

The Altar Fire

Arthur Christopher Benson

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- October 12, 1891.

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Cecidit autem ignis Domini,
et voravit holocaustum

PREFACE

It will perhaps be said, and truly felt, that the following is a morbid book. No doubt the subject is a morbid one, because the book deliberately gives a picture of a diseased spirit. But a pathological treatise, dealing with cancer or paralysis, is not necessarily morbid, though it may be studied in a morbid mood. We have learnt of late years, to our gain and profit, to think and speak of bodily ailments as natural phenomena, not to slur over them and hide them away in attics and bedrooms. We no longer think of insanity as demoniacal possession, and we no longer immure people with diseased brains in the secluded apartments of lovely houses. But we still tend to think of the sufferings of the heart and soul as if they were unreal, imaginary, hypochondriacal things, which could be cured by a little resolution and by intercourse with cheerful society; and by this foolish and secretive reticence we lose both sympathy and help. Mrs. Proctor, the friend of Carlyle and Lamb, a brilliant and somewhat stoical lady, is recorded to have said to a youthful relative of a sickly habit, with stern emphasis, "Never tell people how you are! They don't want to know." Up to a certain point this is shrewd and wholesome advice. One does undoubtedly keep some kinds of suffering in check by resolutely minimising them. But there is a significance in suffering too. It is not all a clumsy error, a well-meaning blunder. It is a deliberate part of the constitution of the world.

Why should we wish to conceal the fact that we have suffered, that we suffer, that we are likely to suffer to the end? There are abundance of people in like case; the very confession of the fact may help others to endure, because one of the darkest miseries of suffering is the horrible sense of isolation that it brings. And if this book casts the least ray upon the sad problem—a ray of the light that I have learned to recognise is truly there—I shall be more than content. There is no morbidity in suffering, or in confessing that one suffers. Morbidity only begins when one acquiesces in suffering as being incurable and inevitable; and the motive of this book is to show that it is at once curative and curable, a very tender part of a wholly loving and Fatherly design.

A. C. B.

Magdalene College, Cambridge,

July 14, 1907.

INTRODUCTION

I had intended to allow the records that follow—the records of a pilgrimage sorely beset and hampered by sorrow and distress—to speak for themselves. Let me only say that one who makes public a record so intimate and outspoken incurs, as a rule, a certain responsibility. He has to consider in the first place, or at least he cannot help instinctively considering, what the wishes of the writer would have been on the subject. I do not mean that one who has to decide such a point is bound to be entirely guided by that. He must weigh the possible value of the record to other spirits against what he thinks that the writer himself would have personally desired. A far more important consideration is what living people who play a part in such records feel about their publication. But I cannot help thinking that our whole standard in such matters is a very false and conventional one. Supposing, for instance, that a very sacred and intimate record, say, two hundred years old, were to be found among some family papers, it is inconceivable that any one would object to its publication on the ground that the writer of it, or the people mentioned in it, would not have wished it to see the light. We show how weak our faith really is in the continuance of personal identity after death, by allowing the lapse of time to affect the question at all; just as we should consider it a horrible profanation to exhume and exhibit the body of a man who had been buried a few years ago, while we approve of the action of archaeologists who explore Egyptian sepulchres, subscribe to their operations, and should consider a man a mere sentimentalist who suggested that the mummies exhibited in museums ought to be sent back for interment in their original tombs. We think vaguely that a man who died a few years ago would in some way be outraged if his body were to be publicly displayed, while we do not for an instant regard the possible feelings of delicate and highly-born Egyptian ladies, on whose seemly sepulture such anxious and tender care was expended so many centuries ago.

But in this case there is no such responsibility. None of the persons concerned have any objection to the publication of these records, and as for the writer himself he was entirely free from any desire for a fastidious seclusion. His life was a secluded one enough, and he felt strongly that a man has a right to his own personal privacy. But his own words sufficiently prove, if proof were needed, that he felt that to deny the right of others to participate in thoughts and experiences, which might uplift or help a mourner or a sufferer, was a selfish form of individualism with which he had no sympathy whatever. He felt, and I have heard him say, that one has no right to withhold from others any reflections which can console and sustain, and he held it to be the supreme duty of a man to ease, if he could, the burden of another. He knew that there is no sympathy in the world so effective as the sharing of similar experiences, as the power of assuring a sufferer that another has indeed trodden the same dark path and emerged into the light of Heaven. I will even venture to say that he deliberately intended that his records should be so used, for purposes of alleviation and consolation, and the bequest that he made of his papers to myself, entrusting them to my absolute discretion, makes it clear to me that I have divined his wishes in the matter. I think, indeed, that his only doubt was a natural diffidence as to whether the record had sufficient importance to justify its publication. In any case, my own duty in the matter is to me absolutely clear.

But I think that it will be as well for me to sketch a brief outline of my friend's life and character. I would have preferred to have done this, if it had been possible, by allowing him to speak for himself. But the earlier Diaries which exist are nothing but the briefest chronicle of events. He put his earlier confessions into his books, but he was in many ways more interesting than his books, and so I will try and draw a portrait of him as he appeared to one of his earliest friends. I knew him first as an undergraduate, and our friendship was unbroken after that. The Diary, written as it is under the shadow of a series of calamities, gives an impression of almost wilful sadness which is far from the truth. The requisite contrast can only be attained by representing him as he appeared to those who knew him.

He was the son of a moderately wealthy country solicitor, and was brought up on normal lines. His mother died while he was a boy. He had one brother, younger than himself, and a sister who was younger still. He went to a leading public school, where he was in no way distinguished either in work or athletics. I gathered, when I first knew him, that he had been regarded as a clever, quiet, good-natured, simple-minded boy, with a considerable

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charm of manner, but decidedly retiring. He was not expected to distinguish himself in any way, and he did not seem to have any particular ambitions. I went up to Cambridge at the same time as he, and we formed a very close friendship. We had kindred tastes, and we did not concern ourselves very much with the social life of the place. We read, walked, talked, played games, idled, and amused ourselves together. I was more attached to him, I think, than he was to me; indeed, I do not think that he cared at that time to form particularly close ties. He was frank, engaging, humorous, and observant; but I do not think that he depended very much upon any one; he rather tended to live an interior life of his own, of poetical and fanciful reflection. I think he tended to be pensive rather than high-spirited—at least, I do not often remember any particular ebullition of youthful enthusiasm. He liked congenial company, but he was always ready to be alone. He very seldom went to the rooms of other men, except in response to definite invitations; but he was always disposed to welcome any one who came spontaneously to see him. He was a really diffident and modest fellow, and I do not think it even entered into his head to imagine that he had any social gifts or personal charm. But I gradually came to perceive that his mind was of a very fine quality. He had a mature critical judgment, and, though I used to think that his tastes were somewhat austere, I now see that he had a very sure instinct for alighting upon what was best and finest in books and art alike. He used to write poetry in those days, but he was shy of confessing it, and very conscious of the demerits of what he wrote. I have some of his youthful verses by me, and though they are very unequal and full of lapses, yet he often strikes a firm note and displays a subtle insight. I think that he was more ambitious than I perhaps knew, and had that vague belief in his own powers which is characteristic of able and unambitious men. His was certainly, on the whole, a cold nature in those days. He could take up a friendship where he laid it down, by virtue of an easy frankness and a sympathy that was intellectual rather than emotional. But the suspension of intercourse with a friend never troubled him.

I became aware, in the course of a walking tour that I took with him in those days, that he had a deep perception of the beauties of nature; it was not a vague accessibility to picturesque impressions, but a critical discernment of quality. He always said that he cared more for little vignettes, which he could grasp entire, than for wide and majestic prospects; and this was true of his whole mind.

I suppose that I tended to idealise him; but he certainly seems to me, in retrospect, to have then been invested with a singular charm. He was pure-minded and fastidious to a fault. He had considerable personal beauty, rather perhaps of expression than of feature. He was one of those people with a natural grace of movement, gesture and speech. He was wholly unembarrassed in manner, but he talked little in a mixed company. No one had fewer enemies or fewer intimate friends. The delightful ears soon came to an end, and one of the few times I ever saw him exhibit strong emotion was on the evening before he left Cambridge, when he altogether broke down. I remember his quoting a verse from Omar Khayyam:—

"Yet ah! that spring should vanish with the rose,
That Youth's sweet-scented manuscript should close,"

and breaking off in the middle with sudden tears.

It was necessary for me to adopt a profession, and I remember envying him greatly when he told me that his father, who, I gathered, rather idolised him, was quite content that he should choose for himself at his leisure. He went abroad for a time; and I met him next in London, where he was proposing to read for the bar; but I discovered that he had really found his metier. He had written a novel, which he showed me, and though it was in some ways an immature performance, it had, I felt, high and unmistakable literary qualities. It was published soon afterwards and met with some success. He thereupon devoted himself to writing, and I was astonished at his industry and eagerness. He had for the first time found a congenial occupation. He lived mostly at home in those days, but he was often in London, where he went a good deal into society. I do not know very much about him at this time, but I gather that he achieved something of a social reputation. He was never a voluble talker; I do not suppose he ever set the table in a roar, but he had a quiet, humorous and sympathetic manner. His physical health was then, as always, perfect. He was never tired or peevish; he was frank, kindly and companionable; he talked little about himself, and had a genuine interest in the study of personality, so that people were apt to feel at their

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best in his society. Meanwhile his books came out one after another—not great books exactly, but full of humour and perception, each an advance on the last. By the age of thirty he was accepted as one of the most promising novelists of the day.

Then he did what I never expected he would do; he fell wildly and enthusiastically in love with the only daughter of a Gloucestershire clergyman, a man of good family and position. She was the only child; her mother had died some years before, and her father died shortly after the marriage. She was a beautiful, vigorous girl, extraordinarily ingenuous, simple-minded, and candid. She was not clever in the common acceptance of the term, and was not the sort of person by whom I should have imagined that my friend would have been attracted. They settled in a pleasant house, which they built in Surrey, on the outskirts of a village. Three children were born to them—a boy and a girl, and another boy, who survived his birth only a few hours. From this time he almost entirely deserted London, and became, I thought, almost strangely content with a quiet domestic life. I was often with them in those early days, and I do not think I ever saw a happier circle. It was a large and comfortable house, very pleasantly furnished, with a big garden. His father died in the early years of the marriage, and left him a good income; with the proceeds of his books he was a comparatively wealthy man. His wife was one of those people who have a serene and unaffected interest in human beings. She was a religious woman, but her relations with others were rather based on the purest kindness and sympathy. She knew every one in the place, and, having no touch of shyness, she went in and out among their poorer neighbours, the trusted friend and providence of numerous families; but she had not in the least what is called a parochial mind. She had no touch of the bustling and efficient Lady Bountiful. The simple people she visited were her friends and neighbours, not her patients and dependents. She was simply an overflowing fountain of goodness, and it was a natural to her to hurry to a scene of sorrow and suffering as it is for most people to desire to stay away. My friend himself had not the same taste; it was always rather an effort to him to accommodate himself to people in a different way of life; but it ought to be said that he was universally liked and respected for his quiet courtesy and simplicity, and fully as much for his own sake as for that of his wife. This fact could hardly be inferred from his Diary, and indeed he was wholly unconscious of it himself, because he never realised his natural charm, and indeed was unduly afraid of boring people by his presence.

He was not exactly a hard worker, but he was singularly regular; indeed, though he sometimes took a brief holiday after writing a book, he seldom missed a day without writing some few pages. One of the reasons why they paid so few visits was that he tended, as he told me, to feel so much bored away from his work. It was at once his occupation and his recreation. He was not one of those who write fiercely and feverishly, and then fall into exhaustion; he wrote cheerfully and temperately, and never appeared to feel the strain. They lived quietly, but a good many friends came and went. He much preferred to have a single quest, or a husband and wife, at a time, and pursued his work quietly all through. He used to see that one had all one could need, and then withdrew after tea-time, not reappearing until dinner. His wife, it was evident, was devoted to him with an almost passionate adoration. The reason why life went so easily there was that she studied unobtrusively his smallest desires and preferences; and thus there was never any sense of special contrivance or consideration for his wishes: the day was arranged exactly as he liked, without his ever having to insist upon details. He probably did not realise this, for though he liked settled ways, he was sensitively averse to feeling that his own convenience was in any way superseding or overriding the convenience of others. It used to be a great delight and refreshment to stay there. He was fond of rambling about the country, and was an enchanting companion in a *tete-a-tete*. In the evening he used to expand very much into a genial humour which was very attractive; he had, too, the art of making swift and subtle transitions into an emotional mood; and here his poetical gift of seeing unexpected analogies and delicate characteristics gave his talk a fragrant charm which I have seldom heard equalled.

It was indeed a picture of wonderful prosperity, happiness, and delight. The children were engaging, clever, and devotedly affectionate, and indeed the atmosphere of mutual affection seemed to float over the circle like a fresh and scented summer air. One used to feel, as one drove away, that though one's visit had been a pleasure, there would be none of the flatness which sometimes follows the departure of a guest, but that one was leaving them to a home life that was better than sociability, a life that was both sacred and beautiful, full to the brim of affection, yet without any softness or sentimentality.

Then came my friend's great success. He had written less since his marriage, and his books, I thought, were beginning to flag a little. There was a want of freshness about them; he tended to use the same characters and

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similar situations; both thought and phraseology became somewhat mannerised. I put this down myself to the belief that life was beginning to be more interesting to him than art. But there suddenly appeared the book which made him famous, a book both masterly and delicate, full of subtle analysis and perception, and with that indescribable sense of actuality which is the best test of art. The style at the same time seemed to have run clear; he had gained a perfect command of his instrument, and I had about this book, what I had never had about any other book of his, the sense that he was producing exactly the effects he meant to produce. The extraordinary merit of the book was instantly recognised by all, I think, but the author. He went abroad for a time after the book was published, and eventually returned; it was at that point of his life that the Diary began.

I went to see him not long after, and it became rapidly clear to me that something had happened to him. Instead of being radiant with success, eager and contented, I found him depressed, anxious, haggard. He told me that he felt unstrung and exhausted, and that his power of writing had deserted him. But I must bear testimony at the same time to the fact which does not emerge in the Diary, namely, the extraordinary gallantry and patience of his conduct and demeanour. He struggled visibly and pathetically, from hour to hour, against his depression. He never complained; he never showed, at least in my presence, the smallest touch of irritability. Indeed to myself, who had known him as the most equable and good-humoured of men, he seemed to support the trial with a courage little short of heroism. The trial was a sore one, because it deprived him both of motive and occupation. But he made the best of it; he read, he took long walks, and he threw himself with great eagerness into the education of his children—a task for which he was peculiarly qualified. Then a series of calamities fell upon him: he lost his boy, a child of wonderful ability and sweetness; he lost his fortune, or the greater part of it. The latter calamity he bore with perfect imperturbability—they let their house and moved into Gloucestershire. Here a certain measure of happiness seemed to return to him. He made a new friend, as the Diary relates, in the person of the Squire of the village, a man who, though an invalid, had a strong and almost mystical hold upon life. Here he began to interest himself in the people of the place, and tried all sorts of education and social experiments. But his wife fell ill, and died very suddenly; and, not long after, his daughter died too. He was for a time almost wholly broken down. I went abroad with him at his request for a few weeks, but I was myself obliged to return to England to my professional duties. I can only say that I did not expect ever to see him again. He was like a man, the spring of whose life was broken; but at the same time he bore himself with a patience and a gentleness that fairly astonished me. We were together day by day and hour by hour. He made no complaint, and he used to force himself, with what sad effort was only too plain, to converse on all sorts of topics. Some time after he drifted back to England; but at first he appeared to be in a very listless and dejected state. Then there arrived, almost suddenly, it seemed to me, a change. He had made the sacrifice; he had accepted the situation. There came to him a serenity which was only like his old serenity from the fact that it seemed entirely unaffected; but it was based, I felt, on a very different view of life. He was now content to wait and to believe. It was at this time that the Squire died; and not long afterwards, the Squire's niece, a woman of great strength and simplicity of character, married a clergyman to whom she had been long attached, both being middle-aged people; and the living soon afterwards falling vacant, her husband accepted it, and the newly-married pair moved into the Rectory; while my friend, who had been named as the Squire's ultimate heir, a life-interest in the property being secured to the niece, went into the Hall. Shortly afterwards he adopted a nephew—his sister's son—who, with the consent of all concerned, was brought up as the heir to the estate, and is its present proprietor.

My friend lived some fifteen years after that, a quiet, active, and obviously contented life. I was a frequent guest at the Hall, and I am sure that I never saw a more attached circle. My friend became a magistrate, and he did a good deal of county business; but his main interest was in the place, where he was the trusted friend and counsellor of every household in the parish. He took a great deal of active exercise in the open air; he read much. He taught his nephew, whom he did not send to school. He regained, in fuller measure than ever, his old delightful charm of conversation, and his humour, which had always been predominant in him, took on a deeper and a richer tinge; but whereas in old days he had been brilliant and epigrammatic, he was now rather poetical and suggestive; and whereas he had formerly been reticent about his emotions and his religion, he now acquired what is to my mind the profoundest conversational charm—the power of making swift and natural transitions into matters of what, for want of a better word, I will call spiritual experience. I remember his once saying to me that he had learnt, from his intercourse with his village neighbours, that the one thing in the world in which every one was interested was religion; "even more," he added, with a smile, "than is the one subject in which Sir Robert

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Walpole said that every one could join."

I do not suppose that his religion was of a particularly orthodox kind; he was impatient of dogmatic definition and of ecclesiastical tendencies; but he cared with all his heart for the vital principles of religion, the love of God and the love of one's neighbour.

He lived to see his adopted son grow up to maturity; and I do not think I ever saw anything so beautiful as the confidence and affection that subsisted between them; and then he died one day, as he had often told me he desired to die. He had been ailing for a week, and on rising from his chair in the morning he was seized by a sudden faintness and died within half-an-hour, hardly knowing, I imagine, that he was in any danger.

It fell to me to deal with his papers. There was a certain amount of scattered writing, but no completed work; it all dated from before the publication of his great book. It was determined that this Diary should eventually see the light, and circumstances into which I need not now enter have rendered its appearance advisable at the present date.

The interest of the document is its candour and outspokenness. If the tone of the record, until near the end, is one of unrelieved sadness, it must be borne in mind that all the time he bore himself in the presence of others with a singular courage and simplicity. He said to me once, in an hour of dark despair, that he had drunk the dregs of self-abasement. That he believed that he had no sense of morality, no loyal affection, no love of virtue, no patience or courage. That his only motives had been timidity, personal ambition, love of respectability, love of ease. He added that this had been slowly revealed to him, and that the only way out was a way that he had not as yet strength to tread; the way of utter submission, absolute confidence, entire resignation. He said that there was one comfort, which was, that he knew the worst about himself that it was possible to know. I told him that his view of his character was unjust and exaggerated, but he only shook his head with a smile that went to my heart. It was on that day, I think, that he touched the lowest depth of all; and after that he found the way out, along the path that he had indicated.

This is no place for eulogy and panegyric. My task has been just to trace the portrait of my friend as he appeared to others; his own words shall reveal the inner spirit. The beauty of the life to me was that he attained, unconsciously and gradually, to the very virtues which he most desired and in which he felt himself to be most deficient. He had to bear a series of devastating calamities. He had loved the warmth and nearness of his home circle more deeply than most men, and the whole of it was swept away; he had depended for stimulus and occupation alike upon his artistic work, and the power was taken from him at the moment of his highest achievement. His loss of fortune is not to be reckoned among his calamities, because it was no calamity to him. He ended by finding a richer treasure than any that he had set out to obtain; and I remember that he said to me once, not long before his end, that whatever others might feel about their own lives, he could not for a moment doubt that his own had been an education of a deliberate and loving kind, and that the day when he realised that, when he saw that there was not a single incident in his life that had not a deep and an intentional value for him, was one of the happiest days of his whole existence. I do not know that he expected anything or speculated on what might await him hereafter; he put his future, just as he put his past and his present, in the hands of God, to Whom he committed himself "as unto a faithful Creator."

The Altar Fire

THE ALTAR FIRE

September 8, 1888.

We came back yesterday, after a very prosperous time at Zermatt; we have been there two entire months. Yes, it was certainly prosperous! We had delicious weather, and I have seen a number of pleasant people. I have done a great deal of walking, I have read a lot of novels and old poetry, I have sate about a good deal in the open air; but I do not really like Switzerland; there are of course an abundance of noble wide-hung views, but there are few vignettes, little on which the mind and heart dwell with an intimate and familiar satisfaction. Those airy pinnacles of toppling rocks, those sheets of slanted snow, those ice-bound crags—there is a sense of fear and mystery about them! One does not know what is going on there, what they are waiting for; they have no human meaning. They do not seem to have any relation to humanity at all. Sunday after Sunday one used to have sermons in that hot, trim little wooden church—some from quite famous preachers—about the need of rest, the advantage of letting the mind and eye dwell in awe upon the wonderful works of God. Of course the mountains are wonderful enough; but they make me feel that humanity plays a very trifling part in the mind and purpose of God. I do not think that if I were a preacher of the Gospel, and had a speculative turn, I should care to take a holiday among the mountains. I should be beset by a dreary wonder whether the welfare of humanity was a thing very dear to God at all. I should feel very strongly what the Psalmist said, "What is man that Thou art mindful of him?" It would take the wind out of my sails, when I came to preach about Redemption, because I should be tempted to believe that, after all, human beings were only in the world on sufferance, and that the aching, frozen, barren earth, so inimical to life, was in even more urgent need of redemption. Day by day, among the heights, I grew to feel that I wanted some explanation of why the strange panorama of splintered crag and hanging ice-fall was there at all. It certainly is not there with any reference to man—at least it is hard to believe that it is all there that human beings may take a refreshing holiday in the midst of it. When one penetrates Switzerland by the green pine-clad valleys, passing through and beneath those delicious upland villages, each clustering round a church with a glittering cupola, the wooden houses with their brown fronts, their big eaves, perched up aloft at such pleasant angles, one thinks of Switzerland as an inhabited land of valleys, with screens and backgrounds of peaks and snowfields; but when one goes up higher still, and gets up to the top of one of the peaks, one sees that Switzerland is really a region of barren ridges, millions of acres of cold stones and ice, with a few little green cracks among the mountain bases, where men have crept to live; and that man is only tolerated there.

One day I was out with a guide on a peak at sunrise. Behind the bleak and shadowy ridges there stole a flush of awakening dawn; then came a line of the purest yellow light, touching the crags and snowfields with sharp blue shadows; the lemon-coloured radiance passed into fiery gold, the gold flushed to crimson, and then the sun leapt into sight, and shed the light of day upon the troubled sea of mountains. It was more than that—the hills made, as it were, the rim of a great cold shadowy goblet; and the light was poured into it from the uprushing sun, as bubbling and sparkling wine is poured into a beaker. I found myself thrilled from head to foot with an intense and mysterious rapture. What did it all mean, this awful and resplendent solemnity, full to brim of a solitary and unapproachable holiness? What was the secret of the thing? Perhaps every one of those stars that we had seen fade out of the night was ringed round by planets such as ours, peopled by forms undreamed of; doubtless on millions of globes, the daylight of some central sun was coming in glory over the cold ridges, and waking into life sentient beings, in lands outside our ken, each with civilisations and histories and hopes and fears of their own. A stupendous, an overwhelming thought! And yet, in the midst of it, here was I myself, a little consciousness sharply divided from it all, permitted to be a spectator, a partaker of the intolerable and gigantic mystery, and yet so strangely made that the whole of that vast and prodigious complexity of life and law counted for less to me than the touch of weariness that hung, after my long vigil, over limbs and brain. The faculty, the godlike power of knowing and imagining, all actually less to me than my own tiny and fragile sensations. Such moods as these are strange things, because they bring with them so intense a desire to know, to perceive, and yet paralyse one with the horror of the darkness in which one moves. One cannot conceive why it is that one is given the power of realising the multiplicity of creation, and yet at the same time left so wholly ignorant of its significance. One longs to leap into the arms of God, to catch some whisper of His voice; and at the same time there falls the shadow of the prison-house; one is driven relentlessly back upon the old limited life, the duties, the labours, the

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round of meals and sleep, the tiny relations with others as ignorant as ourselves, and, still worse, with the petty spirits who have a complacent explanation of it all. Even over love itself the shadow falls. I am as near to my own dear and true Maud as it is possible to be; but I can tell her nothing of the mystery, and she can tell me nothing. We are allowed for a time to draw close to each other, to whisper to each other our hopes and fears; but at any moment we can be separated. The children, Alec and Maggie, dearer to me—I can say it honestly—than life itself, to whom we have given being, whose voices I hear as I write, what of them? They are each of them alone, though they hardly know it yet. The little unnamed son, who opened his eyes upon the world six years ago, to close them in a few hours, where and what is he now? Is he somewhere, anywhere? Does he know of the joy and sorrow he has brought into our lives? I would fain believe it . . . these are profitless thoughts, of one staring into the abyss. Somehow these bright weeks have been to me a dreary time. I am well in health; nothing ails me. It is six months since my last book was published, and I have taken a deliberate holiday; but always before, my mind, the strain of a book once taken off it, has begun to sprout and burgeon with new ideas and schemes: but now, for the first time in my life, my mind and heart remain bare and arid. I seem to have drifted into a dreary silence. It is not that things have been less beautiful, but beauty seems to have had no message, no significance for me. The people that I have seen have come and gone like ghosts and puppets. I have had no curiosity about them, their occupations and thoughts, their hopes and lives; it has not seemed worth while to be interested, in a life which appears so short, and which leads nowhere. It seems morbid to write thus, but I have not been either morbid or depressed. It has been an easy life, the life of the last few months, without effort or dissatisfaction, but without zest. It is a mental tiredness, I suppose. I have written myself out, and the cistern must fill again. Yet I have had no feeling of fatigue. It would have been almost better to have had something to bear; but I am richer than I need be, Maud and the children have been in perfect health and happiness, I have been well and strong. I shall hope that the familiar scene, the pleasant activities of home-life will bring the desire back. I realise how much the fabric of my life is built upon my writing, and write I must. Well, I have said enough; the pleasure of these entries is that one can look back to them, and see the movement of the current of life in a bygone day. I have an immense mass of arrears to make up, in the form of letters and business, but I want to survey the ground; and the survey is not a very happy one this morning; though if I made a list of my benefits and the reverse, like Robinson Crusoe, the credit side would be full of good things, and the debit side nearly empty.

September 15, 1888.

It is certainly very sweet to be at home again; to find oneself in familiar scenes, with all the pretty homely comfortable things waiting patiently for us to return—pictures, books, rooms, tree, kindly people. Wright, my excellent gardener, with whom I spent an hour strolling round the garden to-day, touched me by saying that he was glad to see me back, and that it had seemed dull without me; he has done fifty little simple things in our absence, in his tranquil and faithful way, and is pleased to have them noticed. Alec, who was with me to-day, delighted me by finding his stolid wooden horse in the summer-house, rather damp and dishevelled, and almost bursting into tears at the pathos of the neglect. "Did you think we had forgotten you?" he said as he hugged it. I suggested that he should have a good meal. "I don't think he would care about GRASS," said Alec thoughtfully, "he shall have some leaves and berries for a treat." And this was tenderly executed. Maud went off to see some of her old pensioners, and came back glowing with pleasure, with twenty pleasant stories of welcome. Two or three people came in to see me on business, and I was glad to feel I was of use. In the afternoon we all went off on a long ramble together, and we were quite surprised to see that everything seemed to be in its place as usual. Summer is over, the fields have been reaped; there is a comfortable row of stacks in the rickyard; the pleasant humming of an engine came up the valley, as it sang its homely monotone, now low, now loud. After tea—the evenings have begun to close in—I went off to my study, took out my notebook and looked over my subjects, but I could make nothing of any of them. I could see that there were some good ideas among them; but none of them took shape. Often I have found that to glance over my subjects thus, after a holiday, is like blowing soap-bubbles. The idea comes out swelling and eddying from the bowl; a globe swimming with lucent hues, reflecting dim moving shapes of rooms and figures. Not so to-day. My mind winked and flapped and rustled like a burnt-out fire; not in a depressed or melancholy way, but phlegmatically and dully. Well, the spirit bloweth as it listeth; but it is strange to find my mind so unresponsive, with none of that pleasant stir, that excitement that has a sort of fantastic terror about it, such as happens when a book stretches itself dimly and mysteriously before the mind—when one has a glimpse of a quiet room with people talking, a man riding fiercely on lonely roads, two strolling together in a moonlit garden with the shadows of the cypresses on the turf, and the fragrance of the sleeping flowers blown abroad. They stop to listen to the nightingale in the bush . . . turn to each other . . . the currents of life are intermingled at the meeting of the lips, the warm shudder at the touch of the floating tress of fragrant hair. To-day nothing comes to me; I throw it all aside and go to see the children, am greeted delightfully, and join in some pretty and absurd game. Then dinner comes; and I sit afterwards reading, dropping the book to talk, Maud working in her corner by the fire—all things moving so tranquilly and easily in this pleasantly ordered home-like house of ours. It is good to be at home; and how pitiful to be hankering thus for something else to fill the mind, which should obliterate all the beloved things so tenderly provided. Maud asks about the reception of the latest book, and sparkles with pride at some of the things I tell her. She sees somehow—how do women divine these things?—that there is a little shadow of unrest over me, and she tells me all the comforting things that I dare not say to myself—that it is only that the book took more out of me than I knew, and that the resting-time is not over yet; but that I shall soon settle down again. Then I go off to smoke awhile; and then the haunting shadow comes back for a little; till at last I go softly through the sleeping house; and presently lie listening to the quiet breathing of my wife beside me, glad to be at home again, until the thoughts grow blurred, take grotesque shapes, sinking softly into repose.

September 18, 1888.

I have spent most of the morning in clearing up business, and dealing with papers and letters. Among the accumulations was a big bundle of press-cuttings, all dealing with my last book. It comes home to me that the book has been a success; it began by slaying its thousands, like Saul, and now it has slain its tens of thousands. It has brought me hosts of letters, from all sorts of people, some of them very delightful and encouraging, many very pleasant—just grateful and simple letters of thanks—some vulgar and impertinent, some strangely intimate. What is it, I wonder, that makes some people want to tell a writer whom they have never seen all about themselves, their thoughts and histories? In some cases it is an unaffected desire for sympathy from a person whom they think perceptive and sympathetic; in some cases it proceeds, I think, from a hysterical desire to be thought interesting, with a faint hope, I fear, of being possibly put into a book. Some of the letters have been simply unintelligible and inconceivable on any hypothesis, except for the human instinct to confess, to bare the heart, to display the secret sorrow. Many of these letters are intensely pathetic, affecting, heart-rending; an invalid lady writes to say that she would like to know me, and will I come to the North of England to see her? A man writes a pretentious letter, to ask me to go and stay with him for a week. He has nothing to offer, he says, but plain fare and rather cramped quarters; but he has thought deeply, he adds, on many of the problems on which I touch, and thinks that he could throw light upon some of them. Imagine what reserves of interest and wisdom he must consider that he possesses! Then there are patronising letters from people who say that I have put into words thoughts which they have always had, and which they never took the trouble to write down; then there are requests for autographs, and "sentiments," and suggestions for new books. A man writes to say that I could do untold good if I would write a book with a purpose, and ventures to propose that I should take up anti-vivisection. There are a few letters worth their weight in gold, from good men and true, writers and critics, who thank me for a book which fulfils its aim and artistic purpose, while on the other hand there are some from people who find fault with my book for not doing what I never even attempted to do. Here is one that has given me deep and unmitigated pain; it is from an old friend, who, I am told, is aggrieved because he thinks that I have put him into my book, in the form of an unpleasant character. The worst of it is that there is enough truth in it to make it difficult for me to deny it. My character is, in some superficial ways, habits, and tricks of speech, like Reginald. Well, on hearing what he felt, I wrote him a letter of apology for my carelessness and thoughtlessness, saying, as frankly as I could, that the character was not in any way drawn from him, but that I undoubtedly had, almost unconsciously, taken an external trait or two from him; adding that I was truly and heartily sorry, and hoped that there would be no ill-feeling; and that I valued his friendship even more than he probably imagined. Here is his reply:

MY DEAR F——,

—If you spit on the head of a man passing in the street, and then write to him a few days after to say that all is forgiven, and that you are sorry your aim was so accurate, you don't mend matters.

You express a hope that after what has occurred there may be no ill-feeling between us. Well, you have done me what I consider an injury. I have no desire to repay it; if I had a chance of doing you a good turn, I should do it; if I heard you abused, I should stick up for you. I have no intention of making a grievance out of it. But if you ask me to say that I do not feel a sense of wrong, or to express a wish to meet you, or to trust you any longer as I have hitherto trusted you, I must decline saying anything of the kind, because it would not be true.

Of course I know that there cannot be omelettes without breaking eggs; and I suppose that there cannot be what are called psychological novels, without violating confidences. But you cannot be surprised, when you encourage an old friend to trust you and confide in you, and then draw an ugly caricature of him in a book, if he thinks the worse of you in consequence. I hear that the book is a great success; you must be content with the fact that the yolks are as golden as they are. Please do not write to me again on the subject. I will try to forget it, and if I succeed, I will let you know.

Yours ——

That is the kind of letter that poisons life for a while. While I am aware that I meant no treachery, I am none the less aware that I have contrived to be a traitor. Of course one vows one will never write another line; but I do

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not suppose I shall keep the vow. I reply shortly, eating all the dirt I can collect; and I shall try to forget it too; though it is a shabby end of an old friendship.

Then I turn to the reviews. I find them gracious, respectful, laudatory. They are to be taken cum grano, of course. When an enthusiastic reviewer says that I have passed at one stride into the very first class of contemporary writers, I do not feel particularly elated, though I am undeniably pleased. I find my conception, my structure, my style, my descriptions, my character—drawing, liberally and generously praised. There is no doubt that the book has been really successful beyond my wildest hopes. If I were in any doubt, the crop of letters from editors and publishers asking me for articles and books of every kind, and offering me incredible terms, would convince me.

Now what do I honestly feel about all this? I will try for my own benefit to say. Of course I am very much pleased, but the odd thing is that I am not more pleased. I can say quite unaffectedly that it does not turn my head in the least. I reflect that if this had happened when I began to write, I should have been beside myself with delight, full of self-confidence, blown out with wind, like the fog in the fable. Even now there is a deep satisfaction in having done what one has tried to do. But instead of raking in the credit, I am more inclined to be grateful for my good fortune. I feel as if I had found something valuable rather than made something beautiful; as if I had stumbled on a nugget of gold or a pearl of price. I am very fatalistic about writing; one is given a certain thing to say, and the power to say it; it does not come by effort, but by a pleasant felicity. After all, I reflect, the book is only a good story, well told. I do not feel like a benefactor of the human race, but at the best like a skilful minstrel, who has given some innocent pleasure. What, after all, does it amount to? I have touched to life, perhaps a few gracious, tender, romantic fancies—but, after all, the thoughts and emotions were there to start with, just as the harmonies which the musician awakes are all dormant in his throbbing strings. I have created nothing, only perceived and represented phenomena. I have gained no sensibility, no patience, no wisdom in the process. I know no more of the secret of life and love, than before I wrote my book. I am only like a scientific investigator who has discovered certain delicate processes, subtle laws at work. They were there all the time; the temptation of the investigator and of the writer alike is to yield to the delusion that he has made them, by discerning and naming them. As for the style, which is highly praised, it has not been made by effort. It is myself. I have never written for any other reason than because I liked writing. It has been a pleasure to overcome difficulties, to make my way round obstacles, to learn how to express the vague and intangible thing. But I deserve no credit for this; I should deserve credit if I had made myself a good writer out of a bad one; but I could always write, and I am not a better writer, only a more practised one. There is no satisfaction there.

And then, too, I find myself overshadowed by the thought that I do not want to do worse, to go downhill, to decline. I do not feel at all sure that I can write a better book, or so good a one indeed. I should dislike failing far more than I like having succeeded. To have reached a certain standard makes it incumbent on one that one should not fall below that standard; and no amount of taking pains will achieve that. It can only be done through a sort of radiant felicity of mood, which is really not in my power to count upon. I was happy, supremely happy, when I was writing the book. I lighted upon a fine conception, and it was the purest joy to see the metal trickle firmly from the furnace into the mould. Can I make such a mould again? Can I count upon the ingots piled in the fierce flame? Can I reckon upon the same temperamental glow? I do not know—I fear not.

Here is the net result—that I have become a sort of personage in the world of letters. Do I desire it? Yes, in a sense I do, but in a sense I do not. I do not want money, I do not wish for public appearances. I have no social ambitions. To be pointed out as the distinguished novelist is distinctly inconvenient. People will demand a certain standard of talk, a certain brilliance, which I am not in the least capable of giving them. I want to sit at my ease at the banquet of life, not to be ushered to the highest rooms. I prefer interesting and pleasant people to important and majestic persons. Perhaps if I were more simple-minded, I should not care about the matter at all; just be grateful for the increased warmth and amenity of life—but I am not simple-minded, and I hate not fulfilling other people's expectations. I am not a prodigal, full-blooded, royal sort of person at all. I am not conscious of greatness, but far more of emptiness. I do not wish to seem pretentious. I have got this one faculty; but it has outrun all the rest of me, and I am aware that it has drained the rest of my nature. The curious thing is that this sort of fame is the thing that as a young man I used to covet. I used to think it would be so sustaining and resplendent. Now that it has come to me, in far richer measure, I will not say than I hoped, but at all events than I had expected, it does not seem to be a wholly desirable thing. Fame is only one of the sauces of life; it is not the food

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of the spirit at all. The people that praise one are like the courtiers that bow in the anterooms of a king, through whom he passes to the lonely study where his life is lived. I am not feeling ungrateful or ungenerous; but I would give all that I have gained for a new and inspiring friendship, or for the certainty that I should write another book with the same happiness as I wrote my last book. Perhaps I ought to feel the responsibility more! I do feel it in a sense, but I have never estimated the moral effectiveness of a writer of fiction very high; one comforts rather than sustains; one diverts rather than feeds. If I could hear of one self-sacrificing action, one generous deed, one tranquil surrender that had been the result of my book, I should be more pleased than I am with all the shower of compliments. Of course in a sense praise makes life more interesting; but what I really desire to apprehend is the significance and meaning of life, that strange mixture of pain and pleasure, of commonplace events and raptures; and my book brings me no nearer that. To feel God nearer me, to feel, not by evidence but by instinct, that there is a Heart that cares for me, and moulded me from the clay for a purpose—why, I would give all that I have in the world for that!

Of course Maud will be pleased; but that will be because she believes that I deserve everything and anything, and is only surprised that the world has not found out sooner what a marvellous person I am. God knows I do not undervalue her belief in me; but it makes and keeps me humble to feel how far she is from the truth, how far from realising the pitiful weakness and emptiness of her lover and husband.

Is this, I wonder, how all successful people feel about fame? The greatest of all have often never enjoyed the least touch of it in their lifetime; and they are happier so. Some few rich and generous natures, like Scott and Browning, have neither craved for it nor valued it. Some of the greatest have desired it, slaved for it, clung to it. Yet when it comes, one realises how small a part of life and thought it fills—unless indeed it brings other desirable things with it; and this is not the case with me, because I have all I want. Well, if I can but set to work at another book, all these idle thoughts will die away; but my mind rattles like a shrunken kernel. I must kneel down and pray, as Blake and his wife did, when the visions deserted them.

September 25, 1888.

Here is a social instance of what it means to become "quite a little man," as Stevenson used to say. Some county people near here, good-natured, pushing persons, who have always been quite civil but nothing more, invited themselves to luncheon here a day or two ago, bringing with them a distinguished visitor. They throw in some nauseous compliments to my book, and say that Lord Wilburton wishes to make my acquaintance. I do not particularly want to make his, though he is a man of some not. But there was no pretext for declining. Such an incursion is a distinct bore; it clouds the morning—one cannot settle down with a tranquil mind to one's work; it fills the afternoon. They came, and it proved not uninteresting. They are pleasant people enough, and Lord Wilburton is a man who has been everywhere and seen everybody. The fact that he wished to make my acquaintance shows, no doubt, that I have sailed into his ken, and that he wishes to add me to his collection. I felt myself singularly unrewarding. I am not a talker at the best of times, and to feel that I am expected to be witty and suggestive is the last straw. Lord Wilburton discoursed fluently and agreeably. Lady Harriet said that she envied me my powers of writing, and asked how I came to think of my last brilliant book, which she had so enjoyed. I did not know what to say, and could not invent anything. They made a great deal of the children. They walked round the garden. They praised everything ingeniously. They could not say the house was big, and so they called in convenient. They could not say that the garden was ample, but Lord Wilburton said that he had never seen so much ground go to the acre. That was neat enough. They made a great point of visiting my library, and carried away my autograph, written with the very same pen with which I wrote my great book. This they called a privilege. They made us promise to go over to the Castle, which I have no great purpose of doing. We parted with mutual goodwill, and with that increase of geniality on my own part which comes on me at the end of a visit. Altogether I did not dislike it, though it did not seem to me particularly worth while. To-day my wife tells me that they told the Fitzpatricks that it was a great pleasure seeing me, because I was so modest and unaffected. That is a courteous way of concealing their disappointment that I was not more brilliant. But, good heavens, what did they expect? I suppose, indeed I have no doubt, that if I had talked mysteriously about my book, and had described the genesis of it, and my method of working, they would have preferred that. Just as in reminiscences of the Duke of Wellington, the people who saw him in later life seem to have been struck dumb by a sort of tearful admiration at the sight of the Duke condescending to eat his dinner, or to light a guest's bedroom candle. Perhaps if I had been more simple-minded I should have talked frankly about myself. I don't know; it seems to me all rather vulgar. But my visitors are kindly and courteous people, and felt, I am sure, that they were both receiving and conferring benefits. They will like to describe me and my house, and they will feel that I am pleased at being received on equal terms into county society. I don't put this down at all cynically; but they are not people with whom I have anything in common. I am not of their monde at all. I belong to the middle class, and they are of the upper class. I have a faint desire to indicate that I don't want to cross the border-line, and that what I desire is the society of interesting and congenial people, not the society of my social superior. This is not unworldliness in the least, merely hedonism. Feudalism runs in the blood of these people, and they feel, not consciously but quite instinctively, that they confer a benefit by making my acquaintance. "No doubt but ye are the people," as Job said, but I do not want to rise in the social scale. It would be the earthen pot and the brazen pot at best. I am quite content with my own class, and life is not long enough to change it, and to learn the habits of another. I have no quarrel with the aristocracy, and do not in the least wish to level them to the ground. I am quite prepared to acknowledge them as the upper class. They are, as a rule, public-spirited, courteous barbarians, with a sense of honour and responsibility. But they take a great many things as matters of course which are to me simply alien. I no more wish to live with them than Wright, my self-respecting gardener, wishes to live with me—though so deeply rooted are feudal ideas in the blood of the race, that Wright treats me with a shade of increased deference because I have been entertaining a party of Lords and Ladies; and the Vicar's wife said to Maud that she heard we had been giving a very grand party, and would soon be quite county people. The poor woman will think more of my books than she has ever thought before. I don't think this is snobbish, because it is so perfectly instinctive and natural.

But what I wanted to say was that this is the kind of benefit which is conferred by success; and for a quiet

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person, who likes familiar and tranquil ways, it is no benefit at all; indeed, rather the reverse; unless it is a benefit that the stationmaster touched his hat to me to-day, which he has never done before. It is a funny little world. Meanwhile I have no ideas, and my visitors to-day haven't given me any, though Lord Wilburton might be a useful figure in a book; so perfectly appointed, so quiet, so deferential, so humorous, so deliciously insincere!

October 4, 1888.

I have happened to read lately, in some magazines, certain illustrated interviews with prominent people, which have given me a deep sense of mental and moral nausea. I do not think I am afflicted with a strong sense of the sacredness of a man's home life—at least, if it is sacred at all, it seems to me to be just as much profaned by allowing visitors or strangers to see it and share it as it is by allowing it to be written about in a periodical. If it is sacred in a peculiar sense, then only very intimate friends ought to be allowed to see it, and there should be a tacit sense that they ought not to tell any one outside what it is like; but if I am invited to luncheon with a celebrated man whom I do not know, because I happen to be staying in the neighbourhood, I do not think I violate his privacy by describing my experience to other people. If a man has a beautiful house, a happy interior, a gifted family circle, and if he is himself a remarkable man, it is a privilege to be admitted to it, it does one good to see it; and it seems to me that the more people who realise the beauty and happiness of it the better. The question of numbers has nothing to do with it. Suppose, for instance, that I am invited to stay with a great man, and suppose that I have a talent for drawing; I may sketch his house and his rooms, himself and his family, if he does not object—and it seems to me that it would be churlish and affected of him to object—I may write descriptive letters from the place, giving an account of his domestic ways, his wife and family, his rooms, his books, his garden, his talk. I do not see that there is any reasonable objection to my showing those sketches to other people who are interested in the great man, or to the descriptive letters or diary that I write being shown or read to others who do not know him. Indeed I think it is a perfectly natural and wholesome desire to know something of the life and habits of great men; I would go further, and say that it is an improving and inspiring sort of knowledge to be acquainted with the pleasant details of the well-ordered, contented, and happy life of a high-minded and effective man. Who, for instance, considers it to be a sort of treachery for the world at large to know something of the splendid and affectionate life of the Kingsley circle at Eversley Rectory, or of the Tennyson circle at Freshwater? to look at pictures of the scene, to hear how the great men looked and moved and spoke? And if it is not profanation to hear and see this in the pages of a biography, why is it a profanation to read and see it in the pages of a magazine? To object to it seems to me to be a species of prudish conventionality.

Only you must be sure that you get a natural, simple, and unaffected picture of it all; and what I object to in the interviews which I have been reading is that one gets an unnatural, affected, self-conscious, and pompous picture of it all. To go and pose in your favourite seat in a shrubbery or a copse, where you think out your books or poems, in order that an interviewer may take a snap-shot of you—especially if in addition you assume a look of owlish solemnity as though you were the prey of great thoughts—that seems to me to be an infernal piece of posing. But still worse than that is the kind of conversation in which people are tempted to indulge in the presence of an interviewer. A man ought not to say to a wandering journalist whom he has never seen before, in the presence of his own wife, that women are the inspirers and magnetisers of the world, and that he owes all that has made him what he is to the sweet presence and sympathetic tenderness of his Bessy. This, it seems to me, is the lowest kind of melodrama. The thing may be perfectly true, the thought may be often in his mind, but he cannot be accustomed to say such things in ordinary life; and one feels that when he says them to an interviewer he does it in a thoroughly self-conscious mood, in order that he may make an impressive figure before the public. The conversations in the interviews I have been reading give me the uncomfortable sense that they have been thought out beforehand from the dramatic point of view; and indeed one earnestly hopes that this is the solution of the situation, because it would make one feel very faint if one thought that remarks of this kind were the habitual utterances of the circle—indeed, it would cure one very effectually of the desire to know anything of the interiors of celebrated people, if one thought that they habitually talked like the heroes of a Sunday-school romance. That is why the reading of these interviews is so painful, because, in the first place, one feels sure that one is not realising the daily life of these people at all, but only looking on at a tableau vivant prepared by them for the occasion; and secondly, it makes one very unhappy to think that people of real eminence and effectiveness can condescend to behave in this affected way in order to win the applause of vulgar readers. One vaguely hopes, indeed, that some of the dismal platitudes that they are represented as uttering may have been addressed to them in the form of questions by the interviewer, and that they have merely stammered a shamefaced assent. It makes a

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real difference, for instance, whether as a matter of fact a celebrated authoress leads her golden-haired children up to an interviewer, and says, "These are my brightest jewels;" or whether, when she tells her children to shake hands, the interviewer says, "No doubt these are your brightest jewels?" A mother is hardly in a position to return an indignant negative to such a question, and if she utters an idiotic affirmative, she is probably credited with the original remark in all its unctuousness!

It is a difficult question to decide what is the most simple-minded thing to do, if you are in the unhappy position of being requested to grant an interview for journalistic purposes. My own feeling is that if people really wish to know how I live, what I wear, what I eat and drink, what books I read, what kind of a house I live in, they are perfectly welcome to know. It does not seem to me that it would detract from the sacredness of my home life, if a picture of my dining-room, with the table laid for luncheon in a very cramped perspective, or if a photogravure of the scrap of grass and shrubbery that I call my garden, were to be published in a magazine. All that is to a certain extent public already. I should not wish to have a photograph of myself in bed, or shaving, published in a magazine, because those are not moments when I am inclined to admit visitors. Neither do I particularly want my private and informal conversation taken down and reproduced, because that often consists of opinions which are not my deliberate and thought-out utterances. But I hope that I should be able to talk simply and courteously to an interviewer on ordinary topics, in a way that would not discredit me if it was made public; and I hope, too, that decency would restrain me from making inflated and pompous remarks about my inner beliefs and motives, which were not in the least characteristic of my usual method of conversation.

The truth is that what spoils these records is the desire on the part of worthy and active people to appear more impressive in ordinary life than they actually are; it is a well-meant sort of hypocrisy, because it is intended, in a way, to influence other people, and to make them think that celebrated people live habitually on a higher tone of intellect and emotion than they do actually live upon. My own experience of meeting great people is that they are, as a rule, disappointingly like ordinary people, both in their tastes and in their conversation. Very few men or women, who are extremely effective in practical or artistic lines, have the energy or the vitality to expend themselves very freely in talk or social intercourse. They do not save themselves up for their speeches or their books; but they give their best energies to them, and have little current coin of high thought left for ordinary life. The mischief is that these interviews are generally conducted by inquisitive and rhetorical strangers, not distinguished for social tact or overburdened with good taste; and so the whole occasion tends to wear a melodramatic air, which is fatal both to artistic effect as well as to simple propriety.

October 9, 1888.

Let me set against my fashionable luncheon-party of a few weeks ago a visit which I owe no less to my success, and which has been a true and deep delight to me. I had a note yesterday from a man whom I hold in great and deep reverence, a man who I have met two or three times, a poet indeed, one of our true and authentic singers. He writes that he is in the neighbourhood; may he come over for a few hours and renew our acquaintance?

He came, in the morning. One has only to set eyes upon him to know that one is in the presence of a hero, to feel that his poetry just streams from him like light from the sun; that it is not the central warmth, but the flying rippling radiance of the outward-bound light, falling in momentary beauty on the common things about his path. He is a great big man, carelessly dressed, like a Homeric king. I liked everything about him from head to foot, his big carelessly-worn clothes, the bright tie thrust loosely through a cameo ring; his loose shaggy locks, his strong beard. His face, with its delicate pallor, and purely moulded features, had a youthful air of purity and health; yet there was a dim trouble of thought on his brow, over the great, smiling, flashing grey eyes. He came in with a sort of royal greeting, he flung his big limbs on a sofa; he talked easily, quietly, lavishly, saying fine things with no effort, dropping a subject quickly if he thought it did not interest me; sometimes flashing out with a quick gesture of impatience or gusto, enjoying life, every moment and every detail. His quick eyes, roving about, took in each smallest point, not in the weary feverish way in which I apprehend a new scene, but as though he liked everything new and unfamiliar, like an unsated child. He greeted Maud and the children with a kind of chivalrous tenderness and intimacy, as though he loved all pretty and tender things, and took joy in their nearness. He held Alec between his knees, and played with him while he talked. The children took possession of him, as if they had known him all their lives. And yet there was no touch of pose, no consciousness of greatness or vigour about him. He was as humble, grateful, interested, as though he were a poor stranger dependent on our bounty. I asked him in a quiet moment about his work. "No, I am writing nothing," he said with a smile, "I have said all I have got to say,"—and then with a sudden humorous flash, "though I believe I should be able to write more if I could get decent paper and respectable type to print my work." I ventured to ask if he did not feel any desire to write? "No," he said, "frankly I do not—the world is so full of pleasant things to do and hear and see, that I sometimes think myself almost a fool for having spent so much time in scribbling. Do you know," he went on, "a delicious story I picked up the other day? A man was travelling in some God-forsaken out-of-the-way place—I believe it was the Andes—and he fell in with an old podgy Roman priest who was going everywhere, in a state of perpetual fatigue, taking long expeditions every day, and returning worn-out in the evening, but perfectly content. The man saw a good deal of the priest, and asked him what he was doing. The priest smiled and said, 'Well, I will tell you. I had an illness some time ago and believed that I was going to die. One evening—I was half unconscious—I thought I saw some one standing by my bed. I looked, and it was a young man with a beautiful and rather severe face, whom I knew to be an angel, who was gazing at me rather strangely. I thought it was the messenger of death, and—for I was wishing to be gone and have done with it all—I said something to him about being ready to depart—and then added that I was waiting hopefully to see the joys of Paradise, the glory of the saints in light. He looked at me rather fixedly, and said, "I do not know why you should say that, and why you should expect to take so much pleasure in the beauty of heaven, when you have taken so little trouble to see anything of the beauty of earth;" and then he left me; and I reflected that I had always been doing my work in a dull humdrum way, in the same place all my life; and I determined that, if I got well, I would go about and see something of the glory that IS revealed to us, and not expect only the glory that SHALL BE revealed to us.' It is a fine story," he went on, "and makes a parable for us writers, who are inclined to think too much about our work, and disposed to see that it is very good, like God brooding over the world." He sate for a little, smiling to himself. And then I plied him with questions about his writing, how his thoughts came to him how he worked them out. He told me as if he was talking about some one else, half wondering that there could be anything to care about. I have heard many craftsmen talk about their work, but never one who talked with such detachment. As a rule, writers talk with a secret glee, and with a deprecating humility that deceives no one; but the great man talked, not as if he cared to think about it, but because it happened to interest me. He strolled with me, he lunched; and he thanked us when he

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went away with an earnest and humble thankfulness, as though we had extended our hospitality to an obscure and unworthy guest. And then his praise of my own books—it was all so natural; not as if he had come there with fine compliments prepared, with incense to burn; but speaking about them as though they were in his mind, and he could not help it. "I read all you write," he said; "ah, you go deep—you are a lucky fellow, to be able to see so far and so minutely, and to bring it all home to our blind souls. He must be a terrible fellow to live with," he said, smiling at my wife. "It must be like being married to a doctor, and feeling that he knows so much more about one than one knows oneself—but he sees what is best and truest, thank God; and says it with the voice of an angel, speaking softly out of his golden cloud."

I can't say what words like these have meant to me; but the visit itself, the sight of this strong, equable, good-humoured man, with no feverish ambitions, no hankering after fame or recognition, has done even more. I have heard it said that he is indolent, that he has not sufficient sense of responsibility for his gifts. But the man has done a great work for his generation; he has written poetry of the purest and finest quality. Is not that enough? I cannot understand the mere credit we give to work, without any reference to the object of the work, or the spirit in which it is done. We think with respect of the man who makes a fortune, or who fills an official post, the duties of which do nothing in particular for any one. It is a kind of obsession with us practical Westerners; of course a man ought to contribute to the necessary work of the world; but many men spend their lives in work which is not necessary; and, after all, we are sent into the world to live, and work is only a part of life. We work to live, we do not live to work. Even if we were all socialists, we should, I hope, have the grace to dig the gardens and make the clothes of our poets and prophets, so as to give them the leisure they need.

I do not question the instinct of my hero in the matter; he lives eagerly and peacefully; he touches into light the spirits of those who draw near to him; and I admire a man who knows how to stop when he has done his best work, and does not spur and whip his tired mind into producing feebler, limper, duller work of the same kind; how few of our great writers have known when to hold their hand!

God be praised for great men! My poet to-day has made me feel that life is a thing to be lived eagerly and high-heartedly; that the world is full of beautiful, generous, kindly things, of free air and sunshine; and that we ought to find leisure to drink it all in, and to send our hearts out in search of love and beauty and God—for these things are all about us, if we could but feel and hear and see them.

October 12, 1888.

How absurd it is to say that a writer could not write a large, wise, beautiful book unless he had a great soul—is it almost like saying that an artist could not paint a fine face unless he had a fine face himself. It is all a question of seeing clearly, and having a skilled hand. There is nothing to make one believe that Shakespeare had a particularly noble or beautiful character; and some of our greatest writers have been men of unbalanced, childish, immature temperaments, full of vanity and pettiness. Of course a man must be interested in what he is describing; but I think that a man of a naturally great, wise, and lofty spirit is so disposed as a rule to feel that his qualities are instinctive, and so ready to credit other people with them, that it does not occur to him to depict those qualities. I am not sure that the best equipment for an artist is not that he should see and admire great and noble and beautiful things, and feel his own deficiency in them acutely, desiring them with the desire of the moth for the star. The best characters in my own books have been, I am sure, the people least like myself, because the creation of a character that one whole-heartedly admires, and that yet is far out of one's reach, is the most restful and delightful thing in the world. If one is unready in speech, thinking of one's epigrams three hours after the occasion for them has arisen, how pleasant to draw the man who says the neat, witty, appropriate, consoling thing! If one suffers from timidity, from meanness, from selfishness, what a delight to depict the man who is brave, generous, unselfish! Of course the quality of a man's mind flows into and over his work, but that is rather like the varnish of the picture than its tints—it is the medium rather than the design. The artistic creation of ideal situations is often a sort of refuge to the man who knows that he makes a mess of the beautiful and simple relations of life. The artist is fastidious and moody, feeling the pressure of strained nerves and tired faculties, easily discouraged, disgusted by the superficial defect, the tiny blot that spoils alike the noble character, the charming prospect, the attractive face. He sees, let us say, a person with a beautiful face and an ugly hand. The normal person thinks of the face and forgets the hand. The artist thinks with pain of the hand and forgets the face. He desires an impossible perfection, and flies for safety to the little world that he can make and sway. That is why artists, as a rule, love twilight hours, shaded rooms, half-tones, subdued hues, because what is common, staring, tasteless, is blurred and hidden. Men of rich vitality are generally too much occupied with life as it is, its richness, its variety, its colour and fragrance, to think wistfully of life as it might be. The unbridled, sensuous, luxurious strain, that one finds in so many artists, comes from a lack of moral temperance, a snatching at delights. They fear dreariness and ugliness so much that they welcome any intoxication of pleasure. But after all, it is clearness of vision that makes the artist, the power of disentangling the central feature from the surrounding details, the power of subordinating accessories, of seeing which minister to the innermost impression, and which distract and blur. An artist who creates a great character need not necessarily even desire to attain the great qualities which he discerns; he sees them, as he sees the vertebrae of the mountain ridge under pasture and woodland, as he sees the structure of the tree under its mist of green; but to see beauty is not necessarily to desire it; for, as in the mountain and the tree, it may have no ethical significance at all, only a symbolical meaning. The best art is inspired more by an intellectual force than by a vital sympathy. Of course to succeed as a novelist in England to-day, one must have a dash of the moralist, because an English audience is far more preoccupied with moral ideals than with either intellectual or artistic ideals. The reading public desires that love should be loyal rather than passionate; it thinks ultimate success a more impressive thing than ultimate failure; it loves sadness as a contrast and preface to laughter. It prefers that the patriarch Job should end by having a nice new family of children and abundant flocks, rather than that he should sink into death among the ashes, refusing to curse God for his reverses. Its view of existence after death is that Dives should join Lazarus in Abraham's bosom. To succeed, one must compromise with this comfortable feeling, sacrificing, if needs be, the artistic conscience, because the place of the minstrel in England is after the banquet, when the warriors are pleasantly tired, have put off the desire of meat and drink, and the fire roars and crackles in the hearth. When Ruskin deserted his clouds and peaks, his sunsets and sunrises, and devoured his soul over the brutalities and uglinesses and sordid inequalities of life, it was all put down to the obscure pressure of mental disease. Ophelia does not sob and struggle in the current, but floats dreamily to death in a bed of meadow-flowers.

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October 21, 1888.

Let me try to recollect for my own amusement how it was that my last book grew up and took shape. How well I remember the day and the hour when the first thought came to me! Some one was dining here, and told a story about a friend of his, and an unhappy misunderstanding between him and a girl whom he loved, or thought he loved. A figure, two figures, a scene, a conversation, came into my head, absolutely and perfectly life-like. I lay awake half the night, I remember, over it. How did those people come to be in exactly that situation? how would it develop? At first it was just the scene by itself, nothing more; a room which filled itself with furniture. There were doors—where did they lead to? There were windows—where did they look out? The house was full, too, of other people, whose quiet movements I heard. One person entered the room, and then another; and so the story opened out. I saw the wrong word spoken, I saw the mist of doubt and distress that filled the girl's mind; I felt that I would have given anything to intervene, to explain; but instead of speaking out, the girl confided in the wrong person, who had an old grudge against the man, so old that it had become instinctive and irrational. So the thing evolved itself. Then at one time the story got entangled and confused. I could go no further. The characters were by this time upon the scene, but they could not speak. I then saw that I had made a mistake somewhere. The scaffolding was all taken down, spar by spar, and still the defect was not revealed. I must go, I saw, backwards; and so I felt my way, like a man groping in the dark, into what had gone before, and suddenly came out into the light. It was a mistake far back in the conception. I righted it, and the story began to evolve itself again; this time with a delicate certainty, that made me feel I was on the track at last. An impressive scene was sacrificed—it was there that my idea had gone wrong! As to the writing of it, I cannot say it was an effort. It wrote itself. I was not creating; I was describing and selecting. There was one scene in particular, a scene which has been praised by all the reviewers. How did I invent it? I do not know. I had no idea what the characters were to say when I began to write it, but one remark grew inevitably and surely out of the one before. I was never at a loss; I never stuck fast; indeed the one temptation which I firmly and constantly resisted was the temptation to write morning, noon, and night. Sometimes I had a horrible fear that I might not live to set down what was so clear in my mind; but there is a certain freshness which comes of self-restraint. Day after day, as I strolled, and read, and talked, I used to hug myself at the thought of the beloved evening hours that were coming, when I should fling myself upon the book with a passionate zest, and feel it grow under my hand. And then it was done! I remember writing the last words, and the conviction came upon me that it was the end. There was more to be told; the story stretched on into the distance; but it was as though the frame of the picture had suddenly fallen upon the canvas, and I knew that just so much and no more was to be seen. And then, as though to show me plainly that the work was over, the next day came an event which drew my mind off the book. I had had a period of unclouded health and leisure, everything had combined to help me, and then this event, of which I need not speak, came and closed the book at the right moment.

What wonder if one grows fatalistic about writing; that one feels that one can only say what is given one to say! And now, dry and arid as my mind is, I would give all I have for a renewal of that beautiful glow, which I cannot recover. It is misery—I can conceive no greater—to be bound hand and foot in this helpless silence.

November 6, 1888.

It is a joy to think of the way in which the best, most beautiful, most permanent things have stolen unnoticed into life. I like to think of Wordsworth, an obscure, poor, perverse, absurd man, living in the corner of the great house at Alfoxden, walking in the moonlight with Coleridge, living on milk and eggs, utterly unaccountable and puerile to the sensible man of affairs, while the two planned the Lyrical Ballads. I like to think of Keats, sitting lazily and discontentedly in the villa garden at Hampstead, with his illness growing upon him and his money melting away, scribbling the "Ode to the Nightingale," and caring so little about the fate of it that it was only by chance, as it were, that the pencil scraps were rescued from the book where he had shut them. I love to think of Charlotte Bronte, in the bare kitchen of the little house in the grey, wind-swept village on the edge of the moorland, penning, in sickness and depression, the scenes of Jane Eyre, without a thought that she was doing anything unusual or lasting. We surround such scenes with a heavenly halo, born of the afterglow of fame; we think them romantic, beautiful, thrilled and flushed by passionate joy; but there was little that was delightful about them at the time.

The most beautiful of all such scenes is the tale of the maiden— wife in the stable at Bethlehem, with the pain and horror and shame of the tragic experience, in all its squalid publicity, told in those simple words, which I never hear without a smile that is full of tears, **BECAUSE THERE WAS NO ROOM FOR THEM IN THE INN.** We poor human souls, knowing what that event has meant for the race, make the bare, ugly place seemly and lovely, surrounding the Babe with a tapestry of heavenly forms, holy lights, rapturous sounds; taking the terror and the meanness of the scene away, and thereby, by our clumsy handling, losing the divine seal of the great mystery, the fact that hope can spring, in unstained and sublime radiance, from the vilest, lowest, meanest, noisiest conditions that can well be conceived.

November 20, 1888.

I wonder aimlessly what it is that makes a book, a picture, a piece of music, a poem, great. When any of these things has become a part of one's mind and soul, utterly and entirely familiar, one is tempted to think that the precise form of them is inevitable. That is a great mistake.

Here is a tiny instance. I see that in the "Lycidas" Milton wrote:—

"Who would not sing for Lycidas? He WELL knew
Himself to sing and build the lofty rhyme."

The word "well" occurs in two MSS., and it seems to have been struck out in the proof. The introduction of the word seems barbarous, unmetrical, an outrage on the beauty of the line. Yet Milton must have thought that it was needed, and have only decided by an after-thought that it was better away. If it had been printed so, we should equally have thought its omission barbarous and inartistic.

And thus, to an artist, there must be many ways of working out a conception. I do not believe in the theory that the form is so inevitable, because what great artist was ever perfectly content with the form? The greater the artist, the more conscious he probably is of the imperfection of his work; and if it could be bettered, how is it then inevitable? It is only our familiarity with it that gives it inevitableness. A beautiful building gains its mellow outline by a hundred accidents of wear and weather, never contemplated by the designer's mind. We love it so, we would not have it otherwise; but we should have loved it just as intensely if it had been otherwise. Only a small part, then, of the greatness of artistic work is what we ourselves bring to it; and it becomes great, not only from itself, but from the fact that it fits our minds as the dagger fits the sheath. The greatness of a conception depends largely upon its being near enough to our own conceptions, and yet a little greater, just as the vault of a great church gives one a larger sense of immensity than the sky with its sailing clouds. Indeed it is often the very minuteness of a conception rather than its vastness that makes it great. It must not be outside our range. As to the form, it depends upon some curious felicity of hand, and touch, and thought. Suppose that a great painter gave a rough pencil-sketch of a picture to a hundred students, and told them all to work it out in colour. Some few of the results would be beautiful, the majority would be still uninteresting and tame.

Thus I am somewhat of a fatalist about art, because it seems to depend upon a lucky union of conception and technical instinct. The saddest proof of which is that many good and even great artists have not improved in greatness as their skill improved. The youthful works of genius are generally the best, their very crudities and stiffnesses adorable.

The history of art and literature alike seems to point to the fact that each artistic soul has a flowering period, which generally comes early, rarely comes late; and therefore the supreme artist ought also to know when the bloom is over, when his good work is done. And then, I think, he ought to be ready to abjure his art, to drown his book, like Prospero, and set himself to live rather than to produce. But what a sacrifice to demand of a man, and how few attain it! Most men cannot do without their work, and go on to the end producing more feeble, more tired, more mannerised work, till they cloud the beauty of their prime by masses of inferior and uninspired production.

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November 24, 1888.

Soft wintry skies, touched with faintest gleams of colour, like a dove's wing, blue plains and heights, over the nearer woodland; everywhere fallen rotting leaf and oozy water-channel; everything, tint and form, restrained, austere, delicate; nature asleep and breathing gently in the cool airs; a tranquil and sober hopefulness abroad.

I walked alone in deep woodland lanes, content for once to rest and dream. The country seemed absolutely deserted; such labour as was going forward was being done in barn and byre; beasts being fed, hurdles made.

I passed in a solitary road a draggled ugly woman, a tramp, wheeling an old perambulator full of dingy clothes and sordid odds and ends; she looked at me sullenly and suspiciously. Where she was going God knows: to camp, I suppose, in some dingle, with ugly company; to beg, to lie, to purloin, perhaps to drink; but by the perambulator walked a little boy, seven or eight years old, grotesquely clothed in patched and clumsy garments; he held on to the rim, dirty, unkempt; but he was happy too; he was with his mother, of whom he had no fear; he had been fed as the birds are fed; he had no anxious thoughts of the future, and as he went, he crooned to himself a soft song, like the piping of a finch in a wayside thicket. What was in his tiny mind and heart? I do not know; but perhaps a little touch of the peace of God.

November 26, 1888.

Another visitor! I am not sure that his visit is not a more distinguished testimonial than any I have yet received. He is a young Don with a very brilliant record indeed. He wrote to ask if he might have the honour of calling, and renewing a very slight acquaintance. He came and conquered. I am still crushed and battered by his visit. I feel like a land that has been harried by an invading army. Let me see if, dizzy and unmanned as I am, I can recall some of the incidents of his visit. He has only been gone an hour, yet I feel as though a month had elapsed since he entered the room, since I was a moderately happy man. He is a very pleasant fellow to look at, small, trim, well-appointed, courteous, friendly, with a deferential air. His eyes gleam brightly through his glasses, and he has brisk dexterous gestures. He was genial enough till he settled down upon literature, and since then what waves and storms have gone over me! I have or had a grovelling taste for books; I possess a large number, and I thought I had read them. But I feel now, not so much as if I had read the wrong ones, but as if those I had read were only, so to speak, the anterooms and corridors which led to the really important books—and of them, it seems, I know nothing. Epigrams flowed from his tongue, brilliant characterisations, admirable judgments. He had "placed" every one, and literature to him seemed like a great mosaic in which he knew the position of every cube. He knew all the movements and tendencies of literature, and books seemed to him to be important, not because they had a message for the mind and heart, but because they illustrated a tendency, or were a connecting link in a chain. He quoted poems I had never heard of, he named authors I had never read. He did it all modestly and quietly enough, with no parade, (I want to do him full justice) but with an evidently growing disappointment to find that he had fallen among savages. I am sure that his conclusion was that authors of popular novels were very shallow, ill-informed people, and I am sure I wholly agreed with him. Good heavens, what a mind the man had, how stored with knowledge! how admirably equipped! Nothing that he had ever put away in his memory seemed to have lost its colour or outline; and he knew, moreover, how to lay his hand upon everything. Indeed, it seemed to me that his mind was like an emporium, with everything in the world arranged on shelves, all new and varnished and bright, and that he knew precisely the place of everything. I became the prey of hopeless depression; when I tried to join in, I confused writers and dates; he set me right, not patronisingly but paternally. "Ah, but you will remember," he said, and "Yes, but we must not overlook the fact that"—adding, with admirable humility, "Of course these are small points, but it is my business to know them." Now I find myself wondering why I disliked knowledge, communicated thus, so much as I did. It may be envy and jealousy, it may be humiliation and despair. But I do not honestly think that it is. I am quite sure I do not want to possess that kind of knowledge. It is the very sharpness and clearness of outline about it all that I dislike. The things that he knows have not become part of his mind in any way: they are stored away there, like walnuts; and I feel that I have been pelted with walnuts, deluged and buried in walnuts. The things which my visitor knows have undergone no change, they have not been fused and blended by his personality; they have not affected his mind, nor has his mind affected them. I don't wish to despise or to decry his knowledge; as a lecturer, he must be invaluable; but he treats literature as a purveyor might—it has not been food to him, but material and stock-in-trade. Some of the poetry we talked about—Elizabethan lyrics—grow in my mind like flowers in a copse; in his mind they are planted in rows, with their botanical names on tickets. The worst of it is that I do not even feel encouraged to fill up my gaps of knowledge, or to master the history of tendency. I feel as if he had rather trampled down the hyacinths and anemones in my wild and uncultivated woodlands. I should like, in a dim way, to have his knowledge as well as my own appreciation, but I would not exchange my knowledge for his. The value of a lyric or a beautiful sentence, for me, is its melody, its charm, its mysterious thrill; and there are many books and poems, which I know to be excellent of their kind, but which have no meaning or message for me. He seems to think that it is important to have complete texts of old authors, and I do not think that he makes much distinction between first-rate and second-rate work. In fact, I think that his view of literature is the sociological view, and he seems to care more about tendencies and influences than about the beauty and appeal of literature. I do not go so far as to say or to think that literature cannot be treated scientifically; but I feel as I feel about the doctor in Balzac, I think, who, when his wife cried upon his shoulder, said, "Hold, I have analysed tears," adding that they contained so much chlorate of sodium and so much mucus. The truth is that he is a philosopher, and that I am an

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individualist; but it leaves me with an intense desire to be left alone in my woodland, or, at all events, not to walk there with a ruthless botanist!

November 29, 1888.

I have heard this morning of the suicide of an old friend. Is it strange to say that I have heard the news with an unfeigned relief, even gladness? He was formerly a charming and brilliant creature, full of enthusiasm and artistic impulses, fitful, wayward, wilful. Somehow he missed his footing; he fell into disreputable courses; he did nothing, but drifted about, planning many things, executing nothing. The last time I saw him was exquisitely painful; we met by appointment, and I could see that he had tried to screw himself up for the interview by stimulants. The ghastly feigning of cheerfulness, the bloated face, the trembling hands, told the sad tale. And now that it is all over, the shame and the decay, the horror of his having died by his own act is a purely conventional one. One talks pompously about the selfishness of it, but it is one of the most unselfish things poor Dick has ever done; he was a burden and a misery to all those who cared for him. Recovery was, I sincerely believe, impossible. His was a fine, uplifted, even noble spirit in youth, but there were terrible hereditary influences at work, and I cannot honestly say that I think he was wholly responsible for his sins. If I could think that this act was done reasonably, in a solemn and recollected spirit, and was not a mere frightened scurrying out of life, I should be, I believe, wholly glad. I do not see that any one had anything to gain by his continuing to live; and if reason is given us to use, to guide our actions by, it seems to me that we do right to obey it. Suicide may, of course, be a selfish and a cowardly thing, but the instinct of self-preservation is so strong that a man must always manifest a certain courage in making such a decision. The sacrifice of one's own life is not necessarily and absolutely an immoral thing, because it is always held to be justified if one's motive is to save another. It is purely, I believe, a question of motive; whatever poor Dick's motives were, it was certainly the kindest and bravest thing that he could do; and I look upon his life as having been as naturally ended as if he had died of disease or by an accident. There is not a single one of his friends who would not have been thankful if he had died in the course of nature; and I for one am even more thankful as it is, because it seems to me that his act testifies to some tenderness, some consideration for others, as well as to a degree of resolution with which I had not credited him.

Of course such a thing deepens the mystery of the world; but such an act as this is not to me half as mysterious as the action of an omnipotent Power which allowed so bright and gracious a creature as Dick was long ago to drift into ugly, sordid, and irreparable misery. Yet it seems to me now that Dick has at last trusted God completely, made the last surrender, and put his miserable case in the Father's hands.

December 2, 1888.

As I came home to-night, moving slowly westward along deserted roads, among wide and solitary fields, in the frosty twilight, I passed a great pale fallow, in the far corner of which, beside a willow-shaded stream, a great heap of weeds was burning, tended by a single lonely figure raking in the smouldering pile. A dense column of thick smoke came volleying from the heap, that went softly and silently up into the orange-tinted sky; some forty feet higher the smoke was caught by a moving current of air; much of it ascended higher still, but the thin streak of moving wind caught and drew out upon itself a long weft of aerial vapour, that showed a delicate blue against the rose-flushed west. The long lines of leafless trees, the faint outlines of the low distant hills, seemed wrapped in meditative silence, dreaming wistfully, as the earth turned her broad shoulder to the night, and as the forlorn and chilly sunset faded by soft degrees on the horizon. As the day thus died, the frost made itself felt, touching the hedgerows with rime, and crisping the damp road beneath my feet. The end drew on with a mournful solemnity; but the death of the light seemed a perfectly natural and beautiful thing, not an event to be grieved over or regretted, but all part of a sweet and grave progress, in which silence and darkness seemed, not an interruption to the eager life of the world, but a happy suspension of activity and life. I was haunted, as I often am at sunset, by a sense that the dying light was trying to show me some august secret, some gracious mystery, which would silence and sustain the soul could it but capture it. Some great and wonderful presence seemed to hold up a hand, with a gesture half of invitation, half of compassion for my blindness. Down there, beyond the lines of motionless trees, where the water gleamed golden in the reaches of the stream, the secret brooded, withdrawing itself resistlessly into the glowing west. A wistful yearning filled my soul to enter into that incommunicable peace. Yet if one could take the wings of the morning, and follow that flying zone of light, as swiftly as the air, one could pursue the same sunset all the world over, and see the fiery face of the sun ever sinking to his setting, over the broad furrows of moving seas, over tangled tropic forests, out to the shapeless wintry land of the south. Day by day has the same pageant enacted itself, for who can tell what millions of years. And in that vast perspective of weltering aeons has come the day when God has set me here, a tiny sentient point, conscious, in a sense, of it all, and conscious too that, long after I sleep in the dust, the same strange and beautiful thing will be displayed age after age. And yet it is all outside of me, all without. I am a part of it, yet with no sense of my unity with it. That is the marvellous and bewildering thing, that each tiny being like myself has the same sense of isolation, of distinctness, of the perfectly rounded life, complete faculties, independent existence. Another day is done, and leaves me as bewildered, as ignorant as ever, as aware of my small limitations, as lonely and un comforted.

Who shall show me why I love, with this deep and thirsty intensity, the array of gold and silver light, these mist-hung fields with their soft tints, the glow that flies and fades, the cold veils of frosty vapour? Thousands of men and women have seen the sunset pass, loving it even as I love it. They have gone into the silence as I too shall go, and no hint comes back as to whether they understand and are satisfied.

And now I turn in at the well-known gate, and see the dark gables of my house, with the high elms of the grove outlined against the pale sky. The cheerful windows sparkle with warmth and light, welcoming me, fresh from the chilly air, out of the homeless fields. With such array of cheerful usages I beguile my wondering heart, and chase away the wild insistent thoughts, the deep yearnings that thrill me. Thus am I bidden to desire and to be unsatisfied, to rest and marvel not, to stay, on this unsubstantial show of peace and security, the aching and wondering will.

December 4, 1888.

Writing, like music, ought to have two dimensions—a horizontal movement of melody, a perpendicular depth of tone. A person unskilled in music can only recognise a single horizontal movement, an air. One who is a little more skilled can recognise the composition of a chord. A real musician can read a score horizontally, with all its contrasting and combining melodies. Sometimes one gets, in writing, a piece of horizontal structure, a firm and majestic melody, with but little harmony. Such are the great spare, strong stories of the old world. Modern writing tends to lay much more emphasis upon depth of colour, and the danger there is that such writing may become a mere structureless modulation. The perfect combination is to get firm structure, sparingly and economically enriched by colour, but colour always subordinated to structure. When I was young I undervalued structure and overvalued colour; but it was a good training in a way, because I learned to appreciate the vital necessity of structure, and I learnt the command of harmony. What is it that gives structure? It is firm and clear intellectual conception, the grasp of form and proportion; while colour is given by depth and richness of personality, by power of perception, and still more by the power of fusing perception with personality. The important thing here is that the thing perceived and felt should not simply be registered and pigeon-holed, but that it should become a cell of the writer's soul, respond to his pulse, be animated by his vital forces.

Now, in my present state, I have lost my hold on melody in some way or other; my creative intellectual power has struck work; and when I try to exercise it, I can only produce vague textures of modulated thoughts—things melodious in themselves, but ineffective because they are isolated effects, instead of effects emphasising points, crises, climaxes. I have strained some mental muscle, I suppose; but the unhappy part of the situation is that I have not lost the desire to use it.

It would be a piece of good fortune for me now if I could fall in with some vigorous mind who could give me a lead, indicate a subject. But then the work that resulted would miss unity, I think. What I ought to be content to do is to garner more impressions; but I seem to be surfeited of impressions.

December 10, 1888.

To-day I stumbled upon one of my old childish books—Grimm's Household Stories. I am ashamed to say how long I read it. These old tales, which I used to read as transcripts of marvellous and ancient facts, have, many of them, gained for me, through experience of life, a beautiful and symbolical value; one in particular, the tale of Karl Katz.

Karl used to feed his goats in the ruins of an old castle, high up above the stream. Day after day one of his herd used to disappear, coming back in the evening to join the homeward procession, very fat and well-liking. So Karl set himself to watch, and saw that the goat slipped in at a hole in the masonry. He enlarged the hole, and presently was able to creep into a dark passage. He made his way along, and soon heard a sound like a falling hailstorm. He groped his way thither, and found the goat, in the dim light, feeding on grains of corn which came splashing down from above. He looked and listened, and, from the sounds of stamping and neighing overhead, he became aware that the grain was falling through the chinks of a paved floor from a stable inside the hill. I forget at this moment what happened next—the story is rich in inconsequent details—but Karl shortly heard a sound like thunder, which he discerned at last to be persons laughing and shouting and running in the vaulted passages. He stole on, and found, in an open, grassy place, great merry men playing at bowls. He was welcomed and set down in a chair, though he could not even lift one of the bowls when invited to join in the game. A dwarf brought him wine in a cup, which he drank, and presently he fell asleep.

When he woke, all was silent and still; he made his way back; the goats were gone, and it was the early morning, all misty and dewy among the ruins, when he squeezed out of the hole.

He felt strangely haggard and tired, and reached the village only to find that seventy years had elapsed, and that he was an old and forgotten man, with no place for him. He had lost his home, and though there were one or two old grandfathers, spent and dying, who remembered the day when he was lost, and the search made for him, yet now there was no room for the old man. The gap had filled up, life had flowed on. They had grieved for him, but they did not want him back. He disturbed their arrangements; he was another useless mouth to feed.

The pretty old story is full of parables, sad and sweet. But the kernel of the tale is a warning to all who, for any wilfulness or curiosity, however romantic or alluring the quest, forfeit their place for an instant in the world. You cannot return. Life accommodates itself to its losses, and however sincerely a man may be lamented, yet if he returns, if he tries to claim his place, he is in the way, *de trop*. No one has need of him.

An artist has most need of this warning, because he of all men is tempted to enter the dark place in the hill, to see wonderful things and to drink the oblivious wine. Let him rather keep his hold on the world, at whatever sacrifice. Because by the time that he has explored the home of the merry giants, and dreamed his dream, the world to which he tries to tell the vision will heed it not, but treat it as a fanciful tale.

All depends on the artist being in league with his day; if he is born too early or too late, he has no hold on the world, no message for it. Either he is a voice out of the past, an echo of old joys, piping a forgotten message, or he is fanciful, unreal, visionary, if he sees and tries to utter what shall be. By the time that events confirm his foresight, the vitality of his prophecy is gone, and he is only looked at with a curious admiration, as one that had a certain clearness of vision, but no more; he is called into court by the historian of tendency, but he has had no hold on living men.

One sees men of great artistic gifts who suffer from each of these disadvantages. One sees poets, born in a prosaic age, who would have won high fame if they had been born in an age of poets. And one sees, too, men who seem to struggle with big, unintelligible thoughts, thoughts which do not seem to fit on to anything existing. The happy artist is the man who touches the note which awakens a responsive echo in many hearts; the man who instinctively uses the medium of the time, and who neither regrets the old nor portends the new.

Karl Katz must content himself, if he can find a corner and a crust, with the memory of the day when the sun lay hot among the ruins, with the thought of the pleasant coolness of the vault, the leaping shower of corn, the thunder of the imprisoned feet, the heroic players, the heady wine. That must be enough for him. He has had a taste, let him remember, of marvels hidden from common eyes and ears. Let it be for him to muse in the sun, and to be grateful for the space of recollection given him. If he had lived the life of the world, he would but have had a

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treasure of simple memories, much that was sordid, much that was sad.

But now he has his own dreams, and he must pay the price in heaviness and dreariness!

December 14, 1888.

The danger of art as an occupation is that one uses life, looks at life, as so much material for one's art. Life becomes a province of art, instead of art being a province of life. That is all a sad mistake, perhaps an irreparable mistake! I walked to-day on the crisp frozen snow, down the valley, by field-paths, among leafless copses and wood-ends. The stream ran dark and cold, between its brambly banks; the snow lay pure and smooth on the high-sloping fields. It made a heart of whiteness in the covert, the trees all delicately outlined, the hazels weaving an intricate pattern. All perfectly and exquisitely beautiful. Sight after sight of subtle and mysterious beauty, vignette after vignette, picture after picture. If I could but sing it, or say it, depict or record it, I thought to myself! Yet I could not analyse what the desire was. I do not think I wished to interpret the sight to others, or even to capture it for myself. No matter at what season of the year I pass through the valley, it is always filled from end to end with beauty, ever changing, perishing, ever renewing itself. In spring the copse is full of tender points of green, uncrumpling and uncurling. The hyacinths make a carpet of steely blue, the anemones weave their starred tapestry. In the summer, the grove hides its secret, dense with leaf, the heavy-seeded grass rises in the field, the tall flowering plants make airy mounds of colour; in autumn, the woods blaze with orange and gold, the air is heavy with the scent of the dying leaf. In winter, the eye dwells with delight upon the spare low tints; and when the snow falls and lies, as it does to-day, the whole scene has a still and mournful beauty, a pure economy of contrasted light and gloom. Yet the trained perception of the artist does not dwell upon the thought of the place as upon a perpetual feast of beauty and delight. Rather, it shames me to reflect, one dwells upon it as a quarry of effects, where one can find and detach the note of background, the sweet symbol that will lend point and significance to the scene that one is labouring at. Instead of being content to gaze, to listen, to drink in, one thinks only what one can carry away and make one's own. If one's art were purely altruistic, if one's aim were to emphasise some sweet aspect of nature which the careless might otherwise overlook or despise; or even if the sight haunted one like a passion, and fed the heart with hope and love, it would be well. But does one in reality feel either of these purposes? Speaking candidly, I do not. I care very little for my message to the world. It is true that I have a deep and tender love for the gracious things of earth; but I cannot be content with that. One thinks of Wordsworth, rapt in contemplation, sitting silent for a whole morning, his eyes fixed upon the pool of the moorland stream, or the precipice with the climbing ashes. It was like a religion to him, a communion with something holy and august which in that moment drew near to his soul. But with me it is different. To me the passion is to express it, to embalm it, in phrase or word, not for my pride in my art, not for any desire to give the treasure to others, but simply, so it seems, in obedience to a tyrannous instinct to lend the thought, the sight, another shape. I despair of defining the feeling. It is partly a desire to arrest the fleeting moment, to give it permanence in the ruinous lapse of things, the same feeling that made old Herrick say to the daffodils, "We weep to see you haste away so soon." Partly the joy of the craftsman in making something that shall please the eye and ear. It is not the desire to create, as some say, but to record. For when one writes an impassioned scene, it seems no more an act of creation than one feels about one's dreams. The wonder of dreams is that one does not make them; they come upon one with all the pleasure of surprise and experience. They are there; and so, when one indulges imagination, one does not make, one merely tells the dream. It is this that makes art so strange and sad an occupation, that one lives in a beautiful world, which does not seem to be of one's own designing, but from which one is awakened, in terror and disgust, by bodily pain, discomfort, anxiety, loss. Yet it seems useless to say that life is real and imagination unreal. They are both there, both real. The danger is to use life to feed the imagination, not to use imagination to feed life. In these sad weeks I have been like a sleeper awakened. The world of imagination, in which I have lived and moved, has crumbled into pieces over my head; the wind and rain beat through the flimsy dwelling, and I must arise and go. I have sported with life as though it were a pretty plaything; and I find it turn upon me like a wild beast, gaunt, hungry, angry. I am terrified by its evil motions, I sicken at its odour. That is the deep mystery and horror of life, that one yields unerringly to blind and imperious instincts, not knowing which may lead us into green and fertile pastures of hope and happy labour, and which may draw us into thorny wildernesses. The old fables are true, that one must not trust the smiling presences, the beguiling words. Yet how is one to know which of the forms that beckon us we may trust. Must we learn the

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lesson by sad betrayals, by dark catastrophes? I have wandered, it seems, along a flowery path—and yet I have not gathered the poisonous herbs of sin; I have loved innocence and goodness; but for all that I have followed a phantom, and now that it is too late to retrace my steps, I find that I have been betrayed. I feel

"As some bold seer in a trance
Seeing all his own mischance."

Well, at least one may still be bold!

December 22, 1888.

Perhaps my trial comes to me that it may test my faith in art; perhaps to show me that the artist's creed is a false and shallow one after all. What is it that we artists do? In a happy hour I should have said glibly that we discern and interpret beauty. But now it seems to me that no man can ever live upon beauty. I think I have gone wrong in busying myself so ardently in trying to discern the quality of beauty in all things. I seem to have submitted everything—virtue, honour, life itself—to that test. I appear to myself like an artist who has devoted himself entirely to the appreciation of colour, who is suddenly struck colour-blind; he sees the forms of things as clearly as ever, but they are dreary and meaningless. I seem to have tried everything, even conduct, by an artistic standard, and the quality which I have devoted myself to discerning has passed suddenly out of life. And my mistake has been all the more grievous, because I have always believed that it was life of which I was in search. There are three great writers—two of them artists as well—whose personality has always interested me profoundly—Ruskin, Carlyle, Rossetti. But I have never been able wholly to admire the formal and deliberate products of their minds. Ruskin as an art-critic—how profoundly unfair, prejudiced, unjust he is! He has made up his mind about the merit of an artist; he will lay down a principle about accuracy in art, and to what extent imagination may improve upon vision; and then he will abuse Claude for modifying a scene, in the same breath, and for the same reasons, with which he will praise Turner for exaggerating one. He will use the same stick that he throws for one dog to fetch, to beat another dog that he dislikes. Of course he says fine and suggestive things by the way, and he did a great work in inspiring people to look for beauty, though he misled many feeble spirits into substituting one convention for another. I cannot read a page of his formal writings without anger and disgust. Yet what a beautiful, pathetic, noble spirit he had! The moment he writes, simply and tenderly, from his own harrowed heart, he becomes a dear and honoured friend. In *Praeterita*, in his diaries and letters, in his familiar and unconsidered utterances, he is perfectly delightful, conscious of his own waywardness and whimsicality; but when he lectures and dictates, he is like a man blowing wild blasts upon a shrill trumpet. Then Carlyle—his big books, his great tawdry, smoky pictures of scenes, his loud and clumsy moralisations, his perpetual thrusting of himself into the foreground, like some obstreperous showman; he wearies and dizzies my brain with his raucous clamour, his uncouth convolutions. I saw the other day a little Japanese picture of a boat in a stormy sea, the waves beating over it; three warriors in the boat lie prostrate and rigid with terror and misery. Above, through a rent in the clouds, is visible an ugly grotesque figure, with a demoniacal leer on his face, beating upon a number of drums. The picture is entitled "The Thunder-God beats his drums." Well, Carlyle seems to me like that; he has no pity for humanity, he only likes to add to its terrors and its bewilderment. He preached silence and seclusion to men of activity, energy to men of contemplation. He was furious, whatever humanity did, whether it slept or waked. His message is the message of the booming gale, and the swollen cataract. Yet in his diaries and letters, what splendid perception, what inimitable humour, what rugged emotion! I declare that Carlyle's thumbnail portraits of people and scenes are some of the most admirable things ever set down on paper. I love and admire the old furious, disconsolate, selfish fellow with all my heart; though he was a bad husband, he was a true friend, for all his discordant cries and groans. Then there is Rossetti—a man who wrote a few incredibly beautiful poems, and in whom one seems to feel the inner fire and glow of art. Yet many of his pictures are to me little but voluptuous and wicked dreams; and his later sonnets are full of poisonous fragrance—poetry embroidered and scented, not poetry felt. What a generous, royal prodigal nature he had, till he sank into his drugged and indulgent seclusion! Here then are three great souls. Ruskin, the pure lover of things noble and beautiful, but shadowed by a prim perversity, an old-maidish delicacy, a petulant despair. Carlyle, a great, rugged, and tumultuous heart, brutalised by ill-health, morbidity, selfishness. Rossetti, a sort of day-star in art, stepping forth like an angel, to fall lower than Lucifer. What is the meaning of these strange catastrophes, these noble natures so infamously hampered? In the three cases, it seems to be that melancholy, brooding over a world, so exquisitely designed and yet so unaccountably marred, drove one to madness, one to gloom, one to sensuality. We believe or try to believe that God is pure and loving and true, and that His Heart is with all that is noble and hopeful and high. Yet the more generous the character, the deeper is the fall! Can such things be meant to show us that we have no concern with art at all; and that our only hope is to cling to bare, austere, simple, uncomforted virtue? Ought we to try to

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think of art only as an innocent amusement and diversion for our leisure hours? As a quest to which no man may vow himself, save at the cost of walking in a vain shadow all his days? Ought we to steel our hearts against the temptation, which seems to be implanted as deep as anything in my own nature—nay, deeper—to hold that what one calls ugliness and bad taste is of the nature of sin? But what then is the meaning of the tyrannous instinct to select and to represent, to capture beauty? Ought it to be enough to see beauty in the things around us, in flowers and light, to hear it in the bird's song and the falling stream—to perceive it thus gratefully and thankfully, and to go back to our simple lives? I do not know; it is all a great mystery; it is so hard to believe that God should put these ardent, delicious, sweet, and solemn instincts into our spirits, simply that we may learn our error in following them. And yet I feel with a sad certainty to-day that I have somehow missed the way, and that God cannot or will not help me to find it. Are we then bidden and driven to wander? Or is there indeed some deep and perfect secret of peace and tranquillity, which we are meant to find? Does it perhaps lie open to our eyes—as when one searches a table over and over for some familiar object, which all the while is there before us, plain to touch or sight?

The Altar Fire
January 3, 1889.

There is a tiny vignette of Blake's, a woodcut, I think, in which one sees a ladder set up to the crescent moon from a bald and bare corner of the globe. There are two figures that seem to be conversing together; on the ladder itself, just setting his foot to the lowest rung, is the figure of a man who is beginning to climb in a furious hurry. "I want, I want," says the little legend beneath. The execution is trivial enough; it is all done, and not very well done, in a space not much bigger than a postage-stamp— but it is one of the many cases in which Blake, by a minute symbol, expressed a large idea. One wonders if he knew how large an idea it was. It is a symbol for me of all the vague, eager, intense longing of the world, the desire of satisfaction, of peace, of fulfilment, of perfection; the power that makes people passionately religious, that makes souls so much greater and stronger than they appear to themselves to be. It is the thought that makes us at moments believe intensely and urgently in the justice, the mercy, the perfect love of God, even at moments when everything round us appears to contradict the idea. It is the outcome of that strange right to happiness which we all feel, the instinct that makes us believe of pain and grief that they are abnormal, and will be, must be, set right and explained somewhere. The thought comes to me most poignantly at sunset, when trees and chimneys stand up dark against the fiery glow, and when the further landscape lies smiling, lapt in mist, on the verge of dreams; that moment always seems to speak to me with a personal voice. "Yes," it seems to say, "I am here and everywhere—larger, sweeter, truer, more gracious than anything you have ever dreamed of or hoped for—but the time to know all is not yet." I cannot explain the feeling or interpret it; but it has sometimes seemed to me, in such moments, that I am, in very truth, not a child of God, but a part of Himself—separated from Him for a season, imprisoned, for some strange and beautiful purpose, in the chains of matter, remembering faintly and obscurely something that I have lost, as a man strives to recall a beautiful dream that has visited him. It is then that one most desires to be strong and free, to be infinitely patient and tender and loving, to be different. And then one comes back to the world with a sense of jar and shock, to broken purposes, and dull resentments, to unkindly thoughts, and people who do not even pretend to wish one well. I have been trying with all my might in these desolate weeks to be brave and affectionate and tender, and I have not succeeded. It is easy enough, when one is happily occupied for a part of the day, but when one is restless, dissatisfied, impatient, ineffective, it is a constant and a weary effort. And what is more, I dislike sympathy. I would rather bear a thing in solitude and silence. I have no self-pity, and it is humiliating and weakening to be pitied. Yet of course Maud knows that I am unhappy; and the wretchedness of it is that it has introduced a strain into our relations which I have never felt before. I sit reading, trying to pass the hours, trying to stifle thought. I look up and see her eyes fixed on me full of compassion and love—and I do not want compassion. Maud knows it, divines it all; but she can no more keep her compassion hidden than I can keep my unrest hidden. I have grown irritable, suspicious, hard to live with. Yet with all my heart and soul I desire to be patient, tolerant, kindly, sweet-tempered. FitzGerald said somewhere that ill-health makes all of us villains. This is the worst of it, that for all my efforts I get weaker, more easily vexed, more discontented. I do not and cannot trace the smallest benefit which results to me or any one else from my unhappiness. The shadow of it has even fallen over my relations with the children, who are angelically good. Maggie, with that divine instinct which women possess—what a perfectly beautiful thing it is!—has somehow contrived to discern that things are amiss with me, and I can perceive that she tries all that her little heart and mind can devise to please, soothe, interest me. But I do not want to be ministered to, exquisite as the instinct is in the child; and all the time I am as far off my object as ever. I cannot work, I cannot think. I have said fine things in my books about the discipline of reluctant suffering; and now my feeling is that I could bear any other kind of trial better. It seems to be given to me with an almost demoniacal prescience of what should most dishearten me.

"It would not school the shuddering will
To patience, were it sweet to bear,"

says an old poet; and it is true, I have no doubt; but, good God, to think that a man, so richly dowered as I am

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with every conceivable blessing, should yet have so small a reserve of faith and patience! Even now I can frame epigrams about it. "To learn to be content not to be content"—that is the secret—but meanwhile I stumble in dark paths, through the grove *nullo penetrabilis astro*, where men have wandered before now. It seems fine and romantic enough, when one thinks of another soul in torment. One remembers the old sage, reading quietly at a sunset hour, who had a sudden vision of the fate that should befall him. His book falls from his hands, he sits there, a beautiful and venerable figure enough, staring heavily into the void. It makes me feel that I shall never dare to draw the picture of a man in the grip of suffering again; I have had so little of it in my life, and I have drawn it with a luxurious artistic emotion. I remember once saying of a friend that his work was light and trivial, because he had never descended into hell. Now that I have myself set foot there, I feel art and love, and life itself, shrivel in the relentless chill—for it is icy cold and drearily bright in hell, not dark and fiery, as poets have sung! I feel that I could wrestle better with the loss of health, of wealth, of love, for there would be something to bear, some burden to lift. Now there is nothing to bear, except a blank purposelessness which eats the heart out of me. I am in the lowest place, in the darkness and the deep.

The Altar Fire
January 8, 1889.

Snow underfoot this morning; and a brown blink on the horizon which shows that more is coming. I have the odd feeling that I have never really seen my house before, the snow lights it all up so strangely, tinting the ceilings a glowing white, touching up high lights on the top of picture-frames, and throwing the lower part of the rooms into a sort of pleasant dusk.

Maud and the children went off this afternoon to an entertainment. I accompanied them to the door; what a pretty effect the snow background gives to young faces; it lends a pretty morbidezza to the colouring, a sort of very delicate green tinge to the paler shades. That does not sound as if it would be beautiful in a human face, but it is; the faces look like the child-angels of Botticelli, and the pink and rose flush of the cheeks is softly enriched and subdued; and then the soft warmth of fair and curly hair is delicious. I was happy enough with them, in a sort of surface happiness. The little waves at the top of the mind broke in sunlight; but down below, the cold dark water sleeps still enough. I left them, and took a long trudge among the valleys. Oh me! how beautiful it all was; the snowy fields, with the dark copses and leafless trees among them; the rich clean light everywhere, the world seen as through a dusky crystal. Then the sun went down in state, and the orange sky through the dark tree-stems brought me a thrill of that strange yearning desire for something—I cannot tell what—that seems so near and yet so far away. Yet I was sad enough too; my mind works like a mill with no corn to grind. I can devise nothing, think of nothing. There beats in my head a verse of a little old Latin poem, by an unhappy man enough, in whose sorrowful soul the delight of the beautiful moment was for ever poisoned by the thought that it was passing, passing; and that the spirit, whatever joy might be in store for it, could never again be at the same sweet point of its course. The poem is about a woodcock, a belated bird that haunted the hanging thickets of his Devonshire home. "Ah, hapless bird," he says, "for you to-day King December is stripping these oaks; nor any hope of food do the hazel-thickets afford." That is my case. I have lingered too late, trusting to the ease and prodigal wealth of the summer, and now the woods stand bare about me, while my comrades have taken wing for the South. The beady eye, the puffed feathers grow sick and dulled with hunger. Why cannot I rest a little in the beauty all about me? Take it home to my shivering soul? Nay, I will not complain, even to myself.

I came back at sundown, through the silent garden, all shrouded and muffled with snow. The snow lay on the house, outlining the cornices, cresting the roof-tiles, crusted sharply on the cupola, whitening the tall chimney-stacks. The comfortable smoke went up into the still air, and the firelight darted in the rooms. What a sense of beautiful permanence, sweet hopefulness, fireside warmth it all gave; and it is real as well. No life that I could have devised is so rich in love and tranquillity as mine; everything to give me content, except the contented mind. Why cannot I enter, seat myself in the warm firelight, open a book, and let the old beautiful thoughts flow into my mind, till the voices of wife and children return to gladden me, and I listen to all that they have seen and done? Why should I rather sit, like a disconsolate child among its bricks, feebly and sadly planning new combinations and fantastic designs? I have done as much and more than most of my contemporaries; what is this insensate hunger of the spirit that urges me to work that I cannot do, for rewards that I do not want? Why cannot I be content to dream and drowse a little?

"Rest, then, and rest
And think of the best,
'Twixt summer and spring,
When no birds sing."

That is what I desire to do, and cannot. It is as though some creeper that had enfolded and enringed a house with its tendrils, creeping under window-ledges and across mellow brickwork, had been suddenly cut off at the root, and hung faded and lustreless, not even daring to be torn away. Yet I am alive and well, my mind is alert and vigorous, I have no cares or anxieties, except that my heart seems hollow at the core.

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January 12, 1889.

I have had a very bad time of late. It seems futile to say anything about it, and the plain man would rub his eyes, and wonder where the misery lay. I have been perfectly well, and everything has gone smoothly; but I cannot write. I have begun half-a-dozen books. I have searched my notes through and through. I have sketched plots, written scenes. I cannot go on with any of them. I have torn up chapters with fierce disgust, or have laid them quietly aside. There is no vitality in them. If I read them aloud to any one, he would wonder what was wrong—they are as well written as my other books, as amusing, as interesting. But it is all without energy or invention, it is all worse than my best. The people are puppets, their words are pumped up out of a stagnant reservoir. Everything I do reminds me of something I have done before. If I could bring myself to finish one of these books, I could get money and praise enough. Many people would not know the difference. But the real and true critic would see through them; he would discern that I had lost the secret. I think that perhaps I ought to be content to work dully and faithfully on, to finish the poor dead thing, to compose its dead limbs decently, to lay it out. But I cannot do that, though it might be a moral discipline. I am not conscious of the least mental fatigue, or loss of power—quite the reverse. I hunger and thirst to write, but I have no invention.

The worst of it is that it reveals to me how much the whole of my life was built up round the hours I gave to writing. I used to read, write letters, do business in the morning, holding myself back from the beloved task, not thinking over it, not anticipating the pleasure, yet aware that some secret germination was going on among the cells of the brain. Then came the afternoon, the walk or ride, and then at last after tea arrived the blessed hour. The chapter was all ready to be written, and the thing flowed equably and clearly from the pen. The passage written, I would turn to some previous chapter, which had been type-written, smooth out the creases, enrich the dialogue, retouch the descriptions, omit, correct, clarify. Perhaps in the evening I would read a passage aloud, if we were alone; and how often would Maud, with her perfect instinct, lay her finger on a weak place, show me that something was abrupt or lengthy, expose an unreal emotion, or, best of all, generously and whole-heartedly approve. It seems now, looking back upon it, that it was all impossibly happy and delightful, too good to be true. Yet I have everything that I had, except my unhappy writing; and the want of it poisons life. I no longer seem to lie pleasantly in ambush for pretty traits of character, humorous situations, delicate nuances of talk. I look blankly at garden, field, and wood, because I cannot draw from them the setting that I want. Even my close and intimate companionship with Maud seems to have suffered, for I was like a child, bringing the little wonders that it finds by the hedgerow to be looked at by a loving eye. Maud is angelically tender, kind, sweet. She tells me only to wait; she draws me on to talk; she surrounds me with love and care. And in the midst of it all I sit, in dry misery, hating myself for my feebleness and cowardice, keeping as far as possible my pain to myself, brooding, feverishly straining, struggling hopelessly to recover the clue. The savour has gone out of life; I feel widowed, frozen, desolate. How often have I tranquilly and good-humouredly contemplated the time when I need write no more, when my work should be done, when I should have said all I had to say, and could take life as it came, soberly and wisely. Now that the end has come of itself, I feel like a hopeless prisoner, with death the only escape from a bitter and disconsolate solitude.

Can I not amuse myself with books, pictures, talk? No, because it is all a purposeless passing of dreary hours. Before, there was always an object ahead of me, a light to which I made my way; and all the pleasant incidents of life were things to guide me, and to beguile the plodding path. Now I am adrift; I need go neither forwards nor backwards; and the things which before were gentle and quiet occupations have become duties to be drearily fulfilled.

I have put down here exactly what I feel. It is not cowardice that makes me do it, but a desire to face the situation, exactly as it is. *Forsan et haec olim meminisse juvabit!* And in any case nothing can be done by blinking the truth. I shall need all my courage and all my resolution to meet it, and I shall meet it as manfully as I can. Yet the thought of meeting it thus has no inspiration in it. My only desire is that the frozen mind may melt at the touch of some genial ray, and that the buds may prick and unfold upon the shrunken bough.

January 15, 1889.

One of the miseries of my present situation is that it is all so intangible, and to the outsider so incomprehensible. There is no particular reason why I should write. I do not need the money; I believe I do not desire fame. Let me try to be perfectly frank about this; I do not at all desire the tangible results of fame, invitations to banquets, requests to deliver lectures, the acquaintance of notable people, laudatory reviews. I like a quiet life; I do not want *monstrari digito*, as Horace says. I have had a taste of all of these things, and they do not amuse me, though I confess that I thought they would. I feel in this rather as Tennyson felt—that I dislike contemptuous criticism, and do not value praise—except the praise of a very few, the masters of the craft. And this one does not get, because the great men are mostly too much occupied in producing their own masterpieces to have the time or inclination to appraise others. Yet I am sure there is a vile fibre of ambition lurking in me, interwoven with my nature, which I cannot exactly disentangle. I very earnestly desire to do good and fine work, to write great books. If I genuinely and critically approved of my own work, I could go on writing for the mere pleasure of it, in the face of universal neglect. But one may take it for granted that unless one is working on very novel and original lines—and I am not—the good qualities of one's work are not likely to escape attention. The reason why Keats, and Shelley, and Tennyson, and Wordsworth were decried, was because their work was so unusual, so new, that conventional critics could not understand it. But I am using a perfectly familiar medium, and there is a large and acute band of critics who are looking out for interesting work in the region of novels. Besides I have arrived at the point of having a vogue, so that anything I write would be treated with a certain respect. Where my ambition comes in is in the desire not to fall below my standard. I suppose that while I feel that I do not rate the judgment of the ordinary critic highly, I have an instinctive sense that my work is worthy of his admiration. The pain I feel is the sort of pain that an athlete feels who has established, say, a record in high-jumping, and finds that he can no longer hurl his stiffening legs and portly frame over the lath. Well, I have always held strongly that men ought to know when to stop. There is nothing more melancholy and contemptible than to see a successful man, who has brought out a brood of fine things, sitting meekly on addled eggs, or, still worse, squatting complacently among eggshells. It is like the story of the old tiresome Breton farmer whose wife was so annoyed by his ineffective fussiness, that she clapt him down to sit on a clutch of stone eggs for the rest of his life. How often have I thought how deplorable it was to see a man issuing a series of books, every one of which is feebler than its predecessor, dishing up the old characters, the stale ideas, the used-up backgrounds. I have always hoped that some one would be kind and brave enough to tell me when I did that. But now that the end seems to have come to me naturally and spontaneously, I cannot accept my defeat. I am like the monkey of whom Frank Buckland wrote, who got into the kettle when the water was lukewarm, and found the outer air so cold whenever he attempted to leave it, that he was eventually very nearly boiled alive. The fact that my occupation is gone leaves life hollow to the core. Perhaps a wise man would content himself with composing some placid literary essays, selecting some lesser figure in the world of letters, collecting gossip, and what are called "side-lights," about him, visiting his birthplace and early haunts, criticising his writings. That would be a harmless way of filling the time. But any one who has ever tried creative work gets filled with a nauseating disgust for making books out of other people's writings, and constructing a kind of resurrection-pie out of the shreds. Moreover I know nothing except literature; I could only write a literary biography; and it has always seemed to me a painful irony that men who have put into their writings what other people put into deeds and acts should be the very people whose lives are sedulously written and rewritten, generation after generation. The instinct is natural enough. The vivid memories of statesmen and generals fade; but as long as we have the fascinating and adorable reveries of great spirits, we are consumed with a desire to reconstruct their surroundings, that we may learn where they found their inspiration. A great poet, a great imaginative writer, so glorifies and irradiates the scene in which his mighty thoughts came to him, that we cannot help fancying that the secret lies in crag and hill and lake, rather than in the mind that gathered in the common joy. I have a passion for visiting the haunts of genius, but rather because they teach me that inspiration lies everywhere, if we can but perceive it, than because I hope to detect where the particular charm lay. And so I am driven back upon my own poor imagination. I say to myself, like Samson, "I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself," and then the end of the verse falls on me like a

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shadow—"and he wist not that the Lord was departed from him."

January 18, 1889.

Nothing the matter, and yet everything the matter! I plough on drearily enough, like a vessel forging slowly ahead against a strong, ugly, muddy stream. I seem to gain nothing, neither hope, patience, nor strength. My spirit revolted at first, but now I have lost the heart even for that: I simply bear my burden and wait. One tends to think, at such times, that no one has ever passed through a similar experience before; and the isolation in which one moves is the hardest part of it all. Alone, and cut off even from God! If one felt that one was learning something, gaining power or courage, one could bear it cheerfully; but I feel rather as though all my vitality and moral strength was being pressed and drained from me. Yet I do not desire death and silence. I rather crave for life and light.

No, I am not describing my state fairly. At times I have a sense that something, some power, some great influence, is trying to communicate with me, to deliver me some message. There are many hours when it is not so, when my nerveless brain seems losing its hold, slipping off into some dark confusion of sense. Yet again there are other moments, when sights and sounds have an overpowering and awful significance; when the gleams of some tremendous secret seemed flashed upon my mind, at the sight of the mist-hung valley with its leafless woods and level water-meadows; the flaring pomp of sunset hung low in the west over the bare ploughland or the wide-watered plain; the wailing of the wind round the firelit house; the faint twitter of awakening birds in the ivy; the voice and smile of my children; the music breaking the silence of the house at evening. In a moment the sensation comes over me, that the sound or sight is sent not vaguely or lightly, but deliberately shown to me, for some great purpose, if I could but divine it; an oracle of God, if I could but catch the words He utters in the darkness and the silence.

February 1, 1889.

My dissatisfaction and depression begin to tell on me. I grow nervous and strained; I am often sleepless, or my sleep is filled by vivid, horrible, intolerable dreams. I wake early in the clutch of fear. I wrestle at times with intolerable irritability; social gatherings become unbearable; I have all sorts of unmanly sensations, dizzinesses, tremors; I have that dreadful sensation that my consciousness of things and people around me is slipping away from me, and that only by a strong effort can one retain one's hold upon them. I fall into a sort of dull reverie, and come back to the real world with a shock of surprise and almost horror. I went the other day to consult a great doctor about this. He reassured me; he laughed at my fears; he told me that it was a kind of neurasthenia, not fanciful but real; that my brain had been overworked, and was taking its revenge; that it was insufficiently nourished, and so forth. He knew who I was, and treated me with a respectful sympathy. I told him I had taken a prolonged holiday since my last book, and he replied that it had not been long enough. "You must take it easy," he said. "Don't do anything you don't like." I replied that the difficulty was to find anything I did like. He smiled at this, and said that I need not be afraid of breaking down; he sounded me, and said that I was perfectly strong. "Indeed," he added, "you might go to a dozen doctors to be examined for an insurance policy, and you would be returned as absolutely robust." In the course of his investigations, he applied a test, quite casually and as if he were hardly interested, the point of which he thought (I suppose) that I should not divine. Unfortunately I knew it, and I need only say that it was a test for something very bad indeed. That was rather a horrible moment, when a grim thing out of the shadow slipped forward for a moment, and looked me in the face. But it was over in an instant, and he went on to other things. He ended by saying: "Mr. —, you are not as bad as you feel, or even as you think. Just take it quietly; don't overdo it, but don't be bored. You say that you can't write to please yourself at present. Well, this experience is partly the cause, and partly the result of your condition. You have used one particular part of your brain too much, and you must give it time to recover. My impression is that you will get better very gradually, and I can only repeat that there is no sort of cause for anxiety. I can't help you more than that, and I am saying exactly what I feel."

I looked at the worn face and kind eyes of the man whose whole life is spent in plumbing abysses of human suffering. What a terrible life, and yet what a noble one! He spoke as though he had no other case in the world to consider except my own; yet when I went back to the waiting-room to get my hat, and looked round on the anxious-looking crowd of patients waiting there, each with a secret burden, I felt how heavy a load he must be carrying.

There is a certain strength, after all, in having to live by rule; and I have derived, I find, a certain comfort in having to abstain from things that are likely to upset me, not because I wish it, but because some one else has ordered it. So I struggle on. The worst of nerves is that they are so whimsical; one never knows when to expect their assaults; the temptation is to think that they attack one when it is most inconvenient; but this is not quite the case. They spare one when one expects discomfort; and again when one feels perfectly secure, they leap upon one from their lair. The one secret of dealing with the malady is to think of it as a definite ailment, not to regard the attacks as the vagaries of a healthy mind, but as the symptoms of an unhealthy one. So much of these obsessions appears to be purely mental; one finds oneself the prey of a perfectly causeless depression, which involves everything in its shadow. As soon as one realises that this is not the result of the reflections that seem to cause it, but that one is, so to speak, merely looking at normal conditions through coloured glasses, it is a great help. But the perennial difficulty is to know whether one needs repose and inaction, or whether one requires the stimulus of work and activity. Sometimes an unexpected call on one's faculties will encourage and gladden one; sometimes it will leave one unstrung and limp. A definite illness is always with one, more or less; but in nervous ailments, one has interludes of perfect and even buoyant health, which delude one into hoping that the demon has gone out.

It is a very elaborate form of torture anyhow; and I confess that I find it difficult to discern where its educative effect comes in, because it makes one shrink from effort, it makes one timid, indecisive, suspicious. It seems to encourage all the weaknesses and meannesses of the spirit; and, worst of all, it centres one's thoughts upon oneself. Perhaps it enlarges one's sympathy for all secret sufferers; and it makes me grateful for the fact that I have had so little ill-health in my life. Yet I find myself, too, testing with some curiosity the breezy maxims of

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optimists. A cheerful writer says somewhere: "Will not the future be the better and the richer for memories of past pleasure? So surely must the sane man feel." Well, he must be very sane indeed. It takes a very burly philosopher to think of the future as being enriched by past gladness, when one seems to have forfeited it, and when one is by no means certain of getting it back. One feels bitterly how little one appreciated it at the time; and to rejoice in reflecting how much past happiness stands to one's credit, is a very dispassionate attitude. I think Dante was nearer the truth when he said that "a sorrow's crown of sorrow was remembering happier things."

February 3, 1889.

To amuse oneself—that is the difficulty. Amusements are or ought to be the childish, irrational, savage things which a man goes on doing and practising, in virtue, I suppose, of the noble privilege of reason, far longer than any other animal—only YOUNG animals amuse themselves; a dog perhaps retains the faculty longer than most animals, but he only does it out of sympathy and companionship, to amuse his inscrutable owner, not to amuse himself. Amusements ought to be things which one wants to do, and which one is slightly ashamed of doing—enough ashamed, I mean, to give rather elaborate reasons for continuing them. If one shoots, for instance, one ought to say that it gets one out of doors, and that what one really enjoys is the country, and so forth. Personally I was never much amused by amusements, and gave them up as soon as I decently could. I regret it now. I wish we were all taught a handicraft as a regular part of education! I used to sketch, and strum a piano once, but I cannot deliberately set to work on such things again. I gave them all up when I became a writer, really, I suppose, because I did not care for them, but nominally on the grounds of "resolute limitation," as Lord Acton said—with the idea that if you prune off the otiose boughs of a tree, you throw the strength of the sap into the boughs you retain. I see now that it was a mistake. But it is too late to begin again now; I was reading Kingsley's *Life* the other day. He used to overwork himself periodically—use up the grey matter at the base of his brain, as he described it; but he had a hundred things that he wanted to do besides writing—fishing, entomologising, botanising. Browning liked modelling in clay, Wordsworth liked long walks, Byron had enough to do to keep himself thin, Tennyson had his pipe, Morris made tapestry at a loom. Southey had no amusements, and he died of softening of the brain. The happy people are those who have work which they love, and a hobby of a totally different kind which they love even better. But I doubt whether one can make a hobby for oneself in middle age, unless one is a very resolute person indeed.

February 7, 1889.

The children went off yesterday to spend the inside of the day with a parson hard by, who has three children of his own, about the same age. They did not want to go, of course, and it was particularly terrible to them, because neither I nor their mother were to go with them. But I was anxious they should go: there is nothing better for children than occasionally to visit a strange house, and to go by themselves without an elder person to depend upon. It gives them independence and gets rid of shyness. They end by enjoying themselves immensely, and perhaps making some romantic friendship. As a child, I was almost tearfully insistent that I should not have to go on such visits; but yet a few days of the sort stand out in my childhood with a vividness and a distinctness, which show what an effect they produced, and how they quickened one's perceptive and inventive faculties.

When they were gone I went out with Maud. I was at my very worst, I fear; full of heaviness and deeply disquieted; desiring I knew well what—some quickening of emotion, some hopeful impulse—but utterly unable to attain it. We had a very sad talk. I tried to make it clear to her how desolate I felt, and to win some kind of forgiveness for my sterile and loveless mood. She tried to comfort me; she said that it was only like passing through a tunnel; she made it clear to me, by some unspoken communication, that I was dearer than ever to her in these days of sorrow; but there was a shadow in her mind, the shadow that fell from the loneliness in which I moved, the sense that she could not share my misery with me. I tried to show her that the one thing one could not share was emptiness. If one's cup is full of interests, plans, happinesses, even tangible anxieties, it is easy and natural to make them known to one whom one loves best. But one cannot share the horror of the formless dark; the vacuous and tortured mind. It is the dark absence of anything that is the source of my wretchedness. If there were pain, grief, mournful energy of any kind, one could put it into words; but how can one find expression for what is a total eclipse?

It was not, I said, that anything had come between her and me; but I seemed to be remote, withdrawn, laid apart like some stiffening corpse in the tomb. She tried to reassure me, to show me that it was mainly physical, the overstrain of long and actively enjoyed work, and that all I needed was rest. She did not say one word of reproach, or anything to imply that I was unmanly and cowardly—indeed, she contrived, I know not how, to lead me to think that my state was in ordinary life hardly apparent. Once she asked pathetically if there was no way in which she could help. I had not the heart to say what was in my mind, that it would be better and easier for me if she ignored my unhappiness altogether; and that sympathy and compassion only plunged me deeper into gloom, as showing me that it was evident that there was something amiss—but I said "No, there is nothing; and no one can help me, unless God kindles the light He has quenched. Be your own dear self as much as possible; think and speak as little of me as you can,"—and then I added: "Dearest, my love for you is here, as strong and pure as ever—don't doubt that—only I cannot find it or come near it—it is hidden from me somewhere—I am like a man wandering in dark fields, who sees the firelit window of his home; he cannot feel the warmth, but he knows that it is there waiting for him. He cannot return till he has found that of which he is in search."

"Could he not give up the search?" said Maud, smiling tearfully. "Ah, not yet," I said. "You do not know, Maud, what my work has been to me—no man can ever explain that to any woman, I think: for women live in life, but man lives in work. Man DOES, woman IS. There is the difference."

We drew near the village. The red sun was sinking over the plain, a ball of fire; the mist was creeping up from the low-lying fields; the moon hung, like a white nail—paring, high in the blue sky. We went to the little inn, where we had been before. We ordered tea—we were to return by train—and Maud being tired, I left her, while I took a turn in the village, and explored the remains of an old manor—house, which I had seen often from the road. I was intolerably restless. I found a lane which led to the fields behind the manor. It was a beautiful scene. To the left of me ran the great plain brimmed with mist; the manor, with its high gables and chimney—stacks, stood up over an orchard, surrounded by a high, ancient brick wall, with a gate between tall gate—posts surmounted by stone balls. The old pasture lay round the house, and there were many ancient elms and sycamores forming a small park, in the boughs of which the rooks, who were now streaming home from the fields, were clamorous. I found myself near a chain of old fish—ponds, with thorn—thickets all about them; and here the old house stood up against a pure evening sky, rusty red below, melting into a pure green above. My heart went out in wonder at the

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thought of the unknown lives lived in this place, the past joys, the forgotten sorrows. What did it mean for me, the incredible and caressing beauty of the scene? Not only did it not comfort me, but it seemed to darken the gloom of my own unhappy mind. Suddenly, as with a surge of agony, my misery flowed in upon me. I clutched the rail where I stood, and bowed my head down in utter wretchedness. There came upon me, as with a sort of ghastly hopefulness, the temptation to leave it all, to put my case back into God's hands. Perhaps it was to this that I was moving? There might be a new life waiting for me, but it could not well be as intolerable as this. Perhaps nothing but silence and unconsciousness awaited me, a sleep unstirred by any dream. Even Maud, I thought, in her sorrow, would understand. How long I stood there I do not know, but the air darkened about me and the mist rose in long veils about the pasture with a deadly chill. But then there came back a sort of grim courage into my mind, that not so could it be ended. The thought of Maud and the children rose before me, and I knew I could not leave them, unless I were withdrawn from them. I must face it, I must fight it out; though I could and did pray with all my might that God might take away my life: I thought with what an utter joy I should feel the pang, the faintness, of death creep over me there in the dim pasture; but I knew in my heart that it was not to be; and soon I went slowly back through the thickening gloom. I found Maud awaiting me: and I know in that moment that some touch of the dark conflict I had been through had made itself felt in her mind; and indeed I think she read something of it in my face, from the startled glance she turned upon me. Perhaps it would have been better if in that quiet hour I could have told her the thought which had been in my mind; but I could not do that; and indeed it seemed to me as though some unseen light had sprung up for me, shooting and broadening in the darkness. I apprehended that I was no longer to suffer, I was to fight. Hitherto I had yielded to my misery, but the time was come to row against the current, not to drift with it.

It was dark when we left the little inn; the moon had brightened to a crescent of pale gold; the last dim orange stain of sunset still slept above the mist. It seemed to me as though I had somehow touched the bottom. How could I tell? Perhaps the same horrible temptation would beset me, again and again, deepening into a despairing purpose; the fertile mind built up rapidly a dreadful vista of possibilities, terrible facts that might have to be faced. Even so the dark mood beckoned me again; better to end it, said a hollow voice, better to let your dear ones suffer the worst, with a sorrow that will lessen year by year, than sink into a broken shadowed life of separation and restraint—but again it passed; again a grim resolution came to my aid.

Then, as we sped homewards in the speeding train, there came over me another thought. Here was I, who had lightly trafficked with human emotions, who had written with a romantic glow of the dark things of life, despair, agony, thoughts of self-destruction, insane fears, here was I at last confronted with them. I could never dare, I felt, to speak of such things again; were such dark mysteries to be used to heighten the sense of security and joy, to give a trivial reader a thrill of pleasure, a sympathetic reader a thrill of luxurious emotion? No, there was nothing uplifting or romantic about them when they came; they were dark as the grave, cold as the underlying clay. What a vile and loathsome profanation, deserving indeed of a grim punishment, to make a picturesque background out of such things! At length I had had my bitter taste of grief, and drew in to my trembling spirit the shuddering chill of despair. I had stepped, like the light-hearted maiden of the old story, within the forbidden door, and the ugly, the ghastly reality of the place had burst upon me, the huddled bodies, the basin filled with blood. One had read in books of men and women whose life had been suddenly curdled into slow miseries. One had half-blamed them in one's thought; one had felt that any experience, however dark and deep, must have its artistic value; and one had thought that they should have emerged with new zest into life. I understood it now, how life could be frozen at its very source, how one could cry out with Job curses on the day that gave one birth, and how gladly one would turn one's face away from the world and all its cheerful noise, awaiting the last stroke of God.

February 20, 1889.

There is a story of a Cornish farmer who, returning home one dark and misty night, struck across the moorland, every yard of which he knew, in order to avoid a long tramp by road. In one place there were a number of disused mine-shafts; the railing which had once protected them had rotted away, and it had been no one's business to see that it was renewed—some few had been filled up, but many of them were hundreds of feet deep, and entirely unguarded. The farmer first missed the track, and after long wandering found himself at last among the shafts. He sat down, knowing the extreme danger of his situation, and resolved to wait till the morning; but it became so cold that he dared stay no longer, for fear of being frozen alive, and with infinite precautions he tried to make his way out of the dangerous region, following the downward slope of the ground. In spite, however, of all his care, he found suddenly, on putting his foot down, that he was on the edge of a shaft, and that his foot was dangling in vacancy. He threw himself backwards, but too late, and he slid down several feet, grasping at the grass and heather; his foot fortunately struck against a large stone, which though precariously poised, arrested his fall; and he hung there for some hours in mortal anguish, not daring to move, clinging to a tuft of heather, shouting at intervals, in the hope that, when he did not return home, a search-party might be sent out to look for him. At last he heard, to his intense relief, the sound of voices hailing him, and presently the gleam of lanterns shot through the mist. He uttered agonising cries, and the rescuers were soon at his side; when he found that he had been lying in a shaft which had been filled up, and that the firm ground was about a foot below him; and that, in fact, if the stone that supported him had given way, he would have been spared a long period of almost intolerable horror.

It is a good parable of many of our disquieting fears and anxieties; as Lord Beaconsfield said, the greatest tragedies of his life had been things that never happened; Carlyle truly and beautifully said that the reason why the past always appeared to be beautiful, in retrospect, was that the element of fear was absent from it. William Morris said a trenchant thing on the same subject. He attended a Socialist Meeting of a very hostile kind, which he anticipated with much depression. When some one asked him how the meeting had gone off he said, "Well, it was fully as damnable as I had expected—a thing which seldom happens." A good test of the happiness of anyone's life is to what extent he has had trials to bear which are unbearable even to recollect. I am myself of a highly imaginative and anxious temperament, and I have had many hours of depression at the thought of some unpleasant anticipation or disagreeable contingency, and I can honestly say that nothing has ever been so bad, when it actually occurred, as it had represented itself to me beforehand. There are a few incidents in my life, the recollection of which I deliberately shun; but they have always been absolutely unexpected and unanticipated calamities. Yet even these have never been as bad as I should have expected them to be. The strange thing is that experience never comes to one's aid, and that one never gets patience or courage from the thought that the reality will be in all probability less distressing than the anticipation; for the simple reason that the fertile imagination is always careful to add that this time the occasion will be intolerable, and that at all events it is better to be prepared for the worst that may happen. Moreover, one wastes force in anticipating perhaps half-a-dozen painful possibilities, when, after all, they are alternatives, and only one of them can happen. That is what makes my present situation so depressing, that I instinctively clothe it in its worst horrors, and look forward to a long and dreary life, in which my only occupation will be an attempt to pass the weary hours. Faithless? yes, of course it is faithless! but the rational philosophy, which says that it will all probably come right, does not penetrate to the deeper region in which the mind says to itself that there is no hope of amendment.

Can one acquire, by any effort of the mind, this kind of patience? I do not think one can. The most that one can do is to behave as far as possible like one playing a heavy part upon the stage, to say with trembling lips that one has hope, when the sick mind beneath cries out that there is none.

Perhaps one can practise a sort of indifference, and hope that advancing years may still the beating heart and numb the throbbing nerve. But I do not even desire to live life on these terms. The one great article of my creed has been that one ought not to lose zest and spirit, or acquiesce slothfully in comfortable and material conditions, but that life ought to be full of perception and emotion. Here again lies my mistake; that it has not been perception or emotion that I have practised, but the art of expressing what I have perceived and felt. Of course, I wish with

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all my heart and soul that it were otherwise; but it seems that I have drifted so far into these tepid, sun-warmed shallows, the shallows of egoism and self-centred absorption, that there is no possibility of my finding my way again to the wholesome brine, to the fresh movement of the leaping wave. I am like one of those who lingered so long in the enchanted isle of Circe, listening luxuriously to the melting cadences of her magic song, that I have lost all hope of extricating myself from the spell. The old free days, when the heart beat light, and the breeze blew keen against my brow, have become only a memory of delights, just enabling me to speak deftly and artfully of the strong joys which I have forfeited.

February 24, 1889.

I have been away for some days, paying a visit to an old friend, a bachelor clergyman living in the country. The only other occupant of the house, a comfortable vicarage, is his curate. I am better—ashamed almost to think how much better—for the change. It is partly the new place, the new surroundings, the new minds, no doubt. But it is also the change of atmosphere. At home I am surrounded by sympathy and compassion; however unobtrusive they are, I feel that they are there. I feel that trivial things, words, actions, looks are noted, commented upon, held to be significant. If I am silent, I must be depressed; if I talk and smile, I am making an effort to overcome my depression. It sounds unloving and ungracious to resent this: but I don't undervalue the care and tenderness that cause it; at the same time it adds to the strain by imposing upon me a sort of vigilance, a constant effort to behave normally. It is infinitely and deeply touching to feel love all about me; but in such a state of mind as mine, one is shy of emotion, one dreads it, one shuns it. I suppose it argues a want of simplicity, of perfect manfulness, to feel this; but few or no women can instinctively feel the difference. In a real and deep affliction, one that could be frankly confessed, the more affection and sympathy that one can have the better; it is the one thing that sustains. But my unhappiness is not a real thing altogether, not a FRANK thing; the best medicine for it is to think as little about it; the only help one desires is the evidence that one does not need sympathy; and sympathy only turns one's thoughts inwards, and makes one feel that one is forlorn and desolate, when the only hope is to feel neither.

At Hapton it was just the reverse; neither Musgrave nor the curate, Templeton, troubled their head about my fancies. I don't imagine that Musgrave noticed that anything was the matter with me. If I was silent, he merely thought I had nothing to say; he took for granted I was in my normal state, and the result was that I temporarily recovered it.

Then, too, the kind of talk I got was a relief. With women, the real talk is intimate talk; the world of politics, books, men, facts, incidents, is merely a setting; and when they talk about them, it is merely to pass the time, as a man turns to a game. At Hapton, Musgrave chatted away about his neighbours, his boys' club, his new organ, his bishop, his work. I used to think him rather a proser; how I blessed his prosing now! I took long walks with him; he asked a few perfunctory questions about my books, but otherwise he was quite content to prattle on, like a little brook, about all that was in his mind, and he was more than content if I asked an occasional question or assented courteously. Then we had some good talks about the rural problems of education—he is a sensible and intelligent man enough—and some excellent arguments about the movement of religion, where I found him unexpectedly liberal-minded. He left me to do very much what I liked. I read in the mornings and before dinner; and after dinner we smoked or even played a game of dummy whist. It is a pretty part of the country, and when he was occupied in the afternoon, I walked about by myself. From first to last not a single word fell from Musgrave to indicate that he thought me in any way different, or suspected that I was not perfectly content, with the blessed result that I immediately became exactly what he thought me.

I got on no better with my writing; my brain is as bare as a winter wood; but I found that I did not rebel against that. Of course it does not reveal a very dignified temperament, that one should so take colour from one's surroundings. If I can be equable and good-humoured here, I ought to be able to be equable and good-humoured at home; at the same time I am conscious of an intense longing to see Maud and the children. Probably I should do better to absent myself resolutely from home at stated intervals; and I think it argued a fine degree of perception in Maud, that she decided not to accompany me, though she was pressed to come. I am going home to-morrow, delighted at the thought, grateful to the good Musgrave, in a more normal frame of mind than I have been for months.

February 28, 1889.

One of the most depressing things about my present condition is that I feel, not only so useless, but so prickly, so ugly, so unlovable. Even Maud's affection, stronger and more tender than ever, does not help me, because I feel that she cannot love me for what I am, but for what she remembers me as being, and hopes that I may be again. I know it is not so, and that she would love me whatever I did or became; but I cannot realise that now.

A few days ago an old friend came to see me; and I was so futile, so fractious, so dull, so melancholy with him that I wrote to him afterwards to apologise for my condition, telling him that I knew that I was not myself, and hoped he would forgive me for not making more of an effort. To-day I have had one of the manliest, tenderest, most beautiful letters I have ever had in my life. He says, "Of course I saw that you were not in your usual mood, but if you had pretended to be, if you had kept me at arm's length, if you had grimaced and made pretence, we should have been no nearer in spirit. I was proud and grateful that you should so have trusted me, as to let me see into your heart and mind; and you must believe me when I say that I never loved and honoured you more. I understood fully what a deep and insupportable trial your present state of mind must be; and I will be frank—why should I not be?— and say that I thought you were bearing it bravely, and what is better still, simply and naturally. I seemed to come closer to you in those hours than I have ever done before, and to realise better what you were. 'To make oneself beloved,' says an old writer, 'is to make oneself useful to others'—and you helped me perhaps most, when you knew it least yourself. I won't tell you not to brood upon or exaggerate your trouble—you know that well enough yourself. But believe me that such times are indeed times of growth and expansion, even when one seems most beaten back upon oneself, most futile, most unmanly. So take a little comfort, my old friend, and fare onwards hopefully."

That is a very beautiful and wise letter, and I cannot say how much it has meant for me. It is a letter that forges an invisible chain, which is yet stronger than the strongest tie that circumstance can forge; it is a lantern for one's feet, and one treads a little more firmly in the dark path, where the hillside looms formless through the shade.

March 3, 1889.

Best of all the psalms I love the Hundred-and-nineteenth; yet as a child what a weary thing I thought it. It was long, it was monotonous; it dwelt with a tiresome persistency, I used to think, upon dull things—laws, commandments, statutes. Now that I am older, it seems to me one of the most human of all documents. It is tender, pensive, personal; other psalms are that; but Psalm cxix. is intime and autobiographical. One is brought very close to a human spirit; one hears his prayers, his sighs, the dropping of his tears. Then, too, in spite of its sadness, there is a deep hopefulness and faithfulness about it, a firm belief in the ultimate triumph of what is good and true, a certainty that what is pure and beautiful is worth holding on to, whatever may happen; a nearness to God, a quiet confidence in Him. It is all in a subdued and minor key, but swelling up at intervals into a chord of ravishing sweetness.

There is never the least note of loudness, none of that terrible patriotism which defaces many of the psalms, the patriotism which makes men believe that God is the friend of the chosen race, and the foe of all other races, the ugly self-sufficiency that contemplates with delight, not the salvation and inclusion of the heathen, but their discomfiture and destruction. The worst side of the Puritan found delight in those cruel and militant psalms, revelling in the thought that God would rain upon the ungodly fire and brimstone, storm and tempest, and exulting in the blasting of the breath of His displeasure. Could anything be more alien to the spirit of Christ than all that? But here, in this melancholy psalm, there breathes a spirit naturally Christian, loving peace and contemplation, very weary of the strife.

I have said it is autobiographical; but it must be remembered that it was a fruitful literary device in those early days, to cast one's own thought in the mould of some well-known character. In this psalm I have sometimes thought that the writer had Daniel in mind—the surroundings of the psalm suit the circumstances of Daniel with singular exactness. But even so, it was the work of a man, I think, who had suffered the sorrows of which he wrote. Let me try to disentangle what manner of man he was.

He was young and humble; he was rich, or had opportunities of becoming so; he was an exile, or lived in an uncongenial society; he was the member of a court where he was derided, disliked, slandered, plotted against, and even persecuted. We can clearly discern his own character. He was timid, and yet ambitious; he was tempted to use deceit and hypocrisy, to acquiesce in the tone about him; he was inclined to be covetous; he had sinned, and had learnt something of holiness from his fall; he was given to solitude and prayer. He was sensitive, and his sorrows had affected his health; he was sleepless, and had lost the bloom of his youth.

All this and more we can read of him; but what is the saddest touch of all is the isolation in which he lived. There is not a word to show that he met with any sympathy; indeed the misunderstanding, whatever it was, that overshadowed him, had driven acquaintances, friends, and lovers away from him; and yet his tender confidence in God never fails; he feels that in his passionate worship of virtue and truth, his intense love of purity and justice, he has got a treasure which is more to him than riches or honour, or even than human love. He speaks as though this passion for holiness had been the very thing that had cost him so dear, and that exposed him to derision and dislike. Perhaps he had refused to fall in with some customary form of evil, and his resistance to temptation had led him to be regarded as a precisian and a saint? I have little doubt myself that this was so. He speaks as one might speak who had been so smitten with the desire for purity and rightness of life, that he could no longer even seem to condone the opposite. And yet he was evidently not one who dared to withstand and rebuke evil; the most he could do was to abstain from it; and the result was that he saw the careless and evil-minded people about him prosperous, happy and light-hearted, while he was himself plunged by his own act in misunderstanding and solitude and tears.

And then how strange to see this beautiful and delicate confession put into so narrow and constrained a shape! It is the most artificial by far of all the psalms. The writer has chosen deliberately one of the most cramping and confining forms that could be devised. Each of the eight verses that form the separate stanzas begins with the same letter of the alphabet, and each of the letters is used in turn. Think of attempting to do the same in English—it could not be done at all. And then in every single verse, except in one, where the word has probably disappeared in translation, by a mistake, there is a mention of the law of God. Infinite pains must have gone to the

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slow building of this curious structure; stone by stone must have been carved and lifted to its place. And yet the art is so great that I know no composition of the same length that has so perfect a unity of mood and atmosphere. There is never a false or alien note struck. It is never jubilant or contentious or assertive—and, best of all, it is wholly free from any touch of that complacency which is the shadow of virtue. The writer never takes any credit to himself for his firm adherence to the truth; he writes rather as one who has had a gift of immeasurable value entrusted to unworthy hands, who hardly dares to believe that it has been granted him, and who still speaks as though he might at any time prove unfaithful, as though his weakness might suddenly betray him, and who therefore has little temptation to exult in the possession of anything which his own frail nature might at any moment forfeit.

And thus, from its humility, its sense of weakness and weariness, its consciousness of sin and failure, combined with its deep apprehension of the stainless beauty of the moral law, this lyric has found its way to the hearts of all who find the world and temptation and fear too strong, all who through repeated failure have learned that they cannot even be true to what they so pathetically desire and admire; who would be brave and vigorous if they could, but, as it is, can only hope to be just led step by step, helped over the immediate difficulty, past the dreaded moment; whose heart often fails them, and who have little of the joy of God; who can only trust that, if they go astray, the mercy of God will yet go out to seek them; who cannot even hope to run in the way of God's beloved commandments, till He has set their heart at liberty.

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March 8, 1889.

I went to see Darell, my old schoolfellow, a few days ago; he wrote to say that he would much like to see me, but that he was ill and unable to leave home—could I possibly come to see him?

I have never seen very much of him since I left Cambridge; but there I was a good deal in his company—and we have kept up our friendship ever since, in the quiet way in which Englishmen do keep up their friendships, meeting perhaps two or three times in the year, exchanging letters occasionally. He was not a very intimate friend—indeed, he was not a man who formed intimacies; but he was a congenial companion enough. He was a frankly ambitious man. He went to the bar, where he has done well; he married a wife with some money; and I think his ultimate ambition has been to enter Parliament. He told me, when I last saw him, that he had now, he thought, made enough money for this, and that he would probably stand at the next election. I have always liked his wife, who is a sensible, good-natured woman, with social ambitions. They live in a good house in London, in a wealthy sort of way. I arrived to luncheon, and sate a little while with Mrs. Darell in the drawing-room. I became aware, while I sate with her, that there was a sense of anxiety in the air somehow, though she spoke cheerfully enough of her husband, saying that he had overworked himself, and had to lie up for a little. When he came into the room I understood. It was not that he was physically much altered—he is a strongly-built fellow, with a sanguine complexion and thick curly hair, now somewhat grizzled; but I knew at the first sight of him that matters were serious. He was quiet and even cheerful in manner, but he had a look on his face that I had never seen before, the look of a man whose view of life has been suddenly altered, and who is preparing himself for the last long journey. I knew instinctively that he believed himself a doomed man. He said very little about himself, and I did not ask him much; he talked about my books, and a good deal about old friends; but all with a sense, I thought, of detachment, as though he were viewing everything over a sort of intangible fence. After luncheon, we adjourned to his study and smoked. He then said a few words about his illness, and added that it had altered his plans. "I am told," he said, "that I must take a good long holiday—rather a difficult job for a man who cares a great deal about his work and very little about anything else;" he added a few medical details, from which I gathered the nature of his illness. Then he went on to talk of casual matters; it seemed to interest him to discuss what had been happening to our school and college friends; but I knew, without being told, that he wished me to understand that he did not expect to resume his place in the world—and indeed I divined, by some dim communication of the spirit, that he thought my visit was probably a farewell. But he talked with unabated courage and interest, smiling where he would in old days have laughed, and speaking of our friends with more tenderness than was his wont. Only once did he half betray what was in his mind: "It is rather strange," he said, "to be pushed aside like this, and to have to reconsider one's theories. I did not expect to have to pull up—the path lay plain before me—and now it seems to me as if there were a good many things I had lost sight of. Well, one must take things as they come, and I don't think that if I had it all to do again I should do otherwise." He changed the subject rather hurriedly, and began to talk about my work. "You are quite a great man now," he said with a smile; "I hear your books talked about wherever I go—I used to wonder if you would have had the patience to do anything—you were hampered by having no need to earn your living; but you have come out on the top." I told him something about my own late experiences and my difficulty in writing. He listened with undisguised interest. "What do you make of it?" he said. "Well," I said; "you will think I am talking transcendently, but I have felt often of late as if there were two strains in our life, two kinds of experience; at one time we have to do our work with all our might, to get absorbed in it, to do what little we can to enrich the world; and then at another time it is all knocked out of our hands, and we have to sit and meditate—to realise that we are here on sufferance, that what we can do matters very little to any one—the same sort of feeling that I once had when old Hoskyns, in whose class I was, threw an essay, over which I had taken a lot of trouble, into his waste-paper basket before my eyes without even looking it over. I see now that I had got all the good I could out of the essay by writing it, and that the credit of it mattered very little; but then I simply thought he was a very disagreeable and idle old fellow."

"Yes," he said, smiling, "there is something in that; but one wants the marks as well—I have always liked to be marked for my work. I am glad you told me that story, old man."

We went on to talk of other things, and when I rose to go, he thanked me rather effusively for my kindness in

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coming to see him. He told me that he was shortly going abroad, and that if I could find time to write he would be grateful for a letter; "and when I am on my legs again," he said with a smile, "we will have another meeting."

That was all that passed between us of actual speech. Yet how much more seems to have been implied than was said. I knew, as well as if he had told me in so many words, that he did not expect to see me again; that he was in the valley of the shadow, and wanted help and comfort. Yet he could not have described to me what was in his mind, and he would have resented it, I think, if I had betrayed any consciousness of my knowledge; and yet he knew that I knew, I am sure of that.

The interview affected me deeply and poignantly. The man's patience and courage are very great; but he has lived, frankly and laboriously, for perfectly definite things. He never had the least sense of what is technically called religion; he was strong and temperate by nature, with a fine sense of honour; loving work and the rewards of work, despising sentiment and emotion—indeed his respect for me, of which I was fully conscious, is the respect he feels for a sentimental man who has made sentiment pay. It is very hard to see what part the prospect of suffering and death is meant to play in the life of such a man. It must be, surely, that he has something even more real than what he has held to be realities to learn from the sudden snapping off of life and activity. I find myself filled with an immense pity for him; and yet if my faith were a little stronger and purer, I should congratulate rather than commiserate him. And yet the thought of him in his bewilderment helps me too, for I see my own life as in a mirror. I have received a message of truth, the message that the accomplishment of our plans and cherished designs is not the best thing that can befall us. How easy to see that in the case of another, how hard to see it in our own case! But it has helped me too to throw myself outside the morbid perplexities in which I am involved; to hold out open hands to the gift of God, even though He seems to give me a stone for bread, a stinging serpent for wholesome provender. It has taught me to pray—not only for myself, but for all the poor souls who are in the grip of a sorrow that they cannot understand or bear.

March 14, 1889.

The question that haunts me, the problem I cannot disentangle, is what is or what ought our purpose to be? What is our duty in life? Ought we to discern a duty which lies apart from our own desires and inclinations? The moralist says that it ought to be to help other people; but surely that is because the people, whom by some instinct we deem the highest, have had the irresistible desire to help others? How many people has one ever known who have taken up philanthropy merely from a sense of rectitude? The people who have done most to help the world along have been the people who have had an overwhelming natural tenderness, an overflowing love for helpless, weak, and unhappy people. That is a thing which cannot be simulated. One knows quite well, to put the matter simply, the extent of one's own limitations. There are courses of action which seem natural and easy; others which seem hard, but just possible; others again which are frankly impossible. However noble a life, for instance, I thought the life of a missionary or of a doctor to be, I could not under any circumstances adopt the role of either. There are certain things which I might force myself to do which I do not do, and which I practically know I shall not do. And the number of people is very small who, when circumstances suggest one course, resolutely carry out another. The artistic life is a very hard one to analyse, because at the outset it seems so frankly selfish a life. One does what one most desires to do, one develops one's own nature, its faculties and powers. If one is successful, the most one can claim is that one has perhaps added a little to the sum of happiness, of innocent enjoyment, that one has perhaps increased or fed in a few people the perception of beauty. Of course the difficulty is increased by the conventional belief that any career is justified by success in that career. And as long as a man attains a certain measure of renown we do not question very much the nature of his aims.

Then, again, if we put that all aside, and look upon life as a thing that is given us to teach us something, it is easy to think that it does not matter very much what we do; we take the line of least resistance, and think that we shall learn our lesson somehow.

It is difficult to believe that our one object ought to be to thwart all our own desires and impulses, to abstain from doing what we desire to do, and to force ourselves continually to do what we have no impulse to do. That is a philosophical and stoical business, and would end at best in a patient and courteous dreariness of spirit.

Neither does it seem a right solution to say: "I will parcel out my energies—so much will I give to myself, so much to others." It ought to be a larger, more generous business than that; yet the people who give themselves most freely away too often end by having very little to give; instead of having a store of ripe and wise reflection, they have generally little more than an official smile, a kindly tolerance, a voluble stream of commonplaces.

And then, too, it is hard to see, to speak candidly, what God is doing in the matter. One sees useful careers cut ruthlessly short, generous qualities nullified by bad health or minute faults, promise unfulfilled, men and women bound in narrow, petty, uncongenial spheres, the whole matter in a sad disorder. One sees one man's influence spoiled by over-confidence, by too strong a sense of his own significance, and another man made ineffective by diffidence and self-distrust. The best things of life, the most gracious opportunities, such as love and marriage, cannot be entered upon from a sense of duty, but only from an overpowering and instinctive impulse.

Is it not possible to arrive at some tranquil harmony of life, some self-evolution, which should at the same time be ardent and generous? In my own sad unrest of spirit, I seem to be alike incapable of working for the sake of others and working to please myself. Perhaps that is but the symptom of a moral disease, a malady of the soul. Yet if that is so, and if one once feels that disease and, suffering is not a part of the great and gracious purpose of God—if it is but a failure in His design—the struggle is hopeless. One sees all around one men and women troubled by no misgivings, with no certain aim, just doing whatever the tide of life impels them to do. My neighbour here is a man who for years has gone up to town every day to his office. He is perfectly contented, absolutely happy. He has made more money than he will ever need or spend, and he will leave his children a considerable fortune. He is kind, respectable, upright; he is considered a thoroughly enviable man, and indeed, if prosperity and contentment are the sign and seal of God's approbation, such a man is the highest work of God, and has every reason to be an optimist. He would think my questionings morbid and my desires moonshine. He is not necessarily right any more than I; but his theory of life works out a good deal better for him than mine for me.

Well, we drift, we drift! Sometimes the sun shines bright on the wave, and the wheeling birds dip and hover,

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and our heart is full of song. But sometimes we plunge on rising billows, with the wind wailing, and the rain pricking the surface with needle-points; we are weary and uncomforted; and we do not know why we suffer, or why we are glad. Sometimes I have a far-off hope that I shall know, that I shall understand and be satisfied; but sometimes, alas, I fear that my soul will flare out upon the darkness, and know no more either of weal or woe.

March 20, 1889.

I am reading a great deal now; but I find that I turn naturally to books of a sad intimate—books in which are revealed the sorrowful cares and troubles of sensitive people. Partly, I suppose, it is to get the sense of comfort which comes from feeling that others have suffered too; but partly to find, if I can, some medicine for my soul, in learning how others struggled out of the mire. Thus I have been reading Froude's Carlyle and Mrs. Carlyle's Letters over again, and they have moved me strangely and deeply. Perhaps it is mostly that I have felt, in these dark months, drawn to the society of two brave people—she was brave in her silences, he in the way in which he stuck doggedly to his work—who each suffered so horribly, so imaginatively, so inexplicably, and, alas, it would seem, so unnecessarily! Of course Carlyle indulged his moods, while Mrs. Carlyle fought against hers; moreover, he had the instinct for translating thoughts, instantaneously and volubly, into vehement picturesque speech. How he could bite in a picture, an ugly, ill-tempered one enough very often, as when he called Coleridge a "weltering" man! Many of his sketches are mere Gillray caricatures of people, seen through bile unutterable, exasperated by nervous irritability. And Mrs. Carlyle had a mordant wit enough. But still both of them had au fond a deep need of love, and a power of lavishing love. It comes out in the old man's whimsical notes and prefaces; and indeed it is true to say that if a person once actually penetrated into Carlyle's inner circle, he found himself loved hungrily and devotedly, and never forgotten or cast out. And as to Mrs. Carlyle, I suppose it was impossible to be near her and not to love her! This comes out in glimpses in her sad pathological letters. There is a scene she describes, how she returned home after some long and serious bout of illness, when her cook and housemaid rushed into the street, kissed her, and wept on her neck; while two of her men friends, Mr. Cooke and Lord Houghton, who called in the course of the evening, to her surprise and obvious pleasure, did the very same. The result on myself, after reading the books, is to feel myself one of the circle, to want to do something for them, to wring the necks of the cocks who disturbed Carlyle's sleep; and sometimes, alas, to rap the old man's fingers for his blind inconsiderateness and selfishness. I came the other day upon a passage in a former book of my own, where I said something sneering and derisive about the pair, and I felt deep shame and contrition for having written it—and, more than that, I felt a sort of disgust for the fact that I have spent so much time in writing fiction. Books like the Life of Carlyle and Mrs. Carlyle's Letters take the wind out of one's imaginative faculties altogether, because one is confronted with the real stuff of life in them. Life, that hard, stubborn, inconclusive, inconsistent, terrible thing! It is, of course, that very hardness and inconclusiveness that makes one turn to fiction. In fiction, one can round off the corners, repair mistakes, comfort, idealise, smooth things down, make error and weakness bear good fruit, choose, develop as one pleases. Not so with life, where things go from bad to worse, misunderstandings grow and multiply, suffering does not purge, sorrow does not uplift. That is the worst of fiction, that it deludes one into thinking that one can deal gently with life, finish off the picture, arrange things on one's own little principles; and then, as in my own case, life brings one up against some monstrous, grievous, intolerable fact, that one can neither look round or over, and the scales fall from one's eyes. With what courage, tranquillity or joy is one to meet a thoroughly disagreeable situation? The more one leans on the hope that it may amend, the weaker one grows; the thing to realise is that it is bad, that it is inevitable, that it has arrived, and to let the terror and misery do their worst, soak into the soul and not run off it. Only then can one hope to be different; only so can one climb the weary ladder of patience and faith.

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March 28, 1889.

Low-hung ragged grey skies, heaven smeared with watery vapours fleeting, broken and mournful, from the west—these above me, as I stand by the old lichened gate of the high wind-swept field at the top of the wold. In front a stretch of rough common, the dark-brown heather, the young gorse, bluish-green, the rusty red of soaked bracken, the pale ochre-coloured grass, all blent into a rich tint that pleases the eye with its wild freshness. To the left, the wide flat level of the plain, with low hills rising on its verge; to the right, a pale pool of water at the bottom of a secret valley, reflecting the leafless bushes that fringe it, catches the sunset gleam that rises in the west; and then range after range of wolds, with pale-green pastures, dark copses, fawn-coloured ploughland, here and there an emerald patch of young wheat. The air is fresh, soft and fragrant, laden with rain; the earth smells sweet; and the wild woodland scent comes blowing to me out of the heart of the spinney. In front of me glimmer the rough wheel-tracks of a grassy road that leads out on to the heath, and two obscure figures move slowly nearer among the tufted gorse. They seem to me, those two figures, charged with a grave significance, as though they came to bear me tidings, messengers bidden to seek and find me, like the men who visited Abraham at the close of the day.

As I linger, the day grows darker, the colour fading from leaf and blade; bright points of light flash out among the dark ridges from secluded farms, where the evening lamp is lit.

Sometimes on days like this, when the moisture hangs upon the hedges, when the streams talk hoarsely to themselves in grassy channels, when the road is full of pools, one is weary, unstrung and dissatisfied, faint of purpose, tired of labour, desiring neither activity nor rest; the soul sits brooding, like the black crows that I see in the leafless wood beneath me, perched silent and draggled on the tree-tops, just waiting for the sun and the dry keen airs to return; but to-day it is not so; I am full of a quiet hope, an acquiescent tranquillity. My heart talks gently to itself, as to an unseen friend, telling its designs, its wishes, its activities. I think of those I hold dear, all the world over; I am glad that they are alive, and believe that they think of me. All the air seems full of messages, thoughts and confidences and welcomes passing to and fro, binding souls to each other, and all to God. There seems to be nothing that one needs to do to-day except to live one's daily life; to be kind and joyful. To-day the road of pilgrimage lies very straight and clear between its fences, in an open ground, with neither valley nor hill, no by-path, no turning. One can even see the gables and chimneys of some grave house of welcome, "a roof for when the dark hours begin," full of pious company and smiling maidens. And not, it seems, a false security; one is not elated, confident, strong; one knows one's weakness; but I think that the Lord of the land has lately passed by with a smile, and given command that the pilgrims shall have a space of quiet. These birds, these branching trees, have not yet lost the joy of His passing. There, along the grassy tracks, His patient footsteps went, how short a time ago! One does not hope that all the journey will be easy and untroubled; there will be fresh burdens to be borne, dim valleys full of sighs to creep through, dark waters to wade across; these feet will stumble and bleed; these knees will be weary before the end; but to-day there is no doubt about the pilgrimage, no question of the far-off goal. The world is sad, perhaps, but sweet; sad as the homeless clouds that drift endlessly across the sky from marge to marge; sweet as the note of the hidden bird, that rises from moment to moment from the copse beside me, again and yet again, telling of a little heart that is content to wait, and not ill-pleased to be alone with its own soft thoughts.

The Altar Fire
April 4, 1889.

Down in the valley which runs below the house is a mill. I passed it to-day at dusk, and I thought I had never seen so characteristically English a scene. The wheel was silent, and the big boarded walls, dusted with flour, loomed up solemnly in the evening light. The full leat dashed merrily through the sluice, making holiday, like a child released from school. Behind was the stack-yard, for it is a farm as well as a mill; and in the byre I heard the grunting of comfortable pigs, and the soft pulling of the hay from the big racks by the bullocks. The fowls were going to roost, fluttering up every now and then into the big elder-bushes; while high above, in the apple-trees, I saw great turkeys settled precariously for the night. The orchard was silent, except for the murmur of the stream that bounds it. In the mill-house itself lights gleamed in the windows, and I saw a pleasant family-party gathered at their evening meal. The whole scene with its background of sloping meadows and budding woods so tranquil and contented—a scene which William Morris would have loved—for there is a pleasant grace of antiquity about the old house, a sense of homely and solid life, and of all the family associations that have gone to the making of it, generation after generation leaving its mark in the little alterations and additions that have met a need, or even satisfied a pleasant fancy.

The miller is an elderly man now, fond of work, prosperous, good-humoured. His son lives with him, and the house is full of grandchildren. I do not say that it puzzles me to divine what is the miller's view of life, because I think I know it. It is to make money honestly, to bring up his grandchildren virtuously and comfortably, to enjoy his daily work and his evening leisure. He is never idle, never preoccupied. He enjoys getting the mill started, seeing the flour stream into the sacks, he enjoys going to market, he enjoys going prosperously to church on Sundays, he enjoys his paper and his pipe. He has no exalted ideas, and he could not put a single emotion into words, but he is thoroughly honest, upright, manly, kind, sensible. A perfect life in many ways; and yet it is inconceivable to me that a man should live thus, without an aim, without a hope, without an object. He would think my own life even more inconceivable—that a man could deliberately sit down day after day to construct a story about imaginary people; and such respect as he feels for me, is mainly due to the fact that my writings bring me in a larger income than he could ever make from his mill. But of course he is a man who is normally healthy, and such men as he are the props of rural life. He is a good master, he sees that his men do their work, and are well housed. He is not generous exactly, but he is neighbourly. The question is whether such as he is the proper type of humanity. He represents the simple virtues at their high-water mark. He is entirely contented, and his desires are perfectly proportioned to their surroundings. He seems indeed to be exactly what the human creature ought to be. And yet his very virtues, his sense of justice and honesty, his sensible kindness, are the outcome of civilisation, and bear the stamp, in reality, of the dreams of saints and sages and idealists—the men who felt that things could be better, and who were made miserable by the imperfections of the world. I cannot help wondering, in a whimsical moment, what would have been the miller's thoughts of Christ, if he had been confronted with Him in the flesh. He would have thought of Him rather contemptuously, I think, as a bewildering, unpractical, emotional man. The miller would not have felt the appeal of unselfishness and unworldliness, because his ideal of life is tranquil prosperity. He would have merely wondered why people could not hold their tongues and mind their business: and yet he is a model citizen, and would be deeply annoyed if he were told he were not a sincere Christian. He accepts doctrinal statements as he would accept mathematical formulae, and he takes exactly as much of the Christian doctrine as suits him. Now when I compare myself with the miller, I feel that, as far as human usefulness goes, I am far lower in the scale. I am, when all is said and done, a drone in the hive, eating the honey I did not make. I do not take my share in the necessary labour of the world, I do not regulate a little community of labourers with uprightness and kindness, as he does. But still I suppose that my more sensitive organisation has a meaning in the scale of things. I cannot have been made and developed as I am, outside of the purpose of God. And yet my work in the world is not that of the passionate idealist, that kindles men with the hope of bettering and amending the world. What is it that my work does? It fills a vacant hour for leisurely people, it gives agreeable distraction, it furnishes some pleasant dreams. The most that I can say is that I have a wife whom I desire to make happy, and children whom I desire to bring up innocently, purely, vigorously.

Must one's hopes and beliefs be thus tentative and provisional? Must one walk through life, never fathoming

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the secret? I have myself abundance of material comfort, health, leisure. I know that for one like myself, there are hundreds less fortunate. Yet happiness in this world depends very little upon circumstances; it depends far more upon a certain mixture of selfishness, tranquillity, temperance, bodily vigour, and unimaginativeness. To be happy, one must be good-humouredly indifferent to the sufferings of others, and indisposed to forecast the possibilities of disaster. The sadness which must shadow the path of such as myself, is the sadness which comes of the power to see clearly the imperfections of the world, coupled with the inability to see through it, to discern the purpose of it all. One comforts oneself by the dim hope that the desire will be satisfied and the dream fulfilled; but has one any certainty of that? The temptation is to acquiesce in a sort of gentle cynicism, to take what one can get, to avoid as far as possible all deep attachments, all profound hopes, to steel oneself in indifference. That is what such men as my miller do instinctively; meanwhile one tries to believe that the melancholy that comes to such as Hamlet, the sadness of finding the world unintelligible, and painful, and full of shadows, is a noble melancholy, a superior sort of madness. Yet one is not content to bear, to suffer, to wait; one clutches desperately at light and warmth and joy, and alas, in joy and sorrow alike, one is ever and insupportably alone.

The Altar Fire
April 9, 1889.

I have been reading Rousseau lately, and find him a very incomprehensible figure. The Confessions, it must be said, is a dingy and sordid book. I cannot quite penetrate the motive which induced him to write them. It cannot have been pure vanity, because he does not spare himself; he might have made himself out a far more romantic and attractive character, if he had suppressed the shadows and heightened the lights. I am inclined to think that it was partly vanity and partly honesty. Vanity was the motive force, and honesty the accompanying mood. I do not suppose there is any document so transparently true in existence, and we ought to be thankful for that. It is customary to say that Rousseau had the soul of a lackey, by which I suppose is meant that he had a gross and vulgar nature, a thievish taste for low pleasures, and an ill-bred absence of consideration for others. He had all these qualities certainly, but he had a great deal more. He was upright and disinterested. He had a noble disregard of material advantages; he had an enthusiasm for virtue, a passionate love of humanity, a deep faith in God. He was not an intellectual man nor a philosopher; and yet what a ridiculous criticism is that which is generally made upon him, that his reasoning is bad, his knowledge scanty, and that people had better read Hobbes! The very reason which made Rousseau so tremendous an influence was that his point of view was poetical rather than philosophical; he was not too far removed from the souls to which he prophesied. What they needed was inspiration, emotion, and sentimental dogma; these he could give, and so he saved Europe from the philosophers and the cynics. Of course it is a deplorable life, tormented by strong animal passion, ill-health, insanity; but one tends to forget the prevalent coarseness of social tone at that date, not because Rousseau made any secret of it, but because none of his contemporaries dared to be so frank. If Rousseau had struck out a dozen episodes from the Confessions the result would have been a highly poetical, reflective, charming book. I can easily conceive that it might have a very bad effect upon an ingenuous mind, because it might be argued from what he says that moral lapses do not very much matter, and that emotional experience is worth the price of some animalism. Still more perniciously it might induce one to believe that a man may have a deep sense of religion side by side with an unbridled sensuality, and that one whose life is morally infamous may yet be able to quicken the moral temperature of great nations.

Some of the critics of Rousseau speak as though a man whose moral code was so loose, and whose practice was so libidinous, ought almost to have held his tongue on matters of high moral import. But this is a very false line of argument. A man may see a truth clearly, even if he cannot practise it; and an affirmation of a passionate belief in virtue is emphasised and accentuated when it comes from the lips of one who might be tempted rather to excuse his faults by preaching the irresistible character of evil.

To any one who reads wisely, and not in a censorious and Pharisaical spirit, this sordid record, which is yet interspersed with things so fragrant and beautiful, may have a sobering and uplifting effect. One sees a man hampered by ill-health, by a temperament childishly greedy of momentary pleasure, by irritability, suspicion, vanity and luxuriousness, again and again expressing a deep belief in unselfish emotion, a passionate desire to help struggling humanity onward, a child-like confidence in the goodness and tenderness of the Father of all. Disgust and admiration struggle strangely together. One cannot sympathise and yet one dare not condemn. One feels a horrible suspicion that there are dark and slimy corners, vile secrets, ugly memories, in the minds of hundreds of seemingly respectable people; the book brings one face to face with the mystery of evil; and yet through the gloom there steals a silvery radiance, a far-off hope, an infinite compassion for all weakness and imperfection. One can hardly love Rousseau, though one does not wonder that there were many found to do so; and instead of judging him, one cries out with horror at the slime of the pit where he lay bound.

The Altar Fire
April 14, 1889.

A delusion of which we must beware is the delusion that we can have a precise and accurate knowledge of spiritual things. This is a delusion into which the exponents of settled religions are apt to fall. The Roman Catholic, with his belief in the infallible Church, as the interpreter of God's spirit, which is nothing more than a belief in the inspiration of the majority, or even a belief in the inspiration of a bureaucracy, is the prey of this delusion. The Protestant, too, with his legal creed, built up of texts and precedents, in which the argumentative dicta of Apostles and Evangelists are as weighty and important as the words of the Saviour Himself, falls under this delusion. I read the other day a passage from a printed sermon of an orthodox type, an acrid outcry against Liberalism in religion, which may illustrate what I mean.

"To St. Paul and St. John," said the preacher, "the natural or carnal man is hopelessly remote from God; the same Lord who came to make possible for man this intimate communion with God is careful to make it clear that this communion is only possible to redeemed, regenerate man; prior to new birth into the Kingdom of God, far from being a son of God, man is, according to the Lord Himself, a child of the devil, however potentially capable of being translated from death into life."

Such teaching is so horrible and abominable that it is hard to find words to express one's sense of its shamefulness. To attribute it to the Christ, who came to seek and save what is lost, is an act of traitorous wickedness. If Christ had made it His business to thunder into the ears of the outcasts, whom He preferred to the Scribes and Pharisees, this appalling message, where would His teaching be? What message of hope would it hold for the soul? Such a view of Christianity as this insults alike the soul and the mind and the heart; it deliberately insults God; the message of Christ to the vilest human spirit is that it is indeed, in spite of all its corruption, its falls, its shame, in very truth God's own child; it calls upon the sinner to recognise it, it takes for granted that he feels it. The people whom Christ denounced with indignation so fiery, so blasting, that it even seems inconsistent with His perfect gentleness, were the people who thus professed to know and interpret the mind of God, who bade the sinner believe that He was a merciless judge, extreme to mark what is done amiss, when the one secret was that He was the tenderest and most loving of Fathers. But according to this preacher's terrible doctrine God pours into the world a stream of millions of human beings, all children of the devil, with instincts of a corrupt kind, hampered by dreadful inheritances, doomed, from their helpless and reluctant birth, to be sinful here and lost hereafter, and then prescribes to them a hard and difficult path, beset by clamorous guides, pointing in a hundred different directions, bidding them find the intricate way to His Heart, or perish. The truth is the precise opposite. The divine voice says to every man: "Hampered and sore hindered as you are, you are yet My dearly beloved son and child; only turn to Me, only open your heart to Me, only struggle, however faintly, to be what you can desire to be, and I will guide and lead you to Myself; all that is needed is that your heart should be on My side in the battle. Even your sins matter little, provided that you can say sincerely, 'If it were mine to choose and ordain, I would never willingly do evil again.' I know, better even than you yourself know, your difficulties, your temptations, your weaknesses; the sorrow they bring upon you is no dreary and vindictive punishment, it is the loving correction of My hand, and will bring you into peace yet, if only you will trust Me, and not despair."

The world is full of dreadful things, pains and sorrow and miseries, but the worst of all are the dreary wretchednesses of our own devising. The old detestable doctrine of Hell, the idea that the stubborn and perverse spirit can defy God, and make its black choice, is simply an attempt to glorify the strength of the human spirit and to belittle the Love of God. It denies the truth that God, if He chose, could show the darkest soul the beauty of holiness in so constraining a way that the frail nature must yield to the appeal. To deny this, is to deny the omnipotence of the Creator. No man would deliberately reject peace and joy, if he could see how to find them, in favour of feverish evil and ceaseless suffering. If we believe that God is perfect love, it is inconceivable that He should make a creature capable of defying His utmost tenderness, unless He had said to Himself, "I will make a poor wretch who shall defy Me, and he shall suffer endlessly and mercilessly in consequence." The truth is that God's Omnipotence is limited by His Omnipotence; He could not, for instance, abolish Himself, nor create a power that should be greater than He. But if He indeed can give to evil such vitality that it can defy Him for ever, then He is creating a power that is stronger than Himself.

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While the mystery of evil is unexplained, we must all be content to know that we do not know; for the thing is insoluble by human thought. If God be all-pervading, all-in-all, it is impossible to conceive anything coming into being alien to Himself, within Himself. If He created spirits able to choose evil, He must have created the evil for them to choose, for a man could not choose what did not exist; if man can defy God, God must have given him the thought of defiance, for no thought can enter the mind of man not permitted by God.

With this mystery unsolved, we cannot pretend to any knowledge of spiritual things; all that we can do is to recognise that the principle of Love is stronger than the principle of evil, and cling so far as we can cling to the former. But to set ourselves up to guide and direct other men, as the preacher did whose words I have quoted, is to set oneself in the place of God, and is a detestable tyranny. Only by our innate sense of Justice and Love can we apprehend God at all; and thus we are safe in this, that whenever we find any doctrine preached by any human being which insults our sense of justice and love, we may gladly reject it, saying that at least we will not believe that God gives us the power, on the one hand, to recognise our highest and truest instincts, and on the other directs us to outrage them. Such teaching as this we can infallibly recognise as a human perversion and not as a divine message; and we may thankfully and gratefully believe that the obstacles and difficulties, the temptations and troubles, which seem to be strewn so thickly in our path, are to develop rather than to thwart our strivings after good, and assuredly designed to minister to our ultimate happiness, rather than to our ultimate despair.

The Altar Fire
April 25, 1889.

I found to-day on a shelf a Manual of Preparation for Holy Communion, which was given me when I was confirmed. I stood a long time reading it, and little ghosts seemed to rustle in its pages. How well I remember using it, diligently and carefully, trying to force myself into the attitude of mind that it inculcated, and humbly and sincerely believing myself wicked, reprobate, stony-hearted, because I could not do it successfully. Shall I make a curious confession? From quite early days, the time of first waking in the morning has been apt to be for me a time of mental agitation; any unpleasant and humiliating incident, any disagreeable prospect, have always tended to dart into my brain, which, unstrung and weakened by sleep, has often been disposed to view things with a certain poignancy of distress at that hour—a distress which I always knew would vanish the moment I felt my feet on the carpet. I used to take advantage of this to use my Manual at that hour, because by that I secured a deeper intensity of repentance, and I have often succeeded in inducing a kind of tearful condition by those means, which I knew perfectly well to be artificial, but which yet seemed to comply with the rules of the process.

The kind of repentance indicated in the book as appropriate was a deep abasement, a horror and hatred of one's sinful propensities; and the language used seems to me now not only hollow and meaningless, but to insult the dignity of the soul, and to be indeed a profound confession of a want of confidence in the methods and purposes of God. Surely the right attitude is rather a manly, frank, and hopeful co-operation with God, than a degraded kind of humiliation. One was invited to contemplate God's detestation of sin, His awful and stainless holiness. How unreal, how utterly false! It is no more reasonable than to inculcate in human beings a sense of His hatred of weakness, of imperfection, of disease, of suffering. One might as well say that God's courage and beauty were so perfect that He had an impatient loathing for anything timid or ugly. If one said that being perfect He had an infinite pity for imperfection, that would be nearer the truth—but, even so, how far away! To believe in His perfect love and benevolence, one must also believe that all shortcomings, all temptations, all sufferings, somehow emanate from Him; that they are educative, and have an intense and beautiful significance—that is what one struggles, how hardly, to believe! Those childish sins, they were but the expression of the nature one received from His hand, that wilful, pleasure-loving, timid, fitful nature, which yet always desired the better part, if only it could compass it, choose it, love it. To hate one's nature and temperament and disposition, how impossible, unless one also hated the God who had bestowed them! And then, too, how inextricably intertwined! The very part of one's soul that made one peace-loving, affectionate, trustful was the very thing that led one into temptation. The very humility and diffidence that made one hate to seem or to be superior to others was the occasion of falling. The religion recommended was a religion of scrupulous saints and self-torturing ascetics; and the result of it was to make one, as experience widened and deepened, mournfully indifferent to an ideal which seemed so utterly out of one's reach. It is very difficult to make the right compromise. On the one hand, there is the sense of moral responsibility and effort, which one desires to cultivate; on the other hand, truth compels us to recognise our limitations, and to confess boldly the fact that moral improvement is a very difficult thing. The question is whether, in dealing with other people, we will declare what we believe to be the truth, or whether we will tamper with the truth for a good motive. Ought we to pretend that we think a person morally responsible and morally culpable, when we believe that he is neither, for the sake of trying to improve him?

My own practice now is to waste as little time as possible in ineffectual regrets, but to keep alive as far as I can in my heart a hope, a desire, that God will help to bring me nearer to the ideal that I can perceive and cannot reach. To-day, turning over the pages of the old Manual, with its fantastic strained phrases staring at me from the page, I cannot help wishing that some wise and tender person had been able to explain to me the conditions as I now see them. Probably the thing was incommunicable; one must learn for oneself both one's bitterness and one's joy.

The Altar Fire

May 2, 1889.

It sometimes happens to me—I suppose it happens to every one—to hear some well-meaning person play or sing at a party. Last night, at the Simpsons', a worthy young man, who was staying there, sang some Schubert songs in a perfectly correct, weak, inexpressive voice, accompanying himself in a wooden and inanimate fashion—the whole thing might have been turned out by a machine. I was, I suppose, in a fretful mood. "Good God!" I thought to myself, "what is the meaning of this woeful performance?—a party of absurd dressed-up people, who have eaten and drunk too much, sitting in a circle in this hot room listening gravely to this lugubrious performance! And this is the best that Schubert can do! This is the real Schubert! Here have I been all my life pouring pints of subjective emotion into this dreary writer of songs, believing that I was stirred and moved, when it was my own hopes and aspirations all along, which I was stuffing into this conventional vehicle, just as an ecclesiastical person puts his emotion into the grotesque repetitions of a liturgy." I thought to myself that I had made a discovery, and that all was vanity. Well, we thanked the singer gravely enough, and went on, smiling and grimacing, to talk local gossip. A few minutes later, a young girl, very shy and painfully ingenuous, was hauled protesting to the piano. I could see her hands tremble as she arranged her music, and the first chords she struck were halting and timid. Then she began to sing—it was some simple old-fashioned song—what had happened? the world was somehow different; she had one of those low thrilling voices, charged with utterly inexplicable emotion, haunted with old mysterious echoes out of some region of dreams, so near and yet so far away. I do not think that the girl had any great intensity of mind, or even of soul, neither was she a great performer; but there was some strange and beautiful quality about the voice, that now rose clear and sustained, while the accompaniment charged and tinged the pure notes with glad or mournful visions, like wine poured into water; now the voice fell and lingered, like a clear stream among rocks, pathetic, appealing, stirring a deep hunger of the spirit, and at the same time hinting at a hope, at a secret almost within one's grasp. How can one find words to express a thing so magical, so inexpressible? But it left me feeling as though to sing thus was the one thing worth doing in the world, because it seemed to interpret, to reveal, to sustain, to console—it was as though one opened a door in a noisy, dusty street, and saw through it a deep and silent glen, with woodlands stooping to a glimmering stream, with a blue stretch of plain beyond, and an expanse of sunny seas on the rim of the sky.

I have had similar experiences before. I have looked in a gallery at picture after picture—bright, soulless, accomplished things—and asked myself how it was possible for men and women to spend their time so elaborately to no purpose; and then one catches sight of some little sketch—a pool in the silence of high summer, the hot sun blazing on tall trees full of leaf, and rich water-plants, with a single figure in a moored boat, musing dreamily; and at once one is transported into a region of thrilled wonder. What is it all about? What is this sudden glimpse into a life so rich and strange? In what quiet country is it all enacted, what land of sweet visions? What do the tall trees and the sleeping pool hide from me, and in what romantic region of joy and sadness does the dreamer muse for ever, in the long afternoon, so full of warmth and fragrance and murmurous sound? That is the joy of art, of the symbol—that it remains and rests within itself, in a world that seems, for a moment, more real and true than the clamorous and obtrusive world we move in.

It is so all along the line—the hard and soulless art of technique and rule, of tradition and precept, however accomplished, however perfect it is, is worth nothing; it is only another dreary form of labour, unless through some faculty of the spirit, some vital intensity, or even some inexplicable felicity, not comprehended, not designed, not intended by the artist, it has this remote and suggestive quality. And thus suddenly, in the midst of this weary beating of instruments, this dull laying of colour by colour, of word by word, there breaks in the awful and holy presence; and then one feels, as I have said, that this thrill, this message, this oracle, is the one thing in the world worth striving after, and that indeed one may forgive all the dull efforts of those who cannot attain it, because perhaps they too have felt the call, and have thrown themselves into the eternal quest.

And it is true too of life; one is brought near to many people, and one asks oneself in a chilly discomfort what is the use of it all, living thus in hard and futile habits, on dull and conventional lines; and then again one is suddenly confronted by some personality, rich in hope and greatness, touching the simplest acts of life with an unearthly light, making them gracious and beautiful, and revealing them as the symbols of some pure and high

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mystery. Sometimes this is revealed by a word, sometimes by a glance; perfectly virtuous, capable, successful people may miss it; humble, simple, quiet people may have it. One cannot analyse it or describe it; but one has instantaneously a sense that life is a thing of large issues and great hopes; that every action and thought, however simple or commonplace, may be touched with this large quality of interest, of significance. It is a great happiness to meet such a person, because one goes in the strength of that heavenly meat many days and nights, knowing that life is worth living to the uttermost, and that it can all be beautiful and lofty and gracious; but the way to miss it, to lose that fine sense, is to have some dull and definite design of one's own, which makes one treat all the hours in which one cannot pursue it, but as the dirt and debris of a quarry. One must not, I see, wait for the golden moments of life, because there are no moments that are not golden, if one can but pierce into their essence. Yet how is one to realise this, to put it into practice? I have of late, in my vacuous mood, fallen into the dark error of thinking of the weary hours as of things that must be just lived through, and endured, and beguiled, if possible, until the fire again fall. But life is a larger and a nobler business than that; and one learns the lesson sooner, if one takes the suffering home to one's soul, not as a tedious interlude, but as the very melody and march of life itself, even though it crash into discords, or falter in a sombre monotony.

The point is that when one seems to be playing a part to one's own satisfaction, when one appears to oneself to be brilliant, suggestive, inspiriting, and genial, one is not necessarily ministering to other people; while, on the other hand, when one is dull, troubled, and anxious, out of heart and discontented, one may have the chance of making others happier. Here is a whimsical instance; in one of my dreariest days—I was in London on business—I sat next to an old friend, generally a very lively, brisk, and cheerful man, who appeared to me strangely silent and depressed. I led him on to talk freely, and he told me a long tale of anxieties and cares; his health was unsatisfactory, his plans promised ill. In trying to paint a brighter picture, to reassure and encourage him, I not only forgot my own troubles, but put some hope into him. We had met, two tired and dispirited men, we went away cheered and encouraged, aware that we were not each of us the only sufferer in the world and that there were possibilities still ahead of us all, nay, in our grip, if we only were not blind and forgetful.

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May 8, 1889.

I saw the other day a great artist working on a picture in its initial stages. There were a few lines of a design roughly traced, and there was a little picture beside him, where the scheme was roughly worked out; but the design itself was covered with strange wild smears of flaring, furious colour, flung crudely upon the canvas. "I find it impossible to believe," I said,—"forgive me for speaking thus—that these ragged stains and splashes of colour can ever be subdued and harmonised and co-ordinated." The great man smiled. "What would you have said, I wonder," he replied, "if you had seen, as I did once, a picture of Rossetti's in an early stage, with the face and arms of one of his strange and mysterious figures roughly painted in in the brightest ultramarine? Many of these fantastic scraps of colour will disappear altogether from the eye, just lending tone to something which is to be superimposed upon them."

I have since reflected that this makes a beautiful parable of our lives. Some element comes into our experience, some suffering, some anxiety, and we tend to say impatiently: "Well, whatever happens, this at least can never appear just or merciful." But God, like a wise and perfect artist, foresees the end in the beginning. We, who live in time and space, can merely see the rough, crude tints flung fiercely down, till the thing seems nothing but a frantic patchwork of angry hues; but God sees the blending and the softening; how the soft tints of face and hand, of river and tree, will steal over the coarse background, and gain their strength and glory from the hidden stains. Perhaps we have sometimes the comfort of seeing how some old and ugly experience melted into and strengthened some soft, bright quality of heart or mind. Staring mournfully as we do upon the tiny circumscribed space of life, we cannot conceive how the design will work itself out; but the day will come when we shall see it too; and perhaps the best moments of life are those when we have a secret inkling of the process that is going so slowly and surely forward, as the harsh lines and hues become the gracious lineaments of some sweet face, and from the glaring patch of hot colour is revealed the remote and shining expanse of a sunlit sea.

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May 14, 1889.

There used to be a favourite subject for scholastic disputation: WHETHER HERCULES IS IN THE MARBLE. The image is that of the sculptor, who sees the statue lie, so to speak, imbedded in the marble block, and whose duty is so to carve it, neither cutting too deep or too shallow, so that the perfect form is revealed. The idea of the disputation is the root-idea of idealistic philosophy. That each man is, as it were, a block of marble in which the ideal man is buried. The purpose of the educator ought to be to cut the form out, perikoptein, as Plato has it.

What a lofty and beautiful thought! To feel about oneself that the perfect form is there, and that the experience of life is the process of cutting it out—a process full of pain, perhaps, as the great splinters and flakes fly and drop—a rough, brutal business it seems at first, the hewing off great masses of stone, so firmly compacted, fused and concreted together. At first it seems unintelligible enough; but the dints become minuter and minuter, here a grain and there an atom, till the smooth and shapely limbs begin to take shape. At first it seems a mere bewildered loss, a sharp pang as one parts with what seems one's very self. How long before the barest structure becomes visible! but when one once gets a dim inkling of what is going on, as the stubborn temper yields, as the face takes on its noble frankness, and the shapely limbs emerge in all the glory of free line and curve, how gratefully and vehemently one co-operates, how little a thing the endurance of mere pain becomes by the side of the consciousness that one is growing into the likeness of the divine.

The Altar Fire
May 23, 1889.

When Goethe was writing Werther he wrote to his friend Kestner, "I am working out my own situation in art, for the consolation of gods and men." That is a fine thing to have said, proceeding from so sublime an egoism, so transcendent a pride, that it has hardly a disfiguring touch of vanity about it. He did not add that he was also working in the situation of his friend Kestner, and Kestner's wife, Charlotte; though when they objected to having been thus used as material, Goethe apologised profusely, and in the same breath told them, somewhat royally, that they ought to be proud to have been thus honoured. But that is the reason why one admires Goethe so much and worships him so little. One admires him for the way in which he strode ahead, turning corner after corner in the untravelled road of art, with such insight, such certainty, interpreting and giving form to the thought of the world; but one does not worship him, because he had no tenderness or care for humanity. He knew whither he was bound, but he did not trouble himself about his companions. The great leaders of the world are those who have said to others, "Come with me—let us find light and peace together!"—but Goethe said, "Follow me if you can!" Some one, writing of that age, said that it was a time when men had immense and far-reaching desires, but feeble wills. They lost themselves in the melancholy of Hamlet, and luxuriated in their own sorrows. That was not the case with Goethe himself; there never was an artist who was less irresolute.

One of the reasons, I think, why we are weak in art, at the present time, is because we refer everything to conventional ethical standards. We are always arraigning people at the bar of morality, and what we judge them mainly by is their strength or weakness of will. Blake thought differently. He always maintained that men would be judged for their intellectual and artistic perception, by their good or bad taste.

But surely it is all a deep-seated mistake; one might as well judge people for being tall or short, ugly or beautiful. The only thing for which I think most people would consent to be judged, which is after all what matters, is whether they have yielded consciously to mean, prudent, timid, conventional motives in life. It is not a question of success or failure; it is rather whether one has acted largely, freely, generously, or whether one has acted politely, timidly, prudently.

In the Gospel, the two things for which it seems to be indicated that men will be judged are, whether they have been kind, and whether they have improved upon what has been given them. And therefore the judgment seems to depend rather upon what men desire than upon what they effect, upon attitude rather than upon performance. But it is all a great mystery, because no amount of desiring seems to give us what we desire. The two plain duties are to commit ourselves to the Power that made us, and to desire to become what He would have us become; and one must also abstain from any attempt to judge other people—that is the unpardonable sin.

In art, then, a man does his best if, like Goethe, he works his own situation into art for the consolation of gods and men. His own situation is the only thing he can come near to perceiving; and if he draws it faithfully and beautifully, he consoles and he encourages. That is the best and noblest thing he can do, if he can express or depict anything which may make other men feel that they are not alone, that others are treading the same path, in sunshine or cloud; anything which may help others to persevere, to desire, to perceive. The worst sorrows in life are not its losses and misfortunes, but its fears. And when Goethe said that it was for the consolation of gods as well as of men, he said a sublime thing, for if we believe that God made and loved us, may we not sympathise with Him for our blindness and hopelessness, for all the sad sense of injustice and perplexity that we feel as we stumble on our way; all the accusing cries, all the despairing groans? Do not such things wound the heart of God? And if a man can be brave and patient, and trust Him utterly, and bid others trust Him, is He not thereby consoled?

In these dark months, in which I have suffered much, there rises at times in my heart a strong intuition that it is not for nothing that I suffer. I cannot divine whom it is to benefit, or how it is to benefit any one. One thing indeed saddens me, and that is to reflect that I have often allowed the record of old sadnesses to heighten my own sense of luxurious tranquillity and security. Not so will I err again. I will rather believe that a mighty price is being paid for a mightier joy, that we are not astray in the wilderness out of the way, but that we are rather a great and loving company, guided onward to some far-off city of God, with infinite tenderness, and a love so great that we cannot even comprehend its depth and its intensity.

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I sit, as I write, in my quiet room, the fragrant evening air floating in, surrounded by all the beloved familiar things that have made my life sweet, easy, and delightful—books and pictures, that have brought me so many messages of beauty. I hear the voice of Maud overhead—she is telling the children a story, and I hear their voices break out every now and then into eager questions. Yet in the midst of all this peace and sweetness, I walk in loneliness and gloom, hardly daring, so faithless and despairing I am, to let my heart go out to the love and goodness round me, for fear of losing it all, for fear that those souls I love may be withdrawn from me or I from them. In this I know that I am sadly and darkly wrong—the prudent coldness, the fear of sorrow pulls me back; irresolute, cowardly, base! Yet even so I must trust the Hand that moulded me, and the Will that bade me be, just so and not otherwise.

The Altar Fire
June 4, 1889.

It is a melancholy reflection how very little the highest and most elaborate culture effects in the direction of producing creative and original writing. Very few indeed of our great writers have been technically cultivated men. How little we look to the Universities, where a lifetime devoted to the study of the nuances of classical expression is considered well spent, for any literature which either raises the intellectual temperature or enriches the blood of the world! The fact is that the highly-cultivated man tends to find himself mentally hampered by his cultivation, to wade in a sea of glue, as Tennyson said. It is partly that highly-cultivated minds grow to be subservient to authority, and to contemn experiment as rash and obstreperous. Partly also the least movement of the mind dislodges such a pile of precedents and phrases and aphorisms, stored and amassed by diligent reading, that the mind is encumbered by the thought that most things worth saying have been so beautifully said that repetition is out of the question. Partly, too, a false and fastidious refinement lays hold of the mind; and an intellect trained in the fine perception of ancient expression is unable to pass through the earlier stages through which a writer must pass, when the stream flows broken and turbid, when it appears impossible to capture and define the idea which seems so intangible and indefinable.

What an original writer requires is to be able to see a subject for himself, and then to express it for himself. The only cultivation he needs is just enough to realise that there are differences of subject and differences of expression, just enough to discern the general lines upon which subjects can be evolved, and to perceive that lucidity, grace, and force of expression are attainable. The overcultivated man, after reading a masterpiece, is crushed and flattened under his admiration; but the effect of a masterpiece upon an original spirit, is to make him desire to say something else that rises in his soul, and to say it in his own words; all he needs in the way of training is just enough for him to master technique. The highly-cultivated man is as one dazzled by gazing upon the sun; he has no eyes for anything else; a bright disc, imprinted upon his eyes, floats between him and every other object.

The best illustration of this is the case of the great trio, Wordsworth, Southey, and Coleridge. All three started as poets. Coleridge was distracted from poetry into metaphysics, mainly, I believe, by his indulgence in opium, and the torturing contemplation of his own moral impotence. He turned to philosophy to see if he could find some clue to the bewildering riddle of life, and he lost his way among philosophical speculations. Southey, on the other hand, a man of Spartan virtue, became a highly-cultivated writer; he sate in his spacious library of well-selected books, arranged with a finical preciseness, apportioning his day between various literary pursuits. He made an income; he wrote excellent ephemeral volumes; he gained a somewhat dreary reputation. But Wordsworth, with his tiny bookshelf of odd tattered volumes, with pages of manuscript interleaved to supply missing passages, alone kept his heart and imagination active, by deliberate leisure, elaborate sauntering, unashamed idleness.

The reason why very few uneducated persons have been writers of note, is because they have been unable to take up the problem at the right point. A writer cannot start absolutely afresh; he must have the progress of thought behind him, and he must join the procession in due order. Therefore the best outfit for a writer is to have just enough cultivation to enable him to apprehend the drift and development of thought, to discern the social and emotional problems that are in the air, so that he can interpret—that is the secret—the thoughts that are astir, but which have not yet been brought to the birth. He must know enough and not too much; he must not dim his perception by acquainting himself in detail with what has been said or thought; he must not take off the freshness of his mind by too much intellectual gymnastic. It is a race across country for which he is preparing, and he will learn better what the practical difficulties are by daring excursions of his own, than by acquiring a formal suppleness in prescribed exercises.

The originality and the output of the writer are conditioned by his intellectual and vital energy. Most men require all their energy for the ordinary pursuits of life; all creative work is the result of a certain superabundance of mental force. If this force is used up in social duties, in professional business, even in the pursuit of a high degree of mental cultivation, originality must suffer; and therefore a man whose aim is to write, ought resolutely to limit his activities. What would be idleness in another is for him a storing of forces; what in an ordinary man would be malingering and procrastination, is for the writer the repose necessary to allow his energies to

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concentrate themselves upon his chosen work.

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June 8, 1889.

I have been looking at a catalogue, this morning, of the publications of a firm that is always bringing out new editions of old writers. I suppose they find a certain sale for these books, or they would not issue them; and yet I cannot conceive who buys them in their thousands, and still less who reads them. Teachers, perhaps, of literature; or people who are inspired by local lectures to go in search of culture? It is a great problem, this accumulation of literature; and it seems to me a very irrational thing to do to republish the complete works of old authors, who perhaps, in the midst of a large mass of essentially second-rate work, added half-a-dozen lyrics to the literature of the world. But surely it is time that we began to select? Whatever else there is time for in this world, there certainly is not time to read old half-forgotten second-rate work. Of course people who are making a special study of an age, a period, a school of writers, have to plough through a good deal that is not intrinsically worth reading; but, as a rule, when a man has done this, instead of saying boldly that the greater part of an author's writings may be wisely neglected and left alone, he loses himself in the critical discrimination and the chronological arrangement of inferior compositions; perhaps he rescues a few lines of merit out of a mass of writing; but there is hardly time now to read long ponderous poems for the sake of a few fine flashes of emotion and expression. What, as a rule, distinguishes the work of the amateur from the work of the great writer is that an amateur will retain a poem for the sake of a few good lines, whereas a great writer will relentlessly sacrifice a few fine phrases, if the whole structure and texture of the poem is loose and unsatisfactory. The only chance of writing something that will live is to be sure that the whole thing—book, essay, poem—is perfectly proportioned, firm, hammered, definite. The sign and seal of a great writer is that he has either the patience to improve loose work, or the courage to sacrifice it.

But most readers are so irrational, so submissive, so deferential, that they will swallow an author whole. They think dimly that they can arrive at a certain kind of culture by knowledge; but knowledge has nothing to do with it. The point is to have perception, emotion, discrimination. This is where education fails so grievously, that teachers of this independent and perceptive process are so rare, and that teaching too often falls into the hands of conscientious people, with good memories, who think that it benefits the mind to load it with facts and dates, and forget, or do not know, that what is needed is a sort of ardent inner fire, that consumes the debris and fuses the ore.

In that dry, ugly, depressing book, *Harry and Lucy*, which I used to read in my youth, there is a terrible father, kind, virtuous, conscientious, whose one idea seems to be to encourage the children to amass correct information. The party is driving in a chaise together, and Lucy begins to tell a story of a little girl, Kitty Maples by name, whom she has met at her Aunt Pierrepoint's; it seems as if the conversation is for once to be enlightened by a ray of human interest, but the name is hardly out of her lips, when the father directs her attention to a building beside the road, and adds, "Let us talk of things rather than of people." The building turns out to be a sugar-refinery, or some equally depressing place, and the unhappy children are initiated into its mysteries. What could be more cheerless and dispiriting? Lucy is represented as a high-spirited and somewhat giddy child, who is always being made aware of her moral deficiencies.

One looks forward sadly to the time when nature has been resolutely expelled by a knowledge of dynamics and statics, and when Lucy, with children of her own, will be directing their attention away from childish fancies, to the fact that the poker is a lever, and that curly hair is a good hygrometer.

Plenty of homely and simple virtues are inculcated in *Harry and Lucy*; but the attitude of mind that must inevitably result from such an education is hard, complacent, and superior. The children are scolded out of superficial vanities, and their place is occupied by a satanical sort of pride—the pride of possessing correct information.

What does one want to make of one's own children? One wants them to be generous, affectionate, simple-minded, just, temperate in the moral region. In the intellectual region, one desires them to be alert, eager, independent, perceptive, interested. I like them to ask a hundred questions about what they see and hear. I want them to be tender and compassionate to animals and insects. As for books, I want them to follow their own taste, but I surround them only with the best; but even so I wish them to have minds of their own, to have preferences,

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and reasons for their preferences. I do not want them to follow my taste, but to trust their own. I do not in the least care about their amassing correct information. It is much better that they should learn how to use books. It is very strange how theories of education remain impervious to development. In the days when books were scarce and expensive, when knowledge was not formulated and summarised, men had to depend largely on their own stores. But now, what is the use of books, if one is still to load one's memory with details? The training of memory is a very unimportant part of education nowadays; people with accurate memories are far too apt to trust them, and to despise verification. Indeed, a well-filled memory is a great snare, because it leads the possessor of it to believe, as I have said, that knowledge is culture. A good digestion is more important to a man than the possession of many sacks of corn; and what one ought rather to cultivate nowadays is mental digestion.

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June 14, 1889.

It is comforting to reflect how easy it is to abandon habits, and how soon a new habit takes the place of the old. Some months ago I put writing aside in despair, feeling that I was turning away from the most stable thing in life; yet even now I have learned largely to acquiesce in silence; the dreary and objectless mood visits me less and less frequently. What have I found to fill the place of the old habit? I have begun to read much more widely, and recognise how very ill-educated I am. In my writing days, I used to read mainly for the purposes of my books, or, if I turned aside to general reading at all, it was to personal, intimate, subjective books that I turned, books in which one could see the development of character, analyse emotion, acquire psychological experience; but now I find a growing interest in sociological and historical ideas; a mist begins to roll away from my mental horizon, and I realise how small was the circle in which I was walking. I sometimes find myself hoping that this may mean the possibility of a wider flight; but I do not, strange to say, care very much about the prospect. Just at present, I appear to myself to have been like a botanist walking in a great forest, looking out only for small typical specimens of certain classes of ground-plants, without any eyes for the luxurious vegetation, the beauty of the rich opening glade, the fallen day of the dense underwood.

Then too I have begun to read regularly with the children; I did it formerly, but only fitfully, and I am sorry to say grudgingly. But now it has become a matter of intense interest to me, to see how thoughts strike on eager and ingenuous minds. I find my trained imagination a great help here, because it gives me the power of clothing a bare scene with detail, and of giving vitality to an austere figure. I have made all sorts of discoveries, to me astonishing and delightful, about my children. I recognise some of their qualities and modes of thought; but there are whole ranges of qualities apparent, of which I cannot even guess the origin. One thinks of a child as deriving its nature from its parents, and its experience from its surroundings; but there is much beside that, original views, unexpected curiosities, and, strangest of all, things that seem almost like dim reminiscences floated out of other far-off lives. They seem to infer so much that they have never heard, to perceive so much that they have never seen, to know so much that they have never been told. Bewildering as this is in the intellectual region, it is still more marvellous in the moral region. They scorn, they shudder at, they approve, they love, as by some generous instinct, qualities of which they have had no experience. "I don't know what it is, but there is something wrong about Cromwell," said Maggie gravely, when we had been reading the history of the Commonwealth. Now Cromwell is just one of those characters which, as a rule, a child accepts as a model of rigid virtue and public spirit. Alec, whose taste is all for soldiers and sailors just now, and who might, one would have thought, have been dazzled by military glory, pronounced Napoleon "rather a common man." This arose purely in the boy's own mind, because I am very careful not to anticipate any judgments; I think it of the highest importance that they should learn to form their own opinions, so that we never attempt to criticise a character until we have mastered the facts of his life.

Another thing I am doing with them, which seems to me to develop intelligence pleasurable and rapidly, is to read them a passage or an episode, and then to require them to relate it or write it in their own words. I don't remember that this was ever done for me in the whole course of my elaborate education; and the speed with which they have acquired the art of seizing on salient points is to me simply marvellous. I have my reward in such remarks as these which Maud repeated to me yesterday. "Lessons," said Alec gravely, "have become ever so much more fun since we began to do them with father." "Fun!" said Maggie, with indignant emotion; "they are not lessons at all now!" I certainly do not observe any reluctance on their part to set to work, and I do see a considerable reluctance to stop; yet I don't think there is the least strain about it. But it is true that I save them all the stupid and irksome work that made my own acquisition of knowledge so bitter a thing. We read French together; my own early French lessons were positively disgusting, partly from the abominable little books on dirty paper and in bad type that we read, and partly from the absurd character of the books chosen. The Cid and Voltaire's Charles XII.! I used to wonder dimly how it was ever worth any one's while to string such ugly and meaningless sentences together. Now I read with the children Sans Famille and Colomba; and they acquire the language with incredible rapidity. I tell them any word they do not know; and we have a simple system of emulation, by which the one who recollects first a word we have previously had, receives a mark; and the one

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who first reaches a total of a hundred marks gets sixpence. The adorable nature of women! Maggie, whose verbal memory is excellent, went rapidly ahead, and spent her sixpence on a present to console Alec for the indignity of having been beaten. Then, too, they write letters in French to their mother, which are solemnly sent by post. It is not very idiomatic French, but it is amazingly flexible; and it is delicious to see the children at breakfast watching Maud as she opens the letters and smiles over them.

Perhaps this is not a very exalted type of education; it certainly seems to fulfil its purpose very wonderfully in making them alert, inquisitive, eager, and without any shadow of priggishness. It is established as a principle that it is stupid not to know things, and still more stupid to try and make other people aware that you know them; and the apologies with which Maggie translated a French menu at a house where we stayed with the children the other day were delightful to behold.

I am very anxious that they should not be priggish, and I do not think they are in any danger of becoming so. I suppose I rather skim the cream of their education, and leave the duller part to the governess, a nice, tranquil person, who lives in the village, the daughter of a previous vicar, and comes in in the mornings. I don't mean that their interest and alertness does not vary, but they are obedient and active-minded children, and they prefer their lessons with me so much that it has not occurred to them to be bored. If they flag, I don't press them. I tell them a story, or show them pictures. While I write these words in my armchair, they are sitting at the table, writing an account of something I have told them. Maggie lays down her pen with a sigh of satisfaction. "There, that is beautiful! But I dare say it is not as good as yours, Alec." "Don't interrupt me," says Alec sternly, "and don't push against me when I'm busy." Maggie looks round and concludes that I am busy too. In a minute, Alec will have done, and then I shall read the two pieces aloud; then we shall criticise them respectfully. The aim is to make them frankly recognise the good points of each other's compositions as well as the weak points, and this they are very ready to do.

In all this I do not neglect the physical side. They can ride and swim. They go out in all weathers and get wholesomely wet, dirty, and tired. Games are a difficulty, but I want them to be able, if necessary, to do without games. We botanise, we look for nests, we geologise, we study birds through glasses, we garden. It is all very unscientific, but they observe, they perceive, they love the country. Moreover, Maud has a passion for knowing all the village people, and takes the children with her, so that they really know the village-folk all round; they are certainly tremendously happy and interested in everything. Of course they are volatile in their tastes, but I rather encourage that. I know that in the little old moral books the idea was that nothing should be taken up by children, unless it was done thoroughly and perseveringly; but I had rather that they had a wide experience; the time to select and settle down upon a pursuit is not yet, and I had rather that they found out for themselves what they care about, than practise them in a premature patience. The only thing I object to is their taking up something which they have tried and dropped; then I do require a pledge that they shall stick to it. I say to them, "I don't mind how many things you try, and if you find you don't care about one, you may give it up when you have given it a trial; but it is a bad thing to be always changing, and everybody can't do everything; so don't take up this particular thing again, unless you can give a good reason for thinking you will keep to it."

One of the things I insist upon their doing, whether they like it or not, is learning to play the piano. There are innumerable people, I find, who regret not having been made to overcome the initial difficulties of music; and the only condition I make is, that they shall be allowed to stop when they can play a simple piece of music at sight correctly, and when they have learnt the simple rules of harmony.

For teaching them geography, I have a simple plan; my own early geography lessons were to my recollection singularly dismal. I used, as far as I can remember, to learn lists of towns, rivers, capes, and mountains. Then there were horrible lists of exports and imports, such as hides, jute, and hardware. I did not know what any of the things were, and no one explained them to me. What we do now is this. I read up a book of travels, and then we travel in a country by means of atlases, while I describe the sort of landscape we should see, the inhabitants, their occupations, their religion, and show the children pictures. I can only say that it seems to be a success. They learn arithmetic with their governess, and what is aimed at is rapid and accurate calculations. As for religious instruction, we read portions of the Bible, striking scenes and stories, carefully selected, and the Gospel story, with plenty of pictures. But here I own I find a difficulty. With regard to the Old Testament, I have frankly told them that many of the stories are legends and exaggerations, like the legends of other nations. That is not difficult; I say that in old days when people did not understand science, many things seemed possible which we know now

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to be impossible; and that things which happened naturally, were often thought to have happened supernaturally; moreover, that both imagination and exaggeration crept in about famous people. I am sure that there is a great danger in teaching intelligent children that the Bible is all literally true. And then the difficulty comes in, that they ask artlessly whether such a story as the miracle of Cana, or the feeding of the five thousand, is true. I reply frankly that we cannot be sure; that the people who wrote it down believed it to be true, but that it came to them by hearsay; and the children seem to have no difficulty about the matter. Then, too, I do not want them to be too familiar, as children, with the words of Christ, because I am sure that it is a fact that, for many people, a mechanical familiarity with the Gospel language simply blurs and weakens the marvellous significance and beauty of the thought. It becomes so crystallised that they cannot penetrate it. I have treated some parts of the Gospel after the fashion of Philochristus, telling them a story, as though seen by some earnest spectator. I find that they take the deepest interest in these stories, and that the figure of Christ is very real and august to them. But I teach them no doctrine except the very simplest—the Fatherhood of God, the Divinity of Christ, the indwelling voice of the Spirit; and I am sure that religion is a pure, sweet, vital force in their lives, not a harsh thing, a question of sin and punishment, but a matter of Love, Strength, Forgiveness, Holiness. The one thing I try to show them is that God was not, as I used to think, the property, so to speak, of the Jews; but that He is behind and above every race and nation, slowly leading them to the light. The two things I will not allow them to think of are the Doctrines of the Fall and the Atonement; the doctrine of the Fall is contrary to all true knowledge, the doctrine of the Atonement is inconsistent with every idea of justice. But it is a difficult matter. They will hear sermons, and Alec, at school, may have dogmatic instruction given him; but I shall prepare him for Confirmation here, and have him confirmed at home, and thus the main difficulty will be avoided; neither do I conceal from them that good people think very differently on these points. It is curious to remember that, brought up as I was on strict Evangelical lines, I was early inculcated into the sin of schism, with the result that I hurried with my Puritan nurse swiftly and violently by a Roman Catholic chapel and a Wesleyan meeting-house which we used to pass in our walks, with a sense of horror and wickedness in the air. Indeed, I remember once asking my mother why God did not rain down fire and brimstone on these two places of worship, and received a very unsatisfactory answer. To develop such a spirit was, it seems to me, a monstrous sin against Christian charity, and my children shall be saved from that.

Meantime my own hours are increasingly filled. It takes me a long time to prepare for the children's lessons; and I have my reward abundantly in the delight of seeing their intelligence, their perception, their interest grow. I am determined that the beginnings of knowledge shall be for them a primrose path; I suppose there will have to be some stricter mental discipline later; but they shall begin by thinking and expecting things to be interesting and delightful, before they realise that things can also be hard and dull.

The Altar Fire
June 20, 1889.

When I read books on education, when I listen to the talk of educational theorists, when I see syllabuses and schedules, schemes and curricula, a great depression settles on my mind; I feel I have no interest in education, and a deep distrust of theoretical methods. These things seem to aim at missing the very thing of which we are in search, and to lose themselves in a sort of childish game, a marshalling of processions, a lust for organisation. I care so intensely for what it all means, I loathe so deeply the motives that seem at work. I suppose that the ordinary man considers a species of success, a bettering of himself, the acquisition of money and position and respectability, to be the end of life; and such as these look upon education primarily as a means of arriving at their object. Such was the old education given by the sophists, which aimed at turning out a well-balanced, effective man. But all this, it seems to me, has the wrong end in view. The success of it depends upon the fact that every one is not so capable of rising, that the rank and file must be in the background, forming the material out of which the successful man makes his combinations, and whom he contrives to despoil.

The result of it is that the well-educated man becomes hard, brisk, complacent, contemptuous, knowing his own worth, using his equipment for precise and definite ends.

My idea would rather be that education should aim at teaching people how to be happy without success; because the shadow of success is vulgarity, and vulgarity is the one thing which education ought to extinguish. What I desire is that men should learn to see what is beautiful, to find pleasure in homely work, to fill leisure with innocent enjoyment. If education, as the term is generally used, were widely and universally successful, the whole fabric of a nation would collapse, because no one thus educated would acquiesce in the performance of humble work. It is commonly said that education ought to make men dissatisfied, and teach them to desire to improve their position. It is a pestilent heresy. It ought to teach them to be satisfied with simple conditions, and to improve themselves rather than their position—the end of it ought to be to produce content. Suppose, for an instant—it sounds a fantastic hypothesis—that a man born in the country, in the labouring class, were fond of field-work, a lover of the sights of nature in all her aspects, fond of good literature, why should he seek to change his conditions? But education tends to make boys and girls fond of excitement, fond of town sociabilities and amusements, till only the dull and unambitious are content to remain in the country. And yet the country work will have to be done until the end of time.

It is a dark problem; but it seems to me that we are only saved from disaster, in our well-meant efforts, by the simple fact that we cannot make humanity what we so short-sightedly desire to make it; that the dull, uninspired, unambitious element has an endurance and a permanence which we cannot change if we would, and which it is well for us that we cannot change; and that in spite of our curricula and schedules, mankind marches quietly upon its way to its unknown goal.

The Altar Fire
June 28, 1889.

An old friend has been staying with us, a very interesting man for many reasons, but principally for the fact that he combines two sets of qualities that are rarely found together. He has strong artistic instincts; he would like, I think, to have been a painter; he has a deep love of nature, woodland places and quiet fields; he loves old and beautiful buildings with a tenderness that makes it a real misery to him to think of their destruction, and even their renovation; and he has, too, the poetic passion for flowers; he is happiest in his garden. But beside all this, he has the Puritan virtues strongly developed; he loves work, and duty, and simplicity of life, with all his heart; he is an almost rigid judge of conduct and character, and sometimes flashes out in a half Pharisaical scorn against meanness, selfishness, and weakness. He is naturally a pure Ruskinian; he would like to destroy railways and machinery and manufactories; he would like working-men to enjoy their work, and dance together on the village green in the evenings; but he is not a faddist at all, and has the healthiest and simplest power of enjoyment. His severity has mellowed with age, while his love of beauty has, I think, increased; he does not care for argument, and is apt to say pathetically that he knows that his fellow-disputant is right, but that he cannot change his opinions, and does not desire to. He is passing, it seems to me, into a very gracious and soft twilight of life; he grows more patient, more tender, more serene. His face, always beautiful, has taken on an added beauty of faithful service and gracious sweetness.

We began one evening to discuss a book that has lately been published, a book of very sad, beautiful, wise, intimate letters, written by a woman of great perception, high intellectual gifts and passionate affections. These letters were published, not long after her death, by her children, to whom many of them were addressed.

He had read the book, I found, with deep emotion; but he said very decidedly that it ought not to have been published, at all events so soon after the writer's death. I am inclined to defer greatly to his judgment, and still more to his taste, and I have therefore read the book again to see if I am inclined to alter my mind. I find that my feeling is the exact opposite of his in every way. I feel humbly and deeply grateful to the children who have given the letters to the world. Of course if there had been any idea in the mind of the writer that they would be published, she would probably have been far more reticent; but, as it was, she spoke with a perfect openness and simplicity of all that was in her mind. It is curious to reflect that I met the writer more than once, and thought her a cold, hard, unsympathetic woman. She had to endure many sorrows and bereavements, losing, by untimely death, those whom she most loved; but the revelation of her pain and bewilderment, and the sublime and loving resignation with which she bore it, has been to me a deep, holy, and reviving experience. Here was one who felt grief acutely, rebelliously, and passionately, yet whom sorrow did not sear or harden, suffering did not make self-absorbed or morbid, or pain make callous. Her love flowed out more richly and tenderly than ever to those who were left, even though the loss of those whom she loved remained an unfading grief, an open wound. She did not even shun the scenes and houses that reminded her of her bereavements; she did not withdraw from life, she made no parade of her sorrows. The whole thing is so wholesome, so patient, so devoted, that it has shown me, I venture to say, a higher possibility in human nature of bearing intolerable calamities with sweetness and courage, than I had dared to believe. It seems to me that nothing more wise or brave could have been done by the survivors than to make these letters accessible to others. We English people make such a secret of our feelings, are so stubbornly reticent about the wrong things, have so false and stupid a sense of decorum, that I am infinitely grateful for this glimpse of a pure, patient, and devoted heart. It seems to me that the one thing worth knowing in this world is what other people think and feel about the great experiences of life. The writers who have helped the world most are those who have gone deepest into the heart; but the dullest part of our conventionality is that when a man disguises the secrets of his soul in a play, a novel, a lyric, he is supposed to have helped us and ministered to our deepest needs; but if he speaks directly, in his own voice and person, of these things, he is at once accused of egotism and indecorum. It is not that we dislike sentiment and feeling; we value it as much as any nation; but we think that it must be spoken of symbolically and indirectly. We do not consider a man egotistical, if he will only give himself a feigned name, and write of his experiences in the third person. But if he uses the personal pronoun, he is thought to be shameless. There are even people who consider it more decent to say "one feels and one thinks," than to say "I feel and I think." The thing that I most desire, in intercourse with other men and

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women, is that they should talk frankly of themselves, their hopes and fears, their beliefs and uncertainties. Yet how many people can do that? Part of our English shyness is shown by the fact that people are often curiously cautious about what they say, but entirely indiscreet in what they write. The only books which possess a real and abiding vitality are those in which personality is freely and frankly revealed. Of course there are one or two authors like Shakespeare who seem to have had a power of penetrating and getting inside any personality, but, apart from them, the books that go on being read and re-read are the books in which one seems to clasp hands with a human soul.

I said many of these things to my friend, and he replied that he thought I was probably right, but that he could not change his opinion. He would not have had these letters published until all the survivors were dead. He did not think that the people who liked the book were actuated by good motives, but had merely a desire to penetrate behind the due and decent privacies of life; and he would have stopped the publication of such letters if he could, because even if people liked them, it was not good for them to read them. He said that he himself felt on reading the book as if he had been listening at keyholes, or peeping in at windows, and seeing the natural endearments of husband and wife, mother and children.

I said that what seemed to me to make a difference was whether the people thus espied were conscious of the espionage or not; and that it was no more improper to have such things revealed IN A BOOK, than to have them described in a novel or shown upon the stage. Moreover, it seemed to me, I said, as though to reveal such things in a book was the perfect compromise. I feel strongly that each home, each circle has a right to its own privacy; but I am not ashamed of my natural feelings and affections, and, by allowing them to appear in a book, I feel that I am just speaking of them simply to those who will understand. I desire communion with all sympathetic and like-minded persons; but one's actual circle of friends is limited by time and space and physical conditions. People talk of books as if every one in the world was compelled to read them. My own idea of a book is that it provides a medium by which one may commune confidentially with people whom one may never see, but whom one is glad to know to be alive. One can make friends through one's books with people with whom one agrees in spirit, but whose bodily presence, modes of life, reticences, habits, would erect a barrier to social intercourse. It is so much easier to love and understand people through their books than through their conversation. In books they put down their best, truest, most deliberate thoughts; in talk, they are at the mercy of a thousand accidents and sensations. There were people who objected to the publication of the Browning love-letters. To me they were the sacred and beautiful record of an intensely holy and passionate relation between two great souls; and I can afford to disregard and to condemn the people who thought the book strained, unconventional and shameless, for the sake of those whose faith in love and beauty was richly and generously nurtured by it.

It seems to me that the whole progress of life and thought, of love and charity, depends upon our coming to understand each other. The hostile seclusion which some desire is really a savage and almost animal inheritance; and the best part of civilisation has sprung from the generous self-revelation of kindly and honourable souls.

I am not even deterred, in a case of this kind, by wondering whether the person concerned would have liked or disliked the publication of these letters. I feel no sort of doubt that, as far as I am concerned, she would be only too willing that I should thus have read and loved them, and I cannot believe that the disapprobation of a few austere people, or the curiosity of a few vulgar people, would weigh in the balance for a moment against the joy of like-minded spirits.

The worst dissatisfaction of life is the difficulty one has in drawing near to others, the foolish hardness, often only superficial, which makes one hold back from and repudiate intimacies. If I had known and loved a great and worthy spirit, and had been the recipient of his confidences, I should hold it a solemn duty to tell the world what I knew. I should care nothing for the carping of the cold and unsympathetic, but I should base my decision on the approval of all loving and generous souls. This seems to me the highest service that art can render, and if it be said that no question of art comes in, in the publication of such records as these letters, I would reply that they are themselves works of the highest and most instinctive art, because the world, its relations and affections, its loss and grief, its pain and suffering, are here seen patiently mirrored and perfectly expressed by a most perceptive personality. The moment that emotions are depicted and represented, that moment they have felt the holy and transfiguring power of art; and then they pass out of the region of stuffy conventions and commonplace decorums into a finer and freer air. I do not deny that there is much vulgar inquisitiveness abroad, but that matters little; and, for myself, I am glad to think that the world is moving in the direction of a greater frankness. I do not mean that a

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man has not a right to live his life privately, in his own house and his own circle, if he wills. But if that life is lived simply, generously and bravely, I welcome any ripple or ray from it that breaks in light and fragrance upon the harsher and uglier world.

The Altar Fire
July 1, 1889.

I have just read an interesting sentence. I don't know where it comes from—I saw it in a book of extracts.

"I am more and more convinced that the cure for sentiment, as for all weakened forms of strong things, is not to refuse to feel it, but to feel more in it. This seems to me to make the whole difference between a true and a false asceticism. The false goes for getting rid of what it is afraid of; the true goes for using and making it serve, the one empties, the other fills; the one abstracts, the other concentrates."

There is a great deal of truth in this, and it is manfully put. Where it fails is, I think, in assuming an amount of will—power and resolution in human character, which I suspect is not there. The system the writer recommends is a system that a strong character instinctively practises, moving through sentiment to emotion, naturally, and by a sturdy growth. But to tell a man to feel more in a thing, is like telling a man to be intelligent, benevolent, wise. It is just what no one can do. The various grades of emotion are not things like examinations, in which one can successively graduate. They are expressions of temperament. The sentimental man is the man who can go thus far and no farther. How shall one acquire vigour and generosity? By behaving as if one was vigorous and generous, when one is neither? I do not think it can be done in that way. One can do something to check a tendency, very little to deepen it. What the writer calls false asceticism is the only brave and wholesome refuge of people, who know themselves well enough to know that they cannot trust themselves. Take the case of one's relations with other people. If a man drifts into sentimental relations with other people, attracted by charm of any kind, and knowing quite well that the relation is built on charm, and that he will not be able to follow it into truer regions, I think he had probably better try to keep himself in check, not embrace a sentimental relation with a mild hope that it may develop into a real devotion. The strong man may try experiments, even though he burns his fingers. The weak man had better not meddle with the instruments and fiery fluids at all.

I am myself just strong enough to dislike sentiment, to turn faint in the sickly, mawkish air. But I am not strong enough to charge it with vivid life. Moreover, the danger of a strong character taking up the anti-ascetic position is that he is apt to degenerate into a man like Goethe, who plucked the fragrant blooms on every side, and threw them relentlessly away when he had inhaled their sweetness. That is a cruel business, unless there is a very wise and tender heart behind.

Yet again, reconsidering the whole problem, I am not sure that the whole suggestion, taken as advice, is not at fault. I think it is making a melancholy, casuistical, ethical business out of what ought to be a natural process. I think it is vitiated by a principle which vitiates so much of the advice of moralists, the principle that one ought to aim at completeness and perfection. I don't believe that is the secret of life—indeed I think it is all the other way. One must of course do one's best to resist immoral, low, sensuous tendencies; but otherwise I believe that one ought to drink as much as one's glass can hold of pure and beautiful influences. If sentiment is the nearest that a man can come to emotion, I think he had better take it thankfully. It is this ethical prudence which is always weighing issues, and pulling up the plant to see how it grows, which is the weakening and the stunting thing. Of course any principle can be used sophistically; but I think that many people commit a kind of idolatry by worshipping their rules and principles rather than by trusting God. It develops a larger and freer life, if one is not too cautious, too precise. Of course one must follow what light one has, and all lights are lit from God; but if one watches the lanterns of moralists too anxiously, one may forget the stars.

The Altar Fire

July 8, 1889.

I lose myself sometimes in a dream of misery in thinking of the baseness and meanness and squalor that condition the lives of so many of the poor. Not that it is not possible under those conditions to live lives of simplicity and dignity and beauty. It is perfectly possible, but only, I think, for strong natures possessing a combination of qualities—virtue, industry, sense, prudence, and above all good physical health. There must still be thousands of lives which could be happy and simple and virtuous under more secure conditions, which are marred and degraded by the influences under which they are nurtured. Yet what can the more fortunate individual do in the matter? If all the rich men in England were to resign to-morrow all the wealth they possessed, reserving only a bare modicum of subsistence, the matter could not be amended. Even that wealth could not be wisely applied; and, if equally divided, it would hardly make any appreciable difference. What is worse, it would not alter the baneful influences in the least; it would give no increased security of material conditions, and it would not affect the point at issue, namely, the tone and quality of thought and feeling, where the only hope of real amelioration lies, and which is really the source and root of our social evils.

Moreover, the real difficulty is not to see what the classes on whom the problem presses most grimly NEED, but what they WANT. It is no use theorising about it, and providing elegant remedies which will not touch the evil. What one requires to know is what those natures, who lie buried in this weltering tide, and are dissatisfied and tormented by it, really desire. It is no use trying to provide a paradise on the farther bank of the river, till we have constructed bridges to cross the gulf. What one wants is that some one from the darkness of the other side should speak articulately and boldly what they claim, what they could use. It is not enough to have a wistful cry for help ringing in our ears; one wants a philosophical or statesmanlike demand—just the very thing which from the nature of the case we cannot get. It may be that education will make this possible; but at present education seems merely to be a ladder let down into the abyss, by which a few stronger natures can climb out of it, with horror and contempt in their hearts of what they have left behind. The question that stares one in the face is, is there honest work for all to do, if all were strong and virtuous? The answer at present seems to be in the negative; and the problem seems to be solved only by the fact that all are not capable of honest work, and that the weaklings give the strong their opportunity. What, again, one asks oneself, is the use of contriving more leisure for those who could not use it well? Then, too, under present conditions, the survival of the unfittest seems to be assured. Those breed most freely and recklessly of whom it may be said that, for the interests of civilisation, it is least desirable that they should perpetuate their kind. The problem too is so complicated, that it requires a gigantic faith in a reformer to suggest the sowing of seed of which he can never hope to see the fruit. The situation is one which tends to develop vehement and passionate prophets, dealing in vague and remote generalisations, when what one needs is practical prudence, and the effective power of foreseeing contingencies. One who like myself loves security, leisure, beauty and peace, and is actuated by a vague and benevolent wish that all should have the same opportunities as myself, feels himself a mere sentimentalist in the matter, without a single effective quality. I can see the problem, I can grieve over it, I can feel my faith in God totter under the weight of it, but that is all.

July 15, 1889.

One of the hardest things to face in the world is the grim fact that our power of self-improvement is limited. Of some qualities we do not even possess the germs. Some qualities we have in minute quantities, but hardly capable of development; some few qualities we possess in fuller measure, and they are capable of development; but even so, our total capacity of growth is limited, conditioned by our vital energy, and we have to face the fact that if we develop one set of qualities we must neglect another set.

I think of it in a whimsical and fantastic image, the best I can find. Imagine a box in which there are a number of objects like puff-balls, each with a certain life of its own, half-filling the box. Some of the puff-balls are small, hard, sterile; others are soft and expansive; some grow quickly in warmth and light, others fare better in cold and darkness. The process of growth begins: some of them increase in size and press themselves into every crevice, enclosing and enfolding the others; even so the growth of the whole mass is conditioned by the size of the box, and when the box is full, the power of increase is at an end.

The box, to interpret the fable, is our character with its possibilities. The conditions which develop the various qualities are the conditions of our lives, our health, our income, our education, the people who surround us; but even the qualities themselves have their limitations. Two people may grow up under almost precisely similar influences, and yet remain different to the end; two characters may be placed in difficult and bracing circumstances; the effect upon one character is to train the quality of self-reliance, on the other to produce a moral collapse. Some people do their growing early and then stop altogether, becoming impervious to new opinions and new influences. Some people go on growing to the end.

If one develops one side of one's nature, as the intellectual or artistic, one probably suffers on the emotional or moral side. The pain which the perceptive man feels in surveying this process is apt to be very acute. He may see that he lacks certain qualities altogether and yet be unable to develop them. He may find in himself some patent and even gross fault, and be unable to cure it. The only hope for any of us is that we do not know the expansive force of our qualities, nor the size of the box; and therefore it is reasonable to go on trying and desiring; and as long as one can do that, it is clear that there is still room for growth. The worst shadow of all is to find, as one goes on, a certain indifference creeping over one. One accepts a fault as a part of one's nature; one ceases to care about what appears unattainable.

It may be said that this is a fatalistic theory, and leads to a mild inactivity; but the question rather is whether it is true, whether it is attested by experience. One improves, not by overlooking facts, in however generous and enthusiastic a spirit, but by facing facts, and making the best use one can of them. One must resolutely try to submit oneself to favourable conditions, fertilising influences. And much more must one do that in the case of those for whom one is responsible. In the case of my own two children, for instance, my one desire is to surround them with the best influences I can. Even there one makes mistakes, no doubt, because one cannot test the expansive power of their qualities; but one can observe the conditions under which they seem to develop best, and apply them. To lavish love and tenderness on some children serves to concentrate their thoughts upon themselves, and makes them expect to find all difficulties smoothed away; on other more generous natures, it produces a glow of responsive gratitude and affection, a desire to fulfil the hopes formed of them by those who love them. The most difficult cases of all are the cases of temperaments without loyal affection, but with much natural charm. Those are the people who get what is called 'spoilt,' because it is so much easier to believe in the existence of qualities which are superficially displayed than in qualities which lie too deep for facile expression. One comes across cases of children of intense emotional natures, and very little power of expressing their feelings, or of showing their affection. Of course, too, example is far more potent than precept, and it is very difficult for parents to simulate a high-mindedness and an affectionateness that they do not themselves possess, even if they are sincerely anxious that their children should grow up high-minded and affectionate. One of the darkest shadows of my present condition is the fear that any revelation of my own weakness and emptiness may discourage and distort my children's characters; and the watchfulness which this requires increases the strain under which I suffer, because it is a hard fact that an example set for a noble and an unselfish motive is not nearly so potent as an example set naturally, sweetly, and generously, with no particular consciousness of motive behind it at all.

The Altar Fire

July 15, 1889.

July 18, 1889.

I have just heard of the sudden death of an old friend. Francis Willett was a writer of some distinction, whose acquaintance I made in my first years in London. He was a tall, slim man, dark of complexion, who would have been called very handsome, if it had not been for a rather burdened air that he wore. As it was, people tended rather to pity him, and to speak of him as somewhat of a mystery. I never knew anything about the background of his life. He must have had some small means of his own, and he lived in rooms, in rather an out-of-the-way street near Regent's Park. One used to see him occasionally in London, walking rapidly, almost always alone, and very rarely I encountered him at parties, always wearing a slightly regretful air, as though he were wishing himself away. He wrote a good deal, reviewed books, and, I suppose, contrived to make enough to live on by his pen. He once spoke of himself as being in the happy position of being able to exist without writing, but forced to purchase all small luxuries by work. He published two or three books of short stories and sketches of travel, delicate pieces of work, which had no great sale, but gave him a recognised position among men of letters. I drifted into a kind of friendship with him; we were members of the same club, and he sometimes used to flutter shyly into my rooms like a great moth; but he never asked me to his quarters.

I discovered that he had done well at Oxford, and also that he had once, at all events, had considerable ambitions; but his health was not strong, he was extremely sensitive, and very fastidious about the quality of his work. I realised this on an occasion when he once entrusted me with a MS., and asked me if I would give him an opinion, as it was an experiment, and he did not feel sure of his ground; he added that there was no hurry about it. I put the MS. away in a despatch-box, and having at the time a press of work, I forgot about it. He never asked me for it, and I did not happen to open the box where it lay. Some months after I came upon it. I read it through, and thought it a fine and delicate piece of work. I wrote to him, apologising for my delay and speaking warmly of the piece, which was one of those rather uncomfortable stories, which is not quite long enough to make a book, and yet rather too long to put in a volume with other pieces. He wrote at once, thanking me for my opinion, and it was only by accident at a later date, when I happened to ask him what he was doing with the story, that he told me he had destroyed it. I expressed deep regret that he had done so; and he said with a smile that it was probably rather a foolish impulse that had decided him to make away with it. "The fact is," he said, "that you wrote very kindly about it, but you had had it in your hands so long, that I felt somehow that it could not have interested you—it really doesn't matter," he added, "I don't think it was at all successful." I apologised very humbly, and explained the circumstances. "Oh, please don't blame yourself in any way," he said, "I have not the least shadow of resentment in my mind about it. There is something wrong about my work; it doesn't interest people. I suppose it is that I can't let myself go." An interesting conversation followed, and he told me more than he ever told me before or since about himself. He confessed to being so critical of his own work, that his table-drawers were full of unfinished MSS. His usual experience was to begin a piece of work enthusiastically; to plan it all out, and to work at first with zest. "Then it begins to get all out of shape," he said, "there is no go about it; it all loses itself in subtleties and complexities of motive; one thing trips up another, and at last it all gets so tangled that I put it aside; if I could follow the track of one strong and definite emotion, it would be all right—but I am like the man in the story who changes the cow for the horse, and the horse for the pig, and the pig for the grindstone; and then the grindstone rolls into the river." He seemed to take it all very philosophically, and I ventured to say so. "Yes," he said, "I have learnt at last that that is how I am made; but I have been through a good many agonies of disgust and discouragement about it in old days—it is the same with everything I have touched. The bits of work that I have completed have all been done in a rush—if the mood lasts long enough, I am all right—and once or twice it has just lasted. I am like a swimmer," he went on, "who can only swim a certain distance; and if I judge the distance rightly, I can reach the point I desire to reach; but I generally judge the distance wrong; and half-way across I am seized with a sudden fright, and struggle back in terror."

By one of the strange coincidences that sometimes happen in this world, I took an unknown lady in to dinner a few days afterwards, and happened to mention Willett's name. "Do you know him?" she said. "Oh yes, of course you do!" she went on; "you are the Mr. S—— of whom he has spoken to me." I found that my neighbour was a distant relation of Willett's, and she told me a good deal about him. He was absolutely alone in the world; he had

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been left an orphan at an early age, and had spent his holidays with guardians and relations, with any one who would take pity on him. "He was a clever kind of boy," she said, "melancholy and diffident, always thinking that people disliked him. He used to give me the air of a person who was trying to find something, and who did not quite know where to look for it. He had a time of expansion at Oxford, where he made friends and did well; and then he came to London, and began to write. But the real tragedy of his life is this," she said. "He really fell in love, or as nearly as he could, with a very pretty and high-spirited girl, who took a great fancy to him, and pitied him from the bottom of her heart. For five years the thing went on. She would have married him at any time if he had asked her. But he did not. I suppose he could not face the idea of being married. He always seemed to be on the point of proposing to her, and then he would lose heart at the last minute. At last she got tired of waiting, and, I suppose, began to care for some one else; but she was very good to Francis, and never lost patience with him. At last she told him one day quietly that she was engaged, and hoped that they would always remain friends. I think, do you know, that it was almost more a relief to him than otherwise. I did my best to help him—marriage was the one thing he wanted; if he could only have been pushed into it, he would have made a perfect husband, because not only is he very much of a gentleman, but he could never bear to fail any one who depended on him; but he has got the unhappiest mind I know; the moment that he has formed a plan, and sees his way clear, he at once begins to think of all the reasons against it—not the selfish reasons, by any means; in this case he reflected, I am sure, how little he had to offer; he could not bring himself to feel that any one could really care for him; and then, too, he never really cared for anything quite enough himself. Or if he did, he found all sorts of refined reasons why he ought not to do so. If only he had been a little more selfish, it would have been all right. Indeed," said Mrs. T——, with a smile, "he is the only person of whom I could truthfully say that if he had only been a little more vulgar, he would have been a much happier person."

I saw a good deal of Willett after that, and he interested me increasingly. I verified Mrs. T——'s judgment about him, and found it true in every particular. I suppose there was some lack of vitality about him, because the more I knew of him the more I found to admire. He was an exquisitely delicate person, affectionate, responsive, with a fine sense of humour—indeed, the most disconcerting thing was that he saw to the full the humour of his own position. But none of the robust motives that spur men to action affected him. He was ambitious, but he would not make any sacrifices to gain the objects of his ambition. He could not use his powers on conventional lines. He was, I think, deeply desirous of confidence and affection, but he could never believe that he deserved either, or that it was possible for him to be interesting to others. He was laborious, pure-minded, transparently honest, and had a shrewd and penetrating judgment of other people; but he seemed to labour under a sense of shame at his deficiencies, and to feel that he had no claims or rights in the world. He existed on sufferance. The smallest shadow of disapproval caused him to abandon any design, not resentfully but eagerly, as though he was fully aware of his own incompetence.

I grew to feel a strong affection for him, and tried in many ways to help and encourage him. But he always discounted encouragement, and it is a clumsy business trying to help a man who does not demand or desire help.

He seemed to me to have schooled himself into a kind of tender patience; and this attitude, I am ashamed to say, used to irritate me considerably, because it seemed to me to be so much power wasted on accepting defeat, which might have ensured victory.

He was with me a few weeks ago. I was up in town, and he dined with me by appointment. He told me, with a gentle philosophy, a story which made my blood boil. He had been asked to write a book by a publisher, and the lines had been laid down for him. "It was such a comfort to me," he said, "because it supplied just the stimulus I could not myself originate. My book was really rather a good piece of work; but a week ago I sent it to the publisher, and he returned it, saying it was not the least what he wanted—he suggested my retaining about a third of it, and rewriting the rest. Of course I could do nothing of the kind." "What have you done with it?" I asked. "Oh, I have destroyed it." "But didn't you see him," I said, "or do something—or at all events insist on payment?" "Oh no," he said, "I could not do that—the man was probably right—he wanted a particular kind of book, and mine was not what he wanted. I did say that I wished he had explained to me more clearly what he wanted—but after all it doesn't very much matter. I can get along all right, if I am careful."

"Well," I said, "you are really a very aggravating person. If I could not have got my book published elsewhere, I would certainly have had a row—I would have taken out my money's worth in vituperation."

Willett smiled; "I dare say you would have had some fun," he said, "but that is not my line. I have told you

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before that I can't interest people—I don't think it is wholly my fault."

We sate late, talking; and for the only time in his life he spoke to me, with a depth of emotion of which I should hardly have suspected him, of the value he set upon my friendship, and his gratitude for my sympathy.

And now this morning I have heard of his sudden death. He was found dead in his room, bent over his papers. He must have been writing late at night, as his custom was; and it proved on examination that he must have long suffered from an unsuspected disease of the heart. Perhaps that may explain his failure, if it can be called a failure. There is something to me almost insupportably pathetic to think of his lonely and uncomforted life, his isolation, his sensitiveness. And yet I do not feel sure that it is pathetic, because his life somehow seems to me to have been one of the most beautiful I have ever known. He did nothing much for others, he achieved nothing for himself; but it is only our miserable habit of weighing every one's life, in a hard way, by a standard of performance and success, which makes one sigh over Francis Willett's life. It is very difficult at times to see what it is that life is exactly meant to do for us. Most of the men and women I know—I say this sadly but frankly—seem to me to leave the world worse, in essential respects, than they entered it. There is generally something ingenuous, responsive, eager, sweet, hopeful about a child—but though I admit that one does encounter beautiful natures that seem to flower very generously in the light of experience, yet most people grow dull, dreary, conventional, grasping, commonplace—they grow to think rather contemptuously of emotion and generosity—they think it weak to be amiable, unselfish, kind. They become fond of comfort and position and respect and money. They think such things the serious concerns of life, and sentiment a kind of relaxation. But with Willett it was the precise reverse. He claimed nothing for himself, he never profited at the expense of another; he was utterly humble, gentle, unpretentious, kind, sincere. An hour ago I should have called him "poor fellow," and wished that he had had a more robust kind of fibre; now that I know he is dead, I cannot find it in my heart to wish him any such qualities. His life appears to me utterly beautiful and fragrant. He never incurred any taint of grossness from prosperity or success; he never grew indifferent or hard; and in the light of his last passage, such a failure seems the one thing worth achieving, and to carry with it a hope all alive and rich with possibilities of blessing and glory. He would hardly have called himself a Christian, I think; he would have said that he could not have attained to anything like a vital faith or a hopeful certainty; but the only words and thoughts that haunt my mind about him, echoing sweetly and softly through the ages, are the words in which Christ described the tender spirits of those who were nearest to the Father's heart, and to whom it is given to see God.

July 28, 1889.

Health of body and mind return to me, slowly but surely. I have given up all attempt at writing; I rack my brain no longer for plots or situations. I keep, it is true, my note-book for subjects beside me, and occasionally jot down a point; but I feel entirely indifferent to the whole thing. Meanwhile the flood of letters about my book, invitations from editors, offers from publishers, continues to flow. I reply to these benignantly and courteously, but undertake nothing, promise nothing. I seem to have recovered my balance. I think no more about my bodily complaints, and my nerves no longer sting and thrill. The day is hardly long enough for all I have to do. It may be that when the novelty of the experiment in education wears off, I shall begin to hanker after authorship again. Alec will have to go to school in a year or two, I suppose; but it shall be a day-school at first, if I can find one. As to the question of a public school, I am much exercised. Of course there are nightmare terrors about tone and morals; but I am not really very anxious about the boy, because he is sensible and independent, and has no lack of moral courage. The vigorous barrack-life is good for a boy, the give-and-take, the splendid equality, the manly code, the absence of affectation. But the intellectual tone of schools is low, and the conventionality is great. I don't want Alec to be a conventional man, and yet I want him to accept current conventions instinctively about matters of indifference. I have a horror of the sporting public-school type, the good-humoured, robust fellow, who does his work and fills his spare time with games, and thinks intellectual things, and artistic interests, and emotion, and sympathy, moonshine and rot. Such people live a wholesome enough life; they make good soldiers, good officials, good men of business. But they are woefully complacent and self-satisfied. The schools develop a Spartan type, and I want Alec to be an Athenian. But the experiment will have to be made, because a man is at a disadvantage in ordinary life if he has not the public school bonhomie, courtesy, and common sense. I must try to keep the other side alive, and I don't despair of doing it.

Meantime we are a very contented household, in spite of the fact that now, if ever, is the time for me to make my mark as a writer, and I have to pass all the opportunities that offer. On the other hand, this is the point at which one sees, in the history of letters, so many writers go to pieces. They suddenly find, after their first great success, that they have arrived, by a tortuous and secret path, at being a sort of public man. They are dazzled by contact with the world. They go into society, they make speeches, they write twaddle, they drain their energy, already depleted by creation, in fifty different ways. Now I am strongly of Ruskin's opinion that the duty of the artist is to make himself fit for the best society, and then to abstain from it. Very fortunately I have no sort of taste for these things, beyond the simple human satisfaction in enjoying consideration. That is natural and inevitable. But I don't value it unduly, and I dislike its penalties more than I love its rewards.

And then, too, I reflect that it is, after all, life that we are here to taste, and life that so many of us pass by. Work is a part of life, perhaps the essence of life; but to be absorbed in work is to be like a man who is absorbed in collecting specimens, and never has time to sort them. I knew of a man who determined, early in life, to write the history of political institutions. He had a great library, and he devoted himself to study. He put in his books, as he read them, slips of paper to indicate passages and chapters that he would have to consult, and as he finished with a book, he put it in a certain place on a certain shelf. He made no other notes or references—he was a man with a colossal memory, and he knew exactly what his markers meant. In the middle of this life of acquisition, while he bored like a worm in a cheese, he died. His library was sold. The markers meant nothing to any one else; and the book-buyers merely took the markers out and threw them away, and that was the end of the history of political institutions.

I feel that, apart from our work, we ought to try and arrive at some solution, to draw some sort of conclusions—to reflect, to theorise; we may not draw nearer to the secret, but our only hope of doing so, the only hope that humanity will do so, is for some at least to try. And thus I think that I have perhaps been saved from a great delusion. I was spending my time in spinning romances, in elaborating plots, in manoeuvring life as I would; and it is not like that! Life is not run on physical lines, nor on emotional, nor social, nor even moral lines. It is not managed in the least as we should manage it; it is a resultant of innumerable forces, or perhaps the same force running in intricate currents. Of course the strange thing is that we men should find ourselves thrust into it, with strong intuitions, vehement preconceptions, as to how it ought to be directed; our happiness seems to depend upon

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our being, or learning to be, in harmony with it, but it baffles us, it resists us, it contradicts us, it opposes us to the end; sometimes it crushes us; and yet we believe that it means good; and even if we do not so believe, we have to acquiesce, we have to endure; and one thing is certain, we cannot learn the lesson of life by practising indifference or stoical fortitude, or by abandoning ourselves to despair; only by believing that our sufferings are fruitful, our mistakes educative, our sins significant, our sorrows gracious, can we hope to triumph. We go on, many of us, relying on useless defences, beguiling ourselves with fantastic diversions, overlooking, as far as we can, stern realities; stopping our ears, turning away our gaze, shrinking and crying out like children at the prospect of experiences to which we are led by loving presences, that smile as they draw us to the wholesome and bracing incidents that we so weakly dread. We pray for courage, but we know in our souls that courage can only be won by enduring what we fear; and thus preoccupied by hopes and plans and fears, we miss the wholesome sweet and simple stuff of life, its quiet relationships, its tranquil occupations, its beautiful and tender surprises.

And then perhaps, at long intervals, we have a deep and splendid flash of insight, when we can thank God that things have not been as we should have willed and ordered them. We should have lingered, perhaps, in the low rich meadows, the sheltered woodlands of our desire; we should never have set our feet to the hill. In terror and reluctance we have wandered upwards among the steep mountain tracks, by high green slopes, by grim crag-buttresses, through fields of desolate stones. Yet we are aware of a finer, purer air, of wide prospects of hill and plain; we feel that we have gained in strength and vigour, that our perceptions are keener, our very enjoyment nobler; and at last, it may be, we have sight, from some Pisgah-top of hope, of fairer lands yet to which we are surely bound. And then, too, though we have fared on in loneliness and isolation, we see moving forms of friends and comrades converging on our track. It is no dream; it is but a parable of what has happened to many a soul, what is daily happening. What does the sad, stained, weary, fitful past concern us at such a moment as this? It concerns us nothing, save that only through its pains and shadows was it possible for us to climb where we have climbed.

To-day it seems that I have been blessed with such a vision. The mist will close in again, doubtless, wild with wind, chill with rain, sad with the cry of hoarse streams. But I have seen! I shall be weary and regretful and despairing many times; but I shall never wholly doubt again.

The Altar Fire

August 8, 1889.

Alec is ill to-day. He was restless, flushed, feverish, yesterday evening, and I thought he must have caught cold; we put him to bed, and this morning we sent for the doctor. He says there is no need for anxiety, but he does not know as yet what is the matter; his temperature is high, and we must just keep him quietly in bed, and wait. I tell myself that it is foolish to be anxious, but I cannot keep a certain dread out of my mind; there is a weight upon my heart, which seems unduly heavy. Perhaps it is only that it seems unusual, for he has never had an illness of any kind. He is not to be disturbed, and Maggie is not allowed to see him. Maud sate with him this morning, and he slept most of the time. I looked in once or twice, but people coming and going tend to make him restless. Maud herself is a marvel to me. She must be even more anxious than I am, but she is serene, smiling, strong, with a cheerfulness that has no effort about it. She laughed tenderly at my fears, and sent me out for a walk with Maggie. I fear I was a gloomy companion. In the evening I went to sit with Alec a little. He was wakeful, large-eyed, and restless. He lay with a book of stories from Homer, of which he is very fond, in one hand, the other clasping his black kitten, which slept peacefully on the counterpane. He wanted to talk, but to keep him quiet I told him a long trivial story, full of unexciting incidents. He lay musing, his head on his hand; then he seemed inclined to sleep, so I sate beside him, watching and wondering at the nearness and the dearness of the child to me, almost amazed at the revelation which this shadow of fear gives me of the place which he fills in my heart and life. He tossed about for some time, and when I asked him if he wanted anything, he only put his hand in mine; a gesture not quite like him, as he is a boy who is averse to personal caresses or signs of emotion. So I drew my chair up to the bed, and sate there with the little hot hand in my own. Maud came up presently; but as he now seemed sound asleep, we left him in the care of the old nurse, and went down to dinner. If we only knew what was the matter! I argue with myself how much unnecessary misery I give myself by anticipating evil; but I cannot help it; and the weight on my mind grew heavier; half the night I lay awake, till at last, from sheer weariness, I fell into a sort of stupor of the senses, which fled from me in the dismal dawn, and the unmaning hideous fear leapt on me out of the dark, like a beast leaping upon its prey.

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August 11, 1889.

I cannot and dare not write of these days. The child is very ill; it is some obscure inflammation of the brain-tissue. I had an insupportable fear that it might have resulted in some way from being over-pressed in the matter of work, over-stimulated. I asked the doctor. If he lied to me, and I do not think he did, he lied like a man, or an angel. "Not in the least," he said, "it is a constitutional thing; in fact, I may say that the rational and healthy life the child has lived will help more than anything to pull him through."

But I can't write of the days. I sleep, half-conscious of my misery. I suppose I eat, walk, read. But waking is like the waking of a prisoner who awakes up to be put on the rack, who hears doors open and feet approach, and sickens with dread as he lies. God's hand is heavy upon me day and night. Surely nothing, in the world or out of it, can obliterate the memory of this suffering; perhaps, if Alec is given back to us, I shall smile at this time of suffering. But, if not—

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August 12, 1889.

He is losing ground, he is hardly ever conscious now; he sleeps a good deal, but often he talks quietly to himself of all that we have done and said; he often supposes himself to be with me, and, thank God, he never says a word to show that he has ever feared or misunderstood me. I could not bear that. Yesterday when I was with him, he opened his eyes on me; I could see that he knew me, and that he was frightened. I could not speak, but Maud, who was with me, just took his hand and with her own tranquil smile, said, "It is all right, Alec; there is nothing to be frightened about; we are here, and you will soon be well again." The child closed his eyes and lay smiling to himself. I could not have done that.

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August 13, 1889.

He died this morning, just at the dawn. I knew last night that all hope was over. I was with him half the night, and prayed, knowing my prayers were in vain. That I could save him no suffering, could not keep him, could not draw him back. Maud took my place at midnight; I slept, and in the grey dawn, I woke to find her standing with a candle by my bed; I knew in a moment, by a glance, that the end was near. No word passed between us; I found Maggie by the bed; and we three together waited for the end. I had never seen any one die. He was quite unconscious, breathing slowly, looking just like himself, as though flushed with slumber. At last he stirred, gave a long sigh, and seemed to settle himself for the last sleep. I do not know when he died, but I became aware that life had passed, and that the little spirit that we loved had fled, God knows whither. Maggie sate with her hand in mine; and in my dumb and frozen grief, almost without a thought of anything but a deep and cold resentment, a hatred of death and the maker of love and death alike, I became aware that both she and Maud had me in their thoughts, that my sorrow was even more to them than their own—while I was cut off from them; from life and hope alike, in a place of darkness and in the deep.

The Altar Fire

August 19, 1889.

I saw Alec no more; I would remember him as he was in life, not the stiffened waxen mask of my beloved. The days passed in a dull stupor of grief, mechanically, grimly, in a sort of ghastly greyness. And I who thought that I had sounded the depths of pain! I could not realise it, could not believe that all would not somehow be as before. Maud and Maggie speak of him to each other and to me . . . it is inconceivable. With a dull heartache I have collected and put away all the child's things—his books, his toys, his little possessions. I followed the little coffin to the grave. The uncontrollable throb of emotion came over me at the words, "I am the resurrection and the life." It was a grey, gusty day; a silent crowd waited to see us pass. The great churchyard elms roared and swayed, and I found myself watching idly how the clergyman's hood was blown sideways by the wind. I looked into the deep, dark pit, and saw the little coffin lying there, all in a dumb dream. The holy words fell vacuously on my ears. "Man walketh in a vain shadow, and disquieteth himself in vain"—that was all I felt. I seem to believe nothing, to hope nothing. I do not believe I shall ever see or draw near to the child again, and yet the thought of him alone, apart, un comforted, lies cold on my heart. Maud is wonderful to me; her love does not seem to suffer eclipse; she does everything, she smiles, she speaks; she feels, she says, the presence of the child near her and about her; that means nothing to me; the soul appears to me to have gone out utterly like a blown flame, mingling with the unseen life, as the little body we loved will be mingled with the dust.

I cannot say that I endure agony; it is rather as if I had received a blow so fierce that it drove sensation away; I seem to see the bruise, watch the blood flow, and wonder why I do not suffer. The suffering will come, I doubt not; but meanwhile I am only mutely grateful that I do not feel more, suffer more. It does not even seem to me to have drawn me nearer to Maud, to Maggie; my power of loving seems extinguished, like my power of suffering. I do not know why I write in this book, why I record my blank apathy. It is a habit, it passes the time; the only thing that gives me any comfort is the thought that I shall die, too, and close my eyes at last upon this terrible world, made so sweet and beautiful, and then slashed and scored across with such cruel stripes, where we pay so grievous a penalty for feeling and loving. Tennyson found consolation "when he sorrowed most." But I say deliberately that I would rather not have loved my child, than lose him thus.

The Altar Fire

August 28, 1889.

We are to go away. Maggie droops like a faded flower, and for the first time I realise, in trying to comfort and distract her, that I have not lost everything. We are much together, and seeing her thus pine and fade stirs a dread, in the heart that had been so cold, that I may lose her too. At last we are drawn together. She came to say good-night to me last night, and a gush of love passed through me, like the wind stirring the strings of a harp to music. "My precious darling, my comfort," I said; the words put, it seemed, on my lips, by some deeper power. She clung to me, crying softly. Yet, is it strange to say it, that simple utterance seems almost to have revived her, to have given her pride and courage? But Maud is still almost a mystery to me. Who can tell how she suffers—I cannot—it seems to have quickened and enriched her love and tenderness; she seems to have a secret that I cannot come near to sharing; she does not repine, rebel, resist; she lives in some region of unapproachable patience and love. She goes daily to the grave, but I cannot visit it or think of it. The sight of the church-tower on my walks gives me a throb of dismay. But now we are going away. We have been lent a little house in a quiet seaside place; I suppose I am ill—at least, I am aware of a deep and unutterable fatigue at times, when I can rouse myself to nothing, but sit unoccupied, musing, glad to be alone, and only dreading the slightest interruption, the smallest duty. I know by some subtle sense that I am seldom absent from Maud's thoughts; but, with her incredible courage and patience, she betrays nothing by word or glance. She is absolutely patient, entirely self-forgetful; she quietly relieves me of anything I have to do; she alters arrangements a dozen times a day, with a ready smile; and yet it almost seems to me as if I had lost her too.

August 30, 1889.

Our route lay through Cambridge; we had to change there and wait; so we drove down to the town to look at my old college. There it lay, the charming, pretty, quiet place, blinking lazily out of its deep-set barred windows in the bright sun, just the same, it seemed, as ever, though perhaps a touch more mellow and more settled; every corner and staircase haunted with old ghosts for me. I could put a name to every set of rooms, flash an incident to every door and window. In my heavy, apathetic mood the memory of my life there seemed like a memory of some one else, moving in golden light, talking and laughing in firelit rooms, lingering in moonlit nights by the bridge, wondering what life was going to bring. It seemed like turning the pages of some old illuminated book with bright pictures, where the very sunlight is the purest and stiffest gold. The men I knew, the friends I lived with, admired, loved— where are they? scattered to all parts of the earth, parted utterly from me, some of them dead, alas! and silent. It came over me with a thrill of sharpest pain to think how I had pictured Alec here, living the same free and beautiful life, tasting the same innocent pleasures, with the bright, sweet world opening upon him. In that calm, sunny afternoon, life seemed a strange phantasmal business, and I myself a revenant from some thin, unsubstantial world. A door opened, and an old Don, well known to me in those days, hardly altered, it seemed, came out and trotted across the court, looking suspiciously to left and right as he used to do. Had he been doing the same thing ever since, reading the same books, talking the same innocent gossip? I had not the heart to greet him, and he passed me by unrecognising. We peeped into the hall through the screen. I could see where I used to sit, the same dark pictures looking down. We went to the chapel, with its noble classical woodwork, the great carved panels, the angels' heads, the huge, stately reredos. Some one, thank God, was playing softly on the organ, and we sat to listen. The sweet music flowed over my sad heart in a healing tide. Yes, it was not meaningless, after all, this strange life, with the good years shining in their rainbow halo, even though the path led into darkness and formless shadow. I seemed to look back on it all, as the traveller on the hill looks out from the skirts of the cloud upon the sunny valley beneath him. It all worked together, said the delicate rising strain, outlining itself above the soft thunder of the pedals, into something high and grave and beautiful; it all ended in the peace of God. I sat there, with wife and child, a pilgrim faring onwards, tasting of love and life and sorrow, weary of the way, but still—yes, I could say that—still hopeful. In that moment even my bitter loss had something beautiful about it. It was THERE, the bright episode of my dear Alec's life, the memory of the beloved years together. Maggie, seeing something in my face that she was glad to see, put her hand in mine, and the tears rose to my eyes, while I smiled at Maud; the burden fell off my shoulder for a moment, and something seemed as it were to touch me and point onwards. The music with a dying fall came to a soft close; the rich light fell on desk and canopy; the old tombs glimmered in the dusty air. We went out in silence; and then there came back to me, in the old dark court, with its ivied corners, its trim grass plots, the sense that I was still a part of it all, that the old life was not dead, but stored up like a garnered treasure in the rich and guarded past. Not by detachment or aloofness from happiness and warmth and life are our victories won. That had been the dark temptation, the shadow of my loss, to believe that in so sad and strange an existence the only hope was to stand apart from it all, not to care too much, not to love too closely. That was false, utterly false; a bare and grim philosophy, a timid sauntering. Rather it was better to clasp all things close, to love passionately, to desire infinitely, to yield oneself gladly and joyfully to every deep and true emotion; not greedily and luxuriously, flinging aside the crumpled husk that had given up its sweetness; but tenderly and gently, holding out one's arms to everything pure and noble, trusting that behind all there did indeed beat a great and fatherly heart, that loved one better than one dreamed.

That was a strange experience, that sunlit afternoon, a mingling of deepest pain and softest hope, a touch of fire from the very altar of faith, linking the beautiful past with the dark present, and showing me that the future held a promise of perfect graciousness and radiant strength. Did other lives hold the same rich secrets? I felt that they did; for that day, at least, all mankind, young and old alike, seemed indeed my brothers and sisters. In the young men that went lightly in and out, finding life so full of zest, thinking each other so interesting and wonderful; in the tired face of the old Professor, limping along the street; in the prosperous, comfortable contentment of robust men, full of little affairs and schemes—I saw in all of them the same hope, the same unity of purpose, the same significance; and we three in the midst, united by love and loss alike, we were at the centre,

The Altar Fire

as it were, of a great drama of life and love, in which even death could only shift the scene and enrich the intensity of the secret hope.

September 5, 1889.

The rapt and exalted mood that I carried away from Cambridge could not last; I did not hope that it could. We have had a dark and sad time, yet with gleams of sweetness in it, because we have realised how closely we are drawn together, how much we depend on each other. Maud's brave spirit has seemed for a time broken utterly; and this has done more than anything to bring us nearer, because I have felt the stronger, realising how much she leant upon me. She has been filled with self-reproach, I know not for what shadowy causes. She blames herself for a thousand things, for not having been more to Alec, for having followed her own interests and activities, for not having understood him better. It is all unreal, morbid, overstrained, of course, but none the less terribly there. I have tried to persuade her that it is but weariness and grief trying to attach itself to definite causes, but she cannot be comforted. Meanwhile we walk, stroll, drive, read, and talk together—mostly of him, for I can do that now; we can even smile together over little memories, though it is perilous walking, and a step brings us to the verge of tears. But, thank God, there is not a single painful memory, not a thing we would have had otherwise in the whole of that little beautiful life; and I wonder now wretchedly, whether its very beauty and brightness ought not to have prepared me more to lose him; it was too good to be true, too perfectly pure and brave. Yet I never even dreamed that he would leave us; I should have treasured the bright days better if I had. There are times of sharpest sorrow, days when I wake and have forgotten; when I think of him as with us, and then the horror of my loss comes curdling and weltering back upon me; when I thrill from head to foot with hopeless agony, rebelling, desiring, hating the death that parts us.

Maggie seems to feel it differently. A child accepts a changed condition with perhaps a sharper pang, but with a swift accustoming to what irreparably IS. She weeps at the thought of him sometimes, but without the bitter resistance, the futile despair which makes me agonise. That she can be interested, distracted, amused, is a great help to me; but nothing seems to minister to my dear Maud, except the impassioned revival, for it is so, of our earliest first love. It has come back to bless us, that deep and intimate absorption that had moved into a gentler comradeship. The old mysterious yearning to mingle life and dreams, and almost identities, has returned in fullest force; the years have rolled away, and in the loss of her calm strength and patience, we are as lovers again. The touch of her hand, the glance of her eye, thrill through me as of old. It is a devout service, an eager anticipation of her lightest wish that possesses me. I am no longer tended; I tend and serve. There is something soft, appealing, wistful about her that seems to give her back an almost childlike dependence, till my grief almost goes from me in joy that I can sustain and aid her.

September 7, 1889.

Another trouble has fallen upon us. I have had a very grievous letter from my cousin, who succeeded by arrangement, on my father's death, to the business. He has been unfortunate in his affairs; he has thrown money away in speculation. The greater part of my income came from the business. I suppose the arrangement was a bad one, but the practice was so sound and secure in my father's life that it never occurred to me to doubt its stability. The chief part of my income, some nine hundred a year, came to me from this source. Apart from that, I have some three or four hundreds from invested money of my own, and Maud has upwards of two hundred a year. I am going off to-morrow to L—— to meet my cousin, and go into the matter. I don't at present understand how things are. His letter is full of protestations and self-recrimination. We can live, I suppose, if the worst comes to the worst, but in a very different way. Perhaps we may even have to sell our pleasant house. The strange thing is that I don't feel this all more acutely, but I seem to have lost the power of suffering for any other reason than because Alec is dead.

September 12, 1889.

I have come back to-night from some weary nightmare days with my poor cousin. The thing is as bad as it can be. The business will be acquired by Messrs. F——, the next most leading solicitors. With the price they will give, and with the sacrifice of my cousin's savings, and the assets of the firm, the money can just be paid. We shall have some six hundred a year to live upon; my cousin is to enter the office of the F—— firm as an ordinary clerk. The origin of the disaster is a melancholy one; it was not that he himself might profit, but to increase the income of some clients who had lost money and desired a higher rate of interest for funds left in the hands of the firm. If my cousin had resisted the demand, there would have been some unpleasantness, because the money lost had been invested on his advice; he could not face this, and proceeded to speculate with other money, of which he was trustee, to fill the gap. Good-nature, imprudence, credulousness, a faulty grasp of the conditions, and not any deliberate dishonesty, have been the cause of his ruin. It is a fearful blow to him, but he is fortunate, perhaps, in being unmarried; I have urged him to try and get employment elsewhere, but he insists upon facing the situation in the place where he is known, with a fantastic idea, which is at the same time noble and chivalrous, of doing penance. Of course he has no prospects whatever; but I am sure of this, that he grieves over my lost inheritance far more than he grieves over his own ruin. His great misery is that some years ago he refused an offer from Messrs. F—— to amalgamate the two firms.

I feared at first that I might have to sacrifice the rest of my money as well—money slowly accumulated out of my own labours. And the relief of finding that this will not be necessary is immense. We must sell our house at once, and find a smaller one. At present I am not afraid of the changed circumstances; indeed, if I could only recover my power of writing, we need not leave our home. The temptation is to get a book written somehow, because I could make money by any stuff just now. On the other hand, it will almost be to me a relief to part from the home so haunted with the memory of Alec—though that will be a dreadful pain to Maud and Maggie. As far as living more simply goes, that does not trouble me in the least. I have always been slightly uncomfortable about the ease and luxury in which we lived. I only wish we had lived more simply all along, so that I could have put by a little more. I have told Maud exactly how matters stand, and she acquiesces, though I can see that, just at this time, the thought of handing over to strangers the house where we have lived all our married life, the rooms where Alec and the baby died, is a deep grief to her. To me that is almost a relief. I have dreaded going back there. To-night I told Maggie, and she broke out into long weeping. But even so there is something about the idea of being poor, strange to say, which touches a sense of romance in the child. She does not realise the poky restrictions of the new life.

And still stranger to me is the way in which this solid, tangible trouble seems to have restored my energy and calm. I found myself clear-headed, able to grasp the business questions which arose, gifted with a hard lucidity of mind that I did not know I possessed. It is a relief to get one's teeth into something, to have hard, definite occupation to distract one; indeed, it hardly seems to me in the light of a misfortune at present, so much as a blessed tangible problem to be grappled with and solved. What I should have felt if all had been lost, and if I had had to resign my liberty, and take up some practical occupation, I hardly know. I do not think I should even have dreaded that in my present frame of mind.

September 15, 1889.

I have been thinking all day long of my last walk with Alec, the day before he was taken ill. Maud had gone out with Maggie; and the little sturdy figure came to my room to ask if I was going out. I was finishing a book that I was reading for the evening's work; I had been out in the morning, and I had not intended to go out again, as it was cold and drizzling. I very nearly said that I could not go, and I had a shadow of vexation at being interrupted. But I looked up at him, as he stood by the door, and there was a tiny shadow of loneliness upon his face; and I thank God now that I put my book down at once, and consented cheerfully. He brightened up at this; he fetched my cap and stick, and we went off together. I am glad to think that I had him to myself that day. He was in a more confidential mood than usual. Perhaps—who knows?—there was some shadow of death upon him, some instinct to clasp hands closer before the end. He asked me to tell him some stories of my schooldays, and what I used to do as a boy—but he was full of alertness and life, breaking into my narratives to point out a nest that we had seen in the spring, and that now hung, wind-dried and ruinous, among the boughs. Coming back, he flagged a little, and did what he seldom did, put his arm in my own; how tenderly the touch of the little hand, the restless fingers on my arm thrilled me—the hand that lies cold and folded and shrivelled in the dark ground! He was proud that evening of having had me all to himself, and said to Maggie that we had talked secrets, "such as MEN talk when there are no women to ask questions." But thinking that this had wounded Maggie a little, he went and put his arm round her, and I heard him say something about its being all nonsense, and that we had wished for her all the time. . . .

Ah, how can I endure it, the silence, the absence, the lost smile, the child of my own whom I loved from head to foot, body soul and spirit all alike! I keep coming across signs of his presence everywhere, his books, his garden tools in the summerhouse, the little presents he gave me, on my study chimney-piece, his cap and coat hanging in the cupboard—it is these little trifling things, signs of life and joyful days, that sting the heart and pierce the brain with sorrow. If I could but have one sight of him, one word with him, one smile, to show that he is, that he remembers, that he waits for us, I could endure it; but I look into the dark and no answer comes; I send my wild entreaties pulsating through the worlds of space, crying, "Are you there, my child?" That his life is there, hidden with God, I do not doubt; but is it he himself, or has he fallen back, like the drop of water in the fountain, into the great tide of life? That is no comfort to me; it is he that I want, that union of body and mind, of life and love, that was called my child and is mine no more.

September 20, 1889.

Such a loss as mine passes over the soul like a plough cleaving a pasture line by line. The true stuff of the spirit is revealed and laid out in all its bareness. That customary outline, that surface growth of herb and blade, is all pared away. I have been accustomed to think myself a religious man—I have never been without the sense of God over and about me. But when an experience like this comes, it shows me what my religion is worth. I do not turn to God in love and hope; I do not know Him, I do not understand Him. I feel that He must have forgotten me, or that He is indifferent to me, or that He is incapable of love, and works blindly and sternly. My reason in vain says that the great and beautiful gift itself of the child's life and the child's love came from Him. I do not question His power or His right to take my child from me. But I endure only because I must, not willingly or loyally or lovingly. It is not that I feel the injustice of His taking the boy away; it is a far deeper sense of injustice than that. The injustice lies in the fact that He made the child so utterly dear and desired; that He set him so firmly in my heart; this on the one hand; and on the other, that He does not, if He must rend the little life away and leave the bleeding gap, send at the same time some love, some strength, some patience to make the pain bearable. I cannot believe that the love I bore my boy was anything but a sweet and holy influence. It gave me the one thing of which I am in hourly need— something outside of myself and my own interests, to love better than I loved even myself. It seems indeed a pure and simple loss, unless the lesson God would have us learn is the stoical lesson of detachment, indifference, cold self-sufficiency. It is like taking the crutches away from a lame man, knocking the props away from a tottering building. An optimistic moralist would say that I loved Alec too selfishly, and even that the love of the child turned away my heart from the jealous Heart of God, who demands a perfect surrender, a perfect love. But how can one love that which one does not know or understand, a Power that walks in darkness and that gives us on the one hand sweet, beautiful, and desirable things, and on the other strikes them from us when we need them most? It is not as if I did not desire to trust and love God utterly. I should think even this sorrow a light price to pay, if it gave me a pure and deep trust in the mercy and goodness of God. But instead of that it fills me with dismay, blank suspicion, fretful resistance. I do not feel that there is anything which God could send me or reveal to me, which would enable me to acquit Him of hardness or injustice. I will not, though He slay me, say that I trust Him and love Him when I do not. He may crush me with repeated blows of His hand, but He has given me the divine power of judging, of testing, of balancing; and I must use it even in His despite. He does not require, I think, a dull and broken submissiveness, the submissiveness of the creature that is ready to admit anything, if only he can be spared another blow. What He requires, so my spirit tells me, is an eager co-operation, a brave approval, a generous belief in His goodness and His justice; and this I cannot give, and it is He that has made me unable to give it. The wound may heal, the dull pain may die away, I may forget, the child may become a golden memory—but I cannot again believe that this is the surrender God desires. What I think He must desire, is that I should love the child, miss him as bitterly as ever, feel my day darkened by his loss, and yet turn to Him gratefully and bravely in perfect love and trust. It may be that I may be drawn closer to those whom I love, but the loss must still remain irreparable, because I might have learned to love my dear ones better through Alec's presence, and not through his absence. It is His will, I do not doubt it; but I cannot see the goodness or the justice of the act, and I will not pretend to myself that I acquiesce.

The Altar Fire

September 25, 1889.

Yesterday was a warm, delicious, soft day, full of a gentle languor, the air balmy and sweet, the sunshine like the purest gold; we sate out all the morning under the cliff, in the warm dry sand. To the right and left of us lay the blue bay, the waves breaking with short, crisp sparkles on the shore. We saw headland after headland sinking into the haze; a few fishing-boats moved slowly about, and far down on the horizon we watched the smoke of a great ocean-steamer. We talked, Maud and I, for the first time, I think, without reserve, without bitterness, almost without grief, of Alec. What sustains her is the certainty that he is as he was, somewhere, far off, as brave and loving as ever, waiting for us, but waiting with a perfect understanding and knowledge of why we are separated. She dreams of him thus, looking down upon her, and seeming, in her dream, to wonder what there can be to grieve about. I suppose that a mother has a sense of oneness with a child that a father cannot have. It is a deep and marvellous faith, an intuition that transcends all reason, a radiant certainty. I cannot attain to it. But in the warmth and light of her belief, I grew to feel that at least there was some explanation of it all. Not by chance is the dear gift sent us, not by chance do we learn to love it, not by chance is it rent from us. Lying thus, talking softly, in so gracious a world, a world that satisfied every craving of the senses, I came to realise that the Father must wish us well, and that if the shadow fell upon our path, it was not to make us cold and bitter-hearted. Infinite Love! it came near to me in that hour, and clasped me to a sorrowful, tender, beating Heart. I read Maud, at her request, "Evelyn Hope," and the strong and patient love, that dwells so serenely and softly upon the incidents of death, yet without the least touch of morbidity and gloom, treating death itself as a quiet slumber of the soul, taught me for a moment how to be brave.

"You will wake and remember, and understand,"—my voice broke and tears came, unbidden tears which I did not even desire to conceal— and in that moment the spirit of my wife came near to me, and soul looked into the eyes of soul, with a perfect and bewildering joy, the very joy of God.

October 10, 1889.

We have had the kindest, dearest letters from our neighbours about our last misfortune. But no one seems to anticipate that we shall be obliged to leave the place. They naturally suppose that I shall be able to make as large an income as I want by writing. And so I suppose I could. I talked the whole matter over with Maud, and said I would abide by her decision. I confessed that I had an extreme repugnance to the thought of turning out books for money, books which I knew to be inferior; but I also said that if she could not bear to leave the place, I had little doubt that I could, for the present at all events, make enough money to render it possible for us to continue to live there. I said frankly that it would be a relief to me to leave a house so sadly haunted by memory, and that I should myself prefer to live elsewhere, framing our household on very simple lines—and to let the power of writing come back if it would, not to try and force it. It would be a dreadful prospect to me to live thus, overshadowed by recollection, working dimly for money; but I suppose it would be possible, even bracing. Maud did not hesitate: she spoke quite frankly; on the one hand the very associations, which I dread most, were evidently to her a source of sad delight; and the thought of strangers living in rooms so hallowed by grief was like a profanation. Then there was the fact of all her relations with our friends and neighbours; but she said quite simply that my feeling outweighed it all, and that she would far rather begin life afresh somewhere else, than put me in the position I described. We determined to try and find a small house in the neighbourhood of her own old home in Gloucestershire; and this thought, I am sure, gave her real happiness. We determined at once what we would do; we would let our house for a term of years, take what furniture we needed, and dispose of the rest; we arranged to go off to Gloucestershire, as soon as possible, to look for a house. We both realise that we must learn to retrench at once. We shall have less than half our former income, counting in what we hope to get from the old house. I am not at all afraid of that. I always vaguely disliked living as comfortably as we did—but it will not be agreeable to have to calculate all our expenses—that may perhaps mend itself, if I can but begin my writing again.

All this helps me—I am ashamed to say how much—though sometimes the thought of all the necessary arrangements weighs on me like a leaden weight, on days when I fall back into a sad, idle, hopeless repining. Sometimes it seems as if the old happy life was all broken up and gone for ever; and, so strange a thing is memory and imagination, that even the months overshadowed by the loss of my faculty of work seem to me now impossibly fragrant and beautiful, my sufferings unreal and unsubstantial. Real trouble, real grief, have at least the bracing force of actuality, and sweep aside with a strong hand all artificial self-made miseries and glooms.

The Altar Fire

December 15, 1889.

I have kept no record of these weeks. They have been full of business, sadness, and yet of hope. We went back home for a time; we made our farewells, and it moved me strangely to see that our departure was viewed almost with consternation. It is Maud's loss that will be felt. I have lived very selfishly and dully myself, but even so I was half-glad to find that even I should be missed. At such a time everything is forgotten and forgiven, and such grudging, peaceful neighbourliness as even I have shown seems appreciated and valued. It was a heartrending business reviving our sorrow, and it plunged me for a time into my old dry bitterness of spirit. But I hardened my heart as best I could, and felt more deeply than ever, how far beyond my powers of endurance it would have been to have taken up the old life, and Alec not there. Again and again it was like a knife plunged into my heart with an almost physical pain. Not so with Maud and Maggie—it was to them a treasure of precious memories, and they could dare to indulge their grief. I can't write of it, I can't think of it. Wherever I turned, I saw him in a hundred guises—as a tiny child, as a small, sturdy boy, as the son we lost.

We have let the house to some very kind and reasonable people, who have made things very easy to us; and to me at least it was a sort of heavy joy to take the last meal in the old home, to drive away, to see the landscape fade from sight. I shall never willingly return. It would seem to me like a wilful rolling among the thorns of life, a gathering-in of spears into one's breast. I seemed like a naked creature that had lost its skin, that shrank and bled at every touch.

February 10, 1890.

I have been house-hunting, and I do not pretend to dislike it. The sight of unknown houses, high garden walls, windows looking into blind courts, staircases leading to lofts, dark cupboards, old lumber, has a very stimulating effect on my imagination. Perhaps, too, I sometimes think, these old places are full of haunting spiritual presences, clinging, half tearfully, half joyfully to the familiar scenes, half sad, perhaps, that they did not make a finer thing of the little confined life; half glad to be free—as a man, strong and well, might look with a sense of security into a room where he had borne an operation. But I have never believed much in haunted rooms. The Father's many mansions can be hardly worth deserting for the little, dark houses of our tiny life.

I disliked some of the houses intensely—so ugly and pretentious, so inconvenient and dull; but even so it is pleasant in fancy to plan the life one would live there, the rooms one would use. One house touched me inexpressibly. It was a house I knew from the outside in a little town where I used to go and spend a few weeks every year with an old aunt of mine. The name of the little town—I saw it in an agent's list—had a sort of enchantment for me, a golden haze of memory. I was allowed a freedom there I was allowed nowhere else, I was petted and made much of, and I used to spend most of my time in sauntering about, just looking, watching, scrutinising things, with the hard and uncritical observation of childhood. When I got to the place, I was surprised to find that I knew well the look of the house I went to see, though I had not ever entered it. Two neat, contented, slightly absurd old maiden ladies had lived there, who used to walk out together, dressed exactly alike in some faded fashion. The laurels and yews still grew thickly in the shrubbery, and shaded the windows of the ugly little parlours. An old, quiet, respectable maid showed me round; she had been in service there for twenty years, and she was tearfully lamenting over the break-up of the home. The old ladies had lived there for sixty years. One of them had died ten years before, the other had lingered on to extreme old age. The house was like a museum, a specimen of a house of the thirties, in which nothing had ever been touched or changed. The strange wall-papers and chintzes, the crewel-work chairs, the mirrors, the light maple furniture, the case of moth-eaten humming-birds, the dull engravings of historical pictures, the old books—the drawing-room table was covered with annuals and keepsakes, Moore's poems, Mrs. Barbauld's works—all had a pathetic ugliness, redeemed by a certain consistency of quality. And then the poky, comfortable arrangements, the bath-chair in the coach-house, the four-post bedsteads, the hand-rail on the stairs, the sandbags for the doors, all spoke of a timid, invalid life, a dim backwater in the tide of things. There had been children there at some time, for there were broken toys, collections of dried plants, curious stones, in an attic. The little drama of the house shaped itself for me, as I walked through the frowsy, faded rooms, with a touching insistence. This bedroom had never been used since Miss Eleanor died—and I could fancy the poor, little, timid, precise life flitting away among the well-known surroundings. This had been Miss Jackson's favourite room—it was so quiet—she had died there, sitting in her chair, a few weeks before. The leisurely, harmless routine of the quiet household rose before me. I could imagine Miss Jackson writing her letters, reading her book, eating her small meals, making the same humble and grateful remarks, entertaining her old friends. Year after year it had gone on, just the same, the clock ticking loud in the hall, the sun creeping round the old rooms, the birds singing in the garden, the faint footsteps in the road. It had begun, that gentle routine, long before I had been born into the world; and it was strange to me to think that, as I passed through the most stirring experiences of my life, nothing ever stirred or moved or altered here. Miss Jackson had felt Miss Eleanor's death very much; she had hardly ever left the house since, and they had had no company. Yes, what a woefully bewildering thing death swooping down into that quiet household, with all its tranquil security, must have been! One wondered what Miss Eleanor had felt, when she knew she had to die, to pass out into the unknown dark out of a world so tender, so familiar, so peaceful; and what had poor Miss Jackson made of it, when she was left alone? She must have found it all very puzzling, very dreary. And yet, in the dim past, perhaps one or both of them, had had dreams of a fuller life, had fancied that something more than tenderness had looked out of the eyes of a man; well, it had come to nothing, whatever it might have been; and the two old ladies had settled down, perhaps with some natural repining, to their unexciting, contented life, the day filled with little duties and pleasures, the nights with innocent sleep. It had not been a selfish life—they had been good to the poor, the maid told me; and in old days they had often had their nephews and nieces to stay with them.

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But those children had grown up and gone out into the world, and no longer cared to return to the dull little house with its precise ways, and the fidgety love that had once embraced them.

The whole thing seemed a mysterious mixture of purposelessness and contentment. Rumours of wars, social convulsions, patriotic hopes, great ideas, had swept on their course outside, and had never stirred the drowsy current of life behind the garden walls. The sisters had lived, sweetly, perhaps, and softly, like trees in some sequestered woodland, hardly recognising their own gentle lapse of strength and activity.

And now the whole thing was over for good. Curious and indifferent people came, tramped about the house, pronounced it old-fashioned and inconvenient. I could not do that myself; the place was brimful of the pathetic evidences of what had been. Soon, no doubt, the old house would wear a different guise—it would be renovated and restored, the furniture would drift away to second-hand shops, the litter would be thrown out upon the rubbish-heap. New lives, new relationships would spring up; children would be born, boys would play, lovers would embrace, sufferers would lie musing, men and women would die in those refurbished rooms. Everything would drift onwards, and the lives to whom each corner, each stair, each piece of furniture had meant so much, would become a memory first, and then fade into nothingness. Where and what were the two old ladies now? Were they gone out utterly, like an extinguished flame? were they in some new home of tranquil peace? Were they adjusting themselves with a sense of timid impotence—those slender, tired spirits—to new and bewildering conditions?

The old, dull house called to me that day with a hundred faint voices and tremulous echoes. I could make nothing of it; for though it swept the strings of my heart with a ghostly music, it seemed to have no certain message for me, but the message of oblivion and silence.

I was sorry, as I went away, to leave the poor maidservant to her lonely and desolate memories. She had to leave her comfortable kitchen and her easy routine, for new duties and new faces, and I could see that she anticipated the change with sad dismay.

It seemed to me in that hour as though the cruelty and the tenderness of the world were very mysteriously blended—there was no lack of tenderness in the old house with its innumerable small associations, its sheltered calm. And then suddenly the stroke must fall, and fall upon lives whose very security and gentleness seemed to have been so ill a preparation for sterner and darker things. It would have been more loving, one thought, either to have made the whole fabric more austere, more precarious from the first; or else to have bestowed a deep courage and a fertile hope, a firmer endurance, rather than to have confronted lives so frail and delicate with the terrors of the vast unknown.

The Altar Fire
April 8, 1890.

Our new house is charming, beautiful, homelike. It is an old stone building, formerly a farm; it has a quaint garden and orchard, and the wooded hill runs up steeply behind, with a stream in front. It is on the outskirts of a village, and we are within three miles of Maud's old home, so that she knows all the country round. We have got two of our old servants, and a solid comfortable gardener, a native of the place. The house within is quaint and comfortable. We have a spare bedroom; I have no study, but shall use the little panelled dining-room. We have had much to do in settling in, and I have done a great deal of hard physical work myself, in the way of moving furniture and hanging pictures, inducing much wholesome fatigue. Maggie, who broke down dreadfully on leaving the old home, with the wonderful spring that children have, is full of excitement and even delight in the new house. I rather dread the time when all our occupations shall be over, and when we shall settle down to the routine of life. I begin to wonder how I shall occupy myself. I mean to do a good many odd jobs—we have no trap, and there will be a good deal of fetching and carrying to be done. We shall resume our lessons, Maggie and I; there will be reading, gardening, walking. One ought to be able to live philosophically enough. What would I not give to be able to write now! but the instinct seems wholly and utterly dead and gone. I cannot even conceive that I ever used, solemnly and gravely, to write about imaginary people, their jests and epigrams, their sorrows and cares. Life and Art! I used to suppose that it was all a softly moulded, rhythmic, sonorous affair, strophe and antistrophe; but the griefs and sorrows of art are so much nearer each other, like major and minor keys, than the griefs and sorrows of life. In art, the musician smiles and sighs alternately, but his sighing is a balanced, an ordered mood; the inner heart is content, as the pool is content, whether it mirrors the sunlight or the lonely star; but in life, joy is to grief what music is to aching silence, dumbness, inarticulate pain—though perhaps in that silence one hears a deeper, stranger sound, the buzz of the whirring atom, the soft thunder of worlds plunging through the void, joyless, gigantic, oblivious forces.

Is it good thus to have the veils of life rent asunder? If life, the world's life, activity, work, be the end of existence, then it is not good. It breaks the spring of energy, so that one goes heavily and sorely. But what if that be not the end? What then?

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May 16, 1890.

At present the new countryside is a great resource. I walk far among the wolds; I find exquisite villages, where every stone-built house seems to have style and quality; I come down upon green water-meadows, with clear streams flowing by banks set with thorn-bushes and alders. The churches, the manor-houses, of grey rubble smeared with plaster, with stone roof-tiles, are a feast for eye and heart. Long days in the open air bring me a dull equable health of body, a pleasant weariness, a good-humoured indifference. My mind becomes grass-grown, full of weeds, ruinous; but I welcome it as at least a respite from suffering. It is strange to think of myself at what ought, I suppose, to be the busiest and fullest time of my life, living here like a tree in lonely fields. What would be the normal life? A little house in a London street, I suppose, with a lot of white paint and bookshelves. Luncheons, dinners, plays, music, clubs, week-end visits to lively houses, a rush abroad, a few country visits in the winter. Very harmless and pleasant if one enjoyed it, but to me inconceivable and insupportable. Perhaps I should be happier and brisker, perhaps the time would go quicker. Ought one to make up one's mind that this would be the normal life, and that therefore one had better learn to accommodate oneself to it? Does one pay penalties for not submitting oneself to the ordinary laws of human intercourse? Doubtless one does. But then, made as I am, I should have to pay penalties which would seem to be even heavier for the submission. It is there that the puzzle lies; that a man should be created with the strong instinct that I feel for liberty and independence and solitude and the quiet of the country, and then that he should discover that the life he so desires should be the one that develops all the worst side of him—morbidity, fastidiousness, gloom, discontent. This is the shadow of civilisation; that it makes people intellectual, alert, craving for stimulus, and yet sucks their nerves dry of the strength that makes such things enjoyable.

And still, as I go in and out, the death of Alec seems the one absolutely unintelligible and inexplicable thing, a gloom penetrated by no star. It was the one thing that might have made me unselfish, tender-hearted, the anxious care of some other than myself. "Perhaps," says an old friend writing to me with a clumsy attempt at comfort, "perhaps he was taken mercifully away from some evil to come." A good many people say that, and feel it quite honestly. But what an insupportable idea of the ways of Providence, that God had planned a prospect for the child so dreadful that even his swift removal should be tolerable by comparison! What a helpless, hopeless confession of failure! No; either the whole short life, closed by the premature death, must have been designed, planned, executed deliberately; or else God is at the mercy of blank cross-currents, opposing forces, tendencies even stronger than Himself; and then the very idea of God crumbles away, and God becomes the blank and inscrutable force working behind a gentle, good-humoured will, which would be kind and gracious if it could, but is trammelled and bound by something stronger; that was the Greek view, of course—God above man, and Fate above God. The worst of it is that it has a horrible vraisemblance, and seems to lie even nearer to the facts of life than our own tender-hearted and sentimental theories and schemes of religion.

But whether it be God or fate, the burden has to be borne. And my one endeavour must be to bear it myself, consciously and courageously, and to shift it so far as I can from the gentler and tenderer shoulders of those whose life is so strangely linked with mine.

The Altar Fire

May 25, 1890.

One sees a house, like the house we now live in, from a road as one passes, from the windows of a train. It seems to be set at the end of the world, with the earth's sunset distance behind it—it seems a fortress of quiet, a place of infinite peace; and then one lives in it, and behold, it is a centre of a little active life, with all sorts of cross-currents darting to and fro, over it, past it.

Or again one thinks, as one sees such a house in passing, that there at least one could live in meditation and cloistered calm; that there would be neither cares nor anxieties; that one would be content to sit, just looking out at the quiet fields, pacing to and fro, receiving impressions, musing, selecting, apprehending—and then one lives there, and the stream of life is as turbid, as fretful as ever. The strange thing is that such delusions survive any amount of experience; that one cannot read into other lives the things that trouble one's own.

A little definite scheme opens before us here; old friends of Maud's find us out, simple, kindly, tiresome people. There is an exchange of small civilities, there are duties, activities, relationships. To Maud these things come by the light of nature; to her the simplest interchange of definite thoughts is as natural as to breathe. I hear her calm, sweet, full voice answering, asking. To me these things are utterly wearisome and profitless. I want only to speak of the things for which I care, and to people attuned to the same key of thought; a basis of sympathy and temperamental differences—that is the perfect union of qualities for a friend. But these stolid, kindly parsons, with brisk, active wives, ingenuous daughters, heavy sons—I want either to know them better, or not to know them at all. I want to enter the house, the furnished chambers of people's minds; and I am willing enough to throw my own open to a cordial guest; but I do not want to stand and chatter in some debatable land of social conventionality. I have no store of simple geniality. The other night we went to dine quietly with a parson near here, a worthy fellow, happy and useful. Afterwards, in the drawing-room, I sate beside my host. I saw Maud listening, with rapt interest, to the chronicles of all the village families, robustly and unimaginatively told by the parson's wife; meanwhile I, tortured by intolerable ennui, pumped up questions, tried a hundred subjects with my worthy host. He told me long and prolix stories, he discoursed on rural needs. At last I said that we must be going; he replied with genuine disappointment that the night was still young, and that it was a pity to break up our pleasant confabulation. I saw with a shock of wonder that he had evidently been enjoying himself hugely; that it was a pleasure to him, for some unaccountable reason, not to hear a new person talk, but to say the same things that he had said for years, to a new person. It is not ideas that most people want; they are satisfied with mere gregariousness, the sight and sound of other figures. They like to produce the same stock of ideas, the same conclusions. "As I always say," was a phrase that was for ever on my entertainer's lips. I suppose that probably my own range is just as limited, but I have an Athenian hankering after novelty of thought, the new mintage of the mind. I loathe the old obliterated coinage, with the stamp all rounded and faint. Dulness, sameness, triteness, are they essential parts of life? I suppose it is really that my nervous energy is low, and requires stimulus: if it were strong and full, the current would flow into the trivial things. I derive a certain pleasure from the sight of other people's rooms, the familiar, uncomfortable, shabby furniture, the drift of pictures, the debris of ornament—all that stands for difference and individuality. But one can't get inside most people's minds; they only admit one to the public rooms. A crushing fatigue and depression settles down upon me in such hours, and then the old blank sense of grief and loss comes flowing back—it is old already, because it seems to have stained all the backward pages of life; then follows the weary, restless night; and the breaking of the grey, pitiless dawn.

The Altar Fire

June 3, 1890.

I do not want, even in my thoughts, to put the contemplative life above the practical life. Highest of all I would put a combination of the two—a man of high and clear ideals, in a position where he was able to give them shape—a great constructive statesman, a great educator, a great man of business, who was also keenly alive to social problems, a great philanthropist. Next to these I would put great thinkers, moralists, poets—all who inspire. Then I would put the absolutely effective instruments of great designs—legislators, lawyers, teachers, priests, doctors, writers—men without originality, but with a firm conception of civic and human duty. And then I would put all those who, in a small sphere, exercise a direct, quiet, simple influence—and then come the large mass of mankind; people who work faithfully, from instinct and necessity, but without any particular design or desire, except to live honestly, honourably, and respectably, with no urgent sense of the duty of serving others, taking life as it comes, practical individualists, in fact. No higher than these, but certainly no lower, I should put quiet, contemplative, reflective people, who are theoretical individualists. They are not very effective people generally, and they have a certain poetical quality; they cannot originate, but they can appreciate. I look upon all these individualists, whether practical or theoretical, as the average mass of humanity, the common soldiers, so to speak, as distinguished from the officers. Life is for them a discipline, and their *raison d'être* is that of the learner, as opposed to that of the teacher. To all of them, experience is the main point; they are all in the school of God; they are being prepared for something. The object is that they should apprehend something, and the channel through which it comes matters little. They do the necessary work of the world; they support themselves, and they support those who from infirmity, weakness, age, or youth cannot support themselves. There is room, I think, in the world for both kinds of individualist, though the contemplative individualists are in the minority; and perhaps it must be so, because a certain lassitude is characteristic of them. If they were in the majority in any nation, one would have a simple, patient, unambitious race, who would tend to become the subjects of other more vigorous nations: our Indian empire is a case in point. Probably China is a similar nation, preserved from conquest by its inaccessibility and its numerical force. Japan is an instance of the strange process of a contemplative nation becoming a practical one. The curious thing is that Christianity, which is essentially a contemplative, unmilitant, unpatriotic, unambitious force, decidedly oriental in type, should have become, by a mysterious transmutation, the religion of active, inventive, conquering nations. I have no doubt that the essence of Christianity lies in a contemplative simplicity, and that it is in strong opposition to what is commonly called civilisation. It aims at improving society through the uplifting of the individual, not at uplifting the individual through social agencies. We have improved upon that in our latter-day wisdom, for the Christian ought to be inherently unpatriotic, or rather his patriotism ought to be of an all-embracing rather than of an antagonistic kind. I do not want to make lofty excuses for myself; my own unworldliness is not an abnegation at all, but a deliberate preference for obscurity. Still I should maintain that the vital and spiritual strength of a nation is measured, not by the activity of its organisations, but by the number of quiet, simple, virtuous, and high-minded persons that it contains. And thus, in my own case, though the choice is made for me by temperament and circumstances, I have no pricking of conscience on the subject of my scanty activities. It is not mere activity that makes the difference. The danger of mere activity is that it tends to make men complacent, to lead them to think that they are following the paths of virtue, when they are only enmeshed in conventionality. The dangers of the quiet life are indolence, morbidity, sloth, depression, unmanliness; but I think that it develops humility, and allows the daily and hourly message of God to sink into the soul. After all, the one supreme peril is that of self-satisfaction and finality. If a man is content with what he is, there is nothing to make him long for what is higher. Any one who looks around him with a candid gaze, becomes aware that our life is and must be a provisional one, that it has somehow fallen short of its possibilities. To better it is the best of all courses; but next to that it is more desirable that men should hope for and desire a greater harmony of things, than that they should acquiesce in what is so strangely and sadly amiss.

The Altar Fire
June 18, 1890.

I have made a new friend, whose contact and example help me so strangely and mysteriously, that it seems to me almost as though I had been led hither that I might know him. He is an old and lonely man, a great invalid, who lives at a little manor-house a mile or two away. Maud knew him by name, but had never seen him. He wrote me a courtly kind of note, apologising for being unable to call, and expressing a hope that we might be able to go and see him. The house stands on the edge of the village, looking out on the churchyard, a many-gabled building of grey stone, a long flagged terrace in front of it, terminated by posts with big stone balls; a garden behind, and a wood behind that—the whole scene unutterably peaceful and beautiful. We entered by a little hall, and a kindly, plain, middle-aged woman, with a Quaker-like precision of mien and dress, came out to greet us, with a fresh kindness that had nothing conventional about it. She said that her uncle was not very well, but she thought he would be able to see us. She left us for a moment. There was a cleanness and a fragrance about the old house that was very characteristic. It was most simply, even barely furnished, but with a settled, ancient look about it, that gave one a sense of long association. She presently returned, and said, smiling, that her uncle would like to see us, but separately, as he was very far from strong. She took Maud away, and returning, walked with me round the garden, which had the same dainty and simple perfection about it. I could see that my hostess had the poetical passion for flowers; she knew the names of all, and spoke of them almost as one might of children. This was very wilful and impatient, and had to be kept in good order; that one required coaxing and tender usage. We went on to the wood, in all its summer foliage, and she showed us a little arbour where her uncle loved to sit, and where the birds would come at his whistle. "They are looking at us out of the trees everywhere," she said, "but they are shy of strangers"—and indeed we heard soft chirping and rustling everywhere. An old dog and a cat accompanied us. She drew my attention to the latter. "Look at Pippa," she said, "she is determined to walk with us, and equally determined not to seem to need our company, as if she had come out of her own accord, and was surprised to find us in her garden." Pippa, hearing her name mentioned, stalked off with an air of mystery and dignity into the bushes, and we could see her looking out at us; but when we continued our stroll, she flew out past us, and walked on stiffly ahead. "She gets a great deal of fun out of her little dramas," said Miss ——. "Now poor old Rufus has no sense of drama or mystery—he is frankly glad of our company in a very low and common way—there is nothing aristocratic about him." Old Rufus looked up and wagged his tail humbly. Presently she went on to talk about her uncle, and contrived to tell me a great deal in a very few words. I learnt that he was the last male representative of an old family, who had long held the small estate here; that after a distinguished Oxford career, he had met with a serious accident that had made him a permanent invalid. That he had settled down here, not expecting to live more than a few years, and that he was now over seventy; it had been the quietest of lives, she said, and a very happy one, too, in spite of his disabilities. He read a great deal, and interested himself in local affairs, but sometimes for weeks together could do nothing. I gathered that she was his only surviving relation, and had lived with him from her childhood. "You will think," she added, laughing, "that he is the kind of person who is shown by his friends as a wonderful old man, and who turns out to be a person like the patriarch Casby, in *Little Dorrit*, whose sanctity, like Samson's, depended entirely upon the length of his hair. But he is not in the least like that, and I will leave you to find out for yourself whether he is wonderful or not."

There was a touch of masculine irony and humour about this that took my fancy; and we went to the house, Miss —— saying that two new persons in one afternoon would be rather a strain for her uncle, much as he would enjoy it, and that his enjoyment must be severely limited. "His illness," she said, "is an obscure one; it is a want of adequate nervous force: the doctors give it names, but don't seem to be able to cure or relieve it; he is strong, physically and mentally, but the least over-exertion or over-strain knocks him up; it is as if virtue went out of him; though a partial niece may say that he has a plentiful stock of the material."

We went in, and proceeded to a small library, full of books, with a big writing-table in the window. The room was somewhat dark, and the feet fell softly on a thick carpet. There was no sort of luxury about the room; a single portrait hung over the mantelpiece, and there was no trace of ornament anywhere, except a big bowl of roses on a table.

Here, with a low table beside him covered with books, and a little reading-desk pushed aside, I found Mr.

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— sitting. He was leaning forwards in his chair, and Maud was sitting opposite him. They appeared to be silent, but with the natural silence that comes of reflection, not the silence of embarrassment. Maud, I could see, was strangely moved. He rose up to greet me, a tall, thin figure, dressed in a rough grey suit. There was little sign of physical ill-health about him. He had a shock of thick, strong hair, perfectly white. His face was that of a man who lived much in the open air, clear and ascetic of complexion. He was not at all what would be called handsome; he had rather heavy features, big, white eyebrows, and a white moustache. His manner was sedate and extremely unaffected, not hearty, but kindly, and he gave me a quick glance, out of his blue eyes, which seemed to take swift stock of me. "It is very kind of you to come and see me," he said in a measured tone. "Of course I ought to have paid my respects first, but I ventured to take the privilege of age; and moreover I am the obedient property of a very vigilant guardian, whose orders I implicitly obey—'Do this, and he doeth it.'" He smiled at his niece as he said it, and she said, "Yes, you would hardly believe how peremptory I can be; and I am going to show it by taking Mrs. — away, to show her the garden; and in twenty minutes I must take Mr. — away too, if he will be so kind as help me to sustain my authority."

The old man sate down again, smiling, and pointed me to a chair. The other two left us; and there followed what was to me a very memorable conversation. "We must make the best use of our time, you see," he said, "though I hope that this will not be the last time we shall meet. You will confer a very great obligation on me, if you can sometimes come to see me—and perhaps we may get a walk together occasionally. So we won't waste our time in conventional remarks," he added; "I will only say that I am heartily glad you have come to live here, and I am sure you will find it a beautiful place—you are wise enough to prefer the country to the town, I gather." Then he went on: "I have read all your books—I did not read them," he added with a smile, "that I might talk to you about them, but because they have interested me. May I say that each book has been stronger and better than the last, except in one case"—he mentioned the name of a book of mine—"in which you seemed to me to be republishing earlier work." "Yes," I said, "you are quite right; I was tempted by a publisher and I fell." "Well," he said, "the book was a good one—and there is something that we lose as we grow older, a sort of youthfulness, a courageous indiscretion, a beautiful freedom of thought; but we can't have everything, and one's books must take their appropriate colours from the mind. May I say that I think your books have grown more and more mature, tolerant, artistic, wise?—and the last was simply admirable. It entirely engrossed me, and for a blessed day or two I lived in your mind, and saw out of your eyes. I am sure it was a great book—a noble and a large-hearted book, full of insight and faith—the best kind of book." I murmured something; and he said, "You may think it is arrogant of me to speak like this; but I have lived among books, and I am sure that I have a critical gift, mainly because I have no power of expression. You know the best kind of critics are the men who have tried to write books, and have failed, as long as their failure does not make them envious and ungenerous; I have failed many times, but I think I admire good work all the more for that. You are writing now?" "No," I said, "I am writing nothing." "Well, I am sorry to hear it," he said, "and may I venture to ask why?" "Simply because I cannot," I said; and now there came upon me a strange feeling, the same sort of feeling that one has in answering the questions of a great and compassionate physician, who assumes the responsibility of one's case. Not only did I not resent these questions, as I should often have resented them, but it seemed to give me a sense of luxury and security to give an account of myself to this wise and unaffected old man. He bent his brows upon me: "You have had a great sorrow lately?" he said. "Yes," I said, "we have lost our only boy, nine years old." "Ah," he said, "a sore stroke, a sore stroke!" and there was a deep tenderness in his voice that made me feel that I should have liked to kneel down before him, and weep at his knee, with his hand laid in blessing on my head. We sate in silence for a few moments. "Is it this that has stopped your writing?" he said. "No," I said, "the power had gone from me before—I could not originate, I could only do the same sort of work, and of weaker quality than before." "Well," he said, "I don't wonder; the last book must have been a great strain, though I am sure you were happy when you wrote it. I remember a friend of mine, a great Alpine climber, who did a marvellous feat of climbing some unapproachable peak—without any sense of fatigue, he told me, all pure enjoyment—but he had a heart-attack the next day, and paid the penalty of his enjoyment. He could not climb for some years after that." "Yes," I said, "I think that has been my case—but my fear is that if I lose the habit—and I seem to have lost it—I shall never be able to take it up again." "No, you need not fear that," he replied; "if something is given you to say, you will be able to say it, and say it better than ever—but no doubt you feel very much lost without it. How do you fill the time?" "I hardly know," I said, "not very profitably—I read, I teach my daughter, I muddle along." "Well," he

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said, smiling, "the hours in which we muddle along are not our worst hours. You believe in God?" The suddenness of this question surprised me. "Yes," I said, "I believe in God. I cannot disbelieve. Something has placed me where I am, something urges me along; there is a will behind me, I am sure of that. But I do not know whether that will is just or unjust, kind or unkind, benevolent or indifferent. I have had much happiness and great prosperity, but I have had to bear also things which are inconceivably repugnant to me, things which seem almost satanically adapted to hurt and wound me in my tenderest and innermost feelings, trials which seem to be concocted with an almost infernal appropriateness, not things which I could hope to bear with courage and faith, but things which I can only endure with rebellious resistance." "Yes," he said, "I understand you perfectly; but does not their very appropriateness, the satanical ingenuity of which you speak, help you to feel that they are not fortuitous, but sent deliberately to you yourself and to none other?" "Yes," I said, "I see that; but how can I believe in the justice of a discipline which I could not inflict, I will not say upon a dearly loved child, but upon the most relentless and stubborn foe." "Ah," said he, "now I see your heart bare, the very palpitating beat of the blood. Do you think you are alone in this? Let me tell you my own story. Over fifty years ago I left Oxford with, I really think I may say, almost everything before me—everything, that is, which is open to an instinctively cheerful, temperate, capable, active man—I was not rich, but I could afford to wait to earn money. I was sociable and popular; I was endowed with an immense appetite for variety of experience; I don't think that there was anything which appeared to me to be uninteresting. But I could persevere too, I could stick to work, I had taken a good degree. Then an accidental fall off a chair, on which I was standing to get a book, laid me on my back for a time. I fretted over it at first, but when I got about again, I found that I was a man maimed for life. I don't know what the injury was—some obscure lesion of the spinal marrow or brain, I believe—some flaw about the size of a pin's head—the doctors have never made out. But every time that I plunged into work, I broke down; for a long time I thought I should struggle through; but at last I became aware that I was on the shelf, with other cracked jars, for life—I can't tell you what I went through, what agonies of despair and rebellion. I thought that at least literature was left me. I had always been fond of books, and was a good scholar, as it is called; but I soon became aware that I had no gift of expression, and moreover that I could not hope to acquire it, because any concentrated effort threw me into illness. I was an ambitious fellow, and success was closed to me—I could not even hope to be useful. I tried several things, but always with the same result; and at last I fell into absolute despair, and just lived on, praying daily and even hourly that I might die. But I did not die, and then at last it dawned upon me, like a lightning sunrise, that THIS was life for me; this was my problem, these my limitations; that I was to make the best I could out of a dulled and shattered life; that I was to learn to be happy, even useful, in spite of it—that just as other people were given activity, practical energy, success, to learn from them the right balance, the true proportion of life, and not to be submerged and absorbed in them, so to me was given a simpler problem still, to have all the temptations of activity removed—temptations to which with my zest for experience I might have fallen an easy victim—and to keep my courage high, my spirit pure and expectant, if I could, waiting upon God. This little estate fell to me soon afterwards, and I soon saw what a tender gift it was, because it gave me a home; every other source of interest and pleasure was removed, because the simplest visits, the wildest distractions were too much for me—the jarring of any kind of vehicle upset me. By what slow degrees I attained happiness I can hardly say. But now, looking back, I see this—that whereas others have to learn by hard experience, that detachment, self-purification, self-control are the only conditions of happiness on earth, I was detached, purified, controlled by God Himself. I was detached, because my life was utterly precarious, I was taught purification and control, because whereas more robust people can defer and even defy the penalties of luxury, comfort, gross desires, material pleasures, I was forced, every day and hour, to deny myself the smallest freedom—I was made ascetic by necessity. Then came a greater happiness still; for years I was lost in a sort of individualistic self-absorption, with no thoughts of anything but God and His concern with myself—often hopeful and beautiful enough—when I found myself drawn into nearer and dearer relationships with those around me. That came through my niece, whom I adopted as an orphan child, and who is one of those people who live naturally and instinctively in the lives of other people. I got to know all the inhabitants of this little place—simple country people, you will say—but as interesting, as complex in emotion and intellect, as any other circle in the world. The only reason why one ever thinks people dull and limited, is because one does not know them; if one talks directly and frankly to people, one passes through the closed doors at once. Looking back, I can see that I have been used by God, not with mere compassion and careless tenderness, but with an intent, exacting, momentary love, of an

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almost awful intensity and intimacy. It is the same with all of us, if we can only see it. Our faults, our weaknesses, our qualities good or bad, are all bestowed with an anxious and deliberate care. The reason why some of us make shipwreck—and even that is mercifully and lovingly dispensed to us—is because we will not throw ourselves on the side of God at every moment. Every time that the voice says 'Do this,' or 'Leave that undone,' and we reply fretfully, 'Ah, but I have arranged otherwise,' we take a step backwards. He knocks daily, hourly, momentarily, at the door, and when we have once opened, and He is entered, we have no desire again but to do His will to the uttermost." He was silent for a moment, his eyes in-dwelling upon some secret thought; then he said, "Everything about you, your books, your dear wife, your words, your face, tell me that you are very near indeed to the way—a step or two, and you are free!" He sate back for a moment, as though exhausted, and then said: "You will forgive me for speaking so frankly, but I feel from hour to hour how short my time may be; and I had no doubt when I saw you, even before I saw you, that I should have some message to give you, some tidings of hope and patience."

I despair, as I write, of giving any idea of the impressiveness of the old man; now that I have written down his talk, it seems abrupt and even strained. It was neither. The perfect naturalness and tranquillity of it all, the fatherly smile, the little gestures of his frail hand, interpreted and filled up the gaps, till I felt as though I had known him all my life, and that he was to me as a dear father, who saw my needs, and even loved me for what I was not and for what I might be.

At this point Miss —— came in, and led me away. As Maud and I walked back, we spoke to each other of what we had seen and heard. He had talked to her, she said, very simply about Alec. "I don't know how it was," she added, "but I found myself telling him everything that was in my mind and heart, and it seemed as though he knew it all before." "Yes, indeed," I said, "he made me desire with all my heart to be different—and yet that is not true either, because he made me wish not to be something outside of myself, but something inside, something that was there all the time: I seem never to have suspected what religion was before; it had always seemed to me a thing that one put on and wore, like a garment; but now it seems to me to be the most natural, simple, and beautiful thing in the world; to consist in being oneself, in fact." "Yes, that is exactly it," said Maud, "I could not have put it into words, but that is how I feel." "Yes," I said, "I saw, in a flash, that life is not a series of things that happen to us, but our very selves. It is not a question of obeying, and doing, and acting, but a question of being. Well, it has been a wonderful experience; and yet he told me nothing that I did not know. God in us, not God with us." And presently I added: "If I were never to see Mr. —— again, I should feel he had somehow done more for me than a hundred conversations and a thousand books. It was like the falling of the spirit at Pentecost."

That strange sense of an uplifted freedom, of willing co-operation has dwelt with me, with us both, for many days. I dare not say that life has become easy; that the cloud has rolled away; that there have not been hours of dismay and dreariness and sorrow. But it is, I am sure, a turning-point of my life; the way which has led me downwards, deepening and darkening, seems to have reached its lowest point, and to be ascending from the gloom; and all from the words of a simple, frail old man, sitting among his books in a panelled parlour, in a soft, summer afternoon.

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July 10, 1890.

I have been sitting out, this hot, still afternoon, upon the lawn, under the shade of an old lime-tree, with its sweet scent coming and going in wafts, with the ceaseless murmur of the bees all about it; but for that slumberous sound, the place was utterly still; the sun lay warm on the old house, on the box hedges of the garden, on the rich foliage of the orchard. I have been lost in a strange dream of peace and thankfulness, only wishing the sweet hours could stay their course, and abide with me thus for ever. Part of the time Maggie sate with me, reading. We were both silent, but glad to be together; every now and then she looked up and smiled at me. I was not even visited by the sense that used to haunt me, that I must bestir myself, do something, think of something. It is not that I am less active than formerly; it is the reverse. I do a number of little things here, trifling things they would seem, not worth mentioning, mostly connected with the village or the parish. My writing has retired far into the past, like a sort of dream. I never even plan to begin again. I teach a little, not Maggie only, but some boys and girls of the place, who have left school, but are glad to be taught in the evenings. I have plenty of good easy friends here, and have the blessed sense of feeling myself wanted. Best of all, a sense of poisonous hurry seems to have gone out of my life. In the old days I was always stretching on to something, the end of my book, the next book—never content with the present, always hoping that the future would bring me the satisfaction I seemed to miss. I did not always know it at the time, for I was often happy when I was writing a book—but it was, at best, a rushing, tortured sort of happiness. My great sorrow—what has that become to me? A beautiful thing, full of patience and hope. What but that has taught me to learn to live for the moment, to take the bitter experiences of life as they come, not crushing out the sweetness and flinging the rind aside, but soberly, desirously, only eager to get from the moment what it is meant to bring. Even the very shrinking back from a bitter duty, the indolent rejection of the thought that touches one's elbow, bidding one again and again arise and go, means something; to defer one's pleasure, to break the languid dream, to take up the tiny task, what strength is there! Thus no burden seems too heavy, too awkward, too slippery, too ill-shaped, but one can lift it. The yoke is easy, because one bears it in quiet confidence, not overtaxing ability or straining hope. Instead of watching life, as from high castle windows, feeling it common and unclean, not to be mingled with, I am in it and of it. And what is become of all my old dreams of art, of the secluded worship, the lonely rapture! Well, it is all there, somehow, flowing inside life, like a stream that is added to a river, not like a leat drawn aside from the current. The force I spent on art has gone to swell life and augment it; it heightens perception, it intensifies joy—it was the fevered lust of expression that drained the vigour of my days and hours.

But am I then satisfied with the part I play? Do I feel that my faculties are being used, that I am lending a hand to the great sum of toil? I used to feel that, or thought I felt it, in the old days, but now I see that I walked in a vain delusion, serving my own joy, my own self-importance. Not that I think my old toil all ill-spent; that was my work before, as surely as it is not now; but the old intentness, the old watching for tone and gesture, for action and situation, that has all shifted its gaze, and waits upon God. It may be, nay it is certain, that I have far to go, much to learn; but now that I may perhaps recover my strength, life spreads out into sunny shallows, moving slow and clear. It is like a soft sweet interlude between two movements of fire and glow; for I see now, what then I could not see, that something in my life was burnt and shrivelled up in my enforced silence and in my bitter loss— then, when I felt my energies at their lowest, when mind and bodily frame alike flapped loose, like a flag of smut upon the bars of a grate, I was living most intensely, and the soul's wings grew fast, unfolding plume and feather. It was then that life burnt with its fiercest heat, when it withdrew me, faintly struggling, away from all that pleased and caressed the mind and the body, into the silent glow of the furnace. Strange that I should not have perceived it! But now I see in all maimed and broken lives, the lives that seem most idle and helpless, most futile and vain, that the same fierce flame is burning bright about them; that the reason why they cannot spread and flourish, like flowers, into the free air, is because the strong roots are piercing deep, entwining themselves firmly among the stones, piercing the cold silent crevices of the earth. Ay, indeed! The coal in the furnace, burning passively and hotly, is as much a force, though it but lies and suffers, as the energy that throbs in the leaping piston-rod or the rushing wheel. Not in success and noise and triumph does the soul grow; when the body rejoices, when the mind is prodigal of seed, the spirit sits within in a darkened chamber, like a folded chrysalis, stiff as a corpse, in a faint

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dream. But when triumphs have no savour, when the cheek grows pale and the eye darkens, then the dark chrysalis opens, and the rainbow wings begin to spread and glow, uncrumpling to the suns of paradise. My soul has taken wings, and sits poised and delicate, faint with long travail, perhaps to hover awhile about the garden blooms and the chalices of honied flowers, perhaps to take her flight beyond the glade, over the forest, to the home of her desirous heart. I know not! Yet in these sunlit hours, with the slow, strong pulse of life beating round me, it seems that something is preparing for one struck dumb and crushed with sorrow to the earth. How soft a thrill of hope throbs in the summer air! How the bird-voices in the thicket, and the rustle of burnished leaves, and the hum of insects, blend into a secret harmony, a cadence half-heard! I wait in love and confidence; and through the trees of the garden One seems ever to draw nearer, walking in the cool of the day, at whose bright coming the flowers look upwards unashamed. Shall I be bidden to meet Him! Will He call me loud or low?

August 25, 1890.

Maud has been ailing of late—how much it is impossible to say, because she is always cheerful and indomitable. She never complains, she never neglects a duty; but I have found her, several times of late, sitting alone, unoccupied, musing—that is unlike her—and with a certain shadow upon her face that I do not recognise; but the strange, new, sweet companionship in which we live seems at the same time to have heightened and deepened. I seem to have lived so close to her all these years, and yet of late to have found a new and different personality in her, which I never suspected. Perhaps we have both changed somewhat; I do not feel the difference in myself. But there is something larger, stronger, deeper about Maud now, as if she had ascended into a purer air, and caught sight of some unexpected, undreamed-of distance; but instead of giving her remoteness, she seems to be sharing her wider outlook with me; she was never a great talker—perhaps it was that in old days my own mind ran like an ebullient fountain, evoking no definite response, needing no interchange; but she was always a sayer of penetrating things. She has a wonderful gift of seeing the firm issue through a cloud of mixed suggestions; but of late there has been a richness, a generosity, a wisdom about her which I have never recognised before. I think, with contrition, that I under-estimated, not her judgment or instinct, but her intellect. I am sure I lived too much in the intellectual region, and did not guess how little it really solves, in what a limited region it disports itself. I see that this wisdom was hers all along, and that I have been blind to it; but now that I have travelled out of the intellectual region, I perceive what a much greater thing that further wisdom is than I had thought. Living in art and for art, I used to believe that the intellectual structure was the one thing that mattered, but now I perceive dimly that the mind is but on the threshold of the soul, and that the artist may, nay does, often perceive, by virtue of his trained perception, what is going on in the sanctuary; but he is as one who kneels in a church at some great solemnity—he sees the movements and gestures of the priests; he sees the holy rite proceeding, he hears the sacred words; something of the inner spirit of it all flows out to him; but the viewless current of prayer, the fiery ray streaming down from God, that smites itself into the earthly symbol—all this is hidden from him. Those priests, intent upon the sacred work, feel something that they not only do not care to express, but which they would not if they could; it would be a profanation of the awful mystery. The artist is not profane in expressing what he perceives, because he can be the interpreter of the symbol to others more remote; but he is not a real partaker of the mystery; he is a seer of the word and not a doer. What now amazes me is that Maud, to whom the heart of the matter, the inner emotion, has always been so real, could fling herself, and all for love of me, into the outer work of intellectual expression. I have always, God forgive me, believed my work to be in some way superior to hers. I loved her truly, but with a certain condescension of mind, as one loves a child or a flower; and now I see that she has been serenely ahead of me all the time, and it has been she that has helped me along; I have been as the spoilt and wilful child, and she as the sweet and wise mother, who has listened to its prattle, and thrown herself, with all the infinite patience of love, into the tiny bounded dreams. I have told her all this as simply as I could, and though she deprecated it all generously and humbly, I feel the blessed sense of having caught her up upon the way, of seeing—how dimly and imperfectly!—what I have owed her all along. I am overwhelmed with a shame which it is a sweet pleasure to confess to her; and now that I can spare her a little, anticipate her wishes, save her trouble, it is an added joy; a service that I can render and which she loves to receive. I never thought of these things in the old days; she had always planned everything, arranged everything, forestalled everything.

I have at last persuaded her to come up to town and see a doctor. We plan to go abroad for a time. I would earn the means if I could, but, if not, we will sacrifice a little of our capital, and I will replace it, if I can, by some hack-work; though I have a dislike of being paid for my name and reputation, and not for my best work.

I am not exactly anxious; it is all so slight, what they call a want of tone, and she has been through so much; even so, my anxiety is conquered by the joy of being able to serve her a little; and that joy brings us together, hour by hour.

September 6, 1890.

Again the shadow comes down over my life. The doctor says plainly that Maud's heart is weak; but he adds that there is nothing organically wrong, though she must be content to live the life of an invalid for a time; he was reassuring and quiet; but I cannot keep a dread out of my mind, though Maud herself is more serene than she has been for a long time; she says that she was aware that she was somehow overtaxing herself, and it is a comfort to be bidden, in so many words, to abstain a little. We are to live quietly at home for a while, until she is stronger, and then we shall go abroad.

Maud does not come down in the mornings now, and she is forbidden to do more than take the shortest stroll. I read to her a good deal in the mornings; Maggie has proudly assumed the functions of housekeeper; the womanly instinct for these things is astonishing. A man would far sooner not have things comfortable, than have the trouble of providing them and seeing about them. Women do not care about comforts for themselves; they prefer haphazard meals, trays brought into rooms, vague arrangements; and yet they seem to know by instinct what a man likes, even though he does not express it, and though he would not take any trouble to secure it. What centuries of trained instincts must have gone to produce this. The new order has given me a great deal more of Maggie's society. We are sent out in the afternoon, because Maud likes to be quite alone to receive the neighbours, small and great, that come to see her, now that she cannot go to see them. She tells me frankly that my presence only embarrasses them. And thus another joy has come to me, one of the most beautiful things that has ever happened to me in my life, and which I can hardly find words to express—the contact with, the free sight of the mind and soul of an absolutely pure, simple and ingenuous girl. Maggie's mind has opened like a flower. She talks to me with perfect openness of all she feels and thinks; to walk thus, hour by hour, with my child's arm through my own, her wide—opened, beautiful eyes looking in mine, her light step beside me, with all her pretty caressing ways—it seems to me a taste of the purest and sweetest love I have ever felt. It is like the rapture of a lover, but without any shadow of the desirous element that mingles so fiercely and thirstily with our mortal loves, to find myself dear to her. I have a poignant hunger of the heart to save her from any touch of pain, to smooth her path for her, to surround her with beauty and sweetness. I did not guess that the world held any love quite like this; there seems no touch of selfishness about it; my love lavishes itself, asking for nothing in return, except that I may be dear to her as she to me.

Her fancies, her hopes, her dreams—how inexplicable, how adorable! She said to me to-day that she could never marry, and that it was a real pity that she could not have children of her own without. "We don't want any one else, do we, except just some little children to amuse us." She is a highly imaginative child, and one of our amusements is to tell each other long, interminable tales of the adventures of a family we call the Pickfords. I have lost all count of their names and ages, their comings and goings; but Maggie never makes a mistake about them, and they seem to her like real people; and when I sometimes plunge them into disaster, she is so deeply affected that the disasters have all to be softly repaired. The Pickfords must have had a very happy life; the kind of life that people created and watched over by a tender, patient and detailed Providence might live. How different from the real world!

But I don't want Maggie to live in the real world yet awhile. It will all come pouring in upon her, sorrow, anxiety, weariness, no doubt—alas that it should be so! Perhaps some people would blame me, would say that more discipline would be bracing, wholesome, preparatory. But I don't believe that. I had far rather that she learnt that life was tender, gentle and sweet—and then if she has to face trouble, she will have the strength of feeling that the tenderness, gentleness and sweetness are the real stuff of life, waiting for her behind the cloud. I don't want to disillusion her; I want to establish her faith in happiness and love, so that it cannot be shaken. That is a better philosophy, when all is said and done, than the stoical fortitude that anticipates dreariness, that draws the shadow over the sun, that overvalues endurance. One endures by instinct; but one must be trained to love.

February 6, 1891.

It is months since I have opened this book; it has lain on my table all through the dreadful hours—I write the word down conventionally, and yet it is not the right word at all, because I have merely been stunned and numbed. I simply could not suffer any more. I smiled to myself, as the man in the story, who was broken on the wheel, smiled when they struck the second and the third blow. I knew why he smiled; it was because he had dreaded it so much, and when it came there was nothing to dread, because he simply did not feel it.

To-night I just pick up idly the dropped thread. Perhaps it is a sign, this faint desire to make a little record, of the first tingling of returning life. Something stirs in me, and I will not resist it; it may be read by some one that comes after me, by some one perhaps who feels that his own grief is supreme and unique, and that no one has ever suffered so before. He may learn that there have been others in the dark valley before him, that the mist is full of pilgrims stumbling on, falling, rising again, falling again, lying stupefied in a silence which is neither endurance nor patience.

Maud was taken from me first; she went without a word or a sign. She was better that day, she declared, than she had felt for some time; she was on the upward grade. She walked a few hundred yards with Maggie and myself, and then she went back; the last sight I had of her alive was when she stood at the corner and waved her hand to us as we went out of sight. I am glad I looked round and saw her smile. I had not the smallest or faintest premonition of what was coming; indeed, I was lighter of mood than I had been for some time. We came in; we were told that she was tired and had gone up to lie down. As she did not come down to tea, I went up and found her lying on her bed, her head upon her hand—dead. The absolute peace and stillness of her attitude showed us that she had herself felt no access of pain. She had lain down to rest, and she had rested indeed. Even at my worst and loneliest, I have been able to be glad that it was even so. If I could know that I should die thus in joy and tranquillity, it would be a great load off my mind.

But the grief, the shock to Maggie was too much for my dear, love-nurtured child. A sort of awful and desperate strength came on me after that; I felt somehow, day by day, that I must just put away my own grief till a quiet hour, in order that I might sustain and guard the child; but her heart was broken, I think, though they say that no one dies of sorrow. She lay long ill—so utterly frail, so appealing in her grief, that I could think of nothing but saving her. Was it a kind of selfishness that needed to be broken down in me? Perhaps it was! Every single tendril of my heart seemed to grow round the child and clasp her close; she was all that I had left, and in some strange way she seemed to be all that I had lost too. And then she faded out of life, not knowing that she was fading, but simply too tired to live; and my desire alone seemed to keep her with me. Till at last, seeing her weariness and weakness, I let my desire go; I yielded, I gave her to God, and He took her, as though He had waited for my consent.

And now that I am alone, I will say, with such honesty as I can muster, that I have no touch of self-pity, no rebellion. It is all too deep and dark for that. I am not strong enough even to wish to die; I have no wishes, no desires at all. The three seem for ever about me, in my thoughts and in my dreams. When Alec died, I used to wake up to the fact, day after day, with a trembling dismay. Now it is not like that. I can give no account of what I do. The smallest things about me seem to take up my mind. I can sit for an hour by the hearth, neither reading nor thinking, just watching the flame flicker over the coals, or the red heart of the fire eating its way upwards and outwards. I can sit on a sunshiny morning in the garden, merely watching with a strange intentness what goes on about me, the uncrumpling leaf, the snowdrop pushing from the mould, the thrush searching the lawn, the robin slipping from bough to bough, the shapes of the clouds, the dying ray. I seem to have no motive either to live or to die. I retrace in memory my walks with Maggie, I can see her floating hair, and how she leaned to me; I can sit, as I used to sit reading, by Maud's side, and see her face changing as the book's mood changed, her clear eye, her strong delicate hands. I seem as if I had awaked from a long and beautiful dream. People sometimes come and see me, and I can see the pity in their faces and voices; I can see it in the anxious care with which my good servants surround me; but I feel that it is half disingenuous in me to accept it, because I need no pity. Perhaps there is something left for me to do in the world: there seems no reason otherwise why I should linger here.

Mr. —— has been very good to me; I have seen him almost daily. He seems the only person who perfectly

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understands. He has hardly said a word to me about my sorrow. He said once that he should not speak of it; before, he said, I was like a boy learning a lesson with the help of another boy, but that now I was being taught by the Master Himself. That may be so; but the Master has a very scared and dull pupil, alas, who cannot even discern the letters. I care nothing whether God be pleased or displeased; I bear His will, without either pain or resistance. I simply feel as if there had been some vast and overwhelming mistake somewhere; a mistake so incredible and inconceivable that nothing else mattered; as if—I do not speak profanely—God Himself were appalled at what He had done, and dared not smite further one whom He had stunned into silence and apathy.

With Mr. ——— I talk; he talks of simple, quiet things, of old books and thoughts. He tells me, sometimes, when I am too weary to speak, long, beautiful, quiet stories of his younger days, and I listen like a child to his grave voice, only sorry when it comes to an end. So the days pass, and I will not say I have no pleasure in them, because I have won back a sort of odd childish pleasure in small incidents, sights, and sounds. The part of me that can feel seems to have been simply cut gently away, and I live in the hour, just glad when the sun is out, sorry when it is dull and cheerless.

I read the other day one of my old books, and I could not believe it was mine. It seemed like the voice of some one I had once known long ago, in a golden hour. I was amused and surprised at my own quickness and inventiveness, at the confidence with which I interpreted everything so glibly and easily. I cannot interpret any more, and I do not seem to desire to do so. I seem to wait, with a half-amused smile, to see if God can make anything out of the strange tangle of things, as a child peers in within a scaffolding, and sees nothing but a forest of poles, little rising walls of chambers, a crane swinging weights to and fro. What can ever come, he thinks, out of such strange confusion, such fruitless hurry?

Well, I will not write any more; a sense of weariness and futility comes over me. I will go back to my garden to see what I can see, only dumbly and mutely thankful that it is not required of me to perform any dull and monotonous task, which would interrupt my idle dreams.

February 8, 1891.

I tried this morning to look through some of the old letters and papers in Maud's cabinet. There were my own letters, carefully tied up with a ribbon; letters from her mother and father; from the children when we were away from them. I began to read, and was seized with a sharp, unreasoning pain, surprised by sudden tears. I seemed dumbly to resent this, and I put them all away again. Why should I disturb myself to no purpose? "There shall be no more sorrow nor crying, for the former things are passed away"—so runs the old verse, and I had almost grown to feel like that. Why distrust it? Yet I could not forbear. I got the papers out again, and read late into the night, like one reading an old and beautiful story. Suddenly the curtain lifted, and I saw myself alone, I saw what I had lost. The ineffectual agony I endured, crying out for very loneliness! "That was all mine," said the melting heart, so long frozen and dumb. Grief, in waves and billows, began to beat upon me like breakers on a rock-bound shore. A strange fever of the spirit came on me, scenes and figures out of the years floating fiercely and boldly past me. Was my strength and life sustained for this, that I should just sleep awhile, and wake to fall into the pit of suffering, far deeper than before?

If they could but come back to me for a moment; if I could feel Maud's cheek by mine, or Maggie's arms round my neck; if they could but stand by me smiling, in robes of light! Yet as in a vision I seem to see them leaning from a window, in a blank castle-wall rising from a misty abyss, scanning a little stairway that rises out of the clinging fog, built up through the rocks and ending in a postern gate in the castle-wall. Upon that stairway, one by one emerging from the mist, seem to stagger and climb the figures of men, entering in, one by one, and the three, with smiles and arms interlaced, are watching eagerly. Cannot I climb the stair? Perhaps even now I am close below them, where the mist hangs damp on rock and blade? Cannot I set myself free? No, I could not look them in the face, they would hide their eyes from me, if I came in hurried flight, in passionate cowardice. Not so must I come before them, if indeed they wait for me.

The morning was coming in about the dewy garden, the birds piping faint in thicket and bush, when I stumbled slowly, dizzied and helpless, to my bed. Then a troubled sleep; and ah, the bitter waking; for at last I knew what I had lost.

February 10, 1891.

"All things become plain to us," said the good vicar, pulling on his gloves, "when we once realise that God is love—Perfect Love!" He said good-bye; he trudged off to his tea, a trying visit manfully accomplished, leaving me alone.

He had sate with me, good, kindly man, for twenty minutes. There were tears in his eyes, and I valued that little sign of human fellowship more than all the commonplaces he courageously enunciated. He talked in a soft, low tone, as if I was ill. He made no allusions to mundane things; and I am grateful to him for coming. He had dreaded his call, I am sure, and he had done it from a mixture of affection and duty, both good things.

"Perfect Love, yes—if we could feel that!" I sate musing in my chair.

I saw, as in a picture, a child brought up in a beautiful and stately house by a grave strong man, who lavished at first love and tenderness, ease and beauty, on the child, laughing with him, and making much of him; all of which the child took unconsciously, unthinkingly, knowing nothing different; running to meet his guardian, glad to be with him, sorry to leave him.

Then I saw in my parable that one day, when the child played in the garden, as he had often played before, he noticed a little green alley, with a pleasant arch of foliage, that he had never seen before, leading to some secluded place. The child was dimly aware that there were parts of the garden where he was supposed not to go; he had been told he must not go too far from the house, but it was all vague and indistinct in his mind; he had never been shown anything precisely, or told the limits of his wanderings. So he went in joy, with a sense of a sweet mystery, down the alley, and presently found himself in a still brighter and more beautiful garden, full of fruits growing on the ground and on the trees, which he plucked and ate. There was a building, like a pavilion, at the end, of two storeys; and while he wandered thither with his hands full of fruits, he suddenly saw his guardian watching him, with a look he had never seen on his face before, from the upper windows of the garden-house. His first impulse was to run to him, share his joy with him, and ask him why he had not been shown the delicious place; but the fixed and inscrutable look on his guardian's face, neither smiling nor frowning, the stillness of his attitude, first chilled the child and then dismayed him; he flung the fruits on the ground and shivered, and then ran out of the garden. In the evening, when he was with his guardian, he found him as kind and tender as ever. But his guardian said nothing to him about the inner garden of fruits, and the child feared to ask him.

But the next day he felt as though the fruits had given him a new eagerness, a new strength; he hankered after them long, and at last went down the green path again; this time the summer-house seemed empty. So he ate his fill, and this he did for many days. Then one day, when he was bending down to pluck a golden fruit, that lay gem-like on the ground among green leaves, he heard a sudden step behind him, and turning, saw his guardian draw swiftly near, with a look of anger on his face; the next instant he was struck down, again and again; lifted from the ground at last, as in a passion of rage, and flung down bleeding on the earth; and then, without a word, his guardian left him; at first he lay and moaned, but then he crawled away, and back to the house. And there he found the old nurse that tended him, who greeted him with tears and words of comfort, and cared for his hurts. And he asked her the reason of his hard usage, but she could tell him nothing, only saying that it was the master's will, and that he sometimes did thus, though she thought he was merciful at heart.

The child lay sick many days, his guardian still coming to him and sitting with him, with gentle talk and tender offices, till the scene in the garden was like an evil dream; but as his guardian spoke no word of displeasure to the child, the child still feared to ask him, and only strove to forget. And then at last he was well enough to go out a little; but a few days after—he avoided the inner garden now out of a sort of horror—he was sitting in the sun, near the house, feebly trying to amuse himself with one of his old games—how poor they seemed after the fruits of the inner paradise, how he hankered desirously after the further place, with its hot, sweet, fragrant scents, its rich juices!—when again his guardian came upon him in a sudden wrath, and struck him many times, dashing him down to the ground; and again he crept home, and lay long ill, and again his guardian was unwearingly kind; but now a sort of horror of the man grew up in the mind of the child, and he feared that his strange anger might break out at any moment in a storm of blows.

And at last he was well again; and had half forgotten, in the constant kindness, and even merriment, of his

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guardian, the horror of the two assaults. He was out and about again; he still shunned the paradise of fruits, but wearying of the accustomed pleasaunce, he went further and passed into the wood; how cool and mysterious it was among the great branching trees! the forest led him onwards; now the sun lay softly upon it, and a stream bickered through a glade, and now the path lay through thickets, which hid the further woodland from view; and now passing out into a more open space, he had a thrill of joy and excitement; there was a herd of strange living creatures grazing there, great deer with branching horns; they moved slowly forwards, cropping the grass, and the child was lost in wonder at the sight. Presently one of them stopped feeding, began to sniff the air, and then looking round, espied the child, and began slowly to approach him. The child had no terror of the great dappled stag, and held out his hand to him, when the great beast suddenly bent his head down, and was upon him with one bound, striking him with his horns, lifting him up, smiting him with his pointed hooves. Presently the child, in his terror and faintness, became aware that the beast had left him, and he began to drag himself, all bruised as he was, along the glade; then he suddenly saw his guardian approaching, and cried out to him, holding out his hands for help and comfort—and his guardian strode straight up to him, and, with the same fierce anger in his face, struck at him again and again, and spurned him with his feet. And then, when he left him, the child at last, with accesses of deadly faintness and pain, crept back home, to be again tended by the old nurse, who wept over him; and the child found that his guardian came to visit him, as kind and gentle as ever. And at last one day when he sate beside the child, holding his hand, stroking his hair, and telling him an old tale to comfort him, the child summoned up courage to ask him a question about the garden and the wood; but at the first word his guardian dropped his hand, and left him without a word.

And then the child lay and mused with fierce and rebellious thoughts. He said to himself, "If my guardian had told me where I might not go; if he had said to me, 'in the inner garden are unwholesome fruits, and in the wood are savage beasts; and though I am strong and powerful, yet I have not strength to root up the poisonous plants and make the place a wilderness; and I cannot put a fence about it, or a fence about the wood, that no one should enter; but I warn you that you must not enter, and I entreat you for the love I bear you not to go thither,'" then the child thought that he would not have made question, but would have obeyed him willingly; and again he thought that, if he had indeed ventured in, and had eaten of the evil fruits, and been wounded by the savage stag, yet if his guardian had comforted him, and prayed him lovingly not to enter to his hurt, that then he would have loved his guardian more abundantly and carefully. And he thought too that, if his guardian had ever smitten him in wrath, and had then said to him with tears that it had grieved him bitterly to hurt him, but that thus and thus only could he learn the vileness of the place, then he would have not only forgiven the ill-usage, but would even have loved to endure it patiently. But what the child could not understand was that his guardian should now be tender and gracious, and at another time hard and cruel, explaining nothing to him. And thus the child said in himself, "I am in his power, and he must do his will upon me; but I neither trust nor love him, for I cannot see the reason of what he does; though if he would but tell me the reason, I could obey him and submit to him joyfully." These hard thoughts he nourished and fed upon; and his guardian came no more to him for good or for evil; and the child, much broken by his hard usage and his angry thoughts, crept about neglected and spiritless, with nothing but fear and dismay in his heart.

So the imagination shaped itself in my mind, a parable of the sad, strange life of man.

"Perfect Love!" If it were indeed that? Yet God does many things to His frail children, which if a man did, I could not believe him to be loving; though if He would but give us the assurance that it was all leading us to happiness, we could endure His fiercest stroke, His bitterest decree. But He smites us, and departs; He turns away in a rage, because we have broken a law that we knew not of. And again, when we seem most tranquil and blest, most inclined to trust Him utterly, He smites us down again without a word. I hope, I yearn to see that it all comes from some great and perfect will, a will with qualities of which what we know as mercy, justice, and love are but faint shadows—but that is hidden from me. We cannot escape, we must bear what God lays upon us. We may fling ourselves into bitter and dark rebellion; still He spares us or strikes us, gives us sorrow or delight. My one hope is to cooperate with Him, to accept the chastening joyfully and courageously. Then He takes from me joy, and courage alike, till I know not whom I serve, a Father or a tyrant. Can it indeed help us to doubt whether He be tyrant or no? Again I know not, and again I sicken in fruitless despair, like one caught in a great labyrinth of crags and precipices.

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February 14, 1891.

Then the Christian teacher says: "God has given you a will, an independent will to act and choose; put it in unison with His will." Alas, I know not how much of my seeming liberty is His or mine. He seems to make me able to exert my will in some directions, able to make it effective; and yet in other matters, even though I see that a course is holy and beautiful, I have no power to follow it at all. I see men some more, some less hampered than myself. Some seem to have no desire for good, no dim perception of it. The outcast child, brought up cruelly and foully, with vile inheritances, he is not free, as I use the word; sometimes, by some inner purity and strength, he struggles upwards; most often he is engulfed; yet it is all a free gift, to me much, to another little, to some nothing at all. With all my heart do I wish my will to be in harmony with His. I yield it up utterly to Him. I have no strength or force, and He withholds them from me. I do not blame, I only ask to understand; He has given me understanding, and has put in my heart a high dream of justice and love; why will He not show me that He satisfies the dream? I say with the old Psalmist, "Lo, I come," but He comes not forth to meet me; He does not even seem to discern me when I am yet a long way off, as the father in the parable discerned his erring son.

Then the Christian teacher says to me that all is revealed in Christ; that He reconciles, not an angry God to a wilful world, but a grieved and outraged world to a God who cannot show them He is love.

Yet Christ said that God was all-merciful and all-loving, and that He ordered the very falling of a single hair of our heads. But if God ordered that, then He did not leave unordered the qualities of our hearts and wills, and our very sins are of His devising.

No, it is all dark and desperate; I do not know, I cannot know; I shall stumble to my end in ignorance; sometimes glad when a gleam of sunshine falls on my wearied limbs, sometimes wrapping my garments around me in cold and drenching rain. I am in the hand of God; I know that; and I hope that I may dare to trust Him; but my confidence is shaken as He passes over me, as the reed in the river shakes in the wind.

February 18, 1891.

A still February day, with a warm, steady sun, which stole in and caressed me, enveloping me in light and warmth, as I sate reading this morning. If I could be ashamed of anything, I should be ashamed of the fact that my body has all day long surprised me by a sort of indolent contentment, repeating over and over that it is glad to be alive. The mind and soul crave for death and silence. Yet all the while my faithful and useful friend, the body, seems to croon a low song of delight. That is the worst of it, that I seem built for many years of life. Shall I learn to forget?

I walked long and far among the fields, in the fresh, sun-warmed air. Ah! the sweet world! Everything was at its barest and austere—the grass thin in the pastures, the copses leafless. But such a sense of hidden life everywhere! I stood long beside the gate to watch the new-born lambs, whose cries thrilled plaintively on the air, like the notes of a violin. Little black-faced grey creatures, on their high, stilt-like legs—a week or two old, and yet able to walk, to gambol, to rejoice, in their way, to reflect. The bleating mothers moved about, divided between a deep desire to eat, and the anxious care of their younglings. One of them stood over her sleeping lamb, stamping her feet, to dismay me, no doubt, while the little creature lay like a folded door-mat on the pasture. Another brutally repelled the advances of a strange lamb, butting it over whenever it drew near; another chewed the cud, while its lamb sucked, its eyes half closed in contented joy, just turning from time to time to sniff at the little creature pressed close to its side. I felt as if I had never seen the sight before, this wonderful and amazing drama of life, beginning again year after year, the same, yet not the same.

The old shepherd came out with his crook, said a few words to me, and moved off, the ewes following him, the lambs skipping behind. "He shall feed me in a green pasture, and lead me forth beside the waters of comfort." How perfectly beautiful and tender the image, a thing seen how many hundred years ago on the hills of Bethlehem, and touching the old heart just as it touches me to-day!

And yet, alas, to me to-day the image seems to miss the one thing needful; how all the images of guide and guardian and shepherd fail when applied to God! For here the shepherd is but a little wiser, a little stronger than his flock. He sees their difficulties, he feels them himself. But with God, He is at once the Guide, and the Creator of the very dangers past which He would lead us. If we felt that God Himself were dismayed and sad in the presence of evils that He could not touch or remedy, we should turn to Him to help us as He best could. But while we feel that the very perplexities and sufferings come from His hand, how can we sincerely ask Him to guard us from things which He originates, or at least permits? Why should they be there at all, if His concern is to help us past them; or how can we think that He will lead us past them, when they are part of His wise and awful design?

And thus one plunges again into the darkness. Can it indeed be that God, if He be all-embracing, all-loving, all-powerful, can create or allow to arise within Himself something that is not, Himself, alien to Him, hostile to Him? How can we believe in Him and trust Him, if this indeed be so?

And yet, looking upon that little flock to-day, I did indeed feel the presence of a kind and fatherly heart, of something that grieved for my pain, and that laid a hand upon my shoulder, saying, "Son, endure for a little; be not so disquieted!"

The Altar Fire

March 8, 1891.

Something—far—off, faint, joyful—cried out suddenly in the depths of my spirit to—day. I felt—I can but express it by images, for it was too intangible for direct utterance—as a woman feels when her child's life quickens within her; as a traveller's heart leaps up when, lost among interminable hills, he is hailed by a friendly voice; as the river—water, thrust up into creeks and estuaries by the incoming tide, is suddenly freed by the ebb from that stealthy pressure, and flows gladly downwards; as the dark garden—ground may feel when the frozen soil melts under warm winds of spring, and the flower—roots begin to swell and shoot.

Some such thrill it was that moved in the silence of the soul, showing that the darkness was alive.

It came upon me as I walked among soft airs to—day. It was no bodily lightness that moved me, for I was unstrung, listless, indolent; but it was a sense that it was good to live, lonely and crushed as I was; that there was something waiting for me which deserved to be approached with a patient expectation—that life was enriched, rather than made desolate by my grief and losses; that I had treasure laid up in heaven. It came upon me as a fancy, but it was something better than that, that one or other of my dear ones had perhaps awaked in the other world, and had sent out a thought in search of me. I had often thought that if, when we are born into this world of ours, our first years are so dumb and unperceptive, it might be even so in the world beyond; that we are there allowed to rest a little, to sleep; and that has seemed to me to be perhaps the explanation why, in those first sad days of grief, when the mourner aches to have some communication with the vanished soul, and when the soul that has passed the bounds of life would be desiring too, one would think, to send some message back, why, I say, there is no voice nor hint nor sign. Perhaps the reason why our grief loses its sting after a season is that the soul we have loved does contrive to send some healing influence into the desolate heart.

I know not; but as I stood upon the hill—top to—day at evening, the setting sun gilding the cloud—edges, and touching the horizon with a delicate misty azure, my spirit did indeed awake with a smile, with a murmured word of hope.

If I, who have lost everything that can enrich and gladden life, can yet feel that inalienable residue of hope, which just turns the balance on the side of desiring still to live, it must be that life has something yet in store for me—I do not hope for love, I do not desire the old gift of expression again; but there is something to learn, to apprehend, to understand. I have learnt, I think, not to grasp at anything, not to clasp anything close to my heart; the dream of possession has fled from me; it will be enough if, as I learn the lesson, I can ease a few burdens and help frail feet along the road. Duty, pleasure, work—strange names which we give to life, perversely separating the strands of the woven thread, they hold no meaning for me now—I do not expect to be free from suffering or from grief; but I will no more distinguish them from other experiences saying, this is joyful, and I will take all I can, or this is sad, and I will fly from it. I will take life whole, not divide it into pieces and choose. My grief shall be like a silent chapel, lit with holy light, into which I shall often enter, and bend, not to frame mechanical prayers, but to submit myself to the still influence of the shrine. It is all my own now, a place into which no other curious eye can penetrate, a guarded sanctuary. My sorrow seems to have plucked me with a strong hand out of the swirling drift of cares, anxieties, ambitions, hopes; and I see now that I could not have rescued myself; that I should have gone on battling with the current, catching at the river wrack, in the hopes of saving something from the stream. Now I am face to face with God; He saves me from myself, He strips my ragged vesture from me and I stand naked as He made me, unashamed, nestling close to His heart.

The Altar Fire
April 3, 1891.

A truth which has come home to me of late with a growing intensity is that we are sent into the world for the sake of experience, not necessarily for the sake of immediate happiness. I feel that the mistake we most of us make is in reaching out after a sense of satisfaction; and even if we learn to do without that, we find it very difficult to do without the sense of conscious growth. I say again that what we need and profit by is experience, and sometimes that comes by suffering, helpless, dreary, apparently meaningless suffering. Yet when pain subsides, do we ever, does any one ever wish the suffering had not befallen us? I think not. We feel better, stronger, more pure, more serene for it. Sometimes we get experience by living what seems to be an uncongenial life. One cannot solve the problem of happiness by simply trying to turn out of one's life whatever is uncongenial. Life cannot be made into an Earthly Paradise, and it injures one's soul even to try. What we can turn out of our lives are the unfruitful, wasteful, conventional things; and one can follow what seems the true life, though one may mistake even that sometimes. One of the commonest mistakes nowadays is that so many people are haunted with a vague sense that they ought to DO GOOD, as they say. The best that most people can do is to perform their work and their obvious duties well and conscientiously.

If we realise that experience is what we need, and not necessarily happiness or contentment, the whole value of life is altered. We see then that we can get as much or even more out of the futile hour when we are held back from our chosen delightful work, even out of the dreary or terrified hour, when the sense of some irrevocable neglect, some base surrender that has marred our life, sinks burning into the soul, as a hot ember sinks smoking into a carpet. Those are the hours of life when we move and climb; not the hours when we work, and eat, and laugh, and chat, and dine out with a sense of well-merited content.

The value of life is not to be measured by length of days or success or tranquillity, but by the quality of our experience, and the degree in which we have profited by it. In the light of such a truth as this, art seems to fade away as just a pleasant amusement contrived by leisurely men for leisurely men.

Then, further, one grows to feel that such easy happiness as comes to us may be little more than the sweetening of the bitter medicine, just enough to give us courage and heart to live on; that applies, of course, only to the commoner sorts of happiness, when one is busy and merry and self-satisfied. Some sorts of happiness, such as the best kind of affection, are parts of the larger experience.

Then, if we take hold of such experience in the right way, welcoming it as far as possible, not resisting it or trying to beguile it or forget it, we can get to the end of our probation quicker; if, that is, we let the truth burn into us, instead of timidly shrinking away from it.

This seems to me the essence of true religion; the people who cling very close to particular creeds and particular beliefs seem to me to lose robustness; it is like trying to go to heaven in a bath-chair! It retards rather than hastens the apprehension of the truth. Here lies, to my mind, the unreality of mystical books of devotion and piety, where one is instructed to practise a servile sort of abasement, and to beg forgiveness for all one's noblest efforts and aspirations. Neither can I believe that the mystical absorption, inculcated by such books, in the human personality, the human sufferings of Christ, is wholesome, or natural, or even Christian. I cannot imagine that Christ Himself ever recommended such a frame of mind for an instant. What we want is a much simpler sort of Christianity. If a man had gone to Christ and expressed a desire to follow Him, Christ, I believe, would have wanted to know whether he loved others, whether he hated sin, whether he trusted God. He would not have asked him to recite the articles of his belief, and still less have suggested a mystical and emotional sort of passion for His own Person. As least I cannot believe it, and I see nothing in the Gospels which would lead me to believe it.

In any case this belief in our experience being sent us for our far-off ultimate benefit has helped me greatly of late, and will, I am sure, help me still more. I do not practise it as I should, but I believe with all my heart that the truth lies there.

After all, the truth IS there; it matters little that we should know it; it is just so and not otherwise, and what we believe or do not believe about it, will not alter it; and that is a comfort too.

The Altar Fire

April 24, 1891.

After I had gone upstairs to bed last night, I found I had left a book downstairs which I was reading, and I went down again to recover it. I could not find any matches, and had some difficulty in getting hold of the book; it is humiliating to think how much one depends on sight.

A whimsical idea struck me. Imagine a creature, highly intellectual, but without the power of sight, brought up in darkness, receiving impressions solely by hearing and touch. Suppose him introduced into a room such as mine, and endeavouring to form an impression of the kind of creature who inhabited it. Chairs, tables, even a musical instrument he could interpret; but what would he make of a writing-table and its apparatus? How would he guess at the use of a picture? Strangest of all, what would he think of books? He would find in my room hundreds of curious oblong objects, opening with a sort of hinge, and containing a series of laminae of paper, which he would discern by his delicacy of touch to be oddly and obscurely dented. Yet he would probably never be able to frame a guess that such objects could be used for the communication of intellectual ideas. What would he suppose them to be?

The thought expanded before me. What if we ourselves, in this world of ours, which seems to us so complete, may really be creatures lacking some further sense, which would make all our difficulties plain? We knock up against all sorts of unintelligible and inexplicable things, injustice, disease, pain, evil, of which we cannot divine the meaning or the use. Yet they are undoubtedly there! Perhaps it is only that we cannot discern the simplicity and the completeness of the heavenly house of which they are the furniture. Fanciful, of course; but I am inclined to think not wholly fanciful.

The Altar Fire

May 10, 1891.

The question is this: Is there a kind of peace, of tranquillity, attainable in this world, which is proof against all calamities, sufferings, sorrows, losses, doubts? Is it attainable for one like myself, who is sensitive, apprehensive, highly strung, at once confident and timid, alive to impressions, liable to swift changes of mood? Or is it a mere matter of mental, moral, and physical health, depending on some balance of qualities, which may or may not belong to a man, a balance which hundreds cannot attain to?

By this peace, I do not mean a chilly indifference, or a stoical fortitude. I do not mean the religious peace, such as I see in some people, which consists in holding as a certainty a scheme of things which I believe to be either untrue or uncertain—and about which, at all events, no certainty is logically and rationally possible.

The peace I mean is a frame of mind which a man would have, who loved passionately, who suffered acutely, who desired intensely, who feared greatly; and yet for whom, behind love and pain, desire and fear, there existed a sort of inner citadel, in which his soul was entrenched and impregnable.

Such a security could not be a wholly rational thing, because reason cannot solve the enigmas with which we are confronted; but it must not be an irrational intuition either, because then it would be unattainable by a man of high intellectual gifts; and the peace that I speak of ought to be consistent with any and every constitution—physical, moral, mental. It must be consistent with physical weakness, with liability to strong temptations, with an incisive and penetrating intellectual quality; its essence would be a sort of vital faith, a unity of the individual heart with the heart of the world. It would rise like a rock above the sea, like a lighthouse, where a guarded flame would burn high and steady, however loudly the surges thundered below upon the reefs, however fiercely the spray was dashed against the glasses of the casements.

If it is attainable, then it is worth while to do and to suffer anything to attain it; if it is not attainable, then the best thing is simply to be as insensible as possible, not to love, not to admire, not to desire; for all these emotions are channels along which the bitter streams of suffering can flow.

Prudence bids one close these channels; meanwhile a fainter and remoter voice, with sweet and thrilling accents, seems to cry to one not to be afraid, urges one to fling open every avenue by which impassioned experiences, uplifting thoughts, noble hopes, unselfish desires, may flow into the soul.

This peace I have seen, or dream that I have seen, in the faces and voices of certain gracious spirits whom I have known. It seemed to consist in an unbounded natural gratitude, a sweet simplicity, a childlike affectionateness, that recognised in suffering the joy of which it was the shadow, and in desperate catastrophes the hope that lay behind them.

Such a peace must not be a surrender of anything, a feeble acquiescence; it must be a strong and eager energy, a thirst for experience, a large tolerance, a desire to be convinced, a resolute patience.

It is this and no less that I ask of God.

The Altar Fire
June 6, 1891.

I had a beautiful walk to-day. I went a short way by train, and descending at a wayside station, found a little field-path, that led me past an old, high-gabled, mullioned farmhouse, with all the pleasant litter of country life about it. Then I passed along some low-lying meadows, deep in grass, where the birds sang sweetly, muffled in leaves. The fields there were all full of orchids, purple as wine, and the gold of buttercups floated on the top of the rich meadow-grass. Then I passed into a wood, and for a long time I walked in the green glooms of copses, in a forest stillness, only the tall trees rustling softly overhead, with doves cooing deep in the wood. Only once I passed a house, a little cottage of grey stone, in a clearing, with an air of settled peace about it, that reminded me of an old sweet book that I used to read as a child, *Phantastes*, full of the mysterious romance of deep forests and haunted glades. I was overshadowed that afternoon with a sense of the ineffectiveness, the loneliness of my life, walking in a vain shadow; but it melted out of my mind in the delicate beauty of the woodland, with its wild fragrances and cool airs, as when one chafes one's frozen hands before a leaping flame. They told me, those whispering groves, of the patient and tender love of the Father, and I drew very near His inmost heart in that gentle hour. The secret was to bear, to endure, not stoically nor stolidly, but with a quiet inclination of the will to sorrow and pain, that were not so bitter after all, when one abode faithfully in them. I became aware, as I walked, that my heart was with the future after all. The beautiful dead past, I could be grateful for it, and not desire that it were mine again. I felt as a man might feel who is making his way across a wide moor. "Surely," he says to himself, "the way lies here; this ridge, that dingle mark the track; it lies there by the rushy pool, and shows greener among the heather." So he says, persuading himself in vain that he has found the way; but at last the track, plain and unmistakable, lies before him, and he loses no more time in imaginings, but goes straight forward. It was my sorrow, after all, that had shown me that I was in the true path. I had tried, in the old days, to fancy that I was homeward bound; sometimes it was in the love of my dear ones, sometimes in the joy of art, sometimes in my chosen work; and yet I knew in my heart all the time that I was but a leisurely wanderer; but now at last the destined road was clear; I was no longer astray; I was no longer inventing duties and acts for myself, but I had in very truth a note of the way. It was not the path I should have chosen in my blindness and easiness. But there could no longer be any doubt about it. How the false ambitions, the comfortable schemes, the trivial hopes melted away for me in that serene certainty! What I had pursued before was the phantom of delight; and though I still desired delight, with all the passion of my poor frail nature, yet I saw that not thus could the real joy of God be won. It was no longer a question of hope and disappointment, of sin and punishment. It was something truer and stronger than that. The sin and the suffering alike had been the Will of God for me. I had never desired evil, though I had often fallen into it; but there was never a moment when, if I could, I would not have been pure and unselfish and strong. That was a blessed hour for me, when, in place of the old luxurious delight, there came, flooding my heart, an intense and passionate desire that I might accept with a loving confidence whatever God might send; my wearied body, my tired, anxious mind, were but a slender veil, rent and ruinous, that hung between God and my soul, through which I could discern the glory of His love.

The Altar Fire
June 20, 1891.

It was on a warm, bright summer afternoon that I woke to the sense both of what I had lost and what I had gained. I had wandered out into the country, for in those days I had a great desire to be alone. I stood long beside a stile in the pastures, a little village below me, and the gables and chimneys of an old farmhouse stood up over wide fields of young waving wheat. A cuckoo fluted in an elm close by, and at the sound there darted into my mind the memory, seen in an airy perspective, of innumerable happy and careless days, spent in years long past, with eager and light-hearted companions, in whose smiling eyes and caressing motions was reflected one's own secret happiness. How full the world seemed of sweet surprises then! To sit in an evening hour in some quiet, scented garden in the gathering dusk, with the sense of a delicious mystery flashing from the light movements, the pensive eyes, the curve of arm or cheek of one's companion, how beautiful that was! And yet how simple and natural it seemed. That was all over and gone, and a gulf seemed fixed between those days and these. And then there came first that sad and sweet regret, "the passion of the past," as Tennyson called it, that suddenly brimmed the eyes at the thought of the vanished days; and there followed an intense desire to live in it once again, to have made more of it, a rebellious longing to abandon oneself with a careless disregard to the old rapture.

Then on that mood, rising like a star into the blue spaces of the evening, came the thought that the old days were not dead after all. That they were assuredly there, just as the future was there, a true part of oneself, ineffaceable, eternal. And hard on the heels of that came another and a deeper intuition still, that not in such delights did the secret really rest; what then was the secret? It was surely this: that one must advance, led onward like a tottering child by the strong arm of God. That the new knowledge of suffering and sorrow was as beautiful as the old, and more so, and that instead of repining over the vanished joys, one might continue to rejoice in them and even rejoice in having lost them, for I seemed to perceive that one's aim was not, after all, to be lively, and joyful, and strong, but to be wiser, and larger-minded, and more hopeful, even at the expense of delight. And then I saw that I would not really for any price part with the sad wisdom that I had reluctantly learnt, but that though the burden galled my shoulder, it held within it precious things which I could not throw away. And I had, too, the glad sense that even if in a childish petulance I would have laid my burden down and run off among the flowers, God was stronger than I, and would not suffer me to lose what I had gained. I might, I assuredly should, wish to be more free, more light of heart. But I seemed to myself like a woman that had borne a child in suffering, and that no matter how restless and vexatious a care that child might prove to be, under no conceivable circumstances could she wish that she were barren and without the experience of love. I felt indeed that I had fulfilled a part of my destiny, and that I might be glad that the suffering was behind me, even though it separated me from the careless days.

I hope that in after days I may sometimes make a pilgrimage to the place where that wonderful truth thus dawned upon me. I have made a tabernacle there in my spirit, like the saints who saw the Lord transfigured before their eyes; and to me it had been indeed a transfiguration, in which Love and sorrow and hope had been touched with an unearthly light of God.

The Altar Fire
June 24, 1891.

Yesterday I was walking in a field—path through the meadows; it was just that time in early summer when the grass is rising, when flowers appear in little groups and bevvies. There was a patch of speedwell, like a handful of sapphires cast down. Why does one's heart go out to certain flowers, flowers which seem to have some message for us if we could but read it? A little way from the path I saw a group of absolutely unknown flower—buds; they were big, pale things, looking more like pods than flowers, growing on tall stems. I hate crushing down meadow—grass, but I could not resist my impulse of curiosity. I walked up to them, and just as I was going to bend down and look at them, lo and behold, all my flowers opened before my eyes as by a concerted signal, spread wings of the richest blue, and fluttered away before my eyes. They were nothing more than a company of butterflies who, tired of play, had fallen asleep together with closed wings on the high grass—stems.

There they had sate, like folded promises, hiding their azure sheen. Perhaps even now my hopes sit motionless and lifeless, in russet robes. Perhaps as I draw dully near, they may spring suddenly to life, and dance away in the sunshine, like fragments of the crystalline sky.

The Altar Fire

July 8, 1891.

I was in town last week for a few days on some necessary business, staying with old friends. Two or three people came in to dine one night, and afterwards, I hardly know how, I found myself talking with a curious openness to one of the guests, a woman whom I only slightly knew. She is a very able and cultivated woman indeed, and it was a surprise to her friends when she lately became a Christian Scientist. When I have met her before, I have thought her a curiously guarded personality, appearing to live a secret and absorbing life of her own, impenetrable, and holding up a shield of conventionality against the world. To-night she laid down her shield, and I saw the beating of a very pure and loving heart. The text of her talk was that we should never allow ourselves to believe in our limitations, because they did not really exist. I found her, to my surprise, intensely emotional, with a passionate disbelief in and yet pity for all sorrow and suffering. She appealed to me to take up Christian Science—"not to read or talk about it," she said; "that is no use: it is a life, not a theory; just accept it, and live by it, and you will find it true."

But there is one part of me that rebels against the whole idea of Christian Science—my reason. I found, or thought I found, this woman to be wise both in head and heart, but not wise in mind. It seems to me that pain and sorrow and suffering are phenomena, just as real as other phenomena; and that one does no good by denying them, but only by accepting them, and living in them and through them. One might as truly, it seems, take upon oneself to deny that there was any such colour as red in the world, and tell people that whenever they saw or discerned any tinge of red, it was a delusion; one can only use one's faculty of perception; and if sorrow and suffering are a delusion, how do I know that love and joy are not delusions too? They must stand and fall together. The reason why I believe that joy and love will in the end triumph, is because I have, because we all have, an instinctive desire for them, and a no less instinctive fear and dread of pain and sorrow. We may, indeed I believe with all my heart that we shall, emerge from them, but they are no less assuredly there. We triumph over them, when we learn to live bravely and courageously in them, when we do not seek to evade them or to hasten incredulously away from them. We fail, if we spend our time in repining, in regretting, in wishing the sweet and tranquil hours of untroubled joy back. We are not strong enough to desire the cup of suffering, even though we may know that we must drink it before we can discern the truth. But we may rejoice with a deep-seated joy, in the dark hours, that the Hand of God is heavy upon us. When our vital energies flag, when what we thought were our effective powers languish and grow faint, then we may be glad because the Father is showing us His Will; and then our sorrow is a fruitful sorrow, and labours, as the swelling seed labours in the sombre earth to thrust her slender hands up to the sun and air. . . .

We two sate long in a corner of the quiet lamp-lit room, talking like old friends—once or twice our conversation was suspended by music, which fell like dew upon my parched heart; and though I could not accept my fellow-pilgrim's thought, I could see in the glance of her eyes, full of pity and wonder, that we were indeed faring along the same strange road to the paradise of God. It did me good, that talk; it helped me with a sense of sweet and tender fellowship; and I had no doubt that God was teaching my friend in His own fatherly way, even as He was teaching me, and all of us.

The Altar Fire

July 19, 1891.

In one of the great windows of King's College Chapel, Cambridge, there is a panel the beauty of which used to strike me even as a boy. I used to wonder what further thing it meant.

It was, I believe—I may be wholly wrong—a picture of Reuben, looking in an agony of unavailing sorrow into the pit from which his brothers had drawn the boy they hated to sell him to the Midianites. I cannot recollect the details plainly, and little remains but a memory of dim-lit azure and glowing scarlet. Even though the pit was quaintly depicted as a draw-well, with a solid stone coping, the pretty absurdity of the thought only made one love the fancy better. But the figure of Reuben!—even through an obscuring mist of crossing leads and window-bars and weather stains, there was a poignant agony wrought into the pose of the figure, with its clasped hands and strained gaze.

I used to wonder, I say, what further thing it meant. For the deep spell of art is that it holds an intenser, a wider significance beneath its symbols than the mere figure, the mere action it displays.

What was the remorse of Reuben? It was that through his weakness, his complaisance, he had missed his chance of protecting what was secretly dear to him. He loved the boy, I think, or at all events he loved his father, and would not willingly have hurt the old man. And now, even in his moment of yielding, of temporising, the worst had happened, the child was gone, delivered over to what baseness of usage he could not bear to think. He himself had been a traitor to love and justice and light; and yet, in the fruitful designs of God, that very traitorous deed was to blossom into the hope and glory of the race; the deed itself was to be tenderly forgiven, and it was to open up, in the fulness of days, a prospect of greatness and prosperity to the tribe, to fling the seed of that mighty family in soil where it was to be infinitely enriched; it was to open the door at last to a whole troop of great influences, marvellous events, large manifestations of God.

Even so, in a parable, the figure came insistently before me all day, shining and fading upon the dark background of the mind.

It was at the loss of my own soul that I had connived; not at its death indeed—I had not plotted for that—but I had betrayed myself, I saw, year by year. I had despised the dreams and visions of the frail and ingenuous spirit; and when it had come out trustfully to me in the wilderness, I had let it fall into the hands of the Midianites, the purloining band that trafficked in all things, great and small, from the beast of the desert to the bodies and souls of men.

My soul had thus lain expiring before my eyes, and now God had taken it away from my faithless hands; I saw at last that to save the soul one must assuredly lose it; that if it was to grow strong and joyful and wise, it must be sold into servitude and dark afflictions. I saw that when I was too weak to save it, God had rent it from me, but that from the darkness of the pit it should fare forth upon a mighty voyage, and be made pure and faithful in a region undreamed of.

To Reuben was left nothing but shame and sorrow of heart and deceit to hide his sin; unlike him, to me was given to see, beyond the desert and the dwindling line of camels, the groves and palaces of the land of wisdom, whither my sad soul was bound, lonely and dismayed. My heart went out to the day of reconciliation, when I should be forgiven with tears of joy for my own faltering treachery, when my soul should be even grateful for my weakness, because from that very faithlessness, and from no other, should the new life be born.

And thus with a peaceful hope that lay beyond shame and sorrow alike, as the shining plain lies out beyond the broken crags of the weary mountain, I gave myself utterly into the Hands of the Father of All. He was close beside me that day, upholding, comforting, enriching me. Not hidden in clouds from which the wrathful trumpet pealed, but walking with a tender joy, in a fragrance of love, in the garden, at the cool of the day.

August 18, 1891.

Mr. —— is dead. He died yesterday, holding my hand. The end was quite sudden, though not unexpected. He had been much weaker of late, and he knew he could only live a short time. I have been much with him these last few days. He could not talk much, but there was a peaceful glory on his face which made me think of the Pilgrims in the Pilgrim's Progress whose call was so joyful. I never suspected how little desire he had to live; but when he knew that his days were numbered, he allowed something of his delight to escape him, as a prisoner might who has borne his imprisonment bravely and sees his release draw nigh. He suffered a good deal, but each pang was to him only like the smiting off of chains. "I have had a very happy life," he said to me once with a smile. "Looking back, it seems as though my later happiness had soaked backwards through the whole fabric, so that my joy in age has linked itself as by a golden bridge to the old childish raptures." Then he looked curiously at me, with a half-smile, and added, "But happy as I have been, I find it in my heart to envy you. You hardly know how much you are to be envied. You have no more partings to fear; your beautiful past is all folded up, to be creased and tarnished no more. You have had the love of wife and child—the one thing that I have missed. You have had fame too; and you have drunk far deeper of the cup of suffering than I. I look upon you," he said laughingly, "as an old home-keeping captain, who has never done anything but garrison duty, might look upon a young general who has carried through a great campaign and is covered with signs of honour."

A little while after he roused himself from a slumber to say, "You will be surprised to find yourself named in my will; please don't have any scruples about accepting the inheritance. I want my niece, of course, to reign in my stead; but if you outlive her, all is to go to you. I want you to live on in this place, to stand by her in her loneliness, as a brother by a sister. I want you to help and work for my dear people here, to be tender and careful for them. There are many things that a man can do which a woman cannot; and your difficulty will be to find a hem for your life. Remember that there is no one who is injured by this—my niece is my only living relation; so accept this as your post in life; it will not be a hard one. It is strange," he added, "that one should cling to such trifles; but I should like you to take my name, if you will; and you must find some one to succeed you; I wish it could have been your own boy, whom I have learnt to love."

Miss —— came in shortly after, and Mr. —— said to her, "Yes, I have told him, and he consents. You do consent, do you not?" I said, "Yes, dear friend, of course I consent; and consent gratefully, for you have given me a work in the world." And then I took Miss ——'s hand across the bed and kissed it; the old man laid his hands upon our heads very tenderly and said, "Brother and sister to the end."

I thought he was tired then, and made as if to leave him, but he said, "Do not go, my son." He lay smiling to himself, as if well pleased. Then a sudden change came over his face, and I saw that he was going; we knelt beside him, and his last words were words of blessing.

October 12, 1891.

This book has been my companion through some very strange, sad, terrible, and joyful hours; my faithful companion, my silent friend, my true confessor. I have felt the need of utterance, the imperative instinct—the most primitive, the most childish of instincts—to tell my pains and hopes and dreams. I could not utter them, at the time, to another. I could not let the voice of my groaning reach the ears of any human being. Perhaps it would have been better for us both, if I could have said it all to my dearest Maud. But a sort of courtesy forbade my redoubling my monotonous lamentations; her burden was heavy enough without that. I can hardly dignify it with the name of manliness or chivalry, because my frame of mind during those first months, when I lost the power of writing, was purely despicable; and then, too, I did not want sympathy; I wanted help; and help no one but God could give me; half my time was spent in a kind of dumb prayer to Him, that He would give me some sort of strength, some touch of courage; for a helpless cowardice was the note of my frame of mind. Well, He has sent me strength—I recognise that now—not by lightening the load, but by making it insupportably heavy and yet showing me that I had the strength to carry it; I am still in the dark as to why I deserved so sore a punishment, and I cannot yet see that the loneliness to which He has condemned me is the help that is proportioned to my need. But I walk no longer in a vain shadow. I have known affliction by the rod of His wrath. But the darkness in which I walk is not the darkness of thickening gloom, but the darkness of the breaking day.

And then, too, I suppose that writing down my thoughts from day to day just eased the dumb pain of inaction, as the sick man shifts himself in his bed. Anyhow it is written, and it shall stand as a record.

But now I shall write no more. I shall slip gratefully and securely into the crowd of inarticulate and silent men and women, the vast majority, after all, of humanity. One who like myself has the consciousness of receiving from moment to moment sharp and clear impressions from everything on earth, people, houses, fields, trees, clouds, is beset by a kind of torturing desire to shape it all in words and phrases. Why, I know not! It is the desire, I suppose, to make some record of what seems so clear, so distinct, so beautiful, so interesting. One cannot bear that one impression that seems so vivid and strange should be lost and perish. It is the artistic instinct, no doubt. And then one passes through the streets of a great city, and one becomes aware that of the thousands that pass one by, perhaps only one or two have the same instinct, and even they are bound to silence by circumstance, by lack of opportunity. The rest—life is enough for them; hunger and thirst, love and strife, hope and fear, that is their daily meat. And life, I doubt not, is what we are set to taste. Of all those thousands, some few have the desire, and fewer still the power, to stand apart from the throng. These are not content with the humdrum life of earning a livelihood, of forming ties, of passing the time as pleasantly as they can. They desire rather to be felt, to exercise influence, to mould others to their will, to use them for their convenience. I have had little temptation to do that, but my life has been poisoned at its source, I now discern, by the desire to differentiate myself from others. I could not walk faithfully in the procession; I was as one who likes to sit securely in his window above the street, noting all that he sees, sketching all that strikes his fancy, hugging his pleasure at being apart from and superior to the ordinary run of mortals. Here lay my chiefest fault, that I could not bear a humble hand, but looked upon my wealth, my loving circle, as things that should fence me from the throng. I lived in a paradise of my own devising.

But now I have put that all aside for ever. I will live the life of a learner; I will be docile if I can. I might indeed have been stripped of everything, bidden to join the humblest tribe of workers for daily bread. But God has spared my weakness, and I should be faithless indeed, if, seeing how intently His will has dealt with me, I did not recognise the clear guiding of His hand. He has given me a place and a quiet work to do; these strange bereavements, one after another, have not hardened me. I feel the bonds of love for those whom I have lost drawn closer every hour. They are waiting for me, I am sure of that. It is not reason, it is not faith which prompts me; it is a far deeper and stronger instinct, which I could not doubt if I would. What wonder if I look forward with an eager and an ardent hope to death. I can conceive no more welcome tidings than the tidings that death was at hand. But I do not expect to die. My health of body is almost miraculously preserved. What I dare to hope is that I may learn by slow degrees to set the happiness of others above my own. I will listen for any sound of grief or discontent, and I will try to quiet it. I will spend my time and strength as freely as I can. That is a far-off hope. One cannot in a moment break through the self-consideration of a lifetime. But whereas, before, my dim sense

The Altar Fire

that happiness could not be found by deliberately searching for ease made me half rebellious, half uncomfortable, I know now that it is true, and I will turn my back if I can upon that lonely and unsatisfied quest. I did indeed—I can honestly say that— desire with a passionate intentness the happiness of Maud and the children; but I think I desired it most in order that the sunshine of their happiness should break in warmth and light upon myself. It will be hard enough—I can see that—not to labour still for the sake of the ultimate results upon my own peace of mind. But in my deepest heart I do not desire to do that, and I will not, God helping me.

And so to-day, having read the whole record once again, with blinding tears, tears of love, I think, not tears of self-pity, I will close the book and write no more. But I will not destroy it, because it may help some soul that may come after me, into whose hands it may fall, to struggle on in the middle of sorrow and darkness. To him will I gladly reveal all that God has done for my soul. That poor, pitiful, shrinking soul, with all its faint desires after purity and nobleness and peace, all its self-wrought misery, all its unhappy failures, all its secret faults, its undiscerned weaknesses, I put humbly and confidently in the hands of the God who made me. I cannot amend myself, but I can at least co-operate with His loving Will. I can stumble onwards, with my hand in His, like a timid child with a strong and loving father. I may wish to be lifted in His arms, I may wonder why He does not have more pity on my frailty. But I can believe that He is leading me home, and that His way is the best and nearest.

THE END