

he was the stronger, must often have made her marvel, or almost weep.—“I called you away. I called you to Africa. And if I hadn't it would all have been different.”

“No, it would all have been the same.”

Artois started. Out of the darkness a voice, a low, cold, inexorable voice had spoken—had spoken absolute truth, correcting his lie :

“It would all have been the same ! ”

The woman's unerring instinct had penetrated much farther than the man's. He had been feeling the shell ; she plucked out the kernel. He had been speaking of the outward facts, of the actions of the body ; she spoke of the inward facts, of the actions of the soul. Her husband's sin against her was not his unfaithfulness, the unfaithfulness at the Fair, but the fact that all the time he had been with her, all the timeshe had been giving her whole self to him, all the time that she had been surrounding him with her love, he had retained in his soul the power to will to commit it. That he had been given an opportunity to sin was immaterial. What was material was that he had been capable of sinning.

Artois saw his lie. And he stood there silent, rebuked, waiting for the voice to speak again. But it did not speak. And he felt as if Hermione were silently demanding that he should sound the deeper depths of truth, he who had always proclaimed to her his love of truth.

“Perhaps—yes, it would have been the same,” he said. “But—but——” His intention was to say, “But we should not have known it.” He checked himself. Even as they formed themselves in his mind the words seemed bending like some wretched, flabby reed.

“It would have been the same. But that makes no difference in my conduct. I was weak and called to you. You were strong and came to me. How strong you were ! How strong it was of you to come ! ”

As if for the first time—and indeed it was for the first time—he really and thoroughly comprehended her self-sacrifice, the almost bizarre generosity of her implacably unselfish nature. He measured the force of her love, and the greatness of her sacrifice, by the depth of her disillusion ; and he began to wonder, almost as a child wonders at things, how he had been able during all these years quite simply, with indeed the almost incredible simplicity of man, never to be shared by any woman, to assume and to feel, when with Hermione, that he was the dominant spirit of the two, that she was, very rightly and properly, and very happily for her, leaning comfortably upon his strength. And in his wonder he knew that the real dominance strikes its roots in the heart, not in the head.