

Yesterday and To-day

A SKETCH

UNDER the shade of a hawthorn they halted. A flower that he loved when among men had thrust aside the grasses and lay half hidden in the shade. Wistfully as one who knows not the spirit that prompts him, the Mourner had stooped and plucking the flower—another flower—from its companion laid it upon his bier. It was only a bud, the one bud of many thousands but it was the bud the dead man had cherished. Dead, dead did you say?—the rhythm of the falling footsteps. Dead, dead till the brain is dazed with its persistency and the eye is tearless in its pain.

With a sudden start of astonishment I remember the scene of Yesterday. You, my other self were there. Is not that the church against whose mossy steps you leaned and watched the shadows make a gloaming of the gable and a sunset in the oriel window? Is not that the little grave, so little in the mysterious twilight, that you thought peaceful and wondered if the baby sleeper had suffered much and was not after all glad of a quiet resting place under the trees? You cannot deny that surely. Why, do you not remember what you said to the flowers, pressing their wax-like petals against your cheek in sheer exuberance? You told them in that solemn evening hour that He who had given them their sweetness and delicacy was good, so good and merciful; and you did not forget to whisper to the rivulet that the unknown maker of melody was even more beautiful than their own silvery notes and could yet bind the miniature billows in a harmony so ravishing that the willows and reeds would leave off wooing the wind and lie still beside the waters. You told them all that, my second self, and even more, looking up to the stars so cunningly set in the sky till you were half dazed with your happiness and wandered about till the eastern hills were rosy and the pageant of night blurred and faint in the dawn. You told them that and fled. Ah! that I had known you were fickle. Fool was I, the child of the Sorrowful, to listen to your music and flood myself with passionate ecstasy. Did I know the gold would turn to tinsel on the morrow and thy sweet security be the hiding-place of death? Mould and mildew is my inheritance. Toil and travail my reward. But that is not all. This oppressive