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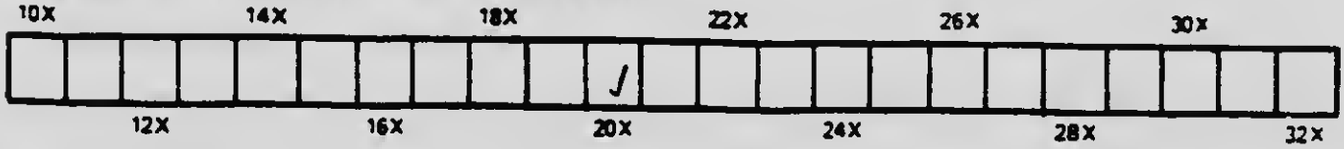

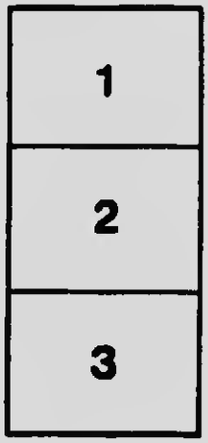

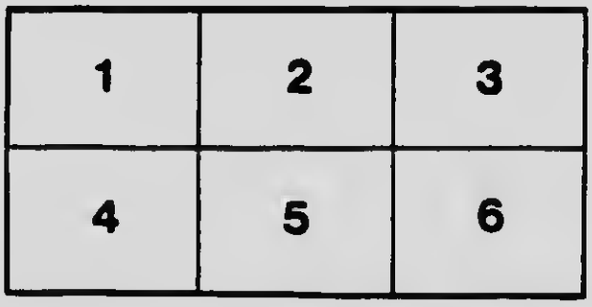

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LORE OF PROSERP IE

LORE OF PROSERPINE

BY

MAURICE HEWLETT

"Thus go the fairy kind,
Whither Fate driveth; not as we
Who fight with it, and deem us free
Therefore, and after pine, or strain
Against our prison bars in vain;
For to them Fate is Lord of Life
And Death, and idle is a strife
With such a master . . ."

Hypsipyle.

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TO

DESPOINA

FROM WHOM, TO WHOM

ALL

PREFACE

I HOPE nobody will ask me whether the things in this book are true, for it will then be my humiliating duty to reply that I don't know. They seem to be so to me writing them; they seemed to be so when they occurred, and one of them occurred only two or three years ago. That sort of answer satisfies me, and is the only one I can make. As I grow older it becomes more and more difficult to distinguish one kind of appearance from another, and to say, that is real, and again, that is illusion. Honestly, I meet in my daily walks innumerable beings, to all sensible signs male and female. Some of them I can touch, some smell, some speak with, some see, some discern otherwise than by sight. But if you cannot trust your eyes, why should you trust your nose or your fingers? There's my difficulty in talking about reality.

There's another way of getting at the truth after all. If a thing is not sensibly true it may be morally so. If it is not phenomenally true it may be so substantially. And it is possible that one may see substance in the idiom, so to speak, of the senses. That, I take it, is how the Greeks saw thunder-storms and other huge convulsions; that is how they saw meadow, grove and stream—in terms of their own

fair humanity. They saw such natural phenomena as shadows of spiritual conflict or of spiritual calm, and within the appearance apprehended the truth. So it may be that I have done. Some such may be the explanation of all fairy experience. Let it be so. It is a fact, I believe, that there is nothing revealed in this book which will not bear a spiritual, and a moral, interpretation; and I venture to say of some of it that the moral implications involved are exceedingly momentous, and timely too. I need not refer to such matters any further. If they don't speak for themselves they will get no help from a preface.

The book assumes up to a certain point an autobiographical cast. This is not because I deem my actual life of any interest to any one but myself, but because things do occur to one "in time," and the chronological sequence is as good as another, and much the most easy of any. I had intended, but my heart failed me, to pursue experience to the end. There was to have been a section, to be called "Despoina," dealing with my later life. But my heart failed me. The time is not yet, though it is coming. I don't deny that there are some things here which I learned from the being called Despoina and could have learned from nobody else. There are some such things, but there is not very much, and won't be any more just yet. Some of it there will never be for the sorry reason that our race won't bear to be told fundamental facts about itself, still less about other orders of creation which are suffi-

ciently like our own to bring self-consciousness into play. To write of the sexes in English you must either be sentimental or a satirist. You must set the emotions to work; otherwise you must be quiet. Now the emotions have no business with knowledge; and there's a reason why we have no fairy lore, because we can't keep our feelings in hand. The Greeks had a mythology, the highest form of Art, and we have none. Why is that? Because we can neither expound without wishing to convert the soul, nor understand without self-experiment. We don't want to know things, we want to feel them—and are ashamed of our need. Mythology, therefore, we English must make for ourselves as we can; and if we are wise we shall keep it to ourselves. It is a pity, because since we alone of created things are not self-sufficient, anything that seems to break down the walls of being behind which we agonise would be a comfort to us; but there's a worse thing than being in prison, and that is quarrelling with our own nature.

I shall have explained myself very badly if my reader leaves me with the impression that I have been writing down marvels. The fact that a thing occurs in nature takes it out of the portentous. There's nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so. With that I end.

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LORE OF PROSERPINE

THE WINDOWS

You will remember that Socrates considers every soul of us to be at least three persons. He says, in a fine figure, that we are two horses and a charioteer. "The right-hand horse is upright and cleanly made; he has a lofty neck and an aquiline nose; his colour is white and his eyes dark; he is a lover of honour and modesty and temperance, and the follower of true glory; he needs no touch of the whip, but is guided by word and admonition only. The other is a crooked lumbering animal, put together anyhow; he has a short thick neck; he is flat-faced and of a dark colour, with grey eyes of blood-red complexion; the mate of insolence and pride, shag-eared and deaf, hardly yielding to whip and spur." I need not go on to examine with the philosopher the acts of this pair under the whip and spur of love, because I am not going to talk about love. For my present purpose I shall suggest another dichotomy. I will liken the soul itself of man to a house, divided according

to the modern fashion into three flats or apartments. Of these the second floor is occupied by the landlord, who wishes to be quiet, and is not, it seems, afraid of fire; the ground-floor by a business man who would like to marry, but doubts if he can afford it, goes to the city every day, looks in at his club of an afternoon, dines out a good deal, and spends at least month of the year at Dieppe, Harrogate, or one of the German spas. He is a pleasant-faced man, as I see him, neatly dressed, brushed, anointed, polished at the extremities—for his boots vie with his hair in this particular. If he has a fault it is that of jingling half-crowns in his trouser-pocket; but he works hard for them, pays his rent with them, and gives one occasionally to a nephew. That youth, at any rate, likes the cheerful sound. He is rather fond, too, of monopolising the front of the fire in company, and thinks more of what he is going to eat, some time before he eats it, than a man should. But really I can't accuse him of anything worse than such little weaknesses. The first floor is occupied by a person of whom very little is known, who goes out chiefly at night and is hardly ever seen during the day. Tradesmen, and the crossing-sweeper at the corner, have caught a glimpse on rare occasions of a white face at the window, the startled face of a queer creature, who blinks and wrings at his nails with his

teeth; who peers at you, jerks and grins; who seems uncertain what to do; who sometimes shoots out his hands as if he would drive them through the glass: altogether a mischancy, unaccountable apparition, probably mad. Nobody knows how long he has been here; for the landlord found him in possession when he bought the lease, and the ground-floor, who was here also, fancies that they came together, but can't be sure. There he is, anyhow, and without an open scandal one doesn't like to give him notice. A curious thing about the man is that neither landlord nor ground-floor will admit acquaintance with him to each other, although, if the truth were known, each of them knows something—for each of them has been through his door; and I will answer for one of them, at least, that he has accompanied the Undesirable upon more than one midnight excursion, and has enjoyed himself enormously. If you could get either of these two alone in a confidential mood you might learn some curious particulars of their coy neighbour; and not the least curious would be the effect of his changing the glass of the first floor windows. It seems that he had that done directly he got into his rooms, saying that it was impossible to see out of such windows, and that a man must have light. Where he got his glass from, by whom it was fitted, I can't tell you, but the effect of it is

most extraordinary. The only summary account I feel able to give of it at the moment is that it transforms the world upon which it opens. You look out upon a new earth, literally that. The trees are not trees at all, but slim grey persons, young men, young women, who stand there quivering with life, like a row of Caryatides—on duty, but tiptoe for a flight, as Keats says. You see life, as it were, rippling up their limbs; for though they appear to be clothed, their clothing is of so thin a texture, and clings so closely that they might as well not be clothed at all. They are eyed, they see intensely; they look at each other so closely that you know what they would be doing. You can see them love each other as you watch. As for the people in the street, the real men and real women, as we say, I hardly know how to tell you what they look like through the first floor's windows. They are changed of everything but one thing. They occupy the places, fill the standing-room of our neighbours and friends; there is a something about them all by which you recognise them —a trick of the hand, a motion of the body, a set of the head (God knows what it is, how little and how much); but for all that—a new creature! A thing like nothing that lives by bread! Now just look at that policeman at the corner, for instance; not only is he stark naked—everybody is like that—but he's

perfectly different from the sturdy, good-humoured, red-faced, puzzled man you and I know. He is thin, wofully thin, and his ears are long and perpetually twitching. He pricks them up at the least thing; or lays them suddenly back, and we see them trembling. His eyes look all ways and sometimes nothing but the white is to be seen. He has a tail, too, long and leathery, which is always curling about to get hold of something. Now it will be the lamp-post, now the square railings, now one of those breathing trees; but mostly it is one of his own legs. Yet if you consider him carefully you will agree with me that his tail is a more expressive remnant of the man you have always seen there than any other part of him. You may say, and truly, that it is the only recognisable thing left. What do you think of his feet and hands? They startled me at first; they are so long and narrow, so bony and pointed, covered with fine short hair which shines like satin. That way he has of arching his feet and driving his toes into the pavement delights me. And see, too, that his hands are undistinguishable from feet: they are just as long and satiny. He is fond of smoothing his face with them; he brings them both up to his ears and works them forward like slow fans. Transformation indeed. I defy you to recognise him for the same man—except for a faint reminiscence about his tail.

But all's of a piece. The crossing-sweeper now has shaggy legs which end in hoofs. His way of looking at young people is very unpleasant;—and one had always thought him such a kindly old man. The butcher's boy—what a torso!—is walking with his arm round the waist of the young lady in Number seven. These are lovers, you see; but it's mostly on her side. He tilts up her chin and gives her a kiss before he goes; and she stands looking after him with shining eyes, hoping that he will turn round before he gets to the corner. But he doesn't.

Wait, now, wait, wait—who is this lovely, straining, beating creature darting here and there about the square, bruising herself, poor beautiful thing, against the railings? A sylph, a caught fairy? Surely, surely, I know somebody—is it?—It can't be. That careworn lady? God in Heaven, is it she? Enough! Show me no more. I will show you no more, my dear sir, if it agitates you; but I confess that I have come to regard it as one of the most interesting spectacles in London. The mere information —to say nothing of the amusement—which I have derived from it would fill a volume; but if it did, I may add, I myself should undoubtedly fill a cell in Holloway. I will therefore spare you what I know about the Doctor's wife, and what happens to Lieutenant-Colonel Storter when I see him through

these windows—I could never have believed it unless I had seen it. These things are not done, I know; but observed in this medium they seem quite ordinary. Lastly—for I can't go through the catalogue—I will speak of the air as I see it from here. My dear sir, the air is alive, thronged with life. Spirits, forms, lovely immaterial diaphanous shapes, are weaving endless patterns over the face of the day. They shine like salmon at a weir, or they darken the sky as redwings in the autumn fields; they circle, shrieking as they flash, like swallows at evening; they battle and wrangle together; or they join hands and whirl about the square in an endless chain. Of their beauty, their grace of form and movement, of the shifting filmy colour, hue blending in hue, of their swiftness, their glancing eyes, their exuberant joy or grief I cannot now speak. Beside them one man may well seem rat, and another goat. Beside them, indeed, you look for nothing else. And if I go on to hint that the owner of these windows is of them, though imprisoned in my house; that he does at times join them in their streaming flights beyond the housetops, and does at times carry with him his half-bewildered, half-shocked and wholly delighted fellow lodgers, I have come to the end of my tether and your credulity, and, for the time at least, have flowered myself to death. The figure is as good

as Plato's though my Pegasus will never stable in his stall.

We may believe ourselves to be two persons, at least, in one, and I fancy that one at least of them is a constant. So far as my own pair is concerned, either one of them has never grown up at all, or he was born whole and in a flash, as the fairies are. Such as he was, at any rate, when I was ten years old, such he is now when I am heavily more than ten; and the other of us, very conscious of the flight of time and of other things with it, is free to confess that he has little more hold of his fellow with all this authority behind him than he had when we commenced partnership. He has some, and thinks himself lucky, since the bond between the pair is of such a nature as to involve a real partnership—a partnership full of perplexity to the working member of it, the ordinary forensic creature of senses, passions, ambitions, and self-indulgences, the eating, sleeping, vainglorious, assertive male of common experience —and it is not to be denied that it has been fruitful, nor again that by some freak of fate or fortune the house has kept a decent front to the world at large. It is still solvent, still favourably regarded by the police. It is not, it never will be, a mere cage of demons; its walls have not been fretted to trans-

parency; no passing eye can detect revelry behind its decent stucco; no passing ear thrill to cries out of the dark. No, no. Troubles we may have; but we keep up appearances. The heart knoweth its own bitterness, and if it be a wise one, keepeth it to itself. I am not going to be so foolish as to deny divergences of opinion, even of practice, between the pair in me; but I flatter myself that I have not allowed them to become a common nuisance, a cause of scandal, a stumbling-block, a rock of offence, or anything of that kind. Uneasy tenant, wayward partner as my recondite may be, he has had a relationship with my forensic which at times has touched cordiality. Influential he has not been, for his colleague has always had the upper hand and been in the public eye. He may have instigated to mischief, but has not often been allowed to complete his purpose. If I am a respectable person it is not his fault. He seeks no man's respect. If he has occasionally lent himself to moral ends, it has been without enthusiasm, for he has no morals of his own, and never did have any. On the other hand, he is by nature too indifferent to temporal circumstances to go about to corrupt his partner. His main desire has ever been to be let alone. Anything which tended to tighten the bonds which held him to his co-tenant would have been a thing to avoid. He

desires liberty, and nothing less will content him. This he will only have by inaction, by mewing his sempiternal youth in his cage and on his perch.

But the tie uniting the pair of us is of such a nature that neither can be uninfluenced by the other. It is just that you should hear both sides of the case. My forensic, eating and arguing self has bullied my other into hypocrisy over and over again. He has starved him, deprived him of his holidays, ignored him, ridiculed him, snubbed him mercilessly. This is severe treatment, you'll allow, and it's worse even than it seems. For the unconscionable fellow, owing to this coheirship which he pretends to disesteem, has been made privy to experiences which must not only have been extraordinary to so plain and humdrum a person, but which have been, as I happen to know, of great importance to him, and which—to put the thing at its highest—have lifted him, dull dog as he is, into regions where the very dogs have wings. Out upon it! But he has been in and out with his victim over leagues of space where not one man in ten thousand has been privileged to fare. He has been familiar all his life with scenes, with folk, with deeds undreamed of by thirty-nine and three-quarters out of forty millions of people, and by that quarter-million only known as nursery tales. Not only so, but he has been awakened to the signifi-

cance of common things, having at hand an interpreter, and been enabled to be precise where Wordsworth was vague. He has known Zeus in the thunder, in the lightning beheld the shaking of the dread Ægis. In the river source he has seen the breasted nymph; he has seen the Oreads stream over the bare hillside. There are men who see these things and don't believe them, others who believe but don't see. He has both seen and believed. The painted, figured universe has for him a new shape; whispering winds and falling rain speak plainly to his understanding. He has seen trees as men walking. His helot has unlocked the world behind appearance and made him free of the Spirits of Natural Fact who abide there. If he is not the debtor of his comrade—and he protests the debt—he should be. But the rascal laps it all up, as a cat porridge, without so much as a wag of the tail for Thank-you. Such are the exorbitant overlords in mortal men, who pass for reputable persons, with a chief seat at feasts.

Such things, you may say, read incredibly, but, *mutatis mutandis*, I believe them to be common, though unrecorded, experience. I deprecate in advance questions designed to test the accuracy of my eyesight or the ingenuous habit of my pen. I have already declared that the windows of my first-floor

lodger are of such properties that they show you, in Xenophon's phrase, *τὰ ὄντα τε ὡς ὄντα, καὶ τὰ μὴ ὄντα ὡς οὐκ ὄντα.* Now consider it from his side. If I were to tell the owner of those windows that I saw the policeman at the corner, a helmeted, blue-tunicked, chin-scratching, ponderous man, some six foot in his boots, how would he take it? Would he not mock me? What, that rat? Ridiculous! And what on earth could I reply? I tell you, the whole affair is one of windows, or, sometimes, of personally-conducted travel; and who is Guide and who Guided, is one of those nice questions in psychology which perhaps we are not yet ready to handle. Of the many speculations as to the nature of the subliminal Self I have never found one to be that he may be a fairy prisoner, occasionally on parole. But I think that not at all unlikely. May not metempsychosis be a scourge of two worlds? If the soul of my grandam might fitly inhabit a bird, might not a Fairy ruefully inhabit the person of my grandam? If Fairy Godmothers, perchance, were Fairy Grandmothers! I have some evidence to place before the reader which may induce him to consider this hypothesis. Who can doubt, at least, that Shelley's was not a case where the not-human was a prisoner in the human? Who can doubt that of Blake's? And what was the result, forensically?

Shelley was treated as a scoundrel and Blake as a madman. Shelley, it was said, broke the moral law, and Blake transcended common sense; but the first, I reply, was in the guidance of a being to whom the laws of this world and the accidents of it meant nothing at all; and to the second a wisdom stood revealed which to human eyes was foolishness. Windows! In either case there was a martyrdom, and human exasperation appeased by much broken glass. Let us not, however, condemn the wreckers of windows. Who is to judge even them? Who is to say even of their harsh and cruel reprisals that they were not excusable? May not they too have been ridden by some wild spirit within them, which goaded them to their beastly work? But if the acceptance of the doctrine of multiple personality is going to involve me in the reconsideration of criminal jurisprudence, I must close this essay.

I will close it with the sentence of another philosopher who has considered deeply of these questions. "It is to be observed," he says, "that the laws of human conduct are precisely made for the conduct of this world of Men, in which we live, breed, and pay rent. They do not affect the Kingdom of the Dogs, nor that of the Fishes; by a parity of reasoning they need not be supposed to obtain in

the Kingdom of Heaven, in which the schoolmen discovered the citizens dwelling in nine spheres, apart from the blessed immigrants, whose privileges did not extend so near to the Heart of the Presence. How many realms there may be between mankind's and that ultimate object of pure desire cannot at present be known, but it may be affirmed with confidence that any denizen of any one of them, brought into relation with human beings, would act, and reasonably act, in ways which to men might seem harsh and unconscionable, without sanction or convenience. Such a being might murder one of the ratepayers of London, compound a felony, or enter into a conspiracy to depose the King himself, and, being detected, very properly be put under restraint, or visited with chastisement, either deterrent or vindictive, or both. But the true inference from the premises would be that although duress or banishment from the kindgom might be essential, yet punishment, so-called, ought not to be visited upon the offender. For he or she could not be *nostri juris*, and that which were abominable to us might well be reasonable to him or her, and indeed a fulfilment of the law of [illegible] being. Punishment, therefore, could not be exemplary, since the person punished exemplified nothing to Mankind; and if vindictive, then would be shocking, since that which is vindi-

cated, in the mind of the victim either did not exist, or ought not. The Ancient Greek who withheld from the sacrifice to Showery Zeus because a thunderbolt destroyed his hayrick, or the Egyptian who manumitted his slaver because a God took the life of his eldest son, was neither a pious, nor a reasonable person."

There is much debatable matter in this considered opinion.

A BOY IN THE WOOD

I HAD many bad qualities as a child, of which I need mention only three. I was moody, irresolute, and hatefully reserved. Fate had already placed me the eldest by three years of a large family. Add to the eminence thus attained intentions which varied from hour to hour, a will so little in accordance with desire that I had rather give up a cherished plan than fight for it, and a secretive faculty equalled only by the magpie, and you will not wonder when I affirm that I lived alone in a household of a dozen friendly persons. As a set-off and consolation to myself I had very strongly the power of impersonation. I could be within my own little entity a dozen different people in a day, and live a life thronged with these companions or rivals; and yet this set me more solitary than ever, for I could never appear in any one of my characters to anybody else. But alone and apart, what worlds I inhabited! Worlds of fact and worlds of fiction. At nine years old I knew Nelson's ardour and Wellesley's phlegm; I had Napoleon's egotism, Galahad's purity, Lance-

lot's passion, Tristram's melancholy. I reasoned like Socrates and made Phædo weep; I persuaded like Saint Paul and saw the throng on Mars' Hill sway to my words. I was by turns Don Juan and Don Quixote, Tom J nes and Mr. Allworthy, Hamlet and his uncle, young Shandy and his. You will gather that I was a reader. I was, and the people of my books stepped out of their pages and inhabited me. Or, to change the figure, I found in every book an open door, and went in and dwelt in its world. Thus I lived a thronged and busy life, a secret life, full of terror, triumph, wonder, frantic enterprise, a noble and gallant figure among my peers, while to my parents, brothers and sisters I was an incalculable, fitful creature, often lethargic and often in the sulks. They saw me mooning in idleness and were revolted; or I walked dully the way I was bid and they despaired of my parts. I could not explain myself to them, still less justify, having that miserable veil of reserve close over my mouth, like a yashmak. To my father I could not speak, to my mother I did not; the others, being my juniors all, hardly existed. Who is to declare the motives of a child's mind? What was the nature of this reticence? Was it that my real habit was reverie? Was it, as I suspect, that constitutional timidity made me diffident? I was a coward, I am very sure, for I

was always highly imaginative. Was it, finally, that I was dimly conscious of matters which I despaired of putting clearly? Who can say? And who can tell me now whether I was cursed or blessed? Certainly, if it had been possible to any person my senior to share with me my daily adventures, I might have conquered the cowardice from which I suffered such terrible reverses. But it was not. I was the eldest of a large family, and apparently the easiest to deal with of any of it. I was what they call a tractable child, being, in fact, too little interested in the world as it was to resent any duties cast upon me. It was not so with the others. They were high-spirited little creatures, as often in mischief as not, and demanded much more pains then I ever did. What they demanded they got, what I did not demand I got not: "Lo, here is alle! What shold I more seye?"

How it was that, taking no interest in my actual surroundings, I became aware of unusual things behind them I cannot understand. It is very difficult to differentiate between what I imagined and what I actually perceived. It was a favourite string of my poor father's plaintive lyre that I had no eyes. He was a great walker, a poet, and a student of nature. Every Sunday of his life he took me and my brother for a long tramp over the country, the

intense spiritual fatigue of which exercise I should never be able to describe. I have a sinking of the heart, even now, when I recall our setting out. Intolerable labour! I saw nothing and said nothing. I did nothing but plug one dull foot after the other. I felt like some chained slave going to the hulks, and can well imagine that my companions must have been very much aware of it. My brother, whose nature was much happier than mine, who dreamed much less and observed much more, was the life of these woful excursions. Without him I don't think that my father could have endured them. At any rate, he never did. I amazed, irritated, and confounded him at most times, but in nothing more than my apathy to what enchanted him.[1] The birds, the flowers, the trees, the waters did not exist for me in my youth. The world for me was uninhabited, a great empty cage. People passed us, or stood at their doorways watching us, but I never saw them. If by chance I descried somebody coming whom it would be necessary to salute, or to whom I might have to speak, I turned aside to avoid them. I was not only shy to a fault, as a diffident child must be, but the world of sense either did not exist for me or

[1] And me also when I was enabled at a later day to perceive them. I am thankful to remember and record for my own comfort that that day came not too late for my enchantment to overtake his and proceed in company.

was thrust upon me to my discomfort. And yet all the while, as I moved or sat, I was surrounded by a stream of being, of infinite constituents, aware of them to this extent that I could converse with them without sight or speech. I knew they were there, I knew them singing, whispering, screaming. They filled my understanding not my senses. I did not see them but I felt them. I knew not what they said or sang, but had always the general sense of their thronging neighbourhood.

I enlarge upon this because I think it justifies me in adding that, observing so little, what I did observe with my bodily eyes must almost certainly have been observable. But now let the reader judge.

The first time I ever saw a creature which was really outside ordinary experience was in the late autumn of my twelfth year. My brother, next in age to me, was nine, my eldest sister eight. We three had been out walking with our mother, and were now returning at dusk to our tea through a wood which covered the top of a chalk down. I remember vividly the scene. The carpet of drenched leaves under bare branches, the thin spear-like shafts of the underwood, the grey lights between, the pale frosty sky overhead with the sickle moon low down in it. I remember, too, various sensations,

such as the sudden chill which affected me as the crimson globe of the sun disappeared; and again how, when we emerged from the wood, I was enheartened by the sight of the village shrouded under chimney smoke and by the one or two twinkling lights dotted here and there about the dim wolds.

In the wood it was already twilight and very damp. Perhaps I had been tired, more likely bored —as I always was when I was not being somebody else. I remember that I had found the path interminable. I had been silent, as I mostly was, while the other two had chattered and played about our mother; and when presently I stayed behind for a purpose I remember that I made no effort to catch them up. I knew the way perfectly, of course, and had no fear of the dark. Oddly enough I had no fear of that. I was far less imaginative in the night than in the day. Besides that, by the time I was ready to go after them I had much else to think of.

I must have been looking at him for some time before I made out that he was there. So you may peer into a thicket a hundred times and see nothing, and then a trick of the light or a flutter of the mood and you see creatures where you had been sure was nothing. As children will, I had stayed longer than I need, looking and wondering into the wood, not observing but yet absorbing the effects of the

lights and shades. The trees were sapling chestnuts if I am not mistaken, Spanish chestnuts, and used for hop-poles in those parts. Their leaves decay gradually, the fleshy part, so to speak, dropping away from the articulation till at last bleached skeleton leaves remain and flicker at every sigh of the wind. The ground was densely carpeted with other leaves in the same state, or about to become so. The silver grey was cross-hatched by the purple lines of the serried stems, and as the view receded this dipped into blue and there lost itself. It was very quiet—a windless fall of the light. To-day I should find it most beautiful; and even then, I suspect, I felt its beauty without knowing it to be so. Looking into it all without realising it, I presently and gradually did realise something else: a shape, a creature, a thing of form and pressure—not a wraith, not, I am quite certain, a trick of the senses.

It was under a clump of the chestnut stems, kneeling and sitting on its heels, and it was watching me with the bright, quick eyes of a mouse. If I were to say that my first thought was of some peering and waiting animal, I should go on to qualify the thought by reference to the creature's eyes. They were eyes which, like all animals', could only express one thing at a time. They expressed now attention, the closest: not fear, not surprise, not apprehension of anything

that I might be meditating against their peace, but simply minute attention. The absence of fear, no doubt, marked their owner off from the animals of common acquaintance; but the fact that they did not at the same time express the being itself showed him to be different from our human breed. For whatever else the human pair of eyes may reveal, it reveals the looker.

The eyes of this creature revealed nothing of itself except that it was watching me narrowly. I could not even be sure of its sex, though I believe it to have been a male, and shall hereafter treat of it as such. I could see that he was young; I thought about my own age. He was very pale, without being at all sickly—indeed, health and vigour and extreme vivacity were implicit in every line and expressed in every act; he was clear-skinned, but almost colourless. The shadow under his chin, I remember, was bluish. His eyes were round, when not narrowed by that closeness of his scrutiny of me, and though probably brown, showed to be all black, with pupil indistinguishable from iris. The effect upon me was of black, vivid black, unintelligent eyes—which see intensely but cannot translate. His hair was dense and rather long. It covered his ears and touched his shoulders. It was pushed from his forehead sideways in a thick, in a solid fold, as

if it had been the corner of a frieze cape thrown back. It was dark hair, but not black; his neck was very thin. I don't know how he was dressed—I never noticed such things; but in colour he must have been inconspicuous, since I had been looking at him for a good time without seeing him at all. A sleeveless tunic, I think, which may have been brown, or grey, or silver-white. I don't know. But his knees were bare—that I remember; and his arms were bare from the shoulder.

I standing, he squatting on his heels, the pair of us looked full at one another. I was not frightened, no more was he. I was excited, and full of interest; so, I think, was he. My heart beat double time. Then I saw, with a curious excitement, that between his knees he held a rabbit, and that with his left hand he had it by the throat. Now, what is extraordinary to me about this discovery is that there was nothing shocking in it.

I saw the rabbit's wild and panic-blown eye, I saw the bright white rim of it, and recognised its little added terror of me even in the midst of its anguish. That must have been the conventional fright of a beast of chase, an instinct to fear rather than an emotion; for of emotions the poor thing must have been having its fill. It was not till I saw its mouth horribly open, its lips curled back to show

its shelving teeth that I could have guessed at what it was suffering. But gradually I apprehended what was being done. Its captor was squeezing its throat. I saw what I had never seen before, and have never seen since, I saw its tongue like a pale pink petal of a flower dart out as the pressure drove it. Revolting sight as that would have been to me, witnessed in the world, here, in this dark wood, in this outland presence, it was nothing but curious. Now, as I watched and wondered, the being, following my eyes' direction, looked down at the huddled thing between his thighs, and just as children squeeze a snap-dragon flower to make it open and shut its mouth, so precisely did he, pressing or releasing the windpipe, cause that poor beast to throw back its lips and dart its dry tongue. He did this many times while he watched it; and when he looked up at me again, and while he continued to look at me, I saw that his cruel fingers, as by habit, continued the torture, and that in some way he derived pleasure from the performance—as if it gratified him to be sure that effect was following on cause inevitably.

I have never, I believe, been cruel to an animal in my life. I hated cruelty then as I hate it now. I have always shirked the sight of anything in pain from my childhood onwards. Yet the fact is that not only did I nothing to interfere in what I saw

going on, but that I was deeply interested and absorbed in it. I can only explain that to myself now, by supposing that I knew then, that the creature in front of me was not of my own kind, and was not, in fact, outraging any law of its own being. Is not that possible? May I not have collected unawares so much out of created nature? I am unable to say: all I am clear about is that here was a thing in the semblance of a boy doing what I had never observed a boy do, and what if I ever had observed a boy do, would have flung me into a transport of rage and grief. Here, therefore, was a thing in the semblance of a boy who was no boy at all. So much must have been as certain to me then as it is indisputable now.

One doesn't, at that age, reason things out; one knows them, and is dumb, though unconvinced, before powerful syllogisms to the contrary. All children are so, confronted by strange phenomena. And yet I had facts to go upon if, child as I was, I had been capable of inference. I need only mention one. If this creature had been human, upon seeing that I was conscious of its behaviour to the rabbit, it would either have stopped the moment it perceived that I did not approve or was not amused, or it would have continued deliberately out of bravado. But it neither stopped nor hardily continued. It watched its experiment with interest for a little,

then, finding me more interesting, did not discontinue it, but ceased to watch it. He went on with it mechanically, dreamingly, as if to the excitation of some other sense than sight, that of feeling, for instance. He went on lasciviously, for the sake of the pleasure so to be had. In other words, being without self-consciousness and ignorant of shame, he must have been non-human.

After all, too, it must be owned that I cannot have been confronted by the appearance for more than a few minutes. Allow me three to have been spent before I was aware of him, three more will be the outside I can have passed gazing at him. But I speak of "minutes," of course, referring to my ostensible self, that inert, apathetic child who followed its mother, that purblind creature through whose muddy lenses the pent immortal had been forced to see his familiar in the wood, and perchance to dress in form and body what, for him, needed neither to be visible. It was this outward self which was now driven by circumstances to resume command—the command which for "three minutes" by his reckoning he had relinquished. Both of us, no doubt, had been much longer there had we not been interrupted. A woodman, homing from his work, came heavily up the path, and like a guilty detected rogue I turned to run and took my incorruptible with me. Not

until I had passed the man did I think to look back. The partner of my secret was not then to be seen. Out of sight out of mind is the way of children. Out of mind, then, withdrew my incorruptible. I hurried on, ran, and overtook my party half-way down the bare hillside. I still remember the feeling of relief with which I swept into the light, felt the cold air on my cheeks, and saw the intimacy of the village open out below me. I am almost sure that my eyes held tears at the assurance of the sweet, familiar things which I knew and could love. There, literally, were my own people: that which I had left behind must be unlawful because it was so strange. In the warmth and plenty of the lighted house, by the schoolroom table, before the cosily covered tea-pot, amid the high talk, the hot toast and the jam, my experience in the dusky wood seemed unreal, lawless, almost too terrible to be remembered—never, never to be named. It haunted me for many days, and gave rise to curious wonderings now and then. As I passed the patient, humble beasts of common experience—a carter's team nodding, jingling its brasses, a donkey, patient, humble, hobbled in a paddock, dogs sniffing each other, a cat tucked into a cottage window, I mused doubtfully and often whether we had touched the threshold of the heart of their mystery. But for the most part, being con-

stitutionally timid, I was resolute to put the experience out of mind. When next I chanced to go through the wood there is no doubt I peered askance to right and left among the trees; but I took good care not to desert my companions. That which I had seen was unaccountable, therefore out of bounds. But though I never saw him there again I have never forgotten him.

HARKNESS'S FANCY

I MAY have been a precocious child, but I cannot tell within a year or two how soon it was that I attained manhood. There must have been a moment of time when I clothed myself in skins, like Adam; when I knew what this world calls good and evil—by which this world means nothing more nor less than men and women, and chiefly women, I think. Savage peoples initiate their young and teach them the taboos of society by stripes. We allow our issue to gash themselves. By stripes, then, upon my young flesh, I scored up this lesson for myself. Certain things were never to be spoken of, certain things never to be looked at in certain ways, certain things never to be done consciously, or for the pleasure to be got out of them. One stepped out of childish conventions into mannish conventions, and did so, certainly, without any instruction from outside. I remember, for instance, that, as children, it was a rigid part of our belief that our father was the handsomest man in the world—handsome was the word. In the same way our mother was by prerogative the most beautiful woman. [illegible] some

hero flashed upon our scene—Garibaldi, Lancelot of the Lake, or another—the greatest praise we could possibly have given him for beauty, excellence, courage, or manly worth would have put him second to our father. So also Helen of Sparta and Beatrice of Florence gave way. That was the law of the nursery, rigid and never to be questioned until unconsciously I grew out of it, and becoming a man, put upon me the panoply of manly eyes. I now accepted it that to kiss my sister was nothing, but that to kiss her friend would be very wicked. I discovered that there were two ways of looking at a young woman, and two ways of thinking about her. I discovered that it was lawful to have some kinds of appetite, and to take pleasure in food, exercise, sleep, warmth, cold water, hot water, the smell of flowers, and quite unlawful so much as to think of, or to admit to myself the existence of other kinds of appetite. I discovered, in fact, that love was a shameful thing, that if one was in love one concealed it from the world, and, above all the world, from the object of one's love. The conviction was probably instinctive, for one is not the descendant of puritans for nothing; but the discovery of it is another matter. Attendance at school and the continuous reading of romance were partly responsible for that; physical development clinched the affair.

I was in all respects mature at thirteen, though my courage (to use the word in Chaucer's sense) was not equal to my ability. I had more than usual diffidence against me, more than usual reserve; and self-consciousness, from which I have only lately escaped, grew upon me hand in hand with experience.

But being now become a day-scholar at the Grammar School, and thrown whether I would or not among other boys of my own age, I sank my recondite self deeply under the folds of my quickened senses. I became aware of a world which was not his world at all. I watched, I heard, I judged, I studied intently my comrades; and while in secret I shared their own hardy lives, I was more than content to appear a cipher among them. I had no friends and made none. All my comradeship with my school-mates took place in my head, for however salient in mood or inclination I may have been I was a laggard in action. In company I was lower than the least of them; in my solitude, at their head I captured the universe. Daily, to and fro, for two or three years I journeyed between my home and this school, with a couple of two-mile walks and a couple of train journeys to be got through in all weathers and all conditions of light. I saw little or nothing of my school-fellows out of hours, and lived all my play-time, if you can so call it, intensely alone

with the people of my imagination—to whose number I could now add gleanings from the Grammar School.

I don't claim objective reality for any of these; I am sure that they were of my own making. Though unseen beings throng round us all, though as a child I had been conscious of them, though I had actually seen one, in these first school years of mine the machinery I had for seeing the usually unseen was eclipsed; my recondite self was fast in his *cachot*—and I didn't know that he was there! But one may imagine fairies enough out of one's reading, and going beyond that, using it as a spring-board, advance in the work of creation from realising to begetting. So it was with me. The *Faerie Queen* was as familiar as the Latin Primer ought to have been. I had much of Mallory by heart—a book full of magic. Forth of his pages stepped men-at-arms and damsels the moment I was alone, and held me company for as long as I would. The persons of Homer's music came next to them. I was Hector and held Andromache to my heart. I kissed her farewell when I went forth to school, and hurried home at night from the station, impatient for her arms. I was never Paris, and had only awe of Helen. Even then I dimly guessed her divinity, that godhead which the supremest beauty really is. But I was often Odys-

seus the much-enduring, and very well acquainted with the wiles of Calypso. Next in power of enchantment came certainly Don Quixote, in whose lank bones I was often encased. Dulcinea's charm was very real to me. I revelled in her honeyed name. I was Don Juan too, and I was Tom Jones; but my most natural impersonation in those years was Tristram. The luxury of that champion's sorrows had a swooning sweetness of their own of which I never tired. Iseult meant nothing. I cared nothing for her. I was enamoured of the hero, and saw myself drenched in his passion. Like Narcissus in the fable, I loved myself, and saw myself, in Tristram's form, the most beautiful and the most beloved of beings.

Chivalry and Romance chained me at that time and not the supernatural. The fairy adventures of the heroes of my love swept by me untouched. Morgan le Fay, Britomart, Vivien, Nimue, Merlin did not convince me; they were picturesque conventions whose decorative quality I felt, while so far as I was concerned they were garniture or apparatus. And yet the fruitful meadows through which I took my daily way were as forests to me; the grass-stems spired up to my fired fancy like great trees. Among them I used to minish myself to the size of an ant and become a pioneer hewing out a pathway through virgin thickets. I had my ears alert for the sound

of a horn, of a galloping horse, of the Questing Beast and hounds in full cry. But I never looked to encounter a fairy in these most fairy solitudes. Beleaguered ladies, knights-errant, dwarfs, churls, fiends of hell, leaping like flames out of pits in the ground: all these, but no fairies. It's very odd that having seen the reality and devoured the fictitious, I should have had zest for neither, but so it is.

As for my school-mates, though I had very little to say to them, or they to me, I used to watch them very closely, and, as I have said, came to weave them into my dreams. Some figured as heroes, some as magnanimous allies, some as malignant enemies, some who struck me as beautiful received of me the kind of idolatry, the insensate self-surrender which creatures of my sort have always offered up to beauty of any sort. I remember T———e, a very shapely and distinguished youth. I worshipped him as a god, and have seen him since—alas! I remember B——— also, a tall, lean, loose-limbed young man. He was a great cricketer, a good-natured, sleepy giant, perfectly stupid (I am sure) but with marks of breed about him which I could not possibly mistake. Him, too, I enthroned upon my temple-frieze; he would have figured there as Meleager had I been a few years older. As it was, he rode a blazoned charger, all black, and feutred his lance with the

Knights of King Arthur's court. Then there was H———n, a good-looking, good-natured boy, and T———r, another. Many and many a day did they ride forth with me adventuring—that is, spiritually they did so; physically speaking, I had no scot or lot with them. We were in plate armour, visored and beplumed. We slung our storied shields behind us; we had our spears at rest; we laughed, told tales, sang as we went through the glades of the forest, down the rutted charcoal-burner's track, and came to the black mere, where there lay a barge with oars among the reeds. I can see, now, H———n throw up his head, bared to the sky and slanting sun. He had thick and dark curly hair and a very white neck. His name of chivalry was Sagramor. T———r was of stouter build and less salient humour. He was Bors, a brother of Lancelot's. I, who was moody, here as in waking life, was Tristram, more often Tramtris.

Of other more sinister figures I remember two. R———s, who bullied me until I was provoked at last into facing him; a greedy, pale, lecherous boy, graceless, a liar, but extremely clever. I had a horror of him which endures now. If he, as I have, had a dweller in the deeps of him, his must have been a satyr. I cannot doubt it now. Disastrous ally for mortal man! Vice sat upon his face like a grease;

vice made his fingers quick. He had a lickorous tongue and a taste for sweet things which even then made me sick. So repulsive was he to me, so impressed upon my fancy, that it was curious he did not haunt my inner life. But I never met him there. No shape of his ever encountered me in the wilds and solitary places. In the manifest world he afflicted me to an extent which the rogue-fairy in the wood could never have approached. Perhaps it was that all my being was forearmed against him, and that I fought him off. At any rate he never trespassed in my preserves.

The other was R———d, a bleared and diseased creature, a thing of pity and terror to the wholesome, one of those outcasts of the world which every school has to know and reckon with. A furtive, nail-bitten, pick-nose wretch with an unholy hunger for ink, earth-worms and the like. What terrible tenant do the likes of these carry about with them! He, too, haunted me, but not fearfully; but he, too, I now understand too well, was haunted and ridden to doom. I pitied him, tried to be kind to him, tried to treat him as the human thing which in some sort he was. I discovered that when he was interested he forgot his loathsome cravings, and became almost lovable. I went home with him once, to a mean house in ———. He took me into the backyard

and showed me his treasury—half a dozen rabbits, as many guinea-pigs, and a raven with a bald head. He was all kindness to these prisoners, fondled them with hands and voice, spoke a kind of inarticulate baby language to them, and gave them pet names. He forgot his misery, his poverty—I remember that he never had a handkerchief and always wanted one, that his jacket-sleeves were near his elbow, and that his wrist bones were red and broken. But now there shone a clear light in his eye; he could face the world as he spoke to me of the habits of his friends. We got upon some sort of terms by these means, and I always had a kind of affection for poor R———d. In a sense we were both outcasts, and might have warmed the world for each other. If I had not been so entirely absorbed in my private life as to grudge any moment of it unnecessarily spent I should have asked him home. But boys are exorbitant in their own affairs, and I had no time to spare him.

I was a year at ——— before I got so far with any schoolfellow of mine there; but just about the time of my visit to R———d I fell in with another boy, called Harkness, who, for some reason of his own, desired my closer acquaintance and got as much of it as I was able to give to anybody, and a good deal more than he deserved or I was the better of. He, too, was a day-boy, whose people lived in a

suburb of the town which lay upon my road. We scraped acquaintance by occasionally travelling together so much of the way as he had to traverse; from this point onward all the advances were his. I had no liking for him, and, in fact, some of his customs shocked me. But he was older than I, very friendly, and very interesting. He evidently liked me; he asked me to tea with him; he used to wait for me, going and returning. I had no means of refusing his acquaintance, and did not; but I got no good out of him.

As he was older, so he was much more competent. Not so much vicious as curious and enterprising, he knew a great many things which I only guessed at, and could do much—or said that he could—which I only dreamed about. He put a good deal of heart into my instruction, and left me finally with my lesson learned. I never saw nor heard of him after I left the school. We did not correspond, and he left no mark upon me of any kind. The lesson learned, I used the knowledge certainly; but it did not take me into the region which he knew best. His grove of philosophy was close to the school, in K——— Park, which is a fine enclosure of forest trees, glades, brake-fern and deer. Here, in complete solitude, for we never saw a soul, my sentimental education was begun by this self-appointed

professor. As I remember, he was a good-looking lad enough, with a round and merry face, high colour, bright eyes, a moist and laughing mouth. Had he known the way in he would have been at home in the Garden of Priapus, where perhaps he is now. He was hardy in address, a ready speaker, rather eloquent upon the theme that he loved, and I dare say he may have been as fortunate as he said, or very nearly. Certainly what he had to tell me of love and women opened my understanding. I believe that I envied him his ease of attainment more than what he said he had attained. I might have been stimulated by his adventures to be adventurous on my own account, but I never was, neither at that time nor at any other. I am quite certain that never in my life have I gone forth conquering and to conquer in affairs of the heart. You need to be a Casanova—which Harkness was in his little way—and I have had no aptitude for the part. But as I said just now I absorbed his teachings and made use of them. So far as he gave me food for reflection I ate it, and assimilated it in my own manner. Neither by him nor by any person far more considerable than himself has my imagination been moved in the direction of the mover of it. Let great poet, great musician, great painter stir me ever so deeply, I have never been able to follow him an inch. I was excited by

pictures to see new pictures of my own, by poems to make poems—of my own, not of theirs. In these, no doubt, were elements of theirs; there was a borrowed something, a quality, an accent, a spirit of attack. But the forms were mine, and the setting always so. All my life I have used other men's art and wisdom as a spring-board. I suppose every poet can say the same. This was to be the use to me of the lessons of the precocious, affectionate, and philoprogenitive Harkness.

I remember very well one golden summer evening when he and I lay talking under a great oak—he expounding and I plucking at the grass as I listened, or let my mind go free—how, quite suddenly, the mesh he was weaving about my groping mind parted in the midst and showed me for an appreciable moment a possibility of something—it was no more—which he could never have seen.

From the dense shade in which we lay there stretched out an avenue of timber trees, whereunder the bracken, breast high, had been cut to make a ride. Upon this bracken, and upon this smooth channel in the midst the late sun streamed toward us, a soft wash of gold. Behind all this the sky, pale to whiteness immediately overhead, deepened to the splendid orange of the sunset. Each tree cast his shadow upon his neighbour, so that only the topmost

branches burned in the light. Over and above us floated the drowsy hum of the insect world; rarely we heard the moaning of a wood-dove, more rarely still the stirring of deer hidden in the thicket shade. This was a magical evening, primed with wonders, in the glamour of which Master Harkness could find nothing better for him to rehearse than the progress of his amours with his mother's housemaid. Yet something of the evening glow, something of the opulence of summer smouldered in his words. He painted his mistress with the colour of the sunset, he borrowed of it burnt gold to deck her clay. He hymned the whiteness of her neck, her slender waist, her whispers, the kisses of her mouth. The scamp was luxuriating in his own imaginings or reminiscences, much less of a lover and far more of a rhapsodist than he suspected. As such his pæan of precocious love stirred my senses and fired my imagination, but not in the direction of his own. For the glow which he cast upon his affair was a borrowed one. He had dipped without knowing into the languid glory of the evening, which like a pool of wealth lay ready to my hand also. I gave him faint attention from the first. After he had started my thoughts he might sing rapture after rapture of his young and ardent sense. For me the spirit of a world not his whispered, "*A te convien tenere altro viaggio*," and

little as I knew it, in my vague exploration of that scene of beauty, of those scarcely stirring, stilly burning trees, of that shimmering-fronded fern, of that misty splendour, I was hunting for the soul of it all, for the informing spirit of it all. Harkness's erotics gave ardour to my search, but no clew. I lost him, left him behind, and never found him again. He fell into the Garden of Priapus, I doubt. As for me, I believed that I was now looking upon a Dryad. I was looking certainly at a spirit informed. A being, irradiate and quivering with life and joy of life, stood dipt to the breast in the brake; stood so, bathing in the light; stood so, preening herself like a pigeon on the roof-edge, and saw me and took no heed.

She had appeared, or had been manifest to me, quite suddenly. At one moment I saw the avenue of lit green, at another she was dipt in it. I could describe her now, at this distance of time—a radiant young female thing, fiercely favoured, smiling with a fierce joy, with a gleam of fierce light in her narrowed eyes. Upon her body and face was the hue of the sun's red beam; her hair, loose and fanned out behind her head, was of the colour of natural silk, but diaphanous as well as burnished, so that while the surfaces glittered like spun glass the deeps of it were translucent and showed the fire behind.

Her garment was thin and grey, and it clung to her like a bark, seemed to grow upon her as a creeping stone-weed grows. Harkness would have admired the audacity of her shape, as I did; but I found nothing provocative in it. As well might a boy have enamoured himself of a slim tree as of that unearthly shaft of beauty.

I said that she preened herself; the word is inexact. She rather stood bathing in the light, motionless but for the lifting of her face into it that she might dip, or for the bending of her head that the warmth behind her might strike upon the nape of her neck. Those were all her movements, slowly rehearsed, and again and again rehearsed. With each of them she thrilled anew; she thrilled and glowed responsive to the play of the light. I don't know whether she saw me, though it seemed to me that our looks had encountered. If her eyes had taken me in I should have known it, I think; and if I had known it I should have quailed and looked at her no more. So shamefaced was I, so self-conscious, that I can be positive about that; for far from avoiding her I watched her intently, studied her in all her parts, and found out some curious things.

Looking at her beside the oaks, for instance, whence she must have emanated, I could judge why

it was that I had not seen her come out. Her colouring was precisely that of her background. Her garment, smock or frock or vest as you will, was grey-green like the oak stems, her whites were those of the sky-gleams, her roses those of the sun's rays. The maze of her hair could hardly be told from the photosphere. I tested this simply and summarily. Shutting my eyes for a second, when I opened them she was gone. Shutting them again and opening, there she was, sunning herself, breathing deep and long, watching her own beauties as the light played with them. I tried this many times and it did not fail me. I could, with her assistance, bring her upon my retina or take her off it, as if I had worked a shutter across my eyes. But as I watched her so I got very excited. Her business was so mysterious, her pleasure in it so absorbing; she was visible and yet secret; I was visible, and yet she could be ignorant of it. I got the same throbbing sort of interest out of her as many and many a time I have got since out of watching other wild creatures at their affairs, crouching hidden where they could not discern me by any of their senses. Few things enthral me more than that—and here I had my first taste of it. I remember that my heart beat, I remember that I trembled. Nothing could have torn me from the spot but what precisely did, an alien inter-

vention. The besotted Harkness stopped short in his recital and asked me what I was staring at.

That was the end of it. I had rather have died than tell him. Perhaps I was afraid of his mockery, perhaps I dared not risk his unbelief, perhaps I felt ashamed that I had been prying, perhaps I grudged him the sight of her moulded beauty and keen wild face. "What am I staring at? Why, nothing," I said. I got up and put the strap of my school satchel over my head. I never looked for her again before I walked away. Whether she left when I left, whether she was really there or a projection of my mind, whether my inner self, my prisoner, had seen her, or my schoolboy self through his agency, whether it was a trick of the senses, a dream, or the like I can't tell you. I only know that I have now recalled exactly what I seemed to see, and that I have seen her since—her or her co-mate—once or twice.

I can account for her now easily enough. I can assure myself that she was really there, that she, or the like of her, pervades, haunts, indwells all such places; but it seems that there must be a right relation between the seer and the object before the unseen can become the seen. Put it like this, that form is a necessary convention of our being, a mode of consciousness just as space is, just as time, just as

rhythm are; then it is clear enough that the spirits of natural fact must take on form and sensible body before we can apprehend them. They take on such form for us or such body through our means; that is what I mean by a right relation between them and ourselves. Now some persons have the faculty of discerning spirits, that is, of clothing them in bodily form, and others have not; but of those who have it all do not discern them in the same form, or clothe them in the same body. The form will be rhythmical to some, to other some audible, to others yet again odorous, "aromatic pain," or bliss. These modes are no matter, they are accidents of our state. They cause the form to be relative, just as the conception of God is; but the substance is constant. I have seen innumerable spirits, but always in bodily form. I have never perceived them by means of any other sense, such as hearing, though sight has occasionally been assisted by hearing. If during an orchestral symphony you look steadily enough at one musician or another you can always hear his instrument above the rest and follow his part in the symphony. In the same way when I look at fairy throngs I can hear them sing. If I single out one of them for observation I hear him or her sing—not words, never words; they have none. I saw once, like a driven cloud, the spirits of the North-west

wind sweep down the sky over the bare ridge of a chalk down, winged and shrouded, eager creatures, embattled like a host. They were grey and dun-coloured, pale in the face. Their hair swept forward, not back; for it seemed as if the wind in gusts went faster than themselves, and was driving them faster than they could go. Another might well have heard these beings like a terrible, rushing music, as cries of havoc or desolation, wild peals of laughter, fury and exultation. But to me they were inaudible. I heard the volleying of the wind, but them I saw. So in the still ecstasy of that Dryad bathing in light I saw, beyond doubt, what the Greeks called by that name, what some of them saw; and I saw it in their mode, although at the time of seeing I knew nothing of them or their modes, because it happened to be also my mode. But so far I did not more than see her, for though I haunted the place where she had been she never came there again, nor never showed herself. It became to me sacred ground, where with awed breath I could say, "Here indeed she stood and bathed herself. Here I really saw her, and she me;" and I encompassed it with a fantastic cult of my own invention. It may have been very comic, or very foolish, but I don't myself think it was either, because it was so sincere, and because the impulse to do it came so naturally. I used to bare my head;

I made a point of saving some of my luncheon (which I took with me to school) that I might leave it there. It was real sacrifice that, because I had a fine appetite, and it was pure worship. In my solitary hours, which were many, I walked with her of course, talked and played with her. But that was another thing, imagination, or fancy, and I don't remember anything of what we said or did. It needs to be carefully distinguished from the first apparition with which imagination, having nothing whatever to proceed upon, had nothing whatever to do. One thing, however, I do remember, that our relations were entirely sexless; and, as I write, another comes into mind. I saw no affinity between her and the creature of my first discovery. It never occurred to me to connect the two, either positively, as being inhabitants of a world of their own, or negatively, as not being of my world. I was not a reflective boy, but my mind proceeded upon flashes, by leaps of intuition. When I was moved I could conceive anything, everything; when I was unmoved I was as dull as a clod. It was idle to tell me to think. I could only think when I was moved from within to think. That made me the despair of my father and the vessel of my schoolmaster's wrath. So here I saw no relationship whatsoever between the two appearances. Now, of course, I do. I see now that

both were fairies, informed spirits of certain times or places. For time has a spirit as well as space. But more of this in due season. I am not synthesising now but recording. One had been merely curious, the other for a time enthralled me. The first had been made when I was too young to be interested. The second found me more prepared, and seeded in my brain for many a day. Gradually, however, it too faded as fancy began to develop within me. I took to writing, I began to fall in love; and at fifteen I went to a boarding-school. Farewell, then, to rewards and fairies!

THE GODS IN THE SCHOOLHOUSE

WHO am I to treat of the private affairs of my betters, to evoke your fragrant names, Félicité, Perpetua, loves of my tender youth? Shall I forget thee, Emilia, thy slow smile and peering brown eyes of mischief or appeal? Rosy Lauretta, or thee, whom I wooed desperately from afar, lured by thy buxom wellbeing, thy meek and schooled replies? And if I forget you not, how shall I explore you as maladies, trace out the stages of your conquest as if you were spores? Never, never. Worship went up from me to you, and worship is religion, and religion is sacred. So, my dears, were you, each of you in your turn, sacred in your shrines. Before each of you in turn I fell down, suddenly, "*Come corpo morto cadde.*" And to each of you in turn I devoted those waking hours which fancy had hitherto claimed of me. Yet this I do feel free to say, by leave of you ladies, that calf-love has not the educative value of the genuine passion. It is blind worship by instinct; it is a sign of awakening sense, but it is not its awakener. It is a lovely thing as all quick

or burning growth is, but it has little relation to the soul, and our Northern state is the more gracious that consummation of it is not feasible. Apart from the very obvious drawbacks there is one not quite so obvious: I mean the early exhaustion of imaginative sympathy. Love, indeed, is an affair of maturity. I don't believe that a man, in this country, can love before forty or a woman before thirty-five. They may marry before that and have children; and they will love their children, but very rarely each other. I am thinking now of love at its highest rating, as that passion which is able to lift a man to the highest flight of which the soul is capable here on earth—a flight, mind you, which it may take without love, as the poet's takes it, or the musician's, but which the ordinary man's can only take by means of love. Calf-love is wholly a sex matter, perfectly natural, mostly harmless, and nearly always a beautiful thing, to be treated tenderly by the wise parent.

In my own case my mother treated it so, with a tact and a reverential handling which only good women know, and I had it as I had mumps and measles, badly, with a high temperature and some delirium but with no aggravation from outside. It ran its course or its courses and left me sane. One of its effects upon me was that it diverted the mind of my forensic self from the proceedings or aptitudes

of my recondite. I neither knew nor cared what my wayward tenant might be doing; indeed, so much was my natural force concerned in the heart-affair of the moment that the other wretch within me lay as it were bound in a dungeon. He never saw the light. The sun to him was dark and silent was the moon. There, in fact, he remained for some five or six years, while sex pricked its way into me intent upon the making of a man. He, maybe, was to have something to say to that, something to do with it—but not yet.

So much for calf-love; but now for a more important matter. I left the Grammar School at S———, at the age when boys usually go to their Harrow and Winchester, as well equipped, I daresay, as most boys of my years; for with the rudiments I had been fairly diligent, and with some of them even had become expert. I was well grounded in Latin and French grammar, and in English literature was far ahead of boys much older than myself. Looking back now upon the drilling I had at S———, I consider it was well done; but I have to set against the benefits I got from the system the fact that I had much privacy and all the chance which that gives a boy to educate himself withal. My school hours limited my intercourse with the school world. Before and after them I could develop at my own

pace and in my own way—and I did. I believe that when I went to my great school I had the makings of an interesting lad in me; but I declare upon my conscience that it was that place only which checked the promise for ten years or more, and might have withered it altogether.

My father was an idealist of 1851; he showed the enthusiasm and nursed in his bosom the hopes and beliefs of the promoters of the International Exhibition of that year. There was a plentiful planting of foreign stock in England after that, and one of its weedy saplings was an International Education Company, which out of a magniloquent prospectus and some too-confident shareholders bore one fruit, the London International College at Spring Grove. It never came to maturity, and is now dropped and returned to the ground of all such schemes. I suppose it had been on the stalk some fifteen years when I went to feed of it.

The scheme, in fact, sprang out of enthusiasm and had no bottom in experience. It may be true that all men are brothers, but it is not logical to infer from that that all brothers are the better for each other's society. The raw Brazilians, Chilians, Nicaraguans and what not who were drawn from their native forests and plunged into the company of blockish Yorkshire lads, or sharp-faced London boys,

were only scared into rebellion and to demonstration after their manner. They used the knife sometimes; they hardly ever assimilated; and they taught us nothing that we were the better of knowing. Quite the contrary. We taught them football, I think, and I remember a negro from Bermuda, a giant of a fellow who raged over the ground like a goaded bull when that game was being played, to the consternation of his opponents. He had a younger brother with inordinately long arms, like a great lax ape, a cheerful, grinning, harmless creature as I remember him. He was a football player too; his hug was that of an octopus which swallowed you all. As for the English, in return for their football lore they received the gift of tobacco. I learned to smoke at fifteen from a Chilian called Perez, a wizened, preternaturally wise, old youth. Nobody in the world could have been wise as he looked, and nobody else in the school as dull as he really was. Over this motley assembly was set as house-master a ferocious Scotchman of great parts, but no discretion; and there were assistants, too, of scholarship and refinement, who, if they had had the genius for education, without which these things are nothing, might have put humanity into some of us. When it was past the time I discovered this, and one of them became my friend and helper. I then discovered

the tragedy of our system from the other side. For the pain is a two-edged sword, and imbrues the breast of the pedagogue even while it bleeds the pupil to inanition. That poor man, scholar, gentleman, humourist, poet, as he was, held boys in terror. He misdoubted them; they made him self-conscious, betrayed him into strange hidden acts of violence, rendered him incapable of instruction except of the most conventional kind. All his finer nature, his humanism, was paralysed. We thought him a poor fool, and got a crude entertainment out of his antics. Actually he was tormenting in a flame; and we thought his contortions ridiculous. God help us all, how are we to get at each other, caged creatures as we are! But this is indeed a tragic business, and I don't want you to tear your hair.

I remained at Spring Grove, I think, four or five years, a barren, profitless time. I remember scarcely one gleam of interest which pierced for more than a few moments the thick gloom of it. The cruel, dull, false gods of English convention (for thought it is not) held me fast; masters and pupils alike were jailers to me. I ate and drank of their provision and can recall still with nausea the sour, stale taste, and still choke with the memory of the chaff and grit of its quality. Accursed, perverse generation! God forbid that any child of mine should suffer as I suf-

fered, starve as I starved, stray where I was driven to stray. The English boarding-school system is that of the straw-yard where colts are broken by routine, and again of the farmyard where pups are walked. Drill in school, *laissez-faire* out of it. It is at once too dull and too indolent to recognise character or even to look for it; it recks nothing of early development or late; it measures young humanity for its class-rooms like a tailor, with the yard measure. The discipline of boy over boy is, as might be expected, brutal or bestial. The school-yard is taken for the world in small, and so allowed to be. There is no thought taken, or at least betrayed, that it is nothing more than a preparation for the world at large. There is no reason, however, to suppose that the International College was worse than any other large boarding-school. I fancy, indeed, that it was in all points like the rest. There were no traces in my time of the Brotherhood of Man about it. A few Portuguese, a negro or two were there, and a multitude of Jews. But I fancy I should have found the same sort of thing at Eton.

I was not in any sense suited to such a place as this; if I had been sent to travel it had been better for me. I was "difficult," not because I was stiff but because I was lax. I resisted nothing except by inertia. If my parents did not know me—and how

should they?—if I did not know myself, and I did not, my masters, for their part, made no attempt to know me nor even inquired whether there might be anything to know. I was unpopular, as might have been expected, made no friends, did no good. My brother, on the other hand, was an ideal schoolboy, diligent, brisk, lovable, abounding in friendships, good at his work and excellent at his play. His career at Spring Grove was one long happy triumph, and he deserved it. He has a charming nature, and is one of the few naturally holy persons I know. Wholesome, thank God, we all are, or could be; pious we nearly all are; but holiness is a rare quality.

If I were to try and set down here the really happy memories which I have of Spring Grove they would be three. The first was the revelation of Greece which was afforded me by Homer and Plato. The surging music and tremendous themes of the poet, the sweet persuasion of the sophist were a wonder and delight. I remember even now the thrill with which I heard my form-master translate for us the prayer with which the *Phædrus* closes: "Beloved Pan, and all ye other gods who haunt this place. . . ." Beloved Pan! My knowledge of Pan was of the vaguest, and yet more than once or twice did I utter that prayer wandering alone the playing field, or watching the evening mist roll down the

Thames Valley and blot up the elm trees, thick and white, clinging to the day like a fleece. The third Iliad again I have never forgotten, nor the twenty-fourth; nor the picture of the two gods, like vulture birds, watching the battle from the dead tree. Nor, again, do I ever fail to recapture the beat of the heart with which I apprehended some of Homer's phrases: "Sandy Pylos," Argos "the pasture land of horses," or "clear-seen" Ithaca. These things happened upon by chance in the dusty class-room, in the close air of that terrible hour from two to three, were as the opening of shutters to the soul, revealing blue distances, dim fields, or the snowy peaks of mountains in the sun. One seemed to lift, one could forget. It lasted but an instant; but time is of no account to the inner soul, of no more account than it is to God. I have never forgotten these moments of escape; nor can I leave Homer without confessing that his books became my Bible. I accepted his theology implicitly; I swallowed it whole. The Godhead of the Olympians, the lesser divinity of Thetis and Alpheios and Xanthos were indisputable. They were infinitely more real to me than the deities of my own land; and though I have found room for these later on in life, it has not been by displacing the others. Nor is there any need for that, so far as I see. I say that out of Homer I took his Gods;

I add that I took them instantly. I seemed to breathe the air of their breath; they appealed to my reason; I knew that they had existed and did still exist. I was not shocked or shaken in my faith, either, by anything I read about them. Young as I was and insipient, I was prepared for what is called the burlesque Olympus of the Iliad, so grievous to Professor Murray. I think I recognised then, what seems perfectly plain to me now, that you might as well think meanly of a God of Africa because the natives make him of a cocoanut on a stick, as of Zeus and Hera because Homer says that they played peccant husband and jealous wife. If Homer halted it is rash to assume that Hephaistos did. The pathetic fallacy has crept in here. Mythology was one of the few subjects I diligently read at school, and all I got out of it was pure profit—for I realised that the Gods' world was not ours, and that when their natures came in conflict with ours some such interpretation must always be put upon their victory. We have a moral law for our mutual wellbeing which they have not. We translate their deeds in terms of that law of ours, and it certainly appears like a standing fact of Nature that when the beings of one order come into commerce with those of another the result will be tragic. There is only a harmony in acquiescence, and the way to that is one of blood and tears.

Brooding over all this I discerned dimly, even in that dusty, brawling place, and time showed me more and more clearly, that I had always been aware of the Gods and conscious of their omnipresence. It seemed plain to me that Zeus, whose haunt is dark Dodona, lorded it over the English skies and was to be heard in the thunder crashing over the elms of Middlesex. I knew Athené in the shrill wind which battled through the vanes and chimneys of our schoolhouse. Artemis was Lady of my country. By Apollo's light might I too come to be led. Poseidon of the dark locks girdled my native seas. I had had good reason to know the awfulness of Pan, and guessed that some day I should couch with Koré the pale Queen. I called them by these names, since these names expressed to me their essence: you may call them what you will, and so might I, for I had not then reasoned with myself about names. By their names I knew them. The Gods were there, indeed, ignorantly worshipped by all and sundry. Then the Dryad of my earlier experience came up again, and I saw that she stood in such a relation to the Gods as I did, perhaps, to the Queen of England; that she, no less than they, was part of a wonderful order, and the visible expression of the spirit of some Natural Fact. But whether above all the Gods and nations of men and beasts there were one God and

Father of us all, whether all Nature were one vast synthesis of Spirit having innumerable appearance but one soul, I did not then stay to inquire, and am not now prepared to say. I don't mean by that at all that I don't believe it. I do believe it, but by an act of religion; for there are states of the individual mind, states of impersonal soul in which this belief is a positive truth, in the which one exults madly, or by it is humbled to the dust. Religion, to my mind, is the result of this consciousness of kinship with the principle of Life; all the emotion and moral uplifting involved in this tremendous certainty, and all the lore gathered and massed about it—this is Religion. Young as I was at the time I now speak of, ignorant and dumb as I was, I had my moments of exultation and humility,—moments so wild that I was transported out of myself. I left my body supine in its narrow bed and soared above the stars. At such times, in an æther so deep that the blue of it looked like water, I seemed to see the Gods themselves, a shining row of them, upon the battlements of Heaven. I called Heaven Olympus, and conceived of Olympus as a towered city upon a white hill. Looming up out of the deep blue arch, it was vast and covered the whole plateau: I saw the walls of it run up and down the ridges, in and out of the gorges which cut into the mass. It had

gates, but I never saw forms of any who entered or left it. It was full of light, and had the look of habitancy about it; but I saw no folk. Only at rare moments of time while I hovered afar off looking at the wonder and radiance of it, the Gods appeared above the battlements in a shining row—still and awful, each of them ten feet high.

These were fine dreams for a boy of sixteen in a schoolhouse dormitory. They were mine, though: but I dreamed them awake. I awoke before they began, always, and used to sit up trembling and wait for them.

An apologue, if you please. On the sacred road from Athens to Eleusis, about midway of its course, and just beyond the pass, there is a fork in it, and a stony path branches off and leads up into the hills. There, in the rock, is a shallow cave, and before that, where once was an altar of Aphrodite, the ruins of her shrine and precinct may be seen. As I was going to Eleusis the other day, I stopped the carriage to visit the place. Now, beside the cave is a niche, cut square in the face of the rock, for offerings; and in that niche I found a fresh bunch of field flowers, put there by I know not what dusty-foot wayfarer. That was no longer ago than last May, and the man who did the piety was a Christian, I suppose. So do I avow myself, without derogation, I hope, to the profession; for no more than Mr.

Robert Kirk, a minister of religion in Scotland in the seventeenth century, do I consider that a knowledge of the Gods is incompatible with belief in God. There is a fine distinction for you: I believe that God exists; I infer him by reason stimulated by desire. But I know that the Gods exist by other means than those. If I could be as sure of God as I am of the Gods, I might perhaps be a better Christian, but I should not believe any less in the Gods.

I found religion through Homer: I found poetry through Milton, whose *Comus* we had to read for examination by some learned Board. If any one thing definitely committed me to poesy it was that poem; and as has nearly always happened to me, the crisis of discovery came in a flash. We were all there ranked at our inky desks on some drowsy afternoon. The books lay open before us, the lesson, I suppose, prepared. But what followed had not been prepared—that some one began to read:

> "The star that bids the shepherd fold
> Now the top of Heav'n doth hold;
> And the gilded car of day
> His glowing axle doth allay
> In the steep Altantic stream"—

and immediately, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, it was changed—for me—from verse to poetry; that is, from a jingle to a significant fact.

It was more than it appeared; it was transfigured; its implication was manifest. That's all I can say —except this, that, untried as I was, I jumped into the poetic skin of the thing, and felt as if I had written it. I knew all about it, *"e'l chi, e'l quale"*; I was privy to its intricacy; I caught without instruction the alternating beat in the second line, and savoured all the good words, *gilded car, glowing axle, Star that bids the shepherd fold. Allay* ravished me, young as I was. I knew why he had called the Atlantic stream *steep*, and remembered Homer's *"Στυγὸς ὕδατος αἰπὰ ῥέεθρα."* Good soul, our pedagogue suggested *deep!* I remember to this hour the sinking of the heart with which I heard him. But the flash passed and darkness again gathered about me, the normal darkness of those hateful days. "Sabrina fair" lifted it; my sky showed me an amber shaft. I am recording moments, the reader will remember, the few gleams which visited me in youth. I was far from the time when I could connect them, see that poetry was the vesture of religion, the woven garment whereby we see God. Love had to teach me that. I was not born until I loved.

My third happy memory is of a brief and idyllic attachment, very fervent, very romantic, entirely my own, and as I remember it, now, entirely beautiful. Nothing remains but the fragrance of it, and

its dream-like quality, the sense I have of straying with the beloved through a fair country. Such things assure me that I was not wholly dead during those crushing years of servitude.

But those are, as I say, gleams out of the dark. They comfort me with the thought that the better part of me was not dead, but buried here with the worse. They point also to the truth, as I take it to be, that the lack of privacy is one of the most serious detriments of public-school life. I don't say that privacy is good for all boys, or that it is good for any unless they are provided with a pursuit. It is true that many boys seek to be private that they may be vicious, and that the having the opportunity for privacy leads to vice. But that is nearly always the fault of the masters. Vice is due to the need for mental or material excitement; it is a crude substitute for romance. If a boy is debarred from good romance, because he doesn't feel it or hasn't been taught to feel it, he will take to bad. It is nothing else at all: he is bored. And remembering that a boy can only think of one thing at a time, the single aim of the master should be to give every boy in his charge some sane interest which he can pursue to the death, as a terrier chases a smell, in and out, up and down, every nerve bent and quivering. There is a problem of the teaching art which the

College at Spring Grove made no attempt to solve while I was there. You either played football and cricket or you were negligible. I was bad at both, was negligible, and neglected.

I suspect that my experiences are very much those of other people, and that is why I have taken the trouble to articulate them, and perhaps to make them out more coherent than they were. We don't feel in images or think in words. The images are about us, the words may be at hand; but it may well be that we are better without them. This world is a tight fit, and life in it, as the Duke said of one day of his own life, is "a devilish close-run thing." If the blessed Gods and the legions of the half-gods in their habit as they live, were to be as clear to us as our neighbour Tom or our chief at the office, what might be the lot of Tom's wife, or what the security of our high stool at the desk? As things are, our blank misgivings are put down to nerves, our yearning for wings to original sin. The policeman at the street corner sees to it, for our good, that we put out of sight these things, and so we grow rich and make a good appearance. It is only when we are well on in years that we can afford to be precise and, looking back, to remember the celestial light, the glory and the freshness of the dream in which we walked and bathed ourselves.

THE SOUL AT THE WINDOW

WHEN I had been in London a year or two, and the place with its hordes was become less strange and less formidable to me, I began to discover it for myself. Gradually the towering cliffs resolved themselves into houses, and the houses into shrouded holds, each with character and each hiding a mystery. They now stood solitary which had before been an agglutinated mass. Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came. . . . I knew one from the other by sight, and had for each a specific sensation of attraction or repulsion, of affection or terror. I read through the shut doors, I saw through the blank windows; not a house upon my daily road but held a drama or promised a tragedy. I had no sense for comedy in those days; life to me, waking life, was always a dreadful thing. And sometimes my bodily eyes had glimpses which confirmed my fancy—unexpected, sudden and vivid flashes behind curtained windows. I once saw two men fighting, shadowed black upon a white blind. I once looked out of a window at the Army and Navy Stores into a mean

bedroom across the way. There was a maidservant in there, making beds, emptying slops, tidying this and that. Quite suddenly she threw her head up with a real despair, and next moment she was on her knees by the bed. Praying! I never saw prayer like that in this country. The soul went streaming from her mouth like blown smoke. And again, one night, very late, I was going to bed, and leaned out of my window for air. Before me, across back yards, leafless trees, and a litter of packing-cases and straw, rose up a dark rampart of houses, in the midst of it a lit window. I saw a poorly furnished sitting-room—a table with a sewing machine, a paraffin lamp, a chair with an antimacassar. A man in his shirt sleeves sat there by the table, smoking a pipe. Then the door opened and a tall, slim woman came in, all in white, with loose dark hair floating about her shoulders. She stood between door and table and rested her hand upon the edge of the table. The man, after a while of continuing to read, quite suddenly looked up and saw her. They looked at each other motionless. He cast down his paper, sprang up and went to her. He fell to his knees before her and clasped hers. She looked across, gravely considering, then laid her hand upon his head. That was all. I saw no more. Husband and wife? Mother and son? Sinner and Saviour? What do I know?

As with the houses, homes of mystery, so with the men and women one passed; homes, they too, of things hidden yet more deep. The noise of the streets, at first paralysing, died down to a familiar rumble, and the ear began to distinguish voices in the tide. Sounds of crying, calls for help, hailings, laughter, tears, separated themselves and appealed. You heard them, like the cries of the drowning, drifting by you upon a dark tide-way. You could do nothing; a word would have broken the spell. The mask which is always over the face would have covered the tongue or throttled the larynx. You could do nothing but hear.

Finally, the passing faces became sometimes penetrable, betrayed by some chance gleam of the eyes, some flicker of the lips, a secret to be shared, or conveyed by a hint some stabbing message out of the deep into the deep. That is what I mean by the soul at the window. Every one of us lives in a guarded house; door shut, windows curtained. Now and then, however, you look up above the street level and catch a glimpse of the scared prisoner inside. He may be a satyr, a fairy, an ape or an angel; he's a prisoner anyhow, who sometimes comes to the window and looks strangely out. You may see him there by chance, saying to himself like Chaucer's Creseyde in the temple, "Ascaunces,

What! May I not stonden here?" And I found out for myself that there is scarcely a man or woman alive who does not hold such a tenant more or less deeply within his house.

Sometimes the walls of the house are transparent, like a frog's foot, and you see the prisoner throbbing and quivering inside. This is rare. Shelley's house must have been a filmy tenement of the kind. With children—if you catch them young enough—it is more common. I remember one whom I used to see nearly every day, the child of poor parents, who kept a green-grocer's shop in Judd Street, Saint Pancras, a still little creature moving about in worlds not recognised. She was slim and small, fair-haired, honey-coloured, her eyes wells of blue. I used to see her standing at the door of the shop, amid baskets of green stuff, crimsoned rhubarb, pyramided dates, and what not. I never saw her dirty or untidy, nor heard her speak, nor saw her laugh. She stood or leaned at the lintel, watching I know not what, but certainly not anything really there, as we say. She appeared to be looking through objects rather than at them. I can describe it no otherwise than that I, or another, crossed her field of vision and was conscious that her eyes met mine and yet did not see me. To me she was instantly remarkable, not for this and not for any beauty she

had—for she was not at all extraordinary in that quality—but for this, that she was not of our kind. Surrounded by other children, playing gaily, circling about her, she was *sui generis*. She carried her own atmosphere, whereby in the company of others she seemed unaccountable, by herself only, normal. Nature she fitted perfectly, but us she did not fit. Now, it is a curious thing, accepted by all visionaries, that a supernatural being, a spirit, fairy, not-human creature, if you see it among animals, beasts and birds, on hills or in the folds of hills, among trees, by waters, in fields of flowers, *looks at home* and evidently is so. The beasts are conscious of it, know it and have no fear of it; the hills and valleys are its familiar places in a way which they will never be to the likes of us. But put a man beside it and it becomes at once supernatural. I have seen spirits, beings, whatever they may be, in empty space, and have observed them as part of the landscape, no more extraordinary than grazing cattle or wheeling plover. Again I have seen a place thick with them, as thick as a London square in a snow-storm, and a man walk clean through them unaware of their existence, and make them, by that act, a mockery of the senses. So precisely it was with this strange child, unreal to me when she was real to everybody else.

She had a name, a niche in the waking world. Marks, Greengrocer, was the inscription of the shop. She was Elsie Marks. Her father was a stout, florid man of maybe fifty years, with a chin-beard and light-blue eyes. Good-humoured he seemed, and prosperous, something of a ready wit, a respected and respectable man, who stamped his way about the solid ground in a way which defied dreams.

If I had been experienced, I should have remarked the mother, but in fact I barely remember her, though I spoke with her one day. She was somewhat heavy and grave, I think, downcast and yet watchful. She did her business efficiently, without enthusiasm, and did not enter into general conversation with her customers. Her husband did that part of the business. Marks was a merry Jew. I bought oranges of her once for the sake of hearing her speak, and while she was serving me the child came into the shop and stood by her. She leaned against her rather than stood, took the woman's disengaged arm and put it round her neck. Looks passed between them; the mother's sharply down, the child's searchingly up. On either side there was pain, as if each tried to read the other.

I was very shy with strangers. The more I wanted to get on terms with them the less I was able to do it. I asked the child whether she liked oranges.

I asked the child, but the mother answered me, measuring her words.

"She likes nothing of ours. It's we that like and she that takes." That was her reply.

"I am sure that she likes you at any rate," I said. Her hold on the child tightened, as if to prevent an escape.

"She should, since I bore her. But she has much to forgive me."

Such a word left me dumb. I was not then able to meet women on such terms. Nor did I then understand her as I do now.

Here is another case. There was a slatternly young woman whom I caught, or who caught me, unawares; who suddenly threw open the windows and showed me things I had never dreamed.

Opposite the chambers in R——— Buildings where I worked, or was intended to work, and across a wall, there was a row of tenements called, if I remember, Gaylord's Rents. Part mews, part warehouses, and all disreputable, the upper story of it, as it showed itself to me over the wall, held some of the frowsiest of London's horde. Exactly before my eyes was one of the lowest of these hovels, the upper part of a stable, I imagine, since it had, instead of a window, a door, of which half was always shut and half always open, so that light might get in or the tenants lean out to take the air.

Here, and so leaning her bare elbows, I saw on most days of the week a slim young woman airing herself—a pale-faced, curling-papered, half-bodiced, unwashed drab of a girl, who would have had shame written across her for any one to read if she had not seemed of all women I have ever seen the least shamefaced. Her brows were as unwritten as a child's, her smile as pure as a seraph's, and her eyes blue, unfaltering and candid. She laughed a greeting, exchanged gossip, did her sewing, watched events, as the case might be, was not conscious of her servitude or anxious to market it. Sometimes she shared her outlook with an old woman—a horrible, greasy go-between, with straggling grey hair and a gin-inflamed face. She chatted with this beldame happily, she cupped her vile old dewlap, or stroked her dishonourable head; sometimes a man in shirt sleeves was with her, treated her familiarly, with rude embraces, with kisses, nudges and leers. She accepted all with good-humour and, really, complete good breeding. She invited nothing, provoked nothing, but resented nothing. It seemed to me as if all these things were indeed nothing to her; that she hardly knew that they were done; as if her soul could render them at their proper worth, transmute them, sherd them off, discard them. It was, then, her surface which took them; what her soul received was a distillation, an essence.

Then one night I had all made plain. She entranced me on a summer night of stillness, under a full yellow moon. I was working late, till past ten, past eleven o'clock, and looking out of my open window suddenly was aware of her at hers. The shutter was down, both wings of it, and she stood hovering, seen at full length, above the street. She! Could this be she? It was so indeed—but she was transfigured, illuminated from within; she rayed forth light. The moon shone full upon her, and revealed her pure form from head to foot swathed in filmy blue—a pale green-blue, the colour of ocean water seen from below. Translucent webbery, whatever it was, it showed her beneath it as bare as Venus was when she fared forth unblemished from the sea. Her pale yellow hair was coiled above her head; her face looked mild and radiant with a health few Londoners know. Her head was bent in a considering way; she stood as one who is about to plunge into deep water, and stands hesitating at the shock. Once or twice she turned her face up, to bathe it in the light. I saw that in it which in human faces I had never seen—communion with things hidden from men, secret knowledge shared with secret beings, assurance of power above our hopes.

Breathless I watched her, the drab of my daily observation, radiant now; then as I watched she

stretched out her arms and bent them together like a shield so that her burning face was hidden from me, and without falter or fury launched herself into the air, and dropt slowly down out of my sight.

Exactly so she did it. As we may see a pigeon or chough high on the verge of a sea-cliff float out into the blue leagues of the air, and drift motionless and light—or descend to the sea less by gravity than at will—so did she. There was nothing premeditated, there was nothing determined on: mood was immediately translated into ability—she was at will lighter or heavier than the air. It was so done that here was no shock at all—she in herself foreshadowed the power she had. Rather, it would have been strange to me if, irradiated, transplendent as she was, she had not considered her freedom and on the instant indulged it. I accepted her upon her face value without question—I did not run out to spy upon her. *Ecce unus fortior me!*

In this case, being still new to the life into which I was gradually being drawn, it did not for one moment occur to me to start an adventure of my own. I might have accosted the woman, who was, as the saying goes, anybody's familiar; or I might have spied for another excursion of her spirit, and, with all preparation made, have followed her. But I did neither of these things at the time. I saw her next

day leaning bare-elbowed on the ledge of her half-door, her hair in curl-papers, her face the pale unwholesome pinched oval of most London women of her class. Her bodice was pinned across her chest; she was coarse-aproned, new from the wash-tub or the grate. Not a sign upon her but told of her frowsy round. The stale air of foul lodgment was upon her. I found out indeed this much about her ostensible state, that she was the wife of a cab-driver whose name was Ventris. He was an ill-conditioned, sottish fellow who treated her badly, but had given her a child. But he was chiefly on night-work at Euston, and the man whom I had seen familiar with her in the daytime was not he. Her reputation among her neighbours was not good. She was, in fact, no better than she should be—or, as I prefer to put it, no better than she could be.

Yet I knew her, withal, as of the fairy-kind, bound to this earth-bondage by some law of the Universe not yet explored; not pitiable because not self-pitying, and (what is more important) not reprehensible because impossible to be bound, as we are, soul to body. I know that now, but did not know it then; and yet—extraordinary thing—I was never shocked by the contrast between her two states of being. This is to me a clear and certain evidence of their reality—just as it is evidence to me that when, at

ten years old, I seemed to see the boy in the wood, I really did see him. An hallucination or a dream upsets your moral balance. The things impressed upon you are abnormal; and the abnormal disturbs you. Now these apparitions did not seem abnormal. I saw nothing wonderful in Mrs. Ventris's act. I was impressed by it, I was excited by it, as I still am by a convulsion of nature—a thunder-storm in the Alps, for instance, a water-spout at sea. Such things hold beauty and terror; they entrance, they appal; but they never shock. They happen, and they are right. I have not seen what people call a ghost, and I have often been afraid lest I should see one. But I know very well that if ever I did I should have no fear. I know very well that a natural fact impresses its conformity with law upon you first and last. It becomes, on the moment of its appearance, a part of the landscape. If it does not, it is an hallucination, or a freak of the imagination, and will shock you. I have much more extraordinary experiences than this to relate, but there will be nothing shocking in these pages—at least nothing which gave me the least sensation of shock. One of them —a thing extraordinary to all—must occupy a chapter by itself. I cannot precisely fit a date to it, though I shall try. And as it forms a whole, having a beginning, a middle and an end, I shall want

to depart from my autobiographical plan and put it in as a whole. The reader will please to recollect that it did not work itself out in my consciousness by a flash. The first stages of it came so, in flashes of revelation; but the conclusion was of some years later, when I was older and more established in the world.

But before I embark upon it I should like to make a large jump forward and finish with the young woman of Gaylord's Rents. It was by accident that I happened upon her at her mysteries, at a later day when I was living in London, in Camden Town.

By that time I had developed from a lad of inarticulate mind and unexpressed desires into a sentient and self-conscious being. I was more or less of a man, not only adventurous but bold in the pursuit of adventure. I lived for some two or three years in that sorry quarter of London in complete solitude —"in poverty, total idleness and the pride of literature," like Doctor Johnson, for though I wrote little I read much, and though I wrote little I was most conscious that I was about to write much. It was a period of brooding, of mewing my youth, and whatever facility of imagination and expression I have since attained I owe very much to my hermitage in Albert Street.

If I walked in those days it was by night. London at night is a very different place from the town of business and pleasure of ordinary acquaintance. During the day I fulfilled my allotted hours at the desk; but immediately they were over I returned to my lodgings, got out my books, and sat enthralled until somewhere near midnight. But then, instead of going to bed, I was called by the night, and forth I sallied all agog. I walked the city, the Embankment, skirted the parks, unless I were so fortunate as to slip in before gate-shutting. Often I was able to remain in Kensington Gardens till the opening hour. Highgate and its woods, Parliament Hill with its splendid panorama of twinkling beacons and its noble tent of stars, were great fields for me. Hampstead Heath, Wimbledon, even Richmond and Bushey have known me at their most secret hour. Such experiences as I have had of the preternatural will find their place in this book, but not their chronological place, for the simple reason that, as I kept no diary, I cannot remember in what order of time they befell me. But it was on the southern slope of Parliament Hill that I came again upon the fairy-woman of Gaylord's Rents.

I was there at midnight, a mild radiant night of late April. There were sheep at graze there, for though it was darkish under the three-quarter moon,

I was used to the dark, and could see them, a woolly mass, quietly feeding close together. I saw no shepherd anywhere; but I remember that his dog sat on his haunches apart, watching them. He was prick-eared, bright-eyed; he grinned and panted intensely. I didn't then know why he was so excited, but very soon I did.

I became aware, gradually, that a woman stood among the sheep. She had not been there when I first saw them, I am sure; nor did I see her approach them or enter their school. Yet there she was in the midst of them, seen now by me as she had evidently been seen for some time by the dog, seen, I suppose, by the sheep—at any rate she stood in the midst of them, as I say, with her hand actually upon the shoulder of one of them—but not feared or doubted by any soul of us. The dog was vividly interested, but did not budge; the sheep went on feeding; I stood bolt upright, watching.

I knew her the moment I saw her. She was the exquisitely formed, slim and glowing creature I had seen before, when she launched herself into the night as a God of Homer—Hermes or Thetis—launched out from Olympus' top into the sea—"ἐξ αἰθέρος ἔμπεσε πόντῳ," and words fail me to describe the perfection of her being, a radiant simulacrum of our own, the inconscient self-sufficiency, the buoyancy

and freedom which she showed me. You may sometimes see boys at their maddest tip of expectation stand waiting as she now stood, quivering on the extreme edge of adventure; yet even in their case there is a consciousness of well being, a kind of rolling of anticipation upon the palate, a getting of the flavours beforehand. That involves a certain dissipation of activity; but here all was concentrated. The whole nature of the creature was strung to one issue only, to that point when she could fling headlong into activity—an activity in which every fibre and faculty would be used. A comparison of the fairy-kind with human beings is never successful, because into our images of human beings we always import self-consciousness. They know what they are doing. Fairies do not. But wait a moment; there is a reason. Human creatures, I think, know what they are doing only too well, because performance never agrees with desire. They know what they are doing because it is never exactly what they meant to do, or what they wanted to do. Now, with fairies, desire to do and performance are instinctive and simultaneous. If they think, they think in action. In this they are far more like animals than human creatures, although the form in which they appear to us, their shape and colouring are like ours, enhanced and refined. Here now stood this crea-

ture in the semblance of a woman glorified, quivering; and so, perched high on his haunches, sat the shepherd's dog, and no one could look at the two and not see their kinship. *Arrière-pensée* they had none—and all's said in that. They were shameless, and we are full of shame. There's the difference; and it is a gulf.

After a while of this quivering suspense she gave a low call, a long mellow and tremulous cry which, gentle as it was, startled by its suddenness, as the unexpected call of a water-fowl out of the reeds of a pond makes the heart jump toward the throat. It was like some bird's call, but I know of no bird's with which to get a close comparison. It had the soft quality, soft yet piercing, of a redshank's, but it shuddered like an owl's. And she held it on as an owl does. But it was very musical, soft and open-throated, and carried far. It was answered from a distance, first by a single voice; but then another took it up, and another; and then another. Slowly so the soft night was filled with musical cries which quavered about me as fitfully as fire-flies gleam and glance in all quarters of a garden of olive-trees. It was enchantment to the ear, a ravishing sound; but it was my eyes which claimed me now, for soon I saw them coming from all quarters. Or rather, I saw them there, for I can't say definitely that I saw any

one of them on the way. It is truer to say that I looked and they were there. Where had been one were now two. Now two were five; now five were a company; now the company was a host. I have no idea how many there were of them at any time; but when they joined hands and set to whirling in a ring they seemed to me to stretch round Parliament Hill in an endless chain.

How can I be particular about them? They were of both sexes—that was put beyond doubt; they were garbed as the first of them in something translucent and grey. It had been quite easy in the lamplight to see the bare form of the woman whom I first saw in Gaylord's Rents. It was plain to me that her companions were in the same kind of dress. I don't think they had girdles; I think their arms and legs were bare. I should describe the garment as a sleeveless smock to the knees, or perhaps, more justly, as a sack of silky gauze with a hole for the head and two for the arms. That was the effect of it. It hung straight and took the folds natural to it. It was so light that it clung closely to the body where it met the air. What it was made of I have no notion; but it was transparent or nearly so. I am pretty sure that its own colour was grey.

They greeted each other; they flitted about from group to group greeting; and they greeted by touch-

ing, sometimes with their hands, sometimes with their cheeks. They neither kissed nor spoke. I never saw them kiss even when they loved—which they rarely did. I saw one greeting between two females. They ran together and stopped short within touching distance. They looked brightly and intently at each other, and leaning forward approached their cheeks till they touched.[1] They touched by the right, they touched by the left. Then they took hands and drew together. By a charming movement of confidence one nestled to the side of the other and resting her head looked up and laughed. The taller embraced her with her arm and held her for a moment. The swiftness of the act and its grace were beautiful to see. Then hand in hand they ran to others who were a little further off. The elder and taller had a wild dark face with stern lips, like a man's; the younger was a beautiful little creature with quick, squirrel's motions. I remember her hair, which looked white in that light, but was no doubt lint colour. It was extremely long, and so fine that it clung to her shoulders and back like a web of thin silk.

They began to play very soon with a zest for mere

[1] I argue from this peculiar manner of greeting, which I have observed several times, that these beings converse by contact, as dogs, cats, mice, and other creatures certainly do. I don't say that they have no other means of converse; but I am sure I am exact in saying that they have no articulate speech.

irresponsible movement which I have never seen in my own kind. I have seen young foxes playing, and it was something like that, only incomparably more graceful. Greyhounds give a better comparison where the rippling of the body is more expressive of their speed than the flying of their feet. These creatures must have touched the earth, but their bodies also ran. And just as young dogs play for the sake of activity, without method or purpose, so did these; and just as with young animals the sexes mingle without any hint of sexuality, so did these. If there was love-making I saw nothing of it there. They met on exact equality so far as I could judge, the male not desirous, the female not conscious of being desired.

But it was a mad business under the cloudy moon. It had a dreamlike element of riot and wild triumph. I suppose I must have been there for two or three hours, during all which time their swift play was never altogether stopped. There were interludes to be seen, when some three or four grew suddenly tired and fell out. They threw themselves down on the sward and lay panting, beaming, watching the others, or they disappeared into the dark and were lost in the thickets which dot the ground. Then finally I saw the great whirling ring of them form—under what common impulse to frenzy I cannot

divine. There was no signal, no preparation, but as if fired in unison they joined hands, and spreading out to a circumference so wide that I could distinguish nothing but a ring of light, they whirled faster and faster till the speed of them sang in my ears like harps, and whirling so, melted away.

Later on and in wilder surroundings than this I saw, and shall relate in its place, a dance of Oreads. It differed in detail from this one, but not, I think, in any essential. This was my first experience of the kind.

QUIDNUNC

I WAS so fired by that extraordinary adventure, that I think I could have overcome my constitutional timidity and made myself acquainted with the only actor in it who was accessible if I had not become involved in another matter of the sort. But I don't know that I should have helped myself thereby. To the night the things of the night pertain. If I could have had speech with Mrs. Ventris in that season of her radiancy there would have been no harm; but by day she was another creature. Thereby contact was impossible because it would have been horrible. It is true that a certain candour of conduct distinguished her from the frowsy drabs with whom she must have jostled in public-house bars or rubbed elbows at lodging-house doors: a sort of unconsciousness of evil, which I take to have been due to an entire absence of a moral sense. It is probable that she was not a miserable sinner because she did not know what was miserable sin. Heat and cold she knew, hunger and thirst, rage and kindness. She could not be unwomanly because she

was not woman, nor good because she could not be bad. But I could have been very bad; and to me she was, luckily, horrible. I could not divorce her two apparent natures, still less my own. We are bound—all of us—by our natures, bound by them and bounded. I could not have touched the pitch she lived with, the pitch of which she was, without defilement. Let me hope that I realised that much. I shall not say how my feet burned to enter that slum of squalor where hovered this bird of the night, unless I add, as I can do with truth, that I did not slake them there. I saw her on and off afterward for a year, perhaps; but tenancies are short in London. There was a flitting during one autumn when I was away on vacation, and I came back to see new faces in the half-doorway and other elbows on the familiar ledge.

But as I have said above, a new affair engrossed me shortly after my night pageant on Parliament Hill. This was concerned with a famous personage whom all knowing London (though I for one had not known it) called Quidnunc.

But before I present to the curious reader the facts of a case which caused so much commotion in distinguished bosoms of the late "eighties," I think I should say that, while I have a strong conviction as to the identity of the person himself, I shall not ex-

press it. I accept the doctrine that there are some names not to be uttered. Similarly I shall neither defend nor extenuate; if I throw it out at all it will be as a hint to the judicious, or a clew, if you like, to those who are groping a way in or out of the labyrinth of Being. To me two things are especially absurd: one is that the trousered, or skirted, forms we eat with, walk with, or pass unheeded, are all the population of our world; the other, that these creatures, ostensibly men or women with fancies, hopes, fears, appetites like our own, are necessarily of the same nature as ourselves. If beings from another sphere should, by intention or chance, meet and mingle with us, I don't see how we could apprehend them at all except in our own mode, or unless they were, so to speak, translated into our idiom. But enough of that. The year in which I first met Quidnunc, so far as my memory serves me, was 1886.

I was in those days a student of the law, with chambers in Gray's Inn which I daily attended; but being more interested in palæography than in modern practice, and intending to make that my particular branch of effort, I spent much of my time at the Public Record Office; indeed, a portion of every working day. The track between R——— Buildings and Rolls Yard must have been sensibly thinned

by my foot-soles; there can have been few of the frequenters of Chancery Lane, Bedford Row and the squares of Gray's Inn who were not known to me by sight or concerning whom I had not imagined (or discerned) circumstances invisible to their friends or themselves to account for their acts or appearances. Among these innumerable personages—portly solicitors, dashing clerks, scriveners, racing tipsters, match-sellers, postmen, young ladies of business, young ladies of pleasure, clients descending out of broughams, clients keeping rendezvous in public-houses, and what not—Quidnunc's may well have been one; but I believe that it was in Warwick Court (that passage from Holborn into the Inn) that, quite suddenly, I first saw him, or became aware that I saw him; for being, as he was, to all appearance an ordinary telegraphic messenger, I may have passed him daily for a year without any kind of notice. But on a day in the early spring of 1886—mid-April at a guess—I came upon him in such a way as to remark him incurably. I saw before me on that morning of tender leafage, of pale sunlight and blue mist contending for the day, a strangely assorted pair proceeding slowly toward the Inn. A telegraph boy was one; by his side walked, vehemently explaining, a tall, elderly solicitor—white-whiskered, drab-spatted, frock-coated, eye-glassed,

silk-hatted—in every detail the trusted family lawyer. I knew the man by sight, and I knew him by name and repute. He was, let me say—for I withhold his real name—George Lumley Fowkes, of Fowkes, Vizard and Fowkes, respectable head of a more than respectable firm; and here he was, with his hat pushed back from his dewy forehead, tiptoeing, protesting, extenuating to a slip of a lad in uniform. The positions of the odd pair were unaccountably reversed; Jack was better than his master, the deference was from the elder to the brat. The stoop of Fowkes's shoulder, the anxious angle of his head, his care to listen to the little he got—and how little that was I could not but observe—his frequent ejaculations of "God bless my soul!" his deep concern—and the boy's unconcern, curtly expressed, if expressed at all—all this was singular. So much more than singular was it to myself that it enthralled me.

They stopped at the gateway which admits you to Bedford Row to finish their colloquy. The halt was made by Fowkes, barely acquiesced in by his companion. Poor old Fowkes, what with his asthma, the mopping of his head, the flacking of his long fingers, exhibited signals of the highest distress. "I need hardly assure you, sir . . ." I heard; and then, "Believe me, sir, when I say. . . ." He was mark-

ing time, unhappy gentleman, for with such phrases does the orator eke out his waning substance. The lad listened in a critical, staring mood, and once or twice nodded. While I was wondering how long he was going to put up with it, presently he jerked his head back and showed Fowkes, by the look he gave him, that he had had enough of him. The old lawyer knew it for final, for he straightened his back, then his hat, touched the brim and made a formal bow. "I leave it so, sir," he said; "I am content to leave it so;" and then, with every mark of respect, he went his way into Bedford Row. I noticed that he walked on tiptoe for some yards, and then more quickly, flapping his arms to his sides.

The boy stood thoughtful where he was, communing by the looks of him quite otherwhere, and I had the opportunity to consider him. He appeared to be a handsome, well-built lad of fifteen or so, big for his age, and precocious. By that I mean that his scrutiny of life was mature; that he looked capable, far beyond the warrant of his years. He was ruddy of complexion, freckled, and had a square chin. His eyes were light grey, with dark lashes to them; they were startlingly light and bright for such a sunburnt face, and seemed to glow in it like steady fires. It was in them that resided, that sat, as it were, enthroned, that mature, masterful ex-

pression which I never saw before or since in one so young. I have seen the eyes of children look as if they were searching through our world into another; that is almost habitual in children. But here was one, apparently a boy, who seemed to read into our circumstances (as you or I into a well-studied book) as though they held nothing inexplicable, nothing unaccounted for. Beyond these singular two eyes of his, his smiling mouth, with its reminder of archaic statuary, was perhaps his only noticeable feature. He wore the ordinary uniform of a telegraphic messenger, which in those days was grey, with a red line down the trousers and a belt for the tunic. His boots were of the service pattern, so were his ankle-jacks. His hands were not cleaner than they ought to have been, his nails well bitten back. Such was he.

Studying him closely over the top of my newspaper, by-and-by he fixed me with his intent, bright eyes. My heart beat quicker; but when he smiled —like the Pallas of Ægina—I smiled too. Then, without varying his expression, even while he smiled upon me, he vanished.

Vanished! There's no other word for it: he vanished; I did not see him go; I don't know whether he went or where he went. At one moment he was there, smiling at me, looking into my eyes; at the next moment he was not there. That's all there is to

say about it. I flashed a glance through the gate into Bedford Row, another up to R——— Buildings, and even ran to the corner which showed me the length and breadth of Field Place. He was not gone any of these ways. These things are certain.

Now for the sequel. Mere fortune led me at four that afternoon into Bedford Row. A note had been put into my hands at the Record Office inviting me to call upon a client whose chambers were in that quarter, and I complied with it directly my work was over. Now as I walked along the Row, the boy of that morning's encounter was going into the entry of the house in which Fowkes and Vizards have their offices. I had just time to recognise him when the double knock announced his errand. I stopped immediately; he delivered in a telegram and came out. I was on the step. Whether he knew me or not he did not look his knowledge. His eyes went through me, his smiling mouth did not smile at me. My heart beat, I didn't know why; but I laughed and nodded. He went his leisurely way and I watched him, this time, almost out of sight. But while I stood so, watching, old Fowkes came bursting out of his office, tears streaming down his face, the telegram in his hand. "Where is he? Where is he?" This was addressed to me. I pointed the way. Old Fowkes saw his benefactor (as I suppose him to have

been) and began to run. The lad turned round, saw him coming, waved him away, and then—disappeared. Again he had done it; but old Fowkes, in no way surprised, stood rooted to the pavement with his hands extended so far toward the mystery that I could see two or three inches of bony old wrist beyond his shirt-cuffs. After a while he turned and slowly came back to his chambers. He seemed now not to see me; or he was careless whether I saw him or not. As he entered the doorway he held up the telegram, bent his head and laid a kiss upon the pink paper.

But that is by no means all. Now I come to the Richborough story, which all London that is as old as I am remembers. That part of London, it may be, will not read this book; or if it does, will not object to the recall of a case which absorbed it in 1886–87. I am not going to be indiscreet. The lady married, and the lady left England. Moreover, naturally, I give no names; but if I did I don't see that there is anything to be ashamed of in what she was pleased to do with her hand and person. It was startling to us of those days, it might be startling in these; what was more than startling was the manner in which the thing was done. That is known to very few persons indeed.

I had seen enough upon that April day, whose

events form my prelude, to give me remembrance of the handsome telegraph boy. The next time I saw him, which was near midnight in July—the place Hyde Park—I knew him at once.

I had been sharing in Prince's Gate, with a dull company, an interminable dinner, one of those at which you eat twice as much as you intend, or desire, because there is really nothing else to do. On one side of me I had had a dowager whom I entirely failed to interest, on the other, a young person who only cared to talk with her left-hand neighbour. There was a reception afterward to which I had to stop, so that I could not make my escape till eleven or more. The night was very hot and it had been raining; but such air as there was was balm after the still furnace of the rooms. I decided immediately to walk to my lodging in Camden Town, entered by Prince's Gate, crossed the Serpentine Bridge and took a bee-line for the Marble Arch. It was cloudy, but not at all dark. I could see all the ankle-high railings which beset the unwary passenger and may at any moment break his legs and his nose, imperil his dignity and ruin his hat. Dimly ahead of me, upon a broad stretch of grass, I presently became aware of a concourse. There was no sound to go by, and the light afforded me no definite forms; the luminous haze was blurred; but certainly people were

there, a multitude of people. I was surprised, but not alarmed. Save for an occasional wastrel of civilisation, incapable of degradation and concerned only for sleep, the park is wont to be a desert at that hour; but the hum of the traffic, the flashing cab lamps, never quite out of sight, prevent fear. Far from being afraid I was highly interested, and hastening my steps was soon on the outskirts of a throng.

A throng it certainly was, a large body of persons, male and female, scattered yet held together by a common interest, loitering and expectant, strangely silent, not concerned with each other, rarely in couples, with all their faces turned one way—namely, to the south-east, or (if you want precision) precisely to Hyde Park Corner. I have remarked upon the silence: that was really surprising; so also was the order observed, and what you may call decorum. There was no ribaldry, no skylarking, no shrill discord of laughter without mirth in it to break the solemnity of the gracious night. These people just stood or squatted about; if any talked together it was in secret whispers. It is true that they were under the watch of a tall policeman; yet he too, I noticed, watched nobody, but looked steadily to the south-east, with his lantern harmless at his belt. As my eyes grew used to the gloom I observed that all

ranks composed the company. I made out the shell jacket, the waist and elongated limbs of a life-guardsman, the open bosom of an able seaman. I happened upon a young gentleman in the crush hat and Inverness of the current fashion; I made certain of a woman of the pavement and of ladies of the boudoir, of a hospital nurse, of a Greenwich pensioner, of two flower-girls sitting on the edge of one basket, of a shoeblack (I think), of a costermonger, and a nun. Others there were, and more than one or two of most categories: in a word, there was an assembly.

I accosted the policeman, who heard me civilly but without committing himself. To my first question, what was going to happen? he carefully answered that he couldn't say, but to my second, with the irrepressible scorn of one who knows for one who wants to know, he answered more frankly, "Who are they waiting for? Why, Quidnunc. Mister Quidnunc. That's who it is. Him they call Quidnunc. So now you know." In fact, I did not know. He had told me nothing, would tell me no more, and while I stood pondering the oracle I was sensible of some common movement run through the company with a thrill, unite them, intensify them, draw them together to be one people with one faith, one hope, one assurance. And then the nun, who stood near

me, fell to her knees, crossed herself and began to pray; and not far off her a slim girl in black turned aside and covered her face with her hands. A perceptible shiver of emotion, a fluttering sigh such as steals over a pine-wood toward dawn ran through all ranks. Far to the south-east a speck of light now showed, which grew in intensity as it came swiftly nearer, and seemed presently to be a ball of vivid fire surrounded by a shroud of lit vapour. Again, as by a common consent, the crowd parted, stood ranked, with an open lane between. The oncoming flare, grown intolerably bright, now seemed to fade out as it resolved itself into a human figure. A human figure at the entry of the lane of people there undoubtedly was, a figure with so much light about him, raying (I thought) from him, that it was easy to observe his form and features. Out of the flame and radiant mist he grew, and showed himself to me in the trim shape and semblance, with the small head and alert air of a youth; and such as he was, in the belted tunic and peaked cap of a telegraph messenger, he came smoothly down the lane formed by the obsequious throng, and stood in the midst of it and looked keenly, with his cold, clear eyes and fixed and inscrutable smile, from one expectant face to another. There was no mistaking him whom all those people so eagerly awaited; he

was my former wonder of Gray's Inn, the saviour of old Mr. Fowkes.

But all my former wonder paled before this my latter. For he stood here like some young Eastern king among his slaves, one hand on his hip, the other at his chin, his face expressionless, his eyes fixed but unblinking. Meantime, the crowd, which had stretched out arms to him as he came, was now seated quietly on the grass, intently waiting, watching for a sign. They sat, all those people, in a wide ring about him; he was in the midst, a hand to his chin.

Whether sign was made or not, I saw none; but after some moments of pause a figure rose erect out of the ring and hobbled toward the boy. I made out an old woman, an old wreck of womanhood, a scant-haired, blue-lipped ruin of what had once been woman. I heard her snivel and sniff and wheeze her "Lord ha' mercy" as she went by, slippering forward on her miserable feet, hugging to her wasted sides what remnant of gown she had, fawning before the boy, within the sphere of light that came from him. If he loathed, or scorned, or pitied her, he showed no sign; if he saw her at all his fixed eyes looked beyond her; if he abhorred her, his nostrils did not betray him. He stood like marble and suffered what followed. It was strange.

Enacting what seemed to be a proper rite, she put her shaking left hand upon his right shoulder, her right hand under his chin, as if to cup it; and then, with sniffs and wailings interspersed, came her petition to his merciful ears.

What she precisely asked of him, muttering, wheezing, whining, snivelling, as she did, repeating herself—with her burthen of "O dear, O dear, O dear!"—I don't know. Her lost girl, her fine upstanding girl, her Nance, her only one, figured in it as needing mercy. Her "Oh, sir, I ask you kindly!" and "Oh, sir, for this once . . . !" made me sick: yet he bore with her as she ran on, dribbling tears and gin in a mingled flood; he bore with her, heard her in silence, and in the end, by a look which I was not able to discover, quieted and sent her shuffling back to her place. So soon as she was down, the life-guardsman was on his feet, a fine figure of a man. He marched unfalteringly up, stiffened, saluted, and then, observing the ritual of hand to shoulder, hand to chin, spoke out his piece like the honest fellow he was; spoke it aloud and without fear, evenly and plainly. I thought that he had got it by heart, as I thought also of another person I was to hear by-and-by. He wanted, badly it seemed, news of his sweetheart, whom he was careful to call Miss Dixon. She had last been heard of outside the Brixton Bon

Marché, where she had been seen with a lady friend, talking to "two young chaps" in Volunteer uniform. They went up the Brixton Road toward Acre Lane, and Miss Dixon, at any rate, was never heard of again. It was wearing him out; he wasn't the man he had been, and had no zest for his meals. She had never written; his letters to her had come back through the "Dead Office." He thought he should go out of his mind sometimes; was afraid to shave, not knowing what he might be after with "them things." If anything could be done for him he should be thankful. Miss Dixon was very well connected, and sang in a choir. Here he stopped, saluted, turned and marched away into the night. I heard him pass a word or two to the policeman, who turned aside and blew his nose. The hospital nurse, who spoke in a feverish whisper, then a young woman from the Piccadilly gas-lamps, who cried and rocked herself about, followed; and then, to my extreme amazement, two ladies with cloaks and hoods over evening gowns—one of them a Mrs. Stanhope, who was known to me. The taller and younger lady, chaperoned by my friend, I did not recognise. Her face was hidden by her hood.

I was now more than interested, it seemed to me that I was, in a sense, implicated. At any rate I felt very delicate about overhearing what was to

come. It is one thing to become absorbed in a ritual the like of which, in mid-London, you can never have experienced before, but quite another thing to listen to the secret desires of a friend in whose house you may have dined within the month. However—by whatever casuistries I might have compassed it—I did remain. Let me hope, nay, let me believe of myself that if the postulant had proved to be my friend, Mrs. Shrewton Stanhope, herself, I should either have stopped my ears or immediately retired.

But Mrs. Stanhope, I saw at once, was no more than *dame de compagnie*. She stood in mid-ring with bent head and hands clasped before her while the graceful, hooded girl approached nearer to the mysterious oracle and fulfilled the formal rites demanded of all who sought his help. Her ringed left hand was laid upon his right shoulder, her fair right hand upheld his chin. When she began to speak, which she did immediately and without a tremor, again I had the sensation of hearing one who had words by heart. This was her burden, more or less. "I am very unhappy about a certain person. It is Captain Maxfield. I am engaged to him, and want to break it off. I must do that—I must indeed. If I don't I shall do a more dreadful thing. I do hope you will help me. Mrs. ———, my friend, was sure that you would. I do hope so. I am very unhappy."

She had commanded her voice until the very end; but as she pitied herself there came a break in it. I heard her catch her breath; I thought she would fall, —and so did Mrs. Stanhope, it was clear, for she went hurriedly forward and put an arm round her waist. The younger lady drooped to her shoulder; Mrs. Stanhope inclined her head to the person—not a sign from him, mind you—and gently withdrew her charge from the ring. The pair then hurried across the park in the direction of Knightsbridge, and left me, I may admit, consuming in the fire of curiosity and excitement which they had lit.

Petitions succeeded, of various interest, but they seemed pale and ineffectual to me. Before all or nearly all of the waiting throng had been heard I saw uneasiness spread about it. Face turned to face, head to head; subtle but unmistakable movements indicated unrest. Then, of the suddenest, amid lifted hands and sighed-forth prayers the youthful object of so much entreaty, receiver of so many secret sorrows, seemed to fade and, without effort, to recede. I know not how else to describe his departure. He backed away, as it were, into the dark. The people were on their feet ere this. Sighs, wailing, appeals, sobs, adjurations broke the quietness of the night. Some ran stumbling after him with extended arms; most of them stayed where they were, watching him

fade, hoping against hope. He emptied himself, so to speak, of light; he faded backward, diminishing himself to a luminous glow, to a blur, to a point of light. Thus he was gone. The disappointed crept silently away, each into silence, solitude and the night, and I found myself alone with the policeman.

Now, what in the name of God was all this? I asked him, and must have it. He gave me some particulars, admitting at the outset that it was a "go." "They seem to think," he said, "that they will get what they want out of him—by wire. Let him bring them a wire in the morning; that's the way of it. Anything in life, from sudden death to a penn'orth of bird-seed. Death! Ah, I've heard 'em cringe to him for death, times and again. They crawl for it—they must have it. Can't do it their-selves, d'ye see? No, no. Let him do it—somehow. Once a week, during the season—his season, I should say, because he ain't here always, by no means—they gets about like this; and how they know where to spot him is more than I can tell you. If I knew it, I would—but I don't. Nobody knows that—and yet they know it. Sometimes he's to be found here two weeks running; then it'll be the Regent's Park, or the Knoll in the Green Park. He's had 'em all the way to Hampstead before now, and Primrose Hill's a likely place, they tell me. Telegrams: that's

what he gives 'em—if he's got the mind. But they don't get all they want, not by no means. And some of 'em gets more than they want, by a lot." He thought, then chuckled at a rather grim instance.

"Why, there was old Jack Withers, 'blue-nosed Jack' they calls him, who works a Hammersmith 'bus! Did you ever hear of that? That was a good one, if you like. Now you listen. This Jack was coming up the Brompton Road on his 'bus—and I was on duty by the Boltons and see him coming. There was that young feller there too—him we've just had here—standing quiet by a pillar-box, reading a letter. One foot he had in the roadway, and his back to the 'bus. Up comes old Jack, pushing his horses, and sees the boy. Gives a great howl like a tom-cat. 'Hi! you young frog-spawn,' he says, 'out of my road,' and startled the lad. I see him look up at Jack very steady, and keep his eye on him. I thought to myself, 'There's something to pay on delivery, my boy, for this here.' Jack owned up to it afterwards that he felt queer, but he forgot about it. Now, if you'll believe me, sir, the very next morning Jack was at London Bridge after his second journey, when up comes this boy, sauntering into the yard. Comes up to Jack and nods. 'Name of Withers?' he says. 'That's me,' says old Jack. 'Thought so,' he says. 'Telegram for you.' Jack

takes it, opens it, goes all white. 'Good God!' he says; 'good God Almighty! My wife's dead!' She'd been knocked down by a Pickford that morning, sure as a gun. What do you think of that for a start?

"He served Spotty Smith the fried-eel man just the very same, and lots more I could tell you about. They call him Quidnunc—Mister Quidnunc, too, and don't you forget it. There's that about him I—well, sir, if it was to come to it that I had to lay a hand on him for something out of Queer Street I shouldn't know how to do it. Now I'm telling you a fact. I shouldn't—know—how—to—do it."

He was not, obviously, telling me a fact, but certainly he was much in earnest. I commented upon the diversity of the company, and so learned the name of my friend Mrs. Stanhope's friend. He clacked his tongue. "Bless you," he said, "I've seen better than to-night, though we did have a slap-up ladyship and all. That was Lady Emily Rich, that young thing was, Earl of Richborough's family—Grosvenor Place. But we had a Duchess or something here one night—ah, and a Bishop another, a Lord Bishop. You'd never believe the tales we hear. He's known to every night-constable from Woolwich to Putney Bridge—and the company he gets about him you'd never believe. High and

low, and all huddled together like so many babes in a nursing-home. No distinction. You saw old Mother Misery get first look-in to-night? My lady waited her turn, like a good girl!" His voice sank to a whisper. "They tell me he's the only living soul—if he *is* a living soul—that's ever been inside the Stock Exchange and come out tidy. He goes and comes in as he likes—quite the Little Stranger. They all know him in Throgmorton Street. No, no. There's more in this than meets the eye, sir. He's not like you and me. But it's no business of mine. He don't go down in my pocket-book, I can tell you. I keep out of his way—and with reason. He never did no harm to me, nor shan't if I can help it. Quidnunc! Mister Quidnunc! He might be a herald angel for all I know."

I went my way home and to bed, but was not done with Quidnunc.

The next day, which was the first day of the Eton and Harrow Match, I read a short paragraph in the *Echo*, headed "Painful Scene at Lord's," to the effect that a lady lunching on Lord Richborough's drag had fainted upon the receipt of a telegram, and would have fallen had she not been caught by the messenger—"a strongly built youth," it said, "who thus saved what might have been a serious accident." That was all, but it gave me food for thought, and

a suspicion which Saturday confirmed in a sufficiently startling way. On that Saturday I was at luncheon in the First Avenue Hotel in Holborn, when a man came in—Tendring by name—whom I knew quite well. We exchanged greetings and sat at our luncheon, talking desultorily. A clerk from his office brought in a telegram for Tendring. He opened it and seemed thunder-struck. "Good Lord!" I heard him say. "Good Lord, here's trouble." I murmured sympathetically, and then he turned to me, quite beyond the range where reticence avails. "Look here," he said, "this is a shocking business. A man I know wires to me—from Bow Street. He's been taken for forgery—that's the charge—and wants me to bail him out." He got up as we finished and went to write his reply: I turned immediately to the clerk. "Is the boy waiting?" I asked. He was. I said "Excuse me, Tendring," and ran out of the restaurant to the street door. There in the street, as I had suspected, stood my inscrutable, steady-eyed, smiling Oracle of the night. I stood, meeting his look as best I might. He showed no recognition of me whatsoever. Then, as I stood there, Tendring came out. "Call me a cab," he told the hall-porter; and to Quidnunc he said, "There's no answer. I'm going at once." Quidnunc went away.

Now Tendring's friend, I learned by the evening paper, was one Captain Maxfield of the Royal Engineers. He was committed for trial, bail refused. I may add that he got seven years.

So much for Captain Maxfield! But much more for Lady Emily Rich, of whose fate I have now to tell. My friend, Mrs. Shrewton Stanhope, was very reserved, would tell me nothing, even when I roundly said that I had fancied to see her in the park one evening. She had the hardihood to meet my eyes with a blank denial, and very plainly there was nothing to be learned from her. A visit, many visits to the London parks at the hour between eleven and midnight taught me no more; but being by now thoroughly interested in the affairs of Lady Emily Rich I made it my business to get a glimpse of her. She was, it seemed, the only unmarried daughter of the large Richborough family which had done so well in that sex, and so badly in the other that there was not only no son, but no male heir to the title. That, indeed, expired with Lady Emily's father. I don't really know how many daughters there were, or were not. Most of them married prosperously. One of them became a Roman princess; one married a Mr. Walker, an American stockjobber (with a couple of millions of money); another was Baroness de Grass—De Grass being a Jew; one

became an Anglican nun to the disgust (I was told) of her family. Lady Emily, whose engagement to the wretched Maxfield was so dramatically terminated was, I think, the youngest of them. I saw her one night toward the end of the season at the Opera. Tendring, who was with me, pointed her out in a box. She was dressed in black and looked very scared. She hardly moved once throughout the evening, and when people spoke to her seemed not to hear. She was certainly a very pretty girl. It may have been fancy, or it may not, but I could have sworn to the corner of a pinky-brown envelope sticking out of the bosom of her dress. I don't think I was mistaken; I had a good look through the glasses. She touched it shortly afterward and poked it down. At the end I saw her come out. A tall girl, rather thin; very pretty certainly, but far from well. Her eyes haunted me; they had what is called a hag-ridden look. And yet, thought I, she had got her desire of Quidnunc. Ah, but had she? Hear the end of the tale.

I say that I saw her come out, that's not quite true. I saw her come down the staircase and stand with her party in the crowded lobby. She stood in it, but not of it; for her vague and shadowed eyes sought otherwhere than in those of the neat-haired young man who was chattering in front of her. She

scanned, rather, the throng of people anxiously and guardedly at once, as if she was looking for somebody, and must not be seen to look. As time wore on and the carriage delayed, her nervousness increased. She seemed to get paler, she shut her eyes once or twice as though to relieve the strain which watching and waiting put upon them, and then, quite suddenly, I saw that she had found what she expected; I saw that her empty eyes were now filled, that they held something without which they had faded out. In a word, I saw her look fixedly, fiercely and certainly at something beyond the lobby. Following the direction she gave me, I looked also. There, assuredly, in the portico, square, smiling and assured of his will, I saw Quidnunc stand, and his light eyes upon hers. For quite a space of time, such as that in which you might count fifteen deliberately, those two looked at each other. Messages, I am sure, sped to and fro between them. His seemed to say, "Come, I have answered you. Now do you answer me." Hers cried her hurt, "Ah, but what can I do?" His, with their cool mastery of time and occasion, "You must do as I bid you. There's no other way." Hers pleaded, "Give me time," and his told her sternly, "I am master of time—since I made it." The throng of waiting people began to surge toward the door; out there in the night link-

boys yelled great names. I heard "Lord Richborough's carriage," and saw Lady Emily clap her hand to her side. I saw her reach the portico and stand there hastily covering her head with a black scarf; I saw her sway alone there. I saw her party go down the steps. The next moment Quidnunc flashed to her side. He said nothing, he did not touch her. He simply looked at her—intently, smiling, self-possessed, a master. Her face was averted; I could see her tremble; she bowed her head. Another carriage was announced—the Richborough coach then was gone. I saw Quidnunc now put his hand upon her arm; she turned him her face, a faint and tender smile, very beautiful and touching, met his own. He drew her with him out of the press and into the burning dark. London never saw her again.

I don't attempt to explain what is to me inexplicable. Was my policeman right when he called Quidnunc a herald angel? Is there any substance behind the surmise that the ancient gods still sway the souls and bodies of men? Was Quidnunc, that swift, remorseless, smiling messenger, that god of the winged feet? The Argeïphont? Who can answer these things? All I have to tell you by way of an epilogue is this.

A curate of my acquaintance, a curate of St. Peter's, Eaton Square, some few years after these

events, took his holiday in Greece. He went out as one of a tourist party, but having more time at his disposal than was contemplated by the contracting agency, he stayed on, chartered a dragoman and wandered far and wide. On his return he told me that he had seen Lady Emily Rich at Pheræ in Arcadia, and that he had spoken to her. He had seen her sitting on the door-step of a one-storied white house, spinning flax. She wore the costume of the peasants, which he told me is very picturesque. Two or three half-naked children tumbled about her. They were beautiful as angels, he said, with curly golden hair and extremely light eyes. He noticed that particularly, and recurred to it more than once. Now Lady Emily was a dark girl, with eyes so deeply blue as to be almost black.

My friend spoke to her, he said. He had seen that she recognised him; in fact, she bowed to him. He felt that he could not disregard her. Mere commonplaces were exchanged. She told him that her husband was away on a journey. She fancied that he had been in England; but she explained half-laughingly that she knew very little about his affairs, and was quite content to leave them to him. She had her children to look after. My friend was surprised that she asked no question of England or family matters; but, in the circumstances, he added,

he hardly liked to refer to them. She served him with bread and wine before he left her. All he could say was that she appeared to be perfectly happy.

It is odd, and perhaps it is more than odd, that there was a famous temple of Hermes in Pheræ in former times. Pindar, I believe, acclaimed it in one of his Epinikean odes; but I have not been able to verify the reference.

THE interest of my matter has caused me to lose sight of myself and to fail in my account of the flight of time over my head. That is, however, comparable with the facts, which were that my attention was then become solely objective. I had other things to think of than the development of my own nature. I had other things to think of, indeed, than those which surround us all, and press upon us until we become permanently printed by their contact. Solitary as I had ever been in mind, I now became literally so by choice. I became wholly absorbed in that circumambient world of being which was graciously opening itself to my perceptions—how I knew not. I was in a state of momentary expectation of apparitions; as I went about my ostensible business I had my ears quick and my eyes wide for signs and tokens that I was surrounded by a seething and whirling invisible population of beings, like ourselves, but glorified: yet unlike ourselves in this, that what seemed entirely right, because natural, to them would have been in ourselves horrible. The ruthlessness,

for instance, of Quidnunc as he pursued and obtained his desire, had Quidnunc been a human creature, would have been revolting; the shamelessness of the fairy wife of Ventris had she been capable of shame, how shameful had that been! But I knew that these creatures were not human; I knew that they were not under our law; and so I explained everything to myself. But to myself only. It is not enough to explain a circumstance by negatives. If Quidnunc and Mrs. Ventris were not under our law, neither are the sun, moon and stars, neither are the apes and peacocks. But all these are under some law, since law is the essence of the Kosmos. Under what law then were Mrs. Ventris and Quidnunc? I burned to know that. For many years of my life that knowledge was my steady desire; but I had no means at hand of satisfying it. Reading? Well, I did read in a fashion. I read, for example, Grimm's *Teutonic Mythology*, a stout and exceedingly dull work in three volumes of a most unsatisfying kind. I read other books of the same sort, chiefly German, dealing in etymology, which I readily allow is a science of great value within its proper sphere. But to Grimm and his colleagues etymology seemed to me to be the contents of the casket rather than the key; for Grimm and his colleagues started with a prejudice, that Gods, fairies and the rest have never existed

and don't exist. To them the interest of the inquiry is not what is the nature, what are the laws of such beings, but what is the nature of the primitive people who imagined the existence of such beings? I very soon found out that Grimm and his colleagues had nothing to tell me.

Then there was another class of book; that which dealt in demonology and witchcraft, exemplified by a famous work called *Satan's Invisible World Discovered*. Writers of these things may or may not have believed in witches and fairies (which they classed together); but in any event they believed them to be wicked, the abomination of uncleanness. That made them false witnesses. My judgment revolted against such ridiculous assumptions. Here was a case, you see, where writers treated their subject too seriously, having the pulpit-cushion ever below their hand, and the fear of the Ordinary before their eyes.[1] Grimm and his friends, on the other hand, took it too lightly, seeing in it matter for a treatise on language. I got no good out of either school, and as time goes on I don't see a prospect of any adequate handling of the theme. I should like to think that

[1] The Reverend Robert Kirk, author of the *Secret Commonwealth*, was a clergyman and a believer in the beings of whom his book professed to treat. He found them a place in his Pantheon; but he knew very little about them. I shall have to speak of him again I expect. He is himself an object-lesson, though his teachings are naught.

I myself was to be the man to expound the fairy-kind candidly and methodically—candidly, that is, without going to literature for my data, and with the notion definitely out of mind that the fairy God-mother ever existed. But I shall never be that man, for though I am candid to the point of weakness, I am not to flatter myself that I have method. But to whomsoever he may be that undertakes the subject I can promise that the documents await their historian, and I will furnish him with a title which will indicate at a glance both the spirit of his attack and the nature of his treatise.

"The Natural History of the Præternatural" it should be. I make him a present of that—the only possible line for a sincere student. God go with him whosoever he be, for he will have rare qualities and rare need of them. He must be cheerful without assumption, respectful without tragic airs, as respectable as he please in the eyes of his own law, so that he finds respect in his heart also for the laws of the realm in which he is privileged to trade. Let him not stand, as the priest in the Orthodox Church, a looming hierophant. Let him avoid any rhetorical pose, any hint of the grand manner. Above all, let him not wear the smirk of the conjuror when he prepares with flourishes to whip the handkerchief away from his guinea-pig. Here is one who con-

descends to reader and subject alike. He would do harm all round: moreover he would be a quack, for he is just as much of a quack who makes little of much as he who makes much of little. No! Let his attitude be that of the contadino in some vast church in Italy, who walking into the cool dark gazes round-eyed at the twinkling candles ahead of him in the vague, and that he may recover himself a little leans against a pillar for a while, his hat against his heart and his lips muttering an Ave. Reassured by his prayer, or the peace of the great place, he presently espies the sacristan about to uncover a picture not often shown. Here is an occasion! The tourists are gathered, intent upon their Baedekers; he tiptoes up behind them and kneels by another pillar —for the pillars of a church are his friendly rocks, touching which he can face the unknown. The curtain is brailed up, and the blue and crimson, the mournful eyes, the wimple, the pointed chin, the long idle fingers are revealed upon their golden background. While the girls flock about papa with his book, and mamma wonders where we shall have luncheon, Annibale, assured familiar of Heaven, beatified at no expense to himself, settles down to a quiet talk with the Mother of God. His attitude is perfect, and so is hers. The firmament is not to be shaken, but Annibale is not a *farceur*, nor his

Blessed One absurd. Mysteries are all about us. Some are for the eschatologist and some for the shepherd; some for Patmos and some for the *podere*. Let our historian remember, in fact, that the natures into which he invites us to pry are those of the little divinities of earth and he can't go very far wrong. Nor can we.

That, I am bold to confess, is my own attitude toward a lovely order of creation. Perhaps I may go on to give him certain hints of treatment. Nearly all of them, I think, tend to the same point—the discarding of literature. Literature, being a man's art, is at its best and also at its worst, in its dealing with women. No man, perhaps, is capable of writing of women as they really are, though every man thinks he is. A curious consequence to the history of fairies has been that literature has recognised no males in that community, and that of the females it has described it has selected only those who are enamoured of men or disinclined to them. The fact, of course, is that the fairy world is peopled very much as our own, and that, with great respect to Shakespeare, an Ariel, a Puck, a Titania, a Peasblossom are abnormal. It is as rare to find a fairy capable of discerning man as the converse is rare. I have known a person intensely aware of the Spirits that reside, for instance, in flowers, in the wind, in

rivers and hills, none the less bereft of any intercourse whatever with these interesting beings by the simple fact that they themselves were perfectly unconscious of him. It is greatly to be doubted whether Shakespeare ever saw a fairy, though his age believed in fairies, but almost certain that Shelley must have seen many, whose age did not believe. If our author is to have a poetical guide at all it had better be Shelley.

Literature will tell him that fairies are benevolent or mischievous, and tradition, borrowing from literature, will confirm it. The proposition is ridiculous. It would be as wise to say that a gnat is mischievous when it stings you, or a bee benevolent because he cannot prevent you stealing his honey. There would be less talk of benevolent bees if the gloves were off. That is the pathetic fallacy again; and that is man all over. Will nothing, I wonder, convince him that he is not the centre of the Universe? If Darwin, Newton, Galileo, Copernicus and Sir Norman Lockyer have failed, is it my turn to try? Modesty forbids. Besides, I am prejudiced. I think man, in the conduct of his business, inferior to any vegetable. I am a tainted source. But such talk is idle, and so is that which cries havoc upon fairy morality. Heaven knows that it differs from our own; but Heaven also knows that our own dif-

fers *inter nos;* and that to discuss the customs and habits of the Japanese in British parlours is a vain thing. *The Forsaken Merman* is a beautiful poem, but not a safe guide to those who would relate the ways of the spirits of the sea. But all this is leading me too far from my present affair, which is to relate how the knowledge of these things—of these beings and of their laws—came upon me, and how their nature influenced mine. I have said enough, I think, to establish the necessity of a good book upon the subject, and I take leave to flatter myself that these pages of my own will be indispensable Prolegomena to any such work, or to any research tending to its compilation.

In the absence of books, in the situation in which I found myself of reticence, I could do nothing but brood upon the things I had seen. Insensibly my imagination (latent while I had been occupied with observation) began to work. I did not write, but I pictured, and my waking dreams became so vivid that I was in a fair way to treat them as the only reality, and might have discarded the workaday world altogether. Luckily for me, my disposition was tractable and law-abiding. I fulfilled by habit the duties of the day; I toiled at my dreary work, ate and slept, wrote to my parents, visited them, having got those tasks as it were by heart, but I

went through the rites like an automaton; my mind was elsewhere, intensely dogging the heels of that winged steed, my fancy, panting in its tracks, and perfectly content so only that it did not come up too late to witness the glories which its bold flights discovered. Thanks to it—all thanks to it—I did not become a nympholept. I did not haunt Parliament Hill o' nights. I did not spy upon the darkling motions of Mrs. Ventris. Desire, appetite, sex were not involved at all in this affair; nor yet was love. I was very prone to love, but I did not love Mrs. Ventris. In whatsoever fairy being I had seen there had been nothing which held physical attraction for me. There could be no allure when there was no lure. So far as I could tell, not one of these creatures —except Quidnunc, and possibly the Dryad, the sun-dyed nymph I had seen long ago in K——— Park— had been aware of my presence. I guessed, though I did not know (as I do now) that manifestation is not always mutual, but that a man may see a fairy without being seen, and conversely, a fairy may be fully aware of mankind or of some man or men without any suspicion of theirs. Moreover, though I saw them all extraordinarily beautiful, I had never yet seen one supremely desirable. The instinct to possess, which is an essential part of the love-passion of every man—had never stirred in me in the presence

of these creatures. If it had I should have yielded to it, I doubt not, since there was no moral law to hold me back. But it never had, so far, and I was safe from the wasting misery of seeking that which could not, from its very nature (and mine) be sought.

There was really nothing I could do, therefore, but wait, and that is what I did. I waited intensely, very much as a terrier waits at the hole of the bolting rabbit. By the merest accident I got a clew to a very interesting case which added enormously to my knowledge. It was a clear case of fairy child-theft, the clearest I ever met with. I shall devote a chapter to it, having been at the pains to verify it in all particulars. I did not succeed in meeting the hero, or victim of it, because, though the events related took place in 1887, they were not recorded until 1892, when the record came into my hands. By that time the two persons concerned had left the country and were settled in Florida. I did see Mr. Walsh, the Nonconformist Minister who communicated the tale to his local society, but he was both a dull and a cautious man, and had very little to tell me. He had himself seen nothing, he only had Beckwith's word to go upon and did not feel certain that the whole affair was not an hallucination on the young man's part. That the child had disappeared was certain, that both parents were equally distressed is certain.

Not a shred of suspicion attached to the unhappy Beckwith. But Mr. Walsh told me that he felt the loss so keenly and blamed himself so severely, though unreasonably, to my thinking, that it would have been impossible for him to remain in England. He said that the full statement communicated to the Field Club was considered by the young man in the light of a confession of his share in the tragedy. It would, he said, have been exorbitant to expect more of him. And I quite agree with him; and now had better give the story as I found it.

BECKWITH'S CASE

THE facts were as follows. Mr. Stephen Mortimer Beckwith was a young man living at Wishford in the Amesbury district of Wiltshire. He was a clerk in the Wilts and Dorset Bank at Salisbury, was married and had one child. His age at the time of the experience here related was twenty-eight. His health was excellent.

On the 30th November, 1887, at about ten o'clock at night, he was returning home from Amesbury where he had been spending the evening at a friend's house. The weather was mild, with a rain-bearing wind blowing in squalls from the south-west. It was three-quarter moon that night, and although the sky was frequently overcast it was at no time dark. Mr. Beckwith, who was riding a bicycle and accompanied by his fox-terrier Strap, states that he had no difficulty in seeing and avoiding the stones cast down at intervals by the road-menders; that flocks of sheep in the hollows were very visible, and that, passing Wilsford House, he saw a barn owl quite plainly and remarked its heavy, uneven flight.

A mile beyond Wilsford House, Strap, the dog, broke through the quickset hedge upon his right-hand side and ran yelping up the down, which rises sharply just there. Mr. Beckwith, who imagined that he was after a hare, whistled him in, presently calling him sharply, "Strap, Strap, come out of it." The dog took no notice, but ran directly to a clump of gorse and bramble half-way up the down, and stood there in the attitude of a pointer, with uplifted paw, watching the gorse intently, and whining. Mr. Beckwith was by this time dismounted, observing the dog. He watched him for some minutes from the road. The moon was bright, the sky at the moment free from cloud.

He himself could see nothing in the gorse, though the dog was undoubtedly in a high state of excitement. It made frequent rushes forward, but stopped short of the object that it saw and trembled. It did not bark outright but rather whimpered—"a curious, shuddering, crying noise," says Mr. Beckwith. Interested by the animal's persistent and singular behaviour, he now sought a gap in the hedge, went through on to the down, and approached the clumped bushes. Strap was so much occupied that he barely noticed his master's coming; it seemed as if he dared not take his eyes for one second from what he saw in there.

Beckwith, standing behind the dog, looked into the gorse. From the distance at which he still stood he could see nothing at all. His belief then was that there was either a tramp in a drunken sleep, possibly two tramps, or a hare caught in a wire, or possibly even a fox. Having no stick with him he did not care, at first, to go any nearer, and contented himself with urging on his terrier. This was not very courageous of him, as he admits, and was quite unsuccessful. No verbal excitations would draw Strap nearer to the furze-bush. Finally the dog threw up his head, showed his master the white arcs of his eyes and fairly howled at the moon. At this dismal sound Mr. Beckwith owned himself alarmed. It was, as he describes it—though he is an Englishman—"uncanny." The time, he owns, the aspect of the night, loneliness of the spot (mid-way up the steep slope of a chalk down), the mysterious shroud of darkness upon shadowed and distant objects and flood of white light upon the foreground—all these circumstances worked upon his imagination.

He was indeed for retreat; but here Strap was of a different mind. Nothing would excite him to advance, but nothing either could induce him to retire. Whatever he saw in the furze-bush Strap must continue to observe. In the face of this Beckwith summoned up his courage, took it in both hands and

went much nearer to the furze-bushes, much nearer, that is, than Strap the terrier could bring himself to go. Then, he tells us, he did see a pair of bright eyes far in the thicket, which seemed to be fixed upon his, and by degrees also a pale and troubled face. Here, then, was neither fox nor drunken tramp, but some human creature, man, woman, or child, fully aware of him and of the dog.

Beckwith, who now had surer command of his feelings, spoke aloud asking, "What are you doing there? What's the matter?" He had no reply. He went one pace nearer, being still on his guard, and spoke again. "I won't hurt you," he said. "Tell me what the matter is." The eyes remained unwinkingly fixed upon his own. No movement of the features could be discerned. The face, as he could now make it out, was very small—"about as big as a big wax doll's," he says, "of a longish oval, very pale." He adds, "I could see its neck now, no thicker than my wrist; and where its clothes began. I couldn't see any arms, for a good reason. I found out afterward that they had been bound behind its back. I should have said immediately, 'That's a girl in there,' if it had not been for one or two plain considerations. It had not the size of what we call a girl, nor the face of what we mean by a child. It was, in fact, neither fish, flesh, nor fowl. Strap had

known that from the beginning, and now I was of Strap's opinion myself."

Advancing with care, a step at a time, Beckwith presently found himself within touching distance of the creature. He was now standing with furze halfway up his calves, right above it, stooping to look closely at it; and as he stooped and moved, now this way, now that, to get a clearer view, so the crouching thing's eyes gazed up to meet his, and followed them about, as if safety lay only in that never-shifting, fixed regard. He had noticed, and states in his narrative, that Strap had seemed quite unable, in the same way, to take his eyes off the creature for a single second.

He could now see that, of whatever nature it might be, it was, in form and features, most exactly a young woman. The features, for instance, were regular and fine. He remarks in particular upon the chin. All about its face, narrowing the oval of it, fell dark glossy curtains of hair, very straight and glistening with wet. Its garment was cut in a plain circle round the neck, and short off at the shoulders, leaving the arms entirely bare. This garment, shift, smock or gown, as he indifferently calls it, appeared thin, and was found afterward to be of a grey colour, soft and clinging to the shape. It was made loose, however, and gathered in at the waist. He could

not see the creature's legs, as they were tucked under her. Her arms, it has been related, were behind her back. The only other things to be remarked upon were the strange stillness of one who was plainly suffering, and might well be alarmed, and appearance of expectancy, a dumb appeal; what he himself calls rather well "an ignorant sort of impatience, like that of a sick animal."

"Come," Beckwith now said, "let me help you up. You will get cold if you sit here. Give me your hand, will you?" She neither spoke nor moved; simply continued to search his eyes. Strap, meantime, was still trembling and whining. But now, when he stooped yet lower to take her forcibly by the arms, she shrank back a little way and turned her head, and he saw to his horror that she had a great open wound in the side of her neck—from which, however, no blood was issuing. Yet it was clearly a fresh wound, recently made.

He was greatly shocked. "Good God," he said, "there's been foul play here," and whipped out his handkerchief. Kneeling, he wound it several times round her slender throat and knotted it as tightly as he could; then, without more ado, he took her up in his arms, under the knees and round the middle, and carried her down the slope to the road. He describes her as of no weight at all. He says it was "exactly

like carrying an armful of feathers about." "I took her down the hill and through the hedge at the bottom as if she had been a pillow."

Here it was that he discovered that her wrists were bound together behind her back with a kind of plait of thongs so intricate that he was quite unable to release them. He felt his pockets for his knife, but could not find it, and then recollected suddenly that he should have a new one with him, the third prize in a whist tournament in which he had taken part that evening. He found it wrapped in paper in his overcoat pocket, with it cut the thongs and set the little creature free. She immediately responded—the first sign of animation which she had displayed—by throwing both her arms about his body and clinging to him in an ecstasy. Holding him so that, as he says, he felt the shuddering go all through her, she suddenly lowered her head and touched his wrist with her cheek. He says that instead of being cold to the touch, "like a fish," as she had seemed to be when he first took her out of the furze, she was now "as warm as a toast, like a child."

So far he had put her down for "a foreigner," convenient term for defining something which you do not quite understand. She had none of his language, evidently; she was undersized, some three feet six

inches by the look of her,[1] and yet perfectly proportioned. She was most curiously dressed in a frock cut to the knee, and actually in nothing else at all. It left her bare-legged and bare-armed, and was made, as he puts it himself, of stuff like cobweb: "those dusty, drooping kind which you put on your finger to stop bleeding." He could not recognise the web, but was sure that it was neither linen nor cotton. It seemed to stick to her body wherever it touched a prominent part: "you could see very well, to say nothing of feeling, that she was well made and well nourished." She ought, as he judged, to be a child of five years old, "and a feather-weight at that"; but he felt certain that she must be "much more like sixteen." It was that, I gather, which made him suspect her of being something outside experience. So far, then, it was safe to call her a foreigner: but he was not yet at the end of his discoveries.

Heavy footsteps, coming from the direction of Wishford, in due time proved to be those of Police Constable Gulliver, a neighbour of Beckwith's and guardian of the peace in his own village. He lifted his lantern to flash it into the traveller's eyes, and dropped it again with a pleasant "good evening."

[1] Her exact measurements are stated to have been as follows: height from crown to sole, 3 feet 5 inches. Round waist, 15 inches; round bust, 21 inches; round wrist, 3½ inches; round neck, 7½ inches.

He added that it was inclined to be showery, which was more than true, as it was at the moment raining hard. With that, it seems, he would have passed on.

But Beckwith, whether smitten by self-consciousness of having been seen with a young woman in his arms at a suspicious hour of the night by the village policeman, or bursting perhaps with the importance of his affair, detained Gulliver. "Just look at this," he said boldly. "Here's a pretty thing to have found on a lonely road. Foul play somewhere, I'm afraid," he then exhibited his burden to the lantern light.

To his extreme surprise, however, the constable, after exploring the beam of light and all that it contained for some time in silence, reached out his hand for the knife which Beckwith still held open. He looked at it on both sides, examined the handle and gave it back. "Foul play, Mr. Beckwith?" he said laughing. "Bless you, they use bigger tools than that. That's just a toy, the like of that. Cut your hand with it, though, already, I see." He must have noticed the handkerchief, for as he spoke the light from his lantern shone full upon the face and neck of the child, or creature, in the young man's arms, so clearly that, looking down at it, Beckwith himself could see the clear grey of its intensely watchful eyes, and the very pupils of them, diminished to specks of black. It was now, therefore, plain to

him that what he held was a foreigner indeed, since the parish constable was unable to see it. Strap had smelt it, then seen it, and he, Beckwith, had seen it; but it was invisible to Gulliver. "I felt now," he says in his narrative, "that something was wrong. I did not like the idea of taking it into the house; but I intended to make one more trial before I made up my mind about that. I said good night to Gulliver, put her on my bicycle and pushed her home. But first of all I took the handkerchief from her neck and put it in my pocket. There was no blood upon it, that I could see."

His wife, as he had expected, was waiting at the gate for him. She exclaimed, as he had expected, upon the lateness of the hour. Beckwith stood for a little in the roadway before the house, explaining that Strap had bolted up the hill and had had to be looked for and fetched back. While speaking he noticed that Mrs. Beckwith was as insensible to the creature on the bicycle as Gulliver the constable had been. Indeed, she went much further to prove herself so than he, for she actually put her hand upon the handle-bar of the machine, and in order to do that drove it right through the centre of the girl crouching there. Beckwith saw that done. "I declare solemnly upon my honour," he writes, "that it was as if Mary had drilled a hole clean through

the middle of her back. Through gown and skin and bone and all her arm went; and how it went I don't know. To me it seemed that her hand was on the handle-bar, while her upper arm, to the elbow, was in between the girl's shoulders. There was a gap from the elbow downwards where Mary's arm was inside the body; then from the creature's diaphragm her lower arm, wrist and hand came out. And all the time we were speaking the girl's eyes were on my face. I was now quite determined that I wouldn't have her in the house for a mint of money."

He put her, finally, in the dog-kennel. Strap, as a favourite, lived in the house; but he kept a greyhound in the garden, in a kennel surrounded by a sort of run made of iron poles and galvanised wire. It was roofed in with wire also, for the convenience of stretching a tarpaulin in wet weather. Here it was that he bestowed the strange being rescued from the down.

It was clever, I think, of Beckwith to infer that what Strap had shown respect for would be respected by the greyhound, and certainly bold of him to act upon his inference. However, events proved that he had been perfectly right. Bran, the greyhound, was interested, highly interested in his guest. The moment he saw his master he saw what he was

carrying. "Quiet, Bran, quiet there," was a very unnecessary adjuration. Bran stretched up his head and sniffed, but went no further; and when Beckwith had placed his burden on the straw inside the kennel, Bran lay down, as if on guard, outside the opening and put his muzzle on his forepaws. Again Beckwith noticed that curious appearance of the eyes which the fox-terrier's had made already. Bran's eyes were turned upward to show the narrow arcs of white.

Before he went to bed, he tells us, but not before Mrs. Beckwith had gone there, he took out a bowl of bread and milk to his patient. Bran he found to be still stretched out before the entry; the girl was nestled down in the straw, as if asleep or prepared to be so, with her face upon her hand. Upon an after-thought he went back for a clean pocket handkerchief, warm water and a sponge. With these, by the light of a candle, he washed the wound, dipped the rag in hazeline, and applied it. This done, he touched the creature's head, nodded a good night and retired. "She smiled at me very prettily," he says. "That was the first time she did it."

There was no blood on the handkerchief which he had removed.

Early in the morning following upon the adventure Beckwith was out and about. He wished to verify

the overnight experiences in the light of refreshed intelligence. On approaching the kennel he saw at once that it had been no dream. There, in fact, was the creature of his discovery playing with Bran the greyhound, circling sedately about him, weaving her arms, pointing her toes, arching her graceful neck, stooping to him, as if inviting him to sport, darting away—"like a fairy," says Beckwith, "at her magic, dancing in a ring." Bran, he observed, made no effort to catch her, but crouched rather than sat, as if ready to spring. He followed her about with his eyes as far as he could; but when the course of her dance took her immediately behind him he did not turn his head, but kept his eye fixed as far backward as he could, against the moment when she should come again into the scope of his vision. "It seemed as important to him as it had the day before to Strap to keep her always in his eye. It seemed—and always seemed so long as I could study them together—intensely important." Bran's mouth was stretched to "a sort of grin"; occasionally he panted. When Beckwith entered the kennel and touched the dog (which took little notice of him) he found him trembling with excitement. His heart was beating at a great rate. He also drank quantities of water.

Beckwith, whose narrative, hitherto summarised, I may now quote, tells us that the creature was in-

describably graceful and light-footed. "You couldn't hear the fall of her foot: you never could. Her dancing and circling about the cage seemed to be the most important business of her life; she was always at it, especially in bright weather. I shouldn't have called it restlessness so much as busyness. It really seemed to mean more to her than exercise or irritation at confinement. It was evident also that she was happy when so engaged. She used to sing. She sang also when she was sitting still with Bran; but not with such exhilaration.

"Her eyes were bright—when she was dancing about—with mischief and devilry. I cannot avoid that word, though it does not describe what I really mean. She looked wild and outlandish and full of fun, as if she knew that she was teasing the dog, and yet couldn't help herself. When you say of a child that he looks wicked, you don't mean it literally; it is rather a compliment than not. So it was with her and her wickedness. She did look wicked, there's no mistake—able and willing to do wickedly; but I am sure she never meant to hurt Bran. They were always firm friends, though the dog knew very well who was master.

"When you looked at her you did not think of her height. She was so complete; as well made as a statuette. I could have spanned her waist with my

two thumbs and middle fingers, and her neck (very nearly) with one hand. She was pale and inclined to be dusky in complexion, but not so dark as a gipsy; she had grey eyes, and dark-brown hair, which she could sit upon if she chose. Her gown you could have sworn was made of cobweb; I don't know how else to describe it. As I had suspected, she wore nothing else, for while I was there that first morning, so soon as the sun came up over the hill she slipped it off her and stood up dressed in nothing at all. She was a regular little Venus—that's all I can say. I never could get accustomed to that weakness of hers for slipping off her frock, though no doubt it was very absurd. She had no sort of shame in it, so why on earth should I?

"The food, I ought to mention, had disappeared: the bowl was empty. But I know now that Bran must have had it. So long as she remained in the kennel or about my place she never ate anything, nor drank either. If she had I must have known it, as I used to clean the run out every morning. I was always particular about that. I used to say that you couldn't keep dogs too clean. But I tried her, unsuccessfully, with all sorts of things: flowers, honey, dew—for I had read somewhere that fairies drink dew and suck honey out of flowers. She used to look at the little messes I made for her, and when

she knew me better would grimace at them, and look up in my face and laugh at me.

"I have said that she used to sing sometimes. It was like nothing that I can describe. Perhaps the wind in the telegraph wire comes nearest to it, and yet that is an absurd comparison. I could never catch any words; indeed I did not succeed in learning a single word of her language. I doubt very much whether they have what we call a language—I mean the people who are like her, her own people. They communicate with each other, I fancy, as she did with my dogs, inarticulately, but with perfect communication and understanding on either side. When I began to teach her English I noticed that she had a kind of pity for me, a kind of contempt perhaps is nearer the mark, that I should be compelled to express myself in so clumsy a way. I am no philosopher, but I imagine that our need of putting one word after another may be due to our habit of thinking in sequence. If there is no such thing as Time in the other world it should not be necessary there to frame speech in sentences at all. I am sure that Thumbeline (which was my name for her—I never learned her real name) spoke with Bran and Strap in flashes which revealed her whole thought at once. So also they answered her, there's no doubt. So also she contrived to talk with my little girl, who,

although she was four years old and a great chatterbox, never attempted to say a single word of her own language to Thumbeline, yet communicated with her by the hour together. But I did not know anything of this for a month or more, though it must have begun almost at once.

"I blame myself for it, myself only. I ought, of course, to have remembered that children are more likely to see fairies than grown-ups; but then—why did Florrie keep it all secret? Why did she not tell her mother, or me, that she had seen a fairy in Bran's kennel? The child was as open as the day, yet she concealed her knowledge from both of us without the least difficulty. She seemed the same careless, laughing child she had always been; one could not have supposed her to have a care in the world, and yet, for nearly six months she must have been full of care, having daily secret intercourse with Thumbeline and keeping her eyes open all the time lest her mother or I should find her out. Certainly she could have taught me something in the way of keeping secrets. I know that I kept mine very badly, and blame myself more than enough for keeping it at all. God knows what we might have been spared if, on the night I brought her home, I had told Mary the whole truth! And yet—how could I have convinced her that she was impaling some one with her arm

while her hand rested on the bar of the bicycle? Is not that an absurdity on the face of it? Yes, indeed; but the sequel is no absurdity. That's the terrible fact.

"I kept Thumbeline in the kennel for the whole winter. She seemed happy enough there with the dogs, and, of course, she had had Florrie, too, though I did not find that out until the spring. I don't doubt, now, that if I had kept her in there altogether she would have been perfectly contented.

"The first time I saw Florrie with her I was amazed. It was a Sunday morning. There was our four-year-old child standing at the wire, pressing herself against it, and Thumbeline close to her. Their faces almost touched; their fingers were interlaced; I am certain that they were speaking to each other in their own fashion, by flashes, without words. I watched them for a bit; I saw Bran come and sit up on his haunches and join in. He looked from one to another, and all about; and then he saw me.

"Now that is how I know that they were all three in communication; because, the very next moment, Florrie turned round and ran to me, and said in her pretty baby-talk, 'Talking to Bran. Florrie talking to Bran.' If this was wilful deceit it was most accomplished. It could not have been better done. 'And who else were you talking to, Florrie?' I said.

She fixed her round blue eyes upon me, as if in wonder, then looked away and said shortly, 'No one else.' And I could not get her to confess or admit then or at any time afterward that she had any cognisance at all of the fairy in Bran's kennel, although their communications were daily, and often lasted for hours at a time. I don't know that it makes things any better, but I have thought sometimes that the child believed me to be as insensible to Thumbeline as her mother was. She can only have believed it at first, of course, but that may have prompted her to a concealment which she did not afterwards care to confess to.

"Be this as it may, Florrie, in fact, behaved with Thumbeline exactly as the two dogs did. She made no attempt to catch her at her circlings and wheelings about the kennel, nor to follow her wonderful dances, nor (in her presence) to imitate them. But she was (like the dogs) aware of nobody else when under the spell of Thumbeline's personality; and when she had got to know her she seemed to care for nobody else at all. I ought, no doubt, to have foreseen that and guarded against it.

"Thumbeline was extremely attractive. I never saw such eyes as hers, such mysterious fascination. She was nearly always good-tempered, nearly always happy; but sometimes she had fits of temper and

kept herself to herself. Nothing then would get her out of the kennel, where she would lie curled up like an animal with her knees to her chin and one arm thrown over her face. Bran was always wretched at these times, and did all he knew to coax her out. He ceased to care for me or my wife after she came to us, and instead of being wild at the prospect of his Saturday and Sunday runs, it was hard to get him along. I had to take him on a lead until we had turned to go home; then he would set off by himself, in spite of hallooing and scolding, at a long steady gallop and one would find him waiting crouched at the gate of his run, and Thumbeline on the ground inside it, with her legs crossed like a tailor, mocking and teasing him with her wonderful shining eyes. Only once or twice did I see her worse than sick or sorry; then she was transported with rage and another person altogether. She never touched me—and why or how I had offended her I have no notion[1]—but she buzzed and hovered about me like an angry bee. She appeared to have wings, which hummed in their furious movement; she was red in the face, her eyes burned; she grinned at me and ground her little teeth together. A curious

[1] "I have sometimes thought," he adds in a note, "that it may have been jealousy. My wife had been with me in the garden and had stuck a daffodil in my coat."

shrill noise came from her, like the screaming of a gnat or hoverfly; but no words, never any words. Bran showed me his teeth too, and would not look at me. It was very odd.

"When I looked in, on my return home, she was as merry as usual, and as affectionate. I think she had no memory.

"I am trying to give all the particulars I was able to gather from observation. In some things she was difficult, in others very easy to teach. For instance, I got her to learn in no time that she ought to wear her clothes, such as they were, when I was with her. She certainly preferred to go without them, especially in the sunshine; but by leaving her the moment she slipped her frock off I soon made her understand that if she wanted me she must behave herself according to my notions of behaviour. She got that fixed in her little head, but even so she used to do her best to hoodwink me. She would slip out one shoulder when she thought I wasn't looking, and before I knew where I was half of her would be gleaming in the sun like satin. Directly I noticed it I used to frown, and then she would pretend to be ashamed of herself, hang her head, and wriggle her frock up to its place again. However, I never could teach her to keep her skirts about her knees. She was as innocent as a baby about that sort of thing.

"I taught her some English words, and a sentence or two. That was toward the end of her confinement to the kennel, about March. I used to touch parts of her, or of myself, or Bran, and peg away at the names of them. Mouth, eyes, ears, hands, chest, tail, back, front: she learned all those and more. Eat, drink, laugh, cry, love, kiss, those also. As for kissing (apart from the word) she proved herself to be an expert. She kissed me, Florrie, Bran, Strap indifferently, one as soon as another, and any rather than none, and all four for choice.

"I learned some things myself, more than a thing or two. I don't mind owning that one thing was to value my wife's steady and tried affection far above the wild love of this unbalanced, unearthly little creature, who seemed to be like nothing so much as a woman with the conscience left out. The conscience, we believe, is the still small voice of the Deity crying to us in the dark recesses of the body; pointing out the path of duty; teaching respect for the opinion of the world, for tradition, decency and order. It is thanks to conscience that a man is true and a woman modest. Not that Thumbeline could be called immodest, unless a baby can be so described, or an animal. But could I be called 'true'? I greatly fear that I could not—in fact, I know it too well. I meant no harm; I was greatly interested;

and there was always before me the real difficulty of making Mary understand that something was in the kennel which she couldn't see. It would have led to great complications, even if I had persuaded her of the fact. No doubt she would have insisted on my getting rid of Thumbeline—but how on earth could I have done that if Thumbeline had not chosen to go? But for all that I know very well that I ought to have told her, cost what it might. If I had done it I should have spared myself lifelong regret, and should only have gone without a few weeks of extraordinary interest which I now see clearly could not have been good for me, as not being founded upon any revealed Christian principle, and most certainly were not worth the price I had to pay for them.

"I learned one more curious fact which I must not forget. Nothing would induce Thumbeline to touch or pass over anything made of zinc.[1] I don't know the reason of it; but gardeners will tell you that the way to keep a plant from slugs is to put a zinc collar round it. It is due to that I was able to keep her in Bran's run without difficulty. To have got out she would have had to pass zinc. The wire was all galvanised.

[1] This is a curious thing, unsupported by any other evidence known to me. I asked Despoina about it, but she would not, or she did not, answer. She appeared not to understand what zinc was, and I had none handy.

"She showed her dislike of it in numerous ways: one was her care to avoid touching the sides or top of the enclosure when she was at her gambols. At such times, when she was at her wildest, she was all over the place, skipping high like a lamb, twisting like a leveret, wheeling round and round in circles like a young dog, or skimming, like a swallow on the wing, above ground. But she never made a mistake; she turned in a moment or flung herself backward if there was the least risk of contact. When Florrie used to converse with her from outside, in that curious silent way the two had, it would always be the child that put its hands through the wire, never Thumbeline. I once tried to put her against the roof when I was playing with her. She screamed like a shot hare and would not come out of the kennel all day. There was no doubt at all about her feelings for zinc. All other metals seemed indifferent to her.

"With the advent of spring weather Thumbeline became not only more beautiful, but wilder, and exceedingly restless. She now coaxed me to let her out, and against my judgment I did it; she had to be carried over the entry; for when I had set the gate wide open and pointed her the way into the garden she squatted down in her usual attitude of attention, with her legs crossed, and watched me, waiting. I wanted to see how she would get through

the hateful wire, so went away and hid myself, leaving her alone with Bran. I saw her creep to the entry and peer at the wire. What followed was curious. Bran came up wagging his tail and stood close to her, his side against her head; he looked down, inviting her to go out with him. Long looks passed between them, and then Bran stooped his head, she put her arms around his neck, twined her feet about his foreleg, and was carried out. Then she became a mad thing, now bird, now moth; high and low, round and round, flashing about the place for all the world like a humming-bird moth, perfectly beautiful in her motions (whose case always surprised me), and equally so in her colouring of soft grey and dusky-rose flesh. Bran grew a puppy again and whipped about after her in great circles round the meadow. But though he was famous at coursing, and has killed his hares single-handed, he was never once near Thumbeline. It was a wonderful sight and made me late for business.

"By degrees she got to be very bold, and taught me boldness too, and (I am ashamed to say) greater degrees of deceit. She came freely into the house and played with Florrie up and down stairs; she got on my knee at meal-times, or evenings when my wife and I were together. Fine tricks she played me, I must own. She spilled my tea for me, broke cups and saucers, scattered my Patience cards, caught

poor Mary's knitting wool and rolled it about the room. The cunning little creature knew that I dared not scold her or make any kind of fuss. She used to beseech me for forgiveness occasionally when I looked very glum, and would touch my cheek to make me look at her imploring eyes, and keep me looking at her till I smiled. Then she would put her arms round my neck and pull herself up to my level and kiss me, and then nestle down in my arms and pretend to sleep. By-and-by, when my attention was called off her, she would pinch me, or tweak my necktie, and make me look again at her wicked eye peeping out from under my arm. I had to kiss her again, of course, and at last she might go to sleep in earnest. She seemed able to sleep at any hour or in any place, just like an animal.

"I had some difficulty in arranging for the night when once she had made herself free of the house. She saw no reason whatever for our being separated; but I circumvented her by nailing a strip of zinc all round the door; and I put one round Florrie's too. I pretended to my wife that it was to keep out draughts. Thumbeline was furious when she found out how she had been tricked. I think she never quite forgave me for it. Where she hid herself at night I am not sure. I think on the sitting-room sofa; but on mild mornings I used to find her outdoors, playing round Bran's kennel.

"Strap, our fox-terrier, picked up some rat poison towards the end of April and died in the night. Thumbeline's way of taking that was very curious. It shocked me a good deal. She had never been so friendly with him as with Bran, though certainly more at ease in his company than in mine. The night before he died I remember that she and Bran and he had been having high games in the meadow, which had ended by their all lying down together in a heap, Thumbeline's head on Bran's flank, and her legs between his. Her arm had been round Strap's neck in a most loving way. They made quite a picture for a Royal Academician; 'Tired of Play,' or 'The End of a Romp,' I can fancy he would call it. Next morning I found poor old Strap stiff and staring, and Thumbeline and Bran at their games just the same. She actually jumped over him and all about him as if he had been a lump of earth or a stone. Just some such thing he was to her; she did not seem able to realise that there was the cold body of her friend. Bran just sniffed him over and left him, but Thumbeline showed no consciousness that he was there at all. I wondered, was this heartlessness or obliquity? But I have never found the answer to my question.[1]

[1] I have observed this frequently for myself, and can answer Beckwith's question for him. I would refer the reader in the first place to my early experience of the boy (to call him so) with the rabbit in the wood. There was an act of shocking cruelty, done idly, almost unconsciously.

"Now I come to the tragical part of my story, and wish with all my heart that I could leave it out. But beyond the full confession I have made to my wife, the County Police and the newspapers, I feel that I should not shrink from any admission that may be called for of how much I have been to blame. In May, on the 13th of May, Thumbeline, Bran, and our only child, Florrie, disappeared.

"It was a day, I remember well, of wonderful beauty. I had left them all three together in the water meadow, little thinking of what was in store for us before many hours. Thumbeline had been crowning Florrie with a wreath of flowers. She had gathered cuckoo-pint and marsh marigolds and woven them together, far more deftly than any of

I was not shocked at all, child as I was, and quickly moved to pity and terror, because I knew that the creature was not to be judged by our standards. From this and other things of the sort which I have observed, and from this tale of Beckwith's, I judge that, to the fairy kind, directly life ceases to be lived at the full, the object, be it fairy, or animal, or vegetable, is not perceived by the other to exist. Thus, if a fairy should die, the others would not know that its accidents were there; if a rabbit (as in the case cited) should be caught it would therefore cease to be rabbit. We ourselves have very much the same habit of regard toward plant life. Our attitude to a tree or a growing plant ceases the moment that plant is out of the ground. It is then, as we say, *dead*—that is, it ceases to be a plant. So also we never scruple to pluck the flowers, or the whole flower-scape from a plant, to put it in our buttonhole or in the bosom of our friend, and thereafter to cease our interest in the plant as such. It now becomes a memory, a *gage d'amour*, a token or a sudden glory—what you will. This is the habit of mankind; but I know of rare ones, both men and women, who never allow dead flowers to be thrown into the draught, but always give them decent burial, either cremation or earth to earth. I find that admirable, yet don't condemn their neighbours, nor consider fairies cruel who torture the living and disregard the maimed or the dead.

us could have done, into a chaplet. I remember the curious winding, wandering air she had been singing (without any words, as usual) over her business, and how she touched each flower first with her lips, and then brushed it lightly across her bosom before she wove it in. She had kept her eyes on me as she did it, looking up from under her brows, as if to see whether I knew what she was about.

"I don't doubt now but that she was bewitching Florrie by this curious performance, which every flower had to undergo separately; but, fool that I was, I thought nothing of it at the time, and bicycled off to Salisbury leaving them there.

"At noon my poor wife came to me at the Bank distracted with anxiety and fatigue. She had run most of the way, she gave me to understand. Her news was that Florrie and Bran could not be found anywhere. She said that she had gone to the gate of the meadow to call the child in, and not seeing her, or getting any answer, she had gone down to the river at the bottom. Here she had found a few picked wild flowers, but no other traces. There were no footprints in the mud, either of child or dog. Having spent the morning with some of the neighbours in a fruitless search, she had now come to me.

"My heart was like lead, and shame prevented

me from telling her the truth as I was sure it must be. But my own conviction of it clogged all my efforts. Of what avail could it be to inform the police or organise search-parties, knowing what I knew only too well? However, I did put Gulliver in communication with the head-office in Sarum, and everything possible was done. We explored a circuit of six miles about Wishford; every fold of the hills, every spinney, every hedgerow was thoroughly examined. But that first night of grief had broken down my shame: I told my wife the whole truth in the presence of Reverend Richard Walsh, the Congregational minister, and in spite of her absolute incredulity, and, I may add, scorn, next morning I repeated it to Chief Inspector Notcutt of Salisbury. Particulars got into the local papers by the following Saturday; and next I had to face the ordeal of the *Daily Chronicle*, *Daily News*, *Daily Graphic*, *Star*, and other London journals. Most of these newspapers sent representatives to lodge in the village, many of them with photographic cameras. All this hateful notoriety I had brought upon myself, and did my best to bear like the humble, contrite Christian which I hope I may say I have become. We found no trace of our dear one, and never have to this day. Bran, too, had completely vanished. I have not cared to keep a dog since.

"Whether my dear wife ever believed my account I cannot be sure. She has never reproached me for my wicked thoughtlessness, that's certain. Mr. Walsh, our respected pastor, who has been so kind as to read this paper, told me more than once that he could hardly doubt it. The Salisbury police made no comments upon it one way or another. My colleagues at the Bank, out of respect for my grief and sincere repentance, treated me with a forbearance for which I can never be too grateful. I need not add that every word of this is absolutely true. I made notes of the most remarkable characteristics of the being I called Thumbeline *at the time of remarking them*, and those notes are still in my possession."

Here, with the exception of a few general reflections which are of little value, Mr. Beckwith's paper ends. It was read, I ought to say, by the Rev. Richard Walsh at the meeting of the South Wilts Folk-lore Society and Field Club held at Amesbury in June 1892, and is to be found in the published transactions of that body (Vol. IV. New Series, pp. 305 *seq.*).

THERE is nothing surprising in that story, to my mind, but the reprobation with which Beckwith visits himself. What could he have done that he did not? How could he have refrained from doing what he did? Yet there are curious things about it, and one of those is the partiality of the manifestation. The fairy was visible to him, his child and his dogs but to no one else. So, in my own experience, had she been whom I saw in K——— Park, whom Harkness, my companion, did not see. My explanation of it does not carry me over all the difficulties. I say, or will repeat if I have said it before, that the fairy kind are really the spirit, essence, substance (what you will) of certain sensible things, such as trees, flowers, wind, water, hills, woods, marshes and the like, that their normal appearance to us is that of these natural phenomena; but that in certain states of mind, perhaps in certain conditions of body, there is a relation established by which we are able to see them on our own terms, as it were, or in our own idiom, and they also to treat with us to some

extent, to a large extent, on the same plane or standing-ground. That there are limitations to this relationship is plain already; for instance, Beckwith was not able to get his fairy prisoner to speak, and I myself have never had speech with more than one in my life. But as to that I shall have a very curious case to report shortly, where a man taught his fairy-wife to speak.

The mentioning of that undoubted marriage brings me to the question of sex. There is, of course, not the slightest doubt about it. Mrs. Ventris was a fairy wife. Mrs. Ventris was a puzzle to me for a good many years—in fact until Despoina explained to me many things. For Mrs. Ventris had a permanent human shape, and spoke as freely as you or I. I thought at one time that she might be the offspring of a mixed marriage, like Elsie Marks (whose mother, by the way, was another case of the sort); but in fact Mrs. Ventris and Mrs. Marks were both fairy wives, and the wood-girl, Mabilla King, whose case I am going to deal with was another. But this particular relationship is one which my explanation of fairy apparitions does not really cover: for marriage implies a permanent accessibility (to put it so) of two normally inaccessible natures; and parentage implies very much more. That, indeed, implies what the Christians call Miracle; but it is quite beyond

dispute. I have a great number of cases ready to my hand, and shall deal at large with all of them in the course of this essay, in which fairies have had intercourse with mortals. It is by no means the fact that the wife is always of the fairy-kind. My own experience at C——— shall prove that. But I must content myself with mentioning the well-known case of Mary Wellwood who was wife to a carpenter near Ashby de la Zouche, and was twice taken by a fairy and twice recovered. She had children in each of her states of being, and on one recorded occasion her two families met. It appears to be a law that the wife takes the nature of the husband, or as much of it as she can, and it is important to remark that *in all cases* the children are of the husband's nature, fairy or mortal as he may happen to be. "Nature," Despoina told me, "follows the male." So far as fairies are concerned it seems certain that union with mortals runs in families or clans, if one may so describe their curious relationships to each other. There were five sisters of the wood in one of the Western departments of France (Lot-et-Garonne, I think), who all married men: two of them married two brothers. Apart they led the decorous lives of the French middle class, but when they were together it was a sight to see! A curious one, and to us, with our strong asso-

ciations of ideas, that tremendous hand which memory has upon our heart-strings, a poignant one. For they had lost their powers, but not their impulses. It was a case of *si vieillesse pouvait*. I suppose they may have appeared to some chance wayfarer, getting a glimpse of them at their gambols between the poplar stems of the road, or in the vistas of the hazel-brakes, as a company of sprightly matrons on a frolic. To the Greeks foolishness! And be sure that such an observer would shrug them out of mind. My own impression is that these ladies were perfectly happy, that they had nothing of that *maggior' dolore* which we mortals know, and for which our joys have so often to pay. Let us hope so at any rate, for about a fairy or a growing boy conscious of the prison-shades could Poe have spun his horrors.

"To the Greeks foolishness," I said in my haste; but in very truth it was far from being so. To the Greeks there was nothing extraordinary in the parentage of a river or the love of a God for a mortal. Nor should there be to a Christian who accepts the orthodox account of the foundation of his faith. So far as we know, the generative process of every created thing is the same; it is, therefore, an allowable inference that the same process obtains with the created things which are not sensible to ourselves. If flowers mate and beget as we do, why not winds

and waters, why not gods and nymphs, fauns and fairies? It is the creative urgency that imports more than the creative matter. To my mind, *magna componere parvis*, it is my fixed belief that all created nature known to us is the issue of the mighty love of God for his first-made creature the Earth. I accept the Greek mythology as the nearest account of the truth we are likely to get. I have never had the least difficulty in accepting it; and all I have since found out of the relations of men with their fellow-creatures of other genera confirms me in the belief that the urgency is the paramount necessity.

If I am to deal with a case of a mixed marriage, where the wife was a fairy, the spirit of a tree, I shall ask leave to set down first a plain proposition, which is that all Natural Facts (as wind, hills, lakes, trees, animals, rain, rivers, flowers) have an underlying Idea or Soul whereby they really are what they appear, to which they owe the beauty, majesty, pity, terror, love, which they excite in us; and that this Idea, or Soul, having a real existence of its own in community with its companions of the same nature, can be discerned by mortal men in forms which best explain to human intelligence the passions which they excite in human breasts. This is how I explain the fact, for instance, that the austerity of a lonely rock at sea will take the form and semblance, and much

more than that, assume the prerogatives of a brooding man, or that the swift freedom of a river will pass by, as in a flash, in the coursing limbs of a youth, or that at dusk, out of a reed-encircled mountain-tarn, silvery under the hush of the grey hour, there will rise, and gleam, and sink again, the pale face, the shoulders and breast of the Spirit of the Pool; that, finally, the grace of a tree, and its panic of fury when lashed by storm, very capable in either case of inspiring love or horror, will be revealed rarely in the form of a nymph. There may be a more rational explanation of these curious things, but I don't know of one:

Fortunatus et ille, Deos qui novit agrestes!

Happy may one be in the fairies of our own country. Happy, even yet, are they who can find the Oreads of the hill, Dryads of the wood, nymphs of river, marsh, plough-land, pasture, and heath. Now, leaving to Greece the things that are Greek, here for an apologue follows a plain recital of facts within the knowledge of every man of the Cheviots.

I

There is in that country, not far from Otterburn —between Otterburn and the Scottish border—a remote hamlet consisting of a few white cottages, farm

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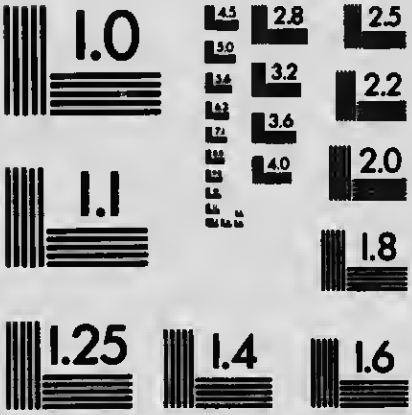

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buildings and a shingle-spired church. It is called Dryhope, and lies in a close valley, which is watered by a beck or burn, known as the Dryhope Burn. It is deeply buried in the hills. Spurs of the Cheviots as these are, they rise to a considerable elevation, but are pasturable nearly to the top. There, however, where the heather begins, peat-hags and morasses make dangerous provision, from which the flocks are carefully guarded. It is the practice of the country for the shepherds to be within touch of them all night, lest some, feeding upward (as sheep always do) should reach the summits and be lost or mired inextricably. These upland stretches, consequently, are among the most desolate spots to be found in our islands. I have walked over them myself within recent years and met not a human soul, nor beast of man's taming. Ravens, curlews, peewits, a lagging fox or limping hare; such, with the unsensed Spirits of the Earth, will be your company. In particular I traversed (in 1902) the great upland called Limmer Fell, and saw the tarn—Silent Water—and the trees called The Seven Sisters. They are silver birches of remarkable size and beauty. One of them is fallen. Standing there, looking north-west, the Knapp may be seen easily, some five miles away; and the extent of the forest with which it is covered can be estimated. A great

and solemn wood that is, which no borderer will ever enter if he can help it.

There was—and may be still—a family of shepherds living in Dryhope of the name of King. When these things occurred there were alive George King, a patriarch of seventy-five years, Miranda King, his daughter-in-law, widow of his son, who was supposed to be a middle-aged woman, and a young man, Andrew King, her only son. That was the family; and there was a girl, Bessie Prawle, daughter of a neighbour, very much in and out of the house, and held by common report to be betrothed to Andrew. She used to help the widow in domestic matters, see to the poultry, milk the cow, churn the butter, press the cheeses. The Kings were independent people, like the dalesmen of Cumberland, and stood, as the saying is, upon their own foot-soles. Old King had a tenant-right upon the fell, and owed no man anything.

There was said to be a mystery connected with Miranda the widow, who was a broad-browed, deep-breasted, handsome woman, very dark and silent. She was not a native of Redesdale, not known to be of Northumberland. Her husband, who had been a sailor, had brought her back with him one day, saying that she was his wife and her name Miranda. He had said no more about her, would say no more,

and had been drowned at sea before his son was born. She, for her part, had been as uncommunicative as he. Such reticence breeds wonderment in the minds of such a people as they of Dryhope, and out of wonderment arise wonders. It was told that until Miranda King was brought in sea-birds had never been seen in Dryhopedale. It was said that they came on that very night when George King the younger came home, and she with him, carrying his bundle and her own. It was said that they had never since left the hamlet, and that when Miranda went out of doors, which was seldom, she was followed by clouds of them whichever way she turned. I have no means of testing the truth of these rumours, but, however it may be, no scandal was ever brought against her. She was respectable and respected. Old King, the grandfather, relied strongly upon her judgment. She brought up her son in decent living and the fear of God.

In the year when Andrew was nineteen he was a tall, handsome lad, and a shepherd, following the profession, as he was to inherit the estate, of his forebears. One April night in that year he and his grandfather, the pair of them with a collie, lay out on the fell-side together. Lambing is late in Redesdale, the spring comes late; April is often a month of snow.

They had a fire and their cloaks; the ground was dry, and they lay upon it under a clear sky strewn with stars. At midnight George King, the grandfather, was asleep, but Andrew was broad awake. He heard the flock (which he could not see) sweep by him like a storm, the bell-wether leading, and as they went up the hill the wind began to blow, a long, steady, following blast. The collie on his feet, ears set flat on his head, shuddering with excitement, whined for orders. Andrew, after waking with difficulty his grandfather, was told to go up and head them off. He sent the dog one way—off in a flash, he never returned that night—and himself went another. He was not seen again for two days. To be exact, he set out at midnight on Thursday the 12th April, and did not return to Dryhope until eleven o'clock of the morning of Saturday the 14th. The sheep, I may say here, came back by themselves on the 13th, the intervening day.

That night of the 12th April is still commemorated in Dryhope as one of unexampled spring storm, just as a certain October night of the next year stands yet as the standard of comparison for all equinoctial gales. The April storm, we hear, was very short and had several peculiar features. It arose out of a clear sky, blew up a snow-cloud which did no more than powder the hills, and then continued to blow

furiously out of a clear sky. It was steady but inconceivably strong while it lasted; the force and pressure of the wind did not vary until just the end. It came from the south-east, which is the rainy quarter in Northumberland, but without rain. It blew hard from midnight, until three o'clock in the morning, and then, for half an hour, a hurricane. The valley and hamlet escaped as by a miracle. Mr. Robson, the vicar, awakened by it, heard the wind like thunder overhead and went out of doors to observe it. He went out into a still, mild air coming from the north-west, and still heard it roaring like a mad thing high above him. Its direction, as he judged by sound, was the precise contrary of the ground current. In the morning, wreckage of all kinds, branches of trees, roots, and whole clumps of heather strewn about the village and meadows, while showing that a furious battle had been fought out on the fells, confirmed this suspicion. A limb of a tree, draped in ivy, was recognised as part of an old favourite of his walks. The ash from which it had been torn stood to the south-east of the village. In the course of the day (the 13th) news was brought in that one of the Seven Sisters was fallen, and that a clean drive could be seen through the forest on the top of Knapp. Coupled with these dreadful testimonies you have the disappearance of Andrew King

to help you form your vision of a village in consternation.

Hear now what befell young Andrew King when he swiftly climbed the fell, driven forward by the storm. The facts are that he was agog for adventure, since, all unknown to any but himself, he had ventured to the summits before, had stood by Silent Water, touched the Seven Sisters one by one, and had even entered the dreadful, haunted, forest of Knapp. He had had a fright, had been smitten by that sudden gripe of fear which palsies limbs and freezes blood, which the ancients called the Stroke of Pan, and we still call Panic after them. He had never forgotten what he had seen, though he had lost the edge of the fear he had. He was older now by some two years, and only waiting the opportunity for renewed experience. He hoped to have it—and he had it.

The streaming gale drove him forward as a ship at sea. He ran lightly, without fatigue or troubled breath. Dimly above him he presently saw the seven trees, dipping and louting to the weather; but as he neared them they had no meaning for him, did not, indeed, exist. For now he saw more than they, and otherwise than men see trees.

II

In a mild and steady light, which came from no illumination of moon or stars, but seemed to be interfused with the air, in the strong warm wind which wrapped the fell-top; upon a sward of bent-grass which ran toward the tarn and ended in swept reeds he saw six young women dancing in a ring. Not to any music that he could hear did they move, nor was the rhythm of their movement either ordered or wild. It was not formal dancing, and it was not at all a Bacchic rout: rather they flitted hither and thither on the turf, now touching hands, now straining heads to one another, crossing, meeting, parting, winding about and about with the purposeless and untirable frivolity of moths. They seemed neither happy nor unhappy, they made no sound; it looked to the lad as if they had been so drifting from the beginning, and would so drift to the end of things temporal. Their loose hair streamed out in the wind, their light gossamer gowns streamed the same way, whipped about their limbs as close as wet muslin. They were bare-footed, bare-armed, and bare-headed. They all had beauty, but it was not of earthly cast. He saw one with hair like pale silk, and one, ruddy and fierce in the face, with snaky black hair which, he thought, flew out beyond her

for a full yard's measure. Another had hazel-brown hair and a sharp little peering face; another's was colour of ripe corn, and another's like a thunder-cloud, copper-tinged. About and about they went, skimming the tops of the grasses, and Andrew King, his heart hammering at his ribs, watched them at their play. So by chance one saw him, and screamed shrilly, and pointed at him.

Then they came about him like a swarm of bees, angry at first, humming a note like that of the telegraph wire on a mountain road, but, as he stood his ground, curiosity prevailed among them and they pried closely at him. They touched him, felt his arms, his knees, handled his clothing, peered into his eyes. All this he endured, though he was in a horrible fright. Then one, the black-haired girl with a bold, proud face, came and stood closely before him and looked him full into his eyes. He gave her look for look. She put a hand on each shoulder and kissed him. After that there was a tussle among them, for each must do what her sister had done. They took a kiss apiece, or maybe more; then, circling round him, they swept him forward on the wind, past Silent Water, over the Edge, out on the fells, on and on and on, and never stopped till they reached Knapp Forest, that dreadful place.

There in the hushed aisles and glades they played

with this new-found creature, played with him, fought for him, and would have loved him if he had been minded for such adventuring. Two in particular he marked as desiring his closer company—the black-haired and bold was one, and the other was the sharp-faced and slim with eyes of a mouse and hazel-brown hair. He called her the laughing girl and thought her the kindest of them all. But they were all his friends at this time. Andrew King, like young Tamlane, might have sojourned with them for ever and a day, but for one thing. He saw by chance a seventh maiden—a white-faced, woe-begone, horror-struck Seventh Sister, blenched and frozen under a great beech. She may have been there throughout his commerce with the rest, or she may have been revealed to him in a flash then and there. So as it was he saw her suddenly, and thereafter saw no other at all. She held his eyes waking; he left his playmates and went to her where she crouched. He stooped and took her hand. It was as cold as a dead girl's and very heavy. Amid the screaming of the others, undeterred by their whirling and battling, he lifted up the frozen one. He lifted her bodily and carried her in his arms. They swept all about him like infuriated birds. The sound of their rage was like that of gulls about a fish in the tide-way; but they laid no hands on him, and said nothing that he

could understand, and by this time his awe was gone, and his heart was on fire. Holding fast to what he had and wanted, he pushed out of Knapp Forest and took the lee-side of the Edge on his way to Dryhope. This must have been about the time of the gale at its worst. The Seventh Sister by Silent Water may have fallen at this time; for had not Andrew King the Seventh Sister in his arms?

Anxiety as to the fate of Andrew King was spread over the village and the greatest sympathy felt for the bereaved family. To have lost a flock of sheep, a dog, and an only child at one blow is a terrible misfortune. Old King, I am told, was prostrated, and the girl, Bessie Prawle, violent in her lamentations over her "lad." The only person unmoved was the youth's mother, Miranda King the widow. She, it seems, had no doubts of his safety, and declared that he "would come in his time, like his father before him"—a saying which, instead of comforting the mourners, appears to have exasperated them. Probably they did not at all understand it. Such consolations as Mr. Robson the minister had to offer she received respectfully, but without comment. All she had to say was that she could trust her son; and when he urged that she had better by far trust in God, her reply, finally and shortly, was that God was bound by His own laws and had not given us

heads and hearts for nothing. I am free to admit that her theology upon this point seems to me remarkably sound.

In the course of the 13th, anxious day as it promised to be, old George King, returning from a fruitless quest over the fells, came upon his sheep within a few hundred yards of his own house, collected together in a flock and under the watch of his dog. They were, in fact, as nearly as possible where he had understood them to be before their stampede of the previous night. He was greatly heartened by the discovery, though unable to account for the facts of it. The dog was excessively tired, and ate greedily. Next morning, when the family and some neighbours were standing together on the fell-side looking up the valley where the Dryhope burn comes down from the hills, they saw two figures on the rough road which follows it. Mrs. King, the widow, I believe, had seen them first, but she had said nothing. It was Bessie Prawle who raised the first cry that "Andrew was coming, and his wife with him." All looked in the direction she showed them and recognised the young man. Behind him walked the figure of a woman. This is the accustomed manner of a man and wife to walk in that country. It is almost a proof of their relationship. Being satisfied of the identity of their child the whole party returned to

the homestead to await him and what he was bringing with him. Speculation was rife and volubly expressed, especially by Bessie Prawle. Miranda King, however, was silent; but it was noticed that she kept her eyes fixed upon the woman behind her son, and that her lips moved as if she was muttering to herself.

The facts were as the expectations. Andrew King brought forward a young, timid and unknown girl as his wife. By that name he led her up to his grandfather, then to his mother; as such he explained her to his neighbours, including (though not by name) Bessie Prawle, who had undoubtedly hoped to occupy that position herself.

Old King, overcome with joy at seeing his boy alive and well, and dazed, probably, by events, put his hands upon the girl's head and blessed her after the patriarchal fashion there persisting. He seems to have taken canonical marriage for granted, though nobody else did, and though a moment's reflection, had he been capable of so much, would have shown him that that could not be. The neighbours were too well disposed to the family to raise any doubts or objections; Bessie Prawle was sullen and quiet; only Miranda King seems to have been equal to the occasion. She, as if in complete possession of facts which satisfied every question, received the girl as an equal. She did not kiss her or touch her, but looked deeply

into her eyes for a long space of time, and took from her again an equally searching regard; then, turning to her father-in-law and the company at large, she said, "This is begun, and will be done. He is like his father before him." To that oracular utterance old King, catching probably but the last sentence, replied, "And he couldn't do better, my child." He meant no more than a testimony to his daughter-in-law. Mrs. King's observations, coupled with that, nevertheless, went far to give credit to the alleged marriage.

The girl, so far, had said nothing whatever, though she had been addressed with more than one rough but kindly compliment on her youth and good looks. And now Andrew King explained that she was dumb. Consternation took the strange form of jocular approval of his discretion in selecting a wife who could never nag him—but it was consternation none the less. The mystery was felt to be deeper; there was nothing for it now but to call in the aid of the parish priest—"the minister," as they called him—and this was done. By the time he had arrived, Miranda King had taken the girl into the cottage, and the young husband and his grandfather had got the neighbours to disperse. Bessie Prawle, breathing threatenings and slaughter, had withdrawn herself.

Mr. Robson, a quiet sensible man of nearer sixty

than fifty years, sat in the cottage, hearing all that his parishioners could tell him and using his eyes. He saw the centre-piece of all surmise, a shrinking, pale slip of a girl, by the look of her not more than fifteen or sixteen years old. She was not emaciated by any means, seemed to be well nourished, and was quite as vigorous as any child of that age who could have been pitted against her. Her surroundings cowed her, he judged. To Dryhope she was a stranger, a foreigner; to her Dryhope and the Dryhopedale folk were perilous matter. Her general appearance was that of a child who had never had anything but ill-usage; she flinched at every sudden movement, and followed one about with her great unintelligent eyes, as if she was trying to comprehend what they showed her. Her features were regular and delicate; her brows broad and eyebrows finely arched, her chin full, her neck slim, her hands and feet narrow and full of what fanciers call "breed." Her hair was very long and fine, dark brown with gleams of gold; her eyes were large, grey in colour, but, as I have said, unintelligent, like an animal's, which to us always seem unintelligent. I should have mentioned, for Mr. Robson noticed it at once, that her hair was unconfined, and that, so far as he could make out, she wore but a single garment—a sleeveless frock, confined at the waist and reaching

to her knees. It was of the colour of unbleached flax and of a coarse web. Her form showed through, and the faint flush of her skin. She was a finely made girl. Her legs and feet were bare. Immodest as such an appearance would have been in one of the village maids, he did not feel it to be so with her. Her look was so entirely foreign to his experience that there was no standard of comparison. Everything about her seemed to him to be quite what one would have expected, until one came, so to speak, in touch with her soul. That, if it lay behind her inscrutable, sightless and dumb eyes, betrayed her. There was no hint of it. Human in form, visibly and tangibly human, no soul sat in her great eyes that a man could discern. That, however, is not now the point. Rather it is that, to all appearance a modest and beautiful girl, she was remarkably undressed. It was inconceivable that a modest and beautiful girl could so present herself, and yet a modest and beautiful girl she was.

Mr. Robson put it to himself this way. There are birds—for instance, jays, kingfishers, goldfinches—which are, taken absolutely, extremely brilliant in colouring. Yet they do not jar, are not obtrusive. So it was with her. Her dress was, perhaps, taken absolutely, indecorous. Upon her it looked at once seemly and beautiful. Upon Bessie Prawle it would

have been glaring; but one had to dissect it before one could discover any fault with it upon its wearer. She was very pale, even to the lips, which were full and parted, as if she must breathe through her mouth. He noticed immediately the shortness of her breath. It was very distressing, and after a little while induced the same thing in himself. And not in him only, but I can fancy that the whole group of them sitting round her where she was crouched against Miranda King's knees, were panting away like steam-engines before they had done with her. While Mr. Robson was there Miranda never took her arm off her shoulder for a moment; but the girl's eyes were always fixed upon Andrew, who called himself her husband, unless her apprehensions were directly called elsewhere. In that case she would look in the required direction for the fraction of a second, terrified and ready, as you may say, to die at a movement, and then, her fears at rest, back to her husband's face.

Mr. Robson's first business was to examine Andrew King, a perfectly honest, well-behaved lad, whom he had known from his cradle. He was candid—up to a point. He had found her on the top of Knapp Fell, he said; she had been with others, who ill-treated her. What others? Others of her sort. Fairies, he said, who lived up there. He pressed

him about this. Fairies? Did he really believe in such beings? Like all country people he spoke about these things with the utmost difficulty, and when confronted by worldly wisdom, became dogged. He said how could he help it when here was one? Mr. Robson told him that he was begging the question, but he looked very blank. To the surprise of the minister, old King—old George King, the grandfather—had no objections to make to the suggestion of fairies on Knapp Fell. He could not say, there was no telling; Knapp was a known place; strange things were recorded of the forest. Miranda, his daughter-in-law, was always a self-contained woman, with an air about her of being forewarned. He instanced her, and the minister asked her several questions. Being pressed, she finally said, "Sir, my son is as likely right as wrong. We must all make up our own minds." There that matter had to be left.

Andrew said that he had followed the fairies from the tarn on Lammer Fell into Knapp Forest. They had run away from him, taking this girl of his, as he supposed, with them. He had followed them because he meant to have her. They knew that, so had run. Why did he want her? He said that he had seen her before. When? Oh, long ago—when he had been up there alone. He had seen her face among the trees for a moment. They had been hurt-

ing her; she looked at him, she was frightened, but couldn't cry out—only look and ask. He had never forgotten her; her looks had called him often, and he had kept his eyes wide open. Now, when he had found her again, he determined to have her. And at last, he said, he had got her. He had had to fight for her, for they had been about him like hell-cats and had jumped at him as if they would tear him to pieces, and screamed and hissed like cats. But when he had got her in his arms they had all screamed together, once—like a howling wind—and had flown away.

What next? Here he became obstinate, as if foreseeing what was to be. What next? He had married her. Married her! How could he marry a fairy on the top of Knapp Fell? Was there a church there, by chance? Had a licence been handy? "Let me see her lines, Andrew," Mr. Robson had said somewhat sternly in conclusion. [illegible]'s answer had been to lift up her left hand and sh[illegible]che thin third finger. It carried a ring, made of plaited rush. "I put that on her," he said, "and said all the words over her out of the book." "And you think you have married her, Andrew?" It was put to him *ex cathedrâ*. He grew very red and was silent; presently he said, "Well, sir, I do think so. But she's not my wife yet, if that's what you mean." The

good gentleman felt very much relieved. It was satisfactory to him that he could still trust his worthy young parishioner.

Entirely under the influence of Miranda King, he found the family unanimous for a real wedding. To that there were two objections to make. He could not put up the banns of a person without a name, and would not marry a person unbaptised. Now, to baptise an adult something more than sponsors are requisite; there must be voluntary assent to the doctrines of religion by the postulant. In this case, how to be obtained? He saw no way, since it was by no means plain to him that the girl could understand a word that was said. He left the family to talk it over among themselves, saying, as he went out of the door, that his confidence in their principles was so strong that he was sure they would sanction no step which would lead the two young people away from the church door.

In the morning Miranda King came to him with a report that matters had been arranged and only needed his sanction. "I can trust my son, and see him take her with a good conscience," she told him. "She's not one of his people, but she's one of mine; and what I have done she can do, and is willing to do."

The clergyman was puzzled. "What do you

mean by that, Mrs. King?" he asked her. "What are *your people?* How do they differ from mine, or your husband's?"

She hesitated. "Well, sir, in this way. She hasn't got your tongue, nor my son's tongue."

"She has none at all," said the minister; but Miranda replied, "She can talk without her tongue."

"Yes, my dear," he said, "but I cannot."

"But I can," was her answer; "she can talk to me—and will talk to you; but not yet. She's dumb for a season, she's struck so. My son will give her back her tongue—by-and-by."

He was much interested. He asked Miranda to tell him who had struck her dumb. For a long time she would not answer. "We don't name him—it's not lawful. He that has the power—the Master—I can go no nearer." He urged her to openness, got her at last to mention "The King of the Wood." The King of the Wood! There she stuck, and nothing he could say could move her from that name, The King of the Wood.

He left it so, knowing his people, and having other things to ask about. What tongue or speech had the respectable, the staid Miranda King in common with the scared waif? To that she answered that she could not tell him; but that it was certain they could understand each other. How? "By

looks," she said, and added scornfully, "she's not the kind that has to clatter with her tongue to have speech with her kindred."

Miranda, then, was a kinswoman! He showed his incredulity, and the woman flushed. "See here, Mr. Robson," she said, "I am of the sea, and she of the fell, but we are the same nation. We are not of yours, but you can make us so. Directly I saw her I knew what she was; and so did she know me. How? By the eyes and understanding. I felt who she was. As she is now so was I once. As I am now so will she be. I'll answer for her; I'm here to do it. When once I'd followed my man I never looked back; no more will she. The woman obeys the man—that's the law. If a girl of your people was taken with a man of mine she'd lose her speech and forsake her home and ways. That's the law all the world over. God Almighty's self, if He were a woman, would do the same. He couldn't help it. The law is His; but He made it so sure that not Himself could break it."

"What law do you mean?" she was asked. She said, "The law of life. The woman follows the man."

This proposition he was not prepared to deny, and the end of it was that Mr. Robson baptised the girl, taking Miranda for godmother. Mabilla they called her by her sponsor's desire, "Mabilla By-the-

Wood," and as such she was published and married. You may be disposed to blame him for lightness of conscience, but I take leave to tell you that he had had the cure of souls in Dryhope for five-and-thirty years. He claimed on that score to know his people. The more he knew of them, the less he was able to question the lore of such an one as Miranda King. And he might remind you that Mabilla King is alive to this hour, a wife and mother of children. That is a fact, and it is also a fact, as I am about to tell you, that she had a hard fight to win such peace.

Married, made a woman, she lost her haunted look and gained some colour in her cheeks. She lost her mortal chill. Her clothing, the putting up of her hair made some difference, but loving entreaty all the difference in the world. To a casual glance there was nothing but refinement to distinguish her from her neighbours, to a closer one there was more than that. Her eyes, they said, had the far, intent, rapt gaze of a wild animal. They seemed to search minutely, reaching beyond our power of vision, to find there things beyond our human ken. But whereas the things which she looked at, invisible to us, caused her no dismay, those within our range, the most ordinary and commonplace, filled her with alarm. Her eyes, you may say, communed with the unseen, and her soul followed their direction and dwelt remote

from her body. She was easily startled, not only by what she saw but by what she heard. Nobody was ever more sensitive to sound. They say that a piano-tuner goes not by sound, but by the vibrations of the wire, which he is able to test without counting. It was so with her. She seemed to feel the trembling of the circumambient air, and to know by its greater or less intensity that something—and very often what thing in particular—was affecting it. All her senses were preternaturally acute—she could see incredible distances, hear, smell, in a way that only wild nature can. Added to these, she had another sense, whereby she could see what was hidden from us and understand what we could not even perceive. One could guess as much, on occasions, by the absorbed intensity of her gaze. But when she was with her husband (which was whenever he would allow it) she had no eyes, ears, senses or thoughts for any other living thing, seen or unseen. She followed him about like a dog, and when that might not be her eyes followed him. Sometimes, when he was afield with his sheep, they saw her come out of the cottage and slink up the hedgerow to the fell's foot. She would climb the brae, search him out, and then crouch down and sit watching him, never taking her eyes off him. When he was at home her favourite place was at his feet. She would sit hud-

dled there for hours, and his hand would fall upon her hair or rest on her shoulder; and you could see the pleasure thrilling her, raying out from her—just as you can see, as well as hear, a cat purring by the fire. He used to whisper in her ear as if she was a child: like a child she used to listen and wonder. Whether she understood him or no it was sometimes the only way of soothing her. Her trembling stopped at the sound of his voice, and her eyes left off staring and showed the glow of peace. For whole long evenings they sat close together, his hand upon her hair and his low voice murmuring in her ear.

This much the neighbours report and the clergyman confirms, as also that all went well with the young couple for the better part of two years. The girl grew swiftly towards womanhood, became sleek and well-liking; had a glow and a promise of ripeness which bid fair to be redeemed. A few omens, however, remained, disquieting when those who loved her thought of them. One was that she got no human speech, though she understood everything that was said to her; another that she showed no signs of motherhood; a third that Bessie Prawle could not abide her. She alone of all the little community avoided the King household, and scowled whensoever she happened to cross the path of this gentle outland girl. Jealousy was presumed the

cause; but I think there was more in it than that. I think that Bessie Prawle believed her to be a witch.

III

To eyes prepared for coming disaster things small in themselves loom out of a clear sky portentous. Such eyes had not young Andrew King the bridegroom, a youth made man by love, secure in his treasure and confident in his power of keeping what his confidence had won. Such eyes may or may not have had Mabilla, though hers seemed to be centred in her husband, where he was or where he might be. George King was old and looked on nothing but his sheep, or the weather as it might affect his sheep. Miranda King, the self-contained, stoic woman, had schooled her eyes to see her common duties. Whatever else she may have seen she kept within the door of her shut lips. She may have known what was coming, she must have known that whatever came had to come. Bessie Prawle, however, with hatred, bitter fear and jealousy to sharpen her, saw much.

Bessie Prawle was a handsome, red-haired girl, deep in the breast, full-eyed and of great colour. Her strength was remarkable. She could lift a heifer into a cart, and had once, being dared to it, carried Andrew King up the brae in her arms. The

young man, she supposed, owed her a grudge for that; she believed herself unforgiven, and saw in this sudden marriage of his a long-meditated act of revenge. By that in her eyes (and as she thought, in the eyes of all Dryhope) he had ill-requited her, put her to unthinkable shame. She saw herself with her favours of person and power passed over for a nameless, haunted, dumb thing, a stray from some other world into a world of men, women, and the children they rear to follow them. She scorned Mabilla for flinching so much, she scorned her for not flinching more. That Mabilla could be desirable to Andrew King made her scoff; that Andrew King should not know her dangerous kept her awake at night.

For the world seemed to her a fearful place since Mabilla had been brought into it. There were signs everywhere. That summer it thundered out of a clear sky. Once in the early morning she had seen a bright light above the sun—a mock sun which shone more fiercely than a fire in daylight. She heard wild voices singing; on still days she saw the trees in Knapp Forest bent to a furious wind. When Mabilla crept up the fell on noiseless feet to spy for Andrew King, Bessie Prawle heard the bents hiss and crackle under her, as if she set them afire.

Next summer, too, there were portents. There

was a great drought, so great that Dryhope burn ran dry, and water had to be fetched from a distance for the sheep. There were heather fires in many places; smut got into the oats, and a plague of caterpillars attacked the trees so that in July they were leafless, and there was no shade. There was no pasture for the kine, which grew lean and languid. Their bones stuck out through their skin; they moaned as they lay on the parched earth, and had not strength enough to swish at the clouds of flies. They had sores upon them, which festered and spread. If Mabilla, the nameless wife, was not responsible for this, who could be? Perhaps Heaven was offended with Dryhope on account of Andrew King's impiety. Bessie believed that Mabilla was a witch.

She followed the girl about, spying on everything she did. Once, at least, she came upon her lying in the heather. She was plaiting rushes together into a belt, and Bessie thought she was weaving a spell and sprang upon her. The girl cowered, very white, and Bessie Prawle, her heart on fire, gave tongue to all her bitter thoughts. The witch-wife, fairy-wife, child or whatever she was seemed to wither as a flower in a hot wind. Bessie Prawle towered above her in her strength, and gained invective with every fierce breath she took. Her blue eyes burned, her bosom heaved like the sea; her arm bared to the

shoulder could have struck a man down. Yet in the midst of her frenzied speech, in full flow, she faltered. Her fists unclenched themselves, her arm dropped nerveless, her eyes sought the ground. Andrew King, pale with rage, sterner than she had ever seen him, stood before her.

He looked at her with deadly calm.

"Be out of this," he said; "you degrade yourself. Never let me see you again." Before she had shrunk away he had stooped to the huddled creature at his feet, had covered her with his arms and was whispering urgent comfort in her ear, caressing her with voice and hands. Bessie Prawle could not show herself to the neighbours for the rest of the summer and early autumn. She became a solitary; the neighbours said that she was in a decline.

The drought, with all the troubles it entailed of plague, pestilence and famine, continued through August and September. It did not really break till All-Hallow's, and then, indeed, it did.

The day had been overcast, with a sky of a coppery tinge, and intensely dry heat; a chance puff of wind smote one in the face, hot as the breath of a man in fever. The sheep panted on the ground, their dry tongues far out of their mouths; the beasts lay as if dead, and flies settled upon them in clouds. All the land was of one glaring brown, where the bents

were dry straw, and the heather first burnt and then bleached pallid by the sun. The distance was blurred in a reddish lurid haze; Knapp Fell and its forest were hidden.

Mabilla, the dumb girl, had been restless all day, following Andrew about like a shadow. The heat had made him irritable; more than once he had told her to go home and she had obeyed him for the time, but had always come back. Her looks roamed wide; she seemed always listening; sometimes it was clear that she heard something—for she panted and moved her lips. There was deep trouble in her eyes too; she seemed full of fear. At almost any other time her husband would have noticed it and comforted her. But his nerves, fretted by the long scorching summer, were on this day of fire stretched to the cracking point. He saw nothing, and felt nothing, but his own discomfort.

Out on the parched fellside Bessie Prawle sat like a bird of omen and gloomed at the wrath to come.

Toward dusk a wind came moaning down the valley, raising little spires of dust. It came now down, now up. Sometimes two currents met each other and made momentary riot. But farm-work has to get itself done through fair or foul. It grew dark, the sheep were folded and fed, the cattle were got in, and the family sat together in the kitchen,

silent, preoccupied, the men oppressed and anxious over they knew not what. As for those two aliens, Miranda King and Mabilla By-the-Wood, whatever they knew, one of them made no sign at all, and the other, though she was white, though she shivered and peered about, had no means of voicing her thought.

They had their tea and settled to their evening tasks. The old shepherd dozed over his pipe, Miranda knitted fast, Mabilla stared out of the window into the dark, twisting her hands, and Andrew, with one of his hands upon her shoulder, patted her gently, as if to soothe her. She gave him a grateful look more than once, but did not cease to shiver. Nobody spoke, and suddenly in the silence Mabilla gasped and began to tremble. Then the dog growled under the table. All looked up and about them.

A scattering, pattering sound lashed at the window. Andrew then started up. "Rain!" he said; "that's what we're waiting for," and made to go to the door. Miranda his mother, and Mabilla his young wife, caught him by the frock and held him back. The dog, staring into the window-pane, bristling and glaring, continued to growl. They waited in silence, but with beating hearts.

A loud knock sounded suddenly on the door—a dull, heavy blow, as if one had pounded it with a tree-stump. The dog burst into a panic of barking,

flew to the door and sniffed at the threshold. He whined and scratched frantically with his forepaws. The wind began to blow, coming quite suddenly down, solid upon the wall of the house, shaking it upon its foundations. George King was now upon his feet. "Good God Almighty!" he said, "this is the end of the world!"

The blast was not long-lived. It fell to a murmur. Andrew King, now at the window, could see nothing of the rain. There were no drops upon the glass, nor sound upon the sycamores outside. But even while he looked, and his grandfather, all his senses alert, waited for what was to come, and the two pale women clung together, knowing what was to come, there grew gradually another sound which, because it was familiar, brought their terrors sharply to a point.

It was the sound of sheep in a flock running. It came from afar and grew in volume and distinctness; the innumerable small thudding of sharp hoofs, the rustling of woolly bodies, the volleying of short breath, and that indefinable sense of bustle which massed things produce, passing swiftly.

The sheep came on, panic-driven, voiceless in their fear, but speaking aloud in the wildly clanging bells; they swept by the door of the house with a sound like the rush of water; they disappeared in that flash of sound. Old King cried, "Man, 'tis the sheep!" and

flew for his staff and shoes. Miranda followed to fetch them; but Andrew went to the door as he was, shaking off his clinging wife, unlatched it and let in a gale of wind. The dog shot out like a flame of fire and was gone.

It was as if the wind which was driving the sheep was going to scour the house. It came madly, with indescribable force; it rushed into the house, blew the window-curtains toward the middle of the room, drove the fire outward and set the ashes whirling like snow all about. Andrew King staggered before it a moment, then put his head down and beat his way out. Mabilla shuddering shrank backward to the fireplace and crouched there, waiting. Old King came out booted and cloaked, his staff in his hand, battled to the door and was swept up the brae upon the gale. Miranda did not appear; so Mabilla, white and rigid, was alone in the whirling room.

Creeping to her through the open door, holding to whatever solid thing she could come by, entered Bessie Prawle. In all that turmoil and chill terror she alone was hot. Her grudge was burning in her. She could have killed Mabilla with her eyes.

But she did not, for Mabilla was in the hands of greater and stronger powers. Before Bessie Prawle's shocked eyes she was seen rigid and awake. She was seen to cower as to some threatening shape, then to

stiffen, to mutter with her dry lips, and to grow still, to stare with her wide eyes, and then to see nothing. A glaze swam over her eyes; they were open, but as the eyes of the dead.

Bessie Prawle, horror-struck, stretched out her arms to give her shelter. All her honest humanity was reborn in her in this dreadful hour. "My poor lass, I'll not harm ye," she was saying; but Mabilla had begun to move. She moved as a sleep-walker, seeing but not seeing her way; she moved as one who must, not as one who would. She went slowly as if drawn to the open door. Bessie never tried to stop her; she could not though she would. Slowly as if drawn she went to the door, staring before her, pale as a cloth, rigid as a frozen thing. At the threshold she swayed for a moment in the power of the storm; then she was sucked out like a dried leaf and was no more seen. Overhead, all about the eaves of the house the great wind shrilled mockery and despairing mirth. The fire leapt toward the middle of the room and fell back so much white ash. Bessie Prawle plumped down to her knees, huddled, and prayed.

Andrew King, coming back, found her there at it, alone. His eyes swept the room. "Mabilla! Bessie Prawle, where is Mabilla?" The girl huddled and prayed on. He took her by the shoulder and shook

her to and fro. "You foul wench, you piece, this is your doing." Bessie sobbed her denials, but he would not hear her. Snatching up a staff, he turned, threw her down in his fury. He left the house and followed the wind.

The wind caught him the moment he was outside, and swept him onward whether he would or not. He ran down the bank of the beck which seemed to be racing him for a prize, leaping and thundering level with its banks; before he had time to wonder whether the bridge still stood he was up with it, over it and on the edge of the brae. Up the moorland road he went, carried rather than running, and where it loses itself in the first enclosure, being hard up against the wall, over he vaulted, across the field and over the further wall. Out then upon the open fell, where the heather makes great cushions, and between all of them are bogs or stones, he was swept by the wind. It shrieked about him and carried him up and over as if he were a leaf of autumn. Beyond that was dangerous ground, but there was no stopping; he was caught in the flood of the gale. He knew very well, however, whither it was carrying him: to Knapp, that place of dread, whither he was now sure Mabilla had been carried, resumed by her own people. There was no drawing back, there was no time for prayer. All he could do was to keep his feet.

He was carried down the Dryhope fell, he said, into the next valley, swept somehow over the roaring beck in the bottom, and up the rugged side of Knapp, where the peat-hags are as high as rocks, and presently knew without the help of his eyes that he was nearing the forest. He heard the swishing of the trees, the cracking of the boughs, the sharp crack and crash which told of some limb torn off and sent to ruin; and he knew also by some hush not far off that the wind, great and furious as it was, was to be quieted within that awful place. It was so. He stood panting upon the edge of the wood, out of the wind, which roared away overhead. He twittered with his foolish lips, not knowing what on earth to do, nor daring to do anything had he known it; but all the prayers he had ever learned were driven clean out of his head.

He could dimly make out the tree-trunks immediately before him, low bushes, shelves of bracken-fern; he could pierce somewhat into the gloom beyond and see the solemn trees ranked in their order, and above them a great soft blackness rent here and there to show the sky. The volleying of the storm sounded like the sea heard afar off: it was so remote and steady a noise that lesser sounds were discernible —the rustlings, squeakings, and snappings of small creatures moving over small undergrowth. Every

one of these sent his heart leaping to his mouth; but all his fears were to be swallowed up in amazement, for as he stood there distracted, without warning, without shock, there stood one by him, within touching distance, a child, as he judged it, with loose hair and bright eyes, prying into his face, smiling at him and inviting him to come on.

"Who in God's name ——?" cried Andrew King; but the child plucked him by the coat and tried to draw him into the wood.

I understand that he did not hesitate. If he had forgotten his gods he had not forgotten his fairy-wife. I suppose, too, that he knew where to look for her; he may have supposed that she had been resumed into her first state. At any rate, he made his way into the forest by guess-work, aided by reminiscence. I believe he was accustomed to aver that he "knew where she was very well," and that he took a straight line to her. I have seen Knapp Forest and doubt it. He did, however, find himself in the dark spaces of the wood and there, sure enough, he did also see the women with whom his Mabilla had once been comate. They came about him, he said, like angry cats, hissing and shooting out their lips. They did not touch him; but if eyes and white hateful faces could have killed him, dead he had been then and there.

He called upon God and Christ and made a way through them. His senses had told him where Mabilla was. He found her pale and trembling in an aisle of the trees. She leaned against a tall tree, perfectly rigid, "as cold as a stone," staring across him with frozen eyes, her mouth open like a round O. He took her in his arms and holding her close turned and defied the "witches"—so he called them in his wrath. He dared them in the name of God to touch him or his wife, and as he did so he says that he felt the chill grow upon him. It took him, he said, in the legs and ran up his body. It stiffened his arms till they felt as if they must snap under the strain; it caught him in the neck and fixed it. He felt his eyes grow stiff and hard; he felt himself sway. "Then," he said, "the dark swam over me, the dark and the bitter cold, and I knew nothing more." Questioned as he was by Mr. Robson and his friends, he declared that it was at the name of God the cold got him first. He saw the women hushed and scared, and at the same time one of them looked over her shoulder, as if somebody was coming. Had he called in the King of the Wood? That is what he himself thought. It was the King of the Wood who had come in quest of Mabilla, had pulled her out of the cottage in Dryhope and frozen her in the forest. It was he, no doubt, said Andrew King, who had come

to defy the Christian and his God. I detect here the inspiration of his mother Miranda, the strange sea-woman who knew Mabilla without mortal knowledge and spoke to her in no mortal speech. But the sequel to the tale is a strange one.

Andrew King awoke to find himself in Mabilla's arms, to hear for the first time in his life Mabilla call him softly by his name. "Andrew, my husband," she called him, and when he opened his eyes in wonder to hear her she said, "Andrew, take me home now. It is all over," or words to that effect. They went along the forest and up and down the fells together. The wind had dropped, the stars shone. And together they took up their life where they had dropped it, with one significant omission in its circumstance. Bessie Prawle had disappeared from Dryhope. She had followed him up the fell on the night of the storm, but she came not back. And they say that she never did. Nothing was found of her body, though search was made; but a comb she used to wear was picked up, they say, by the tarn on Limmer Fell, an imitation tortoise-shell comb which used to hold up her hair. Miranda King, who knew more than she would ever tell, had a shrewd suspicion of the truth of the case. But Andrew King knew nothing, and I daresay cared very little. He had his wood-wife, and she had her voice; and be-

tween them, I believe, they had a child within the year.

I ought to add that I have, with these eyes, seen Mabilla By-the-Wood who became Mabilla King. When I went from Dryhopedale to Knapp Forest she stood at the farmhouse door with a child in her arms. Two others were tumbling about in the croft. She was a pretty, serious girl—for she looked quite a girl—with a round face and large greyish-blue eyes. She had a pink cotton dress on, and a good figure beneath it. She was pale, but looked healthy and strong. Not a tall girl. I asked her the best way to Knapp Forest and she came out to the gate to point it to me. She talked simply, with a northern accent, and might have been the child of generations of borderers. She pointed me the very track by which Andrew King must have brought her home, by which the King of the Wood swept her out on the wings of his wrath; she named the tarn where once she dwelt as the spirit of a tree. All this without a flush, a tremor or a sign in her blue eyes that she had ever known the place. But these people are close, and seldom betray all that they know or think.

OREADS

I END this little book with an experience of my own, or rather a series of experiences, and will leave conclusions to a final chapter. I don't say that I have no others which could have found a place—indeed, there are many others. But they were fitful, momentary things, unaccountable and unrelated to each other, without the main clue which in itself is too intimate a thing to be revealed just yet, and I am afraid of compiling a catalogue. I have travelled far and wide across Europe in my day, not without spiritual experiences. If at some future time these co-ordinate into a body of doctrine I will take care to clothe that body in the vesture of print and paper. Here, meantime, is something of recent years.

My house at Broad Chalke stands in a narrow valley, which a little stream waters more than enough. This valley is barely a mile broad throughout its length, and in my village scarcely half so much. I can be in the hills in a quarter of an hour, and in five-and-twenty minutes find myself deeply involved, out of sight of man or his contrivances. The downs

in South Wilts are nowhere lofty, and have none of the abrupt grandeur of those which guard the Sussex coast and weald; but they are of much larger extent, broader, longer, more untrodden, made much more intricate by the numberless creeks and friths which, through some dim cycle of antiquity, the sea, ebbing gradually to the great Avon delta, must have graved. Beautiful, with quiet and a solemn peacefulness of their own, they always are. They endure enormously, *in sæculâ sæculorum*. Storms drive over them, mists and rains blot them out; rarely they are shrouded in a fleece of snow. In spring the clouds and the light hold races up their flanks; in summer they seem to drowse like weary monsters in the still and fervent heat. They are never profoundly affected by such changes of Nature's face; grow not awful, sharing her wrath, nor dangerously fair when she woos them with kisses to love. They are the quiet and sober spokesmen of earth, clad in Quaker greys and drabs. They show no crimson at sunset, no gilded livery at dawn. The grey deepens to cool purple, the brown glows to russet at such festal times. Early in the spring they may drape themselves in tender green, or show their sides dappled with the white of sheep. Flowers they bear, but secretly; little curious orchids, bodied like bees, eyed like spiders, flecked with the blood-drops of Attis or

Adonis or some murdered shepherd-boy; pale scabious, pale cowslip, thyme that breathes sharp fragrance, "aromatic pain," as you crush it, potentilla, lady's slipper, cloudy blue milkwort, toad-flax that shows silver to the wind. Such as these they flaunt not, but wear for choiceness. You would not see them unless you knew them there. For denizens they have the hare, the fox, and the badger. Redwings, wheatears, peewits, and airy kestrels are the people of their skies.

I love above all the solitude they keep, and to feel the pulsing of the untenanted air. The shepherd and his sheep, the limping hare, lagging fox, wheeling, wailing plover; such will be your company: you may dip deeply into valleys where no others will be by, hear the sound of your own heart, or the shrilling of the wind in the upland bents. I have heard, indeed, half a mile above me, the singing of the great harps of wire which stretch from Sarum to Shaftesbury along the highest ridge; but such a music is no disturbance of the peace; rather, it assures you of solitude, for you wouldn't hear it were you not ensphered with it alone. There's a valley in particular, lying just under Chesilbury, where I choose most to be. Chesilbury, a huge grass encampment, three hundred yards square, with fosse and rampart still sharp, with a dozen gateways and three mist-

pools within its ambit, which stands upon the ancient road and dominates two valleys. Below that, coming up from the south, is my charmed valley. There, I know, the beings whom I call Oreads, for want of a homelier word, haunt and are to be seen now and then. I know, because I myself have seen them.

I must describe this Oread-Valley more particularly, I believe. East and west, above it, runs the old road we call the Race-Plain—the highest ground hereabouts, rising from Harnham by Salisbury to end at Shaftesbury in Dorset. North of this ridge is Chesilbury Camp; immediately south of that is the valley. Here the falling flood as it drained away must have sucked the soil out sharply at two neighbouring points, for this valley has two heads, and between them stands a grass-grown bluff. The western vale-head is quite round but very steep. It faces due south and has been found grateful by thorns, elders, bracken and even heather. But the eastern head is sharper, begins almost in a point. From that it sweeps out in a huge demi-lune of cliff, the outer cord being the east, the inner hugging the bluff. Facing north from the valley, facing these two heads, you see the eastern of them like a great amphitheatre, its steep embayed side so smooth as to seem the work of men's hands. It is too steep for turf; it is grey with marl, and patchy where scree of flint and chalk

has run and found a lodgment. Ice-worn it may be, man-wrought it is not. No red-deer picks have been at work there, no bright-eyed, scrambling hordes have toiled their shifts or left traces through the centuries as at the Devil's Dyke. This noble arena is Nature's. Here I saw her people more than once. And the first sign I had of them was this.

I

I was here alone one summer's night; a night of stars, but without a moon. I lay within the scrub of the western valley-head and looked south. I could just see the profile of the enfolding hills, but only just; could guess that in the soft blackness below me, filling up the foreground like a lake, the valley was there indeed; realise that if I stepped down, perhaps thirty yards or so, my feet would sink into the pile of the turf-carpet, and feel the sharp benediction of the dew. About me surged and beat an enormous silence. The only sound at all—and that was fitful—came from a fern-owl which, from a thorn-bush above me, churred softly and at intervals his content with the night.

The stars were myriad, but sky-marks shone out; the Bear, the Belt, the Chair, the dancing sister Pleiades. The Galaxy was like a snow-cloud; star-

tlingly, by one, by two, meteors flared a short course and died. You never feel lonely when you have the stars; yet they do not pry upon you. You can hide nothing from them, and need not seek to hide. If they have foreknowledge, they nurse no afterthought.

Now, to-night, as I looked and wondered at their beauty, I became aware of a phenomenon untold before. Yet so quietly did it come, and so naturally, that it gave me no disturbance, nor forced itself upon me. A luminous ring, a ring of pale fire, in shape a long, narrow, and fluctuating oval, became discernible in the sky south of my stand-point, midway (I thought) between me and the south.

It was diaphanous, or diaphanous to strong light behind it. At one time I saw the great beacon of the south-west (Saturn, I think) burning through it; not within the ring, but from behind the litten vapour of which the ring was made. Lesser fires than his were put out by it. It varied very much in shape as it spread or drew out, as a smoker's blue rings are varied by puffs of wind. Now it was a perfect round, now so long as to be less a hoop than a fine oblong. Sometimes it was pear-shaped, sometimes amorphous; bulbous here, hollow there. And there seemed movement; I thought now and again that it was spiral as well as circular, that it might, under some stress of

speed, writhe upward like dust in a whirlwind. It wavered, certainly, in elevation, lifting, sinking, wafted one way or another with the ease of a cloud of gnats. It was extraordinarily beautiful and exciting. I watched it for an hour.

At times I seemed to be conscious of more than appearance. I cannot speak more definitely than that. Music was assuredly in my head, very shrill, piercing, continuous music. No air, no melody, but the expectancy of an air, preparation for it, a prelude to melodious issues. You may say the overture to some vast aerial symphony; I know not what else to call it. I was never more than alive to it, never certain of it. It was as furtive, secret, and tremulous as the dawn itself. Now, just as under that shivering and tentative opening of great music you are conscious of the fierce energy of violins, so was I aware, in this surmise of music, of wild forces which made it. I thought not of voices but of wings. I was sure that this ring of flame whirled as well as floated in the air; the motion and the sound, alike indecipherable, were one and the same to me.

I watched it, I say, for an hour: it may have been for two hours. By-and-by it came nearer, gradually very near. It was now dazzling, not to be looked at full; but its rate of approach was inappreciable, and as it came on I was able to peer into it and see nothing

but its beauty. There was a core of intensity, intolerably bright; about that, lambency but no flame, in which I saw leaves and straws and fronds of fern flickering, spiring, heeling over and over. That it whirled as well as floated was now clear, for a strong wind blew before and after it as it rushed by. This happened as I sat there. Blinding but not burning, heralded by a keen wind, it came by me and passed; a swift wind followed it as it went. It swept out toward the hollow of the eastern valley-head, seemed to strike upon that and glance upward; thence it swept gladly up, streaming to the zenith, grew thin, fine and filmy, and seemed to melt into the utmost stars. I had seen wonders and went home full of thought.

II

I first saw an Oread in this place in a snow-storm which, driven by a north-westerly gale, did havoc to the lowlands, but not to the folded hills. I had pushed up the valley in the teeth of the storm to see it under the white stress. It was hard work for me and my dog; I had to wade knee-deep, and he to jump, like a cat in long grass, through the drifts. But we reached our haven and found shelter from the weather. High above us where we stood the snow-flakes tossed and rioted, but before they fell upon

us, being out of the wind, they drifted idly down, *come . . . in Alpe senza vento.* The whole valley was purely white, its outlines blurred by the slant-driving snow. There was not a living creature to be seen, and my dog, a little sharp-nosed black beast, shivered as he looked about, with wide eyes and quick-set ears, for a friendly sight, and held one paw tentatively in the air, as if he feared the cold.

Suddenly he yelped once, and ran, limping on three legs or scuttling on all four, over the snow toward the great eastern escarpment, but midway stopped and looked with all his might into its smoothed hollow. His jet-black ears stood sharp as a hare's; through the white scud I was conscious that he trembled. He gazed into the sweep of the curving hill, and following the direction he gave me, all my senses quick, I gazed also, but for a while saw nothing.

Very gradually, without alarm on my part, a blur of colour seemed to form itself and centre in one spot, half-way up the concave of the down; very pale yellow, a soft, lemon colour. At first scarcely more than a warm tinge to the snow, it took shape as I watched it, and then body also. It was now opaque within semi-transparency; one could trace an outline, a form. Then I made out of it a woman dressed in yellow; a slim woman, tawny-haired, in a thin

smock of lemon-yellow which flicked and bellied in the gale. Her hair blew out to it in snaky streamers, sideways. Her head was bent to meet the cold, her bare white arms were crossed, and hugged her shoulders, as if to keep her bosom warm. From mid-thigh downward she was bare and very white, yet distinct upon the snow. That was the white of chilled flesh I could see. Though she wore but a single garment, and that of the thinnest and shortest, though she suffered cold, hugged herself and shivered, she was not of our nature, to die of such exposure. Her eyes, as I could guess, were long-enduring and steadfast. Her lips were not blue, though her teeth seemed to chatter; she was not rigid with the stiffening that precedes frozen death. Drawing near her by degrees, coming within fifteen yards of where she stood and ıssioned, though she saw me, waited for me, in a way expected me, she showed neither fear nor embarrassment, nor appealed by looks for shelter. She was, rather, like a bird made tame by winter, that finds the lesser fear swallowed up in a greater. For myself, as when one finds one's self before a new thing, one stands and gazes, so was I before this being of the wild. I would go no nearer, speak I could not. But I had no fear. She was new to me not strange. I felt that she and I belonged to worlds apart; that as soon might I hope to be famil-

iar with fox or marten as with her. My little black dog was of the same mind. He was glad when I joined him, and wagged his little body—tail he has none—to say so. But he had no eyes for me, nor I for him. We stood together for company, and filled our eyes with the tenant of the waste. How long we watched her I have no notion, but the day fell swiftly in and found us there.

She was, I take it, quite young, she was slim and of ordinary proportions. When I say that I mean that she had nothing inhuman about her stature, was neither giant nor pygmy. Whether she was what we call good-looking or not I find it impossible to determine, for when strangeness is so added to beauty as to absorb and transform it, our standards are upset and balances thrown out. She was pale to the lips, had large, fixed and patient eyes. Her arms and legs showed greyish in the white storm, but where the smock was cut off the shadows it made upon her were faintly warm. One of her knees was bent, the foot supported only by the toes. The other was firm upon the ground: she looked, to the casual eye, to be standing on one leg. Her eyes in a stare covered me, but were not concerned to see me so near. They had the undiscerning look of one whose mind is numbed, as hers might well be. Shelter—a barn, a hayrick—lay within a mile of her; and yet she chose to suffer the cold, and was able to endure it. She

knew it, I supposed, for a thing not to be avoided; she took it as it came—as she would have taken the warmth and pleasure of the sun. We humankind with our wits for ever turned inward to ourselves, grieve or exult as we bid ourselves: she, like all other creatures else, was not in that self-relation; her parts were closer-knit, and could not separate to envisage each other. So, at least, I read her—that she lived as she could and as she must, neither looked back with regret nor forward with longing. Time present, the flashing moment, was all her being. That state will never be ours again.

I discovered before nightfall what she waited for there alone in the cruel weather. A moving thing emerged from the heart of the white fury, came up the valley along the shelving down: a shape like hers, free-moving, thinly clad, suffering yet not paralysed by the storm. It shaped as a man, a young man, and her mate. Taller, darker, stoutlier made, his hardy legs were browner, and so were his arms—crossed like hers over his breast and clasping his shoulders. His head was bare, dark and crisply covered with short hair. His smock whipped about him before, as the wind drove it; behind him it flacked and fluttered like a flag. Patiently forging his way, bowing his head to the gale, he came into range; and she, aware of him, waited.

He came directly to her. They greeted by touch-

ings. He stretched out his hands to her, touched her shoulders and sides. He touched both her cheeks, her chin, the top of her head, all with the flat of the palm. He stroked her wet and streaming hair. He held her by the shoulders and peered into her face, then put both arms about her and drew her to him. She, who had so far made no motions of her own, now uncrossed her arms and daintily touched him in turn. She put both her palms flat upon his breast; next on his thighs, next, being within the circle of his arms, she put up her hands and cupped his face. Then, with a gesture like a sigh, she let them fall to his waist, fastened them about him and let her head lie on his bosom. She shut her eyes, seemed contented and appeased. He clasped her, with a fine, protecting air upon him, looking down tenderly at her resting head. So they stood together in the dusk, while the wind tore at their thin covering, and the snow, lying, made a broad patch of white upon his shoulder.

Breathless I looked at them, and my dog forgot to be cold. High on his haunches, with lifted forepaw and sharp-cocked ears, he watched, trembled and whined.

After a while, impatient as it appeared of the ravaging storm, the male drew the female to the ground. They used no language, as we understand it, and made no sign that I could see, but rather sank to-

gether to get the shelter of the drift. He lay upon the snow, upon the weather side, she close beside him. They crouched like two birds in a storm, and hid their heads under their interlacing arms. He gave the weather his back, and raised himself on his elbow, the better to shield her. Within his arm she lay and cuddled to him snugly. I can describe his action no more closely than by saying that he covered her as a hen her chick. As a partridge grouts with her wings in a dusty furrow, so he worked in the powdered snow to make her a nest. When the night fell upon them, with its promise of bitter frost in the unrelenting wind, she lay screened against its rigours by the shelter of him. They were very still. Their heads were together, their cheeks touched. I believe that they slept.

III

In the autumn, in harvest-time, I saw her with a little one. She was lying now, deeply at ease, in the copse wood of the valley-head, within a nest of brake-fern, and her colouring was richer, more in tune with the glory of the hour. She had a burnt glow in her cheeks; her hair showed the hue of the corn which, not a mile away, our people were reaping afield. From where we were, she and I, one could hear the rattle of the machine as it swept down the tall and

serried wheat. It was the top of noon when I found her; the sun high in heaven, but so fierce in his power that you saw him through a mist of his own making, and the sky all about him white as a sea-fog. The Oread's body was sanguine brown, only her breast, which I saw half-revealed through a slit in her smock, was snowy white. It was the breast of a maiden, not of a mother with a young child.

She leaned over it and watched it asleep. Once or twice she touched its head in affection; then presently looked up and saw me. If I had had no surprise coming upon her, neither now had she. Her eyes took me in, as mine might take in a tree not noticed before, or a flowering bush, or a finger-post. Such things might well be there, and might well not be; I had no particular interest for her, and gave her no alarm. Nothing assures me so certainly of her remoteness from myself, and of my kinship with her too, as this absence of shock.

She allowed me to come nearer, and nearer still, to stand close over her and examine the child. She did not lift her head, but I knew that she was aware of me; for her eyelids lifted and fell quickly, and showed me once or twice her watchful eyes. She was indeed a beautiful creature, exquisite in make and finish. Her skin shone like the petals of certain flowers. There is one especially, called *Sisyrinchium*,

whose common name of Satin-flower describes a surface almost metallic in its lustre. I thought of that immediately: her skin drank in and exhaled light. I could not hit upon the stuff of which her shift was made. It looked like coarse silk, had a web, had fibres or threads. It may have been flax, but that it was much too sinuous. It seemed to stick to the body where it touched, even to seek the flesh where it did not touch, that it might cling like gossamer with invisible tentacles. In colour it was very pale yellow, not worn nor stained. It was perfectly simple, sleeveless, and stopped half-way between the hip and the knee. I looked for, but could not discover, either hem or seam. Her feet and hands were very lovely, the toes and fingers long and narrow, rosy-brown. I had full sight of her eyes for one throbbing moment. Extraordinarily bright, quick and pulsing, waxing and waning in intensity (as if an inner light beat in them), of the grey colour of a chipped flint stone. The lashes were long, curving and very dark; they were what you might call smut-colour and gave a blurred effect to the eyes which was strange. This, among other things, was what set her apart from us, this and the patient yet palpitating stare of her regard. She looked at me suddenly, widely and full, taking in much more than me, yet making me the centre of her vision. It gave me the

idea that she was surprised at my nearness and ready for any attack, but did not seek to avoid it. There I was overstanding her and her offspring; and what was must be.

Of the little one I could not see much. It was on its side in the fern, fast asleep. Its arms were stretched up the slope, its face was between them. Its knees were bent and a little foot tucked up to touch its body. Quite naked, brown all over, it was as plump and smooth and tender as a little pig. But it was not pink; it was very brown.

All nature seemed at the top of perfection that wonderful day. A hawk soared high in the blue, bees murmured all about, the distance quivered. I could see under the leaves of a great mullein the bright eyes, then the round body of a mouse. Afar off the corn-cutter rattled and whirred, and above us on the ridgeway some workmen sat at their dinner under the telegraph wires. Men were all about us at their affairs with Nature's face; and here stood I, a man of themselves, and at my feet the Oread lay at ease and watched her young. There was food for wonder in all this, but none for doubt. Who knows what his neighbour sees? Who knows what his dog? Every species of us walks secret from the others; every species of us the centre of his universe, its staple of measure, and its final cause. And if at

times one is granted a peep into new heavens and a new earth, and can get no more, perhaps the best thing we win from that is the conviction that we must doubt nothing and wonder at everything. Here, now, was I, common, blundering, trampling, make-shift man, peering upon my Oread—fairy of the hill, whatever she was—and tempted to gauge her by my man-taught balances of right and wrong, and use and wont. Was that young male who had sheltered her in the snow her mate in truth, the father of her young one? Or what sort of mating had been hers? What wild love? What mysteries of the night? And where was he now? And was he one, or were they many, who companioned this beautiful thing? And would he come if I waited for him? And would he share her watch, her quiet content, her still rapture?

Idle, man-made questions, custom-taught! I did wait. I sat by her waiting. But he did not come.

IV

A month later, in October, I saw a great assembling of Oreads, by which I was able to connect more than one experience. I could now understand the phenomenon of the luminous ring.

I reached the valley by about six o'clock in the

evening. It was twilight, not yet dusk. The sun was off the hollow, which lay in blue mist, but above the level of the surrounding hills the air was bathed in the sunset glow. The hush of evening was over all, the great cup of the down absolutely desert; there were no birds, nor voices of birds; not a twig snapped, not a leaf rustled. Imperceptibly the shadows lengthened, faded with the light; and again behind the silence I guessed at, rather than discerned, a preparatory, gathering music. So finally, by twos and threes, they came to their assembling.

Once more I never saw them come. Out of the mist they drifted together. There had been a moment when they were not there; there was a moment when I saw them. I saw three of them together, two females and a male. They formed a circle, facing inwards, their arms intertwined. The pale colour of their garments, the grey tones in their flesh were so perfectly in tune with the hazy light, that it would have been impossible, I am certain, to have seen them at all at a hundred yards' distance. I could not determine whether they were conversing or not: if they were, it was without speech. I have never heard an articulate sound from any one of them, and have no provable reason for connecting the unvoiced music I have sometimes discerned with any act of theirs. It has accompanied them, and may have proceeded

from them—but I don't know that. Of these three linked together I remember that one of them threw back her head till she faced the sky. She did not laugh, or seem to be laughing: there was no sound. It was rather as if she was bathing her face in the light. She threw her head back so far that I could see the gleam in her wild eyes; her hair streamed downward, straight as a fall of water. The other two regarded her, and the male presently withdrew one of his arms from the circle and laid his hand upon her. She let it be so; seemed not to notice.

Imperceptibly others had come about these three. If I took my eyes off a group for a moment they were attracted to other groups or single shapes. Some lay at ease on the sward, resting on elbow; some prone, on both elbows; some seemed asleep, their heads on molehill pillows; some sat huddling together, with their chins upon their knees; some knelt face to face and held each other fondly; some were teasing, some chasing others, winding in and out of the scattered groups. But everything was doing in complete silence.

Now and again one, flying from another, would rise in the air, the pursuer following. They skimmed, soared, glided like swallows, in long sweeping curves —there was no noise in their flight. They were quite without reticence in their intercourse; desired or

avoided, loved or hated as the moment urged them; strove to win, struggled to escape, achieved or surrendered without remark from their companions. They were like children or animals. Desire was reason good; and if love was soon over, hate lasted no longer. One passion or the other set them scuffling: when it was spent they had no after-thought.

One pretty sight I saw. A hare came lolloping over the valley bottom, quite at his ease In the midst of the assembly he stopped to nibble, then reared himself up and cleaned his face. He saw them and they him without concern on either side.

The valley filled up; I could not count the shifting, crossing, restless shapes I saw down there. Presently, without call or signal, as if by one consent, the Oreads joined hands and enclosed the whole circuit in their ring. The effect in the dusk was of a pale glow, as of the softest fire, defining the contour of the valley; and soon they were moving, circling round and round. Shriller and louder swelled the hidden music, and faster span the ring. It whirled and wavered, lifted and fell, but so smoothly, with such inherent power of motion, that it was less like motion visible than motion heard. Nothing was distinguishable but the belt of pale fire. That which I had seen before they had now become—a ring of flame intensely swift. As if sucked upward by a

centripetal force it rose in the air. Wheeling still with a sound incredibly shrill it rose to my level, swept by me heralded by a keen wind, and was followed by a draught which caught leaves and straws of grass and took them swirling along. Round and up, and ever up it went, narrowing and spiring to the zenith. There, looking long after it, I saw it diminish in size and brightness till it became filmy as a cloud, then melted into the company of the stars.

A SUMMARY CHAPTER

Now, it is the recent publication by Mr. Evans Wentz of a careful and enthusiastic work upon *The Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries* which has inspired me to put these pages before the public. Some of them have appeared in the magazines as curious recitals and may have afforded pastime to the idle-minded, but without the courageous initiative of Mr. Wentz I don't know that I should have attempted to give them such coherence as they may claim to possess. And that, I fear, will be very little without this chapter in which I shall, if I can, clear the ground for a systematic study of the whole subject. No candid reader can, I hope, rise from the perusal of the book without the conviction that behind the world of appearance lies another and a vaster with a thronging population of its own—with many populations, indeed, each absorbed in uttering its being according to its own laws. If I have afforded nothing else I have afforded glimpses into that world; and the question now is, What do we precisely gather, what can we be said to know of the laws of that world in which these swift, beautiful and appar-

ently ruthless creatures live and move and utter themselves? I shall have to draw upon more than I have recorded here: cases which I have heard of, which I have read of in other men's books, as well as those which are related here as personal revelation. If I speak pragmatically, *ex cathedrâ*, it is not intentional. If I fail sometimes to give chapter and verse it will be because I have never taken any notes of what has gone into my memory, and have no documents to hand. But I don't invent; I remember.

There is a chain of Being of whose top alike and bottom we know nothing at all. What we do know is that our own is a link in it, and cannot generally, can only fitfully and rarely, have intercourse with any other. I am not prepared with any modern instances of intercourse with the animal and vegetable world, even to such a limited extent, for instance, as that of Balaam with his ass, or that of Achilles with his horses; but I suspect that there are an enormous number unrecorded. Speech, of course, is not necessary to such an intercourse. Speech is a vehicle of human intercourse, but not of that of any other created order so far as we know.[1] Birds and beasts do not converse in speech, smell or touch seems to

[1] The speech of Balaam's ass or of Balaam, of Achilles and his horses are, of course, necessary conventions of the poet's and do not imply that words passed between the parties.

be the sense employed; and though the vehicles of smell and touch are unknown to us, in moments of high emotion we ourselves converse otherwise than by speech. Indeed, seeing that all created things possess a spirit whereby they are what they are, it does not seem necessary to suppose intercourse impossible without speech, and I myself have never had any difficulty in accepting the stories of much more vital mixed intercourse which we read of in the Greek and other mythologies. If we read, for instance, that such and such a man or woman was the offspring of a woman and the spirit of a river, or of a man and the spirit of a hill or oak-tree, it does not seem to me at all extraordinary. The story of the wife who suffered a fairy union and bore a fairy child which disappeared with her is a case in point. The fairy father was, so far as I can make out, the indwelling spirit of a rose, and the story is too painful and the detail in my possession too exact for me to put it down here. I was myself actually present, and in the house, when the child was born. I witnessed the anguish of the unfortunate husband, who is now dead. Mr. Wentz has many instances of the kind from Ireland and other Celtic countries; but fairies are by no means confined to Celtic countries, though they are more easily discerned by Celtic races.

Of this chain of Being, then, of which our order is a member, the fairy world is another and more subtle member, subtler in the right sense of the word because it is not burdened with a material envelope. Like man, like the wind, like the rose, it has spirit; but unlike any of the lower orders, of which man is one, it has no sensible wrapping unless deliberately it consents to inhabit one. This, as we know, it frequently does. I have mentioned several cases of the kind; Mrs. Ventris was one, Mabilla By-the-Wood was another. I have not personally come across any other cases where a male fairy took upon him the burden of a man than that of Quidnunc. Even there I have never been satisfied that Quidnunc became man to the extent that Mrs. Ventris did. Quidnunc, no doubt, was the father of Lady Emily's children; but were those children human? There are some grounds for thinking so, and in that case, if "the nature follows the male," Quidnunc must have doffed his immateriality and suffered real incarnation. If they were fairy children the case is altered. Quidnunc need not have had a body at all. Now since it is clear that the fairy world is a real order of creation, with laws of its own every whit as fixed and immutable as those of any other order known to naturalists, it is very reasonable to inquire into the nature and scope of those laws. I am not at all

prepared at present to attempt anything like a digest of them. That would require a lifetime; and no small part of the task, after marshalling the evidence, would be to agree upon terms which would be intelligible to ourselves and yet not misleading. To take polity alone, are we to understand that any kind of Government resembling that of human societies obtains among them? When we talk of Queens or Kings of the Fairies, of Oberon and Titania, for example, are we using a rough translation of a real something, or are we telling the mere truth? Is there a fairy king? The King of the Wood, for instance, who was he? Is there a fairy queen? Who is Queen Mab? Who is Despoina? Who the Lady of the Lake? Who the "Βασίλισσα τῶν βουνῶν," or "Μεγάλη Κυρά" of whom Mr. Lawson tells us such suggestive things in his *Modern Greek Folklore?* Who is Despoina, with whom I myself have conversed, "a dread goddess, not of human speech?" The truth, I suspect, is this. There are, as we know, countless tribes, clans, or orders of fairies, just as there are nations of men. They confess the power of some greater Spirit among themselves, bow to it instantly and submit to its decrees; but they do not, so far as I can understand, acknowledge a monarchy in any sense of ours. If there is a Supreme Power over the fairy creation it is Proserpine; but hers is

too remote an empire to be comparable to any of ours. Not even Cæsar, not even the Great King, could hope to rule such myriads as she. She may stand for the invisible creation no doubt, but she would never have commerce with it. No fairy hath seen her at any time; no sovereignty such as we are now discussing would be applicable to her dominion. That of Artemis, or that of Pan, is more comparable. Artemis is certainly ruler of the spirits of the air and water, of the hills and shores of the sea, and to some extent her power overlaps that of Pan who is potent in nearly all land solitudes. But really the two lordships can be exactly discriminated. They never conflict. The legions of Artemis are all female, though on earth men as well as women worship her; the legions of Pan are all male, though on earth he can chasten women as well as men.[1] But Pan can do nothing against Artemis, nor she anything against him or any of his. The decree or swift deed of either is respected by the other. They are not, then, as earthly kings, leaders of their hosts to battle against their neighbours. Fairies fight and marshal themselves for war; Mr. Wentz has several cases of the kind. But Pan and Artemis have no share in these warfares. Queen Mab is one of the many names,

[1] But if this is true, who is the King of the Wood? The statement is too sweeping.

and points to one of the many manifestations of Artemis; the Lady of the Lake is another. Both of these have died out, and in the country she is generally hinted at under the veil of "Mistress of the Wood" or "Lady of the Hill." I heard the latter from a Wiltshire shepherd; the former is used in Sussex, in the Cheviots, and in Lincolnshire, and was introduced, I believe, by the Gipsies. Titania was a name of romance, and so was Oberon, that of her husband in romance. Queen Mab has no husband, nor will she ever have.

But she is, of course, a goddess, and not a queen in our sense of the word. The fairies, who partake of her nature just so far as we partake of theirs, pray to her, invoke her, and make her offerings every day. But a vital difference between their kind and ours is that they can see her and live; and we never see the Gods until we die.

They have no other leaders, I believe, and certainly no royal houses. Faculty is free in the fairy world to its utmost limit. A fairy's power within his own order is limited only by the extent of his personal faculty, and subject only to the Gods. There is no civil law to restrain him, and no moral law; no law at all except the law of being.[1]

[1] Apparent eccentricities of this law, such as the obedience to iron, or zinc (if we may believe Beckwith), should be noted. I can't explain them. They seem arbitrary at first sight, but nothing in Nature is arbitrary.

We are contemplating, then, a realm, nay, a world, where anarchy is the rule, and anarchy in the widest sense. The fairies are of a world where Right and Wrong don't obtain, where Possible and Impossible are the only finger-posts at cross-roads; for the Gods themselves give no moral sanction to desire and hold up no moral check. The fairies love and hate intensely; they crave and enjoy; they satisfy by kindness or cruelty; they serve or enslave each other; they give life or take it as their instinct, appetite or whim may be. But there is this remarkable thing to be noted, that when a thing is dead they cannot be aware of its existence. For them it is not, it is as if it had never been. Ruth, therefore, is unknown, their emotions are maimed to that serious extent that they cannot regret, cannot pity, cannot weep for sorrow. They weep through rage, but sorrow they know not. Similarly they cannot laugh for joy. Laughing with them is an expression of pleasure, but not of joy. Here then, at least, we have the better of them. I for one would not exchange my privilege of pity or my consolation of pure sorrow for all their transcendent faculty.

It is often said that fairies of both sexes seek our kind because we know more of the pleasure of love than they do. Since we know more of the griefs of it that is likely to be true; but it is a great mistake

to suppose that they are unsusceptible to the great heights and deeps of the holy passion. It is to make the vulgar confusion between the passion and the expression of it. They are capable of the greatest devotion to the beloved, of the greatest sacrifice of all—the sacrifice of their own nature. These fairy-wives of whom I have been speaking—Miranda King, Mabilla By-the-Wood—when they took upon them our nature, and with it our power of backward-looking and forward-peering, was what they could remember, was what they must dread, no sacrifice? They could have escaped at any moment, mind you, and been free.[1] Resuming their first nature they would have lost regret. But they did not. Love was their master. There are many cases of the kind. With men it is otherwise. I have mentioned Mary Wellwood, the carpenter's wife, twice taken by a fairy and twice recaptured. The last time she was brought back to Ashby-de-la-Zouche she died there. But there is reason for this. A woman marrying a

[1] When a fairy marries a man she gradually loses her fairy-power and her children have none of it or only vestiges—so much as the children of a genius may perhaps exhibit. I am not able to say how long the fairy-wife's ability to resume her own nature lasts. *The Forsaken Merman* occurs to one; but I doubt if Miranda King, at the time, say, of her son's marriage with Mabilla, could have gone back to the sea. Sometimes, as in Mrs. Ventris's case, fairy-wives play truant for a night or for a season. I have reason to believe that not uncommon. The number of fairy-wives in England alone is very considerable—over a quarter of a million, I am told.

male fairy gets some, but not all, of the fairy attributes, while her children have them in full at birth. She bears them with all the signs of human motherhood, and directly they are born her earthly rights and duties cease. She does not nurse them and she can only rise in the air when they are with her. That means that she cannot go after them if they are long away from her, unless she can get another fairy to keep her company. By the same mysterious law she can only conceal herself, or doff her appearance, with the aid of a fairy. For some time after her abduction or surrender her husband has to nourish her by breathing into her mouth; but with the birth of her first child she can support herself in the fairy manner. It was owing to this imperfect state of being that Mary Wellwood was resumed by her friends the first time. The second time she went back of her own accord.

But with regard to their love-business among themselves it is a very different matter, so far as I can understand it. The fairy child is initiated at the age of puberty and is then competent to pair. He is not long in selecting his companion; nor does she often seem to refuse him, though mating is done by liking in all cases and has nothing whatever to do with the parents. It must be remembered, of course, that they are subject to the primitive law from which

man only has freed himself. They frequently fight for the possession of the female, or measure their powers against each other; and she goes with the victor or the better man.[1] I don't know any case where the advance has been made by the female. Pairing may be for a season or for a period or for life. I don't think there is any rule; but in all cases of separation the children are invariably divided—the males to the father, the females to the mother. After initiation the children owe no allegiance to their parents. Love with them is a wild and wonderful rapture in all its manifestations, and without regard necessarily to sex. I never, in my life, saw a more beautiful expression of it than in the two females whom I saw greet and embrace on Parliament Hill. Their motions to each other, their looks and their clinging were beyond expression tender and swift. Nor shall I ever forget the pair of Oreads in the snow, of whose meeting I have said as much as is possible in a previous chapter. It must be remembered that I am dealing with an order of Nature which knows nothing of our shames and qualms, which is not only unconscious of itself but unconscious of anything but its immediate desire; but I

[1] I saw an extraordinary case of that, where a male came suddenly before a mated pair, asserted himself and took her to himself incontinent. There was no fighting. He stood and looked. The period of suspense was breathless but not long.

am dealing with it to the understanding of a very different order, to whom it is not enough to do a thing which seems good in its own eyes, but requisite also to be sure of the approbation of its fellow-men. I should create a wrong impression were I to enlarge upon this branch of my subject; I should make my readers call fairies shameful when as a fact they know not the meaning of shame, or reprove them for shamelessness when, indeed, they are luckily without it. I shall make bold to say once for all that as it is absurd to call the lightning cruel, so it is absurd to call shameful those who know nothing about the deformity. No one can know what love means who has not seen the fairies at their loving—and so much for that.

The laws which govern the appearance of fairies to mankind or their commerce with men and women seem to be conditioned by the ability of men to perceive them. The senses of men are figuratively speaking lenses coloured or shaped by personality. How are we to know the form and pressure of the great river Enipeus, whose shape, for the love of Tyro, Poseidon took? And so the accounts of fairy appearance, of fairy shape, size, vesture, will vary in the measure of the faculty of the percipient. To me, personally, the fairies seem to go in gowns of yellow, grey, russet or green, but mostly in yellow

or grey. The Oreads or Spirits of the hills vary. In winter their vesture is yellow, in summer it is ash-green. The Dryad whom I saw was in grey, the colour of the lichened oak-tree out of which she gleamed. The fairies in a Norman forest had long brown garments, very close and clinging, to the ankles. They were belted, and their hair was loose. But that is invariable. I never saw a fairy with snooded or tied up hair. They are always barefooted. Despoina is the only fairy I ever saw in any other colour than those I have named. She always wears blue, of the colour of the shadows on a moonlight night, very beautiful. She, too, wears sandals, which they say the Satyrs weave for her as a tribute. They lay them down where she has been or is likely to be; for they never see her.

But this matter of vesture is really a digression: I have more important matter in hand, and that is to consider the intercourse between fairy and mortal, as it is governed by appearance. How does a man, for instance, gain a fairy-wife? How does a woman give herself to a fairy-lover? I have given a careful account of a case of each sort in answer. Young King gained his wife by capture; Lady Emily Rich followed her lover at a look.

But this does not really touch the point, which is, rather, how was Lady Emily Rich brought or put

into such a relation with Quidnunc that she could receive a look from him? How was King put into such a relation with Mabilla that he could take her away from her own people? There must have been an incarnation, you would say; and I should agree with you. Now in Andrew King's case there was belief to go upon, the belief common to all the Cheviot side, handed down to it from untold generations and never lost; coupled with that, there was an intense and probably long-standing desire in the young man himself to realise and substantiate his belief. He had brooded over it, his fancy had gone to work upon it; he loved his Mabilla before ever he saw her; his love, it was, which evoked her. And I take it as proved —at any rate it is proved to my own satisfaction— that faith coupled with desire has power—the power of suggestion it is called—over Spirit as it certainly has over Matter. If I say, then, that Andrew King evoked Mabilla By-the-Wood, called her out of her own world into his, I assert two things: the first, that she was really at one time in her own world, the second, that she was afterward really in his. The second my own senses can vouch for. That she was fetched back by the King of the Wood and recaptured by Andrew are minor points. Grant the first taking and there is no difficulty about them.

Mr. Lawson gives cases from Greece which point

to certain ritual performances on the part of the lover; the snatching, for instance, of a handkerchief from the beloved, of which the preservation is tantamount to the permanence of the subsequent union. He has a curious case, too, of a peasant who married a nymph and gave her a child but could not make her speak to him. He consulted a wise woman who advised him to threaten her with the fire for the baby if she would not talk. He did it and the charm worked. The Nymph spoke fiercely to him, "You dog, leave my child alone," she said, and seized it from him, and with it disappeared. That is parallel to my case where love made Mabilla speak. It was love for her husband, to be sure; but she had then no children.

Mr. Wentz gets no evidence of fairy-wives from Ireland, but a great number out of Wales. One of them is the beautiful tale of Einion and Olwen (p. 161) which has many points of resemblance with mine from the Border. Einion also seems to have met the King of the Wood. Like Andrew King he was kissed by the nymphs, but only by one of them; but unlike him he stayed in their country for a year and a day, then went back to his own people, and finally returned for his fairy-wife. Taliesin was their son. No conditions seem to have been made.

So much for fairy brides, but now for fairy grooms.

I have two cases to add to that of Quidnunc, but before giving them, let me say of his affair that since the suggestion there seems to have come from him to the woman, the incarnation, if such there were, must have been voluntary. Evocation was not instrumental in it. He appeared before her, as she had appeared before others, many others, including myself, and his subsequent commerce with her was achieved by his own personal force. You may say that she had been prepared to see him by belief and desire, by belief and desire acting upon a mind greatly distressed and probably overwrought. You may say that she saw what she ardently desired to see. It is quite true, I cannot deny it; but I point to his previous manifestations, and leave it there.

Here is a tale to the purpose which I got out of Worcestershire. Two girls, daughter and niece of a farmer, bosom friends and bed-fellows, became involved in a love-affair and, desperate of a happy issue, attempted a charm to win their lovers back. On All Hallow Eve, two hours before the sun, they went into the garden, barefoot, in their nightgowns and circled about a stone which was believed to be bewitched.[1] They used certain words, the Lord's

[1] It is said to have been the base of a Roman terminal statue, but I have not seen it.

prayer backward or what not, and had an apparition. A brown man came out of the bushes and looked at them for some time. Then he came to them, paralysed as they may have been, and peering closely into the face of one of them gave her a flower and disappeared. That same evening they kept the Hallow E'en with the usual play, half-earnest, half-game, and, among other things which they did, "peascodded" the girls. The game is a very old one, and consists in setting the victim in a chair with her back to the door while her companions rub her down with handfuls of pea-shucks. During this ceremony if any man enter the room he is her lover, and she is handed over to him. This was done, then, to one of the girls who had dared the dawn magic; and in the midst of it a brown man, dressed in a smock-frock tied up with green ribbons, appeared, standing in the door. He took the girl by the hand and led her out of the house. She was seen no more that night, nor for many days afterward, though her parents and neighbours hunted her far and wide. By-and-by she was reported at a village some ten or twelve miles off on the Shropshire border, where some shepherds had found her wandering the hill. She was brought home but could give no good account of herself, or would not. She said that she had followed her lover, married him, and lost him.

Nothing would comfort her, nothing could keep her in the house. She was locked in, but made her way out; she was presently sent to the lunatic asylum, but escaped from that. Then she got away for good and all and never came back again. No trace of her body could be found. What are you to make of a thing of the sort? I give it for what it is worth, with this note only, that the apparition was manifest to several persons, though not, I fancy, to any but the girls concerned in the peascodding.

The Willow-lad's is another tale of the same kind. It was described in 1787 by the Reverend Samuel Jordan in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, if I am not mistaken.

The Willow-lad was an apparition which was believed to appear in a withy-bed on the banks of the Ouse near Huntingdon. He could only be seen at dusk, and only by women. He had a sinister reputation, and to say of a girl that she had been to the withy-bed was a broad hint that she was no better than she should be. Yet, according to Mr. Jordan, the girls did go there in numbers, and to such effect that by an order of the Town Council the place was stubbed up. You had to go alone to the withy-bed between sunset and sunrise of a moonless night, to lay your hand upon a certain stump and say, and in a loud voice:—

Willow-boy, Willow-boy, come to me soon,
After the sun and before the moon.
Hide the stars and cover my head;
Let no man see me when I be wed.

One would like to know whether the Willow-lad's powers perished with the withy-bed. They should not, but should have been turned to malicious uses. There are many cases in Mr. Lawson's book of the malefical effect upon the Dryads of cutting down the trees whose spirit they are. And most people know Landor's idyll, or if they don't, they should.

There are queer doings under the sun as well as under the moon. A man may travel far without leaving his arm-chair by the fire, in countries where no tourist-tickets obtain, and see stranger things than are recorded by Herr Baedeker.

The waies through which my weary steps I guide
In this delightful land of Faery
Are so exceeding spacious and wyde,
And sprinckled with such sweet variety
Of all that pleasant is to eare or eye,
That I, nigh ravisht with rare thoughts' delight,
My tedious travele doe forget thereby;
And when I gin to feele decay of might,
It strength to me supplies, and chears my dulléd spright.

THE END