

"Then again, we can't help seeing that there is no such thing as 'nothingness' for any created object. Even a dead leaf is utilised in the great scheme of creation, and everything dies into new life. On the face of such facts as those shown in nature, it seems opposed to all reason to think that 'man,' the highest creation of all, should perish and be no more. The idea of becoming 'nothingness' is dreadful to me; it makes everything such mockery, especially the all-consuming and undying love one human being can feel for another.

"If Death, with his cold hand, quenches the truest love we are capable of, then we are dupes and fools to waste our strength and our substance, and to sacrifice 'self' at any cost for the sake of a fellow-creature. We should be worse off than the beasts, for they cannot feel, and, God knows, we can."

She hurried a little and a warmer glow spread over her cheeks.

"But it is not so," she continued firmly. "In my eyes, the very fact that we are capable of such love, points emphatically to the fact that we are capable too of a fuller and grander existence towards which we are journeying.

"It is not merely the enshrouding mystery that makes it impossible for us to rest and be satisfied here. It is an inborn sense of incompleteness; the struggling and striving of our better nature, to break away from all that so fetters it here, to a state of being in which it can breathe more freely and make quicker progress towards perfection.

"Your nature tells you that in every human creature, some more and some less, there is an implanted desire to worship, and, taking mankind in the aggregate, there is also a yearning after perfection. If you believe God created us, you must believe also that He gave us these characteristics. Does it not therefore, follow very naturally that a perfect state of being is possible to us, and that it is indeed the end and aim of every created soul, whether he thinks it and knows it or not."

She paused and they walked on in silence.

Presently they reached a stile and Madge leaned her arms on it and gazed across to the horizon with a tired look in her eyes, though she heaved a sigh as of relief.

"I like to hear you talk," she said after awhile. "I can't take it all in at once, but I have a presentiment that I shall by-and-by. There is a sense of restfulness in the mere idea."

"Yes," answered Elsie gently, "it may not come all at once, but I feel convinced it will presently, because you are too reasonable in spite of your scepticism to regret what, if there is not actual proof, there is a tremendous array of probabilities for. Believe me, Mrs. Fawcett, there is no rest on earth but the rest of patience and trust. When one has learnt to wait, one has attained a priceless boon."

Madge leaned her chin on her hands. "It is very hard, isn't it?" she said slowly.

"Yes, very," and Elsie's lips trembled

a little. "It is a lesson seldom learnt, except through a furnace of pain."

"And you think it is worth it?"

"I am absolutely certain," was the quiet answer.

"Yes—yes, I am sure it is," and Madge spoke a little quickly with straining eyes. "Perpetual unrest is—a hell on earth."

They were silent a long while after that, and indeed spoke very little again until they were nearing home, then Madge said rather suddenly, "If I can once make up my mind that I shall see Jack again and my mother, I don't care about anything touching myself."

Elsie looked at her a little doubtfully; a question trembled on her lips and she appeared uncertain about asking it, but finally said hesitatingly, "I should think Mr. Fawcett must sometimes be quite jealous of your brother."

Madge glanced at her quickly and a touch of her old imperious self returned as she said, "My husband is very little to me compared with what my brother was."

"Surely he feels it a good deal," remarked Elsie quietly.

"A little perhaps at times, but not much. It is not his nature to take anything greatly to heart. We are fond of each other in a way, and we are happy together, but he knew when he married me my heart was in Jack's grave and I should never feel deeply for anyone again. He was quite content, for he likes to take things easily and calmly."

"Do you know, I think he has a very sad face," continued Elsie growing braver. "I have met him several times and I always think he looks unhappy."

Madge winced a little and changed colour, but she only said, "Oh, probably it is about his private affairs; he does get rather worried sometimes, but I never interfere, he goes his own way."

"A little sympathy often does great things," was the calm answer, "and it doesn't cost much."

"It might in some cases. We say 'pity is akin to love,' and in that respect it might lead to mistaken ideas and subsequent disappointment. Still, I don't want to be unkind, so I'll ask him when he comes back if anything is wrong."

"Do you expect him soon?"

"I hardly know, but he will probably come in a day or two, and then I will introduce you to him. I expect a letter to-morrow morning."

By this time they had reached their hotel, and after promising to meet again the following day, each went to her own room.

When, a short time afterwards, Madge again sat down to a solitary meal, a change had passed over her. Without scarcely acknowledging it to herself, she was conscious of a wish that Guy was in his usual place opposite to her. Probably there would have been only a little desultory conversation between them, but for all that she missed him. Far more than she realised indeed, for she thought she was only tired and sad and that his presence would have been better than being alone.

When at last the dismal meal was over, she made up a good fire and

settled herself comfortably before it, prepared to have a long think. The afternoon wore away and the dusk came on, but still she sat there silent and motionless.

As the fire-light lit up the room, it shone on a pale sad face and dark eyes dim with tears, strangely unlike the Madge of only yesterday.

The clock struck six and she started in surprise to find how quickly the afternoon had flown.

She had gone through much mentally during those silent hours, for all the old doubts and miseries had been bravely faced again and were quickly losing their hold on her. She began to feel at last that the chief fault probably lay in herself.

And presently in that hour of softness her thoughts turned to her husband, and they were more kindly than was their wont.

She remembered what Elsie said about him and she was sorry about it. She remembered the first evening on the verandah, when his sudden demonstration of affection had surprised her and she wished she had been a little kinder. She was afraid her manner had wounded him, and the thought hurt her, for he had always been so kind and thoughtful.

The regret grew on her, and she made up her mind that when he returned she would try and make up to him for her coldness.

"Even if I am not desperately in love with him," she said, "I needn't behave like an ungrateful wretch and hurt his feelings."

By-and-by she got up.

"I wish he were here now," she continued, looking drearily round the room. "It would be pleasant just to see him, and it seems strange not even to know where he is."

One of his pipes lay on the chimney-piece. She picked it up and handled it almost caressingly.

"It is the one he nearly always smokes," she said to herself. "I wonder why he didn't take it. I will put it away safely for him," and she placed it in her work-basket.

Then she opened a book and tried to read, but found it impossible to fix her thoughts for many minutes together. Her mind kept wandering back to Guy.

"I wonder he didn't come and say good-bye," she mused. "It wasn't like him to go so suddenly without a word. Perhaps I have offended him somehow; I hope not. I hope he will come back to-morrow. Supposing he stays away several days, whatever shall I do with myself?" and she sighed wearily.

She turned to a cabinet in the room and took up a little book called *Hymns and Meditations*, left probably by a visitor to the hotel who had previously occupied the room. Opening it aimlessly she read—

"Source of my life's refreshing springs,
Whose presence in my heart sustains me,
Thy love appoints me precious things,
Thy mercy orders all that pains me.