SHARP ELIZABETH AMELIA

THE WORKS OF "FIONA MACLEOD", VOLUME IV

Elizabeth Sharp

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Содержание

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THE DIVINE ADVENTURE

Let the beginning, I say, of this little book, as if it were some lamp, make it clear that a divine miracle was manifested."
St. Adamnan, Book ii. c. i.

The Divine Adventure

I

"We were three: the Body, the Will, and the Soul… The Will, the Soul, which for the first time had gone along outside of our common home, had to take upon themselves bodily presences likewise." —*The Divine Adventure.*

I remember that it was on St. John's Eve we said we would go away together for a time, but each independently, as three good friends. We had never been at one, though we had shared the same home, and had enjoyed so much in common; but to each, at the same time, had come the great desire of truth, than which there is none greater save that of beauty.

We had long been somewhat weary. No burden of years, no serious ills, no grief grown old in its own shadow, distressed us. We were young. But we had known the two great ends of life – to love and to suffer. In deep love there is always an inmost dark flame, as in the flame lit by a taper: I think it is the obscure suffering upon which the Dancer lives. The Dancer! – Love, who is Joy, is a leaping flame: he it is who is the son of that fabled planet, the Dancing Star.

On that St. John's Eve we had talked with friends on the old mysteries of this day of pagan festival. At last we withdrew, not tired or in disagreement, but because the hidden things of the spirit are the only realities, and it seemed to us a little idle and foolish to discuss in the legend that which was not fortuitous or imaginary, since what then held up white hands in the moonlight, even now, in the moonlight of the dreaming mind, beckons to the Divine Forges.

We left the low-roofed cottage room, where, though the window was open, two candles burned with steadfast flame. The night was listeningly still. Beyond the fuchsia bushes a sighing rose, where a continuous foamless wave felt the silences of the shore. The moonpath, far out upon the bronze sea, was like a shadowless white road. In the dusk of the haven glimmered two or three red and green lights, where the fishing-cobles trailed motionless at anchor. Inland were shadowy hills. One of the St. John's Eve fires burned on the nearest of these, its cone blotting out a thousand eastern stars. The flame rose and sank as though it were a pulse: perhaps at that great height the sea-wind or a mountain air played upon it. Out of a vast darkness in the south swung blacker abysses, where thunders breathed with a prolonged and terrible sighing; upon their flanks sheet-lightnings roamed.

There was no sound in the little bay. Beyond, a fathom of phosphorescence showed that mackerel were playing in the moonshine. Near the trap-ledges, which ran into deep water sheer from the goat-pastures, were many luminous moving phantoms: the medusæ, green, purple, pale blue, wandering shapes filled with ghostly fire.

We stood a while in silence, then one of us spoke:

"Shall we put aside, for a brief while, this close fellowship of ours; and, since we cannot journey apart, go together to find if there be any light upon those matters which trouble us, and perhaps discern things better separately than when trying, as we ever vainly do, to see the same thing with the same eyes?"

The others agreed. "It may be I shall know," said one? "It may be I shall remember," said the other.

"Then let us go back into the house and rest to-night, and to-morrow, after we have slept and eaten well, we can set out with a light heart."

The others did not answer, for though to one food meant nothing, and to the other sleep was both a remembering and a forgetting, each unwittingly felt the keen needs of him whom they despised overmuch, and feared somewhat, and yet loved greatly.

II

Thus it was that on a midsummer morning we set out alone and afoot, not bent for any one place, though we said we would go towards the dim blue hills in the west, the Hills of Dream, as we called them; but, rather, idly troubled by the very uncertainties which beset our going. We began that long stepping westward as pilgrims of old who had the Holy City for their goal, but knew that midway were perilous lands.

We were three, as I have said: the Body, the Will, and the Soul. It was strange for us to be walking there side by side, each familiar with and yet so ignorant of the other. We had so much in common, and yet were so incommunicably alien to one another. I think that occurred to each of us, as, with brave steps but sidelong eyes, we passed the fuchsia bushes, where the wild bees hummed, and round by the sea pastures, where white goats nibbled among the yellow flags, and shaggy kine with their wild hill-eyes browsed the thyme-sweet salted grass. A fisherman met us. It was old Ian Macrae, whom I had known for many years. Somehow, till then, the thought had not come to me that it might seem unusual to those who knew my solitary ways, that I should be going to and fro with strangers. Then, again for the first time, it flashed across me that they were so like me – or save in the eyes I could myself discern no difference – the likeness would be as startling as it would be unaccountable.

I stood for a moment, uncertain. "Of course," I muttered below my breath, "of course, the others are invisible; I had not thought of that." I watched them slowly advance, for they had not halted when I did. I saw them incline the head with a grave smile as they passed Ian. The old man had taken off his bonnet to them, and had stood aside.

Strangely disquieted, I moved towards Macrae.

"Ian," I whispered rather than spoke.

"Ay," he answered simply, looking at me with his grave, far-seeing eyes.

"Ian, have you seen my friends before?"

"No, I have never seen them before."

"They have been here for – for – many days."

"I have not seen them."

"Tell me; do you recognise them?"

"I have not seen them before."

"I mean, do you – do you see any likeness in them to any you know?"

"No, I see no likeness."

"You are sure, Ian?"

"Ay, for sure. And why not?" The old fisherman looked at me with questioning eyes.

"Tell me, Ian, do you see any difference in me?"

"No, for sure, no."

Bewildered, I pondered this new mystery. Were we really three personalities, without as well as within?

At that moment the Will turned. I heard his voice fall clearly along the heather-fragrant air-ledges.

"We, too, are bewildered by this mystery," he said.

So he knew my thought. It was *our* thought. Yes, for now the Soul turned also; and I heard his sunwarm breath come across the honeysuckles by the roadside.

"I, too, am bewildered by this mystery," he said.

"Ian," I exclaimed to the old man, who stared wonderingly at us; "Ian tell me this: what like are my companions; how do they seem to you?"

The old man glanced at me, startled, then rubbed his eyes as though he were half-awakened from a dream.

"Why are you asking that thing?"

"Because, Ian, you do not see any likeness in them to myself. I had thought – I had thought they were so like."

Macrae put his wavering, wrinkled hand to his withered mouth. He gave a chuckling laugh.

"Ah, I understand now. It is a joke you are playing on old Ian."

"Maybe ay, and maybe no, Ian; but I do want to know how they seem to you, those two yonder."

"Well, well, now, for sure, that friend of yours there, that spoke first, he is just a weary, tired old man, like I am myself, and so like me, now that I look at him, that he might be my wraith. And the other, he is a fine lad, a fisher-lad for sure, though I fear God's gripped his heart, for I see the old ancient sorrow in his eyes."

I stared: then suddenly I understood.

"Good-day, Ian," I added hurriedly, "and the blessing of Himself be upon you and yours, and upon the nets and the boats."

Then I moved slowly towards my companions, who awaited me. I understood now. The old fisherman had seen after his own kind. The Will, the Soul, which for the first time had journeyed outside our common home, had to take upon themselves bodily presences likewise. But these wavering images were to others only the reflection of whoso looked upon them. Old Ian had seen his own tired self and his lost youth. With a new fear the Body called to us, and we to him; and we were one, yet three; and so we went onward together.

III

We were silent. It is not easy for three, so closely knit, so intimate, as we had been for so many years, suddenly to enter upon a new comradeship, wherein three that had been as one were now several. A new reticence had come to each of us. We walked in silence – conscious of the beauty of the day, in sea and sky and already purpling moors; of the white gulls flecking the azure, and the yellowhammers and stonechats flitting among the gorse and fragrant bog-myrtle – we knew that none was inclined to speak. Each had his own thoughts.

The three dreamers – for so we were in that lovely hour of dream – walked steadfastly onward. It was not more than an hour after noon that we came to an inlet of the sea, so narrow that it looked like a stream, only that a salt air arose between the irises which thickly bordered it, and that the sunken rock-ledges were fragrant with sea-pink and the stone-convolvulus. The moving tidal water was grass-green, save where dusked with long, mauve shadows.

"Let us rest here," said the Body. "It is so sweet in the sunlight, here by this cool water."

The Will smiled as he threw himself down upon a mossy slope that reached from an oak's base to the pebbly margins.

"It is ever so with you," he said, still smiling. "You love rest, as the wandering clouds love the waving hand of the sun."

"What made you think of that?" asked the Soul abruptly, who till that moment had been rapt in silent commune with his inmost thoughts.

"Why do you ask?"

"Because I, too, was thinking that just as the waving hand of the sun beckons the white wandering clouds, as a shepherd calls to his scattered sheep, so there is a hand waving to us to press forward. Far away, yonder, a rainbow is being woven of sun and mist. Perhaps, there, we may come upon that which we have come out to see."

"But the Body wishes to rest. And, truly, it is sweet here in the sunflood, and by this moving green water, which whispers in the reeds and flags, and sings its own sea-song the while."

"Let us rest, then."

And, as we lay there, a great peace came upon us. There were hushed tears in the eyes of the Soul, and a dreaming smile upon the face of the Will, and, in the serene gaze of the Body, a content that was exceeding sweet. It was so welcome to lie there and dream. We knew a rare happiness in that exquisite quietude.

After a time, the Body rose, and moved to the water-edge.

"It is so lovely," he said, "I must bathe" – and with that he threw aside his clothes, and stood naked among the reeds and yellow flags which bordered the inlet.

The sun shone upon his white body, the colour of pale ivory. A delicate shadow lightly touched him, now here, now there, from the sunlit green sheaths and stems among which he stood. He laughed out of sheer joy and raised his arms, and made a splashing with his trampling feet.

Looking backward with a blithe glance, he cried:

"After all, it is good to be alive: neither to think nor to dream, but just content *to be*."

Receiving no answer, he laughed merrily, and, plunging forward, swam seaward against the sun-dazzle.

His two companions watched him with shining eyes.

"Truly, he is very fair to look upon," said the Soul.

"Yes," added the Will, "and perhaps he has chosen the better part elsewhere as here."

"Can it be the better part to prefer the things of the moment of those of Eternity?"

"What is Eternity?"

For a few seconds the Soul was silent. It was not easy for him to understand that what was a near horizon to him was a vague vista, possibly a mirage, to another. He was ever, in himself, moving just the hither side of the narrow mortal horizon which Eternity swims in upon from behind and beyond. The Will looked at him questioningly, then spoke again:

"You speak of the things of Eternity. What is Eternity?"

"Eternity is the Breath of God."

"That tells me nothing."

"It is Time, freed from his Mortality."

"Again, that tells me little. Or, rather, I am no wiser. What is Eternity to *us*?"

"It is our perpetuity."

"Then is it only a warrant against Death?"

"No, it is more. Time is our sphere: Eternity is our home."

"There is no other lesson for you in the worm, and in the dust?"

"What do you mean, brother?"

"Does dissolution mean nothing to you?"

"What is dissolution?"

It was now the Will who stared with wondering eyes. To him that question was as disquieting as that which he had asked the Soul. It was a minute before he spoke again.

"You ask me what is dissolution? Do you not understand what death means to *me*?"

"Why to you more than to me, or to the Body?"

"What is it to you?"

"A change from a dream of Beauty, to Beauty."

"And at the worst?"

"Freedom: escape from narrow walls – often dark and foul."

"In any case nothing but a change, a swift and absolute change, from what was to what is?"

"Even so."

"And you have no fear?"

"None. Why should I?"

"Why should you not?"

Again there was a sudden silence between the two. At last the Soul spoke:

"Why should I not?" I cannot tell you. But I have no fear. I am a Son of God."

"And we?"

"Ah, yes, dear brother: you, too, and the Body."

"But we perish!"

"There is the resurrection of the Body."

"Where – when?"

"As it is written. In God's hour."

"Is the worm also the Son of God?"

The soul stared downward into the green water, but did not answer. A look of strange trouble was in his eyes.

"Is not the Grave on the hither side of Eternity?"

Still no answer.

"Does God whisper beneath the Tomb?"

At this the Soul rose, and moved restlessly to and fro.

"Tell me," resumed the Will, "what is Dissolution?"

"It is the returning into dust of that which was dust."

"And what is dust?"

"The formless: the inchoate: the mass out of which the Potter makes new vessels, or moulds new shapes."

"But *you* do not go into dust?"

"I came from afar: afar I go again."

"But we – we shall be formless: inchoate?"

"You shall be upbuilded."

"How?"

The Soul turned, and again sat by his comrade.

"I know not," he said simply.

"But if the Body go back to the dust, and the life that is in him be blown out like a wavering flame; and if you who came from afar, again return afar; what, then, for me, who am neither an immortal spirit nor yet of this frail human clan?"

"God has need of you."

"When – where?"

"How can I tell what I cannot even surmise?"

"Tell me, tell me this: if I am so wedded to the Body that, if he perish, I perish also, what resurrection can there be for me?"

"I do not know."

"Is it a resurrection for the Body if, after weeks, or years, or scores of years, his decaying dust is absorbed into the earth, and passes in a chemic change into the living world?"

"No: that is not a resurrection: that is a transmutation."

"Yet that is all. There is nothing else possible. Dust unto dust. As with the Body, so with the mind, the spirit of life, that which I am, the Will. In the Grave there is no fretfulness any more: neither any sorrow, or joy, or any thought, or dream, or fear, or hope whatsoever. Hath not God Himself said it, through the mouth of His prophet?"

"I do not understand," murmured the Soul, troubled.

"Because the Grave is not your portion."

"But I, too, must know Death!"

"Yes, truly – a change what was it? – a change from a dream of Beauty, to Beauty!"

"God knows I would that we could go together – you, and he yonder, and I; or, if that cannot be, he being wholly mortal, then at the least you and I."

"But we cannot. At least, so it seems to us. But I – I too am alive, I too have dreams and visions, I too have joys and hopes, I too have despairs. And for me —*nothing*. I am, at the end, as a blown flame."

"It may not be so. Something has whispered to me at times that you and I are to be made one."

"Tell me: can the immortal wed the mortal?"

"No."

"Then how can we two wed, for I am mortal. My very life depends on the Body. A falling branch, a whelming wave, a sudden ill, and in a moment that which was is not. He, the Body, is suddenly become inert, motionless, cold, the perquisite of the Grave, the sport of the maggot and the worm: and I – I am a subsided wave, a vanished spiral of smoke, a little fugitive wind-eddy abruptly ended."

"You know not what is the end any more than I do. In a moment we are translated."

"Ah, is it so with you? O Soul, I thought that you had a profound surety!"

"I know nothing: I believe."

"Then it may be with you as with us?"

"I know little: I believe."

"When I am well I believe in new, full, rich, wonderful life – in life in the spiritual as well as the mortal sphere. And the Body, when he is ill, he, too, thinks of that which is your heritage. But if *you* are not sure – if *you* know nothing – may it not be that you, too, have fed upon dreams, and have dallied with Will-o'-the-wisp, and are an idle-blown flame even as I am, and have only a vaster spiritual outlook? May it not be that you, O Soul, are but a spiritual nerve in the dark, confused, brooding mind of Humanity? May it not be that you and I and the Body go down unto one end?"

"Not so. There is the word of God."

"We read it differently."

"Yet the Word remains."

"You believe in the immortal life? – You believe in Eternity?"

"Yes."

"Then what is Eternity?"

"Already you have asked me that!"

"You believe in Eternity. What is Eternity?"

"Continuity."

"And what are the things of Eternity?"

"Immortal desires."

"Then what need for us who are mortal to occupy ourselves with what must be for ever beyond us?"

Thereat, with a harsh laugh, the Will arose, and throwing his garments from him, plunged into the sunlit green water, with sudden cries of joy calling to the Body, who was still rejoicefully swimming in the sun-dazzle as he breasted the tide.

An hour later we rose, and, silent again, once more resumed our way.

IV

It was about the middle of the afternoon that we moved inland, because of a difficult tract of cliff and bouldered shore. We followed the course of a brown torrent, and were soon under the shadow of the mountain. The ewes and lambs made incessantly that mournful crying, which in mountain solitudes falls from ledge to ledge as though it were no other than the ancient sorrow of the hills.

Thence we emerged, walking among boulders green with moss and grey with lichen, often isled among bracken and shadowed by the wind-wavering birches, or the finger-leafed rowans already heavy with clusters of ruddy fruit. Sometimes we spoke of things which interested us: of the play of light and shadow in the swirling brown torrent along whose banks we walked, and by whose grayling-haunted pools we lingered often, to look at the beautiful shadowy unrealities of the perhaps not less shadowy reality which they mirrored: of the solemn dusk of the pines; of the mauve shadows which slanted across the scanty corn that lay in green patches beyond lonely crofts; of the travelling purple phantoms of phantom clouds, to us invisible, over against the mountain-breasts; of a solitary seamew, echoing the wave in that inland stillness.

All these things gave us keen pleasure. The Body often laughed joyously, and talked of chasing the shadow till it should turn and leap into him, and he be a wild creature of the woods again, and be happy, knowing nothing but the incalculable hour. It is an old belief of the Gaelic hill-people.

"If one yet older be true," said the Will, speaking to the Soul, "you and Shadow are one and the same. Nay, the mystery of the Trinity is symbolised here again – as in us three; for there is an ancient forgotten word of an ancient forgotten people, which means alike the Breath, the Shadow, and the Soul."[1]

As we walked onward we became more silent. It was about the sixth hour from noon that we saw a little coast-town lying amid green pastures, overhung, as it seemed, by the tremulous blue band of the sea-line. The Body was glad, for here were friends, and he wearied for his kind. The Will and the Soul, too, were pleased, for now they shared the common lot of mortality, and knew weariness as well as hunger and thirst. So we moved towards the blue smoke of the homes.

"The home of a wild dove, a branch swaying in the wind, is sweet to it; and the green bracken under a granite rock is home to a tired hind; and so we, who are wayfarers idler than these, which blindly obey the law, may well look to yonder village as our home for to-night."

So spoke the Soul.

The Body laughed blithely. "Yes," he added, "it is a cheerier home than the green bracken. Tell me, have you ever heard of The Three Companions of Night?"

"The Three Companions of Night? I would take them to be Prayer, and Hope, and Peace."

"So says the Soul – but what do *you* say, O Will?"

"I would take them to be Dream, and Rest, and Longing."

"We are ever different," replied the Body, with a sigh, "for the Three Companions of whom I speak are Laughter, and Wine, and Love."

"Perhaps we mean the same thing," muttered the Will, with a smile of bitter irony.

We thought much of these words as we passed down a sandy lane hung with honeysuckles, which were full of little birds who made a sweet chittering.

Prayer, and Hope, and Peace; Dream, and Rest, and Longing; Laughter, and Wine, and Love: were these analogues of the Heart's Desire?

[1] The Aztec word *Ehecatl*, which signifies alike the Wind (or Breath), Shadow, and Soul.

When we left the lane, where we saw a glow-worm emitting a pale fire as he moved through the green dusk in the shadow of the hedge, we came upon a white devious road. A young man stood by a pile of stones. He stopped his labour and looked at us. One of us spoke to him.

"Why is it that a man like yourself, young and strong, should be doing this work, which is for broken men?"

"Why are you breathing?" he asked abruptly.

"We breathe to live," answered the Body, smiling blithely.

"Well, I break stones to live."

"Is it worth it?"

"It's better than death."

"Yes," said the Body slowly, "it is better than death."

"Tell me," asked the Soul, "why is it better than death?"

"Who wants not to want?"

"Ah – it is the need to want, then, that is strongest!"

The stone-breaker looked sullenly at the speaker.

"If you're not anxious to live," he said, "will you give me what money you have? It is a pity good money should be wasted. I know well where I would be spending it this night of the nights," he added abruptly in Gaelic.

The Body looked at him with curious eyes.

"And where would you be spending it?" he asked, in the same language.

"This is the night of the marriage of John Macdonald, the rich man from America, who has come back to his own town, and is giving a big night of it to all his friends, and his friends' friends."

"Is that the John Macdonald who is marrying Elsie Cameron?" demanded the Body eagerly.

"Ay, the same; though it may be the other daughter of Alastair Rua, the girl Morag."

A flush rose to the face of the Body. His eyes sparkled.

"It is Elsie," he said to the man.

"Belike," the stone-breaker muttered indifferently.

"Do you know where Alastair Rua and his daughters are?"

"Yes, at Beann Marsanta Macdonald's big house of the One-Ash Farm."

"Can you show me the way?"

"I'm going that way."

Thereat the Body turned to his comrades:

"I love her," he said simply; "I love Morag Cameron."

"She is not for your loving," answered the Will sharply; "for she has given troth to old Archibald Sinclair."

The Body laughed.

"Love is love," he said lightly.

"Come," interrupted the Soul wearily; "we have loitered long enough. Let us go."

We stood looking at the stone-breaker, who was gazing curiously at us. Suddenly he laughed.

"Why do you laugh?" asked the Soul.

"Well, I'm not for knowing that. But I'll tell you this: if you two wish to go into the town, you have only to follow this road. And if *you* want to come to One-Ash Farm, then you must come this other way with me."

"Do not go," whispered the Soul.

But the Body, with an impatient gesture, drew aside. "Leave me," he added: "I wish to go with this man. I will meet you to-morrow morning at the first bridge to the westward of the little town yonder, just where the stream slackens over the pebbles."

With reluctant eyes the two companions saw their comrade leave. For a long time the Will watched him with a bitter smile. Redeeming love was in the longing eyes of the Soul.

When the Body and the stone-breaker were alone, as they walked towards the distant farmsteading, where already were lights, and whence came a lowing of kye in the byres, for it was the milking hour, they spoke at intervals.

"Who were those with you?" asked the man.

"Friends. We have come away together."

"What for?"

"Well, as you would say, to see the world."

"To see the world?" The man laughed. "To see the world! Have you money?"

"Enough for our needs."

"Then you will see nothing. The world gives to them that already have, an' more than have."

"What do you hope for to-night?"

"To be drunk."

"That is a poor thing to hope for. Better to think of the laugh and the joke by the fireside; and of food and drink, too, if you will: of the pipes, and dancing, and pretty girls."

"Do as you like. As for me, I hope to be drunk."

"Why?"

"Why? Because I'll be another man then. I'll have forgotten all that I now remember from sunrise to sundown. Can you think what it is to break a hope in your heart each time you crack a stone on the roadside? That's what I am, a stone-breaker, an' I crack stones inside as well as outside. It's a stony place my heart, God knows."

"You are young to speak like that, and you speak like a man who has known better days."

"Oh, I'm ancient enough," said the man, with a short laugh.

"What meaning does that have?"

"What meaning? Well, it just means this, that I'm as old as the Bible. For there's mention o' me there. Only there I'm herding swine, an' here I'm breaking stones."

"And is *your* father living?"

"Ay, he curses me o' Sabbaths."

"Then it's not the same as the old story that is in the Bible?"

"Oh, nothing's the same an' everything's the same – except when you're drunk, an' then it's only the same turned outside in. But see, yonder's the farm. Take my advice, an' drink. It's better than the fireside, it's better than food, it's better than kisses, ay it's better than love, it's as good as hate, an' it's the only thing you can drown in except despair."

Soon after this the Body entered the house of the Beann Marsanta Macdonald, and with laughter and delight met Morag Cameron, and others whom his heart leaped to see.

At midnight, the Will sat in a room in a little inn, and read out of two books, now out of one, now out of the other. The one was the Gaelic Bible, the other was in English and was called *The One Hope*.

He rose, as the village clock struck twelve, and went to the window. A salt breath, pungent with tide-stranded seaweed, reached him. In the little harbour, thin shadowy masts ascended like smoke and melted. A green lantern swung from one. The howling of a dog rose and fell. A faint lapping of water was audible. On a big fishing-coble some men were laughing and cursing.

Overhead was an oppressive solemnity. The myriad stars were as the incalculable notes of a stilled music, become visible in silence. It was a relief to look into unlighted deeps.

"These idle lances of God pierce the mind, slay the spirit," the Will murmured, staring with dull anger at the white multitude.

"If the Soul were here," he added bitterly, "he would look at these glittering mockeries as though they were harbingers of eternal hope. To me they are whited sepulchres. They say *we live*, to those who die; they say *God endures,* to Man that perisheth; they whisper the Immortal Hope to Mortality." Turning, he went back to where he had left the books. He lifted one, and read: —

"*Have we not the word of God Himself that Time and Chance happeneth to all: that soon or late we shall all be caught in a net, we whom Chance hath for his idle sport, and upon whom Time trampleth with impatient feet? Verily, the rainbow is not more frail, more fleeting, than this drear audacity.*"

With a sigh he put the book down, and lifted the other. Having found the page he sought, he read slowly aloud: —

"*… but Time and Chance happeneth to them all. For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare, even so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them.*"

He went to the window again, brooding darkly. A slight sound caught his ear. He saw a yellow light run out, leap across the pavement and pass like a fan of outblown flame. Then the door closed, and we heard a step on the stone flags. He looked down. The Soul was there.

"Are you restless? Can you not sleep?" he asked.

"No, dear friend. But my heart is weary because of the Body. Yet before I go, let me bid you read that which follows upon what you have just read. It is not only Time and Chance upon which to dwell; but upon this, that God knows that which He does, and the hour and the way, and sees the end in the beginning."

And while the Soul moved softly down the little windy street, the Will opened the Book again, and read as the Soul had bidden.

"It may be so," he muttered, "it may be that the dreamer may yet wake to behold his dream – As thou knowest not what is the way of the wind, even so thou knowest not the work of God Who doeth all?"

With that he sighed wearily, and then, afraid to look again at the bitter eloquence of the stars, lit a candle as he lay down on his bed, and watched the warm companionable flame till sleep came upon him, and he dreamed no more of the rue and cypress, but plucked amaranths in the moonshine.

Meanwhile the Soul walked swiftly to the outskirts of the little town, and out by the grassy links where clusters of white geese huddled in sleep, and across the windy common where a tethered ass stood, with drooping head, his long, twitching ears now motionless. In the moonlight, the shadow of the weary animal stretched to fantastic lengths, and at one point, when the startled Soul looked at it, he beheld the shadow of the Cross.

When he neared One-Ash Farm he heard a loud uproar from within. Many couples were still dancing, and the pipes and a shrill flute added to the tumult. Others sang and laughed, or laughed and shouted, or cursed hoarsely. Through the fumes of smoke and drink rippled women's laughter.

He looked in at a window, with sad eyes. The first glance revealed to him the Body, his blue eyes aflame, his face flushed with wine, his left arm holding close to his heart a bright winsome lass, with hair dishevelled, and wild eyes, but with a wonderful laughing eagerness of joy.

In vain he called. His voice was suddenly grown faint. But what the ear could not hear, the heart heard. The Body rose abruptly.

"I will drink no more," he said.

A loud insensate laugh resounded near him. The stone-breaker lounged heavily from a bench, upon the servant's table.

"I am drunk now, my friend," the man cried with flaming eyes. "I am drunk, an' now I am as reckless as a king, an' as serene as the Pope, an' as heedless as God."

The Soul turned his gaze and looked at him. He saw a red flame rising from grey ashes. The ashes were his heart. The flame was his impotent, perishing life.

Stricken with sorrow, the Soul went to the door, and entered. He went straight to the stone-breaker, who was now lying with head and arms prone on the deal table.

He whispered in the drunkard's ear. The man lifted his head, and stared with red, brutish eyes.

"What is that?" he cried.

"Your mother was pure and holy. She died to give you her life. What will it be like on the day she asks for it again?"

The man raised an averting arm. There was a stare of horror in his eyes.

"I know you, you devil. Your name is Conscience."

The Soul looked at the Speaker. "I do not know," he answered simply; "but I believe in God."

"In the love of God?"

"In the love of God."

"He dwells everywhere?"

"Everywhere."

"Then I will find Him, I will find His love, *here*" – and with that the man raised the deathly spirit to his lips again, and again drank. Then, laughing and cursing, he threw the remainder at the feet of his unknown friend.

"Farewell!" he shouted hoarsely, so that those about him stared at him and at the new-comer.

The Soul turned sadly, and looked for his strayed comrade, but he was nowhere to be seen. In a room upstairs that friend whom he loved was whispering eager vows of sand and wind; and the girl Morag, clinging close to him, tempted him as she herself was tempted, so that both stood in that sand, and in the intertangled hair of each that wind blew.

The Soul saw, and understood. None spoke to him, a stranger, as he went slowly from the house, though all were relieved when that silent, sad-eyed foreigner withdrew.

Outside, the cool sea-wind fell freshly upon him. He heard a corncrake calling harshly to his mate, where the corn was yellowing in a little stone-dyked field; and a night-jar creeping forward on a juniper, uttering his whirring love-note; and he blessed their sweet, innocent lust. Then, looking upward, he watched for a while the white procession of the stars. They were to him the symbolic signs of the mystery of God. He bowed his head. "Dust of the world," he muttered humbly, "dust of the world."

Moving slowly by the house – so doubly noisy, so harshly discordant, against the large, serene, nocturnal life – he came against the gable of an open window. On the ledge lay a violin, doubtless discarded by some reveller. The Soul lifted it, and held it up to the night-wind. When it was purified, and the vibrant wood was as a nerve in that fragrant darkness, he laid it on his shoulder and played softly.

What was it that he played? Many heard it, but none knew what the strain was, or whence it came. The Soul remembered, and played. It is enough.

The soft playing stole into the house as though it were the cool sea-wind, as though it were the flowing dusk. Beautiful, unfamiliar sounds, and sudden silences passing sweet, filled the rooms. The last guests left hurriedly, hushed, strangely disquieted. The dwellers in the farmstead furtively bade good-night, and slipt away.

For an hour, till the sinking of the moon, the Soul played. He played the Song of Dreams, the Song of Peace, the three Songs of Mystery. The evil that was in the house ebbed. Everywhere, at his playing, the secret obscure life awoke. Nimble aerial creatures swung, invisibly passive, in the quiet dark. From the brown earth, from hidden sanctuaries in rocks and trees, green and grey lives slid, and stood intent. Out of the hillside came those of old. There were many eager voices, like leaves lapping in a wind. The wild-fox lay down, with red tongue lolling idly: the stag rose from the fern, with dilated nostrils; the night-jar ceased, the corncrake ceased, the moon-wakeful thrushes made no single thrilling note. The silence deepened. Sleep came stealing softly out of the obscure, swimming dusk. There was not a swaying reed, a moving leaf. The strange company of shadows stood breathless. Among the tree-tops the loosened stars shone terribly – lonely fires of silence.

The Soul played. Once he thought of the stone-breaker. He played into his heart. The man stirred, and tears oozed between his heavy lids. It was his mother's voice that he heard, singing-low a cradle-sweet song, and putting back her white hair that she might look earthward to her love.

"Grey sweetheart, grey sweetheart," he moaned. Then his heart lightened, and a moonlight of peace hallowed that solitary waste place.

Again, at the last, the Soul thought of his comrade, heavy with wine in the room overhead, drunken with desire. And to him he played the imperishable beauty of Beauty, the Immortal Love, so that, afterwards, he should remember the glory rather than the shame of his poor frailty. What he played to the girl's heart only those women know who hear the whispering words of Mary the Mother in sleep, when a second life breathes beneath each breath.

When he ceased, deep slumber was a balm upon all. He fell upon his knees and prayed.

"Beauty of all Beauty," he prayed, "let none perish without thee."

It was thus that we three, who were one, realised how Prayer and Hope and Peace, how Dream and Rest and Longing, how Laughter and Wine and Love, are in truth but shadowy analogues of the Heart's Desire.

V

At dawn we woke. A movement of gladness was in the lovely tides of morning – delicate green, and blue, and gold. The spires of the grasses were washed in dew; the innumerous was as one green flower that had lain all night in the moonshine.

We had agreed to meet at the bridge over the stream where it lapsed through gravelly beaches just beyond the little town.

There the Soul and the Will long awaited the Body. The sun was an hour risen, and had guided a moving multitude of gold and azure waters against the long reaches of yellow-poppied sand, and to the bases of the great cliffs, whose schist shone like chrysolite, and whose dreadful bastions of black basalt loomed in purple shadow, like suspended thunder-clouds on a windless afternoon.

The air was filled with the poignant sweetness of the loneroid or bog-myrtle, meadow-sweet, and white wild-roses. The green smell of the bracken, the delicate woodland odour of the mountain-ash, floated hitherward and thitherward on the idle breath of the wind, sunwarm when it came across the sea-pinks and thyme-set grass, cool and fresh when it eddied from the fern-coverts, or from the heather above the hillside-boulders where the sheep lay, or from under the pines at the bend of the sea-road where already the cooing of grey doves made an indolent sweetness.

The Soul was silent. He had not slept, but, after his playing in the dark, peace had come to him.

Before dawn he had gone into the room where the Will lay, and had looked long at his comrade. In sleep the Will more resembled him, as when awake he the more resembled the Body. A deep pity had come upon the Soul for him whom he loved so well, but knew so little.

Why was it, he wondered, that he felt less alien from the Body? Why was it that this strange, potent, inscrutable being, whom both loved, should be so foreign to each? The Body feared him. As for himself, he, too, feared him at times. There were moments when all his marvellous background of the immortal life shrank before the keen gaze of his friend. Was it possible that Mind could have a life apart from mortal substances? Was it possible? If so —

It was here that the Will awoke, and smiled at his friend.

He gave no greeting, but answered his thought.

"Yes," he said gravely, and as though continuing an argument, "it is impossible, if you mean the mortal substance of our brother, the Body. But yet not without material substance. May it not be that the Mind may have an undreamed-of shaping power, whereby it can instantly create?"

"Create what?"

"A new environment for its need? Drown it in the deepest gulfs of the sea, and it will, at the moment it is freed from the body, sheathe itself in a like shape, and habit itself with free spaces of air, so that it may breathe, and live, and emerge into the atmosphere, there to take on a new shape, to involve itself in new circumstances, to live anew?"

"It is possible. But would that sea-change leave the mind the same or another?"

"The Mind would come forth one and incorruptible."

"If in truth, the Mind be an indivisible essence?"

"Yes, if the mind be one and indivisible."

"You believe it so?"

"Tell me, are you insubstantial? You, yourself, below this accident of mortality?"

"I know not what you mean."

"You were wondering if, after all, it were possible for me to have a life, a conscious, individual continuity, apart from this mortal substance in which you and I now share – counterparts of that human home we both love and hate, that moving tent of the Illimitable, which at birth appears a speck on sands of the Illimitable, and at death again abruptly disappears. You were wondering this. But, tell me: have you yourself never wondered how you can exist, as yourself, apart from something of this very actuality, this form, this materialism to which you find yourself so alien in the Body?"

"I am spirit. I am a breath."

"But you are you?"

"Yes, I am I."

"The surpassing egotism is the same, whether in you, the Soul, who are but a breath; or in me, the Will, who am but a condition; or in our brother, the Body, a claimant to Eternal Life while perishing in his mortality!"

"I live in God. Whence I came, thither shall I return."

"A breath?"

"It may be."

"Yet you shall be you?"

"Yes; I."

"Then that breath which will be you must have form, even as the Body must have form."

"Form is but the human formula for the informulate."

"Nay, Form *is* life."

"You have ever one wish, it seems to me, O Will: to put upon me the heavy yoke of mortality."

"Not so: but to lift it from myself."

"And the Body?"

"Where did you leave him last night?"

"You remember what he said about the Three Companions of Night: Laughter, and Wine, and Love? I left him with these."

"They are also called Tears, and Weariness, and the Grave. He has his portion. Perhaps he does well. Death intercepts many retributions."

"He, too, has his dream within a dream."

"Yes, you played to it, in the silence and the darkness."

"You heard my playing – you here, I there?"

"I heard."

"And did you sleep or wake, comforted?"

"I heard a Wind. I have heard it often. I heard, too, my own voice singing in the dark."

"What was the song?"

"This: —

In the silences of the woods
I have heard all day and all night
The moving multitudes
Of the Wind in flight.
He is named Myriad:

And I am sad
Often, and often I am glad;
But oftener I am white
With fear of the dim broods
That are his multitudes."

"And then, when you had heard that song?"

"There was a rush of wings. My hair streamed behind me. Then a sudden stillness, out of which came moonlight; and a star fell slowly through the dark, and as it passed my face I felt lips pressed against mine, and it seemed to me that you kissed me."

"And when I kissed you, did I whisper any word?"

"You whispered: '*I am the Following Love.*'"

"And you knew then that it was the Breath of God, and you had deep peace, and slept?"

"I knew that it was the Following Love, – that is the Breath of God, and I had deep peace, and I slept."

The Soul crossed from the window to the bed, and stooped, and kissed the Will.

"Beloved," he whispered, "the star was but a dewdrop of the Peace that passeth understanding. And can it be that to you, to whom the healing dew was vouchsafed, shall be denied the water-springs?"

"Ah, beautiful dreamer of dreams, bewilder me no more with your lovely sophistries. See, it is already late, and we have to meet the Body at the shore-bridge over the little stream!"

It was then that the two, having had a spare meal of milk and new bread, left the inn, and went, each communing with his own thoughts, to the appointed place.

They heard the Body before they saw him, for he was singing as he came. It was a strange, idle fragment of a song – "The Little Children of the Wind" – a song that some one had made, complete in its incompleteness, as a wind-blown blossom, and, as a blossom discarded by a flying bird, thrown heedlessly on the wayside by its unknown wandering singer: —

I hear the little children of the wind
Crying solitary in lonely places:
I have not seen their faces,
But I have seen the leaves eddying behind,
The little tremulous leaves of the wind.

The Soul looked at the Will.

"So he, too, has heard the Wind," he said softly.

VI

All that day we journeyed westward. Sometimes we saw, far off, the pale blue films of the Hills of Dream, those elusive mountains towards which our way was set. Sometimes they were so startlingly near that, from gorse upland or inland valley, we thought we saw the shadow-grass shake in the wind's passage, or smelled the thyme still wet with dew where it lay under the walls of mountain-boulders. But at noon we were no nearer than when, at sunrise, we had left the little sea-town behind us: and when the throng of bracken-shadows filled the green levels between the fern and the pines – like flocks of sheep following fantastic herdsmen – the Hills of the West were still as near, and as far, as the bright raiment of the rainbow which the shepherd sees lying upon his lonely pastures.

But long before noon we were glad because of what happened to one of us.

The dawn had flushed into a wilderness of rose as we left the bridge by the stream. Long shafts of light, plumed with pale gold, were flung up out of the east: everywhere was the tremulous awakening of the new day. A score of yards from the highway a cottage stood, sparrows stirring in the thatch, swift fairy-spiders running across the rude white-washed walls, a redbreast singing in the dew-drenched fuchsia-bush. The blue peat-smoke which rose above it was so faint as to be invisible beyond the rowan which stood sunways. The westward part of the cottage was a byre: we could hear the lowing of a cow, the clucking of fowls.

In every glen, on each hillside, are crofts such as this. There was nothing unusual in what we saw, save that a collie crouched whimpering beyond a dyke on the farther side of the rowan.

"All is not well here," said the Will.

"No," murmured the Soul, "I see the shadowy footsteps of those who serve the Evil One. Await me here."

With that the Soul walked swiftly towards the cottage, and looked in at the little window. His thought was straightway ours, and we knew that a woman lay within and was about to give birth to a child. We knew, also, that those who had dark, cruel eyes, and wore each the feather of a hawk, had no power within, but were baffled, and roamed restlessly outside the cottage on the side of shadow. The *Fuath* himself was not there, but when his call came the evil spirits rose like a flock of crows and passed away. Then we saw our comrade stand back, and bow down, and fall upon his knees.

When he rejoined us we were for a moment as one, and saw seven tall and beautiful spirits, starred and flame-crested, hand-clasped and standing circlewise round the cottage. They were Sons of Joy, who sang because in that mortal hour was born an immortal soul who in the white flame and the red of mortal life was to be a spirit of gladness and beauty. For there is no joy in the domain of the Spirit like that of the birth of a new joy.

A long while we walked in silence. In the eyes of the Soul we saw a divine and beautiful light: in the eyes of the Will we saw rainbow-spanned depths: in the eyes of the Body we saw gladness.

"We are one!"

None knew who spoke. For a moment I heard my own voice, saw my own shadow in the grass; then, in the twinkling of an eye, three stood, looking at each other with startled gaze.

"Let us go," said the Soul; "we have a long way yet to travel."

Each dreaming his own dream, we walked onward. Suddenly the Soul turned and looked in the eyes of the Body.

"You are thinking of your loneliness," he said gravely.

"Yes," answered the Body.

"And I too," said the Will.

For a time no word more was said.

"I am indeed alone." This I murmured to myself after a long while, and in a moment the old supreme wisdom sank, and we were not one but three.

"But you, O Soul," said the Will, "how can you be alone when in every hour you have the company of the invisible, and see the passage of powers and influence, of demons and angels, creatures of the triple universe, souls, and the pale flight of the unembodied?"

"I do not know loneliness because of what I see or do not see, but because of what I feel. When I walk here with you side by side it is as though I walked along a narrow shore between a fathomless sea and fathomless night."

The thought of one was the thought of three. I shivered with that great loneliness. The Body glanced sidelong at the Will, the Will at the Soul.

"It is not good to dwell upon that loneliness," said the last.

"To you, O Body, and to you, O Will, as to me, it is the signal of Him whom we have lost. Listen, and in the deepest hollow of loneliness we can hear the voice of the Shepherd."

"I hear nothing," said the Body.

"I hear an echo," said the Will: "I hear an echo; but so, too, I can hear the authentic voice of the sea in a hollow shell. Authentic! … when I know well that the murmur is no eternal voice, no whisper of the wave made one with pearly silence, but only the sound of my flowing blood heard idly in the curves of ear and shell?"

"Ah!" … cried the Body, "it is a lie, that cruel word of science. The shell must ever murmur of the sea; if not, at least let us dream that it does. Soon, soon we shall have no dream left. How am I to know that *all*, that everything, is not but an idle noise in my ears? How am I to know that the Hope of the Will, and the Voice of the Soul, and the message of the Word, and the Whisper of the Eternal Spirit, are not one and all but a mocking echo in that shell which for me is the Shell of Life, but may be only the cold inhabitation of my dreams?"

"Yet were it not for these echoes," the Soul answered, "life would be intolerable for you, as for you too, my friend."

The Will smiled scornfully.

"Dreams are no comfort, no solace, no relief from weariness even, if one knows them to be no more than the spray above the froth of a distempered mind."

Suddenly one of us began in a low voice a melancholy little song: —

I hear the sea-song of the blood in my heart,
I hear the sea-song of the blood in my ears;
And I am far apart,
And lost in the years.

But when I lie and dream of that which was
Before the first man's shadow flitted on the grass —
I am stricken dumb
With sense of that to come.

Is then this wildering sea-song but a part
Of the old song of the mystery of the years —
Or only the echo of the tired Heart
And of Tears?

But none answered, and so again we walked onward, silent. The wind had fallen, and in the noon-heat we began to grow weary. It was with relief that we saw the gleam of water between the branches of a little wood of birches, which waded towards it through a tide of bracken. Beyond the birks shimmered a rainbow; a stray cloud had trailed from glen to glen, and suddenly broken among the tree-tops.

"There goes Yesterday!" cried the Body laughingly – alluding to the saying that the morning rainbow is the ghost of the day that passed at dawn. The next moment he broke into a fragment of song: —

Brother and Sister, wanderers they
Out of the Golden Yesterday —
Thro' the dusty Now and the dim To-morrow
Hand-in-hand go Joy and Sorrow.

"Yes, joy and sorrow, O glad Body," exclaimed the Will – "but it is the joy only that is vain as the rainbow, which has no other message. It should be called the Bow of Sorrow."

"Not so," said the Soul gently, "or, if so, not as you mean, dear friend: —

It is not Love that gives the clearest sight:
For out of bitter tears, and tears unshed,
Riseth the Rainbow of Sorrow overhead,
And 'neath the Rainbow is the clearest light.

The Will smiled: —
"I too must have my say, dear poets: —

Where rainbows rise through sunset rains
By shores forlorn of isles forgot,
A solitary Voice complains
'The World is here, the World is not.'

The Voice may be the wind, or sea,
Or spirit of the sundown West:
Or, mayhap, some sweet air set free
From off the Islands of the Blest:

It may be; but I turn my face
To that which still I hold so dear;
And lo, the voices of the days —
'The World is not, the World is here.'

'Tis the same end whichever way
And either way is soon forgot:
The World is all in all, To-day:
'To-morrow all the World is not.'

VII

In the noon-heat we lay, for rest and coolness, by the pool, and on the shadow-side of a hazel. The water was of so dark a brown that we knew it was of a great depth, and, indeed, even at the far verge, a heron, standing motionless, wetted her breast-feathers.

In the mid-pool, where the brown lawns sloped into depths of purple-blue, we could see a single cloud, invisible otherwise where we lay. Nearer us, the water mirrored a mountain-ash heavy with ruddy clusters. That long, feathery foliage, that reddening fruit, hung in a strange, unfamiliar air; the stranger, that amid the silence of those phantom branches ever and again flitted furtive shadow-birds.

We had walked for hours, and were now glad to rest. With us we had brought oaten bread and milk, and were well content.

"It was by a pool such as this," said one of us, after a long interval, "that dreamers of old called to Connla, and Connla heard. That was the mortal name of one whose name we know not."

"Call him now," whispered the Body eagerly.

The Soul leaned forward, and stared into the fathomless brown dusk.

"Speak, Connla! Who art thou?"

Clear as a Sabbath-bell across windless pastures we heard a voice:

"I am of those who wait yet a while. I am older than all age, for my youth is Wisdom; and I am younger than all youth, for I am named To-morrow."

We heard no more. In vain, together, separately, we sought to break that silence which divides the mortal moment from hourless time. The Soul himself could not hear, or see, or even remember, because of that mortal raiment of the flesh which for a time he had voluntarily taken upon himself.

"I will tell you a dream that is not all a dream," he said at last, after we had lain a long while pondering what that voice had uttered, that voice which showed that the grave held a deeper mystery than silence.

The Will looked curiously at him.

"Is it a dream wherein we have shared?" he asked slowly.

"That I know not: yet it may well be so. I call my dream 'The Sons of Joy.' If you or the Body have also dreamed, let each relate the dream."

"Yes," said the Body, "I have dreamed it. But I would call it rather 'The Sons of Delight.'"

"And I," said the Will, "The Sons of Silence."

"Tell it," said the Soul, looking towards the Body.

"It was night," answered the Body at once: "and I was alone in a waste place. My feet were entangled among briars and thorns, and beside me was a quagmire. On the briar grew a great staff, and beside it a circlet of woven thorn. I could see them, in a soft, white light. It must have been moonlight, for on the other side of the briar I saw, in the moonshine, a maze of wild roses. They were lovely and fragrant. I would have liked to take the staff, but it was circled with the thorn-wreath; so I turned to the moonshine and the wild roses. It was then that I saw a multitude of tall and lovely figures, men and women, all rose-crowned, and the pale, beautiful faces of the women with lips like rose-leaves. They were singing. It was the Song of Delight. I, too, sang. And as I sang, I wondered, for I thought that the eyes of those about me were heavy with love and dreams, as though each had been pierced with a shadowy thorn. But still the song rose, and I knew that the flowers in the grass breathed to it, and that the vast slow cadence of the stars was its majestic measure. Then the dawn broke, and I saw all the company, winged and crested with the seven colours, press together, so that a rainbow was upbuilded. In the middle space below the rainbow, a bird sang. Then I knew I was that bird; and as the rainbow vanished, and the dawn grew grey and chill, I sank to the ground. But it was all bog and swamp. I knew I should sing no more. But I heard voices saying: "O happy, wonderful bird, who has seen all delight, whose song was so rapt, sing, sing, sing!" But when I could sing no more I was stoned, and lay dead.

"That was my dream."

The Soul sighed.

"It was not thus I dreamed," he murmured; "but thus: —

"I stood, at night, on the verge of the sea, and looked at the maze of stars. And while looking and dreaming, I heard voices, and, turning, beheld a multitude of human beings. All were sorrowful; many were heavy with weariness and despair; all suffered from some grievous ill. Among them were many who cried continually that they had no thought, or dream, no wish, but to forget all, and be at rest:

"I called to them, asking whither they were bound?

"'We are journeying to the Grave,' came the sighing answer.

"Then suddenly I saw the Grave. An angel stood at the portals. He was so beautiful that the radiance of the light upon his brow lit that shoreless multitude; in every heart a little flame arose. The name of that divine one was Hope.

"As shadow by shadow slipt silently into the dark road behind the Grave, I saw the Angel touch for a moment every pale brow.

"I knew at last that I saw beyond the Grave. Infinite ways traversed the universe, wherein suns and moons and stars hung like fruit. Multitude within multitude was there.

"Then, again, suddenly I stood where I had been, and saw the Grave reopen, and from it troop back a myriad of bright and beautiful beings. I could see that some were souls re-born, some were lovely thoughts, dreams, hopes, aspirations, influences, powers and mighty spirits too. And all sang:

"'We are the Sons of Joy.'

"That was my dream."

We were still for a few moments. Then the Will spoke.

"This dream of ours is one thing as the Body's, and another as the Soul's. It is yet another, as I remember it: —

"On a night of a cold silence, when the breath of the equinox sprayed the stars into a continuous dazzle, I heard the honk of the wild geese as they cleft their way wedgewise through the gulfs overhead.

"In the twinkling of an eye I was beyond the last shadow of the last wing.

"Before me lay a land solemn with auroral light. For a thousand years, that were as a moment, I wandered therein. Then, far before me, I saw an immense semi-circle of divine figures, tall, wonderful, clothed with moonfire, each with uplifted head, as a forest before a wind. To the right they held the East, and to the left the West.

"'Who are you?' I cried, as I drifted through them like a mist of pale smoke.

"'We are the Laughing Gods,' they answered.

"Then after I had drifted on beyond the reach of sea or land, to a frozen solitude of ice, I saw again a vast concourse stretching crescent-wise from east to west: taller, more wonderful, crowned with stars, and standing upon dead moons white with perished time.

"'Who are you?' I cried, as I went past them like a drift of pale smoke.

"'We are the Gods who laugh not,' they answered.

"Then when I had drifted beyond the silence of the Pole, and there was nothing but unhabitable air, and the dancing fires were a flicker in the pale sheen far behind, I saw again a vast concourse stretching crescent-wise from east to west. They were taller still; they were more wonderful still. They were crowned with flaming suns, and their feet were white with the dust of ancient constellations.

"'Who are you!' I cried, as I went past them like a mist of pale smoke.

"'We are the Gods,' they answered.

"And while I waned into nothingness I felt in my nostrils the salt smell of the sea, and, listening, I heard the honk of the wild geese wedging southward.

"That was my dream."

When the Will ceased, nothing was said. We were too deeply moved by strange thoughts, one and all. Was it always to be thus … that we might dream one dream, confusedly real, confusedly unreal, when we three were one; but that when each dreamed alone, the dream, the vision, was ever to be distinct in form and significance?

We lay resting for long. After a time we slept. I cannot remember what then we dreamed, but I know that these three dreams were become one, and that what the Soul saw and what the Will saw and what the Body saw was a more near and searching revelation in this new and one dream than in any of the three separately. I pondered this, trying to remember: but the deepest dreams are always unrememberable, and leave only a fragrance, a sound as of a quiet footfall passing into silence, or a cry, or a sense of something wonderful, unimagined, or of light intolerable: but I could recall only the memory of a moment … a moment wherein, in a flash of lightning, I had seen all, understood all.

I rose … there was a dazzle on the water, a shimmer on every leaf, a falling away as of walls of air into the great river of the wind … and there were three, not one, each staring dazed at the other, in the ears of each the bewilderment of the already faint echo of that lost "I."

VIII

Towards sundown we came upon a hamlet, set among the hills. Our hearts had beat quicker as we drew near, for with the glory of light gathered above the west the mountains had taken upon them a bloom soft and wonderful, and we thought that at last we were upon the gates of the hills

towards which we had journeyed so eagerly. But when we reached the last pines on the ridge we saw the wild doves flying far westward. Beyond us, under a pale star, dimly visible in a waste of rose, were the Hills of Dream.

The Soul wished to go to them at once, for now they seemed so near to us that we might well reach them with the rising of the moon. But the others were tired, nor did the Hills seem so near to them. So we sat down by the peat-fire in a shepherd's cottage, and ate of milk and porridge, and talked with the man about the ways of that district, and the hills, and how best to reach them. "If you want work," he said, "you should go away south, where the towns are, an' not to these lonely hills. They are so barren, that even the goatherds no longer wander their beasts there."

"It's said they're haunted," added the Body, seeing that the others did not speak.

"Ay, sure enough. That's well known, master. An' for the matter o' that, there's a wood down there to the right where for three nights past I have seen figures and the gleaming of fire. But there isn't a soul in that wood – no, not a wandering tinker. I took my dogs through it to-day, an' there wasn't the sign even of a last-year's gypsy. As for the low bare hill beyond it, not a man, let alone a woman or child, would go near it in the dark. In the Gaelic it's called Maol Dè, that is to say, the Hill of God."

For a long time we sat talking with the shepherd, for he told us of many things that were strange, and some that were beautiful, and some that were wild and terrible. One of his own brothers, after an evil life, had become mad, and even now lived in caves among the higher hills, going ever on hands and feet, and cursing by day and night because he was made as one of the wild swine, that know only hunger and rage and savage sleep. He himself tended lovingly his old father, who was too frail to work, and often could not sleep at nights because of the pleasant but wearying noise the fairies made as they met on the dancing-lawns among the bracken. Our friend had not himself heard the simple people, and in a whisper confided to us that he thought the old man was a bit mazed, and that what he heard was only the solitary playing of the Amadan-Dhu, who, it was known to all, roamed the shadows between the two dusks. "Keep away from the river in the hollow," he said at another moment, "for it's there, on a night like this, just before the full moon got up, that, when I was a boy, I saw the Aonaran. An' to this day, if I saw you or any one standing by the water, it 'ud be all I could do not to thrust you into it and drown you: ay, I'd have to throw myself on my face, an' bite the grass, an' pray till my soul shook the murder out at my throat. For that's the Aonaran's doing."

Later, he showed us, when we noticed it, a bit of smooth coral that hung by a coarse leathern thong from his neck.

"Is that an amulet?" one of us asked.

"No: it's my lassie's."

We looked at the man inquiringly.

"The bairn's dead thirty years agone."

In the silence that followed, one of us rose, and went with the shepherd into the little room behind. When the man came back it was with a wonderful light in his face. Our comrade did not return … but when we glanced sidelong, lo, the Soul was there, as though he had not moved. Then, of a sudden, we knew what he had done, what he had said, and were glad.

When we left (the shepherd wanted us to stay the night, but we would not), the stars had come. The night was full of solemn beauty.

We went down by the wood of which the shepherd had spoken, and came upon it as the moon rose. But as a path bordered it, we followed that little winding white gleam, somewhat impatient now to reach those far hills where each of us believed he would find his heart's desire, or, at the least, have that vision of absolute Truth, of absolute Beauty, which we had set out to find.

We had not gone a third of the way when the Body abruptly turned, waving to us a warning hand. When we stood together silent, motionless, we saw that we were upon a secret garden. We were among ilex, and beyond were tall cypresses, like dark flames rising out of the earth, their hither sides lit with wavering moonfire. Far away the hill-foxes barked. Somewhere near us in the dusk an owl

hooted. The nested wild doves were silent. Once, the faint churr of a distant fern-owl sent a vibrant dissonance, that was yet strangely soothing, through the darkness and the silence.

"Look!" whispered the Body.

We saw, on a mossy slope under seven great cypresses, a man lying on the ground, asleep. The moonshine reached him as we looked, and revealed a face of so much beauty and of so great a sorrow that the heart ached. Nevertheless, there was so infinite a peace there, that, merely gazing upon it, our lives stood still. The moonbeam slowly passed from that divine face. I felt my breath rising and falling, like a feather before the mystery of the wind is come. Then, the further surprised, we saw that the sleeper was not alone. About him were eleven others, who also slept; but of these one sat upright, as though the watchman of the dark hour, slumbering at his post.

While the Body stooped, whispering, we caught sight of the white face of yet another, behind the great bole of a tree. This man, the twelfth of that company which was gathered about the sleeper in its midst, stared, with uplifted hand. In his other hand, and lowered to the ground, was a torch. He stared upon the Sleeper.

Slowly I moved forward. But whether in so doing, or by so doing, we broke some subtle spell, which had again made us as one, I know not. Suddenly three stood in that solitary place, with none beside us, neither sleeping nor watching, neither quick nor dead. Far off the hill-foxes barked. Among the cypress boughs an owl hooted, and was still.

"Have we dreamed?" each asked the other. Then the Body told what he had seen, and what heard; and it was much as is written here, only that the sleepers seemed to him worn and poor men, ill-clad, weary, and that behind the white face of the twelfth, who hid behind a tree, was a company of evil men with savage faces, and fierce eyes, and drawn swords.

"I have seen nothing of all this," said the Will harshly, "but only a fire drowning in its own ashes, round which a maze of leaves circled this way and that, blown by idle winds."

The Soul looked at the speaker. He sighed. "Though God were to sow living fires about you, O Will," he said, "you would not believe."

The Will answered dully: "I have but one dream, one hope, and that is to believe. Do not mock me." The Soul leaned and kissed him lovingly on the brow.

"Look," he said; "what I saw was this: I beheld, asleep, the Divine Love; not sleeping, as mortals sleep, but in a holy quiet, brooding upon infinite peace, and in commune with the Eternal Joy. Around him were the Nine Angels, the *Crois nan Aingeal* of our prayers, and two Seraphs – the Eleven Powers and Dominions of the World. And One stared upon them, and upon Him, out of the dark wood, with a face white with despair, that great and terrible Lord of Shadow whom some call Death, and some Evil, and some Fear, and some the Unknown God. Behind him was a throng of demons and demoniac creatures: and all died continually. And the wood itself – it was an infinite forest; a forest of human souls awaiting God."

The Will listened, with eyes strangely ashine. Suddenly he fell upon his knees, and prayed. We saw tears falling from his eyes.

"I am blind and deaf," he whispered in the ear of the Body, as he rose; "but, lest I forget, tell me where I am, in what place we are."

"It is a garden called Gethsemane," answered the other – though I know not how he knew – I – we – as we walked onward in silence through the dusk of moon and star, and saw the gossamer-webs whiten as they became myriad, and hang heavy with the pale glister of the dews of dawn.

IX

The morning twilight wavered, and it was as though an incalculable host of grey doves fled upward and spread earthward before a wind with pinions of rose: then the dappled dove-grey vapour

faded, and the rose hung like the reflection of crimson fire, and dark isles of ruby and straits of amethyst and pale gold and saffron and April-green came into being: and the new day was come.

We stood silent. There is a beauty too great. We moved slowly round by the low bare hill beyond the wood. No one was there, but on the summit stood three crosses; one, midway, so great that it threw a shadow from the brow of the East to the feet of the West.

The Soul stopped. He seemed as one rapt. We looked upon him with awe, for his face shone as though from a light within. "Listen," he whispered, "I hear the singing of the Sons of Joy. Farewell: I shall come again."

We were alone, we two. Silently we walked onward. The sunrays slid through the grass, birds sang, the young world that is so old smiled: but we had no heed for this. In that new solitude each almost hated the other. At noon a new grief, a new terror, came to us. We were upon a ridge, looking westward. There were no hills anywhere.

Doubtless the Soul had gone that way which led to them. For us … they were no longer there.

"Let us turn and go home," said the Body wearily.

The Will stood and thought.

"Let us go home," he said.

With that he turned, and walked hour after hour. It was by a road unknown to us, for, not noting where we went, we had traversed a path that led us wide of that by which we had come. At least we saw nothing of it. Nor, at dusk, would the Will go further, nor agree even to seek for a path that might lead to the garden called Gethsemane.

"We are far from it," he said, "if indeed there be any such place. It was a dream, and I am weary of all dreams. When we are home again, O Body, we will dream no more."

The Body was silent, then abruptly laughed. His comrade looked at him curiously.

"Why do you laugh?"

"Did you not say there would be no more tears? And of that I am glad."

"You did not laugh gladly. But what I said was that there shall be no more dreams for us, that we will dream no more."

"It is the same thing. We have tears because we dream. If we hope no more, we dream no more: if we dream no more, we weep no more. And I laughed because of this: that if we weep no more we can live as we like, without thought of an impossible to-morrow, and with little thought even for to-day."

For a time we walked in brooding thought, but slowly, because of the gathering dark. Neither spoke, until the Body suddenly stood still, throwing up his arms.

"Oh, what a fool I have been! What a fool I have been!"

The Will made no reply. He stared before him into the darkness.

We had meant to rest in the haven of the great oaks, but a thin rain had begun, and we shivered with the chill. The thought came to us to turn and find our way back to the house of the shepherd, hopeless as the quest might prove, for we were more and more bewildered as to where we were, or even as to the direction in which we moved, being without pilot of moon or star, and having already followed devious ways. But while we were hesitating, we saw a light. The red flame shone steadily through the rainy gloom, so we knew that it was no lantern borne by a fellow-wayfarer. In a brief while we came upon it, and saw that it was from a red lamp burning midway in a forest chapel.

We lifted the latch and entered. There was no one visible. Nor was any one in the sacristy. We went to the door again, and looked vainly in all directions for light which might reveal a neighbouring village, or hamlet, or even a woodlander's cottage.

Glad as we were of the shelter, and of the glow from the lamp, a thought, a dream, a desire, divided us. We looked at each other sidelong, each both seeking and avoiding the other's eyes.

"I cannot stay here," said the Body at last; "the place stifles me. I am frightened to stay. The path outside is clear and well trodden; it must lead somewhere, and as this chapel is here, and as the lamp is lit, a village, or at least a house, cannot be far off."

The Will looked at him.

"Do not go," he said earnestly.

"Why?"

"I do not know. But do not let us part. I dare not leave here. I feel as though this were our one safe haven to-night."

The Body moved to the door and opened it.

"I am going. And – and – I am going, too, because I am tired both of you and the Soul. There is only one way for me, I see, and I go that way. Farewell."

The door closed. The Will was alone. For a few moments he stood, smiling scornfully. With a sudden despairing gesture he ran to the door, flung it open, and peered into the darkness.

He could see no one; could hear no steps. His long beseeching cry was drowned among these solitudes. Slowly he re-closed the door; slowly walked across the stone flags; and with folded arms stood looking upon the altar, dyed crimson with the glow from the great lamp which hung midway in the nave.

There was a choir-stall to the right. Here he sat, for a time glad merely to be at rest.

Soon all desire of sleep went from him, and he began to dream. At this he smiled: it was so brief a while ago since he had said he would dream no more.

Away now from his two lifelong comrades, and yet subtly connected with them, and living by and through each, he felt a new loneliness. Life could be very terrible. Life … the word startled him. What life could there be for him if the Body perished? That was why he had cried out in anguish after his comrade had left, with that ominous word "farewell." True, now he lived, breathed, thought, as before: but this, he knew, was by some inexplicable miracle of personality, by which the three who had been one were each enabled to go forth, fulfilling, and in all ways ruled and abiding by, the natural law. If the Body should die, would he not then become as a breath in frost? If the Soul … ah! he wondered what then would happen.

"When I was with the Body," he muttered, "I was weary of dreams, or longed only for those dreams which could be fulfilled in action. But now … now it is different. I am alone. I must follow my own law. But what … how … where … am I to choose? All the world is a wilderness with a heart of living light. The side we see is Life: the side we do not see we call Hope. All ways – a thousand myriad ways – lead to it. Which shall I choose? How shall I go?"

Then I began to dream … I … we … then the Will began to dream.

Slowly the Forest Chapel filled with a vast throng, ever growing more dense as it became more multitudinous, till it seemed as though the walls fell away and that the aisles reached interminably into the world of shadow, through the present into the past, and to dim ages.

Behind the altar stood a living Spirit, most wonderful, clothed with Beauty and Terror.

Then the Will saw, understood, that this was not the Christ, nor yet the Holy Spirit, but a Dominion. It was the Spirit of this world, one of the Powers and Dominions whom of old men called the gods. But all in that incalculable throng worshipped this Spirit as the Supreme God. He saw, too, or realised, that, to those who worshipped, this Spirit appeared differently, now as a calm and august dreamer, now as an inspired warrior, now as a man wearing a crown of thorns against the shadow of a gigantic cross: as the Son of God, or the Prophet of God, or in manifold ways the Supreme One, from Jehovah to the savage Fetich.

Turning from that ocean of drowned life, he looked again at the rainbow-plumed and opal-hued Spirit: but now he could see no one, nothing, but a faint smoke that rose as from a torch held by an invisible hand. The altar stood unserved.

Nor was the multitude present. The myriad had become a wavering shadow, and was no more.

A child had entered the church. The little boy came slowly along the nave till he stood beneath the red lamp, so that his white robe was warm with its glow. He sang, and the Will thought it was a strange song to hear in that place, and wondered if the child were not an image of what was in his own heart.

When the day darkens,
When dusk grows light,
When the dew is falling,
When Silence dreams …
I hear a wind
Calling, calling
By day and by night.

What is the wind
That I hear calling
By day and by night,
The crying of wind?
When the day darkens,
When dusk grows light,
When the dew is falling?

The Will rose and moved towards the child. No one was there, but he saw that a wind-eddy blew about the altar, for a little cloud of rose-leaves swirled above it. As in a dream he heard a voice, faint and sweet: —

Out of the Palace
Of Silence and Dreams
My voice is falling
From height to height:
I am the Wind
Calling, calling
By day and by night.

The red flame waned and was no more. Above the altar a white flame, pure as an opal burning in moonfire, rose for a moment, and in a moment was mysteriously gathered into the darkness.

Startled, the Will stood moveless in the obscurity. Were these symbols of the end – the red flame and the white … the Body and the Soul?

Then he remembered the ancient wisdom of the Gael, and went out of the Forest Chapel and passed into the woods. He put his lips to the earth, and lifted a green leaf to his brow, and held a branch to his ear: and because he was no longer heavy with the sweet clay of mortality, though yet of the human clan, he heard that which we do not hear, and saw that which we do not see, and knew that which we do not know. All the green life was his. In that new world he saw the lives of trees, now pale green, now of woodsmoke blue, now of amethyst: the grey lives of stone: breaths of the grass and reed: creatures of the air, delicate and wild as fawns, or swift and fierce and terrible, tigers of that undiscovered wilderness, with birds almost invisible but for their luminous wings, their opalescent crests.

With these and the familiar natural life, with every bird and beast kindred and knowing him kin, he lived till the dawn, and from the dawn till sunrise, and from sunrise till noon. At noon he slept. When he woke he saw that he had wandered far, and was glad when he came to a woodlander's

cottage. Here a woman gave him milk and bread, but she was dumb, and he could learn nothing from her. She showed him a way which he followed; and by that high upland path, before sundown, he came again upon the Forest Chapel, and saw that it stood on a spur of blue hills.

Were it not for a great and startling weakness that had suddenly come upon him, he would have gone in search of his lost comrade. While he lay with his back against a tree, vaguely wondering what ill had come upon him, he heard a sound of wheels. Soon after a rough cart was driven rapidly towards the Forest Chapel, but when the countryman saw him he reined in abruptly, as though at once recognising one whom he had set out to seek. "Your friend is dying," he said; "come at once if you want to see him again. He sent me to look for you."

In a moment all lassitude and pain went from the Will, and he sprang into the cart, asking (while his mind throbbed with a dreadful anxiety) many questions. But all he could learn from his taciturn companion was that yester eve his comrade had fallen in with a company of roystering and loose folk, with whom he had drunk heavily over-night and gamed and lived evilly; that all this day he had lain as in a stupor, till the afternoon, when he awoke and straightway fell into a quarrel about a woman, and, after fierce words and blows, had been mortally wounded with a knife. He was now lying, almost in the grasp of death, at the Inn of the Crossways.

In the whirl of anxiety, dread, and a new and terrible confusion, the Will could not think clearly as to what he was to say or do, what was to be or could be done for his friend. And while he was still swayed helplessly, this way and that, as a herring in a net drifted to and fro by wind and wave, the Inn was reached.

With stumbling eagerness he mounted the rough stairs, and entered a small room, clean, though almost sordid in its bareness, yet through its western window filled with the solemn light of sunset.

On a white bed lay the Body, and the Will saw at a glance that his comrade had not long to live. The handkerchief the sufferer held on his breast was stained with the bright crimson of the riven lungs; his white face was whiter than the pillow, the more so, as a red splatch lay on each cheek.

The dying man opened his eyes as the door opened. He smiled gladly when he saw who had come.

"I am glad indeed of this," he whispered. "I feared I was to die alone, and in delirium or unconsciousness. Now I shall not be alone till the end. And then – "

But here the Will sank upon his knees by the bedside. For a few minutes his tears fell upon the hand he clasped. The sobs shook in his throat. He had never fully realised what love he bore his comrade, his second self; how interwrought with him were all his joys and sorrows, his interests, his hopes and fears.

Suddenly, with supplicating arms, he cried, "Do not die! Oh, do not die! Save me, save me, save me!"

"How can I save you, how can I help you, dear friend?" asked the Body in a broken voice; "my sand is all but run out; my hour is come."

"But do you not know, do you not see, that I cannot live without you! – that I must *die*– that if you perish so must I also pass with your passing breath!"

"No – no – no! – for, see, we are no longer one, but three. The Soul is far from us now, and soon you too will be gone on your own way. It is only I who can go no more into the beautiful dear world. O Will, if I could, I would give all your knowledge and endless quest of wisdom and all your hopes, and all the dreams and the white faith of the Soul, for one little year of sweet human life – for one month even – ah, what do I say, for a few days even, for a day, for a few hours! It is so terrible thus to be stamped out. Yesterday I saw a dog leaping and barking in delight as it raced about a wagon, and then in a moment a foot caught and it was entangled, and the wagon-wheel crushed it into a lifeless mass. There was no dog; for that poor beast it was the same as though it had never been, as though the world had never been, as though nothing more was to be. He was a breath blown unremembering out of nothing into nothing. That is what death is. That is what death is, O Will!"

"No, no, it is too horrible – too cruel – too unjust."

"Yes, for you. But not for me. Your way is not the way of death, but of life. For me, I am as the beasts are, their sorry lord, but akin – oh yes, akin, akin. I follow the natural law in all things. And I know this now, dear comrade: that without you and the Soul I should have been no other than the brutes that know nothing save their innocent lusts and live and die without thought."

The Will slowly rose.

"It was madness for us to separate and come upon this quest," he said, looking longingly at the Body.

"Not so, dear friend. We should have had to separate soon or late, whatsoever we had done. If I have feared you at times, and turned from you often, I have loved you well, and still more the Soul. I think you have both lied to me overmuch, and you mostly. But I forgive what I know was done in love and hope. And you, O Will, forgive me for all I have brought, what I now bring, upon you; forgive the many thwartings and dull indifference and heavy drag I have so often, oh, so often been to you. For now death is at hand. But I have one thing I wish to ask you."

"Speak."

"Before my life was broken, there was one whom I loved. Every hope, every dream, every joy, every sorrow that I had came from this love. It was her death which broke my life – not only for the piteous loss and all it meant to me, but because death came with tragic heedlessness – for she was young, and strong, and beautiful. And before she died, she said we should meet again. I was never, and now am far the less worthy of her; and yet – and yet – oh, if only that great, beautiful love were all I had to doubt or fear, I should have no doubt or fear! But no – no – we shall never meet. How can we? Before to-morrow I shall be like that crushed dog, and not be: just as if I had never been!"

The blood rose, and sobs and tears made further words inaudible. But after a little the Body spoke again.

"But you, O Will, you and the Soul both resemble me. We are as flowers of the same colour, as clay of the same mould. It may be you shall meet her. Tell her that my last thought was of her: take her all my dreams and hopes – and say – and say – say – "

But here the Body sat up in the bed, ash-white, with parted lips and straining eyes.

"What? Quick, quick, dear Body – say? – "

"Say that I loved best that in her which I loved best in myself – the Soul. Tell her I have never wholly despaired. Ah, if only the Soul were here, I would not even now despair! Tell her I leave all to the Soul – and – and – love shall triumph – "

There was a rush of blood, a gurgling cry, and the Body sank back lifeless. In the very moment of death the eyes lightened with a wonderful radiance – it was as though the evening stars suddenly came through the dark.

The Will looked to see whence it came. The Soul stood beside him, white, wonderful, radiant.

"I have come," he said.

"For me?" said the Will, shaking as with an ague, yet in bitter irony.

"Yes, for you, and for the Body too."

"For the Body? – see, he is already clay. What word have you to say to *that*, to *me* who likewise am already perishing?

"This – do you remember what so brief a while ago we three as one wrote – wrote with my spirit, through your mind, and the Body's hand – these words: *Love is more great than we conceive, and Death is the keeper of unknown redemptions?*"

"Yes – yes – O Soul! I remember, I remember."

"It was true there: it is true here. Have I not ever told you that Love would save?"

With that the Soul moved over to the bedside, and kissed the Body.

"Farewell, fallen leaf. But the tree lives – and beyond the tree is the wind, the breath of the eternal."

"Look," he added, "our comrade is still asleep, though now no mortal skill could nourish the hidden spark"; and with that he stooped and kissed again the silent lips and the still brow and the pulseless heart, and suddenly a breath, an essence, came from the body, in form like itself, a phantom, yet endued with a motion of life.

As the faintest murmur in a shell we heard him whisper, *Life! Life! Life!* Then, as a blown vapour, he was one with us. A singular change came upon the clay which had once been so near and dear to us: a frozen whiteness that had not been there before, a stillness as of ancient marble.

The Will stood, appalled, with wild eyes. Some dreadful invisible power was upon him.

"Lost!" he cried; and now his voice, too, was faint as a murmur in a shell. But the Soul smiled.

Then the Will grew grey as a willow-leaf aslant in the wind; and as the shadow of a reed wavered in the wind; and as a reed's shadow is and is not, so was he suddenly no more.

But, in the miracle of a moment, the Soul appeared in the triple mystery of substance, and mind, and spirit. In full and joyous life the Will stood re-born, and now we three were one again.

I looked for the last time on that which had been our home. The lifeless thing lay, most terribly still and strange; yet with a dignity that came as a benediction, for this dead temple of life had yielded to a divine law, allied not to shadow and decay, but to the recurrent spring, to the eternal ebb and flow, to the infinite processional. It is we of the human clan only who are troubled by the vast waste and refuse of life. There is not any such waste, neither in the myriad spawn nor the myriad seed: a Spirit sows by the law we do not see, and reaps by a law we do not know.

Then I turned and went to the western window. I saw that the Inn stood upon the Hills of Dream, yet, when I looked within, I knew that I was again in my familiar home. Once more, beyond the fuchsia bushes, the sea sighed, as it felt the long shore with a continuous foamless wave. In the little room below, the lamp was lit; for the glow fell warmly upon the gravel path, shell-bordered, and upon the tufted mignonette, sea-pinks, and feathery southernwood. The sound of hushed voices rose.

And now the dawn is come, and I have written this record of what we, who are now indeed one, but far more truly and intimately than before, went out to seek. In another hour I shall go hence, a wayfarer again. I have a long road to travel, but am sustained by joy, and uplifted by a great hope. When, tired, I lay down the pen, and with it the last of mortal uses, it will be to face the glory of a new day. I have no fear. I shall not leave all I have loved, for I have that in me which binds me to this beautiful world, for another life at least, it may be for many lives. And that within me which dreamed and hoped shall now more gladly and wonderfully dream, and hope, and seek, and know, and see ever deeper and further into the mystery of beauty and truth. And that within me which *knew*, now *knows*. In the deepest sense there is no spiritual dream that is not true, no hope that shall for ever go famished, no tears that shall not be gathered into the brooding skies of compassion, to fall again in healing dews.

What the Body could not, nor ever could see, and what to the Will was a darkness, or at best a bewildering mist, is now clear. There are mysteries of which I cannot write; not from any occult secret, but because they are so simple and inevitable, that, like the mystery of day and night, or the change of the seasons, or life and death, they must be learned by each, in his own way, in his own hour. It is not out of their light that I see; it is by these stars that I set forth, where else I should be as a shadow upon a trackless waste.

But Love, I am come to realise, is the supreme deflecting force. Love "unloosens sins," unites failure, disintegrates the act; not by an inconceivable conflict with the immutable law of consequence, but by deflection. For the divine love follows the life, and turns and meets it at last, and in that meeting deflects: so that that which is mortal, evil, and what is of the mortal law, the act, sinks; and on the forehead of the divine law that which is alone inevitable survives and moves onward in the rhythm that is life. When we understand the mystery of Redemption, we shall understand what Love is. The expiatory is an unknown attribute in the Divine. Expiation is but the earthly burnt-offering of that in us that is mortal: Redemption, which is the spiritual absorption of the expiation due to others, and the measureless restitution in love of wrong humbly brought to the soul and consumed there – so that

it issues a living force to meet and deflect – is the living witness in that of us which is immortal. Those who wrong us do indeed become our saviours. It is *their* expiation that we make *ours*: they must go free of us; and when they come again and discrown us, then in love we shall be at one and equal. So far, words may clothe thought; but, beyond, the soul knows there is no expiation. Except you redeem yourself, there is no God. Forgiveness is the dream of little children: beautiful because thus far we see and know, but no farther.

I see now what madness it was, as so often happened, to despise the body. But one mystery has become clear to me through this strange quest of ours – though when I say "I," or "our," I know not whether it is the Body or the Will or the Soul that speaks, till I remember that triune marriage at the deathbed, and know that while each is consciously each – the one with memory, the other with knowledge and hope, the third with wisdom and faith – we are yet one, as are the yellow and the white and the violet in the single flame in this candle beside me. And this mystery is, that the body was not built of life-warmed clay merely to be the house of the soul. Were it so, were the soul unwed to its mortal comrades, it would be no more than a moment's uplifted wave on an infinite sea. Without memory, without hope, it would be no more than a breath of the Spirit. But before the Divine Power moulded us into substance, we were shaped by it in form. And form is, in the spiritual law, what the crystal is in the chemic law.

For now I see clearly that the chief end of the body is to enable the soul to come into intimate union with the natural law, so that it may fulfil the divine law of Form, and be at one with all created life and yet be for ever itself and individual. By itself the soul would only vainly aspire; it has to learn to remember, to become at one with the wind and the grass and with all that lives and moves; to take its life from the root of the body, and its green life from the mind, and its flower and fragrance from what it may of itself obtain, not only from this world, but from its own dews, its own rainbows, dawn stars and evening stars, and vast incalculable fans of time and death. And this I have learned: that there is no absolute Truth, no absolute Beauty, even for the Soul. It may be that in the Divine Forges we shall be so moulded as to have perfect vision. Meanwhile only that Truth is deepest, that Beauty highest which is seen, not by the Soul only, or by the Mind, or by the Body, but all three as one. Let each be perfect in kind and perfect in unity. This is the signal meaning of the mystery. It is so inevitable that it has its blind descent to fetich as well as its divine ascension. But the ignoble use does not annul the noble purport, any more than the blindness of many obscures the dream of one.

There could be no life hereafter for the soul were it not for the body, and what were that life without the mind, the child of both, whom the ancient seers knew and named Mnemosynê? Without memory life would be a void breath, immortality a vacuum.

Ah, the glory of the lifting light! The new day is come. Farewell.

IONA

"There are moments when the soul takes wings: what it has to remember,
it remembers: what it loves, it loves still more: what it longs for, to that it flies."

Iona

A few places in the world are to be held holy, because of the love which consecrates them and the faith which enshrines them. Their names are themselves talismans of spiritual beauty. Of these is Iona.

The Arabs speak of Mecca as a holy place before the time of the prophet, saying that Adam himself lies buried here: and, before Adam, that the Sons of Allah, who are called Angels, worshipped; and that when Allah Himself stood upon perfected Earth it was on this spot. And here, they add, when there is no man left upon earth, an angel shall gather up the dust of this world, and say to Allah, "There is nothing left of the whole earth but Mecca: and now Mecca is but the few grains of sand that I hold in the hollow of my palm, O Allah."

In spiritual geography Iona is the Mecca of the Gael.

It is but a small isle, fashioned of a little sand, a few grasses salt with the spray of an ever-restless wave, a few rocks that wade in heather and upon whose brows the sea-wind weaves the yellow lichen. But since the remotest days sacrosanct men have bowed here in worship. In this little island a lamp was lit whose flame lighted pagan Europe, from the Saxon in his fens to the swarthy folk who came by Greek waters to trade the Orient. Here Learning and Faith had their tranquil home, when the shadow of the sword lay upon all lands, from Syracuse by the Tyrrhene Sea to the rainy isles of Orcc. From age to age, lowly hearts have never ceased to bring their burthen here. Iona herself has given us for remembrance a fount of youth more wonderful than that which lies under her own boulders of Dûn-I. And here Hope waits.

To tell the story of Iona is to go back to God, and to end in God.

But to write of Iona, there are many ways of approach. No place that has a spiritual history can be revealed to those who know nothing of it by facts and descriptions. The approach may be through the obscure glens of another's mind and so out by the moonlit way, as well as by the track that thousands travel. I have nothing to say of Iona's acreage, or fisheries, or pastures: nothing of how the islanders live. These things are the accidental. There is small difference in simple life anywhere. Moreover, there are many to tell all that need be known.

There is one Iona, a little island of the west. There is another Iona, of which I would speak. I do not say that it lies open to all. It is as we come that we find. If we come, bringing nothing with us, we go away ill-content, having seen and heard nothing of what we had vaguely expected to see or hear. It is another Iona than the Iona of sacred memories and prophecies: Iona the metropolis of dreams. None can understand it who does not see it through its pagan light, its Christian light, its singular blending of paganism and romance and spiritual beauty. There is, too, an Iona that is more than Gaelic, that is more than a place rainbow-lit with the seven desires of the world, the Iona that, if we will it so, is a mirror of your heart and of mine.

History may be written in many ways, but I think that in days to come the method of spiritual history will be found more suggestive than the method of statistical history. The one will, in its own way, reveal inward life, and hidden significance, and palpable destiny: as the other, in the good but narrow way of convention, does with exactitude delineate features, narrate facts, and relate events. The true interpreter will as little despise the one as he will claim all for the other.

And that is why I would speak here of Iona as befalls my pen, rather than as perhaps my pen should go: and choose legend and remembrance, and my own and other memories and associations, and knowledge of my own and others, and hidden meanings, and beauty and strangeness surviving in dreams and imaginations, rather than facts and figures, that others could adduce more deftly and with more will.

In the *Félire na Naomh Nerennach* is a strangely beautiful if fantastic legend of one Mochaoi, Abbot of n'-Aondruim in Uladh. With some companions he was at the edge of a wood, and while busy in cutting wattles wherewith to build a church, "he heard a bright bird singing on the blackthorn near him. It was more beautiful than the birds of the world." Mochaoi listened entranced. There was more in that voice than in the throat of any bird he had ever heard, so he stopped his wattle-cutting, and, looking at the bird, courteously asked who was thus delighting him. The bird at once answered, "A man of the people of my Lord" (that is, an angel). "Hail," said Mochaoi, "and for why that, O bird that is an angel?" "I am come here by command to encourage you in your good work, but also, because of the love in your heart, to amuse you for a time with my sweet singing." "I am glad of that," said the saint. Thereupon the bird sang a single surpassing sweet air, and then fixed his beak in the feathers of his wing, and slept. But Mochaoi heard the beauty and sweetness and infinite range of that song for three hundred years. Three hundred years were in that angelic song, but to Mochaoi it was less than an hour. For three hundred years he remained listening, in the spell of beauty: nor in that enchanted hour did any age come upon him, or any withering upon the wattles he had gathered; nor in the wood itself did a single leaf turn to a red or yellow flame before his eyes. Where the spider spun her web, she spun no more: where the dove leaned her grey breast from the fir, she leaned still.

Then suddenly the bird took its beak from its wing-feathers, and said farewell. When it was gone, Mochaoi lifted his wattles, and went homeward as one in a dream. He stared, when he looked for the little wattled cells of the Sons of Patrick. A great church built of stone stood before his wondering eyes. A man passed him, and told the stranger that it was the church of St. Mochaoi. When he spoke to the assembled brothers, none knew him: some thought he had been taken away by the people of the Shee, and come back at fairy-nightfall, which is the last hour of the last day of three hundred years. "Tell us your name and lineage," they cried. "I am Mochaoi, Abbot of n'-Aondruim," he said, and then he told his tale, and they knew him, and made him abbot again. In the enchanted wood a shrine was built, and about it a church grew, "and surpassingly white angels often alighted there, or sang hymns to it from the branches of the forest trees, or leaned with their foot on tiptoe, their eyes on the horizon, their ear on the ground, their wings flapping, their bodies trembling, waiting to send tidings of prayer and repentance with a beat of their wings to the King of the Everlasting."

There are many who thought that Mochaoi was dead, when he was seen no more of his fellow-monks at the forest monastery of n'Aondruim in Uladh. But his chronicler knew: "a sleep without decay of the body Mochaoi of Antrim slept."

I am reminded of the story of Mochaoi when I think of Iona. I think she too, beautiful isle, while gathering the help of human longing and tears and hopes, strewn upon her beaches by wild waves of the world, stood, enchanted, to listen to a Song of Beauty. "That is a new voice I hear in the wave," we can dream of her saying, and of the answer: "we are the angelic flocks of the Shepherd: we are the Voices of the Eternal: listen a while!"

It has been a long sleep, that enchanted swoon. But Mochaoi awoke, after three hundred years, and there was neither time upon his head, nor age in his body, nor a single withered leaf of the forest at his feet. And shall not that be possible for the Isle of Dreams, whose sands are the dust of martyrs and noble and beautiful lives, which was granted to one man by "one of the people of my Lord?"

When I think of Iona I think often, too, of a prophecy once connected with Iona; though perhaps current no more in a day when prophetical hopes are fallen dumb and blind.

It is commonly said that, if he would be heard, none should write in advance of his times. That I do not believe. Only, it does not matter how few listen. I believe that we are close upon a great and

deep spiritual change. I believe a new redemption is even now conceived of the Divine Spirit in the human heart, that is itself as a woman, broken in dreams, and yet sustained in faith, patient, long-suffering, looking towards home. I believe that though the Reign of Peace may be yet a long way off, it is drawing near: and that Who shall save us anew shall come divinely as a Woman, to save as Christ saved, but not, as He did, to bring with Her a sword. But whether this Divine Woman, this Mary of so many passionate hopes and dreams, is to come through mortal birth, or as an immortal Breathing upon our souls, none can yet know.

Sometimes I dream of the old prophecy that Christ shall come again upon Iona, and of that later and obscure prophecy which foretells, now as the Bride of Christ, now as the Daughter of God, now as the Divine Spirit embodied through mortal birth in a Woman, as once through mortal birth in a Man, the coming of a new Presence and Power: and dream that this may be upon Iona, so that the little Gaelic island may become as the little Syrian Bethlehem. But more wise it is to dream, not of hallowed ground, but of the hallowed gardens of the soul wherein She shall appear white and radiant. Or, that upon the hills, where we are wandered, the Shepherdess shall call us home.

From one man only, on Iona itself, I have heard any allusion to the prophecy as to the Saviour who shall yet come: and he in part was obscure, and confused the advent of Mary into the spiritual world with the possible coming again to earth of Mary, as another Redeemer, or with a descending of the Divine Womanhood upon the human heart as a universal spirit descending upon awaiting souls. But in intimate remembrance I recall the words and faith of one or two whom I loved well. Nor must I forget that my old nurse, Barabal, used to sing a strange "oran," to the effect that when St. Bride came again to Iona it would be to bind the hair and wash the feet of the Bride of Christ.

One of those to whom I allude was a young Hebridean priest, who died in Venice, after troubled years, whose bitterest vicissitude was the clouding of his soul's hope by the wings of a strange multitude of dreams – one of whom and whose end I have elsewhere written: and he told me once how, "as our forefathers and elders believed and still believe, that Holy Spirit shall come again which once was mortally born among us as the Son of God, but, then, shall be the Daughter of God. The Divine Spirit shall come again as a Woman. Then for the first time the world will know peace." And when I asked him if it were not prophesied that the Woman is to be born in Iona, he said that if this prophecy had been made it was doubtless of an Iona that was symbolic, but that this was a matter of no moment, for She would rise suddenly in many hearts, and have her habitation among dreams and hopes. The other who spoke to me of this Woman who is to save was an old fisherman of a remote island of the Hebrides, and one to whom I owe more than to any other spiritual influence in my childhood, for it was he who opened to me the three gates of Beauty. Once this old man, Seumas Macleod, took me with him to a lonely haven in the rocks, and held me on his knee as we sat watching the sun sink and the moon climb out of the eastern wave. I saw no one, but abruptly he rose and put me from him, and bowed his grey head as he knelt before one who suddenly was standing in that place. I asked eagerly who it was. He told me that it was an Angel. Later, I learned (I remember my disappointment that the beautiful vision was not winged with great white wings) that the Angel was one soft flame of pure white, and that below the soles of his feet were curling scarlet flames. He had come in answer to the old man's prayer. He had come to say that we could not see the Divine One whom we awaited. "But you will yet see that Holy Beauty," said the Angel, and Seumas believed, and I too believed, and believe. He took my hand, and I knelt beside him, and he bade me repeat the words he said. And that was how I first prayed to Her who shall yet be the Balm of the World.

And since then I have learned, and do see, that not only prophecies and hopes, and desires unclothed yet in word or thought, foretell her coming, but already a multitude of spirits are in the gardens of the soul, and are sowing seed and calling upon the wind of the south; and that everywhere are watching eyes and uplifted hands, and signs which cannot be mistaken, in many lands, in many peoples, in many minds; and, in the heaven itself that the soul sees, the surpassing signature.

I recall one whom I knew, a fisherman of the little green island: and I tell this story of Coll here, for it is to me more than the story of a dreaming islander. One night, lying upon the hillock that is called Cnoc-nan-Aingeal, because it is here that St. Colum was wont to hold converse with an angel out of heaven, he watched the moonlight move like a slow fin through the sea: and in his heart were desires as infinite as the waves of the sea, the moving homes of the dead.

And while he lay and dreamed, his thoughts idly adrift as a net in deep waters, he closed his eyes, muttering the Gaelic words of an old line,

In the Isle of Dreams God shall yet fulfil Himself anew.

Hearing a footfall, he stirred. A man stood beside him. He did not know the man, who was young, and had eyes dark as hill-tarns, with hair light and soft as thistledown; and moved light as a shadow, delicately treading the grass as the wind treads it. In his hair he had twined the fantastic leaf of the horn-poppy.

The islander did not move or speak: it was as though a spell were upon him.

"God be with you," he said at last, uttering the common salutation.

"And with you, Coll mac Coll," answered the stranger. Coll looked at him. Who was this man, with the sea-poppy in his hair, who, unknown, knew him by name? He had heard of one whom he did not wish to meet, the Green Harper: also of a grey man of the sea whom islesmen seldom alluded to by name: again, there was the Amadan Dhû … but at that name Coll made the sign of the cross, and remembering what Father Allan had told him in South Uist, muttered a holy exorcism of the Trinity.

The man smiled.

"You need have no fear, Coll mac Coll," he said quietly.

"You that know my name so well are welcome, but if you in turn would tell me your name I should be glad."

"I have no name that I can tell you," answered the stranger gravely; "but I am not of those who are unfriendly. And because you can see me and speak to me, I will help you to whatsoever you may wish."

Coll laughed.

"Neither you nor any man can do that. For now that I have neither father nor mother, nor brother nor sister, and my lass too is dead, I wish neither for sheep nor cattle, nor for new nets and a fine boat, nor a big house, nor as much money as MacCailein Mòr has in the bank at Inveraora."

"What then do you wish for, Coll mac Coll?"

"I do not wish for what cannot be, or I would wish to see again the dear face of Morag, my lass. But I wish for all the glory and wonder and power there is in the world, and to have it all at my feet, and to know everything that the Holy Father himself knows, and have kings coming to me as the crofters come to MacCailein Mòr's factor."

"You can have that, Coll mac Coll," said the Green Harper, and he waved a withe of hazel he had in his hand.

"What is that for?" said Coll.

"It is to open a door that is in the air. And now, Coll, if that is your wish of all wishes, and you will give up all other wishes for that wish, you can have the sovereignty of the world. Ay, and more than that: you shall have the sun like a golden jewel in the hollow of your right hand, and all the stars as pearls in your left, and have the moon as a white shining opal above your brows, with all knowledge behind the sun, within the moon, and beyond the stars."

Coll's face shone. He stood, waiting. Just then he heard a familiar sound in the dusk. The tears came into his eyes.

"Give me instead," he cried, "give me a warm breast-feather from that grey dove of the woods that is winging home to her young." He looked as one moon-dazed. None stood beside him. He was alone. Was it a dream, he wondered? But a weight was lifted from his heart. Peace fell upon him as dew upon grey pastures. Slowly he walked homeward. Once, glancing back, he saw a white figure

upon the knoll, with a face noble and beautiful. Was it Colum himself come again? he mused: or that white angel with whom the Saint was wont to discourse, and who brought him intimacies of God? or was it but the wave-fire of his dreaming mind, as lonely and cold and unreal as that which the wind of the south makes upon the wandering hearths of the sea?

I tell this story of Coll here, for, as I have said, it is to me more than the story of a dreaming islander. He stands for the soul of a race. It is because, to me, he stands for the sorrowful genius of our race, that I have spoken of him here. Below all the strife of lesser desires, below all that he has in common with other men, he has the livelong unquenchable thirst for the things of the spirit. This is the thirst that makes him turn so often from the near securities and prosperities, and indeed all beside, setting his heart aflame with vain, because illimitable, desires. For him, the wisdom before which knowledge is a frosty breath: the beauty that is beyond what is beautiful. For, like Coll, the world itself has not enough to give him. And at the last, and above all, he is like Coll in this, that the sun and moon and stars themselves may become as trampled dust, for only a breast-feather of that Dove of the Eternal, which may have its birth in mortal love, but has its evening home where are the dews of immortality.

"The Dove of the Eternal." It was from the lips of an old priest of the Hebrides that I first heard these words. I was a child, and asked him if it was a white dove, such as I had seen fanning the sunglow in Icolmkill.

"Yes," he told me, "the Dove is white, and it was beloved of Colum, and is of you, little one, and of me."

"Then it is not dead?"

"It is not dead."

I was in a more wild and rocky isle than Iona then, and when I went into a solitary place close by my home it was to a stony wilderness so desolate that in many moods I could not bear it. But that day, though there were no sheep lying beside boulders as grey and still, nor whinnying goats (creatures that have always seemed to me strangely homeless, so that, as a child, it was often my noon-fancy on hot days to play to them on a little reed-flute I was skilled in making, thwarting the hill-wind at the small holes to the fashioning of a rude furtive music, which I believed comforted the goats, though why I did not know, and probably did not try to know): and though I could hear nothing but the soft, swift, slipping feet of the wind among the rocks and grass and a noise of the tide crawling up from a shore hidden behind crags (beloved of swallows for the small honey-flies which fed upon the thyme): still, on that day, I was not ill at ease, nor in any way disquieted. But before me I saw a white rock-dove, and followed it gladly. It flew circling among the crags, and once I thought it had passed seaward; but it came again, and alit on a boulder.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.