Julius LeVallon

by Algernon Blackwood

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Julius LeVallon An Episode

By Algernon Blackwood

Author of “The Centaur,” “John Silence,” “The Human Chord,” etc.

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TO M. S-K. (1906)

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Book I SCHOOLDAYS

“Dream faces bloom around your face

Like flowers upon one stem;

The heart of many a vanished race

Sighs as I look on them.”

A. E.

Julius LeVallon CHAPTER I

“Surely death acquires a new and deeper significance when we regard it no longer as a single and unexplained break in an unending life, but as part of the continually recurring rhythm of progress—as inevitable, as natural, and as benevolent as sleep.”—“Some Dogmas of Religion” (Prof. J. M’Taggart).

IT was one autumn in the late ’nineties that I found myself at Bâle, awaiting letters. I

was returning leisurely from the Dolomites, where a climbing holiday had combined pleasantly with an examination of the geologically interesting Monzoni Valley. When the claims of the latter were exhausted, however, and I turned my eyes towards the peaks, it happened that bad weather held permanent possession of the great grey cliffs and towering pinnacles, and climbing was out of the question altogether. A world of savage desolation gloomed down upon me through impenetrable mists; the scouts of winter's advance had established themselves upon all possible points of attack; and the whole tossed wilderness of precipice and scree lay safe, from my assaults at least, behind a frontier of furious autumn storms.

Having ample time before my winter's work in London, I turned my back upon the unconquered Marmolata and Cimon della Pala, and made my way slowly, via Bozen and Innsbruck, to Bâle; and it was in the latter place, where my English correspondence was kind enough to overtake me, that I found one letter in particular that interested me more than all the others put together. It bore a Swiss stamp; and the handwriting caused me a thrill of anticipatory excitement even before I had consciously recalled the name of the writer. It was addressed before and behind till there was scarcely room left for a postmark, and it had journeyed from my chambers to my club, from my club to the university, and thence, by way of various poste-restantes, from one hotel to another till, with good luck little short of marvellous, it discovered me in my room of the Trois Rois Hotel overlooking the Rhine.

The signature, to which I turned at once before reading the body of the message, was Julius LeVallon; and as my eye noted the firm and very individual writing, once of familiar and potent significance in my life, I was conscious that emotions of twenty years ago woke vigorously into being, releasing sensations and memories I had thought buried beyond all effective resurrection. I knew myself swept back to those hopes and fears that, all these years before, had been—me. The letter was brief; it ran as follows:

Friend of a million years,—Should you remember your promise, given to me at Edinburgh twenty years ago, I write to tell you that I am ready. Yours, especially in separation,

Julius LeVallon.

And then followed two lines of instructions how to reach him in the isolated little valley of the Jura Mountains, on the frontier between France and Switzerland, whence he wrote.

The wording startled me; but this surprise, not unmingled with amusement, gave place immediately to emotions of a deeper and much more complex order, as I drew an armchair to the window and resigned myself, half pleasurably, half uneasily, to the flood of memories that rose from the depths and besieged me with their atmosphere of half-forgotten boyhood and of early youth. Pleasurably, because my curiosity was aroused abruptly to a point my dull tutorial existence now rarely, if ever, knew; uneasily, because these early associations grouped themselves about the somewhat unearthly figure of a man with whom once I had been closely intimate, but who had since disappeared behind a veil of mystery to follow pursuits where danger to body, mind and soul—it seemed to me—must be his constant attendant.

For Julius LeVallon, or Julius, as he was known to me in our school and university days, had been once a name to conjure with; a personality who evoked for me a world more vast and splendid, horizons wider, vistas of possibilities more dazzling, than any I have since known—which have contracted, in fact, with my study of an exact science to a dwindled universe of pettier scale and measurement;—and wherein, formerly, with all the terror and delight of vividly imagined adventure, we moved side by side among strange experiences and fascinating speculations.

The name brings back the face and figure of as singular an individual as I have ever known who, but for my saving streak of common sense and inability to imagine beyond a certain point, might well have swept me permanently into his own region

of research and curious experiment. As it was, up to the time when I felt obliged to steer my course away from him, he found my nature of great assistance in helping him to reconstruct his detailed mental pictures of the past; we were both “in the same boat together,” as he constantly assured me—this boat that travelled down the river of innumerable consecutive lives; and there can be no doubt that my cautious questionings—lack of perspective, he termed it—besides checking certain aspects of his conception, saved us at the same time from results that must have proved damaging to our reputations, if not injurious actually to our persons, physically and mentally. Yet that he captured me so completely at the time was due to an innate sympathy I felt towards his theories, a sympathy that at times amounted to complete acceptance. I freely admit this sympathy. He used another word for it, however: he called it Memory.

As a boy, Julius LeVallon was beyond question one of the strangest beings that ever wore a mortar-board, or lent his soul and body to the conventionalities of an English private school.

I recall, as of yesterday, my first sight of him, and the vivid impression, startling as of shock, he then produced: the sensitive, fine face, pallid as marble, the thatch of tumbling dark hair, and the eyes of changing greeny blue that shone unlike any English eyes I have ever looked upon before or since. “Giglamps” the other boys called them, of course; but when you caught them through the black hair that straggled over the high white forehead, they somehow conveyed the impression of twin lanterns, now veiled, now clear, seen through the tangled shadows of a twilight wood. Unlike the eyes of most dreamers, they looked keenly within, rather than vaguely beyond; and I recall to this day the sharp, half disquieting effect produced upon my mind as a new boy the first instant I saw them—that here was an individual who somehow stood aloof from the mob of noisy, mischief-loving youngsters all about him, and had little in common with the world in which this school was a bustling, practical centre of educational energy.

Nor is it that I recall that first sight with the added judgment of later years. I insist that this moment of his entrance into my life was accompanied by an authentic thrill of wonder that announced his presence to my nerves, or even deeper, to my very soul. My sympathetic nervous system was instinctively aware of him. He came upon me with a kind of rush for which the proper word is startling; there was nothing gradual about it; its nature was electrifying; and in some sense he certainly captivated me, for, immediately upon knowing him, this opening wonder merged in a deep affection of a kind so intimate, so fearless, so familiar, that it seemed to me that I must, somewhere, somehow, have known him always. For years to come it bound me to his side. To the end, moreover, I never quite lost something of that curious first impression, that he moved, namely, in an outer world that did not claim him; that those luminous, inward-peering eyes saw but dimly the objects we call real; that he saw them as counters in some trivial game he deemed it not worth while to play; that while, perforce, he used them like the rest of us, their face-value was as naught compared to what they symbolised; that, in a word, he stood apart from the vulgar bustle of ordinary ambitious life, and above it, in a region by himself where he was forever questing issues of infinitely greater value.

For a boy of fifteen, as I then was, this seems much to have discerned. At the time I certainly phrased it all less pompously in my own small mind. But that first sense of shock remains: I yearned to know him, to stand where he stood, to be exactly like him. And our speedy acquaintance did not overwhelm me as it ought to have done—for a singular reason; I felt oddly that somehow or other I had the right to know him instantly.

Imagination, no doubt, was stronger in me at that time than it is to-day; my mind more speculative, my soul, perhaps, more sensitively receptive. At any rate the insignificant and very ordinary personality I own at present has since largely recovered itself. If Julius LeVallon was one in a million, I know that I can never expect to be more than one of a million. And it is something in middle age to

discover that one can appreciate the exceptional in others without repining at its absence in oneself.

Julius was two forms above me, and for a day or two after my arrival at mid-term, it appears he was in the sick-room with one of those strange nervous illnesses that came upon him through life at intervals, puzzling the doctors and alarming those responsible for his well-being; accompanied, too, by symptoms that to-day would be recognised, I imagine, as evidence of a secondary personality. But on the third or fourth day, just as afternoon “Preparation” was beginning and we were all shuffling down upon our wooden desks with a clatter of books and pens, the door beside the great blackboard opened, and a figure stole into the room, tall, slender, and unsubstantial as a shadow, yet intensely real.

“Hullo! Giglamps back again!” whispered the boy on my left, and another behind me sniggered audibly “Jujubes”—thus Julius was sometimes paraphrased—“tired of shamming at last!” Then Hurrish, the master in charge, whose head had been hidden a moment behind his desk, closed the lid and turned. He greeted the boy with a few kind words of welcome which, of course, I have forgotten; yet, so strange are the freaks of memory, and so instantaneous and prophetic the first intuitions of sympathy or aversion, that I distinctly recall that I liked Hurrish for his words, and was grateful to him for his kindly attitude towards a boy whose very existence had hitherto been unknown to me. Already, before I knew his name, Julius LeVallon meant, at any rate, this to me.

But from that instant the shadow became most potently real substance. The boy moved forward to his desk, looked about him as though to miss no face, and almost immediately across that big room full of heads and shoulders saw—myself.

That something of psychical import passed swiftly between us is indubitable, for while Julius visibly started, pausing a moment in his walk and staring as though he would swallow me with his eyes, there flashed upon my own mind a thought so

vivid, so precise, that it took actual sentence form, and before I could possibly have imagined or invented an idea so uncorrelated with a previous experience of any kind at all, I heard myself murmuring: “He’s found me...!”

It seemed audible, at least. I hid my face a second, thinking I had spoken it aloud. No one looked at me, however; Hurrish made no comment. My name did not sound terribly across the class-room. The sentence, after all, had remained a thought. But that it leaped into my mind at all seems to me now, as it did at the time, significant.

His eyes rested for the fraction of a second on my face as he crossed the floor, and I felt—but how describe it intelligibly?—as though a wind had risen and caught me up into another place where there was great light and an impression of vast distances. Hypnotic we should call it to-day; hypnotic let it be. I can only affirm how, with that single glance from a boy but slightly older than myself, seen then for the first time, and with no word yet spoken, there came back to me a larger sense of life, and of the meaning of life. I became aware of an extended world, of wonder, movement, adventure on a scale immensely grander than anything I found about me among known external things. But I became aware—“again.” In earlier childhood I had known this bigger world. It suddenly flashed over me that time stretched behind me as well as before—and that I stretched back with it. Something scared me, I remember, with a faint stirring as of old pains and pleasures suffered long ago. The face and eyes that called into being these fancies, so oddly touched with alarm, were like those seen sometimes in dreams that never venture into daily life—things of composite memory, no doubt, that bring with them an atmosphere, and a range of query, nothing in normal waking life can even suggest.

He passed to his place in front of Hurrish’s desk among the upper forms, and a sea of tousled heads intervened to hide him from my sight; but as he went the afternoon sunshine fell through the unfrosted half of the window, and in later years—now, in fact, as I hold his letter in my hand and re-collect these vanished memories—I still

see him coming into my life with the golden sunlight about his head and his face wrapped in its halo. I see it reflected in the lamping eyes, glistening on the mop of dark hair, shining on the pallid face with its high expression of other-worldliness and yearning remote from the chaos of modern life.... It was a long time before I managed to bring myself down again to parse the verbs in that passage of Hecuba, for, if anything, I have understated rather than exaggerated the effect that this first sight of Julius LeVallon produced upon my feelings and imagination. Some one, lost through ages but ever seeking me, rose suddenly and spoke: “So here you are, at last! I’ve found you. We’ve found each other again!”

To say more could only be to elaborate the memory with knowledge that came later, and thus to distort the first simple and profound impression. I merely wish to present, as it occurred, the picture of this wizard face appearing suddenly above the horizon of my small schoolboy world, staring with that deep suggestion of having travelled down upon me from immense distances behind, bringing fugitive and ghostly sensations of things known long ago, and hinting very faintly, as I have tried to describe, of vanished pains and alarms—yet of sufferings so ancient that to touch them even with the tenderest of words is to make them crumble into dust and disappear.

CHAPTER II

“‘Body,’ observes Plotinus, ‘is the true river of Lethe.’ The memory of definite events in former lives can hardly come easily to a consciousness allied with brain.... Bearing in mind also that even our ordinary definite memories slowly become indefinite, and that most drop altogether out of notice, we shall attach no importance to the naïve question, ‘Why does not Smith remember who he was before?’ It would be an exceedingly strange fact if he did, a new Smith being now in evidence along with a new brain and nerves. Still, it is conceivable that such remembrances occasionally arise. Cerebral process, conscious or subconscious, is

psychical."—"Individual and Reality" (E. D. Fawcett).

Looking back upon this entrance, not from the present long interval of twenty years, but from a point much nearer to it, and consequently more sympathetically in touch with my own youth, I must confess that his presence—his arrival, as it seemed—threw a momentary clear light of electric sharpness upon certain "inner scenery" that even at this period of my boyhood was already beginning to fade away into dimness and "mere imagining." Which brings me to a reluctant confession I feel bound to make. I say "reluctant," because at the present time I feel intellectually indisposed to regard that scenery as real. Its origin I know not; its reality at the time I alone can vouch for. Many children have similar experiences, I believe; with myself it was exceptionally vivid.

Ever since I could remember, my childhood days were charged with it—haunting and stimulating recollections that were certainly derived from nothing in this life, nor owed their bright reality to anything seen or read or heard. They influenced all my early games, my secret make-believe, my magical free hours after lessons. I dreamed them, played them, lived them, and nothing delighted me so much as to be alone on half-holidays in summer out of doors, or on winter evenings in the empty schoolroom, so that I might reconstruct for myself the gorgeous detail of their remote, elusive splendour. For the presence of others, even of my favourite playmates, ruined their reality with criticising questions, and a doubt as to their genuineness was an intrusion upon their sacredness my youthful heart desired to prevent by—killing it at once. Their nature it would be wearisome to detail, but I may mention that their grandeur was of somewhat mixed authority, and that if sometimes I was a general like Gideon, against whom Amalekites and such like were the merest insects, at others I was a High Priest in some huge, dim-sculptured Temple whose magnificence threw Moses and the Bible tabernacles into insignificance.

Yet it was upon these glories, and upon this sacred inner scenery, that the arrival of Julius LeVallon threw a new daylight of stark intensity. He made them live again. His coming made them awfully real. They had been fading. Going to school was, it seemed, a finishing touch of desolating destruction. I felt obliged to give them up and be a man. Thus ignored, disowned, forgotten of set deliberation, they sank out of sight and were prepared to disappear, when suddenly his arrival drew the entire panorama delightfully into the great light of day again. His presence re-touched, re-coloured the entire series. He made them true.

It would take too long, besides inviting the risk of unconscious invention, were I to attempt in detail the description of our growing intimacy. Moreover, I believe it is true that the intimacy did not grow at all, but suddenly, incomprehensibly was. At any rate, I remember with distinctness our first conversation. The hour's "prep." was over, and I was in the yard, lonely and disconsolate as a new boy, watching the others playing tip-and-run against the high enclosing wall, when Julius LeVallon came up suddenly behind me, and I turned expectantly at the sound of his almost stealthy step. He came softly. He was smiling. In the falling dusk he looked more shadow-like than ever. He wore the school cap at the back of his head, where it clung to his tumbling hair like some absurd disguise circumstances forced him to adopt for the moment.

And my heart gave a bound of excitement at the sound of his voice. In some strange way the whole thing seemed familiar. I had expected this. It had happened before. And, very swiftly, a fragment of that inner scenery, laid like a theatre-inset against the playground of to-day, flashed through the depths of me, then vanished.

"What is your name?" he asked me, very gently.

"Mason," I told him, conscious that I flushed and almost stammered. "John Mason. I'm a new boy." Then, although my brother, formerly Head of the school, had already gone on to Winchester, I added "Mason secundus." My outer self felt shy,

but another, deeper self realised a sense of satisfaction that was pleasure. I was aware of a desire to seize his hand and utter something of this bigger, happier sensation. The strength of school convention, however, prevented anything of the sort. I was at first embarrassed by the attention of a bigger boy, and showed it.

He looked closely into my face a moment, as though searching for something, but so penetratingly that I felt his eyes actually inside me. The information I had given did not seem to interest him particularly. At the same time I was conscious that his near presence affected me in a curious way, for I lost the feeling that this attention to a new boy was flattering and unusual, and became aware that there was something of great importance he wished to say to me. It was all right and natural. There was something he desired to find out and know: it was not my name. A vague yet profound emotion troubled me.

He spoke then, slowly, earnestly; the voice gentle and restrained, but the expression in the eyes and face so grave, almost so solemn, that it seemed an old and experienced man who addressed me, instead of a boy barely sixteen years of age.

“Have you then ... quite ... forgotten ... everything?” he asked, making dramatic pauses thus between the words.

And, singular in its abruptness though the question was, there flashed upon me even while he uttered it, a sensation, a mood, a memory—I hardly know what to call it—that made the words intelligible. It dawned upon me that I had “forgotten ... everything ... quite”: crowded, glorious, ancient things, that somehow or other I ought to have remembered. A faint sense of guiltiness accompanied the experience. I felt disconcerted, half ashamed.

“I’m afraid ... I have,” came my faltering reply. Though bewildered, I raised my eyes to his. I looked straight at him. “I’m—Mason secundus ... now....”

His eyes, I saw, came up, as it were, from their deep searching. They rested quietly upon my own, with a reassuring smile that made them kindly and understanding as

those of my own father. He put his hand on my shoulder in a protective fashion that gave me an intense desire to remember all the things he wished me to remember, and thus to prove myself worthy of his interest and attention. The desire in me was ardent, serious. Its fervency, moreover, seemed to produce an effect, for immediately there again rose before my inner vision that flashing scenery I had "imagined" as a child.

Possibly something in my face betrayed the change. His expression, at any rate, altered instantly as though he recognised what was happening.

"You're Mason secundus now," he said more quickly. "I know that. But—can you remember nothing of the Other Places? Have you quite forgotten when—we were together?"

He stopped abruptly, repeating the last three words almost beneath his breath. His eyes rested on mine with such pleasure and expectancy in them that for the moment the world I stood in melted out, the playground faded, the shouts of cricket ceased, and I seemed to forget entirely who or where I was. It was as though other times, other feelings, other scenery battled against the actual present, claiming me, sweeping me away, extending the sense of personal identity towards a previous series. Seductive the sensation was beyond belief, yet at the same time disturbing. I wholly ignored the flattery of this kindness from an older boy. A series of vivid pictures, more familiar than the nursery, more distant than a dream of years ago, swam up from some inner region of my being like memories of places, people, adventures I had actually lived and seen. The near presence of Julius LeVallon drew them upwards in a stream above the horizon of some temporarily veiled oblivion.

"... in the Other Places," his voice continued with a droning sound that was like the sea a long way off, or like wind among the branches of a tree.

And something in me leaped automatically to acknowledge the truth I suddenly realised.

“Yes, yes!” I cried, no shyness in me any more, and plunged into myself to seize the flying pictures and arrest their sliding, disappearing motion. “I remember, oh, I remember ... a whole lot of ... dreams ... or things like made-up adventures I once had ages and ages ago ... with ...” I hesitated a second. A rising and inexplicable excitement stopped my words. I was shaking all over. “... with you!” I added boldly, or rather the words seemed to add themselves inevitably. “It was with you, sir?”

He nodded his head slightly and smiled. I think the “sir,” sounding so incongruous, caused the smile.

“Yes,” he said in his soft, low voice, “it was with me. Only they were not dreams. They were real. There’s no good denying what’s real; it only prevents your remembering properly.”

The way he said it held conviction as of sunrise, but anyhow denial in myself seemed equally to have disappeared. Deep within me a sense of reality answered willingly to his own.

“And myself?” he went on gently yet eagerly at the same time, his eyes searching my own. “Don’t you remember—me? Have I, too, gone quite beyond recall?”

But with truth my answer came at once:

“Something ... perhaps ... comes back to me ... a little,” I stammered. For while aware of a keen sensation that I talked with someone I knew as well as I knew my own father, nothing at the moment seemed wholly real to me except his sensitive, pale face with the large and beautiful eyes so keenly peering, and the tangled hair escaping under that ridiculous school cap. The pine trees in the cricket-field rose into the fading sky behind him, and I remember being puzzled to determine where his hair stopped and the feathery branches began.

“... carrying the spears up the long stone steps in the sunshine,” his voice murmured on with a sound like running water, “and the old man in the robe of yellow standing at the top ... and orchards below, all white and pink with blossoms dropping in the

wind ... and miles of plain in blue distances far away, the river winding ... and birds fishing in the shallow places ...”

The picture flashed into my mind. I saw it. I remembered it in detail as easily as any childhood scene of a few years ago, but yet through a blur of summery haze and at the end of a stupendous distance that reduced the scale to lilliputian proportions. I looked down the wrong end of a telescope at it all. The appalling distance—and something else as well I was at a loss to define—frightened me a little.

“I ... my people, I mean ... live in Sussex,” I remember saying irrelevantly in my bewilderment, “and my father’s a clergyman.” It was the upper part of me that said it, no doubt anticipating the usual question “What’s your father?” My voice had a lifeless, automatic sound.

“That’s now,” LeVallon interrupted almost impatiently. “It’s thinking of these things that hides the others.”

Then he smiled, leaning against the wall beside me while the sunset flamed upon the clouds above us and the tide of noisy boys broke, tumbling about our feet. I see those hurrying clouds, crimson and gold, that scrimmage of boys in the school playground, and Julius LeVallon gazing into my eyes, his expression rapt and eager—I see it now across the years as plainly as I saw that flash of inner scenery far, far away. I even hear his low voice speaking. The whole, strange mood that rendered the conversation not too incredibly fantastic at the time comes over me again as I think of it.

He went on in that murmuring tone, putting true words to the pictures that rolled clearly through me:

“... and the burning sunlight on the white walls of the building ... the cool deep shadows where we talked and slept ... the shouting of the armies in the distance ... with the glistening of the spears and shining shields ...”

Mixed curiously together, kaleidoscopic, running one into the other without sharp

outlines of beginning or end, the scenes fled past me like the pages of a coloured picture-book. I saw figures plainly, more plainly than the scenery beyond. The man in the yellow robe looked close into my eyes, so close, indeed, I could almost hear him speak. He vanished, and a woman took his place. Her back was to me. She stood motionless, her hands upraised, and a gesture of passionate entreaty about her plunged me suddenly into a sea of whirling, poignant drama that had terror in it. The blood rushed to my head. My heart beat violently. I knew a moment of icy horror—that she would turn—and I should recognise her face—worse, that she would recognise my own. I experienced actual fear, a shrinking dread of something that was nameless. Escape was impossible, I could neither move nor speak, nor alter any single detail in this picture which—most terrifying of all—I knew contained somewhere too—myself. But she did not turn; I did not see her face. She vanished like the rest ... and I next saw quick, running figures with skins of reddish brown, circlets of iron about their foreheads and red tassels hanging from their loin cloths. The scene had shifted.

"... when we lit the signal fires upon the hills," the voice of LeVallon broke in softly, looking over his shoulder lest we be disturbed, "and lay as sentinels all night beside the ashes ... till the plain showed clearly in the sunrise with the encampments marked over it like stones ..."

I saw the blue plain fading into distance, and across it a swiftly-moving cloud of dust that was ominous in character, presaging attack. Again the scene shifted noiselessly as a picture on a screen, and a deserted village slid before me, with small houses built of undressed stone, and roomy paddocks, abandoned to the wild deer from the hills. I smelt the keen, fresh air and the scent of wild flowers. A figure, carrying a small blue stick, passed with tearing rapidity up the empty street.

"... when you were a Runner to the tribe," the voice stepped curiously in from a world outside it all, "carrying warnings to the House of Messengers ... and I held the

long night-watches upon the passes, signalling with the flaming torches to those below ..."

"But so far away, so dim, so awfully small, that I can hardly——"

The world of to-day broke in upon my voice, and I stopped, not quite aware of what I had been about to say. Martin, the Fourth Form and Mathematical Master, had come up unobserved by either of us, and was eyeing LeVallon and myself somewhat curiously. It was afterwards, of course, that I discovered who the interrupter was. I only knew at the moment that I disliked the look of him, and also that I felt somehow guilty.

"New boy in tow, LeVallon?" he remarked casually, the tone and manner betraying ill-concealed disapproval. The change of key, both in its character and its abruptness, seemed ugly, almost dreadful. It was so trivial.

"Yes, sir. It's young Mason." LeVallon answered at once, touching his cap respectfully, but by no means cordially.

"Ah," said the master dryly. "He's fortunate to find a friend so soon. Tell him we look to him to follow his brother's example and become Head of the school one day perhaps." I got the impression, how I cannot say, that Martin stood in awe of LeVallon, was even a little afraid of him as well. He would gladly have "scored off" him if it were possible. There was a touch of spite in his voice, perhaps.

"We knew one another before, sir," I heard Julius say quietly, as though his attention to a new boy required explanation—to Martin.

I could hardly believe my ears. This extraordinary boy was indeed in earnest. He had not the smallest intention of saying what was untrue. He said what he actually believed. I saw him touch his cap again in the customary manner, and Martin, the under-master, shrugging his shoulders, passed on without another word. It is difficult to describe the dignity LeVallon put into that trivial gesture of conventional respect, or in what way Martin gained a touch of honour from it that really was no

part of his commonplace personality. Yet I can remember perfectly well that this was so, and that I deemed LeVallon more wonderful than ever from that moment for being able to exact deference even from an older man who was a Form Master and a Mathematical Master into the bargain. For LeVallon, it seemed to me, had somehow positively dismissed him.

Yet, to such extent did the pictures in my mind dominate the playground where our bodies stood, that I almost expected to see the master go down the “long stone steps towards the sunny orchard below”—instead of walk up and cuff young Green who was destroying the wall by picking out the mortar from between the bricks. That wall, and the white wall in the dazzling sunshine seemed, as it were, to interpenetrate each other. The break of key caused by the interruption, however, was barely noticeable. The ugliness vanished instantly. Julius was speaking again as though nothing had happened. He had been speaking for some little time before I took in what the words were:

“... with the moonlight gleaming on the bosses of the shields ... the sleet of flying arrows ... and the hissing of the javelins ...”

The battle-scene accompanying the sentence caught me so vividly, so fiercely even, that I turned eagerly to him, all shyness gone, and let my words pour out impetuously as they would, and as they willy-nilly had to. For this scene, more than all the others, touched some intimate desire, some sharp and keen ambition that burned in me to-day. My whole heart was wrapped up in soldiering. I had chosen a soldier’s career instinctively, even before I knew quite the meaning of it.

“Yes, rather!” I cried with enthusiasm, staring so close into his face that I could have counted the tiny hairs on the smooth pale skin, “and that narrow ledge high up inside the dome where the prisoners stood until they dropped on to the spear-heads in the ground beneath, and how some jumped at once, and others stood all day, and—and how there was only just room to balance by pressing the feet sideways against the

curving wall...?”

It all rushed at me as though I had witnessed the awful scene a week ago. Something inside me shook again with horror at the sight of the writhing figures impaled upon the spears below. I almost felt a sharp and actual pain pierce through my flesh. I overbalanced. It was my turn to fall ...

A sudden smile broke swiftly over LeVallon’s face, as he held my arm a moment with a strength that almost hurt.

“Ah, you remember that! And little wonder——” he began, then stopped abruptly and released his grip. The cricket ball came bouncing to our feet across the yard, with insistent cries of “Thank you, ball! Thank you, LeVallon!” impossible to ignore. He did not finish the sentence, and I know not what shrinking impulse of suffering and pain in me it was that felt relieved he had not done so. Instead, he stooped good-naturedly, picked up the ball, and flung it back to the importunate cricketers; and as he did so I noticed that his action was unlike that of any English boy I had ever seen. He did not throw it as men usually throw a ball, but used a violent yet graceful motion that I vaguely remembered to have seen somewhere before. It perplexed me for a moment—then, suddenly, out of that deeper part of me so strangely now astir, the hint of explanation came. It was the action of a man who flings a spear or javelin.

A bell rang over our heads with discordant clangour, and we were swept across the yard with the rush of boys. The transition was abrupt and even painful—as when one comes into the noisy street from a theatre of music, lights and colour. A strong effort was necessary to recover balance and pull myself together. Until we reached the red-brick porch, however, LeVallon kept beside me, and his hurried last phrases, as we parted, were the most significant of all. It seemed as if he kept them for the end, although no such intention was probably in his thought. They left me quivering through and through as I heard them fall from his lips so quietly.

His face was shining. The words came from his inmost heart:

"Well, anyhow," he said beneath his breath lest he might be overheard, "I've found you, and we've found each other—at last. That's the great thing, isn't it? No one here understands all that. Now, we can go on together where we left off before; and, having found you, I expect I shall soon find her as well. For we're all three together, and—sooner or later—there's no escaping anything."

I remember that I staggered. The hand I put out to steady myself scraped along the uneven bricks and broke the skin. A boy with red hair struck me viciously in the back because I had stumbled into him; he shouted at me angrily too, though I heard no word he said. And LeVallon, for his part, just had time to bend his head down with "work hard and get up into my form—we shall have more chances then," and was gone into the passage and out of sight—leaving me trembling inwardly as though stricken by some sudden strange attack of nerves.

For his words about the woman turned me inexplicably—into ice. My legs gave way beneath me. A cold perspiration broke out upon my skin. No words of any kind came to me; there was no definite thought; clear recollection, absolutely none. The strange emotion itself I could not put a name to, nor could I say what part was played in it by any particular ingredient such as horror, terror, or mere ordinary alarm. All these were in it somewhere, linked darkly to a sense of guilt at length discovered and brought home. I can only say truthfully that I saw again the picture of that woman with her back towards me; but that, when he spoke, she turned and looked at me. She showed her face. I knew a sense of dreadful chill like some murderer who, after years of careful hiding, meets unexpectedly The Law and sees the gallows darkly rise. A hand of justice—of retribution—seemed stretched upon my shoulder from the empty sky.

I now set down my faithful recollection of what happened; and, incredible as it doubtless sounds to-day, yet it was most distressingly real. Out of what dim,

forgotten past his words, this woman's face, arose to haunt "me" of To-day, I had no slightest inkling. What crime of mine, what buried sin, came as with a blare of trumpets, seeking requital, no slightest hint came whispering. Yet this was the impression I instantly received. I was a boy. It terrified and amazed me, but it held no element of make-believe. Julius LeVallon, myself, and an unknown woman stood waiting on the threshold of the breathless centuries to set some stone in its appointed place—a stone, moreover, he, I, and she, together breaking mighty laws, had left upon the ground. It seemed no common wrong to her, to him, to me, and yet we three, working together, alone could find it and replace it.

This, somehow, was the memory his words, that face, struggled to reconstruct.

I saw LeVallon smiling as he left my side. He disappeared in the way already described. The stream of turbulent boys separated us physically, just as, in his belief, the centuries had carried us apart spiritually—he—myself—and this other. I saw a veil drop down upon his face. The lamps in his splendid eyes were shrouded. At supper we sat far apart, and the bedroom I shared with two other youngsters of my own age and form, of course, did not include LeVallon.

CHAPTER III

"Souls without a past behind them, springing suddenly into existence, out of nothing, with marked mental and moral peculiarities, are a conception as monstrous as would be the corresponding conception of babies suddenly appearing from nowhere, unrelated to anybody, but showing marked racial and family types."—"The Ancient Wisdom" (A. Besant).

As the terms passed and I ceased to be a new boy, it cannot be said that I got to know Julius LeVallon any better, because our intimacy had been established, or "resumed" as he called it, from the beginning; but the chances of being together increased, we became members of the same form, our desks were side by side, and we shared at length the same bedroom with another Fifth Form boy named

Goldingham. And since Goldingham, studious, fat, good-natured, slept soundly from the moment his head touched the pillow till the seven o'clock bell rang—and sometimes after it in order to escape his cold bath—we practically had the room to ourselves.

Moreover, from the beginning, it all seemed curiously true. It was not Julius who invented, but I who in my stupidity had forgotten. Long, detailed dreams, too, came to me about this time, which I recognised as a continuation of these of "Other Places" his presence near me in the daytime would revive. They existed, apparently, in some layer deeper than my daily consciousness, recoverable in sleep. In the daytime something sceptical in me that denied, rendered them inaccessible, but once reason slept and the will was in abeyance, they poured through me in a continuous, uninterrupted flow. A word from Julius, a touch, a glance from his eyes perhaps, would evoke them instantly, and I would see. Yet he made no potent suggestions that could have caused them; there was no effort; I did not imagine at his bidding; and often, indeed, his descriptions differed materially from my own, which makes me hesitate to ascribe the results to telepathy alone. It was his presence, his atmosphere that revived them. To-day, of course, immediately after our schooldays in fact, they ceased to exist for me—to my regret, I think, on the whole, for they were very entertaining, and sometimes very exquisite. I still retain, however, the vivid recollection of blazing summer landscapes; of people, sometimes barbaric and always picturesque, moving in brilliant colours; of plains, and slopes of wooded mountains that dipped, all blue and thirsty, into quiet seas—scenes and people, too, utterly unlike any I had known during my fifteen years of existence under heavy English skies.

LeVallon knew this inner world far better and more intimately than I did. He lived in it. Motfield Close, the private school among the Kentish hills, was merely for him a place where his present brain and body—instruments of his soul—were acquiring the current knowledge of To-day. It was but temporary. He himself, the eternal self

that persisted through all the series of lives, was in quest of other things, “real knowledge,” as he called it. For this reason the recollection of his past, these “Other Places,” was of paramount importance, since it enabled him to see where he had missed the central trail and turned aside to lesser pursuits that had caused delay. He was forever seeking to recover vanished clues, to pick them up again, and to continue the main journey with myself and, eventually, with—one other.

“I’ve always been after those things,” he used to say, “and I’m searching, searching always—inside myself, for the old forgotten way. We were together, you and I, so your coming back like this will help——”

I interrupted, caught by an inexplicable dread that he would mention another person too. I said the first thing that came into my head. Instinctively the words came, yet right words:

“But my outside is different now. How could you know? My face and body, I mean——?”

“Of course,” he smiled; “but I knew you instantly. I shall never forget that day. I felt it at once—all over me. I had often dreamed about you,” he added after a moment’s pause, “but that was no good, because you didn’t dream with me.” He looked hard into my eyes. “We’ve a lot to do together, you know,” he said gravely, “a lot of things to put right—one thing, one big thing in particular—when the time comes. Whatever happens, we mustn’t drift apart again. We shan’t.”

Another minute and I knew he would speak of “her.” It was strange, this sense of shrinking that particular picture brought. Never, except in sleep occasionally, had it returned to me, and I think it was my dread that kept it out of sight. Yet Julius just then did not touch the topic that caused my heart to sink.

“I must be off,” he exclaimed a moment later. “There’s ‘stinks’ to mug up, and I haven’t looked at it. I shan’t know a blessed word!” For the chemistry, known to the boys by this shorter yet appropriate name, was a constant worry to him. He was

learning it for the first time, he found it difficult. But he was a boy, a schoolboy, and he talked like one.

He never doubted for one instant that I was not wholly with him. He assumed that I knew and remembered, though less successfully, and that we merely resumed an interrupted journey. Pre-existence was as natural to him as that a certain man and woman had provided his returning soul with the means of physical expression, termed body. His soul remembered; he, therefore, could not doubt. It was innate conviction, not acquired theory.

“I can’t get down properly to the things I want,” he said another time, “but they’re coming. It’s a rotten nuisance—learning dates and all these modern languages keeps them out. The two don’t mix. But, now you’re here, we can dig up a jolly sight more than I could alone. And you’re getting it up by degrees all right enough.”

For the principle of any particular knowledge, once acquired, was never lost. It was learning a thing for the first time that was the grind. Instinctive aptitude was subconscious memory of something learned before.

“The pity is we’re made to learn a lot of stuff that belongs to one particular section, and doesn’t run through them all. It clogs the memory. The great dodge is to recognise the real knowledge and go for it bang. Then you get a bit further every section.”

Until my arrival, it seems, he kept these ideas strictly to himself, knowing he would otherwise be punished for lying, or penalised in some other educational manner for being too imaginative. Yet, while he stood aloof somewhat from the common school life, he was popular and of good repute. The boys admired, but stood in awe of him. He pleased the masters almost as much as he puzzled them; for, unlike most dreamy, fanciful youths, he possessed concentration and an imperious will; he worked hard and always knew his lessons. Modern knowledge he found difficult, and only mastered with great labour the details of recent history, elementary science,

chemistry, and so forth, whereas in algebra, Euclid, mathematics, and the dead languages, especially Greek, he invariably stood at the head of the form. He was merely re-collecting them.

During the whole two years of our schooldays at the Close, I never heard him use such phrases as “former life” or “reincarnation.” Life, for him, was eternal simply, and at Motfield he was in eternal life, just as he always had been and always would be. Only he never said this. He was a boy and talked like a boy. He just lived it. Death to him was an insignificant detail. His whole mind ran to the idea that life was continuous, each section casting aside the worn-out instrument which had been exactly suited to the experience its wearer needed for its development at that time and under those conditions. And, certainly, he never understood that astounding tenet of most religions, that life can be “eternal” by prolonging itself endlessly in the future, without having equally extended endlessly also in the past!

“But I’m going to be a general,” I said, “when I grow up,” afraid that the “real knowledge” might interfere with my main ambition. “I could never think of giving up that.”

Julius looked up from tracing figures in the sand with the point of his gymnasium shoe. There was a smile on his lips, a light in his eye that I understood. I had said something that belonged to To-day, and not to all To-days.

“You were before,” he answered patiently, “a magnificent general, too.”

“But I don’t remember it,” I objected, being in one of my denying moods.

“You want to be it again,” he smiled. “It’s born in you. That is memory. But, anyhow,” he added, “you can do both—be a general with your mind and the other thing with your soul. To shirk your job only means to come back to it again later, don’t you see?”

Quite naturally, and with profound conviction, he spoke of life’s obligations. Physical infirmities resulted from gross errors in the past; mental infirmities, from

lost intellectual opportunities; spiritual disabilities, from past moral shirkings and delinquencies: all were methods, moreover, by which the soul divines her mistakes and grows, through discipline, stronger, wiser. He would point to a weakness in someone, and suggest what kind of error caused it in a previous section, with the same certainty that a man might show a scar and say “that came from fooling with a mowing machine when I was ten years old.”

The antipathies and sympathies of To-day, the sudden affinities like falling in love at sight, and the sudden hostilities that apparently had no cause—all were due to relationships in some buried Yesterday, while those of To-morrow could be anticipated, and so regulated, by the actions of To-day. Even to the smallest things. If, for instance, Martin vented his spite and jealousy, working injustice upon another, he but prepared the way for an exactly adequate reprisal later that must balance the account to date. For into the most trivial affairs of daily life dipped the spirit of this remarkable boy’s belief, revealing as with a torch’s flare the workings of an implacable justice that never could be mocked. No question of punishment meted out by another entered into it, but only an impersonal law, which men call—elsewhere—Cause and Effect.

At the time, of course, I was somewhat carried away by the thoroughness with which he believed and practised these ideas, though without grasping the logic and consistency of his intellectual position. I was aware, most certainly, in his presence of large and vitalising sensations not easily accounted for, of being caught up into some unfamiliar region over vast horizons, where big winds blew from dim and ancient lands, where a sunlight burned that warmed the inmost heart in me, and where I seemed to lose myself amid the immensities of an endless, vistaed vision.

This, of course, is the language of maturity. At the time I could not express a tithe of what my feelings were, except that they were vast and wonderful. To think myself back imaginatively, even now, into that period of my youth with Julius LeVallon by

my side, is to feel myself eternally young, alive forever beyond all possibility of annihilation or decay; it is, further, to realise an ample measure of lives at my disposal in which to work towards perfection, the mere ageing and casting off of any particular body after using it for sixty years or so—nothing, and less than nothing.

"Don't funk!" I remember his saying once to a boy named Creswick who had "avoided" the charging Hurrish at football. "You can't lose your life. You can only lose your body. And you'll lose that anyhow."

"Crazy lout!" Creswick exclaimed, nursing his ankle, as he confided to another boy of like opinions. "I'm not going to have my bones all smashed to pulp for anybody. Body I'm using at the moment indeed! It'll be life I'm using at the moment next!"

Which, I take it, was precisely what LeVallon meant.

CHAPTER IV

"In the case of personal relations, I do not see that heredity would help us at all. Heredity, however, can produce a more satisfactory explanation of innate aptitudes. On the other hand, the doctrine of pre-existence does not compel us to deny all influence on a man's character of the character of his ancestors. The character which a man has at any time is modified by any circumstances which happen to him at that time, and may well be modified by the fact that his re-birth is in a body descended from ancestors of a particular character."—Prof. J. M'Taggart.

There were numerous peculiarities about this individual with a foreign name that I realise better on looking back than I did at the time.

Of his parentage and childhood I knew nothing, for he mentioned neither, and his holidays were spent at school; but he was always well dressed and provided with plenty of pocket-money, which he generously shared. Later I discovered that he was an orphan, but a certain cruel knowledge of the world whispered that he was something else as well. This mystery of his origin, however, rather added to the

wonder of him than otherwise. Compared to the stretch of time behind, it seemed a trifling detail of recent history that had no damaging significance. “Julius LeVallon is my label for this section,” he observed, “and John Mason is yours.” And family ties for him seemed to have no necessary existence, since neither parents nor relations were of a man’s own choosing. It was the ties deliberately formed, and especially the ties renewed, that held real significance.

I thought of him as “foreign,” though, in a deeper sense than that he was not quite English. He carried me away from England, but also away from modern times; and something about him belonged to lands where life was sunnier, more passionate, more romantic even, and where the shadows of great Gods haunted blue, wooded mountains, vast plains and deep, sequestered valleys. He claimed kinship somehow with an earlier world, magical, unstained. Even his athletic gifts, admired of all, had this subtle distinction too: the way he ran and jumped and “fielded” was not English. At fives, squash-racquets, or with the cricket-bat he fumbled badly, whereas in any game that demanded speed, adroitness, swift intuitive decision, and physical dexterity of a certain un-English kind—as against mere strength and pluck—he was supreme. He was deer rather than bull-dog. The school-games of modern days he was learning, apparently, for the first time.

In a corner of the field, where a copse of larches fringed the horizon against the sloping woods and hop-poles in the distance, we used to lie and talk for hours during playtime. The high-road skirted this field, and a hedge was provided with a gate which, under penalties, was the orthodox means of entrance. Few boys attempted any other, though Peabody was once caught by the Head as he floundered through a thorny opening with the jumping pole. But Julius never used the gate—nor was ever caught. He would dart from my side with a few quick steps, leap into the air, and fly soaring over the hedge, his feet tucked neatly under him like a bird’s.

“Now,” he would say, as we flung ourselves down beneath the shade of the larches,

“we’ve got an hour or more. Let’s talk, and remember, and get well down into it all.”

How it was accomplished I cannot hope to describe. The world about me faded, another took its place. It rose in sheets and layers, shimmering, alive, and amazingly familiar. Space and time seemed to overlap, objects and scenery interpenetrated. There was fragrance, light and colour; adventure and alarm; delight and ceaseless expectation. It was a kind of fairyland where flowers never died, where motion was swift as thought, and life seemed meted out on a more lavish scale than by the meagre measurements of ticking clocks. And, while the memories were often hard to disentangle, the marked idiosyncrasies of our separate natures were never in the least confusion: my passion for adventure, his to find the reality that lay behind all manifested life. For this was the lode-star that guided him over the hills and deserts of all his many “sections”—the unquenchable fever to learn essential truth, to pierce behind the veil of appearances and discover the secret nature of the soul, its origin, its destiny, the methods of its full realisation.

It was a pastoral people that interested me most, primitive folk with migratory habits not yet abandoned. Their herds roamed an enormous territory. There was a Red Tribe and a Blue Tribe. The fighting men used bows, spears and javelins, and carried shields with round, smooth metal bosses to deflect the rain of arrows. And there was cavalry—two thousand men on horseback called a “coorlie.” Julius and I both knew it all as if we had lived with them, not merely read an invented tale; and it was pictures of this land and people that had first flared up in me that afternoon in the playground when he asked if I “remembered.” Memories of my childhood a few years before had not half the vividness and actuality of these. Nothing could have been more stupid than such undistinguished legends, but for this convincing reality that was their outstanding characteristic.... It all came back to me: the days and nights of hunting, nomad existence, the wild freedom of open plains and trackless forests, of migrations in the spring, wood fires, lawless raids, and also of some kind

of mighty worship that stirred me deeply with an old, grand sense of Nature Deities adequately approached.

This latter fact, indeed, rose most possessingly upon me. There came a vague uneasiness and discomfort with it. I was aware of brooding Presences....

“And they are still about us if we care to look for them,” interrupted a low voice in my ear, “ready to give us of their strength and happiness, waiting to answer if we call....”

I looked up, disagreeably startled. A breath of wind stirred in the branches overhead. The tufts of ragwort bent their yellow heads. In the sky there was a curious glow and warmth. A sense of hush pervaded all the air, as though someone had crept close to where we lay and overheard our thoughts with sympathy.

And in that very moment, just as I looked up at Julius, the picture of the woman, her face averted and her hands upraised, stole like a ghost before my inner vision. She vanished into mist again; the layer that had so suddenly disclosed itself, sank down; the other shifted up into its former place; and my companion, I saw, with sharp amazement was stretched upon his back, his head turned from me, resting on his folded hands—as though he had not spoken any word at all. For his eyes, as I then leaned over to discover, were gazing into space, and his mind seemed intent upon pictures that he visualised for himself.

“Julius,” I said quickly, “you spoke to me just now?”

He turned slowly, as with an effort to tear himself away from what he saw within him; he answered quietly:

“I may have spoken. I can’t be sure. Why do you ask? I’ve been so far away.” His face was rapt as with some inner light. It had a radiant look. There was no desire in me to insist.

“Oh, nothing,” I answered quickly, and lay down again to follow what memories might come. The slight shiver that undeniably had touched me went its way. There

was relief, intense relief—that he had not taken the clue I recklessly had offered. And, almost at once, the world about me faded out once more, the larches dipped away, the field sank out of sight. I plunged down into the sea of older memories....

I saw the sunlight flashing on shield and spear; I saw the hordes all gathered in the plains below, a mass of waving plumes, with red on the head-dress of the chieftains; I saw the river blackened by the thousands crossing it, covering the opposite bank like swarms of climbing ants.... I saw the chieftains lay aside their arms as they entered the sacred precincts of the grove; I smelt the odour of the sacrificial fires, heard the long-drawn droning of petitions, the cries of the victims.... And then the sentry-fires behind the sleeping camps ... the stirring of the soldiers at dawn ... the perfume of leagues of open plain ... muffled tramping far away ... wind ... fading stars ... wild-flowers dripping with the dew....

There was fighting, too, galore; tremendous marches; signalling by night from the mountain-tops with torches alternately hidden and revealed; and of sacred rites, primitive and fraught with danger to human life, no end....

In the middle of which up stole again that other layer, breathing terror and shrinking dread, and with a vividness of actuality that put all the rest into the shade. It could not, would not be dismissed. Its irruption was of but an instant’s duration, but in that instant there flashed upon me a clear intuition of certainty. I knew that Julius refrained purposely from speaking of this figure, because he understood my dread might drive me from his side before what we three must accomplish together was ripe for action, and because he waited—till she should appear in person. And, before it vanished again, I knew another thing: that what we three must accomplish together had to do directly with the worship of these mighty, old-world Nature Deities.

The stirring of these deep, curious emotions in me banished effectually all further scenery. I sat up and began to talk. I laughed a little and raised my voice. The sky, meanwhile, had clouded over, there was no heat in the occasional gleams of

sunshine.

“I’ve been hunting and fighting and the Lord knows what else besides,” I exclaimed, touching Julius on the shoulder where he lay. “But somehow I didn’t feel that you were with me—always.”

“It’s too awfully far back, for one thing,” he replied dreamily, as if still half withdrawn, “and, for another, we both left that section young. The three of us were not together then. That was a bit later. All the same,” he added, “it was there you sowed the first seeds of the soldiering instinct which is so strong in you to-day. I was killed in battle. We were on opposite sides. You fell——”

“On the steps——” I cried, seizing a flashing memory.

“Of the House of Messengers,” he caught me up. “You carried the Blue Stick of warning. You got down the street in safety when the flying javelin caught you as you reached the very steps——”

There was a sound behind us in the field quite close.

“What in the world do you two boys find to talk about so much?” asked the voice of Hurrish suddenly. “I’m afraid it’s not all elegiacs.” And he laughed good-humouredly.

We turned with a start. Julius looked up, then rose and touched his cap. I followed his example the same moment.

“No, sir,” he said, before I could think of anything to answer. “It’s the Memory Game.”

Hurrish looked at him with a quiet smile upon his face. His expression betrayed interest. But he said nothing, merely questioning with his eyes.

“The most wonderful game you ever played, sir,” continued Julius.

“Indeed! The most wonderful game you ever played?” Hurrish repeated, yet by no means unkindly.

“Getting down among the memories of—of before, sir. Recovering what we did, and what we were—and so understanding what we are to-day.”

The master stared without a sign of emotion upon his face. Apparently, in some delightful way, he understood. He was very sympathetic, I remember, to both of us. We thought the world of him, respecting him almost to the point of personal affection; and this in spite of punishments his firm sense of justice often obliged him to impose. I think, at that moment, he divined what Julius meant and even felt more sympathy than he cared to show.

“The Memory Game,” he repeated, looking quizzically down at us over the top of his glasses. “Well, well.” He hummed and hesitated a moment, choosing his words, it seemed, with care. “There’s a good deal of that in the air just now, I know—as you’ll discover for yourselves when you leave here and get into the world outside. But, remember,” he went on with a note of earnestness and warning in his voice, “most of it is little better than a feeble, yet rather dangerous, form of hysteria, with vanity as a basis.”

I hardly understood what he meant myself, but I saw the quick flush that coloured the pale cheeks of my companion.

“There are numbers of people about to-day,” continued Hurrish, as we walked home slowly across the field, “who pretend to remember all kinds of wonderful things about themselves and about their past, not one of which can be justified. But it only means, as a rule, that they wish to appear peculiar by taking up the fad of the moment. They like to glorify themselves, though few of them understand even the A B C of the serious belief that may lie behind it all.”

Julius squeezed my arm; the flush had left his skin; he was listening eagerly.

“You may later come across a good many thinking people, too,” said the master, “who play your Memory Game, or think they do, and some among them who claim to have carried it to an extraordinary degree of perfection. There are ways and

means, it is said. I do not deny that their systems may be worthy of investigation; I merely say it is a good plan to approach the whole thing with caution and common sense."

He glanced down first at one, then the other of us, with a grave and kindly expression in the eyes his glasses magnified so oddly.

"And most who play it," he added dryly, "remember so much of their wonderful past that they forget to do their ordinary duties in their very commonplace present." He chuckled a little, while Julius again gripped my flesh so hard that I only just prevented crying out.

"I'll remember him in a minute—if only I can get down far enough," he managed to whisper in my ear. "We were together——"

We had reached the gate, and were walking down the road towards the house. It was very evident that Hurrish understood more than he cared to admit about our wonderful game, and was trying to guide us rather than to deride instinctive beliefs.

That night in our bedroom, when Goldingham was asleep and snoring, I felt a touch upon my pillow, and looking up from the edge of unconsciousness, saw the white outline of Julius beside the bed.

"Come over here," he whispered, pointing to a shaded candle on the chest of drawers, "I've got something to show you. Something Hurrish gave me—something out of a book."

We peered together over a page of writing spread before us. Julius was excited and very eager. I do not think he understood it much better than I myself did, but it was the first time he had come across anything approaching his beliefs in writing. The discovery thrilled him. The authority of print was startling.

"He said it was somebody or other of importance, an Authority," Julius whispered as I leaned over to read the fine handwriting. "It's Hurrish's," I announced. "Rather," Julius answered. "But he copied it from a book. He knows right enough."

Oddly enough, the paper came eventually into my hands, though how I know not; I found it many years later in an old desk I used in those days. I have it now somewhere. The name of the author, however, I quite forget.

“The moral and educational importance of the belief in metempsychosis,” it ran, as our fingers traced the words together in the uncertain candle-light, “lies in the fact that it is a manifestation of the instinct that we are not ‘complete,’ and that one life is not enough to enable us to reach that perfection whither we are urged by the inmost depths of our being, and also an evidence of the belief that all human action will be inevitably rewarded or punished——”

“Rewards or punishes itself,” interrupted Julius; “it’s not punishment at all really.”

“And this is an importance that must not be underestimated,” the interrupted sentence concluded. “In so far,” we read on together, somewhat awed, I think, to tell the truth, “as the theory is based upon the supposition that a personal divine power exists and dispenses this retributive justice——”

“Wrong again,” broke in Julius, “because it’s just the law of natural results—there’s nothing personal about it.”

“—and that the soul must climb a long steep path to approach this power, does metempsychosis preserve its religious character.”

“He means going back into animals as well—which never happens,” commented the excited boy beside me once again. We read to the end then without further interruption.

“This, however, is not all. The Theory is also the expression of another idea which gives it a philosophical character. It is the earliest intellectual attempt of man, when considering the world and his position in it, to conceive that world, not as alien to him, but as akin to him, and to incorporate himself and his life as an indispensable and eternal element in the past and future of the world with which it forms one comprehensive totality. I say an eternal element, because, regarded philosophically,

the belief in metempsychosis seems a kind of unconscious anticipation of the principle now known as ‘Conservation of Energy.’ Nothing that has ever existed can be lost, either in life or by death. All is but change; and hence souls do not perish, but return again and again in ever-changing forms. Moreover, later developments of metempsychosis, especially as conceived by Lessing, can without difficulty be harmonised with the modern idea of evolution from lower to higher forms.”

“That’s all,” Julius whispered, looking round at me.

“By George!” I replied, returning his significant stare.

“I promised Hurrish, you know,” he added, blowing out the candle. “Promised I’d read it to you.”

“All right,” I answered in the dark.

And, without further comment or remark, we went back to our respective beds, and quickly so to sleep.

Before taking the final plunge, however, into oblivion, I heard the whisper of Julius, sharply audible in the silence, coming at me across the darkened room:

“It’s all rot,” he said. “The chap who wrote that was simply thinking with his brain. But it’s not the brain that remembers; it’s the other part of you.” There was a pause. And then he added, as though after further reflection: “Don’t bother about it. There’s lots of stuff like that about—all tommy-rot and talk, that’s all. Good night! We’ll dream together now and p’raps remember.”

CHAPTER V

“We have no right whatever to speak of really unconscious Nature, but only of uncommunicative Nature, or of Nature whose mental processes go on at such different time-rates to ours that we cannot easily adjust ourselves to an appreciation of their inward fluency, although our consciousness does make us aware of their presence.... Nature is a vast realm of finite consciousness of which your own is at

once a part and an example."—Royce.

There was a great deal more in LeVallon, however, than the Memory Game: he brought a strange cargo with him from these distant shores, where, apparently, I—to say nothing of another—had helped to load it. Bit by bit, as my own machinery of recovery ran more easily, I tapped other layers also in myself. Our freight was slowly discharged. We examined and discussed each bale, as it were, but I soon became aware that there was a great deal he kept back from me. This secrecy first piqued and then distressed me. It brought mystery between us; there stood a shadowy question-mark in our relationship.

I divined the cause, and dreaded it—that is, I dreaded the revelation he would sooner or later make. For I guessed—I knew—what it involved and whom. I asked no questions. But I noticed that at a certain point our conversations suddenly stopped, he changed the subject, or withdrew abruptly into silence. And something sinister gripped my heart. Behind it, closely connected in some undiscovered manner, lay two things I have already mentioned: the woman, and the worship.

This reconstruction of our past together, meanwhile, was—for a pair of schoolboys—a thrilling pursuit that never failed to absorb. Stone by stone we built it up. After often missing one another, sometimes by a century, sometimes by a mere decade or so, our return at last had chimed, and we found ourselves on earth again. We had inevitably come together. There was no such thing as missing eventually, it seemed. Debts must be discharged between those who had incurred them. And, chief among these mutual obligations, I gathered, were certain dealings we had together in connection with some form of Nature worship, during a section he referred to as our "Temple Days."

The character of these dealings was one of those secret things that he would not disclose; he knew, but would not speak of it; and alone I could not "dig it up." Moreover, the effect upon me here was decidedly a mixed one, for while there was

great beauty in these Temple Days, there lurked behind this portion of them—terror. We had not been alone in this. Involved somehow or other with us was “the woman.”

Julius would talk freely of certain aspects of this period, of various practices, physical, mental, spiritual, and of gorgeous ceremonies that were stimulating as well as true, pertaining undoubtedly to some effective worship of the sun, that resulted in the obtaining of enormous energy by the worshippers; but after a certain point he would say no more, and would deliberately try to shift back to some other “layer” altogether. And it was sheer cowardice in me that prevented my forcing a declaration. I burned to know, yet was afraid.

“I do wish I could remember better,” I said once.

“It comes gradually of itself,” he answered, “and best of all when you’re not thinking at all. The top part gets thin, and suddenly you see down into clear deep water. The top part, of course, is recent; it smothers the older things.”

“Like thick sand, mine is,” I said, “heaps and heaps of it.”

He shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

“The pictures of To-day hide those of Yesterday,” he explained. “You can’t remember two things at once. If your head is stuffed with what’s happening at the moment, you can’t expect to remember what happened a month ago. Dig back. It’s trying that starts it moving.”

Ancient as the stars themselves appeared the origins of our friendship and affection of to-day.

“Then I didn’t get as far as you—in those Temple Days?” I asked.

He glanced sharply at me beneath his long dark eyelids. He hesitated a moment.

“You began,” he answered presently in a low voice, “but got caught later by—something in the world—fighting, or money, or a woman—something sticky

like that. And you left me for a time."

Any temptation that enticed the soul from "real knowledge" he described as "sticky."

"For several sections you fooled with things that counted for the moment, but were not carried over through the lot. You came back to the real ones—but too late." His voice sank down into a whisper; his face was grave and troubled. Shrinking stole over me. There was the excitement that he was going to tell me something, yet the dread, too, that I should hear it. "But now," he went on, half to himself and half to me, "we can put that right. Our chance—at last—is coming." These last words he uttered beneath his breath.

And then he abruptly shifted the subject, leaving me with a strangely disquieting emotion that I should be drawn against my will into something that I dreaded yet could not possibly avoid. The expression of his face chilled my heart. He pulled me down upon the grass beside him. "You've got to burrow down inside yourself," he went on earnestly, raising his voice again to its normal pitch, "that's where it all lies buried. Once you get it up by yourself, you'll understand. Then you can help me."

His own excitement ran across the air to me. I felt grandeur in his wonderful conception—this immense river of our lives, the justice of inevitable cause and effect, the ultimate importance of every action, word and thought, and, what appealed to me most of all, the idea that results depended upon one's own character and will without the hiring of exalted substitutes to make it easy. Even as a boy this all appealed strongly to me, probably to the soldier fighting-instinct that was my chief characteristic....

Of these Temple Days with their faint, flying pictures I retain fascinating recollections. In them was nothing to suggest any country I could name, certainly neither Egypt, Greece nor India. Julius spoke of some great civilisation in which primitive worship of some true kind combined with accomplishments we might

regard to-day as the result of trained and accurate science. It involved union somehow with great “natural” forces. There was awe in it, but an atmosphere, too, of wonder, power and aspiration of a genuinely lofty type.

It left upon me the dim impression that it was not on the earth at all. But, for me it was too thickly veiled for detailed recovery, though an invincible instinct whispered that it was here “the woman” first intruded upon our joint relationship. I saw, with considerable sharpness, however, delightful pictures of what was evidently sun-worship, though of an intelligent rather than a superstitious kind. We seemed nearer to the sun than we are to-day, differently constituted, aware of greater powers; there was vast heat, there were gigantic, mighty winds. In this heat, through these colossal winds, came deity. The elemental powers were its manifestation. The sun, the planets, the entire universe, in fact, seemed then alive; we knew it was alive; we were kin with every point in it; and worship of a sun, a planet, or a tree, as the case might be, somehow drew their beings into definite relationship with our own, even to the point of leaving the characteristics of their particular Powers in our systems. A human being was but one living detail of a universe in which all other details were equally living and equally—possibly more—important. Nature was a power to be experienced, shared, and natural objects had a meaning in their own right. We read the phenomena of Nature as signs and symbols, clear as the black signs of writing on a printed page.

Out of many talks together, Julius and I recovered all this. Alone I could not understand it. Julius, moreover, believed it still to-day. Though nominally, and in his life as well, a Christian, he always struck me as being intensely religious, yet without a definite religion. It was afterwards, of course, I realised this, when my experience of modern life was larger. He was unfettered by any little dogmas of man-made creeds, but obeyed literally the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, which he knew by heart. It was essential spiritual truth he sought. His tolerance and respect for all the religions of to-day were based upon the belief that each contained

a portion of truth at least. His was the attitude of a perfect charity—of an "old soul," as he phrased it later, who "had passed through all the traditions." His belief included certainly God and the gods, Nature and Christ, temples of stone and hills and woods and that temple of the heart which is the Universe itself. True worship, however, was with Nature.

A vivid picture belongs to this particular "layer." I saw the light of a distant planet being used, apparently in some curative sense, by human beings. It took place in a large building. Long slits in the roof were so arranged that the planet shone through them exactly upon the meridian. Dropping through the dusky atmosphere, the rays were caught by an immense concave mirror of polished metal that hung suspended above an altar where the smoke of incense rose; and, since a concave mirror forms at its focus in the air before it an image of whatever is reflected in its depths, a radiant image of the planet stood shining there in the heart of the building. It was a picture of arresting beauty and significance. Gleaming overhead, hung a mirror of still mightier proportions that caught the reflected rays and poured them down in a stream of intensified light upon the backs of men and women who lay naked on the ground, waiting to receive them.

"The quality of that particular planet is what they need," whispered Julius, as we watched together; "the light-cures of that age have hardly changed," he laughed; "the principle, at least, remains the same."

There was another scene as well in which I saw motionless, stretched figures. I could never see it clearly, though. Darkness invariably rolled down and hid it; and I had the idea that LeVallon tried to prevent its complete recovery—just then. Nor was I sorry at this, for beyond it lay something that seemed the source of the shrinking dread that haunted me. If I saw all, I should see also—her. I should know the secret thing Julius kept back from me, the thing we three had somehow to "set right again." And once, when this particular scene was in my mind and Julius, I felt

sure, was seeing it too, as he lay beside me on the grass, there passed into me a sudden sensation of a kind I find it difficult to describe. There was yearning in it, but there was anguish too, and a pain as of deep, unfathomable regret wholly beyond me to account for. It swept into me, I think, from him.

I turned suddenly. He lay, I saw, with his face hidden in his hands; his shoulders shook as though he sobbed; and it seemed that some memory of great poignancy convulsed him. For several minutes he lay speechless in this way, yet an air of privacy about him, that forbade intrusion. Once or twice I surprised him under these curious attacks; they were invariably connected with this particular “inner scenery”; and sometimes were followed by bouts of that nameless and mysterious illness that kept him in the sick-room for several days. But I asked no questions, and he vouchsafed no explanation.

On this particular point, at least, I asked no questions; but on the general subject of my uneasiness I sometimes probed him.

“This sense of funk when I remember these old forgotten things,” I asked, “what is it? Why does it frighten me?”

Gazing at me out of those strange eyes that saw into so huge a universe, he answered softly:

“It’s a faint memory too—of the first pains and trials you suffered when you began to learn. You feel the old wrench and strain.”

“It hurt so——?”

He nodded, with that smile of yearning that sometimes shone so beautifully on his face.

“At first,” he replied. “It seemed like losing your life—until you got far enough to know the great happiness of the bigger way of living. Coming back to me like this revives it. We began to learn together, you see.”

I mentioned the extraordinary feelings of the playground when first I spoke with him, and of the class-room when first we saw each other.

“Ah,” he sighed, “there’s no mistaking it—the coming together of old friends or enemies. The instant the eyes meet, the flash of memory follows. Only, the tie must have been real, of course, to make it binding.”

“How can it ever end?” I asked. “Each time starts it all going again.”

“By starting the opposite. Love dissolves the link. Understand why you hate—and at once it lessens. Sympathy follows, feeling-with—that’s love; and love sets you both free. It’s not thinking, but feeling that makes the strongest chains.”

And it was speaking of “feeling” that led to his saying things I have never forgotten. For thinking, in those older days, seemed of small account. It was an age of feeling, chiefly. Feeling was the way to knowledge: here was the main difference between To-day and those far-off Yesterdays. The way to know an object was to feel it—feel-with it. The simplicity of the method was as significant as its—impossibility! Yet a fundamental truth was in it.

To know a thing was not to enumerate merely its qualities. To state the weight, colour, texture of a stone, for instance, was merely to mention its external characteristics; whereas to think of it till it became part of the mind, seen from its own point of view, was to know it as it actually is. The mind felt-with it. It became a part of yourself. Knowledge, as Julius understood the word, was identifying himself with the object: it became part of the substance of the mind: it was known from within.

Communion with inanimate objects, with Nature itself, was in this way actually possible.

“Dwell upon anything you like,” he said, “to the point where you feel it, and you get it all exactly as it is, not merely as you see it. Its quality, its power, becomes a part of yourself. Take trees, rivers, mountains, take wind and fire in this way—and you

feel their power in you. You can use them. That was the way of worship—then."

"The sun itself, the planets, anything?" I asked eagerly, recognising something that seemed once familiar to me.

"Anything," he replied quietly. "Copy their own movements too, and you'll get nearer still. Imitate the attitude and gestures of a stranger and you begin to understand what he's up to, his point of view—what he's feeling. You begin to know him. All ceremonies began that way. On that big plain where the worship of the sun was held, the smaller temples represented the planets, the distances all calculated in proper ratio from the heavens. We copied their movements exactly, as we moved, thousands and thousands of us, in circular form about the centre. We felt-with them, got all joined up to the whole system; by imitating their gestures, we understood them and absorbed a portion of their qualities and powers. Our energy became as theirs. Acting the ceremony brought the knowledge, don't you see? Oh, it's scientific, right enough," he added. "It's not going backwards—instinctive knowledge. It's a pity it's forgotten now."

"How do you know all this?" I asked.

"I've done it so often. You've done it with me. Alone, of course, it's difficult to get results; but when a lot together do it—a crowd—a nation—the whole world—you could shift Olympus into the Ægean, or bring Mars near enough to throw a bridge across!"

We burst out laughing together, though his face instantly again grew grave and earnest.

"It will come," he said, "it will come again in time. When the idea of brotherhood has spread, and the separate creeds have merged, and the whole world feels the same thing together—it will come. It's another order of consciousness, that's all."

His passionate conviction certainly stirred joy and wonder in me somewhere. It was stupendous, yet so simple. The universe was knowable; its powers assimilable by

human beings. Here was true Nature Magic, the elements co-operating, the stars alive, the sun a deity to be known and felt.

“And that’s why concentration gives such power,” he added. “By feeling anything till you feel-with it and become it, you know every blessed thing about it from inside. You have instinctive knowledge of it. Mistakes become impossible. You live and act with the whole universe.”

And, as I listened, it seemed a kind of childish presumption that had shut us off from the sun, the stars, the numerous other systems of space, and that reduced knowledge to the meagre statement of a people dwelling upon one unimportant globe of comparatively recent matter in one of the smaller solar systems.

Our earth, indeed, was not the centre of the universe; it was but a temporary point in the long, long journey of the River of Lives. The soul would eventually traverse a million other points. It was so integral a part of everything, so intimately akin to every corner and aspect of the cosmos, that a “human” being’s relative position to the very stars, the angle at which he met their light and responded to the tension of their forces, must necessarily affect his inmost personality. If the moon could raise the tides, she could assuredly cause an ebb and flow in the fluids of the human body, and how could men and women expect to resist the stress and suction of those tremendous streams of power that played upon the earth from the network of great distant suns? Times and seasons, now known as feast-days and the like, were likewise of significance. There were moments, for instance, in the “ceremony” of the heavens when it was possible to see more easily in one direction than in another, when certain powers, therefore, were open and accessible. The bridges then were clear, the channels open. A revelation of intenser life—from the universe, from a star, from mountains, rivers, winds or forests—could then steal down and leave their traces in the heart and passion of a human being. For, just as there is a physical attitude of prayer by which the human body invites communion, so times and

seasons were attitudes and gestures of that greater body of Nature when results could be most favourably expected.

It was all very bewildering, very big, very curious; but if I protested that it merely meant a return to the unreasoning superstitious days of Nature Magic, there was something in me at the same time that realised vital, forgotten truth behind it all. Cleansed and scientific, Julius urged, it must return into the world again. What men formerly knew by feeling, an age now coming would justify and demonstrate by brain and reason. Touch with the universe would be restored. We should go back to Nature for peace and power and progress. Scientific worship would be known.

Yet by worship he meant not merely kneeling before an Ideal and praying eagerly to resemble it; but approaching a Power and acquiring it. What heat in itself may be we do not know; only that without it we collapse into inert particles. What lies behind, beyond the physicist's account of air as a gas, remains unknown; deprived of it, however, we cease to breathe and be conscious in matter. Each moment we feel the sun, take in the air, we live; and the more we accomplish this union, the more we are alive. In addition to these physical achievements, however, their essential activities could be known and acquired spiritually. And the means was that worship which is union—feeling-with.

To Julius this achievement was a literal one. The elements were an expression of spiritual powers. To be in touch with them was to be in touch with a Whole in which the Earth or Sirius are, after all, but atoms. Moreover, it was a conscious Whole. In atoms themselves he found life too. Chemical affinity involved intelligence. Certain atoms refuse to combine with certain other atoms, they are hostile to each other; while others rush headlong into each other's arms. How do the atoms know?

Here lay hints of powers he sought to reclaim for human use and human help and human development.

"For they were known once," he would cry. "We knew them, you and I. Their nature

is not realised to-day; consciousness has lost touch with them. We recall a broken fragment, but label it superstition, ignorance, and the like. And, being incomplete, these remnants of necessity seem childish. Their meaning cannot come through the brain, and that other mode of consciousness which understood has left us now. The world, pursuing a lesser ideal, denies its forgotten greatness with a sneer!"

A great deal of this he said to me one day while we were walking home from church, whose "service" had stirred him into vehement and eager utterance. His language was very boyish, and yet it seemed to me that I listened to someone quite as old as Dr. Randall, the Headmaster who had preached. I can see the hedges, wet and shining after rain; the dull November sky; ploughed fields and muddy lanes. I can hear again the plover calling above the hill. Nothing could possibly have been more uninspiring than the dreary hop-poles, the moist, depressing air, the leafless elms, and the "Sunday feeling" amid which the entire scene was laid.

The boys straggled along the road in twos and threes, hands in pockets, points of Eton jackets sticking out behind. Hurrish, the nice master, was just in front of us, walking with Goldingham. I saw the latter turn his face up sideways as he asked some question, and I suddenly wondered whether he knew how odd he looked, or, indeed, what he looked like at all. I wondered what sort of "sections" and adventures Goldingham, Hurrish, and all these Eton-jacketed boys had been through before they arrived at this; and next it flashed across me what a grotesque result it was for LeVallon to have reached after so many picturesque and stimulating lives—an Eton jacket, a mortar-board, and tight Wesleyan striped trousers.

And now, as I recall these curious recollections of years ago, it occurs to me as remarkable that, although a sense of humour was not lacking in either of us, yet neither then nor now could the spirit of the comic, and certainly never of the ludicrous, rob by one little jot the reality, the deep, convincing actuality of these strange convictions that LeVallon and I shared together when at Motfield Close we

studied Greek and Latin, while remembering a world before Greeks or Latins ever existed at all.

CHAPTER VI

"There seems nothing in pre-existence incompatible with any of the dogmas which are generally accepted as fundamental to Christianity."—Prof. M'Taggart.

By my last half-year at Motfield Close, when I was Head of the school, LeVallon had already left, but the summer term preceding his departure is the one most full of delightful recollections for me. He was Head then—which proves that he was sufficiently normal and practical to hold that typically English position, and to win respect in it—and I was "Follow-on Head," as we called it.

I suppose he was verging on eighteen at the time, for neither of us was destined for a Public School later, and we stayed on longer than the general run of boys. We still shared the room with Goldingham—"Goldie," who went on to Wellington and Sandhurst, and afterwards lost his life in the Zulu War—and we enjoyed an unusual amount of liberty. The "triumvirate" the masters called us, and I remember that we were proud of topping Hurrish by half an inch, each being over six feet in his socks.

With peculiar pleasure, too, I recall the little class we formed by ourselves in Greek, and the hours spent under Hurrish's sympathetic and enthusiastic guidance, reading Plato for the first time. Hurrish was an admirable scholar, and myself and Goldie, though unable to match LeVallon's singular and intuitive mastery of the language, made up for our deficiency by working like slaves. The group was a group of enthusiasts, not of mere plodding schoolboys. But Julius it undoubtedly was who fed the little class with a special subtle fire of his own, and with a spirit of searching interpretative insight that made the delighted Hurrish forget that he was master and Julius pupil. And in the "Sympathetic Studies" the former published later upon Plotinus and some of the earlier Gnostic writings, I certainly traced more than one illuminating passage to its original inspiration in some remark let fall by LeVallon in

those intimate talks round Hurrish's desk at Motfield Close.

But what comes back to me now with a kind of veritable haunting wonder that almost makes me sorry such speculations are no longer possible, were the talks and memories we enjoyed together in our bedroom. For there was a stimulating excitement about these whispered conversations we held by the open window on summer nights—an atmosphere of stars and scented airs and hushed silent spaces beyond the garden—that comes back to me now with an added touch of mystery and beauty both compelling and suggestive. When I think of those bedroom hours I step suddenly out of the London murk and dinginess, out of the tedium of my lecturing and teaching, into a vast picture gallery of vivid loveliness. The scenery of mighty dreams usurps the commonplace realities of the present.

Ten o'clock was the hour for lights out, and by ten-fifteen Goldie, with commendable regularity, was asleep and snoring. We thanked him much for that, as somebody says in "Alice," and Julius, as soon as the signal of Goldie's departure became audible, would creep over to my bed, touch me on the shoulder, and give the signal to drag the bolsters from a couple of unused beds and plant ourselves tailor-wise in our dressing-gowns before the window.

"It's like the old, old days," he would say, pointing to the sky. "The stars don't change much, do they?" He indicated the dim terraces of lawn with the tassel of his dressing-gown. "Can't you imagine it all? I can. There were the long stone steps—don't you see?—below, running off into the plain. Behind us, all the halls and vestibules, cool and silent, veil after veil hiding the cells for meditation, and over there in the corner the little secret passages down to the crypts below ground where the tests took place. Better put a blanket round you if you're cold," he added, noticing that I shivered, though it was excitement and not cold that sent the slight trembling over my body. "And there"—as the church clock sounded the hour across the Kentish woods and fields—"are the very gongs themselves, I swear, the great

gongs that swung in the centre of the dome."

Goldie's peaceful snoring, and an occasional closing of a door as one master after another retired to his room in the house below, were the only sounds that reminded me of the present. Julius, sitting beside me in the starlight, his eyes ashine, his pale skin gleaming under the mop of tangled dark hair, whispered words that conjured up not only scenes and memories, but the actual feelings, atmosphere and emotions of days more ancient than any dreams. I smelt the odour of dim, pillared aisles, tasted the freshness of desert air, heard the high rustle of other winds in palm and tamarisk. The Past that never dies swept down upon us from sky and Kentish countryside with the murmur of the night-breeze in the shrubberies below. It enveloped us completely.

"Not the stars we knew together first—not the old outlines we once travelled by," he whispered, describing in the air with his finger the constellations presumably of other skies. "That was earlier still. Yet the general look is the same. You can feel the old tinglings coming down from some of them." And he would name the planet that was in ascension at the moment, with invariable correctness I found out afterwards, and describe the particular effect it produced upon his thoughts and imagination, the moods and forces it evoked, the mental qualities it served—in a word its psychic influence upon the inner personality.

"Look," he whispered, but so suddenly that it made me start. He pointed to the darkened room behind us. "Can't you almost see the narrow slit in the roof where the rays came through and fell upon the metal discs swinging in mid-air? Can't you see the rows of dark-skinned bodies on the ground? Can't you feel the minute and crowding vibrations of the light on your flesh, as the disc swung round and the stream fell down in a jolly blaze all over you?"

And, though I saw nothing in the room but faintly luminous patches where the beds stood, and the two tin baths upon the floor, a vivid scene rose before my mind's eye

that stirred poignant emotions I was wholly at a loss to explain. The consciousness of some potent magical life stirred in my veins, a vaster horizon, and a larger purpose than anything I had known hitherto in my strict and conventional English life and my quaint worship in a pale-blue tin tabernacle where all was ugly, cramped, and literally idolatrous.

“And the gongs so faintly ringing,” I cried.

Julius turned quickly and thrust his face closer into mine. Then he stood up beside the open window and drew in a deep breath of the June night air.

“Ah, you remember that?” he said, with eyes aglow. “The gongs—the big singing gongs! There you had a bit of clean, deep memory right out of the centre. No wonder you feel excited...!”

And he explained to me, though I scarcely recognised the voice or language, so strongly did the savour of shadowy past days inform them, how it was in those old temples when the world was not cut off from the rest of the universe, but claimed some psychical kinship with all the planetary and stellar forces, that each planet was represented by a metal gong so attuned in quality and pitch as to vibrate in sympathy with the message of its particular rays, sound and colour helping and answering one another till the very air trembled and pulsed with the forces the light brought down. No doubt, Julius’s words, vibrating with earnestness, completed my confusion while they intensified my enjoyment, for I remember how carried away I was by this picture of the temples acting as sounding-boards to the sky, and by his description of the healing powers of the light and sound thus captured and concentrated.

The spirit of comedy peeped in here and there between the entr’actes, as it were, for even the peaceful and studious Goldie was also included in these adventures of forgotten days, sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously.

“By the gods!” Julius exclaimed, springing up, “I’ve an idea! We’ll try it on Goldie, and see what happens!”

“Try what?” I whispered, catching his own excitement.

“Gongs, discs and planet,” was the reply.

I stared at him through the gloom. Then I glanced towards the unconscious victim.

“There’s no harm. We’ll imagine this is one of the old temples, and we’ll do an experiment!” He touched me on the back. Excitement ran through me. Something caught me from the past. I watched him with an emotion that was half amazement, half alarm.

In a moment he had the looking-glass balanced upon the window-ledge at a perilous angle, reflecting the faint starlight upon the head of the sleeping Goldingham. Any minute I feared it would fall with a crash upon the lawn below, or break into smithereens upon the floor. Julius fixed it somehow with a hair-brush and a towel against the sash.

“Get the disc,” he whispered, and after a moment’s reflection I understood what he meant; I emptied one bath as quietly as possible into the other, then dragged it across the carpet to the bedside of the snoring Goldie who was to be “healed.” The ridiculous experiment swept me with such a sense of reality, owing to the intense belief LeVallon injected into it, that I never once felt inclined to laugh. I was only vaguely afraid that Goldingham might somehow suffer.

“It’s Venus,” exclaimed Julius under his breath. “She’s in the ascendant too. That’s the luck of the gods, isn’t it?”

I whispered something in reply, wondering dimly what Goldie might think.

“You bang the bath softly for the sound,” said he, “while I hold it up for you. We may hit the right note—the vibrations that fit in with the rate of the light, I mean—though it’s a bit of a chance, I suppose!”

I obeyed, thinking of masters sleeping down below in the silent building.

“Louder!” exclaimed Julius peremptorily.

I obeyed again, with a dismal result resembling tin cans in orgy. And the same minute the good-natured and studious Goldingham awoke with a start and stretched out a hand for his glasses.

“Feel anything unusual, Goldie?” asked LeVallon at once, tremendously in earnest, as he lowered the tin bath.

“Oh, it’s only you!” exclaimed the victim, awakened out of his first sleep and blinking in the gloom, “and you!” he added, catching sight of me, my fist still upraised to beat; “rotten brutes, both of you! You might let a fellow sleep a bit. You know I’m swotting up for an exam.!”

“But do you feel anything, Goldie?” insisted LeVallon, as though it were a matter of life and death. “It was Venus, you know....”

“Was it?” spluttered the other, catching sight of the big bath between him and the open window. “Well, Venus is beastly cold. Who opened the window?” The sight of the bath apparently unnerved him. He hardly expected it before seven in the morning.

Further explanations were cut short by the sudden collapse of the mirror with a crash of splintering glass upon the floor. The noise of the bath, that pinged and boomed as I balanced it against the bed, completed the uproar. Then the door opened, and there stood—Martin.

It was an awkward moment. Yet it was not half as real, half as vivid, half as alive with the emotion of actual life, as that other memory so recently vanished. Martin, at first, seemed the dream; that other, the reality.

He entered with a lighted candle. The noise of the opening window and the footsteps had, no doubt, disturbed him for some time. Yet, quickly as he came, Goldie and I were “asleep” even before he had time to cross the threshold. Julius stood alone to face him in the middle of the floor. It was characteristic of the boy. He never shirked.

"What's the meaning of all this noise?" asked Martin, obviously pleased to find himself in a position of unexpected advantage. "LeVallon, why are you not in bed? And why is the window open?"

Secretly ashamed of myself, I lay under the sheets, wondering what Julius would answer.

"We always sleep with the window open, sir," he said quietly.

"What was that crash I heard?" asked the master, coming farther into the room, and holding the candle aloft so that it showed every particle of the broken glass. "Who did this?" He glanced suspiciously about him, knowing of course that Julius was not the only culprit.

LeVallon stood there, looking straight at him. Martin—as I think of the incident to-day—had the appearance of a weasel placed by chance in a position of advantage, yet afraid of its adversary. He winced, yet exulted.

"Do you realise that it's long after eleven," he observed frigidly, "and that I shall be obliged to report you to Dr. Randall in the morning...."

"Yes, sir," said Julius.

"It's very serious," continued Martin, more excitedly, and apparently uncertain how to drive home his advantage, "it's very distressing—er—to find you, LeVallon, Head of the School, guilty of mischief like a Fourth-Form boy—at this hour of the night too!"

The reference to the lower form was, of course, intended to be crushing. But Julius in his inimitable way turned the tables astonishingly.

"Very good, sir," he said calmly, "but I was only trying to get the light of Venus, and her sound, into Goldingham's head—into his system, that is—by reflecting it in the looking-glass; and it fell off the ledge. It's an experiment of antiquity, as you know, sir. I'm exceedingly sorry...."

Martin stared. He was a little afraid of LeVallon; the boy's knowledge of mathematics had compelled his admiration as often as his questions, sometimes before the whole class, had floored him.

"It's an old experiment," the boy added, his pale face very grave, "healing, you know, sir, by the rays of the planets—forgotten star-worship—like the light-cures of to-day——"

Martin's somewhat bewildered eye wandered to the flat tin bath still propped against Goldingham's bedside.

"... and using gongs to increase the vibrations," explained Julius further, noticing the glance. "We were trying to make it do for a gong—the scientists will discover it again before long, sir."

The master hardly knew whether to laugh or scold. He stood there in his shirt-sleeves looking hard at LeVallon who faced him with tumbled hair and shining eyes in his woolly red dressing-gown. Erect, dignified, for all the absurdity of the situation, the flush of his strange enthusiasm emphasising the delicate beauty of his features, I remember feeling that even the stupid Martin must surely understand that there was something rather wonderful about him, and pass himself beneath the spell.

"I was the priest," he said.

"But I did the gong—I mean, the bath-part, please sir," I put in, unable any longer to let Julius bear all the blame.

There was a considerable pause, during which grease dripped audibly upon the floor from the master's candle, while Goldingham lay blinking in bed in such a way that I dared not look at him for fear of laughter. I have often wondered since what passed through the mind of Tuke Martin, the senior Master of Mathematics, during that pregnant interval.

"Get up, all of you," he said at length, "and pick up this mess. Otherwise you'll cut your feet to pieces in the morning. Here, Goldingham, you help too. You're no more

asleep than the others.” He tried to make his tone severe.

“Goldingham only woke when the glass fell off the ledge, sir,” explained LeVallon. “It was all my doing, really——”

“And mine,” I put in belatedly.

Martin watched us gather up the fragments, Goldie, still dazed and troubled, barking his shins against chairs and bedposts, unable to find his blue glasses in the excitement.

“Put the pieces in the bath,” continued Martin shortly, “and ring for William in the morning to clear it away. And pay the matron for a new looking-glass,” he added, with something of a sneer; “Mason half, and you, LeVallon, the other half.”

“Of course, sir,” said Julius.

“And don’t let me hear any further sounds to-night,” said the master finally, closing the window, and going out after another general look of suspicion round the room.

Which was all that we ever heard of the matter! For the Master of Mathematics did not particularly care about reporting the Head of the School to Dr. Randall, and incurring the dislike of the three top boys into the bargain. I got the impression, too, that Tuke Martin was as glad to get out of that room without loss of dignity as we were to see him go. LeVallon, by his very presence even, had a way of making one feel at a disadvantage.

“Anything particular come to you?” he asked Goldie, as soon as we were alone again, and the victim’s temper was restored by finding himself the centre of so much general interest. “I suppose there was hardly time, though——”

“Queer dream’s all I can remember,” he replied gruffly.

“What sort?”

“Nothing much. I seemed to be hunting through a huge lexicon for verbs, but every time I opened the beastly thing it was like opening the lid of a box instead of the

cover of a book; and, in place of pages, I saw rows of people lying face downwards, and streaks of light dodging about all over their skins. Rotten nightmare, that's all!"

Julius and I exchanged glances.

"And then," continued Goldie, "that bally tin bath banged like thunder and I woke up to see you two rotters by my bed."

"If there had been more time——" Julius observed to me in an aside.

"I'm jolly glad it's your last term," Goldingham growled, looking at LeVallon, or LeValion, as he usually called him; "you're as mad as a March hare, anyhow!"—which was the sentence I took into dreamland with me.

CHAPTER VII

"The blue dusk ran between the streets: my love was winged within my mind,

It left to-day and yesterday and thrice a thousand years behind.

To-day was past and dead for me, for from to-day my feet had run

Through thrice a thousand years to walk the ways of ancient Babylon."—A. E.

It was another time, very early in the morning, that LeVallon called me from the depths of dreamless sleep with a whisper that seemed to follow me out of some vast place where I had been lying under open skies with the winds of heaven about my face and the stars as close as flowers. It was no dream; I brought back no single detail of incident or person—only this keen, sweet awareness of having been somewhere far away upon an open plain or desert of enormous stretch, waiting for something, watching, preparing—and that I had been awakened. Great hands drew back into the stars; eyes that were mighty closed; heads of majestic aspect turned away; and Presences of some infinite demeanour grandly concealed themselves as when mountains become veiled by the hood of hurrying clouds. I had the feeling that the universe had touched me, then withdrawn.

The room was dark, but shades of tender grey, stealing across the walls and ceiling,

told that the dawn was near. Our windows faced the east; a flush of delicate light was in the sky; and, between me and this sky, something moved very softly and came close. It touched me.

Julius, I saw, was bending down above my pillow.

“Are you ready?” he whispered, as I felt his hand upon my hair. “The sun is on the way!”

The words, however, at first, seemed not in English, but in some other half-familiar language that I instantly translated into my own tongue. They drifted away from me like feathers into space. I grew wide awake and rubbed my eyes. It startled me a little to find myself in this modern room and to see his pale visage peering so closely into mine. I surely had dropped from a height, or risen from some hollow of prodigious depth; for it flashed across me that, had I waked a moment sooner, I must have caught a glimpse of other faces, heard other voices in that old familiar language, remembered other well-known things, all of which had fled too suddenly away, plunging with swiftness into the limbo of forgotten times and places.... It was very sweet. There was yearning desire in me to know more.

I sat up in bed.

“What is it?” I asked, my tongue taking the words with a certain curious effort. “What were you saying...? A moment ago ... just now?” I tried to arrest the rout of flying sensations. Dim, shadowy remoteness gathered them away like dreams.

“I’m calling you to see the sunrise,” he whispered softly, taking my hand to raise me; “the sunrise on the Longest Day upon the plain. Wake up and come!”

Confusion vanished at his touch and voice. Yet a fragment of words just vanished dropped back into my mind. Something sublime and lovely ran between us.

“But you were saying—about the Blue Circle and the robes—that it was time to——” I went on, then, with the effort to remember, lost the clue completely. He had said these other things, but already they had dipped beyond recovery. I

scrambled out of bed, almost expecting to find some robe or other in place of my old grey dressing-gown beside the chair. Strong feelings were in me, awe, wonder, high expectancy, as of some grand and reverent worship. No mere bedroom of a modern private school contained me. I was elsewhere, among imperial and august conditions. I was aware of the Universe, and the Universe aware of me.

I spoke his name as I followed him softly over the carpet. But to my amazement, my tongue refused the familiar "Julius" of to-day, and framed instead another sound. Four syllables lay in the name. It was "Concerighé" that slipped from my lips. Then instantly, in the very second of utterance, it was gone beyond recovery. I tried to repeat the name, and could not find it.

Julius laughed softly just below his breath, making no reply. I saw his white teeth shine in the semi-darkness. He moved away on tiptoe towards the window, while I followed....

The lower sash was open wide as usual. I heard Goldingham breathing quietly in his sleep. Still with the mistiness of slumber round me, I felt bewildered, half caught away, as it seemed, into some web of ancient, far-off things that swung earthwards from the stars. In this net of other times and other places, I hung suspended above the world I ordinarily knew. I was not Mason, a Sixth-Form boy at a private school in Kent, yet I was indubitably myself. A flood of memories rose; my soul moved among more spacious conditions; all hauntingly alive and real, yet never recoverable completely....

We stood together by the open window and looked out. The country lay still beneath the fading stars. A faint breath of air stirred in the laurel shrubberies below. The notes of awakening birds, marvellously sweet, came penetratingly from the distant woods. I smelt the night, I smelt the coolness of very early morning, but there was another subtler, wilder perfume, that came to my nostrils with a deep thrill of happiness I could not name. It was the perfume of another day, another time, another

land, all three as familiar to me as this Kentish hill where now I lived, yet gone otherwise beyond recall. Deep emotion stirred in me the sense of recognition, as though smell alone had the power to reconstruct the very atmosphere of those dim days by raising the ghosts of feelings that once accompanied them....

To the right I saw the dim cricket-field with hedge of privet and hawthorn that ran away in a dark and undulating line towards the hop-poles standing stiffly in the dusk; and, farther off, to the left, loomed the oast-houses, peaked and hooded, their faces turned the other way like a flock of creatures that belonged to darkness. The past seemed already indistinguishable from the present. I stood upon shifting sands that rustled beneath my feet.... The centuries drove backwards....

And the eastern sky, serene and cloudless, ran suddenly into gold and crimson near to the horizon's rim. It became a river of fire that flashed along the edge of the world with high, familiar speed. It broke the same instant into coloured foam far overhead, with shafts of reddish light that swept the stars and put them out. And then this strange thing happened:

For, as my sight passed from the shadowy woods beyond, the scene before me rose like a lifted map into the air; changed; trembled as though it were a sheet shaken from the four corners, and—disclosed another scene below it, most exquisitely prepared. The world I knew melted and disappeared. I looked a second time. It was gone.

And with it vanished the entire little bundle of thoughts and feelings I was accustomed to regard as John Mason.... I smelt the long and windy odours of the open world. The stars bent down and whispered. Rivers rolled through me. Forests and grass grew thickly in my thoughts. And there was dew upon my face.... It was all so natural and simple. It was divine. The Universe was conscious. I was not separate from it at any point.... More, I was conscious with it.

Far off, as an auditorium seen with a bird's-eye view from some gigantic height, yet

with the distinctness of a map both scaled and raised, I saw a treeless plain of vast dimensions, grey in the shadows just before the dawn. In the middle distance stood a domed white building upon the summit of a mound, with broad steps of stone in circles all about it, leading to a pillared door that faced the east. On all sides round it, covering the plain like grass, there was a concourse, many thousands strong, of people, upright and motionless, arranged in wide concentric rings, each one a hundred to two hundred deep. Each ring was dressed in coloured robes, from blue to red, from green to a soft pale yellow, purple, brown and orange, and the outermost of all a delicate and tender green that merged into the tint of the plain itself at a distance of a mile beyond the central building.

These concentric rings of colour, this vast living wheel of exquisitely merging tints, standing motionless and silent about the hub of that majestic temple, formed a picture whose splendour has never left my mind; and a sense of intoxicating joy and awe swept through me as something whispered that long ago, I, too, had once taken my appointed place in those great circles, and had felt the power of the Deity of Living Fire pass into me in the act of worship just about to begin. The courage and sweetness of the sun stole on me; light, heat and glory burned in my heart; I knew myself akin to earth, sea and sky, as also to every human unit in the breathing wheel; and, knowing this, I knew the power of the universe was in me because the universe was my Self.

Imperceptibly at first, but a moment later with measurable speed, a movement ran quivering round the circles. They began to turn. The immense, coloured wheel revolved silently upon the plain. The rings moved alternately, the first to the right, the second to the left, those at the outer rim more swiftly, and those within more slowly, each according to its distance from the centre, so that the entire mass presented the appearance of a single body rotating with a uniform and perfect smoothness. There rose a deep, muffled sound of myriad feet that trampled down the sand. The mighty shuffling of it paced the air. No other sound was audible. The sky

grew swiftly brighter. The shafts of light shot out like arms towards the paling zenith. There came a whir of cool, delicious wind that instantly died down again and left the atmosphere more still and empty than before.

And then the sun came up. With the sudden rush of an eastern clime, it rose above the world. One second it was not there, the next it had appeared. The wheel blazed into flame. The circles turned to coloured fire. And a roaring chant burst forth instantaneously—a prodigious sound of countless voices whose volume was as the volume of an ocean. This wind of singing swept like a tempest overhead, each circle emitting the note related to its colour, the total resulting in a chord whose magnificence shook the heart with an ecstasy of joyful worship.... I was aware of the elemental power of fire in myself....

How long this lasted, or how long I listened is impossible to tell ... the dazzling glory slowly faded; there came a moment when the brilliance dimmed; a blur of coloured light rose like a sheet from the surface of the wheeling thousands, floating off into the sky as though it were a separate shining emanation the multitude gave off. I seemed to lose my feet. I no longer stood on solid earth. There came upon me a curious sense of lightness, as of wings, that yet left my body far below.... I was charged with a deific power, energy.... Long shafts of darkness flashed across the sea of light; the pattern of interwoven colour was disturbed and broken; and, suddenly, with a shock as though I fell again from some great height, I remembered dimly that I was no longer—that my name was——

I cannot say. I only know confusion and darkness sponged the entire picture from the world; and my sight, I suddenly realised, went groping with difficulty about a little field, a rough, uneven hedge, a strip of ribboned whiteness that was a road, and some ugly, odd-shaped things that I recognised as—yes, as oast-houses just beyond. And a pale, sad-looking sun then crawled above the horizon where the hop-poles stood erect.

“You saw...?” whispered someone beside me.

It was Julius. His voice startled me. I had forgotten his very presence.

I nodded in reply; no words came to me; there was still a trembling in me, a sense of intolerable yearning, of beauty lost, of power gone beyond recall, of pain and littleness in the place of it.

Julius kept his eyes upon my face, as though waiting for an answer.

“The sun ...” I said in a low and shaking voice.

He bent his head a moment, leaning down upon the window-sill with his face in his hands.

“As we knew it then,” he said with a deep-drawn sigh, raising himself again. “To-day——!”

He pointed. Across the fields I saw the tin roof of the conventicle where we went to church on Sunday, lifting its modern ugliness beyond the playground walls. The contrast was somehow dreadful. A revulsion of feeling rose within me like a storm. I stared at the meagre building beneath whose roof of corrugated iron, once a week, we knelt and groaned that we were “miserable sinners”—begging another to save us from “punishment” because we were too weak to save ourselves. I saw once more in memory the upright-standing throng, claiming with joy the powers of that other Deity of whom they knew they formed a living portion. And again this intolerable yearning swept me. My soul rose up in a passionate protest that vainly sought to express itself in words. Language deserted me; tears dimmed my eyes and blurred my sight; I stretched my hands out straight towards that misty sunrise of To-day....

And, when at length I turned again to speak to Julius, I saw that he had already left my side and gone back to bed.

CHAPTER VIII

“Not unremembering we pass our exile from the starry ways:

One timeless hour in time we caught from the long night of endless days."—A. E.

And so, in due course, the period of our schooldays came to its appointed end without one single further reference to the particular thing I dreaded. Julius had offered no further word of explanation, and my instinctive avoidance of the subject had effectively prevented my asking pointed questions. It remained, however; it merely waited the proper moment to reveal itself. It was real. No effort on my part, no evasion, no mere pretence that it was fantasy or imagination altered that. The time would come when I should know and understand; evasion would be impossible. It was inevitable as death.

During our last term together it lay in almost complete abeyance, only making an appearance from time to time in those vivid dreams which still presented themselves in sleep. It hid; and I pretended bravely to ignore it altogether.

Meanwhile our days were gloriously happy, packed with interest, and enlivened often with experiences as true and beautiful as the memory of our ancient sun-worship I have attempted to describe. No doubt assailed me; we had existed in the past together; those pictures of "inner scenery" were memories. The emotions that particular experience, and many others, stirred in me were as genuine as the emotions I experienced the last term but one, when my mother died; and, whatever my opinion of the entire series may be to-day, on looking back, honesty compels me to admit this positive character of their actuality. There was no make-believe, no mere imagination.

Our intimacy became certainly very dear to me, and I felt myself linked to Julius LeVallon more closely than to a brother. The knowledge that much existed he could not, or would not, share with me was pain, the pain of jealousy and envy, or possibly the deeper pain that a barrier was raised. Sometimes, indeed, he went into his Other Places almost for days together where I could not follow him, and on these occasions the masters found him absent-minded and the boys avoided him; he went

about alone; if games or study compelled his attention, he would give it automatically—almost as though his body obeyed orders mechanically while the main portion of his consciousness seemed otherwise engaged. And, while it lasted, he would watch me curiously, as from a distance, expecting apparently that I would suddenly "remember" and come up to join him. His soul beckoned me, I felt, but half in vain. I longed to be with him, to go where he was, to see what he saw, but there was something that effectually prevented.

And these periods of absence I rather dreaded for some reason. It was uncanny, almost creepy. For I would suddenly meet his glowing eyes fixed queerly, searchingly on my own, gazing from behind a veil at me, asking pregnant questions that I could not catch. I would see him lying there beneath the larches of the cricket-field alone, rapt, far away, deep in his ancient recollections, and apart from me; or I would come upon him suddenly in the road, in a sunny corner of the playground, even in the deserted gymnasium on certain afternoons, when he would start to see me, and turn away without a word, but with an expression of unhappy yearning in his eyes as though he shared my pain that he dwelt among these Other Places which, for the moment, I might not know.

Many, many, indeed, are the details of these days that I might mention, but their narration would prove too long. One, however, may be told. He had, for instance, a kind of sign-language that was quite remarkable. On the sandy floor of a disused gravel-pit, where we lay on windy days for shelter while we talked, he would trace with a twig a whole series of these curious signs. They were for him the alphabet of a long-forgotten language—some system of ideograph or pictorial representation that expressed the knowledge of the times when it was used. He never made mistakes; the same sign invariably had the same meaning; and it all existed so perfectly in his inner vision that he used it even in his work, and kept a book in which the Greek play of the moment was written out entirely in this old hieroglyphic side by side with the original. He read from it in class, even under the eagle eye of

the Head, with the same certainty as he read from the Greek itself.

There were characteristic personal habits, too, that struck me later as extraordinary for a boy of eighteen—in England; for he led an inner life of exceeding strictness, not to say severity, and was for ever practising mental concentration with a view to obtaining complete control of his feelings, thoughts and, therefore, actions. Upright as a rod of steel himself, he was tolerant to the failings of others, lenient to their weaknesses, and forgiving to those who wronged him. He bore no malice, cherished no ill-feeling. “It’s as far as they’ve got,” he used to say, “and no one can be farther than he is.” Indeed, his treatment of others implied a degree of indifference to self that had something really big about it. And, even on the lowest grounds, to bear a grudge meant only casting a net that must later catch the feet.

His wants in the question of food were firmly regulated too; for at an age when most boys consider it almost an aim in life to devour all they can possibly get and to spend half of their pocket-money on tempting eatables, Julius exercised a really Spartan control over these particular appetites. Not only was his fare most frugal in quantity, but he avoided the eating of meat almost entirely, alcohol completely, and sometimes would fast for a period that made me wonder for his health. He never spoke of this. I noticed it. Nor ever once did he use his influence to persuade me to like habits. No boy was ever less a prig than LeVallon. Another practice of his was equally singular. In order to increase control of the body and develop tenacity of will, I have known him, among other similar performances, stand for hours at a time on winter nights, clad only in a nightshirt, fighting sleep, cold, hunger, movement—stand like a statue in the centre of the room, as though the safety of the world depended upon success.

Most curious of all, however, seemed to me his habit of—what I can only call—communing with inanimate things. “You only remember the sections where we were together,” he explained, when once I asked the meaning of what he did;

"and as you were little with me when this was the way of getting knowledge, it is difficult for you to understand." This fact likewise threw light upon the enormous intervals between remembered sections. We recalled no recent ones at all. We had not come back together in them.

This communing with inanimate things had chiefly to do, of course, with Nature, and I may confess at once that it considerably alarmed me. To read about it comfortably in an armchair over the fire is one thing; to see it done is another. It alarmed me, moreover, for the reason that somewhere, somehow, it linked on to the thing I dreaded above all others—the days when he and I and she had made some wrong, some selfish use of it. This, of course, remained an intuition of my own. I never asked; I never spoke of it. Only in my very bones I felt sure that the thing we three must come together to put right again somehow involved, and involved unpleasantly, this singular method of acquiring knowledge and acquiring power. We had abused it together; we had yet to put it right.

To see Julius practising this mysterious process with a stone, a flower, a tree, and to hear him then talk about these three different objects, was like listening to a fairy tale told with the skill of a great imaginative artist. He personified them, gave their life history, rendered their individual experiences, moods, sensations, qualities, adventures—anything and everything that could ever happen to a stone, a flower, a tree. I realised their existence from their own point of view; felt-with them; shared their joys and sufferings, and understood that they were living things, though with a degree of life so far below our own. Communion with Nature was, for him, communion with the very ground of things. All this, though exquisitely wonderful, was within the grasp of sympathetic comprehension. It was natural.

But when he dealt with things less concrete—and his favourites were elemental forces such as air and heat, or as he preferred to call them, wind and fire—the experience, though no whit less convincing owing to the manner of his description,

was curiously disturbing, because of the results produced upon himself. I can describe it in two words, though I can give no real idea of it in two thousand. He rushed, he flamed. It was almost as if, in one case, his actual radiation became enormous, and in the other, some power swept, as in the form of torrential enthusiasm, from his very person. I remember my first impression in the class-room—that a great wind blew, and that flaming colours moved upon the air.

When he was "feeling-with" this pair of elemental forces he seemed to draw their powers into his own being so that I, being in close sympathy with him, caught some hint of what was going forward in his heart. Sometimes on drowsy summer afternoons when no air stirred through the open windows of the room, there would come a sudden change in my surroundings, an alteration. I would hear a faint and distant sound of roaring; something invisible drove past me. Julius, at the desk beside me, had finished work, and closed his books. His head in his hands, he sat motionless, an intent expression on both face and body, wrapped deep in concentrated effort of some kind. He was practising.... And once, too, I remember being waked out of sleep in the early morning with an impression of a stimulating heat about me which amounted to an intensification of life almost. There he stood beside the window, arms folded, head bent down upon his breast, and an effect about him that can only be described as glowing. The air immediately round him seemed to shine with a faint, delicate radiance as of tropical starlight, or as though he stood over a dying fire of red-hot coals. It was a half fascinating, half terrifying sight; the light pulsed and trembled with distinct vibrations, the air quivered so as to increase his bodily appearance. He looked taller, vaster. And not once I saw this thing, but many times. No single dream could possibly explain it. In both cases, with the wind as with the fire, his life seemed magnified as though he borrowed from these elemental forces of Nature their own special qualities and powers.

"All the elements," I remember his saying to me once, "are in our bodies. Do you expect Nature to be less intelligent than the life that she produces?" For him,

certainly, there was the manifestation of something deeper than physics in the operations of so-called natural laws.

For here, let me say now in conclusion of this broken record of our days at school together, was the rock on which our intercourse eventually suffered interruption, and here was that first sign of the parting of our ways. It frightened me.... Later, in our university days, the cleavage became definite, causing a break in our friendship that seemed at the moment final. For a long time the feeling in me had been growing that his way and mine could not lie much farther together. Julius attributed it to my bringing up, which I was not independent enough to shake off. I can only say that I became conscious uneasily that this curious intercourse with Nature—"communing" as he termed it—led somehow away from the Christianity of my childhood to the gods and deification of the personal self. I did not see at the time, as he insisted, that both were true, being different aspects of the central fact that God is the Universe, and that man, being literally part of it, must eventually know Him face to face by actually becoming Him. All this lay far beyond me at the time.

It seemed to me then, and more as I grew older, an illegitimate, dangerous traffic; for paganism, my father taught me sternly, was the Devil, and that the Universe could actually be alive was a doctrine of heathenish days that led straight to hell and everlasting burning. I could not see, as Julius saw, that here was teaching which might unify the creeds, put life into the formal churches, inspire the world with joy and hope, and bring on the spirit of brotherhood by helping the soul to rediscover its kinship with a living cosmos.

One certainty, however, my schooldays with this singular boy bequeathed to me, a certainty I have never lost, and a very gorgeous and inspiring one—that life is continuous.

LeVallon lived in eternal life. He knew that it stretched infinitely behind his present "section," and infinitely ahead into countless other "sections." The results of what

lay behind he must inevitably exhaust. Be that harvest painful or pleasant, he must reap what he had sown. But the future lay entirely in his own hands, and in his power of decision; chance or caprice had no word to say at all. And this consciousness of being in eternal life now, at the present moment, master of fate, potentially at least deific—this has remained a part of me, whether I will or no. To Julius LeVallon I owe certainly this unalterable conviction.

Another memory of that early intercourse that has remained with me, though too vaguely for very definite description, is the idea that personal life, even in its smallest details, is part of a cosmic ceremony, that to perform it faithfully deepens the relationship man bears to the Universe as a living whole, and is therefore of ultimate spiritual significance. An inspiring thought, I hold, even in the vagueness of my comprehension of it.

Yet above and beyond such notions, remained the chief memory of all: that in some such ancient cosmic ceremony, Julius, myself and one other had somehow abused our privileges in regard to Nature Powers, and that the act of restoration still awaiting fulfilment at our hands, an act involving justice to the sun and stars as well as to our lesser selves, could not be accomplished until that “other” was found on earth together with himself and me. And that other was a woman.

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“We do not know where sentient powers, in the widest sense of the term, begin or end. And there may be disturbances and moods of Nature wherein the very elemental forces approach sentient being, so that, perhaps, mythopœic man has not been altogether a dreamer of dreams. I need not dwell on the striking reflections to which this possibility gives rise; enough that an idealistic dynamism forces the possibility on our view. If the life of Nature is from time to time, and under special conditions, raised to the intense requisite level, we are in the presence of elemental

forces whose character primitive man has not entirely misunderstood.”—“Individual and Reality” (E. D. Fawcett).

CHAPTER IX

There was an interval of a year and a half before we met again. No letters passed between us, and I had no knowledge of where LeVallon was or what he did. Yet while in one sense we had gone apart, in another sense I knew that our relationship suffered no actual break. It seemed inevitable that we should come together again. Our tie was of such a kind that neither could shake the other off. In the meantime my soldier’s career had been abandoned; loss of money in the family decreed a more remunerative destiny; and the interval had been spent learning French and German abroad with a view to a less adventurous profession. At the age of nineteen, or thereabouts, I found myself at Edinburgh University to study for a Bachelor of Science degree, and the first face I saw in Professor Geikie’s lecture room for geology was that of my old school-friend of the “Other Places,” Julius LeVallon.

I stood still and stared, aware of two opposing sensations. For this unexpected meeting came with a kind of warning upon me. I felt pleasure, I felt dread: I cannot determine which came first, only that, mingled with the genuine gratification, there was also the touch of uneasiness, the sinking of the heart I knew so well.

And I remember saying to myself—so odd are the tricks of memory—“Why, he’s as pale as ever! Always that marble skin!” As though during the interval he ought somehow to have acquired more colour. He was tall, over six feet, thin, graceful as an Oriental; an expression of determination in his face had replaced the former dreaminess. The eyes were clear and very strong. There was an expression of great intensity about him.

His greeting was characteristic: he showed eager pleasure, but expressed no surprise.

“Old souls like ours are bound to meet again,” he said with a smile as he shook my

hand. “We have so much to do together.”

I recalled the last time I had seen him, waiting on the school platform as the train went out, and I realised that there were changes in him that left me standing still, as it were. Perhaps he caught my thought, for his face took on a touch of sadness; he gazed into my eyes, making room for me beside him on the bench. “But you’ve been dawdling on the way a bit,” he added. “You’ve been after other things, I see.”

It was true enough. I had fallen in love, for one thing, besides devoting myself with the ardour of youth to literature, music, sport, and other normal interests of my age. From his point of view, of course, I had not advanced, whereas he obviously had held steadily to the path he had chosen for himself, following always one main thing—this star in the east of his higher knowledge. His attitude to me, I felt moreover, had undergone a change. The old sympathy and affection had not altered, but a strain of pity had crept in, a regret that I suffered the attractions of the world to interfere with my development.

A delay, as he called it, in our relationship there had certainly been, though the instant we met I realised that something bound us together fundamentally with a power that superficial changes or external separation could never wholly dissolve.

Yet, on the whole, I saw little enough of him during these Edinburgh days, far less certainly than at Motfield Close. I was older, for one thing, more of the world for another. As a boy, of course, the idea that we renewed an eternal friendship, faithful to one another through so many centuries, made a romantic appeal that was considerable. But the glamour had evaporated; I was a man now, I considered, busy with the things of men. At the same time I was aware that these other tendencies were by no means dead in me, and that very little would be required to revive them. Buried by other interests, they were yet ready to assert themselves again.

And LeVallon, for his part, though he saw less of me, and I think cared to see less of me than before, kept deliberately in touch, and of set purpose would not suffer us to

go too far apart. We did not live in the same building, but he came often to my rooms, we took great walks together over the Pentland Hills, and once or twice wandered down the coast from Musselburgh to the cliffs of St. Abbs Head above the sea. Why he came to Edinburgh at all, indeed, puzzled me a little; but I am probably not far wrong in saying that two things decided the choice: He wished to keep me in sight, having heard somehow of my destination; and, secondly, certain aspects of Nature that he needed were here easily accessible—the sea, hills, woods, and lonely places that his way of life demanded. Among the lectures he took a curious selection: geology, botany, chemistry, certain from the Medical Course, such as anatomy and materia medica, and, above all, the advanced mental classes. He attended operations, post-mortems, and anything in the nature of an experiment, while the grim Dissecting Room knew him as well as if his living depended upon passing the examination in anatomy.

Of his inner life at this period it was not so easy to form an estimate. He worked incessantly, but at something I never could quite determine. At school he was for ever thinking of this “something”; now he was working at it. It seemed remote from the life of the rest of us, students and others, because its aim was different. Pleasure, as such, and the usual forms of indulgence, he left on one side; and women, though his mysterious personality, his physical beauty, and his cold indifference attracted them, he hardly admitted into his personal life at all; to his intimacy, never. His habits were touched with a singular quality of selflessness, very rare, very exquisite, sincere as it was modest, that set him apart in a kind of divine loneliness, giving to all, yet asking of none. My former feeling that his aims were tinged by something dark and anti-spiritual no longer held good; it was due to a partial and limited judgment, to ignorance, even to misunderstanding. His aims were undeniably lofty, his life both good and pure. Respect grew with my closer study of him, for his presence brought an uplifting atmosphere of intenser life whose centre of activity lay so high above the aims of common men as to constitute an “other-worldliness” of a

very unusual kind indeed.

I observed him now as a spectator, more critically. No dreams or imaginative visions—with one or two remarkable exceptions—came to bewilder judgment. I saw him from outside. If not sufficiently unaffected by his ideas to be quite a normal critic, I was certainly more prosaic, and often sceptical. None the less the other deeper tendency in me was still strong; it easily wakened into life. This deep contradiction existed.

The only outward change I noticed, apart from the greater maturity and decision in the features, was a look of sadness he habitually wore, that altered when he spoke of the things he cared about, into an expression of radiant joy. The thought of his great purpose then lit flames in his eyes, and brought into the whole countenance a certain touch of grandeur. It was not often, evidently, that he found anyone to talk with; and arguing, as such, he never cared about. He knew. He was one of those fortunate beings who never had felt doubt. Perfect assurance he had.

Julius, at that time, occupied a suite of rooms at the end of Princes Street, where Queensferry Road turns towards the Forth. They were, I think, his only extravagance, for the majority of students were content with a couple of rooms, or a modest flat on the Morningside. This suite he furnished himself, and there was one room in it that no one but himself might enter. It had, I believe, no stick of furniture in it, and required, therefore, no dusting apparently; in any case, neither landlady, friend nor servant ever passed its door.

My curiosity concerning it was naturally considerable, though never satisfied. He needed a place, it seems, where absolute solitude was possible, an atmosphere uncoloured by others. He made frequent use of it, but whether for that process of “feeling-with” already mentioned, or for some kind of secret worship, ceremonial, or what not, is more than I can say. Often enough I have sat waiting for him in the outer room when he was busy within this mysterious sanctum; no sound audible; no

movement; a bright light visible beneath the crack of the door; a sense of hush, both deep and solemn, about the entire place. Though it may sound ridiculous to say so, there was a certain air of sanctity that hung like a veil about that inner chamber, the silence and stillness evoked a hint of reverence. I waited with something between awe and apprehension for the handle to turn, aware that behind the apparent stillness something intensely active was going forward, of which faint messages reached my mind outside. Certainly, while sitting with book or newspaper, waiting for his footstep, my thoughts would glow and burn within me, rushing with energy along unaccustomed channels, and I remember the curious feeling that behind those panels of painted deal there lay a space far larger than the mere proportions of a room.

As in the fairy-tale, that door opened into outer space; and I suspect that Julius used the solitude for “communing” with those Nature Powers he seemed always busy with. Once, indeed, when he at length appeared, after keeping me waiting for a longer period than usual, I was aware of two odd things about him: he brought with him a breath of open air, cool, fresh and scented as by the fragrance of the forest; about him, too, a faintly luminous atmosphere that lent to his face a kind of delicate radiance almost shining. My sight for a moment wavered; the air between us vibrated as he came across the room towards me. There was a strangeness round about him. There was power. And when he spoke, his voice, though low as always, had a peculiar resonance that woke echoes, it seemed, beyond the actual walls.

The impressions vanished as curiously as they came; but their reality was beyond question. And at times like these, I confess, the old haunting splendour of his dream would come afresh upon me as at Motfield Close. My little world of ambition and desire seemed transitory and vain. The magic of his personality stole sweetly, powerfully upon me; I was swept by gusts of passionate yearning to follow where he led. For his purpose was not selfish. The knowledge and powers he sought were for the ultimate service of the world. It was the permanent Self he trained rather than the particular brain and body of one brief and transient “section,” called To-day.

These moods with me passed off quickly, and the practical world in which I now lived brought inevitable reaction; I mention them to show that in me two persons existed still: an upper, that took life normally like other people, and a lower, that hid with Julius LeVallon in strange "Other Places." For in this duality lies the explanation of certain experiences I later shared with him, to be related presently.

Our relations, meanwhile, held intimate and close as of old—up to a certain point. There was this barrier of my indifference and the pity that it bred in him. Though never urging it, he was always hoping that I would abandon all and follow him; but, failing this, he held to me because something in the future made me necessary. Otherwise the gulf between us had certainly not widened.

I see him as he stood before me in those Edinburgh lodgings: young, in the full tide of modern life, with good faculties, health, means, looks, high character, and sane as a policeman! All that men hold dear and the world respects was his. Yet, without a hint of insincerity or charlatanism, he seemed conscious only of what he deemed the long, sweet prizes of the soul, difficult of attainment, and to the majority mere dreams. His was that rare detachment which sees clear to the end, not through avoiding the stress of perilous adventure by the way, but through refusing the conclusion that the adventures were ends in themselves, or could have any other significance than as items in development, justifying all suffering.

Eternal life for him was now. He sought the things that once acquired can never be forgotten, since their fruits are garnered by the Self that persists through all the series of consecutive lives. Through all the bewildering rush and clamour of the amazing world he looked ever to the star burning in the depths of his soul. And for a tithe of his certainty, as of the faith and beauty of living that accompanied it, I sometimes felt tempted to give all that I possessed and follow him. The scale at any rate was grand. The fall of empires, the crash of revolutions, the destiny of nations, all to him were as nothing compared with the advance or retreat of a single

individual soul in the pursuit of what he deemed “real knowledge.”

Yet, while acknowledging the seduction of his dream, and even half yielding to it sometimes, ran ever this hidden thread of lurking dread and darkness that, for the life of me, I could never entirely get rid of. It was lodged too deeply in me for memory to discover, or for argument to eject. Ridicule could not reach it, denial made no difference. To ignore it was equally ineffective. Even during the long interval of our separation it was never quite forgotten. Like something on the conscience it smouldered out of sight, but when the time was ripe it would burst into a blaze.

At school I merely “funked” it; I would not hear about it. Now, however, my attitude had changed a little. The sense of responsibility that comes with growing older was involved—rather to my annoyance and dismay. Here was something I must put right, or miss an important object of my being. It was inevitable; the sooner it was faced and done with, the better.

Yet the time, apparently, was not quite yet.

CHAPTER X

“Instead of conceiving the elements as controlled merely by blindly operative forces, they may be imagined as animated spiritual beings, who strive after certain states, and offer resistance to certain other states.”—Lotze.

In connection with LeVallon’s settled conviction that the Universe was everywhere alive and one, and that only the thinnest barriers divided animate from so-called inanimate Nature, I recall one experience in particular. The world men ordinarily know is limited to a few vibrations the organs of sense respond to. Though science, with her delicate new instruments, was beginning to justify the instinctive knowledge of an older time, and wireless marvels and radio-activity were still unknown (at the time of which I write), Julius spoke of them as the groundwork of

still greater marvels by which thought would be transmissible. The thought-current was merely a little higher than the accepted wave lengths; moreover, powers and qualities were equally transmissible. Unscientifically, he was aware of all these things, and into this beyond-world he penetrated, apparently, though with the effort of a long-forgotten practice. He linked the human with the non-human. He knew Saturn or the Sun in the same way that he knew a pebble or a wild flower—by feeling-with them.

"It's coming back into the world," he said. "Before we leave this section it will all be known again. The 'best minds,'" he laughed, "will publish it in little primers, and will label it 'extension of consciousness,' or some such laboured thing. And they will think themselves very wonderful to have discovered what they really only re-collect."

He looked up at me and smiled significantly, as we sat side by side in the Dissecting Room, busily tracing the nerves and muscles in a physical "instrument" some soul had recently cast aside. I use his own curious phraseology, of course. He laid his pointed weapon down a moment upon the tangle of the solar plexus that resembled the central switch-board of a great London telegraph office.

"There's the main office," he pointed, "not that," indicating the sawn-off skull where the brain was visible. "Feeling is the clue, not thinking."

And, then and there, he described how this greatest nerve-centre of the human system could receive and transmit messages and powers between its owner and the entire universe. His quiet yet impassioned language I cannot pretend at this interval to give; I only remember the conviction that his words conveyed. It was more wonderful than any fairy-tale, for it made the fairy-tale come true. For this "beyond-world" of Julius LeVallon contained whole hierarchies of living beings, whose actuality is veiled to-day in legend, folk-lore, and superstition generally—some small and gentle as the fairies, some swift and radiant as the

biblical angels, others, again, dark, powerful and immense as the deities of savage and “primitive” races. But all knowable, all obedient to the laws of their own being, and, furthermore, all accessible to the trained will of the human who understood them. Their great powers could be borrowed, used, adapted. Herein lay for him a means to deeper wisdom, richer life, the recovery of true worship, powers that must eventually help Man to that knowledge of the universe which is, more simply put, the knowledge of one God. At present Man was separate, cut off from all this bigger life, matter “inanimate” and Nature “dead.”

And I remember that in this remarkable outburst he touched very nearly upon the origin of my inner dread. Again I felt sure that it was in connection with practices of this nature that he and I and she had involved ourselves in something that, as it were, disturbed the equilibrium of those forces whose balance constitutes the normal world, but something that could only be put right again by the three of us acting in concert and facing an ordeal that was somehow terrible.

One afternoon in October I always associate particularly with this talk about elemental Nature Powers being accessible to human beings, for it was the first occasion that I actually witnessed anything in the nature of definite results. And I recall it in detail; the memory of such an experience could never fade.

We had been walking for a couple of hours, much of the time in silence. My own mind was busy with no train of thought in particular; rather I was in a negative, receptive state, idly reviewing mental pictures, and my companion’s presence obtruded so little that I sometimes almost forgot he was beside me. On the Pentlands we followed the sheep tracks carelessly where they led, and presently lay down among the heather of the higher slopes to rest. Julius flung himself down first, and, pleasantly tired, I imitated him at once. In the distance lay the mosaic of Edinburgh town, her spires rising out of haze and mist. Across the uninspiring strip of modern houses called the Morningside, the Castle Rock stood on its blunt pedestal, carved

out by the drive of ancient glaciers. At the end of the small green valley where immense ice-chisels once had ploughed their way, we saw the Calton Hill; beyond it, again, the line of Princes Street with its stream of busy humanity; and further still, the lovely dip over the crest of the hill where the Northern ocean lay towards the Bass Rock and the sea-birds.

The autumn air drew cool and scented along the heathery ridges, and while Julius lay gazing at the cirrus clouds, I propped myself upon one elbow and enjoyed the scene below. It was my pleasure always to know a thing by name and recognise it—the different churches, the prison, the University buildings, the particular house where my own lodgings were; and I was searching for Frederick Street, trying to pick out the actual corner where George Street cut through it, when I became aware that, across the great dip of intervening valley, something equally saw me. This was my first impression—that something watched me.

I placed it, naturally enough, where my thought was fixed, across the dip; but the same instant I realised my mistake. It was much nearer—close beside me. Something was watching us intently. We were no longer quite alone. And, with the discovery, there grew gradually about me a sense of indescribable loveliness, a soft and tender beauty impossible to define precisely. It came like one of those enveloping moods of childhood, when everything is alive and anything may happen. My heart, it seemed, expanded. It turned wild.

I looked round at Julius. He still lay on his back as before, with the difference that his hands now were folded across his eyes and that his body was motionless and rigid as a log. He hardly breathed. He seemed part and parcel of the earth, merged in the hill-side as naturally as the heather.

Yet something had happened, or was in the act of happening, to him. The forgotten schoolday atmosphere of Other Places stole over me as I gazed.

I made no sound; I did not speak; my eyes passed quickly from the panorama of

town and sea to a flock of mountain sheep that nibbled the patches of coarse grass not far away. The feeling that something invisible yet conscious approached us from the empty spaces of the afternoon became a certainty. My spirit lifted. There was a new and vital relationship between my inner nature, so to speak, and my material environment. My nerves were quivering, the sense of beauty remained, but my questioning wonder changed to awe. Somewhere about me on that bare hill-side Nature had become aggressively alive.

Yet no one of my senses in particular conveyed the great impression; it seemed wrought of them all in combination—a large, synthetic, universal report sent forth by the natural things about me. Some flooding energy, like a tide of unknown power, rose through my body. But my brain was clear. One by one I ticked off the different senses; it was neither sight, smell, touch, nor hearing that was individually affected. There was vague uneasiness, it seems, as well, for I sought instinctively what was of commonplace import in the landscape. I stared at the group of nibbling sheep. My sight wandered to the larches on my right, some thirty yards away. Next, seeking things more humanly comforting still, I fixed my gaze upon my nailed and muddy boots.

At the same moment Julius became suddenly alert. He sat erect.

The change in his attitude startled me; he seemed intent upon something in the nearer landscape that escaped me. He, like myself, was aware that other life approached; he shared my strange emotion of delight and power; but in him was no uneasiness, for whereas I questioned nervously, he knew with joy. Yet he was doing nothing definite, so far as I could see. The change of attitude resulted in no act. His face, however, was so intense, so animated, that I understood it was the touch of his mind that had reached my own so stimulatingly, and that what was coming—came through him. His eyes were fixed, I saw, upon the little grove of larches.

I made no movement, but watched the larches and his face alternately. And what I

can only call the childhood mood of make-believe enormously increased. It extended, however, far beyond the child's domain; it seemed all-potent, irresistibly imperative. By the mere effort of my will I could—create. Some power in me hidden, lost, unused, seemed trying to assert itself. I merely had to say "Let there be a ball before me in the air," and by the simple fiat of this power it must appear. I had only to will the heather at my feet to move, and it must move—as though, in the act of willing, some intense, intermolecular energy were set free. There was almost the sense that I had this power in me now—that I had certainly once known how to use it.

I can hardly describe intelligently what followed. It is so easy to persuade myself that I was dreaming or deceived, yet so difficult to prove that I was neither one nor other, but keenly observant and wholly master of my mind. For by this time it was clear to me that the sensation of being watched, of knowing another living presence close, as also of sharing this tender beauty, issued primarily from the grove of larches. My being and their own enjoyed some inter-relationship, exquisite yet natural. There was exchange between us. And the wind, blowing stiffly up the heather slopes, then lifted the lower branches of the trees, so that I saw deep within the little grove, yet at the same time behind and beyond them. Something that their veil of greenness draped went softly stirring. The same minute it came out towards me with a motion best described as rushing. The heart of the grove became instinct with life, life that I could appreciate and understand, each individual tree contributing its thread to form the composite whole, Julius and myself contributing as well. This Presence swam out through the afternoon atmosphere towards us, whirring, almost dancing, as it came. There was an impression of volume—of gigantic energy. The air in our immediate neighbourhood became visible.

Yet to say that I saw something seems as untrue as to say that I saw nothing. Form was indistinguishable from movement. The air, the larches and ourselves were marvellously entangled with the sunshine and the landscape. I was aware of an

intelligence different from my own, immensely powerful, but somehow not a human intelligence. Superb, unearthly beauty touched the very air.

“Hush!” I heard LeVallon whisper. “Feel-with it, but do not think.”

The advice was unnecessary. I felt; but I had no time to think, no inclination either. A long-forgotten “I” was active. My familiar, daily self shrank out of sight. Vibrant, sensitive, amazingly extended, my being responded in an immediate fashion to things about me. Any “thoughts” I had came afterwards.

For the greenness whirled and flashed like sunlight upon water or on fluttering silk. With an intricate and complex movement it appeared to spin and revolve within itself; and I cannot dare to say from what detail came the absolute persuasion that it was alive in the same sense that I myself and Julius were alive, while of another order of intelligence.

Julius rose suddenly to his feet, and a fear came over me that he was going to touch it; for he moved forwards with an inviting gesture that caused me an exhilarating distress as when a friend steps too near the edge of a precipice. But the next moment I saw that he was directing it rather, with the immediate result that it swerved sharply to one side, passed with swiftness up the steep hill-side, and—disappeared. It raced by me with a soft and roaring noise, leaving a marked disturbance of the air that was like a wind within a wind. I seemed pushed aside by the fringe of a small but violent whirlwind. The booming already sounded some distance up the slope.

“I’ve lost it!” I remember shouting with a pang of disappointment. For it seemed that the power and delight in me both ebbed and that energy went with them.

“Because you thought a moment instead of felt!” cried Julius. He turned, holding up one hand by way of warning. His voice was more than ordinarily resonant, his whole body charged with force. “Now—watch the sheep,” he added in a lower tone. And, although the words surprised me in one way, in another I anticipated them. There passed across his face a momentary expression of intense effort, but even before the

sentence was finished I heard the rushing of the frightened animals, and understood something of what was happening. There was panic in them. The entire flock ran headlong down the steep slope of heather. The thunder of their feet is in my ears to-day. I see their heaving backs of dirty wool climbing in tumbling fashion one upon another as they pressed tightly in a wedge-shaped outline. They plunged frantically together down the steep place to some level turf below. But, even then, I think they would not have stopped, had not a sound, half cry, half word of command, from my companion brought them to a sudden halt again. They paused in their wild descent. Like a single animal the entire company of them—twenty or thirty, perhaps, all told—were arrested. They looked stupidly about them, turned their heads in the opposite direction, and with one accord began once more peacefully—eating grass.

The incident had occupied, perhaps, three minutes.

"The larches!" I heard, and the same instant that softly-roaring thing, not wind, yet carried inside the wind, again raced past me, going this time in the direction of the grove. There was just time to turn, when I heard a clap—not unlike the sound of an open hand that strikes a pillow, though on a far vaster scale—and it seemed to me that the bodies of the trees trembled for a moment where they melted into one another amid the general greenness of stems and branches.

For the fraction of a second they shone and pulsed and quivered. Something opened; something closed again. The enthralling sense of beauty left my heart, the power sank away, the huge energy retired. And, in a flash, all was normal once again; it was a cool October afternoon upon the Pentland Hills, and a wind was blowing freshly from the distant sea.

I was lying on the grass again exactly as before; Julius, watching me keenly beneath the lids of his narrowed eyes, had just flung himself down to keep me company....

"The barriers, you see, are thin," he said quietly. "There really are no barriers at all."

This was the first sentence I heard, though his voice, it seemed, had been speaking for some considerable time. I had closed my eyes—to shut out a rising tide of wonderful and familiar pictures whose beauty somehow I sought vigorously to deny. Yet there was this flare of vivid memory: a penetrating odour of acrid herbs that burned in the clearing of a sombre forest; a low stone altar, the droning of men's voices chanting monotonously as they drew near in robes of white and yellow ... and I seemed aware of some forgotten but exquisite ceremonial by means of which natural forces were drawn upon to benefit the beings of the worshippers....

"All is transmissible," rose LeVallon's voice out of the picture, "all can be shared. That was the aim and meaning of our worship...."

I opened my eyes and looked at him. The expansion of my consciousness had been a genuine thing; the power and joy both real; the worship authentic. Now they had left me and the shrinkage caused me pain; there was a poignant sense of loss. I felt afraid again.

"But it's all gone," I answered in a hushed tone, "and everything has left me." Reason began to argue and deny. I could scarcely retain the memory of those big sensations which had offered a channel into an extended world.

Julius searched my face with his patient, inward-gazing eyes.

"Your attitude prevented," he replied after a moment's hesitation; "it became unsafe."

"You brought it?" I faltered.

He nodded. "A human will," he replied, "and a physical body—as channel. Your resistance broke the rhythm and brought danger in." And after a pause he added significantly: "For the return—the animals served well." He smiled. "Ran down a steep place into the sea—almost."

And, abruptly then, the modern world came back, as though what I had just experienced had been but some pictured memory, thrust up, withdrawn. I was aware

that my fellow student at Edinburgh University, LeVallon by name, lay beside me in the heather, his face charged with peace and happiness ... that the dusk was falling, and that the air was turning chilly.

Without further speech we rose and made our way down from the windy ridge, and the chief change I noticed in myself seemed to be a marked increase of vitality that was singularly exhilarating, yet included the touch of awe already mentioned. The feeling was in me that life of some non-human kind had approached us both. I looked about me, first at Julius, then at the landscape, growing dim. The wind blew strongly from the sea. Far in the distance rose the outline of the Forth Bridge, then a-building, its skeleton, red in the sunset, rearing across the water like a huge sea-serpent with ribs of gleaming steel. I could almost hear the hammering of the iron.... And, at our feet, the first lights of the Old Town presently twinkled through the veil of dusk and smoke that wove itself comfortingly about the habitations of men and women.

My thoughts were busy, but for a long time no speech passed. Occasionally I stole glances at my companion as we plodded downwards through the growing dusk, and there seemed a curious glow about his face that made him more clearly visible than the other objects about us. The way he looked back from time to time across his shoulder increased my impression—by no means a pleasant one just then—that something followed us from those heathery hill-tops, kept close behind us through the muddy lanes, and watched our movements across the fields and hedges.

I have never forgotten that walk home in the autumn twilight, nor the sense of haunting possibilities that hung about it like an atmosphere—the feeling that other life loomed close upon our steps. Before Roslin Chapel was passed, and the welcome lights of the town were near, this consciousness of a ghostly following suite became a certainty, and I felt that every copse and field sent out some messenger to swell the throng. We had established touch with another region of life,

of power, and the link was not yet fully broken.

And the sentences Julius let fall from time to time, half to himself and half to me, increased my nervousness instead of soothing it.

“The gods, you see, are not dead,” he said, waving his hand towards the hills, “but only distant. They are still accessible to all who can feel-with their powers. In your self-consciousness a door stands open; they can be approached—through Nature. Ages ago, when the sun was younger, and you and I were nearer to the primitive beauty ...”

A cat, darting silently across the road like a shadow from a cottage door, gave me such a start that I lost the remainder of the sentence. His arm was linked in mine as he added softly:

“... Only, what is borrowed in this way must always be returned, for otherwise the equilibrium is destroyed, and the borrower suffers until he puts it right again. So utterly exact is the balance of the universe....”

I deliberately turned my head away, aware that something in me would not listen. The conviction grew that he had a motive in the entire business. That inner secret dread revived. Yet, in spite of it, there was a curiosity that refused to let me escape altogether. It was bound to satisfy itself. The question seemed to force itself out of my lips:

“They are unconscious, though, these Powers?” And, having asked it, I would willingly have blotted out the words. I heard his low voice answer so far away it seemed an echo from the hills behind us.

“Of a different order,” he replied, “until they are part of you; and then they share your consciousness....”

“Hostile or friendly?” I believed I thought this question only, but apparently I spoke it out aloud. Julius paused a moment. Then he said briefly:

“Neither one nor other, of themselves. Merely that they resent an order being placed upon them. It involves mastery or destruction.”

The words sank into me with something like a shudder. It seemed that everything I asked and everything he answered were as familiar as though we spoke of some lecture of the day before. What I had witnessed shared this familiarity, too, though more faintly. All belonged to this incalculable past he for ever searched to bring to light. Yet of what dim act of mine, of his, or of another working with us, this mysterious shudder was born, I still remained in ignorance, though an ignorance that seemed now slowly about to lift.

Then, suddenly, the final question was out before I could prevent it. It came irresistibly:

“And if, instead of animals, it had been men...?”

The effect was instantaneous, and very curious. I could have sworn he had been waiting for that question. For he turned upon me with passion that shone a moment in his pale and eager face, then died away as swiftly as it came. His hand tightened upon my arm; he drew me closer. He bent down. I saw his eyes gleam in the darkness as he whispered:

“Such men would know themselves cut off from their own kind, a gulf between humanity—and themselves. For the elemental powers may be borrowed, but not kept. There would burn in them fires no human hands could quench, because no human hands had lit them. Yet their vast energies might lift our little self-seeking race into that grander universal life where——”

He stopped dead in the darkened road and fixed me with his eyes. He said the next words with a vehement conviction that struck cold into my very entrails:

“He who retains within himself the elemental powers which are the deities in Nature, is both above and below his kind.”

A moment he hid his face in his hands; then, opening his arms wide and throwing

his head back to the sky, he raised his voice; he almost cried aloud: “A man who has worshipped the Powers of Wind and the Powers of Fire, and has retained them in himself, keeping them out of their appointed places, is born of them. He is become their child. He is a son of Wind and Fire. And though he break and flame with energies that could regenerate the world, he must remain alien and outcast from humanity, untouched by love or sorrow, stranger to joy, aloof, impersonal, until by full and complete restitution, he restore the balance in the surrender of his stolen powers.”

It seemed to me he towered; that his stature grew; that the darkness round his very head turned bright; and that a wind from nowhere went driving down the sky behind him with a wailing violence. The amazing outburst took me off my feet by its suddenness. An emotion from the depths rose up and shook me. What happened next I hardly realised, only that he caught my arm and hurried along the road at a reckless, half stumbling speed, and that the lonely hills behind us followed in the darkness....

A few moments afterwards we found ourselves among the busy lights and traffic of the streets. His calm had returned as suddenly as it had deserted him. Such moments with him were so rare, he seemed almost unnatural, superhuman. And presently we separated at the corner of the North Bridge, going home to our respective rooms. He made no single reference to the storm that had come upon him in this extraordinary manner; I likewise spoke no word. We said good night. He turned one way, I another. But, as I went, his burning sentences still haunted me; I saw his face like moonlight through the tangle of a wood; and I knew that all we had seen and heard and spoken that afternoon had reference to a past that we had shared, yet also to a future, which he and I awaited together for the coming of a—third.

CHAPTER XI

“Strange as it may appear to the modern mind, whose one ambition is to harden and

formalise itself ... the ancient mind conceived of knowledge in a totally different fashion. It did not crystallise itself into a hardened point, but, remaining fluid, knew that the mode of knowledge suitable to its nature was by intercourse and blending. Its experience was ... that it could blend with intelligence greater than itself, that it could have intercourse with the gods."—"Some Mystical Adventures" (G. R. S. Mead).

An inevitable result of this experience was that, for me, a reaction followed. I had no stomach for such adventures. Though carried away at the moment by the enthralling character of the feelings roused that afternoon, my normal self, my upper self as I had come to call it, protested—with the result that I avoided Julius. I changed my seat in the class-rooms, giving as excuse that I could not hear the lecturer; I gave up attending post-mortems and operations where I knew that he would be; and if I saw him in the street I would turn aside or dive into some shop until the danger of our meeting passed. Ashamed of my feebleness, I yet could not bring myself to face him and thrash the matter out.

Other influences also were at work, for my father, it so happened, and the girl I was engaged to marry, her family too, were all of them in Edinburgh just about that time, and some instinct warned me that they and LeVallon must not meet. In the latter case particularly I obeyed this warning instinct, for in the influence of Julius there hid some strain of opposition towards these natural affections. I was aware of it unconsciously, perhaps. It seemed he made me question the reality of my love; made me doubt and hesitate; sometimes almost made me challenge the value of these ties that meant so much to me. From his point of view, I knew, these emotions belonged to transient relationships of one brief section, and to become centred in them involved the obliteration of the larger view. His attitude was more impersonal: Love everyone, but do not lose perspective by focusing your entire self in one or two. It was au fond a selfish pleasure merely; it delayed the development of the permanent personality; it destroyed—more important still—the sense of kinship with the

universe which was the basic principle with him. It need not: but it generally did.

For some weeks, therefore, our talks and walks were interrupted; I devoted myself to work, to intercourse with those I loved, and led generally the normal existence of a university student who was reading for examinations that were of importance to his future career in life.

Yet, though we rarely met, and certainly held no converse for some time, interruption actually there was none at all. To pretend it were a farce. The inner relationship continued as before. Physical separation meant absolutely nothing in those ties that so strangely and so intimately knit our deeper lives together. There was no more question of break between us than there is question of a break in time when light is extinguished and the clock becomes invisible. His presence always stood beside me; the beauty of his pale, un-English face kept ever in my thoughts; I heard his whisper in my dreams at night, and the ideas his curious language watered continued growing with a strength I could not question.

There were two selves in me then as in our schooldays: one that resisted, and one that yearned. When together, it was the former that asserted its rights, but when apart, oddly enough, it was the latter. There is little question, however, that the latter was the stronger of the two. Thus, the moment I found myself alone again, my father and my fiancée both gone, we rushed together like two ends of an elastic that had been stretched too long apart.

And almost immediately, as though the opportunity must not be lost, he spoke to me of an experiment he had in view.

By what network of persuasiveness he induced me to witness, if not actually to co-operate in, this experiment, I cannot pretend at this distance to remember. I think it is true that he used no persuasion at all, but that at the first mention of it my deeper being met the proposal with curious sympathy. At the horror and audacity my upper self shrank back aghast; the thing seemed wholly impermissible and dreadful;

something unholy, as of blasphemy, lay in it too. But, as usual, when this mysterious question of “Other Places” was involved, in the end I followed blindly where he led. My older being held the casting vote. And the reason—I admit it frankly—was that somewhere behind the amazing glamour of it all lay—truth. While reason scoffed, my heart remembered and believed.

Moreover, in this particular instance, a biting curiosity had its influence too. I was wholly sceptical of results. The thing was mad, incredible, even wicked. It could never happen. Yet, while I said these words, and more besides, there ran a haunting terror in me underground that, after all ... that possibly ... I cannot even set down in words the nature of my doubt. I can merely affirm that something in me was not absolutely sure.

“The essential thing,” he told me, “is to find an empty ‘instrument’ that is in perfect order—young, vigorous, the tissues unwasted by decay or illness. There must have been no serious deterioration of the organs, muscles, and so forth.”

I knew then that this new experiment was akin to that other I had already witnessed. The experience on the Pentlands had also been deliberately brought about. The only difference was that this second one he announced beforehand. Further, it was of a higher grade. The channel of evocation, instead of being in the vegetable kingdom, was in the human.

I understood his meaning, and suggested that someone in deep trance might meet the conditions, for in trance he held that the occupant, or soul, was gone elsewhere, the tenement of flesh deserted.

But he shook his head. That was not, he said, legitimate. The owner would return. He watched me with a curious smile as he said this. I knew then that he referred to the final emptiness of a vacated body.

“Sudden death,” I said, while his eyes flashed back the answer. “And the Elemental Powers?” I asked quickly.

"Wind and fire," he replied. And in order to carry his plan into execution he proposed to avail himself of his free access to the students' Dissecting Room.

During the longish interval between the conception and carrying out of this preposterous experiment I shifted like a weathercock between acceptance and refusal. My doubts were torturing. There were times when I treated it as the proposal of a lunatic that at worst could work no injury to anyone concerned. But there were also times when a certain familiar reality clothed it with a portentous actuality. I was reminded faintly of something similar I had been connected with before. Dim figures of this lost familiarity stalked occasionally across the field of inner sight. Julius and I had done this thing together long, long ago, "when the sun was younger," and when we were "nearer to the primitive beauty," as he phrased it. In reverie, in dreams, in moments when thinking was in abeyance, this odd conviction asserted itself. It had to do with a Memory of some worship that once was mighty and effective; when august Presences walked the earth in stupendous images of power; and traffic with them had been useful, possible. The barrier between the human and the non-human, between Man and Nature, was not built. Wind and fire! It was always wind and fire that he spoke of. And I remember one vivid and terrific dream in particular in which I heard again a voice pronounce that curious name of "Concerighé," and, though the details were blurred on waking, I clearly grasped that certain elemental powers had been evoked by us for purposes of our own and had not been suffered to return to their appointed places; further, that concerned with us in the awful and solemn traffic was—another. We had been three.

This dream, of course, I easily explained as due directly to my talks with Julius, but my dread was not so easily dismissed, and that I overcame it finally and consented to attend was due partly to the extraordinary curiosity I felt, and partly to this inexplicable attraction in my deeper self which urged me to see the matter through. Something inevitable about it forced me. Yet, but for the settled conviction that behind the abhorrent proposal lay some earnest purpose of LeVallon's, not ignoble

in itself, I should certainly have refused. For, though saying little, and not taking me fully into his confidence, he did manage to convey the assurance that this thing was not to be carried out as an end, but as a means to an end, in itself both legitimate and necessary. It was, I gathered, a kind of preliminary trial—an attempt that might possibly succeed, even without the presence of the third.

"Sooner or later," he said, aware that I hesitated, "it must be faced. Here is an opportunity for us, at least. If we succeed, there is no need to wait for—another. It is a question. We can but try."

And try accordingly we did.

The occasion I shall never forget—a still, cold winter's night towards the middle of December, most of the students already gone down for Christmas, and small chance of the room being occupied. For even in the busiest time before examinations there were few men who cared to avail themselves of the gruesome privilege of night-work, for which special permission, too, was necessary. Julius, in any case, made his preparations well, and the janitor of the grey-stone building on the hill, whose top floor was consecrated to this grisly study of life in death, had surrendered the keys even before we separated earlier in the evening for supper at the door of the post-mortem theatre.

"Upstairs at eleven o'clock," he whispered, "and if I'm late—the preparations may detain me—go inside and wait. Your presence is necessary to success." He laid his hand on my shoulder; he looked at me searchingly a moment, almost beseechingly, as though he detected the strain of opposition in me. "And be as sympathetic as you can," he begged. "At least, do not actively oppose." Then, as he turned away, "I'll try to be punctual," he added, smiling, "but—well, you know as well as I do——!" He shrugged his shoulders and was gone.

You know! Somehow or other it was true: I did know. The interval of several hours he would spend in his inner chamber concentrated upon the process of

feeling-with—evoking. He would have no food, no rest, no moment's pause. At the appointed hour he would arrive, charged with the essential qualities of these two elemental powers which in dim past ages, summoned by another audacious "experiment" from their rightful homes, he now sought to "restore." He would seek to return what had been "borrowed." He would attempt to banish them again. For they could only be thus banished, as they had been summoned—through the channel of a human organism. They were of a loftier order, then, than the Powers for whose return the animal organisms of the sheep had served.

I went my way down Frederick Street with a heart, I swear, already palpitating.

Of the many thrilling experiences that grew out of my acquaintance with this extraordinary being, I think that night remains supreme—certainly, until our paths met again in the Jura Mountains. But, strangest of all, is the fact that throughout the ghastly horror of what occurred was—beauty! To convey this beauty is beyond any power that I possess, yet it was there, a superb and awful beauty that informed the meanest detail of what I witnessed. The experiment failed of course; in the accomplishment of LeVallon's ultimate purpose, that is, it failed; but the failure was due, apparently, to one cause alone: that the woman was not present.

It is most difficult to describe, and my pen, indeed, shrinks from setting down so revolting a performance. Yet this curious high beauty redeems it in my memory as I now recall the adventure through the haze of years, and I believe the beauty was due to a deeper fact impossible to convey in words. Behind the little "modern" experiment, and parallel to it, ran another, older Memory that was fraught with some significance of eternity. This parent memory penetrated and overshadowed the smaller copy of it; it exalted what was ugly, uplifted what seemed abominable, sublimated the distressing failure into an image of what might have been magnificent. I mean, in a word, that this experiment was a poor attempt to reconstruct an older ritual of spiritual significance whereby those natural forces,

once worshipped as the gods, might combine with qualities similar to their own in human beings. The memory of a more august and effective ceremony moved all the time behind the little reconstruction. The beauty was derived from my dim recollection of some transcendent but now forgotten worship.

At the appointed hour I made my way across the Bridge and towards the Old Town where the University buildings stood. It was, as I said, a bitter night. The Castle Rock and Cathedral swam in a flood of silvery moonlight; frost sparkled on the roofs; the spires of Edinburgh shone in the crystal wintry atmosphere. The air, so keen, was windless. Few people were about at this late hour, and I had the feeling that the occasional pedestrians, hurrying homewards in tightly-buttoned overcoats, eyed me askance. No one of them was going in the same direction as myself. They questioned my purpose, looked sharply over their shoulders, then quickened their pace away from me towards the houses where the fires burned in cosy human sitting-rooms.

At the door of the great square building itself I hesitated a moment, hiding in the shadow of the overhanging roof. It was easy to pretend that moral disapproval warned me to turn back, but the simpler truth is that I was afraid. At the best of times the Dissecting Room, with its silent cargo of dreadful forms and faces, was a chamber of horrors I could never become hardened to as the majority of students did; but on this occasion, when a theory concerning life alien to humanity was to be put to so strange a test, I confess that the prospect set my nerves a-quivering and made the muscles of my legs turn weak. A cold sensation ran down my spine, and it was not the wintry night alone that caused it.

Opening the heavy door with an effort, I went in and waited a moment till the clanging echo had subsided through the deserted building. My imagination figured the footsteps of a crowd hurrying away behind the sound down the long stone corridors. In the silence that followed I slowly began climbing the steps of granite,

hoping devoutly that Julius would be waiting for me at the top. I was a little late; he might possibly have arrived before me. Up the four flights of stairs I went stealthily, trying to muffle my footsteps, putting my weight heavily upon the balustrade, and doing all I could to make no sound at all. For it seemed to me that my movements were both watched and heard, and that those motionless, silent forms above were listening for my approach, and knew that I was coming.

On the landings at each turn lay a broad sweet patch of moonlight that fell through the lofty windows, and but for these the darkness would have been complete. No light, it seemed to me, had ever looked more clean and pure and welcome. I thought of the lone Pentland ridges, and of the sea, lying calm and still outside beneath the same sheet of silver, the air of night all keen and fragrant. The heather slopes came back to me, the larches and the flock of nibbling sheep. I thought of these in detail, of my fire-lit rooms in Frederick Street, of the vicarage garden at home in Kent where my boyhood had been spent; I thought of a good many things, truth to tell, all of them as remote as possible from my present surroundings; but when I eventually reached the topmost landing and found LeVallon was not there, I thought of one thing only—that I was alone. Just beyond me, through that door of frosted glass, lay in its most loathsome form the remnant of humanity left behind by death.

In the daytime, when noisy students, callous and unimaginative, thronged the room, the horror of it retreated, modified by the vigorous vitality of these doctors of the future; but now at night, amid the ominous silence, with darkness over the town and the cold of outer space dropping down upon the world, as though linking forces with that other final cold within the solemn chamber, it seemed quite otherwise. I stood shivering and afraid upon the landing, angry that I could have lent myself to so preposterous and abominable a scheme, yet determined, so long as my will held firm, to go through with it to the end.

He had asked me to wait for him—inside.

Knowing that every minute of hesitation must weaken my powers of resolve, I moved at once towards the door, then paused again. The comforting roar of the traffic floated to my ears; I heard the distant tinkle of a tramcar bell, the boom of Edinburgh, a confused noise of feet and wheels and voices, far away, it is true, but distinctly reassuring.

Outside, the life of humanity rolled upon its accustomed way, recking little of the trembling figure that stood on the top floor of this silent building, one hand on the door upon whose further side so many must one day come to final rest. For one hand already touched the freezing knob, and I was in the act of turning it when another sound, that was certainly not the murmur of the town, struck sharply through the stillness and brought all movement in me to a sudden halt.

It came from within, I thought at first; and it was like a wave of sighs that rose and fell, sweeping against the glass door a moment, then passing away as abruptly as it came. Yet it was more like wind than sighs through human lips, and immediately, then, I understood that it was wind. I caught my breath again with keen relief. Wind was rising from the hills, and this was its first messenger running down among the roofs and chimney-pots. I heard its wailing echoes long after it had died away.

But a moment later it returned, louder and stronger than before, and this time, hearing it so close, I know not what secret embassies of wonder touched me from the night outside, deposited their undecipherable messages, and were gone again. I can only say that the key of my emotions changed, changed, moreover, with a swelling rush as when the heavier stops are pulled out upon an organ-board. For, on entering the building, the sky had been serenely calm, and keen frost locked the currents of the air; whereas now that wind went wailing round the walls as though it sought an entrance, almost as though its crying voice veiled purpose. There seemed a note of menace, eager and peremptory, in its sudden rush and drop. It knocked upon the stones and upon the roof above my head with curious and repeated buffets

of sound that resembled the “clap” I had heard that October afternoon among the larches, only a hundred times repeated and a hundred-fold increased. The change in myself, moreover, was similar to the change then experienced—the flow and drive of bigger consciousness that helped to banish fear. I seemed to know about that wind, to feel its life and being, indeed, to share it. No longer was I merely John Mason, a student in Edinburgh, separate and distinct from all about me, but was—I realised it amazingly—a bit of life in the universe, not isolated even from the wind.

The beauty of the sensation did not last; it passed through me, linked to that insistent roar; but the fact that I had felt it gave me courage. The stops were instantly pushed in again ... and the same minute the swing-door closed behind me with a sullen thud.

I stood within the chamber; Julius, I saw in a moment, was not there. I moved through the long, narrow room, keeping close beside the wall, taking up my position finally about halfway down, where I could command the six tall windows and the door. The moon was already too high to send her rays directly through the panes, but from the extensive sky-lights she shed a diffused, pale glow upon the scene, and my eyes, soon accustomed to the semi-darkness, saw everything quite as clearly as I cared about.

In front of me stretched the silent, crowded room, patchy in the moonshine, but with shadows deeply gathered in the corners; and, row after row upon the white marble slabs, lay the tenantless forms in the grotesque, unnatural positions as the students had left them a few hours before. The picture does not invite detailed description, but I at once experienced the peculiar illusion that attacks new students even in the daytime. It seemed that the sightless eyes turned slowly round to stare at me, that the shrunken lips half opened as in soundless speech, and that the heads with one accord shifted to an angle whence they could observe and watch me better. There went a rustling through that valley of dry bones as though life returned for a moment to drive the broken machinery afresh.

This sensible illusion was, of course, one I could easily dismiss. More difficult, however, was the subtler attack that came upon me from behind the sensory impressions. For, while I stood with my back against the wall, listening intently for LeVallon's step upon the stairs, I could not keep from my mind the terror of those huddled sheep upon the Pentland ridges; the whole weird force of his theories about "life" in Nature came beating against my mind, aided, moreover, by some sympathy in myself that could never wholly ridicule their possible truth.

I gazed round me at the motionless, discarded forms, used for one brief "section," then cast aside, and as I did so my mind naturally focused itself upon a point of dreadful and absorbing interest—which one was to be the subject of the experiment? So short a time ago had each been a nest of keenest activity and emotion, enabling its occupant to reap its harvest of past actions while sowing that which it must reap later again in its new body, already perhaps now a-forming. And of these discarded vehicles, one was to be the channel through which two elemental Powers, evoked in vanished ages, might return to their appointed place. I heard that clamouring wind against the outer walls; I felt within me the warmth of a strange enthusiasm rise and glow; and it seemed to me just then that the whole proposal was as true and simple and in the natural order of things as birth or death, or any normal phenomenon to the terror and glory of which mankind has grown accustomed through prolonged familiarity. To this point, apparently, had the change in my feelings brought me. The dreadful novelty had largely gone. Something would happen, nor would it be entirely unfamiliar.

Then, on a marble slab beside the door, the body of a boy, fresh, white and sweet, and obviously brought in that very day, since it was as yet untouched by knife or scalpel, "drew" my attention of its own accord—and I knew at once that I had found it.

Oddly enough, the discovery brought no increase of fearful thrill; it was as natural as

though I had helped to place it there myself. And, again, for some reason, that delightful sense of power swept me; my diminutive modern self slipped off to hide; I remembered that a million suns surrounded me; that the earth was but an insignificant member of one of the lesser systems; that man's vaunted Reason was as naught compared to the oceans of what might be known and possible; and that this body I wore and used, like that white, empty one upon the slab, was but a transient vehicle through which I, as a living part of the stupendous cosmos, acted out my little piece of development in the course of an eternal journey. This wind, this fire, that Julius spoke of, were equally the vehicles of other energies, alive as myself, only less tamed and cabined, yet similarly obedient, again, to the laws of their own beings. The extraordinary mood poured through me like a flood—and once more passed away. And the wind fled singing round the building with a shout.

I looked steadily at the beautiful but vacated framework that the soul had used—used well or ill I knew not—lying there so quietly, so calmly, the smooth skin as yet untouched by knife, unmarred by needle, surrounded on all sides by the ugly and misshapen crew of older death; and as I looked, I thought of some fair shell the tide had left among the seaweed wrack, a flower of beauty shining 'mid decay. In the moonlight I could plainly see the thin and wasted ribs, the fixed blue eyes still staring as in life, the lank and tangled hair, the listless fingers that a few hours before must have been active in the flush of health, and passionately loved by more than one assuredly. For, though I knew not the manner of the soul's out-passing, this boy must have suddenly met death that very day. And I found it odd that he should now be lying here, since usually the students' work is concerned to study the processes of illness and decay. It confirmed my certainty that here was the channel LeVallon meant to use.

Time for longer reflection, however, there was none, for just then another gust of this newly-risen wind fell against the building with a breaking roar, and at the same moment the swing door opened and Julius LeVallon stood within the room.

Whether windows had burst, or the great skylights overhead been left unfastened, I had no time, nor inclination either, to discover, but I remember that the wind tore past him down the entire length of the high-ceilinged chamber, tossing the hair uncannily upon a dozen heads in front of me and even stirring the dust about my feet. It was almost as though we stood upon an open plain and met the unobstructed tempest in our teeth.

Yet the rush and vehemence with which he entered startled me, for I found myself glad of the support which a high student's stool afforded. I leaned against it heavily, while Julius, after standing by the door a moment, turned immediately then to the left. He knew exactly where to look. Simultaneously, he saw me too.

Our eyes, in that atmosphere of shadow and soft moonlight, met also across centuries. He spoke my name; but it was no name I answered to To-day.

"Come, Silvatela," he said, "lend me your will and sympathy. Feel now with Wind and Fire. For both are here, and the time is favourable. At last, I shall perhaps return what has been borrowed." He beckoned me with a gesture of strange dignity. "It is not that time of balanced forces we most desire—the Equinox—but it is the winter solstice," he went on, "when the sun is nearest. That, too, is favourable. We may transcend the appointed boundaries. Across the desert comes the leaping wind. Both heat and air are with us. Come!"

And, having vaguely looked for some kind of elaborate preparation or parade, this sudden summons took me by surprise a little, though the language somehow did not startle me. I sprang up; the stool fell sideways, then clattered noisily upon the concrete floor. I made my way quickly between the peering faces. It seemed no longer strange, this abrupt disturbance of two familiar elements, nor did I remark with unusual curiosity that the wind went rushing and crying about the room, while the heat grew steadily within me so that my actual skin was drenched with perspiration. All came about, indeed, quickly, naturally, and without any pomp of

dreadful ceremonial as I had expected. Julius had come with power in his hands; and preparation, if any, had already taken place elsewhere. He spoke no further word as I approached, but bent low over the thin, white form, his face pale, stern and beautiful as I had never seen it before. I thought of a star that entered the roof of those Temple Memories, falling beneficently upon the great concave mirrors where the incense rose in a column of blue smoke. His entire personality, when at length I stood beside him, radiated an atmosphere of force as though charged with some kind of elemental activity that was intense and inexhaustible. The wonder and beauty of it swept me from head to foot. The air grew marvellously heated. It rose in beating waves that accompanied the rushing wind, like a furnace driven by some powerful, artificial draught; in his immediate neighbourhood it whirled and roared. It drew me closer. I, too, found myself bending down above the motionless, stretched form, oblivious of the other crowded slabs about us.

So familiar it all seemed suddenly. Some such scene I had witnessed surely many a time elsewhere. I knew it all before. Upon success hung issues of paramount importance to his soul, to mine, to the soul of another who, for some reason unexplained, was not present with us, and, somehow, also, to the entire universe of which we formed, with these two elements, a living, integral portion. A weight of solemn drama lay behind our little show. It seemed to me the universe looked on and waited. The issue was of cosmic meaning.

Then, as I entered the sphere of LeVallon’s personality, a touch of dizziness caught me for an instant, as though this running wind, this accumulating heat, emanated directly from his very being; and, before I quite recovered myself, the moonlight was extinguished like a lamp blown out. Across the sky, apparently, rushed clouds that changed the spreading skylights into thick curtains, while into the room of death came a blast of storm that I thought must tear the windows from their very sockets in the stone. And with the wind came also a yet further increase of heat that was like a touch of naked fire on some inner membrane.

I dare not assert that I was wholly master of myself throughout the swift, dramatic scene that followed in darkness and in tumult, nor can I claim that what I witnessed in the gloom, shot with occasional gleams of moonlight here and there, was more than the intense visualisation of an over-wrought imagination. It well may be that what I expected to happen dramatised itself as though it actually did occur. I can merely state that, at the moment, it seemed real and natural, and that what I saw was the opening scene in a ceremony as familiar to me as the Litany in my father's church.

For, with the pouring through the room of these twin energies of wind and fire, I saw, sketched in the dim obscurity, one definite movement—as the body of the boy rose up into a sitting posture close before our faces. It instantly then sank back again, recumbent as before upon the marble slab. The upright movement was repeated the same second, and once more there came the sinking back. There were several successive efforts before the upright position was maintained; and each time it rose slowly, gradually, all of one piece and rigidly, until finally these tentative movements achieved their object—and the boy sat up as though about to stand. Erect before us, the head slightly hanging on one side, the shoulders squared, the chest expanded as with lung-drawn air, he rose steadily above his motionless companions all around.

And Julius drew back a pace. He made certain gestures with his arms and hands that in some incalculable manner laid control upon the movements. I saw his face an instant as the moon fell on it, pale, glorious and stately, wearing a glow that was not moonlight, the lips compressed with effort, the eyes ablaze. He looked to me unearthly and magnificent. His stature seemed increased. There was an air of power, of majesty about him that made his presence beautiful beyond words; and yet, most strange of all, it was familiar to me, even this. I had seen it all before. I knew well what was about to happen.

His gesture changed. No word was spoken. It was a Ceremony in which gesture was more significant than speech. There was evidence of intense internal struggle that yet did not include the ugliness of strain. He put forth all his power merely—and the body rose by jerks. Spasmodically, this time, as though pulled by wires, yet with a kind of terrible violence, it floated from that marble slab into the air. With a series of quick, curious movements, half plunge, half jerk, it touched the floor. It stood stiffly upright on its feet. It rose again, it turned, it twisted, moving arms and legs and head, passing me unsupported through the atmosphere some four feet from the ground. The wind rushed round it with a roar; the fire, though invisible, scorched my eyes. This way and that, now up, now down, the body of this boy danced to and fro before me, silent always, the blue eyes fixed, the lips half parted, more with the semblance of some awful marionette than with human movement, yet charged with a colossal potency that drove it hither and thither. Like some fair Ariel, laughing at death, it flitted above the yellow Calibans of horror that lay strewn below.

Yet, from the very nature of these incompleted movements, I was aware that the experiment was unsuccessful, and that the power was insufficient. Instead of spasmodic, the movements should have been rhythmical and easy; there should have been purpose and intention in the performance of that driven body; there should have been commanding gestures, significant direction; there should have been spontaneous breathing and—a voice—the voice of Life.

And instead—I witnessed an unmeaning pantomime, and heard the wailing of the dying wind....

A voice, indeed, there was, but it was the voice of Julius LeVallon that eventually came to me across the length of the room. I saw him slowly approaching through the patches of unequal moonlight, carrying over his shoulder the frail, white burden that had collapsed against the further wall. And his words were very few, spoken more to himself apparently than to me. I heard them; they struck chill and ominous upon my

heart:

“The conditions were imperfect, the power insufficient. Alone we cannot do it. We must wait for her.... And the channel must be another’s—as before.”

The strain of high excitement passed. I knew once again that small and pitiful sensation of returning to my normal consciousness. The exhilaration all was gone. There came a dwindling of the heart. I was “myself” again, John Mason, student at Edinburgh University. It produced a kind of shock, the abruptness of the alteration took my strength away. I experienced a climax of sensation, disappointment, distress, fear and revolt as well, that proved too much for me. I ran. I reeled. I heard the sound of my own falling.

No recollection of what immediately followed remains with me ... for when I opened my eyes much later, I found myself prone upon the landing several floors below, with Julius bending solicitously over me, helping me to rise. The moonlight fell in a flood through a window on the stairs. My recovery was speedy, though not complete. I accompanied him down the remaining flight, leaning upon his arm; and in the street my senses, though still dazed, took in that the night was calm and cloudless, that the moonlight veiled the stars by its serene brightness, and that the clock above the University buildings pointed to the hour of two in the morning.

The cold was bitter. There was no wind!

Julius came with me to my door in Frederick Street, but the entire distance of a mile neither of us spoke a word.

At the door of my lodging-house, however, he turned. I drew back instinctively, hesitating, for my desire was to get upstairs into my own room with the door locked safely behind me. But he caught my hand.

“We failed to-night,” he whispered, “but when the real time comes we shall succeed. You will not—fail me then?”

In the stillness of very early morning, the moon sinking towards the long dip of the

Queensferry Road, and the shadows lying deep upon the deserted streets, I heard his voice once more come travelling down the centuries to where I stood. The atmosphere of those other days and other places came back with incredible appeal upon me.

He drew me within the chilly hall-way, the sound of our feet echoing up the spiral staircase of stone. Night lay silently over everything, sunrise still many hours away.

I turned and looked into his eager, passionate face, into his eyes that still shone with the radiance of the two great powers, at the mouth and lips which now betrayed the exhaustion that had followed the huge effort. And something appealing and personal in his entire expression made it impossible to refuse. I shook my head, I shrank away, but a voice I scarcely recognised as my own gave the required answer. My upper and my under selves conflicted; yet the latter gave the inevitable pledge: “Julius ... I promise you.”

He gazed into my eyes. An inexpressible tenderness stole into his manner. He took my hand and held it. The die was cast.

“She is now upon the earth with us,” he said. “I soon shall find her. We three shall inevitably be drawn together, for we are linked by indestructible ties. There is this debt we must repay—we three who first together incurred it.”

There was a pause. Far away I heard a cart rumbling over the cobbles of George Street. In another world it seemed, for the gods were still about us where we stood. Julius moved from me. Once more I saw his eyes fixed pleadingly, almost yearningly upon my own. Then the street door closed upon him and he was gone.

CHAPTER XII

“Love and pity are pleading with me this hour.

What is this voice that stays me forbidding to yield,

Offering beauty, love, and immortal power,

Aeons away in some far-off heavenly field?"—A. E.

The actual beginnings of a separation are often so slight that they are scarcely noticed. Between two friends, whose acquaintance is of several years' standing, sure that their tie will stand the ordinary tests of life, some unexpected and trivial incident first points to the parting of the ways; each discovers suddenly that, after all, the other is not necessary to him. An emotion unshared is sufficient to reveal some fundamental lack of sympathy hitherto concealed, and they go their different ways, neither claim debited with the least regret. Like the scarce perceptible mist of evening that divides dusk from night, the invisible chill has risen between them; each sees the other through a cloud that first veils, then distorts, and finally obliterates.

For some weeks after the "experiment" I saw LeVallon through some such risen mist, now thin, now thick, but always there and invariably repelling. I remember distinctly, however, that our going apart was to me not without a sense of regret both keen and poignant. I owed him something impossible to describe; a yearning sense of beauty touched common things about me at the sight of him, even at the mention of his name in the University class-rooms; he had given me an awareness of other possibilities, an exhilarating view of life that held immense perspectives; a feeling that justice determined even the harshest details; above all, a sense of kinship with Nature that combined to form a tie of a most uncommon order.

Yet I went willingly from his side; for his prospectus of existence led me towards heights where I could not comfortably breathe. His entire scheme I never properly grasped, perhaps; the little parts we shared I saw, possibly, in wrong proportion, uncorrelated to the huge map his mind contained so easily. My own personality was insignificant, my powers mediocre; above all I had not always his strange conviction of positive memory to support me. I lagged behind. I left him. The seductive world that touched him not made decided claims upon my heart—love, passion, ambition

and adventure called me strongly. I would not give up all and follow where he led. Yet I left him with the haunting consciousness that I surrendered a system of belief that was logical, complete and adequate, its scale of possible achievement wonderful, and its unselfish ideal, if immensely difficult, at least noble and inspiring. For all his mysticism, Julius, it seems to me, was practical and scientific.

Yet, the plausibility of his audacious theories would sometimes return questioningly upon me. Man was an integral part of Nature, not alien to it. What was there, after all, so impossible in what he claimed? And what amongst it might not the science of to-morrow, with its X rays, N rays, its wireless messages, its radium, its inter-molecular energy, and its slowly-formulating laws of telepathy and the dynamic character of Thought, not come eventually to confirm under new-fangled names?

So far as I reflected concerning these things at all, I kept an open mind; my point was simply that I preferred the ordinary pursuits of ordinary men. He was evidently aware of the change in me, while yet he made no effort to prevent my going. Nor did he make, so far as I can recall, any direct reference to the matter. Once only, in a lecture room, with a hand upon my shoulder while we jostled out together in the stream of other students, he bent his face towards me and said with the tender, comprehending smile that never failed to touch me deeply: “Our lives are far too deeply knit for any final separation. Out of the Past we come, and that Past is not exhausted yet.” The crowd had carried us apart before I could reply, but through me like a flash of lightning rose the certainty that this was literally true, and that while my upper, modern Self went off, my older, hidden Self was with him to the end. We merely took two curves that presently must join again.

But, though we saw little of one another all these weeks, I can never forget the scene of our actual leave-taking, nor the extraordinary incidents that led up to it. Now that I set it down on paper such phrases as “imaginative glamour” and the like may tempt

me, but at the time it was as real and actual as the weekly battles with my landlady, or the sheaves of laborious notes I made at lecture-time. In some region of my consciousness, abnormal or otherwise, this scene most certainly took place.

It was one late evening towards the close of the session—March or April, therefore—that I had occasion to visit LeVallon's house for some reason in itself of no importance; one of those keen and blustery nights that turn Edinburgh into a scene of unspeakable desolation, Princes Street, a vista of sheeted rain where shop-windows glistened upon black pavements; the Castle smothered in mist; Scott's Monument semi-invisible with a monstrous air about it in the gloom; and the entire deserted town swept by a wind that howled across the Forth with gusts of quite thunderous energy. Even the cable-cars blundered along like weary creatures blindly seeking shelter.

I hurried through the confusion of the tempest, fighting my way at every step, and on turning the corner past the North British Railway Station, the storm carried me with a rush into the porch of the house, whipping the soaked macintosh with a blow across my face. The rain struck the dripping walls down their entire height, then poured splashing along the pavement in a stream. Night seemed to toss me into the building like some piece of wreckage from the crest of a great wave.

Panting and momentarily flustered, I paused in the little hall to recover breath, while the hurricane, having flung me into shelter, went roaring and howling down the sloping street. I wiped the rain from my face and put straight my disordered clothes. My mind just then was occupied with nothing but these very practical considerations. The impression that followed the next instant came entirely unbidden:

For I became aware of a sudden and enveloping sense of peace, beyond all telling calm and beautiful—an interior peace—a calm upon the spirit itself. It was a spiritual emotion. There drifted over me and round me, like the stillness of some

perfect dawn, the hush of something serene and quiet as the stars. All stress and turmoil of the outer world passed into an exquisite tranquillity that in some nameless way was solemn as the spaces of the sky. I felt almost as if some temple atmosphere, some inner Sanctuary of olden time, where the tumult of external life dared not intrude, had descended on me. And the change arrested every active impulse in my being; my hurrying thoughts lay down and slept; all that was scattered in me gathered itself softly into an inner fold; unsatisfied desires closed their eyes. It seemed as if all the questing energies of my busy personality found suddenly repose. Life's restlessness was gone. I even forgot momentarily the purpose for which I came.

So abrupt a change of key was difficult to realise; I can only say that the note of spiritual peace seemed far more true and actual than the physical relief due to the escape from wind and rain. Moreover, as I climbed the spiral staircase to the second floor where Julius lived, it deepened perceptibly—as though it emanated from his dwelling quarters, pervading the entire building. It brought back the atmosphere of what at school we called our "Temple Days."

I went on tiptoe, fearful of disturbing what seemed solemn even to the point of being sacred, for the mood was so strong that I felt no desire to resist or criticise. Whatever its cause, this subjective state of mind was soothing to the point of actual happiness. A hint of bliss was in it. And it did not lessen either, when I discovered the landlady, Mrs. Garnier, white of face in the little hall-way, showing signs of nervousness that she made no attempt whatever to conceal.

She was all eagerness to speak. Before I could ask if Julius was at home, she relieved her burdened mind:

"Oh, it'll be you, Mr. Mason! And I'm that glad ye've come!"

Her round, puffy visage plainly expressed relief, as she came towards me with a shambling gait, looking over her shoulder across the dim-lit hall. "Mr. LeVallion,"

she whispered, “has been in there without a sound since mornin’, and I’m thinkin’, maybe, something would ha’ happened to him.” And she stared into my face as though I could instantly explain what troubled her. Where I felt spiritual peace, she felt, obviously, spiritual alarm.

“He is engaged?” I inquired. Then—though hardly aware why I put the question—I added: “There is someone with him?”

She peered about her.

“He’ll be no engaged to you, sir,” she replied. Plainly, it was not her lodger’s instructions that prompted the words; by the way she hung back I discerned that she dreaded to announce me; she hoped I would go in and explore alone.

“I’ll wait in the sitting-room till he comes out,” I said, after a moment’s hesitation. And I moved towards the door.

Mrs. Garnier, however, at once made an involuntary gesture to prevent me. I can still hear her slippered tread shuffling across the oil-cloth. The gesture became a sort of leap when she saw that I persisted. It reminded me of a frightened animal.

“There’ll be twa gentlemen already waiting,” she mumbled thickly, her face turning a shade paler.

And, hearing this, I paused. The old woman, I saw, was trembling. I was annoyed at the interruption, for it destroyed the sense of delightful peace I had enjoyed.

“Anyone I know?”

I was close to the door as I asked it, the terrified old woman close beside me. She thrust her grey face up to mine; her eyes shone in the gleam of the low-turned gas jet above our heads; and her excitement communicated itself suddenly to my own blood. A distinct shiver ran down my back.

“I dinna ken them,” she whispered behind a hand she held to her mouth, “for, ye see, I dinna let them in.”

I stared at her, wondering what was coming next. The slight trepidation I had felt for a moment vanished, but I kept my voice at a whisper for fear of disturbing Julius in his inner chamber on the other side of the wall.

“What do you mean? Tell me plainly what’s the matter.” I said it with some sharpness.

She replied at once, only too glad to share her anxiety with another.

“They came in by themselves,” she whispered with a touch of superstitious awe; “wonderfu’ big men, the twa of them, and dark-skinned as the de’il,” and she drew back a pace to watch the effect of her words upon me.

“How long ago?” I asked impatiently. I remembered suddenly that Julius had friends among the Hindu students. It was more than possible that he had given them his key.

Mrs. Garnier shook her head suggestively. “I went in an hour ago,” she told me in a low tone, “thinkin’ maybe he would be eatin’ something, and, O Lord mercy, I ran straight against the pair of them, settin’ there in the darkness wi’oot a word.”

“Well?” I said, seeing that she was likely to invent, “and what of it?”

“Neither of them moved a finger at me,” she continued breathlessly, “but they looked all over me, and they had eyes like a flame o’ fire, and I all but let the lamp fall and came out in a faintin’ condeetion, and have been prayin’ ever since that someone would come in.”

She shuffled into the middle of the hall-way, drawing me after her by my sleeve. She pointed towards a corner of the ceiling. A small square window was let into the wall of the little interior room where Julius sought his solitude, and where at this moment he was busy with his mysterious occupations.

“And what’ll be that awfu’ licht, then?” she inquired, plucking me by the arm.

A gleam of bright white light, indeed, was visible through the small dusty pane above us, and again a curious memory ran like sheet-lightning across my mind that I

had seen this kind of light before and that it was familiar to me. It vanished instantly before I could seize the fleeting picture. The light certainly was of peculiar brightness, coming from neither gas nor candle, nor from any ordinary light that I could have named off-hand.

"It'll be precisely that kind of licht that's in their eyes," I heard her whisper, as she jerked her whole body rather than her head alone towards the sitting-room I was about to enter. She wiped her clammy hands upon the striped apron that hung crooked from her angular hips.

"Mrs. Garnier," I said with authority, "there's nothing to be afraid of. Mr. LeVallon makes experiments sometimes, that's all. He wouldn't hurt a hair of your head——"

"Nae doot," she interrupted me, backing away from the door, "for his bonny face is a face to get well on, but the twa others in there, the darkies—aye, and that'll be another matter, and not one for me to be meddlin' with——"

I cut her short. "If you feel frightened," I said, smiling, "go to your room and pray. You needn't announce me. I'll go in and wait until he's ready to come out and see me."

Her face went white as linen, showing up an old scar on the cheek in an ugly reddish pattern, while I pushed past her and turned the handle of the door. I heard the breath catch in her throat. The next minute, lamp in hand, I was in the room, slamming the door literally in her face lest she might follow and do some foolish thing. I set the lamp down upon the table in the centre. I looked quickly about me. No living person but myself was there—certainly no Hindu gentlemen with eyes of flame. Mrs. Garnier's Celtic imagination had run away with her altogether. I sat down and waited. A line of that same bright, silvery light shone also beneath the crack of the door from the inner chamber. The wind and rain trumpeted angrily at the windows. But the room was undeniably empty.

Yet it is utterly beyond me to describe the sense of exaltation that at once rose over

me like some influence of perfect music; “exaltation” is the right word, I think, and “music” conveys best the uplifting and soothing effect that was produced. For here, at closer quarters, the sensation of exquisite peace was doubly renewed. The nervous alarm inspired by the woman fled. This peace flooded me; it stirred the bliss of some happy spiritual life long since enjoyed and long since forgotten. I passed instantly, as it were, under the sway of some august authority that banished the fret and restlessness of the extraneous world; and compared to which the strife and ambition of my modern life seemed, indeed, well lost.

Behind it, however, and behind the solemnity that awed, was at the same time the faint presage of something vaguely disquieting. The memory of some afflicting incompleteness gripped me; the anguish of ideals too lofty for attainment; the sweet pain and passion of some exquisite long suffering; the secret yearning of a soul that had dared sublime accomplishment, then plunged itself and others in the despair of failure—all this lay in the apprehension that stood close behind the bliss.

But, above all else, was the certainty that I remembered definite details of those Temple Days, and that I was upon the verge of still further and more detailed recollection.... That faintness stealing over me was the faintness of immeasurable distance, the ache of dizzy time, the weariness that has no end and no beginning. I felt what Julius LeVallon felt—the deep sickness of eternity that knows no final rest, either of blessed annihilation or of non-existence, until the journey of the soul comes to its climax in the Deity. And, feeling this—realising it—for the first time, I understood, also for the first time, LeVallon’s words at Motfield Close two years ago—“If the soul remembered all, it would lose the courage to attempt. Only the vital things are worth recalling, because they guide.”

This flashed across me now, as I sat in that Edinburgh lodging-house, waiting for him to come. I knew myself, beyond all doubt or question, caught away in that web of wonderful, far-off things; there revived in me the yearnings of memories

exceedingly remote; poignant still with life, because they were unexhausted still, and terrible with that incompleteness which sooner or later must find satisfaction. And it was this sense of things left undone that brought the feeling of presentiment. Julius, in that inner chamber, was communing as of old. But also—he was searching. He was hard upon the trail of ancient clues. He was seeking her. I knew it in my bones.

For I felt some subtle communication with that other mind beyond the obstructing door—not, however, as it was to-day, but as it was in the recoverable centuries when the three of us had committed the audacious act which still awaited its final readjustment at our hands. Julius, searching by some method of his own among the layers of our ancient lives, reconstructed the particular scenes he needed. Involuntarily, unwittingly, I shared them too. I had stepped into his ancient mood....

My mind grew crowded. The pictures rose and passed, and rose again....

But it was always one in particular that returned, staying longer than the others. He concentrated upon one, then. In his efforts to find her soul in its body of to-day, he went back to the source of our original relationship, the immensely remote experience when he and I and she had sown the harvest we had now come back to reap together. Thence, holding the clue, he could trace the thread of her existences down to this very moment. He could find her where she stood upon the earth—to-day.

This seemed very clear to me, though how I realised it is difficult to say. I remember a curious thought—which proves how real the conviction was in me. I asked myself: “Does she feel anything now, as she goes about her business on this earth, perhaps in England, perhaps not far removed from us, as distance goes? And is she, too, wherever she stands and waits, aware perhaps of some queer presentiment that haunts her waking or her sleeping mind—the presentiment of something coming, something about to happen—that someone waits for her?”

The one persistent picture rose and captured me again....

In blazing sunlight stood the building of whitened stone against the turquoise sky; and, a little to the left, the yellow cliffs, precipitous and crumbling. At their base were mounds of sand the wind and sun had chiselled and piled up against their feet. The soft air trembled with the heat; fierce light bathed everything—from the small white figures moving up and down the rock-hewn steps, to the Temple hollowed out between the stone paws of an immense outline half animal, half human. To the right, and towards the east, stretched the abundant desert, shimmering grey and blue and green beneath the torrid sun. I smelt the empty leagues of sand, the delicate perfume that gathers among the smooth, baked hollows of a million dunes; I felt the breeze, sharp and exhilarating, that knew no interruption of broken surfaces to break its journey of days and nights; and behind me I heard the faint, sharp rustle of trees whose shadows flickered on the burning ground. This heat and air grew stealthily upon me; fire and wind were here the dominating influences, the natural methods which furnished vehicles for the manifestation of particular Powers. Here was the home of our early worship of the Sun and space, of Fire and Wind. Yet, somehow, it seemed not of this present planet we call Earth, but of some point nearer to the centre.

Beside those enormous paws, where the air danced and shimmered in the brilliant glare, I saw the narrow flight of steps leading to the crypts below—the retreats for solitude. And then, suddenly, with a shock of poignant recognition, I saw a figure that I knew instantly to be myself, the Sower of my harvest of To-day. It slowly moved down the steps behind another figure that I recognised with equal conviction—some inner flash of lightning certainty—as Julius LeVallon, the soul I knew to-day in Edinburgh, the soul that, in another body, now stood near me in a nineteenth century lodging-house. The bodies, too, were lighter, less dense and material than those we used to-day, the spirit occupier less hampered and restricted. That too was clear to me.

I was aware of both times, both places simultaneously. That is, I was not dreaming. The peace, moreover, that stole round me in this modern building was but a faint reflection of the peace once familiar to me in those far-off Temple Days. And somehow it was the older memory that dominated consciousness.

About me the room held still as death, the battle of that earthly storm against the walls and windows half unreal, or so remote as to be not realised. Time paused a moment. I looked back. I lived as I had been then—in another type of consciousness, it seemed. It was marvellous, yet natural as in a dream. Only, as in a dream, subsequent language fails to retain the searching, vivid reality. The living fact is not recaptured. I felt. I understood. Certain tendencies and characteristics that were "me" to-day I saw explained—those that derived from this particular period. What must be conquered, and why, flashed sharply; also individuals whom to avoid would be vain shirking, since having sown together we must reap together—or miss the object of our being.

I heard strange names—Concerighé, Silvatela, Ziaz ... and a surge of passionate memories caught at my heart. Yet it was not Egypt, it was not India or the East, it was not Assyria or old Chaldea even; this belonged to a civilisation older than them all, some dim ancient kingdom that antedated all records open to possible research to-day....

I was in contact with the searching mind within that inner chamber. His effort included me, making the deeps in me give up their dead. I saw. He sought through many "sections."... I followed.... There was confusion—the pictures of recent days breaking in upon others infinitely remote. I could not disentangle....

Very sharply, then, and with a sensation of uneasiness that was almost pain, another figure rose. I saw a woman. With the same clear certainty of recognition the face presented itself. Hair, lips, and eyes I saw distinctly, yet somehow through a haze that veiled the expression. About the graceful neck hung a soft cloth of gold; dark

lashes screened a gaze still starry and undimmed; there was a smile of shining teeth ... the eyes met mine....

With a diving rush the entire picture shifted, passing on to another scene, and I saw two figures, her own and his, bending down over something that lay stretched and motionless upon an altar of raised stones. We were in shadow now; the air was cool; the perfume of the open desert had altered to the fragrance that was incense.... The picture faded, flashed quickly back, faded again, and once again was there. I could not hold it for long. Larger, darker figures swam between to confuse and blur its detail, figures of some swarthier race, as though layers of other memories, perhaps more recent, mingled bewilderingly with it. The two passed in and out of one another, sometimes interpenetrating, as when two slides appear upon the magic-lantern sheet together; yet, peering at me through the phantasmal kaleidoscope, shone ever this woman-face, seductively lovely, haunting as a vision of stars, mask of a soul even then already "old," although the picture was of ages before the wisdom of Buddha or the love of Christ had stolen on the world....

Then came a moment of clearer sight suddenly, and I saw that the objects lying stretched and motionless in the obscurity, and over one of which they bent in concentrated effort, were the bodies of men not dead, but temporarily vacated. And I knew that we stood in the Hall of the Vacated Bodies, an atmosphere of awe and solemnity about us. For these were the advanced disciples who in the final initiation lay three days and nights entranced, while their souls acquired "elsewhere and otherwise" the knowledge no brain could attain to in the flesh. During the interval there were those who watched the empty tenements—Guardians of the Vacated Bodies—and two of these I now saw bending low—the woman and a man. The body itself I saw but dimly, but an overmastering curiosity woke in me to see it clearly—to recognise——!

The intensity of my effort caused a blur, it seemed. Across my inner sight the haze

thickened for a moment, and I lost the scene. But this time I understood. The dread of something they were about to consummate blackened the memory with the pain of treachery. Guardians of the Vacated Bodies, they had been faithless to their trust: they had used their position for some personal end. Awe and terror clutched my soul. Who was the leader, who the led, I failed utterly to recover, nor what the motive of the broken trust had been. A sublime audacity lay in it, that I knew. There was the desire for knowledge not yet properly within their reach; there was the ambition to evoke the elemental powers; and there was an "experiment," using the instrument at hand as the channel for an achievement that might have made them—one of them, at any rate—as the gods. But there was about it all an entanglement of personalities and motives I was helpless to unravel. The whole deep significance I could not recover. My own part, the part he played, and the part the woman played, seemed woven in an involved and inextricable knot. It belonged, I felt, to an order of consciousness which is not the order of to-day. I, therefore, failed to understand completely. Only that we three were together, closely linked, emerged absolutely clear.

For one moment the scene returned again. I remember that something drove forcibly against me in that ancient place, that it flung itself roaring like a tempest in my face, that a great burning sensation passed through me, while sheets of what I can only describe as black fire tore through the air about us. There was fire and there was wind ... that much I realised.

I rocked—that is my present body rocked. I reeled upon my chair. The entire memory plunged down into darkness with a speed of lightning. I seemed to rise—to emerge from the depths of some sea within me where I had lain sunk for ages. In one sense—I awoke. But, before the glamour passed entirely, and while the reality of the scene hung about me still, I remember that a cry for help escaped my lips, and that it was the name of our leader that I called upon:

“Concerighé...!”

With that cry still sounding in the air, I turned, and saw him whom I had called upon beside me. With a kind of splendid, dazzling light he came. He rested one hand upon my shoulder; he gazed down into my eyes; and I looked into a face that was magnificent with power, radiant, glorious. The atmosphere momentarily seemed turned to flame. I felt a wind of strength strike through me. The old temptation and the sin—the failure—all were clear at last.

I remembered....

CHAPTER XIII

The brilliance of the figure dimmed and melted, as though the shadows ate it from the edges inwards; there came a rattling at the handle of that inner chamber door; it opened suddenly; and Julius LeVallon, this time in his body of To-day, stood framed against the square of light that swirled behind him like clouds of dazzlingly white steam. The door swung to and closed. He moved forward quickly into the room.

By this time I was more in possession of my normal senses again. Here was no question of memory, vision, or imagination’s glamour. Beyond any doubt or ambiguity, there stood beside me in this sitting-room of the Edinburgh lodging-house two figures of Julius LeVallon. I saw them simultaneously. There was the normal Julius walking across the carpet towards me, and there was his double that stood near me in a body of light—now fading, yet unquestionably wearing the likeness of that Concerighé whom I had seen bending with the woman above the vacated body.

They moved together swiftly. Almost the same moment they met; they intermingled, much as two outlines of an object slip one into the other when the finger’s pressure on the eyeball is removed. They became one person. Julius was there before me in the lamp-lit room, just come from his inner chamber that blazed with brilliance. This

light now disappeared. No line showed beneath the crack of the door. I heard the wind and rain shout drearily past the windows with the dying storm.

I caught my breath. I stood up to face him, taking a quick step backwards. And I heard Julius laugh a little. He told me afterwards I had assumed an attitude of defence.

He was speaking—in his ordinary voice, no sign of excitement in him, nor about his presence anything unusual.

"You called me," he said quietly; "you called for help. But I could not come at once; I could not get back; it was such a long way off." He looked at me and smiled. "I was searching," he added, as though he had been merely turning the pages of a book.

"Our old Memory Game. I know. I felt it—even out here."

He nodded gravely.

"You could hardly help it," he replied, "being so close," and indicated that inner room with a gesture of his head. "Besides, you were in it all the time. And she was in it too. Oh," he said with a touch of swift enthusiasm, "I have recovered nearly all. I know exactly now what happened. I was the leader, I the instigator; you both merely helped me; you with your faithful friendship, even while you warned; she with her passionate love that asked no questions, but obeyed."

"She loved you so?" I asked faintly, but with an uncontrollable trembling of the voice. An amazing prescience seized me.

"You," he said calmly. "It was you she loved."

What thrill of romance, deathless and enthralling, stirred in me as I heard these words! What starry glory stepped down upon the world! A memory of bliss poured into me; the knowledge of an undying love constant as the sun itself. Then, hard upon its heels, flashed back the Present with a small and insignificant picture—of my approaching union—with another. An extraordinary revulsion caught me. I

remember steadying myself against the chair in front of me.

“For it was your love,” Julius went on quietly, “that made you so necessary. You two were a single force together. I had the knowledge, but you together had the greatest power in the world. We were three—a trinity—the strongest union possible. And the temptation was too much for me——”

He turned away a moment so that I could not see his face. He broke off suddenly. There was a new and curious quality in his voice, as though it dwindled in volume and grew smaller, yet was not audibly lowered.

What caused the old sense of dread to quicken in me? What brought this sudden sinking of the heart as he turned again from the cabinet where he stood, and our eyes met steadily through the lamp-lit room?

“I borrowed love, but knew not how to use it,” he went on slowly, solemnly. “I had evoked the Powers successfully; through the channel of that vacated body I had drawn them into my own being. Then came the failure——”

“I—we failed you!” I faltered.

“The failure,” he replied, still fixing me with his glowing eyes, “was mine, and mine alone. The power lent me I did not understand. It was not my own, and without great love these things cannot be accomplished. I must first know love. What I had summoned I was too weak to banish. The owner of the vacated body returned.” Then, after a pause, he added half below his breath: “The Powers, exiled from their appointed place, are about me to this very day. But it is the owner of that body whose forgiveness I need most. And only with your help—with the presence, the sympathetic presence of yourself and her—can this be effected.”

Past, present, and future seemed strangely intermingled as I heard, for my thoughts went groping forward, and at the same time diving backwards among desert sands and temples. The passion of an immense love-story caught me; I was aware of intense yearning to resume my place in it all with him, with her, with all the

reconstructed conditions of relationships so ancient and so true. It swept over me like a storm unchained. That scene in the cool and sunless crypt flamed forth again, reality in each smallest detail. The meaning of his words I did not wholly grasp, however; there was something lacking in my mind of To-day that withheld the final clue. My present consciousness was not as then. From brain and reason all this seemed so utterly divorced, and I had forgotten how to understand by feeling in the way that Julius did. Those last words, however, brought a sudden question to my lips. Almost unconsciously I gave it utterance:

"Through the channel of a body?" I asked, and my voice was lower than his own.

"Through the channel of a human system," was his answer, "an organism that uses consciously both heat and air, and that, therefore, knows the nature of them both. For the Powers can be summoned only by those who understand them; and understanding, being worship, depends ultimately upon sharing their natures, though it be in little."

There came a welcome break, then, in the strain of this extraordinary conversation, as Julius, using no bridge to transpose our emotions from one key to the other, walked quietly over to the cupboard. It was characteristically significant of his attitude to life in general, that the solemn things we had been speaking of were yet no more sacred than the prosaic detail of to-day that now concerned him—a student's supper. All was "one" to him in this rare but absolutely genuine way. He was unconscious of any break in the emotional level of what had been—for him there was, indeed, no break—and, watching him, it almost seemed that I still saw that other figure of long ago striding across the granite, sun-drenched slabs.

The voice rose unbidden within me, choked by the stress of some inexplicable emotion:

"Concerighé...!" I cried aloud involuntarily; "Concerighé ... Ziaz.... We are all together still ... my help is yours ... my unfailing help...."

Julius, loaf and marmalade jar in hand, turned from the cupboard as though he had been struck. For a moment he stood and stared. The customary expression melted from his face, and in its place a look of tenderest compassion shone through the strength.

“You do remember, then!” he said very softly; “even the names!”

“And Silvatela,” I murmured, moisture rising unaccountably to my eyes. I saw the room in mist.

Julius stood before me like a figure carved in stone. For a long time he spoke no word. Gradually the curious disturbance in my own breast sank and passed. The mist lifted and disappeared. I felt myself slipping back into To-day on the ebb of some shattering experience, already half forgotten.

“You remember,” he repeated presently, his voice impassioned but firmly quiet, “the temptation—and—the failure...?”

I nodded, almost involuntarily again.

“And still hold to you—both,” I murmured.

He held me with his eyes for quite a minute. Though he used no word or gesture, I felt his deep delight.

“Because we must,” he answered presently; “because we must.”

He had moved so close to me that I felt his breath upon my face. I could have sworn for a second that I gazed into the shining eyes of that other and audacious figure, for it was the voice of Concerighé, yet the face of Julius. Past and present seemed to join hands, mingling confusedly in my mind. Cause and effect whispered across the centuries, linking us together. And the voice continued deeply, as if echoing down hollow aisles of stone.

I heard the words in the shadowy spaces of that old-world crypt, rather than among the plush furniture of these Edinburgh lodgings.

"We three are at last together again, and must bring the Balance to a final close. As the stars are but dust upon the pathway of the gods, so our mistakes are but dust upon the pathway of our lives. What we let fall together, we must together remove."

Then, with an abruptness that pertained sometimes to these curious irruptions from the past, the values shifted. He became more and more the Julius LeVallon whom I knew to-day. Speech changed to a modern and more usual key. And the effect upon myself was of vague relief, for while the impression of great drama did not wholly pass, the uneasiness lightened in me, and I found my tongue again. I told my own experience—all that I had seen and felt and thought. Brewing the cocoa, and setting out the bread and marmalade upon the table, Julius listened to every word without interruption. Our intimacy was complete again as though no separation, either of lives or days, had been between us.

"Inside me, of course," I concluded the recital; "in some kind of interior sight I saw it all——"

"The only true sight," he declared, "though what you saw was but the reflection at second-hand of memories I evoked in there." He pointed to the inner room. "In there," he went on significantly, "where nothing connected with the Present enters, no thought, no presence, nothing that can disturb or interrupt,—in there you would see and remember as vividly as I myself. The room is prepared.... The channels all are open. As it was, my pictures flashed into you and set the great chain moving. For no life is isolated; all is shared; and every detail, animate or so-called inanimate, belongs inevitably to every other."

"Yet what I saw was so much clearer than our schoolday memories," I said. "Those pictures, for instance, of the pastoral people where we came together first."

An expression of yearning passed into his eyes as he answered.

"Because in our Temple Days you led the life of the soul instead of the body merely. The soul alone remembers. There lies the permanent record. Only what has touched

the soul, therefore, is recoverable—the great joys, great sorrows, great adventures that have reached it. You feel them. The rest are but fugitive pictures of scenery that accompanied the spiritual disturbances. Each body you occupy has a different brain that stores its own particular series. But true memory is in, and of, the Soul. Few have any true soul-life at all; few, therefore, have anything to remember!"

His low voice ran on and on, charged with deep earnestness; his very atmosphere seemed to vibrate with the conviction of his words; about his face occasionally were flashes of that radiance in which his body of light—his inmost being—dwelt for ever. I remember moving the marmalade pot from its precarious position on the table edge, lest his gestures should send it flying! But I remember also that the haunting reality of "other days and other places" lay about us while we talked, so that the howling of the storm outside seemed far away and quite unable to affect us. We knew perfect communion in that dingy room. We felt together.

"But it is difficult, often painful, to draw the memories up again," he went on, still speaking of recovery, "for they lie so deeply coiled about the very roots of joy and grief. Things of the moment smother the older pictures. The way of recovery is arduous, and not many would deem the sacrifice involved worth while. It means plunging into yourself as you must plunge below the earth if you would see the starlight while the sun is in the sky. To-day's sunlight hides the stars of yesterday. Yet all is accessible—the entire series of the soul's experiences, and real forgetting is not possible."

A movement as of wind seemed to pass between us over the faded carpet, bearing me upwards while he spoke, sweeping me with his own conviction of our eternal ancestry and of our unending future.

"We have made ourselves exactly what we are. We are making our future at this very minute—now!" I exclaimed. The justice of the dream inspired me. Great courage, a greater hope awoke.

He smiled, opening his arms with a gesture that took in the world.

“Your aspirations, hopes and fears, all that has ever burned vitally at your centre, every spiritual passion that uplifted or enticed, each deep endeavour that seeded your present tendencies and talents—everything, in fact, strong enough to have touched your Soul—sends up its whirling picture of beauty or dismay at the appointed time. The disentangling may be difficult, but all are there, for you yourself are their actual, living Record. Feeling, not thinking, best unravels them—the primitive vision as of children—the awareness of kinship with everything about you. The sense of separateness and isolation vanishes, and the soul recovers the consciousness of sharing all the universe. There is no loneliness; there is no more fear.”

Ah, how we talked that night of tempest through! What thoughts and dreams and possibilities Julius sent thundering against my mind as with the power of the loosed wind and rain outside. The scale of life became immense, each tiniest detail of act and thought important with the sacredness of some cosmic ceremonial that it symbolised. Yet to his words alone this power was not due, but rather to some force of driving certitude in himself that brought into me too a similar conviction. The memory of it hardened in the sands of my imagination, as it were, so that the result has remained, although the language by which he made it seem so reasonable has gone.

I smoked my pipe; and, as the smoke curled upwards, I watched his face of pallid marble and the mop of ebony hair that set off so well the brilliance of the eyes. He looked, I thought to myself, like no human being I had ever seen before.

“And sometimes,” I remember hearing, “the memories from a later section may suddenly swarm across an earlier one—confusing the sight, perhaps, just when it is getting clear. A few hours ago, for instance, my search was interrupted by an inrush of two more recent layers—Eastern ones—which came to obliterate with their

vividness the older, dimmer ones I sought."

I mentioned what the frightened woman imagined she had seen.

"She caught a reflected fragment too," he said. "So strong a picture was bound to spread."

"Then was Mrs. Garnier with us too before?" I asked, as we burst out laughing.

"Not in that sense, no. It was the glamour that touched her only—second-sight, as she might call it. She is sensitive to impressions, nothing more."

He came over and sat closer to me. The web of his language folded closer too. The momentum of his sincerity threw itself against all my prejudices, so that I, too, saw the serpentine vista of these previous lives stretching like a river across the ages. To this day I see his tall, slim figure, his face with the clear pale skin, the burning eyes; now he leaned across the table, now stood up to emphasise some phrase, now paced the floor of that lamp-lit students' lodging-house, while he spoke of the long battling of our souls together, sowing thoughts and actions whose consequences must one day be reaped without evasion. The scale of his Dream was vast indeed, its prospect austere and merciless, yet the fundamental idea of justice made it beautiful, as its inclusion of all Nature made it grand.

To Julius LeVallon the soul was indeed unconquerable, and man master of his fate. Death lost its ugliness and terror; the sense of broken, separated life was replaced by the security of a continuous existence, whole, unhurried, eternal, affording ample time for all development, accepting joy and suffering as the justice of results, but never as of reward or punishment. There was no caprice; there was no such thing as chance.

Then, as the night wore slowly on, and the wind died down, and the wonderful old town lay sleeping peacefully, we talked at last of that one thing towards which all our conversation tended subconsciously: our future together and the experiment that it held in store for us—with her.

I cannot hope to set down here the words by which this singular being led me, half accepting, to the edge of understanding that his conception might be right. To that edge, however, I somehow felt my mind was coaxed. I looked over that edge. I saw for a moment something of his magnificent panorama. I realised a hint of possibility in his shining scheme. But it is beyond me to report the persuasive reasonableness of all I heard, for the truth is that Julius spoke another language—a language incomprehensible to my mind to-day. His words, indeed, were those of modern schools and books, but the spirit that ensouled them belonged to a forgotten time. Only by means of some strange inner sympathy did I comprehend him. Another, an older type of consciousness, perhaps, woke in me. As with the pictures, this also seemed curiously familiar as I listened. Something in me old as the stars and wiser than the brain both heard and understood.

For the elemental forces he held to be Intelligences that share the life of the cosmos in a degree enormously more significant than anything human life can claim. Mother Earth, for him, was no mere poetic phrase. There was spiritual life in Nature as there was spiritual life in men and women. The insignificance of the latter was due to their being cut off from the great sources of supply—to their separation from Nature. Under certain conditions, and with certain consequences, it was possible to obtain these powers which, properly directed, might help the entire world. This experiment we had once made—and failed.

The method I already understood in a certain measure; but the rest escaped my comprehension. Memory failed to reconstruct it for me; vision darkened; his words conveyed no meaning. It was beyond me. Somewhere, somehow, personal love had entered to destroy the effective balance that ensured complete success. Yet, equally, the power of love which is quintessential sympathy, was necessary.

What, however, I did easily understand was that the object of that adventure was noble, nothing meanly personal in it anywhere; and, further, that to restore the

damaged equilibrium by returning these particular powers to their rightful places, there must be an exact reproduction of the conditions of evocation—that is, the three original participants must be together again—a human system must serve again as channel.

And the essential fact of all that passed between us on this occasion was that I gave again my promise. When the necessary conditions were present—I would not fail him. This is the memory I have carried with me through the twenty years of our subsequent separation. I gave my pledge.

The storm blew itself to rest behind the hills; the rain no longer set the windows rattling; the hush of early morning stole down upon the sleeping city. We had talked the night away. He seemed aware—I know not how—that we stood upon the brink of going apart for years. There was great tenderness in his manner, his voice, his gestures. Turning to me a moment as the grey light crept past the curtains, he peered into my face as though he would revive lost centuries with the passion of his eyes. He took my hand and held it, while a look of peace and trust passed over his features as though the matter of the future were already then accomplished.

He led me silently across the room towards the door. I turned instinctively; words rose up in me, but words that found no utterance. A deep emotion held me dumb. Then, as I opened the door, I found the old, familiar name again:

“Concerighé ... Friend of a million years...!”

But no sentence followed it. He touched my arm. A cold wind seemed to pass between us. I firmly believe that somehow he foresaw the long interval of separation that was coming. Something about him seemed to fade; I saw him less distinctly; my sight, perhaps, was blurred with the strain of these long hours—hours the like of which I was not to know again for many years. That magical name has many a time echoed since in my heart away from him, as it echoed then across the darkened little hall-way of those Edinburgh lodgings: “Concerighé! Friend of a million years!”

Side by side we went down the granite steps of the spiral staircase to the street. Julius opened the big front door. I heard the rattling of the iron chain. A breeze from the sea blew salt against our faces, then ran gustily along the streets. Behind the Calton Hill showed a crimson streak of dawn. A line of clouds, half rosy and half gold, ran down the sky. No living being was astir. I heard only the noisy whirling of the iron chimney-pots against the morning wind.

And then his voice:

“Good-bye—— Until we meet again....”

He pressed my hands. I looked into his eyes. He stepped back into the shadow of the porch. The door closed softly.

CHAPTER XIV

“Forgive? O yes! How lightly, lightly said!

Forget? No, never, while the ages roll,

Till God slay o’er again the undying dead,

And quite unmake my soul!”—Mary Coleridge.

I stepped down, it seemed, into a lilliputian world where the grander issues no longer drew the souls of men. The deep and simple things were fled, the old Nature gods withdrawn. The scale of life had oddly shrunk.

I saw the names above the shuttered shops with artificial articles for sale—“11-¾d. a yard”—on printed paper labels. The cheapness of a lesser day flashed everywhere.

I passed the closed doors of a building where people flocked to mumble that no good was in them, while a man proclaimed in a loud voice things he hardly could believe. A few streets behind me Julius LeVallon stood in the shadows of another porch, solitary and apart, yet communing with stars and hills and seas, survival from a vital, vanished age when life was realised everywhere and the elemental Nature Powers walked hand in hand with men.

Through the deserted streets I made my way across the town to my own little student's flat on the Morningside where I then lived. Gradually the crimson dawn slipped into a stormy sunrise. I watched the Pentlands take the gold, and the Castle rock turn ruddy; a gentle mist lay over Leith below; a pool of deep blue shadow marked the slumbering Old Town.

But about my heart at this magic hour stirred the dawn-winds of a thousand ancient sunrises, and I felt the haunting atmosphere of other days and other places steal up through the mists of immemorial existences. I thought of the whole great series, each life rising and setting like a little day, each with its dawn and noon and sunset, each with its harvest of failure and success, of joy and sorrow, of friendships formed and enemies forgiven, of ideals realised or abandoned—pouring out of the womb of time and slowly bringing the soul through the discipline of all possible experience towards that perfection which proclaims it one with the entire universe—the Deity.

And a profound weariness fell about my spirit as I went. I became aware of my own meagre enthusiasm. I welcomed the conception of some saviour who should do it all for me. I knew myself unequal to the gigantic task. In that moment the heroic figure of Julius seemed remote from reality, a towering outline in the sky, an austere embodiment of legendary myth. The former passionate certainty that he was right dwindled amid wavering doubts. The perplexities of life came back upon me with tormenting power. I lost the coherent vision of consistent and logical beauty that he inspired. It was all too vast for me.

This reaction was natural enough, though for a long time mood chased mood across my troubled mind, each battling for supremacy. The materialism of the day, proudly strutting with its boundless assurance and its cock-sure knowledge, regained possession of my thoughts. The emptiness of scholastic theology no longer seemed so hideously apparent. It was pain to let the other go, but go it did—though never, perhaps, so completely as I then believed.

By insignificant details the change revealed itself. I recalled that I was due that very afternoon at a luncheon where “intellectual” folk would explain away the soul with a single scientific formula, and where learned heads would wag condescendingly as they murmured “But there’s no evidence to prove that, you know ...” ... and Julius rose before me in another light at once—Pagan, dreamer, monster of exploded superstitions, those very hills where he evoked the sylvan deities, a momentary hallucination....

Then again, quite suddenly, it was the chatterers at the luncheon party who seemed unreal, and all their clever patter about the “movements” of the day mere shallow verbiage. The hoardings of the town were blue and yellow with gaudy election posters, but the sky was aflame with the grand old message of the Sun God, written in eternal hieroglyphs of gold and red upon the clouds that brushed the hills. The elemental deities stormed thundering by. And, instead of scholars laying down the letter of their little law, I heard the tones of Concerighé calling across the centuries the names of great belief, of greater beauty.

And the older pageantry stole back across the world.

Almost it was in me to turn and seek ... with him ... that soul-knowledge which ran through all the “sections.”... Yet the younger fear oppressed me. The endless journey, the renunciation and suffering involved, the incessant, tireless striving, with none to help but one’s own unconquerable will—this, and a host of other feelings that lay beyond expression, bore down upon me with their cold, glacier power. I thought of Julius with something of reverence akin to terror.... I despised myself. I also understood why the majority need priests and creeds and formulæ to help them.... The will, divorced from Nature, was so small a thing!

When I entered my rooms the sunlight lay upon the carpet, and never before had it seemed so welcome or so comforting. I could then and there have worshipped the great body that sent it forth. But, instead, in a state of exhaustion and weariness, I

flung myself upon the bed. Yet, while I slept, it seemed I left that little modern room and entered the region of great, golden days “when the sun was younger.” In very different attire, I took my place in the blue-robed circle, a portion of some ancient, gorgeous ceremonial that was nearer to the primitive beauty, when the “circles swallowed the sun,” and the elemental Powers were accessible to every heart.

It was not surprising that I slept till dusk, missing my lectures and the luncheon party as well; but it was distinctly surprising to find myself wakened by a knocking at the door for a telegram that summoned me south forthwith. And only in the train, anxiously counting the minutes in the hope that I might find my father still alive, did the possible significance of LeVallon’s final words come back upon my troubled mind: “Until we meet again.”

For little did I guess that my father’s death was to prevent my returning to the University, that my career would be changed and hastened owing to an unexpected lack of means, that my occasional letters to Julius were to be returned “unknown,” or that my next word of him would be received twenty years later in a room overlooking the Rhine at Bâle, where I have attempted to set down these difficult notes of reminiscence....

Book III THE CHÂLET IN THE JURA MOUNTAINS

“He (man) first clothes the gods in the image of his own innermost nature; he personifies them as modes of his own greater consciousness. All this was native to him when he still felt himself kin with Nature; when he felt rather than thought, when he followed instinct rather than ratiocination. But for long centuries this feeling of kinship with Nature has been gradually weakened by the powerful play of that form of mind peculiar to man; until he has at last reached a stage when he finds himself largely divorced from Nature, to such an extent indeed that he treats her as something foreign and apart from himself....

"He seems at present, at any rate in the persons of most of the accredited thinkers of the West, to be absolutely convinced that no other mode of mind can exist except his own mode.... To say that Nature thinks, he regards as an entire misuse of language.... That Nature has feelings even, he will not allow; to speak of love and hate among the elements is for him a puerile fancy the cultured mind has long outgrown.

"The sole joy of such a mind would almost seem to be the delight of expelling the life from all forms and dissecting their dead bodies."—"Some Mystical Adventures" (G. R. S. Mead).

CHAPTER XV

For a long time that letter lay on my table like a challenge—neither accepted nor refused. Something that had slumbered in me for twenty years awoke. The enchantment of my youthful days, long since evaporated as I believed, rose stealthily upon me at the sight of this once familiar handwriting. LeVallon, of course, had found the woman. And my word was pledged.

To say that I hesitated, however, would be no more true than to say that I debated or considered. The first effect upon me was a full-blown amazement that I could ever have come under the spell of so singular a kind or have promised co-operation in anything so wildly preposterous as Julius had proposed. The second effect, however—and, as it turned out, the deeper one—was different. I experienced a longing, a thrill of anticipation, a sense even of joy—I know not what to call it; while in its train came a hint, though the merest hint, of that vague uneasiness I had known in my school and university days.

Yet by some obscure mental process difficult to explain, I found myself half caught already in consent. I answered the letter, asking instructions how to reach him in his distant valley of the Jura Mountains. Some love of adventure—so I flattered myself—long denied by my circumscribed conditions of life, prompted the decision in part. For in the heart of me I obviously wished to go; and, briefly, it was the heart

of me that finally went.

I passed some days waiting for a reply, LeVallon's abode being apparently inaccessible to the ordinary service of the post—"poste restante" in a village marked only upon the larger maps where, I judged, he had to fetch his letters. And those days worked their due effect upon me; they were filled with questions to which imagination sought the answers. How would the intervening years have dealt with him? What changes would have come upon him with maturity? And this woman—what melancholy splendours brought from "old, forgotten, far-off things" would she bring with her down into the prosaic conditions of this materialistic century? What signs and evidences would there be that she, like himself, was an adept at life, seeking eternal things, discerning what was important, an "old soul" taught of the gods and charged with the ideals of another day? I saw her already in imagination—a woman of striking appearance and unusual qualities. And, how had he found her? A hundred similar questions asked themselves, but, chief among them, two: Would she—should I, remember?

The time passed slowly; my excitement grew; sometimes I hesitated, half repented, almost laughed, but never once was tempted really to change my mind. For in the deeper part of me, now so long ignored, something of these ancient passions blew to flame again; symptoms of that original dread increased; there rose once more the whisper "we are eternally together; the thing is true!" And on the seventh day, when the porter handed me the letter, it almost seemed that Julius stood beside me, beckoning. I felt his presence; the old magic of his personality tightened up a thousand loosened threads; belief was unwillingly renewed.

The instructions were very brief, no expression of personal feeling accompanying them. Julius counted on my fidelity. It had never occurred to him that I could fail. I left my heavy luggage in the care of the hotel and packed the few things necessary for the journey. The notes of our school and university days I have just jotted down I

sent by post to my London chambers. A spirit of recklessness seemed in me. I was off into fairyland, mystery and wonder about me, possibly romance. Nothing mattered; work could wait; I possessed a small competency of my own; the routine of my life was dull and uninspiring. Also I was alone in the world, for my early attachment had not resulted in marriage, and I knew no other home than that of chambers, restaurants, and the mountain inns where my holidays were usually spent. I welcomed the change with its promise of adventure—and I went. This feeling of welcome owned perhaps a deeper origin than I realised.

Travelling via Bienne and Neuchâtel to a point beyond the latter town, I took thence, according to instructions, a little mountain railway that left the lake behind and plunged straight into the purple valleys of the Jura range. Deep pine woods spread away on all sides as we climbed a winding ravine among the folds of these soft blue mountains that are far older than the Alps. Scarred cliffs and ridges of limestone gleamed white against the velvet forests, now turning red and yellow in the sunset, but no peaks were visible and no bare summits pricked the sky. Thick and soft, the trees clothed all. Their feathery presence filled the air. The clatter of the train seemed muffled, and the gathering shadows below the eastern escarpments took on that rich black hue that ancient forests lend to the very atmosphere above them. We passed into a world where branches, moss and flowers muted every sound with a sense of undisturbable peace. The softness of great age reigned with delicious silence. The very engine puffed uphill on wheels of plush.

Occasional hamlets contributed a few wood-cutters by way of passengers; strips of half-cleared valley revealed here and there a farm-house with dark brown walls and spreading roof; little sentiers slipped through the pine trees to yet further recesses of unfrequented woods; but nowhere did I see a modern building, a country house, nor any dwelling that might be occupied by other than simple peasant folk. Suggestion of tourists there was absolutely none; no trees striped blue and yellow by Improvement Committees; no inns with central-heating and tin banners stating that

touring clubs endorsed them; no advertisements at all; only this air of remote and kindly peace, the smoke of peat fires, and the odour of living woods stealing upon the dusk.

The feeling grew that I crossed a threshold into a region that lay outside the common happenings of the world; life here must be very gentle, wonderful, distinguished, and things might come to pass that would be true yet hard to explain by the standards of the busy cities. Those cities, indeed, seemed very far away, unreal, and certainly unimportant. For the leisurely train itself was almost make-believe, and the station officials mere uniformed automata. The normal world, in a word, began to fade a little. I was aware once more of that bigger region in which Julius LeVallon lived—the cosmic point of view. The spell of our early days revived, worked on my nerves and thought, altering my outlook sensibly even at this early stage of my return.

The autumn afternoon was already on the wane when at length I reached C——, an untidy little watch-making town, and according to instructions left the train. I searched the empty platform in vain for any sign of Julius. Instead of the tall, familiar figure, a little dark-faced man stood abruptly before me, stared into my face with the questioning eyes of a child or animal, and exclaimed bluntly enough "Monsieur le professeur?" We were alone on the deserted platform, the train already swallowed by the forest, no porter, of course, visible, and signs of civilisation generally somewhat scanty.

This man, sent by Julius, made a curious impression on me as I gave him my bag and prepared to follow him to the cart I saw standing outside the station. His mode of addressing me seemed incongruous. Of peasant type, with black moustaches far too big for his features, and bushy eyebrows reminding me of tree-lichen, there was something in his simplicity of gesture and address that suggested a faithful animal. His voice was not unlike a growl; he was delighted to have found me, but did not

accept me yet; he showed his pleasure in his honest smile and in certain quick, jerky movements of the body that made me think how a clever caricaturist could see the dog in him. Yet in his keen and steady eyes there was another look that did not encourage levity; one would not lightly trifle with him. There was something about the alert little fellow that insisted on respect, and a touch of the barbaric counteracted the comedy of the aggressive eyebrows and moustache. In the eyes, unflinching yet respectful, I fancied to detect another thing as well: a nameless expression seen sometimes in the eyes of men who have known uncommon things—habitual amazement grown slowly to unwilling belief. He was a man, certainly, who would serve his master to the death and ask no questions.

But also he would not answer questions; I could get nothing out of him, as the springless cart drove slowly up the steep mountain road behind the pair of sturdy horses. Oui and non and peut-être summed up his conversational powers, till I gave up trying and lapsed into silence. Perhaps he had not "passed" me yet, not quite approved me. He was just the sort of faithful, self-contained servant Julius required, no doubt, and, as a conductor into mysterious adventure, a by no means inadequate figure. Name, apparently, he had also none, for Julius, as I learned later, referred to him as simply "he." But my imagination instantly christened him "The Dog-Man," and as such the inscrutable fellow lives in my memory to this day. He seemed just one degree above the animal stage.

But while thought was busy with a dozen speculations, the dusk had fallen steadily, and the character of the country, I saw, had changed. It was more rugged and inhospitable, the valleys narrower, the forests very deep, with taller and more solemn trees, and no signs anywhere of the axe. An hour ago we had left the main road and turned up a rough, deep-rutted track that only the feet of oxen seemed to have used. We moved in comparative gloom, though far overhead the heights shone still with the gold of sunset. For a long time we had seen no peasant huts, no sign of habitation, nor passed a single human being. Wood-cutters and charcoal-burners

apparently had not penetrated here, and the track, I gathered, was used in summer only and led to some lonely farm among the upper pastures. It was very silent; no wind stirred the sea of branches; no animal life showed itself; and the only moving things beside ourselves were the jays that now and again flew across the path or announced their invisible presence in the woods by raucous screaming.

Although the ceaseless jolting of the cart was severe, the long journey most fatiguing, I was sensible of the deep calm that brooded everywhere. After the bluster of the aggressive Alps, this peaceful Jura stole on the spirit with a subtle charm. Something whispered that I was not alone, but that a friendly touch of welcome pervaded the cool recesses of these wooded hills. The sense of hostile isolation inspired by the snowy peaks, that faint dismay one knows sometimes at the foot of towering summits, was wholly absent here. I felt myself, not alien to these rolling mountains, but akin. I was known and hospitably admitted, not merely ignored, nor let in at my own grave risk. The spirit of the mountains here was kind.

Yet that I was aware of this at all made me realise the presence of another thing as well: It was in myself, not in these velvet valleys. For, while the charm of the scenery acted as a sedative, I realised that something alert in me noted the calming influence and welcomed it. That did not go to sleep—it resolutely kept awake. A faint instinct of alarm had been stimulated, if ever so slightly, from the moment I left the train and touched the atmosphere of my silent guide, the “Dog-Man.” It was, of course, that he brought his master nearer. Julius and I should presently meet again, shake hands, look into each other’s eyes—I should hear his voice and share again the glamour of his personality. Also there would be—a third.

It was an element, obviously, in a process of readjustment of my being which had begun the moment I received his letter; it had increased while I sat in the Bâle hotel and jotted down those early recollections—an ingredient in the new grouping of emotions and sensations constituting myself which received the attack, so to speak,

of what came later. My consciousness was slowly changing.

Yet this, I think, was all I felt at the moment: a perfectly natural anticipatory excitement, a stirring wonder, and behind them both a hint of shrinking that was faint uneasiness. It was the thought of the woman that caused the last, the old premonition that something grave involving the three of us would happen. The potent influences of my youth were already at work again.

My entrance into the secluded spot Julius had chosen came unexpectedly; we were suddenly upon it; the effect was almost dramatic. The last farm-house had been left behind an hour or more, and we had been winding painfully up a steep ascent that led through a tunnel of dark, solemn trees, when the forest abruptly stopped, and a little, cup-like valley lay before me, bounded on three sides by jagged limestone ridges. Open to the sky like some lonely flower, it lay hidden and remote upon this topmost plateau, difficult of access to the world. I saw cleared meadows of emerald green beneath the peeping stars; a stream ran gurgling past my feet; the surface of a little lake held the shadows of the encircling cliffs; and at the further end, beneath the broken outline of the ridges, lights twinkled in a peasant's châlet.

The effect was certainly of Fairyland. The stillness and cool air, after the closeness of the heavy forest, seemed to bring the stars much nearer. There was a clean, fresh perfume; the atmosphere crystal clear, the calm profound. I felt a little private world about me, self-contained, and impressive with a quiet dignity of its own. Unknown, unspoilt, serene and exquisite, it lay hidden here for some purpose that vulgar intrusion might not discover. If ever an enchanted valley existed, it was here before my eyes.

"So this is the chosen place—this isolated spot of beauty!" My heart leaped to think that Julius stood already within reach of my voice, possibly of my sight as well. No meeting-place, surely, could have been more suitable.

The cart moved slowly, and the horses, steam rising from their heated bodies against

the purple trees, stepped softly upon the meadow-land. The sound of hoofs and wheels was left behind, we silently moved up the gentle slope towards the lights. Night stepped with us from the hills; the forest paused and waited at a distance; only the faint creaking of the wheels upon damp grass and the singing of the little stream were audible. The air grew sharp with upland perfumes. We passed the diminutive lake that mirrored the first stars. And a curious feeling reached me from the sky and from the lonely ridges; a nameless emotion caught my heart a moment; some thrill of high, unearthly loveliness, familiar as a dream yet gone again before it could be seized, mirrored itself in the depths of me like those buried stars within the water—when, suddenly, a figure detached itself from the background of trees and cliffs, and towards me over the dew-drenched grass moved—Julius LeVallon.

He came like a figure from the sky, the forest, the distant ridges. The spirit of this marvellous spot came with him. He seemed its incarnation. Whether he first drew me from the cart, or whether I sprang down to meet him, is impossible to say, for in that big moment the thousand threads that bound us together with their separate tensions slipped into a single cable of overwhelming strength. We stood upon the wet meadow, close to one another, hands firmly clasped, eyes gazing into eyes.

"Julius—it's really you—at last!" I found to say—then his reply in the old, unchanging voice that made me tremble a little as I heard it: "I knew you would come—friend of a million years!" He laughed a little; I laughed too.

"I promised." It seemed incredible to me that I had ever hesitated.

"Ages ago," I heard his answer. It was like the singing of the stream that murmured past our feet. "Ages ago."

I was aware that he let go my hand. We were moving through the dripping grass, crossing and recrossing the little stream. The mountains rose dark and strong about us. I heard the cart lumbering away with creaking wheels towards the barn. Across the heavens the stars trailed their golden pattern more and more thickly. I saw them

gleaming in the unruffled lake. I smelt the odour of wood-smoke that came from the châlet chimney.

We walked in silence. Those stars, those changeless hills, deep woods and singing rivulet—primitive and eternal things—accompanied us. They were the right witnesses of our meeting. And a night-wind, driving the dusk towards the west, woke in the forest and came out to touch our faces. Splendour and loneliness closed about us, heralding Powers of Nature that were here not yet explained away.

CHAPTER XVI

"We cannot limit the types, superhuman or subhuman, that may obtain. We can 'set no bounds to the existence or powers of sentient beings'—a consideration of the highest importance, as well, perhaps, practical as theoretical.... The discovery of Superhumans of an exalted kind may be only a question of time, and the attainment of knowledge on this head one of the most important achievements in the history of races that are to come."—"The Individual and Reality" (Fawcett).

Something certainly tightened in my throat as we went across that soaking grass towards the building that was half châlet, half farm-house, with steep, heavy roof and wide veranda. The lights beckoned to us through the little windows. I saw a shadow slip across the casement window on the upper floor. And my question was out of its own accord before I could prevent it. My mind held in that moment no other thought at all; my pulses quickened.

"So, Julius, you have—found her?"

And he answered as though no interval of years had been; as though still we stood in the dawn upon the steps of the Edinburgh lodging-house. The tone was matter of fact and without emotion:

"She is with me here—my wife—eager to see you at last."

The words dropped down between us like lightning into the earth, and a sense of

chill, so faint I hardly recognised it, passed over me. Emotion followed instantly, yet emotion, again, so vague, so odd, so distant in some curious way, that I found no name for it. A shadow as, perhaps, of disappointment fell on my thoughts. Yet, assuredly, I had expected no different statement. He had said the right and natural thing. He had found the woman of his dream and married her. What lurked, I wondered nervously, behind my lame congratulations? Why was I baffled and ashamed? What made my speech come forth with a slight confusion between the thought and its utterance? For—almost—I had been about to say another thing, and had stopped myself just in time.

"And she—remembers?" I asked quickly—point-blank, and bluntly enough—and felt mortified the same instant by my premature curiosity. Before I could modify my words, or alter them into something less aggressively inquisitive, he turned and faced me, holding my arm to make me look at him. His skin wore the familiar marble pallor as of old; I saw it shine against the dark building where the light from the window caught it.

"Me?" he asked quietly, "or—you?"

"Anything," I stammered, "anything at all of—of the past, I meant. Forgive me for asking so abruptly; I——"

The words froze on my lips at the expression that came into his face. He merely looked at me and smiled. No more than that, so far as accurate description goes, and yet enough to make my heart stop dead as a stone, then start thumping against my ribs as though a paddle-wheel were loose in me. For it was not Julius in that instant who looked at me. His white skin masked another; behind and through his eyes this other stared straight into my own; and this other was familiar to me, yet unknown. The look disappeared again as instantaneously as it came.

"You shall judge for yourself," I heard, as he drew me on towards the house.

His tone made further pointed questioning impossible, rousing my curiosity higher

than ever before. Again I saw the woman in my imagination; I pictured her as a figure half remembered. As the shadow had slid past the casement of the upper floor, so her outline slipped now across a rising screen of memory not entirely obliterated.

The presentment was even vivid: she would be superb. I saw her of the Greek goddess type, with calm, inscrutable eyes, majestic mien, the suggestion of strange knowledge in her quiet language and uncommon gestures. She would be genuinely distinguished, remarkable in mind as well as in appearance. Already, as we crossed the veranda, the thrill of anticipation caught me. She would be standing in the hall to greet us, or, seated before an open fire of logs, would rise out of the shadows to meet the friend of whom she had doubtless "heard so much," and with whom such strange things were now to be accomplished. The words Julius next actually uttered, accordingly, reached me with a sense of disappointment that was sharp, and the entire picture collapsed like a house of cards. The reaction touched my sense of comedy almost.

"I think she is still preparing your room," he said. "I had just taken the water up when I heard your cart. We have little help, or need for help. A girl from the farm in the lower valley brings butter sometimes. We do practically everything ourselves." I murmured something, courtesy keeping a smile in check; and then he added, "We chose this solitude on purpose, of course—she chose it, rather—and you are the first visitor since we came here months ago. We were only just ready for you; it was good that you were close—that it was so easy for you to get here."

"I am looking forward immensely to seeing Mrs. LeVallon," I replied, but such a queer confusion of times and places had fallen on my mind that my tongue almost said "to seeing her again."

He smiled. "She will be with us in the morning," he added quietly, "if not to-night."

This simple exchange of commonplaces let down the tension of my emotions

pleasantly. He turned towards me as he spoke, and for the first time, beneath the hanging oil lamp, I noted the signature of the intervening years. There was a look of power in eyes and mouth that had not been there previously. I was aware of a new distance between us, and a new respect came with it. Julius had “travelled.” He seemed to look down upon me from a height. But, at the same time, the picture his brief words conveyed had the effect of restoring me to my normal world again. For nothing more banal could have been imagined, and side by side with the chagrin to my sense of the theatrical ran also a distinct relief. It came as a corrective to the loneliness and grandeur of the setting, and checked the suggestion lying behind the hint that they were “only just ready” for my coming.

My emotions sank comfortably to a less inflated level. I murmured something politely as we passed into the so-called “sitting-room” together, and for a moment the atmosphere of my own practical world came in strongly with me. The sense of the incongruous inevitably was touched. The immense fabric of my friend’s beliefs seemed in that instant to tremble a little. That the woman he—we—had been waiting for through centuries, this “old soul” taught of the ancient wisdom and aware of august, forgotten worship, should be “making a bed upstairs” woke in me a sense of healthy amusement. Julius took up the water! She was engaged in menial acts! A girl brought butter from a distant farm! And I could have laughed—but for one other thing that lay behind and within the comedy. For that other thing was—pathos. There was a kind of yearning pain at the heart of it: a pain whose origins were too remote to be discoverable by the normal part of me.

It touched the poetry in me, too. For after the first disturbing effect—that it was not adequate—I felt slowly another thing: that this commonplace meeting was far more likely to be true than the dramatic sort I had anticipated. It was natural, it was simple; all big adventures of the soul begin in a quiet way. Obviously, as yet, the two selves in me were not yet comfortably readjusted.

I became aware, too, that Julius was what I can only call somewhere less human than before—more impersonal. He talked, he acted, he even looked as a figure might outside our world. I had no longer insight into his being as before. His life lay elsewhere, expresses it best perhaps. I can hardly present him as a man of flesh and blood. Emotion broke through so rarely.

And our talk that evening together—for Mrs. LeVallon put in no appearance—was ordinary, too. Julius, of course, as ever, used phrases that belonged to the world peculiarly his own, but he said nothing startling in the sense I had expected. No dramatic announcement came. He took things for granted in the way he always did, assuming my beliefs and theories were his own, and that my scepticism was merely due to the "mind" in me to-day. We had some supper together, a bowl of bread and milk the man brought in, and we talked of the intervening years as naturally as might be—but for this phraseology he favoured. When the man said "good night," Julius smiled kindly at him, and the fellow made a gesture of delight as though the attention meant far more to him than money. He reminded me again irresistibly, yet in no sense comically, of a faithful and devoted animal. Julius had patted him! It was delightful. An inarticulateness, as of the animal world, belonged to him. His rare words came out with effort, almost with difficulty. He looked his master straight in the eye, listened to orders with a personal interest mere servants never have, and, without a trace of servility in face or manner, hurried off gladly to fulfil them. The distress in the eyes alone still puzzled me.

"You have a treasure there," I said. "He seems devoted to you."

"A young soul," he said, "in a human body for the first time, still with the innocence and simplicity of the recent animal stage about his awakening self-consciousness. It is unmistakable...."

"What sleeps in the vegetable, dreams in the animal, wakes in the man," I said, remembering Leibnitz. "I'm glad we've left the earlier stages behind us." His

explanation interested me. “But that expression in his eyes,” I asked, “that look of searching, almost of anxiety?”

Julius replied thoughtfully. “My atmosphere acts upon him as a kind of forcing-house, perhaps. He is dimly aware of knowledge that lies, at present, too far beyond him—and yet he reaches out for it. Instinctive, but not yet intuitional. The privilege brings terror. Opportunities of growth so swift and concentrated involve bewilderment, even pain.”

“Pain?” I queried, interested as of old.

“Development is nothing but a series of little deaths. The soul passes so quickly to new stages.” He looked up searchingly into my face. “We knew that privilege once,” he added significantly; “we, too, knew special teaching.”

And, though at the moment I purposely ignored this reference to our “Temple Days,” I understood that this man’s neighbourhood might, indeed, have an unusual and stimulating effect upon a simple, ignorant type of mind. Even in my own case his presence gave me furiously to think. The “Dog-Man,” the more I observed him, was little more than a faithful creature standing on his hind legs with considerable surprise and enjoyment that he was able to do so—that “little more” being quite possibly self-consciousness. He showed his teeth when I met him at the station, whereas, now that I was accepted by his master, his approval was unlimited. He gave willing service in the form of love.

While Julius continued speaking, as though nothing else existed at the moment, I observed him carefully. My eyes assessed the changes in the outward “expression” of himself. He was thinner, slighter than before; there was an increased balance and assurance in his manner; a poise not present in our earlier days; but to say that he looked older seemed almost a misuse of language. Though the eyes were stronger, steadier, the lines in the skin more deeply cut, the outline of the features chiselled with more decision, these, even in combination, added no signature of age to the

general expression of high beauty that was his. The years had not coarsened, but etherealised the face. Two other things, moreover, impressed me: the texture of skin and flesh had refined away, so that the inner light of his enthusiasm shone through; and—there was a marked increase in what I must term the “feel” of his immediate atmosphere or presence. Always electric and alive, it now seemed doubly charged. Against that dark inner screen where the mind visualises pictorially, he rose in terms of radiant strength. Immense potency lay suppressed in him; Powers—spiritual or Nature Powers—were in attendance. He had acquired a momentum that was in some sense both natural and super-human. It was not unlike the sense of power that great natural scenes evoke in those who are receptive—mountains, landscapes, forests. It was elemental. I felt him immense, at the head of an invisible procession, as it were, a procession from the sky, the heights, the woods, the stars.

And a touch of eeriness stole over me. I was aware of strange vitality in this lonely valley; and I was aware of it—through him. I stood, as yet, upon the outer fringe. Its remoteness from the modern world was not a remoteness of space alone, but of—condition.

There was, however, another thing impossible to ignore—that somewhere in this building there moved a figure already for me mysterious and half legendary. Upstairs, not many feet away from us, her step occasionally audible by the creaking of the boards, she moved, breathing, thinking, listening, hearing our voices, almost within touching distance of our hands. There was a hint of the fabulous in it somewhere.

And, realising her near presence, I felt a curious emotion rising through me as from a secret spring. Its character, veiled by interest and natural anticipation, remained without a name. I could not describe it to myself even. Each time the thought of meeting her, that she was close, each time the sound of her soft footfall overhead was audible, this emotion rose in me pleasurably, yet with dread behind it

somewhere lurking. I caught it stirring; the stream of it went out to this woman I had never seen with the certain aim of intuitive direction; I surprised it in the act. But always something blocked it, hiding its name away. It escaped analysis. And, never more than instantaneous, passing the very moment it was born, it seemed to me that the opposing force that blocked it thus had to do with the man who was my host and my companion. It emanated from him—this objecting force. Julius checked it; though not with deliberate consciousness—he prevented my discovery of its nature. There was uncommon and mysterious sweetness in it, a sweetness as of long mislaid romance that lifted the heart. Yet it returned each time upon me, blank and unrewarded.

It was noticeable, moreover, that our talk avoided the main object of my presence here. LeVallon talked freely of other things, of the "Dog-Man," of myself—I gave him a quick sketch of my life in the long interval—of anything and everything but the purpose of my coming. There was, doubtless, awkwardness on my side, since my instinct was not to take my visit heavily, but to regard the fulfilment of my old-time pledge as an adventure, even a fantasy, rather than the serious acceptance of a grave "experiment." His reluctance, yet, was noticeable. He told me little or nothing of himself by way of exchange.

"To-morrow, when you are thoroughly rested from your journey," he met my least approach to the matter that occupied our deepest thoughts; or—"later, when you've had a little time to get acclimatised. You must let this place soak into you. Rest and sleep and take things easy; there is no hurry—here." Until I realised that he wished to establish a natural sympathy between my being and the enchanted valley, to avoid anything in the nature of surprise or shock which might disturb a desired harmony, and that, in fact, the absence of his wife and his silence about himself were both probably intentional. Conditions were to flow in upon me of their own accord and naturally, thus reducing possible hostility to a minimum. Before we rose to go to bed an hour later this had become a conviction in me. It was all thought out beforehand.

We stood a moment on the veranda to taste the keen, sweet air and see the dark mountains blocked against the stars. The sound of running water was all we heard. No lights, of course, showed anywhere. The meadows, beneath thin, frosty mist, lay very still. But the valley somehow rushed at me; it seemed so charged to the brim with stimulating activity and life. Something felt on the move in it. I stood in the presence of a crowd, waiting to combine with energies latent in it. I was aware of the idea of co-operation almost.

"One of the rare places," he said significantly when I remarked upon it cautiously, "where all is clean and open still. Humanity has been here, but humanity of the helpful kind. We went to infinite trouble to find it."

It was the first time he had come so near to the actual subject. I was aware he watched me, although his eyes were turned towards the darkness of the encircling forest.

"And—your wife likes it too?" For though I remembered that she had "chosen it," its loneliness must surely have dismayed an ordinary woman.

Still with his eyes turned out across the valley, he replied, "She chose it. Yes"—he hesitated slightly—"she likes it, though not always——" He broke off abruptly, still without looking at me, then added, as he came a little nearer, "But we both agree—we know it is the right place for us." That "us," I felt certain, included myself as well.

I did not press for explanation at the moment. I touched upon another thing.

"Humanity, you say, has been here! I should have thought some virgin corner of the earth would have suited your—purpose—better?" Then, as he did not answer for a moment, I added: "This is surely an ordinary peasant's house that you've made comfortable?"

He looked at me. A breath of wind went past us. I had the ghostly feeling someone had been listening; and a faint shiver ran across my nerves.

"A peasant's, yes, but not"—and he smiled—"an ordinary peasant. We found here an old man with his sons; they, or their forbears, had lived in isolation for generations in this valley; they were 'superstitious' in the sense of knowing Nature and understanding her. They believed, though in an imperfect and degraded form, what was once a living truth. They sold out to me quite willingly and are now established in the plains below. In this loneliness, away from modern 'knowledge,' they loved what surrounded them, and in that sense their love was worship. They felt-with the forests, with streams and mountains, with clouds and sky, with dawn and sunset, with the darkness too." He looked about him as he said it, and my eyes followed the direction of his own across the night. Again the valley stirred and moved throughout its whole expanse. "They also," Julius continued in a lower tone, his face closer than before, "felt-with the lightning and the wind."

I could have sworn some subtle change went through the surrounding darkness as he said the words. Fire and wind sprang at me, so vivid was their entrance into my thought. Again that slight shudder ran tingling up my spine.

"The place," he continued, "is therefore already prepared to some extent, for the channels that we need are partly open. The veil is here unthickened. We can work with less resistance."

"There is certainly peace," I agreed, "and an uplifting sense of beauty."

"You feel it?" he asked quickly.

"I feel extraordinarily and delightfully alive," I admitted truthfully.

Whereupon he turned to me with a still more significant rejoinder:

"Because that which worship and consecration-ceremonies ought to accomplish for churches—are meant to accomplish, rather—has never been here undone. All places were holy ground until men closed the channels with their unbelief and thus defiled them by cutting them off from the life about them."

I heard a window softly closing above us; we turned and went indoors. Julius put the

lamps out one by one, taking a candle to show me up the stairs. We went along the wooden passage. We passed several doors, beneath one of which I saw a line of light. My own room was at the further end, simply, almost barely, furnished, with just the actual necessaries. He paused at the threshold, shook my hand, said a short "good night," and left me, closing the door behind him carefully. I heard his step go softly down the passage. A door in the distance also opened and closed. Then complete silence hushed the entire house about me, yet a silence that was listening and alive. No ancient, turreted castle, with ivied walls and dungeons, with forsaken banqueting-hall or ghostly corridors, could possibly have felt more haunted than this peasant's châlet in the Jura fastnesses.

For a considerable time I sat at my open window, thinking; and yet not thinking so much, perhaps, as—relaxing. I was aware that my mind had been at high tension the entire day, almost on guard—as though seeking unconsciously to protect itself. Ever since the morning I had been on the alert against quasi-attack, and only now did I throw down my arms and abandon myself without reserve. Something I had been afraid of had shown itself friendly after all. A feeling of security stole over me; I was safe; gigantic powers were round me, oddly close, yet friendly, provided I, too, was friendly. It was a singular feeling of being helpless, yet cared for. The valley took hold of me and all my little human forces. To set myself against it would be somehow dangerous, but to go with it, adopting its overmastering stride, was safety. This became suddenly clear to me—that I must be sympathetic and that hostility on my part might involve disaster.

Here, apparently, was the first symptom of that power which Julius declared was derived from "feeling-with." I began to understand another thing as well; I recalled his choice of words—that the veil hereabouts was "unthickened" and the channels "open." He did not say the veil was thin, the channels cleared. It was in its native, primitive condition.

I sat by the window, letting the valley pour through and over me. It flooded my being with its calm and beauty. The stars were very bright above the ridges; small clouds passed westwards; the water sang and tinkled; the cup-like hollow had its secrets, but it told them. I had never known night so wonderfully articulate. Power brooded here. I felt my blood quicken with the sense of kinship.

And the little room with its unvarnished pine-boards that held a certain forest perfume, was comforting too; the odour of peat fires still clung to the darkened rafters overhead; the candle, in its saucer-like receptacle of wood, gave just the simple, old-fashioned light that was appropriate. Bodily fatigue made bed exceedingly welcome, though it was long before I fell asleep. Figures, at first, stole softly in across the night and peered at me—Julius, pale and rapt, remote from the modern world; the silent "Dog-Man," with those eyes of questioning wonder and half-disguised distress. And another ghostly figure stole in too, though without a face I could decipher; a woman whom the long, faultless balance of the ages delivered, with the rest of us, into the keeping of this lonely spot for some deep purpose of our climbing souls. Their outlines hovered, mingled with the shadows, and withdrew.

And a certain change in myself, though perhaps not definitely noted at the time, was apparent too—I found in my heart a singular readiness to believe. While sleep crept nearer, and reason dropped a lid, there assuredly was in me, as part of something accepted naturally, the likelihood that LeVallon's attitude was an aspect of forgotten truth. Veiled in Nature's operations, perchance directing them, and particularly in spots of loneliness such as this, dwelt those mighty elemental Potencies he held were accessible to humanity. A phrase from some earlier reading floated back to me, as though deliberately supplied—not that Nature "works towards what are called 'ends,' but that it was possible or rather probable, that 'ends' which implied conscious superhuman activities, are being realised." The sentence, for some reason, had remained in my memory. When life was simpler, closer to Nature, some such

doctrine may have been objectively verifiable, and worship, in the sense that Julius used the word, might well promise to restore the grandeur of forgotten beliefs which should make men as the gods....

With the delightful feeling that in this untainted valley, the woods, the mountains, the very winds and stormy lightnings, were yet but the physical vehicle of powers that expressed intelligence and true being, I passed from dozing into sleep, the cool outside air touching my eyelids with the beauty of the starry Jura night. An older, earlier type of consciousness—though I did not phrase it to myself thus—was asserting itself and taking charge of me. The spell was on my heart.

Yet the human touch came last of all, following me into the complicated paths of slumber, and haunting me as with half-recovered memories of far-off, enchanted days. Uncommon visions met my descending or ascending consciousness, so that while brain and body slept, some deeper part of me went travelling swiftly backwards. I knew the old familiar feeling that the whole of me did not sleep ... and, though remembering nothing definite, my first thought on awakening was the same as my final thought on falling into slumber: What manner of marvellous woman would she prove to be?

CHAPTER XVII

“Thy voice is like to music heard ere birth,

Some spirit lute touched on a spirit sea;

Thy face remembered is from other worlds.

It has been died for, though I know not when,

It has been sung of, though I know not where.

It has the strangeness of the luring West,

And of sad sea-horizons; beside thee

I am aware of other times and lands,

Of birth far back, of lives in many stars.”—“Marpessa” (Stephen Phillips).

During sleep, however, the heavier emotions had sunk to the bottom, the lighter had risen to the top. I woke with a feeling of vigour, and with the sense called “common” distinctly in the ascendant. Through the open window came sunshine in a flood, the crisp air sparkled. I could taste it from my bed. Youth ran in my veins and ten years seemed to drop from my back as I sprang up and thrust my face into the radiant morning. Drawing a deep draught into my lungs, I must at the same time have unconsciously exclaimed, for the peasant girl gathering vegetables below—the garden, such as it was, merged into the pastures—looked up startled. She had been singing to herself. I withdrew my pyjamaed figure hurriedly, while she, as hurriedly, let drop the skirts the dew had made her lift so high; and when I peeped a moment later, she had gone. I, too, felt inclined to sing with happiness, so invigorating was the clear brilliance of the opening day. A joyful irresponsibility, as of boyhood, coursed in my tingling blood. Everything in this enchanted valley seemed young and vigorous; the stream ran gaily past the shining trees; the meadows glistened; the very mountains wore a lustre as of life that ran within their solid frames.

It was impossible to harbour the slightest thought of dread before such peace and beauty; all ominous forebodings fled away; this joy and strength of Nature brought in life. Even the “Dog-Man” smiled with eyes unclouded when, a little later, he brought a small pail of boiling water, and informed me that there was a pool in the forest close at hand where I could bathe. He nosed about the room—only thus can I describe his friendly curiosity for my welfare—fussed awkwardly with my boots and clothes, looked frankly into my eyes with an expression that said plainly “How are you this morning? I’m splendid!” grunted, sniffed, almost wagged his tail for pleasure—and trotted out. And he went, I declare, as though he had heard a rabbit and must be after it. The laughter in me was only just suppressed, for I could have sworn that he expected me to pat him, with the remark “Good fellow! Sik ’em, then!” or words to that effect.

The secluded valley, walled-in from the blustering world like some wild, primitive garden, was drenched in sunshine by the time I went downstairs; the limestone cliffs a mile away of quite dazzling brilliance; and the pine woods across the meadow-land scented the whole interior of the little châlet. But for stray wisps of autumn mist that still clung along the borders of the stream, it might have been a day in June the mountains still held prisoner. My heart leaped with the beauty. This lonely region of woods and mountain tops suggested the presence of some Nature Deity that presided over it, and as I stood a moment on the veranda, I turned at a sound of footsteps to see the figure of my imagination face to face. “If she is of equal splendour!” flashed instantly through my mind. For Julius wore the glory of the morning in his eyes, the neck was bare and the shirt a little open; standing there erect in his mountain clothes, he was as like the proverbial Greek god as any painter could have possibly desired.

“Whether I slept well?” I answered his inquiry. “Why, Julius, I feel positively like a boy again. This place has worked magic on me while I slept. There’s the idea in me that one must live for ever.”

And, even while I said it, my eyes glanced over his shoulder into the hall for a sight of someone who any moment might appear. Excitement was high in me.

Julius quietly held my hand in his own firm grasp a second.

“Life came to you in sleep,” he said. “I told you—I warned you, the channels here were open and easily accessible. All power—all powers—everywhere are natural. Our object is to hold them, isn’t it?”

“You mean control them?” I said, still watching the door behind him.

“They visit the least among us; they touch us, and are gone. The essential is to harness them—in this case before they harness us—again.”

I made no reply. The other excitement was too urgent in me.

Linking his arm in mine, he led me towards a corner of the main room, half hall, half

kitchen, where a white tablecloth promised breakfast. The “man” was already busying himself to and fro with plates and a gleaming metal pot that steamed. I smelt coffee and the fragrance of baked bread. But I listened half-heartedly to my host’s curious words because every minute I expected the door to open. There was a nervousness in me what I should find to say to such a woman when she came.

Was there, as well, among my bolder feelings, a faint suspicion of something else—something so slight and vague it hardly left a trace, while yet I was aware that it had been there? I could not honestly say. I only knew that, again, there stirred about my heart unconsciously a delicate spider-web of resentment, envy, disapproval—call it what one may, since it was too slight to own a definite name—that seemed to wake some ghost of injustice, of a grievance almost, in the hidden depths of me. It passed, unexplained, untraceable. Perhaps I smothered it, perhaps I left it unacknowledged. I know not. So elusive an emotion I could not retain a second, far less label. “Julius has found her; she is his,” was the clear thought that followed it. No more than that. And yet—like the shadow of a leaf, it floated down upon me, darkening, though almost imperceptibly, some unknown corner of my heart.

And, remembering my manners, I asked after her indisposition, while he laughed and insisted upon our beginning breakfast; she would presently join us; I should see her for myself. He looked so happy that I yielded to the momentary temptation.

“Julius,” I said, by way of compliment and somewhat late congratulation, “she must be wonderful. I’m so—so very pleased—for you.”

“Yes,” he said, as he poured coffee and boiling milk into my wooden bowl, “and we have waited long. But the opportunity has come at last, and this time we shall not let it slip.”

The simple words were not at all the answer I expected. There was a mingling of relief and anxiety in his voice; I remembered that she “did not always like it here,”

and I wondered again what my "understanding" was to be that he had promised would "come later." What determined her change of mood? Why did she sometimes like it, and sometimes not like it? Was it loneliness, or was it due to things that—happened? Any moment now she would be in the room, holding my hand, looking into my eyes, expecting from me words of greeting, speaking to me. I should hear her voice. Twice I turned quickly at the sound of an opening door, only to find myself face to face with the "man"; but at length came a sound that was indisputably the rustle of skirts, and, with a quickening of the heart, I pushed my plate away, and rose from my chair, turning half way to greet her.

Disappointment met me again, however, for this time it was merely the peasant girl I had seen from my window; and once more I sat down abruptly, covering my confusion with a laugh and feeling like a schoolboy surprised in a foolish mistake. And then a movement from Julius opposite startled me. He had risen from his seat. There was a new expression on his face, an extraordinary expression—observation the most alert imaginable, anxiety, question, the tension of various deep emotions oddly mingled. He watched me keenly. He watched us both.

"My wife," he said quietly, as the figure advanced towards us. Then, turning to her: "And this is my friend, Professor Mason." He indicated myself.

I rose abruptly, startled and dismayed, nearly upsetting the chair behind me in my clumsiness. The "Professor Mason" sounded ludicrous, almost as ludicrous as the "Mrs. LeVallon" he had not uttered. I stared. She stared. There was a moment of blank silence. Disappointment petrified me. There was no distinction, there was no beauty. She was tall and slim, and the face, of a commonplace order, was slightly pockmarked. I forgot all manners.

She was the first to recover. We both laughed. But if there was nervousness of confused emotion in my laugh, there was in hers a happy pleasure, frankly and naturally expressed.

"How do you do, sir—Professor?" she instantly corrected herself, shaking me vigorously, yet almost timidly, by the hand. It was a provincial and untutored voice.

"I'm—delighted to see you," my lips stammered, stopping dead before the modern title. The control of my breath was not quite easy for a moment.

We sat down. In her words—or was it in her manner, rather?—there was a hint of undue familiarity that tinged my disappointment with a flash of disapproval too, yet caught up immediately by a kind of natural dignity that denied offence, or at any rate, corrected it. Another impression then stole over me. I was aware of charm. The voice, however, unquestionably betrayed accent. Of the "lady," in the restricted, ordinary meaning of the word, there was no pretence. A singular revulsion made me tremble. For a moment she had held my hand with deliberate pressure, while her eyes remained fixed upon my face with a direct, a searching intentness. She too, like her husband, watched me. If she formed a swift, intuitive judgment regarding myself, nothing at first betrayed it. I was aware, however, at once, that, behind the decision of her natural frankness, something elusive hovered. The effect was highly contradictory, even captivating, certainly provocative of curiosity. Accompanying her laughter was a delicate, swift flush, and the laugh, though loud in some other sense than of sound alone, was not unmusical. A breath of glamour, seductive as it was fleeting, caught me as I heard.

For a moment or two my senses certainly reeled. It seemed that swift shutters rose and fell before my eyes. One screen rolled up, another dropped, vistas opened, vanishing before their depths showed anything. The châlet, with our immediate surroundings, faded; I was aware of ourselves only, chiefly, however, of her. This first sight of her had the effect that years before Julius had produced: the peculiar sense of "other places." And this in spite of myself, without any decided belief of my own as yet to help it....

The confusion of my senses passed then, and consciousness focused clearly once

more on my surroundings. The disturbed emotions, however, refused wholly to quiet down. Her face, I noted, beneath the disfiguring marks, was rosy, and the grey-green eyes were very bright. They were luminous, changing eyes, their hue altering of its own accord apart from mere play or angle of the light. Sometimes their grey merged wholly into green, but a very wonderful deep green that made them like the sea; later, again, they were distinctly blue. They lit the entire face, its expression changing when they changed. The frank and open innocence of the child in them was countered, though not injuriously, by an unfathomed depth that had its effect upon the whole physiognomy. An arresting power shone in them as if imperiously. There were two faces there.

And the singular and fascinating effect of these dominating eyes left further judgment at first disabled. I noticed, however, that her mouth had that generous width that makes for strength rather than for beauty; that the teeth were fine and regular; and that the brown hair, tinged with bronze, was untidy about the neck and ears. A narrow band of black velvet encircled the throat; she wore a blouse, short skirt, and high brown boots with nails that clattered on the stone flooring when she moved. Since gathering vegetables in the dawn she had changed her costume, evidently. A certain lightness, I saw now, had nothing of irresponsibility in it, but was merely youth, vitality, and physical vigour. She was fifteen years younger than Julius, if a day, and I judged her age no more than twenty-five perhaps.

“It’s a pore house to have your friends to,” she said in her breezy, uncultivated voice, “but I hope you managed all right with your room—Professor?” It was the foundation of the voice that had the uncultivated sound; on the top of it, like a layer of something imitated or acquired, there was refinement. I got the impression that, unconsciously, she aped the better manner of speech, yet was not aware she did so.

Burning questions rose within me as I listened to this opening conversation: How much she knew, and believed, of her husband’s vast conceptions; what explanation

of my visit he had offered her, what explanation of myself; chief of all, how much—if anything—she remembered? For our coming together in this hidden Jura valley under conditions that seemed one minute ludicrous, and the next sublime, was the alleged meeting of three Souls who had not recognised each other through bodily, human eyes for countless centuries. And our purpose, if not madness, held a solemnity that might well belong to a forgotten method of approaching deity.

"He's told me such a lot about you, Julius has," she continued half shyly, jerking her thumb in the direction of her husband, "that I wanted to see what you were like." It was said naturally, as by a child; yet the freedom might equally have been assumed to conceal an admitted ignorance of manners. "You're such—very old friends, aren't you?" She seemed to look me up and down. I thought I detected disappointment in her too.

"We were together at school and university, you see," I made reply, shirking the title again, "but it's a good many years now since we met. We've been out of touch for a long time. I hadn't even heard of his marriage. My congratulations are late, but most sincere."

I bowed. Strange! Both in word and gesture some faintest hint of sarcasm or resentment forced itself against my conscious will. The blood rose—I hoped unnoticed—to my cheeks. My eyes dropped quickly from her face.

"That's reely nice of you," she said simply, and without a touch of embarrassment anywhere. She cut a lump of bread from the enormous loaf in front of us and broke it in little pieces into her bowl of milk. Her spoon remained standing in her coffee cup. It seemed impossible for me to be unaware of any detail that concerned her, either of gesture or pronunciation. I noticed every tiniest detail whether I would or no. Her charm, I decided, increased. It was wholly independent of her looks. It took me now and again by surprise, as it were.

"Maybe—I suppose he didn't know where you were," she added, as Julius

volunteered no word. “But he was shore you’d come if you got the letter.”

“It was a promise,” her husband put in quietly. Evidently he wished us to make acquaintance in our own way. He left us alone with purpose, content to watch and show his satisfaction. The relationship between them seemed natural and happy, utterly devoid of the least sign of friction. She certainly—had I perhaps, anticipated otherwise?—showed no fear of him.

The “man” came in with a plate of butter, clattering out noisily again in his heavy boots. He gave us each a look in turn, of anxiety first, and then of pleasure. All was well with us, he felt. His eyes, however, lingered longest on his mistress, as though she needed his protective care more than we did. It was the attitude and expression of a faithful dog who knows he has the responsibility of a child upon his shoulders, and is both proud and puzzled by the weight of honour.

A pause followed, during which I made more successful efforts to subdue the agitation that was in me. I broke the silence by a commonplace, expressing a hope that my late arrival the night before had not disturbed her.

“Lord, no!” she exclaimed, laughing gaily, while she glanced from me to Julius. “Only I thought you and he’d like to be alone for a bit after such a long time apart.... Besides, I didn’t fancy my food somehow—I get that way up here sometimes,” she added, “don’t I, Julius?”

“You’ve been here some time already?” I asked sympathetically, before he could reply.

“Ever since the wedding,” she answered frankly. “Seven—getting on for eight—months ago, it is now—we came up straight from the Registry Office. At times it’s a bit funny, an’ no mistake—lonely, I mean,” she quickly corrected herself. And she looked at her husband again with a kind of childish mischief in her expression that I thought most becoming.

“It’s not for ever, is it?” he laughed with her.

"And I understand you chose it, didn't you?" I fell in with her mood. "It must be lonely, of course, sometimes," I added.

"Yes, we chose it," she replied. "We choose everything together." And they looked proudly at each other like two children. For a moment it flashed across me to challenge him playfully, yet not altogether playfully, for burying a young wife in such a deserted place. I did not yield to the temptation, however, and Mrs. LeVallon continued breezily in her off-hand manner:

"Julius wanted you badly, I know. You must stay here now we've got you. There's reelly lots to do, once you get used to it; only it seems strange at first after city life—like what I've had, and sometimes"—she hesitated a second—"well, of an evening, or when it gets stormy—the thunder-storms are something awful—you feel wild and want to do things, to rush about and take your clothes off." She stopped; and the deep green of the sea came up into her eyes. Again, for an instant, I caught two faces in her. "It turns you wild here when the wind gets to blowing," she added, laughing, "and the lightning's like loose, flying fire." The way she said it made me forget the physical disabilities. There was even a hint of fascination somewhere in the voice.

"It takes you back to the natural, primitive state," I said. "I can well believe it." And no amount of restraint could keep the admiration out of my eyes. "Civilisation is easily forgotten in a place like this."

"Oh, is that it?" she said shortly, while we laughed, all three together. "Civilisation—eh?"

I got the impression that she felt left out of something, something she knew was going on, but that didn't include her quite. Her intuition, I judged, was very keen. Beneath this ordinary conversation she was aware of many things. She was fully conscious of a certain subdued excitement in the three of us, and that between her husband and her guest there was a constant interplay of half-discovered meaning,

half-revealed emotion. She was reading me too. Yet all without deliberation; it was intuitive, the mind took no conscious part in it. And, when she spoke of the effect of the valley upon her, I saw her suddenly a little different, too—wild and free, untamed in a sense, and close to the elemental side of life. Her enthusiasm for big weather betrayed it. During the whole of breakfast, indeed, we all were "finding" one another, Julius in particular making notes. For him, of course, there was absorbing interest in this meeting of three souls whom Fate had kept so long apart—the signs of recognition he detected or imagined, the sympathy, the intimacy betrayed by the way things were taken for granted between us. He said no word, however. He was very quiet.

My own feelings, meanwhile, seemed tossed together in too great and violent confusion for immediate disentanglement. My sense of the dramatic fitness of things was worse than unsatisfied—it was shattered. Julius unquestionably had married a superior domestic servant.

"Is the bread to your liking, Professor?"

"I think it's quite delicious, Mrs. LeVallon. It tempts me even to excess," I added, facetious in my nervousness. I had used her name at last, but with an effort.

"I made it," she said proudly. "Mother taught me that before I was fifteen."

"And the butter, too?" I asked.

"No," she laughed, with a touch of playful disappointment. "We get that from a farm five miles down the valley. It's in special honour of your arrival, this."

"Our nearest contact with the outside world," added Julius, "and over a thousand feet below us. We're on a little plateau here all by ourselves——"

"Put away like," she interrupted gaily, "as though we'd been naughty," and then she added, "or for something special and very mysterious." She looked into his face half archly, half inquisitively, as if aware of something she divined yet could not understand. Her honesty and sincerity made every little thing she said seem

dignified. I was again aware of pathos.

“The peace and quiet,” I put in quickly, conscious of something within me that watched and listened intently, “must be delightful—after the cities—and with the great storms you mention to break the possible monotony.”

She looked at me a full moment steadily, and in her eyes, no longer green but sky-blue, I read the approach of that strange expression I called another “face,” that in the end, however, did not fully come. But the characteristic struck me, for Julius had it too.

“Oh, you find out all about yourself in a place like this,” she said slowly, “a whole lot of things you didn’t know before. You’ll like it; but it’s not for everybody. It’s very élite.” She turned to Julius. “The Professor’ll love it, won’t he? And we must keep him,” she repeated, “now we’ve got him.”

Something moved between the three of us as she said it. There was no inclination in me to smile, even at the absurd choice of a word. An upheaving sense of challenge came across the air at me, including not only ourselves at the breakfast table, but the entire valley as well. Against some subterranean door in me rose sudden pressure, and the woman’s commonplace words had in them something incalculable that caused the door to yield. Out rushed a pouring, bursting flood. A wild delight of beauty ran suddenly in my civilised veins; I felt uplifted, stimulated, carried off my feet.

It was but the flash and touch of a passing mood, of course, yet it marked a change in me, another change. She was aware of elemental powers even as her husband was. First through him, but now through her, I, too, was becoming similarly—aware.

I glanced at Julius, calmly devouring bread and milk beyond all reach of comedy—Julius who recognised an “old soul” in a servant girl with the same conviction that he invoked the deific Powers of a conscious Nature; to whom nothing was trivial, nothing final, the future magnificent as the past, and behind

whose chair stood the Immensities whispering messages of his tireless evolutionary scheme. And I saw him “unclassable”—merely an eternal, travelling soul, working out with myself and with this other “soul” some detail long neglected by the three of us. Marriage, class, social status, education, culture—what were they but temporary external details, whose sole value lay in their providing conditions for acquiring certain definite experiences? Life’s outer incidents were but episodic, after all.

And this flash of insight into his point of view came upon me thus suddenly through her. The mutual sympathy and understanding between the three of us that he so keenly watched for had advanced rapidly. Another stage was reached. The foundations seemed already established here among us.

Thus, while surprise, resentment and distress fought their battle within me against something that lay midway between disbelief and acceptance, my mind was aware of a disharmony that made judgment extremely difficult. Almost I knew the curious feeling that one of us had been fooled. It was all so incongruous and disproportioned, on the edge of the inconceivable. And yet, at the same time, some sense of keen delight awoke in me that satisfied. Joy glowed in some depth I could not reach or modify.

Had the “woman” proved wonderful in some ordinary earthly way, I could have continued to share in a kind of dramatic make-believe LeVallon’s imagination of an “old soul” returned. The sense of fitness would have felt requited. Yet what so disconcerted me was that this commonplace disclosure of the actual facts did not destroy belief, but even increased it! This unexpected and banal dénouement, denying, apparently, all the requirements of his creed, fell upon me with a crash of reality that was arresting in an entirely unexpected way. It made the conception so much more likely—possible—true!

Out of some depth in me I could not summon to the bar of judgment or analysis rose the whisper that in reality the union of these two was not so incongruous and

outrageous as it seemed. To a penetrating vision such as his, what difference could that varnish of the mind called “education” pretend to make? Or how could he be deceived by the surface tricks of “refinement,” in accent, speech, and manner, that so often cloak essential crudeness and vulgarity? These were to him but the external equipment of a passing To-day, whereas he looked for the innate acquirements due to real experience—age in the soul itself. Her social status, education and so forth had nothing to do with—her actual Self. In some ultimate region that superficial human judgment barely acknowledges the union of these two seemed right, appropriate and inevitably true.

This breakfast scene remains graven in my mind. LeVallon talked little, even as he ate little, while his wife and I satisfied our voracious appetites with the simple food provided. She chattered sans gêne, eating not ungracefully so much as in a manner untaught. Her smallest habits drew my notice and attention of their own accord. I watched the velvet band rising and falling as she swallowed—noisily, talking and drinking with her mouth full, and holding her knife after the manner of the servants’ hall. Her pronunciation at times was more than marked. For instance, though she did not say “gime,” she most assuredly did not say “game,” and her voice, what men call “common,” was undeniably of the upper servant class. While guilty now and again of absurd solecisms, she chose words sometimes that had an air of refinement above the ordinary colloquial usage—the kind affected by a lady’s-maid who has known service in the “upper suckles” of the world—“close” the door in place of simply “shut” it, “commence” in preference to the ordinary “begin,” “costume” rather than merely “clothes,” and a hundred others of similar kind. Sofa, again, was “couch.” She missed a sentence, and asked for it with “What say?” while her “if you please” and “pardon” held a suspicion of that unction which, it seemed, only just remembered in time not to add “sir,” or even “my lady.” She halted instinctively before a door, as though to let her husband or myself pass out in front, and even showed surprise at being helped at the table before ourselves. These and a thousand

other revealing touches I noticed acutely, because I had expected something so absolutely different. I was profoundly puzzled.

Yet, while I noted closely these social and mental disabilities, I was aware also of their flat and striking contradiction; and her beautifully-shaped hands, her small, exquisite feet and ankles, her natural dignity of carriage, gesture, bearing, were the least of these. Setting her beside maid or servitor, my imagination recoiled as from something utterly ill-placed. I could have sworn she owned some secret pedigree that no merely menial position could affect, most certainly not degrade. In spite of less favourable indications, so thick about her, I caught unmistakable tokens of a superiority she herself ignored, which yet proclaimed that her soul stood erect and four-square to the winds of life, independent wholly of the "social position" her body with its untutored brain now chanced to occupy.

Exactly the nature of these elusive signs of innate nobility I find it more than difficult to describe. They rose subtly out of her, yet evaded separate subtraction from either the gestures or conversation that revealed them. They explained the subtle and increasing charm. They were of the soul.

For, even thus early in our acquaintance, there began to emerge these other qualities in this simple girl that at first the shock of disappointment and surprise had hidden from me. The apparent emptiness of her face was but a mask that cloaked an essential, native dignity. From time to time, out of those strange, arresting eyes that at first had seemed all youth and surface, peered forth that other look, standing a moment to query and to judge, then, like moods of sky which reveal and hide a depth of sea, plunged out of sight again. It betrayed an inner, piercing sight of a far deeper kind. Out of this deeper part of her I felt she watched me steadily—to wonder, ask, and weigh. It was hence, no doubt, I had the curious impression of two faces, two beings, in her, and the moments when I surprised her peering thus were, in a manner, electrifying beyond words. For then, into tone and gesture, conquering

even accent and expression, crept flash-like this “something” that would not be denied, hinting at the distinction of true spiritual independence superior to all local, temporary, or worldly divisions implied in mere “class” or “station.”

This girl, behind her ignorance of life’s snobbish values, possessed that indefinable spiritual judgment best called “taste.” And taste, I remember Julius held, was the infallible evidence of a soul’s maturity—of age. The phrase “old soul” acquired more meaning for me as I watched her. I recalled that strange hint of his long years before, that greatness and position, as the world accepts them, are actually but the kindergarten stages for the youngest, crudest souls of all. The older souls are not “distinguished” in the “world.” They are beyond it.

Moreover, during the course of this singular first meal together, while she used the phraseology of the servant class and betrayed the manners of what men call “common folk,” it was borne in upon me that she, too, unknowingly, touched the same vast sources of extended life that her husband claimed to realise, and that her being unknowingly swept that region of elemental Powers with which he now sought conscious union. In her infectious vitality beat the pulse of vaster tides than she yet knew.

Already, in our conversation, this had come to me; it increased from minute to minute as our atmospheres combined and mingled. The suggestion of what I must call great exterior Activities that always accompanied the presence of Julius made themselves felt also through the being of this simple and uneducated girl. Winds, cool and refreshing, from some elemental region blew soundlessly about her. I was aware of their invigorating currents. And this came to me with my first emotions, and was not due to subsequent reflection. For, in my own case, too, while resenting the admission, I felt something more generously scaled than my normal self, scientifically moulded, trying to urge up as with great arms and hands that thrust into my mind. What hitherto had seemed my complete Self opened, as though it

were but a surface tract, revealing depths of consciousness unguessed before.

And this, I think, was the disquieting sensation that perplexed me chiefly with a sense of unstable equilibrium. The idea of pre-existence, with its huge weight of memory lost and actions undischarged, pressed upon a portion of my soul that was trying to awake. The foundations of my known personality appeared suddenly insecure, and what the brain denied, this other part accepted, even half remembered. The change of consciousness in me was growing. While observing Mrs. LeVallon, listening to the spontaneous laughter that ran between her sentences, meeting her quick eyes that took in everything about them, these varied and contradictory judgments of my own worked their inevitable effect upon me. The quasi-memory, with its elusive fragrance of far-off, forgotten things; the promised reconstruction of passionate emotions that had burned the tissues of our earlier bodies before even the foundations of these "eternal" hills were laid; the sense of being again among ancient friends, netted by deathless forces of spiritual adventure and desire—Julius, his wife, myself, mutually involved in the intricate pattern of our souls' development:—all this, while I strove to regard it as mere telepathic reflection from his own beliefs, yet made something in me, deeper than any ratiocination, stand up and laugh in my face with the authoritative command that it was absolutely—true.

Our very intimacy, so readily established as of its own accord—established, moreover, among such unlikely and half antagonistic elements—seemed to hint at a relationship resumed, instead of now first beginning. The fact that the three of us took so much for granted almost suggested memory. For the near presence of this woman—I call her woman, though she was but girl—disturbed me more than uncommonly; and this curious, soft delight I felt raging in the depths of me—whence did it come? Whence, too, the depth and power of other feelings that she roused in me, their reckless quality, their certainty, the haunting pang and charm that her face, not even pretty apart from its disfigurement, stirred in my inmost being? There was mischief and disaster in her sea-green eyes, though neither

mischief nor disaster quite of this material world.

I confessed—the first time for many years—to something moving beyond ordinary. More and more I longed to learn of her first meeting with the man she had married, and by what method he claimed to have recognised in this servant girl the particular ancient soul he waited for, and by what unerring instinct he had picked her out and set her upon so curious a throne.

I watched the velvet band about the well-shaped neck....

“I have been here before,

But when or how I cannot tell:

I know the grass beyond the door,

The sweet keen smell,

The sighing sound, the lights around the shore.

“You have been mine before,

How long ago I may not know:

But just when at that swallow’s soar

Your neck turned so ...

Some veil did fall—I knew it all of yore.”

“And now,” she exclaimed, springing up and turning to her husband, “I’m going to leave you and the Professor together to talk out all your old things without me intervening! Besides I’ve got the bread to make,” she added with a swift, gay smile in my direction, “that bread you called delicious. I generally do it of a morning.”

With a swinging motion of her lithe young body she was gone; the room seemed strangely empty; the disfiguring marks upon her girlish face were already forgotten; and a sense of companionship within me turned somehow lonely and bereft.

CHAPTER XVIII

To Memory

“Yet, when I would command thee hence,

Thou mockest at the vain pretence,

Murmuring in mine ear a song

Once loved, alas! forgotten long;

And on my brow I feel a kiss

That I would rather die than miss.”—Mary Coleridge.

“Well?” Julius asked me, as we strolled across the pastures that skirted the main forest, “and does it seem anywhere familiar to you—the three of us together again? You recall—how much?” A rather wistful smile passed over his face, but the eyes were grave. He was in earnest if ever man was. “She doesn’t seem wholly a stranger to you?”

My mind searched carefully for words. To refer to any of my recent impressions was difficult, even painful, and frank discussion of my friend’s wife impossible—though, probably, there was nothing Julius would not have understood and even welcomed.

“I—cannot deny,” I began, “that somewhere—in my imagination, perhaps, there seems——”

He interrupted me at once. “Don’t suppress the imaginative pictures—they’re memory. To deny them is only to forget again. Let them come freely in you.”

“Julius——!” I exclaimed, conscious that I flushed a little, “but she is wonderful; superior, too, in some magnificent way to—any——”

“Lady,” he came abruptly to my assistance, no vestige of annoyance visible.

“To anyone of our own class,” I completed the sentence more to my liking. “I admit I feel drawn to her—in a kind of understanding sympathy—though how can I pretend that I—that this sense of familiarity is really memory?” It was impossible to

treat him lightly; his belief was his life, commanding a respect due to all great convictions of the soul. “You have found someone you can love,” I went on, aware that it gave me no pleasure to say it, “and someone who loves you. I—am delighted.”

He turned to me, standing hatless, the sunlight in his face, his eyes fixed steadily upon my own.

“We had to meet—all three,” he said slowly; “sooner or later. It’s an old, old debt we’ve got to settle up together, and the opportunity has come at last. I only ask your sympathy—and hers.” He shrugged his shoulders slightly. “To you it may seem a small thing, and, if you have no memory, a wild, impossible thing as well, even with delusion in it. But nothing is really small.” He paused. “I only ask that you shall not resist.” And then he added gravely: “The risk is mine.”

I felt uneasiness; the old schooldays’ basis of complete sincerity was not in me quite. I had lived too long in the world of ordinary men and women. His marriage seemed prompted by an impersonal sense of justice to the universe rather than by any desire for the companionship and sweetness that a woman’s love could give him. For a moment I knew not what to say. Could such a view be hers as well? Had she yielded herself to him upon a similar understanding? And if not—the thought afflicted me—might not this debt he spoke of have been discharged without claiming the whole life of another in a union that involved also physical ties?

Yet, while I could not find it in me to utter all I thought, there was a burning desire to hear details of the singular courtship. Almost I felt the right to know, yet shrank from asking it.

“Then nothing more definite stirs in you?” he asked quietly, his eyes still holding mine, “no memory you can recognise? No wave of feeling; no picture, even of that time when we—we three——”

“Julius, old friend,” I exclaimed with sudden impulsiveness, and hardly knowing

why I said it, “it only seems to me that these pine woods behind you are out of the picture rather. They should be palms, with spaces of sand shimmering in a hot sun. And the châlet”—pointing over his shoulder—“seems still less to belong to you when I recall the temples we talked about before the plain where the worship of the rising sun took place——”

I broke off abruptly with a little shamefaced laughter: my invention, or imagination, seemed so thin. But Julius turned eagerly, his face alight.

“Laugh as you please,” he said, “but what makes you feel me out of the picture, as you call it, is memory—memory of where we three were last together. That sense of incongruity is memory. Don’t resist. Let the pictures rise and grow as they will. And don’t deny any instinctive feelings that come to you—they’re memory too.”

A moment of revolt swept over me, yet with it an emotion both sweet and painful. Dread and delight both troubled me. Unless I resisted, his great conviction would carry me away again as of old. And what if she should come to aid him? What if she should bring the persuasion of her personality to the attack, and with those eyes of mischief and disaster ask me questions out of a similar conviction and belief? If she should hold me face to face: “Do you remember me—as I remember you?”

“Julius,” I cried, “let me speak plainly at once and so prevent your disappointment later.” I forced the words out against my will, it seemed. “For the truth, my dear fellow, is simply—that I remember—nothing! Definitely—I remember nothing.”

Yet there was pain and sadness in me suddenly. I had prevaricated. Almost I had told a lie. Some vague fear of involving myself in undesirable consequences had forced me against my innate knowledge. Almost I had denied—her.

From the forest stole forth a breath too soft and perfumed for an autumn wind. It stirred the hair upon his forehead, left its touch of dream upon my cheeks, then passed on to lift a wreath of mist in the fields below. And, as though a spirit older than the wind moved among my thoughts, this modern world seemed less real when

it had gone. I heard the voice of Julius answering me. His words came very slowly, fastening upon my own. The resentment, the disappointment I had looked for were not there, nor the comparison of myself—in her favour—I had half anticipated.

The answer utterly nonplussed me:

"Neither does she remember—anything."

I started. A curious pang shot through me—something of regret, even of melancholy in it. That she had forgotten "everything" was pain. She had forgotten me.

"But we—you, I mean—can make her?"

The words were out impulsively before I could prevent them. He did not look at me. I did not look at him.

"I should have put it differently, perhaps," he answered. "She is not aware that she remembers."

He drew me further along the dewy meadow towards the upper valley, and drew me deeper, as it seemed, into his own strange region whence came these perplexing statements.

"But, Julius," I stammered, seeing that he kept silence, "if she remembers nothing—how could you know—how could you feel sure, when you met her——?"

My sentences stopped dead. Even in these unusual circumstances it was not possible to question a friend about the woman he had married. Had she proved some marvel of physical beauty or of intellectual attainment, curiosity might have been taken as a compliment. But as it was——!

Yet all the time I knew that her insignificant worldly value was a clean stroke of proof that he had not suffered himself to be deceived in this recovery and recognition of the spiritual maturity he meant by the term "old soul." His voice reached me, calm and normal as though he talked about the weather. "I'll tell you," he said, "for it's interesting, and, besides, you have the right to know."

And the words fell among my tangled thoughts like deft fingers that put confusion straight. The incredible story he told me as a child might relate a fairy-tale it knows is true, yet thinks may not be quite believed. Without the slightest emphasis, and certainly without the least embarrassment or sense that it was unusual. Even of comedy I was not properly once aware. All through the strange recital rang in my mind, "She is not aware that she remembers."

"'The Dardanelles,'" he began, smiling a little as though at the recollection, "was where I met her, thus recovered. Not on the way from Smyrna to Constantinople; oh, no! It was not romantic in that little sense. 'The Dardanelles' was a small and ugly red-brick villa in Upper Norwood, with a drive ten yards long, ragged laurel bushes, and a green five-barred gate, gold-lettered. Maennlich lives there—the Semitic language man and Egyptologist; you know. She was his parlour-maid at the time, and before that had been lady's-maid to the daughter of some undistinguished duchess. In this way," he laughed softly, "may old souls wait upon the young ones sometimes! Her father," he continued, "was a market-gardener and fruiterer in a largish way at East Croydon, and she herself had been brought up upon the farm whence his supplies came. 'Chance,' as they call it, led her into these positions I have mentioned, and so, inevitably—to me."

He looked up at me a moment. "And so to you as well."

His manner was composed and serious. He spoke with the simple conviction of some Christian who traces the Hand of God in the smallest details of his daily life, and seeks His guidance in his very train journeys. There was something rather superb about it all.

"A fruiterer in East Croydon! A maid in service! And—you knew—you recognised her?"

"At once. The very first day she let me in at the front door and asked if I wished to see her master, what name she might announce, and so forth."

“It was all—er—unexpected and sudden like that?” came the question from a hundred others that crowded together in me. “To find a lost friend of years only—in such a way—the shock, I mean, to you——!” I simply could not find my words. He told it all so calmly, naturally. “You were wholly unprepared, weren’t you? Nothing had led you to expect?” I ended with a dash.

“Not wholly unprepared,” was his rejoinder; “nor was the meeting altogether unexpected—on my side, that is. Intimations, as I told you at Motfield Close twenty years ago—when she was born—had come to me. No soul draws breath for the first time, without a quiver of response running through all that lives. Souls intimately connected with each other may feel the summons. There are ways——! I knew that she was once more in the world, that, like ourselves, her soul had reincarnated; and ever since I have been searching——”

“Searching——!”

“There are clues that offer themselves—that come, perhaps in sleep, perhaps by direct experiment, and, regardless of space, give hints——”

“Psychometry?” I asked, remembering a word just coined.

He shrugged his shoulders. “All objects radiate,” he said, “no matter how old they are. Their radiation never ceases till they are disintegrated; and if you are sensitive you can receive their messages. If you have certain powers, due to relation and affinity, you may interpret them. There is an instantaneous linking-up—in picture-form—impossible to mistake.”

“You knew, then, she was somewhere on the earth—waiting for you?” I repeated, wondering what was coming next. That night in the Edinburgh lodgings, when he had been “searching,” came back to me.

“For us,” he corrected me. “It was something from a Private Collection that gave me the clue by which I finally traced her—something from the older sands.”

“The sands! Egyptian?”

Julius nodded. “Egypt, for all of us, was a comparatively recent section—nearer to To-day, I mean. Many a time has each of us been back there—Thebes, Memphis, even as lately ago as Alexandria at its zenith, learning, developing, reaping what ages before we sowed—for in Egypt the knowledge that was our knowledge survived longer than anywhere else. Yet never, unfortunately, returning together, and thus never finding the opportunity to achieve the great purpose of our meeting.”

“But the clue?” I asked breathlessly.

He smiled again at the eagerness that again betrayed me.

“This old world,” he resumed quietly, “is strewn, of course, with the remnants of what once has been our bodies—‘suits of clothes’ we have inhabited, used, and cast aside. Here and there, from one chance or another, some of these may have been actually preserved. The Egyptians, for instance, went to considerable trouble to ensure that they should survive as long as possible, thus assisting memory later.”

“Embalming, you mean?”

“As you wander through the corridors of a modern museum,” he continued imperturbably, “you may even look through a glass covering at the very tenement your soul has occupied at an earlier stage! Probably, of course, without the faintest whisper of recognition, yet, possibly, with just that acute and fascinated interest which is the result of stirring memory. For the ‘old clothes’ still radiate vibrations that belong to you; the dried blood and nerves once thrilled with emotions, spiritual or otherwise, that were you—the link may be recoverable. You think it is wild nonsense! I tell you it is in the best sense scientific. And, similarly,” he added, “you may chance upon some such remnant of another—the body of ancient friend or enemy.” He paused abruptly in his extraordinary recital. “I had that good fortune,” he added, “if you like to call it so.”

“You found hers?” I asked in a low voice. “Her, I mean?”

“Maennlich,” he replied with a smile, “has the best preserved mummies in the

world. He never allowed them even to be unwrapped. The object I speak of—a body she had occupied in a recent Egyptian section—though not when we were there, unfortunately—lay in one of his glass cases, while the soul who once had used it answered his bell and walked across his carpets—two of her bodies in the house at once. Curious, wasn't it? A discarded instrument and the one in present use! The rest was comparatively easy. I traced her whereabouts at once, for the clue furnished the plainest possible directions. I went straight to her."

"And you knew instantly—when you saw her? You had no doubt?"

"Instantly—when the door swung open and our eyes met on the threshold."

"Love at first sight, Julius, you mean? It was love you felt?" I asked it beneath my breath, for my heart was beating strangely.

He raised his eyebrows. "Love?" he repeated, questioningly. "Deep joy, intuitive sympathy, content and satisfaction, rather. I knew her. I knew who she was. In a few minutes we were more intimate in mind and feeling than souls who meet for the first time can become after years of living together. You understand?"

I lowered my eyes, not knowing what to say. The standards of modern conduct, so strong about me, prevented the comments or questions that I longed to utter.

There flashed upon me in that instant's pause a singular conviction—that these two had mated for a reason of their own. They had not known the clutch of elemental power by which Nature ensures the continuance of the race. They had not shuddered, wept, and known the awful ecstasy, but had slipped between her fingers and escaped. They had not loved. While he knew this consciously, she was aware of it unconsciously. They mated for another reason, yet one as holy, as noble, as pure—if not more so, indeed—as those that consecrate marriage in the accepted sense. And the thought, strange as it was, brought a sweet pleasure to me, though shot with a pain that was equally undeniable and equally perplexing. While my thoughts floundered between curiosity, dismay and something elusive that yet was

more clamorous than either, Julius continued without a vestige of embarrassment, though obviously omitting much detail that I burned to hear.

“And that very week—the next day, I think, it was—I asked Maennlich to allow me an hour’s talk with her alone——”

“She—er——?”

“She liked me—from the very first, yes. She felt me.”

“And showed it?” I asked bluntly.

“And showed it,” he repeated, “although she said it puzzled her and she couldn’t understand.”

“On her side, then, it was love—love at first sight?”

“Strong attraction,” he put it, “but an attraction she thought it her duty to resist at first. Her present conditions made any relationship between us seem incongruous, and when I offered marriage—as I did at once—it overwhelmed her. She made sensible objections, but it was her brain of To-day that made them. You can imagine how it went. She urged that to marry a man in another class of life, a ‘gentleman,’ a ‘wealthy’ gentleman and an educated, ‘scholar gentleman,’ as she called me, could only end in unhappiness—because I should tire of her. Yet, all the time—she told me this afterwards—she had the feeling that we were meant for one another, and that it must surely be. She was shy about it as a child.”

“And you convinced her in the end!” I said to myself rather than aloud to him. There were feelings in me I could not disentangle.

“Convinced her that we needed one another and could never go apart,” he said. “We had something to fulfil together. The forces that drove us together, though unintelligible to her, were yet acknowledged by her too, you see.”

“I see,” my voice murmured faintly, as he seemed to expect some word in reply. “I see.” Then, after a longer pause than usual, I asked: “And you told her of

your—your theories and beliefs—the purpose you had to do together?"

"No single word. She could not possibly have understood. It would have frightened her." I heard it with relief, yet with resentment too.

"Was that quite fair, do you think?"

His answer I could not gainsay. "Cause and effect," he said, "work out, whether memory is there or not. To attempt to block fulfilment by fear or shrinking is but to delay the very thing you need. I told her we were necessary to each other, but that she must come willingly, or not at all. I used no undue persuasion, and I used no force. I realised plainly that her upper, modern, uncultured and uneducated self was merely what she had acquired in the few years of her present life. It was this upper self that hesitated and felt shy. The older self below was not awake, yet urged her to acceptance blindly—as by irresistible instinctive choice. She knew subconsciously; but, once I could succeed in arousing her knowledge consciously, I knew her doubts would vanish. I suggested living away from city life, away from any conditions that might cause her annoyance or discomfort due to what she called our respective 'stations' in life; I suggested the mountains, some beautiful valley perhaps, where in solitude for a time we could get to know each other better, untroubled by the outer world—until she became accustomed——"

"And she approved?" I interrupted with impatience.

"Her words were 'That's the very thing; I've always had a dream like that.' She agreed with enthusiasm, and the opposition melted away. She knew the kind of place we needed," he added significantly.

We had reached the head of the valley by this time, and I sat down upon a boulder with the sweep of Jura forests below us like a purple carpet. The sun and shadow splashed it everywhere with softest colouring. The morning wind was fresh; birds were singing; this green vale among the mountains seemed some undiscovered paradise.

"And you have never since felt a moment's doubt—uncertainty—that she really is this 'soul' you knew before?"

He lay back, his head upon his folded hands, and his eyes fixed upon the blue dome of sky.

"A hundred proofs come to me all the time," he said, stretching himself at full length upon the grass. "And in her atmosphere, in her presence, the memories still revive in detail from day to day—just as at school they revived in you—those pictures you sought to stifle and deny. From the first she never doubted me. She was aware of a great tie and bond between us. 'You're the only man,' she said to me afterwards, 'that could have done it like that. I belonged to you—oh! I can't make it out—but just as if there wasn't any getting out of it possible. I felt stunned when I saw you. I had always felt something like this coming, but thought it was a dream.' Only she often said there was something else to come as well, and that we were not quite complete. She knew, you see; she knew." He broke off suddenly and turned to look at me. He added in a lower tone, as he watched my face: "And you see how pleased and happy she is to have you here!"

I made no reply. I reached out for a stone and flung it headlong down the steep slope towards the stream five hundred feet below.

"And so it was settled then and there?" I asked, after a pause that Julius seemed inclined to prolong.

"Then and there," he said, watching the rolling stone with dreamy eyes. "In the hall-way of that Norwood villa, under the very eyes of Maennlich who paid her wages and probably often scolded her, she came up into my arms at the end of our final talk, and kissed me like a happy child. She cried a good deal at the time, but I have never once seen her cry since!"

"And it's all gone well—these months?" I murmured.

"There was a temporary reaction at first—at the very first, that is," he said, "and I

had to call in Maennlich to convince her that I was in earnest. At her bidding I did that. Some instinct told her that Maennlich ought to see it—perhaps, because it would save her awkward and difficult explanations afterwards. There's the woman in her, you see, the normal, wholesome woman, sweet and timid."

"A fascinating personality," I murmured quickly, lest I might say other things—before their time.

"No looks, no worldly beauty," he nodded, "but the unconscious charm of the old soul. It's unmistakable."

Worlds and worlds I would have given to have been present at that interview; Julius LeVallon, so unusual and distinguished; the shy and puzzled serving-maid, happy and incredulous; the grey-bearded archæologist and scholar; the strange embarrassment of this amazing proposal of marriage!

"And Maennlich?" I asked, anxious for more detail.

Julius burst out laughing. "Maennlich lives in his own world with his specimens and theories and memories of travel—more recent memories of travel than our own! It hardly interested him for more than a passing moment. He regarded it, I think, as an unnecessary interruption—and a bothering one—some joke he couldn't quite appreciate or understand. He pulled his dirty beard, patted me on the back as though I were a boy running after some theatre girl, and remarked with a bored facetiousness that he could give her a year's character with a clear conscience and great pleasure. Something like that it was; I forget exactly. Then he went back to his library, shouting through the door some appointment about a Geographical Society meeting for the following week. For how could he know"—his voice grew softer as he said it and his laughter ceased—"how could he divine, that old literal-minded savant, that he stood before a sign-post along the route to the eternal things we seek, or that my marrying his servant was a step towards something we three owe together to the universe itself?"

It was some time before either of us spoke, and when at length I broke the silence it was to express surprise that a woman, so long ripened by the pursuit of spiritual, or at least exalted aims, should have returned to earth among the lowly. By rights, it seemed, she should have reincarnated among the great ones of the world. I knew I could say this now without offence.

"The humble," Julius answered simply, "are the great ones."

His fingers played with the fronds of a piece of staghorn moss as he said it, and to this day I cannot see this kind of moss without remembering his strange words.

"It's among what men call the lower ranks that the old souls return," he went on; "among peasants and simple folk, unambitious and heedless of material power, you always find the highest ones. They are there to learn the final lessons of service or denial, neglected in their busier and earlier—kindergarten sections. The last stages are invariably in humble service—they are by far the most difficult; no young, 'ambitious' soul could manage it. But the old souls, having already mastered all the more obvious lessons, are content."

"Then the oldest souls are not the great minds and great characters of history?" I exclaimed.

"Not necessarily," he answered; "probably never. The most advanced are unadvertised, in the least assuming positions. The Kingdom of Heaven belongs to them, hard of attainment by those the world applauds. The successful, so called, are the younger, cruder souls, passionately acquiring still the external prizes men hold so dear. Maturer souls have long since discarded these as worthless. The qualities the world crowns are great, perhaps, at that particular stage, but they never are the highest. Intellect, remember, is not of the soul, and all that reason teaches must be unlearned again. Theories change, knowledge shifts, facts are forgotten or proved false; only what the soul itself acquires remains eternally the same. The old are the intuitional; and the oldest of all—ah! how wonderful!—He who came back from

loftier heights than most of us can yet even conceive of, was the—son of a carpenter."

I left my seat upon the boulder and lay beside him, listening for a long time while he talked, and if there was much that seemed visionary, there was also much that thrilled me with emotions beyond ordinary. Nothing, certainly, was foolish—because of the man who said it. And, while he took it for granted that all Nature was alive and a manifestation of spiritual powers, the elements themselves but forces to be mastered and acquired, it grew upon me that I had indeed entered an enchanted valley where, with my strange companions, I might witness new, incredible things. Finding little to reply, I was content to listen, wondering what was coming next. And in due course the talk came round again to ourselves, and so to the woman who was now his wife.

"Then she has no idea," I said at length, "that we three—you and I and she—have been together before, or that there is any particular purpose in my being here at this moment?"

"In her normal condition—none," he answered. "For she has no memory."

"There is a state, however, when she does remember?" I asked. "You have helped her to remember? Is that it, Julius?"

"Yes," he replied; "I have reached down and touched her soul, so that she remembers for herself."

"The deep trance state?"

"Where all the memories of the past lie accumulated," he answered, "the subconscious state. Her Self of To-day—with new body and recent brain—she has forgotten; in trance—the subconscious Self where the soul dwells with all its past—she remembers."

CHAPTER XIX

"Proof of the reality of a personal sovereign of the universe will not be obtained. But proof of the reality of a power or powers, not unworthy of the title of gods, in respect of our corner of the cosmos, may be feasible."—"The Individual and Reality" (E. D. Fawcett).

I shrank. Certain memories of our Edinburgh days revived unpleasantly. They seemed to have happened yesterday instead of years ago. A shadowy hand from those distant skies he spoke of, from those dim avenues of thickly written Time, reached down and touched my heart, leaving the chill of an indescribable uneasiness. The change in me since my arrival only a few hours before was too rapid not to bring reaction. Yet on the whole the older, deeper consciousness gained power.

Possibilities my imagination had unwisely played with now seemed stealing slowly toward probabilities. I felt as a man might feel who, having never known fire, and disbelieved in its existence, becomes aware of the warmth of its approach—a strange and revolutionary discomfort. For Julius was winning me back into his world again, and not with mere imaginative, half-playful acceptance, but with practical action and belief. Yet the change in me was somehow welcome. No feeling of resentment kept it in check, and certainly neither scorn nor ridicule. Incredulity glanced invitingly at faith. They would presently shake hands.

I made, perhaps, an effort to hold back, to define the position, my position, at any rate.

"Julius," I said gravely, yet with a sympathy I could not quite conceal, "as boys together, and even later at the University, we talked of various curious things, remarkable, even amazing things. You even showed me certain extraordinary things which, at the time, convinced me possibly. I ought to tell you now—and before we go any further, since you take it for granted that my feelings and—er—beliefs are still the same as yours—that I can no longer subscribe to all the articles of your wild

conviction. I have been living in the world, you see, these many years, and—well, my imagination has collapsed or dried up or whatever you like to call it. I don't really see, or remember—anything—quite in the way you mean——"

"The 'world' has smothered it—temporarily," he put in gently.

"And what is more," I continued, ignoring his interruption, "I must confess that I have no stomach now for any 'great experiment' such as you think our coming together in this valley must involve. Your idea of reincarnation may be true—why not? It's a most logical conception. And we three may have been together before—granted! I admit I rather like the notion. It may even be conceivable that the elemental powers of Nature are intelligent, that men and women could use them to their advantage, and that worship and feeling-with is the means to acquire them—it's just as likely as that some day we shall send telegrams without wires, thoughts and pictures too!"

I drew breath a moment, while he waited patiently, linking his arm in mine and listening silently.

"It may even be possible, too," I went on, finding some boyish relief in all these words, "that we three together in earlier days did—in some kind of primitive Nature Worship—make wrong use of an unconscious human body to evoke those particular Powers you say exist behind Wind and Fire, and that, having thus upset the balance of material forces, we must readjust that balance or suffer accordingly—you in particular, since you were the prime mover——"

"How well you state it," he murmured. "How excellent your memory is after all."

"But even so," I continued, nettled by his calm interpretation of my long and plodding objection, "and even if all you claim is true—I—I mean bluntly—that the transitory acceptance you woke in me years ago no longer holds. I am with you now merely to keep a promise, a boy's promise, but my heart is no longer in the matter—except out of curiosity—curiosity pure and simple."

I stopped, or rather it was his face and the expression in his eyes that stopped me. I felt convicted of somewhat pompous foolishness, my sense of humour and proportion gone awry. Fear, with its ludicrous inhibitions, made me strut in this portentous fashion. His face, wearing the child's expression of belief and confidence, arrested me by its sheer simplicity. But the directness of his rejoinder, however—of his words, at least, for it was not a reply—struck me dumb.

"You are afraid for her," he said without a trace of embarrassment or emotion, "because you love her still, even as she loves you—beneath."

If unconsciously or consciously I avoided his eye, he made no attempt to avoid my own. He looked calmly at me like some uncannily clairvoyant lawyer who has pierced the elaborate evasions of his cross-examined witness—yet a witness who believed in his own excuses, quite honestly self-deceived.

At first the shock of his words deprived me of any power to think. I was not offended, I was simply speechless. He forgot who I was and what my life had been, forgot my relation with himself, forgot also the brevity of my acquaintance with his wife. He forgot, too, that I had accepted her, an inferior woman, accepted her without a hint of regret—nay, let me use the word I mean—of contempt that he, my friend, had linked his life with such a being—married her. And, further, he forgot all that was due to himself, to me, to her! It was too distressing. What could he possibly think of me, of himself, of her, that so outrageous a statement, and without a shred of evidence, could pass his lips? I, a middle-aged professor of geology, with an established position in the world! And she, a parlour-maid he had been wild enough to marry for the sake of some imagined dream, a woman, moreover, I had seen for the first time a short hour before, and with whom I had exchanged a few sentences in bare politeness, remembering that this uneducated creature was the wife of my old friend, and——!

Thought galloped on in indignant disorder and agitation. The pretence was so

apparent even to myself. But I remained speechless. For while he spoke, looking me calmly in the eye, without a sign of arrière pensée, I realised in a flash—that it all was true. Like the witness who still believes in his indignant answers until the lawyer puts questions that confound him by unexpected self-revelation—I suddenly saw—myself. My own heart opened in a blaze of fire. It was the truth.

And all this came upon me, not in a flash, but in a series of flashes. I had not known it. I now discovered myself, but for the first time. Layer after layer dropped away. The naked fact shone clearly.

"It is exactly what I hoped," he went on quietly. "It proves memory beyond all further doubt. A love like yours and hers can never die. Even another thirty thousand years could make no difference—the instant you met you would be bound to take it up again—exactly where you left it off—no matter how long the interval of separation. The first sign would be this divine and natural intimacy."

"Of course."

How I said it passes my understanding. I swear my lips moved without my mind's consent. The words slipped out. I couldn't help myself. The same instant some words he had used in our Edinburgh days came back to me: that human love was somehow necessary to him, since love was the greatest power in the world, the supreme example of "feeling-with." Without its aid—that majestic confidence it brings—his great experiment must be impossible and fail. That union which is love was necessary.

I felt an extraordinary exultation, an extraordinary tumult of delight, and—a degrading flush of shame. I felt myself blushing under his quiet gaze while the blood rushed over neck and cheeks and forehead. Both guilty and innocent I felt. The very sun and trees, it seemed, witnessed my nakedness. I stumbled as I moved beside my friend, and it was my friend who caught my arm and steadied me.

"Good God, Julius," I remember stammering, "but what in the name of heaven are

you saying?”

“The truth,” he answered, smiling. “And do not for a moment think of me as unnatural or a monster. For this is all inevitable and right and good. It means our opportunity has come at last. It also means that you have not failed me.”

I was glad he went on talking. I am a fool, I know it. I am weak, susceptible and easily influenced. I have no claim to any strength of character, nor ever had. But, without priggishness or self-righteousness, I can affirm that hitherto I have never done another man deliberate, conscious injury, or wronged a personal friend—never in all my days. I can say that, and for the satisfaction of my conscience I did say it, and kept on saying it in my thought while listening to the next words that Julius uttered there beside me.

“And so, quite naturally, from your point of view,” he pursued, “you are afraid for her. I am delighted; for it proves again the strength of the ineradicable, ancient tie. My union, remember, is not, properly speaking, love; it is the call of sympathy, of friendship, of something that we have to do together, of a claim that has the drive of all the universe behind it. And if I have felt it wise and right and necessary to”—he must have felt the shudder down the arm he held, for he said it softly, even tenderly—“give to her a child, it is because her entire nature needs it, and maternity is the woman’s first and ultimate demand of her present stage in life. Without it she is never quite complete....”

“A child!”

“A child,” he repeated firmly but with a kind of reverent gravity, “for otherwise her deepest functions are not exercised and——”

“And?” I asked, noticing the slight pause he made.

“The soul—her complete and highest self—never takes full possession of her body. It hovers outside. She misses the full, entire object of her reincarnation. The child, you see, was necessary—for her sake as well as for my own—for ours.”

Thought, speech and action—all three stood still in me. I stopped in my walk, half paralysed. I remember we sat down.

"And she," I said at length, "knows nothing—of all this?"

"She," he replied, "knows everything, and is content. Her mind and brain of To-day may remain unaware; but she—the soul now fully in her—knows all, and is content, as you shall see. She has her debt to pay as well as myself—and you."

For a long time we sat there silent in that sweet September sunshine. The birds sang round us, the rivulet went murmuring, the branches sighed and rustled just behind us, as though no problems vexed their safe, unconscious lives. Yet to me just then they all seemed somehow to participate in this complex plot of human emotion. Nature herself in some deep fashion was involved.

No man, I realised, knows himself, nor understands the acts of which he is potentially capable, until certain conditions bring them out. We imagine we know exactly how we should act in given circumstances—until those circumstances actually arrive and dislocate all our preconceived decisions. For the "given circumstances" produce emotions before whose stress—not realised when the decisions were so lightly made—we act quite otherwise. I could have sworn, for instance, that in a case like this—incredible though its ever happening must have seemed—I should then and there have taken my departure. I should have left. I would have gone without a moment's hesitation, and let him follow his own devices without my further assistance at any rate. I would have been furious with anyone who dared to state the contrary.

Yet it was exactly the opposite I did. The first instinct to clear out of this outrageous situation—proved impossible. It was not for her I remained; it was equally not for him; and it was assuredly not for myself in any meaning of the words. But yet I stayed. I could no more have gone away than I could have—made love to her before his eyes, or even not before his eyes. I argued, reasoned, moralised—but I stayed. It

was over very soon—what there was of doubt and hesitation. While we sat there side by side upon that sunny mountain slope, I came to the clear decision that I could not go. But why, or how, I stayed is something beyond my powers to explain. Perhaps, au fond, it was because I believed in Julius LeVallon—believed, that is, in his innate uprightness and rectitude and nobility of soul. It was all beyond me. I could not understand. But—I had this strange belief in him. My relationship with her was, and would remain on both sides, a subconscious one—a memory. There would be no betrayal anywhere. I resolved to see it through.

"I ask nothing but your presence," I heard him saying presently; "if not actively sympathetic, at least not actively hostile. It is the sum of forces you bring with you that I need. They are in your atmosphere, whether expressed or merely latent. You are you." He watched me as he said this. "I failed once before, you remember," he added, "because she was absent. Your desertion now would render success again impossible."

He took my hand in his. A tender, even beseeching note crept into his deep voice. "Help me," he concluded, "if you will. You bring your entire past with you, though you know it not. It is that Past that our reconstruction needs."

A wind from the south, I remember, blew the firs behind us into low, faint sighing, and with the exquisite sound there stole a mingled joy and yearning on my soul. Perhaps some flower of memory in that moment yielded up its once familiar perfume, dim, ancient, yet not entirely forgotten. The sighing of the forest wafted it from other times and other places. Wonder and beauty touched me; I knew longing, but a longing so acutely poignant that it seemed not of this little earth at all. A fragrance and power of other stars, I could have sworn, lay in it. The pang of some long, long sweetness made me tremble. An immense ideal rose and beckoned with that whispering wind among the Jura pine woods, and a grandeur, remote but of ineffable sweetness, stirred through the undergrowths of a half-claimed,

half-recognised consciousness within me.

I was aware of this incalculable emotion. Ancient yearnings seemed on the verge of coaxing loved memories into the light of day. I burned, I trembled, I suffered atrociously, yet with a rush of blind delight never before realised by me on earth. Then, suddenly, and wholly without warning, the desire for tears came over me in a flood.... Control was possible, but left no margin over. Somehow I managed it, so that no visible sign of this acute and extraordinary collapse should appear. It seemed, for a moment, that the frame of my modern personality was breaking down under the stress of new powers unleashed by my meeting with these two in this enchanted valley. Almost, another order of consciousness supervened ... then passed without being quite accomplished.... I heard the singing of the trees in the low south wind again. I saw the clouds sailing across the blue foreign sky. I saw his eyes upon me like twin flames. With the greatest difficulty I found speech possible in that moment.

“I can promise, at least, that I will not be hostile. I can promise that,” I said in a low and faltering tone.

He made no direct reply; least of all did it occur to him to thank me. The storm that had shaken me had apparently not touched him. His tone was quiet and normal as he continued speaking, though its depth and power, with that steady drive of absolute conviction behind, could never leave it quite an ordinary voice.

“She, as I told you, knows nothing in her surface mind,” I heard. “Beyond occasional uprushes of memory that have come to her lately in dreams—she tells them naïvely, confusedly in the morning sometimes—she is aware of no more than a feeling of deep content, and that our union is right in the sense of being inevitable. Her pleasure that you have come is obvious. And more,” he added, “I do not wish the older memories to break through yet, for that might wake pain or terror in her and, therefore, unconscious opposition.”

He touched my arm a moment, looking at me with a significant expression. It was a suggestive thing he said: “For human consciousness is different at different periods, remember, and ages remotely separated cannot understand each other. Their points of view, their modes of consciousness, are too different. In her deeper state—separated by so huge an interval from the nineteenth century—with its origin long before we came to live upon this little earth—she would not, could not understand. There would be no sympathy; there might be terror; there must certainly be failure.”

I murmured something or other, heaven alone knows what it was.

“What we think fine and wonderful may then have seemed the crudest folly, superstition, wickedness—and vice versa. Look at the few thousand years of history we have—and you’ll see the truth of this. We cannot grasp how certain periods could possibly have done the things they did.” He paused, then added in a lower tone, more to himself than to me: “So with what we have to do now—though exceptional, utterly exceptional—it is a remnant that we owe to Nature—to the universe—and we must see it through....” His voice died away.

“I understand,” my voice dropped into the open pause he left.

“Though you neither believe nor welcome,” he replied.

“My promise,” I said quietly, “holds good. Also”—I blushed and half-stammered over the conventional words—“I will do nothing that can cause possible offence—to anyone.”

The hand that rested on my arm tightened its grasp a little. He made no other sign. It was remarkable how the topic that must have separated two other men—any two other men in the world, I suppose—had been subtracted from our relationship, laid aside as dealt with and admitted, calling for no further mention even. It all seemed, in some strange way, impersonal almost—another attitude to life—a faint sign, it may well have been, of that older mode of consciousness he spoke about.

I hardly recognised myself, so complete was the change in me, and so swiftly going forward. This dragnet from the Past drew ever closer. If the mind in me resisted still, it seemed rather from some natural momentum acquired by habit, than from any spontaneous activity due to the present. The modern, upper self surrendered.

"How soon?" was the question that seemed to come of its own accord; it was certainly not my confused and shaken mind that asked it. "When do you propose to——"

He answered without a sign of hesitation. "The Autumnal Equinox. You've forgotten that," he added as though he justified my lack of memory here, "for all the world has forgotten it too—the science of Times and Seasons—the oldest known to man. It was true cosmic knowledge, but so long ago that it has left our modern consciousness as though it never had existed even."

He stopped abruptly. I think he desired me to discover for myself, unguided, unhampered by explanation. And, at the words, something remote and beautiful did stir, indeed, within me. A curtain drew aside....

CHAPTER XX

Some remnant of ghostly knowledge quickened. Behind the mind and brain, in that region, perhaps, where thought ceases and intuition offers her amazing pageant, there stirred—reality. Times and seasons, I seemed to realise, have spiritual importance; there is a meaning in months and hours; if noon is different from six o'clock, what happens at noon varies in import from what happens at six o'clock, although the happening itself at both moments be identical. An event holds its minimum or its maximum of meaning according to the moment when it happens. Its effectiveness varies with the context.

Power is poured out, or power is kept back. To ask a man for energetic action when he is falling asleep is to court refusal; to expect life of him when he is overflowing

with vitality and joy is probably to obtain it. The hand is stretched out to give, or the hand is withheld.

With the natural forces of the earth—it now dawned upon me—the method was precisely similar. Nature and human-nature reacted differently at different moments. At the moment of equilibrium called "equinox," there was a state of balance so perfect that this balance could be most easily, most naturally—transcended.

And objects in the outer world around me changed. Their meaning, ordinarily superficial, appeared of incalculable significance. The innate activities of Nature, the elements, I realised indeed as modes of life; the communication Julius foreshadowed, a possible and natural thing.

Someone, I believe, was speaking of these and similar things—words came floating on the wind, it seemed—yet with meanings so remote from all that my mind of To-day deemed possible, that I scarcely knew whether it was the voice of my companion speaking, or a voice of another kind, whispering in my very blood.

In Bâle a week ago, or in London six weeks ago, such theories would have left me cold. Now, at this particular juncture, they came with a solemn beauty I can only account for by the fact that I had changed into almost another being. My mind seemed ready for anything and everything. No modern creeds and dogmas could confine my imagination....

I had entered a different cycle of operation. I felt these ideas all-over-me. The brain might repeat insistently "this is false, this is superstition"; but something bigger than reason steadily overrode the criticism. My point of view had changed. In some new way, strangely exciting, I saw everything at once. My entire Self became the percipient, rather than my five separate senses. In Nature all around me another language uttered. It was the cosmic sense that stirred and woke. It was another mode of consciousness.

We three, it came upon me, were acting out some omitted detail of a great

world-purpose. The fact that she forgot, that I was ignorant, that Julius LeVallon seemed guilty of unmoral things—these were but ripples upon the deep tide that bore us forward. We were uttering a great sentence we had left unfinished. I knew not exactly what was coming, only that we had begun its utterance ages before the present, and probably upon a planet nearer to the sun than our younger earth. The verb had not yet made its appearance in this sentence, but it would presently appear and explain the series of acts, and, meanwhile, I must go on acting and wondering what it all could mean. I thought of a language that first utters the nouns and adjectives, then adds the verb at the end, explaining the whole series of unmeaning sounds. Our "experiment" was the verb.

Then came the voice of Julius suddenly:

"Fate is the true complement of yourself; it completes your nature. By doing it, you become one with your surroundings. Note attitude and gesture—of yourself and of everything. They are signs. Our attitudes must coincide with that of the earth to the heavens—possible only at the Equinox. We must feel with her. We then act with her. Do not resist. Let this valley say to you what it will. Regard it, and regard our life here at the moment, as a symbol, clothed in a whole story of information, the story varying with every hour of the day and with the slightest change of the earth in relation to the universe."

It seemed I watched the track of some unknown animal upon the ground, and tried to reconstruct the entire creature. Such imprint is but a trace of the invisible being that has made it. All about this valley there were tracks offering a hint of Beings that had left them—that any moment might reveal themselves. Julius talked on in his calm and unimpassioned way. I both understood and could not understand. I realised that there is a language for the mind, but no language for the spirit. There are no words in which to express big cosmic meanings. Action—a three-dimensional language—alone could be their vehicle. The knowledge must be performed—acted

out in ceremony. Comprehension filtered into me, though how I cannot say.

"Symbols are merely the clues," he went on. "It is a question of stimulating your own imagination. Into the images created by your own activities the meaning flows. You must play with them and let them play with you. They depend for their meaning on history and happenings, and vary according to their setting—the time of day or night, the season of the year, the year itself, the exact relation of your Self to every other Self, human or otherwise, in the universe. Let your life and activities now arrange themselves in such a way that they shall demonstrate the workings of the elemental powers you feel about you. Every automatic activity of your body, every physiological process in you, links you on to this great elemental side of things. Be open now to the language of action. Think of the motion of all objects here as connected with the language of symbols, a living, ever-moving language, and do not allow your mind to mutilate the moods that come upon you. Let your nerves, if they will, come into contact with the Nature Powers, and so realise that the three kingdoms are alive. Watch your own automatic activities—I mean what you do unconsciously without deliberate thinking. For what you do consciously you are learning, but what you do unconsciously you have learned before. We have to become the performance by acting it—instantaneous understanding. All such attitudes are language, and the power to read it comes from a synthetical, intuitive feeling of the entire being. The heart may get one letter only, but that letter is a clue, an omen. A moth flies into the room and everything immediately looks different; it remains the same, yet means something different. It's like the vowel in the ancient languages—put in later, according to the meaning. You have, I know, forgotten"—he paused a moment and put his hand on my shoulder—"but every wind that blows across our valley here, and every change in temperature that lowers or raises the heat and fire of your own particular system"—he looked at me with a power in bearing and gesture impossible to describe—"is a sign and hint of whether——"

He stopped, glancing suddenly down the steep grass slopes. A breeze stirred the hair upon his forehead. It brushed my eyes and cheeks as well. I felt as though a hand had touched me as it passed invisibly. A momentary sensation of energy, of greater life swept over me, then disappeared as though the wind had borne it off.

“Of whether your experiment will be successful?” I broke in.

Turning his eyes from the sunny valley to my face again, he said slowly:

“These Powers can only respond to the language they understand. My deliverance must be experienced, acted out.”

“A ceremony?” I asked, wondering uneasily what “acts of language” he might demand of me and of another.

“To restore them finally—where they rightfully belong,” he answered, “I must become them. There is no other way.”

How little intelligible result issued from this conversation must be apparent from the confused report here given, yet that something deep and true was in his mind lay beyond all question. At the back of my own, whence no satisfactory sentences could draw it out into clean description, floated this idea that the three of us were already acting out some vast, strange ceremonial in which Nature, indeed the very earth and heavens themselves, were acting with us. There was this co-operation, this deep alliance. The “experiment” we approached would reveal itself in natural happenings and circumstances. Action was to take the place of words, conveying meaning as speech or handwriting conveys a message. The attitude of ourselves, the very grouping of inanimate objects, of trees and hills, the effects of light and shade, the moods of day and night, above all, the time and season of the year which is nothing but the attitude of the earth towards the rest of the universe—all these, as modes of intelligent expression, would belong to the strange performance. They were the conscious gestures of the universe. If I could feel-with them, interpretation would be mine.

And, that I understood even this proved memory. “You will gradually become conscious,” he said, “of various signs about you. Analyse these signs. But analyse them with a view to creating language. For language does not create ideas; Ideas become language. Put the vowels in. When communication begins to be established, the inanimate world here will talk to you as in the fairy tales—seem alive. Play with it, as you play with symbols in algebra before you rise to the higher mathematics. So, notice and think about anything that”—he emphasised the verb significantly—“draws your attention. Do not point out at the moment; that’s compulsion and rouses opposition; just be aware and accept by noticing. And do not concentrate too much; what flows in must also be able to flow out; otherwise there comes congestion, and so—fear. In this valley the channels all are open, and wonder everywhere. The more you wonder, the more your memory will come back and consciousness extend. Great language has no words. The only way to grow in consciousness is to be for ever changing your ideas and point of view. Accept Nature here. Feel like a tree and then like a star. Be violent with wind, and burn with fire. These things are forgotten To-day because Wonder has left the world—and with it worship. So do not be ashamed to wonder at anything you notice. It all lies in you—I know that—and here it will rise to the surface.” He laughed. “If a woman,” he went on, “wears embroidered lilies on her dress, all London seems full of flower-sellers. They were there before, but she had nothing in herself to make her conscious of them. Notice all the little things, for you are a portion of the universe as much as Sirius or Vega, and in living relation with every other atom. You can share Nature, and here in our secret valley you may welcome her without alarm. The cosmic organism, denied by civilisation, survives in you as it survives also in myself and in—my wife. Through that, and through that alone, is the experiment possible to us.”

And it flashed into me that my visit to this enchanted valley would witness no concentrated, miniature “ceremonial,” reduced in form for worship as in a church or

temple, but that all we did and experienced in the course of normal, every-day life would mark the outlines of this vast performance. Understanding would come that way.

And then the mention of his "wife" brought me sharply back to emotions of—another kind. My thought leaped back again—by what steps I cannot say, it seemed so disconnected with what had just occupied my mind—to his statement of ten minutes before.

"By becoming them," I asked, "you mean that you must feel-with wind and fire to the point of being them?"

"You think this might be done alone, without your help or hers?" he asked, picking the thought straight out of my mind. "But only a group could have done what we did—a group, moreover, in perfect sympathy. For as love between the three of us was essential to success then, so is love between us essential now. A group, combined by love into a unit, exerts a power impossible to an individual. The secret of our power lies in that—ideal love and perfect sympathy."

I listened, sure of one thing only—that I would keep an open mind. To deny, object, criticise, above all to ridicule would rob me of an experience. I believe honestly this was my attitude: to miss no value that might be in it by assuming it was nonsense merely because it was so strange. Apart from the curious fact that something in me was sympathetic to a whole world of deep ideas behind his language, I felt the determined desire to see the matter through. There was no creed or religious dogma in me to offend. I made myself receptive. For, out of this singular exposition the conviction grew that I was entering almost a new order of existence, and that an earlier mode of consciousness revived.

In this lonely valley, untouched by the currents of modern thought and feeling, companioned by Julius LeVallon and that old, recovered soul, his wife, the conditions of our previous existence together perhaps re-formed themselves. Behind

his talk came ideas that wore an aspect of familiarity, although my present brain, try as it might, failed to mould them into any acceptable form. The increasing change in myself was certainly significant. The crumbling of old shibboleths continued. A relationship between my inner nature and the valley seemed established in some way that was new, yet not entirely forgotten. The very sunlight and the wind assisted. Closer to the natural things I felt, the earth not alien to me....

We had neared the châlet again. I saw the peat smoke rising against the background of the ridges. The “man” was whistling at his work in the yard behind the building. The column of smoke, I remember, was agitated by the wind towards the top; it turned, blew downwards. No other sign of movement was anywhere visible, for in the bottom of the hollow where we now stood, the wind did not even stir the isolated larches or tall yellow gentians. Sunshine flooded everything. Out of this peace and stillness then came a sudden cry and the sight of something moving rapidly—both from the châlet.

“Julius!” called a shrill voice, as the figure of Mrs. LeVallon, with flying hair and skirts, came running over the meadow towards us. “Julius!—Professor! Quick!”

The voice and figure startled me; both came, it seemed, out of some other place; a picture from my youth rose up—a larch grove in October upon the Pentland Hills. I experienced a sense of deep and thrilling beauty similar to what I had felt then. But as I watched the slim, hurrying figure I was aware of another thing that left me breathless: For with her, as she passed through chequered sun and shadow along the fringe of forest, there moved something else enormously larger than herself. It was in the air about her. Like that strange Pentland memory, it whirled. It was formless, and owing to its huge proportions gave the impression of moving slowly, yet its very formlessness was singularly impressive and alive, so that the word “body” sprang instantly into my mind. Actually it moved at a tremendous speed.

In my first confusion and bewilderment I remember saying aloud in sheer

amazement: “a fragment of the day has broken off; it’s clothed in wind and sunlight!”

A phrase quite meaningless, of course, yet somehow accurately descriptive, for it appealed to me as a fragment of conditionless, universal activity that had seized upon available common elements to furnish itself a visible appearance. I got the astounding suggestion that it was heat and air moving under intelligent and conscious direction. Combined with its airy lightness there was power, for in its brief, indeed its instantaneous, appearance I felt persuaded of an irresistible strength that no barrier of solid matter could possibly withstand. At the same time it was transparent, for I saw the trees upon its further side. It passed ahead of the human figure, so close it seemed to touch her dress, rose with a kind of swift, driving plunge into the air, slipped meltingly into the clean blue colour of the atmosphere—and disappeared.

And so swift was the entire presentment of the thing, that even while I tried to focus my sight upon it to make sure I was not deceived, it had both come and gone. The same second Julius caught my arm. I heard him utter a quick, low cry, stifled instantly. He gasped. He quivered. I heard him whispering:

“Already! Your presence here—the additional forces that you bring—are known and recognised! See, how complete we are—a unit—you, she and I—a trinity!”

A coldness not of this world touched me as I heard. But that first sense of joy and beauty followed. I felt it true—the three of us were somehow one.

“You saw it too?” I asked, exhilaration still about me.

“They are everywhere and close,” he whispered quickly, as the running figure came on toward us, “breaking out into visible manifestation even. Hold yourself strong and steady. Remember, your attitude of mind and feeling are important. Each detail of behaviour is significant.”

His anxiety, I realised, was for us, not for himself. Already, it seemed, our souls

were playing vital rôles in some great dramatic ceremonial just beginning. What we did and felt and thought was but a partial expression of something going forward with pregnant completeness behind the visible appearances all round. Mrs. LeVallon stood breathless in front of us. She was hatless, her hair becomingly dishevelled; her arms bare to the elbow and white with flour. She stopped, placed her hands upon her hips, and panted for a full minute before she could get breath enough to speak. Her eyes, a deep, luminous sea-green, looked into ours. Her face was pale, yet the emotion was excitement rather than alarm. I was aware of a superb, nymph-like grace and charm about her. I caught my breath. Julius made no movement, spoke no word. I wondered. I made a step forward to catch her. But she did not fall; she merely sank down upon the ground at our feet.

"Julius," she panted, "that thing I've dreamed about so often——"

She stopped short, glancing up at me, the eyes, charged with a sweet agitation, full upon my own. I turned to Julius with a gesture of uncontrollable impatience.

He spoke calmly, sitting down on the slope beside her. "You felt it again—the effect of your vivid dreaming? Or did you this time—see anything?"

The swiftness and surprise of the little scene had been bewildering, but the moment he spoke confusion and suspense both vanished. The sound of his quiet voice restored the threatened balance. Peace came back into the sunlight and the air. There was composure again.

"You certainly were not frightened!" he added, as she made no reply. "You look too happy and exhilarated for that." He put his hand on hers.

I sat down then beside her, and she turned and looked at me with a pathetic mingling of laughter and agitation still in her wide-opened eyes. The three of us were close together. He kept his hand on hers. Her shoulder touched me. I was aware of something very wonderful there between us. We comforted her, but it was more, far more, than that. There was sheer, overflowing happiness in it.

“It came into the house,” she said, her breath recovered now, and her voice gentle. “It follered me—out here. I ran.” She looked swiftly round at me. The radiance in her face was quite astonishing, turning her almost beautiful. Her eyelids quivered a moment and the corners of her lips seemed trying to smile—or not to smile. She was happy there, sitting between us two. Yet there was nothing light or foolish in her. Something of worship rose in me as I watched her.

“Well,” urged Julius, “and then—what?” I saw him watching me as well as her. “You remembered your dream, you felt something, and—you ran out here to us. What else?”

She hesitated deliciously. But it was not that she wanted coaxing. She evidently knew not how to tell the thing she had to say. She looked hard into my face, her eyes keenly searching.

“It has something to do with him, you mean?” asked Julius, noting the direction of her questioning gaze.

“Oh, I’m glad he’s here,” she answered quickly. “It’s the best thing that could happen.” And she looked round again at Julius, moving her hand upon his own.

“We need him,” said Julius simply with a smile. Then, suddenly, she took my hand too, and held it tightly. “He’s a protection, I think, as well,” she added quite gravely; “that’s how I feel him.” Her hand lay warm and fast on mine.

There was a pause. I felt her fingers strongly clasp my own. The three of us were curiously linked together somehow by those two hands of hers. A great harmony united us. The day was glorious, the power of the sun divine, there was power in the wind that touched our faces.

“Yes,” she continued slowly, “I think it had to do with him—with you, Professor,” she repeated emphatically, fixing her bright gaze upon me. “I think you brought it—brought my dream back—brought that thing I dreamed about into—the house itself.” And in her excitement she said distinctly “’ouse.”

I found no word to say at the moment. She kept her hand firmly upon mine.

“I was making bread there, by the back winder as usual,” she went on, “when suddenly I started thinking of that splendid dream I’ve had so often—of you,” looking at her husband, “and me and another man—that’s you I’m sure,” she gazed at me—“all three of us doing some awful thing together in a place underground somewhere, but dressed quite different to what we are now, and standing round a lot of people sleeping in a row—when something we expected, yet were frightened at, used to come in—and give me such a start that I always woke up before knowing what was really going to happen.”

She paused a second. She was confused. Her sentences ran into each other.

“Well, I was making the bread there when the wind came in with a bang and sent the flour in a cloud all over everything—look! You can see it over my dress still—and with it, sort of behind it, so to speak, something followed with a rush—oh, an enormous rush and scurry it was—and I thought I was rising in the air, or going to burn to pieces by the heat that came in with it. I felt big like—as the sea when you get out of your depth and feel yourself being carried away. I screamed—and the three of us were all together in a moment, just as in the dream, you know—and we were glad, tremendously glad, because we’d got something we wanted that made us feel as if we could do anything, oh, anything in the world—a sort of ’eavenly power I think it was—and then, just as we were going to use our power and do all kinds of things with it, someone—I don’t know who it was, for I never can see the face—a man, though—one of those sleeping figures—rose up and came at us all in a fury, and—well, I don’t know exactly, but it all turned out a failure somehow—It got terrible then——” She looked like a flash of lightning into my face, then dropped her eyes again.

“You acted out your dream, as it were?” interrupted Julius a moment.

She looked at him with a touch of wonder. “I suppose so,” she said, and let go both

our hands. “Only this time someone really did come in and caught me just as I seemed going out of myself—it may have been fainting, but I don’t think so, for I’m never one to faint—more like being carried off in a storm, a storm with wind and fire in it——”

“It was the ‘man’ caught you?” I asked quickly.

“The man, yes,” she continued. “I didn’t fall. He caught me just in time; but my wind was gone—gone clean out of me as though someone had knocked me down.”

“He said nothing?” Julius asked.

She looked sharply at him. “Nothing,” she answered, “not a single word. I ran away. He frightened me. For a moment—I was that confused with remembering my dream, I suppose; so I just pushed him off and ran out here to find you both. I’d been watching you for a long time while I was mixing the dough.”

“I’m glad he was close enough to help you,” put in Julius.

“Well,” she explained, “I’ve a sort of idea he was watching me and saw the thing coming, for he’d been in and out of the kitchen for half an hour before, asking me silly questions about whether I wanted this or that, and fussing about”—she laughed at her own description—“just like an old faithful dog or something.”

We all laughed together then.

“I’m glad I found you so quickly,” she concluded, “because while I was running up here I felt that something was running with me—something that was burning and rushing—like a bit of what was in the house.”

She stopped, and a shadow passed across her eyes, changing their colour to that nondescript grey tint they sometimes wore. The wonderful deep green went out of them. And for a moment there was silence that seemed to fill the entire valley. Julius watched her steadily, strong and comforting in his calmness. The valley, I felt, watched us too, something protective in its perfect stillness. All signs of agitation

were gone; the wind sank down; the trees stood by in solemn rows; the very clouds moved more slowly down the calm blue sky. I watched the bosom of Mrs. LeVallon rise and fall as she recovered breath again. She put her hands up to gather in the hair at the back of her head, deftly tidying its disordered masses, and as she did so I felt her gaze draw my own with a force I could not resist. We looked into each other's eyes for a full two minutes, no one speaking, no signs anywhere exchanged, Julius watchfully observant close beside us; and though I know not how to tell it quite, it is a fact that something passed from those clear, discerning eyes into my heart, convincing me more than any words of Julius ever could, that all he claimed about her and myself was true. She was imperial somewhere.... She had once been mine....

The cloud passed slowly from her face. To my intense relief—for I had the dread that the silent gaze would any moment express itself in fateful words as well. The muscles of her firm, wide mouth relaxed. She broke into happy laughter suddenly.

"It's very silly of me to think and feel such things, or be troubled by a dream," she exclaimed, still holding my eyes, and her laughter running over me like some message of forgiveness. "We shall frighten him away," she went on, turning now to Julius, "before he's had time to taste the new bread I'm making—for him." Her manner was quiet and composed again, natural, prettily gracious. I searched in vain for something to say; the turmoil of emotion within offered too many possible rejoinders; I could not choose. Julius, however, relieved me of the necessity by taking her soothingly in both his arms and kissing her. The next second, before I could move or speak, she leaned over against my shoulder and kissed me on the cheek as well.

Yet nothing happened; there was no sign anywhere that an unusual thing had occurred; I felt that the sun and wind had touched me. It was as natural as shaking hands. Ah! but the sun and wind were magical with life!

"There!" she laughed happily, "we're all three together and understanding, and

nothing can go wrong. Isn't it so, Julius?" And, if there was archness in her voice and manner, there was certainly no trace of that mischief which can give offence. "And you understand, Professor, don't you?"

I saw him take her hand and stroke it. He showed no more resentment than if she had handed me a flower. And I tried to understand. I struggled. I at least succeeded in keeping my attitude of thought and feeling above destructive levels. We three were one; love made us so. A devouring joy was in me, but with it the strange power of a new point of view.

"We couldn't be together like this," she laughed naïvely, "in a city. It's only here. It's this valley and the sun and wind what does it." She looked round her. "All this sun and air, and the flowers, and the forest and the clear cold little stream. Why, I believe, if we stay here we shall never die at all. We'd turn into gods or something."

She murmured on half to herself, the voice sinking towards a whisper—leaning over upon her husband's breast, she stretched out her hand and quietly took my own again. "It's got much stronger," I heard, "since he's come; it makes me feel closer to you too, Julius. Only—he's with us as well, just like—just as if we were all meant for each other somehow."

There was pressure, yet no suggestive pressure, in the hand that held my own. It just took me firmly, with a slight gesture of drawing me closer to herself and to Julius too. It united us all three. And, strange as it all was, I, for my part, was aware of no uneasiness, no discomfort, no awkwardness certainly. I only felt that what she said was true: we were linked together by some deep sympathy of feeling-with; we were at one; we were marvellously fused by some tie of universal life that this enchanted valley made apparent. Nature fused with human nature, raising us all to a diviner level.

There was a period of silence in which no one moved or spoke; and then, to my relief, words came from Julius—natural and unforced, yet with a meaning that I saw

was meant for me:

"The presence of so distinguished a man," he said lightly, looking down into her face with almost a boyish smile, "is bound to make itself felt anywhere." He glanced across at me significantly. "Even the forces of Nature in this peaceful valley, you see, are aware of his arrival, and have sent out messengers to greet him. Only," he added, "they need not be in such a hurry about it, need they—or so violent?"

We all laughed together. It was the only reference he made in her presence to what had happened. Nor did she ask a single question. We lay a little longer, basking in the sunlight and breathing the fragrant mountain air, and then Mrs. LeVallon sprang to her feet alertly, saying that she must go and finish her bread. Julius went with her. I was left alone—with the eerie feeling that more than these two had just been with me....

Less than an hour later the horizon darkened suddenly. Out of a harmless sky appeared masses of ominous cloud. Wild gusts of hot, terrific wind rushed sideways over the swaying forest. The trees shook to their roots, groaning; they shouted; loosened stones fell rattling down the nearer gullies; and, following a minute of deep silence, there blazed forth then a wild glory of lightning such as I have never witnessed. It was a dancing sea of white and violet. It came from every quarter of the sky at once with a dazzling fury as though the entire atmosphere were set on fire. The wind and thunder shook the mountains. From a cupful of still, sweet sunshine, our little valley changed into a scene of violent pandemonium. The precipices tossed the echoing thunder back and forth, the clear stream beside the châlet became a torrent of foaming, muddy water, and the wind was of such convulsive turbulence that it seemed to break with explosive detonations that menaced the upheaval of all solid things. There was a magnificence in it all as though the universe, and not a small section of the sky, produced it.

It passed away again as swiftly as it came. At lunch time the sun blazed down upon

a drenched and laughing scene, washed as by magic, brilliant and calm as though made over all afresh. The air was limpid; the forest poured out perfume; the meadows shone and twinkled.

During the assault I saw neither Julius nor the Man, but in the occasional deep pauses I heard the voice of Mrs. LeVallon singing gaily while she kneaded bread at the kitchen "winder" just beneath my own. She, at any rate, was not afraid. But, while it was in progress, I went alone to my room and watched it, caught by a strange sensation of power and delight its grandeur woke in me, and also by a sense of wonder that was on the increase.

CHAPTER XXI

"Why is she set so far, so far above me,

And yet not altogether raised above?

I would give all the world that she should love me,

My soul that she should never learn to love."—Mary Coleridge.

"The channels here are open."

As the days went by the words remained with me. I recognised their truth. Nature was pouring through me in a way I had never known before. I had gone for a walk that afternoon after the sudden storm, and tried to think things out. It was all useless. I could only feel. The stream of this strange new point of view had swept me from known moorings; I was in deep water now; there was exhilaration in the rush of an unaccustomed tide. One part of me, hourly fading, weighed, criticised and judged; another part accepted and was glad. It was like the behaviour of a divided personality.

"Your brain of To-day asks questions, while your soul of long ago remembers and is sure."

I was constantly in the presence of Mrs. LeVallon. My "brain" was active with a

thousand questions. The answers pointed all one way. This woman, so humbly placed in life to-day, rose clearer and clearer before me as the soul that Julius claimed to be of ancient lineage. Respect increased in me with every word, with every act, with every gesture. Her mental training, obviously, was small, and of facts that men call knowledge she had but few; but in place of these recent and artificial acquirements she possessed a natural and spontaneous intelligence that was swiftly understanding. She seized ideas though ignorant of the words that phrased them; she grasped conceptions that have to be hammered into minds the world regards as well equipped—seized them naïvely, yet with exquisite comprehension. Something in her discriminated easily between what was transitory and what was real, and the glory of this world made evidently small appeal to her. No ordinary ambition of vulgar aims was hers. Fame and position were no bait at all; she cared nothing about being "somebody." There was a touch of unrest and impatience about her when she spoke of material things that most folk value more than honour, some even more than character. Something higher, yet apparently forgotten, drew her after it. The pursuit of pleasure and sensation scarcely whispered to her at all, and though her self-esteem was strong, personal vanity in the little sense was quite a negligible quantity.

This young wife had greatness in her. Domestic servant though she certainly had been, she was distinguished in her very bones. A clear ray of mental guidance and intuition ran like a gleam behind all her little blunders of speech and action. To her, it was right and natural, for instance, that her husband's money should mostly be sent away to help those who were without it. "We're much better this way," she remarked lightly, remembering, perhaps, the life of detailed and elaborate selfishness she once had served, "and anyhow I can't wear two dresses at the same time, can I? Or live in two houses—what's the good of all that? But for those who like it," she added, "I expect it's right enough. They need it—to learn, or something. I've been in families of the best that didn't want for anything—but really they had

nothing at all." It was in the little things I caught the attitude. Although conditions here made it impossible to test it, I had more and more the impression, too, that she possessed insight into the causes of human frailty, and understood temptations she could not possibly have experienced personally in this present life.

An infallible sign of younger souls was their pursuit hot-foot of pleasure and sensation, of power, fame, ambition. The old souls leave all that aside; they have known its emptiness too often. Their hall-mark lies in spiritual discernment, the power to choose between the permanent and the transitory. Brains and intellect were no criterion of development at all. And I reflected with a smile how the "educated" and "social" world would close its doors to such a woman—the common world of younger, cruder souls, insipid and undistinguished, many of them but just beyond the animal stage—the "upper classes"! The Kingdom of Heaven lies within, I remembered, and the meek and lowly shall inherit the "earth."

And the "Dog-Man" also rose before me in another light—this slow-minded, instinctive being whom elsewhere I should doubtless have dismissed as "stupid." His approximation to the instinctive animal life became so clear. In his character and essential personality lay the curious suggestion. Out of his frank gaze peered the mute and searching appeal of the soul awakening into self-consciousness—a look of direct and simple sincerity, often questioning, often poignant. The interval between Mrs. LeVallon and himself was an interval of countless lives. How welcome to him would be the support of a thought-out religious creed, to her how useless! The different stages individuals occupy, how far apart, how near, how various! I felt it all as true, and the effect of this calm valley upon me was not sympathy with Nature only, but a certain new sympathy with all the world. It was very wonderful.

I watched the "man" with a new interest and insight—the proud and self-conscious expression on his face as he moved constantly about us, his menial services earnest and important. The safety of the entire establishment lay upon his shoulders. He

made the beds as he served the coffee, cleaned the boots or lit the lamps at dusk, with a fine dignity that betrayed his sense of our dependence on him—he would never fail. He was ever on the watch. I could believe that he slept at night with one eye open, muscles ready for a spring in case of danger. In myself, at any rate, his signal devotion to our interest woke a kind of affectionate wonder that touched respect. He was so eager and ready to learn, moreover. The pathos in his face when found fault with was quite appealing—the curious dumb attitude, the air of mortification that he wore: "I'm rather puzzled, but I shall know another time. I shall do better. Only—I haven't got as far as you have!"

In myself, meanwhile, the change worked forward steadily. I was much alone, for Julius, preoccupied and intense, was now more and more engaged upon purposes that kept him out of sight. Much of the time he kept to his room upstairs, but he spent hours, too, in the open, among the woods and on the further ridges, especially at night. Not always did he appear at meals even, and what intercourse I had was with Mrs. LeVallon, so that our intimacy grew quickly, ripening with this sense of sudden and delightful familiarity as though we had been long acquainted. There was at once a happy absence of formality between us, although a dignity and sweet reserve tempered our strange relationship in a manner the ordinary world—I feel certain—could hardly credit. Out of all common zones of danger our intercourse was marvellously lifted, yet in a way it is difficult to describe without leaving the impression that we were hardly human in the accepted vulgar meaning of the words.

But the truth was simple enough, the explanation big with glory. It was that Nature included us, mothering all we said or did or thought, above all, felt. Our intercourse was not a separate thing, apart, shut off, two little humans merely aware of the sympathetic draw of temperament and flesh. It was part of Nature, natural in the biggest sense, a small, true incident in the processes of the entire cosmos whose life we shared. The physical thing called passion, of course, was present, yet a passion that the sun and wind took care of, spreading it everywhere about us through the

hourly happenings of “common” things—in the wind that embraced the trees and then passed on, in the rushing stream that caught the flowers on its bank, then let them go again, in the fiery sunshine that kissed the earth while leaving the cooling shadows beside every object that it glorified.

All this seemed in some new fashion clear to me—that passion degrades because it is set exclusive and apart, magnified, idolatrised into a false importance due to Nature’s being neglected and left outside. For not alone the wind and sun and water shared our intercourse, knowing it was well, but in some further sacramental way the whole big Earth, the movements of the Sun, the Seasons, aye, and the armies of the other stars in all their millions, took part in it, justifying its necessity and truth. Without a trace of false exaltation in me I saw far, far beyond even the poet’s horizon of love’s philosophy:

“Nothing in the world is single;

All things by a law divine

In one another’s being mingle—

Why not I with thine?”

and so came again with a crash of fuller comprehension upon the words of Julius that here we lived and acted out a Ceremony that conveyed great teaching from a cosmic point of view. My relations with Mrs. LeVallon, as our relations all three together, seen from this grander angle, were not only possible and true: they were necessary. We were a unit formed of three, a group-soul affirming truths beyond the brain’s acceptance, proving universal, cosmic teaching in the only feasible way—by acting it out.

The scale of experience grew vast about me. This error of the past we would set right was but an episode along the stupendous journey of our climbing souls. The entire Present, the stage at which humanity found itself to-day, was but a moment, and values worshipped now, and by the majority rightly worshipped, would pass

away, and be replaced by something that would seem entirely new, yet would be in reality not discovery but recovery.

CHAPTER XXII

“This mighty sea of Love, with wondrous tides,

Is sternly just to sun and grain;

’Tis laving at this moment Saturn’s sides,

’Tis in my blood and brain.”—Alexander Smith.

One evening, as the shadows began to lengthen across the valley, I came in from my walk, and saw Mrs. LeVallon on the veranda, looking out towards the ridges now tipped with the sunset gold. Her back was to me. One hand shaded her eyes; her tall figure was like a girl’s; her attitude conveyed expectancy. I got the impression she had been watching for me.

She turned at the sound of my footstep on the boards. “Ah, I hoped you’d get back before the dark,” she said, with a smile of welcome that betrayed a touch of relief. “It’s so easy to get lost in those big woods.” She led the way indoors, where a shaded lamp stood on the table laid for tea. She talked on easily and simply. She had been washing “hankercheefs,” and as the dusk came on had felt she “oughter” be seeing where I’d got to. I thanked her laughingly, saying that she must never regard me as a guest who had to be looked after, and she replied, her big eyes penetratingly on my own—“Oh, I didn’t mean that, Professor. I knew by instinc’ you were not one to need entertaining. I saw it reely the moment you arrived. I was just wondering where you’d got to and—whether you’d find your way back all right.” And then, as I made no reply, she went on to talk about the housework, what fun it was, how it amused her, and how different it was from working for other people. “I could work all day and night, you see, when the results are there, in sight. It’s working for others when you never see the result, or what it leads to, and jest get paid so much a week

or month, that makes you tired. Seeing the result seems to take away fatigue. The other's simply toil. Now, come to tea. I do relish my cup of tea."

It was very still and peaceful in the house; the logs burned brightly on the open hearth; Julius was upstairs in his room. The winds had gone to sleep, and the hush of dusk crept slowly on the outside world.

I followed my hostess into the corner by the fire where two deep arm-chairs beside the table beckoned us. Rather severe she looked now in a dark stuff dress, dignified, something half stately, half remote about her attitude. The poise in her physical expression came directly from the mind. She moved with grace, sure of herself, seductive too, yet with a seduction that led the thoughts far beyond mere physical attraction. It was the charm of a natural simplicity I felt.

"I've taken up Julius his," I heard her saying in her uncultivated voice, as she began to pour out tea. "And I've made these—these sort of flat unleavened cakes for us." The adjective startled me. She pointed to thin, round scone-like things that lay steaming in a plate. But her eyes were fixed on mine as though they questioned.

"You used to like 'em...."

Or, whether she said "I hope you'll like 'em," I am not certain—for a sudden sense of intimacy flashed between us and disconcerted me. Perhaps it was the tone and gesture rather than the actual words. A sweetness as of some deep, remembered joy rose in me.

I started. There had been disclosure, a kind of revelation. A door had opened. They were familiar to me—those small "unleavened cakes." Something of happiness that had seemed lost slipped back of its own accord into my heart. My head swam a second. Some part of me was drawn backwards. For, as I took the offered cake, there stole to my nostrils a faint perfume that made me tremble. Elusive, ghostly sensations dropped their hair-like tracery on the brain, then vanished utterly. It was all dim, yet haunting as a dream. The perfume faded instantly.

“Thank you,” I murmured. “You make them deliciously ...” aware at the same moment I had been about to say another thing in place of the empty words, but had deliberately kept it back.

The bewilderment came and went. Mrs. LeVallon dropped her eyes from mine, although the question in their penetrating gaze still lingered. I realised this new sense of intimacy that seemed uncannily perfect, it was so natural. No suggestion lay in it of anything that should not be, but rather the close-knit comfortable atmosphere of two minds that were familiar and at home in silence. It deepened with every minute. It seemed the deep companionship that many, many years had forged.

Yet the moment of wonder had mysteriously come and gone. Even the aroma of the little steaming cake was lost as well—I could not recapture the faint odour. And it was my surface consciousness, surely, that asked then about the recipe, and joined in the soft, familiar laughter with which she answered that she “reely couldn’t say quite,” because “it seemed to have come of its own accord while I was doing nothing in particular with odds and ends about the cooking-stove.”

“A very simple way,” I suggested, trying to keep my thoughts upon the present, “a very easy way of finding new recipes,” whereupon, her manner graver somewhat, she replied: “But, of course, I could make them better if I stopped to think a bit first ... and had the proper things. It’s jest my laziness. I know how—only”—she looked peeringly at me again as with an air of searching for something I might supply—“I’ve sort of mislaid something—forgot it, rather ... and I can’t, for the life of me, remember where I learned it first.”

There stirred between us into that corner of the lamp-lit room an emotion that made me feel we used light words together as men use masks upon their faces for disguise, fully aware that while the skin is hidden the eyes are clear. My happiness seemed long-established. There was a little pause in which the key sank deeper. Before I could find anything to say, Mrs. LeVallon went on again:

"There's several things come to me like that these last few days——"

"Since I came?" I could not prevent the question, nor could I hide the pleasure in my voice.

"That's it," she agreed instantly; "it's as though you brought them—back—simply by being here. It's got to do with you." Her elbows were on the table, the chin resting on her folded hands as she stared at me, both concentration and absent-mindedness in her expression at the same time. Her thoughts were travelling, searching, beating backwards into time. She leaned a little nearer to me suddenly, so that I could almost feel her breath upon my face.

"Like memories of childhood revived," I said. My heart beat quickly. There was great sweetness in me.

"That's it," she repeated, but in a lowered tone. "That's it, I think; as if we'd been children together, only so far back I can't hardly remember."

She gazed again into my eyes, searching for words her untutored brain could not supply. There was a moment of extraordinary tenseness. I felt unsure of myself; uneasiness was in it, but a strange, lifting joy as well. I knew an instant's terror that either she or I might say an undesirable thing.

And to my relief just then the Man came clattering in with a cup containing—cream! Her eyes left mine as with an effort. Drawing herself free, yet not easily, from some inner entanglement that had captured both of us, she turned and took the little cup. "There is no proper cream jug," she observed with a smile, dropping back into the undisguised accent of the East Croydon fruiterer's daughter, "but the cream's thick and good jest the same, and we'll take it like this, won't we?" She stirred it with a spoon into my teacup.

The "Man" stood watching us a moment with a questioning, puzzled look, and then went out again. At the door he turned once more to assure himself that all was as it should be, decided that it was so, and vanished with a little run. Slowly, then, upon

her face stole back that graver aspect of the eyes and mouth; and into my own mind stole equally a sense of deep confusion as I watched her—very delightful, strangely sweet, but my first uneasiness oddly underlying it. Instinctively I caught myself shrinking as from vague pain or danger. I made a struggle to get free, but it was a feeble and half-hearted effort. Mrs. LeVallon was saying exactly what I had known she was going to say.

"I'm all upset to-day," she said with blunt simplicity, "and you must excuse my manners. I feel sort of lost and queer. I can't make it out, but I keep forgettin' who I am, and sometimes even where I am. You"—raising her eyes from the plate to mine—"oughter be able to help me. D'you know what I mean? Professor, sometimes, especially nights," her voice sinking as she said it, "I feel afraid of something——" She paused, correcting herself suddenly. "Oh, no, it isn't fear exactly, you see, but a great happiness that seems too big to get hold of quite. It's jest out of reach always, and something'll go wrong before it reely comes." She looked very hard at me. The strange sea-green eyes became luminous. I felt power in her, a power she was not aware of herself. "As if," she continued earnestly, "there was some price to pay for it—first. And somehow it's for you—it's what you've come for——" She broke off suddenly.

A touch of rapture caught me. It was only with strong effort that I made a commonplace reply:

"This valley, Mrs. LeVallon"—I purposely used the name and title—"is exceedingly lonely; you are shut off from the world you are accustomed to." I tried to put firmness and authority into my words and manner. "You have no companionship—of your own sex——"

She brushed my explanation aside impatiently. "Oh, but it ain't nothing of that sort," she exclaimed, seeing through my conventional words, and knowing I realised that she did so; "it's not loneliness, nor anything ordin'ry like that. Julius is everything to

me in that way. It's something bigger and quite different—that's got worse, got stronger I mean, since you came. But I like your being here," she added quickly, "because I feel it's jest the thing for Julius and for—for all of us. Only, since you've been here it seems—well, it's sort of coming to a head."

I remained speechless. A kind of helplessness came over me. I could not prevent it.

"And mixed up with it," she continued, not waveringly, but wholly mistress of herself, "is the feeling that you've been here before too—been with me. We've been together, and you know we have." Her cheek turned a shade paler; she was very earnest; there was deep emotion in her. "That's what I keep feelin' for one thing. Everything is that familiar—as if all three of us had been together before and had come back again." Her breath came faster.

"You understand me, don't you? When Julius told me you were coming, it seemed quite natural, and I didn't feel nothing of any kind except that it was so natural; but the day you arrived I felt—afraid, though always with this tremendous happiness behind it. And that's why I didn't come down to meet you!" The words came pouring out, yet without a sign of talking wildly. Her eyes shone; the velvet band on her throat rose and fell; I was aware of happiness and amazement, but never once of true surprise. I had expected this, and more besides. "The moment I saw you—up there at the winder in the early mornin'—it came bursting over me, Professor, as sure as anything in this world, that we've come together again like old, old friends."

And it was still my conventional sense of decent conduct that held me to make a commonplace rejoinder. Yet how the phrases came, and why the thin barrier between us did not fall with a crash is more than I can tell.

"Julius had spoken about me, and no doubt your imagination—here in this deserted place——"

She shook her head almost contemptuously. "Julius said nothing," she put in quickly, "nothing in particular, I mean; only that you were old friends and he was

positive sure you'd come because you'd promised. It's since you've come here that I've felt all this so strong. You come as familiar and natural to me as my own mother," she continued, a faint flush rising on the former pallor; "and what's more, your coming has brought a whole lot of other things nearer, too," adding in a whisper suddenly, "things that make me afraid and happy at the same time."

She paused a moment, peering round the room and out of the blindless windows into the darkening valley. "Now, he"—pointing with her thumb in the direction of the kitchen—"is all new to me, and I have no feeling about him at all. But you! Why, I always know where you are, and what you'll be doing next, and saying, and even what you're thinking and feeling half the time—jest as I do with Julius—almost."

The next minute came the direct question that I dreaded. It was like a pistol shot:

"And you feel the same, Professor? You feel it, too? You know all about me—and this great wonderful thing that's creepin' up nearer all the time. Don't you, now?"

I looked straight at her over the big lamp-shade, feeling that some part of me went lost in the depths of those strange, peering eyes. There was a touch of authority in her face—about lips and mouth—that I had seen once before. For an instant it hovered there while she waited for my reply. It lifted the surface plainness of her expression into a kind of solemn beauty. Her charm poured over me envelopingly.

"There is," I stammered, "a curious sense of intimacy between us—all, and it is very delightful. It comes to me rather like childhood memories revived. The loneliness of this valley," I added, sinking my voice lest its trembling should be noticeable, "may account for a good many strange feelings, but it's the peace and loveliness that should make the chief appeal."

The searching swiftness of the look she flashed upon me, faintly touched with scorn, I have seen sometimes in the eyes of a child who knows an elder says vain things for its protection in the dark. Such weak attempts but bring the reality nearer.

"Oh, I feel that too—the loveliness—right enough," she said at once, her eyes still

fixed on mine, “but I mean these other things as well.” Her tone, her phrase, assumed that I also was aware of them. “Where do they come from? What are they exactly? I often fancy there’s lots of other people up here besides ourselves, only they’re hidden away always—watchin’, waitin’ for something to happen—something that’s being got ready like. Oh, but it’s a splendid feeling, too, and makes me feel alive all over.” She sat up and clapped her hands softly like a child, but there was awe as well as joy in her. “And it comes from the woods and sky somehow—like wind and lightning. God showed Himself once, didn’t He, in a burnin’ bush and in a mighty rushin’ wind?”

“Nature seems very real in a place like this,” I said hurriedly. “We see no other human beings. Imagination grows active and constructs——”

The instant way she swept aside the evasive reply I was so proud of made me feel foolish.

“Imagination,” she said firmly, yet with a bewitching smile, “is not making up. It’s finding out. You know that!”

We stared at one another for a moment without speech. It seemed as if the forest, the meadows, the little rivulet of cool, clear water, the entire valley itself became articulate—through her. Her personality rushed over me like a gush of wind. In her enthusiasm and belief rose the glow of fire.

“You feel the same,” she went on, with conviction in her voice, “or you wouldn’t try to pretend you don’t. You wouldn’t try to hide it.” And the authority grew visibly upon her face. There was a touch of something imperious as well. “You see, I can’t speak to him about it, I can’t ask him”—jerking her head towards the room upstairs—“because”—she faltered oddly for a second—“because it’s about himself. I mean he knows it all. And if I asked him—my God, he’d tell me!”

“You prefer not to know?”

She smiled and shrugged her shoulders with a curious gesture impossible to

interpret. “I long to know,” she replied, “but I’m half afraid”—she shivered slightly—“to hear everything. I feel as if it would change me—into—someone else.” The last words were spoken almost below her breath.

But the joy broke loose in me as I heard. It was another state of consciousness she dreaded yet desired. This new consciousness was creeping over her as well. She shared it with me; our innate sympathy was so deep and perfect. More, it was a type of consciousness we had shared together before. An older day rose hauntingly about us both. We felt-with one another.

“For yourself?” I asked, dropping pretence as useless any longer. “You feel afraid for yourself?”

She moved the lamp aside with a gesture so abrupt it seemed almost violent; no object intervened between our gaze; and she leaned forward, folding her hands upon the white tablecloth. I sat rigidly still and watched her. Her face was very near to mine. I could see myself reflected in her glowing eyes.

“Not for myself, Professor, nor for you,” she said in a low voice. Then, dropping the tone to a whisper, “but for him. I’ve felt it on and off ever since we came up here last spring. But since you’ve come, I’ve known it positive—that something’ll happen to Julius—before we leave—and before you leave....”

“But, Mrs. LeVallon——”

“And it’s something we can’t prevent,” she went on whispering, “neither of us—nor oughter prevent either—because it’s something we’ve got to do all three together.”

The intense conviction in her manner blocked utterance in me.

“Something I want to do, what’s more,” she continued, “because it’s sort of magnificent—if it comes off proper and as it should—magnificent for all of us, and like a great vision or something. You know what I mean. We are together in it, but this old valley and the whole world is somehow in it, too. I can’t quite understand. It’s very wonderful. Julius will suffer, too, only he’ll call it jest development.” Her

voice sank lower still. “D’you know, Professor, I sometimes feel there’s something in Julius that seems to me like—God.”

She stood up as she said it, tall, erect, her figure towering above me; and as she rose her face passed out of the zone of yellow lamplight into comparative shadow, the eyes fixed always penetratingly upon my own. And I could have sworn that not alone their expression altered, growing as with fiery power, but that the very outline of her head and shoulders shifted into something else, something dark, remote and solemn as a tree at midnight, drawn almost visibly into larger scale.

She bent lower again a little over the table, leaning her hands upon the back of the chair she had just occupied. I knew exactly what she was going to say. The sentences dropped one by one from her lips just as I expected.

“I’ve always had a dread in me, ever since I can remember,” I heard this familiar thing close in my ear, “a sinking like—of some man that I was bound to meet—that there was an injury I’d got to put right, and that I’d have to suffer a lot in doing it. When I met Julius first I thought it might be him. Then I knew it wasn’t him, but that I’d meet the other—the right man—through him sooner or later.” She stopped and watched me for a second. Her eyes looked through and through me. “It’s you, Professor,” she concluded; “it’s you.”

She straightened up again and passed behind my chair. I heard her retreating steps. A thousand words rose up in me, but I kept silence. What should I say? How should I confess that I, too, had known a similar dread of meeting—her? A net encompassed me, a web was flung that tightened as it fell—a web of justice, marvellously woven, old as the stars and certain as the pull of distant planets, closing us all together into a pattern of actions necessary and inexorable.

I turned. I saw her against the window where she stood looking out into the valley, now thick with darkness about the little house. And for one passing instant it seemed to me that the entire trough of that dark valley brimmed with the forces of wind and

fire that were waiting to come in upon us.

And Mrs. LeVallon turned and looked at me across the room. There was a smile upon her lips.

“But we’ll play it out,” her whisper reached me, “and face it all without fear or shirking ... when it ... comes....” And as she whispered it I hid my face in my hands so as not to meet her gaze. For my own dread of years ago returned in force upon me, and I knew beyond all doubt or question, though without a shred of evidence, that what she said was true.

And when I lifted my eyes a moment later Mrs. LeVallon had gone from the room, and the Man, I saw, was clearing away the tea things, glancing at me from time to time for a word or smile, as though to show that whatever happened he was always faithful, ready to fight for all of us to the death if necessary, and to be depended upon absolutely.

CHAPTER XXIII

“A thousand ages onward led

Their joys and sorrows to that hour;

No wisdom weighed, no word was said,

For only what we were had power.”—A. E.

Meanwhile my intercourse with Nature now began to betray itself in curious little ways, and none more revealing of this mingled joy and nervousness than my growing excitement on being abroad after dark alone.

In the far more desolate Monzoni Valley a few weeks before I had passed whole nights in the open without the least suspicion of uneasiness, yet here, amid these friendly woods, covered by this homely, peaceful valley, it was suddenly made clear to me that I had nerves. And the reason, briefly put, was that there I knew myself alone, whereas here I knew myself never alone.

This sense of a populated Nature grew. After dusk it fairly mastered me, but even in broad daylight, when the September sunshine flooded the whole trough of valley with warmth and brightness, there clung to me the certainty that my moods and feelings, as my very footsteps, too, were noted—and understood. This sense of moving Presences, as in childhood, was stirred by every wind that blew. The feeling of co-operation increased. It was conscious, intelligent co-operation.

"Over that limestone ridge against the sky," I caught myself feeling, rather than definitely thinking; "from just beyond the crests of those tall pines, will presently come——" What? I knew not, even as the child knows not. Only, it would come—appearing suddenly from the woods, or clouds, or from behind the big boulders that strewed the open spaces.

In the fields about the châlet this was manifest too, but especially on the naked ridges above the forests and in the troughs that held the sunlight. Where the wind had unobstructed motion, and where the heat of the sun accumulated in the hollows, this sense of preparation, of co-operation, chiefly touched me. There was behind it pressure—as of purpose and direction, the idea that intelligence stirred within these natural phenomena. Some type of elemental life, enormous yet generally diffused through formlessness, moved and had its being behind natural appearances.

More and more, too, I realised that "inanimate" Nature was a script that it was possible to read; that certain objects, certain appearances drew my attention because they had a definite meaning to convey, whereas others remained unnoticed, as though not necessary to the sentence of some message or communication. The Language of Happenings that Julius talked about—the occurrences of daily life as words in some deep cosmical teaching—connected itself somewhere with this meaning that hid in common objects.

That my awareness of these things was known to others of the household besides myself was equally clear, for I never left the immediate neighbourhood of the châlet

after dark without the Man following my movements with a kind of anxiety, sometimes coming on my very tracks for a considerable distance, or hanging about until I returned to light and safety. In sleep, too, as I passed slowly into unconsciousness, it seemed that the certainty of these Presences grew startlingly distinct, and more than once I woke in the night without apparent cause, yet with the conviction that they brooded close upon the châlet and its inmates, pressing like a rising flood against the very walls and windows. And on these occasions I usually heard Julius moving in his room just across the narrow passage, or the Man astir in the lower regions of the house. Outside, the moonlight, cold and gleaming, silvered the quiet woods and limestone heights. Yet not all the peace and beauty of the scene, nor the assurance of the steady stars themselves, could quite dispel this conviction that something was in active progress all about me, and that the elements themselves urged forward towards the deliverance of some purpose that had relation to ourselves.

Julius, I knew, was at the root of it.

One night—a week or so after my arrival—I woke from a dreamless sleep with the impression that a voice had called me. I paused and listened, but the sound was not repeated. I lay quietly for some minutes, trying to discover whose voice it was, for I seemed bereft of some tender companionship quite recently enjoyed. Someone who had been near me had gone again. I was aware of loneliness.

It was between one and two in the morning and I had slept for several hours, yet this mood was not the one in which I had gone to bed. Sleep, even ten minutes' sleep, brings changes on the heart; I woke to this sense of something desirable just abandoned. Someone, it seemed, had called my name. There was a tingling of the nerves, a poignant anticipation that included high delight. I craved to hear that voice again. Then, suddenly, I knew.

I rose and crossed the room. The warmth of the house oppressed me, although the

wood-fire in the hearth downstairs was long since out, and by the open window I drank in the refreshing air. The valley lay in a lake of silver. There was mist upon the meadows, transparent, motionless, the tinkling of the rivulet just audible beneath its gauzy covering. The cliffs rose in the distance, gaunt and watchful; the forest was a pool of black. I saw the lake, a round blot upon the fields. Over the shingled roof occasional puffs of wind made a faint rushing sound under the heavy eaves. The moonlight was too bright for stars, and the ridges seemed to top the building with the illusion of nearness that such atmosphere engenders. The hush of a perfect autumn night lay over all.

I stood by that open window spellbound. For the clear loveliness seemed to take my hand and lead me forth into a vale of beauty that, behind the stillness, was brimming with activity. Vast energy paused beneath the immobility. The moonlight, so soft and innocent, yet gleamed with a steely brightness as of hidden fire; the puffs of wind were but the trickling draughts escaping from reservoirs that stored incalculable reserves. A terrific quality belied the appearance of this false repose. I was aware of elemental powers, pressed down and eager to run over. It came to me they also had been—called. Their activity, moreover, was in some very definite relation to myself. The voice that summoned me had warned as well.

I stood listening, trembling with an anticipation of things called unearthly. Nature, dressed in the Night, stepped in and took my hand. There seemed an enormous gesture; and it was a gesture, I felt, of adoration. Somewhere behind the calm picture there lay worship.

And I realised, then, that I stood before a page of writing. Out of this inanimate map that was composed of earth, air, fire and water, a deep sentence of elemental significance thrust up into my consciousness. Objects, forced into syllables of this new language, spoke to me. The cosmic language which is the language of the gods stood written on the moonlit world. “We lie here ready for your use,” I read.

"Worship is the link. We may be known on human terms. You can use us. We can work with you."

The message was so big, it seemed to thunder. Close to this window-sill on which I leaned the rising energy swayed like a sea. It was obedient to human will, and human will could harness it for practical purposes. I was feeling-with it. Immense, far-spreading, pouring down in viewless flood from the encircling heights, the surge of it came round the lonely châlet. The valley brimmed. The blindly-heaving lift of it—thus it presented itself to my imagination—could alter the solid rocks until they flowed like water, could float the trees as though they were but straws. For this also came to me with a conviction no less significant than the rest—that the particular elemental powers at hand were the familiar ones of heat and air. With those twin powers, which in their ultimate physical manifestation men know as wind and fire, my mind had established contact. But it was with the spiritual prototypes of these two elements my own small personal breath and heat linked on. There was co-operation. I had been called by name; yet my summoning was but a detail in some vaster evocation. There was no barrier between the not-me, as I must call it, and the me. Others had been called as well.

So strong was the sense that some unusual manifestation of these two "elements" approached, that I instinctively drew back; and in that same instant there flashed into me a vision, as it were, of sheeted flame and of gigantic wind. In my heart the picture rushed, for outwardly still reigned the calm and silence of the autumn night. Yet any moment, it seemed, the barrier into visible, sensible appearance would be leaped. And it was then, while I stood hesitating half-way between the window and the bed, that the sound rose again with sharp distinctness, and my name was called a second time.

I heard the voice; I recognised it; but the name was not the one I answer to to-day. It was another—first uttered at Edinburgh many years ago—Silvatela. And strong

emotion laid a spell upon my senses, masking the present with a veil of other times and other places. I stood entranced.... I heard Julius moving softly on the bare boards of the passage as he came towards my room; the door opened quietly; he held a lighted candle; I saw him framed against the darkness on the threshold.

For a fraction of a second then, before either of us spoke, it was as though he stood before me in another setting. For the meagre wood on either side of him gave place somehow to pylons of grey stone, hewn massively; the ceiling lifted into vaulted space where stars hung brightly; cool air breathed against my skin; and through an immense crepuscular distance I was aware of moving figures, clothed like his own in flowing white with napkined heads, their visages swarthier than those I knew to-day. He took a step forward into the room, and the shifting shadows from the moving candle dispelled the entire scene as though the light and darkness had constructed it. He spoke at once:

“She calls you,” he said quietly.

He set the candle down upon the table by my bed and gently closed the door. The draught, as he did so, shook the flame, sending a flutter of shadows dancing through the air. Yet it was no play of light and shadow that this time laid the strange construction on his face and gestures. So stately were his movements, so radiant his pale, passionless features, so touched with high, unearthly glory his whole appearance, that I watched him for a minute in silence, conscious of respect that bordered upon awe. He had been, I knew, in direct communication with the very sources of his strange faith, and a remnant of the power still clung to the outer body of his flesh. Into that small, cramped chamber Julius brought the touch of other life, of other consciousness that yet was not wholly unfamiliar to me. I remained close beside him. I drank in power from him. And, again, across my thoughts swept that sheet of fire and that lift of violent wind.

“She calls you,” he repeated calmly; and by the emphasis on the pronoun I knew he

meant her Self of older times.

“She——” I whispered. “Your wife!”

He bowed his head. “She knows, now for the first time, that you are here.”

“She remembers?” I asked falteringly, knowing the “you” he meant was also of an older day.

“She lies in trance,” he answered, “and the buried Self is in command. She felt your presence, and she called for you—by name.”

“In trance?” I had the feeling of distress that he had forced her. But he caught my thought and set it instantly at rest.

“From deep sleep she passed of her own accord,” he said, “into the lucid state. Her older Self, which retains the memories of all the sections, is now consciously awake.”

“And she knows you too? Knows you as you were—remembers?” I asked breathlessly, thinking of my first sight of him in the doorway.

“She is aware at this very moment of both you and me,” he answered, “but as she knew us in that particular past. For the old conditions are gathering to-night about the house, and the Equinox is nearer.”

“Gathered, then, by you,” I challenged, conscious that an emotion of protection rose strong in me—protection of the woman.

“Gathered, rather,” he at once rejoined, “by our collective presence, by our collective feeling, thought and worship, but also by necessity and justice which bring the opportunity.”

He spoke with solemnity. I stared for several minutes in silence, facing him and holding his brilliant eyes with an answering passion in my own. Through the open window came a sighing draught of wind; a sense of increasing warmth came with it; it seemed to me that the pictured fire and wind were close upon me, as though the

essential life of these two common elements were rising upon me from within; and I turned, trembling slightly, aware of the valley behind me in the moonlight. The châlet, it seemed, already was surrounded. The Presences stood close.

“They also know,” he whispered; “they wait for the moment when we shall require them—the three of us together. She, too, desires them. The necessity is upon us all.”

With the words there rose a certainty in me that knew no vain denial. The sense of reality and truth came over me again. He was in conscious league with powers of Nature that held their share of universal intelligence; we three had returned at last together. The approach of semi-spiritual intelligences that operate through phenomenal effects—in this case wind and fire—was no imaginative illusion. The channels here were open.

“No sparrow falls, no feather is misplaced,” he whispered, “but it is known and the furthest star responds. From our life in another star we brought our knowledge first. But we used it here—on the earth. It was you—your body—that we used as channel. It was your return that prevented our completion. Your dread of to-day is memory——”

There broke in upon his unfinished sentence an interrupting voice that turned me into stone. Ringing with marvellous authority, half sweet, half terrible, it came along the wooden walls of that narrow corridor, entered the very room about our ears, then died away in the open valley at our backs. The awakened Self of “Mrs. LeVallon” called us:

“Concerighé ... Silvatela...!” sounded through the quiet night.

The voice, with its clear accents, plunged into me with an incredible appeal of some forgotten woe and joy combined. It was a voice I recognised, yet one unheard by me for ages. Power and deep delight rose in me, but with them a flash of stupid, earthly terror. It sounded again, breaking the silence of the early morning, but this time nearer than before. It was close outside the door. I felt Julius catch me quickly by the

arm. My terror vanished at his touch.

The tread of bare feet upon the boards was audible; the same second the door pushed open and she stood upon the threshold, a tall, white figure with fixed and luminous eyes, and hair that fell in a dark cloud to the waist. Into the zone of pallid candle-light that the moon made paler still, she passed against the darkness of the outer passage, white and splendid, like some fair cloud that swims into the open sky. And as wind stirs the fringes of a cloud, the breeze from the window stirred the edges of her drapery where the falling hair seemed to gather it in below the waist.

It was the wife of Julius, but the wife of Julius changed. Like some vision of ethereal beauty she stood before us, yet a vision that was alive. For she moved, she breathed, she spoke. It was both the woman as I knew her actually To-day, and the woman as I had known her—Yesterday. The partial aspect that used this modern body was somehow supplemented—fulfilled by the presentment of her entire Self. The whole series of past sections came up to reinforce the little present, and I gazed upon the complete soul of her, rather than upon the fragment that made bread now in the kitchen and had known domestic service. The bearing was otherwise, the attitude another, the very fashion of her features changed. Her walk, her gestures, her mien had undergone enthralling alteration.

The stream of time went backwards as I gazed, or, rather, it stopped flowing altogether and held steady in a sea that had no motion. I sought the familiar points in her, plunging below the surface with each separate one to find what I—remembered. The eyes, wide open in the somnambulistic lucidity, were no longer of a nondescript mild grey, but shone with the splendour I had already half surprised in them before; the poise of the neck, the set of the shoulders beneath the white linen of her simple night-dress, had subtly, marvellously changed. She stood in challenge to a different world. It seemed to me that I saw the Soul of her, attended by the retinue of memories, experience, knowledge of all its past, summed up sublimely in a single

moment. She was superb.

The outward physical change was, possibly, of the slightest, yet wore just that touch of significant alteration which conveyed authority. The tall, lithe figure moved with an imperial air; she raised her arm towards the open window; she spoke. The voice was very quiet, but it held new depth, sonority and accent. She had not seen me yet where I stood in the shadows by the wall, for Julius screened me somewhat, but I experienced that familiar clutch of dread upon the heart that once before—ages and ages ago—had overwhelmed me. Memory poured back upon my own soul too.

"Concerighé," she uttered, looking full at Julius while her hand pointed towards the moonlit valley. "They stand ready. The air is breaking and the fire burns. Then where is he? I called him."

And Julius, looking from her face to mine, answered softly: "He is beside you—close. He is ready with us too. But the appointed time—the Equinox—is not quite yet."

The pointing hand sank slowly to her side. She turned her face towards me and she—saw. The gaze fell full upon my own, the stately head inclined a little. We both advanced; she took my outstretched hand, and at the touch a shock as of wind and fire seemed to drive against me with almost physical violence. I heard her voice.

"Silvatela—we meet—again!" Her eyes ran over in a smile of recognition as the old familiar name came floating to me through the little room. But for the firm clasp of her hand I should have dropped, for there was a sudden weakness in my knees, and my senses reeled a moment. "We meet again," she repeated, while her splendid gaze held mine, "yet to you it is a dream. Memory in you lies unawakened still. And the fault is ours."

She turned to Julius; she took his hand too; we stood linked together thus; and she smiled into her husband's eyes. "His memory," she said, "is dim. He has forgotten that we wronged him. Yet forgiveness is in his soul that only half remembers." And

the man who was her husband of To-day said low in answer: “He forgives and he will help us now. His love forgives. The delay we caused his soul he may forget, but to the Law there is no forgetting possible. We must—we shall—repay.”

The clasp of our hands strengthened; we stood there linked together by the chain of love both past and present that knows neither injustice nor forgetting.

Then, with the words, as also with the clasping hands that joined us into one, some pent up barrier broke down within my soul, and a flood of light burst over me within that made all things for a moment clear. There came a singular commotion of the moonlit air outside the window, as if the tide that brimmed the valley overflowed and poured about us in the room. I stood transfixed and speechless before the certainty that Nature, in the guise of two great elements, flooded in and shared our passionate moment of recognition. A blinding confusion of times and places struggled for possession of me. For a tempest of memories surged past, driven tumultuously by sheeted flame and rushing wind. The inner hurricane lasted but a second. It rose, it fell, it passed away. I was aware that I saw down into deep, prodigious depths as into a pool of water, crystal clear; veil lifted after veil; memory revived.

I shuddered; for it seemed my present self slipped out of sight while this more ancient consciousness usurped its place. My little modern confidence collapsed; the mind that doubts and criticises, but never knows, fell back into its smaller rôle. The sum-total that was Me remembered and took command. And realising myself part of a living universe, I answered her:

“With love and sympathy,” I uttered in no uncertain tones, “and with complete forgiveness too.”

In that little bedroom of a mountain châlet, lit by the moon and candle-light, we stood together, our bodies joined by the clasp of hands, and our ancient souls united in a single purpose.

I looked into the eyes of this great woman, imperially altered in her outward aspect, magnificent in the towering soul of her; I looked at Julius, stately as some hierophantic figure who mastered Nature by comprehending her; I felt their hands, his own firm and steady, hers clasping softly, tenderly, yet with an equal strength; and I realised that I stood thus between them, not merely in this isolated mountain valley, but in the full tide of life whose source rose in the fountains of an immemorial past, Nature and human-nature linked together in a relationship that was a practical reality. Our three comrade-souls were re-united in an act of restitution; sharing, or about to share, a ceremony that had cosmic meaning.

And the beauty of the woman stole upon my heart, bringing the loveliness of the universe, while Julius brought its strength.

“This time,” I said aloud, “you shall not fail. I am with you both in sympathy, forgiveness,—love.”

Their hands increased the pressure on my own.

Her eyes held mine as she replied: “This duty that we owe to Nature and to you—so long—so long ago.”

“To me——?” I faltered.

With shining eyes, and a smile divinely tender, she answered: “Love shall repay. We have delayed you by our deep mistake.”

“We shall undo the wrong we worked upon you,” I heard Julius say. “We stole the channel of your body. And we failed.”

“My love and sympathy are yours,” I repeated, as we drew closer still together. “I bear you no ill-will....”

And then she continued gravely, but ever with that solemn beauty lighting up her face:

“Oh, Silvatela, it seems so small a thing in the long, long journey of our souls. We

were too ambitious only. The elemental Powers we tried to summon through your vacated body are still unhoused. The fault was not yours; it was our ambition and our faithlessness. I loved you to your undoing—you sacrificed yourself so willingly, loving me, alas, too well. The failure came. Instead of becoming as the gods, we bear this burden of a mighty debt. We owe it both to you and to the universe. Fear took us at the final moment—and you returned too soon—robbed of the high teaching that was yours by right, your progress delayed thereby, your memory clouded now...."

"My development took another turning," I said, hardly knowing whence the knowledge came to me, "no more than that. It was for love of you that I returned too soon—the fault was mine. It was for the best—there has been no real delay." But there mingled in me a memory both clouded and unclouded. There was a confusion beyond me to unravel. I only knew our love was marvellous, although the fuller motives remained entangled. "It is all forgiven," I murmured.

"Your forgiveness," she answered softly, "is of perfect love. We loved each other then—nor have we quite forgotten now. This time, at least, we shall ensure success. The Powers stand ready, waiting; we are united; we shall act as one. At the Equinox we shall restore the balance; and memory and knowledge shall be yours a hundredfold at last."

The voice of Julius interrupted, though so low it was scarcely audible:

"I offer myself. It is just and right, not otherwise. The risk must be all mine. Once accomplished"—he turned to me with power in his face—"we shall provide you with the privilege you lost through us. Our error will then be fully expiated and the equilibrium restored. It is an expiation and a sacrifice. Nature in this valley works with us now, and behind it is the universe—all, all aware...."

It seemed to me she leaped at him across the space between us. Our hands released. Perhaps, with the breaking of our physical contact, some measure of receptiveness

went out of me, or it may have been the suddenness of the unexpected action that confused me. I no longer fully understood. Some bright clear flame of comprehension wavered, dimmed, went out in me. Even the words that passed between them then I did not properly catch. I saw that she clasped him round the neck while she uttered vehement words that he resisted, turning aside as with passionate refusal. It was—this, at least, I grasped before the return of reason in me broke our amazing union and left confusion in the place of harmony—that each one sought to take the risk upon himself, herself. The channel of evocation—a human system—I dimly saw, was the offering each one burned to make. The risk, in some uncomprehended way, was grave. And I stepped forward, though but half understanding what it was I did. I offered, to the best of my memory and belief—offered myself as a channel, even as I had offered or permitted long ago in love for her.

For I had discerned the truth, and knew deep suffering, nor cared what happened to me. It was the older Self in her that gave me love, while her self of To-day—the upper self—loved Julius. Mine was the old subconscious love unrecognised by her normal self; the love of the daily, normal self was his.

The look upon their faces stopped me. They moved up closer, taking my hands again. The moonlight fell in a silver pool upon the wooden flooring just between us; it clothed her white-clad figure with its radiance; it shone reflected in the eyes of Julius. I heard the tinkling of the little stream outside, beginning its long journey to an earthly sea. The nearer pine trees rustled. And her voice came with this moonlight, wind and water, as though the quiet night became articulate.

“So great is your forgiveness, so deep our ancient love,” she murmured. And while she said it, both he and she together made the mightiest gesture I have ever seen upon small human outlines—a gesture of resignation and refusal that yet conveyed power as though a forest swayed or some great sea rolled back its flood. There was

this sublime suggestion in the wordless utterance by which they made me know my offering was impossible. For Nature behind both of them said also No....

Then, with a quiet motion that seemed gliding rather than the taking of actual steps, her figure withdrew slowly towards the door. Her face turned from me as when the moon slips down behind a cloud. Erect and stately, as though a marble statue passed from my sight by some interior motion of its own, her figure entered the zone of shadow just beyond the door. The sound of her feet upon the boards was scarcely audible. The narrow passage took her. She was gone.

CHAPTER XXIV

I stood alone with Julius, Nature alive and stirring strangely, as with aggressive power, just beyond the narrow window-sill on which he leaned.

“You understand,” he murmured, “and you remember too—at last.”

I made no reply. There are moments when extraordinary emotions, beyond expression either of tears or laughter, move the heart as with the glory of another world. And one of these was certainly upon me now. I knew things that I did not understand. A pageant of incomparable knowledge went past me, yet, as it were, just out of reach. The memories that offered themselves were too enormous—and too different—to be grasped intelligently by the mind.

And yet one thing I realised clearly: that the elemental powers of Nature already existing in every man and woman in small degree, could know an increase, an intensification, which, directed rightly, might exalt humanity. The consciousness of those olden days knew direct access to Nature. And the method, for which no terms exist To-day in any spoken language, was that feeling-with which is adoration, and that desiring sympathy which is worship. The script of Nature wrote it clear. To read it was to act it out. The audacity of their fire-stealing ambition in the past I understood, and so forgave. My memory, further than this, refused to clear....

I remember that we talked together for a space; and it was longer than I realised at the time, for before we separated the moon was down behind the ridges and the valley lay in a single blue-black shadow. There was confusion on my heart and mind. The self in me that asked and answered seemed half of To-day and half of Yesterday.

"She remembered," Julius said below his breath yet with deep delight; "she recognised us both. In the morning she will have again forgotten, for she knows not how to bring the experiences of deep sleep over into her upper consciousness."

"She said 'they waited.' There are—others—in this valley?" It was more a statement to myself than a question, but he answered it:

"Everywhere and always there are others. But just now in this valley they are near to us and active. I have sent out the call."

"You have sent out the call," I repeated without surprise and yet with darkened meaning. "Yes, I knew—I was aware of it." My older consciousness was sinking down again.

"By worship," he interrupted, "the worship of many weeks. We have worshipped and felt-with, intensifying the link already established by those who lived before us here. Your attitude is also worship. Together we shall command an effective summons that cannot fail. Already they are aware of us, and at the Equinox their powers will come close—closer than love or hunger."

"In ourselves," I muttered. "Aware of their activities in ourselves!"

And my mouth went suddenly dry as I heard his quiet answer:

"We shall feel their immense activities in ourselves as they return to their appointed places whence we first evoked them. Through one of our three bodies they must pass—the bodiless ones." A silence fell between us. The blood beat audibly in my ears like drums.

"They need a body—again?" I whispered.

He bowed his head. "The channel, as before," he whispered with deep intensity, "of a human organism—a brain, a mind, a body." And, seeing perhaps that I stared with a bewilderment half fear and half refusal, he added quietly, "In the raw, they are too vast for human use, their naked, glassy essence impossible to hold. They must mingle first with our own smaller powers that are akin to them, and thus take on that restraint which enables the human will to harness their colossal strength. Alone I could not accomplish this, but with the three of us, merged by our love into a single unit——"

"But the risk—you both spoke of——?" I asked it impatiently, yet it was only a thick whisper that I heard.

There was a little pause before he answered me.

"There are two risks," he said with utmost gravity in his voice and face. "The descent of such powers may cause a shattering of the one on whom they first arrive—he is the sacrifice. My death—any consequent delay—might thus be the expiation I offer in the act of their release. That is the first, the lesser risk."

He paused, then added: "But I shall not fail."

"And—should you——!" My voice had dwindled horribly.

"The Powers, once summoned, would—automatically—seek another channel: the channel for their return—in case I failed. That is the second and the greater risk."

"Your wife?" The words came out with such difficulty that they were scarcely audible. But Julius heard them.

He shook his head. "For herself there is no danger," he answered. "My love of to-day, and yours of yesterday protect her. Nor has it anything to do with you," he added, seeing the touch of fear that flashed from my eyes beyond my power to conceal it. "The Powers, deprived of my control in the case of my collapse beneath

the strain, would follow the law of their own beings automatically. They would seek the easiest channel they could find. They would follow the line of least resistance."

And, realising that it was the other human occupant of the house he meant, I experienced a curious sensation of pity and relief; and with a hint of grandeur in my thought, I knew with what fine pathetic willingness, with what whole-hearted simplicity of devotion, this faithful "younger soul" would offer himself to help in so big a purpose—if he understood.

It was with an appalling shock that I realised my mistake. Julius, watching me closely, divined my instant thought. He made a gesture of dissent. To my complete amazement, I saw him shake his head.

"An empty and deserted organism, as yours was at the time we used it for our evocation," he said slowly; "an organism unable to offer resistance owing to its being unoccupied—that is the channel, if it were available, which they would take. When the soul is out—or not yet—in."

We gazed fixedly at one another for a time I could not measure. I knew his awful meaning. For to me, in that first moment of comprehension, it seemed too terrible, too incredible for belief. I staggered over to the open window. Julius came after me and laid his hand upon my shoulder.

"The body is but the instrument," I heard him murmur; "the vehicle of the soul that uses it. Only at the moment of birth does a soul move in to take possession. The parents provide it, helpless and ignorant as to who eventually shall take command. And if this thing happened—though the risk is small——"

I turned and faced him as he stopped.

"A monster!"

"An elemental being, a child of the elements——"

"Non-human?" I gasped.

“Nature and human-nature linked,” he replied with curious reverence. “A cosmic being born in a human body. Only—— I shall not fail.”

And before I could find another word to utter, or even acknowledge the quick pressure of his hand upon my own, I heard his step upon the passage boards, and found myself alone again. I stood by the open window, gazing into the deep, star-lit sky above this mountain valley on our little, friendly Earth, prey to emotions that derived from another, but forgotten planet—emotions, therefore, that no “earthly” words can attempt to fathom or describe....

Book IV THE ATTEMPTED RESTITUTION

CHAPTER XXV

“Let us consider wisdom first.

“Can we be wiser by reason of something which we have forgotten? Unquestionably we can.... A man who dies after acquiring knowledge—and all men acquire some—might enter his new life, deprived indeed of his knowledge, but not deprived of the increased strength and delicacy of mind which he had gained in acquiring the knowledge. And if so, he will be wiser in the second life because of what has happened in the first.

“Of course he loses something in losing the actual knowledge.... But ... is not even this loss really a gain? For the mere accumulation of knowledge, if memory never ceased, would soon become overwhelming, and worse than useless. What better fate would we wish for than to leave such accumulations behind us, preserving their greatest value in the mental faculties which have been strengthened by their acquisition.”—J. M’Taggart.

As I sit here in the little library of my Streatham house, trying to record faithfully events of so many years ago, I find myself at a point now where the difficulty

well-nigh overwhelms me. For what happened in that valley rises before me now as though it had been some strange and prolonged enchantment; it comes back to me almost in the terms of dream or vision.

If it be possible for a man to enjoy two states of consciousness simultaneously, then that possibility was mine. I know not. I can merely state that at the time my normal consciousness seemed replaced by another mode, another order, that usurped it, and that this usurping consciousness was incalculably older than anything known to men to-day; further, also, that the three of us had revived it from some immemorial pre-existence. It was memory.

Thus it seemed to me at the time; thus, therefore, I must record it. And so completely was the change effected in me that belief came with it. In no one of us, indeed, lay the slightest hint of doubt. What happened must otherwise have been the tawdriest superstition, whereas actually there was solemnity in it, even grandeur. The performance our sacramental attitude of mind made holy, was true with the reality of an older time when Nature-Worship was effective in some spiritual sense far beyond what we term animism in our retrospective summary of the past. We did, each one of us, and in more or less degree, share the life of Nature by the inner process of feeling-with that life. Her natural forces augmented us indubitably—there was intelligent co-operation.

To-day, of course, the forces in humanity drive in quite another direction; Nature is inanimate and Pan is dead; another attitude obtains—thinking, not feeling, is our ideal; men's souls are scattered beyond the hope of unity and the sword of formal creeds sharply separates them everywhere. We regard ourselves proudly as separate from Nature. Yet, even now, as I struggle to complete this record in the suburban refuge my old age has provided for me, I seem aware of changes stealing over the face of the world once more. Like another vast dream beginning, I feel, perhaps, that man's consciousness is slowly spreading outwards once again; it is re-entering

Nature, too, in various movements; the wireless note is marvellously sounding; on all sides singular phenomena that seem new suggest that there is no limit—to extension of consciousness—to interior human activity. Some voice from the long ago is divinely trumpeting across our little globe.

This, possibly, is an old man's dream. Yet it helps me vaguely to understand how, in that enchanted valley, the three of us may actually have realised another, older point of view which amounted even to a different type of consciousness. The slight analogy presents itself; I venture to record it. Only on some such supposition could I, a normal, commonplace product of the day, have consented to remain in the valley without repugnance and distress, much less to have participated willingly as I did in all that happened. For I was almost whole-heartedly in and of it. My moments of criticism emerged, but passed. I saw existence from some cosmic point of view that presented a human life as an insignificant moment in an eternal journey that was related both to the armies of the stars and to the blades of grass along the small, cool rivulet. At the same time this vast perspective lifted each tiny detail into a whole that inspired these details with sacramental value whose meaning affected everything. To live with the universe made life the performance of a majestic ceremony; to live against it was to creep aside into a cul de sac. And so this small item of balance we three, as a group, desired to restore was both an insignificant and a mighty act of worship.

Yet, whereas to myself the happenings were so intense as to seem terrific even, to one who had not felt them—as I did—they must seem hardly events or happenings at all. I say "felt," because my perception of what occurred was "feeling" more than anything else. I enjoyed this other mode of existence known to the human spirit in an earlier day, and brought, apparently, to earth from our experience upon another planet.

The happenings, to me, seemed momentous—yet they consisted largely of interior

changes. They were inner facts. And such inner facts “To-day” regards as less real than outer events, dismissing them as subjective. The collapse of a roof is real, the perception of an eternal verity is a mood! And if my attempt to describe halts between what is alternately bald and overstrained, it is because modern words can only stammer in dealing with experiences that have so entirely left the racial memory.

For myself the test of their actuality lies in the death that resulted—an indubitable fact at any rate!—and in the birth that followed it a little later—another unquestionable “fact.”

I may advantageously summarise the essential gist of the entire matter. I would do so for this reason: that physical memory grows dim on looking back so many years and that the events in the châlet grow more and more elusive, so that I find a sharp general outline helpful to guide me in this subsequent record. Further, the portion I am now about to describe depends wholly upon a yet older memory, the memory—as it seemed to me—of thousands of years ago. This more ancient memory came partially to me only. I saw much I could not understand or realise, and so can merely report baldly. There was fluctuation. Perhaps, after all, my earlier consciousness was never restored with sufficient completeness to reconstitute the entire comprehension that had belonged to it when it was my natural means of perceiving, knowing, being. Words, therefore, obviously fail.

Let me say then, as Julius himself might have said, that in some far off earlier existence the three of us had offended a cosmic law, and that for the inevitable readjustment of this error, its expiation, the three of us must first of all find ourselves reincarnated once again together. This, after numerous intervening centuries, had come to pass.

The nature of the offence seemed crudely this: that, in the days when elemental Nature-Powers were accessible to men, we used two of these—those operating

behind wind and fire—for selfish instead of for racial purposes. Apparently they had been evoked by means of a human body which furnished their channel of approach. It was available because untenanted, as already described. I state merely the belief and practice of an earlier day. Special guardians protected the vacated bodies from undesirable invasion, and while Julius and the woman performed this duty, they had been tempted to unlawful use for purposes of their own. The particular body was my own: I was the channel of evocation. That I had, however, been persuaded to permit such usage was as certain as that it was the love between the woman and myself that was the reason of such permission. How and why I cannot state, because, simply, I could not—remember. But that the failure of their experiment resulted in my sudden recall into the body, and the loss, therefore, of teaching and knowledge I should have otherwise enjoyed—this had delayed my soul's advance and explained also why, To-day, memory failed in me and my soul had lagged behind in its advance. Somewhat in this way LeVallon stated it.

Where this ancient experiment took place, in what country and age, I cannot pretend to affirm. The knowledge made use of, however, seems to have been, in its turn, a yet earlier memory still, and of an existence upon a planet nearer to the sun, since Fire and Wind were there recognised as a means by which deific Powers became accessible—through worship. That the human spirit was then clothed in bodies of lighter mould, and that Wind and Fire were viewed as manifestations of deity, turns my imagination, if not my definite memory, to a planet like Mercury, where gigantic Heat and therefore mighty Winds would be imposing vehicles of conveying energy from their source—the Sun.

For the expiation of the error, a re-enactment of the actual scene of its committal was necessary. It must be acted out to be effective—a ceremony. The channel, again, of a human system was essential as before. The struggles that eventually ensued, complicated by the stress of personal emotion—the individual attempts each participator made to become the channel and so the possible sacrifice—this caused,

apparently, the awful failure. Emotion destroyed the unity of the group. For Julius was unable to direct the Powers evoked. They were compelled to seek a channel elsewhere, and they automatically availed themselves of that which offered the least resistance. The birth that subsequently followed, accordingly, was a human body informed literally by these two elemental Powers; and it is in the hope that of those who chance to read these notes, someone may perhaps be aware of the existence in the world of this unique being—it is in this hope primarily, I say, that the record I have attempted is made, that it may survive my death which cannot now be very long delayed.

One word more, however, I am compelled to add:

I am aware that my so easy surrender to the spell of LeVallon's personality and ideas must seem difficult to justify. Even those of my intimates, who may read this record after I am gone, may feel that my capitulation was due to what men now term hypnotic influence; whereas, that some part of me accepted with joy and welcome is the actual truth—it was some lesser part that objected and disapproved.

To myself, as to those few who may find these notes, I owe this somewhat tardy confession of personal bias. That I have concealed it in this Record hitherto seems because my "educated" self must ever struggle to deny it.

For there have always been two men in me—more than in the usual sense of good and evil. One, up to date and commonplace, enjoys the game of nineteenth century life, interests itself in motors, telephones, and mechanical progress generally, finds Socialism intriguing and even politics absorbing; while the other, holding all that activity of which such things are symbols, in curious contempt, belongs to the gods alone know what. It remains essentially inscrutable, incalculable, its face masked by an indecipherable smile. It worships the sun, believes in Magic, accepts the influences of the stars, and acknowledges with sweet reverence extended hierarchies of Beings, both lower and higher than the stage at which humanity now finds itself.

In youth, of course, this other self was stronger than in later years; yet, though submerged, it has never been destroyed. It seemed an older aspect of my divided being that declined to die. For periods of varying duration, the modern part would deny it as the superstition of primitive animistic ignorance; but, biding its time, it would rise to the surface and take the reins again. The modern supremacy passed, the older attitude held authoritative sway. The Universe then belonged to it, alive in every detail; there was communion with trees and winds and streams; the thrill of night became articulate; it was concerned with distant stars; the sun changed the earth once more into a vast temple-floor. I was not apart from any item, large or small, on earth or in the heavens, while myth and legend, poetry and folk-lore were but the broken remnants of a once extended faith, a mighty worship that was both of God and knew the gods.

At such times the drift of modern life seemed in another—a minor—direction altogether. The two selves in me could not mingle, could not even compromise. The recent one seemed trivial, but the older one pure gold. It dwelt, this latter, in loneliness, sweetly-prized, perhaps, but isolated from all minds of to-day worth knowing, because its mode of being was not theirs. A loneliness, however, not intolerable, since it was aware of lifting joy, of power no mere contrivance could conceive, and of a majestic beauty nothing of to-day could even simulate.... Societies, moreover, called secret, fraternities labelled magical and hierophantic, were all too trumpery to feed its ancient longings, too charlatan to offer it companionship, too compromising to obtain results. Among modern conditions I found no mode of life that answered to its imperious call in me. It seemed an echo and a memory.

As I grew older, both science and religion told me it must be denied. Respectful of the former, I sought some reasonable basis for these strange burning beliefs that flamed up with this older self—in vain. Unjustifiable, according to all knowledge at my disposal, they remained. History went back step by step to that darkness whence

ignorance emerged; evolution traced a gradual rise from animal conditions; to no dim, former state of exalted civilisation, either remembered or imagined, could this deeper part of me track its home and origin. Yet that home, that origin, I felt, existed, and were accessible. I could no more resign their actuality than I could cease to love, to hate, to live. The mere thought of them woke emotions independent of my will, contemptuous of my intellect—emotions that were of indubitable reality. They remained convictions.

Had I, then, known some state antedating history altogether, some unfabled land of which storied Atlantis, itself a fragment, lingered as a remnant of some immenser life? Had I experienced a mode of being less cabined than the one I now experienced in a body of blood and flesh—another order of consciousness, yet identity retained—upon another star? ... The centuries geology counts backwards were but moments, the life of a planet only a little instant in the universal calendar. Was there, a million years ago, a civilisation of another kind, too ethereal to leave its signatures in sand and rocks, yet in its natural simplicity nearer, perhaps, to deity? Was here the origin of my unrewarded yearnings? Could reincarnation, casting back across the æons to lovelier or braver planets, give the clue? And did this older self trail literally clouds of glory from a golden age of light and heat and splendour that lay nearer to the shining centre of our corner of the heavens...?

At intervals I flung my queries like leaves upon the wind; and the leaves came back to me upon the wind. I found no answer. Speculation became gradually less insistent, though the yearnings never died. Deeper than doubt or question, they seemed ingrained—that my pre-existence has been endless, that I continue always.... And it was this strange, buried self in me, already beginning to fade a little when I went to Motfield Close to train my modern mind in modern knowledge—it was this curious older self that Julius LeVallon vitalised anew. Back came the flood of mighty questions:—Whence have we come? From what dim corner of the unmeasured cosmos are we derived, descended, making our little way on to the

earth? Where have these hints of an immenser life their sweet, terrific origin, and—why this unbridged hiatus in our memory...?

The subsequent events lie somewhat confused in me until the night that heralded the Equinox. Whether two days or three intervened between the night-scene of Mrs. LeVallon's Older Self already described, and the actual climax, I cannot remember clearly. The sequence of hours went so queerly sliding; incidents of external kind were so few that the interval remained unmarked; little happened in the sense of outward happenings on which the mind can fasten by way of measurement. We lived, it seems, so close to Nature that those time-divisions we call hours and days flowed with us in a smooth undifferentiated stream. I think we were too much in Nature to observe the size or length of any particular parcels. We just flowed forward with the tide itself. Yet to explain this, now that for years I am grown normal and ordinary again, is hardly possible. I only remember that larger scale; I can no longer realise it.

I recall, however, the night of that conversation when Julius left me to my hurricane of thoughts and feelings, and think I am right in saying it immediately preceded the September day that ushered in the particular "attitude" of our earth towards the rest of the Universe we call the Autumnal Equinox.

Sleep and resistance were equally impossible; I swam with an enormous current upon a rising tide. And this tide bore stars and worlds within its irresistible momentum. It bore also little flowers; moisture felt, before it is seen, as dew or rain; heat that is latent before the actual flame is visible; and air that lies everywhere until the rush of wind insists on recognition. I was aware of a prophecy that included almost menace. An uneasy sense that preparations of immense, portentous character were incessantly in progress, not in the house and in ourselves alone, but in the entire sweep of forest, vale and mountain, pressed upon me from all sides. Nature conspired, I felt, through her most usual channels to drive into a corner where she

would drip over, so to speak, into amazing manifestation. And that corner, waiting and inviting, was ourselves....

Towards morning I fell asleep, and when I woke a cloudless day lay clear and fresh upon the world, the meadows shone with dew, cobwebs shimmered past my open window, and a keen breeze from the heights stung my nostrils with the scent from miles of forest. A sparkling vitality poured almost visibly with the air and sunshine into my human blood. I bathed and dressed. Frost had laid silvery fingers upon the valley during the night, and the shadows beneath the woods still shone in white irregular patches of a pristine loveliness. The feeling that Nature brimmed over was even stronger than before, and I went downstairs half conscious that the “corner” we prepared would show itself somehow fuller, different. The little arena waiting for it—that arena occupied by our human selves—would proclaim the risen tide. I almost expected to find Julius and his wife expressing in their physical persons the advent of this power, their very bodies, gestures, voices increased and grown upon a larger scale. And when I met them at the breakfast table, two normal, ordinary persons, merely full of the exhilarating autumn morning, I knew a moment of surprise that at the same time included relief, though possibly, too, a touch of disappointment. They were both so simple and so natural.

It brought me up short, as though before a promised hope not justified, a balked anticipation. But the next moment my mistake was clear. The sense of something dwindled gave place to its very opposite—a fuller realisation. The three of us were so intimate—I might say so divinely intimate—that my failure to see them “grander” arose from my attempt to see them “separate”—from myself. For actually we floated, all three, upon the risen tide together. It was the “mind” in me that sounded the old false note. Having increased like themselves, I was of equal stature with them; to see them “different” was impossible.

And this amazing quality was characteristic of all that followed. Ever since my

arrival I had been slowly rising with the tide that brimmed the valley now to the very lips of the surrounding mountains. It brimmed our hearts as well. My companions were quiet because they, like myself, were part of it. There was no sense of disproportion or exaggeration, much less of dislocation; we shared Nature's powers without effort, without struggle, as naturally as sunshine, wind or rain. We stood within; the day contained all three. The Ceremony, which was living-with Nature, tuned to the universal life, had been in progress from the instant Julius had welcomed me a week ago. Our attitude and the earth's were one. The Equinox was in us too.

In that moment when we met at breakfast, the flash of clearer sight left all this beyond dispute. Memory shot back in a lightning glance over recent sensations and events. I realised my gradual growth into the larger scale, I grasped the significance of the various moods and tenses my changing consciousness had known as in a kind of initiation. Premonitions of another mode of mind had stolen upon me out of ordinary things. The habitual had revealed its marvellous hidden beauty. There had been transmutation. The ensouling life behind broke loose everywhere, even through the elements themselves: but particularly through the two of them that are so closely levelled to the little division we call human life: air-things and fire-things had become alert and eager. There was commotion in the palaces of Wind and Fire.

And so the bigger truth explained itself to me. What happened later seems only incredible on looking back at it from my present dwindled consciousness. At the time it was natural and quiet. A tourist, passing through our lonely valley, need not have been aware either of tumult or of wonder. He would have been too remote from us, too centred in the consciousness of To-day that accepts only what is expected, or explicable—too different, in a word, to have noticed anything beyond the presence of three strangely quiet people in a lonely châlet of the mountains.

But for us, the gamut of experience had stretched; there was in our altered state both

a microscope and telescope; but a casual intruder, unprovided with either, must have gone his way, I think, unaware, unstimulated, and uninformed.

CHAPTER XXVI

"With virtue the point is perhaps clearer.... I have forgotten the greater number of the good and evil acts which I have done in my present life. And yet each must have left a trace on my character. And so a man may carry over into his next life the dispositions and tendencies which he has gained by the moral contests of this life, and the value of those experiences will not have been destroyed by the death which has destroyed the memory of them."—Ibid.

The day that followed lives with me still as an experience of paradise beyond intelligible belief. Yet I unquestionably experienced it. The touch of dread was but the warning of the little mind, which shrank from a joy too vast for it to comprehend. Of Mrs. LeVallon this was similarly true. Julius alone, sure and steadfast in the state from which since early boyhood he had never lapsed, combined Reason and Intuition in that perfect achievement towards which humanity perhaps slowly seems moving now. He remained an image of strength and power; he lived in full consciousness what she and I lived half unconsciously. Yet to record the acts and words which proved it I find now stammeringly difficult; they were so ordinary. The point of view which revealed their "otherness" I have so wholly lost.

"The Equinox comes to-night—the pause in Nature," he said at breakfast, joy in his voice and eyes. "We shall have greater life. The moment is ours, because we know how to use it." Yet what pregnant truth came with the quiet words, what realisation of simple, overflowing beauty, what incalculable power, no language known to me can possibly express.

And his wife, equally, was aglow with happiness and splendour as of a forgotten age. In myself, too, remained no vestige of denial or alarm. The day seemed a long, sweet period without divisions, a big, simple sacrament of unconditioned bliss.

Memory came back upon me in a flood, yet a memory of states, and never once of scenes or places. I re-lived a time, a state, when men knew greater purposes than they realised, dimly and instinctively perhaps, not blindly altogether, yet taught of Nature and the Nature Powers close upon their daily lives. They knew these Powers direct, experiencing them, existing side by side with them in definite mutual relationship. They neither reasoned nor, possibly, even thought. They knew.

For my nature was no longer in opposition to the rest of things, nor set over against the universe, as apart from it. I felt my acts related in a vital manner to the planet, as to the entire cosmos, and the elemental side of Nature moved alongside of my most trivial motions. The drift of happenings, in things "external" to me, were related to that drift of inner sensation that I called myself. Thoughts, desires, emotions found themselves completed in trees and grass, in rocks and flowers, in the flowing rivulet, in the whir of wind, the drip of water, the fire of the sunshine. They told me things about myself; they revealed a pregnant story of information by their attitudes and aspects; they were related to my very fate and character. The sublime simplicity of it lies beyond description. For this sacramental tone changed ordinary daily life into something splendid as eternity. I shared the elemental power of "inanimate" things. They affected me and I affected them. The Universe itself, but especially the known and friendly Earth, was hand in hand and arm in arm with me. It was feeling-with; it was the cosmic point of view.

And thus, I suppose, it was that I realised humanity as but a little portion of the whole—important, of course, as the animalculæ in a drop of water are important, yet living towards extinction only if they live apart from the surrounding ocean which divinely mothers them. To this divinity seemed due the presumption with which man To-day imagines himself the centre of this colossal ocean, and lays down the law so insolently for the entire Universe. The birth of a soul—its few years of gaining experience in a material form called body—was vital certainly for itself, yet whether that body should be informed by a "human" soul, or by another type of life

of elemental kind—this, seen in proportion to the gigantic scale of universal life, left me unshocked and undismayed. To provide a body for any life was a joy, a proud delight, a duty to the whole, but whether Mrs. LeVallon bore a girl or a boy, or furnished a vehicle for some swift marvellous progeny of another kind, seemed in no sense to offer an afflicting alternative. My present point of view may be imagined—the ghastliness and terror, even the horror of it—but at the time I faced it otherwise, regarding the possibility with a kind of reverent wonder only. It was not terrible, but grand.

The certainty of all this I realised at the time. I see it now less vividly. The intensity has left me. So overwhelming was its perfection, however, that, as I have said, the contingency to which Mrs. LeVallon, as mother, was exposed, held no dire or unmoral suggestion for me, as it now must hold. Nor did the correlative conditions appear otherwise than true and possible. And that these two, Julius and his wife, staked an entire lifetime to correct an error of the past, meant no more—viewed in this vaster proportion—than if I ran upstairs to close a door I had foolishly left open. An open door is a little thing, yet may cause currents of air that can disarrange the harmony of the objects in its path, upsetting the purpose and balance of the entire household. It must be closed before the occupants of the house can do their work effectively. They owe it to the house as well as to themselves. There was this door left open. It must be closed.

But it could not be closed by one. We three, a group, alone could compass this small act. We who had opened it alone could close it. The potential strength of three in one was the oldest formula of effective power known to life. Such a group was capable of a claim on Nature impossible to an individual—the method of evocation we had used together in the long ago.

CHAPTER XXVII

“There remains love. The gain which the memory of the past gives us here is that the

memory of past love for any person can strengthen our present love of him. And this is what must be preserved if the value of past love is not to be lost. But love has no end but itself. If it has gone, it helps us little that we keep anything it has brought us....

"What more do we want? The past is not preserved separately in memory, but it exists, concentrated and united in the present.... If we still think that the past is lost, let us ask ourselves whether we regard as lost all those incidents in a friendship which, even before death, are forgotten."—Ibid.

Here, then, as well as the mind in me can set it down, was the background against which the various incidents of this final day occurred. This was my "attitude" towards them; these thoughts and feelings, though unexpressed in words, were the "mood" which accepted and understood each slightest incident of those extraordinary hours.

The length of the day amazed me; it seemed endless. Time went another gait. The sequence of little happenings that marked its passage remains blurred in the memory, and I look back to these with the curious feeling that they happened all at once. Yet the strongest impression, perhaps, is that time, the sense of duration, was arrested or at least moved otherwise. There was a pause in Nature, the pause before the approaching Equinox. A river halted a moment at the bend. And hence came, of course, the sensation of pressure accumulating everywhere in the valley. Acceleration would come afterwards, but first this wondrous pause.

And this pressure that brimmed the valley forced common details into an uncommon view. The rising tide drove objects on the banks above high-water mark. There was exhilaration without alarm, as when an exceptional tide throws a full ocean into unaccustomed inlets. The thrill was marvellous. The forest made response, offering its secret things without a touch of fear ... as when the deer came out and grazed upon the meadow before the châlet windows, not singly but in groups, and

invariably, I noticed, groups of three and three. We passed close in and out among them; I stroked the thick rough hair upon their flanks; I remember Mrs. LeVallon's arm about their necks, and once in particular, when she was lying down, that a fawn, no hint of fear in its beautiful, gracious eyes, pushed her hair aside with its shining muzzle to nibble the grass against her neck. The mood of an ancient and divining prophecy lay in the sight, linking Nature with human-nature in natural harmony when the lion and the lamb might play together, and a little child might lead them. For—significant, arresting item—the very air came sweetly down among us too, and the friendly intimacy of the birds brought this exquisite touch of love into the entire day. There was communion everywhere between our Selves and Nature. The birds were in my room when I went upstairs, one hopping across the pillow on my bed, its bright eyes shining as it perched an instant on my shoulder, two others twittering and dancing along the narrow window-sill. There was no fear in them; they fluttered here and there at will, and my quickest movements caused them no alarm. From the table they peeped up into my face; they were downstairs flitting in and out among the chairs and sofas; they did not fly away when we came in. And in threes I saw them, always in threes together. It was like reading natural omens; I understood the significance that lay in omens; and in this delightful sense, but in no other, these natural signs were—ominous.

Over the face of Nature, and in our hearts as well, lay everywhere this attitude of divine carelessness. Everything felt-with everything else, and all were neighbours. The ascension of the soul through all the natural kingdoms seemed written clear upon the trees and rocks and flowers, upon birds and animals, upon the huge, quiet elements themselves.

For the pause and stillness, these were ominous, too. This hush of Nature upon the banks of Time, this beautiful though solemn pause upon the heart of things, was but the presage of an accelerated rushing forward that would follow it. The world halted and took breath. It was the moment just before the leap.

With midnight the climax would be reached—the timeless instant of definite arrest, too brief, too swift for mechanism to record, the instant when Julius would enforce his ancient claim. Then the impetuous advance would be resumed, but resumed with the increased momentum, moreover, of natural forces whose outward manifestation men call the equinoctial gales. Those elemental disturbances, that din and riot in the palaces of heat and air, of wind and fire—how little the sailors, the men upon the heights, the dwellers in the streets of crowded cities might guess the free divinity loose upon the earth behind the hurricanes! The forgotten majesty of it broke in upon me as I realised it. For realise it I most assuredly did. The channels here, indeed, were open.

There seemed a halo laid upon the day; sanctity and peace in all its corners; the valley was a temple, the splendour of true old-world worship ushering in the Equinox: Earth's act of adoration to the sun, the breathless moment when she sank upon her knees before her source of life, her progeny aware, participating.

For the joy and power that vibrated with every message of light and sound about us came to me in the terms of love, as though a love which broke all barriers down flowed in from Nature. It woke in me an unmanageable, an infinite yearning; I burned to sweep all modern life into this lonely mountain valley, to share its happiness with the entire world; the tired ones, the sick and weary, the poor, those who deem themselves outcast and useless in the scheme of things, the lonely, the destitute in spirit, the failures, the wicked, and, above all, the damned. For here all broken and shattered lives, it seemed to me, must find that sense of wholeness which is confidence and that peace due to the certainty of being cared for by the universe—divinely mothered. The natural sacrament of elemental powers, in its simplicity, could heal the nations. I yearned to bring humanity into the power of Nature and the joy of Nature-Worship.

So complete, moreover, was my inclusion in this sacramental attitude towards

Nature, that I saw the particular purpose for which we three were here—as Julius saw it. I experienced a growing joy, an ever lessening alarm. Three human souls met here upon this island of a moment's restitution, important certainly, yet after all an episode merely, set between a series of lives long past and of countless lives to follow after. The elements, and the Earth to which they were consciously related, the Universe of which, with ourselves, she formed an integral constituent—all were relatively and in their just proportions involved in this act of restitution. Hence, in a dim way, it was out of time and space. Our very acts and feelings were those of Nature and of that vaster Whole, wherein Nature, herself but a little item, lies secure. The Universe felt and acted with us. The gentian in the field would be aware, but Sirius, too.

Three human specks would act out certain things, but the wind in the forest would co-operate and feel glad, and the fire in Orion's nebula would be aware.

An older form of consciousness was operative. We were not separate. Instead of thinking as separate items apart from the rest of the cosmos, we felt as integral bits of it—and here, perhaps, lay the essence of what I call another kind of consciousness than the one known to-day.

CHAPTER XXVIII

My mind retains with photographic accuracy the detail of that sinister yet gorgeous night. One thing alone vitiates the value of my report—while I remember what happened, I cannot remember why it happened.

At the actual time, I understood the meaning of every word and action because the power to do so was in me. I was in another state of consciousness. That state has passed, and with it the ability to interpret. I am in the position of a man who remembers clearly the detail of some dream to which, on waking, he has lost the key. While dreaming it, the meaning was daylight clear. The return to normal consciousness has left him with a photograph he no longer can explain.

The first tentative approach, however, of those Intelligences men call Fire and Wind—their first contact with this other awakened Self in me, I remember perfectly. Wind came first, then Fire; yet at first it was merely that they made their presence known. I became aware of them. And the natural, simple way in which this came about I may describe to some extent perhaps.

The ruins of a flaming sunset lay above the distant ridges when Julius left my room, and, after locking away the private papers entrusted to my charge, I stood for some time watching the coloured storm-clouds hurrying across the sky. For, though the trees about the châlet were motionless, a violent wind ran high overhead, and on the summits it would have been impossible to stand. Round the building, however, sunken in its protected valley, and within the walls especially, reigned a still, delightful peace. The wind kept to the summits. But of some Spirit of Wind I was aware long before the faintest movement touched a single branch.

Upon me then, gathering with steady power, stole the advance-guard of these two invasions—air and warmth, yet an inner air, an inner warmth. For, while I watched, the silence of those encircling forests conveyed the sound and movement of approaching life. There grew upon me, first as by dim and curious suggestion, a sense of ordered preparation slowly accumulating behind the mass of shadowy trees. The picture then sharpened into more definite outline. The forest was busy with the stirrings of a million thread-like airs that built up together the body of a rising wind, yet not of wind as commonly experienced, but rather of some subtler, more acute activity of which wind is but the outer vehicle. The inner activity, of which it is the sensible manifestation—the body—was beginning to move. The soul of air itself was stirring. These million ghost-like airs were lifting wings from their invisible, secret lairs, all running as by a word of command towards a determined centre whence, obeying a spiritual summons, they would presently fall upon the valley in that sensible manifestation called the equinoctial gales. Behind the material effect, the spiritual Cause was active.

This imaginative picture grew upon me, as though in some way I was let into the inner being of that life which prompts all natural movements and hides, securely veiled, in every stock and stone. A new interpretative centre was awake in me. In the movement of wind I was aware of—life. Then, while this subtle perception that an intelligent, directing power lay behind the very air I breathed, a similar report reached me from another, equally elemental, quarter, though it is less easy to describe.

From the sun? Originally, yes—since primarily from the sun emerges all the heat the earth contains. It first stirred definite sensation in me when my eye caught the final gleam upon the turreted walls of vapour where still the sunset stood emblazoned. From that coloured sea of light, and therefore of heat, something flashed in power through me; a vision of running fire broke floodingly above the threshold of my mind, ran into every corner of my being, left its inspiring trail, became part of my very nerves and blood. Consciousness was deepened and intensified.

Yet it was neither common heat I felt nor common flame I pictured, but rather a touch of that primordial and ethereal fire which dwells at the heart of all manifested life—latent heat. For it was neither yellow, red, nor white with any aspect of common flame, but what I can only dare to describe as a fierce, dark splendour, black and shining, yet of intense, incandescent brilliance. The contradictory adjectives catch a ghost of it. Moreover, I was aware of no discomfort, for while it threatened to overwhelm me, the chief effect was to leave a glow, a radiance, an enthusiasm of strengthened will and confidence, combined with a sense of lightning's power. It was spiritual heat, of which fire is but a physical vehicle. The central fire of the universe burned in my heart.

I realised, in a word, that both elements were vehicles of intelligent and living Agencies. Of their own accord they became active, and natural laws were but their method of activity. They were alert; the valley was alive, combining, co-operating

with myself—and taking action.

This was their first exquisite approach. But presently, when I moved away from the window, the sunset clouds grown dark and colourless again, I realised lesser manifestations of this new emotion which may seem more intelligible when I set them down in words. The candle flame, for instance, and the flaring match with which I lit my cigarette seemed not so much to produce fire by a chemical device, as to puncture holes through a curtain into that sea of latent fire that lies in all material things. The breath of air, moreover, that extinguished the flame did not annihilate it, but merged it into the essential being of its own self. The two acted in sympathy together. Both Wind and Fire drew attention to themselves of set intention, insisting upon notice, as if inviting co-operation.

And something leviathan leaped up in me to welcome them. The standing miracle of fire lit up the darkened valley. Pure flame revealed itself suddenly as the soul in me, the eternal part that remembered and grew wise, the deathless part that survived all successive bodies.

And I realised with a shock of comprehension the danger that Julius ran in the evocation that his “experiment” involved: Fire, once kindled, and aided naturally by air, must seek to destroy the prison that confines it....

I remained for some time in my room. My will, my power of choice, seemed taken from me. My life moved with these vaster influences. I argued vehemently with some part of me that still offered a vague resistance. It was the merest child’s play. I figured myself in my London lecture room, explaining to my students the course and growth of the delusion that had captured me. The result was futile; I convinced neither my students nor myself. It was the thinking mind in me that opposed, but it was another thing in me that knew, and this other thing was enormously stronger than the reasoning mind, and overwhelmed it. No amount of arguing could stand against the power of knowledge that had become established in me by feeling-with. I

felt-with Nature, especially with her twin elemental powers of wind and fire. And this wisdom of feeling-with dominated my entire being. Denial and argument were merely false.

All that evening this sense of the companionship of Wind and Fire remained vividly assertive. Everywhere they moved about me. They acted in concert, each assisting the other. I was for ever aware of them; their physical manifestations were as great dumb gestures of two living and intelligent Immensities in Nature. Yet it was only in part, perhaps, I knew them. Their full, amazing power never came to me completely. The absolute realisation that came to Julius in full consciousness was not mine. I shared at most, it seems, a reflected knowledge, seeing what happened as through some lens of half-recovered memory.

Moreover, supper, when I came downstairs to find Julius and his wife already waiting for me, was the most ordinary and commonplace meal imaginable. We talked of the weather! Mrs. LeVallon was light-hearted, almost gay, though I felt it was repressed excitement that drove outwards this trivial aspect of her. But for the fact that all she did now seemed individual and distinguished, her talk and gestures might have scraped acquaintance with mere foolishness. Indeed, our light talk and her irresponsibility added to the sense of reality I have mentioned. It was a mask, and the mask dropped occasionally with incongruous abruptness that was startling.

Such insignificant details revealed the immediate range of the Powers that watched and waited close beside our chairs. That sudden, fixed expression in her eyes, for instance, when the Man brought in certain private papers, handed them to Julius who, after reading them, endorsed them with a modern fountain pen, then passed them on to me! That fountain pen and her accompanying remark—how incongruous and insignificant they were! Both seemed symbolical items in some dwindled, trivial scale of being!

“It isn’t everybody that’s got a professor for a secretary, Julius, is it?”

She said it with her mouth full, her elbows on the table, and only that other look in the watchful eyes seemed to contradict the awkward, untaught body. There was a flash of tenderness and passion in them, a pathetic questioning and wonder, as though she saw in her husband's act an acknowledgment of dim forebodings in her own deep heart. She appealed, it seemed, to me. Was it that she divined he was already slipping from her, farewells all unsaid, yet that she was—inarticulate? ... The entire little scene, the words, the laughter and the look, were but evidence of an attempt to lift the mask. Her choice of words, their accent and pronunciation, that fountain pen, the endorsement, the stupid remark about myself—were all these lifted by those yearning eyes into the tragedy of a fateful good-bye message? ...

More significant still, though even less direct, was another moment—when the Man stretched his arm across the table to turn the lamp up. For in this unnecessary act she saw—the intuition came sharply to me—an effect of the approaching Powers upon his untutored soul. The wick was already high enough when, with an abrupt, impulsive movement, he stooped to turn it higher; and instantly Mrs. LeVallon was on her feet, her face first pale, then hotly flushed. She rose as though to strike him, then changed the gesture as if to ward a blow—almost to protect. It was an impetuous, revealing act.

Out of some similar impulse, too, only half understood, I sprang to her assistance.

"There's light enough," I exclaimed.

"And heat," she added quickly. "Good Lord! the room's that hot, it's like a furnace!"

She flashed a look of gratitude at me. What exactly was in her mind I cannot know, but in my own was the strange feeling that the less visible fire in the air the better. An expression of perplexed alarm showed itself in the face of the faithful but inarticulate serving man. Unwittingly he had blundered. His distress was acute. I almost thought he would drop to his knees and lick his mistress's hand for

forgiveness.

Whether Julius perceived all this is hard to say. He looked up calmly, watching us; but the glance he gave, and the fact that he spoke no word, made me think he realised what the energy of her tone and gesture veiled. The desire to assist the increase of heat, of fire—co-operation—had acted upon the physical medium least able to resist—the most primitive system present. The approach of the two Activities affected us, one and all.

There were other incidents of a similar kind before the meal was over, quite ordinary in themselves, yet equally revealing; my interpretation of them due to this enhanced condition of acute perception that pertained to awakening memory. Air and fire accumulated, flake by flake. A kind of radiant heat informed all common objects. It was in our hearts as well. And wind was waiting to blow it into flame.

CHAPTER XXIX

“Not yet are fixed the prison bars;

The hidden light the spirit owns

If blown to flame would dim the stars

And they who rule them from their thrones:

And the proud sceptred spirits thence

Would bow to pay us reverence.”—A. E.

It was out of this accumulation of unusual emotion that a slight but significant act of Julius recalled me to the outer world. I was lighting my pipe—from the chimney of the lamp rather than by striking a match—when I overheard him telling the Man that, instead of sitting up as usual, he might go to bed at once. He went off obediently, but with some latent objection, half resentment, half opposition, in his manner. There was a sulkiness as of disappointment in his face. He knew that something unusual was on foot, and he felt that he should by rights be in it—he

might be of use, he might be needed. There was this dumb emotion in him, as in a faithful dog who, scenting danger, is not called upon to fight, and so retires growling to his kennel.

He went slowly, casting backward glances, and at the door he turned and caught my eye. I had only to beckon, to raise my hand a moment, to say a word—he would have come running back with a bound into the room. But the gaze of his master was upon him, and he went; and though he may have lain down in his room beyond the kitchen, I felt perfectly sure he did not sleep. His body lay down, but not his excited instincts.

For this dismissal of the Man was, of course, a signal. The three of us were then in that dim-lit peasant's room—alone; and for a long time in a silence broken only by the sparks escaping from the burning logs upon the hearth, and by the low wind that now went occasionally sighing past the open window. We sat there waiting, not looking at each other, yet each aware of the slightest physical or mental movement. It was an intense and active silence in which deep things were being accomplished; for, if Mrs. LeVallon and myself were negative, I was alert to immense and very positive actions that were going forward in the being of our companion. Julius, sitting quietly with folded hands, his face just beyond the lamp's first circle of light, was preparing, and with a stress of extreme internal effort that made the silence seem a field of crashing battle. The entire strength of this strange being's soul, co-operating with Nature, and by methods of very ancient acquirement known fully to himself alone, sought an achievement that should make us act as one. Through two natural elemental powers, fire and wind—both vitally part of us since the body's birth—we could claim the incalculable support of the entire universe. It was a cosmic act. Ourselves were but the channel. Later this channel would define itself still more.

Beneath those smoke-stained rafters, as surely as beneath the vaulted roof of some

great temple, stepped worship and solemnity. The change came gradually. From the sky above the star-lit valley this grave, tremendous attitude swung down into our hearts. Not alone the isolated châlet, but the world itself contained us, a temple wherein we, insignificant worshippers, knelt before the Universe. For the powers we invoked were not merely earthly powers, but those cosmic energies that drove and regulated even the flocks of stars.

Mrs. LeVallon and I both knew it dimly, as we waited with beating hearts in that great silence. She scarcely moved. Somehow divining the part she had to play, she sat there motionless as a figure in stone, offering no resistance. Her reawakened memory must presently guide us; she knew the importance of her rôle, and the composure with which she accepted it touched grandeur. Yet each one of us was necessary. If Julius took the leader's part, her contribution, as my own, were equally essential to success. If the greater risk was his, our own risk was yet not negligible. The elemental Powers would take what channel seemed best available. It was not a personal consideration for us. We were most strangely one.

My own measure of interpretation I have already attempted to describe. Hers I guess intuitively. For we shared each other's feelings as only love and sympathy know how to share. These feelings now grew steadily in power; and, obeying them, our bodies moved to new positions. We changed our attitudes.

For I remember that while Julius rose and stood beside the table, his wife went quietly from my side and seated herself before the open window, her face turned towards the valley and the night. Instinctively we formed a living triangle, Mrs. LeVallon at the apex. And, though at the time I understood the precise significance of these changes, reading clearly the language they acted out in motion, that discernment is now no longer in me, so that I cannot give the perfect expression of meaning they revealed. Upon Julius, however, some appearance, definite as a robe upon the head and shoulders, proclaimed him a figure of command and somehow,

too, of tragedy. It set him in the centre. Close beside me, within the circle of the lamplight, I watched him—so still, so grave, the face of marble pallor, the dark hair tumbling as of old about the temples whereon the effort of intensest concentration made the pulsing veins stand out as thick as cords. Calm as an image he stood there for a period of time I cannot state. Beyond him, in the shadows by the window, his wife's figure was just visible as she leaned, half reclining, across the wooden sill into the night. There was no sound from the outer valley, there was no sound in the room. Then, suddenly of itself, a change approached. The silence broke.

"Julius...!" came faintly from the window, as Mrs. LeVallon with a sudden gesture drew the curtain to shut out the darkness. She turned towards us. "Julius!" And her voice, using the tone I had heard before when she fled past me up that meadow slope, sounded as from some space beyond the walls. I looked up, my nerves on the alert, for it came to me that she was at the limit of endurance and that something now must break in her.

Julius moved over to her side, while she put her hands out first to welcome him, then half to keep him off. He spoke no word. He took her outstretched hands in both of his, leading her back a little nearer towards the centre of the room.

"Julius," she whispered, "what frightens me to-night? I'm all a-shiver. There's something coming?—but what is it? And why do I seem to know, yet not to know?"

He answered her quietly, the voice deep with tenderness:

"We three are here together"—I saw the shining smile I knew of old—"and there is no cause to feel afraid. You are tired with your long, long waiting." And he meant, I knew, the long fatigue of ages that she apprehended, but did not grasp fully yet. She was Mrs. LeVallon still.

"I'm both hot and cold together, and all oppressed," she went on; "like a fever it is—icy and yet on fire. I can't get at myself, to keep it still. Julius ... what is it?" The whisper held somehow for me the potentiality of scream. Then, taking his two hands

closer, she raised her voice with startling suddenness. “Julius,” she cried, “I know what frightens me—it’s you! What are you to-night?” She looked searchingly a moment into his face. “And what is this thing that’s going to happen to you? I hear it coming nearer—outside”—she moved further from the curtained window with small, rushing steps, looking back across her shoulder—“all down the valley from the mountains, those awful mountains. Oh, Julius, it’s coming—for you—my husband——! And for him,” she added, laying her eyes upon me like a flame.

I thought the tears must come, but she held them back, looking appealingly at me, and clutching Julius as though he would slip from her. Then, with a quick movement and a little gust of curious laughter, she clapped her hand upon her mouth to stop the words. Something she meant to say to me was left unspoken, she was ashamed of the momentary weakness. “Mrs. LeVallon” was still uppermost.

“Julius,” she added more softly, “there’s something about to-night I haven’t known since childhood. There’s such heat and—oh, hark!”—she stopped a moment, holding up her finger—“there’s a sound—like riggin’ in the wind. But it ain’t wind. What is it, Julius? And why is that wonderful?”

Yet no sound issued from the quiet valley; it was as still as death. Even the sighing of the breeze had ceased about the walls.

“If only I understood,” she went on, looking from his face to mine, “if only I knew exactly. It was something,” she added almost to herself, “that used to come to me when I was little—on the farm—and I put it away because it made me”—she whispered the last two words below her breath—“feel crazy——”

“Crazy?” repeated Julius, smiling down at her.

“Like a queen,” she finished proudly, yet still timid. “I couldn’t feel that way and do my work.” And her long lashes lifted, so that the eyes flashed at me across the table. “It made everything seem too easy.”

I cannot say what quality was in his voice, when, leading her gently towards a

wicker chair beside the fire, he spoke those strange words of comfort. There seemed a resonant power in it that brought strength and comfort in. She smiled as she listened, though it was not her brain his language soothed. That other look began to steal upon her face as he proceeded.

"You!" he said gently, "so wonderful a woman, and so poised with the discipline these little nerves forget—you cannot yield to the fear that loneliness and darkness bring to children." She settled down into the chair, gazing into his face as he settled the cushions for her back. Her hands lay in her lap. She listened to every syllable, while the expression of perplexity grew less marked. And the change upon her features deepened as he continued: "There are moments when the soul sees her own shadow, and is afraid. The Past comes up so close. But the shadow and the fear will pass. We three are here. Beyond all chance disaster, we stand together ... and to our real inner selves nothing that is sad or terrible can ever happen."

Again her eyes flashed their curious lightning at me as I watched; but the sudden vague alarm was passing as mysteriously as it came. She said no more about the wind and fire. The magic of his personality, rather than the words which to her could only have seemed singular and obscure, had touched the sources of her strength. Her face was pale, her eyes still bright with an unwonted brilliance, but she was herself again—I think she was no longer the "upper" self I knew as "Mrs. LeVallon." The marvellous change was slowly stealing over her.

"You're cold and tired," he said, bending above her. "Come closer to the fire—with us all."

I saw her shrink, for all the brave control she exercised. The word "fire" came on her like a blow. "It's not my body," she answered; "that's neither cold nor tired. It's another thing—behind it." She turned toward the window, where the curtain at that moment rose and fell before a draught of air. "I keep getting the feeling that something's coming to-night for—one of us." She said it half to herself, and Julius

made no answer. I saw her look back then at the glowing fire of wood and peat. At the same moment she threw out both hands first as if to keep the heat away, then as though to hold her husband closer.

"Julius! If you went from me! If I lost you——!"

I heard his low reply:

"Never, through all eternity, can we go—away from one another—except for moments."

She partly understood, I think, for a great sigh, but half suppressed, escaped her.

"Moments," she murmured, "that are very long ... and lonely."

It was then, as she said the words, that I noticed the change which so long had been rising, establish itself definitely in the luminous eyes. That other colour fastened on them—the deep sea-green. "Mrs. LeVallon" before my sight sank slowly down, and a completer, far more ancient self usurped her. Small wonder that my description halts in confusion before so beautiful a change, for it was the beginning of an actual transfiguration of her present person. It was bewildering to watch the gradual, enveloping approach of that underlying Self, shrine of a million memories, deathless, and ripe with long-forgotten knowledge. The air of majesty that she wore in the sleep-walking incident gathered by imperceptible degrees about the uninspired modern presentment that I knew. Slowly her face turned calm with beauty. The features composed themselves in some new mould of grandeur. The perplexity, at first so painfully apparent, but marked the singular passage of the less into the greater. I saw it slowly disappear. As she lay back in that rough chair of a peasant's châlet, there was some calm about her as of the steadfast hills, some radiance as of stars, a suggestion of power that told me—as though some voice whispered it in my soul—she knew the link with Nature re-established finally within her being. Her head turned slightly towards me. I stood up.

Instinctively I moved across the room and drew the curtain back. I saw the stars; I

saw the dark line of mountains; the odours of forest and meadow came in with sweetness; I heard the tinkling of the little stream—yet all contained somehow in the message of her turning head and shoulders.

There was no sound, there was no spoken word, but the language was one and unmistakable. And as I came slowly again towards the fire Julius stood over her, uttering in silence the same stupendous thing. The sense of my own inclusion in it was amazing. He smiled down into her lifted face. These two, myself a vital link between them, smiled across the centuries at one another. We formed—I noticed then—with the fire and the open window into space—a circle.

To say that I grasped some spiritual import in these movements of our bodies, realising that they acted out an inevitable meaning, is as true as my convinced belief can make it. It is also true that in this, my later report of the event, that meaning is no longer clear to me. I cannot recover the point of view that discerned in our very positions a message of some older day. The significance of attitude and gesture then were clear to me; the translation of this three-dimensional language I have lost again. A man upon his knees, two arms outstretched to clasp, a head bowed down, a pointing finger—these are interpretable gestures and attitudes that need no spoken words. Similarly, following some forgotten wisdom, our related movements held a ceremonial import that, by way of acceptance or refusal, helped or hindered the advance of the elemental powers then invoked. In some marvellous fashion one consciousness was shared amongst us all. We worked with a living Nature, and a living Nature worked actively with us, and it was attitude, movement, gestures, rather than words, that assisted the alliance.

Then Julius took the hand that lay nearest to him, while the other she lifted to place within my own. And a light breeze came through the open window at that moment, touched the embers of the glowing logs, and blew them into flame. I felt our hands tighten as that slight increase of heat and air passed into us. For in that passing

breeze was the eternal wind which is the breath of God, and in that flame upon the hearth was the fire which burns in suns and lights the heart in men and women....

There came with unexpected suddenness, then, a moment of very poignant human significance—because of the great perspective against which it rose. She sat erect; she gazed into his face and mine; in her eyes burned an expression of beseeching love and sacrifice, but a love and sacrifice far older than this present world on which her body lay. Her arms stretched out and opened, she raised her lips, and, while I looked aside, she kissed him softly. I turned away from that embrace, aware in my heart that it was a half-divined farewell ... and when I looked back again the little scene was over.

He bent slightly down, releasing the hand he held, and signifying by a gesture that I should do the same. Her body relaxed a little; she sank deeper into the chair; she sighed. I realised that he was assisting her into that artificial slumber which would lead to the full release of the subconscious self whose slow approach she already half divined. Stooping above her, he gently touched the hypnogenic points above the eyes and behind the ears. It was the oldest memories he sought. She offered them quite willingly.

“Sleep!” he said soothingly, command and tenderness mingled in the voice. “Sleep ... and remember!” With the right hand he made slow, longitudinal passes before her face. “Sleep, and recover what you ... knew! We need your guidance.”

Her body swayed a little before it settled; her feet stretched nearer to the fire; her respiration rapidly diminished, becoming deep and regular; with the movement of her bosom the band of black velvet rose and fell about the neck, her hands lay folded in her lap. And, as I watched, my own personal sensations of quite nameless joy and anguish passed into a curious abandonment of self that merged me too completely in the solemnity of worship to leave room for pain. Hand in hand with the earthly darkness came in to us that Night of Time which neither sleeps nor dies, and like a

remembered dream up stole our inextinguishable Past.

“Sleep!” he repeated, lower than before.

Cold, indeed, touched my heart, but with it came a promise of some deep spiritual sweetness, rich with the comfort of that life which is both abundant and universal. The valley and the sky, stars, mountains, forests, running water, all that lay outside of ourselves in Nature everywhere, came with incredible appeal into my soul. Confining barriers crumbled, melted into air; the imprisoned human forces leaped forth to meet the powers that “inanimate” Nature holds. I knew the drive of tireless wind, the rush of irresistible fire. It seemed a state in which we all joined hands, a state of glory that justified the bravest hopes, annihilating doubt and disbelief.

She slept. And in myself something supremely sure, supremely calm, looked on and watched.

“It helps,” Julius murmured in my ear, referring to the sleep; “it makes it easier for her. She will remember now ... and guide.”

He moved to her right side, I to her left. Between the fire and the open window we formed then—a line.

Along a line there is neither tension nor resistance. It was the primitive, ultimate figure.

CHAPTER XXX

A rush of air ran softly round the walls and roof, then dropped away into silence. There was this increased activity outside. A roar next sounded in the chimney, high up rather; a block of peat fell with a sudden crash into the grate, sending a shower of sparks to find the outer air. Behind us the pine boards cracked with miniature, sharp reports.

Julius continued the longitudinal passes, and “Mrs. LeVallon” passed with every minute into deeper and more complete somnambulism. It was a natural, willing

process. He merely made it easier for her. She sank slowly into the deep subconscious region where all the memories of the soul lie stored for use.

It seemed that everything was in abeyance in myself, except the central fact that this experience was true. The rest of existence fell away, clipped off as by a pair of mighty shears. Both fire and wind seemed actively about me; yet not unnaturally. There was this heat and lift, but there was nothing frantic. The native forces in me were raised to their ultimate capacity, though never for a moment beyond the limit that high emotion might achieve. Nature accomplished the abnormal, possibly, but still according to law and what was—or had been once—comprehensible.

The passes grew slower, with longer intervals between; Mrs. LeVallon lay motionless, the lips slightly parted, the skin preternaturally pale, the eyelids tightly closed.

"Hush!" whispered Julius, as I made an involuntary movement, "it is still the normal sleep, and she may easily awake. Let no sound disturb her. It must go gradually." He spoke without once removing his gaze from her face. "Be ready to write what you hear," he added, "and help by 'thinking' fire and wind—in my direction."

A long-drawn sigh was audible, accompanied by the slightest possible convulsive movement of the reclining body.

"She sinks deeper," he whispered, ceasing the passes for a moment. "The consciousness is already below the deep-dream stage. Soon she will wake into the interior lucidity when her Self of To-day will touch the parent source behind. They are already with her: they light—and lift—her soul. She will remember all her past, and will direct us."

I made no answer; I asked no questions; I stood and watched, willingly sympathetic, yet incapable of action. The curious scene held something of tragedy and grandeur. There was triumph in it. The sense of Nature working with us increased, yet we ourselves comparatively unimportant. The earth, the sky, the universe took part and

were involved in our act of restitution. It was beyond all experience. It was also—at times—intolerable.

The body settled deeper into the chair; the crackling of the wicker making sharp reports in the stillness. The pallor of the face increased; the cheeks sank in, the framework of the eyes stood out; imperceptibly the features began to re-arrange themselves upon another, greater scale, most visible, perhaps, in the strong, delicate contours of the mouth and jaw. Upon Julius, too, as he stood beside her, came down some indefinable change that set him elsewhere and otherwise. His dignity, his deep solicitous tenderness, and at the same time a hint of power that emanated more and more from his whole person, rendered him in some intangible fashion remote and inaccessible. I watched him with growing wonder.

For over the room as well a change came stealing. In the shadows beyond the fringe of lamplight, perspective altered. The room ran off in distances that yet just escaped the eye: I felt the change, though it was so real that the breath caught in me each time I sought to focus it. Space spread and opened on all sides, above, below, while so naturally that it was never actually unaccountable. Wood seemed replaced by stone, as though the solidity of our material surroundings deepened. I was aware of granite columns, corridors of massive build, gigantic pylons towering to the sky. The atmosphere of an ancient temple grew about my heart, and long-forgotten things came with a crowding of half-familiar detail that insisted upon recognition. It was an early memory, I knew, yet not the earliest....

“Be ready.” I heard the low voice of Julius. “She is about to wake—within,” and he moved a little closer to her, while I took up my position by the table by the lamp. The paper lay before me. With fingers that trembled I lifted the pencil, waiting. The hands of the sleeping woman raised themselves feebly, then fell back upon the arms of the chair. It seemed she tried to make signs but could not quite complete them. The expression on the face betrayed great internal effort.

“Where are you?” Julius asked in a steady but very gentle tone.

The answer came at once, with slight intervals between the words:

“In a building ... among mountains....”

“Are you alone?”

“No ... not alone,” spoken with a faint smile, the eyes still tightly closed.

“Who, then, is with you?”

“You ... and he,” after a momentary hesitation.

“And who am I?”

The face showed slight confusion; there was a gesture as though she felt about her in the air to find him.

“I do not know ... quite,” came the halting answer. “But you—both—are mine ... and very near to me. Or else you own me. All three are so close I cannot see ourselves apart ... quite.”

“She is confused between two memories,” Julius whispered to me. “The true regression of memory has not yet begun. The present still obscures her consciousness.”

“It is coming,” she said instantly, aware of his lightest whisper.

“All in due time,” he soothed her in a tender tone; “there is no hurry. Nor is there anything to fear——”

“I am not afraid. I am ... happy. I feel safe.” She paused a moment, then added: “But I must go deeper ... further down. I am too near the surface still.”

He made a few slow passes at some distance from her face, and I saw the eyelids flutter as though about to lift. She sighed deeply. She composed herself as into yet deeper sleep.

“Ah! I see better now,” she murmured. “I am sinking ... sinking ...”

He waited for several minutes and then resumed the questioning.

“Now tell me who you are,” he enjoined.

She faintly shook her head. Her lips trembled, as though she tried to utter several names and then abandoned all. The effort seemed beyond her. The perplexed expression on the face with the shut eyes was movingly pathetic, so that I longed to help her, though I knew not how.

“Thank you,” she murmured instantly, with a gentle smile in my direction. Our thoughts, then, already found each other!

“Tell me who you are,” Julius repeated firmly. “It is not the name I ask.”

She answered distinctly, with a smile:

“A mother. I am soon to be a mother and give birth.”

He glanced at me significantly. There was both joy and sadness in his eyes. But it was not this disclosure that he sought. She was still entangled in the personality of To-day. It was far older layers of memory and experience that he wished to read. “Once she gets free from this,” he whispered, “it will go with leaps and bounds, whole centuries at a time.” And again I knew by the smile hovering round the lips that she had heard and understood.

“Pass deeper; pass beyond,” he continued, with more authority in the tone. “Drive through—sink down into what lies so far behind.”

A considerable interval passed before she spoke again, ten minutes at the lowest reckoning, and possibly much longer. I watched her intently, but with an afflicting anxiety at my heart. The body lay so still and calm, it was like the immobility of death, except that once or twice the forehead puckered in a little frown and the compression of the lips told of the prolonged internal effort. The grander aspect of her features came for moments flittingly, but did not as yet establish itself to stay. She was still confused with the mind and knowledge of To-day. At length a little

movement showed itself; she changed the angle of her head in an effort to look up and speak; a scarcely perceptible shudder ran down the length of her stretched limbs. “I cannot,” she murmured, as though glancing at her husband with closed eyelids. “Something blocks the way. I cannot see. It’s too thickly crowded ... crowded.”

“Describe it, and pass on,” urged Julius patiently. There was unalterable decision in his quiet voice. And in her tone a change was also noticeable. I was profoundly moved; only with a great effort I controlled myself.

“They crowd so eagerly about me,”—the choice of words seemed no longer quite “Mrs. LeVallon’s”—“with little arms outstretched and pleading eyes. They seek to enter, they implore ...”

“Who are they?”

“The Returning Souls.” The love and passion in her voice brought near, as in a picture, the host of reincarnating souls eager to find a body for their development in the world. They besieged her, clamouring for birth—for a body.

“Your thoughts invite them,” replied Julius, “but you have the power to decide.” And then he asked more sternly: “Has any entered yet?”

It was unspeakably moving—this mother willing to serve with anguish the purpose of advancing souls. Yet this was all of To-day. It was not the thing he sought. The general purpose must stand aside for the particular. There was an error to be set right first. She had to seek its origin among the ages infinitely far away. The guidance Julius sought lay in the long ago. But the safety of the little unborn body troubled him, it seemed.

“As yet,” she murmured, “none. The little body of the boy is empty ... though besieged.”

“By whom besieged?” he asked more loudly. “Who hinders?”

The little body of the boy! And it was then a further change came suddenly, both in

her face and voice, and in the voice of Julius too.

That larger expression of some forgotten grandeur passed into her features, and she half sat up in the chair; there was a stiffening of the frame; resistance, power, an attitude of authority, replaced the former limpness. The moment was, for me, electrifying. Ice and fire moved upon my skin.

She opened her lips to speak, but no words were audible.

“Look close—and tell me,” came from Julius gravely.

She made an effort, then shrank back a little, this time raising one arm as though to protect herself from something coming, then sharply dropping it again over the heart and body.

“I cannot see,” she murmured, slightly frowning; “they stand so close and ... are ... so splendid. They are too great ... to see.”

“Who—what—are they?” he insisted. He took her hand in his. I saw her smile.

The simple words were marvellously impressive. Depths of untold memory stirred within me as I heard.

“Powers ... we knew ... so long ago.”

Some ancient thing in me opened an eye and saw. The Powers we evoked came seeking an entrance, brought nearer by our invitation. They came from the silent valley; they were close about the building. But only through a human channel could they emerge from the spheres where they belonged.

“Describe them, and pass on,” I heard Julius say, and there came a pause then that I thought would never end. The look of power rolled back upon her face. She spoke with joy, with a kind of happiness as though she welcomed them.

“They rush and shine.... They flood the distance like a sea, and yet stand close against my heart and blood. They are clothed in wind and fire. I see the diadems of flame ascending and descending. Their breath is all the winds. There is such roaring.

I see mountains of wind and fire ... advancing ... nearer ... nearer.... We used them—we invited ... long, long ago.... And so they ... come again about us....”

His following command appalled me:

“Keep them back. You must protect the vacant body from invasion.”

And then he added in tones that seemed to make the very air vibrate, although the voice but whispered, “You must direct them—towards me.”

He moved to a new position, so that we formed a triangle again. Dimly at the time I understood. The circle signified the union which, having received, enclosed the mighty forces. Only it enclosed too much; the danger of misdirection had appeared. The triangle, her body forming the apex towards the open night, aimed at controlling the immense arrival by lessening the entry. Another thing stood out, too, with crystal clearness—at the time: the elemental Powers sought the easiest channel, the channel of least resistance, the body still unoccupied: whereas Julius offered—himself. The risk must be his and his alone. There was—in those few steps he took across the dim-lit room—a sense of tremendous, if sinister, drama that swept my heart with both tenderness and terror. The significance of his changed position was staggering.

I watched the sleeper closely. The lips grew more compressed, and the fingers of both hands clenched themselves upon the dark dress on her lap. I saw the muscles of the altering face contract with effort; the whole framework of the body became more rigid. Then, after several minutes, followed a gradual relaxation, as she sank back again into her original position.

“They retire ...” she murmured with a sigh. “They retire ... into darkness a little. But they still ... wait and hover. I hear the rush of their great passing.... I see the distant shine of fire ... still.”

“And the souls?” he asked gently, “do they now return?”

She lowered her head as with a gesture of relief.

“They are crowding, crowding. I see them as an endless flight of birds....” She held out her arms, then shrank back sharply. An expression I could not interpret flashed across the face. Behind a veil, it seemed. And the stern voice of Julius broke in upon the arrested action:

“Invite them by your will. Draw to you by desire and love one eager soul. The little vacant body must be occupied, so that the Mighty Ones, returning, shall find it thus impossible of entry.”

It was a command; it was also a precaution; for if the body of the child were left open it would inevitably attract the invading Powers from—himself. I watched her very closely then. I saw her again stretch out her arms and hands, then once again—draw sharply back. But this time I understood the expression on the quivering face. The veil had lifted.

By what means this was clear to me, yet hidden from Julius, I cannot say. Perhaps the ineradicable love that she and I bore for one another in that long-forgotten time supplied the clue. But of this I am certain—that she disobeyed him. She left the little waiting body as it was, empty, untenanted. Life—a soul returning to re-birth—was not conceived and did not enter in. The reason, moreover, was also clear to me in that amazing moment of her choice: she divined his risk of failure, she wished to save him, she left open the channel of least resistance of set purpose—the unborn body. For a love known here and now, she sacrificed a love as yet unborn. If Julius failed, at least he would not now be destroyed; there would be another channel ready.

That thus she thought, intended, I felt convinced. If her mistake was fraught with more danger than she knew, my lips were yet somehow sealed. Our deeper, ancient bond gave me the clue that to Julius was not offered, but no words came from me to enlighten him. It seemed beyond my power; I should have broken faith with her, a faith unbelievably precious to me.

For a long time, then, there was silence in the little room, while LeVallon continued to make slow passes as before. The anguish left her face, drowned wholly in the grander expression that she wore. She breathed deeply, regularly, without effort, the head sunk forward a little on the breast. The rustle of his coat as his arm went to and fro, and the creaking of the wicker chair were all I heard. Then, presently, Julius turned to me with a low whisper I can hear to this very day. “I, and I alone,” he said, “am the rightful channel. I have waited long.” He added more that I have forgotten; I caught something about “all the aspects being favourable,” and that he felt confidence, sure that he would not fail.

“You will not,” I interrupted passionately, “you dare not fail....” And then speech suddenly broke down in me, and some dark shadow seemed to fall upon my senses so that I neither heard nor saw nor felt anything for a period I cannot state.

An interval there certainly was, and of some considerable length probably, for when I came to myself again there was change accomplished, though a change I could not properly estimate. His voice filled the room, addressing the sleeper as before, yet in a way that told me there had been progress accomplished while I had been unconscious.

“Deeper yet,” I heard, “pass down deeper yet, pass back across a hundred intervening lives to that far-off time and place when first—first—we called Them forth. Sink down into your inmost being and remember!”

And in her immediate answer there was a curious faintness as of distance: “It is ... so ... far away ... so far beyond ...”

“Beyond what?” he asked, the expression of “Other Places” deepening upon his face.

Her forehead wrinkled in a passing frown. “Beyond this earth,” she murmured, as though her closed eyes saw within. “Oh, oh, it hurts. The heat is awful ... the light ... the tremendous winds ... they blind, they tear me...!” And she stopped abruptly.

"Forget the pain," he said; "it is already gone." And instantly the tension of her face relaxed. She drew a sigh of deep relief. Before I could prevent it, my own voice sounded: "When we were nearer to the sun!"

She made no reply. He took my hand across the table and laid it on her own. "She cannot hear your voice," he said, "unless you touch us. She is too far away. She does not even know that you are here beside me. You of To-day she has forgotten, and the you of that long ago she has not yet found."

"You speak with someone—but with whom?" she asked at once, turning her head a little in my direction. Not waiting for his reply she at once went on: "Upon another planet, yes ... but oh, so long ago...." And again she paused.

"The one immediately before this present one?" asked Julius.

She shook her head gently. "Still further back than that ... the one before the last, when first we knew delight of life ... without these heavy, closing bodies. When the sun was nearer ... and we knew deity in the fiery heat and mighty winds ... and Nature was ... ourselves...." The voice wavered oddly, broke, and ceased upon a sigh. A thousand questions burned in me to ask. An amazing certainty of recognition and remembrance burst through my heart. But Julius spoke before my tongue found words.

"Search more closely," he said with intense gravity. "The time and place we summoned Them is what we need—not where we first learned it, but where we practised it and failed. Confine your will to that. Forget the earlier planet. To help you, I set a barrier you cannot pass...."

"The scene of our actual evocation is what we must discover," he whispered to me. "When that is found we shall be in touch with the actual Powers our worship used."

"It was not there, in that other planet," she murmured. "It was only there we first gained the Nature-wisdom. Thence—we brought it with us ... to another time and place ... later ... much nearer to To-day—to Earth."

“Remember, then, and see——” he began, when suddenly her unutterably wonderful expression proclaimed that she at last had found it.

It was curiously abrupt. He moved aside. We waited. I took up my pencil between fingers that were icy cold. My gaze remained fixed upon the motionless body. Those fast-closed eyes seemed cut in stone, as if they never in this world could open. The forehead gleamed pale as ivory in the lamplight. The soft gulping of the lamp oil beside me, the crumbling of the firewood in the grate deepened the silence that I feared to break. The pallid oval of the sleeper’s countenance shone at me out of a room turned wholly dark. I forgot the place wherein we sat, our names, our meanings in the present. For there grew vividly upon that disc-like countenance the face of another person—and of one I knew.

And with this shock of recognition—there came over me both horror and undying sweetness—a horror that the face would smile into my own with a similar recognition, that from those lips a voice must come I should remember; that those arms would lift, those hands stretch out; an ecstasy that I should be remembered.

“Open!” I heard, as from far away, the voice of Julius.

And then I realised that the eyes were open. The lids were raised, the eyeballs faced the lamp. Some tension drew the skin sideways. They were other eyes. The eternal Self looked out of them bringing the message of a vast antiquity. They gazed steadily and clearly into mine.

CHAPTER XXXI

To-day retired. I remembered Yesterday, but a Yesterday more remote, perhaps, than the fire-mist out of which our little earth was born....

I half rose in my chair. The first instinct—strong in me still as I write this here in modern Streatham—was to fall upon my knees as in the stress of some immense, remembered love. That glory caught me, that power of an everlasting passion that

was holy. Bathed in a sea of perfect recollection, my eyes met hers, lost themselves, lived back into a Past that had been joy. A flood of shame broke fiercely over me that such a union could ever have seemed "forgotten." That To-day could smother Yesterday so easily seemed sacrilege. For this memory, uprising from the mists of hoary pre-existence, brought in its train other great emotions of recovered grandeur, all stirred into life by this ancient ceremony we three acted out. Our purpose then had been, I knew, no ordinary, selfish love, no lust of possession or ownership behind it. Its aim and end were not mere personal contentment, mere selfish happiness that excluded others, but, rather, a part of some vast, co-ordinated process that involved all Nature with her powers and workings, and fulfilled with beauty a purpose of the entire Universe. It was holy in the biggest sense; it was divine. The significance of our attitudes To-day was all explained—Julius, herself and I, exquisitely linked to Nature, a group-soul formed by the loves of Yesterday and Now.

We gazed at one another in silence, smiling at our recovered wonder. We spoke no word, we made no gesture; there was perfect comprehension; we were, all three, as we had been—long ago. An earlier state of consciousness took this supreme command.... And presently—how long the interval I cannot say—her eyelids dropped, she drew a deep sigh of happiness, and lay quiescent as before.

It was then, I think, that the sense of worship in me became so imperative that denial seemed impossible. Some inner act of adoration certainly accomplished itself although no physical act resulted, for I remember dropping back again into my chair, not knowing what exactly I meant to do. The old desire for the long, sweet things of the soul burst suddenly into flame, the inner yearning to know the deathless Nature Powers which were the gods, and to taste divinity by feeling-with their mighty beings. That early state of simpler consciousness, it seems, lay too remote from modern things to be translatable in clear language. Yet at the time I knew it, felt it, realised it, because I lived it once again. The flood of aspiration that bore me on its

crest left thinking and reason utterly out of account. No link survives To-day with the state we then recovered....

And both she and Julius changed before my eyes. The châlet changed as well, slipping into the shadowy spaces of some vast, pillared temple. The soul in me realised its power and knew its origin divine. Bathed in a sea of long-forgotten glory, it rose into a condition of sublimest bliss and confidence. It recognised its destiny and claimed all Heaven. And this raging fire of early spiritual ambition passed over me as upon a mighty wind; desire and will became augmented as though wind blew them into flame.

"Watch ... and listen," I heard, "and feel no fear!"

The change visibly increased; it seemed that curtains lifted in succession.... The sunken head was raised; the lips quivered with approaching speech; the pale cheeks deepened with a sudden flush that set the cheekbones in a quick, high light; the neck bent slightly forward, foreshortening, as it were, the presentment of the head and shoulders; while some indescribable touch of power painted the marble brows cold and almost stern. The entire countenance breathed the august passion of a remoter age dropped close.... And to see the little face I knew as Mrs. LeVallon, domestic servant in the world To-day, unscreen itself thus before me, while its actual structure yet remained unchanged, broke down the last resistance in me, and rendered my subjugation absolute. Transfiguration was visibly accomplished....

Once more she turned her head and looked at me. I met the eyes that saw me and remembered. And, though I would have screened myself from their tremendous gaze, there was no remnant of power in me that could do so.... She smiled, then slowly withdrew her eyes.... I passed, with these two beside me, back into the womb of pre-existence. We were upon the Earth—at the very time and place where we had used the knowledge brought from a still earlier globe.

"What do you see?" came in those quiet tones that rolled up time and distance like a

scroll. “Tell me now!” It was the scene of the lost experiment he sought. We were close upon it.

She spread her arms; her hands waved slowly through the air to indicate these immense enclosing walls of stone about us. The voice reverberated as in great hollow space.

“Darkness ... and the Vacated Bodies,” was the reply. I knew that we stood in the Hall of Silence where the bodies lay entranced while their spirits went forth upon the three days’ quest. And one of these, I knew, was mine.

“What besides?”

“The Guardians—who protect.”

“Who are they? Who are these Guardians?”

An expression of shrinking passed across her face, and disappeared again. The eyes stared fixedly before her into space.

“Myself,” she answered slowly, “you—Concerighé ... and ...”

“There was another?” he asked. “Another who was with us?”

She hesitated. At first no answer came. She seemed to search the darkness to discover it.

“He is not near enough to see,” she murmured presently. “Somewhere beyond ... he stands ... he lies ... I cannot see him clearly.”

Julius touched my hand, and with the contact the expression on her face grew clear. She smiled.

“You see him now,” he said with decision.

She turned her face towards me with a tender, stately movement. The sterner aspect deepened into softness on the features. Great joy for an instant passed into the strange sea-green eyes.

“Silvatela,” she whispered, slightly lowering the head. “He offered himself—for me.

He lies now—empty at our feet." And the utterance of the name passed through me with a thrill of nameless sweetness. An infinite desire woke, yet desire not for myself alone.

"The time...?" asked Julius in that calm, reverent tone.

She rose with a suddenness that made me start, though, somehow, I had expected it. At her full height she stood between us. Then, spreading her hands from both the temples outwards, she bowed her head to the level of the breast. Julius, I saw, did likewise, and before I realised it, the same deep, instinctive awe had brought me to my feet in a similar obeisance. A breath of air from the night outside passed sensibly between us, enough to stir the hair upon my head and increase the fire on the hearth behind. It ceased, and a wave of comforting heat moved in, paused a moment, settled like a great invisible presence, and held the atmosphere.

"It is the Pause in Nature," I heard the answer, and saw that she was seated in the chair once more. "The Third Day nears its end.... The Questing Souls ... draw near again to enter. We have kept their vacated bodies safe for them. Our task is almost over...."

She drew a deep, convulsive sigh. Then Julius, taking her right hand, guided my left to hold the other one. I touched her fingers and felt them instantly clasp about my own; she sighed again, the frown went from her forehead, and turning her gaze upon us both she murmured:

"I see clearly, I see everything."

The past surged over me in a drowning flood.

"This is the moment, this the very place," came the voice of Julius. "It was at this moment we were faithless to our trust. We used your body as the channel...." He turned slightly in my direction.

"The moment and the place," she interrupted. "There is just time. Before the Souls return.... You have called upon the Powers.... Yet both cannot enter! ... he ... and

they....”

There was a mighty, echoing cry.

She stopped abruptly. Her face darkened as with some great internal effort. I darkened too. My vision broke.... There was a sense of interval....

“And the channel——?” he asked below his breath.

She shook her head slowly to and fro. “It lies waiting still in the Iron Slumber.... You used it ... it is shattered.... The soul returning finds it not.... His soul ... whom I loved ...”

The voices ceased. A sudden darkness dropped. I had the sensation that I was rushing, flying, whirling. The hand I clasped seemed melted into air. I lost the final remnant of present things about me. The circle of my own sensations, my identity, the identity of my two companions vanished. A remarkable feeling of triumph came upon me, of joyful power that lifted me high above all injury and death, while something utterly gigantic asserted itself in the place of what had just been “me”—something that could never be maimed, subdued, held prisoner. The darkness then lifted, giving way before a hurricane of light that swept me, as it were, upon a pinnacle. Secure and strong I felt beyond all possible disaster, yet breathless amid things too long unfamiliar.... And then, abruptly, I knew searing pain, the pain of something broken in me, of spiritual incompleteness, disappointment.... I was called back to lesser life—before my time—before some high fulfilment due to me....

Julius and Mrs. LeVallon were no longer there beside me, but in their place I saw two solemn figures standing motionless and grave above a prostrate body. It lay upon a marble slab, and sunlight fell over the face and folded hands. The two moved forward. They knelt ... there was a sound of voices as in prayer, a powerful, drawn-out sound that produced intense vibrations, vibrations so immense that the motion in the air was felt as wind. I saw gestures ... the body half rose up upon its

marble slab ... and then the blaze of some incredible effulgence descended before my eyes, so fiercely brilliant, and accompanied by such an intolerable, radiant heat ... that the entire scene went lost behind great shafts of light that splintered and destroyed it ... and an awful darkness followed, a darkness that again had pain and incompleteness at the heart of it....

One thing alone I understood—that body on the shining slab was mine. My absent soul, deprived of high glory elsewhere that was mine by right, returned into it unexpectedly, aware of danger. It had been used for the purposes of evocation. I had met the two Powers evoked by means of it midway: Fire and Wind....

The vision vanished. I was standing in the châlet room again, he and the woman by my side. There was a sense of enormous interval.

We were back among the present things again. I had merely re-lived in a moment's space a vision of that Past where these two had sinned against me. The memory was gone again. We now resumed our present reconstruction, by means of which the balance should be finally restored. The same two elemental Powers were with us still. Summoned once again—but this time that they might be dismissed.

"The Messengers of Wind and Fire approach," Julius was saying softly. "Be ready for the Powers that follow after."

"But—there poured through me but a moment ago——" I began, when his face stopped my speech sharply.

"That 'moment' was sixty centuries ago! Keep hold now upon your will," he interrupted, yet without a trace of the vast excitement that I felt, "lest they invade your heart instead of mine. The glory that you knew was but the shadow of their coming—as long ago you returned and met them—when we failed. Keep close watch upon your will. It is the Equinox.... The pause now comes with midnight."

Even before he had done speaking the majesties of Wind and Fire were upon us. And Nature came in with them. A dislocating change, swift as the shaking of some

immense thick shutter that hides life behind material things, passed in a flash about us. We stood in a circle, hands firmly clasped. There was a first effect as if those very hands were fused and ran into a single molten chain. There was no outer sound. The silence in the air was deathlike. But the sensation in my soul was—life. The momentary confusion was stupendous, then passed away. I stood in that room, but I stood in the valley too. I was in Nature everywhere. I heard the deer go past me, I heard them on the soft, sweet grass, I heard their breathing and the beating of their hearts. Birds fluttered round my face and shoulders, I heard their singing in my blood and ears, I knew their wild desires and freedom, their darting to and fro, their swaying on the boughs. My feet were running water, while yet the solid mass of earth and cliff stood up in me. I also knew the growing of the flowers by the forests, tasted their fragrance in my breath, their tender, delicate essence all unwasted. It passed understanding, yet was natural as sight, for my hands went far away, while still quite close, dipping among the stars that grew and piled like heaps of gathered sand. It all was simple, easy, mine by right. Nature gave me her myriad sensations without stint. I had forgotten. I remembered. The universe stood open. “I” had entered with these other two beside me.

She raised her arms aloft, taking our hands up with her own, and cried with a voice like wind against great branches:

“They come! The Doors of Fire are wide, and the Gates of Wind stand open! They enter the channel that is offered.”

And his voice, like a roar of flame, came answering hers:

“The salutations of the Fire and Wind are made! The channel is prepared! There is no resistance!”

They stood erect and rigid, their outlines merged with some strange extension into space. They were superb, tremendous. There was no shrinking there. The deities of wind and fire came up, seeking their channel of return.

And so “They” came. Yet not outwardly; nor was the terrific impact of their advent known completely to any but himself alone who sought to harbour them now within his little human organism. Into my heart and soul poured but a fragment of their radiant, rushing presences. About us all some intelligent power as of a living wind brought in its mighty arms that ethereal fire which is not merely living, but is life itself. Material objects wavered, then disappeared, thin as transparent glass that increases light and heat. Walls, ceiling, floor were burned away, yet not consumed; the atoms composing all physical things glowed with a radiant energy they no longer could conceal. The latent heat of inanimate Nature emerged, not rebellious but triumphant. It was a deific manifestation of those natural powers which are the first essentials of human existence—heat and air. We were not alien to Nature, nor was Nature set apart from us; we shared her inexhaustible life, and the glory of the Universe in which she is a fragment.

“The Doors of the Creative Fire stand wide,” rang out her triumphant voice again. “The golden splendour of the invisible Fire loosens and flows free. The Breath of Life is everywhere ... our own.... But what, oh what of—him!” The scene of their past audacious error swept again before me. And, partially, I caught it.

Into a gulf of silence her words fell, recaptured from a mode of invocation effective in forgotten ages. Quivering lightnings, like a host of running stars, flashed marvellously about us, with bars of fire that seemed to map all space, while there was a sense of prodigious lifting in the heart as though some power like rushing wind drove will and yearning to the summit of all possible achievement. I realised simply this—that Nature’s powers and purposes became mine too.

How long this lasted is impossible to state; duration disappeared. The Universe, it seemed, had caught me up, joyful and unafraid, into her bosom. It was too immense for little terrors.... And it was only after what seemed an interminable interval that I became aware of something that marred; of effort somewhere to confine and limit;

of conflict, in a word, as though some smaller force strove to impose an order upon Powers that resented it. And I understood the meaning of this too. Julius battled in his soul. He wrestled with the Energies he had invoked, exerting to the utmost a trained, spiritual will to influence their direction into himself, as expiatory channel. Julius, after the lapse of centuries, fought to restore the balance he had long ago disturbed.

Her voice, too, occasionally reached me with a sound as of wind that rushed, but very far away. The words went past me with a heat like flame. I caught fragments only ... “The King of Breath ... The Master of the Diadems of Fire ... they seek to enter ... the channel of safe return.... Oh, beware ... beware ...”

And it was then I saw this wonderful thing happen, poignant with common human drama, intensifying the reality of the whole amazing experience. For she turned suddenly to him, her face alight and radiant. She would not let him accept the awful risk. Her arms went out to hold him to her. He drove her back.

“I open wide the channel of my life and soul!” he cried, with a gesture of the entire body that made it relaxed and unresisting. He stepped backwards a little from her touch. “It must be through me!”

And there was anguish in her tone that seemed to press all possible human passion into the single sentence:

“I, too, throw myself open! I cannot let you go from me!”

He moved still further from her. It seemed to me he went at prodigious speed, yet grew no smaller to the eye. The withdrawal belonged to some part of his being that I was aware of inwardly. Streams of fire and wind went with him. They followed. And I heard her voice in agonised pursuit. She raised her hands as in supplication, but to whom or what I knew not. She fought to prevent. She fought to offer herself instead.

But also she offered the body as yet unclaimed—untenanted.

“He who is in the Fire and in the Sun ... I call upon His power. I offer myself!” I heard her cry.

His answering voice seemed terrible:

“The Law forbids. You hold Them back from me.” And then as from a greater distance, the voice continued more faintly: “You prevent. It has to be! Help me before it is too late; help me ... or ... I ... fail!”

Fail! I heard the awful word like thunder in the heavens.

The conflict of their wills, the distress of it was terrible. At this last moment she realised that the strain was more than he could withstand—he would go from her in that separation which is the body’s death. She saw it all; there was division in her will and energies. Opposing herself to the justice he had invoked, she influenced the invasion of the elemental Powers, offering herself as channel in the hope of saving him. Her human desire weighed the balance—turning it just against him. Her insight clouded with emotion. She increased the risk for him, and at the same time left open to the great invading Powers another channel—the line of least resistance, the empty vehicle all prepared within herself.

To me it was mercilessly clear. I tried to speak, but found no words to utter; my tongue refused to frame a single sound; nor could I move my limbs. I heard Julius only, his voice calling like a distant storm.

“I call upon the Fire and Wind to enter me, and pass to their eternal home ... whence you and I ... and he ...”

His voice fell curiously away into a gulf; there was weakness in it. I saw her frail body shake from head to foot. She swayed as though about to fall. And then her voice, strong as a bugle-call, rang out:

“I claim it by—my love....!”

There was a burst of wind, a rush of sheeted fire. Then darkness fell. But in that

instant before the fire passed, I saw his form stand close before my eyes. The face, alight with compassion and resignation, was turned towards her own. I saw the eyes; I saw the hands outstretched to take her; the lips were parted in a final attempt at utterance which never knew completion. And I knew—the certainty stopped the beating of my heart—that he had failed. There was no actual sound. Like a gleaming sword drawn swiftly from its scabbard, he rose past me through the air, borne from his body, as it were, on wings of ascending flame. There was a second of intolerable radiance, a rush of driving wind—and he was gone.

And far away, at the end of some stone corridor in the sunshine, yet at the same time close beside me upon the floor of the little mountain châlet, I heard the falling body as it dropped with a thud before my feet—untenanted....

CHAPTER XXXII

I remember what followed very much as one remembers the confusion after an anæsthetic—fragments of extraordinary dream and of sensational experience jostling one another on the threshold of awakening. Then, very swiftly, like a train of gorgeous colour disappearing into a tunnel of darkness, the memory slipped down within me and was gone. The Past with a rush of lightning swept back into its sheath.

The glory and sense of exaltation, that is, were gone, but not the memory that they had been. I knew what had happened, what I had felt, seen, yearned for; but it was the cold facts alone remained, the feelings that had accompanied them vanished. Into a dull, chilled world I dropped back, wondering and terrified. A long interval had passed.

And the first thing I realised was that Mrs. LeVallon still lay sleeping in that chair of wicker—profoundly sleeping—that the lamp had burned low, and that the châlet felt like ice. Her face, even in the twilight, I saw was normal, the older expression gone. I turned the wick up higher, noting as I did so that the paper strewn about me was

thick with writing, and it was then my half-dazed senses took in first that Julius was not standing near us, and that a shadow, oddly shaped and huddled, lay on the floor where the lamplight met the darkness.

The moving portion seemed at once to disentangle itself from the rest, and a face turned up to stare at me. It was the serving-man upon his knees. The expression in his eyes did more to bring me to my normal senses than anything else. That scared and anguished look made me understand the truth—that, and the moaning that from time to time escaped his lips.

Of speech from him I hardly got a word; he was inarticulate to the last as ever, and all that I could learn was that he had felt his master's danger and had come....

We carried the body upstairs and laid it on the bed. I strove to regard it merely as the "instrument" he had used awhile, strove to find still his real undying Presence close to me—but that comfort failed me too. The face was very white. Upon the pale marble features lay still that signature of "Other Places" which haunted his life and soul. We closed the staring eyes and covered him with a sheet. And there the servant crouched upon the floor for the remaining five hours until the dawn, when I came up from watching that other figure of sleep in the room below, and found him in the same position. All that day as well he watched indeed, until at last I made him realise that the sooner he got the farmer's horse below and summoned a doctor, the better for all concerned.

But that was many hours later in the day, and meanwhile he just crouched there, difficult of approach, eyeing me savagely almost when I came, his eyes aflame with a kind of ugly, sullen resentment, but faithful to the last. What the silent, devoted being had heard or seen during our long hours of sinister struggle and experiment, I never knew, nor ever shall know.

My memory hardly lingers upon that; nor upon the unprofitable detail of the doctor's tardy arrival in the evening, his ill-concealed suspicion and eventual

granting of a death certificate according to Swiss law; nor, again, upon his obvious verdict of a violent heart-stroke, or the course of procedure that he bade us follow.

Even the distressing details of the burial have somewhat faded, and I recall chiefly the fact that the Man established himself in the village where the churchyard was and began his watch that kept him near the grave, I believe, till death relieved him. My memory lingers rather upon the hours that I watched beside the sleeping woman, and upon the dreadful scene of her awakening and discovery of the truth.

For hours we had the darkness and the silence to ourselves, a silence broken only by the steady breathing of her slumber. I dared not wake her; knowing that the trance condition in time exhausts itself and the subject returns to normal waking consciousness without effort or distress, I let her slumber on, dreading the moment when the eyes would open and she must question me. The cold increased with the early hours of the morning, and I spread a rug about her stretched-out form. Slowly with the failing of the oil, the little lamp flame flickered and died, then finally went out, leaving us in the chill gloom together. All heat had long since left the fire of peat.

It was a vigil never to be forgotten. My thoughts revolved the whole time in one and the same circle, seeking in vain support from common things. Slowly and by degrees my mind found steadiness, though with returning balance my pain grew keener and more searching. The poignant minutes stretched to days and years. For ever I fell to reconstructing those vanished scenes of memory, while striving to believe that the whole thing had been but a detailed vivid dream, and that presently I, too, should awake to find our life in the châlet as before, Julius still alive and close....

The moaning from the room overhead, where the Man watched over that other, final sleep, then brought bitterly again the sad reality, and set my thoughts whirling afresh with anguish. I was distraught and trembling.... London and my lectures, the recent

climbing in the Dolomites, cities and trains and the business of daily modern life, these were the dreams.... The reality, truth, lay in that world of vision just departed ... Concerighé, Silvatela, the woman of that ancient, splendid past, the re-capture of the Temple Days when we three trod together that strange path of questing; the broken fragment of it all; the Chamber of the Vacated Bodies, and the sin of long ago; then, chief of all, the attempt to banish the Powers, evoked in those distant ages, back to their eternal home—his effort to offer himself as channel—her fear to lose him and her offering of herself—the failure ... and that appalling result upstairs.

For, ever and again, my thoughts returned to that: the spirit of the chief transgressor hovering now without a body, waiting for the River of the Lives to bring in some dim future another opportunity for atonement.

The failure...! In the glimmer of that pale, cold dawn I watched the outline of her slumbering form. I remembered her cry of sacrificing love that drew the great rushing Powers down into herself, and thus into the unresisting little body gathered now in growth against her heart. That human love the world deems great, seeking to save him to her own distress, had only blocked the progress of his soul she yearned to protect, so little understanding.... I heard her deep-drawn breathing in the darkness and wondered ... for the child that she would bear ... come to our modern strife and worldly things with this freight of elemental forces linked about his human heart and mind—fierce child of Wind and Fire...! A “natural,” perhaps a “super-natural” being....

This sense of woe and passion, haunting my long, silent vigil from night to dawn, and after it when the sunshine of the September morning lit the room and turned her face to silver—this it is that, after so many years, clings to the memory as though of yesterday.

And then, without a sign or movement to prepare me, I saw that the eyes had opened and were fixed upon my face.

The whispered words came instantly:

“Where is he? Has he gone away?”

Stupid with distress and pain, my heart was choked. I stared blankly in return, the channels of speech too blocked to find a single syllable.

I raised my hands, though hardly knowing what I meant to do. She sat up in the chair and looked a moment swiftly about the room. Her lips parted for another question, but it did not come. I think in my face, or in my gesture perhaps, she read the message of despair. She hid her face behind her hands, leaned back with a dreadful drooping of the entire frame, and let a sigh escape her that held the substance of all unutterable words of grief.

I yearned to help, but it was my silence, of course, that brought the truth so swiftly home to her returning consciousness. The awakening was complete and rapid, not as out of common sleep. I longed to touch and comfort her, yet my muscles refused to yield in any action I could manage, and my tongue clung dry against the roof of my mouth.

Then, presently, between her fingers came the words below a whisper:

“I knew that this would happen ... I knew that once I slept, he’d go from me ... and I should lose him. I tried ... that hard ... to keep awake.... But sleep would take me. An’ now ... it’s took him ... too. He’s gone for—for very long ... again!” She did not say “for ever.”

It was the voice, the accent and the words again of Mrs. LeVallon.

“Not for ever,” I whispered, “but for a little time.”

She rose up like a figure of white death, taking my hand. She did not tremble, and her step was firm. And more than this I never heard her say, for the entire contents of the interval since she first fell asleep beneath her husband’s passes had gone beyond recall.

“Take me to him,” she said gently. “I want to say good-bye.”

I led her up those creaking wooden stairs and left her with her dead.

Her strength was wonderful. I can never forget the quiet self-control she showed through all the wretched details that the situation then entailed. She asked no questions, shed no tears, moving brave and calm through all the ghastly duties. Something in her that lay deeper than death understood, and with the resignation of a truly great heart, accepted. Far stronger than myself she was; and, indeed, it seemed that my pain for her—at the time anyhow—absorbed the suffering that made my own heart ache with a sense of loss that has ever since left me empty and bereaved. Only in her eyes was there betrayal of sorrow that was itself, perhaps, another half revival of yet dimmer memories ... “eyes in which desire of some strange thing unutterably burned, unquenchable....” For the first time I understood the truth of another’s words—so like a statue was her appearance, so set in stone, her words so sparing and her voice so dead:

“I tell you, hopeless grief is passionless;

That only men incredulous of despair,

Half taught in anguish, through the midnight air

Beat upward to God’s throne in loud access

Of shrieking and reproach. Full desertness

In souls as countries lieth silent-bare....”

Her soul lay silent-bare; her grief was hopeless.... To my shame it must be confessed that I longed to escape from all the strain and nightmare of what had passed. The few days had been charged with material for a lifetime. I knew the sharp desire to find myself in touch once more with common, wholesome things—with London noise and bustle, trains, telephones and daily newspapers, with stupid students who could not even remember what they had learned the previous week, and with all the

great majority who never even dreamed of a consciousness less restricted than their own. I saw the matter through, however, to the bitter end, and did not lose sight of Mrs. LeVallon until I left her safely in Lausanne, and helped her find a woman who should be both maid and companion, at least for the immediate future. It cannot be of interest or value to relate here. She did not cross my path again; while, on the other hand, it has never been possible for me to forget her. To this day I hear her voice and accent, I feel the touch of that hand that drew me softly into such depths of inexplicable vision; above all, I see her luminous, strange eyes and her movements of strange grace across the châlet floor.... And sometimes, even now, I half ... remember.

Yet never, till after this long interval of years, could I bring myself to set down any record of what had happened. Perhaps—most probably, I think—I feared that dwelling upon the haunting details that writing would involve might revive too obsessingly the memory of an experience so curiously overwhelming.

Now time has brought the necessity, as it were, of this confession; and I have done my best with material that really resists the mould of language, at least as I can use it. Later reading—for I devoured the best authorities and ransacked even the most extravagant records in my quest—has come to throw a little curious light upon some parts of it; and the results of this subsequent study no doubt appear in this report. At the time, however, I was ignorant of all such things, and the effect upon me of what I witnessed thus for the first time may be judged accordingly. It was dislocating.

Two facts alone remain to mention. And the first seems to me perhaps the most singular of the entire experience. For the pages I had covered with writing showed suddenly an abrupt and extraordinary change of script. Although the earlier sheets were in my own handwriting, roughly jotting down question and reply as they fell from the lips of Julius or his wife, there came midway in them this inexplicable change that altered them into the illegible scribble of a language that I could not

read, yet recognised. It changed into that curious kind of ideograph that Julius used at school, that he showed me many a time in the sand at the end of the football field where we used to lie and talk, and that he claimed then was the ancient sacerdotal cipher we had used together in our remotest “Temple Days.” I cannot read a word of it, nor can any to whom I have shown it decipher a single outline. The change began, it seems, at the point where “Mrs. LeVallon” went “deeper” at his word of command, and entered the layer of memories that dealt with that most ancient “section.” This accounts, too, for the confusion and incompleteness of my record as written. A page of this script is framed upon my walls to-day; my eye rests on it as I write these words upon a modern typewriter—in Streatham.

The other fact I have to mention might well be the starting point for study and observation of an interesting kind. Yet, though it sorely tempted me, I resisted the temptation, and now, after twenty years, it is too late, and I, too old. This record, if published, may fall beneath the eye of someone to whom the chance and the desire may possibly combine to bring the opportunity.

For some weeks after the events that have been here described, Mrs. LeVallon gave birth to a boy, surviving him, alas! by but a single day.

This I heard long afterwards by the merest chance. But my strenuous efforts to trace the child proved unavailing, and I only learned that he was adopted by a French family whose name even was not given to me. If alive he would be now about twenty years of age.

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Transcriber’s Note:

Variations in hyphenations have been retained as they appear in the original publication. Changes have been made as follows:

Page 26 euclid, mathematics, and the dead languages changed to Euclid, mathematics, and the dead languages Page 36 the coming of a—third changed to the

coming of a—third. Page 178 by surprise, as it were." changed to by surprise, as it were. Page 271 Le Vallon's personality and changed to LeVallon's personality and

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK JULIUS LEVALLON: AN EPISODE ***

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