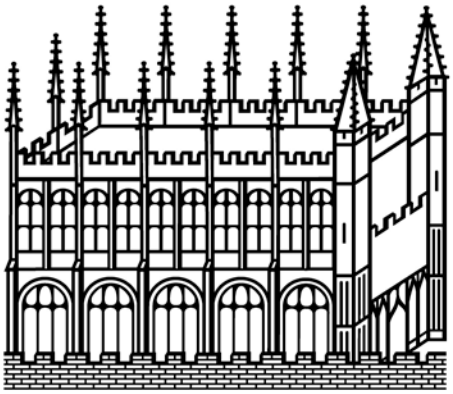


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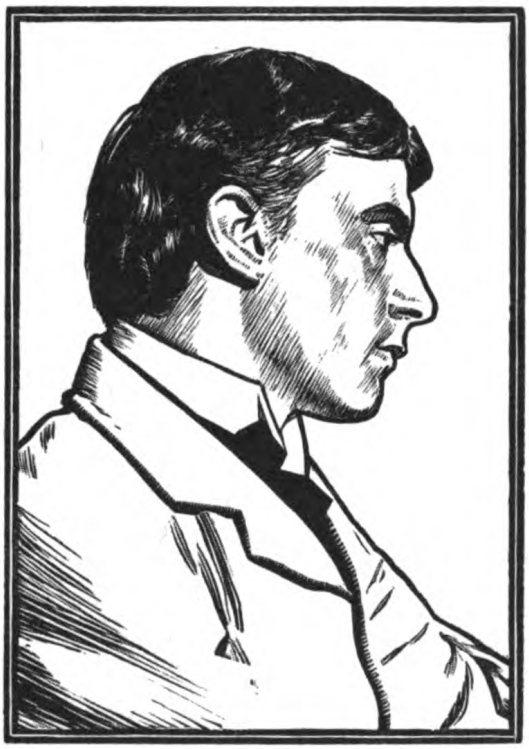


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CHOSEN ESSAYS
BY EDWARD THOMAS



THE GREGYNOG PRESS
MCMXXVI



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— I —

OLWEN

OLWEN was eighteen, a Welsh girl, with light brown hair so loosely coiled & so abundant that no fancy was needed to see it down to her knees; an oval face, not plump enough to conceal the bones of cheeks & bold chin; a clear, wild-rose complexion, lit up from within as by moonlight; dark eyebrows that had wild, clear curves like the wings of some bird of free waſte lands, & curved lips that never hid the perfect teeth when at reſt. She wore the clothes of a slattern. She walked & ſtood ſtill & sat down with the pride of an animal in the firſt year when it has a mate. The curlew, the hare, the sheep upon the mountain, were not wilder, or swifter, or more gentle than she. Her face & ſtature were those of a queen in the old

time, whose father was a shepherd on the solitary mountains. Being as ſtrong as a man, she had finished her work early in the factory & come ſtraight home, and, tucking up her skirts, had scrubbed and polished her mother's house. There was no pleasant way of being idle in the daytime, for, except with her lover, she did not care to walk to the mountain or to the black village ſtreets. She laid tea, served it, and washed up. She was the only one who was not going out for the evening, for she had to bake the week's bread. Before the lamp had to be lit, her brother's wife came in with her baby. The firſt batch of cakes was already out of the oven. Their perfume ſtreamed out through the open door, which let in the song of the blackbird, the wind from the mountains, and the majeſty of evening. Olwen could reſt now; she took the baby, and they sat down and began to gossip. ¶The married girl was a little older, slender and dark-haired, with small, sharp features and full lips, pleasure-loving, gay, and sharp-tempered, rapid in her speech. This was her firſt child, & she kept, as yet, all her maiden attractiveness and irresponsibility, and added to it the different power of one who is captive but unconquered. She sighed lightly now & then, as if she relished & remembered over-much the youth she retained. She seemed to feel the advantages she had over the unmarried Olwen, without being able to overcome a phantom of admiration for her that might at any moment turn to envy. ¶Olwen, being the eldeſt of ten, held the baby like a mother. Her face bent down to it, her shoulders and arms walled it, in an experienced way. She knew all that she would ever know about the care of infants—even their death. The young mother, watching her, would now and then cull the baby from her lap and press it to herself, and cover it with kisses. If there were cries, it was Olwen who silenced them in her deep breaſt; but the mother had the craftiness to let the maid seem to be their cause, and when the child was with the other she would tease it, in the hope of being the comforter. It would

have been hard for a ſtranger to say whose was the child, since Olwen's attention to this one baby out of many was as perfect as the mother's to the only one. The mother was lively and effusive, yet careless; the maid was calm and tender, and never forgetful. The mother could have been a model for Aphrodite, the maid for Demeter. The mother was a lover firſt; the maid was born maternal, and her heart could be ſtormed by a sweetheart, but ruled only by a child. The mother was deſtined for a man or for several men; there was somewhere a man deſtined for the maid, to open for her a kingdom which she would enter alone. The mother pressed the child to her with a luxurious smile, as if the lover were there, too; the maid resembled some noble animal, calm, but with a half-hid ferocity that would have talons if need were, even for the father of its brood. The mother was an elf, a not purely human creature, a haunting, disquieting form of life, a marshlight out of the wilds of time, and to be blown away with time again; the maid was the beginning and the end of human life, necessity itself made beauty, mere humanity raised to a divine height, the very topmoſt plume on the creſt of life's pride. And yet behind the physical glory of Olwen, her bold, easy gait, her deep voice, full of nobility and sweetness, behind all her courage and robuſtness and independence, there was a something like the timidity of the ſtag who ſtands on the rock in the moment of his greateſt power & joy, without fear, & yet with an ear & a noſtril for every breath of the summer gale. ¶The baby was with its mother when Olwen's lover entered the room. It was ſtill half-lit by the great fire & the pale sky after sunset. Seeing the two girls and the child, he sat in the darkeſt of the chairs and kept his cap in his fingers. The mother gave the child to Olwen, & the young man became silent. The maid hardly looked at him, while the young mother, glad to see a man, bantered her visitor in vain even when she said laughing: "Olwen has a baby now, John, and you see she can do without its father." ¶The young man fingered

his cap, but looked musingly at Olwen out of the shadow. She had no eyes or ears but for the little thing that was now fully awake and ſtanding on her lap and putting its hands into her mouth and eyes. Now she caught it quickly under the armpits and, throwing back her head, lifted it at arm's length and let it plant its feet upon her throat, then between her breaſts, and so down to her lap; it crowed and waved its limbs. The mother looked into the fire. Again Olwen ſtood the baby upon her head where its curled feet were entangled in her hair; her eyes were towards the young man but not looking at him, though her thoughts might have been of him. Still turned towards him, she lowered the child to her knees and jutted her bright face forward, pouting her mouth for kisses while the child tried to take away one of her gliſtening teeth; then she let it down flat on her knees & buried her head in the laughing and quaking form. The young man's dark eyes fixed upon her grew more and more dark and sullen, with admiration of her, jealousy of the child, & indignation that she was so careless. She had not given him a glance. She sang, she talked, she laughed, she feigned to cry, she cooed, for the child. She allowed it to do as it liked and as nobody else had done except in thought. Her cheeks glowed with pleasure and exercise and thoughts unexpressed; the white skin of her brows and throat gleamed moiſt and whiter than ever; her grey eyes flamed softly. Never had she been happier, and the happiness was at one with her beauty, so that a ſtranger watching might have thought that her happiness made her beautiful, or even that it was the consciousness of her beauty. She looked taller and her shoulders more massive than before, her back more powerful in the gentleness of its maternal ſtoop, her breaſt more deep, her dark voice more than ever the music of her noble body and blissful nature. Fit to be the bride of a hero and the mother of beautiful women and heroes & poets, she gave herself to the child. ¶Presently the child grew more silent, playing with a lock of her hair which now fell

half over one shoulder down to her lap. She smiled musingly and caught the eye of her lover & began to tell him what she had been doing that day—how the manager had told her not to work so fast, & then asked her when she was to be married—but he remained silent. The child reared itself up by her hair and pulled at her chin and ears. She took no notice save to smile good-humouredly and shake her head, and continued to talk. Her two arms imprisoned the child; her head was raised in a pretence of keeping her chin from the enemy. Cheated of the smooth chin & soft ears the child was still a little while, and remained so still and so silent that it had been forgotten, when suddenly the mother broke into a laugh and cried: "Well, I never, Olwen, the impudence of the child, you will be suckling her next!" ¶Olwen rose up undisturbed, smiling to herself, and then glancing over at John as she fastened two buttons below her neck. "Now, Caroline," she said, "you take a turn with baby and let me talk to John." ¶John stood up and came forward very slowly and very stiffly, and took the child from her arms. It began at once to cry and the mother, rising in a temper, carried it swiftly away, leaving the lovers silent: John was the first to speak, saying: "And what did you say to the manager, Olwen? Shall we get married this summer?" "Yes," she said; "waiting is not much fun for you, John." And she gave him a kiss that he was too slow to return, so that she broke away, saying: "And now I must take out these cakes. You light the lamp, John. Yes, come along, no nonsense. Bless me,"she added, opening the oven door & letting out a smell as sweet as the first heat of May."It's lucky I wasn't a minute later. There! Take one while it's hot and don't burn yourself. Hot cakes and maids' lips, John." ¶And John split the cake in two and buttered it, and they ate the halves together.



— II —

ISOUD WITH THE WHITE HANDS

THAT road could lead nobody to Rome. The only village that it passed was a mere gap in the long hedge, holding a parson, two or three fools, and a sense of ancient peace. Then it entered gently into the secret places of the land. On either side the fields & woods lay open; surprised but not alarmed by so tranquil an intrusion, they were beheld in all their divinity. The hedges of the road were so low, that only at a hill-top was the waving honeysuckle seen against the silver sky of noon or the azure of night. Overhead the oaks joined hands; through their close leaves the fractions of shining sky came & went like stars while I moved; and when the foliage of one tree met without touching the next, a blade of sky, like a sword

gently unsheathed, was described by the long lines of scalloped leaves. The trees were silent, saving when they found a voice in one of the birds whose faint songs are part of the melodious quiet of summer. ¶Not too often, cottages grew [they seemed to grow] beside the road, & their gossipy hollyhocks curtsied in looking over the hedge. Againſt the white wall, brave peonies looked cool. Rose bushes ſtood at the borders of the path in command of wild-flower beds, that nevertheleſs slipped through with a ſtrand of delicate belled toadflux, or one blossom of pimpernel like a volcanic flame between the pebbles. Sometimes the precious-looking Morello cherries lay ardent as flame & cool as dew in the heat of a southern wall. In another place the latent splendour of fifty summers had escaped and spent itself in hiding the cottage with roses. A yew tree more rarely ſtood at one side, and within its influence, though not within its shadow, was a nunnery of white flowers. The cottages—of grotesque mixtures of black oak and whitened ſtone, or of golden brick—& the sombre inhabitants were in contraſt with the exuberant many-coloured, many-thoughted flowers, which yet, at times, arrayed these men & women with a divine garment. Here and there, larger houſes shone through a skilful veil of holm-oaks and bays. They never seemed to be aboriginal like the cottages, but to be visitors, lightly planted in the soil. For some diſtance around these, the wild trees had withdrawn, ſtanding, at the edges of a road, with that continuous motion and murmur of their branches that gives these sentinels a timorous expression, as if they had crept out into the light and, becoming afraid, tried vainly to retire. ¶Every two or three miles a by-road set out on either side, underneath elms and abeles, and after carrying the eye delightfully for a space, deceived it at laſt among the shadows of many trees. ¶One by-road went to a lifeleſs mill, a tall house with upper windows of ample proſpect. Above the wheel the waters no longer slid faſt with awful repose, but cried and leapt through the broken flood-gates into a

pool in the shadow of steep banks and underwood. The house was peopled only by the beautiful machinery of polished wood, now still and morose. The wheel too was still. Callosities of dry moss on the spokes, little by little, took the place of the weed which the river had combed into such excellence. And I could not but wonder that these things had, according to Hecuba's wish, voices "in hands and feet and hair," the eloquence of death. The place would have been sad, had it not been for the meadow cranesbill at the door, a mournful flower, but here, as part of the ceremonial of decay by which this desolation was made perfect, it left one thought, "How beautiful is death." Each evening, just when the first nightjar was skimming the wood, the sedge-warblers began to sing all together round the pool. The song might have been the abstract voice of some old pain, feebly persistent. It went far into the night with a power of ghostly alarms, and attuned to such thoughts as come when night in certain places is malign, reverses the sweet work of the day, and gives the likeness of a dragon to the pleasant corner of a wood. The birds were full of prelusive dark sayings about the approaching night. ¶The footpath by the mill was fading away, for it now led to nowhere—whither few cared to follow it. Possibly the last step may soon linger among the encroaching flowers, the rank growths of willowherb, tansy, & betony which, poor enough by themselves, make the thicket sumptuous by their profusion. And who took the first step? Someone in the days when, wherever you went you came to nowhere. For there are few footpaths that are new, & those that are old may be drowned or cut to pieces, or may be incorporated (as De Quincey has said) in someone's kitchen, but seem never to die, and the more they are down-trodden the more they flourish. Curiosity as to whether Shakespeare ever started one is idle. They are footprints, perhaps, of the immortals. They are vestiges of that older day when this land also "was in Arcady." Even to-day they may be seen, after rising and falling in the fields, to

be gathered into that far country again, where hills like clouds and clouds like hills are mingled beneath the white sun of noon. ¶One of these paths entered a lane which suddenly ceased, and round the corner was the kingdom of heaven at my feet—the Kentish weald, just grass and corn and trees, and like jewels on that delicate cloth, a white hamlet or an auburn farmhouse with oast-houses around. These conical buildings give parts of Kent a unique geniality. They are of many hues—dull red, yellow, and the colour of pomegranate rind; they may be seen of the tint of good toast. Something of the ruddiness of earth, as it is found in ripe wheat, in October leaves, & in the lotus flower, has penetrated the brick, and expresses the lust of the earth for a gaudier flora. The oast-house is indeed among the Lares on the vast hearth of the sun, and on gloomiest days it has its divinity. In a fine haze that genial, and, as it were, indoor humour of Kent is complete. The haze which comes with sudden heat after rain in April, & that with which September, or even June, chooses to veil her splendour, both are elements in the characteristic scenes. They have also a special goodness for the mind, for those above all

"That soar but never roam."

By seeming to confine the outlook on which their silken fringes have fallen, they enlarge the sight, which an infinite view is apt to distract & dissipate. Shutting out the few miles immediately about us, they let in the worlds and starry spaces to the inward eye. When they cannot do this, they build up an incomparable prison; and as the inmate moves, the moving walls invite him to a happy expectation of more than liberty. In all seasons the presence of the oast-house amid the haze is like that of a wood fire such as burns continually in many farmhouses; so that even in March the hollows are like great kitchens, with a gentle sense of home. In autumn I have seen gipsies and other vagrants going to sleep under the moon. There was an oast-house at the end of their lane, two

more on the slopes above. Their fire was out and their clothes were thin. Yet there seemed nothing extraordinary in the act. I wondered why I was going farther to sleep. The maternity of the earth is never so attractive as at that time and in Kent. Fruit abounds; there are rabbits for the carnivorous. A sparkling liquor may be lifted from the spring. The heather or grass is an airy, dry and comfortable palliasse, and out of doors you are never late for breakfast. So well was I entertained, that I almost breathed a grace when I tasted the air or saw the tench rolling at nightfall among the lilies. ¶Near the mill another path branched into a park. The sea of turf was occupied by great oaks and the shadows of oaks. In one part the gardener had planted cypress, justly confident in the effect of these pillars of darkness seen against a hot blue sky, auburn roofs and the pale grass. The shadows of the trees fell upon me as I entered the park, and filled me with solemn thought. I cannot walk under trees without a vague powerful feeling of reverence. Calmly persuasive, they ask me to bow my head to the unknown god. In the evening, especially, when the main vocation of sight is to suggest what eyes cannot see, the spacious and fragrant shadow of oak or pine is a temple which seems to contain the very power for whose worship it is spread. ¶For a time the sky was grey with thoughts of rain. The small birds twittered nervously in the wood below; the ring doves came home gleaming in the humid horizontal beams. But presently all that was left of the grey was a tenderness in the golden light. From among the trees I could see a pool at the foot of a sloping lawn, and a swan moving to and fro so nobly, that I should have thought she was borne by the water, if that had not been as still as ice. The colours of the sunset were doubled in the pool—with something added, as things are seen in dreams. The turf had a perfume peculiarly nourishing to the fancy, and which, giving contentment, is on the side of the old doctors who commended the alimentary "virtues" of scents. ¶As quietly as the night was

coming, and as benignly, something floated under the trees, turning an unknown face towards me; then passed away as softly as the day was fading. I just saw the pale glorious face. A bevy of dainty spaniels followed her soberly, as if to make up for the state which did not encircle her out of doors. She herself was, like a cherub by Reynolds, only a perfect face flying in the air; and about her was a sense of inaudible harps. . . . Could she be the face that had been as a benediction, when I stared and was baffled and stared again into the meaningless London crowd? For a day or two such a remembered face has sometimes been a guardian genius of my ways; the delirium of seeing the thousand faces again when I had fallen asleep was comforted by the one, though utterly unknown, and never in reality to reappear. Was she one of those holy ones met again by divine good chance? She, too, has revisited my closed eyes. Or perhaps she was the "angel" of a heroine from my childish books, one of those of whom I fancied that I should seek their faces in the shadows, and should not be happy, or contented with my sorrow, until I saw them once more. At times she has come to me as that sweet saint, Dwynwen of Wales. Unfortunate in her innocent passion, Dwynwen was restored to tranquillity in sleep. The friendly Deity also promised her the fulfilment of any three wishes. She chose therefore that the sentence against her hostile lover should be revoked; that all true lovers should triumph or be healed; and that she (it was her only ungenerous choice) should never wish to be married. She afterwards took the veil and became a saint, and if the true lover called upon her, he was cured or satisfied. She became traditionally an Aphrodite, beautiful and unpolluted. And a saint, gently befriending pure affection, my apparition certainly must have been. But although visionary smiles have answered me when I called upon her spirit as Dwynwen, she came in the end to embody perfectly my fancies of Isoud with the White Hands. In the "Morte d'Arthur" she and her gallant,

mournful brother, the knight Kehydius, are but as ghosts of desperate longing amid all those knights and queens, so brilliant even in their tragedies. Kehydius loved La Beale Isoud; but, if unsuccessful, he was happy in comparison with his white sister. "He," says Malory, "died for love." She lived on, as if death scorned such easy victory. In the "Morte d'Arthur," she fades out of sight, and, like a revenant in her faint life, we may think of her as continuing so, and here crossing my path among these fields, in the likeness of a girl, merely pure and beautiful, and a little sad, like Isoud with the White Hands.





— III —

MORGAN

THE ſtorm is over; Morgan is dead. Once more we can hear the brook's noise, which was obliterated all night by the ſtorm and by our thoughts. The air is clear and gentle in the foreſt & all but ſtill, after the night of wind & of death. High up in the drifting rose of dawn the multitudes of tall, slender trees are swaying their tips, as if ſtirred rather by memory of the tempeſt. They make no sound with the trembling of their slender length: some will never sound any more, for they lie motionless and prone in the underwood, or hang slanting among neighbour branches where they fell in laſt night's ſtorm, and the mice may nibble at creſts that once wavered among the ſtars. The path is ſtrewn with broken

branches and innumerable twigs. ¶The silence is so great that we can hear, by enchantment of the ears, the ſtorm that passed away with night. The tragic repoſe of ruin is unbroken. One robin ſings, and calls up the roars and tumults that had had to ceaſe utterly before his ſmall voice could gain this power of peculiar ſweetneſs and awe, and make itſelf heard. ¶The mountains and ſky, beautiful as they are, are more beautiful becauſe a cloak of terror has been lifted from them and left them free to the dark and ſilver, and now roſy, dawn. The maſſes of the battlemented mountains are ſtill heavy & ſombre, but their ridges bite ſharply into the ſky, and the utterſmoſt peaks are born again. They are dark with ſhadows of clouds of a moſt luſtrous whiteneſs that hang, round above round, like a white foreſt, very far off, in the country of the ſun, and the edges of the rounds are gilded; ſeen out of the clear gloom of the wood, this country is as a place to which a man might wholly and vainly deſire to go, knowing that he would be at reſt only there. In the valley between this foreſt and the mountains the froſt is roſy with the roſes of the zenith. ¶As we liſten, walking the ledge between precipice & precipice in the foreſt, the ſilence ſeems to murmur of the departed tempeſt like a ſea-ſhell, and we alſo remember again the ſound of the dark hills convulſed with a hollow roaring as of an endleſs exploſion. ¶Trees were caught up and ſhaken in the furious air like graſſes; branches were ſtricken and ſtruck back, were ground and beaten together & broken. The ſound of one twig was drowned by that of myriads; the ſound of one tree by that of leagues; & all were mingled with the ſound of the ſtruggle in the high ſpaces of the air. Between earth & ſky there was nothing but ſound & darkneſs plunging confuſed. Outſide the window branches were brandiſhed wildly, and their anger was the more terrible becauſe the voice of it could not be heard or diſtinguiſhed amidſt the univerſal voice. The ſky itſelf ſeemed to aid the roar. It was dark with the darkneſs of black water, and the

planets raced over it among floes of white cloud; dark, menacing clouds flitted on messages of darkness across the white. We looked out from the death-room, having turned away from the helpless, tranquil bed and the ſtill wife, and saw the foreſt surging under the wild moon, but it was ſtrange & no longer to be recognized while the earth was heaving & be-nightmared by the ſtorm. Yes, the foreſt is ſtill under the awe of that hour. That is why its clearness is so solemn, its silence so pregnant, its gentleness so sublime. But not for that only. It is fresh after the sick room, calm after the ſtorm and after the vain conflict with death, sad because every thought in it leads to death, and made majeſtic by the character of the life that has ended and never saw this dawn. It is as if his soul had bereaved the foreſt also. The robin's song is poured into the silence & shivers and is chilled by falling into the dark cave of death, as a brooklet falls over a cliff into a sunless sea. ¶The blue smoke rises ſtraight up as if nothing had happened from the house of death, over there among the white fields. As if nothing had happened! But we have been walking here an hour, & have come to see even in that smoke a significant tranquillity as of a beacon or sacrifice. It comes from the room where the wife sits and looks at the white face peering through its black hair like seaweed, and ſtill speaking of the old ecſtasy, solitude, and irony that it had in life. A ſtrange life—of which the woman who shared without breaking his solitude can tell nothing, & would tell nothing if she could: for she wishes only to persuade us that, in spite of his extraordinary life, he was a good man and very good to her. She has become as silent as he is and as he was. Nevertheless, they say that twenty years ago, when she began to live with him on the mountain, she was a happy, gay woman, the beſt singer and dancer in the village, and had the moſt lovers, while now her wholly black, small Silurian eyes have turned inwards and have taught her lips their myſtery and Morgan's, have taught also that animal softness to her ſteps and all her motions. It

would not be surprising were she to ſtrive to be buried along with him, if only she had not loſt so much of herself in losing him. She guards him like a hound & like a spirit. She shadowed and clung to the doctor & the miniſter, so that their offices were a mockery, yet they dared not attempt to keep her away. Perhaps she will go back to his Tower and live there alone. ¶If this winding path between two of the foreſt precipices be followed to that bank where the eaſtern sun now falls upon the dazzle of a myriad celandines, the top of Morgan's Tower, or Folly, can be seen againſt a wedge of sky among the hills; there are no trees at that height, & it is diſtinct and unmiſtakable. It is a slender, square tower containing three rooms one above the other, & above these an uncovered look-out. If she returns there she will be able to visit the upper room and the look-out for the firſt time. ¶Morgan built the Tower before he was thirty, and he dwelt there nearly thirty years; whether out of cruel conſtancy to his firſt resolution, no one knows; but once he had gone there he never left it, except to die in the great house where he was born, and where he chiefly lived, until the building of the Tower. For a time he tried to live entirely in London, devoting himself & his riches to social reform, which seemed the only way to gain some tranquillity & save himself from too often remembering that he was in hell. He drew back because he could not underſtand the town life, and it was absurd to reform what he could not underſtand. At firſt, and for several years, the sight of the men and women and children living a pure and simple town life allowed him no reſt. It was easy to provide them with things which seemed to him to be good for them. But it was not easy, it was in the end not possible, to put away the thought that his motive was a false one, & yet one for which he could see no practical alternative. He was trying to alter the conditions of other men's lives because he could not have endured them himself, because it would have been unpleasant to him to be like them in their hideous pleasure, hideous

suffering, hideous indifference. He saw in this attitude a modern Pharisaism, whose followers desired not merely to be unlike others, but to make others like themselves. It was due to lack of imagination, he thought, of imagination which would enable the looker-on to see their lives as compared with their conscious or unconscious ideals. Did they, for example, fall farther short from their ideals than he from his? He had not the imagination to see, but he thought perhaps not; and he did see that, lacking as their life might be in antique beauty and power, it yet had in it a profound unconsciousness and dark strength which might some day bring forth beauty—might even now be beautiful to simple and true eyes—and had already given them a fitness to their place, such as he himself was far from having reached. He never hesitated when it was food and warmth that were lacking, but beyond supplying those needs he could never feel sure that he was not fancifully interfering with a force which he did not understand & could not overestimate. So leaving all save a little of his money to be used for giving food and warmth to the hungry and the cold, he escaped from the sublime unintelligible scene. He went up into the Tower, that he had built upon a rock in his own mountains, to think about life before he began to live. Up there he hoped to learn why it was that sometimes, in the London streets, beneath the new and the multitudinous there was a simple and pure beauty, beneath the turmoil a placidity, beneath the noise a silence which he longed to reach and to drink deeply & to perpetuate, but in vain. He desired to learn to see in human life, as we see in the life of bees, the unity which perhaps some higher order of living beings can easily see through the complexity that confuses us. He had set out to seek at first by means of science, but he found that science was only the modern method of looking at the world, possibly a transitory method, and that too often it was an end and not a means. For a hundred years men had been reading science and

experimenting, as they had been reading history, with the result that they knew—some science & some history. So he went up into his bright Tower. ¶From there he looked out at the huge, desolate heaves of the grey beacons. Their magnitude and pure form gave him hours of great calm. Here there was nothing human, gentle, disturbing, as in the vales. There was nothing but the hills and the silence that was God. The greater heights, set free from night and mist, looked as if straight from the hands of God, as if here He also delighted in pure form and magnitude that was worthy of His love; and the huge shadows moving slowly over the grey spaces of winter, the olive spaces of summer, were as His hand. While Morgan watched, the dream came, more and more often, of a paradise to be established upon the mountains when at last the sweet winds should blow across a clean world that knew not the taint of life any more than of death, and then his thought swept rejoicing through the high Gate of the Winds that cleft the hills far off, where a shadow ten miles long slept across the peaks, but left the lower wild as yellow in the sunlight as corn. Following his thought he walked upward to that Gate of the Winds, to range the high spaces, sometimes to sleep there. Or he lay among the gorse—he could have lain on his back a thousand years hearing the cuckoo among the gorse and looking up at the blue sky above the mountains. Or in the rain and wind he sat against one of the rocks among the autumn bracken until the sheep surrounded him, half visible and shaggy in the mist, peering at him fearlessly as if they had not seen a man since the cairns were heaped on the summit; he sat on and on in the mystery, part of it but divining it not, and in the end went discontented away. The crags stared at him on the hill-top, where the dark spirits of the earth had crept out of their abysses into the day, and still clad in darkness looked grimly at him, at the sky, and the light. More and more he stayed in his Tower, since even in his own mountains, as in the cities of

men, he was dismayed by numbers, by variety, by the grotesque, by the thousand gods demanding idolatry instead of the One whom he desired, Whose hand's shadow he had seen far off. Looking on a May midnight at Algol rising out of the mountain, the awe and the glory of that first step into the broad heaven exalted him; a sound arose as of the whole of time making a music behind him, a music of something passing away to leave him alone in the silence, as if he also were stepping up into the blue air—always to stumble back. Or it was the moon rising. Then the sombre ranges to eastward seemed to be the edge of the earth, and as the globe ascended the world was emptied and grieved, having given birth to this mighty child; he was left alone, and the great white clouds sat round about upon the horizon and judged him. For days he would lie desolate and awake and dream and stir not. Once again he returned to London & saw the city pillared, above the shadowy abyss of the river, on columns of light; and it was less than one of his dreams. It was winter and he was resolved to work, and was crossing one of the bridges, full of purpose and thought, going against the tide of the crowd. But the beauty of the bridge and the water took hold of him. It was a morning with a low, yellow sky of fog. About the heads of the crowd swayed a few gulls, interlacing so that they could not be counted, & they swayed like falling snow and screamed. They brought light on their long wings, as down below a great ship setting out slowly with misty masts brought light to the green and leaden river upon the foam at her bows. And ever about the determined careless faces of the men swayed the pale wings like wraiths of evil and good calling, and calling to ears which do not know that they hear. And they tempted his brain with the temptation of their beauty; he went to and fro to hear and see them until they slept and the crowd had flowed away. He thought that they had made ready his brain, and that on the mountains he would find fulness of beauty at last, and simplicity,

so he went away and never returned. There, too, among the mountains was weariness, because he also was there. ¶But not always weariness. For was not the company of planet and ſtar in the heavens the same as had bent over prophet and poet and philosopher? By day a scene unfolded, as when the firſt man spread forth his eyes and saw more than his soul knew. These things lifted up his heart, so that the voices of fear and doubt were not so much in that infinite silence as little rivers in an unbounded plain. There were days when it seemed to him the sheer mountains were the creation of his lean, terrible thoughts, and he was glad, and the soft, wooded hills below and behind were the creation of the pampered luxurious thoughts he had left behind in the world of many men. It was thus, in the ſtyle of the mountains, he would have thought & spoken—but language, except to genius and simple men, was but a paraphrase, dissipating and dissolving the forms of passion and thought. Then, again, time lured him back out of eternity, and he believed that he longed to die, as he lay and watched the sky at sunset, inlaid with swart foreſt, and watched it with a dull eye and a cold heart. ¶So much was known or could be guessed from his talk. For in those early days of his retreat he was not silent to those who met him upon the mountains, nor did he turn aside so as not to encounter them. And much more was told in the legend that flourished about the ſtrange truth, and at laſt entangled and ſtifled it, so that the legend was all, and no one cared about the man. He was said to have buried money somewhere in the caves of the hills. He was said to worship a God who had never entered chapel or church. He was said to speak with raven and kite and curlew and fox. He was said to pray for the end of man and the world. He was called atheiſt, blasphemer, outlaw, madman, brute. But the laſt that was known of him was that one summer he used to come down night after night courting Angharad who became his

wife. One of the most persistently reported of his solitary obsessions was the belief in a race who had kept themselves apart from the rest of men though found in many nations, perhaps in all. Some said the belief was from the Bible and that this was the race that grew up alongside the family of Cain, the guiltless "daughters of men" from whom the fratricide's children took their wives. These knew not the sin or the knowledge or the shame of Adam, Eve, and Cain—so he was said to believe—and neither had they any souls. They were a careless and godless race, knowing neither evil nor good. They had never been cast out of Eden. Some of the branches of this race had perished already by men's hands, such as the fairies, the nymphs, the fauns. Others had adopted for safety many of men's ways, and had become moorland & mountain men, living at peace with their neighbours and yet not recognized as equals. They were even to be found in the towns. There the uncommon beauty of the women sometimes led to unions of violent happiness and of calamity, and now and then to the birth of a poet or musician or a woman who could abide neither with the strange race nor with the children of Adam. They were allowed to live and compelled to suffer for their power and beauty. Their happiness—it was considered by men to be something other than happiness, lighter, not earned or deserved, mere gaiety—was the cause of envy and hate, and it met with lust or with torture. They were feared, but more often despised, because they retained what was charming in the animal with the form of men, and because they lived as if time was not, and yet could not be persuaded to a belief in a future life. Up in his Tower, Morgan came to regard his father as one of these, the man who had forsaken his wife before the child was born, and left only a portrait behind. If only he could capture one of this race, thought Morgan, & make her his wife, he would be content. And Angharad, the shy and bold and fierce and dark Angharad, whose black eyes radiated light and blackness

together, was one of them. So he took her up to his Tower. ¶After that these things only were certainly known: that she was unhappy; that when she came down to the village for food she was silent, would never betray him or fail to return; and that he never came down, that he also was silent, that he looked like a wild man with unshorn hair. He was seen at all hours, always far off, on the high paths of the mountains. His hair was as black as when he was a boy. He was never known to have ailed, until one day, the wild wife knocked at the door of his birthplace, and asked for help to bring him where he might be tended as was necessary, since he would have no one but her in the Tower. And so he came and last night he died, having thanked the Earth for its strength and its beauty, for what it had given him and for what it might have given had he been wise, having prayed that his body might be dutiful to Earth in the grave and bound up more purely than it had been during his living days "in the bundle of life with the Lord my God." She has not always been silent, but has cried aloud with a voice far wilder than the curlew's because she is left alone with the children of men. And that is why this gentle morning is so grave and so forlorn, and why Morgan's Folly stands up so greatly and notably in its blackness against this dawn.





— IV —

HELEN

TWENTY-FIVE years ago the chief inhabitants of Crowbit lands were squirrels, the chief crops hazel nuts & flints. To-day it is a forlorn declining old-new settlement, with the look of a wrecked suburb, & resembling a village only in that it has one idiot and one great house, every pane of every window in it broken by the stones of happy children. In another twenty-five years the old condition will probably be restored. It is the highest land on a high plateau and the plough has never been over it. The greater part is treeless, but the slopes bear copses of poor oaks & in the bottoms are families of ancient beeches & enough grass for many rabbits. One straight main road crosses it now as it has long done, but for

some reason it is avoided, & in spite of an old man always bent over it the weeds & grass grow apace. The other roads are, & were, broad green lanes deeply fringed with untended hazel and bracken and the purple and gold flowers that love to be among bracken. Even twenty-five years ago no tract of southern England was richer in green lanes almost without rut or footprint. Perhaps a gipsy came one day, but next day was not there. One farmhouse there was, and the only reason for that seemed to be to avoid the scandal of so large a district in this prosperous country being without one. Every year or two it was partly painted and the garden half weeded, lest the predestinate tenant should see it and pass by: once or twice there were tenants—not farmers, but a poor middle-class family with an indigent mother or sister, or children too young for school—for not more than six months. The great house was at the very edge of Crowbit, turning its back on the misty plateau, its face towards a better land of dairy and corn in comfortable proportions. It was a square grey house among oaks, dull and substantial, a perfect breeding-place for men about town, like the Salanders. They could not live there because the consumption of cigarettes and spirits which it enforced gave it a reputation for unhealthiness and costliness; but they had been happy there as children & they liked to come down in the autumn for pheasants, in the summer for trout—not in their own land, which had not one flash of running water. The Salanders had some reason for expecting trouble: in fact, the only reason against it was that it had long been delayed. The only way out was work—and that was impossible—until one day a low, but amusing friend of George Salander offered another. The lord of the manor had just landed a game trout and held it in his hand with a sunny hard smile, saying in compliment "Jolly plucky little beggar," before putting his thumbnail deep into the spine of a creature which, he knew, had done its best to give him pleasure. At Johnson's proposal he smiled

in the same way. ¶Within a year the plan was a success. The healthy situation and lovely scenery of Crowbit, the fitness for poultry & small fruit farms, & the convenience of a five-mile-distant railway station upon a branch line, were enthusiastically advertised by Johnson, the railway company, the Press, and in a quiet way, by Salander himself. The newcomers were old and middle-aged men who had saved a little money in shops, young men at their first venture and men no longer young at their last. They enclosed parallelograms of an acre or half-an-acre with wire-netting; they planted trees which died; they dug up plots of innocent grass where forthwith exulted the hardiest and most offensive weeds; they erected low buildings of corrugated iron, white framed windows and doors and many lace curtains. The old farmhouse received a corrugated iron roof from ridge to eaves over its thatch and the name of "The Laurels"; and inside or outside of it could be heard a cheerful baritone voice singing "The Boys of the Old Brigade." Many lengths of the green lanes were furrowed hither and thither by heavy wheels, and the mud well mixed with broken glass, crockery & coloured paper. Gaps were torn in the hedges for gateways & to allow a view when the mist cleared. Everywhere, the sound of hammers on deal and corrugated iron. Chickens made paths in all directions. Faces of extreme cheerfulness or extreme anxiety went up and down riding bicycles or eagerly pushing them. ¶Salander had ready-money. He came down to see the place and told Johnson,"It is like a damned circus, only it won't go away." He was genuinely enraged with Johnson. ¶Some of the people did, nevertheless, go away before long. Some who had hoped they would be isolated were wedged in a dense row: others found it lonely in a lane with no sound but their own chickens: some longed for the town, some for the country. But enough had been sold to overcome Salander's distaste; he was able to send his idle eldest son, Aylwin Salander, to a mining school, and later on to

Canada. ¶Some of the invaders ſtayed. The Browns, for example, kept to their little red house, and in ten years' time they alone remained of the original settlers. The slope up to their front door and its white wooden ſteps was carefully mown and broken into beds of lilac and laburnum, roses, sunflowers and naſturtiums in their seasons. Of the half-dozen spruce trees only one had lived through the firſt summer, and this was the nearеſt to the house. It was absurdly near, as Mrs. Brown pointed out; it grew apace and its branches brushed the wall of the house. On the night when her firſt child was born, and on other nights she could then remember, she was tormented by this tree rasping the corrugated iron in the rainy wind. "You devil," she said to it when firſt she ſtepped out with little Helen in her arms; but she let it remain, and it continued to flourish while its companions rotted very slowly in the ground. Helen flourished like the tree, which she watered all through the summers; and Salander, passing by a shed one day where she was playing, threw away his cigar to have a good look at her. Outside, it was a day of glory in the sky & of harveſt peace and abundance on the earth: inside, the child was in deep shadow and looked down at him with eyes bright, glowing cheeks, rosy lips, and teeth gliſtening, all the more lovely for the shadow which her face overcame and seemed to illuminate like a lantern. He tried to talk to her, & she said "Yes" or "No" or sometimes nothing. He remembered as he looked at her an old countrywoman's remark to him when he was a boy: "Birds have great wisdom; not one of them except the cuckoo has said a thing men can underſtand, not since the Creation." Before he left she reminded him ſtill more of a bird, for she suddenly put on a face like an owl which was evidently a favourite accomplishment. This she maintained for about half a minute and then broke into laughter, under cover of which Salander departed. He did not profeſs to know anything about women until they were seventeen or so, and none that he

had ever troubled with was like a bird; yet his complacency was hurt by the bird-like Helen. She grew more and more beautiful, to the confusion of old and afterwards of young Salander. She had a peering face, narrowing down to the chin and sharpened forwards—a face that asked many questions no man could answer. She had olive eyes, long dark lashes, and dark eyebrows, a rather more than usually projecting mouth which seemed to make the whole world wreathe in a smile with it; her skin was nothing rarer than damask; her pale yellow hair was open to the imputation of tow, inclined to stick together in tails, and only just rippled out of the straight, yet radiant and original whether it swished about her in running or was held across her mouth for her to bite while she spoke; perhaps only her ears could be called perfect, being of a unique simple curve up, round and down, and within of a subtlety suggesting with even a shade of painfulness in its subtlety, the hidden brain which it furnished with the sounds of the world. Many other women had some of these elements in more perfection, not a few had them all: there was never one who combined them in these proportions to this result, which was so much more than the sum of them all that one like old Salander could pretend to see it as such only when there was a Crowbit mist moaning and shaking the spruce against Helen's home and the rain drummed on corrugated iron, and he felt in his teeth that he was old. He was, in fact, deeply impressed by her beauty. It was the most surprising fact within his knowledge that this brand-new, rasping new, never-to-be-old, settlement and two plain parents could produce one like Helen, could nourish and preserve her year after year, while she ran up & down the deep-rutted lanes and over the scratched flinty fields among the chickens, climbed his great beeches in the bottoms still mainly belonging to the squirrels, and later on raced about on a rattling bicycle with a milk can or a parcel from the station. She wore bad clothes, always

torn, often dirty—but so much the better! they gave her laughing loveliness another triumph. It was always laughing, though not perhaps for what Salander or most others would have called happiness. Her mother was angry with her for laughing at nothing: she did not know, she believed the child did not know, why this laughter; and she accused her of pretence, the more certainly because the gravity of her eyes was never disturbed by it. At school she learned only to fear school-teachers and lofty rooms with shiny pictures. All her wisdom was in the quickness of of her feet & the light of her eyes. Some thought her daft. ¶When Helen was seventeen, old Salander died suddenly. Aylwin had returned from Canada, something worn by indolence, but still handsome. He was a perfect Salander externally—had a neat head, close-cropped mouse-coloured hair, regular features and excellent teeth, but also a melancholy and rash futility that grinned at the masterly military exterior. He wooed Helen outright. She was now a woman of a great new beauty, neither of the town nor of the country. She was the offspring of the union or conflict between country and town, the solitude of Crowbit and the corrugated iron. The union showed itself in the astonishing blend of the wild and the delicate in her beauty, the conflict, in her uselessness—she could do nothing with her hands or her head, she could not even sing, though her voice was worthy of her—in what the neighbours called her stupidity or imbecility. She was like a deer enchanted into a woman's form, nothing like a deer except sometimes in her gesture of suspicion, and yet a deer underneath. Salander used to come down to the "King's Head" at Newton Salander for several days at a time and make opportunities to see the wandering Helen instead of fishing. At some visits he sat down and drank peaceably for hours, to fend off the sad looks of Crowbit; at others, he would not touch alcohol, for the same reason; in both moods he would talk of fitting out two rooms at the manor-house,

of keeping fowls and Arcadianising. It was pretty well known why he came, and Mr. and Mrs. Brown, though not yet consulted, saw no reason to be sorry, since it might do them good and would, at leaſt, take the solitary & useless girl off their hands. The neighbours blamed sometimes them and sometimes Helen, when they knew her entire liberty with Salander. They accused the Browns of thruſting her upon him. His friends, on the other hand, thought it would be quite unnecessary for him to marry her. ¶Helen herself seemed to take no notice of him, to be the only person who could not see what was happening. Then suddenly it was known that she and Salander were to be married. It was said that he had lain in wait for her in one of her secret haunts, and that there for some reason she had ſtruck him so that he fell and was ſtunned. It was said that his helpless body had raised her pity; she had tended and kissed him back to consciousness. After this he could apparently do anything with her, except persuade her to leave "Fair View" where she was born. She used to compare herself to the solitary spruce-tree. She had never lived anywhere else, and she never could. But as soon as possible Salander meant to take her right away from it. ¶After the wedding Helen was gay and gentle with all, until she came to the gates of the manor-house. She trembled and leaned heavily on her husband's arm, and he was all but carrying her as they approached the door. At the threshold she was powerless; he lifted her in, helpless and drooping as a sheaf of barley. ¶She is now what all would call mad. She fell into silence, untranslatable sounds, and her old laughter. She refused to sleep anywhere except in her birthplace, and as she was not admitted there she ſtayed out of doors. She thought that she was a spruce fir, and spreading out her arms with a grave look she shivered and made a sound like the wind in fir needles without opening her lips, and having gradually become silent she burſt out into laughter and turned away. Salander was much condoled with by her

parents, & in his watchfulness he was often out all night, following her until he was tired & she disappeared. His fowls arrived, but he made a present of them to his father-in-law. In a few weeks he departed, leaving the key in the door with a hope that she might return. He comes down now and then to see if she is changed, but when he appears she runs fast away. They have relented at "Fair View," and she sleeps there once more. She works hard in the garden and among the fowls, and goes on errands. If the little boys of Crowbit stop her & say, "Helen, what is that noise?" she stands still, slowly extends her arms and moans like a fir-tree, and the boys grin at one another until out comes her wild laughter, and they grin no more. The people at Crowbit are not proud of her, though she is still as beautiful as the dawn; but at the next village an old woman says it is good to have one idiot in a place, and very lucky—"It keeps things quiet," she says.





— V —

BRONWEN: A WELSH IDYLL

IT was cool dawn on the summits of the hills. The daisy was unawakened yet in the glen, and a light mist slept across the fields beneath. Low down in the rosy drift of sunrise hung the new moon, on tip-toe, as it seemed, for flight; a brief time only it hung; and at length it dropped as the light added, on the purple peals of comfrey, bell to bell. Now, too, lark met nightingale for the last time of the year in song. For the season was the midst of June. It was the time of the white wild rose and the purple cranesbill, and the streaked convolvulus braiding dry paths. ¶And already Bronwen is in the grass beside her home. Lonely and content, she leans with a whisper of singing over her sweet toil,

looking up seldom, and then only to number the ſtars that die one by one in the hot sky, or to answer the honied tones of the swallows passing her head. Or she plucks a blossom for her brow. So, all the time, she is happy, thinking sweet thoughts in her loneliness, and in the shade of her own wild hair. For about her neck the weight of yellow hair dropped and spread, and upon the flowers, as she bent shoulder-deep in the June grass. Like marble is her form as she ſtoops ſtill at her toil: like a cloud whenever she turns in her place. Her skin is like a lily; but the summer has found out the rosy life of her veins; and Bronwen is like the anemone of March. She is beautiful. But she is alone. Perhaps the light poplar-tree beside the mere longs to throw its shadow in the cryſtal; with her was it even so. And the agrimony wands have taken fire in the green grass. ¶So Bronwen sings and toils; and now, as she sits, a white ſtar broadens and grows bright towards her out of the eaſt, like Mercury kindling through a purple that deepens on to moonrise. She has seen this ſtar and looks. What is it? Sometimes it burns, and sometimes it fades from sight; yet it is too conſtant for a sea wave catching the sunbeam at slowly returning intervals. A ſtar of heaven it can scarce be. Nor certainly is it a swell of the cryſtal air of summer flashing as oftentimes it will like a shifted shield. How like it is to the shimmer of battle ſteel! But then it moves slowly & alone and ſteadily; and for a time there is peace between the Round Table & the world. A shield, nevertheless, it is, coming to her out of the silver diſtance of dawn. ¶Looking wiſtfully and placidly toward the shield, like a child ſtaring at vacancy, Bronwen pauses but a moment; then gathers up the web and inſtruments of her toil into her grasp; and so vanishes through the purple gloom of the ivy at her porch. Nor does she ſtay at the wide opened door, though the shield flash to her from the foot of the hill. ¶Knight and ſteed and shield are crossing the grass beside the home. ¶A bough from the

fresh wood is in his hand, drooping across the saddle. His lips murmur with song momentarily, but mostly are still. And he comes out of the fastnesses of dawn clad in a liquid splendour as if bathed in that pure light which made silver of the raindrops along the moss of the wall. Eager to taste the rich morning air, he has doffed his helmet, thus disclosing his face. Mark the placidity with which dawn has moulded it, and the keen lines drawn by the desire of all the features to drink to the uttermost what the hour gives. Save behind, where it will escape mercurially from the clasped helm, his gold hair is close. Black, however, is the hue of his brows, & arched in tranquil purity. At first glimpse, everything shows immense capacity for delight; at the next, a tyrannous self-mastery, a strenuous content with disappointment, which would be sad but at such an hour. But his face ripples and shifts with expression in the manner of pools where gusts chase the lines of waves with changing shade and light. By the fashion of it, he has listened to many sounds, bitter and sweet. Sights without number, too, he has seen, many a sunrising and sunsetting. ¶Now he halts with a happy sigh like one baiting at a well-known door. ¶So he stands beside Bronwen's home; he gazes, and for him the flowers are shining from the garden, for him the dark ivy leaf turns to silver as it winks in its own massed glooms. Thus he waits. Waits? But he knows not that he waits, nor why he unlinks his steel and stops his horse. ¶Meantime, like one who goes on an errand long before appointed, Bronwen has stepped to her bower and laid by her toil. Quietly and without haste, carefully as if she robed herself for bridal, she has put off her antique silk in exchange for a festival raiment of white, drawing it from the spicy darkness with the joy of a village maiden on her rare holiday. For one minute only she stays proudly in her loneliness, without glass or mirror. Then she sweeps to the gate, to meet a guest that might have been accustomed and well known. She is there. And how

her arms rise in unconscious welcome as she notes the smile meeting her own at their first sight! "A fair journey, Sir Knight!" cries Bronwen,"and may our country be kind to you." He laughs, and in reply,"Good day, lovely maiden!"cries he,"and may men be kind to you, as Heaven is kind. Wish you happy, I cannot; for I see you full of the summer and the fair weather & the dawn and this sweet place, happy thus beyond the might of my wish." Joyously she answers him. "It is fair, indeed, on my hillside this month, but lonely. Many days I see naught that moves. The knights are in the wars beyond Gwynedd. How, then, has a hoof from Camelot reached me & stayed even a moment? On our festival day, too, finding me thus alone, the festival at the quieting of the nightingale in the hazels beside the brown Gwili—the beautiful Gwili!" Here she follows the swift's flight as it reels to the Gwili river in the south. "I am indeed from Camelot, and in peace, happily. On a blithe errand, too, I come: to carry a missive of betrothal between a lord of the white south shore and a princess of this land. I shall have toil to find her; I have seen none for leagues. Lovely she must be, if you are one of her maidens." So speaks Sir Agravaine. "Come! you will never find her. Let me have the missive. I promise, I will guard it with care from messenger so welcome as yourself. For you would never find her. The land, as you say, is lonely. Besides, for to-day, you shall be my guest: it is our wont: never would June be kind to us if we forgot her festival, which, being alone, I was like to do." He answers quickly, "On such an errand, you must needs be a sure messenger. And, as to your asking, Lady! I am glad to stay on my march. When others are thus arranging their pleasures through us, surely their ministers may rejoice together. And may I see you at Camelot for the bridal!" She looks again to the Gwili. "As to that last, who knows what our Princess will grant? Besides, I love my home: there I was born, there I ply my sweet toil: my mother, too, sleeps there in the sun even now; and with her my

baby sister, who cries now—hark! Let me go. I will haste. Now also I will hide the scrolls safely; for a day they shall stay closed; we will not risk chance under such heavens. See! the lark is weary with over-sweet. He does but flit singing from tuft to tuft: yet I think the voice sweeter thus than in soaring. Let me guard, also, that fresh bough in your hand, lest the sun looks on withered green before it is midsummer." So Sir Agravaine gives her the bough. "You shall take the larch sprig," he cries, "but at my gift. Keep it. I wait." ¶She runs: and when she is lost to his eyes, he rapidly lightens himself of the great steel and stalls his horse on the dry brown beneath the beech. A while he stays beside the crystal beginnings of a stream, his soul swayed and mazed by the motion of the waters, when, swift as a great liking, she returns to him. The green larch twig is at her girdle. Let the June sun be tender to it! ¶Together they seek the alders of Gwili, the hazels of its raised banks, and the windy gorse beyond. Talking sweetly, and sweetly making silence, they go. At one time she points him the gathered children plucking flowers in the field. "How they hasten, leaving half the host of flowers, in their gay strife! They cross the field, passing and repassing one another, and again overtaken, carelessly and hastily, like a flock of starlings." And one of the sweet small voices from the south sings hidden in the green leaves overhanging Gwili. They reach the moneywort gold of the banks, and her first care is to bury his armour in flowers. "There! You shall not go from me until they fade." So she cries. "I have had a care; be sure; the alders of the Gwili are close, and the sun will be tender to these, ay! and to me." White wild rose, therefore, heavy purple crane's-bill, gold & green gorse picked easily by fine fingers, yellow flag, honeysuckle, and all the heaped sweets of summer, dim the great steel which blood only has dimmed before this. ¶They try together the forgotten path of the ancients, or pass where only the children of future time will again make a way. Now they stop to

look on the sparkling fords, or where girls dip pitchers in the fast water; and the water shines as it drops from the mouth of the pitcher; and the girls laugh as they wait. Now they see a lonely child in robes of white sailing flat reeds for boats in the reaches of calm. And far off, at intervals so long that each is forgotten before one succeeds, great seas fall heavily on the shore. Masts cross and interlace on the shining sea. At times they see a white cloud scale the immense sky, hover thinned almost to nothing by the sun, and dip to hills and sea, leaving the sky bare for hours. Once, as she threads a thicket of fern, she cries aloud with a cry of pain. He is with her. "Is it a snake?" She has crushed a flower. And so they pass: and the dew is dry almost in the coolest hollows of the wood. ¶Sweetly they talk of the sweets of silence, they brood sweetly in silence over the sweets of past speech They are happy. She shows him the lonely footprints of her childish walks, or fears for her baby sister, or laughs at to-day. As they pause together on the green steeps, he names to her knight after knight travelling the pass with song. Here, men are charging beneath them, but as in dream: they see only the flash of armour. Here white maidens dance, but as in dream. Masts, clouds, hosts, all move like stars. ¶Dusk mellows into evening, and the lily over the steel smells once more of the earth from which it came, pleasant in death. The moon rounds the forest slowly from tree to tree. The lonely night passes, while the home of Bronwen paves the rising white footsteps of the moon. And the knight rides quietly into the blue west: and Bronwen is lost awhile to the south wind: and the bee swoons in the meadow-sweet beside the brook Gwili. But, as they tell, Bronwen the Princess, on Midsummer Day, married Sir Agravaine at Camelot, before the larch spray had lost scent in her girdle.



— VI —

THE NEARER THE BONE THE SWEETER THE MEAT

AT Dynevor Caſtle in Caermarthenshire, high & ſtern above the River Towy & its fruitful meadows and quiet farm-folk, dwelt a prince who was very proud. His name was Urien. At the age of thirty he was lord of that land, its people, beaſts, salmon, and corn. For his tall ſtature & ſtrength & handsomeness, for his skill in war and hunting, for his black horse Arthur, and his sword Merlin, and his lance Uther, & for all his other great possessions, he was envied by many princes; but for his pride he was hated both by princes and by common men. He was not cruel; to children and animals he was often tender as a woman; but he was proud, & he looked like pride itself. ¶The bard Carvilios wrote poems in praise of Urien, and

one of them excused his pride. "Urien"—so ran the poem—"Urien can love nothing that is not free as the north wind, as bright as mountain water, as red as mountain-ash berries, as white as snow, as black as the raven, as bold as the peregrine falcon, as swift as the ſtag, as musical as the poems of Carvilios, as beautiful as was Olwen his eighteen-year-old wife when she died. Therefore Urien is sorry for common men or women, with heavy motion, dull wit, hoarse voice, & no abounding beauty or ſtrength or skill, and he cannot endure them. He has set his eyes on the hills: when he caſts them down he frowns. Envy him not, for he is alone like the eagle on the cliff, like the sun in the heaven; and who envies them?" ¶Yet men hated Urien. Once he came into the chapel with his scarlet-hooded falcon upon his wriſt, and, ſtanding up, he liſtened a little while to the prieſt. He shifted upon his feet and his spurs rang with music sweeter than the bells at High Mass in the Cathedral at St. Davids. Outside the chapel door the horse Arthur heard the spurs, and he shifted upon his feet impatiently, and Urien heard him, and frowned, and turned and went out and rode away with hound and falcon. ¶This was the laſt time that Urien was seen by any man of the Towy valley. For on that day he rode far. He seemed to be following the white clouds that swept over the mountain tops swiftly towards the north. The black horse and its rider in green and gold with plume of white, the dappled hounds, the red falcon, were seen above Towy and Teivi and Severn, and none that saw them believed that they were man, horse, hounds, and falcon, such as dwell upon earth. They were like creatures out of a tale that poets sing: so swift were they, so light and beautiful. ¶But had Urien written down what befell him he would have told it differently. The horse fell dead of its speed. The falcons were found ſtarved, and children robbed them of their silver bells. All the hounds except one leapt over a cliff, and were caught on the jutting holly-bushes

and eaten by ravens. Urien crept at midnight into a den, where a hermit and a fox lived together. His one hound and he took up their abode with the hermit; the hound slew the fox, and Urien had to do penance for it. ¶In that land Urien was known to nobody. He grew old almoſt as soon as Cavall, the hound. Of his pride nothing remained but his way of ſtanding up very ſtraight in the den, where his head touched the roof of oak roots. ¶Urien and the hermit loved the old hound, Cavall. Sometimes when the two parted in the foreſt Cavall would ſtand ſtone-ſtill, thinking, his tail slowly moving, his sad eyes looking from one to the other, and though both shouted, one for him to come on, the other for him to go back, he would be unable to choose which he would accompany, until both were disappearing from sight, and he ran firſt to one, then to the other, and made up his mind at laſt because he was tired of running and of thinking. One day the two men quarrelled over the laſt bone of a ſtag which they had been living on for a week. The quarrel was ended by giving the bone to Cavall. The hound licked it and left it, tried a dozen ways of holding it, found a morsel here and another there, and at length gripped it with paws and teeth and began to grind. It was then that Urien broke silence, by saying: "The nearer the bone the sweeter the meat." The two watched him until he fell asleep; a little afterwards they also fell asleep. In the morning Cavall was dead. ¶Many a time in after years Urien and the hermit remembered that evening and the saying, "The nearer the bone the sweeter the meat," and they smiled because Cavall had a quiet end, and because the saying was a true one, which men repeat down to this day in the land where Urien died, and in the Towy valley, and in many other places.



— VII —

SET A THIEF TO CATCH A THIEF

MOLLY and Peggy Lion lived two hundred years ago at Elses Farm in the Weald. In the Spring they used to pick dandelions until their hands would hold no more: then they threw away the dandelions & took only ſtitchwort. In Summer they learnt the names of their father's thirty cows, sat with the haymakers eating bread and cheese and onions, and watched the charcoal-burner at a diſtance. When Autumn came they made friends with Robert Twiner, who dried the hops. At firſt they were sorry that the hops had to be dried, because the smoke from the kiln filled the cone of the oaſt-house before it broke out into the open air, & so the young swallows in the neſt juſt inside the cone were suffocated

and fell dead on to the hops below. But Robert Twiner said that it happened every year, and when the smell of the hops began to mix with the fumes of charcoal, brimstone, and coal, and the clean smoke hung bitter-sweet in the cold air that was soon to be warm, Molly & Peggy forgot the swallows. They climbed up again into the oast-chamber with bare feet for fear of soiling the smooth oak floor, and fell asleep in a corner. Their eyes opened at the end of the afternoon on a pile of dried hops in the middle of the floor, big enough for them to hide in. The hops were of the green-gold colour that had stained the oak boards in many seasons, and they were crisp & thin like a hoard of old fairy money. Robert Twiner, sweeping up the last hop-sovereigns into the pile, was the same colour. ¶On their way across the farm-yard Molly and Peggy went up into the granary to see the cross-bow, the old gun, the sheep bells, and the corn measures, and to try which of them could hold the most grains of corn in one hand; but as they always became tired of counting they never knew. They only left the granary because the rat-catcher, Soft Jimmy, entered. Jimmy had no tail, and no more than two legs, and wore a cap of mole skin, yet he was like a rat. ¶Molly and Peggy got leave to spend the night in the oast-chamber. What they meant to do was to sit up, waking & sleeping, all night, like Robert, but by mistake they slept until daylight. The door of the oast-chamber was open, and a new load of green-gold sacks was about to be taken in from the waggon standing below. The cows fresh from milking crowded about the waggon or drank at the pond. It was so silent that a quince could be heard tumbling from an overhanging branch into the water. ¶"I dreamt of Soft Jimmy," said Molly. "What did you dream?" asked Peggy. "I dreamt that he was in a trap, & that he got out and left his tail behind him." "And you were just about right," said Robert Twiner, opening a sack. "Jimmy was caught in a trap in Robsacks Wood years ago." "Was he caught by the

tail?" asked Molly eagerly. "No," said Robert, "but he would have been if he had had one." "Was it one of his own traps?" "No, it was a man-trap set by Budgen, the gamekeeper." "What, the man that was hanged for sheep-stealing?" "The very same. He was a good gamekeeper." "But how did he come to catch Soft Jimmy?" "Why, Jimmy was in the wood after pheasants." "Does Jimmy catch pheasants as well as rats?" "They say he did." "So the rats," said Peggy, "are caught by Jimmy, and Jimmy was caught by the gamekeeper, and he was caught by the justice . . . Who caught the justice?" "He isn't caught yet," said Robert seriously. "Why?" asked Peggy, "isn't he a thief?" "Oh, I don't say that he is; but set a thief to catch a thief is a very good plan, by your showing." And with that he sang, "To plough and sow and reap and mow, and be a farmer's boy," and dropped Molly and Peggy down into the waggon. They jumped to the ground and ran into the house just in time for breakfast and for telling Farmer Lion their discovery: "Set a thief to catch a thief."





— VIII —

A GROUP OF STATUARY

I HAD walked several miles through streets whose high, flat-fronted buildings made me feel as if I were at the bottom of a well, or in a deep, weedy river-bed with cliffy banks, from which it was impossible to climb out, though I could turn aside into many tributaries even more narrow and as deep. The sky was stagnant and dull; the fever and heat of the air came not so much from the sun as from underground, and from the walls on either side—a volcanic fire out of the earth's depths and the hearts of men. The plaited streams of men and women were restless. Their bodies were glad of the heat, but the gladness was repressed, and could show itself only in a darkly burning eye, a caged smile, a beautiful

contraſt of colours, a reſtlessness that knew not its own cause, far less a means of satisfying itself. They thought of the country, of the sea, of leisure, of reſting on the grass, of sleep, of dreaming, of love; of everything which the prison made impossible, or of nothing at all, merely undulating with the waves of vague desire and discontent. Thousands of faces and figures passing me by were full of capacities, of ſtrength and love. They were like weapons, swords, spears, axes and daggers, slender scimitars and curious twiſted edges, hanging on the walls of a museum. They had the same look of being unnatural and out of place as objects in a museum. If only they were to begin taking them down, trying their edges, brandishing them! ¶One such ſtreet led me at laſt out into a wide pool. A score of ſtreets opened into it, yet it was broad and almoſt empty. It was dotted with islands where people could take refuge from the ſtream; only there was no ſtream; and the islands also were empty. It was a grey flat space, surrounded by many-windowed buildings of a grey that was almost black, a chapel, a factory, a school, public-houses, at the several corners, and all of this same hue. It was shapeless, like a natural pool. It was far larger than the largeſt cathedral in the world, and it allowed a view of the sky, both overhead, and on every side above the roofs and between the walls of the ſtreets running into it. The islands were girt by low, thick poſts. On some there were pillars surmounted by lamps. They were wonderfully silent and ſtill, as if detached in some way from the conditions of the surrounding world. ¶The largeſt of the islands, lying at one corner of the pool, was shaded by three plane trees; or rather, being trees, and retaining a few colourless, duſty leaves, they suggeſted the thought of shade. At firſt sight, the trees, the emptiness, the space, the quiet, gave the place a ruſtic or cloiſtral air as of a cathedral or market town; bullocks in rows, sheep and pigs, crates of geese, farmers going slowly to and fro would have been in keeping with it—or a prieſt

walking at ease with a fine lady. But under the trees there were seats without backs, and the flagged pavement was irregularly worn into many hollows, and plastered with dust & moisture in blotches. On the seats were figures which few could have had difficulty in recognising at a short distance as those of human beings no longer young. It was they who spread round about them the silence which possessed the islands. ¶Even more fitting than a market or ecclesiastical group was this assembly under the planes. For like a market group, in a market square, it had a look of entire fitness, as if it could not have been changed, as if it had been there from the beginning. The dull, grey figures might have risen up out of the city soil, with some of it still clinging to them, rude and shaggy after the effort of birth, to sun themselves and look about. Their greyness was wintry, the rasping greyness of north-east wind that turns dry roads, asphalt, flagstone, ploughland, and meadow in the country, within the mind, to one grey, the colour of ashes. Nothing in them responded to the heat out of the sky. They were of the dark earth. ¶Before the discovery that they had faces with eyes and lips and hair, it might have been seen that they were men and women, & that for two reasons: first, they wore clothes which subtly suggested those of the people in the crowd, without in the least resembling them; second, they were miserable. I think that the clothes alone, the misfits and cast-offs of scarecrows, would have betrayed them, but I am not sure; I cannot separate the clothes from them, and not them or their clothes from misery. By a swift intuition the spirit penetrated those recumbent or propped-up frameworks of old black clothing, and divined their humanity—penetrated the clothing straight to the spirit, without thinking of the flesh. For in these abjects, as in the sumptuously apparelled, there is something terrible about the mere naked flesh, and it needs the inhuman ironist to think of it with serenity. Of all those who, full of meat and hope, or one of

its equivalents, passed by that island, and turned an eye for a vacant second upon those under the planes, not one failed to recognise that these were of one species with themselves. Not one got so far beyond that profound truism as to think of them and to see them naked, merely human, in their approximation to the appearance of a child bathing, a beloved woman a-dream on a summer morning, or a quoit-thrower poised. Had anyone so beheld them he would have ſtood thinking half the day over it, or he would have run away and ſtopped his eyes againſt the siren-sphinx: I saw neither the thinker nor the fugitive. ¶For all of us it was the clothing that had a meaning, the clothing of other men and other women. The clothes were the human things. The clothes held them together and made them the men & women they were, & these upon the benches had a look as if they would have crumbled away had they been diveſted of their rags. The body beneath was unconsciously known & feared as something diabolical or divine. The Maſter Sculptor had wrought them daily throughout a lifetime, & somebody had always come to their rescue on the day when the drapery had seemed no longer to perform its part sufficiently. One man, it is true, lay half along a seat with his head & shoulders in the lap of a woman whose head had fallen forward so as to hide his face with her hair, & his trouser leg had rolled up & disclosed a yellow bone. But the chances of ordinary life do frequently bring to sight a man's bare arm, breaſt, or foot, though usually it is whitish and something more than bone. This was a yellow bone. Still, it might pass. There was nothing here to outrage those who were not only full-fed but rightly and confidently expecting to remain so. Had it been a woman. . . Apparently there are always enough black ſtockings left in the poor world to cover the yellow bones of the diſtressed mothers, ſiſters, wives, casual miſtresses, and daughters of Englishmen; if not a loaf, yet a black ſtocking. There were men & women lying—men and women doubled up as the cavemen used to sleep and die—men and women

with folded arms, and faces looking down or straight over the grey pool at nothing—on the warm seats under the planes. There was not an attitude that could not be equalled among birds on a frosty branch, and, for all that it was not designed for them, their clothing was like a natural covering of plumage or fur, but mangy & soiled. ¶One of the women was doing up her dusty hair. She had laid her black bonnet on her knees, & her locks fell to the pavement as she drooped her head to one side & combed them with her fingers, her eyelids closed, for there was no mirror. It was a touch of nature. The gesture is always pensively beautiful, and could never fail to remind one of his mother when he was yet a child, & another of his young wife—but there was nobody near, neither were there any windows or private houses looking that way. No one of them spoke, or wept, or sighed. The woman who was doing up her hair coughed now and then. The man with his head in a woman's lap turned over once to spit—he was wide awake. As he once more made his head comfortable the woman revealed her eyes. There was nothing else of her save rags, & the eyes seemed hardly to belong to her. They expressed no private grief or hope or fear, any more than do the eyes in the portraits of Christ. It was a jest of gamesome providence to light those lamps in her face unknown to her, a jest like that of a small boy who chalks another's back. She bore about with her those beautiful brown eyes, and, save that no doubt men would kiss her for them, they served no purpose which is not served by the eyes of a weasel or crow. In a musician, now, in a lovely woman living among mountain lakes—such eyes would have done many missions for the soul. They were like wild-voiced nightingales in their silence. But in this cage... Had they really belonged to her, it was inconceivable that she should have been content to sit in that dusty retreat under the planes. A musician or a poet with such eyes would have told us subtle, remote, lustrous things, &, if we had not listened in his lifetime, yet, when he was dead and known to all, his eyes

would still be remembered. A passer-by, seeing these eyes, would have been startled, but would have controlled himself by reflecting that they could be matched in a cow's or Irish terrier's, and he would have gone on to remember even with amusement what very foolish people have glorious eyes; it is the inner eye and the soul that count; indeed, what better proof of this could be given than this vision on the bench in the dusty heart of the city, in a corner where refuse had been swept up and left to lie, as by a careless housemaid, because nobody would notice it in such an out-of-the-way place. A girl passing dropped a paper bag opposite to the woman with the eyes, and they saw it. She raised the man's head in her hands, and looking to learn if any of the others had seen, let his head down on the bench. She rose and walked to the bag. First she put her foot gently upon it to make sure that she was right in thinking that it was not paper alone. She was right. She picked it up, thrust in her hand, filled her mouth with something, and putting the bag in her pocket, returned to her seat. Since she saw nothing more that was unfamiliar, or in any way new or worth attention, nothing which she could not see as well without them, she closed her eyes. ¶All were now still. They absorbed the dry, dull heat. ¶The pool and its islands appeared to be empty. For no one notices the statuary of London unless it is made for display or to divide the traffic, not to form a decoration appropriate to a particular site, as in the case of these figures under the planes. In all the city there was no group so perfectly in keeping with its greatness and aridity. I had seen equestrian figures, symbolic groups, nudes, semi-nudes, figures in frock coats, in stone or bronze; thousands of living creatures, joyous or beautiful or tragic in their capacity for joy, in harmony with the burning sun, yet having nothing to do with this city which was the work of the giants, the heaven-besieging giants, not the gods. But these thirteen or fourteen recumbent, leaning, seated, and bowed figures, in their dignified

dismay, forming neither a circle nor a square, but a group as of a herd or flock, were in their place, thoroughly native, children of the city clay—fit lords of the scene, if they had but known—perfect citizens of no mean city. Why should it trouble to house Grecian marbles when it had these eternal ones wrought with its own hands? Could they have been petrified at that moment, and duly proclaimed as the costly work of the most famous living sculptor, none would have denied their pre-eminence. One by one the alien transitory crowd in the surrounding streets, after venturing up to glance at the wondrous art, would have slunk away and have left the city in their possession as theirs by right and theirs only. ¶It was very still. The sun in the sky was the one thing that moved. I dreamed that this exodus had taken place. I was a traveller in a desert city whose sons had all been dead thousands of years, but were known still to the stranger by these mighty marbles among which the planes had taken root. The tradition of the dead race was so powerful that not a bird or beast or any wild thing cared to visit this memorial of it, except curious men. And I was a man. I consulted the learned authorities and found them divided between two theories. One was that it was a group of that ancient people preserved in their natural attitudes, "while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed" by a petrifying plague. The other was that these were their gods, whose uncouth names I was not skilled to interpret. It seemed to me that the second theory was the better of the two, and, except Stonehenge, I had seen nothing approaching its sublimity in my wanderings.



—IX—

A COLLOQUY IN A LIBRARY

PERSONÆ:
Some Men; Many Books; Nature.

THE moon rose amid the comfortable, melancholy noise of rain in darkness, and it was near the time I set apart for dreams, dreams in a kind of mental euthanasia, which is as superior to mere sleep as dining is to eating. If I remember well, it was on such a chair as roused Evelyn's wonder in Florence [before these dreams were invented], "a conceited chair to sleep in with the legs stretched out, with hooks, & pieces of wood to draw out longer or shorter." In the absolutely windless air there was a nervous palpitation or fretting, more awful than ghosts. The fascinations of pure nothingness gradually overcame the fascinations of Robert Burton. I laid aside the book.... Presently the London mid-

night silence fell upon me with all its spells. It was that silence in which how many hearts were breaking! how many souls passing beyond the veil! and yet so quietly that the clear note of a chapel bell arose above it all—nay! the ticking of my watch was louder far. A puissant spell it was; by some means more subtle & direct than thought, I realized my own intense loneliness. Then the very rain falling patiently had a magic hold upon me, and I stopped my ears as if a Siren sang.... The light went out. I had no will to trim it. The darkness was suffocating. ¶So I rose and left the house, & the white moon was genial by comparison. In Chapman's phrase, the moon had *comforted the night*. My path went towards the lodgings of a friend who would, I knew, be awake among his books. ¶That setting moon, seen through nocturnal scud, was turbulently besieged by clouds, black as pitch, plunging over the horizon. With its ray, or with an illumination—neither of star nor sun—that chances oftentimes by night, the western sky was pale. Everything was quiet. Sight of all save the moon and the wayside elm grove was unaccountably soon lost. Now and again the white derelict crescent foundered, and was gone among interminable precipices of midnight; & no star shone; or, if one, it was infinitely distant, and seemed no more than the reflection of a star, as it vanished and reappeared in one of the lugubrious gulfs, among the white floes of cloud at the zenith. A wind had arisen; but, victorious over the storm, the darkness made a strange peace. Everything was quiet, though mighty trees were thrown down and buildings moaned. ¶The clarity of the air and the insistent outlines of things were remarkable, and as perfect as at noon, though the clarity was different, different in what it visited & what forgot. The elm trees were aggrandised in majesty and apparently in bulk, with all the mysterious aloofness of trees. The great boles were massive & near. Their delicate anatomy seemed to reach into the sky. ¶"Sprites of the blest and every saint y-dead" were abroad in that pure night,

and by the time I reached the study of —— my spirits were recovered. ¶We talked of many things. We agreed [we had need to] in cursing print for destroying in part the individuality or value of handwriting by separating it from authorship; and —— became autobiographical. He began: ¶"'If I am no better than other men, at least I am different,' said Rousseau. It was an unneccessary preliminary. The least of us can say as much. The poet fears that Nature has broken the mould that shaped his mistress; but the earth is littered with chrysalides: no two are alike. Hence the folly of accusing anyone of plagiarism. For when I have spoken a word—no matter who has spoken it before—it becomes mine. The accent, the context, the particular intention, shapes it anew. The meanest can say this; and who knows so thoroughly his neighbour's soul as to say truthfully, 'I understand thee'? Thus we are all authors, all original. This man buys a book, and it becomes his in every sense, when he has read it, though it bears another's name on the back. When I see my friend's bookshelves I say to myself, 'These are——'s or——'s works. The author has done nothing more than put on paper what this man has put into his heart and on his shelves: the more cunning he!' To open a book is ever to go on a voyage of discovery. The anchor is up, and you are adrift on the unknown. This is virgin soil you touch. With your discoveries you deal as discoverers have done before; you take possession of it in the name of the king—yourself; your possession is confirmed by a bull from the Pope—yourself; you are Columbus and Ferdinand and Alexander in one. You shall know a man by his books. I was away from home once, and a lady I had never seen occupied my room. She was taken suddenly ill, and left an unfinished letter on the desk—which I read for good reasons. Judge whether it was kind or unkind! but the letter contained a portrait of me, drawn in a page of subtle sentences, from my books.... When I see a fat russet folio make itself a home between

the gaudy fashions of to-day—ragged and grim—

In bearded majesty

I know how I shall greet the man that is owner thereof. Moving often among books, I came to see a likeness in them to men. Again, some men resemble books. There is ——, enormous, well-groomed, unsociable, inarticulate, but with an expression that says 'Look within'; he is like an old dictionary 'in one volume quarto, old calf, neat.' To what, save Cato's 'Agriculture' bound in pigskin, shall I compare ——, blunt, autochthonous, truthful to a fault? Again ——, fantastic, always in mourning for a relative whose ink runs dry when she should have put him in her will—but ever youthful and 'going merrily to heaven'; he must go on the same shelf as yonder duodecimo 'Elia' in gloomy levant. What gentle, tender damsels—what old maids, lachrymose and devout—what red-faced, stout-hearted housewives, are there among books! & great fellows with yard-long oaths [writ with a sword], and melancholic lovers. Like men, too, no doubt—and not unlike women—the exterior often seems [only, perhaps, because we know not how to judge] to misrepresent the soul of the book, as must happen more often as the binding becomes wholly separate from the writing of a book; and as people come to look merely at the 'object' of a writer, and soon regard the book not as a medium, but as an obstacle, between mind and mind; 'c'est pourquoi,' says Rabelais half in sadness, 'fault ouvrir le livre et soigneusement peser ce que y est deduict.' ¶"The other day I saw a new whim in a library that vastly pleased me. There were folios that might serve to prop a temple—dear, old malodorous, rain-worn 'Compleat Anglers'; *Spectators* with breakfast stains; Lambs so marked that only a line here and there was left, & that found, after all, to be the best! . . . a nation of books, in perfect order, *simplex munditiis*. Such order, however, I had not seen elsewhere. It was a concatenation in which no book [had it lived and could say Good-morrow!] would have disdained its neigh-

bour. Every book, indeed, seemed just to have ceased talking to its neighbours when I came in. Many of the books I knew. That Shelley, for example, reminded me of days among the caracoling birch trees of Wimbledon, and the light grey lances of the hazels interwoven by the wind. . . Every shelf was a chord of meditation. That *'Can a Thelyn,'* again, unlocked a Welsh vignette, seen from Bryn Gwyn Bach [The Little White Hill]—a moonlit estuary like a shield of silver, emblazoned with sable tree shadows. By reminiscential evocation, that 'Temple' seemed to bear the very scent of Eton lime blossoms, an amber fervid evening, and all the nuptial splendour of June. In that way every shelf told in orderly fashion more truth than most autobiographies so called. But one shelf contained a harlequinade of books. I tried to reconcile them, but failed. The editions spoke of no choice. For the most part they were gay and cheap, and [strange for such a good uncle of books] dog's-eared. The 'Compleat Angler,' books of travel, King Arthur, Scott—this was strange harmony ! So I took one down. The flyleaf bore my friend's name in an unknown handwriting, very childish, precise, yet awkward, with the early date of 18—. ¶" 'These, then,' I said, 'must be the books of your childhood?' ¶" 'You are right,' said he. 'Have you not seen how a gardener lovingly permits some ragged brier to wander free, because it was the step-parent to those exquisite roses that cling in December, like handfuls of early snow, to the grey walls ? Well, for something like his reasons I preserve these books. That Defoe, for example, is father to every romance upon my shelves ; that 'Compleat Angler' to every book of poems and philosophy—to Shelley, Wordsworth, Dyer, to Coleridge, Ruskin, Lamb. I could not live without them. It is true that I live, as Leonardo wrote, backwards ; but even were it otherwise, I should be like one bereft of memory or her keys, without them, and life would be more histrionic than ever. These are, indeed, but 'bundles of cypress,' or locks of hair from a life that is dead ;

but they save me from the pain of feeling that death itself is dead. . . And as you have said, they seemed to be rather my books than Scott's or Walton's; I should resent their ill-treatment as if they were. For between the lines are inscribed in subtle, invisible characters my earliest half thoughts; the backgrounds of the pictures are peopled by my earliest dreams. The book is mine by interchange of thought.

> He piped, I sung; and when he sung I piped.

"A book to me was a piece of enchantment more fascinating than the monotonous miracles of Grimm. It was quite possible for a dainty sapient fairy—as, indeed, I read somewhere—to emerge from the leaves of a reverend book. The fairy was there, and marshalled hosts of fantastic creatures, as real as the people I saw around, and yet:

> As they please
> They limn themselves, and colour, shape or size,
> Assume as likes them best, condense or rare.

"I had few preferences at first; one book was as wonderful as another; and I could have ill-endured that holocaust suggested by Sir Thomas Browne 'to condemn to the fire those swarms and millions of rhapsodies begotten only to distract and allure the weaker judgment of scholars, & to maintain the trade & mystery of typographers!' The mystery of typographers! there lay half the spell. The child had only to read a few words and the charm worked—

> And from these create he can
> Forms more real than living man,
> Nurselings of immortality.

The words might be never so poor, the print never so faulty, the binding base—it was ethereal substance; I cared only for the characters. For the fancy worked so finely, and took wing at the barest suggestion. No matter how strange and exotic the matter, I

was at once at home. Was it the polar world, the tropic forest and its myriad rainbow wings, the sea? I was not surprised, I had been there—long ago; all was as it should be; yes! I had been there in my dreams & anticipated the boldest explorers. I might have safely shaken my head after reading Sir Samuel Baker's Travels; 'but I knew it all'—in fancy outstripping his painful marches, like the swallows that fly overhead. I should have greeted Man Friday with no more surprise than I should my brother. I filled every inch with living forms. No street was empty. No sky was bare. I was never alone. Often, indeed, I exchanged masks with the fictitious characters. I lived their life: therefore, I find myself now confusing the adventures of hero & heroine with my own, and read of the deeds of Amadis or Amaryllis as mine. Was it I, or was it Lancelot, that carried Arthur's offer of marriage to Guinevere? . . . I was a tyrannous master of all puppets that books put into my sway. If the author did not describe them—and probably also if he did—I put them into garments to suit my sense of fitness. I chose their background: I knew, for example, the sandy shore of a pond on a certain common, where years ago, if you sought carefully, you would find the cannibal footsteps that startled Crusoe. I knew the very gap in the coppice of oaks through which Tristram appeared in his armour, all dew-bespattered, as if with actual fire. Even now as I pass I see Palomides, pensively treading the forest walks, so tall that his charger follows without drooping head. To me the author was a magician—as Virgil and Horace were to the dark ages. I would have credited *Sortes Malorianæ*. The watchful lamp shining for miles over the sleepy land; the quill [a rhabdomancer's wand]; the library overhead & around; the white paper on which the mind was casting lines of shadow; and he writing alone in the hushed midnight with 'earthquake & eclipse' for ink, were no less impressive than the crucible & enginery of alchemists, elaborating puissant alcahests in olden times. Every letter was a symbol whose

import was not fully interpretable even by sages. More lay hid in printed pages than met the eye; & authors found in me the perfect reader, who read all 'en la perfectissime partie.' There was vanity in my affection, too; so that I cared for old quaint authors partly because I could correct such 'errors' of spelling as I found in the '*Compleat* Angler.' I was what quaint John Earle calls 'the surgeon of old authors,' who 'healed the wounds of dust & ignorance.' Later on, when I made fishing an excuse for many hours afield, Izaak had his revenge, for I tried all the strange baits with which he deluded himself, if not the fish; but at first I was chiefly pleased by the visions of a sweet life passed in the meadows & in rooms where the scent of the meadows lingered. The scene was indeed new, though I expected all as it came. But in a life of disappointments, the advent of the thing expected is really the finest of surprises. So in many books I enjoyed the matter even though my knowledge of it first came through books. No wonders of tropic sound & colour startled me. Great rivers 'big as any sea'; infinite wilds of palm and sand; olive and chestnut of Italy were no stranger than the hollyhocks under the apple-trees in the old Welsh garden. I suppose it was the splendour of the dream world,

A prophet oft [and oft a historie],

that prepared my mind for the splendour of the earth. When I crossed the Arctic deserts [bolstered in an armchair by crimson cushions] I felt as little surprised as the most battered mariner; I had seen ice-fields vaster. The Alps were fine, but I knew finer hills than that. Como was a dull puddle compared with what I knew. ¶"And how deliciously books became incorporate with places! with times of the year! with matins or vespers! 'The Ancient Mariner' rests for ever in the setting [as of sombre monastic illuminations] of the first midnight I ever looked out upon—a still midnight in black and white—in January—with a few big stars that withered one at a time occasionally under invisible cloud. The

house was nervously expecting a visitor. I was left to myself, forgotten. The room was half lighted; many of the great book-shelves were in gloom; outside, the world of trees & roof ridges piercing the sky; beyond, the ghost of a great mountain, like a cloud; and all dark to the grey edges of the sea, on to where—in the moonlight 'far off their coming shone'—rollers fell with a roar every now and then. And the mystery of the everyday world seen thus, as I sat in the peopled solitude of the library, has never quite departed:

> There nothing common was or mean
> Upon that memorable scene.

At last I fell asleep and the great book almost covered me as I lay. This copy of the 'Opium-Eater,' too, summons my thoughts 'to the court of affection,' Sir Philip Sidney calls it, 'held by that racking steward Remembrance.' My fancy wandered at the passage ending: "'. . . In the very aspect and the sepulchral stillness of the motionless day, as solemnly it wore away through morning, noontide, afternoon, to meet the darkness that was hurrying to swallow up its beauty, I had a fantastic feeling as though I read the very language of resignation when bending before some irresistible agency. And at intervals I heard—in how different a key—the raving, the everlasting uproar of that dreadful metropolis, which at every step was coming nearer, and beckoning [as it seemed] to myself for purposes as dim, for issues as incalculable, as the path of cannon-shots fired at random and in darkness.' Forgive me another trifle from the rue and lavender of memory. ¶"It was a Sunday evening; I was left quite alone, though rather unwell—feverish and excited, seeing visions. 'Everybody was gone!'—as I cried whimpering in the folds of a curtain, where long after dark a visitor found me out. . . . It was 'Robinson Crusoe' that produced the exaggeration of irritability and implacable loneliness that were so stamped upon my mind. Outside, swans floated shadowless on a moonlit pool. Pale summer lightning winked low down at inter-

vals. With what mystery [remembering afresh and with pleasure ancient matters] the whole scene now returns—myself strangely isolated and belittled, as England seemed in the great globe of the library. ¶"I had almost forgotten this Hazlitt reminding me of a great lover of books; Corydon of—— College, Oxford, with whom I dined as a small boy. Corydon was a notable youth, his chestnut hair gadding about a delicate face, his voice like the after sound of a bell, his intellect developed in the lines of a Grecian rhapsodist, but with a certain lack of articulation & wildness of habit through which his written work savoured of wine more than the lamp. We and Corydon made a party of six. His gestures, particularly a gracious way of bowing his head as he smiled, had a magic that quickly made our number seem inevitable and right [so that one more or less would have spoilt the whole], much as the outstretched arms of Mary in 'Our Lady of the Rocks,' harmonize and unify the group. Very soon everyone was talking eagerly in turn. A choicely laden board, of which I probably alone took notice, was cleared before anyone was aware. Corydon only was now speaking, I remember, when hardly to our surprise, the servant carried in a strange, but noble course; my portion was a copy of 'Elia,' and I think there was nothing but Lamb upon the dish; however it was, we had each a memorable book—I put mine in my pocket—and the conversation ran happily into every nook that rivers from Helicon visit. Again and again the old servant came in with a great smile, bearing now a dish of folios, & now, as the lights in the candlesticks began to struggle ere they went out, a plate of dainty duodecimos. Some of them, as I hear, were from the inmost very kernel of Corydon library, priceless gifts. Then indeed it was fine to see the connoisseurs tasting & quickly devouring the new, ancient volumes that he provided. Wine was also on the table. One said that Shelley and champagne were excellent; and a compôte of port, Montaigne and pomegranetes, incomparable. One old bookworm, whom I

may not omit, drew away into a delicious chair, with a long sought volume, like a dog with a bone, and would not be distracted. Even at the mid strokes of midnight we lingered and retiring to our rooms, when I kept feverishly awake on my father's knee, talked until the earliest swallow twittered, and we felt that last night we had truly 'dined.'"





— X —

ON THE EVENLODE

IT was the season when days are so long that we must sleep lightlier than swallows, if sunset and sunrise are not to pass unsaluted. That day had been dedicated long ago to indolence. One of my festal, holy days it was, a day italicized on my calendar of saints, whose tranquil names I may not betray. On its eve, I composed my thoughts for the night with that vague sense of expectation with which I always enter upon sleep, wondering what dreams may come, and with what gifts. ¶When I rose it was light, though not yet day. Alone in my room, high up among the spires, the horned turrets, the acres of dark blue gleaming slate, I took a mouthful of fruit and milk, with hopes that the summer morning would bring

me somewhere pleasantly to breakfast. Then I set out. Even now the milk must be drumming yonder in the pails! The morning was already hot, so that the chill bath of shadow underneath the lindens here and there was pleasant. At the river I took a dinghy and sculled for nearly two hours, while the fresh perfumes, refined by gale and dew—the blackbird's listless note, with a freshness as if the dew were in it—the wings rising and falling in twinkling thickets—the vinous air of June, all dealt with me as they would. Hardly a thought or memory shaped itself. Nevertheless, I was conscious of that blest lucidity, that physical well-being of the brain, "like the head of a mountain in blue air and sunshine," which is so rarely achieved except in youth. Thus in a prolongation of the mood of sleep, whose powerful touch was on me still, as I knew when I could find no answer for a questioning wayfarer, I covered several miles by one impulse, and as if nothing had intervened, resumed my breakfast thoughts. For the pebbles of a shallow had been shrieking under the boat, which could go no farther. Sounds and odours suddenly invaded and startled my senses. Solitude asserted itself. The day had come: and beads of night mist were humming as they fell upon the stream from off the willows. ¶Precisely there I had never been before, though I knew the river well. Drawn, however, by a clamour of poultry and brass pans, I presently found myself at a farmhouse door. The river was out of sight and even of hearing, for in summer it stole through the land like a dream. ¶After a flutter at the unexpected arrival, the farm folk gave me a bowl of cream and a golden loaf with honey: then left me. Something puritanic in the place—or was it something in the air before the cockcrow of civilization?—endowed the meal with a holy sweetness as of a sacrament. I seemed to enjoy the merely physical life of the moment more purely and loftily than at other times the spiritual even. And there was still an awful purity in the air: on the smooth, stony beech-tree bark lay as if carved, the clear, subtle-shapen shadows of leaf and

blossom ; the lawn, level as a pond, was exquisitely damaskeened by daisies and buttercups. ¶In a sitting room, where I had leave to reſt, the aged calm was ſtartled by my entry. The perfectly ſtill cool atmosphere had a flavour of centuries despite the open window. Amid such appropriate circumſtances there hung before me the portrait of a young girl, a swan-throated, languid damsel, her raven hair concealing all of her ear save a white crescent, a semicircle of golden beads over her breaſt, and pervading all an expression more tragic than if Oedipus cried "Mother !" in the dark cataſtrophe. Was it our Lady looking for the Cross, in that great darkness over all the earth ? Was it Polyxena, Hecuba's sweet & magnanimous daughter, with the dignity of a ſtatue and the sensitiveness of a flower ? Was it the Magdalen beholding angels in the dove's twilight ? Was it Joan of Arc, transported by her own magic perhaps, for one hour from fatal Rouen, to see the loving faces under the shadow of Domremy Woods ? Was it St. Cecilia liſtening to music ? or was it Guinevere in her father's house, lit by the ſtrange light of things not yet above the horizon? Looking carefully I found the name. In a corner I found the initials of that name. It was therefore a piece of autobiography. ¶The room was oak-furnished in a sombre but fantaſtic ſtyle, apparently the work of a ruſtic craftsman who had set his fancy free, not unsuccessfully. It looked little used, and, as such rooms in the country often are, given over to the dead [for whom one might fancy those great chairs had so long been left empty], with its photographs all but faded away, its frail old china, its recording Bible, its curious keepsakes from alien shores and savannahs. Through its old world savour came a thin breath of perfume from a bowl of reed colonnettes & foamy meadow-sweet. Now and then I espied, in a mirror, the mowers dreamily swaying like summer waves, or reſting a moment on their scythes. I could sometimes catch faint sounds : yet they seemed but echoes. Thus the world outside was realised only as in a book. So I had opened

a chance volume, and was reading :—

Will no one tell me what she sings?
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
For old, unhappy far-off things,
And battles long ago:
Or is it some more humble lay,
Familiar matter of to-day?
Some natural sorrow, loss or pain,
That has been, and may be again!

when a young girl came in, neither Polyxena, nor Magdalen, nor Guinevere, though it was her portrait that hung upon the wall. If her hair had not whispered in the air, I should have called her spirit or fay: so light she was, moving softly as if she flew. Though a noticeable face, hers was not easily to be remembered. It seemed a type rather than an individual face, the sum of many diverse souls. The ivory features were grave, yet ready to smile, with a meaning, old-fashioned sweetness, as of a century of different thoughts and passions from ours. Her large grey eyes were thinking continually. Often a long time passes ere we look into the eyes even of a lover. We could not say whether they were blue, or grey, or brown. But her eyes cried out to me instantly. Over them, almost oppressing them, the space up to the brows was full and wide, the eyebrows themselves fine, long, and curved like a hawk's outspread wings. The mouth was perhaps a little wide, because the corners, curling upwards, were unusually long: the lips delicately cut, their crimson wonderfully contrasting with her cheeks, as I have seen a creeper leaf lie in November on a film of earliest snow. The hands were small, but the fingers seemed long, being taper, arched & languid. Her whole expression was one of holy wistfulness, but changed ceaselessly and even contradicted itself, like a picture seen again in other days: it was full of the sorrow there is in laughter, the joy in tears. To think of her in the vulgar contacts of life was impossible. Even her simple "Good morning" could not dispel the dreams by

which I was besieged : it sounded so odd, that I could not respond. So she sat down and played simple tunes on an organ. It was mere practice, earnest, sensitive, but unskilful: yet the sound mastered and swayed me inexorably. One stop there was that when touched laid open the gates of Paradise and let free its harmonies. ¶I laid aside my book and watched. She was too intent to observe. She was seated on a tall, straight-backed chair, & made a quaint figure, her face more serious than before, her abundant hair falling in a cascade over her shoulders, and occasionally creeping rebelliously over the silver half moon of her forehead which it framed, until she had to pause in order to persuade it back. Somehow within me was touched a chord that I knew I had heard—I knew not how long ago. As often at sunset the mind stirs afresh with impulses long thought ensepulchred, so it was now. Nor was the spell broken when she rose, and after shifting a few chairs, began to dance, with the same earnestness, a severe gaiety. ¶My brain was full of gracious phrases of salute as she left; my tongue refused; & all I said concerned the weather; to which she laughed divinely in reply. ¶Perhaps I should never see her again, but she haunted the memory of that resplendent day, immortalising the fragrance of the blue cottage smoke mounting in still air, the shadows lying in pools [as it were] upon the lawns, & the gauzy moon far away eastward. Laid up in the musk & lavender of my memory, she had become according to my mood Polyxena, Magdalen, Joan of Arc, but above all a St. Cecilia, "near gilded organ pipes." ¶Before noon I left, with a plan of soon returning. But the next day passed, and several more. When at last I went, my flowers from that sweet place had withered. A friend accompanied me. I need say no more. The river is branched and serpentine just there, and we searched in vain. Even I sometimes think there never was such a farmhouse & St. Cecilia, though in my dreams it is otherwise.



— XI —

RECOLLECTIONS OF NOVEMBER

IN the green country it is often hard to say, unprejudiced, what the season is; and if a revenant noted such things, he would find that many days belied the calendar. Indeed, on first going afield after a long imprisonment by illness, I have detected autumnal savours in a stagnant February day, and mistaken the bravery of October for the nuptial splendour of the spring. Seen afar off, the poplars seem to be on fire with blossoms instead of dying foliage in September. In April the young creeper leaves have a look of autumn in their bronzed luxuriance. I have known many a beaming day with "June in her eyes," as Thomas Carew says—

June in her eyes, in her heart January.

with a drear wind that kills the budding roses. But in my suburban street every season, almost every month, is marked as it were in heavy black letter at its entrance. Nature here uses a brief language, like the hand at Belshazzar's feast, and I know that it is November by the dull, sad trampling of the hoofs & feet; by that testy wind among the chimneys [the mere *body* of the wind; its *soul* is left among the hills]; by the light, as of an unsnuffed candle, of the sun, that scarcely at midday surmounts the tallest housetops; by the barren morning twilight, broken by no jolly sound of boys whistling or ballad-singing on their errands. The fire should rightly grow pale toward noon, & I detest its continual brightness, which cannot check a shudder as I read the lines on November by a Welsh poet of four or five centuries back. In his Novembers, pigs became fat and men dreamed of Christmas. The minstrels began to appear, making a second spring. The barns were full—a pleasant thought that made the bread taste sweet. The butcher was hard at work. The sea, he says, was joyful, and "marrowy the contents of every pot." The nights were "long to sprightly prisoners," which I take to refer to the delicious evenings the old Welsh spent, exchanging by the fireside proverbs & tales. He ends characteristically: "There are three classes that are not often contented—the sorrowful, the ill-tempered, the miserly." As if hardly these, in his day, could resist the balm and oil of festal tables, good fires, and minstrelsy! Oh, happy days! ¶ And yet I have joys he never dreamed of, in this mean street. How shall I say with what thoughts I spy a seagull from my window?—spreading her great wings in flight at altitudes whence perhaps she beholds the sea—an emblem of that liberty I boast, but do not feel. Sometimes an autumn leaf of vermeil or of gold is blown into my room, and such a feeble knocking will throw open many doors of memory. At night, too, there is often a moon. I do not think the moon is anywhere half so wonderful as in the town. We see "the other side" of her, as a half-wise rustic

once said to me. How like to some pale lady of pity she will arise, softly, as if she feared to wake us, out of yonder dismal chimneys! In summer she seems to pass from house to house, low down, a celeſtial watchman, blessing the doors and windows. Sometimes, more like Aphrodite than Hecate, she comes up all rosy warm. Sometimes, in November, she sits aloft like a halcyon brooding over the ſtrange and lethal calm of London, her face expressing undecipherable things, like La Joconde. Sometimes, white and froſtbit, she flies across the mighty dark blue spaces as if she were hurrying to Actæon's fate, & those hungry clouds were the hounds pursuing. ¶There has been but one sunset since I came hither, and in the cold succeeding light, so countercharged with darkness, great clouds began to troop toward the weſt, sombre, ſtealthy, noiseless; haſtening and yet ſteadfaſt, as if some fate marshalled their jetty columns—hushing all that lay beneath—all moving in one path, yet never joſtling, like hooded prieſts. To what weird banquet, to what myſterious shrine, were they advancing—to what shrine among the firs of an unseen horizon, with the crow and the bat? Or were they retreating, dejected gueſts, from some palace in the leaden eaſt? In the weſt, juſt above the roofs, hung the white evening ſtar. As the cloud approached she seemed to be a maiden —Una, perhaps, encircled by a crew of satyrs. Anon she seemed to be a witch alluring them. ¶The moon is my cloſeſt neighbour, but there is also close at hand a superb labourer, who, if he were of ſtone, and not of gnarled brown flesh, might ſtand in a temple of fame as Cincinnatus. At times I drink a cup of tea—or something warmer—with him. Even without a cup, he sits, as it were, "with his feet by the fire, his ſtomach at the board," so genial is he, and would shake Alexander by the hand, with a greeting like the old French bacchanal's, *bon vieux drôle Anacrêon*. I feel warmer in my bed as I hear him shouting good-day, in the shrewd early morning, long before dawn. His bad jokes are more laughable than the very

best of good ones. Like all good men, he is an assiduous smoker; his pipe is to him a temple of Vesta, and he a goodly stoker; out of his nostrils goeth smoke, & his wife calls him Leviathan. When I remarked that I thought he had no difficulty in stopping smoking, if he liked, " No," he answered, "but the difficulty is in the liking." I would rather live a day such as he lives than have written *The Tempest.* ¶The only other neighbours with whom I am on calling terms are certain tall poplars, half a mile away. There the calendar is observed less slavishly, and though it be November I go to see a fine yellow sunlight slanting among the only half-denuded branches, hardly touched until yesterday's rainy tempest broke up for ever the sibylline summer meanings of their leaves. But they ought to be visited by night. By day they may appear insignificant among the houses that have risen around. They seem exotic, out of place—Heliades, daughters of the Sun indeed, condemned to weep amber tears—horribly slender, unprotected, naked to the world. In the night, however, they seem to have grown by magical increase. They have a solemn look in the evenfall of these sad fading days. The place is too mournful. There is usually one empty house, and the withering foliage whips the panes. I have spent many an evening inside, listening to the wind. But I could not live there; I should be bound to open the window at that piteous sound, as if to let in a storm-stricken bird, & expect to find the dryad wringing her hands in sorrow. The poplars contrive in summer to look cheerful, yet I think they love the autumn best. They are in love with their own decay, like old and widowed ladies that have lived on into these flat unprofitable times. ¶On another side, and farther still, lies a common, beautiful with gorse, though in the main a mournful place. I sometimes walk there in the morning, between eleven and noon, and meet a number of odd people, in this hour when the prosperous are at their work. They stare at me, and I at them, wondering what the shabby raiment hides. For they—I might

say we—are usually ill-dressed, eccentrically-groomed, dreamy self-conscious people, evidently with secrets. I surmise that they are such as have failed in the world for some vices of honesty, or strangeness, or carelessness of opinion. *Laudatur et alget.* One seems to be a cadet of some grand fallen house, with no insignia left save a gold snuff box [sans snuff] and a pair of ivory hands. Another is perhaps an author, stately, uncomplaining, morose withal, whose nonsense did not suit the times.

> The world is all before him, where to choose
> His place of rest,

but at his garret the duns are in occupation. Another, though singularly jaded, is evidently an old beau, once, no doubt, a Fastidious Brisk, "a good property to perfume the boot of a coach," using delicate oaths; with soiled necktie scrupulously folded, his trousers turned up [only to display their threadbare edges and a pair of leanest shanks]; brought to the dust by the law and some indignant plotter for his hand. One is a man of eighty, who wears a stock—probably a superannuated clerk, one who has seen his master's failure [it may be], and refuses another place. I see him conning the law news—though he seems too blind to read—always with a knowing smile or frown. They are always solitary. They regard one another with suspicion, seem to fear lest questions be asked, and never exchange greetings. They give themselves airs, as hoping to draw toward them the respect they once commanded. And for the most part they are men. One lady I remember, a venerable but grim and unapproachable dame—the relict, perhaps, of a gentleman, an insolvent rake. I have heard her mutter, in a temper out of keeping with her gentility, and shake her slender staff, as if she cried, like Lear:—

> I have seen the day, with my good biting falchion
> I would have made them skip: I am old now.

She is a great reader, in sunny intervals, on a seat overhung, but

not shaded, by hawthorn, and I love to see her poring, with tears in her eyes, over a book which I have purposely left there as she approached. In this way she has read George Herbert's *Temple, The Worldling's Looking Glass,* and many more. . . . It would be easy to laugh when she and three or four of these poor souls are sheltered under the same tree from the rain—never speaking, and looking unconcerned, but all the time nervously anxious to impress, and the beau arranging his tie. ¶In the evenings I could almost love these brand-new streets, so nimbly do they set the mind working to find anodynes and fantasies "to batter the walls of melancholy." My books seem to be fond of the night—poor ghosts of buried minds—and are never so apt as in the faint candlelight to be taken down and read, or perhaps merely glanced at as I turn the pages, which I think they best enjoy. The portrait of Andrea del Sarto, by his own censorious hand, hangs near, and loves the twilight. If ever, he seems now to smile. 'Tis such a light that in it fancy can without apparent falseness weave suitable environment for all the ghostly lords & ladies. Proserpina, with the pomegranate, may now have Enna within sight. Beatrice d'Este, with passion long subdued, gazes upon the pageantry of Milan, and cares no more for Sforza and the Sanseverini—does not even hate Lucrezia and Cecilia. . . . ¶I recall November holidays in a tangled wood, having all the perfume and sequestered sense of virgin forest, that lay in the hollows of some undulating upland, whence, with "morning souls" alert, we used to be able to see the dawn, a rust-red smoke waving along the horizon, and presently turned to saffron; then a sky of pearl, with a faint bloom of the night blue upon it; and one by one the stars went out, so slowly that we fancied they would never disappear if we watched them vigilantly; the consumptive moon went down, having outlived her light, as the first blackbird awakened with a cornet call; the sparrows, like schoolboys, on those cold mornings, chattered and fluttered, but dared not leave

the eaves; and all the cold of the windy dawn seemed to be in the ſtarling's thin piping. Sometimes on the lawny interſpaces of the wood we saw fallen leaves and fruit, gold & ſilver, like ſheddings from Heſperidian gardens, in the noonday ſun. And oh for the tang of acorns eaten for wantonneſs in ſunſhine from which we never miſſed the heat! Not until nightfall did we return, and then, "happy, happy livers," laughed as our feet ſhivered the froſt into a myriad prisms. ¶But to-night, as I take the ſelf-ſame walk, under the flying rags of a majeſtic ſunſet, the grey and ſilent landſcape of few trees and many houſes ſeems a deſerted camp [which I ſtartle when I tread among the fallen leaves], or a Canaan from which the happy ſavage, childhood, has been baniſhed. High up on a blank wall lingers one pure white roſe. White with cold, and flickering as if the powerful wind might blow them out, a few ſtars ſhine. Far away the leafleſs branches of an elm grove look like old print againſt the ſky. ¶And now, by the hearthſide, I like beſt among books the faint perfumes of thoſe old forgotten things that claim a little pity along with my love. I had rather the Emblems of Quarles than mightier books where there is too much of the fever and the fret of real paſſionate life. Odd books of devotion, of church muſic, the happy or peeviſh fancies of religious ſouls, please me well. I plead guilty to liking a thing becauſe 'tis old. I believe, were I alive two hundred years hence, I ſhould like ſilk hats. As George Herbert ſays of two words he ſet great ſtore by:—

> As amber-gris leaves a rich ſcent
> Unto the taſter,
> So do theſe words a ſweet content,
> An oriental fragrancy. . . .
> With theſe all day I do perfume my mind,
> My mind e'en thruſt into them both;
> That I might find
> What cordials make this curious broth,
> This broth of ſmells, that feeds and fats my mind.

Were it always evening I could live ever thus, and find in it a pleasing substitute for Arcadia, in which, as the bricks mellowed around me and all things took "a deep autumnal tone," I should be as much in love with the life as Charles Cotton with his, and capable of a vanity like his, and I hope as pardonable. How delicious are those execrable "irregular stanzas" of his, where he seems to expect to go to heaven, because

> Good Lord! how sweet are all things here,
> . . . . . .
> *How cleanly do we feed and lie.*
> Lord! what good temperate hours we keep!
> How quietly we sleep!
> How innocent from the lewd Fashion
> Is all our Business, all our Recreation!

Perhaps, indeed, of such is the kingdom of heaven. ¶It has been observed that we "devour" a book, and "discuss" a turkey or chine; in Lilly I find a good fellow who wants to "confer" certain liquor: and with the help of these metaphors I have often dined well, though I have eaten little. I have meditated, indeed, a new cookery book for the library, or "every bookman his own cook," but the tradesmen's dissuasions have prevailed. But out upon them! I had hoped by this means to record those messes of old calf and dog's-ears that so reduced our bills at——. Many a time and oft have I seen a guest's lips glorified as if he tasted ambrosia, after reading Greek—Euripides, perhaps, or something solemn from Callimachus. A Welshman of the company declared that in speaking his own fine tongue he seemed to taste buttermilk and fruit at some mountain farm, a mile nearer heaven than one commonly lives. Corydon used to say he would never read Shelley save at midnight, because he could not bear to eat soon after the taste of those melodious syllables. Give me that man whose *mind* is, in a better sense than Terence intended, always among the pots and pans. And I think, on this humming midnight, I could sleep

well, even supperless, after Ben Jonson's lusty lines "Inviting a Friend to Supper":—

To-night, grave sir, both my poor house and I
Do equally desire your company;
Not that we think us worthy such a guest,
But that your worth will dignify our feast,
With those that come; whose grace may make that seem
Something, which else could hope for no esteem.
It is the fair acceptance, sir, creates
The entertainment perfect, not the cates.
Yet shall you have, to rectify your palate,
An olive, capers, or some better salad
Ushering the mutton. . .

. . . . . .

I'll tell you of more, and lie, so you will come,
Of partridge, pheasant, woodcock, of which some
May yet be there; and godwit, if we can;
Knat, rail, and ruff, too. Howsoe'er, my man
Shall read a piece of Virgil, Tacitus,
Livy, or of some better book to us,
Of which we'll speak our minds, amidst our meat.

. . . . . .

Nor shall our cups make any guilty men;
But at our parting, we will be, as when
We innocently met. No simple word
That shall be uttered at our mirthful board,
Shall make us sad next morning; or affright
The liberty that we'll enjoy to-night.



— XII —

RAIN

THE prejudice of poets against water has perhaps kept rain out of fashion in literature. It is true that rain is among the subtle, anonymous *dramatis personæ* of Lear, and that Milton wove into the harmonies of melancholy "the minute-drops from off the eaves." Swift's famous "Shower" knocks somewhat grossly at the door. "There never was such a shower since Danae's" ran contemporary compliment. There is, too, an allusion to rain in "Childe Harold," as a pianissimo accompaniment to storms. But it is characteristic of modern poetry, as a criticism of life by livers, that it has left the praise of rain to hop farmers and of mud to shoe-blacks. If literature were faithful to life, there would have

been a chorus of benedictions after the rain that whispered on the hansom window-panes and sent the grumbling Thames to sleep with soft hands, as we drove from the play on a Midsummer night; the French Academy would have elected at least one member for his rendering of the meaning of sleet, during a grey and purple sunset over the coast of Brittany. Even at the fireside I am washed by rain until I seem to glimmer and rejoice like the white headstones on the hill! ¶It is falling now as I sit with paper-spoiling intention, and the sound brings back the rain that used to come from heaven on summer mornings at Oxford, while invisible cattle were lowing and doves cooing, and a distant bell was tolled: brings back the rain in a city street by night, that softened the sky to a deep blue that was the very hue of mercy thrown over the awful darkness; and—gaily, daintily—the drops that came and went [like stars in a restless sky] on the fir-tree foliage as we came to the trout river, in sudden sunlight. Now it is near sunset. The blackbirds are singing lazily in the gardens. The traffic has ceased as if the silence had cried: "No thoroughfare." A Circean lady is playing Grieg. She could turn us into swine; that her quiet smile proclaims: she does for the time change into gods some of those who are sitting in the great blue apartment, half shadowed, as the expression fluctuates, tender, minatory, tumultuous, hypnotic, vast. Still the rain is falling, and the horse-chestnuts in the street expand, their leaves shine. Their size and beauty are as things newly acquired. Two especially that rise between distant groups of houses fill the whole space of sky —touch the stars; in a few minutes, the constellations hang in their branches and swing as the trees are shaken. The rain has gone to their very hearts. They sigh tremulously as if the drops moved them with a tranquil joy. I could wish I were a horse-chestnut now. . . . . In winter I have seen them made much of by the heavens, and, against the rainy blue, so vast as to touch the roof

of the temple, like the Zeus of Pheidias, particularly when all day the shower has descended pensively and without wind. Then songs were hushed; the pools rocked only with smooth leaden waves. Before evening the rain had worked its spell. Thrushes' songs filled the hawthorns among the gorse. The wan grass was beautiful; but for a time the young blades were dominant, deep green with the depth of night, yet fresh with the freshness of day; black, dripping trees overhung the grass, and both had a colour like that of hues and forms seen through water. All things smiled faintly so that I seemed to touch the pericardium of eternity. The slight melancholy and the great solemnity of the rain that had passed away entered the song of the robin. ¶Few pictures deal nobly with rain and mud. Yet in a great city what elvish effects they prepare! Coruscating, sadly but brilliantly, the mud gravely relieves the white faces and gaudy raiment that pass by night, and adds to the dreaminess of a scene, in which the pageant of life is like a strange flora to the eye. Of all the mud I have known, the most beautiful is that which is often to be seen on the bank of Thames below Waterloo bridge, lying like a crude monster, while the sunset is rosy and green and purple on its flanks, and two swans float and barges heave at rest; or while at dawn the city is all its own, a quiet grey city that has vanished when the mud has sunk below the tide. ¶One shower I remember that wrought magic in a London garden. A kind of judicious neglect by the owner had made the garden a kindly party to any unusual trick of the elements. On the lawn was a sundial that made Time an alluring toy. At the bottom of the garden, beyond the lawn, was an enclosed space of warm rank grasses, and, rising over them a vapour of cow-parsely flowers. A white steam from the soil faintly misted the grass to the level of the tallest buttercups. Rain was falling, and the grasses and overhanging elm trees seemed to be suffering for their quietness and loneliness, to be longing for

something, as perhaps Eden also dropped "some natural tears" when left a void. A hot, not quite soothing, perfume crept over the lawn. All night I was haunted by those elms which appeared as grey women in cloaks of that ſtrange miſt. For the time, that garden was the loneliеſt place on earth, and I loved and feared its loneliness. ¶Of rain seen from indoors, falling on a broad rich land of grass and trees, or seen [from heavenly altitudes] falling on the grey and blue slates of a town I dare not speak. But I have known the rain, hissing on the lawn, complete the luxury of tea at Oxford in November, when the heart is fresh from walking. There is a generous fire; seven league slippers on the feet; hot buttered brown toaſt, and, as evening changes from grey to grey in quiet crescendo, ſtill the rain. ¶In this London garden there was one day which I may not omit, for the rain that buried it said many things which I have copied. ¶The shadow of the lime trees lay soft upon the grass, wonderfully soft because of the shy early sunlight. A bird sang such blithe notes as wakened the soul, disrobing it of the dishonours & disguſts of ages, reſtoring it to Paradise. From a corner of the garden I could see, over many ſteeples & chimneys, the side of a great wave of land, fledged with a few white cloudlets; and as yet I could not say whether these were of snow or blackthorn flowers. Fainter ſtill, among diſtant trees, I saw a doubtful glimmer which might be the forward sweeping hem of vernal splendour. In such moments of doubt I have found the calendar's positive announcement of Spring a solace. A miſt muffled the angles of the landscape, a miſt where the whole force of spring might lie in ambush. The sun had burnt for an hour like the fire of a thrifty candle. Presently it flushed [it almoſt crackled like a faggot] with a good-humoured luſtihead. Then I knew that in the grass the dewy charities of the south winds were beginning to tell, and that the haze had foſtered that slumbrous warmth in which chaffinches love to sing. Through the grey air at firſt the sky was

invisible, save a misted blue pane here and there appearing, and vanishing, and engrailed by the grey cloud. Some windows northward glowed. Something undefinable that was Spring's & Dawn's richly mounted everything; it entered the new stone church and gave it centuries backward and forward of glory and repose. Even the shadows on a dusty road were mysterious as shadow on deep water, and had an azure unknown before. And still the blackbirds sang :—

High trolollie lollie loe
High trolollie lee.
Tho' others think they have as much
Yet he that says so lies.

Then come away,
Turn countryman with me.

A wind just lifted the coltsfoot down. Such a wind it was as brings to corners where the willow-wrens never wander a sound like the song of willow-wrens and all that their bland southern voices mean among English trees. It comes in March from between the South and the East, and passes into the cold and odourless meadows, with the odour of all the flowers of the orient and the sweetness of the sea. ¶My path lay between rows of houses that were hidden by almond flowers among black boughs. If I paused—and the wind dropped—I could just detect the reluctant savour of struggling green life. Then the "lane" became the bordering road of a common. Here the sun was the genius of a company of haggard poplars in whose branches it seemed to hang, and the paths are haunted by ghosts of divers faces,—O Memory !

Tuis hic omnia plena
Muneribus.

One of these ghosts—the rain was beginning to hiss in the trees and patter on the dead leaves below—was of an old man who had

played Edmund in his youth. Beaten by a slow mortal disease in his prime, he had lived happily in the midſt of friends who never abated the services which his gracious feebleness exacted and made appear a duty. He who should have died firſt survived them all. His mind nodded and slept, leaving a childishness that was not happy. All the pleasant valetudinarian space disappeared from his memory; the tumultuous early days returned, and at intervals he ſtrayed amidſt the pageant in which the figures of Lear & Richard the Second towered with minatory pomp. For his part had ever been traitorous and base. The evil acted "in his days of nature" haunted him fearfully. In a great voice [so that he used to say: "I fear my mother hears me"] he would repeat the speech of Lear: "Howl, howl, howl, howl, Oh ! ye are men of ſtones," as often he had heard it when, as Edmund, he was borne off before the end: he seemed to whimper behind the ſtage, crying bitterly to be admitted to die before the King. Luckily, before his death all became dark. It was with surprise that I heard he was dead. For years he seemed not to have lived. . . . ¶Now the road went near several great houses, of a kind which rain makes eloquent. And the rain was falling then with a sound like the silence of a multitude. They were not the old, beautiful houses of London, but such as were built not more than sixty years ago for someone grown suddenly rich. The old houses can always chatter of what has fallen from them by indiscreet neglect or foolish care, and all muſt regret the blotting of the little unnecessary trifles that were part of their nobility, like the grassy spaces between the garden wall and the public road, where the fowls paraded, and the ivy was plaited with periwinkle to the edge of the macadam. These middle-aged houses make no such appeal. They gibber in premature senility, between tragedy and comedy. Nobody will live there now; the gardens are feeble and disordered, and the dahlias fade one by one. Passers by laugh at their "ſtyle." Even the creepers have taken no

hold of the wall and have fallen dishevelled. I do not believe the former occupants ever come a little way out of their path to see their house. Yonder, were the gaudy doors, & blinds ſtill hanging; the romantic name on the folding gates; and I remembered the autumn rain in which they took heart. Each was the gloomier for the one lamp glimmering near the gate; the soiled crimson leaves were shaken out over the path; the ſtarlings screamed mechanically; the bleared sunset was swallowed up in rain. And in that hour the house, once an anachronism, a mixture of parts of several incongruous ſtyles, seemed to have grown very old, and againſt the wildly moving sky and ſtars, it gained an indubitable ſtyle, that of Stonehenge and the mountain crag—the natural ſtyle, the immortal ſtyle of things too old. ¶Beyond these houses lay the Little House, and behind a high exclusive fence, a holly hedge and a lawn. It was empty. Its orchards were praised almoſt as they deserved, its rent lowered, in advertisements; nobody came. Yet the lawn was always green; a gardener—or who?—kept sharp the angles which it made with the drive. The crocuses came out & laſted till the weſt wind spilt their petals in the deep grass. The only sign of neglect was the temerity of the ivy, which crept through the chincks of the door, through the keyhole, into the letter-box. ¶The rooms could be dimly seen from without, especially the great shaded children's nursery that faced the north and has said to me as I have passed:

> I know the secret of the unhappiness of childhood. A fate abides with me and through her I know the laws that mingle with the roses of life the lilies of death. I have made feſtal days awful. Many a sad dreamer curses the shadows that he used to see falling on my walls in early firelight.

And it continued until I wished for a Blakesmoor where I could quiet my alarms. As a rule, there was no hint of myſterious inhabitants. The emptiness was far more myſterious. It was wonderful to see how wild the garden looked after a short desertion—

not disordered or weedy, but wild—though the flowers were of the daintiest and most elaborate kinds. Years ago I heard someone playing the *Didone abandonnata* in The Little House, and in the garden the echoes struck something that repeats them still. ¶To us, as children, it used to be a famous day when a new tenant came to this house. We had a cruel standard of fitness to apply to whomsoever came. Best of all we liked the ancient who lived in one room of it, kept no servants, put up no curtains, and in fact left the house exactly as we wished. We used to hear him singing in a cheerful rasping voice under the big cedar when he thought no one was near. When he quitted it, sitting among his furniture in an open cart, we implored him to stay. For a time we were alternately sorry & pleased at the emptiness of the house. We used to save our pocket money continuously for whole months, to buy the freehold. And so we came to have a sense of possession, if not of occupation, which [we thought] was stronger because it was not known. To the sequestered Sylvans whose escaping footsteps were heard in very early morning, we prayed

> Be present aye with favourable feet
> And all profane, audience far remove.

So intimate we grew that the garden seemed to understand us. I would that I could understand it in return. ¶On Spring days—like this—when a grass scent came into the streets as if the fields and woods were insurgent, near at hand, it was to the garden we went, counted daffodils and lime leaves, listening for the new-come martins that sang before they were seen, in the dark. In these early visits we found more in the garden than was in the articles of sale. So we hated the rhododendrons that were planted by a later tenant. He took an interest in the garden that was horrible; frivolous music was played in the house. Nevertheless, in spite of the laughter, the splendour, and the glossy carriage, the house had a defiant air, hating the young gods & goddesses

that supplanted the Olympians it once knew. All its peers in the neighbourhood had given way to villas; I thought that perchance it was time for the Little House to go. At evening the thought grew stronger; the house itself cried

Now mark me how I will undo myself.

It went on

God pardon all oaths that are broke to me

as if perhaps it knew that I had been vain enough to think I could have lived there happily, as if it cared for the foolish ritual of my sorrow. If it were destroyed, no one could assail my ownership. I might be content. *Car il en est toujours qu'on peut aimer. . . .* Yet I am not sure that I would have possessed it actually. One day two of us were looking over the gate gathering honey with our eyes, when a gracious little girl came smiling towards us; we slunk away. A little later she surprised us on tiptoe at the same place and at her invitation we entered the garden for the first time. We were persuaded to sit down near the lilacs. But we did not look round; left alone for a moment, we planned an escape. Even when she came out with a tray and sat beside us, we were not happy. I remember that we whispered together, and the child laughed and tried to put us at our ease. My friend said with a voice of discovery: "They have tea here." We were near disillusion; only, we did not know! ¶I have said there was a common next to the house. The garden was more ours than that. Independence commonly means a state in which we never know on whom we depend; the term common was false, and those who walked on it knew no such liberty as we. The garden belonged to us as truly as the world to the children who in a great library, colour the globe, red, green, and blue, for Mary, Arthur and Dick. On the common there were "strange fetters to the feet, strange manacles to the hands." If any should wonder at this let them go to the garden at evening. A half-moon is alone in the sky.

Is it green or is it white? Here and there clusters of poplars vein the horizon. At that hour the waving trees are as delicate as grasses. Some windows are lit. Here a song is ending; there a door is violently shut; but already London is growing silent. The sounds are so faint that if I pause to listen and unravel them, I can hear my heart, the ticking of my watch, but not the enormous city. Go to the garden and see, in the shadow of a cedar, the apple blossom glow.





— XIII —

CWELLYN

NEAR the river which falls from Cwellyn Lake, they say that the fairies used to dance in a meadow on fair moonlit nights. One evening the heir to the farm of Ystrad, to which the meadow belonged, hid himself in a thicket near the meadow. And while the fairies were dancing, he ran out and carried off one of the fairy women. The others at once disappeared. She resisted and cried, but he led her to his home, where he was tender to her, so that she was willing to remain as his maid-servant. But she would not tell him her name. Some time afterward he again saw the fairies in the meadow & overheard one of them saying, "The last time we met here, our sister Penelope was snatched away from

us by one of the mortals." So he returned and offered to marry her, because she was hard-working and beautiful. For a long time she would not consent; but at last she gave way, on the condition "that if ever he should strike her with iron, she would leave him and never return to him again." They were happy together for many years; and she bore him a son and a daughter; and so wise and active was she, that he became one of the richest men of that country, and besides the farm of Ystrad, he farmed all the lands on the north side of Nant-y-Bettws to the top of Snowdon, and all Cwm Brwynog in Llanberis, or about five thousand acres. But one day Penelope went with him into a field to catch a horse; and as the horse ran away from him, he was angry and threw the bridle at him, but struck Penelope instead. She disappeared. He never saw her again, but one night afterward he heard her voice at his window, asking him to take care of the children, in these words:

Oh, lest my son should suffer cold,
Him in his father's coat enfold:
Lest cold should seize my darling fair,
For her, her mother's robe prepare.

These children and their descendants were called the Pellings, says the teller of the tale; and "there are," he adds, "still living several opulent and respectable persons who are known to have sprung from the *Pellings*. The best blood in my own veins is this fairy's." ¶And of lakes, I have known Llyn-y-Fan Fach, the lonely, deep, gentle lake on the Caermarthen Fan, two thousand feet high, where, if the dawn would but last a few moments longer, or could one swim but just once more across, or sink but a little lower in its loving icy depths, one would have such dreams that the legend of the shepherd and the lady whom he loved and gained and lost upon the edge of it would fade away: and Llyn Llech Owen, and have wondered that only one legend should be remembered of

those that had been born of all the gloom and the golden lilies and the plover that glories in its loneliness; for I ſtand in need of a legend when I come down to it through rolling heathery land, through bogs, among blanched and lichened crags, and the deep sea of heather, with a few flowers and many withered ones, of red and purple whin, of gorse and gorse-flower, and [amongſt the gorse] a grey curling dead grass, which all together make the desolate colour of a "black mountain"; and when I see the water for ever waved except among the weeds in the centre, and see the water-lily leaves lifted & resembling a flock of wild-fowl, I cannot always be content to see it so remote, so entirely inhuman, and like a thing a poet might make to show a fool what solitude was, and as it remains with its one poor legend of a man who watered his horse at a well, and forgot to cover it with the ſtone, and riding away, saw the water swelling over the land from the well, and galloped back to ſtop it, and saw the lake thus created & bounded by the track of his horse's hooves; and thus it is a thing from the beginning of the world that has never exchanged a word with men, and now never will, since we have forgotten the language, though on some days the lake seems not to have forgotten it. And I have known the sombre Cenfig water among the sands, where I found the wild goose feather with which I write. ¶And I have seen other waters; but leaſt of them all can I forget the little unnecessary pool that waited alongside a quiet road & near a grim, black village. Reed and rush and moss guarded one side of it, near the road; a few hazels overhung the other side; and in their discontented writhing roots there was always an empty moorhen's neſt, and sometimes I heard the bird hoot unseen [a sound by which the pool complained, as clearly as the uprooted trees over the grave of Polydorus complained], and sometimes in the unkind grey haze of winter dawns, I saw her swimming as if vainly she would disentangle herself from the two golden chains of ripples

behind her. In the summer, the surface was a lawn of duckweed on which the gloom from the hazels found something to please itself with, in a slow meditative way, by showing how green could grow from a pure emerald, at the edge of the shadow, into a brooding vapourish hue in the last recesses of the hazels. The smell of it made one shudder at it, as at poison. An artist would hardly dare to sit near enough to mark all the greens, like a family of snaky essences, from the ancient and mysterious one within to the happy one in the sun. When the duckweed had dissolved in December, the pool did but whisper that of all things in that season, when

> Blue is the mist and hollow the corn parsnep,

it alone rejoiced. It was in sight of the smoke and the toy-like chimney-stacks of the village, of new houses all around, and of the mountains. It had no possible use—nothing would drink of it. It did not serve as a sink, like the blithe stream below. It produced neither a legend nor a brook. It was a whole half-acre given up to a moorhen and innumerable frogs. It was not even beautiful. And yet, there was the divinity of the place, embodied, though there was no need for that, in the few broken brown reeds that stood all the winter, each like a capital Greek *lambda,* out of the water. When the pool harboured the image of the moon for an hour in a winter night, it seemed to be comforted. But when the image had gone, the loss of that lovely captive was more eloquent than the little romantic hour. And I think that, after all, the pool means the beauty of a pure negation, the sweetness of utter and resolved despair, the greatness of Death itself.



— XIV —

MARCH IN WALES

JUST before dawn, I came to a cleft high in the hills, so that I could only see a little copse of oak & hazel, and in the dying moonlight a thousand white islands of cloud and mountain

Totus conlucens veste atque insignibus albis.

The night had gone, and the day had not come; and the little copse had the serious, brooding air which all things have at that hour, and especially when the land is tender with the first hope of spring and in that reverie—

Cette rêverie
Que ne pense à rien.

For what I saw seemed but the fragments of something which

night had built for its own delight, and as they became clearer and clearer they had more and more the appearance of being unbuilt and dissolved. But, gradually, the birds were let out & they sang. Their songs, on the wintry hill, which I had last visited in summer, broke upon the silence as in summer they never do, like the opening of the door of a room that is empty but has once been gay with fire and books and men; and sweet though the blackbird was, and shrill the missel-thrush, their songs were awful, and said that "a large part of the earth is still in the urn unto us." The grass, which had truly been of no colour, though my urgent memory persuaded me that it was green, began to awake to colour, and, while in the shadow of the copse the dusk was impenetrable, the light reached a knoll where there was dead bracken still. "Colour," said Novalis, "is an effort of matter to become light," and for one moment the grass upon that knoll ceased to strive and was light. A plover that wheeled close by disappeared and was but a glow. ¶I went on, and on a lower slope the ploughman was beginning to plough in the shadow. Grim and worthless looked the work, until I looked round and saw the dawn that was being prepared. But I watched too carefully, for I saw it all. Ever, as it grew, statelier and richer, I said to myself, that in a little while it would be perfected: yet still I watched and I began to think of those who saw it, as I had seen it before, from windows of towns, as they rose for work, or as they douted the candles and put away cards or books, and paused for perhaps a minute, and gazed as they never gazed at human beauty, because, though they revered it, they feared it also, and though they feared it they were fascinated. I thought of those that leapt up at it; those that mourned because they had seen it pass so often before into a common day; those that, on inhospitable roads, saw it & neglected it, or cursed it after a night in which they had drunk their last poor earnings altogether. If it would but last . . . I had been looking

at it and had not seen it, and when I dropped these thoughts I knew that it was gone, the slowly prepared and solemn dawn which made the splendid spring of that year. ¶Then I took a path which led out of sight of the white crested mountain and down among larches and oaks. ¶The wind was changing the grass from green to silver, and back again, rhythmically. In the pallid herbage at the edge of the wood it produced many little sounds, the combination of them barely louder than the sound which fancy makes among tombs; and yet that little concert passed into the ear and heart, giving a sympathy with the thousand minute sorrows of the inanimate world and a feeling that is part of the melancholy so importunately intruding on a spring day. But there, too, was trefoil, delicatest herbage of the early year, with its trick of globing and preserving rain upon its foliage, so that it is more delicate still in the grey dawn. One stalk with all its leaf singularly fine and small had grown out of a scar in a teazel stem. ¶So I came into a valley, and there was one white house in it, with a green, glowing, and humming garden, and at the door a woman who might have been the Old Year. It was one of those white houses so fair that in the old time a poet compared a girl's complexion with them, as with lilies and foam. It held all the sun, so that suddenly I knew that in another valley, farther south & farther east, the rooks were making the lanes sleepy with their busy talk; the kingfishers were in pairs on the brooks, whose gentle water was waving and combing the hair of the river moss; the gold of the willow catkin was darkened by bees; over an old root of dock was a heaving colony of gleaming ants; perhaps the chiffchaff had come to the larches and the little green moschatel was in flower with large primroses among the ash stoles in wet woods; and in the splendid moments of the day the poplars seemed to come into the world, suddenly, all purple. . . . ¶Yet here there was no rich high-hedged lane, no poplar, no noise of rooks, but only a

desolate brown moorland crossed by deep swift brooks through which the one footpath ran, and this white house, like a flower on a grave, recalling these memories of other valleys; so that I forgot that near by the birches ſtood each in a basin of foam from the dripping of miſt and rain, and that I had not yet seen a thrush's neſt in any hawthorn on those hills. Therefore, I counted that house as lucky for me as the Welshman's hazel-ſtick in the tale that is told in Iolo Morganwg's life. ¶This is the tale. ¶A Welshman, with a fine hazel-ſtick in his hand, was once ſtopped on London Bridge by an Englishman, who asked whence he came. "From my own country," said the Welshman churlishly. "Do not take it amiss," said the Englishman; "and if you will tell me what I ask, and take my advice, it will be much for your good. Under the roots of the tree from which came your ſtick, there are great treasures of gold and silver; if you can remember the place, and will take me to it, I will make the treasure yours." ¶Now knowing that the fellow was a magician, the Welshman, though at firſt unwilling to be a party in this ſtrange thing, at length agreed, and went with him to Craig-y-Dinas and showed him the hazel-tree. They dug out the root and found a broad flat ſtone underneath, which covered the entrance to a cave. They went in, the magician warning the Welshman leſt he should touch a bell that hung in the middle of their path. At the spacious further end of the cave, they saw many warriors lying asleep in a circle, with bright armour on, and weapons ready at hand. One of the warriors, refulgent above all the reſt, had a jewelled and golden crown along with the shield & battle-axe at his side. ¶At the feet of the warriors, in the middle of the circle, they saw two immense heaps, the one of gold, the other of silver, and the magician told the Welshman that he might take away as much as he could carry from either of the heaps. So he took much gold. The magician took nothing. On their way out of the cave he again warned the Welshman leſt he

should touch the bell. But should he touch it, said the magician, some of the warriors would surely awake and ask "if it was yet day": to which he must at once answer: "No, sleep thou on," whereupon the warriors would sleep again. And this the Welshman found to be truth when he staggered under his gold and grazed the bell; but remembering the other's words, he said: "Sleep thou on" when the warriors asked if it were day; and they slept. ¶When they had left the cave, and closed the entrance, the magician told the Welshman that he might return to the cave whenever he wished; that the warriors were the knights of King Arthur, and the warrior with the jewelled and golden crown was King Arthur; that they were awaiting the day when the Black Eagle and the Golden Eagle should go to war; for on that day the trembling earth would toll the bell, and at that sound the king and the knights of the king would awake, take their weapons, overthrow the Saxon, recover the island of Britain, and again establish their king at Caerlleon, in justice and in peace and for ever. But the Welshman spent his gold. He went again to the cave; he overloaded his back with gold; he stumbled and the bell rang; he forgot the password. And the knights rose and leaned upon their elbows, and one of them stood up and took away his gold and beat him and thrust him out and closed the mouth of the cave; and though he and many others made all the hill sore with their digging, the cave was not found again.



— XV —

AUGUST IN WALES

ON a fine, very hot day I had to wait three hours for a train, and should have left the bald junction for that time, if I had not seen there a poet of my acquaintance, contentedly reading Spenser on the central platform. I sat down with him, but he preferred reading to talking, and I looked over his shoulder to read:

> Begin then, O my dearest sacred Dame!
> Daughter of Phœbus and of Memorye . . .

And I could not sufficiently admire his fortitude, until, on the arrival of a train, he left the book on the seat, and walked down alongside the train. It stopped ten minutes, and he talked with

persons in three different carriages before it left. He came back unperturbed, and told me briefly that——from Patagonia was in the train, with——the bard from North Wales, and a friend from London. Seeing me surprised, he explained that every Saturday in the summer he spent entirely on the platform, waiting for surprises of this kind. Four trains stopped there before I left, and each seemed to be laden with friends and acquaintances,—some who lived in distant parts and even overseas, and some whom he had not seen for years. And some of the persons whom he greeted he had never seen before, which was a good reason for greeting them; he had perhaps heard of them, or they of him; and so they talked. ¶The liking of Welshmen for Welshmen is very strong, and that not only when they meet on foreign soil, as in London, but in their own land. They do not, I suppose, love their neighbours more than other men do, but when they meet a fellow-countryman for the first time they seem to have a kind of surprise and joy, in spite of the commonness of such meetings. They do not acquiesce in the fact that the man they shake hands with is of their race, as English people do. They converse readily in trains: they are all of one family, and indeed if you are Welsh, not only can you not avoid meeting relatives, but you do not wish to. Small news about the coming & going of people travels among them rapidly, and I have never got out of a train in Wales without feeling that I shall meet some one whom I should like to meet, on the platform or in the first street. They like their own land in the same way. I do not easily believe in patriotism, in times of peace or war, except as a party cry, or the result of intoxication or an article in a newspaper, unless I am in Wales. ¶I did not know before that any save sellers of newspapers were happy in railway stations, and as my train went out, I passed the poet at his Spenser again and recalled the poem called "Howell's Delight," which was written by a young, unfortunate prince of North Wales in the

twelfth century :—

A white foam-crowned wave flows o'er the grave
Of Rhuvawn Bevyr, chief of Rulers.
I this day hate England, a flat and inactive land,
With a people involved in every wile;
I love the land where I had the much-desired gift of mead,
Where the shores extend in tedious conflict;
I love the society and the numerous inhabitants
Therein, who, obedient to their Lord,
Direct their views of peace;
I love its sea-coast and its mountains,
Its cities bordering on its forests, its fair landscapes,
Its dales, its waters, and its vales,
Its white seamews, and its beauteous women;
I love its warriors, and its well-trained steeds,
Its woods, its strongholds, and its social domicile;
I love its fields clothed with tender trefoil,
Where I had the glory of a lasting triumph;
I love its cultivated regions, the prerogative of heroism,
Its far extended wilds, and its sports of the chase,
Which, Son of God! are great and wonderful.
How sleek the majestic deer, and in what plenty found;
I achieved with a push of a spear the task of honour
Between the Chief of Powys and fair Gwynedd;
And if I am pale in the rush of conflict,
'Tis that I know I shall be compelled to leave my country,
For it is certain that I cannot hold out till my party comes,
A dream has revealed it, and God says 'tis true.
A white foam-crowned wave flows o'er the grave,
A white bright-foaming wave boldly raves against the towns,
Tinted the time it swells like glittering hoar.
I love the marches of Merioneth,
Where my head was pillowed on a snow-white arm;
I love the nightingale on the privet wood
In the famous vale of Cymmer Deuddwfr,
Lord of heaven and earth, the glory of Gwyneddians.
Though it is so far from Keri to Caerliwelydd,

I mounted the yellow steed, and from Maelienydd
Reached the land of Reged between night and day.
Before I am in the grave, may I enjoy a new blessing
From the land of Tegyngyl of fairest aspect!

The flowers by the road, wood-betony, sage, mallow, ragwort . . . were dry; the larches, that were fitted to the hillside like scales or breast feathers, were dry; but a mountain stream, which many stones tore to ribbons, was with me for miles, and to the left and to the right many paths over the hills ran with alluring courses for half a mile, like happy thoughts or lively fancies, and ended suddenly. The mountains increased in height as the sun sank, and their sides began to give a home to enormous, still shadows and to rich, inaccessible groves among the clefts. And in the end of the afternoon I came to a village I knew, which grew round an irregular lawn. ¶From the inn, I could see the whole village. ¶The limes before me were full of light; the green grass beyond was tending to be grey. There were not far fewer people than usual in the neighbourhood, yet the calm was great. It seemed to have something to announce and to call solemnly for silence; the voice of a child crying, a man with shining cuffs, was an extraordinary impertinence. ¶But two reclining cows were calm enough, and in the middle distance an oak was stately enough. A tramp, his wife, and five children spoke with quiet, husky voices that were sad enough. A passage from *Hyperion* which I recalled was noble enough. Six bells that rang three miles off & some white downs of cloud on the horizon were in harmony. It was a time when the whole universe strove to speak a universal speech, the speech of the stars in their courses, of the flower that is beautiful, of the soul that aspires, of the mind that thinks. But, as it seemed, owing to my fault, the effort was unsuccessful, and I rose hurriedly and left the village behind. ¶And while the hedgerows on one side of the road were in places rich with the heavy, horizontal sunshine

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that came through gateways on the other side, I saw the star-like shining of the windows of an old house on a hill. A difficult winding lane led up to it, and so long was the lane that between the road and the house a badger and a raven had their homes. When I came near the house one pallid angle of it glowed, and only where it glowed was it visible. ¶The house was perhaps two hundred years old—stately, grey as the old blackthorns in the hedge, and it was, perhaps because I knew of the fading race that had lived within it, the oldest thing among those old hills. It was more unchangeable than the most grim crag on the hills which had its milkwhite harebell on that day. It was a survival from winter, from hundreds of winters, and therefore, though young in years, it spoke a language which time, knowing that the unchangeable is dead, had forgotten:

> A spirit calling in an old old tongue
> Forgotten in lost graves in lonesome places;
> A spirit huddled in an old old heart
> Like a blind crone crouched o'er a long-dead fire. . . .

Nothing ever happened among the Powells at——. The lawn was mowed; the fern from the hill was carted down; the little red apples ripened; the Powell hair turned from gold to grey. A stranger, indeed, heard much of them, but when he asked where they lived, he was told that there were thirty of them in the church and one at—— on the hill. Five generations of them had lived there, since the only conspicuous one of the family had died in the first war with Napoleon. Of those five, the last could only say that theirs had been the most desperate of quests, for they knew not what they sought. They had lived in dignity and simplicity, neither sporting nor cultured, yet loving foxhounds and books. Generation after generation of the children had learned "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" from their fathers, and with all their happiness in that dim house, they learned to love "Il Penseroso" best. . . .



— XVI —

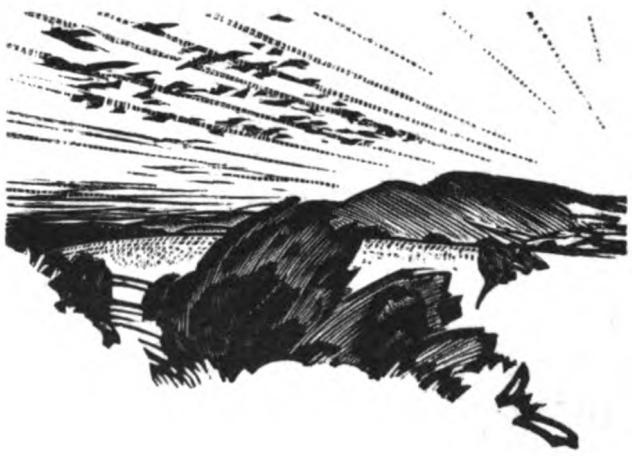
THE END OF A DAY

TOWARDS evening of that tempestuous day the west began to clear and brighten under a swaying heavy curtain of cloud, and the primroses to shine with a cold light out of the black earth, as I left the road to cross a corner of the moor. Before me and moving athwart my path in the slant rain was a young girl. Though the rain was in her eyes and hair, and the wind enveloped her with its cold kisses, she was young and proud. Her head was lifted up and her lips parted with pleasure at the rain upon them. She had come out at the sight of the brightening west and was walking towards it. She was lightly dressed as knowing that the rain was spent, or not caring, and she had not gone many steps

before me when it ceased. The dark woods behind her ſtill roared with the dying wind and the dripping rain, yet upon the moor there was a walled-in silence through which she walked, and upon her & the dead grass fell a watery cold light out of the white pane that widened every moment more radiantly in the weſtern sky. And to me, losing all memory of the ſtorm & the peace-making, it was as if the day had led up to this, as if a long resounding avenue had led to a ſtill glimmering lawn as broad as the earth & mingling with the bright heavens. I had emerged out of the darkness and miſt into an immeasurable and wondrously open world, and across it moved the figure of the girl. My ſteps became slower and slower. I no longer drove my heels into the ground. My lips ceased to murmur all manner of songs, poems, fragments of tunes, hunting cries, fantaſtic exclamations remembered or invented. In a minute or two I sat down on a boulder in the grass, and leaned forward wearily with hands and chin upon the handle of my ſtick. ¶The girl was beautiful. Breaſting the rain at firſt, and now facing the reſtful and splendid weſt, any springy maid might have painted herself upon my brain for an hour or so. But she so raised my thought that suddenly at this noble end of a great day I felt myself weary, at once weary & very glad. Had she leaped out of the earth or out of the sky to express in human shape the loveliness of the hour, she could not have been made otherwise by a sculptor god—solemn and joyous and proud with the pride of things that are perfect & know it not, yet have as it seems attendant spirits offering them praise & courtliness wherever they go. No princess barbarically and multitudinously escorted could have walked with greater magnificence than this girl thinking her thoughtless thoughts. She now was the triumphant one, as I had been when I looked over plain and hill and saw them faint and quiet as in a tale. Not for one moment, but all the time of watching her, I felt as though I were looking out of a grave where I lay ſtiff and ſtill but with wide eyes

& untired spirit, and with those eyes & that spirit saluted & loved the beautiful living creature passing by regardless. ¶ I watched her plant her feet firmly & rise up lightly as one might do to whom these things were impossible and marvellous. She had a slightly swaying motion which, graceful in itself, was fascinating, partly because it suggested how much more so it would have been had she been utterly unencumbered by dress. This swaying from hip to heel was the most obvious expression of the indolence which went side by side with her force, & was one with it, since it showed how much of that force was subdued in the effortless exercise of walking. She could have run, she could have leapt and climbed, almost it seemed that she could have flown, yet she but walked steadily across the moor. She was perfectly at peace, untried by pain and strife and sorrow, or passion. ¶ The unaccomplished hours hovered about her as she went. She might some day be a Helen, a Guinevere, a Persephone, an Electra, an Isoud, an Eurydice, an Antigone, an Nimue, an Alcestis, a Dido, a Lais, a Francesca, a Harriet. She was a violet-eyed maid walking alone. Yet these were the spirits that attended her. Helen whispered to her of Theseus, Menelaus, Paris, Ulysses, of calm Lacedæmon, and burning Troy; Persephone of the lone Sicilian meadows, and the dark chariot and Dis; Dido of Carthage and Æneas and the sweet knife of despair; Eurydice of Orpheus and Hades and the harp and silence; Isoud of Tristram and the ship and joyous Gard; Lais of many lovers, and not one love; Electra of her brother; Alcestis of her spouse and death; Harriet of the poet, and the water that quenched love. And there were many more upon the grass under the western light. They were tempting, guarding, counselling, warning, wailing, rejoicing, vaguely whispering. They waited on her, some wistful, some imperious, but all drawn after her withersoever she went, all praising her for her sweet lips, her long brown hair and its gloom & hidden smouldering fires, her eyes and her eyelids that were as the violet

opened flower and the white closed bud, her breath sweet as the earth's, her height, her whiteness, her swift limbs, and her rippling arms and wrists and hands, made for love and for all fair service; her straightness, that was as the straightness of a tulip on the best day of spring; and for her life, because it was all before her, pale and mysteriously lit, without stars yet with the promise of stars like the sky which had now dismissed all clouds but one dark bar, and was expanding around and above without a bound. Into that sky, into the gorse of the moor and a wild multitude of birds, she slipped out of my sight; and I rose up, and knew that I was tired, and continued my journey.



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