

THE GREATEST DRAMA.

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THE fulness of the dramatic is realized in the experience of one single human life, however humble and however prosaic its sphere. For several thousand years the imagination of man has been creating its images and painting its hopes. All that fancy could conceive has been thrown upon the canvas, graven itself in stone, and flashed upon the pages of song and story. The beatings of the heart have all been laid bare, and the great themes which in all ages and among all peoples have touched the heart—love, hate, pride, ambition, sympathy, crime and death—have been dealt with by genius in every form, and the result is a mass of literature and a world of intelligence. But all the wealth of poetry and all the sublimest strains of sentiment could not touch the simple record of one poor human life, if all that it had thought and felt, and all the plants it had nurtured and grown could only be brought to light.

There are tremendous differences in human life. One has large capacities, another small; one has large opportunities, another a narrow sphere; one has a great career, another a humble lot; one has a brilliant imagination, another is dull-witted; one has keen sensibilities, another a leaden stupidity; one, by surroundings and aids, has reached the perfection of mental and moral culture, another lies like a neglected weed, into whose brain only a few stray rays have penetrated. And yet, with all, when the drama of life is written, the distinctions are not very great. If one could gather together the thoughts, aims, hopes, fears, hates and agonies of the dullest life, what a drama would be there! How Shakespeare's weird genius, which has pictured the dark villainies of Iago, the

fierce jealousy of Othello, the cruel rapacity of a Richard, the ecstatic love and devotion of a Romeo and Juliet, would seem tame beside that!

For a little, then, in this quiet spot, where no sound disturbs, where no voice distracts, let us review the drama of this life of ours, which, by the aid of memory, is still so vividly before us. Though past middle life, and recognizing that the years which remain will quickly glide away, and that life itself hangs upon a thread which may snap at any moment, and we drop into the great unknown, we still cherish all aims which have filled life so far, and look forward to a thousand designs as fully as if the scene would never change and the curtain never ring down. We are living along with all the occupations and all the engagements of life, quite unconscious of the *denouement*, or only looking to it as a vague and half unreal affair. And yet, perchance, when the roseate lines have been clouded by the mists of disappointment, sorrow or misfortune, we sit down to look it all over—the past, the present and—ah, me!—the future, and then we catch a glimpse of the drama—the great and terrible drama of a life.

First, and most vivid of all, comes the first conscious memories of childhood. Out of the dark depths of infantile unconsciousness at last, some day, there dawns the first light of consciousness, and images take shape and fix themselves upon the memory. Then, as life opens, come the vague dreams of childhood. Life looks, then, so long. Forty years, sixty years, seventy years—when can such an immense space be bridged? These dreams vary according to the instincts and characteristics of the dreamer. Some-