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Island, an Ironic Fantasy

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Author: Edmund Gosse

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*VERSE BY THE SAME
AUTHOR*

ON VIOL AND FLUTE
KING ERIK
FERDAUSI IN EXILE
IN RUSSET AND SILVER

HYPOLYMPIA
OR
THE GODS IN THE ISLAND
AN IRONIC FANTASY

BY
EDMUND GOSSE

LONDON
WILLIAM HEINEMANN
1901

PREFACE

The scene of this fantasy is an island, hitherto inhabited by Lutherans, in a remote but temperate province of Northern Europe. The persons are the Gods of Ancient Greece. The time is early in the Twentieth Century.

I

[Pg 3]

[A terrace high above the sea, which is seen far below, through vast masses of woodland. Steps lead down towards the water, from the centre of the scene. To the left, a large, low country-house, of unpretentious character, in the style of the late eighteenth century. Gardens belonging to the same period, and now somewhat neglected and overgrown, stretch on either side. The edge of the terrace is marked by a stone balustrade, with a stone seat running round it within. At the top of steps, ascending, appear APHRODITE and EROS.]

APHRODITE.

A moment, Eros. Let us sit here. What can this flutter at my girdle be? I breathe with difficulty. Oh! Eros, can this be death?

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EROS.

Death? Ah! no; you have roses in your cheeks, mother. Your lips are like blood.

APHRODITE.

It must be weariness. Ever these new sensations, these odd, exciting apprehensions! This must be mortality. I never breathed the faster as I rose from terrace to terrace in Cythera.

EROS.

Yet this is like Cythera—a little like it. [*Looking round.*] It is not the least like it. These round billowy woods, that grey strip of sea far below, the long smooth land with square yellow fields and pointed brown fields, and the wild grey sky above. No; it would be impossible for anything to be less like Cythera.

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APHRODITE.

Yet it is like it. [*Gazing round.*] How strange ... to be where everything is not azure and gold and white—white land, gold houses and blue sky and sea. What are these woods, Eros?

EROS.

Are they beech-woods?

APHRODITE.

I did not think that I could ever be happy again. I am not *happy*. But I am not miserable. Now that my heart is quiet again, I am not miserable. Oh! that sick tossing on the black sea, the nausea, the aching, the dulness; that I, who sprang from the waves, could come to hate them so. We will never venture on the sea, again?

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EROS.

Then must we stay for ever here, since this is an island.

APHRODITE.

Yes, here for ever. For ever? We have no "for ever" now, Eros.

[Enter, from the house, CYDIPPE.]

APHRODITE.

Is all prepared for us, Cydippe?

CYDIPPE.

I have done my best. The barbarian people are kind and clean. They have blue eyes. There is one, with marigold curls and a crisp beard, who has brought up

water and logs of wood. There are two maidens, with hair like a wheat-field and rough red fingers. There are others.... I know not. All seem civil and frightened. But your Majesty will be wretched.

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APHRODITE.

No, Cydippe, I think I shall be happy.

EROS [*walking to the parapet, and looking down*].

Our white ship still lies there, mother. Shall we start again?

APHRODITE.

On that leaden water, with the little cruel breakers like coriander seeds? Never. And whither should we go, Eros? We have lost our golden home, our only home. We have lost the old white world of empire; any grey corner of the world of stillness is good enough for us. I will eat, and lie down, and rest without that long, awful heave of the intolerable ocean. Which way, Cydippe?

[APHRODITE *and* CYDIPPE *enter the house.*]

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EROS [*alone*].

This little milk-white flower, with the drop of wine in it.... It is like the grass that grows on the slopes of Parnassus. It is the only home-like thing here. Can that be grey wool that hangs in the sky, and droops like a curtain over the opposite hills? How cold the air is! Ah! it is raining over in the other island, and the brown fields grow like the yellow fields, melt into a mere white mist behind the slate-coloured sea. Here is one of the barbarians.

[POSEIDON *slowly appears at the top of the steps.*]

POSEIDON.

Ah, you here alone, Eros?

EROS [*aside*].

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It is Poseidon! How old and bluff he looks! [*To* POSEIDON.] My mother is within. [*Smiling.*] She was angry with you, Poseidon, but her anger is fallen.

POSEIDON.

Adversity brings us all together. It was once I who burned with anger against her. Why was she angry?

EROS.

The cruelty of your sea; it shook and sickened her.

POSEIDON.

It once was her sea, too. Now it is not even mine.... Rebellion everywhere, everywhere the servant risen against the master, everywhere our spells and portents broken. I rule the sea still, but it is as a man holds in a wild horse with a hard rein: it obeys with hatred, it would obey not one moment after the master's hand was withdrawn.

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EROS.

How cold it is. But I am not disconsolate. Nor should you be, Poseidon, for you will have the sea to occupy your thoughts. Hephæstus will help you to break it in. He at least should be consoled, for in our fallen estate his magical ingenuity will employ his brain.

POSEIDON.

We have never needed to be ingenious. It has been enough for us to command, to wield the elements like weapons, to say it shall be and to see it is.

EROS.

To see it is not, and yet to make it be, perhaps this may be a joy in store for us. For Hephæstus, certainly; for you, if you are wise; but for me, ah! what will there be? My arrows break against old hearts, and now we all are old.

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[PALLAS ATHENE *comes rapidly down the steps from the house and speaks while still behind* EROS.]

PALLAS.

I have brought with me the box which Epimetheus made for Pandora.

EROS [*turning suddenly*].

Ah! Pallas! What, you have brought that ivory box with you? Why did you burden your hands with that?

PALLAS.

I snatched it from the burning palace. There is something strange at the bottom of it—something like an opal, with a violet flame in it.

EROS.

Alas! we have no great need of jewels here. This shining beech-leaf is the treasure you should wear, Pallas. See, a little bough of it, bent just above the white enamel of your forehead. It will be as green as a beryl to-day, and red like copper to-morrow, and perhaps you will need no third adornment.

PALLAS.

There is something in the carved box which the shrieking oracle commended to me. "Take this," it said, "take this, and it will turn the blackness of exile into living light."

EROS.

Poor oracle, it became mad before it became dumb.

PALLAS.

I was the only one of us all, Eros, who anticipated this change. High up above the glaciers of Olympus, where the warm crystal shone like ice, and the faint cumuli rained jasmine on us, and the blue light was like the cold acid of a fruit, in the midst of our incomparable felicity I pondered on the vicissitude of things.

EROS.

You only, I remember, ever heeded the foolish screaming oracle that moaned for mortals. You always had something of the mortal temperament, Pallas. It jarred upon my mother that you seem to shudder even at the voluptuous turmoil of the senses. She said you always looked old. You look younger now than she does, Pallas.

PALLAS.

I am neither old nor young. I know not what I am. But this grey colour and those blowing woods are not unpleasing to me. I can be *myself*, even here, on a beech-wood peak in the cold sea.

[*Enter up the steps ZEUS, leaning heavily on GANYMEDE, and attended by many other Gods.*]

EROS, POSEIDON, and PALLAS.

Hail! father and king!

ZEUS.

I can push on no farther. Why have I brought you here? [*Gazing round.*] Nay, it is you who have brought me here. [*He moves up the scene.*] I have a demon in my legs, that swells them, breaks them, crushes me down. [*To GANYMEDE.*] You are careless; stiffen your shoulder, it slopes like a woman's. I have lost my thunderbolt, I have lost everything. Shall I be *bound* upon this muddy, slippery rock? What is that horror in the sky?

POSEIDON.

It is some dark bird of the north; it seeks a prey in the woodlands.

ZEUS.

I think it is a vulture. My eagle fled from me when the rebel whistled to it. It perched beside him, and smoothed its crest against his elbow. All have left me, even my eagle.

PALLAS.

Father, we have not left you. We are about you here. One by one the alleys of the beech-wood will open, and one after one we shall all gather here, all your children, all the Olympians.

ZEUS.

But where is Olympus? I hardly know you. [*Gazing blankly about him.*] Are you my children? You [*to PALLAS*] gaze at me with eyes like those I hated most.

EROS.

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Whose eyes, father and king?

ZEUS.

I will not say. Are you sure [*to POSEIDON*] that is not a vulture? I am torn, see, here under my beard, by a thorn. I can feel pain at last, *I*, who could only inflict it.

EROS.

Pallas has something in a box—

ZEUS [*vehemently*].

There is nothing in any box, there is nothing in any island, there is nothing in all the empty caskets of this world which can give me any happiness. Is it in this shanty that we must live? Lead me on, Ganymede, lead me on into it, that I may sink down and sleep. Walk slowly and walk steadily, wretched boy.

[*He passes into the house, followed by all the others.*]

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II

[Pg 21]

[*The terrace as before. Early morning, with warm sunshine. Enter CIRCE, very carefully helping KRONOS down the steps of the house. RHEA follows, leaning on a staff. CIRCE places KRONOS in one throne, and sees RHEA comfortably settled in another. Then she sits on the ground between them, at RHEA'S knees.*]

CIRCE.

There! We are all comfortable now. How did Kronos sleep, Rhea?

RHEA.

He has not complained this morning. [*Raising her voice.*] Did you sleep, Kronos?

KRONOS [*vaguely*].

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Yes, oh yes! I always sleep. Why should I not sleep?

CIRCE.

These new arrangements—I was afraid they might disturb you.

RHEA [*to CIRCE*].

He notices very little. I do not think he recollects that there has been any change. Already he forgets Olympus. [*After a pause.*] It is very thoughtful of you, Circe, to take so much trouble about us.

CIRCE.

I have been anxious about you both. All the rest of us ought to be able to console ourselves, but I am afraid that you will find it very difficult to live in the new way.

RHEA.

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Kronos will soon have forgotten that there was an old way; and as for me, Circe, I have seen so much and wandered in so many places, that one is as another to me.

KRONOS.

Is it Zeus who has driven us forth?

CIRCE.

Oh no! Zeus has led us hither. It was he who was attacked, it was against him that the rage of the enemy was directed.

KRONOS [*to himself*].

He let me stay where I was. We were not driven forth before, Rhea, were we? When I saw that it was hopeless, I did not struggle; I rose and took you by the hand....

RHEA.

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Yes; and we went half-way down the steps of the throne together....

KRONOS [*very excitedly*].

And we bowed to Zeus....

RHEA.

And he walked forward as if he did not see us....

KRONOS.

And then we came down, and I [*all his excitement falls from him*] I cannot quite remember. Did he strike us, Rhea?

RHEA.

Oh! no, no! He swept straight on, and did not so much as seem to see us, and in a moment he was up in the throne, and all the gods, the new and the old, were bowing to him with acclamation.

CIRCE [*looking up at RHEA, with eager sympathy*].

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What did *you* do, you poor dears?

RHEA [*after a pause*].

We did nothing.

KRONOS.

Zeus let us stay then. Why has he driven us out now?

RHEA [*aside*].

He does not understand, Circe. It is very sweet of you to be so kind to us, but you must go back now to your young companions. Who is here?

CIRCE.

I think we are all here, or nearly all. I have not seen Iris, but surely all the rest are here.

RHEA.

Is Zeus very much disturbed? On the ship I heard Æolus say that it was impossible to go near him, he was so unreasonably angry.

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CIRCE.

Yes, he thought that our miseries were all the fault of Poseidon and Æolus. But mortality will make a great change in Zeus; I think perhaps a greater change than in any of us. He has eaten a very substantial breakfast. Æsculapius says that as Zeus has hitherto considered the quality of his food so much, it is probable that in these lower conditions it may prove to be quantity which will interest him most. He was greatly pleased with a curious kind of aromatic tube which Hermes invented for him this morning.

RHEA.

Does Zeus blow down it?

CIRCE.

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No; he puts fire to one end of it, and draws in the vapour. He is delighted. How clever Hermes is, is he not, Rhea? What shall you do here?

RHEA.

I must look after Kronos, of course. But he gives me no trouble. And I do not need to do much more. I am very tired, Circe. I was tired in my immortality. When Kronos and I were young, things were so very different in Olympus.

CIRCE.

How were they different? Do tell me what happened. I have always longed to know, but it was not considered quite nice, quite respectful to Zeus, for us to ask questions about the Golden Age. But now it cannot matter; can it, Rhea?

RHEA [*after a pause*].

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The fact is that when I look back, I cannot see very plainly any longer. Do you know, Circe, that after the younger Gods invaded Heaven, although Zeus was very good-natured to us, and let us go on as deities, something of our god-head passed away?

KRONOS [*aloud, to himself*].

I said to him, "If I am unwelcome, I can go." And he answered, "Pray don't discommode yourself." Just like that; very politely, "Don't discommode yourself." And now he drives us away after all.

CIRCE [*flinging herself over to KRONOS' knees*].

Oh! Kronos, he does not drive you away! It is not he. It is our new enemies, not of our own race, that have driven us. And we are all here—Pallas, Ares, Phœbus—we are all here. You like Hermes, do you not, Kronos? Well, Hermes is here, and he will amuse you.

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KRONOS.

I thought that Zeus had forgiven us. But never mind, never mind!

RHEA.

We are tired, Circe. And what does the new life matter to us now? The old life had run low, and we had long been prepared for mortality by the poverty of our immortality.

[*Enter HERMES running.*]

HERMES [*in reply to a gesture of CIRCE*].

I cannot stay. I am trying to rouse Demeter from her dreadful state of depression. She sits in the palace heaving deep sighs, and doing absolutely nothing else. It will affect her heart, Æsculapius say.

CIRCE.

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She has always been so closely wedded to the study of agriculture, and now....

HERMES.

Precisely. And it has occurred to me that the way to rouse her will be to send Persephone to her in a little country cart I have discovered. I have two mouse-coloured ponies already caught and harnessed—such little beauties. The only thing left to do is to search for Persephone.

CIRCE.

I will find her in a moment. [*Exit.*]

RHEA.

We hear that you have already invented a means of amusing Zeus, Hermes? Is he prepared to forget his thunderbolt?

HERMES.

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He has mentioned it only twice this morning, and I have set Hephæstus to work to make him another, of yew-tree wood. It will be less incommodious, more fitted to this place, and in a very short time Zeus will forget the original.

KRONOS [*loudly, to himself*].

Zeus gave me an orb and sceptre to console me. I used to play cup and ball with them behind his throne.

RHEA [*in a solicitous aside to HERMES*].

Oh! it is not true. Kronos' mind now wanders so strangely. He thinks that it is Zeus who has turned him out of Olympus.

HERMES [*in the same tone*].

Do not distress him, Rhea, by contradiction and explanation. I will find modes of amusing him a little every day, and, for the rest, let him doze in the sunshine. His mind is worn so smooth that it fails any longer to catch in ideas as they flit against it. They pass off, glide away. It is useless, Rhea, to torment Kronos.

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RHEA.

I shall watch him, all day long. For I, too, am weary. Do not propose to me, with your restless energy, any fresh interests. Let me sit, with my cold hands folded in my lap, and look at Kronos, nodding, nodding. It is very kind of Circe, but we are too old for love; and of you, but we are too old for amusement. Let us rest, Hermes, rest and sleep; perhaps dream a little, dream of the far-away past.

[*CIRCE and PERSEPHONE enter from the left.*]

PERSEPHONE [*to HERMES*].

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My mother requires so much activity of mind and body. You must not believe that I was neglecting her. But I went forth in despair this morning to see what I could invent, adapt, discover, as a means of rousing her. I am stupid, I could think of nothing. I wandered through the woods, down the glen, along the sea-shore, up the side of the tarn and of the marsh, but I could think of nothing.

CIRCE.

And when I found Persephone she was lying, flung out among the flowers, with bees and butterflies leaping round her in the sunshine, and the beech-leaves singing their faint song of peace. It was beautiful, it was like Enna—with, ah! such a difference.

PERSEPHONE.

Circe does not tell you that I was so foolish as to be in tears. But now it seems that you have invented an occupation for Ceres? You are so divinely ingenious.

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HERMES.

I hope it may be successful.

PERSEPHONE.

Tell me what it is.

HERMES.

I have found at the back of the palace a small rural waggon, and I have caught two ponies, with coats like grey velvet, and great antelopes' eyes—dear little creatures. I have harnessed them, and now I want you to sit in this cart, while I am dressed like some herdsman of these barbarians, and lead the ponies, and we will go together to coax Demeter out into the fields.

PERSEPHONE.

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Oh! Hermes, how splendid of you. Let us fly to carry out your plan. Circe, will you not come with us?

CIRCE.

Or shall I not rather go to prepare the mind of Demeter for an agreeable surprise? Shall you be happy by yourselves, Kronos and Rhea?

RHEA.

Quite happy, for we desire to sleep.

[*Exit CIRCE to right, HERMES and PERSEPHONE to left.*]

III

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[*A ring of turf, in a hollow of the slope, surrounded by beech-trees, except on one side, where a marsh descends to a small tarn. Over the latter is rising the harvest moon. PHŒBUS APOLLO alone; he watches the luminary for a long time in silence.*]

PHŒBUS.

Selene! sister!—since that tawny shell,
Stained by thy tears and hollowed by thy sighs,
Recalls thee still to mind—dost thou regard,
From some tumultuous covert of this woodland,
Thy whilom sphere and palace? Nun of the skies,
In coy virginity of pulse, thy hands
Repelled me when I sought to win thy lair,
Fraternal, with no thoughts but humorous ones;
And in thy chill revulsion, through thy skies,
At my advance thy crystal home would fade,
A ghost, a shadow, a film, a papery dream.
Thou and thy moon were one. What is it now,
Thy phantom paradise of gorgeous pearl,
With sibilant streams and palmy tier on tier
Of wind-bewhitened foliage? Still it floats,
As when thy congregated harps and viols

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Beat slow harmonious progress, light on light,
Across our stainless canopy of heaven.
Ah! but how changed, Selene! If thy form
Crouches among these harsher herbs, O turn
Thy withering face away, and press thine eyes
To darkness in the strings of dusty heather,
Since that loose globe of orange pallor totters,
Racked with the fires of anarchy, and sheds
The embers of thy glory; and the cradles
Of thy imperial maidenhood are foul
With sulphur and the craterous ash of hell.
O gaze not, sister, on the loathsome wreck
Of what was once thy moon. Yet, if thou must
With tear-fed eyes visit thine ancient realm,
Bend down until the fringe of thy faint lids
Hides all save what is in this tarn reflected—
Cold, pallid, swimming in the lustrous pool,
There only worthy of thy clear regard,
A vision purified in woe.

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[The reeds in the tarn are stirred, and there is audible a faint shriek and a ripple of laughter. A shrouded figure rises from the marsh, and, hastening by PHŒBUS through the darkness, is lost in the woods. It is followed closely by PAN, who, observing PHŒBUS, pauses in embarrassment.]

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PHŒBUS.

I thought I was alone.

PAN.

And so did we, sire.

PHŒBUS.

Am I to congratulate you on your distractions?

PAN.

I have a natural inclination to marshy places.

PHŒBUS.

This is a ghastly night, Pan.

PAN.

I had not observed it, sire. Yes, doubtless a ghastly night. But I was occupied, and I am no naturalist. This glen curiously reminded me of rushy Ladon. I am a great student of reeds, and I was agreeably surprised to find some very striking specimens here—worthy of the Arcadian watercourses, as I am a deity. I should say, *was* a deity.

PHŒBUS.

They will help, perhaps, to reconcile you to mortality. You can add them to your collection.

PAN.

That, sire, is my hope. The stems are particularly full and smooth, and the heads of the best of them rustle back with a profusion of flaxen flowerage, remarkably agreeable to the touch. I broke one as your Highness approached. But the wind, or some goblin, bore it from me. This curious place seems full of earth-spirits.

PHŒBUS.

You must study them, too, Pan. That will supply you with another object.

PAN.

But the marsh water has a property unknown to the Olympian springs. I suspect it of being poisoned. After standing long in it, I found myself troubled with aching in the shank, from knee to hoof. If this is repeated, my studies of reed-life will be made dolorously difficult.

PHŒBUS.

It must now be part of your pleasure to husband your enjoyments. You have always rolled in the twinkle of the vine-leaves, hot enough and not too hot, with grapes—immense musky clusters—just within your reach. If you think of

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it philosophically—

PAN.

How, sire?

PHŒBUS.

Philosophically.... Well, if you think of it sensibly, you will see that there was a certain dreariness in this uniformity of satisfaction. Rather amusing, surely, to find the cluster occasionally spring up out of reach, to find the polished waist of the reed slip from your hands? Occasionally, of course; just enough to give a zest to pursuit.

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PAN.

Ah! there was pursuit in Ladon, but it was pursuit which always closed easily in capture. What I am afraid of is that here capture may prove the exception. Your Highness ... but a slight family connection and our adversities are making me strangely familiar....

PHŒBUS.

Speak on, my good Pan.

PAN.

Your Highness was once something of a botanist?

PHŒBUS.

A botanist? Ah, scarcely! A little arboriculture, the laurel; a little horticulture, the sun-flower. Those varieties seem entirely absent here, and I have no thought of replacing them.

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PAN.

The last thing I should dream of suggesting would be a *hortus siccus*....

PHŒBUS.

And I was never a consistent collector. There are reeds everywhere, you fortunate goat-foot, but even in Olympus I was the creature of a fastidious selection.

PAN.

The current of the thick and punctual blood never left me liable to the distractions of choice.

PHŒBUS.

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I congratulate you, Pan, upon your temperament, and I recommend to you a further pursuit of the attainable.

[PAN *makes a profound obeisance and disappears in the woodland.*
PHŒBUS *watches him depart, and then turns to the moon.*]

PHŒBUS [*alone*].

His familiarity was not distasteful to me. It reminded me of days out hunting, when I have come suddenly upon him at the edge of the watercourse, and have shared his melons and his conversation. I anticipate for him some not unagreeable experiences. The lower order of divinities will probably adapt themselves with ease to our new conditions. They despaired the most suddenly, with wringing of hands as we raced to the sea, with interminable babblings and low moans and screams, as they clustered on the deck of that extraordinary vessel. But the science of our new life must be to forget or to remember. We must live in the past or forego the past. For Pan and his likes I conceive that it will largely resolve itself into a question of temperature—of temperature and of appetite. That orb is of a sinister appearance, but to do it justice it looks heated. My sister had a passion for coldness; she would never permit me to lend her any of my warmth. I cannot say that it is chilly here to-night. I am agreeably surprised.

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[*The veiled figure flits across again, and PAN once more crosses in close pursuit.*]

PHŒBUS [*as they vanish*].

What an amiable vivacity! Yes; the lower order of divinities will be happy, for they will forget. We, on the contrary, have the privilege of remembering. It is only the mediocre spirits, that cannot quite forget nor clearly remember, which will have neither the support of instinct nor the solace of a vivid

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recollection.

[*He seats himself. A noise of laughter rises from the marsh, and dies away. In the silence a bird sings.*]

PHŒBUS.

Not the Daulian nightingale, of course, but quite a personable substitute: less prolongation of the triumph, less insistence upon the agony. How curiously the note breaks off! Some pleasant little northern bird, no doubt. I experience a strange and quite unprecedented appetite for moderation. The absence of the thrill, the shaft, the torrent is not disagreeable. The actual Phocian frenzy would be disturbing here, out of place, out of time. I must congratulate this little, doubtless brown, bird on a very considerable skill in warbling. But the moon—what is happening to *it*? It is not merely climbing higher, but it is manifestly clarifying its light. When I came, it was copper-coloured, now it is honey-coloured, the horn of it is almost white like milk. This little bird's incantation has, without question, produced this fortunate effect. This little bird, halfway on the road between the nightingale and the cicada, is doubtless an enchanter, and one whose art possesses a more than respectable property. My sister's attention should be drawn to this highly interesting circumstance. Selene! Selene!

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[*He calls and waits. From the upper woods SELENE slowly descends, wrapped in long white garments.*]

PHŒBUS.

Sister, behold the throne that once was thine.

SELENE.

And now, a rocking cinder, fouls the skies.

PHŒBUS.

A magian sweeps its filthy ash away.

SELENE.

There is no magic in the bankrupt world.

PHŒBUS.

Nay, did'st thou hear this twittering peal of song?

SELENE.

Some noise I heard; this glen is full of sounds.

PHŒBUS.

Fling back thy veil, and staunch thy tears, and gaze.

SELENE.

At thee, my brother, not at my darkened orb.

PHŒBUS.

Gaze then at me. What seest thou in mine eyes?

SELENE.

Foul ruddy gleams from what was lately pure.

PHŒBUS.

Nay, but thou gazest not. Look up, look at me!

SELENE.

But on thy sacred eyeballs fume turns fire.

PHŒBUS.

Nay, then, turn once and see thy very moon.

SELENE [*turning round*].

Ah! wonder! the volcanic glare is gone.

PHŒBUS.

The wizard bird has sung the fumes away.

SELENE.

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Empty it seems, and vain; but foul no more.

PHŒBUS [*approaching her, and in a confidential tone*].

I will not disguise from you, Selene, my apprehension that the hideous colour may return. Your moon is divorced from yourself, and can but be desecrated and forlorn. But at least it should be a matter of interest to you—yes, even of gratification, my sister—that this little bird, if it be a bird, has an enchanting power of temporarily relieving it and raising it.

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[SELENE, *manifestly more cheerful, ascends to the wood on the left.*
PHŒBUS, *turning again to the moon,*]

I have observed that this species of mysterious agency has a very salutary effect upon the more melancholy of our female divinities. They are satisfied if they have the felicity of waiting for something which they cannot be certain of realising, and which they attribute to a cause impossible to investigate. [*To SELENE, raising his voice.*] Whither do you go, my sister?

SELENE.

I am searching for this little bird. I propose to discuss with it the nature of its extraordinary, and I am ready to admit its gratifying, control over the moon. I think it possible that I may concoct with it some scheme for our return. You shall, in that case, Phœbus, be no longer excluded from my domain.

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PHŒBUS.

Let me urge you to do no such thing. The action of this little bird upon your unfortunate luminary is sympathetic, but surely very obscure. It would be a pity to inquire into it so closely as to comprehend it.

[SELENE, *without listening to him, passes up into the woods, and exit.*]

PHŒBUS [*alone*].

To comprehend it might even be to discover that it does not exist. Whereas to come here night after night, in the fragrant darkness, to see the unhallowed lump of fire creep out of the lake, to listen for the first clucks and shakes of the sweet little purifying song, and to watch the orb growing steadily more hyaline and lucent under its sway, how delicious! The absolute harmony and concord of nature would be then patent and recurrent before us. My poor sister! However, it is consoling to reflect that she is almost certain not to be able to find that bird.

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IV

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[*The same glen. ÆSCULAPIUS alone, busily arranging a great cluster of herbs which he has collected. He sits on a large stone, with his treasures around him.*]

ÆSCULAPIUS.

Yew—an excellent styptic. Tansy, rosemary. Spurge and marsh mallow. The best pellitory I ever plucked out of a wall. The herbs of this glen are admirable. They surpass those of the gorges of Cyllene. Is this lavender? The scent seems more acrid.

[*Enter PALLAS and EUTERPE.*]

PALLAS.

You look enviably animated, Æsculapius. Your countenance is so fresh beneath that long white beard of yours, that the barbarians will suppose you to be some mad boy, masquerading.

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EUTERPE.

What will you do with these plants?

ÆSCULAPIUS.

These are my simples. As we shot through the Iberian narrows on our frantic voyage hither, my entire store was blown out of my hands and away to sea. The rarest sorts were flung about on rocks where nothing more valetudinarian than a baboon could possibly taste them. My earliest care on arriving here was to search these woods for fresh specimens, and my success

has been beyond all hope. See, this comes from the wet lands on the hither side of the tarn——

EUTERPE.

Where Selene is now searching for the wizard who draws the smoke away from the moon's face at night.

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ÆSCULAPIUS.

This from the beck where it rushes down between the stems of mountain-ash, this from beneath the vast ancestral elm below the palace, this from the sea-shore. Marvellous! And I am eager to descend again; I have not explored the cliff which breaks the descent of the torrent, nor the thicket in the gully. There must be marchantia under the spray of the one, and possibly dittany in the peat of the other.

PALLAS.

We must not detain you, Æsculapius. But tell us how you propose to adapt yourself to our new life. It seems to me that you are determined not to find it irksome.

ÆSCULAPIUS.

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Does it not occur to you, Pallas, that—although I should never have had the courage to adopt it—thus forced upon us it offers me the most dazzling anticipations? Hitherto my existence has been all theory. What there is to know about the principles of health as applied to the fluctuations of mortality, I may suppose is known to me. You might be troubled, Pallas, with every conceivable malady, from elephantiasis to earache, and I should be in a position to analyse and to deal with each in turn. You might be obscured by ophthalmia, crippled by gout or consumed to a spectre by phthisis, and I should be able, without haste, without anxiety, to unravel the coil, to reduce the nodosities, to make the fleshy instrument respond in melody to all your needs.

PALLAS.

But you have never done this. We knew that you *could* do it, and that has been enough for us.

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ÆSCULAPIUS.

It has never been enough for me. The impenetrable immortality of all our bodies has been a constant source of exasperation to me.

PALLAS.

Is it not much to know?

ÆSCULAPIUS.

Yes; but it is more to *do*. The most perfect theory carries a monotony and an emptiness about with it, if it is never renovated by practice. In Olympus the unbroken health of all the inmates, which we have accepted as a matter of course, has been more advantageous to them than it has been to me.

PALLAS.

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I quite see that it has made your position a more academic one than you could wish.

ÆSCULAPIUS.

It has made it purely academic, and indeed, Pallas, if you will reflect upon it, the very existence of a physician in a social system which is eternally protected against every species of bodily disturbance borders upon the ridiculous.

PALLAS.

It would interest me to know whether in our old home you were conscious of this incongruity, of this lack of harmony between your science and your occasions of using it.

ÆSCULAPIUS.

No; I think not. I was satisfied in the possession of exact knowledge, and not directly aware of the charm of application. It is the result, no doubt, of this resignation of immortality which has startled and alarmed us all so much——

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PALLAS.

Me, Æsculapius, it has neither alarmed nor startled.

ÆSCULAPIUS.

I mean that while we were beyond the dread of any attack, the pleasure of rebutting such attack was unknown to us. I have divined, since our misfortunes, that disease itself may bring an excitement with it not all unallied to pleasure.... You smile, Euterpe, but I mean even for the sufferer. There is more in disease than the mere pang and languishment. There is the sense of alleviation, the cessation of the throb, the resuming glitter in the eye, the restoration of cheerfulness and appetite. These, Pallas, are qualities which are indissolubly identified with pain and decay, and which therefore—if we rightly consider—were wholly excluded from our experience. In Olympus we never brightened, for we never flagged; we never waited for a pang to subside, nor felt it throbbing less and less poignantly, nor, as if we were watching an enemy from a distance, hugged ourselves in a breathless ecstasy as it faded altogether; this exquisite experience was unknown to us, for we never endured the pang.

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EUTERPE.

You make me eager for an illness. What shall it be? Prescribe one for me. I am ignorant even of the names of the principal maladies. Let it be a not unbecoming one.

ÆSCULAPIUS.

Ah! no, Euterpe. Your mind still runs in the channel of your lost impermeability. Till now, you might fling yourself from the crags of Tartarus, or float, like a trail of water-plants, on the long, blown flood of the altar-flame, and yet take no hurt, being imperishable. But now, part of your hourly occupation, part of your faith, your hope, your duty, must be to preserve your body against the inroads of decay.

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EUTERPE.

You present us with a tedious conception of our new existence, surely.

ÆSCULAPIUS.

Why should it be tedious? There was tedium, rather, in the possession of bodies as durable as metal, as renewable as wax, as insensitive as water. In the fiercest onset of the passions, prolonged to satiety, there was always an element of the unreal. What is pleasure, if the strain of it is followed by no fatigue; what the delicacy of taste, if we can eat like caverns and drink like conduits without being vexed by the slightest inconvenience? You will discover that one of the acutest enjoyments of the mortal state will be found to consist in guarding against suffering. If you are provided with balloons attached to all your members, you float upon the sea with indifference. It is the certainty that you will drown if you do not swim which gives zest to the exercise. I climb along yonder jutting cornice of the cliff with eagerness, and pluck my simples with a hand that trembles more from joy than fear, precisely because the strain of balancing the nerves, and the certainty of suffering as the result of carelessness, knit my sensations together into an exaltation which is not exactly pleasure, perhaps, but which is not to be distinguished from it in its exciting properties.

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PALLAS.

Is life, then, to resolve itself for us into a chain of exhilarating pangs?

ÆSCULAPIUS.

Life will now be for you, for all of us, a perpetual combat with a brine that half supports, half drags us under; a continual creeping and balancing on a chamois path around the forehead of a precipice. A headache will be the breaking of a twig, a fever a stone that gives way beneath your foot, to lose the use of an organ will be to let the alpenstock slip out of your starting fingers. And the excitement, and be sure the happiness, of existence will be to protract the struggle as long as possible, to push as far as you can along the dwindling path, to keep the supports and the alleviations of your labour about you as skilfully as you can, and in the fuss and business of the little momentary episodes of climbing to forget as long and as fully as may be the final and absolutely unavoidable plunge. [*A pause, during which EUTERPE sinks upon the green sward.*]

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ÆSCULAPIUS.

I have unfolded before you a scheme of philosophical activity. Are you not gratified?

PALLAS.

Euterpe will learn to be gratified, Æsculapius, but she had not reflected upon the plunge. If she will take my counsel, she will continue to avoid doing so. [EUTERPE rises, and approaches PALLAS, who continues, to ÆSCULAPIUS.] I am with you in recommending to her a constant consideration of the momentary episodes of health. And now let us detain you no longer from the marchanteas.

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EUTERPE.

But pray recollect that they grow where the rocks are both slippery and shelving.

[Exit ÆSCULAPIUS. EUTERPE sinks again upon the grass, with her face in her hands, and lies there motionless. PALLAS walks up and down, in growing emotion, and at length breaks forth in soliloquy.]

PALLAS.

Higher than this dull circle of the sense—
Shrewd though its pulsing sharp reminders be,
With ceaseless fairy blows that ring and wake
The anvil of the brain—I rather choose
To lift mine eyes and pierce
The long transparent bar that floats above,
And hides, or feigns to hide, the choiring stars,
And dulls, or faintly dulls, the fiery sun,
And lacquers all the glassy sky with gold.
For so the strain that makes this mortal life
Irk some or squalid, chains that bind us down,
Rust on those chains which soils the reddening skin,
Passes; and in that concentrated calm,
And in that pure concinnity of soul,
And in that heart that almost fails to beat,
I read a faint beatitude, and dream
I walk once more upon the roof of Heaven,
And feel all knowledge, all capacity
For sovereign thought, all intellectual joy,
Blow on me, like fluttering and like dancing winds.
We are fallen, fallen!...
And yet a nameless mirth, flooding my veins,
And yet a sense of limpid happiness
And buoyancy and anxious fond desire
Quicken my being. It is much to see
The perfected geography of thought
Spread out before the gorged intelligence,
A map from further detail long absolved.
But ah! when we have tasted the delight
Of toilsome apprehension, how return
To that satiety of mental ease
Where all is known because it merely is?
Nay, here the joy will be to learn and learn,
To learn in error and correct in pain,
To learn through effort and with ease forget,
Building of rough and slippery stones a House,
Long schemed, and falling from us, and at the last
Imperfect. Knowledge not the aim, so much
As pleasure in the toil that leads to knowledge,
We shall build, although the house before our eyes
Crumble, and we shall gladden in the toil
Although it never leads to habitation—
Building our goal, though never a fabric rise.

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V

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[The glen, down which a limpid and murmuring brook descends, with numerous tiny cascades and pools. Beside one of the latter, underneath a great beech-tree, and sitting on the root of it, APHRODITE, alone. Enter from below, concealed at first by the undergrowth, ARES. It is mid-day.]

APHRODITE [to herself].

Here he comes at last, and from the opposite direction.... No! that cannot be Phœbus.... Ah! it is you, then!

ARES.

Is it possible? Your Majesty—and alone!

APHRODITE.

Phœbus offered me the rustic entertainment of gathering wild raspberries. We found some at length, and regaled ourselves. I wished for more, and Phœbus, with his usual gallantry, wandered dreamily away into the forest on the quest. He has evidently lost his way. I sat me down on this tree and waited.

ARES.

Surely it is the first time that you were ever abroad unattended. I am amazed at the carelessness of Phœbus. Aphrodite—without an attendant!

APHRODITE.

That is rather a fatuous remark, and from you of all people in the world. My most agreeable reminiscences are, without exception, connected with occasions on which I had escaped from my body-guard of nymphs. At the present moment you would do well to face the fact, Ares, that I have but a single maid, and that she has collapsed under the burdens of novelty and exile.

ARES.

Is that my poor friend Cydippe?

APHRODITE.

You have so many friends, Ares. Poor Cydippe, then, broke down this morning in moaning hysterics after having borne up just long enough to do my hair. I really came out on this rather mad adventure after the raspberries to escape the dolours of her countenance, and the last thing I saw was her chlamys flung wildly over her head as she dived down upon the floor in misery. Such consolations as this island has to give me will not proceed from what you call my attendant. You do not look well, Ares.

ARES.

I am always well. I am still incensed.

APHRODITE.

Ah, you are oppressed by our misfortunes?

ARES.

I can think of nothing else.

APHRODITE.

You do not, I hope, give way to the most foolish of the emotions, and endure the silly torture of self-reproach?

ARES.

I have nothing to reproach myself with. Our forces had never been in smarter trim, public spirit in Olympus never more patriotic and national; and as to the personal bravery of our forces, it was simply a portent of moral splendour.

APHRODITE.

And your discipline?

ARES.

It was perfect. I had led the troops up to the point of cheerfully marching and counter-marching until they were ready to drop with exhaustion, on the eve of each engagement; and at the ends of all our practising-grounds brick walls had been set up, at which every officer made it a point of honour to tilt head-foremost once a day. There was no refinement preserved from the good old wars of chivalry which was not familiar to our gallant fellows, and I had expressly forbidden every species of cerebral exercise. Nothing, I have always said, is so hurtful to the temper of an army as for the rank and file to suspect that they are led by men of brains.

APHRODITE.

There every one must do you justice, Ares. I never heard even the voice of

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prejudice raised to accuse you.

ARES.

No; I do not think any one could have the effrontery to charge me with encouraging that mental effort which is so disastrous to the work of a soldier. The same old practices which led our forefathers to glory—the courage of tigers; the firm belief that if any one tried to be crafty it must be because he is a coward; a bull-front set straight at every obstacle, whatever its nature; a proper contempt for any plan or discovery made since the days of Father Uranus—these are the principles in which I disciplined our troops, and I will not admit that I can have anything to reproach myself with. The circumstances which we were unexpectedly called upon to face were such as could never have been anticipated.

APHRODITE.

I do not see that you could have done otherwise than, as you did, to refuse with dignity to anticipate anything so revolutionary.

ARES.

There are certain things which one seems to condone by merely acknowledging their existence. That employment of mobile mechanisms, for instance—

APHRODITE.

Do not speak of it! I could never have believed that the semblance of the military could be made so excessively distasteful to me.

ARES.

Can I imagine myself admitting the necessity of guarding against such an ungentlemanlike form of attack?

APHRODITE.

Your friends are all aware, Ares, that if the conditions were to return, you would never demean yourself and them by guarding against anything of the kind. But I advise you not to brood upon the past. Your figure will suffer. You must keep up your character for solid and agile exercises.

ARES.

It will not be easy for me to occupy myself here. I am accustomed, as you know, to hunting and slaying. I thought I might have enjoyed some sport with the barbarian islanders, and I selected one for the purpose. But Zeus intervened, with that authority which even here, in our shattered estate, we know not how to resist.

APHRODITE.

Did he give any reason for preventing the combat?

ARES.

Yes; and his reasons (I was bound to admit) carried some weight with them. He said, first, that it was wrong to kill those who had received us with so generous a hospitality; and secondly, that, as I am no longer immortal, this brawny savage, with hair so curiously coiled and matted over his brain-pan, might kill me; and thirdly, that the whole affair might indirectly lead to his, Zeus', personal inconvenience. Here then is enjoyment by one door quite shut out from me.

APHRODITE.

Are there not deer in these woods, and perhaps wolves and boars? There must be wild duck on the firth, and buzzards in the rocks. Instead of challenging the barbarians to a foolish trial of strength, why not make them your companions, and learn their accomplishments?

ARES.

It is possible that I shall do so. But for the present, anger gushes like an intermittent spring of bitter water in my bosom. I forget for a moment, and the fountain falls; and then, with a rush, memory leaps up in me, a column of poison. I say to myself, It cannot be, it shall not be; but I grow calm again and find that it is.

APHRODITE.

The worst of the old immortality was the carelessness of it. We were utterly

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unprepared for anything bordering on catastrophe, and behold, without warning, we are swept away in a complete cataclysm of our fortunes. I see, Ares, that it will be long before you can recover serenity, or take advantage of the capabilities of our new existence. They will appeal to you more slowly than to the rest of us, and you will respond more unwillingly, because of your lack—your voluntary and boasted lack—of all intellectual suppleness.

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ARES.

It is not the business of a soldier to be supple.

APHRODITE.

So it appears. And you will suffer for it. For, stiff and blank as you may determine to be, circumstances will overpower you. Under their influences you will not be able to avoid becoming softer and more redundant. But you will resist the process, I see, and you will make it as painful as you can.

ARES.

You discuss my case with a cheerful candour, Aphrodite. Are you sure of being happier yourself?

APHRODITE.

Not *sure*; but I have a reasonable confidence that I shall be fairly contented. For I, at least, am supple, and I court the influences which you think it a point of gallantry to resist.

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ARES.

You will continue, I suppose, to make your main business the stimulating and the guiding of the affections? Here I admit that suppleness, as you call it, is in place.

APHRODITE.

Unfortunately, even here, immortality was no convenient prelude to our present state. We did not, indeed, neglect the heart—

ARES.

If I forget all else, there must be events—

APHRODITE.

Alas! we loved so briefly and with so facile a susceptibility, that I am tempted to ask myself whether in Olympus we really loved at all.

ARES [*with ardour*].

There, at least, memory supplies me with no sort of doubt—

APHRODITE [*coldly*].

Let us keep to generalities. Looking broadly at our experience, I should say that the misfortune of the gods, as a preparation for their mortality, was that in their deathless state the affections fell at the foot of the tree, like these withered leaves. We should have fastened the branches of life together in long elastic wires of the thin-drawn gold of perdurable sentiment.

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ARES.

The rapture, the violence, the hammering pulse, the bursting heart,—I see no resemblance between these and the leaves that flutter at our feet.

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APHRODITE.

These leaves had their moment of vitality, when the sap rushed through their veins, when their tissue was like a ripple of sparkling emerald on the face of the smiling sky. But they could not preserve their glow, and they are the more hopelessly dead now, because they burned in their green fire so fiercely.

ARES.

We felt no shadow of coming disability strike across our pleasures.

APHRODITE.

No; but that was precisely what made our immortality such an ill preparation for a brief existence on this island. In Olympus the sentiment of yesterday was forgotten, and we realised the passion of to-day as little as the caprice of to-morrow. Perhaps this fragmentary tenderness was the real chastisement of our implacable prosperity.

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ARES [*in a very low voice*].

Can we not resume in this our exile, and with more prospect of continuity, the emotions which were so agreeable in our former state? So agreeable—although, as you justly say, too ephemeral [*coming a little closer*]. Can you not teach us to moderate and to prolong the rapture?

APHRODITE [*rising to her feet*].

It may be. We shall see, Ares. But one thing I have already perceived. In this mortal sphere, the heart needs solitude, it needs silence. It must have its questionings and its despairs. The triumphant supremacy of the old emotions cannot be repeated here. For we have a new enemy to contend with. Even if love should prosecute its conquests here in all the serenity of success, it will not be able to escape from an infliction worse than any which we dreamed of when we were immortals.

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ARES.

And what is that, Aphrodite?

APHRODITE.

The blight of indifference.

VI

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[APHRODITE and CIRCE are seated on the grass in a little dell surrounded by beechwoods. Far away a bell is heard.]

CIRCE.

What is that curious distant sound? Is it a bird?

APHRODITE.

Cydippe tells me that there is a temple on the hill beyond these woods. I wonder to whom amongst us it is dedicated?

CIRCE.

I think it must be to you, Aphrodite, for now it is explained that on coming hither I met a throng of men and maidens, sauntering slowly along in twos, exactly as they used to do at Paphos.

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APHRODITE.

Were they walking apart, or wound together by garlands?

CIRCE.

They were wound together by the arm of the boy coiled about the waist of the girl, or resting upon it, a symbol, no doubt, of your cestus.

APHRODITE [*eagerly*].

With any animation of gesture, Circe?

CIRCE.

With absolutely none. The maidens were dressed—but not all of them—in robes of that very distressing electric blue that bites into the eye, that blue which never was on sky or sea, and which was absolutely banished from every colour-combination in Olympus. It was employed in Hades as a form of punishment, if you recollect.

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APHRODITE.

No doubt, then, this procession was a penitential one, and its object to appease my offended deity. But what a mistake, poor things! No one ever regained my favour by making a frump of herself.

CIRCE.

After these couples, came, in a very slow but formless moving group, figures of a sombre and spectral kind, draped, both males and females, in dull black, with little ornaments of gold in their hands. It was with the utmost amazement that, on their coming closer, I recognised some of the faces as those of the ruddy, gentle barbarians to whom we owe our existence here.

You cannot think how painful it was to see them thus travestied. In their well-fitting daily dress they look very attractive in a rustic mode; there is one large one that labours in the barn, who reminds me, when his sleeves are turned up, of Ulysses. But, oh! Aphrodite, you must contrive to let them know that you pardon their shortcomings, and relieve them from the horrors of this remorseful costume. I know not which is more depressing to the heart, the blue of the young or the black of the aged.

APHRODITE.

I expect that at this distance from the centre of things, all manner of misconception has crept into my ritual. Of course, I cannot now demand any rites, and that the dear good people should pay them at all is very touching.

CIRCE.

Don't you think that it would be delightful to introduce here a purer form of liturgy? It is very sad to see your spirit so little understood.

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APHRODITE.

Well, I hardly know. It is kind of you, Circe, to suggest such a thing. No doubt it would be very pleasant. But I feel, of course, the hollowness of the whole concern. We must be careful not to deceive the barbarians.

CIRCE.

Certainly ... oh! yes, certainly. But ... I am sure it would be so good for them to have a ritual to follow. We should not absolutely assert to them that you still exist as an immortal, but I do not see why we should insist on tearing every illusion away from them. Suppose I could persuade them that you were no longer displeased with them, and that you were quite willing to let them wear pink and white robes again, and plenty of flowers in their hair; and suppose I encouraged them to sacrifice turtle-doves on your altar, and arrange garlands of wild roses in the proper way, don't you think you could bring yourself to make a concession?

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APHRODITE.

What do you mean by a "concession"?

CIRCE.

Well, for instance, when they were all assembled in the temple, and had sung a hymn, and the priest had gone up to the altar, could you not suddenly make an appearance, voluminous and splendid, and smile upon them? Could you not shower a few champak-blossoms over the congregation?

APHRODITE.

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It is very ingenious of you to think of these things. But I suppose it would not be right to attempt to do it. In the first place it would encourage them to believe in my immortality—

CIRCE.

Oh! but to *believe* is such a salutary discipline to the lower classes. That is the whole principle of religion, surely, Aphrodite? It is not for people like ourselves. You know how indolent Dionysus is, but he always attended the temple when he was hunting upon Nysa.

APHRODITE.

There is a great deal in that argument, no doubt. Only, what will be the result when they discover that it is all a mistake, and that I am a mortal like themselves?

CIRCE.

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You never can be a mortal like the barbarians, for you have been a force ruling the sea, and the flowers, and the winds, and twisting the blood of man and woman in your fingers like a living skein of soft red silk. They will always worship you. It may not be in temples any longer, not with a studied liturgy, but wherever the sap rises in a flower, or the joy of life swims up in the morning through the broken film of dreams, or a young man perceives for the first time that the girl he meets is comely, you will be worshipped, Aphrodite, for the essence of your immortality is the cumulative glow of its recurrent mortality.

HERMES [*entering abruptly*].

You will be disappointed—

CIRCE.

Ah! you followed the youths and maidens to the little temple of our friend. Is it not beautiful?

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HERMES.

It is hideous.

CIRCE.

Are you sure that it is a temple at all?

HERMES.

I confess that I was for a long time uncertain, but on the whole I believe that it is.

APHRODITE.

But is it dedicated to me?

HERMES.

That is the disappointment.... It is best to tell you at once that I see no evidence whatever that it is.

CIRCE.

I am very much disappointed.

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APHRODITE.

I am very much relieved. But could you not gather from the decoration of the interior to whom of us it is inscribed?

HERMES.

It is not decorated at all: whitewashed walls, wooden benches, naked floors.

CIRCE.

But what is the nature of the sculpture?

HERMES.

I could see no sculpture, except a sort of black tablet, with names upon it, and at the sides two of the youthful attendants of Eros—those that have wings, indeed, but cannot rest. These were exceedingly ill-carven in a kind of limestone. And I hardly like to tell you what I found behind the altar—

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APHRODITE.

I am not easily shocked. My poor worshippers sometimes demand a very considerable indulgence.

CIRCE.

Nothing very ugly, I hope?

HERMES.

Yes; very ugly, and still more incomprehensible. But nothing that could spring out of any misconception of the ritual of our friend. No; I hardly like to tell you. Well, a gaunt painted figure, with spines about the bleeding forehead—

APHRODITE.

Was it fastened to any symbol? Did you notice anything that explained the horror of it?

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HERMES.

No. I did not observe it very closely. As I was glancing at it, the celebration or ritual, or whatever we are to call it, began, and I withdrew to the door, not knowing what frenzy might seize upon the worshippers.

APHRODITE.

There was a cannibal altar in Arcadia to Phœbus, so I have heard. He instantly destroyed it, and scattered the ignorant savages who had raised it.

HERMES.

There was a touch of desolate majesty about this figure. I fear that it portrays some blighting Power of suffering or of grief. [*He shudders.*]

APHRODITE.

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There are certainly deities of whom we knew nothing in Olympus. Perhaps this is the temple of some Unknown God.

HERMES.

I admit that I thought, with this picture, and with their sinister garments of black and of blue, and with the bareness and harshness of the temple, that something might be combined which it would give me no satisfaction to witness. I placed myself near the door, where, in a moment, I could have regained the exquisite forest, and the odour of this carpet of woodruff, and your enchanting society. But nothing occurred to disconcert me. After genuflexions and liftings of the voice—

APHRODITE.

What was the object of these?

HERMES.

I absolutely failed to determine. Well, the priest—if I can so describe a man without apparent dedication, robed without charm, and exalted by no visible act of sacrifice—ascended a species of open box, and spoke to the audience from the upturned lid of it.

CIRCE.

What did he say? Did he explain the religion of his people?

HERMES.

To tell you the truth, Circe, although I listened with what attention I could, and although the actual language was perfectly clear to me—you know I am rather an accomplished linguist—I formed no idea of what he said. I could not find the starting-point of his experience.

CIRCE.

To whom can this temple be possibly dedicated?

APHRODITE.

Depend upon it, it is not a temple at all. What Hermes was present at was unquestionably some gathering of local politicians. Poor these barbarians may be, but they could not excuse by poverty such a neglect of the decencies as he describes. No flowers, no bright robes, no music of stringed instruments, no sacrifice—it is quite impossible that the meanest of sentient beings should worship in such a manner. And as for the picture which you saw behind what you took to be the altar, I question not that it is used to keep in memory some ancestor who suffered from the tyranny of his masters. In the belief that he was assisting at a process of rustic worship, our poor Hermes has doubtless attended a revolutionary meeting.

CIRCE.

Dreadful! But may its conflicts long keep outside the arcades of this delightful woodland!

HERMES.

And still we know not to which of us the mild barbarians pray!

VII

[*The same scene, but no one present. A butterfly flits across from the left, makes several pirouettes and exit to the right. HERA enters quickly from the left.*]

HERA.

Could I be mistaken? What is this overpowering perfume? Is it conceivable that in this new world odours take corporeal shape? Anything is conceivable, except that I was mistaken in thinking that I saw it fly across this meadow. It can only have been beckoning me. [*The butterfly re-enters from the right, and, after towering upwards, and wheeling in every direction, settles on a cluster of meadow-sweet. It is followed from the right by EROS. He and HERA look at one another in silence.*]

HERA.

You are occupied, Eros. I will not detain you.

EROS.

I propose to stay here for a little while. Are you moving on? [*Each of them fixes eyes on the insect.*]

HERA.

I must beg you to leave me, or to remain perfectly motionless. I am excessively agitated.

EROS.

I followed the being which is hanging downwards from that spray of blossom. Does it recall some one to you?

HERA.

Not in its present position. But I will not pretend, Eros, that it is not the source of my agitation. Look at it now, as it flings itself round the stalk, and opens and waves its fans. Do you still not comprehend?

EROS.

I see nothing in it now. I am disappointed.

HERA.

But those great coloured eyes, waxing and waning! Those moons of pearl! The copper that turns to crimson, the turquoise that turns to violet, the greenish, pointed head that swings and rolls its yoke of slender plumage! Ah! Eros, is it possible that you do not perceive that it is a symbol of my peacock, my bird translated into the language of this narrow and suppressed existence of ours? What a strange and exquisite messenger! My poor peacock, with a strident shriek of terror, fled from me on that awful morning, the flames singeing its dishevelled train, its wings helplessly flapping in the torrents of conflagration. It bade me no adieu, its clangour of despair rang forth, an additional note of discord, from the inner courts of my palace. And out of its agony, of its horror, it has contrived to send me this adorable renovation of itself, all its grace and all its splendour reincarnated in this tiny creature. But alas! how am I to capture, how to communicate with it?

EROS.

I hesitate to disturb your illusion, Hera. But you are singularly mistaken. I have a far greater interest in this messenger than you can have; and if you dream its presence to be a tribute to your pride, I am much more tenderly certain that it is a reproach to my affections. See, those needlessly gaudy wings,—a mere disguise to bring it through the multitude of its enemies—are closed now, and it resumes its pendulous attitude, as aerial as an evening cloud, as graceful as sorrow itself, sable as the shadow of a leaf in the moonlight.

HERA.

Whom do you suppose it to represent, Eros?

EROS.

"Represent" is an inadequate word. I know it to be, in some transubstantiation, the exact nature of which I shall have to investigate, my adored and injured Psyche. You never appreciated her, Hera.

HERA.

It was necessary in such a society as ours to preserve the hierarchical distinctions. She was a charming little creature, and I never allowed myself to indulge in the violent prejudice of your mother. When you presented her at last, I do not think that you had any reason to reproach me with want of civility.

[*The butterfly dances off.*]

HERA and EROS together.

It is gone.

[*A pause.*]

HERA.

We are in a curious dilemma. Unless we are to conceive that two of the lesser

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Olympians have been able to combine in adopting a symbolic disguise, either you or I have been deceived. That tantalising visitant can scarcely have been at the same time Psyche and my peacock.

EROS.

I know not why; and for my part am perfectly willing to recognise its spots and moons to your satisfaction, if you will permit me to recognise my own favourite in the garb of grief.

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HERA.

My bird was ever a masquerader—it may be so.

EROS.

Psyche, also, was not unaccustomed to disguises.

HERA.

You take the recollection coolly, Eros.

EROS.

Would you have me shriek and moan? Would you have me throw myself in convulsive ecstasy upon that ambiguous insect? You are not the first, Hera, who has gravely misunderstood my character. I am not, I have never been, a victim of the impulsive passions. The only serious misunderstandings which I have ever had with my illustrious mother have resulted from her lack of comprehension of this fact. *She* is impulsive, if you will! Her existence has been a succession of centrifugal adventures, in which her sole idea has been to hurl herself outward from the solitude of her individuality. I, on the other hand, leave very rarely, and with peculiar reluctance, the rock-crystal tower from which I watch the world, myself unavoidable and unattainable. My arrows penetrate every disguise, every species of physical and spiritual armour, but they are not turned against my own heart. I have always been graceful and inconspicuous in my attitudes. The image of Eros, with contorted shoulders and projected elbows, aiming a shaft at himself, is one which the Muse of Sculpture would shudder to contemplate.

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HERA.

Then what was the meaning of your apparent infatuation for Psyche?

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EROS.

O do not call it "apparent." It was genuine and it was all-absorbing. But it was absolutely exceptional. Looking back, it seems to me that I must have been gazing at myself in a mirror, and have dismissed an arrow before I realised who was the quarry. It is not necessary to remind you of the circumstances —

HERA.

You would, I suppose, describe them as exceptional?

EROS.

As wholly exceptional. And could I be expected to prolong an ardour so foreign to my nature? The victim of passion cannot be a contemplator at the same moment, and I may frankly admit to you, Hera, that during the period of my infatuation for Psyche, there were complaints from every province of the universe. It was said that unless my attention could be in a measure diverted from that admirable girl, there would be something like a stagnation of general vitality. Phœbus remarked one day, that if the ploughman became the plough the cessation of harvests would be inevitable.

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HERA.

It was at that moment, I suppose, that you besought Zeus so passionately to confer upon Psyche the rank of a goddess?

EROS.

You took that, no doubt, for an evidence of my intenser infatuation. An error; it was a proof that the arguments of the family were beginning to produce their effect upon me. I perceived my responsibility, and I recognised that it was not the place of the immortal organiser of languishment to be sighing himself. To deify my lovely Psyche was to recognise her claim, and—and—

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HERA.

To give you a convenient excuse for neglecting her?

EROS.

It is that crudity of yours, Hera, which has before now made your position in Olympus so untenable. You lack the art of elegant insinuation.

HERA.

Am I then to believe that you were playing a part when you seemed a little while ago so anxious to recognise Psyche in the drooping butterfly?

EROS.

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Oh! far from it. The sentiment of recognition was wholly genuine and almost rapturously pleasurable. It is true that in the confusion of our flight I had not been able to give a thought to our friend, who was, unless I am much mistaken, absent from her palace. Nor will I be so absurd as to pretend that I have, for a long while past, felt at all keenly the desire for her company. She has very little conversation. There are certain peculiarities of manner, which —

HERA.

I know exactly what you mean. My peacock has a very peculiar voice, and——

EROS [*impatiently*].

You must permit me to protest against any comparison between Psyche and your worthy bird. But I was going to say that the moment I saw the brilliant little discrepancy which led us both to this spot—and to which I hesitate to give a more definite name—I was instantly and most pleasantly reminded of certain delightful episodes, of a really charming interlude, if I may so call it. I cannot be perfectly certain what connection our ebullient high-flyer has with the goddess whose adorer I was and whose friend I shall ever be. But the symbol—if it be no more than a symbol—has been sufficient to awaken in me all that was most enjoyable in our relations. I shall often wander in these woods, among the cloud-like masses of odorous blossom, in this windless harbour of sunlight and the murmur of leaves, in the hope of finding the little visitant here. She will never fail to remind me, but without disturbance, of all that was happiest in a series of relations which grew at last not so wholly felicitous as they once had been. One of the pleasures this condition of mortality offers us, I foresee, is the perpetual recollection of what was delightful in the one serious liaison of my life, and of nothing else.

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HERA.

Aphrodite would charge you with cynicism, Eros.

EROS.

It would not be the first time that she has mistaken my philosophy for petulance.

VIII

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[*On the terrace beside the house are seated PERSEPHONE, MAIA, and CHLORIS. The afternoon is rapidly waning, and lights are seen to twinkle on the farther shore of the sea. As the twilight deepens, from just out of sight a man's voice is heard singing as follows:*]

*As I lay on the grass, with the sun in the west,
A woman went by me, a babe at her breast;
She kissed it and pressed it,
She cooed, she caressed it,
Then rocked it to sleep in her elbow-nest.*

*She rocked it to rest with a sad little song,
How the days were grown short, and the nights grown long;
How love was a rover,
How summer was over,
How the winds of winter were shrill and strong.*

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*We must haste, she sang, while the sky is bright,
While the paths are plain and the town's in sight,
Lest the shadows that watch us
Should creep up and catch us,*

For the dead walk here in the grass at night.

[The voice withdraws farther down the woods, but from a lower istance, in the clear evening, the last stanza is heard repeated. The GODDESSES continue silent, until the voice has died away.]

CHLORIS.

Rude words set to rude music; but they seem to penetrate to the very core of the heart.

MAIA.

Are you sad to-night, Chloris?

CHLORIS.

Not sad, precisely; but anxious, feverish, a little excited.

PERSEPHONE.

Hark! the song begins again.

[They listen, and from far away the words come faintly back:

For the dead walk here in the grass at night.]

MAIA.

The dead! Shall we see them?

CHLORIS.

Why not? These barbarians appear to avoid them with an invincible terror, but why should we do so?

MAIA.

I do not feel that it would be possible for the dead to "catch" me, since I should be instantly and keenly watching for them, and much more eager to secure their presence than they could be to secure mine.

CHLORIS.

We do not know of what we speak, for it may very well be that the barbarians have some experience of these beings. Their influence may be not merely malign, but disgusting.

MAIA.

How ignorant we are!

CHLORIS.

Surely, Persephone, you must be able to give us some idea of the dead. Were they not the sole occupants of your pale dominions?

PERSEPHONE.

It is very absurd of me, but really I do not seem to recollect anything about them.

MAIA.

I suppose you disliked living in Hades very much?

PERSEPHONE.

Well, I spent six months there every year, to please my husband. But a great deal of my time was taken up in corresponding with my mother. She was always nervous if she did not hear regularly from me. I really feel quite ashamed of my inattention.

MAIA.

You don't even recall what the inhabitants of the country were like?

PERSEPHONE.

I recollect that they seemed dreadfully wanting in vitality. They came in troops when I held a reception; they swept by.... I cannot remember what they were like—

CHLORIS.

It must have been dreary for you there, Persephone.

PERSEPHONE.

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Well, we had our own interests. I believe I did my duty. It seemed to me that I must be there if Pluto wished it, and I was pleased to be with him. But—if you can understand me—there was a sort of a dimness over everything, and I never entered into the political life of the place. As to the social life, you can imagine that they were not people that one cared to know. At the same time, of course, I feel now how ridiculous it was of me to hold that position and not take more interest.

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MAIA.

Demeter, of course, never encouraged you to make any observation of the manners and customs of Hades.

PERSEPHONE.

Oh, no! that was just it. She always said: "Pray don't let me hear the least thing about the horrid place." You remember that she very strongly disapproved of my going there at all—

CHLORIS.

Yes; I remember that Arethusa, when she brought me back my daffodils, told me how angry Demeter was—

PERSEPHONE.

And yet she was quite nice to my husband when once Zeus had decided that I had better go.

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[There is a pause. MAIA rises and leans on the parapet, over the woods, now drowned in twilight, to the sea, which still faintly glitters. She turns and comes back to the other two, standing above them.]

MAIA.

I, too, might have observed something as I went sailing over the purpleal ocean. But I was always talking to my sisters. The fact is we all of us neglected to learn anything about death.

CHLORIS.

We thought of it as of something happening in that world of Hades which could never become of the slightest importance to us. Who could have imagined that we should have to take it into practical account?

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MAIA.

Well, now we shall have to accept it, to be prepared for its tremendous approach.

CHLORIS *[after a pause]*.

Perhaps this famous "death" may prove after all to be only another kind of life. *[Rising and approaching MAIA.]* Don't you think this is indicated even by the song of these barbarians? Besides, our stay here must be the ante-chamber to something wholly different.

MAIA.

We can hardly suppose that it can lead to nothing.

CHLORIS.

No; surely we shall put off more or less leisurely, with dignity or without it, the garments of our sensuous existence, and discover something underneath all these textures of the body?

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PERSEPHONE.

One of our priests in Hades, I do remember, sang that silence was a voice, and declared that even in the deserts of immensity the soul was stunned and deafened by the chorus and anti-chorus of nature.

CHLORIS.

What did he mean? What is the soul?

MAIA.

I must confess that in this our humility, our corporeal degradation, instead of feeling crushed, I am curiously conscious of a wider range of sensibility. Perhaps that is the soul? Perhaps, in the suppression of our immortality, something metallic, something hermetical, has been broken down, and already we stand more easily exposed to the influences of the spirit?

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CHLORIS.

In that case, to slough the sheaths of the body, one by one, ought to be to come nearer to the final freedom, and the last coronation and consecration of existence may prove to be this very "death" we dread so much.

PERSEPHONE.

I can fancy that such conjectures as these may prove to be one of the chief sources of satisfaction in this new mortality of ours: the variegated play of light and shadow thrown upon it. Well, the less we know and see, the more exciting it ought to be to guess and to peer.

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MAIA.

And some of us, depend upon it, will be able to persuade ourselves that we alone can use our eyesight in the pitch profundity of darkness, and these will find a peculiar pleasure in tormenting the others who have less confidence in their imagination.

[They seat themselves, and are silent. Far away is once more faintly heard the song, and then it dies away. A long silence. Then, a confused hum of cries and voices is heard, and approaches the terrace from below. The Goddesses start to their feet. From the left appear SILVANUS, ALCYONE and FAUNA, bearing the body of CYDIPPE, which they place very carefully on the grass in front of the scene.]

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CHLORIS [*in an excited whisper*].

Is this our first experience of the mystery?

FAUNA *and* ALCYONE.

She is dead! She is dead!

MAIA.

The first of the immortals to succumb to the burden of mortality!

SILVANUS.

Where is Æsculapius? Call him, call him!

MAIA.

He cannot bring back the dead.

PERSEPHONE.

What has happened? Cydippe is livid, her limbs are stark, her eyes are wide open, and motionless, and unnaturally brilliant.

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SILVANUS [*to* CHLORIS].

She was gathering a little posy of your wild flowers—eyebright, and crane's bills and small blue pansies, when—

FAUNA.

There glided out of the intertwisted fibres of the blue-berries a serpent—

ALCYONE.

Grey, with black arrows down the spine, and a flat, diabolical head—

FAUNA.

And Cydippe never saw it, and stretched out her hand again, and—see—

SILVANUS.

The viper fixed his fangs here, in the blue division of the vein, here in her translucent wrist. See, it swells, it darkens!

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FAUNA.

And with a scream she fell, and swooned away, and died, turning backwards, so that her hair caught in the springy herbage, and her head rolled a little in her pain, so that her hair was loosened and tightened, and look, there are still little tufts of blue-berry leaves in her hair.

SILVANUS.

But here comes Æsculapius.

[They all greet ÆSCULAPIUS, who enters from the left, with his basket of

PERSEPHONE.

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Ah! sage master of simples, this is a problem beyond thy solution, a case beyond thy cure.

ÆSCULAPIUS [*to the goddesses*].

You think that Cydippe is dead?

MAIA.

Unquestionably. The savage viper has slain her.

ÆSCULAPIUS.

Then prepare to behold what should seem a greater miracle to you than to me. But, first, Silvanus, bind a strip of clothing very tightly round the upper part of her arm, for no more than we can help of those treasonable messengers must fly posting from the wound to Cydippe's heart.

PERSEPHONE [*sententiously*].

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It can receive no more such messages.

ÆSCULAPIUS.

I think you are mistaken. And now, Fauna, a few drops of water in this cup from the trickling spring yonder. That is well. Stand farther away from Cydippe, all of you.

PERSEPHONE.

What are those pure white needles you drop into the water? How quickly they dissolve. Ah! he lays the mixture to Cydippe's wound. She sighs; her eyelids close; her heart is beating. What is this magic, Æsculapius?

ÆSCULAPIUS.

Do not tell your husband, Persephone, or he will complain to Zeus that I am depriving him of his population. But if there is magic in this, there is no miracle. [*To the others.*] Take her softly into the house and lay her down. She will take a long sleep, and will wake at the end of it with no trace of the poison or recollection of her suffering.

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[*They carry CYDIPPE forth. PERSEPHONE, MAIA, and ÆSCULAPIUS remain.*]

MAIA.

Then—she was not dead?

ÆSCULAPIUS.

No; it was but the poison-swoon, which precedes death, if it be not arrested.

MAIA.

How rejoiced I am!

PERSEPHONE.

One would say your joy had disappointed you.

MAIA.

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No, indeed, for I am attached to Cydippe, but oh! Persephone, it is strange to be at the very threshold of the mystery—

PERSEPHONE.

And to have the opening door shut in our faces? Perhaps ... next time ... they may not be able to find Æsculapius.

IX

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[*The terrace, as in the first scene; ZEUS enters from the house, conducted by HEBE and several of the lesser divinities.*]

HEBE.

Will your Majesty be pleased to descend to the lower boskage?

ZEUS.

No! Place my throne here, out of the wind, in the sun, which seems to have very little fire left in it, but some pleasant light still. The sea down there is bright again to-day; the carrying of our unfortunate person upon its surface was probably the source of immense alarm to it. It quaked and blackened continuously. Now we are removed, it regains something of its normal quiescence. I trust that the land hereabouts is dowered with a less painful susceptibility.

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GANYMEDE.

A priest, sire, the only one who saved his musical instrument through our calamities, stands within. Is your Majesty disposed to be sung to?

ZEUS.

No, certainly not. Which is he? [*The PRIEST is pointed out.*] What an odd-looking person! Yes, he may give me a specimen of his art—a short one.

[*The PRIEST comes forward; he is dressed in wild Thessalian raiment. He approaches with uncouth gestures, and a mixture of servility and self-consciousness. On receiving a nod from ZEUS, he tunes his instrument and sings as follows:*]

*Wild swans winging
Through the blue,
Spiders springing
To a clue,
Till the sparkling drops renew
All that ever
Youth's endeavour
Had determined to undo.
White and blue are hoards of treasure,
For the panting hands of pleasure
To go dropping, dropping, dropping,
Without measure
Through and through.*

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ZEUS.

Very pretty, I must say. Would you repeat it again?

[*PRIEST repeats it again.*]

ZEUS.

What does it ... exactly *mean*? I think it quite pretty, you understand.

PRIEST.

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Does your Majesty receive any impression from it?

ZEUS.

Well, I don't know that I could precisely parse it. But it is very pretty. Yes, I think I gain a certain impression from it.

PRIEST.

Do you not feel, sire, a peculiar sense of flush, of spring-tide—a direct juvenile ebullience?

ZEUS.

Ah, no doubt, no doubt. And a kind of nostalgia, or harking-back to happier days, a sense of their rapid passage, and their irrecoverability. Is that right?

PRIEST.

It is a positive divination!

ZEUS.

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I am conscious of the agreeable recollection of an incident—

PRIEST [*with rapture*].

Ah!—

ZEUS.

A little event?—

PRIEST.

You make my heart beat so high, sire, that I can hardly speak. Deign, sire, to recall that incident.

ZEUS [*with extreme affability*].

It was hardly an incident.... I merely happened, while you were reciting your song, to remember an occasion on which—on which Iris, at the rampart of our golden wall, bending back, was caught by the wind, and—and the contours were delicious.

PRIEST.

Oh! the word, the word!

ZEUS [*with slight hauteur*].

I do not follow you. Her rainbow—

PRIEST.

Ah! yes, sire, the rainbow, the rainbow! O what an art of incontestable divination!

ZEUS [*much animated*].

But you did not say anything about a rainbow, nor describe one, nor ever mention the elements of such a bow.

PRIEST.

Ah! no, sire. That is the art of the New Poetry. It names nothing, it describes nothing. All that it designs to do is to place the mind of the listener—of the august and perspicacious listener—in such an attitude as that the unnamed, the undescribed object rises full in vision. The poet flings forth his melody, and to the gross ear it seems a mere tinkle of inanity. That is simply because the crowd who worship at the shrine of the Sminthean Apollo have been accustomed by an old-fashioned and ridiculously incompetent priesthood to look for an instant and mechanical relation between sound and sense. I would not exaggerate, sire; but the kind of poetry lately cultivated, not only at Delphi, but in Delos also, is simply obsolete.

ZEUS [*suspiciously*].

Again I am not sure that I quite follow you.

PRIEST.

To your Majesty, at least, the New Poetry opens its casket as widely as the rose-bud does to the zephyr.

ZEUS.

I can follow that—but it rather reminds me of the Old Poetry.

PRIEST.

It was intended to do so. What promptitude of mind! What divine penetration!

ZEUS [*affably*].

I have always believed that if I had enjoyed leisure from public life, I should have excelled in my judgment of the fine arts. [*To the PRIEST, with gravity.*] You are a gifted young man. Be sure that you employ your talents with discretion. Such an intellect as yours carries responsibility with it. I shall be quite pleased to permit you to recite "The Rainbow" to me again. [*The PRIEST prepares to recite it.*]

ZEUS.

Oh, not now! Some other time! [*Graciously dismisses the PRIEST.*]

ZEUS [*after a long pause*].

The attitude of my family, in these ambiguous circumstances, is everything that could be desired. My original feeling of irritability has passed away. I should have supposed it to be what Pallas calls "fatigue," a confusion or discord of the nerve-centres, which she tells me is incident to mortality. What Pallas can possibly know about it is more than I can guess, especially, as there were not infrequent occasions on Olympus itself on which my Supreme Godhead was disturbed by flashes of what I should be forced to describe as exasperation, states of mind in which I formed—and indeed executed—the sudden project of breaking something. These were, I believe, simply the result of an excessive sense of responsibility. I am not one of those who

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conceive that the duty of deity is to sit passive beside the cup of nectar. Here on this island, in the permanent absence of that refreshment, I reflect (I perceive that I shall have very frequent opportunities for reflection) that I was perhaps only too anxious to preserve the harmony of heaven. My sense of decorum—may it not have been excessive? From below, as I imagine, from the stations occupied—I will not say by the inanimate or half-animate creation, such as insects, or men, or minerals—but by the demi-gods, I take it that the dignity and orbic beauty of our court appeared sublimely immaculate. In the inner circle, alas! no one knows better than I do that there were—well, dissensions. I will go further, in candour to myself, and admit that these occasionally led to excesses. I cannot charge my recollection with my having done anything to excuse or encourage these. The personal conduct of the Sovereign was always, I cannot but believe, above reproach. But the eccentricities—if I may style them so—of certain of my children were sometimes regrettable. I wonder that they did not age me; they would do so immediately in my present condition. But in this island, where we are to swarm like animalcules in a drop of water, I shall be relieved of all responsibility. Where there is no one to notice that errors are committed, no errors *are* committed. As the person of most experience in the whole world, I do not mind stating my ripe opinion that a fault which has no effect upon political conditions is in no sensible degree a fault at all. Pallas would contend the point, I suppose, but I am at ease. I shall not allow the conduct of my children, except as it shall regard myself, to affect my good-humour in the slightest degree.

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[PHŒBUS *enters, slowly pacing across the terrace.*]

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ZEUS.

Your planet seems to have recovered something of its tone, Phœbus.

PHŒBUS.

If, father, you regard—as you have every right to do—your venerable person as the centre of my interests, I rejoice to allow that this seems to be the case.

ZEUS [*with a touch of reserve*].

I meant that the sun shows a tendency to return to its forgotten orbit. It is quite warm here out of the wind. [*More genially.*] But as to myself, I admit a great recovery in my spirits. I have given up fretting for Iris, who was certainly lost on our way here, and Pallas has been showing me a curious little jewel she brought with her, which has created in me a kind of wistful cheeriness. I do not remember to have experienced anything of the kind before.

[Pg 165]

PHŒBUS.

I declare I believe that you will adapt yourself as well as the rest of us to this anomalous existence.

ZEUS.

We shall see; and I shall have so much time now, that I may even—what I am sure ought to gratify you, Phœbus,—be able to give my attention to the fine arts. A fallen monarch can always defy adversity by forming a collection of curiosities.

PHŒBUS.

If you make the gem of which Pallas is so proud the nucleus of your cabinet, I feel convinced that it will give you lasting satisfaction. And we are so poor now that it can never be complete, and therefore never become tiresome. But what was it that the oracle of Nemea amused and puzzled us by saying, "To form a collection is well, yet to take a walk is better"? I will attend your Majesty to your apartments, and then wander in these extensive woods.

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[*Exeunt.*]

X

[Pg 169]

[*A dell below the house, with a white poplar-tree growing alone. Under it HERACLES sits, in an attitude of deep dejection, his club fallen at his feet, a horn empty at his side. To him enters EROS.*]

EROS.

I have been congratulating our friends on their surpassing cheerfulness. Even Zeus is displaying a marvellous longanimity in his adverse state, and Pallas is positively frivolous. We must have disembarked, however, upon the island of Paradox, for everything goes by contraries; here I find you, Heracles, commonly so serene and uplifted, sunken in the pit of depression. You should squeeze the breath out of your melancholy, as you did out of Hera's snakes so long ago.

[Pg 170]

HERACLES.

That was a foolish tale. Do you not recollect that I am not as the rest of you?

EROS.

Come, man, brighten up! You look as sulky as you did when I broke your bow and arrows, and set Aphrodite laughing at you. But I have learned manners, and the goddesses only smile now. Cheer up! How is your destiny a whit different from ours?

HERACLES.

That rude old story about Alcmena, Eros—it is impossible that you can be the dupe of that? When I hunted lions on Cithaeron—that really *was* a gentlemanlike sport, my friend—when I hunted lions I was not a god. Gods don't hunt lions, Eros; I have not gone a-hunting since that curious affair on Mount Ceta. You remember it?

[Pg 171]

EROS.

I have preferred to forget it.

HERACLES.

Only an immortal can afford wilfully to forget, and I—well, you know as well as I do that I am only a mortal canonised. I never understood the incident, I confess. I lay down among the ferns to sleep, after an unusually heavy day's bag of monsters. It was sultry weather; I woke to an oppressive sense of singeing, I found myself enveloped in a blaze of leaves and brushwood.... But I bore you, and what does it matter now? What does anything matter?

EROS.

[Pg 172]

No, no; pray continue! I am excessively interested. You throw a light on something that has always puzzled me, something that—

HERACLES.

A dense black smoke blinded and numbed me. The next moment, as it seemed—perhaps it was the next day—I was hustled up through the æther to Olympus, and dumped down at the foot of Zeus' throne. Perhaps you remember?

EROS.

Yes, for I was there.

HERACLES.

All of you were there. And Zeus came down and took me by the wrist. Olympus rang with shouts and the clapping of hands. I was hailed with unanimity as an immortal; the ambrosia melted between my charred lips; I rose up amongst you all, immaculate and fresh. But when, or how, or wherefore I have never known. And now I shall never care to know.

[Pg 173]

EROS.

You are a strange mixture, Heracles; strangely contradictory. You never quailed before any scaly horror, you never spared a truculent robber or a noisome beast, nor avoided a laborious act—

HERACLES.

These might be quoted, I should have thought, as instances of my consistency.

EROS.

Yes, but then (you must really forgive me) your weakness in the matter of Omphale did seem, to those who knew you not, like want of self-respect. I have the reputation of shrinking, in the pursuit of pleasure, from no fantastic disguise, but I never sat spinning in the garments of a servant-maid. You must have looked a strange daughter of the plough, Heracles. I blush for you to think of it.

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HERACLES.

It was odd, certainly. Yet if *you* cannot comprehend it, Eros, I despair of explaining it to anybody. I should never do it again. You must admit I showed no want of firmness afterwards in dealing with Hebe, but then, she never interested me. Is she here? But do not reply, I am not anxious to learn.

EROS.

Your dejection passes beyond all bounds. You cannot have been shown the singularly cheerful little jewel which Pallas has brought with her? It raises every one's spirits.

[Pg 175]

HERACLES.

It will not raise mine; for all of you, Eros, have been immortals from the beginning, and your mortality is a new and pungent flavour on the moral palate. But the taste of it was known of old to me, and I am not its dupe. It simply carries me back to the ancient weary round of ceaseless struggle, unending battle, incessant renaissance of the sprouting heads of Hydra; to all that from which the windless Olympus was a refuge. Hope is presented—to one who has tasted it and who knows that it is futile—without reawakening, under such new conditions as we have here, any zest of adventure. The jewel of Pandora may be exhilarating to fallen immortality; it has no lustre whatever for a backsliding mortal.

[*Sounds of laughter are heard, and steps ascending from the shore.*]

[Pg 176]

EROS [*to* HERACLES].

Draw your lion's skin about you less negligently, Heracles; I hear visitants approaching. You are not in the woodways of Ceta.

[*The OCEANIDES rush in from the lower woodlands. They are carrying torches, and arrive in a condition of the highest exhilaration. EROS proceeds a step or two to meet them, with a smile and a mock reverence. HERACLES, brooding over his knees, does not even raise his eyes at their clamorous entry.*]

EROS.

Are you proceeding to set our Father Zeus on fire, or do you intend to repeat on our unwilling Heracles the rites of canonisation? Have a care with those absurd flambeaux; you will put all the underwood aflame. What are you doing with torches?

[Pg 177]

AMPHITRITE.

It was Hephæstus who gave them to us to hold. He is in a cave down there by the sea, making the most ingenious things in the darkness. He called us in to hold these lights—

DORIS.

And oh, Eros, we had such fun, teasing him—

PITHO.

He was quite angry at last—

AMPHITRITE.

And threatened to nail us to the cliff—

PITHO.

And off we ran, and left him in the dark.

DORIS.

He is coming after us. I never felt so frightened.

AMPHITRITE.

I never enjoyed myself anywhere so much.

PITHO.

Come away, come away! If he is going to pursue, let us give him a long chase, and leave him panting at last!

[*The OCEANIDES escape, in a tumult of laughter, through the upper woods, as HEPHÆSTUS, limping heavily, and much out of breath, appears from below.*]

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HEPHÆSTUS.

The rogues, the rogues!

EROS.

What a cataract of animal spirits! I am afraid, Hephæstus, that you do not escape, even here, from the echoes of the laughter of heaven.

HERACLES [*savagely*].

Follow them, and strike them down. Take my club, Hephæstus, if you have lost your hammer.

HEPHÆSTUS.

Strike them! Strike the darling rogues? I would as soon wrap your too-celebrated tunic about a little playful marmozet. What is the matter with you, Heracles?

HERACLES.

What change, indeed, has come over *you*, you sulky artificer? Time was when your pincers would have met in the flesh of maid or man who disturbed you in your work. Have you left your forge to cool for the mere pleasure of clambering after these ridiculous children! Go back to it, Hephæstus, go back and be ashamed.

[Pg 180]

HEPHÆSTUS.

You do not seem deeply engaged yourself. You look sourer and idler than the lion's head that dangles at your shoulder. The days are long here, though not too long. My handicraft will spare me for half an hour to sport with these exquisite and affable fragilities. I rather enjoy being laughed at. On Olympus I was rarely troubled by such teasing attentions. The little ones seem to enjoy themselves in their exile, and, to say true, so do I. My work was carried on, I admit, much more smoothly and surely than it can be here, and my hand, I am afraid, in crossing the sea, has lost much of its infallible cunning. But I enjoy the exercise, and I look onward to the art as I never did before, and I seem to have more leisure. Can you explain it, Eros?

[Pg 181]

EROS.

I do not attempt to do so, but I feel a similar and equally surprising serenity. Heracles is insensible to it, it seems, and he gives me a sort of reason.

HEPHÆSTUS.

What is it?

EROS.

Well ... I am not sure that.... Perhaps I ought to leave him to explain it.

HERACLES.

[Pg 182]

You would not be able to comprehend me. I am not sure that I myself—

[Two of the OCEANIDES re-enter, much more seriously than before, and with an eager importance of gesture.]

AMPHITRITE.

We are not playing now. We have a message from Zeus, Hephæstus. He says that he is waiting impatiently for the sceptre you are making for him.

DORIS.

Yes, you must hurry back to your cave. And we are longing to see what ornament you are putting on the sceptre. Let us come with you. We will hold the torches for you as steadily as if we were made of marble.

HEPHÆSTUS.

[Pg 183]

Come, then, come. Let us descend together. I hope that my science has not quitted me. We will see whether even on this rugged shore and with these uncouth instruments, I cannot prove to Zeus that I am still an artist. Come, I am in a hurry to begin. Give me your hands, Amphitrite and Doris.

[*Exeunt.*]

[*The glen, through which the stream, slightly flooded by a night's rain, runs faintly turbid. DIONYSUS, earnestly engaged in angling, does not hear the approach of ÆSCULAPIUS.*]

ÆSCULAPIUS [*in a high, voluble key*].

It is not to me but to you, O ruddy son of Semele, that the crowds of invalids will throng, if you cultivate this piscatory art so eagerly, since to do nothing, serenely, in the open air, without becoming fatigued, is to storm the very citadel of ill-health, and——

DIONYSUS [*testily, without turning round*].

Hush! hush!... I felt a nibble.

ÆSCULAPIUS [*in a whisper, flinging himself upon the grass*].

[Pg 188]

It was in such a secluded spot as this that Apollo heard the trout at Aroanius sing like thrushes.

DIONYSUS.

How these poets exaggerate! The trout sang, I suppose, like the missel-thrush.

ÆSCULAPIUS.

What song has the missel-thrush?

DIONYSUS.

It does not sing at all. Nor do trout.

ÆSCULAPIUS.

You are sententious, Dionysus.

DIONYSUS.

[Pg 189]

No, but closely occupied. I am intent on the subtle movements of my rod, round which my thoughts and fancies wind and blossom till they have made a thyrus of it. Now, however, I shall certainly catch no more fish, and so I may rest and talk to you. Are you searching for simples in this glen?

ÆSCULAPIUS.

To tell you the plain truth, I am waiting for Nike. She has given me an appointment here.

DIONYSUS.

I have not seen her since we arrived on this island.

ÆSCULAPIUS.

You have seen her, but you have not recognised her. She goes about in a perpetual incognito. Poor thing, in our flight from Olympus she lost all her attributes—her wings dropped off, her laurel was burned, she flung her armour away, and her palm-tree obstinately refused to up-root itself.

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DIONYSUS.

No doubt at this moment it is obsequiously rustling over the odious usurper.

ÆSCULAPIUS.

It was always rather a poor palm-tree. What Nike misses most are her wings. She was excessively dejected when we first arrived, but Pallas very kindly allowed her to take care of the jewel for half an hour. Nike—if still hardly recognisable—is no longer to be taken for Niobe.

DIONYSUS [*rising to his feet*].

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I shall do well, however, to go before she comes.

ÆSCULAPIUS.

By no means. I should prefer your staying. Nike will prefer it, too. In the old days she always liked you to be her harbinger.

DIONYSUS.

Not always; sometimes my panthers turned and bit her. But my panthers and my vines are gone to keep her laurels and her palm-tree company. I think I

will not stay, Æsculapius. But what does Nike want with you?

[*Slowly and pensively descending from the upper woods, NIKE enters.*]

DIONYSUS.

I was excusing myself, Nike, to our learned friend here for not having paid my addresses to you earlier. You must have thought me negligent?

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NIKE.

Oh! Dionysus, I assure you it is not so. Your temperament is one of violent extremes—you are either sparkling with miraculous rapidity of apprehension, or you are sunken in a heavy doze. These have doubtless been some of your sleepy days. And I ... oh! I am very deeply changed.

DIONYSUS.

No, not at all. Hardly at all. [*He scarcely glances at her, but turns to ÆSCULAPIUS.*] But farewell to both of you, for I am going down to the sea-board to watch for dolphins. That long melancholy plunge of the black snout thrills me with pleasure. It always did, and the coast-line here curiously reminds me of Naxos. Be kind to Æsculapius, Nike.

[Pg 193]

[*He descends along the water-course, and exit. NIKE smiles sadly, and half holds out her arms towards ÆSCULAPIUS.*]

NIKE.

It is for you, O brother of Hermes, to be kind to *me*. How altered we all are! Dionysus is not himself.... As I came here, I passed below the little grey precipice of limestone—

ÆSCULAPIUS.

Where the marchantias grow? Yes?

NIKE.

And three girls in white dresses, with wreaths of flowers on their shoulders, were laughing and chatting there in the shade of the great yew-tree. Who do you suppose they were, these laughing girls in white?

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ÆSCULAPIUS.

Perhaps three of the Oceanides, bright as the pure foam of the wave?

NIKE.

Æsculapius, they were not girls. They were the terrible and ancient Eumenides, black with the curdled blood of Uranus. They were the inexorable Furies, who were wont to fawn about my feet, with the adders quivering in their tresses, tormenting me for the spoils of victory. What does it mean? Why are they in white? As we came hither in the dreadful vessel, they were huddled together at the prow, and their long black raiment hung overboard and touched the brine. They were mumbling and crooning hate-songs, and pointing with skinny fingers to the portents in the sky. What is it that has changed their mood? What is it that can have turned the robes of the Eumenides white, and enamelled their wrinkled flesh with youth?

[Pg 195]

ÆSCULAPIUS.

Is it not because a like strange metamorphosis has invaded your own nature that you have come to meet me here?

NIKE [*after a pause*].

I am bewildered, but I am not unhappy. I come because the secrets of life are known to you. I come because it was you whom Zeus sent to watch over Cadmus and Harmonia when their dread and comfortable change came over them. They were weary with grief and defeat, tired of being for ever overwhelmed by the ever-mounting wave of mortal fate. I am weary—

ÆSCULAPIUS [*slowly*].

[Pg 196]

Of what, Nike? Be true to yourself. Of what are you weary?

NIKE.

I come to you that you may tell. I know no better than the snake knows when his skin withers and bloats. I feel distress, apprehension, no pain, a little fear.

ÆSCULAPIUS.

You speak of Cadmus and Harmonia; but is not your case the opposite of

theirs? They were saved from defeat; is it not your unspoken hope to be saved from victory, saved from what was your essential self?

NIKE.

Can it be so? I find, it is true, that I look back upon my rush and blaze of battle with no real regret. What a vain thing it was, the perpetual clash and resonance of a victory that no one could withstand; the mockery that conquest must be to an immortal whom no one can ever really oppose;—no veritable difficulty to overcome, no genuine resistance to meet, nothing positively tussled with and thrown, nothing but ghostly armies shrinking and melting a little way in front of my advancing eagles! That can never happen again, and even through the pang of losing my laurel and my wings, I did not genuinely deplore it. Nothing but the sheer intoxication of my immortality had kept me at the pitch. And now that it is gone, oh wisest of the gods, it is for you to tell me how, in this mortal state, I can remain happy and yet be *me*.

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ÆSCULAPIUS.

You are on the high road to happiness; you see its towers over the dust, for you dare to know yourself.

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NIKE.

Myself, Æsculapius?

ÆSCULAPIUS.

Yes; you have that signal, that culminating courage.

NIKE.

But it is because I do *not* know my way that I come to you.

ÆSCULAPIUS.

To recognise the way is one thing, it is much; but to recognise yourself is infinitely more, and includes the way.

NIKE.

Ah! I see. I think I partly see. The element of real victory was absent where no defeat could be.

ÆSCULAPIUS [*eagerly*].

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Dismal, sooty, raven-coloured robes of the Eumenides!

NIKE.

And it may be present even where no final conquest can ensue?

ÆSCULAPIUS.

Ah! how white they grow! How the serpents drop out of their tresses.

NIKE.

I am feeling forward with my finger-tips, like a blind woman searching.... And the real splendour of victory may consist in the helpless mortal state; may blossom there, while it only budded in our immortality?

ÆSCULAPIUS.

May consist, really, of the effort, the desire, the act of gathering up the will to make the plunge. This will be victory now, it will be the drawing of the bow-string and not the mere cessation of the arrow-flight.

[Pg 200]

XII

[Pg 203]

[*The main terrace, soon after dawn. In the centre ZEUS sits alone, throned and silent. One by one the Gods come out of the house, and arrange themselves in a semicircle, to the left and right, each as he passes making obeisance to ZEUS. It is a perfectly still morning, and a dense white mist hangs over the woods, completely hiding the sea and the farther shore. When all are seated.*]

ZEUS [*in a very slow voice*].

My children, since we came here I have not been visited until to-night by even a shadow of those forebodings which, in the form of divine prescience, illuminated my plans and your fortunes in Olympus. [*A pause, while the gods lean towards him in deepest attention.*] But a dream came close to my pillow last night and whispered to me strange, disquieting words.... I have no longer the art of clairvoyance, but I find I am not wholly dark. Still can I faintly divine the forms of the future, as we may all divine the roll of the woods before us, and the cleft which leads down to the shore, although this impalpable vapour shrouds our world.... And, from the dream, or from my faint perceptions, I am made aware that another mighty change is approaching us.

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[*A silence.*]

HERACLES.

Can you indicate to us the nature of this change? [*Looking round the semicircle.*] If it is permitted to us to do so we would repudiate it. [*The gods in silence signify their assent.*]

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ZEUS [*not replying to HERACLES*].

When we fled hither from the consuming malignity of the traitor, it was communicated to me that this island on the very uttermost border of the world was left us as a home from which we should never be dislodged. Here we were to dwell in peace, and here ... to grow old, and ... die. Here, in the meantime, new interests, humble wishes, cheerful curiosities have already twined about us, and we have gazed upon Pandora's jewel, and are no more the same.

PERSEPHONE.

Are we to be driven hence still farther towards the confines of immensity, father?

ZEUS.

[Pg 206]

I know not.

KRONOS.

More journeys, more weary, weary journeys?

ZEUS.

I know but what I tell you ... that I foresee a change. [*A silence.*] How breathless is the air. Not the outline of a leaf is shaken against the sky.

PHŒBUS.

But the mist grows thinner, and high up in it I see a faint blueness.

ZEUS.

I do not—nothing but the bewildering woolly whiteness, that chills my eyeballs.... [*With a sudden vivacity.*] Ah! yes ... it is the sea! Is Poseidon here?

POSEIDON.

[Pg 207]

I went down to the shore very early indeed this morning, before there was an atom of mist in the air. I called upon the glassy, oily sea, and I could not but fancy that, although there was little motion in the wave, it did roll faintly to my foot, and fawn at me in its reply. To me also, father, it seemed as though my element was burdened with a secret which it knew not how to convey to me.

[*A silence.*]

APHRODITE [*aside to PALLAS*].

If we must be driven forth again, let us at least cling to such new gifts as we have secured here.

PALLAS [*in an eager whisper*].

I should like to know what you consider them to be. Do you hold introspection as one of them?

APHRODITE.

[Pg 208]

I certainly do. The analysis of one's own feelings, and the sense of watching the fluctuating symptoms of one's individuality, form one of the principal consolations of our mortal state.

PALLAS.

I think I should give it another name.

HERMES [*who has come up behind them, and bending forward has overheard the conversation*].

My name for it would be the indulgence of personal vanity.

APHRODITE [*speaks louder, while the conversation becomes general, except that ZEUS takes no part in it*].

You may call it so, if you please, but it is a source of genuine pleasure to us.

PHOEBUS.

[Pg 209]

Ignorance is doubtless another of these consolations—ignorance chemically modified by a few drops of the desire for knowledge.... [*Enthusiastically.*] And all the chastened forms of recollection, how delightful they are, and how they add to our satisfaction here!

NIKE.

It would be interesting to me to understand what you mean by chastened forms of recollection. I don't think that is my experience.

PALLAS.

I conceive memory as a pure, unbiased emotion, an image of past life cast upon an unflawed mirror. Why do you say "chastened"?

PHOEBUS.

That memory which is nothing but a plain reproduction on the mirror of the mind is a tame concern, Pallas. It transfers, without modification, all that is dull, and squalid, and unessential. The only memory which is worthy of those who have tasted immortality is that which has in some degree been fortified. To recollect with enjoyment is to select certain salient facts from an experience and to be oblivious of the rest; or else it is to heighten the exciting elements of an event out of all proportion with historic fact; or it even is to place what should be in the seat of what precisely was.... But this must be done firmly, logically, with no timidity in reminiscence, so that the mind shall rest in a perfectly artistic conviction that what it recollects is all the truth and nothing but the truth. This is chastened, or, if you prefer it, civilised memory. But Zeus is about to speak.

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[*The Gods resume their seats in silence. ZEUS rises from his throne, and the Gods perceive that the mist has now almost entirely evaporated around them, and that the entire scene is luminous with morning radiance. All the Gods lean forward to gaze on ZEUS, who gazes over and beyond them to the sea.*]

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ZEUS.

The whole bay heaves in one vast wave of unbroken pearl.... And in the east something flashes ... something moves ... approaches.

[*All the Gods, except KRONOS and RHEA, rise and follow with their gaze the extended hand of ZEUS. POSEIDON steps forward to the front of the scene and shouts.*]

POSEIDON.

See! Three huge white ships are coming out of the east, and the waves glide away at their wake in widening glassy hues. How they speed! How they speed, without oar or sail!

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KRONOS.

No rest, no sleep for us. Leave us here behind you, Zeus. We never have any rest.

RHEA.

Yes; do not drag us farther in the wearisome train of your misfortunes.

ZEUS [*benignly, turning to them.*]

Be not afraid, Rhea and Kronos. But we must not abandon you. For the old sakes' sake we will hold together to the end.

ARES.

Shall we not collect our forces in unison, mortal as they are, and die together in resisting this invasion?

The kind barbarians are with us. They will fight at our side.

HEPHÆSTUS.

Yes, let us fight and die.

ZEUS.

You have no forces to collect, my sons. We cannot take toll of the blood of the barbarians. We cannot resist, we can but submit and withdraw.... The ships fleet closer. They are like monstrous fishes of living silver. I confess this is not what I anticipated. This is not what my faint dream seemed to indicate. What inspires the implacable destroyer to pursue us, and with this imposing and miraculous navy, to the shore of that harmless exile in which we were endeavouring to forget his existence, I know not. But let us at least preserve that dignity which has survived our deity. Whatever may be now in store for us—if the worst of all things be now hurrying to complete our annihilation—let us meet it with simplicity. Let us meet it with an even mind.

[Pg 214]

CIRCE.

Oh, see! what are those filaments of blue and violet and grassy green which flutter in the cordage of the three ships?

PHŒBUS.

They leap forward, though no wind is blowing.

CIRCE.

They are arranged in order, and they bend upwards and now outwards.

HERA.

The colours of them are those which adorn my bird.

PALLAS.

Ah! wonder of wonders! These have joined one another, see, and now they shoot forward together in a vibrating ribband of delicious lustre, and now it is arched to our shore, and descends at the lowest of these our woodland stairs.

[Pg 215]

ZEUS.

A vast rainbow from the three white vessels to this island!... And behold, a figure steps from it. She is robed to the feet in palest watchet blue, and her face is like a rosy star, and she waves her violet wings in the incommunicable speed of her ascent. My children, it is Iris, our lost daughter, our ineffable messenger. Let us await in silence the tidings which she brings.

[ZEUS *seats himself, and the Gods take their places as before. The air is now translucent, the sky cloudless, while the beechwoods flash with the lustre of dew, and the sea beyond the white ships is like a floor of turquoise. IRIS is seen to rise from the shore, through the gorge in the woods. She approaches, half flying, half climbing, with incredible velocity. She appears, in her splendour, at the top of the stairs, and looks round upon the Gods. Without exception, in the magnificence of her presence they look grey and old and dim. She hesitates a moment, and then kneels before the throne of ZEUS.*]

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IRIS.

Father and lawgiver! Imperial Master of Heaven! The rebellion in Olympus is over. The usurper has fallen under the weight of his own presumption, lower than the lowest chasms of Hades, chained for all eternity by the fetters of his own insolence and madness. It is not needful for you, Zeus, to punish or to be clement. Under the inevitable rebound of his impious frenzy, himself has sealed his doom for ever and ever. It is now for the Father of Heaven, and these his children, to resume their immortality and to regain their incomparable abodes. Be it my reward for the joyous labour of bringing the good news, to be the first to kiss these awful and eternal feet.

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[IRIS *flings herself before ZEUS in adoration, and folds her wings about her face. As she touches him, his deity blazes forth from him. When IRIS rises again, she glances round at the Gods with gratified astonishment, for all of them have become brilliant and young.*]

ZEUS.

[Pg 218]

Lead the way, Iris. This is no longer a place for us. Lead on and we will follow.
Lead on, that we may resume our immortality.

[IRIS *flies down to the sea, and ZEUS descends the steps. He is followed
by all the other deities.*]

CIRCE.

Were we really happy among these trees? I can scarcely credit it, they seem
so common and so frail.

NIKE.

Ha, my palm and my laurel and my wings. How can I have breathed without
them for an hour?

APHRODITE [*to EROS*].

Shall we recollect this little episode when we walk up the golden street
presently to our houses?

EROS.

I cannot think so, mother. That refinement of memory of which Phœbus was
speaking will seem the most ridiculous of illusions there.

PHŒBUS.

Yes; to cultivate illusion, to live in the past, to resuscitate experience, may be
the amusements of mortality, but they mean nothing now to us. When Selene
re-enters her orb, she will not disquiet herself about the disorders of its
interregnum.

PALLAS [*hastily reascending*].

I have left Pandora's jewel behind me. I must fetch it.

HERMES [*the last to descend*].

Let me confess that I took it from you. One of the barbarians was weeping,
and I wished, I cannot tell why, to see her smile. I gave your jewel to her.

PALLAS.

It is of no moment. It would be an inconspicuous ornament in that blaze of the
heart's beauty to which the white ships are about to carry us.

HERMES.

Come, then, Pallas, and let us linger here no more.

[*They descend and disappear.*]

THE END.

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Transcriber's Note

Variant spellings in this ebook have been retained to match the
original document.

The use of an ae-ligature in the name 'Hephæstus' has been
regularized. The oe-ligature is represented by 'oe' in the text
version of this ebook, and retains the oe-ligature in the HTML
version. Ellipses have been regularized.

The original text contained duplicate headers for Acts; these
duplications have been omitted in this ebook.

The following typographical corrections were made to this text:

[Page](#)
[16](#): Added missing period (EROS.)

[Pg 219]

[Pg 220]

[Page 16:](#) Changed em-dash to long dash to match style of text

[Page 16:](#) Changed casket to caskets (all the empty caskets)

[Page 28:](#) Added missing comma (he answered, "Pray don't")

[Page 101:](#) Changed 'o' to 'of' (It is kind of)

[Page 132:](#) Added missing period (CHLORIS.)

[Page 140:](#) Changed 'o' to 'of' (degradation, instead of)

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