

## THE DIVINE FIRE

acquaintance ; where, indeed, out of that multitudinous, never-ending procession of persons, his power of selection was unlimited. He never had any difficulty with them ; their methods were so charmingly simple and direct. In the streets the soul is surprised through the lifting of an eyelid, and the secret of the heart sits lightly on the curl of the lip. These passers by never wearied him ; they flung him the flower of the mystery and — passed by. The perfection of social intercourse he conceived as a similar procession of radiant intimacies.

To-night he went southwards down Gower Street, drawn by the never-ending fugitive perspective of the lamps. He went westwards down Shaftesbury Avenue to Piccadilly. The Circus was a gleaming basin filled with grey night clear as water, the floor of it alive with lights. Lights that stood still ; lights that wandered from darkness into darkness ; that met and parted, darting, wheeling, and crossing in their flight. Long avenues opened out of it, precipitous deep cuttings leading into the night. The steep, shadowy masses of building seemed piled sky-high, like a city of the air ; here the gleam of some golden white façade, there some aerial battlement crowned with stars, with clusters, and points, and rings of flame that made a lucid twilight of the dark above them. Over all was an illusion of immensity.

Nine o'clock of an April night—the time when a great city has most power over those that love her ; the time when she lowers her voice and subdues her brilliance, intimating that she is not what she seems ; when she makes herself unearthly and insubstantial, veiling her grossness in the half-transparent night. Like some consummate temptress, she plays the mystic, clothing herself with light and darkness, skirting the intangible, hinting at the infinities, flinging out the eternal spiritual lure, so that she may better seduce the senses through the soul. And Rickman was too young a poet to distinguish clearly between his senses and his imagination, or his imagination and his soul.

He stood in Piccadilly Circus and regarded the spectacle of the night. He watched the groups gathering at the street corners, the boys that went laughing arm in arm, the young girls smiling into their lovers' eyes ; here and