THE

LAND OF DARKNESS

ALONG WITH SOME

FURTHER CHAPTERS IN THE EXPERIENCES

OF

THE LITTLE PILGRIM

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CONTENTS

I

THE LAND OF DARKNESS

I FOUND myself standing on my feet, with the tingling sensation of having come down rapidly upon the ground from a height. There was a similar feeling in my head, as of the whirling and sickening sensation of passing downward through the air, like the description Dante gives of his descent upon Geryon. My mind, curiously enough, was sufficiently disengaged to think of that, or at least to allow swift passage for the recollection through my thoughts. All the aching of wonder, doubt, and fear which I had been conscious of a little while before was gone. There was no distinct interval between the one

condition and the other, nor in my fall (as I supposed it must have been) had I any consciousness of change. There was the whirling of the air, resisting my passage, yet giving way under me in giddy circles, and then the sharp shock of once more feeling under my feet something solid, which struck yet sustained. After a little while the giddiness above and the tingling below passed away, and I felt able to look about me and discern where I was. But not all at once: the things immediately about me impressed me first—then the general aspect of the new place.

First of all the light, which was lurid, as if a thunderstorm were coming on. I looked up involuntarily to see if it had begun to rain; but there was nothing of the kind, though what I saw above me was a lowering canopy of cloud, dark, threatening, with a faint reddish tint diffused upon the vaporous darkness. It was, however, quite sufficiently clear to see everything, and there was a good deal to see. I was

in a street of what seemed a great and very populous place. There were shops on either side, full apparently of all sorts of costly wares. There was a continual current of passengers up and down on both sides of the way, and in the middle of the street carriages of every description, humble and splendid. The noise was great and ceaseless, the traffic continual. Some of the shops were most brilliantly lighted, attracting one's eyes in the sombre light outside, which, however, had just enough of day in it to make these spots of illumination look sickly; most of the places thus distinguished were apparently bright with the electric or some other scientific light; and delicate machines of every description, brought to the greatest perfection, were in some windows, as were also many fine productions of art, but mingled with the gaudiest and coarsest in a way which struck me with astonishment. I was also much surprised by the fact that the traffic, which was never stilled for a moment,

seemed to have no sort of regulation. Some carriages dashed along, upsetting the smaller vehicles in their way, without the least restraint or order, either, as it seemed, from their own good sense, or from the laws and customs of the place. When an accident happened, there was a great shouting, and sometimes a furious encounter—but nobody seemed to interfere. This was the first impression made upon me. The passengers on the pavement were equally regardless. I was myself pushed out of the way, first to one side, then to another, hustled when I paused for a moment, trodden upon and driven about. I retreated soon to the doorway of a shop, from whence with a little more safety I could see what was going on. The noise made my head ring. It seemed to me that I could not hear myself think. If this were to go on for ever, I said to myself, I should soon go mad.

'Oh no,' said some one behind me, 'not at all; you will get used to it; you will be

glad of it. One does not want to hear one's thoughts; most of them are not worth hearing.'

I turned round and saw it was the master of the shop, who had come to the door on seeing me. He had the usual smile of a man who hoped to sell his wares; but to my horror and astonishment, by some process which I could not understand, I saw that he was saying to himself, 'What a d——d fool! here's another of those cursed wretches, d—— him!' all with the same smile. I started back, and answered him as hotly, 'What do you mean by calling me a d——d fool?—fool yourself, and all the rest of it. Is this the way you receive strangers here?'

'Yes,' he said, with the same smile, 'this is the way; and I only describe you as you are, as you will soon see. Will you walk in and look over my shop? Perhaps you will find something to suit you if you are just setting up, as I suppose.'

I looked at him closely, but this time I

could not see that he was saying anything beyond what was expressed by his lips, and I followed him into the shop, principally because it was quieter than the street, and without any intention of buying—for what should I buy in a strange place where I had no settled habitation, and which probably I was only passing through?

'I will look at your things,' I said, in a way which I believe I had, of perhaps undue pretension. I had never been overrich, or of very elevated station; but I was believed by my friends (or enemies) to have an inclination to make myself out something more important than I was. 'I will look at your things, and possibly I may find something that may suit me; but with all the *ateliers* of Paris and London to draw from, it is scarcely to be expected that in a place like this——'

Here I stopped to draw my breath, with a good deal of confusion; for I was unwilling to let him see that I did not know where I was.

'A place like this,' said the shopkeeper, with a little laugh which seemed to me full of mockery, 'will supply you better, you will find, than—any other place. At least you will find it the only place practicable,' he added. 'I perceive you are a stranger here.'

'Well—I may allow myself to be so—more or less. I have not had time to form much acquaintance with—the place: what—do you call the place?—its formal name, I mean,' I said, with a great desire to keep up the air of superior information. Except for the first moment I had not experienced that strange power of looking into the man below the surface which had frightened me. Now there occurred another gleam of insight, which gave me once more a sensation of alarm. I seemed to see a light of hatred and contempt below his smile, and I felt that he was not in the least taken in by the air which I assumed.

'The name of the place,' he said, 'is not

a pretty one. I hear the gentlemen who come to my shop say that it is not to be named to ears polite; and I am sure your ears are very polite.' He said this with the most offensive laugh, and I turned upon him and answered him, without mincing matters, with a plainness of speech which startled myself, but did not seem to move him, for he only laughed again. 'Are you not afraid,' I said, 'that I will leave your shop and never enter it more?'

'Oh, it helps to pass the time,' he said; and without any further comment began to show me very elaborate and fine articles of furniture. I had always been attracted to this sort of thing, and had longed to buy such articles for my house when I had one, but never had it in my power. Now I had no house, nor any means of paying so far as I knew, but I felt quite at my ease about buying, and inquired into the prices with the greatest composure.

'They are just the sort of thing I want.

I will take these, I think; but you must set them aside for me, for I do not at the present moment exactly know——'

'You mean you have got no rooms to put them in,' said the master of the shop. 'You must get a house directly, that's all. If you're only up to it, it is easy enough. Look about until you find something you like, and then—take possession.'

'Take possession'—I was so much surprised that I stared at him with mingled indignation and surprise—'of what belongs to another man?' I said.

I was not conscious of anything ridiculous in my look. I was indignant, which is not a state of mind in which there is any absurdity; but the shopkeeper suddenly burst into a storm of laughter. He laughed till he seemed almost to fall into convulsions, with a harsh mirth which reminded me of the old image of the crackling of thorns, and had neither amusement nor warmth in it; and presently this was echoed all around, and looking up, I saw

grinning faces full of derision, bent upon me from every side, from the stairs which led to the upper part of the house and from the depths of the shop behind—faces with pens behind their ears, faces in workmen's caps, all distended from ear to ear, with a sneer and a mock and a rage of laughter which nearly sent me mad. I hurled I don't know what imprecations at them as I rushed out, stopping my ears in a paroxysm of fury and mortification. My mind was so distracted by this occurrence that I rushed without knowing it upon some one who was passing, and threw him down with the violence of my exit; upon which I was set on by a party of half a dozen ruffians, apparently his companions, who would, I thought, kill me, but who only flung me, wounded, bleeding, and feeling as if every bone in my body had been broken, down on the pavement—when they went away, laughing too.

I picked myself up from the edge of the

causeway, aching and sore from head to foot, scarcely able to move, yet conscious that if I did not get myself out of the way one or other of the vehicles which were dashing along would run over me. It would be impossible to describe the miserable sensations, both of body and mind, with which I dragged myself across the crowded pavement, not without curses and even kicks from the passers-by ; and, avoiding the shop from which I still heard those shrieks of devilish laughter, gathered myself up in the shelter of a little projection of a wall, where I was for the moment safe. The pain which I felt was as nothing to the sense of humiliation, the mortification, the rage with which I was possessed. There is nothing in existence more dreadful than rage which is impotent, which cannot punish or avenge, which has to restrain itself and put up with insults showered upon it. I had never known before what that helpless, hideous exasperation was; and I was humiliated

beyond description, brought down — I, whose inclination it was to make more of myself than was justifiable—to the aspect of a miserable ruffian beaten in a brawl, soiled, covered with mud and dust, my clothes torn, my face bruised and disfigured: all this within half an hour or thereabout of my arrival in a strange place where nobody knew me or could do me justice! I kept looking out feverishly for some one with an air of authority to whom I could appeal. Sooner or later somebody must go by, who, seeing me in such a plight, must inquire how it came about, must help me and vindicate me. I sat there for I cannot tell how long, expecting every moment that, were it but a policeman, somebody would notice and help me. But no one came. Crowds seemed to sweep by without a pause—all hurrying, restless: some with anxious faces, as if any delay would be mortal; some in noisy groups intercepting the passage of the others. Sometimes one

would pause to point me out to his comrades, with a shout of derision at my miserable plight; or if by a change of posture I got outside the protection of my wall, would kick me back with a coarse injunction to keep out of the way. No one was sorry for me—not a look of compassion, not a word of inquiry was wasted upon me; no representative of authority appeared. I saw a dozen quarrels while I lay there, cries of the weak, and triumphant shouts of the strong; but that was all.

I was drawn after a while from the fierce and burning sense of my own grievances by a querulous voice quite close to me. 'This is my corner,' it said. 'I've sat here for years, and I have a right to it. And here you come, you big ruffian, because you know I haven't got the strength to push you away.'

'Who are you?' I said, turning round horror-stricken; for close beside me was a miserable man, apparently in the last stage of disease. He was pale as death, yet

eaten up with sores. His body was agitated by a nervous trembling. He seemed to shuffle along on hands and feet, as though the ordinary mode of locomotion was impossible to him, and yet was in possession of all his limbs. Pain was written in his face. I drew away to leave him room, with mingled pity and horror that this poor wretch should be the partner of the only shelter I could find within so short a time of my arrival. I who—— It was horrible, shameful, humiliating; and yet the suffering in his wretched face was so evident that I could not but feel a pang of pity too. 'I have nowhere to go,' I said. 'I am—a stranger. I have been badly used, and nobody seems to care.'

'No,' he said; 'nobody cares—don't you look for that. Why should they? Why, you look as if you were sorry for *me!* What a joke!' he murmured to himself—'what a joke! Sorry for some one else! What a fool the fellow must be!'

'You look,' I said, 'as if you were suffering horribly; and you say you have come here for years.'

'Suffering! I should think I was,' said the sick man; 'but what is that to you? Yes; I've been here for years—oh, years! —that means nothing,—for longer than can be counted. Suffering is not the word—it's torture—it's agony. But who cares? Take your leg out of my way.'

I drew myself out of his way from a sort of habit, though against my will, and asked, from habit too, 'Are you never any better than now?'

He looked at me more closely, and an air of astonishment came over his face. 'What d'ye want here,' he said, 'pitying a man! That's something new here. No; I'm not always so bad, if you want to know. I get better, and then I go and do what makes me bad again, and that's how it will go on; and I choose it to be so, and you needn't bring any of your d——d pity here.'

'I may ask, at least, why aren't you looked after? Why don't you get into some hospital?' I said.

'Hospital!' cried the sick man, and then he too burst out into that furious laugh, the most awful sound I ever had heard. Some of the passers-by stopped to hear what the joke was, and surrounded me with once more a circle of mockers. 'Hospitals! perhaps you would like a whole Red Cross Society, with ambulances and all arranged?' cried one. 'Or the *Misericordia!*' shouted another. I sprang up to my feet, crying, 'Why not?' with an impulse of rage which gave me strength. Was I never to meet with anything but this fiendish laughter? 'There's some authority, I suppose,' I cried in my fury. 'It is not the rabble that is the only master here, I hope.' But nobody took the least trouble to hear what I had to say for myself. The last speaker struck me on the mouth, and called me an accursed fool for talking of what I did not

understand; and finally they all swept on and passed away.

I had been, as I thought, severely injured when I dragged myself into that corner to save myself from the crowd; but I sprang up now as if nothing had happened to me. My wounds had disappeared, my bruises were gone. I was, as I had been when I dropped, giddy and amazed, upon the same pavement, how long—an hour?—before? It might have been an hour, it might have been a year, I cannot tell. The light was the same as ever, the thunderous atmosphere unchanged. Day, if it was day, had made no progress; night, if it was evening, had come no nearer: all was the same.

As I went on again presently, with a vexed and angry spirit, regarding on every side around me the endless surging of the crowd, and feeling a loneliness, a sense of total abandonment and solitude, which I cannot describe, there came up to me a man of remarkable appearance. That he was

a person of importance, of great knowledge and information, could not be doubted. He was very pale, and of a worn but commanding aspect. The lines of his face were deeply drawn, his eyes were sunk under high arched brows, from which they looked out as from caves, full of a fiery impatient light. His thin lips were never quite without a smile; but it was not a smile in which any pleasure was. He walked slowly, not hurrying, like most of the passengers. He had a reflective look, as if pondering many things. He came up to me suddenly, without introduction or preliminary, and took me by the arm. 'What object had you in talking of these antiquated institutions?' he said.

And I saw in his mind the gleam of the thought, which seemed to be the first with all, that I was a fool, and that it was the natural thing to wish me harm,—just as in the earth above it was the natural thing, professed at least, to wish well—to say,

Good morning, good day, by habit and without thought. In this strange country the stranger was received with a curse, and it woke an answer not unlike the hasty 'Curse you, then, also!' which seemed to come without any will of mine through my mind. But this provoked only a smile from my new friend. He took no notice. He was disposed to examine me—to find some amusement perhaps—how could I tell?—in what I might say.

'What antiquated things?'

'Are you still so slow of understanding? What were they? hospitals: the pretences of a world that can still deceive itself. Did you expect to find them here?'

'I expected to find—how should I know?' I said, bewildered—'some shelter for a poor wretch where he could be cared for—not to be left there to die in the street. Expected! I never thought. I took it for granted——'

'To die in the street!' he cried, with a smile, and a shrug of his shoulders. 'You'll

learn better by and by. And if he did die in the street, what then? What is that to you?'

'To me!' I turned and looked at him amazed; but he had somehow shut his soul, so that I could see nothing but the deep eyes in their caves, and the smile upon the close-shut mouth. 'No more to me than to any one. I only spoke for humanity's sake, as—a fellow-creature.'

My new acquaintance gave way to a silent laugh within himself, which was not so offensive as the loud laugh of the crowd, but yet was more exasperating than words can say. 'You think that matters? But it does not hurt you that he should be in pain. It would do you no good if he were to get well. Why should you trouble yourself one way or the other? Let him die—if he can—— That makes no difference to you or me.'

'I must be dull indeed,' I cried,—'slow of understanding, as you say. This is going back to the ideas of times

beyond knowledge — before Christianity ——' As soon as I had said this I felt somehow—I could not tell how—as if my voice jarred, as if something false and unnatural was in what I said. My companion gave my arm a twist as if with a shock of surprise, then laughed in his inward way again.

'We don't think much of that here; nor of your modern pretences in general. The only thing that touches you and me is what hurts or helps ourselves. To be sure, it all comes to the same thing —for I suppose it annoys you to see that wretch writhing: it hurts your more delicate, highly-cultivated consciousness.'

'It has nothing to do with my consciousness,' I cried, angrily; 'it is a shame to let a fellow-creature suffer if we can prevent it.'

'Why shouldn't he suffer?' said my companion. We passed as he spoke some other squalid wretched creatures shuffling among the crowd, whom he

kicked with his foot, calling forth a yell of pain and curses. This he regarded with a supreme contemptuous calm which stupefied me. Nor did any of the passers-by show the slightest inclination to take the part of the sufferers. They laughed, or shouted out a gibe, or, what was still more wonderful, went on with a complete unaffected indifference, as if all this was natural. I tried to disengage my arm in horror and dismay, but he held me fast, with a pressure that hurt me. 'That's the question,' he said. 'What have we to do with it? Your fictitious consciousness makes it painful to you. To me, on the contrary, who take the view of nature, it is a pleasurable feeling. It enhances the amount of ease, whatever that may be, which I enjoy. I am in no pain. That brute who is'—and he flicked with a stick he carried the uncovered wound of a wretch upon the roadside—'makes me more satisfied with my condition. Ah!

you think it is I who am the brute? You will change your mind by and by.'

'Never!' I cried, wrenching my arm from his with an effort, 'if I should live a hundred years.'

'A hundred years—a drop in the bucket!' he said, with his silent laugh. 'You will live for ever, and you will come to my view; and we shall meet in the course of ages, from time to time, to compare notes. I would say good-bye after the old fashion, but you are but newly arrived, and I will not treat you so badly as that.' With which he parted from me, waving his hand, with his everlasting horrible smile.

'Good-bye!' I said to myself, 'good-bye—why should it be treating me badly to say good-bye——'

I was startled by a buffet on the mouth. 'Take that!' cried some one, 'to teach you how to wish the worst of tortures to people who have done you no harm.'

'What have I said? I meant no harm

I repeated only what is the commonest civility, the merest good manners.'

'You wished,' said the man who had struck me,—'I won't repeat the words: to me, for it was I only that heard them, the awful company that hurts most—that sets everything before us, both past and to come, and cuts like a sword and burns like fire. I'll say it to yourself, and see how it feels. God be with you! There! it is said, and we all must bear it, thanks, you fool and accursed, to you.'

And then there came a pause over all the place—an awful stillness—hundreds of men and women standing clutching with desperate movements at their hearts as if to tear them out, moving their heads as if to dash them against the wall, wringing their hands, with a look upon all their convulsed faces which I can never forget. They all turned to me, cursing me, with those horrible eyes of anguish. And everything was still—

the noise all stopped for a moment—the air all silent, with a silence that could be felt. And then suddenly out of the crowd there came a great piercing cry; and everything began again exactly as before.

While this pause occurred, and while I stood wondering, bewildered, understanding nothing, there came over me a darkness, a blackness, a sense of misery such as never in all my life, though I have known troubles enough, I had felt before. All that had happened to me throughout my existence seemed to rise pale and terrible in a hundred scenes before me, all momentary, intense, as if each was the present moment. And in each of these scenes I saw what I had never seen before. I saw where I had taken the wrong instead of the right step—in what wantonness, with what self-will it had been done; how God (I shuddered at the name) had spoken and called me, and even entreated, and

I had withstood and refused. All the evil I had done came back, and spread itself out before my eyes; and I loathed it, yet knew that I had chosen it, and that it would be with me for ever. I saw it all in the twinkling of an eye, in a moment, while I stood there, and all men with me, in the horror of awful thought. Then it ceased as it had come, instantaneously, and the noise and the laughter, and the quarrels and cries, and all the commotion of this new bewildering place, in a moment began again. I had seen no one while this strange paroxysm lasted. When it disappeared, I came to myself emerging as from a dream, and looked into the face of the man whose words, not careless like mine, had brought it upon us. Our eyes met, and his were surrounded by curves and lines of anguish which were terrible to see.

'Well,' he said, with a short laugh, which was forced and harsh, 'how do you like it? that is what happens when——

If it came often, who could endure it?' He was not like the rest. There was no sneer upon his face, no gibe at my simplicity. Even now, when all had recovered, he was still quivering with something that looked like a nobler pain. His face was very grave, the lines deeply drawn in it, and he seemed to be seeking no amusement or distraction, nor to take any part in the noise and tumult which was going on around.

'Do you know what that cry meant?' he said. 'Did you hear that cry? It was some one who saw—even here once in a long time, they say, it can be seen——'

'What can be seen?'

He shook his head, looking at me with a meaning which I could not interpret. It was beyond the range of my thoughts. I came to know after, or I never could have made this record. But on that subject he said no more. He turned the way I was going, though it mattered nothing what way I went, for all were the

same to me. 'You are one of the new-comers?' he said; 'you have not been long here——'

'Tell me,' I cried, 'what you mean by *here*. Where are we? How can one tell who has fallen—he knows not whence or where? What is this place? I have never seen anything like it. It seems to me that I hate it already, though I know not what it is.'

He shook his head once more. 'You will hate it more and more,' he said; 'but of these dreadful streets you will never be free, unless——' And here he stopped again.

'Unless—what? If it is possible, I will be free of them, and that before long.

He smiled at me faintly, as we smile at children, but not with derision.

'How shall you do that? Between this miserable world and all others there is a great gulf fixed. It is full of all the bitterness and tears that come from all the universe. These drop from them, but stagnate

here. We, you perceive, have no tears, not even at moments——' Then, 'You will soon be accustomed to all this,' he said. 'You will fall into the way. Perhaps you will be able to amuse yourself, to make it passable. Many do. There are a number of fine things to be seen here. If you are curious, come with me and I will show you. Or work—there is even work. There is only one thing that is impossible—or if not impossible——' And here he paused again, and raised his eyes to the dark clouds and lurid sky overhead. 'The man who gave that cry! if I could but find him—he must have seen——'

'What could he see?' I asked. But there rose in my mind something like contempt. A visionary! who could not speak plainly, who broke off into mysterious inferences, and appeared to know more than he would say. It seemed foolish to waste time when evidently there was still so much to see, in the company of such a man. And I began already to feel more at home.

There was something in that moment of anguish which had wrought a strange familiarity in me with my surroundings. It was so great a relief to return out of the misery of that sharp and horrible self-realisation, to what had come to be, in comparison, easy and well known. I had no desire to go back and grope among the mysteries and anguish so suddenly revealed. I was glad to be free from them, to be left to myself, to get a little pleasure perhaps like the others. While these thoughts passed through my mind, I had gone on without any active impulse of my own, as everybody else did; and my latest companion had disappeared. He saw, no doubt, without any need for words, what my feelings were. And I proceeded on my way. I felt better as I got more accustomed to the place, or perhaps it was the sensation of relief after that moment of indescribable pain. As for the sights in the streets, I began to grow used to them. The wretched creatures

who strolled or sat about with signs of sickness or wounds upon them disgusted me only, they no longer called forth my pity. I began to feel ashamed of my silly questions about the hospital. All the same, it would have been a good thing to have had some receptacle for them, into which they might have been driven out of the way. I felt an inclination to push them aside as I saw other people do, but was a little ashamed of that impulse too; and so I went on. There seemed no quiet streets, so far as I could make out, in the place. Some were smaller, meaner, with a different kind of passengers, but the same hubbub and unresting movement everywhere. I saw no signs of melancholy or seriousness; active pain, violence, brutality, the continual shock of quarrels and blows: but no pensive faces about, no sorrowfulness, nor the kind of trouble which brings thought. Everybody was fully occupied, pushing on as if in a race, pausing for nothing.

The glitter of the lights, the shouts, and

sounds of continual going, the endless whirl of passers-by, confused and tired me after a while. I went as far out as I could go to what seemed the outskirts of the place, where I could by glimpses perceive a low horizon all lurid and glowing, which seemed to sweep round and round. Against it in the distance stood up the outline, black against that red glow, of other towers and house-tops, so many and great that there was evidently another town between us and the sunset, if sunset it was. I have seen a western sky like it when there were storms about, and all the colours of the sky were heightened and darkened by angry influences. The distant town rose against it, cutting the firmament so that it might have been tongues of flame flickering between the dark solid outlines; and across the waste open country which lay between the two cities, there came a distant hum like the sound of the sea, which was in reality the roar of that other multitude. The country between showed no green-

ness or beauty; it lay dark under the dark over-hanging sky. Here and there seemed a cluster of giant trees scathed as if by lightning, their bare boughs standing up as high as the distant towers, their trunks like black columns without foliage; openings here and there, with glimmering lights, looked like the mouths of mines: but of passengers there were scarcely any. A figure here and there flew along as if pursued, imperfectly seen, a shadow only a little darker than the space about. And in contrast with the sound of the city, here was no sound at all, except the low roar on either side, and a vague cry or two from the openings of the mine—a scene all drawn in darkness, in variations of gloom, deriving scarcely any light at all from the red and gloomy burning of that distant evening sky.

A faint curiosity to go forward, to see what the mines were, perhaps to get a share in what was brought up from them, crossed my mind. But I was afraid of the

dark, of the wild uninhabited savage look of the landscape: though when I thought of it, there seemed no reason why a narrow stretch of country between two great towns should be alarming. But the impression was strong and above reason. I turned back to the street in which I had first alighted, and which seemed to end in a great square full of people. In the middle there was a stage erected, from which some one was delivering an oration or address of some sort. He stood beside a long table, upon which lay something which I could not clearly distinguish, except that it seemed alive and moved, or rather writhed, with convulsive twitchings, as if trying to get free of the bonds which confined it. Round the stage in front were a number of seats occupied by listeners, many of whom were women, whose interest seemed to be very great, some of them being furnished with note-books; while a great unsettled crowd coming and going, drifted round—many, arrested for

a time as they passed, proceeding on their way when the interest flagged, as is usual to such open-air assemblies. I followed two of those who pushed their way to within a short distance of the stage, and who were strong, big men, more fitted to elbow the crowd aside than I, after my rough treatment in the first place, and the agitation I had passed through, could be. I was glad, besides, to take advantage of the explanation which one was giving to the other. 'It's always fun to see this fellow demonstrate,' he said, 'and the subject to-day's a capital one. Let's get well forward, and see all that's going on.'

'Which subject do you mean?' said the other; 'the theme or the example?' And they both laughed, though I did not seize the point of the wit.

'Well, both,' said the first speaker; 'the theme is nerves: and as a lesson in construction and the calculation of possibilities, it's fine. He's very clever at that. He shows how they are all strung to give as

much pain and do as much harm as can be; and yet how well it's all managed, don't you know, to look the reverse. As for the example, he's a capital one—all nerves together, lying, if you like, just on the surface, ready for the knife.'

'If they're on the surface I can't see where the fun is,' said the other.

'Metaphorically speaking: of course they are just where other people's nerves are; but he's what you call a highly organised nervous specimen. There will be plenty of fun. Hush! he is just going to begin.'

'The arrangement of these threads of being,' said the lecturer, evidently resuming after a pause, 'so as to convey to the brain the most instantaneous messages of pain or pleasure, is wonderfully skilful and clever. I need not say to the audience before me, enlightened as it is by experiences of the most striking kind, that the messages are less of pleasure than of pain. They report to the brain the stroke of injury far more

often than the thrill of pleasure: though sometimes that too, no doubt, or life could scarcely be maintained. The powers that be have found it necessary to mingle a little sweet of pleasurable sensation, else our miserable race would certainly have found some means of procuring annihilation. I do not for a moment pretend to say that the pleasure is sufficient to offer a just counterbalance to the other. None of my hearers will, I hope, accuse me of inconsistency. I am ready to allow that in a previous condition I asserted somewhat strongly that this was the case. But experience has enlightened us on that point. Our circumstances are now understood by us all, in a manner impossible while we were still in a condition of incompleteness. We are all convinced that there is no compensation. The pride of the position, of bearing everything rather than give in, or making a submission we do not feel, of preserving our own will and individuality to all eternity, is the only

compensation. I am satisfied with it, for my part.'

The orator made a pause, holding his head high, and there was a certain amount of applause. The two men before me cheered vociferously. 'That is the right way to look at it,' one of them said. My eyes were upon them, with no particular motive, and I could not help starting, as I saw suddenly underneath their applause and laughter a snarl of cursing, which was the real expression of their thoughts. I felt disposed in the same way to curse the speaker, though I knew no reason why.

He went on a little further, explaining what he meant to do; and then turning round, approached the table. An assistant, who was waiting, uncovered it quickly. The audience stirred with quickened interest, and I with consternation made a step forward, crying out with horror. The object on the table, writhing, twitching, to get free, but bound down by every limb, was a living man. The lecturer went

forward calmly, taking his instruments from their case with perfect composure and coolness. 'Now, ladies and gentlemen,' he said: and inserted the knife in the flesh, making a long clear cut in the bound arm. I shrieked out, unable to restrain myself. The sight of the deliberate wound, the blood, the cry of agony that came from the victim, the calmness of all the lookers-on, filled me with horror and rage indescribable. I felt myself clear the crowd away with a rush, and spring on the platform, I could not tell how. 'You devil!' I cried, 'let the man go. Where is the police?—where is a magistrate?—let the man go this moment! fiends in human shape! I'll have you brought to justice!' I heard myself shouting wildly, as I flung myself upon the wretched sufferer, interposing between him and the knife. It was something like this that I said. My horror and rage were delirious, and carried me beyond all attempt at control.

Through it all I heard a shout of laughter rising from everybody round. The lecturer laughed, the audience roared with that sound of horrible mockery which had driven me out of myself in my first experience. All kinds of mocking cries sounded around me. 'Let him a little blood to calm him down.' 'Let the fool have a taste of it himself, doctor.' Last of all came a voice mingled with the cries of the sufferer whom I was trying to shield —'Take him instead; curse him! take him instead.' I was bending over the man with my arms outstretched, protecting him, when he gave vent to this cry. And I heard immediately behind me a shout of assent, which seemed to come from the two strong young men with whom I had been standing, and the sound of a rush to seize me. I looked round, half mad with terror and rage; a second more and I should have been strapped on the table too. I made one wild bound into the midst of the crowd, and struggling among

the arms stretched out to catch me, amid the roar of the laughter and cries—fled—fled wildly, I knew not whither, in panic and rage and horror, which no words could describe. Terror winged my feet. I flew, thinking as little of whom I met, or knocked down, or trod upon in my way, as the others did at whom I had wondered a little while ago.

No distinct impression of this headlong course remains in my mind, save the sensation of mad fear such as I had never felt before. I came to myself on the edge of the dark valley which surrounded the town. All my pursuers had dropped off before that time, and I have the recollection of flinging myself upon the ground on my face in the extremity of fatigue and exhaustion. I must have lain there undisturbed for some time. A few steps came and went, passing me; but no one took any notice, and the absence of the noise and crowding gave me a momentary respite. But in my heat and fever I got no

relief of coolness from the contact of the soil. I might have flung myself upon a bed of hot ashes, so much was it unlike the dewy cool earth which I expected, upon which one can always throw one's self with a sensation of repose. Presently the uneasiness of it made me struggle up again and look around me. I was safe: at least the cries of the pursuers had died away, the laughter which made my blood boil offended my ears no more. The noise of the city was behind me, softened into an indefinite roar by distance, and before me stretched out the dreary landscape in which there seemed no features of attraction. Now that I was nearer to it, I found it not so unpeopled as I thought. At no great distance from me was the mouth of one of the mines, from which came an indication of subterranean lights: and I perceived that the flying figures which I had taken for travellers between one city and another, were in reality wayfarers endeavouring to keep clear of what

seemed a sort of pressgang at the openings. One of them, unable to stop himself in his flight, adopted the same expedient as myself, and threw himself on the ground close to me when he had got beyond the range of pursuit. It was curious that we should meet there, he flying from a danger which I was about to face, and ready to encounter that from which I had fled. I waited for a few minutes till he had recovered his breath, and then: 'What are you running from?' I said; 'is there any danger there?' The man looked up at me with the same continual question in his eyes—Who is this fool?

'Danger!' he said. 'Are you so new here, or such a cursed idiot, as not to know the danger of the mines? You are going across yourself, I suppose, and then you'll see.'

'But tell me,' I said; 'my experience may be of use to you afterwards, if you will tell me yours now.'

'Of use!' he cried, staring; 'who cares?

Find out for yourself. If they get hold of you, you will soon understand.'

I no longer took this for rudeness, but answered in his own way, cursing him too for a fool. 'If I ask a warning I can give one; as for kindness,' I said, 'I was not looking for that.'

At this he laughed, indeed we laughed together—there seemed something ridiculous in the thought: and presently he told me, for the mere relief of talking, that round each of these pit-mouths there was a band to entrap every passer-by who allowed himself to be caught, and send him down below to work in the mine. 'Once there, there is no telling when you may get free,' he said; 'one time or other most people have a taste of it. You don't know what hard labour is if you have never been there. I had a spell once. There is neither air nor light, your blood boils in your veins from the fervent heat, you are never allowed to rest. You are put in every

kind of contortion to get at it, your limbs twisted, and your muscles strained.'

'For what?' I said.

'For gold!' he cried with a flash in his eyes—'gold! there it is inexhaustible; however hard you may work there is always more, and more!'

'And to whom does all that belong?' I said.

'To whoever is strong enough to get hold and keep possession — sometimes one, sometimes another. The only thing you are sure of is that it will never be you.'

Why not I as well as another? was the thought that went through my mind, and my new companion spied it with a shriek of derision.

'It is not for you nor your kind,' he cried. 'How do you think you could force other people to serve *you?* Can you terrify them or hurt them, or give them anything? You have not learnt yet who are the masters here.'

This troubled me, for it was true. 'I had begun to think,' I said, 'that there was no authority at all—for every man seems to do as he pleases: you ride over one, and knock another down; or you seize a living man and cut him to pieces' —I shuddered as I thought of it—'and there is nobody to interfere.'

'Who should interfere?' he said. 'Why shouldn't every man amuse himself as he can? But yet for all that we've got our masters,' he cried, with a scowl, waving his clenched fist in the direction of the mines; 'you'll find it out when you get there.'

It was a long time after this before I ventured to move—for here it seemed to me that for the moment I was safe—outside the city, yet not within reach of the dangers of that intermediate space which grew clearer before me as my eyes became accustomed to the lurid threatening afternoon light. One after another the fugitives came flying past

me,—people who had escaped from the armed bands whom I could now see on the watch near the pit's mouth. I could see, too, the tactics of these bands—how they retired, veiling the lights and the opening, when a greater number than usual of travellers appeared on the way, and then suddenly widening out, throwing out flanking lines, surrounded and drew in the unwary. I could even hear the cries with which their victims disappeared over the opening which seemed to go down into the bowels of the earth. By and by there came flying towards me a wretch more dreadful in aspect than any I had seen. His scanty clothes seemed singed and burnt into rags; his hair, which hung about his face unkempt and uncared for, had the same singed aspect; his skin was brown and baked. I got up as he approached, and caught him and threw him to the ground, without heeding his struggles to get on. 'Don't you see,' he cried with a gasp,

'they may get me again.' He was one of those who had escaped out of the mines; but what was it to me whether they caught him again or not? I wanted to know how he had been caught, and what he had been set to do, and how he had escaped. Why should I hesitate to use my superior strength when no one else did? I kept watch over him that he should not get away.

'You have been in the mines?' I said.

'Let me go!' he cried; 'do you need to ask?' and he cursed me as he struggled, with the most terrible imprecations. 'They may get me yet. Let me go!'

'Not till you tell me,' I cried. 'Tell me and I'll protect you. If they come near I'll let you go. Who are they, man? I must know.'

He struggled up from the ground, clearing his hot eyes from the ashes that were in them, and putting aside his singed hair. He gave me a glance of hatred and impotent resistance (for I

was stronger than he), and then cast a wild terrified look back. The skirmishers did not seem to remark that anybody had escaped, and he became gradually a little more composed. 'Who are they!' he said hoarsely; 'they're cursed wretches like you and me; and there are as many bands of them as there are mines on the road: and you'd better turn back and stay where you are. You are safe here.'

'I will not turn back,' I said.

'I know well enough: you can't. You've got to go the round like the rest,' he said, with a laugh which was like a sound uttered by a wild animal rather than a human voice. The man was in my power, and I struck him, miserable as he was. It seemed a relief thus to get rid of some of the fury in my mind. 'It's a lie,' I said; 'I go because I please. Why shouldn't I gather a band of my own if I please, and fight those brutes, not fly from them like you?'

He chuckled and laughed below his breath, struggling and cursing and crying

out, as I struck him again, '*You* gather a band! What could you offer them?—where would you find them? Are you better than the rest of us? Are you not a man like the rest? Strike me you can, for I'm down. But make yourself a master and a chief—you!'

'Why not I?' I shouted again, wild with rage and the sense that I had no power over him, save to hurt him. That passion made my hands tremble: he slipped from me in a moment, bounded from the ground like a ball, and with a yell of derision escaped, and plunged into the streets and the clamour of the city from which I had just flown. I felt myself rage after him, shaking my fists with a consciousness of the ridiculous passion of impotence that was in me, but no power of restraining it; and there was not one of the fugitives who passed, however desperate he might be, who did not make a mock at me as he darted by. The laughing-stock of all those miserable objects, the sport of fate,

afraid to go forward, unable to go back, with a fire in my veins urging me on! But presently I grew a little calmer out of mere exhaustion, which was all the relief that was possible to me. And by and by, collecting all my faculties, and impelled by this impulse, which I seemed unable to resist, I got up and went cautiously on.

Fear can act in two ways: it paralyses and it renders cunning. At this moment I found it inspire me. I made my plans before I started, how to steal along under the cover of the blighted brushwood which broke the line of the valley here and there. I set out only after long thought, seizing the moment when the vaguely perceived band were scouring in the other direction intercepting the travellers. Thus, with many pauses, I got near to the pit's mouth in safety. But my curiosity was as great as, almost greater than, my terror. I had kept far from the road, dragging myself sometimes on hands and feet over broken

ground, tearing my clothes and my flesh upon the thorns; and on that farther side all seemed so silent and so dark in the shadow cast by some disused machinery, behind which the glare of the fire from below blazed upon the other side of the opening, that I could not crawl along in the darkness, and pass, which would have been the safe way; but with a breathless hot desire to see and know, dragged myself to the very edge to look down. Though I was in the shadow, my eyes were nearly put out by the glare on which I gazed. It was not fire; it was the lurid glow of the gold, glowing like flame, at which countless miners were working. They were all about like flies, some on their knees, some bent double as they stooped over their work, some lying cramped upon shelves and ledges. The sight was wonderful, and terrible beyond description. The workmen seemed to consume away with the heat and the glow, even in the few minutes I gazed. Their eyes shrank into their

heads, their faces blackened. I could see some trying to secrete morsels of the glowing metal, which burned whatever it touched, and some who were being searched by the superiors of the mines, and some who were punishing the offenders, fixing them up against the blazing wall of gold. The fear went out of my mind, so much absorbed was I in this sight. I gazed, seeing farther and farther every moment, into crevices and seams of the glowing metal, always with more and more slaves at work, and the entire pantomime of labour and theft, and search and punishment, going on and on—the baked faces dark against the golden glare, the hot eyes taking a yellow reflection, the monotonous clamour of pick and shovel, and cries and curses, and all the indistinguishable sound of a multitude of human creatures. And the floor below, and the low roof which overhung whole myriads within a few inches of their faces, and the irregular walls all breached and shelved, were every

one the same, a pandemonium of gold,—gold everywhere. I had loved many foolish things in my life, but never this: which was perhaps why I gazed and kept my sight, though there rose out of it a blast of heat which scorched the brain.

While I stooped over, intent on the sight, some one who had come up by my side to gaze too was caught by the fumes (as I suppose); for suddenly I was aware of a dark object falling prone into the glowing interior with a cry and crash which brought back my first wild panic. He fell in a heap, from which his arms shot forth wildly as he reached the bottom, and his cry was half anguish yet half desire. I saw him seized by half a dozen eager watchers, and pitched upon a ledge just under the roof, and tools thrust into his hands. I held on by an old shaft, trembling, unable to move. Perhaps I cried too in my horror—for one of the overseers who stood in the centre of the glare looked up. He had the air of ordering all that

was going on, and stood unaffected by the blaze, commanding the other wretched officials, who obeyed him like dogs. He seemed to me, in my terror, like a figure of gold, the image, perhaps, of wealth or Pluto, or I know not what: for I suppose my brain began to grow confused, and my hold on the shaft to relax. I had strength enough, however, for I cared not for the gold, to fling myself back the other way upon the ground, where I rolled backward, downward, I knew not how, turning over and over, upon sharp ashes and metallic edges, which tore my hair and beard,—and for a moment I knew no more.

This fall saved me. I came to myself after a time, and heard the pressgang searching about. I had sense to lie still among the ashes thrown up out of the pit, while I heard their voices. Once I gave myself up for lost. The glitter of a lantern flashed in my eyes, a foot passed, crashing among the ashes so close to my cheek that the shoe grazed it. I found the mark after,

burned upon my flesh: but I escaped notice by a miracle. And presently I was able to drag myself up and crawl away. But how I reached the end of the valley I cannot tell. I pushed my way along mechanically on the dark side. I had no further desire to see what was going on in the openings of the mines. I went on, stumbling and stupid, scarcely capable even of fear, conscious only of wretchedness and weariness, till at last I felt myself drop across the road within the gateway of the other town —and lay there, with no thought of anything but the relief of being at rest.

When I came to myself, it seemed to me that there was a change in the atmosphere and the light. It was less lurid, paler, gray, more like twilight than the stormy afternoon of the other city. A certain dead serenity was in the sky—a black paleness, whiteness, everything faint in it. This town was walled, but the gates stood open, and I saw no defences of troops or other guardians.

I found myself lying across the threshold, but pushed to one side, so that the carriages which went and came should not be stopped or I injured by their passage. It seemed to me that there was some thoughtfulness and kindness in this action, and my heart sprang up in a reaction of hope. I looked back as if upon a nightmare on the dreadful city which I had left, on its tumults and noise, the wild racket of the streets, the wounded wretches who sought refuge in the corners, the strife and misery that were abroad, and, climax of all, the horrible entertainment which had been going on in the square, the unhappy being strapped upon the table. How, I said to myself, could such things be? Was it a dream? was it a nightmare? was it something presented to me in a vision—a strong delusion to make me think that the old fables which had been told concerning the end of mortal life were true? When I looked back it appeared

like an allegory, so that I might have seen it in a dream; and still more like an allegory were the gold-mines in the valley, and the myriads who laboured there. Was it all true? or only a reflection from the old life, mingling with the strange novelties which would most likely elude understanding, on the entrance into this new? I sat within the shelter of the gateway, on my awakening, and thought over all this. My heart was quite calm—almost, in the revulsion from the terrors I had been through, happy. I persuaded myself that I was but now beginning; that there had been no reality in these latter experiences, only a curious succession of nightmares, such as might so well be supposed to follow a wonderful transformation like that which must take place between our mortal life and—the world to come. The world to come! I paused and thought of it all, until the heart began to beat loud in my breast. What was this, where I

lay? Another world; a world which was not happiness, not bliss? Oh no — perhaps there was no world of bliss save in dreams. This, on the other hand, I said to myself, was not misery: for was not I seated here, with a certain tremulousness about me, it was true, after all the experiences which, supposing them even to have been but dreams, I had come through, — a tremulousness very comprehensible, and not at all without hope?

I will not say that I believed even what I tried to think. Something in me lay like a dark shadow in the midst of all my theories; but yet I succeeded to a great degree in convincing myself that the hope in me was real, and that I was but now beginning — beginning with at least a possibility that all might be well. In this half conviction, and after all the troubles that were over (even though they might only have been imaginary troubles), I felt a certain sweetness in resting there,

within the gateway, with my back against it. I was unwilling to get up again, and bring myself in contact with reality. I felt that there was pleasure in being left alone. Carriages rolled past me occasionally, and now and then some people on foot; but they did not kick me out of the way or interfere with my repose.

Presently as I sat trying to persuade myself to rise and pursue my way, two men came up to me in a sort of uniform. I recognised with another distinct sensation of pleasure that here were people who had authority, representatives of some kind of government. They came up to me and bade me come with them in tones which were peremptory enough; but what of that? — better the most peremptory supervision than the lawlessness from which I had come. They raised me from the ground with a touch, for I could not resist them, and led me quickly along the street, into which that gateway gave access, which was a handsome street with

tall houses on either side. Groups of people were moving about along the pavement, talking now and then with considerable animation; but when my companions were seen, there was an immediate moderation of tone, a sort of respect which looked like fear. There was no brawling nor tumult of any kind in the street. The only incident that occurred was this: when we had gone some way, I saw a lame man dragging himself along with difficulty on the other side of the street. My conductors had no sooner perceived him than they gave each other a look and darted across, conveying me with them, by a sweep of magnetic influence, I thought, that prevented me from staying behind. He made an attempt with his crutches to get out of the way, hurrying on—and I will allow that this attempt of his seemed to me very grotesque, so that I could scarcely help laughing: the other lookers-on in the street laughed too, though some put on an

aspect of disgust. 'Look, the tortoise!' some one said; 'does he think he can go quicker than the orderlies?' My companions came up to the man while this commentary was going on, and seized him by each arm. 'Where were you going? Where have you come from? How dare you make an exhibition of yourself?' they cried. They took the crutches from him as they spoke and threw them away, and dragged him on until we reached a great grated door which one of them opened with a key, while the other held the offender, for he seemed an offender, roughly up by one shoulder causing him great pain. When the door was opened, I saw a number of people within, who seemed to crowd to the door as if seeking to get out. But this was not at all what was intended. My second companion dragged the lame man forward, and pushed him in with so much violence that I could see him fall forward on his face on the floor. Then the other locked the door, and we pro-

ceeded on our way. It was not till some time later that I understood why.

In the meantime I was hurried on, meeting a great many people who took no notice of me, to a central building in the middle of the town, where I was brought before an official attended by clerks, with great books spread out before him. Here I was questioned as to my name and my antecedents, and the time of my arrival, then dismissed with a nod to one of my conductors. He led me back again down the street, took me into one of the tall great houses, opened the door of a room which was numbered, and left me there without a word. I cannot convey to any one the bewildered consternation with which I felt myself deposited here; and as the steps of my conductor died away in the long corridor, I sat down, and looking myself in the face, as it were, tried to make out what it was that had happened to me. The room was small and bare. There was but one thing hung upon the undecor-

ated walls, and that was a long list of printed regulations which I had not the courage for the moment to look at. The light was indifferent, though the room was high up, and the street from the window looked far away below. I cannot tell how long I sat there thinking, and yet it could scarcely be called thought. I asked myself over and over again, Where am I? is it a prison? am I shut in, to leave this enclosure no more? what am I to do? how is the time to pass? I shut my eyes for a moment and tried to realise all that had happened to me; but nothing save a whirl through my head of disconnected thoughts seemed possible, and some force was upon me to open my eyes again, to see the blank room, the dull light, the vacancy round me in which there was nothing to interest the mind, nothing to please the eye, a blank wherever I turned. Presently there came upon me a burning regret for everything I had left, for the noisy town with all its tumults and cruelties, for

the dark valley with all its dangers. Everything seemed bearable, almost agreeable, in comparison with this. I seemed to have been brought here to make acquaintance once more with myself, to learn over again what manner of man I was. Needless knowledge, acquaintance unnecessary, unhappy! for what was there in me to make me to myself a good companion? Never, I knew, could I separate myself from that eternal consciousness; but it was cruelty to force the contemplation upon me. All blank, blank, around me, a prison! And was this to last for ever?

I do not know how long I sat, rapt in this gloomy vision; but at last it occurred to me to rise and try the door, which to my astonishment was open. I went out with a throb of new hope. After all, it might not be necessary to come back; there might be other expedients: I might fall among friends. I turned down the long echoing stairs, on which I met various people, who took no notice of me, and in

whom I felt no interest save a desire to avoid them, and at last reached the street. To be out of doors in the air was something, though there was no wind, but a motionless still atmosphere which nothing disturbed. The streets, indeed, were full of movement, but not of life—though this seems a paradox. The passengers passed on their way in long regulated lines—those who went towards the gates keeping rigorously to one side of the pavement, those who came, to the other. They talked to each other here and there; but whenever two men in uniform, such as those who had been my conductors, appeared, silence ensued, and the wayfarers shrank even from the looks of these persons in authority. I walked all about the spacious town. Everywhere there were tall houses, everywhere streams of people coming and going, but no one spoke to me, or remarked me at all. I was as lonely as if I had been in a wilderness. I was indeed in a wilderness of men, who were as though they did not

see me, passing without even a look of human fellowship, each absorbed in his own concerns. I walked and walked till my limbs trembled under me, from one end to another of the great streets, up and down, and round and round. But no one said, How are you? Whence come you? What are you doing? At length in despair I turned again to the blank and miserable room, which had looked to me like a cell in a prison. I had wilfully made no note of its situation, trying to avoid rather than to find it, but my steps were drawn thither against my will. I found myself retracing my steps, mounting the long stairs, passing the same people, who streamed along with no recognition of me, as I desired nothing to do with them; and at last found myself within the same four blank walls as before.

Soon after I returned I became conscious of measured steps passing the door, and of an eye upon me. I can say no more than this. From what point it was that I was

inspected I cannot tell; but that I was inspected, closely scrutinised by some one, and that not only externally, but by a cold observation that went through and through me, I knew and felt beyond any possibility of mistake. This recurred from time to time, horribly, at uncertain moments, so that I never felt myself secure from it. I knew when the watcher was coming by tremors and shiverings through all my being: and no sensation so unsupportable has it ever been mine to bear. How much that is to say, no one can tell who has not gone through those regions of darkness, and learned what is in all their abysses. I tried at first to hide, to fling myself on the floor, to cover my face, to burrow in a dark corner. Useless attempts! The eyes that looked in upon me had powers beyond my powers. I felt sometimes conscious of the derisive smile with which my miserable subterfuges were regarded. They were all in vain.

And what was still more strange was

that I had not energy to think of attempting any escape. My steps, though watched, were not restrained in any way, so far as I was aware. The gates of the city stood open on all sides, free to those who went as well as to those who came; but I did not think of flight. Of flight! Whence should I go from myself? Though that horrible inspection was from the eyes of some unseen being, it was in some mysterious way connected with my own thinking and reflections, so that the thought came ever more and more strongly upon me, that from myself I could never escape. And that reflection took all energy, all impulse from me. I might have gone away when I pleased, beyond reach of the authority which regulated everything,—how one should walk, where one should live,—but never from my own consciousness. On the other side of the town lay a great plain, traversed by roads on every side. There was no reason why I should not continue my journey there. But I did

not. I had no wish nor any power in me to go away.

In one of my long, dreary, companionless walks, unshared by any human fellowship, I saw at last a face which I remembered; it was that of the cynical spectator who had spoken to me in the noisy street in the midst of my early experiences. He gave a glance round him to see that there were no officials in sight, then left the file in which he was walking, and joined me. 'Ah!' he said, 'you are here already,' with the same derisive smile with which he had before regarded me. I hated the man and his sneer, yet that he should speak to me was something, almost a pleasure.

'Yes,' said I, 'I am here.' Then, after a pause, in which I did not know what to say—'It is quiet here,' I said.

'Quiet enough. Do you like it better for that? To do whatever you please with no one to interfere; or to do nothing you please, but as you are forced to do it, —which do you think is best?'

I felt myself instinctively glance round, as he had done, to make sure that no one was in sight. Then I answered, faltering, 'I have always held that law and order were necessary things; and the lawlessness of that—that place—I don't know its name —if there is such a place,' I cried, 'I thought it was a dream.'

He laughed in his mocking way. 'Perhaps it is all a dream—who knows?' he said.

'Sir,' said I, 'you have been longer here than I——'

'Oh,' cried he, with a laugh that was dry and jarred upon the air almost like a shriek, 'since before your forefathers were born!' It seemed to me that he spoke like one who, out of bitterness and despite, made every darkness blacker still. A kind of madman in his way; for what was this claim of age?—a piece of bravado, no doubt, like the rest.

'That is strange,' I said, assenting, as when there is such a hallucination it is best to do. 'You can tell me, then,

whence all this authority comes, and why we are obliged to obey.'

He looked at me as if he were thinking in his mind how to hurt me most. Then, with that dry laugh, 'We make trial of all things in this world,' he said, 'to see if perhaps we can find something we shall like—discipline here, freedom in the other place. When you have gone all the round like me, then, perhaps, you will be able to choose.'

'Have you chosen?' I asked.

He only answered with a laugh. 'Come,' he said, 'there is amusement to be had too, and that of the most elevated kind. We make researches here into the moral nature of man. Will you come? But you must take the risk,' he added, with a smile which afterwards I understood.

We went on together after this till we reached the centre of the place, in which stood an immense building with a dome, which dominated the city, and into a great hall in the centre of that, where a crowd

of people were assembled. The sound of human speech, which murmured all around, brought new life to my heart. And as I gazed at a curious apparatus erected on a platform, several people spoke to me.

'We have again,' said one, 'the old subject to-day.'

'Is it something about the constitution of the place?' I asked, in the bewilderment of my mind.

My neighbours looked at me with alarm, glancing behind them to see what officials might be near.

'The constitution of the place is the result of the sense of the inhabitants that order must be preserved,' said the one who had spoken to me first. 'The lawless can find refuge in other places. Here we have chosen to have supervision, nuisances removed, and order kept. That is enough. The constitution is not under discussion.'

'But man is,' said a second speaker. 'Let us keep to that in which we can mend nothing. Sir, you may have to

contribute your quota to our enlightenment. We are investigating the rise of thought. You are a stranger; you may be able to help us.'

'I am no philosopher,' I said, with a panic which I could not explain to myself.

'That does not matter. You are a fresh subject.' The speaker made a slight movement with his hand, and I turned round to escape in wild, sudden fright, though I had no conception what could be done to me. But the crowd had pressed close round me, hemming me in on every side. I was so wildly alarmed that I struggled among them, pushing backwards with all my force, and clearing a space round me with my arms. But my efforts were vain. Two of the officers suddenly appeared out of the crowd, and seizing me by the arms, forced me forward. The throng dispersed before them on either side, and I was half dragged, half lifted up upon the platform, where stood the strange apparatus which I had contem-

plated with a dull wonder when I came into the hall. My wonder did not last long. I felt myself fixed in it, standing supported in that position by bands and springs, so that no effort of mine was necessary to hold myself up, and none possible to release myself. I was caught by every joint, sustained, supported, exposed to the gaze of what seemed a world of upturned faces: among which I saw, with a sneer upon it, keeping a little behind the crowd, the face of the man who had led me here. Above my head was a strong light, more brilliant than anything I had ever seen, and which blazed upon my brain till the hair seemed to singe and the skin shrink. I hope I may never feel such a sensation again. The pitiless light went into me like a knife; but even my cries were stopped by the framework in which I was bound. I could breathe and suffer, but that was all.

Then some one got up on the platform above me and began to speak. He said, so far as I could comprehend in the anguish

and torture in which I was held, that the origin of thought was the question he was investigating, but that in every previous subject the confusion of ideas had bewildered them, and the rapidity with which one followed another. 'The present example has been found to exhibit great persistency of idea,' he said. 'We hope that by his means some clearer theory may be arrived at.' Then he pulled over me a great movable lens as of a microscope, which concentrated the insupportable light. The wild, hopeless passion that raged within my soul had no outlet in the immovable apparatus that held me. I was let down among the crowd, and exhibited to them, every secret movement of my being, by some awful process which I have never fathomed. A burning fire was in my brain, flame seemed to run along all my nerves, speechless, horrible, incommunicable fury raged in my soul. But I was like a child—nay, like an image of wood or wax in the pitiless hands that

held me. What was the cut of a surgeon's knife to this? And I had thought *that* cruel! And I was powerless, and could do nothing—to blast, to destroy, to burn with this same horrible flame the fiends that surrounded me, as I desired to do.

Suddenly, in the raging fever of my thoughts, there surged up the recollection of that word which had paralysed all around, and myself with them. The thought that I must share the anguish did not restrain me from my revenge. With a tremendous effort I got my voice, though the instrument pressed upon my lips. I know not what I articulated save 'God,' whether it was a curse or a blessing. I had been swung out into the middle of the hall, and hung amid the crowd, exposed to all their observations, when I succeeded in gaining utterance. My God! my God! Another moment and I had forgotten them and all my fury in the tortures that arose within myself. What, then, was the light that racked my

brain? Once more my life from its beginning to its end rose up before me—each scene like a spectre, like the harpies of the old fables rending me with tooth and claw. Once more I saw what might have been, the noble things I might have done, the happiness I had lost, the turnings of the fated road which I might have taken,—everything that was once so possible, so possible, so easy! but now possible no more. My anguish was immeasurable; I turned and wrenched myself, in the strength of pain, out of the machinery that held me, and fell down, down among all the curses that were being hurled at me—among the horrible and miserable crowd. I had brought upon them the evil which I shared, and they fell upon me with a fury which was like that which had prompted myself a few minutes before. But they could do nothing to me so tremendous as the vengeance I had taken upon them. I was too miserable to feel the blows that rained upon me, but presently I suppose

I lost consciousness altogether, being almost torn to pieces by the multitude.

While this lasted, it seemed to me that I had a dream. I felt the blows raining down upon me, and my body struggling upon the ground; and yet it seemed to me that I was lying outside upon the ground, and above me the pale sky which never brightened at the touch of the sun. And I thought that dull, persistent cloud wavered and broke for an instant, and that I saw behind a glimpse of that blue which is heaven when we are on the earth—the blue sky—which is nowhere to be seen but in the mortal life; which is heaven enough, which is delight enough, for those who can look up to it, and feel themselves in the land of hope. It might be but a dream: in this strange world who could tell what was vision and what was true?

The next thing I remember was, that I found myself lying on the floor of a great room full of people, with every kind of disease and deformity, some pale with

sickness, some with fresh wounds, the lame, and the maimed, and the miserable. They lay round me in every attitude of pain, many with sores, some bleeding, with broken limbs, but all struggling, some on hands and knees, dragging themselves up from the ground to stare at me. They roused in my mind a loathing and sense of disgust which it is impossible to express. I could scarcely tolerate the thought that I—I! should be forced to remain a moment in this lazar-house. The feeling with which I had regarded the miserable creature who shared the corner of the wall with me, and who had cursed me for being sorry for him, had altogether gone out of my mind. I called out, to whom I know not, adjuring some one to open the door and set me free; but my cry was answered only by a shout from my companions in trouble. 'Who do you think will let you out?' 'Who is going to help you more than the rest.' My whole body was racked with pain; I could not move from the floor,

on which I lay. I had to put up with the stares of the curious, and the mockeries and remarks on me of whoever chose to criticise. Among them was the lame man whom I had seen thrust in by the two officers who had taken me from the gate. He was the first to gibe. 'But for him they would never have seen me,' he said. 'I should have been well by this time in the fresh air.'—'It is his turn now,' said another. I turned my head as well as I could and spoke to them all.

'I am a stranger here,' I cried. 'They have made my brain burn with their experiments. Will nobody help me? It is no fault of mine, it is their fault. If I am to be left here uncared for, I shall die.'

At this a sort of dreadful chuckle ran round the place. 'If that is what you are afraid of, you will not die,' somebody said, touching me on my head in a way which gave me intolerable pain. 'Don't touch me,' I cried. 'Why shouldn't I?' said the other, and pushed me again upon the throb-

bing brain. So far as my sensations went, there were no coverings at all, neither skull nor skin upon the intolerable throbbing of my head, which had been exposed to the curiosity of the crowd, and every touch was agony; but my cry brought no guardian, nor any defence or soothing. I dragged myself into a corner after a time, from which some other wretch had been rolled out in the course of a quarrel; and as I found that silence was the only policy, I kept silent, with rage consuming my heart.

Presently I discovered by means of the new arrivals which kept coming in, hurled into the midst of us without thought or question, that this was the common fate of all who were repulsive to the sight, or who had any weakness or imperfection which offended the eyes, of the population. They were tossed in among us, not to be healed, or for repose or safety, but to be out of sight, that they might not disgust or annoy those who were more fortunate, to whom

no injury had happened; and because in their sickness and imperfection they were of no use in the studies of the place, and disturbed the good order of the streets. And there they lay one above another, a mass of bruised and broken creatures, most of them suffering from injuries which they had sustained in what would have been called in other regions the service of the State. They had served like myself as objects of experiments. They had fallen from heights where they had been placed, in illustration of some theory. They had been tortured or twisted to give satisfaction to some question. And then, that the consequences of these proceedings might offend no one's eyes, they were flung into this receptacle, to be released if chance or strength enabled them to push their way out when others were brought in, or when their importunate knocking wearied some watchman, and brought him angry and threatening to hear what was wanted. The sound of this knocking against the door, and of

the cries that accompanied it, and the rush towards the opening when any one was brought in, caused a hideous continuous noise and scuffle which was agony to my brain. Every one pushed before the other; there was an endless rising and falling as in the changes of a feverish dream, each man as he got strength to struggle forward himself, thrusting back his neighbours, and those who were nearest to the door beating upon it without cease, like the beating of a drum without cadence or measure, sometimes a dozen passionate hands together, making a horrible din and riot. As I lay unable to join in that struggle, and moved by rage unspeakable towards all who could, I reflected strangely that I had never heard when outside this horrible continual appeal of the suffering. In the streets of the city, as I now reflected, quiet reigned. I had even made comparisons on my first entrance, in the moment of pleasant anticipation which came over me, of the happy stillness here, with the horror

and tumult of that place of unrule which I had left.

When my thoughts reached this point I was answered by the voice of some one on a level with myself, lying helpless like me on the floor of the lazar-house. 'They have taken their precautions,' he said; 'if they will not endure the sight of suffering, how should they hear the sound of it? Every cry is silenced there.'

'I wish they could be silenced within too,' I cried savagely; 'I would make them dumb had I the power.'

'The spirit of the place is in you,' said the other voice.

'And not in you?' I said, raising my head, though every movement was agony; but this pretence of superiority was more than I could bear.

The other made no answer for a moment: then he said faintly, 'If it is so, it is but for greater misery.'

And then his voice died away, and the hubbub of beating, and crying, and cursing,

and groaning filled all the echoes. They cried, but no one listened to them. They thundered on the door, but in vain. They aggravated all their pangs in that mad struggle to get free. After a while my companion, whoever he was, spoke again.

'They would rather,' he said, 'lie on the roadside to be kicked and trodden on, as we have seen; though to see that made you miserable.'

'Made me miserable! You mock me,' I said. 'Why should a man be miserable save for suffering of his own?'

'You thought otherwise once,' my neighbour said.

And then I remembered the wretch in the corner of the wall in the other town, who had cursed me for pitying him. I cursed myself now for that folly. Pity him! was he not better off than I? 'I wish,' I cried, 'that I could crush them into nothing, and be rid of this infernal noise they make!'

'The spirit of the place has entered into you,' said that voice.

I raised my arm to strike him; but my hand fell on the stone floor instead, and sent a jar of new pain all through my battered frame. And then I mastered my rage, and lay still, for I knew there was no way but this of recovering my strength,—the strength with which, when I got it back, I would annihilate that reproachful voice, and crush the life out of those groaning fools, whose cries and impotent struggles I could not endure. And we lay a long time without moving, with always that tumult raging in our ears. At last there came into my mind a longing to hear spoken words again. I said, 'Are you still there?'

'I shall be here,' he said, 'till I am able to begin again.'

'To begin! Is there here, then, either beginning or ending? Go on: speak to me: it makes me a little forget my pain.'

'I have a fire in my heart,' he said; 'I

must begin and begin—till perhaps I find the way.'

'What way?' I cried, feverish and eager; for though I despised him, yet it made me wonder to think that he should speak riddles which I could not understand.

He answered very faintly, 'I do not know.' The fool! then it was only folly, as from the first I knew it was. I felt then that I could treat him roughly, after the fashion of the place—which he said had got into me. 'Poor wretch!' I said, 'you have hopes, have you? Where have you come from? You might have learned better before now.'

'I have come,' he said, 'from where we met before. I have come by the valley of gold. I have worked in the mines. I have served in the troops of those who are masters there. I have lived in this town of tyrants, and lain in this lazar-house before. Everything has happened to me, more and worse than you dream of.'

'And still you go on? I would dash my head against the wall and die.'

'When will you learn,' he said, with a strange tone in his voice, which, though no one had been listening to us, made a sudden silence for a moment—it was so strange: it moved me like that glimmer of the blue sky in my dream, and roused all the sufferers round with an expectation—though I know not what. The cries stopped, the hands beat no longer. I think all the miserable crowd were still, and turned to where he lay. 'When will you learn—that you have died, and can die no more?'

There was a shout of fury all round me. 'Is that all you have to say?' the crowd burst forth: and I think they rushed upon him and killed him: for I heard no more: until the hubbub began again more wild than ever, with furious hands beating, beating, against the locked door.

After a while I began to feel my strength come back. I raised my head. I sat up.

I began to see the faces of those around me, and the groups into which they gathered; the noise was no longer so insupportable — my racked nerves were regaining health. It was with a mixture of pleasure and despair that I became conscious of this. I had been through many deaths; but I did not die, perhaps could not, as that man had said. I looked about for him, to see if he had contradicted his own theory. But he was not dead. He was lying close to me, covered with wounds; but he opened his eyes, and something like a smile came upon his lips. A smile—I had heard laughter, and seen ridicule and derision, but this I had not seen. I could not bear it. To seize him and shake the little remaining life out of him was my impulse. But neither did I obey that. Again he reminded me of my dream—was it a dream? —of the opening in the clouds. From that moment I tried to shelter him, and as I grew stronger and stronger, and pushed my way to the door, I dragged him along

with me. How long the struggle was I cannot tell, or how often I was balked—or how many darted through before me when the door was opened. But I did not let him go; and at the last, for now I was as strong as before—stronger than most about me—I got out into the air and brought him with me. Into the air! it was an atmosphere so still and motionless that there was no feeling of life in it, as I have said; but the change seemed to me happiness for the moment. It was freedom. The noise of the struggle was over, the horrible sights were left behind. My spirit sprang up as if I had been born into new life. It had the same effect, I suppose, upon my companion, though he was much weaker than I, for he rose to his feet at once with almost a leap of eagerness, and turned instantaneously towards the other side of the city.

'Not that way,' I said; 'come with me and rest.'

'No rest—no rest—my rest is to go on;' and then he turned towards me and smiled

and said 'Thanks'—looking into my face. What a word to hear! I had not heard it since—— A rush of strange and sweet and dreadful thoughts came into my mind. I shrank and trembled, and let go his arm, which I had been holding. But when I left that hold I seemed to fall back into depths of blank pain and longing. I put out my hand again and caught him. 'I will go,' I said, 'where you go.'

A pair of the officials of the place passed as I spoke. They looked at me with a threatening glance, and half paused, but then passed on. It was I now who hurried my companion along. I recollected him now. He was a man who had met me in the streets of the other city when I was still ignorant, who had convulsed me with the utterance of that name which, in all this world where we were, is never named but for punishment,—the name which I had named once more in the great hall in the midst of my torture, so that all who heard me were transfixed

with that suffering too. He had been haggard then, but he was more haggard now. His features were sharp with continual pain, his eyes were wild with weakness and trouble, though there was a meaning in them which went to my heart. It seemed to me that in his touch there was a certain help, though he was weak and tottered, and every moment seemed full of suffering. Hope sprang up in my mind—the hope that where he was so eager to go there would be something better, a life more liveable than in this place. In every new place there is new hope. I was not worn out of that human impulse. I forgot the nightmare which had crushed me before—the horrible sense that from myself there was no escape—and holding fast to his arm, I hurried on with him, not heeding where. We went aside into less frequented streets, that we might escape observation. I seemed to myself the guide, though I was the follower. A great faith in this man

sprang up in my breast. I was ready to go with him wherever he went, anywhere —anywhere must be better than this. Thus I pushed him on, holding by his arm, till we reached the very outmost limits of the city. Here he stood still for a moment, turning upon me, and took me by the hands.

'Friend,' he said, 'before you were born into the pleasant earth I had come here. I have gone all the weary round. Listen to one who knows: all is harder, harder, as you go on. You are stirred to go on by the restlessness in your heart, and each new place you come to the spirit of that place enters into you. You are better here than you will be farther on. You were better where you were at first, or even in the mines than here. Come no farther. Stay—unless——' but here his voice gave way. He looked at me with anxiety in his eyes, and said no more.

'Then why,' I cried, 'do you go on? Why do you not stay?'

He shook his head, and his eyes grew more and more soft. 'I am going,' he said, and his voice shook again. 'I am going—to try—the most awful and the most dangerous journey——' His voice died away altogether, and he only looked at me to say the rest.

'A journey? Where?'

I can tell no man what his eyes said. I understood, I cannot tell how; and with trembling all my limbs seemed to drop out of joint and my face grow moist with terror. I could not speak any more than he, but with my lips shaped, How? The awful thought made a tremor in the very air around. He shook his head slowly as he looked at me—his eyes, all circled with deep lines, looking out of caves of anguish and anxiety; and then I remembered how he had said, and I had scoffed at him, that the way he sought was one he did not know. I had dropped his hands in my fear; and yet to leave him seemed dragging the heart out of my breast, for none

but he had spoken to me like a brother—had taken my hand and thanked me. I looked out across the plain, and the roads seemed tranquil and still. There was a coolness in the air. It looked like evening, as if somewhere in those far distances there might be a place where a weary soul might rest. And I looked behind me, and thought what I had suffered, and remembered the lazar-house and the voices that cried and the hands that beat against the door; and also the horrible quiet of the room in which I lived, and the eyes which looked in at me and turned my gaze upon myself. Then I rushed after him, for he had turned to go on upon his way; and caught at his clothes, crying—'Behold me, behold me! I will go too!'

He reached me his hand and went on without a word; and I with terror crept after him, treading in his steps, following like his shadow. What it was to walk with another, and follow, and be at one, is more than I can tell; but likewise my heart

failed me for fear, for dread of what we might encounter, and of hearing that name, or entering that presence, which was more terrible than all torture. I wondered how it could be that one should willingly face *that* which racked the soul, and how he had learned that it was possible, and where he had heard of the way. And as we went on I said no word—for he began to seem to me a being of another kind, a figure full of awe; and I followed as one might follow a ghost. Where would he go? Were we not fixed here for ever, where our lot had been cast? and there were still many other great cities where there might be much to see, and something to distract the mind, and where it might be more possible to live than it had proved in the other places. There might be no tyrants there, nor cruelty, nor horrible noises, nor dreadful silence. Towards the right hand, across the plain, there seemed to rise out of the gray distance a cluster of towers and roofs like another habitable place—and who could

tell that something better might not be there? Surely everything could not turn to torture and misery. I dragged on behind him, with all these thoughts hurrying through my mind. He was going—I dare to say it now, though I did not dare then—to seek out a way to God; to try, if it was possible, to find the road that led back—that road which had been open once to all. But for me, I trembled at the thought of that road. I feared the name, which was as the plunging of a sword into my inmost parts. All things could be borne but that. I dared not even think upon that name. To feel my hand in another man's hand was much, but to be led into that awful presence, by awful ways, which none knew—how could I bear it? My spirits failed me, and my strength. My hand became loose in his hand: he grasped me still, but my hold failed, and ever with slower and slower steps I followed, while he seemed to acquire strength with every winding of the way. At length he said to me, looking

back upon me, 'I cannot stop: but your heart fails you. Shall I loose my hand and let you go?'

'I am afraid; I am afraid!' I cried.

'And I too am afraid; but it is better to suffer more and to escape than to suffer less and to remain.'

'Has it ever been known that one escaped? No one has ever escaped. This is our place,' I said, 'there is no other world.'

'There are other worlds—there is a world where every way leads to One who loves us still.'

I cried out with a great cry of misery and scorn. 'There is no love!' I said.

He stood still for a moment and turned and looked at me. His eyes seemed to melt my soul. A great cloud passed over them, as in the pleasant earth a cloud will sweep across the moon; and then the light came out and looked at me again. For neither did he know. Where he was going all might end in despair and double and

double pain. But if it were possible that at the end there should be found that for which he longed, upon which his heart was set! He said with a faltering voice —'Among all whom I have questioned and seen there was but one who found the way. But if one has found it, so may I. If you will not come, yet let me go.'

'They will tear you limb from limb—they will burn you in the endless fires,' I said. But what is it to be torn limb from limb, or burned with fire? There came upon his face a smile, and in my heart even I laughed to scorn what I had said.

'If I were dragged every nerve apart, and every thought turned into a fiery dart —and that is so,' he said; 'yet will I go, if but, perhaps, I may see Love at the end.'

'There is no love!' I cried again, with a sharp and bitter cry; and the echo seemed to come back and back from every side, No love! no love! till the man who was my friend faltered and stumbled like

a drunken man; but afterwards he recovered strength and resumed his way.

And thus once more we went on. On the right hand was that city, growing ever clearer, with noble towers rising up to the sky, and battlements and lofty roofs, and behind a yellow clearness, as of a golden sunset. My heart drew me there; it sprang up in my breast and sang in my ears, Come, and Come. Myself invited me to this new place as to a home. The others were wretched, but this will be happy: delights and pleasures will be there. And before us the way grew dark with storms, and there grew visible among the mists a black line of mountains, perpendicular cliffs, and awful precipices, which seemed to bar the way. I turned from that line of gloomy heights, and gazed along the path to where the towers stood up against the sky. And presently my hand dropped by my side, that had been held in my companion's hand; and I saw him no more.

I went on to the city of the evening light. Ever and ever, as I proceeded on my way, the sense of haste and restless impatience grew upon me, so that I felt myself incapable of remaining long in a place, and my desire grew stronger to hasten on and on; but when I entered the gates of the city this longing vanished from my mind. There seemed some great festival or public holiday going on there. The streets were full of pleasure-parties, and in every open place (of which there were many) were bands of dancers, and music playing; and the houses about were hung with tapestries and embroideries and garlands of flowers. A load seemed to be taken from my spirit when I saw all this—for a whole population does not rejoice in such a way without some cause. And to think that, after all I had found a place in which I might live and forget the misery and pain which I had known, and all that was behind me, was delightful to my soul. It seemed to me that all the dancers were

beautiful and young, their steps went gaily to the music, their faces were bright with smiles. Here and there was a master of the feast, who arranged the dances and guided the musicians, yet seemed to have a look and smile for new-comers too. One of these came forward to meet me, and received me with a welcome, and showed me a vacant place at a table, on which were beautiful fruits piled up in baskets, and all the provisions for a meal. 'You were expected, you perceive,' he said. A delightful sense of well-being came into my mind. I sat down in the sweetness of ease after fatigue, of refreshment after weariness, of pleasant sounds and sights after the arid way. I said to myself that my past experiences had been a mistake, that this was where I ought to have come from the first, that life here would be happy, and that all intruding thoughts must soon vanish and die away.

After I had rested, I strolled about, and entered fully into the pleasures of the

place. Wherever I went, through all the city, there was nothing but brightness and pleasure, music playing, and flags waving, and flowers and dancers and everything that was most gay. I asked several people whom I met what was the cause of the rejoicing; but either they were too much occupied with their own pleasures, or my question was lost in the hum of merriment, the sound of the instruments and of the dancers' feet. When I had seen as much as I desired of the pleasure out of doors, I was taken by some to see the interiors of houses, which were all decorated for this festival, whatever it was—lighted up with curious varieties of lighting, in tints of different colours. The doors and windows were all open, and whosoever would could come in from the dance or from the laden tables, and sit down where they pleased and rest, always with a pleasant view out upon the streets, so that they should lose nothing of the spectacle. And the dresses, both of women and men, were beautiful in form

and colour, made in the finest fabrics, and affording delightful combinations to the eye. The pleasure which I took in all I saw and heard was enhanced by the surprise of it, and by the aspect of the places from which I had come, where there was no regard to beauty nor anything lovely or bright. Before my arrival here I had come in my thoughts to the conclusion that life had no brightness in these regions, and that whatever occupation or study there might be, pleasure had ended and was over, and everything that had been sweet in the former life. I changed that opinion with a sense of relief, which was more warm even than the pleasure of the present moment; for having made one such mistake, how could I tell that there were not more discoveries awaiting me, that life might not prove more endurable, might not rise to something grander and more powerful? The old prejudices, the old foregone conclusion of earth that this was a world of punishment, had warped

my vision and my thoughts. With so many added faculties of being, incapable of fatigue as we were, incapable of death, recovering from every wound or accident as I had myself done, and with no foolish restraint as to what we should or should not do, why might not we rise in this land to strength unexampled, to the highest powers? I rejoiced that I had dropped my companion's hand, that I had not followed him in his mad quest. Some time, I said to myself, I would make a pilgrimage to the foot of those gloomy mountains, and bring him back, all racked and tortured as he was, and show him the pleasant place which he had missed.

In the meantime the music and the dance went on. But it began to surprise me a little that there was no pause, that the festival continued without intermission. I went up to one of those who seemed the masters of ceremony, directing what was going on. He was an old man, with a flowing robe of brocade, and a chain and

badge which denoted his office. He stood with a smile upon his lips, beating time with his hand to the music, watching the figure of the dance.

'I can get no one to tell me,' I said, 'what the occasion of all this rejoicing is.'

'It is for your coming,' he replied, without hesitation, with a smile and a bow.

For the moment a wonderful elation came over me. 'For my coming!' But then I paused and shook my head. 'There are others coming besides me. See! they arrive every moment.'

'It is for their coming too,' he said, with another smile and a still deeper bow; 'but you are the first as you are the chief.'

This was what I could not understand; but it was pleasant to hear, and I made no further objection. 'And how long will it go on?' I said.

'So long as it pleases you,' said the old courtier.

How he smiled! His smile did not

please me. He saw this, and distracted my attention. 'Look at this dance,' he said; 'how beautiful are those round young limbs! Look how the dress conceals yet shows the form and beautiful movements! It was invented in your honour. All that is lovely is for you. Choose where you will, all is yours. We live only for this: all is for you.' While he spoke, the dancers came nearer and nearer till they circled us round, and danced and made their pretty obeisances, and sang: 'All is yours; all is for you:' then breaking their lines floated away in other circles and processions and endless groups, singing and laughing till it seemed to ring from every side, 'Everything is yours; all is for you.'

I accepted this flattery I know not why: for I soon became aware that I was no more than others, and that the same words were said to every new-comer. Yet my heart was elated, and I threw myself into all that was set before me.

But there was always in my mind an expectation that presently the music and the dancing would cease, and the tables be withdrawn, and a pause come. At one of the feasts I was placed by the side of a lady very fair and richly dressed, but with a look of great weariness in her eyes. She turned her beautiful face to me, not with any show of pleasure, and there was something like compassion in her look. She said, 'You are very tired,' as she made room for me by her side.

'Yes,' I said, though with surprise, for I had not yet acknowledged that even to myself. 'There is so much to enjoy. We have need of a little rest.'

'Of rest,' said she, shaking her head, 'this is not the place for rest.'

'Yet pleasure requires it,' I said, 'as much as——' I was about to say pain; but why should one speak of pain in a place given up to pleasure? She smiled faintly and shook her head again. All her movements were languid and faint;

her eyelids drooped over her eyes. Yet, when I turned to her, she made an effort to smile. 'I think you are also tired,' I said.

At this she roused herself a little. 'We must not say so: nor do I say so. Pleasure is very exacting. It demands more of you than anything else. One must be always ready——'

'For what?'

'To give enjoyment, and to receive it.' There was an effort in her voice to rise to this sentiment, but it fell back into weariness again.

'I hope you receive as well as give,' I said.

The lady turned her eyes to me with a look which I cannot forget, and life seemed once more to be roused within her. But not the life of pleasure: her eyes were full of loathing, and fatigue, and disgust, and despair. 'Are you so new to this place,' she said, 'and have not learned even yet what is the height of all

misery and all weariness: what is worse than pain and trouble, more dreadful than the lawless streets and the burning mines, and the torture of the great hall and the misery of the lazar-house——'

'Oh, lady,' I said, 'have you been there?'

She answered me with her eyes alone; there was no need of more. 'But pleasure is more terrible than all,' she said; and I knew in my heart that what she said was true.

There is no record of time in that place. I could not count it by days or nights: but soon after this it happened to me that the dances and the music became no more than a dizzy maze of sound and sight, which made my brain whirl round and round; and I too loathed what was spread on the table, and the soft couches, and the garlands, and the fluttering flags and ornaments. To sit for ever at a feast, to see for ever the merry-makers turn round and round, to hear

in your ears for ever the whirl of the music, the laughter, the cries of pleasure! There were some who went on and on, and never seemed to tire; but to me the endless round came at last to be a torture from which I could not escape. Finally, I could distinguish nothing—neither what I heard nor what I saw: and only a consciousness of something intolerable buzzed and echoed in my brain. I longed for the quiet of the place I had left; I longed for the noise in the streets, and the hubbub and tumult of my first experiences. Anything, anything rather than this! I said to myself; and still the dancers turned, the music sounded, the bystanders smiled, and everything went on and on. My eyes grew weary with seeing, and my ears with hearing. To watch the new-comers rush in, all pleased and eager, to see the eyes of the others glaze with weariness, wrought upon my strained nerves. I could not think, I could not rest, I could not endure.

Music for ever and ever—a whirl, a rush of music, always going on and on; and ever that maze of movement, till the eyes were feverish and the mouth parched; ever that mist of faces, now one gleaming out of the chaos, now another, some like the faces of angels, some miserable, weary, strained with smiling, with the monotony, and the endless, aimless, never-changing round. I heard myself calling to them to be still—to be still! to pause a moment. I felt myself stumble and turn round in the giddiness and horror of that movement without repose. And finally, I fell under the feet of the crowd, and felt the whirl go over and over me, and beat upon my brain, until I was pushed and thrust out of the way lest I should stop the measure. There I lay, sick, satiate, for I know not how long; loathing everything around me, ready to give all I had (but what had I to give?) for one moment of silence. But always the music went on, and the dancers danced, and the people

feasted, and the songs and the voices echoed up to the skies.

How at last I stumbled forth I cannot tell. Desperation must have moved me, and that impatience which, after every hope and disappointment, comes back and back, the one sensation that never fails. I dragged myself at last by intervals, like a sick dog, outside the revels, still hearing them, which was torture to me, even when at last I got beyond the crowd. It was something to lie still upon the ground, though without power to move, and sick beyond all thought, loathing myself and all that I had been and seen. For I had not even the sense that I had been wronged to keep me up, but only a nausea and horror of movement, a giddiness and whirl of every sense. I lay like a log upon the ground.

When I recovered my faculties a little, it was to find myself once more in the great vacant plain which surrounded that accursed home of pleasure—a great and

desolate waste upon which I could see no track, which my heart fainted to look at, which no longer roused any hope in me, as if it might lead to another beginning, or any place in which yet at the last it might be possible to live. As I lay in that horrible giddiness and faintness, I loathed life and this continuance which brought me through one misery after another, and forbade me to die. Oh that death would come—death which is silent and still, which makes no movement and hears no sound! that I might end and be no more! Oh that I could go back even to the stillness of that chamber which I had not been able to endure! Oh that I could return—return! to what? to other miseries and other pain, which looked less because they were past. But I knew now that return was impossible until I had circled all the dreadful round; and already I felt again the burning of that desire that pricked and drove me on—not back, for that was impossible. Little by little I had learned

to understand, each step printed upon my brain as with red-hot irons: not back, but on, and on. To greater anguish, yes; but on: to fuller despair, to experiences more terrible: but on, and on, and on. I arose again, for this was my fate. I could not pause even for all the teachings of despair.

The waste stretched far as eyes could see. It was wild and terrible, with neither vegetation nor sign of life. Here and there were heaps of ruin, which had been villages and cities; but nothing was in them save reptiles and crawling poisonous life, and traps for the unwary wanderer. How often I stumbled and fell among these ashes and dust-heaps of the past—through what dread moments I lay, with cold and slimy things leaving their trace upon my flesh—the horrors which seized me, so that I beat my head against a stone, —why should I tell? These were nought; they touched not the soul. They were but accidents of the way.

At length, when body and soul were

low and worn out with misery and weariness, I came to another place, where all was so different from the last, that the sight gave me a momentary solace. It was full of furnaces and clanking machinery and endless work. The whole air round was aglow with the fury of the fires, and men went and came like demons in the flames, with red-hot melting metal, pouring it into moulds and beating it on anvils. In the huge workshops in the background there was a perpetual whir of machinery — of wheels turning and turning, and pistons beating, and all the din of labour, which for a time renewed the anguish of my brain, yet also soothed it; for there was meaning in the beatings and the whirlings. And a hope rose within me that with all the forces that were here, some revolution might be possible — something that would change the features of this place and overturn the worlds. I went from workshop to workshop, and examined all that was

being done and understood—for I had known a little upon the earth, and my old knowledge came back, and to learn so much more filled me with new life. The master of all was one who never rested, nor seemed to feel weariness, nor pain, nor pleasure. He had everything in his hand. All who were there were his workmen, or his assistants, or his servants. No one shared with him in his councils. He was more than a prince among them—he was as a god. And the things he planned and made, and at which in armies and legions his workmen toiled and laboured, were like living things. They were made of steel and iron, but they moved like the brains and nerves of men. They went where he directed them, and did what he commanded, and moved at a touch. And though he talked little, when he saw how I followed all that he did, he was a little moved towards me, and spoke and explained to me the conceptions that were

in his mind, one rising out of another, like the leaf out of the stem and the flower out of the bud. For nothing pleased him that he did, and necessity was upon him to go on and on.

'They are like living things,' I said—'they do your bidding whatever you command them. They are like another and a stronger race of men.'

'Men!' he said, 'what are men? the most contemptible of all things that are made—creatures who will undo in a moment what it has taken millions of years, and all the skill and all the strength of generations to do. These are better than men. They cannot think or feel. They cannot stop but at my bidding, or begin unless I will. Had men been made so, we should be masters of the world.'

'Had men been made so, you would never have been—for what could genius have done or thought?—you would have been a machine like all the rest.'

'And better so!' he said, and turned

away; for at that moment, watching keenly as he spoke the action of a delicate combination of movements, all made and balanced to a hair's-breadth, there had come to him suddenly the idea of something which made it a hundredfold more strong and terrible. For they were terrible these things that lived yet did not live, which were his slaves, and moved at his will. When he had done this, he looked at me, and a smile came upon his mouth: but his eyes smiled not, nor ever changed from the set look they wore. And the words he spoke were familiar words, not his, but out of the old life. 'What a piece of work is a man!' he said; 'how noble in reason, how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! And yet to me what is this quintessence of dust?' His mind had followed another strain of thought, which to me was bewildering, so that I did not know how to reply. I answered like a child, upon his last word.

'We are dust no more,' I cried, for

pride was in my heart—pride of him and his wonderful strength, and his thoughts which created strength, and all the marvels he did—'those things which hindered are removed. Go on, go on—you want but another step. What is to prevent that you should not shake the universe, and overturn this doom, and break all our bonds? There is enough here to explode this gray fiction of a firmament, and to rend those precipices and to dissolve that waste—as at the time when the primeval seas dried up, and those infernal mountains rose.'

He laughed and the echoes caught the sound and gave it back as if they mocked it. 'There is enough to rend us all into shreds,' he said, 'and shake, as you say, both heaven and earth, and these plains and those hills.'

'Then why,' I cried in my haste, with a dreadful hope piercing through my soul—'why do you create and perfect, but never employ? When we had armies on the

earth we used them. You have more than armies. You have force beyond the thoughts of man: but all without use as yet.'

'All,' he cried, 'for no use! All in vain!—in vain!'

'O master!' I said, 'great, and more great, in time to come. Why?—why?'

He took me by the arm and drew me close.

'Have you strength,' he said, 'to bear it if I tell you why?'

I knew what he was about to say. I felt it in the quivering of my veins, and my heart that bounded as if it would escape from my breast. But I would not quail from what he did not shrink to utter. I could speak no word, but I looked him in the face and waited—for that which was more terrible than all.

He held me by the arm, as if he would hold me up when the shock of anguish came. 'They are in vain,' he said, 'in vain—because God rules over all.'

His arm was strong; but I fell at his feet like a dead man.

How miserable is that image, and how unfit to use! Death is still and cool and sweet. There is nothing in it that pierces like a sword, that burns like fire, that rends and tears like the turning wheels. O life, O pain, O terrible name of God, in which is all succour and all torment! What are pangs and tortures to that, which ever increases in its awful power, and has no limit, nor any alleviation, but whenever it is spoken penetrates through and through the miserable soul? O God, whom once I called my Father! O Thou who gavest me being, against whom I have fought, whom I fight to the end, shall there never be anything but anguish in the sound of Thy great name?

When I returned to such command of myself as one can have who has been transfixed by that sword of fire, the master stood by me still. He had not fallen like me, but his face was drawn with anguish

and sorrow like the face of my friend who had been with me in the lazar-house, who had disappeared on the dark mountains. And as I looked at him, terror seized hold upon me, and a desire to flee and save myself, that I might not be drawn after him by the longing that was in his eyes.

The master gave me his hand to help me to rise, and it trembled, but not like mine.

'Sir,' I cried, 'have not we enough to bear? Is it for hatred, is it for vengeance, that you speak that name!'

'O friend,' he said, 'neither for hatred nor revenge. It is like a fire in my veins: if one could find Him again——!'

'You, who are as a god—who can make and destroy—you, who could shake His throne!'

He put up his hand. 'I who am His creature, even here—and still His child, though I am so far, so far——' He caught my hand in his, and pointed with the other trembling. 'Look! your eyes

are more clear than mine, for they are not anxious like mine. Can you see anything upon the way?'

The waste lay wild before us, dark with a faintly-rising cloud, for darkness and cloud and the gloom of death attended upon that name. I thought, in his great genius and splendour of intellect, he had gone mad, as sometimes may be. 'There is nothing,' I said, and scorn came into my soul; but even as I spoke I saw—I cannot tell what I saw—a moving spot of milky whiteness in that dark and miserable wilderness,—no bigger than a man's hand, no bigger than a flower. 'There is something,' I said unwillingly; 'it has no shape nor form. It is a gossamer-web upon some bush, or a butterfly blown on the wind.'

'There are neither butterflies nor gossamers here.'

'Look for yourself then!' I cried, flinging his hand from me. I was angry with a rage which had no cause. I turned from him, though I loved him, with a desire to

kill him in my heart; and hurriedly took the other way. The waste was wild: but rather that than to see the man who might have shaken earth and hell thus turning, turning to madness and the awful journey. For I knew what in his heart he thought, and I knew that it was so. It was something from that other sphere—can I tell you what? a child perhaps—oh, thought that wrings the heart! for do you know what manner of thing a child is? There are none in the land of darkness. I turned my back upon the place where that whiteness was. On, on, across the waste! On to the cities of the night! On, far away from maddening thought, from hope that is torment, and from the awful Name!

The above narrative, though it is necessary to a full understanding of the experiences of the Little Pilgrim in the Unseen, does not belong to her personal story in any way, but is drawn from the Archives in the Heavenly City where all the records of the human race are laid up.

II

THE LITTLE PILGRIM

IN THE SEEN AND UNSEEN

THE little Pilgrim, whose story has been told in another place, and who had arrived but lately on the other side, among those who know trouble and sorrow no more, was one whose heart was always full of pity for the suffering. And after the first rapture of her arrival, and of the blessed work which had been given to her to do, and all the wonderful things she had learned of the new life, there returned to her in the midst of her happiness so many questions and longing thoughts that They were touched by them who have the care

of the younger brethren, the simple ones of heaven. These questions did not disturb her peace or joy, for she knew that which is so often veiled on earth, that all is accomplished by the will of the Father, and that nothing can happen but according to His appointment and under His care. And she was also aware that the end is as the beginning to Him who knows all, and that nothing is lost that is in His hand. But though she would herself have willingly borne the sufferings of earth ten times over for the sake of all that was now hers, yet it pierced her soul to think of those who were struggling in darkness, and whose hearts were stifled within them by all the bitterness of the mortal life. Sometimes she would be ready to cry out with wonder that the Lord did not hasten His steps and go down again upon the earth to make all plain; or how the Father himself could restrain His power and did not send down ten legions of angels to

make all that was wrong right, and turn all that was mournful into joy.

'It is but for a little time,' said her companions. 'When we have reached this place we remember no more the anguish.'—'But to them in their trouble it does not seem a little time,' the Pilgrim said. And in her heart there rose a great longing. Oh that He would send me! that I might tell my brethren—not like the poor man in the land of darkness, of the gloom and misery of that distant place, but, a happier message, of the light and brightness of this, and how soon all pain would be over. She would not put this into a prayer, for she knew that to refuse a prayer is pain to the Father, if in His great glory any pain can be. And then she reasoned with herself and said, 'What can I tell them, except that all will soon be well? and this they know, for our Lord has said it: but I am like them, and I do not understand.'

One fair morning while she turned

over these thoughts in her mind there suddenly came towards her one whom she knew as a sage, of the number of those who know many mysteries and search into the deep things of the Father. For a moment she wondered if perhaps he came to reprove her for too many questionings, and rose up and advanced a little towards him with folded hands and a thankful heart, to receive the reproof if it should be so—for whether it were praise, or whether it were blame, it was from the Father, and a great honour and happiness to receive. But as he came towards her he smiled and bade her not to fear. 'I am come,' he said, 'to tell you some things you long to know, and to show you some things that are hidden to most. Little sister, you are not to be charged with any mission——'

'Oh no,' she said, 'oh no. I was not so presuming——'

'It is not presuming to wish to carry

comfort to any soul; but it is permitted to me to open up to you, so far as I may, some of the secrets. The secrets of the Father are all beautiful, but there is sorrow in them as well as joy; and Pain, you know, is one of the great angels at the door.'

'Is his name Pain? and I took him for Consolation!' the little Pilgrim said.

'He is not Consolation: he is the schoolmaster whose face is often stern. But I did not come to tell you of him whom you know: I am going to take you—back,' the wise man said.

'Back!' She knew what this meant, and a great pleasure, yet mingled with fear, came into her mind. She hesitated and looked at him, and did not know how to accept, though she longed to do so, for at the same time she was afraid. He smiled when he saw the alarm in her face.

'Do you think,' he said, 'that you are to go this journey on your own

charges? Had you insisted, as some do, to go at all hazards, you might indeed have feared; and even now I cannot promise that you will not feel the thorns of the earth as you pass: but you will be cared for, so that no harm can come.'

'Ah,' she said wistfully, 'it is not for harm——' and could say nothing more.

He laid his hand upon her arm and he said, 'Do not fear; though they see you not, it is yet sweet, for a moment, to be there—and as you pass, it brings thoughts of you to their minds.'

For these two understood each other and knew that to see and yet not be seen is only a pleasure for those who are most like the Father, and can love without thought of love in return.

When he touched her it seemed to the little Pilgrim suddenly that everything changed round her, and that she was no longer in her own place but walking along a weary length of road. It was

narrow and rough, and the skies were dim. And as she went on by the side of her guide she saw houses and gardens which were to her like the houses that children build, and the little gardens in which they sow seeds and plant flowers, and take them up again to see if they are growing. She turned to the Sage, saying, 'What are——?' and then stopped and gazed again, and burst out into something that was between laughing and tears. 'For it is home,' she cried, 'and I did not know it! dear home.' Her heart was remorseful, as if she had wounded the little diminished place.

'This is what happens with those who have been living in the king's palaces,' he said, with a smile.

'But I love it dearly, I love it dearly,' the little Pilgrim said, stretching out her hands as if for pardon. He smiled at her, consoling her: and then his face changed and grew very grave.

'Little sister,' he said, 'you have come

not to see happiness but pain. We want no explanation of the joy, for that flows freely from the heart of the Father and all is clear between us and Him; but that which you desire to know is why trouble should be. Therefore you must think of Him and be strong, for here is what will rend your heart.'

The little Pilgrim was seized once more with mortal fear. 'O friend,' she cried, 'I have done with pain. Must I go and see others suffering and do nothing for them?'

'If anything comes into your heart to do or say, it will be well for them,' the Sage replied: and he took her by the hand and led her into a house she knew. She began to know them all now as her vision became accustomed to the atmosphere of the earth. She perceived that the sun was shining though it had appeared so dim, and that it was a clear summer morning, very early, with still the colours of the dawn in the

east. When she went indoors at first she saw nothing, for the room was darkened, the windows all closed, and a miserable watch light only burning. In the bed there lay a child whom she knew. She knew them all—the mother at the bedside, the father near the door, even the nurse who was flitting about disturbing the silence. Her heart gave a great throb when she recognised them all, and though she had been glad for the first moment to think that she had come just in time to give welcome to a little brother stepping out of earth into the better country, a shadow of trouble and pain enveloped her when she saw the others and remembered and knew. For he was their beloved child—on all the earth there was nothing they held so dear; they would have given up their home and all they possessed, and become poor and homeless and wanderers, with joy, if God, as they said, would have but spared their child. She saw into their

hearts and read all this there, and knowing them she knew it without even that insight. Everything they would have given up and rejoiced, if but they might have kept him. And there he lay, and was about to die. The little Pilgrim forgot all but the pity of it, and their hearts that were breaking, and the vacant place that was soon to be. She cried out aloud upon the Father with a great cry. She forgot that it was a grief to Him in His great glory to refuse.

There came no reply: but the room grew light as with a reflection out of heaven, and the child in the bed, who had been moving restlessly in the weariness of ending life, turned his head towards her, and his eyes opened wide and he saw her where she stood. He cried out, 'Look! mother, mother!' The mother, who was on her knees by the bedside, lifted her head and cried, 'What is it, what is it, O my darling?' and the father, who had turned away his face not

to see the child die, came nearer to the bed, hoping they knew not what. Their faces were paler than the face of the dying, upon which there was light; but no light came to them out of the hidden heaven. 'Look! she has come for me,' he said; but his voice was so weak they could not hear him, nor take any comfort. At this the little Pilgrim put out her arms to him, forgetting in her joy the poor people who were mourning, and cried out, 'Oh, but I must go with him. I must take him home!' For this was her own work, and she thought of her wonderings and her questions no more.

Some one touched her on the shoulder and she looked round, and behind her was a great company of the dear children from the better country, whom the Father had sent, and not her—lest he should grieve for those he had left behind—to come for the child and show him the way. She paused for a moment, scarcely willing to give him up: but

then her companion touched her and pointed to the other side. Ah, that was different! The mother lay by the side of the bed, her face turned only to the little white body which her child had dropped from him as he came out of his sickness—her eyes wild with misery, without tears; her feverish mouth open, but no cry in it. The sword of the angel had gone through and through her. She did not even writhe upon it, but lay motionless, cut down, dumb with anguish. The father had turned round again and leant his head upon the wall. All was over! All over! The love and the hope of a dozen lovely years, the little sweet companion, the daily joy, the future trust —all—over—as if a child had never been born. Then there rose in the stillness a great and exceeding bitter cry, 'God!' that was all, pealing up to heaven, to the Father, whom they could not see in their anguish, accusing Him, reproaching Him who had done it. Was He their enemy

that He had done it? No man was ever so wicked, ever so cruel, but he would have spared them their boy—taken everything and spared them their boy; but God, God! The little Pilgrim stood by and wept. She could do nothing but weep, weep, her heart aching with the pity and the anguish. How were they to be told that it was not God, but the Father—that God was only His common name, His name in law, and that He was the Father; This was all she could think of; she had not a word to say. And the boy had shaken his little bright soul out of the sickness and the weakness with such a look of delight! He knew in a moment? but they—oh when, when would they know?

Presently she sat outside in the soft breathing airs and little morning breezes, and dried her aching eyes. And the Sage who was her companion soothed her with kind words. 'I said you would feel the thorns as you passed,' he said.

'We cannot be free of them, we who are of mankind.'

'But oh,' she cried amid her tears, 'why—why? The air of the earth is in my eyes, I cannot see. Oh what pain it is, what misery! Was it because they loved him too much, and that he drew their hearts away?'

The Sage only shook his head at her, smiling. 'Can one love too much?' he said.

'O brother, it is very hard to live and to see another—— I am confused in my mind,' said the little Pilgrim, putting her hand to her eyes. 'The tears of those that weep have got into my soul. To live and see another die —that was what I was saying; but the child lives like you and me. Tell me, for I am confused in my mind.'

'Listen!' said the Sage; and when she listened she heard the sound of the children going back with a great murmur and ringing of pleasant voices

like silver bells in the air, and among them the voice of the child asking a thousand questions, calling them by their names. The two pilgrims listened and laughed to each other for love at the sound of the children. 'Is it for the little brother that you are troubled?' the Sage said in her ear.

Then she was ashamed, and turned from the joyful sounds that were ascending ever higher and higher, to the little house that stood below with all its windows closed upon the light. It was wrapped in darkness though the sun was shining, the windows closed as if they never would open more, and the people within turning their faces to the wall, covering their eyes that they might not see the light of day. 'O miserable day!' they were saying, 'O dark hour! —O life that will never smile again!' She sat between earth and heaven, her eyes smiling, but her mouth beginning to quiver once more. 'Is it to raise

their thoughts and their hearts?' she said.

'Little sister,' said he, 'when the Father speaks to you, it is not for me nor for another that He speaks. And what He says to you is——'

'Ah,' said the little Pilgrim with joy, 'it is for myself, myself alone! As if I were a great angel; as if I were a saint. It drops into my heart like the dew. It is what I need, not for you though I love you, but for me only. It is my secret between me and Him.'

Her companion bowed his head. 'It is so. And thus has He spoken to the little child. But what He said or why He said it, is not for you or me to know. It is His secret; it is between the little one and his Father. Who can interfere between these two? Many and many are there born on earth whose work and whose life are ordained elsewhere; for there is no way of entrance into the race of man which is the nature

of the Lord, but by the gates of birth: and the work which the Father has to do is so great and manifold that there are multitudes who do but pass through those gates to ascend to their work elsewhere. But the Father alone knows whom He has chosen. It is between the child and Him. It is their secret; it is as you have said.'

The little Pilgrim was silent for a moment, but then turned her head from the bright shining of the skies and the voices of the children which floated farther and farther off, and looked at the house in which there was sorrow and despair. She pointed towards it, and looked at him who was her instructor and had come to show her how these things were.

'They are to blame,' he said, 'but none will blame them. The little life is hard. The Father, though He is very near, seems far off: and sometimes even His word is as a dream. It is to

them as if they had lost their child. Can you not remember?—that was what we said. We have lost——'

Then the little Pilgrim musing began to smile, but wept again as she thought of the father and the mother. 'If we were to go,' she said, 'hand in hand, you and I, and tell them that the Father had need of him: that it was not for the little life but for the great and beautiful world above that the child was born; and that he had got great promotion and was gone with the princes and the angels according as was ordained? And why should they mourn? Let us go and tell them——'

He shook his head. 'They could not see us; they would not know us; we should be to them as dreams. If they do not take comfort from our Lord, how could they take comfort from you and me? We could not bring them back their child. They want their child, not only to know that all is well with him,—

for they know that all is well with him,—but what they want is their child. They are to blame, but who shall blame them? Not any one that is born of woman. How can we tell them what is the Father's secret and the child's?'

'And yet we could tell them why it must be so?' said the little Pilgrim. 'For they prayed and besought the Lord. O brother, I have no understanding. For the Lord said, "Ask, and it shall be given you"; and they asked: yet they are refused.'

'Little sister, the Father must judge between His children: and he must first be heard who is most concerned. While they were praying, the Father and the child talked together and said what we know not: but this we know that his heart was satisfied with that which was said to him. Must not the Father do what is best for the child He loves, whatever the other children may say? Nay, did not our own fathers do this

on earth, and we submitted to them: how much more He who sees all?'

The little Pilgrim stole softly from his side when he had done speaking and went back into the darkened house, and saw the mother where she sat weeping and refusing to be comforted, in her sorrow perceiving not heaven nor any consolation, nor understanding that her child had gone joyfully to his Father and her Father, as his soul had required, and as the Lord had willed. Yet though she had not joy but only anguish in her faith, and though her eyes were darkened that she could not see, yet the woman ceased not to call upon God, God, and to hold by Him who had smitten her. And the father of the child had gone into his chamber and shut the door, and sat dumb, opening not his mouth, thinking upon his delightsome boy, and how they had walked together and talked together, and should do so again nevermore. And in their hearts they reproached their God, the giver of all, and

accused the Lord to His face, as if He had deceived them: yet clung to Him still, weeping and upbraiding, and would not let Him go. The little Pilgrim wept too, and said many things to them which they could not hear. But when she saw that though they were in darkness and misery God was in all their thoughts, she bethought herself suddenly of what the poet had said in the celestial city, and of the songs he sang, which were a wonder to the Angels and Powers, of the little life and the sorrowful earth, where men endured all things, yet overcame by the name of the Lord. When this came into her mind she rose up again softly with a sacred awe, and wept not, but did them reverence; for without any light or guidance in their anguish they yet wavered not, died not, but endured, and in the end would overcome. It seemed to her that she saw the great beautiful angels looking on, the great souls that are called to love and to serve, but not to suffer like

the little brethren of the earth; and that among the princes of heaven there was reverence and awe, and even envy of those who thus had their garments bathed in blood, and suffered loss and pain and misery, yet never abandoned their life and the work that had been given them to do.

As she came forth again comforted, she found the Sage standing with his face lifted to heaven, smiling still at the sound, though faint and distant, of the children all calling to each other and shouting together as they reached the gate. 'Oh hush,' she said, 'let not the mother hear them! for it will make her heart more bitter to think she can never hear again her child's voice.'

'But it is her child's voice,' he said: then very gently, 'They are to blame: but no one will be found to blame them either in earth or heaven.'

The earth pilgrims went far after this, yet more softly than when they first left their beautiful country: for then the little

Pilgrim had been glad, believing that as all had been made clear to her in her own life, so that all that concerned the life of man should be made clear; but this was more hard and encompassed with pain and darkness, as that which is in the doing is always more hard to understand than that which is accomplished. And she learned now what she had not understood, though her companion warned her, how sharp are those thorns of earth that pierce the wayfarer's foot, and that those who come back cannot help but suffer because of love and fellow-feeling. And she learned that though she could smile and give thanks to the Father in the recollection of her own griefs that were past, yet those that are present are too poignant, and to look upon others in their hour of darkness makes His ways more hard to comprehend than even when the sorrow is your own.

While she mused thus there was suddenly revealed to her another sight. They had gone far before they came to

this new scene. Night had crept over the skies all gray and dark, and the sea came in with a whisper which sounded to some like the hush of peace, and to some like the voice of sorrow and moaning, and to some was but the monotony of endless recurrence, in which was no soul. The skies were dark overhead, but opened with a clear shining of light which had no colour, towards the west, for the sun had long gone down and it was night. The two travellers perceived a woman who came out of a house all lit with lamps and firelight, and took the lonely path towards the sea. And the little Pilgrim knew her as she had known the father and mother in the darkened house, and would have joined her with a cry of pleasure: but she remembered that the friend could not see her or hear her, being wrapped still in the mortal body, and in a close enveloping mantle of thoughts and cares. The Sage made her a sign to follow, and these two tender companions accompanied her who

saw them not, walking darkling by the silent way. The heart of the woman was heavy in her breast; it was so sore by reason of trouble, and for all the bitter wounds of the past, and all the fears that beset her life to come, that she walked, not weeping because of being beyond tears, but as it were bleeding, her thoughts being in her little way like those of His upon whose brow there once stood drops as it were of blood; and out of her heart there came a moaning which was without words. If words had been possible, they would have been as His also, who said, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' For those who had wounded her were those whom in all the world she loved most dear: and the quivering of anguish was in her as she walked, seeking the darkness and the silence, and to hide herself, if that might be, from her own thoughts. She went along the lonely path with the stinging of her wounds so keen and sharp that all her

body and soul were as one pain. Greater grief hath no man than this, to be slain and tortured by those whom he loves. When her soul could speak, this was what it said: 'Father, forgive them. Father, save them.' She had no strength for more.

This the heavenly pilgrims saw, for they stood by her as in their own country, where every thought is clear, and saw her heart. But as they followed her and looked into her soul—with their hearts, which were human too, wrung at the sight of hers in its anguish—there suddenly became visible before them a strange sight such as they had never seen before. It was like the rising of the sun, but it was not the sun. Suddenly into the heart upon which they looked there came a great silence and calm. There was nothing said that even they could hear, nor done that they could see; but for a moment the throbbing was stilled, and the anguish calmed, and there came a great

peace. The woman in whom this wonder was wrought was astonished, as they were. She gave a low cry in the darkness for wonder that the pain had gone from her in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye. There was no promise made to her that her prayer would be granted, and no new light given to guide her for the time to come. But her pain was taken away. She stood hushed and lifted her eyes, and the gray of the sea, and the low cloud that was like a canopy above, and the lightening of colourless light towards the west, entered with their great quiet into her heart. 'Is this the peace that passeth all understanding?' she said to herself, confused with the sudden calm. In all her life it had never so happened to her before —to be healed of her grievous wounds, yet without cause; and while no change was wrought, yet to be put to rest.

'It is our Brother,' said the little Pilgrim, shedding tears of joy. 'It is the secret of the Lord,' said the Sage;

but not even they had seen Him passing by.

They walked with her softly in the silence, in the sound of the sea, till the wonder in her was hushed like the pain, and talked with her though she knew it not. For very soon questions arose in her heart. 'And oh,' she said, 'is this the Lord's reply?' with thankfulness and awe; but because she was human, and knew so little, and was full of impatience, 'Oh, and is this *all?*' was what she next said, 'I asked for *them*, and Thou hast given to *me*——' then the voice of her heart grew louder, and she cried, with the sound of the pain coming back, 'I ask one thing, and Thou givest another. I asked no blessing for me. I asked for them, my Lord, my God! Give it to them—to them!' with disappointment rising in her heart.

The little Pilgrim laid her hand upon the woman's arm—for she was afraid lest our Lord might be displeased, forgetting (for

she was still imperfect) that He sees all that is in the soul, and understands and takes no offence—and said quickly, 'Oh, be not afraid; He will save them too. The blessing will come for them too.'

'At His own time,' said the Sage, 'and in His own way.'

These thoughts rose in the woman's soul. She did not know that they were said to her, nor who said them, but accepted them as if they had come from her own thoughts. For she said to herself, 'This is what is meant by the answer of prayer. It is not what we ask; yet what I ask is according to Thy will, my Lord. It is not riches, nor honours, nor beauty, nor health, nor long life, nor anything of this world. If I have been impatient, this is my punishment—that the Lord has thought, not of them, but of me. But I can bear all, O my Lord! that and a thousand times more—if Thou wilt but think of them and not of me!'

Nevertheless she returned to her home

stilled and comforted; for though her trouble returned to her and was not changed, yet for a moment it had been lifted from her, and the peace which passeth all understanding had entered her heart.

'But why, then,' said the little Pilgrim to her companion, when the friend was gone, 'why will not the Father give to her what she asks? for I know what it is; it is that those whom she loves should love Him and serve Him: and that is His will too; for He would have all love Him, He who loves all.'

'Little sister,' said her companion, 'you asked me why He did not let the child remain upon the earth.'

'Ah, but that is different,' she cried; 'oh, it is different! When you said that the secret was between the child and the Father I knew that it was so; for it is just that the Father should consider us first one by one, and do for us what is best. But it is always best to serve Him:

it is best to love Him: it is best to give up all the world and cleave to Him, and follow wherever He goes. No man can say otherwise than this, that to follow the Lord and serve Him, that is well for all, and always the best!'

She spoke so hotly and hastily that her companion could find no room for reply. But he was in no haste; he waited till she had said what was in her heart. Then he replied, 'If it were even so; if the Father heard all prayers, and put forth His hand and forced those who were far off to come near——'

The little Pilgrim looked up with horror in her face, as if he had blasphemed, and said, 'Forced! not so—not so.'

'Yet it must be so,' he said, 'if it is against their desire and will.'

'Oh, not so—not so!' she cried, 'but that He should change their hearts.'

'Yet that too against their will,' he said.

The little Pilgrim paused upon the way, and her heart rose against her companion,

who spoke things so hard to be received, and that seemed to dishonour the work of the Lord. But she remembered that it could not be so, and paused before she spoke, and looked up at him with eyes that were full of wonder and almost of fear. 'Then must they perish?' she said, 'and must her heart break?' and her voice sank low for pity and sorrow. Though she was herself among the blessed, yet the thorns and briers of the earth caught at her garments and pierced her tender feet.

'Little sister,' said the Sage, 'to us who are born of the earth it is hard to remember that the child belongs not first to the parents, nor the husband to the wife, nor the wife to the husband, but that all are the children of the Father. And He is just; He will not neglect the little one because of those prayers which the father and the mother pour forth to Him, although they cry with anguish and with tears. Nor will He break His great law and violate the nature He has made, and

compel His own child to what it wills not and loves not. The woman is comforted in the breaking of her heart:—but those whom she loves, are not they also the children of the Father who loves them more than she does? And each is to Him as if there were not another in the world. Nor is there any other in the world: for none can come between the Father and the child.'

A smile came upon the little Pilgrim's face, yet she trembled. 'It is dim before me,' she said, 'and I cannot see clearly. Oh, if the time would but hasten that our Lord might come, and all struggles be ended, and the darkness vanish away!'

'He will come when all things are ready,' said the Sage; and as they went upon their way he showed her other sights, and the mysteries of the heart of man, and the great patience of our Lord.

It happened to them suddenly to perceive in their way a man returning home. These are words that are sweet to all

who have lived upon the earth and known its ways; but far, far were they from that meaning which is sweet. The dark hours had passed, and men had slept, and the night was over. The sun was rising in the sky, which was keen and clear with the pleasure of the morning. The air was fresh with the dew, and the birds awaking in the trees, and the breeze so sweet that it seemed to blow from heaven; and to the two travellers it seemed almost in the joy of the new day as if the Lord had already come. But here was one who proved that it was not so. He had not slept all the night, nor had night been silent to him nor dark, but full of glaring light and noise and riot; his eyes were red with fever and weariness, and his soul was sick within him, and the morning looked him in the face and upbraided him as a sister might have upbraided him, who loved him; and he said in his heart, as One had said of old, that all was vanity —that it was vain to live, and evil to have

been born—that the day of death was better than the day of birth, and all was delusion, and love but a word, and life a lie. His footsteps on the road seemed to sound all through the sleeping world, and when he looked the morning in the face he was ashamed and cursed the light. The two went after him into a silent house, where everybody slept. The light that had burned for him all night was sick like a guilty thing in the eye of day, and all that had been prepared for his repose was ghastly to him in the hour of awaking as if prepared not for sleep but for death. His heart was sick like the watch-light, and life flickered within him with disgust and disappointment. For why had he been born, if this were all?—for all was vanity. The night and the day had been passed in pleasure, and it was vanity; and now his soul loathed his pleasures, yet he knew that was vanity too, and that next day he would resume them as before. All was vain—the morning and the evening,

and the spirit of man and the ways of human life. He looked himself in the face and loathed this dream of existence, and knew that it was naught. So much as it had cost to be born, to be fed, and guarded, and taught, and cared for, and all for this! He said to himself that it was better to die than to live, and never to have been than to be.

As these spectators stood by with much pity and tenderness looking into the weariness and sickness of this soul, there began to be enacted before them a scene such as no man could have seen, which no one was aware of save he who was concerned, and which even to him was not clear in its meanings, but rather like a phantasmagoria, a thing of the mists; yet which was great and solemn as is the council of a king in which great things are debated for the welfare of the nations. The air seemed in a moment to be full of the sound of footsteps, and of something more subtle which the Sage and the Pilgrim knew to

be wings; and as they looked there grew before them the semblance of a court of justice, with accusers and defenders: but the judge and the criminal were one. Then was put forth that indictment which he had been making up in his soul against life and against the world: and again another indictment which was against himself. And then the advocates began their pleadings. Voices were there great and eloquent, such as are familiar in the courts above, which sounded forth in the spectators' ears earnest as those who plead for life and death. And these speakers declared that sin only is vanity, that life is noble and love sweet, and every man made in the image of God, to serve both God and man; and they set forth their reasons before the judge and showed him mysteries of life and death; and they took up the counter-indictment and proved to him how in all the world he had sought but himself, his own pleasure and profit, his own will, not the will of God, nor even the good

desire of humble nature, but only that which pleased his sick fancies and his self-loving heart. And they besought him with a thousand arguments to return and choose again the better way. 'Arise,' they cried, 'thou, miserable, and become great; arise thou vain soul and become noble; take thy birthright, O son, and behold the face of the Father.' And then there came a whispering of lower voices, very penetrating and sweet like the voices of women and children who murmured and cried, 'O father! O brother! O love! O my child!' The man who was the accused, yet who was the judge, listened and his heart burned, and a longing arose within him for the face of the Father and the better way. But then there came a clang and clamour of sound on the other side; and voices called out to him as comrade, as lover, as friend, and reminded him of the delights which once had been so sweet to him, and of the freedom he loved; and boasted the right of man to seek what was pleasant and

what was sweet, and flouted him as a coward whose aim was to save himself, and scorned him as a believer in old wives' tales and superstitions that men had outgrown. And their voices were so vehement and full of passion that by times they mastered the others, so that it was as if a tempest raged round the soul which sat in the midst, and who was the offender and yet the judge of all.

The two spectators watched the conflict, as those who watch the trial upon which hangs a man's life. It seemed to the little Pilgrim that she could not keep silent, and that there were things which she could tell him which no one knew but she. She put her hand upon the arm of the Sage and called to him, 'Speak you, speak you! he will hear you; and I too will speak, and he will not resist what we say.' But even as she said this, eager and straining against her companion's control, the strangest thing ensued. The man who was set there to judge himself and his life, he who was the criminal,

yet august upon his seat, to weigh all and give the decision—he before whom all those great advocates were pleading—a haze stole over his eyes. He was but a man and he was weary, and subject to the sway of the little over the great, the moment over the life, which is the condition of man. While yet the judgment was not given or the issue decided, while still the pleadings were in his ears, in a moment his head dropped back upon his pillow and he fell asleep. He slept like a child, as if there was no evil, nor conflict, nor danger, nor questions, more than how best to rest when you are weary, in all the world. And straightway all was silent in the place. Those who had been conducting this great cause departed to other courts and tribunals, having done all that was permitted them to do. And the man slept, and when it was noon woke and remembered no more.

The Sage led the little Pilgrim forth in a great confusion, so that she could not speak for wonder. But he said, 'This

sleep also was from the Father; for the mind of the man was weary, and not able to form a judgment. It is adjourned until a better day.'

The little Pilgrim hung her head and cried, 'I do not understand. Will not the Lord interfere? Will not the Father make it clear to him? Is he the judge between good and evil? Is it all in his own hand?'

The Sage spoke softly as if with awe. He said 'This is the burden of our nature, which is not like the angels. There is none in heaven or on earth that can take from him what is his right and great honour among the creatures of God. The Father respects that which He has made. He will force no child of His. And there is no haste with Him. Nor has it ever been fathomed among us how long He will wait, or if there is any end. The air is full of the coming and going of those who plead before the sons of men; and sometimes in great misery and trouble there will be a cause won and a judgment

recorded which makes the universe rejoice. And in everything at the end it is proved that our Lord's way is the best, and that all can be accomplished in His name.'

The little Pilgrim went on her way in silence, knowing that the longing in her heart which was to compel them to come in, like that king who sent to gather his guests from the highways and the hedges, could not be right since it was not the Father's way, yet confused in her soul, and full of an eager desire to go back and wake that man and tell him all that had been in her heart while she watched him sitting on his judgment-seat. But there came recollections wafted across her mind as by breezes of the past, of scenes in her earthly life when she had spoken without avail, when she had said all that was in her heart and failed, and done harm when she had meant to do good. And slowly it came upon her that her companion spoke the truth, and that no man can save his brother, but each must sit and hear the pleadings and pro-

nounce that judgment which is for life or death. 'But oh,' she cried, 'how long! and how bitter it is for those who love them, and must stand by and can give no aid!'

Then her companion unfolded to her the patience of the Lord, and how He is not discouraged, nor ever weary, but opens His great assizes year by year and day by day: and how the cause was argued again, as she had seen it, before the souls of men, sometimes again and again, and over and over, till the pleadings of the advocates carried conviction and the judge perceived the truth and consented to it. He showed her that this was the great thing in human life, and that though it was not enough to make a man perfect, yet that he who sinned against his will was different from the man who sinned with his will: and how in all things the choice of the man for good or evil was all in all. And he led her about the world so that she could see how everywhere the heavenly advocates were travel-

ling, entering into the secret places of the souls and pleading with each man to his face. And the little Pilgrim looked on with pitying and tender eyes, and it seemed to her that the heart of the judge, before whom that great question was debated, leant mostly to the right, and acknowledged that the way of the Lord was the best way: but either that sleep overpowered him and weariness, or the other voices deafened his ears, or something betrayed him that he forgot the reasons of the wise and the judgment of his own soul. At first it comforted her to see how something nobler in every man would answer to the pleadings; and then her heart failed her to perceive that notwithstanding this the judge would leave his seat without a decision, and all would end in vanity. 'And oh, friend,' she cried, 'what shall be done to those who see and yet refuse?'—her heart being wrung by the disappointment and the failure. But her companion smiled still, and he said, 'They are the children of

the Father. Can a woman forget her child that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? She may forget: yet will not He forget.' And thus they went on and on.

But time would not suffice to tell what these two pilgrims saw as they wandered among the ways of men. They saw poverty and misery and pain, which came of the evil which man had done upon the earth, and were his punishment, and could be cured by nothing but by the return of each to his Father, and the giving up of all self-worship and self-seeking and sin. But amid all the confusion and among those who had fallen the lowest they found not one who was forsaken, whose name the Father had forgotten, or who was not made to pause in his appointed moment, and to sit upon his throne and hear the pleadings before him of the great advocates of God, reasoning of temperance and righteousness and judgment to come.

But once before they returned to their

home, a great thing befell them: and they beheld that court sit, and the pleadings made, for the last time upon earth, which was a sight more solemn and terrible than anything they had yet seen. They found themselves in a chamber where sat a man who had lived long and known both good and evil, and fulfilled many great offices, so that he was famed and honoured among men. He was a man who was wise in all the learning of the earth, standing but a little way below those who have begun the higher learning in the world beyond, and lifting up his head as if he would reach the stars. The travellers stood by him in his beautiful house, which was as the palace of wisdom, and saw him in the midst of all his honours. The lamps were lit within, and the night was sweet without, breathing of rest and happy ease, and riches and knowledge as if they would endure for ever. And the man looked round on all he had, and all he had achieved, and everything which he possessed, to enjoy it. For of

wisdom and of glory he had his fill, and his soul was yet strong to take pleasure in what was his, and he looked around him like God, and said that everything was good—so that the little Pilgrim gazed and wondered whether this could indeed be one of the brethren of the earth, or if he was one who had wandered hither from another sphere.

But as the thought arose, she heard, and lo! the steps of the pleaders and the sound of their entry. They came slowly like a solemn procession, more grave and awful in their looks than any she had seen, for they were great and the greatest of all, such as come forth but rarely when the last word is to be said. The words they said were few, but they stood round him reminding him of all that had been, and of what must be: and of many things which were known but to God and him alone: and calling upon him yet once more before time should come to an end and life be lost. But the sound of their voices in his ear was

but as some great strain of music which he had heard many times and knew and heeded not. He turned to the goods which he had laid up for many years, and all the knowledge he had stored, and said to himself, Soul, take thine ease. And to the heavenly advocates he smiled and replied that life was strong and wisdom the master of all. Then there came a chill and a shiver over all, as if the earth had been stopped in her career or the sun fallen from the sky; and the little Pilgrim, looking on, could see the heavenly pleaders come forth with bowed heads and the door of hope shut to, and a whisper which crept about from sea to sea and said, 'In vain—in vain!' And as they went forth from the gates an icy breath swept in, and the voice of the Death-Angel saying, 'Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee!' The sound went through her heart as if it had been pierced by a sword, and she gave a cry of anguish, for she could not bear that a brother should be lost. But when she

looked up at the face of her companion, though it was pale with the pity and the terror of that which had been thus accomplished, there was still upon it a smile: and he said, 'Not yet—not yet. The Father loves not less, but more than ever.'—'O friend,' she cried, 'will there ever come a moment when the Father will forget? is there any place where He cannot go?'

Then he who was wise turned towards her, and a great light came upon his face: and he said, 'We have searched the records, and heard all witnesses from the beginnings of time: but we have never found the boundary of His mercy, and there is no country known to man that is without His presence. And never has it been known that He has shut His ear to those who called upon Him, or forgotten one who is His. The heavenly pleaders may be silenced, but never our Lord, who pleads for all: and heaven and earth may forget, yet will He never forget who is the Father of all. And every child of His is

to Him as if there was none other in the world.'

Then the little Pilgrim lifted her face and beheld that radiance which is over all, which is the love that lights the world, both angels and the great spheres above and the little brethren who stumble and struggle and weep; and in that light there was no darkness at all, but everything shone as in the morning, sweet yet terrible, but ever clear and fair. And immediately, ere she was aware, the rough roads of the earth were left far behind, and she had returned to her place, and to her peaceful state, and to the work which had been given her—to receive the wanderers and to bid them a happy welcome as the doors opened and they entered into their inheritance. And thus her soul was satisfied, though she knew now nothing more than she had known always, that the eye of the Father is over all, and that He can neither forget nor forsake.

III

ON THE DARK MOUNTAINS

I

WHEN the little Pilgrim had been thus permitted to see the secret workings of God in earthly places, and among the brethren who are still in the land of hope —these being things which the angels desire to look into, and which are the subject of story and of song not only in the little world below, but in the great realms above—her heart for a long time reposed and was satisfied, and asked no further question. For she had seen what the dealings of the Father were in the hearts of men, and how till the end came

He did not cease to send His messengers to plead in every heart, and to hold a court of justice that no man might be deceived, but each know whither his steps were tending, and what was the way of wisdom. After this it was permitted to her to read in the archives of the heavenly country the story of one who, neglecting all that the advocates of God could say, had found himself, when the little life was completed, not upon the threshold of a better country, but in the midst of the Land of Darkness—that region in which the souls of men are left by God to their own devices, and the Father stands aloof, and hides His face and calls them not, neither persuades them more. Over this story the little pilgrim had shed many tears: for she knew well, being enlightened in her great simplicity by the heavenly wisdom, that it was pain and grief to the Father to turn away His face; and that no one who has but the little heart of a man can imagine to him-

self what that sorrow is in the being of the great God. And a great awe came over her mind at the thought, which seemed well-nigh a blasphemy, that He could grieve: yet in her heart, being His child, she knew that it was true. And her own little spirit throbbed through and through with longing and with desire to help those who were thus utterly lost. 'And oh!' she said, 'if I could but go! There is nothing which could make a child afraid, save to see them suffer. What are darkness and terror when the Father is with you? I am not afraid—if I might but go!' And by reason of her often pleading, and of the thought that was ever in her mind, it was at last said that one of those who knew might instruct her, and show her by what way alone the travellers who come from that miserable land could approach and be admitted on high.

'I know,' she said, 'that between us and them there is a gulf fixed, and that they

who would come from thence cannot come, neither can any one——'

But here she stopped in great dismay, for it seemed that she had thus answered her own longing and prayer.

The guide who had come for her smiled upon her and said, 'But that was before the Lord had ended His work. And now all the paths are free: wherever there is a mountain-pass or a river-ford: the roads are all blessed, and they are all open, and no barriers for those who will.'

'Oh,' she cried, 'dear friend, is that true for all?'

He looked away from her into the depths of the lovely air, and he replied: 'Little sister, our faith is without bounds, but not our knowledge. I who speak to you am no more than a man. The princes and powers that are in high places know more than I; but if there be any place where a heart can stir and cry out to the Father and He take no heed—if it be only in a groan—if it be only with a sigh—

I know not that place: yet many depths I know.' He put out his hand and took hers, after a pause, and then he said, 'There are some who are stumbling upon the dark mountains. Come and see.'

As they passed along there were many who paused to look at them, for he had the mien of a great prince, a lord among men: and his face still bore the trace of sorrow and toil, and there was about him an awe and wonder which was more than could be put in words; so that those who saw him understood as he went by, not who he was, nor what he had been, but that he had come out of great tribulation, of sorrow beyond the sorrows of men. The sweetness of the heavenly country had soothed away his care, and taken the cloud from his face; but he was as yet unaccustomed to smile—though when he remembered and looked round him, and saw that all was well, his countenance lightened like the morning sky, and his eyes woke up in splendour like the sun rising. The little

pilgrim did not know who her brother was, but yet gave thanks to God for him she knew not why.

How far they went cannot be estimated in words, for distance matters little in that place; but at the end they came to a path which sloped a little downwards to the edge of a delightful moorland country, all brilliant with the hues of the mountain flowers. It was like a flowery plateau high among the hills, in a region where are no frosts to check the glow of the flowers, or scorch the grass. It spread far around in hollows and ravines and softly swelling hills, with the rush over them of a cheerful breeze full of mountain scents and sounds; and high above them rose the mountain-heights of the celestial world, veiled in those blue breadths of distance which are heaven itself when man's fancy ascends to them from the low world at their feet. All the little earth can do in colour and mists, and travelling shadows fleet as the breath,

and the sweet steadfast shining of the sun, was there, but with a tenfold splendour. They rose up into the sky, every peak and jagged rock all touched with the light and the smile of God, and every little blossom on the turf rejoicing in the warmth and freedom and peace. The heart of the little pilgrim swelled, and she cried out, 'There is nothing so glorious as the everlasting hills. Though the valleys and the plains are sweet, they are not like them. They say to us, lift up your heart!'

Her guide smiled, but he did not speak. His smile was full of joy, but grave, like that of a man whose thoughts are bent on other things: and he pointed where the road wound downward by the feet of these triumphant hills. She kept her eyes upon them as she moved along. Those heights rose into the very sky, but bore upon them neither snow nor storm. Here and there a whiteness like a film of air rounded out over a peak, and she recognised that it was

one of those angels who travel far and wide with God's commissions, going to the other worlds that are in the firmament as in a sea. The softness of these films of white was like the summer clouds that she used to watch in the blue of the summer sky in the little world which none of its children can cease to love: and she wondered now whether it might not sometimes have been the same dear angels whose flight she had watched unknowing, higher than thought could soar or knowledge penetrate. Watching those floating heavenly messengers, and the heights of the great miraculous mountains rising up into the sky, the little pilgrim ceased to think whither she was going, although she knew from the feeling of the ground under her feet that she was descending, still softly, but more quickly than at first, until she was brought to herself by the sensation of a great wind coming in her face, cold as from a sudden vacancy. She turned her head quickly from gazing above to what was before

her, and started with a cry of wonder. For below lay a great gulf of darkness, out of which rose at first some shadowy peaks and shoulders of rock, all falling away into a gloom which eyes accustomed to the sunshine could not penetrate. Where she stood was the edge of the light — before her feet lay a line of shadow slowly darkening out of daylight into twilight, and beyond into that measureless blackness of night; and the wind in her face was like that which comes from a great depth below of either sea or land —the sweep of the current which moves a vast atmosphere in which there is nothing to break its force. The little pilgrim was so startled by these unexpected sensations that she caught the arm of her guide in her sudden alarm, and clung to him, lest she should fall into the terrible darkness and the deep abyss below.

'There is nothing to fear,' he said, 'there is a way. To us who are above there is no danger at all — and it is

the way of life to those who are below.'

'I see nothing,' she cried, 'save a few points of rock, and the precipice—the pit which is below. Oh, tell me what is it?—is it where the fires are and despair dwells? I did not think that was true. Let me go and hide myself and not see it, for I never thought that was true.'

'Look again,' said the guide.

The little pilgrim shrank into a crevice of the rock, and uncovering her eyes, gazed into the darkness; and because her nature was soft and timid there came into her mind a momentary fear. Her heart flew to the Father's footstool, and cried out to Him, not any question or prayer, but only 'Father, Father!' and this made her stand erect, and strengthened her eyes, so that the gloom even of hell could no more make her afraid. Her guide stood beside with a steadfast countenance, which was grave yet full of a solemn light. And then all at once

he lifted up his voice, which was sonorous and sweet like the sound of an organ, and uttered a shout so great and resounding that it seemed to come back in echoes from every hollow and hill. What he said the little pilgrim could not understand; but when the echoes had died away and silence followed, something came up through the gloom—a sound that was far, far away, and faint in the long distance, a voice that sounded no more than an echo. When he who had called out heard it, he turned to the little pilgrim with eyes that were liquid with love and pity—'Listen,' he said, 'there is some one on the way.'

'Can we help them?' cried the little pilgrim: her heart bounded forward like a bird. She had no fear. The darkness and the horrible way seemed as nothing to her. She stretched out her arms as if she would have seized the traveller and dragged him up into the light.

He who was by her side shook his

head, but with a smile. 'We can but wait,' he said. 'It is forbidden that any one should help. For this is too terrible and strange to be touched even by the hands of angels. It is like nothing that you know.'

'I have been taught many things,' said the little pilgrim, humbly. 'I have been taken back to the dear earth, where I saw the judgment-seat, and the pleaders who spoke, and the man who was the judge—and how each is judge for himself.'

'You have seen the place of hope,' said her guide, 'where the Father is and the Son, and where no man is left to his own ways. But there is another country, where there is no voice either from God or from good spirits, and where those who have refused are left to do as seems good in their own eyes.'

'I have read,' said the little pilgrim, with a sob, 'of one who went from city to city and found no rest.'

Her guide bowed his head very gravely in assent. 'They go from place to place,' he said, 'if haply they might find one in which it is possible to live. Whether it is order or whether it is licence, it is according to their own will. They try all things, ever looking for something which the soul may endure. And new cities are founded from time to time, and a new endeavour ever and ever to live, only to live. For even when happiness fails and content, and work is vanity and effort is naught, it is something if a man can but endure to live.'

The little pilgrim looked at him with wistful eyes, for what he said was beyond her understanding. 'For us,' she said, 'life is nothing but joy. Oh, brother, is there then condemnation?'

'It is no condemnation, it is what they have chosen—it is to follow their own way. There is no longer any one to interfere. The pleaders are all silent: there is no voice in the heart. The Father hinders them not, nor helps them:

but leaves them.' He shivered as if with cold; and the little pilgrim felt that there breathed from the depths of darkness at their feet an icy wind which touched her hands and feet and chilled her heart. She shivered too, and drew close to the rock for shelter, and gazed at the awful cliffs rising out of the gloom, and the paths that disappeared at her feet, leading down, down into that abyss — and her heart failed within her to think that below there were souls that suffered, and that the Father and the Son were not there. He the All-loving, the All-present—how could it be that He was not there?

'It is a mystery,' said the man who was her guide, and who answered to her thought. 'When I set my foot upon this blessed land I knew that there, even there, He is. But in that country His face is hidden, and even to name His name is anguish—for then only do men understand what has befallen them, who can say that name no more.'

'That is death indeed,' she cried; and the wind came up silent with a wild breath that was more awful than the shriek of a storm: for it was like the stifled utterances of all those miserable ones who have no voice to call upon God, and know not where He is nor how to pronounce His name.

'Ah,' said he, 'if we could have known what death was! We had believed in death in the time of all great illusions, in the time of the gentle life, in the day of hope. But in the land of darkness there are no illusions, and every man knows that though he should fling himself into the furnace of the gold, or be cut to pieces by the knives, or trampled under the dancers' feet, yet that it will be but a little more pain, and that death is not, nor any escape that way.'

'Oh, brother!' she cried, 'you have been there!'

He turned and looked upon her, and she read as in a book things which tongue

of man cannot say—the anguish and the rapture, the unforgotten pang of the lost, the joy of one who has been delivered after hope was gone.

'I have been there: and now I stand in the light, and have seen the face of the Lord, and can speak His blessed name.' And with that he burst forth into a great melodious cry, which was not like that which he had sent into the dark depths below, but mounted up like the sounding of silver trumpets and all joyful music, giving a voice to the sweet air and the fresh winds which blew about the hills of God. But the words he said were not comprehensible to his companion, for they were in the sweet tongue which is between the Father and His child, and known to none but to them alone. Yet only to hear the sound was enough to transport all who listened, and to make them know what joy is and peace. The little pilgrim wept for happiness to hear her brother's voice. But in the midst of it her ear was caught by

another sound—a faint cry which tingled up from the darkness like a note of a muffled bell—and she turned from the joy and the light, and flung out her arms and her little voice towards him who was stumbling upon the dark mountains. And 'Come,' she cried, 'Come, come!' forgetting all things save that one was there in the darkness, while here was light and peace.

'It is nearer,' said her guide, hearing, even in the midst of his triumph song, that faint and distant cry; and he took her hand and drew her back, for she was upon the edge of the precipice gazing into the black depths, which revealed nothing save the needles of the awful rocks and sheer descents below. 'The moment will come,' he said, 'when we can help—but it is not yet.'

Her heart was in the depths with him who was coming, whom she knew not save that he was coming, toiling upwards towards the light; and it seemed to her

that she could not contain herself, nor wait till he should appear, nor draw back from the edge, where she might hold out her hands to him and save him some single step, if no more. But presently her heart returned to her brother who stood by her side, and who was delivered, and with whom it was meet that all should rejoice, since he had fought and conquered, and reached the land of light. 'Oh,' she said, 'it is long to wait while he is still upon these dark mountains. Tell me how it came to you to find the way.'

He turned to her with a smile, though his ear too was intent, and his heart fixed upon the traveller in the darkness, and began to tell her his tale to beguile the time of waiting, and to hold within bounds the pity that filled her heart. He told her that he was one of many who came from the pleasant earth together, out of many countries and tongues; and how they had gone here and there each man to a different city, and how they had crossed each

other's paths coming and going, yet never found rest for their feet. And how there was a little relief in every change, and one sought that which another left; and how they wandered round and round over all the vast and endless plain, until at length, in revolt from every other way, they had chosen a spot upon the slope of a hill, and built there a new city, if perhaps something better might be found there. And how it had been built with towers and high walls, and great gates to shut it in, so that no stranger should find entrance. And how every house was a palace, with statues of marble, and pillars so precious with beautiful work, and arches so lofty and so fair, that they were better than had they been made of gold; yet gold was not wanting, nor diamond stones that shone like stars, and everything more beautiful and stately than heart could conceive.

'And while we built and laboured,' he said, 'our hearts were a little appeased. And it was called the city of Art, and all

was perfect in it, so that nothing had ever been seen to compare with it for beauty: and we walked upon the battlements and looked over the plain and viewed the dwellers there, who were not as we. And we went on to fill every room and every hall with carved work in stone and beaten gold, and pictures and woven tissues that were like the sun-gleams and the rainbows of the pleasant earth. And crowds came around envying us and seeking to enter. But we closed our gates and drove them away. And it was said among us that life would now become as of old, and everything would go well with us as in the happy days.'

The little pilgrim looked up into his face, and for pity of his pain (though it was past) almost wished that *that* could have come true.

'But when the work was done,' he said: and for a moment no more.

'Oh, brother! when the work was done?'

'You do not know what it is,' he said,

'to be ten times more powerful and strong, to want no rest, to have fire in your veins, to have the craving in your heart above everything that is known to man. When the work was done, we glared upon each other with hungry eyes, and each man wished to thrust forth his neighbour and possess all to himself. And then we ceased to take pleasure in it, notwithstanding that it was beautiful; and there were some who would have beaten down the walls and built them anew—and some would have torn up the silver and gold, and tossed out the fair statues and the adornments in scorn and rage to the meaner multitudes below. And we, who were the workers, began to contend one against another to satisfy the gnawings of the rage that was in our hearts. For we had deceived ourselves, thinking once more that all would be well: while all the time nothing was changed, and we were but as the miserable ones that rushed from place to place.'

Though all this wretchedness was over and past, it was so terrible to think of that he paused and was silent a while. And the little pilgrim put her hand upon his arm in her great pity to soothe him, and almost forgot that there was another traveller not yet delivered upon the way. But suddenly at that moment there came up through the depths the sound of a fall, as if the rocks had crashed from a hundred peaks, yet all muffled by the great distance, and echoing all around in faint echoes, and rumblings as in the bosom of the earth. And mingled with them were far-off cries, so faint and distant that human ears could not have heard them, like the cries of lost children, or creatures wavering and straying in the midst of the boundless night. This time she who was watching upon the edge of the gloom would have flung herself forward altogether into it, had not her companion again restrained her. 'One has stumbled upon the mountains; but

listen, listen, little sister, for the voices are many,' he said,—'it is not one who comes, but many; and though he falls he will rise again.'

And once more he shouted aloud, bending down against the rocks, so that they caught his voice—and the sweet air from the skies came behind him in a great gust like a summer storm, and carried it into all the echoing hollows of the hills. And the little pilgrim knew that he shouted to all who came to take courage and not to fear. And this time there rose upward many faint and wavering sounds that did not stir the air, but made it tingle with a vibration of the great distance and the unknown depths; and then again all was still. They stood for a time intent upon the great silence and darkness which swept up all sight and sound, and then the little pilgrim once more turned her eyes towards her companion, and he began again his wonderful tale.

'He who had been the first to found the city, and who was the most wise of any, though the rage was in him like all the rest, and the disappointment and the anguish, yet would not yield. And he called upon us for another trial, to make a picture which should be the greatest that ever was painted. And each one of us, small or great, who had been of that art in the dear life, took share in the rivalry and the emulation, so that on every side there was a fury and a rush, each man with his band of supporters about him struggling and swearing that his was the best. Not that they loved the work or the beauty of the work, but to keep down the gnawing in their hearts, and to have something for which they could still fight and storm, and for a little forget.

'I was one who had been among the highest.' He spoke not with pride, but in a low and deep voice which went to the heart of the listener, and brought the tears to her eyes. It was not like that of

the painter in the heavenly city, who rejoiced and was glad in his work, though he was but as a humble workman, serving those who were more great. But this man had the sorrow of greatness in him, and the wonder of those who can do much, to find how little they can do. 'My veins,' he said, 'were filled with fire, and my heart with the rage of a great desire to be first, as I had been first in the days of the gentle life. And I made my plan to be greater than all the rest, to paint a vast picture like the world, filled with all the glories of life. In a moment I had conceived what I should do, for my strength was as that of a hundred men: and none of us could rest or breathe till it was accomplished, but flung ourselves upon this new thing as upon water in the desert. Oh, my little sister, how can I tell you—what words can show forth this wonderful thing? I stood before my great canvas with all those who were of my faction pressing upon me,

noting every touch I made, shouting, and saying, "He will win! he will win!" When lo! there came a mystery and a wonder into that place. I had arranged men and women before me according to all the devices of art, to serve as my models that nature might be in my picture, and life: but when I looked I saw them not, for between them and me had come a Face.'

The eyes of the little pilgrim dropped with tears. She held out her hands towards him with a sympathy which no words could say.

'Often had I painted that face in the other life,—sometimes with awe and love, sometimes with scorn: for hire and for bread, and for pride and for fame. It is pale with suffering, yet smiles; the eyes have tears in them, yet light below, and all that is there is full of tenderness and of love. There is a crown upon the brow, but it is made of thorns. It came before me suddenly, while I stood there, with the

men shouting close to my ear urging me on, and fierce fury in my heart, and the rage to be first, and to forget. Where my models were, there it came. I could not see them, nor my groups that I had planned, nor anything but that Face. I called out to my men, "Who has done this?" but they heard me not, nor understood me, for to them there was nothing there save the figures I had set—a living picture all ready for the painter's hand.

'I could not bear it, the sight of that face. I flung my tools away. I covered my eyes with my hands. But those who were about me pressed on me and threatened. They pulled my hands from my eyes. "Coward!" they cried, and "Traitor, to leave us in the lurch. Now will the other side win and we be shamed. Rather tear him limb from limb, fling him from the walls!" The crowd came round me like an angry sea; they forced my pencils back into my hands. "Work," they cried, "or we will tear you limb

from limb." For though they were upon my side, it was for rivalry, and not out of any love for me.' He paused for a moment, for his heart was yet full of the remembrance, and of joy that it was past.

'I looked again,' he said, 'and still it was there. O Face divine—the eyes all wet with pity, the lips all quivering with love! And neither pity nor love belonged to that place, nor any succour, nor the touch of a brother, nor the voice of a friend. "Paint," they cried, "or we will tear you limb from limb!"—and fire came into my heart. I pushed them from me on every side with the strength of a giant. And then I flung it on the canvas, crying I know not what—not to them but to Him. Shrink not from me, little sister, for I blasphemed. I called Him Impostor, Dèceiver, Galilean; and still with all my might, with all the fury of my soul, I set Him there for every man to see, not knowing what I did.

Everything faded from me but that Face—I saw it alone. The crowd came round me with shouts and threats to drag me away, but I took no heed; they were silenced, and fled and left me alone, but I knew nothing; nor when they came back with others and seized me, and flung me forth from the gates, was I aware what I had done. They cast me out and left me upon the wild without a shelter, without a companion, storming and raving at them as they did at me. They dashed the great gates behind me with a clang, and shut me out. And I turned and defied them, and cursed them as they cursed me, not knowing what I had done.'

'Oh, brother!' murmured the little pilgrim, kneeling, as if she had accompanied him all the way with her prayers, but could not now say more.

'Then I saw again,' he went on, not hearing her in the great force of that passion and wonder which was still in his mind—'that vision in the air. Wherever

I turned, it was there: His eyes wet with pity, His countenance shining with love. Whence came He? What did He in that place, where love is not, where pity comes not?'

'Friend,' she cried, 'to seek you there!'

Her companion bowed his head in deep humbleness and joy. And again he lifted his great voice and intoned his song of praise. The little pilgrim understood it, but by fragments—a line that was more simple that came here and there. And it praised the Lord that where the face of the Father was hidden, and where love was not, nor compassion, nor brother had pity on brother, nor friend knew the face of friend, and all succour was stayed, and every help forbidden—yet still in the depths of the darkness and in the heart of the silence, He who could not forget nor forsake was there. The voice of the singer was like that of one of the great angels, and many of the inhabitants of the blessed

country began to appear, gathering in crowds to hear this great music, as the little sister thought; and she herself listened with all her heart, wondering and seeing on the faces of those dear friends whom she did not know an expectation and a hope which were strange to her, though she could always understand their love and their joy.

But in the middle of this great song there came again another sound to her ear —a sound which pierced through the music like lightning through the sky, though it was but the cry of one distraught and fainting,—a cry out of the depths not even seeking help, a cry of distress too terrible to be borne. Though it was scarcely louder than a sigh, she heard it through all the music, and turned and flew to the edge of the precipice whence it came. And immediately the darkness seemed to move as with a pulse, in a great throb, and something came through the wind with a rush, as if part of the

mountain had fallen—and lo! at her feet lay one who had flung himself forward, his arms stretched out, his face to the ground, as if he had seized and grasped in an agony the very soil. He lay there, half in the light and half in the shadow, gripping the rocks with his hands, burrowing into the cool herbage above and the mountain flowers; clinging, catching hold, despairing, yet seizing everything he could grasp—the tender grass, the rolling stones. The little pilgrim flung herself down upon her knees by his side, and grasped his arm to help, and cried aloud for aid; and the song of the singer ceased, and there was silence for a moment, so that the breath of the fugitive could be heard panting, and his strong struggle to drag himself altogether out of that abyss of darkness below. She thought of nothing, nor heard nor saw anything, but the strain of that last effort which seemed to shake the very mountains; until suddenly there seemed to rise all

around the hum and murmur as of a great multitude, and looking up, she saw every little hill and hollow, and the glorious plain beyond as far as eye could see, crowded with countless throngs; and on the high peaks above, in the full shining of the sun, came bands of angels, and of those great beings who are more mighty than men. And the eyes of all were fixed upon the man who lay as one dead upon the ground, and from the lips of all came a low murmur of rapture and delight, that spread like the hum of the bees, like the cooing of the doves, like the voice of a mother over her child; and the same sound came to her own lips unawares, and she murmured 'welcome' and 'brother' and 'friend,' not knowing what she said; and looking to the others, whispered, 'Hush! for he is weak'—and all of them answered with tears, with 'hush,' and 'welcome,' and 'friend,' and 'brother,' and 'beloved,' and stood smiling and weeping for joy. And presently there

came softly into the blessed air the ringing of the great silver bells, which sound only for victory and great happiness and gain. And there was joy in heaven,—and every world was stirred. And throughout the firmament, and among all the lords and princes of life, it was known that the impossible had become true, and the name of the Lord had proved enough, and love had conquered even despair.

'Hush!' she said, 'for he is weak.' And because it was her blessed service to receive those who had newly arrived in that heavenly country, and to soothe and help them so that like new-born children they should be able to endure and understand the joy, she knelt by him on the ground and tried to rouse him, though with trembling, for never before had she stood by one who was newly come out of the land of despair. 'Let the sun come upon him,' she said; 'let him feel the brightness of the light,'—and with her soft hands she drew him

out of the shade of the twilight to where the brightness of the day fell like a smile upon the flowers. And then at last he stirred, and turned round and opened his eyes, for the genial warmth had reached him. But his eyes were heavy and dazzled with the light, and he looked round him as if confused from beneath his heavy eyelids. 'And where am I?' he said; 'and who are you?'—'Oh, brother!' said the little pilgrim, and told him in his ear the name of that heavenly place, and many comforting and joyful things. But he understood her not, and still gazed about him with dazzled eyes, for his face was still towards the darkness, and fear was upon him lest this place should prove no more than a delusion, and the darkness return, and the anguish and pain.

Then he who had been her guide, and told her his tale, came forward and stood by the side of the newly come. And 'Brother,' he said, 'look upon me, for

you know me, and know from whence I come.'

The stranger looked dimly with his heavy eyes. And he replied, 'It is as a dream that I know you, and know from whence you came. And the dream is sweet to lie here, and think that I am at peace. Deceive me not—oh! deceive me not, with dreams that are sweet—but let me go upon my way and find the end; if there is any end, or if any good can be.'

'What shall we do,' cried the little pilgrim, 'to persuade him that he has arrived and is safe, and dreams no more?'

And they stood round him wondering, and troubled to find how little they could do for him, and that the light entered so slowly into his soul. And he lay on the bank like one left for death, so weary and so worn with all the horrors of the way that his heart was faint within him, and peace itself seemed to him but an illusion. He lay silent while they watched and

waited, then turned himself upon the grass, which was as soft to the weary wayfarer as angels' wings; and then the sunshine caught his eye, as if he had been a new-born babe awakened to the light. He put out his hand to it, and touched the ground that was golden with those heavenly rays, and gathered himself up till he felt it upon his face, and opened wide his dazzled eyes, then shaded them with trembling hands, and said to himself, 'It is the sun, it is the sun.' But still he did not dare to believe that the danger and the toil were over, nor could he listen, nor understand what the brethren said. While they all stood around and watched and waited, wondering each how the newcomer should be satisfied, there suddenly arose a sound with which they were all acquainted—the sound of One approaching. The faces of the blessed were all around like the stars in the sky—multitudes whom none could count or reckon; but He who came was seen of none, save

him to whom He came. The weary man rose up with a great cry, then fell again upon his knees, and flung his arms wide in the wonder and the joy. And 'Lord,' he cried, 'was it Thou? Lord, it was Thou! Thine was the face. And Thou hast brought me here!'

The watchers knew not what the other voice said, for what is said to each newcomer is the secret of the Lord. But when they looked again the man stood upright upon his feet, and his face was full of light; and though he trembled with weakness and with weariness, and with exceeding joy, yet the confusion and the fear were gone from him. And he had no longer any suspicion of them, as if they might betray him, but held out his trembling hands and cried, 'Friends: you are friends? and you spoke to me and called me brother? And am I here? And am I here?' For to name the name of that blessed country was not needful any longer, now that he had seen the Lord.

Then a great band and guard of honour, of angels and principalities and powers, surrounded him, and led him away to the holy city, and to the presence of the Father, who had permitted and had not forbidden what the Lord had done. And all the companies of the blessed followed after with wonder and gladness and triumph, because the great love of the Lord had drawn out of the darkness even those who were beyond hope.

II

The little pilgrim saw them depart from her with love and joy, and sat down upon the rocky edge and sang her own song of peace; for her fear was gone, and she was ready to do her service there upon the verge of the precipice as among the flowers and the sunshine, where her own place was. 'From the depths,' she said, 'they come, they come!—from the land of darkness, where no love is. For Thy love,

O Lord, is more than the darkness and the depths. And where hope is not, there Thy pity goes.' She sat and sang to herself like a happy child, for her heart had fathomed the awful gloom which baffles angels and men, and she had learned that though hope comes to an end and light fails, and the feet of the ambassadors are stayed on the mountains, and the voice of the pleaders is silenced, and darkness swallows up the world, yet Love never fails. As she sang, the pity in her heart grew so strong, and her desire to help the lost, that she rose up and stepped forth into the awful gloom, and, had it been permitted, in her gentleness and weakness would have gone forth to the deeps and had no fear.

The ground gave way under her feet, so dreadful was the precipice; but though her heart beat with the horror of it, and the whirl of the descent and the darkness which blinded her eyes, yet had she no hurt; and when her foot touched the rock,

and that sinking sense of emptiness and vacancy ceased, she looked around and saw the path by which that traveller had come. For when the eyes are used to the darkness, the horror of the gloom was no longer like a solid thing, but moved into shades of darker and less dark, so that she saw where the rocks stood, and how they sank with edges that cut like swords, down and ever down into the abysses,—and how here a deep ravine was rent between them, and there were breaks and scars as though some one had caught the jagged points with wounded hand or foot struggling up the perpendicular surface towards the little ray of light, like a tiny star which shone as on immeasurable heights to show where life was. As she travelled deeper and deeper, it was a wonder to see how far that little ray penetrated down and down, through gulfs of darkness, blue and cold like the shimmer of a diamond; and even when it could be seen no more,

sent yet a shadowy refraction, a line of something less black than the darkness, a lightening amid the gloom, a something indefinable which was hope. The rocks were more cruel than imagination could conceive — sometimes pointed and sharp like knives, sometimes smooth and upright as a wall with no hold for the climber, sometimes moving under the touch, with stones that rolled and crushed the bleeding feet; and though the solid masses were distinguishable from the lighter darkness of the air, yet it could only be in groping that the travellers by that way could find where any foothold was. The traveller who came from above, and who had the privilege of her happiness, sank down as if borne on wings, yet needed all her courage not to be afraid of the awful rocks that rose all above and around her, perpendicular in the gloom. And the great blast of an icy wind swept upward like something flying upon great wings, so tremendous was the

force of it, whirling from the depths below, sucked upwards by the very warmth of the life above, so that the little pilgrim herself caught at the rocks that she might not be swept again towards the top, or dashed against the stony pinnacles that stood up on every side. She was glad when she found a little platform under her feet for a moment where she could rest, and also because she had come, not from curiosity to see that gulf, but with the hope and desire to meet some one to whom she could be of a little comfort or help in the terrors of the way.

While she stood for a moment to get her breath, she became sensible that some living thing was near, and putting out her hand she felt that there was round her something that was like a bastion upon a fortified wall, and immediately a hand touched hers, and a soft voice said, 'Sister, fear not! for this is the watch-tower, and I am one of those who keep the way.' She had started and trembled indeed, not that

she feared, but because the delicate fabric of her being was such that every movement of the wind, and even those that were instinctive and belonged to the habits of another life, betrayed themselves in her. And 'Oh,' she said, 'I knew not that there were any watch-towers, or any one to help, but came because my heart called me, if perhaps I might hold out my hand in the darkness, and be of use where there was no light.'

'Come and stand by me,' said the watcher; and the little pilgrim saw that there was a whiteness near to her, out of which slowly shaped the face of a fair and tender woman, whom she knew not, but loved. And though they could scarcely see each other, yet they knew each other for sisters, and kissed, and took comfort together, holding each other's hands in the midst of the awful gloom. And the little pilgrim questioned in low and hushed tones—'Is it to help that you are here?'

'To help when that may be; but rather

to watch, and to send the news and make it known that one is coming—that the bells of joy may be sounded, and all the blessed may rejoice.'

'Oh,' said the little pilgrim, 'tell me your name, that I may do you honour: for to gain such high promotion can be given only to the great who are made perfect, and to those who love most.'

'I am not great,' said the watcher; 'but the Lord who considers all has placed me here, that I may be the first to see when one comes who is in the dark places below. And also because there are some who say that love is idolatry, and that the Father will not have us long for our own: therefore am I permitted to wait and watch and think the time not long for the love I bear him. For he is mine; and when he comes I will ascend with him to the dear country of the light, and some other who loves enough will be promoted in my place.'

'I am not worthy,' said the little pilgrim. 'It is a great promotion; but oh, that we

might be permitted to help, to put out a hand, or to clear the way!'

'Nay, my little sister,' said the watcher, 'but Patience must have its perfect work; and for those who are coming help is secret. They must not see it nor know it; for the land of darkness is beyond hope. The Father will not force the will of any creature He has made, for He respects us in our nature, which is His image. And when a man will not, and will not till the day is over, what can be done for him? He is left to his will, and is permitted to do it, as it seems good in his eyes. A man's will is great, for it is the gift of God. But the Lord, who cannot rest while one is miserable, still goes secretly to them, for His heart yearns after them. And by times they will see His face, or some thought of old will seize upon them. And some will say, "To perish upon the dark mountains is better than to live here." And I have seen,' said the watcher, 'that the Lord will go with them all the way—

but secretly, so that they cannot see Him. And though it grieves His heart not to help, yet will He not; for they have become the creatures of their own will, and by that must they attain.' She put out her hand to the new-comer, and drew her to the side of the rocky wall, so that they felt the sweep of the wind in their faces, but were not driven before it. 'And come,' she said, 'for two of us together will be like a great light to those who are in the darkness. They will see us like a lamp, and it will cheer them though they know not why we are here. Listen!' she cried. And the little pilgrim, holding fast the hand of the watcher, listened and looked down upon the awful way; and underneath the sweep of the icy wind was a small sharp sound as of a stone rolling or a needle of rock that broke and fell, like the sounds that are in a wood when some creature moves, though too far off for footstep to sound. 'Listen!' said the watcher, and her face so shone

with joy that the little pilgrim saw it clearly, like the shining of the morning in the midst of the darkness. 'He comes!'

'Oh, sister!' she cried, 'is it he—whom you love above all the rest?—is it he?'

The watcher smiled, and said, 'If it is not he, yet is it a brother; if it is not he now, yet his time will come. And in every one who passes, I hope to see his face; and the more that come, the more certain it is that he will come. And the time seems not long for the love I bear him. And it is for this that the Lord has so considered me. Listen! for some one comes.'

And there came to these watchers the strangest sight; for there flew past them while they gazed a man, who seemed to be carried upon the sweep of the wind. In the midst of the darkness they could see the faint white in his face, with eyes of flame and lips set firm—whirled forward upon the wind, which would have dashed him against the rocks; but as he whirled past he caught with his hand the needles

of the opposite peaks, and was swung high over a great chasm, and landed upon a higher height, high over their heads. And for a moment they could hear, like a pulsation through the depths, the hard panting of his breath. Then, with scarcely a moment for rest, they heard the sound of his progress onward, as if he did battle with the mountain, and his own swiftness carried him like another wind. It had taken less than a moment to sweep him past, quicker than the flight of a bird, as sudden as a lightning flash. The little pilgrim followed him with her eager ears, wondering if he would leap thus into the country of light and take heaven by storm; or whether he would fall upon the heavenly hills, and lie prostrate in weariness and exhaustion, like him to whom she had ministered. She followed him with her ears, for the sound of his progress was with crashing of rocks and a swift movement in the air: but she was called back by the pressure of the hand of the watcher

who did not, like the little pilgrim, follow him who thus rushed through space as far as there was sound or sight of him, but had turned again to the lower side, and was gazing once more, and listening for the little noises in the gulf below. The little pilgrim remembered her friend's hope, and said softly, 'It was not he?' And the watcher clasped her hand again, and answered, 'It was a dear brother. I have sounded the silver bells for him: and soon we shall hear them answering from the heights above. And another time it will be he.' And they kissed each other because they understood each the other in her heart.

And then they talked together of the old life when all things began, and of the wonderful things they had learned concerning the love of the Father and the Son, and how all the world was held by them, and penetrated through and through by threads of love, so that it could never fail. And the darkness seemed light

round them, and they forgot for a little that the wind was not as a summer breeze. Then once more the hand of the watcher pressed that of her companion, and bade her hush and listen. And they sat together holding their breath, straining their ears. Then heard they faint sounds which were very different from those made by him who had been driven past them like an arrow from a bow,—first as of something falling, but very far away, and a faint sound as of a foot which slipped. The listeners did not say a word to each other; they sat still and listened, scarcely drawing their breath. The darkness had no voice; it could not be but that some traveller was there, though hidden deep, deep in the gloom, only betrayed by the sound. There was a long pause, and the watcher held fast the little pilgrim's hand, and betrayed to her the longing in her heart; for though she was already blessed beyond all blessedness known on earth, yet had she not forgotten the love that

had begun on earth, but was for evermore. She murmured to herself, and said, 'If it is not he, it is a brother. And the more that come the more sure it is that he will come. Little sister, is there one for whom you watch?'

'There is no one,' the pilgrim said,—'but all.'

'And so care I for all,' cried the watcher; and she drew her companion with her to the edge of the abyss, and they sat down upon it low among the rocks to escape the rushing of the wind, and they sang together a soft song, 'for if he should hear us,' she said, 'it may give him courage.' And there they sat and sang; and the white of their garments and of their heavenly faces showed like a light in the deep gloom, so that he who was toiling upward might see that speck above him, and be encouraged to continue upon his way.

Sometimes he fell, and they could hear the moan he made, for every sound came

upward, however small and faint it might be; and sometimes dragged himself along, so that they heard his movement up some shelf of rock. And as the pilgrim looked, she saw other and other dim whitenesses along the ravines of the dark mountains, and knew that she was not the only one, but that many had come to watch and look for the coming of those who had been lost.

Time was as nothing to these heavenly watchers: but they knew how long and terrible were the moments to those upon the way. Sometimes there would be silence like the silence of long years: and fear came upon them that the wayfarer had turned back, or that he had fallen and lay suffering at the bottom of some gulf, or had been swept by the wind upon some icy peak and dashed against the rocks. Then anon, while they listened and held their breath, a little sound would strike again into the silence, bringing back hope. And again and again all would be still. The little pilgrim held her companion's hand,

and the thought went through her mind that were she watching for one whom she loved above the rest, her heart would fail. But the watcher answered her as if she had spoken, and said, 'Oh no, oh no; for if it is not he, it is a brother: and the Lord give them joy!' But they sang no more, their hearts being faint with suspense and with eagerness to hear every sound.

Then in the great chill of the silence, suddenly, and not far off, came the sound of one who spoke. He murmured to himself, and said, 'Who can continue on this terrible way? The night is black like hell, and there comes no morning. It was better in the land of darkness, for still we could see the face of man, though not God.' The muffled voice shook at that word and then was still suddenly, as though it had been a flame and the wind had blown it out. And for a moment there was silence: until suddenly it broke forth once more—

'What is this that has come to me that I can say the name of God? It tortures no longer, it is as balm. But He is far off and hears nothing. He called us and we answered not. Now it is we who call and He will not hear. I will lie down and die. It cannot be that a man must live and live for ever, in pain and anguish. Here will I lie and it will end. Oh Thou whose face I have seen in the night, make it possible for a man to die.'

The watcher loosed herself from her companion's clasp, and stood upright upon the edge of the cliff, clasping her hands together and saying low, as to herself, Father, Father! as one who cannot refrain from that appeal, but who knows the Father loves best, and that to intercede is vain. And longing was in her face and joy. For it was he; and she knew that he could not now fail, but would reach to the celestial country and to the shining of the sun: yet that it was not hers to help him, nor any man's, nor angel's. But the

little pilgrim was ignorant, not having been taught. And she committed herself to those depths, though she feared them, and though she knew not what she could do. And once more the dense air closed over her, and the vacancy swallowed her up, and when she reached the rocks below, there lay something at her feet which she felt to be a man; but she could not see him nor touch him, and when she tried to speak, her voice died away in her throat, and made no sound. Whether it was the wind that caught it, and swept it quite away, or that the well of that depth profound sucked every note upward, or whether because it was not permitted that either man or angel should come out of their sphere, or help be given which was forbidden, the little pilgrim knew not: for never had it been said to her that she should stand aside where need was. And surprise which was stronger than the icy wind, and for a moment a great dismay, took hold upon her, for she understood not

how it was that the bond of silence should bind her, and that she should be unable to put forth her hand to help him whom she heard moaning and murmuring, but could not see. And scarcely could her feet keep hold of the awful rock, or her form resist the upward sweep of the wind; but though he saw her not nor she him, yet could not she leave him in his weakness and misery, saying to herself that even if she could do nothing, it must be well that a little love should be near.

Then she heard him speak again, crouching under the rock at her feet, and he said faintly to himself, 'That was no dream. In the land of darkness there are no dreams nor voices that speak within us. On the earth they were never silent struggling and crying; but there—all blank and still. Therefore it was no dream. It was One who came and looked me in the face: and love was in His eyes. I have not seen love, oh, for so long. But it was no dream. If God is a dream I know not,

but love I know. And He said to me, "Arise and go." But to whom must I go? The words are words that once I knew, and the face I knew. But to whom, to whom?'

The little pilgrim cried aloud, so that she thought the rocks must be rent by the vehemence of her cry, calling like the other, Father, Father, Father! as if her heart would burst; and it was like despair to think that she made no sound, and that the brother could not hear her who lay thus fainting at her feet. Yet she could not stop, but went on crying like a child that has lost its way; for to whom could a child call but to her father, and all the more when she cannot understand? And she called out and said that God was not His name save to strangers, if there are any strangers, but that His name was Father, and it was to Him that all must go. And all her being thrilled like a bird with its song, so that the very air stirred, yet no voice came. And she lifted up her

face to the watcher above, and beheld, where she stood holding up her hands, a little whiteness in the great dark. But though these two were calling and calling, the silence was dumb. And neither of them could take him by the hand nor lift him up, nor show him, far, far above the little diamond of the light, but were constrained to stand still and watch, seeing that he was one of those who are beyond hope.

After she had waited a long time, he stirred again in the dark, and murmured to himself once more, saying low, 'I have slept and am strong. And while I was sleeping He has come again: He has looked at me again. And somewhere I will find Him. I will arise and go—I will arise and go——'

And she heard him move at her feet, and grope over the rock with his hands. But it was smooth as snow with no holding, and slippery as ice. And the watcher stood above and the pilgrim below, but could not help him. He groped and

groped, and murmured to himself, ever saying, 'I will arise and go.' And their hearts were wrung that they could not speak to him, nor touch him, nor help him. But at last in the dark there burst forth a great cry, 'Who said it?' and then a sound of weeping, and amid the weeping, words. 'As when I was a child, as when hope was—— I will arise and I will go —to my Father, to my Father! for now I remember, and I know.'

The little pilgrim sank down into a crevice of the rocks in the weakness of her great joy. And something passed her, mounting up and up—and it seemed to her that he had touched her shoulder or her hand unawares, and that the dumb cry in her heart had reached him, and that it had been good for him that a little love stood by, though only to watch and to weep. And she listened and heard him go on and on; and she herself ascended higher to the watch-tower. And the watcher was gone who had waited there

for her beloved, for she had gone with him, as the Lord had promised her, to be the one who should lead him to the holy city and to see the Father's face. And it was given to the little pilgrim to sound the silver bells and to warn all the bands of the blessed, and the great angels and lords of the whole world, that from out the land of darkness and from the regions beyond hope another had come.

She remained not there long, because there were many who sought that place that they might be the first to see if one beloved was among the travellers by that terrible way, and to welcome the brother or sister who was the most dear to them of all the children of the Father. But it was thus that she learned the last lesson of all that is in heaven and that is in earth, and in the heights above and in the depths below, which the great angels desire to look into, and all the princes and powers. And it is this: that there is that which is beyond hope yet not beyond love. And

that hope may fail and be no longer possible, but love cannot fail. For hope is of men, but love is the Lord. And there is but one thing which to Him is not possible, which is to forget. And that even when the Father has hidden His face and help is forbidden, yet there goes He secretly and cannot forbear.

But if there were any deep more profound, and to which access was not, either from the dark mountains or by any other way, the pilgrim was not taught, nor ever found any knowledge, either among the angels who know all things, or among her brothers who were the children of men.

THE END

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