

# VARIOUS

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**AGNES OF SORRENTO**

**CHAPTER V**  
**IL PADRE FRANCESCO**

The next morning Elsie awoke, as was her custom,—when the very faintest hue of dawn streaked the horizon. A hen who has seen a hawk balancing his wings and cawing in mid-air over her downy family could not have awakened with her feathers, metaphorically speaking, in a more bristling state of caution.

"Spirits in the gorge, quotha?" said she to herself, as she vigorously adjusted her dress. "I believe so,—spirits in good sound bodies, I believe; and next we shall hear, there will be rope-ladders, and climbings, and the Lord knows what. I shall go

to confession this very morning, and tell Father Francesco the danger; and instead of taking her down to sell oranges, suppose I send her to the sisters to carry the ring and a basket of oranges?"

"Ah, ah!" she said, pausing, after she was dressed, and addressing a coarse print of Saint Agnes pasted against the wall,—"you look very meek there, and it was a great thing no doubt to die as you did; but if you'd lived to be married and bring up a family of girls, you'd have known something greater. Please, don't take offence with a poor old woman who has got into the way of speaking her mind freely! I'm foolish, and don't know much,—so, dear lady, pray for me!" And old Elsie bent her knee and crossed herself reverently, and then went out, leaving her young charge still sleeping.

It was yet dusky dawn when she might have been seen kneeling, with her sharp, clear-cut profile, at the grate of a confession-box in a church in Sorrento. Within was seated a personage who will have some influence on our story, and who must therefore be somewhat minutely introduced to the reader.

Il Padre Francesco had only within the last year arrived in the neighborhood, having been sent as superior of a brotherhood of Capuchins, whose convent was perched on a crag in the vicinity. With this situation came a pastoral care of the district; and Elsie and her grand-daughter found in him a spiritual pastor very different from the fat, jolly, easy Brother Girolamo, to whose place he had been appointed. The latter had been one of those numerous priests taken from the peasantry, who never

rise above the average level of thought of the body from which they are drawn. Easy, gossipy, fond of good living and good stories, sympathetic in troubles and in joys, he had been a general favorite in the neighborhood, without exerting any particularly spiritualizing influence.

It required but a glance at Father Francesco to see that he was in all respects the opposite of this. It was evident that he came from one of the higher classes, by that indefinable air of birth and breeding which makes itself felt under every change of costume. Who he might be, what might have been his past history, what rank he might have borne, what part played in the great warfare of life, was all of course sunk in the oblivion of his religious profession, where, as at the grave, a man laid down name and fame and past history and worldly goods, and took up a coarse garb and a name chosen from the roll of the saints, in sign that the world that had known him should know him no more.

Imagine a man between thirty and forty, with that round, full, evenly developed head, and those chiselled features, which one sees on ancient busts and coins no less than in the streets of modern Rome. The cheeks were sunken and sallow; the large, black, melancholy eyes had a wistful, anxious, penetrative expression, that spoke a stringent, earnest spirit, which, however deep might be the grave in which it lay buried, had not yet found repose. The long, thin, delicately formed hands were emaciated and bloodless; they clasped with a nervous eagerness a rosary and crucifix of ebony and silver,—the only mark of luxury that could

be discerned in a costume unusually threadbare and squalid. The whole picture of the man, as he sat there, had it been painted and hung in a gallery, was such as must have stopped every person of a certain amount of sensibility before it with the conviction that behind that strong, melancholy, earnest figure and face lay one of those hidden histories of human passion in which the vivid life of medieval Italy was so fertile.

He was listening to Elsie, as she kneeled, with that easy air of superiority which marks a practised man of the world, yet with a grave attention which showed that her communication had awakened the deepest interest in his mind. Every few moments he moved slightly in his seat, and interrupted the flow of the narrative by an inquiry concisely put, in tones which, clear and low, had a solemn and severe distinctness, producing, in the still, dusky twilight of the church, an almost ghostly effect.

When the communication was over, he stepped out of the confessional and said to Elsie in parting,—“My daughter, you have done well to take this in time. The devices of Satan in our corrupt times are numerous and artful, and they who keep the Lord's sheep must not sleep. Before many days I will call and examine the child; meanwhile I approve your course.”

It was curious to see the awe-struck, trembling manner in which old Elsie, generally so intrepid and commanding, stood before this man in his brown rough woollen gown with his corded waist; but she had an instinctive perception of the presence of the man of superior birth no less than a reverence for the man

of religion.

After she had departed from the church, the Capuchin stood lost in thought; and to explain his reverie, we must throw some further light on his history.

Il Padre Francesco, as his appearance and manner intimated, was in truth from one of the most distinguished families of Florence. He was one of those whom an ancient writer characterizes as "men of longing desire." Born with a nature of restless stringency that seemed to doom him never to know repose, excessive in all things, he had made early trial of ambition, of war, and of what the gallants of his time called love,—plunging into all the dissipated excesses of a most dissolute age, and outdoing in luxury and extravagance the foremost of his companions.

The wave of a great religious impulse—which in our times would have been called a revival—swept over the city of Florence, and bore him, with multitudes of others, to listen to the fervid preaching of the Dominican monk, Jerome Savonarola; and amid the crowd that trembled, wept, and beat their breasts under his awful denunciations, he, too, felt within himself a heavenly call,—the death of an old life, and the uprising of a new purpose.

The colder manners and more repressed habits of modern times can give no idea of the wild fervor of a religious revival among a people so passionate and susceptible to impressions as the Italians. It swept society like a spring torrent from the

sides of the Apennines, bearing all before it. Houses were sacked with religious fervor by penitent owners, and licentious pictures and statuary and books, and all the thousand temptations and appliances of a luxurious age, were burned in the great public square. Artists convicted of impure and licentious designs threw their palettes and brushes into the expiatory flames, and retired to convents, till called forth by the voice of the preacher, and bid to turn their art into higher channels. Since the days of Saint Francis no such profound religious impulse had agitated the Italian community.

In our times a conversion is signalized by few outward changes, however deep the inner life; but the life of the Middle Ages was profoundly symbolical, and always required the help of material images in its expression.

The gay and dissolute young Lorenzo Sforza took leave of the world with rites of awful solemnity. He made his will and disposed of all his worldly property, and assembling his friends, bade them the farewell of a dying man. Arrayed as for the grave, he was laid in his coffin, and thus carried from his stately dwelling by the brethren of the Misericordia, who, in their ghostly costume, with mournful chants and lighted candles, bore him to the tomb of his ancestors, where the coffin was deposited in the vault, and its occupant passed the awful hours of the night in darkness and solitude. Thence he was carried, the next day, almost in a state of insensibility, to a neighboring convent of the severest order, where, for some weeks, he observed a penitential

retreat of silence and prayer, neither seeing nor hearing any living being but his spiritual director.

The effect of all this on an ardent and sensitive temperament can scarcely be conceived; and it is not to be wondered at that the once gay and luxurious Lorenzo Sforza, when emerging from this tremendous discipline, was so wholly lost in the worn and weary Padre Francesco that it seemed as if in fact he had died and another had stepped into his place. The face was ploughed deep with haggard furrows, and the eyes were as those of a man who has seen the fearful secrets of another life. He voluntarily sought a post as far removed as possible from the scenes of his early days, so as more completely to destroy his identity with the past; and he devoted himself with enthusiasm to the task of awakening to a higher spiritual life the indolent, self-indulgent monks of his order, and the ignorant peasantry of the vicinity.

But he soon discovered, what every earnest soul learns who has been baptized into a sense of things invisible, how utterly powerless and inert any mortal man is to inspire others with his own insights and convictions. With bitter discouragement and chagrin, he saw that the spiritual man must forever lift the dead weight of all the indolence and indifference and animal sensuality that surround him,—that the curse of Cassandra is upon him, forever to burn and writhe under awful visions of truths which no one around him will regard. In early life the associate only of the cultivated and the refined, Father Francesco could not but experience at times an insupportable *ennui* in listening to

the confessions of people who had never learned either to think or to feel with any degree of distinctness, and whom his most fervent exhortations could not lift above the most trivial interests of a mere animal life. He was weary of the childish quarrels and bickerings of the monks, of their puerility, of their selfishness and self-indulgence, of their hopeless vulgarity of mind, and utterly discouraged with their inextricable labyrinths of deception. A melancholy deep as the grave seized on him, and he redoubled his austerities, in the hope that by making life painful he might make it also short.

But the first time that the clear, sweet tones of Agnes rang ill his ears at the confessional, and her words, so full of unconscious poetry and repressed genius, came like a strain of sweet music through the grate, he felt at his heart a thrill to which it had long been a stranger, and which seemed to lift the weary, aching load from off his soul, as if some invisible angel had borne it up on his wings.

In his worldly days he had known women as the gallants in Boccaccio's romances knew them, and among them one enchantress whose sorceries had kindled in his heart one of those fatal passions which burn out the whole of a man's nature, and leave it, like a sacked city, only a smouldering heap of ashes. Deepest, therefore, among his vows of renunciation had been those which divided him from all womankind. The gulf that parted him and them was in his mind deep as hell, and he thought of the sex only in the light of temptation and danger. For the first

time in his life, an influence serene, natural, healthy, and sweet breathed over him from the mind of a woman,—an influence so heavenly and peaceful that he did not challenge or suspect it, but rather opened his worn heart insensibly to it, as one in a fetid chamber naturally breathes freer when the fresh air is admitted.

How charming it was to find his most spiritual exhortations seized upon with the eager comprehension of a nature innately poetic and ideal: Nay, it sometimes seemed to him as if the suggestions which he gave her dry and leafless she brought again to him in miraculous clusters of flowers, like the barren rod of Joseph, which broke into blossoms when he was betrothed to the spotless Mary; and yet, withal, she was so humbly unconscious, so absolutely ignorant of the beauty of all she said and thought, that she impressed him less as a mortal woman than as one of those divine miracles in feminine form of which he had heard in the legends of the saints.

Thenceforward his barren, discouraged life began to blossom with wayside flowers,—and he mistrusted not the miracle, because the flowers were all heavenly The pious thought or holy admonition that he saw trodden under the swinish feet of the monks he gathered up again in hope,—she would understand it; and gradually all his thoughts became like carrier-doves, which, having once learned the way to a favorite haunt, are ever fluttering to return thither.

Such is the wonderful power of human sympathy, that the discovery even of the existence of a soul capable of

understanding our inner life often operates as a perfect charm; every thought, and feeling, and aspiration carries with it a new value, from the interwoven consciousness that attends it of the worth it would bear to that other mind; so that, while that person lives, our existence is doubled in value, even though oceans divide us.

The cloud of hopeless melancholy which had brooded over the mind of Father Francesco lifted and sailed away, he knew not why, he knew not when. A secret joyfulness and alacrity possessed his spirits; his prayers became more fervent and his praises more frequent. Until now, his meditations had been most frequently those of fear and wrath,—the awful majesty of God, the terrible punishment of sinners, which he conceived with all that haggard, dreadful sincerity of vigor which characterized the modern Etruscan phase of religion of which the "Inferno" of Dante was the exponent and the out-come. His preachings and his exhortations had dwelt on that lurid world seen by the severe Florentine, at whose threshold hope forever departs, and around whose eternal circles of living torture the shivering spirit wanders dismayed and blasted by terror.

He had been, shocked and discouraged to find how utterly vain had been his most intense efforts to stem the course of sin by presenting these images of terror: how hard natures had listened to them with only a coarse and cruel appetite, which seemed to increase their hardness and brutality; and how timid ones had been withered by them, like flowers scorched by the blast of a

furnace; how, in fact, as in the case of those cruel executions and bloody tortures then universal in the jurisprudence of Europe, these pictures of eternal torture seemed to exert a morbid demoralizing influence which hurried on the growth of iniquity.

But since his acquaintance with Agnes, without his knowing exactly why, thoughts of the Divine Love had floated into his soul, filling it with a golden cloud like that which of old rested over the mercy-seat in that sacred inner temple where the priest was admitted alone. He became more affable and tender, more tolerant to the erring, more fond of little children; would stop sometimes to lay his hand on the head of a child, or to raise up one who lay overthrown in the street. The song of little birds and the voices of animal life became to him full of tenderness; and his prayers by the sick and dying seemed to have a melting power, such as he had never known before. It was spring in his soul,—soft, Italian spring,—such as brings out the musky breath of the cyclamen, and the faint, tender perfume of the primrose, in every moist dell of the Apennines.

A year passed in this way, perhaps the best and happiest of his troubled life,—a year in which, insensibly to himself, the weekly interviews with Agnes at the confessional became the rallying-points around which the whole of his life was formed, and she the unsuspected spring of his inner being.

It was his duty, he said to himself, to give more than usual time and thought to the working and polishing of this wondrous jewel which had so unexpectedly been intrusted to him for the

adorning of his Master's crown; and so long as he conducted with the strictest circumspection of his office, what had he to fear in the way of so delightful a duty? He had never touched her hand; never had even the folds of her passing drapery brushed against his garments of mortification and renunciation; never, even in pastoral benediction, had he dared lay his hand on that beautiful head. It is true, he had not forbidden himself to raise his glance sometimes when he saw her coming in at the church-door and gliding up the aisle with downcast eyes, and thoughts evidently so far above earth, that she seemed, like one of Frà Angelico's angels, to be moving on a cloud, so encompassed with stillness and sanctity that he held his breath as she passed.

But in the confession of Dame Elsie that morning he had received a shock which threw his whole interior being into a passionate agitation which dismayed and astonished him.

The thought of Agnes, his spotless lamb, exposed to lawless and licentious pursuit, of whose nature and probabilities his past life gave him only too clear an idea, was of itself a very natural source of anxiety. But Elsie had unveiled to him her plans for her marriage, and consulted him on the propriety of placing Agnes immediately under the protection of the husband she had chosen for her; and it was this part of her communication which had awakened the severest internal recoil, and raised a tumult of passions which the priest vainly sought either to assuage or understand.

As soon as his morning duties were over, he repaired to his

convent, sought his cell, and, prostrate on his face before the crucifix, began his internal reckoning with himself. The day passed in fasting and solitude.

It is now golden evening, and on the square, flat roof of the convent, which, high-perched on a crag, overlooks the bay, one might observe a dark figure slowly pacing backward and forward. It is Father Francesco; and as he walks up and down, one could see by his large, bright, dilated eye, by the vivid red spot on either sunken cheek, and by the nervous energy of his movements, that he is in the very height of some mental crisis,—in that state of placid *extase* in which the subject supposes himself perfectly calm, because every nerve is screwed to the highest point of tension and can vibrate no more.

What oceans had that day rolled over him and swept him, as one may see a little boat rocked on the capricious surges of the Mediterranean! Were, then, all his strivings and agonies in vain? Did he love this woman with any earthly love? Was he jealous of the thought of a future husband? Was it a tempting demon that said to him, "Lorenzo Sforza might have shielded this treasure from the profanation of lawless violence, from the brute grasp of an inappreciative peasant, but Father Francesco cannot"? There was a moment when his whole being vibrated with a perception of what a marriage bond might have been that was indeed a sacrament, and that bound together two pure and loyal souls who gave life and courage to each other in all holy purposes and heroic deeds; and he almost feared that he had

cursed his vows,—those awful vows, at whose remembrance his inmost soul shivered through every nerve.

But after hours of prayer and struggle, and wave after wave of agonizing convulsion, he gained one of those high points in human possibility where souls can stand a little while at a time, and where all things seem so transfigured and pure that they fancy themselves thenceforward forever victorious over evil.

As he walks up and down in the gold-and-purple evening twilight, his mind seems to him calm as that glowing sea that reflects the purple shores of Ischia, and the quaint, fantastic grottos and cliff's of Capri. All is golden and glowing; he sees all clear; he is delivered from his spiritual enemies; he treads them under his feet.

Yes, he says to himself, he loves Agnes,—loves her all-sacredly as her guardian angel does, who ever beholdeth the face of her Father in Heaven. Why, then, does he shrink from her marriage? Is it not evident? Has that tender soul, that poetic nature, that aspiring genius, anything in common with the vulgar, coarse details of a peasant's life? Will not her beauty always draw the eye of the licentious, expose her artless innocence to solicitation which will annoy her and bring upon her head the inconsiderate jealousy of her husband? Think of Agnes made subject to the rude authority, to the stripes and correction, which men of the lower class, under the promptings of jealousy, do not scruple to inflict on their wives! What career did society, as then organized, present to such a nature, so perilously gifted in body

and mind? He has the answer. The Church has opened a career to woman which all the world denies her.

He remembers the story of the dyer's daughter of Siena, the fair Saint Catharine. In his youth he had often visited the convent where one of the first artists of Italy has immortalized her conflicts and her victories, and knelt with his mother at the altar where she now communes with the faithful. He remembered how, by her sanctity, her humility, and her holy inspirations of soul, she had risen to the courts of princes, whither she had been sent as ambassadress to arrange for the interests of the Church; and then rose before his mind's eye the gorgeous picture of Pinturicchio, where, borne in celestial repose and purity amid all the powers and dignitaries of the Church, she is canonized as one of those that shall reign and intercede with Christ in heaven.

Was it wrong, therefore, in him, though severed from all womankind by a gulf of irrevocable vows, that he should feel a kind of jealous property in this gifted and beautiful creature? and though he might not, even in thought, dream of possessing her himself, was there sin in the vehement energy with which his whole nature rose up in him to say that no other man should,—that she should be the bride of Heaven alone?

Certainly, if there were, it lurked far out of sight; and the priest had a case that might have satisfied a conscience even more fastidious;—and he felt a sort of triumph in the results of his mental scrutiny.

Yes, she should ascend from glory to glory,—but *his* should be

the hand that should lead her upward. *He* would lead her within the consecrated grate,—he would pronounce the awful words that should make it sacrilege for all other men to approach her; and yet through life *he* should be the guardian and director of her soul, the one being to whom she should render an obedience as unlimited as that which belongs to Christ alone.

Such were the thoughts of this victorious hour,—which, alas! were destined to fade as those purple skies and golden fires gradually went out, leaving, in place of their light and glory, only the lurid glow of Vesuvius.

## CHAPTER VI

# THE WALK TO THE CONVENT

Elsie returned from the confessional a little after sunrise, much relieved and satisfied. Padre Francesco had shown such a deep interest in her narrative that she was highly gratified. Then he had given her advice which exactly accorded with her own views; and such advice is always regarded as an eminent proof of sagacity in the giver.

On the point of the marriage he had recommended delay,—a course quite in accordance with Elsie's desire, who, curiously enough, ever since her treaty of marriage with Antonio had been commenced, had cherished the most whimsical, jealous dislike of him, as if he were about to get away her grandchild from her; and this rose at times so high that she could scarcely speak peaceably to him,—a course of things which caused Antonio to open wide his great soft ox-eyes, and wonder at the ways of woman-kind; but he waited the event in philosophic tranquillity.

The morning sunbeams were shooting many a golden shaft among the orange-trees when Elsie returned and found Agnes yet kneeling at her prayers.

"Now, my little heart," said the old woman, when their morning meal was done, "I am going to give you a holiday to-day. I will go with you to the Convent, and you shall spend the day with the sisters, and so carry Saint Agnes her ring."

"Oh, thank you, grandmamma! how good you are! May I stop a little on the way, and pick some cyclamen and myrtles and daisies for her shrine?"

"Just as you like, child; but if you are going to do that, we must be off soon, for I must be at my stand betimes to sell oranges. I had them all picked this morning while my little darling was asleep."

"You always do everything, grandmamma, and leave me nothing to do: it is not fair. But, grandmamma, if we are going to get flowers by the way, let us follow down the stream, through the gorge, out upon the sea-beach, and so walk along the sands, and go by the back path up the rocks to the Convent: that walk is so shady and lovely at this time in the morning, and it is so fresh along by the sea-side!"

"As you please, dearie; but first fill a little basket with our best oranges for the sisters."

"Trust me for that!" And the girl ran eagerly to the house, and drew from her treasures a little white wicker basket, which she proceeded to line curiously with orange-leaves, sticking sprays of blossoms in a wreath round the border.

"Now for some of our best blood-oranges!" she said;—"old Jocunda says they put her in mind of pomegranates. And here are some of these little ones,—see here, grandmamma!" she exclaimed, as she turned and held up a branch just broken, where five small golden balls grew together with a pearly spray of white buds just beyond them.

The exercise of springing up for the branch had sent a vivid glow into her clear brown cheek, and her eyes were dilated with excitement and pleasure; and as she stood joyously holding the branch, while the flickering shadows fell on her beautiful face, she seemed more like a painter's dream than a reality.

Her grandmother stood a moment admiring her.

"She's too good and too pretty for Antonio or any other man: she ought to be kept to look at," she said to herself. "If I could keep her always, no man should have her; but death will come, and youth and beauty go, and so somebody must care for her."

When the basket was filled and trimmed, Agnes took it on her arm. Elsie raised and poised on her head the great square basket that contained her merchandise, and began walking erect and straight down the narrow rocky stairs that led into the gorge, holding her distaff with its white flax in her hands, and stepping as easily as if she bore no burden.

Agnes followed her with light, irregular movements, glancing aside from time to time, as a tuft of flowers or a feathery spray of leaves attracted her fancy. In a few moments her hands were too full, and her woollen apron of many-colored stripes was raised over one arm to hold her treasures, while a hymn to Saint Agnes, which she constantly murmured to herself, came in little ripples of sound, now from behind a rock, and now out of a tuft of bushes, to show where the wanderer was hid. The song, like many Italian ones, would be nothing in English, —only a musical repetition of sweet words to a very simple and childlike

idea, the *bella, bella, bella* ringing out in every verse with a tender joyousness that seemed in harmony with the waving ferns and pendent flowers and long ivy-wreaths from among which its notes issued. "Beautiful and sweet Agnes," it said, in a thousand tender repetitions, "make me like thy little white lamb! Beautiful Agnes, take me to the green fields where Christ's lambs are feeding! Sweeter than the rose, fairer than the lily, take me where thou art!"

At the bottom of the ravine a little stream tinkles its way among stones so mossy in their deep, cool shadow as to appear all verdure; for seldom the light of the sun can reach the darkness where they lie. A little bridge, hewn from solid rock, throws across the shrunken stream an arch much wider than its waters seem to demand; for in spring and autumn, when the torrents wash down from the mountains, its volume is often suddenly increased.

This bridge was so entirely and evenly grown over with short thick moss that it might seem cut of some strange kind of living green velvet, and here and there it was quaintly embroidered with small blossoming tufts of white alyssum, or feathers of ferns and maiden's-hair which shook and trembled to every breeze. Nothing could be lovelier than this mossy bridge, when some stray sunbeam, slanting up the gorge, took a fancy to light it up with golden hues, and give transparent greenness to the tremulous thin leaves that waved upon it.

On this spot Elsie paused a moment, and called back after

Agnes, who had disappeared into one of those deep grottos with which the sides of the gorge are perforated, and which are almost entirely veiled by the pendent ivy-wreaths.

"Agnes! Agnes! wild girl! come quick!"

Only the sound of "*Bella, bella Agnella*" came out of the ivy-leaves to answer her; but it sounded so happy and innocent that Elsie could not forbear a smile, and in a moment Agnes came springing down with a quantity of the feathery lycopodium in her hands, which grows nowhere so well as in moist and dripping places.

Out of her apron were hanging festoons of golden broom, crimson gladiolus, and long, trailing sprays of ivy; while she held aloft in triumph a handful of the most superb cyclamen, whose rosy crowns rise so beautifully above their dark quaint leaves in moist and shady places.

"See, see, grandmother, what an offering I have! Saint Agnes will be pleased with me to-day; for I believe in her heart she loves flowers better than gems."

"Well, well, wild one,—time flies, we must hurry." And crossing the bridge quickly, the grandmother struck into a mossy foot-path that led them, after some walking, under the old Roman bridge at the gateway of Sorrento. Two hundred feet above their heads rose the mighty arches, enamelled with moss and feathered with ferns all the way; and below this bridge the gorge grew somewhat wider, its sides gradually receding and leaving a beautiful flat tract of land, which was laid out as an

orange-orchard. The golden fruit was shut in by rocky walls on either side which here formed a perfect hot-bed, and no oranges were earlier or finer.

Through this beautiful orchard the two at length emerged from the gorge upon the sea-sands, where lay the blue Mediterranean swathed in bands of morning mist, its many-colored waters shimmering with a thousand reflected lights, and old Capri panting through sultry blue mists, and Vesuvius with his cloud-spotted sides and smoke-wreathed top burst into view. At a little distance a boatload of bronzed fishermen had just drawn in a net, from which they were throwing out a quantity of sardines, which flapped and fluttered in the sunshine like scales of silver. The wind blowing freshly bore thousands of little purple waves to break one after another at the foamy line which lay on the sand.

Agnes ran gayly along the beach with her flowers and vines fluttering from her gay striped apron, and her cheeks flushed with exercise and pleasure,—sometimes stopping and turning with animation to her grandmother to point out the various floral treasures that enamelled every crevice and rift of the steep wall of rock which rose perpendicularly above their heads in that whole line of the shore which is crowned with the old city of Sorrento: and surely never did rocky wall show to the open sea a face more picturesque and flowery. The deep red cliff was hollowed here and there into fanciful grottos, draped with every varied hue and form of vegetable beauty. Here a crevice high in air was all abloom with purple gillyflower, and depending in

festoons above it the golden blossoms of the broom; here a cleft seemed to be a nestling-place for a colony of gladiolus, with its crimson flowers and blade-like leaves; here the silver-frosted foliage of the miller-geranium, or of the wormwood, toned down the extravagant brightness of other blooms by its cooler tints. In some places it seemed as if a sort of floral cascade were tumbling confusedly over the rocks, mingling all hues and all forms in a tangled mass of beauty.

"Well, well," said old Elsie, as Agnes pointed to some superb gillyflowers which grew nearly half-way up the precipice,— "is the child possessed? You have all the gorge in your apron already. Stop looking, and let us hurry on."

After a half-hour's walk, they came to a winding staircase cut in the rock, which led them a zigzag course up through galleries and grottos looking out through curious windows and loop-holes upon the sea, till finally they emerged at the old sculptured portal of a shady garden which was surrounded by the cloistered arcades of the Convent of Saint Agnes.

The Convent of Saint Agnes was one of those monuments in which the piety of the Middle Ages delighted to commemorate the triumphs of the new Christianity over the old Heathenism.

The balmy climate and paradisiacal charms of Sorrento and the adjacent shores of Naples had made them favorite resorts during the latter period of the Roman Empire,—a period when the whole civilized world seemed to human view about to be dissolved in the corruption of universal sensuality. The shores of

Baiae were witnesses of the orgies and cruelties of Nero and a court made in his likeness, and the palpitating loveliness of Capri became the hot-bed of the unnatural vices of Tiberius. The whole of Southern Italy was sunk in a debasement of animalism and ferocity which seemed irrecoverable, and would have been so, had it not been for the handful of salt which a Galilean peasant had about that time east into the putrid, fermenting mass of human society.

We must not wonder at the zeal which caused the artistic Italian nature to love to celebrate the passing away of an era of unnatural vice and demoniac cruelty by visible images of the purity, the tenderness, the universal benevolence which Jesus had brought into the world.

Some time about the middle of the thirteenth century, it had been a favorite enterprise of a princess of a royal family in Naples to erect a convent to Saint Agnes, the guardian of female purity, out of the wrecks and remains of an ancient temple of Venus, whose white pillars and graceful acanthus-leaves once crowned a portion of the precipice on which the town was built, and were reflected from the glassy blue of the sea at its feet. It was said that this princess was the first lady abbess. Be that as it may, it proved to be a favorite retreat for many ladies of rank and religious aspiration, whom ill-fortune in some of its varying forms led to seek its quiet shades, and it was well and richly endowed by its royal patrons.

It was built after the manner of conventual buildings generally,

—in a hollow square, with a cloistered walk around the inside looking upon a garden.

The portal at which Agnes and her grandmother knocked, after ascending the winding staircase cut in the precipice, opened through an arched passage into this garden.

As the ponderous door swung open, it was pleasant to hear the lulling sound of a fountain, which came forth with a gentle patter, like that of soft summer rain, and to see the waving of rose-bushes and golden jessamines, and smell the perfumes of orange-blossoms mingling with those of a thousand other flowers.

The door was opened by an odd-looking portress. She might be seventy-five or eighty; her cheeks were of the color of very yellow parchment drawn in dry wrinkles; her eyes were those large, dark, lustrous ones so common in her country, but seemed, in the general decay and shrinking of every other part of her face, to have acquired a wild, unnatural appearance; while the falling away of her teeth left nothing to impede the meeting of her hooked nose with her chin. Add to this, she was hump-backed, and twisted in her figure; and one needs all the force of her very good-natured, kindly smile to redeem the image of poor old Jocunda from association with that of some Thracian witch, and cause one to see in her the appropriate portress of a Christian institution.

Nevertheless, Agnes fell upon her neck and imprinted a very fervent kiss upon what was left of her withered cheek, and was repaid by a shower of those epithets of endearment which in the

language of Italy fly thick and fast as the petals of the orange-blossom from her groves.

"Well, well," said old Elsie,—"I'm going to leave her here to-day. You've no objections, I suppose?"

"Bless the sweet lamb, no! She belongs here of good right. I believe blessed Saint Agnes has adopted her; for I've seen her smile, plain as could be, when the little one brought her flowers."

"Well, Agnes," said the old woman, "I shall come for you after the Ave Maria." Saying which, she lifted her basket and departed.

The garden where the two were left was one of the most peaceful retreats that the imagination of a poet could create.

Around it ran on all sides the Byzantine arches of a cloistered walk, which, according to the quaint, rich fashion of that style, had been painted with vermilion, blue, and gold. The vaulted roof was spangled with gold stars on a blue ground, and along the sides was a series of fresco pictures representing the various scenes in the life of Saint Agnes; and as the foundress of the Convent was royal in her means, there was no lack either of gold or gems or of gorgeous painting.

Full justice was done in the first picture to the princely wealth and estate of the fair Agnes, who was represented as a pure-looking, pensive child, standing in a thoughtful attitude, with long ripples of golden hair flowing down over a simple white tunic, and her small hands clasping a cross on her bosom, while, kneeling at her feet, obsequious slaves and tire-women were offering the richest gems and the most gorgeous robes to her

serious and abstracted gaze.

In another, she was represented as walking modestly to school, and winning the admiration of the son of the Roman Praetor, who fell sick—so says the legend—for the love of her.

Then there was the demand of her hand in marriage by the princely father of the young man, and her calm rejection of the gorgeous gifts and splendid gems which he had brought to purchase her consent.

Then followed in order her accusation before the tribunals as a Christian, her trial, and the various scenes of her martyrdom.

Although the drawing of the figures and the treatment of the subjects had the quaint stiffness of the thirteenth century, their general effect, as seen from the shady bowers of the garden, was of a solemn brightness, a strange and fanciful richness, which was poetical and impressive.

In the centre of the garden was a fountain of white marble, which evidently was the wreck of something that had belonged to the old Greek temple. The statue of a nymph sat on a green mossy pedestal in the midst of a sculptured basin, and from a partially reversed urn on which she was leaning a clear stream of water dashed down from one mossy fragment to another, till it lost itself in the placid pool.

The figure and face of this nymph, in their classic finish of outline, formed a striking contrast to the drawing of the Byzantine pairings within the cloisters, and their juxtaposition in the same inclosure seemed a presentation of the spirit of a

past and present era: the past so graceful in line, so perfect and airy in conception, so utterly without spiritual aspiration or life; the present limited in artistic power, but so earnest, so intense, seeming to struggle and burn, amid its stiff and restricted boundaries, for the expression of some diviner phase of humanity.

Nevertheless, the nymph of the fountain, different in style and execution as it was, was so fair a creature, that it was thought best, after the spirit of those days, to purge her from all heathen and improper histories by baptizing her in the waters of her own fountain, and bestowing on her the name of the saint to whose convent she was devoted. The simple sisterhood, little conversant in nice points of antiquity, regarded her as Saint Agnes dispensing the waters of purity to her convent; and marvellous and sacred properties were ascribed to the water, when taken fasting with a sufficient number of prayers and other religious exercises. All around the neighborhood of this fountain the ground was one bed of blue and white violets, whose fragrance filled the air, and which were deemed by the nuns to have come up there in especial token of the favor with which Saint Agnes regarded the conversion of this heathen relic to pious and Christian uses.

This nymph had been an especial favorite of the childhood of Agnes, and she had always had a pleasure which she could not exactly account for in gazing upon it. It is seldom that one sees in the antique conception of the immortals any trace

of human feeling. Passionless perfection and repose seem to be their uniform character. But now and then from the ruins of Southern Italy fragments have been dug, not only pure in outline, but invested with a strange pathetic charm, as if the calm, inviolable circle of divinity had been touched by some sorrowing sense of that unexplained anguish with which the whole lower creation groans. One sees this mystery of expression in the face of that strange and beautiful Psyche which still enchants the Museum of Naples. Something of this charm of mournful pathos lingered on the beautiful features of this nymph,—an expression so delicate and shadowy that it seemed to address itself only to finer natures. It was as if all the silent, patient woe and discouragement of a dumb antiquity had been congealed into this memorial. Agnes was often conscious, when a child, of being saddened by it, and yet drawn towards it with a mysterious attraction.

About this fountain, under the shadow of bending rose-trees and yellow jessamines, was a circle of garden-seats, adopted also from the ruins of the past. Here a graceful Corinthian capital, with every white acanthus-leaf perfect, stood in a mat of acanthus-leaves of Nature's own making, glossy green and sharply cut; and there was a long portion of a frieze sculptured with graceful dancing figures; and in another place a fragment of a fluted column, with lycopodium and colosseum vine hanging from its fissures in graceful draping. On these seats Agnes had dreamed away many a tranquil hour, making garlands of violets,

and listening to the marvellous legends of old Jocunda.

In order to understand anything of the true idea of conventual life in those days, we must consider that books were as yet unknown, except as literary rarities, and reading and writing were among the rare accomplishments of the higher classes, and that Italy, from the time that the great Roman Empire fell and broke into a thousand shivers, had been subject to a continual series of conflicts and struggles, which took from life all security. Norman, Dane, Sicilian, Spaniard, Frenchman, and German mingled and struggled, now up and now down; and every struggle was attended by the little ceremonies of sacking towns, burning villages, and routing out entire populations to utter misery and wretchedness. During these tumultuous ages, those buildings consecrated by a religion recognized alike by all parties afforded to misfortune the only inviolable asylum, and to feeble and discouraged spirits the only home safe from the prospect of reverses.

If the destiny of woman is a problem that calls for grave attention even in our enlightened times, and if she is too often a sufferer from the inevitable movements of society, what must have been her position and needs in those ruder ages, unless the genius of Christianity had opened refuges for her weakness, made inviolable by the awful sanctions of religion?

What could they do, all these girls and women together, with the twenty-four long hours of every day, without reading or writing, and without the care of children? Enough: with

their multiplied diurnal prayer periods, with each its chants and ritual of observances,—with the preparation for meals, and the clearing away thereafter,—with the care of the chapel, shrine, sacred gifts, drapery, and ornaments,—with embroidering altar-cloths and making sacred tapers,—with preparing conserves of rose-leaves and curious spiceries,—with mixing drugs for the sick,—with all those mutual offices and services to each other which their relations in one family gave rise to,—and with divers feminine gossipries and harmless chatterings and cooings, one can conceive that these dove-cots of the Church presented often some of the most tranquil scenes of those convulsive and disturbed periods.

Human nature probably had its varieties there as elsewhere. There were there the domineering and the weak, the ignorant and the vulgar and the patrician and the princess, and though professedly all brought on the footing of sisterly equality, we are not to suppose any Utopian degree of perfection among them. The way of pure spirituality was probably, in the convent as well as out, that strait and narrow one which there be few to find. There, as elsewhere, the devotee who sought to progress faster toward heaven than suited the paces of her fellow—travellers was reckoned a troublesome enthusiast, till she got far enough in advance to be worshipped as a saint.

Sister Theresa, the abbess of this convent, was the youngest daughter in a princely Neapolitan family, who from her cradle had been destined to the cloister, in order that her brother

and sister might inherit more splendid fortunes and form more splendid connections. She had been sent to this place too early to have much recollection of any other mode of life; and when the time came to take the irrevocable step, she renounced with composure a world she had never known.

Her brother had endowed her with a *livre des heures*, illuminated with all the wealth of blue and gold and divers colors which the art of those times afforded,—a work executed by a pupil of the celebrated Frà Angelico; and the possession of this treasure was regarded by her as a far richer inheritance than that princely state of which she knew nothing. Her neat little cell had a window that looked down on the sea,—on Capri, with its fantastic grottos,—on Vesuvius, with its weird daily and nightly changes. The light that came in from the joint reflection of sea and sky gave a golden and picturesque coloring to the simple and bare furniture, and in sunny weather she often sat there, just as a lizard lies upon a wall, with the simple, warm, delightful sense of living and being amid, scenes of so much beauty. Of the life that people lived in the outer world, the struggle, the hope, the fear, the vivid joy, the bitter sorrow, Sister Theresa knew nothing. She could form no judgment and give no advice founded on any such experience.

The only life she knew was a certain ideal one, drawn from, the legends of the saints; and her piety was a calm, pure enthusiasm which had never been disturbed by a temptation or a struggle. Her rule in the Convent was even and serene; but those who came

to her flock from the real world, from the trials and temptations of a real experience, were always enigmas to her, and she could scarcely comprehend or aid them.

In fact, since in the cloister, as everywhere else, character will find its level, it was old Jocunda who was the real governess of the Convent. Jocunda was originally a peasant woman, whose husband had been drafted to some of the wars of his betters, and she had followed his fortunes in the camp. In the sack of a fortress, she lost her husband and four sons, all the children she had, and herself received an injury which distorted her form, and so she took refuge in the Convent. Here her energy and *savoir-faire* rendered her indispensable in every department. She made the bargains, bought the provisions, (being allowed to sally forth for these purposes,) and formed the medium by which the timid, abstract, defenceless nuns accomplished those material relations with the world with which the utmost saintliness cannot afford to dispense. Besides and above all this, Jocunda's wide experience and endless capabilities of narrative made her an invaluable resource for enlivening any dull hours that might be upon the hands of the sisterhood; and all these recommendations, together with a strong mother-wit and native sense, soon made her so much the leading spirit in the Convent that Mother Theresa herself might be said to be under her dominion.

"So, so," she said to Agnes, when she had closed the gate after Elsie,— "you never come empty-handed. What lovely oranges!—worth double any that one can buy of anybody else but your

grandmother."

"Yes, and these flowers I brought to dress the altar."

"Ah, yes! Saint Agnes has given you a particular grace for that," said Jocunda.

"And I have brought a ring for her treasury," said Agnes, taking out the gift of the Cavalier.

"Holy Mother! here is something, to be sure!" said Jocunda, catching it eagerly. "Why, Agnes, this is a diamond,—and as pretty a one as ever I saw. How it shines!" she added, holding it up. "That's a prince's present. How did you get it?"

"I want to tell our mother about it," said Agnes.

"You do?" said Jocunda. "You'd better tell me. I know fifty times as much about such things as she."

"Dear Jocunda, I will tell you, too; but I love Mother Theresa, and I ought to give it to her first."

"As you please, then," said Jocunda. "Well, put your flowers here by the fountain, where the spray will keep them cool, and we will go to her."

\* \* \* \* \*

# GREEK LINES

Blessed are the shadows of porches and cloisters! Blessed the walls that shut us out from the dusty, dazzling world, and shed upon us the repose and consolation of our own serene humanity! We, harassed among the base utilities of life, made weary and sore by the ceaseless struggles of emulation and daily warfare, turn wistfully to the Peripatetic among the shady groves of Athens,—dream of quiet Saracenic courts, echoing with plashy fountains,—of hooded monks, pacing away their cloistered lives beneath storied vaults and little patches of sky,—knowing, while we dream, that out of these came of yore the happiness of the old *eurekas* and the deep sweetness of ancient knowledge. And then, away from the city of our toil, the tumult of our ambitions, we gratefully find Vallombrosas of our own, where we walk not alone, but in the pleasant companionship of elevated thoughts, and of old sages and masters, long passed away, but still wise and gentle to those who approach them with faith and simplicity. Here, like those chimes which wander unheeded over the house-tops of the roaring town, till they drop down blessed dews of Heaven into still, grass-grown courts and deserted by-ways, the great universal human heart beats closer to our own, and our whole being palpitates with almost ethereal sympathies. Voices of old minstrels, wandering down to us on loving lips through the generations, murmur in our ears the dear burden

of human, affection for men and things; and the same tale is poured abundantly into our hearts by all those great masters who, through their Art, have become to us oracles of Beauty and eloquent interpreters of the Love of God.

There are few persons so hardened in the practical life as not to have recognized that in these moments of large and spiritual stillness all the processes of the mind seem to be instinctively attuned to harmonies almost celestial. Experience and memory present their pictures softened and made gentle by some mysterious power. The imagination is swayed by the sweetest impulses of humanity; and the whole man is changed. The mere instincts of affinity are purified and deepened into tenderest affection, and all the external relations of existence

"come apparelled in more precious habit, More moving delicate and full of life, Into the eye and prospect of the soul,"

than when they offered themselves to the ordinary waking senses. This is a wonder and a mystery. I sometimes believe, thinking on these things, that we have inherited from our father Adam a habit of day-dreaming; that in this exile of coarse and work-day life our heated brows are sometimes fanned with breezes from some half-remembered Araby the Blest, and there instinctively come over us such visions of beatitude that the Paradise we have lost is recalled to us, and we live once more among the dreamy and grateful splendors of Eden. These moods come upon us so like memories! But you, graybeard travellers

in the Desert of Life, you are not to be deceived by the trickery of the elements; you know the moist *mirage*; you are not to be beguiled by it from your track; let the unwary dream dreams of bubbling wellsprings and pleasant shade, of palmy oases and tranquil repose; as for you, you must goad your camels and press onward for Jerusalem.

But I like to chase phantoms; I hate the plodding of the caravans. I turn aside and spread my own tent apart. Will you tarry awhile under its shadow, O serious and gentle stranger, and listen to some poor words of mine?

These memories of Eden! Let us cherish them, for they are not worthless or deceitful. We, who, when we can, carry our hearts in our eyes, know very well, and have often said it before, that Eden is not so many days' journey away from our feet that we may not inhale its perfumes and press our brows against its sod whenever we wish. It is not cant, I hope, to say that Eden is not lost entirely. There stands no angel at its gates with naming sword; nor did it fade away with all its legendary beauties, drop its leaves into the melancholy streams, leaving no trace behind of its glades and winding alleys, its stretches of flowery mead, its sunny hill-sides, and valleys of happiness and peace. But Eden still blooms wherever Beauty is in Nature; and Beauty, we know, is everywhere. We cannot escape from it, if we would. It is ever knocking at the door of our hearts in sweet and unexpected missions of grace and tenderness. We are haunted by it in our loneliest walks. Almost unconsciously, out of flowers and trees,

earth and sky, sunrises and sunsets,—out of mosses under the feet, mosses and pebbles and grasses,—out of the loveliness of moon and stars, their harmonies and changes,—out of sea-foam, and what sea-foam reveals to us of the rich and strange things beneath the waters far down,—out of sweet human eyes,—out of all these things creeps into our spirits the knowledge that God is Love, and His handiwork the expression of ineffable tenderness and affection. I believe, indeed, that the principle of Beauty, philosophically speaking, pervades all material objects, all motions and sounds in Nature,—that it enters intimately into the very idea of Creation. But we, poor finite beings, do not seek for it, as we do for gold and gems. We remain content with those conventional manifestations of it which are continually and instinctively touching our senses as we walk the earth. Fearfully and wonderfully as we are made, there is no quality in our being so blessed as this sensitiveness to Beauty. All the organs of our life are attuned by it to that vast universal symphony which, in spite of the warring elements of passion and prejudice, unites us in friendly sympathies with all mankind. If

"the meanest flower that blows can bring Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears,"—

if it can so move some of us, who have cared to open the portals of our hearts to receive and cherish the little waif,—why, verily, the simple violet that blooms alike under every sky, the passing cloud that floats changing ever over every land, gathering equal glories from the sunsets of Italy and Labrador, are more

potent missionaries of peace and good-will to all the earth than the most persuasive accents of human eloquence.

These are familiar truths. Like

"The stretchèd metre of an antique song,"

they flow from our grateful lips in ready words. But we do not suspect how these manifestations of material Beauty are received by the mysterious alembic of the soul,—how they are worked up there by exquisite and subtile processes of moral chemistry, humanized, spiritualized, and appropriated unconsciously to sweet uses of piety and affection. We do not know how the star, the flower, the dear human face, the movement of a wave, the song of a bird,—we do not know how these things enter into the heart, become ideal, mingle with human emotions, consecrate and are consecrated, and come forth once more into light, but transfigured into tenderest sympathies and the gentle offices of charity and grace. There was Wordsworth,—he knew something of this still machinery, this "kiss of toothèd wheels" within the soul of man. Listen to him,—he had been to Tintern Abbey and heard once more the "soft inland murmur" of the Wye;—

"These beauteous forms,

Through a long absence, have not been to me

As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:

But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din

Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,

In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,

Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart,

And passing even into my purer mind,  
With tranquil restoration:—*feelings, too,*  
*Of unremembered pleasure:* such, perhaps,  
As have no slight or trivial influence  
On that best portion of a good man's life,  
His little, nameless, unremembered acts  
Of kindness and of love."

And then who that has ever read it can forget his exquisite picture in the "Education of a little Child"?—

"And she shall lean her ear  
In many a secret place,  
Where rivulets dance their wayward round,  
*And beauty burn of murmuring sound*  
*Shall pass into her face!"*

The material Beauty of the world, as exhibited in the manifold objects, sounds, perfumes, motions of Nature, is created for a nobler purpose than only to delight the senses and please the aesthetic faculties. I believe it is the distant source whence flow all our dear daily affections. We know, that, according to the suggestions of our merely human passions and instincts, we ease our hearts of Love by heaping treasures and the choicest gifts of fancy in the laps of those whom we most dearly cherish. We take no credit to ourselves for such precious prodigalities; for they are the inevitable and disinterested outpourings of affection. They are received as such. And when we cast our eyes abroad

and behold the loving prodigality of a divine hand, we accept the manifestation, are made happy in the consciousness of being beloved, and, constituted as we are in the image and likeness of God, express our instinctive gratitude in those fine human sympathies which impress the seal of Truth on the primary idea of our creation.

And so, blessed are the shadows of porches and cloisters! Blessed the hours of serene meditation, when the "tender grace of days that are dead," of flowers that have faded, of scenes "gone glimmering through the dream of things that were," comes back to us with a new meaning, softening and refining the heart to unexpected capacities of affection. But how they fade away, these ghostly and unsubstantial pageants, when they "scent the morning air"! How they leave in our hearts nought but the dim consciousness that we are capable of an existence ineffably deeper and vaster than that which we lead in the visible world! Nought but this? Alas, poor human nature! do we leave the casket of Pandora open in wanton carelessness, and let all escape but the mere scent of the roses? Or does there not remain, behind an indefinable presence to comfort and console us,—the precious *Ideal of Beauty*,—

"The light that never was on sea or land,  
The inspiration and the poet's dream"?

The human heart forever yearns *to create*,—this is the pure

antique word for it,—to give expression and life to an evasive loveliness that haunts the soul in those moments when the body is laid asleep and the spirit walks. There is a continual and godlike longing to embody these elusive phantoms of Beauty. But the immortal songs which remain unsung, the exquisite idyls which gasp for words, the bewildering and restless imagery which seeks in vain the eternal repose of marble or of canvas,—while these confess the affectionate and divine desires of humanity, they prove how few there are to whom it is given to learn the great lesson of Creation. When one arises among us, who, like Pygmalion, makes no useless appeal to the Goddess of Beauty for the gift of life for his Ideal, and who creates as he was created, we cherish him as a great interpreter of human love. We call him poet, composer, artist, and speak of him reverently as *Master*. We say that his lips have been wet with dews of Hybla,—that, like the sage of Crotona, he has heard the music of the spheres,—that he comes to us, another Numa, radiant and inspired from the kisses of Egeria.

Thus, as infinite Love begets infinite Beauty, so does infinite Beauty reflect into finite perceptions that image of its divine parentage which the antique world worshipped under the personification of Astarte, Aphrodite, Venus, and recognized as the *great creative principle* lying at the root of all high Art.

There is a curious passage in Boehme, which relates how Satan, when asked the cause of the enmity of God and his own consequent downfall, replied,—"I wished to be an Artist." So,

according to antique tradition, Prometheus manufactured a man and woman of clay, animated them with fire stolen from the chariot of the Sun, and was punished for the crime of Creation; Titans chained him to the rocks of the Indian Caucasus for thirty thousand years!

This Ideal, this Aphrodite of old mythologies, still reigns over the world of Art, and every truly noble effort of the artist is saturated with her spirit, as with a religion. It is impossible for a true work of Art to exist, unless this great creative principle of Love be present in its inception, in its execution, in its detail. It must be pervaded with the warmth of human, passionate affection. The skill which we are so apt to worship is but the instrument in the hands of Love. It is the means by which this humanity is transferred to the work, and there idealized in the forms of Nature. Thus the test of Art is in our own hearts. It is not something far away from us, throwing into our presence gleaming reflections from some supernal source of Light and Beauty; but it is very near to us,—so near, that, like the other blessings which lie at our feet, we overlook it in our far-reaching searches after the imaginary good. We, poor underlings, have been taught in the school of sad experience the mortal agony of Love without Skill,—the power of perception, without the power of utterance. We know how dumb are the sweet melodies of our souls,—how fleeting their opulent and dreamy pageantries. But we have not fully learned the utter emptiness and desolation of Skill without Love. We accept its sounding brass and tinkling

cymbals for immortal harmonies. We look reverently upon its tortured marbles and its canvases stained with academic knowledge as revelations of higher intelligence; forgetting, that, if we go down to the quiet places of our own souls, we shall find there the universe reflected, like a microcosm, in the dark well-springs, and that out of these well-springs in the deep silence rises the beautiful Ideal, Anadyomene, to compensate and comfort us for the vacancy of Life. If we know ourselves, it is not to the dogmas of critics, the artificial rules of aesthetics, that we most wisely resort for judgments concerning works of Art. Though technical externals and the address of manipulation naturally take possession of our senses and warp our opinions, there are depths of immortal Truth within us, rarely sounded, indeed, but which can afford a standard and a criterion far nobler than the schools can give us.

The broken statues and columns and traditions and fragmentary classics which Greece has left us are so still and tranquil to the eye and ear, that we search in vain for the Delphic wisdom they contain, till we find it echoed in the sympathetic depths of our souls, and repeated in the half-impalpable Ideals there. It is to Greece that we must look for the external type of these Ideals, whose existence we but half suspect within us. It is not pleasant, perhaps, to think that we were nearly unconscious of the highest capacities of our humanity, till we recognized their full expression in the ashes of a distant and dead civilization,—that we did not know ourselves, till

"The airy tongues that syllable men's names  
In pathless wildernesses"

uttered knowledge to us among the ghastly ruins of Hellas. It is good for us to lend a spiritual ear to these ancient whisperings, and hear nymph calling to nymph and faun to faun, as they caper merrily with the god Pan through the silence. It is good for us to listen to that "inextinguishable laughter" of the happy immortals of Olympus, ever mingling with all the voices of Nature and setting them to the still sweet music of humanity, —good, because so we are reminded how close we are to the outward world, and how all its developments are figurative expressions of our near relationships with the visible Beauty of things. Thus it is that the poetic truths of old religions exquisitely vindicate themselves; thus we find, even we moderns, with our downward eyes and our wrinkled brows, that we still worship at the mythological altars of childlike divinities; and when we can get away from the distracting Bedlam of steam-shrieks and machinery, we behold the secrets of our own hearts, the Lares and Penates of our own households, reflected in the "white ideals" on antique vases and medallions.

Abstract lines are the most concentrated expressions of human ideas, and, as such, are peculiarly sensitive to the critical tests of all theories of the Beautiful. Distinguished from the more usual and direct means by which artists express their

inspirations and appeal to the sympathies of men, distinct from the common language of Art, which contents itself with conveying merely local and individual ideas, abstract lines are recognized as the grand hieroglyphic symbolism of the aggregate of human thought, the artistic manifestations of the great human Cosmos. The natural world, passing through the mind of man, is immediately interpreted and humanized by his creative power, and assumes the colors, forms, and harmonies of Painting, Sculpture, and Music. But abstract lines, as we find them in Architecture and in the ceramic arts, are the independent developments of this creative power, coming directly from humanity itself, and obtaining from the outward world only the most distant motives of composition. Thus it is an inevitable deduction that Architecture is the most *human* of all arts, and its lines the most *human* of all lines.

"A thing of beauty is a joy forever";

and the affectionate devotion with which this gift is received by finite intelligences from the hand of God is expressed in Art, when its infinite depth *can* be so expressed at all, in a twofold language,— the one objective, the other subjective; the one recalling the immediate source of the emotion, and presenting it palpably to the senses, arrayed in all the ineffable tenderness of Art, which is Love,—the other, portraying rather the emotion than the cause of it, and by an instinctive and

universal symbolism expressing the deep and serious joy with which the "thing of beauty" is welcomed to the heart. Hence come those lines which aesthetic writers term "Lines of Beauty," so eloquent to us with an uncomprehended meaning,—so near, and yet so far,—so simple, and yet so mysterious,—so animated with life and thought and musical motion, and yet so still and serene and spiritual. Links which bind us fraternally to old intelligences, tendrils by which the soul climbs up to a wider view of the glimmering landscape, they are grateful and consoling to us. We look with cognizant eyes at their subtle affinities with some unexpressed part of human life, and, turning one to another, are apt to murmur,

"We cannot understand: we love."

The mysteries of orb and cycle, with which old astrologers girded human life, and sought to define from celestial phenomena the horoscope of man, have been brought down to modern applications by learned philosophers and mathematicians. These have labored with a godlike energy and skill to trace the interior relationships existing between the recondite revelations of their Geometry, their wonderful laws of mathematical harmonies and unities, and those lines which by common consent are understood to be exponential of certain phases of our own existence. No well-organized intellect can fail to perceive that a sublime and immortal Truth underlies

these speculations. Undoubtedly, in the straight line, in the conic sections, in the innumerable composite curves of the mathematician, lie the germs of all these symbolic expressions. But the artist, whose lines of Beauty vary continually with the emotions which produce them, who feels in his own human heart the irresistible impulse which gives an exquisite balance and poise to those lines, cannot allow that the *spirit* of his compositions is governed by the exact and rigid formula; of the philosopher to any greater extent or in any other manner than as the numbers of the poet are ruled by the grammar of his language. These formulae may be applied as a curious test to ascertain what strange sympathies there may be between such lines and the vast organic harmonies of Nature and the Universe; but they do not enter into the soul of their creation any more than the limitations of counterpoint and rhythm laid their incubus on the lyre of Apollo. The porches where Callicrates, Hermogenes, and Callimachus walked were guarded by no such Cerberus as the disciples of Plato encountered at the entrance of the groves of the Academy,—

"[Greek: Oudeis ageometraetos eisito],"

"Let no one ignorant of Geometry enter here";

but the divine Aphrodite welcomed all mankind to the tender teachings of the Wild Acanthus, the Honeysuckle, and the Sea-

Shell, and all the deep utterances of boundless Beauty.

Truly, it is sad and dispiriting to the artist to find that all modern aesthetical writings limit and straiten the free walks of highest Art with strict laws deduced from rigid science, with mathematical proportions and the formal restrictions of fixed lines and curves, nicely adapted from the frigidities of Euclid. The line A B must equal the line C D; somewhere in space must be found the centre or the focus of every curve; and every angle must subtend a certain arc, to be easily found on reference to the tables of the text-books. "The melancholy days have come" for Art, when the meditative student finds his early footsteps loud among these dry, withered, and sapless leaves, instead of brushing away the dews by the fountains of perpetual youth. I am aware of no extant English work on Greek Lines which does not aim to reduce that magnificent old Hellenic poetry to the cold, hard limitations of Geometry. Modern Pharisees nail that antique Ideal of loveliness and purity to a mathematical cross.

Now it is capable of distinct proof, that abstract Lines of Beauty, even in a greater degree than any other expressions of Art, are born and baptized in Love. Because parabolic curves frequently *coincide* with these lines, it is no proof that they *created* them.

The Water-Lily, or Lotus, perpetually occurs in Oriental mythology as the sublime and hallowed symbol of the productive power in Nature,—the emblem of that great life-giving principle which the Hindu and the Egyptian and all early nations

instinctively elevated to the highest and most cherished place in their Pantheons. Payne Knight, quoted in Mr. Squier's work on the "Antiquities of America," ingeniously attributes the adoption of this symbol to the fact, that the Lotus, instead of rejecting its seeds from the vessels where they are germinated, nourishes them in its bosom till they have become perfect plants, when, arrayed in all the irresistible panoply of grace and beauty, they spring forth, Minerva-like, float down the current, and take root wherever deposited. And so it was used by nearly all the early peoples to express the creative spirit which gives life and vegetation to matter. Lacshmi, the beautiful Hindu goddess of abundance, corresponding to the Venus Aphrodite of the Greeks, was called "the Lotus-born," as having ascended from the ocean in this flower. Here, again, is the inevitable intermingling of the eternal principles of Beauty, Love, and the Creative Power in that pure triune medallion image which the ancients so tenderly cherished and so exquisitely worshipped with vestal fires and continual sacrifices of Art. Old Father Nile, reflecting in his deep, mysterious breast the monstrous temples of Nubia and Pylae, bears eloquent witness to the earnestness and sincerity of the old votive homage to Isis, "the Lotus-crowned" Venus of Egypt. For the symbolic Water-Lily, *recreated* by human Art, blooms forever in the capitals of Karnac and Thebes, and wherever columns were reared and lintels laid throughout the length and breadth of the "Land of Bondage." It is the key-note of all that architecture; and a brief examination into the principles

of this, new birth of the Lotus, of the monumental straightening and stiffening of its graceful and easy lines, will afford some insight into the strange processes of the human mind, when it follows the grandest impulse of Love, and out of the material beauties of Nature creates a work of Art.

It is well known that the religion of the old Egyptians led them to regard this life as a mere temporary incident, an unimportant phase of their progress toward that larger and grander state imaged to them with mysterious sublimity in the idea of Death or Eternity. In accordance with this belief, they expressed in their dwellings the sentiment of transitoriness and vicissitude, and in their tombs the immortality of calm repose. And so their houses have crumbled into dust ages ago, but their tombs are eternal. In all the relations of Life the sentiment of Death was present in some form or other. The hallowed mummies of their ancestors were the most sacred mortgages of their debts, and to redeem them speedily was a point of the highest honor. They had corpses at their feasts to remind them how transitory were the glory and happiness of the world, how eternal the tranquillity of Death.

Now, how was this prevailing idea expressed in their Art? They looked around them and saw that all Organic Life was full of movement and wavy lines; their much-loved Lotus undulated and bent playfully to the solemn flow of the great Nile; the Ibis fluttered with continual motion; their own bodies were full of ever-changing curves; and their whole visible existence was unsteady, like the waves of the sea. But when the temporary

Life was changed, and "this mortal put on immortality," their eyes and souls were filled with the utter stillness and repose of its external aspects; its features became rigid and fixed, and were settled to an everlasting and immutable calm; the vibrating grace of its lines departed, and their ever-varying complexity became simplified, and assumed the straightness and stiffness of Death. So the straight line, the natural expression of eternal repose, in contradistinction to the wavy line, which represents the animal movements of Life, became the motive and spirit of their Art. The anomaly of Death in Life was present in every development of the creative faculty, and no architectural feature could be so slight and unimportant as not to be thoroughly permeated with this sentiment. The tender and graceful lines of the Lotus became sublime and monumental under the religious loyalty of Egyptian chisels; and these lines, whether grouped or single, in the severity of their fateful repose, in their stateliness and immobility, wherever found, are awful with the presence of a grand serious humanity long passed away from any other contact with living creatures. The rendering of the human form, under this impulse of Art, produced results in which the idea of mutability was so overwhelmed in this grandeur of immortality, that we cry

"O melancholy eyes!

O vacant eyes! from which the soul has gone

To gaze in other lands,"

bend not upon us, living and loving mortals, that stony stare of death,—lest we too, as smit with the basilisk, be turned into monumental stone, and all the dear grace and movement of life be lost forever!

"Solid-set,  
And moulded in colossal calm,"

all the lines of this lost Art thus recall the sentiment of endless repose, and even the necessary curves of its mouldings are dead with straightness. The Love which produced these lines was not the passionate Love which we understand and feel; they were not the result of a sensuous impulse; but the Egyptian artist seemed ever to be standing alone in the midst of a trackless and limitless desert,—around him earth and sky meeting with no kiss of affection, no palpitating embrace of mutual sympathy; he felt himself encircled by a calm and pitiless Destiny, the cold expression of a Fate from which he could not flee, and in himself the centre and soul of it all. Oppressed thus with a vast sense of spiritual loneliness, when he uttered the inspirations of Art, the memories of playful palms and floating lilies and fluttering wings, though they came warm to the Love of his heart, were attuned in the outward expression to the deep, solemn, prevailing monotone of his humanity. His Love for the Lotus and the Ibis, more profound than the passion of the senses, dwelt serene in the bottom of his soul, and thence came forth transfigured and

dedicated to the very noblest uses of Life. And this is the Art of Egypt.

But among all the old nations which have perished with their gods, Greece appeals to our closest sympathies. She looks upon us with the smile of childhood, free, contented, and happy, with no ascetic self-denials to check her wild-flower growth, no stern religion to bind the liberty of her actions. All her external aspects are in harmony with the weakness and the strength of human nature. We recognize ourselves in her, and find all the characteristics of our own humanity there developed into a theism so divine, clothed with a personification so exquisite and poetical, that the Hellenic mythology seems still to live in our hearts, a silent and shadowy religion without ceremonies or altars or sacrifices. The festive gods of the "Iliad" made man a deity to himself, and his soul the dwelling-place of Ideal Beauty. In this Ideal they lived, and moved and had their being, and came forth thence, bronze, marble, chryselephantine, a statuesque and naked humanity, chaste in uncomprehended sin and glorified in antique virtue. The Beauty of this natural Life and the Love of it was the soul of the Greek Ideal; and the nation continually cherished and cultivated and refined this Ideal with impulses from groves of Arcadia, vales of Tempe, and flowery slopes of Attica, from the manliness of Olympic Games and the loveliness of Spartan Helens. They cherished and cultivated and refined it, because here they set up their altars to known gods and worshipped attributes which they could understand. The Ideal

was their religion, and the Art which came from it the expression of their highest aspiration.

Lines of Beauty, produced in such a soil, were not, as might at first be supposed, tropic growths of wanton and luxurious curves, wild, spontaneous utterances of superabundant Life. The finely-studied perception of the Greek artist admitted no merely animal, vegetable, instinctive, licentious renderings of what Nature was ever giving him with a liberal hand in the whorls of shells, the veins of leaves, the life of flames, the convolutions of serpents, the curly tresses of woman, the lazy grace of clouds, the easy sway of tendrils, flowers, and human motion. He was no literal interpreter of her whispered secrets. But the Grace of his Art was a *deliberate grace*,—a grace of thought and study. His lines were *creations*, and not *instincts* or *imitations*. They came from the depth of his Love, and it was his religion so to nurture and educate his sensitiveness to Beauty and his power to love and create it, that his works of Art should be deeds of passionate worship and expressions of a godlike humanity. Unlike the Egyptian's, there was nothing in *his* creed to check the sweet excess of Life, and no grim shadow, "feared of man," scared him in his walks, or preached to him sermons of mortality in the stones and violets of the wayside. Life was hallowed and dear to him for its own sake. He saw it was lovable, and he made it the theme of his noblest poems, his subtlest philosophies, and his highest Art. Hence the infinite joy and endless laughter on Olympus, the day-long feasting, *the silver stir of strings* in the

hollow shell of the exquisite Phoebus, "the soft song of the Muse with voices sweetly replying."

I believe that all true Lines of Grace and Beauty, in their highest, *intellectual, human* significance, may be concentrated and expressed in one; not a *precise* and *exact* line, like a formula of mathematics, to which the neophyte can refer for deductions of Grace to suit any premises or conditions. This, of course, is contrary to the spirit of beautiful design; and the ingenious Hay,—who maintains that his "composite ellipse" is capable of universal application in the arts of ornamental composition, and that by its use any desirable lines in mouldings or vases can be mechanically produced, especially Greek lines, falls into the grave error of endeavoring to materialize and fix that *animula vagula, blandula*, that coy and evasive spirit of Art, which is its peculiar characteristic, and gives to its works inspiration, harmony, and poetic sentiment. Ideal Beauty can be hatched from no geometrical eggs. But the line which I refer to, as the expression of most subtile Grace, pretends to be merely a type of that large language of forms with which the most refined intellects of antiquity uttered their Love, and their joyful worship of Aphrodite. This line, of course, is Greek.

[Illustration]

The three great distinctive eras of Art, in a purely psychological sense, have been the Egyptian, the Grecian, and the Romanesque,—including in the latter term both Roman Art itself and all subsequent Art, whether derived directly

or indirectly from Rome, as the Byzantine, the Moresque, the Mediaeval, and the Renaissance. Selecting the most characteristic works to which these great eras respectively gave birth, it is not difficult, by comparison, to ascertain the master-spirit, or type, to which each of these three families may be reduced. If we place these types side by side, the result will be as in the diagram, presenting to the eye, at one view, the concentration of three civilizations, DESTINY, LOVE, and LIFE;—Destiny, finding utterance in the stern and inflexible simplicity of the tombs and obelisks of Egypt; Love, expressing itself in the statuesque and thoughtful grace of Grecian temples, statues, and urns; Life, in the sensuous and impulsive change, evident in all the developments of Art, since Greece became Achaia, a province of the Roman Empire. Here we behold the perpetual youth, the immortal genius of Hellas, tempering the solid repose of Egypt with the passion of Life. This intermediate Beauty is the essence of the age of Pericles; and in it "the capable eye" may discover the pose of the Cnidian Venus of Praxiteles, of the Jupiter Olympius of Phidias, and the other lost wonders of ancient chisels, and, more directly, the tender severity of Doric capitals, and the secret grace of the shafts of the Parthenon.

You remember Pliny's account of the visit of Apelles to the great painter Protogenes, at Rhodes;—how, not finding him at home, Apelles inscribed a line upon a board, assuring the slave that this line would signify to the master who had been to see him. Whatever the line was, Protogenes, we hear, recognized in it

the hand of the greatest limner of Greece. It was the signature of that Ideal, known to the antique world by its wider developments in the famous pictures of the Venus Anadyomene, and Alexander with the Thunderbolt, hung in the temple of Diana at Ephesus.

The gravity with which this apparently trifling anecdote is given us from antiquity evidently proves that it was one of the household tales of old Greece. It did not seem absurd in those times, when Art was recognized as a great Unity, an elaborate system of infinite language founded on the simplest elements of Life, and in its grandest and widest flowings bearing ever in its bosom, like a great river, the memory of the little weeping Naiad far up among the mountains with her "impoverished urn." And so every great national Art, growing up naturally out of the necessities of an earnest people, expressing the grand motives of their Life, as that of the Greeks and the Egyptians and the mediaeval nations of Europe, is founded on the simplest laws. So long as these laws are obeyed in simplicity and Love, Art is good and true; so long as it remembers the purity and earnestness of its childhood, the strength that is ordained out of the mouth of babes is present in all its expressions; but when it spreads itself abroad in the fens and marshes of humanity, it has lost the purity of its aim, the singleness and unity of its action,—it becomes stagnant, and sleeps in the Death of Idleness.

Therefore I believe in the expressiveness of single lines as symbols of the grandest phases of human Life. And when one studies Greek Art, the whole motive of it seems so childlike and

so simple that the impulse to seek for that little Naiad which is the fountain and source of it all is irresistible. Look at the line I have traced, and see if there is not a curious humanity about it. It is impossible to produce it with a wanton flourish of the pencil, as I have done in that wavy, licentious curve, which Hogarth, in his quaint "Analysis of Beauty," assumes as the line of true Grace; nor yet are its infinite motions governed by any cold mathematical laws. In it is the earnest and deliberate labor of Love. There are thought and tenderness in every instant of it; but this thought is grave and almost solemn, and this tenderness is chastened and purified by wise reserve. Measure it by time, and you will find it no momentary delight, no voluptuous excess which comes and goes in a breath; but there is a whole cycle of deep human feeling in it. It is the serene joy of a nation, and not the passionate impulse of a man. Observe, from beginning to end, its intention is to give expression by the serpentine line to that sentiment of beautiful Life which was the worship of the Greeks; but they did not toss it off, like a wine-cup at a feast. They prolonged it through all the varied emotions of a lifetime with exquisite art, making it the path of their education in childhood and of their wider experience as men. All the impulses of humanity they bent to a kindly parallelism with it. This is that famous principle of Variety in Unity which St. Augustine and hosts of other philosophers considered the true Ideal of Beauty. Start with this line from the top upon its journeying: look at the hesitation of it, ere it launches into action; how it cherishes

its resources, and gathers up its strength!— with a confidence in its beautiful Destiny, and yet a chaste shrinking from the full enjoyment of it, how inevitably, but how purely, it yields itself up to the sudden curve! It does not embrace this curve with a sensuous sweep, nor does it, like Sappho, throw itself with quick passion into the tide. It enters with maidenly and dignified reserve into its new Life; and then how is this new Life spent? As you glance at it, it seems almost ascetic, and reminds you of the rigid fatalism of Egypt. Its grace is almost strangled, as those other serpents were in the grasp of the child Hercules. But if you watch it attentively, you will find it ever changing, though with subtlest refinement, ever human, and true to the great laws of emotion. There is no straight line here,—no Death in Life,—but the severity and composure of intellectual meditation,—meditation, moving with serious pleasure along the grooves of happy change,—

"As all the motions of its  
Were governed by a strain  
Of music, audible to it alone!"

As the eye is cheated out of its rectitude, following this grave delight, and seems to dilate and grow dreamy in the cool shade of imaginative cloisters and groves, the wanton joyousness of Life, with its long waving lily-stems and the luscious pending of vines, comes with dim recollections into the mind, but modified by a certain habitual chastity of thought. Follow the line still farther,

and you will find it grateful to the sight, neither fatiguing with excess of monotony nor cloying the appetite with change. And when the round hour is full and the end comes, this end is met by a Fate, which does not clip with the shears of Atropos and leave an aching void, but fulfils itself in gentleness and peace. The line bends quietly and unconsciously towards the beautiful consummation, and then dies, because its work is done.

This is the way the Greeks made that Line which represents to "the capable eye" the true Attic civilization. And when we examine the innumerable lines of Grecian architecture, we find that they never for an instant lost sight of this Ideal. The fine humanity of it was everywhere present, and mingled not only with such grand and heroic lines as those of the sloping pediments and long-drawn entablatures of the Parthenon and Theseion, bending them into curves so subtly modulated that our coarse perceptions did not perceive the variations from the dead straight lines till the careful admeasurements of Penrose and Cockerel and their *confrères* of France assured us of the fact,—not only did it make these enormous harp-strings vibrate with deep human soul-music, but there is not an abstract line in moulding, column, or vase, belonging to old Greece or the islands of the Aegean or Ionia or the colonies of Italy, which does not have the same intensity of meaning, the same statuesque Life of thought. Besides, I very much doubt if the same line, in all its parts and proportions, is ever repeated twice,—certainly not with any emphasis; and this is following out the great law of our

existence, which varies the emotion infinitely with the occasion which produced it. Let us suppose, for example, that a moulding was needed to crown a column with fitting glory and grace. Now the capital of a column may fairly be called the throne of Ideal expression; it is the *cour d'honneur* of Art. The architect in this emergency did not set himself at "the antique," and seek for authorities, and reproduce and copy; for he desired not only an abstract line of Beauty there, but a line which in every respect should answer all the requirements of its peculiar position, a line which should have its individual and essential relationships with the other lines around it, those of shaft, architrave, frieze, and cornice, should swell its fitting melody into the great *fugue*. And so, between the summit of the long shaft and that square block, the abacus, on which reposes the dead weight of the lintel of Greece, the Doric *echinus* was fashioned, crowning the serene Atlas-labor of the column with exquisite glory, and uniting the upright and horizontal masses of the order with a marriage ring, whose beauty is its perfect fitness. The profile of this moulding may be rudely likened to the upper and middle parts of the line assumed as the representative of the Greek Ideal. But it varied ever with the exigency of circumstances. Over the short and solid shafts of Paestum, it became flat and almost horizontal; they needed there an expression of emphatic and sudden grace; they meet the *abacus* with a moulding of passionate energy, in which the soft undulations of Beauty are nearly lost in a masculine earnestness of purpose. On the other hand, the more slender and

feminine columns of the Parthenon glide into the *echinus* with gentleness and sweetness, crown themselves with a diadem of chastity, as if it grew there by Fate, preordained from the base of the shaft, like a flower from the root. It was created as with "the Dorian mood of soft recorders." Between these two extremes there is an infinity of change, everywhere modified and governed by "the study of imagination."

The same characteristics of nervous grace and severe intellectual restraint are found wherever the true Greek artist put his hand and his heart to work. Every moulding bears the impress of utter refinement, and modulates the light which falls upon it with exquisite and harmonious gradations of shade. The sun, as it touches it, makes visible music there, as if it were the harp of Memnon,—now giving us a shadow-line sharp, strict, and defined, now drawing along a beam of quick and dazzling light, and now dying away softly and insensibly into cool shade again. All the phenomena of reflected lights, half lights, and broken lights are brought in and attuned to the great daedal melody of the edifice. The antiquities of Attica afford nothing frivolous or capricious or merely fanciful, no playful extravagances or wanton meanderings of line; but ever loyal to the purity of a high Ideal, they present to us, even from their ruins, a wonderful and very evident Unity of expression, pervading and governing every possible mood and manner of thought. No phase of Art that ever existed gives us a line so very human and simple in itself as this Greek type, and so pliable to all the uses of

monumental language. If this type were a mere mathematical type, its applicability to the expression of human emotions would be limited to a formalism absolutely fatal to the freedom of thought in Art. But because it has its birth in intense Love, in refined appreciation of all the movements of Life and all the utterances of Creation, because it is the humanized essence of these motions and developments, it becomes thus an inestimable Unity, containing within itself the germs of a new world of ever new delight.

When this type in Greek Art was brought to bear on the interpretation of natural forms into architectural language, we shall curiously discover that the creative pride of the artist and his reverence for the integrity of his Ideal were so great, that he not only subjected these forms to a rigid subservience to the abstract line till Nature was nearly lost in Art, but the immediate adoption of these forms under any circumstances was limited to some three or four of the most ordinary vegetable productions of Greece and to one sea-shell. This wise reserve and self-restraint, among the boundless riches of a delicious climate and a soil teeming with fertility, present to us the best proof of the fastidious purity of artistic intentions. Nature poured out at the feet of the Greek artist a most plenteous offering, and the lap of Flora overflowed for him with tempting garlands of Beauty; but he did not gather these up with any greedy and indiscriminate hand, he did not intoxicate himself at the harvest of the vineyard. Full of the divinity of high purpose, and intent upon the nobler

aim of creating a pure work of Art, he considered serenely what were his needs for decoration, took lovingly a few of the most ordinary forms, and, studying the creative sentiment of them, breathed a new and immortal life into them, and tenderly and hesitatingly applied them to the work of illustrating his grand Ideal. These leaves and flowers were selected not for their own sake, though he felt them to be beautiful, but for the decorative motive they suggested, the humanity there was in them, and the harmony they had with the emergencies of his design. The design was not bent to accommodate them, but they were translated and lifted up into the sphere of Art.

A drawing of the Ionic capitals of the temple of Minerva Polias in the Erechtheum is accessible to nearly everybody. It is well to turn to it and see what use the Greeks, under such impulses, made of the Wild Honeysuckle and of Sea-Shells. Perhaps this capital affords one of the most instructive epitomes of Greek Art, inasmuch as in its composition use is made of so much that Nature gave, and those gifts are so tenderly modelled and wrought into such exquisite harmony and eloquent repose. Examine the volute: this is the nearest approach to a mathematical result that can be found in Grecian architecture; yet this very approximation is one of the greatest triumphs of Art. No geometrical rule has been discovered which can exactly produce the spirals of the Erechtheum, nor can they be found in shells. In avoiding the exuberance of the latter and the rigid formalism of the former, a work of human thought and Love has been

evolved. Follow one of these volutes with your eye from its centre outwards, taking all its congeries of lines into companionship; you find your sympathies at once strangely engaged. There is an intoxication in the gradual and melodious expansion of these curves. They seem to be full of destiny, bearing you along, as upon an inevitable tide, towards some larger sphere of action. Ere you have grown weary with the monotony of the spiral, you find that the system of lines which compose it gradually leave their obedience to the centrifugal forces of the volute, and, assuming new relationships of parts, sweep gracefully across the summit of the shaft, and become presently entangled in the reversed motion of the other volute, at whose centre Ariadne seems to stand, gathering together all the clues of this labyrinth of Beauty. This may seem fanciful to one who regards these things as matters of formalism. But inasmuch as, to the studious eye of affection, they suggest human action and human sympathies, this is a proof that they had their birth in some corresponding affection. It is the inanimate body of Geometry made spiritual and living by the Love of the human heart. And when a later generation reduced the Ionic volutes to rule, and endeavored to inscribe them with the gyrations of the compass, they have no further interest for us, save as a mathematical problem with an unknown value equal to a mysterious symbol  $x$ , in which the soul takes no comfort. But true Art, using the volute, inevitably makes it eloquent with an intensity of meaning, a delicacy of expression, which awaken certain very inward and very poetic sentiments, akin to those

from which it was evolved in the process of creation. When we reasonably regard the printed words of an author, we not only behold an ingenious collection of alphabetical symbols, but are placed by them in direct contact with the mind which brought them together, and, for the moment, our train of thought so entirely coincides with that of the writer, that, though perhaps he died centuries ago, he may be said to live again in us. This great work of architectural Art has the same immortal life; and though it may not so often find a heart capable of discerning the sentiment and intention of it under the outward lines, yet that heart, when found, is touched very deeply and very tenderly. We imbibe the creative impulse of the artist, and the beautiful thing has a new life in our affections. Studying it, we become artists and poets ere we are aware. The alphabet becomes a living soul.

Under the volutes of this capital, and belting the top of the shaft, is a broad band of ornamentation, so happy and effectual in its uses, and so pure and perfect in its details, that a careful examination of it will, perhaps, afford us some knowledge of that spiritual essence in the antique Ideal out of which arose the silent and motionless Beauty of Greek marbles.

Here are brought together the *sentiments* of certain vegetable productions of Greece, but sentiments so entirely subordinated to the flexure of the abstract line, that their natural significance is almost lost in a new and more human meaning. Here is the Honeysuckle, the wildest, the most elastic and undulating of plants, under the severe discipline of order and artistic symmetry,

assuming a strict and chaste propriety, a formal elegance, which render it at once monumental and dignified. The harmonious succession and repetition of parts, the graceful contrasts of curves and the strict poise and balance of them, their unity in variety, their entire subjection to aesthetic laws, their serious and emphatic earnestness of purpose,—these qualities combine in the creation of one of the purest works of Art ever conceived by the human mind. It is called the Ionic *Anthemion*, and suggests in its composition all the creative powers of Greece. Its value is not alone in the sensuous gratification of the eye, as with the Arabesque tangles of the Alhambra, but it is more especially in its complete intellectual expression, the evidence there is in it of thoughtfulness and judgment and deliberate care. The inventor studied not alone the plant, but his own spiritual relationships with it; and ere he made his interpretation, he considered how, in mythological traditions, each flower once bore a human shape, and how Daphne and Syrinx, Narcissus and Philemon, and those other idyllic beings, were eased of the stress of human emotions by becoming Laurels and Reeds and Daffodils and sturdy Oaks, and how human nature was thus diffused through all created things and was epigrammatically expressed in them.

"And he, with many feelings, many thoughts,  
Made up a meditative joy, and found  
Religious meanings in the forms of Nature."

Like Faustus, he was permitted to look into her deep bosom,

as into the bosom of a friend,—to find his brothers in the still wood, in the air, and in the water,—to see himself and the mysterious wonders of his own breast in the movements of the elements. And so he took Nature as a figurative exponent of humanity, and extracted the symbolic truths from her productions, and used them nobly in his Art.

Garbett, an English aesthetical writer, assures us that the *Anthemion* bears not the slightest resemblance to the Honeysuckle or any other plant, "being no representation of anything in Nature, but simply the necessary result of the complete and systematic attempt to combine unity and variety by the principle of *gradation*." But here he speaks like a geometer, and not like an artist. He seeks rather for the resemblance of form than the resemblance of spirit, and, failing to realize the object of his search, he endeavors to find a cause for this exquisite effect in pure reason. With equal perversity, Poe endeavored to persuade the public that his "Raven" was the result of mere aesthetical deductions!

And here the old burden of our song must once again be heard: If we would know the golden secret of the Greek Ideal, we must ourselves first learn how to *love* with the wisdom and chastity of old Hellenic passion. We must sacrifice Taste and Fancy and Prejudice, whose specious superficialities are embodied in the errors of modern Art,—we must sacrifice these at the shrine of the true Aphrodite; else the modern Procrustes will continue to stretch and torture Greek Lines on geometrical beds, and the

aesthetic Pharisees around us will still crucify the Greek Ideal.  
[To be continued.]

# THE ROSE ENTHRONED

It melts and seethes, the chaos that shall grow  
To adamant beneath the house of life:  
In hissing hatred atoms clash, and go  
To meet intenser strife.

And ere that fever leaves the granite veins,  
Down thunders o'er the waste a torrid sea:  
Now Flood, now Fire, alternate despot reigns,—  
Immortal foes to be.

Built by the warring elements, they rise,  
The massive earth-foundations, tier on tier,  
Where slimy monsters with unhuman eyes  
Their hideous heads uprear.

The building of the world is not for you  
That glare upon each other, and devour:  
Race floating after race fades out of view,  
Till beauty springs from power

Meanwhile from crumbling rocks and shoals of death  
Shoots up rank verdure to the hidden sun;  
The gulfs are eddying to the vague, sweet breath  
Of richer life begun,—

Richer and sweeter far than aught before,  
Though rooted in the grave of what has been.  
Unnumbered burials yet must heap Earth's floor,  
Ere she her heir shall win;

And ever nobler lives and deaths more grand  
For nourishment of that which is to come:  
While 'mid the ruins of the work she planned  
Sits Nature, blind and dumb.

For whom or what she plans, she knows no more  
Than any mother of her unborn child;  
Yet beautiful forewarnings murmur o'er  
Her desolations wild.

Slowly the clamor and the clash subside:  
Earth's restlessness her patient hopes subdue:  
Mild oceans shoreward heave a pulse-like tide:  
The skies are veined with blue.

And life works through the growing quietness  
To bring some darling mystery into form:  
Beauty her fairest Possible would dress  
In colors pure and warm.

Within the depths of palpitating seas  
A tender tint;—anon a line of grace  
Some lovely thought from its dull atom frees,

The coming joy to trace;—

A pencilled moss on tablets of the sand,  
Such as shall veil the unbudded maiden-blush  
Of beauty yet to gladden the green land;—  
A breathing, through the hush,

Of some sealed perfume longing to burst out  
And give its prisoned rapture to the air;—  
A brooding hope, a promise through a doubt  
Is whispered everywhere.

And, every dawn a shade more clear, the skies  
A flush as from the heart of heaven disclose:  
Through earth and sea and air a message flies,  
Prophetic of the Rose.

At last a morning comes of sunshine still,  
When not a dew-drop trembles on the grass;  
When all winds sleep, and every pool and rill  
Is like a burnished glass

Where a long-looked-for guest may lean to gaze;  
When day on earth rests royally,—a crown  
Of molten glory, flashing diamond rays,  
From heaven let lightly down.

In golden silence, breathless, all things stand.  
What answer meets this questioning repose?

A sudden gush of light and odors bland,  
And, lo! the Rose! the Rose!

The birds break into canticles around;  
The winds lift Jubilate to the skies:  
For, twin-born with the rose on Eden-ground,  
Love blooms in human eyes.

Life's marvellous queen-flower blossoms only so,  
In dust of low ideals rooted fast.  
Ever the Beautiful is moulded slow  
From truth in errors past.

What fiery fields of Chaos must be won,  
What battling Titans rear themselves a tomb,  
What births and resurrections greet the sun,  
Before the rose can bloom!

And of some wonder-blossom yet we dream,  
Whereof the time that is infolds the seed,—  
Some flower of light, to which the rose shall seem  
A fair and fragile weed.

# A BAG OF MEAL

I often wonder what was the appearance of Saul's mother, when she walked up the narrow aisle of the meeting-house and presented her boy's brow for the mystic drops that sealed him with the name of Saul.

Saul isn't a common name. It is well,—for Saul is not an ordinary man,—and—Saul is my husband.

We came in the cool of an evening upon the brink of the swift river that flows past the village of Skylight.

The silence of a nearing experience brooded over my spirit; for Saul's home was a vast unknown to me, and I fain would have delayed awhile its coming.

I wonder if the primal motion of unknown powers, like electricity, for instance, is spiral. Have you ever seen it winding out of a pair of human eyes, knowing that every fresh coil was a spring of the soul, and felt it fixing itself deeper and deeper in your own, until you knew that you were held by it?

Perhaps not. I have: as when Saul turned to me in the cool of that evening, and drew my eyes away, by the power I have spoken of, from the West, where the orange of sunset was fading into twilight.

I have felt it otherwise. A horse was standing, surrounded by snow; the biting winds were cutting across the common, and the blanket with which he had been covered had fallen from

him, and lay on the snow. He had turned his head toward the place where it lay, and his eyes were fixed upon it with such power, that, if that blanket had been endowed with one particle of sensation, it would have got up, and folded itself, without a murmur, around the shivering animal. Such a picture as it was! Just then, I would have been Rosa Bonheur; but being as I was, I couldn't be expected to blanket a horse in a crowded street, could I?

We were on the brink of the river. Saul drew my eyes away, and said,—

"You are unhappy, Lucy."

"No," I answered,—"not that."

"That does not content me. May I ask what troubles you?"

I aroused myself to reason. Saul is never satisfied, unless I assign a reason for any mood I am in.

"Saul!" I questioned, "why do the mortals that we call Poets write, and why do non-Poets, like ourselves, sigh over the melancholy days of autumn, and why are we silent and thoughtful every time we think enough of the setting sun to watch its going down?"

"Simply because the winter coming is cold and dreary, in the one case,—and in the other, there are several reasons. Some natures dread the darkness; others have not accomplished the wishes or the work of the day."

"I don't think you go below the surface," I ventured. "It seems to me that the entire reason is simple want of faith, a vague

uncertainty as to the coming back of the dried-up leaf and flower, when they perish, and a fear, though unexpressed, that the sun is going down out of your sight for the last time, and you would hold it a little longer."

"Would you now to-night, Lucy?"

"If I could."

My husband did not speak again for a long time, and gradually I went back into my individuality.

We came upon an eminence outside the river-valley, and within sight of the village.

"Is it well? do you like it?" asked Saul.

The village was nested in among the elms to such a degree that I could only reply,—

"I am certain that I shall, when I find out what it is."

Saul stayed the impatient horse at the point where we then were, and, indicating a height above and a depth below, told me the legend of the naming of his village.

It was given thus:—

"A long time ago, when the soundless tread of the moccason walked fearlessly over the bed of echoes in this valley, two warriors, Wabausee and Waubeeneemah, came one day upon the river, at its opposite sides. Both were, weary with the march; both wore the glory of many scalps. Their belts were heavy with wampum, their hearts were heavy with hate. Wabausee was down amid the dark pines that grew beside the river's brink. Waubeeneemah was upon the high land above the river. With

folded arms and unmoved faces they stood, whilst in successive flashes across the stream their eyes met, until Wabausee slowly opened out his arms, and, clasping a towering tree, cried out, 'I see sky!' and he steadfastly fixed his gaze upon the crevices of brightness that urged their way down amid the pines over his head.

"Waubeeneemah turned his eyes over the broad valley, and answered the cry with, 'I see light!'"

"Thus they stood, one with his eyes downward, the other with his intent on the sky, and fast and furious ran the river, swollen with the meltings of many snows, and fierce and quick rang the battle-cries of 'I see sky!' 'I see light!'"

"A white man was near; his cabin lay just below; he had climbed a tree above Waubeeneemah and remained a silent witness of this wordy war, until, looking up the river, he saw a canoe that had broken from its fastenings and was rushing down to the rapids below. It contained the families of the two warriors, who were helplessly striving against the swift flow of waters.

"The white man spoke, and the warriors listened. He cried, 'Look to your canoe! and see Skylight!'"

"Through the pines rushed Wabausee, and down the river-bank Waubeeneemah, and into the tide, until they met the coming canoe, across whose birchen bow they gave the grasp of peace, and ever since that time Indian and white man have called this place Skylight."

"Where are the Indians now?" I could not help asking,—and

yet with no purpose, beyond expression of the thought question.

The shadows were gathering, the eyelids of the day were closing. Saul caught me up again through the shadows into those eyes of his, and answered,—

"Here, Lucy! I am a pale form of Waubeeneemah! I know it. I feel it now!

I sometimes ache for foemen and the wilds."

Why do I think of that time to-night on the Big Blue, far away from Skylight, and imagine that the prairie airs are ringing with the echoes of the great cries that are heard in my native land, "I see North!" and "I see South!" and there is no white man of them all high enough to see the United States?

I've wandered! Let me think,—yes, I have it! My thought began with trying to fancy Saul's mother taking him to baptism.

She was dead, when I went to Skylight, her son's wife.

She went into the higher life at thirty-three of the threescore-and-ten cycle of the human period. How young to die!

The longer we live, the stronger grows the wish to live. And why not? When the circle is almost ended, and all the momentum of threescore-and-ten is gained, why not pass the line and enter into second childhood? What more beautiful truth in Nature's I Am, than obedience to this law?

I've another fancy on the Big Blue to-night. It is a place for fancies. I remember—a long time ago it seems, and yet I am not so old as Saul's mother—the first knowledge that I had of life. I saw the sun come up one morning out of the sea, and with it

there came out of the night of my past a consciousness. I was a soul, and held relations separate from other souls to that risen sun and that sea. From that hour I grew into life. A growth from the Unseen came to me with every day, born I knew not how into my soul. I sent out nothing to people the future. All came to me.

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