

A BOOK OF
STRANGE
SINS

BY COULSON KERNAHAN
AUTHOR OF
"A DEAD MAN'S
DIARY"

A Book of Strange Sins

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A Book of Strange Sins

By Coulson Kernahan

AUTHOR OF "A DEAD MAN'S DIARY"

“Whatsoever a man soeth, that shall he
also reap.” – Galatians 6:7

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Dedication

To
Louise Chandler Moulton
A True Poet
And
A Friend of Friends

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Preface

WHEN THE FOURTH EDITION of “A Dead Man’s Diary” was in the press, my friend, Mr. James Bowden (of Ward, Lock & Bowden, Limited, the publishers), whose generous and honorable treatment in regard to the first book of a young and inexperienced author I shall not soon forget, was of opinion that, as the First, Second and Third Editions were published anonymously, it would be well if the Fourth appeared with a preface by myself. I did not however feel that I had anything to say which was of sufficient importance to warrant me in thus specially coming forward to say it, but in publishing my second book I may perhaps be permitted to avail myself of the opportunity to express my cordial thanks to the readers and the reviewers who found something in my first book to praise, and the hope that I have profited by their strictures to those who found much in it to condemn, as well as to make an explanation in regard to the title and aim of the present volume.

And first I would say that this is not a collection of short stories. It is true that before the publication of my first book, I assisted in bringing about the premature dissolution of several promising magazines by contributing short stories to their pages; and it is true too that after the appearance of that volume, a certain publisher was unwise enough to offer me a not undesirable sum of money if I would allow him to collect the best of them in a volume.

That I refused my consent has been a constant source of consolation to me when I find myself in danger of losing my literary self respect. We suffer nowadays from a plethora, rather than from a scarcity of book production, and unless a writer have something to say, which is different from, or better said than what has been said before, he will earn a more lasting title to our regard by selling sound sugar at honest prices than by publishing a book.

It is likely enough that my own words will be held by some to sentence me to the Siberia of the scales and the sugar-scoop; but whether it be so or

not I can at least claim to have practiced what I preach, for it is now more than three years since my "Dead Man's Diary" was published, during which, with the exception of having had the pleasure and the privilege of acting as assistant editor to Mr. Frederick Locker-Lampson in the preparation of the new edition of his "Lyra Elegantiarum," and the contribution of a few critical articles to the Fortnightly Review, my name has not been before the reading public in any prominent way.

With the exception of "The Lonely God," and "The Garden of God," which by the advice of my ever-honored and ever-loved friend, and more than friend, the late G. T. Bettany, I wrote to relieve the somber tone which pervades the rest of the volume, all the papers in this book have, or are meant to have unity and connection, inasmuch as each is a study of some form of crime or sin. Drink, Lust, Murder, Soul-Murder, Pride, Suicide, and last not least, the sordid, respectable, self-seeking and self-righteousness which are often more deadening to the spiritual nature than actual vice or sin, are dealt with either separately or in connection with some other form of human wrongdoing.

That I shall be accused of straining after what is sensational and morbid I fully foresee, and upon this subject I wish to say an anticipatory word.

I deny that in these studies I have dwelt unduly upon the details of any crime or sin. Such details are to my thinking, what the hands of a watch or clock are to its works, and are of importance only as indications of the state of the restless, unseen, but infinitely interesting influences at work within; and indeed crime or sin, in itself and apart from the conditions which bring it about, runs much to one pattern, and is scarcely a more interesting subject of study than are the hands of the watch or clock to which I have likened it. It is not the sordid particulars of crime and sin which I have tried to lay bare in these pages, but the influence of these crimes and sins upon the men and women who commit them. It is the secrets of souls and not of sins into which I have attempted to look, and whatever there is that is sensational or morbid in this volume, is, as far as I am concerned, merely a matter of detail and background.

COULSON KERNAHAN.

"Thrums," Southend-On-Sea,
August 24th, 1893.

A Strange Sin

1. Mr. Michael Armstrong

NO ONE who was not brought into daily contact with the poor of East Weerham could realize the honor and reverence with which the name of the man whom I will call in these pages Michael Armstrong was associated; and only those who knew of the long series of generous deeds, which had won for him the love of the people, and who were aware, as I was, of the purity and nobility of his life, could understand the intense excitement and indignation which were aroused in the district, when it became known that he was in prison on a disgraceful charge.

Mr. Armstrong, as I recollect him, was tall and gaunt, with a stiff carriage and angular, square shoulders. His limbs were so fleshless that his clothes seemed literally to hang upon him; and he had the appearance of a man who had, at one time of his life endured terrible privations, which had left him shattered in nerves and in health. So emaciated was he that his head always reminded me of a skull and, indeed, the bones of jaw, cheek and forehead could distinctly be seen under the tense and tightly-stretched skin of his sunken face. Thin hair of a grizzled red was brushed across a high and wide forehead, which was developed to an extraordinary fulness at the temples; and deep set red-brown eyes glittered with unnatural brightness beneath the overhanging brows and shaggy red eyebrows. A coarse, red mustache stood out so stiffly over lips which had the grey, death-stricken look of a consumptive that the corners of the mouth were scarcely concealed; and his skinny, knotty-knuckled, and yellow hands shook with a strange nervousness as he swiftly rolled up and lit the innumerable cigarettes, without one of which he was seldom seen.

He and my father were friends of many years' standing, and when the failure of a bank, followed almost immediately by my father's death, left me penniless, Mr. Armstrong, who was a man of means and a bachelor,

insisted that I should make my home with him, offering me a sufficient income in return for my services as his private secretary. He was, I think, the most melancholy and moody man I have ever known, and every year his melancholy seemed to become more marked and more morbid.

To what it was attributable I do not to this day know, except in a vague way, and my father, as he has often told me, never knew at all. That it was not, as was sometimes suggested, due to religious causes seemed evident from the fact that Mr. Armstrong never spoke of, or made any outward profession of religion, and never under any circumstances entered a chapel or church.

But, on the other hand, the whole tone and tenor of his life seemed to me, who knew him best, intensely religious. For sickness, suffering, or want he had an intuitive instinct, and I have known him ready with sympathy or assistance in cases where not even intimate friends had suspected that of sympathy or assistance there was any need.

Was a hard-working family struggling to pay its way or to keep up an appearance of respectability under the pinch of want, Mr. Armstrong was sure, by some mysterious means, to become acquainted with the facts, and to hit upon a delicately-devised plan by which he might assist without wounding what he considered honorable pride.

When diphtheria was decimating one of the poorest and most squalid quarters of the town, it was Mr. Armstrong who, as was frequently said, "saved more lives than the doctors," and who, heedless of his own health or of the dangers of infection, gave himself up, body and soul, to the service of the sufferers. One would scarcely suppose that so melancholy a man would prove a welcome visitor in sickness; but, sincere and unaffected as his melancholy undoubtedly was, he never carried it with him to the cottages of the poor or to the sick-room. Women of all ranks he invariably treated with a certain gentle deference which, though very marked, was perfectly natural to him; and I never yet saw the child in whom he did not seem to inspire an instinctive liking and trust.

All this I learned from my father, or discovered little by little for myself, for if ever there was a man who did good by stealth it was Michael Armstrong. He had indeed, the most singular and morbid dislike to having his benevolence known or even alluded to. Gentle as was his manner generally, an allusion to his generosity would lead to a passionate outburst of fierce invective which, after it was over, would leave him moody, morose

and irritable for days. More than one well-meaning clergyman or minister under whose notice some charitable deed of Mr. Armstrong's had directly or indirectly come, and who had ventured on an appreciative word, has to my knowledge, been given to understand that his remarks were considered as an impertinent and unwarrantable intrusion upon the private affairs of another.

Mr. Armstrong's account books, which are in my possession, show that he subscribed large amounts anonymously to many deserving institutions, although his name never, under any circumstances, appeared in subscription lists. And yet, if invited personally to subscribe to these very institutions, or if called upon by those who were collecting for some local charity, to which he had already contributed anonymously, he would refuse in so curt and churlish a manner that the request was not likely to be repeated.

At first people feared him, and spoke of him as an unmannerly bear; but no one can do good, day by day, in a country town, no matter how stealthily he do it, and keep his well-doing a secret. Little by little the truth leaked out, and while the upper and middle classes regarded Mr. Armstrong as an eccentric but noble-hearted man, the poor of the district simply worshipped him.

2. The Arrest

THINGS WENT ON in this way for many years, during each of which Mr. Armstrong seemed to grow more melancholy, brooding and careworn, until one day the town, and in fact the whole neighborhood, was thrown into a state of intense and unprecedented excitement by the news that he was in custody upon a serious charge. I do not propose, in this narrative, to enter upon anything which is not necessary to a right understanding of essentials; and into the particulars of Mr. Armstrong's offence I need not go further than to say it was one which in a man of his reputation and position would be considered peculiarly disgraceful. That he had committed, or was even capable of committing, such an offence was everywhere declared a moral impossibility; and that an explanation, which would effectually clear him, would sooner or later be forthcoming was held by all.

Even men who, because their lives were known to be low and dissolute, might have been supposed ready to believe any charge against the character

of another, the blamelessness of whose life was a silent condemnation of their own even these men refrained, for once, from trying to make capital out of the affair; and some of them did not hesitate to express their hope that the accusation against Mr. Armstrong would turn out to be unfounded.

And then, like the proverbial thunder out of a clear sky, came the intelligence that Mr. Armstrong had not only admitted his guilt, but had absolutely refused to defend himself or to allow himself to be defended.

Great as was the shock which the news of his arrest had been, his admission of guilt was a still greater shock, and for the first few moments all who heard it looked at each other with faces of blank, mistrustful dismay, on which were plainly written the questions: "Whom, then, can we trust?" and, "Are all men alike equally corrupt and rotten at heart?" But this wavering in the respect which was felt for Mr. Armstrong was only temporary, and the reaction in his favor, by which it was immediately followed, carried him at once, as on the crest of a huge billow, to a still higher place in the public sympathy, for the belief that the crime had been committed during a moment of mental aberration had scarcely been suggested before it was universally accepted as the one and only explanation of the case; and great indignation was expressed that no medical opinion was taken with a view to sanctioning his transference from the prison to an asylum.

3. The Trial

THE TOWN OF EAST WEERHAM, where all this occurred, was at one time famous for the collieries, which gave employment to some hundreds of men; and it so fell out that my friend's arrest and trial took place within a few weeks after a fearful accident in which many lives were lost.

Mr. Armstrong, who, notwithstanding his haggard looks and attenuated frame, was a man of considerable physical strength and capable of great endurance, had been one of the most active and hard-working of the "rescue" party. He was in the first "cage" which descended the burning mine, and had risked his life again and again in the perilous task of searching for the dead.

It may well be supposed that the heroism and untiring devotion which he had displayed during this terrible time had endeared him more than ever to

the hearts of the people, and it is no matter for surprise that his arrest, almost immediately afterwards, should have aroused intense excitement and sympathy among the colliers, many of whom were then out of employment on account of the temporary stoppage of work necessitated by the disaster.

As the hour for the trial approached, a vast crowd, consisting of these unemployed colliers, and of men, women and even children from the surrounding villages and the poorest parts of the district, collected in the large market place, where the town hall was situated, all in such a state of distress and excitement that the police became not only anxious but alarmed.

That the case should excite extraordinary local interest was to be expected; but as no one, not even the poor people themselves for the affair was in no sense an organized demonstration had anticipated such a gathering, the necessity of increasing the police staff had not occurred to the authorities. The whole of the local constabulary did not amount to twenty men, all told; and as the nearest town of any size was fifteen miles distant, it would be impossible in the event of a riot, to obtain reinforcements within several hours.

Two minutes after the doors were open the court was full. The handful of police, who had tried to stem the current, and maintain some show of order, was practically powerless against so great a number, and the judge took his seat under such circumstances as have probably never before occurred.

That such a scene as that which I am about to describe should have been permitted in a court of justice, will doubtless seem incredible to some readers of this narrative; and I admit that the action of the judge was an extraordinary departure from precedent, and was, from the point of order, quite indefensible. But the entire circumstances under which the trial took place were so exceptional that it seemed to be tacitly recognized throughout the court that this was no case in which the nice rules of legal etiquette could be enforced. And moreover the reader must remember that what I am describing took place twenty years ago and in a small county town in the Northern midlands.

4. “God Bless Him!”

MR. ARMSTRONG'S was the first case on the list, and I shall never forget the scene which took place when his name was called and his familiar figure was seen to enter the dock from the back. The spectacle of the man they so honored and loved standing in that shameful place was too much for those present; and as if by common consent, there broke from that great crowd a cry like that of a wounded animal, which was followed by a torrent of weeping and wailing from the women, as the people stood up, some with outstretched hands and streaming eyes, to sob, "God bless him!" while those who were near the dock struggled and pressed to shake his hand, or even, in one or two instances, to kiss the sleeve of his coat.

Scandalized at so unheard-of an outrage upon the majesty of the law, the dozen or so policemen who were in the court struggled and pushed about vigorously among the packed and heaving masses; but their indignant threats and cries of "Order!" passed unregarded, and indeed, were scarcely heard among the sobs and benedictions of the people.

Under ordinary circumstances the judge would have given orders for the court to be cleared. To do so in this instance would have been to provoke a riot; and after a short consultation with the head of the police, he very wisely adopted a course which, if it set, as I have already said, precedent and legal etiquette at defiance, had the result of quieting the people and preventing a disturbance.

"This expression of your respect and affection for Mr. Armstrong" – I noticed that at no stage of the trial did the judge ever refer to the occupant of the dock as the "prisoner—" "does you and him honor," he said, as soon as he could make himself heard, "but I cannot allow this uproar to proceed, and unless order is immediately restored, the Court will rise, and the case be sent elsewhere for trial. Such a course will only prolong Mr. Armstrong's suspense and anxiety, and I trust that for his sake, if for no other reason, you will control your feelings."

This had some effect in quelling the tumult, and Mr. Armstrong, whom it had been thought advisable to take out of court lest the uproar should result in a riot, and an organized attempt at rescue be made, was brought back.

He had scarcely taken his place again before a sickly-looking woman, who had been swept in on the crest of the crowd, and carried up close to the dock, stretched out a gaunt beshawled arm towards him, while with the other she clasped to her bosom a little child, almost a baby; and the wee, white-faced creature, catching sight of the familiar features of the prisoner,

smiled up at him, and held out a baby hand, as if in expectation of the cake or sweetmeat which it had learned to associate with his entrance.

“Don’t believe anything bad against Mr. Armstrong, sir,” cried the woman, turning appealingly to the judge. “Im couldn’t do nothing bad, if ’im tried. I know ’twas ’im saved my poor ’usband’s life down yon mine; and but for Mr. Armstrong, there’s a many ’ere as ’ud starved afore now.”

Again the storm of weeping and wailing broke forth as one poor creature after another strove vainly, amid the tumult, to bear her shrill testimony to the kindly deeds of the prisoner; but up to this point the crowd, except in manifestations of sympathy and affection, had shown no disposition to behave other than peacefully. At this stage of the proceedings, however two policemen, fearing a rush towards the dock, took up their position inside it; and the sight of Mr. Armstrong, standing guarded on either side like a common felon, called forth such a roar of rage and indignation, that had not the prisoner himself again and again held up his hand, in deprecating and imploring remonstrance, a rush would then and there have been made to rescue him, and a serious riot would undoubtedly have ensued.

5. “Guilty or Not Guilty?”

SOMETHING LIKE ORDER was at last restored and the trial proceeded with, the proofs which were brought forward of the prisoner’s guilt being conclusive and convincing. It so happened that, with the exception of the judge (and even he, I afterwards learned, had for many years been aware of the noble work which Mr. Armstrong was doing), nearly all who were engaged upon the case were residents in the district, and knew the accused personally, or were acquainted with the unselfishness and nobility of his life. It was for this reason probably that the prosecution was as half-hearted as it was, for the evidence against Mr. Armstrong was given and elicited with unconcealed reluctance.

When the judge asked, merely as a matter of form, if charges of a similar or any other nature had been made against the accused in the past, the question remained for a moment unanswered, not because there could be any doubt about a reply, but because, as Mr. Armstrong was unrepresented, some hesitation was felt as to who was the proper person to respond.

The hesitation was, however, only momentary the counsel for the prosecution taking upon himself to answer with marked emphasis that, on the contrary, no breath of scandal had ever attached to Mr. Armstrong's name before, and that there were witnesses without number, and representing all classes of society, who were willing and wishful to come forward and give evidence as to the universal respect and honor in which he was held.

For a professional adversary to voluntarily make an admission which tells against his own case is very unusual, and this chivalrous and generous speech called forth a burst of enthusiastic cheering, which was again and again renewed, and only died away when Mr. Armstrong, with his characteristic dislike to hearing himself lauded, stepped to the front of the dock, and, with a gesture of intense annoyance, expressed, somewhat ungraciously, a wish that the prosecution would confine its remarks to the facts of the case.

And here I must say something about the prisoner's general aspect and bearing throughout the trial.

When the news of his arrest was first made known, the opinion was generally expressed that even if he were acquitted and declared to leave the court without a stain upon his character, the disgrace and humiliation of being accused, if only wrongfully, of such an offence would kill him.

His melancholy had always made him appear careworn and aged beyond his years, and many of his friends expected that when he was seen in court on the day of which I am writing, it would be found that the time between his trial and his arrest had sufficed to change him from a comparatively young man to an old one.

Knowing his nervous, excitable and brooding temperament as I did, I fully concurred in this view, and indeed, feared the worst possible results, and I could scarcely believe the evidence of my eyes when I saw him enter the dock, looking younger by a score of years than he had looked before his arrest. His figure was more erect, and his bearing more alert and vigorous, than it had been within many people's recollection of him. The color had come back to his cheeks, and the light to his eyes, and strangest of all, his habitual melancholy seemed to have disappeared, and on his face there was something of the brightness and beauty of youth.

That this singular change was attributed, not only by the spectators, but by the judge and jury and notwithstanding the prisoner's having pleaded

guilty to the consciousness of innocence, seems likely enough; and I believe it was partly answerable for the evident prejudice in his favor with which the case was conducted, and for the intense desire to believe the best of him which was manifested throughout.

The look of the man seemed positively inspired, and there was a dignity in his bearing and a light on his face which made one think of him as a martyr confronting persecution and shame for conscience's sake, rather than as a prisoner on his trial for a disgraceful charge.

The evidence was at last completed, and Mr. Armstrong declining to say anything in his defense, the jury were informed that the time had come for them to consider their verdict.

After a few minutes' whispering, the foreman intimated that there was no necessity to leave the box, as they had already come to a decision.

The judge, at whom the clerk of the court glanced as if asking whether or not he was to proceed, seemed, now that the decisive moment had come, scarcely less moved and excited than the spectators, and could not trust himself to do more than make a hasty gesture of assent with his hand; and then, after the usual formalities, the question was put:

“Do you find the prisoner guilty or not guilty?”

There was a momentary pause between the question and the answer a pause which, though it was only of a few seconds' duration, seemed positively awful in absolute cessation of sound and motion a pause in which every breath was held, and in which it seemed as if the very hearts of all present were standing still; and then, clear, firm and unhesitating, came the answer, “Not guilty.”

A choking gasp, as if that great assembly had, like one man, come-to suddenly from a swoon, quivered in the air, and then the spell was broken, the overwrought nerves gave way, and bursting from hundreds of throats, came ringing cheer after ringing cheer, and peal after peal of uncontrollable and hysterical laughter, as men shook hands again and again in the wildest enthusiasm and excitement, and women threw themselves into each others' arm to laugh, to sob, or to pray.

It did not need that the words “Not guilty!” should be shouted by those around the door to those who thronged the stairway, and thence passed on from mouth to mouth, through the packed hall and porch, to the waiting masses outside.

They knew outside the meaning of that cheer, and took it up, and re-echoed it again and again with a roar which threatened to drown the joyful din within.

But in all that scene of delirious gladness and boundless excitement one face only looked gray and old and stricken; one form there was which seemed, in the moments preceding and following the delivery of the verdict to pass from youth to age the form and face of the man whom the united voice of the jury had declared innocent of the crime with which he was charged.

I watched Mr. Armstrong as he stood up to hear the verdict, and could not but notice how firm and manly was his bearing. His eyes were bright, his face calm and confident, and so youthful-looking that I could scarcely believe that he and the moody, melancholy and time-worn man I had known, were one and the same being.

He seemed to be upheld and sustained by some faith and confidence such as inspired the martyrs of old; but as the words, "Not guilty," passed the lips of the foreman, the color faded out from the prisoner's face and the light from his eyes; and a feeble old man, with a look like that of death on his features, sank back into the arms of the warders, only to leap up again, and to the front of the dock, where, trembling from head to foot with emotion, and with both hands grasping the bar, he cried, passionately:

"I am guilty, as God is my witness, and I claim to be justly judged!"

6. A Disputed Verdict

A SUDDEN, palpitating hush filled the crowded court at these words, and then something like a start ran through the assembly as the foreman of the jury, who, it had not been noticed, had remained standing, said in a clear and incisive voice:

"I wish to add, my lord, that we are each and all firmly convinced that at the time the offence with which Mr. Armstrong is charged was committed, he must have been in a state of mind in which he could not be held responsible for his actions, and it is for this reason that we return a verdict of 'Not Guilty.'"

As the foreman's last words died away, and before the judge could make any remark, the prisoner spoke again at first with an almost painful

slowness which was evidently the result of a tremendous effort to master himself, but afterwards with consuming passion and fire.

“What I did, I did deliberately and willfully, and when I was in full possession of my senses. I decline to receive my freedom by means of a lie, and I call upon you, my lord, to see that no personal feeling be allowed to interfere with the administration of justice.”

“There is not one of you,” he continued, almost fiercely, turning as he spoke to the jury, “who believes in his heart that I am, or was, mad;” and then, with a sudden break in his voice, “Some of you most of you are my friends. It is possible that it may have been in my power to render two or three of you a service. Oh! if I have any claim upon your gratitude or regard if I have ever served you or my fellow townsmen, or am in any way entitled to your respect, I beg you, I beseech you, I abjure you, to be true to your convictions and to your conscience, and not to humiliate me by a verdict of acquittal which you know in your hearts is a lie.”

Though the silence which fell upon the court after this ringing and passionate appeal was only of a few seconds’ duration, it was painful in its strained intensity, and when it was broken by the first word of the judge’s reply, the sense of relief was so great that one long-drawn sigh escaped from the lips of all.

He began by pointing out to the jury that their verdict was utterly out of order, inasmuch as they were not called upon to decide the question of Mr. Armstrong’s responsibility or irresponsibility. All they were required to do was to decide whether he was guilty or not guilty of the offence with which he was charged. But if they found the accused guilty; there was nothing to prevent them from adding that in their opinion he should not be held responsible, as they were convinced that the offence was committed at a time when he was not answerable for his actions; and it would then remain for him, the judge said, to remand Mr. Armstrong until medical opinion in regard to his mental condition could be obtained.

When the jury returned to the box after half an hour’s deliberation, the foreman stood up to say that they were prepared with a restatement of the verdict, in accordance with the judge’s remarks. They would comply with the regulations which it was necessary to observe in such circumstances, and return a formal verdict of guilty; but they were one and all convinced that the offence was committed when the accused was utterly unanswerable for what he did.

Mr. Armstrong's protestation of his full responsibility in regard to his actions was, the jury believed, a common feature in such cases. They considered, the foreman went on to say, that the circumstances under which the offence was committed were such that no one, not absolutely an idiot, could hope to escape detection and conviction. So far from being wanting in shrewdness and in common sense, Mr. Armstrong, when in possession of his faculties, and notwithstanding his eccentricity, was known to be a man of keen perception and exceptional clear-sightedness. That such a man a man of high social position and honorable reputation; a man who had for twenty years lived openly among them, and who, if he had any propensity for evil-doing, was in possession of the means to follow his inclination where there would be little fear of detection could, when in possession of his faculties, be capable of such incredible folly as to commit, in the very town in which he was universally known, an offence like that with which he was charged, could not be seriously entertained by the jury. And if further proof of his mental aberration were needed, the jury believed it was to be found, not only in the fact that the accused had refused the right to be defended a right to which the lowest criminal was entitled but also in the extraordinary scene which they had just witnessed, and in his persisting, in the face of an acquittal, in declaring his guilt. "Our verdict of 'guilty' is then, we wish it to be understood," said the foreman of the jury, in conclusion, "tantamount to a unanimous acquittal. We honor Mr. Armstrong for his noble, if quixotic conscientiousness, in wishing to suffer punishment for an offence for which he, mistakenly, believes himself responsible; but nothing could convince us, who know him so well, that he could willfully commit, or even wish to commit, a dishonorable action."

Again a mighty and approving roar broke forth from the packed and heaving masses, but it ceased as suddenly as it had commenced, when the prisoner was seen staggering forward to the front of the dock. For one-half minute he stood swaying backward and forward as if about to fall, and then he lifted a face, working and distorted with anguish, to the window which lighted the court from the roof, and throwing his arms upward, cried out in a voice to which it was terrible to listen:

"I appeal from earthly justice to divine! Judge Thou between them and me, O God, and suffer not the guilty to go unpunished!"

And then he fell back, with the blood gushing from mouth and ears and nostrils a dying man.

7. A Strange Sin

MANY OF THOSE who had most cause to believe in Mr. Armstrong's innocence, seemed unable after his death to shake themselves free from a certain superstitious dread concerning him, or to refrain from asking themselves if all could be right with a man whom God had singled out for such an end; and some did not hesitate to say that they saw in the circumstances under which his death took place, the swift visitation of divine judgment.

While by no means disposed to dispute the interposition of Providence though the interpretation I put upon that interposition was a very different one Mr. Armstrong's death by the bursting of a blood vessel on the brain seemed to me in no wise strange or unnatural, in consideration of the intense emotional strain under which he was laboring at the moment. All this, however, it can answer no purpose to discuss, but as the event which I have been describing happened twenty years ago, and no one immediately concerned in the case is likely to suffer by the truth being made known, I give below part of a letter which I received from Mr. Armstrong on the day following his arrest.

He began by solemnly charging me to make no attempt either to defend him or to obtain his release, and then went on as follows:

"When I was quite a young man – excitable, emotional, and of a deeply religious temperament – I was suddenly subjected to a terrible temptation to which, in a moment of unexpected weakness, I yielded. The thing was hardly done before I was overwhelmed with the most awful remorse – remorse which was the more agonizing from the fact that I was unable to satisfy my conscience by making reparation for the wrong I had done, or by confessing my guilt.

"Reparation there could be none, for what had been done could never be undone, and the consolation of confession was equally denied me, for to have made known my sin would have brought misery and disgrace upon the innocent.

"You may call me morbid, or even mad, if you will, but God is my witness that from that day to this I have never known a moment's peace of mind. Life closed for me in the hour of the committal of the crime I have spoken of, and the thing which has borne my likeness is not myself but my phantom.

"I have stood aside and watched life's dance of passion and joy go by, knowing that I was but a ghost, and had no part to play among living men and women. Dare I, who knew that I had no right to take the hand of an honest man in friendship, offer my love to any honorable woman? If I could only have made confession of my crime, if I could only have stood forth for what I was before all, I might at last have proved my repentance, and have earned the right to my own, and to others' respect. But confession and atonement were, for the reasons I have stated, alike denied me; and from that day to this I have walked the world, conscious that I was a living, incarnate Lie – a thing which seemed white and fair before men, but which knew itself to be one of the foulest and most loathsome creatures that defile God's earth.

"Can you understand now why it was that I was always solitary, brooding and melancholy? Can you wonder now why every thoughtless word of praise was to me who knew myself for what I was, and who was seeking by the complete surrender and sacrifice of self to atone for the one irreparable wrong I had done like the tearing away, by a rude hand, of the bandage from an unhealed wound? I have got up in the night, after hearing such words of praise, and looked at my reflection in the glass, until I saw such loathing of myself expressed upon the uncanny ghost-face which loomed out at me from the silver twilight, that I could meet the look in those eyes no longer, but slunk and stole away with furtive, backward-cast glance, like a guilty thing surprised; and I remember that once, in my hatred and abhorrence of myself, I struck the grinning thing with my clenched fist, cutting my flesh to the bone and shivering the glass to atoms.

"At last I felt that I could bear the burden of my sin no more. To stand in the dock or on the scaffold, would be a very heaven in comparison with the hell of knowing and loathing myself as a hypocrite, to which I was each day condemned; and, at last, I decided to commit some crime what, was of little matter so long as it served to brand me as foul and debased in the eyes of all, and so long, too, as no fellow creature suffered injury or debasement thereby.

"And so it was that I determined to commit, or to go through a form of committing (for the thing itself I had no feeling but loathing and abhorrence), the offence with which I am charged, and I planned it to take place at such a time, and under such circumstances, that detection and conviction were inevitable.

"The rest you know; and you know now, too, why I have forbidden you to take any steps to defend me, or to explain away my crime. To do so would be to rob me of the one thing for which I have longed as man never longed for woman, the starving for bread, or the dying for life. The cup of shame which I hold to my lips is sweeter to me than ever was sunlight to the prisoner in a dungeon; for now at last, I know that I shall not step into eternity an incarnate Lie – now, at last, I can face God and man and my conscience again, for it is better to be branded and shunned as a criminal, than to walk God's earth the foulest of all foul things upon it – an unsuspected hypocrite!"

A Suicide

“Be not deceived: God is not mocked.” Gal. 6:7.

“And thou shall know that I am the Lord, and have heard all thy blasphemies.” Ezek. 35:12.

I

London Bridge – How I came to be there – The letter, after receiving which, I determine to take my life and end my misery – I set out from my lodgings reach the bridge, and see, without being seen, and for the last time, the face of the woman who has broken my heart – the river God and the man The man defies and taunts his Maker, and with blasphemy upon his lips, leaps out into the night.

IT WAS MIDNIGHT when I reached the water, and over London Bridge two thin and straggling human streams, which flowed as restlessly on as the running of the river beneath the arches, poured incessantly in opposite directions. I had very little recollection of how I came to be there. I remembered a time – was it possible it could have been only that morning – when my life lay fair and bright before me; but between that time and the time of which I am speaking, there yawned an impassable gulf, and I seemed to have lived centuries since the blow had fallen.

It was in the morning, and while I was sitting at breakfast, that the news which wrecked my life had reached me, and evening found me lying humped in the same chair, with head on breast, and hollow, haggard eyes a-stare, and the letter, which told me that the woman I loved had betrayed and deceived me, still fluttering in the fingers of the nerveless hand that dropped over the chair-back. I was as one paralyzed. My brain had stopped just as a drowning man's watch stops, on coming in contact with the water – at the moment when I had received the blow. As the hands of the watch of the man, who has met his death by drowning, indicate only the time when to

him time ceased to be, so on the dial of my consciousness there was recorded but one fateful fact; and into one fierce focal point of light – the realization of my misery – all the thoughts which passed through the burning glass of my brain were concentrated.

Suddenly I started convulsively, catching my breath and clenching my hand, until the letter which lay in it was crushed to a ball; for, like the dart of a serpent's tongue upon a sleeping bird, the thought that I had it in my power to end my misery darted through my deadened brain.

Just as I had been previously dominated by the one thought of my wretchedness, so now, I was alone possessed by the one thought of suicide. All the slumbering hounds of consciousness gave tongue at that thought, and swept on at full cry in wild pursuit; and that thought I set before me, as the runner sets the mark towards which to press.

Self-interest, Expediency and Religion sprang up clamoring, and, knocking at the door of my brain, cried out, "What will it profit thee, if thou doest this thing? Knowest thou not that punishment will await thee hereafter?" but them I let knock at an unopened door; and when Conscience arose, and, placing herself in my pathway, strove with despairing hands to drag me back, I would not as much as let my eyes rest upon her, but, turning from her, cried out, "This thing I will do, and must!"

How or when I left my lodgings, I have no knowledge; but my next recollection is that of finding myself in the street. Stooping and slouched, with head on breast and burning eyes, and choosing always the darkest street and crossing, I slunk doggedly on, shrinking from, and yet scarcely heeding the passers, until at last I reached the bridge, and, with shoulder hunched to the wall, dragged myself slowly along to the first recess, and paused to peer over the parapet upon the water.

Westward the Cannon Street viaduct barred the view of the river, and through the cold shine of the electric lights, the gas lamps on the distant embankment burned yellow and dim. A train, laboring like a blown runner, puffed panting over the bridge. For one second the electric light flickered from glare to gloom, and then flared out into a dazzling, purplish-pink, which lit every carriage with such startling distinctness that the features of the passengers were plainly visible. A face looked out across the water into mine, and I saw that it was the face of the woman who had broken my heart, and for love of whom I was there to take my life. Forgetful of the fact that the blaze of light by which she was surrounded would effectually blind

her to all that lay outside; forgetful of my wrongs, and of the ruin she had brought to me, and of everything except my wretchedness and the immeasurable love I bore her, I stretched out my arms with an eager and passionate cry; but even as I did so, she smiled and turned to speak to a companion in the compartment, and in another moment the train passed on, and was lost under the huge half-cylinder which roofs the station, leaving me alone upon the dark bridge, and in the night – as alone as I had been before she had come into my life, as alone as I should be in the death which I was there to seek. Alone we live; alone we suffer and die, and sympathy can avail us as little as hate. Your sympathy is powerless to avert one pang of the pain which tears me, for sympathy is but the stretching of hands across an impassable gulf. Even love resembles less the blending of clouds upon the blue, than the sad vigil of neighboring stars. We are companions one to another, we are affected by the nearness or distance of the loved one, but never, ah! never do we touch.

Sick in soul and faint in body, (for I had had no food since the morning), I turned and crossed to the eastward side of the bridge. Below me, in naked majesty, and with blar lights on the right hand and on the left, like death candles ranged by an Ethiop's corpse, brooded the black mystery of the river. As I looked down upon its waters – here flowing with snaky and treacherous swiftness under a surface as smooth as glass; there foaming in eddy and swirl, or sliding as sullenly on as molten pitch, and barred by the broken reflection of lights on steamer and barge, my excited fancy seemed to see the mouth of hell lying before me. I had always thought of hell as a place far distant; but now I localized it immediately beneath the water, and believed that I had but to plunge to the other side of those inky waves to find hell and all its horrors awaiting me horrors, which I was, of my own free will, and not by the decree of God or devil about to seek. I hugged myself with a hideous pride as I thought of it. Yes, the life, which men murder and lie to prolong, which they sell their souls to save, *I* was about to fling unvalued from me. The hell, to escape from which they shuffle and whimper and cringe, and portion out their days into petty rounds of fasting, church-going and prayer – this hell, *I* was, of my own accord about to seek.

“Do Thy worst, O God!” I shrieked. “Thou mayest be cruel, but Thou canst not be more cruel than I can be to myself. I fear not the death with which Thou dost terrify us here, the hell with which Thou dost threaten us hereafter; and wert Thou, Thyself, to open for me the gates of heaven, I

would spurn Thy offer, and fling myself of my own will into hell. Of my own choice I came not into the world, but of my own choice I can and will leave it; and Thou, O God, the Omnipotent, art powerless to prevent me! Behold, the thing which Thou madest mocks Thee and defies Thee! Thou gavest me life, O God, and thus do I fling Thy vile gift back!”

With a cry like the cry of a wild beast, I sprang at a bound upon the parapet. For one moment I tottered, swaying betwixt river and sky above me the wan, white face of a swooning moon, below me the dark mystery of the river, and then with impious hands upthrust to the silent heaven, and with a shriek of blasphemy upon my lips, I sprang out, far out, into the night.

II

In the water – A last struggle for life – A drowning man’s dreams – I am a child again – A youth – The travail of a soul – I face my doubts, and declaring for atheism, burn my Bible – The last of the pictures of the past – The final sensations of drowning, and the dreamy swooning into death.

I REMEMBER that a momentary contraction of the stomach and a sense of sickness followed the leap. I can recall the hissing of hot blood in my ears, the cold rush, as of a mighty wind, but have no recollection of striking the water.

Then there came a sudden and deadly shock of all-enveloping cold, which sent such torture of cramp to every muscle, that my limbs were drawn up distortedly to my body; and in the next moment I was battling and beating for breath, fighting for life, and clutching at the unsubstantial water in such frenzy of fear, that it was churned, as it closed over my head, into crackling bubbles of foam. Blood and fire were in my ears and mouth and nostrils. My eyes were balls of flame, which lit up the cup of my brain, and I saw red blood whirling round and round in it, as water whirls in a whirlpool.

But slowly and surely, and with paralyzing numbness, the cold stole through body and limb. My struggles became less and less fierce, and the fires flickered and went out. From my brain the blood had cleared, and it was now an empty chamber, into which I looked, as one looks into a room through a window: and I saw pictures come and go upon the walls.

A motherless, brother-less, sister-less child sat alone in a little dark garret, so near the roof that he could hear the rain-drops pattering upon the tiles. The side walls of the garret slanted upward and inward from the floor, so that there was scarcely room to stand upright, except where they met in a point overhead; and the little leaden-paned window by which he sat, with his head upon his hands and his elbows upon the sill, was set so far back into the room, that his view was limited to the sky and the upper windows of an opposite house. But it was a warm, wet, summer Sunday evening, and one of these windows, from which there floated the words of an evening hymn, was open, and he could see a group of happy-faced children gathered around an old piano, in a small and shabby but homelike room. As he looked at the uplifted, worshiping face of the young mother, and watched her white fingers wandering reverently among the keys, he saw her turn with a loving smile to slip an arm around a little pinafores, pink-cheeked fellow of his own age at her side; and then the picture faded out and was succeeded by another.

A heavy-mouthed, dark-eyed lad, sallow of complexion, and with straight, stiff hair, thick-massed and growing low down over scowling brows, sat with his feet upon the fender and his elbows on his knees, looking sullenly and fixedly at the fire which burned in the grate of a dingy parlor. His chin was rested upon the cup of his right hand, his fingers being hooked till the tips touched the teeth; and as he sat, he bit steadily, almost viciously, at his nails. His left hand was buried in the shaggy hair that was bushed over his ears, and on a chair by his side lay an open Bible. Some strange emotion stirred within him. His nostrils dilated and quivered, and in his eyes there was a dull and lurid glow, like the reflection of subterranean fires upon the belly of clouds that hang over the mouth of a volcano. Suddenly he flung himself, rather than rose, to his feet, and began to pace restlessly to and fro, talking aloud to himself as he did so.

“It is to the abject fear of death, the fear which makes us crave for something superhuman to cling to, when the human can avail us no more,” he said, “that the world owes its conception of a God. We are cowards who would rather lull our fears to rest with a lie, than face the inevitable facts.

All the religions of the world are rivers that rise from one selfish source; and were there no death, God would be but a subject for the curious speculation of the philosopher, and the majority of men would concern themselves as little about Him as they do about the plurality of worlds. But death is, and must be faced; and so we try to bolster up our failing courage, by dogmatizing about a Divine Being, who will do and be for us, what we cannot do and be for ourselves. And we are not even honest in our thoughts about the Deity we fable. Events are daily happening which cannot be reconciled with our theory of an Omnipotent and Benevolent Ruler; but rather than make use of our reason and think for ourselves, we profess a blind faith in the divine justice, and declare that what is, must be right, because it is of God's ordaining. Just as the Roman Catholic seeks to evade his responsibilities, by accepting, in the place of his abdicated reason, an infallible church, which think?, prays, believes, atones for, and absolves him, so we try to evade the questions which confront us, by referring them back to that dead-letter office – the will of an Almighty Creator to which we relegate all the disquieting problems and undelivered mental packets, for which we cannot find a place in the sorting-box of our reason. Our minds are like so many oysters, each of which is perpetually perplexed with an unanswerable problem in place of a grain of sand; and when we cannot get rid of the gritty cause of our uneasiness, we cover it over with a coating of fine words, and call it our conception of a God.

“I look down at this marvelous body of mine – these fingers which open and shut at my bidding, these limbs which so anticipate my wish, that they act in accordance with it, before I am aware of having put my will into action; and I look in at the mystery of this strangely selfconscious shade – this ‘myself’ as I call it – which from behind the window curtains of a little chamber, at the back of my eyes, looks out, unseen, upon the world, and I ask myself who t am and where I came from; and when I cannot find an answer to my question, I put it away from me unanswered, by falling back upon the figment of a Divine Creator, knowing all the time that to account for the unaccountable by presupposing the existence of an Infinite and Omnipotent Being, brooding in lonely grandeur athwart the waste spaces of eternity, or hovering, bird-like, over the world, as over a nest, and with outstretched wings that span the universe, is but attempting to dispose of one mystery by hiding it in the shadow of another a thousand-fold more unfathomable; is but seeking to set the mind at rest by asking it to believe

something which is monstrously incredible. Why should there be a Supreme Being? Who gave God the right to be God? And is there any justice in one All-greedy, All-grasping Power, arrogating omnipotence to himself?"

He stooped, and taking the open Bible from the chair, flung it face downward upon the fire; and as he did so, the picture faded out and was succeeded by another.

It was early summer, and two lovers were following a path through a meadow thick-sown with tender corn, over which, as the wind swept the tremulous sheen of the emerald banner-blades to shivering silver, there rose and sank a soft and willowy stirring, which was like the sigh of a soul passing out on its way to God. The face of the man was the face of the lonely child and of the lonely lad; and the face of the woman was the face which had looked out at me that evening across the river. And at the sight of that face, the last of the pictures faded away, and I was back in my room again, and reading the fatal letter – I was slinking doggedly on by street and crossing, with brain on fire, and all my thoughts bent on ending my misery – I stood upon the bridge with hell and hatred to God in my heart – and I was battling and beating for breath, fighting for life, and clutching at the unsubstantial water in my drowning agony. And then it seemed to me that I had drifted out into the open sea, and lay buried beneath such a weight of waters that I was able to stir neither hand nor foot. I could see, through a softened and subdued haze of greenish light which swam around me, the little hollows and hills among the shingle and shells, the banks of white and shelving sand; and overhead, like a sheet of ice or silvered glass, the under side of the surface of the sea. Bubbles floated upward from my mouth, and coated this under side with shining pearls. Here and there the water-atmosphere of my submarine world was shot with silvery streaks and spears of refracted light; and I could see filaments of seaweed combed out in long ribbons upon the water, and floating and fluttering above me like emerald pennons streaming in a breeze.

After a time the weight upon my breast lightened, and finally passed away into a dreamy peace. I closed my eyes, and a delicious drowsiness stole over brain and limb. My body swayed in unison with a gentle undulation in the water, as though the kindly sea had stooped to clasp her

strong arms around me, and to rock me to sleep upon her breast. There was the singing as of a sweet slumber song in my ears. One by one the record of the years faded out from my brain. I was a lad – a child – a babe. My cheek nestled against a warm, soft pulsing bosom; my brow was light-brushed by a waving ringlet, as lips, which whispered a prayer that God would keep me innocent and pure, were pressed upon mine. For one moment I opened my eyes to look up into the beautiful face, and into the love-filled and luminous eyes of the young mother whom I had never seen; and then, with one deep sigh of infinite content, I closed my eyes and fell into a dreamless slumber.



My awakening – The punishment of the Suicide – My promise.

SLOWLY BUT SURELY, thought and sensation came back to me, and I awoke, with a nameless horror at my heart, to find myself lying on my back, and staring up fixedly at the ceiling of my own room – the room in which I had received and read the letter, and which, when I set out to take my life, I never expected again to see. I strove to raise myself to a sitting posture; but though my brain was clear and active, I seemed to have lost all power over my limbs. Next I tried to turn my eyeballs in their sockets that I might look around me; but I found that they were stiff and set, and that I had as little control over them as over my body. And then a great cry of shuddering and unutterable horror welled up in my heart; but my drawn lips gave no utterance to it, for I was lying dead in my coffin, and the footsteps of those who came to bear me to the grave might, even then, be upon the stair.

For this is the judgment which awaits the suicide: that, though he kill the corporeal life, he cannot disentangle the dead body from the living spirit, but must lie there a conscious corpse, aware of the coming interment and decomposition, which he is powerless to hinder or to avert.

The will of God *cannot* by mortal cunning be evaded. The Creator may *not* by His creature be outwitted and defied; for our life, as well as the length of it, is of God's and not of our ordaining, and can be terminated, not by any act of ours, but only by His decree.

At last the time came when I knew, by the rattling of the earth upon the lid, that the coffin was being lowered into the grave. I remember that then, when it was too late, God or the devil mocked me by restoring to me some measure of power over my limbs, and that I clenched my hands, until the dry nails peeled off like wound-scabs, and the flesh fell away in flakes from the bone.

“Kill me, O God!” I shrieked. “Kill me, O God or Devil! and I who curse thee now, will bless thee and worship Thee Thee, God, or thee, Devil, if thou wilt but promise to kill me, and to cast me out into everlasting night!”

Like the rattling of teeth in a skull, my voice rattled from the hollow sides of the coffin, and died away, unechoed, amid the walls of dead and oozy clay which closed me in; but neither Hell nor Heaven gave answer to my prayer. Though there was scarcely room to turn or to move in the coffin, I managed, by one supreme and frenzied effort, to double my straightened arms with the fists under my chin and the elbows outward; and then, with the superhuman strength of a madman, I strained against the boards which shut me in. The strings of my eyeballs cracked, but the oaken walls gave slightly, and as, once more, I wrenched my arms apart and against the sides, there was a sound of breaking timber, and my God! was it possible? Light! Light! and the light of day!

I was in a room; it looked like a hospital, and I heard the sound of a voice:

“He’s had a hard time of it, doctor, but I think he’s coming round at last. Don’t hand him over to the police, poor devil! No one can swear it was suicide but me, and hang me if I’ll appear against him!”

“It’s a risky thing you’re doing, my boy – condoning an offence of that sort,” was the answer, “but if he promises never to attempt anything of the kind again, I’m willing to keep the secret.”

And I promised.

The Garden Of God. (a Story For Children From Eight To Eighty.)

I

IT WAS BROAD NOONDAY in the garden, and so hot that one could see the air palpitating and quivering above the gravel paths in undulant haze of heat. Even the butterfly gasped for breath, and grumbled because the swaying of the grasses set stirring a warm puff, which was like the opening of an oven. The sun seemed so near, and was trying so hard to be hot, that the daisies said they could see him spinning and panting as he stood above them; but that, I think, was only their fancy, although it is true that he was shining so exactly overhead, that there was not a streak of shadow where one could creep from shelter from the sweltering heat. All the flowers were parched and drooping, and except for the passing buzz where a bee went drowsily by, or buried himself with a contented burr in the heart of a pansy, not a sound stirred the sultry silence.

All at once there was a sudden scurry among the birds. A cat which had been basking and purring in the sunshine, opening and shutting an eye every now and then to make believe that she was not sleepy, had dropped off into a doze, and now yawned and awakened; and this was the signal for a general stir.

“Phew! but it is hot, to be sure!” exclaimed the butterfly, as he darted up for a stretch from the poppy-head on which he had been sitting, and went waltzing, angle-wise, down the graveled path of the garden, lacing the long, green lines of the boxwood bordering with loops of crimson and gold.

“I hope my weight won’t inconvenience you,” he said with airy politeness to the lily, dropping himself lazily, and without waiting for an

answer, upon her delicate head, which drooped so feebly beneath this new burden that several scented petals fluttered fainting to the ground.

"I am grieved to see you looking so sadly," he continued, after he had settled himself to his liking; "but what on earth, my good soul, makes you lean forward in that uncomfortable attitude? There is a charmingly shady spot under the shelter of the wall behind you. Why don't you lean in that direction? As it is, you are going out of your way to make yourself uncomfortable, besides which *I* should very much prefer to be out of the heat."

"I should be glad to move into the shade," said the lily gently, "but my sweetheart, the rose, has fallen asleep by the border, and I am leaning over her to keep the sun from her buds."

"How very charming you are!" lisped the butterfly languidly, and in a tone of polite contempt which seemed to imply, "and what a fool!" "But your ideas are a little crude, don't you know? though of course interesting. It is easy to see you are not a person of the world. When you have traveled about, and learnt as much as I have, you will come to look at such things in a different way."

"Yes, you have traveled, and lived in the world, and seen a great deal," said the lily; "but I have *loved*; and it is by loving, as well as by living, that one learns."

"Don't presume to lecture me!" was the impatient answer. "Fancy a flower finding fault with a butterfly! Don't you know that I am your superior in the scale of being! But, tell me, does this love of which you speak bring happiness?"

"The greatest of all happiness," whispered the lily almost to herself, and with infinite tenderness her white bells seeming to light up and overflow, like human eyes, as she spoke. "To love truly, and to be loved, is indeed to be favored of heaven. All the good things which this world contains are not worthy to be offered in exchange for the love of one faithful heart."

"Then I must learn to love," said the butterfly decisively, "for happiness has always been my aim. Tell me how to begin."

"*You'll* have to begin by unlearning," put in a big double-dahlia, which was standing by like a sentinel, and looking as stiff and stuck-up as if he had just been appointed flower policeman to the garden.

"Don't you be afraid that any one's going to fall in love with you," was the spiteful rejoinder of the butterfly, edging himself round and round on a

lily-bell as he spoke. " Your place is in the vegetable garden, along with the cauliflowers and the artichokes. There is something distinguished about a white chrysanthemum, and the single-dahlias are shapely, although they do stare so; but the double dahlias!" and the butterfly affected a pretty shudder of horror which made the double dahlia stiffen on his stem with rage.

"How dare you speak slightingly of my family!" he said indignantly. "And as for those big chrysanthemums! why they're just like tumbled heaps of worsted, or that shaggy-eyed skye-terrior dog that we see sometimes in the garden – untidy, shapeless, lumpy things I call them!"

The butterfly, who had been alternately opening and shutting his wings, as if he thought the sight of such splendor was too dazzling to be borne continuously, but really because he knew that the somber tinting which they displayed when closed, heightened, by contrast, their gorgeous coloring when open, was nothing if not well-bred, so he simply pretended to stifle a yawn in the dahlia's face, and to make believe that he had not heard what was said.

"After all," he said, turning his back pointedly upon the dahlia, and shutting up his wings with a final snap – just as a fine lady closes a fan – "after all, my dear lily, I don't know whether it's worth my while to learn to love; for, by this time next year, you and I will be dead, and it will be all the same then to us as if we had never loved, or even lived at all."

"I know nothing about death," replied the lily, "but no one who loves can doubt immortality, and if the rose and I are not already immortal, I believe that our love will make us so."

"What is this immortality?" said the butterfly. "I have heard the word used a great deal in my wanderings, but I never quite knew the meaning of it."

"It is the finding again after death of these we have loved and lost; and the loving and living with them forever, I think," answered his companion.

"I don't believe you know anything about it," said the butterfly, decisively. "All the men and women I've met and they ought to know used ever so much longer words."

"Perhaps you are right," replied the lily quietly, bending forward to shield a stray rosebud from the burning sun, but to be forever with those I love would be immortality enough for me. And I heard the maiden who walks in the garden, speaking yesterday, and I remember that she said it was more godlike to love one little child purely and unselfishly than to have a

heart filled with a thousand vast vague aspirations after things we can neither know nor understand."

II

HOW STRANGELY STILL it was in the garden! Summer had gone, and October was nearly over, but the day had been so bright and warm that every one said the winter must be a very long way off. But since the sun went down, the air had been getting more and more chilly, and the stars were glittering like cold steel, and the moon looked so bright and large, that the flowers, which had awakened with an icy pain at their hearts, could scarcely believe that it was night and not day, for every tiny grass-blade and buttercup stood out with startling distinctness on the grass. A strange, sharp scent was in the air, and a singular stillness was abroad.

There was no "going" in the trees, nor bough-swing among the branches, but all stood rigid and motionless as if intently listening.

"Perhaps they are listening for the first footfall of the winter the winter which is coming to kill us," said the lily sadly, bending down, as she spoke, to twine herself protectingly around the rose.

"Perhaps we are dead already," said the rose, with a shudder, "and are but ghost-flowers in a ghostly garden. How cold and wan my rosy petals look in this pallid light! And is this grey place – blanched and silent and still as death – our sweet-scented and sunny garden, that glowed with warm color and was astir with life?"

Just then, and before the lily could answer, they heard a sudden cry of pain.

It was the butterfly who had fallen, half dead with cold, from a sycamore bough, and now lay shelterless and shivering on the frozen path.

"Creep up upon my leaves, dear butterfly," said the lily, tenderly, as she bent towards him, "and I will try and find a warm place for you near my heart."

"Oh, I'm so frightened! I'm so frightened!" he sobbed. "The world is dying; even now the trees seem still and dead. Soon the stars will fall out of the sky into the garden. Shall we be left in darkness when the moon goes out? Already her face is deadly pale, although she shines so brightly. And

what has come to the trees? On every bough there sparkle a thousand lights. Are they stars which have dropped from the sky?"

"They are not stars at all," said the lily, bending over him and hushing him to her heart as a mother hushes a frightened child, "but diamonds for the Frost King's crown. I think we shall die tonight. Are you asleep, dear rose? The end is coming; at least let us meet it waking, and in each other's arms."

"It is coming, dear heart, and coming soon," said the rose with a cry. "Already I can scarce speak for pain. The night grows ever colder and more cold. And how strangely bright the moon is! What was that streak of silver across the sky? A star which has fallen from its place?"

"I think 'twas the shining angel God sends to fetch us," answered the lily. "Dear Love, the end will soon be here. Already the pain has reached my heart; already I begin to die."

"And I, too," said the rose. "I sink – I faint – the sharp pain stings and bites! Hold me fast, darling! I scarce can see you now."

"Nor I you, sweetheart!"

"Hold me closer – closer. Everything seems to fall away."

"Everything but love, dearest, and where love is, all is. At least we shall die together."

Icier and more icy grew the air; brighter and whiter shone the moonlight on the garden, until the sunflowers' shadow lay like ebony upon silver along the grass; colder and more steely glittered the stars through the limpid atmosphere; and closer crept the pain to the heart of the dying flowers. And all the long night through the silent trees stood rigid and motionless, but now they listened no longer, for winter was come indeed, and on every branch the frost-crystals glinted and sparkled.

And when morning dawned the butterfly lay dead for ever, but the lily and the rose were the fairest flowers a-bloom in the Garden of God.

The Apples Of Sin

A strange punishment to the workers of iniquity." – Job 31:3.

1. The Man and the Woman

THE APPLES of sin are all poisoned at the core," she said, "and every unlawful pleasure we pursue is transformed at last into a hound that turns and rends us. There was a time when you would have sold your soul to call me yours; and now – well, now, you would give the world to be rid of me. You would murder me, I believe, if you dared, but you haven't the courage to be criminal, and even the relation in which we stand to each other to-day was not of your bringing about. I left home and husband to come to you, and though you were not too moral to avail yourself of my madness, you were not man enough to look God in the face, and say: – 'I have sinned, and must bear the consequences of my sinning:' but have whimpered ever since like a hound that expects a whipping, and now you are praying to Him to rid you of me, that you may marry some good and reputable woman, and thus recover your respectability and your forfeited hope of heaven."

I looked round, apprehensive of listeners, but not a soul could be seen from the lonely Belgian hillside upon which we were standing. The one hotel of the village lay upon the other side of the hill, and though I knew that the landlord and his wife had witnessed our quarrel in the morning, it was not likely that they would set any watch upon our subsequent proceedings.

How weary I was of this woman, no words can say. Hers was a love which was always at white heat, and unless I was continually protesting my affection, I was charged with indifference and change. Passion which has once passed away will never return under protest, and the kisses and caresses, which I had at one time coveted, had become stale and joyless to me, for she was lavish of them, and we do not prize that which we are put to

no pains to win. She was right, too, in saying that I was too cowardly to be criminal, and that I was seeking an excuse to put an end to our connection. I had often in my lifetime stepped aside from the paths of right-doing into the byways of sin, but I had taken care to keep an eye upon the road whence I came, for I was too fearful of consequences to wander far afield. When she and I had slipped into sin together, I had had no intention of continuing in open defiance of the moral law. The possibility of her leaving home and husband to come to me, as she had done, had never entered into my calculations; and had it not been that she had already made confession of her infidelity, I should have insisted on her immediate return.

The time came, however, when I determined to break with her; but instead of telling her of my intention to her face, I informed her that it was necessary for me to go for a day or two to Belgium on business, and thence I wrote to her, saying that I had decided our connection must end. To my surprise (for I had thought that her pride would have prevented her from taking such a step) she had followed me, to make one last appeal, and hence it was that she and I stood together that fatal morning upon the lonely Belgian hillside.

2

'Ye have scarce the soul of a louse," he said,
"But the roots of sin are there."

KIPLING'S "TOMLINSON."

"YOU CANNOT, you cannot want to leave me now, and after all that has happened!" she continued. "You are my husband in the sight of God, if not of the world, and I swear that if you do not marry me, I will kill myself."

"Look!" she cried, fumbling in the folds of her dress and producing a pistol. "This is yours. I took it from your dressing table in the morning. Promise that you will marry me, or I will shoot myself where I stand!"

I made no answer, for I was thinking what my life might have been had I never come within her fatal influence – of what it might yet be, if that influence were for ever withdrawn. Were she gone, I could look men and women in the face once more, fearing nothing, and concealing naught. I could range myself on the side of right again, and no more hear myself condemned in every law-breaker whom the world cast out. I saw myself in

imagination, no longer the prey of unhallowed passion, but living a life of sweet domestic bliss. Little children climbed upon my knee to call me “father” and a sweet woman-face – the face of one, through whose pure prayers and counsels, I should forget and outlive my sin-stained past – was forever at my side.

Her words awoke a savage hope in my heart – the hope that she would carry out her threat, and thus free me from a connection which threatened to ruin my career, and which I had long wished at an end, In wish and will I was at that moment a murderer, although I was too great a coward to let the thought of taking her life, by any act of mine, as much as cross the

disc of my consciousness. But I knew well that she was desperate, and that it was in my power to drive her to madness by a single word, or to soothe her to the gentleness of a child. When I had been most inconsiderately cruel to her (as men, God forgive them! are, sooner or later, cruel to the women who have trusted them too well) her looks, as well as her words of scorn, had shown how accurately she gauged the selfishness of my nature. And yet – so inexplicable a mystery is a woman’s love, – she, knowing me as she did, still clung to me with an unreasoning and desperate infatuation, upon which I had often coldly calculated, when I had wanted to attain some selfish end. Sometimes, when our quarrels were at the worst, a sudden revulsion of feeling would come over her, and she would cast herself at my feet – like a hound that crawls back to lick the hand which has beaten it and look up into my face with eyes of dumb, dog-like devotion and despair.

I saw some such change coming over her then, and, fearful lest it might tempt her to forget her threat, I answered her with the taunt which I knew would madden her most.

“Go back to the man you left, and to your dishonored children, and try to frighten them with your tragedy-queen airs and threats of suicide, for I have done with you once and for ever.”

“My God!” she cried, reeling as from a blow, and white to the lips. “My God! and it is for this that I have made myself what I am!”

I have said that I was a murderer, and the word which I spoke then (I will not set it down here) stretched her dead at my feet, as truly as if it had been I who pointed the weapon or pulled the trigger. She fell without a word or groan, the pistol still in her hand; and I remember that I stood with bent head, looking down upon] her in a horrified stupor, and wondering, in

a curious childish way, how long those thin wreaths of smoke would continue to curl upward from the barrel mouth. But within a moment after the deed was done, it appeared something so hideously different from what it had appeared a second before it was done, that it seemed to me as if my whole world had changed with the report of the pistol – as if I had passed from one self into another. The new self stood, with the dead body at its feet, by the brink of an ever-widening gulf, upon the farther side of which now fast receding into distance – was set the old self which I had once thought so guilty, but which, when compared with the present self, shone out like innocence beside infamy.

3. Afterwards

NOW THAT THE END, which I had with such devilish deliberation sought to attain, was indeed accomplished, it seemed to me a thing so unnaturally and monstrously impossible, that I was incapable of realizing it.

“She is dead,” I said, as though I were telling it to some person slow of comprehension. “She is dead, and I am her murderer!”

So conscious was I of the fact that I was not merely morally, but in every sense of the word, guilty, that I felt it as necessary to conceal the evidence of my crime, as if it had been my hand which had actually shed her blood. I remembered too that I was known to have quarreled with her in the morning; that it was in my company she had last been seen; that it was by my pistol her life had been taken; and that if the body were found, and inquiries made, nothing could save me from being convicted of the murder. A panic seized me as I thought of all this, a panic which paralyzed body and brain, brought out a cold sweat upon hands and forehead, and set me trembling like a palsied man. I looked around in an agony of fear, and as I did so, my eyes fell upon a long narrow fissure in the chalky hillside, a natural crevice formed by the cracking of the earth in a former dry season. I dared not lift the body, lest the blood which was still welling from the wound, and from which as the fierce rays of the summer sun beat upon it, there rose a warm and insufferable odor which turned me sick, should find its way upon my hands or clothes, so I dragged the corpse by the feet to the side of the natural grave I had found, and then gently rolled it into the aperture. It slid down until it stopped at a bend where the fissure slanted

away to the right, but, by means of my walking stick, I managed to force it round the angle where it was out of sight, and then, after filling up the fissure with stones and rubble, and covering the blood stains with earth I stood up to do what? To think? No, that way madness lay; that was the one thing I dared not do; the one thing of all others I must at any cost avoid. I had murder upon my conscience now, and, as the soul which is once dyed black can take no darker stain, I felt that there was no sin of act or thought, no evil, no matter how foul, that I would at that moment have hesitated to commit, if only it would serve to save me from the memory of what I had done. I, who in the past had been refined and delicately fastidious even in regard to my thoughts, now strove in a very frenzy of fear to stimulate all that was low and evil within me, in order that I might lash myself into a savage sensuality, which should dominate body and brain, and save me from thinking of what I had done. I knew that Nemesis stalked like a shadow at my side, pointing with one grisly hand to a scroll which he held in the other, and I knew that on that scroll the word "MURDERER" was inscribed in letters of fire, and that in the moment when I looked thereon, hell itself would lay hold on me.

A sudden terror of solitude seized me, for solitude meant something scarcely less terrible than death. To be alone was to be at the mercy of my thoughts – of *the* thought which I dared not think; and hurrying as though a pack of fiends were after me, I climbed the hill, and passed down into the village.

4. The Cavern

ARRIVED at the hotel, I sent for the landlord, and told him that I would take lunch at *table d'hôte*, and not in my own room as I had done on previous days.

"And madame?" he said, in a tone of deferential inquiry.

"Madame," I answered, "has already returned to Brussels. The business about which she came to see me is finished, and she has gone by diligence to the station."

I said this with perfect ease and self-possession, for I was calm with the indifference of despair. We can scarce conceal our annoyance at some petty slight, and over-do the indifference we assume, but we never act more

naturally than when despair is eating at our hearts, and we care not whether we be believed or not.

The hotel keeper bowed, being evidently quite satisfied with my explanation, but lingered to say that a party was being formed to visit the famous subterranean caverns in the neighborhood, and that if I cared to join, he would arrange the matter for me. Anything which promised companionship and an adventure was welcome, and more than welcome, and I answered that I should be delighted to avail myself of the offer.

I have no recollection of what was said at lunch or during the drive to the caverns, for I had fallen into a strange daze or stupor, in which I spoke and acted mechanically. The faces of the folk at *table d'hôte* appeared to recede before my eyes, so that I seemed to be looking at them down a vista, and their voices sounded as if from a distance. But I talked well, and even brilliantly, and I knew that I did so, as I might have known it of another person. The real self which had shrunk inward like a snail within a shell,, where it lay hugging its guilty secret to its heart, away from its own sight and the sight of others, looked out with wondering,, watchful eyes at the smiling stranger, who bore its name and likeness, and asked itself where was the brain which animated the puppet, and whence came the words which rose so readily to its lips.

When we arrived at our destination, the guide, after putting a lighted torch in the hand of every third person, bade us follow carefully in his footsteps, and we entered the caverns. For the first few hundred yards he led us through a series of pitch-dark grottoes where our way wound in and out among fantastically-formed stalactites and stalagmites that writhed like huge reptiles around us, and then, after creeping, bent double, through a slimy-walled tunnel from the roof of which the percolating waters dropped monotonously into little pools below, we emerged into an enormous cavern-hall, lofty as a vast cathedral. Though the guide hurled flaming brands high into the air overhead, and as far on either side as his strength would allow, no glimpse of the cavern's limits was revealed, nor could the combined light of all our torches penetrate the unsearchable darkness which brooded like a starless midnight around. A fierce wind that was as icy-cold as if it blew from the halls of death, swept shrieking like a flight of fiends, over our heads, and as it died away howling and rumbling in the womb of night, we heard the rush and roar of waters beneath us. Calling out that none was to move, the guide tossed a lighted torch into the air. It fell a yard or two in

front of us, but instead of striking ground, as we had expected, rushed hissing down an abyss which opened almost at our feet, and at the bottom of which we saw surging sullenly on, an ink-black river of death. And around us writhed foul slimy things that stole noiselessly away into the darkness; and above us circled clouds of bat-like creatures, uttering unearthly cries of impotent anger.

And then, in an instant, a strange faintness came over me. I saw the guide take up his bundle of torches to resume the march, and heard him bidding us walk warily and keep together, but though I strove to cry out for help, my parched lips gave forth no sound. In a very paroxysm of terror, for I was, at that moment, the last of the party, and being personally unknown to the others, was not likely to be missed, I attempted to catch at the coat of the man in front of me, but being giddy with fear and faintness, I fell forward upon my face. For one second the darkness which seemed suddenly to become palpable, and the light of the torches, swam round and round me in a mad dance; in another second the lights were gone, and I saw only the darkness, which still whirled on in spirals that came ever nearer and nearer, as if a huge black boa-constrictor were contracting his folds around me – and then night closed over me like a sea, and I knew no more.

5. Murder and Soul-Murder

HOW LONG I lay thus I cannot say, but when next I opened my eyes, I remembered nothing, was conscious of nothing, save of a death-cold numbness in body and limb. I asked myself where I "was and looked around from side to side in a sudden, inexplicable terror, but though I strained my eyeballs till they cracked in their sockets, I could not pierce the impenetrable darkness which closed about me like a cloak. I pnt out my hand to feel where I was lying, and with the shudder which ran through me as I touched the ice-cold and clammy ground, the past rose up in a flash, and I knew that I was alone, with murder most foul upon my soul, alone, and in that awful abode of darkness and death.

But it was not the fear of death, nor the darkness of the place, nor its loneliness, but my own thoughts, which lent such supreme agony to my awakening, and caused me to leap to my feet with the cry of a hunted creature, and to shriek out to God, in His mercy, to slay me. For in that

moment, the thoughts, to escape from which I would have sought distraction in the vilest sin, the thoughts which even in the open air and the daylight, I dared not think, gave tongue like hounds that sight the quarry they had feared would escape them, and leapt upon me – a bloody pack – as though to rend my very soul. A whole aeon of hell-torture was concentrated into every minute that passed. It seemed impossible that I could endure such anguish, and live; – as if mental pain must kill as surely as physical.

But when the death which I had half-hoped for came not, I dropped, huddled in a heap to the ground, and, clutching my throat with both hands, strove to throttle the life out of me, and well-nigh succeeded, had not a terrible physical faintness which forced my nerveless fingers to loosen and relax, left me choking and gasping for breath, with eyes starting from their sockets, and lolling tongue adrip.

For a long time I lay thus, helpless and half-dead in body, but with brain abnormally active and alive. Thoughts came and went continually – now racing by like bridle-less horses – now seething and surging in the maelstrom of my mind, like waters in a whirlpool. Remorse awful beyond conception for the woman I had murdered had sinned only in loving me too well – and which was more terrible than any physical pain, racked me with an agony which became every minute more unendurable. And then a strange thing happened to me, for an unconscious habit of thought brought about a self-revelation in which I read my own heart as I had never read it before, and I saw something there which added immeasurably to the supreme agony of that moment. I had never made any pretense of entertaining a grand passion for the woman with whom I had sinned. The passion was all on her side, and my part had been more passive than active. But cut off and disowned, as both of us had been, by our relatives, we had naturally come to depend a great deal upon each other, and for some months it had been my habit to come to her for sympathy in all my troubles. The child-instinct which taught us, in all our sorrows to nestle up for shelter into the warm darkness, the soft, sweet-smelling silence of a woman's bosom, never dies out in us; and the man for whom, though all else be lost, there yet throbs one faithful woman-heart upon which he may pillow his head, is not all to be pitied, for to him there remains the divinest comfort which any human creature may know.

So accustomed was I to look to her for consolation in all my troubles, that even in this awful hour, an unconscious habit of thought set stirring in

my momentarily benumbed brain the idea, that in her sympathy, at least, I should find some lightening of my agony. But in the next instant I remembered that the agony from which I thus sought to find surcease, was remorse for her most foul murder, and I laughed a laugh which was more awful than any cry.

And in that moment of self-revelation I read my heart as I had never read it before, and I knew that the woman of whom I fancied myself weary, was the one and only being in the world who was more necessary to me than the air I breathed – that I had grown to love her with an intensity of which I could not have believed my selfish nature capable.

With a great cry of infinite love and longing I sprang to my feet, stretching out my arms to the empty darkness, as though the very intensity of my passion must compel her bodily presence. Her face rose before me, imploring and beseeching as I had so often seen it in the past. Her timid touch was on my arm again; her tear-filled eyes looked into mine; and I heard her tremulous voice, pleading piteously as I had heard it plead on the very day of her death, for the tender words which I had refused to speak. I knew, in that moment that my love for her was so great that were I under the open sky again, and in possession of all that made life sweet, I should have loathed the very sunshine which warmed a world in which she was not. I loved her so truly that life without her were to me more lonely and desolate than death would be to the Christian without his God. It was at my heart that the weapon which shed her blood had been pointed; it was *my* happiness, here and hereafter, as well as her life, which I had slain. I knew then that I had murdered the soul and killed the body of the woman I loved – the woman who should have been more sacred to me than all which is on earth or in heaven.

“Hear me, O God!” I cried, “and visit the sin not upon her, but upon me! Spare me that hell at least! the hell of knowing that Thou gavest an immortal soul into my keeping, and that I flung it back to Thee stained and shamed and lost to all eternity! Spare me that, for Thy Christ’s sake, and upon my head be it visited, O God! if Thou art, indeed, a God of Justice, and not upon hers!”

“But she is not dead! I cannot believe it! I will not. She could not go she who loved me so well where the sound of my voice would not recall her! She is mine, and I am hers, and we must be together in hell, if need must be, but always together, O God! she and I.”

Does God hear and heed the supplications of His creatures? I think so, and God help the sinner whom God derides by the satire of an answered prayer!

For one moment the intensity of my anguish caused my heart, strained well-nigh unto bursting, to fail me, and I staggered forward a step or two, but my nerveless limbs gave way beneath me, and I sank to the ground, fainting and fighting for breath. But as I lay, a nameless horror seized me, a horror of *something* which lay beside me, a *something* which I had neither touched nor seen, but of which every fiber of my body was conscious, and which caused my very flesh to creep on my bones, as it shrank back, shuddering from fear of contact. In one second I had drawn a box of matches from my pocket, and had struck a light, and then there rang out a shriek more awful than hell has ever known, for that *something* which lay beside me was the body of the woman I had murdered, and which the waters had washed down from the crevice in which I had placed it, and carried to my feet in answer to my prayer.

6. My Atonement

YOU HAVE BEEN ILL, Monsieur," said the landlord of the hotel, when, on opening my eyes, and finding myself lying on the bed which I had previously occupied, I asked him what had happened.

"How long? and who is that?" I inquired, pointing to a man in uniform, who stood near the window.

"That, Monsieur, is a police officer, and you have been ill three weeks, and no wonder! You were found in the cavern with Madame. Madame was dead, and well the officer is waiting for you to explain."

"Call the man here," I answered, but he was already beside me.

"My good sir," he said, not unkindly, "there is really no need for anxiety. The doctors are all of opinion from the direction of the shot that it was a case of suicide, but the circumstances are unpleasant, and well, you will have to explain them."

"I can explain them," I replied.

"Of course you can, of course you can," he said, "but don't let us talk about it now, for anything you say will be taken down, and might be used against you."

“It will not matter, in view of what I have to say,” I answered, “for the woman you found was murdered, and I am her murderer.”

A Literary Gent. A Study In Vanity And Dipsomania

"And sometimes we are devils to ourselves,
When we will tempt the frailty of our powers,
Presuming on their changeful potency."

TROILUS AND CRESSIDA, ACT IV, SC. IV.

I

En route to the dinner – My first warning.

YOU TELL ME, Frank," he said, "that your circumstances your being a bachelor, and so on – are against your leading as temperate a life as you wish to lead; but 'circumstances,' my dear boy, never yet made the man do right who didn't do right in spite of them. It's quite true that I've never known you the worse for drink, but I can't help noticing that the habit of indulgence has been growing on you somewhat lately, and though I have no doubt you mean what you say when you tell me you intend to be very careful about everything of the sort when you are married, I should like to see you make the change beforehand, if my Alice is to be your wife."

"My dear Colonel Frazer," I said, lightly, "you need not have the slightest anxiety upon that score. If it were a new thing for me to take a little stimulant now and then, it would be a different matter, but I've been used to drinking in moderation for years, and I know just when to begin and when to leave off."

"I'm sorry to be disagreeable, Frank," he persisted, "but you know as well as I do what it was spoilt your father's life; and when there is a chance of a man having the thing in his blood, the best course he can pursue is not to drink at all. I quite agree with what you said just now about the

intemperate advocates of a cause doing it more harm than its enemies; but when we are dealing with a thing so accursed that it can make men spend their money in public-houses while their wives and children are starving at home or in the streets – when I read in the papers of the murders and worse-than bestial outrages which, almost every day, are committed under the influence of drink, I tell you, sir, that, man of the world and old soldier as I am, I can sympathize with the veriest teetotal ranter that ever thumped a tub. And as for what you said about ‘temperance fanatics’ and the ‘folly of extreme measures,’ I think you might just as reasonably complain of the fanaticism of the sanitary authorities in taking ‘extreme measures’ to keep the cholera out of England – and drink kills more men, and women too, I am afraid, in this country, each year than the cholera does in a century. No, Frank, my boy; you’re a good fellow and I like you; but there’s no doubt that the habit has been growing on you lately, and when I remember your father, I must stick to my point, if you’re to marry my girl. Come, give me your promise that you’ll turn the thing up altogether, and let’s drop the subject."

“Promises and pledges are for weak-minded fools who have no will of their own,” I answered hotly, being annoyed at his persistence; “I’m not one of that sort, and I know what I’m about. I’ve never given you. cause to speak to me as you have to-night, and I must say that I consider your remarks almost insulting. But excuse me, here we are at Sir Frederick’s, and as his dinner-hour is seven, we have no time to spare for further unprofitable discussions.”

II

At Sir Frederick’s – I lose my head, and make my first slip.

MY SEAT at dinner was, I discovered to my annoyance, exactly opposite to that of Colonel Frazer, my future father-in-law and would-be mentor. I was already flushed and heated by his remarks; and it did not mend matters when I found, or fancied that I found, he was narrowly watching what I drank; and as I was determined to show him that I was not to be bullied or dictated to, I took wine with each course more freely than was my custom. Under other circumstances, and in my usually collected condition, this

would have been followed by no perceptible result; but Colonel Frazer's insulting remarks and subsequent offensive behavior had brought about such a state of brain and nerve irritation, that the wine affected me almost immediately, and by the time two or three courses had been gone through, I scarcely knew what I was about. Up to this point, I had said or done nothing to attract attention; but as time went on, I found myself almost monopolizing the conversation; and as the more I talked, the more excited I became, I am afraid that long before dinner was over my remarks had become not only inconsidered, but inconsiderate. I had not, however, so lost my head as to be altogether unconscious of the fact that some of the guests were beginning to look at me curiously, and to exchange meaning glances among themselves. My wisest plan would have been to withdraw at once from the conversation, and to remain comparatively silent for the rest of the evening, but I was too flushed and excited to have the complete control over myself which was necessary for such a course. At last, and in order to cover a remark which, directly I had said it, I felt was both wild and foolish, I broke into and interrupted a conversation which was being carried on between Sir Frederick and one of his guests. The slightest possible lifting of our host's eyebrows, as he turned courteously to accord me his attention, told me of what I was next moment aware that the interruption was in anything but good taste; and this, in conjunction with a cup of strong coffee, had some effect in recalling me to myself. But when, pleading a headache, I took an early leave, I carried with me the mortifying consciousness that I had, for the first time in my life, been betrayed into drinking more wine than was consistent with the self-possession and self-restraint which are the first essentials of all well-bred intercourse, and that I had thus been guilty of one of the most unpardonable forms of social suicide.



I make self excuses and good resolutions.

HOW NATURAL it is, says an American humorist, for a man who has made a fool of himself to ease his mind by cursing somebody else for it. When I awoke on the morning following the dinner at Sir Frederick Deane's and recollected with intense mortification what had happened the night before,

it was against Colonel Frazer, rather than against myself, that my indignation was directed. I was the more convinced that it was at his door, and not mine, that the fault lay, from the fact that, so far from ever having been guilty of a similar offence in the past, I had, on the contrary, achieved something of a reputation for irreproachable bearing, and was regarded, even in the most fastidious “set,” as a man whom it was particularly safe to ask anywhere, or to meet any one.

But for Colonel Frazer’s ill-timed and impertinent remark, I should have been, I told myself, as collected and self-possessed as was my wont; and but for his particularly offensive conduct in watching what wine I took, I should never have been betrayed into any excess. For what had happened, he and only he, was accountable; and the more assured I became of this fact the less inclined was I to under-estimate the heinousness of the offence. Had any one but the father of the woman I loved been guilty of such ungentlemanly behavior, I would have declined to have anything further to do with him. As it was, I determined that if when I called to see Alice that night Colonel Frazer referred in any way to the events of the preceding evening, I would give him clearly to understand what my views were upon the subject. When I arrived at the house, however, I heard that he had been summoned out of town on urgent business, and was not likely to return for some weeks. But I saw and spent the evening with Alice, who, though she was, as I now know, aware of what had happened, never alluded to it by look or word, When I bade her “good-night,” and returned to my chambers, I was more in love with her than I had ever been, and – shall I say it? – not a little ashamed of myself, and full of good resolutions for the future.

IV

My first book I awake to find myself famous and get a bad attack of “swelled head.”

COLONEL FRAZER did not treat me very cordially when he returned, but he refrained from any allusion to what had happened, or from again favoring me with his views upon the total abstinence question. Though I had not forgotten the incident at Sir Frederick Deane’s, I knew myself too well to fear any repetition of the mistake I had made on that occasion; and the months as they went by fully justified my confidence in myself. At last the

time approached when I felt I might reasonably ask Alice to fix the date of our marriage, which was finally settled for the following spring. This was in the autumn, and it was almost immediately afterwards that my first book was published. The success of the volume which was on Social Reform was immense and immediate; and I might almost say that I went to bed one night a nobody, and awoke in the morning to find my book a “boom,” and my personality an object of public interest.

The suddenness and unexpectedness of the notoriety I had achieved had the not uncommon effect of turning my head completely. Great as was the stir which the book had made, this stir assumed such exaggerated proportions in my eyes, that it seemed to me as if the nation not to say the world instead of that microscopical minority of the population which is known as the “reading public,” was concerning itself about me. I walked, or rather swaggered the streets, puffed up with pride and self-sufficiency, as I told myself that I – the being inside this suit of clothes and wearing this identical hat – was the Frank Russell about whom everyone was talking, and whose portrait was in all the papers, If anything be needed to prove how unsubstantial was the basis upon which the fabric of my fame was erected, I think it is to be found in the fact that I was thus spoiled by success. The man who, conscious of great abilities, toils patiently on unrecognized and unknown, until at last, by sheer force of intellect or of character, he collars the great world as a policeman collars a prisoner, and assisting the gaping creature, by means of a fist fixed in the scruff of the neck, up to the book or picture it has persistently neglected, says: “There, you fool! Look as that! It’s been staring you in the face long enough!” – that man is rarely spoiled by success, be it slow or sudden, when it comes. If the smile with which he hears the public gushing as persistently about his work, as it had in the past persistently ignored it, is a smile of gratification, the gratification is not altogether unmixed with cynicism or contempt. And so far from being inclined to give himself airs or to lose his head, he is not a little shamefaced that so much has been made of so little; and is inclined, in his less hopeful moments, to ask himself whether work which has been so indiscriminately praised is not more shoddy and less sterling than he had believed it to be.

No such mistrust of myself or of my abilities ever troubled my peace of mind, and I regarded my “fame” (the word means in these nineteenth century days, as Mr. Oscar Wilde once wittily said, “being talked about in the penny and halfpenny newspapers”) as seriously as if the verdict of the

press of the day had already been endorsed by posterity. The amount of money I managed to spend in periodical literature at that time was marvelous; and I invested the various journals with a sort of personality, in accordance with the views they took in regard to my book, or the amount of space they devoted to paragraphs about myself. But so far from being grateful to the men who had done most to exploit me, I felt when, as afterwards happened, the interest in my book subsided and – a scandal in high life succeeding to the first place in public attention – my name began to drop out of the papers, that these same men had treated me exceedingly ill. Jealousy had prompted them, I declared, to enter into a conspiracy to crush me; and I was more malignantly inclined towards them than I was towards the journalists who had never noticed me at all.

But, during the time of which I am now writing, the “boom” was in full swing, and my vanity seemed to grow by what it fed on, and to become each day more and more insatiable. Flattery could not be fulsome enough for my voracious maw, and I know now that at one of the literary and artistic clubs I frequented, “trailing” me was a frequent pastime among the members. Except for the fact that most of us like to be on intimate terms with a “lion,” I think my many acquaintances must have sickened at the sight of me during those weeks. As the bee flits from flower to flower to drain the honey, so I went from friend to friend, greedily drinking to the dregs the cups of flattery which were offered me, and making my house-to-house visitations with all the persistency of a tax-gatherer. Chance acquaintances, whom I had lost sight of for years, I now looked up as anxiously as if I hoped to borrow money from them. Each one of them represented to me an as-yet unreaped harvest-field of flattery; and the arrogance with which I treated those who did not appear to be sufficiently impressed with a due sense of my new importance was only equaled by the insufferable patronage which I graciously extended to those who seemed to have formed a proper estimate of my merits.

V

The “boom” progresses, and I become a man of much importance.

ONE MORNING, a few weeks after the publication of my book, and when the “boom” was at its height, I took up *The Times*, and having ascertained that it contained no “reviews,” commenced turning the pages of general news with a somewhat languid and exhausted interest. Suddenly I gave a start, and clutching excitedly at the paper, sat bolt upright in my chair, flushed to the forehead, and with staring eyes, that had scarcely looked at one line, before they had snatched the sense of the next, and leaping on to the following one, had raced, lightning-like, down the columns two of which bristled with my name. A prominent member of the House of Commons had – so the paper told me – asked the Home Secretary if his attention had been called to some appalling statistics given in a volume (mentioning my book by name) which dealt with certain social questions of the highest importance to public morality, and if so, whether Her Majesty’s Government proposed taking any steps in the matter. An evasive and unsatisfactory reply had called forth a storm of dissent, and resulted in something like a scene in the House, and as a consequence the papers were full of me and my book. I had hardly finished the report of the speeches before a telegram was brought me by the maid-servant, and on opening it, I found it was from the editor of ———, the most important and influential of all the monthly reviews, asking me to write a paper on social reform for his next number. He offered me an unusually handsome fee, but said that as the month was already far gone, he had to go to press in a couple of days, and could give me only till the following night to send in my copy. His telegram concluded with the words: “Next month too late.”

I decided instantly to accept his offer. The time was certainly very short, but no preparation would be necessary, as my mind was full of the subject, and even if my paper lacked finish, it would certainly be the stronger for being written at white heat. Next month, as the editor rightly said, *would* be too late. Public attention is notoriously fickle, and before then, some royal or eminent personage might die or get into the Divorce Courts, or something else happen to distract people’s minds. In five minutes after my reply was despatched, I was hard at work. I worked all that day, and the greater part of the night. My excitement was so intense that I was quite unable to take solid food, and except a little whisky-and-water which I sipped when I found myself beginning to flag, nothing passed my lips until the paper was done, which was on the afternoon of the following day. That article was the high-water mark of my literary achievements. In it I

surpassed and surprised myself beyond my most sanguine hopes. Something outside myself seemed to animate and to inspire me. The red-hot thoughts, to which I gave utterance, the noble and eloquent language in which I expressed them, were not mine. Such thoughts and such language had never been at my command in the past; they have never been at my command since.

I remember that when I was young, impressionable and a hero-worshiper, and had high ideals about life and especially about authorship, I used to believe with George Eliot that all our noblest thoughts are given to us that they come from some source outside ourselves, and are, in a measure, an inspiration. But after a time it occurred to me that if this be true of what is great in literature, it must be true, to some extent, of passages in, for instance, Byron, which though unquestionably finer than anything to be found in the works of many authors to whom George Eliot's theory about inspiration would apply, are hardly the kind of thing of which one would use the term "inspired."

And when I recollected that I had heard in my boyhood one of the most eminent and eloquent preachers of the day (a man who was frequently spoken of as "inspired") tell my father that he had, on a particular occasion, sat down with the express intention of writing a moving sermon, but that there had come into his head instead, whence he could not tell, a screamingly-funny idea for a farcical story, – I could not help saying to myself: "If this man's sermons be attributable, as he says, to something outside himself, and were 'given him,' was not the farcical story seeing that it was not there before derived from the same source?"

After that I gave up thinking about the subject of present day "inspiration," and the knowledge that the source of inspiration of the one and only "inspired" work I ever did was, like the best work of other men infinitely greater than I, – whisky, has not encouraged me to re-open the question.

VI

A Disgraceful Incident.

AS SOON as I had finished the article I took it to the editor, and waited while he read the MS. He was delighted with it, assuring me that it was bound to score immensely; and when I left his office my brain was – what with want of sleep, whisky, and gratified vanity – in a whirl. My wisest plan would have been to go home and to bed, but I was engaged to dine at Colonel Frazer’s that evening, and did not feel inclined to forego the triumph and lionizing to which I considered myself entitled. Recent events, too, had made me feel that, much as I loved his daughter, I was doing him and his family an honor in wishing to become his son-in-law; and that it was time he should be made to realize this. As a matter of fact his name had recalled an incident to my mind, the recollection of which had rudely dispelled the pleasant thoughts which the flattery I had received had awakened. I had almost forgotten that he had once ventured to lecture me – *me*, about whom every one was now talking, and who was welcomed as an honored guest in some of the best houses in London, – as though I had been a badly-behaved schoolboy; but as, in my excited state of mind, I recalled the circumstances, my vanity took fire afresh, and what was in reality a closed incident, assumed the appearance of a recent insult. My brain was already inflamed with whisky and egotism; and as the more I brooded over the matter, the more indignant I became, I worked myself at last to such a pitch of excitement that when I went home to dress for dinner, I had to nerve myself with neat brandy before my hand was steady enough for me to shave myself. As a rule I rarely touched brandy, but I felt on this occasion that in view of the mental strain to which I had been subjected during the twenty-four hours which had just passed, something in the way of stimulant was absolutely necessary. Of what happened on that eventful evening, and at the dinner at Colonel Frazer’s, I have very little recollection. I have been told since that the tone I adopted to my host and his guests was either insolently arrogant or even more insolently patronizing. I can recall Colonel Frazer’s putting forward some theory, which, though he was not addressing me at the time, I violently attacked; and I remember that, galled by his contemptuous withdrawal from the conversation, and by the meaning looks which, rightly or wrongly, I fancied he was bending in my direction, I insulted him openly and grossly.

I can just recall the moment of pained surprise and silence it partly sobered me which followed, and remember hearing some snatches of a courteous explanation, “young man of great ability,” “most excitable brain,”

“fear he has been working too hard,” which our host was making to his guests. My next recollection is that of standing in the open air, without a hat, and holding on to the arm of a friend and neighbor of mine who sat near me at dinner; a hansom drove up; we got in; and I remember no more.

VII

“Next Morning” – I renounce the accursed cause of my misery.

THERE IS NO MERCY in the calm, cold eyes of Memory, as she stands by our bedside on the inevitable “next morning,” waiting and watching for our waking, that she may show us our follies of the night before, as they look in the white and searching light of day. We have turned a page in the ledger of our lives, and the new day’s leaf lies white and fair before us, but there is a tiny penciled line at the top of the page which tells of the fatal figures which we have “carried over” from the entries of the preceding day, and after one glance at that, the bright, white, unsullied beauty of the morning is bright and beautiful for us no more. I remember that on the day following the scene at Colonel Frazer’s I was conscious, almost before I was awake, of a sense of imminent evil and shame which lay upon my heart like lead; and I had hardly opened my eyes before Memory had taken me by the throat, and was looking me in the face with pitiless and basilisk eyes, from which there was no escape. I need not here describe how bitterly I cursed my folly; how I writhed and rocked, as if in bodily pain, and in a very agony of unavailing remorse, as I reacted in imagination the shameful scene, and pictured to myself the disgust which my conduct must have aroused in the minds of all present. That I, I of all men in the world, should have drunk myself, like a pothouse sot, into such a state of bestiality as to be capable of grossly insulting a friend at his own table, and that friend my future father-in-law, seemed to me so monstrously and preposterously incredible that I could scarcely believe the events of the preceding night were other than a hideous nightmare.

Upon one course, I was at least, decided – that I would at once and forever renounce the accursed thing which was the cause of my misery; and, hastily dressing, I sat down and wrote a note to Colonel Frazer, telling him of my shame and humiliation, and offering him the most ample and

unconditional apology. Though I could not, I told him, ever forgive myself, I implored him for the sake of the love I bore his daughter, which I knew he was aware was sincere, to accept my solemn promise never to touch stimulants more.

His reply was generous and manly. If what had happened, he said, should be the means of showing me the danger in which I stood; he for one, would never regret it. He accepted my apology unreservedly, and if, after a month's time, I could come to him and tell him that my promise had been kept, he would allow me to resume my old footing in his family. He enclosed a short letter from Alice, in which, except for the fact that she said she had promised her father not to see me or communicate with me for a month, there was no allusion to what had happened, or word of reproach. The letter was as loving, tender, and gentle as ever, and concluded with an assurance of love and faith, and of the joyfulness with which she was looking forward to the day of our meeting.

VIII

In the toils. A terrible temptation."

THE DAY PASSED BY, and though I felt low and despondent, and in need, if only for medicinal reasons, of something in the nature of a stimulant, I touched nothing of the sort either at dinner or at lunch. In the evening I settled down to work at an article with which the editor of the — had proposed I should follow up the paper which was making such a stir in his current number; but midnight found me no nearer the accomplishment of my task than when I began. Try as I would, my sluggish brain refused to formulate my thoughts in fitting words, and when at last the few ideas I had upon the subject were brought to birth, they had been so turned over and tumbled in the travail of my brain, that they had lost all freshness, and were, from the literary point of view, almost worthless. All this while I had been conscious of an intense craving for stimulant, and I began to recognize for the first time and with uneasiness which was akin to fear, how necessary the use of wine and spirit had become to me. That the sudden and total cessation of a habit to which I had accustomed myself for years would require an effort on my part, and would leave me restless and unsettled, I

had fully expected, but I could not have believed that the hold the thing had upon me was so fast. I felt, however, that I had reason to be thankful I had made the discovery thus early; and now that I fully recognized the danger in which I stood, I determined to shake myself free, once and for all, from everything in the shape of drink. I passed a restless night, and awoke next morning feeling nervous and depressed, but strong in my resolution. Hoping to make up by redoubled exertion for the profitless labor of the night before, I settled down to my work immediately after breakfast; but though I tried to stimulate my brain by strong tea and coffee, in place of whiskey, what I wrote was so flabby and feeble that, when I read it over to myself in the afternoon, I thrust it impatiently into the fire.

The experience of the next day, and of the four days following it, were of a similar nature, and, to add to my dismay, I discovered that the craving for drink, instead of decreasing as time went on, was becoming stronger and more continuous. I found, too, that this craving was at no time so imperious as when I attempted to work. Just as surely as I took up a pen and sat waiting, with all my attention turned inward, to see what thought-pictures the magic lantern of my brain would cast upon the white disc of consciousness, just as surely would the longing for the forbidden thing rise within me – now stealing over my senses like a subtle odor, soothing them to a soft deliciousness which wooed them to surrender, now enticing them by memories of past revelries, and always becoming more and more irresistible. Whether it was that the mutinous body, ever at war with the restrictions placed upon it by the spirit, saw in these unguarded moments of inaction an opportunity to break out into open revolt; or whether the attempt to stimulate the brain induced a proportionate stimulus of the senses, I cannot say, but the facts are as I have stated. Nor were signs wanting to show that my moral garrison was less loyal than I had supposed. “If you are really sincere in your wish to free yourself from the thing that has you in its power,” whispered a voice within me, “are you sure you are going the right way to work? Would it not be wiser to break off the habit gradually – reducing your allowance day by day, until it reaches vanishing point? Then your victory will be final and complete, for you will have conquered yourself, and killed, not merely put to flight, the enemy whom you have let into your citadel. And are you sure that you have sufficient strength of purpose to stand the terrible strain you are placing upon yourself and you must remember, before answering, that one failure now would be fatal?”

Again and again such thoughts as these recurred to me, until the confidence and courage with which, in the first flush of my resolution, I had regarded the struggle before me, began to ooze away, and I became not only anxious but terrified. The knowledge that seven days out of the ten in which I had promised to complete my paper had passed, without my having written anything to which I could put my signature, added immeasurably to my dismay; for, next to my love for Alice, nothing lay so near my heart as my work.

The eighth day found me no further advanced than before, and now my misery amounted almost to madness, for it seemed to me as if ruin and disgrace were on every side staring me in the face. To have resource to stimulant again would not only necessitate the breaking of my solemn promise to Colonel Frazer, and the consequent loss of Alice, but, in view of the terrible hold which drink already had upon me, would mean mental and moral suicide. And yet I could no longer disguise the fact that the many years during which I had accustomed myself to working upon whisky had rendered me so dependent upon the aid of stimulant, that without something of the sort, I was absolutely incapable of doing the work upon which I depended for my livelihood. The thing which had been my slave had now become my master, and had me at its mercy. I was like a man, who, having found a pretty, purring, soft-furred creature in a forest, carries it to his home, where he fondles and feeds it, teaching it to come and go at his call, until one night he awakens to feel a tiger's fangs at his throat, and his life-blood draining away beneath its cruel clutching claws.

In my misery and despair, I did what I had not done since I was a child – fell on my knees and prayed. “Help me, O God!” I cried, “if Thou art, indeed, the God of the helpless. Thou knowest my love for Alice. Thou knowest my love for my work, and Thou seest the temptations wherewith I am surrounded. I *must* be true to her, and true to my better, my best, self. Help me, then, to do my work, and help me to fight against the foul thing which seeks to destroy me; and give me the victory, Amen.”

Somewhat comforted in a vague way, I rose and tried to settle to my work, but the unwonted act of prayer had recalled old memories of the mother I had lost in my childhood. She was a Catholic, and had taught me, as a little lad, to cross myself at the words, “And deliver us from evil,” in the Lord's Prayer, telling me of the terror with which this sign was regarded by the powers of darkness – how Satan was recorded to have fled screaming

at the sight of it, and how witchcraft and sorcery had, by the same holy symbol, made in the Name of the Trinity, been brought to nought. As all this was corroborated by a mediaeval romance I had once read and been much interested in, it had greatly impressed me, and I had for years followed the habit my mother had taught me, of making the sign of the Cross when in the presence of death or danger, or when tempted to do anything wrong. The reader will, perhaps, smile when I tell him that in the utter misery and despair of my struggle against the terrible temptations which beset me, this old, almost forgotten habit of my childhood recurred to me. Whenever the first symptoms of the craving for drink came upon me, I hastily made the sign of the Cross upon my breast or in the air, just as I had done in my childish days, when it had seemed to me that every evil thought or suggestion which entered my mind was whispered in my ear by the devil, whom I thus hoped to exorcise and drive away.

Early faiths die hard. I recollect seeing the son of a professing atheist fall before his father's eyes from the top of a high scaffold, and I remember that the cry of agony which rose to the father's lips was not "My son!" but "My God!"

Once more I knelt and prayed, and this time it seemed as if help had verily and indeed come, for when I arose my brain was clear and composed, and what I wrote was at all events more passable than anything I had penned for the last five days. I worked on steadily the whole afternoon and evening, and by the aid of strong tea, I managed to complete my paper in time for the midnight post.

The next afternoon it was returned with a note from the editor, asking what had come to me that I had sent him such feeble stuff. To publish it would, he said, bring only ridicule upon us both; and he warned me that I had reached a critical point in my career, and that if I valued my reputation I should immediately set to work and rewrite the paper. "I can't leave it out now," he added, in conclusion, "for the thing has been announced, and will be looked for. I can give you three days more, although I shall have to delay the publication of the Review; but for both our sakes, man, pull yourself together, and rise to the occasion, no matter what the cost!"

IX

“Only this once!”

I FELT as I read his letter that Fate had taken the thing out of my hand, and decided for me. One course only remained open. “For this once, and this once only,” I said to myself, “I must break my promise to Colonel Frazer – or rather let me call it *not* the breaking of my promise, but merely the postponement of the day when that promise comes into force. The paper, now that the thing has gone thus far, must, as he says, be done in my old style and in my best form, no matter what the cost. After that I need be in no hurry to publish anything else until my brain has accustomed itself to working without stimulant!”

Determined to lose no further time, I sent out for whisky, and set to work. In two days I had finished the paper to my own satisfaction and to the editor’s, and on the third I awoke to start the new life which I was now determined to lead. About the result I had no anxiety. “The fact of my having abstained for so many days is sufficient proof, if any were needed,” I said to myself, “of my ability to abstain altogether, I *could* have continued to abstain then, and should undoubtedly have done so, but for the exceptional circumstances of my having to rewrite that article to time – circumstances which are never likely to occur again, for I shall not accept any other important commission until I have grown accustomed, as I soon shall, to working without whisky; and when I have so accustomed myself, I hope and believe that I shall do stronger and better work *without* the aid of stimulants than I ever did with them.” I was so sanguine and self-confident, indeed, that I was half-inclined to ask myself if my promise to Colonel Frazer had not been a little unnecessary, and if I should not have done better to have dropped the habit of drinking – as he was so fussily set upon it – by slow degrees, and without making such an uncalled for “to-do” as was necessitated by a sudden discontinuance. In fact, I began to feel – under the reaction from the strain which I had put upon myself while wrestling with the temptation to drink – as if, like Don Quixote, I had been fighting wind-mills, and as if no temptation, except that which was created by my own hysterical and overwrought imagination, had ever existed. I recalled the experiment which had once been made – I think in Russia – by permission of the authorities, and in the interests of science, upon two criminals under sentence of death. One of them was put to sleep in a room in which a woman had died the night before of Asiatic cholera. He was, however, left

in blissful ignorance of the danger to which he was exposed, and took no harm whatever, The other was made to sleep in a room which had been unoccupied for months, but he was falsely told that the corpse of a victim to cholera had only just been removed from it. His terror was so great that it absolutely *created* the disease which he feared, for, in a few hours, he developed symptoms of cholera, and died before the night was out.

Just so, I told myself, had I let my terror and panic create a danger, where danger there was none before; and lulled into a false security, I did what I had never dared to do since the day when I had determined to break free from the influence of drink – I gave free rein to my thoughts and let them wander forth to dally with the enemy I had believed so deadly. Scarcely had I allowed my mind to toy for a few minutes with the temptation, before the craving for stimulants was upon me again – at first a mere suggestion, so insidious and pleading as hardly to need a thought, but which I had barely recognized for what it was, before it had ceased to dissemble, and was openly urging its claims; and soon the suitor had become the sovereign, and I who had been the master became the slave, until at last the thing dominated me, so that my body seemed like the bars of a cage which shut in a wild beast, mad with an insatiable thirst. My first impulse, when I recognized my danger, was to leap to my feet, with the unreasoning fear of the hunted creature upon me, and with an ungovernable impulse to seek refuge in flight, as if from a bodily foe. But this lust was something more than a thirst; it was something more even than a physical craving; it was something within me; a something which I must carry with me wherever I went, and from which it were as vain to seek escape by flight as it would be for the wounded stag to flee from the death-dealing arrow which is lodged in its breast.

Just as a drunken man is pushed and shoved – an unwilling prisoner – towards the police station, so invisible hands seemed to push me towards the door, as if to impel me in the direction of the nearest place where drink was to be obtained. I took a step forward as if yielding, but all which was noblest in my nature, all the better feelings which, like sleepless sentinels during a siege, had kept unwinking watch and ward with me for so many days, sprang up to sound a wild alarm, and to call upon me in the name of the woman I loved to be true to myself and to my resolution. And just as the drunken man, when he finds himself overpowered by those who have taken him prisoner, drops to the ground in order that he may resist by the dead

weight of his own inertia the efforts which are being made to get him to the station, so at that cry I let my limbs slip from under me, lest they should be compelled to carry me, against my will, to the goal from which my soul recoiled. But the drink devil which possessed me was not thus to be driven out or conquered, for even as I lay, I felt the foul thing stirring again within me, and gathering itself together for a final effort; and I knew that the supreme struggle of my life had come. In another minute I was wrestling with it as a man wrestles for life and death with the python which has him in its coils. I lay writhing and twisting, and foaming at the mouth like one in an epileptic fit, and fighting for my soul with the fiend which possessed me, as the epileptic fights for life with his disease. But like the incoming of an irresistible sea, the desire for drink swept over me, and possessed me, until *I became no longer a man, but A LUST.*

In my despair I rose to my feet, and as I did so, my hands played the traitor, and less independently of myself, than in spite of myself – stretched out mechanically to open the door, and telling myself that even surrender and defeat, recognized as such, would be more endurable than the agonizing suspense of such resistance; and dismissing, in the very doggedness of despair, every thought which could bring remorse or uneasiness, I stole out of the house like a guilty thing, but with a heart beating with a secret and savage joy.

And that night I was brought home from the club dead-drunk; and in the morning I received a letter from Colonel Frazer, telling me that he had heard of what had happened, and that I must consider everything between Alice and myself at an end.

X

Seventeen years after.

MINE is not a pleasant story, and though I have found it necessary to dwell in detail upon certain incidents which though apparently trivial, are not so when considered as links in the inevitable sequence which connects what is to be, with what is, and what is, with what has been, there is much in my history which I must leave the reader to fill in for himself. Every one of intelligence who knows as much of a man's character as all who have

followed this narrative thus far know already of mine, and who is given certain constitutional tendencies in conjunction with certain circumstances, could in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred predict the logical results. I shall therefore pass over in silence the seventeen years that intervened between the events just described and the present time. Of my life as it is now, I need only say that I live upon the few shillings I earn by translating into English, for a half-penny weekly, the jokes contained in certain coarse comic French and German journals. Sometimes I make ten, sometimes eleven shillings a week enough to procure me shelter for my head, and to find me in sufficient brandy to keep body and soul together. Now and then, when I can get enough brandy to set my brain working, I am so fortunate as to write something for which I receive better pay, and then I get – more brandy. Such a stroke of luck happened to me lately, for the post brought me, a day or two ago, an order for fifteen shillings; and though a cold sleet was falling, and the street was an inch deep in befouled snow, I started off at once to cash it. I was all right when I came out of the corner public-house, for if half a bottle of neat brandy won't put heart into a man, nothing will; and I should have reached home comfortably enough, if it hadn't been that half-a-dozen boys – God strike them dead! set up a yell when they caught sight of me, and began pelting me with snow-balls as fast as they could throw. If I could only have got my hand on one of them, I'd have twisted his damned neck for him, but it's as much as I can do to hobble now, and I could neither catch them nor get away. They drove me into a corner at last, where I huddled up, trying to shield my face from the rain of kneaded and hardened snowballs which came so fast and furiously that I was wet to the skin and screamed with pain and cold. In sheer despair, I turned upon my persecutors, and, foaming at the mouth with impotent rage, called God to witness that if there was justice in the land I'd have the law on them and on the skulking scoundrels who stood by laughing and jeering and egging the young devils on. A howl of derision, accompanied by a thicker shower of the cruel missiles, was the only answer; and then a snowball with a jagged piece

A LITERARY GENT. III

of flint embedded in it hit me in the mouth. As I fell to the ground, with the blood streaming down my face and clothes, a woman ran out from an adjoining house to my assistance. She helped me to my feet, and while I was holding shakily to her shoulder, for I could not stand by myself, she

turned upon the bystanders (the boys had made off on her appearance), asking them indignantly if there was an Englishman among them, that they could stand by, jeering, while an old and defenseless man was thus set upon by a cowardly mob. As she did so, I saw her face, and recognized – it sounds like a novel, or a Sunday-school story, doesn't it? – Alice! I had been told that, after the break with me, she had refused more than one offer of marriage, and had gone to live and work among the poor in East London. I had heard, too, that she had lost all her good looks, and that such was the case I saw at a glance, for but for her voice, which was unchanged, I should not have been sure it was she.

It was a striking “situation,” wasn't it? And what a catching scene it would make for a teetotal tract of the “look on this picture and on that” type – the meeting between the degraded, drink-sodden and ragged creature (I am rather a scarecrow, I know) and the woman whose lover he had once been!

I suppose the right thing for me to have done under the circumstances would have been to tell her that I wasn't fit for such as she to touch to have sniveled and talked pious, and cried out after my “lost youth.”

Do you think. I did so? No; when she recognized me and called me my old pet name I turned on her and cursed her to hell for her interference, telling her to take her yellow monkey face out of my sight before I struck her.

XI

A Last Word.

AND NOW one word, please, before I close. Some of you who read this may be inclined to pity me; to snuffle and grow sentimental about my “wasted opportunities” and “shipwrecked life”. It is possible, even, that some of you may recognize my identity, and affect a pitying pain at the thought of the wretched and degraded creature who started life with such promise. But you may spare me and yourself your pity, for I do not need it, and I will have none of it – do you mark me? – I will have none of it. Keep it for some more “deserving object,” as you would say; one who would not as I would, were it offered me, spit and spurn it back into your face with curses and

blows. You are over-generous and gratuitous with your pity, you pious folks, sometimes – attributing to the objects of your compassion sensibilities and sufferings which do not exist. For, listen! *the drunkard has no friend*; HE NEEDS NONE, except the one friend which is more to him than is your Christ to the Christian; the friend which is at once wife and child, father and mother, sister and brother, and God!

I have written out for you the story of my life; but I have not told you my reason for doing this. I will do so, lest any of you should think me one of those abject wretches who, from the condemned cell, or the dishonored deathbed, send out maudlin messages about the warning to be derived from their “awful example.” I’m not that sort, thank God! and I wouldn’t lift a ringer to save one of my fellow sinners from going the road that I have gone. Let them go to hell, say I, and be damned to them; the hell that I’m bound for, and that many a better fellow than I has gone to, and will go to yet. No, I have only one reason for writing this story. Can you not guess it? It is that I may sell it, as I’d sell my immortal soul were I able for money to buy more drink.

A Lost Soul

A WOMAN, who was very fair, lay with her new-born babe at her bosom. And as she lay, a Spirit, clad in shining robes, appeared unto her, saying: "Look, that thou mayest behold the Birth of a Soul!"

Then the woman looked, and saw, as through a silver mist, a realm – whether far-off or near, she knew not – over which there rested a light as serene as that of moonlight softened by clouds.

And many forms she saw therein, among which was one that was like unto her own babe; and, turning to the Spirit, she said: "What place is this? and whose is yonder child?"

And the Spirit made answer: "The place which thou seest is the Abode of Souls, and the child is the soul of thine own babe."

Then the woman laughed, saying, "That may not be, seeing that my child is alive, and lies even now upon my bosom; and it were more easy for thee to persuade me that the thing which I behold is my own soul, than that it is the soul of my child!"

And the Spirit said: "What, then, is the thing which thou callest thy 'soul'?"

But the woman made answer, "I cannot tell."

Then said the Spirit: "Whenever a human being is born into the world, there is born in the Abode of Souls that human being's *spiritual counterpart*, Thy soul abidest there, as does the soul of every other human creature; and as is the growth of thy body on earth, so is the growth of thy soul in the Abode of Souls, the one keeping pace with the other."

And the woman said: "Myself is where my body is, and there only; and if, as thou sayest, there is elsewhere another self which thou callest my 'soul,' then is that other self not truly I."

But the Spirit made answer: " Thy soul is more truly thyself than thou art, for thy soul is what thou really art, but the thing which I see before me, which thou callest thyself is but what thou seemest to be. And though thy outward and bodily self be white and fair, yet if thine inner and real self be

evil and unclean, then will thy soul be evil and unclean to look upon, so that thou shalt be known even as thou art. The thing which thou didst in public, calling upon all men to witness, shall not be more manifest than the thing which thou didst steal away in secret to commit. Thou didst double lock thy chamber-door, that none might see thee, but I tell thee that every deed thou doest in the body – nay, not only every deed which thou doest, but the most secret thought of thine inmost heart, – is recorded upon the face of thy soul, and cannot be hid."

Then said the woman: "Why tellest thou me these things? Are *my* sins greater than the sins of others, that thou speakest thus? Are there not murderers and adulterers, thieves and Sabbath-breakers enough, that thou comest to *me*, who am none of these? My sins, which are not many, I have long since repented, and lo! thou revilest me, as if I were the chief of sinners!"

Then said the Spirit: "If thou hast truly repented of all thy sins, then is it well with thee indeed!"

"I look back upon thy past life, and I see it lying behind thee like a river – at first broad and bold to gaze upon, but narrowing as it winds away past mountain and plain and scenes thou hast long since forgotten, until at last it becomes but a line, and loses itself in the misty meadows of childhood. But, as I look, I see, lying upon the banks thereof, the unburied corpses of many a strangled hope and murdered aspiration for which thou wilt one day be called upon to answer. And other and darker forms, too, I see, which tell of evil deeds, of which thou canst surely never think save with sorrow and shame.

"But for every sin which thou has remembered and repented, there are myriads which thou hast forgotten. Dost thou think that because the very memory of -them has passed from thy mind, so that they have become to thee as though they had never been, that for this reason they are *not*?

"I tell thee that in the day wherein thou shalt look upon thine own soul, be it fair or foul, and see it in all its nakedness the day which men speak of as the 'Day of Judgment,' thou shalt see the least of these unremembered, unrepented sins, writ large upon the face of thy soul."

"But – answer me, ere I go from thee: Is there any one under thy roof or among the human beings, whose lives thou art able, for good or for evil, to influence, upon whose soul thou dost seek to look?"

And the woman made answer: "The souls of all who are under my roof, I know, and need not to see; but one there is, my neighbor, who is very fair, and concerning whom I am curious. Show me, then, her soul, that I may learn whether what men say of her be true or untrue."

But the Spirit said: "God hath not revealed unto thee a vision of souls that so thou mayest gratify an idle curiosity, but that thou mayest realize thy responsibilities and profit thereby.

"And dost thou indeed think that thou knowest the souls of all them that dwell under thy roof, or that there is anyone on earth, who knoweth even his own soul, as it is in the sight of God?

"The heart of man resembles a secret chamber wherein stands – like the block of white unhewn marble, set in the studio of a sculptor a veiled figure. Though the man may not so much as lift the corner of the veil, yet must he forever and in secret work to fashion and to form the figure that lies beneath.

"And the figure is the Soul of the man, and the unveiling thereof is called death; and until the figure be unveiled, the man scarce knoweth what manner of man he is.

"And I tell thee that so far from knowing the souls of all them who dwell under thy roof, there are some among thy nearest and dearest into the secret places of whose heart thou hast never looked, and of whose real self thou knowest scarce more than thou knowest of the stranger in the street.

"Is there no speck in thine own heart, or in thine own past, which thou wouldst wish that the husband, whose soul thou countest one with thine, should see with *thy* eyes, rather than with *his*, and which thou wouldst not hesitate to reveal in all its nakedness? And dost thou think thou knowest him better than he knoweth thee?"

"The very child whom for many years thou didst scarce venture to let out of thy sight, that so thou mightest keep him from knowledge of evil, and whose innocent face thou didst kiss this morning, hugging thyself in thy heart that thou wast secure of his confidence and love – dost thou know that that child has already a life apart from thee – that he lives in a world which is created for him, less by thy teaching than by the talk of his companions and that so far from scarce realizing, as thou dreamest, the existence of evil, it may be that he is already old in the knowledge of sin?"

The Spirit ceased, and through the silver mist that veiled the Abode of Souls, the woman saw many forms pass to and fro. Some were fair to look

upon, and some were foul; and others were neither fair nor foul; and some few she saw which she recognized readily, inasmuch as they differed but little from the selves which she knew.

Then said the Spirit: "Hast thou aught to ask about any of these?"

And, pointing with her finger, the woman made answer: "One form I see which troubles me, and which I seem to know, and yet know not. Tell me, then, whose soul it may be."

And the Spirit said: "Thy father's."

But the woman laughed, saying: "My father's face is wrinkled, and his form feeble and bent, but yonder figure is straight and lusty as a sapling, and the face thereof hath the bloom and the beauty of youth."

And the Spirit made answer: "The face of thy father is wrinkled, and his form feeble and old, but years have not hardened his heart, nor aged his soul, and therefore dost thou see him young and fair in the Abode of Souls."

And as the woman turned again to look into the Abode of Souls, there arose before her the form of a beautiful girl, who gazed upon her with eyes full of pity and love.

And the Spirit spake to the woman, saying: "Behold! the soul of thy sister."

But the woman made answer: "The face of my sister is as ill-favored as mine is fair, and yonder girl is more beautiful than I."

And the Spirit said: "Dost thou think because God hath chosen to make thee fair of face, and thy sister ill-favored, that thou shalt be fair and she ill-favored to all eternity?"

And as the woman, much wondering, turned from him to gaze again upon the Abode of Souls, another face rose up before her, upon which she could not but look.

It was the face of one who had once been fair; but as the woman looked upon it, she saw something written thereon, which repelled her more than did the faces she had seen that were low and animal. No sensual vice had loosened the lip, bleared the eye, or bloated the complexion; but meanness had set its mark upon the mouth and pinched the nostrils; and sordid, respectable self-seeking and self-righteousness had made hard the heart, and deadened the spiritual nature more surely than vice or sin; so that the woman felt, as she looked, that she was gazing upon the face of one who was lower in the scale of being and farther from the Kingdom of God, than are the wretched creatures whom this world calls 'fallen' or 'lost.'

And turning to the Spirit, she said: "Who art thou? and what is yonder evil shape?"

And the Spirit replied: "I am the Angel of Death and Judgment, and the thing which thou beholdest is thyself, and the soul which thou hast made."

Then, laughing scornfully, the woman made answer: "By this I know that thou art a lying Spirit, whom I need neither fear nor heed: for behold! I have but dreamed a dream!"

And the Spirit replied: "Thou hast indeed dreamed a dream, *but the name of that Dream was Life, and now thou dreamest no longer.*"

The Lonely God

A MAN lay on his bed at midnight, and dreamt that he stood alone by the sea, and that his hour of death was nigh.

He looked out upon the black and interminable waste of waters, and up to the changeless stars in the unpitying sky, as the mariner gazes upon a new and unknown land which he is approaching; and he told himself that soon he should know the secrets of sea, and sky.

And as he stood, there blew from the gates of night and across the sea, a wind that made him shiver less with physical cold than with a sense of soul desolation and loneliness; a wind which chilled the heart of him even more than the body.

And as he looked again upon the windy and cloud-swept sky, and to the cold and steely glitter of the silent stars, his lonely spirit, losing itself in the infinite abyss, turned sick and giddy at the thought of dying, and reeled shuddering to earth again.

And the man thought of the woman he loved, the wife of his heart and mother of his children, and that if he and she might but die together if he might but set out with her hand in his, he should no longer fear to make death's journey; and, even as he so thought, he awoke with pounding heart and panting breath; awoke to shudder at the darkness and the loneliness, and with a nameless fear lying at the center of life, like the lurking shadow of an unknown, unseen foe.

And as he lay he heard the low breathing of his sleeping wife, and with a sigh of glad relief, and all sense of lonesomeness gone, the man closed his eyes and fell asleep.

And again he dreamed a dream in which he thought that he stood in the presence of God.

Whether he had been borne to the infinite regions which stretch on and away, and yet away, and yet again away beyond the limits of our universe; or whether he were still on the earth; or had soared to a distant star, or to the vast and void sky spaces that lie between the worlds; or had crept into the

narrow chamber of the human soul, the man knew not, but he was aware in some wonderful way of all that was taking place on all God's myriad and marvelous worlds.

He saw circling planets sweep faster and faster on their ever-narrowing orbit, until at last they fell and flew, like moths to a candle, to feed the flaming furnace of the sun; and he looked upon his own home, and saw the billowy rise and fall of his sleeping wife's bosom, and heard the cry of the child which lay in a cot by her side.

He gazed upon burnt-out worlds, moons that had once been astir with life, and heard their cooling and cinderous surfaces crack into chasm and cave; and he looked into the bowels of the earth, and saw strange creatures breeding and sporting amid the central fires.

He watched comets, those vagabonds of the heavens, wandering gypsy-like between the worlds, or weaving out-lying system to out-lying system, like nebulous shuttlecocks of the skies; and he saw into the secret workings of human souls.

He looked upon the planet Jupiter, that laboratory of God, and beheld, moving athwart the thin atmosphere, strange shapes, uncanny as a half-formed, prematurely-born babe, that seemed neither spirit nor flesh, but which he knew were the soul-embryos of creatures which, developing by progressive stages and from age to age, should, in the aeons to be, become beings infinitely greater than man, and scarcely less glorious than God; and he peered beneath the earth's surface, and watched the anxious running to and fro of innumerable ants.

Then raising his head the man looked into the eyes of God, and saw eternity lying therein.

And at that sight the man fell back with a cry like that of one smitten by the lightning, and with the very soul of him sick and swooning with fear.

But in a voice of infinite tenderness, God spake to the man, bidding him be of good cheer.

And God said: "Art thou he who feared death because of its loneliness?"

And the man said: "I am he."

And to him the Almighty spake again:

"Thou *dienst* alone, but I *live* alone; and as is the sound which thou hearest in the hollow convolutions of a shell, to the roar of the central sea, so is thy loneliness to Mine. When God throws his arms around a soul and draws that soul away from its companions, and to Himself, then is that soul

very lonely, *but the loneliness is but the being gathered to the heart of God.*”

Then said the man: “By Thee all that is in heaven above or in the earth beneath was created. Thou hast but to speak the word, and lo! a legion of angels are at Thy side, waiting and willing to do Thy bidding, and to bear Thee company by night or by day.”

But God made answer: “That which I create, be it angel or archangel, is but My creature, and can never be My companion.”

And again the man: “Thou art God the Eternal One, Ruler of Earth and Sea. Is it nothing to Thee that all men worship Thee and hold Thee in reverence?”

But to him the Almighty made answer:

“The thought of God is, to most men, but a plank to which they hope to cling when the waters of death are closing over their heads. How many are there, thinkest thou, who love the God they have never seen, as thou lovest thy wife and child?”

And the man said: “Thou hast but to say the word, and behold all men *must* love Thee.”

But God answered him: “The love which I compel, I care not for.”

Then said the man: “Thou art God, the Omnipotent One. Sun, moon, and stars sprang into being at Thy bidding. Thou hadst but to say, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light; and Thou didst but breathe upon unclean and inanimate clay, and lo! it became an immortal soul, clothed in a form divinely fair, and fashioned in Thine own likeness; and man, the heir of eternity and image of God, came into being. To Thee all things are possible; and Thou hast but to say, ‘Let be!’ to set at Thy side another God, like even unto Thyself, that so Thou mayst be alone no more.”

And yet again God said: “That which I create is but My creature, and can never be my companion; and from My loneliness, even Mine own omnipotence is powerless to deliver me.”

"Rememberest thou not of Him who was slain on Calvary, that men taunted Him, saying, ‘He saved others: Himself He cannot save?’

"Even so from the loneliness wherefrom God saveth others, Himself God cannot save.

"The cry in loneliness that rang from Calvary’s Cross rings throughout creation still. Thou lookest out into the night, and thou shudderest not because of the blackness that broods between earth and sky, but because

thou hast looked as into an abyss into the lonely soul of God. Nature is lonely because of God's loneliness. On every breeze is borne were the ear of man attuned to hear it the sound of innumerable lamentations, which is Nature's echo of God's lonely cry.

"God shudders and, over the shining surface of the sea, a sudden tremor flits.

"God hides His countenance and the sunshine fades from meadow and field, and darkness covers the face of the sky.

"But on the shadowless, shining peaks of Eternity, God sits lonely forever; and into His loneliness neither man nor Nature can enter. Nay, of such loneliness as God's, the soul of man cannot even conceive, for man's *death* is not more lonely than God's *life*.

"I am THE Loneliness: God is Loneliness and Loneliness God."

The voice ceased, and the man awoke, and knew that he had been dreaming.

Outside the wind made moan continually, and from the tossing tree tops there came a sound like the ceaseless sighing of the sea.

And, for a moment, the man gazed into the black and brooding night, whence it seemed to him that eyes of infinite sadness looked out of the darkness into his own.

In the next, he had drawn the curtain and turned from the window, that in the warmth and light of the room and the caresses of his waiting wife, he might cease even to remember that he had dreamed a dream.

Yet sometimes, as he stands and listens to the sea at midnight, there seems borne to him on every breeze a sound like that of innumerable lamentations; and then the man thinks again of his dream, and fancies that in sobbing surge and wailing wind he hears the cry of the lonely God.

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Originally published 1890 by Ward, Lock And Co, Ltd., London.

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