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SISTER DOLOROSA

AND

POSTHUMOUS FAME

BY

JAMES LANE ALLEN

Copyright Edition

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DAVID DOUGLAS, CASTLE STREET
1892

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TO HER

FROM WHOSE FRAIL BODY HE DREW LIFE IN THE
BEGINNING, FROM WHOSE STRONG SPIRIT HE
WILL DRAW LIFE UNTIL THE CLOSE, THESE
TALES, WITH ALL OTHERS HAPLY HEREAFTER
TO BE WRITTEN, ARE DEDICATED
AS A PERISHABLE MONUMENT
OF INEFFABLE
REMEMBRANCE

PREFACE TO BRITISH EDITION.

The Author is glad to know that a British Edition of his Kentucky Tales is to be brought out by Mr. David Douglas of Edinburgh.

Generations ago his mother's ancestors came from Scotland and Ireland; generations ago his father's came from England. Toward the three countries his attention was fondly turned in early life; and the interest then begotten has been but fostered since.

It is with peculiar pleasure, therefore, that he now avails himself of the chance to ride hither and thither through these lands in his own conveyance—albeit the vehicle, a little book, may turn out a slow coach.

JAMES LANE ALLEN.

CHRISTMAS EVE,
LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY, 1891.

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SISTER DOLOROSA.

I.

When Sister Dolorosa had reached the summit of a low hill on her way to the convent, she turned and stood for a while looking backward. The landscape stretched away in a rude, unlovely expanse of grey fields, shaded in places by brown stubble, and in others lightened by pale, thin corn—the stunted reward of necessitous husbandry. This way and that ran wavering lines of low fences, some worm-eaten, others rotting beneath over-clambering wild-rose and blackberry. About the horizon masses of dense and rugged woods burned with sombre fires as the westering sun smote them from top to underbrush. Forth from the edge of one a few long-horned cattle, with lowered heads, wound meekly homeward to the scant milking. The path they followed led towards the middle background of the picture, where the weather-stained and sagging roof of a farmhouse rose above the tops of aged cedars. Some of the branches, broken by the sleet and snow of winters, trailed their burdens from the thinned and desolated crests—as sometimes the highest hopes of the mind, after being beaten down by the tempests of the world, droop around it as memories of once transcendent aspirations.

Where she stood in the dead autumn fields few sounds broke in upon the pervasive hush of the declining day. Only a cricket, under the warm clod near by, shrilled sturdily with cheerful forethought of drowsy hearthstones; only a lamb, timid of separation from the fold, called anxiously in the valley beyond the crest of the opposite hill; only the summoning whistle of a quail came sweet and clear from the depths of a neighbouring thicket. Through all the air floated that spirit of vast loneliness which at seasons seems to steal like a human mood over the breast of the

great earth and leave her estranged from her transitory children. At such an hour the heart takes wing for home, if any home it have; or when, if homeless, it feels the quick stir of that yearning for the evening fireside with its half-circle of trusted faces, young and old, and its bonds of love and marriage, those deepest, most enchanting realities to the earthly imagination. The very landscape, barren and dead, but framing the simple picture of a home, spoke to the beholder the everlasting poetry of the race.

But Sister Dolorosa, standing on the brow of the hill whence the whole picture could be seen, yet saw nothing of it. Out of the western sky there streamed an indescribable splendour of many-hued light, and far into the depths of this celestial splendour her steadfast eyes were gazing.

She seemed caught up to some august height of holy meditation. Her motionless figure was so lightly poised that her feet, just visible beneath the hem of her heavy black dress, appeared all but rising from the dust of the pathway; her pure and gentle face was upturned, so that the dark veil fell away from her neck and shoulders; her lips were slightly parted; her breath came and went so imperceptibly that her hands did not appear to rise and fall as they clasped the cross to her bosom. Exquisite hands they were—most exquisite—gleaming as white as lilies against the raven blackness of her dress; and with startling fitness of posture, the longest finger of the right hand pointed like a marble index straight towards a richly-embroidered symbol over her left breast—the mournful symbol of a crimson heart pierced by a crimson spear. Whether attracted by the lily-white hands or by the red symbol, a butterfly, which had been flitting hither and thither in search of the gay races of the summer gone, now began to hover nearer, and finally lighted unseen upon the glowing spot. Then, as if disappointed not to find it the bosom of some rose, or lacking hope and strength for further quest—there it rested, slowly fanning with its white wings the tortured emblem of the divine despair.

Lower sank the sun, deeper and more wide-spread the splendour of the sky, more rapt and radiant the expression of her face. A painter of the angelic school, seeing her standing thus, might have named the scene the transfiguration of angelic womanhood. What but heavenly images should she be gazing on; or where was she in spirit but flown out of the earthly autumn fields and gone away to sainted vespers in the cloud-built realm of her own fantasies? Perhaps she was now entering yon vast cathedral of the skies, whose white spires touched the blue eternity; or toiling devoutly up yon grey mount of Calvary, with its blackened crucifix falling from the summit.

Standing thus towards the close of the day, Sister Dolorosa had not yet passed out of that ideal time which is the clear white dawn of life. She was still within the dim, half-awakened region of womanhood, whose changing mists are beautiful illusions, whose shadows about the horizon are the mysteries of poetic feeling, whose purpling east is the palette of the imagination, and whose up-springing skylark is blithe aspiration that has not yet felt the weight of the clod it soars within. Before her still was the full morning of reality and the burden of the mid-day hours.

But if the history of any human soul could be perfectly known, who would wish to describe this passage from the dawn of the ideal to the morning of the real—this transition from life as it is imagined through hopes and dreams to life as it is known through action and submission? It is then that within the country of the soul occur events too vast, melancholy, and irreversible to be compared to anything less than the downfall of splendid dynasties, or the decay of an august religion. It is then that there leave us for ever bright, aerial spirits of the fancy, separation from whom is like grief for the death of the beloved.

The moment of this transition had come in the life of Sister Dolorosa, and unconsciously she was taking her last look at the gorgeous western clouds from the hill-tops of her chaste life of dreams.

A flock of frightened doves sped hurtling low over her head, and put an end to her reverie. Pressing the rosary to her lips, she turned and walked on towards the convent, not far away. The little footpath across the fields was well trodden and familiar, running as it did between the convent and the farmhouse behind her, in which lived old Ezra and Martha Cross; and as she followed its windings, her thoughts, as is likely to be true of the thoughts of nuns, came home from the clouds to the humblest concerns of the earth, and she began to recall certain incidents of the visit from which she was returning.

The aged pair were well known to the Sisters. Their daughters had been educated at the convent; and, although these were married and scattered now, the tie then formed had since become more close through their age and loneliness. Of late word had come to the Mother Superior that old Martha was especially ailing, and Sister Dolorosa had several times been sent on visits of sympathy. For reasons better to be understood later on, these visits had had upon her the effect of an April shower on a thirsting rose. Her missions of mercy to the aged couple over, for a while the white taper of ideal consecration to the Church always burned in her bosom with clearer, steadier lustre, as though lit afresh from the Light eternal. But to-day she could not escape the conviction that these visits were becoming a source of disquietude; for the old couple, forgetting the restrictions which her vows put upon her very thoughts, had spoken of things which it was trying for her to hear—love-making, marriage, and children. In vain had she tried to turn away from the proffered share in such parental confidences. The old mother had even read aloud a letter from her eldest son, telling them of his approaching marriage, and detailing the hope and despair of his wooing. With burning cheeks and downcast eyes Sister Dolorosa had listened till the close and then risen and quickly left the house.

The recollection of this returned to her now as she pursued her way along the footpath which

descended into the valley; and there came to her, she knew not whence or why, a piercing sense of her own separation from all but the Divine love. The cold beauty of unfallen spirituality which had made her august as she stood on the hill-top died away, and her face assumed a tenderer, more appealing loveliness, as there crept over it, like a shadow over snow, that shy melancholy under which those women dwell who have renounced the great drama of the heart. She resolved to lay her trouble before the Mother Superior to-night, and ask that some other Sister be sent hereafter in her stead. And yet this resolution gave her no peace, but a throb of painful renunciation; and since she was used to the most scrupulous examination of her conscience, to detect the least presence of evil, she grew so disturbed by this state of her heart that she quite forgot the windings of the pathway along the edge of a field of corn, and was painfully startled when a wounded bird, lying on the ground a few feet in front of her, flapped its wings in a struggle to rise. Love and sympathy were the strongest principles of her nature, and with a little outcry she bent over and took it up; but scarce had she done so, when, with a final struggle, it died in her hand. A single drop of blood oozed out and stood on its burnished breast.

She studied it—delicate throat, silken wings, wounded bosom—in the helpless way of a woman, unwilling to put it down and leave it, yet more unwilling to take it away. Many a time, perhaps, she had watched this very one flying to and fro among its fellows in the convent elms. Strange that any one should be hunting in these fields, and she looked quickly this way and that. Then, with a surprised movement of the hands that caused her to drop the bird at her feet, Sister Dolorosa discovered, standing half hidden in the edge of the pale yellow corn a few yards ahead, wearing a hunting-dress, and leaning on the muzzle of his gun, a young man who was steadfastly regarding her. For an instant they stood looking each into the other's face, taken so unprepared as to lose all sense of convention. Their meeting was as unforeseen as another far overhead, where two white clouds, long shepherded aimlessly and from opposite directions across the boundless pastures by the unreasoning winds, touched and melted into one. Then Sister Dolorosa, the first to regain self-possession, gathered her black veil closely about her face, and advancing with an easy, rapid step, bowed low with downcast eyes as she passed him, and hurried on towards the convent.

She had not gone far before she resolved to say nothing about the gossip to which she had listened. Of late the Mother Superior had seemed worn with secret care and touched with solicitude regarding her. Would it be kind to make this greater by complaining like a weak child of a trivial annoyance? She took her conscience proudly to task for ever having been disturbed by anything so unworthy. And as for this meeting in the field, even to mention that would be to give it a certain significance, whereas it had none whatever. A stranger had merely crossed her path a moment and then gone his way. She would forget the occurrence herself as soon as she could recover from her physical agitation.

II.

The Convent of the Stricken Heart is situated in that region of Kentucky which early became the great field of Catholic immigration. It was established in the first years of the present century, when mild Dominicans, starving Trappists, and fiery Jesuits hastened into the green wildernesses of the West with the hope of turning them into religious vineyards. Then, accordingly, derived from such sources as the impassioned fervour of Italy, the cold, monotonous endurance of Flanders, and the dying sorrows of ecclesiastical France, there sprang up this new flower of faith, unlike any that ever bloomed in pious Christendom. From the meagrest beginning, the order has slowly grown rich and powerful, so that it now has branches in many States, as far as the shores of the Pacific Ocean.

The convent is situated in a retired region of country, remote from any village or rural highway. The very peace of the blue skies seems to descend upon it. Around the walls great elms stand like tranquil sentinels, or at a greater distance drop their shadows on the velvet verdure of the artificial lawns. Here, when the sun is hot, some white-veiled novice may be seen pacing soft-footed and slow, while she fixes her sad eyes upon pictures drawn from the literature of the Dark Ages, or fights the first battle with her young heart, which would beguile her to heaven by more jocund pathways. Drawn by the tranquillity of this retreat—its trees and flowers and dews—all singing-birds of the region come here to build and brood. No other sounds than their pure cadencies disturb the echoless air except the simple hymns around the altar, the vesper bell, the roll of the organ, the deep chords of the piano, or the thrum of the harp. It may happen, indeed, that some one of the Sisters, climbing to the observatory to scan the horizon of her secluded world, will catch the faint echoes of a young ploughman in a distant field lustily singing of the honest passion in his heart, or hear the shouts of happy harvesters as they move across the yellow plains. The population scattered around the convent domain are largely of the Catholic faith, and from all directions the country is threaded by footpaths that lead to the church as a common shrine. It was along one of these that Sister Dolorosa, as has been said, hastened homeward through the falling twilight.

When she reached the convent, instead of seeking the Mother Superior as heretofore with news from old Martha, she stole into the shadowy church and knelt for a long time in wordless prayer —wordless, because no petition that she could frame appeared inborn and quieting. An unaccountable remorse gnawed the heart out of language. Her spirit seemed parched, her will

was deadened as by a blow. Trained to the most rigorous introspection, she entered within herself and penetrated to the deepest recesses of her mind to ascertain the cause. The bright flame of her conscience thus employed was like the turning of a sunbeam into a darkened chamber to reveal the presence of a floating grain of dust. But nothing could be discovered. It was the undiscovered that rebuked her as it often rebukes us all—the undiscovered evil that has not yet linked itself to conscious transgression. At last she rose with a sigh, and, dejected, left the church.

Later, the Mother Superior, noiselessly entering her room, found her sitting at the open window, her hands crossed on the sill, her eyes turned outward into the darkness.

"Child, child," she said hurriedly, "how uneasy you have made me! Why are you so late returning?"

"I went to the church when I came back, Mother," replied Sister Dolorosa, in a voice singularly low and composed. "I must have returned nearly an hour ago."

"But even then it was late."

"Yes, Mother; I stopped on the way back to look at the sunset. The clouds looked like cathedrals. And then old Martha kept me. You know it is difficult to get away from old Martha."

The Mother Superior laughed slightly, as though her anxiety had been removed. She was a woman of commanding presence, with a face full of dignity and sweetness, but furrowed by lines of difficult resignation.

"Yes; I know," she answered. "Old Martha's tongue is like a terrestrial globe; the whole world is mapped out on it, and a little movement of it will show you a continent. How is her rheumatism?"

"She said it was no worse," replied Sister Dolorosa absently.

The Mother Superior laughed again. "Then it must be better. Rheumatism is always either better or worse."

"Yes, Mother."

This time the tone caught the Mother Superior's ear. "You seem tired. Was the walk too long?"

"I enjoyed the walk, Mother. I do not feel tired."

They had been sitting on opposite sides of the room. The Mother Superior now crossed, and, laying her hand softly on Sister Dolorosa's head, pressed it backward and looked fondly down into the upturned eyes.

"Something troubles you. What has happened?"

There is a tone that goes straight to the heart of women in trouble. If there are tears hidden, they gather in the eyes. If there is any confidence to give, it is given then.

A tremor, like that of a child with an unspent sob, passed across Sister Dolorosa's lips, but her eyes were tearless.

"Nothing has happened, Mother. I do not know why, but I feel disturbed and unhappy." This was the only confidence that she had to give.

The Mother Superior passed her hand slowly across the brow, white and smooth like satin. Then she sat down, and as Sister Dolorosa slipped to the floor beside her she drew the young head to her lap and folded her aged hands upon it. What passionate, barren loves haunt the hearts of women in convents! Between these two there existed a tenderness more touching than the natural love of mother and child.

"You must not expect to know at all times," she said, with grave gentleness. "To be troubled without any visible cause is one of the mysteries of our nature. As you grow older you will understand this better. We are forced to live in conscious possession of all faculties, all feelings, whether or not there are outward events to match them. Therefore you must expect to have anxiety within when your life is really at peace without; to have moments of despair when no failure threatens; to have your heart wrung with sympathy when no object of sorrow is nigh; to be spent with the need of loving when there is no earthly thing to receive your love. This is part of woman's life, and of all women, especially those who, like you, must live, not to stifle the tender, beautiful forces of nature, but to ennoble and unite them into one divine passion. Do not think, therefore, to escape these hours of heaviness and pain. No saint ever walked this earth without them. Perhaps the lesson to be gained is this: that we may feel things before they happen, so that if they do happen we shall be disciplined to bear them."

The voice of the Mother Superior had become low and meditative; and, though resting on the bowed head, her eyes seemed fixed on events long past. After the silence of a few moments she continued in a brighter tone—

"But, my child, I know the reason of *your* unhappiness. I have warned you that excessive ardour would leave you overwrought and nervous; that you were being carried too far by your ideals. You live too much in your sympathies and your imagination. Patience, my little St. Theresa! No saint was ever made in a day, and it has taken all the centuries of the Church to produce its

martyrs. Only think that your life is but begun; there will be time enough to accomplish everything. I have been watching, and I know. This is why I send *you* to old Martha. I want you to have the rest, the exercise, the air of the fields. Go again to-morrow, and take her the ointment. I found it while you were gone to-day. It has been in the Church for centuries, and you know this bottle came from blessed Loretto in Italy. It may do her some good. And, for the next few days, less reading and study."

"Mother!" Sister Dolorosa spoke as though she had not been listening. "What would become of me if I should ever—if any evil should ever befall me?"

The Mother Superior stretched her hands out over the head on her knees as some great, fierce, old, grey eagle, scarred and strong with the storms of life, might make a movement to shield its imperilled young. The tone in which Sister Dolorosa had spoken startled her as the discovered edge of a precipice. It was so quiet, so abrupt, so terrifying with its suggestion of an abyss. For a moment she prayed silently and intensely.

"Heaven mercifully shield you from harm!" she then said, in an awestricken whisper. "But, timid lamb, what harm can come to you?"

Sister Dolorosa suddenly rose and stood before the Mother Superior.

"I mean," she said, with her eyes on the floor and her voice scarcely audible—"I mean—if I should ever fail, would you cast me out?"

"My child!—Sister!—Sister Dolorosa!—Cast you out!"

The Mother Superior started up and folded her arms about the slight dark figure, which at once seemed to be standing aloof with infinite loneliness. For some time she sought to overcome this difficult, singular mood.

"And now, my daughter," she murmured at last, "go to sleep and forget these foolish fears. I am near you!" There seemed to be a fortress of sacred protection and defiance in these words; but the next instant her head was bowed, her upward-pointing finger raised in the air, and in a tone of humble self-correction she added: "Nay, not I; the Sleepless guards you! Good-night."

Sister Dolorosa lifted her head from the strong shoulder and turned her eyes, now luminous, upon the troubled face.

"Forgive me, Mother!" she said, in a voice of scornful resolution. "Never—never again will I disturb you with such weakness as I have shown to-night. I *know* that no evil can befall me! Forgive me, Mother. Good-night."

While she sleeps learn her history. Pauline Cambron was descended from one of those sixty Catholic families of Maryland that formed a league in 1785 for the purpose of emigrating to Kentucky without the rending of social ties or separation from the rites of their ancestral faith. Since then the Kentucky branch of the Cambrons has always maintained friendly relations with the Maryland branch, which is now represented by one of the wealthy and cultivated families of Baltimore. On one side the descent is French; and, as far back as this can be traced, there runs a tradition that some of the most beautiful of its women became barefoot Carmelite nuns in the various monasteries of France or on some storm-swept island of the Mediterranean Sea.

The first of the Kentucky Cambrons settled in that part of the State in which, nearly a hundred years later, lived the last generation of them—the parents of Pauline. Of these she was the only child, so that upon her marriage depended the perpetuation of the Kentucky family. It gives to the Protestant mind a startling insight into the possibilities of a woman's life and destiny in Kentucky to learn the nature of the literature by which her sensitive and imaginative character was from the first impressed. This literature covers a field wholly unknown to the ordinary student of Kentucky history. It is not to be found in well-known works, but in the letters, reminiscences, and lives of foreign priests, and in the kindling and heroic accounts of the establishment of Catholic missions. It abounds in such stories as those of a black friar fatally thrown from a wild horse in the pathless wilderness; of a grey friar torn to pieces by a saw-mill; of a starving white friar stretched out to die under the green canopy of an oak; of priests swimming half-frozen rivers with the sacred vestments in their teeth; of priests hewing logs for a hut in which to celebrate the mass; of priests crossing and recrossing the Atlantic and traversing Italy and Belgium and France for money and pictures and books; of devoted women laying the foundation of powerful convents in half-ruined log-cabins, shivering on beds of straw sprinkled on the ground, driven by poverty to search in the wild woods for dyes with which to give to their motley worldly apparel the hue of the cloister, and dying at last, to be laid away in pitiless burial without coffin or shroud.

Such incidents were to her the more impressive since happening in part in the region where lay the Cambron estate; and while very young she was herself repeatedly taken to visit the scenes of early religious tragedies. Often, too, around the fireside there was proud reference to the convent life of old France and to the saintly zeal of the Carmelites; and once she went with her parents to Baltimore and witnessed the taking of the veil by a cousin of hers—a scene that afterwards burned before her conscience as a lamp before a shrine.

Is it strange if under such influences, living in a country place with few associates, reading in her father's library books that were to be had on the legends of the monastic orders and the lives of the saints—is it strange if to the young Pauline Cambron this world before long seemed little else

than the battle-field of the Church, the ideal man in it a monk, the ideal woman a nun, the human heart a solemn sacrifice to Heaven, and human life a vast, sad pilgrimage to the shrine eternal?

Among the places which had always appealed to her imagination as one of the heroic sites of Kentucky history was the Convent of the Stricken Heart, not far away. Whenever she came hither she seemed to be treading on sacred ground. Happening to visit it one summer day before her education was completed, she asked to be sent hither for the years that remained. When these were past, here, with the difficult consent of her parents, who saw thus perish the last hope of the perpetuation of the family, she took the white veil. Here at last she hid herself beneath the black. Her whole character at this stage of its unfolding may be understood from the name she assumed—Sister Dolorosa. With this name she wished not merely to extinguish her worldly personality, but to clothe herself with a lifelong expression of her sympathy with the sorrows of the world. By this act she believed that she would attain a change of nature so complete that the black veil of Sister Dolorosa would cover as in a funeral urn the ashes which had once been the heart of Pauline Cambron. And thus her conventual life began.

But for those beings to whom the span on the summer-evening cloud is as nothing compared with that fond arch of beauty which it is a necessity of their nature to hang as a bow of promise above every beloved hope—for such dreamers the sadness of life lies in the dissipation of mystery and the disillusion of truth. When she had been a member of the order long enough to see things as they were, Sister Dolorosa found herself living in a large, plain, comfortable brick convent, situated in a retired and homely region of Southern Kentucky. Around her were plain nuns with the invincible contrariety of feminine temperament. Before her were plain duties. Built up around her were plain restrictions. She had rushed with outstretched arms towards poetic mysteries, and clasped prosaic reality.

As soon as the lambent flame of her spirit had burned over this new life, as a fire before a strong wind rushes across a plain, she one day surveyed it with that sense of reality which sometimes visits the imaginative with such appalling vividness. Was it upon this dreary waste that her soul was to play out its drama of ideal womanhood?

She answered the question in the only way possible to such a nature as hers. She divided her life in twain. Half, with perfect loyalty, she gave out to duty; the other, with equal loyalty, she stifled within. But perhaps this is no uncommon lot—this unmating of the forces of the mind, as though one of two singing-birds should be released to fly forth under the sky, while the other—the nobler singer—is kept voiceless in a darkened chamber.

But the Sisters of the Stricken Heart are not cloistered nuns. Their chief vow is to go forth into the world to teach. Scarcely had Sister Dolorosa been intrusted with work of this kind before she conceived an aspiration to become a great teacher of history or literature, and obtained permission to spend extra hours in the convent library on a wider range of sacred reading. Here began a second era in her life. Books became the avenues along which she escaped from her present into an illimitable world. Her imagination, beginning to pine, now took wing and soared back to the remote, the splendid, the imperial, the august. Her sympathies, finding nothing around her to fix upon, were borne afar like winged seed and rooted on the colossal ruins of the centuries. Her passion for beauty fed on holy art. She lived at the full flood of life again.

If in time revulsion came, she would live a shy, exquisite, hidden life of poetry in which she herself played the historic rôles. Now she would become a powerful abbess of old, ruling over a hundred nuns in an impregnable cloister. To the gates, stretched on a litter, wounded to death, they bore a young knight of the Cross. She had the gates opened. She went forth and bent over him; heard his dying message; at his request drew the plighted ring from his finger to send to another land. How beautiful he was! How many masses—how many, many masses—she had celebrated for the peace of his soul! Now she was St. Agatha, tortured by the proconsul; now she lay faint and cold in an underground cell, and was visited by Thomas à Kempis, who read to her long passages from the *Imitation*. Or she would tire of the past, and making herself an actor in her own future, in a brief hour live out the fancied drama of all her crowded years.

But whatever part she took in this dream existence and beautiful passion-play of the soul, nothing attracted her but the perfect. For the commonplace she felt a guileless scorn.

Thus for some time these unmated lives went on—the fixed outward life of duty, and the ever-wandering inner life of love. In mid-winter, walking across the shining fields, you have come to some little frost-locked stream. How mute and motionless! You set foot upon it, the ice is broken, and beneath is musical running water. Thus under the chaste rigid numbness of convent existence the heart of Sister Dolorosa murmured unheard and hurried away unseen to plains made warm and green by her imagination. But the old may survive upon memories; the young cannot thrive upon hope. Love, long reaching outward in vain, returns to the heart as self-pity. Sympathies, if not supported by close realities, fall in upon themselves like the walls of a ruined house. At last, therefore, even the hidden life of Sister Dolorosa grew weary of the future and the past, and came home to the present.

The ardour of her studies and the rigour of her duties combined—but more than either that wearing away of the body by a restless mind—had begun to affect her health. Both were relaxed, and she was required to spend as much time as possible in the garden of the convent. It was like lifting a child that has become worn out with artificial playthings to an open window to see the flowers. With inexpressible relief she turned from mediæval books to living nature; and her beautiful imagination, that last of all faculties to fail a human being in an unhappy lot, now began

to bind nature to her with fellowships which quieted the need of human association. She had long been used to feign correspondences with the fathers of the Church; she now established intimacies with dumb companions, and poured out her heart to them in confidence.

The distant woods slowly clothing themselves in green; the faint perfume of the wild rose, running riot over some rotting fence; the majestical clouds about the sunset; the moon dying in the spectral skies; the silken rustling of doves' wings parting the soft foliage of the sentinel elms; landscapes of frost on her window-pane; crumbs in winter for the sparrows on the sill; violets under the leaves in the convent garden; myrtle on the graves of the nuns—such objects as these became the means by which her imprisoned life was released. On the sensuous beauty of the world she spent the chaste ravishments of her virginal heart. Her love descended on all things as in the night the dew fills and bends down the cups of the flowers.

A few of these confidences—written on slips of paper, and no sooner written than cast aside—are given here. They are addressed severally to a white violet, an English sparrow, and a butterfly.

"I have taken the black veil, but thou wearest the white, and thou dwellest in dim cloisters of green leaves—in the domed and many-pillared little shrines that line the dusty roadside, or seem more fitly built in the depths of holy woodlands. How often have I drawn near with timid steps, and, opening the doors of thy tiny oratories, found thee bending at thy silent prayers—bending so low that thy lips touched the earth, while the slow wind rang thine Angelus! Wast thou blooming anywhere near when He came into the wood of the thorn and the olive? Didst thou press thy cool face against His bruised feet? Had I been thou, I would have bloomed at the foot of the Cross, and fed His failing lungs with my last breath. Time never destroys thee, little sister, or stains thy whiteness; and thou wilt be bending at thy prayers among the green graves on the twilight hillside ages after I who lie below have finished mine. Pray for me then, pray for thine erring sister, thou pure-souled violet!"

"How cold thou art! Shall I take thee in and warm thee on my bosom? Ah, no! For I know who thou art! Not a bird, but a little brown mendicant friar, begging barefoot in the snow. And thou livest in a cell under the convent eaves opposite my window. What ugly feet thou hast, little Father! And the thorns are on thy toes instead of about thy brow. That is a bad sign for a saint. I saw thee in a brawl the other day with a mendicant brother of thine order, and thou drovest him from roof to roof and from icy twig to twig, screaming and wrangling in a way to bring reproach upon the Church. Thou shouldst learn to defend a thesis more gently. Who is it that visits thy cell so often? A penitent to confess? And dost thou shrive her freely? I'd never confess to thee, thou cross little Father! Thou'dst have no mercy on me if I sinned, as sin I must since human I am. The good God is very good to thee that He keeps thee from sinning while He leaves me to do wrong. Ah, if it were but natural for me to be perfect! But that, little Father, is my idea of heaven. In heaven it will be natural for me to be perfect. I'll feed thee no longer than the winter lasts, for then thou'lt be a monk no longer, but a bird again. And canst thou tell me why? Because, when the winter is gone, thou'lt find a mate, and wert thou a monk thou'dst have none. For thou knowest perfectly well, little Father, that monks do not wed."

"No fitting emblem of my soul art thou, fragile Psyche, mute and perishable lover of the gorgeous earth. For my soul has no summer, and there is no earthly object of beauty that it may fly to and rest upon as thou upon the beckoning buds. It is winter where I live. All things are cold and white, and my soul flies only above fresh fields of flowerless snow. But no blast can chill its wings, no mire bedraggle, or rude touch fray. I often wonder whether thou art mute, or the divine framework of winged melodies. Thy very wings are shaped like harps for the winds to play upon. So, too, my soul is silent never, though none can hear its music. Dost thou know that I am held in exile in this world that I inhabit? And dost thou know the flower that I fly ever towards and cannot reach? It is the white flower of eternal perfection that blooms and waits for the soul in Paradise. Upon that flower I shall some day rest my wings as thou foldest thine on a faultless rose."

Harmonising with this growing passion for the beauty of the world—a passion that marked her approach to riper womanhood—was the care she took of her person. The coarse, flowing habit of the order gave no hint of the curves and symmetry of the snow-white figure throbbing with eager life within; but it could not conceal an air of refinement and movements of the most delicate grace. There was likewise a suggestion of artistic study in the arrangement of her veil, and the sacred symbol on her bosom was embroidered with touches of elaboration.

It was when she had grown weary of books, of the imaginary drama of her life, and the loveliness of Nature, that Sister Dolorosa was sent by the Mother Superior on those visits of sympathy to old Martha Cross; and it was during her return from one of them that there befell her that adventure which she had deemed too slight to mention.

III.

Her outward history was that night made known to Gordon Helm by old Martha Cross. When Sister Dolorosa passed him he followed her at a distance until she entered the convent gates. It caused him subtle pain to think what harm might be lurking to ensnare her innocence. But subtler pain shot through him as he turned away, leaving her housed within that inaccessible

fold.

Who was she, and from what mission returning alone at such an hour across those darkening fields? He had just come to the edge of the corn and started to follow up the path in quest of shelter for the night, when he had caught sight of her on the near hill-top, outlined with startling distinctness against the jasper sky and bathed in a tremulous sea of lovely light. He had held his breath as she advanced towards him. He had watched the play of emotions in her face as she paused a few yards off, and her surprise at the discovery of him—the timid start; the rounding of the fawn-like eyes; the vermeil tint overspreading the transparent purity of her skin: her whole nature disturbed like a wind-shaken anemone. All this he now remembered as he returned along the footpath. It brought him to the door of the farm-house, where he arranged to pass the night.

"You are a stranger in this part of the country," said the old housewife an hour later.

When he came in she had excused herself from rising from her chair by the chimney-side; but from that moment her eyes had followed him—those eyes of the old which follow the forms of the young with such despairing memories. By the chimney-side sat old Ezra, powerful, stupid, tired, silently smoking, and taking little notice of the others. Hardly a chill was in the air, but for her sake a log blazed in the cavernous fireplace and threw its flickering light over the guest who sat in front.

He possessed unusual physical beauty—of the type sometimes found in the men of those Kentucky families that have descended with little admixture from English stock; body and limbs less than athletic, but formed for strength and symmetry; hair brown, thick, and slightly curling over the forehead and above the ears; complexion blond, but mellowed into rich tints from sun and open air; eyes of dark grey-blue, beneath brows low and firm; a moustache golden-brown, thick, and curling above lips red and sensuous; a neck round and full, and bearing aloft a head well poised and moulded. The irresistible effect of his appearance was an impression of simple joyousness in life. There seemed to be stored up in him the warmth of the sunshine of his land; the gentleness of its fields; the kindness of its landscapes. And he was young—so young! To study him was to see that he was ripe to throw himself heedless into tragedy; and that for him, not once, but nightly, Endymion fell asleep to be kissed in his dreams by encircling love.

"You are a stranger in this part of the country," said the old housewife, observing the elegance of his hunting-dress and his manner of high breeding.

"Yes; I have never been in this part of Kentucky before." He paused; but seeing that some account of himself was silently waited for, and as though wishing at once to despatch the subject, he added: "I am from the blue-grass region, about a hundred miles northward of here. A party of us were on our way further south to hunt. On the train we fell in with a gentleman who told us he thought there were a good many birds around here, and I was chosen to stop over to ascertain. We might like to try this neighbourhood as we return, so I left my things at the station and struck out across the country this afternoon. I have heard birds in several directions, but had no dog. However, I shot a few hoves in a cornfield."

"There are plenty of birds close around here, but most of them stay on the land that is owned by the Sisters, and they don't like to have it hunted over. All the land between here and the convent belongs to them except the little that's mine." This was said somewhat dryly by the old man, who knocked the ashes off his pipe without looking up.

"I am sorry to have trespassed; but I was not expecting to find a convent out in the country, although I believe I have heard that there is an abbey of Trappist monks somewhere down here."

"Yes; the abbey is not far from here."

"It seems strange to me. I can hardly believe I am in Kentucky," he said musingly, and a solemn look came over his face as his thoughts went back to the sunset scene.

The old housewife's keen eyes pierced to his secret mood.

"You ought to go there."

"Do they receive visitors at the convent?" he asked quickly.

"Certainly; the Sisters are very glad to have strangers visit the place. It's a pity you hadn't come sooner. One of the Sisters was here this afternoon, and you might have spoken to her about it."

This intelligence threw him into silence, and again her eyes fed upon his firelit face with inappeasable hunger. She was one of those women, to be met with the world over and in any station, who are remarkable for a love of youth and the world, which age, sickness, and isolation but deepen rather than subdue; and his sudden presence at her fireside was more than grateful. Not satisfied with what he had told, she led the talk back to the blue-grass country, and got from him other facts of his life, asking questions in regard to the features of that more fertile and beautiful land. In return she sketched the history of her own region, and dwelt upon its differences of soil, people, and religion—chiefly the last. It was while she spoke of the Order of the Stricken Heart that he asked a question he had long reserved.

"Do you know the history of any of these Sisters?"

"I know the history of all of them who are from Kentucky. I have known Sister Dolorosa since she was a child."

"Sister Dolorosa!" The name pierced him like a spear.

"The nun who was here to-day is called Sister Dolorosa. Her real name was Pauline Cambron."

The fire died away. The old man left the room on some pretext and did not return. The story that followed was told with many details not given here—traced up from parentage and childhood with that fine tracery of the feminine mind which is like intricate embroidery, and which leaves the finished story wrought out on the mind like a complete design, with every point fastened to the sympathies.

As soon as she had finished he rose quickly from a desire to be alone. So well had the story been knit to his mind that he felt it an irritation, a binding pain. He was bidding her good-night when she caught his hand. Something in his mere temperament drew women towards him.

"Are you married?" she asked, looking into his eyes in the way with which those who are married sometimes exchange confidences.

He looked quickly away, and his face flushed a little fiercely.

"I am not married," he replied, withdrawing his hand.

She threw it from her with a gesture of mock, pleased impatience; and when he had left the room, she sat for a while over the ashes.

"If she were not a nun——" then she laughed and made her difficult way to her bed. But in the room above he sat down to think.

Was this, then, not romance, but life in his own State? Vaguely he had always known that further south in Kentucky a different element of population had settled, and extended into the New World that mighty cord of ecclesiastical influence which of old had braided every European civilisation into an iron tissue of faith. But this knowledge had never touched his imagination. In his own land there were no rural Catholic churches, much less convents, and even among the Catholic congregations of the neighbouring towns he had not many acquaintances and fewer friends.

To descend as a gay bird of passage, therefore, upon these secluded, sombre fields, and find himself in the neighbourhood of a powerful Order—to learn that a girl, beautiful, accomplished, of wealth and high social position, had of her own choice buried herself for life within its bosom—gave him a startling insight into Kentucky history as it was forming in his own time. Moreover—and this touched him especially—it gave him a deeper insight into the possibilities of woman's nature; for a certain narrowness of view regarding the true mission of woman in the world belonged to him as a result of education. In the conservative Kentucky society by which he had been largely moulded the opinion prevailed that woman fulfilled her destiny when she married well and adorned a home. All beauty, all accomplishments, all virtues and graces, were but means for attaining this end.

As for himself, he came of a stock which throughout the generations of Kentucky life, and back of these along the English ancestry, had stood for the home; a race of men with the fireside traits: sweet-tempered, patient, and brave; well-formed and handsome; cherishing towards women a sense of chivalry; protecting them fiercely and tenderly; loving them romantically and quickly for the sake of beauty; marrying early, and sometimes at least holding towards their wives such faith, that these had no more to fear from all other women in the world than from all other men.

Descended from such a stock and moulded by the social ideals of his region, Helm naturally stood for the home himself. And yet there was a difference. In a sense he was a product of the new Kentucky. His infancy had been rocked on the chasm of the Civil War; his childhood spent amid its ruins; his youth ruled by two contending spirits—discord and peace: and earliest manhood had come to him only in the morning of the new era. It was because the path of his life had thus run between light and shade that his nature was joyous and grave; only joy claimed him entirely as yet, while gravity asserted itself merely in the form of sympathy with anything that suffered, and a certain seriousness touching his own responsibility in life.

Reflecting on this responsibility while his manhood was yet forming, he felt the need of his becoming a better, broader type of man, matching the better, broader age. His father was about his model of a gentleman; but he should be false to the admitted progress of the times were he not an improvement on his father. And since his father had, as judged by the ideals of the old social order, been a blameless gentleman of the rural blue-grass kind, with farm, spacious homestead, slaves, leisure, and a library,—to all of which, except the slaves, he would himself succeed upon his father's death—his dream of duty took the form of becoming a rural blue-grass gentleman of the newer type, reviving the best traditions of the past, but putting into his relations with his fellow-creatures an added sense of helpfulness, a broader sense of justice, and a certain energy of leadership in all things that made for a purer, higher human life. It will thus be seen that he took seriously not only himself, but the reputation of his State; for he loved it, people and land, with broad, sensitive tenderness, and never sought or planned for his future apart from civil and social ends.

It was perhaps a characteristic of him as a product of the period that he had a mind for looking at his life somewhat abstractedly and with a certain thought-out plan; for this disposition of mind naturally belongs to an era when society is trembling upon the brink of new activities and forced to the discovery of new ideals. But he cherished no religious passion, being committed by

inheritance to a mild, unquestioning, undeviating Protestantism. His religion was more in his conduct than in his prayers, and he tried to live its precepts instead of following them from afar. Still, his make was far from heroic. He had many faults; but it is less important to learn what these were than to know that, as far as he was aware of their existence, he was ashamed of them, and tried to overcome them.

Such, in brief, were Pauline Cambron and Gordon Helm: coming from separate regions of Kentucky, descended from unlike pasts, moulded by different influences, striving towards ends in life far apart and hostile. And being thus, at last they slept that night.

When she had been left alone, and had begun to prepare herself for bed, across her mind passed and repassed certain words of the Mother Superior, stilling her spirit like the waving of a wand of peace: "To be troubled without any visible cause is one of the mysteries of our nature." True, before she fell asleep there rose all at once a singularly clear recollection of that silent meeting in the fields; but her prayers fell thick and fast upon it like flakes of snow, until it was chastely buried from the eye of conscience; and when she slept, two tears, slowly loosened from her brain by some repentant dream, could alone have told that there had been trouble behind her peaceful eyes.

IV.

Sister Dolorosa was returning from her visit to old Martha on the following afternoon. When she awoke that morning she resolutely put away all thought of what had happened the evening before. She prayed oftener than usual that day. She went about all duties with unwonted fervour. When she set out in the afternoon, and reached the spot in the fields where the meeting had taken place, it was inevitable that a nature sensitive and secluded like hers should be visited by some question touching who he was and whither he had gone; for it did not even occur to her that he would ever cross her path again. Soon she reached old Martha's; and then—a crippled toad with a subtle tongue had squatted for an hour at the ear of Eve, and Eve, beguiled, had listened. And now she was again returning across the fields homeward. Homeward?

Early that afternoon Helm had walked across the country to the station, some two miles off, to change his dress, with the view of going to the convent the next day. As he came back he followed the course which he had taken the day before, and this brought him into the same footpath across the fields.

Thus they met the second time. When she saw him, had she been a bird, with one sudden bound she would have beaten the air down beneath her frightened wings and darted high over his head straight to the convent. But his step grew slower and his look expectant. When they were a few yards apart he stepped out of the path into the low, grey weeds of the field, and seemed ready to pause; but she had instinctively drawn her veil close, and was passing on. Then he spoke quickly.

"I beg your pardon, but are strangers allowed to visit the convent?"

There was no mistaking the courtesy of the tone. But she did not lift her face towards him. She merely paused, though seeming to shrink away. He saw the fingers of one hand lace themselves around the cross. Then a moment later, in a voice very low and gentle, she replied, "The Mother Superior is glad to receive visitors at the convent," and, bowing, moved away.

He stood watching her with a quick flush of disappointment. Her voice, even more than her garb, had at once waved off approach. In his mind he had crossed the distance from himself to her so often that he had forgotten the actual abyss of sacred separation. Very thoughtfully he turned at last and took his way along the footpath.

As he was leaving the farm-house the next day to go to the convent, Ezra joined him, merely saying that he was going also. The old man had few thoughts; but with that shrewd secretiveness which is sometimes found in the dull mind he kept his counsels to himself. Their walk was finished in silence, and soon the convent stood before them.

Through a clear sky the wan light fell upon it as lifeless as though sent from a dead sun. The air hung motionless. The birds were gone. Not a sound fell upon the strained ear. Not a living thing relieved the eye. And yet within what tragedies and conflicts, what wounds and thorns of womanhood! Here, then, she lived and struggled and soared. An unearthly quietude came over him as he walked up the long avenue of elms, painfully jarred on by the noise of Ezra's shuffling feet among the dry leaves. Joyous life had retired to infinite remoteness; and over him, like a preternatural chill in the faint sunlight, crept the horror of this death in life. Strangely enough he felt at one and the same time a repugnance to his own nature of flesh and a triumphant delight in the possession of bodily health, liberty—the liberty of the world—and a mind unfettered by tradition.

A few feet from the entrance an aged nun stepped from behind a hedgerow of shrubbery and confronted them.

"Will you state your business?" she said coldly, glancing at Helm and fixing her eyes on Ezra, who for reply merely nodded to Helm.

"I am a stranger in this part of the country, and heard that I would be allowed to visit the convent."

"Are you a Catholic?"

"No; I am a Protestant."

"Are you acquainted with any of the young ladies in the convent?"

"I am not."

She looked him through and through. He met her scrutiny with frank unconsciousness.

"Will you come in? I will take your name to the Mother Superior."

They followed her into a small reception-room, and sat for a long time waiting. Then an inner door opened, and another aged nun, sweet-faced and gentle, entered and greeted them pleasantly, recognising Ezra as an acquaintance.

"Another Sister will be sent to accompany us," she said, and sat down to wait, talking naturally the while to the old man. Then the door opened again, and the heart of Helm beat violently; there was no mistaking the form, the grace. She crossed to the Sister, and spoke in an undertone.

"Sister Generose is engaged. Mother sent me in her place, Sister." Then she greeted Ezra and bowed to Helm, lifting to him an instant, but without recognition, her tremulous eyes. Her face had the whiteness of alabaster.

"We will go to the church first," said the Sister, addressing Helm, who placed himself beside her, the others following.

When they entered the church he moved slowly around the walls, trying to listen to his guide and to fix his thoughts upon the pictures and the architecture. Presently he became aware that Ezra had joined them, and as soon as pretext offered he looked back. In a pew near the door through which they had entered he could just see the kneeling form and bowed head of Sister Dolorosa. There she remained while they made the circuit of the building, and not until they were quitting it did she rise and again place herself by the side of Ezra. Was it her last prayer before her temptation?

They walked across the grounds towards the old-fashioned flower-garden of the convent. The Sister opened the little latticed gate, and the others passed in. The temptation was to begin in the very spot where Love had long been wandering amid dumb companions.

"Ezra!" called the aged Sister, pausing just inside the gate and looking down at some recently dug bulbs, "has Martha taken up her tender bulbs? The frost will soon be falling." The old man sometimes helped at the convent in garden work.

"Who is this young man?" she inquired carelessly a few moments later.

But Ezra was one of those persons who cherish a faint dislike of all present company. Moreover, he knew the good Sister's love of news. So he began to resist her with the more pleasure that he could at least evade her questions.

"I don't know," he replied, with a mysterious shake of the head.

"Come this way," she said beguilingly, turning aside into another walk, "and look at the chrysanthemums. How did you happen to meet him?"

When Sister Dolorosa and Helm found themselves walking slowly side by side down the garden-path—this being what he most had hoped for and she most had feared—there fell upon each a momentary silence of preparation. Speak she must; if only in speaking she might not err. Speak he could; if only in speaking he might draw from her more knowledge of her life, and in some becoming way cause her to perceive his interest in it.

Then she, as his guide, keeping her face turned towards the border of flowers, but sometimes lifting it shyly to his, began with great sweetness and a little hurriedly, as if fearing to pause—

"The garden is not pretty now. It is full of flowers, but only a few are blooming. These are daffodils. They bloomed in March, long ago. And here were spring beauties. They grow wild, and do not last long. The Mother Superior wished some cultivated in the garden, but they are better if let alone to grow wild. And here are violets, which come in April. And here is Adam and Eve, and tulips. They are gay flowers, and bloom together for company. You can see Adam and Eve a long way off, and they look better at a distance. These were the white lilies, but one of the Sisters died, and we made a cross. That was in June. Jump-up-Johnnies were planted in this bed, but they did not do well. It has been a bad year. A storm blew the hollyhocks down, and there were canker-worms in the roses. That is the way with the flowers: they fail one year, and they succeed the next. They would never fail if they were let alone. It is pleasant to see them starting out in the Spring to be perfect each in its own way. It is pleasant to water them and to help. But some will be perfect, and some will be imperfect, and no one can alter that. They are like the children in the school; only the flowers would all be perfect if they had their way, and the children would all

be wrong if they had theirs—the poor, good children! This is touch-me-not. Perhaps you have never heard of any such flower. And there, next to it, is love-lies-bleeding. We have not much of that; only this one little plant." And she bent over and stroked it.

His whole heart melted under the white radiance of her innocence. He had thought her older; now his feeling took the form of the purest delight in some exquisite child nature. And therefore, feeling thus towards her, and seeing the poor, dead garden with only common flowers, which nevertheless she separately loved, oblivious of their commonness, he said with sudden warmth, holding her eyes with his—

"I wish you could see my mother's garden and the flowers that bloom in it." And as he spoke there came to him a vision of her as she might look in a certain secluded corner of it, where ran a trellised walk; over-clambering roses, pale golden, full blown or budding, and bent with dew; the May sun golden in the heavens; far and near birds singing and soaring in ecstasy; the air lulling the sense with perfume, quickening the blood with freshness; and there, within that frame of roses, her head bare and shining, her funereal garb for ever laid aside for one that matched the loveliest hue of living nature around, a flower at her throat, flowers in her hand, sadness gone from her face, there the pure and radiant incarnation of a too-happy world, this exquisite child-nature, advancing towards him with eyes of love.

Having formed this picture, he could not afterwards destroy it; and as they resumed their walk he began very simply to describe his mother's garden, she listening closely because of her love for flowers, which had become companions to her, and merely saying dreamily, half to herself and with guarded courtesy half to him, "It must be beautiful."

"The Mother Superior intends to make the garden larger next year, and to have fine flowers in it, Ezra. It has been a prosperous year in the school, and there will be money to spare. This row of lilacs is to be dug up, and the fence set back so as to take in the onion patch over there. When does he expect to go away?" The aged Sister had not made rapid progress.

"I haven't heard him say," replied the old man.

"Perhaps Martha has heard him say."

Ezra only struck the toe of his stout boot with his staff.

"The Mother Superior will want *you* to dig up the lilacs, Ezra. You can do it better than any one else."

The old man shook his head threateningly at the bushes. "I can settle them," he said.

"Better than any one else. Has Martha heard him say when he is going away?"

"To-morrow," he replied, conceding something in return for the lilacs.

"These are the chrysanthemums. They are white, but some are perfect and some are imperfect, you see. Those that are perfect are the ones to feel proud of, but the others are the ones to love."

"If all were perfect would you no longer love them?" he said gently, thinking how perfect she was and how easy it would be to love her.

"If all were perfect, I could love all alike, because none would need to be loved more than others."

"And when the flowers in the garden are dead, what do you find to love then?" he asked, laughing a little and trying to follow her mood.

"It would not be fair to forget them because they are dead. But they are not dead; they go away for a season, and it would not be fair to forget them because they have gone away." This she said simply and seriously as though her conscience were dealing with human virtues and duties.

"And are you satisfied to love things that are not present?" he asked, looking at her with sudden earnestness.

"The Mother Superior will wish him to take away a favourable impression of the convent," said the Sister. "Young ladies are sometimes sent to us from that region." And now, having gotten from Ezra the information she desired and turned their steps towards the others, she looked at Helm with greater interest.

"Should you like to go upon the observatory?" she meekly asked, pointing to the top of the adjacent building. "From there you can see how far the convent lands extend. Besides, it is the only point that commands a view of the whole country."

The scene of the temptation was to be transferred to the pinnacle of the temple.

"It is not asking too much of you to climb so far for my pleasure?"

"It is our mission to climb," she replied wearily; "and if our strength fails, we rest by the way."

Of herself she spoke literally; for when they came to the topmost story of the building, from which the observatory was reached by a short flight of steps, she sank into a seat placed near as a resting-place.

"Will you go above, Sister?" she said feebly. "I will wait here."

On the way up, also, the old man had been shaking his head with a stupid look of alarm and muttering his disapproval.

"There is a high railing, Ezra," she now said to him, "You could not fall." But he refused to go further; he suffered from vertigo.

The young pair went up alone.

For miles in all directions the landscape lay shimmering in the autumnal sunlight—a poor, rough, homely land, with a few farmhouses of the plainest kind. Briefly she traced for him the boundary of the convent domain. And then he, thinking proudly of his own region, now lying heavy in varied autumnal ripeness and teeming with noble, gentle animal life; with rolling pastures as green as May under great trees of crimson and gold; with flashing streams and placid sheets of water, and great secluded homesteads—he, in turn, briefly described it; and she, loving the sensuous beauty of the world, listened more dreamily, merely repeating over and over, half to herself, and with more guarded courtesy half to him, "It must be very beautiful."

But whether she suddenly felt that she had yielded herself too far to the influence of his words and wished to counteract this, or whether she was aroused to offset his description by another of unlike interest, scarcely had he finished when she pointed towards a long stretch of woodland that lay like a mere wavering band of brown upon the western horizon.

"It was through those woods," she said, her voice trembling slightly, "that the procession of Trappists marched behind the cross when they fled to this country from France. Beyond that range of hills is the home of the Silent Brotherhood. In this direction," she continued, pointing southward, "is the creek which used to be so deep in winter that the priests had to swim it as they walked from one distant mission to another in the wilderness, holding above the waves the crucifix and the sacrament. Under that tree down there the Father who founded this convent built with his own hands the cabin that was the first church, and hewed out of logs the first altar. It was from those trees that the first nuns got the dyes for their vestments. On the floor of that cabin they sometimes slept in mid-winter with no other covering than an armful of straw. Those were heroic days."

If she had indeed felt some secret need to recover herself by reciting the heroisms of local history, she seemed to have succeeded. Her face kindled with emotion; and as he watched it he forgot even her creed in this revelation of her nature, which touched in him also something serious and exalted. But as she ceased he asked, with peculiar interest—

"Are there any Kentuckians among the Trappist Fathers?"

"No," she replied, after a momentary silence, and in a voice lowered to great sadness. "There was one a few years ago. His death was a great blow to the Fathers. They had hoped that he might some day become the head of the order in Kentucky. He was called Father Palemon."

For another moment nothing was said. They were standing side by side, looking towards that quarter of the horizon which she had pointed out as the site of the abbey. Then he spoke meditatively, as though his mind had gone back unawares to some idea that was very dear to him —

"No, this does not seem much like Kentucky; but, after all, every landscape is essentially the same to me if there are homes on it. Poor as this country is, still it is history; it is human life. Here are the eternal ties and relations. Here are the eternal needs and duties; everything that keeps the world young and the heart at peace. Here is the unchanging expression of our common destiny, as creatures who must share all things, and bear all things, and be bound together in life and death."

"Sister!" called up the nun waiting below, "is not the wind blowing? Will you not take cold?"

"The wind is not blowing, Sister, but I am coming."

They turned their faces outward upon the landscape once more. Across it wound the little footpath towards the farm-house in the distance. By a common impulse their eyes rested upon the place of their first meeting. He pointed to it.

"I shall never forget that spot," he said impulsively.

"Nor I!"

Her words were not spoken. They were not uttered within. As unexpectedly and silently as in the remotest profound of the heavens at midnight some palest little star is loosened from its orbit,

shoots a brief span, and disappears, this confession of hers traced its course across the depths of her secret consciousness; but, having made it to herself, she kept her eyes veiled, and did not look at him again that day.

"I think you have now seen everything that could be of any interest," the aged Sister said doubtfully, when they stood in the yard below.

"The place is very interesting to me," he answered, looking around that he might discover some way of prolonging his visit.

"The graveyard, Sister. We might go there." The barely audible words were Sister Dolorosa's. The scene of the temptation was to be transferred for the third time.

They walked some distance down a sloping hillside, and stepped softly within the sacred enclosure. A graveyard of nuns! O Mother Earth, all-bearing, passion-hearted mother! Thou that sendest love one for another into thy children, from the least to the greatest, as thou givest them life! Thou that livest by their loves and their myriad plightings of troth and myriad marriages! With what inconsolable sorrow must thou receive back upon thy bosom, the chaste dust of lorn virgins, whose bosoms thou didst mould for a lover's arms and a babe's slumbers! As marble vestals of the ancient world, buried and lost, they lie, chiselled into a fixed attitude of prayer through the silent centuries.

The aspect and spirit of the place: the simple graves placed side by side like those of the nameless poor, or of soldiers fallen in an unfriendly land: the rude wooden cross at the head of each, bearing the sacred name of her who was dust below; the once chirruping nests of birds here and there in the grass above the songless lips; the sad desolation of this unfinished end—all were the last thing needed to wring the heart of Helm with dumb pity and an ungovernable anguish of rebellion. This, then, was to be her portion. His whole nature cried aloud against it. His ideas of human life, civilisation, his age, his country, his State, rose up in protest. He did not heed the words of the Sister beside him. His thoughts were with Sister Dolorosa, who followed with Ezra in a silence which she had but once broken since her last words to him. He could have caught her up and escaped back with her into the liberty of life, into the happiness of the world.

Unable to endure the place longer, he himself led the way out. At the gate the Sister fell behind with Ezra.

"He seems deeply impressed by his visit," she said in an undertone, "and should bear with him a good account of the convent. Note what he says, Ezra. The order wants friends in Kentucky, where it was born and has flourished;" and looking at Sister Dolorosa and Helm, who were a short distance in front, she added to herself—

"In her, more than in any other one of us, he will behold the perfect spiritual type of the convent. By her he will be made to feel the power of the order to consecrate women, in America, in Kentucky, to the service of the everlasting Church."

Meantime, Sister Dolorosa and Helm walked side by side in a silence that neither could break. He was thinking of her as a woman of Kentucky—of his own generation—and trying to understand the motive that had led her to consecrate herself to such a life. His own ideal of duty was so different.

"I have never thought," he said at length, in a voice lowered so as to reach her ear alone—"I have never thought that my life would not be full of happiness. I have never supposed I could help being happy if I did my duty."

She made no reply, and again they walked on in silence and drew near the convent building. There was so much that he wished to say, but scarcely one of his thoughts that he dared utter. At length he said, with irrepressible feeling—

"I wish your life did not seem to me so sad. I wish, when I go away to-morrow, that I could carry away, with my thoughts of this place, the thought that you are happy. As long as I remember it I wish I could remember you as being happy."

"You have no right to remember me at all," she said quickly, speaking for the nun and betraying the woman.

"But I cannot help it," he said.

"Remember me, then, not as desiring to be happy, but as living to become blessed."

This she said, breaking the long silence which had followed upon his too eager exclamation. Her voice had become hushed into unison with her meek and patient words. And then she paused, and, turning, waited for the Sister to come up beside them. Nor did she even speak to him again, merely bowing without lifting her eyes when, a little later, he thanked them and took his leave.

In silence he and the old man returned to the farm-house, for his thoughts were with her. In the garden she had seemed to him almost as a child, talking artlessly of her sympathies and ties with mute playthings; then on the heights she had suddenly revealed herself as the youthful transcendent devotee; and finally, amid the scenes of death, she had appeared a woman too quickly aged and too early touched with resignation. He did not know that the effect of convent life is to force certain faculties into maturity while others are repressed into unalterable unripeness; so that in such instances as Sister Dolorosa's the whole nature resembles some long,

sloping mountain-side, with an upper zone of ever-lingering snow for childhood, below this a green vernal belt for maidenhood, and near the foot fierce summer heats and summer storms for womanhood. Gradually his plan of joining his friends the next day wavered for reasons that he could hardly have named.

And Sister Dolorosa—what of her when the day was over? Standing that night in a whitewashed, cell-like room, she took off the heavy black veil and hood which shrouded her head from all human vision, and then unfastening at waist and throat the heavier black vestment of the order, allowed it to slip to the floor, revealing a white under-habit of the utmost simplicity of design. It was like the magical transformation of a sorrow-shrouded woman back into the shape of her own earliest maidenhood.

Her hair, of the palest gold, would, if unshorn, have covered her figure in a soft, thick golden cloud; but shorn, it lay about her neck and ears in large, lustrous waves that left defined the contour of her beautiful head, and gave to it the aerial charm that belongs to the joyousness of youth. Her whole figure was relaxed into a posture slightly drooping; her bare arms, white as the necks of swans, hung in forgotten grace at her sides; her eyes, large, dark, poetic, and spiritual, were bent upon the floor, so that the lashes left their shadows on her cheeks, while the delicate, overcircling brows were arched high with melancholy. As the nun's funereal robes had slipped from her person had her mind slipped back into the past, that she stood thus, all the pure oval of her sensitive face stilled to an expression of brooding pensiveness? On the urn which held the ashes of her heart had some legend of happy shapes summoned her fondly to return?—some garden? some radiant play-fellow of childhood summers, already dim but never to grow dimmer?

Sighing deeply, she stepped across the dark circle on the floor which was the boundary of her womanhood. As she did so her eyes rested on a small table where lay a rich veil of white that she had long been embroidering for a shrine of the Virgin. Slowly, still absently, she walked to it, and, taking it up, threw it over her head, so that the soft fabric enveloped her head and neck and fell in misty folds about her person; she thinking the while only of the shrine; she looking down on this side and on that, and wishing only to judge how well this design and that design, patiently and prayerfully wrought out, might adorn the image of the Divine Mother in the church of the convent.

But happening to be standing quite close to the white wall of the room with the lamp behind her, when she raised her eyes she caught sight of her shadow, and with a low cry clasped her hands, and for an instant, breathless, surveyed it. No mirrors are allowed in the convent. Since entering it Sister Dolorosa had not seen a reflection of herself, except perhaps her shadow in the sun or her face in a troubled basin of water. Now, with one overwhelming flood of womanly self-consciousness, she bent forward, noting the outline of her uncovered head, of her bared neck and shoulders and arms. Did this accidental adorning of herself in the veil of a bride, after she had laid aside the veil of the Church, typify her complete relapse of nature? And was this the lonely marriage-moment of her betrayed heart?

For a moment, trembling, not before the image on the wall, but before that vivid mirror which memory and fancy set before every woman when no real mirror is nigh, she indulged her self-surrender to thoughts that covered her, on face and neck, with a rosy cloud more maidenly than the white mist of the veil. Then, as if recalled by some lightning stroke of conscience, with fearful fingers she lifted off the veil, extinguished the lamp, and, groping her way on tiptoe to the bedside, stood beside it, afraid to lie down, afraid to pray, her eyes wide open in the darkness.

V.

Sleep gathers up the soft threads of passion that have been spun by us during the day, and weaves them into a tapestry of dreams on which we see the history of our own characters. We awake to find our wills more inextricably caught in the tissues of their own past; we stir, and discover that we are the heirs to our dead selves of yesterday, with a larger inheritance of transmitted purpose.

When Gordon awoke the next morning, among his first thoughts was the idea of going on to join his friends that day, and this thought now caused him unexpected depression. Had he been older, he might have accepted this unwillingness to go away as the best reason for leaving; but, young, and habitually self-indulgent towards his desires when they were not connected with vice, he did not trouble himself with any forecast of consequences.

"You ought not to go away to-day," the old housewife said to him in the morning, wishing to detain him through love of his company. "To-morrow will be Sunday, and you ought to go to vespers and hear Sister Dolorosa sing. There is not such another voice in any convent in Kentucky."

"I will stay," he replied quickly; and the next afternoon he was seated in the rear of the convent church, surrounded by rural Catholic worshippers who had assembled from the neighbourhood. The entire front of the nave on one side was filled with the black-veiled Sisters of the order; that on the other with the white-veiled novices—two far-journeying companies of consecrated souls who reminded him in the most solemn way how remote, how inaccessible, was that young pilgrim

among them of whom for a long time now he had been solely thinking. With these two companies of sacrificial souls before him he understood her character in a new light.

He beheld her much as a brave, beautiful boy volunteer, who, suddenly waving a bright, last adieu to gay companions in some gay-streeted town, from motives of the loftiest heroism, takes his place in the rear of passing soldiery, marching to misguided death: who, from the rear, glowing with too impetuous ardour, makes his way from rank to rank ever towards the front; and who, at last, bearing the heavy arms and wearing the battle-stained uniform of a veteran, steps forward to the van at the commander's side, and sets his fresh, pure face undaunted towards destruction. As he thought of her thus, deeper forces stirred within his nature than had ever been aroused by any other woman. In comparison every one that he had known became for the moment commonplace, human life as he was used to it gross and uninspiring, and his own ideal of duty a dwarfish mixture of selfishness and luxurious triviality. Impulsive in his recognition of nobleness of nature wherever he perceived it, for this devotedness of purpose he began to feel the emotion which of all that ever visit the human heart is at once the most humbling, the most uplifting, and the most enthralling—the hero-worship of a strong man for a fragile woman.

The service began. As it went on he noticed here and there among those near him such evidences of restlessness as betray in a seated throng high-wrought expectancy of some pleasure too long deferred. But at last these were succeeded by a breathless hush, as, from the concealed organ-loft above, a low, minor prelude was heard, groping and striving nearer and nearer towards the concealed motive, as a little wave creeps further and further along a melancholy shore. Suddenly, beautiful and clear, more tender than love, more sorrowful than death, there floated out upon the still air of the church the cry of a woman's soul that has offended, and that, shrinking from every prayer of speech, pours forth its more intense, inarticulate, and suffering need through the diviner faculty of song.

At the sound every ear was strained to listen. Hitherto the wont had been to hear that voice bear aloft the common petition as calmly as the incense rose past the altar to the roof; but now it quivered over troubled depths of feeling, it rose freighted with the burden of self-accusal. Still higher and higher it rose, borne triumphantly upward by love and aspiration, until the powers of the singer's frame seemed spending themselves in one superhuman effort of the soul to make its prayer understood to the divine forgiveness. Then, all at once, at the highest note, as a bird soaring towards the sun has its wings broken by a shot from below, it too broke, faltered, and there was a silence. But only for a moment: another voice, poor and cold, promptly finished the song; the service ended; the people poured out of the church.

When Gordon came out there were a few groups standing near the door talking; others were already moving homeward across the grounds. Not far off he observed a lusty young countryman, with a frank, winning face, who appeared to be waiting, while he held a child that had laid its bright head against his tanned, athletic neck. Gordon approached him, and said with forced calmness—

"Do you know what was the matter in the church?"

"My wife has gone to see," he replied warmly. "Wait; she'll be here in a minute. Here she is now."

The comely, Sunday-dressed young wife came up and took the child, who held out its arms, fondly smiling.

"She hadn't been well, and they didn't want her to sing to-day; but she begged to sing, and broke down." Saying this, the young mother kissed her child, and slipping one hand into the great brown hand of her husband, which closed upon it, turned away with them across the lawn homeward.

When Sister Dolorosa, who had passed a sleepless, prayerless night, stood in the organ-loft and looked across the church at the scene of the Passion, at the shrine of the Virgin, at the white throng of novices and the dark throng of the Sisters, the common prayer of whom was to be borne upward by her voice, there came upon her like a burying wave a consciousness of how changed she was since she had stood there last. Thus at the moment when Gordon, sitting below, reverently set her far above him, as one looks up to a statue whose feet are above the level of his head, she, thinking of what she had been and had now become, seemed to herself as though fallen from a white pedestal to the miry earth. But when, to a nature like hers, absolute loyalty to a sinless standard of character is the only law of happiness itself, every lapse into transgression is followed by an act of passionate self-chastisement and by a more passionate outburst of love for the wronged ideal; and therefore scarce had she begun to sing, and in music to lift up the prayer she had denied herself in words, before the powers of her body succumbed, as the strings of an instrument snap under too strenuous a touch of the musician.

Gordon walked out of the grounds beside the rustic young husband and wife, who plainly were lovers still.

"The Sister who sang has a beautiful voice," he said.

"None of them can sing like her," replied the wife. "I love her better than any of the others."

"I tin sing!" cried the little girl, looking at Gordon resentfully, as though he had denied her that accomplishment.

"But you'll never sing in a convent, missy," cried the father, snatching her from her mother.

"You'll sing for some man till he marries you as your mother did me. I was going to join the Trappist monks, but my wife said I was too good a sweetheart to spoil, and she had made up her mind to have me herself," he added, turning to Gordon with a laugh.

"I'd have been a Sister long ago if you hadn't begged and begged me not," was the reply, with the coquettish toss of a pretty head.

"I doin' be Tap monk," cried the little girl, looking at Gordon still more assertively, but joining in the laugh that followed with a scream of delight at the wisdom of her decision.

Their paths here diverged, and Gordon walked slowly on alone, but not without turning to watch the retreating figures, his meeting with whom at such a moment formed an episode in the history of that passion under the influence of which he was now rapidly passing. For as he had sat in the church his nature, which was always generous in its responsiveness, had lent itself wholly to the solicitations of the service; and for a time the stillness, the paintings portraying the divine sorrow, the slow procession of nameless women, the tapers, the incense, the hoary antiquity of the ceremonial, had carried him into a little-known region of his religious feeling. But from this he had been sharply recalled by the suggestion of a veiled personal tragedy close at hand in that unfinished song. His mood again became one of vast pity for her; and issuing from the church with this feeling, there, near the very entrance, he had come upon a rustic picture of husband, wife, and child, with a sharpness of transition that had seemed the return of his spirit to its own world of flesh and blood. There to him was the poetry and the religion of life—the linked hands of lovers; the twining arms of childhood; health and joyousness; and a quiet walk over familiar fields in the evening air from peaceful church to peaceful home. And so, thinking of this as he walked on alone, and thinking also of her, the two thoughts blended, and her image stood always before him in the pathway of his ideal future.

The history of the next several days may soon be told. He wrote to his friends, stating that there was no game in the neighbourhood, and that he had given up the idea of joining them and would return home. He took the letter to the station, and waited for the train to pass southward, watching it rush away with a subtle pleasure at being left on the platform, as though the bridges were now burned behind him. Then he returned to the farm-house, where Ezra met him with that look of stupid alarm which was natural to him whenever his few thoughts were agitated by a new situation of affairs.

Word had come from the convent that he was wanted there to move a fence and make changes in the garden, and, proud of the charge, he wished to go; but certain autumnal work in his own orchard and garden claimed his time, and hence the trouble. But Gordon, who henceforth had no reason for tarrying with the old couple, threw himself eagerly upon this opportunity to do so, and offered his aid in despatching the tasks. So that thus a few days passed, during which he unconsciously made his way as far as any one had ever done into the tortuous nature of the old man, who began to regard him with blind trustfulness.

But they were restless, serious days. One after another passed, and he heard nothing of Sister Dolorosa. He asked himself whether she were ill, whether her visits to old Martha had been made to cease; and he shrank from the thought of bearing away into his life the haunting pain of such uncertainty. But some inner change constrained him no longer to call her name. As he sat with the old couple at night the housewife renewed her talks with him, speaking sometimes of the convent and of Sister Dolorosa, the cessation of whose visits plainly gave her secret concern; but he listened in silence, preferring the privacy of his own thoughts. Sometimes, under feint of hunting, he would take his gun in the afternoon and stroll out over the country; but always the presence of the convent made itself felt over the landscape, dominating it, solitary and impregnable, like a fortress. It began to draw his eyes with a species of fascination. He chafed against its assertion of barriers, and could have wished that his own will might be brought into conflict with it. It appeared to watch him; to have an eye at every window; to see in him a lurking danger. At other times, borne to him across the darkening fields would come the sweet vesper bell, and in imagination he would see her entering the church amid the long procession of novices and nuns, her hands folded across her breast, her face full of the soft glories of the lights that streamed in through the pictured windows. Over the fancied details of her life more and more fondly he lingered.

And thus, although at first he had been interested in her wholly upon general grounds, believing her secretly unhappy, thus by thinking always of her, and watching for her, and walking often beside her in his dreams, with the folly of the young, with the romantic ardour of his race, and as part of the never-ending blind tragedy of the world, he came at last to feel for her, among women, that passionate pain of yearning to know which is to know the sadness of love.

Sleepless one night, he left the house after the old couple were asleep. The moon was shining, and unconsciously following the bent of his thoughts, he took the footpath that led across the fields. He passed the spot where he had first met her, and, absorbed in recollection of the scene, he walked on until before him the convent towered high in light and shadow. He had reached the entrance to the long avenue of elms. He traversed it, turned aside into the garden, and, following with many pauses around its borders, lived over again the day when she had led him through it. The mere sense of his greater physical nearness to her enthralled him. All her words came back: "These are daffodils. They bloomed in March, long ago.... And here are violets, which come in April." After awhile, leaving the garden, he walked across the lawn to the church and sat upon the steps, trying to look calmly at this whole episode in his life, and to summon resolution to bring it to an end. He dwelt particularly upon the hopelessness of his passion; he made himself

believe that if he could but learn that she were not ill and suffering—if he could but see her once more, and be very sure—he would go away, as every dictate of reason urged.

Across the lawn stood the convent building. There caught his eye the faint glimmer of a light through a half-opened window, and while he looked he saw two of the nuns moving about within. Was some one dying? Was this light the taper of the dead? He tried to throw off a sudden weight of gloomy apprehension, and resolutely got up and walked away; but his purpose was formed not to leave until he had intelligence of her.

One afternoon, a few days later, happening to come to an elevated point of the landscape, he saw her figure moving across the fields in the distance below him. Between the convent and the farm-house, in one of the fields, there is a circular, basin-like depression; and it was here, hidden from distant observation, with only the azure of the heavens above them, that their meeting took place.

On the day when she had been his guide he had told her that he was going away on the morrow, and as she walked along now it might have been seen that she thought herself safe from intrusion. Her eyes were bent on the dust of the pathway. One hand was passing bead by bead upward along her rosary. Her veil was pushed back, so that between its black border and the glistening whiteness of her forehead there ran, like a rippling band of gold, the exposed edges of her shining hair. In the other hand she bore a large cluster of chrysanthemums, whose snow-white petals and green leaves formed a strong contrast with the crimson symbol that they partly framed against her sable bosom.

He had come up close before the noise of his feet in the stubble drew her attention. Then she turned and saw him. But certain instincts of self-preservation act in women with lightning quickness. She did not recognise him, or give him time to recognise her. She merely turned again and walked onward at the same pace. But the chrysanthemums were trembling with the beating of her heart, and her eyes had in them that listening look with which one awaits the on-coming of danger from behind.

But he had stopped. His nature was simple and trustful, and he had expected to renew his acquaintanceship at the point where it had ceased. When, therefore, she thus reminded him, as indeed she must, that there was no acquaintanceship between them, and that she regarded herself as much alone as though he were nowhere in sight, his feelings were arrested as if frozen by her coldness. Still, it was for this chance that he had waited all these days. Another would not come; and whatever he wished to say to her must be said now. A sensitiveness wholly novel to his nature held him back, but a moment more and he was walking beside her.

"I hope I do not intrude so very far," he said, in a tone of apology, but also of wounded self-respect.

It was a difficult choice thus left to her. She could not say "Yes" without seeming unpardonably rude; she could not say "No" without seeming to invite his presence. She walked on for a moment, and then, pausing, turned towards him.

"Is there anything that you wished to ask me in regard to the convent?" This she said in the sweetest tone of apologetic courtesy, as though in having thought only of herself at first she had neglected some larger duty.

If he had feared that he would see traces of physical suffering on her face, he was mistaken. She had forgotten to draw her veil close, and the sunlight fell upon its loveliness. Never had she been to him half so beautiful. Whatever the expression her eyes had worn before he had come up, in them now rested only inscrutable calmness.

"There is one thing I have wished very much to know," he answered slowly, his eyes resting on hers. "I was at the church of the convent last Sunday and heard you sing. They said you were not well. I have hoped every day to hear that you were better. I have not cared to go away until I knew this."

Scarcely had he begun when a flush dyed her face, her eyes fell, and she stood betrayed by the self-consciousness of what her own thoughts had that day been. One hand absently tore to pieces the blooms of the chrysanthemums, so that the petals fell down over her dark habit like snowflakes. But when he finished, she lifted her eyes again.

"I am well now, thank you," she said; and the first smile that he had ever seen came forth from her soul to her face. But what a smile! It wrung his heart more than the sight of her tears could have done.

"Then I shall hope to hear you sing again to-morrow," he said quickly, for she seemed on the point of moving away.

"I shall not sing to-morrow," she replied a little hurriedly, with averted face, and again she started on. But he walked beside her.

"In that case I have still to thank you for the pleasure I have had. I imagine that one would never do wrong if he could hear you sing whenever he is tempted," he said, looking sidewise at her with a quiet, tentative smile.

"It is not my voice," she replied more hurriedly. "It is the music of the service. Do not thank me.

Thank God."

"I have heard the service before. It was your voice that touched me."

She drew her veil about her face, and walked on in silence.

"But I have no wish to say anything against your religion," he continued, his voice deepening and trembling. "If it has such power over the natures of women, if it lifts them to such ideals of duty, if it develops in them such characters, that merely to look into their faces, to be near them, to hear their voices, is to make a man think of a better world, I do not know why I should say anything against it."

How often, without meaning it, our words are like a flight of arrows into another's heart. What he said but reminded her of her unfaithfulness. And therefore while she revolved how with perfect gentleness she might ask him to allow her to continue her way alone, she did what she could: she spoke reverently, though all but inaudibly, in behalf of her order.

"Our vows are perfect and divine. If they ever seem less, it is the fault of those of us who dishonour them."

The acute self-reproach in her tone at once changed his mood.

"On the other hand, I have also asked myself this question: Is it the creed that makes the natures of you women so beautiful, or is it the nature of woman that gives the beauty to the creed? Is it not so with any other idea that women espouse? with any other cause that they undertake? Is it not so with anything that they spend their hearts upon, toil for, and sacrifice themselves for? Do I see any beauty in your vows except such as your life gives to them? I can believe it. I can believe that if you had never taken those vows your life would still be beautiful. I can believe that you could change them for others and find yourself more nearly the woman that you strive to be—that you were meant to be!" He spoke in the subdued voice with which one takes leave of some hope that brightens while it disappears.

"I must ask you," she said, pausing—"I must ask you to allow me to continue my walk alone," and her voice quivered.

He paused, too, and stood looking into her eyes in silence with the thought that he should never see her again. The colour had died out of his face.

"I can never forgive your vows," he said, speaking very slowly and making an effort to appear unmoved. "I can never forgive your vows that they make it a sin for me to speak to you. I can never forgive them that they put between us a gulf that I cannot pass. Remember, I owe you a great deal. I owe you higher ideas of a woman's nature and clearer resolutions regarding my own life. Your vows perhaps make it even a sin that I should tell you this. But by what right? By what right am I forbidden to say that I shall remember you always, and that I shall carry away with me into my life——"

"Will you force me to turn back?" she asked in greater agitation; and though he could not see her face, he saw her tears fall upon her hands.

"No," he answered sadly; "I shall not force you to turn back. I know that I have intruded. But it seemed that I could not go away without seeing you again, to be quite sure that you were well. And when I saw you, it seemed impossible not to speak of other things. Of course this must seem strange to you—stranger, perhaps, than I may imagine, since we look at human relationships so differently. My life in this world can be of no interest to you. You cannot, therefore, understand why yours should have any interest for me. Still, I hope you can forgive me," he added abruptly, turning his face away as it flushed and his voice faltered.

She lifted her eyes quickly, although they were dim. "Do not ask me to forgive anything. There is nothing to be forgiven. It is I who must ask—only leave me!"

"Will you say good-bye to me?" And he held out his hand.

She drew back, but, overborne by emotion he stepped forward, gently took her hand from the rosary, and held it in both his own.

"Good-bye! But, despite the cruel barriers that they have raised between us, I shall always——"

She foresaw what was coming. His manner told her that. She had not withdrawn her hand. But at this point she dropped the flowers that were in her other hand, laid it on her breast so that the longest finger pointed towards the symbol of the transfixed heart, and looked quickly at him with indescribable warning and distress. Then he released her, and she turned back towards the convent.

"Mother," she said, with a frightened face, when she reached it, "I did not go to old Martha's. Some one was hunting in the fields, and I came back. Do not send me again, Mother, unless one of the Sisters goes with me." And with this half-truth on her lips and full remorse for it in her heart, she passed into that deepening imperfection of nature which for the most of us makes up the inner world of reality.

Gordon wrote to her that night. He had not foreseen his confession. It had been drawn from him under the influences of the moment; but since it was made, a sense of honour would not have allowed him to stop there, even had feeling carried him no further. Moreover, some hope had

been born in him at the moment of separation, since she had not rebuked him, but only reminded him of her vows.

His letter was full of the confidence and enthusiasm of youth, and its contents may be understood by their likeness to others. He unfolded the plan of his life—the life which he was asking her to share. He dwelt upon its possibilities, he pointed out the field of its aspirations. But he kept his letter for some days, unable to conceive a way by which it might be sent to its destination. At length the chance came in the simplest of disguises.

Ezra was starting one morning to the convent. As he was leaving the room, old Martha called to him. She sat by the hearthstone, with her head tied up in red flannel, and her large, watery face flushed with pain, and pointed towards a basket of apples on the window-sill.

"Take them to Sister Dolorosa, Ezra," she said. "Mind that you see *her*, and give them to her with your own hands. And ask her why she hasn't been to see me, and when she is coming." On this point her mind seemed more and more troubled. "But what's the use of asking *you* to find out for me?" she added, flashing out at him with heroic anger.

The old man stood in the middle of the room, dry and gnarled, his small eyes kindling into a dull rage at a taunt made in the presence of a guest whose good opinion he desired. But he took the apples in silence and left the room.

As Gordon followed him beyond the garden, noting how his mind was absorbed in petty anger, a simple resolution came to him.

"Ezra," he said, handing him the letter, "when you give the Sister the apples, deliver this. And we do not talk about business, you know, Ezra."

The old man took the letter and put it furtively into his pocket, with a backward shake of his head towards the house.

"Whatever risks I may have to run from other quarters, he will never tell *her*," Gordon said to himself.

When Ezra returned in the evening he was absorbed, and Gordon noted with relief that he was also unsuspicious. He walked some distance to meet the old man the next two days, and his suspense became almost unendurable, but he asked no questions. The third day Ezra drew from his pocket a letter, which he delivered, merely saying—

"The Sister told me to give you this."

Gordon soon turned aside across the fields, and having reached a point screened from observation, he opened the letter and read as follows:—

> "I have received your letter. I have read it. But how could I listen to your proposal without becoming false to my vows? And if you knew that I had proved false to what I held most dear and binding, how could you ever believe that I would be true to anything else? Ah, no! Should you unite yourself to one who for your sake had been faithless to the ideal of womanhood which she regarded as supreme, you would soon withdraw from her the very love that she had sacrificed even her hopes of Heaven to enjoy.
>
> "But it seems possible that in writing to me you believe my vows no longer precious to my heart and sacred to my conscience. You are wrong. They are more dear to me at this moment than ever before, because at this moment, as never before, they give me a mournful admonition of my failure to exhibit to the world in my own life the beauty of their ineffable holiness. For had there not been something within me to lead you on—had I shown to you the sinless nature which it is their office to create—you would never have felt towards me as you do. You would no more have thought of loving me than of loving an angel of God.
>
> "The least reparation I can make for my offence is to tell you that in offering me your love you offer me the cup of sacred humiliation, and that I thank you for reminding me of my duty, while I drain it to the dregs.
>
> "After long deliberation I have written to tell you this; and if it be allowed me to make one request, I would entreat that you will never lay this sin of mine to the charge of my religion and my order.
>
> "We shall never meet again. Although I may not listen to your proposal, it is allowed me to love you as one of the works of God. And since there are exalted women in the world who do not consecrate themselves to the church, I shall pray that you may find one of these to walk by your side through life. I shall pray that she may be worthy of you; and perhaps you will teach her sometimes to pray for one who will always need her prayers.
>
> "I only know that God orders our lives according to His goodness. My feet He set in one path of duty, yours in another, and He had separated us for ever long before He allowed us to meet. If, therefore, having thus separated us, He yet brought us together only that we should thus know each other and then be parted, I cannot believe that there was not in it some needed lesson for us both. At least, if He will

deign to hear the ceaseless, fervent petition of one so erring, He will not leave you unhappy on account of that love for me, which in this world it will never be allowed me to return. Farewell!"

The first part of this letter awakened in Gordon keen remorse and a faltering of purpose, but the latter filled him with a joy that excluded every other feeling.

"She loves me!" he exclaimed; and, as though registering a vow, he added aloud, "And nothing—God help me!—nothing shall keep us apart."

Walking to a point of the landscape that commanded a view of the convent, he remained there while the twilight fell, revolving how he was to surmount the remaining barriers between them, for these now seemed hardly more than cobwebs to be brushed aside by his hand; and often, meanwhile, he looked towards the convent, as one might look longingly towards some forbidden shrine, which the coming night would enable him to approach.

VI.

A night for love it was. The great sun at setting had looked with steadfast eye at the convent standing lonely on its wide landscape, and had then thrown his final glance across the world towards the east; and the moon had quickly risen and hung about it the long silvery twilight of her heavenly watchfulness. The summer, too, which had been moving southward, now came slowly back, borne on warm airs that fanned the convent walls and sighed to its chaste lattices with the poetry of dead flowers and vanished songsters. But sighed in vain. With many a prayer, with many a cross on pure brow and shoulder and breast, with many a pious kiss of crucifix, the convent slept. Only some little novice, lying like a flushed figure of Sleep on a couch of snow, may have stirred to draw one sigh, as those zephyrs, toying with her warm hair, broke some earthly dream of too much tenderness. Or they may merely have cooled the feverish feet of a withered nun, who clasped her dry hands in ecstasy, as on her cavernous eyes there dawned a vision of the glories and rewards of Paradise. But no, not all slept. At an open window on the eastern side of the convent stood the sleepless one looking out into the largeness of the night like one who is lost in the largeness of her sorrow.

Across the lawn, a little distance off, stood the church of the convent. The moonlight rested on it like a smile of peace, the elms blessed it with tireless arms, and from the zenith of the sky down to the horizon there rested on outstretched wings, rank above rank and pinion brushing pinion, a host of white, angelic cloud-shapes, as though guarding the sacred portal.

But she looked at it with timid yearning. Greater and greater had become the need to pour into some ear a confession and a prayer for pardon. Her peace was gone. She had been concealing her heart from the Mother Superior. She had sinned against her vows. She had impiously offended the Divine Mother. And to-day, after answering his letter in order that she might defend her religion, she had acknowledged to her heart that she loved him. But they would never meet again. To-morrow she would make a full confession of what had taken place. Beyond that miserable ordeal she dared not gaze into her own future.

Lost in the fears and sorrows of such thoughts, long she stood looking out into the night, stricken with a sense of alienation from human sympathy. She felt that she stood henceforth estranged from the entire convent—Mother Superior, novice, and nun—as an object of reproach, and of suffering into which no one of them could enter.

Sorer yet grew her need, and a little way across the lawn stood the church, peaceful in the moonlight. Ah, the divine pity! If only she might steal first alone to the shrine of her whom most she had offended, and to an ear gracious to sorrow make confession of her frailty. At length, overcome with this desire and gliding noiselessly out of the room, she passed down the moonlit hall, on each side of which the nuns were sleeping. She descended the stairway, took from the wall the key of the church, and then softly opening the door, stepped out into the night. For a moment she paused, icy and faint with physical fear; then, passing like a swift shadow across the silvered lawn, she went round to the side entrance of the church, unlocked the door, and, entering quickly, locked herself inside. There she stood for some time with hands pressed tightly to her fluttering heart, until bodily agitation died away before the recollection of her mission; and there came upon her that calmness with which the soul enacts great tragedies. Then slowly, very slowly, hidden now, and now visible where the moonlight entered the long, Gothic windows, she passed across the chancel towards the shrine of one whom ancestral faith had taught her to believe divine; and before the image of a Jewish woman—who herself in full humanity loved and married a carpenter nearly two thousand years ago, living beside him as blameless wife and becoming blameless mother to his children—this poor child, whose nature was unstained as snow on the mountain peaks, poured out her prayer to be forgiven the sin of her love.

To the woman of the world, the approaches of whose nature are defended by the intricacies of wilfulness and the barriers of deliberate reserve; to the woman of the world, who curbs and conceals that feeling to which she intends to yield herself in the end, it may seem incredible that there should have rooted itself so easily in the breast of one of her sex this flower of a fatal passion. But it should be remembered how unbefriended that bosom had been by any outpost of

feminine self-consciousness; how exposed it was through very belief in its unearthly consecration; how, like some unwatched vase that had long been collecting the sweet dews and rains of heaven, it had been silently filling with those unbidden intimations that are shed from above as the best gifts of womanhood. Moreover, her life was unspeakably isolate. In the monotony of its routine a trifling event became an epoch; a fresh impression stirred within the mind material for a chapter of history. Lifted far above commonplace psychology of the passions, however, was the planting and the growth of an emotion in a heart like hers.

Her prayer began. It began with the scene of her first meeting with him in the fields, for from that moment she fixed the origin of her unfaithfulness. Of the entire hidden life of poetic reverie and unsatisfied desires which she had been living before, her innocent soul took no account. Therefore, beginning with that afternoon, she passed in review the history of her thoughts and feelings. The moon outside, flooding the heavens with its beams, was not so intense a lamp as memory, now turned upon the recesses of her mind. Nothing escaped detection. His words, the scenes with him in the garden, in the field—his voice, looks, gestures—his anxiety and sympathy—his passionate letter—all were now vividly recalled, that they might be forgotten; and their influence confessed, that it might for ever be renounced. Her conscience stood beside her love as though it were some great fast-growing deadly plant in her heart, with deep-twisted roots and strangling tendrils, each of which to the smallest fibre must be uptorn so that not a germ should be left.

But who can describe the prayer of such a soul? It is easy to ask to be rid of ignoble passions. They come upon us as momentary temptations and are abhorrent to our better selves; but of all tragedies enacted within the theatre of the human mind what one is so pitiable as that in which a pure being prays to be forgiven the one feeling of nature that is the revelation of beauty, the secret of perfection, the solace of the world, and the condition of immortality?

The passing of such a tragedy scars the nature of the penitent like the passing of an age across a mountain rock. If there had lingered thus long on Sister Dolorosa's nature any upland of childhood snows, these vanished in that hour; if any vernal belt of maidenhood, it felt the hot breath of that experience of the world and of the human destiny which quickly ages whatever it does not destroy. So that while she prayed there seemed to rise from within her and take flight for ever that spotless image of herself as she once had been, and in its place to stand the form of a woman, older, altered, and set apart by sorrow.

At length her prayer ended and she rose. It had not brought her the peace that prayer brings to women; for the confession of her love before the very altar—the mere coming into audience with the Eternal to renounce it—had set upon it the seal of irrevocable truth. It is when the victim is led to the altar of sacrifice that it turns its piteous eyes upon the sacrificing hand and utters its poor dumb cry for life; and it was when Sister Dolorosa bared the breast of her humanity that it might be stabbed by the hand of her religion, that she, too, though attempting to bless the stroke, felt the last pangs of that deep thrust.

With such a wound she turned from the altar, walked with bowed head once more across the church, unlocked the door, stepped forth and locked it. The night had grown more tender. The host of seraphic cloud-forms had fled across the sky; and as she turned her eyes upward to the heavens, there looked down upon her from their serene, untroubled heights only the stars, that never falter or digress from their fore-written courses. The thought came to her that never henceforth should she look up to them without being reminded of how her own will had wandered from its orbit. The moon rained its steady beams upon the symbol of the sacred heart on her bosom, until it seemed to throb again with the agony of the crucifixion. Never again should she see it without the remembrance that *her* sin also had pierced it afresh.

With what loneliness that sin had surrounded her! As she had issued from the damp, chill atmosphere of the church, the warm airs of the south quickened within her long-sleeping memories; and with the yearning of stricken childhood she thought of her mother, to whom she had turned of yore for sympathy; but that mother's bosom was now a mound of dust. She looked across the lawn towards the convent where the Mother Superior and the nuns were sleeping. To-morrow she would stand among them a greater alien than any stranger. No; she was alone; among the millions of human beings on the earth of God there was not one on whose heart she could have rested her own. Not one save him—him—whose love had broken down all barriers that it might reach and infold her. And him she had repelled. A joy, new and indescribable, leaped within her that for him, and not for another she suffered and was bound in this tragedy of her fall.

Slowly she took her way along the side of the church towards the front entrance, from which a paved walk led to the convent building. She reached the corner, she turned, and then she paused as one might pause who had come upon the beloved dead, returned to life.

For he was sitting on the steps of the church, leaning against one of the pillars, his face lifted upward so that the moonlight fell upon it. She had no time to turn back before he saw her. With a low cry of surprise and joy he sprang up and followed along the side of the church; for she had begun to retrace her steps to the door, to lock herself inside. When he came up beside her, she paused. Both were trembling; but when he saw the look of suffering on her face, acting upon the impulse which had always impelled him to stand between her and unhappiness, he now took both of her hands.

"Pauline!"

He spoke with all the pleading love, all the depth of nature, that was in him.

She had attempted to withdraw her hands; but at the sound of that once familiar name, she suddenly bowed her head as the wave of memories and emotions passed over her; then he quickly put his arms around her, drew her to him, and bent down and kissed her.

VII.

For hours there lasted an interview, during which he, with the delirium of hope, she with the delirium of despair, drained at their young lips that cup of life which is full of the first confession of love.

In recollections so overwhelming did this meeting leave Gordon on the next morning, that he was unmindful of everything beside; and among the consequences of absentmindedness was the wound that he gave himself by the careless handling of his gun.

When Ezra had set out for the convent that morning he had walked with him, saying that he would go to the station for a daily paper, but chiefly wishing to escape the house and be alone. They had reached in the fields a rotting fence, on each side of which grew briers and underwood. He had expected to climb this fence, and as he stood beside it speaking a few parting words to Ezra he absently thrust his gun between two of the lower rails, not noticing that the lock was sprung. Caught in the brush on the other side, it was discharged, making a wound in his left leg a little below the thigh. He turned to a deadly paleness, looked at Ezra with that stunned, bewildered expression seen in the faces of those who receive a wound, and fell.

By main strength the old man lifted and bore him to the house and hurried off to the station, near which the neighbourhood physician and surgeon lived. But the latter was away from home; several hours passed before he came; the means taken to stop the hæmorrhage had been ineffectual; the loss of blood had been very great; certain foreign matter had been carried into the wound; the professional treatment was unskilful; and septic fever followed, so that for many days his life hung upon a little chance. But convalescence came at last, and with it days of clear, calm thinking. For he had not allowed news of his accident to be sent home or to his friends; and except the old couple, the doctor, and the nurse whom the latter had secured, he had no company but his thoughts.

No tidings had come to him of Sister Dolorosa since his accident; and nothing had intervened to remove that sad image of her which had haunted him through fever and phantasy and dream since the night of their final interview. For it was then that he had first realised in how pitiless a tragedy her life had become entangled, and how conscience may fail to govern a woman's heart in denying her the right to love, but may still govern her actions in forbidding her to marry. To plead with her had been to wound only the more deeply a nature that accepted even this pleading as a further proof of its own disloyalty, and was forced by it into a state of more poignant humiliation. What wonder, therefore, if there had been opened in his mind from that hour a certain wound which grew deeper and deeper, until, by comparison, his real wound seemed painless and insignificant.

Nevertheless, it is true that during this interview he had not been able to accept her decision as irreversible. The spell of her presence over him was too complete; even his wish to rescue her from a lot, henceforth unhappier still, too urgent; so that in parting he had clung to the secret hope that little by little he might change her conscience, which now interposed the only obstacle between them.

Even the next day, when he had been wounded and life was rapidly flowing from him, and earthly ties seemed soon to be snapped, he had thought only of this tie, new and sacred, and had written to her. Poor boy!—he had written, as with his heart's blood, his brief, pathetic appeal that she would come and be united to him before he died. In all ages of the world there have been persons, simple in nature and simple in their faith in another life, who have forgotten everything else in the last hour but the supreme wish to grapple to them those they love, for eternity, and at whatever cost. Such simplicity of nature and faith belonged to him; for although in Kentucky the unrest of the century touching belief in the supernatural, and the many phases by which this expresses itself, are not unknown, they had never affected him. He believed as his fathers had believed, that to be united in this world in any relation is to be united in that relation, mysteriously changed yet mysteriously the same, in another.

But this letter had never been sent. There had been no one to take it at the time; and when Ezra returned with the physician he had fainted away from loss of blood.

Then had followed the dressing of the wound, days of fever and unconsciousness, and then the assurance that he would get well. Thus, nearly a month had passed, and for him a great change had come over the face of nature and the light of the world. With that preternatural calm of mind which only an invalid or a passionless philosopher ever obtains, he now looked back upon an episode which thus acquired fictitious remoteness. So weak that he could scarcely lift his head from his pillow, there left his heart the keen, joyous sense of human ties and pursuits. He lost the key to the motives and forces of his own character. But it is often the natural result of such illness that while the springs of feeling seem to dry up, the conscience remains sensitive, or even

burns more brightly, as a star through a rarer atmosphere. So that, lying thus in the poor farm-house during dreary days, with his life half-gone out of him, and with only the sad image of her always before his eyes, he could think of nothing but his cruel folly in having broken in upon her peace; for perfect peace of some sort she must have had in comparison with what was now left her.

Beneath his pillow he kept her letter, and as he often read it over he asked himself how he could ever have hoped to change the conscience which had inspired such a letter as that. If her heart belonged to him, did not her soul belong to her religion; and if one or the other must give way, could it be doubtful with such, a nature as hers which would come out victorious? Thus he said to himself that any further attempt to see her could but result in greater suffering to them both, and that nothing was left him but what she herself had urged—to go away and resign her to a life from which he had too late found out that she could never be divorced.

As soon as he had come to this decision, he began to think of her as belonging only to his past. The entire episode became a thing of memory and irreparable incompleteness; and with the conviction that she was lost to him her image passed into that serene, reverential sanctuary of our common nature, where all the highest that we have grasped at and missed, and all the beauty that we have loved and lost, take the forms of statues around dim walls and look down upon us in mournful, never-changing perfection.

As he lay one morning revolving his altered purpose, Ezra came quietly into the room and took from a table near the foot of the bed a waiter on which were a jelly-glass and a napkin.

"*She* said I'd better take these back this morning," he observed, looking at Gordon for his approval, and motioning with his head towards that quarter of the house where Martha was supposed to be.

"Wait awhile, will you, Ezra?" he replied, looking at the old man with the dark, quiet eye of an invalid. "I think I ought to write a few lines this morning to thank them for their kindness. Come back in an hour, will you?"

The things had been sent from the convent; for, from the time that news had reached the Mother Superior of the accident of the young stranger who had visited the convent some days before, there had regularly come to him delicate attentions which could not have been supplied at the farmhouse. He often asked himself whether they were not inspired by *her*; and he thought that when the time came for him to write his thanks, he would put into the expression of them something that would be understood by her alone—something that would stand for gratitude and a farewell.

When Ezra left the room, with the thought of now doing this another thought came unexpectedly to him. By the side of the bed there stood a small table on which were writing materials and a few books that had been taken from his valise. He stretched out his hand, and opening one of them took from it a letter which bore the address, "Sister Dolorosa." It contained those appealing lines that he had written her on the day of his accident; and with calm, curious sadness he now read them over and over, as though they had never come from him. From the mere monotony of this exercise sleep overtook him, and he had scarcely restored the letter to the envelope and laid it back on the table before his eyelids closed.

While he still lay asleep, Ezra came quietly into the room again, and took up the waiter with the jelly-glass and the napkin. Then he looked around for the letter that he was to take. He was accustomed to carry Gordon's letters to the station, and his eye now rested on the table where they were always to be found. Seeing one on it, he walked across, took it up and read the address, "Sister Dolorosa," hesitated, glanced at Gordon's closed eyes, and then, with an intelligent nod to signify that he could understand without further instruction, he left the room and set out briskly for the convent.

Sister Dolorosa was at the cistern filling a bucket with water when he came up and, handing her the letter, passed on to the convent kitchen. She looked at it with indifference; then she opened and read it; and then in an instant everything whirled before her eyes, and in her ears the water sounded loud as it dropped from the chain back into the cistern. And then she was gone—gone with a light, rapid step, down, the avenue of elms, through the gate, across the meadows, out into the fields—bucket and cistern, Mother Superior and sisterhood, vows and martyrs, zeal of Carmelite, passion of Christ, all forgotten.

When, nearly a month before, news had reached the Mother Superior of the young stranger's accident, in accordance with the rule which excludes from the convent worldly affairs, she had not made it known except to those who were to aid in carrying out her kindly plans for him. To Sister Dolorosa, therefore, the accident had just occurred, and now—now as she hastened to him—he was dying.

During the intervening weeks she had undergone by insensible degrees a deterioration of nature. Prayer had not passed her lips. She believed that she had no right to pray. Nor had she confessed. From such, a confession as she had now to make, certain new-born instincts of womanhood bade her shrink more deeply into the privacy of her own being. And therefore she had become more scrupulous, if possible, of outward duties, that no one might be led to discover the paralysis of her spiritual life. But there was that change in her which soon drew attention; and thenceforth, in order to hide her heart, she began to practise with the Mother Superior little acts of self-concealment and evasion, and by-and-by other little acts of pretence and feigning,

until—God pity her!—being most sorely pressed by questions, when sometimes she would be found in tears or sitting listless with her hands in her lap like one who is under the spell of mournful phantasies, these became other little acts of positive deception. But for each of them remorse preyed upon her the more ruthlessly, so that she grew thin and faded, with a shadow of fear darkening always her evasive eyes.

What most held her apart, and most she deemed put upon her the angry ban of Heaven, was the consciousness that she still loved him, and that she was even bound to him the more inseparably since the night of their last meeting. For it was then that emotions had been awakened which drew her to him in ways that love alone could not have done. These emotions had their source in the belief that she owed him reparation for the disappointment which she had brought upon his life. The recollection of his face when she had denied him hope rose in constant reproach before her; and since she held herself blamable that he had loved her, she took the whole responsibility of his unhappiness.

It was this sense of having wronged him that cleft even conscience in her and left her struggling. But how to undo the wrong—this she vainly pondered; for he was gone, bearing away into his life the burden of enticed and baffled hope.

On the morning when she was at the cistern—for the Sisters of the Order have among them such interchange of manual offices—if, as she read the letter that Ezra gave her, any one motive stood out clear in the stress of that terrible moment, it was, that having been false to other duties she might at least be true to this. She felt but one desire—to atone to him by any sacrifice of herself that would make his death more peaceful. Beyond this everything was void and dark within her as she hurried on, except the consciousness that by this act she separated herself from her Order and terminated her religious life in utter failure and disgrace.

The light, rapid step with which she had started soon brought her across the fields. As she drew near the house, Martha, who had caught sight of her figure through the window, made haste to the door and stood awaiting her. Sister Dolorosa merely approached and said—

"Where is he?"

For a moment the old woman did not answer. Then she pointed to a door at the opposite end of the porch, and with a sparkle of peculiar pleasure in her eyes she saw Sister Dolorosa cross and enter it. A little while longer she stood, watching the keyhole furtively, but then went back to the fireside, where she sat upright and motionless with the red flannel pushed back from her listening ears.

The room was dimly lighted through half-closed shutters. Gordon lay asleep near the edge of the bed, with his face turned towards the door. It might well have been thought the face of one dying. Her eyes rested on it a moment, and then with a stifled sob and moan she glided across the room and sank on her knees at the bedside. In the utter self-forgetfulness of her remorse, pity, and love, she put one arm around his neck, she buried her face close beside his.

He had awaked, bewildered, as he saw her coming towards him. He now took her arm from around his neck, pressed her hand again and again to his lips, and then laying it on his heart crossed his arms over it, letting one of his hands rest on her head. For a little while he could not trust himself to speak; his love threatened to overmaster his self-renunciation. But then, not knowing why she had come unless from some great sympathy for his sufferings, or perhaps to see him once more since he was now soon to go away, and not understanding any cause for her distress but the tragedy in which he had entangled her life—feeling only sorrow for her sorrow and wishing only by means of his last words to help her back to such peace as she still might win, he said to her with immeasurable gentleness—

"I thought you would never come! I thought I should have to go away without seeing you again! They tell me it is not yet a month since the accident, but it seems to me so *long*—a lifetime! I have lain here day after day thinking it over, and I see things differently now—so differently! That is why I wanted to see you once more. I wanted you to understand that I felt you had done right in refusing—in refusing to marry me. I wanted to ask you never to blame yourself for what has happened—never to let any thought of having made *me* unhappy add to the sorrow of your life. It is my fault, not yours. But I meant it—God *knows*, I meant it!—for the happiness of us both? I believed that your life was not suited to you. I meant to make you happy! But since you *cannot* give up your life, I have only been unkind. And since you think it wrong to give it up, I am glad that you are so true to it! If you *must* live it, Heaven only knows how glad I am that you will live it heroically. And Heaven keep me equally true to the duty in mine, that I also shall not fail in it! If we never meet again, we can always think of each other as living true to ourselves and to one another. Don't deny me this! Let me believe that your thoughts and prayers will always follow me. Even your vows will not deny me this! It will always keep us near each other, and it will bring us together where they cannot separate us."

He had spoken with entire repression of himself, in the slow voice of an invalid, and on the stillness of the room each word had fallen with hard distinctness. But now, with the thought of losing her, by a painful effort he moved closer to the edge of the bed, put his arms around her neck, drew her face against his own, and continued—

"But do not think it is easy to tell you this! Do not think it is easy to give you up! Do not think that I do not love you! O Pauline—not in *another* life, but in *this—in this*!" He could say no more; and out of his physical weakness tears rose to his eyes and fell drop by drop upon her veil.

VIII.

Sister Dolorosa had been missed from the convent. There had been inquiry growing ever more anxious, and search growing ever more hurried. They found her bucket overturned at the cistern, and near it the print of her feet in the moist earth. But she was gone. They sought her in every hidden closet, they climbed to the observatory and scanned the surrounding fields. Work was left unfinished, prayer unended, as the news spread through the vast building; and as time went by and nothing was heard of her, uneasiness became alarm, and alarm became a vague, immeasurable foreboding of ill. Each now remembered how strange of late had been Sister Dolorosa's life and actions, and no one had the heart to name her own particular fears to any other or to read them in any other's eyes. Time passed on and discipline in the convent was forgotten. They began to pour out into the long corridors, and in tumultuous groups passed this, way and that, seeking the Mother Superior. But the Mother Superior had gone to the church with the same impulse that in all ages has brought the human heart to the altar of God when stricken by peril or disaster; and into the church they also gathered. Into the church likewise came the white flock of the novices, who had burst from their isolated quarter of the convent with a sudden contagion of fear. When, therefore, the Mother Superior rose from where she had been kneeling, turned, and in the dark church saw them assembled close around her, pallid, anxious, disordered, and looking with helpless dependence to her for that assurance for which she had herself in helpless dependence looked to God, so unnerved was she by the spectacle that strength failed her and she sank upon the steps of the altar, stretching out her arms once more in voiceless supplication towards the altar of the Infinite helpfulness.

But at that moment a little novice, whom Sister Dolorosa loved and whom she had taught the music of the harp, came running into the church, wringing her hands and crying. When she was half-way down the aisle, in a voice that rang through the building she called out—

"O Mother, she is coming! Something has happened to her! Her veil is gone!" and, turning again, she ran out of the church.

They were hurrying after her when a note of command, inarticulate but imperious, from the Mother Superior arrested every foot and drew every eye in that direction. Voice had failed her, but with a gesture full of dignity and reproach she waved them back, and supporting her great form between two of the nuns, she advanced slowly down the aisle of the church and passed out by the front entrance. But they forgot to obey her and followed; and when she descended the steps to the bottom and made a sign that she would wait there, on the steps behind they stood grouped and crowded back to the sacred doors.

Yes, she was coming—coming up the avenue of elms—coming slowly, as though her strength were almost gone. As she passed under the trees on one side of the avenue she touched their trunks one by one for support. She walked with her eyes on the ground and with the abstraction of one who has lost the purpose of walking. When she was perhaps half-way up the avenue, as she paused by one of the trees and supported herself against it, she raised her eyes and saw them all waiting to receive her on the steps of the church. For a little while she stood and surveyed the scene; the Mother Superior standing in front, her sinking form supported between two Sisters, her hands clasping the crucifix to her bosom; behind her the others, step above step, back to the doors; some looking at her with frightened faces; others with their heads buried on each other's shoulders; and hiding somewhere in the throng, the little novice, only the sound of whose sobbing revealed her presence. Then she took her hand from the tree, walked on quite steadily until she was several yards away, and paused again.

She had torn off her veil and her head was bare and shining. She had torn the sacred symbol from her bosom, and through the black rent they could see the glistening whiteness of her naked breast. Comprehending them in one glance, as though she wished them all to listen, she looked into the face of the Mother Superior, and began to speak in a voice utterly forlorn, as of one who has passed the limits of suffering.

"Mother!—--"

"Mother!—--"

She passed one hand slowly across her forehead, to brush away some cloud from her brain, and for the third time she began to speak—

"Mother!—--"

Then she paused, pressed both palms quickly to her temples, and turned her eyes in bewildered appeal towards the Mother Superior. But she did not fall. With a cry that might have come from the heart of the boundless pity the Mother Superior broke away from the restraining arms of the nuns and rushed forward and caught her to her bosom.

IX.

The day had come when Gordon was well enough to go home. As he sat giving directions to Ezra, who was awkwardly packing his valise, he looked over the books, papers, and letters that lay on the table near the bed.

"There is one letter missing," he said, with a troubled expression, as he finished his search. Then he added quickly, in a tone of helpless entreaty—

"You couldn't have taken it to the station and mailed it with the others, could you, Ezra? It was not to go to the station. It was to have gone to the convent."

The last sentence he uttered rather to his own thought than for the ear of his listener.

"I *took* it to the convent," said Ezra, stoutly raising himself from over the valise in the middle of the floor. "I didn't *take* it to the station!"

Gordon wheeled on him, giving a wrench to his wound which may have caused the groan that burst from him, and left him white and trembling.

"You took it *to the convent*! Great God, Ezra! When?"

"The day you *told* me to take it," replied Ezra simply. "The day the Sister came to see you."

"O *Ezra*!" he cried piteously, looking into the rugged, faithful countenance of the old man, and feeling that he had not the right to censure him.

Now for the first time he comprehended the whole significance of what had happened. He had never certainly known what motive had brought her to him that day. He had never been able to understand why, having come, she had gone away with such abruptness. Scarcely had he begun to speak to her when she had strangely shrunk from him; and scarcely had he ceased speaking when she had left the room without a word, and without his having so much as seen her face.

Slowly now the sad truth forced itself upon his mind that she had come in answer to his entreaty. She must have thought his letter just written, himself just wounded and dying. It was as if he had betrayed her into the utmost expression of her love for him and in that moment had coldly admonished her of her duty. For him she had broken what was the most sacred obligation of her life, and in return he had given her an exhortation to be faithful to her vows.

He went home to one of the older secluded country-places of the Blue-grass Region not far from Lexington. His illness served to account for a strange gravity and sadness of nature in him. When the winter had passed and spring had come, bringing perfect health again, this sadness only deepened. For health had brought back the ardour of life. The glowing colours of the world returned; and with these there flowed back into his heart, as waters flow back into a well that has gone dry, the perfect love of youth and strength with which he had loved her and tried to win her at first. And with this love of her came back the first complete realisation that he had lost her; and with this pain, that keenest pain of having been most unkind to her when he had striven to be kindest.

He now looked back upon his illness, as one who has gained some clear headland looks down upon a valley so dark and overhung with mist that he cannot trace his own course across it. He was no longer in sympathy with that mood of self-renunciation which had influenced him in their last interview. He charged himself with having given up too easily; for might he not, after all, have won her? Might he not, little by little, have changed her conscience, as little by little he had gained her love? Would it have been possible, he asked himself again and again, for her ever to have come to him as she had done that day, had not her conscience approved? Of all his torturing thoughts, none cost him greater suffering than living over in imagination what must have happened to her since then—the humiliation, perhaps public exposure; followed by penalties and sorrows of which he durst not think, and certainly a life more unrelieved in gloom and desolation.

In the summer his father's health began to fail and in the autumn he died. The winter was passed in settling the business of the estate, and before the spring passed again Gordon found himself at the head of affairs, and stretching out before him, calm and clear, the complete independence of his new-found manhood. His life was his own to make it what he would. As fortunes go in Kentucky he was wealthy, his farm being among the most beautiful of the beautiful ones which make up that land, and his homestead being dear through family ties and those intimations of fireside peace which lay closest the heart of his ideal life. But amid all his happiness, that one lack which made the rest appear lacking—that vacancy within which nothing would fill! The beauty of the rich land henceforth brought him the dream-like recollection of a rough, poor country a hundred miles away. Its quiet homesteads, with the impression they create of sweet and simple lives, reminded him only of a convent standing lonely and forbidding on its wide landscape. The calm liberty of woods and fields, the bounding liberty of life, the enlightened liberty of conscience and religion, which were to him the best gifts of his State, his country, and his time, forced on him perpetual contrast with the ancient confinement in which she languished.

Still he threw himself resolutely into his duties. In all that he did or planned he felt a certain sacred, uplifting force added to his life by that high bond through which he had sought to link their sundered pathways. But, on the other hand, the haunting thought of what might have befallen her since became a corrosive care, and began to eat out the heart of his resolute purposes.

So that when the long, calm summer had passed and autumn had come, bringing him lonelier

days in the brown fields, lonelier rides on horseback through the gorgeous woods, and lonelier evenings beside his rekindled hearth-stones, he could bear the suspense no longer, and made up his mind to go back, if but to hear tidings whether she yet were living in the convent. He realised, of course, that under no circumstances could he ever again speak to her of his love. He had put himself on the side of her conscience against his own cause; but he felt that he owed it to himself to dissipate uncertainty regarding her fate. This done, he could return, however sadly, and take up the duties of his life with better heart.

X.

One Sunday afternoon he got off at the little station. From one of the rustic loungers on the platform he learned that old Ezra and Martha had gone the year before to live with a son in a distant State, and that their scant acres had been absorbed in the convent domain.

Slowly he took his way across the sombre fields. Once more he reached the brown footpath and the edge of the pale, thin corn. Once more the summoning whistle of the quail came sweet and clear from the depths of a neighbouring thicket. Silently in the reddening west were rising the white cathedrals of the sky. It was on yonder hill-top he had first seen her, standing as though transfigured in the evening light. Overwhelmed by the memories which the place evoked, he passed on towards the convent. The first sight of it in the distance smote him with a pain so sharp that a groan escaped his lips as from a reopened wound.

It was the hour of the vesper service. Entering the church he sat where he had sat before. How still it was, how faint the autumnal sunlight stealing in through the sainted windows, how motionless the dark company of nuns seated on one side of the nave, how rigid the white rows of novices on the other!

With sad fascination of search his eyes roved among the black-shrouded devotees. She was not there. In the organ-loft above, a voice, poor and thin, began to pour out its wavering little tide of song. She was not there, then. Was her soul already gone home to Heaven?

Noiselessly from behind the altar the sacristine had come forth and begun to light the candles. With eyes strained and the heart gone out of him he hung upon the movements of her figure. A slight, youthful figure it was—slighter, as though worn and wasted; and the hands which so firmly bore the long taper looked too white and fragile to have upheld aught heavier than the stalk of a lily.

With infinite meekness and reverence she moved hither and thither about the shrine, as though each footfall were a step nearer the glorious Presence, each breath a prayer. One by one there sprang into being, beneath her touch of love, the silvery spires of sacred flame. No angel of the night ever more softly lit the stars of heaven. And it was thus that he saw her for the last time—folded back to the bosom of that faith from which it was left him to believe that he had all but rescued her to love and happiness, and set, as a chastening admonition, to tend the mortal fires on the altar of eternal service.

Looking at her across the vast estranging gulf of destiny, heart-broken, he asked himself in his poor yearning way whether she longer had any thought of him or longer loved him. For answer he had only the assurance given in her words, which now rose as a benediction in his memory—

"If He will deign to hear the ceaseless, fervent petition of one so erring, He will not leave you unhappy on account of that love for me which in this world it will never be allowed me to return."

One highest star of adoration she kindled last, and then turned and advanced down the aisle. He was sitting close to it, and as she came towards him, with irresistible impulse he bent forward to meet her, his lips parted as though to speak, his eyes implored her for recognition, his hands were instinctively moved to attract her notice. But she passed him with unuplifted eyes. The hem of her dress swept across his foot. In that intense moment, which compressed within itself the joy of another meeting and the despair of an eternal farewell—in that moment he may have tried to read through her face and beyond it in her very soul the story of what she must have suffered. To any one else, on her face rested only that beauty, transcending all description, which is born of the sorrow of earth and the peace of God.

Mournful as was this last sight of her, and touched with remorse, he could yet bear it away in his heart for long remembrance not untempered by consolation. He saw her well; he saw her faithful; he saw her bearing the sorrows of her lot with angelic sweetness. Through years to come the beauty of this scene might abide with him, lifted above the realm of mortal changes by the serenitude of her immovable devotion.

XI.

There was thus spared him knowledge of the great change that had taken place regarding her within the counsels of the Order; nor, perhaps, was he ever to learn of the other changes, more

eventful still, that were now fast closing in upon her destiny.

When the Creator wishes to create a woman, the beauty of whose nature is to prefigure the types of an immortal world, He endows her more plenteously with the faculty of innocent love. The contravention of this faculty has time after time resulted in the most memorable tragedies that have ever saddened the history of the race. He had given to the nature of Pauline Cambron two strong, unwearying wings: the pinion of faith and the pinion of love. It was His will that she should soar by the use of both. But they had denied her the use of one; and the vain and bewildered struggles which marked her life thenceforth were as those of a bird that should try to rise into the air with one of its wings bound tight against its bosom.

After the illness which followed upon the events of that terrible day, she took towards her own conduct the penitential attitude enjoined by her religion. There is little need to lay bare all that followed. She had passed out of her soft world of heroic dreams into the hard world of unheroic reality. She had chosen a name to express her sympathy with the sorrows of the world, and the sorrows of the world had broken in upon her. Out of the white dawn of the imagination she had stepped into the heat and burden of the day.

Long after penances and prayers were over, and by others she might have felt herself forgiven, she was as far as ever from that forgiveness which comes from within. It is not characteristic of a nature such as hers to win pardon so easily for such an offence as she considered hers. Indeed, as time passed on, the powers of her being seemed concentrated more and more in one impassioned desire to expiate her sin; for, as time passed on, despite penances and prayers, she realised that she still loved him.

As she pondered this she said to herself that peace would never come unless she should go elsewhere and begin life over in some place that was free from the memories of her fall, there was so much to remind her of him. She could not go into the garden without recalling the day when they had walked through it side by side. She could not cross the threshold of the church without being reminded that it was the scene of her unfaithfulness and of her exposure. The graveyard, the footpath, across the fields, the observatory—all were full of disturbing images. And therefore she besought the Mother Superior to send her away to some one of the missions of the Order, thinking that thus she would win forgetfulness of him and singleness of heart.

But while the plan of doing this was yet being considered by the Mother Superior, there happened one of those events which seem to fit into the crises of our lives as though determined by the very laws of fate. The attention of the civilised world had not yet been fixed upon the heroic labours of the Belgian priest, Father Damien, among the lepers of the island of Molokai. But it has been stated that near the convent are the monks of La Trappe. Among these monks were friends of the American priest, Brother Joseph, who for years was one of Father Damien's assistants; and to these friends this priest from time to time wrote letters, in which he described at great length the life of the leper settlement and the work of the small band of men and women who had gone to labour in that remote and awful vineyard. The contents of these letters were made known to the ecclesiastical superior of the convent; and one evening he made them the subject of a lecture to the assembled nuns and novices, dwelling with peculiar eloquence upon the devotion of the three Franciscan Sisters who had become outcasts from human society that they might nurse and teach leprous girls, until inevitable death should overtake them also.

Among that breathless audience of women there was one soul on whom his words fell with the force of a message from the Eternal. Here, then, at last, was offered her a pathway by following meekly to the end of which she might perhaps find blessedness. The real Man of Sorrows appeared to stand in it and beckon her on to the abodes of those abandoned creatures whose sufferings He had with peculiar pity so often stretched forth His hand to heal. When she laid before the Mother Superior her petition to be allowed to go, it was at first refused, being regarded as a momentary impulse; but months passed, and at intervals, always more earnestly, she renewed her request. It was pointed out to her that when one has gone among the lepers there is no return; the alternatives are either lifelong banishment, or death from leprosy, usually at the end of a few years. But always her reply was—

"In the name of Christ, Mother, let me go!"

Meantime it had become clear to the Mother Superior that some change of scene must be made. The days of Sister Dolorosa's usefulness in the convent were too plainly over.

It had not been possible in that large household of women to conceal the fact of her unfaithfulness to her vows. As one black veil whispered to another—as one white veil communed with its attentive neighbour—little by little events were gathered and pieced together, until, in different forms of error and rumour, the story became known to all. Some from behind window lattices had watched her in the garden with the young stranger on the day of his visiting the convent. Others had heard of his lying wounded at the farm-house. Still others were sure that under pretext of visiting old Martha she had often met him in the fields. And then the scene on the steps of the church, when she had returned soiled and torn and fainting.

So that from the day on which she arose from her illness and began to go about the convent, she was singled out as a target for those small arrows which the feminine eye directs with such faultless skill at one of its own sex. With scarcely perceptible movements they would draw aside when passing her, as though to escape corrupting contact. Certain ones of the younger Sisters, who were jealous of her beauty, did not fail to drop inuendoes for her to overhear. And upon

some of the novices, whose minds were still wavering between the church and the world, it was thought that her example might have a dangerous influence.

It is always wrong to judge motives; but it is possible that the head of the Order may have thought it best that this ruined life should take on the halo of martyrdom, from which fresh lustre would be reflected upon the annals of the church. However this may be, after about eighteen months of waiting, during which correspondence was held with the Sandwich Islands, it was determined that Sister Dolorosa should be allowed to go thither and join the labours of the Franciscan Sisters.

From the day when consent was given she passed into that peace with which one ascends the scaffold or awaits the stake. It was this look of peace that Gordon had seen on her face as she moved hither and thither about the shrine.

Only a few weeks after he had thus seen her the day came for her to go. Of those who took part in the scene of farewell she was the most unmoved. A month later she sailed from San Francisco for Honolulu; and in due time there came from Honolulu to the Mother Superior the following letter. It contains all that remains of the earthly history of Pauline Cambron—

XII.

"KALAWAO, MOLOKAI, HAWAIIAN ISLANDS,
"*January 1, 188—*.

"DEAR MOTHER,—I entreat you not to let the sight of this strange handwriting, instead of one that must be so familiar, fill you with too much alarm. I hasten to assure you that before my letter closes you will understand why Sister Dolorosa has not written herself.

"Since the hour when the vessel sailed from the American port, bearing to us that young life as a consecrated helper in our work among these suffering outcasts of the human race, I know that your thoughts and prayers have followed her with unceasing anxiety; so that first I should give you tidings that the vessel reached Honolulu in safety. I should tell you also that she had a prosperous voyage, and that she is now happy—far happier than when she left you. I know, likewise, that your imagination has constantly hovered about this island, and that you have pictured it to yourself as the gloomiest of all spots in the universe of God; so that in the next place I should try to remove this impression by giving you some description of the island itself, which has now become her unchanging home.

"The island of Molokai, then, on which the leper settlement has been located by the Government, is long, and shaped much like the leaf of the willow-tree. The Sandwich Islands, as you well know, are a group of volcanoes out of which the fires have for the most part long since died. Molokai, therefore, is really but a mountain of cooled lava, half of which perhaps is beneath the level of the sea. The two leper villages are actually situated in the cup of an ancient crater. The island is very low along the southern coast, and slopes gradually to its greatest altitude on the northern ridge, from which the descent to the sea is in places all but perpendicular. It is between the bases of these northern cliffs and the sea that the villages are built. In the rear of them is a long succession of towering precipices and wild ravines, that are solemn and terrible to behold; and in front of them there is a coast-line so rough with pointed rocks that as the waves rush in upon them spray is often thrown to the height of fifty or a hundred feet. It is this that makes the landing at times so dangerous; and at other times, when a storm has burst, so fatal. So that shipwrecks are not unknown, dear Mother, and sometimes add to the sadness of life in this place.

"But from this description you would get only a mistaken idea of the aspect of the island. It is sunny and full of tropical loveliness. The lapse of centuries has in places covered the lava with exquisite verdure. Soft breezes blow here, about the dark cliffs hang purple atmospheres, and above them drift pink and white clouds. Sometimes the whole island is veiled in golden mist. Beautiful streams fall down its green precipices into the sea, and the sea itself is of the most brilliant blue. In its depths are growths of pure white corals, which are the homes of fishes of gorgeous colours.

"If I should speak no longer of the island, but of the people, I could perhaps do something further still to dissipate the dread with which you and other strangers must regard us. The inhabitants are a simple, generous, happy race; and there are many spots in this world—many in Europe and Asia, perhaps some in your own land—where the scenes of suffering and death are more poignant and appalling. The lepers live for the most part in decent white cottages. Many are the happy faces that are seen among them; so that, strange as it may seem, healthy people would sometimes come here to live if the laws did not forbid. So much has Christianity done that one may now be buried in consecrated ground.

"If all this appears worldly and frivolous, dear Mother, forgive me! If I have chosen to withhold from you news of her, of whom alone I know you are thinking, it is because I have wished to give you as bright a picture as possible. Perhaps you will thus become the better prepared for what is to follow.

"So that before I go further, I shall pause again to describe to you one spot which is the loveliest

on the island. About a mile and a half from the village of Kalawao there is a rocky point which is used as an irregular landing-place when the sea is wild. Just beyond this point there is an inward curve of the coast, making an inlet of the sea; and from the water's edge there slopes backward into the bosom of the island a deep ravine. Down this ravine there falls and winds a gleaming white cataract, and here the tropical vegetation grows most beautiful. The trees are wreathed with moist creepers; the edges and crevices of the lava blocks are fringed with ferns and moss. Here the wild ginger blooms and the crimson lehua. Here grow trees of orange and palm and punhala groves. Here one sees the rare honey-bird with its plumage of scarlet velvet, the golden plover, and the beautiful white bos'un-bird, wheeling about the black cliff heights. The spot is as beautiful as a scene in some fairy tale. When storms roll in from the sea the surf flows far back into this ravine, and sometimes—after the waters have subsided—a piece of wreckage from the ocean is left behind.

"Forgive me once more, O dear Mother! if again I seem to you so idle and unmeaning in my words. But I have found it almost impossible to go on; and, besides, I think you will thank me, after you have read my letter through, for telling you first of this place.

"From the day of our first learning that there was a young spirit among you who had elected, for Christ's sake, to come here and labour with us, we had counted the days till she should arrive. The news had spread throughout the leper settlement. Father Damien had made it known to the lepers in Kalawao, Father Wendolen had likewise told it among the lepers in Kalapaupa, and the Protestant ministers spoke of it to their flocks. Thus her name had already become familiar to hundreds of them, and many a prayer had been offered up for her safety.

"Once a week there comes to Molokai from Honolulu a little steamer called *Mokolii*. When it reached here last Saturday morning it brought the news that just before it sailed from Honolulu the vessel bearing Sister Dolorosa had come into port. She had been taken in charge by the Sisters until the *Mokolii* should return and make the next trip. I should add that the steamer leaves at about five o'clock in the afternoon, and that it usually reaches here at about dawn of the following morning in ordinary weather.

"And now, dear Mother, I beseech you to lay my letter aside! Do not read further now. Lay it aside, and do not take it up again until you have sought in prayer the consolation of our divine religion for the sorrows of our lives.

"I shall believe that you have done this, and that, as you now go on with the reading of my letter, you have gained the fortitude to hear what I have scarcely the power to write. Heaven knows that in my poor way I have sought to prepare you!

"As it was expected that the steamer would reach the island about dawn on Saturday morning, as usual, it had been arranged that many of us should be at the landing-place to give her welcome. But about midnight one of the terrific storms which visit this region suddenly descended, enveloping the heavens, that had been full of the light of the stars, in impenetrable darkness. We were sleepless with apprehension that the vessel would be driven upon the rocks—such was the direction of the storm—long before it could come opposite the villages: and a few hours before day Father Damien, accompanied by Father Conradi, Brother James, and Brother Joseph, went down to the coast. Through the remaining hours of the night they watched and waited, now at one point, and now at another, knowing that the vessel could never land in such a storm. As the dawn broke they followed up the coast until they came opposite that rocky point of which I have already spoken as being an irregular landing-place.

"Here they were met by two or three men who were drenched with the sea, and just starting towards the villages, and from them they learned that, an hour or two before, the steamer had been driven upon the hidden rocks of the point. It had been feared that it would soon be sunk or dashed to pieces, and as quickly as possible a boat had been put off, in which were the leper girls that were being brought from Honolulu. There was little hope that it would ever reach the shore, but it was the last chance of life. In this boat, dear Mother, Sister Dolorosa also was placed. Immediately afterwards a second boat was put off, containing the others that were on board.

"Of the fate of the first boat they had learned nothing. Their own had been almost immediately capsized, and, so far as they knew, they were the sole survivors. The Hawaiians are the most expert of swimmers, being almost native to the sea; and since the distance was short, and only these survived, you will realise how little chance there was for any other.

"During the early hours of the morning, which broke dark and inexpressibly sad for us, a few bodies were found washed ashore, among them those of two leper girls of Honolulu. But our search for her long proved unavailing. At length Father Damien suggested that we follow up the ravine which I have described, and it was thither that he and Brother Joseph and I accordingly went. Father Damien thought it well that I should go with them.

"It was far inland, dear Mother, that at last we found her. She lay outstretched on a bare, black rock of lava, which sloped upward from the sea. Her naked white feet rested on the green moss that fringed its lower edge, and her head was sheltered from the burning sun by branches of ferns. Almost over her eyes—the lids of which were stiff with the salt of the ocean—there hung a spray of white poppies. It was as though nature would be kind to her in death.

"At the sight of her face, so young, and having in it the purity and the peace of Heaven, we knelt down around her without a word, and for a while we could do nothing but weep. Surely nothing so spotless was ever washed ashore on this polluted island! If I sinned, I pray to be forgiven; but I

found a strange joy in thinking that the corruption of this terrible disease had never been laid upon her. Heaven had accepted in advance her faithful spirit, and had spared her the long years of bodily suffering.

"At Father Damien's direction Brother Joseph returned to the village for a bier and for four lepers who should be strong enough to bear it. When they came we laid her on it, and bore her back to the village, where Mother Marianne took the body in charge and prepared it for burial.

"How shall I describe her funeral? The lepers were her pall-bearers. The news of the shipwreck had quickly spread throughout the settlement, and these simple, generous people yield themselves so readily to the emotion of the hour. When the time arrived, it seemed that all who could walk had come to follow her to the churchyard. It was a moving sight—the long, wavering train of that death-stricken throng, whose sufferings had so touched the pity of our Lord when He was on earth, and the desolation of whose fate she had come to lessen. There were the young and the old alike, Protestants and Catholics without distinction, children with their faces so strangely aged with ravages of the leprosy, those advanced in years with theirs so mutilated and marred. Others, upon whom the leprosy had made such advances that they were too weak to walk, sat in their cottage doors and lifted their husky voices in singing that wailing native hymn in which they bemoan their hopeless fate. Some of the women, after a fashion of their own, wore large wreaths of blue blossoms and green leaves about their withered faces.

"And it was thus that we lepers—I say we lepers because I am one of them, since I cannot expect long to escape the disease—it was thus that we lepers followed her to the graveyard in the rock by the blue sea, where Father Damien with his own hands had helped to dig her grave. And there, dear Mother, all that is mortal of her now rests. But we know that ere this she has heard the words: 'I was sick, and ye visited me.'

"Mother Marianne would herself have written, but she was called away to the Leproserie.

"Sister Agatha."

Posthumous Fame; or, A Legend of the Beautiful

I.

There once lived in a great city, where the dead were all but innumerable, a young man by the name of Nicholas Vane, who possessed a singular genius for the making of tombstones. So beautiful they were, and so fitly designed to express the shadowy pain of mortal memory or the bright forecasting of eternal hope, that all persons were held fortunate who could secure them for the calm resting-places of their beloved sleepers. Indeed, the curious tale was whispered round that the bereft were not his only patrons, but that certain personages who were peculiarly ambitious of posthumous fame—seeing they had not long to live, and unwilling to intrust others with the grave responsibility of having them commemorated—had gone to his shop and secretly advised with him respecting such monuments as might preserve their memories from too swift oblivion.

However this may fall out, certain it is that his calling had its secrets; and once he was known to observe that no man could ever understand the human heart until he had become a maker of tombstones. Whether the knowledge thus derived should make of one a laughing or a weeping philosopher, Nicholas himself remained a joyous type of youthful manhood—so joyous, in fact, that a friend of his who wrought in colour, strolling one day into the workshop where Nicholas stood surrounded by the exquisite shapes of memorial marbles, had asked to paint the scene as a representation of Life chiselling to its beautiful purposes the rugged symbols of Death, and smiling as it wove the words of love and faith across the stony proofs of the universal tragedy. Afterwards, it is true, a great change was wrought in the young artisan.

He had just come in one morning and paused to look around at the various finished and unfinished mortuary designs.

"Truly," he said to himself all at once, "if I were a wise man, I'd begin this day's business by chiselling my own head-stone. For who knows but that before sunset my brother the gravedigger may be told to build me one of the houses that last till doomsday! And what man could then make the monument to stop the door of *my* house with. But why should I have a monument? If I lie beneath it, I shall not know I lie there. If I lie not there, then it will not stand over me. So, whether I lie there, or lie not there, what will it matter to me then? Ay; but what if, being dead only to this world and living in another, I should yet look on the monument erected to my memory and therefore be the happier? I know not; nor to what end we are vexed with this desire to be remembered after death. The prospect of vanishing from a poor, toilsome life fills us with such consternation and pain! It is therefore we strive to impress ourselves ineffaceably on the race, so

that, after we have gone hence, or ceased to be, we may still have incorporeal habitation among all coming generations."

Here he was interrupted by a low knock at the door. Bidden to come in, there entered a man of delicate physiognomy, who threw a hurried glance around and inquired in an anxious tone—

"Sir, are you alone?"

"I am never alone," replied Nicholas in a ringing voice; "for I dwell hard by the gate-way of life and death, through which a multitude is always passing."

"Not so loud, I beseech you," said the visitor, stretching forth his thin, white hands with eager deprecation. "I would not, for the world, have any one discover that I have been here."

"Are you, then, a personage of such importance to the world?" said Nicholas, smiling, for the stranger's appearance argued no worldly consideration whatsoever. The suit of black, which his frail figure seemed to shrink away from with very sensitiveness, was glossy and pathetic with more than one covert patch. His shoes were dust-covered and worn. His long hair went round his head in a swirl, and he bore himself with an air of damaged, apologetic, self-appreciation.

"I am a poet," he murmured with a flush of pain, dropping his large mournful eyes beneath the scrutiny of one who might be an unsympathetic listener. "I am a poet, and I have come to speak with you privately of my—of the—of a monument. I am afraid I shall be forgotten. It is a terrible thought."

"Can you not trust your poems to keep you remembered?" asked Nicholas, with more kindliness.

"I could if they were as widely read as they should be." He appeared emboldened by his hearer's gentleness. "But, to confess the truth, I have not been accepted by my age. That, indeed, should give me no pain, since I have not written for it, but for the great future to which alone I look for my fame."

"Then why not look to it for your monument also?"

"Ah, sir!" he cried, "there are so many poets in the world that I might be entirely overlooked by posterity, did there not descend to it some sign that I was held in honour by my own generation."

"Have you never noticed," he continued, with more earnestness, "that when strangers visit a cemetery they pay no attention to the thousands of little head-stones that lie scattered close to the ground, but hunt out the highest monuments, to learn in whose honour they were erected? Have you never heard them exclaim: 'Yonder is a great monument! A great man must be buried there. Let us go and find out who he was and what he did to be so celebrated.' O sir, you and I know that this is a poor way of reasoning, since the greatest monuments are not always set over the greatest men. Still the custom has wrought its good effects, and splendid memorials do serve to make known in years to come those whom they commemorate, by inciting posterity to search for their actions or revive their thoughts. I warrant you the mere bust of Homer——"

"You are not mentioning yourself in the same breath with Homer, I hope," said Nicholas, with great good-humour.

"My poems are as dear to me as Homer's were to him," replied the poet, his eyes filling.

"What if you *are* forgotten? Is it not enough for the poet to have lived for the sake of beauty?"

"No!" he cried passionately. "What you say is a miserable error. For the very proof of the poet's vocation is in creating the beautiful. But how know he has created it? By his own mind? Alas, the poet's mind tells him only what is beautiful to *him*! It is by fame that he knows it—fame, the gratitude of men for the beauty he has revealed to them! What is so sweet, then, as the knowledge that fame has come to him already, or surely awaits him after he is dead?"

"We labour under some confusion of ideas, I fear," said Nicholas, "and, besides, are losing time. What kind of mon——"

"That I leave to you," interrupted the poet. "Only, I should like my monument to be beautiful. Ah, if you but knew how all through this poor life of mine I have loved the beautiful! Never, never have I drawn near it in any visible form without almost holding my breath as though I were looking deep, deep into God's opened eyes. But it was of the epitaph I wished to speak."

Hereupon, with a deeper flush, he drew from a large inside breast-pocket, that seemed to have been made for the purpose, a worn duodecimo volume, and fell to turning the much-fingered pages.

"This," he murmured fondly, without looking up, "is the complete collection of my poems."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Nicholas, with deep compassion.

"Yes, my complete collection. I have written a great deal more, and should have liked to publish all that I have written. But it was necessary to select, and I have included here only what it was intolerable to see wasted. There is nothing I value more than a group of elegiac poems, which every single member of my large family—who are fine critics—and all my friends, pronounce very beautiful. I think it would be a good idea to inscribe a selection from one on my monument, since those who read the selection would wish to read the entire poem, and those who read the entire

poem would wish to read the entire collection. I shall now favour you with these elegies."

"I should be happy to hear them; but my time!" said Nicholas courteously. "The living are too impatient to wait on me; the dead too patient to be defrauded."

"Surely you would not refuse to hear one of them," exclaimed the poet, his eyes flashing.

"Read *one*, by all means." Nicholas seated himself on a monumental lamb.

The poet passed one hand gently across his forehead, as though to brush away the stroke of rudeness; then, fixing upon Nicholas a look of infinite remoteness, he read as follows:—

"He suffered, but he murmured not;
To every storm he bared his breast;
He asked but for the common lot—
To be a man among the rest.

"Here lies he now——"

"If you ask but for the common lot," interrupted Nicholas, "you should rest content to be forgotten."

But before the poet could reply, a loud knock caused him to flap the leaves of the "Complete Collection" together with one hand, while with the other he gathered the tails of his long coat about him, as though preparing to pass through some difficult aperture. The exaltation of his mood, however, still showed itself in the look and tone of proud condescension with which he said to Nicholas—

"Permit me to retire at once by some private passway."

Nicholas led him to a door in the rear of the shop, and there, with a smile and a tear, stood for a moment watching the precipitate figure of the retreating bard, who suddenly paused when disappearing and tore open the breast of his coat to assure himself that his beloved elegies were resting safe across his heart.

The second visitor was of another sort. He hobbled on a cork leg, but inexorably disciplined the fleshly one into old-time firmness and precision. A faded military cloak draped his stalwart figure. Part of one bushy grey eyebrow had been chipped away by the same sword-cut that left its scar across his battle-beaten face.

"I have come to speak with you about my monument," he said, in a gruff voice that seemed to issue from the mouth of a rusty cannon. "Those of my old comrades that did not fall at my side are dead. My wife died long ago, and my little children. I am old and forgotten. It is a time of peace. There's not a boy who will now listen to me while I tell of my campaigns. I live alone. Were I to die to-morrow my grave might not have so much as a head-stone. It might be taken for that of a coward. Make me a monument for a true soldier."

"Your grateful country will do that," said Nicholas.

"Ha!" exclaimed the veteran, whom the shock of battle had made deaf long ago.

"Your country," shouted Nicholas, close to his ear, "your country—will erect a monument—to your memory."

"My country!" The words were shot out with a reverberating, melancholy boom. "My country will do no such a thing. How many millions of soldiers have fallen on her battle-fields! Where are their monuments? They would make her one vast cemetery."

"But is it not enough for you to have been a true soldier? Why wish to be known and remembered for it?"

"I know I do not wish to be forgotten," he replied simply. "I know I take pleasure in the thought that long after I am forgotten there will be a tongue in my monument to cry out to every passing stranger, 'Here lies the body of a true soldier.' It is a great thing to be brave!"

"Is, then, this monument to be erected in honour of bravery, or of yourself?"

"There is no difference," said the veteran bluntly. "Bravery *is* myself."

"It is bravery," he continued, in husky tones, and with, a mist gathering in his eyes that made him wink as though he were trying to see through the smoke of battle—"it is bravery that I see most clearly in the character of God. What would become of us if He were a coward? I serve Him as my brave Commander; and though I am stationed far from Him and may be faint and sorely wounded, I know that He is somewhere on the battle-field, and that I shall see Him at last, approaching me as He moves up and down among the ranks."

"But you say that your country does not notice you—that you have no friends; do you, then, feel no resentment?"

"None, none," he answered quickly, though his head dropped on his bosom.

"And you wish to be remembered by a world that is willing to forget you?"

He lifted his head proudly. "There are many true men in the world," he said, "and it has much to think of. I owe it all I can give, all I can bequeath; and I can bequeath it nothing but the memory of a true man."

One day, not long after this, there came into the workshop of Nicholas a venerable man of the gravest, sweetest, and most scholarly aspect, who spoke not a word until he had led Nicholas to the front window and pointed a trembling finger at a distant church spire.

"You see yon spire?" he said. "It almost pierces the clouds. In the church beneath I have preached to men and women for nearly fifty years. Many that I have christened at the font I have married at the altar; many of these I have sprinkled with dust. What have I not done for them in sorrow and want! How have I not toiled to set them in the way of purer pleasures and to anchor their tempest-tossed hopes! And yet how soon they will forget me! Already many say I am too old to preach. Too old! I preach better than I ever did in my life. Yet it may be my lot to wander down into the deep valley, an idle shepherd with an idle crook. I have just come from the writing of my next sermon, in which I exhort my people to strive that their names be not written on earthly monuments or human hearts, but in the Book of Life. It is my sublimest theme. If I am ever eloquent, if I am ever persuasive, if I ever for one moment draw aside to spiritual eyes the veil that discloses the calm, enrapturing vistas of eternity, it is when I measure my finite strength against this mighty task. But why? Because they are the sermons of my own aspiration. I preach them to my own soul. Face to face with that naked soul I pen those sermons—pen them when all are asleep save the sleepless Eye that is upon me. Even in the light of that Eye do I recoil from the thought of being forgotten. How clearly I foresee it! Ashes to ashes, dust to dust! Where then will be my doctrines, my prayers, my sermons?"

"Is it not enough for you to have scattered your handful of good broadcast, to ripen as endlessly as the grass? What if they that gather know naught of him that sowed?"

"It is not enough. I should like the memory of *me* to live on and on in the world, inseparable from the good I may have done. What am I but the good that is in me? 'Tis this that links me to the infinite and the perfect. Does not the Perfect One wish His goodness to be associated with His name? No! No! I do not wish to be forgotten!"

"It is mere vanity."

"Not vanity," said the aged servitor meekly. "Wait until you are old, till the grave is at your helpless feet: it is the love of life."

But some years later there befell Nicholas an event that transcended all past experiences, and left its impress on his whole subsequent life.

II.

The hour had passed when any one was likely to enter his shop. A few rays of pale sunlight, straggling in through crevices of the door, rested like a dying halo on the heads of the monumental figures grouped around. Shadows, creeping upward from the ground, shrouded all else in thin, penetrable half-gloom, through which the stark grey emblems of mortality sent forth more solemn suggestions. A sudden sense of the earthly tragedy overwhelmed him. The chisel and the hammer dropped from his hands, and, resting his head on the block he had been carving, he gave himself up to that mood of dim, distant reverie in which the soul seems to soar and float far above the shock and din of the world's disturbing nearness. On his all but oblivious ear, like the faint washings of some remote sea, beat the waves of the city's tide-driven life in the streets outside. The room itself seemed hushed to the awful stillness of the high aerial spaces. Then all at once this stillness was broken by a voice, low, clear, and tremulous, saying close to his ear—

"Are you the maker of gravestones?"

"That is my sad calling," he cried bitterly, starting up with instinctive forebodings.

He saw before him a veiled figure. To support herself, she rested one hand on the block he had been carving, while she pressed the other against her heart, as though to stifle pain.

"Whose monument is this?"

"A neglected poet's who died not long ago. Soon, perhaps, I shall be making one for an old soldier, and one for a holy man, whose soul, I hear, is about to be dismissed."

"Are not some monuments sadder to make than others?"

"Ay, truly."

"What is the saddest you ever made?"

"The saddest monument I ever made was one for a poor mother who had lost her only son. One day a woman came in who had no sooner entered than she sat down and gave way to a passionate outburst of grief.

"'My good woman,' I said, 'why do you weep so bitterly?'

"'Do not call me good,' she moaned, and hid her face.

"I then perceived her fallen character. When she recovered self-control she drew from her sinful bosom an old purse filled with coins of different values.

"'Why do you give me this?' I asked.

"'It is to pay for a monument for my son,' she said, and the storm of her grief swept over her again.

"I learned that for years she had toiled and starved to hoard up a sum with which to build a monument to his memory, for he had never failed of his duty to her after all others had cast her out. Certainly he had his reward, not in the monument, but in the repentance which came to her after his death. I have never seen such sorrow for evil as the memory of his love wrought in her. For herself she desired only that the spot where she should be buried might be unknown. This longing to be forgotten has led me to believe that none desire to be remembered for the evil that is in them, but only for some truth, or beauty, or goodness by which they have linked their individual lives to the general life of the race. Even the lying epitaphs in cemeteries prove how we would fain have the dead arrayed on the side of right in the thoughts of their survivors. This wretched mother and human outcast, believing herself to have lost everything that makes it well to be remembered, craved only the mercy of forgetfulness."

"And yet I think she died a Christian soul."

"You knew her, then?"

"I was with her in the last hours. She told me her story. She told me also of you, and that you would accept nothing for the monument you were at such care to make. It is perhaps for this reason that I have felt some desire to see you, and that I am here now to speak with you of——"

A shudder passed over her.

"After all, that was not a sad, but a joyous monument to fashion," she added abruptly.

"Ay, it was joyous. But to me the joyous and the sad are much allied in the things of this life."

"And yet there might be one monument wholly sad, might there not?"

"There might be, but I know not whose it would be."

"If she you love should die, would not hers be so?"

"Until I love, and she I love is dead, I cannot know," said Nicholas, smiling.

"What builds the most monuments?" she asked quickly, as though to retreat from her levity.

"Pride builds many—splendid ones. Gratitude builds some, forgiveness some, and pity some. But faith builds more than these, though often poor, humble ones; and love!—love builds more than all things else together."

"And what, of all things that monuments are built in memory of, is most loved and soonest forgotten?" she asked, with intensity.

"Nay, I cannot tell that."

"Is it not a beautiful woman? This, you say, is the monument of a poet. After the poet grows old, men love him for the songs he sang; they love the old soldier for the battles he fought, and the preacher for his remembered prayers. But a woman! Who loves her for the beauty she once possessed, or rather regards her not with the more distaste? Is there in history a figure so lonely and despised as that of the woman, who, once the most beautiful in the world, crept back into her native land a withered hag? Or, if a woman die while she is yet beautiful, how long is she remembered? Her beauty is like heat and light—powerful only for those who feel and see it."

But Nicholas had scarcely heard her. His eyes had become riveted upon her hand, which rested on the marble, as white as though grown out of it under the labours of his chisel.

"My lady," he said, with the deepest respect, "will you permit me to look at your hand? I have carved many a one in marble, and studied many a one in life; but never have I seen anything so beautiful as yours."

He took it with an artist's impetuosity and bent over it, laying its palm against one of his own and stroking it softly with the other. The blood leaped through his heart, and he suddenly lifted it to his lips.

"God only can make the hand beautiful," he said.

Displaced by her arm which he had upraised, the light fabric that had concealed her figure parted on her bosom and slipped to the ground. His eyes swept over the perfect shape that stood revealed. The veil still concealed her face. The strangely mingled emotions that had been deepening within him all this time now blended themselves in one irrepressible wish.

"Will you permit me to see your face?"

She drew quickly back. A subtle pain was in his voice as he cried—

"O my lady! I ask it as one who has pure eyes for the beautiful."

"My face belongs to my past. It has been my sorrow; it is nothing now."

"Only permit me to see it!"

"Is there no other face you would rather see?"

Who can fathom the motive of a woman's questions?

"None, none!"

She drew aside her veil, and her eyes rested quietly on his like a revelation. So young she was as hardly yet to be a woman, and her beauty had in it that seraphic purity and mysterious pathos which is never seen in a woman's face until the touch of another world has chastened her spirit into the resignation of a saint. The heart of Nicholas was wrung by the sight of it with a sudden sense of inconsolable loss and longing.

"O my lady!" he cried, sinking on one knee and touching his lips to her hand with greater gentleness. "Do you indeed think the beauty of a woman so soon forgotten? As long as I live, yours will be as fresh in my memory as it was the moment after I first saw it in its perfection and felt its power."

"Do not recall to me the sorrow of such thoughts." She touched her heart. "My heart is a tired hour-glass. Already the sands are wellnigh run through. Any hour it may stop, and then—out like a light! Shapeless ashes! I have loved life well, but not so well that I have not been able to prepare to leave it."

She spoke with the utmost simplicity and calmness, yet her eyes were turned with unspeakable sadness towards the shadowy recesses of the room, where from their pedestals the monumental figures looked down upon her as though they would have opened their marble lips and said, "Poor child! Poor child!"

"I have had my wish to see you and to see this place. Before long some one will come here to have you carve a monument to the most perishable of all things. Like the poor mother who had no wish to be remembered——"

Nicholas was moved to the deepest.

"I have but little skill," he said. "The great God did not bestow on me the genius of His favourite children of sculpture. But if so sad and sacred a charge should ever become mine, with His help I will rear such a monument to your memory that as long as it stands none who see it will ever be able to forget you. Year after year your memory shall grow as a legend of the beautiful."

When she was gone he sat self-forgetful until the darkness grew impenetrable. As he groped his way out at last along the thick guide-posts of death, her voice seemed to float towards him from every head-stone, her name to be written in every epitaph.

The next day a shadow brooded over the place. Day by day it deepened. He went out to seek intelligence of her. In the quarter of the city where she lived he discovered that her name had already become a nucleus around which were beginning to cluster many little legends of the beautiful. He had but to hear recitals of her deeds of kindness and mercy. For the chance of seeing her again he began to haunt the neighbourhood; then, having seen her, he would return to his shop the victim of more unavailing desire. All things combined to awake in him that passion of love whose roots are nourished in the soul's finest soil of pity and hopelessness. Once or twice, under some pretext, he made bold to accost her; and once, under the stress of his passion, he mutely lifted his eyes, confessing his love; but hers were turned aside.

Meantime he began to dream of the monument he chose to consider she had committed to his making. It should be the triumph of his art; but more, it would represent in stone the indissoluble union of his love with her memory. Through him alone would she enter upon her long after-life of saint-like reminiscence.

When the tidings of her death came, he soon sprang up from the prostration of his grief with a burning desire to consummate his beloved work.

"Year after year your memory shall grow as a legend of the beautiful."

These words now became the inspiration of his masterpiece. Day and night it took shape in the rolling chaos of his sorrow. What sculptor in the world ever espoused the execution of a work that lured more irresistibly from their hiding-places the shy and tender ministers of his genius? What one ever explored with greater boldness the utmost limits of artistic expression, or wrought in sterner defiance of the laws of our common forgetfulness?

III.

One afternoon, when people thronged the great cemetery of the city, a strolling group were held fascinated by the unique loveliness of a newly created monument.

"Never," they exclaimed, "have we seen so exquisite a masterpiece. In whose honour is it erected?"

But when they drew nearer, they found carved on it simply a woman's name.

"Who was she?" they asked, puzzled and disappointed. "Is there no epitaph?"

"Ay," spoke up a young man lying on the grass and eagerly watching the spectators. "Ay, a very fitting epitaph."

"Where is it?"

"Carved on the heart of the monument!" he cried, in a tone of triumph.

"On the heart of the monument? Then we cannot see it."

"It is not meant to be seen."

"How do *you* know of it?"

"I made the monument."

"Then tell us what it is."

"It cannot be told. It is there only because it is unknown."

"Out on you! You play your pranks with the living and the dead."

"You will live to regret this day," said a thoughtful bystander. "You have tampered with the memory of the dead."

"Why, look you, good people," cried Nicholas, springing up and approaching his beautiful master-work. He rested one hand lovingly against it and glanced around him pale with repressed excitement, as though a long-looked-for moment had at length arrived. "I play no pranks with the living or the dead. Young as I am, I have fashioned many monuments, as this cemetery will testify. But I make no more. This is my last; and as it is the last, so it is the greatest. For I have fashioned it in such love and sorrow for her who lies beneath it as you can never know. If it is beautiful, it is yet an unworthy emblem of that brief and transporting beauty which was hers; and I have planted it here beside her grave, that as a delicate white flower it may exhale the perfume of her memory for centuries to come.

"Tell me," he went on, his lips trembling, his voice faltering with the burden of oppressive hope —"tell me, you who behold it now, do you not wed her memory deathlessly to it? To its fair shape, its native and unchanging purity?"

"Ay," they interrupted impatiently. "But the epitaph?"

"Ah!" he cried, with tenderer feeling, "beautiful as the monument is to the eye, it would be no fit emblem of her had it not something sacred hidden within. For she was not lovely to the sense alone, but had a perfect heart. So I have placed within the monument that which is its heart, and typifies hers. And, mark you!" he cried, in a voice of such awful warning that those standing nearest him instinctively shrank back, "the one is as inviolable as the other. No more could you rend the heart from the human bosom than this epitaph from the monument. My deep and lasting curse on him who attempts it! For I have so fitted the parts of the work together, that to disunite would be to break them in pieces; and the inscription is so fragile and delicately poised within, that so much as rudely to jar the monument would shiver it to atoms. It is put there to be inviolable. Seek to know it, you destroy it. This I but create after the plan of the Great Artist, who shows you only the fair outside of His masterpieces. What human eye ever looked into the mysterious heart of His beautiful—that heart which holds the secret of inexhaustible freshness and eternal power? Could this epitaph have been carved on the outside, you would have read it and forgotten it with natural satiety. But uncomprehended, what a spell I mark it exercises! You will—nay, you *must*—remember it for ever! You will speak of it to others. They will come. And thus in ever-widening circle will be borne afar the memory of her whose name is on it, the emblem of whose heart is hidden within. And what more fitting memorial could a man rear to a woman, the pure shell of whose beauty all can see, the secret of whose beautiful being no one ever comprehends?"

He walked rapidly away, then, some distance off, turned and looked back. More spectators had come up. Some were earnestly talking, pointing now to the monument, now towards him. Others stood in rapt contemplation of his master-work.

Tears rose to his eyes. A look of ineffable joy overspread his face.

"O my love!" he murmured, "I have triumphed. Death has claimed your body, heaven your spirit; but the earth claims the saintly memory of each. This day about your name begins to grow the Legend of the Beautiful."

The sun had just set. The ethereal white shape of the monument stood outlined against a soft background of rose-coloured sky. To his transfiguring imagination it seemed lifted far into the cloud-based heavens, and the evening star, resting above its apex, was a celestial lamp lowered to guide the eye to it through the darkness of the descending night.

IV.

Mysterious complexity of our mortal nature and estate that we should so desire to be remembered after death, though born to be forgotten! Our words and deeds, the influences of our silent personalities, do indeed pass from us into the long history of the race and abide for the rest of time: so that an earthly immortality is the heritage, nay, the inalienable necessity, of even the commonest lives; only it is an immortality not of self, but of its good and evil. For Nature sows us and reaps us, that she may gather a harvest, not of us, but from us. It is God alone that gathers the harvest of us. And well for us that our destiny should be that general forgetfulness we so strangely shrink from. For no sooner are we gone hence than, even for such brief times as our memories may endure, we are apt to grow by processes of accumulative transformation into what we never were. Thou kind, kind fate, therefore—never enough named and celebrated—that biddest the sun of memory rise on our finished but imperfect lives, and then lengthenest or shortenest the little day of posthumous reminiscence, according as thou seest there is need of early twilight or of deeper shadows!

Years passed. City and cemetery were each grown vaster. It was again an afternoon when the people strolled among the graves and monuments. An old man had courteously attached himself to a group that stood around a crumbling memorial. He had reached a great age; but his figure was erect, his face animated by strong emotions, and his eyes burned beneath his brows.

"Sirs," said he, interposing in the conversation, which turned wholly on the monument, "you say nothing of him in whose honour it was erected."

"We say nothing because we know nothing."

"Is he then wholly forgotten?"

"We are not aware that he is at all remembered."

"The inscription reads: 'He was a poet.' Know you none of his poems?"

"We have never so much as heard of his poems."

"My eyes are dim; is there nothing carved beneath his name?"

One of the bystanders went up and knelt down close to the base.

"There *was* something here, but it is effaced by time—Wait!" And tracing his finger slowly along, he read like a child—

"He—asked—but—for—the—common—lot.

"That is all," he cried, springing lightly up. "Oh, the dust on my knees!" he added with vexation.

"He may have sung very sweetly," pursued the old man.

"He may, indeed!" they answered carelessly.

"But, sirs," continued he, with a sad smile, "perhaps you are the very generation that he looked to for the fame which his own denied him; perhaps he died believing that *you* would fully appreciate his poems."

"If so, it was a comfortable faith to die in," they said, laughing, in return. "He will never know that we did not. A few great poets have posthumous fame: we know *them* well enough." And they passed on.

"This," said the old man, as they paused elsewhere, "seems to be the monument of a true soldier; know you aught of the victories he helped to win?"

"He may not have helped to win any victories. He may have been a coward. How should *we* know? Epitaphs often lie. The dust is peopled with soldiers." And again they moved on.

"Does any one read his sermons now, know you?" asked the old man as they paused before a third monument.

"Read his sermons!" they exclaimed, laughing more heartily. "Are sermons so much read in the country you come from? See how long he has been dead! What should the world be thinking of, to be reading his musty sermons?"

"At least does it give you no pleasure to read 'He was a good man'?" inquired he plaintively.

"Ay; but if he was good, was not his goodness its own reward?"

"He may have also wished long to be remembered for it."

"Naturally; but we have not heard that his wish was gratified."

"Is it not sad that the memory of so much beauty and truth and goodness in our common human

life should perish? But, sirs,"—and here the old man spoke with sudden energy—"if there should be one who combined perfect beauty and truth and goodness in one form and character, do you not think such a rare being would escape the common fate and be long and widely remembered?"

"Doubtless."

"Sirs," said he, quickly stepping in front of them with flashing eyes, "is there in all this vast cemetery not a single monument that has kept green the memory of the being in whose honour it was erected?"

"Ay, ay," they answered readily. "Have you not heard of it?"

"I am but come from distant countries. Many years ago I was here, and have journeyed hither with much desire to see the place once more. Would you kindly show me this monument?"

"Come!" they answered eagerly, starting off. "It is the best known of all the thousands in the cemetery. None who see it can ever forget it."

"Yes, yes!" murmured the old man. "That is why I have—I foresaw—— Is it not a beautiful monument? Does it not lie—in what direction does it lie?"

A feverish eagerness seized him. He walked now beside, now before, his companions. Once he wheeled on them.

"Sirs, did you not say it perpetuates the memory of her—of the one—who lies beneath it?"

"Both are famous. The story of this woman and her monument will never be forgotten. It is impossible to forget it."

"Year after year——" muttered he, brushing his hand across his eyes.

They soon came to a spot where the aged branches of memorial evergreens interwove a sunless canopy, and spread far around a drapery of gloom through which the wind passed with an unending sigh. Brushing aside the lowest boughs, they stepped in awestricken silence within the dank, chill cone of shade. Before them rose the shape of a grey monument, at sight of which the aged traveller, who had fallen behind, dropped his staff and held out his arms as though he would have embraced it. But, controlling himself, he stepped forward, and said, in tones of thrilling sweetness—

"Sirs, you have not told me what story is connected with this monument that it should be so famous. I conceive it must be some very touching one of her whose name I read—some beautiful legend——"

"Judge you of that!" interrupted one of the group, with a voice of stern sadness and not without a certain look of mysterious horror. "They say this monument was reared to a woman by the man who once loved her. She was very beautiful, and so he made her a very beautiful monument. But she had a heart so hideous in its falsity that he carved in stone an enduring curse on her evil memory, and hung it in the heart of the monument because it was too awful for any eye to see. But others tell the story differently. They say the woman not only had a heart false beyond description, but was in person the ugliest of her sex. So that while the hidden curse is a lasting execration of her nature, the beautiful exterior is a masterpiece of mockery which her nature, and not her ugliness, maddened his sensitive genius to perpetrate. There can be no doubt that this is the true story, as hundreds tell it now, and that the woman will be remembered so long as the monument stands—ay, and longer—not only for her loathsome—— Help the old man!"

He had fallen backward to the ground. They tried in vain to set him on his feet. Stunned, speechless, he could only raise himself on one elbow and turn his eyes towards the monument with a look of preternatural horror, as though the lie had issued from its treacherous shape. At length he looked up to them, as they bent kindly over him, and spoke with much difficulty—

"Sirs, I am an old man—a very old man, and very feeble. Forgive this weakness. And I have come a long way, and must be faint. While you were speaking my strength failed me. You were telling me a story—were you not?—the story—the legend of a most beautiful woman, when all at once my senses grew confused and I failed to hear you rightly. Then my ears played me such a trick! O sirs! if you but knew what a damnable trick my ears played me, you would pity me greatly, very, very greatly. This story touches me. It is much like one I seemed to have heard for many years, and that I have been repeating over and over to myself until I love it better than my life. If you would but go over it again—carefully—very carefully."

"My God, sirs!" he exclaimed, springing up with the energy of youth when he had heard the recital a second time, "tell me *who* started this story! Tell me *how* and *where* it began!"

"We cannot. We have heard many tell it, and not all alike."

"And do they—do you—believe—it is—true?" he asked helplessly.

"We all *know* it is true; do not *you* believe it?"

"I can never forget it!" he said, in tones quickly grown harsh and husky. "Let us go away from so pitiful a place."

It was near nightfall when he returned, unobserved, and sat down beside the monument as one

who had ended a pilgrimage.

"They all tell me the same story," he murmured wearily. "Ah, it was the hidden epitaph that wrought the error! But for it, the sun of her memory would have had its brief, befitting day and tender setting. Presumptuous folly, to suppose they would understand my masterpiece, when they so often misconceive the hidden heart of His beautiful works, and convert uncomprehended good and true into a curse of evil!"

The night fell. He was awaiting it. Nearer and nearer rolled the dark, suffering heart of a storm; nearer towards the calm, white breasts of the dead. Over the billowy graves the many-footed winds suddenly fled away in a wild, tumultuous cohort. Overhead, great black bulks swung heavily at one another across the tremulous stars.

Of all earthly spots, where does the awful discord of the elements seem so futile and theatric as in a vast cemetery? Blow, then, winds, till you uproot the trees! Pour, floods, pour, till the water trickles down into the face of the pale sleeper below! Rumble and flash, ye clouds, till the earth trembles and seems to be aflame! But not a lock of hair, so carefully put back over the brows, is tossed or disordered. The sleeper has not stretched forth an arm and drawn the shroud closer about his face, to keep out the wet. Not an ear has heard the riving thunderbolt, nor so much as an eyelid trembled on the still eyes for all the lightning's fury.

But had there been another human presence on the midnight scene, some lightning flash would have revealed the old man, a grand, a terrible figure, in sympathy with its wild, sad violence. He stood beside his masterpiece, towering to his utmost height in a posture of all but superhuman majesty and strength. His long white hair and longer white beard streamed outward on the roaring winds. His arms, bared to the shoulder, swung aloft a ponderous hammer. His face, ashen-grey as the marble before him, was set with an expression of stern despair. Then, as the thunder crashed, his hammer fell on the monument. Bolt after bolt, blow after blow. Once more he might have been seen kneeling beside the ruin, his eyes strained close to its heart, awaiting another flash to tell him that the inviolable epitaph had shared in the destruction.

For days following many curious eyes came to peer into the opened heart of the shattered structure, but in vain.

Thus the masterpiece of Nicholas failed of its end, though it served another. For no one could have heard the story of it, before it was destroyed, without being made to realise how melancholy that a man should rear a monument of execration to the false heart of the woman he once had loved; and how terrible for mankind to celebrate the dead for the evil that was in them instead of the good.

THE END.

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