GEORGE MACDONALD

LILITH

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MacDonald G.

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Содержание

George MacDonald
Lilith: A Romance

I took a walk on Spaulding's Farm the other afternoon. I saw the setting sun lighting up the opposite side of a stately pine wood. Its golden rays straggled into the aisles of the wood as into some noble hall. I was impressed as if some ancient and altogether admirable and shining family had settled there in that part of the land called Concord, unknown to me,—to whom the sun was servant, —who had not gone into society in the village,—who had not been called on. I saw their park, their pleasure-ground, beyond through the wood, in Spaulding's cranberry-meadow. The pines furnished them with gables as they grew. Their house was not obvious to vision; their trees grew through it. I do not know whether I heard the sounds of a suppressed hilarity or not. They seemed to recline on the sunbeams. They have sons and daughters. They are quite well. The farmer's cart-path, which leads directly through their hall, does not in the least put them out,—as the muddy bottom of a pool is sometimes seen through the reflected skies. They never heard of Spaulding, and do not know that he is their neighbor,—notwithstanding I heard him whistle as he drove his team through the house. Nothing can equal the serenity of their lives. Their coat of arms is simply a lichen. I saw it painted on the pines and oaks. Their attics were in the tops of the trees. They are of no politics. There was no noise of labor. I did not perceive that they were weaving or spinning. Yet I did detect, when the wind lulled and hearing was done away, the finest imaginable sweet musical hum,—as of a distant hive in May, which perchance was the sound of their thinking. They had no idle thoughts, and no one without could see their work, for their industry was not as in knots and excrescences embayed.

But I find it difficult to remember them. They fade irrevocably out of my mind even now while I speak and endeavor to recall them, and recollect myself. It is only after a long and serious effort to recollect my best thoughts that I become again aware of their cohabitancy. If it were not for such families as this, I think I should move out of Concord.

Thoreau: "WALKING."

CHAPTER I. THE LIBRARY

I had just finished my studies at Oxford, and was taking a brief holiday from work before assuming definitely the management of the estate. My father died when I was yet a child; my mother followed him within a year; and I was nearly as much alone in the world as a man might find himself.

I had made little acquaintance with the history of my ancestors. Almost the only thing I knew concerning them was, that a notable number of them had been given to study. I had myself so far inherited the tendency as to devote a good deal of my time, though, I confess, after a somewhat desultory fashion, to the physical sciences. It was chiefly the wonder they woke that drew me. I was constantly seeing, and on the outlook to see, strange analogies, not only between the facts of different sciences of the same order, or between physical and metaphysical facts, but between physical hypotheses and suggestions glimmering out of the metaphysical dreams into which I was in the habit of falling. I was at the same time much given to a premature indulgence of the impulse to turn hypothesis into theory. Of my mental peculiarities there is no occasion to say more.

The house as well as the family was of some antiquity, but no description of it is necessary to the understanding of my narrative. It contained a fine library, whose growth began before the invention of printing, and had continued to my own time, greatly influenced, of course, by changes of taste and pursuit. Nothing surely can more impress upon a man the transitory nature of possession than his succeeding to an ancient property! Like a moving panorama mine has passed from before many eyes, and is now slowly flitting from before my own.

The library, although duly considered in many alterations of the house and additions to it, had nevertheless, like an encroaching state, absorbed one room after another until it occupied the greater part of the ground floor. Its chief room was large, and the walls of it were covered with books almost to the ceiling; the rooms into which it overflowed were of various sizes and shapes, and communicated in modes as various—by doors, by open arches, by short passages, by steps up and steps down.

In the great room I mainly spent my time, reading books of science, old as well as new; for the history of the human mind in relation to supposed knowledge was what most of all interested me. Ptolemy, Dante, the two Bacons, and Boyle were even more to me than Darwin or Maxwell, as so much nearer the vanished van breaking into the dark of ignorance.

In the evening of a gloomy day of August I was sitting in my usual place, my back to one of the windows, reading. It had rained the greater part of the morning and afternoon, but just as the sun was setting, the clouds parted in front of him, and he shone into the room. I rose and looked out of the window. In the centre of the great lawn the feathering top of the fountain column was filled with his red glory. I turned to resume my seat, when my eye was caught by the same glory on the one picture in the room—a portrait, in a sort of niche or little shrine sunk for it in the expanse of book-filled shelves. I knew it as the likeness of one of my ancestors, but had never even wondered why it hung there alone, and not in the gallery, or one of the great rooms, among the other family portraits. The direct sunlight brought out the painting wonderfully; for the first time I seemed to see it, and for the first time it seemed to respond to my look. With my eyes full of the light reflected from it, something, I cannot tell what, made me turn and cast a glance to the farther end of the room, when I saw, or seemed to see, a tall figure reaching up a hand to a bookshelf. The next instant, my vision apparently rectified by the comparative dusk, I saw no one, and concluded that my optic nerves had been momentarily affected from within.

I resumed my reading, and would doubtless have forgotten the vague, evanescent impression, had it not been that, having occasion a moment after to consult a certain volume, I found but a gap in the row where it ought to have stood, and the same instant remembered that just there I had seen, or fancied I saw, the old man in search of a book. I looked all about the spot but in vain. The next

morning, however, there it was, just where I had thought to find it! I knew of no one in the house likely to be interested in such a book.

Three days after, another and yet odder thing took place.

In one of the walls was the low, narrow door of a closet, containing some of the oldest and rarest of the books. It was a very thick door, with a projecting frame, and it had been the fancy of some ancestor to cross it with shallow shelves, filled with book-backs only. The harmless trick may be excused by the fact that the titles on the sham backs were either humorously original, or those of books lost beyond hope of recovery. I had a great liking for the masked door.

To complete the illusion of it, some inventive workman apparently had shoved in, on the top of one of the rows, a part of a volume thin enough to lie between it and the bottom of the next shelf: he had cut away diagonally a considerable portion, and fixed the remnant with one of its open corners projecting beyond the book-backs. The binding of the mutilated volume was limp vellum, and one could open the corner far enough to see that it was manuscript upon parchment.

Happening, as I sat reading, to raise my eyes from the page, my glance fell upon this door, and at once I saw that the book described, if book it may be called, was gone. Angrier than any worth I knew in it justified, I rang the bell, and the butler appeared. When I asked him if he knew what had befallen it, he turned pale, and assured me he did not. I could less easily doubt his word than my own eyes, for he had been all his life in the family, and a more faithful servant never lived. He left on me the impression, nevertheless, that he could have said something more.

In the afternoon I was again reading in the library, and coming to a point which demanded reflection, I lowered the book and let my eyes go wandering. The same moment I saw the back of a slender old man, in a long, dark coat, shiny as from much wear, in the act of disappearing through the masked door into the closet beyond. I darted across the room, found the door shut, pulled it open, looked into the closet, which had no other issue, and, seeing nobody, concluded, not without uneasiness, that I had had a recurrence of my former illusion, and sat down again to my reading.

Naturally, however, I could not help feeling a little nervous, and presently glancing up to assure myself that I was indeed alone, started again to my feet, and ran to the masked door—for there was the mutilated volume in its place! I laid hold of it and pulled: it was firmly fixed as usual!

I was now utterly bewildered. I rang the bell; the butler came; I told him all I had seen, and he told me all he knew.

He had hoped, he said, that the old gentleman was going to be forgotten; it was well no one but myself had seen him. He had heard a good deal about him when first he served in the house, but by degrees he had ceased to be mentioned, and he had been very careful not to allude to him.

“The place was haunted by an old gentleman, was it?” I said.

He answered that at one time everybody believed it, but the fact that I had never heard of it seemed to imply that the thing had come to an end and was forgotten.

I questioned him as to what he had seen of the old gentleman.

He had never seen him, he said, although he had been in the house from the day my father was eight years old. My grandfather would never hear a word on the matter, declaring that whoever alluded to it should be dismissed without a moment’s warning: it was nothing but a pretext of the maids, he said, for running into the arms of the men! but old Sir Ralph believed in nothing he could not see or lay hold of. Not one of the maids ever said she had seen the apparition, but a footman had left the place because of it.

An ancient woman in the village had told him a legend concerning a Mr. Raven, long time librarian to “that Sir Upward whose portrait hangs there among the books.” Sir Upward was a great reader, she said—not of such books only as were wholesome for men to read, but of strange, forbidden, and evil books; and in so doing, Mr. Raven, who was probably the devil himself, encouraged him. Suddenly they both disappeared, and Sir Upward was never after seen or heard of, but Mr. Raven continued to show himself at uncertain intervals in the library. There were some who

believed he was not dead; but both he and the old woman held it easier to believe that a dead man might revisit the world he had left, than that one who went on living for hundreds of years should be a man at all.

He had never heard that Mr. Raven meddled with anything in the house, but he might perhaps consider himself privileged in regard to the books. How the old woman had learned so much about him he could not tell; but the description she gave of him corresponded exactly with the figure I had just seen.

“I hope it was but a friendly call on the part of the old gentleman!” he concluded, with a troubled smile.

I told him I had no objection to any number of visits from Mr. Raven, but it would be well he should keep to his resolution of saying nothing about him to the servants. Then I asked him if he had ever seen the mutilated volume out of its place; he answered that he never had, and had always thought it a fixture. With that he went to it, and gave it a pull: it seemed immovable.

CHAPTER II. THE MIRROR

Nothing more happened for some days. I think it was about a week after, when what I have now to tell took place.

I had often thought of the manuscript fragment, and repeatedly tried to discover some way of releasing it, but in vain: I could not find out what held it fast.

But I had for some time intended a thorough overhauling of the books in the closet, its atmosphere causing me uneasiness as to their condition. One day the intention suddenly became a resolve, and I was in the act of rising from my chair to make a beginning, when I saw the old librarian moving from the door of the closet toward the farther end of the room. I ought rather to say only that I caught sight of something shadowy from which I received the impression of a slight, stooping man, in a shabby dress-coat reaching almost to his heels, the tails of which, disparting a little as he walked, revealed thin legs in black stockings, and large feet in wide, slipper-like shoes.

At once I followed him: I might be following a shadow, but I never doubted I was following something. He went out of the library into the hall, and across to the foot of the great staircase, then up the stairs to the first floor, where lay the chief rooms. Past these rooms, I following close, he continued his way, through a wide corridor, to the foot of a narrower stair leading to the second floor. Up that he went also, and when I reached the top, strange as it may seem, I found myself in a region almost unknown to me. I never had brother or sister to incite to such romps as make children familiar with nook and cranny; I was a mere child when my guardian took me away; and I had never seen the house again until, about a month before, I returned to take possession.

Through passage after passage we came to a door at the bottom of a winding wooden stair, which we ascended. Every step creaked under my foot, but I heard no sound from that of my guide. Somewhere in the middle of the stair I lost sight of him, and from the top of it the shadowy shape was nowhere visible. I could not even imagine I saw him. The place was full of shadows, but he was not one of them.

I was in the main garret, with huge beams and rafters over my head, great spaces around me, a door here and there in sight, and long vistas whose gloom was thinned by a few lurking cobwebbed windows and small dusky skylights. I gazed with a strange mingling of awe and pleasure: the wide expanse of garret was my own, and unexplored!

In the middle of it stood an unpainted inclosure of rough planks, the door of which was ajar. Thinking Mr. Raven might be there, I pushed the door, and entered.

The small chamber was full of light, but such as dwells in places deserted: it had a dull, disconsolate look, as if it found itself of no use, and regretted having come. A few rather dim sunrays, marking their track through the cloud of motes that had just been stirred up, fell upon a tall mirror with a dusty face, old-fashioned and rather narrow—in appearance an ordinary glass. It had an ebony frame, on the top of which stood a black eagle, with outstretched wings, in his beak a golden chain, from whose end hung a black ball.

I had been looking at rather than into the mirror, when suddenly I became aware that it reflected neither the chamber nor my own person. I have an impression of having seen the wall melt away, but what followed is enough to account for any uncertainty:—could I have mistaken for a mirror the glass that protected a wonderful picture?

I saw before me a wild country, broken and heathy. Desolate hills of no great height, but somehow of strange appearance, occupied the middle distance; along the horizon stretched the tops of a far-off mountain range; nearest me lay a tract of moorland, flat and melancholy.

Being short-sighted, I stepped closer to examine the texture of a stone in the immediate foreground, and in the act espied, hopping toward me with solemnity, a large and ancient raven, whose purply black was here and there softened with gray. He seemed looking for worms as he came.

Nowise astonished at the appearance of a live creature in a picture, I took another step forward to see him better, stumbled over something—doubtless the frame of the mirror—and stood nose to beak with the bird: I was in the open air, on a houseless heath!

CHAPTER III. THE RAVEN

I turned and looked behind me: all was vague and uncertain, as when one cannot distinguish between fog and field, between cloud and mountain-side. One fact only was plain—that I saw nothing I knew. Imagining myself involved in a visual illusion, and that touch would correct sight, I stretched my arms and felt about me, walking in this direction and that, if haply, where I could see nothing, I might yet come in contact with something; but my search was vain. Instinctively then, as to the only living thing near me, I turned to the raven, which stood a little way off, regarding me with an expression at once respectful and quizzical. Then the absurdity of seeking counsel from such a one struck me, and I turned again, overwhelmed with bewilderment, not unmingled with fear. Had I wandered into a region where both the material and psychical relations of our world had ceased to hold? Might a man at any moment step beyond the realm of order, and become the sport of the lawless? Yet I saw the raven, felt the ground under my feet, and heard a sound as of wind in the lowly plants around me!

"How DID I get here?" I said—apparently aloud, for the question was immediately answered.

"You came through the door," replied an odd, rather harsh voice.

I looked behind, then all about me, but saw no human shape. The terror that madness might be at hand laid hold upon me: must I henceforth place no confidence either in my senses or my consciousness? The same instant I knew it was the raven that had spoken, for he stood looking up at me with an air of waiting. The sun was not shining, yet the bird seemed to cast a shadow, and the shadow seemed part of himself.

I beg my reader to aid me in the endeavour to make myself intelligible—if here understanding be indeed possible between us. I was in a world, or call it a state of things, an economy of conditions, an idea of existence, so little correspondent with the ways and modes of this world—which we are apt to think the only world, that the best choice I can make of word or phrase is but an adumbration of what I would convey. I begin indeed to fear that I have undertaken an impossibility, undertaken to tell what I cannot tell because no speech at my command will fit the forms in my mind. Already I have set down statements I would gladly change did I know how to substitute a truer utterance; but as often as I try to fit the reality with nearer words, I find myself in danger of losing the things themselves, and feel like one in process of awaking from a dream, with the thing that seemed familiar gradually yet swiftly changing through a succession of forms until its very nature is no longer recognisable.

I bethought me that a bird capable of addressing a man must have the right of a man to a civil answer; perhaps, as a bird, even a greater claim.

A tendency to croak caused a certain roughness in his speech, but his voice was not disagreeable, and what he said, although conveying little enlightenment, did not sound rude.

"I did not come through any door," I rejoined.

"I saw you come through it!—saw you with my own ancient eyes!" asserted the raven, positively but not disrespectfully.

"I never saw any door!" I persisted.

"Of course not!" he returned; "all the doors you had yet seen—and you haven't seen many—were doors in; here you came upon a door out! The strange thing to you," he went on thoughtfully, "will be, that the more doors you go out of, the farther you get in!"

"Oblige me by telling me where I am."

"That is impossible. You know nothing about whereness. The only way to come to know where you are is to begin to make yourself at home."

"How am I to begin that where everything is so strange?"

"By doing something."

"What?"

"Anything; and the sooner you begin the better! for until you are at home, you will find it as difficult to get out as it is to get in."

"I have, unfortunately, found it too easy to get in; once out I shall not try again!"

"You have stumbled in, and may, possibly, stumble out again. Whether you have got in UNFORTUNATELY remains to be seen."

"Do you never go out, sir?"

"When I please I do, but not often, or for long. Your world is such a half-baked sort of place, it is at once so childish and so self-satisfied—in fact, it is not sufficiently developed for an old raven—at your service!"

"Am I wrong, then, in presuming that a man is superior to a bird?"

"That is as it may be. We do not waste our intellects in generalising, but take man or bird as we find him.—I think it is now my turn to ask you a question!"

"You have the best of rights," I replied, "in the fact that you CAN do so!"

"Well answered!" he rejoined. "Tell me, then, who you are—if you happen to know."

"How should I help knowing? I am myself, and must know!"

"If you know you are yourself, you know that you are not somebody else; but do you know that you are yourself? Are you sure you are not your own father?—or, excuse me, your own fool?—Who are you, pray?"

I became at once aware that I could give him no notion of who I was. Indeed, who was I? It would be no answer to say I was who! Then I understood that I did not know myself, did not know what I was, had no grounds on which to determine that I was one and not another. As for the name I went by in my own world, I had forgotten it, and did not care to recall it, for it meant nothing, and what it might be was plainly of no consequence here. I had indeed almost forgotten that there it was a custom for everybody to have a name! So I held my peace, and it was my wisdom; for what should I say to a creature such as this raven, who saw through accident into entity?

"Look at me," he said, "and tell me who I am."

As he spoke, he turned his back, and instantly I knew him. He was no longer a raven, but a man above the middle height with a stoop, very thin, and wearing a long black tail-coat. Again he turned, and I saw him a raven.

"I have seen you before, sir," I said, feeling foolish rather than surprised.

"How can you say so from seeing me behind?" he rejoined. "Did you ever see yourself behind? You have never seen yourself at all!—Tell me now, then, who I am."

"I humbly beg your pardon," I answered: "I believe you were once the librarian of our house, but more WHO I do not know."

"Why do you beg my pardon?"

"Because I took you for a raven," I said—seeing him before me as plainly a raven as bird or man could look.

"You did me no wrong," he returned. "Calling me a raven, or thinking me one, you allowed me existence, which is the sum of what one can demand of his fellow-beings. Therefore, in return, I will give you a lesson:—No one can say he is himself, until first he knows that he IS, and then what HIMSELF is. In fact, nobody is himself, and himself is nobody. There is more in it than you can see now, but not more than you need to see. You have, I fear, got into this region too soon, but none the less you must get to be at home in it; for home, as you may or may not know, is the only place where you can go out and in. There are places you can go into, and places you can go out of; but the one place, if you do but find it, where you may go out and in both, is home."

He turned to walk away, and again I saw the librarian. He did not appear to have changed, only to have taken up his shadow. I know this seems nonsense, but I cannot help it.

I gazed after him until I saw him no more; but whether distance hid him, or he disappeared among the heather, I cannot tell.

Could it be that I was dead, I thought, and did not know it? Was I in what we used to call the world beyond the grave? and must I wander about seeking my place in it? How was I to find myself at home? The raven said I must do something: what could I do here?—And would that make me somebody? for now, alas, I was nobody!

I took the way Mr. Raven had gone, and went slowly after him. Presently I saw a wood of tall slender pine-trees, and turned toward it. The odour of it met me on my way, and I made haste to bury myself in it.

Plunged at length in its twilight glooms, I spied before me something with a shine, standing between two of the stems. It had no colour, but was like the translucent trembling of the hot air that rises, in a radiant summer noon, from the sun-baked ground, vibrant like the smitten chords of a musical instrument. What it was grew no plainer as I went nearer, and when I came close up, I ceased to see it, only the form and colour of the trees beyond seemed strangely uncertain. I would have passed between the stems, but received a slight shock, stumbled, and fell. When I rose, I saw before me the wooden wall of the garret chamber. I turned, and there was the mirror, on whose top the black eagle seemed but that moment to have perched.

Terror seized me, and I fled. Outside the chamber the wide garret spaces had an UNCANNY look. They seemed to have long been waiting for something; it had come, and they were waiting again! A shudder went through me on the winding stair: the house had grown strange to me! something was about to leap upon me from behind! I darted down the spiral, struck against the wall and fell, rose and ran. On the next floor I lost my way, and had gone through several passages a second time ere I found the head of the stair. At the top of the great stair I had come to myself a little, and in a few moments I sat recovering my breath in the library.

Nothing should ever again make me go up that last terrible stair! The garret at the top of it pervaded the whole house! It sat upon it, threatening to crush me out of it! The brooding brain of the building, it was full of mysterious dwellers, one or other of whom might any moment appear in the library where I sat! I was nowhere safe! I would let, I would sell the dreadful place, in which an aërial portal stood ever open to creatures whose life was other than human! I would purchase a crag in Switzerland, and thereon build a wooden nest of one story with never a garret above it, guarded by some grand old peak that would send down nothing worse than a few tons of whelming rock!

I knew all the time that my thinking was foolish, and was even aware of a certain undertone of contemptuous humour in it; but suddenly it was checked, and I seemed again to hear the croak of the raven.

“If I know nothing of my own garret,” I thought, “what is there to secure me against my own brain? Can I tell what it is even now generating?—what thought it may present me the next moment, the next month, or a year away? What is at the heart of my brain? What is behind my THINK? Am I there at all?—Who, what am I?”

I could no more answer the question now than when the raven put it to me in—at—“Where in?—where at?” I said, and gave myself up as knowing anything of myself or the universe.

I started to my feet, hurried across the room to the masked door, where the mutilated volume, sticking out from the flat of soulless, bodiless, non-existent books, appeared to beckon me, went down on my knees, and opened it as far as its position would permit, but could see nothing. I got up again, lighted a taper, and peeping as into a pair of reluctant jaws, perceived that the manuscript was verse. Further I could not carry discovery. Beginnings of lines were visible on the left-hand page, and ends of lines on the other; but I could not, of course, get at the beginning and end of a single line, and was unable, in what I could read, to make any guess at the sense. The mere words, however, woke in me feelings which to describe was, from their strangeness, impossible. Some dreams, some poems, some musical phrases, some pictures, wake feelings such as one never had before, new in colour and form—spiritual sensations, as it were, hitherto unproved: here, some of the phrases, some of the senseless half-lines, some even of the individual words affected me in similar fashion—as with

the aroma of an idea, rousing in me a great longing to know what the poem or poems might, even yet in their mutilation, hold or suggest.

I copied out a few of the larger shreds attainable, and tried hard to complete some of the lines, but without the least success. The only thing I gained in the effort was so much weariness that, when I went to bed, I fell asleep at once and slept soundly.

In the morning all that horror of the empty garret spaces had left me.

CHAPTER IV. SOMEWHERE OR NOWHERE?

The sun was very bright, but I doubted if the day would long be fine, and looked into the milky sapphire I wore, to see whether the star in it was clear. It was even less defined than I had expected. I rose from the breakfast-table, and went to the window to glance at the stone again. There had been heavy rain in the night, and on the lawn was a thrush breaking his way into the shell of a snail.

As I was turning my ring about to catch the response of the star to the sun, I spied a keen black eye gazing at me out of the milky misty blue. The sight startled me so that I dropped the ring, and when I picked it up the eye was gone from it. The same moment the sun was obscured; a dark vapour covered him, and in a minute or two the whole sky was clouded. The air had grown sultry, and a gust of wind came suddenly. A moment more and there was a flash of lightning, with a single sharp thunder-clap. Then the rain fell in torrents.

I had opened the window, and stood there looking out at the precipitous rain, when I descried a raven walking toward me over the grass, with solemn gait, and utter disregard of the falling deluge. Suspecting who he was, I congratulated myself that I was safe on the ground-floor. At the same time I had a conviction that, if I were not careful, something would happen.

He came nearer and nearer, made a profound bow, and with a sudden winged leap stood on the window-sill. Then he stepped over the ledge, jumped down into the room, and walked to the door. I thought he was on his way to the library, and followed him, determined, if he went up the stair, not to take one step after him. He turned, however, neither toward the library nor the stair, but to a little door that gave upon a grass-patch in a nook between two portions of the rambling old house. I made haste to open it for him. He stepped out into its creeper-covered porch, and stood looking at the rain, which fell like a huge thin cataract; I stood in the door behind him. The second flash came, and was followed by a lengthened roll of more distant thunder. He turned his head over his shoulder and looked at me, as much as to say, “You hear that?” then swivelled it round again, and anew contemplated the weather, apparently with approbation. So human were his pose and carriage and the way he kept turning his head, that I remarked almost involuntarily,

“Fine weather for the worms, Mr. Raven!”

“Yes,” he answered, in the rather croaky voice I had learned to know, “the ground will be nice for them to get out and in!—It must be a grand time on the steppes of Uranus!” he added, with a glance upward; “I believe it is raining there too; it was, all the last week!”

“Why should that make it a grand time?” I asked.

“Because the animals there are all burrowers,” he answered, “—like the field-mice and the moles here.—They will be, for ages to come.”

“How do you know that, if I may be so bold?” I rejoined.

“As any one would who had been there to see,” he replied. “It is a great sight, until you get used to it, when the earth gives a heave, and out comes a beast. You might think it a hairy elephant or a deinotherium—but none of the animals are the same as we have ever had here. I was almost frightened myself the first time I saw the dry-bog-serpent come wallowing out—such a head and mane! and SUCH eyes!—but the shower is nearly over. It will stop directly after the next thunder-clap. There it is!”

A flash came with the words, and in about half a minute the thunder. Then the rain ceased.

“Now we should be going!” said the raven, and stepped to the front of the porch.

“Going where?” I asked.

“Going where we have to go,” he answered. “You did not surely think you had got home? I told you there was no going out and in at pleasure until you were at home!”

“I do not want to go,” I said.

“That does not make any difference—at least not much,” he answered. “This is the way!”

"I am quite content where I am."

"You think so, but you are not. Come along."

He hopped from the porch onto the grass, and turned, waiting.

"I will not leave the house to-day," I said with obstinacy.

"You will come into the garden!" rejoined the raven.

"I give in so far," I replied, and stepped from the porch.

The sun broke through the clouds, and the raindrops flashed and sparkled on the grass. The raven was walking over it.

"You will wet your feet!" I cried.

"And mire my beak," he answered, immediately plunging it deep in the sod, and drawing out a great wriggling red worm. He threw back his head, and tossed it in the air. It spread great wings, gorgeous in red and black, and soared aloft.

"Tut! tut!" I exclaimed; "you mistake, Mr. Raven: worms are not the larvæ of butterflies!"

"Never mind," he croaked; "it will do for once! I'm not a reading man at present, but sexton at the—at a certain graveyard—cemetery, more properly—in—at—no matter where!"

"I see! you can't keep your spade still: and when you have nothing to bury, you must dig something up! Only you should mind what it is before you make it fly! No creature should be allowed to forget what and where it came from!"

"Why?" said the raven.

"Because it will grow proud, and cease to recognise its superiors."

No man knows it when he is making an idiot of himself.

"Where DO the worms come from?" said the raven, as if suddenly grown curious to know.

"Why, from the earth, as you have just seen!" I answered.

"Yes, last!" he replied. "But they can't have come from it first—for that will never go back to it!" he added, looking up.

I looked up also, but could see nothing save a little dark cloud, the edges of which were red, as if with the light of the sunset.

"Surely the sun is not going down!" I exclaimed, struck with amazement.

"Oh, no!" returned the raven. "That red belongs to the worm."

"You see what comes of making creatures forget their origin!" I cried with some warmth.

"It is well, surely, if it be to rise higher and grow larger!" he returned. "But indeed I only teach them to find it!"

"Would you have the air full of worms?"

"That is the business of a sexton. If only the rest of the clergy understood it as well!"

In went his beak again through the soft turf, and out came the wriggling worm. He tossed it in the air, and away it flew.

I looked behind me, and gave a cry of dismay: I had but that moment declared I would not leave the house, and already I was a stranger in the strange land!

"What right have you to treat me so, Mr. Raven?" I said with deep offence. "Am I, or am I not, a free agent?"

"A man is as free as he chooses to make himself, never an atom freer," answered the raven.

"You have no right to make me do things against my will!"

"When you have a will, you will find that no one can."

"You wrong me in the very essence of my individuality!" I persisted.

"If you were an individual I could not, therefore now I do not. You are but beginning to become an individual."

All about me was a pine-forest, in which my eyes were already searching deep, in the hope of discovering an unaccountable glimmer, and so finding my way home. But, alas! how could I any

longer call that house HOME, where every door, every window opened into OUT, and even the garden I could not keep inside!

I suppose I looked discomfited.

"Perhaps it may comfort you," said the raven, "to be told that you have not yet left your house, neither has your house left you. At the same time it cannot contain you, or you inhabit it!"

"I do not understand you," I replied. "Where am I?"

"In the region of the seven dimensions," he answered, with a curious noise in his throat, and a flutter of his tail. "You had better follow me carefully now for a moment, lest you should hurt some one!"

"There is nobody to hurt but yourself, Mr. Raven! I confess I should rather like to hurt you!"

"That you see nobody is where the danger lies. But you see that large tree to your left, about thirty yards away?"

"Of course I do: why should I not?" I answered testily.

"Ten minutes ago you did not see it, and now you do not know where it stands!"

"I do."

"Where do you think it stands?"

"Why THERE, where you know it is!"

"Where is THERE?"

"You bother me with your silly questions!" I cried. "I am growing tired of you!"

"That tree stands on the hearth of your kitchen, and grows nearly straight up its chimney," he said.

"Now I KNOW you are making game of me!" I answered, with a laugh of scorn.

"Was I making game of you when you discovered me looking out of your star-sapphire yesterday?"

"That was this morning—not an hour ago!"

"I have been widening your horizon longer than that, Mr. Vane; but never mind!"

"You mean you have been making a fool of me!" I said, turning from him.

"Excuse me: no one can do that but yourself!"

"And I decline to do it."

"You mistake."

"How?"

"In declining to acknowledge yourself one already. You make yourself such by refusing what is true, and for that you will sorely punish yourself."

"How, again?"

"By believing what is not true."

"Then, if I walk to the other side of that tree, I shall walk through the kitchen fire?"

"Certainly. You would first, however, walk through the lady at the piano in the breakfast-room. That rosebush is close by her. You would give her a terrible start!"

"There is no lady in the house!"

"Indeed! Is not your housekeeper a lady? She is counted such in a certain country where all are servants, and the liveries one and multitudinous!"

"She cannot use the piano, anyhow!"

"Her niece can: she is there—a well-educated girl and a capital musician."

"Excuse me; I cannot help it: you seem to me to be talking sheer nonsense!"

"If you could but hear the music! Those great long heads of wild hyacinth are inside the piano, among the strings of it, and give that peculiar sweetness to her playing!—Pardon me: I forgot your deafness!"

"Two objects," I said, "cannot exist in the same place at the same time!"

"Can they not? I did not know!—I remember now they do teach that with you. It is a great mistake—one of the greatest ever wiseacre made! No man of the universe, only a man of the world could have said so!"

"You a librarian, and talk such rubbish!" I cried. "Plainly, you did not read many of the books in your charge!"

"Oh, yes! I went through all in your library—at the time, and came out at the other side not much the wiser. I was a bookworm then, but when I came to know it, I woke among the butterflies. To be sure I have given up reading for a good many years—ever since I was made sexton.—There! I smell Grieg's Wedding March in the quiver of those rose-petals!"

I went to the rose-bush and listened hard, but could not hear the thinnest ghost of a sound; I only smelt something I had never before smelt in any rose. It was still rose-odour, but with a difference, caused, I suppose, by the Wedding March.

When I looked up, there was the bird by my side.

"Mr. Raven," I said, "forgive me for being so rude: I was irritated. Will you kindly show me my way home? I must go, for I have an appointment with my bailiff. One must not break faith with his servants!"

"You cannot break what was broken days ago!" he answered.

"Do show me the way," I pleaded.

"I cannot," he returned. "To go back, you must go through yourself, and that way no man can show another."

Entreaty was vain. I must accept my fate! But how was life to be lived in a world of which I had all the laws to learn? There would, however, be adventure! that held consolation; and whether I found my way home or not, I should at least have the rare advantage of knowing two worlds!

I had never yet done anything to justify my existence; my former world was nothing the better for my sojourn in it: here, however, I must earn, or in some way find, my bread! But I reasoned that, as I was not to blame in being here, I might expect to be taken care of here as well as there! I had had nothing to do with getting into the world I had just left, and in it I had found myself heir to a large property! If that world, as I now saw, had a claim upon me because I had eaten, and could eat again, upon this world I had a claim because I must eat—when it would in return have a claim on me!

"There is no hurry," said the raven, who stood regarding me; "we do not go much by the clock here. Still, the sooner one begins to do what has to be done, the better! I will take you to my wife."

"Thank you. Let us go!" I answered, and immediately he led the way.

CHAPTER V. THE OLD CHURCH

I followed him deep into the pine-forest. Neither of us said much while yet the sacred gloom of it closed us round. We came to larger and yet larger trees—older, and more individual, some of them grotesque with age. Then the forest grew thinner.

"You see that hawthorn?" said my guide at length, pointing with his beak.

I looked where the wood melted away on the edge of an open heath.

"I see a gnarled old man, with a great white head," I answered.

"Look again," he rejoined: "it is a hawthorn."

"It seems indeed an ancient hawthorn; but this is not the season for the hawthorn to blossom!" I objected.

"The season for the hawthorn to blossom," he replied, "is when the hawthorn blossoms. That tree is in the ruins of the church on your home-farm. You were going to give some directions to the bailiff about its churchyard, were you not, the morning of the thunder?"

"I was going to tell him I wanted it turned into a wilderness of rose-trees, and that the plough must never come within three yards of it."

"Listen!" said the raven, seeming to hold his breath.

I listened, and heard—was it the sighing of a far-off musical wind—or the ghost of a music that had once been glad? Or did I indeed hear anything?

"They go there still," said the raven.

"Who goes there? and where do they go?" I asked.

"Some of the people who used to pray there, go to the ruins still," he replied. "But they will not go much longer, I think."

"What makes them go now?"

"They need help from each other to get their thinking done, and their feelings hatched, so they talk and sing together; and then, they say, the big thought floats out of their hearts like a great ship out of the river at high water."

"Do they pray as well as sing?"

"No; they have found that each can best pray in his own silent heart.—Some people are always at their prayers.—Look! look! There goes one!"

He pointed right up into the air. A snow-white pigeon was mounting, with quick and yet quicker wing-flap, the unseen spiral of an ethereal stair. The sunshine flashed quivering from its wings.

"I see a pigeon!" I said.

"Of course you see a pigeon," rejoined the raven, "for there is the pigeon! I see a prayer on its way.—I wonder now what heart is that dove's mother! Some one may have come awake in my cemetery!"

"How can a pigeon be a prayer?" I said. "I understand, of course, how it should be a fit symbol or likeness for one; but a live pigeon to come out of a heart!"

"It MUST puzzle you! It cannot fail to do so!"

"A prayer is a thought, a thing spiritual!" I pursued.

"Very true! But if you understood any world besides your own, you would understand your own much better.—When a heart is really alive, then it is able to think live things. There is one heart all whose thoughts are strong, happy creatures, and whose very dreams are lives. When some pray, they lift heavy thoughts from the ground, only to drop them on it again; others send up their prayers in living shapes, this or that, the nearest likeness to each. All live things were thoughts to begin with, and are fit therefore to be used by those that think. When one says to the great Thinker:—'Here is one of thy thoughts: I am thinking it now!' that is a prayer—a word to the big heart from one of its own little hearts.—Look, there is another!"

This time the raven pointed his beak downward—to something at the foot of a block of granite. I looked, and saw a little flower. I had never seen one like it before, and cannot utter the feeling it woke in me by its gracious, trusting form, its colour, and its odour as of a new world that was yet the old. I can only say that it suggested an anemone, was of a pale rose-hue, and had a golden heart.

"That is a prayer-flower," said the raven.

"I never saw such a flower before!" I rejoined.

"There is no other such. Not one prayer-flower is ever quite like another," he returned.

"How do you know it a prayer-flower?" I asked.

"By the expression of it," he answered. "More than that I cannot tell you. If you know it, you know it; if you do not, you do not."

"Could you not teach me to know a prayer-flower when I see it?" I said.

"I could not. But if I could, what better would you be? you would not know it of YOURSELF and ITself! Why know the name of a thing when the thing itself you do not know? Whose work is it but your own to open your eyes? But indeed the business of the universe is to make such a fool of you that you will know yourself for one, and so begin to be wise!"

But I did see that the flower was different from any flower I had ever seen before; therefore I knew that I must be seeing a shadow of the prayer in it; and a great awe came over me to think of the heart listening to the flower.

CHAPTER VI. THE SEXTON'S COTTAGE

We had been for some time walking over a rocky moorland covered with dry plants and mosses, when I descried a little cottage in the farthest distance. The sun was not yet down, but he was wrapt in a gray cloud. The heath looked as if it had never been warm, and the wind blew strangely cold, as if from some region where it was always night.

"Here we are at last!" said the raven. "What a long way it is! In half the time I could have gone to Paradise and seen my cousin—him, you remember, who never came back to Noah! Dear! dear! it is almost winter!"

"Winter!" I cried; "it seems but half a day since we left home!"

"That is because we have travelled so fast," answered the raven. "In your world you cannot pull up the plumb-line you call gravitation, and let the world spin round under your feet! But here is my wife's house! She is very good to let me live with her, and call it the sexton's cottage!"

"But where is your churchyard—your cemetery—where you make your graves, I mean?" said I, seeing nothing but the flat heath.

The raven stretched his neck, held out his beak horizontally, turned it slowly round to all the points of the compass, and said nothing.

I followed the beak with my eyes, and lo, without church or graves, all was a churchyard! Wherever the dreary wind swept, there was the raven's cemetery! He was sexton of all he surveyed! lord of all that was laid aside! I stood in the burial-ground of the universe; its compass the unenclosed heath, its wall the gray horizon, low and starless! I had left spring and summer, autumn and sunshine behind me, and come to the winter that waited for me! I had set out in the prime of my youth, and here I was already!—But I mistook. The day might well be long in that region, for it contained the seasons. Winter slept there, the night through, in his winding-sheet of ice; with childlike smile, Spring came awake in the dawn; at noon, Summer blazed abroad in her gorgeous beauty; with the slow-changing afternoon, old Autumn crept in, and died at the first breath of the vaporous, ghosty night.

As we drew near the cottage, the clouded sun was rushing down the steepest slope of the west, and he sank while we were yet a few yards from the door. The same instant I was assailed by a cold that seemed almost a material presence, and I struggled across the threshold as if from the clutches of an icy death. A wind swelled up on the moor, and rushed at the door as with difficulty I closed it behind me. Then all was still, and I looked about me.

A candle burned on a deal table in the middle of the room, and the first thing I saw was the lid of a coffin, as I thought, set up against the wall; but it opened, for it was a door, and a woman entered. She was all in white—as white as new-fallen snow; and her face was as white as her dress, but not like snow, for at once it suggested warmth. I thought her features were perfect, but her eyes made me forget them. The life of her face and her whole person was gathered and concentrated in her eyes, where it became light. It might have been coming death that made her face luminous, but the eyes had life in them for a nation—large, and dark with a darkness ever deepening as I gazed. A whole night-heaven lay condensed in each pupil; all the stars were in its blackness, and flashed; while round it for a horizon lay coiled an iris of the eternal twilight. What any eye IS, God only knows: her eyes must have been coming direct out of his own! the still face might be a primeval perfection; the live eyes were a continuous creation.

"Here is Mr. Vane, wife!" said the raven.

"He is welcome," she answered, in a low, rich, gentle voice. Treasures of immortal sound seemed to be buried in it.

I gazed, and could not speak.

"I knew you would be glad to see him!" added the raven.

She stood in front of the door by which she had entered, and did not come nearer.

"Will he sleep?" she asked.

"I fear not," he replied; "he is neither weary nor heavy laden."

"Why then have you brought him?"

"I have my fears it may prove precipitate."

"I do not quite understand you," I said, with an uneasy foreboding as to what she meant, but a vague hope of some escape. "Surely a man must do a day's work first!"

I gazed into the white face of the woman, and my heart fluttered. She returned my gaze in silence.

"Let me first go home," I resumed, "and come again after I have found or made, invented, or at least discovered something!"

"He has not yet learned that the day begins with sleep!" said the woman, turning to her husband. "Tell him he must rest before he can do anything!"

"Men," he answered, "think so much of having done, that they fall asleep upon it. They cannot empty an egg but they turn into the shell, and lie down!"

The words drew my eyes from the woman to the raven.

I saw no raven, but the librarian—the same slender elderly man, in a rusty black coat, large in the body and long in the tails. I had seen only his back before; now for the first time I saw his face. It was so thin that it showed the shape of the bones under it, suggesting the skulls his last-claimed profession must have made him familiar with. But in truth I had never before seen a face so alive, or a look so keen or so friendly as that in his pale blue eyes, which yet had a haze about them as if they had done much weeping.

"You knew I was not a raven!" he said with a smile.

"I knew you were Mr. Raven," I replied; "but somehow I thought you a bird too!"

"What made you think me a bird?"

"You looked a raven, and I saw you dig worms out of the earth with your beak."

"And then?"

"Toss them in the air." "And then?"

"They grew butterflies, and flew away."

"Did you ever see a raven do that? I told you I was a sexton!"

"Does a sexton toss worms in the air, and turn them into butterflies?"

"Yes."

"I never saw one do it!"

"You saw me do it!—But I am still librarian in your house, for I never was dismissed, and never gave up the office. Now I am librarian here as well."

"But you have just told me you were sexton here!"

"So I am. It is much the same profession. Except you are a true sexton, books are but dead bodies to you, and a library nothing but a catacomb!"

"You bewilder me!"

"That's all right!"

A few moments he stood silent. The woman, moveless as a statue, stood silent also by the coffin-door.

"Upon occasion," said the sexton at length, "it is more convenient to put one's bird-self in front. Every one, as you ought to know, has a beast-self—and a bird-self, and a stupid fish-self, ay, and a creeping serpent-self too—which it takes a deal of crushing to kill! In truth he has also a tree-self and a crystal-self, and I don't know how many selves more—all to get into harmony. You can tell what sort a man is by his creature that comes oftenest to the front."

He turned to his wife, and I considered him more closely. He was above the ordinary height, and stood more erect than when last I saw him. His face was, like his wife's, very pale; its nose handsomely encased the beak that had retired within it; its lips were very thin, and even they had no

colour, but their curves were beautiful, and about them quivered a shadowy smile that had humour in it as well as love and pity.

"We are in want of something to eat and drink, wife," he said; "we have come a long way!"

"You know, husband," she answered, "we can give only to him that asks."

She turned her unchanging face and radiant eyes upon mine.

"Please give me something to eat, Mrs. Raven," I said, "and something—what you will—to quench my thirst."

"Your thirst must be greater before you can have what will quench it," she replied; "but what I can give you, I will gladly."

She went to a cupboard in the wall, brought from it bread and wine, and set them on the table.

We sat down to the perfect meal; and as I ate, the bread and wine seemed to go deeper than the hunger and thirst. Anxiety and discomfort vanished; expectation took their place.

I grew very sleepy, and now first felt weary.

"I have earned neither food nor sleep, Mrs. Raven," I said, "but you have given me the one freely, and now I hope you will give me the other, for I sorely need it."

"Sleep is too fine a thing ever to be earned," said the sexton; "it must be given and accepted, for it is a necessity. But it would be perilous to use this house as a half-way hostelry—for the repose of a night, that is, merely."

A wild-looking little black cat jumped on his knee as he spoke. He patted it as one pats a child to make it go to sleep: he seemed to me patting down the sod upon a grave—patting it lovingly, with an inward lullaby.

"Here is one of Mara's kittens!" he said to his wife: "will you give it something and put it out? she may want it!"

The woman took it from him gently, gave it a little piece of bread, and went out with it, closing the door behind her.

"How then am I to make use of your hospitality?" I asked.

"By accepting it to the full," he answered.

"I do not understand."

"In this house no one wakes of himself."

"Why?"

"Because no one anywhere ever wakes of himself. You can wake yourself no more than you can make yourself."

"Then perhaps you or Mrs. Raven would kindly call me!" I said, still nowise understanding, but feeling afresh that vague foreboding.

"We cannot."

"How dare I then go to sleep?" I cried.

"If you would have the rest of this house, you must not trouble yourself about waking. You must go to sleep heartily, altogether and outright." My soul sank within me.

The sexton sat looking me in the face. His eyes seemed to say, "Will you not trust me?" I returned his gaze, and answered,

"I will."

"Then come," he said; "I will show you your couch."

As we rose, the woman came in. She took up the candle, turned to the inner door, and led the way. I went close behind her, and the sexton followed.

CHAPTER VII. THE CEMETERY

The air as of an ice-house met me crossing the threshold. The door fell-to behind us. The sexton said something to his wife that made her turn toward us.—What a change had passed upon her! It was as if the splendour of her eyes had grown too much for them to hold, and, sinking into her countenance, made it flash with a loveliness like that of Beatrice in the white rose of the redeemed. Life itself, life eternal, immortal, streamed from it, an unbroken lightning. Even her hands shone with a white radiance, every "pearl-shell helmet" gleaming like a moonstone. Her beauty was overpowering; I was glad when she turned it from me.

But the light of the candle reached such a little way, that at first I could see nothing of the place. Presently, however, it fell on something that glimmered, a little raised from the floor. Was it a bed? Could live thing sleep in such a mortal cold? Then surely it was no wonder it should not wake of itself! Beyond that appeared a fainter shine; and then I thought I descried uncertain gleams on every side.

A few paces brought us to the first; it was a human form under a sheet, straight and still—whether of man or woman I could not tell, for the light seemed to avoid the face as we passed.

I soon perceived that we were walking along an aisle of couches, on almost every one of which, with its head to the passage, lay something asleep or dead, covered with a sheet white as snow. My soul grew silent with dread. Through aisle after aisle we went, among couches innumerable. I could see only a few of them at once, but they were on all sides, vanishing, as it seemed, in the infinite.—Was it here lay my choice of a bed? Must I go to sleep among the unwaking, with no one to rouse me? Was this the sexton's library? were these his books? Truly it was no half-way house, this chamber of the dead!

"One of the cellars I am placed to watch!" remarked Mr. Raven—in a low voice, as if fearing to disturb his silent guests. "Much wine is set here to ripen!—But it is dark for a stranger!" he added.

"The moon is rising; she will soon be here," said his wife, and her clear voice, low and sweet, sounded of ancient sorrow long bidden adieu.

Even as she spoke the moon looked in at an opening in the wall, and a thousand gleams of white responded to her shine. But not yet could I descry beginning or end of the couches. They stretched away and away, as if for all the disparted world to sleep upon. For along the far receding narrow ways, every couch stood by itself, and on each slept a lonely sleeper. I thought at first their sleep was death, but I soon saw it was something deeper still—a something I did not know.

The moon rose higher, and shone through other openings, but I could never see enough of the place at once to know its shape or character; now it would resemble a long cathedral nave, now a huge barn made into a dwelling of tombs. She looked colder than any moon in the frostiest night of the world, and where she shone direct upon them, cast a bluish, icy gleam on the white sheets and the pallid countenances—but it might be the faces that made the moon so cold!

Of such as I could see, all were alike in the brotherhood of death, all unlike in the character and history recorded upon them. Here lay a man who had died—for although this was not death, I have no other name to give it—in the prime of manly strength; his dark beard seemed to flow like a liberated stream from the glacier of his frozen countenance; his forehead was smooth as polished marble; a shadow of pain lingered about his lips, but only a shadow. On the next couch lay the form of a girl, passing lovely to behold. The sadness left on her face by parting was not yet absorbed in perfect peace, but absolute submission possessed the placid features, which bore no sign of wasting disease, of "killing care or grief of heart": if pain had been there, it was long charmed asleep, never again to wake. Many were the beautiful that there lay very still—some of them mere children; but I did not see one infant. The most beautiful of all was a lady whose white hair, and that alone, suggested her old when first she fell asleep. On her stately countenance rested—not submission, but a right noble acquiescence, an assurance, firm as the foundations of the universe, that all was as it should be. On

some faces lingered the almost obliterated scars of strife, the marrings of hopeless loss, the fading shadows of sorrows that had seemed inconsolable: the aurora of the great morning had not yet quite melted them away; but those faces were few, and every one that bore such brand of pain seemed to plead, “Pardon me: I died only yesterday!” or, “Pardon me: I died but a century ago!” That some had been dead for ages I knew, not merely by their unutterable repose, but by something for which I have neither word nor symbol.

We came at last to three empty couches, immediately beyond which lay the form of a beautiful woman, a little past the prime of life. One of her arms was outside the sheet, and her hand lay with the palm upward, in its centre a dark spot. Next to her was the stalwart figure of a man of middle age. His arm too was outside the sheet, the strong hand almost closed, as if clenched on the grip of a sword. I thought he must be a king who had died fighting for the truth.

“Will you hold the candle nearer, wife?” whispered the sexton, bending down to examine the woman’s hand.

“It heals well,” he murmured to himself: “the nail found in her nothing to hurt!”

At last I ventured to speak.

“Are they not dead?” I asked softly.

“I cannot answer you,” he replied in a subdued voice. “I almost forget what they mean by DEAD in the old world. If I said a person was dead, my wife would understand one thing, and you would imagine another.—This is but one of my treasure vaults,” he went on, “and all my guests are not laid in vaults: out there on the moor they lie thick as the leaves of a forest after the first blast of your winter—thick, let me say rather, as if the great white rose of heaven had shed its petals over it. All night the moon reads their faces, and smiles.”

“But why leave them in the corrupting moonlight?” I asked.

“Our moon,” he answered, “is not like yours—the old cinder of a burnt-out world; her beams embalm the dead, not corrupt them. You observe that here the sexton lays his dead on the earth; he buries very few under it! In your world he lays huge stones on them, as if to keep them down; I watch for the hour to ring the resurrection-bell, and wake those that are still asleep. Your sexton looks at the clock to know when to ring the dead-alive to church; I hearken for the cock on the spire to crow; ‘AWAKE, THOU THAT SLEEPEST, AND ARISE FROM THE DEAD!’”

I began to conclude that the self-styled sexton was in truth an insane parson: the whole thing was too mad! But how was I to get away from it? I was helpless! In this world of the dead, the raven and his wife were the only living I had yet seen: whither should I turn for help? I was lost in a space larger than imagination; for if here two things, or any parts of them, could occupy the same space, why not twenty or ten thousand?—But I dared not think further in that direction.

“You seem in your dead to see differences beyond my perception!” I ventured to remark.

“None of those you see,” he answered, “are in truth quite dead yet, and some have but just begun to come alive and die. Others had begun to die, that is to come alive, long before they came to us; and when such are indeed dead, that instant they will wake and leave us. Almost every night some rise and go. But I will not say more, for I find my words only mislead you!—This is the couch that has been waiting for you,” he ended, pointing to one of the three.

“Why just this?” I said, beginning to tremble, and anxious by parley to delay.

“For reasons which one day you will be glad to know,” he answered.

“Why not know them now?”

“That also you will know when you wake.”

“But these are all dead, and I am alive!” I objected, shuddering.

“Not much,” rejoined the sexton with a smile, “—not nearly enough! Blessed be the true life that the pauses between its throbs are not death!”

“The place is too cold to let one sleep!” I said.

"Do these find it so?" he returned. "They sleep well—or will soon. Of cold they feel not a breath: it heals their wounds.—Do not be a coward, Mr. Vane. Turn your back on fear, and your face to whatever may come. Give yourself up to the night, and you will rest indeed. Harm will not come to you, but a good you cannot foreknow."

The sexton and I stood by the side of the couch, his wife, with the candle in her hand, at the foot of it. Her eyes were full of light, but her face was again of a still whiteness; it was no longer radiant.

"Would they have me make of a charnel-house my bed-chamber?" I cried aloud. "I will not. I will lie abroad on the heath; it cannot be colder there!"

"I have just told you that the dead are there also,

> 'Thick as autumnal leaves that strow the brooks
> In Vallombrosa,'"

said the librarian.

"I will NOT," I cried again; and in the compassing dark, the two gleamed out like spectres that waited on the dead; neither answered me; each stood still and sad, and looked at the other.

"Be of good comfort; we watch the flock of the great shepherd," said the sexton to his wife.

Then he turned to me.

"Didst thou not find the air of the place pure and sweet when thou enteredst it?" he asked.

"Yes; but oh, so cold!" I answered.

"Then know," he returned, and his voice was stern, "that thou who callest thyself alive, hast brought into this chamber the odours of death, and its air will not be wholesome for the sleepers until thou art gone from it!"

They went farther into the great chamber, and I was left alone in the moonlight with the dead.

I turned to escape.

What a long way I found it back through the dead! At first I was too angry to be afraid, but as I grew calm, the still shapes grew terrible. At last, with loud offence to the gracious silence, I ran, I fled wildly, and, bursting out, flung-to the door behind me. It closed with an awful silence.

I stood in pitch-darkness. Feeling about me, I found a door, opened it, and was aware of the dim light of a lamp. I stood in my library, with the handle of the masked door in my hand.

Had I come to myself out of a vision?—or lost myself by going back to one? Which was the real—what I now saw, or what I had just ceased to see? Could both be real, interpenetrating yet unmingling?

I threw myself on a couch, and fell asleep.

In the library was one small window to the east, through which, at this time of the year, the first rays of the sun shone upon a mirror whence they were reflected on the masked door: when I woke, there they shone, and thither they drew my eyes. With the feeling that behind it must lie the boundless chamber I had left by that door, I sprang to my feet, and opened it. The light, like an eager hound, shot before me into the closet, and pounced upon the gilded edges of a large book.

"What idiot," I cried, "has put that book in the shelf the wrong way?"

But the gilded edges, reflecting the light a second time, flung it on a nest of drawers in a dark corner, and I saw that one of them was half open.

"More meddling!" I cried, and went to close the drawer.

It contained old papers, and seemed more than full, for it would not close. Taking the topmost one out, I perceived that it was in my father's writing and of some length. The words on which first my eyes fell, at once made me eager to learn what it contained. I carried it to the library, sat down in one of the western windows, and read what follows.

CHAPTER VIII. MY FATHER'S MANUSCRIPT

I am filled with awe of what I have to write. The sun is shining golden above me; the sea lies blue beneath his gaze; the same world sends its growing things up to the sun, and its flying things into the air which I have breathed from my infancy; but I know the outspread splendour a passing show, and that at any moment it may, like the drop-scene of a stage, be lifted to reveal more wonderful things.

Shortly after my father's death, I was seated one morning in the library. I had been, somewhat listlessly, regarding the portrait that hangs among the books, which I knew only as that of a distant ancestor, and wishing I could learn something of its original. Then I had taken a book from the shelves and begun to read.

Glancing up from it, I saw coming toward me—not between me and the door, but between me and the portrait—a thin pale man in rusty black. He looked sharp and eager, and had a notable nose, at once reminding me of a certain jug my sisters used to call Mr. Crow.

"Finding myself in your vicinity, Mr. Vane, I have given myself the pleasure of calling," he said, in a peculiar but not disagreeable voice. "Your honoured grandfather treated me—I may say it without presumption—as a friend, having known me from childhood as his father's librarian."

It did not strike me at the time how old the man must be.

"May I ask where you live now, Mr. Crow?" I said.

He smiled an amused smile.

"You nearly hit my name," he rejoined, "which shows the family insight. You have seen me before, but only once, and could not then have heard it!"

"Where was that?"

"In this very room. You were quite a child, however!"

I could not be sure that I remembered him, but for a moment I fancied I did, and I begged him to set me right as to his name.

"There is such a thing as remembering without recognising the memory in it," he remarked. "For my name—which you have near enough—it used to be Raven."

I had heard the name, for marvellous tales had brought it me.

"It is very kind of you to come and see me," I said. "Will you not sit down?"

He seated himself at once.

"You knew my father, then, I presume?"

"I knew him," he answered with a curious smile, "but he did not care about my acquaintance, and we never met.—That gentleman, however," he added, pointing to the portrait,—"old Sir Up'ard, his people called him,—was in his day a friend of mine yet more intimate than ever your grandfather became."

Then at length I began to think the interview a strange one. But in truth it was hardly stranger that my visitor should remember Sir Upward, than that he should have been my great-grandfather's librarian!

"I owe him much," he continued; "for, although I had read many more books than he, yet, through the special direction of his studies, he was able to inform me of a certain relation of modes which I should never have discovered of myself, and could hardly have learned from any one else."

"Would you mind telling me all about that?" I said.

"By no means—as much at least as I am able: there are not such things as wilful secrets," he answered—and went on.

"That closet held his library—a hundred manuscripts or so, for printing was not then invented. One morning I sat there, working at a catalogue of them, when he looked in at the door, and said, 'Come.' I laid down my pen and followed him—across the great hall, down a steep rough descent, and along an underground passage to a tower he had lately built, consisting of a stair and a room at

the top of it. The door of this room had a tremendous lock, which he undid with the smallest key I ever saw. I had scarcely crossed the threshold after him, when, to my eyes, he began to dwindle, and grew less and less. All at once my vision seemed to come right, and I saw that he was moving swiftly away from me. In a minute more he was the merest speck in the distance, with the tops of blue mountains beyond him, clear against a sky of paler blue. I recognised the country, for I had gone there and come again many a time, although I had never known this way to it.

"Many years after, when the tower had long disappeared, I taught one of his descendants what Sir Upward had taught me; and now and then to this day I use your house when I want to go the nearest way home. I must indeed—without your leave, for which I ask your pardon—have by this time well established a right of way through it—not from front to back, but from bottom to top!"

"You would have me then understand, Mr. Raven," I said, "that you go through my house into another world, heedless of disparting space?"

"That I go through it is an incontrovertible acknowledgement of space," returned the old librarian.

"Please do not quibble, Mr. Raven," I rejoined. "Please to take my question as you know I mean it."

"There is in your house a door, one step through which carries me into a world very much another than this."

"A better?"

"Not throughout; but so much another that most of its physical, and many of its mental laws are different from those of this world. As for moral laws, they must everywhere be fundamentally the same."

"You try my power of belief!" I said.

"You take me for a madman, probably?"

"You do not look like one."

"A liar then?"

"You give me no ground to think you such."

"Only you do not believe me?"

"I will go out of that door with you if you like: I believe in you enough to risk the attempt."

"The blunder all my children make!" he murmured. "The only door out is the door in!"

I began to think he must be crazy. He sat silent for a moment, his head resting on his hand, his elbow on the table, and his eyes on the books before him.

"A book," he said louder, "is a door in, and therefore a door out.—I see old Sir Up'ard," he went on, closing his eyes, "and my heart swells with love to him:—what world is he in?"

"The world of your heart!" I replied; "—that is, the idea of him is there."

"There is one world then at least on which your hall-door does not open?"

"I grant you so much; but the things in that world are not things to have and to hold."

"Think a little farther," he rejoined: "did anything ever become yours, except by getting into that world?—The thought is beyond you, however, at present!—I tell you there are more worlds, and more doors to them, than you will think of in many years!"

He rose, left the library, crossed the hall, and went straight up to the garret, familiar evidently with every turn. I followed, studying his back. His hair hung down long and dark, straight and glossy. His coat was wide and reached to his heels. His shoes seemed too large for him.

In the garret a light came through at the edges of the great roofing slabs, and showed us parts where was no flooring, and we must step from joist to joist: in the middle of one of these spaces rose a partition, with a door: through it I followed Mr. Raven into a small, obscure chamber, whose top contracted as it rose, and went slanting through the roof.

"That is the door I spoke of," he said, pointing to an oblong mirror that stood on the floor and leaned against the wall. I went in front of it, and saw our figures dimly reflected in its dusty

face. There was something about it that made me uneasy. It looked old-fashioned and neglected, but, notwithstanding its ordinary seeming, the eagle, perched with outstretched wings on the top, appeared threatful.

"As a mirror," said the librarian, "it has grown dingy with age; but that is no matter: its clearness depends on the light."

"Light!" I rejoined; "there is no light here!"

He did not answer me, but began to pull at a little chain on the opposite wall. I heard a creaking: the top of the chamber was turning slowly round. He ceased pulling, looked at his watch, and began to pull again.

"We arrive almost to the moment!" he said; "it is on the very stroke of noon!"

The top went creaking and revolving for a minute or so. Then he pulled two other chains, now this, now that, and returned to the first. A moment more and the chamber grew much clearer: a patch of sunlight had fallen upon a mirror on the wall opposite that against which the other leaned, and on the dust I saw the path of the reflected rays to the mirror on the ground. But from the latter none were returned; they seemed to go clean through; there was nowhere in the chamber a second patch of light!

"Where are the sunrays gone?" I cried.

"That I cannot tell," returned Mr. Raven; "—back, perhaps, to where they came from first. They now belong, I fancy, to a sense not yet developed in us."

He then talked of the relations of mind to matter, and of senses to qualities, in a way I could only a little understand, whence he went on to yet stranger things which I could not at all comprehend. He spoke much about dimensions, telling me that there were many more than three, some of them concerned with powers which were indeed in us, but of which as yet we knew absolutely nothing. His words, however, I confess, took little more hold of me than the light did of the mirror, for I thought he hardly knew what he was saying.

Suddenly I was aware that our forms had gone from the mirror, which seemed full of a white mist. As I gazed I saw, growing gradually visible beyond the mist, the tops of a range of mountains, which became clearer and clearer. Soon the mist vanished entirely, uncovering the face of a wide heath, on which, at some distance, was the figure of a man moving swiftly away. I turned to address my companion; he was no longer by my side. I looked again at the form in the mirror, and recognised the wide coat flying, the black hair lifting in a wind that did not touch me. I rushed in terror from the place.

CHAPTER IX. I REPENT

I laid the manuscript down, consoled to find that my father had had a peep into that mysterious world, and that he knew Mr. Raven.

Then I remembered that I had never heard the cause or any circumstance of my father's death, and began to believe that he must at last have followed Mr. Raven, and not come back; whereupon I speedily grew ashamed of my flight. What wondrous facts might I not by this time have gathered concerning life and death, and wide regions beyond ordinary perception! Assuredly the Ravens were good people, and a night in their house would nowise have hurt me! They were doubtless strange, but it was faculty in which the one was peculiar, and beauty in which the other was marvellous! And I had not believed in them! had treated them as unworthy of my confidence, as harbouring a design against me! The more I thought of my behaviour to them, the more disgusted I became with myself. Why should I have feared such dead? To share their holy rest was an honour of which I had proved myself unworthy! What harm could that sleeping king, that lady with the wound in her palm, have done me? I fell a longing after the sweet and stately stillness of their two countenances, and wept. Weeping I threw myself on a couch, and suddenly fell asleep.

As suddenly I woke, feeling as if some one had called me. The house was still as an empty church. A blackbird was singing on the lawn. I said to myself, "I will go and tell them I am ashamed, and will do whatever they would have me do!" I rose, and went straight up the stairs to the garret.

The wooden chamber was just as when first I saw it, the mirror dimly reflecting everything before it. It was nearly noon, and the sun would be a little higher than when first I came: I must raise the hood a little, and adjust the mirrors accordingly! If I had but been in time to see Mr. Raven do it!

I pulled the chains, and let the light fall on the first mirror. I turned then to the other: there were the shapes of the former vision—distinguishable indeed, but tremulous like a landscape in a pool ruffled by "a small pipling wind!" I touched the glass; it was impermeable.

Suspecting polarisation as the thing required, I shifted and shifted the mirrors, changing their relation, until at last, in a great degree, so far as I was concerned, by chance, things came right between them, and I saw the mountains blue and steady and clear. I stepped forward, and my feet were among the heather.

All I knew of the way to the cottage was that we had gone through a pine-forest. I passed through many thickets and several small fir-woods, continually fancying afresh that I recognised something of the country; but I had come upon no forest, and now the sun was near the horizon, and the air had begun to grow chill with the coming winter, when, to my delight, I saw a little black object coming toward me: it was indeed the raven!

I hastened to meet him.

"I beg your pardon, sir, for my rudeness last night," I said. "Will you take me with you now? I heartily confess I do not deserve it."

"Ah!" he returned, and looked up. Then, after a brief pause, "My wife does not expect you to-night," he said. "She regrets that we at all encouraged your staying last week."

"Take me to her that I may tell her how sorry I am," I begged humbly.

"It is of no use," he answered. "Your night was not come then, or you would not have left us. It is not come now, and I cannot show you the way. The dead were rejoicing under their daisies—they all lie among the roots of the flowers of heaven—at the thought of your delight when the winter should be past, and the morning with its birds come: ere you left them, they shivered in their beds. When the spring of the universe arrives,—but that cannot be for ages yet! how many, I do not know—and do not care to know."

"Tell me one thing, I beg of you, Mr. Raven: is my father with you? Have you seen him since he left the world?"

"Yes; he is with us, fast asleep. That was he you saw with his arm on the coverlet, his hand half closed."

"Why did you not tell me? That I should have been so near him, and not know!"

"And turn your back on him!" corrected the raven.

"I would have lain down at once had I known!"

"I doubt it. Had you been ready to lie down, you would have known him!—Old Sir Up'ard," he went on, "and your twice great-grandfather, both are up and away long ago. Your great-grandfather has been with us for many a year; I think he will soon begin to stir. You saw him last night, though of course you did not know him."

"Why OF COURSE?"

"Because he is so much nearer waking than you. No one who will not sleep can ever wake."

"I do not at all understand you!"

"You turned away, and would not understand!" I held my peace.—But if I did not say something, he would go!

"And my grandfather—is he also with you?" I asked.

"No; he is still in the Evil Wood, fighting the dead."

"Where is the Evil Wood, that I may find him?"

"You will not find him; but you will hardly miss the wood. It is the place where those who will not sleep, wake up at night, to kill their dead and bury them."

"I cannot understand you!"

"Naturally not. Neither do I understand you; I can read neither your heart nor your face. When my wife and I do not understand our children, it is because there is not enough of them to be understood. God alone can understand foolishness."

"Then," I said, feeling naked and very worthless, "will you be so good as show me the nearest way home? There are more ways than one, I know, for I have gone by two already."

"There are indeed many ways."

"Tell me, please, how to recognise the nearest."

"I cannot," answered the raven; "you and I use the same words with different meanings. We are often unable to tell people what they NEED to know, because they WANT to know something else, and would therefore only misunderstand what we said. Home is ever so far away in the palm of your hand, and how to get there it is of no use to tell you. But you will get there; you must get there; you have to get there. Everybody who is not at home, has to go home. You thought you were at home where I found you: if that had been your home, you could not have left it. Nobody can leave home. And nobody ever was or ever will be at home without having gone there."

"Enigma treading on enigma!" I exclaimed. "I did not come here to be asked riddles."

"No; but you came, and found the riddles waiting for you! Indeed you are yourself the only riddle. What you call riddles are truths, and seem riddles because you are not true."

"Worse and worse!" I cried.

"And you MUST answer the riddles!" he continued. "They will go on asking themselves until you understand yourself. The universe is a riddle trying to get out, and you are holding your door hard against it."

"Will you not in pity tell me what I am to do—where I must go?"

"How should I tell YOUR to-do, or the way to it?"

"If I am not to go home, at least direct me to some of my kind."

"I do not know of any. The beings most like you are in that direction."

He pointed with his beak. I could see nothing but the setting sun, which blinded me.

"Well," I said bitterly, "I cannot help feeling hardly treated—taken from my home, abandoned in a strange world, and refused instruction as to where I am to go or what I am to do!"

"You forget," said the raven, "that, when I brought you and you declined my hospitality, you reached what you call home in safety: now you are come of yourself! Good night."

He turned and walked slowly away, with his beak toward the ground. I stood dazed. It was true I had come of myself, but had I not come with intent of atonement? My heart was sore, and in my brain was neither quest nor purpose, hope nor desire. I gazed after the raven, and would have followed him, but felt it useless.

All at once he pounced on a spot, throwing the whole weight of his body on his bill, and for some moments dug vigorously. Then with a flutter of his wings he threw back his head, and something shot from his bill, cast high in the air. That moment the sun set, and the air at once grew very dusk, but the something opened into a soft radiance, and came pulsing toward me like a fire-fly, but with a much larger and a yellower light. It flew over my head. I turned and followed it.

Here I interrupt my narrative to remark that it involves a constant struggle to say what cannot be said with even an approach to precision, the things recorded being, in their nature and in that of the creatures concerned in them, so inexpressibly different from any possible events of this economy, that I can present them only by giving, in the forms and language of life in this world, the modes in which they affected me—not the things themselves, but the feelings they woke in me. Even this much, however, I do with a continuous and abiding sense of failure, finding it impossible to present more than one phase of a multitudinously complicated significance, or one concentric sphere of a graduated embodiment. A single thing would sometimes seem to be and mean many things, with an uncertain identity at the heart of them, which kept constantly altering their look. I am indeed often driven to set down what I know to be but a clumsy and doubtful representation of the mere feeling aimed at, none of the communicating media of this world being fit to convey it, in its peculiar strangeness, with even an approach to clearness or certainty. Even to one who knew the region better than myself, I should have no assurance of transmitting the reality of my experience in it. While without a doubt, for instance, that I was actually regarding a scene of activity, I might be, at the same moment, in my consciousness aware that I was perusing a metaphysical argument.

CHAPTER X. THE BAD BURROW

As the air grew black and the winter closed swiftly around me, the fluttering fire blazed out more luminous, and arresting its flight, hovered waiting. So soon as I came under its radiance, it flew slowly on, lingering now and then above spots where the ground was rocky. Every time I looked up, it seemed to have grown larger, and at length gave me an attendant shadow. Plainly a bird-butterfly, it flew with a certain swallowy double. Its wings were very large, nearly square, and flashed all the colours of the rainbow. Wondering at their splendour, I became so absorbed in their beauty that I stumbled over a low rock, and lay stunned. When I came to myself, the creature was hovering over my head, radiating the whole chord of light, with multitudinous gradations and some kinds of colour I had never before seen. I rose and went on, but, unable to take my eyes off the shining thing to look to my steps, I struck my foot against a stone. Fearing then another fall, I sat down to watch the little glory, and a great longing awoke in me to have it in my hand. To my unspeakable delight, it began to sink toward me. Slowly at first, then swiftly it sank, growing larger as it came nearer. I felt as if the treasure of the universe were giving itself to me—put out my hand, and had it. But the instant I took it, its light went out; all was dark as pitch; a dead book with boards outspread lay cold and heavy in my hand. I threw it in the air—only to hear it fall among the heather. Burying my face in my hands, I sat in motionless misery.

But the cold grew so bitter that, fearing to be frozen, I got up. The moment I was on my feet, a faint sense of light awoke in me. “Is it coming to life?” I cried, and a great pang of hope shot through me. Alas, no! it was the edge of a moon peering up keen and sharp over a level horizon! She brought me light—but no guidance! SHE would not hover over me, would not wait on my faltering steps! She could but offer me an ignorant choice!

With a full face she rose, and I began to see a little about me. Westward of her, and not far from me, a range of low hills broke the horizon-line: I set out for it.

But what a night I had to pass ere I reached it! The moon seemed to know something, for she stared at me oddly. Her look was indeed icy-cold, but full of interest, or at least curiosity. She was not the same moon I had known on the earth; her face was strange to me, and her light yet stranger. Perhaps it came from an unknown sun! Every time I looked up, I found her staring at me with all her might! At first I was annoyed, as at the rudeness of a fellow creature; but soon I saw or fancied a certain wondering pity in her gaze: why was I out in her night? Then first I knew what an awful thing it was to be awake in the universe: I WAS, and could not help it!

As I walked, my feet lost the heather, and trod a bare spongy soil, something like dry, powdery peat. To my dismay it gave a momentary heave under me; then presently I saw what seemed the ripple of an earthquake running on before me, shadowy in the low moon. It passed into the distance; but, while yet I stared after it, a single wave rose up, and came slowly toward me. A yard or two away it burst, and from it, with a scramble and a bound, issued an animal like a tiger. About his mouth and ears hung clots of mould, and his eyes winked and flamed as he rushed at me, showing his white teeth in a soundless snarl. I stood fascinated, unconscious of either courage or fear. He turned his head to the ground, and plunged into it.

“That moon is affecting my brain,” I said as I resumed my journey. “What life can be here but the phantasmic—the stuff of which dreams are made? I am indeed walking in a vain show!”

Thus I strove to keep my heart above the waters of fear, nor knew that she whom I distrusted was indeed my defence from the realities I took for phantoms: her light controlled the monsters, else had I scarce taken a second step on the hideous ground. “I will not be appalled by that which only seems!” I said to myself, yet felt it a terrible thing to walk on a sea where such fishes disported themselves below. With that, a step or two from me, the head of a worm began to come slowly out of the earth, as big as that of a polar bear and much resembling it, with a white mane to its red neck. The drawing

wriggles with which its huge length extricated itself were horrible, yet I dared not turn my eyes from them. The moment its tail was free, it lay as if exhausted, wallowing in feeble effort to burrow again.

"Does it live on the dead," I wondered, "and is it unable to hurt the living? If they scent their prey and come out, why do they leave me unharmed?"

I know now it was that the moon paralysed them.

All the night through as I walked, hideous creatures, no two alike, threatened me. In some of them, beauty of colour enhanced loathliness of shape: one large serpent was covered from head to distant tail with feathers of glorious hues.

I became at length so accustomed to their hurtless menaces that I fell to beguiling the way with the invention of monstrosities, never suspecting that I owed each moment of life to the staring moon. Though hers was no primal radiance, it so hampered the evil things, that I walked in safety. For light is yet light, if but the last of a countless series of reflections! How swiftly would not my feet have carried me over the restless soil, had I known that, if still within their range when her lamp ceased to shine on the cursed spot, I should that moment be at the mercy of such as had no mercy, the centre of a writhing heap of hideousness, every individual of it as terrible as before it had but seemed! Fool of ignorance, I watched the descent of the weary, solemn, anxious moon down the widening vault above me, with no worse uneasiness than the dread of losing my way—where as yet I had indeed no way to lose.

I was drawing near the hills I had made my goal, and she was now not far from their sky-line, when the soundless wallowing ceased, and the burrow lay motionless and bare. Then I saw, slowly walking over the light soil, the form of a woman. A white mist floated about her, now assuming, now losing to reassume the shape of a garment, as it gathered to her or was blown from her by a wind that dogged her steps.

She was beautiful, but with such a pride at once and misery on her countenance that I could hardly believe what yet I saw. Up and down she walked, vainly endeavouring to lay hold of the mist and wrap it around her. The eyes in the beautiful face were dead, and on her left side was a dark spot, against which she would now and then press her hand, as if to stifle pain or sickness. Her hair hung nearly to her feet, and sometimes the wind would so mix it with the mist that I could not distinguish the one from the other; but when it fell gathering together again, it shone a pale gold in the moonlight.

Suddenly pressing both hands on her heart, she fell to the ground, and the mist rose from her and melted in the air. I ran to her. But she began to writhe in such torture that I stood aghast. A moment more and her legs, hurrying from her body, sped away serpents. From her shoulders fled her arms as in terror, serpents also. Then something flew up from her like a bat, and when I looked again, she was gone. The ground rose like the sea in a storm; terror laid hold upon me; I turned to the hills and ran.

I was already on the slope of their base, when the moon sank behind one of their summits, leaving me in its shadow. Behind me rose a waste and sickening cry, as of frustrate desire—the only sound I had heard since the fall of the dead butterfly; it made my heart shake like a flag in the wind. I turned, saw many dark objects bounding after me, and made for the crest of a ridge on which the moon still shone. She seemed to linger there that I might see to defend myself. Soon I came in sight of her, and climbed the faster.

Crossing the shadow of a rock, I heard the creatures panting at my heels. But just as the foremost threw himself upon me with a snarl of greedy hate, we rushed into the moon together. She flashed out an angry light, and he fell from me a bodiless blotch. Strength came to me, and I turned on the rest. But one by one as they darted into the light, they dropped with a howl; and I saw or fancied a strange smile on the round face above me.

I climbed to the top of the ridge: far away shone the moon, sinking to a low horizon. The air was pure and strong. I descended a little way, found it warmer, and sat down to wait the dawn.

The moon went below, and the world again was dark.

CHAPTER XI. THE EVIL WOOD

I fell fast asleep, and when I woke the sun was rising. I went to the top again, and looked back: the hollow I had crossed in the moonlight lay without sign of life. Could it be that the calm expanse before me swarmed with creatures of devouring greed?

I turned and looked over the land through which my way must lie. It seemed a wide desert, with a patch of a different colour in the distance that might be a forest. Sign of presence, human or animal, was none—smoke or dust or shadow of cultivation. Not a cloud floated in the clear heaven; no thinnest haze curtained any segment of its circling rim.

I descended, and set out for the imaginable forest: something alive might be there; on this side of it could not well be anything!

When I reached the plain, I found it, as far as my sight could go, of rock, here flat and channeled, there humped and pinnacled—evidently the wide bed of a vanished river, scored by innumerable water-runs, without a trace of moisture in them. Some of the channels bore a dry moss, and some of the rocks a few lichens almost as hard as themselves. The air, once “filled with pleasant noise of waters,” was silent as death. It took me the whole day to reach the patch,—which I found indeed a forest—but not a rudiment of brook or runnel had I crossed! Yet through the glowing noon I seemed haunted by an aural mirage, hearing so plainly the voice of many waters that I could hardly believe the opposing testimony of my eyes.

The sun was approaching the horizon when I left the river-bed, and entered the forest. Sunk below the tree-tops, and sending his rays between their pillar-like boles, he revealed a world of blessed shadows waiting to receive me. I had expected a pine-wood, but here were trees of many sorts, some with strong resemblances to trees I knew, others with marvellous differences from any I had ever seen. I threw myself beneath the boughs of what seemed a eucalyptus in blossom: its flowers had a hard calyx much resembling a skull, the top of which rose like a lid to let the froth-like bloom-brain overfoam its cup. From beneath the shadow of its falchion-leaves my eyes went wandering into deep after deep of the forest.

Soon, however, its doors and windows began to close, shutting up aisle and corridor and roomier glade. The night was about me, and instant and sharp the cold. Again what a night I found it! How shall I make my reader share with me its wild ghostiness?

The tree under which I lay rose high before it branched, but the boughs of it bent so low that they seemed ready to shut me in as I leaned against the smooth stem, and let my eyes wander through the brief twilight of the vanishing forest. Presently, to my listless roving gaze, the varied outlines of the clumpy foliage began to assume or imitate—say rather SUGGEST other shapes than their own. A light wind began to blow; it set the boughs of a neighbour tree rocking, and all their branches aswing, every twig and every leaf blending its individual motion with the sway of its branch and the rock of its bough. Among its leafy shapes was a pack of wolves that struggled to break from a wizard’s leash: greyhounds would not have strained so savagely! I watched them with an interest that grew as the wind gathered force, and their motions life.

Another mass of foliage, larger and more compact, presented my fancy with a group of horses’ heads and forequarters projecting caparisoned from their stalls. Their necks kept moving up and down, with an impatience that augmented as the growing wind broke their vertical rhythm with a wilder swaying from side to side. What heads they were! how gaunt, how strange!—several of them bare skulls—one with the skin tight on its bones! One had lost the under jaw and hung low, looking unutterably weary—but now and then hove high as if to ease the bit. Above them, at the end of a branch, floated erect the form of a woman, waving her arms in imperious gesture. The definiteness of these and other leaf masses first surprised and then discomposed me: what if they should overpower

my brain with seeming reality? But the twilight became darkness; the wind ceased; every shape was shut up in the night; I fell asleep.

It was still dark when I began to be aware of a far-off, confused, rushing noise, mingled with faint cries. It grew and grew until a tumult as of gathering multitudes filled the wood. On all sides at once the sounds drew nearer; the spot where I lay seemed the centre of a commotion that extended throughout the forest. I scarce moved hand or foot lest I should betray my presence to hostile things.

The moon at length approached the forest, and came slowly into it: with her first gleam the noises increased to a deafening uproar, and I began to see dim shapes about me. As she ascended and grew brighter, the noises became yet louder, and the shapes clearer. A furious battle was raging around me. Wild cries and roars of rage, shock of onset, struggle prolonged, all mingled with words articulate, surged in my ears. Curses and credos, snarls and sneers, laughter and mockery, sacred names and howls of hate, came huddling in chaotic interpenetration. Skeletons and phantoms fought in maddest confusion. Swords swept through the phantoms: they only shivered. Maces crashed on the skeletons, shattering them hideously: not one fell or ceased to fight, so long as a single joint held two bones together. Bones of men and horses lay scattered and heaped; grinding and crunching them under foot fought the skeletons. Everywhere charged the bone-gaunt white steeds; everywhere on foot or on wind-blown misty battle-horses, raged and ravened and raved the indestructible spectres; weapons and hoofs clashed and crushed; while skeleton jaws and phantom-throats swelled the deafening tumult with the war-cry of every opinion, bad or good, that had bred strife, injustice, cruelty in any world. The holiest words went with the most hating blow. Lie-distorted truths flew hurtling in the wind of javelins and bones. Every moment some one would turn against his comrades, and fight more wildly than before, THE TRUTH! THE TRUTH! still his cry. One I noted who wheeled ever in a circle, and smote on all sides. Wearied out, a pair would sit for a minute side by side, then rise and renew the fierce combat. None stooped to comfort the fallen, or stepped wide to spare him.

The moon shone till the sun rose, and all the night long I had glimpses of a woman moving at her will above the strife-tormented multitude, now on this front now on that, one outstretched arm urging the fight, the other pressed against her side. “Ye are men: slay one another!” she shouted. I saw her dead eyes and her dark spot, and recalled what I had seen the night before.

Such was the battle of the dead, which I saw and heard as I lay under the tree.

Just before sunrise, a breeze went through the forest, and a voice cried, “Let the dead bury their dead!” At the word the contending thousands dropped noiseless, and when the sun looked in, he saw never a bone, but here and there a withered branch.

I rose and resumed my journey, through as quiet a wood as ever grew out of the quiet earth. For the wind of the morning had ceased when the sun appeared, and the trees were silent. Not a bird sang, not a squirrel, mouse, or weasel showed itself, not a belated moth flew athwart my path. But as I went I kept watch over myself, nor dared let my eyes rest on any forest-shape. All the time I seemed to hear faint sounds of mattock and spade and hurtling bones: any moment my eyes might open on things I would not see! Daylight prudence muttered that perhaps, to appear, ten thousand phantoms awaited only my consenting fancy.

In the middle of the afternoon I came out of the wood—to find before me a second net of dry water-courses. I thought at first that I had wandered from my attempted line, and reversed my direction; but I soon saw it was not so, and concluded presently that I had come to another branch of the same river-bed. I began at once to cross it, and was in the bottom of a wide channel when the sun set.

I sat down to await the moon, and growing sleepy, stretched myself on the moss. The moment my head was down, I heard the sounds of rushing streams—all sorts of sweet watery noises. The veiled melody of the molten music sang me into a dreamless sleep, and when I woke the sun was already up, and the wrinkled country widely visible. Covered with shadows it lay striped and mottled

like the skin of some wild animal. As the sun rose the shadows diminished, and it seemed as if the rocks were re-absorbing the darkness that had oozed out of them during the night.

Hitherto I had loved my Arab mare and my books more, I fear, than live man or woman; now at length my soul was athirst for a human presence, and I longed even after those inhabitants of this alien world whom the raven had so vaguely described as nearest my sort. With heavy yet hoping heart, and mind haunted by a doubt whether I was going in any direction at all, I kept wearily travelling "north-west and by south."

CHAPTER XII. FRIENDS AND FOES

Coming, in one of the channels, upon what seemed a little shrub, the outlying picket, I trusted, of an army behind it, I knelt to look at it closer. It bore a small fruit, which, as I did not recognise it, I feared to gather and eat. Little I thought that I was watched from behind the rocks by hundreds of eyes eager with the question whether I would or would not take it.

I came to another plant somewhat bigger, then to another larger still, and at length to clumps of a like sort; by which time I saw that they were not shrubs but dwarf-trees. Before I reached the bank of this second branch of the river-bed, I found the channels so full of them that it was with difficulty I crossed such as I could not jump. In one I heard a great rush, as of a multitude of birds from an ivied wall, but saw nothing.

I came next to some large fruit-bearing trees, but what they bore looked coarse. They stood on the edge of a hollow, which evidently had once been the basin of a lake. From the left a forest seemed to flow into and fill it; but while the trees above were of many sorts, those in the hollow were almost entirely fruit-bearing.

I went a few yards down the slope of grass mingled with moss, and stretched myself upon it weary. A little farther down stood a tiny tree full of rosiest apples no bigger than small cherries, its top close to my hand; I pulled and ate one of them. Finding it delicious, I was in the act of taking another, when a sudden shouting of children, mingled with laughter clear and sweet as the music of a brook, startled me with delight.

“He likes our apples! He likes our apples! He’s a good giant! He’s a good giant!” cried many little voices.

“He’s a giant!” objected one.

“He IS rather big,” assented another, “but littleness isn’t everything! It won’t keep you from growing big and stupid except you take care!”

I rose on my elbow and stared. Above and about and below me stood a multitude of children, apparently of all ages, some just able to run alone, and some about twelve or thirteen. Three or four seemed older. They stood in a small knot, a little apart, and were less excited than the rest. The many were chattering in groups, declaiming and contradicting, like a crowd of grown people in a city, only with greater merriment, better manners, and more sense.

I gathered that, by the approach of my hand to a second apple, they knew that I liked the first; but how from that they argued me good, I did not see, nor wondered that one of them at least should suggest caution. I did not open my mouth, for I was afraid of frightening them, and sure I should learn more by listening than by asking questions. For I understood nearly all they said—at which I was not surprised: to understand is not more wonderful than to love.

There came a movement and slight dispersion among them, and presently a sweet, innocent-looking, lovingly roguish little fellow handed me a huge green apple. Silence fell on the noisy throng; all waited expectant.

“Eat, good giant,” he said.

I sat up, took the apple, smiled thanks, and would have eaten; but the moment I bit into it, I flung it far away.

Again rose a shout of delight; they flung themselves upon me, so as nearly to smother me; they kissed my face and hands; they laid hold of my legs; they clambered about my arms and shoulders, embracing my head and neck. I came to the ground at last, overwhelmed with the lovely little goblins.

“Good, good giant!” they cried. “We knew you would come! Oh you dear, good, strong giant!”

The babble of their talk sprang up afresh, and ever the jubilant shout would rise anew from hundreds of clear little throats.

Again came a sudden silence. Those around me drew back; those atop of me got off and began trying to set me on my feet. Upon their sweet faces, concern had taken the place of merriment.

"Get up, good giant!" said a little girl. "Make haste! much haste! He saw you throw his apple away!"

Before she ended, I was on my feet. She stood pointing up the slope. On the brow of it was a clownish, bad-looking fellow, a few inches taller than myself. He looked hostile, but I saw no reason to fear him, for he had no weapon, and my little friends had vanished every one.

He began to descend, and I, in the hope of better footing and position, to go up. He growled like a beast as he turned toward me.

Reaching a more level spot, I stood and waited for him. As he came near, he held out his hand. I would have taken it in friendly fashion, but he drew it back, threatened a blow, and held it out again. Then I understood him to claim the apple I had flung away, whereupon I made a grimace of dislike and a gesture of rejection.

He answered with a howl of rage that seemed to say, "Do you dare tell me my apple was not fit to eat?"

"One bad apple may grow on the best tree," I said.

Whether he perceived my meaning I cannot tell, but he made a stride nearer, and I stood on my guard. He delayed his assault, however, until a second giant, much like him, who had been stealing up behind me, was close enough, when he rushed upon me. I met him with a good blow in the face, but the other struck me on the back of the head, and between them I was soon overpowered.

They dragged me into the wood above the valley, where their tribe lived—in wretched huts, built of fallen branches and a few stones. Into one of these they pushed me, there threw me on the ground, and kicked me. A woman was present, who looked on with indifference.

I may here mention that during my captivity I hardly learned to distinguish the women from the men, they differed so little. Often I wondered whether I had not come upon a sort of fungoid people, with just enough mind to give them motion and the expressions of anger and greed. Their food, which consisted of tubers, bulbs, and fruits, was to me inexpressibly disagreeable, but nothing offended them so much as to show dislike to it. I was cuffed by the women and kicked by the men because I would not swallow it.

I lay on the floor that night hardly able to move, but I slept a good deal, and woke a little refreshed. In the morning they dragged me to the valley, and tying my feet, with a long rope, to a tree, put a flat stone with a saw-like edge in my left hand. I shifted it to the right; they kicked me, and put it again in the left; gave me to understand that I was to scrape the bark off every branch that had no fruit on it; kicked me once more, and left me.

I set about the dreary work in the hope that by satisfying them I should be left very much to myself—to make my observations and choose my time for escape. Happily one of the dwarf-trees grew close by me, and every other minute I plucked and ate a small fruit, which wonderfully refreshed and strengthened me.

CHAPTER XIII. THE LITTLE ONES

I had been at work but a few moments, when I heard small voices near me, and presently the Little Ones, as I soon found they called themselves, came creeping out from among the tiny trees that like brushwood filled the spaces between the big ones. In a minute there were scores and scores about me. I made signs that the giants had but just left me, and were not far off; but they laughed, and told me the wind was quite clean.

"They are too blind to see us," they said, and laughed like a multitude of sheep-bells.

"Do you like that rope about your ankles?" asked one.

"I want them to think I cannot take it off," I replied.

"They can scarcely see their own feet!" he rejoined. "Walk with short steps and they will think the rope is all right."

As he spoke, he danced with merriment.

One of the bigger girls got down on her knees to untie the clumsy knot. I smiled, thinking those pretty fingers could do nothing with it, but in a moment it was loose.

They then made me sit down, and fed me with delicious little fruits; after which the smaller of them began to play with me in the wildest fashion, so that it was impossible for me to resume my work. When the first grew tired, others took their places, and this went on until the sun was setting, and heavy steps were heard approaching. The little people started from me, and I made haste to put the rope round my ankles.

"We must have a care," said the girl who had freed me; "a crush of one of their horrid stumpy feet might kill a very little one!"

"Can they not perceive you at all then?"

"They might see something move; and if the children were in a heap on the top of you, as they were a moment ago, it would be terrible; for they hate every live thing but themselves.—Not that they are much alive either!"

She whistled like a bird. The next instant not one of them was to be seen or heard, and the girl herself had disappeared.

It was my master, as doubtless he counted himself, come to take me home. He freed my ankles, and dragged me to the door of his hut; there he threw me on the ground, again tied my feet, gave me a kick, and left me.

Now I might at once have made my escape; but at length I had friends, and could not think of leaving them. They were so charming, so full of winsome ways, that I must see more of them! I must know them better! "To-morrow," I said to myself with delight, "I shall see them again!" But from the moment there was silence in the huts until I fell asleep, I heard them whispering all about me, and knew that I was lovingly watched by a multitude. After that, I think they hardly ever left me quite alone.

I did not come to know the giants at all, and I believe there was scarcely anything in them to know. They never became in the least friendly, but they were much too stupid to invent cruelties. Often I avoided a bad kick by catching the foot and giving its owner a fall, upon which he never, on that occasion, renewed his attempt.

But the little people were constantly doing and saying things that pleased, often things that surprised me. Every day I grew more loath to leave them. While I was at work, they would keep coming and going, amusing and delighting me, and taking all the misery, and much of the weariness out of my monotonous toil. Very soon I loved them more than I can tell. They did not know much, but they were very wise, and seemed capable of learning anything. I had no bed save the bare ground, but almost as often as I woke, it was in a nest of children—one or other of them in my arms, though which I seldom could tell until the light came, for they ordered the succession among themselves.

When one crept into my bosom, unconsciously I clasped him there, and the rest lay close around me, the smaller nearer. It is hardly necessary to say that I did not suffer much from the nightly cold! The first thing they did in the morning, and the last before sunset, was to bring the good giant plenty to eat.

One morning I was surprised on waking to find myself alone. As I came to my senses, however, I heard subdued sounds of approach, and presently the girl already mentioned, the tallest and gravest of the community, and regarded by all as their mother, appeared from the wood, followed by the multitude in jubilation manifest—but silent lest they should rouse the sleeping giant at whose door I lay. She carried a boy-baby in her arms: hitherto a girl-baby, apparently about a year old, had been the youngest. Three of the bigger girls were her nurses, but they shared their treasure with all the rest. Among the Little Ones, dolls were unknown; the bigger had the smaller, and the smaller the still less, to tend and play with.

Lona came to me and laid the infant in my arms. The baby opened his eyes and looked at me, closed them again, and fell asleep.

"He loves you already!" said the girl.

"Where did you find him?" I asked.

"In the wood, of course," she answered, her eyes beaming with delight, "—where we always find them. Isn't he a beauty? We've been out all night looking for him. Sometimes it is not easy to find!"

"How do you know when there is one to find?" I asked.

"I cannot tell," she replied. "Every one makes haste to tell the other, but we never find out who told first. Sometimes I think one must have said it asleep, and another heard it half-awake. When there is a baby in the wood, no one can stop to ask questions; and when we have found it, then it is too late."

"Do more boy or girl babies come to the wood?"

"They don't come to the wood; we go to the wood and find them."

"Are there more boys or girls of you now?"

I had found that to ask precisely the same question twice, made them knit their brows.

"I do not know," she answered.

"You can count them, surely!"

"We never do that. We shouldn't like to be counted."

"Why?"

"It wouldn't be smooth. We would rather not know."

"Where do the babies come from first?"

"From the wood—always. There is no other place they can come from."

She knew where they came from last, and thought nothing else was to be known about their advent.

"How often do you find one?"

"Such a happy thing takes all the glad we've got, and we forget the last time. You too are glad to have him—are you not, good giant?"

"Yes, indeed, I am!" I answered. "But how do you feed him?"

"I will show you," she rejoined, and went away—to return directly with two or three ripe little plums. She put one to the baby's lips.

"He would open his mouth if he were awake," she said, and took him in her arms.

She squeezed a drop to the surface, and again held the fruit to the baby's lips. Without waking he began at once to suck it, and she went on slowly squeezing until nothing but skin and stone were left.

"There!" she cried, in a tone of gentle triumph. "A big-apple world it would be with nothing for the babies! We wouldn't stop in it—would we, darling? We would leave it to the bad giants!"

"But what if you let the stone into the baby's mouth when you were feeding him?" I said.

"No mother would do that," she replied. "I shouldn't be fit to have a baby!"

I thought what a lovely woman she would grow. But what became of them when they grew up? Where did they go? That brought me again to the question—where did they come from first?

"Will you tell me where you lived before?" I said.

"Here," she replied.

"Have you NEVER lived anywhere else?" I ventured.

"Never. We all came from the wood. Some think we dropped out of the trees."

"How is it there are so many of you quite little?"

"I don't understand. Some are less and some are bigger. I am very big."

"Baby will grow bigger, won't he?"

"Of course he will!"

"And will you grow bigger?"

"I don't think so. I hope not. I am the biggest. It frightens me sometimes."

"Why should it frighten you?"

She gave me no answer.

"How old are you?" I resumed.

"I do not know what you mean. We are all just that."

"How big will the baby grow?"

"I cannot tell.—Some," she added, with a trouble in her voice, "begin to grow after we think they have stopped.—That is a frightful thing. We don't talk about it!"

"What makes it frightful?"

She was silent for a moment, then answered,

"We fear they may be beginning to grow giants."

"Why should you fear that?"

"Because it is so terrible.—I don't want to talk about it!"

She pressed the baby to her bosom with such an anxious look that I dared not further question her.

Before long I began to perceive in two or three of the smaller children some traces of greed and selfishness, and noted that the bigger girls cast on these a not infrequent glance of anxiety.

None of them put a hand to my work: they would do nothing for the giants! But they never relaxed their loving ministrations to me. They would sing to me, one after another, for hours; climb the tree to reach my mouth and pop fruit into it with their dainty little fingers; and they kept constant watch against the approach of a giant.

Sometimes they would sit and tell me stories—mostly very childish, and often seeming to mean hardly anything. Now and then they would call a general assembly to amuse me. On one such occasion a moody little fellow sang me a strange crooning song, with a refrain so pathetic that, although unintelligible to me, it caused the tears to run down my face. This phenomenon made those who saw it regard me with much perplexity. Then first I bethought myself that I had not once, in that world, looked on water, falling or lying or running. Plenty there had been in some long vanished age —that was plain enough—but the Little Ones had never seen any before they saw my tears! They had, nevertheless, it seemed, some dim, instinctive perception of their origin; for a very small child went up to the singer, shook his clenched pud in his face, and said something like this: "'Ou skeeze ze juice out of ze good giant's seeberries! Bad giant!"

"How is it," I said one day to Lona, as she sat with the baby in her arms at the foot of my tree, "that I never see any children among the giants?"

She stared a little, as if looking in vain for some sense in the question, then replied,

"They are giants; there are no little ones."

"Have they never any children?" I asked.

"No; there are never any in the wood for them. They do not love them. If they saw ours, they would stamp them."

"Is there always the same number of the giants then? I thought, before I had time to know better, that they were your fathers and mothers."

She burst into the merriest laughter, and said,

"No, good giant; WE are THEIR firsters."

But as she said it, the merriment died out of her, and she looked scared.

I stopped working, and gazed at her, bewildered.

"How CAN that be?" I exclaimed.

"I do not say; I do not understand," she answered. "But we were here and they not. They go from us. I am sorry, but we cannot help it. THEY could have helped it."

"How long have you been here?" I asked, more and more puzzled—in the hope of some side-light on the matter.

"Always, I think," she replied. "I think somebody made us always."

I turned to my scraping.

She saw I did not understand.

"The giants were not made always," she resumed. "If a Little One doesn't care, he grows greedy, and then lazy, and then big, and then stupid, and then bad. The dull creatures don't know that they come from us. Very few of them believe we are anywhere. They say NONSENSE!—Look at little Blunty: he is eating one of their apples! He will be the next! Oh! oh! he will soon be big and bad and ugly, and not know it!"

The child stood by himself a little way off, eating an apple nearly as big as his head. I had often thought he did not look so good as the rest; now he looked disgusting.

"I will take the horrid thing from him!" I cried.

"It is no use," she answered sadly. "We have done all we can, and it is too late! We were afraid he was growing, for he would not believe anything told him; but when he refused to share his berries, and said he had gathered them for himself, then we knew it! He is a glutton, and there is no hope of him.—It makes me sick to see him eat!"

"Could not some of the boys watch him, and not let him touch the poisonous things?"

"He may have them if he will: it is all one—to eat the apples, and to be a boy that would eat them if he could. No; he must go to the giants! He belongs to them. You can see how much bigger he is than when first you came! He is bigger since yesterday."

"He is as like that hideous green lump in his hand as boy could look!"

"It suits what he is making himself."

"His head and it might change places!"

"Perhaps they do!"

"Does he want to be a giant?"

"He hates the giants, but he is making himself one all the same: he likes their apples! Oh baby, baby, he was just such a darling as you when we found him!"

"He will be very miserable when he finds himself a giant!"

"Oh, no; he will like it well enough! That is the worst of it."

"Will he hate the Little Ones?"

"He will be like the rest; he will not remember us—most likely will not believe there are Little Ones. He will not care; he will eat his apples."

"Do tell me how it will come about. I understand your world so little! I come from a world where everything is different."

"I do not know about WORLD. What is it? What more but a word in your beautiful big mouth?—That makes it something!"

"Never mind about the word; tell me what next will happen to Blunty."

"He will wake one morning and find himself a giant—not like you, good giant, but like any other bad giant. You will hardly know him, but I will tell you which. He will think he has been a giant always, and will not know you, or any of us. The giants have lost themselves, Peony says, and that is

why they never smile. I wonder whether they are not glad because they are bad, or bad because they are not glad. But they can't be glad when they have no babies! I wonder what BAD means, good giant!"

"I wish I knew no more about it than you!" I returned. "But I try to be good, and mean to keep on trying."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.