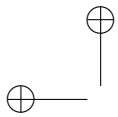
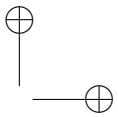
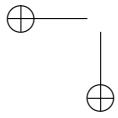
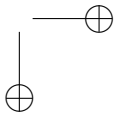
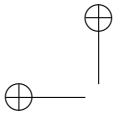
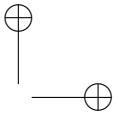
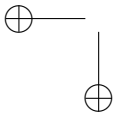
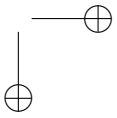



Apologia Diffidentis

Apologia Diffidentis

W. Compton Leith

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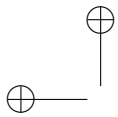
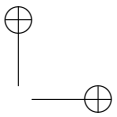

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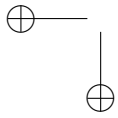
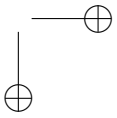

"I am naturally bashful; nor hath conversation, age, or travel been able to effront or enharden me."

Sir Thomas Browne

In the matter of avowals the diffident never speak if they can write. That is why my apology for a furtive existence is here set down in solitude instead of being told face to face. You have borne so many years with my unresponsive and incomprehensible ways that shame at last constrains me to this poor defence; for I must either justify myself in your sight, or go far away where even your kindness cannot reach me. The first alternative is hard, but the second too grievous for impaired powers of endurance; I must therefore find what expression I may, and tell you how my life has been beshrewed ever since, a boy of twelve, I first incurred the obloquy of being shy. The word slips easily from the pen though the lips refuse to frame it; for I think most men would rather plead guilty to a vice than to this weakness.

A doom of reticence is upon all our shy confraternity, and we seldom make confidences even to each other. It is only at rarest intervals that the spell is lifted, by silent sympathy, by a smile, by a tear, by I know not what. At such times our souls

are like those deep pools of the shore, only open to the sky at lowest tides of still summer days, only to be approached across long stretches of wet sand and slippery shelves of rock. In their depths are delicate fronded seaweeds and shells tinted with hues of sundawn; but to see them you must bend low over the surface, which no lightest breath must furrow, or the vision is gone.

Few of the busy toilers of the world will leave the firm sands to see so little; but sometimes one weary of keen life will stray aside, and oftener a child will come splashing across the beach to peer down with artless curiosity and delight. Then the jealous ocean returns, and the still clear depths are confused once more with refluent waters; soon the waves are tossing above the quiet spot, and the child is gone home to sleep and forget. I cannot have you with me at these still hours of revelation; I must tell my tale as best I can with such success as fortune may bestow.

I shall say nothing of the miseries which embittered the life of the diffident boy. But I cannot pass in silence the deeper trouble of earliest manhood, when my soul first awoke to the dread that though other clouds might drift westward and dissolve, one would impend over me for ever. It was at the university that this vague misgiving crept upon me like a chill mist, until the hopes and aspira-

tions of youth were one by one extinguished, as to a sailor putting out to sea the comfortable harbour lights vanish in the wracks of a tempestuous winter morning. I turned my face away from the gracious young life amidst which I moved, like a man possessed of a dark secret to his undoing. My heart, yet eager for the joy of living and yearning for affection, was daily starved of its need as by a power of deliberate and feline cruelty; and with every expansive impulse instantly restrained by this dæmonic force, I was left at last unresponsive as a maltreated child, who flings his arms round no one, but shrinks back into his own world of solitary fancies.

I think there is no misery so great as that of youth surrounded by all opportunities for wholesome fellowship, endowed with natural faculties for enjoyment, yet repressed and thwarted at every turn by invincible self-consciousness and mistrust: surely no lost opportunities of manhood leave such aching voids as these. In the spring-time of life to feel day by day the slow erosion of the power of joy is of all pains most poignant; out of it grow anxieties, premature despairs, incongruous with fresh cheeks and a mind not yet mature. This misery was mine for those four years which to most men are the happiest of a whole career, but to me at every retrospect seem so beset with gloomy

shadows that could I live my life again, I would not traverse them once more for all the gold of Ophir.

At first I writhed and strained in my bonds, and sometimes would make timid advances to the generous young hearts around me. But the tension always proved too sore; I never maintained the ground I had won, and with a perilous fatalism more and more readily accepted what I deemed inevitable failure. There were among them, I doubt it not now, Samaritans who would have tended my bruised limbs; but then they all seemed to be gliding over the black ice, too happy to stay and lift up the fallen. And bruised though I was, I still rose time and again and moved painfully among them, so that theirs was no culpable or merciless neglect.

Yet the end for me was illimitable dreariness; and like Archie in *Weir of Hermiston*, I seemed abroad in a world from which every hope of intimacy was banished. And as with every month the hopelessness of resistance was made plainer and plainer, there came upon me the recklessness of the condemned man who jests or blasphemes to hide his ruth. Overwrought continually by forebodings of coming pain, unstrung by strange revulsions, I would pass from burning wrath to cold despair, a most petulant and undisciplined sufferer. Uniting

in one person the physical exuberance of youth and the melancholy of disillusioned manhood, I was deprived of the balanced energy proper to either age, and kept up a braggart courage with the headiest wine of literature. I could not bear the bland homilies of the preachers, but ranged myself with the apostles of rebellion who blew imperious trumpet blasts before the walls of ordered life.

Verily the violence of the blasts was sometimes such that the ramparts should have fallen down; and often in my exaltation I already saw them totter, as I strode along reciting the dithyrambs of men who like myself could find scarce a responsive heart-beat in all this throbbing world. Above all I gloried in the declamations of Queen Mab, which sanctioned by high poetic authority the waste of my affections and my moody defiance of life's most salutary law. With these upon my lips I roamed, an absurd pathetic figure, amid the haunts of the Scholar Gipsy, and the wayward upland breezes conspired with my truant moods. And while I sat by my lamp late into the night, I turned the pages of pessimists and cynics, for no principles are dearer to a man than those which allow him to profess contempt for the benefits which he cannot enjoy.

Yet by seeking amid such simples a balm for wounded pride, I did not really deceive myself, but

lived as a sophist rather than a philosopher. And all the while I was digging graves for my better instincts, until my sexton's mood, confining me within churchyard walls, gave me over almost entirely to the company of mental bats and owls. The danger of it all was that though I was yet youthful, and should have been still pliant as a sapling, I was fostering the growth of those habits which, like rings in the grain, are the signature of unyielding years. Naturalists say that a bullfinch fed only on hempseed gradually loses his fair plumage and becomes black as a raven: so my soul, nourished on thoughts of rebellion, put off its bright and diverse enthusiasms and was clothed in the dark garment of despair.

When the long-desired hour of release came, and I was free to turn my back upon the spires of my prison city, I had already plumbed an abyss of misery. The very thought of life in the conflict of the world was abhorrent; and if I had been of the Roman Church I should have become a Benedictine and sought a lettered and cloistered peace. I despaired of finding anywhere upon earth the profound quietude, the absolute detachment, when a chance occasion seemed to crown my desire, and blind to all warnings of disillusion, I suddenly set sail for what I then thought might be a permanent sojourn in the East.

Within two months' time the whole environment of my life was changed, and I was established on a lonely plantation set high upon a range of hills whose slopes were clothed with primeval forests verging to a tropical sea. My home, a white-walled, red-roofed bungalow with a great columned verandah like a temple's peristyle, lay in the issue of an upper valley threaded by a clear stream, whence you may look far down over rolling plains to an horizon lost in the shimmering heat of noon. Immediately to the east rose the cone of a great solitary hill, always outlined against the sky with a majestic isolation that lent it an almost personal existence, and at the birth of every day bearing the orb of the rising sun upon its wooded shoulder. Round about, in scattered villages of thatched and mud-walled huts, dwelled brown men of ancient pagan ways, men who neither knew progress nor set any price upon time.

There I entered upon a wholly new existence as remote from all the social trials which beset shyness as if it were passed in some island of the uttermost sea. I had escaped from a harrying pursuit; I was free; and to the bliss of this recovered liberty I abandoned myself, without attempting to justify my flight to conscience or forming any scheme for future years. Like a deer which has eluded the hounds, I yearned only for rest and long

oblivion of the chase; I wanted to live woodland days until, all the strain and panic of the past forgotten, I might rise refreshed and see a new way clear before me.

And this first abandonment was a time of ecstasy. The long tranquil days were crowned by nights of peace yet more desired. I lay beneath the verandah and watched the stars in their splendour, not the pin-points of cold light that pierce our misty western heavens, but bright orbs in innumerable companies hovering upon the tranced earth. Night after night I saw the incomparable vision; month after month the moon rose slowly over the high wall of the jungle, first a great globe imminent upon the trees, next soaring remote through the upper heavens, waning at last to a sphere of pale unquickening light. I would lie thus for hours motionless, with lulled mind, until the breeze forerunning the dawn, or the quavering wail of the jackal, recalled the startled thought to the prison bonds of self.

With the gentle lapse of months all these impersonal influences took dominion over me and gave me a quiet happiness never known before. The nights brought the greater light; but the days too had their glories. I would climb the rugged sides of the mountain, and emerging into a colder world sit beneath an overhanging rock and see the hot

air quivering over leagues of plain; while in the nearer distance, far down beneath my feet, the rice-fields shone like emerald and the palm-fringed pools like shields of silver. Or I would stretch myself at early afternoon on the close-cropped grass on the jungle-edge, and watch the opposite sky take on an ever-deeper blue against the setting sun behind me. Often at such times I would hear a rushing in the highest branches, and turning very silently, see the outposts of a troop of monkeys peering down through the gleaming foliage. Then, if I moved, neither head nor limb, others would come, and yet others, leaping from branch to branch and plunging down from higher to lower levels like divers cleaving a deep green sea; until at last some slightest involuntary movement of mine would put the whole host to flight, and greybeards, young warriors, camp followers and mothers with their children on their backs would spring precipitate from tree to tree, screaming and gibbering like Homer's sapless dead. Then, when the stars rushed out and the darkness came on apace, it was sweet to wander home along those paths so dear to primitive men in all countries, narrow paths and sinuous, smoothed by the footfalls of centuries, winding patiently round every obstacle and never breaking through after the brutal manner of civilization. The fire-flies gleamed

in the brushwood on either hand, and from every side rose that all-pervading hum of busy insects through which the tropic forest is never still.

Amid these surroundings, so peaceful and so new, my soul was stilled to that γαλήνη or ocean-calm which the old Greek philosopher found the highest good for man. And month by month the mere material side of life grew of less moment; the body fretted the spirit less, but often seemed a tissue of gossamer lightness through which it could pass at will, as the breeze through the gleaming spider-webs upon the bushes at dawn. There were times when the ideal of the mystic seemed well-nigh accomplished, when my body might almost have been abandoned by the soul for hours upon end. The words of Emerson seemed to be fulfilled: "By being assimilated to the original soul by whom and after whom all things subsist, the soul of man does then easily flow into all things and all things flow into it: they mix; and he is present and sympathetic with their structure and law."

As I write now amid the roar of London traffic, I well believe that to men who have never bathed in eastern moonlight, the description will sound hyperbolical and false. But when I think of those old days, how serene they were, how apart, I let the words stand: I am not artist enough to give them a more plausible simplicity. All conditions that a

recluse might crave seemed now to be fulfilled for my benefit. The virgin forests and great hills were a perpetual joy, but there was a tranquil pleasure in the plantation which man's labour had reclaimed from these. That was a meet place indeed for the meditation of a quiet hour, and no more grateful refuge can be conceived than such a shady grove at the height of noon. You must not fancy an expanse of dusty land lined with prim rows of plants in the formal style of a nursery garden; but, spread over the lower slopes of the valleys, spacious woods of clean, grey-stemmed trees, with overarching branches thinned to cast a diaphanous shade over the sea of lustrous dark leaves below. The shrubs stood waist-high in serried, commingling ranks, their dark burnished leaves gleaming here and there in the sifted rays that found their way down through the vaults of foliage; the groves of Daphne had no more perfect sheen.

I learned to feel for this gracious place a love only second to that of the wilder jungle; for nature thus tamed to work side by side with man loses indeed her austerer charm, but not her calm and dignity: these she brings with her always to be a glory to the humblest associate of her labour. Often as I pruned a tree, or stripped its stem of suckers, I felt the soothing, quickening influence of this partnership, and my thoughts turned to others

who had known a like satisfaction and relief; to Obermann forgetting his melancholy in the toil of the vintage, plucking the ripe clusters and wheeling them away as if he had never known the malady of thought; or to Edward Fitzgerald out with the dawn among his roses at Little Grange.

Amid these high dreams and simple occupations, time seemed to glide away like a brimming stream, and the only events that marked the passing of the years were wayfarings through the country-side, sojournings in strange, slumbrous native towns, expeditions of wider range to old white ports of Malabar still dreaming of the forgotten heroes whose story Camoens sang. After many such journeys the genius of this oriental land seemed to travel with us, so familiar did every aspect of this simple Indian life become. Our equipment was of set purpose the patriarchal gear of native fashion; narrow carts with great lumbering wheels were covered by matting arched upon bent saplings, and had within a depth of clean rice-straw on which at night mattresses were spread. Beneath each yoke went a pair of milk-white oxen with large mild eyes and pendulous dewlaps, great beasts of a fine Homeric dignity and worthy of Nausicaa's wain. They swung along with a leisurely rolling gait; and if their silent feet moved too slowly, the sleepy brown-skinned driver, crouching on the pole

between them, would shame them into speed by scornful words about their ancestry, more prompt than blows in their effect on beasts of ancient and sacred lineage.

We travelled at night or in the freshness of early morning, regardless of the hours, unfretted by the tyrannous remembrances of appointed times. Milestones passed slowly, like things drifting, which ask no attention, and hardly perceived in the moment of their disappearance, serve only to enrich and replenish the mind's voluptuous repose. It was a joy to lie drowsily back upon the straw, awaiting sleep and looking out upon the stars through the open back of the cart, while the fire-flies darted across the feathery clusters of bamboo, and the cradling sound of wheels and footfalls called slumber up out of the darkness. And it was equal delight to spring from the cart at first flush of dawn, and see some far blue hill in the east lined like a cloud with broadening gold, until the resistless sun rose a full orb above it, flooding the grey plains and making the leaves of the banyans gleam with the lustre of old bronze. But though the sun was come, we would often press on for yet three hours, through belts of squirrel-haunted wood, beside great sheets of water with wild-duck floating far amidst, and borders starred with yellow nenuphars, across groves of mango and plantain

trees into landscapes of tiny terraced plots, where the vivid green rice-blades stood thick in the well-soaked earth, and bowed brown figures diverted to their roots the thread-like rivulet from the great brown tank above.

Here would be a wayside shrine, a simple stuccoed portico with columns streaked in red, enclosing the sacred emblems with their offerings of golden marigold, and bearing upon each corner, carved in dark grey stone, Siva's recumbent bull. Here millet fields, with hedges of blue aloe or euphorbias like seven-branched candlesticks, announced a place of habitation; soon the village itself appeared, a long irregular line of white-walled houses roofed with thatch or tile, and here and there greater dwellings with carved balconies and barred verandahs, behind which impassive white-robed figures sat and seemed to ponder upon life. On the right, perhaps, would be a shop all open to the road, where, cross-legged upon a kind of daïs, the merchant sat among his piled wares, unenterprising and unsolicitous, serenely confident in the balance-sheet of fate. On the left, in a shady corner, a barber would be bending over a half-shaven skull. Everywhere children of every shade from yellow to deep umber would be playing solemnly about the ways, turning upon the passing stranger their grave, unfathomable eyes.

Beyond the village there would be a rest-house maintained for the use of wayfaring white men, and here we would repose through the heat of the day, reclining with a book in rooms shaded with shutters, or with fine mats drenched from hour to hour with cooling sprays of water. Then with the sun's decline we would set out once more, meeting a file of blue-robed women erect as caryatides as they came up from the well, each bearing upon her back-thrown head a water-jar of earthen or brazen ware, staying her burden with a shapely brown arm circled with bangles of glass and silver. In the short hours before the darkness, we would encounter all the types of men which go to make up Indian country life – the red-slippered banker jogging on his pony beneath a white umbrella, the vendor of palm-wine urging a donkey almost lost beneath the swollen skins, barefooted ryots with silent feet and strident tongues, crowds of boys and children driving buffaloes and cows, all coming homeward from their labour with the evening.

And when these had gone by, and we rolled on through the scented air of the silent open country, we would come perhaps in the gathering darkness to a great river lapping and murmuring through the blackened rocks above the ford, and shining like a glorious path in the light of the rising moon. Silently, high above the banks, there would flit

through the still air bands of flying foxes awakened for their nightly raid upon the plantain groves; and in the shadows of the further bank there would gleam a sudden light, or the echoes of a hailing voice would rise and then die away. Steeped in the poetry of all these things we would cross and emerge upon the opposite slope to begin the pilgrimage of the night anew. So to live tranquil days and unfretful, moving in quiet through a still land rich in old tradition – this was an experience of peace which no dreams of imagination could surpass, a freshness of joy penetrative as the fragrance of unplucked wayside flowers.

Sometimes we would set out on longer journeys by land and sea, crossing the wooded ghats and descending to some old port of historic name, Cochin or Mangalore or Calicut, white places of old memory, sleeping by the blue waves as if no Vasco de Gama had ever come sailing up out of the West to disturb their enchanted slumber. The approach to these dreamy shores was dark and tumultuous, as if nature had set an initiation of contrasting toil before the enjoyment of that light and peace. It followed the bed of a mountain stream, which began in a mere pleat of the hills, tumbling often in white cascades, and enduring no boat upon its waters until half its course was run. But here it challenged man to essay a fall; for where it burst

its way over rocky slopes were channels jeopardous and hardly navigable, sequences of foaming rapids, races of wild water swirling round opposing boulders, and careering indignant of restraint between long walls of beetling rock. Here when the sun had gone down we would embark with a crew of lithe brown men in a boat hewn from a single tree, seamless and stoutly fashioned to be the unharmed plaything of such rocks and boisterous waters as these. In these rapids the river waked to consciousness of mighty life, tossing our little craft through a riot of dancing waves, whirling it round the base of perpendicular rocks set like adamant in the hissing waters, sweeping it helpless as a petal down some glassy plane stilled, as it were, into a concentrated wrath of movement. The men sprang from side to side, from bow to stern, staving the craft with a miraculous deftness from a projecting boulder, forcing her into a new course, steadying her as she reeled in the shock and strain of the conflict, while their long poles bent continually like willow wands against her battered sides. The steersman stood silent, except when he shouted above all the din some resonant, eruptive word of command; the men responded by breathless invocations to their gods, relaxing no tense sinew until the pent waters rushed out into some broad pool where the

eased stream went brimming silently, gathering new strength in the darkness of its central deeps.

At such places the moon would perhaps be obscured by passing clouds, and we would land upon an eyot until she shone once more in a clear heaven. Stretched at length upon the fine white sand waiting for her return, we could hear the boom of waters in the distance calling us on to a renewal of the conflict. These periods of great stillness, interposed between tumults past and impending, had their own refinement of pleasure as far above the joys of fenced and covenanted ease as the bivouac of the hard campaign surpasses slumber in the fine linen of a captured city: they brought the wandering mind into communion with elemental forces, and seemed to hold it expectant of supernatural events. In that interlunar twilight there reigned a solemn sense of wonder evoked here eternally, one felt, from the ancient time, with the rustling of stirred foliage and the voice of those far waters for its music.

The lulled reason yielded place to reverie, and the whole rapt being abandoned itself like an Orphic worshipper to the guidance of an unseen mysteriarch. This acquiescence in the swift succession of calm to fury and stress, resembled the quiet which may be conceived to follow sudden death; the heightened sense of vicissitude in things sum-

moned up and sustained a solemn mood. All the while that we lay charmed and half oppressed in this atmosphere as of an under-world, the clouds were drawing forward on their course; and as their last fringe trailed slowly by and the moon was revealed once more, the spell was broken in an instant by human voices calling us to re-embark. Again we glided to the verge of tumultuous falls, again we were flung through foaming narrows and labyrinthine passages of torn rocks, until, the last promontory turned with arrowy swiftness, we shot through a postern of the granite barrier and bounded far into still water fringed with trees of profoundest shadow. We put in to shore, for this stage of our journey was over; the dawn was near; the carts stood waiting on the road. But the influence of the wonderful night, clinging about us, would keep us long silent, as if awed by the passing of ancient Vedic gods.

I will not describe the later stages of these journeys: the coasting voyages in restful ships that seemed built to sail Mæander; the touchings at old wharfless ports; the visits to lone temples where Herodotus would have loved to linger; the rambles on the slopes of Adam's Peak; the meditations amid the ruins of Anaradhapura and Pollanarrua, ancient homes of kings, now stripped of every glory but that of these sonorous names – such are the

records of every traveller, and are chronicled to satiety by a hundred hasty pens. A month of wandering within the fringe of civilization would be closed by a last week of patriarchal travel, bringing us back to our remote valley just as the clouds of the coming monsoon were ranging in denser ranks along the evening sky like the tents of a beleaguering army. Hardly had we time to settle down for the wet season, see to the stacking of fire-logs, and be sure that every tile on the roof was firm in its appointed place, when the embattled host seemed to break up from its last camp, and advance upon us along the whole line that the eye perceived.

One year I was witness of the first onset, which came in the late afternoon – an immediate shock of massed clouds without throwing forward of skirmishers or any prelude of the vanguard. Our home looked down upon a gentle incline of open grassy land to a broad belt of jungle in the middle distance; here the undergrowth and small trees had been newly cleared away, opening out a dim far view across an uncumbered leaf-strewn floor into the backward gloom of the forest. I sat with my eyes fixed upon the trees, drawing the rain on with the whole strength of desire to the parched country lying there faint with the exhaustion of three months of drought. While I watched, the deep line of cloud, at first distinct from the forest-top along

which it came rolling, insensibly merged with the foliage, until every contour was lost in a common gloom, only the great bare stems below standing pale against the gathering darkness. There was an intense stillness everywhere like the silence of expectation which falls upon an awestruck crowd; the very insects had ceased their usual song. And now the ear caught a distant sound, vague and deep, coming up out of the mid darkness, and growing to a mighty volume as a sudden wind swept out from the sounding foliage into the open land and searched every cranny of the house as it passed. Then, as if drawn by the wind, there came into view among the nearest tree-stems a moving grey line advancing with a long roar until it hid the whole forest from sight: it was the wave of battle about to break upon us. It came on like a wall, enormous, irresistible; one instant, and it had devoured the intervening space; another, and we were lost in the deluge, and the great rain drops were spilled upon the roof with the noise of continuous thunder. As the deep sound reverberated through the roof above me, I went in exulting to a hearth piled with blazing logs, glad in the prospect of renewing for many weeks old and quiet habitudes of indoor life, rich with solace of books and tranquil meditation.

I have dwelt upon the outward aspects of my life in exile, because the sojourn of these years amid the hills and forests taught a natural leechcraft which was to stand me in good stead in coming years, and may stand in equal stead other souls desolate as mine. Like the Nile brimming over the fields, a flood of joy from nature overlaid my parched being, enriching it with a fertile loam, and shielding it from the irritations of the world. I lay fallow beneath the still, sunlit waters, unharrowed by teasing points of doubt, and porous to the influence of an all-encompassing peace. Exile had opened to me a new heaven and a new earth, whose freshness and calm charmed thought away from all vain questionings; the fascination of outward things had for a while cooled the useless ardour of introspection. But it was inevitable that the bland ease of such a contemplative life should bring no enduring satisfaction to the mind; it was not an end in itself, but a mere means to serenity, a breathing-space useful to the recovery of a long-lost fortitude. The time was now come when the hunted deer, refreshed in the quiet of his inaccessible glen, was to awake to new thought of the herd, and of the duties of a common life; when the peace of successful flight was to appear in its true light as a momentary release, and no longer

as the ultimate goal imagined in the anguish of pursuit.

It was during this last monsoon that doubts began to stir within, interrupting my studies of the systems of Hindu philosophy and my porings over sacred books. The vague insistence of these misgivings made me surely aware that even in this eastern paradise all was not well; but at first I refused to listen, and plunged deep into the maze of the Vedanta to escape the importunate voice. Yet anxiety came up around me like a heavy atmosphere; an indescribable sense of disillusion, clinging as a damp mist, brought its mildew to the soul, until my new heaven was overcast and my new earth dispeopled of all pleasures. Then one day the fever struck me down, and of a sudden my mind became an arena in which memories of earlier life chased one another unceasingly in the round of a delirious dance. Trivial events impressed themselves on consciousness with strange precision; objects long forgotten rose before me outlined in fire – one, a pane of stained glass in Fairford Church, with a lost soul peering in anguish through the red bars of hell. Each and every apparition was of the old life; all were emissaries from the forsaken West summoning me back to my renounced allegiance. When the fever left me, returning reason slowly brought order amid the

welter of confused ideas, as the ants sorted the grain for distracted Psyche, and for the first time I considered in the detachment of reminiscence the nature of my action in leaving England. I sifted the evidence at length as I lay under the verandah slowly recovering strength; and when at last judgment was delivered, it took the necessary form of condemnation.

I saw now that unless a man is prepared to discard every western usage, to slough off his inherited cast of thought, to renounce his faith, wholly and finally to abandon his country and his father's house, his flight is but the blind expedient of cowardice or pride. Here and there may be born one who can so cut himself off from the parent stem as to endure a fruitful grafting upon an oriental stock, but I knew that I at least was none such. I was no more prepared for so uncompromising a renunciation than any other weakling who seeks prestige by parade of exotic wisdom, and deems himself a seer if he can but name the Triad, or tell the avatars of Vishnu, I had not the credulity which may justify the honest renegade, and the western blood still ran too warmly in my veins. I felt that were I to stay in the East for fifty years, I should never reach the supreme heights of metaphysical abstraction whence men really appear as specks and life as a play; therefore to remain was to avow

myself a runaway and to live henceforth despicable in my own eyes. For over the unfathomable deep of oriental custom the torrent of our civilization flows unblending, as in the Druid's legend the twin streams of Dee flow clear through Bala lake, and never mingle with its waters. Not for our use is that intricate mind which in logic needs more than two premises to a conclusion, and in art is intolerant of all void space, entangling its figures in labyrinths of ornament which Maya herself might have devised to distract the sight from truth.

The Hindu has the true dignity of contemplation, and superbly removes himself from the sordid greeds of life. But in imagining and reviling an abstraction called Matter, he abides in the errors of the first Greek sages, and mines so far beneath the trodden earth that when he looks up into middle day he sees only the stars above him. Could I have shared the eremite's belief that his prayers help not merely his own solitary soul but all souls travailing through all the world, I might yet have remained where I was, an alien living indifferent to the common rule, like a monk of some shunned exotic order. But with convictions like mine, to do so would have brought the drear sense of derogation. All the miseries of the past were as nothing to that; there was but one manly course – to return and gird my loins for a new struggle with western

life. Within a month from the time when this course was seen to be a duty, I was standing on the deck of a homeward-bound steamer, watching the harbour lights recede into the distance.

Back once more in England, I threw aside the clinging robe of meditation, and falling upon work ravenously, indulged what genius of energy was still alive within me. I made haste to adore all that I had so lately burned, making life objective, revering personal ideals, and in the ordinance of material things finding the truest satisfaction of all endeavour. I saw in civilization the world's sole hope; its brisk life and abounding force took sudden hold of a fancy enervated by dreams. Again I found a new heaven and a new earth, though earth was now no more than man's dinted anvil, and heaven his reservoir of useful light. I lived for action and movement; I mingled eagerly with my fellows, and cursed the folly which had driven me to waste three years in an intellectual swoon. Now the day was not long enough for work, Lebanon was not sufficient to burn. I saw the western man with race-dust on his cheeks, or throned in the power-houses of the world, moving upon iron platforms and straight ladders in the mid throb and tumult of encompassing engines. One false step, and he must fall a crushed and mutilated

thing. Yet unconcerned as one strolling at large, he controlled the great wheels and plunging pistons, and brought them to a standstill with a touch of his finger. The confidence and strenuous ease of such life compelled me to marvel and admire, and I who had so lately lain at the feet of eastern sages, set up this mechanician as my god. If I looked back at all to the land of dreams, the placid figure beneath the Tree of Enlightenment took on the aspect of a fool's idol, ignobly self-manacled, pitiful and irksome in remembrance.

But if once more I dreamed of finality in change I deceived myself, forgetting that God Himself cannot unmake the past or undo what is done. A year had hardly gone by in this new apprenticeship to life, when at moments of weariness or overstrain sharp doubts shot through me and were gone again, like twinges of sudden pain recalling old disease to one who has lulled himself with dreams of cure. The feeling of fellowship with men grew weaker, and as it waned I began to shrink once more from my kind. I still believed myself happy, but happiness seemed to need constant affirmation, as though it could make no way in my favour without display of token or credential to confirm its truth. There were pauses in the clatter and jangle of life; the revolutions of the great wheels sometimes slowed into silence; and as these interludes

grew more frequent, I caught myself repeating that I really was content. The faint assurance given, I flung myself with devouring industry upon my allotted task, trying to stifle the forebodings which prophesied against my peace.

In one such pause my old self appeared before me again, like the face of an ancient enemy looking in from the darkness; stealthy footfalls which of late I had so often seemed to hear were now referred to their true cause as we saw each other eye to eye. The old Adam had awakened and was come for his inheritance; and the vision of him there across the pane gazing in upon his own, seemed to arraign me for disowning a brother and denying his indefeasible right. I recognized that with this familiar form cold reason had returned to oust the hopes and emotions which had usurped her office. My rush for freedom had ended, as such sallies often do, in exhaustion, capture and despair; upon the thrill and thunder of the charge followed the silence of the dungeon and the anguish of stiffening wounds. The truth, so simply written that a child might have spelled it, lay clear before me: I had left reformation till too late. I was too old to change.

Even a few years before, I might have dashed out, like Marmion, from the prison-fortress; but now the opportunity was past and the portcullis

was down. My character with all its faults was formed within me; and the very years which I had passed in the wilderness, instead of averting the danger, had set the final seal upon my fate, for when a man has reached a certain point in life he is intractable to the reforming hand. But though at last I knew myself beaten, and helpless in the hands of an implacable power, I fluttered like a wounded bird and sought wildly for a loophole of escape. I could no longer hope to stand alone against destiny; that conceit was gone: could I find a comrade to help me through the press and lift me when I fell? But here the invincible pride of shyness barred the way, forbidding alike any confession of weakness or any appeal to man's compassion. I could not bring myself to say: I am unable to rule my life, do you undertake it for me. Was marriage a conceivable path of redemption? I had never envisaged it before, but now, in my desperation, I dreamed it for a moment a possible issue. I even fixed upon the person who should thus save me from myself, and beguiled many lonely hours by picturing her charms and enumerating her noble qualities.

She lived in a country house where I had been several times a guest, and she had one of those faces which, in Gray's beautiful expression, speak the language of all nations. Her features had that

sunny charm which thaws mistrust; she was dowered with all graces and sweet qualities; and you could no more have doubted the immanent nobility of her nature than you could have dreamed a stain in the texture of a white petal. And with all her gentleness there was present I know not what sign and promise of strength, waking in those who saw her an intuitive trust in loyalty of uttermost proof. She would have flamed indignant against evil, but only evil could have moved her from that equal poise of soul which made her entrance into a room the prelude to higher thoughts and finer feelings. She was naturally kind without consciousness of a mission, neither seeking to enslave nor enfranchise, but by a silent outflowing of goodness ennobling whatever company she was in. Nor was her tongue the prattling servant of her beauty, but a guide of cheerful converse; for just as she charmed without device or scheme of fascination, so she possessed the art of speaking well without seeming to have ever studied it. In the chase after just and felicitous ideas, she could lead or follow over the most varied fields with the intuition of the huntress born. With all these excellences, her wit, her sincerity, her ardour for all things bright and true, she had no conceit of herself but kept her father's house in gladness and loved the country-side.

To her, in these days of imminent dismay, my thoughts flew out as to a fair protecting saint; until the inspiration of her visionary presence wrought in my fancy with such a dramaturgic power, that I seemed to walk daily with her, and to know all those delicate and sweet propinquities by which liking passes into affection and affection is glorified into love. So far did these happy day-dreams carry me, that they brought me to the extreme of imaginary bliss, and poured out for me the wine of untempered joy which thrills the hearts of lovers on the verge of their betrothal. The dreams that followed that magic draught denied me no convincing touch of circumstance, and projected upon a credible and familiar scene the bright possibilities to which fate denied a real existence. The scene was always the same, and the words and movements which entranced me followed each other with almost religious exactitude of detail which the adult demands of his day-dreams and the child of the fairy-tale he loves.

It was always a June afternoon when we went out together, into the meadows near her home; she moving with fluent grace as befitted a daughter of the woods, her eyes indrawing joy from all nature, her hair reflecting rich gold of the sunlight, her whole face lit with the pleasure of a bright hour; I a mere satellite attendant upon its central

star. We strolled through the four home-meadows, crossed a high-banked lane and a dingle with a brook running down it, and then from an open common flooded with sunlight passed into a wood of tallest beeches. In that cool, shadowy place the sun, searching a way through crannies in the upper verdure, chequered with patches of silver light the even mast-strewn floor. The multitude of smooth grey stems rose aligned like cathedral columns; and the grateful dimness of the wood, succeeding the glare of day, wakened a sense of purposed protection and quietude pervading all things, which soothed the mind with the illusion that this was a sacred spot appointed for an offering of souls. Near one of those isles of sunlight we lingered; and as she looked up to the source of light, the movement brought her face near the slanting shaft of rays, until there was set round it an aureole of dancing beams. It seemed to me at this part of my dream that there came to both of us some gracious influence, for as her eyes met mine they dropped again, and were fixed for a moment upon the wild flowers she carried. Then my heart began to beat and my whole being to grow greater: impassioned words, to that hour unconceived, came rushing to my lips; the fire and glory of a new manhood were kindling in me to the transformation of my nature – when, in the

very moment of utterance, a sheer barrier of doom descended between me and my joy; the fire was quenched, and my soul was poured out within me.

To this fatal point my fancy always brought me and no further, that coming thus to the threshold of the house of joy and hearing the bars shoot into their sockets I might thoroughly know my ineffectual self and leave untouched the forbidden latch. So far I came in my dream times without number; and always on the verge of joy there came that doom, and the shooting of those adamantine bolts.

Yet all the while I wove it, I knew that this texture of dreams must soon be drawn aside, and like the curtain in the tragedy reveal at last the horror concealed within. Such brooding was but the deception of a reluctant spirit dallying and delaying with any trifle by the way to put off the arrival at the hill of evil prospect. At last I learned the lesson of this abrupt ending to the dream at the point of full disillusion; it forced itself upon me with the power of an oracular utterance warning me to cease my palterings with fate. My reason now rebuked me like a stern judge, dissecting all false pleas and laying bare their weakness. What right had I, now knowing myself incurable, even to dream of easing my own pain by darkening and despoiling a second life? The love of solitude

was now more to me than even the love of a wife; it would surely come between us like a strange woman, and fill a pure heart with bitterness. No smiling hopes of a possible redemption could annul the immutable decree, and if I disobeyed the warning, guilt as well as misery would be mine; for he is pitiful indeed who only weds that his wife may suck the poison from his wounds. If I married I should stand for ever condemned of an unutterable meanness. So I dispelled my dreams and looked reality in the face.

It was a dismal prospect that lay before me. Until then the future had held its possible secrets, its imaginable revelations of change, which, like the luminous suggestions in dark clouds, allured with a promise of a brief and penetrable gloom. In my darkest hours I had lulled fear by the thought of a haply interposing Providence, and drifted on from day to aimless day nursing the hope of some miraculous release upon the very steps of the scaffold. But now I was twice fallen; and as a man abandoned by the last illusion of deliverance calls ruin to him, and in the new leisure of despair calmly scans the features at which but now he dared not glance, so I saw as in a hard grey light the true outlines of my destiny. The wreathing mist, the profound soft shadows, the clouds with their promise of mutability, were now all gone,

leaving the bare framework of a world arid and severe as a lunar landscape.

I seemed to be sitting in the dust, as in inmost Asia a sick man may crouch abandoned, while the caravan in which all his earthly hopes are centred goes inexorably upon its way. The blue sky flushes to deep purple before him; night falls; all colour is swallowed up in darkness, until the jingling camel-bells receding up the pass cross the dividing ridge, and for him the last silence is begun. Such then was the end of youthful ambition: for food a mouthful of ashes instead of the very marrow of joy; for home not the free ocean, but a stagnant pool ringed with weeping willows, a log's fit floating-place. Here to float, marking the weed creep onward until all from bank to bank was overfilmed, and there remained no clear water of space for reflection of a single star: to float, and feel the sodden fibres of life loosening in slow decay – this was to be the last state of the seedling which had sprung up on the mountain slopes with promise of mighty stem and overarching branches full of sap like the cedars of the Lord.

My life henceforth was to be ringed round and overhung with so heavy an air that joy and fancy should never fly in it, but fall dead as the birds above Avernus according to the ancient story. I seemed to see nothing upon the path of the fu-

ture but the stern form of Renunciation drawing between me and the living world the impassable circle of death in life, the ultima *linea rerum.* It was the last decree, the irrevocable sentence, the absolute end: and I had not yet reached half the Psalmist's span; I had not yet forgotten the lost summer mornings when the breeze scented with lilac came blowing through the casement, bearing with it the sound of glad voices welcoming the day.

Philosophers are prone to gird at the animal in man, accusing it of dragging the soul down to the mire in which it wallows. They forget that by its brutal insistence upon physical needs it often preserves from madness, and timely arrests him who goes like a sleep-walker upon the verge of the abyss. Weariness and hunger are like brakes upon the car; they stop the dire momentum of grief, and insure that if misery will again drive us furiously, she must lash winded steeds anew. But what force should stay a disembodied sorrow, which unbreathed by period or alternation of despair, should be rapt onward in the whirlwind and the hurricane, gathering eternally a fresh impetus of woe? Let us rail at the body for its weakness if we will, but prize it also for its restraint of the distracted mind. In the worst hour of my dejection it was the body which called the lost reason home. I became hungry and ate, hardly knowing what I

did; I slept exhaustion away; and after many hours awoke with clearer eyes, grateful to the weak flesh, and ready in its company to face life once more, a defeated but not a desperate man. I was glad to be thus reminded that the body could play this helpful part, and my gratitude for its timely rescue taught me in after days to endure its tyranny with a better grace. In the interlude between despair and new effort, I once more turned a dispassionate gaze upon myself, as upon some abandoned slave of a drug; and maintaining an attitude of half-amused detachment, sought by a diagnosis of my case to establish the real causes of my failure to lead a normal life.

At the outset I would make it clear that for me the only shyness that counts, is that which is so deeply ingrained, as to have outlasted youth. It may, indeed, be physically related to that transient bashfulness which haunts so many of us in our younger days only to vanish at maturity, swift as the belated ghost at cockcrow. But unlike this common accident of growth, it is no surface-defect, but an inward stain which dyes the very fibres of the being. It may, indeed, be somewhat bleached and diminished by a timely and skilful treatment, but is become too much a part of life to be ever wholly washed away. And the unhappy step-children of nature whose inheritance it is, seldom find a de-

liverer good at need; for as the world draws no distinction between their grave affliction and that other remediable misery of youth, it will sanction no other treatment than banter or mockery, which does but infuse yet more deeply the mournful dye. When this fails, it leaves its victims to the desolation which according to its judgment they have wilfully chosen; for the most part ignoring their existence, but often chastising them with scorpion-stings of disdain. Yet the subjects of this scorn, sufferers as I believe from a hereditary tendency matured by neglect into disease, deserve a more merciful usage than this, and their plea for extenuating circumstances should not be too impatiently rejected. For in them what is to most men a transient ailment has thrown down permanent roots to draw a nourishment from pain: and he who is fortunate enough to be whole should think twice before he makes sport of those in this distress.

To me this malady seems to arise from an antinomy between the physical and intellectual elements of the personality, from an unhappy marriage of mind and body, suffering the lower of the two partners to abase the life of the higher by the long-drawn misery of a hateful but indissoluble union. When the physical and mental natures in a man are happily attuned, there is a fair concord in his life and the outward expression of his

being is an unimpeded process, to which, as to the functions of a healthy organism, no heedful thought is given. If both natures are of the finest temper, they find utterance in a noble amiability and ease of manner; if both are coarse in the grain, they blend in a naïve freedom always sure of itself, the freedom of Sancho spreading himself in the duchess's boudoir. Between these two extremes there intervene a hundred compromises by which minds and bodies less equally yoked contrive to muffle the discordant notes of an inharmonious wedlock.

In most cases use gives to this politic agreement the peace and permanence of settled habit; the body proves itself so far amenable that it is accepted as a needful if uninspiring companion, and its plain usefulness ends by dulling the edged criticisms of the mind. But wherever there is a permanent incompatibility too profound for compromise, an elemental difference keeping the personality continually distraught, then shyness, in the sense in which I understand it, assumes its inalienable dominion. The flame of rebellion may smoulder unobserved while the sufferer is in his own home, but among strangers it will blaze fiercely, as the mind protests against the misinterpretations of its unworthy partner. This burning shame is not the proof of a foolish conceit, as unsympathetic

criticism proclaims it, but the visible misery of a keen spirit thwarted by physical defect. The man who manifests it is angered with himself because through a physical hindrance he has failed to take the place which would otherwise be his. He is proud, it may be, but not fatuous; for shyness as a rule implies a comparative quickness and alertness of intellect: its exceeding sensibility is exclusive of dulness; and it is frequently due to the presence in a reluctant body of a mind endowed with active powers.

Inasmuch as diffidence appears where the subtler formalities of life are compulsory, it is clear that it essentially belongs to the class called gentle, for this class alone enforces that exacting code of etiquette to which our discomfiture is so largely due. Shyness has seldom place in the patriarchal life where men live, "sound, without care, every man under his own vine or his own fig-tree," nor among those who, perforce pursuing a too laborious existence, have no leisure for superficial refinements. Though here and there you may find a Joseph Poorgrass, it is rare among the simple; it is not a popular weakness, and therefore wins no popular sympathy. Such is its first social limitation: it is almost restricted to the classes which are outwardly refined.

But it has another limitation of equal importance which may be described as climatic; for this malady is not found in equal degrees all over the habitable globe. There are many lands where it hardly exists at all even among the class which is alone liable to it; and in its serious form it is found only over a small part of the earth. There are many causes which conduce to this partial distribution. In one country manners are not minutely schooled, women being held of secondary account, and men content without subtlety; in another, life is in itself too primitive to devise the artifices of refinement; in a third, the fundamental disunion between the mind and the physical organism is prevented by the kindly hand of nature. For these reasons all the savage world, all the East, and the whole of southern Europe have little knowledge of the diffident, and what zoologists would call the area of distribution of the species is confined within narrow geographical limits.

It is in fact chiefly in the north and west of our own continent that the haunts of the diffident are to be found, for there alone are all the conditions necessary to their maintenance fulfilled – a society sufficiently leisured and wealthy to have elaborated conventional rules of intercourse, the assemblage of both sexes upon an equal footing, and a climate which exaggerates the antagonism be-

tween the quick mind and the unresponsive body. Here the cold humid airs have produced a race with great limbs and great appetites, but compensated these gifts by a certain unreadiness in the delicate encounter of wits and graces. To these impassive natures all displays of the personality are distasteful, and the lighter social arts, seeming both insignificant and histrionic, are learned with difficulty and practised with repugnance. An awkwardness of address, in the uneducated almost bovine, becomes in the cultivated a painful reserve and self-consciousness, reflecting in open physical distress the uneasiness of the man's whole being.

And among the northern nations which are thus afflicted England has achieved an undesirable supremacy, having herself smoothed the path of her eminence by a school system which withdraws her youth from female influences during the years when the tendency to reserve may be combated with a certain hope of success. It would ill become one who has never recovered from the effects of such deprivation to assume on the ground of his own narrow experience any wide dissemination of similar defects among his countrymen; his testimony would be received with suspicion, and he would be condemned as one who to justify himself would drag others down to his own poor level. Let me therefore place myself on surer ground by

calling as a witness an impartial observer from another country, one exceptionally trained in the analysis of national temperament and conduct.

When M. Taine visited England towards the close of the nineteenth century one of the first things to attract his notice was the bashfulness which he encountered in unexpected places. He was surprised to meet travelled and cultured men who were habitually embarrassed in society, and so reserved that you might live with them six months before you discovered half their excellent qualities. To unveil their true nature there was needed the steady breeze of a serious interest or the hurricane of perilous times; the faint airs of courtliness could not stir the heavy folds that hung before their hearts. These strong men could not join in delicate raillery, but shrank back afraid; as if a tortoise, startled by a shower of blossoms, should withdraw into that thick carapace which can bear the impact of a rock. There was one who stammered pitifully in a drawing-room, but the next day sought the suffrages of electors with an unembarrassed and fluent eloquence, so proving that his failure came not of folly or cowardice, but from lack of training in a certain school of fence. He needed the open air for the play of his broadsword; and to his hand, apt to another hilt, the foil appeared a woman's weapon. Speaking of

high aims and national ideals, he moved in a large place oblivious of himself; but in the social arena he tripped with timid steps, like a man essaying an unfamiliar dance. On the platform he had the enthusiasm and confidence of an orator; on the carpet he could not string three sentences in any courtly language.

In the North the art of mercurial dialogue, which in the South is a natural gift, is only learned under favourable conditions, and is often condemned by those who have it not, as a popinjay's accomplishment. Immediate cordiality to strangers is frowned upon as tending to divorce courtesy from truth. It is otherwise with the southern peoples. While the Englishman conceals his benevolence by a frigid aloofness of manner, or blurts out friendliness like an indiscretion, the Italian is courtly without a second thought, and the Frenchman seems the comrade of a chance acquaintance from the moment when he has taken his hand. They are amiable without effort in the security of a harmonious nature, and if they encounter diffidence at all, observe it like an anthropologist confronted with a survival of primitive times in the culture of a civilized age.

Taine did not err when he found the home of shyness among the Teutonic peoples; he saw that it flourishes in climatic conditions acting hardly

upon a vigorous race, and only allowing it to cultivate ease of manner by effort and outlay, just as they only allow it to raise under glass the grapes and oranges which more favoured peoples can grow in the open air. He saw too that this pain of diffidence becomes more subtle as the progress of culture makes us more sensitive to vague impressions from our environment, and tunes the nerves to a higher pitch. A shy nature upon this plane of susceptibility suffers anguish from an uncontrollable body; and even in peaceful moments the memory of the discomfitures so inflicted may distort a man's whole view of the world around him. He is impatient of the wit which demands a versatility in response beyond his powers, and persuades himself into contempt of those ephemeral arts to which his nature cannot be constrained. Irritated at the injustice which places so high in the general scale of values accomplishments which he cannot practise, shrinking from the suave devices of gesture and expression which in his own case might quickly pass into antic or grimace, he withdraws more and more from the places where such arts win esteem to live in a private world of inner sentiment. As he leaves this sure retreat but rarely himself, so he forbids ingress to others; and becoming yearly a greater recluse, he confines himself more and more within the walls of his forbidden city. The

mind which may have been fitted to expand in the free play of intellectual debate or to explore the high peaks of idea, loses its power of flight in this cave where it dwells with a company of sad thoughts, until at last the sacrifice is complete and the perfect eremite is formed.

But the virile Teutonic spirit does not suffer things to reach this ultimate pass without stubborn resistance, and this is one reason why shyness is often so conspicuous, seeming deliberately to court an avoidable confusion. Over and over again it forces the recalcitrant body back into the arena, preferring repeated humiliation to a pusillanimous surrender. People often wonder at the recklessness with which the shy expose themselves to disaster, forgetting that in this insistence of a soul under discomfiture, there is evidence of a moral strength which is its own reward. What discipline is harder than that which conscientious diffidence imposes upon itself? To stand forth and endure, though every instinct implores retreat, is a true assertion of the higher self for the satisfaction of imperious duty. Such deliberate return towards suffering is no cowardice, but a triumph over weak flesh; and the awkward strife of diffidence may often prove a greater feat of arms than the supple fence of self-possession.

Like the physical obstacles, the mists, the snows and bleak winds, which have hardened the fibre of northern men, diffidence as an obstacle to ease has its place among the causes of strong character; and those who appear at a first glance weak and ineffectual as Hamlet, will often in the light of knowledge be found guided by the most inflexible moral determination. They see, as in a mirage, peace supreme and adorable, but may not tread the hermit's path that leads to her dwelling. Only a religious vow might justify the abandonment of the human struggle, and even that appears desertion. The stern genius of the North grudges immurement, even to great piety, remembering that Christ himself remained but forty days in the desert and then returned to deliver the world. If he had remained there all his life, and never met the Pharisees and high-priests, our forefathers would have rejected his law. For this reason there can be no more rest for the shy than for starving Tantalus; for this reason my flight into the East had been foredoomed to failure.

If shyness is thus affected by climate and geography, its birth and growth are also conditioned by historical causes. Just as it is the peculiar failing of northern and western peoples, so it is the creation of comparatively modern times; it had no

place among the classified weaknesses of men until these peoples began in their turn to make history.

In Greece, where limb and thought were consentient in one grace of motion, the body was too perfect an expression of the mind to admit any consciousness of discord; the greater simplicity of a life passed largely in the open air, left no place for awkwardness in the franker converse of man with man. Moreover the seclusion of women rendered unnecessary that complicated code of manners which the freer intercourse of the sexes has built up in later times as a barrier against brutality or the unseemly selfishness of passion. In Greece the words of the witty and the wise could be heard in the market-place; good conversation was not for the few alone; and the common man might of unquestioned right approach the circle of Socrates or Plato. The sense of community was everywhere, overthrowing reserve, and propitious to the universal growth of fellowship.

In the Roman world things were changed; there were more closed doors and courts impenetrable of access. Insignia of office, gradations of wealth and rank, sundered those of high estate from classes which now acknowledged their own inferiority; privacies, exclusions, distinctions innumerable, altered the face of public life as the easy *mos majorum* was confined by the ordinances of encroaching

fashion. It was now that women began to be cast for leading parts upon the great stage of life. Under the Empire, by the rapid removal of her disabilities the Roman matron achieved a position of independence which made her, according to her nature, a potent force of good or evil. It was now that the intricate threads of social prescription were woven into that ceremonial mantle which was afterwards to sit so uneasily on the shoulders of barbarian men.

But the time for shyness was not yet come, for Italy is a sunny land where clear air makes clear minds, blandly or keenly observant of the world, and never impelled by onset of outer mists and darkness to tend a flickering light within themselves. There was melancholy, high and stately, such as Lucretius knew, when he went lonely among the homesteads or along the shore; but it was too exalted to be one with diffidence, for he who will hold the sum of things in his thoughts walks on clouds above the heads of men, free of all misgiving. Perhaps beyond the Alps, in some Rhætian upland where Roman dignity was interfused with old barbaric roughness, the first signs of our malady were perceived and the first ancestor of all the shy was born. But even yet the time was not ripe, nor the place prepared. Christianity had to come, turning men's eyes inwards and proclaim-

ing the error of the objective pagan way. A new feeling, the sense of personal unworthiness before God, spreading through the Roman world, now stirred mankind to still communing with themselves, and sanctioned the stealing away from the noisy festivals of life. By enjoining a search into the depths of the heart, it encouraged the growth of a self-consciousness hitherto unknown. It was not always a panic of contrition, sweeping the joyous out of the sunlight into a monastic shade, which brought the troubled into a new way of peace, but sometimes a quiet joy in renunciation, congruous with a timid mood, leading by gradual allurement to cloisters of shadowy lanes and cells which were forest bowers. The new faith gave open sanction to evasion of the banquet, and thus fortified and increased those who loved not the ceremonial day. The spirit of solitude, no more a mænad, but a nun, sheltered earth's children in the folds of her robe, and no man said her nay.

Moreover, Christianity quickened the force of that feminine influence which Rome had first set flowing through the civilized world, but diverted the stream from irregular and torrential courses into a smooth channel gliding amid sacred groves. It clothed woman with ideal grace and virtue, and perceived in her powers which the virile mind could never wield. "Inesse quinetiam sanctum aliquid

et providum putant, nec aut consilia earum aspernantur, nec responsa negligunt." So our ancestors held in the northern woods, and Christianity, purifying and expanding their belief, fulfilled it with a new perfection.

But this gradual binding of all men's limbs in silken cords of reverence, making a rude world civil, was now to inaugurate for diffidence its miserable career. Through the rough deference of the German camp, through the Provençal code of *courtoisie*, up to the modern law of fine manners, the drudge and chattel of the primeval tribe has risen to impose her law upon the modern world. Earth is better for this finer power, but social intercourse is less sincere. For woman, having curbed the brute man by conventional restraints of outward demeanour, has made human intercourse smooth and seemly, but imposed upon mankind the wearing of unnatural masks. Before the multitude of locked souls with labels of smiling faces the sensitive nature feels itself mocked, and is soon distraught. It cannot suffer convention gladly for an ultimate good, but is chilled by this everlasting urbanity, which must, it fancies, be compact of irony and conceal a disingenuous soul.

All this finished science of illusion is like an east wind to the confidences of the shy, and if they stay within its range they are blighted be-

fore their hearts have time to unfold. They long for a less biting air, for vernal hours in sheltered dells, where without sheaths and unguarded the hearts of flowers lie open to their neighbours and to heaven. There was once a simple day when religion set hearts interflowing, but now it can melt them only within the precincts; the fire which is carried from the altar is dead at the church door. The brotherliness of those early days is indeed often found in humble walks of life, but these we cannot continually tread, because our intellectual and artistic tastes find there no sufficient nurture. Among the cultured a cold convention often reigns, behind which only a more persistent nature than ours can pass. Unless, therefore, we find our way into some circle of gentle scholars or lovers of the beautiful quite simple in their tastes, a thing possible but not often granted by a niggard fortune, we are perforce thrown back upon our own company, and move towards the grave alone. For this we accuse none; nothing is more at fault than our own constitution. But to us society is a school of dames, who are not to be blamed if amid the crowd that clamours for their teaching, they find no time for the backward scholar. We are the dunces of the school, and are dismissed without learning the accomplishments set forth upon the

prospectus. That is why in our northern streets so many seeming hats are cowls.

In England the loss of congenial intercourse is perhaps more certain than in other lands. For through his national reserve the highly-cultured Englishman has a cold perfection of good breeding to which heartiness is vulgarity; he emanates intimidation, and in courtesy is rather studious than spontaneous, seldom genial but in an ancient friendship. If you knew him to the concealed heart, and were suffered to assay the fine metal beneath this polished surface, you would win a golden friendship; but only on a desert island would he permit the operation. To the shy who may encumber his path his bearing seems marked by an indifference which they magnify into aversion, and are thereby the worse confounded. In a land where such convention reigns they go through life like persons afflicted with a partial deafness; between them and the happier world there is as it were a crystalline wall which the pleasant low voices of confidence can never traverse.

I say, then, that the real, the enduring shyness is that inveteration of reserve to which a few men in a few countries are miserably condemned. Others know it as a transient inconvenience, as the croup or measles of childhood; but in us it is obstinate and ineradicable as grave disease. If out of the long

frustration of our efforts to be whole some strain of bitterness passes into our nature; if sometimes we burn with unjust resentment against the fate which suffers such lives as ours to be prolonged, let it be remembered in extenuation that to those who bear a double burden human charity owes the larger kindliness. For though like you we bear our share of common troubles, O happier men and women, the common pleasures and compensations which are as wings upon your shoulders are heavy packs on ours. The cheerful contrasts are for you alone; for us the bright threads interwoven in the dark stuff of life were faded before they reached the loom.

You who have the friendships and affections without which you would not care to live a day, think more kindly of those to whom the interludes of toil are often harder than the toil itself. Of your charity believe our fate ordained and not the choice of our own perversity; for what man born of woman would choose a path so sad, were there not within him some guiding and possessing devil which he could in nowise cast out? Never will in maddest hours of freedom consented to such doom; we were condemned at birth, our threads were spoiled upon the fingers of the Norns.

Such in its broader outlines seemed the infirmity which had grown with my growth, and now had to be reckoned with, like the bridle of Theages, as a permanent hindrance to a reasonable happiness. Old hopes lay shattered about me – well, I had to pick up the fragments and piece together a less ambitious ideal.

I will not linger over the forces which helped my resolution, the great and general remedies which come to the relief of men in like evil case. Religion, philosophy, art, science, literature – all promised their anodynes against despair; slowly they stirred in me anew those springs of interest in life which disillusion seemed to have choked for ever. I rose up, and looking round upon the world saw that it was still good; and there came into my memory brave words which a golden book puts in the mouths of its indomitable knights: "I will take the adventure which God shall ordain me." I now perceived that if evil fortune had unhorsed me it had yet left me endurance to continue the combat on foot. My second failure was more final and disastrous than the first discomfiture in earlier life, but now the plague of pessimism was stayed by a greater recuperative power. Those long hours of the long eastern day, spent under the verandah with books of many ages and languages, had not been altogether fruitless; they had helped to ma-

ture a wider and more catholic taste than that of restless youth, the kind of culture that brings not rebellion but peace.

In my eastern watch-tower I had re-read the great books from a new point of vantage, and let the eye roam over fields of literature which lie beyond the undergraduate's bounds; by a still permeation of fine influence, my crude philosophy was unconsciously mellowed, as the surface of ivory, according to Roman belief, by the bland air of Tibur. For by the mere being in an atmosphere of serenity our nature grows porous to gracious influences streaming in we know not how or when, and taking their abode in our very grain and structure. And so without consciousness of good desert, I found myself confident in a new discipline, and looking for the word of command from wiser leaders than Byron or the youthful Shelley. Queen Mab was now the saddest rhetoric, and Childe Harold's plaint unseemly lamentation; I had erased from my calendar of saints the names of apostles of affliction once held in honour; the Caliph Amurath with his tale of fourteen happy days out of a long life of royal opportunity; Swift with his birthday lection from Jeremiah. Rather there trooped into memory with a quiet pomp and induction of joy, forms of men who, though justified in rebellion by every human suffrage, remained loyal to the

end and proved by endurance a more imperial humanity. Socrates unperturbed by mortal injustice; Dante a deep harmonious voice amid jangling destinies; William the Silent serene in every desperate conjecture – these seemed now the more perfect captains. If exile had done no more than transfer my allegiance to such as these, I had not borne the lash in vain.

But at the first setting out upon this later stage I had still mistakes to make, and the ascent to tranquillity was not to be accomplished without stumbling. It was the old Roman creed which first drew me away from fretting memories; in its high restraint, as of a hushed yet mighty wind, it breathed a power of valiant endurance, and promised before nightfall the respite of a twilight hour. For stoicism has qualities which seem foreordained for the bracing of shy souls, as if the men who framed its austere laws had prescience of our frailty and consciously legislated to its intention. It is the philosophy of the individual standing by himself, as the shy must always stand, over against a world which he likes not but may not altogether shun. And in this proud estrangement it promises release from all the inquisition of morbid fears, and an imperturbable calm above the need of earthly friends or comfort or happiness; it plants the feet upon that path of nature along

which a man may go strongly, consoled in solitude by a god-like sense of self-reliance. This immutable confidence is the essential power of stoicism, which does not, like the great oriental religions, tame personality by ruthless maiming, but teaches it to bear the brunt of adversities erect, like an athlete finely trained. Its very arrogance, its sufficiency, perforce commend it to those whose instinct urges to self-abasement: its lofty disregard of adverse circumstance is medical to their timidity.

And so in the hour of my bereavement its voice inspired to resistance like a bugle sounding the advance; its echoes rang with the assurance that man was not made to be the worm of Eden, darkly creeping in the dust, but rather its noblest creature, with the light crowning his head and the winds tossing his hair. And then its strong simplicity, so masculine and unemotional, was grateful to one now finally dismated, and so cruelly handled as to have, it seemed, no use for a heart any more. Better let feeling die than be betrayed by diffidence into the denial of its true allegiance, or into expressions of the inner life false and wry as the strange laughter which the doomed suitors in Ithaca could not control. Though it stifled feeling, the creed of Cleanthes exalted the intellect, which was all that now remained to me unimpaired; surely it was the appointed rule for one henceforth to be severed

from the passions and enthusiasms through which humanity errs and is happy.

"The world," the wise Stoic seemed to say, "is twofold in its nature. Some things may be changed by man, others are by his utmost effort immutable. God has implanted in you a right reason by which, when it is well trained, you can infallibly distinguish between the two, avoiding thus all unworthy fretfulness and all idle kicking against the pricks. Therefore he has made you for happiness; for the joy of men is an achievement; and their misery in the coveting of the unattainable end. If you would fulfil his benevolent design, seek only what has been placed in your power, frankly resigning all that lies beyond; but be ever difficult in renunciation; test and sound well every issue, lest you leave a permitted good undone, than which nothing is a greater sin. To be loyal, to be contented, to acquiesce in all things save only in ameliorable evil, this is to live according to nature, which is God's administration. If you are assiduous in careful choosing, you will learn at last to make a right use of every event; you will be harassed no more by vain desire or unreasoning aversion, but will become God's coadjutor and be always of his mind. So, when external things have ceased to trouble your spirit, you will no longer be a competitor for vanities; but, enfranchised from all solicitude, you

will have discarded envy and conceit and intolerance, which are the ill fruits of that vain rivalry. You will neither cringe before power nor covet great place, for alike from inordinate affection and from the fear of pain or death you will be free. Disenamoured of mundane things, you will live simply and unperturbed, in kindness and cheerfulness and in gratitude to Providence. Life will be to you as a feast or solemnity, and when it comes to a close, you will rise up saying, 'I have been well and nobly entertained, it is fit that I give place to another guest.' "

The strength and mastery thus promised raised my dejected spirits, as the words of a new and sanguine physician may hearten one who had long lain stricken yet now dares to hope for the day of recovery. This was a law which did not denounce the world as illusion or enjoin a cloistral seclusion upon the mind, but rather proposed each and every appearance as a touchstone on which the quality of personality should be unceasingly tried. By the constant application of a high standard to life, it seemed to implant an incorrupt seed of manliness, and to create in its disciples that saner mood which holds in equal aversion a Heliogabalus and a Simeon Stylites. So persuaded, I could join with the fervour of a neophyte in the Stoic's profession: "Good and evil are in choice alone, and

there is no cause of sorrowing save in my own errant and wilful desires. When these shall have been overcome, I shall possess my soul in tranquillity, vexing myself in nowise if, in the world's illusive good, all men have the advantage over me. For all outward things I will bear with equal mind, even chains or insults or great pain, ashamed of this only, if reason shall not wholly free me from the servitude of care. Let others boast of material goods; mine is the privilege of not needing these or stooping to their control. I will have but a temperate desire of things open to choice, as they are good and present, and the tempter shall find no hold for his hands by which to draw me astray. I will be content with any sojourn or any company, for there is none, howsoever perilous, which may not prove and strengthen the defences of my soul. For I have built an impregnable citadel whence, if only I am true to myself, I can repel assaults from the four quarters of heaven. Who shall console one lifted above the range of grief, whom neither privation nor insolence can annoy? for he has peace as an inalienable possession, and by no earthly tyranny shall be perturbed. Bearing serenely all natural impediments to action, trespassing beyond no eternal landmark, by no foolishness provoked, he shall become a spectator and interpreter of God's works; he shall ripen to the harvest in the

sunshine and wait tranquilly for the sickle, knowing that corn is only sown that it may be reaped, and man only born to die."

The mere repetition of these words, so instinct with the spirit of old Roman fortitude, roused me to a more immediate resolution than any other form of solace. There are times when a splendour of exaggeration is the best foil to truth. The Roman's pride is the best corrective to the earthward bias of the diffident; by its excess of an opposite defect it drives us soonest into the mean of a simple and manly confidence. It is better for us first to repeat, "Dare to look up to God and say: Make use of me for the future as Thou wilt, I am of the same mind, I am equal with Thee... Lead me whither Thou wilt," than to dwell upon such words as these: "It is altogether necessary that thou have a true contempt for thyself if thou desire to prevail against flesh and blood" – or these: "If I abase myself... and grind myself to the dust which I am, Thy grace will be favourable to me, and Thy light near unto my head... By seeking Thee alone and purely loving Thee I have found both myself and Thee, and by that love have more deeply reduced myself to nothing."

This supreme abnegation may leave the saint unharmed, but it is ill fitted for those who droop already with the malady of dejection. The divine

wisdom which knows the secrets of all hearts and their necessities infinitely various, shall exact obedience according to no adamantine law: it loves not the jots and tittles of formalism, nor the pretensions of those who would cast all things in one mould. From those made perfect, from the saints whose links with earth are almost severed, whose sight begins to pierce gross matter through, it may accept prostration and endless contrite tears, knowing that to these, upon the very verge of illumination, the forms of slavery have lost their vileness. But to those who are still of earth and can but conceive God's fatherhood according to earthly similitudes, it will not ordain a prone obeisance. Such it will require to stand erect even in contrition, in that posture which is the privilege of sons. We who are unperfected affront God supposing him pleased with the prostration of his children. It is the ignorance of a feudal age that ascribes to him a Byzantine love of adulation; but that age is no more, and he disserves the divine majesty who imputes to it a liking for the *esprit d'antichambre*.

I did not need to dwell upon my weakness and misery but rather upon the grandeur of humanity, whose kinship and collaboration God himself does not reject. The Stoic phase was a useful stage on the road of convalescence, and the majestic words

of Epictetus more helpful to a manlier bearing than the confessions of the saintliest souls. If, as is not to be doubted, there are others who seek an issue from the same dark region where I wandered, I do not fear to point them to the Stoic way, which like a narrow gorge cold with perpetual shadow is yet their shortest path upward to the high slopes lit with sunlight. Let them enter it without fear and endure its shadows a while, for by other ways they will fetch a longer compass and come later to their release.

But when some interval had passed I became aware that this cold ideal was not the end, and that out of the gall of austerity sweetness should yet come forth. Wise men have said that all great systems of ethics meet upon a higher plane, as the branches of forest trees rustle together in the breeze; for though in the dark earth their roots creep apart, their summits are joined in the freedom of clear air. As I now struck inland from the iron shores of shipwreck, my heart warmed to a brighter and softer landscape, and with Landor I began to wish that I might walk with Epicurus on the right hand and Epictetus on the left. With a later thinker I reflected that if the Stoic knew more of the faith and hope of Christianity, the Epicurean came nearer to its charity. For it is true that Stoicism commands admiration rather than

love. It was indeed too harsh a saying that "the ruggedness of the Stoic is only a silly affectation of being a god, to wind himself up by pulleys to an insensibility of suffering": that is the judgment of the bluff partisan, so shocked by the adversary's opinions that he feels absolved from any effort to understand them. But even those who in extremity have been roused to new valour by the precepts as by a Tyrtæan ode, for all the gratitude which they owe, will not impute to their deliverers an inhuman perfection. The Stoic does in truth wear a semblance of academic conceit, as though related to God not as a child to its father, but as a junior to a senior colleague. And with all its sufficiency, his philosophy seems too Fabian in its counsels; it is always withdrawing, passing by on the other side, avoiding battle – so that as a preparation for the uttermost ordeal it will often prove inferior to the reckless pugnacity of a narrow zealot.

Then, too, it acts like a frost not merely upon personal, but upon national ambition, and so keeps the wellspring from the root. Its assumption of a superhuman fortitude accords but ill with scientific truth, for if with one bound every man may become as God, he will despise that infinitely slow upward progression which is the only real advance. But, above all, it lives estranged from tenderness, in which alone at certain hours of torment the dis-

tracted mind finds God's face reflected. It preaches renunciation of all vain aversions and desires; but it repels sweet impulses that are not vain. By exalting apathy in regard to personal suffering, it becomes insensible to others' pain also. In the conviction that appeals for sympathy are avowals of unworthiness, it will have no part in the love of comrades, and it never discovered the truth that the strength and the compassion of the Divine are one perfection.

There is a favourite mediæval legend depicted in one of the windows of the cathedral at Bourges, which exposes in a characteristic fashion this weakness of the Stoic's creed. The Evangelist St John, when at Ephesus, remarked in the forum the philosopher Cratinus giving a lesson of abnegation to certain rich young men. At the teacher's bidding the youths had converted all their wealth into precious stones, and these they were now bidden crush to dust with a heavy hammer in the presence of the assembled people, that so they might make public profession of their contempt for riches. But St John was angered at so wasteful a renunciation. "It is written," he said, "that whoso would be perfect should not destroy his possessions, but sell them, and give the proceeds to the poor." "If your master is the true God," replied Cratinus scornfully, "restore these gems again to their original

form, and then they shall be bestowed according to your desire." St John prayed, and the precious stones lay there once more perfect in all their brilliance and splendour. The moral of the old tale is clear – that all virtue without charity is nothing worth; and that of virtue without charity, the Stoic's cold renunciation is the chief type and ensample.

The insight into this higher truth did not come by inspiration, but was gradually imparted during long summer days, when I wandered from dawn to dark among the fields and woods. Hoping at first no more than to tire the mind with the body and so win a whole repose, I became by degrees receptive of a new learning from nature, which created new sympathies and kindled fresh ambitions. Naturally I again read Wordsworth, and now for the first time since childhood I knew what joys intimacy brings. I was one of a brotherhood, and wherever I went was sure of a friendly salutation. Things that grew in silence became my friends; I was with them at all hours, in light and shadow, in warmth and cold, watching their gracious and responsive existences, which reject no good gift, but radiantly grow towards the light while it endures. Insensibly the spirit of this gentle expansive life was infused within me, until the heart which I had deemed useless and outworn, began to open like a flower

scathed by frost, at the full coming of spring. The plants and trees were human to me, the brooks spoke with articulate voice; by that ancient witchery of animism, old as the relationship of man and nature, I was put to school again: until at last, absorbed in the vicissitudes of small things and surrendering reason to a host of pathetic fallacies, I was taught the great secret that life may not be centred in itself, but in the going out of the heart is wisdom. And as among human friends there are some to whom a man is bound by deeper and tenderer links than to the rest, so it is with these other friends which have no language, but only the wild-wood power of growing about the heart. Among their gracious company each man will discover his own affinity, and having found it will look on the rest of nature with brighter eyes. Some learn the great lessons from mountains, lakes, and sounding cataracts; others from broad rivers peacefully flowing to the sea. To me there spoke no such romantic voices. My wanderings led me through a country of simple rural charm, and the friends that became dearest to me were just our English elms.

Who but the solitary, artists alone excepted, understand the full charm of elms in an English landscape? To us there is an especial appeal in their loneliness, as they range apart along the

hedgerows, embayed in blue air and sunlight which do but play upon the fringe of your huddling forest. See them on a breezy August morning across a tawny corn-field, printing their dark feathery contours on a blue sky and holding the shadows to their bosoms; or on a June evening get them between you and the setting sun, and mark the droop and poise of the upper foliage fretted black upon a ground of red fire. Here are no cones or hemispheres, or shapeless bulks of green, but living beings of articulated form, clothed in verdure as with the fine-wrought drapery that enhances rather than conceals the beauty of the statue.

Or at a still later hour, over against the harvest moon, see them rise congruous with the gentle night, casting round them not palls of ominous gloom, but clear translucent shadows sifted through traceries of leafage which do but veil the light. And what variety of form and structure sunders them from other trees, what irregular persuasive grace. Some are tall and straight, springing like fountains arrested in the moment when they turn to fall; others bend oblique without one perpendicular line, every branch by some subtle instinct evading the hard angles of earth-measurement as unmeet for that which frames the sky; others again spread to all the quarters of heaven their vast umbrageous arms. No trees are

so companionable as the elms to the red-roofed homestead which nestles at their feet and is glad for them. Seen from a distance, how delightful is this association, how delicate the contrast of tile and leaf and timbered barn, each lending some complement to the other's fairest imperfection. Perhaps there will be a whole line of distinct trees, and then you will see as it were a cliff-side of verdure in which, beneath the billowy curves of lit foliage, there open caverns and cool deeps of shadow fit for a Dryad's rest.

To know the elm-tree you must not come too near, for it too is wild and does not reveal its nature lightly; you may be cooler in the shadow of the beech or stand drier beneath the red-stemmed leaves of the sycamore. Yet it suffers the clinging ivy; it was beloved of poets in old days, and painters love it still. It has not the walnut's vivid green nor the rare flush that lights up the pine-stem. Its leaves are rough and of no brilliance; its bark is rugged also. But in life the familiar guardian of home meadows, it has stood by our fathers' landmarks from generation to generation, and when fallen and hewn and stacked it sheds a fragrance which, wherever perceived in after years, brings back memories of wanderings in deep lanes and of the great dim barns where we played in childhood. In the dull winter days when only yews

and cypresses wear their leaves, I sometimes wander to a place whose walls are hung with the works of many a seer and lover of elms; there seated before a few small frames I give them thanks for having read the dear trees truly, and glorified a close and barren gallery with all the breezes and colours of the fields: I am beyond all noise and murkiness, walking in the peace and spaciousness of unsullied air.

To a mind now happily reverted to the primitive confidence in souls everywhere indwelling and creating sympathies between all things, the bonds of kinship between man and nature were drawn ever closer, and it seemed a wholly natural belief that the changes of the visible universe, affecting things which lived an almost personal existence, should be instinct with the deeper meaning of events in the drama of human existence.

Like the every-day life of men with its imperceptible attritions was the insensible growth and decay of things; as the tumult of his emotions were the storms and catastrophes that convulse the face of nature. The movement never ceased; the transforming power was never wearied; the spectator had but to give rapt attention, to be carried beyond his poor solicitudes to a participation in elemental processes of change in which the fates of humanity were mysteriously involved. The

thought of this indissoluble union kept alive the sense of brotherhood within me, of responsibility in life, of interest in all that happens; and whether it was the daily contraction of a pond in drought, or a battle of ants by the wayside, or the first tinge of autumn upon the woods, all was ennobled by symbolic relationships to man's experience, which in the unceasing flow of their perception were lustral to a solitary heart, without them choked and stagnant.

There was a certain heath-clad ridge which like a watch-tower set above a city never failed to bring before the ranging eye some vision pregnant of those emotions by which the sense of humanity is quickened to a deeper consciousness of itself. The witchery of space was there always, and seemed to draw from the soul the clinging mists of her indifference. It was there that I saw nature in all her moods, and felt that to each my own moods responded; there that despondency, imagining her monotony of woe, was confuted by the saving changefulness of created things. I remember one day, when a summer storm was spending its fury, I stood upon this ridge and looked across the low lands that stretched away beneath me. They lay with all their boundaries confused by a pall of purple gloom, then darkly transparent, and dissolving before the returning sun, whose penetrative

influence was felt rather than actually perceived. As I gazed, high in the veil of cloud there began faintly to gleam a spot of palest gold, so high that it seemed to belong to the sky and to have no part in an earthly landscape. Gradually it expanded, grew more vivid, and assumed form, other forms and tints emerged beside it, until at last it was revealed as a ripe corn-field on the high slopes across the valley, and before many moments had passed, a long line of downs stood out in the pure air with a sculptural clearness, as if during the storm all had been uprooted and moved a whole league towards the spot where I stood. While the rainbow spanned the plain, and the thunder still rolled in the distance, all the opposite heaven cleared almost to the furthest horizon; but there a remoter range yet lay half-covered by a billowy mass of clouds, like the hull of a dismasted ship in the folds of her fallen sails. At last even this trace of the battle was gone; the sun shone unopposed; the wet lands and clear sky were lit with an intenser brightness for their transient eclipse.

Then the humanity of all these things was borne in upon my mind, and I was affected by these vicissitudes shadowing forth the destiny of man, and reminding him in their beautiful and majestic procession that nature endures no perpetual gloom. The sudden ruin of a bright day in deluge and

darkness and sonorous thunder, the timid reappearance of faint light, the natural forms strangely emerging from the perplexed wrack infesting the heaven, and at last seen as never before through leagues of pellucid air; the thunder's silence, the final and supreme triumph of light; – these swift yet utter revolutions of the visible world, by very grace of mutability, were rich with instant consolations for the soul's misgiving. They served to remind me that the fears, the spiritual conflicts, the darkness that seems eternal, are mere incidents of a summer noon and leave behind them a purer and serener day. Through all this close intercourse with nature my mind was being prepared for a healthier relation to my fellow-man, and my heart saved from the petrification of melancholy self-regard. The ever-growing delight in these inanimate things, the constant discovery of new charms as knowledge widened with experience, united to prevent stagnation and despair; they kept heart and mind alert for the perception of new glories; and it is from a clear sense of their salutary power that I dwell upon them in this record of a self-tormented life. How should he find life colourless whose eyes are often fixed upon the sky, who sees grey zones of cloud flush crimson before the sunrise, and at evening the wide air richly glowing, moted as with

the bloom of plums and the golden pollen of all flowers?

At the end of that summer I returned to the occupations of life, appeased and almost happy in this inheritance of new sympathies. And before long I found that these were themselves but precursors of that which was to come, and that like the paranymphs who escort the bride, they did but apparel the heart for a deeper and more abiding joy. They were busied about me in tranquil hours, and speaking not, but seeming to wait in gladness for another, they made me serenely expectant also. They destroyed all sadness of retrospect; they led me always forward; with faces transparent with the light of an inward happiness they seemed to promise a vision at each near bending of the way. From glad looks and gestures assuring imminent joy, I too was charmed into a like faith, and went on blithely in the confidence of a coming illumination. Nor was that hope vain, for at length the mystery was made plain, and one day they brought me exulting into the presence of the Ideal Love.

There is a place in every heart which must be filled by adoration, or else the whole will grow hard and wither like a garden whose central fountain is grown dry. And though the affection of mortal man or woman may abandon it, there remains yet this other love which by pure and strenuous

invocation may be drawn to it, and dwell in it, to the ennoblement of life; so great is the care of providence for mortal need. Love is our need, and it is given, if we despair not of it, even to such as have rarely felt the glow of earthly passion. For love is of many kinds; yet the palest and most subtle of its forms are made real to those who believe, and may become the guiding influences of their lives. Such are the visions of the ideal love to which those glad natural sympathies now led me, leaving me alone awhile that I might worship the orient light. And when I came out from that presence I rejoiced indeed, for the path was clear for my return, and life was now glad with promise like an orchard burgeoning with white blossoms. Old memories crowded back on me of hours beneath the cedars with the Phædrus and the Vita Nuova, hours made happy with intellectual and austere delights. But now the joy was other than intellectual, though significant tenfold, for then in untried youth I had wondered at the beauty of an imaginary world; now with eyes that had looked on desolation I perceived that these visions were true. For had they been no more than airy fancies, they surely had not endured throughout these long ages in our laden and mortal air.

It was not merely the beauty of a literary setting which had preserved them: the craftsman's

skill might indeed have enhanced their natural splendour, but it could not have alone inspired them with this perennial life. The gem with fire in its heart outlives the delicate setting; though it may be maltreated and buried for centuries by the wayside, it will come to light when the gold that framed it is long battered or lost, and will be desired by new generations for its inherent and unalterable beauty.

Not Plato's or Dante's creative power, but truth surviving all incarnations of genius, has kept this celestial gem aglow: they have but celebrated that which was never mortal, and guided wandering eyes to heaven's most beautiful star. This intangible and unincarnate vision exacts more from its votaries than the love which walks the earth: holding the lover ever in the strain of apprehension, it inures him to unwearying worship, and itself moving in regions incorruptible, never loses the glory of its first hour. The years may pass, but one face, like a hallowed thing, abides continually; years may fret and corrode other ideals, but to this they add beauties of ever fresh significance. The auroral glow is always round it, brightening the world, until it becomes an emblem of illumination and the symbol of eternal truths. This visionary presence wakes aspiration to new effort and touches the intellect with passion; beleaguered

thought sallies out with new strength, and the frontiers of darkness recede before it. From this comes the quickening of the heart without which hope wanes and the mind is barren: the deep pure joy of contemplation awakens all that is best in the soul, which goes towards it on tense wings of desire. And as with time it draws further from the earth, and, following, the soul essays ever higher flights, it is often poised at a great height as in a trance of motion, whence it looks back upon the world it has left, and round it upon other worlds. Then, its love-range being wondrously expanded, it sees beyond that visionary countenance, which dissolves and forms again like a delicate wreath of mist; and clear starlight falls upon it from every side, so that all shadow is destroyed. And when it returns to earth again, and is forced to contemplate meaner things, it is now aware that the very soil is compacted of dust of stars, and that he who looks listlessly upon creation is unworthy of the human name. And so continually flying forth and returning, it weaves endless bonds between the infinitesimal and the infinite, forgetting how to despise, which is the heavenly science.

All this ardour is awakened and sustained by love, which began in sense and is now transformed. Through each succeeding change it is known for the same divine power which has so attuned the

body that it vibrates no more to desire alone, but is now become resonant beneath a faint and spiritual breath.

It is an old story that love is sightless, but that is the love which romps among the roses and is blinded by their thorns. There is another and a better tradition that love's eyes pierce heaven, and this is a great truth; for infinity is cold and vaporous until man projects upon it his mortal ideal, his conception of an earthly love transfigured. When this beloved guide appears throned above him as in the clouds, he dares to lift his eyes, and there he reads through its light the divine purports of his existence. Is it a small thing to stand, though but for a moment, searching infinity undismayed? This is the celestial ocean to whose shore he is come; and now "drawing towards and contemplating the vast sea of beauty, he will create many fair and noble thoughts and notions in boundless love of wisdom, until on that shore he grows and waxes strong, and at last the vision is revealed to him of a single science, which is the science of beauty everywhere... beauty absolute, separate, simple, everlasting, which without diminution, without increase, or any change, is imparted to the ever growing and perishing beauties of all other things."

To some the great perception comes but late, rising from the ashes of love's common furnace. But they whose hearts have never been consumed in these roaring flames may find it earlier; and purged from all taints of jealousy and covetousness, may pass straightway into the bliss of a higher union. This is that supreme affiance and espousal of the soul wherein they may be released into a larger air, undelayed by the earthward longings and gradual initiations of seemingly happier men. Thus its servants do not decline into slothful service, but are strenuous always; raised above the acquiescence of use, they never know the cloying of fruition or suffer the barbarian conquest of indifference. Their soul is unaffected by material circumstance or misfortune, and illuminates their lives as often as in the silent hour of meditation they concentrate their thoughts upon its grace. The cup of earthly love, even the noblest, is often dipped in Pyriphlegethon, and the draught it offers scathes the palate until its finest sensibility is for ever dulled. Those who have quaffed this liquid fire can no longer understand his mood who leaves the roses and the wine to toil through deserts in search of limpid water. They think him madly ungrateful for God's good gifts, a fool abandoning joy proved and present for a shadow far and incomprehensible. But they who have not denied themselves are no

longer fit judges of him who has renounced. They cannot know that by this renunciation the senses are thrice refined, and receive as a vital influence the stellar beam which falls chill and ineffectual upon a grosser frame. They cannot believe that this love from the infinite distance wields as mighty a force over renunciant lives as the near flame of passion over their own. But, for all their denial, it lives and puissantly reigns. It reigns in very truth predominant, this ideal love to which space exists not and propinquity is nothing; and it will have none for its subjects but those who by bereavement or aspiration or intense purity are being prepared for its dominion.

Happy therefore are the shy if in the midst of their tribulation they are guided to the gateway of so bright a kingdom. It may well be that we must first be led thither by some dear-remembered and virgin form once almost ours through earthly love, but now joined to us only by an imperishable and mystic union. Our sight may at first need the embodied beauty to give it the finer powers by which the revelation of the ideal grows familiar to us, but is at last attainable without mortal intervention by an immediate flight of the soul. Until that late day of enlightenment we must still be set upon the celestial path by a touch of human tenderness; a pure yet sensuous yearning must be

ours when we are first girded to the ascent. If there are beings which attain the fulness of the ideal love without the first inspiration of a fair earthly form I know nothing in creation to which they may be likened, nor had I ever part in so rare an enfranchisement. The vision that now entrances my soul first arose from a living, breathing form radiant with earthly brightness and instinct with every charm which brings men fawning to the feet of women. The sensuous frenzy which lovers sing was also mine, the tremor of the heart, the vibration of the very life; the deep seventh wave of passion rioted through me also. But from the first amazement of the shaken being it was not given me to pass through satisfaction into tranquillity; I was held long in a whirl of trouble; in the anguish of denial I learned initiation into the mystery which is eternal and supreme.

It is good for some of earth's children that passion should be stayed before it makes ashes of the fancy; for if it does but touch for a moment only to be withdrawn for ever, it does not destroy, but by its meteoric passage kindles the imagination with the glow of an incorruptible flame. It is with them long enough to brand upon memory the image which, though never renewed before their bodily eyes, by its very severance from perception puts on an immortality of virginal grace. Love is under-

standing, said the poet of Heaven and Hell, and love ennobled through renunciant years shall at the last encompass the world. The sensuous glow that first quickened the heart of youth is transmuted into a purer fire akin to that which moves the spheres.

To know this truth is their compensation who are swiftly withdrawn from the warm radiance of earthly love. They are stricken, but before passion blinds them are rapt into a high solitude, whence, if they truly love, an infinite prospect is unrolled before them. They know desire; but as their passion was hopeless in this world, their steps were mercifully set upon a new path, whereby the bodily semblance of the beloved became the symbol of spiritual comeliness, alluring the beholder into the peace of a serene and unworldly mood. A thin and rarefied ideal, you say, a mirage which no wayfarer can approach: experience rejects these subtleties, and to these creations of a dream human affection was never given. True, to hearts established and content in happy unions, to minds preoccupied with the near cares and pleasures of a home, our distant visions may appear frail structures wrought in mist by homeless fancy. But for the exiled heart they are not such, but verities of abiding inspiration. For the ideal love did not die with Plato, but came again in mediæval Italy, and who shall say

that even our material age has banished it from the earth?

No indeed it is not dead, the ideal love, but indwells, a redeeming power, wherever there are desolate hearts and minds to be updrawn and united by its ministry; a power so lustral in its nature, that no abject and despairing thought creeps into its presence but is purified and exalted by its regard. This love brings hope and cheerful constancy; with a shining falchion it affrights into their natal darkness the monstrous forms of despair, and lends to all work a secret charm of chivalry. It sustains that high anticipatory mood to which life is but a preparation, and the bees buzzing round the honey-flowers seem poor things toiling for an inessential gain. Because it is mystic and transcendental it is the predestined guide of all whom fate holds removed from earthly love. This is the old device of the world's failures, you say, to trick themselves out in Plato's mantle or the schoolman's cowl, and conceal their spite beneath the pretensions of the mystic. But I answer that the causes which moved the Greek and the Florentine are still at work among mankind to-day; they have never ceased, however much obscured by the glare of triumphant luxury or the stress of miserable toil. Often when disillusion has laid bare a soul, this love which did but slumber awakes to

contest with envy or despair the possession of a wounded heart. I aver that any exile from the happier earth whose heart is pure, if he invokes this love with ardent faith, may unbar his door and feel that it has passed his threshold. Let us never be persuaded that the ideal world is far from this earth of ours, or that the way to it may not be daily traversed by him who has submitted to the heavenly guide. Not even the close entanglement of common cares can avail to keep such an one from his love; but as Bishop Berkeley is said to have been able to pass in a moment from the consideration of trifling things to the throne of thrones and the seats of the Trinity, so this lover shall overpass with easy and habitual flight the barriers that hold most men life-long prisoners.

For to the Spirit that is chastened and endures there is given a power of flight and poise, by which, if it abandon itself to the celestial wind, it may instantly remove from the deeper planes of life, as a bird by the mere slanting of its wings is carried in proud quiescence into an upper region of the air. He shall know instant release from the leaguer of disillusion and vain solicitudes; in the light of one beautiful and compassionate countenance the unquiet memories of failure shall give up their exceeding bitterness.

And though the style and instinct of modern life are hostile to such love, though in prosperity it is ignored and in adversity often overborne by a vain uproar of lamentation, yet even in a self-indulgent and furious world it still draws many to the severe exaltation of its service. We cannot approach the heights where a Plato and a Dante walked with ease, but far beneath upon the lower slopes we can draw a breath of new life as we fix our weaker eyes upon the glory which they saw so near. Although the men who have there ascended are a supreme company, we may yet presume to follow; for let it never be said that the gods have reserved for surpassing genius the consolation of which lesser men have so much deeper need. But he who would reach a serener air must press forward strenuously; for as a mountain may have one bare and northern slope, and another sunlit and clothed with verdure, and yet there may be a path on each side to the summit, so it is with the ascent to this felicity. One lingers amid pleasant groves and laughing waters; another, undistracted by the beauty of any lower zone, but fixing his eyes upon the far summit, crosses the chill rocky slopes, never feeling the warmth of the sun and only seeing his brightness reflected from the highest peak. Though the ways of the two travellers lie far apart until the end, their endurance may be crowned with the same reward;

but he who knew no dalliance and plucked no fruit has from the beginning seen the goal clearly, and lived steadfastly in its distant promise. And do you tell me that this is not love or joy, you who saunter in the verdant southern valleys breathing a present happiness with the perfume of a thousand flowers? Your way may lead you upward after long vicissitudes, but endurance will more swiftly fail you for the last most arduous ascent. Very love is of the heights, and he whose thoughts have long been thither exalted will breathe with least pain the attenuate upper air.

To this pilgrimage the diffident are foreordained; it is their happiest hour when they take staff and scrip and set out in earnest for the shrine built among the mountains. The gardens of Armida are not for them, nor the warm breezes fragrant of fruit and flowers; but the vision of a far peak flushed at sundawn draws them onward, and strength and peace are increased upon them throughout the great ascent. He is still too rich for pity to whom renunciation brings these high and enviable hours.

But the heavens are not opened every day, and the adept of these mysteries must walk the dull round of common life like other men, not warmed as they are by the glow of constant friendship, yet cheered by intermittent flames of remembrance and of hope. The real life of the diffident is cunningly

hidden from those around them, for whom, indeed, it is wont to have faint interest; but before you who have often sought me out through fair and foul weather, I may venture to undo the pack of small resources which brings variety and distraction into lonely days.

Firstly, I still dare to haunt the forecourts of philosophy. Into her inner courts I may not penetrate, lacking the leisure which her whole service demands; yet the loiterings which I may still enjoy are to me like voyages into a foreign country, and give my mind the healthful enjoyment of change; they are not long enough to bring that whole detachment from daily life which, in my case, might prove a perilous advantage. All that I need for common use is a simple rule based on a few fundamental thoughts to give me a course upon the wayward ocean, and though it be full of error as the Almagest, yet it shall surpass the thumb-rules of Philistia. It must be a doctrine which allows imagination her right and durable career, and therefore not be monist. For materialism is too wildly imaginative at the start: like a runner who at the outset overstrains his heart and thereafter runs no more, the follower of this creed, by his postulate of a blind impersonal Law, exhausts his power of speed and plods henceforth eyes downward over flattest plains of dulness. That my mind

may remain curious and alert in isolation, I must conceive in the universal scheme a power that does not alone impel, but also draws me forward. For were it true that the sum of things blunders from change to change, swept by blind force into uncharted voids, I should abandon myself in despair to that hopeless course, and drift indifferent to the direction or the end.

Let me rather believe that if each several idea is compacted by my active intelligence out of some vast system of relations, then only a supreme intelligence akin to man's can brace together the whole system or universal sum of things. For this earth, yes, and all the complex of the spheres, exist to me imperfectly as idea alone, nor can I conceive them any complete existence apart from a kindred but omniscient mind. Each advance in human knowledge should then be an infinitesimal approach towards the supreme comprehension; and the aspiring race of man is justified in that inchoation of long hope which is folly to the single life.

I would also believe that new relations between things may be detected not merely by the staid and ordered process of collating abstractions, which is science, but by swifter and more genial methods of intuition.

"Hurrah for positive science,
Long live exact demonstration!"

cried Walt Whitman, exulting over the filed fetters of mankind; and let us all echo the cry, nor ever forget the razed Bastilles of superstition. But there glimmers a wealth of truth in the penumbra beyond our lanterns to which science will creep too slowly without the aid of imagination. Yet this truth may be seized by swift sallies into the darkness, and assured to us as it were by some dim apperception of the soul, when the whole personality is made tense, and subtly anticipates the cosmic argument. Life is too short to renounce this daring: the sense of kinship with the All-Consciousness sanctions if not commands the right adventure.

It was this feeling which led William Blake to exclaim in his impulsive way, that to generalize is to be an idiot, that direct perception is all, and the slow process of the inductive reason a devil's machination. This method of intuition is to the more sober method of science as the romantic to the classical spirit in literature, permitting to the individual mind a licence of noble vagrancy. But it must be a law for the ordinary intelligence to exercise the two apart, else it will fall into sick fancies of excitement, and by abuse of wild analogies lose

the vital art of balance and sane comparison. Only the greatest minds, endowed as it were with some divine genius of extrication, may dare to practise the two together. So Leonardo da Vinci drove inference and intuition abreast without disaster, and gathered from purple distances of thought their wildest and most splendid flowers. To him, as has been well said, philosophy was something giving strange swiftness and double sight, clairvoyant of occult gifts in common or uncommon things. The doom of Phæton awaits those who now would follow that marvellous course; but the poetic observation of resemblances in things remote, which lent so rich a colour to the science of the Renaissance, may yet be trained in all our minds; and the philosophy which trusts in the slow suffusion of the worlds with intellectual light will bless and encourage its reasonable growth.

Such a philosophy brings also a living sympathy with art. For the artist ever sees a perfection of truth beyond his rendering, yet always calling for expression; there is something eternally missed by his highest effort, and he can never know complacency. The philosophy which conceives the gradual growth of form through consciousness towards a perfection infinitely removed, yet in its remoteness drawing up our life as the moon sways the tides – this surely is the artist's wisdom. Idealism is

like love, ἄπορα πόριμος, holding us as it were in touch with the intangible: it will have us conceive the Absolute without that helpless absorption in thought which changed Amiel's life from a fountain to a vapour: it would keep us near the surf and confluence of things. Its function is not to give any mysterious transcendental knowledge, but to serve culture "by suggesting questions which help to detect the passion, and strangeness and dramatic contrasts of life." And not only to bring suggestions, but repose, by granting to eyes wearied with minute concerns the contrasts of vast times and spaces, the majestic idea of the Whole; to change the focus and variously dispose the perspectives of familiar things.

An old watchmaker, whose window overlooked a wide meadow, used ever and again to lay down his instruments to gaze out upon the expanse of green, pasturing upon it a wandering vague regard, and absorbing from it an assuagement of his wearied senses which, he said, served him more effectually after these bright interludes. The province of Metaphysics should be to us as to this wise workman his field; not a place to dream our days away in, but for occasional resort; in which we may forget the infinitesimal in healing visions of broad space and colour. I counsel every lonely man to satisfy what has been described as the common

metaphysical instinct, and according to his powers to become a metaphysician. There is no discipline which so well consists with solitude, none which so instantly enfranchises the mind from the tyranny of mean self-interest or vain and envious polemics. Men do not grow sour and quarrelsome about the Absolute: everything that is polemical is inspired, as Michelet once said, by some temporal and momentary interest. The man who has climbed to the Idalian spring comes down benevolent. He does not grudge this toiling ant his grain, that snarling dog his bone, but is content to live serene, in the certainty that his soul has great provision, and that though all human things are small, each is worth its while. Into his hand there is given a scale by which life is known in its fair proportions; a tranquil joy, disturbed neither by dirges nor Epinician odes, is poured into his heart and exalts him above distraction. He respects himself as akin to that great Self whose perfection shall one day be known; he understands the passion for the ideal through which men die young; he wonders at envy and in the happiness of enfranchisement would have all men free.

The pages of this Almagest are for the exceptional hour; but daily, as one bookish from the nursery, I read much in many directions. For if books are called the best friends of happy men,

to the sad they are saviours also. And when I remember too clearly what I am, I turn perhaps most often to Lucretius. For of all those who have taken up the pen to assuage the miseries of men, it is he who sings most bravely of the great endurance. This austere enthusiast, whose soul was never fused in the fire of friendship; who went apart, as it were, amid thunders upon the lonely heights; who, without any lover, yet loved his kind so well that all the years of his maturity, how short and splendid a period, were poured forth in one song of human consolation, – this man for all the madness of his creed, was yet aflame with a wisdom to be called divine. That calm face, lit with one desire – to drive the furies from the way and soothe the frightened children of men, is ever among the nobler countenances which fancy summons about my bed. Over the anxious heart they flow, those slow cadences, so vibrant yet so magnificently passionless, until the nerves of pain cease to throb, and fear shrinks as a taint impossible to the patient of such a physician. It is not his to intimidate or denounce, to evoke visions of lurid hell, to linger over dire vaticinations, or apportion to each his grade of torment, but with cool fingers to smooth the hair back from the forehead, and in grave, tender accents to say: Sleep now, for it was a dream.

Landor, in a fine passage, compared the merciful tolerance of the Roman poet with the pitiless ire of Dante, contrasting in respect of the quality of mercy these two poets, one in their austere perfection, but so different in their vision of death, and judgment, and ultimate reward. The seer of lost worlds has written his own defence, and was indeed but attacked to point the sharp antithesis; but Lucretius, though he owes it to a literary feint, is very finely praised. And to me it seems that his compassionate mood increased upon him just because he was not emulous of the world's gifts or earnest for its pleasures, but withdrew from the press, and lived out his few great years contemplating apart the vicissitudes of orbs and men. He did not wait in ante-chambers or sit at wedding feasts; but severing all entangling and intricate threads of observance, followed the voice which called him to solitary places of illimitable prospect. It was not through disillusion or injustice, or wounded pride, that he walked aloof; but loneliness was his birthright, and from the hills and headlands to which solitude allured his steps he saw the dust of mad encounters rise to heaven, and the rent sails of foundering galleys. He saw, and could not but be wrung with pity for man deafened to wise counsel by the noise of vanities, and fiercely conspiring to precipitate his doom. As he went by shore and

upland, there gathered in his mind those resonant hexameters of warning or consolation, those similes from the life of husbandry and dumb things, which, set like diamonds in clay, lend to the most arid arguments their own incomparable splendour, or that homelier beauty which instantly pierces the defences of the heart. Not diffident as we, but of a nature so infinitely absent and reserved that in the legend his wife must concoct a philter to remind him of his love, he is of all the pagans the best companion for our angrier moods. An archaic and elemental serenity is upon his language and thought, rebuking our unprofitable petulance; if emotion gains him he finds utterance in those tremendous periods "where single words seem to gather out of the deep and to reverberate like thunder." As the reverberation dies away and the clouds are pierced by the sun, the world is seen in new lights through an air clear as upon rain-swept mountains.

As my reading is incessant, so also is my writing. For the happiness of man is in his fertility, and of barrenness comes the worst despair. To be happy is to have issue – children, or books written, or things beautifully wrought, or monuments of goodness to live after you, if only in the memory of some tiny hamlet of the folded hills. This is the law of life that Diotima knew, by which flower

and tree, animal and man, fulfil the end of their creation; and man in nothing more surely proves his lordship than by his many-handed hold upon posterity. For the lower creation is procreant in one way, but man in many; who may have offspring not of body alone but of mind and heart, and be so redeemed from the grim dismay of childlessness. The greatest human happiness is to be fertile in every way, a thing granted rarely in the world we know; the next, perhaps, is that of the parent who gives all of himself to his family, not tilling any field beyond the charmed walls confining his desire. The author sure of his fame, the born artist, the benefactor of his kind, are also happy, seeing their offspring grow in years and in the power of making a brighter world.

But he is miserable who, aspiring to follow these, feels his force wane within him while he remains yet fatherless; or who has sons stillborn, or weakly, or dishonoured. I question whether sheer degradation into evil brings more pain to man than such sense of sterility or frustrate parentage. But it is no small part of human redemption that none need know the interminable misery. A man may have neither sons nor genius, but in the dark hour he can go out and give, if it be only a penny or a kind word, and on that foundation build a temple to receive his thanksgiving. To give of yourself is good. This

is that grand agreement and œcumenical consent to which those words *quod ab omnibus quod ubique* in deed and truth may be applied. For this reason meanness is of the deeps, and avarice groans in the lowest zone of hell. And if there are faces of blank and permanent despair upon your path, be sure that these are not masks of whole men, but of those who wilfully abstained from joy and have received the greater damnation. My children are mostly writings, poor weakly creatures dying inarticulate and unchristened, tenderly remembered by myself only, but at least no nuisance to the world. I loved them at their birth, I hold them in remembrance, though they were ever of a hectic and uncertain beauty.

The comparison of children with branches of the olive is not the mere ornament of a Bible verse, but the wisdom of one who knew both tree and child. For as children are bright creatures of swiftly changing moods, so are the olive leaves in the blue southern air. I once read of an artist who essayed to paint a group of olives and a cypress growing before them. Against their silvery leaves its dark burnished form stood finely mysterious, the contrasting grey lending it a depth of almost sable colour; all was propitious for his work. Then suddenly, the air being to all seeming quite still, the grey-green leaves began to shake and quiver, until

each olive tree was like a silver bonfire, tremulous with a thousand waves of white flame flowing and following along the branches. It was a revelation and swift effluence of life, perplexing and full of charm. The brush was laid down, the moment of inspiration gone, before the capricious leaves ceased their quivering to be robed once more in grey, casting on the ground that translucent shadow which tempers the sunlight only, and does not spoil it of its gold. In the end the canvas was covered, but with a sketch far less true and beautiful than the painter's first happy vision. Even so of all our children few attain the perfection of our dreams. While we look, some influence comes upon them and they are changed, some breeze, born we know not where, stirs them to their heart of joy while we stand perplexed; innumerable laughter of leaves, a rushing and a shivering in quick answer to a mere breath, silence as swift when unperceived it dies away – these are their replies to our silent invocations. We cannot follow the swift course, but are quickened with a glad rejuvenescence, the true prize and guerdon of parentage. They may grow old or die, or bring us sorrow; it is enough that once they so lived and stirred a pride within us. Let Hedonist and idealist dispute, let one worship pleasure and another wait on the intangible joy, but in the fathering and mothering and the bring-

ing up of young children, of the flesh, the mind, or the spirit, lies the natural happiness of men and women. It is a joy which outlasts disillusions; it rests surely upon achievement and deserts which lie ponderable in the archangel's scales. For it is certain that he who creates as best he knows best serves God, the world and himself, and what system of Ethics has conceived a more perfect rule?

All young life is instinct with such a beauty and trustfulness, that though he himself may have no part or lot in its creation, and be dumb or awkward in its presence, a man will be the brighter for having passed, if but for a moment, out of the darkness of his own course into the radiance within its orbit. To the diffident this is an especial grace. For children by some deeper intuition understand us as their parents cannot do; and when all the world is cold will often smile upon us with happy upturned faces. It is one of my consolations that the little players in the parks come running to me rather than to others with their eternal question after the exact hour of day. For I reflect that though my face grows wrinkled and drawn with years, there must yet hover something about its ugly surface which tells of a good will within. There was a time when I found the children's question importunate, and drew out my watch ungraciously; but now I feel disappointment if during their hours of play I

can walk my mile without answering one of these high-pitched inquiries.

To have the confidence of children is indeed a thing of which a poor wanderer may be proud, a credential confirming his self-respect, and worthy one day to be presented at the gate of heaven. Once during one of my worst hours of desolation, when I was tramping across the fields, I found a little maid of seven picking primroses on the edge of an old orchard. For some time I stood watching, so charmed with the grace of her movements and the beauty of the spring sunlight on her golden mane, that I lost all consciousness of present trouble, and beyond her fairy form began to see vague visions of lost happiness returning. As I stood thus forgetful and looking absently before me, I suddenly felt a touch which recalled my scattered thoughts: she had come to me and put her hand in mine. I think in all my lonely life I never felt so swift a thankfulness as that which suffused me then: the memory of it is always with me, and now I never see a happy child engrossed in its little task of duty or pleasure without thinking to myself there is one of those who truly have power to remit sins. I will not repeat the fond things often written about children. Not all of them are like the infant angels of Bellini or Filippino Lippi or Carpaccio; some indeed are strident, pert, without

charm or candour, not doves but little jays; but for the loveliness of those who have smiled upon me, whether rich or poor, whether wild or tended flowers, I shall ever hold the whole company dear.

Whether I read or write, or go painfully upon difficult paths of thought, like many other men whom the world dismays, I win a larger tranquillity and a clearer vision from an increased simplicity of life. I know that to use the word asceticism of one's daily practice is to incur the judgment of all those whom the world calls good fellows, whose motto is live and let live, or any other aphorism of convenient and universal remission. To them asceticism is the deterrent saintliness which renounces all joy, and with a hard thin voice condemns the leanings of mankind to reasonable indulgence. The ill-favour drawn down by ecclesiastical exaggeration upon the good Greek word ἄσκησις, which means nothing more than the practice of fitness, has prejudiced men against all system of conduct bold enough to include it in their terminology.

Kant's chapter on the Ascetic Exercise of Ethics is a fine defence of that training of the heart and mind which has no affinity with the morbid discipline of hair shirt and scourge. "The ascetic exercise of the monasteries," he says, "inspired by superstitious fear and the hypocritical disesteem of a man's own self, sets to work with self-reproaches,

whimpering compunction and a torturing of the body. It is intended not to result in virtue but to make expiation for sins, and by self-imposed punishment the sinners expect to do penance, instead of ethically repenting." And again – "All ethical gymnastics consist therefore singly in subjugating the instincts and appetites of our physical system... a gymnastic exercise rendering the will hardy and robust, which by the consciousness of regained freedom makes the heart glad."

This is sound doctrine, neither ungodly nor inhuman, the word of a man in whose veins the warm blood yet flowed. Few pictures of venerable age please more than that of the old philosopher of Königsberg drawn for us by de Quincey in one of his miscellaneous Essays. There we see Immanuel Kant, leading his tranquil sane existence, giving his friends sober entertainment, talking brightly of mundane things, practising "the hilarity which goes hand in hand with virtue." For me the very eccentricities of his daily routine have a fascination, and I read them as a devout Catholic reads many a quaint passage in the *Acta Sanctorum*. How wise was his nightly habit, as he settled himself in bed before falling asleep, to asseverate with a sigh of thankfulness that no man living was more contented and healthier than he! Here is the true asceticism, the child's glad abandonment to nature

maintained and grown articulate in philosophic age.

To this beauty of plain life I cannot attain. But my own life is as far removed as may be from brilliant or luxurious pleasures, and I divide my time between the country and the town. This I do from obedience to reason rather than fashion; for while the country has my love, the city is more remedial to my peculiar pain. There the shy man may have what Lamb called the perfect and sympathetic solitude, as opposed to the "inhuman and cavern-haunting solitariness," to which his infirmity inclines. There he and those who rub shoulders with him on the pavement can "enjoy each other's want of conversation." No creature with a heart can jostle daily with his kind, but he wins some consciousness of kindly feeling. The very annoyances and constraints of propinquity are in their own way disciplinary, and insistent, uncongenial persons, like glaring red buoys with clanging bells, serve at least to keep us in the fairway of navigation. And in a city there are voices of cheerful exhortation always echoing in the higher air above the roar and the trampling, which in the interludes of coarser sound, or by our removal into some quiet court or garden, may be heard repeating their stirring watchwords of endeavour. We are told that no word spoken ever

dies, but goes reverberating through space for ever. It is my fancy that only evil words escape into the outer void, which eternally engulfs their profitless message, while words of hope and helpfulness are not thus lightly sundered from the world that needs them, but hover still near above us, descending with every lull of the tumult into those ears which are strained towards them. The laden air of towns carries not the rumour of the battle only, but by the presence of these fair echoes held within it, gives back to the soul more health than ever it drew from the body. With this thought I am often consoled as I go my way through gloom and clamour and unloveliness, finding a Providence in places which else seem abandoned in the outer desolation.

Nor is the vast city to be valued only for what it gives, but for its own wonderful self, an obvious point which need not be expanded into a tedious circle. The shy will naturally draw more advantage from so rich a field of contemplation than those who seldom walk alone. In London I often map out a course of wandering which in its varied stages shall remind me of the change in progress or decay of particular arts or industries or different quarters of the town. Reading their meaning in the light of history, I make bare walls speak to me with a personal voice. Let any one but acquaint himself with

the styles of ecclesiastical or domestic architecture, or of monuments of the dead, or with the history of the thoroughfares he frequents, and he will be pleasantly constrained to reflection upon those who have gone before him. As he stands in the shadow of an ancient church he will think to himself: "By this very wall Chaucer may have stood." As he walks amid the reverberating ravines which are city streets he will say: "Here along green and silent paths the Roman legionary marched when Hadrian ruled the world." When once the faculty of observation has been awakened to a permanent alertness, the desire to be widely read in history of men and their arts will become irresistible; and through the knowledge gradually amassed it will be thought a sorry chance if any ramble of wider compass yield no vision which in comeliness or deformity tells its tale of changing fortune. To appreciate human work, and the conditions under which it is born, is to exult in abounding sympathy with this man's conquest over things poor in promise, or to condole with that man's failure to do the best that in him lay.

As I walk by the strand of Thames, my fancy sees upon one flood the gay barge gliding upward to green fields, and the black hull bearing down the prisoner to the Traitors' Gate. If I go up Holborn, I remember that where this traffic now

thunders John Gerard tended his Physic Garden when Elizabeth was queen. I know where Sarah Siddons lived; and where William Blake died; and my curious wanderings are now so far extended, that when I turn to the great book of London I seldom find a tedious page. The places where people strove and suffered evoke before me the forms of men and women dead but unforgotten, and if I am alone I am not aware of loneliness.

London is the central wonder, but wonderful also in spirit and suggestion are those old places which ring it round: these I often frequent at every season, and carry their portraits over my heart. Let a man once learn to know them, and his memory shall never starve; he will never forget the hour when first they yielded him up their secret. Many moments of intimate delight do I treasure in remembrance, moments when I was suddenly aware that all previous impressions were the poor gatherings of purblind eyes; but I will only tell you of one, which may suffice to show what riches lie ever open to those who roam in solitude.

It was mid-April and the close of a cloudless day. I had been to the Observatory hill at Greenwich to see the sun set over London, looking for such a transfiguration of the grey city as should reveal its line of warehouses lying along the horizon in a mist of splendour like the walls of the New

Jerusalem. So I had seen it before, marvellous and refined in unearthly fire: but to-day, in a sadder mood, and hungering more deeply for the vision, I looked out to the west in vain. For the wind had set in from the east, and driven back upon the town a zone of iron-grey smoke, ragged along its upper edge like a great water blown to spray, but merging below with those gloomy and innumerable buildings. Upon this the sun, which all day had ridden in a clear air, was slowly falling, losing radiance with every minute, until as it approached that gloomy spray it was luminous no more, but a dull red orb whose light, like a flame withdrawn into the consumed heart of coals, glows for awhile beneath a gathering film of grey. In a few minutes it descended, as if sadly and of resolution, into the murky sea, where for a moment its red curves seemed to refine the smoke into translucency; but at last the dun waves gathered upon it dark and voluminous, drowning it so deeply that the clearer sky above was instantly robbed of the wonted afterglow. Some pale reflection there was in the upper heaven, ensuring a time of twilight, but no glory; and smitten with a congruous sadness, I went down to the river. But there, pacing to and fro as if upon a quarter-deck, with the water lapping upon the wall beneath, I lived one of the happy hours of

life, redeemed from disappointment, and carried far into a magical world.

The flood tide, which had turned for more than an hour, was now racing down wilful for the sea, though the breeze ruffling its surface seemed to thwart and stay its eager course. And on the surface, indeed, chafed and broken into innumerable ripples, the wind triumphed; but as one looked westwards towards the city, it was clear that the sullen strength of stream and tide had the mastery. For over the broad curving reach, lit like white unburnished silver with the reflection of the pallid sky, there glided forward a line of barges each with every red sail set, and as silent as if they sallied from a besieged city. One by one they hung out their lights, the lamps swaying and casting yellow bars over the quivering water, until in perfect silence all passed down before me. Each in turn attaining the lower bend where the river sweeps northward, went about and stood for the Middlesex shore; and then for a moment the wind seemed to overcome the tide, for before the boat could win new way, lying almost broadside across the stream, the breeze held her motionless, like a tired bird on a windy day when it flies out from the shelter of the wood. It was but for a moment, and then the blunt bows glided forward towards

the north bank, and another barge succeeded in the gathering gloom.

And so it was until all were passed. The departing light drew the colours from the red sails and the silvery brightness from the river; all forms became outlined in black upon what uncertain light remained. Two men put off in a boat from an anchored ship; the mingled sound of their oars and voices came with subdued tone as if out of an infinite distance. Then the whole reach lay bare and silent for a while, and only the little waves lapping upon the stone steps played an accompaniment to my dream.

The hour and the place compelled to reverie, and memory consenting to their evocative charm, I peopled the still scene with the forms of those who had swayed or shared the fortunes of this land; imperious Elizabeth and gentler Mary, the slight heroic figure with one sleeve pinned empty on the breast, and all those who, going down to their business in deep waters or returning therefrom, have saluted with melancholy or with joy these towers and this wooded hill. I thought of the lads playing beneath these trees, and so inbreathing the spirit of this place that for them there was no career but to follow the river down to ocean, and ocean himself in his circuit of the world. I thought of the veterans returned from that quest,

old Argonauts of a later day, now clustering round the Hospital fires and perhaps recalling amid tales of havens and high seas the very morning when they first dropped round the bend and passed into the new world beyond. For this Thames is such an avenue and entry into marvellous life that earth can show no greater rival, none more rich in dignity or in the multitude of its merchandise. And if the flood of that merchandise shall cease, and the stream once more go lonely to the sea or carry coracles, it cannot be again as if it had never borne great ships, or swung the Admiral's galley on its tide.

It is good for an Englishman to stand here and listen to the brown waters lapping on the old walls and caulked timbers; to hear, as an under murmur, voices of Lechlade and Bablockhythe, for all intervening leagues of wood and meadow not altogether lost: before this persistence and continuity of youth to feel high thoughts stir within him and solemnize the nativity of new resolve. You cannot feel beneath your feet these old stones trodden by the great generations of your own blood and kindred, and not be moved to walk uprightly, to be approved by their shades as one not unworthy of such descent. For whether such worn stones be in the aisle of some great minster, or here, paving this narrow way for hurrying feet, the inspiration

is as strong and the thankfulness not other. For this is a place of meridian, the navel of our land and empire; the wind searching its alleys has no usual voice, but as it were a deep and oceanic sound, according with old ballads and stories of the sea.

I lingered leaning upon the rail until the tide had fallen from the wall, tracing along the narrow pebbled foreshore a clear marginal line of irregular contour, now sinuous, now straight, but palely luminous like a silver tone on some enamel of old Italy, a line drawn by a master draughtsman, in its inevitable and sure perfection wholly satisfying the eye. With the dark bank it vanished towards the great city, now marked in the upper sky by a hovering brightness of light escaped beyond the smoky rampart to tell the effort of innumerable lamps beneath, all pouring their blurred and vain effulgence to the disdainful stars.

Moreover, the city will give the shy man all the consolations of art, philosophy and literature of which his education or experience may have made him worthy. He can see great pictures or read great books at little cost, and find in them the truest of friends in need. It is so obvious that a solitary of any culture will find relief with such companions, that here I take for granted his resort to their aid, and will only mention two resources from which

the real recluse often draws less advantage than he might, I mean orchestral music and the drama. Any man of feeling who hears a great symphony ceases to be self-centred with the first movement; he goes out of himself, and rides upon waves of sound, exalted by this majesty of collective effort. No other music thrills his whole being like this, which sweeps him with all around into the very course of changing fates. In the confluence of dim hopes and passions which rise above the harmonies like smoke-wreaths riding the red flame, the soul glows interfluous with other souls and is elated with the inspiration of their presence. He bears arms exulting who never had comrades till now; his will is absorbed in confederate joy and human force unanimous. In this abandonment of the whole being, the diffident know their fellows near, and in the ecstasy of shared emotion learn the full measure of their humanity. Philosophers in all ages have known and taught the power of music in compelling ten thousand to the love of one, and so ennobling an infinite multitude in the glow of a common emotion. Sound was the first instinctive language, one for man and winds and waters; and music, which is the development of this primeval converse, leaving to grammars the expression of cold and abstract thought, has gathered about her in her mountain caverns the echoes of all sighs

sad or passionate, of all inarticulate cries born of aspiration or desire, and there blended them into eternal harmonies which at her word flow forth and join the hearts of men.

Indeed, that swift responsiveness of feeling which music thus awakes is a gift beyond gems of Golconda; not youth's swift effusion cheaply given and soon forgotten, but the vibration of a heart stirred in sympathy with some profound note of life, as the dyed pane stirs and quivers when the organ gives forth its deepest tones. Sentiment is a draught of old wine passing into the veins and enriching the blood, until in the generous glow all the privations and the stints of loneliness are forgotten. Pure emotion is like righteous anger, which may be lawfully indulged if the sun go not down upon it; and as he who shrinks from all fire of wrath lives but a vaporous life, so he who will never be moved is proud of a poor crustacean strength, like the limpet, winning darkness in exchange for dull stability. As for me, in the propitious hour when the heart longs for expansion, I give it honourable licence, and quicken its unfolding by spells of magical words. At such times I invoke the aid of passionate souls, not shrinking even from the vain, provided that they loved greatly and give great expression to their humanity. Such is that wild lover of George Sand whose *Souvenir*, for all its

rhetoric, charms like an incantation. The ancients quenched the ashes of the pyre with red wine, as if the blood of the god-given vine could hearten the spirit that yet hovered near. Over my ashes let no wine be poured, but read me such verses high and valiant, that if my soul yet lingers undelivered from the earth's attraction it may be regenerated and set free into a braver life.

And let the lonely man be an assiduous frequenter of the playhouse, for the drama will also open the world's heart to him, and that by a plainer and less elusive speech. Seated in the theatre among his kind, he knows a deeper pleasure than other men; for while to these the changing scene brings remembrance or anticipation of familiar things, to him it reveals whole vistas of life which, except in dreams, his feet may never tread. When the curtain is rung down, and he goes out into the street, for a while at least his existence is transformed. All those front doors aligned in their innumerable sequence, which in daylight or darkness he passes when he wanders alone, are now no longer barred against him; they open at the touch of his fancy, and he sees within the light of homeliness, where father, mother, and child weave round warm firesides their close conspiracies of affection. At last he knows what is passing behind those bars; like an old family friend he takes his place

by the fire and receives as of right the confidences which in his real lonely life never find their way to his ears. He helps the lovers to build their cloudy castles, he reasons away the parents' care, he goes up-stairs with a shaded candle to look in upon the children sleeping. Good women unlock the jewel-caskets which are their souls; happy maidens are sisterly with him; strong men grapple him to their hearts and call him friend. He that was vagabond has now innumerable homes, and of the faces that fleet by him out of doors there are always some which seem to give him greeting.

These secret and unavowed alliances transfigure the unlovely streets, and light in the cavernous blank houses many a glowing and familiar hearth. As he goes on, careless of distance or direction, he is now inwardly busy with fresh and delightful dreams. He plights his troth and earth is Eden; he imagines brilliant hours for the dream-children who go by his side, holding each of his hands. And if the visions change, and sorrow or sin pass in over a familiar threshold, what generous abnegation, what pity, what righteous wrath does he not know, until the plastic power of fancy moulds out of this poor recluse a man like other men. Amid these visionary sympathies time goes quickly by, and returning to his voiceless dwelling he has stored up such wealth of dreams that he can even endure the

supreme test when the lonely man finds himself sitting in the wan light with no one near him to whom he is dear. Of the strength and peacefulness which bring him safely through that hour of desolation he owes much to the players, who have shot the drab texture of life with an infinity of bright and tender hues, so that he can bear to turn it in his hands and look upon it with a wistful pleasure. I say, then, let the shy man frequent the playhouse, and there facet and burnish his dulled mind until it reflects, if it may not touch, the many-sided world.

For the discipline of sympathy, for the quickened sense of comradeship in work, for the very presence of that unloveliness which compels sympathy, I dwell more months in the town than in the country-side. But remembering what Nature did to save me, and owing her an endless debt of filial duty, I return to her in the summer days, and to make up for the long months of separation cling nearer to her than most of her truant sons. For communion with Nature, the ideal joy of country life, is not attained by the sportsman or the mere player of games, who think of their bodies chiefly, and use as a means to rude physical vigour the end ordained for the fine contentience of body, mind, and spirit. Again I will pass by the obvious and

familiar resources of outdoor life, and speak only of such as men are unaccountably prone to neglect.

There is a way of learning nature which in this wet land is mostly followed by tramps and vagrants; the way of sleeping beneath the stars. So far is this joy from the thoughts of most men, that even George Borrow felt a strange uneasiness when for the first time the darkness descended upon him in the open country. I think we carry with us all our lives that fear of night with which nursery tales inspired our childhood; it reinforces the later more reasoned fear of boisterous weather, or of the men who walk in darkness because their works are evil. We shrink from night as a chill privation of daylight, as a gloom which we must traverse, but not inhabit; the distrust becomes with years instinctive and universal, and the nearest approach to friendly relation with night attained by most of us is a timid liking for the twilight hours. Yet as the sun rises alike upon the just and upon the unjust even so does he descend, and we put a slight upon Providence if we abandon to rogues and rakes that wonderful kingdom of the darkness of which by natural prerogative we are enfranchised. By never using our proper freedom, we give them prescriptive licence of usurpation, so that the hours in which the heavens are nearest to us are become the peculiar inheritance of thieves.

I confess that on the night when first I set out to do without a bedroom I too felt all the force of the traditional mistrust. I heard human whispers in the wind, and saw the shadows of walls and trees as forms of men lurking to spring out against me. The movements of roosting birds startled me as I passed; the sudden silences startled me more. And when I had spread my gear on the ground and settled down to rest, the sense of exposure on every side made sleep impossible; time after time I seemed to hear footsteps stealthily approaching; and there was a strangeness pervading everything which to my nervous fancy was simply provocative of apparitions. This lasted many nights; and whether I established myself on the edge of a copse, or in the open grass, or in a hammock beneath two trees, I continued a prey to the same uneasy wakefulness. But then, as if satisfied of good faith by such perseverance, the night began to wear a friendly aspect, the shadows gave up their ghosts, and the breezes became the expected messengers of slumber.

When the lonely sleeper-out has grown familiar with the moonlight and the darkness, he is admitted into the number of earth's favoured sons; for lying like a child upon her bosom, he hears her heart beating in the silence, and wakes to see her smiling in her beauty like a queen apparelled. To

no man slumber comes more gently than to him; and his uprising is as that of a child exulting in the cloudless day. Health and innocence return to him, and his one sorrow is that he has lived into maturity without continually partaking of these sane and natural delights. Remorse is his that for all these years he has feared the dews and shrunk from the bland night airs; and remembering the needless imprisonment of a hundred chambers, he mourns over the irrecoverable hours which would have rooted his life more deeply in tranquillity and strength. But the June sun is up, and the birds are singing: he strides with light step over the grass, watching the rabbits play in the glades, and in unison with a host of fellow-creatures singing a welcome to the dawn. When it is time for him to think of home and he comes once more beneath a doorway, he has a mind refreshed by the quietude of dim space, and a heart replenished with innocence and good-will. He who so sleeps hates no man, and will go upon the dullest way free from petulance or despair. The scent of the rich earth is in his nostrils, and the clearness of morning air has passed into his eyes.

I have made my lair in many places since I first kept house with Nature. I have couched in heather by the pines of hills far above the Sussex Weald; I have lain in dry furrows or on the margin of a

copse, or in the parks of the children of fortune, for whose welfare, in gratitude for their unconscious hospitality, I shall ever pray. But of all wild resting-places I have known, the openest are the most delightful. To see the whole sweep of the stars; to lie on the shorn ground free of all that overshadows or encompasses or confines; to breathe in the great gulf of air; to stretch unhindered limbs – this is an initiation into a new life, a pleasant memory in the long glooms of winter. Let nothing come between you and the stars, that they may look well upon your face, and haply repenting of some ancient unkindliness, draw you at this rebirth a new horoscope of blessing and fair fortune. And if slumber tarries when you lie in an open spot, you may consciously ride the great globe through space, and like the shepherd watching by his flock in the clear night while star rises after star, grow aware of the great earth rolling to the east beneath you.

In these still hours of night or early dawn there steals upon the charmed mind an Orphic sense of worship and inexplicable joy. For here on bare uplands and wooded hills, where the starlight rains down through the silence, or the day, welling up over the rim of the downs, glides fresh from the lips of ocean, a calm river of light, here is the place of Dionysus, of him born from fire and dew, Zagreus the soul of clean souls and wild lives, his

heart a-quiver with vague sadness drawn from all the worlds, Eleutherios, loosener of heart and lip, the regenerator, the absolver, the eternally misunderstood, whose true followers are priests of impassioned pure life, whose wine is not juice of grapes but the clear air ambient upon the hills. Here when sleep is shamed away by expectant awe, the whole being grows one with all-environing life; personality glides into the stream of cosmic existence, lost and found a thousand times in the trance and ecstasy of dim divine feelings beyond the power of words inexpressible. It is miracle; it is religion; it is a feast of purification above pomps or mysteries, a cleansing ritual without victims and undefiled. In such hours, and in such hours alone, man and things are joined in a supreme utterance of life high and humble, transient and immortal, by which the fellowship of all existences within the universe is made real and significant to the initiate mind. For in the day fences are about us, roofs and towers impend above our heads, we are cribbed in streets and markets, the din of rhetoric or sordid bargaining fills our ears. Or if we withdraw into some still chamber, yet the walls built by hired hands offend, and the doorposts of sapless timber; no high influence can penetrate to us save through the close court of memory, and compared with the

breezy starlit meadows, how poor an avenue to the soul is that!

And the exuberant sun of noon distracts, and the multitude of his beams is troublous, for what does sight avail if the things of the heart's desire are lost in immeasurable perplexities of light? For in the high day the quivering bright air is more opaque than the dim spaces of night, so tranquil and severe, or the glowing kingdoms of the morning. At the springing of the day the eyes open upon awakening flowers, giving filial heed to the marvellous earth which waits in patience for a human greeting. I like the passage in which Chaucer tells how in May-time his couch was spread in an arbour upon the margin of the grass, that he might wake to see the daisies unfold their petals. Sleeping thus, he also must have known those intervals of slumber when a sense of some impending wonder grows too strong for sleep, and all nature seems calling to high vision. Often I have been thus awakened, not by noise or movement, but as it were by some strange prescience of beauty constraining me to rise and look. Once I was drawn some distance round the corner of a copse, and there, low in the sable-blue of the sky, in a rivalry of intense but dazzling light, the crescent moon hung splendid over against a great constellation which glittered like a carcanet of diamonds. They seemed to speak together as if

in some scene or passage of celestial drama, nor did I know which was the diviner speech, the moon's unwavering effulgence or that leaping coruscation of the stars. Nothing stirred on the right hand or the left, but earth and air were hushed, as if before that colloquy all sound and motion were miraculously holden. Tall trees brown with densest shadows were massed upon one side, obscuring half the heaven, and lending by their contrasted gloom that sense of wizardry in natural things which enchants the clear summer nights when the air is still.

This is but one among many visions of which the remembrance makes life worshipful; and it is pity that at the hour of their coming well-nigh all whom they should delight lie chambered within brick walls, lost in sleep or in the mazes of unprofitable thoughts. For these things in their rare appearances are more precious than an hour's slumber, were it dreamless as a child's, or all the watches of luxurious unrest. If another summer is given me I hope to take the road when July has come with balmy nights, and wander days at a stretch with all I need upon my shoulders. Then I shall know the real joy of vagrancy, caring little where night finds me, and quickening my steps for nothing and for no man. I shall linger in every glade or on every hill-top which calls to me to stay; I shall tell

all the hedgerow flowers, and lean over the gates to watch the foals playing. The brooks shall be my washing-basins, and I shall quench hunger and thirst in the tiled kitchens of lonely farmsteads. If I hear the shriek of a train I shall smile when I think of its cooped and harried passengers, and plunge devious into some pathless wood, in whose depths the only sounds are the tap of the woodpecker's bill or the measured axe-strokes of the woodman. I shall fling myself down to rest under what tree I will, and pulling from my pocket the book of my choice, I shall summon a wise and cheerful companion to my side as easily as ever oriental magician called a jinn to do him service. I shall once more be commensal with wild creatures, and wonder that solitude was ever a pain; I shall be healthily disdainful of the valetudinarian who lives to spoil either his body or his soul.

These are the wanderings which henceforward will chiefly suffice to my need. For since I roamed my fill in other continents the gadfly may no longer sting me out of my tranquil haunts. In their youth lonely people suffer more than others from that restlessness which fills the mind with sudden distaste for the present scene, and a fierce longing to be somewhere far away. Others are preserved from it by the love of home; but we, in our poverty of

attachment, listen more readily to the depreciating voice.

I remember how deep had always been my longing to look out upon the sea from some Greek island, and how one day, when this desire was granted, and I walked along hills set high above the blue Ægean, I was seized with an instant yearning to be instead upon Ranmore Common in Surrey. Yet at that moment a life's ambition was being fulfilled; I stood in a scene of incomparable beauty, gazing down on those deep azure waters whose voice is always to me as a lament for wandering Odysseus; the lower slopes were rich with olive trees, powdering with silver the tilled lands round a beautiful monastery lying there in its enchanted rest. Dark cypresses rose amid white walls of villages, by the contrast of their gloom making all bright colours glorious; away to the left, where the shore verged westward tracing inimitable curves between field and sea, lay slumbering a little white town with minarets and walled gardens and tiny haven – a very place for Argonauts; and yet my thoughts turned to the chalk downs of England and honeysuckle crowning the unfruitful hollies. *Sed quia semper abest quod aves praesentia temnis*; – Such desire has distracted Roman minds; the perversity is very old; and perhaps only children find no disillusion in the accomplishment of a dream.

For our feet have one country and our dreams another, and there is no constancy in us. It is not alone in the bartering of one earthly scene for its fellow that we suffer the sick thirst of change; but into the rarest hour of achieved ideal to which hope promised her supreme satisfaction, the same wayward longing will often find a way; as in a sacred place amid the purest and most exquisite meditations of the soul, there will suddenly flit inexplicable shadows of irreverence, with echoes of incongruous voices from the abandoned world.

But now as the years pass and the penury of human love has made the home woods and fields more dear, I feel that this unrest is drawing to its end. For as the seasons pass over the uplands and the meadows, clothing them with new splendours between the seed-time and the harvest, no vision rises upon the memory dearer and more beneficent than theirs. As the lover's fancy dwells upon the image of his beloved in this or that environment, and thus or thus arrayed, so I see the woods and fields in the various glories of the year and know not in which garb I love them best. They have heard my laments, my confidences, all my broken resolves: they are bound to me by so pure and intimate an affection that all those grander wonders of the world should never draw me again from this allegiance. Not for the vision of Himalaya piercing

the heaven, or the sunsets of Sienna, or the moonlight on the Taj Mahal, or for any other beauty or any wonder shall I weary of the cornfields framed in elms or the great horses turning in the furrow against the evening sky.

For with the growth of years our desires wander less, and are mercifully contracted to the scope of our wearying powers. We haunt the same old places and want the same old things, dwelling amongst them with an increasing constancy of devotion. For we find that year by year the old places and things are not really the same; something has touched them in our absence; strange still agencies have intervened, long silences of dissolution and the ineluctable fate of change. And so that perfect sameness which we find unattainable takes on the quality of ideal and demands the grown man's devotion, as the change that is forbidden casts its resistless spell over the guarded and tethered child. The eyes of youth are on the far end of the vista, those of age upon the near; the old horse that has drawn the coulter through the clay is glad for the four hedges of the paddock which irk the growing colt's desire. When Richard Jefferies was asked why he walked the same lane day after day, at first he was at a loss for a reply; but gradually the reason became clear to him. It was because he had become aware of the iron law: *Nothing twice*:

he wanted the same old and loved things not twice but endlessly; he was yearly more eager to be with them, and paint indelibly upon his memory their delicate quiet beauty, their soft and perishable charm.

That is how I also feel, as with the return of summer I wander out into the old meadows and climb the familiar hills; I find myself hoping that nothing is changed, and am stirred with sweet anxieties of reminiscence. And surely within the enchanted boundaries of the counties where I ramble, there is variety which not the hundred eyes of Argus could exhaust. These fields and woodlands in high summer feast all the senses with a surfeit of delights. How good it is to exercise in all its range the fine mechanism of the body, suffering each part of it to indulge its own hunger after beauty; to feel the texture of petals, and draw the long grasses through the fingers; to breathe an air laden with the scent of blossoms, passing from uplands fragrant with bean-flowers into untilled regions odorous with pines; to hear the birds' chorus at sunrise and the distant sound of reaping; to see innumerable marvels; the belts of clover mantling wine-dark in the wind; the poppies in the standing corn, the carmine yew-stems on the downs; above you the soft grey clouds delicately floating; below you, as the day declines, some distant lonely water

emerging in its glory to be the mirror and refuge of all heaven's light; to remember the gorse and broom and look forward to the royal purple of the heather – all this is a consummation of pure life, a high, sensuous pleasure penetrating to the inmost soul, and of such exceeding price that to disdain its offerings or to pass incurious before them, is to live in the blindness of the tribe of Genseric.

In such wanderings the mind is filled with slow and seasonable thoughts, lasting as the trees and buildings of the country-side. Old deliberate contemplations, perceptions after long regard ingathered from abundant nature, theories leisurely compacted in sunshine or storm, to stand in the fields of memory, crowned with beauty by the indulgent years. So in the visible meadows stand the ancient barns, with roofs of umber tiles parcel-gilded with old gold of lichen, and crowning their seasoned timbers "as naturally as leaves"; restful structures of a quiet age, capacious of dim space, unvexed by the glare of a hundred summers.

And if you ask what profit is here for one who must do battle in the loud world, study for a while the artifice and industrious policy of plants by which they attract to themselves the visitants they need or with most masterful defence repel the importunate advance, and you will return to the societies of men, even to their parliaments,

enriched with arts of prudence beyond the practice of Machiavel. Examine the dog-rose upon the hedge, how by putting forth thorns it raises itself to the light and ranges irresistible along the leafy parapets; see how the flowers adapt their form and colour to the convenience of the bee or the predilections of the bird; consider the furze armed with spines against browsing muzzles, and be near when it casts its seed wide upon the earth; and then say if among states or governments there is a wiser economy or an intelligence more provident of its end. I myself have the conceit that if time, revoking my sentence of superannuation, should restore my lost years and add youth to the wisdom learned along the hedges, even I, a very profitless weed, should not again so uncivilly decay, but flower to another June and see my seed multiply around me.

Perhaps, if that might be, I should strive to learn thoroughly, and bring science to bear upon experience. But, as I am, classifications and dissections are repellent to my fancy. I cannot get to the hearts of flowers by any Linnæan approach, but go rather by the old animistic way, still honoured by Milton through his Genius of the Woods:

"When evening gray doth rise I fetch my round,
Over the mount and all this hallowed ground,
And early, ere the breath of odorous morn
Awakes the slumbering leaves."

So I greet the blossoms of hill and upland and water-meadow, knowing them all by their country names, and sometimes fancying that they know me back: all that is lacking is the tutelary power to guard their growth and prolong their bright and fragrant lives. What fine old names they have, great with the blended dignities of literary and rural lore; archangel, tormentil, rosa solis or sundew, horehound, Saracen's wound-wort, melilot or king's clover, pellitory of Spain! I cannot coldly divide so fine a company into bare genera and species, but imagine for them high genealogies and alliances by an imaginative method of my own: to me the lily and the onion shall never be connections.

If I must read books on flowers, I take down such a one as Nicholas Culpeper's *Complete Herbal*, written from "my house in Spitalfields next the Red Lion, September 5th, 1653." For here is a man who attempers science with the quaintest fancies after the manner of his generation, and delightfully misinterprets the real affinity of the flowers and the heavens. "He that would know the operation of the herbs must look up to the

stars astrologically," says this master; and so to him briony is "a furious martial plant," and brank ursine "an excellent plant under the dominion of the moon." Of rosemary he says, "the sun claims privilege in it, and it is under the celestial ram," and of viper's bugloss, "it is a most gallant herb of the sun." The bay-tree rouses him to real eloquence, though not for Apollo's sake. "It is a tree of the sun and under the celestial sign of Leo, and resists witchcraft very potently, as also all the evils that old Saturn can do to the body of man; for neither witch nor devil, thunder nor lightning will hurt a man in the place where a bay-tree is."

Reading in this old book of the ordinance and virtues of the familiar herbs, I escape from the severities of botanical science into a maze of queer fancies, well suited to those retrospective hours when we love best what we least believe. And by the pleasant suggestion of astrology I am led on to contemplate the starry heavens, which I do in the ancient pastoral way, peopling them with mythical forms and connecting them with the seasonable changes of rustic toil. I forget for the moment all the discoveries of Copernicus and Kepler, and see eye to eye with Cleostratus of Tenedos who nightly watched the stars from the sacred slopes of Ida.

Much as the companionships of nature have meant for me, I would not have any man content

himself with these alone. It is not right to live the slave of Pales, or become the rhapsode of docks and nettles. To be all for the lower life, were it the fairest, is derogation; and Har and Heva before they may enter into their kingdom of the flowers must first be fallen spirits. But continually in the interludes of human endeavour to rebathe the mind at these clear wells does indeed exceedingly purify and strengthen against the returning and imminent encounter. Those long retreats at Walden may not often be repeated, for man is either risen too high or too far fallen to live well in the sole company of animals and flowers. What sociologists call the consciousness of kind is as vital to man as the consciousness of self; and to pine for adoption into an alien kind is vain on this side transmigration.

Not seldom my wanderings in town and country lead me to quiet churchyards, or to those vast cemeteries where the living have established the dead in avenues and streets of tombs after their drear suburban fashion. Solitude has ever persuaded to the contemplation of death, and in these silent places I feel no shock of sadness but am rather possessed by a familiar spirit of peace. As I wander from path to path, my fancy is not lamed by mournful thoughts, but finds suggestion amid the poor laconic histories by which these headstones appeal to him that passes by.

It is with most men a natural desire to take their last rest in some green God's acre, far from the smoke and turmoil of towns, lying in a fair space amid a small company, where there is a wide prospect of tilled lands, and the reapers cut the swathes against the very churchyard wall. And this is my most usual aspiration; yet there are times when I would not shrink in thought from the Valley of Ezekiel, and would be content to be written a mere number in some city of the dead, where at last after all the loneliness of life I should no longer be kept apart, but be gathered to my fellows where they lie in their thousands, and be received a member of their society. And though I well know that it matters not a cummin-seed whether my bones are washed to and fro on the bed of the sea or my ashes cast to the winds of heaven, yet I humour this fancy, and find a quiet pleasure in the thought that death at least may end this isolation.

And what if the propinquity of these poor remains be gage and promise of a sympathy of souls unveiled and unhidden by false semblances of the body? Then should death indeed be the crown of a long desire and give me at the last the fellowship into which life denied initiation. Surely, as Coleridge dreamed, there is a sex in souls, which, disengaged from the coarse companionship of the

flesh, shall see into each other's crystal deeps. Thence, in new life, when the last recondite secret is withholden no longer, there shall come forth those qualities and powers that ennobled man and woman in mortality; they shall come forth in all their several strength and beauty, divinely animate, and reflecting upon each other bright rays and soft colours invisible upon these misty oceans of our navigation.

It is not terrible to think, at times, on death, for that *danse macabre* which troubled the fancy of our forefathers is now danced out, and the silent figure that knocks at every door comes not as a grinning skeleton but as one of more gentle countenance than any art can express. The natural change, which to William Blake was but the passing out of one room into another, is well personified in the merciful figure with the kind eyes, coming at the sounded hour to lead away into quietness. My solitude has taught me to know well those noble efforts which art has made to lift from our bowed backs the burden of the fear of death: I like to look upon that youthful Thanatos carved upon a column from the temple of the Ephesian Diana, and every year the red leaves of autumn persuade my steps to that village rich in elms where lived one who also saw death so, and laboured to draw the frightened eyes of men from the hour-glass and

the skull to the gracious vision of the deliverer and friend. There hands which were dear to him have raised a place of leave-taking upon a green slope, a house of farewell set upon the shore to receive the last pledges from the living to the absolved and unburdened dead.

When first I saw Compton it was a cloudless noon in August, the day of days in which to come alone into this silent place. Out of the fiery heat beaten from wall and path like a blinding spray of light, it is a passage into a dimness of cool space, an air glaucous as the shade of olives. There from the circuit of a dome look down kind faces of immortal youth, in form and habit too tranquil for our life, but made homely to us by the mercy in their eyes, and some quality of the white soft hands which draws all weariness and all pain towards them. To me it was as though some furious struggle in the waves were over, and swooning out of life I had awakened upon a floor of translucent ocean, where, in a gracious and tempered light, beings of a compassion too intense for earth, each with a gesture that was not yet a touch, were charming all the bruises of the lost battle away. Surely this is true vision of things to come, and to such mercy we shall awaken. It cannot be that when the eyes reopen they shall see the forms of dark apparitors, or that the ears shall hear Æacus and

Rhadamanthys speaking in dim halls their cold, irrevocable dooms. No, but there shall be a pause and respite upon the way from one to another life, and none may be conceived more grateful than this rest, as it were a sojourn beneath waters of Eunoë, where a flood of dear memories foreboding good shall absolve us from the mortal sin of fear.

Turning back over these pages, I am conscious that I have failed to give real experiences their proper life. Describing solitude I have been dull; I have fixed the rushing flames of emotion in poor flamboyant lines. I have written far more than any reader but yourself will have cared to follow; but now at any rate the confession is over, and in the future I shall work, and use my sight for a worthier end than introspection. It has been said that the tale of any life is interesting if sincerely told; and it may be that the most ordinary lives have the advantage, because it is the common experience which touches most hearts. For the greater part mine has been a common life, unglorified by hazards in the field, or bright fulfilment of ambition; it had been better for its peace if it might wholly have kept the comfortable, usual way.

I sometimes wonder whether the printing of these pages will reveal to me any kinsmen in affliction, for such there must be going westward alone,

and I wish that for a moment we might foregather as we pass, to compare the marvels of our isolation. Then perhaps I might be urged to higher effort, hearing stories more pitiful than mine, tales of silent courage under ban of excommunion to shame me from the very thought of despair. Poets have metaphorically given colours to souls; mine, I feel, is only grey, the common hue of shadows; but it was steeped in gloom by a veritable pain and evils really undergone. And as I reflect upon what I have written, and try to imagine it read by some brisk person utterly content with life, I can well understand that the whole thing would appear to him incredible, too preposterously strange for belief, a rigmarole of sick fancies beyond the power of hellebore. So be it: I expect small comprehension and no mercy, for indeed I have written caring little for such consequence, yielding to that human thirst for utterance which only confession can slake; as one eases pain by a moan though there are none to hear it. It is not altogether a grateful task. For hardly, and then only in a fortunate hour, to one whose years and feelings have been interwoven with his own, will even a healthy man tell the tale of his hidden emotion; and mine is the deeper reticence of a habit which has ever held closely to the recipe of fernseed. To entrust a confidence to one of unproven sympathy,

is to risk a profitless embarrassment. It has been most truly said that both parties to such impulsive avowals, whenever they afterwards meet, must feel a constraint as of confederacy in misdemeanour.

I have hope that though I came late to the steady labour of the vineyard, I may yet earn my wage and begin the new day with the rest. Like Joseph Poorgrass I can now almost regard my diffidence as an interesting study, and agree with the rustic man of calamities that destiny might have made things even worse. Certainly the pain grows less fierce; I can go more readily among my fellows for all but social ends. For those who live much apart learn at last to see men not as individuals but in groups: to them it is the type which counts, the *forma specifica per formam individualem translucens*, of which the scholastic jargon speaks. Those with whom I come in casual contact appear to me now in a vague, diffused light like the atmosphere of some other world. Dwelling upon none with the eyes of intimacy, and passing swiftly from this to that, I find each but the harmless variant of a species; if I lingered or came too near, doubtless old apprehensions would oppress me still. It is a disadvantage of this outlook that the fascination of detail is lost, and that I have less sense for the personal in life. But if I grow old I shall regain the interest in particular things and persons

with which age is consoled amid many miseries; for while youth grows earnest over some riddle of high art or the occultation of Aldebaran, age is happily absorbed in the arrangement of a room or discussing the destinies of a single household.

Meanwhile, though uncongenial to my kind as entering little into their pleasures, I like to be near them in their grief or happiness, standing unnoticed in the wind of their fortune's wheel. At least I am not soured or malevolent, and when there is dancing toward, I am in the crowd upon the margin of the green. I have abandoned social obligations because I am unfitted to perform them well, and society high and low exists by their cheerful fulfilment. But I no longer rail at social law or decline to see anything but evil in conventions devised by the wisdom and refinement of centuries. If I refuse invitations and leave calls unpaid, it is because I am socially bankrupt: were I solvent I should redeem all debts.

I decline therefore to denounce Chesterfield and deify Thoreau: there was exaggeration in both men, and though my sympathies are rather with the recluse of Walden pond, it is quite probable that Chesterfield was the more useful of the two. I am a bad player, I have not the high spirits or the conversational skill which each should contribute to the social game. And in almost any sport the

incompetent confer a benefit by standing out: at least, that is the opinion which I hear the average player express. If I lived in the backwoods where any guest is welcome, it might be my duty to act differently. But my ways are cast in places where there is no need for social press-gangs, and the highways and hedges are left unsearched. If therefore by abstention I gain a qualified peace for myself, and confer positive benefit on others, I may go my way without serious reproach.

And I did wisely not to marry, for I should have clung too closely to my study for the happiness of any woman. I once saw an advertisement in the newspaper inserted by a discontented young wife whose husband was a recluse and would not take her out of evenings. She wanted to communicate with congenial people, and, like a desperate sailor marooned, was driven to wave her signal in the sight of the casual eye. This frank confession of abandonment made a profound impression upon me. I thought to myself, "Master recluse, you are a pilferer and have filched a life. I am yet more solitary in my estate, and if I followed your example, should be guilty of a greater wrong." There are, indeed, hours when I feel embittered at the thought that for one innocent defect a whole life should be amerced of joy; the finality of loss appals: all is so irrevocable; *le vase est imbibé,*

l'étoffe a pris son pli. Avoided not without cause by those who were my natural associates, I grow impenetrable of access, and even in my own family unfamiliar. The resentment that welled up in the man who told the story of Henry Ryecroft obtains the mastery, and I feel one in spirit with that lonely analyst of disillusions. Sometimes a worse darkness gathers round, till I long for one of those intense and all-absorbing creeds which somehow seem to tend the brightest hearth-fires which earth knows: for philosophy, though it invented the void, never built a little Gidding.

It is then that I feel like the suppliant of the old Babylonian prayer, "one whose kin are afar off, whose city is distant," and all that appears before my sight is one scroll of wrongs which this evil heritage has inflicted upon me. It has made my best years rich in misery; it has cut me off from marriage; it has compelled me, one hating vain complaint, to live querulously in the optative mood. Neither poverty nor sickness could chastise more heavily; for poverty is strong in numbers and sickness rich in sympathy, but diffidence reaps laughter and is alone. When such thoughts win dominion over the mind I could envy what sufferer you will his most awful punishment. For in his agony be sure there is movement and action; his limbs are torn, yet he is dragged onward: by his

very writhing in the bonds he confesses his life. But I lie in some dead waste where nothing moves and all is mist without horizon, lost in an abhorred blankness of dismay to which no positive suffering may be likened. Thither comes no fierce provocation to quicken into Promethean scorn; life lies whelmed in blackness unlit by flashes of defiance or the cold splendour of disdain.

Empedocles once described his dream of retribution for the last unutterable offence. For thrice ten thousand years the sinner roams estranged from bliss, taking all mortal shapes, wearing with tired feet all the sad ways of life. Æther sweeps him out to Ocean, Ocean casts him naked on the shores of Earth, Earth hurls him upward to the flames of Helios, and he, relentless, spurns the victim back to Æther, that the dread cycle may begin anew. But to be for ever driven in this majestic whirl of change, to receive the chastisement of all elements and survive unbroken for a new revolution of the wheel, this is but an assurance of the very pride of life, it is the charter of an invincible manhood. The doom which in truth befits the unutterable sin is rather the blank pain without accident or period, without point or salience to draw from stunned nature her last energies of resentment. It is well for me that this misery is short-lived, and that either by thinking on that ideal love I know the

miracle of the twenty-ninth sonnet, or, struggling with instant effort out of the toils, try to see myself as I appear to others, one who should scorn to sit in thirst when there are wells yet for the seeking.

It is a strange life to lead in this pleasureful world; and if when it is over I were condemned to live again, coming like Er the Armenian to that meadow where the lots are thrown down for each to choose his own, I am already decided what character I should elect to play. I should neither cast myself for a protagonist's part nor again for that of a dumb actor in those backgrounds I know too well; but just for a plain manly character, strong to face all fortunes and rich in troops of friends. There should be no more evasion or dreary wrestling of mind with body; but life should move to a restrained harmony, and no elusive wind should carry half the music away.

As for what remains of this present dispensation, I shall know how to endure, trusting that the years may fade finely, like the figures in an old tapestry, and that the end may come to me as to the old gentleman in Hans Christian Andersen's story of the Old House. And I have this advantage over other men, that while they have the whole cornucopia to lose, I can but be deprived of the dregs in its pointed end. For in what can there be further punishment? On others, men of happy

pasts, dismay may fall as the ways are darkened before them. But surely I shall be of good cheer as I come into the land of the fierce old robber Age; for, stripped long since by a more subtle and insatiate despoiler, I shall possess nothing of worth to draw his covetousness upon me. So many joys did my very youth renounce; so many pleasures the Harpies swept from my place at the spread board of life; such gags and fetters held me while others danced and sang, that I was the sad familiar of evil fortune before my companions were acquainted with her name. That leaden weight which brings others low, by a nice adjustment of the scales shall raise me for the first time to their equality. And then, as one experienced in bereavements, of themselves they may seek my company; and I, so long the useless and estranged, may become at the close their helpful counsellor.

If only that might be; if only upon the verge of night I might redeem by usefulness my lost unserviceable day. Then this grey life, so long sole and intrinsical to itself, should glow at last with some reflection of the sunset; once more I should know young ardours imagined lost and devotions miraculously born again.

You will still encounter me now and then, moving absently through the crowd, or wandering in some green place, as in the garden of the Luxem-

bourg Vauvenargues used to meet the wounded of the great battle, keeping apart in the narrower walks, and leaving the broad central ways for lighter feet than theirs. He often longed to have speech with them; but always they turned away, with the proud self-sufficiency of the disillusioned. Perhaps if he had succeeded he would have found that to some of them life had its consolations not unlike mine, and that they could still regard it as something more than a friendly process of detachment. But it is not our habit to expand; we are ever held back by the occult pride which the same soldier-philosopher has assigned to one of his imaginary characters, "cette fierté tendre d'une âme timide, qui ne veut avouer ni sa défaite, ni ses espérances, ni la vanité de ses vœux."