

THE ISLES OF SUNSET

BY

ARTHUR CHRISTOPHER BENSON

The Isles of Sunset

About midway between the two horns of the bay, the Isles of Sunset pierced the sea. There was deep blue water all around them, and the sharp and fretted pinnacles of rock rose steeply up to heaven. The top of the largest was blunt, and covered with a little carpet of grass and sea-herbs. The rest were nought but cruel spires, on which no foot but that of sea-birds could go. At one place there was a small creek, into which a boat might be thrust, but only when the sea was calm; and near the top of the rock, just over this, was the dark mouth of a little cave.

The bay in which the Isles lay was quite deserted; the moorland came to the edge of the cliffs, and through a steep and rocky ravine, the sides of which were overgrown with ferns and low trees, all brushed landward by the fierce winds, a stream fell hoarsely to the sea, through deep rockpools. The only living things there were the wild birds, the moorfowl in the heather, hawks that built in the rock face, and pigeons that made their nest in hollow places. Sometimes a stag pacing slowly on the cliff-top would look over, but that was seldom.

Yet on these desolate and fearful rocks there dwelt a man, a hermit named David. He had grown up as a fisher-boy in the neighbouring village—an awkward silent boy with large eyes which looked as though they were full of inward dreams. The people of the place were Christians after a sort, though it was but seldom that a priest came near them; and then only by sea, for there was no road to the place. But David as a boy had heard a little of the Lord Christ, and of the bitter sacrifice he made for men; and there grew up in his heart a great desire to serve Him, and he prayed much in his heart to the Lord, that he would show him what he might do. He had no parents living. His mother was long dead, and his father had been drowned at sea. He lived in the house of his uncle, a poor fisherman with an angry temper, where he fared very hardly; for there were many mouths to feed, and the worst fell to the least akin. But he grew up handy and active, with strong limbs and a sure head; and he was well worth his victual, for he was a good fisherman, patient of wind and rain; and he could scale the cliff in places where none other dared go, and bring down the eggs and feathers of the sea-birds. So they had much use of him, and gave him but little love in return. When he was free of work, the boy loved to wander alone, and he would lie on the heather in the warm sun, with his face to the ground, drinking in the fragrant breath of the earth, and praying earnestly in his heart to the Lord, who had made the earth so fair and the sea so terrible. When he came to man's estate, he had thoughts of making a home of his own, but his uncle seemed to need him—so he lingered on, doing as he was bid, very silent, but

full of his own thoughts, and sure that the Lord would call him when he had need of him; one by one the children of the family grew up and went their ways; then his uncle's wife died, and then at last one day, when he was out fishing with his uncle, there came a squall and they beat for home. But the boat was upset and his uncle was drowned; and David himself was cast ashore in a wonderful manner, and found himself all alone.

Now while he doubted what he should do, he dreamed a dream that wrought powerfully in his mind. He thought that he was walking in the dusk beside the sea, which was running very high, when he saw a light drawing near to him over the waves. It was not like the light of a lantern, but a diffused and pale light, like the moon labouring in a cloud. The sea began to abate its violence, and then David saw a figure coming to him, walking, it seemed, upon the water as upon dry land, sometimes lower, sometimes higher, as the waves ran high or low. He stopped in a great wonder to watch the approach of the figure, and he saw that it was that of a young man, going very slowly and tranquilly, and looking about him with a gentle and smiling air of command. All about him was a light, the source of which David could not see, but he seemed like a man walking in the light of an open window, when all around is dark. As he came near, David saw that he was clad in a rough tunic of some dark stuff, which was girt up with a girdle at the waist. His head and his feet were bare. Yet though he seemed but poorly clad, he had the carriage of a great prince, whose power none would willingly question. But the strangest thing was that the sea grew calm before his feet, and though the wind was blowing fiercely, yet it did not stir the hair, which fell somewhat long on his shoulders, or so much as ruffle his robe. And then there came into David's head a verse of Scripture where it says, "What manner of man is this that even the winds and the sea obey him?" And then the answer came suddenly into David's mind, and he knelt down where he was upon the beach, and waited in a great and silent awe; and presently that One drew near, and in some way that David did not understand, for he used no form of speech, his eyes made question of David's soul, and seemed to read its depths. And then at last He spoke in words that He had before used to a fisherman beside another sea, and said very softly, "Follow Me." But He said not how He should be followed; and presently He seemed to depart in a shining track across the sea, till the light that went with Him sank like a star upon the verge. Then in his dream David was troubled, and knew not how to follow; till he thought that it might be given him, as it was given once to Peter, to walk dry-shod over the depth; but when he set foot upon the water there broke so furious a wave at him, that he knew not how to follow. So he went back and kneeled upon the sand, and said aloud in his doubt, "What shall I do, Lord?" and as the words sounded on his tongue he awoke.

Then all that day he pondered how he should find the Lord; for he knew that though he had a hope in his heart, and though he leaned much upon God, yet he had not wholly found him yet. God was sometimes with him and near to him, but sometimes far withdrawn; and then, for he was a very simple man, he said in himself, "I will give myself wholly to the search for my Lord. I will live solitary, and I will fix my mind upon Him"; for he thought within himself that his hard life, and the cares of the household in which he had dwelt, had been what had perhaps kept him outside; and therefore he thought that God had taken these cares away from him. And so he made up his mind.

Then he cast about where he had best dwell; and he thought of the Isles of Sunset as a lonely place, where he might live and not be disturbed. There was the little cave high up in the rock-face, looking towards the land, to which he had once scrambled up. This would give him shelter; and there were moreover some small patches of earth, near the base of the rock, where he could grow a few herbs and a little corn. He had some money of his own, which would keep him until his garden was grown up; and he could fish, he thought, from the rocks, and find shell-fish and other creatures of the sea, which would give him meat.

So the next day he bought a few tools that he thought he would need, and rowed all over when it was dusk. He put his small stores in a cave by the water's edge. The day after, he went and made a few farewells; he told no one where he was going; but it pleased him to find a little love for him in the hearts of some. One parting was a strangely sore one: there was an old and poor woman that lived very meanly in the place, who had an only granddaughter, a little maid. These two he loved very much, and had often done them small kindnesses. He kept this good-bye to the last, and went to the house after sundown. The old woman bade him sit down, and asked him what he meant to do, now that he was alone. "I am going away, mother," he said gently. The child, hearing this, came over the room from where she sate, and said to him, "No, David, do not go away." "Yes, dear child," he said, "I must even go." Then she said, "But where will you go? May I not come to see you sometimes?" and she put her small arms round his neck, and laid her cheek to his. Then David's heart was very full of love, and he said smiling, and with his arm round the child, "Dear one, I must not say where I am going—and it is a rough place, too, not fit for such tender little folk as you; but, if I can, I will come again and see you." Then the old grandmother, looking upon him very gravely, said, "Tell me what is in your mind." But he said, "Nay, mother, do not ask me; I am going to a place that is near and yet far; and I am going to seek for one whom I know not and yet know; and the way is long and dark." Then she forbore to ask him more, and fell to

pondering sadly; so after they had sate awhile, he rose up and loosed the child's arms from him, kissing her; and the tears stood in his eyes; and he thought in himself that God was very wise; for if he had had a home of his own, and children whom he loved, he could never have found it in his heart to leave them. So he went out.

Then he climbed up the steep path that led to the downs, and so to the bay where the Isles lay. And just as he reached the top, the moon ran out from a long bank of cloud; and he saw the village lie beneath him, very peaceful in the moonlight; there were lights in some of the windows; the roofs were silvered in the clear radiance of the moon, and the shadows lay dark between. He could see the little streets, every inch of which he knew, and the port below. He could see the coast stretch away to the east, headland after headland, growing fainter; and the great spaces of the sea, with the moon glittering on the waves. There was a holy and solemn peace about it all; and though his life had not been a happy one there, he knew in a flash that the place was very dear to his heart, and he said a prayer to God, that he would guard and cherish the village and those that dwelt there. Then he turned, and went on to the downs; and presently descended by a steep path to the sea, through the thickets. He took off his clothes, and tied them in a pack on his back; and then he stepped quietly into the bright water, which lapped very softly against the shore, a little wave every now and then falling gently, followed by a long rustling of the water on the sand, and a silence till the next wave fell. He waded on till he could swim, and then struck out to where the Isles stood, all sharp and bright in the moon. He swam with long quiet strokes, hearing the water ripple past; and soon the great crags loomed out above him, and he heard the waves fall among their rocky coves. At last he felt the ground beneath his feet; and coming out of the water he dressed himself, and then—for he would not venture on the cliffs in the uncertain light—gathering up some dried weeds of the sea, he made a pillow for his head and slept, in a wonderful peace of mind, until the moon set; and not long after there came a pale light over the sea in the east, brightening slowly, until at last the sun, like a fiery ball, broke upwards from the sea; and it was day.

Now when David awoke in the broad daylight, he found himself full of a great joy and peace. He seemed, as it were, to have leaped over a wide ditch, and to see the world across it. Now he was alone with God, and he had put all the old, mean, hateful life away from him. It did not even so much as peep into his mind that he would have to endure many hardships of body, rain, and chilly winds, a bed of rock, and fare both hard and scanty. This was not what had troubled him in the old days. What had vexed his heart had been unclean words and deeds, greediness, hardness, cruel taunts, the

lack of love, and the meanness and baseness of the petty life. All that was behind him now; he felt free and strong, and while he moved about to spy out his new kingdom, he sang loudly to himself a song of praise. The place pleased him mightily; over his head ran up the cliff with its stony precipices and dizzy ledges. The lower rocks all fringed with weeds, like sea-beasts with rough hair, stood out black from the deep blue water that lay round the rocks. He loved to hear the heavy plunge of the great waves around his bastions, the thin cries of the sea-birds that sailed about the precipice, or that lit on their airy perches. Everywhere was a brisk sharp scent of the sea, and the fresh breeze, most unlike the close sour smell of the little houses. He felt himself free and strong and clean, and he thought of all the things he would say to God in the pleasant solitude, and how he would hear the low and far-off voice of the Father speaking gently with his soul.

His first care was to find the cave that was to shelter him. He spent the day in climbing very carefully and lightly all over the face of the rock. Never had he known his hand so strong, or his head so sure. He sate for a time on a little ledge, to which he had climbed on the crag face, and he feasted his eyes upon the sight of the great cliffs of the mainland that ran opposite him, to left and right, in a wide half-circle. His eyes dwelt with pleasure upon the high sloping shoulders of rock, on which the sun now shone very peacefully, the strip of moorland at the top, the brushwood growing in the sloping coves, the clean shingle at the base of the rocks, and the blue sky over all. That was the world as God had made it, and as He intended it to be; it was only men who made it evil, huddling together in their small and filthy dens, so intent on their little ugly lives, their food and drink and wicked ways.

Presently he found the cave-mouth, and noted in his mind the best way thither. The cave seemed to him a very sweet place; the mouth was all fringed with little ferns; inside it was dry and clean; and in a few hours he had disposed all his small goods within it. There was a low slope, on one side of the rocks, where the fern grew plentifully. He gathered great armfuls of the dry red stalks, and made himself a rustling bed. So the day wore pleasantly away. One of his cares was to find water; but here it seemed that God blessed him very instantly, for he found a place near the sea, where a little spring soaked cool out of the rock, with a pleasant carpet of moss and yellow flowers. He found, too, some beds of shell-fish, which he saw would give him food and bait for his fishing. So about sundown he cast a line from the end of the rocks and presently caught a fish, a ling, which lives round rocky shores. This he broiled at a small fire of driftwood, for he had brought tinder with him; and it pleased him to think of the meal that the Apostles took with the risen Christ, a meal which He had made for them, and to which He Himself called them; for that, too, was a broiled fish, and eaten by

the edge of the sea. Also he ate a little of the bread he had brought with him; and with it some of a brisk juicy herb, called samphire, that sprouted richly in the cliff, which gave his meat an aromatic savour; and with a drink of fresh spring water he dined well, and was content; then he climbed within the cave, and fell asleep to the sound of the wind buffeting in the cliff, and the fall of great waves on the sea beaches.

Now I might make a book of all the things that David saw and did on the islands, but they were mostly simple and humble things. He fared very hard, but though he often wondered how he would find food for the next day, it always came to him; and he kept his health in a way which seemed to him to be marvellous; indeed he seemed to himself to be both stronger in body and lighter in spirit than he had even been before. He both saw and heard things that he could not explain. There were sounds the nature of which he could not divine; on certain days there was a far-off booming, even when the waves seemed still; at times, too, there was a low musical note in the air, like the throbbing of a tense string of metal; once or twice he heard a sound like soft singing, and wondered in his heart what creature of the sea it might be that uttered it. On stormy nights there were sad moans and cries, and he often thought that there were strange and unseen creatures about him, who hid themselves from sight, but whose voices he certainly heard; but he was never afraid. One night he saw a very beautiful thing; it had been a still day, but there was an anxious sound in the wind which he knew portended a storm; he was strangely restless on such days, and woke many times in the night: at last he could bear the silence of the cave no more, and went out, descending swiftly by the rocks, the path over which he could have now followed blindfold, down to the edge of the sea. Then he saw that the waves that beat against the rock were all luminous, as though lit with an inner light; suddenly, far below, how deep he knew not, he saw a great shoal of fish, some of them very large, coming softly round the rocks; the water, as it touched their blunt snouts, burst as it were into soft flame, and showed every twinkle of their fins and every beat of their tails. The shoal came swiftly round the rocks, swimming intently, and it seemed as though there was no end of them. But at last the crowd grew thinner and then ceased; but he could still see the water rippling all radiant in the great sea-pools, showing the motion of broad ribbons of seaweed that swayed to and fro, and lighting up odd horned beasts that stirred upon the ledges. From that day forth he was often filled with a silent wonder at all the sleepless life that moved beneath the vast waters, and that knew nothing of the little human lives that fretted themselves out in the thin air above. That day was to him like the opening of a door into the vast heart of God.

But for all his happiness, the thought weighed upon him, day after day, of all the grief and unhappiness that there was about him. A dying bird that he found in a pool, and that rolled its filmy eye upon him in fear, as if to ask why he must disturb it in its last sad languid hour, the terror in which so many of the small fish abode—he saw once, when the sea was clear, a big fish dart like a dark shadow, with open mouth and gleaming eye, on a little shoal of fishes that sported joyfully in the sun; they scattered in haste, but they had lost their fellows—all this made him ponder; but most of all there weighed on his heart the thought of the world he had left, of how men spoke evil of each other, and did each other hurt; of children whose lot was to be beaten and cursed for no fault, but to please the cruel temper of a master; of patient women, who had so much to bear—so that sometimes he had dark thoughts of why God made the world so fair, and then left so much that was amiss, like a foul stream that makes a clear pool turbid. And there came into his head a horror of taking the lives of creatures for his own use—the shell-worm that writhed as he pulled it from the shell; the bright fish that came up struggling and gasping from the water, and that fought under his hand—and at last he made up his mind that he would take no more life, though how he would live he knew not; and as for the world of men, he became very desirous to help a little as best he could; and there being at this time a wreck in the bay, when a boat and all on board were lost, he thought that he would wish, if he could, to keep a fire lit on dark nights, so that ships that passed should see that there was a dwelling there, and so keep farther away from the dangerous rocks.

By this time it had become known in the country where he was—his figure had been seen several times from the cliffs; and one day there had come a boat, with some of those that knew him, to the island. He had no wish to mix again with men; but neither did he desire to avoid them, if it was God's will that they should come. So he came down courteously, and spoke with the master of the boat, who asked him very curiously of his life and all that he did. David told him all; and when the master asked him why he had thus fled away from the world, David said simply that he had done so that he might pray to God in peace. Then the master said that there were many waking hours in the day, and he knew not what there might be to say prayers about, "for," he said, "you have no book to make prayers out of, like the priests, and you have no store of good-sounding words with which to catch the ear of God." Then David said that he prayed to God to guard all things great and small, and to help himself along the steep road to heaven. Then the master wondered very much, and said that a man must please himself, and no doubt it was a holy work. Then he asked a little shamefacedly for David to pray for him, that he might be kept safe from

shipwreck, and have good fortune for fishing, to which David replied, "Oh, I do that already."

Before the master went away, and he stayed not long, he asked David how he lived, and offered him food. And David being then in a strait—for he had lately vowed to take no life, said gladly that he would have anything they could give him. So the master gave him some victual. And it happened, just at this time, that some of the boats from the village had a wonderful escape from a storm, and through that season they caught fish in abundance; so it was soon noised abroad that this was all because of David's prayers; and after that he never had need of food, for they brought him many little presents, such as eggs, fruit, and bread—for he would take no meat—giving them into his hands when he was on the lower rocks, or leaving them on a ledge in the cove when he was aloft. And as, when the fish were plenteous, they gave him food in gratitude, and when fish were scarce, they gave it him even more abundantly than they might have his prayers, David was never in lack; in all of which he saw the wonderful hand of God working for him.

Now David pondered very much how he might keep a light aloft on dangerous nights.

His first thought was to find a sheltered place among the rocks to seaward, where his fire could burn and not be extinguished by the wind; but, though he climbed all about the rocks, he could find no place to his mind. One day, however, he was in the furthest recess of his cave, when he felt that among the rocks a little thin wind blew constantly from one corner; and feeling about with his hands, he found that it came out of a small crack in the rocks. The stone above it seemed to be loose; and he perceived after a while that the end of the cave must be very near to the seaward face of the crag, and that the cave ran right through the rock, and was only kept from opening on the outer side by a thin barrier of stone; so after several attempts, using all his strength, he worked the stone loose; and then with a great effort, he thrust the stone out; it fell with a great noise, leaping among the crags, and at last plunging into the sea. The wind rushed in through the gap; then he saw that he had, as it were, a small window looking out to sea, so small that he could not pass through it, but large enough to let a light shine forth, if there were a light set there; but though it seemed again to him like the guiding hand of God, he could not devise how he should shelter the light within from the wind. Indeed the hole made the cave a far less habitable place for himself, for the wind whistled very shrewdly through; he found it easy enough to stop the gap with an old fisherman's coat—but then the light was hidden from view. So he tried a further plan; he dug a hole in the earth at the top of the cliff, and then made a bed of dry sand at the

bottom of it; and he piled up dry seaweed and wood within, thinking that if he lit his beacon there, it might be sheltered from the wind, and would burn fiercely enough to throw up the flame above the top of the pit. He saw that heavy rain would extinguish his fire; but the nights were most dangerous when it blew too strongly for rain to fall. So one night, when the wind blew strongly from the sea, he laid wood in order, which he had gathered on the land, and conveyed with many toilsome journeys over to the island. Then he lighted the pile, but it was as he feared; the wind blew fiercely over the top, and drove the flames downward, so that the pit glowed with a fierce heat; and sometimes a lighted brand was caught up and whirled over the cliffs; but he saw plainly enough that the light would not show out at sea. He was very sad at this, and at last went heavily down to his cave, not knowing what he should do; and pondering long before he slept, he could see no way out.

In the morning he went up to the cliff-top again, and turned his steps to the pit. The fire had burned itself out, but the sides were still warm to the touch; all the ashes had been blown by the force of the wind out of the hole; but he saw some bright things lie in the sand, which he could not wholly understand, till he pulled them out and examined them carefully. They were like smooth tubes and lumps of a clear stuff, like molten crystal or frozen honey, full of bubbles and stains, but still strangely transparent; and then, though he saw that these must in some way have proceeded from the burning of the fire, he felt as though they must have been sent to him for some wise reason. He turned them over and over, and held them up to the light. It came suddenly into his mind how he would use these heavenly crystals; he would make, he thought, a frame of wood, and set these jewels in the frame. Then he would set this in the hole of his cave, and burn a light behind; and the light would thus show over the sea, and not be extinguished.

So this after much labour he did; he fitted all the clear pieces into the frame, and he fixed the frame very firm in the hole with wooden wedges. Then he pushed clay into the cracks between the edges of the frame and the stone. Then he told some of those who came to him that he had need of oil for a purpose, and they brought it him in abundance, and wicks for a lamp; and these he set in an earthen bowl filled with oil, and on a dark night, when all was finished, he lit his lamp; and then clambered out on the furthest rocks of the island, and saw his light burn in the rocks, not clearly, indeed, but like an eye of glimmering fire. Then he was very glad at heart, and he told the fishermen how he had found means to set a light among the cliffs, and that he would burn it on dark and stormy nights, so that they might see the light and avoid the danger. The tidings soon spread, and they thought it a

very magical and holy device; but did not doubt that the knowledge of it was given to David by God.

So David was in great happiness. For he knew that the Father had answered his prayer, and allowed him, however little, to help the seafaring folk.

He made other things after that; he put up a doorway with a door of wood in the entering of the cave; he made, too, a little boat that he might go to and fro to the land without swimming. And now, having no care to provide food, for they brought it him in abundance, he turned his mind to many small things. He made a holy carving in the cave, of Christ upon the cross—and he carved around it a number of creatures, not men only but birds and beasts, looking to the Cross, for he thought that the beasts also should have their joy in the great offering. His fame spread abroad; and there came a priest to see him, who abode with him for some days, prayed with him, and taught him much of the faith. The priest gave him a book, and showed him the letters; but David, though he longed to read what was within, could not hold the letters in his head.

He tamed, too, the wild birds of the rock, so that they came to his call; one was a gull, which became so fearless that it would come to his cave, and sit silent on a rock, watching him while he worked. He kept a fish, too, in a pool of the rocks, that would rise to the edge when he approached.

But all this time he went not near to the village; for his solitude had become very dear to him, and he prayed continually; and at evening and morning and midday he would sing praises to God, simple words that he had made.

One morning he awoke in the cave, and as he bestirred himself he thought in his heart of all his happiness. It was a still morning, but the sky was overcast. Suddenly he heard voices below him; and thinking that he was needed, he descended the rocks quickly, and came down a little way from a group of sailors who were standing on the shore; there was a boat drawn up on the sand, and near at hand there lay at anchor a small ship, that seemed to be of a foreign gear, and larger than he was wont to see. He came somewhat suddenly upon the group, and they seemed, as it were, to be amazed to see a man there. He went smilingly towards them, but as he did so there came into his heart a feeling of danger, he knew not what; and he thought that it would be better to retire up the rocks to his cave, and wait till the men had withdrawn—for it was not likely that they would visit him there, or that even if they saw the way thither, they would adventure it, as it was steep and dangerous. But he put the thought away and came up to them. They seemed to be conferring together in low voices, and the nearer that he drew, the less he liked their look. He spoke to them, but they

seemed not to understand, and answered him back very roughly in a tongue he did not understand. But presently they put one forward, an old man, who had some words of English, who asked him what he did there. He tried to explain that he lived on the island, but the old man shook his head, evidently not believing that there could be one living in so bare a place. Then the men conferred again together, and presently the old man asked him, in his broken speech, whether he would take service on the ship with them. David said, smiling, that he would not, for he had other work to do; and the old man seemed to try and persuade him, saying that it was a good service; that they lived a free life, wandering where they would; but that they had lost men lately, and were hardly enough to sail the ship.

Then it came into David's mind that he had fallen in with pirates. They were not often seen in these parts, for there was little enough that they could get, the folk being all poor, and small traffic passing that way. And then, for he saw the group beginning to gather round him, he made a prayer in his heart that he should be delivered from the evil, and made proffer to the men of the little stores that he had. The old man shook his head, and spoke with the others, who now seemed to be growing angry and impatient; and then he said to David that they had need of him to help to sail the ship, and that he must come whether he would or no. David cast a glance round to see if he could escape up the rocks; but the men were all about him, and seeing in his eye that he thought of flight, they laid hands upon him. David resisted with all his might, but they overpowered him in a moment, bound his hands and feet, and cast him with much force into their boat. Then David was sorely disheartened; but he waited, committing his soul to God. While he waited, he saw a strange thing; on the beach there lay a box, tightly corded; the men raised this up very gently, and with difficulty, as it seemed to be heavy. Then they carried it up above the tide-mark; and, making a hole among the loose stones, they buried it very carefully, casting stones over it. Then one of them with a chisel made a mark on the cliff behind, to show where the box lay—and then, first looking carefully out to sea, they came into the boat, and rowed off to the ship, which seemed almost deserted; paying no more heed to David than if he had been a log of wood.

The old man who understood English steered the boat; and David tried to say some words to him, to ask that he should be released; but the old man only shook his head; and at last bade David be silent with great anger. They rowed slowly out, and David could see the great rocks, that had now been his home so long, rising, still and peaceful, in the morning light. Every rock and cranny was known to him. There was the place where, when he first came, he was used to fish. There was the cliff-top where he had made his fire; he could even see his little window in the front of the rocks, and he

thought with grief that it would be dark and silent henceforth. But he thought that he was somehow in the hand of God; and that though to be dragged away from his home seemed grievous, there must be some task to which the Father would presently set him, even if it were to go down to death; and though the cords that bound him were now very painful, and his heart was full of sorrow, yet David felt a kind of peace in his spirit which showed him that God was still with him.

When they got to the ship, there arose a dispute among the men as to whether they should run out to sea before it was dark, or whether they should lie where they were; there was but little wind, so they made up their minds to stay. David himself thought from the look of the sky that there was strong weather brewing. The old man who spoke English asked him what he thought, and he told him that there would be wind. He seemed to be disposed to believe David; but the men were tired, and it was decided to stay.

They had unbound David that he might go on board; and the pain in his hands and feet was very great when the bonds were unloosed; and when he was on board they bound him again, but not so tightly, and led him down into a cabin, close and dirty, where a foul and smoky lamp burnt. They bade him sit in a corner. The low ill-smelling place was very grievous to David, and he thought with a sore heart of his clean cold cave, and his bed of fern. The men seemed to take no further heed of him, and went about preparing a meal. There seemed to be little friendliness among them; they spoke shortly and scowled upon each other; and David divined that there had been some dispute aboard, and that they were ill-content. There was little discipline, the men going and coming when they would.

Before long a meal was prepared; some sort of a stew with a rich strong smell, that seemed very gross and foul to David, who had been used so long to his simple fare. The men came in and took from the dish what they desired; and a large jar was opened, which from its fierce smell seemed to contain a hot and fiery spirit; and that it was so David could easily discern, from the flushed faces and louder talk of the men, which soon became mingled with a gross merriment. The old man brought a mess of the food to David, who shook his head smiling. Then the other, with more kindness than David had expected, asked if he would have bread; and fetched him a large piece, unbinding his hands for a little, that he might eat. Then he offered him some of the spirit; but David asked for water, which the old man gave him, binding his hands after he had drunk, with a certain gentleness.

Presently the old man, after he too had eaten, came and sate down beside David; and in his broken talk seemed to wish to win him, if he could, to join

them more willingly. He spoke of the pleasant life they lived, and of the wealth that they made, though he said not how they came by it. He told him that he had seen some of it hidden that day, which they had done for greater security, so that, if the ship should be cast away, the men might have some of their spoil waiting for them; and David understood from him, though he had but few words to explain it, that it had been that which had caused a strife among them. For they had come by the treasure very hardly, and they had lost some of the crew in so doing it—and some of the men had desired to share it, and have done with the sea for ever; but that it had been decided to make another voyage first.

Then David said very gently that he did not desire to join them, for he was a man of peace; and he told him of his lonely life, and how he made a light to keep ships off the dangerous coast; and at that the old man looked at him with a fixed air, and nodded his head as though he had himself heard of the matter, or at least seen the light—all this David told him, speaking slowly as to a child; but it seemed as though every minute the remembrance of the language came more and more back to the old man.

But at last the man shook his head, and said that he was sorry so peaceful a life must come to an end. But, indeed, David must go with them whether he would or no; and that they would be good comrades yet; and he should have his share of whatever they got. And then he left David and went on to the deck.

Then there fell a great despair upon David; and at the same time the crew, excited by the drink they had taken, for they drained the jar, began to dispute among themselves, and to struggle and fight; and one of them espied David, and they gathered round and mocked him. They mocked at his dress, his face, his hair, which had grown somewhat long. And one of them in particular seemed most urgent, speaking long to the others, and pointing at David from time to time, while the others fell into a great laughter. Then they fell to plucking his hair, and even to beating him—and they tried to force the spirit into his mouth, but he kept his teeth clenched; and the very smell of the fiery stuff made his brain sick. But he could not stir hand or foot; and presently there came into his mind a great blackness of anger, so that he seemed to be in the very grip of the evil one; and he knew in his heart that if he had been unbound, he would have slain one or more of them; for his heart beat thick, and there came a strange redness into his sight, and he gnashed his teeth for rage; at which they mocked him the more. But at last the old man came down into the cabin, and when he saw what they were at, he spoke very angrily to them, stamping his foot; and

it seemed as though he alone had any authority, for they left off ill-using David, and went from him one by one.

Then, after a while they began to nod in their places; one or two of them cast themselves into beds made in the wall; others fell on the floor, and slept like beasts; and at last they all slept; and last of all the old man came in again, bearing a lamp, and looked round the room in a sort of angry disgust. Then he said a word to David, and opening a door went on into a cabin beyond, closing the door behind him.

Then, in the low light of the smoking lamp, and in the hot and reeking room, with the foul breathing of the sleepers round him, David spent a very dreadful hour. He had never in the old days seen so ill a scene; and it was to him, exhausted by pain and by rage, as if a dark thing came behind him, and whispered in his secret ear that God regarded not men at all, and that the evil was stronger than the good, and prevailed. He tried to put the thought away; but it came all the more instantly, that what he had seen could not be, if God had indeed power to rule. It was not only the scene itself, but the thought of what these men were, and the black things they had doubtless done, the deeds of murder, cruelty, and lust that were written plainly on all their faces; all these came like dark shadows and gathered about him.

David stirred a little to ease himself of his pain and stiffness; and his foot struck against a thing. He looked down, and saw in the shadow of the table a knife lying, which had fallen from some man's belt. A thought of desperate joy came into his mind. He bent himself down with his bound hands, and he contrived to gather up the knife. Then, very swiftly and deftly, he thrust the haft between his knees; then he worked the rope that bound his hands to and fro over the blade; the rope parted, and the blood came back into his numbed fingers with a terrible pain. But David heeded it not, and stooping down, he cut the cord that bound his feet; then he rose softly, and sate down again; for the blood, returning to his limbs, made him feel he could not stand yet awhile. All was still in the cabin, except for the slow breathing of those that slept; save that every now and then one of the sleepers broke into a stifled cry, and muttered words, or stirred in his sleep.

Presently David felt that he could walk. He pondered for a moment whether he should take the knife, if he were suddenly attacked; but he resisted the thought, and left the knife lying on the ground.

Then stepping lightly among the sleepers, he moved like a shadow to the door; very carefully he stepped; and at each movement or muttered word he stopped and caught his breath. Suddenly one of the men rose up, leaning on

his arm, and looked at him with a stupid stare; but David stood still, waiting, with his heart fit to break within his breast, till the man lay down again. Then David was at the door. The cabin occupied half the ship to the bows; the rest was undecked, with high bulwarks; a rough ladder of steps led to the gangway. David stood for a moment in the shadow of the door; but there seemed no one on the watch without. The pure air and the fresh smell of the sea came to his senses like a breath of heaven. He stepped swiftly over a coil of rope; then up the ladder, and plunged noiselessly into the sea.

He swam a few strokes very strongly; and then he looked about him. The night was as dark as pitch. He could see a dim light from the ship behind him; the water rose and fell in a slow heavy swell; but which way the land lay he could not tell. But he said to himself that it was better to drown and be certainly with God, than in the den of robbers he had left. So he turned himself round in the water, trying to remember where the shore lay, but it was all dark, both the sky and sea, with a pitchy blackness; only the lights of the ship glimmered towards him like little bright paths across the heaving tide.

Suddenly there came a thing so wonderful that David could hardly believe he saw truly; a bright eye of light, as it were, opened upon him in the dark, far off, and hung high in the heavens, like a quiet star. The radiance of it was like the moon, cold and clear. And though David could not at first divine whence it came, he did not doubt in his heart that it was there to guide him; so he struck out towards it, with long silent strokes. He swam for a long time, the light shining softly over the water, and seeming to rise higher over his head, while the glimmering of the ship's lights grew fainter and more murky behind him. Then he became aware that he was drawing near to the land; great dark shapes loomed up over his head, and he heard the soft beating of waves before him. Then he could see too, as he looked upon the light, that there was a glimmer around it; and he saw that it came from the edges and faces of rocks that were lit up by the radiance. So he swam more softly; and presently his foot struck a rock covered with weed; so he put his feet down, waded in cautiously, and pulling himself up by the hands found himself on a rocky shore, and knew that it was his own island.

Then the light above him, as though it had but waited for his safety to be secured, died softly away, like the moon gliding into a cloud. David wondered very much at this, and cast about in his mind how it might be; but his heart seemed to tell him that there was some holy and beautiful thing on the island very near to him. He could hardly contain himself for gladness; and he thought that God had doubtless given him this day of misery and terror, partly that he might value his peace truly, and partly that

he might feel that he had it not of right, but by the gracious disposition of the Father.

So he climbed very softly and swiftly to the cave; and entered it with a great gladness; and then he became aware of a great awe in his mind. There was somewhat there, that he could not see with his eyes, but which was more real and present than anything he had ever known; the cave seemed to shine with a faint and tender gleam that was dying away by slow degrees; as though the roof and walls had been charged with a peaceful light, which still rayed about them, though the radiance that had fed it was withdrawn. He took off his dripping clothes, and wrapped himself in his old sea-cloak. But he did not think of sleep, or even of prayer; he only sate still on his bed of fern, with his eyes open in the darkness, drinking in the strong and solemn peace which seemed to abide there. David never had known such a feeling, and he was never to know it again so fully; but for the time he seemed to sit at the foot of God, satisfied. While he thus sate, a great wind sprang up outside and thundered in the rocks; fiercer and fiercer it blew, and soon there followed it the loud crying of the sea, as the great waters began to heave and rage. Then David bestirred himself to light and trim his lamp, and set it in the window as a warning to ships. And when he had done this he felt a great and sudden weariness, and he laid himself down; and sleep closed over him at once, as the sea closes over a stone that is flung into it.

Once in the night he woke, with the roar of the storm in his ears, and wondered that he had slept through it. He had been through many stormy nights, but he had never heard the like of this. The wind blew with a steady roar, like a flood of thunder outpoured; in the midst of it, the great waves, hurled upon the rocks, uttered their voices; and between he heard the hiss of the water, as it rushed downwards from the cliff face. In the midst of all came a sharp and sudden wailing cry; and then he began to wonder what the poor ship was doing, which he thought of as riding furiously at her anchor, with the drunken crew, and the old man with his sad and solemn face, who seemed so different from his unruly followers, and yet was not ashamed to rule over them and draw profit from their evil deeds. In spite of the ill they had tried to do him, he felt a great pity for them in his heart; but this was but for a moment, for sleep closed over him again, and drew him down into forgetfulness.

When David woke in the morning, the gale had died away, but the sky wept from low and ragged clouds, as if ashamed and sullen at the wrath of the day before. Water trickled in the cracks of the rock; and when David peered abroad, he looked into the thin drifting clouds. He had a great content in his

heart, but the awe and the strange peace of the night had somehow diminished.

He began to reflect upon the light that he had seen from the sea. It was not his lamp that had given out such light, for it was clear and thin, while the light his own lamp gave was angry and red. Moreover, when he had lighted the lamp before the storm, it was standing idle, not in the window-place, but on the rock-shelf where he had set it. Then he knew that some great and holy mystery had been wrought for him that night, and that he had been very tenderly used.

Presently he descended the cliff, and went out upon the seaward side. The waves still rose angrily under the grey sky, but were fast abating. He saw in a moment that the shore was full of wreckage: there were spars and timbers everywhere, and all the litter of a ship. Some of the timbers were flung so high upon the rocks that he saw how great the violence of the storm had been. He walked along, and in a minute he came upon the body of a man lying on his face, strangely battered.

Then he saw another body, and yet another. He lifted them up, but there was no sign of life in them; and he recognised with a great sadness that they were the pirates who had dragged him from his home. He had for a moment one evil thought in his mind, a kind of triumph in his heart that God had saved him from his enemies, and delivered them over to death; but he knew that it was a wicked thought, and thrust it from him; at last at the end of the rocks he found the old captain himself. There was a kind of majesty about him, even in death, as he lay looking up at the sky, with one arm flung across his breast, and the other arm outstretched beside him. Then he saw the ribs of the ship itself stick up among the rocks, and he wondered to find the hull so broken and ruinous.

His next care was that the poor bodies should have burial. So about midday he took his boat from its shelter, and rowed across to the land; and then, with a strange fear of the heart, he climbed the cliff, and walked down slowly to the village, which he had thought in his heart he would never have seen again.

The wind had now driven the clouds out of the sky, and the sun came out with a strong white light, the light that shines from the sky when the earth has been washed clean by rain. It sparkled brightly in the little drops that hung like jewels in the grass and bushes. It was with a great throb of the heart that David came out upon the end of the down, and saw the village beneath him. It looked as though no change had passed over it, but as though its life must have stood still, since he left it; then there came tears

into David's eyes at the thought of the old hard life he had lived there, and how God had since filled his cup so full of peace; so with many thoughts in his heart he came slowly down the path to the town. He first met two children whom he did not know; he spoke to them, but they looked for a moment in terror at his face; his hair and beard were long, and he was all tanned by the sun; but he spoke softly to them, and presently they came to him and were persuaded to tell their names. They were the children, David thought, of a young lad whom he had known as a boy; and presently, as the manner of children is when they have laid aside fear, they told him many small things, their ages and their doings, and other little affairs which seem so big to a child; and then they would take his hands and lead him to the village, while David smiled to be so lovingly attended. He was surprised, when he entered the street, to see how curiously he was regarded. Even men and women, that he had known, would hardly speak with him, but did him reverence. The children would lead him to their house first; and so he went thither, not unwilling. When they were at the place, he found with a gentle wonder that it was even the house where he had himself dwelt. He went in, and found the mother of the children within, one whom he had known as a girl. She greeted him with the same reverence as the rest; so that he at last took courage, and asked her why it should not be as it had been before. And then he learned from her talk, with a strange surprise, that it was thought that he was a very holy man, much visited by God, who not only had been shown how, by a kind of magical secret, to save ships from falling on that deadly coast, but as one whose prayers availed to guard and keep the whole place safe. He tried to show her that this was not so, and that he was a simple person in great need of holiness; but he saw that she only thought him the holier for his humility, so he was ashamed to say more.

Then he went to the chief man in the village, and told him wherefore he had come—that there was a wreck on the shore of the islands, and that there were bodies that must be buried. One more visit he paid, and that was to the little maiden whom he had seen the last when he went away. She was now nearly grown to a woman, and her grandmother was very old and weak, and near her end. David went there alone, and said that he had returned as he had promised; but he found that the child had much lost her remembrance of him, and could hardly see the friend she had known in the strong and wild-looking figure that he had become. He talked a little quietly; the old grandmother, who could not move from her chair, was easier with him, and asked him, looking curiously upon him, whether he had found that of which he went in search. "Nay, mother," he said, "not found; but I am like a man whose feet are set in the way, and who sees the city gate across the fields." Then she smiled at him and said, "But I am near the gate." Then he told her that he often thought of her, and made mention of her in his

prayers; and so rose to go; but she asked him to bless her, which David did very tenderly, and kissed her and departed; but he went heavily; because he feared to be regarded as he was now regarded; and he thought in his heart that he would never return again, but dwell alone in his cave with God. For the world troubled him; and the voices of the children, and the looks of those that he had known before seemed to lay soft hands about his heart, and draw him back into the world.

The same day he returned to the cave; and the boats came out and took the bodies away, and they were laid in the burying-ground.

Then the next day many returned to clear away the wreck; and David came not out of his cave while they did this; for it went to his heart to see the joy with which they gathered what had meant the death of so many men. They asked him what they should leave for him, and he answered, "Nothing—only a piece of plain wood, for a purpose." So when evening came they had removed all; and the island, that had rung all day with shouts and talk and the feet of men, was silent again; but before they went, David said that he had a great desire to see a priest, if a message could be sent; and this they undertook to do. But David was very heavy-hearted for many days, for it seemed to him that the sight of the world had put all the peace out of his heart; and his prayers came hollow and dry.

A few days after there came a boat to the rock; the sea was running somewhat high, and they had much ado to make a landing. David went down to the water's edge, and saw that besides the fishermen, whom he knew, there was a little wizened man in a priest's dress, that seemed bewildered by the moving of the boat and the tossing of the big waves with their heaving crests, that broke upon the rocks with a heavy sound. At last they got the boat into the creek, and the little priest came nimbly ashore, but not without a wetting. The fishermen said that they would return in the evening, and fetch the priest away.

He looked a frail man, and David could not discern whether he were young or old; and he felt a pity for a man who was so unhandy, and who seemed to be so scared of the sea. But the priest came up to him and took his hand. "I have heard much of you, my brother," he said, "and I have desired to see you—but this sea of yours is a strange and wild monster, and I trust it not,—though indeed it is God's handiwork. Yet King David, your patron, was of the same mind, I think, and wrote in one of his wise psalms how it made the heart to melt within him." David looked at him with much attention as he spoke, and there was something in the priest's eye, a kind of hidden fire, joined with a wise mirth, that made him, all of a sudden, feel like a child before him. So he said, "Where will your holiness sit? It is cold here in the

wind; I have a dwelling in the rocks, but it is hard to come by except for winged fowl, and for men like myself who have been used to the precipices."

"Well, show the way, brother," said the priest cheerfully, "and I will adventure my best." So David showed him the way up the crags, and went slowly in front of him, that he might help him up; but the priest climbed like a cat, looking blithely about him, and had no need of help, though he was encumbered with his robe.

When they were got there, the priest looked curiously about him, and presently knelt down before the carving, and said a little prayer to himself.

Then he questioned David about his life, asking questions briskly, as though he were accustomed to command; and David felt more and more every moment that he was as a child before this masterful and wary man. He told him of his early life, and of his visions, and of his desire to know God, and of the light that he set in the rocks; and then he told him of his adventure with the pirates, not forgetting the treasure. The priest heard him with great attention, and said presently that he had done well, and that God was with him. Then he asked him how he would have the treasure bestowed, and David said that he had no design in his mind. "Then that shall be my care," said the priest, "and I doubt not that the Lord hath sent it us, that there may be a church in this lonely place."

And then, turning to David with a wonderful and piercing look, he said, "And this peace of spirit that you speak of, that you came here to seek, tell me truly, brother, have you found it?"

Then David looked upon the ground a little and said, "Dear sir, I know not; I am indeed strangely happy in this lonely place; but to speak all the truth, I feel like a man who lingers at a gate, and who hears the sound of joy and melody within, which rejoices his heart, but he is not yet admitted. No," he went on, "I have not found the way. The Father is indeed very near me, and I am certain of His love—but there is still a barrier between me and His Heart."

Then the priest bowed his head awhile in thought, but said nothing for a long space; and then David said, "Dear sir, advise me." Then the priest looked at him with a clear gaze, and said, "Shall I advise you, O my brother?" And David said "Yes, dear sir." Then the priest said, "Indeed, my brother, I see in your life the gracious hand of God. He did redeem you, and he planted in your heart a true seed of peace. You have lived here a holy and an innocent life; but he withholds from you his best gift, because you are not willing to be utterly led by him. There have been in ancient days many

such souls, who have fled from the wickedness of the world, and have spent themselves in prayer and penance, and have done a holy work—for indeed there are many victories that may be won by prayer. But indeed, dear brother, I think that God's will for you is that this lonely life of yours should have an end. I think that you have herein followed your own pleasure overmuch; and I believe that God would now have you go back to the world, and work for him therein. You have a great power with this simple folk; but they are as sheep without a shepherd, and must be fed, and none but you can now feed them. You will bethink you of the visit that the Lord Christ paid to the Sisters of Bethany; Martha laboured much to please Him, but she laboured for her own pleasing too; and Mary it was that had the good part, because she thought not of herself but of the Lord. And now, dear brother, I would have you do what will be very grievous to you. I would have you go back to your native place, and there abide to labour for God; you may come hither at seasons, and be alone with God, and that will refresh you; but you are now, methinks, like a man who has found a great treasure, and who speaks no word of it to others, and neither uses it himself, but only looks upon it and is glad."

Then David was very sad at the priest's words, knowing that he spoke the truth. But the priest said, "Now we will speak no more of this awhile; and I would not have you do it, unless your heart consents thereto; only be strong." And then he asked if he might have somewhat to eat; and David brought him his simple fare; so they ate together, and while they ate, it came into David's mind that this was certainly the way. All that afternoon they sate, while the wind rustled without, and the sea made a noise; and then the priest said they would go and look at the treasure, because it was near evening, and he must return. So they went down together, and drew the rocks off from the box. It was a box of wood, tightly corded, and they undid it, and found within a great store of gold and silver pieces, which the priest reckoned up, and said that it would be abundant for a church.

Then they saw the boat approach; and the priest blessed David, and David thanked him with tears, for showing him the truth; and the priest said, "Not so, my brother; I did but show you what is in your own heart, for God puts such truth in the heart of all of us as we can bear; but sometimes we keep it like a sword in its scabbard, until the bright and sharp thing, that might have wrought great deeds, be all rusted and blunted."

And then the priest departed, taking with him the box of gold, and David was left alone.

David was very heavy-hearted when he was left alone on the island. He knew that the priest had spoken the truth, but he loved his solitary life, and

the silence of the cave, the free air and the sun, and the lonely current of his own thoughts. The sun went slowly down over the waters in a great splendour of light and colour, so that the clouds in the sky seemed like purple islands floating in a golden sea; David sitting in his cave thought with a kind of terror of the small and close houses of the village, the sound of feet, and talk of men and women. At last he fell asleep; and in his sleep he dreamed that he was in a great garden. He looked about him with pleasure, and he presently saw a gardener moving about at his work. He went in that direction, and he saw that the man, who was old and had a very wise and tender face, was setting out some young trees in a piece of ground. He planted them carefully with deft hands, and he smiled to himself as he worked, as though he was full of joyful thoughts. David wished in his heart to go and speak with him, but something held him back. Presently the gardener went away, and while he was absent, another man, of a secret aspect, came swiftly into the place, peering about him. His glance passed David by, and David knew that he was in some way unseen. The man looked all about him in a furtive haste, and then plucked up one of the trees, which seemed to David to be already growing and shooting out small leaves and buds. The man smoothed down the ground where he drew it out, and then went very quickly away. David would have wished to stop him, but he could not. Then the old gardener came back, and looked long at the place whence the tree had been drawn. Then he sighed to himself, and cast a swift look in the direction in which the man had fled. He had brought other trees with him, but he did not plant one in the empty space, but left it bare. Then David felt that he must follow the other, and so he did. He found him very speedily, but it was outside the garden, in a rough place, where thorny bushes and wild plants grew thickly. The other had cleared a little space among them, and here he set the tree; but he planted it ill and hastily, as though he was afraid of being disturbed; and then he departed secretly. David stood and watched the tree a little. It seemed at first to begin to grow again as it had done before, but presently something ailed it and it drooped. Then David saw the thorny bushes near it begin to stretch out their arms about it, and the wild herbs round about sprang up swiftly, and soon the tree was choked by them, and hardly appeared above the brake. David began to be sorry for the tree, which still kept some life in it, and struggled as it were feebly to put out its boughs above the thicket. While he stood he saw the old gardener approaching, and as he approached he carefully considered the ground. When he saw the tree, he smiled, and drew it out carefully, and went back to the garden, and David followed him; he planted it again tenderly in the ground; and the tree which had looked so drooping and feeble began at once to put forth leaves and flowers. The gardener smiled again, and then for the first time looked upon David. His eyes were deep and grave like a still water; and he smiled as one might who shares a

secret with another. And then of a sudden David awoke, and found the light of dawn creeping into the cave; and he fell to considering the dream, and in a moment knew that it was sent for his learning. So he hesitated no longer, but gave up his will to God.

It was a sad hour for David nevertheless; he walked softly about the cave, and he put aside what he would take with him, and it seemed to him that he was, as it were, uprooting a tree that had grown deep; he tied up what he would take with him, but he left some things behind, for he thought that he might return. And then he kneeled down and prayed, the tears running over his face; and lastly he rose and kissed the cold wall of the cave; at the door he saw the gull that had been with him so oft, and he scattered some crumbs for it, and while the bird fell to picking the crumbs, David descended the rock swiftly, not having the heart to look about him; and then he put his things in the boat, and rowed swiftly and silently to the shore, looking back at the great rocks, which stood up all bright and clear in the fresh light of the dawn, with the waves breaking softly at their feet.

David had no fixed plan in his mind, as he rowed across to the land. He only thought that it was right for him to return, and to take up his part in the old life again. He did not dare to look before him, but simply put, as it were, his hand in the hand of God, and hoped to be led forward. He was soon at the shore, and he pulled his boat up on the land, and left it lying in a little cave that opened upon the beach; then he shouldered his pack, and went slowly, with even strides, across the hill and down to the village. He met no one on the way, and the street seemed deserted. He made his way to the house of the old woman who was his friend; he put his small pack at the door and entered. The little house was quite silent. But he heard a sound of weeping; when he came into the outer room, he saw the maiden sitting in a chair with her face bowed on the table. He called to her by name; she lifted her head and looked at him for a moment and then rose up and came to him, as a child comes to be comforted. He saw at once that some grievous thing had happened; and presently with sobs and tears she told him that her grandmother had died a few days before, that she had been that day buried, and that she knew not what she was to do; there seemed more behind; and David at last made out that she was asked in marriage by a young fisherman whom she did not love, and she knew not how else to live. And then he said that he was come back and would not depart from her, and that she should be a daughter to him.

Now of the rest of the life of David I must not here speak; he lived in the village, and he did his part; a little chapel was built in the place with the money of the pirates; and David went in and out among the folk of the place,

and drew many to the love of God; he went once back to the cave, but he abode not long there; but of one thing I will tell, and that is of a piece of carving that David did, working little by little in the long winter nights at the piece of wood that came from the pirate ship. The carving is of a man standing on the shore of the sea, and holding up a lantern in his hand, and on the sea is carved a ship. And David calls his carving "The Light of the World." At the top of it is a scroll, with the words thereon, "He shall send down from on high to fetch me, and shall take me out of many waters." And beneath is another scroll on which is graven, "Thou also shalt light my candle; the Lord my God shall make my darkness to be light."

The Waving of the Sword

The things that are set down here happened in the ancient days when there was sore fighting in the land; the king, who was an unjust man, fighting to maintain his realm, and the barons fighting for the law; and the end was not far off, for the king was driven backwards to the sea, and at last could go no further; so he gathered all the troops that he might in a strong fort that lay in the midst of the downs, where the hills dipped to the plain to let the river pass through; and the barons drew slowly in upon him, through the forest in the plain. Beyond the downs lay the sea, and there in a little port was gathered the king's navy, that if the last fight went ill with him, as indeed he feared it would, he might fly for safety to another land.

Now in a house below the down, a few miles from the king's stronghold, dwelt a knight that was neither old nor young, and his name was Sir Henry Strange. He lived alone and peevishly, and he did neither good nor evil. He had no skill in fighting, but neither had he skill in peaceful arts. He had tried many things and wearied of all. He had but a small estate, which was grown less by foolish waste. He could have made it into a rich heritage, for his land was good. But he had no patience with his men, and confused them by his orders, which he would not see carried out. Sometimes he would fell timber, and then leave it to rot in the wood; or he would plough a field, and sow it not. At one time he had a fancy to be a minstrel, but he had not patience to attain to skill; he would write a ballad and leave it undone; or he would begin to carve a figure of wood, and toss it aside; sometimes he would train a dog or a horse; but he would so rage if the beast, being puzzled for all its goodwill, made mistakes, that it grew frightened of him—for nothing can be well learnt except through love and trust. He would sometimes think that he should have been a monk, and that under hard discipline he would have fared better—and indeed this was so, for he had abundant aptitude. He was alone in the world, for he had come into his estate when young; but he had had no patience to win him a wife. At first, indeed, his life had not been an unhappy one, for he was often visited by small joyful thoughts, which made him glad; and he took much pleasure, on sunshiny days, in the brave sights and sounds of the world. But such delights had grown less; and he was now a tired and restless man of forty years, who lay long abed and went not much abroad; and was for ever telling himself how happy he would be if this or that were otherwise. Far down in his heart he despised himself, and wondered how God had come to make so ill-contented a thing; but that was a chamber in his mind that he visited not often; but rather took pleasure in the thought of his skill and deftness, and his fitness for the many things he might have done.

And now in the war he had come to a pass. He would not join himself to the king, because the king was an evil man, and he liked not evil; yet he loved not rebellion, and feared for his safety if the king had the upper hand; but it was still more that he had grown idle and soft-hearted, and feared the hard faring and brisk jesting of the camp. Yet even so the thought of the war lay heavy on his heart, and he wondered how men, whose lives were so short upon the goodly earth, should find it in their hearts to slay and be slain for such shadowy things as command and dominion; and he thought he would have made a song on that thought, but he did not.

And now the fighting had come very near him; and he had let some of his men go to join the king, but he went not himself, saying that he was sick, and might not go abroad.

He stood on a day, at this time, by a little wall that enclosed his garden-ground. It was in the early summer; the trees had put on their fresh green, and glistened in the still air, and the meadows were deep with grass, on the top of which seemed to float unnumbered yellow flowers. In and out the swallows passed, hunting for the flies that danced above the grass; and he stood, knowing how fair the earth was, and yet sick at heart, wondering why he could not be as a careless bird, that hunts its meat all day in the sun, and at evening sings a song of praise among the thickets.

Over the trees ran the great down with its smooth green sides, as far as the eye could see. The heat winked on its velvety bluffs, and it seemed to him, as it had often seemed before, like a great beast lying there in a dream, with a cloth of green cast over its huge limbs.

He was a tall lean man, somewhat stooping. His face had a certain beauty; his hair and beard were dark and curling; he had large eyes that looked sadly out from under heavy lids. His mouth was small, and had a very sweet smile when he was pleased; but his brow was puckered together as though he pondered; his hands were thin and delicate, and there was something almost womanly about his whole air.

Presently he walked into the little lane that bordered his garden. He heard the sound of wheels coming slowly along the white chalky road; he waited to look, and saw a sad sight. In the cart was a truss of hay, and sunk upon it sate a man, his face down on his breast, deadly pale; as the cart moved, he swayed a little from side to side. The driver of the cart walked beside, sullenly and slowly; and by him walked a girl, just grown a woman, as pale as death, looking at the man that sate in the cart with a look of terror and love; sometimes she would take his helpless hand, and murmur a word; but the man heeded not, and sate lost in his pain. As they passed him he could

see a great bandage on the man's chest that was red with blood. He asked the waggoner what this was, and he told him that it was a young man of the country-side that had been hurt in a fight; he was but newly married, and it was thought he could not live. The cart had stopped, and the woman pulled a little cup out of a jug of water that stood in the straw, and put it to the wounded man's lips, who opened his eyes, all dark and dazed with pain, but with no look of recognition in them, and drank greedily, sinking back into his sick dream again. The girl put the cup back, and clasped her hands over her eyes, and then across her breast with a low moan, as though her heart would break. The tears came into Sir Henry's eyes; and fumbling in his pockets he took out some coins and gave them to the woman, with a kind word. "Let him be well bestowed," he said. The woman took the coins, hardly heeding him; and presently the cart started again, a shoot of pain darting across the wounded man's face as the wheels grated on the stones.

Sir Henry stood long looking after them; and it came into his heart that war was a foul and evil thing; though he half envied the poor soul that had fought his best, and was now sinking into the shadow of death.

While he thus lingered there sprang into his mind a thought that made him suddenly grow erect.

He walked swiftly along the lane with its high hedges and tall elms. The lane was at the foot of the down, but raised a little above the plain, so that he could see the rich woodland with its rolling lines, and far away the faint line of the Northern hills. It was very still, and there seemed not a care in the great world; it seemed all peace and happy quiet life; yet the rumbling of the cart-wheels which he still heard at a distance, now low and now loud, told him of the sorrow that lay hidden under those dreaming woods; was it all thus? And then he thought of the great armies that were so near, and of all the death they meant to deal each other. And yet God sat throned aloft watching all things, he thought, with a calm and quiet eye, waiting, waiting. But for what? Was His heart indeed pitiful and loving, as His priests said? and did He hold in His hand, for those that passed into the forgetful gate, some secret of joyful peace that would all in a moment make amends?

He stopped beside a little stile—there, in front of him, over the tops of an orchard, the trees of which were all laden with white and rosy flowers, lay a small high-shouldered church, with a low steeple of wood. The little windows of the tower seemed to regard him as with dark sad eyes. He went by a path along the orchard edge, and entered the churchyard, full of old graves, among which grew long tumbled grass. He thought with a throb, that was almost of joy, of all those that had laid down their weary bones there in the dust, husband by wife, child by mother. They were waiting too, and how

quietly! It was all over for them, the trouble and the joy alike; and for a moment the death that all dread seemed to him like a simple and natural thing, the one thing certain. There at length they slept, a quiet sleep, waiting for the dawn, if dawn there were.

He crossed the churchyard and entered the church; the coolness and the dark and the ancient holy smell was sweet after the brightness and the heat outside. Every line of the place was familiar to him from his childhood. He walked slowly up the little aisle and passed within the screen. The chancel was very dark, only lighted by two or three deep-set windows. He made a reverence and then drew near to the altar.

All the furniture of the church was most simple and old; but over the altar there was a long unusual-looking shelf; he went up to it, and stood for awhile gazing upon it. Along the shelf lay a rude and ancient sword of a simple design, in a painted scabbard of wood; and over it was a board with a legend painted on it.

The legend was in an old form of French words, long since disused in the land. But it said:

Unsheathe me and die thyself, but the battle shall be stayed.

He had known the look of the sword, and the words on the board from a child. The tale was that there had been in days long past a great battle on the hill, and that the general of one of the armies had been told, in a dream or vision, that if he should himself be slain, then should his men have the victory; but that if he lived through the battle, then should his men be worsted. Now before the armies met, while they stood and looked upon each other, the general, so said the tale, had gone out suddenly and alone, with his sword bare in his hand, and his head uncovered; and that as he advanced, one of his foes had drawn a bow and pierced him through the brain, so that he fell in his blood between the armies; and that then a kind of fury had fallen upon his men to avenge his death, and they routed the foe with a mighty slaughter. But the sword had been set in the church with this legend above it; and there it had lain many a year.

So Sir Henry disengaged the sword from its place very tenderly and carefully. It had been there so long that it was all covered with dust; and then, holding it in his hands, he knelt down and made a prayer in his heart that he might have strength for what he had a mind to do; and then he walked softly down the church, looking about him with a sort of secret tenderness, as though he were bidding it all farewell; his own father and mother were buried in the church; and he stopped for awhile beside their

grave, and then, holding the sword by his side—for he wished it not to be seen of any—he went back to his house, and put the sword away in a great chest, that no one might know where it was laid.

Then he tarried not, but went softly out; and all that afternoon he walked about his own lands, every acre of them; for he did not think to see them again; and his mind went back to the old days; he had not thought that all could be so full of little memories. In this place he remembered being set on a horse by his father, who held him very lovingly and safely while he led the great beast about; he remembered how proud he had been, and how he had fancied himself a mighty warrior. On this little pond, with all its reeds and waterlilies, he had sailed a boat on a summer day, his mother sitting near under a tree to see that he had no danger; and thus it was everywhere; till, as he walked in the silent afternoon, he could almost have believed that there were others that walked with him unseen, to left and right; for at every place some little memory roused itself, as the flies that rise buzzing from the leaves when you walk in an alley, until he felt like a child again, with all the years before him.

Then he came to the house again, and did the same for every room. He left one room for the last, a room where dwelt an old and simple woman that had nursed him; she was very frail and aged now, and went not much abroad, but sate and did little businesses; and it was ever a delight to her if he asked her to do some small task for him. He found her sitting, smiling for pleasure that he should come to her thus; and he kissed her, and sate beside her for awhile, and they talked a little of the childish days, for he was still ever a child to her. Then he rose to leave her, and she asked him, as was her wont, if there was anything that she could do for him, for it shamed her, she said, to sit and idle, when she had been so busy once, and when there was still so much to do. And he said, "No, dear nurse, there is nothing at this time." And he hesitated for an instant, and then said, "There is indeed one thing; I have a business to do to-night, that is hard and difficult; and I do not know what the end will be; will you say a prayer for your boy to-night, that he may be strong?" She looked at him quickly and was silent; and then she said, "Yes, dear child, but I ever do that—and I have no skill to make new prayers—but I will say my prayer over and over if that will avail." And he said, smiling at her, though the tears were in his eyes, "Yes, it will avail," and so he kissed her and went away, while she fell to her prayers.

Now the day had all this while grown stiller and hotter, till there was not a breath stirring; and now out to the eastwards there came on an angry blackness in the sky, with a pale redness beneath it, where the thunder dwelt. Sir Henry sate down, for he was weary of his walking, and in a little

he fell asleep; his thoughts still ran upon the sword, for he dreamed that he had it with him in a wood that he knew not, that was dark with the shade of leaves; and he hung the sword upon a tree, and went on, to win out of the wood if he could, for it seemed very close and heavy in the forest; sometimes through the trees he saw a space of open ground, with ferns glistening in the sun; but he could not find the end of the wood; so he came back in his dream to where he had left the sword; and while he stood watching it, he saw that something dark gathered at the scabbard end, and presently fell with a little sound among the leaves. Then with a shock of terror he saw that it was blood; and he feared to take the sword back; but looking downwards he perceived that where the blood had fallen, there were red flowers growing among the leaves of a rare beauty, which seemed to be born of the blood. So he gathered a handful, and wreathed the sword with them; and then came a gladness into his mind, with which he awoke, and found it evening; he came back to himself with a kind of terror, and a fear darted into his breast; the windows were open, and there came in a scent of flowers; and he felt a great love for the beautiful earth, and for his quiet life; and he looked at the chest; and there came into his mind a strong desire to take the sword out, and lay it back in the church, and let things be as they had been; and so he sate and mused.

Presently his old serving-man came in and told him he had set his supper; so Henry went into the parlour, and made some pretence to be about to eat; sending the old man away, who babbled a little to him of the war, of the barons' army that drew nearer, and of how the king was sore bested. When he was gone Sir Henry ate a little bread and drank a sup of wine; and then he rose up, like one who had made up his mind. He went to the chest and drew out the sword; and then he went softly out of the house, and presently walking swiftly he came out on the down.

It was now nearly dusk; the sky lay clear and still, fading into a sort of delicate green, but all the west was shrouded in a dim blackness, the cloud being spread out, like a great dark bird winging its way slowly up the sky. Then far down in the west there leapt, as it were, interlacing streams of fire out of the cloud, and then followed a low rolling of thunder.

But all the while he mounted the down, up a little track that gleamed white in the grass; and now he could see the huge plain, with a few lights twinkling out of farms; far down to the west there was a little redness of light, and he thought that this was doubtless where the army of the barons lay; but he seemed to himself to have neither wonder nor fear left in his mind; he only went like one that had a task to perform; and soon he came to the top.

Here all was bare, save for some bushes of furze that grew blackly in the gloom; he stepped through them, and he came at last to where a great mound stood, that was held to be the highest place in all the down, a mound that marked the place of a battle, or that was perhaps the burying-place of some old tribe—for it was called the Barrow of the Seven Kings.

He came quickly to the mound, and went to the top; and then he laid the sword upon the turf by him, and kneeled down; once again came a great outpouring of fire from heaven in the west, and a peal of thunder followed hard upon it; and indeed the storm was near at hand; he could see the great wings of the cloud moving now, and a few large drops splashed in the grass about him, and one fell upon his brow.

And now a great fear fell upon Henry of he knew not what. He seemed to himself to be in the presence of some vast and fearful thing, that was passing swiftly by; and yet seemed, for all its haste, to have espied him, and to have been, as it were, stayed by him; there came into his mind a recollection of how he had once, on a summer's day, joined the mowers in one of the fields, and had mowed a few swathes with them for the pleasure of seeing the rich seeded grass fall before the gleaming scythe. At one of his strokes, he remembered, he had uncovered a little field-mouse, that sate in the naked field, its high covert having been swept bare from above it, and watched him with bright eyes of fear, while he debated whether he should crush it; he had done so, he remembered, carelessly, with his foot, and now he wished that he had spared it, for it was even so that he himself felt.

So to strengthen himself in his purpose, he made a prayer aloud, though it was a thing that in his idle life he had much foregone; and he said:

"Lord God, if Thou indeed hearest and seest me, make me strong to do what I have a mind to do; I have lived foolishly and for myself, and I have little to give. I have despised life, and it is as an empty husk to me. I have put love away from me, and my heart is dry; I have had friends and I have wearied of them. I have profited nothing; I have wasted my strength in foolish dreams of pleasure, and I have not found it. I am as a weed that cumpers the fair earth."

Then he stayed for a moment, for he was afraid; for it seemed to him as though somewhat stood near to listen. Then he said again:—

"But, Lord, I do indeed love my fellow men a little; and I would have the waste of life stayed. It is a pitiful thing that I have to offer, but it is all that I have left—an empty life, which yet I love. I will not promise, Lord, to yield my life to the service of men, for I love my ease too well, and I should not keep

my word—so I offer my life freely into Thy hand, and let it avail that which it may avail."

Then the blackness seemed to gather all about him, and he felt with his hand in the turf and found the sword; then he drew the scabbard off, and flung it down beside him, and he raised the sword in his hands.

Then it seemed as though the heavens opened above him, but he saw not the fire, nor heard the shouting of the thunder that followed; he fell on his face in the turf without a sound and moved no more.

Now it happened that about the time that he unsheathed the sword, it came into the heart of the king to send a herald to the barons; for he saw the host spread out below him on the plain, and he feared to meet them; and the barons, too, were weary of fighting; and the king bound himself by a great oath to uphold the law of the realm, and so the land had peace.

The next day came a troop of men-at-arms along the hill; and they wondered exceedingly to see a man lie on the mound with a sword in his hand unsheathed, and partly molten. He lay stiff and cold, but they could not tell how he came by his death, and they knew not what he had done for the land; his hand was so tightly clenched upon the sword, that they took it not out, but they buried him there upon the hill-top, very near the sky, and passed on; and no man knew what had become of him. But God, who made him and had need of him, knoweth.

Renatus

Renatus was a Prince of Saxony that was but newly come to his principedom; his father had died while he was a boy, and the realm had been administered by his father's brother, a Duke of high courage and prudence. The Duke was deeply anxious for the fate of the principedom and his nephew's fortunes, for they lived in troubled times; the Barons of the province were strong and haughty men, with little care for the Prince, and no thought of obedience; each of them lived in his castle, upon a small realm of his own; the people were much discontented with the rule of the Barons, and the Duke saw plainly enough that if a prince could arise who could win the confidence of the people, the Barons would have but little power left. Thus his care was so to bring up the Prince Renatus that he should understand how hard a task was before him; but the boy, though quick of apprehension, was fond of pleasure and amusement, and soon wearied of grave instructions; so the Duke did not persist overmuch, but strove to make the little Prince love him and confide in him, hoping that, when the day of trial came, he might be apt to ask advice rather than act hastily and perhaps foolishly; but yet in this the Duke had not perfectly succeeded, as he was by nature grave and austere, and even his face seemed to have in it a sort of rebuke for lively and light-minded persons. Still the Prince, though he was not at ease with the Duke, trusted him exceedingly, and thought him wise and good, even more than the Duke imagined.

The days had been full of feasting and pageants, and Renatus was greatly excited and eager at finding himself in so great a place. He had borne himself with much courtesy and dignity in his receiving of embassies and such compliments; he had, too, besides the sweet gifts of youth and beauty, a natural affectionateness, which led him to wish to please those about him; and the Duke's heart was full of love and admiration for the graceful boy, though there lay in the back of his mind a shadow of fear; and this grew very dark when he saw two of the most turbulent Barons speaking together in a corner, with sidelong glances at the Prince, at one of the Court assemblies, and divined that they thought the boy would be but a pretty puppet in their hands.

The custom was that the Prince, on the eve of his enthroning, should watch for two hours alone in the chapel of the castle, from eleven to one at night, and should there consecrate himself to God; the guests of the evening were departed; and a few minutes before eleven the Duke sate with the Prince in a little room off the chapel, waiting till it was time for the Prince to enter the building. Renatus was in armour, as the custom was, with a white robe over all. He sate restlessly in a chair, and there was a mischievous and dancing

light of pleasure in his eye, that made the Duke doubly grave. The Duke, after some discourse of other matters, made a pause; and then, saying that it was the last time that he should take the privilege of guardianship—to offer advice unless it were sought—said: "And now, Renatus, you know that I love you as a dear son; and I would have you remember that all these things are but shows, and that there sits behind them a grave and holy presence of duty; these pomps are but the signs that you are truly the Prince of this land; and you must use your power well, and to God's glory; for it is He that makes us to be what we are, and truly calls us thereto." Renatus heard him with a sort of courteous impatience, and then, with a smile, said: "Yes, dear uncle, I know it; but the shows are very brave; and you will forgive me if my head is full of them just now. Presently, when the pageants are all over, I shall settle down to be a sober prince enough. I think you do not trust me wholly in the matter—but I would not seem ungrateful," he added rather hastily, seeing the gravity in the Duke's face—"for indeed you have been as a true father to me."

The Duke said no more at that time, for he cared not to give untimely advice, and a moment after, a bell began to toll in the silence, and the chaplain came habited to conduct the Prince to his chapel. So they went the three of them together.

It was dark and still within the church; in front of the altar-steps were set a faldstool and a chair, where the Duke might pray, or sit if he were weary; two tall wax lights stood beside, and lit up the crimson cloth and the gold fringes, so that it seemed like a rare flower blossoming in the dark. A single light, in a silver lamp hung by a silver chain, burnt before the altar; all else was dim; but they could see the dark stalls of the choir, with their carven canopies, over which hung the banners of old knights, that moved softly to and fro; beyond were the pillars of the aisles, glimmering faintly in a row. The roof and windows were dark, save where here and there a rib of stone or a tracery stood out very rich and dim. All about there was a kind of holy smell, of wood and carven stone and incense-smoke.

The chaplain knelt beneath the altar; and the Prince knelt down at the faldstool, the Duke beside him on the floor. And just as the old bell of the castle tolled the hour, and died away in a soft hum of sound, as sweet as honey, the chaplain said an ancient prayer, the purport of which was that the Christian must watch and pray; that only the pure heart might see God; and asking that the Prince might be blest with wisdom, as the Emperor Solomon was, to do according to the will of the Father.

Then the chaplain and the Duke withdrew; but as the Duke rose up, he laid his hand on the Prince's head and said, "God be with you, dear son, and open your eyes." And Renatus looked up at him and smiled.

Then the Duke went back to the little room, and prayed abundantly. It was arranged that he should wait there until the Prince's vigil was over, when he would go to attend him forth; and so the Prince was left by himself.

For a time Renatus prayed, gathering up the strength of his mind to pray earnestly; but other thoughts kept creeping in, like children peeping and beckoning from a door. So he rose up after a little, and looked about him; and something of the solemnity of the night and the place came into his mind.

Then, after a while, he sate, his armour clinking lightly as he moved; and wrapping his robe about him—for it grew chill in the church—he thought of what had been and what should be. The time flew fast; and presently Renatus heard the great bell ring the hour of midnight; so he knelt and prayed again, with all his might, that God would bless him and open his eyes.

Then he rose again to his feet; and now the moon was risen and made a very pure and tender radiance through one of the high windows; and Renatus looking about him, was conscious of a thrill of fear that passed through him, as though there were some great presence near him in the gloom; then his eyes fell on a little door on his right, opposite to the door by which they had entered, which he knew led out into the castle court; but underneath the door, between it and the sill, there gleamed a line of very golden light, such as might come from a fire without. The Prince had no foolish terrors, as he was by nature courageous, and the holy place that he was in made him feel secure. But the light, which now began to grow in clearness, and to stream, like a rippling flow of brightness, into the church, surprised him exceedingly. So he rose up and went to the little door, expecting that he would find it closed; but it opened to his hand.

He had thought to see the dark court of the castle as he had often seen it, with its tall chimneys and battlements, and with lights in the windows. But to his amazement he saw that he was on the edge of a vast and dizzy space, so vast that he had not thought there could be anything in the world so great. The church and he seemed to float together in the space, for the solid earth was all gone—and it came into his head that the great building in which he stood, so fair and high, was no larger than a mote that swims in the strong beams of the sun. The space was all misty and dim at first, but over it hung a light like the light of dawn, that seemed to gush from a place

in the cloud, near at hand and yet leagues away. Then as his sight became more used to the place, he saw that it was all sloping upwards and downwards, and built up of great steps or stairs, that ran across the space and were lost at last in cloud; and that the light came from the head of the steps. Then with a sudden shock of surprise he saw that there were persons kneeling on the steps; and every moment his sight became clearer and clearer, so that he could see the persons nearest to him, their robes and hands, and even the very lineaments of their faces.

Very near him there were three figures kneeling, not together in a group, but with some space between them. And, in some way that he could not explain, he felt that all the three were unconscious both of each other and of himself.

Looking intently upon them, he saw that they were kings, in royal robes. The nearest to him was an ancient man, with white hair; he knelt very upright and strong; his face was like parchment, with heavy lines, but his eyes glowed like a fire. Renatus thought he had never seen so proud a look. He had an air of command, and Renatus seemed to know that he had been a warrior in his youth. In his hands he held a crown of fine golden work, filled with jewels of great rarity and price; and the king held the crown as though he knew its worth; he seemed, as it were, to be proffering it, but as a gift of mighty value, the worthiest thing that he had to offer.

On a step below him at a little distance knelt the second; he was a younger man, in the prime of life; he had the look more of a student than a warrior, of one who was busied in many affairs, and who pondered earnestly over high matters of policy and state. He had a wiser face than the older man, but his brow was drawn by lines, as though he had often doubted of himself and others; and he had a crown in one hand, which he held a little irresolutely, as though he half loved it, and were yet half wearied of it; as though he was fain to lay it down, and yet not wholly glad to part with it.

Then Renatus turned a little to the third; and he was more richly apparelled than the others; his hands were clasped in prayer; and by his knee there lay a splendid diadem, an Emperor's crown, with few jewels, but each the price of a kingdom. And Renatus saw that he was very young, scarce older than himself; and that he had the most beautiful face he had ever seen, with large soft eyes, clear-cut features, and a mouth that looked both pure and strong; but in his face there was such a passion of holiness and surrender, that Renatus fell to wondering what it was that a man could so adore. He was the only one of the three who looked, as it were, rapt out of himself; and the crown lay beside him as if he had forgotten its very existence.

Then there came upon the air a great sound of jubilant and tender music like the voice of silver trumpets—and the cloud began to lift and draw up on every side, and revealed at last, very far off and very high, yet strangely near and clear, a Throne at the head of the steps. But Renatus dared not look thereon, for he felt that the time was not come; but he saw, as it were reflected in the eyes of the kings, that they looked upon a sight of awful splendour and mystery. Then he saw that the two that still held their crowns laid them down upon the ground with a sort of fearful haste, as though they were constrained; but the youngest of the kings smiled, as though he were satisfied beyond his dearest wish.

Then Renatus felt that somewhat was to be done too bright and holy for a mortal eye to behold, and so he drew back and softly closed the door; and it was a pain to find himself within the dark church again; it was as though he had lost the sight of something that a man might desire above all things to see—but he dared look no longer; and the music came again, but this time more urgently, in a storm of sound.

Then Renatus went back to his place, that seemed to him very small and humble beside what he had seen outside. And all the pride was emptied out of his heart, for he knew that he had looked upon the truth, and that it was wider than he had dreamed; and then he knelt and prayed that God would keep him humble and diligent and brave; but then he grew ashamed of his prayer, for he remembered that, after all, he was but still praying for himself; and he had a thought of the young Emperor's face, and he knew that there was something deeper and better still than humility and diligence and courage; what it was he knew not; but he thought that he had been, as it were, asking God for those fair things, like flower-blooms or jewels, which a man may wear for his own pride; but that they must rather rise and blossom, like plants out of a rich soil. So he ended by praying that God would empty him of all unworthy thoughts, and fill him full of that good and great thing, which, in the Gospel story, Martha went near to miss, but Mary certainly divined.

That was a blessed hour, to the thought of which Renatus afterwards often turned in darker and more weary days. But it drew swiftly to an end, and as he knelt, the bell beat one, and his vigil was over.

Presently the Duke came to attend him back; and Renatus could not speak of the vision, but only told the Duke that he had seen a wonderful thing, and he added a few words of grateful love, holding the Duke's hand close in his own.

On the next day, before Renatus came to be enthroned, the Barons came to do him homage; and Renatus, asking God to give him words that he might say what was in his heart, spoke to them, the Duke standing by; he said that he well knew that it appeared strange that one so young as himself should receive the homage of those who were older and wiser and more strong, adding: "But I believe that I am truly called, under God, to rule this land for the welfare of all that dwell therein, and I will rule it with diligence. Nay—for it is not well that a land should have many masters—I purpose that none shall rule it but myself, under God." And at that the Barons looked upon one another, but Renatus, leaning a little forward, with his hand upon his sword-hilt, said: "I think, my Lords, that there be some here that are saying to themselves, He hath learnt his lesson well, and I hope that it may be seen that it is so—but it is God and not man who hath put it into my heart to say this; it is from Him that I receive this throne. Counsel will I ask, and that gladly; but remembering the account that I must one day make, I will rule this realm for the welfare of the people thereof, and I will have all men do their parts; so see that your homage be of the heart and not of the lips, for it is to God that you make it, and not to me, who am indeed unworthy; but He that hath set me in this place will strengthen my hands. I have spoken this," he said, "not willingly; but I would have no one mistake my purpose in the matter."

Then the Barons came silently to do obeisance; and so Renatus came to his own; but more of him I must not here say, save that he ruled his realm wisely and well, and ever gave God the glory.

The Slype House

In the town of Garchester, close to St. Peter's Church, and near the river, stood a dark old house called the Slype House, from a narrow passage of that name that ran close to it, down to a bridge over the stream. The house showed a front of mouldering and discoloured stone to the street, pierced by small windows, like a monastery; and indeed, it was formerly inhabited by a college of priests who had served the Church. It abutted at one angle upon the aisle of the church, and there was a casement window that looked out from a room in the house, formerly the infirmary, into the aisle; it had been so built that any priest that was sick might hear the Mass from his bed, without descending into the church. Behind the house lay a little garden, closely grown up with trees and tall weeds, that ran down to the stream. In the wall that gave on the water, was a small door that admitted to an old timbered bridge that crossed the stream, and had a barred gate on the further side, which was rarely seen open; though if a man had watched attentively he might sometimes have seen a small lean person, much bowed and with a halting gait, slip out very quietly about dusk, and walk, with his eyes cast down, among the shadowy byways.

The name of the man who thus dwelt in the Slype House, as it appeared in the roll of burgesses, was Anthony Purvis. He was of an ancient family, and had inherited wealth. A word must be said of his childhood and youth. He was a sickly child, an only son, his father a man of substance, who lived very easily in the country; his mother had died when he was quite a child, and this sorrow had been borne very heavily by his father, who had loved her tenderly, and after her death had become morose and sullen, withdrawing himself from all company and exercise, and brooding angrily over his loss, as though God had determined to vex him. He had never cared much for the child, who had been peevish and fretful; and the boy's presence had done little but remind him of the wife he had lost; so that the child had lived alone, nourishing his own fancies, and reading much in a library of curious books that was in the house. The boy's health had been too tender for him to go to school; but when he was eighteen, he seemed stronger, and his father sent him to a university, more for the sake of being relieved of the boy's presence than for his good. And there, being unused to the society of his equals, he had been much flouted and despised for his feeble frame; till a certain bitter ambition sprang up in his mind, like a poisonous flower, to gain power and make himself a name; and he had determined that as he could not be loved he might still be feared; so he bided his time in bitterness, making great progress in his studies; then, when those days were over, he departed eagerly, and sought and obtained his father's leave to betake himself to a university of Italy, where he fell into

somewhat evil hands; for he made a friendship with an old doctor of the college, who feared not God and thought ill of man, and spent all his time in dark researches into the evil secrets of nature, the study of poisons that have enmity to the life of man, and many other hidden works of darkness, such as intercourse with spirits of evil, and the black influences that lie in wait for the soul; and he found Anthony an apt pupil. There he lived for some years till he was nearly thirty, seldom visiting his home, and writing but formal letters to his father, who supplied him gladly with a small revenue, so long as he kept apart and troubled him not.

Then his father had died, and Anthony came home to take up his inheritance, which was a plentiful one; he sold his land, and visiting the town of Garchester, by chance, for it lay near his home, he had lighted upon the Slype House, which lay very desolate and gloomy; and as he needed a large place for his instruments and devices, he had bought the house, and had now lived there for twenty years in great loneliness, but not ill-content.

To serve him he had none but a man and his wife, who were quiet and simple people and asked no questions; the wife cooked his meals, and kept the rooms, where he slept and read, clean and neat; the man moved his machines for him, and arranged his phials and instruments, having a light touch and a serviceable memory.

The door of the house that gave on the street opened into a hall; to the right was a kitchen, and a pair of rooms where the man and his wife lived. On the left was a large room running through the house; the windows on to the street were walled up, and the windows at the back looked—on the garden, the trees of which grew close to the casements, making the room dark, and in a breeze rustling their leaves or leafless branches against the panes. In this room Anthony had a furnace with bellows, the smoke of which discharged itself into the chimney; and here he did much of his work, making mechanical toys, as a clock to measure the speed of wind or water, a little chariot that ran a few yards by itself, a puppet that moved its arms and laughed—and other things that had wiled away his idle hours; the room was filled up with dark lumber, in a sort of order that would have looked to a stranger like disorder, but so that Anthony could lay his hand on all that he needed. From the hall, which was paved with stone, went up the stairs, very strong and broad, of massive oak; under which was a postern that gave on the garden; on the floor above was a room where Anthony slept, which again had its windows to the street boarded up, for he was a light sleeper, and the morning sounds of the awakening city disturbed him.

The room was hung with a dark arras, sprinkled with red flowers; he slept in a great bed with black curtains to shut out all light; the windows looked into

the garden; but on the left of the bed, which stood with its head to the street, was an alcove, behind the hangings, containing the window that gave on the church. On the same floor were three other rooms; in one of these, looking on the garden, Anthony had his meals. It was a plain panelled room. Next was a room where he read, filled with books, also looking on the garden; and next to that was a little room of which he alone had the key. This room he kept locked, and no one set foot in it but himself. There was one more room on this floor, set apart for a guest who never came, with a great bed and a press of oak. And that looked on the street. Above, there was a row of plain plastered rooms, in which stood furniture for which Anthony had no use, and many crates in which his machines and phials came to him; this floor was seldom visited, except by the man, who sometimes came to put a box there; and the spiders had it to themselves; except for a little room where stood an optic glass through which on clear nights Anthony sometimes looked at the moon and stars, if there was any odd misadventure among them, such as an eclipse; or when a fiery-tailed comet went his way silently in the heavens, coming from none might say whence and going none knew whither, on some strange errand of God.

Anthony had but two friends who ever came to see him. One was an old physician who had ceased to practise his trade, which indeed was never abundant, and who would sometimes drink a glass of wine with Anthony, and engage in curious talk of men's bodies and diseases, or look at one of Anthony's toys. Anthony had come to know him by having called him in to cure some ailment, which needed a surgical knife; and that had made a kind of friendship between them; but Anthony had little need thereafter to consult him about his health, which indeed was now settled enough, though he had but little vigour; and he knew enough of drugs to cure himself when he was ill. The other friend was a foolish priest of the college, that made belief to be a student but was none, who thought Anthony a very wise and mighty person, and listened with open mouth and eyes to all that he said or showed him. This priest, who was fond of wonders, had introduced himself to Anthony by making believe to borrow a volume of him; and then had grown proud of the acquaintance, and bragged greatly of it to his friends, mixing up much that was fanciful with a little that was true. But the result was that gossip spread wide about Anthony, and he was held in the town to be a very fearful person, who could do strange mischief if he had a mind to; Anthony never cared to walk abroad, for he was of a shy habit, and disliked to meet the eyes of his fellows; but if he did go about, men began to look curiously after him as he went by, shook their heads and talked together with a dark pleasure, while children fled before his face and women feared him; all of which pleased Anthony mightily, if the truth were told; for at the bottom of his restless and eager spirit lay a deep vanity unseen, like a lake

in woods; he hungered not indeed for fame, but for repute—*monstrari digito*, as the poet has it; and he cared little in what repute he was held, so long as men thought him great and marvellous; and as he could not win renown by brave deeds and words, he was rejoiced to win it by keeping up a certain darkness and mystery about his ways and doings; and this was very dear to him, so that when the silly priest called him Seer and Wizard, he frowned and looked sideways; but he laughed in his heart and was glad.

Now, when Anthony was near his fiftieth year, there fell on him a heaviness of spirit which daily increased upon him. He began to question of his end and what lay beyond. He had always made pretence to mock at religion, and had grown to believe that in death the soul was extinguished like a burnt-out flame. He began, too, to question of his life and what he had done. He had made a few toys, he had filled vacant hours, and he had gained an ugly kind of fame—and this was all. Was he so certain, he began to think, after all, that death was the end? Were there not, perhaps, in the vast house of God, rooms and chambers beyond that in which he was set for awhile to pace to and fro? About this time he began to read in a Bible that had lain dusty and unopened on a shelf. It was his mother's book, and he found therein many little tokens of her presence. Here was a verse underlined; at some gracious passages the page was much fingered and worn; in one place there were stains that looked like the mark of tears; then again, in one page, there was a small tress of hair, golden hair, tied in a paper with a name across it, that seemed to be the name of a little sister of his mother's that died a child; and again there were a few withered flowers, like little sad ghosts, stuck through a paper on which was written his father's name—the name of the sad, harsh, silent man whom Anthony had feared with all his heart. Had those two, indeed, on some day of summer, walked to and fro, or sate in some woodland corner, whispering sweet words of love together? Anthony felt a sudden hunger of the heart for a woman's love, for tender words to soothe his sadness, for the laughter and kisses of children—and he began to ransack his mind for memories of his mother; he could remember being pressed to her heart one morning when she lay abed, with her fragrant hair falling about him. The worst was that he must bear his sorrow alone, for there were none to whom he could talk of such things. The doctor was as dry as an old bunch of herbs, and as for the priest, Anthony was ashamed to show anything but contempt and pride in his presence.

For relief he began to turn to a branch of his studies that he had long disused; this was a fearful commerce with the unseen spirits. Anthony could remember having practised some experiments of this kind with the old Italian doctor; but he remembered them with a kind of disgust, for they seemed to him but a sort of deadly juggling; and such dark things as he had

seen seemed like a dangerous sport with unclean and coltish beings, more brute-like than human. Yet now he read in his curious books with care, and studied the tales of necromancers, who had indeed seemed to have some power over the souls of men departed. But the old books gave him but little faith, and a kind of angry disgust at the things attempted. And he began to think that the horror in which such men as made these books abode, was not more than the dark shadow cast on the mirror of the soul by their own desperate imaginings and timorous excursions.

One day, a Sunday, he was strangely sad and heavy; he could settle to nothing, but threw book after book aside, and when he turned to some work of construction, his hand seemed to have lost its cunning. It was a grey and sullen day in October; a warm wet wind came buffeting up from the West, and roared in the chimneys and eaves of the old house. The shrubs in the garden plucked themselves hither and thither as though in pain. Anthony walked to and fro after his midday meal, which he had eaten hastily and without savour; at last, as though with a sudden resolution, he went to a secret cabinet and got out a key; and with it he went to the door of the little room that was ever locked.

He stopped at the threshold for a while, looking hither and thither; and then he suddenly unlocked it and went in, closing and locking it behind him. The room was as dark as night, but Anthony going softly, his hands before him, went to a corner and got a tinder-box which lay there, and made a flame.

A small dark room appeared, hung with a black tapestry; the window was heavily shuttered and curtained; in the centre of the room stood what looked like a small altar, painted black; the floor was all bare, but with white marks upon it, half effaced. Anthony looked about the room, glancing sidelong, as though in some kind of doubt; his breath went and came quickly, and he looked paler than was his wont.

Presently, as though reassured by the silence and calm of the place, he went to a tall press that stood in a corner, which he opened, and took from it certain things—a dish of metal, some small leathern bags, a large lump of chalk, and a book. He laid all but the chalk down on the altar, and then opening the book, read in it a little; and then he went with the chalk and drew certain marks upon the floor, first making a circle, which he went over again and again with anxious care; at times he went back and peeped into the book as though uncertain. Then he opened the bags, which seemed to hold certain kinds of powder, this dusty, that in grains; he ran them through his hands, and then poured a little of each into his dish, and mixed them with his hands. Then he stopped and looked about him. Then he walked to a place in the wall on the further side of the altar from the door,

and drew the arras carefully aside, disclosing a little alcove in the wall; into this he looked fearfully, as though he was afraid of what he might see.

In the alcove, which was all in black, appeared a small shelf, that stood but a little way out from the wall. Upon it, gleaming very white against the black, stood the skull of a man, and on either side of the skull were the bones of a man's hand. It looked to him, as he gazed on it with a sort of curious disgust, as though a dead man had come up to the surface of a black tide, and was preparing presently to leap out. On either side stood two long silver candlesticks, very dark with disuse; but instead of holding candles, they were fitted at the top with flat metal dishes; and in these he poured some of his powders, mixing them as before with his fingers. Between the candlesticks and behind the skull was an old and dark picture, at which he gazed for a time, holding his taper on high. The picture represented a man fleeing in a kind of furious haste from a wood, his hands spread wide, and his eyes staring out of the picture; behind him everywhere was the wood, above which was a star in the sky—and out of the wood leaned a strange pale horned thing, very dim. The horror in the man's face was skilfully painted, and Anthony felt a shudder pass through his veins. He knew not what the picture meant; it had been given to him by the old Italian, who had smiled a wicked smile when he gave it, and told him that it had a very great virtue. When Anthony had asked him of the subject of the picture, the old Italian had said, "Oh, it is as appears; he hath been where he ought not, and he hath seen somewhat he doth not like." When Anthony would fain have known more, and especially what the thing was that leaned out of the wood, the old Italian had smiled cruelly and said, "Know you not? Well, you will know some day when you have seen him;" and never a word more would he say.

When Anthony had put all things in order, he opened the book at a certain place, and laid it upon the altar; and then it seemed as though his courage failed him, for he drew the curtain again over the alcove, unlocked the door, set the tinder-box and the candle back in their place, and softly left the room.

He was very restless all the evening. He took down books from the shelves, turned them over, and put them back again. He addressed himself to some unfinished work, but soon threw it aside; he paced up and down, and spent a long time, with his hands clasped behind him, looking out into the desolate garden, where a still, red sunset burnt behind the leafless trees. He was like a man who has made up his mind to a grave decision, and shrinks back upon the brink. When his food was served he could hardly touch it, and he drank no wine as his custom was to do, but only water, saying to

himself that his head must be clear. But in the evening he went to his bedroom, and searched for something in a press there; he found at last what he was searching for, and unfolded a long black robe, looking gloomily upon it, as though it aroused unwelcome thoughts; while he was pondering, he heard a hum of music behind the arras; he put the robe down, and stepped through the hangings, and stood awhile in the little oriel that looked down into the church. Vespers were proceeding; he saw the holy lights dimly through the dusty panes, and heard the low preluding of the organ; then, solemn and slow, rose the sound of a chanted psalm on the air; he carefully unfastened the casement which opened inward and unclosed it, standing for a while to listen, while the air, fragrant with incense smoke, drew into the room along the vaulted roof. There were but a few worshippers in the church, who stood below him; two lights burnt stilly upon the altar, and he saw distinctly the thin hands of a priest who held a book close to his face. He had not set foot within a church for many years, and the sight and sound drew his mind back to his childhood's days. At last with a sigh he put the window to very softly, and went to his study, where he made pretence to read, till the hour came when he was wont to retire to his bed. He sent his servant away, but instead of lying down, he sate, looking upon a parchment, which he held in his hand, while the bells of the city slowly told out the creeping hours.

At last, a few minutes before midnight, he rose from his place; the house was now all silent, and without the night was very still, as though all things slept tranquilly. He opened the press and took from it the black robe, and put it round him, so that it covered him from head to foot, and then gathered up the parchment, and the key of the locked room, and went softly out, and so came to the door. This he undid with a kind of secret and awe-struck haste, locking it behind him. Once inside the room, he wrestled awhile with a strong aversion to what was in his mind to do, and stood for a moment, listening intently, as though he expected to hear some sound. But the room was still, except for the faint biting of some small creature in the wainscot.

Then with a swift motion he took up the tinder-box and made a light; he drew aside the curtain that hid the alcove; he put fire to the powder in the candlesticks, which at first spluttered, and then swiftly kindling sent up a thick smoky flame, fragrant with drugs, burning hotly and red. Then he came back to the altar; cast a swift glance round him to see that all was ready; put fire to the powder on the altar, and in a low and inward voice began to recite words from the book, and from the parchment which he held in his hand; once or twice he glanced fearfully at the skull, and the hands which gleamed luridly through the smoke; the figures in the picture wavered

in the heat; and now the powders began to burn clear, and throw up a steady light; and still he read, sometimes turning a page, until at last he made an end; and drawing something from a silver box which lay beside the book, he dropped it in the flame, and looked straight before him to see what might befall. The thing that fell in the flame burned up brightly, with a little leaping of sparks, but soon it died down; and there was a long silence, in the room, a breathless silence, which, to Anthony's disordered mind, was not like the silence of emptiness, but such silence as may be heard when unseen things are crowding quietly to a closed door, expecting it to be opened, and as it were holding each other back.

Suddenly, between him and the picture, appeared for a moment a pale light, as of moonlight, and then with a horror which words cannot attain to describe, Anthony saw a face hang in the air a few feet from him, that looked in his own eyes with a sort of intent fury, as though to spring upon him if he turned either to the right hand or to the left. His knees tottered beneath him, and a sweat of icy coldness sprang on his brow; there followed a sound like no sound that Anthony had ever dreamed of hearing; a sound that was near and yet remote, a sound that was low and yet charged with power, like the groaning of a voice in grievous pain and anger, that strives to be free and yet is helpless. And then Anthony knew that he had indeed opened the door that looks into the other world, and that a deadly thing that held him in enmity had looked out. His reeling brain still told him that he was safe where he was, but that he must not step or fall outside the circle; but how he should resist the power of the wicked face he knew not. He tried to frame a prayer in his heart; but there swept such a fury of hatred across the face that he dared not. So he closed his eyes and stood dizzily waiting to fall, and knowing that if he fell it was the end.

Suddenly, as he stood with closed eyes, he felt the horror of the spell relax; he opened his eyes again, and saw that the face died out upon the air, becoming first white and then thin, like the husk that stands on a rush when a fly draws itself from its skin, and floats away into the sunshine.

Then there fell a low and sweet music upon the air, like a concert of flutes and harps, very far away. And then suddenly, in a sweet clear radiance, the face of his mother, as she lived in his mind, appeared in the space, and looked at him with a kind of heavenly love; then beside the face appeared two thin hands which seemed to wave a blessing towards him, which flowed like healing into his soul.

The relief from the horror, and the flood of tenderness that came into his heart, made him reckless. The tears came into his eyes, not in a rising film, but a flood hot and large. He took a step forwards round the altar; but as he

did so, the vision disappeared, the lights shot up into a flare and went out; the house seemed to be suddenly shaken; in the darkness he heard the rattle of bones, and the clash of metal, and Anthony fell all his length upon the ground and lay as one dead.

But while he thus lay, there came to him in some secret cell of the mind a dreadful vision, which he could only dimly remember afterwards with a fitful horror. He thought that he was walking in the cloister of some great house or college, a cool place, with a pleasant garden in the court. He paced up and down, and each time that he did so, he paused a little before a great door at the end, a huge blind portal, with much carving about it, which he somehow knew he was forbidden to enter. Nevertheless, each time that he came to it, he felt a strong wish, that constantly increased, to set foot therein. Now in the dream there fell on him a certain heaviness, and the shadow of a cloud fell over the court, and struck the sunshine out of it. And at last he made up his mind that he would enter. He pushed the door open with much difficulty, and found himself in a long blank passage, very damp and chilly, but with a glimmering light; he walked a few paces down it. The flags underfoot were slimy, and the walls streamed with damp. He then thought that he would return; but the great door was closed behind him, and he could not open it. This made him very fearful; and while he considered what he should do, he saw a tall and angry-looking man approaching very swiftly down the passage. As he turned to face him, the other came straight to him, and asked him very sternly what he did there; to which Anthony replied that he had found the door open. To which the other replied that it was fast now, and that he must go forward. He seized Anthony as he spoke by the arm, and urged him down the passage. Anthony would fain have resisted, but he felt like a child in the grip of a giant, and went forward in great terror and perplexity. Presently they came to a door in the side of the wall, and as they passed it, there stepped out an ugly shadowy thing, the nature of which he could not clearly discern, and marched softly behind them. Soon they came to a turn in the passage, and in a moment the way stopped on the brink of a dark well, that seemed to go down a long way into the earth, and out of which came a cold fetid air, with a hollow sound like a complaining voice. Anthony drew back as far as he could from the pit, and set his back to the wall, his companion letting go of him. But he could not go backward, for the thing behind him was in the passage, and barred the way, creeping slowly nearer. Then Anthony was in a great agony of mind, and waited for the end.

But while he waited, there came some one very softly down the passage and drew near; and the other, who had led him to the place, waited, as though ill-pleased to be interrupted; it was too murky for Anthony to see the new-

comer, but he knew in some way that he was a friend. The stranger came up to them, and spoke in a low voice to the man who had drawn Anthony thither, as though pleading for something; and the man answered angrily, but yet with a certain dark respect, and seemed to argue that he was acting in his right, and might not be interfered with. Anthony could not hear what they said, they spoke so low, but he guessed the sense, and knew that it was himself of whom they discoursed, and listened with a fearful wonder to see which would prevail. The end soon came, for the tall man, who had brought him there, broke out into a great storm of passion; and Anthony heard him say, "He hath yielded himself to his own will; and he is mine here; so let us make an end." Then the stranger seemed to consider; and then with a quiet courage, and in a soft and silvery voice like that of a child, said, "I would that you would have yielded to my prayer; but as you will not, I have no choice." And he took his hand from under the cloak that wrapped him, and held something out; then there came a great roaring out of the pit, and a zigzag flame flickered in the dark. Then in a moment the tall man and the shadow were gone; Anthony could not see whither they went, and he would have thanked the stranger; but the other put his finger to his lip as though to order silence, and pointed to the way he had come, saying, "Make haste and go back; for they will return anon with others; you know not how dear it hath cost me." Anthony could see the stranger's face in the gloom, and he was surprised to see it so youthful; but he saw also that tears stood in the eyes of the stranger, and that something dark like blood trickled down his brow; yet he looked very lovingly at him. So Anthony made haste to go back, and found the door ajar; but as he reached it, he heard a horrible din behind him, of cries and screams; and it was with a sense of gratitude, that he could not put into words, but which filled all his heart, that he found himself back in the cloister again. And then the vision all fled away, and with a shock coming to himself, he found that he was lying in his own room; and then he knew that a battle had been fought out over his soul, and that the evil had not prevailed.

He was cold and aching in every limb; the room was silent and dark, with the heavy smell of the burnt drugs all about it. Anthony crept to the door, and opened it; locked it again, and made his way in the dark very feebly to his bed-chamber; he had just the strength to get into his bed, and then all his life seemed to ebb from him, and he lay, and thought that he was dying. Presently from without there came the crying of cocks, and a bell beat the hour of four; and after that, in his vigil of weakness, it was strange to see the light glimmer in the crevices, and to hear the awakening birds that in the garden bushes took up, one after another, their slender piping song, till all the choir cried together.

But Anthony felt a strange peace in his heart; and he had a sense, though he could not say why, that it was as once in his childhood, when he was ill, and his mother had sate softly by him while he slept.

So he waited, and in spite of his mortal weakness that was a blessed hour.

When his man came to rouse him in the morning, Anthony said that he believed that he was very ill, that he had had a fall, and that the old doctor must be fetched to him. The man looked so strangely upon him, that Anthony knew that he had some fear upon his mind. Presently the doctor was brought, and Anthony answered such questions as were put to him, in a faint voice, saying, "I was late at my work, and I slipped and fell." The doctor, who looked troubled, gave directions; and when he went away he heard his man behind the door asking the doctor about the strange storm in the night, that had seemed like an earthquake, or as if a thunderbolt had struck the house. But the doctor said very gruffly, "It is no time to talk thus, when your master is sick to death." But Anthony knew in himself that he would not die yet.

It was long ere he was restored to a measure of health; and indeed he never rightly recovered the use of his limbs; the doctor held that he had suffered some stroke of palsy; at which Anthony smiled a little, and made no answer.

When he was well enough to creep to and fro, he went sadly to the dark room, and with much pain and weakness carried the furniture out of it. The picture he cut in pieces and burnt; and the candles and dishes, with the book, he cast into a deep pool in the stream; the bones he buried in the earth; the hangings he stored away for his own funeral.

Anthony never entered his workroom again; but day after day he sate in his chair, and read a little, but mostly in the Bible; he made a friend of a very wise old priest, to whom he opened all his heart, and to whom he conveyed much money to be bestowed on the poor; there was a great calm in his spirit, which was soon written in his face, in spite of his pain, for he often suffered sorely; but he told the priest that something, he knew not certainly what, seemed to dwell by him, waiting patiently for his coming; and so Anthony awaited his end.

Out of the Sea

It was about ten of the clock on a November morning in the little village of Blea-on-the-Sands. The hamlet was made up of some thirty houses, which clustered together on a low rising ground. The place was very poor, but some old merchant of bygone days had built in a pious mood a large church, which was now too great for the needs of the place; the nave had been unroofed in a heavy gale, and there was no money to repair it, so that it had fallen to decay, and the tower was joined to the choir by roofless walls. This was a sore trial to the old priest, Father Thomas, who had grown grey there; but he had no art in gathering money, which he asked for in a shamefaced way; and the vicarage was a poor one, hardly enough for the old man's needs. So the church lay desolate.

The village stood on what must once have been an island; the little river Reddy, which runs down to the sea, there forking into two channels on the landward side; towards the sea the ground was bare, full of sand-hills covered with a short grass. Towards the land was a small wood of gnarled trees, the boughs of which were all brushed smooth by the gales; looking landward there was the green flat, in which the river ran, rising into low hills; hardly a house was visible save one or two lonely farms; two or three church towers rose above the hills at a long distance away. Indeed Blea was much cut off from the world; there was a bridge over the stream on the west side, but over the other channel was no bridge, so that to fare eastward it was requisite to go in a boat. To seaward there were wide sands, when the tide was out; when it was in, it came up nearly to the end of the village street. The people were mostly fishermen, but there were a few farmers and labourers; the boats of the fishermen lay to the east side of the village, near the river channel which gave some draught of water; and the channel was marked out by big black stakes and posts that straggled out over the sands, like awkward leaning figures, to the sea's brim.

Father Thomas lived in a small and ancient brick house near the church, with a little garden of herbs attached. He was a kindly man, much worn by age and weather, with a wise heart, and he loved the quiet life with his small flock. This morning he had come out of his house to look abroad, before he settled down to the making of his sermon. He looked out to sea, and saw with a shadow of sadness the black outline of a wreck that had come ashore a week before, and over which the white waves were now breaking. The wind blew steadily from the north-east, and had a bitter poisonous chill in it, which it doubtless drew from the fields of the upper ice. The day was dark and over, hung, not with cloud, but with a kind of dreary vapour that shut out the sun. Father Thomas shuddered at the wind, and drew his patched

cloak round him. As he did so, he saw three figures come up to the vicarage gate. It was not a common thing for him to have visitors in the morning, and he saw with surprise that they were old Master John Grimston, the richest man in the place, half farmer and half fisherman, a dark surly old man; his wife, Bridget, a timid and frightened woman, who found life with her harsh husband a difficult business, in spite of their wealth, which, for a place like Blea, was great; and their son Henry, a silly shambling man of forty, who was his father's butt. The three walked silently and heavily, as though they came on a sad errand.

Father Thomas went briskly down to meet them, and greeted them with his accustomed cheerfulness. "And what may I do for you?" he said. Old Master Grimston made a sort of gesture with his head as though his wife should speak; and she said in a low and somewhat husky voice, with a rapid utterance, "We have a matter, Father, we would ask you about—are you at leisure?" Father Thomas said, "Ay, I am ashamed to be not more busy! Let us go within the house." They did so; and even in the little distance to the door, the Father thought that his visitors behaved themselves very strangely. They peered round from left to right, and once or twice Master Grimston looked sharply behind them, as though they were followed. They said nothing but "Ay" and "No" to the Father's talk, and bore themselves like people with a sore fear on their backs. Father Thomas made up his mind that it was some question of money, for nothing else was wont to move Master Grimston's mind. So he had them into his parlour and gave them seats, and then there was a silence, while the two men continued to look furtively about them, and the goodwife sate with her eyes upon the priest's face. Father Thomas knew not what to make of this, till Master Grimston said harshly, "Come, wife, tell the tale and make an end; we must not take up the Father's time."

"I hardly know how to say it, Father," said Bridget, "but a strange and evil thing has befallen us; there is something come to our house, and we know not what it is—but it brings a fear with it." A sudden paleness came over her face, and she stopped, and the three exchanged a glance in which terror was visibly written. Master Grimston looked over his shoulder swiftly, and made as though to speak, yet only swallowed in his throat; but Henry said suddenly, in a loud and woeful voice: "It is an evil beast out of the sea." And then there followed a dreadful silence, while Father Thomas felt a sudden fear leap up in his heart, at the contagion of the fear that he saw written on the faces round him. But he said with all the cheerfulness he could muster, "Come, friends, let us not begin to talk of sea-beasts; we must have the whole tale Mistress Grimston, I must hear the story—be content—nothing

can touch us here." The three seemed to draw a faint content from his words, and Bridget began:—

"It was the day of the wreck, Father. John was up betimes, before the dawn; he walked out early to the sands, and Henry with him—and they were the first to see the wreck—was not that it?" At these words the father and son seemed to exchange a very swift and secret look, and both grew pale. "John told me there was a wreck ashore, and they went presently and roused the rest of the village; and all that day they were out, saving what could be saved. Two sailors were found, both dead and pitifully battered by the sea, and they were buried, as you know, Father, in the churchyard next day; John came back about dusk and Henry with him, and we sate down to our supper. John was telling me about the wreck, as we sate beside the fire, when Henry, who was sitting apart, rose up and cried out suddenly, 'What is that?'"

She paused for a moment, and Henry, who sate with face blanched, staring at his mother, said, "Ay, did I—it ran past me suddenly." "Yes, but what was it?" said Father Thomas trying to smile; "a dog or cat, methinks." "It was a beast," said Henry slowly, in a trembling voice—"a beast about the bigness of a goat. I never saw the like—yet I did not see it clear; I but felt the air blow, and caught a whiff of it—it was salt like the sea, but with a kind of dead smell behind." "Was that all you saw?" said Father Thomas; "belike you were tired and faint, and the air swam round you suddenly—I have known the like myself when weary."

"Nay, nay," said Henry, "this was not like that—it was a beast, sure enough."

"Ay, and we have seen it since," said Bridget. "At least I have not seen it clearly yet, but I have smelt its odour, and it turns me sick—but John and Henry have seen it often—sometimes it lies and seems to sleep, but it watches us; and again it is merry, and will leap in a corner—and John saw it skip upon the sands near the wreck—did you not, John?" At these words the two men again exchanged a glance, and then old Master Grimston, with a dreadful look in his face, in which great anger seemed to strive with fear, said "Nay, silly woman, it was not near the wreck, it was out to the east." "It matters little," said Father Thomas, who saw well enough this was no light matter. "I never heard the like of it. I will myself come down to your house with a holy book, and see if the thing will meet me. I know not what this is," he went on, "whether it is a vain terror that hath hold of you; but there be spirits of evil in the world, though much fettered by Christ and His Saints—we read of such in Holy Writ—and the sea, too, doubtless hath its monsters; and it may be that one hath wandered out of the waves, like a dog that hath strayed from his home. I dare not say, till I have met it face to face. But God

gives no power to such things to hurt those who have a fair conscience."— And here he made a stop, and looked at the three; Bridget sate regarding him with a hope in her face; but the other two sate peering upon the ground; and the priest divined in some secret way that all was not well with them. "But I will come at once," he said rising, "and I will see if I can cast out or bind the thing, whatever it be—for I am in this place as a soldier of the Lord, to fight with works of darkness." He took a clasped book from a table, and lifted up his hat, saying, "Let us set forth." Then he said as they left the room, "Hath it appeared to-day?" "Yes, indeed," said Henry, "and it was ill content. It followed us as though it were angered." "Come," said Father Thomas turning upon him, "you speak thus of a thing, as you might speak of a dog—what is it like?" "Nay," said Henry, "I know not; I can never see it clearly; it is like a speck in the eye—it is never there when you look upon it—it glides away very secretly; it is most like a goat, I think. It seems to be horned, and hairy; but I have seen its eyes, and they were yellow, like a flame."

As he said these words Master Grimston went in haste to the door, and pulled it open as though to breathe the air. The others followed him and went out; but Master Grimston drew the priest aside, and said like a man in a mortal fear, "Look you, Father, all this is true—the thing is a devil—and why it abides with us I know not; but I cannot live so; and unless it be cast out it will slay me—but if money be of avail, I have it in abundance." "Nay," said Father Thomas, "let there be no talk of money—perchance if I can aid you, you may give of your gratitude to God." "Ay, ay," said the old man hurriedly, "that was what I meant—there is money in abundance for God, if he will but set me free."

So they walked very sadly together through the street. There were few folk about; the men and the children were all abroad—a woman or two came to the house doors, and wondered a little to see them pass so solemnly, as though they followed a body to the grave.

Master Grimston's house was the largest in the place. It had a walled garden before it, with a strong door set in the wall. The house stood back from the road, a dark front of brick with gables; behind it the garden sloped nearly to the sands, with wooden barns and warehouses. Master Grimston unlocked the door, and then it seemed that his terrors came over him, for he would have the priest enter first. Father Thomas, with a certain apprehension of which he was ashamed, walked quickly in, and looked about him. The herbage of the garden had mostly died down in the winter, and a tangle of sodden stalks lay over the beds. A flagged path edged with box led up to the house, which seemed to stare at them out of its dark windows with a sort of

steady gaze. Master Grimston fastened the door behind them, and they went all together, keeping close one to another, up to the house, the door of which opened upon a big parlour or kitchen, sparsely furnished, but very clean and comfortable. Some vessels of metal glittered on a rack. There were chairs, ranged round the open fireplace. There was no sound except that the wind buffeted in the chimney. It looked a quiet and homely place, and Father Thomas grew ashamed of his fears. "Now," said he in his firm voice, "though I am your guest here, I will appoint what shall be done. We will sit here together, and talk as cheerfully as we may, till we have dined. Then, if nothing appears to us,"—and he crossed himself—"I will go round the house, into every room, and see if we can track the thing to its lair: then I will abide with you till evensong; and then I will soon return, and lie here to-night. Even if the thing be wary, and dares not to meet the power of the Church in the day-time, perhaps it will venture out at night; and I will even try a fall with it. So come, good people, and be comforted."

So they sate together; and Father Thomas talked of many things, and told some old legends of saints; and they dined, though without much cheer; and still nothing appeared. Then, after dinner, Father Thomas would view the house. So he took his book up, and they went from room to room. On the ground floor there were several chambers not used, which they entered in turn, but saw nothing; on the upper floor was a large room where Master Grimston and his wife slept; and a further room for Henry, and a guest-chamber in which the priest was to sleep if need was; and a room where a servant-maid slept. And now the day began to darken and to turn to evening, and Father Thomas felt a shadow grow in his mind. There came into his head a verse of Scripture about a spirit which found a house "empty, swept and garnished," and called his fellows to enter in.

At the end of the passage was a locked door; and Father Thomas said: "This is the last room—let us enter." "Nay, there is no need to do that," said Master Grimston in a kind of haste; "it leads nowhither—it is but a room of stores." "It were a pity to leave it unvisited," said the Father—and as he said the word, there came a kind of stirring from within. "A rat, doubtless," said the Father, striving with a sudden sense of fear; but the pale faces round him told another tale. "Come, Master Grimston, let us be done with this;" said Father Thomas decisively; "the hour of vespers draws nigh." So Master Grimston slowly drew out a key and unlocked the door, and Father Thomas marched in. It was a simple place enough. There were shelves on which various household matters lay, boxes and jars, with twine and cordage. On the ground stood chests. There were some clothes hanging on pegs, and in a corner was a heap of garments, piled up. On one of the chests stood a box of rough deal, and from the corner of it dripped water, which lay in a little pool

on the floor. Master Grimston went hurriedly to the box and pushed it further to the wall. As he did so, a kind of sound came from Henry's lips. Father Thomas turned and looked at him; he stood pale and strength-less, his eyes fixed on the corner—at the same moment something dark and shapeless seemed to slip past the group, and there came to the nostrils of Father Thomas a strange sharp smell, as of the sea, only that there was a taint within it, like the smell of corruption.

They all turned and looked at Father Thomas together, as though seeking a comfort from his presence. He, hardly knowing what he did, and in the grasp of a terrible fear, fumbled with his book; and opening it, read the first words that his eye fell upon, which was the place where the Blessed Lord, beset with enemies, said that if He did but pray to His Father, He should send Him forthwith legions of angels to encompass Him. And the verse seemed to the priest so like a message sent instantly from heaven that he was not a little comforted.

But the thing, whatever the reason was, appeared to them no more at that time. Yet the thought of it lay very heavy on Father Thomas's heart. In truth he had not in the bottom of his mind believed that he would see it, but had trusted in his honest life and his sacred calling to protect him. He could hardly speak for some minutes,—moreover the horror of the thing was very great—and seeing him so grave, their terrors were increased, though there was a kind of miserable joy in their minds that some one, and he a man of high repute, should suffer with them.

Then Father Thomas, after a pause—they were now in the parlour—said, speaking very slowly, that they were in a sore affliction of Satan, and that they must withstand him with a good courage—"and look you," he added, turning with a great sternness to the three, "if there be any mortal sin upon your hearts, see that you confess it and be shriven speedily—for while such a thing lies upon the heart, so long hath Satan power to hurt—otherwise have no fear at all."

Then Father Thomas slipped out to the garden, and hearing the bell pulled for vespers, he went to the church, and the three would go with him, because they would not be left alone. So they went together; by this time the street was fuller, and the servant-maid had told tales, so that there was much talk in the place about what was going forward. None spoke with them as they went, but at every corner you might see one check another in talk, and a silence fall upon a group, so that they knew that their terrors were on every tongue. There was but a handful of worshippers in the church, which was dark, save for the light on Father Thomas' book. He read the holy service swiftly and courageously, but his face was very pale and grave in the

light of the candle. When the vespers were over, and he had put off his robe, he said that he would go back to his house, and gather what he needed for the night, and that they should wait for him at the churchyard gate. So he strode off to his vicarage. But as he shut to the door, he saw a dark figure come running up the garden; he waited with a fear in his mind, but in a moment he saw that it was Henry, who came up breathless, and said that he must speak with the Father alone. Father Thomas knew that somewhat dark was to be told him. So he led Henry into the parlour and seated himself, and said, "Now, my son, speak boldly." So there was an instant's silence, and Henry slipped on to his knees.

Then in a moment Henry with a sob began to tell his tale. He said that on the day of the wreck his father had roused him very early in the dawn, and had told him to put on his clothes and come silently, for he thought there was a wreck ashore. His father carried a spade in his hand, he knew not then why. They went down to the tide, which was moving out very fast, and left but an inch or two of water on the sands. There was but a little light, but, when they had walked a little, they saw the black hull of a ship before them, on the edge of the deeper water, the waves driving over it; and then all at once they came upon the body of a man lying on his face on the sand. There was no sign of life in him, but he clasped a bag in his hand that was heavy, and the pocket of his coat was full to bulging; and there lay, moreover, some glittering things about him that seemed to be coins. They lifted the body up, and his father stripped the coat off from the man, and then bade Henry dig a hole in the sand, which he presently did, though the sand and water oozed fast into it. Then his father, who had been stooping down, gathering somewhat up from the sand, raised the body up, and laid it in the hole, and bade Henry cover it with the sand. And so he did till it was nearly hidden. Then came a horrible thing; the sand in the hole began to move and stir, and presently a hand was put out with clutching fingers; and Henry had dropped the spade, and said, "There is life in him," but his father seized the spade, and shovelled the sand into the hole with a kind of silent fury, and trampled it over and smoothed it down—and then he gathered up the coat and the bag, and handed Henry the spade. By this time the town was astir, and they saw, very faintly, a man run along the shore eastward; so, making a long circuit to the west, they returned; his father had put the spade away and taken the coat upstairs; and then he went out with Henry, and told all he could find that there was a wreck ashore.

The priest heard the story with a fierce shame and anger, and turning to Henry he said, "But why did you not resist your father, and save the poor sailor?" "I dared not," said Henry shuddering, "though I would have done so if I could; but my father has a power over me, and I am used to obey him."

Then said the priest, "This is a dark matter. But you have told the story bravely, and now will I shrive you, my son." So he gave him shrift. Then he said to Henry, "And have you seen aught that would connect the beast that visits you with this thing?" "Ay, that I have," said Henry, "for I watched it with my father skip and leap in the water over the place where the man lies buried." Then the priest said, "Your father must tell me the tale too, and he must make submission to the law." "He will not," said Henry. "Then will I compel him," said the priest. "Not out of my mouth," said Henry, "or he will slay me too." And then the priest said that he was in a strait place, for he could not use the words of confession of one man to convict another of his sin. So he gathered his things in haste, and walked back to the church; but Henry went another way, saying "I made excuse to come away, and said I went elsewhere; but I fear my father much—he sees very deep; and I would not have him suspect me of having made confession."

Then the Father met the other two at the church gate; and they went down to the house in silence, the Father pondering heavily; and at the door Henry joined them, and it seemed to the Father that old Master Grimston regarded him not. So they entered the house in silence, and ate in silence, listening earnestly for any sound. And the Father looked oft on Master Grimston, who ate and drank and said nothing, never raising his eyes. But once the Father saw him laugh secretly to himself, so that the blood came cold in the Father's veins, and he could hardly contain himself from accusing him. Then the Father had them to prayers, and prayed earnestly against the evil, and that they should open their hearts to God, if he would show them why this misery came upon them.

Then they went to bed; and Henry asked that he might lie in the priest's room, which he willingly granted. And so the house was dark, and they made as though they would sleep; but the Father could not sleep, and he heard Henry weeping silently to himself like a little child.

But at last the Father slept—how long he knew not—and suddenly brake out of his sleep with a horror of darkness all about him, and knew that there was some evil thing abroad. So he looked upon the room. He heard Henry mutter heavily in his sleep as though there was a dark terror upon him; and then, in the light of the dying embers, the Father saw a thing rise upon the hearth, as though it had slept there, and woke to stretch itself. And then in the half-light it seemed softly to gambol and play; but whereas when an innocent beast does this in the simple joy of its heart, and seems a fond and pretty sight, the Father thought he had never seen so ugly a sight as the beast gambolling all by itself, as if it could not contain its own dreadful joy; it looked viler and more wicked every moment; then, too, there spread in the

room the sharp scent of the sea, with the foul smell underneath it, that gave the Father a deadly sickness; he tried to pray, but no words would come, and he felt indeed that the evil was too strong for him. Presently the beast desisted from its play, and looking wickedly about it, came near to the Father's bed, and seemed to put up its hairy forelegs upon it; he could see its narrow and obscene eyes, which burned with a dull yellow light, and were fixed upon him. And now the Father thought that his end was near, for he could stir neither hand nor foot, and the sweat rained down his brow; but he made a mighty effort, and in a voice which shocked himself, so dry and husky and withal of so loud and screaming a tone it was, he said three holy words. The beast gave a great quiver of rage, but it dropped down on the floor, and in a moment was gone. Then Henry woke, and raising himself on his arm, said somewhat; but there broke out in the house a great outcry and the stamping of feet, which seemed very fearful in the silence of the night. The priest leapt out of his bed all dizzy, and made a light, and ran to the door, and went out, crying whatever words came to his head. The door of Master Grimston's room was open, and a strange and strangling sound came forth; the Father made his way in, and found Master Grimston lying upon the floor, his wife bending over him; he lay still, breathing pitifully, and every now and then a shudder ran through him. In the room there seemed a strange and shadowy tumult going forward; but the Father saw that no time could be lost, and kneeling down beside Master Grimston, he prayed with all his might.

Presently Master Grimston ceased to struggle and lay still, like a man who had come out of a sore conflict. Then he opened his eyes, and the Father stopped his prayers, and looking very hard at him he said, "My son, the time is very short—give God the glory." Then Master Grimston, rolling his haggard eyes upon the group, twice strove to speak and could not; but the third time the Father, bending down his head, heard him say in a thin voice, that seemed to float from a long way off, "I slew him ... my sin." Then the Father swiftly gave him shrift, and as he said the last word, Master Grimston's head fell over on the side, and the Father said, "He is gone." And Bridget broke out into a terrible cry, and fell upon Henry's neck, who had entered unseen.

Then the Father bade him lead her away, and put the poor body on the bed; as he did so he noticed that the face of the dead man was strangely bruised and battered, as though it had been stamped upon by the hoofs of some beast. Then Father Thomas knelt, and prayed until the light came filtering in through the shutters; and the cocks crowed in the village, and presently it was day. But that night the Father learnt strange secrets, and something of the dark purposes of God was revealed to him.

In the morning there came one to find the priest, and told him that another body had been thrown up on the shore, which was strangely smeared with sand, as though it had been rolled over and over in it; and the Father took order for its burial.

Then the priest had long talk with Bridget and Henry. He found them sitting together, and she held her son's hand and smoothed his hair, as though he had been a little child; and Henry sobbed and wept, but Bridget was very calm. "He hath told me all," she said, "and we have decided that he shall do whatever you bid him; must he be given to justice?" and she looked at the priest very pitifully. "Nay, nay," said the priest. "I hold not Henry to account for the death of the man; it was his father's sin, who hath made heavy atonement—the secret shall be buried in our hearts."

Then Bridget told him how she had waked suddenly out of her sleep, and heard her husband cry out; and that then followed a dreadful kind of struggling, with the scent of the sea over all; and then he had all at once fallen to the ground and she had gone to him—and that then the priest had come.

Then Father Thomas said with tears that God had shown them deep things and visited them very strangely; and they would henceforth live humbly in his sight, showing mercy.

Then lastly he went with Henry to the store-room; and there, in the box that had dripped with water, lay the coat of the dead man, full of money, and the bag of money too; and Henry would have cast it back into the sea, but the priest said that this might not be, but that it should be bestowed plentifully upon shipwrecked mariners unless the heirs should be found. But the ship appeared to be a foreign ship, and no search ever revealed whence the money had come, save that it seemed to have been violently come by.

Master Grimston was found to have left much wealth. But Bridget would sell the house and the land, and it mostly went to rebuild the church to God's glory. Then Bridget and Henry removed to the vicarage and served Father Thomas faithfully, and they guarded their secret. And beside the nave is a little high turret built, where burns a lamp in a lantern at the top, to give light to those at sea.

Now the beast troubled those of whom I write no more; but it is easier to raise up evil than to lay it; and there are those that say that to this day a man or a woman with an evil thought in their hearts may see on a certain evening in November, at the ebb of the tide, a goatlike thing wade in the

water, snuffing at the sand, as though it sought but found not. But of this I know nothing.

Paul the Minstrel

I

The old House of Heritage stood just below the downs, in the few meadows that were all that was left of a great estate. The house itself was of stone, very firmly and gravely built; and roofed with thin slabs of stone, small at the roof-ridge, and increasing in size towards the eaves. Inside, there were a few low panelled rooms opening on a large central hall; there was little furniture, and that of a sturdy and solid kind—but the house needed nothing else, and had all the beauty that came of a simple austerity.

Old Mistress Alison, who abode there, was aged and poor. She had but one house-servant, a serious and honest maid, whose only pride was to keep the place sweet, and save her mistress from all care. But Mistress Alison was not to be dismayed by poverty; she was a tranquil and loving woman, who had never married; but who, as if to compensate her for the absence of nearer ties, had a simple and wholesome love of all created things. She was infirm now, but was quite content, when it was fine, to sit for long hours idle for very love, and look about her with a peaceful and smiling air; she prayed much, or rather held a sweet converse in her heart with God; she thought little of her latter end, which she knew could not be long delayed, but was content to leave it in the hands of the Father, sure that He, who had made the world so beautiful and so full of love, would comfort her when she came to enter in at the dark gate.

There was also an old and silent man who looked after the cattle and the few hens that the household kept; at the back of the house was a thatched timbered grange, where he laid his tools; but he spent his time mostly in the garden, which sloped down to the fishpond, and was all bordered with box; here was a pleasant homely scent, on hot days, of the good herbs that shed their rich smell in the sun; and here the flies, that sate in the leaves, would buzz at the sound of a footfall, and then be still again, cleaning their hands together in their busy manner.

The only other member of the quiet household was the boy Paul, who was distantly akin to Mistress Alison. He had neither father nor mother, and had lived at Heritage all of his life that he could remember; he was a slender, serious boy, with delicate features, and large grey eyes that looked as if they held a secret; but if they had, it was a secret of his forefathers; for the boy had led a most quiet and innocent life; he had been taught to read in a fashion, but he had no schooling; sometimes a neighbouring goodwife would say to Mistress Alison that the boy should be sent to school, and Mistress Alison would open her peaceful eyes and say, "Nay, Paul is not like other

boys—he would get all the hurt and none of the good of school; when there is work for him he will do it—but I am not for making all toil alike. Paul shall grow up like the lilies of the field. God made not all things to be busy." And the goodwife would shake her head and wonder; for it was not easy to answer Mistress Alison, who indeed was often right in the end.

So Paul grew up as he would; sometimes he would help the old gardener, when there was work to be done; for he loved to serve others, and was content with toil if it was sweetened with love; but often he rambled by himself for hours together; he cared little for company, because the earth was to him full of wonder and of sweet sights and sounds. He loved to climb the down, and lie feasting his eyes on the rich plain, spread out like a map; the farms in their closes, the villages from which went up the smoke at evening, the distant blue hills, like the hills of heaven, the winding river, and the lake that lay in the winter twilight like a shield of silver. He loved to see the sun flash on the windows of the houses so distant that they could not themselves be seen, but only sparkled like stars. He loved to loiter on the edge of the steep hanging woods in summer, to listen to the humming of the flies deep in the brake, and to catch a sight of lonely flowers; he loved the scent of the wind blowing softly out of the copse, and he wondered what the trees said to each other, when they stood still and happy in the heat of midday. He loved, too, the silent night, full of stars, when the wood that topped the hill lay black against the sky. The whole world seemed to him to be full of a mysterious and beautiful life of which he could never quite catch the secret; these innocent flowers, these dreaming trees seemed, as it were, to hold him smiling at arm's length, while they guarded their joy from him. The birds and the beasts seemed to him to have less of this quiet joy, for they were fearful and careful, working hard to find a living, and dreading the sight of man; but sometimes in the fragrant eventide the nightingale would say a little of what was in her heart. "Yes," Paul would say to himself, "it is like that."

One other chief delight the boy had; he knew the magic of sound, which spoke to his heart in a way that it speaks to but few; the sounds of the earth gave up their sweets to him; the musical fluting of owls, the liquid notes of the cuckoo, the thin pipe of dancing flies, the mournful creaking of the cider-press, the horn of the oxherd wound far off on the hill, the tinkling of sheep-bells—of all these he knew the notes; and not only these, but the rhythmical swing of the scythes sweeping through the grass, the flails heard through the hot air from the barn, the clinking of the anvil in the village forge, the bubble of the stream through the weir—all these had a tale to tell him. Sometimes, for days together, he would hum to himself a few notes that pleased him by their sweet cadence, and he would string together some

simple words to them, and sing them to himself with gentle content. The song of the reapers on the upland, or the rude chanting in the little church had a magical charm for him; and Mistress Alison would hear the boy, in his room overhead, singing softly to himself for very gladness of heart, like a little bird of the dawn, or tapping out some tripping beat of time; when she would wonder and speak to God of what was in her heart.

As Paul grew older—he was now about sixteen—a change came slowly over his mind; he began to have moods of a silent discontent, a longing for something far away, a desire of he knew not what. His old dreams began to fade, though they visited him from time to time; but he began to care less for the silent beautiful life of the earth, and to take more thought of men. He had never felt much about himself before; but one day, lying beside a woodland pool at the feet of the down, he caught a sight of his own face; and when he smiled at it, it seemed to smile back at him; he began to wonder what the world was like, and what all the busy people that lived therein said and thought; he began to wish to have a friend, that he might tell him what was in his heart—and yet he knew not what it was that he would say. He began, too, to wonder how people regarded him—the people who had before been but to him a distant part of the shows of the world. Once he came in upon Mistress Alison, who sate talking with a gossip of hers; when he entered, there was a sudden silence, and a glance passed between the two; and Paul divined that they had been speaking of himself, and desired to know what they had said.

One day the old gardener, in a more talkative mood than was his wont, told him a tale of one who had visited the Wishing Well that lay a few miles away, and, praying for riches, had found the next day, in digging, an old urn of pottery, full of ancient coins. Paul was very urgent to know about the well, and the old man told him that it must be visited at noonday and alone. That he that would have his wish must throw a gift into the water, and drink of the well, and then, turning to the sun, must wish his wish aloud. Paul asked him many more questions, but the old man would say no more. So Paul determined that he would visit the place for himself.

The next day he set off. He took with him one of his few possessions, a little silver coin that a parson hard by had given him. He went his way quickly among the pleasant fields, making towards the great bulk of Blackdown beacon, where the hills swelled up into a steep bluff, with a white road, cut in the chalk, winding steeply up their green smooth sides. It was a fresh morning with a few white clouds racing merrily overhead, the shadows of which fell every now and then upon the down and ran swiftly over it, like a flood of shade leaping down the sides. There were few people to be seen

anywhere; the fields were full of grass, with large daisies and high red sorrel. By midday he was beneath the front of Blackdown, and here he asked at a cottage of a good-natured woman, that was bustling in and out, the way to the well. She answered him very kindly and described the path—it was not many yards away—and then asked where he came from, saying briskly, "And what would you wish for? I should have thought you had all you could desire." "Why, I hardly know;" said Paul smiling. "It seems that I desire a thousand things, and can scarcely give a name to one." "That is ever the way," said the woman, "but the day will come when you will be content with one." Paul did not understand what she meant, but thanked her and went on his way; and wondered that she stood so long looking after him.

At last he came to the spring. It was a pool in a field, ringed round by alders. Paul thought he had never seen a fairer place. There grew a number of great kingcups round the brim, with their flowers like glistening gold, and with cool thick stalks and fresh leaves. Inside the ring of flowers the pool looked strangely deep and black; but looking into it you could see the sand leaping at the bottom in three or four cones; and to the left the water bubbled away in a channel covered with water-plants. Paul could see that there was an abundance of little things at the bottom, half covered with sand—coins, flowers, even little jars—which he knew to be the gifts of wishers. So he flung his own coin in the pool, and saw it slide hither and thither, glancing in the light, till it settled at the dark bottom. Then he dipped and drank, turned to the sun, and closing his eyes, said out loud, "Give me what I desire." And this he repeated three times, to be sure that he was heard. Then he opened his eyes again, and for a moment the place looked different, with a strange grey light. But there was no answer to his prayer in heaven or earth, and the very sky seemed to wear a quiet smile.

Paul waited a little, half expecting some answer; but presently he turned his back upon the pool and walked slowly away; the down lay on one side of him, looking solemn and dark over the trees which grew very plentifully; Paul thought that he would like to walk upon the down; so he went up a little leafy lane that seemed to lead to it. Suddenly, as he passed a small thicket, a voice hailed him; it was a rich and cheerful voice, and it came from under the trees. He turned in the direction of the voice, which seemed to be but a few yards off, and saw, sitting on a green bank under the shade, two figures. One was a man of middle age, dressed lightly as though for travelling, and Paul thought somewhat fantastically. His hat had a flower stuck in the band. But Paul thought little of the dress, because the face of the man attracted him; he was sunburnt and strong-looking, and Paul at first thought he must be a soldier; he had a short beard, and his hair was grown rather long; his face was deeply lined, but there was something

wonderfully good-natured, friendly, and kind about his whole expression. He was smiling, and his smile showed small white teeth; and Paul felt in a moment that he could trust him, and that the man was friendly disposed to himself and all the world; friendly, not in a servile way, as one who wished to please, but in a sort of prodigal, royal way, as one who had great gifts to bestow, and was liberal of them, and looked to be made welcome. The other figure was that of a boy rather older than himself, with a merry ugly face, who in looking at Paul, seemed yet to keep a sidelong and deferential glance at the older man, as though admiring him, and desiring to do as he did in all things.

"Where go you, pretty boy, alone in the noontide?" said the man.

Paul stopped and listened, and for a moment could not answer. Then he said, "I am going to the down, sir, and I have been"—he hesitated for a moment—"I have been to the Wishing Well."

"The Wishing Well?" said the man gravely. "I did not know there was one hereabouts. I thought that every one in this happy valley had been too well content—and what did you wish for, if I may ask?"

Paul was silent and grew red; and then he said, "Oh, just for my heart's desire."

"That is either a very cautious or a very beautiful answer," said the man, "and it gives me a lesson in manners; but will you not sit a little with us in the shade?—and you shall hear a concert of music such as I dare say you shall hardly hear out of France or Italy. Do you practise music, child, the divine gift?"

"I love it a little," said Paul, "but I have no skill."

"Yet you look to me like one who might have skill," said the man; "you have the air of it—you look as though you listened, and as though you dreamed pleasant dreams. But, Jack," he said, turning to his boy, "what shall we give our friend?—shall he have the 'Song of the Rose' first?"

The boy at this word drew a little metal pipe out of his doublet, and put it to his lips; and the man reached out his hand and took up a small lute which lay on the bank beside him. He held up a warning finger to the boy. "Remember," he said, "that you come in at the fifth chord, together with the voice—not before." He struck four simple chords on the lute, very gently, and with a sort of dainty preciseness; and then at the same moment the little pipe and his own voice began; the pipe played a simple descant in quicker time, with two notes to each note of the song, and the man in a

brisk and simple way, as it were at the edge of his lips, sang a very sweet little country song, in a quiet homely measure.

There seemed to Paul to be nothing short of magic about it. There was a beautiful restraint about the voice, which gave him a sense both of power and feeling held back; but it brought before him a sudden picture of a garden, and the sweet life of the flowers and little trees, taking what came, sunshine and rain, and just living and smiling, breathing fragrant breath from morning to night, and sleeping a light sleep till they should waken to another tranquil day. He listened as if spellbound. There were but three verses, and though he could not remember the words, it seemed as though the rose spoke and told her dreams.

He could have listened for ever; but the voice made a sudden stop, not prolonging the last note, but keeping very closely to the time; the pipe played a little run, like an echo of the song, the man struck a brisk chord on the lute—and all was over. "Bravely played, Jack!" said the singer; "no musician could have played it better. You remembered what I told you, to keep each note separate, and have no gliding. This song must trip from beginning to end, like a brisk bird that hops on the grass." Then he turned to Paul and, with a smile, said, "Reverend sir, how does my song please you?"

"I never heard anything more beautiful," said Paul simply. "I cannot say it, but it was like a door opened;" and he looked at the minstrel with intent eyes;—"may I hear it again?" "Boy," said the singer gravely, "I had rather have such a look as you gave me during the song than a golden crown. You will not understand what I say, but you paid me the homage of the pure heart, the best reward that the minstrel desires."

Then he conferred with the other boy in a low tone, and struck a very sad yet strong chord upon his lute; and then, with a grave face, he sang what to Paul seemed like a dirge for a dead hero who had done with mortal things, and whose death seemed more a triumph than a sorrow. When he had sung the first verse, the pipe came softly and sadly in, like the voice of grief that could not be controlled, the weeping of those on whom lay the shadow of loss. To Paul, in a dim way,—for he was but a child—the song seemed the voice of the world, lamenting its noblest, yet triumphing in their greatness, and desirous to follow in their steps. It brought before him all the natural sorrows of death, the call to quit the sweet and pleasant things of the world—a call that could not be denied, and that was in itself indeed stronger and even sweeter than the delights which it bade its listeners leave. And Paul seemed to walk in some stately procession of men far off and ancient, who followed a great king to the grave, and whose hearts were too full of

wonder to think yet what they had lost. It was an uplifting sadness; and when the sterner strain came to an end, Paul said very quietly, putting into words the thoughts of his full heart, "I did not think that death could be so beautiful." And the minstrel smiled, but Paul saw that his eyes were full of tears.

Then all at once the minstrel struck the lute swiftly and largely, and sang a song of those that march to victory, not elated nor excited, but strong to dare and to do; and Paul felt his heart beat within him, and he longed to be of the company. After he had sung this to an end, there was a silence, and the minstrel said to Paul, yet as though half speaking to himself, "There, my son, I have given you a specimen of my art; and I think from your look that you might be of the number of those that make these rich jewels that men call songs; and should you try to do so, be mindful of these two things: let them be perfect first. You will make many that are not perfect. In some the soul will be wanting; in others the body, in a manner of speaking, will be amiss; for they are living things, these songs, and he that makes them is a kind of god. Well, if you cannot mend one, throw it aside and think no more of it. Do not save it because it has some gracious touch, for in this are the masters of the craft different from the mere makers of songs. The master will have nothing but what is perfect within and without, while the lesser craftsman will save a poor song for the sake of a fine line or phrase.

"And next, you must do it for the love of your art, and not for the praise it wins you. That is a poisoned wine, of which if you drink, you will never know the pure and high tranquillity of spirit that befits a master. The master may be discouraged and troubled oft, but he must have in his soul a blessed peace, and know the worth and beauty of what he does; for there is nothing nobler than to make beautiful things, and to enlighten the generous heart. Fighting is a fair trade, and though it is noble in much, yet its end is to destroy; but the master of song mars nought, but makes joy;—and that is the end of my sermon for the time. And now," he added briskly, "I must be going, for I have far to fare; but I shall pass by this way again, and shall inquire of your welfare; tell me your name and where you live." So Paul told him, and then added timidly enough that he would fain know how to begin to practise his art. "Silence!" said the minstrel, rather fiercely; "that is an evil and timorous thought. If you are worthy, you will find the way." And so in the hot afternoon he said farewell, and walked lightly off. And Paul stood in wonder and hope, and saw the two figures leave the flat, take to the down, and wind up the steep road, ever growing smaller, till they topped the ridge, where they seemed to stand a moment larger than human; and presently they were lost from view.

So Paul made his way home; and when he pushed the gate of Heritage open, he wondered to think that he could recollect nothing of the road he had traversed. He went up to the house and entered the hall. There sate Mistress Alison, reading in a little book. She closed it as he came in, and looked at him with a smile. Paul went up to her and said, "Mother" (so he was used to call her), "I have heard songs to-day such as I never dreamt of, and I pray you to let me learn the art of making music; I must be a minstrel." "'Must' is a grave word, dear heart," said Mistress Alison, looking somewhat serious; "but let me hear your story first." So Paul told of his meeting with the minstrel. Mistress Alison sate musing a long time, smiling when she met Paul's eye, till he said at last, "Will you not speak, mother?" "I know," she said at last, "whom you have met, dear child—that is Mark, the great minstrel. He travels about the land, for he is a restless man, though the king himself would have him dwell in his court, and make music for him. Yet I have looked for this day, though it has come when I did not expect it. And now I must tell you a story, Paul, in my turn. Many years ago there was a boy like you, and he loved music too and the making of songs, and he grew to great skill therein. But it was at last his ruin, for he got to love riotous company and feasting too well; and so his skill forsook him, as it does those that live not cleanly and nobly. And he married a young wife, having won her by his songs, and a child was born to them. But the minstrel fell sick and presently died, and his last prayer was that his son might not know the temptation of song. And his wife lingered a little, but she soon pined away, for her heart was broken within her; and she too died. And now, Paul, listen, for the truth must be told—you are that child, the son of sorrow and tears. And here you have lived with me all your life; but because the tale was a sad one, I have forborne to tell it you. I have waited and wondered to see whether the gift of the father is given to the son; and sometimes I have thought it might be yours, and sometimes I have doubted. And now, child, we will talk of this no more to-day, for it is ill to decide in haste. Think well over what I have said, and see if it makes a difference in your wishes. I have told you all the tale."

Now the story that Mistress Alison had told him dwelt very much in Paul's mind that night; but it seemed to him strange and far off, and he did not doubt what the end should be. It was as though the sight of the minstrel, his songs and words, had opened a window in his mind, and that he saw out of it a strange and enchanted country, of woods and streams, with a light of evening over it, bounded by far-off hills, all blue and faint, among which some beautiful thing was hidden for him to find; it seemed to call him softly to come; the trees smiled upon him, the voice of the streams bade him make haste—it all waited for him, like a country waiting for its lord to come and take possession.

Then it seemed to him that his soul slipped like a bird from the window, and rising in the air over that magical land, beat its wings softly in the pale heaven; and then like a dove that knows, by some inborn mysterious art, which way its path lies, his spirit paused upon the breeze, and then sailed out across the tree-tops. Whither? Paul knew not. And so at last he slipped into a quiet sleep.

He woke in the morning all of a sudden, with a kind of tranquil joy and purpose; and when he was dressed, and gone into the hall, he found Mistress Alison sitting in her chair beside the table laid for their meal. She was silent and looked troubled, and Paul went up softly to her, and kissed her and said, "I have chosen." She did not need to ask him what he had chosen, but put her arm about him and said, "Then, dear Paul, be content—and we will have one more day together, the last of the old days; and tomorrow shall the new life begin."

So the two passed a long and quiet day together. For to the wise and loving-hearted woman this was the last of sweet days, and her soul went out to the past with a great hunger of love; but she stilled it as was her wont, saying to herself that this dear passage of life had hitherto only been like the clear trickling of a woodland spring, while the love of the Father's heart was as it were a great river of love marching softly to a wide sea, on which river the very world itself floated like a flower-bloom between widening banks.

And indeed if any had watched them that day, it would have seemed that she was the serener; for the thought of the life that lay before him worked like wine in the heart of Paul, and he could only by an effort bring himself back to loving looks and offices of tenderness. They spent the whole day together, for the most part in a peaceful silence; and at last the sun went down, and a cool breeze came up out of the west, laden with scent from miles and miles of grass and flowers, which seemed to bear with it the fragrant breath of myriads of sweet living things.

Then they ate together what was the last meal they were to take thus alone. And at last Mistress Alison would have Paul go to rest. And so she took his hand in hers, and said, "Dear child, the good years are over now; but you will not forget them; only lean upon the Father, for He is very strong; and remember that though the voice of melody is sweet, yet the loving heart is deeper yet." And then Paul suddenly broke out into a passion of weeping, and kissed his old friend on hand and cheek and lips; and then he burst away, ashamed, if the truth be told, that his love was not deeper than he found it to be.

He slept a light sleep that night, his head pillowed on his hand, with many strange dreams ranging through his head. Among other fancies, some sweet, some dark, he heard a delicate passage of melody played, it seemed to him, by three silver-sounding flutes, so delicate that he could hardly contain himself for gladness; but among his sadder dreams was one of a little man habited like a minstrel who played an ugly enchanted kind of melody on a stringed lute, and smiled a treacherous smile at him; Paul woke in a sort of fever of the spirit; and rising from his bed, felt the floor cool to his feet, and drew his curtain aside; in a tender radiance of dawn he saw the barn, deep in shadow, in the little garden; and over them a little wood-end that he knew well by day—a simple place enough—but now it had a sort of magical dreaming air; the mist lay softly about it like the breath of sleep; and the trees, stretching wistfully their leafy arms, seemed to him to be full of silent prayer, or to be hiding within them some divine secret that might not be shown to mortal eyes. He looked long at this; and presently went back to his bed, and shivered in a delicious warmth, while outside, very gradually, came the peaceful stir of morning. A bird or two fluted drowsily in the bushes; then another further away would join his slender song; a cock crew cheerily in a distant grange, and soon it was broad day. Presently the house began to be softly astir; and the faint fragrance of an early kindled fire of wood stole into the room. Then worn out by his long vigil he fell asleep again; and soon waking, knew it to be later than was his wont, and dressed with haste. He came down, and heard voices in the hall; he went in, and there saw Mistress Alison in her chair; and on the hearth, talking gaily and cheerily, stood Mark the minstrel. They made a pause when he came in. Mark extended his hand, which Paul took with a kind of reverence. Then Mistress Alison, with her sweet old smile, said to Paul, "So you made a pilgrimage to the Well of the Heart's Desire, dear Paul? Well, you have your wish, and very soon; for here is a master for you, if you will serve him." "Not a light service, Paul," said Mark gravely, "but a true one. I can take you with me when you may go, for my boy Jack is fallen sick with a stroke of the sun, and must bide at home awhile." They looked at Paul, to see what he would say. "Oh, I will go gladly," he said, "if I may." And then he felt he had not spoken lovingly; so he kissed Mistress Alison, who smiled, but somewhat sadly, and said, "Yes, Paul—I understand."

So when the meal was over, Paul's small baggage was made ready, and he kissed Mistress Alison—and then she said to Mark with a sudden look, "You will take care of him?" "Oh, he shall be safe with me," said Mark, "and if he be apt and faithful, he shall learn his trade, as few can learn it." And then Paul said his good-bye, and walked away with Mark; and his heart was so full of gladness that he stepped out lightly and blithely, and hardly looked back. But at the turn of the road he stopped, while Mark seemed to consider

him gravely. The three that were to abide, Mistress Alison, and the maid, and the old gardener, stood at the door and waved their hands; the old house seemed to look fondly out of its windows at him, as though it had a heart; and the very trees seemed to wave him a soft farewell. Paul waved his hand too, and a tear came into his eyes; but he was eager to be gone; and indeed, in his heart, he felt almost jealous of even the gentle grasp of his home upon his heart. And so Mark and Paul set out for the south.

II

Of the life that Paul lived with Mark I must not here tell; but before he grew to full manhood he had learned his art well. Mark was a strict master, but not impatient. The only thing that angered him was carelessness or listlessness; and Paul was an apt and untiring pupil, and learnt so easily and deftly that Mark was often astonished. "How did you learn that?" he said one day suddenly to Paul when the boy was practising on the lute, and played a strange soft cadence, of a kind that Mark had never heard. The boy was startled by the question, for he had not thought that Mark was listening to him. He looked up with a blush and turned his eyes on Mark. "Is it not right?" he said. "I did not learn it; it comes from somewhere in my mind."

Paul learnt to play several instruments, both wind and string. Sometimes he loved one sort the best, sometimes the other. The wind instruments of wood had to him a kind of soft magic, like the voice of a gentle spirit, a spirit that dwelt in lonely unvisited places, and communed more with things of earth than the hearts of men. In the flutes and bassoons seemed to him to dwell the voices of airs that murmured in the thickets, the soft gliding of streams, the crooning of serene birds, the peace of noonday, the welling of clear springs, the beauty of little waves, the bright thoughts of stars. Sometimes in certain modes, they could be sad, but it was the sadness of lonely homeless things, old dreaming spirits of wind and wave, not the sadness of such things as had known love and lost what they had loved, but the melancholy of such forlorn beings as by their nature were shut out from the love that dwells about the firelit hearth and the old roofs of homesteads. It was the sadness of the wind that wails in desolate places, knowing that it is lonely, but not knowing what it desires; or the soft sighing of trees that murmur all together in a forest, dreaming each its own dream, but with no thought of comradeship or desire.

The metal instruments, out of which the cunning breath could draw bright music, seemed to him soulless too in a sort, but shrill and enlivening. These clarions and trumpets spoke to him of brisk morning winds, or the cold sharp plunge of green waves that leap in triumph upon rocks. To such sounds he fancied warriors marching out at morning, with the joy of fight in their hearts, meaning to deal great blows, to slay and be slain, and hardly thinking of what would come after, so sharp and swift an eagerness of spirit held them; but these instruments he loved less.

Best of all he loved the resounding strings that could be twanged by the quill, or swept into a heavenly melody by the finger-tips, or throb beneath the strongly-drawn bow. In all of these lay the secrets of the heart; in these Paul heard speak the bright dreams of the child, the vague hopes of growing

boy or girl, the passionate desires of love, the silent loyalty of equal friendship, the dreariness of the dejected spirit, whose hopes have set like the sun smouldering to his fall, the rebellious grief of the heart that loses what it loves, the darkening fears that begin to roll about the ageing mind, like clouds that weep on mountain tops, and the despair of sinners, finding the evil too strong.

Best of all it was when all these instruments could conspire together to weave a sudden dream of beauty that seemed to guard a secret. What was the secret? It seemed so near to Paul sometimes, as if he were like a man very near the edge of some mountain from which he may peep into an unknown valley. Sometimes it was far away. But it was there, he doubted not, though it hid itself. It was like a dance of fairies in a forest glade, which a man could half discern through the screening leaves; but, when he gains the place, he sees nothing but tall flowers with drooping bells, bushes set with buds, large-leaved herbs, all with a silent, secret, smiling air, as though they said, "We have seen, we could tell."

Paul seemed very near this baffling secret at times; in the dewy silence of mornings, just before the sun comes up, when familiar woods and trees stand in a sort of musing happiness; at night when the sky is thickly sown with stars, or when the moon rises in a soft hush and silvers the sleeping pool; or when the sun goes down in a rich pomp, trailing a great glow of splendour with him among cloudy islands, all flushed with fiery red. When the sun withdrew himself thus, flying and flaring to the west, behind the boughs of leafless trees, what was the hidden secret presence that stood there as it were finger on lip, inviting yet denying? Paul knew within himself that if he could but say or sing this, the world would never forget. But he could not yet.

Then, too, Paul learned the magic of words, the melodious accent of letters, sometimes so sweet, sometimes so harsh; then the growing phrase, the word that beckons as it were other words to join it trippingly; the thought that draws the blood to the brain, and sets the heart beating swiftly—he learned the words that sound like far-off bells, or that wake a gentle echo in the spirit, the words that burn into the heart, and make the hearer ashamed of all that is hard and low. But he learned, too, that the craftsman in words must not build up his song word by word, as a man fetches bricks to make a wall; but that he must see the whole thought clear first, in a kind of divine flash, so that when he turns for words to write it, he finds them piled to his hand.

All these things Paul learnt, and day by day he suffered all the sweet surprises and joys of art. There were days that were not so, when the strings

jangled aimlessly, and seemed to have no soul in them; days when it appeared that the cloud could not lift, as though light and music together were dead in the world—but these days were few; and Paul growing active and strong, caring little what he ate and drank, tasting no wine, because it fevered him at first, and then left him ill at ease, knowing no evil or luxurious thoughts, sleeping lightly and hardly, found his spirits very pure and plentiful; or if he was sad, it was a clear sadness that had something beautiful within it, and dwelt not on any past grossness of his own, but upon the thought that all beautiful things can but live for a time, and must then be laid away in the darkness and in the cold.

So Paul grew up knowing neither friendship nor love, only stirred at the sight of a beautiful face, a shapely hand, or a slender form; by a grateful wonder for what was so fair; untainted by any desire to master it, or make it his own; living only for his art, and with a sort of blind devotion to Mark, whom he soon excelled, though he knew it not. Mark once said to him, when Paul had made a song of some old forgotten sorrow, "How do you know all this, boy? You have not suffered, you have not lived!" "Oh," said Paul gaily, knowing it to be praise, "my heart tells me it is so."

Paul, too, as he grew to manhood, found himself with a voice that was not loud, but true—a voice that thrilled those who heard it through and through; but it seemed strange that he felt not what he made other men feel; rather his music was like a still pool that can reflect all that is above it, the sombre tree, the birds that fly over, the starry silence of the night, the angry redness of the dawn.

It was on one of his journeys with Mark that the news of Mistress Alison's death reached him. Mark told him very carefully and tenderly, and while he repeated the three or four broken words in which Mistress Alison had tried to send a last message to Paul—for the end had come very suddenly—Mark himself found his voice falter, and his eyes fill with tears. Paul had, at that sight, cried a little; but his life at the House of Heritage seemed to have faded swiftly out of his thoughts; he was living very intently in the present, scaling, as it were, day by day, with earnest effort, the steep ladder of song. He thought a little upon Mistress Alison, and on all her love and goodness: but it was with a tranquil sorrow, and not with the grief and pain of loss. Mark was very gentle with him for awhile; and this indeed did shame Paul a little, to find himself being used so lovingly for a sorrow which he was hardly feeling. But he said to himself that sorrow must come unbidden, and that it was no sorrow that was made with labour and intention. He was a little angered with himself for his dulness—but then song was so beautiful, that he could think of nothing else; he was dazzled.

A little while after, Mark asked him whether, as they were near at hand, he would turn aside to see Mistress Alison's grave. And Paul said, "No; I would rather feel it were all as it used to be!"—and then seeing that Mark looked surprised and almost grieved, Paul, with the gentle hypocrisy of childhood, said, "I cannot bear it yet," which made Mark silent, and he said no more, but used Paul more gently than ever.

One day Mark said to him, very gravely, as if he had long been pondering the matter, "It is time for me to take another pupil, Paul. I have taught you all I know; indeed you have learned far more than I can teach." Then he told him that he had arranged all things meetly. That there was a certain Duke who lacked a minstrel, and that Paul should go and abide with him. That he should have his room at the castle, and should be held in great honour, making music only when he would. And then Mark would have added some words of love, for he loved Paul as a son. But Paul seemed to have no hunger in his heart, no thought of the days they had spent together; so Mark said them not. But he added very gently, "And one thing, Paul, I must tell you. You will be a great master—indeed you are so already—and I can tell you nothing about the art that you do not know. But one thing I will tell you—that you have a human heart within you that is not yet awake: and when it awakes, it will be very strong; so that a great combat, I think, lies before you. See that it overcome you not!" And Paul said wondering, "Oh, I have a heart, but it is altogether given to song." And so Mark was silent.

Then Paul went to the Duke's Castle of Wrething and abode with him year after year. Here, too, he made no friend; he was gracious with all, and of a lofty courtesy, so that he was had in reverence; and he made such music that the tears would come into the eyes of those who heard him, and they would look at each other, and wonder how Paul could thus tell the secret hopes of the heart. There were many women in the castle, great ladies, young maidens, and those that attended on them. Some of these would have proffered love to Paul, but their glances fell before a certain cold, virginal, almost affronted look, that he turned to meet any smile or gesture that seemed to hold in it any personal claim, or to offer any gift but that of an equal and serene friendship. As a maiden of the castle once said, provoked by his coldness, "Sir Paul seems to have everything to say to all of us, but nothing to any one of us." He was kind to all with a sort of great and distant courtesy that was too secure even to condescend. And so the years passed away.

III

It was nearly noon at the Castle of Wresting, and the whole house was deserted, for the Duke had ridden out at daybreak to the hunt; and all that could find a horse to ride had gone with him; and, for it was not far afield, all else that could walk had gone afoot. So bright and cheerful a day was it that the Duchess had sent out her pavilion to be pitched in a lawn in the wood, and the Duke with his friends were to dine there; none were left in the castle save a few of the elder serving-maids, and the old porter, who was lame. About midday, however, it seemed that one had been left; for Paul, now a tall man, strongly built and comely, yet with a somewhat dreamful air, as though he pondered difficult things within himself, and a troubled brow, under which looked out large and gentle eyes, came with a quick step down a stairway. He turned neither to right nor left, but passed through the porter's lodge. Here the road from the town came up into the castle on the left, cut steeply in the hill, and you could see the red roofs laid out like a map beneath, with the church and the bridge; to the right ran a little terrace under the wall. Paul came through the lodge, nodding gravely to the porter, who returned his salute with a kind of reverence; then he walked on to the terrace, and stood for a moment leaning against the low wall that bounded it; below him lay for miles the great wood of Wresting, now all ablaze with the brave gold of autumn leaves; here was a great tract of beeches all rusty red; there was the pale gold of elms. The forest lay in the plain, here and there broken by clearings or open glades; in one or two places could be seen the roofs of villages, with the tower of a church rising gravely among trees. On the horizon ran a blue line of downs, pure and fine above the fretted gold of the forest. The air was very still, with a fresh sparkle in it, and the sun shone bright in a cloudless heaven; it was a day when the heaviest heart grows light, and when it seems the bravest thing that can be designed to be alive.

Once or twice, as Paul leaned to look, there came from the wood, very far away, the faint notes of a horn; he smiled to hear it, and it seemed as though some merry thought came into his head, for he beat cheerfully with his fingers on the parapet. Presently he seemed to bethink himself, and then walked briskly to the end of the terrace, where was a little door in the wall; he pushed this open, and found himself at the head of a flight of stone steps, with low walls on either hand, that ran turning and twisting according to the slope of the hill, down into the wood.

Paul went lightly down the steps; once or twice he turned and looked up at the grey walls and towers of the castle, rising from the steep green turf at their foot, above the great leafless trees—for the trees on the slope lost their

leaves first in the wind. The sight pleased him, for he smiled again. Then he stood for a moment, lower down, to watch the great limbs and roots of a huge beech that seemed to cling to the slope for fear of slipping downwards. He came presently to a little tower at the bottom that guarded the steps. The door was locked; he knocked, and there came out an old woman with a merry wrinkled face, who opened it for him with a key, saying, "Do you go to the hunt, Sir Paul?" "Nay," he said smiling, "only to walk a little alone in the wood." "To make music, perhaps?" said the old woman shyly. "Perhaps," said Paul smiling, "if the music come—but it will not always come for the wishing."

As Paul walked in the deep places of the wood, little by little his fresh holiday mood died away, and there crept upon him a shadow of thought that had of late been no stranger to him. He asked himself, with some bitterness, what his life was tending to. There was no loss of skill in his art; indeed it was easier to him than ever; he had a rich and prodigal store of music in him, music both of word and sound, that came at his call. But the zest was leaving him. He had attained to his utmost desire, and in his art there was nothing more to conquer. But as he looked round about him and saw all the beautiful chains of love multiplying themselves about those among whom he lived, he began to wonder whether he was not after all missing life itself. He saw children born, he saw them growing up; then they, too, found their own path of love, they married, or were given in marriage; presently they had children of their own; and even death itself, that carried well-loved souls into the dark world, seemed to forge new chains of faith and loyalty. All this he could say and did say in his music. He knew it, he divined it by some magical instinct; he could put into words and sounds the secrets that others could not utter—and there his art stopped. It could not bring him within the charmed circle—nay, it seemed to him that it was even like a fence that kept him outside. He looked forward to a time when his art of itself must fade, when other minstrels should arise with new secrets of power; and what would become of him then?

He had by this time walked very far into the wood, and as he came down through a little rise, covered with leafy thickets, he saw before him a green track, that wound away among the trees. He followed it listlessly. The track led him through a beech wood; the smooth and shapely stems, that stood free of undergrowth, thickly roofed over by firm and glossy autumn foliage, with the rusty fallen floor of last year's leaves underfoot, brought back to him his delight in the sweet and fresh world—so beautiful whatever the restless human heart desired in its presence.

He became presently aware that he was approaching some dwelling, he knew not what; and then the trees grew thinner; and in a minute he was out in a little forest clearing, where stood, in a small and seemly garden, inclosed with hedges and low walls and a moat, a forest lodge, a long low ancient building, ending in a stone tower.

The place had a singular charm. The ancient battlemented house, overgrown with ivy, the walls green and grey with lichens, seemed to have sprung as naturally out of the soil as the trees among which it stood, and to have become one with the place. He lingered for a moment on the edge of the moat, looking at a little tower that rose out of the pool, mirrored softly in the open spaces of the water, among the lily-leaves. The whole place seemed to have a wonderful peace about it; there was no sound but the whisper of leaves, and the doves crooning, in their high branching fastnesses, a song of peace.

As Paul stood thus and looked upon the garden, a door opened, and there came out a lady, not old, but well advanced in years, with a shrewd and kindly face; and then Paul felt a sort of shame within him, for standing and spying at what was not his own; and he would have hurried away, but the lady waved her hand to him with a courtly air, as though inviting him to approach. So he came forward, and crossing the moat by a little bridge that was hard by, he met her at the gate. He doffed his hat, and said a few words asking pardon for thus intruding on a private place, but she gave him a swift smile and said, "Sir Paul, no more of this—you are known to me, though you know me not. I have been at the Duke's as a guest; I have heard you sing—indeed," she added smiling, "I have been honoured by having been made known to the prince of musical men—but he hath forgotten my poor self; I am the Lady Beckwith, who welcomes you to her poor house—the Isle of Thorns, as they call it—and will deem it an honour that you should set foot therein; though I think that you came not for my sake."

"Alas, madam, no," said Paul smiling too. "I did but walk solitary in the forest; I am lacking in courtesy, I fear; I knew not that there was a house here, but it pleased me to see it lie like a jewel in the wood."

"You knew not it was here, or you would have shunned it!" said the Lady Beckwith with a smile. "Well, I live here solitary enough with my daughters—my husband is long since dead—but to-day we must have a guest—you will enter and tarry with us a little?"

"Yes, very willingly," said Paul, who, like many men that care not much for company, was tenderly courteous when there was no escape. So after some further passages of courtesy, they went within.

The Lady Beckwith led him into a fair tapestried room, and bade him be seated, while she went to call upon her servants to make ready refreshments for him. Paul seated himself in an oak chair and looked around him. The place was but scantily furnished, but Paul had pleasure in looking upon the old solid furniture, which reminded him of the House of Heritage and of his far-off boyhood. He was pleased, too, with the tapestry, which represented a wood of walnut-trees, and a man that sate looking upon a stream as though he listened; and then Paul discerned the figure of a brave bird wrought among the leaves, that seemed to sing; while he looked, he heard the faint sound in a room above of some one moving; then a lute was touched, and then there rose a soft voice, very pure and clear, that sang a short song of long sweet notes, with a descant on the lute, ending in a high drawn-out note, that went to Paul's heart like wine poured forth, and seemed to fill the room with a kind of delicate fragrance.

Presently the Lady Beckwith returned; and they sate and talked awhile, till there came suddenly into the room a maiden that seemed to Paul like a rose; she came almost eagerly forward; and Paul knew in his mind that it was she that had sung; and there passed through his heart a feeling he had never known before; it was as though it were a string that thrilled with a kind of delicious pain at being bidden by the touch of a finger to utter its voice.

"This is my daughter Margaret;" said the Lady Beckwith; "she knows your fame in song, but she has never had the fortune to hear you sing, and she loves song herself."

"And does more than love it," said Paul almost tremblingly, feeling the eyes of the maiden set upon his face; "for I heard but now a lute touched, and a voice that sang a melody I know not, as few that I know could have sung it."

The maiden stood smiling at him, and then Paul saw that she carried a lute in her hand; and she said eagerly, "Will you not sing to us, Sir Paul?"

"Nay," said the Lady Beckwith smiling, "but this is beyond courtesy! It is to ask a prince to our house, and beg for the jewels that he wears."

The maiden blushed rosy red, and put the lute by; but Paul stretched out his hand for it. "I will sing most willingly," he said. "What is my life for, but to make music for those who would hear?"

He touched a few chords to see that the lute was well tuned; and the lute obeyed his touch like a living thing; and then Paul sang a song of spring-time that made the hearts of the pair dance with joy. When he had finished,

he smiled, meeting the smiles of both; and said, "And now we will have a sad song—for those are ever the sweetest—joy needs not to be made sweet."

So he sang a sorrowful song that he had made one winter day, when he had found the body of a little bird that had died of the frost and the hard silence of the unfriendly earth—a song of sweet things broken and good times gone by; and before he had finished he had brought the tears to the eyes of the pair. The Lady Beckwith brushed them aside—but the girl sate watching him, her hands together, and a kind of worship in her face, with the bright tears trembling on her cheeks. And Paul thought he had never seen a fairer thing; but wishing to dry the tears he made a little merry song, like the song of gnats that dance up and down in the sun, and love their silly play—so that the two smiled again.

Then they thanked him very urgently, and Margaret said, "If only dear Helen could hear this"; and the Lady Beckwith said, "Helen is my other daughter, and she lies abed, and may not come forth."

Then they put food before him; and they ate together, Margaret serving him with meat and wine; and Paul would have forbidden it, but the Lady Beckwith said, "That is the way of our house—and you are our guest and must be content—for Margaret loves to serve you." The girl said little, but as she moved about softly and deftly, with the fragrance of youth about her, Paul had a desire to draw her to him, that made him ashamed and ill at ease. So the hours sped swiftly. The maiden talked little, but the Lady Beckwith had much matter for little speech; she asked Paul many questions, and told him something of her own life, and how, while the good Sir Harry, her husband, lived, she had been much with the world, but now lived a quiet life, "Like a wrinkled apple-tree behind a house," she added with a smile, "guarding my fruit, till it be plucked from the bough." And she went on to say that though she had feared, when she entered the quiet life, the days would hang heavy, yet there never seemed time enough for all the small businesses that she was fain to do.

When the day began to fall, and the shadows of the trees out of the forest began to draw nearer across the lawn, Paul rose and said, "Come, I will sing you a song of farewell and thanks for this day of pleasure," and he made them a cheerful ditty; and so took his leave, the Lady Beckwith saying that they would speak of his visit for many days—and that she hoped that if his fancy led him again through the wood, he would come to them; "For you will find an open door, and a warm hearth, and friends who look for you." So Paul went, and walked through the low red sunset with a secret joy in his heart; and never had he sung so merrily as he sang that night in the hall of the Duke; so that the Duke said smiling that they must often go a-hunting,

and leave Sir Paul behind, for that seemed to fill him to the brim with divine melody.

Now Paul that night, before he laid him down to sleep, stood awhile, and made a prayer in his heart. It must be said that as a child he had prayed night and morning, in simple words that Mistress Alison had taught him, but in the years when he was with Mark the custom had died away; for Mark prayed not, and indeed had almost an enmity to churches and to priests, saying that they made men bound who would otherwise be free; and he had said to Paul once that he prayed the best who lived nobly and generously, and made most perfect whatever gift he had; who was kind and courteous, and used all men the same, whether old or young, great or little; adding, "That is my creed, and not the creed of the priests—but I would not have you take it from me thus—a man may not borrow the secret of another's heart, and wear it for his own. All faiths are good that make a man live cleanly and lovingly and laboriously; and just as all men like not the same music, so all men are not suited with the same faith; we all tend to the same place, but by different ways; and each man should find the nearest way for him." Paul, after that, had followed his own heart in the matter; and it led him not wholly in the way of the priests, but not against them, as it led Mark. Paul took some delight in the ordered solemnities of the Church, the dark coolness of the arched aisles, the holy smell—he felt there the nearer to God. And to be near to God was what Paul desired; but he gave up praying at formal seasons, and spoke with God in his heart, as a man might speak to his friend, whenever he was moved to speak; he asked His aid before the making of a song; he told Him when he was disheartened, or when he desired what he ought not; he spoke to Him when he had done anything of which he was ashamed; and he told Him of his dreams and of his joys. Sometimes he would speak thus for half a day together, and feel a quiet comfort, like a strong arm round him; but sometimes he would be silent for a long while.

Now this night he spoke in his heart to God, and told him of the sweet and beautiful hope that had come to him, and asked Him to make known to him whether it was His will that he should put forth his hand, and gather the flower of the wood—for he could not even in his secret heart bring himself that night to speak, even to God, directly about the maiden; but, in a kind of soft reverence, he used gentle similitudes. And then he leaned from his window, and strove to send his spirit out like a bird over the sleeping wood, to light upon the tower; and then his thought leapt further, and he seemed to see the glimmering maiden chamber where she slept, breathing evenly. But even in thought this seemed to him too near, as though the vision were lacking in that awful reverence, which is the herald of love. So he thought

that his spirit should sit, like a white bird, on the battlement, and send out a quiet song.

And then he fell asleep, and slept dreamlessly till the day came in through the casements; when he sprang up, and joy darted into his heart, as when a servitor fills a cup to the brim with rosy and bubbling wine.

Now that day, and the next, and for several days, Paul thought of little else but the house in the wood and the maiden that dwelt there. Even while he read or wrote, pictures would flash before his eye. He saw Margaret stand before him, with the lute in her hand; or he would see her as she had moved about serving him, or he would see her as she had sate to hear him sing, or as she had stood at the door as he went forth—and all with a sweet hunger of the heart; till it seemed to him that this was the only true thing that the world held, and he would be amazed that he had missed it for so long. That he was in the same world with her; that the air that passed over the house in the wood was presently borne to the castle; that they two looked upon the same sky, and the same stars—this was all to him like a delicate madness that wrought within his brain. And yet he could not bring himself to go thither. The greater his longing the more he felt unable to go without a cause; and yet the thought that there might be other men that visited the Lady Beckwith, and had more of the courtly and desirable arts of life than he, was like a bitter draught—and so the days went on; and never had he made richer music; it seemed to rush from his brain like the water of a full spring.

A few days after, there was a feast at the castle and many were bidden; and Paul thought in his heart that the Lady Beckwith would perhaps be there. So he made a very tender song of love to sing, the song of a heart that loves and dares not fully speak.

When the hour drew on for the banquet, he attired himself with a care which he half despised, and when the great bell of the castle rang, he went down his turret stairs with a light step. The custom was for the guests to assemble in the great hall of the castle; but they of the Duke's household, of whom Paul was one, gathered in a little chamber off the hall. Then, when the Duke and Duchess with their children came from their rooms, they passed through this chamber into the hall, the household following. When the Duke entered the hall, the minstrels in the gallery played a merry tune, and the guests stood up; then the Duke would go to his place and bow to the guests, the household moving to their places; then the music would cease, and the choir sang a grace, all standing. Paul's place was an honourable one, but he sate with his back to the hall; and this night, as soon as he entered the hall, and while the grace was sung, he searched with

his eyes up and down the great tables, but he could not see her whom he desired to see, and the joy died out of his heart. Now though the Lords and Knights of the castle honoured Paul because he was honoured by the Duke, they had little ease with him; so to-night, when Paul took his place, a Knight that sate next him, a shrewd and somewhat malicious man, who loved the talk of the Court, and turned all things into a jest, said "How now, Sir Paul? You entered to-night full of joy; but now you are like one that had expected to see a welcome guest and saw him not." Then Paul was vexed that his thoughts should be so easily read, and said with a forced smile, "Nay, Sir Edwin, we musical men are the slaves of our moods; there would be no music else; we have not the bold and stubborn hearts of warriors born." And at this there was a smile, for Sir Edwin was not held to be foremost in war-like exercise. But having thus said, Paul never dared turn his head. And the banquet seemed a tedious and hateful thing to him.

But at last it wore to an end, and healths had been drunk, and grace was sung; and then they withdrew to the Presence Chamber, where the Duke and Duchess sate upon chairs of state under a canopy, and the guests sate down on seats and benches. And presently the Duke sent courteous word to Paul that if he would sing they would gladly hear him. So Paul rose in his place and made obeisance, and then moved to a dais which was set at the end of the chamber; and a page brought him his lute. But Paul first made a signal to the musicians who were set aloft in a gallery, and they played a low descant; and Paul sang them a war-song with all his might, his voice ringing through the room. Then, as the voice made an end, there was a short silence, such as those who have sung or spoken from a full heart best love to hear—for each such moment of silence is like a rich jewel of praise—and then a loud cry of applause, which was hushed in a moment because of the presence of the Duke.

Then Paul made a bow, and stood carelessly regarding the crowd; for from long use he felt no uneasiness to stand before many eyes; and just as he fell to touching his lute, his eye fell on a group in a corner; the Lady Beckwith sate there, and beside her Margaret; behind whom sate a young Knight, Sir Richard de Benoit by name, the fairest and goodliest of all in the castle, whom Paul loved well; and he leaned over and said some words in the maiden's ear, who looked round shyly at him with a little smile.

Then Paul put out all his art, as though to recover a thing that he had nearly lost. He struck a sweet chord on the lute, and the talk all died away and left an utter silence; and Paul, looking at but one face, and as though he spoke but to one ear, sang his song of love. It was like a spell of magic; men and women turned to each other and felt the love of their youth rise in

their hearts as sweet as ever. The Duke where he sate laid a hand upon the Duchess' hand and smiled. They that were old, and had lost what they loved, were moved to weeping—and the young men and maidens looked upon the ground, or at the singer, and felt the hot blood rise in their cheeks. And Paul, exulting in his heart, felt that he swayed the souls of those that heard him, as the wind sways a field of wheat, that bends all one way before it. Then again came the silence, when the voice ceased; a silence into which the last chords of the lute sank, like stones dropped into a still water. And Paul bowed again, and stepped down from the dais—and then with slow steps he moved to where the Lady Beckwith sate, and bowing to her, took the chair beside her.

Then came a tumbler and played many agile tricks before them; and then a company of mummers, with the heads of birds and beasts, danced and sported. But the Lady Beckwith said, "Sir Paul, I will tell you a tale. A bird of the forest alighted at our window-sill some days ago, and sang very sweetly to us—and we spread crumbs and made it a little feast; and it seemed to trust us, but presently it spread its wings and flew away, and it comes not again. Tell us, what shall we do to tempt the wild bird back?" And Paul, smiling in her face, said, "Oh, madam, the bird will return; but he leads, maybe, a toilsome life, gathering berries, and doing small businesses. The birds, which seem so free, live a life of labour; and they may not always follow their hearts. But be sure that your bird knows his friends; and some day, when he has opportunity, he will alight again. To him his songs seem but a small gift, a shallow twittering that can hardly please." "Nay," said the Lady Beckwith, "but this was a nightingale that knew the power of song, and could touch all hearts except his own; and thus, finding love so simple a thing to win, doubtless holds it light." "Nay," said Paul, "he holds it not light; it is too heavy for him; he knows it too well to trifle with it."

Then finding that the rest were silent, they two were silent. And so they held broken discourse; and ever the young Knight spoke in Margaret's ear, so that Paul was much distraught, but dared not seem to intervene, or to speak with the maiden, when he had held aloof so long.

Presently the Lady Beckwith said she had a boon to ask, and that she would drop her parables. And she said that her daughter Helen, that was sick, had been very envious of them, because she had not heard his songs, but only a soft echo of them through the chamber floor. "And perhaps, Sir Paul," she said, "if you will not come for friendship, you will come for mercy; and sing to my poor child, who has but few joys, a song or twain." Then Paul's heart danced within him, and he said, "I will come to-morrow." And soon after that the Duke went out and the guests dispersed; and then Paul greeted the Lady

Margaret, and said a few words to her; but he could not please himself in what he said; and that night he slept little, partly for thinking of what he might have said: but still more for thinking that he would see her on the morrow.

So when the morning came, Paul went very swiftly through the forest to the Isle of Thorns. It was now turning fast to winter, and the trees had shed their leaves. The forest was all soft and brown, and the sky was a pearly grey sheet of high cloud; but a joy as of spring was in Paul's heart, and he smiled and sang as he went, though he fell at times into sudden silences of wonder and delight. When he arrived, the Lady Beckwith greeted him very lovingly, and presently led him into a small chamber that seemed to be an oratory. Here was a little altar very seemly draped, with stools for kneeling, and a chair or two. Near the altar, at the side, was a little door in the wall behind a hanging; the Lady Beckwith pulled the hanging aside, and bade Paul to follow; he found himself in a small arched recess, lit by a single window of coloured glass, that was screened from a larger room, of which it was a part, by a curtain. The Lady Beckwith bade Paul be seated, and passed beyond the curtain for an instant. The room within seemed dark, but there came from it a waft of the fragrance of flowers; and Paul heard low voices talking together, and knew that Margaret spake; in a moment she appeared at the entrance, and greeted him with a very sweet and simple smile, but laid her finger on her lips; and so slipped back into the room again, but left Paul's heart beating strangely and fiercely. Then the Lady Beckwith returned, and said in a whisper to Paul that it was a day of suffering for Helen, and that she could not bear the light. So she seated herself near him, and Paul touched his lute, and sang songs, five or six, gentle songs of happy untroubled things, like the voices of streams that murmur to themselves when the woods are all asleep; and between the songs he spoke not, but played airily and wistfully upon his lute; and for all that it seemed so simple, he had never put more art into what he played and sang. And at last he made the music die away to a very soft close, like an evening wind that rustles away across a woodland, and moves to the shining west. And looking at the Lady Beckwith, he saw that she had passed, on the wings of song, into old forgotten dreams, and sate smiling to herself, her eyes brimming with tears. And then he rose, and saying that he would not be tedious, put the lute aside, and they went out quietly together. And the Lady Beckwith took his hand in both her own and said, "Sir Paul, you are a great magician—I could not believe that you could have so charmed an old and sad-hearted woman. You have the key of the door of the land of dreams; and think not that I am ungrateful; that you, for whose songs princes contend in vain, should deign to come and sing to a maiden that is sick—how shall I repay it?" "Oh, I am richly repaid," said Paul, "the guerdon of the singer is

the incense of a glad heart—and you may give me a little love if you can, for I am a lonely man." Then they smiled at each other, the smile that makes a compact without words.

Then they went down together, and there was a simple meal set out; and they ate together like old and secure friends, speaking little; but the Lady Beckwith told him somewhat of her daughter Helen, how she had been fair and strong till her fifteenth year; and that since that time, for five weary years, she had suffered under a strange and wasting disease that nothing could amend. "But she is patient and cheerful beneath it, or I think my heart would break;—but I know," she added, and her mouth quivered as she spoke, "that she can hardly see another spring, and I would have her last days to be sweet. I doubt not," she went on, "the good and wise purposes of God, and I think that he often sends his bright angels to comfort her—for she is never sad—and when you sing as you sang just now, I seem to understand, and my heart says that it is well."

While they spoke the Lady Margaret came into the room, with a sudden radiance; and coming to Paul she knelt down beside him, and kissed his hand suddenly, and said, "Helen thanks you, and I thank you, Sir Paul, for giving her such joy as you could hardly believe."

There came a kind of mist over Paul's eyes, to feel the touch of the lips that he loved so well upon his hand; but at the same time it appeared to him like a kind of sin that he who seemed to himself, in that moment, so stained and hard, should have reverence done him by one so pure. So he raised her up, and said, "Nay, this is not meet"; and he would have said many other words that rushed together in his mind, but he could not frame them right. But presently the Lady Beckwith excused herself and went; and then Paul for a sweet hour sate, and talked low and softly to the maiden, and threw such worship into his voice that she was amazed. But he said no word of love. And she told him of their simple life, and how her sister suffered. And then Paul feared to stay longer, and went with a mighty and tumultuous joy in his heart.

Then for many days Paul went thus to the Isle of Thorns—and the Lady Margaret threw aside her fear of him, and would greet him like a brother. Sometimes he would find her waiting for him at the gate, and then the air was suddenly full of a holy radiance. And the Lady Beckwith, too, began to use him like a son; but the Lady Helen he never saw—only once or twice he heard her soft voice speak in the dark room. And Paul made new songs for her, but all the time it was for Margaret that he sang.

And they at the castle wondered why Sir Paul, who used formerly to sit so much in his chamber, now went so much abroad. But he guarded his secret, and they knew not whither he went; only he saw once, from looks that passed between two of the maidens, that they spoke of him; and this in times past might have made him ashamed, but now his heart was too high, and he cared not.

There came a day when Paul, finding himself alone with the Lady Beckwith, opened his heart suddenly to her; but he was checked, as it were, by a sudden hand, for there came into her face a sad and troubled look, as though she blamed herself for something. Then she said to him, faltering, that she knew not what to say, for she could not read her daughter's heart—"and I think, Sir Paul," she added, "that she hath no thought of love—love of the sort of which you speak. Nay, the maiden loves you well, like a dear brother; she smiles at your approach, and runs to meet you when she hears your step at the door"; and then seeing a look of pain and terror in the face of Paul, she said, "Nay, dear Paul, I know not. God knows how gladly I would have it so, but hearts are very strangely made; yet you shall speak if you will, and I will give you my prayers." And then she stooped to Paul, and kissed his brow, and said, "There is a mother's kiss, for you are the son of my heart, whatever befall."

So presently the maiden came in, and Paul asked her to walk a little with him in the garden, and she went smiling; and then he could find no words at all to tell her what was in his heart, till she said, laughing, that he looked strangely, and that it seemed he had nought to say. So Paul took her hand, and told her all his love; and she looked upon him, smiling very quietly, neither trembling nor amazed, and said that she would be his wife if so he willed it, and that it was a great honour; "and then," she added, "you need not go from us, but you can sing to Helen every day." Then he kissed her; and there came into his heart a great wave of tenderness, and he thanked God very humbly for so great a gift. Yet he somehow felt in his heart that he was not yet content, and that this was not how he had thought it would fall out; but he also told himself that he would yet win the maiden's closer love, for he saw that she loved not as he loved. Then after a little talk they went together and told the Lady Beckwith, and she blessed them; but Paul could see that neither was she content, but that she looked at Margaret with a questioning and wondering look.

Then there followed very sweet days. It was soon in the spring-time of the year; the earth was awaking softly from her long sleep, and was by gentle degrees arraying herself for her summer pomp. The primroses put out yellow stars about the tree roots; the hyacinths carpeted the woods with blue, and

sent their sweet breath down the glade; and Paul felt strange desires stir in his heart, and rise like birds upon the air; and when he walked with the Lady Margaret among the copses, or rested awhile upon green banks, where the birds sang hidden in the thickets, his heart made continual melody, and rose in a stream of praise to God. But they spoke little of love; at times Paul would try to say something of what was in his mind; but the Lady Margaret heard him, sedately smiling, as though she were pleased that she could give him this joy, but as though she understood not what he said. She loved to hear of Paul's life, and the places he had visited. And Paul, for all his joy, felt that in his love he was, as it were, voyaging on a strange and fair sea alone, and as though the maiden stood upon the shore and waved her hand to him. When he kissed her or took her hand in his own, she yielded to him gently and lovingly, like a child; and it was then that Paul felt most alone. But none the less was he happy, and day after day was lit for him with a golden light.

IV

One day there came a messenger for Paul, and brought him news that made him wonder: the House of Heritage had fallen, on Mistress Alison's death, to a distant kinsman of her own and of his. This man, who was without wife or child, had lived there solitary, and it seemed that he was now dead; and he had left in his will that if Sir Paul should wish to redeem the house and land for a price, he should have the first choice to do so, seeing his boyhood had been spent there. Now Paul was rich, for he had received many great gifts and had spent little; and there came into his heart a great and loving desire to possess the old house. He told the Lady Beckwith and Margaret of this, and they both advised him to go and see it. So Paul asked leave of the Duke, and told him his business. Then the Duke said very graciously that Paul had served him well, and that he would buy the house at his own charges, and give it to Paul as a gift; but he added that this was a gift for past service, and that he would in no way bind Paul; but he hoped that Paul would still abide in the castle, at least for a part of the year, and make music for them. "For indeed," said the Duke very royally, "it were not meet that so divine a power should be buried in a rustic grange, but it should abide where it can give delight. Indeed, Sir Paul, it is not only delight! but through your music there flows a certain holy and ennobling grace into the hearts of all who attentively hear you, and tames our wild and brutish natures into something worthier and more seemly." Then Paul thanked the Duke very tenderly, and said that he would not leave him.

So Paul journeyed alone with an old man-at-arms, whom the Duke sent with him for his honour and security; and when he arrived at the place, he lodged at the inn. He found the House of Heritage very desolate, inhabited only by the ancient maid of Mistress Alison, now grown old and infirm. So Paul purchased the house and land at the Duke's charges, and caused it to be repaired, within and without, and hired a gardener to dress and keep the ground. He was very impatient to be gone, but the matter could not be speedily settled; and though he desired to return to Wresting, and to see Margaret, of whom he thought night and day, yet he found a great spring of tenderness rise up in his heart at the sight of the old rooms, in which little had been changed. The thought of his lonely and innocent boyhood came back to him, and he visited all his ancient haunts, the fields, the wood, and the down. He thought much, too, of Mistress Alison and her wise and gracious ways; indeed, sitting alone, as he often did in the old room at evening, it seemed to him almost as though she sate and watched him, and was pleased to know that he was famous, and happy in his love; so that it appeared to him as though she gave him a benediction from some far-off and holy place, where she abode and was well satisfied.

Then at last he was able to return; but he had been nearly six weeks away. He had moved into the house and lived there; and it had filled him with a kind of solemn happiness to picture how he would some day, when he was free, live there with Margaret for his wife; and perhaps there would be children too, making the house sweet with their laughter and innocent games—children who should look at him with eyes like their mother's. Long hours would pass thus while he sate holding a book or his lute between his hands, the time streaming past in a happy tide of thoughts.

But the last night was sad, for he had gone early to his bed, as he was to start betimes in the morning; and he dreamed that he had gone through the wood to the Isle of Thorns, and had seen the house stand empty and shuttered close, with no signs of life about it. In his dream he went and beat upon the door, and heard his knocks echo in the hall; and just as he was about to beat again, it was opened to him by an old small woman, that looked thin and sad, with grey hair and many wrinkles, whom he did not know. He had thrust past her, though she seemed to have wished to stay him; and pushing on, had found Margaret sitting in the hall, who had looked up at him, and then covered her face with her hands, and he had seen a look of anguish upon her face. Then the dream had slipped from him, and he dreamed again that he was in a lonely place, a bleak mountain-top, with a wide plain spread out beneath; and he had watched the flight of two white birds, which seemed to rise from the rocks near him, and fly swiftly away, beating their wings in the waste of air.

He woke troubled, and found the dawn peeping through the chinks of the shutter; and soon he heard the tramping of horses without, and knew that he must rise and go. And the thought of the dream dwelt heavily with him; but presently, riding in the cool air, it seemed to him that his fears were foolish; and his love came back to him, so that he said the name Margaret over many times to himself, like a charm, and sent his thoughts forward, imagining how Margaret, newly risen, would be moving about the quiet house, perhaps expecting him. And then he sang a little to himself, and was pleased to see the old man-at-arms smile wearily as he rode beside him.

Three days after he rode into the Castle of Wresting at sundown, and was greeted very lovingly; the Duke would not let him sing that night, though Paul said he was willing; but after dinner he asked him many questions of how he had fared. And Paul hoped that he might have heard some talk of the Lady Margaret. But none spoke of her, and he dared not ask. One thing that he noticed was that at dinner the young Sir Richard de Benoit sate opposite him, looking very pale; and Paul, more than once, looking up suddenly, saw that the Knight was regarding him very fixedly, as though he

were questioning of somewhat; and that each time Sir Richard dropped his eyes as though he were ashamed. After dinner was over, and Paul had been discharged by the Duke, he had gone back into the hall to see if he could have speech of Sir Richard, and ask if anything ailed him; but he found him not.

Then on the morrow, as soon as he might, he made haste to go down to the Isle of Thorns. As he was crossing a glade, not far from the house, he saw to his surprise, far down the glade, a figure riding on a horse, who seemed for a moment to be Sir Richard himself. He stood awhile to consider, and then, going down the glade, he cried out to him. Sir Richard, who was on a white horse, drew rein, and turned with his hand upon the loins of the horse; and then he turned again, and, urging the horse forward, disappeared within the wood. There came, as it were, a chill into Paul's heart that he should be thus unkindly used; and he vexed his brain to think in what he could have offended the Knight; but he quickly returned to his thoughts of love; so he made haste, and soon came down to the place.

Now, when he came near, he thought for a moment of his dream; and shrank back from stepping out of the trees at the corner whence he could see the house; but chiding himself for his vain terrors, he went swiftly out, and saw the house stand as before, with the trees all delicate green behind it, and the smoke ascending quietly from the chimneys.

Then he made haste; and—for he was now used to enter unbidden—went straight into the house; the hall and the parlours were all empty; so that he called upon the servants; an old serving-maid came forth, and then Paul knew in a moment that all was not well. He looked at her for a moment, and a question seemed to be choked in his throat; and then he said swiftly, "Is the Lady Beckwith within?" The old serving-maid said gravely, "She is with the Lady Helen, who is very sick." Then Sir Paul bade her tell the Lady Beckwith that he was in the house; and as he stood waiting, there came a kind of shame into his heart, that what he had heard was so much less than what he had for an instant feared; and while he strove to be more truly sorry, the Lady Beckwith stood before him, very pale. She began to speak at once, and in a low and hurried voice told him of Helen's illness, and how that there was little to hope; and then she put her hand on Paul's arm, and said, "My son, why did you leave us?" adding hastily, "Nay, it could not have been otherwise." And Paul, looking upon her face, divined in some sudden way that she had not told him all that was in her mind. So he said, "Dear mother, you know the cause of that—but tell me all, for I see there is more behind." Then the Lady Beckwith put her face in her hands, and saying, "Yes, dear Paul, there is more," fell to weeping secretly. While they thus

stood together—and Paul was aware of a deadly fear that clutched at his heart and made all his limbs weak—the Lady Margaret came suddenly into the room, looking so pale and worn that Paul for a moment did not recognise her. But he put out his arms, and took a step towards her; then he saw that she had not known he was in the house; for she turned first red and then very pale, and stepped backwards; and it went to Paul's heart like the stabbing of a sharp knife, that she looked at him with a look in which there was shame mingled with a certain fear.

Now while Paul stood amazed and almost stupefied with what he saw, the Lady Beckwith said quickly and almost sternly to Margaret, "Go back to Helen—she may not be left alone." Margaret slipped from the room; and the Lady Beckwith pointed swiftly to a chair, and herself sate down. Then she said, "Dear Paul, I have dreaded this moment and the sight of you for some days—and though I should wish to take thought of what I am to say to you, and to say it carefully, it makes an ill matter worse to dally with it—so I will even tell you at once. You must know that some three days after you left us, the young Knight Sir Richard de Benoit fell from his horse, when riding in the wood hard by this house, and was grievously hurt by the fall. They carried him in here and we tended him. I had much upon my hands, for dear Helen was in great suffering; and so it fell out that Margaret was often with the Knight—who, indeed, is a noble and generous youth, very pure and innocent of heart—and oh, Paul, though it pierces my heart to say it, he loves her—and I think that she loves him too. It is a strange and terrible thing, this love! it is like the sword that the Lord Christ said that He came to bring on earth, for it divides loving households that were else at one together; and now I must say more—the maiden knew not before what love was; she had read of it in the old books; and when you came into this quiet house, bringing with you all the magic of song, and the might of a gentle and noble spirit, and offered her love, she took it gladly and sweetly, not knowing what it was that you gave; but I have watched my child from her youth up, and the love that she gave you was the love that she would have given to a brother—she admired you and revered you. She knew that maidens were asked and given in marriage, and she took your love, as a child might take a rich jewel, and love the giver of it. And, indeed, she would have wedded you, and might have learned to love you in the other way. But God willed it otherwise; and seeing the young Knight, it was as though a door was opened in her spirit, and she came out into another place. I am sure that no word of love has passed between them; but it has leaped from heart to heart like a swift fire; and all this I saw too late; but seeing it, I told Sir Richard how matters stood; and he is an honourable youth; for from that moment he sought how he might be taken hence, and made reasons to see no more of the maid. But his misery I could see; and she is no less miserable; for she

has a very pure and simple spirit, and has fought a hard conflict with herself; yet will she hold to her word.

"And now, dear Paul, judge between us, for the matter lies in your hands. She is yours, if you claim her; but her heart cannot be yours awhile, though you may win it yet. It is true that both knights and maidens have wedded, loving another; yet they have learned to love each other, and have lived comfortably and happily; but whether, knowing what I have been forced to tell you, you can be content that things should be as before, I know not."

Then the Lady Beckwith made a pause, and beat her hands together, watching Paul's face; Paul sate very still and pale, all the light gone out of his eyes, with his lips pressed close together. And at the sight of him the tears came into the Lady Beckwith's eyes, and she could not stay them. And Paul, looking darkly on her, strove to pity her, but could not; and clasping the arms of his chair, said hoarsely, "I cannot let her go." So they sate awhile in silence; and then Paul rose and said, "Dear lady, you have done well to tell me this—I know deep down in my heart what a brave and noble thing you have done: but I cannot yet believe it—I will see the Lady Margaret and question her of the matter." Then the lady said, "Nay, dear Paul, you will not—you think that you would do so; but you could not speak with her face to face of such a matter, and she could not answer you. You must think of it alone, and to-morrow you must tell me what you decide; and whichever way you decide it, I will help you as far as I can." And then she said, "You will pity me a little, dear Paul, for I had rather have had a hand cut off than have spoken with you thus." And these simple words brought Paul a little to himself, and he rose from his place and kissed the Lady Beckwith's hand, and said, "Dear mother, you have done well; but my sorrow is greater than I can bear," And at that the Lady Beckwith wept afresh; but Paul went out in a stony silence, hardly knowing what he did.

Then it seemed to Paul as though he went down into deep waters indeed, which passed cold and silent, in horror and bitterness, over his soul. He did not contend or cry out; but he knew that the light had fallen out of his life, and had left him dark and dead.

So he went slowly back to the castle through the wood, hating his life and all that he was; once or twice he felt a kind of passion rise within him, and he said to himself, "She is pledged to me, and she shall be mine." And then there smote upon him the thought that in thinking thus he was rather brute than man. And he fell at last into an agony of prayer that God would lead him to the light, and show him what he should do. When he reached the castle he put a strong constraint upon himself; he went down to the hall; he even sang; but it was like a dream; he seemed to be out of the body, and as

it were to see himself standing, and to hear the words falling from his own lips. The Duke courteously praised him, and said that he was well content to hear his minstrel again.

As he left the hall, he passed through a little anteroom, that was hung with arras, on the way to his chamber; and there he saw sitting on a bench, close to the door that led to the turret stair, the young Knight, Sir Richard; and there rose in his heart a passion of anger, so strong that he felt as though a hand were laid upon his heart, crushing it. And he stood still, and looked upon the Knight, who raised so pale and haggard a face upon him, that Paul, in spite of his own misery, saw before him a soul as much or more vexed than his own; and then the anger died out of his heart, and left in him only the sense of the bitter fellowship of suffering; the Knight rose to his feet, and they stood for a moment looking at each other; and then the Knight said, pale to the lips, "Sir Paul, we are glad to welcome you back—I have heard of the Duke's gift, and rejoice that your inheritance should thus return to you." And Paul bowed and said, "Ay, it is a great gift; but it seems that in finding it I have lost a greater." And then, seeing the Knight grow paler still, if that were possible, he said, "Sir Richard, let me tell you a parable; there was a little bird of the wood that came to my window, and made me glad—so that I thought of no other thing but my wild bird, that trusted me: and while I was absent, one hath whispered it away, and it will not return." And Sir Richard said, "Nay, Sir Paul, you are in this unjust. What if the wild bird hath seen its mate? And, for you know not the other side of the parable, its mate hath hid itself in the wood, and the wild bird will return to you, if you bid it come."

Then Sir Paul, knowing that the Knight had done worthily and like a true knight, said, "Sir Richard, I am unjust; but you will pardon me, for my heart is very sore." And so Paul passed on to his chamber; and that night was a very bitter one, for he went down into the sad valley into which men must needs descend, and he saw no light there. And once in the night he rose dry-eyed and fevered from his bed, and twitching the curtain aside, saw the forest lie sleeping in the cold light of the moon; and his thought went out to the Isle of Thorns, and he saw the four hearts that were made desolate; and he questioned in his heart why God had made the hard and grievous thing that men call love.

Then he went back and fell into a sort of weary sleep; and waking therefrom, he felt a strange and terrible blackness seize upon his spirit, so that he could hear his own heart beat furious and thick in the darkness; and he prayed that God would release him from the prison of the world. But while he lay, he heard the feet of a horse clatter on the pavement, it being now

near the dawn; and presently there came a page fumbling to the door, who bore a letter from the Lady Beckwith, and it ran;—

"I would not write to you thus, dear Paul, unless my need were urgent; but the dear Helen is near her end, and has prayed me many times that, if it were possible, you should come and sing to her—for she fears to go into the dark, and says that your voice can give her strength and hope. Now if it be possible, come; but if you say nay to my messenger, I shall well understand it. But the dear one hath done you no hurt, and for the love of the God who made us, come and comfort us—from her who loves you as a son, these."

Then Paul when he had read, pondered for awhile; and then he said to the page, "Say that I will come." So he arrayed himself with haste, and went swiftly through the silent wood, looking neither to left or to right, but only to the path at his feet. And presently he came to the Isle of Thorns; it lay in a sort of low silver mist, the house pushing through it, as a rock out of the sea. And then a sudden chill came over Paul, and the very marrow of his bones shuddered; for he knew in his heart that this was nothing but the presaging of death; and he thought that the dreadful angel stood waiting at the door, and that presently the spirit of one that lay within must arise, leaving the poor body behind, and go with the angel.

In the high chamber where Helen lay burnt a light behind a curtain; and Paul saw a form pass slowly to and fro. And he would fain have pitied the two who must lose her whom they loved; but there passed over his spirit a sort of bitter wind; and he could feel no pity for any soul but his own, and his heart was dry as dust; he felt in his mind nothing but a kind of dumb wonder as to why he had troubled himself to come.

There must have been, he saw, a servant bidden to await his coming, because, as his feet sounded on the flags, the door was opened to him; and in a moment he was within the hall. At the well-known sights and scents of the place, the scene of his greatest happiness, the old aching came back into his stony heart, and grief, that was like a sharp sword, thrust through him. Suddenly, as he stood, a door opened, and Margaret came into the hall; she saw him in a moment; and he divined that she had not known he was within, but had meant only to pass through; for she stopped short as though irresolute, and looked at him with a wild and imploring gaze, like a forest thing caught in a trap.

In a moment there flowed into Paul's heart a great pity and tenderness, and a strength so wonderful that he knew it was not his own, but the immortal strength of God. And he stepped forward, forgetting all his own pain and misery, and said, "Margaret, dear one, dear sister, what is the shadow that

hath fallen between us at this time? I would not," he went on, "speak of ourselves at such an hour as this; but I see that there is somewhat—we minstrels have a power to look in the heart of those we love—and I think it is this—that you can love me, dear one, as a brother, and not as a lover. Well, I am content, and so it shall be. I love you too well, little one, to desire any love but what you can give me—so brother and sister we will be." Then he saw a light come into her face, and she murmured words of sorrow that he could not hear; but he put his arm about her as a brother might, and kissed her cheek. And then she put her hands upon his shoulder, and her face upon them, and broke out into a passion of weeping. And Paul, saying "Even so," kissed and comforted her, as one might comfort a child, till she looked up, as if to inquire somewhat of him. And he said smiling, "So this is my dear sister indeed—yes, I will be content with that—and now take me to the dear Helen, that I may see if my art can comfort her." Then it was very sweet to Paul's sore heart that she drew her arm within his own and led him up from the room. Then there came in haste the Lady Beckwith down to meet them, with a look of pain upon her face; and Paul said, still smiling, "We are brother and sister henceforth." Then the Lady Beckwith smiled too out of her grief and said, "Oh, it is well."

Then they passed together through the oratory and entered the chamber of death. And then Paul saw a heavenly sight. The room was a large one, dim and dark. In a chair near the fire, all in white, sate a maiden like a lily—so frail and delicate that she seemed like a pure spirit, not a thing of earth. She sate with a hand upraised between her and the fire; and when Paul came in, she looked at him with a smile in which appeared nothing but a noble patience, as though she had waited long; but she did not speak. Then they drew a chair for Paul, and he took his lute, and sang soft and low, a song of one who sinks into sweet dreams, when the sounds of day are hushed—and presently he made an end. Then she made a sign that Paul should approach, and he went to her, and kneeled beside her, and kissed her hand. And Margaret came out of the dark, and put her hand on Paul's shoulder saying, "This is our brother." And Helen smiled in Paul's face—and something, a kind of heavenly peace and love, seemed to pass from her eyes and settle in Paul's heart; and it was told him in that hour, he knew not how, that this was his bride whom he had loved, and that he had loved Margaret for her sake; and that moment seemed to Paul to be worth all his life that had gone before, and all that should go after. So he knelt in the silence; and then in a moment, he knew not where or whence, the whole air seemed full of a heavenly music about them, such music as he had never dreamed of, the very soul and essence of the music of earth. But Helen laid her head back, and, smiling still, she died. And Paul laid her hand down.

Then without a word he rose, and went from the chamber; and he stepped out into the garden, and paced there wondering; he saw the trees stand silent in their sleep, and the flowers like stars in their dewy beds. And he knew that God was very near him; he put all his burdens and sorrows, his art, and all himself within the mighty hands; and he knew that he could never doubt again of the eternal goodness and the faithful tender love of the Father. And all the while the dawn slowly brightened over the wood, and came up very slowly and graciously out of the east. Then Paul gave word that he must return to the castle, but would come back soon. And as he mounted the steps, he saw that there was a man pacing on the terrace above, and knew that it was the Knight Richard, whom he sought. So he went up on the terrace, and there he saw the young Knight looking out over the forest; Paul went softly up to him and laid his hand upon his shoulder, and the Knight turned upon him a haggard and restless eye. Then Paul said, "Sir Richard, I come from the Isle of Thorns—but I have more to say to you. You are a noble Knight and have done very worthily—and I yield to you with all my heart the dear Margaret, for we are brother and sister, and nought else, now and henceforth." Then Sir Richard, as though he hardly heard him aright, stood looking upon his face; and Paul took his hand very gently in both his own, and said, "Yes, it is even so—and we will be brothers too." Then he went within the castle—and lying down in his chamber he slept peacefully like a little child.

V

Many years have passed since that day. First Sir Richard wedded the Lady Margaret, and dwelt at the Isle of Thorns. A boy was born to them, whom they named Paul, and a daughter whom they called Helen. And Paul was much with them, and had great content. He made, men said, sweeter music than ever he had done, in those days. Then the Duke died; and Paul, though his skill failed not, and though the King himself would have had him to his Court, went back to the House of Heritage, and there dwelt alone, a grave and kindly man, very simple of speech, and loving to walk and sit alone. And Sir Richard and the Lady Margaret bought an estate hard by and dwelt there.

Now Paul would make no more music, save that he sometimes played a little on the lute for the pleasure of the Lady Margaret; but he took into his house a boy whom he taught the art; and when he was trained and gone into the world, to make music of his own, Paul took another—so that as the years went on, he had sent out a number of his disciples to be minstrels; so his art was not lost; and one of these, who was a very gracious child named Percival, he loved better than the rest, because he saw in him that he had a love for the art more than for all the rewards of art. And once when they sate together, the boy Percival said, "Dear sir, may I ask you a question?" "A dozen, if it be your will," said Paul, smiling; "but, dear child, I know not if I can answer it." Then the boy said, "Why do you not make more music, dear sir? for it seems to me like a well that holds its waters close and deep, and will not give them forth." Then Paul said smiling, "Nay, I have given men music of the best. But there are two reasons why I make no more; and I will tell you them, if you can understand them. The first is that many years ago I heard a music that shamed me; and that sealed the well." Then the boy said musing, "Tell me the name of the musician, dear Sir Paul, for I have heard that you were ever the first." Then Paul said, "Nay, I know not the name of the maker of it." Then the boy said smiling, "Then, dear sir, it must have been the music of the angels." And Paul said, "Ay, it was that." Then the boy was silent, and sate in awe, while Paul mused, touching his lute softly. Then he roused himself and said, "And the second reason, dear child, is this. There comes a time to all that make—whether it be books or music or pictures—when they can make no new thing, but go on in the old manner, working with the fingers of age the dreams of youth. And to me this seems as it were a profane and unholy thing, that a man should use so divine an art thus unworthily; it is as though a host should set stale wine before his guests, and put into it some drug which should deceive their taste; and I think that those who do this do it for two reasons: either they hanker for the praise thereof, and cannot do without the honour—and that is unworthy—or

they do it because they have formed the habit of it, and have nought to fill their vacant hours—and that is unworthy too. So hearing the divine music of which I spoke but now, I knew that I could attain no further; and that there was a sweet plenty of music in the hand of God, and that he would give it as men needed it; but that my own work was done. For each man must decide for himself when to make an end. And further, dear child, mark this! The peril for us and for all that follow art is to grow so much absorbed in our handiwork, so vain of it, that we think there is nought else in the world. Into that error I fell, and therein abode. But we are in this world like little children at school. God has many fair things to teach us, but we grow to love our play, and to think of nought else, so that the holy lessons fall on unheeding ears; but now I have put aside my play, and sit awhile listening to the voice of God, and to all that He may teach me; and the lesson is hard to spell; but I wait upon Him humbly and quietly, till He call me hence. And now we have talked enough, and we will go back to our music; and you shall play me that passage over, for you played it not deftly enough before."

Now it happened that a few days later Paul in his sleep dreamed a dream; and when he woke, he could scarce contain his joy; and the boy Percival, seeing him in the morning, marvelled at the radiance that appeared in his face; and a little later Paul bade him go across the fields to the Lady Margaret's house, and to bid her come to him, if she would, for he had something that he must tell her, and he might not go abroad. So Percival told the Lady Margaret; and she wondered at the message, and asked if Sir Paul was sick. And the boy said, "No, I never saw him so full of joy—so that I am afraid."

Then the Lady Margaret went to the House of Heritage; and Paul came to greet her at the door, and brought her in, and sate for awhile in silence, looking on her face. The Lady Margaret was now a very comely and sedate lady, and had held her son's child in her arms; and Paul was a grey-haired man; yet in his eyes she was still the maiden he had known. Then Paul, speaking very softly, said, "Dear Margaret, I have bidden you come hither, for I think I am called hence; and when I depart, and I know not when it may be, I would close my eyes in the dear house where I was nurtured." Then she looked at him with a sudden fear, but he went on, "Dear one, I have dreamed very oft of late of Helen—she stands smiling in a glory, and looks upon me. But this last night I saw more. I know not if I slept or waked, but I heard a high and heavenly music; and then I saw Helen stand, but she stood not alone; she held by the hand a child, who smiled upon me; and the child was like herself; but I presently discerned that the child had a look of myself as well; and she loosed the child's hand from her own, and the child ran to me and kissed me; and Helen seemed to beckon me; and then I

passed into sleep again. But now I see the truth. The love that I bear her hath begotten, I think, a child of the spirit that hath never known a mortal birth; and the twain wait for me." And Margaret, knowing not what to say, but feeling that he had seen somewhat high and heavenly, sate in silence; and presently Paul, breaking out of a muse, began to talk of the sweet days of their youth, and of the tender mercies of God. But while he spoke, he suddenly broke off, and held up his hand; and there came a waft of music upon the air. And Paul smiled like a tired child, and lay back in his chair; and as he did so a string of the lute that lay beside him broke with a sweet sharp sound. And the Lady Margaret fell upon her knees beside him, and took his hand; and then she seemed to see a cloudy gate, and two that stood together—a fair woman and a child; and up to the gate, out of a cloud, came swiftly a man, like one that reaches his home at last; and the three went in at the gate together, hand in hand;—and then the music came once again, and died upon the air.