The Soul of Lilith, Vol. 3

Marie Corelli

Table of Contents

The Soul of Lilith, Vol. 3

Marie Corelli

CHAPTER I.

HE remained quite still, standing near the tall vase that held the clustered roses,—in his hand he grasped unconsciously the stalk of the one he had pulled to pieces. He was aware of his own strange passiveness,—it was a sort of inexplicable inertia which like temporary paralysis seemed to incapacitate him from any action. It would have appeared well and natural to him that he should stay there so, dreamily, with the scented rose−stalk in his hand, for any length of time. A noise in the outer street roused him a little,—the whistling, hooting and laughing of drunken men reeling homewards,—and lifting his eyes from their studious observation of the floor, he sighed deeply.

"That is the way the great majority of men amuse themselves,"—he mused. "Drink, stupidity, brutality, sensuality—all blatant proofs of miserable unresisted weakness,—can it be possible that God can care for such? Could even the pity of Christ pardon such wilful workers of their own ruin? The pity of Christ, said I?—nay, at times even He was pitiless. Did He not curse a fig−tree because it was barren?—though truly we are not told the cause of its barrenness. Of course the lesson is that Life—the fig−tree,—has no right to be barren of results,—but why curse it, if it is? What is the use of a curse at any time? And what, may equally be asked, is the use of a blessing? Neither are heard; the curse is seldom if ever wreaked,—and the blessing, so the sorrowful say, is never granted."

The noise and the laughter outside died away,—and a deep silence ensued. He caught sight of himself in the mirror, and noted his own reflective attitude,—his brooding visage; and studied himself critically as he would have studied a picture.

"You are no Antinous, my friend"—he said aloud, addressing his own reflection with some bitterness—"A mere sun−tanned Oriental with a pair of eyes in which the light is more of hell than heaven. What should you do with yourself, frowning at Fate? You are a superb Egoist,—no more."

As he spoke, the roses in the vase beside him swayed lightly to and fro, as though a faint wind had fanned them, and their perfume stole upon the air like the delicate breath of summer wafted from some distant garden.

There was no window open—and El−Râmi had not stirred, so that no movement on his part could have shaken the vase,—and yet the roses quivered on their stalks as if brushed by a bird's wing. He watched them with a faint sense of curiosity—but with no desire to discover why they thus nodded their fair heads to an apparently causeless vibration. He was struggling with an emotion that threatened to overwhelm him,—he knew that he was not master of himself,—and instinctively he kept his face turned away from the tranced Lilith.

"I must not look upon her—I dare not;" he whispered to the silence—"Not yet—not yet."

There was a low chair close by, and he dropped into it wearily, covering his eyes with one hand. He tried to control his thoughts—but they were rebellious, and ran riot in spite of him. The words of Zaroba rang in his ears—"For you were the days of Ashtaroth." The days of Ashtaroth!—for what had they been renowned? For love and the feasts of love,—for mirth and song and dance—for crowns of flowers, for shouting of choruses and tinkling of cymbals, for exquisite luxury and voluptuous pleasures,—for men and women who were not ashamed of love and took delight in loving;—were there not better, warmer ways of life in those old times than now—now when cautious and timid souls make schemes for marriage as they scheme for wealth,—when they snigger at "love" as though it were some ludicrous defect in mortal composition, and when real passion of any kind is deemed downright improper, and not to be spoken of before cold and punctilious society?

"Aye, but the passion is there all the same;"—thought El−Râmi—"Under the ice burns the fire,—all the fiercer and the more dangerous for its repression."

And he still kept his hand over his eyes, thinking.

"The Christ claims all"—had said Zaroba. Nay, what has Christ done that He should claim all? "He died for us!" cry the preachers. Well,—others can die also. "He was Divine!" proclaim the churches. We are all Divine, if we will but let the Divinity in us have way. And moved by these ideas, El−Râmi rose up and crossed to a niche in the purple−pavilioned walls of the room, before which hung a loose breadth of velvet fringed with gold,—this he drew aside, and disclosed a picture very finely painted, of Christ standing near the sea, surrounded by his disciples—underneath it were in− scribed the words—"Whom say ye that I am?"

The dignity and beauty of the Face and Figure were truly marvellous,—the expression of the eyes had

something of pride as well as sweetness, and El−Râmi confronted it as he had confronted it many times before, with a restless inquisitiveness.

"Whom say ye that I am?"

The painted Christ seemed to audibly ask the question.

"O noble Mystery of a Man, I cannot tell!" exclaimed El−Râmi suddenly and aloud—"I cannot say who you are, or who you were. A riddle for all the world to wonder at,—a white Sphinx with a smile inscrutable,—all the secrets of Egypt are as nothing to your secret, O simple, pure−souled Nazarene! You, born in miserable plight in miserable Bethlehem, changed the aspect of the world, altered and purified the modes of civilization, and thrilled all life with higher motives for work than it had ever been dowered with before. All this in three years' work, ending in a criminal's death! Truly if there was not something Divine in you, then God Himself is an Error!"

The grand Face seemed to smile upon him with a deep and solemn pity, and "Whom say ye that I am?" sounded in his ears as though it were spoken by someone in the room.

"I must be getting nervous;"—he muttered, drawing the curtain softly over the picture again, and looking uneasily round about him, "I think I cannot be much more than the weakest of men,—after all."

A faint tremor seized him as he turned slowly but resolutely round towards the couch of Lilith, and let his eyes rest on her enchanting loveliness. Step by step he drew nearer and nearer till he bent closely over her, but he did not call her by name. A loose mass of her hair lay close to his arm,—with an impetuous suddenness he gathered it in his hands and kissed it.

"A sheaf of sunbeams!"—he whispered, his lips burning as they caressed the shining wealth of silken curls—"A golden web in which kisses might be caught and killed! Ah Heaven have pity on me!" and he sank by the couch, stifling his words beneath his breath—"If I love this girl—if all this mad tumult in my soul is Love—let her never know it, O merciful Fates!—or she is lost, and so am I. Let me be bound,—let her be free,—let me fight down my weakness, but let her never know that I am weak, or I shall lose her long obedience. No, no! I will not summon her to me now—it is best she should be absent,—this body of hers, this fair fine casket of her spirit is but a dead thing when that spirit is elsewhere. She cannot hear me,—she does not see me—no, not even when I lay this hand—this 'shadow of a hand,' as she once called it, here, to quell my foolish murmurings."

And, lifting Lilith's hand as he spoke, he pressed its roseate palm against his lips,—then on his forehead. A strange sense of relief and peace came upon him with the touch of those delicate fingers—it was as though a cool wind blew, bringing freshness from some quiet mountain lake or river. Silently he knelt,—and presently, somewhat calmed, lifted his eyes again to look at Lilith,—she smiled in her deep trance—she was the very picture of some happy angel sleeping. His arm sank in the soft satin coverlid as he laid back the little hand he held upon her breast,—and with eager scrutiny he noted every tint and every line in her exquisite face;—the lovely long lashes that swept the blush−rose of her cheeks,—the rounded chin, dimpled in its curve,—the full white throat, the perfect outline of the whole fair figure as it rested like a branched lily in a bed of snow,—and as he looked, he realized that all this beauty was his—his, if he chose to take Love, and let Wisdom go. If he chose to resign the chance of increasing his knowledge of the supernatural,—if he were content to accept earth for what it is, and heaven for what it may be, Lilith, the bodily incarnation of loveliness, purity and perfect womanhood, was his—his only. He grew dizzy at the thought,—then by an effort conquered the longing of his heart. He remembered what he had sworn to do,—to discover the one great secret before he seized the joy that tempted him,—to prove the actual, individual, conscious existence of the Being that is said to occupy a temporary habitation in flesh. He knew and he saw the Body of Lilith,—he must know, and he must **see** her Soul. And while he leaned above her couch entranced, a sudden strain of music echoed through the stillness,—music solemn and sweet, that stirred the air into rhythmic vibrations as of slow and sacred psalmody. He listened, perplexed but not afraid,—he was not afraid of anything in earth or heaven save—himself. He knew that man has his worst enemy in his own Ego,—beyond that, there is very little in life that need give cause for alarm. He had, till now, been able to practise the stoical philosophy of an Epictetus while engaged in researches that would have puzzled the brain of a Plato,—but his philosophy was just now at fault and his self−possession gone to the four winds of heaven—and why? He knew not—but he was certain the fault lay in himself, and not in others. Of an arrogant temper and a self−reliant haughty disposition he had none of that low cowardice which people are guilty of, who finding themselves in a dilemma, cast the blame at once on others, or on "circumstances" which after all, were most probably of their own creating. And the strange music that ebbed and flowed in sonorous pulsations through the

air around him, troubled him not at all,—he attributed it at once to something or other that was out of order in his own mental perceptions. He knew how in certain conditions of the brain, some infinitesimal trifle gone wrong in the aural nerves, will persuade one that trumpets are blowing, violins playing, birds singing or bells ringing in the distance,—just as a little disorder of the visual organs will help to convince one of apparitions. He knew how to cast a "glamour" better than any so−called "Theosophist" in full practice of his trickery,—and being thus perfectly aware how the human sense can be deceived, listened to the harmonious sounds he heard with speculative interest, wondering how long this "fancy" of his would last. Much more startled was he, when amid the rising and falling of the mysterious melody he heard the voice of Lilith saying softly in her usual manner—

"I am here!"

His heart beat rapidly, and he rose slowly from his kneeling position by her side. "I did not call you, Lilith!" he said tremblingly.

"No!" and her sweet lips smiled—"you did not call, ... I came!"

"Why did you come?" he asked, still faintly.

"For my own joy and yours!" she answered in thrilling tones—"Sweeter than all the heavens is Love,—and Love is here!"

An icy cold crept through him as he heard the rapture in her accents,—such rapture!—like that of a lark singing in the sunlight on a fresh morning of May. And like the dim sound of a funeral bell came the words of the monk, tolling solemnly across his memory, in spite of his efforts to forget them, "With Lilith's love comes Lilith's freedom."

"No, no!" he muttered within himself—"It cannot be,—it shall not be!—she is mine, mine only. Her fate is in my hands; if there be justice in Heaven, who else has so much right to her body or her soul as I?"

And he stood, gazing irresolutely at the girl, who stirred restlessly and flung her white arms upward on her pillows, while the music he had heard suddenly ceased. He dared not speak,—he was afraid to express any desire or impose any command upon this "fine sprite" which had for six years obeyed him, but which might now, for all he could tell, be fluttering vagrantly on the glittering confines of realms far beyond his ken.

Her lips moved,—and presently she spoke again.

"Wonderful are the ways of Divine Law!" she murmured softly—"and infinite are the changes it works among its creatures! An old man, despised and poor, by friends rejected, perplexed in mind, but pure in soul; such Was the Spirit that now Is. Passing me flame−like on its swift way heavenward,—saved and uplifted, not by Wisdom, but by Love."

El−Râmi listened, awed and puzzled. Her words surely seemed to bear some reference to Kremlin?

"Of the knowledge of the stars and the measuring of light there is more than enough in the Universe;"—went on Lilith dreamily—"but of faithful love, such as keeps an Angel forever by one's side, there is little; therefore the Angels on earth are few."

He could no longer restrain his curiosity.

"Do you speak of one who is dead, Lilith?" he asked—"One whom I knew—"

"I speak of one who is living,"—she replied—"and one whom you **know**. For none are dead; and Knowledge has no Past, but is all Present."

Her voice sank into silence. El−Râmi bent above her, studying her countenance earnestly—her lashes trembled as though the eyelids were about to open,—but the tremor passed and they remained shut. How lovely she looked!—how more than lovely!

"Lilith!" he whispered, suddenly oblivious of all his former forebodings, and unconscious of the eager passion vibrating in his tone—"Sweet Lilith!"

She turned slightly towards him, and lifting her arms from their indolently graceful position on the pillows, she clasped her hands high above her head in apparent supplication.

"Love me!" she cried, with such a thrill in her accent that it rang through the room like a note of music—"Oh my Belovëd, love me!"

El−Râmi grew faint and dizzy,—his thoughts were all in a whirl, ... was he made of marble or ice that he should not respond? Scarcely aware of what he did, he took her clasped hands in his own.

"And do I not, Lilith?" he murmured, half−anguished, half−entranced—"Do I not love you?"

"No, no!" said Lilith with passionate emphasis—"Not me,—not me, Myself! Oh my Belovëd! love Me, not my

Shadow!"

He loosened her hands, and recoiled, awed and perplexed. Her appeal struck at the core of all his doubts,—and for one moment he was disposed to believe in the actual truth of the Immortal Soul without those "proofs" for which he constantly searched,—the next, he rallied himself on his folly and weakness. He dared not trust himself to answer her, so he was silent,—but she soon spoke again with such convincing earnestness of tone that almost ... almost he believed—but not quite.

"To love the Seeming and not the Real," she said—"is the curse of all sad Humanity. It is the glamour of the air,—the barrier between Earth and Heaven. The Body is the Shadow—the Soul is the Substance. The Reflection I cast on Earth's surface for a little space, is but a Reflection only,—it is not Me:—I am beyond it!"

For a moment El−Râmi stood irresolute,—then gathering up his scattered thoughts, he began to try and resolve them into order and connection. Surely the time was ripe for his great Experiment?—and as he considered this, his nerves grew more steady,—his self−reliance returned—all his devotion to scientific research pressed back its claim upon his mind,—if he were to fail now, he thought, after all his patience and study,—fail to obtain any true insight into the spiritual side of humanity, would he not be ashamed, aye, and degraded in his own eyes? He resolved to end all his torture of pain and doubt and disquietude,—and sitting on the edge of Lilith's couch, he drew her delicate hands down from their uplifted position, and laid them one above the other cross−wise on his own breast.

"Then you must teach me, Lilith"—he said softly and with tender persuasiveness—"you must teach me to know you. If I see but your Reflection here,—let me behold your Reality. Let me love you as you are, if now I only love you as you seem. Show yourself to me in all your spiritual loveliness, Lilith!—it may be I shall die of the glory,—or—if there is no death as you say,—I shall not die, but simply pass away into the light which gives you life. Lift the veil that is between us, Lilith, and let me see you face to face. If this that **seems** you"—and he pressed the little hands he held—"is naught, let me realize the nothingness of so much beauty beside the greater beauty that en− genders it. Come to me as you **are**, Lilith!—come!"

As he spoke, his heart beat fast with a nervous thrill of expectancy; what would she answer? ... what would she do? He could not take his eyes from her face—he half fancied he should see some change there; for the moment he even thought it possible that she might transform herself into some surpassing Being, which, like the gods of the Greek mythology, should consume by its flame−like splendour whatever of mortality dared to look upon it. But she remained unaltered, and sculpturally calm,—only her breathing seemed a little quicker, and the hands that he held trembled against his breast.

Her next words however startled him—

"I will come!" she said, and a faint sigh escaped her lips—"Be ready for me. Pray!—pray for the blessing of Christ,—for if Christ be with us, all is well."

At this, his brow clouded,—his eyes drooped gloomily.

"Christ!" he muttered more to himself than to her—"What is He to me? Who is He that He should be with us?"

"This world's Rescue and all worlds' Glory!"

The answer rang out like a silver clarion, with something full and triumphant in the sound, as though not only Lilith's voice had uttered it, but other voices had joined in a chorus. At the same moment, her hands moved, as if in an effort to escape from his hold. But he held them closely in a jealous and masterful grasp.

"When will you come to me, Lilith?" he demanded in low but eager accents—"When shall I see you and know you as Lilith? ... **my** Lilith, my own forever?"

"God's Lilith—God's own forever!" murmured Lilith dreamily, and then was silent.

An angry sense of rebellion began to burn in El−Râmi's mind. Summoning up all the force of his iron will, he unclasped her hands and laid them back on each side of her, and placed his own hand on her breast, just where the ruby talisman shone and glowed.

"Answer me, Lilith!" he said, with some− thing of the old sternness which he had used to employ with her on former occasions—"When will you come to me?"

Her limbs trembled violently as though some inward cold convulsed her, and her answer came slowly, though clearly—

"When you are ready."

"I am ready now!" he cried recklessly.

"No—no!" she murmured, her voice growing fainter and fainter—"Not yet ... not yet! Love is not strong enough, high enough, pure enough. Wait, watch and pray. When the hour has come, a sign will be given—but O my Belovëd, if you would know me, love Me—love Me! not my Shadow!"

A pale hue fell on her face, robbing it of its delicate tint,—El−Râmi knew what that pallor indicated.

"Lilith! Lilith!" he exclaimed, "Why leave me thus if you love me? Stay with me yet a little!"

But Lilith—or rather the strange Spirit that made the body of Lilith speak,—was gone. And all that night not another sound, either of music or speech, stirred the silence of the room. Dawn came, misty and gray, and found the proud El−Râmi kneeling before the unveiled picture of the Christ,—not praying, for he could not bring himself down to the necessary humiliation for prayer,—but simply wondering vaguely as to what **could** be and what **might** be the one positive reply to that Question propounded of old—

"Whom Say Ye That I Am?"

CHAPTER II.

OF what avail is it to propound questions that no one can answer? Of what use is it to attempt to solve the mystery of life which must for ever remain mysterious? Thus may the intelligent critic ask, and in asking, may declare that the experiments, researches, and anxieties of El−Râmi, together with El−Râmi himself, are mistaken conceptions all round. But it is necessary to remind the intelligent critic, that the eager desire of El−Râmi to prove what appears unprovable, is by no means an uncommon phase of human nature,—it is in fact, the very key−note and pulse of the present time. Every living creature who is not too stunned by misery for thought, craves to know positively whether the Soul,—the Immortal, Individual Ego, be Fable or Fact. Never more than in this, our own period, did people search with such unabated feverish yearning into the things that seem supernatural;—never were there bitterer pangs of recoil and disappointment when trickery and imposture are found to have even temporarily passed for truth. If the deepest feeling in every human heart today were suddenly given voice, the shout "Excelsior!" would rend the air in mighty chorus. For we know all the old earth−stories;—of love, of war, of adventure, of wealth, we know pretty well the beginning and the end,—we read in our histories of nations that were, but now are not, and we feel that we shall in due time go the same way with them,—that the wheel of Destiny spins on in the same round always, and that nothing—nothing can alter its relentless and monotonous course. We tread in the dust and among the fallen columns of great cities, and we vaguely wonder if the spirits of the men that built them are indeed no more,—we gaze on the glorious pile of the Duomo at Milan and think of the brain that first devised and planned its majestic proportions, and ask ourselves—Is it possible that this, the creation, should be Here, and its creator Nowhere? Would such an arrangement be reasonable or just? And so it happens that when the wielders of the pen essay to tell us of wars, of shipwrecks, of hair−breadth escapes from danger, of love and politics and society, we read their pages with merely transitory pleasure and frequent indifference, but when they touch upon subjects beyond earthly experience,—when they attempt, however feebly, to lift our inspirations to the possibilities of the Unseen, then we give them our eager attention and almost passionate interest. Critics look upon this tendency as morbid, unwholesome and pernicious; but nevertheless the tendency is there,—the demand for "Light! more light!" is in the very blood and brain of the people. It would seem as though this world has grown too narrow for the aspirations of its inhabitants;—and some of us instinctively feel that we are on the brink of strange discoveries respecting the powers unearthly, whether for good or evil we dare not presume to guess. The nonsensical tenets of "Theosophy" would not gain ground with a single individual man or woman were not this feeling very strong among many,—the tricky "mediums" and "spiritualists" would not have a chance of earning a subsistence out of the gullibility of their dupes, and the preachers of new creeds and new forms would obtain no vestige of attention if it were not for the fact that there is a very general impression all over the world that the time is ripe for a clearer revelation of God and the things of God than we have ever had before. "Give us something that will endure!" is the exclamation of weary humanity—"The things we have, pass; and by reason of their ephemeral nature, are worthless. Give us what we can keep and call our own for ever!" This is why we try and test all things that **appear** to give proof of the super−sensual element in man,—and when we find ourselves deceived by impostors and conjurers, our disgust and disappointment are too bitter to ever find vent in words. The happiest are those who, in the shifting up and down of faiths and formulas, ever cling stedfastly to the one pure Example of embodied Divinity in Manhood as seen in Christ. When we reject Christ, we reject the Gospel of Love and Universal Brotherhood, without which the ultimate perfection and progress of the world must ever remain impossible.

A few random thoughts such as these occurred to El−Râmi now and then as he lived his life from day to day in perpetual expectation of the "sign" promised by Lilith, which as yet was not forthcoming. He believed she would keep her word, and that the "sign" whatever it was would be unmistakable; and,—as before stated—this was the nearest approach to actual faith he had ever known. His was a nature which was originally disposed to faith, but which had persistently fought with its own inclination till that inclination had been conquered. He had been able to prove as purely natural, much that had **seemed** supernatural, and he now viewed everything from two points—Possi− bility and Impossibility. His various confusions and perplexities however, generally arose from the frequent discovery he made, that what he had once thought the Impossible, suddenly became through some small chance clue, the Possible. So many times had this occurred that he often caught himself wondering whether

anything in very truth could be strictly declared as "impossible." And yet, ... with the body of Lilith under his observation for six years, and an absolute ignorance as to **how** her intelligence had developed, or **where** she obtained the power to discourse with him as she did, he always had the lurking dread that her utterances might be the result of **his own brain unconsciously working upon hers**, and that there was no "soul" or "spirit" in the matter. This too, in spite of the fact that she had actually given him a concise description of certain planets, their laws, their government, and their inhabitants, concerning which **he** could know nothing,—and that she spoke with a sure conviction of the existence of a personal God, an idea that was entirely unacceptable to **his** nature. He was at a loss to explain her "separated consciousness" in any scientific way, and afraid of himself lest he should believe too easily, he encouraged the presence of every doubt in his mind, rather than give entrance to more than the palest glimmer of faith.

And so time went on, and May passed into June, and June deepened into its meridian−glow of bloom and sunlight, and he remained shut up within the four walls of his house, seeing no one, and displaying a total indifference to the fact that the "season" with all its bitter froth and frivolity was seething on in London in its usual monotonous manner. Unlike pretenders to "spiritualistic" powers, he had no inclination for the society of the rich and great,—"titled" people had no attraction for him save in so far as they were cultured, witty, or amiable,—"position" in the world, was a very miserable trifle in his opinion, and though many a gorgeous flunkied carriage at this time found its way into the unfashionable square where he had his domicile, no visitors were admitted to see him,—and "too busy to receive anyone" was the formula with which young Féraz dismissed any would−be intruder. Yet Féraz himself wondered all the while how it was that as a matter of fact, El−Râmi seemed to be just now less absorbed in actual study than he had ever been in his whole life. He read no books save the old Arabic vellum−bound volume which held the explanatory key to so much curious phenomena palmed off as "spiritual miracles" by the Theosophists, and he wrote a good deal,—but he answered no letters, accepted no invitations, manifested no wish to leave the house even for an hour's stroll, and seemed mentally engrossed by some great secret subject of meditation. He was uniformly kind to Féraz, exacting no duties from him save those prompted by interest and affection,—he was marvellously gentle too with Zaroba, who, agitated, restless and perplexed as to his ultimate intentions with respect to the beautiful Lilith, was vaguely uneasy and melancholy, though she deemed it wisest to perform all his commands with exactitude, and, for the present to hold her peace. She had expected something—though she knew not what—from his last interview with her beautiful charge—but all was unchanged,—Lilith slept on, and the cherished wish of Zaroba's heart, that she should wake, seemed as far off realization as ever. Day after day passed, and El−Râmi lived like a hermit amidst the roar and traffic of mighty London,—watching Lilith for long and anxious hours, but never venturing to call her down to him from wherever she might be,—waiting, waiting for **her** summons, and content for once to sink himself in the thought of **her** identity. All his ambitions were now centred on the one great object, ... to see the Soul, **as** it is, **if** it is indeed existent, conscious and individual. For, as he argued, what is the use of a "Soul" whose capacities we are not permitted to understand?—and if it be no more to us than the Intelligent Faculty of Brain? The chief proof of a possible Something behind Man's inner consciousness, was, he considered, the quality of Discontent, and, primarily, because Discontent is so universal. No one is contented in all the world from end to end. From the powerful Emperor on his throne to the whining beggar in the street, all chafe under the goading prick of the great Necessity,—a Something Better,—a Something Lasting. Why should this resonant key−note of Discontent be perpetually resounding through space, if this life is all? No amount of philosophy or argument can argue away Discontent—it is a god−like Disquietude ever fermenting changes among us, ever propounding new suggestions for happiness, ever restless, never satisfied. And El−Râmi would ask himself—Is Discontent the voice of the Soul?—not only the Universal Soul of things, but the Soul of each individual? Then, if Individual, why should not the Individual be made manifest, if manifestation be possible? And if not possible, why should we be called upon to believe in what cannot be manifested?

Thus he argued, not altogether unwisely; he had studied profoundly all the divers conflicting theories of religion, and would at one time have become an obstinately confirmed Positivist, had it not been for the fact that the further his researches led him the more he became aware that there was nothing positive,—that is to say, nothing so apparently fixed and unalterable that it might not, under different conditions, prove capable of change. Perhaps there is no better test−example of this truth than the ordinary substance known as iron. We use in common parlance unthinkingly the phrase "as hard as iron"—while to the smith and engineer who mould and

twist it in every form, it proves itself soft and malleable as wax. Again, to the surface−observer, it might and does seem an incombustible metal,—the chemist knows it will burn with the utmost fury. How then form a **universal** decision as to its various capabilities when it has so many variations of use all in such contrary directions? The same example, modified or enlarged, will be found to apply to all things, wherefore the word "Positivism" seems out of place in merely mortal language. God may be "positive," but we and our surroundings have no such absolute quality.

During this period of El−Râmi's self−elected seclusion and meditation, his young brother Féraz was very happy. He was in the midst of writing a poem which he fondly fancied might perhaps—only perhaps—find a publisher to take it and launch it on its own merits,—it is the privilege of youth to be over−sanguine. Then too, his brain was filled with new musical ideas,—and many an evening's hour he beguiled away by delicious improvisations on the piano, or exquisite songs to the mandoline. El−Râmi, when he was not upstairs keeping anxious vigil by the tranced Lilith's side, would sit in his chair, leaning back with half−closed eyes, listening to the entrancing melodies like another Saul to a new David, soothed by the sweetness of the sounds he heard, yet conscious that he took too deep and ardent a pleasure in hearing, when the songs Féraz chose were of love. One night Féraz elected to sing the wild and beautiful "Canticle of Love" written by the late Lord Lytton, when as "Owen Meredith" he promised to be one of the greatest poets of our century, and who would have fulfilled more than that promise if diplomacy had not claimed his brilliant intellectual gifts for the service of his country,—a country which yet deplores his untimely loss. But no fatality had as yet threatened that gallant and noble life in the days when Féraz smote the chords of his mandoline and sang:—

"I once heard an angel by night in the sky
Singing softly a song to a deep golden lute;
The pole−star, the seven little planets and I
To the song that he sang, listened mute,
For the song that he sang was so strange and so sweet,
And so tender the tones of his lute's golden strings
That the seraphs of heaven sat hush'd at his feet
And folded their heads in their wings.
And the song that he sang to the seraphs up there
Is called 'Love'! But the words ... I had heard them elsewhere.

"For when I was last in the nethermost Hell,
On a rock 'mid the sulphurous surges I heard
A pale spirit sing to a wild hollow shell;
And his song was the same, every word,
And so sad was his singing, all Hell to the sound
Moaned, and wailing, complained like a monster in pain
While the fiends hovered near o'er the dismal profound
With their black wings weighed down by the strain;
And the song that was sung to the Lost Ones down there
Is called 'Love'! But the spirit that sang was Despair!"

The strings of the mandoline quivered mournfully in tune with the passionate beauty of the verse, and from El−Râmi's lips there came involuntarily a deep and bitter sigh.

Féraz ceased playing and looked at him.

"What is it?" he asked anxiously.

"Nothing!" replied his brother in a tranquil voice—"What should there be? Only the poem is very beautiful, and out of the common,—though to me, terribly suggestive of—a mistake somewhere in creation. Love to the

Saved—Love to the Lost!—naturally it would have different aspects,—but it is an anomaly—Love, to be true to its name, should have no 'lost' ones in its chronicle."

Féraz was silent.

"Do you believe"—continued El−Râmi—"that there is a 'nethermost Hell'?—a place or a state of mind resembling that 'rock 'mid the sulphurous surges'?"

"I should imagine," replied Féraz with some diffidence, "that there must be a condition in which we are bound to look back and see where we were wrong,—a condition, too, in which we have time to be sorry—"

"Unfair and unreasonable!" exclaimed his brother hotly. "For, suppose we did not **know** we were wrong? We are left absolutely without guidance in this world to do as we like."

"I do not think you can quite say that"—remonstrated Féraz gently—"We **do** know when we are wrong—generally; some instinct tells us so—and while we have the book of Nature, we are not left without guidance. As for looking back and seeing our former mistakes, I think that is unquestionable,—for as I grow older, I begin to see where I failed in my former life, and how I deserved to lose my star−kingdom."

El−Râmi looked impatient.

"You are a dreamer"—he said decisively—"and your star−kingdom is a dream also. You cannot tell me truthfully that you remember anything of a former existence?"

"I am beginning to remember," said Féraz steadily.

"My dear boy, anybody but myself hearing you, would say you were mad—hopelessly mad!"

"They would be at perfect liberty to say so"—and Féraz smiled a little—"Everyone is free to have his own opinion—I have mine. My star exists; and I once existed in it—so did you."

"Well, I know nothing about it then," declared El−Râmi—"I have forgotten it utterly."

"Oh no! You think you have forgotten"—said Féraz mildly—"But the truth is, your very knowledge of science and other things is only— **memory**."

El−Râmi moved in his chair impatiently.

"Let us not argue;"—he said—"We shall never agree. Sing to me again!"

Féraz thought a moment, and then laid aside his mandoline and went to the piano, where he played a rushing rapid accompaniment like the sound of the wind among trees, and sang the following—

"Winds of the mountain, mingle with my crying,
Clouds of the tempest, flee as I am flying,
Gods of the cloudland, Christus and Apollo,Follow, O follow!

"Through the dark valleys, up the misty mountains,
Over the black wastes, past the gleaming fountains,
Praying not, hoping not, resting nor abiding,Lo, I am riding!

"Clangour and anger of elements are round me,
Torture has clasped me, cruelty has crown'd me,
Sorrow awaits me, Death is waiting with her,Fast speed I thither.

"Gods of the storm−cloud, drifting darkly yonder,
Point fiery hands and mock me as I wander;
Gods of the forest glimmer out upon me,Shrink back and shun me.

"Gods, let them follow!—gods, for I defy them!
They call me, mock me, but I gallop by them;
If they would find me, touch me, whisper to me,Let them pursue me!"

He was interrupted in the song by a smothered cry from El−Râmi, and looking round, startled, he saw his brother standing up and staring at him with something of mingled fear and horror. He came to an abrupt stop, his hands resting on the piano keys.

"Go on, go on!" cried El−Râmi irritably. "What wild chant of the gods and men have you there? Is it your own?"

"Mine!" echoed Féraz—"No indeed!—I wish it were. It is by a living poet of the day, Robert Buchanan."

"Robert Buchanan!"—and El−Râmi tried to recover his self−possession—"Ah!—Well, I wonder what devil possessed him to write it!"

"Don't you like it?" exclaimed Féraz wonderingly—"To my thinking it is one of the finest poems in the English language."

"Of course, of course I like it;"—said El−Râmi, sitting down again, angry with himself for his own emotion—"Is there more of it?"

"Yes, but I need not finish it,"—and Féraz made as though he would rise from the piano.

El−Râmi suddenly began to laugh.

"Go on, I tell you, Féraz"—he said carelessly—"There is a tempest of agitation in the words and in your music that leaves one hurried and breathless, but the sensation is not unpleasant,—especially when one is prepared, ... go on!—I want to hear the end of this ... this−defiance."

Féraz looked at him to see if he were in earnest, and perceiving he had settled down to give his whole attention to the rest of the ballad, he resumed his playing, and again the rush of the music filled the room—

"Faster, O faster! Darker and more dreary
Groweth the pathway, yet I am not weary—
Gods, I defy them! gods, I can unmake them,Bruise them and break them!

"White steed of wonder with thy feet of thunder,
Find out their temples, tread their high−priests under—
Leave them behind thee—if their gods speed after,Mock them with laughter.

"Shall a god grieve me? shall a phantom win me?
Nay!—by the wild wind around and o'er and in me—
Be his name Vishnu, Christus or Apollo—Let the god follow!

"Clangour and anger of elements are round me,
Torture has clasped me, cruelty has crown'd me,
Sorrow awaits me, Death is waiting with her,Fast speed I thither!"

The music ceased abruptly with a quick clash as of jangling bells,—and Féraz rose from the piano.

El−Râmi was sitting quite still.

"A fine outburst!" he remarked presently, seeing that his young brother waited for him to speak—"And you rendered it finely. In it the voice of the strong man speaks;—**Do you believe it?**"

"Believe what?" asked Féraz, a little surprised.

"This—" and El−Râmi quoted slowly—

"Shall a god grieve me? shall a phantom win me?
Nay!—by the wild wind around and o'er and in me—

Be his name Vishnu, Christus or Apollo—Let the god follow!"

"Do you think"—he continued, "that in the matter of life's leadership, the 'god' should follow, or we the god?"

Féraz lifted his delicately marked eyebrows in amazement.

"What an odd question!" he said—"The song is **only** a song,—part of a poem entitled, 'The City of Dream,' which none of the press−critics have ever done justice to. If Lord Tennyson had written the 'City of Dream' what columns and columns of praise would have been poured out upon it! What I sang to you is the chant, or lyrical soliloquy of the 'Outcast Esau,' who in the poem is evidently 'outcast' from all creeds; and it is altogether a character which, if I read it rightly, represents the strong doubter, almost unbeliever, who defies Fate. But we do not receive a mere poem, no matter how beautiful, as a gospel. And if you speak of life's leadership, it is devoutly to be hoped that God not only leads, but rules us all."

"Why should you hope it?" asked El−Râmi gloomily—"Myself, I fear it!"

Féraz came to his side and rested one hand affectionately on his arm.

"You are worried and out of sorts, my brother,"—he said gently—"Why do you not seek some change from so much indoor life? You do not even get the advantages I have of going to and fro on the household business. I breathe the fresh air every day,—surely it is necessary for you also?"

"My dear boy, I am perfectly well"—and El−Râmi regarded him steadily—"Why should you doubt it? I am only—a little tired. Poor human nature cannot always escape fatigue."

Féraz said no more,—but there was a certain strangeness in his brother's manner that filled him with an indefinable uneasiness. In his own quiet fashion he strove to distract El−Râmi's mind from the persistent fixity of whatever unknown purpose seemed to so mysteriously engross him,—and whenever they were together at meals or at other hours of the day, he talked in as light and desultory a way as possible on all sorts of different topics in the hope of awakening his brother's interest more keenly in external affairs. He read much and thought more, and was a really brilliant conversationalist when he chose, in spite of his dreamy fancies—but he was obliged to admit to himself that his affectionate endeavours met with very slight success. True, El−Râmi **appeared** to give his attention to all that was said, but it was only an appearance,—and Féraz saw plainly enough that he was not really moved to any sort of feeling respecting the ways and doings of the outer world. And when, one morning, Féraz read aloud the account of the marriage of Sir Frederick Vaughan, Bart., with Idina, only daughter of Jabez Chester of New York, he only smiled indifferently and said nothing.

"We were invited to that wedding;"—commented Féraz.

"Were we?" El−Râmi shrugged his shoulders and seemed totally oblivious of the fact.

"Why of course we were"—went on Féraz cheerfully—"And, at your bidding I opened and read the letter Sir Frederick wrote you, which said that as you had prophesied the marriage, he would take it very kindly if you would attend in person the formal fulfilment of your prophecy. And all you did in reply was to send a curt refusal on plea of other engagements. Do you think that was quite amiable on your part?"

"Fortunately for me I am not called upon to be amiable;"—said El−Râmi, beginning to pace slowly up and down the room—"I want no favours from society, so I need not smile to order. That is one of the chief privileges of complete independence. Fancy having to grin and lie and skulk and propitiate people all one's days!—I could not endure it,—but most men can—and do!"

"Besides"—he added after a pause—"I cannot look on with patience at the marriage of fools. Vaughan is a fool, and his baronetage will scarcely pass for wisdom,— the little Chester girl is also a fool,—and I can see exactly what they will become in the course of a few years."

"Describe them, *in futuro*!" laughed Féraz.

"Well—the man will be 'turfy'; the woman, a blind slave to her dressmaker. That is all. There can be nothing more. They will never do any good or any harm—they are simply—nonentities. These are the sort of folk that make me doubt the immortal soul,—for Vaughan is less 'spiritual' than a well−bred dog, and little Chester less mentally gifted than a well−instructed mouse."

"Severe!"—commented Féraz smiling—"But, man or woman,—mouse or dog, I suppose they are quite happy just now?"

"Happy!" echoed El−Râmi satirically—"Well—I daresay they are,—with the only sort of happiness their

intelligences can grasp. She is happy because she is now 'my lady' and because she was able to wear a wedding−gown of marvellous make and cost, to trail and rustle and sweep after her little person up to God's altar with, as though she sought to astonish the Almighty before whom she took her vows, with the exuberance of her millinery. He is happy because his debts are paid out of old Jabez Chester's millions. There the 'happiness' ends. A couple of months is sufficient to rub the bloom off such wedlock."

"And you really prophesied the marriage?" queried Féraz.

"It was easy enough"—replied his brother carelessly—"Given two uninstructed, unthinking bipeds of opposite sexes—the male with debts, the female with dollars, and an urbanely obstinate schemer to pull them together like Lord Melthorpe, and the thing is done. Half the marriages in London are made up like that,—and of the after−lives of those so wedded, 'there needs no ghost from the grave' to tell us,—the divorce−courts give every information."

"Ah!" exclaimed Féraz quickly—"That reminds me,—do you know I saw something in the evening−paper last night that might have interested you?"

"Really! You surprise me!" and El− Râmi laughed—"That is strange indeed, for papers of all sorts, whether morning or evening, are to me the dullest and worst−written literature in the world."

"Oh, for literature one does not go to them"—answered Féraz.—"But this was a paragraph about a man who came here not very long ago to see you—a clergyman. He is up as a co−respondent in some very scandalous divorce case. I did not read it all—I only saw that his Bishop had caused him to be 'unfrocked,' whatever that means—I suppose he is expelled from the ministry?"

"Yes. 'Unfrocked' means literally a stripping−off of clerical dignity," said El−Râmi. "But if it is the man who came here, he was always naked in that respect. Francis Anstruther was his name?"

"Exactly—that is the man. He is disgraced for life, and seems to be one of the most consummate scoundrels that ever lived. He has deserted his wife and eight children...."

"Spare me and yourself the details!" and El−Râmi gave an expressively contemptuous gesture—"I know all about him, and told him what I knew when he came here. But he'll do very well yet—he'll get on capitally in spite of his disgrace."

"How is that possible?" exclaimed Féraz.

"Easily! He can 'boom' himself as a new 'General' Booth, or he can become a 'Colonel' under Booth's orders—as long as there are fools to support Booth with money. Or he can go to America or Australia and start a new creed—he's sure to fall on his feet and make his fortune—pious hypocrites always do. One would almost fancy there must be a special Deity to protect the professors of Humbug. It is only the sincerely honest folk who get wronged in this admirably−ordered world!"

He spoke with bitterness; and Féraz glanced at him anxiously.

"I do not quite agree with you"—he said; "Surely honest folk always have their reward?—though perhaps superficial observers may not be able to perceive where it comes in. I believe in 'walking uprightly' as the Bible says—it seems to me easier to keep along a straight open road, than to take dark bye−ways and dubious short cuts."

"What do you mean by your straight open road?" demanded El−Râmi, looking at him.

"Nature,"—replied Féraz promptly—"Nature leads us up to God."

El−Râmi broke into a harsh laugh.

"O credulous beautiful lad!" he exclaimed; "You know not what you say! Nature! Consider her methods of work—her dark and cunning and cruel methods! Every living thing preys on some other living thing;—creatures wonderful, innocent, simple or complex, live apparently but to devour and be devoured;—every inch of ground we step upon is the dust of something dead. In the horrible depths of the earth, Nature,—this generous kindly Nature!—hides her dread volcanic fires,—her streams of lava, her boiling founts of sulphur and molten lead, which at any unexpected moment may destroy whole continents crowded with unsuspecting humanity. This is NATURE,—nothing but Nature! She hides her trea− sures of gold, of silver, of diamonds and rubies, in the deepest and most dangerous recesses, where human beings are lost in toiling for them,—buried in darkness and slain by thousands in the difficult search; diving for pearls, the unwary explorer is met by the remorseless monsters of the deep,—in fact, in all his efforts towards discovery and progress, Man, the most naturally defenceless creature upon earth, is met by death or blank discouragement. Suppose he were to trust to Nature

alone, what would Nature do for him? He is sent into the world naked and helpless;—and all the resources of his body and brain have to be educated and brought into active requisition to enable him to live at all,—lions' whelps, bears' cubs have a better 'natural' chance than he;—and then, when he has learned how to make the best of his surroundings, he is turned out of the world again, naked and helpless as he came in, with all his knowledge of no more use to him than if he had never attained it. This is NATURE,—if Nature be thus reckless and unreasonable as the 'reflex of God' —how reckless and unreasonable must be God Himself!"

The beautiful stag−like eyes of Féraz darkened slowly, and his slim hand involuntarily clenched.

"Ay, if God were so," he said—"the veriest pigmy among men might boast of nobler qualities than He! But God is not so, El−Râmi! Of course you can argue any and every way, and I cannot confute your reasoning. Because you reason with the merely mortal intelligence; to answer you rightly I should have to reply as a Spirit,—I should need to be out of the body before I could tell you where you are wrong."

"Well!" said his brother curiously—"Then why do you not do so? Why do you not come to me out of the body, and enlighten me as to what you know?"

Féraz looked troubled.

"I cannot!" he said sadly—"When I go—away yonder—I seem to have so little remembrance of earthly things—I am separated from the world by thousands of air−spaces. I am always conscious that you exist on earth,—but it is always as of someone who will join **me** presently—not of one whom **I** am compelled to join. There is the strangeness of it. That is why I have very little belief in the notion of ghosts and spirits appearing to men—because I know positively that no detached soul willingly returns to or remains on earth. There is always the upward yearning. If it returns, it does so simply because it is for some reason, **commanded**, not because of its own desire."

"And who do you suppose commands it?" asked El−Ra mi.

"The Highest of all Powers,"—replied Féraz reverently—"whom we all, whether spirit or mortal, obey."

"I do not obey,"—said El−Râmi composedly—"I enforce obedience."

"From whom?" cried Féraz with agitation—"O my brother, from whom? From mortals perhaps—yes,—so long as it is permitted to you—but from Heaven—no! No, not from Heaven can you win obedience. For God's sake do not boast of **such** power"

He spoke passionately, and in anxious earnest.

El−Râmi smiled.

"My good fellow, why excite yourself? I do not 'boast'—I am simply—strong! If I am immortal, God Himself cannot slay me,—if I am mortal only, I can but die. I am indifferent either way. Only I will not shrink before an imaginary Divine Terror till I prove what right it has to my submission. Enough!—we have talked too much on this subject, and I have work to do."

He turned to his writing−table as he spoke and was soon busy there. Féraz took up a book and tried to read, but his heart beat quickly, and he was overwhelmed by a deep sense of fear. The daring of his brother's words smote him with a chill horror,—from time immemorial, had not the Forces Divine punished pride as the deadliest of sins? His thoughts travelled over the great plain of History, on which so many spectres of dead nations stand in our sight as pale warnings of our own possible fate, and remembered how surely it came to pass that when men became too proud and defiant and absolute,—rejecting God and serving themselves only, then they were swept away into desolation and oblivion. As with nations, so with individuals—the Law of Compensation is just, and as evenly balanced as the symmetrical motion of the Universe. And the words "Except ye become as little children ye shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven," rang through his ears, as he sat heavily silent, and wondering, wondering **where** the researches of his brother would end, and **how?**

El−Râmi himself meanwhile was scanning the last pages of his dead friend Kremlin's private Journal. This was a strange book,—kept with exceeding care, and written in the form of letters which were all addressed "To the Beloved Maroussia in Heaven"—and amply proved that in spite of the separated seclusion and eccentricity of his life, Kremlin had not only been faithful to the love of his early days, the girl who had died self−slain in her Russian prison,—but he had been firm in his acceptance of and belief in the immortality of the soul and the reunion of parted spirits. His last "letter" ran thus—it was unfinished and had been written the night before the fatal storm which had made an end of his life and learning together,—

"I seem to be now on the verge of the discovery for which I have yearned. Thou knowest, O heart of my heart,

how I dream that these brilliant and ceaseless vibrations of light may perchance carry to the world some message which it were well and wise we should know. Oh, if this 'Light,' which is my problem and mystery, could but transmit to my earthly vision one flashing gleam of thy presence, my beloved child! But thou wilt guide me, so that I presume not too far;—I feel thou art near me, and that thou wilt not fail me at the last. If in the space of an earthly ten minutes this marvellous 'Light' can travel 111,600,000 miles, thou as a 'spirit of light' canst not be very far away. Only till my work for poor humanity is done, do I choose to be parted from thee —be the time long or short—we shall meet...."

Here the journal ended.

"And have they met?" thought El−Râmi, as closing the book he locked it away in his desk—"And do they remember they were ever mortal? And **what** are they—and **where** are they?"

CHAPTER III.

IN the midst of the strange "summer" weather which frequently falls to the lot of England,—weather alternating between hot and cold, wet and dry, sun and cloud with the most distracting rapidity and irregularity,—there came at last one perfect night towards the end of June,—a night which could have met with no rival even in the sunniest climes of the sunniest south. A soft tranquiity hovered dove−like in the air,—a sense of perfect peace seemed to permeate all visible and created things. The sky was densely blue and thickly strewn with stars, though these glimmered but faintly, their light being put to shame by the splendid brilliancy of the full moon which swam aloft airily like a great golden bubble. El−Râmi's windows were all set open; a big bunch of heliotrope adorned the table, and the subtle fragrance of it stole out delicately to mingle with the faintly stirring evening breeze. Féraz was sitting alone,—his brother had just left the room,—and he was indulging himself in the *dolce far niente* as only the Southern or Eastern temperament can do. His hands were clasped lightly behind his head, and his eyes were fixed on the shabby little trees in the square which had done their best to look green among the whirling smuts of the metropolis and had failed ignominiously in the attempt, but which now, in the ethereal light of the moon, presented a soft outline of gray and silver like olive−boughs seen in the distance. He was thinking, with a certain serious satisfaction, of an odd circumstance that had occurred to himself that day. It had happened in this wise: Since the time Zaroba had taken him to look upon the beautiful creature who was the "subject" of his brother's experiments, he had always kept the memory of her in his mind without speaking of her, save that whenever he said a prayer or offered up a thanksgiving, he had invariably used the phrase—"God defend her!" He could only explain "Her" to himself by the simple pronoun, because, as El−Râmi had willed, he had utterly and hopelessly forgotten her name. But now, strange to say he remembered it!—it had flashed across his mind like a beam of light or a heaven−sent signal,—he was at work, writing at his poem, when some sudden inexplicable instinct had prompted him to lift his eyes and murmur devoutly—"God defend Lilith!" Lilith!—how soft the sound of it!—how infinitely bewitching! After having lost it for so long, it had come back to him in a moment—how or why, he could not imagine. He could only account for it in one way—namely, that El−Râmi's will−forces were so concentrated on some particularly absorbing object that his daily influence on his brother's young life was thereby materially lessened. And Féraz was by no means sorry that this should be so.

"Why should it matter that I remember her name?" he mused—"I shall never speak of her—for I have sworn I will not. But I can think of her to my heart's content,—the beautiful Lilith!"

Then he fell to considering the old legend of that Lilith who it is said was Adam's first wife,—and he smiled as he thought what a name of evil omen it was to the Jews, who had charms and talismans wherewith to exorcise the supposed evil influence connected with it,—while to him, Féraz, it was a name sweeter than honey−sweet singing. Then there came to his mind stray snatches of poesy,—delicate rhymes from the rich and varied stores of one of his favourite poets Dante Gabriel Rossetti,—rhymes that sounded in his ears just now like the strophes of a sibylline chant or spell:—

"It was Lilith the wife of Adam:
(*Sing Eden Bower!*)
Not a drop of her blood was human,
But she was made like a soft sweet woman."

"And that is surely true!" said Féraz to himself, a little startled,—"For—if she is **dead**, as El−Râmi asserts, and her seeming life is but the result of his art, then indeed in the case of this Lilith 'not a drop of her blood is human.'"

And the poem ran on in his mind—

"Lilith stood on the skirts of Eden

(*Alas, the hour!*)
She was the first that thence was driven:
With her was hell, and with Eve was heaven."

"Nay, I should transpose that,"—murmured the young man drowsily, staring out on the moonlit street—"I should say 'With Eve was hell, and with Lilith heaven.' How strange it is I should never have thought of this poem before!—and I have often turned over the pages of Rossetti's book,—since—since I saw her;—I must have actually seen the name of Lilith printed there, and yet it never suggested itself to me as being familiar or offering any sort of clue."

He sighed perplexedly,—the heliotrope odours floated around him, and the gleam of the lamp in the room seemed to pale in the wide splendour of the moon−rays pouring through the window,—and still the delicate sprite of Poesy continued to remind him of familiar lines and verses he loved, though all the while he thought of Lilith, and kept on wondering vaguely and vainly what would be, what could be, the end of his brother's experiment (whatever that was, for he, Féraz, did not know) on the lovely, apparently living girl who yet was dead. It was very strange—and surely, it was also very terrible!

"The day is dark and the night
  To him that would search their heart;
  No lips of cloud that will part,
Nor morning song in the light:
  Only, gazing alone
  To him wild shadows are shown,
  Deep under deep unknown
And height above unknown height.
  Still we say as we go,—
    'Strange to think by the way,
  Whatever there is to know,
    That shall we know one day.'"

This passage of rhyme sang itself out with a monotonous musical gentleness in his brain,—he closed his eyes restfully,—and then—lying back thus in his chair by the open window, with the moonlight casting a wide halo round him and giving a pale spiritual beauty to his delicate classic features,—he passed away out of his body, as **he** would have said, and was no more on earth; or rather as **we** should say, he fell asleep and dreamed. And the "dream" or the "experience" was this;—

He found himself walking leisurely upon the slopes of a majestic mountain, which seemed not so much mountain as garden, for all the winding paths leading to its summit were fringed with flowers. He heard the silvery plashing of brooks and fountains, and the rustling of thickly−foliaged trees,—he knew the place well, and realized that he was in his "star" again,—the mystic Sphere he called his "home." But he was evidently an exile or an alien in it,—he had grown to realize this fact and was sorry it should be so, yet his sorrow was mingled with hope, for he felt it would not always be so. He wandered along aimlessly and alone, full of a curiously vague happiness and regret, and as he walked he was passed by crowds of beautiful youths and maidens, who were all pressing forward eagerly as to some high festival or great assembly. They sang blithe songs,—they scattered flowers,—they talked with each other in happy−toned voices,—and he stood aside gazing at them wistfully while they went on rejoicing.

"O land where life never grows old and where love is eternal!" he mused—"Why am I exiled from thy glory? Why have I lost thy joy?"

He sighed;—he longed to know what had brought together so bright a multitude of these lovely and joyous beings,—his own "dear people" as he felt they were; and yet—yet he hesitated to ask one of them the least

question, feeling himself unworthy. At last he saw a girl approaching,—she was singing to herself and tying flowers in a garland as she came,—her loose gold hair streamed behind her, every glistening tress seeming to flash light as she moved. As she drew near him she glanced at him kindly and paused as though waiting to be addressed,—seeing this, he mustered up his courage and spoke.

"Whither are you all going?" he asked, with a sad gentleness—"I may not follow you, I know,—but will you tell me why, in this kingdom of joy, so much fresh joy seems added?"

She pointed upwards, and as his eyes obeyed her gesture, he saw in the opal−coloured sky that bent above them, a dazzling blaze of gold and crimson glory towards the south.

"An Angel passes!" she replied—"Below that line of light the Earth swings round in its little orbit, and from the Earth She comes! We go to watch her flight heavenward, and win the benediction that her passing presence gives. For look you!—all that splendour in the sky is not light, but wings!"

"Wings!" echoed Féraz dreamily, yet nothing doubting what she said.

"Wings or rays of glory,—which you will"—said the maiden, turning her own beautiful eyes towards the flashing brilliancy; "They are waiting there,—those who come from the furthest Divine world,—they are the friends of Lilith."

She bent her head serenely, and passed onward and upward, and Féraz stood still, his gaze fixed in the direction of that southern light which he now perceived was never still, but quivered as with a million shafts of vari−coloured fire.

"The friends of Lilith!" he repeated to himself—"Angels then,—for she is an Angel."

Angels!—angels waiting for Lilith in the glory of the South! How long—how long would they wait?—when would Lilith herself appear?—and would the very heavens open to receive her, soaring upward? He trembled,—he tried to realize the unimaginable scene,—and then, ... then he seemed to be seized and hurried away somewhere against his will ... and all that was light grew dark. He shuddered as with icy cold, and felt that earth again encompassed him,—and presently he woke—to find his brother looking at him.

"Why in the world do you go to sleep with the window wide open?" asked El−Râmi—"Here I find you, literally bathed in the moonlight—and moonlight drives men mad they say,—so fast too in the land of Nod that I could hardly waken you. Shut the window, my dear boy, if you **must** sleep."

Féraz sprang up quickly,—his eyes felt dazzled still with the remembrance of that "glory of the angels in the South."

"I was not asleep,"—he said—"But certainly I was not here."

"Ah!—In your Star again of course!" murmured El−Râmi with the faintest trace of mockery in his tone. But Féraz took no offence—his one anxiety was to prevent the name of "Lilith" springing to his lips in spite of himself.

"Yes—I was there"—he answered slowly, "And do you know all the people in the land are gathering together by thousands to see an Angel pass heavenward? And there is a glory of her sister−angels, away in the Southern horizon like the splendid circle described by Dante in his 'Paradiso.' Thus—

> "'There is a light in heaven whose goodly shine
> Makes the Creator visible to all
> Created, that in seeing Him alone
> Have peace. And in a circle spreads so far
> That the circumference were too loose a zone
> To girdle in the sun!'"

He quoted the lines with strange eagerness and fervour,—and El−Râmi looked at him curiously.

"What odd dreams you have!" he said, not unkindly—"Always fantastic and impossible, but beautiful in their way. You should set them down in black and white, and see how earth's critics will bespatter your heaven with the ink of their office pens! Poor boy!—how limply you would fall from 'Paradise'!—with what damp dejected wings!"

Féraz smiled.

"I do not agree with you"—he said—"If you speak of imagination,—only in this case I am not imagining,—no one can shut out that Paradise from me at any time—neither pope nor king, nor critic. Thought is free, thank God!"

"Yes—perhaps it is the only thing we have to be really thankful for,"—returned El−Râmi—"Well—I will leave you to resume your 'dreams'—only don't sleep with the windows open. Summer evenings are treacherous,—I should advise you to get to bed."

"And you?" asked Féraz, moved by a sudden anxiety which he could not explain.

"I shall not sleep to−night,"—said his brother moodily—"Something has occurred to me—a suggestion—an idea, which I am impatient to work out without loss of time. And, Féraz,—if I succeed in it—you shall know the result to−morrow."

This promise, which implied such a new departure from El−Râmi's customary reticence concerning his work, really alarmed Féraz more than gratified him.

"For Heaven's sake be careful!" he exclaimed—"You attempt so much,—you want so much,—perhaps more than can in law and justice be given. El−Râmi, my brother, leave something to God—you cannot, you dare not take all!"

"My dear visionary," replied El−Râmi gently—"You alarm yourself needlessly, I assure you. I do not want to take anything except what is my own,—and as for leaving something to God, why He is welcome to what He makes of me in the end—a pinch of dust!"

"There is more than dust in your composition—" cried Féraz impetuously—"There is divinity! And the divinity belongs to God, and to God you must render it up, pure and perfect. He claims it from you, and you are bound to give it."

A tremor passed through El−Râmi's frame, and he grew paler.

"If that be true, Féraz," he said slowly and with emphasis—"if it indeed be true that there **is** Divinity in me,—which I doubt!—why then let God claim and take His own particle of fire when He will, and as He will! Good−night!"

Féraz caught his hands and pressed them tenderly in his own.

"Good−night!" he murmured—"God does all things well, and to His care I commend you, my dearest brother."

And as El−Râmi turned away and left the room, he gazed after him with a chill sense of fear and desolation,—almost as if he were doomed never to see him again. He could not reason his alarm away, and yet he knew not why he should feel any alarm,—but truth to tell, his interior sense of vision seemed still to smart and ache with the radiance of the light he had seen in his "star" and that roseate sunset−flush of "glory in the south" created by the clustering angels who were "the friends of Lilith." Why were they there?—what did they wait for?—how should Lilith know them or have any intention of joining them, when she was here,—here on the earth, as he, Féraz, knew,—here under the supreme dominance of his own brother? He dared not speculate too far; and, trying to dismiss all thought from his mind, he was proceeding towards his own room there to retire for the night, when he met Zaroba coming down the stairs. Her dark withered face had a serene and almost happy expression upon it,—she smiled as she saw him.

"It is a night for dreams—" she said, sinking her harsh voice to a soft aImost musical cadence—"And as the multitude of the stars in heaven, so are the countless heart−throbs that pulsate in the world at this hour to the silver sway of the moon. All over the world!—all over the world!—" and she swung her arms to and fro with a slow rhythmical movement, so that the silver bangles on them clashed softly like the subdued tinkling of bells;—then, fixing her black eyes upon Féraz with a mournful yet kindly gaze she added—"Not for you—not for you, gentlest of dreamers! not for you! It is destined that you should dream,—and for you, dreaming is best,—but for me—I would rather **live** one hour than dream for a century!"

Her words were vague and wild as usual,—yet somehow Féraz chafed under the hidden sense of them, and he gave a slight petulant gesture of irritation. Zaroba, seeing it, broke into a low laugh.

"As God liveth,—" she muttered—"The poor lad fights bravely! He hates the world without ever having known it,—and recoils from love without ever having tasted it! He chooses a thought, a rhyme, a song, an art, rather than a passion! Poor lad—poor lad! Dream on, child!—but pray that you may never wake. For to dream of love may be sweet, but to wake without it is bitter!"

Like a gliding wraith she passed him and disappeared. Féraz had a mind to follow her downstairs to the basement where she had the sort of rough sleeping accommodation her half−savage nature preferred, whenever she slept at all out of Lilith's room, which was but seldom,—yet on second thoughts he decided he would let her alone.

"She only worries me—" he said to himself half vexedly as he went to his own little apartment—"It was she who first disobeyed El−Râmi, and made me disobey him also, and though she did take me to see the wonderful Lilith, what was the use of it? Her matchless beauty compelled my adoration, my enthusiasm, my reverence, almost my love—but who could dare to love such a removed angelic creature? Not even El−Râmi himself,—for he must know, even as I feel, that she is beyond all love, save the Love Divine."

He cast off his loose Eastern dress, and prepared to lie down, when he was startled by a faint far sound of singing. He listened attentively;—it seemed to come from outside, and he quickly flung open his window, which only opened upon a little narrow backyard such as is common to London houses. But the moonlight transfigured its ugliness, making it look like a square white court set in walls of silver. The soft rays fell caressingly too on the bare bronze−tinted shoulders of Féraz, as half undressed, he leaned out, his eyes upturned to the halcyon heavens. Surely, surely there was singing somewhere,—why, he could distinguish words amid the sounds!

Away, away!
Where the glittering planets whirl and swim
And the glory of the sun grows dim
Away, away!
To the regions of light and fire and air
Where the spirits of life are everywhere
Come, oh come away!

Trembling in every limb, Féraz caught the song distinctly, and held his breath in fear and wonder.

Away, away!
Come, oh come! we have waited long
And we sing thee now a summoning−song
Away, away!
Thou art freed from the world of the dreaming dead,
And the splendours of Heaven are round thee spread—
Come away!—away!

The chorus grew fainter and fainter—yet still sounded like a distant musical hum on the air.

"It is my fancy"—murmured Féraz at last, as he drew in his head and noiselessly shut the window—"It is the work of my own imagination, or what is perhaps more probable, the work of El−Râmi's will. I have heard such music before,—at his bidding—no, not **such** music, but something very like it."

He waited a few minutes, then quietly knelt down to pray,—but no words suggested themselves, save the phrase that once before had risen to his lips that day,—"God defend Lilith!"

He uttered it aloud,—then sprang up confused and half afraid, for the name had rung out so clearly that it seemed like a call or a command.

"Well!" he said, trying to steady his nerves—"What if I did say it? There is no harm in the words 'God defend her.' If she is dead, as El−Râmi says, she needs no defence, for her soul belongs to God already."

He paused again,—the silence everywhere was now absolutely unbroken and intense, and repelling the vague presentiments that threatened to oppress his mind, he threw himself on his bed and was soon sound asleep.

CHAPTER IV.

AND what of the "sign" promised by Lilith? Had it been given? No,—but El−Râmi's impatience would brook no longer delay, and he had determined to put an end to his perplexities by violent means if necessary, and take the risk of whatever consequences might ensue. He had been passing through the strangest phases of thought and self−analysis during these latter weeks,—trying, reluctantly enough, to bend his haughty spirit down to an attitude of humility and patience which ill suited him. He was essentially masculine in his complete belief in himself,—and more than all things he resented any interference with his projects, whether such interference were human or Divine. When therefore the tranced Lilith had bidden him "wait, watch and pray," she had laid upon him the very injunctions he found most difficult to follow. He could wait and watch if he were certain of results,—but where there was the slightest glimmer of **un** certainty, he grew very soon tired of both waiting and watching. As for "praying"—he told himself arrogantly that to ask for what he could surely obtain by the exerted strength of his own will was not only superfluous, but implied great weakness of character. It was then, in the full−armed spirit of pride and assertive dominance that he went up that night to Lilith's chamber, and dismissing Zaroba with more than usual gentleness of demeanour towards her, sat down beside the couch on which his lovely and mysterious "subject" lay, to all appearances inanimate save for her quiet breathing. His eyes were sombre, yet glittered with a somewhat dangerous lustre under their drooping lids;—he was to be duped no longer, he said to himself,—he had kept faithful vigil night after night, hoping against hope, believing against belief, and not the smallest movement or hint that could be construed into the promised "sign" had been vouchsafed to him. And all his old doubts returned to chafe and fret his brain,—doubts as to whether he had not been deceiving himself all this while in spite of his boasted scepticism,—and whether Lilith, when she spoke, was not merely repeating like a mechanical automaton, the stray thoughts of his own mind reflected upon hers? He had "proved" the possibility of that kind of thing occurring between human beings who were scarcely connected with each other even by a tie of ordinary friendship—how much more likely then that it should happen in such a case as that of Lilith,—Lilith who had been under the sole dominance of his will for six years! Yet while he thus teased himself with misgivings, he knew it was impossible to account for the mystic tendency of her language, or the strange and super−sensual character of the information she gave or feigned to give. It was not from himself or his own information that he had obtained a description of the landscapes in Mars,—its wondrous red fields,—its rosy foliage and flowers,—its great jagged rocks ablaze with amethystine spar,—its huge conical shells, tall and light, that rose up like fairy towers, fringed with flags and garlands of marine blossom, out of oceans the colour of jasper and pearl. Certainly too, it was not from the testimony of **his** inner consciousness that he had evoked the faith that seemed so natural to her; **her** belief in a Divine Personality, and **his** utter rejection of any such idea, were two things wider asunder than the poles, and had no possible sort of connection. Nevertheless what he could not account for, wearied him out and irritated him by its elusiveness and unprovable character,—and finally, his long, frequent, and profitless reflections on the matter had brought him this night up to a point of determination which but a few months back would have seemed to him impossible. **He had resolved to waken Lilith.** What sort of a being she would seem when once awakened, he could not quite imagine. He knew she had died in his arms as a child,—and that her seeming life now, and her growth into the loveliness of womanhood was the result of artificial means evolved from the wonders of chemistry,—but he persuaded himself that though her existence was the work of science and not nature, it was better than natural, and would last as long. He determined he would break that mysterious trance of body in which the departing Intelligence had been, by his skill, detained and held in connection with its earthly habitation,—he would transform the sleeping visionary into a living woman, for—he loved her. He could no longer disguise from himself that her fair face with its heavenly smile, framed in the golden hair that circled it like a halo, haunted him in every minute of time,—he could not and would not deny that his whole being ached to clasp with a lover's embrace that exquisite beauty which had so long been passively surrendered to his experimentings,—and with the daring of a proud and unrestrained nature, he frankly avowed his feeling to himself and made no pretence of hiding it any longer. But it was a far deeper mystery than his "search for the Soul of Lilith," to find out when and how this passion had first arisen in him. He could not analyse himself so thoroughly as to discover its vague beginnings. Perhaps it was germinated by Zaroba's wild promptings,—perhaps by the fact that a certain unreasonable jealousy had chafed his spirit when he knew that his

brother Féraz had won a smile of attention and response from the tranced girl,—perhaps it was owing to the irritation he had felt at the idea that his visitor, the monk from Cyprus, seemed to know more of her than he himself did,—at any rate, whatever the cause, he who had been sternly impassive once to the subtle attraction of Lilith's outward beauty, madly adored that outward beauty now. And as is usual with very self−reliant and proud dispositions, he almost began to glory in a sentiment which but a short time ago he would have repelled and scorned. What was **for** himself and **of** himself was good in his sight—**his** knowledge, **his** "proved" things, **his** tested discoveries, all these were excellent in his opinion, and the "Ego" of his own ability was the pivot on which all his actions turned. He had laid his plans carefully for the awakening of Lilith,—but in one little trifle they had been put out by the absence from town of Madame Irene Vassilius. She, of all women he had ever met, was the one he would have trusted with his secret, because he knew that her life, though lived in the world, was as stainless as though it were lived in heaven. He had meant to place Lilith in her care,—in order that with her fine perceptions, lofty ideals, and delicate sense of all things beautiful and artistic, she might accustom the girl to look upon the fairest and noblest side of life, so that she might not regret the "visions"—yes, he would call them "visions"—she had lost. But Irene was among the mountains of the Austrian Tyrol, enjoying a holiday in the intimate society of the fairest Queen in the world, Margherita of Italy, one of the few living Sovereigns who really strive to bestow on intellectual worth its true appreciation and reward. And her house in London was shut up, and under the sole charge of the happy Karl, former servant to Dr. Kremlin, who had now found with the fair and famous authoress a situation that suited him exactly. "Wild horses would not tear him from his lady's service" he was wont to say, and he guarded her household interests jealously, and said "Not at home" to undesired visitors like Roy Ainsworth for example, with a gruffness that would have done credit to a Russian bear. To Irene Vassilius, therefore, El−Râmi could not turn for the help he had meant to ask; and he was sorry and disappointed, for he had particularly wished to remove his "sleeper awakened" out of the companionship of both Zaroba and Féraz,—and there was no other woman like Irene,—at once so pure and proud, so brilliantly gifted, and so far removed from the touch and taint of modern social vulgarity. However, her aid was now unattainable, and he had to make up his mind to do without it. And so he resolutely put away the thought of the after−results of Lilith's awakening,—he, who was generally so careful to calculate consequences, instinct− ively avoided the consideration of them in the present instance.

The little silver timepiece ticked with an aggressive loudness as he sat now at his usual post, his black eyes fixed half−tenderly, half−fiercely on Lilith's white beauty,—beauty which was, as he told himself, all his own. Her arms were folded across her breast,—her features were pallid as marble, and her breathing was very light and low. The golden lamp burned dimly as it swung from the purple−pavilioned ceiling—the scent of the roses that were always set fresh in their vase every day, filled the room, and though the windows were closed against the night, a dainty moonbeam strayed in through a chink where the draperies were not quite drawn, and mingled its emerald glitter with the yellow lustre shed by the lamp on the darkly−carpeted floor.

"I will risk it,"—said El−Râmi in a whisper,—a whisper that sounded loud in the deep stillness—"I will risk it—why not? I have proved myself capable of arresting life, or the soul—for life **is** the soul—in its flight from hence into the Nowhere,—I must needs also have the power to keep it indefinitely here for myself in whatever form I please. These are the rewards of science,—rewards which I am free to claim,—and what I have done, that I have a right to do again. Now let me ask myself the question plainly;—Do I believe in the supernatural?"

He paused, thinking earnestly,—his eyes still fixed on Lilith.

"No, I do not,"—he answered himself at last—"Frankly and honestly, I do not. I have no proofs. I am, it is true, puzzled by Lilith's language,—but when I know her as she is, a woman, sentient and conscious of my presence, I may find out the seeming mystery. The dreams of Féraz are only dreams,—the vision I saw on that one occasion"—and a faint tremor came over him as he remembered the sweet yet solemn look of the shining One he had seen standing between him and his visitor the monk—"the vision was of course **his** work—the work of that mystic master of a no less mystic brotherhood. No—I have no proofs of the supernatural, and I must not deceive myself. Even the promise of Lilith fails. Poor child!—she sleeps like the daughter of Jairus, but when I, in my turn, pronounce the words 'Maiden I say unto thee, arise'—she will obey;—she will awake and live indeed."

"She will awake and live indeed!"

The words were repeated after him distinctly—but by whom? He started up,—looked round—there was no one in the room,—and Lilith was immovable as the dead. He began to find something chill and sad in the intense

silence that followed,—everything about him was a harmony of glowing light and purple colour,—yet all seemed suddenly very dull and dim and cold. He shivered where he stood, and pressed his hands to his eyes,—his temples throbbed and ached, and he felt curiously bewildered. Presently, looking round the room again, he saw that the picture of "Christ and His Disciples" was unveiled;—he had not noticed the circumstance before. Had Zaroba inadvertently drawn aside the curtain which ordinarily hid it from view? Slowly his eyes travelled to it and dwelt upon it—slowly they followed the letters of the inscription beneath.

"WHOM SAY YE THAT I AM?"

The question seemed to him for the moment all−paramount; he could not shake off the sense of pertinacious demand with which it impressed him.

"A good Man,"—he said aloud, staring fixedly at the divine Face and Figure, with its eloquent expression of exalted patience, grandeur and sweetness. "A good Man, misled by noble enthusiasm and unselfish desire to benefit the poor. A man with a wise knowledge of human magnetism and the methods of healing in which it can be employed,—a man too, somewhat skilled in the art of optical illusion. Yet when all is said and done, a **good** Man—too good and wise and pure for the peace of the rulers of the world,—too honest and clear−sighted to deserve any other reward but death. Divine?—No!—save in so far as in our highest moments we are all divine. Existing now?—a Prince of Heaven, a Pleader against Punishment? Nay, nay!—no more existing than the Soul of Lilith,—that soul for which I search, but which I feel I shall never find!"

And he drew nearer to the ivory−satin couch on which lay the lovely sleeping wonder and puzzle of his ambitious dreams. Leaning towards her he touched her hands,—they were cold, but as he laid his own upon them they grew warm and trembled. Closer still he leaned, his eyes drinking in every detail of her beauty with eager, proud and masterful eyes.

"Lilith!—**my** Lilith!" he murmured—"After all, why should we put off happiness for the sake of everlastingness, when happiness can be had, at any rate for a few years. One can but live and die and there an end. And Love comes but once, ... Love!—how I have scoffed at it and made a jest of it as if it were a plaything. And even now while my whole heart craves for it, I question whether it is worth having! Poor Lilith!—only a woman after all,—a woman whose beauty will soon pass—whose days will soon be done,—only a woman—not an immortal Soul,—there is, there can be, no such thing as an immortal Soul."

Bending down over her, he resolutely unclasped the fair crossed arms, and seized the delicate small hands in a close grip.

"Lilith! Lilith!" he called imperiously.

A long and heavy pause ensued,—then the girl's limbs quivered violently as though moved by a sudden convulsion, and her lips parted in the utterance of the usual formula—

"I am here."

"Here at last, but you have been absent long"—said El−Râmi with some reproach, "Too long. And you have forgotten your promise."

"Forgotten!" she echoed—"O doubting spirit! Do such as I am, ever forget?"

Her thrilling accents awed him a little, but he pursued his own way with her, undauntedly.

"Then why have you not fulfilled it?" he demanded—"The strongest patience may tire. I have waited and watched, as you bade me—but now—now I am weary of waiting."

Oh, what a sigh broke from her lips!

"I am weary too"—she said—"The angels are weary. God is weary. All Creation is weary—of Doubt."

For a moment he was abashed,—but only for a moment; in himself he considered Doubt to be the strongest part of his nature,—a positive shield and buckler against possible error.

"You cannot wait,"—went on Lilith, speaking slowly and with evident sadness—"Neither can we. We have hoped,—in vain! We have watched—in vain! The strong man's pride will not bend, nor the stubborn spirit turn in prayer to its Creator. Therefore what is not bent must be broken,—and what voluntarily refuses Light must accept Darkness. I am bidden to come to you, my beloved,—to come to you as I am, and as I ever shall be,—I will come—but how will you receive me?"

"With ecstasy, with love, with welcome beyond all words or thoughts!" cried El− Râmi in passionate excitement. "O Lilith, Lilith! you who read the stars, cannot you read my heart? Do you not see that I—I who have recoiled from the very thought of loving,—I, who have striven to make of myself a man of stone and iron rather than flesh and blood, am conquered by your spells, victorious Lilith!—conquered in every fibre of my being by some subtle witchcraft known to yourself alone. Am I weak?—am I false to my own beliefs? I know not,—I am only conscious of the sovereignty of beauty which has mastered many a stronger man than I. What is the fiercest fire compared to this fever in my veins? I worship you, Lilith! I love you!—more than the world, life, time and hope of heaven, I love you!"

Flushed with eagerness and trembling with his own emotion, he rained kisses on the hands he held, but Lilith strove to withdraw them from his clasp. Pale as alabaster she lay as usual with fast−closed eyes, and again a deep sigh heaved her breast.

"You love my Shadow,"—she said mournfully—"not Myself."

But El−Râmi's rapture was not to be chilled by these words. He gathered up a glittering mass of the rich hair that lay scattered on the pillow and pressed it to his lips.

"O Lilith mine, is this 'Shadow'?" he asked—"All this gold in which I net my heart like a willingly caught bird, and make an end of my boasted wisdom? Are these sweet lips, these fair features, this exquisite body, all 'shadow'? Then blessed must be the light that casts so gracious a reflection! Judge me not harshly, my Sweet,—for if indeed you are Divine, and this Beauty I behold is the mere reflex of Divinity, let me see the Divine Form of you for once, and have a guarantee for faith through love! If there is another and a fairer Lilith than the one whom I now behold, deny me not the grace of so marvellous a vision! I am ready!—I fear nothing—to−night I could face God Himself undismayed!"

He paused abruptly—he knew not why. Something in the chill and solemn look of Lilith's face checked his speech.

"Lilith—Lilith!" he began again whisper− ingly—"Do I ask too much? Surely not—not if you love me! And you do love me—I feel, I know you do!"

There was a long pause,—Lilith might have been made of marble for all the movement she gave. Her breathing was so light as to be scarcely perceptible, and when she answered him at last, her voice sounded strangely faint and far−removed. "Yes, I love you"—she said—"I love you as I have loved you for a thousand ages, and as you have never loved me. To win your love has been **my** task—to repel my love has been **yours**.

He listened, smitten by a vague sense of compunction and regret.

"But you have conquered, Lilith"—he answered—"yours is the victory. And have I not surrendered, willingly, joyfully? O my beautiful Dreamer, what would you have me do?"

"Pray!" said Lilith, with a sudden passionate thrill in her voice—"Pray! Repent!"

El−Râmi drew himself backward from her couch, impatient and angered.

"Repent!" he cried aloud—"And why should I repent? What have I done that calls for repentance? For what sin am I to blame? For doubting a God who, deaf to centuries upon centuries of human prayer and worship, will not declare Himself? and for striving to perceive Him through the cruel darkness by which we are surrounded? What crime can be discovered there? The world is most infinitely sad,—and life is most infinitely dreary,—and may I not strive to comfort those amid the struggle who fain would 'prove' and hold fast to the things beyond? Nay!—let the heavens open and cast forth upon me their fiery thunderbolts I will **not** repent! For, vast as my Doubt is, so vast would be my Faith, if God would speak and say to His creatures but once—'Lo! I am here!' Tortures of hell−pain would not terrify me, if in the end His Being were made clearly manifest—a cross of endless woe would I endure, to feel and see Him near me at the last, and more than all, to make the world feel and see Him,—to prove to wondering, trembling, terror−stricken, famished, heart−broken human beings that He exists,—that He is aware of their misery,—that He cares for them, that it is all well for them,—that there **is** Eternal Joy hiding itself somewhere amid the great star−thickets of this monstrous universe—that we are not desolate atoms whirled by a blind fierce Force into life against our will, and out of it again without a shadow of reason or a glimmer of hope. Repent for such thoughts as these? I will not! Pray to a God of such inexorable silence? I will not! No, Lilith—my Lilith whom I snatched from greedy death—even you may fail me at the last,—you may break your promise,—the promise that I should see with mortal eyes your own Immortal Self—who can blame you for the promise of a dream, poor child! You may prove yourself nothing but woman;

woman, poor, frail, weak, helpless woman, to be loved and cherished and pitied and caressed in all the delicate limbs, and kissed in all the dainty golden threads of hair, and then—then—to be laid down like a broken flower in the tomb that has grudged me your beauty all this while,— all this may be, Lilith, and yet I will not pray to an unproved God, nor repent of an unproved sin!"

He uttered his words with extraordinary force and eloquence—one would have thought he was addressing a multitude of hearers instead of that one tranced girl, who, though beautiful as a sculptured saint on a sarcophagus, appeared almost as inanimate, save for the slow parting of her lips when she spoke.

"O superb Angel of the Kingdom!" she murmured—"It is no marvel that you fell!"

He heard her, dimly perplexed; but strengthened in his own convictions by what he had said, he was conscious of power,—power to defy, power to endure, power to command. Such a sense of exhilaration and high confidence had not possessed him for many a long day, and he was about to speak again, when Lilith's voice once more stole musically on the silence.

"You would reproach God for the world's misery. Your complaint is unjust. There is a Law,—a Law for the earth as for all worlds; and God cannot alter one iota of that Law without destroying Himself and His Universe. Shall all Beauty, all Order, all Creation come to an end because wilful Man is wilfully miserable? Your world trespasses against the Law in almost everything it does—hence its suffering. Other worlds accept the Law and fulfil it,—and with them, all is well."

"Who is to know this Law?" demanded El−Râmi impatiently. "And how can the world trespass against what is not explained?"

"It is explained;"—said Lilith—"The explanation is in every soul's inmost consciousness. You all know the Law and feel it—but knowing, you ignore it. Men were intended by Law—God's Law—to live in brotherhood; but your world is divided into nations all opposed to each other,—the result is Evil. There is a Law of Health, which men can scarcely be forced to follow—the majority disobey it; again, the result is Evil. There is a Law of 'Enough'—men grasp more than enough, and leave their brother with less than enough,—the result is Evil. There is a Law of Love—men make it a Law of Lust,—the result is Evil. All Sin, all Pain, all Misery, are results of the Law's transgression,—and God cannot alter the Law, He Himself being part of it and its fulfilment."

"And is Death also the Law?" asked El−Râmi—"Wise Lilith!—Death, which concludes all things, both in Law and Order?"

"There is no death."—responded Lilith—"I have told you so. What you call by that name is Life."

"Prove it!" exclaimed El−Râmi excitedly, "Prove it, Lilith! Show me Yourself! If there is another You than this beloved beauty of your visible form, let me behold it, and then—then will I repent of doubt,—then will I pray for pardon!"

"You will repent indeed,"—said Lilith sorrowfully—"And you will pray as children pray when first they learn 'Our Father.' Yes, I will come to you;—watch for me, O my erring Belovëd!—watch!—for neither my love nor my promise can fail. But O remember that you are not ready—that your will, your passion, your love, forces me hither ere the time,—that if I come, it is but to depart again—forever!"

"No, no!" cried El−Râmi desperately—"Not to depart, but to remain!—to stay with me, my Lilith, my own—body and soul,—forever!"

The last words sounded like a defiance flung at some invisible opponent. He stopped, trembling—for a sudden and mysterious wave of sound filled the room, like a great wind among the trees, or the last grand chord of an organ−symphony. A chill fear assailed him,—he kept his eyes fixed on the beautiful form of Lilith with a strained eagerness of attention that made his temples ache. She grew paler and paler,—and yet, ... absorbed in his intent scrutiny he could not move or speak. His tongue seemed tied to the roof of his mouth,—he felt as though be could scarcely breathe. All life appeared to hang on one supreme moment of time, which like a point of light wavered between earth and heaven, mortality and infinity. He,—one poor atom in the vast Universe,—stood, audaciously waiting for the declaration of God's chiefest Secret! Would it be revealed at last?—or still withheld?

CHAPTER V.

ALL at once, while he thus closely watched her, Lilith with a violent effort, sat up stiffly erect and turned her head slowly towards him. Her features were rigidly statuesque, and white as snow,—the strange gaunt look of her face terrified him, but he could not cry out or utter a word—he was stricken dumb by an excess of fear. Only his black eyes blazed with an anguish of expectation,—and the tension of his nerves seemed almost greater than he could endure.

"In the great Name of God and by the Passion of Christ,"—said Lilith solemnly, in tones that sounded far−off and faint and hollow—"do not look at this Shadow of Me! Turn, turn away from this dust of Earth which belongs to the Earth alone,—and watch for the light of Heaven which comes from Heaven alone! O my love, my belovëd!—if you are wise, if you are brave, if you are strong, turn away from beholding this Image of Me, which is not Myself,—and look for me where the roses are—there will I stand and wait!"

As the last word left her lips she sank back on her pillows, inert, and deathly pale; but El−Râmi, dazed and bewildered though he was, retained sufficient consciousness to understand vaguely what she meant,—he was not to look at her as she lay there,—he was to forget that such a Lilith as he knew existed,—he was to look for another Lilith there—"where the roses are." Mechanically, and almost as if some invisible power commanded and controlled his volition, he turned sideways round from the couch, and fixed his gaze on the branching flowers, which from the crystal vase that held them, lifted their pale−pink heads daintily aloft as though they took the lamp that swung from the ceiling for some little new sun, specially invented for their pleasure. Why,—there was nothing there; ... "Nothing there!" he half−muttered with a beating heart, rubbing his eyes and staring hard before him, ... nothing—nothing at all, but the roses themselves, and ... and ... yes!—a Light behind them!—a light that wavered round them and began to stretch upward in wide circling rings!

El−Râmi gazed and gazed, ... saying over and over again to himself that it was the reflection of the lamp, ... the glitter of that stray moonbeam there, ... or something wrong with his own faculty of vision, ... and yet he gazed on, as though for the moment, all his being were made of eyes. The roses trembled and swayed to and fro delicately as the strange Light widened and brightened behind their blossoming clusters,—a light that seemed to palpitate with all the wondrous living tints of the rising sun when it shoots forth its first golden rays from the foaming green hollows of the sea. Upward, upward and ever upward the deepening glory extended, till the lamp paled and grew dimmer than the spark of a feeble match struck as a rival to a flash of lightning,—and El−Râmi's breath came and went in hard panting gasps as he stood watching it in speechless immobility.

Suddenly, two broad shafts of rainbow luminance sprang, as it seemed from the ground, and blazed against the purple hangings of the room with such a burning dazzle of prismatic colouring in every glittering line, that it was well−nigh impossible for human sight to bear it, and yet El−Râmi would rather have been stricken stone−blind than move. Had he been capable of thought, he might have remembered the beautiful old Greek myths which so truthfully and frequently taught the lesson that to look upon the purely divine, meant death to the purely human; but he could not think,—all his own mental faculties were for the time rendered numb and useless. His eyes ached and smarted as though red−hot needles were being plunged into them, but though he was conscious of, he was indifferent to the pain. His whole mind was concentrated on watching the mysterious radiance of those wing−shaped rays in the room,—and now ... now while he gazed, he began to perceive an Outline between the rays, ... a Shape, becoming every second more and more distinct, as though some invisible heavenly artist were drawing the semblance of Beauty in air with a pencil dipped in morning−glory.... O wonderful, ineffable Vision!—O marvellous breaking forth of the buds of life that are hid in the quiet ether!—where, where in the vast wealth and reproduction of deathless and delicate atoms, is the Beginning of things?—where the End? ...

Presently appeared soft curves, and glimmers of vapoury white flushed with rose, suggestive of fire seen through mountain−mist,—then came a glittering flash of gold that went rippling and ever rippling backward, like the flowing fall of lovely hair; and the dim Shape grew still more clearly visible, seeming to gather substance and solidity from the very light that encircled it. Had it any human likeness? Yes,—yet the resemblance it bore to humanity was so far away, so exalted and ideal, as to be no more like our material form than the actual splendour of the sun is like its painted image. The stature and majesty and brilliancy of it increased,—and now the unspeakable loveliness of a Face too fair for any mortal fairness began to suggest itself dimly; ... El−Râmi

growing faint and dizzy, thought he distinguished white outstretched arms, and hands uplifted in an ecstasy of prayer;—nay,—though he felt himself half−swooning in the struggle he made to overcome his awe and fear, he would have sworn that two star−like eyes, full−orbed and splendid with a radiant blue as of Heaven's own forget−me−nots, were turned upon him with a questioning appeal, a hope, a supplication, a love beyond all eloquence! ... But his strength was rapidly failing him;—unsupported by faith, his mere unassisted flesh and blood could endure no more of this supernatural sight, and ... all suddenly, ... the tension o his nerves gave way, and morbid terrors shook his frame. A blind frenzied feeling that he was sinking,—sinking out of sight and sense into a drear profound, possessed him, and hardly knowing what he did, he turned desperately to the couch where Lilith, the Lilith he knew best lay, and looking,—

"Ah God!" he cried, pierced to the heart by the bitterest anguish he had ever known,—Lilith—**his** Lilith was withering before his very eyes! The exquisite Body he had watched and tended was shrunken and yellow as a fading leaf,—the face, no longer beautiful, was gaunt and pinched and skeleton−like—the lips were drawn in and blue,—and strange convulsions shook the wrinkling and sunken breast!

In one mad moment he forgot everything,—forgot the imperishable Soul for the perishing Body,—forgot his long studies and high ambitions,—and could think of nothing, except that this human creature he had saved from death seemed now to be passing into death's long−denied possession,—and throwing himself on the couch he clutched at his fading treasure with the desperation of frenzy.

"Lilith!—Lilith!" he cried hoarsely, the extremity of his terror choking his voice to a smothered wild moan—"Lilith! My love, my idol, my spirit, my saint! Come back!—come back!"

And clasping her in his arms he covered with burning kisses the thin peaked face—the shrinking flesh,—the tarnishing lustre of the once bright hair.

"Lilith! Lilith!" he wailed, dry−eyed and fevered with agony—"Lilith, I love you! Has love no force to keep you? Lilith, love Lilith! You shall not leave me,—you are mine—mine! I stole you from death—I kept you from God!—from all the furies of heaven and earth!—you **shall** come back to me—I love you!"

And lo! ... as he spoke the body he held to his heart grew warm,—the flesh filled up and regained its former softness and roundness—the features took back their loveliness—the fading hair brightened to its wonted rich tint and rippled upon the pillows in threads of gold—the lips reddened,—the eyelids quivered,—the little hands, trembling gently like birds' wings, nestled round his throat with a caress that thrilled his whole being and calmed the tempest of his grief as suddenly as when of old the Master walked upon the raging sea of Galilee and said to it "Peace, be still!"

Yet this very calmness oppressed him heavily,—like a cold hand laid on a fevered brow it chilled his blood even while it soothed his pain. He was conscious of a sense of irreparable loss,—and moreover he felt he had been a coward,—a coward physically and morally. For, instead of confronting the Supernatural, or what seemed the Supernatural calmly, and with the inquisitorial research of a scientist, he had allowed himself to be overcome by It, and had fled back to the consideration of the merely human, with all the delirious speed of a lover and fool. Nevertheless he had his Lilith—his own Lilith,—and holding her jealously to his heart, he presently turned his head tremblingly and in doubt to where the roses nodded drowsily in their crystal vase;—only the roses now were there! The marvellous Wingëd Brightness had fled, and the place it had illumined seemed by contrast very dark. The Soul,—the Immortal Self—had vanished;—the subtle Being he had longed to see, and whose existence and capabilities he had meant to "prove"; and he, who had consecrated his life and labour to the attainment of this one object had failed to grasp the full solution of the mystery at the very moment when it might have been his. By his own weakness he had lost the Soul,—by his own strength he had gained the Body,—or so he thought, and his mind was torn between triumph and regret. He was not yet entirely conscious of what had chanced to him—he could formulate no idea,—all he distinctly knew was that he held Lilith, warm and living, in his arms, and that he felt her light breath upon his cheek.

"Love is enough!" he murmured, kissing the hair that lay in golden clusters against his breast—"Waken, my Lilith!—waken!—and in our perfect joy we will defy all gods and angels!"

She stirred in his clasp,—he bent above her, eager, ardent, expectant,—her long eyelashes trembled,—and then,—slowly, slowly, like white leaves opening to the sun, the lids upcurled, disclosing the glorious eyes beneath,—eyes that had been closed to earthly things for six long years,—deep, starry violet−blue eyes that shone with the calm and holy lustre of unspeakable purity and peace,—eyes that in their liquid softness held all the

appeal, hope, supplication and eloquent love, he had seen (or fancied he had seen) in the strange eyes of the only half−visible Soul! The Soul indeed was looking through its earthly windows for the last time, had he known it,—but he did not know it. Raised to as giddy a pinnacle of delight as suddenly as he had been lately plunged into an abyss of grief and terror, he gazed into those newly−opened wondrous worlds of mute expression with all a lover's pride, passion, tenderness and longing.

"Fear nothing, Lilith!" he said—"It is I! I whose voice you have answered and obeyed,—I, your lover and lord! It is I who claim you, my belovëd!—I who bid you waken from death to life!"

Oh, what a smile of dazzling rapture illumined her face!—it was as if the sun in all his glory had suddenly broken out of a cloud to brighten her beauty with his purest beams. Her child−like, innocent, wondering eyes remained fixed upon El−Râmi,—lifting her white arms languidly she closed them round about him with a gentle fervour that seemed touched by compassion,—and he, thrilled to the quick by that silent expression of tenderness, straightway ascended to a heaven of blind, delirious ecstasy. He wanted no word from her ... what use of words!—her silence was the perfect eloquence of love! All her beauty was his own—his very own! ... he had willed it so,—and his will had won its way,—the iron Will of a strong wise man without a God to help him!—and all he feared was that he might die of his own excess of triumph and joy! ... Hush! ... hush! ... Music again!—that same deep sound as of the wind among trees, or the solemn organ−chord that closes the song of departing choristers. It was strange,—very strange!—but though he heard, he scarcely heeded it; unearthly terrors could not shake him now,—not now, while he held Lilith to his heart, and devoured her loveliness with his eyes, curve by curve, line by line, till with throbbing pulses, and every nerve tingling in his body, he bent his face down to hers, and pressed upon her lips a long, burning passionate kiss! ...

But, even as he did so, she was wrenched fiercely out of his hold by a sudden and awful convulsion,—her slight frame writhed and twisted itself away from his clasp with a shuddering recoil of muscular agony—once her little hands clutched the air, ... and then, ... then, the brief struggle over, her arms dropped rigidly at her sides, and her whole body swerved and fell backward heavily upon the pillows of the couch, stark, pallid and pulseless! ... And he,—he, gazing upon her thus with a vague and stupid stare, wondered dimly whether he were mad or dreaming? ...

What ... what was this sudden ailment? ... this ... this strange swoon? What bitter frost had stolen into **her** veins? ... what insatiable hell−fire was consuming **his?** Those eyes, ... those just unclosed, innocent lovely eyes of Lilith, ... was it possible, could it be true that all the light had gone out of them?—gone, utterly gone? And what was that clammy film beginning to cover them over with a glazing veil of blankness? ... God! ... God! ... he must be in a wild nightmare, he thought! ... he should wake up presently and find all this seeming disaster unreal,—the fantastic fear of a sick brain ... the "clangour and anger of elements" imaginative, not actual, ... and here his reeling terror found voice in a hoarse, smothered cry—

"Lilith! ... Lilith! ..."

But stop, stop! ... was it Lilith indeed whom he thus called? ... **That?** ... that gaunt, sunken, rigid form, growing swiftly hideous! ... yes—hideous, with those dull marks of blue discoloration coming here and there on the no longer velvety fair skin!

"Lilith! ... Lilith!"

The name was lost and drowned in the wave of solemn music that rolled and throbbed upon the air, and El−Râmi's distorted mind, catching at the dread suggestiveness of that unearthly harmony, accepted it as a sort of invisible challenge.

"What, good Death! brother Death, are you there?" he muttered fiercely, shaking his clenched fist at vacancy—"Are you here, and are you everywhere? Nay, we have crossed swords before now in desperate combat ... and I have won! ... and I will win again! Hands off, rival Death! Lilith is mine!"

And, snatching from his breast a phial of the liquid with which he had so long kept Lilith living in a trance, he swiftly injected it into her veins, and forced some drops between her lips ... in vain ... in vain! No breath came back to stir that silent breast—no sign whatever of returning animation evinced itself, only, ... at the expiration of the few moments which generally sufficed the vital fluid for its working, there chanced a strange and terrible thing. Wherever the liquid had made its way, there the skin blistered, and the flesh blackened, as though the whole body were being consumed by some fierce inward fire; and El−Râmi, looking with strained wild eyes at this destructive result of his effort to save, at last realized to the full all the awfulness, all the dire agony of his fate!

The Soul of Lilith had departed for ever; ... even as the Cyprian monk had said, it had outgrown its earthly tenement, ... its cord of communication with the body had been mysteriously and finally severed,—and the Body itself was crumbling into ashes before his very sight, helped into swifter dissolution by the electric potency of his own vaunted "life−elixir"! It was horrible ... horrible! ... was there **no** remedy?

Staring himself almost blind with despair, he dashed the phial on the ground, and stamped it under his heel in an excess of impotent fury, ... the veins in his forehead swelled with a fulness of aching blood almost to bursting, ... he could do nothing, ... nothing! His science was of no avail;—his Will,—his proud inflexible Will was "as a reed shaken in the wind!" . . Ha! ... the old stock phrase! ... it had been said before, in old times and in new, by canting creatures who believed in Prayer. Prayer!—would it bring back beauty and vitality to that blackening corpse before him? ... that disfigured, withering clay he had once called Lilith! ... How ghastly It looked! ... Shuddering violently he turned away,—turned,—to meet the grave sweet eyes of the pictured Christ on the wall, ... to read again the words, "WHOM SAY YE THAT I AM?" The letters danced before him in characters of flame, ... there seemed a great noise everywhere as of clashing steam−hammers and great church−bells,—the world was reeling round him as giddily as a spun wheel.

"Robber of the Soul of Lilith!" he muttered between his set teeth—"Whoever you be, whether God or Devil, I will find you out! I will pursue you to the uttermost ends of vast infinitude! I will contest her with you yet, for surely she is mine! What right have you, O Force Unknown, to steal my love from me? Answer me!—prove yourself God, as I prove myself Man! Declare **something**, O mute Inflexible!—**Do** some− thing other than mechanically grind out a reasonless, unexplained Life and Death for ever! O Lilith!—faithless Angel!—did you not say that love was sweet?—and could not love keep you here,—here, with me, your lover, Lilith?"

Involuntarily and with cowering reluctance, his eyes turned again towards the couch,—but now—now ... the horror of that decaying beauty, interiorly burning itself away to nothingness was more than he could bear; ... a mortal sickness seized him,—and he flung up his arms with a desperate gesture as though he sought to drag down some covering wherewith to hide himself and his utter misery.

"Defeated, baffled, befooled!" he exclaimed frantically—"Conquered by the Invisible and Invincible after all! Conquered! I! ... Who would have thought it! Hear me, earth and heaven!—hear me, O rolling world of Human Wretchedness, hear me!—for I have proved a Truth! There IS a God!—a jealous God—jealous of the Soul of Lilith!—a God tyrannical, absolute, and powerful—a God of infinite and inexorable Justice! O God, I know you!—I own you—I meet you! I am part of you as the worm is!—and you can change me, but you cannot destroy me! You have done your worst,—you have fought against your own Essence in me, till light has turned to darkness and love to bitterness;—you have left me no help, no hope, no comfort; what more remains to do, O terrible God of a million Universes! ... what more? Gone—gone is the Soul of Lilith—but Where? ... Where in the vast Unknowable shall I find my love again? ... Teach me **that** O God! ... give me that one small clue through the million million intricate webs of star−systems, and I too will fall blindly down and adore an Imaginary Good invisible and all−paramount Evil! ... I too will sacrifice reason, pride, wisdom and power and become as a fool for Love's sake! ... I too will grovel before an unproved Symbol of Divinity as a savage grovels before his stone fetish, ... I will be weak, not strong, I will babble prayers with the children, ... only take me where Lilith is, ... bring me to Lilith ... angel Lilith! ... love Lilith! ... **my** Lilith! ... ah God! God! Have mercy ... mercy! ..."

His voice broke suddenly in a sharp jarring shriek of delirious laughter,—blood sprang to his mouth,—and with a blind movement of his arms, as of one in thick darkness seeking light, he fell heavily face forward, insensible on the couch where the Body he had loved, deprived of its Soul, lay crumbling swiftly away into hideous disfigurement and ashes.

CHAPTER VI.

"**AWAKE,** *Féraz! To−day dreams end, and Life begins.*"

The words sounded so distinctly in his ears that the half−roused Féraz turned drowsily on his pillows and opened his eyes, fully expecting to see the speaker of them in his room. But there was no one. It was early morning,—the birds were twittering in the outer yard, and bright sunshine poured through the window. He had had a long and refreshing sleep,—and sitting up in his bed he stretched himself with a sense of refreshment and comfort, the while he tried to think what had so mysteriously and unpleasantly oppressed him with forebodings on the previous night. By−and−by he re− membered the singing voices in the air and smiled.

"All my fancy of course!" he said lightly, springing up and beginning to dash the fresh cold water of his morning bath over his polished bronze−like skin, till all his nerves tingled with the pleasurable sensation—"I am always hearing music of some sort or other. I believe music is pent up in the air, and loosens itself at intervals like the rain. Why not? There must be such a wealth of melody aloft,—all the songs of all the birds,—all the whisperings of all the leaves;—all the dash and rush of the rivers, waterfalls and oceans,—it is all in the air, and I believe it falls in a shower sometimes and penetrates the brains of musicians like Beethoven, Schumann and Wagner."

Amused with his own fantastic imaginings he hummed a tune sotto−voce as he donned his easy and picturesque attire,—then he left his room and went to his brother's study to set it in order for the day, as was his usual custom.

He opened the door softly and with caution, because El−Râmi often slept there on the hard soldier's couch that occupied one corner,—but this morning, all was exactly as it had been left at night,—the books and papers were undisturbed,—and, curiously enough, the little sanctum presented a vacant and deserted appearance, as though it would dumbly express a fear that its master was gone from it for ever. How such a notion suggested itself to Féraz, he could not tell,—but he was certainly conscious of a strange sinking at the heart, as he paused in the act of throwing open one of the windows, and looked round the quiet room. Had anything been moved or displaced during the night that he should receive such a general impression of utter emptiness? Nothing—so far as he could judge;—there was his brother's ebony chair wheeled slightly aside from the desk,—there were the great globes, terrestrial and celestial,—there were the various volumes lately used for reference,—and, apart from these, on the table, was the old vellum book in Arabic that Féraz had once before attempted to read. It was open,—a circum− stance that struck Féraz with some surprise, for he could not recall having seen it in that position last evening. Perhaps El−Râmi had come down in the night to refer to it and had left it there by accident? Féraz felt he must examine it more nearly, and approaching, he rested his elbows on the table and fixed his eyes on the Arabic page before him which was headed in scrolled lettering "The Mystery of Death." As he read the words, a beautiful butterfly flew in through the open window and circled joyously round his head, till presently espying the bunch of heliotrope in the glass where Féraz had set it the previous day, it fluttered off to that, and settled on the scented purple bloom, its pretty wings quivering with happiness. Mechanically Féraz watched its flight,—then his eyes returned and dwelt once more on the time−stained lettering before him; "The Mystery of Death,"—and following the close lines with his fore−finger, he soon made out the ensuing passages. "The Mystery of Death. Whereas, of this there is no mystery at all, as the ignorant suppose, but only a clearing up of many intricate matters. When the body dies,—or to express it with more pertinacious exactitude, when the body resolves itself into the living organisms of which earth is composed, it is because the Soul has outgrown its mortal habitation and can no longer endure the cramping narrowness of the same. We speak unjustly of the aged, because by their taciturnity and inaptitude for worldly business, they seem to us foolish, and of a peevish weakness; it should however be remembered that it is a folly to complain of the breaking of the husk when the corn is ripe. In old age the Soul is weary of and indifferent to earthly things, and makes of its tiresome tenement a querulous reproach,—it has exhausted earth's pleasures and surpassed earth's needs, and palpitates for larger movement. When this is gained, the husk falls, the grain sprouts forth—the Soul is freed,—and all Nature teaches this lesson. To call the process 'death' and a 'mystery' is to repeat the error of barbarian ages,—for once the Soul has no more use for the Body, you cannot detain it,—you cannot com− press its wings,—you cannot stifle its nature,—and, being Eternal, it demands Eternity."

"All that is true enough;"—murmured Féraz—"As true as any truth possible, and yet people will not accept or understand it. All the religions, all the preachers, all the teachers seem to avail them nothing,—and they go on believing in death far more than in life. What a sad and silly world it is!—always planning for itself and never for God, and only turning to God in imminent danger like a coward schoolboy who says he is sorry because he fears a whipping."

Here he lifted his eyes from the book, feeling that someone was looking at him, and true enough, there in the doorway stood Zaroba. Her withered face had an anxious expression and she held up a warning finger.

"Hush! ..." she said whisperingly.... "No noise! ... where is El−Râmi?"

Féraz replied by a gesture, indicating that he was still upstairs at work on his mysterious "experiment."

Zaroba advanced slowly into the room, and seated herself on the nearest chair.

"My mind misgives me;"—she said in low awe−stricken tones,—"My mind misgives me; I have had dreams—**such** dreams! All night I have tossed and turned,—my head throbs here,"—and she pressed both hands upon her brow,—"and my heart—my heart aches! I have seen strange creatures clad in white,—ghostly faces of the past have stared at me,—my dead children have caressed me,—my dead husband has kissed me on the lips—a kiss of ice, freezing me to the marrow. What does it bode? No good—no good!—but ill! Like the sound of the flying feet of the whirlwind that brings death to the sons of the desert, there is a sound in my brain which says—'Sorrow! Sorrow!' again and yet again 'Sorrow!'"

Sighing, she clasped her hands about her knees and rocked herself to and fro, as though she were in pain. Féraz stood gazing at her wistfully and with a somewhat troubled air,—her words impressed him uncomfortably,—her very attitude suggested misery. The sunlight beaming across her bent figure, flashed on the silver bangles that circled her brown arms, and touched her rough gray hair to flecks of brightness,—her black eyes almost hid themselves under their tired drooping lids,—and when she ceased speaking her lips still moved as though she inwardly muttered some weird incantation. Growing impatient with her, he knew not why, the young man paced slowly up and down the room;—her deafness precluded him from speaking to her, and he just now had no inclination to communicate with her in the usual way by writing. And while he thus walked about, she continued her rocking movement, and peered at him dubiously from under her bushy gray brows.

"It is ill work meddling with the gods;"—she began again presently—"In old time they were vengeful,—and have they changed because the times are new? Nay, nay! The nature of a man may alter with the course of his passions,—but the nature of a god!—who shall make it otherwise than what it has been from the beginning? Cruel, cruel are the ways of the gods when they are thwarted;—there is no mercy in the blind eyes of Fate! To tempt Destiny is to ask the thunderbolt to fall and smite you,—to oppose the gods is as though a babe's hand should essay to lift the Universe. Have I not prayed the Master, the wise and the proud El−Râmi Zarânos, to submit and not contend? As God liveth, I say, let us submit while we can like the slaves that we are, for in submission alone is safety!"

Féraz heard her with increasing irritation,—why need she come to him with all this melancholy jabbering, he thought angrily. He leaned far out of the open window and looked at the ugly houses of the little square,—at the sooty trees, the sparrows hopping and quarrelling in the road, the tradesmen's carts that every now and again dashed to and from their various customers' doors in the aggravatingly mad fashion they affect, and tried to realize that he was actually in busy practical London, and not, as seemed at the moment more likely, in some cavern of an Eastern desert, listening to an ancient sybil croaking misfortune. Just then a neighbouring clock struck nine, and he hastily drew in his head from the outer air, and making language with his eloquent fingers, he mutely asked Zaroba if she were going upstairs now, or whether she meant to wait till El−Râmi himself came down?

She left off rocking to and fro, and half rose from her chair,—then she hesitated.

"I have never waited"—she said—"before,—and why? Because the voice of the Master has roused me from my deepest slumbers,—and like a finger of fire laid on my brain, his very thought has summoned my attendance. But this morning no such voice has called,—no such burning touch has stirred my senses,—how should I know what I must do? If I go unbidden, will he not be angered?—and his anger works like a poison in my blood! ... yet ... it is late, ... and his silence is strange—"

She paused, passing her hand wearily across her eyes,—then stood up, apparently resolved.

"I will obey the voices that whisper to me,"—she said, with a certain majestic resignation and gravity—"The voices that cry to my heart 'Sorrow! Sorrow!' and yet again 'Sorrow!' If grief must come, then welcome,

grief!—one cannot gainsay the Fates. I will go hence and prove the message of the air,—for the air holds invisible tongues that do not lie."

With a slow step she moved across the room,—and on a sudden impulse Féraz sprang towards her exclaiming, "Zaroba!—stay!"—then recollecting she could not hear a word, he checked himself and drew aside to let her pass, with an air of indifference which he was far from feeling. He was in truth wretched and ill at ease,—the exhilaration with which he had arisen from sleep had given way to intense depression, and he could not tell what ailed him.

"*Awake, Féraz! To−day dreams end, and life begins.*" Those were the strange words he had heard the first thing on awaking that morning,—what could they mean, he wondered rather sadly? If dreams were indeed to end, he would be sorry,—and if life, as mortals generally lived it, were to begin for him, why then, he would be sorrier still. Troubled and perplexed, he began to set the breakfast in order, hoping by occupation to divert his thoughts and combat the miserable feeling of vague dread which oppressed him, and which, though he told himself how foolish and unreasonable it was, remained increasingly persistent. All at once such a cry rang through the house as almost turned his blood to ice,—a cry wild, despairing and full of agony. It was repeated with piercing vehemence,—and Féraz, his heart beating furiously, cleared the space of the room with one breathless bound and rushed upstairs, there to confront Zaroba tossing her arms distractedly and beating her breast like a creature demented.

"Lilith!" she gasped,—"Lilith has gone ... gone! ... and El−Râmi is dead!"

CHAPTER VII.

PUSHING the panic−stricken woman aside, Féraz dashed back the velvet curtains, and for the second time in his life penetrated the mysterious chamber. Once in the beautiful room, rich with its purple colour and warmth, he stopped as though he were smitten with sudden paralysis,—every artery in his body pulsated with terror,—it was true! ... true that Lilith was no longer there! This was the first astounding fact that bore itself in with awful conviction on his dazed and bewildered mind;—the next thing he saw was the figure of his brother, kneeling motionless by the vacant couch. Hushing his steps and striving to calm his excitement, Féraz approached more nearly, and throwing his arms round El−Râmi's shoulders endeavoured to raise him,—but all his efforts made no impression on that bent and rigid form. Turning his eyes once more to the ivory blankness of the satin couch on which the maiden Lilith had so long reclined, he saw with awe and wonder the distinct impression of where her figure had been, marked and hollowed out into deep curves and lines, which in their turn were outlined by a tracing of fine grayishwhite dust, like sifted ashes. Following the track of this powdery substance, he still more clearly discerned the impress of her vanished shape; and, shuddering in every limb, he asked himself—Could that—that dust—be all—all that was left of ... of Lilith? ... What dire tragedy had been enacted during the night?—what awful catastrophe had chanced to **her** ,—to **him**, his beloved brother, whom he strove once more to lift from his kneeling position, but in vain. Zaroba stood beside him, shivering, wailing, staring, and wringing her hands, till Féraz, dry−eyed and desperate, finding his own strength not sufficient, bade her, by a passionate gesture, assist him. Trembling violently, she obeyed, and between them both they at last managed to drag El−Râmi up from the ground and get him to a chair, where Féraz chafed his hands, bathed his forehead, and used every possible means to restore animation. Did his heart still beat? Yes, feebly and irregularly;—and presently one or two faint gasping sighs came from the labouring breast.

"Thank God!" muttered Féraz—"Whatever has happened, he lives!—Thank God he lives! When he recovers, he will tell me all;—there can be no secrets now between him and me."

And he resumed his quick and careful ministrations, while Zaroba still wailed and wrung her hands, and stared miserably at the empty couch, whereon her beautiful charge had lain, slumbering away the hours and days for six long years. She too saw the little heaps and trackings of gray dust on the pillows and coverlid, and her feeble limbs shook with such terror that she could scarcely stand.

"The gods have taken her!" she whispered faintly through her pallid lips—"The gods are avenged! When did they ever have mercy! They have claimed their own with the breath and the fire of lightning, and the dust of a maiden's beauty is no more than the dust of a flower! The dreadful, terrible gods are avenged—at last ... at last!"

And sinking down upon the floor, she huddled herself together, and drew her yellow draperies over her head, after the Eastern manner of expressing inconsolable grief, and covered her aged features from the very light of day.

Féraz heeded her not at all, his sole attention being occupied in the care of his brother, whose large black eyes now opened suddenly and regarded him with a vacant expression like the eyes of a blind man. A great shudder ran through his frame,—he looked curiously at his own hands as Féraz gently pressed and rubbed them,—and he stared all round the room in vaguely in− quiring wonderment. Presently his wandering glance came back to Féraz, and the vacancy of his expression softened into a certain pleased mildness,—his lips parted in a little smile, but he said nothing.

"You are better, El−Râmi, my brother?" murmured Féraz caressingly, trembling and almost weeping in the excess of his affectionate anxiety, the while he placed his own figure so that it might obstruct a too immediate view of Lilith's vacant couch, and the covered crouching form of old Zaroba beside it—"You have no pain? ... you do not suffer?"

El−Râmi made no answer for the moment;—he was looking at Féraz with a gentle but puzzled inquisitiveness. Presently his dark brows contracted slightly, as though he were trying to connect some perplexing chain of ideas,—then he gave a slight gesture of fatigue and indifference.

"You will excuse me, I hope,—" he then said with plaintive courtesy—"I have forgotten your name. I believe I met you once, but I cannot remember where."

The heart of poor Féraz stood still, ... a great sob rose in his throat. But he checked it bravely,—he would not,

he could not, he dared not give way to the awful fear that began to creep like a frost through his warm young blood.

"You cannot remember Féraz?" he said gently—"Your own Féraz? ... your little brother, to whom you have been life, hope, joy, work—everything of value in the world!" Here his voice failed him, and he nearly broke down.

El−Râmi looked at him in grave surprise.

"You are very good!" he murmured, with a feebly polite wave of his hand;—"You over−rate my poor powers. I am glad to have been useful to you—very glad!"

Here he paused;—his head sank forward on his breast, and his eyes closed.

"El−Râmi!" cried Féraz, the hot tears forcing their way between his eyelids—"Oh, my belovëd brother!—have you no thought for me?"

El−Râmi opened his eyes and stared;—then smiled.

"No thought?" he repeated—"Oh, you mistake!—I have thought very much,—very much indeed, about many things. Not about you perhaps,—but then I do not know you. You say your name is Féraz,—that is very strange; it is not at all a common name. I only knew one Féraz,—he was my brother, or seemed so for a time,—but I found out afterwards, ... hush! ... come closer! ..." and he lowered his voice to a whisper,—"that he was not a mortal, but an angel,—the angel of a Star. The Star knew him better than I did."

Féraz turned away his head,—the tears were falling down his cheeks—he could not speak. He realized the bitter truth,—the delicate overstrained mechanism of his brother's mind had given way under excessive pain and pressure,—that brilliant, proud, astute, cold and defiant intellect was all unstrung and out of gear, and rendered useless, perchance for ever.

El−Râmi however seemed to have some glimmering perception of Féraz's grief, for he put out a trembling hand and turned his brother's face towards him with gentle concern.

"Tears?" he said in a surprised tone—"Why should you weep? There is nothing to weep for;—God is very good."

And with an effort, he rose from the chair in which he had sat, and standing upright, looked about him. His eye at once lighted on the vase of roses at the foot of the couch and he began to tremble violently. Féraz caught him by the arm,—and then he seemed startled and afraid.

"She promised, ... she promised!" he began in an incoherent rambling way—"and you must not interfere,—you must let me do her bidding. 'Look for me where the roses are; there will I stand and wait!' She said that,—and she will wait, and I will look, for she is sure to keep her word—no angel ever forgets. You must not hinder me;—I have to watch and pray,—you must help me, not hinder me. I shall die if you will not let me do what she asks;—you cannot tell how sweet her voice is;—she talks to me and tells me of such wonderful things,—things too beautiful to be believed, yet they are true. I know so well my work;—work that must be done,—you will not hinder me?"

"No, no!"—said Féraz, in anguish himself, yet willing to say anything to soothe his brother's trembling excitement—"No, no! You shall not be hindered,—I will help you,—I will watch with you,—I will pray ..." and here again the poor fellow nearly broke down into womanish sobbing.

"Yes!" said El−Râmi, eagerly catching at the word—"Pray! You will pray—and so will I;—that is good,—that is what I need,—prayer, they say, draws all Heaven down to earth. It is strange,—but so it is. You know"—he added, with a faint gleam of intelligence lighting up for a moment his wandering eyes—"Lilith is not here! Not here, nor there, ... she is Everywhere!"

A terrible pallor stole over his face, giving it almost the livid hue of death,—and Féraz, alarmed, threw one arm strongly and resolutely about him. But El−Râmi crouched and shuddered, and hid his eyes as though he strove to shelter himself from the fury of a whirlwind.

"Everywhere!" he moaned—"In the flowers, in the trees, in the winds, in the sound of the sea, in the silence of the night, in the slow breaking of the dawn,—in all these things is the Soul of Lilith! Beautiful, indestructible, terrible Lilith! She permeates the world, she pervades the atmosphere, she shapes and unshapes herself at pleasure,—she floats, or flies, or sleeps at will;—in substance, a cloud;—in radiance, a rainbow! She is the essence of God in the transient shape of an angel—never the same, but for ever immortal. She soars aloft—she melts like mist in the vast Unseen!—and I—I—I shall never find her, never know her, never see her—never,

never again!"

The harrowing tone of voice in which he uttered these words pierced Féraz to the heart, but he would not give way to his own emotion.

"Come, El−Râmi!" he said very gently—"Do not stay here,—come with me. You are weak,—rest on my arm; you must try and recover your strength,—remember, you have work to do."

"True, true!" said El−Râmi, rousing himself—"Yes, you are right,—there is much to be done. Nothing is so difficult as patience. To be left all alone, and to be patient, is very hard,—but I will come,—I will come."

He suffered himself to be led towards the door,—then, all at once he came to an abrupt stand−still, and looking round, gazed full on the empty couch where Lilith had so long been royally enshrined. A sudden passion seemed to seize him—his eyes sparkled luridly,—a sort of inward paroxysm convulsed his features, and he clutched Féraz by the shoulder with a grip as hard as steel.

"Roses and lilies and gold!" he muttered thickly—"They were all there,—those delicate treasures, those airy nothings of which God makes woman! Roses for the features, lilies for the bosom, gold for the hair!—roses, lilies and gold! They were mine,—but I have burned them all!—I have burned the roses and lilies, and melted the gold. Dust! —dust and ashes! But the dust is not Lilith. No!—it is only the dust of the roses, the dust of lilies, the dust of gold. Roses, lilies and gold! So sweet they are and fair to the sight, one would almost take them for real substance; but they are Shadows!—shadows that pass as we touch them,—shadows that always go, when most we would have them stay!"

He finished with a deep shuddering sigh, and then, loosening his grasp of Féraz, began to stumble his way hurriedly out of the apartment, with the manner of one who is lost in a dense fog and cannot see whither he is going. Féraz hastened to assist and support him, whereupon he looked up with a pathetic and smiling gratefulness.

"You are very good to me,"—he said, with a gentle courtesy, which in his condition was peculiarly touching—"I thought I should never need any support;—but I was wrong—quite wrong,—and it is kind of you to help me. My eyes are rather dim,—there was too much light among the roses, ... and I find this place extremely dark, ... it makes me feel a little confused **here;**"—and he passed his hand across his forehead with a troubled gesture, and looked anxiously at Féraz, as though he would ask him for some explanation of his symptoms.

"Yes, yes!" murmured Féraz soothingly—"You must be tired—you will rest, and presently you will feel strong and well again. Do not hurry,—lean on me,"—and he guided his brother's trembling limbs carefully down the stairs, a step at a time, thinking within himself in deep sorrow—Could this be the proud El−Râmi, clinging to him thus like a weak old man afraid to move? Oh, what a wreck was here!—what a change had been wrought in the few hours of the past night!—and ever the fateful question returned again and again to trouble him—What had become of Lilith? That she was gone was self−evident,—and he gathered some inkling of the awful truth from his brother's rambling words. He remembered that El−Râmi had previously declared Lilith to be **dead** , so far as her body was concerned, and only kept **apparently** alive by artificial means;—he could easily imagine it possible for those artificial means to lose their efficacy in the end, ... and then, ... for the girl's beautiful body to crumble into that dissolution which would have been its fate long ago, had Nature had her way. All this he could dimly surmise,—but he had been kept so much in the dark as to the real aim and intention of his brother's "experiment" that it was not likely he would ever understand everything that had occurred;—so that Lilith's mysterious evanishment seemed to him like a horrible delusion;—it could not be! he kept on repeating over and over again to himself, and yet it was!

Moving with slow and cautious tread, he got El−Râmi at last into his own study, wondering whether the sight of the familiar objects he was daily accustomed to, would bring him back to a reasonable perception of his surroundings. He waited anxiously, while his brother stood still, shivering slightly and looking about the room with listless, unrecognising eyes. Presently, in a voice that was both weary and petulant, El−Râmi spoke.

"You will not leave me alone I hope?" he said—"I am very old and feeble, and I have done you no wrong,—I do not see why you should leave me to myself. I should be glad if you would stay with me a little while, because everything is at present so strange to me;—I shall no doubt get more accustomed to it in time. You are perhaps not aware that I wished to live through a great many centuries—and my wish was granted;—I have lived longer than any man, especially since She left me,—and now I am growing old, and I am easily tired. I do not know this place at all—is it a World or a Dream?"

At this question, it seemed to Féraz that he heard again, like a silver clarion ringing through silence, the

mysterious voice that had roused him that morning saying, "*Awake, Féraz! To−day dreams end, and life begins!*" ... He understood, and he bent his head resignedly,—he knew now what the "life" thus indicated meant;—it meant a sacrificing of all his poetic aspirations, his music, and his fantastic happy visions,—a complete immolation of himself and his own desires, for the sake of his brother. His brother, who had once ruled him absolutely, was now to be ruled **by** him;—helpless as a child, the once self−sufficient and haughty El−Râmi was to be dependent for everything upon the very creature who had lately been his slave,—and Féraz, humbly reading in these reversed circumstances, the Divine Law of Compensation, answered his brother's plaintive query—"Is it a World or a Dream?" with manful tenderness.

"It is a World,"—he said—"not a Dream, beloved El−Râmi—but a Reality. It is a fair garden, belonging to God and the things of God"—he paused, seeing that El−Râmi smiled placidly and nodded his head as though he heard pleasant music,—then he went on steadily—"a garden in which immortal spirits wander for a time self−exiled, till they fully realize the worth and loveliness of the Higher Lands they have forsaken. Do you understand me, O dear and honoured one?—−do you understand? None love their home so dearly as those who have left it for a time—and it is only for a time—a short, short time,"—and Féraz, deeply moved by his mingled sorrow and affection, kissed and clasped his brother's hands—"and all the beauty we see here in this beautiful small world, is made to remind us of the greater beauty yonder. We look, as it were, into a little mirror, which reflects in exquisite miniature, the face of Heaven! See!" and he pointed to the brilliant blaze of sunshine that streamed through the window and illumined the whole room—"There is the tiny copy of the larger Light above,—and in that little light the flowers grow, the harvests ripen, the trees bud, the birds sing and every living creature rejoices,—but in the other Greater Light, God lives, and angels love and have their being;"—here Féraz broke off abruptly, wondering if he might risk the utterance of the words that next rose involuntarily to his lips, while El−Râmi gazed at him with great wide−open eager eyes like those of a child listening to a fairy story.

"Yes, yes!—what next?" he demanded impatiently—"This is good news you give me;—the angels love, you say, and God lives,—yes!—tell me more, ... more!"

"All angels love and have their being in that Greater Light,"—continued Féraz softly and steadily—"And there too is Lilith—beautiful—deathless,—faithful—"

"True!" cried El−Râmi, with a sort of sobbing cry—"True! ... She is there,—she promised—and I shall know, ... I shall know where to find her after all, for she told me plainly—'Look for me where the roses are,—there will I stand and wait.'"

He tottered, and seemed about to fall;—but when Féraz would have supported him, he shook his head, and pointed tremblingly to the amber ray of sunshine pouring itself upon the ground:

"Into the light!"—he murmured—"I am all in the dark;—lead me out of the darkness into the light."

And Féraz led him where he desired, and seated him in his own chair in the full glory of the morning radiance that rippled about him like molten gold, and shone caressingly on his white hair,—his dark face that in its great pallor looked as though it were carved in bronze,—and his black, piteous, wandering eyes. A butterfly danced towards him in the sparkling shower of sunbeams, the same that had flown in an hour before and alighted on the heliotrope that adorned the centre of the table. El−Râmi's attention was attracted by it—and he watched its airy flutterings with a pleased, yet vacant smile. Then he stretched out his hands in the golden light, and lifting them upward, clasped them together and closed his eyes.

"Our Father" ... he murmured; "which art in Heaven! ... Hallowed be Thy Name!"

Féraz, bending heedfully over him, caught the words as they were faintly whispered,—caught the hands as they dropped inert from their supplicating posture and laid them gently back;—then listened again with strained attention, the pitying tears gathering thick upon his lashes.

"Our Father!" ... once more that familiar appeal of kinship to the Divine, stole upon the air like a far−off sigh,—then came the sound of regular and quiet breathing;—Nature had shed upon the over−taxed brain her balm of blessed unconsciousness,—and like a tired child, the proud El−Râmi slept.

CHAPTER VIII.

UPSTAIRS meanwhile, in the room that had been Lilith's, there reigned the silence of a deep desolation. The woman Zaroba still crouched there, huddled on the floor, a mere heap of amber draperies,—her head covered, her features hidden. Now and then a violent shuddering seized her,—but otherwise she gave no sign of life. Hours passed;—she knew nothing, she thought of nothing; she was stupefied with misery and a great inextinguishable fear. To her bewildered, darkly superstitious, more than pagan mind, it seemed as if some terrible avenging angel had descended in the night and torn away her beautiful charge out of sheer spite and jealousy lest she should awake to the joys of earth's life and love. It had always been her fixed idea that the chief and most powerful ingredient of the Divine character (and of the human also) was jealousy; and she considered therefore that all women, as soon as they were born, should be solemnly dedicated to the ancient goddess Ananitis. Ananitis was a useful and accommodating deity, who in the old days, had unlimited power to make all things pure. A woman might have fifty lovers, and yet none could dare accuse her of vileness if she were a "daughter" or "priestess" of Ananitis. She might have been guilty of any amount of moral enormity, but she was held to be the chastest of virgins if Ananitis were her protectress and mistress. And so, in the eyes of Zaroba, Ananitis was the true patroness of love,—she sanctified the joys of lovers and took away from them all imputation of sin;—and many and many a time had the poor, ignorant, heathenish old woman secretly invoked the protection of this almost forgotten pagan goddess for the holy maiden Lilith. And now—now she wondered tremblingly, if in this she had done wrong? ... More than for anything in the world had she longed that El−Râmi, the "wise man" who scoffed at passion with a light contempt, should love with a lover's wild idolatry the beautiful creature who was so completely in his power;—in her dull, half−savage, stupid way, she had thought that such a result of the long six years "experiment" could but bring happiness to both man and maid; and she spared no pains to try and foster the spark of mere interest which El−Râmi had for his "subject" into the flame of a lover's ardour. For this cause she had brought Féraz to look upon the tranced girl, in order that El−Râmi knowing of it, might feel the subtle prick of that perpetual motor, jealousy,—for this she had said all she dared say, concerning love and its unconquerable nature;—and now, just when her long−cherished wish seemed on the point of being granted, some dreadful Invisible Power had rushed in between the two, and destroyed Lilith with the fire of wrath and revenge;—at any rate that was how she regarded it. The sleeping girl had grown dear to her,—it was impossible not to love such a picture of innocent, entrancing, ideal beauty,—and she felt as though her heart had been torn open and its very core wrenched out by a cruel and hasty hand. She knew nothing as yet of the fate that had overtaken El−Râmi himself,—for as she could not hear a sound of the human voice, she had only dimly seen that he was led from the room by his young brother, and that he looked ill, feeble and distraught. What she realized most positively and with the greatest bitterness, was the fact of Lilith's loss,—Lilith's evident destruction. This was undeniable,—this was irremediable,—and she thought of it till her aged brain burned as with some inward consuming fire, and her thin blood seemed turning to ice.

"Who has done it?" she muttered—"Who has claimed her? It must be the Christ,—the cold, quiet, pallid Christ, with His bleeding Hands and beckoning Eyes! He is a new god,—He has called, and she, Lilith has obeyed! Without love, without life, without aught in the world save the lily−garb of un− touched holiness,—it is what the pale Christ seeks, and He has found it here,—here, with the child who slept the sleep of innocent ignorance,—here where no thought of passion ever entered unless **I** breathed it,—or perchance he—El−Râmi—thought it, unknowingly. O what a white flower for the Christ in Heaven, is Lilith!—What a branch of bud and blossom! ... Ah, cruel, cold new gods of the Earth!—how long shall their sorrowful reign endure! Who will bring back the wise old gods,—the gods of the ancient days,—the gods who loved and were not ashamed,—the gods of mirth and life and health,—they would have left me Lilith,—they would have said—'Lo, now this woman is old and poor,—she hath lost all that she ever had,—let us leave her the child she loves, albeit it is not her own but ours;—we are great gods, but we are merciful!' Oh, Lilith, Lilith! child of the sun and air, and daughter of sleep! would I had perished instead of thee!—Would I had passed away into darkness, and thou been spared to the light!"

Thus she wailed and moaned, her face hidden, her limbs quivering, and she knew not how long she had stayed thus, though all the morning had passed and the afternoon had begun. At last she was roused by the gentle yet

firm pressure of a hand on her shoulder, and, slowly uncovering her drawn and anguished features she met the sorrowful eyes of Féraz looking into hers. With a mute earnest gesture he bade her rise. She obeyed, but so feebly and tremblingly, that he assisted her, and led her to a chair, where she sat down, still quaking all over with fear and utter wretchedness. Then he took a pencil and wrote on the slate which his brother had been wont to use,—

"A great trouble has come upon us. God has been pleased to so darken the mind of the beloved El−Râmi, that he knows us no longer, and is ignorant of where he is. The wise man has been rendered simple,—and the world seems to him as it seems to a child who has everything in its life to learn. We must accept this ordinance as the Will of the Supreme, and bring our own will in accordance with it, believing the ultimate intention to be for the Highest Good. But for his former life, El−Râmi exists no more,—the mind that guided his actions then, is gone."

Slowly, and with pained, aching eyes Zaroba read these words,—she grasped their purport and meaning thoroughly, and yet, she said not a word. She was not surprised,—she was scarcely affected;—her feelings seemed blunted or paralysed. El−Râmi was mad? To her, he had always seemed mad,—with a madness born of terrible knowledge and power. To be mad now was nothing; the loss of Lilith was amply sufficient cause for his loss of wit. Nothing could be worse in her mind than to have loved Lilith and lost her,—what was the use of uttering fresh cries and ejaculations of woe! It was all over,—everything was ended,—so far as she, Zaroba, was concerned. So she sate speechless,—her grand old face rigid as bronze, with an expression upon it of stern submission, as of one who waits immovably for more onslaughts from the thunderbolts of destiny.

Féraz looked at her very compassionately, and wrote again—

"Good Zaroba, I know your grief. Rest—try to sleep. Do not see El−Râmi to−day. It is better I should be alone with him. He is quite peaceful and happy,—happier indeed than he has ever been. He has so much to learn, he says, and he is quite satisfied. For to−day we must be alone with our sorrows,—to−morrow we shall be able to see more clearly what we must do."

Still Zaroba said nothing. Presently however, she arose, and walked totteringly to the side of Lilith's couch, ... there, with an eloquently tragic gesture of supremest despair, she pointed to the gray−white ashes that were spread in that dreadfully suggestive outline on the satin coverlet and pillows. Féraz, shuddering, shut his eyes for a moment;—then, as he opened them again, he saw, confronting him, the uncurtained picture of the "Christ and His Disciples." He remembered it well,—El−Râmi had bought it long ago from among the despoiled treasures of an old dismantled monastery,— and besides being a picture it was also a reliquary. He stepped hastily up to it and felt for the secret spring which used, he knew, to be there. He found and pressed it,—the whole of the picture flew back like a door on a hinge, and showed the interior to be a Gothic−shaped casket, lined with gold, at the back of which was inserted a small piece of wood, supposed to have been a fragment of the "True Cross." There was nothing else in the casket,—and Féraz, leaving it open, turned to Zaroba who had watched him with dull, scarcely comprehending eyes.

"Gather together these sacred ashes,"—he wrote again on the slate,—"and place them in this golden recess,—it is a holy place fit for such holy relics. El−Râmi would wish it, I know, if he could understand or wish for anything,—and wherever we go, the picture will go with us, for one day perhaps he will remember, ... and ask, ..."

He could trust himself to write no more,—and stood sadly enrapt, and struggling with his own emotion.

"The Christ claims all!" muttered Zaroba wearily, resorting to her old theme—"The crucified Christ, ... He must have all;—the soul, the body, the life, the love, the very ashes of the dead,—He must have all, ... all!"

Féraz heard her,—and taking up his pencil once more, wrote swiftly—

"You are right,—Christ has claimed Lilith. She was His to claim,—for on this earth we are all His,—He gave His very life to make us so. Let us thank God that we **are** thus claimed,—for with Christ all things are well."

He turned away then immediately, and left her alone to her task,—a task she performed with groans and trembling, till every vestige of the delicate ashes, as fine as the dust of flowers, was safely and reverently placed in its pure golden receptacle. Strange to say, one very visible relic of the vanished Lilith's bodily beauty had somehow escaped destruction,—this was a long, bright waving tress of hair which lay trembling on the glistening satin of the pillows like a lost sunbeam. Over this lovely amber curl, old Zaroba stooped yearningly, staring at it till her tears, the slow, bitter scalding tears of age fell upon it where it lay. She longed to take it for herself,—to wear it against her own heart,—to kiss and cherish it as though it were a living, sentient thing,—but thinking of El−Râmi, her loyalty prevailed, and she tenderly lifted the clinging, shining, soft silken curl, and laid it by with the ashes in the antique shrine. All was now done,—and she shut to the picture, which when once closed, showed

no sign of any opening.

Lilith was gone indeed;—there was now no perceptible evidence to show that she had ever existed. And, to the grief−stricken Zaroba, the Face and Figure of the Christ, as painted on the reliquary at which she gazed, seemed to assume a sudden triumph and majesty which appalled while it impressed her. She read the words "Whom Say Ye That I Am?" and shuddered; this "new god" with His tranquil smile and sorrowful dignity had more terrors for her than any of the old pagan deities.

"I cannot! I cannot!" she whispered feebly; "I cannot take you to my heart, cold white Christ,—I cannot think it is good to wear the thorns of perpetual sorrow! You offer no joy to the sad and weary world,—one must sacrifice one's dearest hopes,—one must bear the cross and weep for the sins of all men, to be at all acceptable to You! I am old—but I keep the memories of joy; I would not have all happiness reft out of the poor lives of men. I would have them full of mirth,—I would have them love where they list, drink pure wine, and rejoice in the breath of Nature,—I would have them feast in the sunlight and dance in the moonbeams, and crown themselves with the flowers of the woodland and meadow, and grow ruddy and strong and manful and generous, and free—free as the air! I would have their hearts bound high for the pleasure of life;—not break in a search for things they can never win. Ah no, cold Christ! I cannot love you!—at the touch of your bleeding Hand the world freezes like a starving bird in a storm of snow;—the hearts of men grow weak and weary, and of what avail is it, O Prince of Grief, to live in sadness all one's days for the hope of a Heaven that comes not? O Lilith!—child of the sun, where art thou?—Where? Never to have known the joys of love,—never to have felt the real pulse of living,—never to have thrilled in a lover's embrace,—ah, Lilith, Lilith! Will Heaven compensate thee for such loss? ... Never, never, never! No God, were He all the worlds' gods in One, can give aught but a desolate Eden to the loveless and lonely Soul!"

In such wise as this, she muttered and moaned all day long, never stirring from the room that was called Lilith's. Now and then she moved up and down with slow restlessness,—sometimes fixing eager eyes upon the vacant couch, with the vague idea that perhaps Lilith might come back to it as suddenly as she had fled; and sometimes pausing by the vase of roses, and touching their still fragrant, but fast−fading blossoms. Time went on, and she never thought of breaking her fast, or going to see how her master, El−Râmi, fared. His mind was gone, —she understood that well enough,—and in a strange wild way of her own, she connected this sudden darkening of his intellect with the equally sudden disappearance of Lilith; and she dreaded to look upon his face.

How the hours wore away she never knew; but by−and−by her limbs began to ache heavily, and she crouched down upon the floor to rest. She fell into a heavy stupor of unconsciousness,—and when she awoke at last, the room was quite dark. She got up, stiff and cold and terrified,—she groped about with her hands,—it seemed to her dazed mind that she was in some sepulchral cave in the desert, all alone. Her lips were dry,—her head swam,—and she tottered along, feeling her way blindly, till she touched the velvet portière that divided the room from its little antechamber, and dragging this aside in nervous haste, she stumbled through, and out on to the landing, where it was light. The staircase was before her,—the gas was lit in the hall—and the house looked quite as usual,—yet she could not in the least realize where she was. Indistinct images floated in her brain,—there were strange noises in her ears,—and she only dimly remembered El−Râmi, as though he were someone she had heard of long ago, in a dream. Pausing on the stair−head, she tried to collect her scattered senses,—but she felt sick and giddy, and her first instinct was to seek the air. Clinging to the banisters, she tottered down the stairs slowly, and reached the front−door, and fumbling cautiously with the handle a little while, succeeded in turning it, and letting herself out into the street. The door had a self−acting spring, and shut to instantly, and almost noiselessly, behind her,—but Féraz, sitting in the study with his brother, fancied he heard a slight sound, and came into the hall to see what it was. Finding everything quiet he concluded he was mistaken, and went back to his post beside El−Râmi, who had been dozing nearly all day, only waking up now and again to mildly accept the nourishment of soup and wine which Féraz prepared and gave him to keep up his strength. He was perfectly tranquil, and talked at times quite coherently of simple things, such as the flowers on the table, the lamp, the books, and other ordinary trifles. He only seemed a little troubled by his own physical weakness,—but when Féraz assured him he would soon be strong, he smiled, and with every appearance of content, dozed off again peacefully. In the evening, however, he grew a little restless,—and then Féraz tried what effect music would have upon him. Going to the piano he played soft and dreamy melodies, ... but as he did so, a strange sense of loss stole over him,—he had the mechanism of the art, but the marvellously delicate attunement of his imagination had fled! Tears rose in his eyes,—he knew

what was missing,—the guiding−prop of his brother's wondrous influence had fallen,—and with a faint terror he realized that much of his poetic faculty would perish also. He had to remember that he was not **naturally** born a poet or musician,—poesy and music had been El−Râmi's fairy gifts to him—the exquisitely happy poise of his mind had been due to his brother's daily influence and control. He would still retain the habit and the memory of art,—but what had been Genius, would now be simple Talent,—no more,—yet what a difference between the two! Nevertheless his touch on the familiar ivory keys was very tender and delicate, and when, distrusting his own powers of composition, he played one of the softest and quaintest of Grieg's Norwegian folk−songs, he was more than comforted by the expression of pleasure that illumined El−Râmi's features, and by the look of enraptured peace that softened the piteous dark eyes.

"It is quite beautiful,—that music!" he murmured—"It is the pretty sound the daisies make in growing."

And he leaned back in his chair and composed himself to rest,—while Féraz played on softly, thinking anxiously the while. True, most true, that for him dreams had ended, and life had begun! What was he to do? ... how was he to meet the daily needs of living,—how was he to keep himself and his brother? His idea was to go at once to the monastery in Cyprus, where he had formerly been a visitor,—it was quiet and peaceful,—he would ask the brethren to take them in,—for he himself detested the thought of a life in the world,—it was repellant to him in every way,—and El−Râmi's affliction would necessitate solitude. And while he was thus puzzling himself as to the future, there came a sharp knock at the door,—he hastened to see who it was,—and a messenger handed him a telegram addressed to himself. It came from the very place he was thinking about, sent by the Head of the Order, and ran thus—

"We know all. It is the Will of God. Bring El−Râmi here,—our house is open to you both."

He uttered a low exclamation of thankfulness, the while he wondered amazedly how it was that they, that far−removed Brotherhood, "knew all"! It was very strange! He thought of the wondrous man whom he called the "Master," and who was understood to be "wise with the wisdom of the angels," and remembered that he was accredited with being able to acquire information when he chose, by swift and supernatural means. That he had done so in the present case seemed evident, and Féraz stood still with the telegram in his hand, stricken by a vague sense of awe as well as gratitude, thinking also of the glittering Vision he had had of that "glory of the Angels in the South";—angels who were waiting for Lilith the night she disappeared.

El−Râmi suddenly opened his weary eyes and looked at him.

"What is it?" he asked faintly—"Why has the music ceased?"

Féraz went up to his chair and knelt down beside it.

"You shall hear it again"—he said gently, "But you must sleep now, and get strong,—because we are soon going away on a journey—a far, beautiful journey—"

"To Heaven?" inquired El−Râmi—"Yes, I know—it is very far."

Féraz sighed.

"No—not to Heaven,"—he answered—"Not yet. We shall find out the way there, afterwards. But in the meantime, we are going to a place where there are fruits and flowers,—and where the sun is very bright and warm. You will come with me, will you not, El−Râmi,—there are friends there who will be glad to see you."

"I have no friends,"—said El−Râmi plaintively, "unless you are one. I do not know if you are,—I hope so, but I am not sure. You have an angel's face,—and the angels have not always been kind to me. But I will go with you wherever you wish,—is it a place in this world, or in some other star?"

"In this world,—replied Féraz—"A quiet little corner of this world."

"Ah!" and El−Râmi sighed profoundly—"I wish it had been in another. There are so many millions and millions of worlds;—it seems foolish waste of time to stay too long in this."

He closed his eyes again, and Féraz let him rest,—till, when the hour grew late, he persuaded him to lie down on his own bed, which he did with the amiable docility of a child. Féraz himself, half sitting, half reclining in a chair beside him, watched him all night long, like a faithful dog guarding its master,—and so full was he of

anxious thought and tender care for his brother, that he scarcely remembered Zaroba, and when he did, he felt sure that she too was resting, and striving to forget in sleep the sorrows of the day.

CHAPTER IX.

ZAROBA had indeed forgotten her sorrows; but not in slumber, as Féraz hoped and imagined. Little did he think that she was no longer under the roof that had sheltered her for so many years; little could he guess that she was out wandering all alone in the labyrinth of the London streets,—a labyrinth of which she was almost totally ignorant, having hardly ever been out of doors since El−Râmi had brought her from the East. True, she had occasionally walked in the little square opposite the house, and in a few of the streets adjoining,—once or twice in Sloane Street itself, but no further, for the sight of the hurrying, pushing, busy throngs of men and women confused her. She had not realized what she was doing when she let herself out that night,—only when the street−door shut noiselessly upon her she was vaguely startled,—and a sudden sense of great loneliness oppressed her. Yet the fresh air blowing against her face was sweet and balmy,—it helped to relieve the sickness at her heart, the dizziness in her brain,—and she began to stroll along, neither knowing nor caring whither she was going,—chiefly impelled by the strong necessity she felt for movement,—space,—liberty. It had seemed to her that she was being suffocated and buried alive in the darkness and desolation that had fallen on the chamber of Lilith;—here, out in the open, she was free,—she could breathe more easily. And so she went on, almost unseeingly,—the people she met looked to her like the merest shadows. Her quaint garb attracted occasional attention from some of the passers−by,—but her dark fierce face and glittering eyes repelled all those who might have been inquisitive enough to stop and question her. She drifted errantly, yet safely, through the jostling crowds like a withered leaf on the edge of a storm,—her mind was dazed with grief and fear and long fasting, but now and then as she went, she smiled and seemed happy. Affliction had sunk so deep within her, that it had reached the very core and centre of imagination and touched it to vague issues of discordant joy;—wherefore, persuaded by the magic music of delusion, she believed herself to be at home again in her native Egypt. She fancied she was walking in the desert;—the pavement seemed hot to her feet and she took it for the burning sand,—and when after long and apparently interminable wanderings, she found herself opposite Nelson's column in Trafalgar Square, she stared at the four great lions with stupefied dismay.

"It is the gate of a city,"—she muttered—"and at this hour the watchmen are asleep. I will go on—on still further,—there must be water close by, else there would be no city built."

She had recovered a certain amount of physical strength in the restorative influence of the fresh air, and walked with a less feeble tread,—she became dimly conscious too of there being a number of people about, and she drew her amber−coloured draperies more closely over her head. It was a beautiful night;—the moon was full and brilliant, and hundreds of pleasure−seekers were moving hither and thither,—there was the usual rattle and roar of the vehicular traffic of the town which, it must be remembered, Zaroba did not hear. Neither did she clearly see anything that was taking place around her,—for her sight was blurred, and the dull confusion in her brain continued. She walked as in a dream,—she felt herself to be in a dream;—the images of El−Râmi, of the lost Lilith, of the beautiful young Féraz, had faded away from her recollection,—and she was living in the early memories of days long past,—days of youth and hope and love and promise. No one molested her; people in London are so accustomed to the sight of foreigners and foreign costumes, that so long as they are seen walking on their apparent way peaceably, they may do so in any garb that pleases them, provided it be decent, without attracting much attention save from a few small and irreverent street−arabs. And even the personal and pointed observations of these misguided youngsters fail to disturb the dignity of a Parsee in his fez, or to ruffle the celestial composure of a Chinaman in his slippers. Zaroba, moreover, did not present such a markedly distinctive appearance,—in her yellow wrapper and silver bangles, she only looked like one of the *ayahs* brought over from the East with the children of Anglo−Indian mothers,—and she passed on uninterruptedly, happily deaf to the noises around her, and almost blind to the evershifting human pageantry of the busy thoroughfares.

"The gates of the city,"—she went on murmuring—"they are shut, and the watchmen are asleep. There must be water near,—a river or a place of fountains, where the caravans pause to rest."

Now and then the glare of the lights in the streets troubled her,—and then she would come to a halt and pass her hands across her eyes,—but this hesitation only lasted a minute, —and again she continued on her aimless way. The road widened out before her,—the buildings grew taller, statelier and more imposing,—and suddenly she caught sight of what she had longed for,—the glimmering of water silvering itself in the light of the moon.

She had reached the Embankment;—and a sigh of satisfaction escaped her, as she felt the damp chillness of the wind from the river blowing against her burning forehead. The fresh coolness and silence soothed her,—there were few people about,—and she slackened her pace unconsciously, and smiled as she lifted her dark face to the clear and quiet sky. She was faint and weary,—light−headed from want of food,—but she was not conscious of this any more than a fever−patient is conscious of his own delirium. She walked quite steadily now,—in no haste, but with the grave, majestic step that belongs peculiarly to women of her type and race,—her features were perfectly composed, and her eyes very bright. And now she looked always at the river, and saw nothing else for a time but its rippling surface lit up by the moon.

"They have cut down the reeds"—she said, softly under her breath,—"and the tall palms are gone,—but the river is always the same,—they cannot change that. Nothing can dethrone the Nile−god, or disturb his sleep among the lilies, down towards the path of the sunset. Here I shall meet my beloved again,—here by the banks of the Nile;—yet, it is strange and cruel that they should have cut down the reeds. I remember how softly they rustled with the movements of the little snakes that lived in the golden sand,—yes!—and the palm−trees were high—so high that their feathery crowns seemed to touch the stars. It was Egypt then,—and is it not Egypt now? Yes—surely—surely it is Egypt!—but it is changed—changed,—all is changed except love! Love is the same for ever, and the heart beats true to the one sweet tune. Yes, we shall meet,—my belovëd and I,—and we shall tell one another how long the time has seemed since we parted yesterday. Only yesterday!—and it seems a century,—a long long century of pain and fear,—but the hours have passed, and the waiting is over,—"

She broke off abruptly, and stood suddenly still;—the Obelisk faced her. Cut sharp and dark against the brilliant sky the huge "Cleopatra's Needle" towered solemnly aloft, its apex seeming to point directly at the planet Mars which glittered with a faint redness immediately above it. Something there was in its weird and frowning aspect, that appealed strangely to Zaroba's wandering intelligence,—she gazed at it with eager, dilated eyes.

"To the memory of heroes!" she said whisperingly, with a slight proud gesture of her hand,—"To the glory of the Dead! Salutation to the great gods and crowned Kings! Salutation and witness to the world of what Hath Been! The river shall find a tongue—the shifting sands shall uphold the record, so that none shall forget the things that Were! For the things that Are, being weak, shall perish,—but the things that Were, being strong, shall endure for ever! Here, as God liveth, is the meeting−place; the palms are gone, but the Nile flows on, and the moon is the sunlight of lovers. Here will I wait for my belovëd,—he knows the appointed hour, ... he will not be long!"

She sat down, as close to the Obelisk as she could get, her face turned towards the river and the moonlight; and the clocks of the great city around her slowly tolled eleven. Her head dropped forward on her chest,—though after a few minutes she lifted her face with an anxious look—and,—"Did the child call me?" she said, and listened. Then she relapsed into her former sunken posture, ... once a strong shuddering shook her limbs as of intense cold in the warm June night, ... and then she was quite still....

The hours passed on,—midnight came and went,—but she never stirred. She seemed to belong to the Obelisk and its attendant Sphinxes,—so rigid was her figure, so weird in its outline, so solemn in its absolute immobility. And in that same attitude she was found later on towards morning, stone dead. There was no clue to her identity,—nothing about her that gave any hint as to her possible home or friends; her statuesque old face, grander than ever in the serene pallor of death, somewhat awed the two burly policemen who lifted her stark body and turned her features to the uncertain light of early dawn, but it told them no history save that of age and sorrow. So, in the sad chronicles entitled "Found Dead," she was described as "a woman unknown, of foreign appearance and costume, seemingly of Eastern origin,"—and, after a day or two, being unrecognised and unclaimed, she was buried in the usual way common to all who perish without name and kindred in the dreary wilderness of a great city. Féraz, missing her on the morning after her disappearance, searched for her everywhere as well as he knew how,—but, as he seldom read the newspapers, and probably would not have recognised the brief account of her there if he had,—and as, moreover, he knew nothing about certain dreary buildings in London called mortuaries, where the bodies of the drowned, and murdered, and unidentified, lie for a little while awaiting recog− nition, he remained in complete and bewildered ignorance of her fate. He could not imagine what had become of her, and he almost began to believe that she must have taken ship back to her native land—and that perhaps he might hear of her again some day. And truly, she had gone back to her native land,—in fancy;—and truly, it was also possible she might be met with again some day,—in another world than this. But in the meantime she had died,—as best befitted a servant of the old gods,—alone, and in uncomplaining silence.

CHAPTER X.

THE hair's−breadth balance of a Thought,—the wrong or right control of Will;—on these things hang the world, life, time, and all Eternity. Such slight threads!—imperceptible, ungraspable,—and yet withal strong,—strong enough to weave the everlasting web of good or evil, joy or woe. On some such poise, as fine, as subtly delicate, the whole majestic Universe swings round in its appointed course,—never a pin's point awry, never halting in its work, never hesitating in the fulfilment of its laws, carrying out the Divine Command with faithful exactitude and punctuality. It is strange—mournfully strange,—that we never seem able to learn the grand lessons that are taught us by this unvarying routine of Natural Forces,—Sub− mission, Obedience, Patience, Resignation, Hope. Preachers preach the doctrine,—teachers teach it,—Nature silently and gloriously manifests it hourly; but we,—we continue to shut our ears and eyes,—we prefer to retreat within ourselves,—our little incomplete ignorant selves,—thinking we shall be able to discover some way out of what has no egress, by the cunning arguments of our own finite intellectual faculties. We fail always;—we must fail. We are bound to find out sooner or later that we must bend our stubborn knees in the presence of the Positive Eternal. But till the poor brain gives way under the prolonged pressure and strain of close inquiry and analysis, so long will it persist in attempting to probe the Impenetrable,—so long will it audaciously attempt to lift the veil that hides the Beyond instead of resting content with what Nature teaches. "Wait"—she says—"Wait till you are mentally able to understand the Explanation. Wait till the Voice which is as a silver clarion, proclaims all truth, saying 'Awake, Soul, for thy dream is past! Look now and see,—for thou art strong enough to bear the Light.'"

Alas! we will not wait,—hence our life in these latter days of analysis, is a mere querulous Complaint, instead of what it should be, a perpetual Thanksgiving.

Four seasons have passed away since the "Soul of Lilith" was caught up into its native glory,—four seasons,—summer, autumn, winter and spring—and now it is summer again,—summer in the Isle of Cyprus, that once most sacred spot, dear to historic and poetic lore. Up among the low olive−crowned hills of Baffo or Paphos, there is more shade and coolness than in other parts of the island, and the retreat believed to have been the favourite haunt of Venus, is still full of something like the mystical glamour that hallowed it of old. As the singer of "Love−Letters of a Violinist" writes:

"There is a glamour all about the bay
  As if the nymphs of Greece had tarried here.
  The sands are golden and the rocks appear
Crested with silver; and the breezes play
Snatches of song they humm'd when far away,
  And then are hush'd as if from sudden fear."

Flowers bloom luxuriantly, as though the white, blue−veined feet of the goddess had but lately passed by,—there is a suggestive harmony in the subdued low whispering of the trees, accompanied by the gentle murmur of the waves and "Hieros Kipos" or the Sacred Grove, still bends its thick old boughs caressingly towards the greensward as though to remind the dreaming earth of the bygone glories here buried deep in its silent bosom. The poor fragment of the ruined "Temple of Venus" once gorgeous with the gold and precious stones, silks and embroideries, and other offerings brought from luxury−loving Tyre, stands in its desolation among the quiet woods, and no sound of rejoicing comes forth from its broken wall to stir the heated air. Yet there is music not far off,—the sweet and solemn music of an organ chant, accompanying a chorus of mild and mellow voices singing the "Agnus Dei." Here in this part of the country, the native inhabitants are divided in their notions of religious worship,—they talk Greek, albeit modern Greek, with impurities which were unknown to the sonorous ancient tongue, and they are heroes no more, as the heroic Byron has told us in his superb poesy, but simply slaves. They but dimly comprehend Christianity,—the joyous paganism of the past is not yet extinct, and the Virgin Mother of Christ is here adored as "Aphroditissa." Perhaps in dirty Famagousta they may be more orthodox,—but among

these sea−fronting hills where the sound of the "Agnus Dei" solemnly rises and falls in soft surges of harmony, it is still the old home of the Queen of Beauty, and still the birthplace of Adonis, son of a Cyprian King. Commercial England is now the possessor of this bower of sweet fancies,—this little corner of the world haunted by a thousand poetic memories,—and in these prosy days but few pilgrimages are made to a shrine that was once the glory of a glorious age. To the native Cypriotes themselves the gods have simply changed their names and become a little sadder and less playful, that is all,—and to make up for the lost "Temple of Venus" there is, hidden deep among the foliage, a small monastic retreat with a Cross on its long low roof,—a place where a few poor monks work and pray,—good men whose virtues are chiefly known to the sick, destitute and needy. They call themselves simply "The Brotherhood," and there are only ten of them in all, including the youngest, who joined their confraternity quite recently. They are very poor,—they wear rough white garments and go barefooted, and their food is of the simplest; but they do a vast amount of good in their unassuming way, and when any of their neighbours are in trouble, such afflicted ones at once climb the little eminence where Venus was worshipped with such pomp in ancient days, and make direct for the plain unadorned habitation devoted to the service of One who was "a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief." There they never fail to find consolation and practical aid,—even their persistent prayers to "Aphroditissa" are condoned with a broad and tender patience by these men who honestly strive to broaden and not confine the road that leads to heaven. Thus Paphos is sacred still,— with the glamour of old creeds and the wider glory of the new,—yet though it is an interesting enough nook of the earth, it is seldom that travellers elect to go thither either to admire or explore. Therefore the sight of a travelling−carriage, a tumble−down sort of vehicle, yet one of the best to be obtained thereabouts, making its way slowly up the ascent, with people in modern fashionable dress sitting therein, was a rare and wonderful spectacle to the ragged Cypriote youth of both sexes, who either stood by the roadway, pushing their tangled locks from their dark eyes and staring at it, or else ran swiftly alongside its wheels to beg for coppers from its occupants. There were four of these,—two ladies and two gentlemen,—Sir Frederick Vaughan and Lady Vaughan (*née* Idina Chester); the fair and famous authoress, Irene Vassilius, and a distinguished−looking handsome man of about forty or thereabouts, the Duke of Strathlea, a friend of the Vaughans, who had entertained them royally during the previous autumn at his grand old historic house in Scotland. By a mere chance during the season, he had made the acquaintance of Madame Vassilius, with whom he had fallen suddenly, deeply and ardently in love. She, however, was the same unresponsive far−gazing dreamy sibyl as ever, and though not entirely indifferent to the gentle reverential homage paid to her by this chivalrous and honourable gentleman, she could not make up her mind to give him any decided encouragement. He appeared to make no progress with her whatever,—and of course his discouragement increased his ardour. He devised every sort of plan he could think of for obtaining as much of her society as possible,—and finally, he had entreated the Vaughans to persuade her to join them in a trip to the Mediterranean in his yacht. At first she had refused,—then, with a sudden change of humour, she had consented to go, provided the Island of Cyprus were one of the places to be visited. Strathlea eagerly caught at and agreed to this suggestion,—the journey had been undertaken, and had so far proved most enjoyable. Now they had reached the spot Irene most wished to see,— it was to please her that they were making the present excursion to the "Temple of Venus," or rather, to the small and obscure monastery among the hills which she had expressed a strong desire to visit,—and Strathlea, looking wistfully at her fair thoughtful face, wondered whether after all these pleasant days passed together between sparkling sea and radiant sky, she had any kinder thoughts of him,—whether she would always be so quiet, so impassive, so indifferent to the love of a true man's heart?

The carriage went slowly,—the view widened with every upward yard of the way,—and they were all silent, gazing at the glittering expanse of blue ocean below them.

"How very warm it is!" said Lady Vaughan at last breaking the dumb spell, and twirling her sunshade round and round to disperse a cloud of gnats and small flies—"Fred, you look absolutely broiled! You are so dreadfully sunburnt!"

"Am I?" and Sir Frederick smiled blandly,—he was as much in love with his pretty frivolous wife as it is becoming for a man to be, and all her remarks were received by him with the utmost docility—"Well, I dare say I am. Yachting doesn't improve the transparent delicacy of a man's complexion. Strathlea is too dark to show it much,—but I was always a florid sort of fellow. You've no lack of colour yourself, Idina."

"Oh, I'm sure I look a fright!" responded her ladyship vivaciously and with a slight touch of petulance—"Irene is the only one who appears to keep cool. I believe her aspect would be positively frosty with the thermometer

marking 100 in the shade!"

Irene, who was gazing abstractedly out to sea, turned slowly and lifted her drooping lace parasol slightly higher from her face. She was pale,—and her deep−set gray eyes were liquid as though unshed tears filled them.

"Did you speak to me, dear?" she inquired gently. "Have I done something to vex you?"

Lady Vaughan laughed.

"No, of course you haven't. The idea of your vexing anybody! You look irritably cool in this tremendous heat,—that's all."

"I love the sun,"—said Irene dreamily—"To me it is always the visible sign of God in the world. In London we have so little sunshine,—and, one might add, so little of God also! I was just then watching that golden blaze of light upon the sea."

Strathlea looked at her interrogatively.

"And what does it suggest to you, Madame?" he asked—"The glory of a great fame, or the splendour of a great love?"

"Neither"—she replied tranquilly—"Simply the reflex of Heaven on Earth."

"Love might be designated thus," said Strathlea in a low tone.

She coloured a little, but offered no response.

"It was odd that you alone should have been told the news of poor El−Râmi's misfortune,"—said Sir Frederick, abruptly addressing her,—"None of us, not even my cousin Melthorpe, who knew him before you did, had the least idea of it."

"His brother wrote to me"—replied Irene; "Féraz, that beautiful youth who accompanied him to Lady Melthorpe's reception last year. But he gave me no details,—he simply explained that El−Râmi, through prolonged over−study had lost the balance of his mind. The letter was very short, and in it he stated he was about to enter a religious fraternity who had their abode near Baffo in Cyprus, and that the brethren had consented to receive his brother also and take charge of him in his great helplessness."

"And their place is what we are going to see now"—finished Lady Vaughan—"I dare say it will be immensely interesting. Poor El−Râmi! Who would ever have thought it possible for him to lose his wits! I shall never forget the first time I saw him at the theatre. 'Hamlet' was being played, and he entered in the very middle of the speech 'To be or not to be.' I remember how he looked, perfectly. What eyes he had!—they positively scared me!"

Her husband glanced at her admiringly.

"Do you know, Idina"—he said, "that El−Râmi told me on that very night—the night of 'Hamlet'—that I was destined to marry you?"

She lifted her eyelids in surprise.

"No! Really! And did you feel yourself compelled to carry out the prophecy?"—and she laughed.

"No, I did not feel myself compelled,—but somehow, it happened—didn't it?" he inquired with naïve persistency.

"Of course it did! How absurd you are!" and she laughed again—"Are you sorry?"

He gave her an expressive look,—he was really very much in love, and she was still a new enough bride to blush at his amorous regard. Strathlea moved impatiently in his seat;—the assured happiness of others made him envious.

"I suppose this prophet,—El−Râmi, as you call him, prophesies no longer, if his wits are lacking"—he said—"otherwise I should have asked him to prophesy something good for me."

No one answered. Lady Vaughan stole a meaning glance and smile at Irene, but there was no touch of embarrassment or flush of colour on that fair, serene, rather plaintive face.

"He always went into things with such terrible closeness, did El−Râmi,—" said Sir Frederick after a pause—"No wonder his brain gave way at last. You know you can't keep on asking the why, why, why of everything without getting shut up in the long run."

"I think we were not meant to ask 'why' at all," said Irene slowly—"We are made to accept and believe that everything is for the best."

"There is a story extant in France of a certain philosopher who was always asking why—" said Strathlea—"He was a taciturn man as a rule, and seldom opened his lips except to say 'Pourquoi?' When his wife died suddenly, he manifested no useless regrets—he merely said 'Pourquoi?' One day they told him his house in the country was

burnt to the ground,—he shrugged his shoulders and said 'Pourquoi?' After a bit he lost all his fortune,—his furniture was sold up,—he stared at the bailiffs and said 'Pourquoi?' Later on he was suspected of being in a plot to assassinate the King,—men came and seized his papers and took him away to prison,—he made no resistance,—he only said 'Pourquoi?' He was tried, found guilty and condemned to death; the judge asked him if he had anything to say? He replied at once 'Pourquoi?' No answer was vouchsafed to him, and in due time he was taken to the scaffold. There the executioner bandaged his eyes,—he said 'Pourquoi?'—he was told to kneel down; he did so, but again demanded 'Pourquoi?'—the knife fell, and his head was severed from his body—yet before it rolled into the basket, it trembled on the block, its eyes opened, its lips moved and for the last time uttered that final, never−to−be−answered query 'Pourquoi?'!"

They all laughed at this story, and just then the carriage stopped. The driver got down and explained in very bad French that he could go no further,—that the road had terminated and that there was now only a footpath which led through the trees to the little monastic retreat whither they were bound. They alighted, therefore, and found themselves close to the ruin supposed to have once been the "Temple of Venus." They paused for a moment, looking at the scene in silence.

"There must have been a great joyousness in the old creeds," said Strathlea softly, with an admiring glance at Irene's slight slim, almost fairy−like figure clad in its closefitting garb of silky white—"At the shrine of Venus for example, one could declare one's love without fear or shame."

"That can be done still,"—observed Sir Frederick laughingly—"And is done, pretty often. People haven't left off making love because the faith in Venus is exploded. I expect they'll go on in the same old abandoned way to the end of the chapter."

And, throwing his arm round his wife's waist, he sauntered on with her towards the thicket of trees at the end of which their driver had told them the "refuge" was situated, leaving Strathlea and Madame Vassilius to follow. Strathlea perceived and was grateful for the opportunity thus given, and ventured to approach Irene a little more closely. She was still gazing out to the sea,—her soft eyes were dreamy and abstracted,—her small ungloved right hand hung down at her side,—after a moment's hesitation, he boldly lifted it and touched its delicate whiteness with a kiss. She started nervously—she had been away in the land of dreams,—and now she met his gaze with a certain vague reproach in the sweet expression of her face.

"I cannot help it—" said Strathlea quickly, and in a low eager tone—"I cannot, Irene! You know I love you,—you have seen it, and you have discouraged and repelled me in every possible way,—but I am not made of stone or marble—I am mere flesh and blood, and I must speak. I love you, Irene! I love you—I will not unsay it. I want you to be my wife. Will you, Irene? Do not be in a hurry to answer me—think long enough to allow some pity for me to mingle with your thoughts. Just imagine a little hand like this"—and he kissed it again—"holding the pen with such a masterful grip and inditing to the world the thoughts and words that live in the minds of thousands,—is it such a cold hand that it is impervious to love's caress? I cannot—I will not believe it. You cannot be obdurate for ever. What is there in love that it should repel you?"

She smiled gravely, and gently, very gently, withdrew her hand.

"It is not love that repels me—" she said, "It is what is **called** love, in this world,—a selfish sentiment that is not love at all. I assure you I am not insensible to your affection for me, my dear Duke, ... I wish for your sake I were differently constituted."

She paused a moment, then added hastily, "See, the others are out of sight—do let us overtake them."

She moved away quickly with that soft gliding tread of hers which reminded one of a poet's sylph walking on a moonbeam, and he paced beside her, half mortified, yet not altogether without hope.

"Why are you so anxious to see this man who has lost his wits,—this El−Râmi Zarânos?" he asked, with a touch of jealousy in his accents—"Was he more to you than most people?"

She raised her eyes with an expression of grave remonstrance.

"Your thoughts wrong me—" she said simply—"I never saw El−Râmi but twice in my life,—I only pitied him greatly. I used to have a strong instinct upon me that all would not be well with him in the end."

"Why?"

"First, because he had no faith,—secondly because he had an excess of pride. He dismissed God out of his calculations altogether, and was perfectly content to rely on the onward march of his own intellect. Intellectual Egoism is always doomed to destruction,—this seems to be a Law of the Universe. Indeed, Egoism, whether

sensual or intellectual, is always a defiance of God."

Strathlea walked along in silence for a minute, then he said abruptly,

"It is odd to hear you speak like this, as if you were a religious woman. You are not religious,—everyone says so,—you are a free−thinker,—and also, pardon me for repeating it, society supposes you to be full of this sin you condemn—Intellectual Egoism."

"Society may suppose what it pleases of me"—said Irene—"I was never its favourite, and never shall be, nor do I court its good opinion. Yes, I am a free−thinker, and freely think without narrow law or boundary, of the majesty, beauty and surpassing goodness of God. As for intellectual egoism,—I hope I am not in any respect guilty of it. To be proud of what one does, or what one knows, has always seemed to me the poorest sort of vanity,—and it is the stumbling−block over which a great many workers in the literary profession fall, never to rise again. But you are quite right in saying I am not a 'religious' woman; I never go to church, and I never patronize bazaars."

The sparkle of mirth in her eyes was infectious, and he laughed. But suddenly she stopped, and laid her hand on his arm.

"Listen," she said, with a slight tremor in her voice—"You love me, you say ... and I—I am not altogether indifferent to you—I confess that much. Wait!" for in an excess of delight he had caught both her hands in his own, and she loosened them gently—"Wait—you do not know me, my dear friend. You do not understand my nature at all,—I sometimes think myself it is not what is understood as 'feminine.' I am an abnormal creature—and perhaps if you knew me better you would not like me..."

"I adore you!" said Strathlea impetuously, "and I shall always adore you!"

She smiled rather sadly.

"You think so now,"—she said—"but you cannot be sure,—no man can always be sure of himself. You spoke of society and its opinion of me;—now, as a rule, average people do not like me,—they are vaguely afraid of me,—and they think it is strange and almost dangerous for a 'writing woman' to be still young, and not entirely hideous. Literary women generally are so safely and harmlessly repellant in look and bearing. Then again, as you said, I am not a religious woman,—no, not at all so in the accepted sense of the term. But with all my heart and soul I believe in God, and the ultimate good of everything. I abhor those who would narrow our vision of heavenly things by dogma or rule—I resent all ideas of the Creator that seem to lessen His glory by one iota. I may truly say I live in an ecstasy of faith, accepting life as a wondrous miracle, and death as a crowning joy. I pray but seldom, as I have nothing to ask for, being given far more than I deserve,—and I complain of nothing save the blind, cruel injustice and misjudgment shown by one human unit to another. This is not God's doing, but Man's—and it will, it must, bring down full punishment in due season."

She paused a moment,—Strathlea was looking at her admiringly, and she coloured suddenly at his gaze.

"Besides"—she added with an abrupt change of tone, from enthusiasm to coldness, "you must not, my dear Duke, think that I feel myself in any way distinguished or honoured by your proposal to make me your wife. I do not. This sounds very brusque, I know, but I think as a general rule in marriage, a woman gives a great deal more than she ever receives. I am aware how very much your position and fortune might appeal to many of my sex,—but I need scarcely tell you they have no influence upon me. For, notwithstanding an entire lack of log−rollers and press 'booms'"—and she smiled—"my books bring me in large sums, sufficient and more than sufficient, for all my worldly needs. And I am not ambitious to be a duchess."

"You are cruel, Irene"—said Strathlea—"Should I ever attaint you with worldly motives? I never wanted to be a duke—I was born so,—and a horrid bore it is! If I were a poor man, could you fancy me?"

He looked at her,—and her eyes fell under his ardent gaze. He saw his advantage and profited by it.

"You do not positively hate me?" he asked.

She gave him one fleeting glance through her long lashes, and a faint smile rested on her mouth.

"How could I?" she murmured—"you are my friend."

"Well, will you try to like me a little more than a friend?"—he continued eagerly—"Will you say to yourself now and then—'He is a big, bluff, clumsy Englishman, with more faults than virtues, more money than brains, and a stupid title sticking upon him like a bow of ribbon on a boar's head, but he is very fond of me, and would give up everything in the world for me'—will you say that to yourself, and think as well as you can of me?—will you, Irene?"

She raised her head. All coldness and hauteur had left her face, and her eyes were very soft and tender.

"My dear friend, I cannot hear you do yourself wrong"—she said—"and I am not as unjust as you perhaps imagine. I know your worth. You have more virtues than faults, more brains than money,—you are generous and kindly,—and in this instance, your title sets off the grace of a true and gallant gentleman. Give me time to consider a little,—let us join the Vaughans,—I promise you I will give you your answer today."

A light flashed over his features, and stooping, he once more kissed her hand. Then, as she moved on, a gracefully gliding figure under the dark arching boughs, he followed with a firm joyous step such as might have befitted a knight of the court of King Arthur who had, after hard fighting, at last won some distinct pledge of his 'ladye's' future favour.

CHAPTER XI.

DEEPLY embowered among arching boughs and covered with the luxuriant foliage of many a climbing and flowering vine, the little monastic refuge appeared at first sight more like the retreat of a poet or painter than a religious house where holy ascetics fasted and prayed and followed the difficult discipline of daily self−denial. When the little party of visitors reached its quaint low door they all paused before ringing the bell that hung visibly aloft among clustering clematis, and looked about them in admiration.

"What a delicious place!" said Lady Vaughan, bending to scent the odours of a rich musk rose that had pushed its lovely head through the leaves as though inviting attention—"How peaceful! ... and listen! What grand music they are singing!"

She held up her finger,—the others obeyed the gesture, and hushed their steps to hear every note of the stately harmony that pealed out upon the air. The brethren were chanting part of the grand Greek "Hymn of Cleanthes," a translation of which may be roughly rendered in the following strophes:

"Many−named and most glorious of the Immortals, Almighty forever,
Ruler of Nature whose government is order and law,
Hail, all hail! for good it is that mortals should praise thee!

"We are Thy offspring; we are the Image of Thy Voice,
And only the Image, as all mortal things are that live and move by Thy power,
Therefore do we exalt Thy Name and sing of Thy glory forever!
"Thee doth the splendid Universe obeyMoving whithersoever Thou leadest,And all are gladly swayed by Thee.

"Naught is done in the earth without Thee, O God—
Nor in the divine sphere of the heavens, nor in the deepest depths of the sea,
Save the works that evil men commit in their hours of folly.

"Yet thou knowest where to find place for superfluous things,
Thou dost order that which seems disorderly,
And things not dear to men are dear to Thee!

"Thou dost harmonise into One both Good and Evil,
For there is One Everlasting Reason for them all.

"O thou All−Giver, Dweller in the clouds, Lord of the thunder,
Save thou men from their own self−sought unhappiness,
Do thou, Father, scatter darkness from their souls, and give them light to discover true wisdom.

"In being honoured let them pay Thee Honour,
Hymning Thy glorious works continually as beseems mortal men,
Since there can be no greater glory for men or gods than this,
To praise for ever and ever the grand and Universal Law! Amen!—Amen!—Amen!"

"Strange they should elect to sing that"—said Strathlea musingly—"I remember learning it off by heart in my student days. They have left out a verse of it here and there,—but it is quite a Pagan hymn."

"It seems to me very good Christianity"—said Irene Vassilius, her eyes kindling with emotion—"It is a grand

and convincing act of thanksgiving, and I think we have more cause for thankfulness than supplication."

"I am not yet quite sure about that myself"—murmured Strathlea in her ear—"I shall know better when the day is ended which I need most, prayer or thanksgiving."

She coloured a little and her eyes fell,—meanwhile the solemn music ceased.

"Shall I ring?" inquired Sir Frederick as the last note died away on the air.

They all silently acquiesced,—and by means of a coarse rope hanging down among the flowers the bell was gently set in motion. Its soft clang was almost immediately answered by a venerable monk in white garments, with a long rosary twisted into his girdle and a Cross and Star blazoned in gold upon his breast.

"Benedicite!" said this personage mildly, making the sign of the cross before otherwise addressing the visitors,—then, as they instinctively bent their heads to the pious greeting, he opened the door a little wider and asked them in French what they sought.

For answer Madame Vassilius stepped forward and gave him an open letter, one which she knew would serve as a pass to obtain ready admission to the monastery, and as the monk glanced it over his pale features brightened visibly.

"Ah! Friends of our youngest brother Sebastian"—he said in fluent English—"Enter! You are most heartily welcome."

He stood aside, and they all passed under the low porch into a square hall, painted from ceiling to floor in delicate fresco. The designs were so beautiful and so admirably executed, that Strathlea could not resist stopping to look at one or two of them.

"These are very fine"—he said addressing the gray−haired recluse who escorted them—"Are they the work of some ancient or modern artist?"

The old man smiled and gave a deprecating, almost apologetic gesture.

"They are the result of a few years' pleasant labour"—he replied—"I was very happy while employed thus."

"You did them!" exclaimed Lady Vaughan, turning her eyes upon him in frank wonder and admiration—"Why then you are a genius!"

The monk shook his head.

"Oh no, Madame, not so. We none of us lay claim to 'genius'; that is for those in the outer world,—here we simply work and do our best for the mere love of doing it."

Here, preceding them a little, he threw open a door, and ushered them into a quaint low room, panelled in oak, and begged them to be seated for a few moments while he went to inform "Brother Sebastian" of their arrival.

Left alone they gazed about in silence, till Sir Frederick, after staring hard at the panelled walls said—

"You may be pretty sure these fellows have carved every bit of that oak themselves. Monks are always wonderful workmen,—'Laborare est orare' you know. By the way, I noticed that monk artist who was with us just now wore no tonsure,—I wonder why? Anyhow it's a very ugly disfigurement and quite senseless; they do well to abjure it."

"Is this man you come to see,—El−Râmi —a member of the Fraternity?" asked Strathlea of Irene in a low tone.

She shook her head compassionately.

"Oh no—poor creature,—he would not understand their rules or their discipline. He is simply in their charge, as one who must for all his life be weak and helpless."

At that moment the door opened, and a tall slim figure appeared, clad in the trailing white garments of the brotherhood; and in the dark poetic face, brilliant eyes and fine sensitive mouth there was little difficulty in recognising Féraz as the "Brother Sebastian" for whom they waited. He advanced towards them with singular grace and quiet dignity,—the former timidity and impetuosity of youth had entirely left him, and from his outward aspect and bearing he looked like a young saint whose thoughts were always set on the highest things, yet who nevertheless had known what it was to suffer in the search for peace.

"You are most welcome, Madame"—he said, inclining himself with a courteous gentleness towards Irene,—"I expected you,—I felt sure that you would one day come to see us. I know you were always interested in my brother..."

"I was, and am still"—replied Irene gently, "and in yourself also."

Féraz, or "Brother Sebastian" as he was now called, made another gentle salutation expressive of gratitude, and

then turned his eyes questioningly on the other members of the party.

"You will not need to be reminded of Sir Frederick Vaughan and Lady Vaughan,"—went on Irene,—then as these exchanged greetings, she added—"This gentleman whom you do not know is the Duke of Strathlea,—we have made the journey from England in his yacht, and—" she hesitated a moment, the colour deepening a little in her fair cheeks—"he is a great friend of mine."

Féraz glanced at her once,—then once at Strathlea, and a grave smile softened his pensive face. He extended his hand with a frank cordiality that was charming, and Strathlea pressed it warmly, fascinated by the extreme beauty and dignity of this youthful ascetic, sworn to the solitariness of the religious life ere he had touched his manhood's prime.

"And how is El−Râmi?" asked Sir Frederick with good−natured bluffness—"My cousin Melthorpe was much distressed to hear what had happened,—and so were we all,—really—a terrible calamity—but you know over−study will upset a man,—it's no use doing too much—"

He broke off his incoherent remarks abruptly, embarrassed a little by the calmly mournful gaze of "Brother Sebastian's" deep dark eyes.

"You are very good, Sir Frederick,"—he said gently—"I am sure you sympathize truly, and I thank you all for your sympathy. But—I am not sure that I should be sorrowful for my brother's seeming affliction. God's will has been made manifest in this, as in other things,—and we must needs accept that will without complaint. For the rest, El−Râmi is well,—and not only well, but happy. Let me take you to him."

They hesitated,—all except Irene. Lady Vaughan was a nervous creature,—she had a very vivid remembrance of El−Râmi's "terrible eyes"—they looked fiery enough when he was sane,—but how would they look now when he was ... mad? She moved uneasily,—her husband pulled his long moustache doubtfully as he studied her somewhat alarmed countenance,—and Féraz, glancing at the group, silently understood the situation.

"Will you come with me, Madame?" he said, addressing himself solely to Irene—"It is better perhaps that you should see him first alone. But he will not distress you ... he is quite harmless ... poor El−Râmi!"

In spite of himself his voice trembled,—and Irene's warm heart swelled for sympathy.

"I will come at once"—she said, and as she prepared to leave the room Strathlea whispered: "Let me go with you!"

She gave a mute sign of assent,—and Féraz leading the way, they quietly followed, while Sir Frederick and his wife remained behind. They passed first through a long stone corridor,—then into a beautiful quadrangular court with a fountain in its centre, and wooden benches set at equal distances under its moss−grown vine−covered colonnades. Flowers grew everywhere in the wildest, loveliest profusion,—tame doves strutted about on the pavement with peaceful and proud complacency, and palms and magnolias grew up in tall and tangled profusion wherever they could obtain root−hold, casting their long, leafy trembling shadows across the quadrangle and softening the too dazzling light reflected from the brilliant sky above. Up in a far corner of this little garden paradise, under the shade of a spreading cedar, sat the placid figure of a man,—one of the brethren at first he seemed, for he was clothed in the garb of the monastic order, and a loose cowl was flung back from his uncovered head on which the hair shone white and glistening as fine spun silver. His hands were loosely clasped together,—his large dark eyes were fixed on the rays of light that quivered prismatically in the foam of the tossing fountain, and near his feet a couple of amorous snowy doves sat brooding in the sun. He did not seem to hear the footsteps of his approaching visitors, and even when they came close up to him, it was only by slow degrees that he appeared to become conscious of their presence.

"El−Râmi!" said his brother with tender gentleness—"El−Râmi, these are friends who have journeyed hither to see you."

Then, like a man reluctantly awaking from a long and pleasant noonday dream, he rose and stood up with singularly majestic dignity, and for a moment looked so like the proud, indomitable El−Râmi of former days, that Irene Vassilius in her intense interest and compassion for him, half fancied that the surprise of seeing old acquaintances had for a brief interval brought back both reason and remembrance. But no,—his eyes rested upon her unrecognisingly, though he greeted her and Strathlea also, with the stateliest of salutations.

"Friends are always welcome"—he said, "But friends are rare in the world,—it is not in the world one must look for them. There was a time I assure you, ... when I ... even I, ... could have had the most powerful of all friends for the mere asking,—but it is too late now—too late."

He sighed profoundly, and seated himself again on the bench as before.

"What does he mean?" asked Strathlea of Féraz in a low tone.

"It is not always easy to understand him" responded Féraz gently—"But in this case, when he speaks of the friend he might have had for the mere asking, he means,—God."

The warm tears rushed into Irene's eyes.

"Nay, God is his friend I am sure"—she said with fervour—"The great Creator is no man's enemy."

Féraz gave her an eloquent look.

"True, dear Madame"—he answered,—"But there are times and seasons of affliction when we feel and know ourselves to be unworthy of the Divine friendship, and when our own conscience considers God as one very far off."

Yielding to the deep impulse of pity that swayed her, she advanced softly, and sitting down beside El−Râmi, took his hand in her own. He turned and looked at her,—at the fair delicate face and soft ardent eyes,—at the slight dainty figure in its close−fitting white garb,—and a faint wondering smile brightened his features.

"What is this?" he murmured, then glancing downward at her small white ringless hand as it held his—"Is this an angel? Yes, it must be,—well then, there is hope at last. You bring me news of Lilith?"

Irene started, and her heart beat nervously,—she could not understand this, to her, new phase of his wandering mind. What was she to say in answer to so strange a question?—for who was Lilith? She gazed helplessly at Féraz,—he returned her look with one so earnest and imploring, that she answered at once as she thought most advisable—

"Yes!"

A sudden trembling shook El−Râmi's frame, and he seemed absorbed. After a long pause, he lifted his dark eyes and fixed them solemnly upon her.

"Then, she knows all now?" he de− mended—"She understands that I am patient?—that I repent?—that I believe?—and that I love her as she would have me love her,—faithfully and far beyond all life and time?"

Without hesitation, and only anxious to soothe and comfort him, Irene answered at once—

"Yes—yes—she understands. Be consoled—be patient still—you will meet her soon again."

"Soon again?" he echoed, with a pathetic glance upward at the dazzling blue sky—"Soon? In a thousand years?—or a thousand thousand?—for so do happy angels count the time. To me an hour is long—but to Lilith, cycles are moments."

His head sank on his breast,—he seemed to fall suddenly into a dreamy state of meditation,—and just then a slow bell began to toll to and fro from a wooden turret on the monastery roof.

"That is for vespers"—said Féraz—"Will you come, Madame, and hear our singing? You shall see El−Râmi again afterwards."

Silently she rose, but her movement to depart roused El−Râmi from his abstraction, and he looked at her wistfully.

"They say there is happiness in the world"—he said slowly—"but I have not found it. Little messenger of peace, are you happy?"

The pathos of his rich musical voice as he said the words "little messenger of peace," was indescribably touching. Strathlea found his eyes suddenly growing dim with tears, and Irene's voice trembled greatly as she answered—

"No, not quite happy, dear friend;—we none of us are quite happy."

"Not without love,"—said El−Râmi, speaking with sudden firmness and decision—"Without love we are powerless. With it, we can compass all things. Do not miss love; it is the clue to the great Secret,—the only key to God's mystery. But you know this already,—better than I can tell you,—for I have missed it,—not lost it, you understand, but only missed it. I shall find it again,—I hope, ... I pray I shall find it again! God be with you, little messenger! Be happy while you can!"

He extended his hand with a gesture which might have been one of dismissal or benediction or both, and then sank into his former attitude of resigned contemplation, while Irene Vassilius, too much moved to speak, walked across the court between Strathlea and the beautiful young "Brother Sebastian," scarcely seeing the sunlight for tears. Strathlea too was deeply touched;—so splendid a figure of a man as El−Râmi he had seldom seen, and the ruin of brilliant faculties in such a superb physique appeared to him the most disastrous of calamities.

"Is he always like that?" he inquired of Féraz, with a backward compassionate glance at the quiet figure sitting under the cedar−boughs.

"Nearly always," replied Féraz—"Sometimes he talks of birds and flowers,—sometimes he takes a childish delight in the sunlight—he is most happy, I think, when I take him alone into the chapel and play to him on the organ. He is very peaceful, and never at any time violent."

"And," pursued Strathlea hesitatingly, "who is, or who was the Lilith he speaks of?"

"A woman he loved"—answered Féraz quietly—"and whom he loves still. She lives—for him—in Heaven."

No more questions were asked, and in another minute they arrived at the open door of the little chapel, where Sir Frederick and Lady Vaughan, attracted by the sound of music, were already awaiting them. Irene briefly whispered a hurried explanation of El−Râmi's condition, and Lady Vaughan declared she would go and see him after the vesper−service was over.

"You must not expect the usual sort of vespers"—said Féraz then—"Our form is not the Roman Catholic."

"Is it not?" queried Strathlea, surprised—"Then, may one ask what is it?"

"Our own,"—was the brief response. Three or four white−cowled, white−garmented figures now began to glide into the chapel by a side−entrance, and Sir Frederick Vaughan asked with some curiosity:

"Which is the Superior?"

"We have no Superior"—replied Féraz—"There is one Master of all the Brotherhoods, but he has no fixed habitation, and he is not at present in Europe. He visits the different branches of our Fraternity at different intervals,—but he has not been here since my brother and I came. In this house we are a sort of small Republic,—each man governs himself, and we are all in perfect unity, as we all implicitly follow the same fixed rules. Will you go into the chapel now? I must leave you, as I have to sing the chorale."

They obeyed his gesture, and went softly into the little sacred place, now glowing with light, and redolent of sweet perfume, the natural incense wafted on the air from the many flowers which were clustered in every nook and corner. Seating themselves quietly on a wooden bench at the end of the building, they watched the proceedings in mingled wonder and reverence,—for such a religious service as this they had assuredly never witnessed. There was no altar,—only an arched recess, wherein stood a large, roughly carved wooden cross, the base of which was entirely surrounded with the rarest flowers. Through the stained glass window behind, the warm afternoon light streamed gloriously,—it fell upon the wooden beams of the Sign of Salvation, with a rose and purple radiance like that of newly−kindled fire,—and as the few monks gathered together and knelt before it in silent prayer, the scene was strangely impressive, though the surroundings were so simple. And when, through the deep stillness an organ−chord broke grandly like a wave from the sea, and the voice of Féraz, deep, rich, and pathetic exclaimed as it were, in song,

"Quare tristis es anima mea?
Quare conturbas me?"

giving the reply in still sweeter accents,

"Spera in Deo!"

then Irene Vassilius sank on her knees and hid her face in her clasped hands, her whole soul shaken by emotion and uplifted to heaven by the magic of divinest harmony. Strathlea looked at her slight kneeling figure and his heart beat passionately,—he bent his head too, close beside hers, partly out of a devotional sense, partly perhaps to have a nearer glimpse of the lovely fair hair that clustered in such tempting little ripples and curls on the back of her slim white neck. The monks, prostrating themselves before the Cross, murmured together some indistinct orisons for a few minutes,—then came a pause,—and once more the voice of Féraz rang out in soft warm vibrating notes of melody;—the words he sang were his own, and fell distinctly on the ears as roundly and perfectly as the chime of a true−toned bell—

O hear ye not the voice of the Belovëd?
Through golden seas of starry light it falls,
And like a summons in the night it calls,
Saying,—'Lost children of the Father's House
Why do ye wander wilfully away?
Lo, I have sought ye sorrowing every day,—
And yet ye will not answer,—will not turn
To meet My love for which the angels yearn!
In all the causeless griefs wherewith your hearts are movëd
Have ye no time to hear the Voice of the Belovëd?

O hearken to the Voice of the Belovëd!
Sweeter it is than music,—sweeter far
Than angel−anthems in a happy star!
O wandering children of the Father's House,
Turn homeward ere the coming of the night,
Follow the pathway leading to the light!
So shall the sorrows of long exile cease
And tears be turned to smiles and pain to peace.
Lift up your hearts and let your faith be provëd;—
Answer, oh answer the Voice of the Belovëd!

Very simple stanzas these, and yet, sung by Féraz as only he could sing, they carried in their very utterance a singularly passionate and beautiful appeal. The fact of his singing the verses in English implied a gracefully intended compliment to his visitors,—and after the last line "Answer, oh answer the voice of the Belovëd!" a deep silence reigned in the little chapel. After some minutes, this silence was gently disturbed by what one might express as the gradual **flowing−in** of music,—a soft, persuasive ripple of sound that seemed to wind in and out as though it had crept forth from the air as a stream creeps through the grasses. And while that delicious harmony rose and fell on the otherwise absolute stillness, Strathlea was thrilled through every nerve of his being by the touch of a small soft warm hand that stole tremblingly near his own as the music stole into his heart;—a hand, that after a little hesitation placed itself on his in a wistfully submissive way that filled him with rapture and wonder. He pressed the clinging dainty fingers in his own broad palm—

"Irene!" he whispered, as he bent his head lower in apparent devotion—"Irene,—is this my answer?"

She looked up and gave him one fleeting glance through eyes that were dim with tears; a faint smile quivered on her lips,—and then, she hid her face again,—but—left her hand in his. And as the music, solemn and sweet, surged around them both like a rolling wave, Strathlea knew his cause was won, and for this favour of high Heaven, mentally uttered a brief but passionately fervent *"Laus Deo."* He had obtained the best blessing that God can give—Love,—and he felt devoutly certain that he had nothing more to ask for in this world or the next. Love for him was enough,—as indeed it should be enough for us all if only we will understand it in its highest sense. Shall we ever understand?—or never?

CHAPTER XII.

THE vespers over, the little party of English visitors passed out of the chapel into the corridor. There they waited in silence, the emotions of two of them at least, being sufficiently exalted to make any attempt at conversation difficult. It was not however very long before Féraz or "Brother Sebastian" joined them, and led them as though by some involuntary instinct into the flower−grown quadrangle, where two or three of the monks were now to be seen pacing up and down in the strong red sunset−light with books open in their hands, pausing ever and anon in their slow walk to speak to El−Râmi, who sat, as before, alone under the boughs of the cedar−tree. One of the tame doves that had previously been seen nestling at his feet, had now taken up its position on his knee, and was complacently huddled down there, allowing itself to be stroked, and uttering crooning sounds of satisfaction as his hand passed caressingly over its folded white wings. Féraz said very little as he escorted all his guests up to within a yard or so of El−Râmi's secluded seat,—but Lady Vaughan paused irresolutely, gazing timidly and with something of awe at the quiet reposeful figure, the drooped head, the delicate dark hand that stroked the dove's wings,—and as she looked and strove to realize that this gentle, submissive, meditative, hermit−like man was indeed the once proud and indomitable El−Râmi, a sudden trembling came over her, and a rush of tears blinded her eyes.

"I cannot speak to him"—she whispered sobbingly to her husband—"He looks so far away,—I am sure he is not here with us at all!"

Sir Frederick, distressed at his wife's tears, murmured something soothing,—but he too was rendered nervous by the situation and he could find no words in which to make his feelings intelligible. So, as before, Irene Vassilius took the initiative. Going close up to El−Râmi, she with a quick yet graceful impulsiveness threw herself in a half−kneeling attitude before him.

"El−Râmi!" she said.

He started, and stared down upon her amazedly,—yet was careful in all his movements not to disturb the drowsing white dove upon his knee.

"Who calls me?" he demanded—"Who speaks?"

"I call you"—replied Irene, regardless how her quite unconventional behaviour might affect the Vaughans as onlookers—"I ask you, dear friend, to listen to me. I want to tell you that I am happy—very happy,—and that before I go, you must give me your blessing."

A pathetic pain and wonderment crossed El−Râmi's features. He looked helplessly at Féraz,—for though he did not recognise him as his brother, he was accustomed to rely upon him for everything.

"This is very strange!" he faltered—"No one has ever asked me for a blessing. Make her understand that I have no Power at all to do any good by so much as a word or a thought. I am a very poor and ignorant man—quite at God's mercy."

Féraz bent above him with a soothing gesture.

"Dear El−Râmi," he said—"this lady honours you. You will wish her well ere she departs from us,—that is all she seeks."

El−Râmi turned again towards Irene, who remained perfectly quiet in the attitude she had assumed.

"I thought,"—he murmured slowly—"I thought you were an angel,—it seems you are a woman. Sometimes they are one and the same thing. Not often, but sometimes. Women are wronged,—much wronged,—when God endows them, they see further than we do. But you must not honour me,—I am not worthy to be honoured. A little child is much wiser than I am. Of course I must wish you well—I could not do otherwise. You see this poor bird,"—and he again stroked the dove which now dozed peacefully—"I wish it well also. It has its mate and its hole in the dove−cote, and numberless other little joys,—I would have it always happy,—and ... so—I would have you always happy too. And,—most assuredly, if you desire it, I will say—'God bless you!'"

Here he seemed to collect his thoughts with some effort,—his dark brows contracted perplexedly,—then, after a minute, his expression brightened, and, as if he had just remembered something, he carefully and with almost trembling reverence, made the sign of the cross above Irene's drooping head. She gently caught the hovering hand and kissed it. He smiled placidly, like a child who is caressed.

"You are very good to me"—he said—"I am quite sure you are an angel. And being so, you need no

blessing—God knows His own, and always claims them ... in the end."

He closed his eyes languidly then and seemed fatigued,—his hand still mechanically stroked the dove's wings. They left him so, moving away from him with hushed and cautious steps. He had not noticed Sir Frederick or Lady Vaughan,—and they were almost glad of this, as they were themselves entirely disinclined to speak. To see so great a wreck of a once brilliant intellect was a painful spectacle to good−natured Sir Frederick,—while on Lady Vaughan it had the effect of a severe nervous shock. She thought she would have been better able to bear the sight of a distracted and howling maniac, than the solemn pitifulness of that silent submission, that grave patience of a physically strong man transformed, as it were, into a child. They walked round the court, Féraz gathering as he went bouquets of roses and jessamine and passiflora for the two ladies.

"He seems comfortable and happy"—Sir Frederick ventured to remark at last.

"He is, perfectly so"—rejoined Féraz. "It is very rarely that he is depressed or uneasy. He may live on thus till he is quite old, they tell me,—his physical health is exceptionally good."

"And you will always stay with him?" said Irene.

"Can you ask, Madame!" and Féraz smiled—"It is my one joy to serve him. I grieve sometimes that he does not know me really, who I am,—but I have a secret feeling that one day that part of the cloud will lift, and he **will** know. For the rest he is pleased and soothed to have me near him,—that is all I desire. He did everything for me once,—it is fitting I should do everything for him now. God is good,—and in His measure of affliction there is always a great sweetness."

"Surely you do not think it well for your brother to have lost the control of his brilliant intellectual faculties?" asked Sir Frederick, surprised.

"I think everything well that God designs"—answered Féraz gently, now giving the flowers he had gathered, to Irene and Lady Vaughan, and looking, as he stood in his white robes against a background of rosy sunset−light, like a glorified young saint in a picture,—"El−Râmi's intellectual faculties were far too brilliant, too keen, too dominant,—his great force and supremacy of will too absolute. With such powers as he had he would have ruled this world, and lost the next. That is, he would have gained the Shadow and missed the Substance. No, no—it is best as it is. 'Except ye become as little children, ye shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven!' That is a true saying. In the Valley of Humiliation the birds of paradise sing, and in El−Râmi's earth−darkness there are gleams of the Light Divine. I am content,—and so, I firmly and devoutly believe, is he."

With this, and a few more parting words, the visitors now prepared to take their leave. Suddenly Irene Vassilius perceived an exquisite rose hanging down among the vines that clambered about the walls of the little monastery;—a rose pure white in its outer petals but tenderly tinted with a pale blush pink towards its centre. Acting on her own impulsive idea, she gathered it, and hastened back alone across the quadrangle to where El−Râmi sat absorbed and lost in his own drowsy dreams.

"Good−bye, dear friend,—good−bye!" she said softly, and held the fragrant beautiful bud towards him.

He opened his sad dark eyes and smiled,—then extended his hand and took the flower.

"I thank you, little messenger of peace!" he said—"It is a rose from Heaven,—it is The Soul of Lilith!"

FINIS.