The Last Miracle

by M. P. Shiel

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE LAST MIRACLE ***

THE LAST MIRACLE

By M. P. SHIEL

Author of "The Yellow Danger," "The Lord of the Sea," "The Evil that Men do," "The Yellow Wave," etc.

LONDON T. WERNER LAURIE CLIFFORD'S INN 1906

"My domain how lordly large, sublime! Time's my domain; my seedfield's Time."

THE LAST MIRACLE

Towards the end of May 1900 the writer received as noteworthy a letter and packet of papers as it has been his lot to examine. They came from a good friend of mine, a Dr A. Lister Browne, M.A. Oxon., F.R.C.P., whom, as it happened that for some years I had been living mostly in France, and Browne being in Norfolk, I had not seen during my visits to London. Moreover, as we were both bad correspondents, only three notes had passed between us in the course of those years.

But in the May of 1900 there reached me the letter—and the packet—to which I refer, the packet consisting of four note-books full of shorthand, the letter also pencilled in shorthand, and this letter, together with the note-book marked "I.," I now publish.

[The note-book marked "II." has already appeared under the title of "The Lord of the Sea," and that marked "III." under the title of "The Purple Cloud," each in three languages; while that marked "IV." has been judged unsuitable to publication.]

The following is Browne's letter:—

"Dear old Man,—I have been thinking of you, wishing that you were here to give me a last squeeze of the hand before I—go. Four days ago I felt a soreness in the throat, so in passing by old Johnson's surgery at Selbridge, I asked him to have a look at me. He muttered something about membranous laryngitis which made me

smile; but by the time I reached home I was hoarse, and not smiling: before night I had stridor. I at once telegraphed to London for Horsford, and he and Johnson have been opening my inside and burning it with the cautery, so I am breathing easier now, and it is wonderful how little I suffer; but I am too old a hand not to know what's what: the bronchi are involved—too far, and, as a matter of fact, there isn't any hope. Horsford is still fondly hoping to add me to his successful-tracheotomy statistics; but I have bet him not, and the consolation of my death will be the beating of a specialist in his own line.

"I have been arranging some of my affairs, and remembered these note-books which I intended letting you have long ago; but you know my habit of putting things off, and, moreover, the lady was alive from whose mouth I took down the words. She is now dead, and, as a man of books, you should be interested, if you can manage to read them.

"I am under a little morphia at present, propped up in a nice little state of languor, so I will give you in the old Pitman's something about her. Her name was Miss Mary Wilson; she was about thirty when I met her, forty-five when she died, and I knew her all those fifteen years. Do you know anything of the philosophy of the hypnotic trance? That was the relation between us—hypnotist and subject. She suffered from tic of the fifth nerve, had had all her teeth drawn before I knew her, and an attempt had been made to wrench out the nerve by the external scission. But it made no difference: all the clocks in purgatory tick-tacked in that poor woman's jaw, and it was a mercy of Providence that ever she came across me.

"Well, you never knew anyone so weird in appearance as my friend, Miss Wilson. Medicineman as I am, I could never see her without a shock, she so suggested what we call 'the other world.' Her brow was lofty, her lips thin, her complexion ashen, and she was execrably emaciated; her eyes were of the hue of mist; at forty her wisp of hair was withered to white.

"She lived almost alone in old Marsham manor-house, five miles from Ash Thomas, and I, just beginning in these parts at the time, soon took up my residence at the manor, she insisting that I should give up myself to her.

"Well, I quickly found that in the state of trance Miss Wilson possessed very queer powers—queer, I mean, not because peculiar to herself in kind, but because so far-reaching in degree. Most people are now talking with an air of discovery about the reporting powers of the mind in its trance state, as though the fact had not been fully known to every old crone since the Middle Ages; but the certainty that someone in a trance in Manchester may tell what is going on in Glasgow was not, of course, left to the discovery of an office in Fleet Street, and the psychical people in establishing the fact for the public have not gone one step towards explaining it.

"But, speaking of poor Miss Wilson, I say that her powers were queer because so special in quantity. I believe it to be a fact that, in general, the powers of trance manifest themselves with respect to space, as distinct from time: the spirit roams in the present, travels over a plain, doesn't usually astonish one by huge ascents or descents. I fancy that this is so. But Miss Wilson's gift was queer to this degree, that she travelled in every direction, and easily in all but one, north and south, up and down, in the past, the present, and the future.

"This much I soon got to find out. She would give out a stream of sounds in the trance state—I can hardly call it speech, so murmurous, yet guttural, was the utterance, mixed with puffy breath-sounds at the lips, this state being accompanied by contraction of the pupils, failure of the knee-jerk, rigour, and a rapt expression, so I got into the habit of tarrying for hours by her bedside, fascinated by her, trying to catch the news of those musings which came mounting from her mouth; and in the course of months my ear learned to make out the words: 'the veil was rent' for me also, and I was able to follow somewhat the trips of her straying spirit.

"At the end of six months I heard her one day repeat some words which were

familiar to me. They were these: 'Such were the arts by which the Romans extended their conquests, and attained the palm of victory; and the concurring testimony of different authors enables us to describe them with precision....' I was startled: they are part of Gibbon's 'Decline and Fall,' which I readily guessed that she had never read.

"I said in a stern voice: 'Where are you?'

"She replied: 'Us are in a room, eight hundred miles above. A man is writing. Us are reading.'

"I may tell you two things: first, that in trance she never spoke of herself as 'I' but, for some reason, as 'us': 'us are,' she would say, 'us will'; secondly, that when wandering in the past she represented herself as being above (the earth?), and higher the farther back she went; in describing present events she appears to have felt herself on (the earth); while, as to the future, she always declared that 'us' were so many miles 'within' (the earth).

"To her excursions in this last direction, however, there seemed to exist certain limits: I say seemed, for I can't be sure, and only mean that she never, in fact, went far in this direction. Three, four thousand 'miles' were common figures in her mouth in describing her distance 'above'; but her distance 'within' never got beyond sixty-three. She appeared, in relation to the future, to be like a diver in the sea who, the deeper he dives, finds a more resistant pressure, till at no great depth resistance grows to prohibition, and he can no further dive.

"I am afraid I can't go on, though I had a good deal to tell you about this lady. During fifteen years, off and on, I sat listening by her couch to her murmurs. At last my ear could catch the meaning of her briefest breath. I heard the 'Decline and Fall' almost from beginning to end. Some of her reports were the merest twaddle; over others I have hung in a sweat of interest. About the fifth year it struck me that I might just as well jot down some of her mouthings, and the note-book marked 'I.'

belongs to the seventh year. Its history is this: I heard her one afternoon murmuring in the tone which she used when reading, asked her where she was, and she replied: 'Us are forty-five miles within: us read, and another writes'; from which I concluded that she was some forty to sixty years in the future. I believe you may find it curious, if you are able to read my notes.

"But no more of Mary Wilson now, and a little of A. L. Browne, F.R.C.P.!—with a breathing-tube in his trachea, and Eternity under his bed now. Isn't that a curious beast, my dear boy, the thing you call a 'modern man'? Is he not? Here am I writing to you about Miss Mary Wilson and her freights of froth, and all the time I know what this frame of mine will be to-morrow night; I know and am not afraid. Am I a saint, then? At least a hero? No, I am a modern man, a know-nothing. The Lord have mercy upon my never-dying soul! if my soul is never-dying, and if ... rather a mess.

"Well, no more now. I know you will think of me sometimes. You will have to, by the way, because I am making you one of my executors. 'A long farewell!' ..."

Here begins the Note-book marked I."

CHAPTER I

MY VISIT TO SWANDALE

I have been asked by the publishers who bring out this book to add yet a mite to the mass of writing which has appeared in regard to the late events, for how are the mighty fallen! and, as when an oak announces its downfall through the forest, so here it was only natural that the little fowl should fly and flap, with outcries (sometimes) of sharp shrillness! Much, then, has been written and said; and if I now place my small word with the books already sprung out of what we call "The Revival" and, rather blatantly, the "Abolition of Christianity," my excuse lies in the circumstance that during those storms I was much with Aubrey Langler, and that,

long before those events, I was probably his closest friend.

I can, therefore, give details as to that gracious life and the strifes in which he had a hand not very possible to another writer.

It was my way to stay with Langler at least thrice a year. My crowded town-life was a rude enough contrast with his eremite mood, so I rarely failed to avail myself of his invitations. Of these he gave me one in the August of the year of the Pope's visit, and shortly afterwards I started for Alresford (Swandale lies five miles north-west of Alresford by carriage-road).

There happened to travel in the rail-train with me a remarkable man: certainly, I think that I never beheld a larger human being, except in an exhibition. We were alone in my carriage, and I was able to take note of him. His vast jacket was of satin, and from every button ran two cords of silk, ending in a barrel-shaped ornament of silk, such as used, I believe, to be called "frogs"; his shirt was frilled and limp; and he wore four or five rings. This was enough to prove him a foreigner, though otherwise his dress was ordinary. He sat with his fat legs wide apart, smiling at the world in the most good-humoured, yet sneering way, showing some very long top teeth.

All the time his hand travelled to and fro, fro and to, in a rub along the tightly-clad length of his thigh.

The man seemed most happy. From the manner in which his eyes, half hid by their sleepy lids, hovered anon upon me, I could see that he was longing to speak out some of his self-satisfaction; and after some short time he did indeed speak, saying with a drowsy drawl through his nostrils, exhibiting the sneer of his teeth, and speaking English without a hint of foreignness:

"The landscape is not displeasing to me. Oh no; it is not so bad. There now, you see, that little farm: it is not so bad. But it is not romantic—not plantureux. It would be strange to me if the English were other than they are. The English are an exact

expression of England—their character, constitution, Church, everything. The cliffs of Dover, now. Cæsar might have foretold their future from their mere appearance as he approached them; a traveller might just look at them from his ship, and go back home saying: 'I know the English'—if he be a man of force and grasp and insight. Oh no; that is a little hyperbole perhaps—my little tendency to hyperbole. But, I assure you, the landscape does not displease me...."

In this way he went on purring; did not stop; would not permit me to say anything. His utterance was lazy, nasal; and ever and anon he pipped from his lips, as he droned and rubbed his thigh, a dry pin-point of nothing: this, one could see, was a habit of his being. I cannot now recall a thousandth part of his talk, but I do recall that, as he droned on and on from topic to topic, this thought roved through my brain: "But what a head! what a fount of ideas!"

The man made upon me an impression of great grossness, perhaps from his big bulk, or his manner of ironing his thigh, or his ejection of nothings, or that wallowing in his own self-satisfaction. Round his chin and cheeks ran a bandage of iron-grey beard; his hair was scanty, and bald at the temples, where his forehead ran up into two gulfs of bare skin, so that the skimpy region of hair on his great head resembled a jacket much too small for the person who wears it.

A few minutes before our arrival at Alresford something led him to tell me that he was about to join the house-party of the Prime Minister at Goodford. His servants, I soon saw, were in the carriage next to ours, for as the train drew up a valet ran out to help his master to alight, but his master coolly made use of my shoulder to help himself out as he limped heavily to the platform, and did it with such an air of patronage and old friendship, that, for the life of me, I couldn't help feeling flattered.

I suppose that to be caressed by a force is always pleasant—the purring of a petted cat!—and I understood that the Baron Gregor Kolár was a force.

For now I knew his already well-known name, inasmuch as, after turning away from

me on the platform, he turned again, fumbled fretfully for his card, and gave it me. I gave him mine. Then, with a bow-legged rolling of gait which bowled his head aside at each stride, he strolled to the brougham awaiting him.

His brougham and mine ran along the same road for some distance—Goodford, his bourne, being only five miles from Swandale—till we parted at a meeting of roads, and he passed from my mind for a season.

CHAPTER II

THE WREN

As I went on towards Swandale the thought suddenly struck me that my driver's back was strange to me. I bent forward, and asked him what, then, had become of Robinson.

"I wish I could tell you, sir," was his answer, "but seemingly that's just what nobody knows."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Robinson has been missing for three days, sir," he said—"since Thursday noon, high or low, no one can find him: and cut up is what Mr and Miss Langler are about it."

This Robinson, a very handsome man, well under forty years, was a part of Swandale, and long known to me; but now the carriage rolled over broken stones, and I asked no more. Soon thereafter we passed into the gorge which runs into Swandale.

The fame of this vale is at present pretty far-spread, yet of the "pen-pictures" which have appeared of it I know of none which portrays half its witchery. The piling up of details is, in fact, fruitless, for not the pen, but the brush, is fashioned to paint. I may repeat, however, that the vale is an oval, the gorge being at the south-east, in which

already the ear is caught by that sound of waters whose chant pervades the vale (the whole is not more than twelve hundred yards long and eight hundred wide), and one goes on through an air of perfumes to a giant portal, till, in contrast with the wildness of the approach, Swandale itself dawns upon the eye in all its rusticity—a rusticity attained by the touchiest art, for I think that throughout the dale there was not at that time a coo or a drain not due to the care of its designer. Langler had, in fact, given many years and the mass of his fortune to the making of this garden.

The house is not precisely in the centre of the oval, but towards the north-west, on an islet in the lake, the lake itself being an oval, and it is strange that waters so shaken can show so staringly every pebble and grayling in their deeps: shaken, for the ground north of the house mounts in terrace on terrace to the hills, and down these, all rowdy with laughter, darts a rout of waters which wash into the lake. On the wooden bridge looking east over the lake Langler and his sister stood awaiting me.

Langler was now a man of forty, with some silver in his hair, and Miss Emily at this time twenty-seven.

They formed something of a contrast, she was so much darker than he, for Langler had light, wavy hair, parted in the middle over the broadest brow, a brow parcelled up into lax fields by the furrows of "much learning." He wore no hair on the face, save side-whiskers down the longish hollow of his cheeks, cheeks which looked no wider than the breadth of his broad chin: a massive countryman's-face, yet with something wistful and ill-fated about the eyes and the thick lips, which ever bore a sad smile. His "bone-in-the-throat" drew the eye by its prominence! He always impressed one as being better groomed than other men, I never could tell why, since he was ever quite plainly dressed, but in the very pink of correctness somehow.

However, in a certain—shall I say cynicalness?—of look there was resemblance between the two—or, say, criticalness, scepticism: both had a trick of screwing up at

the cheek-bones a little and piercing into anything new or curious that was in question.

It is commonly known now that both were beings of uncommon endowment, and so kin and kind were they, that they appeared to live, as it were, a twin life.

When we went into the cottage I found waiting to welcome me several men and women servants—a small crowd of much more than ordinary comeliness. Langler said then to me: "have you heard about my poor friend?"

It was nothing new for him to speak so of his servant, so I knew that he referred to Robinson, and replied: "I have heard something. Can't you form any idea what has become of him?"

"No idea so far," he answered; "I am giving my mind to it."

"He should be found, then," I said; at which Langler smiled.

Miss Emily was rather behind us in the passage, and at that moment I heard her say: "Aubrey, here is John running after us with something."

I turned, and saw this John pelting up the boards embedded in the soil which served as steps from the bridge to the cottage. He held a spade in the left hand and some object on the right palm; Langler turned to him; and at once I saw that the thing on the man's palm lived, fluttered a wing, was a bird.

"What!" said Langler, "a wren?"

"Why, it is ill," said Miss Emily.

"I found it caught in the vine tendrils, miss," said John.

Everybody bent over it.

"I have never seen it before," said Langler.

"No, it is certainly a stranger," said Miss Emily, "and what can that be round its leg?"

She was rather palish.

The thing round the leg was a piece of paper, wound with worsted.

And Langler, peering at it, said: "stay, I will undertake the cure of this wanderer."

CHAPTER III

THE STYRIAN

Swandale cottage is very large, covering more than half of the island, but mostly one-storeyed, the roofs being of thatch made heavy with rocks, and the walls of marble kept snow-white by means of snakestone; but not much of the walls is visible, for the eaves of the roof droop so low that parts of them have had to be removed over the doors; and as most of the timber about the cottage is huge, the twilight within broods at noon. At the time of which I write candles burned in most of the rooms throughout the day in an atmosphere smoky with incense; for all within was a feeling of the ecclesiastical, everywhere the Church, monasticism, the vestment, the ritual, the Middle Ages, the mood of the altar.

I spent most of the day after my arrival—a Sunday—with Langler in his study, which was in a corner of the cottage, and looked like a great garret or barn with its black beams, its floor of black and red stone, its arras and bookshelves; the ottoman, fixed into a nook under a Christ in hone-stone, was covered with embroideries of the Armenian Church; three diamond-paned windows looked out upon some flower-beds and lawn and upon a slip of the lake seen through oak and poplar; on the desk stood a pyx-and-cross, with two candelabra of plain old gold, whose six candles more or less cancelled the gloom.

At breakfast I had asked him how the wren was faring, his answer had been evasive, but in the study he referred himself to it, saying, "you asked about the wren at breakfast, by which I understood you to ask about the paper round its leg. Now, I have been examining this paper, it bears some written words, and as they are

unpleasant I didn't wish to speak of it before Emily. However, I will show it now to you."

He opened the pyx, took out a little curl of paper, and spread it on the desk. It was uneven at the edges, had been much begrimed, but with a magnifying-glass I contrived to read these words in the tiniest writing:

"Ich, der Pater Max Dees, bin ein ... ner im Sc ... des Barons Gregor ... Um Gottes Willen"; or: "I, Father Max Dees, am a ... 'ner' in the 'Sc' ... of Baron Gregor.... For God's sake."

"Notice the material of writing," said Langler.

"Not red ink?"

"No, blood. And the instrument of writing——"

"Not a pen?"

"No, a pin, as you see from the downstrokes."

"But have you been able to fill in the blanks in the sentence?"

"In two at least of the three instances: for if a man writes with a pin and with blood he is certainly somehow a prisoner, and that seems to suggest the word ending in 'ner', namely, Gefangener. And, having that, we know the word beginning with 'Sc': for he could hardly be a prisoner in anything beginning with 'Sc' except a Schloss. So that we get that Father Max Dees is a prisoner in the castle of Baron Gregor Something; and he begs us for God's sake to do something: very likely he was interrupted in the act of writing it."

"But how on earth, I wonder, did he trap the wren in his prison?" I said.

"People in such situations do become ingenious," Langler answered.

"But will you take any steps in the matter?"

"Well, I suppose one must, for mercy's sake," he answered: "but what steps?"

"The first thing," I said, "is to locate our priest: that is, to find out the full name of

our Baron Gregor; but that is precisely what may be difficult."

"No; I think not," he answered; "you haven't looked at the thread with which the paper was tied round the wren's leg: just look now, though I doubt if it will give you any information, but Emily or John would know at once."

After examining the thread under the glass I said No.

"Well," he said, "over yonder among my flock are three goats, half-domesticated Styrian hill-goats, whose greyish undergrowth of mohair is woven undyed for underclothing in Upper Styrian villages, and, in spite of its long exposure, I feel sure that the fibre you are looking at is Styrian hill-goat wool, and a thread ravelled from some garment or other woven in Styria."

"So that Father Max Dees probably is in some Styrian castle?"

"So it would seem, and we shall know which Styrian castle as soon as we run our eyes down some list of Styrian barons—unless there are two or more Gregors among them. At any rate, we shall have some information, and can then take some step to rid our backs of the burden of the matter. But where to find a list of Styrian barons?"

I answered that I didn't know, but that there would be no difficulty about that. "But a Styrian wren!" I said. "How comes it in England in August—or at any time?"

"We shall have to get Emily to coach you in some of the more glaring facts of country-life," Langler said, with a nod. "Don't you know, really, that many wrens are winter birds? And as to the migratory ones, surely you know that hardly any kind of bird is reliable in its migrations. I once knew a cuckoo—but I won't talk Greek to a Scythian. They drift into strange tribes, you know, at the home-coming; they even change their nationality for a summer or for a lifetime. That bit of paper, remember, has been wafted at least twelve months on the wings of the wind, and mauled in the forests of midmost old Lybia, so that our prisoner may be already free—or dead. In any case, it seems an odd little trait of chance that the thing should come here—to

me."

CHAPTER IV

THE RITUAL, THE STREET CORNER, THE DEATH-BED, AND THE BELLS

Towards evening of the same day I was sitting with Langler in a little dingle not far from the water, while down by the water's edge idled Miss Emily, feeding swans. I did not think that she was listening to our talk, or might divine it; but her lightness of ear was always very decided.

I had been telling Langler of the spectacle at Canterbury during Holy Week of that year. For the first time, I believe, since 1870 a Bishop of Rome had been permitted to leave the Vatican, and to pledge, as it were, the return of a prodigal, had pontificated High Mass in the metropolitan cathedral of England.

At that ritual I had been present, and Langler had been questioning me as to the conditions under which Tenebræ had been sung on the Wednesday night, and as to certain minutiæ of the vestments worn by the orders during the liturgical drama of the Thursday. The rite was fresh in my memory, and he listened, I could see, keenly, as I went on to tell of the conveyance of the Pontiff from the dean's house; of the trumpets of the Noble Guard; of the reception of his Holiness by a procession of clergy, headed by the Bishop of Emmaus; of the last sound of the bell during the Gloria, and the clapper of the Sanctus and Canon; of the consecration of the holy oils, vase, oil-sticks, and chrism; of the twelve trumpets during Elevation; of the Communion, of which twelve bishops partook; of the conveyance of the wafer to an Altar of Repose; then of Vespers; of the antiphon "Diviserunt"; of "Deus, Deus meus" during the stripping of the altar; and of the ceremony of the night—the cope of violet, the washing and the wiping and the kissing of the right feet of the

thirteen....

And as I spoke Miss Emily spun round from over her swans, and flung at us across the distance the words: "thus have they crucified to themselves afresh the son of man, and put him to an open shame."

"Ah? Is that so?" asked Langler, with his smile.

"Happily," I said, "nobody any longer cares, Emily."

"Unhappily," sighed Langler.

And, like an echo, there came from Miss Emily, who had not heard him: "unhappily!"

"But observe," I said, "that this whole Canterbury gaudery remains illegal, for I have yet to hear that the Act of Uniformity has been repealed. Wouldn't the civil power be competent, if it chose, to take action against someone?"

"I think so," replied Langler, "if the civil power were not far too deeply indifferent to what takes place in Canterbury to rake up against it old laws which have become academic. Even thirty, twenty years ago what a howl of 'popery!' Now—nothing...."

"Yet," I said, "I can't think that indifference was quite the feeling of the nation with regard to the Pope's visit; on the contrary, people seemed interested and pleased. With our much of numbness about the Church is there not, really, mixed a sort of interest?"

"In one class," replied Langler—"in the class which has acquired a liking for charming rites and vestments in good taste. Hence the corporate reunion that has been growing up since the last century, till now it culminates, for the English Church got to see that it must more and more imitate its great old Mother and her graces if it was to retain any of the interest of the nation. It has, in fact, by this imitation retained some of the interest of one class, but we know that it is none of it a religious interest, but an æsthetic one; and as to the lower classes, no sort of interest has

survived. In other words, while the dogmas of the Church have become mawkish to all, her dear altar-cloths and subcingula have continued pleasing to some—to you and me, for example."

"But the end!" I said.

"Ah, the end," he sighed, and we were silent for a while till he added: "ah, but talking of all that, I have not told you, have I, of our new rector? You shall hear! He is a man with a tragedy in his future, a brilliance in his past, and, to my mind, much lovableness in his present—though you may not say so. His name is Burton—a Harrow and King's College man, the son of a successful undertaker of Belfast. He became a Bell Scholar and Browne's Medallist before he was twenty-one, and was Senior Classic and Senior Chancellor's Medallist very shortly after. Later on he was appointed lecturer, and got a tutorship. I don't know what he did for some years, but I am told that he was offered the headmastership of Ardingly, which he refused: he said, mark you, that he wished to devote himself to pastoral work! Think of that for a modern person of that sort! Then the Prime Minister, hearing of his parts, offered him Ritching, which, you know, is in his gift, and at Ritching Burton now is, so you will not fail to come across him somewhere soon. But it is my belief that, if ever Edwards regretted a thing, it is this of grafting Burton under his nose here into Ritching. He has caught a Tartar in Burton, I can tell you. Burton believes! He is the last of the, let us say the—Barons. And he has quite the tone of the old-world type of priest and arch-priest—more lofty than Lucifer himself, in his quality of churchman, you understand, though underneath I believe him to be a dear, humble fellow. The living is worth three hundred pounds, and of that let us say thirty pounds is spent upon Dr Burton. The rest goes in needless 'works' among his flock—really his flock I mean, for Burton's intellect still divides the world into Church and Sheep: he actually says 'sheep.' He breaks his fast at noon, in Advent and Lent not till five, and I hear of hair-cloths, and of midnight risings to recite the breviary office. Add to what I have said that the sermons which he preaches weekly to empty pews are

undoubtedly the most brilliant, impassioned, inspired now anywhere uttered in the English tongue—I have been to hear two of them, and you may believe me—and you get a figure rather incongruously ranged with regard to his age. He, by the way, bans me even more than I love him, pronouncing at my shadow a 'Retro, Satanas.' He knows that I am hardly quite 'of the light,' and my love of the Church is an added fault in his eyes. However, to his smitings I find no difficulty in turning always my other cheek. On the whole, I assure you, the world will hear of Dr Burton, or Dr Burton will break himself up against the world——But who is this?"

It was one of the gardeners, named John, who came to say that someone had run over from Ritching with the tidings that Mrs Robinson, the mother of the vanished Robinson, was dying.

At this Miss Emily hurried up from the water, rushing into pinks and whites, calling: "what, Mrs Robinson! not dying?... Oh, my forgetful head! I intended the first thing this morning.... It is grief and solitude that is killing the poor woman. Aubrey, I must go now to her."

"Well, and I too," said Langler; and to me: "Would you care to come?"

We hurried to the house, and soon set out—Langler with his broad hat and thorn stick, Miss Emily with a basket, and old Bruno (a mastiff) at our heels.

We wound the north way out of Swandale by a path where we had to walk in single file through aftermath, Langler going first, Miss Emily behind, and as I in the middle reached my hand backward to relieve her of the basket my fingers happened to meet her palm, Langler then talking about Robinson, though at the time I hardly heeded him; he said, however: "if ever midnight darkened with sudden disaster upon the life of any man, surely it was upon this poor fellow. He was an easy, good chap, this Robinson. You knew him, Arthur. What a beauty of mild, large eye was his, and dark-curling beard! Do you know, I often seemed to realise in him my notion of the face of Jesus; certainly, he wasn't unlike the later French conception of the Saviour.

As to his disappearance, nothing can be queerer. He left Swandale at noon on Thursday to walk to Ritching, in order, they say, to bespeak Lang, the blacksmith. Now, a little on this north side of Swandale there lay in a spinney a ne'er-do-weel named Notter; Notter saw Robinson, but Robinson did not see Notter: and what, according to Notter, was Robinson doing as he went by?—looking up into the air, whistling! So that we may say that Robinson was not then running away—had, in fact, no perverse purpose of any kind in his mind. Yet Ritching is less than three miles from Swandale! And he never entered Ritching! that we know. In that interval, then, the poor fellow was whiffed from the ways of men by some injurious magic: and the place which knew him knows him no more."

"And as to the police?" I said.

"No doubt they are at work," he answered; "but in a matter of just this kind I believe you will find that nothing but a species of inspired divining, hardly common in the bureaux, will accomplish much."

"Aubrey, there were three strangers in Ritching during the week," called Miss Emily from behind.

"Ah? Is that so?" said Langler. "I didn't know."

"Jane heard it in Ritching last night, and told me."

"Friends?" asked Langler.

"No, apparently; they were people taking holiday. They put up for several days at the Calf's Head. Two were foreigners."

We were now at a gate between two great masses of rock, and passed through it to the path over which poor Robinson had lately gone to his fate. Hence to the dale in which Ritching moons the way is mostly downhill, and we were soon entering the south end of the old townlet.

At that south end of the street stood a group of people singing—a squad of three

Salvationists, from Alresford perhaps, and with them a few of the villagers—singing as we drew near, with a certain rollicking swing, and I well recall the lilt and the words:

"At the Cross, at the Cross, where I first saw the light, And the burden of my heart rolled away, It was there by faith I received my sight, And now I am happy all the day."

Twice they encored this chorus, some laughing as they sang, others standing silent, with dimples of amusement on that side of the lips where the pipe was not. When this was chanted out sprang a captain, and, himself smiling, began to cry aloud: "Well, friends, you may laugh, but—but——" He got no further, for just then down the path ran bounding a rat, a terrier, a lot of men and boys; I had to draw Miss Emily aside, as, rushing by, they pelted among the Salvationists, who, in their turn, scattered, and joined the chase. Only the captain and his two mates were left.

I caught the captain's words: "well, here's a rum go, mates."

We, for our part, went on our way, I smiling, but on the face of either of my friends not a smile. I could not help saying: "modern Christianity in the modern village does not thrive"; but at once I was sorry for having said anything, for neither the one nor the other answered me.

Only after some time Langler said: "still, the martyrs, dying for it, lifted up their eyes, and saw heaven open. But now, you see, it has come to this." I heard him murmur to himself: "And now I am happy all the day...."

Miss Emily, who had hurried on a little ahead, now vanished into a cottage into which Langler and I presently followed her. On our entrance she had just passed through into an inner room, and we heard someone in there going "Sh-h-h!" to her in an angry fashion.

We, too, after a little moved into that inner room. There the mother of Robinson lay dying, and it was there that I first laid eyes on Dr Burton.

He was standing, with a stole on, at the further side of the bed, and a murmur of rapid words was coming from him.

At the near bedside were two of the villagers, with a lay sister from the Poor Clares at Up Hatherley, and Miss Emily; the little place was very dingy, but Dr Burton's face was towards us as we entered: I saw Langler bow austerely, but the Doctor looked through him with a vacant gaze.

The appearance of Dr Burton was impressive: his waistband circumferenced a hemisphere of paunch, so that the hem of his frock stuck well out in front of his toes, and he was also thick about the shoulders, chest, and throat; his brow, invaded all round by close-cropped hair, had a scowl, and his mouth a pout; his complexion was of a red brown. I heard him mutter: "by this holy unction, and through His great mercy, Almighty God forgive thee whatever thou hast sinned by sight...." And his right thumb anointed the eyelids of the dying with oil.

And again he ran on in a rapid recitative: "by this holy unction, and through His great mercy, Almighty God forgive thee whatever thou hast sinned by hearing...." And his right thumb smeared the ear of the dying with oil.

I saw Miss Emily bridle a little. In Dr Burton's left hand was an old Sarum liturgical book in pigskin, and on he droned: "by this holy unction, and through His great mercy, Almighty God forgive thee whatever thou hast sinned by smelling...." And his thumb noted the nose of the poor old woman with oil.

Except this cantering mutter and a death-ruckle on the bed all was still in the darkling room. Miss Emily stood at the head, parted from Dr Burton by the breadth of the bed, I with her. And once more the drone was droning: "by this holy unction, and through His great mercy, Almighty God forgive thee——"

But now there was an interruption: the little old woman for some half minute had been making some effort—to speak or to move—and now she lifted her head, opened her eyes, and whispered something to Miss Emily. Her words, as I

afterwards learned, were: "ah, Miss Emily, tell him to stop ... dear, good soul he is ... my poor son...."

Her head fell back upon the pillow. It was clear that her strength had already been well tried before our entrance, for on a table near the bed were the bell, light, and cross of the Blessed Sacrament, with the pyx wrapped in linen. But at the interruption Dr Burton stopped; his face darkened, and forth went his arm, pointing to the door.

"All leave the room," cried he with a gruff brogue.

I saw Miss Emily's face go rosy, while Langler's eyes dwelt upon the Doctor, and he asked, with a smile: "but why so, Dr Burton?"

"Do it, sir!" cried the doctor in a startling manner; whereupon for perhaps thirty seconds it lasted, the doctor pointing, Langler smiling, till Langler turned, and said "come" to Miss Emily and to me.

We went out, the two villagers following us, leaving the doctor and the Franciscan alone with the dying woman. But in the outer room Miss Emily sat on a chair, saying: "I mean to wait here till Dr Burton chooses to go away. Send John to me, and don't expect me home until all is over."

"Well, then," said Langler; and he and I started off to go back to Swandale, night now falling as we passed through Ritching and thence on up the rising land towards Swandale, and half way up we halted, and turned together, surveying the scene of the valley, veiled now in the hazes of the Sabbath evening: Ritching church-spire could be seen standing out of a garland of wood; so could a part of Goodford village far in the north-west, and there, too, just vanishing out of sight, a church-spire; and presently there was wafted up to us from the valley a charming noise—church-bells chiming for Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Langler said then to me in a low voice: "Arthur, to me it is very touching, such a scene; that Goodford church always reminds me of Bemerton, where George Herbert walked and talked with his Lord,

and on the whole, what a language do they speak, those spires, those bells, how noble an expression of men's noblest thoughts of this world through twenty ages! One knows that for the new phasis of the world the old expression will not do; but for myself, though I tolerate the sun, give me Iris and the Götterdämmerung. Certainly, she was rather lovely, this old church of the Nazarene, with a loveliness that was so useful, too, to lure and lever the world. Who could have foretold that just in sorrow would have been born such a charm, that the moan alone of a saint could more ravish the sense than the rose of Sharon? And through such a roll of generations, Arthur! The beauty that could so long baffle the law 'they all shall change,' what a charm of life must have informed her! If we who now see her mouthing her mumblings in her extreme age, garishly rouged and dizened with trumperies, can still by an effort live again in her youth, how vital a youth must that have been! But that extreme age is really here apparently. Surely the rouge cracks now, and beneath peers the very saffron of death and putrescence imminent. Look where you like, from the event at Canterbury to our 'now I am happy all the day,' and do not the signs bode the passing-bell and the sexton? Judging only from our experiences of to-day, may we not say with some assurance that we now listen to those chimes for about the last time?"

CHAPTER V

THE TRAIL

Langler, let me repeat here, was a man of some luck in prophecy; and though those bells of Ritching, which he said that we then listened to for about "the last time," were about to clash over Europe carillons of summons, shaking the hearts of men, yet even here, it will be said, he was not quite at fault: for death more often than not is forerun by this very kind of flickering: slow decay, then a rage and show of life, then the end and darkness—that appears to be the way.

On the Monday morning after our visit to Ritching, as I entered the breakfast-room a few minutes early, there at a casement stood Miss Emily, and I see her once more as she was then, as fresh as the morning, or as the twines of roses that climbed within the small marble casement. Like her brother, she was not tall, but her figure was highly spirited, with a quite French outpush of bust, reminding one always of Gainsborough's "Duchess."

We two were speaking together in low voices when I heard the steps of Langler coming. I may say that I had been begging her for a rose, but she had not given it me. I had prayed, and she was saying, "but I thought that 'blue is the hue for folk who hope,'" when I heard the steps of Langler, and whispered her, "then some forget-me-nots."

The room was gaily feted out with flowers, and she glanced round to find what I had asked for; but there were none, and she was saying, "there are none; it is rather late—" when Langler walked in. I was angry with fate, for it was an anniversary date with her and me; and jealous, for into his jacket she pinned a rosebud.

On sitting to table she said to her brother: "Aubrey, Mrs Edwards wants you and me to go over to Goodford. I have just answered that we have a guest, and, of course, she will ask us to bring him too."

"Would you care?" Langler asked me: "they are crude but worthy folk, as you know, and their guests are often well chosen."

I said that I should be glad to go.

"But as to Mrs Robinson?" asked Langler of his sister.

"She died just before nine," answered Miss Emily. "I came home with John after eleven, so wouldn't disturb you, as I had made all the arrangements. Dr Burton went away at seven, came back after Compline, frowned excommunications at me, sprinkled the body, said a prayer from the Alexandrine Liturgy of St Basil, and groaned 'poor sheep!' with the very tenderness of the Good Shepherd. I should

revere that man, if I didn't despise him."

"Ah? is that so?" asked Langler, with his smile.

We spoke through breakfast of Mrs Robinson and her missing son, of the Prime Minister's guests at Goodford, of our probable visit to him, and again of the missing man.

"Do you know," said Miss Emily in her dry way, hardly meaning, I think, to be taken seriously, "I have my theory of Robinson? Given a village like Ritching, where nothing odd ever happens, when two odd things happen in it those two will be related. Is that a fair statement of a law of probability?"

"Excellent, I think," I answered.

Langler did not answer, but was listening, one could see, attentively.

"Then," said Miss Emily, "I say that three tourists at the Calf's Head is one thing, and Robinson's disappearance is another thing; and my theory is that these strangers have kidnapped Robinson."

"But with what motive?" asked Langler, glancing sharply at her.

"Because," she answered, while the nerves of her face screwed up into a little energy of shrewdness—"because he was beautiful."

We were silent at this, till Langler remarked: "ah, there you are hardly convincing."

"I suppose not," she replied. "But what other reason? There was nothing special about Robinson except that one thing, his beauty, and that is how I feel. Find out some reason why one English and two foreign tourists should need to kill or capture a specially handsome man and you solve the mystery of Robinson."

Langler answered nothing more, and we spoke of other matters. He afterwards said that he would be absent during most of the day, and, as some letter-writing kept me from going with him, I saw him ride down the course of the brook and vanish behind the arches of the abbey.

He returned before dinner, and some hours later, when the house was asleep, we two were down by the lake's brim, the night murky and autumnal, but we could just see some moor-hen or wild-fowl briskly breast the waters, like boats in a choppy channel, moored, yet seeming to move forward, as when the moon is flying through cloud.

I asked Langler if he had been able to do anything for the captive, Father Max Dees; he puffed at his pipe several times before replying, and then said: "Father Max Dees is becoming too interesting, Arthur—so much so that he threatens to overwhelm my interest in all life outside himself. How if I tell you that this man, so remote from me and mine, speaking with me from afar by a bird, now seems connected in some way with the disappearance of Robinson?"

"It sounds queer," I said.

"Yet it is true; and, since true, mark the luck of Emily in this matter. She said that the mere singularity of two such things as the strangers and the disappearance of Robinson was sufficient to make her think those things connected. Well, the singularity is not sufficient, she was not convincing: but we know that her guesses are of a quality not very common, and it will be some time, I promise, before I again permit myself to slight one of them."

"You have discovered, then, that she was right?"

"Not directly," he answered; "but I believe so by one of those processes of the mind which, if they be not reason, resemble it. You will understand me when I remind you of a third event among us about that time—the wren, namely, and its message. Now, by Emily's guess all the three should be interconnected; and if I tell you that two of them are, in fact, connected, I think you will jump to the conclusion that all are so."

"But which two are connected?" I asked.

"The wren and the strangers."

"Tell me."

"I rode out to-day with the object of making some inquiries about these strangers, and also of finding somewhere a list of Styrian barons. Well, then, I went first to the Calf's Head, and what I gathered there was this: that the strangers are now gone; that they were 'certainly' unknown to one another; and that at the hour when Robinson vanished one of the foreigners was sitting on the doorstep of the inn studying the county-map, one was sipping beer in the bar-parlour, while the third, the Englishman, was leaning against Lang's smithy-door: so that Brown, the landlord, had all these men under his eyes on that Thursday noon when poor Robinson was undergoing his mystery. However, I had no sooner heard of this tableau vivant than my own instinct of wrong, vague before, started into liveliness, the word which stirred my anger being Brown's 'certainly' in saying that the three were strangers to one another. He said it because he had never seen them speak together. Yet these men for days ate, smoked, etc., together, under which conditions men do exchange a word; so what could have kept these apart, except a wish to appear unacquainted?—a wish which argues that they were not so. But their pose at the moment of the tragedy! Brown says that 'they were like that most of the afternoon.' Imagine, therefore, the tale of sips taken by one of them, the countless interest of the second in the county-map, the resource in chat of the last at the smithy-door of Lang—all under the benign, remarking eye of Brown. One can almost assert that, if a wrong was then to their knowledge being accomplished, it would be in just such poses of statuesque guilelessness that they would parade themselves.... At all events, I left Brown with the expectation of finding that other foreigners than these had been in our midst on that mid-day of mystery.

"I then rode over to Goodford, and was told that three weeks previously two strangers had been there—one a foreigner. I went to Ayeling, Mins, St Peter's, Up Hatherley—all within eight miles of Ritching—and learned that the neighbourhood within the last months has been liable to quite a little epidemic of 'strangers,' foreign and English, who did not seem acquainted. I asked whether any of the strangers had

been absent on the noon of mystery. In every case I gathered that they had gone for good before that day, or else on that day had remained conspicuously present in the villages.

"But at Mins a very odd accident brought into my way something of a character so wild that my eyes almost could not credit it. You know, Arthur, the unconsciousness of people when in a foreign land that anyone in it can understand their speech: I had this fact in my mind when at each of the villages I inquired whether the strangers had left behind no leaves, no fragments of paper. I pried into waste-paper baskets, even poked into dust-heaps, but could find nothing. However, I was leading the horse from the door of the Crown at Mins towards the gate when I saw a little stick, so to speak, of paper in the hedge. It had been crumpled up to be used as a pipe-light perhaps—you know the habitual frugality of foreigners as to matches—and was scorched at one end, smeared, too, with soap and atoms of hair, so that someone had used it to wipe his razor on. However, it had on it some German writing, still mostly legible, and I got six almost perfect lines. These were the words which I read: '... now—the 15th of June—I have been here three weeks, so I know him well. I am sure that he will do for England. He is another Max Dees, as arrogant as he is brilliant, a union of Becket and Savonarola. His name is Burton, and he is rector at a place called Ritching. Your Excellency should find some way of coming down here, for ...' and I can't tell you, Arthur, the queer feeling which chilled my veins at the instant when, in an inn-yard of Mins, I chanced upon those words: 'Max Dees.'"

"It is very astonishing," I breathed.

"But mark," continued Langler, "the point at which I had now arrived. I had already decided that, if other strangers were about on the day of Robinson's disappearance, then the three at Ritching were conscious of what was going on, and that if the three were conscious, then all might be concerned. But at least one of those concerned had that name of Father Max Dees familiarly on his pen's point; and, looking at the bald

record of his captivity which Dees sent forth by the wren, we may conclude that that captivity is unknown to his world—that, in fact he vanished from his world more or less in the manner of Robinson; whereupon one's mind no longer pauses, but, in lack of knowledge, says at once: 'in each case the same agents, in each the same motive.'

"But, given two disappearances, my divination went on to a surmise which would never have been suggested to me by one only, and I asked myself, 'since there are more than one, may there not be more than two?' And this question no sooner occurred to me than I spurred my horse, and hurried to Alresford, where I have spent my afternoon. At the library I obtained some volumes of the county papers, and though my search was, of course, very hurried, I harked back nearly a year, and what I half-expected I found.

"Most dark, Arthur, is the path of some power which now, to-night, is at work within this Europe of ours—a phantom of whose being and trend one's fancy can form no dream, walking vast though invisible among us, amorphous, yet most actual. And I do not speak of a probability. I am pretty sure now that this is so, and Father Max Dees and Robinson, if they live, are sure also.

"One of the oddest things which I have noticed is the slumber of understanding and of memory—especially of memory—with which we modern people look through the newspapers. I have been reading to-day, with dismay, details which I had undoubtedly read before, but at the first reading must have dully cast out of my consciousness as devoid of interest. May we not, then, define man as 'a dormouse who wakes during earthquakes'?

"The bits of news which I mean were mostly printed small, in obscure corners, and the significance of their considerable number in the papers which I perused is big when one considers that they are country papers, not formal chronicles of world-news. If, then, you find in them mention of two disappearances of fishermen within four months on the north French coast, you may conceive that not two, but

four, may have been the actual number: men vanished; caught quite away like leaves on the midnight wind; and one in the Harz Mountains; and one in London; and one in Naples; and two in Hungary; and one in Belgium; and three in Russia; and one in Catalonia; and one in Savoy——"

"My good Aubrey!" I breathed.

"Vanished, Arthur," he said—"gone into the gorge of that dragon. There it stands printed, and all have read it, but none has seen it, so unrelated seems each case in its isolated chronicle. I, however, have been able to read with a larger eye; and as to the palace of torment of at least one of the victims we are not in the dark."

"Have you discovered, then," I said, "the full name of the Styrian baron who has imprisoned Max Dees?"

"Unfortunately," he answered, "there are no less than three Styrian barons part of whose name is Gregor—one a Dirnbach, one a Strass, and one a Kolár—possibly the well-known Kolár——"

At that name an exclamation escaped me.

"Well?" said Langler.

"But have I said nothing at all to you since I have been here, about Baron Gregor Kolár?" I asked.

"I think not," he answered.

"Then it is a singular chance," I said: "why, I came down with him in the same carriage, I have his card in my pocket now. It never once entered my head that he might be Styrian! He is over at Goodford at this moment, a guest of Mr Edwards."

"Well, then, that fact seems to narrow our round of inquiry to two," said Langler: "our Gregor will doubtless now be found to be a Strass or a Dirnbach."

I made no answer, and we sat there some time silent, looking where some moor-hen or wild-fowl breasted the streaming of a surface agitated by the inrush of the

cascade, stationary, yet seeming to move forward, like the moon ranging through flights of cloud.

CHAPTER VI

THE MEETING

The next day we were at Goodford. The mansion is Queen Anne, square and grave, standing on grounds which slope towards the exterior of the domain into oak-dotted swards that droop down to a wooded valley.

That first day at dinner I was able to point out to Langler the sneer of Baron Kolár at the part of the table where he droned amid the silence of his neighbours; and the next afternoon, when some men who had been shooting were standing in a group on a terrace, Baron Kolár, who was among them, left them to lower himself upon a bench close to that on which Langler and I were sitting.

It was just then that I heard someone in the standing group remark: "here comes our eloquent divine." And I heard Mr Edwards, who had looked round, say in his characteristic way: "what, he still on that same temperance job, I wonder?"

This remarkable man (who started life as a puddler's-boy in South Wales, then became a typewriter in a London newspaper-office, then editor of a boys' paper, then of a financial paper, then speculator and millionaire, then—without eloquence, stateliness, "brilliance" of any sort—Prime Minister of his country at the age of thirty-seven)—this remarkable man, I say, gave by his mere manners and appearance some hint of the reasons which underlay his elevation; he himself always accounted for it by declaring that "he alone knew how to run the Empire on purely business lines"; and, in truth, he looked like a man who could do this.

His face at this period was still fresh and pink, and assuredly he did not look older than a youth of four or five and twenty. His hair swept from the parting across his

forehead quite down to the right eyebrow; and against this he waged an old war, ever dashing it back, but down it came again. His eyes darted from side to side, and he appeared ever on the point of pitching at something, and having it over and accomplished. He was not large in stature, and by the side of big Mrs Edwards (who was some ten years his senior) looked rather insignificant. It was suggested by his walk that one of his legs was somewhat shorter than the other.

He started out at once to meet Dr Burton, who came toiling up the terraces swinging a copy of, I fancy, Paradisus Animæ. I saw them shake hands, and then lay their heads together, Edwards hearkening, Burton talking. Their walk led them towards Langler and me. Edwards began half to laugh, deprecatingly I thought; his shoulders shrugged; his arms opened; Dr Burton's brogue swelled; he waxed wroth.

The first words which I heard were these: "and are these poor sheep, then, to be so lost and ruined, Mr Edwards? Always, always the body, and never the soul? And is the protest of the Church no longer of avail with the great ones of the earth, sir? I tell you, sir——!"

Mr Edwards said: "but, Dr Burton, if you would only listen to common reason! My good sir, what can I do? If I were a parish councillor, now—or a magistrate—but I am only a Prime Minister, after all."

Edwards, by the way, was never averse from references to this fact, with some mirth tacked on. But now he was interrupted by a deep, a bitter word: the doctor looked ireful, and in the very voice of reproof he said: "the matter is not one for jest, sir. I have laid this question before the Bishop, before the Suffragan of Southampton, before the Bishop of Guildford, the Dean, the Residential Canons; I have appealed to the Licensing Magistrates; again and again I have appealed to you; I have turned right, I have turned left: and everywhere I have fallen in with evasions, with infidel shrugs, with dull delay. Now hear what I say as to this grievance: I say that I should not suffer it, no, I should not bear it at all. I don't wish to see this new bugbear in my

parish: I will not see it: and if the heavens should rain for a harvest-moon a rain of atheist archbishops and rebellious ministers-of-State and blatant councils, all bound together to impose it upon me, still I say I would not suffer it, no, I would not bear it at all, at all, for God's sake I would not. In the spirit of the blessed St Ambrose, with my own sacred hand I shall abolish it from my sight if it confront me; and afterwards, but not before, will I give up the government that I hold, not of men, but of God."

And as this torrent ceased I just heard snuffled with a drawl near my ear these words:

"Oh, well, he is not so bad, though; he does it very well—very well...."

They came from Baron Kolár, who was gazing through sleepy lids at Dr Burton with (it seemed to me) the fondness of a father contemplating the feats of his boy in the presence of friends.

As for Mr Edwards, I saw him fling his hand at Dr Burton's words. He was a being who gave heed to one thing only—effective force. Pride, high words were so far wide of his interest that they failed even to win a smile from him; he heard them like wind, regarded only facts, results.

"Well, Dr Burton," he said, "I am always glad to lend a helping hand to a parson like yourself, interested in your work, go-a-head, and so on, and so on; I am the same kind of man myself, and there's the fellow-feeling, and so on, and so on. But I can do nothing in this matter—candidly, it would be going too far out of my way; you must approach the proper authorities, mentioning, of course, that you have my sympathies, and so on, and so on——"

Here I lost his words. Meantime the baron's eyes were dreamily following the priest and the minister-of-State, while Langler's gaze was fastened upon the baron's face, and I glanced from one to the other, seeking to fathom how much was inherent in what I saw about me.

Presently the Baron's eyes wandered round, as if looking for someone to talk to, and when they lighted upon me quite close he droned in his happy manner: "Well, he seems a worthy fellow, a nice fellow: a little too zealous, like a torrid sun, but he's not so bad. Have you heard him preach?"

"Dr Burton? No. Have you?"

"I went to hear him last Sunday. He does it very well—very well. You should hear him."

"Yes, I have been told...."

"But you could not conceive; he does not do it badly. He is a man who really is master of his business. He preaches with the progression of a great river. He is destined to become the greatest priest in Europe...."

"Ah? You think that?"

"Wait, you will see. If a man is master of his business, and has self-assertion to make the world cringe before his force, that is all that is necessary. A man is either like leaven or like meal: he leavens or is leavened. The chief thing about any animal is its amount of available vigour. How much of Sun-fire has the man in him?—that is the question. If he has only enough, he can wash the world in his flush, and also if he is taught in what fashion to use it. But this Dr Burton, I assure you, he is not a paltry man. I want you to present me—now."

"I?" I said, taken rather aback, "I don't know him."

But at once Langler said at my ear: "I do."

"Mr Langler, however," I added, "probably knows him."

At this the baron said, half rising: "Ah, then——," and Langler stood up quickly, saying: "with pleasure...."

Dr Burton had now parted from Mr Edwards, and was passing close by us, wrapped in gloom, his frock brabbling at every stalk with the breeze; so Langler hurried out

to get at him, and Baron Kolár goaded after Langler his rolling gait.

At this Dr Burton, as when a bull stops in its career to stare at some new object, stood still, and at once Langler said graciously to him: "Dr Burton, permit me to present to you my friend, Mr Templeton—his Excellency Baron Kolár—Dr Burton."

The moment which followed was full of misery: for one could not tell what the doctor, still heated, would say or do. I was afraid that he wouldn't shake hands!

But the baron, with instant tact, spoke. "It was I," he said, "who asked Mr Langler to present me to Dr Burton. I had the pleasure last Sunday of being in the church at Ritching: that will explain."

At some moments, when he ceased to show his teeth and measured one with a stern up-and-down movement of the eyes, this man's face took on an expression of power which could even become compelling; so he looked now, eyeing Dr Burton, measuring him from head to toe, till Dr Burton put out his hand, whereupon the baron pipped a nothing sideways, and showed his teeth.

"Ah, well," he said in his happy drawl, "it is not often now that one can hear a sermon—not often. The pleasure comes from toillessly lolling and watching the toil of another: but the toil of that other must be real toil, and the toillessness of the hearer must be real also. I confess that I have some fault to find with your pews, doctor: a pew should never be a symbol of the narrow path that leadeth unto life. Oh, but they are not so bad, though—not so bad. Still, I, now, in Styria, have a church, and the pews are fauteuils. A man begins to cherish these little boons when the hair is getting grey. Oh, yes. The later Romans were the only race who truly understood the art of temple service. The courts, too, where men like Cicero, Hortensius, and Pliny thundered, were made luxurious. There must be the felt contrast between another's toil and one's own comfortable indolence. Only, the toil must be real toil. In the matter of books, now, the French have not done so badly in that—not badly. The author thinks and works hard, yet manages so that the reader need merely read,

without thought or worry. That is rather good, very nice. I, for example, am no longer a young man: an old fellow gets to feel that people should see a little to his comforts. Everything should be made easy and pleasant. The King of Korea, now: he sits, I am told, through a certain ceremonial on a couch made, back and seat, of four bags of brains. You know the derivation of the word assiduity: to sit is to be a man; to sit much is to be civilised. But that is a long tale. What I wanted to tell you was not to disturb yourself about the detail which I heard you discussing with Mr Edwards. I will take the affair upon my shoulders, and see to it that no public-house is opened in your parish to offend your eyes."

As the sense of these words possessed my ears I saw that the astonishment of Dr Burton was as supreme as my own. Langler leant with his well-straightened neck over his thorn-stick, smiling, the lax skin of his forehead twitching a little.

After some seconds Dr Burton said, looking at the baron as at some strange being: "I am sorry, sir, but I am pressed for time. As you see, I am a priest, and my harvest is great, and the labourers are few, so I think you will understand that I have no time for loitering and listening. As to your reference to the public-house, I confess that I do not understand you at all."

Baron Kolár was bestowing upon him a smile of sleepy fondness, and as the doctor half turned to go, the baron's hand went out to the doctor's arm.

"Ah, well, you are busy, of course," he said: "well, it does not displease me to see you so. A man's youth is his ancestry: the best heirloom which he can inherit from it is a habit of industry. A young man should work hard, not for the sake of what he can accomplish in his youth, but because the impulse of his acquired energy will last him through his course in a higher sphere. He buys the habit of strife and empire, and that persists to the end. I am rejoiced to see you stressful and impressé. Similarly, the youth of nations should be full of rages; their age suave and luxurious. But with regard to the public-house, now—do not harass yourself about such a

nothing, since I answer for it that the difficulty will vanish. I would speak to you, but you are so busy. I will call upon you to talk it over. Tell me when, and I will come, oh yes, I will come."

I was certain that, as the baron stopped, Langler, standing now close by Dr Burton, whispered some word at the doctor's ear. He afterwards told me that the words were: "you should say no."

But at his whisper Dr Burton turned upon him a look of surprise and some resentment, and at once said to the baron: "I shall be at home to-morrow evening at eight-thirty, sir, if that will please you." Whereupon he bowed, and was off.

"Oh, well, he's a nice fellow—a nice fellow," said the baron, summing up the doctor. "In a high position he would be just the man whom the Church needs to push her forward and make her aggressive. What is your opinion of the Church in England?"

His eyes rested upon Langler's face.

"My opinion?" said Langler.

"As to her lasting powers, now, I mean."

"My outlook is vague enough," answered Langler: "I should say that bishops, church-bells, sermons, and so on, will persist as we know them in England for another thirty, forty years."

"Ah, you think that. Well, well. I, now, should say a hundred, a hundred and fifty years."

"That is a long time," said Langler.

"Not so long. I mean, you know, if nothing happens to annihilate her. It is astonishing how old things will continue to hold on long after they are quite dead and decayed. Look at old oaks and houses! A glass of water will sometimes remain in the liquid state a long time below the freezing-point; the least shake would make it shiver into a glass of ice, but, lacking that, it remains liquid. Well, so with the

Church. Especially in a country like England, I give her another hundred and fifty years."

"You are quite possibly right," said Langler; "your opportunities for observing may have been better than mine."

"Oh, yes, I know old England very well—very well. I was once an attaché to the Embassy for three years; altogether, I have lived in England eight to ten years. I know the old country very well—not badly. Very nice it is, too—provided one brings one's own chef. The pride of England is not her political potency, but her beef, for in no country in the world is so exquisite a care bestowed upon the culture of cattle, and if a quarter as much had been given to the culture of men, by this time the Angles would, in truth, have been angels. Not that I have a word to say against the culture of cattle. Perhaps after all man himself is not of so much importance as what he eats. Beef is the half of life; the other half is mutton. No, that is a little hyperbole perhaps—my little tendency to neatness and epigram. It is astonishing how, as a man gets older, he runs to seed in that way, for epigram is only an instinctive device for concealing meagreness of thought. I, for example, am no longer a young man. I begin to get fond of my little comforts. To be candid with you, the cooking at Goodford does not altogether please me, those partridges at dinner last night were not done enough—not enough. Still, they were not so bad—a little underdone—and the wines are very good—very good. But, talking of the Church, I assure you I give her a hundred and fifty years—unless someone has a motive for giving her a push, and then down she goes. Would you care to see that done?"

His wandering eyes halted suddenly upon Langler's face.

"I?" said Langler, "why should I?"

"Oh, well, isn't there always the danger that a decayed old house may tumble and crush one? If the thing is a groan and a danger it may as well go, and be done."

"But if it be quaint and gracious and historic," said Langler, "it may as well stay, even at the cost of a prop or two. While it stands it hurts no one: it is only its fall that may hurt."

"Well, I see your point of view. You are right, too, in your own fashion. But for myself, the Modern Spirit does not displease me; it is very nice in its way—oh yes. Let us have it in its full noon, I say. Whatever survival of the past stifles it should be quickly excised and suppressed. And if in England the Church is only laughable, I assure you that in other parts of Europe, where it is more mixed up with the life of the people, it continues to be positively baleful. In Austria, for example, one half of the teachers in the common schools are still ecclesiastics! and though the people do not believe in the Church any more than you do here, yet it influences them, it checks and hampers them: they feel that they would like to be quit of it, yet do not quite know how. And, apart from any harm which it does, it is astonishing how many thousands of men might be found in Europe who, from mere motives of vanity, merely to tell how they took a part in modifying the modern world, would lend a willing hand to pulling down the old building. I believe that that is so. But you, now, you see from a different standpoint. Well, you are right, too, in your own fashion."

To me it became clear that these two were pumping and sounding each other with some not very evident motive on either side, Langler striking his stick into the turf as he walked, looking downward; the baron looking downward also, at Langler's face.

Langler said: "I cannot be made a convert, Baron Kolár. Shells, you know, are sometimes quite charming things, and for this shell which remains of the Church, I personally should, under certain conceivable conditions, be even prepared to give my life: such is the whim of my mind. But now you will excuse me—Arthur, you will excuse me: I have some letters.... But stay; I have to ask you a question, baron."

He had stood still; we all stood still, and Langler and the baron faced each other.

"Well, then," said the baron gravely, eyeing Langler up and down.

Langler, I must say, was paler than usual. He said: "I have lately had reason to run my eyes down a list of the Styrian nobility, baron, and find that three several Styrian barons have the name of 'Gregor'—you being one. Are you acquainted with the other two?"

"Well, yes," was the answer: "one is a Strass, the other a Dirnbach; easy, good fellows they are. Our Styrian nobility is not what it was; no, the nobilities will soon have to go too. Fortunate thing, they will last through my time. Look at Mr Edwards, now—nice fellow, powerful fellow. It is fellows like him, with fresh, vulgar energies and elementary insights, whom the world needs to guide it now. Oh no, the nobilities must go, too. Do you know——?"

But Langler cut short that drawl. He said: "Well, one of these two Barons Gregor unlawfully has in his castle a prisoner, one Father—Max—Dees——"

He spoke pointedly, his eyes fixed on Baron Kolár's face; and on his face dwelt the Gorgon eyes of the Styrian.

Some time went by in what was to me a distressing silence, till the baron pipped a nothing sideways—a movement, to me, of relief, as it were setting me free to breathe again, for I felt that Langler had dared to cross a definite Rubicon.

"What about him?" said the baron, a new something in his voice.

Undaunted, though gauntly, leaning over his stick, Langler went on.

"It is my intention," he said, "to expose and punish this particular Styrian baron as soon as ever I discover his identity; and I speak of him to you in order to see if you can give me any hint as to which of the two is the guilty one."

The baron's look had lost its rigour now; his lips unwreathed from his teeth in a smile.

"It is that fellow Strass, you may be sure," he said; "or it may be Dirnbach, it may be, there is no telling. The nobilities are no longer what they were in authoritative power, and in Styria, I assure you, it is nothing very astonishing that a baron should lawlessly clap a priest into a dungeon; but nice fellows all of them, not wicked, not so bad. I really should not worry myself about the matter, if I were you."

Langler said: "thank you, baron, I will think over what you have said." And he walked away to the house.

It was only after two or three minutes of silence that the baron said to me: "your friend is one of the brightest minds in the world, really as extraordinary a fellow as I ever met, I assure you. No one with any respect for intellect could avoid liking him. But he is a man of books, he is of the scholar type, he is not a man of action—oh no. A scholar should never jog himself into antagonism with a man of action. The man of action may even wish to save and spare him, but sometimes he cannot: for, just as he is vastly stronger than the scholar, so facts and auspices may be vastly stronger than he. By far the safest plan for the scholar is to hatch pastorals in his closet and handle volumes of piety. So amiable a man is your friend Mr Langler, so charming—nice fellow. I don't know if you think it worth while to repeat my words to him. Now I must leave you to talk to Mr Edwards about my friend the doctor ..." and he rolled away on his bow-legs, his hat canted over his eyes in his habitual manner.

That very night, some time after ten, Langler was handed a letter which he called me into the library to show me. It was a card damasked with raised devices in red—a Christ on the Cross—and on it had been scribbled in pencil the words: "You should not interfere."

CHAPTER VII

THE COMPACT

The next evening, as Baron Kolár raised himself on the arm of a valet into the trap which was to carry him to his meeting with Dr Burton, Langler remembered that some matters were going forward at Swandale which demanded his personal managing, and he asked me to go with him.

It was a fine autumn twilight when we set out, a sound of singing following us from the house and laughter from knots on the lawn, and we had a very pleasant ride. At Swandale Langler talked with John, with Jane, saw this and that with his own eyes, the water-cress at the rill under wire, the patch of reaped corn, for now poppies lay low, over the fields of the land the corn-shocks were leant together in lots, and all smelt well of harvest.

Langler wished to return to Goodford on foot, and we were presently trudging back through Ritching.

That something was on his mind I had felt sure; and this proved to be so, for as we drew nigh to Ritching church he said: "I have decided, Arthur, to speak with Dr Burton to-night, since, if this good man runs his rather rash head into any danger, I do not wish to have to reproach myself with too shrinking and nice a silence on my part."

"But danger of what nature?" I asked.

"Its nature is unguessable," he answered; "but of the danger itself one can't, I think, have any doubt. We know, for instance, that Dr Burton is 'another Max Dees,' and we know that Max Dees is, for some reason or other, in durance. Now, of Max Dees we have two further pieces of knowledge: first, that his imprisonment has features resembling the disappearance of Robinson; and secondly, that he, like Dr Burton, is a 'union of Becket and Savonarola.' Well, now, with regard to the vanishing of Robinson, Emily has let fall the view that it was motived by his 'beauty'; and though this reason for the disappearance of a man seems even ridiculous, still we have

promised ourselves not wholly to ignore her instincts in this matter. If, then, she may somehow be right, the reason for the disappearance of Max Dees may somehow be found in the fact that he, too, is 'beautiful'; or it may be found in the second fact known of him, that he is a 'union of Becket and Savonarola': we don't know: but we know that he is imprisoned, and that in some respects he resembles Dr Burton. As to who is the gaoler of Max Dees, I am really no more in any doubt. The word 'Kolár' fits very well into the blurred space on the missive brought us by the wren; and the man himself, you remember, made no effort to blind our eyes when asked about the matter, even going out of his way to assure us that the other two Gregors are 'harmless, nice fellows.' What a beast that man is! Yet how great a strength of soul is his! Imagine, Arthur (if he is, in truth, the gaoler of Dees), his astonishment at hearing that name on my lips! How utter at this moment must be his loss to understand by what marvel I could ever have learned that name. I expected at least to see him start, to look abashed a little. But no; his eyes rested serenely on my face: he seemed to be sorry for me, to deplore my indiscretion. Here, then, is a man mighty in mass and stature, all self-assured, whose will, whether it be bent upon good or upon ill, is hardly to be withstood. Such a person is, apart from special considerations, inherently formidable; but how if this person be found trying to convert another to enmity against the Church, and at the same time be found striking up a friendship with a churchman who in certain particulars resembles another churchman imprisoned in his castle? Certainly, one's mind can't reject a notion of danger; and it has appeared to me that I ought not to hold my peace in the matter, in spite of the outré warning of the card which Baron Kolár has been kind enough to forward me."

We had now arrived before Ritching church, which stands well back from the village street in a large piece of land—"park" one may call it—well timbered and dark. The building itself is big, modern, and ugly—one of those churches with huge roofs, red bricks, red shingles, which rather suggest the cult of some latter-day

Moloch than of the Carpenter. It is built, however, over some old vaults in which repose generations of the Hampshire branch of the Bellasis family, once of Goodford, now extinct.

We got into the grounds by a gateway in a wall of rubble before the church, and thence, by a path which winds inward through the park some quarter of a mile towards the vicarage, passed on to the vicarage garden. The night was now dark, and we found the house in darkness.

"It looks," said Langler in a low voice, "as if the baron's visit to the doctor has been quite a long one—two hours at the least—for he seems to be still here, if one may divine by the darkness in this front part, which, no doubt, the doctor would have lighted on seeing his visitor through. The baron must have left his trap at the Calf's Head, for I don't see it here. Let us wait outside, then, a little. The doctor, by the way, has the good taste to look out from his study window behind yonder upon a patch of that white vetch which shimmers so bridally in all shades of twilight. Come softly, and I will show it you."

I tracked his tread through thicket towards the back of the old manse, till we began to catch sight of a glow of light emanating from a casement behind, and a moment later Langler whispered me: "There, you see, is the growth of vetch."

Five feet farther, and from an angle of a lean-to, we could peer through ivy and rose-bush into a lighted room: in it were Baron Kolár and Dr Burton, standing. Langler laid hold of my arm, and we stood breathless, looking.

The two in the room were deep in converse, the rumour of which reached us, but none of the words.

Presently the baron took his hand from the doctor's shoulder, took up a book from a table, held it uplifted a minute, kissed it.

He then tendered the book to the doctor, who seemed to us to draw back rather, and I felt Langler's grasp tighten on my arm, but the baron seemed to press and reason

with the doctor; then the doctor took the book, lifted it to his lips, kissed it: and at once the hands of the two men met in a clasp.

Langler whispered into my ear: "but what agreement hath Christ with Belial? Isn't it written that he who is a friend of the world is the enemy of God?"

CHAPTER VIII

THE FACE OF ROBINSON

Two minutes after that clasp of the hands the doctor passed out of the room with the baron; two minutes later he returned to the room alone, and stood at the casement, with his brow drooped toward his breast, in a brown study.

Langler whispered to me: "you will wait outside. I am going to speak to him now."

We walked round to the front of the manse, where Langler rapped, Dr Burton presently came to him, and I from outside looked on at the two standing together in lamplight in a parlour.

Langler, I think, was not asked to sit. I heard the brogue of Dr Burton, then in Langler's hand beheld the piece of paper on which Dr Burton was spoken of as a "union of Becket and Savonarola." Dr Burton did not look at it, but began to lower angrily, Langler to bow, till at last Dr Burton frowned towards the doorway. Langler bowed, and withdrew.

When angry he had a habit of lowering the eyelids in an expression of hissing disdain, and the street-lamps, as we trudged through Ritching, revealed him so to me. For some time he was silent, but finally, when we were climbing towards Goodford village, he said: "Dr Burton has insulted me, Arthur, and for the moment I find it difficult to speak of him in a Christian spirit. However, he is a good man—I really need just now to repeat that fact to myself—though mewed up in crassness. Uppishness, of course, is part of the being of every dominant man, and I don't blame

him for his uppishness, but only for the fact that it is so blatant and instant. Still, one must take the thorns with the rose, and I promise by to-morrow morning to love him again. Partly it was my own fault, for I should have felt, after the compact which we witnessed, that my warning would be all too late. Imagine how momentous must have been the matter of that compact, Arthur, when Burton could be brought to confirm it with the Bible at his lips, and imagine the craft and the might of will by which he must have felt himself crimped and mesmerised. Here is a man who two days ago began by telling Baron Kolár that he had not leisure to listen to him, and already we find him in genubus, with (of all things) the Book at his lips. Have you not here a miracle of mind? But given a known individuality, one may deduce certain facts from it. We can assert, for instance, from our sure knowledge of Burton, that the compact contained nothing dishonouring to him, that it was lofty and pure on his part. It must be so. And since it was Kolár who first kissed, and afterwards Burton, we may say, too, that the first terms of the pact are to be fulfilled by Kolár. If Kolár will do certain things, as he says he will, then Burton will do certain things. But what things? Pity we couldn't catch a few snatches of the talk; yet certainly, even so, I don't think that we are quite in the dark. For Burton's motives were lofty and pure: therefore Kolár's promises of good things did not concern Burton's own self-interests, or not solely. Yet Burton was so enthusiastic as to these promises that he took an oath of repayment: they may very likely, therefore, have concerned his love—the Church. But the Church where? At Ritching? It is inconceivable that Kolár can be so interested in the Church at Ritching as to wish to exact any oath with regard to it. 'Church,' therefore, as between him and Burton, must mean Church on a larger scale; and in the Church on this scale we know that Kolár is, in fact, interested. But how is Burton, a village priest, to repay services rendered to the Church on so large a scale? Does it not seem as if Kolár's promises do not apply altogether to the Church, but in part to Burton personally, that Burton is not for ever to remain a village priest? Indeed, did not Kolár yesterday volunteer the

prophecy that this 'union of Becket and Savonarola' is 'destined to become the greatest priest in Europe'? A singular prophecy, Arthur, from a man whose words in general assuredly have some significance. We may guess, then, that Kolár's undertakings consist in rendering to the Church some good which will include the rise and greatness of the doctor himself, and the doctor swears to use his greatness in some way indicated, or to be indicated, by Kolár. Certainly, such seem the divinations prompted by the facts which we have."

"Isn't it a strange thing," I said, "the interest of Kolár in the doctor, even before he saw him? It is not to be supposed that Kolár is a very regular church-goer, yet he hastened to hear the doctor at once on coming to Goodford. One could be almost certain that the letter describing the doctor as Becket plus Savonarola, and asking someone to 'come down,' was addressed to no other than to Baron Kolár."

"Very likely," replied Langler; "and that was chiefly what I had to say to Burton in our interview just now. I tried to persuade him that the baron is no friend of priests, that he probably has one of them a prisoner in his burg at this moment, but because I could make no certain statements his mind was closed against me. On his part, he used the words 'evil-speaking,' 'presumption,' 'interference'; he said 'dare,' he said 'irreverent.' But I won't speak of that interview—it was bête. The sentiment that now occupies my mind about Dr Burton is this: 'the pity of it!' One cannot touch pitch and go undefiled. I have often had the augury that Burton is a man with a tragedy in his future, and, if I was right, that tragedy now perhaps takes shape: it will consist in his 'defilement.' Baron Kolár has prophesied that the doctor will be the greatest of priests: well, if I, too, may prophesy, I say that from being the greatest of priests, as he now is, he will become no priest at all; that by little and little he will drop from his height, will lose perfection of motive and absoluteness of fibre, till on a day he will find himself fingering the dross of the grosser world."

By this time we had got into sight of the lights of Goodford House. On our arrival,

as we were passing through the outer hall, a man handed a letter to Langler, which Langler, after glancing through it, handed to me; and I read the words: "Charles Robinson, your groom, is certainly in this neighbourhood, and if you have not found him it is because you have not searched enough. If you have the courage to meet the writer at the north-west corner of Hallam Castle alone at seven on Sunday evening, he promises you that at least you shall see the face of the missing man.—A Well-wisher."

CHAPTER IX

"CRUCIFY TO YOURSELVES AFRESH THE SON OF MAN ..."

It was the thirteenth Sunday after Trinity, and for what reason I don't remember—certainly, the house-party at Goodford were hardly zealots in the matter of church-going—that Sunday evening quite a party had been got up to go to the office at Ritching. The fact, I believe, was that the fame of Dr Burton's oratory had spread through the house, and dowager and lordling, finding the Sabbath evening empty, yielded to the pique of curiosity and to Mrs Edward's organising genius.

Baron Kolár, too, had everywhere dropped the opinion that Dr Burton was a nice fellow, that he was not so bad, that he was the only living man with whom grandiose speech was a natural function, like sleep.

Langler alone had declined to take part in the bout. Under any circumstances, I fancy, he would have shrunk from that kind of religious picnic; but he had now the special reason that he meant to go "at seven" that evening to the rendezvous at Hallam Castle given him in the unsigned letter.

To me this seemed very foolish, for I argued that no one could know the whereabouts of Robinson except those to whom he owed his disappearance, and during two days I had been praying Langler to ignore the letter. He answered that he

had made up his mind to go. But at least he would let me go with him, I urged. He answered that he would rather be alone. What arms, I asked, would he take with him? He said that he was not accustomed to carry weapons about, and would take his stick.

"But you speak," I had said, "just as though you were not conscious of any danger in the undertaking."

"Well, I am conscious of danger," he answered, "but I believe that in proportion to the danger may be the amount of information to be gathered."

He had said that he would walk to Hallam Castle (three miles), and then, after his interview with the letter-writer, walk from Hallam to Ritching church (two miles), in order to get back to Goodford with the house-party in a carriage.

A little before six on the Sunday evening I was leaning with Miss Emily over a bridge in the north park when he came to us on his way to the rendezvous, spoke a few words, said he was going farther, and made me a signal with the eyes to be mum. Twice he waved back at us as he went forward; once and again I saw him stop to bend over a hedge-flower. He was rather pale. I had long understood that his heart was not strong, as small exertions would sometimes put him out of breath.

Miss Emily, for her part, had consented to be one of the party of excursionists, so after half-an-hour at the bridge she and I climbed the rising ground to the house to go to the church.

She said, I remember, that the escapade was a bore to her, so that up to that moment she certainly meant to go.

There in front of the porch when we reached it stood a crowd of vehicles, saddle-horses, drivers, grooms, in the midst of costumes and chatter. Two of the carriages had already started, bearing away cries of laughter at the crowded discomfort within them. I saw the pink brow of Mr Edwards under the neck of a rearing horse; large Mrs Edwards was in a flush of earnestness; Baron Kolár was

seated on a cube of marble bestowing his teeth upon the scene.

Miss Emily was not yet ready to start, so ran into the house, telling me that she would be back in three minutes.

It had been ordained by Mrs Edwards that she should drive with Baron Kolár. I was with another party. In a few minutes only two of the vehicles were left; in one of them sat the baron, waiting for Miss Emily. I was in the other with four ladies; the baron's was a cabriolet, mine a car; both waited for the coming of Miss Emily.

Someone in my car said: "she is a long time."

The baron's eyes wandered; he drew his hand backward over his scrap of hair, looking restless; he pipped nothings. Presently he called out: "where is she, then?"

I was unwilling to drive away without her, so I called back to him: "if you will take my place, I will take yours, and wait for her."

There was the objection of space to this proposition; but, without answering, the baron at once got himself down from his cabriolet, and, with ponderous cares, managed to wedge himself into my place in the car, which drove off, while I stood by the cabriolet, waiting for Miss Emily.

She did not come. I waited ten minutes, fifteen. Then I went into the house, full of trouble.

I quickly found a housemaid, and sent her to hunt, but, running back after some minutes, she said that Miss Langler was not in her room. Before long I had a number of men and women searching the house for her; but she could not be found, and my heart sank at the thought that both of them, brother and sister, were where I did not know.

One of the girls said that half-an-hour before, when Miss Langler was coming down the great stair to join the party, she had handed to Miss Langler a note which one of the villagers of Mins had given her. She had gone away while Miss Langler was

reading the note, and did not know what Miss Langler had done afterwards.

As for me, my mind was a void filled only with fear. The house was empty, I had no one to consult, no notion how to act. At last I leapt into the cabriolet, lashed the horse, and went along the road that leads to Hallam Castle: at least I knew where one of the two was to be sought.

It is a ruin in the older Norman mood in the midst of Goodford Manor demesne. On getting to it I made fast the horse, and ran up a dell to the "north-west corner" of the rendezvous: Langler was not there, but it was still light enough for me to see some footprints in moss on a mass of broken ground not far from the castle-wall: whether his footprints or not I couldn't tell.

I began to call out, but there was no answer, and the footprints passing from the moss, I lost them among stones.

Night was darkening when I went to the other (east) end of the ruin, and entered by a wicket into one of the courtyards. When I had stumbled a little way up a stair I was all in darkness. I called aloud Langler's name again and again; but there was no answer.

I would go no farther, the steps were so broken, the darkness so crowded with foes and fears; I had no light; so at last I ran back down. He might after all, I thought, have left the ruin and gone to the church, as arranged. That was the first thing now to find out, so I ran back to my trap, and cantered off towards Ritching.

At Ritching I flung my reins to the railing before the church, and ran inward, the middle portal framing a glimmer of light before me. I heard the rise, long triumph, and fall of a royal voice: Dr Burton preaching; and, running up the three steps before the church, I peeped in.

There was no pulpit, no rood-screen; Dr Burton was before the sacrarium; and with his hands behind his back, he was striding sharply a little way to and fro, with swinging shoulders at the turn, like a man moved to wrath.

That evening he had read of the sending out of the Twelve; of the power vouchsafed them over unclean spirits; of the charge that they must take naught for their journey, save a staff only—no scrip, no bread, no money in their purse; and the contrast between the spirit of Christ and the spirit of Christendom may have fired the doctor. He had taken for his text: "crucify to yourselves afresh the son of man, and put him to an open shame"; and at the moment when I entered he was launching a war of language against the modern world and the modern Church.

The party from Goodford formed much the larger part of the congregation, down the nave running a desert of pews, and I think I am right in saying that not more than fifty persons were present, all herded towards the front, looking lost in the largeness of the church. So low had the gas been turned that, though I went peering quite half way up the nave, I could not say whether Langler was or was not there.

At that moment Dr Burton had lashed himself into a really painful pitch of heat. He was tacking to and fro in short runs, rather like lions at the moment when they spy their keeper coming with meat, and loudly he cried out in his brogue: "ye crucify him afresh! Oh, the poor, bleeding hands—so nailed. Oh, the poor, bleeding side—so pierced. Oh, the ravished lamb, oh, the violated dove, oh, the crushed Christ! Have ye, then, no pity? no entrails of compassion? ye dry eyes? ye hard hearts? ye tearless teats? Have ye become men of wood? worm-eaten? loth as death? chill as the silver ye gloat on? sallow as the gold ye clutch? May God put fire into you, if it were half hell-fire, ye Monophysites, ye modern men of pure Polar snow! Oh, look—oh, see: that lip—so sucked: Is there no lust about you that you don't bind it with wild community to your mouth? Those eyeballs ooze a whey of blood: is there no heart in all the Sahara of your vulgar gullets to weep and groan and weep?... Yes, it was pitiful: he was kind, and he was killed, he was good, and he was galled, he was meek, and he was mangled. And will you crucify him afresh? In the name of Holy Church, I call the Eternal God this night——"

But at this point Dr Burton stopped with a gasp, gaping upward all in wonderment; and from his mouth, from mine, from the mouths of us all in the church, there burst a sound.

Yonder in mid-air—under the roof of the central aisle—hung the crucified himself.

That sight will never tend to fade or be blurred in the memory of those who beheld it; if there be memory in Eternity, then always still in Eternity that sight, I think, will be with me.

It was not an optical error—that was the first certainty at which the brain, on waking a little from its deadness, arrived; it was not some magic illusion: a real man crucified on a real cross stood there revealed. From three points of the thorn-dented forehead I, with my eye of flesh, saw a trickle creep, and pause, and creep.

I found myself on my knees on the tiles, with my hands clasped. I forgot Langler—I forgot my love, his sister—and all things else. From the bowed knot of men and women in front of me came groan on groan.

At last! The heavens had spoken....

Yet it was faintly seen, and though I raised my head, and forced my eyes to search the divine horror, the light was most dim, and the revelation seemed rather the spectre of a thing than the thing itself. Only, each detail was perfect, and it was the crudeness of these details which proved its reality to the mind with proof a hundred times sure. The haggard crucifixions of Dürer and Spagnoletto—all the macabre dreams of a painter, graver, sculptor, heaped into one massacre of flesh and of grinning bone—would seem like a child's fancy in comparison with that fact. Still in my dreams I see the sideward hang of that under-lip, and that hollow between ribs and hips drawn out into shocking length, and the irregular drip from the hands, the left of which had been ripped to the finger-roots, and the crown of sorrow, and the dead drop of that tragic brow, it cannot be told....

Perhaps I alone examined details; the rest knelt bowed down; only Dr Burton, with

his neck stretched back, stared as if in vision straight upward upon heaven. In myself I felt a kind of rapture, and also of peace; and the words which I murmured to myself were these: "at last."

All at once, without ascent, descent, or movement, the image vanished.

But still for a longish time no stir nor sound, save some hushed sob, was to be heard echoing through the building.

At last! after the dumb centuries, a sign from the skies, a flag from God; and I thought to myself: "long have been those years in which so many generations of men have wept in the face of the sphinx, craving but one sure word from the callous vault for a morsel of manna to their hunger, and now the old silence is over"; and I remember hugging myself, thinking: "it was true, then! it was not a fancy of man's infancy! it was all quite true."

Through the church the sobs of duchess and ploughman, of server and acolyte, began to sound in growing volume; I saw Dr Burton lift himself and escape into the sacristy; the others mingled the sounds of their awe, till the echoes became one murmur in the vault. As for me, the burden of my thought was this: "at last...."

But, looking up, I was conscious of a row of teeth, and of Baron Kolár, who, with a raised head, was smiling his benediction upon the scene, and his look was as when he snuffled sleepily of a thing, "well, it is not so bad." I do not know if anyone else noticed him; but, as for me, filled though I was with my other feelings, for a moment I was most offended.

CHAPTER X

OF HALLAM CASTLE

When at last a movement was made to leave the church I first assured myself that neither Langler nor Miss Emily was there, then I set out upon the drive back to

Goodford somewhat behind the crowd of carriages, no sound now to be heard from all that picnic party which had left Goodford loud with gaiety an hour before.

During that drive the mere sight of the trees and fields once more brought down my mind from the miracle to the care which had racked it before I had entered the church. Langler, his sister, both of them, were where I did not know; and at another time my fright at a situation so fraught with darkness might have been even madding, but that night my heart was the home of feelings so pious that something of hope healed my fears.

My relief, however, was great enough when, in front of Goodford House, I spied Langler standing among the alighting church-party. As I hurried up to him he was just saying to one of the ladies: "I hope you enjoyed the office," but her only answer was: "ah, Mr Langler."

Langler, of course, was quite out of tune with us all at the moment, and he could not perhaps observe the look of our faces, for the night was dark.

As I touched his arm he spun round, saying: "ah, Arthur," and I remember how his tone of the world, his cigar, shocked me: he seemed to me a grosser being than we. I wished to say to him: "Hush! the earth is holy ground."

In a low voice I asked him as to his sister. His answer was: "she is in the house; two hours ago a note was handed to her, purporting——"

"We can't speak of it now," I said, stopping him: "all is well if she is in the house."

When he looked at me with some surprise I whispered to him: "we are none of us inclined to talk just now: you will soon know why."

The others meanwhile all going within, in the inner hall I now heard a laugh which I recognised as Miss Emily's, and I did not know whether it more shocked me or filled me with thankfulness that she was safely there.

"If you had waited one little hour for me," she said as I went in, "I should have been

back to go to the church with you."

"I will explain all later," I answered. "I had to go to look for Aubrey."

"Look for him?"

"You may be told in time," I answered: "you see, everyone is making haste to retire...."

"So I see," said she, "but what is the matter?"

"We have all seen something."

"One would say a ghost."

"The ghost of God," I answered, in what she must have thought a tone of bathos!

"You imply that God is dead," she retorted in her dry way.

"He died for us, Emily," I answered most crassly! whereat she bridled, and said: "O!" with such an underlook and depth of satire, that I could not bear to see her so banned from my awful mood, and, with a motion of my hand, left her in haste, for all manner of talk at that moment seemed to me unholy.

On the Monday morning, as I was breakfasting in my own quarters, Langler came to me, saying: "I have to apologise, Arthur, if my manner last night was at all incongruous with your mood, and I have to add Emily's apologies to my own. We have now heard and read what you saw, and understand how you must have felt."

"You understand something," I answered; "you can't understand all."

"Well, no," said he: "I am only sorry that neither Emily nor I was privileged to be present, so that we might be in the fullest sympathy with you. Did you, Arthur—get a complete sight of the vision?"

He sat beside me, his hand on my arm, and I told him all, word by word, in a husky voice; and he listened with a bent head.

"We are dust and ashes," he murmured when I had finished: "the humiliation of it for us all!"

"Yes, the salvation," said I.

"But the humiliation firstly, I think," said he. "How modern men have taken up and confirmed the seer's word: 'the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.' It was the one certain clue which we had to God. And now that, too, is snapped when we find His way of acting on Sunday night so foreign to His way on Saturday and Monday."

"Aubrey, we know nothing," I said.

"So I, too, say," he answered, "and I say that it is in the proof which the vision has given us of this that our humiliation lies. How shall we ever more trust our reason, or enjoy the pleasures of our mind? We were so assured that His voice is ever small and hinting, that He guides us with His eye; but now on a sudden we seem to find Him glaring and pedagogic——"

"Still, let us not allow ourselves to criticise the vision, Aubrey," I said.

"No, certainly, we mustn't allow ourselves to do that," he replied: "I was rather criticising the paltriness of our reason, and I was thinking of the damper which the vision will undoubtedly put upon the intellect of the Western world before this day is over."

"Well, since our intellect is unreliable, that won't much matter," I said, "and God's way is best. But I still know nothing of your adventures last night: did you go to Hallam Castle?"

"Yes, I went, and the promise of my unknown correspondent was even duly fulfilled."

"You don't mean that you saw Robinson?"

"At least I saw Robinson's face, according to the promise."

His words struck me dumb.

"I reached the Castle soon after twilight had begun to darken," he went on. "It is a low ruin, you know, stretching along the upper edges of a mound, at the bottom of

which, on the north side, runs a road through a sort of dell which they call the 'Castle Dell'; up this road I went in order to get to the 'north-west corner' named in the rendezvous. A few sheep were pasturing on the castle-mound; but no other living thing was to be seen, nor a sound to be heard, and I won't pretend that I was so perfectly collected in mind as I might have been. It is a pity that we should ever breathe shorter than we will, but.... Anyway, I climbed up the dell-road till I came as near the north-west corner of the ruin as I could, for one can't quite get up to it, the mound at that point being rocky and steep; but after waiting on the road some minutes, and seeing no one, I began to climb a path at right angles to the dell-road leading south on the west side of the castle—a path with steps embedded in the soil. I was on these steps when I heard some sound like the echo of a shout, and on glancing to my left I saw Robinson's face at a window of the round-tower which forms the north-west corner of the ruin."

The fact of Robinson's face being seen at last sounded so strange to my ears that I could only breathe: "but are you sure, Aubrey?"

"Well," said he, "he was separated from me by perhaps thirty yards, for between the mass of ground on which I stood and that west side of the castle is a ravine or dry moat of about that breadth; moreover, it was getting dark in the dell, which is well wooded; but still I saw him pretty well, and it was certainly Robinson and no other."

"But did he see you? Did he speak?" I asked.

"He probably did not see me," Langler answered; "certainly he did not speak. I cried out to him, bending forward over a rail at the edge of the cleft, but he did not answer.... Oh, Arthur, it was a face much marred, believe me! It is my belief that he was unconscious, that he was held at the window for me to see by others whom I could not see. After some seconds he was withdrawn from my sight."

"But this is pitiful," I said. "What did you do?"

"I might perhaps have acted more promptly than I did," he answered: "I see that

now, and must confess it to you and to myself. It is certainly to be regretted that the rate of one's breathing should ever have an influence upon the quality of the mental operations or upon the quality of one's mode of acting; and here certainly is a little matter to which, it seems, that I, for my part, will have to give some attention on all future occasions. There is no doubt that I lost some minutes in thinking what I should next do: however, as I am familiar with the castle, I did not lose time in running to the west gate near on my left, for this I knew to be fastened, but I hurried down the dell-road to the east side of the ruin, and there climbed the mound by a path in the sward which leads to the east gate. Here I could gain an entrance, for the wicket of this gate has disappeared, but I see now that I ought to have waited outside, and not gone in: help might have come from some source; at least no one could have come out of the ruin without being seen by me. However, I went in, for after the delays already made I felt urged to do something energetic, and, no doubt, fidgeted. Some people seem to act aptly without forethought, as the fly flies; others act aptly by forethought; and others again, in using too much forethought here, and none at all there, produce those left-handed, gawky results which seem to guffaw in one's face. I hope that I am not of this last type; but on this particular occasion, I confess, I do rather seem to have been outdone—in fact, I was outdone. I rushed without thought through the wicket into the lowest of the three courtyards, which is now a greensward shaded by two walnut-trees, and ran up some steps in the north-east round-tower, my feet, I fear, making some sounds, and once or twice I slipped in the dark, the stones being very displaced. Near the tower-top I turned west over the castle-wall—the wall is really two walls, you know, filled between with concrete, over which runs a footway between field flowers. This footway brought me into a second tower, where some stairs lead up to a similar path on the wall which runs along the second courtyard. It was quite dark in that tower, and I stopped once to consider whether the course which I was pursuing was quite the best; however, having come to no decision, I was creeping on up when I heard a sound

behind me, the creak of a door, then at once another creak of another door somewhere; at the same time both doors were bolted, and I understood that I was in durance."

He smiled at my look of concern, adding: "don't be alarmed, since you now see me here; in fact, having convinced myself that I was really imprisoned, I, for my part, became easier in mind than I had been, feeling the irksomeness of having to fight out this matter taken off my hands, since, being a prisoner, it was now out of my power to do anything; and I resigned myself to suffer with a calm spirit whatever might be in store for me. Indeed, it seems to be often less of a burden and bore to suffer patiently than to have to run, and wage war, and act; at any rate, I felt that my captors had relieved me of a responsibility in this matter of the rescue of poor Robinson. I stood against the wall on a ledge three feet wide, with a railing at its edge, and the hollow interior of the tower below, and the two doors being grey with age, their surface rough with the carvings of visitors' names, but still stout, I put my arm through some of the holes which have appeared in the oak, trying to reach the bolts, but could not. Then I sat down in a hearthplace, and was sitting there so long, with nothing for the eye to rest on but the bushes at the tower-top massed against the dark sky, that I should have fallen asleep if I had not been roused by hearing some shouts, coming, I thought, from the castle-dell——"

"They were my shouts probably," I said; "and you were there all the time!"

"What, were you at Hallam Castle last night?" he asked.

"Why, yes," I answered, "for when Emily disappeared, and it struck me that you had both been inveigled away, I could think of nothing but to go to the castle to look for you. I shouted your name in the castle-dell, I even went up the very stairs—didn't you hear me call out 'Aubrey'? Hearing no answer, I hurried off to Ritching, to see if you were in the church: and you were in the ruins all the time!"

"Your shouts reached me only as echoes," he said, "and when they ceased I

composed myself afresh to rest in my hearthplace, but was soon again startled by a sound—the drawing of the bolt of the door by which I had entered. I leapt up, to find the door open: but my liberator, whoever he was, was not to be seen. I hurried down the stair, but neither saw him nor heard his tread."

"Strange proceedings," I said.

"But with a meaning in their strangeness, I am convinced," said Langler.

"What did you do now?"

"What could I do? I walked back to Goodford village, informed the constabulary that I had seen Robinson, then, very tired, trudged up to Goodford House, only to hear that Emily had not gone to the church with the party, but had disappeared. However, I was examining the servants on the matter when Emily herself walked in."

"What had happened?" I asked.

"As she was about to set out with the party," he answered, "a note had been handed her, purporting to come from me, asking her to join me secretly on a matter of urgency at the Cart-and-Horse in Mins. So outré a thing, of course, alarmed her, and she started out in great haste. It was only when she got to the Cart-and-Horse, that, looking again at the note, she saw that the writing was not really mine, but a forgery. She then got a trap, and drove back to Goodford."

"Oh, there is something ominous in all this, Aubrey," I said.

"Well, so it seems," he answered. "The note purporting to come from me was handed to Emily by a still-room girl here named Charlotte, and was handed to Charlotte by a villager named Weeks. Now, I have had Weeks over from Mins this morning, and Weeks declares that the note was handed him by a dapper young gentleman, probably a foreigner, who met him a little outside Mins, and offered him five shillings for taking it to Goodford House. Weeks left the stranger sitting in the gloaming on the roots of a well-known yew on the road between Mins and Up

Hatherley."

"But what design," I said, "could this man have had in enticing Emily from Goodford at that particular time?"

"That is hard to say," answered Langler; "but you observe that I, too, was enticed from Goodford at that time by a promise which was kept by men whom we need not suppose to be scrupulous in the matter of keeping their word. What, then, could have been the motive of actually showing me the face of Robinson, as promised? It could only have been to draw me into the tower to his rescue, and so to my imprisonment. But remember that that imprisonment only lasted three-quarters of an hour at most, and during that short detainment it was that Emily was enticed to Mins. It would seem, then, that with the same motive her absence and mine from Goodford House during that particular three-quarters of an hour was a thing to be desired."

"It wasn't from Goodford that our absence was desired, Aubrey," cried Miss Emily, suddenly looking through the half-opened door, "but from Ritching church: for I was about to go to the church, and so did you mean to go to it from Hallam Castle."

Langler, it seems, had been constrained to tell her something of his adventures at the castle, and he said now, with rather a start: "well, then, it may have been from the church that our absence was desired."

"But for what reason in the world?" I asked.

"Who knows?" he answered. "Still, it does seem now to be so."

"But for what possible reason, do you imagine, Emily?" I asked again.

Miss Emily after a moment's silence answered: "how should I know? But quidquid latet apparebit! we shall know it all some day"—and, saying this, she was gone from us.

CHAPTER XI

BARON KOLAR ON THE MIRACLE

Going down the stair later in the day, I was met by Mrs Edwards hurrying up with her large face flushed, and she stopped a little to give into my ear like a cargo all that was on her mind. Her manner was ever homely, one might say petting and motherly.

"How did you sleep?" she said in a sort of whisper, "I hope you and the Langlers are not going to desert me, too: five of the others are off after lunch, and it is too bad, everything will be spoiled. If the miracle had only waited till—but God's will be done. What a thing! I haven't got over it yet, have you? Edwards says he will be at the telephone most of the day, and that Dr Burton will have to be a prelate or something. The Queen has been talking with him from Windsor about Burton and the miracle; the whole world seems wild with excitement; they say that no miracle was ever seen by so many reliable witnesses. Poor Edwards is up to the ears in it, I'm afraid he is not very pleased at bottom, and he puts the whole blame of it upon me, as though I had any power to interfere.... I oughtn't to have got up the church-party, he says—as though I could have foreseen.... Anyway, five of the guests are off, and Edwards says that Society will have to moderate its tone in face of what he foresees"—and some more of this kind.

I told her that I didn't think that the Langlers would be shortening their visit. "But as to Baron Kolár," I said, "is he among the departing guests?"

"No," she answered, "the baron stays on till Thursday. He was closeted an hour this morning with Edwards—Oh, that man! he is too incorrigible; he has told Lady Truscott not to be overwhelmed, since the miracle has some explanation—puts it all down to hypnotism—I must go." On this she ran on up, and left me.

Below I was at once struck by a difference in the tone of the house. I did not see Mr Edwards, and Baron Kolár too was missing. Langler told me that the baron was at Ritching Vicarage with Dr Burton, and when I mentioned to him what Mrs Edwards

had whispered me as to Burton's probable rise, his answer was: "well, that will be only fitting: moreover, Baron Kolár prophesied it, you remember."

The afternoon passed into twilight, and still I saw no sign of the Styrian, but an hour before dinner, as I happened to be strolling alone in one of the home-coverts separated by a path from the park, Mr Edwards, without any hat, broke through the bushes, dashing back his hair, and looking pestered. "Oh, Mr Templeton," he said, "have you seen anything of Baron Kolár?"

I said no.

"Hang the man," said he, "I have had four men out on his trail for an hour...."

I said that I had understood earlier in the day that the baron was at Dr Burton's.

"He was," answered Edwards, "but he isn't now. It is precisely about Dr Burton that I want to see him, for the Bishop of Lincoln offers Burton the nomination to the vacant Chancellorship and Residentiary Canonry, on condition that I accept at once. Properly speaking, you know, the whole job lies miles outside my interest, and I only wish——God forgive me."

"But why all the flurry?" I asked.

"Well," he answered, "the country, of course, looks to me now to rush Dr Burton into some Grand Lamaship—as though one could at a moment's notice like this! I assure you, Mr Templeton, soft isn't the word for the hundreds of unpractical suggestions that have been made me this day by leading men in the country, so what we are coming to from a business point of view is rather hard to say. Oxford is a place up in the clouds! and Cambridge isn't far below.... I don't seem to have even a spare deanery into which to fit Burton, and the whole to-do is rather hard on me—all extraneous work and worry—for I haven't studied Church-organisation! if anyone were to ask me who is the real head of it all as things are, the King or the Pope, I believe I'd be put to it to give him a straight answer. However, there's this Lincoln Chancellorship, and I'm hunting down Baron Kolár to see whether or not he'll have

it for Dr Burton just for the time being...."

At this I could not help exclaiming: "but what voice has Baron Kolár in the matter of the career of Dr Burton?"

"Oh, well," said Mr Edwards, "you would hardly see the inwardness of it off-hand by the light of nature, for it is delicate in a diplomatic way. You know that Baron Kolár fills such a place both in and out of the Reichsrath that he is one of the four men who really have the world's peace in the hollow of their hand, but perhaps you don't know by how far he is probably the most dangerous of the four, for the bottom meanings of that man's polity remain an unknown quantity, and in order to get at them you would have first of all to draw his teeth, for his mind lurks in a stronghold of which his teeth are the ramparts, and it takes a pretty tricky one to see much that's behind 'em. Anyway, the Foreign Minister of a country whose chief asset is peace would rather stand personally well with Baron Kolár with a view to sound sleep at night than with, I was going to say his—own—wife."

"Quite so," said I; "but still, what can be the grounds of this interest of the baron in Dr Burton? not political?"

"It is, somehow," said Edwards, "though I don't pretend quite to fathom the lees of this particular mind; but from the first he adopted Burton, and, of course, when a man like him chooses to chaperon a parish-priest up the mountains of preferment——"

At this point a clerk ran up to deliver some message to Mr Edwards, who went off with him, I, for my part, continuing my stroll through the covert till I came out upon a road, where the first thing which I saw was Baron Kolár's valet reclining in a meadow, smoking. I went through a gate to him, and asked where his master was. His answer was in the words: "perhaps can you that house there under see? there is he."

I knew the house to which he pointed: it is called Dale Manor, and was then the

home of two old maids whom I had long known as "Miss Jane" and "Miss Lizzie" (Chambers), for they were visitors at Swandale. How Baron Kolár had come to know them, why he was there, I couldn't guess; but, in good nature to Mr Edwards, I walked down three very steep fields, then down two lanes, to Dale Manor, in order to tell the baron that he was being sought.

This Dale Manor, certainly, was a very charming home. I pulled the bell-chain at the wall which surrounds the place, and, on being let in, caught sight of Miss Jane pacing, with gloves and scissors, among her flowers. I think that the sun had already set, and the scene in there was all one of bowery shades and peace and well-being. Miss Jane, I suppose, thought that I had come on a visit, and after asking some questions about the Langlers and the miracle invited me in. I then asked if Baron Kolár was in the house, to which she replied, with a smile: "yes—fast asleep."

"Asleep!"

"Sh-h-h!" she whispered, "he is just under that window there: my sister is watching over him; it must be nearly time for me to relieve her...."

I was too astonished to speak! My knowledge of the manner of life of these ladies, its English primness and reclusion, made all the keener my feeling of the oddity here, for certainly they would have consented to take turns in watching over the slumbers of no other male person, and I thought to myself: "well! such miracles are wrought by great men."

"I didn't know that you even knew the baron," I said at last.

"We have known him for five afternoons," answered Miss Jane in a hushed, but animated, manner—"since last Thursday! In passing by the Manor he fell in love with it, and rang the gate-bell. I happened to be in the gardens, and, being naturally startled, contrived to send for my sister, who after examining him through the spyglass from a window came down to us. It was so embarrassing at first! we had no notion what to make of the man suddenly sprung upon us, with his great satin jacket

and stream of talk, we couldn't, of course, know who he might be, for it was only after a long while that he let out that he was staying at Goodford. He led us round the grounds, criticising and admiring everything, then had the head gardener brought to suggest certain changes to him—and there is no doubt that he must be a past master of horticulture, forestry, and landscape gardening, you know—then he said that he was tired and thirsty, and had a headache, so we had finally to decide to ask him in."

"It must have been an event!"

"Well, we were certainly put out," answered Miss Jane, "and poor Lizzie has been taking lavender-water; for Barons Kolár do not grow on every bush, and it all came upon us like any thunderclap. He sat by that window in the drawing-room, talking, talking in his long-drawn way, and looking sleepy, while Lizzie and I glanced at each other, wondering what next, for my sister and I of course know what each other is thinking without needing to speak. Now, as it happened, Fanny, our between-maid, was ill, and Lizzie had been making some special milk-toast for her, so it occurred to Lizzie to give him some of it, with tea; she had made quite a pile, and never dreamt—anyway, it was brought in. Well, he began to eat languidly, but he kept on eating and talking, and, Mr Templeton, he ate up every scrap—yes, every scrap."

"Poor Fanny!"

"Yes, indeed. My sister and I glanced at each other when we saw the pile of milk toast going, going, and then gone. But he consoled poor Lizzie, who, if she has just a touch of vanity, is to be condoned on the score of her youth—you know, of course, Mr Templeton, that my sister is my junior by three years—he consoled her by saying that he had never tasted anything so nice; and it is only just to my sister to admit that she can make milk-toast. But he had hardly finished the milk-toast when he began to nod, and before we knew where we were we had him fast asleep on our

hands. He muttered afresh that he had a headache, that he wished to be allowed to sleep on the sofa, and that he would like his hair to be brushed while he slept! then he threw himself down, and was instantly asleep. Imagine our plight! What could we do, Mr Templeton? Lizzie, who was quite distracted, put a chair under his feet, and proposed to me to brush his hair! I simply would not! She maintained that it was my duty to assume the initiative, since I am the elder, but I could not see eye to eye with her, and at last, after a great deal too many words, she decided that, since it had to be done, and I would not, then she must, being the younger——"

"That was brave and charming of Miss Lizzie," I said.

"You think so?" asked Miss Jane, with a weighing look at me: "to tell the truth, we here are not much in favour of adventures and new departures, and rather affect the quiet old monotonies; but since you think so——At any rate, he slept for an hour; and every afternoon since then he comes, eats a pile of milk-toast, sleeps an hour, and has his hair brushed. What can we do or say? We are in the maze of an enchantment! Punctually as the clock strikes four his ring is heard at the gate, and in he comes, happy and smiling."

"It is an idyll," I said; "but I have an urgent message for him, if one may venture to disturb his Excellency's siesta."

"I fear he would hardly approve of being awakened," said Miss Jane; "but he won't sleep long now, I know. We might go in softly, and see them...."

On this we went in, to find Miss Lizzie, all brown silk and mitts, sitting in patient vigil over the Styrian, from whom came a note of slumber. To me nothing could have been funnier than this casting of his gross weight by Baron Kolár upon these dainty ladies, and at the sight of it I was afresh pierced with laughter. Miss Jane now took Miss Lizzie's place as watcher, while Miss Lizzie came to ply me with hushed questions about the miracle, till at last the baron opened his eyes, showed his teeth in a smile, moaned for happiness, and sat up.

I informed him that he was being sought by the Prime Minister, and presently, after some talk, we two left Dale Manor together for Goodford.

"Dear beings," he said happily to me of the Misses Chambers, "nice people, charming people, I like them. These are not women, oh no, they are angels. It is astonishing to what differentiations the human species lends itself: here in these ladies you have a type which is not the highest anthropologically, and yet may be as unapelike as the exactest genius of our age. Primitive creatures spent their lives in a passion of earnestness, seeking their food, and defending themselves from violence; but evolution is toward the appreciation of trifles. The earnestness of the engineer, of the statesman, is still brutish: he bestrides the world wild of eye, while to these ladies a parish is the world, tiny traditions are their life, whatever arises causes them to exchange a code of glances. Nice people, gracious people: their velvet manners, their cushions, their shaded interior—everything nice and luxurious, and, I assure you, they make very good toast—very good. Nor does it displease me to find them devoid of ideas, oh no, there is no need for them to say anything: merely as listeners they have a merit. I am only sorry that this so-called miracle has come to excite and unsettle them."

"But 'so-called,' Baron Kolár!" I could not help crying out: "surely you saw the miracle with your own eyes, like the rest of us!"

"Well, yes, I saw it," he said; "oh yes, I saw it, too. But this looks to me a case in which it would be well not to place too much faith in the senses. If we know that miracles cannot happen, then, when we see them, we can only regard them as due to some caprice of our fancy; and if Providence is warned beforehand that we shall so regard them, it will be the less tempted to trouble us with any. On the whole, a mood of impassive aloofness seems to me the wisest with regard to what we witnessed on Sunday night. Do not permit it to engage or modify you at all; just say to yourself: 'let the vulgar millions lose their heads, but let me and my friends watch them with

an impregnable eye.' Or do you not think that my advice is good?"

"On the contrary," I said, while a flush leapt to my face, "I think it even irreverent, baron—as an eye-witness of such a revelation must needs think it."

"Oh, you think that: well, you are right, too, in your own way," he answered. "A religion that was based on the senses would not be displeasing to me, even though somewhat displeasing to reason. Do not imagine me an enemy of piety. I only meant to suggest that the senses are not always sure avenues to knowledge. But you, now, believe that you have seen a revelation, and the dawn of an epoch: well, you are right, too, in your own fashion."

As he was thus droning we arrived before Goodford House, and the private secretary hurried out from a French window where he had been watching, to hail and greet the baron.

CHAPTER XII

THE QUESTION OF STYRIA

My half-promise to Mrs Edwards that the miracle should not shorten the stay of the Langlers at Goodford was too soon given, for on the Tuesday both Langler and Miss Emily begged me to return at once to Swandale with them; in fact, quite a number of departures was already proving the spirit of dissolution at work in the house-party.

"I do pity Aubrey," Miss Emily said aside to me on the Tuesday night: "there he stands smiling like a statue, but I know that he is tasting bitterness in the very valley. To any scholar of forty years it must be no fun to have to change his scheme of thought and life on a sudden; so what this miracle, or whatever you call it, must mean to Aubrey's touchy intellect and tremulous piety is more than I care to think on. Anyway it is certain that he must be in agony in his present company, and longing to be alone."

"Yes, that must be so," I agreed. "Well, let us go away, for we all need time and solitude to find room in ourselves for this new thing."

"Oh, as for me," she said, "I am in no rage to adjust myself to it: my soul can wait till his has won back to rest. Being a woman, I am less sensitive to evidence, you see, and tougher in the nerve; but poor Aubrey's elements are delicately mixed, and ah, he suffers."

"I understand that," I said; "perhaps it would be even well if I returned to London for the present."

She looked at me, saying: "don't say that; he needs you now, and wishes you to stay."

"And you?" I asked.

"Not what I will," she answered softly in Greek, "but what he."

We accordingly returned to Swandale from Goodford on the Thursday morning. But something of the old Sabbath was soon known now to have departed from our habit of life in the cottage, for the roar of the age reached even into our cloister, hampering the mood of that old world which we wished to inhabit. The very servants had new looks of unrest. Langler smiled doggedly, but was as one who ruminates bitterish herbage. He was much alone, questioning the oracles in the dells or in his study; and Miss Emily and I were much with each other.

She at least knew little quietness in those days, I think: I would spy her hanging about the door behind which her brother paced, and her fever about his state of mind became chronic. "The visits of this man must be terrible to him," she said of some sort of police-official from London who called about the happenings at Hallam Castle on the Sunday night of the miracle; Robinson had left no trace behind: so poor Langler was plied with questions, without having the least faith probably that the man with the note-book would see light where he himself saw none. And "it is so distressing," Miss Emily said to me during the third of the visits; "he keeps Aubrey

closeted an hour, and he is not pretty, his boots creak. I only wish that Aubrey could be coaxed into some change of scene; you ought to be able to get him to Paris, if you try. Have you noticed that for four days he has burned no incense at all in his rooms?"

"I wonder why?" I said.

"Perhaps he thinks it unbecoming now—I don't know; and he hasn't once played the usual chants since we have been back from Goodford. The old attitude to everything has to be all changed, twisted, readjusted, now. Deus meus! in what foreign world have we suddenly waked up?"

"Patience!" I said: "in time the new way will be seen to be the best."

"But the old pleases Cato all the same," she muttered, with a nod of stubbornness which belonged to her; "it is to be desired at least that the new way was not complicated by officers of the law."

As to this officer, Langler himself spoke to me that same evening when I happened to be in his study, saying: "you saw, Arthur, the officer who called to-day?"

"Yes," I answered, "I am afraid he must have bored you to death."

"Well, he means well," he answered, "and we are none of us perfect in grace and wisdom. This man in particular must be very impressed just now with the limitations of our human intelligence, for he stands almost ludicrously dumfoundered before the facts which we know about Robinson; dumfoundered, above all, before the fact that Robinson should have been shown to me in an unconscious state at Hallam Castle at the hour of seven-fifteen, and in that state should have been conveyed away through a peopled countryside without being seen, though by eight p.m. the constabulary had been warned by me, and have been searching for him ever since. Before the failure to find some trace the mind stands as staggered as if in the presence of unearthly agents. To the questions Where is Robinson now? in a house? in the grave? conscious? still unconscious? why can he contrive to give no sign? our minds can

begin to form no guess. Well, we are a small infantry, just wise enough to learn to be meek, and of few days, and full of trouble. But what I wanted to tell you as to this officer is that I took occasion to lay before him all we know about Father Max Dees in his Styrian dungeon, and to ask what I could do for this poor man."

I had forgotten Max Dees in the excitement of what had lately happened! "Well, what did the officer advise?" I asked.

"He seemed unreceptive of the whole matter," was the answer: "to people of stolid minds the unique is apt to seem unreal; and the mere fact that our knowledge of Dees was brought us by a wren appeared to obstruct this man's concern in the case. However, he remarked with truth that we had no evidence that, of the three Barons Gregor, the one whom we suspect is really the gaoler of Dees; that, in any case, the English police have nothing to do with the incident; but that, with regard to the Austrian authorities, my best course before approaching them is to 'make sure of the facts.' In truth, he doesn't half believe in Dees—the wren being to blame. The man actually recommended me, with a smile, to go myself to Styria in order to 'make sure of the facts.'"

"Well, that might be done," I said: "by all means let us go, for I would go, too."

Langler looked at me, and smiled, hardly taking me seriously, I fancy.

But this question of "going to Styria" was destined, alas, to arise again. The very next (Sunday) morning, in the breakfast-room, Miss Emily, to my surprise, said to me: "who, then, is Max Dees?"

As I knew that nothing had been told her of the wren's message, I could only think that she had overheard Langler's talk with me on the Saturday evening, and, anyway, had now to tell her all—of Dees' imprisonment, of his prayer "for God's sake," of our almost certainty that Baron Kolár was his gaoler, of the paper found at the inn at Mins stating that "Dr Burton is another Max Dees," of the disappearances, like Robinson's, which Langler had found to have been going on over Europe, and so on.

That morning Langler had not risen from bed—he had flutters of the heart—so I had time to tell a long tale, to which Miss Emily listened without comment, and remained museful throughout the day.

In the evening we were all at Ritching church to hear Dr Burton's farewell before his departure for Lincoln, and I don't know who took care of Swandale during the office, for Langler was now most strict in having every soul about the place at each church-service. He had risen from bed, and we three walked somewhat ahead, with the knot of retainers following. I have an idea that in some recess of Miss Emily's mind these church-goings were not regarded with emotions quite utterly saintly; but whatever resentment rankled in her she breathed no word of it, but went meekly in the pilgrimages with her brother.

We had started out early, so as to secure seats, and far off, as we walked down the road to Ritching, out broke the shambling brogue of the chimes. I thought then how, when Langler and I last heard those bells together, he had said that we heard them for "about the last time," and thenceforth all the evening there were ringing in my head like a sing-song the words: "[Greek: kai pulai adou, kai pulai adou]—and gates of hell shall not prevail against it." When we reached the church it was already full; but in the end I fancy that seats were found for all the Swandale party, though we were all separated throughout the office.

Dr Burton was assisted in the duty by his diocesan and two others, but spoke the address in person. His manner, I judged, was most meek, his throat choked, as of a man who has been struck dumb and has not yet recovered himself: I, in a seat far back, could hardly hear his words, though once, twice, as it were, the lion's voice lifted and vaunted a little, threatening wraths. However, one had little need to hear, in order to feel, Dr Burton that night, for his holiness by itself was as a focus of fire, pouring forth its power into all.

When it was ended, and our set met once more beyond the crowd, Miss Emily said

to me: "three-quarters of these folk have never seen Ritching before; half are from London: I saw Lady Agnew, the President of the Academy, and Dr Gootch, who has Aubrey's heart in his keeping. What do you say brought all these good people here?"

Her manner of speaking, I must say, seemed to me rather dry, and I answered shortly: "a pious need, no doubt."

"Not a hope to see in Dr Burton's church a repetition of the 'miracle'?" she asked: "not the lust of a new thrill?"

"How you can be cruel!" I whispered.

"But what went they out for to see?" she laughed. "Wherever Dr Burton preaches henceforth all England will be squeezing after him in the secret hope of a peep-show! and I prophesy——" But at that moment Langler joined us, and she was mum.

It was a gloomy night, without any moonlight, and during our return to Swandale groups of wayfarers trudged before and behind us, a strange sight, quite changing the mood of the countryside. Night, however, in the country merges everything in an enchantment, and in Swandale itself was once more nothing but fays and black shades. But even there, just as we were crossing the bridge to enter the cottage, a messenger from the world intruded to trouble us. It was a boy who brought a telegram—for me—which on going in I opened, and read the words: "Two fresh visions reported—one in village-church, Windau, Baltic, one in Bayeux Cathedral." It had been sent to me from London by a good friend of mine, the editor of a morning paper, and I handed it to Langler, who, having read it, handed it to Miss Emily.

It was at that moment that a thing new, I think, to Swandale took place—a spark of anger, a flush of the cheek: for Miss Emily, tossing the telegram aside even as she read it, let the heated words escape her: "oh, I am like Baron Kolár: I don't believe in miracles"; and then for the first time I saw Langler look with reproof at his sister.

"Emily," said he pointedly, "your words seem to me irreverent."

Miss Emily's cheek blanched. There was silence for a little while.

"Emily," said Langler again, "I ask you to take back those words."

Miss Emily sat down sharply on a chair by the table, having on still her hat and gloves, the little bird perched on her shoulder, her lips set. She answered nothing, and another most painful silence followed. I, for my share, did not know what to say, or where to hide myself away from such a scene so suddenly sprung upon us. I wished that the unhappy telegram had never come.

But after a minute of this silence Miss Emily's pallor rushed into pink, and the words broke from her in a heat not far from choking, and a strain of tears: "so, then, I am to abase my intellect before the incredible at your bidding, Aubrey! Then, I will say that I do believe in miracles, since such is your pleasure, Aubrey, but that I do not believe in this one."

"But this is precisely the only one that was ever well attested," said Langler, with a puzzled brow.

"Then, it is my whim to believe in the ill-attested, Aubrey, rather than in this," said Miss Emily, "since we are in the Inquisition, Aubrey, and expected to believe in miracles." She stopped a moment, and then went on, pouring out her words chokily, with stoppages: "I did not see the thing, I am not gainsaying my own senses, and to be charged with irreverence, Aubrey! Why was I not allowed to see it? Why were not you? To be charged with irreverence, Aubrey! The thing is not, so to say, 'the work of God'; it is related to the disappearance of Charles Robinson and of Father Max Dees, and of all the others, and to these two new 'miracles'—and Baron Kolár foreknew that it would happen in Dr Burton's church when he foretold Dr Burton's rise. And to be charged with irreverence, Aubrey! If you wish to find out the meaning of it all, go to a castle in Styria, for that is where the key lies—" and some more of this kind: guesses without proof, statements without form, but so sprung in a

pile upon our minds that Langler and I stood dumb before them.

Thus, at any rate, for the second time in two days, those words: "go to Styria," were broached in the cottage: a seed of bitter reaping.

Miss Emily went to a casement, and stood there looking out, while upon me Langler turned a look which I took to imply surprise that I should have spoken to her of Max Dees. For some minutes nothing was said; but presently Langler moved to the window, and laid his hand upon his love; whereat she heaved up to him a smile which beamed with beatitude: and at this I slipped away.

CHAPTER XIII

MISS LANGLER OUTRAGED

So peace was made. However, Langler did not sup with Miss Emily and me that night, nor was it till one p.m. of the next day that I saw him again, looking rather haggard, and it was then, for the first time (not the last!), that he made me the announcement that he would go to Styria.

"Yes," he said, "I will go."

"Well, and I also, Aubrey," I said.

"That is like you, Arthur," he answered. "Ah, yes, it is a high mountain, this, but I say that it shall be climbed."

"A short journey," I said. "When do we start?"

"At once," he answered, "while the grimness of it is upon us."

"To-morrow, then?"

"It shall be done!" said he; "but let us hasten slowly: Emily has first to be won over."

"Oh, I think that that will be all right," I answered, for I knew that Miss Emily desired a change for him.

"She may be alarmed," he said; "in any case, the question must be broached to her by degrees."

I answered nothing, but thought to myself: "then, it will be another week before we start."

He did not mention to me the grounds of this impulse to "go to Styria," but I assumed that the words of his sister, random as they were, had roused and set him furiously thinking, as they had set me. Indeed, the miracle had been very numbing to the intellect, as it were bludgeoning one's head, so I was glad to notice that afternoon an almost playfulness in Langler during a visit of Miss Jane and Miss Lizzie (Chambers), for it seemed to show that nature in him was at last roused to cast off a gloom which it found unbearable.

Still, this new gaiety of his was certainly a little forced, a little distempered. I was rather puzzled. Once when Miss Emily left the room, Langler seemed only to have waited for this in order to say to the Misses Chambers: "I am on the very verge of a voyage to Styria."

"Styria!" they said together.

"What, is Styria so remote?" asked Langler, leaning forward with a quizzing look. "I didn't say China, I said Styria—a two days' journey by the new rail-trains, with 'every luxury' en route! Do you imagine, then, that you will never see me again?"

"But can he be serious?" asked one of the ladies over her tea-cup: "Emily said nothing of it."

"Emily does not happen to know!" cried Langler—"that is something in store for Emily!"

"Then it is hardly a serious intention, since Emily has not yet been told."

"Who lives will see if it is serious!" said Langler.

"But Styria," said one of the ladies—"Styria sounds so mythical! Why Styria?"

"To open the eyes of the blind," said Langler in a deep voice, "to set at liberty them that are bound!"

The ladies exchanged glances; but before any more could be said Miss Emily came in with a plate of seeds, and Langler sat up straight.

Now, before this, Miss Jane and Miss Lizzie had been giving the story of Baron Kolár's visits; one afternoon lately, they said, the baron had come down from London merely to eat their toast; and they expected him again soon. This being so, I was surprised that Langler should be so unbridled as to publish to them his going to Styria to set free the baron's prisoner! To this day I am at a loss to understand him, though I suppose that he was somewhat distempered by the late events, and in a state of unreal levity. And the very next afternoon, when one of the Benedictines of Up Hatherley, an old college friend, called at the cottage, to him, too, Langler told his intention of "starting at once for Styria." All this time he had said not a word of it to Miss Emily, so that I found myself doubting whether his intention could be serious. When at last Miss Emily heard that we should perhaps be going, it was I who told it her in confidence.

That was just a week after Langler had assured me that his mind was made up to go: and it was during the evening of that same day on which I told Miss Emily of it that a group of Spanish peasants, moving homeward in the gloaming through some fields between the villages of Guardo and Villalba, in Palencia, saw wrought in mid-air by a mountain side a vision of the crucifixion, and dropped to the ground. I was in my own rooms when a message of it was brought me. It was after dinner; Miss Emily had gone to Ritching to see some sick, and when I went to look for Langler I heard that he, too, was not in the house. However, I presently found him down in the south-west, in a grape-arbour near the abbey, and handed him the telegram without a word. He, as he read it, rose slowly from his seat, with a paleness under the skin; for the news of these events had always the same effect upon the mind—awe mixed

with a very peculiar ecstasy—which did not diminish with repetition, for with each new alarm I was anew imbued with the same dream of the wind-up and term of the drama of time and the trumps of the tribunes of eternity. I saw the telegram tremble in Langler's hand; I heard him murmur: "another."

"Yes," I said, "another—the fourth." And I cried out: "Oh, Aubrey! where do we stand?"

He made no answer; his head was bowed; till presently he said: "let us go! why do we delay? let us go to-morrow."

"But am I not ready?" I cried.

"That is settled, then," said he: "we go. Emily shall hear it this night, and to-morrow we turn our backs upon Swandale and all our life here. It shall be done now."

"I am sure that you will be none the worse for it," I said.

"On the contrary," said he, "for ease and sloth are the very bane of the soul, Arthur, believe me. It is putting out from port to rough it that braces the ship's timbers! Well, let us launch forth: I at least am ready. So there is another now—the fourth."

"The fourth."

"From Heaven, Arthur?"

"Or from hell."

"Ah, talking of hell," said he, "just come now with me, and I will show you something in that tone."

He left the arbour, and I went with him down a dell towards the south-east of Swandale, till, near the great gate, he stopped at a certain larch tree on a brook's bank, peered at its bark, and pointed to it. It was already rather dark, but I, looking close, saw carved in large letters in the trunk the two words: "Don't Go."

"You see it?" asked Langler: "it was pointed out to me yesterday by John. You see, now, you see...."

I kept on gazing at the carving, while Langler looked at me, smiling, with his arms akimbo; and I thought to myself: "what a pity that our intention of going was ever divulged!"

"Someone seeks a quarrel with me, Arthur," said Langler: "you see now, you see. But perhaps I do not look dismayed."

"Of course not," I murmured.

"Let them threaten me," he said, "let them do their worst! They may find me of grimmer make than their present delusions of me conceive me. Wait, you shall see me give them their fit answer now."

"But why?" I cried: "no, Aubrey, pray, don't think of carving anything there"—for I saw him opening a pen-knife.

But he would not listen to me: "Allow me," he said, coming to the tree. I could do nothing to stop him, and stooping there during ten minutes, he carved under "Don't Go" the words "I Will." I was astonished at his conduct, and still cannot understand what end he imagined would be served by this ataxic defiance.

That same night he spoke to Miss Emily of our voyage, and from the next morning the business of making ready began. But this was not soon over! I had imagined that the packing of a trunk would be almost all: but Langler had many orders to give, and letters of farewell to write to his churchmen and wardens and fellows and professors; and by three in the afternoon it was seen that we could not go that day. Nor could we go the next, for Langler rose from bed with a pain in the heart and a pallor under his skin, and toward evening said to me in his study: "it seems callow, Arthur, for us to set out upon this enterprise without seeing our way before us: let us hasten more slowly, and at least provide ourselves with the proper introductions to people abroad."

"But isn't it rather a question of time, Aubrey?" I asked, for it began to seem to me that if we hastened any more slowly we should never get to Styria.

"Yes, most decidedly, it is a question of time," said he, "and each day that passes is such a care and qualm to me, such a disease and harassment, that if I break down under it, you won't wonder. Would that we were already gone—that we had gone long ago! Oh, Arthur, am I never to know sweet quiet and peace of heart again?"

I was taken aback! poor Langler said this with so much heart; nor did I quite understand ... since a voyage to Styria to make some inquiries did not seem to me such a task. Langler, of course, was an autochthon—had never been farther than Paris!—and I understood that he was loth to tear himself from his Armenian cushions, his roses, and the Greekish old routine of life in Swandale; but still, I could not see.... Each mind, however, knows the bitter tang of its own plight and entanglement.

"Well, well," I said, "but we have only to set out and you will feel better."

"I know it full well!" he answered, "but each day's delay has only made our departure the more irksome to me. If we had set out at once, as I begged you to, all our difficulties would by now perhaps have solved themselves. But when I think of that poor man in his dungeon, and of how each of the days which we have wasted here may be an age of pain to him, and of how much hangs upon our action—how much!—my limbs seem bound, and my sense of my guilt becomes hard to bear."

"Perhaps it is the heat of these last few days," I said.

"Certainly it has been hot," he answered: "one can hardly get one's breath; and to venture at such a time into southern lands——"

"Ah, but there is the sea-voyage," I said; "let us not think of obstacles, let us just go: solvitur faciendo."

"You are right," he cried, "right! That is just the word that we needed—solvitur faciendo! thanks for that word. Oh, Arthur, we have lost time—time that never comes back—the angel with the parting look. And think of what world-business depends upon us—so much. For mercy's sake, let us lose no more."

"That is agreed, then," I said: "we set out."

"But to what?" he asked suddenly. "We take a voyage into mist! Where exactly are we going to? What shall we do when there? Nothing is clear to me. Suppose we go and effect nothing, and have to return like Quixotes? Suppose there is no Max Dees, no Styrian castle, save in our brains? Shall we leave Emily alone, and our solid good.... Really, Arthur, a certain terror of the absurd is mixed for me with the other obstructions to this adventure."

"But that is what the police-officer thought of Dees," I said, "that he is a myth, and you called him stolid. What you were sure of now seems mist to you when it becomes a question of venturing your weight upon it, as Peter lost faith when he stepped out on the waves. But even if it is a myth, let us go and see, fearing nothing, not even the absurd."

"Well, that is bravely said, too," he answered: "let us go, then, let us go.... But tell me whether you do not think it better to get letters to the foreign personages first, and not go crudely like birds migrating without due support."

"As you please," I said, and said no more, for I did not see that we needed any letters.

However, he wrote for letters, and it was some days—I forget how many—before he had all of the number which he asked for. By this time our date of departure, our very train, had been fixed by Miss Emily, it was now three weeks since Langler had first mooted his idea of going, and by now scores of persons all about must have known that he was going, and when.

During the day before our departure Langler gave a last look to every part of Swandale, and re-entering the house near five p.m., had tea with Miss Emily and me. We were having tea when I heard a noise in a corridor, and on asking was told by Miss Emily that it was "Aubrey's trunks being taken to the station." I could not at first understand why they were being taken that night till, on glancing through the

door, I saw almost a cartload of baggage (swelled by books!). Miss Emily and I, standing at a window, she with the wren on her shoulder, watched all this luggage being put upon a cart—Langler had now left the room—and driven away; but a minute after it had gone Miss Emily, crying out something, ran from my side, and out of the cottage. I saw her hurry across the bridge, heard her call after the driver, who had disappeared, and soon she too disappeared beyond the bridge.

I assumed that she had run to give the man some forgotten instruction, and expected her back soon; but when she did not come I was not at all anxious, since I had no reason to be so. I was reading Bellarmine, I remember, in a wicker chair that rocked me, and it became so dark that I could hardly see the print. I heard Langler playing Gregorian chants on the organ in the oratory, for he had the habit of playing chants about that hour of the evening, but had rather given it up since the miracles.

Well, I was thus reading in the half dark when, suddenly, a man stood before me—the driver of the cart, who, having left the luggage at the station, was now returned. He seemed unable to speak: if ever I saw awe it was in that man's face; when I asked: "what is it?" his breath burst from his lips in his vain effort to answer me; his face rolled with sweat. At last when he was able to say something, it was in the words: "Miss Langler—come with me—don't say anything——"

I sped with him past two astonished girls in the passage out of the cottage, he taking the way to the south-east, but having already run far he had now to make stoppages, and so hard he found it to speak that we had gone over a quarter of a mile, and were near the great gate, before I could gather from him aught of what was in his mind. He had led me down a path that ran between a brook and a rose-tree hedge, till we were within sight of the carriage-road, and there in a sort of glade, where a larch stood by the brook's bank, he stopped, and pointed—the same larch on which had been carved "Don't Go" and Langler's "I Will." At the foot of the tree, in a patch of reeds, I saw a female form lying like one asleep, or unconscious, or dead. It was my

poor Miss Emily. When I peered nearer I perceived that her left hand had been pegged to the tree by a big nail. But she did not know it, nor reck, she lay in sleep, without any pain or care, her lips a little open, and two poor tears of her truce had trickled down her cheeks.

While I was still gloating over her I was aware, to my woe, that Langler was with us: one of the girls in the house, on seeing me run out, must have warned him of something wrong, and he had hasted at a rounder rate, though a sorry runner, than the exhausted man who had brought me could come; but the effort had been altogether too large for Aubrey's gauge: he was awfully breathed and gaunt. I saw him stand off, peering gingerly at his dear, asking: "what is it?" with his cheeks peaked up, poor Aubrey: and I had to leave her pierced, in order to turn to him.

CHAPTER XIV

CANTERBURY

After this weeks passed before we knew whether Miss Emily would live or die, and the existence of Max Dees and of Styria was forgotten in Swandale, for our poor friend took a delirious fever, and had three relapses, so we others dragged our lives through many a black day while hers hung in the balance: weeks of watching: leaving not much outstanding in the memory, save the fact of a certain new quarry—a puny affair perhaps, but for ever associated in my mind with the nightmare of that time, and somehow lending to it a strange awfulness; for it happened that someone had lately opened a quarry some miles north of Swandale, and was blasting the rock: so fifteen, twenty times a day we would hear it, not loud, but clear, a knock at the north door of heaven, and two seconds later an answer sounded in the south of heaven: and each time Langler would look at me with such a smile. So that this sound of blasting, all mingled as it was with Miss Langler's fight for life, has still for me whenever I hear it meanings the most momentous, as it were

rumours of the guns and din of Armageddon, and the arbitrament of the doom of being. In the end, however, I managed to make terms with the owner, and the noises ceased.

About the same time—i.e. towards the end of the year—hope brightened for our wounded friend, and my mind found some breathing-space to think out what I could do for her brother, who had been very gravely shocked and cowed. After a time I would get him into his study at night, and there read to him his accumulated correspondence, with a view to weaning his thoughts from a room three corridors away; for the letters, being mainly from men in the whirlpool, were full of history, and such as to reawaken his interest in things. Also I insisted upon answers to some of them being dictated to me; and also, at last, I read to him a little from books and newspapers.

At midnight of Christmas Day I was thus reading to him through the noise of the cascade, made noisier that night by stormy weather, when he said: "Europe and America, then, are again Christian in an ancient sense. How many visions in all have now been seen?"

I found among the newspapers on our half-round settle one containing a list of the miracles, with their dates, and saw that their number was twenty-three.

At this Langler seemed to wince, and we sat cowering over our wood fire in a bitter rumination, till after a while he said: "I have nothing to do with the defect in the world's fate, and don't wish to cause my voice to be any more heard: but still, Arthur, consider how the sins of nations do find them out."

I was pleased at his new tone of interest, but said that I did not know to what he referred.

"I refer," he answered, "to this proposed 'weeding out' of our refuse populations by the 'lethal chamber' method, and to the growth among men of a certain brute directness with which the nineteenth century was less tainted. Mind you, I interfere

in nothing; but don't let us hide from each other the existence in our minds of certain ghastly suspicions with regard to these visions; and if such a thing can be, however large-minded the motive, think of it, Arthur! The growth of such a brute directness can only be the penalty, subtle yet terrible, of some sin in the body politic; nor is any seer needed to see that that sin is the mere discussion of such a step as this wholesale 'weeding out' of men's lives."

"I, too," I said, "have felt that such a thing was brutalising."

"But it is beastly!" he hissed. "Man's evolution, certainly, is henceforth in his own hands; but to want to beget taller sons with a strain of the thug in their blood! It is an instance, and a chief cause, of that brute directness which is tainting society, which perhaps culminates in these miracles, which I myself have experienced——"

"Never mind," I murmured.

"To strike me through her——"

I said quickly: "but this purpose of 'weeding out' the submerged seems to have died since the miracles, for the people are now Christian, Aubrey, in deed as well as in creed."

"But before we rejoice, let us ask for how long!" said he. "If what we have dared to suspect of the miracles—that they may be none—be true, is it not probable that they involve some plot unfriendly to the Church? We have sure knowledge, for that matter, that someone who need not be named between us is no friend of churches. Since, therefore, the Church flourishes by the miracles, it can only be, if there is a plot against her, that the miracles will in time be shown to be none: in which case, think of the moral swing back, huge enough perhaps to wreck the frame of society."

I said nothing, and for some time we bent over the fire in a silence of wormwood.

"Is there a plot?" he began again: "if there is, I believe with her who lies hurt that the key to it may be found in a castle of—Austria. But anon, when I remember that we here are the only three in the world into whom such a doubt has entered, it strikes

me as even impious——"

"There is also Rivers who doubts," I said. "Lidcott, by the way, has written you an account of Rivers' secession and 'new religion' in Littlemore—a 'religion' with a following of six! Lidcott's letter also contains one from Burton about Rivers' secession: I'll read it you now, if you like."

"Well, then," said he; so I got and read the letters.

Rivers was an Oriel man of very brilliant reputation, one of the younger group of leaders of the so-called "Liberal Movement"—a church-party which had been making some noise in the world just before the miracles; he was a contemporary of Langler and myself, so we were familiar with his personality and church-idea, which had been called "anti-romantic"; he was one of the warmest admirers of Langler's criticism, and had set to sweet minor music some of Langler's songs. Well, when the miracles began, Ambrose Rivers, alone of thinkers, for some reason or other broke off from the Church, and started a new "religion" in Littlemore—with a following of six; and Dr Lidcott's letter to Langler was a description of this new flight of Rivers', containing also the following from Dr Burton: "The Chancery, Lincoln, In Festo Sanct. F. Xav. My dear Lidcott,—The tragedy of Rivers has been as great a heaviness to me as to you and the rest; how mysterious, too, now, when our Light is come. Can nothing be done even now? It was a branch loaded with flowers and fruit, and though the very canker was in them, it is hard to see it lopped off at a stroke. Do reason with him, then, still a little; but, if he be obdurate and damned in error, you will leave him to the tormentors, warning him that the day is even at hand when Holy Church will no longer spare dissent and rebellion, but everywhere on the front of that chief of crimes will brand her effective anathema. Verbum caro factum est, et habitavit in nobis. Farewell. On the 13th inst. I leave this for St Paul's. Miserere mei, Deus, asperge me, Domine, hyssopo, et mundabor; and you, pray for me.—In haste, yours faithfully in Xt., John Burton."

"Well," said Langler when I had read the two letters, "but Rivers' doubt of the miracles is due to some trait of a wayward mind, if not to some wisdom of the man's really divine genius; but in our case the doubt has grown out of facts which have come before us, and since those facts are very meagre I say that our doubt sometimes strikes me as impious. I think, however, that it will be justified if Dr Burton's rise so continues as strikingly to fulfil the prophecy that he is 'destined to be the greatest of churchmen.'"

"Oh, you think that," I said.

"Yes," said he; "for, if there is a plot, there is no difficulty about divining its purposes: we can say with assurance that those purposes are, firstly, to raise the Church to the height of power, in which case what she will surely do was foreseen: she will become harsh, will clash with the modern spirit. And to make this clash doubly certain a number of brisk churchmen would naturally be chosen out by the plotters to become generals of the Church—of whom Burton was chosen for England. It is so. For we read of Burton: 'I am sure that he will do for England: he is another Max Dees, as arrogant as he is brilliant, a union of Becket and Savonarola.' Now, it is clear that the 'Savonarola' and the 'brilliance' in Burton are one, and the 'Becket' and the 'arrogance' are one: for who was Becket? an arch-priest who flouted the civil power. Therefore, if there is a plot—for I state nothing, I interfere in nothing—if there is one, I say that the Church is to be pushed to clash with the civil power. And now suppose, secondly, that at the height of that clash the miracles be shown to be none; and suppose further, thirdly, that it be then made to appear that these false miracles were contrived not by the enemies of the Church for her ruin, but by churchmen themselves for their own rise and rule: well, then—what then?... And shall no man be found to meddle in this, one with heart, head, hand, Arthur, though a sword pierce his own heart?"

"I mean to meddle in it somehow," I said suddenly.

"Beware, however, Arthur," he murmured. "I too feel the muth to venture—if it be not already too late.... In any case, let us hasten slowly, and wait till our doubt acquires some little certitude. I say that something of certitude will be ours, if Dr Burton's rise becomes so marked——"

"But surely, Aubrey," I said, "we need not wait for that. Look at things in Germany and Russia, look at France: in France ever since the Separation Act, the Church was a dead thing; then came the miracles, and to-day France is on her knees. It is touching: there never was an age so hungry for faith. This week there have been eleven pilgrimages in France alone to the spots of the miracles—caravans counting their hundreds of thousands. Things have been moving, you know. Italy is more a theocracy now than under Alexander VI.; one quarter of the Austrian Abgeordneten House is already given over to churchmen; in our own election in October forty people of churchman type were tided into Parliament, and in the Lords the bishops awe, so how it would be there under Dr Burton one may imagine; when Burton was preaching at St Paul's crowds vaster than the cathedral could contain waited all the night through—nowhere, it seems, are there enough churches, and women hourly swoon in the crowds round certain churches; not a few rich men have stripped themselves to endow the Church; as for charity, here is the high day of Christ's sick and needy: everyone is giving apparently, everyone is muttering prayers—merchants over their cargoes, doctors over their charges; in November two New York negroes, by pretending to have seen the vision on a country-road, and asking for funds to open a church, became vastly rich, and now have disappeared; even the bourses have caught the rapture, gambling is going out, all sorts of personal oddities of behaviour and costume abound, as in Puritan days, saints arise, newspapers no more print certain kinds of matter, in the Commons during prayers members are as if in pews; as for the Nonconformists, they are hardly any longer even the political clubs and caucuses which they had become, since most of them have gone over to the Church of the miracles. If you would bear to hear me read, you would see for

yourself the millionfold modification of everything. A certain Father Mathieu, in whose church at Windau the second of the visions appeared, is followed by multitudes to be healed by his touch; while the once Vicar-Apostolic of Bayeux, a man of Burton's very temper, is now Metropolitan of Paris. It was about him, by the way, that I wanted to tell you, for since his rise is complete, we needn't wait for Dr Burton's to become so, in order to get that certitude as to a plot——"

"Well, let that be so," said Langler; "but ah, Arthur, what touch shall be found, both gentle and strong, to heal all this fevered world? If the Master were indeed here, with the stars of night in his eyes! As for me, I confess, my longing is for escape. I have read a tale of a tiny world which struck our earth, tore up a field or two, and carried off someone into space——think of that!—the dumb empyrean, the leisure to be a man, the starry dream, and in those grassy graves, too, of Ritching churchyard——"

"But things are as they are," I murmured; "we can't escape them."

"True," he answered; "life is a sterner dreaming than dreams, but surely a diviner; and in His plan be our good."

"Well, then," said I, "this being so, what I, for myself, propose to do now is to write a letter to the Styrian authorities, stating what I know of Father Max Dees, and giving hints as to the place of his imprisonment, without breaking any law of libel. Dees may thus be liberated; whereupon, if he knows anything of a plot, he will divulge it."

"Well, we might think that over," said Langler, "and see if we find it to be our duty."

In the end this was determined upon between us, and from the next morning I set about it, writing first to consult my solicitors as to the proper authority to whom to address ourselves: this, they answered, was the Public Safety Bureau of Upper Styria; so Langler and I set to work to draw up the document, and on the 7th of January it was posted.

This work quite warmed us anew, and we were eager for a reply, sometimes discussing whether it would come in one week, in two, or in three: but a month passed, Miss Emily was being allowed to sit up, and no reply had come.

Those were the days when England was at the height of the excitement over the disappearance of the Bishop of Bristol. On the death, three weeks before, of Archbishop Kempe, the question who would succeed him had raised a simmering of interest, not in church-circles only, but in the nation: a very distinguished Cambridge man was a rumour, also Dr Todhunter, Bishop of Bristol, while Dr Burton, now Bishop of Winchester, was the popular choice. For us at Swandale, however, only two of these were really in the running, for we lived too near to Goodford not to know that Mr Edwards would never of his free will set such a spirit as Burton over the province of Canterbury. Edwards' majority in the House was now only twenty-three, and, apart from that, everything in him shied at Dr Burton's whole State-idea and order of mind; so when Dr Todhunter's appointment was made known Langler said to me, "you see, now, it is as we said."

Three days after Edwards' letter of invitation to Dr Todhunter the doctor wrote to Langler, stating that he had accepted the primacy, and closing with a very tender reference to our wounded friend. We two had known and loved him since undergraduate days, and Langler in particular had a kind of devotion for the classicism of his style and preaching. Who, in fact, that ever knew him could fail to revere him? When only fifty his mass of hair was quite wool-white, and no saintlier face, surely, ever lifted towards the skies. Well, his election by dean-and-chapter had taken place by the 17th of February; on the 19th the archbishop elect took a trip to London, meaning to be back in Bristol by the 21st; but from the hour of two p.m. on the 20th nothing appears ever to have been seen of him. At that hour of two—high daytime!—the old man parted from the Rev. William Vaux, Dean of the Arches, on the pavement in Whitehall, and—walked away into nothingness; nor, I think, has one ray of real light ever been thrown upon his disappearance.

I can almost feel again, as I write, the mood of those days. One sometimes lost control of oneself! one had seizures of excitement, could hardly utter one's words! Langler in particular was strongly moved: his cheek at one spot would go pale, and quiver. By the 24th or 25th we at Swandale began to understand that Dr Todhunter would never more be seen; and I said then: "No! he will never more be seen; and in two months from to-day—wait and see!—Dr Burton will be primate of England."

"But will he consent?" asked Langler, pale with excitement: "does he not already—suspect? Will he plug up both his ears against a hundred whispers that already throng in his consciousness?"

What grounds Langler had for assuming these "hundred whispers" in Dr Burton's consciousness I do not know; but, if it was a guess, it may have been a shrewd one, for I have seen a letter of Burton's written about then, in which twice, occurs a certainly very suggestive prayer against "the deceitful man": "ab homine iniquo et doloso erue me"—twice in one letter.

However this was, it was soon beyond doubt that Dr Burton would not only be invited, but would accept the primacy. The rumour grew and grew. The Prime Minister, in fact, must have been under the strongest pressure to invite Burton, and after a struggle with fate, with his hair, and with the wire-pullers, had to give in. Mrs Edwards herself, who drove over one afternoon from Goodford, told us so much; and by the middle of March it began to be taken for granted that Dr Burton would be metropolitan of Canterbury. I remember the date very well, for just about that time Baron Kolár came down to Goodford for one afternoon to repose himself, to eat the Misses Chambers' toast, and sleep on their sofa, and have his hair brushed; and it was that same day—either the 14th or 15th of March—that the weak voice of our friend said to her brother: "you should go to Styria, since it is so." It was a rough evening, before the candles were lit, and we two were sitting beside her cane chair by her fire; and Langler, with his brow bowed over her hand, answered: "yes, I will

go, since I should. We have written a letter to the authorities in those parts, and are waiting for their answer, but if it does not come within a week—or two—I shall do as you bid me."

CHAPTER XV

OUR START

Ten more days passed without answer from Styria, and I was daily awaiting Miss Emily's word: "You should start now."

She had left her room on the 22nd, and I can see again in fancy our friend as she was that day, with her hair somewhat lax, and the little wren on her bosom; she was palish, but one would hardly have thought that she had come through a great illness, and more laughter than I could quite account for, than quite pleased me perhaps, was on her lips.

Those were warm days in which much more than the daffodil had blown in Swandale, and on the 25th of the month our friend went out of doors. Towards evening she and I were in the pavilion—for I find that I must tell something as to her and me, and since I must, will tell it more or less verbatim, with reporter's blankness, as well as I can remember. We, then, being in the pavilion (a circular temple at the end of an oblong of water), she said to me: "those groups of lily-leaves on the lake looking like ears must remember the music which Aubrey and I made here most nights last summer. They will never hear us more. We used to sit in that recess there, and this is the cupboard where we put up the violin and harp." (A series of cupboards and old chairs went round the wall, and there were chambers within the thickness of the marble, each with its big window and seat; in one of the cupboards I saw still a harp in a bag.)

"But the water-lilies will hear you and him again, Emily," I answered.

"Will they? What name shall we give him, Kitty-wren?" she asked of the bird, "let's call him Mr Hopeful, Mr Butterlips; let's screech him down with nicknames, Jenny"—whereat the bird from picking at the scab in her palm broke, as if in answer, into chattering, so that we had to smile: indeed, this tiny brown being that had come to us so strangely with its message from Styria, and would never leave us, was seldom silent even in the winter, and now in the spring would sometimes scatter one's talk with its showers of music. Miss Emily touched its cocky, short tail, saying: "Jenny knows! and the water-lilies know, too: they are never to hear us more. Birds and herbs and women: they are in the original obiah-dodge, and know what they do know."

"Women above all," I remember saying, though my heart was sore for her and for me.

"Look at her now!" she cried—"perched right atop of the harp, screaming something: the devil's in the bird, I think—pneuma akatharton echei!" This she said with a laugh, but when the bird now suddenly hopped upon her she stepped back from it with grave looks, brushing it off, murmuring, "get away, you, go"; and at this I found myself bowed over her drawn left palm, choked with her name; for she was no longer herself, and feelings surged within me which cannot be told; but as I held her hand, she first looked gravely at me, and then, to my wonder, began to hum the common song: "two in a bed," whereat, with playful reproach, I murmured "Gregorian," and let go her hand. Just then, the bird settling afresh upon her, she said to it: "well, come then, Kitty-wren: though you be the banshee, the very moth of death, I sha'n't shun you—not though your mood be all of shrouds, and of thundery lone nights in the ground, and good-bye all. Still, you were sick, you know, and I nursed you, I have fed you, and watered you, and cleaned you, and tamed you, and loved you, and you have a devil against me, Jenny."

"Oh, but, Emily," I said, "this little bird begins now to take up too much of your

thoughts!"

She did not answer me, but remarked thoughtfully: "she has baseness in her nature; yes, she makes a show of affection, but how flightily she forsook me that evening! I was just by that whitethorn bush out there, looking down at the water-lilies, and she was on my left shoulder, when suddenly she flew away, and before you could say 'Jenny!' a wet cloth was over my face, my mouth was crammed, and the scream of my being made no sound in my ears. Yet I have a sort of memory of a man, a masked man, a lanky man with a stoop, so strong, so rude, dark as death, cruel as the grave——"

"But, Emily, you speak of that?" I cried.

"Aubrey isn't here to hear," she said in a confidential way, "so it is nothing. Let me talk. There's something in mere blackness without one ray, in ravines without bottom, in bitterness so bitter that it churns to cud in the chewing. You don't know how strong he was: I struggled with him, but I was like a straw in his grasp; and when I felt myself going, and no succour nor ruth in the world, and the large darkness glooming, why then I sighed and was reconciled, and I chewed the brash of the grave like black bread, and it was boon and good to me."

When I began now to reproach her for such melancholies she hummed a catch of Langler's—

"In its dash Showers down the rill,"

then at once ran to a window, crying: "look, you can see the whitethorn from here; I must have been dragged at least forty yards from it——" but I would no longer hear her, but drawing her down to the window-seat, said, "hear me, dear Emily: you are not well, you are still far from well, and for some days I have determined to ask you whether you do not see that it would be well for you now to end my ordeal. If I have the right——"

"Which right, Jenny?" she cried: "here is a young man who wishes to sleep two in a

bed with me—two in a bed, bed, bed, bed, bed! but he will never sleep two in a bed with me, I think."

At these words I was so alarmed for her and pierced with pain, that I could only bow my head over her knees, and I used the word "mercy."

"Mercy?" said she, "is it she who lives in Cuckoo-town? But you have not waited long."

"Five years."

"Is that long? madly, dyingly long?... But it is only four."

"The fifth has long since begun."

"Has it? Truly? You might have reminded me!"

"On the morning when it began I begged of you a rose as symbol, and you would not give it."

"Is that so? But perhaps I might have given some forget-me-nots, only there were none.... You see, there's failure in you somewhere, Arthur, there's a troubled light about your eyes, you were not born to make a mother of me: you should buy an urn, Arthur, to blubber in."

"Well, I must, since you pronounce me so unfortunate," I said; "but after four years and nearly a half of hope and promise——"

"Not promise."

"But of hope so warm——"

"The conditions remain: I have a brother." "But, Emily, you care——"

"For him."

"Alone?"

"They say the flowers grow fresher on maids' graves, Arthur: have you ever heard say that?"

"Yes, but hear me: a day had to come when you must leave Aubrey—only for a time, only partially—and for over a week it has seemed sure to me that it is come now. You should be taken from Swandale, you should enter upon a new life—only for a time. Hear me, Emily: you have been fearfully ill, nigh to death; turn to me, say that you will come——"

"To Styria?"

"Styria! Of course, I did not mean Styria."

"Then, where does the man mean, Kitty-wren?" cried she: "he is talking in Nephelo-coccugia, he hears a toll and thinks it a marriage-bell, I am sure he is bewitched, he has blinkers on his eyes and morris bells on his fingers: let's scream at him, and stop his dancing; he will take worms to his bed, and be hugging them for his warm darling: Heaven guard us from such a carle!"

"But pray, pray," was all that I could say, for a hunger and pity of her possessed me.

"I am only telling you the truth," she answered, "your luck has leprosy, your godmother must have been cross-eyed; and have I ever vowed to be one Mrs Templeton, with your ring round my finger, whispering: 'this is my body'? I don't remember! I knew you when you were a young boy, and I had a dream of you one night in which something said into my ear nothing but 'Arthur, Arthur, Arthur'—just 'Arthur, Arthur, Arthur' for years, and nothing else—a rum dream. But 'wife!' 'wife!' shrilled the thrush, and the cuckoo answered, 'all gone,' 'all gone.' 'Wife' is a bird-word, Jenny, it has no equivalent in my language. 'Wife!' sing 'wife!' My tongue is too thick to sweet it."

"Mine isn't," I said, "if you will hear me say it. Emily, look at me, I am praying you——"

"Idolatrously: I am wood and stone. Still, let me hear you say it."

"Say what?"

"'Wife': to hear how you pronounce the fluty f-sound and the deep i and the wallowing w."

"Well, since that pleases you, I say—'wife.'"

"Oh, but so sheepishly? without unction? Hear me say it—'wife.'"

"Well, so I too say it—'wife.'"

"Yes, that's strong. But you still speak of this? You still hope for such a thing of me, really?"

"But may I not? Only to be allowed to take you——"

"To Styria?" she repeated: "oh, Arthur, the colour of your eyes and mine don't match, you were not fashioned to be the father of a houseful of sons, they would all squint. Deus meus! doesn't the enthronisation of Archbishop Burton take place to-morrow, and will you not be going to Styria the day after, or the day after?"

"I do not know that," I said: "we are waiting for a letter from the authorities there."

"But if no letter comes? Will you not be going? Will you let Aubrey go alone?"

"I am far from certain that Aubrey is going! There are pits and perils——"

"He shall go," she said, "though they pierce my side, too, so that out of it gush blood mingled with tears; he will go of himself, because he should, and he shall go, because I will tell him to."

"I know that he will if he should," I answered; "but should he? What has Aubrey to do with the world's trouble? As for me, I tell you, Emily, that I care for nothing in the wide earth——"

"But care you must! Kitty-wren has come, the gripe's on," said she, "and if she hath a devil we must nourish a God in us, to match it. There is no escape, we are under orders, and care we must, go he shall, and you with him, though they crucify him and you, and though they fix every muscle of me to a different tree."

"But why did this bird come to us?" I thought then in my pity: "there was the world

for her, and she came to Swandale"; and some despair in our friend's face seemed to say to me, "yes, she came to us, to me, to you, not to others, but to us: it stands recorded, two Gods are in it." Her face showed wannish in that twilight against her violet velvet and her furs, for the shades of night were gathering, and we looked aside through the window upon the darkling oblong of water in silence, since I could find nothing to answer her, nor any way out of the entanglement in which my feet seemed to be engaged; anon her large plush hat touched my face, anon she fingered the chords of the harp, while the bird on her shoulder twittered its song. At last I said to her: "let it be as you wish, Emily: but is a journey to Styria such a great matter? We will go, and we shall return. Nothing shall be strong enough to restrain me from returning, if you say that my ordeal shall then come to its conclusion."

She looked with sorrowful eyes over the water, and after some minutes she murmured: "only return safe with him, and I may be fond to you, Arthur."

We dallied there a goodly time after this, till some of the star-glints were lit all amid the lilies of the pool; the little bird became sullener or sleepy, and barely lisped anon; I saw a tear steal down the cheek of our friend, as she commenced to hum, and then to sing wistfully, and to twang out on the harp one of those artificial little hymns of her brother, whose austere, sad music had long been dear to our hearts: it was his Serenade, already at that time set to music by the many-minded Ambrose Rivers of "New Church" notoriety:

"In its dash Showers down the rill, Raving of the hill (Graves are on the hill), May its streams Mingle with thy dreams. Rove with Robin, love: Mumble in thy brain Murmurs of the main.

For the cock Drawleth as a-yawn, Dreaming of the dawn (Hoarily a-dawn), And a-mount Showereth the fount. Almond-drugged the garth, Showery besprayed, Hoarily arrayed.

And of God Worthy is the sight, Worlds are in the night (Walkers of the night), And

He calls Westwardly His thralls; Gorgeous large they glide, Wardedly like sheep, Walkers in a sleep.

And a brawl Craveth in this breast, Craving thee and rest (God in thee and rest), And a roar Droneth to the shore. Dashing raves the rill, 'Lazily they lie, God it is to die.'"

Her rendering of it was berippled all the while by the whispering tongue of the wren, and when she finished I said to her: "you see, the water-lilies have heard at least you once more, Emily, and there is hope, for Mercy is only in Cuckoo-town in so far as Cuckoo-town is in heaven. But we should go back to the cottage now, for the stars are looking out in crowds, and it is beginning to grow cold."

She came with me, and we paced back by the margin of the pool, through the wood, and up a dell, to the cottage. All laughter had gone now from her lips, her steps were laggard, for she was easily wearied and emptied now; and I held her poor hand all the way.

As we entered upon the bridge, there stood Langler at a door of the cottage, a letter in his hand, which, when we had gone into the dining-room, he handed to me openly before Miss Emily. It was the letter from Upper Styria come at last, signed by a certain Oberpolizeirath Tiarks, whose face I was destined one day to see. I read it with a greed which I could not hide. But it consisted mostly of a gorgeous heading, the writing being in two lines only, and these cold enough but for their salute of "high-born sir!" It merely acknowledged the receipt of our "honoured but somewhat insubstantial [ungegründet!] communication"; and there it ended.

It was for this that we had waited! The paper was actually perfumed.

It had upon me an effect of gloom, and I felt now that our departure was about to be, but nothing was said of the letter at dinner, nor was it till near ten in the night that we three met to talk of it in Langler's study. Miss Emily closed the shutter, we felt like plotters, and laid our heads together with low voices. Our friend seemed now quite business-like and herself: she proposed that we should leave England in four

days' time, our purpose of going being kept quite secret meantime, and that I should start first, to await Langler in London. All this was arranged; also that Miss Emily should stay mainly with the Misses Chambers during our absence, and it was not till towards one in the morning that, at the third knocking of a nurse, we rose and parted to go to bed.

After all this I was naturally not a little surprised to hear Langler say the next morning to his old butler, Davenport: "Davenport, I am about to take a long voyage from home, as you will soon see for yourself!" It was a propos of nothing! The old fellow had brought in some sour milk, and was retiring, when Langler stretched back his neck and made the remark! No one, indeed, could be safer than old Davenport, but still, the confidence seemed so needless.... "But it is a secret, Davenport," I said pointedly.

Well, I left Alresford for London that evening, and from the next morning, the 27th—the morning after Dr Burton was enthroned—set to work to gather all the information which would be useful to our undertaking: I engaged an agent, named Barker, to accompany us, I wrote letters, did business, relearned German and the map of Styria, kept clear of friends, and even bought a number of things, including some revolvers. On my second morning in London I got a letter from Langler, and another the next morning, with a note from his sister: he said that he was ready, and would be with me at three p.m. of the 29th.

During the evening of the 28th, I being at home alone, reading, a letter was handed me, consisting only of the three words: "All is known," scribbled across half-a-sheet of note-paper, with a criss-cross for crest. After much reflection I made up my mind not to write of it to the Langlers, but it robbed me of sleep that night.

At three p.m. the next day I was at the station to meet Langler, but he did not come, and from then I underwent the keenest anxiety till six, when I got a telegram: "About to start now"; and near nine Langler, thick in furs, stood smiling before me, with the

words: "eh bien, me voici."

"The luggage below?" I asked.

"No, I took it direct to Victoria."

"Oh, but I thought, Aubrey, that you were to bring it here, as the safest way?"

"Well, to save a double nuisance...."

"All right: I hope it doesn't matter. And as to Emily?"

"Well, thank God, and strong in heart."

"And you, how do you feel after the voyage?"

He smiled in his wistful way.

"Well, let us dine," I said, pulling the bell. "I mean to have you in bed by eleven, after no more than two pipes, for our train starts as the clock strikes nine in the morning."

I had kept back dinner for him, and we were soon at table. We were eating fish when my man brought me in two telegrams, and the moment I saw them in his hand, before ever I opened or touched them, my heart sank: for I think that only the farther future is quite unknown, but we know a moment hence, as when a heavy weight is to drop we feel it beforehand. Tearing open one of the telegrams, I glanced at the sender's name—"Lizzie Chambers"; she had written: "Emily ill, don't go away"; I tore open the other: it, too, was from Miss Chambers, and she wrote: "Emily's other hand has been nailed."

Into the gloom of my mind grew the understanding that the milder of the telegrams must be for Langler's eyes, the sterner for mine alone: but I showed him neither, I left him there at the table, and in another room called out upon Almighty God for help and strength. When I returned to the outer room I could speak.

But I showed him neither of the telegrams, for I had not the heart, and he slept in peace that night. The next morning I told him when he came to my bedside that I

feared I should not be able to go to Styria, since I was ill; and indeed I was very ill.

CHAPTER XVI

"DISEASED PERSONS"

What happened now I do not find it easy to tell, for my next weeks were passed in a state like to De Quincey's "tortures of opium": I cannot clearly remember telling Langler what had happened, or showing him the telegrams, and he had to return to Swandale alone, in what sort of state I do not know, for I was in a bad dream, flushed with fever, nor was I able to go out of doors till the 25th of April. It was a Sunday, towards evening, I was accompanied by a friend, and we happened to go into St Clement Dane's, where the preacher referred to Miss Langler, and expressed the wonder of the world at the outrage; but what makes that service stand out in my memory is a little thing that happened to myself, for I was sitting with my head bowed during the Kyrie when a priest who was pacing about came and pushed me rudely on the back, saying: "kneel, kneel." I never was more astonished.

The next day I stood at last by the bedside of our friend. She knew me, I think, though not very clearly, but I understood that she had received such a shock this time that she would never more be strong, even if she did not die, for she had been still frail from the first woe when again she was torn. Langler stood with me and watched her, for his self-control was at all times fine, though I don't think born with him, but won by strict schooling of himself; but after a time when we saw her tossing her head from side to side, so acquainted with misfortune, we had to turn from her. She had been especially unlucky, since she had meant to be on her guard, never to be out of doors alone, during her brother's absence; but in passing from her carriage at the park wall of Dale Manor to the house, it had come upon her. I remember spending that evening of my arrival on my back at a window, staring up at a poplar which looked like a fountain of leafage shot up to a point on high out of

the ground; sometimes its top seemed to be sailing against the sky, as toppling to fall; and the breaths of the wind rocked its branches, roughing up the under-white of its foliage with a chaunting like the psalm of Time; and a starling flew up to her charming home on high in it: and this somehow calmed and consoled me.

I could stay only three days then, and for the next six weeks was to and fro between Swandale and London on dates of which I have no record, spending most of my time in a sort of political pool and uproar of things, which perhaps did me good. Those were Diseased Persons days, and well I recollect the thrill that ran through England on the night of its virtual throwing out by the Lords in Committee. Burton and Edwards were now at their death-grips, on the side of the archbishop being all the awe of the nation, on that of the minister all its reason, its secret sympathy, for it seemed that even God, howling from heaven, could not quite bring it about to clericalise the modern world. I had just telegraphed the throwing out to Langler, and was gossiping about it with some men in one of my clubs—it was late, after the theatres—when I was aware of Baron Kolár's presence: he had come in with three men, and his eyes, swimming round, found me out. He walked straight to me. "Miss Langler," were his first low words—"how is she?"

The cheek, and also the hearty concern, of the question confounded me. "Miss Langler is, of course, gravely ill," I answered.

He groaned, with a look of ruth, of care, on his face: nor did it occur to me to suppose it feigned, since I very well knew that the man was no hypocrite; yet I was sure too, in my heart, that here was the man who was the undoer of Miss Langler.

"But surely she will recover?" said he: "let me hear now that she will."

"Well, no doubt she will recover," I said.

He pipped a nothing with relief, his lips unwreathed, his teeth shone out happily, and he said: "Oh, well, everything works out nicely in the end, if only things be premeditated by men of grasp and vigour. I assure you, the longer I live the more I

see it—the supremacy of mind in the world. When I was a wild chap of seventeen I said to myself one night: 'go to, now, I will be a man: I will be grand, I will govern my passions, and have a hand in history.' And so said, so done. I did it! here you see me now, I did it very well, very well, oh yes, here I am. Mind is everything. Look at Mr Edwards, now—nice fellow, powerful fellow, sharp as a falchion! You know, of course, that the Lords have just virtually thrown out Diseased Persons? Tell me now which of the two you think will come off the victor in this duel between Edwards and the archbishop."

"Who can win against the grain of an archbishop under a régime of miracles, Baron Kolár?" I asked.

"What!" said he, eyeing me sternly from top to toe, "but is there to be no term to the insolence of the Church? Remember that this plan of sterilising diseased persons is no new thing: during twenty years it has been under discussion; in Austria, I assure you, if it had not been for the miracles, diseased persons would at present be consigned to the lethal chamber; but this most moderate bill only ensures their sterilisation. Everywhere such a measure is called for; it is in the very gist of our age; and now when Mr Edwards, by a travail of Hercules, has driven it through his House with a grim majority of twelve—earnest fellow, grand fellow—are we to see his pearl trampled under foot by a herd of bishops? But you shall not see that. I forecast that the bill will be sent back to the Lords a second and a third time, and in the end Edwards will win—oh yes, he will win."

"He may," said I.

"He will," said he: "England will rise to his support; wait, you will see."

He turned off from me, but turned again to ask after the Misses Chambers, then left me to rejoin his friends.

When I mentioned his words the next day at Swandale, Langler said to me: "but since this man is so very sure beforehand of the Prime Minister's victory, may we

not at once look for some stroke of policy against the Church on his part—perhaps the showing of the miracles to be none?"

"In that case, Aubrey," said I, for I was excited, "let us be beforehand with him! let both of us now write plainly to our friends that the miracles are probably none, but still are no contrivance of priests——"

But Langler interrupted me, saying: "you would hardly have us, Arthur, appear to our friends in the light of crusaders and quixotes."

"Why quixotes?" said I.

"Wouldn't it be terribly like springing upon them the statement, 'the sky is brown'? The miracles are now among established things, nor are our suspicions anything but suspicions. Certainly, we should seem pert, if not irrelevant. Letters are perused over the breakfast-cup, and are not expected to be epic."

"However," said I, "this is the one plan which you can carry out without fear of being interfered with and hindered, and by it you wash your hands at once of the whole business and burden."

"Perhaps; but still, frankly, it would not be quite to my taste: I'd rather die than seem outré, or strutting, or oracular——"

"But since so much is at stake——"

"Sooner any other plan, Arthur."

"But what other plan—except going to Styria?"

"Hardly again," said he, with closed eyes, "hardly again," and we were silent.

After a while he asked: "does the agent, Barker, still decline to go to Styria alone?"

"Yes," said I; "he and others naturally scent danger in the adventure after what has twice befallen us. If anyone goes, it must be ourselves; so what shall be done?"

"But do you ask me that, Arthur?" cried he, much moved: "how shall I answer you? I have already paid a great price; my heart has wept. The men who are against us are

of withering mood, though I do not say wicked men; in fact, they are not, since the mere success of their exploits implies, I think, an erectness of meaning which commands our esteem——"

"Esteem, Aubrey," I murmured: but such was the finesse of Langler's criticism, whose scales no zephyr of passion could ever shake, and he derided as crass and green whoever did not give to the devil his dainty due.

"Yes, I say esteem," said he, "for the misdoer is, and must be, a bungler, so where you have a series of lawlessnesses finely achieved you may look to find behind them a mood of moral erectness. But little the morality of these men concerns me—I was speaking of their power."

"Now, however," said I, "whatever their power, is the hour for us to strike in, if ever: Diseased Persons will soon be back in the Lords; Burton, of course, will not yield—"

"Talking of Burton," said he, "I have two letters of his which I will show you now"—and he rose and got them: one was a letter of sympathy, very feelingly worded, written to Langler on the second wounding of our friend; the other, written only five days before to Percival of Keble, was as follows:—"The Palace, Lambeth. P. + T. My dear Percival,—Forgive my silence, since you are continually in my heart. It is now confirmed that Diseased Persons will be thrown out; and as Israel prevailed over Amalek in Rephidim, so we shall ride over them that rise up against us. Hertford, Jersey, and Ellenborough have declared on our side, and the zeal of young Denman, who now has rooms in the Palace, is profitable to me: the Lord reward them according to their works.... There can be no looking back now, even if we would, being more strongly impelled against the Bill from the side of St Peter than many divine; and, in addition, there are forces, in their nature subterranean, which prompt and urge us, and make retreat impossible—even if we would! Bellini of the Maddallena writes that he does not consider the Bill contrary to Holy Writ!

And is it? What say you? Give me of your wisdom. But however that be, on we must, the force behind is grim and deaf. I say that the whole truth is known to none: you will remember at some future day, if need be, that I have said it to you and to others; nor is what I now give you any whisper between ourselves. But is not the whole truth still good to speak? not the truth only, but the whole? We have Clement of Alexandria on 'uttering a lie, as the Sophists say'; but to utter a lie is it not to tell one? and to tell one is it not to lie? and to lie is it not to be a rotting liar? And to trim, and economise, and keep dark, and be shifty, is it not to utter many lies? To all which I say: 'Get thee behind me, Satan! I will wash my hands in innocency.' Forgive me if I am curious and obscure to-night, good friend, since I write in some gloom of mind. One short year ago I was a village-priest, and had songs in the night; at present I am full of tossings to and fro till the morning. But my every loss, were it of life and soul, I will count as gain, if only Zion prosper, though I warn you, Percival, of rocks ahead, and fears and doubts not to be formulated; at some hours I see the future dark as crape—I could not tell you. Our victory in Gloucester was ominously close, and here and there in the country one hears Old Adam growling. They must obey! they must submit themselves! stantes sunt pedes nostri in atriis tuis, Jerusalem: over all uprising we shall ride gloriously, God help us. Alas! sometimes when I am mightiest, then am I weakest: the solid Pisgah gives way under my feet, the wings of Icarus stream with melting; oh, for faith, and more faith, and still more: pray for me. Still, we shall ride, we shall triumph. As to the Lambeth degrees in medicine, and our right to grant them, this you shall see carried against all the rage of the heathen in the near future, so also as to the proposed new powers of Consistory Courts and of my Court of Audience, so also as to the restoring to Canterbury of her jurisdiction over wills and intestacies, so also as to the condign punishment of Ambrose Rivers: all these. Only, still the sleeplessness, no rest, no shutting of the eyelid, but tossings till the morning, and not poppy nor mandragoras shall medicine me now, I think. Oh, Percival, how happy is the obscure good man,

the upright heart and pure, kept unspotted from the world! Down yonder in Ritching parish my garden grew wild, the vicarage was holey and ruined, but very pretty, very homely, and ever for me there was one sweetest, secret cruse of water from Siloa's brook, and my morsel of dry bread was like coriander seed, man, I tell you, and the taste of it like wafers made with honey. Percival, I warn you, fly from preferment: there is one sweeter sluice than all. Pray write as to the scripturalness of Diseased Persons. Farewell, dear friend.—In haste, yours faithfully in N.D.J.C., John Cantuar."

"Here, I think," said Langler when I had got through the two letters, "you have a soul in the toils," and we went on talking about Burton and other things, without coming to the point as to what we personally were now to do; moreover, I had promised to be back in London at once, and left Swandale that night, our friend being then definitely on the road to recovery.

I did not, I think, return to Swandale during some two weeks, and meanwhile twice saw Archbishop Burton, once in the Lords on the night when Diseased Persons was being debated for the second time; all the world was there: I saw Mr Edwards peeping behind the throne; I saw Baron Kolár ironing his thigh, while his eyes dwelt upon the primate, who, somehow, denounced the bill less loudly than I had expected to hear. I thought that Dr Burton's girth was less outgrown, his visage less brown than usual; indeed, I have grounds to know that about that time the archbishop was putting himself to cruel tortures with regimen, the thongs of discipline, and other articles of piety. Twice to my knowledge, while speaking, he glanced up at Baron Kolár in the gallery, and I witnessed the meeting of their eyes. Well, the bill, which had been sent up this second time with an ominous drop in Edwards' majority from twelve to nine, was anew mutilated; and at this thing the sort of ecstasy which marked the mood of the country can only be recalled, not described, for Diseased Persons and the Education Bill (setting up lycees on the French model) were the two main items in the King's Speech, the Church withstood both, and the deadlock was

complete. Edwards would not yield, for if ever man knew England and Englishmen it was he, and a sort of world-wide mutter against churchmen, which did not dare express itself, yet could be felt, was abroad. It was at this juncture that I again saw the archbishop one night at a political crush at the Duchess of St Albans'. I was making my way through a throng when I caught a view of Baron Kolár's head above a press of men, and, the hall being full of a noise of tongues, I won near to the group around him to hear, for he was talking; in doing which I caught sight of the robed figure of the archbishop sitting on an ottoman, silent, solitary, but within earshot of the baron's talk; indeed, I fancied that the baron's voice was purposely pitched so that Dr Burton might overhear. As I won near the first words of the baron which reached my ears were: "but Jesus did not believe in the immortality of the soul: no, he didn't believe in it; he never heard of such a thing: not in our sense of the term——"

I stood astonished at this drowsy outrage upon the ears of a devout crowd, though a year previously his words would have been ordinary enough, and I saw Dr Burton's eyes fixed sideward upon the baron with I know not what musketry of meanings in them.

"Oh no," the baron went on, "he had no notion of our 'immortality.' Our notion of a ghost distinct from the body, of 'spirit' distinct from matter, is, of course, an Aryan-Greek one, quite foreign to the Hebrew mind: the very angels of the Hebrews ate mutton like Charles II., their very God was material, with hind parts and front parts; and you will burrow through the Old Testament in vain for a valid hint that men may live after their body is livid."

No one answered anything; only Dr Burton's eyes aimed a ray of keener and keener meaning at the speaker.

"However," the baron went on, "there arose at a late date a crowd among the Hebrews called Pharisees, who said: 'no, all is not over at death, for some day there

will be a resurrection, and we shall then live again'; opposed to whom were the Conservatives—the Sadducees—who denied that there would be a resurrection: and Jesus was a Pharisee in this belief in a resurrection of the body. But as to our fantastic Greek ghost and its immortality, it was quite outlandish to all Hebrews, to Pharisee, Essene, and Sadducee alike: Jesus hardly heard of it."

I glanced toward Dr Burton's face: it had in it reproach, shame, and anger together: and still the baron droned on: "hence the frequency of this word 'resurrection' in the Gospels, in spite of the fact that their writers were tinged with Greek ideas: for Jesus believed that we ceased to live at death, but afterwards should have a 'resurrection': he was a good Hebrew. On the other hand, in the writings of St Paul, who was both a Hebrew and a man learned in Greek ideas, we have a perfect confusion of the two ideas, Greek 'immortality' and Pharisee 'resurrection.' Sometimes Paul believes in one, sometimes in the other, sometimes somehow in both together. Where he says, 'to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord,' he is a Greek; where he says, 'I have fought a good fight ... henceforth there is laid up for me a crown which the Lord will give me in the day of his appearing,' he is a Hebrew: for he won't get the crown at once, oh no, it is laid up for him till resurrection-day, when he will wake up out of the dust. And so all through that epistle——'"

But at that point the baron stopped, looking with a delicious fat chuckle after the flight of Dr Burton, who was off through the throng. Nobody made any reply to the baron's words. I wish that one could describe the man's tones, his eyes!—wandering, fishy, light grey, the whites fouled yellowish; but so strong somehow! They would light upon one a moment in a preoccupied way, and wander off again, as if one was not of worth enough to engage their attention. But I'm afraid that my pen was not made to paint. At any rate, his words were always most weighty, living, memorable, and overbearingly authoritative—not in themselves perhaps, but in some way because they came from him.

I happened to overhear a few private words between him and Dr Burton that same night which I should recount, but before then I was in a crowd with Mr Edwards, who was looking rather harassed, though quick-eyed as ever, and appeared from his talk to be less bitter against Dr Burton's big attacks than against the "pin-pricks "; "the face of Europe was turned towards the future," one heard him say, "and now come the parsons twisting it about, and saying, 'look back to the past.' It can't be done, you know: neck'll break. And such pettifogging, penny-ha'penny, antediluvian antics! How is an archbishop to grant degrees in medicine at this time of day? As for Ambrose Rivers, all I can say is, if the church-party should succeed in laying a finger upon that harmless lunatic, then the Government will begin to ask itself whether the time is not come to throw up the cards. May the dickens fly away——!" he stopped, but I understood him to mean "with the church-party, and all things, save the multiplication-table and the present Prime Minister of England." He was a man of many sterling qualities of mind, and exercised a true influence over his countrymen, perhaps through his very actuality and directness; and though he ever refused to embellish himself with one touch of personal stateliness, he was listened to with attention.

Half-an-hour afterwards I was talking with a man over a balcony rail, where it was dark, when I heard behind me the words: "you should not slacken in your opposition to the bill: the Church must be pushed on and made quite triumphant"; they were spoken by Baron Kolár, and from Dr Burton I heard a murmured reply, but not the words; then I am almost certain that I heard the baron say: "there will be some more miracles"; and I distinctly heard the doctor's reply, halting, wifely: "how do you—know?" and the answer too to this I heard: "I know by faith, doctor," whereupon they turned in their pacing, and their voices were lost. I allowed myself to whisper to the man with me: "Mephisto and Faust!"

Well, what happened next with respect to Diseased Persons happened in a kind of whirlwind, and before I knew where I was I was off to Styria. Once more the bill

was sent up, this time by Lower House majorities of in general seventeen. What Mr Edwards' hope was, whether he was pushed from behind by secret forces, one does not know; certainly by this time the grumble in his favour—on the platform, in the press, in the country—had grown; but still, no one much expected the Church to give way. However, at about two in the afternoon of the very night on which the bill was brought for the third time before the Lords, an old woman, one Madame Ronfaut, who housed close to the Cathedral of Bayeux, found in her cellar a grave, not a new grave, but one newly reopened, and in the grave a cross, and nailed to the cross the remains of a man's body that had been dead at least some months. The news of this thing flew that afternoon like loosened effluvia. What was the precise significance of the find I suppose that nobody gave himself the breathing-space to think; it was felt to be significant: and never was news more dynamic. That night Diseased Persons had a victory in spite of all the bishops. I, for my part, flew to Swandale, understanding that the finding of the body and cross was no chance thing, but purposely managed to give a first shock to the faith of men. "Have you heard all?" said I to Langler as I hurried into the cottage. He gazed at me strangely, without answer; I saw his cheek shake; and I cried out: "Aubrey, how is Emily?"

"She is gone, she is gone," said he, with as woeful a smile as ever I beheld.

"Gone, Aubrey," said I, "what do you mean?"

He handed me a note which she had written to him, and I saw that, on hearing of the finding of the body and cross, she had fled from Swandale, alone, weak, hardly yet able to walk. "Dearest Aubrey," she had written, "you will go now to Styria, because you should; and partly to make the leaving of me possible to you, and partly to save you from being stopped this time by any hurt done to me, I am running away to hide myself well somewhere. Have no fear for me, I undertake that no one shall track me, I shall be safely hidden, and get quite well, and be back in Swandale to welcome you when you return. Go at once, will you, for me? with Arthur. 'Quit you like men, be

strong'; you are in for it now, poor dear: it has happened so. I take £40 from the casket. But, beloved, if it be only possible, come back to me; and bring him who goes with you. Your Emily."

I found Langler in such a state of powerful, though governed, emotion, that I was unwilling to have him start that night, for his heart was not strong. But he would come, and we reached London at two a.m., went to bed for a time, and started in the morning by private car, so as to catch the first passage.

We were safe aboard at Dover, and the boat about to cast her moorings, when a car was seen making down the pier, and an outcry arose for the boat to wait awhile, the men in the car being Baron Kolár and two others. They were barely in time, and soon after the baron had manœuvred himself aboard I saw his earnest looks clear into a smile.

During the trip across he took not the least notice of our presence, nor we of his.

CHAPTER XVII

THE MOUNTAINS

Langler was a great preacher of France and French lucidity—when he was in England, but in France itself he changed his tune, for nothing now quite pleased him as we raced through the land—not the food, the people, the language, the country—but all came under his criticism, which, indeed, was mostly unuttered, but one felt when he was criticising by a certain fastidiousness and thickening at the cheek-bones, as if he tasted acid. At Charleville, where we found a streaming town, one of the pilgrimages having just got there, the tone of the dévotes was specially distasteful to him; we saw a throng kneeling in the twilight on some church-steps, everyone with a certain beggar-like languishing of the eye-whites—a very Latin thing—which Langler called "sick-saintly." But he was ever out of joint with the

age, had flinched from its paganism before the miracles, as now he flinched from its piety. "We are such hapless Midases," he said: "whatever we happen to touch turns to iron." Swandale itself he found wanting; he sighed for a rounder world. Now, piety was "the rage" in France, and one day in France was quite long enough to turn Langler qualmish against the words "male and female Christian," ever chattered everywhere. At Charleville, when we returned to our hotel from our stroll, a lively little maid with flaxen curls would have us look at her first-communion veil, her paroissien, and suchlike pious gems, remarking meanwhile: "is it not soft and nice, sir, to be a female Christian—n'est-ce pas, monsieur, que c'est doux et bon d'être crétienne?" To which Langler replied: "I only hope so: moi je suis crétien."

Being very weary that first night we slept till two a.m., when we set out afresh on the car road over the suspension-bridge through Mézières, under a dark sky most bright with stars. Our trim little chauffeur, whose name was Hanska, was a "rager,"; but this mode of flight was never to Langler's taste, and we had meant to travel on rails, till the sight of Baron Kolár on the Channel-boat had caused me to know that the rail-train would be much too slow. We had lost sight of the baron at Calais, but near noon of the second day, when we were shooting some miles well on past Sedan, a trumpet hooted behind, and there churned upon us a large chariot travelling urgently. It must have been very swift, for we were swift, but it rolled pressingly past us, showed its hind wheels, and travelled on out of our sight. Through the dust I saw in it Baron Kolár and his two friends.

"Baron Kolár means to be in Styria before us, Aubrey," I said.

"In which case, what is the good of our going on?" asked Langler.

"We are going to investigate some facts," said I: "no one can stop us in that, unless they kill us; in any case, we have it to do to the end: your sister's eyes are upon us."

"God's," said he. "On we must, I know; I only question whether we are on the road to accomplish any real good: I hope so, God grant it; but it is a world like those

jointed marionettes which, however you tug them straight, stick out crudely somewhere; its piety and its impiety both curve the lips of the gods. But let us hope that we shall accomplish something, if only for our poor prisoner."

Well, on we went, hardly knowing toward what: but our object after much talk had turned out to be threefold—(1) to find out whether there was really a prisoner Father Max Dees in Baron Kolár's castle of Schweinstein; (2) to present ourselves with this fact to the authorities, and so force the release of Dees; (3) to interview the released Dees, and then give to the world whatever he might have to divulge of a design against churchmen. And chance favoured us to a wonderful extent that day between Sedan and Metz, for not fifteen minutes after Baron Kolár's chariot had vanished ahead we came anew upon it standing still by the roadside, its occupants standing and prying round it. As we flew past them I cried to Langler: "they can't repair, and are miles from anywhere: are bound to lose a day!" nor from that moment, I think, did we waste ten minutes bootlessly, till we were climbing the country at the mountain-foot. One morning early I woke in a village-room, and peeping out from my window saw the village-street bounded by a wall and some trees; beyond the trees the froths and freshes of a shallow river lacerated with rocks; beyond the river a mountain-side with a crucifix on it, a world of mountains; and grouped about the crucifix the kind of grey goats whose wool had been used by Dees to tie his tidings round the wren's leg; and I said to myself: "we have arrived." What a charm was in that place that morning surpasses expression; it appeared to me the haven of the world; the morning-star was awane in the heavens; and I had the thought: "how well to have been born in here, and to have housed here always in peace!" It was a breathing-space to me, till the burden that was ours darkened down anew upon my mind with its weight of care and doubt. As to where Baron Kolár might be we had no idea, having seen nothing of him since his breakdown near Metz.

My own hostess—Langler had slept in another cottage—had a son named Piast whom she offered to me as guide, upon which this conversation took place between

us: "does Piast know the alp well?" "Kiss the hand, sir, he is a Slovene." "But is he to be depended upon as a guide?" "He is a Slovene, sir." "Yes, but does he know the best way to Schweinstein?" "Sir, he is a Slovene." She herself was a heavy Slav woman, but as our Piast looked a brave wight we took him, and began to climb through higher valleys now and a wilder world. I knew Switzerland very well, but this was different somehow—a heavier eventide of wood and wonderland of solitude, for I think that Upper Styria must be about the loneliest of lands. We travelled up beside one river (with banks of slime, and forested cliff on either hand) which had a mood of millions of years gone, before man or brute was; yet the wild goat bounded on the crag, the boar slouched in the black of the bush. At noon we stopped at a sennhaus (cow-farm) on the banks of a mountain-tarn, and here, to my surprise, it got into Langler's head to bathe. "But can we spare the time?" I asked him. "Too cold, too cold," said our host the cow-keeper, with a shake of the head, for though the day was warm, we were now at an elevation where oak and ash were giving place to black fir and yew. But Langler would bathe, the water looked so nice, and as I knew that he could not swim, and was afraid that the bottom might be deceptive, I made up my mind to go in first, to try it. Our cow-keeper lent us two old knee-breeches, for the wagon with our luggage was down behind, and there we cowered by the shore, Langler with knives in the flesh because of the sennerin's eyes on his back, for she and three children stood in a crowd up at the sennhaus door to watch us. Well, I chose a spot, and plunged in: and the instant I was under, as it were a thousand whispers were about me urging me to be out. It was too cold for man, with a certain great gloom of cold, and I was no sooner in than I was out again. Understanding now that it would hardly do for Langler with his panting heart, I prayed him not to try it; but his honour, I suppose, was now at stake—he had ever a large share of what one may call physical courage—and in he stepped. However, he did not plunge, but almost at once came out gasping, and seeing his left foot dyed with blood, I knew that something had gashed it.

On the whole, we had no sort of right in that water, since time might be so dear to us: but so it happened; Langler's gash proved grave, for he could not put on his boot, so after our good sennerin had bandaged it up there we sat for hours before the longish shed which was the sennhaus, drinking goat's milk, smoking porcelain pipes, and looking toward the summer snow on the top of high Hochgolling.

"Pity we ever went into the water," said Langler as we sat there disabled and the afternoon sun sank low: "we have lost a day, and through me, I'm afraid."

"Bad luck," said I, "not your fault."

"We are such tools of Nature!" said he. "Men rage of their 'power' over Her, but what of Her unperturbed reign over and in them? We should now be at Schweinstein, yet here we are, the truth being that new lands induce a vagueness and vagabondage in the mind, so hypnotising it that one's own concerns seem paltry in comparison with the mass and pageant of Nature, and irrelevant to her mood; whereupon 'I am here' grows so uppermost in the mind as to strangle 'why am I here?' However, I think that the foot is now fast healing."

"Then we may be able to get on to-night," said I. "But who is that man talking so earnestly to our Piast? He was here an hour ago, went away, and now is back again."

"I have observed it," said he; "they are at this moment discussing us."

"Are they?"

"Yes, they are talking near the cascade, and louder than they think, for I have twice heard 'die Herren,' and presently you will see them glance this way."

"But do you suspect Piast at all?"

"I doubt if he is quite trusty and good."

"Then let us not go one step farther with him."

"But we have the charts, he can't lead us far astray; nor can we allow ourselves to judge him on a mere suspicion."

I said no more, but felt uneasy. Soon afterwards I left Langler outside, went up the (external) steps into the middle room of the sennhaus, and sat by the wheel where the sennerin was spinning flax; she looked homely and good with her thick waist and calves and dress of opera-bouffe, so I entered into talk with her, asking her first what had been the effect of the miracles in the alp. "Kiss the hand, sir!" she said, and she smiled as she told me that "the good people of the alp must work hard to keep body and soul together, without troubling the head about such matters. That is not all gold what glances."

I was astonished! The thought came into my mind, "here is Ambrose Rivers in the Noric Alps," for, except Rivers and this woman, I had heard of no one who thus lightly threw off the miracles. "But surely," said I, "such high events!" She sighed, saying: "ah, dear Heaven, those on the alp had their miracle six long years ago, and that was enough of miracles, it seems to me, with great cry and little wool." "Six years ago? a miracle?" said I. "Yes, sir; but let each sweep before her own door"—another proverb, and a strong one apparently, for nothing further could I get from her as to this miracle of six years before.

I then, for the first time in Styria, spoke of Max Dees. "My friend and I," I said, "are here to visit the Pater Max Dees: do you—know him?" Again she smiled, saying: "my man did frohn-arbeit on his buckwheat-field for three years"—(this "frohn-arbeit" being, as she explained it, a kind of church-due paid in day-labour). "So you know the Pater well?" I asked. With the same half-a-smile, she answered: "I knew him." "But isn't he still in the alp, then?" "Not at the church, sir." "Which church?" "St Photini's in the castle-court." "Oh, he is not still the priest at St Photini's, so perhaps my friend and I have taken a voyage in vain. Who, then, is now the priest there?" "There is no priest," said she; "even if there were, we of this church-parish should no longer plod to his church, since it is work enough to keep body and soul together; for burials a priest rides up from Badsögl; but St Photini's has been shut up near five years—before the birth of the little sugar-corn Käthchen,

in fact."

"But that is strange!" said I. "To whom does St Photini's belong?"

"All this alp, one might say, belongs to the baron, sir."

"All? He must be enormously rich and powerful!"

"Gold makes old, sir; but the baron is not believed to be rich, not as some of the great landowners are, for glaciers and precipices make no man rich, and the most of his land is forest, with some flax, beet, and then the pastures; his lordship has also a share in the glass factory a mile up."

"So he is not very rich, the baron? But is he powerful? much feared in the alp?"

"Ah, dear Heaven, he is very much feared, and very much loved, and very much pitied, by all."

"Pitied? Baron Kolár?"

"Ah, dear Heaven, yes: for nothing less than a very great wrong was done to his lordship by one in whom he had trust. They say 'one love is worth the other'; but unthankfulness is ever the world's repayment."

"But what was this great wrong done to his lordship?"

She sighed, and answered: "end good, all good; it is a long story, sir"; nor was there any overcoming her reserves when she chose to be silent.

"But that is strange," said I, "that St Photini's should be shut up—five years! To what church, then, do you—go?"

"We go to none, since the body is more real than the soul. There is a little Roman church down there in Speisendorf, but no one goes to it since the miracle of six years ago; those of the alp once went to St Photini's, but St Photini's is of the Oriental Greek Church, and the Pater Max Dees was an Oriental Greek priest." "Was?" said I, "but is the good Pater no longer alive?" "Who knows?" said she. "You do; tell me," said I. "But I do not know, sir, truly! perhaps the baron himself

could impart to you that information." "But where is the baron?" I asked, "in the duchy, do you know?" "The baron is at the burg, sir." "Baron Kolár at Schweinstein! When did he arrive?" "Late last night, I believe," she answered.

"Strange," I thought, "that we have heard nothing of it, though we have questioned so many people"; and wondering if he had come in a clandestine manner, or by another route than ours, I hurried out to give Langler the news. In telling him, I saw the cow-man trotting toward the tarn under a load of wurzels, so I called him to us, and asked why he had told us that the baron was not at the castle. "Kiss the hand, sirs!" he said, and answered with a blank air, "but this is strange! is the baron at the castle? and is it the little woman who has told you this? she must have seen it in a dream"——and he peered sourly up into the room where the spinning-wheel sounded. Turning to Langler, I asked him how the foot was going, for I felt that it would be well to make a move; "you see I have on the boot," was his reply, "I can walk quite well"; and within some minutes we had started, for eventide was falling, and we had to get to a sort of guest-court three miles higher. We had sent the horses back down to Speisendorf, our farther route being rough for night-travelling; and with our Piast stepping out ahead in his coloured home-spuns, we tramped toward the bourn where beds and the trunks awaited us. It had turned bleak now, the fuffs of the mountain-winds began to tune-up and fife, the gloom deepened toward night. I confess that I felt afraid, I hardly knew of what, but the mood of the mountains was undoubtedly morose and dark. When I asked the lad if he had heard the news that his lordship had arrived he looked foolish, and said no, he had not heard. We passed by rude altars decked with gauds, by crucifixes on the crags, and a mile from the sennhaus reached a river all shut in by ravines, up the banks of which we wound, till, after about an hour and a half of continuous walking, we came to some lock-gates, and then, in an opening in the cliff-wall, to a factory, which Piast said was a glass-factory, and I remember wondering where the hands could come from to work it; a little higher was a mill-wheel and other lock-gates, and thenceforward

unbroken lines of cliff, walling-in the river. I had known that we should have to journey up this or some such river, so had no fear that we were being jockeyed; yet I felt like one lost, for by this time we could hardly see our hand before our eyes, the winds waged their business in many a strange tongue, and my knowledge that Langler was limping made me the more anxious to come at shelter. As usual in such a case, we were stricken rather silent, plodding on in patience for the journey to be over and for a light to arise before us. And in front of us stepped our Piast.

But at one place when I called out "Piast!" to ask him something, I got no answer; whereupon we both stopped, we called and called, but Piast was gone.

"Well, we seem to be abandoned," Langler said.

At the same moment I called out sharply: "but do you feel your feet wet?"

"Yes," said he, "I do. The river seems to be rising."

As he spoke I was already wet above the ankles, for not only was the river rising, but so very fast, that I understood that this was no tidal rising, but must be due to some other cause. Langler too understood, for he now said: "the lock-gates have apparently been closed."

"Purposely to drown us, Aubrey?" I cried.

"Well, the timely flight of Piast seems to indicate as much," he answered with astonishing composure, to judge from his voice, for he was merely a voice, since I could only just divine his presence with my eyes, and I heard the water welter directly upon the cliff-wall, and felt it at my knees.

"But what are we to do?" I cried.

"What can we do?" said he, "except bear our lot with fortitude."

"But we shall be drowned!"

"Well, so it seems," said he. "I personally never hoped to get through this adventure."

The water, working actively up, had won to my middle, striking very cold; and that cold, together with my forlornness in that wild, made my death the more awful to me. I tried once, and only once, to climb the cliff-wall; but I could not lift myself a foot, and thenceforth, as in a glass, I saw that there was no escape. A mile or so lower down was a water-mill, where the gorge opened somewhat, and thereabouts we might have got out of the trap (provided that we could climb the lock-gates); but, as Langler said, long before we could get to the gates the water would be over our heads; he could not swim; nor did I mean to leave him before he drowned in any hope of saving myself by swimming, since I knew that I should very soon perish of cold.

Only one thought, and with it a hope, if it can be called a hope, occurred within me, and I said to Langler: "but which way did Piast escape? it must have been forward: let us move forward...." and we did so, walking on a bottom of grass and slime, I in front with a grip on Langler's sleeve, and the water at our breasts. But it was slow going, and still the wall of rock was with us, so we did not go far, but stood still again near together, and I heard Langler's breaths looser than the puffs of the wind, and more burdened: a rather horrid sound in my memory.

"Well, Aubrey," I panted, with my hand on his shoulder.

His jaws chattered: he could make no answer.

It was about then that a light from, say, forty feet above streamed down comet-wise upon us that must have come from an electric dark-lantern, for, on looking up, I could see nothing save the dazzlement, though I have now an impression, too, of the hoofs of a horse on the cliff-edge: and a voice was shouting to us.

"There is," it cried—in English—and stopped; or I may be mistaken, but I am privately convinced that I did hear those two English words, though Langler did not.

"There is," it cried in German, "a stair in the rock twenty metres below"—and at once the light vanished.

We had walked past "the stair"! nor was there any chance that we should ever have found it, though so near; a stair it was not, but a few jags notched out of a slanting slip of the cliff. However, we found them, we contrived to climb to the top: but no one was any longer there when we got to it.

What followed for us that night was almost as baleful as what we had evaded: we were abroad hour after hour in an alpine storm, miners in the colliery of the night, sometimes standing still, dreading to take a step; indeed, it is strange that we were not many times dashed to death, for one could not see the mountains, nor the ground, nor the sky on high, all on all hands was swallowed up in awe, the heart failed at the great rivers of grief which the deluges of wind poured through the forests. It must have been long past midnight when, by a feat of luck, we hit upon a hut in which was one poor woman, living that hermit-life which they call almen-leben, with a few kine only for companions; she took us in, and succoured us; and with such greed did we eat out and still eat out this good Gretel's larder that our griefs ended in laughter.

When at last we were lying wrapped in blankets in a gloom beshone by a blush from the stove, I whispered to Langler: "did you hear the 'there is' in English from the cliff?" "No," said he, "I think not." "But was not the voice at all familiar?" "I thought, Arthur, that it resembled Baron Kolár's." "So did I," I said.

Outside the winds worked, venting brokenly and gruff like breakers of oceans thundering on unearthly shores, while for some time I lay too fore-done to sleep, pondering the wonder of that voice in the night. If it was truly Baron Kolár's—I am still not sure of it!—what, I asked myself, could be his motive? Had he merely wished to prove to us his absolute power over our lives? Or had this terrible man meant to destroy us, but relented in the midst? I oftentimes think that he had a liking for Langler.... But I could not solve the riddle, and before long was asleep.

CHAPTER XVIII

AT THE SCHLOSS

The next afternoon we got down at last to the little guest-court where our luggage was, and now could see a tower of Schweinstein half-a-league away. Langler, however, had to take to his bed, and thus lost three days more.

I, for my part, more easily overcame the effects of my night on the alp, and during those days set myself to come at the truth as to whether or no Baron Kolár was really at home; I must have questioned twenty people; but the answer was always the same: his lordship was not in residence.

On our third morning (a Saturday) at the guest-court we received, to our joy, a long letter from our wounded friend. I had thought it likely that she would write us at the P.O. at Gratz, so I had written to the P.O., and they had now sent on this letter to us in the mountains. Langler's hand trembled, and he had such a ravished smile as touched one to the heart. She had fled to a village in Gloucestershire named Alvington, and was still safely buried there, but meant, she said, to go back to Swandale as soon as she should opine that we in Styria had had time to work out our purpose. The letter for the most part was in a tone of affected lightness; she described the inn where she lodged, its flower-beds, its cat, the landlady's mows, the gambols of the wren; she even gave the political news! Diseased Persons had become law, and now it was the Education Bill that was the row: "as Satan and Michael contended for the body of Moses," she wrote, "so Mr Edwards and Dr Burton are striving for Ambrose Rivers"—Burton struggling to bring Rivers and his "New Church" under the power of the ecclesiastical courts, Edwards struggling tooth and nail against it; Dr Burton, however, she said, had had an apoplectic fit, and was laid aside for the time being. She begged to be remembered to "the good frock-coat" (i.e. to me), but, giving way in the end to her grief, cried out upon our

pity to return to her. For us it was a heart-rending letter. I, at any rate, felt that if any mishap should befall her brother in this adventure, then dangers too sinister to be breathed to one's own heart might overhang her spirit. We had meant to present ourselves that day at the castle, but Langler was too deeply moved by the letter, so we put it off till the next day.

All those days I had not been idle, but had roved a good deal, trying to get friends, and had explored, too, round about the castle by land and river. There were quite thirty to fifty dwellings within two miles, but I found all these people very reserved, given up to their swine and agrarian cares, and looking upon me as a needless phenomenon. Swine abounded! a pig was in every life. However, I won some of them into saying something, and gathered, on the whole, that probably no one knew what had become of Dees, but that all probably had a guess that he was, or had been, a prisoner in the castle, in which case they were pleased, with a feeling of "serve him right"; also that no one had, or wished to say that he had, any intuition whereabouts in the world his lordship then was. This, too, was strange, that on that Sunday when Langler and I at last walked down through the forest towards the river and burg no sound of bell called the people to worship; Europe was on its knees, but this one valley of Europe had washed its hands of the Christian Church.

And everyone had only one excuse to offer for this—namely, that "it was enough to do to keep body and soul together."

How clear and new-made was the air in there that Sunday afternoon! "Up here," wrote Langler to his sister, "it is never hot nor muggy, I think, for the breezes rest not day nor night, breathing eras of music through the timber." He said that he had never felt better, though bitterly like Don Quixote before the windmill! Old Lossow (our host) and two boys came along with us, but they left us in a flurry at the outwork barbacan; then we two stood before the gate, dressed to our gloves, and Langler said to me: "you know, Arthur, that Christ of Castagno in the gallery at

Christ Church? it rises before me now as an expression of the languishment of mind which I feel in the presence of this stronghold." So I, too, felt; nor was I at all sure that, once in, we should ever come out again; but there we were, and I summoned the castle—the knocker being a cannon-ball hanging on a chain, whereat a woman opened, we stepped into the bailey-court, and a somewhat loosely-dressed man, with a tasselled smoking-cap on his head hurried towards us, followed by a brown bear. "Kiss the hand, sirs," said he, "you are without doubt the two English acquaintances of the baron from whom I have received a communication." "Yes, sir," said I. "I am the burgvogt, Jan Tschudi," said he; "I take it that you still wish to inspect the burg?" "Still, yes," said I, for I had a weapon on me. "Willingly from the heart will I show you over the fortress," said he, "be so good as to come this way."

We followed him inward, Langler fondling the bear, which had a string of rhododendrons round its neck, Herr Tschudi himself a burly German of middle age, fresh-faced, with a bold brow under his smoking-cap. He led us to some cannon, saying: "these two are fifteenth-century sakers, those there are what they call culverins; and everything with us is of this kind, sirs: here you will find all old, nothing splendid." He next led us into the gaudy little church, which Langler examined lingeringly, especially two curious niches in the south wall beside the altar, where the elements had been kept, over which he bent so long that Herr Tschudi and I became restless; "I see," I said meanwhile to Tschudi, "that your front row of seats are really easy-chairs, as I once heard Baron Kolár say that they are."

"Yes," he answered, with a smile. And he added, with a certain flush and challenge: "we once had a particularly brilliant preacher here whom the baron used to take a pleasure in coming down to hear on Sunday mornings; hence the chairs, for his lordship is fond of his ease."

I could see his lordship reclining, stroking back his scrap of hair, and enjoying the "real toil" of another!

"Who, then, was that brilliant preacher?" I asked.

"He was called the Pater Dees, sir."

"And what has become of him now?"

"I could not tell you."

"But can it be the same Pater Max Dees of whom I have heard that he has been a prisoner in the castle?"

"The very same."

"May I ask—what was his offence?"

"The sin of ingratitude."

"Indeed? What is the story?"

"Ah, I'm afraid it might be long: you would regret having asked to hear it."

"I don't often regret what I do. But ingratitude! Does one go into prison in the alp for that?"

"It may happen!"

"But in a private castle?"

"Sir, let me tell you what you are not perhaps aware of, that among the ancestors of his lordship on the distaff side have been several Reichsunmittelbarer-Fürsts, and that till late times the lords of this castle have been rechts-fähig" (able to make private laws).

"Quite so, quite so," said I, "but still, a prisoner in a private castle ... in our times...."

"It is a mere nothing; you should not let that trouble you."

"But is Father Dees—still a prisoner, if one may ask?"

"Surely one may ask: there is no harm in asking, you know. But all that was five long years ago, of course. Here, however, is your friend, the connoisseur, at last."

Langler now at last joined us. As we set out afresh a youth with ringlets and a velvet

coif came up blushing, to be presented by Herr Tschudi as "Mr Court-painter (Hof-maler) Friedrich." "But has the baron a court?" I asked, to which Herr Tschudi answered: "not in strict etiquette any longer perhaps; but it amuses the baron to keep up a pretence of the old sovereign rights, and, being a dear heart at bottom, he is ever fond of pets, of whom our friend, the court-painter here, is one."

We now went on inward to the second court, a party thenceforth of five (including the bear), and were shown the granary, storehouses, electric set. "Do you keep a large staff of retainers?" I asked at the offices. "A mere handful now," was the answer; and Herr Tschudi added with a laugh: "but they are all trusty to the backbone, in case you ever think of storming the castle!" This was the hard nut whom I had had the fantastic thought of bribing to tell the truth as to Dees! He was full of pride in his baron and castle, and such a hero-worshipper that I even fancied that he tried to ape the baron's manner and speech. "Certainly, the baron keeps some excellent horses," said I at the stables: "is he fond of riding?" "Ach, not now," was the answer; "but he has been a dashing bear and boar huntsman in his time, for whatever he attempts he does with a more magnificent success than others; the mother of the good Ami here (meaning the bear) was slain by him. As for the horses, the alp is noted for them." "So, since the baron no longer rides," said I, "how does he amuse himself now when in residence?" "Mainly in the laboratory, which I will show you presently in the keep," he answered. "Indeed?" said I, "is the baron a chemist?" "What, you did not know that?" said he: "everyone knows that he is even a specially profound chemist, for chemistry has been his life-study." "The baron is always found to be more than one had thought him," said I; "I wonder if my friend and I will have the honour of seeing him before we leave the alp?" "His lordship's comings and goings," answered Herr Tschudi, "are always very uncertain." "Strange to say," said I, "there is a rumour in the alp that the baron is actually in residence; at least one woman told me that she knows it for a fact." "Thundery weather!" cried the man with a flush, "what is the woman's name?" "I don't know her name," I

answered, not wishing to get my good sennerin into any trouble.

A move was now made towards the keep with its square tower at each corner. By an outside flight of steps we went up to the first floor—there was no ingress to the ground floor—and were shown the old hall (ritter-saal). The quality of this place was most quaint somehow, with some feeling of ancient forests, damsels and nixen, and knights of Lyones, yet all was quite plain, even shabby, save some rather portentous portieres which shut off his lordship's private quarters. I, for the most part, strolled with Herr Tschudi, while Langler, with Herr Court-painter, bent over everything in his connoisseur way: there were paintings by old abbots in tempera whose secret is lost, there were cressets, gobelins, tables of pierced bone, painted hoch-Deutsch MSS. Langler said hardly anything, and only once spoke to Herr Tschudi, when he called out: "Is this pieta ancient?" to which Herr Tschudi answered: "fifteenth-century, sir." "But," said Langler, "Herr Court-painter says sixteenth-century," at which Herr Court-painter blushed all over his broad face. "No, sir, fifteenth-century," repeated Herr Tschudi. "I thought it modern," said Langler; "but what is this inscription on its base?" We all now went to look at the pieta, a Virgin and dead Christ in wax; but Herr Tschudi could make nothing of the inscription, for he said, "it is some pious motto, but I do not know that language—do you, perhaps, Herr Court-painter?" Herr Court-painter of the star-gazing spectacles shook his ringlets, with the answer: "I do not know what it says." "Does—the baron read Hebrew?" asked Langler suddenly. "Ach, not now any more, I think," answered Herr Tschudi; "but he has been a master of several old languages in his time." I noticed Langler's brow twitch, but did not imagine that the matter was of any importance; I saw, indeed, that the letters on the pieta were Greek, but all in capitals, with the sigmas like C's, and much effaced, so my mind shirked the bore of reading, and I turned away with the others from it.

After this we were shown the baron's laboratory, the upper rooms, one of the four towers, and were now escorted by Herr Tschudi, Herr Court-painter, and the bear

back to the gate, where Herr Tschudi parted from us with profound reverences.

"It is a fabulous place," Aubrey wrote of it, "imbued with an old forlornness, and a waving of woods, and the pining of an alto wawl in the windpipe of its airs," but certainly I felt rather foolish when I left it, for I had learned nothing, and what we were now to do I had no notion. At the entrance to the forest we met our old Lossow with his pipe, and he climbed with me back to the guest-court, Langler meanwhile striding well ahead of us, wrapped in silence.

CHAPTER XIX

THE FACE OF DEES

On going into my sitting-room at the guest-court I beheld Langler already there, with a busy pen in his hand and his hat still on his head; he said nothing, nor could I guess what he was at, till, getting up sharply, he handed me to read a note to Herr Tschudi in something like the following words:—"Sir, you have, to my certain knowledge, one Father Max Dees unlawfully confined in Schweinstein Castle, of which you are the governor, his dungeon being the cell at the bottom of the north-west tower. For such an act of flagrant unrighteousness there can be no excuse whatever, and I have to address to you, in the pretended absence of the castle-lord, the warning that, if within the next twenty-four hours your prisoner is not released, then my friend, Mr Templeton, and I will know how to coerce and duly punish you...."

I was never more surprised!—every word of it was surprising! My first words were: "but by what means are we to coerce and duly punish him?"

"Oh, we shall find a way," said Langler: "I intend to be no longer tentative and tolerant; Dees must now be set at liberty, or I shall act with a certain rigour."

"But, Aubrey——"

"No; Arthur, we have already been sluggish and patient, we have lost time—time. It is for us now to put our powers brusquely to the test."

"I agree," said I: "let us put our powers to the test, let us act with a certain rigour. But how? I confess that I don't understand you. Tell me first how on earth you can know that Dees is not only still a prisoner, but in the north-west tower?"

"As to his being still a prisoner, that is on the surface of things," he answered: "the slightest criticism applied to the words and manner of Herr Tschudi would unveil the man's consciousness of that fact. He has even caught the contemptuous, frank trick of his master, and was hardly at the pains to be a hypocrite. When you said to him, 'but is Father Dees still a prisoner, if one may ask?' his answer was: 'surely one may ask; but all that was five long years ago, of course.' Very 'long' years—'of course.' No, he wouldn't have spoken at all like that if he had not had Dees' present captivity in his consciousness; he wouldn't have been stung to retort: 'surely one may ask,' but would have answered at once with a careless 'Oh no.' And all his manner and other words were in the same sense."

"You are no doubt quite right," said I.

"I am even sure of it," said he: "when I asked him as to the pieta, whether it was ancient, how off-hand was his answer, 'fifteenth-century, sir,' though he had previously called me a connoisseur, and might have known, if he had troubled to think, that I should see his statement to be untrue. The pieta is not at all in any of the moods of old Northern work, and it bears the initials of Max Dees, who most likely made it. But Herr Tschudi did not wish Dees to be a topic, and shunned his name even at the cost of an untruth; nor would he have acted at all like that, Arthur, if Dees had gone out of his life and care five 'long' years ago—unless, indeed, there were unseen ears listening somewhere to which Dees' name is ever a word forbidden in the castle."

"Well," said I, "let it be taken as settled that Dees is still there in prison; but how can

you know that he is in the north-west tower?"

"You didn't read the words in raised letters on the base of the pieta?" he asked.

"No, I didn't read them."

"In what language do you imagine that they are?"

"In Greek," said I.

"No, in Hebrew," said he, "Hebrew words in Greek letters, and so put there by a most knowing mind, I gather, the same mind and hand which captured the wren, and sent her out with her message; and if you add to these proofs of wit the craftsmanship in the pieta, and Herr Tschudi's admission of Dees' oratory, you get an intelligence of many gifts, as 'brilliant' perhaps as 'Savonarola.' Dees apparently made the pieta some time shortly before his imprisonment, when he was not without bodings of his doom; and the Hebrew words in Greek letters were meant to baffle a half-classic like the baron, in case it should ever occur to the baron to read what he would assume to be some pious motto in such a place."

"But what are the words?" I asked.

"These, Arthur," said he: "'If I am killed, it will be the lord's doing; if imprisoned, at the bottom of the north-west tower.'"

"But that is nearly everything!" I cried: "what luck! I wonder what was Dees' hope.... But do you mean to say, Aubrey, that you would betray to Herr Tschudi that we are in possession of this wonderful piece of knowledge?"

"It has seemed to me that we have dallied and been mild more than enough, Arthur."

At this, I must confess, there rose in my mind the old rhyme: "he never said a foolish thing, he never did a wise one." "But, Aubrey," said I, "is it not clear that the last thing which we must do is to threaten and challenge these people? We should only provoke a smile; even our liberty, our lives, are in their hands. Pray listen to me in this for Emily's sake, for all our sakes. We can effect nothing by impulse and

spasmodic high-handedness when our power is just nil. And if we betray our knowledge of Dees' dungeon in this fashion, what is to prevent them removing him to another?"

"Well, your judgment is always good," said he, with a smile: "there stands the letter, written, at any rate, but it need not be actually sent; all life is the same tangle, I suppose, in which not only the why but even the how of conduct remains enigmatic, and the maze is without clue, save at its end," and he threw himself on our old sofa, with his hands behind his head, while I at our window-garden of fuchsias and oleanders tore up the note, looking down an avenue of the wood, till presently I said: "I wonder if Dees' dungeon has a window?"

"Castles of that date," answered Langler, "have not usually dungeon-windows; but Dees' dungeon has one, of course."

"How do you know?"

"But didn't he send a bird from it?"

"Well, of course. Well, then, since there is an opening of some sort, the thing for us now to do is to get at Dees, and he will tell us how to work out his release. I believe that it can be done, if he is really in the north-west tower, for the north wall of the castle rises sheer from the river-cliffs, which are only some thirty feet high."

Langler sat up at my words, and for the rest of that evening we were discussing this thing on every side.

The next (Monday) morning I rode five miles towards Speisendorf, where I got a boy to buy for me forty metres of rope, and on coming home spent the remainder of the day in my room making a rope-ladder; on the Tuesday I purloined two hooks from a shanty in the cow-yard to fasten to my ladder; and at midnight of that same day I was face to face with Max Dees.

I shall never forget that night, that experience, it was so tenebrous and windy, all was like a scene in Erebus—the castle, the cliffs, the forests, not a light anywhere on

the earth or in the heaven, and my heart, like the midnight thief's, was in my mouth. We left the guest-court by stealth, hurried down the forest, and at the river launched the fishing-boat which I had previously fixed upon—a nasty piece of work, for that small river falls some five feet, and by ill luck the tide was at ebb, so we had to push down the boat through slush, and when we had got under the castle I had to climb through more slush to the cliff. Langler remained in the boat, for there was nothing to make her fast to. Above some ivy grew on the cliff, but none below.

At a cranny where the cliff-surface was more broken I now began to cast the ladder; but I had cruel luck at first, every cast making a racket of which all the jackdaws on the rock and the very soul of the night seemed to be conscious, and I regretted keenly that we had not tried our luck with the wooden ladder of the guest-court, much too short though it was. However, after a few throws, the grapples caught fifteen feet up, and in the end, by three stages, I stepped over a crucifix at the top at a point where a yew and an ash grew out of the bush at the cliff-edge; and now not two feet from the edge was the north wall of the north-west tower, and in it a window almost level with the ground.

At that window I lay on my right side, I called upon Max Dees: and at once, startling me, a hungry breath was with me; "yes," it whispered, "I am here, you are come to deliver me—tell me!"

"Yes, Dees," I whispered, "we are two——"

"Gott!" he whispered, "speak low."

I told him that his message sent out by the wren had come to us, and asked what we were to do for him.

"Yes, to deliver me," he whispered, "a good file, bring it to-morrow night, in three nights I shall be ready to fly with you, go now, tread softly, one good file...."

"I shall bring the file," I whispered, "but our object in coming was to be able to swear that you are actually a prisoner, and so move the authorities——"

"Speak low," he whispered horridly: "no, the file, the authorities would not act against him—not for months, years, and he means to crucify me.... Has the Church fallen?"

"No; why?"

"He vowed to keep me to see the downfall of the Church, which I loved, and then crucify me, bring the file...."

"He shall fail, I promise you, don't be so frightened, take comfort, trust in God, trust in us, we mean to stick to you to our last breath——"

"Thanks, the file, go, go, one good file."

"We sha'n't fail," I said, and I was now about to rise when, to my dismay, I heard a noise in the bush, and, peering that way, my eyes made out the form of a man. I was very unnerved. It came toward me along the cliff-edge, and I had a thought of shooting, for a weapon was in my trousers pocket, when I became aware of Langler!—a surprising thing, seeing that he had arranged not to climb. He stooped to my ear, panting, "is he there?" "Yes," I whispered, "but to what have you made fast the boat?" "Gott, speak low," came in agony from the window-bars. "I made her fast to the ladder," whispered Langler, "have you seen him?" "One can't now, go back," I whispered. "We should see him," he whispered, "so as to be able——" "It is all right; go back," I whispered, "no! no! don't strike—" for I heard him about to strike a match; but the match was struck, and in its shine we had a vision of a face all eyes in a bush of black beard and hair; it seemed horrified at the striking of the light! which, however, was hardly burning before it was puffed out by the wind.

It was at that moment that I became aware of a grating sound ten yards along the cliff-edge where the ladder was, and immediately I heard a splash in the river; whereupon, picking myself up, I pelted to the spot, only to find the ladder gone. I understood at once that the boat, tied by Langler to the ladder-foot, had dragged upstream (the tide was rising), dragging the grapples aside from the arm of the

crucifix at the cliff-edge, and taking the ladder with her; and I felt hopelessness, for how we were ever to get away it was hard to see, since I was aware that some parts of the bailey-wall went up sheer from the cliff-edge.

"Is the ladder gone?" whispered Langler.

"Yes," I whispered, and I could not help adding: "pity you came up!"

"I thought that I had better see him, in order to be able to say that I had," he whispered.

"You might have said it without actually seeing, you know, Aubrey."

"Hardly, I think, Arthur," said he.

I would not answer, for at the moment, I confess, I was a little impatient of Oxford and the academic stiff mind of the schoolmen. The ladder was gone! that was the point: and with it all seemed lost.

However, we presently started out eastward on hands and knees, until we entered some narrows beyond which there was no venturing; then, having turned, we once more went by Dees' window, who sent out to us some momentous hist, which we were in too much misery of mind to heed; and in the end, after somehow managing two danger-spots, we came out into forest at the castle-back. From that point we saw for the first time a light in the night, a light in a tiny window of the donjon—as to which Langler made the reckoning that it was burning either in or near the baron's laboratory.

We then walked up through the forest, got by stealth into the guest-court about two o'clock, and crept to our beds. I, however, could not sleep, but lay living over again all our night-bewitched adventure: the winds, the tremors and chances, seeing again the eyes and hearing the gasps of that poor, darksome prisoner, and thinking of the loss of the boat and of what that meant: for I knew that with the next ebb of the tide the boat would very likely be recovered by her owner, with our ladder tied to her, and with my jacket, waistcoat, and cap, and Langler's hat, in her! so that what we

had been about would too probably soon be known in the castle and throughout the alp.

CHAPTER XX

THE UPSHOT

Early the following morning Langler and I had pretty sharp difference of opinion at my bedside. I said to him: "Dees' own view of what is good for himself is naturally worth more than yours or mine: a file is what he says that he wants, and I believe that we can still get it to him if we act now before the boat is found."

"The boat may have already been found," said Langler.

"Possibly," said I; "but no doubt the rumour will take some time to get into the castle, so that if we act boldly at once, taking the ladder here, we may get the file to Dees."

"But we have no file," said he.

"That is the least of it, surely," I answered: "Lossow has a big box of tools; we can take a file."

"No, frankly, Arthur, it would not be quite to my taste," said he.

"What would not, Aubrey?"

"This of the file: does it seem quite pretty and correct to allow ourselves to become the abettors of any person in breaking open another man's house?"

I was silent: it was painful to me to believe that Langler could be serious. "But in this case," said I, "the other man's house happens to be a house in which the person is lawlessly imprisoned. Or is that not so?"

"True," said he; "but still, isn't it very well said that two wrongs do not make a right? If you look at it with a certain sidelong criticism and detachment, I fancy that you

will just see that it would not be quite decorous and becoming. No, it would not be decorous, and, moreover, it is not in the scheme. We have now actually seen Dees in prison, so the proper authorities can no longer refuse to act, and upon them we must now cast the burden."

"But the authorities can refuse to act," said I, "for Baron Kolár, remember, is no mere nobleman, but a political somebody, and the authorities, if they do act, may take weeks, or 'months or years,' as Dees said. True, the authorities are what we originally proposed: but we did not then contemplate that time would be the question, that Baron Kolár might be here at home, or might have any purpose against the life of this poor man—'crucify,' by the way, is the word which Dees used: open your mind to it, Aubrey."

"Well, but to me there is something fantastic in the mere word," said he: "Dees' mind may be unhinged."

"Not in the least, I believe," I answered. "Are crucifixions so very unfamiliar to you? I say that if some circumstance or other once led Baron Kolár to vow that this thing shall be done, then it will be done, unless we act now out of the rut of ourselves, on a plane higher than our everyday height. It is hard to do, of course, but perhaps we can screw ourselves up to it. Let us think of Dees' agony of waiting for the file to-night, to-morrow night, every night; and I promised him, I said, 'we sha'n't fail you, trust in us, we shall stick to you to our last breath.' No, we can't fail him."

"But you speak as though I proposed to fail him, Arthur!" said Langler.

"No, you don't, of course, propose that," said I, "but still, we can't let some qualm of primness or respectability in us cause the man to curse Heaven: he should have the file; I know that Emily would agree with me——"

"Emily? No! Emily would hardly say, I think, that the principles of conduct should be modified by pressing circumstances."

"But did not David eat of the shewbread in pressing circumstances?" said I: "I am

convinced that Emily would agree with me, if I know her."

"No, nego, nego."

"Well, we won't dispute that," said I; "but still, let us think of Dees waiting, despairing, conscious perhaps that Baron Kolár is in the castle, with God knows what ghastly meaning. And to move the authorities will take time, even if they be willing; and who can say what may happen meanwhile to Max Dees?"

"Then I shall know how to act this very day," said he, "neither approaching the authorities nor giving Dees the file, but in another vigorous, yet law-abiding, fashion."

"Which fashion, Aubrey?"

"I shall rouse the alp," said he, "I shall implant into each mind the certainty of Dees' imprisonment, I shall ignite their indignation, and lead them all to demand his release."

For some time I made no answer to this; then I said: "well, do so; and, if the human swineherds on this alp were theories, you might just possibly succeed: remember, however, that, in the event of your failure, it will be too late then to take the file, for the news of the boat and ladder will certainly by that time have reached the castle, and Dees will thenceforth be strictly guarded, or removed to another dungeon."

"Well, but I won't fail," said he—"at least let us hope that I won't fail, Arthur; one can but try one's purblind best, and it may perhaps be that time and tide will happen to him."

"Yes, I see how you feel, I see," said I; "but you know the awe, and even affection, which all these people here cherish for the baron: how, then, can you expect to 'lead' them against him? If you do manage it, the baron will send Herr Court-painter to stare them away with his spectacles——"

"No, I think that you underestimate the good people," he answered: "though indolent

in the presence of a suspected wrong, they will not be slow to rise against a proved wrong. Do let us have some little trust in our kind."

I felt myself, as it were, caught in the toils with this sudden scheme of Langler's, seeing quite clearly, as I did, that no good would come of it, but the more I argued the more I seemed to fix him in it, till at last it almost looked as if a crick of contradiction to me had entered into his motive. I saw, indeed, his point of view: to approach the authorities might be fatally slow, to give Dees the file was "improper"—a touch of bigotry perhaps being added to this latter view by my unlucky claim that his sister would believe it proper, for he was touchy as to her judgments, and inflexible whenever the moral, or even the proper, was at all involved; but still, his way out of the fix appeared to me too wild. At one moment I even had the thought of taking the file to Dees without him, but I saw that I should probably fail single-handed; and, moreover, he was the head in this matter: to his house, not to mine, Max Dees' wren had come, and I had merely accompanied his undertaking.

Well, what happened that day is tedious to me to tell, and shall be told shortly: first, I saw Langler in head-to-head talk with Lossow, our host, who, though very friendly with us, had never yet let one word of Dees' history escape his lips; then after all the talk, the head-noddings, the finger-countings, I saw Langler giving money—a good mass of it, too—and I thought to myself: "what, has it become a question already of bribing the 'good people'? the disillusionment will grow!" Lossow then wrote out a list of names, which Langler conned, and near eleven in the morning they two rode out together. I offered to be with them: but it was felt that my heart was hardly in the business, and I was left out of it behind.

At one o'clock Lossow came back alone, and hurried to me, mopping his bald head, where I sat at the foot of a tree. This old man always seemed by some movement of the mouth to be trying to keep back a smile, but without success; he was stout and

chubby, his arms hung from his stooped shoulders with a certain paralysed look, and he stepped short like a woman. "Kiss the hand!" he said, beaming, "all goes well, we have ridden like blackriders, and canvassed the folk. Herr Somebody will not only come, but will bring his two sons and his three day-labourers, and by three o'clock you will see gathered here the bravest swarm of them." "That should mean good trade in the beer for you, Lossow," said I. "The beer? good trade? for me?" said he, taken aback, "well, no doubt, folks must drink after all, folks must drink, what would you have? There's Karl and Jakub So-and-so have already struck work, and mean to make a day of it—it is the richest affair this day! You'll see them come gaping here like fish presently, the blessed swarm of them!" "But why gaping?" said I, "hasn't Herr Langler explained why they are to come?" "Ach, not to all," he answered, "for I whispered to Herr Langlaire, 'hasten with leisure,' 'many heads, many minds'; they of these parts are a curious lot, you know, oh, a curious lot, you wouldn't understand them even after many years, for one must be born among them." "On the contrary, Lossow," said I, "I understand you through and through: you mean that, if Herr Langler had told them everything, they would have been afraid to show their noses, and the rich affair would have been spoiled." "Ah, you are a rogue!" said he, "well, between us, it was something like that: what would you have? one is nearer to himself than to his neighbour. After all, these bauers and landsasses here are a mean-spirited swarm, what can you expect? As for me, if I had been they, I should have demanded the release of the Pater Dees long ago, yes, I!—if I had been they. Still, some of them have been told all, and there's Herr Somebody coming with his two sons, Wolfgang and Ernst——" "Who is this Herr Somebody?" I asked. "What," said he, "not know Herr Somebody yet? the Mittel-frei? with fifty acres of beet on the yon side of the Schwannsee? Between us, he keeps a little grudge against the baron, and is all for a lark, with a carouse to follow"——in this way he kept on gossiping, trying not to smile, but smiling, and full of the heyday. Langler, it appeared, was still "canvassing the folk," had five

cottages more to visit, but would be back for dinner, which Lossow at last hurried off to see to.

Langler, returning near two, threw himself upon our sofa with a sad sigh, saying: "well, so far, so good; but the boat has been recovered, Arthur; all is known, and your things and my hat, with the ladder, have been taken to the castle. Perhaps some of them will shrink from coming to the rendezvous now." He sighed again.

"As to the boat," said I, "that I quite expected: it is calamitous, but I expected it. But as to the rendezvous, I doubted that you would still adhere, Aubrey, to this strange action upon which you have embarked."

"But you speak of it, Arthur, as strange! Is it not as natural as the unfolding of a flower to appeal to one's human fellows in a case where humanity has been outraged? True, these people are not quite gilt with perfection—ah, no! one must admit that; but their rudeness is the plainness of honesty, they are robust and good, and, after all, I have had more success with them than I could have hoped."

"But you have not told them for what purpose you want them to come."

"No, not told it to all, not yet."

"And when you do tell them, do you imagine that they will march to the castle?"

"Yes, they will rise, they will act: men are not sheep after all."

"But suppose they rise, and act, and march, what then? Will they tear the castle down like the Bastille?"

"No, certainly, not that: but truth alone is huge, surely; justice by itself is the shout of a host. We shall see how it turns out. One after all can only steer by one's best chart, Arthur, casting one's cause upon the immortal gods, not without hope. But here is Lossow come to call us to dinner."

In peeped a face trying not to smile, but smiling, and we went down to dinner in the old kitchen, soon after which I began to note the shy arrival of Hans and Klaus, one

by one, two by two, who all slunk into the beer-room on the left of the porch, and I heard later on (though not from Langler) that drink was free that day. Meantime Langler was pacing our sitting-room with a strenuous brow, preparing, I think, a speech.

Down below grew a noise of tongues, and soon after three o'clock in looked Lossow busily, giving out the whisper: "they are all in the beer-garden waiting!" this beer-garden being a yard with tables, swings, etc., behind the house, which was L-shaped. Upon this Langler paced yet twice, took up hat and thorn-stick, and said quietly to me: "well, then, let us go."

Below we stood under the verandah, and with us were Lossow, Frau Lossow, their four daughters, and two servants; before us in the garden a mob of some fifty, with a few women and infants, earth-born beings, one of whom bore a broomstick with a rag for flag: this was Herr Somebody!—I think the name was Voss or Huss—a sloven, red rascal like a satyr. Some few gaped silent, "like fishes," but it was evident to me that the mind of the meeting was waggish; and Langler, standing against the verandah-rail, addressed them.

He was palish, but then his brow reddened, and, on the whole, I was surprised how well he spoke, since German was strange to his tongue; he kept putting his palms to the rail and catching them up again, and bowing forward and up again, and I felt how very foreign, very trying and hard, to him all this must be; but he became earnest, speaking feelingly, and I could have cried to see him spending his soul upon that herd, appealing to them as brothers where no brotherhood was, giving them news of justice and of compassion and of passionate intrepidity, where only pigs and mugs were understood. Several times he was stopped by the ribald Herr Voss or Huss waving the broomstick, and whooping some such cry as "on to the burg, you clowns! let's souse old Tschudi in the river-water!"

"Well, now," said Langler, "let us go: all of us together: with the fixed purpose not

to leave the castle without bringing back our poor prisoner with us. We will carry no weapon in our hands, no, yet we shall be great in power. Let us go; and I shall go in front, and my friend here, too, will come, to strengthen us."

I think that he was about to say more: but just now, on a sudden, behold Herr Castle-governor Tschudi in his smoking-cap standing with us. I first heard a guffaw behind me, then at once the man was beside Langler at the verandah-rail, and at once he was crying out jokes to this or the other of the crowd, cutting Langler short, asking one how his horrid old swell-foot was, assuring another that his old woman was at that very moment making a cuckold of him, egging on another to go at once to the castle to rescue the saintly and grateful Pater Dees; and the throng was roaring with laughter when, all at once, the man's face took on a look of ire that strongly reminded one of his over-lord, and he ordered them all instantly to be gone to their abodes.

Langler made not one other effort, for he was not one to strive and cry, and the power over the mob of the coarse-grained man beside him was so obvious. As the crowd began to flow away my friend turned to me, and smiled.

The last I saw of our army was Voss or Huss marching loudly away, broomstick held aloft, against the burg, in the midst of a crew of some eight or ten.

As these disappeared, Herr Tschudi tapped me on the arm.

"Sirs," said he, "kiss the hand: will you have the goodness to step this way with me?"

We followed him into a room opening upon the verandah.

"Those articles yours, sirs?" said he, pointing to a chair on which lay our rope-ladder together with my jacket, waistcoat, and cap, and Langler's hat, left in the boat.

"Yes," said I, "they are ours."

"Well, I have brought them for you," said he; "but I have now to suggest to you, sirs,

that you leave the alp before noon to-morrow."

"Is it a threat?" cried I, starting.

The man made me no answer, but laying his hand upon Langler's arm, said to him: "don't take it as a threat; I suggest it to you in a friendly way: listen to me. You have shot a buck (made a blunder) in coming here, and you will spin no silk by remaining longer. You have been strangely lucky so far, owing to the fact that your intentions are amiable; but you know nothing, you are groping in the dark on the brink of a precipice. You go away now."

"Well, your advice seems to be kindly meant," said Langler, "and we thank you. But there is no chance of its influencing us at all, Herr Tschudi."

"Then I leave it to you," said Tschudi, "God guard," and he strode away.

We two then went up to our sitting-room, where we spent the evening and most of that night. Little was said between us. Langler was not well, and complained of a pain in the heart. He was, indeed, very deeply hurt, and said to me with a meekness that made my heart ache: "I shall never again act against your judgment, Arthur, in such a matter. Oh, I thought men nobler, and the gods less niggard." It was useless to go to bed, for I never heard such a racket, the wind was rough, and the crew of peasants, who had gone away only for a time, were below, since drink already reckoned for was to be had that night. Till quite into the morning their music, quarrelling, and roars of merriment rose up to us through the roaring of the tempest in the forest—hour after hour—so that I pitied Langler, who, I knew, must be feeling that the money which he had laid out with fond hopes of good was working harm. Between the noises he and I deliberated as to what was now to be done by us; but there was nearly nothing to be said, since nothing remained but to address ourselves to the law of the land. I wanted him to come, too, with me to Gratz, but he said, what was true, that it was useless for us both to go; he was weary and disillusioned, and perhaps Herr Tschudi's command to go had something to do with

his will to stay, but I was unwilling to leave him, and begged him to go down at least to Speisendorf or Badsögl; but no, he would stay where he was. At last the noises died down, and some time after two we went to bed.

CHAPTER XXI

AT GRATZ

The next morning I came upon our Hanska in Speisendorf street, hands in pockets, whistling (as ever) at the crucifix on the mountain. This knit little chit of a man had a pride in his cylinders and some flea of flight in his brain; he and his car were well ready for me, and we reached Gratz in the early afternoon after a charming ride.

I had no hope that affairs would go flyingly with me in Gratz, and thought to myself, "this will be a matter of some days"; but it was three weeks before I left the town.

Whether those were trying weeks for me will be divined: I was afraid for Dees, afraid for Langler up there alone in the mountains, and afraid to open the letters from Swandale which he forwarded on to me. Miss Emily had, in truth, become awfully eager and anxious! all too eager and anxious, I thought. Why the delay, she wished to know! I had begged Langler to write her fully of everything as it happened, but no, he chose to be general and vague, and this only enlarged, instead of lulling, her fears. She was now back in Swandale, living partly with the Misses Chambers, and was quite well, she said. But something in me boded that she was not so well as she said.

Hence those weeks in Gratz were rather to me like three years. Among Langler's letters of introduction was one to a Herr Müller, a grain-merchant in the Holz Platz, upon whom I first called; he received me heartily, and introduced me to a certain Herr von Dungern, a lawyer, who said to me in his office on the morning after my arrival: "I'm afraid that that letter of yours written from England to Public

Safety—foh! foh!—unsupported by evidence as it was, will now be against you." He was a fine, soldierly man, but afflicted with something which caused him to mix in all his talk this foh! foh! flung sideways with venom. "But," said I, "that old letter of ours must be forgotten by now." "Oh no," he answered; "there it still lies in the Evidenz-bureau, and you know that interest in a question once dead is not easily revived." "That may be," said I, "but I can now take oath that I have seen the Pater Dees in his dungeon, and here is Mr Langler's written statement, which you will duly formalise for me." "True, true," said he, "very true. Well, it is a matter—foh! foh!—for the Blessed Virgin and Herr Oberpolizeirath."

I now know that this Herr von Dungern was a tenant of land under Baron Kolár, but still, I can't accuse him of untrustiness to me, only of slowness—of intentional slowness, I think. It was not till the following morning that I was brought to the bureaux with the affidavits, and then it was from bureau to bureau, each interview somehow filling up the better part of a day, and everyone as it were laying his hand over his mouth at the high scandal which I was so bold as to air. "But," said I to Herr von Dungern as we drove away on the fourth evening, "someone must be the final authority! I have now been referred up and up from a common Sicherheits-wache-serjeant to two Polizeiraths, and still no end to it." "Lands, manners," said he, with a shrug—"every country has its usages." "Just so," said I, "but I am still at a loss to know why I have spent my afternoon with Herr Polizeirath of Central Inquiry in a case where there is nothing to inquire into." "Well," said he, hardly very honestly, "one, of course, must see Herr Polizeirath before one can see Herr Oberpolizeirath." "Yes," said I, "Herr Polizeirath of Safety, but why, after all, Herr Polizeirath of Inquiry? the interview seems to have been as needless as it was long!" "You do not—foh! foh!—understand," said he. "No," said I, "I do not, and it is very trying." "I am grieved from the heart," said he, "for I foresee that your patience is about to be tried; but you must amuse yourself, since everyone in our city is eager to entertain you, and the good Lord, thank God, does not grudge us any

innocent gaieties; my wife and daughters in especial look forward with keenness to seeing you at our birthday-ball." "But that is a week hence!" said I: "do you anticipate that I shall still be in Gratz?" "Ah, it may be!" said he, "we shall see: to-morrow at eleven we appear before Herr Oberpolizeirath of Safety himself...."

This Herr Oberpolizeirath, whose name was Tiarks, was a gross old man, all slashed and epauletted, with a nose like a bunch of blackberries in August. I was received by him in a chamber which brought back to my mind the scented answer which he had sent to our letter from Swandale, and from the first I had little hope in this old man. "But what, sir," he asked me, "is your motive in this affair?" "A motive of humanity," I answered: "a bird sent out by the captive with a note bound about its leg came to the house of my friend; we felt bound to investigate the matter; we have done so; and we now place it with confidence in your hands." "But," said he, "in order to see this captive, you must have entered upon Schweinstein Castle by stealth?" "Yes," I answered cuttingly, "but that, I take it, is not a point which will distract your Honour's attention from the proved fact of an outrage committed within the scope of your jurisdiction." "But," said he, his face flushing purpler, "perhaps you will find, sir, that the Austrian authorities are not inclined to allow themselves to be pleased with chords (pretensions) strung too high." "I have already found it, Herr Oberpolizeirath," said I. "Ach, it is an affair, this!" sighed he faintly to himself, with a waved hand, and eyes cast upward.

In the greater part of the interview I had no share, but sat staring at the apple-green walls, while Tiarks and von Dungern laid their heads together apart. Such shrugs, such spreadings of both palms, and gazings over the rims of spectacles, one never saw! Then came the proposal that I should drop my plaint for a time, till the baron should be given a chance to set free his captive; to which I answered angrily: "But is Baron Kolár to be forewarned by those who should be his judges? He will never of himself set free this captive, and if he be given hints and nudges in the dark I shall consider that both justice and myself have been betrayed." "Eh, eh, we know that the

English hold no leaf before the mouth!" cried Herr Oberpolizeirath, with a waved hand: "but do you imagine, sir, that the baron does not already know what is being done? Poh, he knows; all Gratz knows. And would you not prefer to withdraw the plaint a little, rather than see it referred to the President at Vienna, and then perhaps up to the Provincial Diet itself after several months? Come, take your lawyer's advice; and meantime, if you stay on in Gratz—why, we know that every young man craves for the society of the opposite sex—saving the claims of religion, mind you, saving the claims of religion; but between us three here, you can't beat Gratz for female loveliness: what, von Dungern? Yes, sir, drop the plaint a little, and on the 7th of the month you have the Statthalterei Ball, on the 8th Count Attem's, on the 9th the Prince-bishop of Seckau comes into residence, with street-processions, church-rites"—and more of this sort. In this way this old fogey thought to stroke my beard with honey, as the Germans say. Of course, I did not drop the plaint, and it was formally heard the next day before a lower commissary: but I might as well have dropped it! From the tenth day I began to despair, for I had by then been put through even the formality of giving the date of my mother's birth, had interviewed at the rathhaus, land-hause, Schlossberg people whose relation with the affair seemed to be as remote and entangled as possible; and I said then to myself: "Max Dees was right: they don't mean to interfere."

Meantime I wrote daily to, and heard from, Langler, and enclosed in his letters came some from Swandale which made the delays of the authorities maddening to me, because of a panting for our return which those letters now appeared to reveal. Alas, at the bottom of her heart Miss Emily did not believe that we should ever return to her, I think; but mixed with this under-despair was that hope which is common to all the living, and I believe that it was this hope battling for breath against this despair which gave rise to this sort of fierce haste that now possessed and hissed in her to see our faces yet once again.

Gratz, meantime, was as lively a town, both in a social and religious way, as it is

ever a charming one. I saw the fête of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin, and that of the Precious Blood on the Sunday following, and each time I peeped into St Ægidius it was full of people praying, with a priest or two pacing among them, like well-satisfied shepherds, while in the lesser churches also was much the same sight. I had nothing to do at night, and to escape from myself went to two balls, at the first of which a little German monk, who reminded me of Luther, gave a homily on the lawfulness of innocent amusements. But I was sick of Gratz by the eleventh day, and was wrought to throw up everything, when something gave me a new thought.

On that eleventh day I was strolling in an alley of the Stadt Park when I saw coming towards me a girl whom I had long known—a particularly pretty little girl named Rosie, who for some years had been in the service of my sister, Lady Burney, but now was in the service of the Duchess of St Albans. When I expressed my surprise at seeing her, her answer was: "the duchess is on the way to Vienna, but stopped at Gratz to have an interview with Baron Kolár; she understood in London that the baron is at Schweinstein, but he isn't, as it turns out, and no one seems to know where he is somehow, so I don't know what our next move will be."

We sat under a tree within sound of the band, and had a long talk that afternoon, for this servant-girl seemed to know everybody of any importance in Europe and the secret history of all that was going on, so she not only kept me amused, but posted me anew as to things and men in an astonishing way. Her mistress was, of course, the great lady in English politics, and had a habit, Rosie said, of making her her messenger, and even of "consulting her opinion"! Speaking of Ambrose Rivers, she said that he had now won a following of over eight hundred, and had opened a church in Kensington, to which she had once gone: "it is a kind of a cross between a theatre and a gymnasium," said she, "but the duchess regards him more as a crank than as a serious force in religious politics, and he only owes it to Dr Burton's illness that he has not been already brought under the consistory court. Ah!" she added in her bright way, "I saw that fit of Dr Burton's!" "What, you were present?" said I. "I

alone," said she: "I was even the cause of it." "How do you mean—the cause of it?" I asked. "I'll tell you," said she, "but, of course, it is between us, sir. Never was so frightened in my life! It was about nine in the evening, at the palace, the duchess had sent me with a note, I was to wait for an answer, and was led into a room in that Blore part. The Archbishop, who was at a table covered with papers, laid the note by his side, said 'take a chair' to me, and went on writing. I noticed that he was not looking well: every two minutes he heaved a sigh, twice got up to look for something, but seemed to forget what, and sat down again without, and he would press his hand to his brow, as if he had a headache. Presently he sprang up, and began to pace about: all this time, mind you, he hadn't opened the duchess's note, nor seemed to be aware that I was anywhere, and I, of course, sat quite mum, taking stock of my archbishop. But, all at once, he saw me, looked at me—didn't say anything, went on pacing, but I noticed that he turned pale, and several times after that he looked at me, growing paler and paler, till at last, making up his mind, he came to me: I never saw anyone so ghastly gaunt! he frightened me! And what do you think his Grace said, sir? 'Well, pretty, do you love me?'"

"Dr Burton? said that? 'well, pretty, do you love me?'"

"Yes, he said it—in such a secret voice; and he was pale, pale...."

"But—what did you say?"

"My answer was a scream, sir, for the words had hardly passed his lips when he was on the ground in a fit. The doctors say, by the way, that if ever he has another, he will slip his cable."

Some of Rosie's phrases were not utterly pretty, and her anecdotes so numerous that one doubted whether they could be all quite true; but, assuming this of Dr Burton to have at least some truth, I was very shocked, very deeply moved, and I got from her a promise not again to mention it during the doctor's lifetime.

When I asked her what was the big thing at the moment in England, "Oh, still

Education," she answered in her off-hand manner: "it is nearly through the Commons now, but the Church isn't going to hear of it. This bill puts an Eton education within the reach of every boy, as in France and elsewhere, and it does seem hard that the Church should stand in the way when anyone can see that England is perishing for lack of just this thing: but that is the Church all over—the old enemy of light." "Why, Rosie, you are not a good Catholic!" I said. "Oh, well," said she, "one must submit one's reason to God, of course; but still, one's private thoughts will peep through. However, the Church was defeated over Diseased Persons, and she may be over Education, too: Mr Edwards, I know, means fight, and so does the duchess." "But Diseased Persons was won through the discovery of that body and cross in Bayeux," said I: "do people, by the way, still discuss that discovery?" "Nothing has ever been made of it that I know of," she answered: "but some queer things were said, as some queer things were said of the disappearance of Dr Todhunter, and it gave a shock to the Church somehow, till two more of the visions were seen, and that turned people's minds away."

On the whole, the girl proved a mine of modernity: but what causes me to mention her here is a criticism of some of her words made by Langler, and a meditation which occurred in my mind in consequence of that criticism, not without definite result.

On the night of our meeting I mentioned her in my usual letter to Langler, and in his next to me were the following words:—"This Rosie, you tell me, says that Baron Kolár is not at Schweinstein: but you and I believe differently! That voice and those two English words which you heard on the night when we were saved from drowning, and that light in (?) the castle laboratory on the night when we saw Max Dees—these, indeed, are hardly proofs; yet we do have a feeling that he is there: and I have asked myself what can be his reason for hiding his presence there, if he is there, even from political people like the Duchess of St Albans. The reason suggested to my mind is that he may really mean to do Max Dees some harm, with

the odium of which he does not wish to be afterwards pestered. Dees, it seems, has somehow wronged him, and vengeance is to be taken. But why, then, one might ask, does the man not take his vengeance and be done? It seems to be because Dees is being reserved till something else first happens, till (according to Dees himself) 'the downfall of the Church.' But, in that case, why is the baron at present lurking in Schweinstein? Perhaps it is in order to hurt Dees prematurely, before 'the downfall,' in case you and I should make serious headway in the matter of effecting Dees' release. But if this be so, it would seem to show that the baron must have some real fear of our power to release Dees. Indeed, he has such a fear: why else did he hurry hither the moment he saw that we could no longer be kept away from Styria? How sensitive he must be of the least chance of Dees' escaping him! Yet he is not a nervous man; one would imagine that he might securely have left Dees to the care of the watch-dog Tschudi! But no, he flies to the spot in person. And those two outrages upon the innocent hands—how sensitive, how frightfully in earnest he must have been to keep us from meddling! But that earnestness certainly implies a fear of our power—of our power, which seems to be nil. It must be, then, that the baron perceives that we have some power of which we ourselves are not aware."

There Langler's discernment seems to have stopped short; but his words so struck me, that I could not forget them, and after a sleepless night, which I shall ever remember, towards morning this thought was born in my head: "but Max Dees is a churchman! this is the heyday of the Church, so it is through the Church perhaps that his release may be wrought; and the baron, more far-seeing than we, has long seen this, and has feared our power, because it seemed certain to him that we, too, must see it! Here have I been tossed from Herr to Herr and from pillar to post; but the Prince-bishop of Seckau is in Gratz, and it is to him perhaps that I should have gone."

Thus oddly, one might say awfully, do things come off: if I had not met that girl in the Stadt Park I might never have come at this meditation, and everything, in the

end, would have been otherwise than it was.

CHAPTER XXII

END OF DEES

It was on my seventeenth morning in Gratz that, having been fortified with a letter by Herr Oberbürgermeister, I saw the Prince-bishop: the morning of an audience: so that I had first to wait a long time among a mob of all sorts of men, who passed in one by one at the call of a Spanish abbé with sandals on his feet, a lad of such beauty that one's eyes clung to his face, till my turn at last came, and I was ushered into a chamber almost Pompadour in style, with statues, mirrors, flowers, through a door of which one could see, and smell, the palace-chapel. The Prince-bishop was pacing the floor, shut up within himself. I think that I never saw a more imposing figure, for he was big, and, having lately come from the chapel, had on a most gorgeous large cope, the apparel of his amice sticking up stiffly about his jaws under a dalmatic that might have bought a farm. Here was the Church in the awe of her gaudery. He looked a young man of not more than thirty-five, and stood like a king; but his lengthy chin was retreating, and he had some kind of lisp which made his speech rather common and silly.

He motioned me to a chair, and as I unfolded my tale quietly enough he listened, pacing, pacing; but the moment I had finished he reddened, and, suddenly placing his two palms far forth on the table, bringing his face down to mine, the good man glared at me, giving forth the roar: "Impious scoundrel!"

I, for my part, felt myself flush, and half rose to answer the insult, for I fancied that he meant me: but he meant Baron Kolár!

During the remainder of our half-hour's interview it became clear to me that there had been long-standing feud and war before this between the prince-bishop and the

baron, an old trial of strengths never yet decided, but now to be decided; and when I deposited the affidavits with the great churchman I deposited them certain that I had at last discovered the key to the dungeon of Dees.

And so it proved: for, to cut short the story of intrigue, and runnings to and fro, and hurried breaths, during the next three days, on my twentieth day in Gratz a body of garrison-soldiers and sicherheitswachmänner, numbering twenty-seven, set out from Gratz for the mountains, I being in the rail-train with them, after having sent to Swandale the telegram: "All goes well; you will see us within four days."

These officers of the law were sent out in secret, under orders to break into any part of Schweinstein Castle if need were, and to set free the priest. I parted from them at Badsögl at four in the afternoon, hurrying on upward on horseback, while the troop followed, travelling afoot. Langler and I clasped hands under the corn-sheaf hung in the guest-court porch, where he stood expecting me, looking, I thought, remarkably well, with the good old smile stretching his lips. It was a most happy meeting: I had returned in triumph to find him safe, with a bundle of edelweiss as white as his soul in his hands and a fine brown in his skin. "Well done, Arthur," said he to me, and I to him: "all through you." "No, nego, nego," he answered. "Well, the point is," said I, "that our pains are all but over, and Swandale once more in sight." "Ah, Swandale," said he, "well, that, too, by God's mercy. Did you telegraph to Emily?" "Yes," I answered. "I, too," said he. "Do you think," I asked, "that anyone up here knows yet of the coming of the troop?" "I fancy that Lossow knows," said he. "I wonder how?" said I. "I don't know," said he, "but I fancy that it is anticipated; however, it can be of no importance, since the troop are under vigorous orders." "Let us hope not," said I; "well, but I am very hungry." Just then Lossow's face appeared, trying not to smile, but chubbily smiling, so we ordered a meal, and, passing inward, I was met at the foot of the stair by the "kiss the hand, sir!" of the frau, of her children, and of all the household. At that moment, at any rate, I may say that these people wore their wonted faces, and seemed to have no weight on their minds.

While I was feeding upon the old gansbrust and beet, Langler and I made up our minds that we had better be at the burg when Dees was set free, so as to seize upon him, hear whatever he might have to tell, and then speed down in the waggonette to Badsögl, whence we would wire Dees' story to England, and so, having won our backs bare of the world's business, make for home. All this was settled. My trunk was waiting below at Badsögl; Langler's was ready packed.

In the midst of our talk a boy of the place named Fritz brought us a telegram: it was from Swandale, and in the words: "Yours received, praises to God, beloved, shall await you Friday night at 9.17 at latest; am quite well, but try, will you, for Thursday." Langler read, and handed it to me. Now, every word from Swandale always powerfully moved him, so I was surprised now that his first words were: "but what is the matter with Fritz?" I answered that I hadn't noticed. "Well, he seems much agitated," said Langler.

I ended my meal, and we sat by our window, smoking and still talking about our plans. I was in the act of looking at my watch, and of saying "within fifteen minutes now the troop should be at the castle-gate," when we were startled by the toll of a bell. It seemed to come from the burg. Langler and I looked at each other, as the toll was anew borne to us, shivering up through the forest on the soughs of the evening-breeze. "Someone must be no more," murmured Langler in a low tone. I uttered no word in answer: I was all hushed and bemused into the mood of the tolls; all the mountain seemed hushed now on a sudden in submission to their meaning and the tremolo of their bleating treble. I murmured to Langler: "they seem to be tolling at the burg; someone must be dead."

The tolling of the bell went on. Presently I got up, and struck the triangle (our bell), in answer to which old Lossow rushed wildly in, no smiling now, in that old man's looks the very ghost and gauntness of awe. "Why, what is the matter, Lossow?" said I, "who, then, is dead?" "Oh, good gentleman!" he groaned, with an appealing

underlook. "But who is dead?" said I again, at which repetition of my question the old man now seemed to fly into a flurry, and crying out, "I know nothing, nothing of it!" washing his hands of it, tripped with his petty steps from the room.

I looked at Langler, saying: "we shall learn nothing from him, so let us start for the castle at once; by the time we get there the troop should have come."

We took umbrellas, Langler taking his greatcoat, too, for since my arrival the weather had turned out rough. At the bottom of the stair we saw the Lossows all in a knot, all with the same blankness and eyes of awe, and without stopping to speak to them passed out and down through the forest, which every few moments was swamped with shivery tempests and volumes of commotion mixed with spray. It was well past six, but there was still some twilight, save in the thick of the timber. Some way beyond the forest we saw a group of men staring at the troop before the burg with faces that told more plainly than words that something tremendous must have awed all these people to the heart. The bell was still tolling, and again tolling, even now telling out to the mountain as with the tongue of a woman its tidings of good-bye and bereavement, the castle flagstaff flying a flag at half-mast. We two hastened up the footpath to the gate, with the river at flood on our right, to find the men of the troop with their field-caps pushed back, their brows flushed from the tramp, for the most part soldiers of the third army-division, proud fellows, dressed in blue-grey bluses, with cockades and greatcoats. Their leader had just handed his warrant to Herr Tschudi, who lifted his eyes from it to fix upon us two, as we drew nigh, a look of venom. He, too, was white, like every denizen of the valley that untoward night; he strove to keep under his agitation, but the warrant shook in his hand, crackled in the wind; and close behind him the castle bell tolled, and again tolled.

"Well, Herr Feldwebel," I heard him say, "there was certainly such a prisoner in the castle as is named here, but I may tell you that he left it over an hour ago."

"So much the better, Herr Burgvogt," answered the other; "still, I must make a search."

"Willingly from the heart, since that is your pleasure," answered Tschudi.

"Who, then, is dead?" asked Herr Feldwebel: "I hear your bell tolling."

"Oh, one of the men of the alp," was the answer.

"Forward!" said the sergeant-major to his men.

They stooped through the wicket, which closed after them, and Langler and I were left alone. We waited at first under a wood of yews near the outwork, but as there was lightning we drew away again into the open before the portal, dressing our umbrellas against the wind, which anon brewed drizzle. The twilight died out more and more bleakly; the bell continued to toll. We stood silent, waiting. As for me, a fear was in me. I felt that some doom may have overtaken Dees, though, in that case, it seemed hardly to be believed that they would dare to toll the bell in the very presence of the officers of the law; still, I feared; I think that Langler did, too, but he said nothing of it; if we spoke, it was to remark on the strangeness of the lightning, which up there on the heights somehow strikes in different tints, now purplish, now greenish, or rosy. We must have waited forty minutes when seven of the troop came out, bearing pine-torches in their three-fingered gloves, and biting sandwiches. I ran and asked one of them for the news.

"He is not in there," was his answer, "we have searched every nook, and are now going to look round."

"Did you see Baron Kolár inside?"

"No, the baron is not in the castle," he said.

They ran up into the barbacan, ran down again in ten minutes, then ran down the path to the south castle-side, and vanished from our sight.

We abode between fear and hope. No sound was to be heard within or without the

burg but the sounds of the winds. It was almost dark before we saw the torches of the troop of seven returning, these having discovered no trace of Dees. They went back into the castle. Some minutes later the whole troop of twenty-seven came out with lanterns and torches. I approached the sergeant-major, to whom I was known, and had some talk with him: all he could say was that the captive named in his commission was nowhere in or near the castle, so that nothing remained to him now but to march back down the mountain.

We saw their torch-lights pass away down the castle-mound, and up to the forest, and lost to sight, and still we loitered by the portal, not knowing what to think or what next to do.

"Perhaps we had better go back to the guest-court," I said at last; "something may be learned there."

Before Langler could answer the wicket opened, Herr Tschudi stepped out, and, peering at us, cried jauntily: "kiss the hand, sirs! What, still waiting to see the good Pater Dees come out?"

Neither of us answered him.

"You are only losing your time," he went on: "Pater Max, is it? the blessed Max? But no saintly Max will come out here again, by Gott, no. Look you"—his voice sank secretly—"I'll bite into the sour apple, and give you a hint, just to satisfy you two men. You have been eager to see the lovely saint—eager, eager: well, he is not a thousand metres off, up yonder by the right river-bank, waiting now for you; you go, you will find him, you were eager to see him"—and at once the man dashed inward from us, chuckling, and slamming the wicket after him.

"But what a fury!" said Langler.

"Let me go up the river as he says, and see," said I, "and you wait here till I come back."

"But if you can go I will, too," he answered in a strained voice.

We went by a path which, after skirting the castle-back, followed the line of the cliffs a few feet from their edge. Occasionally, in a flash, the river appeared at flood thirty to forty feet below; but mostly it was so murky that we kept on missing the path; our minds, too, were crowded full of gloom, for all that night seemed to us haunted with ghosts and meanings of awe and fear. Some little distance from the burg the river and cliffs had a sudden bend from east to north, thenceforth the cliffs being clad to their foot in fir-forest, and we had gone past this bend, and were going on northward, I holding Langler's arm, when, at a lighting up of the scene of river and forest, we both stood still in a fright. At one place at the base of the opposite cliffs was a patch of sward some inches above the water, a very lonely little spot, and just there, in the cut of the lightning, our eyes seemed to catch sight of a crucifix. It was about twenty feet below us, perhaps fifty yards beyond us.

What stopped my breath was the fact that that was an uncommon place for one of the wooden crucifixes common in Styria, and that I had never chanced to notice a crucifix just there before, though I knew the cliffs well; but we were still standing uncertain as to what we had actually beheld, when somewhere someone was heard to say: "yes, it is my son Max that you see nailed to that wood."

The tone was like a woman's, and not remote, though our eyes could make out no form in the dark; I seemed to find myself with the world of the departed, and while I shrank there from the presence that was with us, I remember hearing in the silence a roaring of waters against the arches of the bridge and the banks of slime below; for the tide was turned, the flood had convened, had teemed, had lasted, and was over now, and the brimming river was streaming back down, as when hosts stream back homeward from some supremeness and ritual, when all's over now and done, and the mourners stream about the streets.

CHAPTER XXIII

STORY OF DEES

We had never till now even heard of a mother of Dees! so stern a silence must have been imposed by the burg upon the mountain.

"Yes," said the woman to us, "they watched me and the little Undine in my cottage, dreading that I should bespeak the two foreigners, for I fear neither them nor anything—the world knows it." We stood now with her within a hütte, or cowshed, which let in the drizzle, and we had lightning glimpses of a Roman face, and black locks, and proud rags, and of a child whom she called Undine hugged in her powerful arms to her bosom.

"Tell us, if you can, about your son," Langler said to her, "but not if that pains you, for our hearts bleed for you; we tried our best for him, and our best has turned to your utter sorrow, but you will forgive us, if you can, since we meant well."

"But I do not sorrow!" she cried. "I am only glad and proud! There he hangs nailed up like a bat; dead, sirs; with the wind of where he was born blowing his hair. Is it Max? Is it the lad? It was for this, after all, that you were born that Rosenkranz Sunday night. I said to you, 'take care, mind your steps, do not always fly on horses of wind,' but you wouldn't hear, you wouldn't heed, and this is what it was to come to. But better this than rotting in the dungeon—a grand death for a grand lad! Yes, he defied them all, the lad! he thought himself the equal of the baron's self, or of any prince of them. That lad! it is strange, too, where I had the stuff about me to make the lad; his father had nothing in the lad; none knew that lad but me, for a mother knows. He came as a surprise, the lad: he set himself above them all! But now you hang there, Max, for the eagles——" She was interrupted in this species of raving by someone who, after peering near at us, suddenly cried out: "now, Mother Dees, you know that you should be at home, get you gone from this!" "I defy you all, Hans Richter!" shouted the mother of Dees in answer. "You can do to me nothing worse than has been done to him, and it is that which would be sweet to me." "Yes, yes,

but you know that I have caught you blabbing to the foreigners," said the man, "come, come—" And at this I, understanding that he had laid hands upon her, landed him a hit on the chest, whereat, without saying more, he took to his heels.

I suspected that he had run to report to the castle what he had seen, so I pressed the woman to talk, and within some minutes we had from her the tale of Dees' life.

Max Dees was born of peasant parents thirty-two years before, within two miles of Schweinstein burg. From his tenderest years the boy began to notify a genius to whose nimbleness there appeared to be no end: he took to painting and to playing the zither; he would make figures of wood and stone and engines out of fragments of metal; he could cut out and make his mother's clothes; at the age of eight he vested himself as a bishop, and went preaching at every doorway of Jonah in the whale's belly and of Lazarus raised out of the grave: everything he managed with ease and mastery. However, he had tempests of passion, a craze for the other sex, and no government over himself.

The fame of his gifts came early to the baron's ears, and Max was early established a pet in the castle. He was sent to the University of Gratz, where he highly distinguished himself. As in Austria most of the priests are of peasant birth, the baron decided to make of the genius a churchman; and in due course Dees came to be the priest of St Photini's in the castle-court. At that time Baron Kolár was a widower, with one child, the joy of his eye, a little maid of sixteen named Undine.

"But Max strung his chords all too high for the folk," his mother told us; "I said to him: 'do not always fly on horses of wind,' but he would not hear, he would not heed." The head of Dees, in fact, seems to have gone half-mad with churchman's-pride; if anyone was lax in religion he raged, he warned, he launched fines and penances. But no man is a prophet in his own piggery; the alp men kicked against this rigour; and there came a time when St Photini's was left almost empty of worshippers. During all which Max Dees was the tutor of the little Undine.

It was in this state of things, when matters at the church had turned from bad to worse, that a wonder happened: one Sunday night the handful of worshippers in St Photini's beheld a vision hung in mid-air in the nave—a lamb nailed to a cross: a real lamb to a real cross; they marked the dripping blood, there could be no mistake. It chanced that the baron was just then in residence, and present in the church: he, too, saw, and was almost as awed as anyone. Wild was the effect: St Photini's was thereafter the holy of holies, and Max Dees more the lord of the alp than the lord himself.

But this success must have been too much for the arrogant, weak head of Dees. He now dared to let his eye rest on Undine. The baron was often away at the Court in Vienna or elsewhere; often he had his Undine with him; but once for five months he left her at home. He appears to have had a fond confidence in Dees, though all this while he well knew that Dees was an impostor; or perhaps his confidence was in his own coronet and height above Dees, upon whom, moreover, he had lavished so many bounties: for powerful men are but moderately precautious. At any rate, on a certain Sunday morning when the baron returned to the burg after this term of absence, he returned to learn that his girl had been hurt by Dees. The people of the burg afterwards reported that he took it all very patiently; went down to the church that morning, and, seated in his easy-chair, enjoyed the oratory of Dees, sneering with his teeth at the corpse who preached. Only, before this, he had locked Undine into the chamber, from which she was never to come forth living.

During that same afternoon the baron had a talk with Dees in the burg: and it was rumoured about the mountain that he then made to Dees an offer of the chance of marrying Undine—a marvellous offer on the part of a German nobleman, if it be a fact; but the impudence of Dees was even more marvellous than the father's meekness: the priest demurred to disfrock himself by marriage: he trembled, and said no.

That Sunday night the folk flocked as usual to the church in the castle-court, and the bell ceased to ring, the people waited, but no Max Dees appeared. The hour for the beginning of the office was long past, and the congregation was murmuring, when all eyes were caught by a vision hung in mid-air: but a disgusting one this time—one worthy of Baron Kolár—a pig nailed to a cross, a real pig to a real cross. And while they gaped at it, the head of the baron came up through the trap-door of the vaults; he walked to the pulpit, went up into it. His hands were red with blood. The people declared that in that one day the man's hair had turned grey and his back had bent. And from the pulpit he spoke to them.

He told them that they would never see their friend, the Pater Dees, any more, since he had proved ungrateful to his patron, and had that afternoon been imprisoned in the burg, where he would probably be kept for some years, till the time should be ripe for a still worse thing to come upon him. He, the baron, had been sorry to shock them with the vision of the pig, but he had ordained it so in order to clear their minds completely of the effect of the vision of the lamb which they had seen. That vision of the lamb had been contrived by the mechanical genius of their friend, the Pater Dees. On the Sunday night, a year before, when it had appeared the baron had locked Dees into a room with him for three hours, and had compelled Dees to tell by what means the vision had been produced. Dees had confessed that he had nailed a lamb to a cross in the vaults, and by means of a dark lantern, some limelight, and some plates of glass—a contrivance not new, yet new in its perfection—had thrown, as it were, the ghost of the lamb into the nave of the church. He, the baron, had successfully repeated the same thing with the pig that evening for them to see. He believed now that none of them would ever wish for any more church; if they should, he made them an offer: let any six of them come to him and say so, and he would supply them with a new priest. He would watch with interest to see how they would act. Meantime he hoped that they would continue to be good Christians in their homes; Christianity was the highest sign of man, and could never be destroyed

or abolished, but it was an affair of aspiration and conduct, not of dogma: they might take it from him that there was no truth in any one of its dogmas, and for some years he had been casting about for an easy method of destroying the institution which persisted in embarrassing the world with those dogmas. Perhaps their friend, the Pater Dees, had now supplied him with such a method. He would watch and see. But, meantime, they must never repeat to a soul what had passed on the alp or what they heard him say that night; he set up a secret between them and himself, because they were his, and he loved them, and knew that they truly feared and loved him: but if ever anyone should recount or imply aught to outsiders that would incur his displeasure.

So much Langler and I were able to gather from the Mother Dees' gabble. As for the ill-starred Undine, she seems to have died in, or soon after, giving birth to the five-year-old Undine of whom I had lightning glimpses on the breast of the Mother Dees. This child, the granddaughter of a nobleman, was in rags, and had never been seen by Baron Kolár: a fact which chilled me with a sense of the changelessness of this man's resentments.

CHAPTER XXIV

OUR FLIGHT

Anyhow, in this unforeseen fashion we now had in full the history of the ill-fated Dees, to hear which we had started out for Styria. I now whispered to Langler, "we should be quick"; but he, not perhaps quite understanding my eagerness to be gone, lingered, trying to get the poor woman to come with us, it was such a night, and she within sight of what anon was lit up down on the strip of grass by the river's brink. Langler offered to adopt the child straightway, but she would not part with it, nor would she come with us, so we had to leave her, leading the van, almost running, so that Langler, who was no runner, panted: "well, no doubt it is as well to make

haste." "Yes," I answered, "for I sha'n't be astonished if some attempt be now made to keep us from leaving the alp. That man who ran off has by now taken the news to the castle, where it will be taken for granted that from the Mother Dees we have heard all, and we may not be allowed to get away with so much knowledge in our heads. In my opinion we oughtn't to go back to the guest-court for your trunk, but hurry straight down to the nearest sennhaus, get horses——"

"But I have five or six manuscript poems in the trunk, and the Theocritus with all my notes," panted Langler, trotting after my haste.

"Well, then, we must get the trunk," said I, "but it is dangerous: I wish to Heaven that we were safe down at Badsögl...."

At that moment—we were now at the castle-back—I saw the light of a lantern, and a second later struck against Herr Tschudi. "Well met, sirs!" he cried at once: "it is just for you that I was going to look, for I have to talk with you; if not in a hurry, perhaps you would favour me by stepping into the castle a moment." "I am afraid that we are rather in a hurry," I answered, "for we are wet, and have had nothing to eat; but if to-morrow morning at eleven will do, we shall then be happy to call upon you in the castle." "That will do just as well," said he, "but mayn't you as well step in now?" "Pray excuse us for to-night," I answered. "Willingly from the heart," said he, "since that is your wish; but—has not the Mother Dees been telling you about things?" I was about to say "which things?" when Langler said: "perhaps, sir!" "Oh, she has?" broke out Tschudi, "but, you see, you two men have gone a step too far now." "Come, Aubrey!" I cried out, "we can't wait!"—and I ran, dragging him by the sleeve, while Tschudi sent after us the shout: "yes, fly, you two! but don't hope to see your birth-places again...."

On reaching the guest-court breathless, I asked Lossow if the horse had been harnessed for us: he answered that he supposed so, and would see. I then paced our sitting-room for, say, six minutes, expecting him to summon us down, Langler being

in his bedroom, crowding some knick-knacks into the trunk. I went in to him, saying that the waggonette must be waiting. "One moment," said he, and I waited till he locked the trunk. But when we went to go out the door had been fastened on the outside.

We stared at each other's paleness, then I flew to the window, which was at the side of the house. The night was so deep that I could not see the ground, but I knew that it was no light leap. However, it was our only way out, so Langler slid down by the sheets, which I held for him, below heaped them for me to leap upon without making a hubbub, and I dropped upon my feet: the trap laid for us had failed. We ran on tiptoe, meaning somehow to make our way down the mountain on foot; but when we got to the back the light of the waggonette appeared just coming from the stable, and when the boy spoke to us we perceived that he had not yet been made privy to the plot against us. "We came to meet you, Jan," said I as I leapt in, "for we are in a hurry." "But the trunk, sirs?" said he. "We leave the trunk for to-night," said I: "just turn round now, and drive straight down."

He did so! and we were off down the main road in a flush of escape. I pitied Langler for his lost papers, but there was no help. "Let us only hope," said I, "that we sha'n't reach Badsögl too late to send the telegrams to England to-night."

"Why so particularly to-night?" he asked.

"But is it not certain," I answered, "that the last phase of the plot against the Church must now be about to show itself in the greatest haste? Wasn't it because of the might of the Church that Baron Kolár so feared our meddling in the matter of Dees? And now that he has dared this massacre of a churchman, how shall he escape the Church's vengeance if the Church is to remain mighty one month more? He is about to strike sharply, be sure, for we have forced his hand, and our seconds are precious."

"But shall we do much good?" asked Langler.

"Well, certainly," said I, with a laugh, "it seems late in the day to ask that, Aubrey. Assuredly we shall do good. We, too, indeed, shall have to show that the miracles are none, but, then, we shall also show that they were no machinery of churchmen. In the case of the miracle up here six years ago, which made the little model for Kolár's great scheme, the death of the Church was due to the fact that the miracle was found out to be the doing of the priest; but if we show that on the great scale churchmen have been guiltless of guile no shock of tempest will be let loose, things will decline into their old mood as before the miracles, and the Church will survive."

"True," said he; "but is that worth all our pains? an obsolete Church keeping up a look of life...."

"But is it not late in the day, Aubrey," said I, "to trouble our heads with any such doubts? We decided months ago, before we came, that the Church was worth saving; hence we came. Let's not disparage our own work. Personally, I assure you, I am not deeply concerned, for I don't deem myself called upon to be the saviour of anything: but Emily despatched me upon this work, and so I do it with conviction. Moreover, the quicker done the quicker at Swandale."

"Ah, Swandale," sighed Langler. "But I confess, Arthur, that I depart from the mountain with some regret: that old burg up there is so cradled in gales, such a spirit-world wears out its winds with well-a-days, and the tarns, the vapours, the wild swans...."

"My own feeling is rather rapture than regret," I answered; but such was the elegiac soul of Langler, which still discovered something over which to sigh and indulge its chaste melancholies. Meantime, our waggonette was moving at a walk down the benighted mountain-world, our Jan cowering so still over his nag that he might have been asleep; while we others chatted constantly—I at least being elated at our escape, at our task almost over, at home in sight, though I had no hat, the drizzles were trying, the bosom of the mountains gave out a steam of music, as it were

thousands and ten thousands busy and breeding, and the organ's sound-board breathing, and our talk was a forlorn droning in a state of being which was made all of winds and bewitchment; sometimes in a flash we might descry a crucifix hung on a crag, and our sighs would then hanker back to that night-whelmed thing on the river-bank away behind us. Keenly our hearts smote us at this memory of Max Dees. How much harm had our meddling hurled upon that man! how he must have waited and hungered for that "one good file" which never found its way to him; and now he was all in the dark on the river-bank. When I expressed my surprise that it was Tschudi himself who had sent us to see him there, Langler said: "I wonder if Tschudi has been acting to-night on his own initiative? The baron now, at any rate, does not appear to be about the burg, or the troop should have seen him; still, Tschudi may be in wireless communication with him. But Tschudi's own private motive in sending us to the crucifix seems to have been an impulse of mere spite or rage, and he may have had in his mind that we should never leave the region after seeing."

"I doubt though that at that time he meant to stop us," said I: "I think it was only after he knew of our talk with the Mother Dees. Yet it would be odd, too, that they shouldn't mind our getting away with the knowledge of Dees' doom, but should be so eager to stop us with the knowledge of Dees' life-story."

"But of the two the latter is the more important," said Langler; "for, as to Dees' doom, they perhaps calculated that by the time we could report it the Church would be impotent to avenge it; but, as to Dees' life-story, our knowledge of it is knowledge of the Church-plot, and is of permanent value as proof that churchmen are innocent of fraud in the present miracles; therefore it was urgent to stop us when we had this knowledge, since even years hence our evidence may be of use in restoring churchmen to favour, and in ruining the plot."

"Ah," said I, "years hence little would be left of the Church, I think, if we had once

been locked into that north-west dungeon. However, here we are, and now for the break-up of the fountains of the great deep. Poor Dr Burton! I wonder where he will be found in all that upheaval? I am afraid for him: the spirit that could pitch from such a moral height to 'well, pretty, do you love me?'——"

"Beastly mess!" hissed Langler to himself: "oh, pray, Arthur, I beg——"

"As for me," I said quickly, "the man upon whom I now rather bet is the archbishop's red rag, Ambrose Rivers"—and we went on chatting about the latest news of Rivers which we had from Swandale. We were still, I remember, discussing Rivers when a jodeling call arose somewhere in our rear, at which our Jan, it seemed to me, sat up to prick his ears. In a minute the call was anew heard, lalling nearer now; and now Jan pulled up short. "Why do you stop?" I cried to him, "don't stop! get on!" "It is my cousin Isai, sirs," he answered, "who is running to me with a message, for it is his jodel." "Still, you are to hurry on instantly," I cried; "every moment is precious!" But he would not budge, and even as I urged him I heard the panting of a runner near upon us. Our Jan now jumped down; at the horse's head there was a confab between the cousins, of which all that I could catch was the pantings of Isai; and I sat in a stew of the keenest anxiety. It came into my head to rush and seize the reins and lash the horse; but before I could act the whispering was over, Jan jumped up afresh, and we moved on—at least it never entered my mind to doubt that it was Jan who jumped up, though I now suspect that it was Isai. Anyway, we went on at the old walk, regained some calm of mind, again began to be talkative, and for perhaps twenty minutes now nothing happened, till all at once I was aware of the leap of our driver from the wagon, and a second afterwards the nag broke into galloping. It is my belief that a knife or something keen had been driven into its flesh—nothing less could account for its fury, and the clown had chosen for his deed a piece of the road which was little broader than the vehicle, with precipice on the right, with cliff on the left above us. There was no hope for us but in leaping, and "leap, Aubrey!" I cried as I sprang into the air over the back, with my face to the

pace, and fell on my length. Lying there, I seemed to hear a fearful silence; no sound of horse and cart; and, understanding that both had bounded down the steep, I feared to stir, lest I might find that Langler had gone with them. But presently, from some distance down, he called out upon me. I ran asking if he was hurt. "A few bruises perhaps," he panted in answer, "but I seem to have lost my hat." This solicitude about his hat I understood to be feigned, for I felt him trembling like a leaf. But such was Langler: he was for ever preoccupied about the soul, and, not calm by nature, wished always to appear to himself immovably calm.

Well, the hat could not be found, and on foot we went on down the pass. But it was not long before we were lost in a wilderness of stone and wood, where no way was. We fell into a state of fear that night both of us, and it imbued our souls for hours. I had never before in my life felt quite like that; I hope never to have to undergo such ghouls again. But there are things which can hardly be put on paper. Perhaps our experiences of the evening, the nets set for our feet, the steepness of our leap from the cart, that sight on the river-bank behind us—all these may have helped to demoralise us. The word "jumpy" somewhat describes our panic. After a time we ceased to try to hide our chills from each other. What exactly was the matter I can't quite tell; we had always endeavoured to be brave men, and no particular peril now menaced; but that night our spirits caught affrights one from the other; we both seem to have had the boding that we were about to taste of death; the grave, being, the mountains, grew too hugely gruesome for us, the womb of gloom brought forth awe—somehow we were unhinged. It was Langler perhaps who openly began it. We were resting together on a rock under the fragments of a Carthusian monastery when I heard him murmur in a sort of awed contemplation: "God be merciful...." "Why, what now?" said I. "God be merciful," he murmured again, "I have seen the wraith of Emily." This was so unlike him! My blood ran cold. "Where?" I whispered. For a minute he made no answer, then with the same entranced awe he murmured: "there—to the left of the arch, between the two trees: do you see nothing?" The hairs

of my head bristled as, peering that way, I murmured: "yes, it is she." "Our breath is in His hand," sighed Langler, with a held-up hand.

For me to say now, after so long, that I did, or could, see any such thing would be too much beyond reason; most likely I saw nothing: there was little light in the night; I think that there was no lightning at the time; but we were on that stretch of the spirit when spectres start up, and are catching: at the moment I could have sworn that I saw. It may have been the form of the boy Isai, who had perhaps followed us, it may have been Miss Emily's wraith, or a phantom of our brains; in any case, we underwent such troubles and shyings of the soul that night as could not be told, lasting more or less upon us almost till we got to Badsögl about daybreak, so worn out that we at once dropped upon our beds, and slept.

CHAPTER XXV

END OF LANGLER

I opened my eyes about mid-day quite quit of our night of griefs, with the word "safe" on my lips, for down there at Badsögl in bright daylight all looked rosy at last, and I was already inclined to doubt the bogies of the dark. Eager to start for England, I woke Langler, wired to Swandale, warned our Hanska to be ready. We breakfasted, and now nothing remained but to send the telegrams and set out.

We had determined to send two telegrams—one to Percival of Keble, the other to my friend, Mr Martin Bentley, of The Chronicle. In that morning's paper was no word yet of any exposure, the only big news being that overnight in England Education had been again sent up to the Lords; so under the corn-sheaf in the porch I, at Langler's request, wrote the two telegrams, telling of the little alp-miracle, of the world-plot, of the coming vials: and I handed it to Langler to read.

To my astonishment, Langler's face showed fastidious, and he said: "Percival will

think me sudden and epic, Arthur."

"Perhaps," I answered shortly, for he seemed not to mind that Mr Martin Bentley would think me sudden and epic.

"Couldn't we arrange somehow," said he, "to spread abroad our knowledge without having our names mixed up in it? I hate this glare——"

"But the sudden proposition, Aubrey, at this eleventh hour," said I: "how can this possibly be done?"

"I have thought," said he, "of a meeting of journalists in London, to whom we could tell everything viva voce, since that, I think, would be more in order."

"For Heaven's sake, Aubrey," I exclaimed, "let us get this thing off our backs now, and be done with it!"

"But I have thought," said he, "that if we retard the news even a day or two that might be a great thing for the Church as against the Education Bill." (He disliked the bill for some reason—called it "smart.")

"But what have we to do with the fate of the Education Bill?" said I, for what I wanted was to see his sister's face: "surely we can't gyve and entangle ourselves with such side-motives now! See, here is the boy waiting to take the telegrams; pray let us send them."

"Is that your deliberate judgment?" he asked.

"It is, yes," said I.

"Then," said he, "I submit to it: send the telegrams."

But he said it just too late, and the telegrams were never sent, for at that moment a letter-carrier came into the porch with a telegram for us which I saw shake in Langler's hand as he read it; it came from Paris, bore no signature, and was in the words: "If you send any telegrams you sacrifice Miss Langler."

We ought now to have decided upon our action in one minute, but were two hours in

the dining-room, where we went to discuss it. "What we have to do," I said from the first, "is to send instantly a telegram to Emily ordering her to fly and hide herself, as she did before, till we come; then send the two telegrams to Percival and Bentley, just as we intended."

"Ah, it would shock her, such a telegram," said Langler.

"We needn't send it, really," said I; "I only propose it so as to be quite on the safe side, for this message of Baron Kolár's is just a threat, a last card to keep us from acting; if we defy it, and send the two telegrams, he will have no motive whatever to hurt Emily—except a wanton revenge, of which the man is incapable. I believe that Emily is quite safe, really. Let us boldly send the two telegrams, whether we send one to Emily or not."

"Oh, I couldn't," he murmured, flinching, pacing the floor, sorely pestered now. Of Baron Kolár as regards his sister he had a blue awe and shiver, like a man who when a child has been frighted with bogies. It is obvious that my view of the matter was the rational one, but he flinched irrationally, he had a blue fear of what Kolár might just possibly be minded to do to Miss Emily. On the other hand, his pride rebelled against the baron, for when I said: "don't send the telegrams, then, but let us start at once," his answer was: "but who is this man that I should in all things obey him blindly? He may find me of grimmer make than he thinks!"

"But it must be one thing or the other, Aubrey," said I. "Send the telegrams or not as you please, but, either way, do let us be gone at once. My telegram to Emily this morning assured her that she should see us on Friday morning; if we don't start now we can't reach London till Friday night, and she will thus be thrown into a fresh stew of misery. The one fatal thing for us is indecision."

He stood at a window, looking out upon the garden, and after some time said: "well, I won't send the telegrams: let us start, and in passing through London we can divulge all to the meeting of journalists, secretly called, then at once hurry on to

Swandale."

"Very good," said I, "the car is ready; let us start this moment."

"But what a mess!" he hissed, turning upon me: "I warn you, Arthur, that it is even mean, it is even craven. Am I, then, the bondman of this person?"

"Still, let us start, Aubrey! let us start!" cried I, with a pang of panic in me.

"We are about to start," said he. "But consider whether this meeting of journalists in London will not mean delay: suppose the man gets wind of it, and, even while we are about it, perpetrates some horror at Swandale...."

"He will have no motive!" I cried.

"Ah, he may have, he may. Would it not be better to send the telegrams, only warning Percival and Mr Bentley not to make them public for some days? In that way we act as we originally intended, our purposes will not have been influenced by this man's mandates, and at the same time he will not know that we have defied him."

"Well, then, let us do so, and quickly," said I.

"But that, after all, is mere self-cheating," he sighed: "if the telegrams are not to be made public at once, why send telegrams? Why not wait and write letters, which, moreover, would be less sudden and assaulting? No, Arthur, if we are to obey the mandates of the man let us not do so in such a way as to persuade ourselves that we have not done so."

"But all this subtlety, Aubrey, when we should be stirring!" said I: "come, shall we not decide one way or the other, and start now?"

"But are we to start without knowing what we are about?" he cried. "What a mess! Is it possible that you cannot help me a little to see my way?"

"What more can I say?" I asked: "I have begged you to send the telegrams, but, since you are timid about Emily, do not send them; there remains the meeting of

journalists in London; or thirdly, we can write letters from Swandale. Only, let us start. I see clearly that all danger to Emily is past; the really terrible danger now is to ourselves up to the moment when we shall have communicated to someone else this knowledge that we carry in our heads; and, indirectly, there is a danger to Emily if our return is delayed, for it will monstrously shock her, I warn you, Aubrey: let us start."

"Yes, do, do let us start," he muttered: "I shall send the telegrams; in which case, do you still advise me to send one to Emily bidding her fly from Swandale?"

I looked at the clock, saying, "no, not now, too late: for if Baron Kolár really meant her any harm, by this time he has made his arrangements to accomplish it; she wouldn't escape him. But he means her no harm, and such a telegram would only throw her into needless alarms."

"Well, but I couldn't venture to send the telegrams to Percival and Mr Bentley without also sending one to her," he answered.

"Ah, then, here is another deadlock," said I.

"Oh, Arthur," he cried out, "how we do need some faculty between scent and sight to live!"

"But if you would let me decide for you—if you could, if you would!" I wooed to him.

"Do so, do so, I beg for nothing better," he answered with his bitter-sweet smile.

And again I decided for him, but again he raised new side-issues, and it went on until near three, when we at last departed, after wiring to Swandale that we should not arrive on Friday morning, as promised, but on Friday evening between nine and eleven. As for the two telegrams, they had not gone, for our world-message was to be shuffled off our shoulders at the meeting of journalists.

Away, then, we flew westward. A whine was now in the time of year even in the

lowlands, and the worm of winter at its work in the woods. I saw bands of telegraph-wires like bars of written music, crowded with birds migrating, and thought how a messenger-wren, too, may be, had once halted to rest on this band or on that; I saw cliffs of forest reflected red, yellow, and negro in rivers, like old tapestry, angular and faded; and that evening I saw such a sunset as I think that I have never seen, save on the three following evenings, perfectly astonishing, like portents. At dinner-time we arrived at Munich, where a telegram from Swandale awaited us, and as she could hardly have been certain at which hotel we should stay, we understood that she must have sent many telegrams on the chance of striking us somewhere. Why the delay from Friday morning to Friday night, she wished to know! Were we actually now on the way? Would we telegraph her at every town? She had been greatly upset, but was reconciled now to the delay, provided we were actually now at last on the way—a long message. We wired that we were straining homeward, and at Stuttgart that midnight met yet a message from her that seemed to laugh through tears, not without something of the rictus of hysteria, I am afraid, with its "joy!" and its "bless God!" and its "poor Kitty-wren is ill; she will sink more and more as you come nearer, and the moment you re-enter Swandale gate will drop dead." We had to stop some time at Stuttgart, but sleep was far from me, such a pity bled in me, such a fear was mine; then under the stars we started out afresh behind our flying Hanska, who had gained from Langler the biblical name of "the terror, the arrow, and—the pestilence."

On the Thursday evening we were at Metz, where fresh messages passed between us and Swandale; at Metz also we arranged for the meeting of journalists, first wiring to Langler's friend, the Rev. Thomas Grimes, who in his reply placed at our disposal a room in the Church-house, Great Titchfield Street; we then sent messages to eight journalists whom I knew, begging them to be at the Church-house at eight on the Friday night, and to bring with them any other journalists whom they chose, to hear a matter of high moment: we hoped that we might thus have a meeting of perhaps a

hundred men, who would instantly flood the world with the news.

We then afresh set off, straining to catch the next day's 5.35 p.m. boat. I am fond of the memory of that ride, for with it ended most of my merriment in this life; the air was crisp and bright, the flight filled our breasts, and raised our spirits. That evening on leaving Metz we looked with something like awe and joy at the sunset, which was most flamboyant, and likened by Langler to God's war-lords mingled in battle. There burned in it a form that had an urn in her hand, which he pointed me out, and with much feeling said to me: "to me, too, this earth is dear, Arthur. It is easy to conceive a world with ruby mountains and coloured moons, where all the lads are forever blowing the oboe and ring-doves roll their soft rondeaus; but give me this hand-made old home of ours, with her quite Greek trimness of style; for it is something after all not to have been turned out by a God in a troubadour mood, and out of her strength comes forth sweetness, too, anon,—consolations and vouchsafements, winning twangs, and Memnon-vowels. Farther in the future this music of our Father will discourse perhaps, and mourn, Arthur, to a humanity that will have outlived this outer ear, and hoarded up an inward hearing and harmony."

Moved by some throe of love, I laid my hand on his arm then, as the sunset faded, murmuring to him "Aubrey, always full of grace and truth"—I cannot tell why; it was my last caress; I did it to his burying; and God knew, but not I. The same night we rushed through Charleville, and by 5.10 the next evening were in Calais.

CHAPTER XXVI

END OF LANGLER—continued

We crossed over to Dover, where a man came on board the boat, calling abroad: "Langler! Langler!" with a wire for us from Swandale: she wished to know if we had actually reached England, and also why it was that, arriving at Dover at 6.15, we

should not arrive at Swandale till ten!—for we had mentioned to her nothing of the meeting of journalists in Great Titchfield Street. She begged us to telegraph the instant we touched British soil, and again when we should reach Victoria.

Langler telegraphed that we were safe at Dover, that all was, and would be, well, praying her to be patient, promising to be with her at ten—but still not mentioning the meeting of journalists, though I entreated him to.

We then set off by rail-train for London, and still there was no mention of any exposure of the miracles, as I saw on looking through the evening paper in the train.

"I suspect," said Langler to me, "that the delay in the exposure may be accounted for by this Education Bill turmoil, for as the Lords have now again mangled the bill, and the clash between Church and world has now waxed into acuteness, the plotters may be waiting a little till this reach its highest fever, when they will strike. Remember how it was with Diseased Persons. But this time we should be able to counteract at least half the force of their stroke."

"In any case, I think that the Education Bill will triumph," said I.

"Well," said he, "let that be as it will: why do we so heave and rave in all the batrachomuomachia, leaving our poor souls behind, as though life were a flight on motor-cars, with the nitrogen all drained out of the air? The earth does not march by petroleum with puffs, but by the charm of an old spell-word; and that sunset, Arthur—look at it: ah, for one bath of that large, warm calm."

"Extraordinary thing," said I, "there must be some atmospheric disturbance somewhere; it seems even more glorious than yesterday's."

"It may be the assembled good-bye of all the prophets and apostles to their old Church," said he: "that shape afaint above yonder in white is Elijah translated far with robes aflaunt, and that charmed to rose is St Paul caught up in trance to the third heaven."

He was talkative, full of sparkle and fancy, even playful, that evening; but all our

talk in the train was interrupted by a debate between two men about the eternity of hell-fire, which they maintained to the moment of our alighting at Victoria. It was then night, with only twenty minutes left us in which to get to Great Titchfield Street by eight o'clock, but we first made our way to the telegraph-office, where yet a message from Swandale awaited us, this time our friend writing in the words: "Yours from Dover to hand; you are in England, so all's well, I await now with quietness. Poor Kitty-wren drooped visibly at moment when you must have touched Dover. I pity her a little. She can't last. Am quite at rest now, waiting upon God's good will. Carriage will await you at Alresford at 9.52 without fail. Wire me from Victoria." We sent her a message, I left my chest at the station, and we hastened away.

It was drizzling slightly, the night dreary, the yard crowded with people and things darting to and fro, and I was struck with a feeling of how intensely even within the past few years, the pace of everything had quickened. But only two cars came to bid for our fare. I fancy now that this seemed queer to me at the moment, but being rather late for the meeting of journalists, elated at our nearness to Swandale, I paid no heed to it, and we leapt into one of the cars, I calling to the man: "the Church-house, Great Titchfield Street."

We sped off, but had not proceeded far when we fell in with a procession with banners, at which our car had to pull up. All down Victoria Street it teemed, blocking the world's business, some regions of it chanting ave, maris stella. I was very teased, for by this means we must have lost five minutes, having just collided with the Friday in the octave of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin. Our driver, a lank man with a stoop, deliberately turned, in crossing himself, as if for us to see—so it looked to me, then off afresh we started behind the last of the procession. London was in high animation, in spite of the wet, and I was admiring the flaming advertisements, the tempest of life, when Langler said: "London is still not a great city, no, it lacks the tone, it is a group of parishes. Look at that newspaper-placard

occupied with 'Buggins Captured.' Who is Buggins? Some mean misdoer, I suppose. And that other: 'Buggins' Love-letters to Peggy Jinks.' You can't conceive that in Paris: it is not world-news; my Athenians of Paris would slightly shrug at such parish pragmatism; no, London is not a great city...." and as he spoke, I saw "Great Titchfield Street" at a street corner, and into it we dashed.

But we had not gone far down it when our man careered into a by-street to the right; whereat I started up to him, calling out: "but where are you going? you have left Great Titchfield Street." "Yes, sir," was his answer, "they have just taken up the street down yonder, so we have to go round." I, for my part, had no idea whereabouts in Great Titchfield Street the Church-house was, nor any grounds to fancy that the man's words might be false, and after he had raced with us through a maze of Soho back-streets, through so many that I lost track of where we were, when he halted at the door of a house, unhandsome and dark though it was, I did not doubt that I was in Titchfield Street, and at the Church-house.

When we went to the door a man inside said "this way, gentlemen," to us, whereat we stepped into a passage, and not a thought of wrong crossed my mind until I found myself on the ground, while a crowd of men searched my pockets—to see if I had any pistol, I imagine. Langler was in a like way. I struggled, of course, but quickly gave in; and presently we were permitted to get up, and were taken up through darkness to a room on the second floor.

This room was quite small, not more than fifteen feet long and fifteen broad, in a corner of the house, without any window, and like a room within a room, for two of its sides were made of boarding, which may have been run up for the special purpose of imprisoning us—I cannot tell. The floor was bare, the furniture was one chair and a bedstead placed under one of the two boardings—a cheap little bedstead without a bed, but with a pillow without a pillow-slip. On one of the walls burned an antique electric jet very palely.

All was silent. For it might be ten minutes Langler and I fronted each other's gaze, the notion or dream, meantime, in my own heart being that our door did not seem over strong, that a dart downward might well deliver us. All, I say, was silent. I drove my shoulder at the door, and my heart hailed Heaven with thanks when I found it frail, so heaving now my all into the strain, I heard the steel give out sounds, felt the beams bound. But the staple would not quite start, though again I dashed myself into it, and again and again and again, with passion. Then I panted out upon Langler, "help, Aubrey, help...."

"Oh, Arthur," was his answer, "are we to strive and cry?"

"Never mind ... help ... help...." I panted.

"I implore you to be calm," said Langler.

Sure that his help would force the door, I now flew from it in a passion to my knees before him, with my arms spread out beseechingly to him, crying out to him, "for Christ's sake, help me, help me...."

"Well, since you so insist," said he, "but it seems useless, too, and is it not better...."

"Never mind, help," I panted.

I think that he would now have helped, but as he was now about to say something else the key turned outside, and Baron Kolár came in, equal to three men. As he locked the door again, I sprang up from my knees, and we both faced him. He had on the old shabby satin jacket, his hat hung over his eyes, looking earnest and abstracted, like a man carrying on his back matters of large mass and amplitude, in his hand a bit of paper.

CHAPTER XXVII

END OF LANGLER—continued

"Well, now, you see," said the man.

We made no answer, and Baron Kolár began to pace the room.

"You have been most insolent and foolish, you two men," said he: "I have lavished warnings upon you in vain, and I shall have you shot within five minutes like two dogs, without compunction, I assure you, unless you do now as I direct you."

"But don't be angry," said I, "since we have meant well, and are quite likely to do as you direct us."

"You have been most insolent and foolish," he repeated with invective; "you have hampered me, badgered me, invaded my estate, forced my hand, placed me in the greatest personal danger, threatened the success of my life-work. You are a nuisance and a danger, and should be removed.... Tell me now how you came to know that there was a prisoner in Schweinstein Castle."

"The prisoner sent out a messenger-bird," said I, "which came to Mr Langler's estate."

"Oh, that was it, yes, that was it.... Well, that was no fault of yours. You have no doubt acted like honourable men. But I hate you for having molested me. You made a great mistake to listen to the woman who gave you the story of the Styrian priest's life—for I take it that you did hear it of her?"

"Some of it," said I.

"Or rather—all of it," suggested Langler.

"Well, you made a mistake," said Baron Kolár. "However, I have a confirmed confidence in your honour: sign me, therefore, this paper, promising not to divulge to a soul during ten years, or till my death, anything that you have learned on the alp, and you shall be free men. To-night several of the bodies that were crucified are to be disinterred, including that of your groom, Charles Robinson; to-morrow morning the world will learn that the miracles were the work of priests; and, as I do not wish you to be out in the crisis of the excitement, I shall have you here till to-morrow afternoon; after that you may go, yes, you may go. I understand that I risk something

in trusting you; it is a disloyalty to my comrades; but I am a reader of men—though I have sometimes been wrong, too, I have not always been right: you, however, are not men who would wound the hand that has given you life. Sign me that paper, as a formality between us."

"Willingly," said I, for what I wished to look on was the face of Miss Langler, and gave little heed to aught else, so, without even reading the thing, I knelt flurriedly by the chair, and had it signed and finished with.

It was now for Langler to sign.

"Now, Mr Langler," said Baron Kolár, when Langler made no movement to sign.

"No, Baron Kolár," answered Langler, "no," with his eyes cast down.

"What! You do not sign?"

"No, Baron Kolár, no," he repeated.

"Then woe to you, sir," said the Baron, measuring him from head to foot.

"Well, then, woe to me," said Langler.

Ah, he was pallid now, with a mulishness of mien which I knew with panic; whereat I at his secret ear breathed in my anguish: "but Emily, Aubrey, fair's fair, loyalty to Emily first, this is too much, you know, Aubrey, Emily first——"

"No, second," he said, with a stiff neck.

"As if duty and God had anything to do with it!" I groaned panic-stricken: "martyrs are martyrs, and die for what they cherish, but to die for a Church which you always call obsolete, for which you care nothing really, except by some trick of culture, it would be too monstrously pitiful, for God's sake, only this once——"

"But what is the matter with Mr Langler?" said Baron Kolár: "my time is short."

"But by what right do you even dream of daring to shed anyone's blood?" asked Langler, turning upon the baron.

"Know that I have this right, Mr Langler," answered the baron sternly: "men like

me, whose heads are clear, and whose motives are righteous, have such divine rights."

"One readily admits the righteousness of your motives," said Langler, "but the clearness of your head is less certain, if I may say so. We all intend to do good, Baron Kolár, but to do it is an intricate trick, only given to critics. You seem in your scheming to have quite forgotten the moral reaction which must follow upon the sudden death of faith, and upon the disclosure that the men who try to remind the world of God are a gang of misdoers. Is it nothing to you that to-morrow every wanton impulse of men's hearts will lift its head, the restraints of ages once swept away? Your motives are good: why should you not give up this scheme even now, and I, on my side, should be able to vow myself to silence?"

At this Baron Kolár, looking down upon him, answered: "you speak, sir, very like a child; you are a man with a mind made up chiefly of theories acquired in your study, or acquired from other prigs and theorists who are foreigners to the agoras of men. Is not this scheme of mine modelled on the incident of the alp? But in that case no 'wanton impulses' lifted their head——"

"Ah, I think so," said Langler.

"But you annoy me, Mr Langler," said the baron. "Understand that on the final death of 'faith' to-morrow the people will remain precisely where they stood before the miracles, when 'faith' was already dead, and this because they are moral by habit and heredity. Wasn't this just the work in evolution which God designed 'faith' to do—to make men moral by heredity? for they would hardly, I think, have become so without the goad of 'hell,' and so on. Descartes, a theorist like you, was assured that God cannot be a deceiver; but God does nothing but deceive for His creatures' good, and, housed in His motley, the zebra-herd browses hidden and grey in the grey of the morning. At first two hells were needed; but by the date of the Reformation purgatory could be dispensed with in the highest nations; by the date of the abolition

of hanging for sheep-stealing men could do without any hell at all. The Church was thus an excellent crutch, which humanity is now able to hurl away and burn; for men, thanks to her, are now as hardened in good conduct as they were once naturally heinous, and crime would now be quite irksome to the host of them, as swimming is to a frog that was lately a swimming tadpole. But do not trouble your head about any such questions at all: just sign me that paper now."

"I regret that I do not quite see with you, Baron Kolár," answered Langler stiffly, with downcast eyes, while I, wooing at his ear, whispered, "ah, but Emily, Aubrey, you forget!"

"But will he not sign?" asked the baron.

"No, sir," said Langler.

Baron Kolár groaned.

"It seems a pity, Mr Langler," he said, "that you are quite so gallant a man. Nature, after all, is a cannibal tigress that devours her fairest offspring...." saying which, he now reached aside, and pressed an electric button.

It was now that I cast myself down at the man's feet, grasping him so that he could not escape me, gasping to him: "but you cannot hurt him, cannot touch him, she will go crazy, is not strong, it is your fault, you should not have done to her what you twice did; she is expecting him to-night, never hoped in her heart to see him again, but we made her hope against hope, and now that he is almost at home—see, these are her telegrams, read them, mad with haste, and it is useless to plead with him, he is infected with some moral crotchet, but you will find a way for us, I cast myself upon your mighty heart like a child, not for myself, nor for him, but for her, whom you have so horribly wronged ..." and, as I so pleaded, the man's hand lifted, and was about to come upon me: was it a half-blow? a half-caress? I am not even now sure; but when, just then, someone rapped at the door in answer to his summons, he called out in Italian, "never mind, I will ring again when I want you"; and to me he

said: "give me the telegrams."

His demand for them surprised me. I handed them to him in a mass as I had snapped them out of my pocket, whereupon he took out his spectacles, wiped them, adjusted them upon his nose, and holding the telegrams away from his eyes close to the grimy light, perused them patiently, while I waited with legs that could hardly any more uphold my weight. One by one he let the leaves of paper fall down, having read them, and read the next; but the last two he tossed away without reading, and turned off to pace the floor.

I waited shivering while four or five times he paced, poring upon him, and once I saw his brow lift largely, his eyes wander round the roof, and heard him breathe to himself the words: "death death." Of what he was thinking I was not then aware, and I waited, shaking, my eyes nailed to his face. When he next spoke it was with sudden vexation, saying: "ridiculous beings! I foresaw that you would come to grief, I lavished warnings upon you, I ought to see you shot like two dogs. How do you dare to say now that Miss Langler's frailty is any fault of mine, when it is wholly your own? I was devoting myself to the welfare of men, seeing clearly, knowing clearly, what I did, for as the heavens are high above the earth, just so, I suppose, are my thoughts larger than your thoughts, and you dared to meddle with me. I ought to see you shot now like two dogs, I assure you. Why should I take my useful life down into the darkness of death in order to save pedants like you, or to spare a woman's feelings?"

"Your life?" I breathed; "the darkness of death? There is no such question!"

"But you speak very like a child," said he: "is it not clear to you that either Mr Langler or I must throw up the cards now, since he will not give his word to be silent? The crucifixion of the priest which you witnessed by the riverside in the mountain would be called a murder by the world, so undoubtedly will the miracle-crucifixions. It is true that I am rather above being punished by the law for

them, but my name would be quite blighted, and my life nothing worth to me. I have neither wife nor child.... I must only sacrifice it, since you insist that I have already enough wounded Miss Langler—unless Mr Langler will sign me that paper this instant."

"Oh, sign," I whispered, edging nearer to Langler, but he stood white, inflexible. "There is no occasion for anyone to die," he said, with lowered lids: "let Baron Kolár be silent as to the miracles being none, and I, too, will be silent; but if they be bruited abroad as the work of churchmen, then, I shall not fail, if I have life and liberty, to declare that, on the contrary, they are the work of Baron Kolár."

"But how am I to be silent?" asked the baron: "does Mr Langler imagine that I am alone in this scheme? This night three thousand gentlemen, earnest fellows, large fellows, are in the act of carrying their task to its end, nor should I dream of spoiling their work by sparing your life if I thought that one man's voice could seriously spoil it; but your voice will effect little, Mr Templeton will not support it, it will be lost in the vast uproar, and will only be of avail to cast a blight upon my own private name: to save my life, then, which I have a thought of laying down for your wounded sister's sake, vouchsafe to sign me that paper this instant."

"Such a thought is most admirable, Baron Kolár, and would be quite surprising, if it were not you who had it," said Langler; "but, after all, the claims upon us of gratitude and affection are not the greatest. I pray you, then, not again to ask me to sign the paper."

To this Baron Kolár said nothing in reply, but picked up the paper signed by me, put it into his pocket, and paced about, frowning; till on a sudden his brow cleared, he said: "oh, well," and he sat himself down on the bedstead laths. There he took out of his pocket a bag of grapes, and, stooping forward, began to feed upon them, with quite a working of the mouth and a sputtering of seeds. While thus busy, and given up to this guttling, he kept looking up with wandering eyes, and he mumbled mainly

to himself, saying: "they are grapes of Egripos; very sweet they are, too, very nice, not bad, and whenever I die, if I be opened, some of them will be found in me. These few here may be my last feast, hence I do not offer you any. But I do not fancy so, oh no, you will see. It is astonishing what influences personality has upon events: from my boyhood, if by chance I bet on a race-horse, it always won, strange thing, it always won. Once, when a youth, I fought a duel with the famous swordsman, Paulus, and, though no hand at the rapier myself, I somehow came out grandly, I got in such a slash, yes, such a slash, right in his cheek—very nice. I have always come nicely through everything. Archbishop Burton, now: two hours ago he called me a scoundrel, and lifted a chair to strike me; but the moment he lifted it he dropped in a fit, and has since died. I seem to be immune from such maniacs, I assure you. On the sixth of June five years ago a fellow named Vesgolcza threw a bomb at me in Vienna; but it killed my political enemy, Count Attem, and I procured the fellow's pardon. No, I was not born for the martyr's crown, I own the badge and trick of escape. It is a question of organisation and secret league with the soul of the world. Look at me, I am sound throughout, a little trouble with the stomach after food sometimes, a little flatulence, nothing much, a little trouble. But Mr Langler, now: you are one of those men who are tricked out with every jewel, except just the pearl of great price, effectualness, favouritism with high God; such men are the scapegoats of progress; history is based on their pains and groans; to the bane in their fate there grows no bezoar. If you perish to-night, do not imagine that I shall grieve for you; you are a man whom I might have loved, but I lavished warnings upon you in vain, and I am such that even in death my gall cannot quite forgive a personal insolence; but I shall realise that your fate is over-sad, and I shall grieve for your graceful sister, who has not offended me, but to whom I was forced to be ungallant. Therefore I am about to give you one last great chance of life, though you will not rise to the luck of it, you will be failing, I think.... But let me not brag too soon. As you see, it must be either you or I to whom this bedstead within

one hour will turn out to be the death-bed. Death is dark and monstrous, yes, death is dark. The artful old brain all at once ceases to discern, the old heart no longer brawls, all becomes nothing. But some humour of the soul has brought me to risk it, and, even if I should not manage to get through, what, after all, is the death of a man? Nothing more to God than the jaundice and death of a leaf. I notice that Fitzroy Square out there is covered just now with dead leaves: no one heeds them, no, no one heeds them.... Well, now, we shall see."

He sprang up, sputtering his last seeds, wiping his hands, saying: "I shall be back in three minutes," and went out. Some seconds later I was standing with my forehead on my arm against the wall when I heard behind me some heavy pantings, and, glancing round, beheld Langler staggering, with his hand held over his heart. I was only just in time to catch him. "One moment," he sighed, "my heart...." He looked ghastly. But when I had got him to the chair and fanned him with my handkerchief he presently opened his eyes. "My heart, God knows," he began to say, when the key was again heard in the lock, whereat he got up hastily, buttoning his dress again, as Baron Kolár came in.

The baron first placed the key of the door and a piece of paper on the chair, saying: "here is the key and a permit for you to go out of the house, in case of my death, gentlemen"; then, pouring two pills from a big blue pill-box into his palm, he held them out to Langler, saying: "now, sir, if you take one of these I will take the other."

"But why so?" I heard Langler ask; and I heard Baron Kolár answer: "one is a poison, the other is harmless; choose one, sir, and I will have the other."

"But if I chance to choose the harmless one," Langler next said, "I become the cause of the death of a most magnanimous man, Baron Kolár."

"Of a most rash and foolhardy man, sir," was Baron Kolár's answer; "but choose quickly, I charge you, sir."

"But, baron——" I heard Langler say.

"Do not delay! or I dash the cursed pills to the ground!" I now heard Baron Kolár cry out: "your chance to serve your sister and madman Church vanishes in two ticks of my watch!"

"Well, then, since you put it in that way, baron ... well, then, baron...." I heard Langler say, but what next went on I did not witness, for my face all this while was pressed against the wall. Indeed, I was sick, with a most mortal taste in my mouth, and there at the wall I waited in what seemed to me a month of stillness, until there reached me a sound of moaning which I understood to come from Baron Kolár. I dared then, for the first time, to turn and look at them. Langler was standing with his back against the wall, white, but smiling; Baron Kolár was sitting on the bedstead, holding his head with both his hands, his eye wandering wildly. When he caught my eye he said to me: "it is I who have swallowed the poison-pill, yes, it is I." And when I now moved to stand at his side he turned up at me a most haggard jowl, an all-gone gaze, his eyes hanging languishingly upon mine. On a sudden he started, saying with new alarm: "It is I who have taken the poison!" Then afresh he rocked himself from side to side, moving his palm to and fro along the length of his thigh, full of sighs and retchings and moans. I was crouched on my knees before his anguish, I sobbed aloud to him: "great, fatherly heart!" "Stay!" he said, with a new brusqueness, "I feel the stiffness coming on in the neck, I had better get up: it is brucine," and he now raised himself by my help, and stepped about, upheld on my shoulder, during which, "yes," he said to me in confidence, "I have gone a step too far, I have tempted God, and He has abandoned me"; and again he moaned, "it is brucine," pressing his reins ruefully, with groans. "But can I do nothing?" I cried to him, "let me do something for you!" To this he made no answer, but said to me: "I never thought to fail; I have always managed to come out prettily through everything, but now I perish miserably for a mere whim of my bile, a moment's noble wind, it is all your own doing, Gregor, you reap what you have sown. Recount to Miss Langler how a man like me died for her, tell the Misses Chambers and all

your friends how I perished, let all their hearts pity me and bleed...." It was while he was saying this that I first noticed Langler, who now stepped out from the wall toward us, trying to smile, saying to Kolár, "no, baron, do not dismay yourself with such fancies, you have already over-much worked out ..." but his speech was broken short by a jerk of the neck, his mouth was drawn, he had an aspect of terror: death was in the face of my friend. Baron Kolár, staring at him, seemed to start from a dream, and like a man dropped aghast but glad from the gallows-rope the man's lips unwreathed in a kind of rictus, as he said with an opening of the arms: "well, I told you how it would be," whereupon at once he now turned in flight from the sight of Langler's face, but turned again to whisper to me, "you can go into another room or be here, just as you wish," and after waiting an instant for my answer, when I only gaped at him, he fled away.

I sat by the bedstead, upon which Langler had fallen, and must have remained there on the floor, I imagine, till five or six p.m. the next evening. Baron Kolár's prophecy that the bedstead would become a death-bed within one hour did not come true, for it must have been two, perhaps three, hours before Langler was freed from his anguish, though I am not sure, for after half-an-hour or so the light for some cause died out, and the darkness may have stifled out my consciousness of time. I think, however, that he lived three hours. The poison given him may have been over-little, or over-much, or poor in poignancy, so that at some times it was difficult to believe that he could be really dying; there were such intervals as that in which he repeated most of the Homeric hymn to Apollo, then there were spasms on spasms, and presently again his mind gave signs of wandering. All was in rayless darkness—it was well so. Thrice he cried to me: "Oh, that we knew where once more we might find Him, Arthur!" "We are like babes that are being weaned," he said, "but nothing is offered us in place of the Breast that has been withdrawn, we bawl in the dark...." After this he lay without saying anything for some time, until he said again: "yes, now in the hour of my voyage it is Jesus who to me is the most eminent, the

best-beloved. Blessed name, blessed name. How abounding in beguilement are all his words, like lovers' sidelong glances, and honey of Hybla to the tongue! 'Consider the lilies of the field, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these'—surely, Arthur, the most literary words ever used—except in a quite literal sense—if you accept my definition of literature as 'chastity a-burn.' I know of nothing quite to match them for that demure rich indirectness which is the essence of literature, except perhaps '[Greek: asteras eisathreis],' and the 'path which no fowl knoweth.' How staid the statement, how rosy the aroma; how little is said, how much is felt and meant and suggested: for the puny men dissect and depict, the huge men sum up and suggest. And that big-mouthed 'swear not by Heaven'—you can't match me that God for downright bulk, the earth His footstool, His buttocks throned broad over the stars, His head up in the room beyond, huge Egyptian shadow——Oh, I must...." Upon this my friend was held up by one of the fits, in which he stretched like an arch on his head and feet; but there was no bed, his legs slipped between the laths, causing them to vibrate and jangle; I could not see, it was very well so. But in the interims he was easy enough, without much suffering, I think, and now he was unconscious of me, and maundered with a wandering mind, showing still his ruling passion, criticising still, arguing still of literature, till his passing. "Surely the light is good," says he, "and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun," being all gone by that time, I believe, and all gone, too, when he breathed to himself: "oh, a rough God! In what velocities does He mix and revel! The encounter of dark suns—how He slackens bridle and urges them like chargers, faster, faster, with laughter in His beard, and afterwards muses upon the silence of their tragedy when a new star psalms in the sky at night, and the star-masters watch it with awe." This was among his final utterances, and afterwards I had for some time a sense of being alone in the dark there without him; but then I heard my friend say in a thin and dying whine: "why art thou cast down, oh, my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me?" and at the last he panted out at me, "tell her, Arthur, tell her, in His will

is our peace." Long I sat then, incaved in night, with nothing but the darkness and his death in my mind, but in the end God gave me tears, and a deep sleep.

CHAPTER XXVIII

END OF MISS LANGLER

When I opened my eyes I found myself lying alone half under the bedstead. The body of my friend, no longer there, must have been very quietly taken away. It was found in the river, high up about Wargrave.

I gathered up my hat and some telegrams scattered over the floor, and passed out, for the door of the room I found to be now open, so also was the door below. I think that I met no one on the stairs.

I next found myself in a train, and noticed now that it was evening at the sight of one of those sunsets that for three evenings had surprised everyone. Some men in the train were wildly talking, and though I heard little more of it than "Church" and "miracles," and "downfall," I can vividly remember their vowels of wonder and agitated jabbering.

On arriving at Alresford I got into a car to go to Swandale, but half-way to Swandale got out again, for I was now in no haste to be there, so it came into my head to walk, and at one moment I walked, at another I was standing still, at another I rabidly ran. In Swandale, when I was crossing the bridge toward the cottage, I beheld an old man named Davenport at the cottage-door whispering to two maid-servants, one of whom darted away, and when I had come to the cottage, "quite well, I hope, sir?" this old man mumbled to me, "fine evening, sir." "None o' that," I said to him, "where is Miss Langler?" "This way, sir," he answered, and ushered me into the morning-room. But I was no sooner in than the doorway was blocked with retainers, men and women, and it appeared to me that these people were there to impede and

tease me. No doubt my dress and appearance were in some disarray, since they seemed to gape in alarm at me, so now, growing angry, I said to old Davenport: "what is the meaning of this? is Miss Langler alive?" "Surely, sir," was his answer. "Then what is the meaning of this?" said I, "where is she?" "Miss Langler is no longer in the house, sir," he answered. "That now is a wilful falsehood, Davenport, and you know it full well," said I. "You say so, sir," he answered, "though I was never charged quite in that way till now, sir." "Well, you are charged now, Davenport," said I, "and I require to be taken instantly to Miss Langler." "The Almighty God look down upon this house!" he now bawled out, "you cannot, Mr Arthur, you cannot!" "But we shall see, then, whether I am a captive or not, Davenport!" I cried, whereat the old man shouted out: "John! stop him! he is out of his wits!" They failed, however, to hold me, for I tore clear out of the thick of them, and pelted down the length of two long, dark corridors, nor did any of them dare to come after me.

Through all that region of the house I now flew in a heat of search for Miss Langler: I glanced into her chamber, and she was not there; I looked into room after room, and did not see her; I peered into nooks, for nothing was lit anywhere, and everything brooded in a deep dusk. But on getting nearer to Langler's study I seemed to detect some sound.... I went to it. Both the doors were locked on the outside, and the sound, louder now, was going on within; so, crouching there at one of the two doors in the hush of the dark, I hearkened a long, long while to it. Something within seemed to me to be running about the study at a trot, round and round, with trot, trot, trot, in a steady way; but whether it was a living human soul I did not know, for it was strange that the lungs of a man should last so long, and not fail, and I wondered whether it was she—or he; when it drew nigh to the door I heard pantings awhile, till it went on its way, and presently panted nigh once more, and was away, round and round, in a steady way; twice or thrice, too, I seemed to be aware of a flutter somewhere, the thin utterance of a bird; and ever I spurred myself to venture in, to

look and see for myself, but each time that I brisked up to try it my hairs bristled, and I shied at it.

There did, however, come a moment when I very gingerly turned the key and found myself in. It was Miss Langler whom I saw; but she, for her part, did not see, or at least heed, me at all, nor make any attempt to escape, but continued to trot round, panting towards some bourn in a heavy haste, made heavier by the large hat that she wore, and by the velvet of a violet hue that voluminously clothed her, some of which she carried over her arm that she might the handier hurry. That print of Gainsborough's "Duchess" in her large gown over the pyx, if it had stepped down from its frame to run and run, could hardly have more resembled her. The mastiff Bruno was following at her heels, and on her shoulder rode the little wren in unstable balance, this latter all mauled now and bemuddled in its own blood, while many of its feathers lay moulted about the floor-tiles: for when she had seen that her brother did not come to her, she seems to have given way to a craving to crush out the creature's life, but it had contrived to escape her hand, she had run after to catch it, and had kept on running. But why, I wondered, did she so press, with her eye musing inwardly upon herself, the enamel eye of mosaics, fixed and dull? If I dared to stand in her way to bar her, for I was far from dreaming of daring to touch her, she meekly swerved as from some rock or block, and continued to run her course. Rarely did she halt for sheer breathlessness, and lean her shoulder a little, and pant, and start afresh, followed by the machine that whined at her heels with a long lolling tongue and eyes of abashment. I, seated in the casement, hearkened and hearkened to her every step, and to the rushing of the cascade, and my eye-corners were ever aware of her as she came and went in that twilight stillness, of the flutterings, too, of the bird, and of the fading out of the sunset, for all that heaven of hues in the west I saw die down to bloodshed and dabbling, and wished that I, too, was dead.

It was not till two in the morning that I saw her removed, she protesting with a meek dignity, begging to be permitted to catch.... But of this I could hardly write more; it

was with her as the hard heart of the world would have it; and God is on His throne, thinking on His glory....

APPENDIX

Having finished the tale of my tragedy, what I may still further have to utter will contain naught that is new, no exclusive knowledge of my own, but may still be of interest as a sketch of my introduction to the so-called Church-of-the-overman.

The nine months following the death of Langler are somehow almost wholly blotted out of my life, I remember next to nothing of them, living somehow in vacuo, with curiously little of pain or pleasure or volition, and almost my first new memories are of the visits of my friend, Mr Martin Magee, who put himself to infinite pains with me, read to me, insisted upon interesting me. Again and again he would recount to me the thousand-fold drama of "the downfall" in all its ramifications and phases. "Dead?" he would say of the Church, with his Irish energy and a thump of the fist, "dead with a thud that has been felt by the priesthood in China: there has been a little recrudescence of old-fashioned Nonconformity in England, Scotland, and America, but that isn't going to last ten years, you'll see."

"So the people imagine that the miracles were the work of churchmen?" I asked.

"Pooh, not now," he answered; "they did at first, and it was the rage arising out of this fancy that wiped out the Church as a political power; but, of course, the real death of the Church is not due to rage, but to unconcern and oblivion."

"Was it for this, then, that Aubrey Langler died?" I thought, "in order that the Church as a political power might be wiped out?" "But was there no moral reaction, Magee?" I asked: "Langler said that there would be, and another friend of mine that there would not."

"Which friend was that?" asked Magee.

"I may tell you and the world some day," I answered, "if he dies before me, but not at present."

"Well, whoever he is, he knows his modern Europe," said Magee. "I don't remember hearing of any moral reaction."

"But, then," said I, "is the Western world left now without any religion?"

"Never a bit," said he; "it is now just beginning to be gushingly religious. Haven't we, first of all, our store of hereditary religion, unconscious in us? And remember that 'the unconscious is the alone complete.' Religion, I suppose, is whatever binds us back from living to please our primary natural selves? Therefore religion of old said, 'live to please those about you'; and man has roughly reached to that, of old making society possible, now making it solid. But the evolution of 'live to please those about you,' is it not this: 'live to please those whom you cannot even see, the unborn'? All which you may hear Rivers say if you will come with me forthwith to church."

"Which church?" I asked.

"Why, Rivers'—or any of the others."

"But what is it all about?" I asked.

"Haven't I told you about it again and again?" said he: "but with this wilful numbness of yours you won't remember anything. It is a Church of transcendent ambitions, Templeton, aspiring at no less than the planting under heaven before long of a tribe higher than man, though its methods of setting about it are of a naiveté bound at first to leave you alien to their mystery of meaning; its theory is that the fowl precedes the egg: it grapples with the parent, beginning at the base of the ladder, its eyes fixed on the flying galaxies; but you wouldn't catch a glimpse of all at your first visit, and, if you find anything queerish, remember sacring-bells and praying-mills, and remember that the first British person who happened to broach an umbrella in a public road cast twelve million fools into a brabble of laughter.

Anyhow, I challenge you to go twice to the new Church without hungering to go thrice."

"You seem sincere," I said, "but you only wish to win me out of doors, I suppose. Where did Rivers get money from? He didn't use to be rich."

"But the whole hubbubboo is more or less early-Christian-communistic," answered Magee: "people pay, because it is costly, and earns its pay. Socialism just needed a religious nerve, didn't it? and here you have it. The base-wall of all is equality—'if one's neck-muscles alone are brawny,' Rivers always has it, 'he will call no man your lordship.' The idea is to preach and drill the nation into one army, the train-band of the times to come, for Rivers is the arch-foe of heterogeneity, he would have all men as twin as two perfect peas. But the Church is built on pity as well as on aspiration; equality is swallowed up in fraternity; charity is her riches, love is her festival. Run chiefly by women, she is an enthusiasm of the poor for the poor, and for the poorest of the poor, the child to be born; and to the poor a Gospel is again preached. You will find them all inflamed with the finest faith in the future, full of self-culture, ideality, good fellowship, and good food. The soul, too, is fed with a true emotion and communion of saints, as distinct from a fictitious: worship takes place."

"You seem quite enamoured," I said. "But worship of what?"

"Of God," said he.

"But which God?" said I, "the old God?"

"No," said he, "the new God."

"Ah, the new God," said I, "He is a most vague person: like Langler, I almost prefer the old God."

"But is it a question of preference?" asked Magee: "prefer as you please, you can't have the old God: He is as dead as His Church. But His death is, of course, phoenix-death, and the new God is only vague because the age is new, and men's brains only just enough evolved to see Him darkly; soon, I dare say. He will take the

darlingest bright ship-shape. The old God too at first was pitched too high for men's eyes, hence lapses into idolatry and golden-calfishness, for idolatry is ever a soul-sloth, an idle backsliding to some lower, more facile ideal of one's forefathers; and for us now sluggishly to worship the old God would be equally idolatrous; we must stretch up now to the new, so making the stretch facile for our children: all which are not my own ungiven words, but Rivers'; let's go now to him."

"But is this the right day and hour?" I asked.

"There's a service every day at noon," he answered, "we should be just in time."

Well, I let myself be led. As I was getting ready Magee called to me: "by the way, you must put on a belt; one doesn't go in braces and corsets." So I put on a belt, and we went.

It was a sultry day in May, like summer almost, and most strange, I remember, was the look and mood of everything to me that day as we drove to Kensington. Arrived there, under the porch of the church I was struck by a prodigious fresco of Jesus, which was rather a revelation to me, for then first I seemed to see Jesus, a brown peasant in a turban—not going about blessing little children with long hair and nothing on his head in a blazing climate, according to the too churchy fancy of the painters, in defiance of St Paul's "It is a shame for a man to have long hair." Here, anyway, as it struck me, was the Man, the dusky Lily, and though much too garishly painted, it powerfully engaged our gaze. However, the crowd pressed; we went in.

But never yet had I bowed the head under half so vast a house of man! most vast, though cheap and unhandsome. Magee and I were so fortunate as to be led far forward toward the stage, and there we sat, each in a pew four feet long—only one person sitting in each pew—while hosts of nuns haunted the aisles and seven galleries, nutmegging the air with incense swung from censers; and I noticed that the roofs were in some way detached, and the air as pure and fresh as in the open.

A young man, parting the curtain, stood and howled out with all his heart a number

out of a hymn-book; upon which the host of people started up, and shouted it—Tennyson's "Brook"—"for men may come and men may go, but I go on for ever." But that burden of sound was almost too over-ponderous for the bethundered eardrum! trumpets pealed, organs braved, while the earthquake and brotherhood of it brushed in ague-chills down my back, and was still humming about my head half-a-minute after it was hushed.

The next twenty minutes were taken up with the Blessed Sacrament, partaken of in early-Christian manner, only that there was no table. It was served by a hive of nuns, who bore baskets of sandwiches, fruit, cakes, etc., and water dashed with wine. The sandwiches were rather palpable for my palate! but, as with early-Christians, those who were not hungry no longer partook of the Lord's body, though all drank of his blood, those who were not thirsty drinking from liqueur-glasses and the thirsty from tumblers. Meantime, a man at the edge of the stage was howling: "though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee...." And again he howled with passion: "he was oppressed, yet he humbled himself, and opened not his mouth; as a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before her shearers is dumb: yea! he opened not his mouth...."

When this was over the curtains rushed away, the stage was opened, and for some twenty minutes I was the witness of a set of shows. There was no dialogue, and never should I have supposed that means so guileless would persuade to so high a sense of art: each heart, I think, was touched. The shows were little pictures of man in his various doings and modes of being, and we had all to become human, and brothers of one another; in one case it was a dog that caused the music, and we had all to become brothers of the dog and of one another. First, there sprang upon the stage a Japanese athlete, naked but for a loin-cloth, who did nothing but parade himself as our pattern, with a few wanton movements about the waist to give assurance of his grace and perfected joy. Then followed a boy and girl who kissed on the sly behind a horrid aunt. Then a Jewish rag-picker, who did nothing but pick

up rags, but still moved the springs of one's breast with love of him. Then a woman in a loose garment who lay down on a couch, and we marked the pangs that wrung her; she ran off slimmer than she came on! laughing! with an infant in her arms, while the people pursued her with the acclaims proper to victors. Then a child was stolen, but its mother was joyfully guided to it by a dog. Then came a ship-boy, a musician who forgot his own name, a grey astronomer, and three or four more.

While our hearts were still fond at these shows an acolyth who took his stand at the front and left of the stage vociferated the shout: "Blessed are the poor in spirit!" and at once there appeared on the stage a shoeblack, and also a young man rather shabbily dressed, with a bag in his hand; the young man begged the shoeblack to shine his boots, for he had stepped into bog: but he made the request with such polite shynesses and diffidences that the shoeblack at once put him down as a nobody, and cut some faces at him. When, however, the boots were shined the shabbily-dressed young man handed the shoeblack a handful of shillings for his pains. The shoeblack, seeing now that here must be a millionaire, gaped so open-mouthed at his riches, that only after some time did he observe that the young man had gone and forgotten his bag behind. The shoeblack then opened the bag, and drew out what was crowded within—an old lady's portrait, a lock of hair, a violin, an etching, and a copy of Ronsard: and the instant he drew out the Ronsard the acolyth who before had shouted out "blessed are the poor in spirit" rang now to the high dome his shout of triumph: "for theirs is the kingdom of the soul!"

The acolyth next shouted out: "Blessed are the pure in heart!" and at once there appeared an Egyptian man and woman—Joseph and Potiphar's wife; Joseph had bone tablets in his hand, adding up figures; Potiphar's wife tickled his neck and drew him: Joseph smiled, pinched her cheek, puzzling ever over his figures. Still the woman would have him, she coaxed, she intrigued: Joseph patted her shoulder, shook her ear, without ever budging or looking up out of his tablets. At last the woman drew him over to left-centre, Joseph going unconsciously with her; but at the

door itself he woke up, laughed, escaped, as who should say "not for Joseph," leaving his garment in her hands, and instantly was puzzling over his figures again. But now all at once Joseph began to wave out gestures of glad new discovery! The man had detected some mistake in his arithmetic! and the instant he detected his mistake, the acolyth gave out the high shout of triumph: "for they shall see God!"

Then again the acolyth shouted out: "Blessed are the merciful!" and at once there came on a man in brown who cowed a hound, and another man in bright who was kind to it. Years passed: and Brown and Bright were both chased in a lane by a madman with a hatchet; but Brown's morose habit of mind had been the seed in him of biliousness and other ills; he hopped on crutches, could not escape; but Bright escaped: and the instant he escaped the acolyth shouted out in triumph: "for they shall obtain mercy!"

And so they tripped on through the Beatitudes, teaching the people biology in parables. Here was a whole new art: the old prejudice of "Christianity" in respect to the stage had ranged to the other pole, and Church had changed into stage. How fruitful within the last few years has been the evolution of these germs we know. At that time no use was made of the bioscope. The shows were changed each day.

All at once, when this was over, one was aware of the presence of Ambrose Rivers, whereat my eyes ran through the hall to its seventh heaven, and saw it all like leafage of the aspen-forest, while Rivers advanced from the stage-back bent beneath the storm of cheers. And poised just over the orchestra-pews, with a pure voice that pealed through the vast, he vociferated: "Let us reverence That Which made us!"

Thereupon he fell to his knees, with his arms stretched up straight and parallel; all the people did the same, while the orchestra rendered Vogel's "Eternal Tool"; and Rivers, gazing straight upward, shouted: "Father! hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Give us our bread to-day. And forgive us our debt as we forgive everyone who is in our debt. Amen."[1]

This said, after a minute his arms shot horizontal, his neck bowed, and, still kneeling, he shouted to us: "Let us reverence one another in our human ancestors!"

And while the choir gave "Mild son of man, thy front sublime," all our arms shot horizontal, each worshipper straining to touch the finger-tips of his neighbour to left and right, for the shoulder-joint is capable of no little stretching, with practice.

This done, Rivers rose to his feet with the shout: "Let us reverence the ape, without bending the knee or the neck!"

And thereupon, while the orchestra rendered Brewers' "Ye humble wombs with homage fraught," he put his finger-tips to the ground. Through the building everyone put his or her finger-tips to the ground.

When this was over Rivers shouted: "Let us reverence the half-apes!"

Whereupon, without bending the knees or the neck, he put the first finger-joint to the ground; and while the choir gave Thibaut's "Crooked shapes, the alphabet of life," everyone did the same—or tried to. As it were a wind of breaths began to whiff through the building.

Rivers next shouted: "Let us reverence the dog!"

And with this he put his fists to the ground. We all tried our best to do the same, while the choir gave Sauer-Motti's "Dark Backward and Abysm of Time."

Rivers next shouted: "Let those of us who can reverence all That Which is below the dog!" And with this, without bending the knees or the neck, while the orchestra gave the overture to "The Creation," he put his palms on the ground.

But it was no easy matter to reverence all That Which is below the dog! I can now do it with nonchalance, but it tried me then. It was not a mere question of putting the palms on the ground, but of keeping them there during three straining minutes, with the eyes of ladies criticising your performance! However, I rose from the effort a straighter man: it is this touching what is beneath without bending the knees which

makes soldiers, and also saints. Meantime, I was charmed with the movements of the hosts of nuns and other ladies, who, it was clear, vied with one another in ease and achievement: I thought that some of them must certainly have a selection of lovers.

When this was over Rivers called to us: "Let us sum up and reverence all!" whereat everyone held up a bamboo rod behind the back with the stretched arms, and, sitting tight, swung the shoulders smartly, this way and that alternately, thus hardening the muscles of the back. And so it was during twenty minutes: when we reviewed the Past we stood fronting the stage, but with our necks strained back, looking at the opposite wall; when we aspired to the Future we struck our chests with our knees, an exaggerated going-upstairs; when we were meek we dropped our body upon our heels with force enough to bounce us up again, an exaggerated curtsey, thus oiling the hinges of the knee-joints; when we were merciful we bent far sideward to left and right, trying to touch the ground; when we were pure in heart we bent backward at the waist to touch the ground behind, and so on.

All this was, of course, highly exhilarating, both in itself, and because done in fellowship with a host of people all making the same gestures at the same moment; but it did not yet edify, did not move me religiously; and, because it did not, I thought to my self: "it is not a fitting function for a Church." Within a few weeks, however, I was to find how very far at fault I was in this, for the gestures only failed to edify me at first for the reason that in my consciousness there was no correlation between each gesture and its husband idea: habit was essential for that. Thus to nations that do not kneel to pray, nor raise the hand to say "hist!" these gestures are destitute of pertinence: there is no correlation. But when habit had once set up in my mind a wedlock between gesture and idea, then the gestures became as touching to the soul as they were teaching of a wonder of buoyancy and joy to the body.

When the exercises were over Rivers spoke to the people. By birth or learning he

had the lungs of a bull, and to the giddiness of the seventh gallery, I believe, his bellows must have blown. On the whole, he impressed me as a real prophet or outspeaker, speaking his truth like the wayfaring of a force of nature, without humour, ire, respect, or prospect. I can't recall much that he said, but he called the people to joy, telling them that a bad tree could not bring forth good fruit, neither could unhappy men beget happy generations. Joy of heart was their obligation, for they were the ancestors of God, the future hung on their joys. "Behold!" he howled, "I bring you word! your life is worth living if you live it a little well." Of course, no one yet half knew how to live it well; but, thanks to the pryers and the tryers, one knew a little. Already a howling gaiety might be theirs. One rather good thing was to live a moment at a time, ruminating the moment's relish deliciously, as when that morning on opening his eyes he had said to himself: "Alive! and still young! not a twinge nor a grief throughout! refugee of a thousand hungry hells! this, then, is my turn in the turning of Eternity: for the men of Misgab and of Bagdad are dead, but I am alaugh for a little while." Then he had run round Hyde Park, and half-way round could not help howling all hey and conversant with wind and the Holy Ghost, to the disgusting of everyone. If there was one thing in this marsh of Divinity more divine than all the rest, it was wind, and ever in March and big November God was with men; but only those dreamed how divine who ran far into it, and breathed it deeply, and drowned in it, and browsed bedrowsedly upon all the sound and sounds of it. Then he had returned home, and had eaten a ton. If they wished to have boisterously high and holy joy of their breakfast, they must work for it, should run at least a mile or two. Joy, then, gushing health, and they knew what went all in fusion with gushing health—chastity, fortnights of titanic continence. Who was the happiest and best of men? He happened to know, and would tell them: not essentially the saint, the philosopher, the plutocrat, but essentially the acrobat—the man with his fibres mobile, his breast like pent Pentecost. The saint, the philosopher, the artist, were happy also, but only because they were acrobats in their fashion. This was just the

news of Christianity, that along the path of self-torture lay in ambush a marvel of awaking, a scarlet dawn: to evolve they must twist themselves. And let them know that the soul was a trick of the body. The result of a beauish body was a religious saltarello. Were they covetous to stride out into the infinite?—let them scout in the finite on every side. Mens sancta in corpore sancto. No more, then, of the old necks, teeth, effete souls. With respect to teeth, there was a misconception abroad which he wished to correct: they all knew that in a few ages man was fated to become a toothless gumption: well, but there were two paths to that gate, not only through decay, but, secondly, through the decrease of the teeth in size, till at last they disappeared. Let them choose the latter by chary mating. Devotion to evolution was for the future their only possible piety; so their own bodies must be their care all day long, till their every movement of muscle or brain was a pattern of grace. Perfection! it had to be: why not now? greyhounds were perfect. The men of late generations had really been rather grotesque, crowds of them strutting their personalities about in some rag or gaud of spiritual skill, yet glaring with the lues of a low evolution. One of the most highly-famed poets of the nineteenth century had had—what did they think?—a paunch. "Ho! Ho!" he howled, "think of the pure grotesqueness of it! a poet with a pouch! no wonder he was obscure! it is like a poet with spectacles on his nose! or a poet with bo-peep in his teeth, whom no pious miss would kiss!" No, that wouldn't do. The chimpanzee vaunted a paunch, and we were devoutly getting done with paunches now, thank God. From men of this age God did not so much need glorious books, of which He was choke-full, but was greedy for glorious children, darting eyes, laughing caverns. The men of the past had learned from St Paul that "bodily exercise profiteth little"; for us it was the main means of grace and the sole hope of glory, of grace for the Roman, of glory for the race. By it they would attain to harmony with God. It had been said by men of old: "God is Love." "How could they possibly know it?" he shouted: "how profound an insight! for this that to us is old science and certainty to them was only surmise. But what, then, does

God love? Not apes, not men, His taste being a bit touchy: God, we know, did once love, or press toward, apes when only dogs and half-apes were; and He did once love men when only ape-people were; but the moment men appeared He left off loving them, and was for loving their children: always it is evolution that He loves, change, the future, with urge and urge and urge." So in loving the future they would be all in harmony with Him, loving what He loved. That future was full of shapes and plays. Happily, they could shape themselves to pledge and usher it in: for that was the right of man—to change himself; that was the definition of man—"a self-changing midget"; and an age was in the eye of the Highest when, by the heightening of this right of self-change, earthly lives would writhe in a trice into any shape of wyvern, or moose, or shivering seraph, or moon-eyed octopus, or quadruped with its belly to the sky and its back to the earth. Meantime, by pitifuler pantings, they, if they were fat, could make themselves fit; if they were short, they should, by taking thought, add one quarter-cubit to their stature; if they were bow-legged like the orang, self-bearding would get themselves knock-kneed like the cock; if they were starting and rapturous like the gorilla, they could get themselves impregnably calm like the overman; in an age or two they could change or redress their quite unnecessary length of arm, of spine, their over-plump shortness of leg, their base remoteness of sex-organ from brain, their too shameful "ears," sham thumbs. They must tackle themselves humbly and in detail. Christianity had been far too heady and star-drunken, had made a leap three feet high to pluck Venus from the sky. We of this age must be more grave and grown-up, more self-conscious and disabused, must use a ladder, come back to the classic. The romantic would return some day in some new dress, for classic and romantic were alternate moods of the mind, neither could ever die. But for us of this age it was the classic, the austere, bare comeliness of reason. If our life and worship was barer and harder than that of the past, it was also far higher. But let them not view our worship as yet worthy to be so called. The idol of the worship of the time to come would be the nightly sky.

Man, so far, though with a much larger subconsciousness, looked forth at the stars with a consciousness little larger than that of gorillas, even with some fatigue; was still a villager of the earth, not yet a civilian of the universe; a few of the most elfin ears, they were told did, it was true, by an effort, and dullishly, catch some actual tollings of the chiming and dulcimers; but he believed that brains larger than ours, when they came, would pass pretty nearly all of life in brooding upon the runes of that writing. Let them wait, meekly grooming themselves to greet that "come to the marriage" which they would hear, and soon, lo, the scales would fall from man's eyes, his tongue should be loosed and enchanted, and the earth should arise at last as the mourning-dove to hie to her room in the chancel of the heavens.

When Rivers had finished speaking we sang another hymn; again the trumpets pealed, organs braved, while the road-march and high brotherhood of it brushed in shiverings over one's back, and troubled the vast building to its base:

"Time like an ever-rolling stream Bears all his sons away, They fly forgotten. :::"

[1] The whole of "The Lord's Prayer" as uttered by Jesus; the rest added by commonplace rude people.

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