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The Hill of Dreams

by Arthur Machen

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I.

There was a glow in the sky as if great furnace doors were opened.

But all the afternoon his eyes had looked on glamour; he had strayed in

fairyland. The holidays were nearly done, and Lucian Taylor had gone

out resolved to lose himself, to discover strange hills and prospects

that he had never seen before. The air was still, breathless, exhausted

after heavy rain, and the clouds looked as if they had been moulded of

lead. No breeze blew upon the hill, and down in the well of the valley

not a dry leaf stirred, not a bough shook in all the dark January

woods.

About a mile from the rectory he had diverged from the main road by an

opening that promised mystery and adventure. It was an old neglected

lane, little more than a ditch, worn ten feet deep by its winter

waters, and shadowed by great untrimmed hedges, densely woven together.

On each side were turbid streams, and here and there a torrent of water

gushed down the banks, flooding the lane. It was so deep and dark that

he could not get a glimpse of the country through which he was passing,

but the way went down and down to some unconjectured hollow.

Perhaps he walked two miles between the high walls of the lane before

its descent ceased, but he thrilled with the sense of having journeyed

very far, all the long way from the known to the unknown. He had come

as it were into the bottom of a bowl amongst the hills, and black woods

shut out the world. From the road behind him, from the road before him,

from the unseen wells beneath the trees, rivulets of waters swelled and

streamed down towards the center to the brook that crossed the lane.

Amid the dead and wearied silence of the air, beneath leaden and

motionless clouds, it was strange to hear such a tumult of gurgling and

rushing water, and he stood for a while on the quivering footbridge and

watched the rush of dead wood and torn branches and wisps of straw, all

hurrying madly past him, to plunge into the heaped spume, the barmy

froth that had gathered against a fallen tree.

Then he climbed again, and went up between limestone rocks, higher and

higher, till the noise of waters became indistinct, a faint humming of

swarming hives in summer. He walked some distance on level ground, till

there was a break in the banks and a stile on which he could lean and

look out. He found himself, as he had hoped, afar and forlorn; he had

strayed into outland and occult territory. From the eminence of the

lane, skirting the brow of a hill, he looked down into deep valleys and

dingles, and beyond, across the trees, to remoter country, wild bare

hills and dark wooded lands meeting the grey still sky. Immediately

beneath his feet the ground sloped steep down to the valley, a hillside

of close grass patched with dead bracken, and dotted here and there

with stunted thorns, and below there were deep oak woods, all still and

silent, and lonely as if no one ever passed that way. The grass and

bracken and thorns and woods, all were brown and grey beneath the

leaden sky, and as Lucian looked he was amazed, as though he were

reading a wonderful story, the meaning of which was a little greater

than his understanding. Then, like the hero of a fairy-book, he went on

and on, catching now and again glimpses of the amazing country into

which he had penetrated, and perceiving rather than seeing that as the

day waned everything grew more grey and somber. As he advanced he heard

the evening sounds of the farms, the low of the cattle, and the barking

of the sheepdogs; a faint thin noise from far away. It was growing

late, and as the shadows blackened he walked faster, till once more the

lane began to descend, there was a sharp turn, and he found himself,

with a good deal of relief, and a little disappointment, on familiar

ground. He had nearly described a circle, and knew this end of the lane

very well; it was not much more than a mile from home. He walked

smartly down the hill; the air was all glimmering and indistinct,

transmuting trees and hedges into ghostly shapes, and the walls of the

White House Farm flickered on the hillside, as if they were moving

towards him. Then a change came. First, a little breath of wind brushed

with a dry whispering sound through the hedges, the few leaves left on

the boughs began to stir, and one or two danced madly, and as the wind

freshened and came up from a new quarter, the sapless branches above

rattled against one another like bones. The growing breeze seemed to

clear the air and lighten it. He was passing the stile where a path led

to old Mrs. Gibbon’s desolate little cottage, in the middle of the

fields, at some distance even from the lane, and he saw the light blue

smoke of her chimney rise distinct above the gaunt greengage trees,

against a pale band that was broadening along the horizon. As he passed

the stile with his head bent, and his eyes on the ground, something

white started out from the black shadow of the hedge, and in the

strange twilight, now tinged with a flush from the west, a figure

seemed to swim past him and disappear. For a moment he wondered who it

could be, the light was so flickering and unsteady, so unlike the real

atmosphere of the day, when he recollected it was only Annie Morgan,

old Morgan’s daughter at the White House. She was three years older

than he, and it annoyed him to find that though she was only fifteen,

there had been a dreadful increase in her height since the summer

holidays. He had got to the bottom of the hill, and, lifting up his

eyes, saw the strange changes of the sky. The pale band had broadened

into a clear vast space of light, and above, the heavy leaden clouds

were breaking apart and driving across the heaven before the wind. He

stopped to watch, and looked up at the great mound that jutted out from

the hills into mid-valley. It was a natural formation, and always it

must have had something of the form of a fort, but its steepness had

been increased by Roman art, and there were high banks on the summit

which Lucian’s father had told him were the \_vallum\_ of the camp, and a

deep ditch had been dug to the north to sever it from the hillside. On

this summit oaks had grown, queer stunted-looking trees with twisted

and contorted trunks, and writhing branches; and these now stood out

black against the lighted sky. And then the air changed once more; the

flush increased, and a spot like blood appeared in the pond by the

gate, and all the clouds were touched with fiery spots and dapples of

flame; here and there it looked as if awful furnace doors were being

opened.

The wind blew wildly, and it came up through the woods with a noise

like a scream, and a great oak by the roadside ground its boughs

together with a dismal grating jar. As the red gained in the sky, the

earth and all upon it glowed, even the grey winter fields and the bare

hillsides crimsoned, the waterpools were cisterns of molten brass, and

the very road glittered. He was wonder-struck, almost aghast, before

the scarlet magic of the afterglow. The old Roman fort was invested

with fire; flames from heaven were smitten about its walls, and above

there was a dark floating cloud, like a fume of smoke, and every

haggard writhing tree showed as black as midnight against the black of

the furnace.

When he got home he heard his mother’s voice calling: “Here’s Lucian at

last. Mary, Master Lucian has come, you can get the tea ready.” He told

a long tale of his adventures, and felt somewhat mortified when his

father seemed perfectly acquainted with the whole course of the lane,

and knew the names of the wild woods through which he had passed in

awe.

“You must have gone by the Darren, I suppose”—that was all he said.

“Yes, I noticed the sunset; we shall have some stormy weather. I don’t

expect to see many in church tomorrow.”

There was buttered toast for tea “because it was holidays.” The red

curtains were drawn, and a bright fire was burning, and there was the

old familiar furniture, a little shabby, but charming from association.

It was much pleasanter than the cold and squalid schoolroom; and much

better to be reading \_Chambers’s Journal\_ than learning Euclid; and

better to talk to his father and mother than to be answering such

remarks as: “I say, Taylor, I’ve torn my trousers; how much do you

charge for mending?” “Lucy, dear, come quick and sew this button on my

shirt.”

That night the storm woke him, and he groped with his hands amongst the

bedclothes, and sat up, shuddering, not knowing where he was. He had

seen himself, in a dream, within the Roman fort, working some dark

horror, and the furnace doors were opened and a blast of flame from

heaven was smitten upon him.

Lucian went slowly, but not discreditably, up the school, gaining

prizes now and again, and falling in love more and more with useless

reading and unlikely knowledge. He did his elegiacs and iambics well

enough, but he preferred exercising himself in the rhymed Latin of the

middle ages. He liked history, but he loved to meditate on a land laid

waste, Britain deserted by the legions, the rare pavements riven by

frost, Celtic magic still brooding on the wild hills and in the black

depths of the forest, the rosy marbles stained with rain, and the walls

growing grey. The masters did not encourage these researches; a pure

enthusiasm, they felt, should be for cricket and football, the

\_dilettanti\_ might even play fives and read Shakespeare without blame,

but healthy English boys should have nothing to do with decadent

periods. He was once found guilty of recommending Villon to a

school-fellow named Barnes. Barnes tried to extract unpleasantness from

the text during preparation, and rioted in his place, owing to his

incapacity for the language. The matter was a serious one; the

headmaster had never heard of Villon, and the culprit gave up the name

of his literary admirer without remorse. Hence, sorrow for Lucian, and

complete immunity for the miserable illiterate Barnes, who resolved to

confine his researches to the Old Testament, a book which the

headmaster knew well. As for Lucian, he plodded on, learning his work

decently, and sometimes doing very creditable Latin and Greek prose.

His school-fellows thought him quite mad, and tolerated him, and indeed

were very kind to him in their barbarous manner. He often remembered in

after life acts of generosity and good nature done by wretches like

Barnes, who had no care for old French nor for curious meters, and such

recollections always moved him to emotion. Travelers tell such tales;

cast upon cruel shores amongst savage races, they have found no little

kindness and warmth of hospitality.

He looked forward to the holidays as joyfully as the rest of them.

Barnes and his friend Duscot used to tell him their plans and

anticipation; they were going home to brothers and sisters, and to

cricket, more cricket, or to football, more football, and in the winter

there were parties and jollities of all sorts. In return he would

announce his intention of studying the Hebrew language, or perhaps

Provençal, with a walk up a bare and desolate mountain by way of

open-air amusement, and on a rainy day for choice. Whereupon Barnes

would impart to Duscot his confident belief that old Taylor was quite

cracked. It was a queer, funny life that of school, and so very unlike

anything in \_Tom Brown\_. He once saw the headmaster patting the head of

the bishop’s little boy, while he called him “my little man,” and

smiled hideously. He told the tale grotesquely in the lower fifth room

the same day, and earned much applause, but forfeited all liking

directly by proposing a voluntary course of scholastic logic. One

barbarian threw him to the ground and another jumped on him, but it was

done very pleasantly. There were, indeed, some few of a worse class in

the school, solemn sycophants, prigs perfected from tender years, who

thought life already “serious,” and yet, as the headmaster said, were

“joyous, manly young fellows.” Some of these dressed for dinner at

home, and talked of dances when they came back in January. But this

virulent sort was comparatively infrequent, and achieved great success

in after life. Taking his school days as a whole, he always spoke up

for the system, and years afterward he described with enthusiasm the

strong beer at a roadside tavern, some way out of the town. But he

always maintained that the taste for tobacco, acquired in early life,

was the great life, was the great note of the English Public School.

Three years after Lucian’s discovery of the narrow lane and the vision

of the flaming fort, the August holidays brought him home at a time of

great heat. It was one of those memorable years of English weather,

when some Provençal spell seems wreathed round the island in the

northern sea, and the grasshoppers chirp loudly as the cicadas, the

hills smell of rosemary, and white walls of the old farmhouses blaze in

the sunlight as if they stood in Arles or Avignon or famed Tarascon by

Rhone.

Lucian’s father was late at the station, and consequently Lucian bought

the \_Confessions of an English Opium Eater\_ which he saw on the

bookstall. When his father did drive up, Lucian noticed that the old

trap had had a new coat of dark paint, and that the pony looked

advanced in years.

“I was afraid that I should be late, Lucian,” said his father, “though

I made old Polly go like anything. I was just going to tell George to

put her into the trap when young Philip Harris came to me in a terrible

state. He said his father fell down ‘all of a sudden like’ in the

middle of the field, and they couldn’t make him speak, and would I

please to come and see him. So I had to go, though I couldn’t do

anything for the poor fellow. They had sent for Dr. Burrows, and I am

afraid he will find it a bad case of sunstroke. The old people say they

never remember such a heat before.”

The pony jogged steadily along the burning turnpike road, taking

revenge for the hurrying on the way to the station. The hedges were

white with the limestone dust, and the vapor of heat palpitated over

the fields. Lucian showed his \_Confessions\_ to his father, and began to

talk of the beautiful bits he had already found. Mr. Taylor knew the

book well—had read it many years before. Indeed he was almost as

difficult to surprise as that character in Daudet, who had one formula

for all the chances of life, and when he saw the drowned Academician

dragged out of the river, merely observed “\_J’ai vu tout ça.\_” Mr.

Taylor the parson, as his parishioners called him, had read the fine

books and loved the hills and woods, and now knew no more of pleasant

or sensational surprises. Indeed the living was much depreciated in

value, and his own private means were reduced almost to vanishing

point, and under such circumstances the great style loses many of its

finer savours. He was very fond of Lucian, and cheered by his return,

but in the evening he would be a sad man again, with his head resting

on one hand, and eyes reproaching sorry fortune.

Nobody called out “Here’s your master with Master Lucian; you can get

tea ready,” when the pony jogged up to the front door. His mother had

been dead a year, and a cousin kept house. She was a respectable person

called Deacon, of middle age, and ordinary standards; and,

consequently, there was cold mutton on the table. There was a cake, but

nothing of flour, baked in ovens, would rise at Miss Deacon’s

evocation. Still, the meal was laid in the beloved “parlor,” with the

view of hills and valleys and climbing woods from the open window, and

the old furniture was still pleasant to see, and the old books in the

shelves had many memories. One of the most respected of the armchairs

had become weak in the castors and had to be artfully propped up, but

Lucian found it very comfortable after the hard forms. When tea was

over he went out and strolled in the garden and orchards, and looked

over the stile down into the brake, where foxgloves and bracken and

broom mingled with the hazel undergrowth, where he knew of secret

glades and untracked recesses, deep in the woven green, the cabinets

for many years of his lonely meditations. Every path about his home,

every field and hedgerow had dear and friendly memories for him; and

the odour of the meadowsweet was better than the incense steaming in

the sunshine. He loitered, and hung over the stile till the far-off

woods began to turn purple, till the white mists were wreathing in the

valley.

Day after day, through all that August, morning and evening were

wrapped in haze; day after day the earth shimmered in the heat, and the

air was strange, unfamiliar. As he wandered in the lanes and sauntered

by the cool sweet verge of the woods, he saw and felt that nothing was

common or accustomed, for the sunlight transfigured the meadows and

changed all the form of the earth. Under the violent Provençal sun, the

elms and beeches looked exotic trees, and in the early morning, when

the mists were thick, the hills had put on an unearthly shape.

The one adventure of the holidays was the visit to the Roman fort, to

that fantastic hill about whose steep bastions and haggard oaks he had

seen the flames of sunset writhing nearly three years before. Ever

since that Saturday evening in January, the lonely valley had been a

desirable place to him; he had watched the green battlements in summer

and winter weather, had seen the heaped mounds rising dimly amidst the

drifting rain, had marked the violent height swim up from the ice-white

mists of summer evenings, had watched the fairy bulwarks glimmer and

vanish in hovering April twilight. In the hedge of the lane there was a

gate on which he used to lean and look down south to where the hill

surged up so suddenly, its summit defined on summer evenings not only

by the rounded ramparts but by the ring of dense green foliage that

marked the circle of oak trees. Higher up the lane, on the way he had

come that Saturday afternoon, one could see the white walls of Morgan’s

farm on the hillside to the north, and on the south there was the stile

with the view of old Mrs. Gibbon’s cottage smoke; but down in the

hollow, looking over the gate, there was no hint of human work, except

those green and antique battlements, on which the oaks stood in circle,

guarding the inner wood.

The ring of the fort drew him with stronger fascination during that hot

August weather. Standing, or as his headmaster would have said,

“mooning” by the gate, and looking into that enclosed and secret

valley, it seemed to his fancy as if there were a halo about the hill,

an aureole that played like flame around it. One afternoon as he gazed

from his station by the gate the sheer sides and the swelling bulwarks

were more than ever things of enchantment; the green oak ring stood out

against the sky as still and bright as in a picture, and Lucian, in

spite of his respect for the law of trespass, slid over the gate. The

farmers and their men were busy on the uplands with the harvest, and

the adventure was irresistible. At first he stole along by the brook in

the shadow of the alders, where the grass and the flowers of wet

meadows grew richly; but as he drew nearer to the fort, and its height

now rose sheer above him, he left all shelter, and began desperately to

mount. There was not a breath of wind; the sunlight shone down on the

bare hillside; the loud chirp of the grasshoppers was the only sound.

It was a steep ascent and grew steeper as the valley sank away. He

turned for a moment, and looked down towards the stream which now

seemed to wind remote between the alders; above the valley there were

small dark figures moving in the cornfield, and now and again there

came the faint echo of a high-pitched voice singing through the air as

on a wire. He was wet with heat; the sweat streamed off his face, and

he could feel it trickling all over his body. But above him the green

bastions rose defiant, and the dark ring of oaks promised coolness. He

pressed on, and higher, and at last began to crawl up the \_vallum\_, on

hands and knees, grasping the turf and here and there the roots that

had burst through the red earth. And then he lay, panting with deep

breaths, on the summit.

Within the fort it was all dusky and cool and hollow; it was as if one

stood at the bottom of a great cup. Within, the wall seemed higher than

without, and the ring of oaks curved up like a dark green vault. There

were nettles growing thick and rank in the foss; they looked different

from the common nettles in the lanes, and Lucian, letting his hand

touch a leaf by accident, felt the sting burn like fire. Beyond the

ditch there was an undergrowth, a dense thicket of trees, stunted and

old, crooked and withered by the winds into awkward and ugly forms;

beech and oak and hazel and ash and yew twisted and so shortened and

deformed that each seemed, like the nettle, of no common kind. He began

to fight his way through the ugly growth, stumbling and getting hard

knocks from the rebound of twisted boughs. His foot struck once or

twice against something harder than wood, and looking down he saw

stones white with the leprosy of age, but still showing the work of the

axe. And farther, the roots of the stunted trees gripped the foot-high

relics of a wall; and a round heap of fallen stones nourished rank,

unknown herbs, that smelt poisonous. The earth was black and unctuous,

and bubbling under the feet, left no track behind. From it, in the

darkest places where the shadow was thickest, swelled the growth of an

abominable fungus, making the still air sick with its corrupt odour,

and he shuddered as he felt the horrible thing pulped beneath his feet.

Then there was a gleam of sunlight, and as he thrust the last boughs

apart, he stumbled into the open space in the heart of the camp. It was

a lawn of sweet close turf in the center of the matted brake, of clean

firm earth from which no shameful growth sprouted, and near the middle

of the glade was a stump of a felled yew-tree, left untrimmed by the

woodman. Lucian thought it must have been made for a seat; a crooked

bough through which a little sap still ran was a support for the back,

and he sat down and rested after his toil. It was not really so

comfortable a seat as one of the school forms, but the satisfaction was

to find anything at all that would serve for a chair. He sat there,

still panting after the climb and his struggle through the dank and

jungle-like thicket, and he felt as if he were growing hotter and

hotter; the sting of the nettle was burning his hand, and the tingling

fire seemed to spread all over his body.

Suddenly, he knew that he was alone. Not merely solitary; that he had

often been amongst the woods and deep in the lanes; but now it was a

wholly different and a very strange sensation. He thought of the valley

winding far below him, all its fields by the brook green and peaceful

and still, without path or track. Then he had climbed the abrupt surge

of the hill, and passing the green and swelling battlements, the ring

of oaks, and the matted thicket, had come to the central space. And

behind there were, he knew, many desolate fields, wild as common,

untrodden, unvisited. He was utterly alone. He still grew hotter as he

sat on the stump, and at last lay down at full length on the soft

grass, and more at his ease felt the waves of heat pass over his body.

And then he began to dream, to let his fancies stray over

half-imagined, delicious things, indulging a virgin mind in its

wanderings. The hot air seemed to beat upon him in palpable waves, and

the nettle sting tingled and itched intolerably; and he was alone upon

the fairy hill, within the great mounds, within the ring of oaks, deep

in the heart of the matted thicket. Slowly and timidly he began to

untie his boots, fumbling with the laces, and glancing all the while on

every side at the ugly misshapen trees that hedged the lawn. Not a

branch was straight, not one was free, but all were interlaced and grew

one about another; and just above ground, where the cankered stems

joined the protuberant roots, there were forms that imitated the human

shape, and faces and twining limbs that amazed him. Green mosses were

hair, and tresses were stark in grey lichen; a twisted root swelled

into a limb; in the hollows of the rotted bark he saw the masks of men.

His eyes were fixed and fascinated by the simulacra of the wood, and

could not see his hands, and so at last, and suddenly, it seemed, he

lay in the sunlight, beautiful with his olive skin, dark haired, dark

eyed, the gleaming bodily vision of a strayed faun.

Quick flames now quivered in the substance of his nerves, hints of

mysteries, secrets of life passed trembling through his brain, unknown

desires stung him. As he gazed across the turf and into the thicket,

the sunshine seemed really to become green, and the contrast between

the bright glow poured on the lawn and the black shadow of the brake

made an odd flickering light, in which all the grotesque postures of

stem and root began to stir; the wood was alive. The turf beneath him

heaved and sank as with the deep swell of the sea. He fell asleep, and

lay still on the grass, in the midst of the thicket.

He found out afterwards that he must have slept for nearly an hour. The

shadows had changed when he awoke; his senses came to him with a sudden

shock, and he sat up and stared at his bare limbs in stupid amazement.

He huddled on his clothes and laced his boots, wondering what folly had

beset him. Then, while he stood indecisive, hesitating, his brain a

whirl of puzzled thought, his body trembling, his hands shaking; as

with electric heat, sudden remembrance possessed him. A flaming blush

shone red on his cheeks, and glowed and thrilled through his limbs. As

he awoke, a brief and slight breeze had stirred in a nook of the matted

boughs, and there was a glinting that might have been the flash of

sudden sunlight across shadow, and the branches rustled and murmured

for a moment, perhaps at the wind’s passage.

He stretched out his hands, and cried to his visitant to return; he

entreated the dark eyes that had shone over him, and the scarlet lips

that had kissed him. And then panic fear rushed into his heart, and he

ran blindly, dashing through the wood. He climbed the \_vallum\_, and

looked out, crouching, lest anybody should see him. Only the shadows

were changed, and a breath of cooler air mounted from the brook; the

fields were still and peaceful, the black figures moved, far away,

amidst the corn, and the faint echo of the high-pitched voices sang

thin and distant on the evening wind. Across the stream, in the cleft

on the hill, opposite to the fort, the blue wood smoke stole up a

spiral pillar from the chimney of old Mrs. Gibbon’s cottage. He began

to run full tilt down the steep surge of the hill, and never stopped

till he was over the gate and in the lane again. As he looked back,

down the valley to the south, and saw the violent ascent, the green

swelling bulwarks, and the dark ring of oaks; the sunlight seemed to

play about the fort with an aureole of flame.

“Where on earth have you been all this time, Lucian?” said his cousin

when he got home. “Why, you look quite ill. It is really madness of you

to go walking in such weather as this. I wonder you haven’t got a

sunstroke. And the tea must be nearly cold. I couldn’t keep your father

waiting, you know.”

He muttered something about being rather tired, and sat down to his

tea. It was not cold, for the “cozy” had been put over the pot, but it

was black and bitter strong, as his cousin expressed it. The draught

was unpalatable, but it did him good, and the thought came with great

consolation that he had only been asleep and dreaming queer,

nightmarish dreams. He shook off all his fancies with resolution, and

thought the loneliness of the camp, and the burning sunlight, and

possibly the nettle sting, which still tingled most abominably, must

have been the only factors in his farrago of impossible recollections.

He remembered that when he had felt the sting, he had seized a nettle

with thick folds of his handkerchief, and having twisted off a good

length, and put it in his pocket to show his father. Mr. Taylor was

almost interested when he came in from his evening stroll about the

garden and saw the specimen.

“Where did you manage to come across that, Lucian?” he said. “You

haven’t been to Caermaen, have you?”

“No. I got it in the Roman fort by the common.”

“Oh, the twyn. You must have been trespassing then. Do you know what it

is?”

“No. I thought it looked different from the common nettles.”

“Yes; it’s a Roman nettle—\_urtica pilulifera\_. It’s a rare plant.

Burrows says it’s to be found at Caermaen, but I was never able to come

across it. I must add it to the \_flora\_ of the parish.”

Mr. Taylor had begun to compile a \_flora\_ accompanied by a \_hortus

siccus\_, but both stayed on high shelves dusty and fragmentary. He put

the specimen on his desk, intending to fasten it in the book, but the

maid swept it away, dry and withered, in a day or two.

Lucian tossed and cried out in his sleep that night, and the awakening

in the morning was, in a measure, a renewal of the awakening in the

fort. But the impression was not so strong, and in a plain room it

seemed all delirium, a phantasmagoria. He had to go down to Caermaen in

the afternoon, for Mrs. Dixon, the vicar’s wife, had “commanded” his

presence at tea. Mr. Dixon, though fat and short and clean shaven,

ruddy of face, was a safe man, with no extreme views on anything. He

“deplored” all extreme party convictions, and thought the great needs

of our beloved Church were conciliation, moderation, and above all

“amolgamation”—so he pronounced the word. Mrs. Dixon was tall,

imposing, splendid, well fitted for the Episcopal order, with gifts

that would have shone at the palace. There were daughters, who studied

German Literature, and thought Miss Frances Ridley Havergal wrote

poetry, but Lucian had no fear of them; he dreaded the boys. Everybody

said they were such fine, manly fellows, such gentlemanly boys, with

such a good manner, sure to get on in the world. Lucian had said

“Bother!” in a very violent manner when the gracious invitation was

conveyed to him, but there was no getting out of it. Miss Deacon did

her best to make him look smart; his ties were all so disgraceful that

she had to supply the want with a narrow ribbon of a sky-blue tint; and

she brushed him so long and so violently that he quite understood why a

horse sometimes bites and sometimes kicks the groom. He set out between

two and three in a gloomy frame of mind; he knew too well what spending

the afternoon with honest manly boys meant. He found the reality more

lurid than his anticipation. The boys were in the field, and the first

remark he heard when he got in sight of the group was:

“Hullo, Lucian, how much for the tie?” “Fine tie,” another, a stranger,

observed. “You bagged it from the kitten, didn’t you?”

Then they made up a game of cricket, and he was put in first. He was

l.b.w. in his second over, so they all said, and had to field for the

rest of the afternoon. Arthur Dixon, who was about his own age,

forgetting all the laws of hospitality, told him he was a beastly muff

when he missed a catch, rather a difficult catch. He missed several

catches, and it seemed as if he were always panting after balls, which,

as Edward Dixon said, any fool, even a baby, could have stopped. At

last the game broke up, solely from Lucian’s lack of skill, as

everybody declared. Edward Dixon, who was thirteen, and had a swollen

red face and a projecting eye, wanted to fight him for spoiling the

game, and the others agreed that he funked the fight in a rather dirty

manner. The strange boy, who was called De Carti, and was understood to

be faintly related to Lord De Carti of M’Carthytown, said openly that

the fellows at his place wouldn’t stand such a sneak for five minutes.

So the afternoon passed off very pleasantly indeed, till it was time to

go into the vicarage for weak tea, homemade cake, and unripe plums. He

got away at last. As he went out at the gate, he heard De Carti’s final

observation:

“We like to dress well at our place. His governor must be beastly poor

to let him go about like that. D’ye see his trousers are all ragged at

heel? Is old Taylor a gentleman?”

It had been a very gentlemanly afternoon, but there was a certain

relief when the vicarage was far behind, and the evening smoke of the

little town, once the glorious capital of Siluria, hung haze-like over

the ragged roofs and mingled with the river mist. He looked down from

the height of the road on the huddled houses, saw the points of light

start out suddenly from the cottages on the hillside beyond, and gazed

at the long lovely valley fading in the twilight, till the darkness

came and all that remained was the somber ridge of the forest. The way

was pleasant through the solemn scented lane, with glimpses of dim

country, the vague mystery of night overshadowing the woods and

meadows. A warm wind blew gusts of odour from the meadowsweet by the

brook, now and then bee and beetle span homeward through the air,

booming a deep note as from a great organ far away, and from the verge

of the wood came the “who-oo, who-oo, who-oo” of the owls, a wild

strange sound that mingled with the whirr and rattle of the night-jar,

deep in the bracken. The moon swam up through the films of misty cloud,

and hung, a golden glorious lantern, in mid-air; and, set in the dusky

hedge, the little green fires of the glowworms appeared. He sauntered

slowly up the lane, drinking in the religion of the scene, and thinking

the country by night as mystic and wonderful as a dimly-lit cathedral.

He had quite forgotten the “manly young fellows” and their sports, and

only wished as the land began to shimmer and gleam in the moonlight

that he knew by some medium of words or colour how to represent the

loveliness about his way.

“Had a pleasant evening, Lucian?” said his father when he came in.

“Yes, I had a nice walk home. Oh, in the afternoon we played cricket. I

didn’t care for it much. There was a boy named De Carti there; he is

staying with the Dixons. Mrs. Dixon whispered to me when we were going

in to tea, ‘He’s a second cousin of Lord De Carti’s,’ and she looked

quite grave as if she were in church.”

The parson grinned grimly and lit his old pipe.

“Baron De Carti’s great-grandfather was a Dublin attorney,” he

remarked. “Which his name was Jeremiah M’Carthy. His prejudiced

fellow-citizens called him the Unjust Steward, also the Bloody

Attorney, and I believe that ‘to hell with M’Carthy’ was quite a

popular cry about the time of the Union.”

Mr. Taylor was a man of very wide and irregular reading and a tenacious

memory; he often used to wonder why he had not risen in the Church. He

had once told Mr. Dixon a singular and \_drolatique\_ anecdote concerning

the bishop’s college days, and he never discovered why the prelate did

not bow according to his custom when the name of Taylor was called at

the next visitation. Some people said the reason was lighted candles,

but that was impossible, as the Reverend and Honorable Smallwood

Stafford, Lord Beamys’s son, who had a cure of souls in the cathedral

city, was well known to burn no end of candles, and with him the bishop

was on the best of terms. Indeed the bishop often stayed at Coplesey

(pronounced “Copsey”) Hall, Lord Beamys’s place in the west.

Lucian had mentioned the name of De Carti with intention, and had

perhaps exaggerated a little Mrs. Dixon’s respectful manner. He knew

such incidents cheered his father, who could never look at these

subjects from a proper point of view, and, as people said, sometimes

made the strangest remarks for a clergyman. This irreverent way of

treating serious things was one of the great bonds between father and

son, but it tended to increase their isolation. People said they would

often have liked to asked Mr. Taylor to garden-parties, and

tea-parties, and other cheap entertainments, if only he had not been

such an \_extreme\_ man and so \_queer\_. Indeed, a year before, Mr. Taylor

had gone to a garden-party at the Castle, Caermaen, and had made such

fun of the bishop’s recent address on missions to the Portuguese, that

the Gervases and Dixons and all who heard him were quite shocked and

annoyed. And, as Mrs. Meyrick of Lanyravon observed, his black coat was

perfectly \_green\_ with age; so on the whole the Gervases did not like

to invite Mr. Taylor again. As for the son, nobody cared to have him;

Mrs. Dixon, as she said to her husband, really asked him out of

charity.

“I am afraid he seldom gets a real meal at home,” she remarked, “so I

thought he would enjoy a good wholesome tea for once in a way. But he

is such an \_unsatisfactory\_ boy, he would only have one slice of that

nice plain cake, and I couldn’t get him to take more than two plums.

They were really quite ripe too, and boys are usually so fond of

fruit.”

Thus Lucian was forced to spend his holidays chiefly in his own

company, and make the best he could of the ripe peaches on the south

wall of the rectory garden. There was a certain corner where the heat

of that hot August seemed concentrated, reverberated from one wall to

the other, and here he liked to linger of mornings, when the mists were

still thick in the valleys, “mooning,” meditating, extending his walk

from the quince to the medlar and back again, beside the mouldering

walls of mellowed brick. He was full of a certain wonder and awe, not

unmixed with a swell of strange exultation, and wished more and more to

be alone, to think over that wonderful afternoon within the fort. In

spite of himself the impression was fading; he could not understand

that feeling of mad panic terror that drove him through the thicket and

down the steep hillside; yet, he had experienced so clearly the

physical shame and reluctance of the flesh; he recollected that for a

few seconds after his awakening the sight of his own body had made him

shudder and writhe as if it had suffered some profoundest degradation.

He saw before him a vision of two forms; a faun with tingling and

prickling flesh lay expectant in the sunlight, and there was also the

likeness of a miserable shamed boy, standing with trembling body and

shaking, unsteady hands. It was all confused, a procession of blurred

images, now of rapture and ecstasy, and now of terror and shame,

floating in a light that was altogether phantasmal and unreal. He dared

not approach the fort again; he lingered in the road to Caermaen that

passed behind it, but a mile away, and separated by the wild land and a

strip of wood from the towering battlements. Here he was looking over a

gate one day, doubtful and wondering, when he heard a heavy step behind

him, and glancing round quickly saw it was old Morgan of the White

House.

“Good afternoon, Master Lucian,” he began. “Mr. Taylor pretty well, I

suppose? I be goin’ to the house a minute; the men in the fields are

wantin’ some more cider. Would you come and taste a drop of cider,

Master Lucian? It’s very good, sir, indeed.”

Lucian did not want any cider, but he thought it would please old

Morgan if he took some, so he said he should like to taste the cider

very much indeed. Morgan was a sturdy, thick-set old man of the ancient

stock; a stiff churchman, who breakfasted regularly on fat broth and

Caerphilly cheese in the fashion of his ancestors; hot, spiced elder

wine was for winter nights, and gin for festal seasons. The farm had

always been the freehold of the family, and when Lucian, in the wake of

the yeoman, passed through the deep porch by the oaken door, down into

the long dark kitchen, he felt as though the seventeenth century still

lingered on. One mullioned window, set deep in the sloping wall, gave

all the light there was through quarries of thick glass in which there

were whorls and circles, so that the lapping rose-branch and the garden

and the fields beyond were distorted to the sight. Two heavy beams,

oaken but whitewashed, ran across the ceiling; a little glow of fire

sparkled in the great fireplace, and a curl of blue smoke fled up the

cavern of the chimney. Here was the genuine chimney-corner of our

fathers; there were seats on each side of the fireplace where one could

sit snug and sheltered on December nights, warm and merry in the

blazing light, and listen to the battle of the storm, and hear the

flame spit and hiss at the falling snowflakes. At the back of the fire

were great blackened tiles with raised initials and a date—I.M., 1684.

“Sit down, Master Lucian, sit down, sir,” said Morgan.

“Annie,” he called through one of the numerous doors, “here’s Master

Lucian, the parson, would like a drop of cider. Fetch a jug, will you,

directly?”

“Very well, father,” came the voice from the dairy and presently the

girl entered, wiping the jug she held. In his boyish way Lucian had

been a good deal disturbed by Annie Morgan; he could see her on Sundays

from his seat in church, and her skin, curiously pale, her lips that

seemed as though they were stained with some brilliant pigment, her

black hair, and the quivering black eyes, gave him odd fancies which he

had hardly shaped to himself. Annie had grown into a woman in three

years, and he was still a boy. She came into the kitchen, curtsying and

smiling.

“Good-day, Master Lucian, and how is Mr. Taylor, sir?”

“Pretty well, thank you. I hope you are well.”

“Nicely, sir, thank you. How nice your voice do sound in church, Master

Lucian, to be sure. I was telling father about it last Sunday.”

Lucian grinned and felt uncomfortable, and the girl set down the jug on

the round table and brought a glass from the dresser. She bent close

over him as she poured out the green oily cider, fragrant of the

orchard; her hand touched his shoulder for a moment, and she said, “I

beg your pardon, sir,” very prettily. He looked up eagerly at her face;

the black eyes, a little oval in shape, were shining, and the lips

smiled. Annie wore a plain dress of some black stuff, open at the

throat; her skin was beautiful. For a moment the ghost of a fancy

hovered unsubstantial in his mind; and then Annie curtsied as she

handed him the cider, and replied to his thanks with, “And welcome

kindly, sir.”

The drink was really good; not thin, nor sweet, but round and full and

generous, with a fine yellow flame twinkling through the green when one

held it up to the light. It was like a stray sunbeam hovering on the

grass in a deep orchard, and he swallowed the glassful with relish, and

had some more, warmly commending it. Mr. Morgan was touched.

“I see you do know a good thing, sir,” he said. “Is, indeed, now, it’s

good stuff, though it’s my own makin’. My old grandfather he planted

the trees in the time of the wars, and he was a very good judge of an

apple in his day and generation. And a famous grafter he was, to be

sure. You will never see no swelling in the trees he grafted at all

whatever. Now there’s James Morris, Penyrhaul, he’s a famous grafter,

too, and yet them Redstreaks he grafted for me five year ago, they be

all swollen-like below the graft already. Would you like to taste a

Blemmin pippin, now, Master Lucian? there be a few left in the loft, I

believe.”

Lucian said he should like an apple very much, and the farmer went out

by another door, and Annie stayed in the kitchen talking. She said Mrs.

Trevor, her married sister, was coming to them soon to spend a few

days.

“She’s got such a beautiful baby,” said Annie, “and he’s quite

sensible-like already, though he’s only nine months old. Mary would

like to see you, sir, if you would be so kind as to step in; that is,

if it’s not troubling you at all, Master Lucian. I suppose you must be

getting a fine scholar now, sir?”

“I am doing pretty well, thank you,” said the boy. “I was first in my

form last term.”

“Fancy! To think of that! D’you hear, father, what a scholar Master

Lucian be getting?”

“He be a rare grammarian, I’m sure,” said the farmer. “You do take

after your father, sir; I always do say that nobody have got such a

good deliverance in the pulpit.”

Lucian did not find the Blenheim Orange as good as the cider, but he

ate it with all the appearance of relish, and put another, with thanks,

in his pocket. He thanked the farmer again when he got up to go; and

Annie curtsied and smiled, and wished him good-day, and welcome,

kindly.

Lucian heard her saying to her father as he went out what a

nice-mannered young gentleman he was getting, to be sure; and he went

on his way, thinking that Annie was really very pretty, and speculating

as to whether he would have the courage to kiss her, if they met in a

dark lane. He was quite sure she would only laugh, and say, “Oh, Master

Lucian!”

For many months he had occasional fits of recollection, both cold and

hot; but the bridge of time, gradually lengthening, made those dreadful

and delicious images grow more and more indistinct, till at last they

all passed into that wonderland which a youth looks back upon in

amazement, not knowing why this used to be a symbol of terror or that

of joy. At the end of each term he would come home and find his father

a little more despondent, and harder to cheer even for a moment; and

the wall paper and the furniture grew more and more dingy and shabby.

The two cats, loved and ancient beasts, that he remembered when he was

quite a little boy, before he went to school, died miserably, one after

the other. Old Polly, the pony, at last fell down in the stable from

the weakness of old age, and had to be killed there; the battered old

trap ran no longer along the well-remembered lanes. There was long

meadow grass on the lawn, and the trained fruit trees on the wall had

got quite out of hand. At last, when Lucian was seventeen, his father

was obliged to take him from school; he could no longer afford the

fees. This was the sorry ending of many hopes, and dreams of a

double-first, a fellowship, distinction and glory that the poor parson

had long entertained for his son, and the two moped together, in the

shabby room, one on each side of the sulky fire, thinking of dead days

and finished plans, and seeing a grey future in the years that advanced

towards them. At one time there seemed some chance of a distant

relative coming forward to Lucian’s assistance; and indeed it was quite

settled that he should go up to London with certain definite aims. Mr.

Taylor told the good news to his acquaintances—his coat was too green

now for any pretence of friendship; and Lucian himself spoke of his

plans to Burrows the doctor and Mr. Dixon, and one or two others. Then

the whole scheme fell through, and the parson and his son suffered much

sympathy. People, of course, had to say they were sorry, but in reality

the news was received with high spirits, with the joy with which one

sees a stone, as it rolls down a steep place, give yet another bounding

leap towards the pool beneath. Mrs. Dixon heard the pleasant tidings

from Mrs. Colley, who came in to talk about the Mothers’ Meeting and

the Band of Hope. Mrs. Dixon was nursing little Æthelwig, or some such

name, at the time, and made many affecting observations on the general

righteousness with which the world was governed. Indeed, poor Lucian’s

disappointment seemed distinctly to increase her faith in the Divine

Order, as if it had been some example in Butler’s \_Analogy\_.

“Aren’t Mr. Taylor’s views very \_extreme?\_” she said to her husband the

same evening.

“I am afraid they are,” he replied. “I was quite \_grieved\_ at the last

Diocesan Conference at the way in which he spoke. The dear old bishop

had given an address on Auricular Confession; he was \_forced\_ to do so,

you know, after what had happened, and I must say that I never felt

prouder of our beloved Church.”

Mr. Dixon told all the Homeric story of the conference, reciting the

achievements of the champions, “deploring” this and applauding that. It

seemed that Mr. Taylor had had the audacity to quote authorities which

the bishop could not very well repudiate, though they were directly

opposed to the “safe” Episcopal pronouncement.

Mrs. Dixon of course was grieved; it was “sad” to think of a clergyman

behaving so shamefully.

“But you know, dear,” she proceeded, “I have been thinking about that

unfortunate Taylor boy and his disappointments, and after what you’ve

just told me, I am sure it’s some kind of judgment on them both. Has

Mr. Taylor forgotten the vows he took at his ordination? But don’t you

think, dear, I am right, and that he has been punished: ‘The sins of

the fathers’?”

Somehow or other Lucian divined the atmosphere of threatenings and

judgments, and shrank more and more from the small society of the

countryside. For his part, when he was not “mooning” in the beloved

fields and woods of happy memory, he shut himself up with books,

reading whatever could be found on the shelves, and amassing a store of

incongruous and obsolete knowledge. Long did he linger with the men of

the seventeenth century; delaying in the gay sunlit streets with Pepys,

and listening to the charmed sound of the Restoration Revel; roaming by

peaceful streams with Izaak Walton, and the great Catholic divines;

enchanted with the portrait of Herbert the loving ascetic; awed by the

mystic breath of Crashaw. Then the cavalier poets sang their gallant

songs; and Herrick made Dean Prior magic ground by the holy incantation

of a verse. And in the old proverbs and homely sayings of the time he

found the good and beautiful English life, a time full of grace and

dignity and rich merriment. He dived deeper and deeper into his books;

he had taken all obsolescence to be his province; in his disgust at the

stupid usual questions, “Will it pay?” “What good is it?” and so forth,

he would only read what was uncouth and useless. The strange pomp and

symbolism of the Cabala, with its hint of more terrible things; the

Rosicrucian mysteries of Fludd, the enigmas of Vaughan, dreams of

alchemists—all these were his delight. Such were his companions, with

the hills and hanging woods, the brooks and lonely waterpools; books,

the thoughts of books, the stirrings of imagination, all fused into one

phantasy by the magic of the outland country. He held himself aloof

from the walls of the fort; he was content to see the heaped mounds,

the violent height with faerie bulwarks, from the gate in the lane, and

to leave all within the ring of oaks in the mystery of his boyhood’s

vision. He professed to laugh at himself and at his fancies of that hot

August afternoon, when sleep came to him within the thicket, but in his

heart of hearts there was something that never faded—something that

glowed like the red glint of a gypsy’s fire seen from afar across the

hills and mists of the night, and known to be burning in a wild land.

Sometimes, when he was sunken in his books, the flame of delight shot

up, and showed him a whole province and continent of his nature, all

shining and aglow; and in the midst of the exultation and triumph he

would draw back, a little afraid. He had become ascetic in his studious

and melancholy isolation, and the vision of such ecstasies frightened

him. He began to write a little; at first very tentatively and feebly,

and then with more confidence. He showed some of his verses to his

father, who told him with a sigh that he had once hoped to write—in the

old days at Oxford, he added.

“They are very nicely done,” said the parson; “but I’m afraid you won’t

find anybody to print them, my boy.”

So he pottered on; reading everything, imitating what struck his fancy,

attempting the effect of the classic meters in English verse, trying

his hand at a masque, a Restoration comedy, forming impossible plans

for books which rarely got beyond half a dozen lines on a sheet of

paper; beset with splendid fancies which refused to abide before the

pen. But the vain joy of conception was not altogether vain, for it

gave him some armor about his heart.

The months went by, monotonous, and sometimes blotted with despair. He

wrote and planned and filled the waste-paper basket with hopeless

efforts. Now and then he sent verses or prose articles to magazines, in

pathetic ignorance of the trade. He felt the immense difficulty of the

career of literature without clearly understanding it; the battle was

happily in a mist, so that the host of the enemy, terribly arrayed, was

to some extent hidden. Yet there was enough of difficulty to appall;

from following the intricate course of little nameless brooks, from

hushed twilight woods, from the vision of the mountains, and the breath

of the great wind, passing from deep to deep, he would come home filled

with thoughts and emotions, mystic fancies which he yearned to

translate into the written word. And the result of the effort seemed

always to be bathos! Wooden sentences, a portentous stilted style,

obscurity, and awkwardness clogged the pen; it seemed impossible to win

the great secret of language; the stars glittered only in the darkness,

and vanished away in clearer light. The periods of despair were often

long and heavy, the victories very few and trifling; night after night

he sat writing after his father had knocked out his last pipe, filling

a page with difficulty in an hour, and usually forced to thrust the

stuff away in despair, and go unhappily to bed, conscious that after

all his labour he had done nothing. And these were moments when the

accustomed vision of the land alarmed him, and the wild domed hills and

darkling woods seemed symbols of some terrible secret in the inner life

of that stranger—himself. Sometimes when he was deep in his books and

papers, sometimes on a lonely walk, sometimes amidst the tiresome

chatter of Caermaen “society,” he would thrill with a sudden sense of

awful hidden things, and there ran that quivering flame through his

nerves that brought back the recollection of the matted thicket, and

that earlier appearance of the bare black boughs enwrapped with flames.

Indeed, though he avoided the solitary lane, and the sight of the sheer

height, with its ring of oaks and moulded mounds, the image of it grew

more intense as the symbol of certain hints and suggestions. The

exultant and insurgent flesh seemed to have its temple and castle

within those olden walls, and he longed with all his heart to escape,

to set himself free in the wilderness of London, and to be secure

amidst the murmur of modern streets.

II.

Lucian was growing really anxious about his manuscript. He had gained

enough experience at twenty-three to know that editors and publishers

must not be hurried; but his book had been lying at Messrs. Beit’s

office for more than three months. For six weeks he had not dared to

expect an answer, but afterwards life had become agonizing. Every

morning, at post-time, the poor wretch nearly choked with anxiety to

know whether his sentence had arrived, and the rest of the day was

racked with alternate pangs of hope and despair. Now and then he was

almost assured of success; conning over these painful and eager pages

in memory, he found parts that were admirable, while again, his

inexperience reproached him, and he feared he had written a raw and

awkward book, wholly unfit for print. Then he would compare what he

remembered of it with notable magazine articles and books praised by

reviewers, and fancy that after all there might be good points in the

thing; he could not help liking the first chapter for instance. Perhaps

the letter might come tomorrow. So it went on; week after week of sick

torture made more exquisite by such gleams of hope; it was as if he

were stretched in anguish on the rack, and the pain relaxed and kind

words spoken now and again by the tormentors, and then once more the

grinding pang and burning agony. At last he could bear suspense no

longer, and he wrote to Messrs. Beit, inquiring in a humble manner

whether the manuscript had arrived in safety. The firm replied in a

very polite letter, expressing regret that their reader had been

suffering from a cold in the head, and had therefore been unable to

send in his report. A final decision was promised in a week’s time, and

the letter ended with apologies for the delay and a hope that he had

suffered no inconvenience. Of course the “final decision” did not come

at the end of the week, but the book was returned at the end of three

weeks, with a circular thanking the author for his kindness in

submitting the manuscript, and regretting that the firm did not see

their way to producing it. He felt relieved; the operation that he had

dreaded and deprecated for so long was at last over, and he would no

longer grow sick of mornings when the letters were brought in. He took

his parcel to the sunny corner of the garden, where the old wooden seat

stood sheltered from the biting March winds. Messrs. Beit had put in

with the circular one of their short lists, a neat booklet, headed:

\_Messrs. Beit & Co.’s Recent Publications\_.

He settled himself comfortably on the seat, lit his pipe, and began to

read: “\_A Bad Un to Beat:\_ a Novel of Sporting Life, by the Honorable

Mrs. Scudamore Runnymede, author of \_Yoicks, With the Mudshire Pack,

The Sportleigh Stables\_, etc., etc., 3 vols. At all Libraries.” The

\_Press\_, it seemed, pronounced this to be “a charming book. Mrs.

Runnymede has wit and humor enough to furnish forth half-a-dozen

ordinary sporting novels.” “Told with the sparkle and vivacity of a

past-mistress in the art of novel writing,” said the \_Review\_; while

Miranda, of \_Smart Society\_, positively bubbled with enthusiasm. “You

must forgive me, Aminta,” wrote this young person, “if I have not sent

the description I promised of Madame Lulu’s new creations and others of

that ilk. I must a tale unfold; Tom came in yesterday and began to rave

about the Honorable Mrs. Scudamore Runnymede’s last novel, \_A Bad Un to

Beat\_. He says all the Smart Set are talking of it, and it seems the

police have to regulate the crowd at Mudie’s. You know I read

everything Mrs. Runnymede writes, so I set out Miggs directly to beg,

borrow or steal a copy, and I confess I burnt the midnight oil before I

laid it down. Now, mind you get it, you will find it so awfully

\_chic\_.” Nearly all the novelists on Messrs. Beit’s list were ladies,

their works all ran to three volumes, and all of them pleased the

\_Press\_, the \_Review\_, and Miranda of \_Smart Society\_. One of these

books, \_Millicent’s Marriage\_, by Sarah Pocklington Sanders, was

pronounced fit to lie on the school-room table, on the drawing-room

bookshelf, or beneath the pillow of the most gently nurtured of our

daughters. “This,” the reviewer went on, “is high praise, especially in

these days when we are deafened by the loud-voiced clamor of

self-styled ‘artists.’ We would warn the young men who prate so

persistently of style and literature, construction and prose harmonies,

that we believe the English reading public will have none of them.

Harmless amusement, a gentle flow of domestic interest, a faithful

reproduction of the open and manly life of the hunting field, pictures

of innocent and healthy English girlhood such as Miss Sanders here

affords us; these are the topics that will always find a welcome in our

homes, which remain bolted and barred against the abandoned artist and

the scrofulous stylist.”

He turned over the pages of the little book and chuckled in high

relish; he discovered an honest enthusiasm, a determination to strike a

blow for the good and true that refreshed and exhilarated. A beaming

face, spectacled and whiskered probably, an expansive waistcoat, and a

tender heart, seemed to shine through the words which Messrs. Beit had

quoted; and the alliteration of the final sentence; that was good too;

there was style for you if you wanted it. The champion of the blushing

cheek and the gushing eye showed that he too could handle the weapons

of the enemy if he cared to trouble himself with such things. Lucian

leant back and roared with indecent laughter till the tabby tom-cat who

had succeeded to the poor dead beasts looked up reproachfully from his

sunny corner, with a face like the reviewer’s, innocent and round and

whiskered. At last he turned to his parcel and drew out some half-dozen

sheets of manuscript, and began to read in a rather desponding spirit;

it was pretty obvious, he thought, that the stuff was poor and beneath

the standard of publication. The book had taken a year and a half in

the making; it was a pious attempt to translate into English prose the

form and mystery of the domed hills, the magic of occult valleys, the

sound of the red swollen brook swirling through leafless woods.

Day-dreams and toil at nights had gone into the eager pages, he had

laboured hard to do his very best, writing and rewriting, weighing his

cadences, beginning over and over again, grudging no patience, no

trouble if only it might be pretty good; good enough to print and sell

to a reading public which had become critical. He glanced through the

manuscript in his hand, and to his astonishment, he could not help

thinking that in its measure it was decent work. After three months his

prose seemed fresh and strange as if it had been wrought by another

man, and in spite of himself he found charming things, and impressions

that were not commonplace. He knew how weak it all was compared with

his own conceptions; he had seen an enchanted city, awful, glorious,

with flame smitten about its battlements, like the cities of the

Sangraal, and he had moulded his copy in such poor clay as came to his

hand; yet, in spite of the gulf that yawned between the idea and the

work, he knew as he read that the thing accomplished was very far from

a failure. He put back the leaves carefully, and glanced again at

Messrs. Beit’s list. It had escaped his notice that \_A Bad Un to Beat\_

was in its third three-volume edition. It was a great thing, at all

events, to know in what direction to aim, if he wished to succeed. If

he worked hard, he thought, he might some day win the approval of the

coy and retiring Miranda of \_Smart Society\_; that modest maiden might

in his praise interrupt her task of disinterested advertisement, her

philanthropic counsels to “go to Jumper’s, and mind you ask for Mr. C.

Jumper, who will show you the lovely blue paper with the yellow spots

at ten shillings the piece.” He put down the pamphlet, and laughed

again at the books and the reviewers: so that he might not weep. This

then was English fiction, this was English criticism, and farce, after

all, was but an ill-played tragedy.

The rejected manuscript was hidden away, and his father quoted Horace’s

maxim as to the benefit of keeping literary works for some time “in the

wood.” There was nothing to grumble at, though Lucian was inclined to

think the duration of the reader’s catarrh a little exaggerated. But

this was a trifle; he did not arrogate to himself the position of a

small commercial traveler, who expects prompt civility as a matter of

course, and not at all as a favor. He simply forgot his old book, and

resolved that he would make a better one if he could. With the hot fit

of resolution, the determination not to be snuffed out by one refusal

upon him, he began to beat about in his mind for some new scheme. At

first it seemed that he had hit upon a promising subject; he began to

plot out chapters and scribble hints for the curious story that had

entered his mind, arranging his circumstances and noting the effects to

be produced with all the enthusiasm of the artist. But after the first

breath the aspect of the work changed; page after page was tossed aside

as hopeless, the beautiful sentences he had dreamed of refused to be

written, and his puppets remained stiff and wooden, devoid of life or

motion. Then all the old despairs came back, the agonies of the

artificer who strives and perseveres in vain; the scheme that seemed of

amorous fire turned to cold hard ice in his hands. He let the pen drop

from his fingers, and wondered how he could have ever dreamed of

writing books. Again, the thought occurred that he might do something

if he could only get away, and join the sad procession in the murmuring

London streets, far from the shadow of those awful hills. But it was

quite impossible; the relative who had once promised assistance was

appealed to, and wrote expressing his regret that Lucian had turned out

a “loafer,” wasting his time in scribbling, instead of trying to earn

his living. Lucian felt rather hurt at this letter, but the parson only

grinned grimly as usual. He was thinking of how he signed a check many

years before, in the days of his prosperity, and the check was payable

to this didactic relative, then in but a poor way, and of a thankful

turn of mind.

The old rejected manuscript had almost passed out of his recollection.

It was recalled oddly enough. He was looking over the \_Reader\_, and

enjoying the admirable literary criticisms, some three months after the

return of his book, when his eye was attracted by a quoted passage in

one of the notices. The thought and style both wakened memory, the

cadences were familiar and beloved. He read through the review from the

beginning; it was a very favorable one, and pronounced the volume an

immense advance on Mr. Ritson’s previous work. “Here, undoubtedly, the

author has discovered a vein of pure metal,” the reviewer added, “and

we predict that he will go far.” Lucian had not yet reached his

father’s stage, he was unable to grin in the manner of that irreverent

parson. The passage selected for high praise was taken almost word for

word from the manuscript now resting in his room, the work that had not

reached the high standard of Messrs. Beit & Co., who, curiously enough,

were the publishers of the book reviewed in the \_Reader\_. He had a few

shillings in his possession, and wrote at once to a bookseller in

London for a copy of \_The Chorus in Green\_, as the author had oddly

named the book. He wrote on June 21st and thought he might fairly

expect to receive the interesting volume by the 24th; but the postman,

true to his tradition, brought nothing for him, and in the afternoon he

resolved to walk down to Caermaen, in case it might have come by a

second post; or it might have been mislaid at the office; they forgot

parcels sometimes, especially when the bag was heavy and the weather

hot. This 24th was a sultry and oppressive day; a grey veil of cloud

obscured the sky, and a vaporous mist hung heavily over the land, and

fumed up from the valleys. But at five o’clock, when he started, the

clouds began to break, and the sunlight suddenly streamed down through

the misty air, making ways and channels of rich glory, and bright

islands in the gloom. It was a pleasant and shining evening when,

passing by devious back streets to avoid the barbarians (as he very

rudely called the respectable inhabitants of the town), he reached the

post-office; which was also the general shop.

“Yes, Mr. Taylor, there is something for you, sir,” said the man.

“William the postman forgot to take it up this morning,” and he handed

over the packet. Lucian took it under his arm and went slowly through

the ragged winding lanes till he came into the country. He got over the

first stile on the road, and sitting down in the shelter of a hedge,

cut the strings and opened the parcel. \_The Chorus in Green\_ was got up

in what reviewers call a dainty manner: a bronze-green cloth, well-cut

gold lettering, wide margins and black “old-face” type, all witnessed

to the good taste of Messrs. Beit & Co. He cut the pages hastily and

began to read. He soon found that he had wronged Mr. Ritson—that old

literary hand had by no means stolen his book wholesale, as he had

expected. There were about two hundred pages in the pretty little

volume, and of these about ninety were Lucian’s, dovetailed into a

rather different scheme with skill that was nothing short of exquisite.

And Mr. Ritson’s own work was often very good; spoilt here and there

for some tastes by the “cataloguing” method, a somewhat materialistic

way of taking an inventory of the holy country things; but, for that

very reason, contrasting to a great advantage with Lucian’s hints and

dreams and note of haunting. And here and there Mr. Ritson had made

little alterations in the style of the passages he had conveyed, and

most of these alterations were amendments, as Lucian was obliged to

confess, though he would have liked to argue one or two points with his

collabourator and corrector. He lit his pipe and leant back comfortably

in the hedge, thinking things over, weighing very coolly his experience

of humanity, his contact with the “society” of the countryside, the

affair of the \_The Chorus in Green\_, and even some little incidents

that had struck him as he was walking through the streets of Caermaen

that evening. At the post-office, when he was inquiring for his parcel,

he had heard two old women grumbling in the street; it seemed, so far

as he could make out, that both had been disappointed in much the same

way. One was a Roman Catholic, hardened, and beyond the reach of

conversion; she had been advised to ask alms of the priests, “who are

always creeping and crawling about.” The other old sinner was a

Dissenter, and, “Mr. Dixon has quite enough to do to relieve good

Church people.” Mrs. Dixon, assisted by Henrietta, was, it seemed, the

lady high almoner, who dispensed these charities. As she said to Mrs.

Colley, they would end by keeping all the beggars in the county, and

they really couldn’t afford it. A large family was an expensive thing,

and the girls \_must\_ have new frocks. “Mr. Dixon is always telling me

and the girls that we must not \_demoralize\_ the people by

indiscriminate charity.” Lucian had heard of these sage counsels, and

through it them as he listened to the bitter complaints of the gaunt,

hungry old women. In the back street by which he passed out of the town

he saw a large “healthy” boy kicking a sick cat; the poor creature had

just strength enough to crawl under an outhouse door; probably to die

in torments. He did not find much satisfaction in thrashing the boy,

but he did it with hearty good will. Further on, at the corner where

the turnpike used to be, was a big notice, announcing a meeting at the

school-room in aid of the missions to the Portuguese. “Under the

Patronage of the Lord Bishop of the Diocese,” was the imposing

headline; the Reverend Merivale Dixon, vicar of Caermaen, was to be in

the chair, supported by Stanley Gervase, Esq., J.P., and by many of the

clergy and gentry of the neighborhood. Senhor Diabo, “formerly a

Romanist priest, now an evangelist in Lisbon,” would address the

meeting. “Funds are urgently needed to carry on this good work,”

concluded the notice. So he lay well back in the shade of the hedge,

and thought whether some sort of an article could not be made by

vindicating the terrible Yahoos; one might point out that they were in

many respects a simple and unsophisticated race, whose faults were the

result of their enslaved position, while such virtues as they had were

all their own. They might be compared, he thought, much to their

advantage, with more complex civilizations. There was no hint of

anything like the Beit system of publishing in existence amongst them;

the great Yahoo nation would surely never feed and encourage a scabby

Houyhnhnm, expelled for his foulness from the horse-community, and the

witty dean, in all his minuteness, had said nothing of “safe” Yahoos.

On reflection, however, he did not feel quite secure of this part of

his defense; he remembered that the leading brutes had favorites, who

were employed in certain simple domestic offices about their masters,

and it seemed doubtful whether the contemplated vindication would not

break down on this point. He smiled queerly to himself as he thought of

these comparisons, but his heart burned with a dull fury. Throwing back

his unhappy memory, he recalled all the contempt and scorn he had

suffered; as a boy he had heard the masters murmuring their disdain of

him and of his desire to learn other than ordinary school work. As a

young man he had suffered the insolence of these wretched people about

him; their cackling laughter at his poverty jarred and grated in his

ears; he saw the acrid grin of some miserable idiot woman, some

creature beneath the swine in intelligence and manners, merciless, as

he went by with his eyes on the dust, in his ragged clothes. He and his

father seemed to pass down an avenue of jeers and contempt, and

contempt from such animals as these! This putrid filth, moulded into

human shape, made only to fawn on the rich and beslaver them, thinking

no foulness too foul if it were done in honor of those in power and

authority; and no refined cruelty of contempt too cruel if it were

contempt of the poor and humble and oppressed; it was to this obscene

and ghastly throng that he was something to be pointed at. And these

men and women spoke of sacred things, and knelt before the awful altar

of God, before the altar of tremendous fire, surrounded as they

professed by Angels and Archangels and all the Company of Heaven; and

in their very church they had one aisle for the rich and another for

the poor. And the species was not peculiar to Caermaen; the rich

business men in London and the successful brother author were probably

amusing themselves at the expense of the poor struggling creature they

had injured and wounded; just as the “healthy” boy had burst into a

great laugh when the miserable sick cat cried out in bitter agony, and

trailed its limbs slowly, as it crept away to die. Lucian looked into

his own life and his own will; he saw that in spite of his follies, and

his want of success, he had not been consciously malignant, he had

never deliberately aided in oppression, or looked on it with enjoyment

and approval, and he felt that when he lay dead beneath the earth,

eaten by swarming worms, he would be in a purer company than now, when

he lived amongst human creatures. And he was to call this loathsome

beast, all sting and filth, brother! “I had rather call the devils my

brothers,” he said in his heart, “I would fare better in hell.” Blood

was in his eyes, and as he looked up the sky seemed of blood, and the

earth burned with fire.

The sun was sinking low on the mountain when he set out on the way

again. Burrows, the doctor, coming home in his trap, met him a little

lower on the road, and gave him a friendly good-night.

“A long way round on this road, isn’t it?” said the doctor. “As you

have come so far, why don’t you try the short cut across the fields?

You will find it easily enough; second stile on the left hand, and then

go straight ahead.”

He thanked Dr. Burrows and said he would try the short cut, and Burrows

span on homeward. He was a gruff and honest bachelor, and often felt

very sorry for the lad, and wished he could help him. As he drove on,

it suddenly occurred to him that Lucian had an awful look on his face,

and he was sorry he had not asked him to jump in, and to come to

supper. A hearty slice of beef, with strong ale, whisky and soda

afterwards, a good pipe, and certain Rabelaisian tales which the doctor

had treasured for many years, would have done the poor fellow a lot of

good, he was certain. He half turned round on his seat, and looked to

see if Lucian were still in sight, but he had passed the corner, and

the doctor drove on, shivering a little; the mists were beginning to

rise from the wet banks of the river.

Lucian trailed slowly along the road, keeping a look out for the stile

the doctor had mentioned. It would be a little of an adventure, he

thought, to find his way by an unknown track; he knew the direction in

which his home lay, and he imagined he would not have much difficulty

in crossing from one stile to another. The path led him up a steep bare

field, and when he was at the top, the town and the valley winding up

to the north stretched before him. The river was stilled at the flood,

and the yellow water, reflecting the sunset, glowed in its deep pools

like dull brass. These burning pools, the level meadows fringed with

shuddering reeds, the long dark sweep of the forest on the hill, were

all clear and distinct, yet the light seemed to have clothed them with

a new garment, even as voices from the streets of Caermaen sounded

strangely, mounting up thin with the smoke. There beneath him lay the

huddled cluster of Caermaen, the ragged and uneven roofs that marked

the winding and sordid streets, here and there a pointed gable rising

above its meaner fellows; beyond he recognized the piled mounds that

marked the circle of the amphitheatre, and the dark edge of trees that

grew where the Roman wall whitened and waxed old beneath the frosts and

rains of eighteen hundred years. Thin and strange, mingled together,

the voices came up to him on the hill; it was as if an outland race

inhabited the ruined city and talked in a strange language of strange

and terrible things. The sun had slid down the sky, and hung quivering

over the huge dark dome of the mountain like a burnt sacrifice, and

then suddenly vanished. In the afterglow the clouds began to writhe and

turn scarlet, and shone so strangely reflected in the pools of the

snake-like river, that one would have said the still waters stirred,

the fleeting and changing of the clouds seeming to quicken the stream,

as if it bubbled and sent up gouts of blood. But already about the town

the darkness was forming; fast, fast the shadows crept upon it from the

forest, and from all sides banks and wreaths of curling mist were

gathering, as if a ghostly leaguer were being built up against the

city, and the strange race who lived in its streets. Suddenly there

burst out from the stillness the clear and piercing music of the

\_réveillé\_, calling, recalling, iterated, reiterated, and ending with

one long high fierce shrill note with which the steep hills rang.

Perhaps a boy in the school band was practicing on his bugle, but for

Lucian it was magic. For him it was the note of the Roman trumpet,

\_tuba mirum spargens sonum\_, filling all the hollow valley with its

command, reverberated in dark places in the far forest, and resonant in

the old graveyards without the walls. In his imagination he saw the

earthen gates of the tombs broken open, and the serried legion swarming

to the eagles. Century by century they passed by; they rose, dripping,

from the river bed, they rose from the level, their armor shone in the

quiet orchard, they gathered in ranks and companies from the cemetery,

and as the trumpet sounded, the hill fort above the town gave up its

dead. By hundreds and thousands the ghostly battle surged about the

standard, behind the quaking mist, ready to march against the

mouldering walls they had built so many years before.

He turned sharply; it was growing very dark, and he was afraid of

missing his way. At first the path led him by the verge of a wood;

there was a noise of rustling and murmuring from the trees as if they

were taking evil counsel together. A high hedge shut out the sight of

the darkening valley, and he stumbled on mechanically, without taking

much note of the turnings of the track, and when he came out from the

wood shadow to the open country, he stood for a moment quite bewildered

and uncertain. A dark wild twilight country lay before him, confused

dim shapes of trees near at hand, and a hollow below his feet, and the

further hills and woods were dimmer, and all the air was very still.

Suddenly the darkness about him glowed; a furnace fire had shot up on

the mountain, and for a moment the little world of the woodside and the

steep hill shone in a pale light, and he thought he saw his path beaten

out in the turf before him. The great flame sank down to a red glint of

fire, and it led him on down the ragged slope, his feet striking

against ridges of ground, and falling from beneath him at a sudden dip.

The bramble bushes shot out long prickly vines, amongst which he was

entangled, and lower he was held back by wet bubbling earth. He had

descended into a dark and shady valley, beset and tapestried with

gloomy thickets; the weird wood noises were the only sounds, strange,

unutterable mutterings, dismal, inarticulate. He pushed on in what he

hoped was the right direction, stumbling from stile to gate, peering

through mist and shadow, and still vainly seeking for any known

landmark. Presently another sound broke upon the grim air, the murmur

of water poured over stones, gurgling against the old misshapen roots

of trees, and running clear in a deep channel. He passed into the chill

breath of the brook, and almost fancied he heard two voices speaking in

its murmur; there seemed a ceaseless utterance of words, an endless

argument. With a mood of horror pressing on him, he listened to the

noise of waters, and the wild fancy seized him that he was not

deceived, that two unknown beings stood together there in the darkness

and tried the balances of his life, and spoke his doom. The hour in the

matted thicket rushed over the great bridge of years to his thought; he

had sinned against the earth, and the earth trembled and shook for

vengeance. He stayed still for a moment, quivering with fear, and at

last went on blindly, no longer caring for the path, if only he might

escape from the toils of that dismal shuddering hollow. As he plunged

through the hedges the bristling thorns tore his face and hands; he

fell amongst stinging-nettles and was pricked as he beat out his way

amidst the gorse. He raced headlong, his head over his shoulder,

through a windy wood, bare of undergrowth; there lay about the ground

mouldering stumps, the relics of trees that had thundered to their

fall, crashing and tearing to earth, long ago; and from these remains

there flowed out a pale thin radiance, filling the spaces of the

sounding wood with a dream of light. He had lost all count of the

track; he felt he had fled for hours, climbing and descending, and yet

not advancing; it was as if he stood still and the shadows of the land

went by, in a vision. But at last a hedge, high and straggling, rose

before him, and as he broke through it, his feet slipped, and he fell

headlong down a steep bank into a lane. He lay still, half-stunned, for

a moment, and then rising unsteadily, he looked desperately into the

darkness before him, uncertain and bewildered. In front it was black as

a midnight cellar, and he turned about, and saw a glint in the

distance, as if a candle were flickering in a farm-house window. He

began to walk with trembling feet towards the light, when suddenly

something pale started out from the shadows before him, and seemed to

swim and float down the air. He was going down hill, and he hastened

onwards, and he could see the bars of a stile framed dimly against the

sky, and the figure still advanced with that gliding motion. Then, as

the road declined to the valley, the landmark he had been seeking

appeared. To his right there surged up in the darkness the darker

summit of the Roman fort, and the streaming fire of the great full moon

glowed through the bars of the wizard oaks, and made a halo shine about

the hill. He was now quite close to the white appearance, and saw that

it was only a woman walking swiftly down the lane; the floating

movement was an effect due to the somber air and the moon’s glamour. At

the gate, where he had spent so many hours gazing at the fort, they

walked foot to foot, and he saw it was Annie Morgan.

“Good evening, Master Lucian,” said the girl, “it’s very dark, sir,

indeed.”

“Good evening, Annie,” he answered, calling her by her name for the

first time, and he saw that she smiled with pleasure. “You are out

late, aren’t you?”

“Yes, sir; but I’ve been taking a bit of supper to old Mrs. Gibbon.

She’s been very poorly the last few days, and there’s nobody to do

anything for her.”

Then there were really people who helped one another; kindness and pity

were not mere myths, fictions of “society,” as useful as Doe and Roe,

and as non-existent. The thought struck Lucian with a shock; the

evening’s passion and delirium, the wild walk and physical fatigue had

almost shattered him in body and mind. He was “degenerate,” \_decadent\_,

and the rough rains and blustering winds of life, which a stronger man

would have laughed at and enjoyed, were to him “hail-storms and

fire-showers.” After all, Messrs. Beit, the publishers, were only sharp

men of business, and these terrible Dixons and Gervases and Colleys

merely the ordinary limited clergy and gentry of a quiet country town;

sturdier sense would have dismissed Dixon as an old humbug, Stanley

Gervase, Esquire, J.P., as a “bit of a bounder,” and the ladies as

“rather a shoddy lot.” But he was walking slowly now in painful

silence, his heavy, lagging feet striking against the loose stones. He

was not thinking of the girl beside him; only something seemed to swell

and grow and swell within his heart; it was all the torture of his

days, weary hopes and weary disappointment, scorn rankling and

throbbing, and the thought “I had rather call the devils my brothers

and live with them in hell.” He choked and gasped for breath, and felt

involuntary muscles working in his face, and the impulses of a madman

stirring him; he himself was in truth the realization of the vision of

Caermaen that night, a city with mouldering walls beset by the ghostly

legion. Life and the world and the laws of the sunlight had passed

away, and the resurrection and kingdom of the dead began. The Celt

assailed him, becoming from the weird wood he called the world, and his

far-off ancestors, the “little people,” crept out of their caves,

muttering charms and incantations in hissing inhuman speech; he was

beleaguered by desires that had slept in his race for ages.

“I am afraid you are very tired, Master Lucian. Would you like me to

give you my hand over this rough bit?”

He had stumbled against a great round stone and had nearly fallen. The

woman’s hand sought his in the darkness; as he felt the touch of the

soft warm flesh he moaned, and a pang shot through his arm to his

heart. He looked up and found he had only walked a few paces since

Annie had spoken; he had thought they had wandered for hours together.

The moon was just mounting above the oaks, and the halo round the dark

hill brightened. He stopped short, and keeping his hold of Annie’s

hand, looked into her face. A hazy glory of moonlight shone around them

and lit up their eyes. He had not greatly altered since his boyhood;

his face was pale olive in colour, thin and oval; marks of pain had

gathered about the eyes, and his black hair was already stricken with

grey. But the eager, curious gaze still remained, and what he saw

before him lit up his sadness with a new fire. She stopped too, and did

not offer to draw away, but looked back with all her heart. They were

alike in many ways; her skin was also of that olive colour, but her

face was sweet as a beautiful summer night, and her black eyes showed

no dimness, and the smile on the scarlet lips was like a flame when it

brightens a dark and lonely land.

“You are sorely tired, Master Lucian, let us sit down here by the

gate.”

It was Lucian who spoke next: “My dear, my dear.” And their lips were

together again, and their arms locked together, each holding the other

fast. And then the poor lad let his head sink down on his sweetheart’s

breast, and burst into a passion of weeping. The tears streamed down

his face, and he shook with sobbing, in the happiest moment that he had

ever lived. The woman bent over him and tried to comfort him, but his

tears were his consolation and his triumph. Annie was whispering to

him, her hand laid on his heart; she was whispering beautiful,

wonderful words, that soothed him as a song. He did not know what they

meant.

“Annie, dear, dear Annie, what are you saying to me? I have never heard

such beautiful words. Tell me, Annie, what do they mean?”

She laughed, and said it was only nonsense that the nurses sang to the

children.

“No, no, you are not to call me Master Lucian any more,” he said, when

they parted, “you must call me Lucian; and I, I worship you, my dear

Annie.”

He fell down before her, embracing her knees, and adored, and she

allowed him, and confirmed his worship. He followed slowly after her,

passing the path which led to her home with a longing glance. Nobody

saw any difference in Lucian when he reached the rectory. He came in

with his usual dreamy indifference, and told how he had lost his way by

trying the short cut. He said he had met Dr. Burrows on the road, and

that he had recommended the path by the fields. Then, as dully as if he

had been reading some story out of a newspaper, he gave his father the

outlines of the Beit case, producing the pretty little book called \_The

Chorus in Green\_. The parson listened in amazement.

“You mean to tell me that \_you\_ wrote this book?” he said. He was quite

roused.

“No; not all of it. Look; that bit is mine, and that; and the beginning

of this chapter. Nearly the whole of the third chapter is by me.”

He closed the book without interest, and indeed he felt astonished at

his father’s excitement. The incident seemed to him unimportant.

“And you say that eighty or ninety pages of this book are yours, and

these scoundrels have stolen your work?”

“Well, I suppose they have. I’ll fetch the manuscript, if you would

like to look at it.”

The manuscript was duly produced, wrapped in brown paper, with Messrs.

Beit’s address label on it, and the post-office dated stamps.

“And the other book has been out a month.” The parson, forgetting the

sacerdotal office, and his good habit of grinning, swore at Messrs.

Beit and Mr. Ritson, calling them damned thieves, and then began to

read the manuscript, and to compare it with the printed book.

“Why, it’s splendid work. My poor fellow,” he said after a while, “I

had no notion you could write so well. I used to think of such things

in the old days at Oxford; ‘old Bill,’ the tutor, used to praise my

essays, but I never wrote anything like this. And this infernal ruffian

of a Ritson has taken all your best things and mixed them up with his

own rot to make it go down. Of course you’ll expose the gang?”

Lucian was mildly amused; he couldn’t enter into his father’s feelings

at all. He sat smoking in one of the old easy chairs, taking the rare

relish of a hot grog with his pipe, and gazing out of his dreamy eyes

at the violent old parson. He was pleased that his father liked his

book, because he knew him to be a deep and sober scholar and a cool

judge of good letters; but he laughed to himself when he saw the magic

of print. The parson had expressed no wish to read the manuscript when

it came back in disgrace; he had merely grinned, said something about

boomerangs, and quoted Horace with relish. Whereas now, before the book

in its neat case, lettered with another man’s name, his approbation of

the writing and his disapproval of the “scoundrels,” as he called them,

were loudly expressed, and, though a good smoker, he blew and puffed

vehemently at his pipe.

“You’ll expose the rascals, of course, won’t you?” he said again.

“Oh no, I think not. It really doesn’t matter much, does it? After all,

there are some very weak things in the book; doesn’t it strike you as

‘young?’ I have been thinking of another plan, but I haven’t done much

with it lately. But I believe I’ve got hold of a really good idea this

time, and if I can manage to see the heart of it I hope to turn out a

manuscript worth stealing. But it’s so hard to get at the core of an

idea—the heart, as I call it,” he went on after a pause. “It’s like

having a box you can’t open, though you know there’s something

wonderful inside. But I do believe I’ve a fine thing in my hands, and I

mean to try my best to work it.”

Lucian talked with enthusiasm now, but his father, on his side, could

not share these ardors. It was his part to be astonished at excitement

over a book that was not even begun, the mere ghost of a book flitting

elusive in the world of unborn masterpieces and failures. He had loved

good letters, but he shared unconsciously in the general belief that

literary attempt is always pitiful, though he did not subscribe to the

other half of the popular faith—that literary success is a matter of

very little importance. He thought well of books, but only of printed

books; in manuscripts he put no faith, and the \_paulo-post-futurum\_

tense he could not in any manner conjugate. He returned once more to

the topic of palpable interest.

“But about this dirty trick these fellows have played on you. You won’t

sit quietly and bear it, surely? It’s only a question of writing to the

papers.”

“They wouldn’t put the letter in. And if they did, I should only get

laughed at. Some time ago a man wrote to the \_Reader\_, complaining of

his play being stolen. He said that he had sent a little one-act comedy

to Burleigh, the great dramatist, asking for his advice. Burleigh gave

his advice and took the idea for his own very successful play. So the

man said, and I daresay it was true enough. But the victim got nothing

by his complaint. ‘A pretty state of things,’ everybody said. ‘Here’s a

Mr. Tomson, that no one has ever heard of, bothers Burleigh with his

rubbish, and then accuses him of petty larceny. Is it likely that a man

of Burleigh’s position, a playwright who can make his five thousand a

year easily, would borrow from an unknown Tomson?’ I should think it

very likely, indeed,” Lucian went on, chuckling, “but that was their

verdict. No; I don’t think I’ll write to the papers.”

“Well, well, my boy, I suppose you know your own business best. I think

you are mistaken, but you must do as you like.”

“It’s all so unimportant,” said Lucian, and he really thought so. He

had sweeter things to dream of, and desired no communion of feeling

with that madman who had left Caermaen some few hours before. He felt

he had made a fool of himself, he was ashamed to think of the fatuity

of which he had been guilty, such boiling hatred was not only wicked,

but absurd. A man could do no good who put himself into a position of

such violent antagonism against his fellow-creatures; so Lucian rebuked

his heart, saying that he was old enough to know better. But he

remembered that he had sweeter things to dream of; there was a secret

ecstasy that he treasured and locked tight away, as a joy too exquisite

even for thought till he was quite alone; and then there was that

scheme for a new book that he had laid down hopelessly some time ago;

it seemed to have arisen into life again within the last hour; he

understood that he had started on a false tack, he had taken the wrong

aspect of his idea. Of course the thing couldn’t be written in that

way; it was like trying to read a page turned upside down; and he saw

those characters he had vainly sought suddenly disambushed, and a

splendid inevitable sequence of events unrolled before him.

It was a true resurrection; the dry plot he had constructed revealed

itself as a living thing, stirring and mysterious, and warm as life

itself. The parson was smoking stolidly to all appearance, but in

reality he was full of amazement at his own son, and now and again he

slipped sly furtive glances towards the tranquil young man in the

arm-chair by the empty hearth. In the first place, Mr. Taylor was

genuinely impressed by what he had read of Lucian’s work; he had so

long been accustomed to look upon all effort as futile that success

amazed him. In the abstract, of course, he was prepared to admit that

some people did write well and got published and made money, just as

other persons successfully backed an outsider at heavy odds; but it had

seemed as improbable that Lucian should show even the beginnings of

achievement in one direction as in the other. Then the boy evidently

cared so little about it; he did not appear to be proud of being worth

robbing, nor was he angry with the robbers.

He sat back luxuriously in the disreputable old chair, drawing long

slow wreaths of smoke, tasting his whisky from time to time, evidently

well at ease with himself. The father saw him smile, and it suddenly

dawned upon him that his son was very handsome; he had such kind gentle

eyes and a kind mouth, and his pale cheeks were flushed like a girl’s.

Mr. Taylor felt moved. What a harmless young fellow Lucian had been; no

doubt a little queer and different from others, but wholly inoffensive

and patient under disappointment. And Miss Deacon, her contribution to

the evening’s discussion had been characteristic; she had remarked,

firstly, that writing was a very unsettling occupation, and secondly,

that it was extremely foolish to entrust one’s property to people of

whom one knew nothing. Father and son had smiled together at these

observations, which were probably true enough. Mr. Taylor at last left

Lucian along; he shook hands with a good deal of respect, and said,

almost deferentially:

“You mustn’t work too hard, old fellow. I wouldn’t stay up too late, if

I were you, after that long walk. You must have gone miles out of your

way.”

“I’m not tired now, though. I feel as if I could write my new book on

the spot”; and the young man laughed a gay sweet laugh that struck the

father as a new note in his son’s life.

He sat still a moment after his father had left the room. He cherished

his chief treasure of thought in its secret place; he would not enjoy

it yet. He drew up a chair to the table at which he wrote or tried to

write, and began taking pens and paper from the drawer. There was a

great pile of ruled paper there; all of it used, on one side, and

signifying many hours of desperate scribbling, of heart-searching and

rack of his brain; an array of poor, eager lines written by a waning

fire with waning hope; all useless and abandoned. He took up the sheets

cheerfully, and began in delicious idleness to look over these

fruitless efforts. A page caught his attention; he remembered how he

wrote it while a November storm was dashing against the panes; and

there was another, with a queer blot in one corner; he had got up from

his chair and looked out, and all the earth was white fairyland, and

the snowflakes whirled round and round in the wind. Then he saw the

chapter begun of a night in March: a great gale blew that night and

rooted up one of the ancient yews in the churchyard. He had heard the

trees shrieking in the woods, and the long wail of the wind, and across

the heaven a white moon fled awfully before the streaming clouds. And

all these poor abandoned pages now seemed sweet, and past unhappiness

was transmuted into happiness, and the nights of toil were holy. He

turned over half a dozen leaves and began to sketch out the outlines of

the new book on the unused pages; running out a skeleton plan on one

page, and dotting fancies, suggestions, hints on others. He wrote

rapidly, overjoyed to find that loving phrases grew under his pen; a

particular scene he had imagined filled him with desire; he gave his

hand free course, and saw the written work glowing; and action and all

the heat of existence quickened and beat on the wet page. Happy fancies

took shape in happier words, and when at last he leant back in his

chair he felt the stir and rush of the story as if it had been some

portion of his own life. He read over what he had done with a renewed

pleasure in the nimble and flowing workmanship, and as he put the

little pile of manuscript tenderly in the drawer he paused to enjoy the

anticipation of tomorrow’s labour.

And then—but the rest of the night was given to tender and delicious

things, and when he went up to bed a scarlet dawn was streaming from

the east.

III.

For days Lucian lay in a swoon of pleasure, smiling when he was

addressed, sauntering happily in the sunlight, hugging recollection

warm to his heart. Annie had told him that she was going on a visit to

her married sister, and said, with a caress, that he must be patient.

He protested against her absence, but she fondled him, whispering her

charms in his ear till he gave in and then they said good-bye, Lucian

adoring on his knees. The parting was as strange as the meeting, and

that night when he laid his work aside, and let himself sink deep into

the joys of memory, all the encounter seemed as wonderful and

impossible as magic.

“And you really don’t mean to do anything about those rascals?” said

his father.

“Rascals? Which rascals? Oh, you mean Beit. I had forgotten all about

it.

No; I don’t think I shall trouble. They’re not worth powder and shot.”

And he returned to his dream, pacing slowly from the medlar to the

quince and back again. It seemed trivial to be interrupted by such

questions; he had not even time to think of the book he had recommenced

so eagerly, much less of this labour of long ago. He recollected

without interest that it cost him many pains, that it was pretty good

here and there, and that it had been stolen, and it seemed that there

was nothing more to be said on the matter. He wished to think of the

darkness in the lane, of the kind voice that spoke to him, of the kind

hand that sought his own, as he stumbled on the rough way. So far, it

was wonderful. Since he had left school and lost the company of the

worthy barbarians who had befriended him there, he had almost lost the

sense of kinship with humanity; he had come to dread the human form as

men dread the hood of the cobra. To Lucian a man or a woman meant

something that stung, that spoke words that rankled, and poisoned his

life with scorn. At first such malignity shocked him: he would ponder

over words and glances and wonder if he were not mistaken, and he still

sought now and then for sympathy. The poor boy had romantic ideas about

women; he believed they were merciful and pitiful, very kind to the

unlucky and helpless. Men perhaps had to be different; after all, the

duty of a man was to get on in the world, or, in plain language, to

make money, to be successful; to cheat rather than to be cheated, but

always to be successful; and he could understand that one who fell

below this high standard must expect to be severely judged by his

fellows. For example, there was young Bennett, Miss Spurry’s nephew.

Lucian had met him once or twice when he was spending his holidays with

Miss Spurry, and the two young fellows compared literary notes

together. Bennett showed some beautiful things he had written, over

which Lucian had grown both sad and enthusiastic. It was such exquisite

magic verse, and so much better than anything he ever hoped to write,

that there was a touch of anguish in his congratulations. But when

Bennett, after many vain prayers to his aunt, threw up a safe position

in the bank, and betook himself to a London garret, Lucian was not

surprised at the general verdict.

Mr. Dixon, as a clergyman, viewed the question from a high standpoint

and found it all deplorable, but the general opinion was that Bennett

was a hopeless young lunatic. Old Mr. Gervase went purple when his name

was mentioned, and the young Dixons sneered very merrily over the

adventure.

“I always thought he was a beastly young ass,” said Edward Dixon, “but

I didn’t think he’d chuck away his chances like that. Said he couldn’t

stand a bank! I hope he’ll be able to stand bread and water. That’s all

those littery fellows get, I believe, except Tennyson and Mark Twain

and those sort of people.”

Lucian of course sympathized with the unfortunate Bennett, but such

judgments were after all only natural. The young man might have stayed

in the bank and succeeded to his aunt’s thousand a year, and everybody

would have called him a very nice young fellow—“clever, too.” But he

had deliberately chosen, as Edward Dixon had said, to chuck his chances

away for the sake of literature; piety and a sense of the main chance

had alike pointed the way to a delicate course of wheedling, to a

little harmless practicing on Miss Spurry’s infirmities, to frequent

compliances of a soothing nature, and the “young ass” had been blind to

the direction of one and the other. It seemed almost right that the

vicar should moralize, that Edward Dixon should sneer, and that Mr.

Gervase should grow purple with contempt. Men, Lucian thought, were

like judges, who may pity the criminal in their hearts, but are forced

to vindicate the outraged majesty of the law by a severe sentence. He

felt the same considerations applied to his own case; he knew that his

father should have had more money, that his clothes should be newer and

of a better cut, that he should have gone to the university and made

good friends. If such had been his fortune he could have looked his

fellow-men proudly in the face, upright and unashamed. Having put on

the whole armor of a first-rate West End tailor, with money in his

purse, having taken anxious thought for the morrow, and having some

useful friends and good prospects; in such a case he might have held

his head high in a gentlemanly and Christian community. As it was he

had usually avoided the reproachful glance of his fellows, feeling that

he deserved their condemnation. But he had cherished for a long time

his romantic sentimentalities about women; literary conventions

borrowed from the minor poets and pseudo-medievalists, or so he thought

afterwards. But, fresh from school, wearied a little with the perpetual

society of barbarian though worthy boys, he had in his soul a charming

image of womanhood, before which he worshipped with mingled passion and

devotion. It was a nude figure, perhaps, but the shining arms were to

be wound about the neck of a vanquished knight; there was rest for the

head of a wounded lover; the hands were stretched forth to do works of

pity, and the smiling lips were to murmur not love alone, but

consolation in defeat. Here was the refuge for a broken heart; here the

scorn of men would but make tenderness increase; here was all pity and

all charity with loving-kindness. It was a delightful picture,

conceived in the “come rest on this bosom,” and “a ministering angel

thou” manner, with touches of allurement that made devotion all the

sweeter. He soon found that he had idealized a little; in the affair of

young Bennett, while the men were contemptuous the women were virulent.

He had been rather fond of Agatha Gervase, and she, so other ladies

said, had “set her cap” at him. Now, when he rebelled, and lost the

goodwill of his aunt, dear Miss Spurry, Agatha insulted him with all

conceivable rapidity. “After all, Mr. Bennett,” she said, “you will be

nothing better than a beggar; now, will you? You mustn’t think me

cruel, but I can’t help speaking the truth. \_Write books!\_” Her

expression filled up the incomplete sentence; she waggled with

indignant emotion. These passages came to Lucian’s ears, and indeed the

Gervases boasted of “how well poor Agatha had behaved.”

“Never mind, Gathy,” old Gervase had observed. “If the impudent young

puppy comes here again, we’ll see what Thomas can do with the

horse-whip.”

“Poor dear child,” Mrs. Gervase added in telling the tale, “and she was

so fond of him too. But of course it couldn’t go on after his shameful

behavior.”

But Lucian was troubled; he sought vainly for the ideal womanly, the

tender note of “come rest on this bosom.” Ministering angels, he felt

convinced, do not rub red pepper and sulfuric acid into the wounds of

suffering mortals.

Then there was the case of Mr. Vaughan, a squire in the neighborhood,

at whose board all the aristocracy of Caermaen had feasted for years.

Mr. Vaughan had a first-rate cook, and his cellar was rare, and he was

never so happy as when he shared his good things with his friends. His

mother kept his house, and they delighted all the girls with frequent

dances, while the men sighed over the amazing champagne. Investments

proved disastrous, and Mr. Vaughan had to sell the grey manor-house by

the river. He and his mother took a little modern stucco villa in

Caermaen, wishing to be near their dear friends. But the men were “very

sorry; rough on you, Vaughan. Always thought those Patagonians were

risky, but you wouldn’t hear of it. Hope we shall see you before very

long; you and Mrs. Vaughan must come to tea some day after Christmas.”

“Of course we are all very sorry for them,” said Henrietta Dixon. “No,

we haven’t called on Mrs. Vaughan yet. They have no regular servant,

you know; only a woman in the morning. I hear old mother Vaughan, as

Edward will call her, does nearly everything. And their house is

absurdly small; it’s little more than a cottage. One really can’t call

it a gentleman’s house.”

Then Mr. Vaughan, his heart in the dust, went to the Gervases and tried

to borrow five pounds of Mr. Gervase. He had to be ordered out of the

house, and, as Edith Gervase said, it was all very painful; “he went

out in such a funny way,” she added, “just like the dog when he’s had a

whipping. Of course it’s sad, even if it is all his own fault, as

everybody says, but he looked so ridiculous as he was going down the

steps that I couldn’t help laughing.” Mr. Vaughan heard the ringing,

youthful laughter as he crossed the lawn.

Young girls like Henrietta Dixon and Edith Gervase naturally viewed the

Vaughans’ comical position with all the high spirits of their age, but

the elder ladies could not look at matters in this frivolous light.

“Hush, dear, hush,” said Mrs. Gervase, “it’s all too shocking to be a

laughing matter. Don’t you agree with me, Mrs. Dixon? The sinful

extravagance that went on at Pentre always \_frightened\_ me. You

remember that ball they gave last year? Mr. Gervase assured me that the

champagne must have cost \_at least\_ a hundred and fifty shillings the

dozen.”

“It’s dreadful, isn’t it,” said Mrs. Dixon, “when one thinks of how

many poor people there are who would be thankful for a crust of bread?”

“Yes, Mrs. Dixon,” Agatha joined in, “and you know how absurdly the

Vaughans spoilt the cottagers. Oh, it was really wicked; one would

think Mr. Vaughan wished to make them above their station. Edith and I

went for a walk one day nearly as far as Pentre, and we begged a glass

of water of old Mrs. Jones who lives in that pretty cottage near the

brook. She began praising the Vaughans in the most fulsome manner, and

showed us some flannel things they had given her at Christmas. I assure

you, my dear Mrs. Dixon, the flannel was the very best quality; no lady

could wish for better. It couldn’t have cost less than half-a-crown a

yard.”

“I know, my dear, I know. Mr. Dixon always said it couldn’t last. How

often I have heard him say that the Vaughans were pauperizing all the

common people about Pentre, and putting every one else in a most

unpleasant position. Even from a worldly point of view it was very poor

taste on their part. So different from the \_true\_ charity that Paul

speaks of.”

“I only wish they had given away nothing worse than flannel,” said Miss

Colley, a young lady of very strict views. “But I assure you there was

a perfect orgy, I can call it nothing else, every Christmas. Great

joints of prime beef, and barrels of strong beer, and snuff and tobacco

distributed wholesale; as if the poor wanted to be encouraged in their

disgusting habits. It was really impossible to go through the village

for weeks after; the whole place was poisoned with the fumes of horrid

tobacco pipes.”

“Well, we see how that sort of thing ends,” said Mrs. Dixon, summing up

judicially. “We had intended to call, but I really think it would be

impossible after what Mrs. Gervase has told us. The idea of Mr. Vaughan

trying to sponge on poor Mr. Gervase in that shabby way! I think

meanness of that kind is so hateful.”

It was the practical side of all this that astonished Lucian. He saw

that in reality there was no high-flown quixotism in a woman’s nature;

the smooth arms, made he had thought for caressing, seemed muscular;

the hands meant for the doing of works of pity in his system, appeared

dexterous in the giving of “stingers,” as Barnes might say, and the

smiling lips could sneer with great ease. Nor was he more fortunate in

his personal experiences. As has been told, Mrs. Dixon spoke of him in

connection with “judgments,” and the younger ladies did not exactly

cultivate his acquaintance. Theoretically they “adored” books and

thought poetry “too sweet,” but in practice they preferred talking

about mares and fox-terriers and their neighbors.

They were nice girls enough, very like other young ladies in other

country towns, content with the teaching of their parents, reading the

Bible every morning in their bedrooms, and sitting every Sunday in

church amongst the well-dressed “sheep” on the right hand. It was not

their fault if they failed to satisfy the ideal of an enthusiastic

dreamy boy, and indeed, they would have thought his feigned woman

immodest, absurdly sentimental, a fright (“never wears stays, my dear”)

and \_horrid\_.

At first he was a good deal grieved at the loss of that charming tender

woman, the work of his brain. When the Miss Dixons went haughtily by

with a scornful waggle, when the Miss Gervases passed in the wagonette

laughing as the mud splashed him, the poor fellow would look up with a

face of grief that must have been very comic; “like a dying duck,” as

Edith Gervase said. Edith was really very pretty, and he would have

liked to talk to her, even about fox-terriers, if she would have

listened. One afternoon at the Dixons’ he really forced himself upon

her, and with all the obtuseness of an enthusiastic boy tried to

discuss the \_Lotus Eaters\_ of Tennyson. It was too absurd. Captain

Kempton was making signals to Edith all the time, and Lieutenant

Gatwick had gone off in disgust, and he had promised to bring her a

puppy “by Vick out of Wasp.” At last the poor girl could bear it no

longer:

“Yes, it’s very sweet,” she said at last. “When did you say you were

going to London, Mr. Taylor?”

It was about the time that his disappointment became known to

everybody, and the shot told. He gave her a piteous look and slunk off,

“just like the dog when he’s had a whipping,” to use Edith’s own

expression. Two or three lessons of this description produced their due

effect; and when he saw a male Dixon or Gervase approaching him he bit

his lip and summoned up his courage. But when he descried a

“ministering angel” he made haste and hid behind a hedge or took to the

woods. In course of time the desire to escape became an instinct, to be

followed as a matter of course; in the same way he avoided the adders

on the mountain. His old ideals were almost if not quite forgotten; he

knew that the female of the \_bête humaine\_, like the adder, would in

all probability sting, and he therefore shrank from its trail, but

without any feeling of special resentment. The one had a poisoned

tongue as the other had a poisoned fang, and it was well to leave them

both alone. Then had come that sudden fury of rage against all

humanity, as he went out of Caermaen carrying the book that had been

stolen from him by the enterprising Beit. He shuddered as he though of

how nearly he had approached the verge of madness, when his eyes filled

with blood and the earth seemed to burn with fire. He remembered how he

had looked up to the horizon and the sky was blotched with scarlet; and

the earth was deep red, with red woods and red fields. There was

something of horror in the memory, and in the vision of that wild night

walk through dim country, when every shadow seemed a symbol of some

terrible impending doom. The murmur of the brook, the wind shrilling

through the wood, the pale light flowing from the mouldered trunks, and

the picture of his own figure fleeing and fleeting through the shades;

all these seemed unhappy things that told a story in fatal

hieroglyphics. And then the life and laws of the sunlight had passed

away, and the resurrection and kingdom of the dead began. Though his

limbs were weary, he had felt his muscles grow strong as steel; a

woman, one of the hated race, was beside him in the darkness, and the

wild beast woke within him, ravening for blood and brutal lust; all the

raging desires of the dim race from which he came assailed his heart.

The ghosts issued out from the weird wood and from the caves in the

hills, besieging him, as he had imagined the spiritual legion besieging

Caermaen, beckoning him to a hideous battle and a victory that he had

never imagined in his wildest dreams. And then out of the darkness the

kind voice spoke again, and the kind hand was stretched out to draw him

up from the pit. It was sweet to think of that which he had found at

last; the boy’s picture incarnate, all the passion and compassion of

his longing, all the pity and love and consolation. She, that beautiful

passionate woman offering up her beauty in sacrifice to him, she was

worthy indeed of his worship. He remembered how his tears had fallen

upon her breast, and how tenderly she had soothed him, whispering those

wonderful unknown words that sang to his heart. And she had made

herself defenseless before him, caressing and fondling the body that

had been so despised. He exulted in the happy thought that he had knelt

down on the ground before her, and had embraced her knees and

worshipped. The woman’s body had become his religion; he lay awake at

night looking into the darkness with hungry eyes; wishing for a

miracle, that the appearance of the so-desired form might be shaped

before him. And when he was alone in quiet places in the wood, he fell

down again on his knees, and even on his face, stretching out vain

hands in the air, as if they would feel her flesh. His father noticed

in those days that the inner pocket of his coat was stuffed with

papers; he would see Lucian walking up and down in a secret shady place

at the bottom of the orchard, reading from his sheaf of manuscript,

replacing the leaves, and again drawing them out. He would walk a few

quick steps, and pause as if enraptured, gazing in the air as if he

looked through the shadows of the world into some sphere of glory,

feigned by his thought. Mr. Taylor was almost alarmed at the sight; he

concluded of course that Lucian was writing a book. In the first place,

there seemed something immodest in seeing the operation performed under

one’s eyes; it was as if the “make-up” of a beautiful actress were done

on the stage, in full audience; as if one saw the rounded calves fixed

in position, the fleshings drawn on, the voluptuous outlines of the

figure produced by means purely mechanical, blushes mantling from the

paint-pot, and the golden tresses well secured by the wigmaker. Books,

Mr. Taylor thought, should swim into one’s ken mysteriously; they

should appear all printed and bound, without apparent genesis; just as

children are suddenly told that they have a little sister, found by

mamma in the garden. But Lucian was not only engaged in composition; he

was plainly rapturous, enthusiastic; Mr. Taylor saw him throw up his

hands, and bow his head with strange gesture. The parson began to fear

that his son was like some of those mad Frenchmen of whom he had read,

young fellows who had a sort of fury of literature, and gave their

whole lives to it, spending days over a page, and years over a book,

pursuing art as Englishmen pursue money, building up a romance as if it

were a business. Now Mr. Taylor held firmly by the “walking-stick”

theory; he believed that a man of letters should have a real

profession, some solid employment in life. “Get something to do,” he

would have liked to say, “and then you can write as much as you please.

Look at Scott, look at Dickens and Trollope.” And then there was the

social point of view; it might be right, or it might be wrong, but

there could be no doubt that the literary man, as such, was not thought

much of in English society. Mr. Taylor knew his Thackeray, and he

remembered that old Major Pendennis, society personified, did not

exactly boast of his nephew’s occupation. Even Warrington was rather

ashamed to own his connection with journalism, and Pendennis himself

laughed openly at his novel-writing as an agreeable way of making

money, a useful appendage to the cultivation of dukes, his true

business in life. This was the plain English view, and Mr. Taylor was

no doubt right enough in thinking it good, practical common sense.

Therefore when he saw Lucian loitering and sauntering, musing amorously

over his manuscript, exhibiting manifest signs of that fine fury which

Britons have ever found absurd, he felt grieved at heart, and more than

ever sorry that he had not been able to send the boy to Oxford.

“B.N.C. would have knocked all this nonsense out of him,” he thought.

“He would have taken a double First like my poor father and made

something of a figure in the world. However, it can’t be helped.” The

poor man sighed, and lit his pipe, and walked in another part of the

garden.

But he was mistaken in his diagnosis of the symptoms. The book that

Lucian had begun lay unheeded in the drawer; it was a secret work that

he was engaged on, and the manuscripts that he took out of that inner

pocket never left him day or night. He slept with them next to his

heart, and he would kiss them when he was quite alone, and pay them

such devotion as he would have paid to her whom they symbolized. He

wrote on these leaves a wonderful ritual of praise and devotion; it was

the liturgy of his religion. Again and again he copied and recopied

this madness of a lover; dallying all days over the choice of a word,

searching for more exquisite phrases. No common words, no such phrases

as he might use in a tale would suffice; the sentences of worship must

stir and be quickened, they must glow and burn, and be decked out as

with rare work of jewelry. Every part of that holy and beautiful body

must be adored; he sought for terms of extravagant praise, he bent his

soul and mind low before her, licking the dust under her feet, abased

and yet rejoicing as a Templar before the image of Baphomet. He exulted

more especially in the knowledge that there was nothing of the

conventional or common in his ecstasy; he was not the fervent, adoring

lover of Tennyson’s poems, who loves with passion and yet with a proud

respect, with the love always of a gentleman for a lady. Annie was not

a lady; the Morgans had farmed their land for hundreds of years; they

were what Miss Gervase and Miss Colley and the rest of them called

common people. Tennyson’s noble gentleman thought of their ladies with

something of reticence; they imagined them dressed in flowing and

courtly robes, walking with slow dignity; they dreamed of them as

always stately, the future mistresses of their houses, mothers of their

heirs. Such lovers bowed, but not too low, remembering their own honor,

before those who were to be equal companions and friends as well as

wives. It was not such conceptions as these that he embodied in the

amazing emblems of his ritual; he was not, he told himself, a young

officer, “something in the city,” or a rising barrister engaged to a

Miss Dixon or a Miss Gervase. He had not thought of looking out for a

nice little house in a good residential suburb where they would have

pleasant society; there were to be no consultations about wall-papers,

or jocose whispers from friends as to the necessity of having a room

that would do for a nursery. No glad young thing had leant on his arm

while they chose the suite in white enamel, and china for “our

bedroom,” the modest salesman doing his best to spare their blushes.

When Edith Gervase married she would get mamma to look out for two

really good servants, “as we must begin quietly,” and mamma would make

sure that the drains and everything were right. Then her “girl friends”

would come on a certain solemn day to see all her “lovely things.” “Two

dozen of everything!” “Look, Ethel, did you ever see such ducky

frills?” “And that insertion, isn’t it quite too sweet?” “My dear

Edith, you \_are\_ a lucky girl.” “All the underlinen specially made by

Madame Lulu!” “What delicious things!” “I hope he knows what a prize he

is winning.” “Oh! do look at those lovely ribbon-bows!” “You darling,

how happy you must be.” “Real Valenciennes!” Then a whisper in the

lady’s ear, and her reply, “Oh, \_don’t\_, Nelly!” So they would chirp

over their treasures, as in Rabelais they chirped over their cups; and

every thing would be done in due order till the wedding-day, when

mamma, who had strained her sinews and the commandments to bring the

match about, would weep and look indignantly at the unhappy bridegroom.

“I \_hope\_ you’ll be kind to her, Robert.” Then in a rapid whisper to

the bride: “Mind, you \_insist\_ on Wyman’s flushing the drains when you

come back; servants are so careless and dirty too. Don’t let him go

about by himself in Paris. Men are so \_queer\_, one never knows. You

\_have\_ got the pills?” And aloud, after these \_secreta\_, “God bless

you, my dear; good-bye! \_cluck\_, \_cluck\_, good-bye!”

There were stranger things written in the manuscript pages that Lucian

cherished, sentences that burnt and glowed like “coals of fire which

hath a most vehement flame.” There were phrases that stung and tingled

as he wrote them, and sonorous words poured out in ecstasy and rapture,

as in some of the old litanies. He hugged the thought that a great part

of what he had invented was in the true sense of the word occult: page

after page might have been read aloud to the uninitiated without

betraying the inner meaning. He dreamed night and day over these

symbols, he copied and recopied the manuscript nine times before he

wrote it out fairly in a little book which he made himself of a skin of

creamy vellum. In his mania for acquirements that should be entirely

useless he had gained some skill in illumination, or limning as he

preferred to call it, always choosing the obscurer word as the obscurer

arts. First he set himself to the severe practice of the text; he spent

many hours and days of toil in struggling to fashion the serried

columns of black letter, writing and rewriting till he could shape the

massive character with firm true hand. He cut his quills with the

patience of a monk in the scriptorium, shaving and altering the nib,

lightening and increasing the pressure and flexibility of the points,

till the pen satisfied him, and gave a stroke both broad and even. Then

he made experiments in inks, searching for some medium that would rival

the glossy black letter of the old manuscripts; and not till he could

produce a fair page of text did he turn to the more entrancing labour

of the capitals and borders and ornaments. He mused long over the

Lombardic letters, as glorious in their way as a cathedral, and trained

his hand to execute the bold and flowing lines; and then there was the

art of the border, blossoming in fretted splendor all about the page.

His cousin, Miss Deacon, called it all a great waste of time, and his

father thought he would have done much better in trying to improve his

ordinary handwriting, which was both ugly and illegible. Indeed, there

seemed but a poor demand for the limner’s art. He sent some specimens

of his skill to an “artistic firm” in London; a verse of the “Maud,”

curiously emblazoned, and a Latin hymn with the notes pricked on a red

stave. The firm wrote civilly, telling him that his work, though good,

was not what they wanted, and enclosing an illuminated text. “We have

great demand for this sort of thing,” they concluded, “and if you care

to attempt something in this style we should be pleased to look at it.”

The said text was “Thou, God, seest me.” The letter was of a degraded

form, bearing much the same relation to the true character as a

“churchwarden gothic” building does to Canterbury Cathedral; the

colours were varied. The initial was pale gold, the \_h\_ pink, the \_o\_

black, the \_u\_ blue, and the first letter was somehow connected with a

bird’s nest containing the young of the pigeon, who were waited on by

the female bird.

“What a pretty text,” said Miss Deacon. “I should like to nail it up in

my room. Why don’t you try to do something like that, Lucian? You might

make something by it.”

“I sent them these,” said Lucian, “but they don’t like them much.”

“My dear boy! I should think not! Like them! What were you thinking of

to draw those queer stiff flowers all round the border? Roses? They

don’t look like roses at all events. Where do you get such ideas from?”

“But the design is appropriate; look at the words.”

“My dear Lucian, I can’t read the words; it’s such a queer

old-fashioned writing. Look how plain that text is; one can see what

it’s about. And this other one; I can’t make it out at all.”

“It’s a Latin hymn.”

“A Latin hymn? Is it a Protestant hymn? I may be old-fashioned, but

\_Hymns Ancient and Modern\_ is quite good enough for me. This is the

music, I suppose? But, my dear boy, there are only four lines, and who

ever heard of notes shaped like that: you have made some square and

some diamond-shape? Why didn’t you look in your poor mother’s old

music? It’s in the ottoman in the drawing-room. I could have shown you

how to make the notes; there are crotchets, you know, and quavers.”

Miss Deacon laid down the illuminated \_Urbs Beata\_ in despair; she felt

convinced that her cousin was “next door to an idiot.”

And he went out into the garden and raged behind a hedge. He broke two

flower-pots and hit an apple-tree very hard with his stick, and then,

feeling more calm, wondered what was the use in trying to do anything.

He would not have put the thought into words, but in his heart he was

aggrieved that his cousin liked the pigeons and the text, and did not

like his emblematical roses and the Latin hymn. He knew he had taken

great pains over the work, and that it was well done, and being still a

young man he expected praise. He found that in this hard world there

was a lack of appreciation; a critical spirit seemed abroad. If he

could have been scientifically observed as he writhed and smarted under

the strictures of “the old fool,” as he rudely called his cousin, the

spectacle would have been extremely diverting. Little boys sometimes

enjoy a very similar entertainment; either with their tiny fingers or

with mamma’s nail scissors they gradually deprive a fly of its wings

and legs. The odd gyrations and queer thin buzzings of the creature as

it spins comically round and round never fail to provide a fund of

harmless amusement. Lucian, indeed, fancied himself a very ill-used

individual; but he should have tried to imitate the nervous

organization of the flies, which, as mamma says, “can’t really feel.”

But now, as he prepared the vellum leaves, he remembered his art with

joy; he had not laboured to do beautiful work in vain. He read over his

manuscript once more, and thought of the designing of the pages. He

made sketches on furtive sheets of paper, and hunted up books in his

father’s library for suggestions. There were books about architecture,

and medieval iron work, and brasses which contributed hints for

adornment; and not content with mere pictures he sought in the woods

and hedges, scanning the strange forms of trees, and the poisonous

growth of great water-plants, and the parasite twining of honeysuckle

and briony. In one of these rambles he discovered a red earth which he

made into a pigment, and he found in the unctuous juice of a certain

fern an ingredient which he thought made his black ink still more

glossy. His book was written all in symbols, and in the same spirit of

symbolism he decorated it, causing wonderful foliage to creep about the

text, and showing the blossom of certain mystical flowers, with emblems

of strange creatures, caught and bound in rose thickets. All was

dedicated to love and a lover’s madness, and there were songs in it

which haunted him with their lilt and refrain. When the book was

finished it replaced the loose leaves as his constant companion by day

and night. Three times a day he repeated his ritual to himself, seeking

out the loneliest places in the woods, or going up to his room; and

from the fixed intentness and rapture of his gaze, the father thought

him still severely employed in the questionable process of composition.

At night he contrived to wake for his strange courtship; and he had a

peculiar ceremony when he got up in the dark and lit his candle. From a

steep and wild hillside, not far from the house, he had cut from time

to time five large boughs of spiked and prickly gorse. He had brought

them into the house, one by one, and had hidden them in the big box

that stood beside his bed. Often he woke up weeping and murmuring to

himself the words of one of his songs, and then when he had lit the

candle, he would draw out the gorse-boughs, and place them on the

floor, and taking off his nightgown, gently lay himself down on the bed

of thorns and spines. Lying on his face, with the candle and the book

before him, he would softly and tenderly repeat the praises of his

dear, dear Annie, and as he turned over page after page, and saw the

raised gold of the majuscules glow and flame in the candle-light, he

pressed the thorns into his flesh. At such moments he tasted in all its

acute savour the joy of physical pain; and after two or three

experiences of such delights he altered his book, making a curious sign

in vermilion on the margin of the passages where he was to inflict on

himself this sweet torture. Never did he fail to wake at the appointed

hour, a strong effort of will broke through all the heaviness of sleep,

and he would rise up, joyful though weeping, and reverently set his

thorny bed upon the floor, offering his pain with his praise. When he

had whispered the last word, and had risen from the ground, his body

would be all freckled with drops of blood; he used to view the marks

with pride. Here and there a spine would be left deep in the flesh, and

he would pull these out roughly, tearing through the skin. On some

nights when he had pressed with more fervor on the thorns his thighs

would stream with blood, red beads standing out on the flesh, and

trickling down to his feet. He had some difficulty in washing away the

bloodstains so as not to leave any traces to attract the attention of

the servant; and after a time he returned no more to his bed when his

duty had been accomplished. For a coverlet he had a dark rug, a good

deal worn, and in this he would wrap his naked bleeding body, and lie

down on the hard floor, well content to add an aching rest to the

account of his pleasures. He was covered with scars, and those that

healed during the day were torn open afresh at night; the pale olive

skin was red with the angry marks of blood, and the graceful form of

the young man appeared like the body of a tortured martyr. He grew

thinner and thinner every day, for he ate but little; the skin was

stretched on the bones of his face, and the black eyes burnt in dark

purple hollows. His relations noticed that he was not looking well.

“Now, Lucian, it’s perfect madness of you to go on like this,” said

Miss Deacon, one morning at breakfast. “Look how your hand shakes; some

people would say that you have been taking brandy. And all that you

want is a little medicine, and yet you won’t be advised. You know it’s

not my fault; I have asked you to try Dr. Jelly’s Cooling Powders again

and again.”

He remembered the forcible exhibition of the powders when he was a boy,

and felt thankful that those days were over. He only grinned at his

cousin and swallowed a great cup of strong tea to steady his nerves,

which were shaky enough. Mrs. Dixon saw him one day in Caermaen; it was

very hot, and he had been walking rather fast. The scars on his body

burnt and tingled, and he tottered as he raised his hat to the vicar’s

wife. She decided without further investigation that he must have been

drinking in public-houses.

“It seems a mercy that poor Mrs. Taylor was taken,” she said to her

husband. “She has certainly been spared a great deal. That wretched

young man passed me this afternoon; he was quite intoxicated.”

“How very said,” said Mr. Dixon. “A little port, my dear?”

“Thank you, Merivale, I will have another glass of sherry. Dr. Burrows

is always scolding me and saying I \_must\_ take something to keep up my

energy, and this sherry is so weak.”

The Dixons were not teetotalers. They regretted it deeply, and blamed

the doctor, who “insisted on some stimulant.” However, there was some

consolation in trying to convert the parish to total abstinence, or, as

they curiously called it, temperance. Old women were warned of the sin

of taking a glass of beer for supper; aged labourers were urged to try

Cork-ho, the new temperance drink; an uncouth beverage, styled coffee,

was dispensed at the reading-room. Mr. Dixon preached an eloquent

“temperance” sermon, soon after the above conversation, taking as his

text: \_Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees\_. In his discourse he

showed that fermented liquor and leaven had much in common, that beer

was at the present day “put away” during Passover by the strict Jews;

and in a moving peroration he urged his dear brethren, “and more

especially those amongst us who are poor in this world’s goods,” to

beware indeed of that evil leaven which was sapping the manhood of our

nation. Mrs. Dixon cried after church:

“Oh, Merivale, what a beautiful sermon! How earnest you were. I hope it

will do good.”

Mr. Dixon swallowed his port with great decorum, but his wife fuddled

herself every evening with cheap sherry. She was quite unaware of the

fact, and sometimes wondered in a dim way why she always had to scold

the children after dinner. And so strange things sometimes happened in

the nursery, and now and then the children looked queerly at one

another after a red-faced woman had gone out, panting.

Lucian knew nothing of his accuser’s trials, but he was not long in

hearing of his own intoxication. The next time he went down to Caermaen

he was hailed by the doctor.

“Been drinking again today?”

“No,” said Lucian in a puzzled voice. “What do you mean?”

“Oh, well, if you haven’t, that’s all right, as you’ll be able to take

a drop with me. Come along in?”

Over the whisky and pipes Lucian heard of the evil rumors affecting his

character.

“Mrs. Dixon assured me you were staggering from one side of the street

to the other. You quite frightened her, she said. Then she asked me if

I recommended her to take one or two ounces of spirit at bedtime for

the palpitation; and of course I told her two would be better. I have

my living to make here, you know. And upon my word, I think she wants

it; she’s always gurgling inside like a waterworks. I wonder how old

Dixon can stand it.”

“I like ‘ounces of spirit,’” said Lucian. “That’s taking it

medicinally, I suppose. I’ve often heard of ladies who have to ‘take it

medicinally’; and that’s how it’s done?”

“That’s it. ‘Dr Burrows won’t \_listen\_ to me’: ‘I tell him how I

dislike the taste of spirits, but he says they are absolutely

\_necessary\_ for my constitution’: ‘my medical man \_insists\_ on

something at bedtime’; that’s the style.”

Lucian laughed gently; all these people had become indifferent to him;

he could no longer feel savage indignation at their little hypocrisies

and malignancies. Their voices uttering calumny, and morality, and

futility had become like the thin shrill angry note of a gnat on a

summer evening; he had his own thoughts and his own life, and he passed

on without heeding.

“You come down to Caermaen pretty often, don’t you?” said the doctor.

“I’ve seen you two or three times in the last fortnight.”

“Yes, I enjoy the walk.”

“Well, look me up whenever you like, you know. I am often in just at

this time, and a chat with a human being isn’t bad, now and then. It’s

a change for me; I’m often afraid I shall lose my patients.”

The doctor had the weakness of these terrible puns, dragged headlong

into the conversation. He sometimes exhibited them before Mrs. Gervase,

who would smile in a faint and dignified manner, and say:

“Ah, I see. Very amusing indeed. We had an old coachmen once who was

very clever, I believe, at that sort of thing, but Mr. Gervase was

obliged to send him away, the laughter of the other domestics was so

very boisterous.”

Lucian laughed, not boisterously, but good-humouredly, at the doctor’s

joke. He liked Burrows, feeling that he was a man and not an automatic

gabbling machine.

“You look a little pulled down,” said the doctor, when Lucian rose to

go. “No, you don’t want my medicine. Plenty of beef and beer will do

you more good than drugs. I daresay it’s the hot weather that has

thinned you a bit. Oh, you’ll be all right again in a month.”

As Lucian strolled out of the town on his way home, he passed a small

crowd of urchins assembled at the corner of an orchard. They were

enjoying themselves immensely. The “healthy” boy, the same whom he had

seen some weeks ago operating on a cat, seemed to have recognized his

selfishness in keeping his amusements to himself. He had found a poor

lost puppy, a little creature with bright pitiful eyes, almost human in

their fond, friendly gaze. It was not a well-bred little dog; it was

certainly not that famous puppy “by Vick out of Wasp”; it had rough

hair and a foolish long tail which it wagged beseechingly, at once

deprecating severity and asking kindness. The poor animal had evidently

been used to gentle treatment; it would look up in a boy’s face, and

give a leap, fawning on him, and then bark in a small doubtful voice,

and cower a moment on the ground, astonished perhaps at the

strangeness, the bustle and animation. The boys were beside themselves

with eagerness; there was quite a babble of voices, arguing,

discussing, suggesting. Each one had a plan of his own which he brought

before the leader, a stout and sturdy youth.

“Drown him! What be you thinkin’ of, mun?” he was saying. “’Tain’t no

sport at all. You shut your mouth, gwaes. Be you goin’ to ask your

mother for the boiling-water? Is, Bob Williams, I do know all that: but

where be you a-going to get the fire from? Be quiet, mun, can’t you?

Thomas Trevor, be this dog yourn or mine? Now, look you, if you don’t

all of you shut your bloody mouths, I’ll take the dog ’ome and keep

him. There now!”

He was a born leader of men. A singular depression and lowness of

spirit showed itself on the boys’ faces. They recognized that the

threat might very possibly be executed, and their countenances were at

once composed to humble attention. The puppy was still cowering on the

ground in the midst of them: one or two tried to relieve the tension of

their feelings by kicking him in the belly with their hobnail boots. It

cried out with the pain and writhed a little, but the poor little beast

did not attempt to bite or even snarl. It looked up with those

beseeching friendly eyes at its persecutors, and fawned on them again,

and tried to wag its tail and be merry, pretending to play with a straw

on the road, hoping perhaps to win a little favor in that way.

The leader saw the moment for his master-stroke. He slowly drew a piece

of rope from his pocket.

“What do you say to that, mun? Now, Thomas Trevor! We’ll hang him over

that there bough. Will that suit you, Bobby Williams?”

There was a great shriek of approval and delight. All was again bustle

and animation. “I’ll tie it round his neck?” “Get out, mun, you don’t

know how it be done.” “Is, I do, Charley.” “Now, let me, gwaes, now do

let me.” “You be sure he won’t bite?” “He bain’t mad, be he?” “Suppose

we were to tie up his mouth first?”

The puppy still fawned and curried favor, and wagged that sorry tail,

and lay down crouching on one side on the ground, sad and sorry in his

heart, but still with a little gleam of hope; for now and again he

tried to play, and put up his face, praying with those fond, friendly

eyes. And then at last his gambols and poor efforts for mercy ceased,

and he lifted up his wretched voice in one long dismal whine of

despair. But he licked the hand of the boy that tied the noose.

He was slowly and gently swung into the air as Lucian went by unheeded;

he struggled, and his legs twisted and writhed. The “healthy” boy

pulled the rope, and his friends danced and shouted with glee. As

Lucian turned the corner, the poor dangling body was swinging to and

fro, the puppy was dying, but he still kicked a little.

Lucian went on his way hastily, and shuddering with disgust. The young

of the human creature were really too horrible; they defiled the earth,

and made existence unpleasant, as the pulpy growth of a noxious and

obscene fungus spoils an agreeable walk. The sight of those malignant

little animals with mouths that uttered cruelty and filthy, with hands

dexterous in torture, and feet swift to run all evil errands, had given

him a shock and broken up the world of strange thoughts in which he had

been dwelling. Yet it was no good being angry with them: it was their

nature to be very loathsome. Only he wished they would go about their

hideous amusements in their own back gardens where nobody could see

them at work; it was too bad that he should be interrupted and offended

in a quiet country road. He tried to put the incident out of his mind,

as if the whole thing had been a disagreeable story, and the visions

amongst which he wished to move were beginning to return, when he was

again rudely disturbed. A little girl, a pretty child of eight or nine,

was coming along the lane to meet him. She was crying bitterly and

looking to left and right, and calling out some word all the time.

“Jack, Jack, Jack! Little Jackie! Jack!”

Then she burst into tears afresh, and peered into the hedge, and tried

to peep through a gate into a field.

“Jackie, Jackie, Jackie!”

She came up to Lucian, sobbing as if her heart would break, and dropped

him an old-fashioned curtsy.

“Oh, please sir, have you seen my little Jackie?”

“What do you mean?” said Lucian. “What is it you’ve lost?”

“A little dog, please sir. A little terrier dog with white hair. Father

gave me him a month ago, and said I might keep him. Someone did leave

the garden gate open this afternoon, and he must ’a got away, sir, and

I was so fond of him sir, he was so playful and loving, and I be afraid

he be lost.”

She began to call again, without waiting for an answer.

“Jack, Jack, Jack!”

“I’m afraid some boys have got your little dog,” said Lucian. “They’ve

killed him. You’d better go back home.”

He went on, walking as fast as he could in his endeavor to get beyond

the noise of the child’s crying. It distressed him, and he wished to

think of other things. He stamped his foot angrily on the ground as he

recalled the annoyances of the afternoon, and longed for some hermitage

on the mountains, far above the stench and the sound of humanity.

A little farther, and he came to Croeswen, where the road branched off

to right and left. There was a triangular plot of grass between the two

roads; there the cross had once stood, “the goodly and famous roode” of

the old local chronicle. The words echoed in Lucian’s ears as he went

by on the right hand. “There were five steps that did go up to the

first pace, and seven steps to the second pace, all of clene hewn

ashler. And all above it was most curiously and gloriously wrought with

thorowgh carved work; in the highest place was the Holy Roode with

Christ upon the Cross having Marie on the one syde and John on the

other. And below were six splendent and glisteringe archaungels that

bore up the roode, and beneath them in their stories were the most fair

and noble images of the xii Apostles and of divers other Saints and

Martirs. And in the lowest storie there was a marvelous imagerie of

divers Beasts, such as oxen and horses and swine, and little dogs and

peacocks, all done in the finest and most curious wise, so that they

all seemed as they were caught in a Wood of Thorns, the which is their

torment of this life. And here once in the year was a marvelous solemn

service, when the parson of Caermaen came out with the singers and all

the people, singing the psalm \_Benedicite omnia opera\_ as they passed

along the road in their procession. And when they stood at the roode

the priest did there his service, making certain prayers for the

beasts, and then he went up to the first pace and preached a sermon to

the people, shewing them that as our lord Jhu dyed upon the Tree of his

deare mercy for us, so we too owe mercy to the beasts his Creatures,

for that they are all his poor lieges and silly servants. And that like

as the Holy Aungells do their suit to him on high, and the Blessed xii

Apostles and the Martirs, and all the Blissful Saints served him

aforetime on earth and now praise him in heaven, so also do the beasts

serve him, though they be in torment of life and below men. For their

spirit goeth downward, as Holy Writ teacheth us.”

It was a quaint old record, a curious relic of what the modern

inhabitants of Caermaen called the Dark Ages. A few of the stones that

had formed the base of the cross still remained in position, grey with

age, blotched with black lichen and green moss. The remainder of the

famous rood had been used to mend the roads, to build pigsties and

domestic offices; it had turned Protestant, in fact. Indeed, if it had

remained, the parson of Caermaen would have had no time for the

service; the coffee-stall, the Portuguese Missions, the Society for the

Conversion of the Jews, and important social duties took up all his

leisure. Besides, he thought the whole ceremony unscriptural.

Lucian passed on his way, wondering at the strange contrasts of the

Middle Ages. How was it that people who could devise so beautiful a

service believed in witchcraft, demoniacal possession and obsession, in

the incubus and succubus, and in the Sabbath and in many other horrible

absurdities? It seemed astonishing that anybody could even pretend to

credit such monstrous tales, but there could be no doubt that the dread

of old women who rode on broomsticks and liked black cats was once a

very genuine terror.

A cold wind blew up from the river at sunset, and the scars on his body

began to burn and tingle. The pain recalled his ritual to him, and he

began to recite it as he walked along. He had cut a branch of thorn

from the hedge and placed it next to his skin, pressing the spikes into

the flesh with his hand till the warm blood ran down. He felt it was an

exquisite and sweet observance for her sake; and then he thought of the

secret golden palace he was building for her, the rare and wonderful

city rising in his imagination. As the solemn night began to close

about the earth, and the last glimmer of the sun faded from the hills,

he gave himself anew to the woman, his body and his mind, all that he

was, and all that he had.

IV.

In the course of the week Lucian again visited Caermaen. He wished to

view the amphitheatre more precisely, to note the exact position of the

ancient walls, to gaze up the valley from certain points within the

town, to imprint minutely and clearly on his mind the surge of the

hills about the city, and the dark tapestry of the hanging woods. And

he lingered in the museum where the relics of the Roman occupation had

been stored; he was interested in the fragments of tessellated floors,

in the glowing gold of drinking cups, the curious beads of fused and

coloured glass, the carved amber-work, the scent-flagons that still

retained the memory of unctuous odours, the necklaces, brooches,

hair-pins of gold and silver, and other intimate objects which had once

belonged to Roman ladies. One of the glass flagons, buried in damp

earth for many hundred years, had gathered in its dark grave all the

splendors of the light, and now shone like an opal with a moonlight

glamour and gleams of gold and pale sunset green, and imperial purple.

Then there were the wine jars of red earthenware, the memorial stones

from graves, and the heads of broken gods, with fragments of occult

things used in the secret rites of Mithras. Lucian read on the labels

where all these objects were found: in the churchyard, beneath the turf

of the meadow, and in the old cemetery near the forest; and whenever it

was possible he would make his way to the spot of discovery, and

imagine the long darkness that had hidden gold and stone and amber. All

these investigations were necessary for the scheme he had in view, so

he became for some time quite a familiar figure in the dusty deserted

streets and in the meadows by the river. His continual visits to

Caermaen were a tortuous puzzle to the inhabitants, who flew to their

windows at the sound of a step on the uneven pavements. They were at a

loss in their conjectures; his motive for coming down three times a

week must of course be bad, but it seemed undiscoverable. And Lucian on

his side was at first a good deal put out by occasional encounters with

members of the Gervase or Dixon or Colley tribes; he had often to stop

and exchange a few conventional expressions, and such meetings, casual

as they were, annoyed and distracted him. He was no longer infuriated

or wounded by sneers of contempt or by the cackling laughter of the

young people when they passed him on the road (his hat was a shocking

one and his untidiness terrible), but such incidents were unpleasant

just as the smell of a drain was unpleasant, and threw the strange

mechanism of his thoughts out of fear for the time. Then he had been

disgusted by the affair of the boys and the little dog; the

loathsomeness of it had quite broken up his fancies. He had read books

of modern occultism, and remembered some of the experiments described.

The adept, it was alleged, could transfer the sense of consciousness

from his brain to the foot or hand, he could annihilate the world

around him and pass into another sphere. Lucian wondered whether he

could not perform some such operation for his own benefit. Human beings

were constantly annoying him and getting in his way, was it not

possible to annihilate the race, or at all events to reduce them to

wholly insignificant forms? A certain process suggested itself to his

mind, a work partly mental and partly physical, and after two or three

experiments he found to his astonishment and delight that it was

successful. Here, he thought, he had discovered one of the secrets of

true magic; this was the key to the symbolic transmutations of the

Eastern tales. The adept could, in truth, change those who were

obnoxious to him into harmless and unimportant shapes, not as in the

letter of the old stories, by transforming the enemy, but by

transforming himself. The magician puts men below him by going up

higher, as one looks down on a mountain city from a loftier crag. The

stones on the road and such petty obstacles do not trouble the wise man

on the great journey, and so Lucian, when obliged to stop and converse

with his fellow-creatures, to listen to their poor pretences and

inanities, was no more inconvenienced than when he had to climb an

awkward stile in the course of a walk. As for the more unpleasant

manifestations of humanity; after all they no longer concerned him. Men

intent on the great purpose did not suffer the current of their

thoughts to be broken by the buzzing of a fly caught in a spider’s web,

so why should he be perturbed by the misery of a puppy in the hands of

village boys? The fly, no doubt, endured its tortures; lying helpless

and bound in those slimy bands, it cried out in its thin voice when the

claws of the horrible monster fastened on it; but its dying agonies had

never vexed the reverie of a lover. Lucian saw no reason why the boys

should offend him more than the spider, or why he should pity the dog

more than he pitied the fly. The talk of the men and women might be

wearisome and inept and often malignant; but he could not imagine an

alchemist at the moment of success, a general in the hour of victory,

or a financier with a gigantic scheme of swindling well on the market

being annoyed by the buzz of insects. The spider is, no doubt, a very

terrible brute with a hideous mouth and hairy tiger-like claws when

seen through the microscope; but Lucian had taken away the microscope

from his eyes. He could now walk the streets of Caermaen confident and

secure, without any dread of interruption, for at a moment’s notice the

transformation could be effected. Once Dr. Burrows caught him and made

him promise to attend a bazaar that was to be held in aid of the

Hungarian Protestants; Lucian assented the more willingly as he wished

to pay a visit to certain curious mounds on a hill a little way out of

the town, and he calculated on slinking off from the bazaar early in

the afternoon. Lord Beamys was visiting Sir Vivian Ponsonby, a local

magnate, and had kindly promised to drive over and declare the bazaar

open. It was a solemn moment when the carriage drew up and the great

man alighted. He was rather an evil-looking old nobleman, but the

clergy and gentry, their wives and sons and daughters welcomed him with

great and unctuous joy. Conversations were broken off in mid-sentence,

slow people gaped, not realizing why their friends had so suddenly left

them, the Meyricks came up hot and perspiring in fear lest they should

be too late, Miss Colley, a yellow virgin of austere regard, smiled

largely, Mrs. Dixon beckoned wildly with her parasol to the “girls” who

were idly strolling in a distant part of the field, and the archdeacon

ran at full speed. The air grew dark with bows, and resonant with the

genial laugh of the archdeacon, the cackle of the younger ladies, and

the shrill parrot-like voices of the matrons; those smiled who had

never smiled before, and on some maiden faces there hovered that look

of adoring ecstasy with which the old maidens graced their angels.

Then, when all the due rites had been performed, the company turned and

began to walk towards the booths of their small Vanity Fair. Lord

Beamys led the way with Mrs. Gervase, Mrs. Dixon followed with Sir

Vivian Ponsonby, and the multitudes that followed cried, saying, “What

a dear old man!”—“Isn’t it \_kind\_ of him to come all this way?”—“What a

sweet expression, isn’t it?”—“I think he’s an old love”—“One of the

good old sort”—“Real English nobleman”—“Oh most correct, I assure you;

if a girl gets into trouble, notice to quit at once”—“Always stands by

the Church”—“Twenty livings in his gift”—“Voted for the Public Worship

Regulation Act”—“Ten thousand acres strictly preserved.” The old lord

was leering pleasantly and muttering to himself: “Some fine gals here.

Like the looks of that filly with the pink hat. Ought to see more of

her. She’d give Lotty points.”

The pomp swept slowly across the grass: the archdeacon had got hold of

Mr. Dixon, and they were discussing the misdeeds of some clergyman in

the rural deanery.

“I can scarce credit it,” said Mr. Dixon.

“Oh, I assure you, there can be no doubt. We have witnesses. There can

be no question that there was a procession at Llanfihangel on the

Sunday before Easter; the choir and minister went round the church,

carrying palm branches in their hands.”

“Very shocking.”

“It has distressed the bishop. Martin is a hard-working man enough, and

all that, but those sort of things can’t be tolerated. The bishop told

me that he had set his face against processions.”

“Quite right: the bishop is perfectly right. Processions are

unscriptural.”

“It’s the thin end of the wedge, you know, Dixon.”

“Exactly. I have always resisted anything of the kind here.”

“Right. \_Principiis obsta\_, you know. Martin is so \_imprudent\_.

There’s a \_way\_ of doing things.”

The “scriptural” procession led by Lord Beamys broke up when the stalls

were reached, and gathered round the nobleman as he declared the bazaar

open.

Lucian was sitting on a garden-seat, a little distance off, looking

dreamily before him. And all that he saw was a swarm of flies

clustering and buzzing about a lump of tainted meat that lay on the

grass. The spectacle in no way interrupted the harmony of his thoughts,

and soon after the opening of the bazaar he went quietly away, walking

across the fields in the direction of the ancient mounds he desired to

inspect.

All these journeys of his to Caermaen and its neighborhood had a

peculiar object; he was gradually leveling to the dust the squalid

kraals of modern times, and rebuilding the splendid and golden city of

Siluria. All this mystic town was for the delight of his sweetheart and

himself; for her the wonderful villas, the shady courts, the magic of

tessellated pavements, and the hangings of rich stuffs with their

intricate and glowing patterns. Lucian wandered all day through the

shining streets, taking shelter sometimes in the gardens beneath the

dense and gloomy ilex trees, and listening to the plash and trickle of

the fountains. Sometimes he would look out of a window and watch the

crowd and colour of the market-place, and now and again a ship came up

the river bringing exquisite silks and the merchandise of unknown lands

in the Far East. He had made a curious and accurate map of the town he

proposed to inhabit, in which every villa was set down and named. He

drew his lines to scale with the gravity of a surveyor, and studied the

plan till he was able to find his way from house to house on the

darkest summer night. On the southern slopes about the town there were

vineyards, always under a glowing sun, and sometimes he ventured to the

furthest ridge of the forest, where the wild people still lingered,

that he might catch the golden gleam of the city far away, as the light

quivered and scintillated on the glittering tiles. And there were

gardens outside the city gates where strange and brilliant flowers

grew, filling the hot air with their odour, and scenting the breeze

that blew along the streets. The dull modern life was far away, and

people who saw him at this period wondered what was amiss; the

abstraction of his glance was obvious, even to eyes not over-sharp. But

men and women had lost all their power of annoyance and vexation; they

could no longer even interrupt his thought for a moment. He could

listen to Mr. Dixon with apparent attention, while he was in reality

enraptured by the entreating music of the double flute, played by a

girl in the garden of Avallaunius, for that was the name he had taken.

Mr. Dixon was innocently discoursing archeology, giving a brief

\_résumé\_ of the view expressed by Mr. Wyndham at the last meeting of

the antiquarian society.

“There can be no doubt that the temple of Diana stood there in pagan

times,” he concluded, and Lucian assented to the opinion, and asked a

few questions which seemed pertinent enough. But all the time the flute

notes were sounding in his ears, and the ilex threw a purple shadow on

the white pavement before his villa. A boy came forward from the

garden; he had been walking amongst the vines and plucking the ripe

grapes, and the juice had trickled down over his breast. Standing

beside the girl, unashamed in the sunlight, he began to sing one of

Sappho’s love songs. His voice was as full and rich as a woman’s, but

purged of all emotion; he was an instrument of music in the flesh.

Lucian looked at him steadily; the white perfect body shone against the

roses and the blue of the sky, clear and gleaming as marble in the

glare of the sun. The words he sang burned and flamed with passion, and

he was as unconscious of their meaning as the twin pipes of the flute.

And the girl was smiling. The vicar shook hands and went on, well

pleased with his remarks on the temple of Diana, and also with Lucian’s

polite interest.

“He is by no means wanting in intelligence,” he said to his family. “A

little curious in manner, perhaps, but not stupid.”

“Oh, papa,” said Henrietta, “don’t you think he is rather silly? He

can’t talk about anything—anything interesting, I mean. And he pretends

to know a lot about books, but I heard him say the other day he had

never read \_The Prince of the House of David\_ or \_Ben-Hur\_. Fancy!”

The vicar had not interrupted Lucian. The sun still beat upon the

roses, and a little breeze bore the scent of them to his nostrils

together with the smell of grapes and vine-leaves. He had become

curious in sensation, and as he leant back upon the cushions covered

with glistening yellow silk, he was trying to analyze a strange

ingredient in the perfume of the air. He had penetrated far beyond the

crude distinctions of modern times, beyond the rough: “there’s a smell

of roses,” “there must be sweetbriar somewhere.” Modern perceptions of

odour were, he knew, far below those of the savage in delicacy. The

degraded black fellow of Australia could distinguish odours in a way

that made the consumer of “damper” stare in amazement, but the savage’s

sensations were all strictly utilitarian. To Lucian as he sat in the

cool porch, his feet on the marble, the air came laden with scents as

subtly and wonderfully interwoven and contrasted as the harmonica of a

great master. The stained marble of the pavement gave a cool

reminiscence of the Italian mountain, the blood-red roses palpitating

in the sunlight sent out an odour mystical as passion itself, and there

was the hint of inebriation in the perfume of the trellised vines.

Besides these, the girl’s desire and the unripe innocence of the boy

were as distinct as benzoin and myrrh, both delicious and exquisite,

and exhaled as freely as the scent of the roses. But there was another

element that puzzled him, an aromatic suggestion of the forest. He

understood it at last; it was the vapor of the great red pines that

grew beyond the garden; their spicy needles were burning in the sun,

and the smell was as fragrant as the fume of incense blown from far.

The soft entreaty of the flute and the swelling rapture of the boy’s

voice beat on the air together, and Lucian wondered whether there were

in the nature of things any true distinction between the impressions of

sound and scent and colour. The violent blue of the sky, the song, and

the odours seemed rather varied symbols of one mystery than distinct

entities. He could almost imagine that the boy’s innocence was indeed a

perfume, and that the palpitating roses had become a sonorous chant.

In the curious silence which followed the last notes, when the boy and

girl had passed under the purple ilex shadow, he fell into a reverie.

The fancy that sensations are symbols and not realities hovered in his

mind, and led him to speculate as to whether they could not actually be

transmuted one into another. It was possible, he thought, that a whole

continent of knowledge had been undiscovered; the energies of men

having been expended in unimportant and foolish directions. Modern

ingenuity had been employed on such trifles as locomotive engines,

electric cables, and cantilever bridges; on elabourate devices for

bringing uninteresting people nearer together; the ancients had been

almost as foolish, because they had mistaken the symbol for the thing

signified. It was not the material banquet which really mattered, but

the thought of it; it was almost as futile to eat and take emetics and

eat again as to invent telephones and high-pressure boilers. As for

some other ancient methods of enjoying life, one might as well set

oneself to improve calico printing at once.

“Only in the garden of Avallaunius,” said Lucian to himself, “is the

true and exquisite science to be found.”

He could imagine a man who was able to live in one sense while he

pleased; to whom, for example, every impression of touch, taste,

hearing, or seeing should be translated into odour; who at the desired

kiss should be ravished with the scent of dark violets, to whom music

should be the perfume of a rose-garden at dawn.

When, now and again, he voluntarily resumed the experience of common

life, it was that he might return with greater delight to the garden in

the city of refuge. In the actual world the talk was of Nonconformists,

the lodger franchise, and the Stock Exchange; people were constantly

reading newspapers, drinking Australian Burgundy, and doing other

things equally absurd. They either looked shocked when the fine art of

pleasure was mentioned, or confused it with going to musical comedies,

drinking bad whisky, and keeping late hours in disreputable and vulgar

company. He found to his amusement that the profligate were by many

degrees duller than the pious, but that the most tedious of all were

the persons who preached promiscuity, and called their system of

“pigging” the “New Morality.”

He went back to the city lovingly, because it was built and adorned for

his love. As the metaphysicians insist on the consciousness of the ego

as the implied basis of all thought, so he knew that it was she in whom

he had found himself, and through whom and for whom all the true life

existed. He felt that Annie had taught him the rare magic which had

created the garden of Avallaunius. It was for her that he sought

strange secrets and tried to penetrate the mysteries of sensation, for

he could only give her wonderful thoughts and a wonderful life, and a

poor body stained with the scars of his worship.

It was with this object, that of making the offering of himself a

worthy one, that he continually searched for new and exquisite

experiences. He made lovers come before him and confess their secrets;

he pried into the inmost mysteries of innocence and shame, noting how

passion and reluctance strive together for the mastery. In the

amphitheatre he sometimes witnessed strange entertainments in which

such tales as \_Daphnis and Chloe\_ and \_The Golden Ass\_ were performed

before him. These shows were always given at nighttime; a circle of

torch-bearers surrounded the stage in the center, and above, all the

tiers of seats were dark. He would look up at the soft blue of the

summer sky, and at the vast dim mountain hovering like a cloud in the

west, and then at the scene illumined by a flaring light, and

contrasted with violent shadows. The subdued mutter of conversation in

a strange language rising from bench after bench, swift hissing

whispers of explanation, now and then a shout or a cry as the interest

deepened, the restless tossing of the people as the end drew near, an

arm lifted, a cloak thrown back, the sudden blaze of a torch lighting

up purple or white or the gleam of gold in the black serried ranks;

these were impressions that seemed always amazing. And above, the dusky

light of the stars, around, the sweet-scented meadows, and the twinkle

of lamps from the still city, the cry of the sentries about the walls,

the wash of the tide filling the river, and the salt savour of the sea.

With such a scenic ornament he saw the tale of Apuleius represented,

heard the names of Fotis and Byrrhaena and Lucius proclaimed, and the

deep intonation of such sentences as \_Ecce Veneris hortator et armiger

Liber advenit ultro\_. The tale went on through all its marvelous

adventures, and Lucian left the amphitheatre and walked beside the

river where he could hear indistinctly the noise of voices and the

singing Latin, and note how the rumor of the stage mingled with the

murmur of the shuddering reeds and the cool lapping of the tide. Then

came the farewell of the cantor, the thunder of applause, the crash of

cymbals, the calling of the flutes, and the surge of the wind in the

great dark wood.

At other times it was his chief pleasure to spend a whole day in a

vineyard planted on the steep slope beyond the bridge. A grey stone

seat had been placed beneath a shady laurel, and here he often sat

without motion or gesture for many hours. Below him the tawny river

swept round the town in a half circle; he could see the swirl of the

yellow water, its eddies and miniature whirlpools, as the tide poured

up from the south. And beyond the river the strong circuit of the

walls, and within, the city glittered like a charming piece of mosaic.

He freed himself from the obtuse modern view of towns as places where

human beings live and make money and rejoice or suffer, for from the

standpoint of the moment such facts were wholly impertinent. He knew

perfectly well that for his present purpose the tawny sheen and shimmer

of the tide was the only fact of importance about the river, and so he

regarded the city as a curious work in jewelry. Its radiant marble

porticoes, the white walls of the villas, a dome of burning copper, the

flash and scintillation of tiled roofs, the quiet red of brickwork,

dark groves of ilex, and cypress, and laurel, glowing rose-gardens, and

here and there the silver of a fountain, seemed arranged and contrasted

with a wonderful art, and the town appeared a delicious ornament, every

cube of colour owing its place to the thought and inspiration of the

artificer. Lucian, as he gazed from his arbour amongst the trellised

vines, lost none of the subtle pleasures of the sight; noting every

\_nuance\_ of colour, he let his eyes dwell for a moment on the scarlet

flash of poppies, and then on a glazed roof which in the glance of the

sun seemed to spout white fire. A square of vines was like some rare

green stone; the grapes were massed so richly amongst the vivid leaves,

that even from far off there was a sense of irregular flecks and stains

of purple running through the green. The laurel garths were like cool

jade; the gardens, where red, yellow, blue and white gleamed together

in a mist of heat, had the radiance of opal; the river was a band of

dull gold. On every side, as if to enhance the preciousness of the

city, the woods hung dark on the hills; above, the sky was violet,

specked with minute feathery clouds, white as snowflakes. It reminded

him of a beautiful bowl in his villa; the ground was of that same

brilliant blue, and the artist had fused into the work, when it was

hot, particles of pure white glass.

For Lucian this was a spectacle that enchanted many hours; leaning on

one hand, he would gaze at the city glowing in the sunlight till the

purple shadows grew down the slopes and the long melodious trumpet

sounded for the evening watch. Then, as he strolled beneath the

trellises, he would see all the radiant facets glimmering out, and the

city faded into haze, a white wall shining here and there, and the

gardens veiled in a dim glow of colour. On such an evening he would go

home with the sense that he had truly lived a day, having received for

many hours the most acute impressions of beautiful colour.

Often he spent the night in the cool court of his villa, lying amidst

soft cushions heaped upon the marble bench. A lamp stood on the table

at his elbow, its light making the water in the cistern twinkle. There

was no sound in the court except the soft continual plashing of the

fountain. Throughout these still hours he would meditate, and he became

more than ever convinced that man could, if he pleased, become lord of

his own sensations. This, surely, was the true meaning concealed under

the beautiful symbolism of alchemy. Some years before he had read many

of the wonderful alchemical books of the later Middle Ages, and had

suspected that something other than the turning of lead into gold was

intended. This impression was deepened when he looked into \_Lumen de

Lumine\_ by Vaughan, the brother of the Silurist, and he had long

puzzled himself in the endeavor to find a reasonable interpretation of

the hermetic mystery, and of the red powder, “glistening and glorious

in the sun.” And the solution shone out at last, bright and amazing, as

he lay quiet in the court of Avallaunius. He knew that he himself had

solved the riddle, that he held in his hand the powder of projection,

the philosopher’s stone transmuting all it touched to fine gold; the

gold of exquisite impressions. He understood now something of the

alchemical symbolism; the crucible and the furnace, the “Green Dragon,”

and the “Son Blessed of the Fire” had, he saw, a peculiar meaning. He

understood, too, why the uninitiated were warned of the terror and

danger through which they must pass; and the vehemence with which the

adepts disclaimed all desire for material riches no longer struck him

as singular. The wise man does not endure the torture of the furnace in

order that he may be able to compete with operators in pork and company

promoters; neither a steam yacht, nor a grouse-moor, nor three liveried

footmen would add at all to his gratifications. Again Lucian said to

himself:

“Only in the court of Avallaunius is the true science of the exquisite

to be found.”

He saw the true gold into which the beggarly matter of existence may be

transmuted by spagyric art; a succession of delicious moments, all the

rare flavors of life concentrated, purged of their lees, and preserved

in a beautiful vessel. The moonlight fell green on the fountain and on

the curious pavements, and in the long sweet silence of the night he

lay still and felt that thought itself was an acute pleasure, to be

expressed perhaps in terms of odour or colour by the true artist.

And he gave himself other and even stranger gratifications. Outside the

city walls, between the baths and the amphitheatre, was a tavern, a

place where wonderful people met to drink wonderful wine. There he saw

priests of Mithras and Isis and of more occult rites from the East, men

who wore robes of bright colours, and grotesque ornaments, symbolizing

secret things. They spoke amongst themselves in a rich jargon of

coloured words, full of hidden meanings and the sense of matters

unintelligible to the uninitiated, alluding to what was concealed

beneath roses, and calling each other by strange names. And there were

actors who gave the shows in the amphitheatre, officers of the legion

who had served in wild places, singers, and dancing girls, and heroes

of strange adventure.

The walls of the tavern were covered with pictures painted in violent

hues; blues and reds and greens jarring against one another and

lighting up the gloom of the place. The stone benches were always

crowded, the sunlight came in through the door in a long bright beam,

casting a dancing shadow of vine leaves on the further wall. There a

painter had made a joyous figure of the young Bacchus driving the

leopards before him with his ivy-staff, and the quivering shadow seemed

a part of the picture. The room was cool and dark and cavernous, but

the scent and heat of the summer gushed in through the open door. There

was ever a full sound, with noise and vehemence, there, and the rolling

music of the Latin tongue never ceased.

“The wine of the siege, the wine that we saved,” cried one.

“Look for the jar marked \_Faunus\_; you will be glad.”

“Bring me the wine of the Owl’s Face.”

“Let us have the wine of Saturn’s Bridge.”

The boys who served brought the wine in dull red jars that struck a

charming note against their white robes. They poured out the violet and

purple and golden wine with calm sweet faces as if they were assisting

in the mysteries, without any sign that they heard the strange words

that flashed from side to side. The cups were all of glass; some were

of deep green, of the colour of the sea near the land, flawed and

specked with the bubbles of the furnace. Others were of brilliant

scarlet, streaked with irregular bands of white, and having the

appearance of white globules in the moulded stem. There were cups of

dark glowing blue, deeper and more shining than the blue of the sky,

and running through the substance of the glass were veins of rich

gamboge yellow, twining from the brim to the foot. Some cups were of a

troubled and clotted red, with alternating blotches of dark and light,

some were variegated with white and yellow stains, some wore a film of

rainbow colours, some glittered, shot with gold threads through the

clear crystal, some were as if sapphires hung suspended in running

water, some sparkled with the glint of stars, some were black and

golden like tortoiseshell.

A strange feature was the constant and fluttering motion of hands and

arms. Gesture made a constant commentary on speech; white fingers,

whiter arms, and sleeves of all colours, hovered restlessly, appeared

and disappeared with an effect of threads crossing and re-crossing on

the loom. And the odour of the place was both curious and memorable;

something of the damp cold breath of the cave meeting the hot blast of

summer, the strangely mingled aromas of rare wines as they fell

plashing and ringing into the cups, the drugged vapor of the East that

the priests of Mithras and Isis bore from their steaming temples; these

were always strong and dominant. And the women were scented, sometimes

with unctuous and overpowering perfumes, and to the artist the

experiences of those present were hinted in subtle and delicate

\_nuances\_ of odour.

They drank their wine and caressed all day in the tavern. The women

threw their round white arms about their lover’s necks, they

intoxicated them with the scent of their hair, the priests muttered

their fantastic jargon of Theurgy. And through the sonorous clash of

voices there always seemed the ring of the cry:

“Look for the jar marked \_Faunus\_; you will be glad.”

Outside, the vine tendrils shook on the white walls glaring in the

sunshine; the breeze swept up from the yellow river, pungent with the

salt sea savour.

These tavern scenes were often the subject of Lucian’s meditation as he

sat amongst the cushions on the marble seat. The rich sound of the

voices impressed him above all things, and he saw that words have a far

higher reason than the utilitarian office of imparting a man’s thought.

The common notion that language and linked words are important only as

a means of expression he found a little ridiculous; as if electricity

were to be studied solely with the view of “wiring” to people, and all

its other properties left unexplored, neglected. Language, he

understood, was chiefly important for the beauty of its sounds, by its

possession of words resonant, glorious to the ear, by its capacity,

when exquisitely arranged, of suggesting wonderful and indefinable

impressions, perhaps more ravishing and farther removed from the domain

of strict thought than the impressions excited by music itself. Here

lay hidden the secret of the sensuous art of literature; it was the

secret of suggestion, the art of causing delicious sensation by the use

of words. In a way, therefore, literature was independent of thought;

the mere English listener, if he had an ear attuned, could recognize

the beauty of a splendid Latin phrase.

Here was the explanation of the magic of \_Lycidas\_. From the standpoint

of the formal understanding it was an affected lament over some wholly

uninteresting and unimportant Mr. King; it was full of nonsense about

“shepherds” and “flocks” and “muses” and such stale stock of poetry;

the introduction of St Peter on a stage thronged with nymphs and river

gods was blasphemous, absurd, and, in the worst taste; there were

touches of greasy Puritanism, the twang of the conventicle was only too

apparent. And \_Lycidas\_ was probably the most perfect piece of pure

literature in existence; because every word and phrase and line were

sonorous, ringing and echoing with music.

“Literature,” he re-enunciated in his mind, “is the sensuous art of

causing exquisite impressions by means of words.”

And yet there was something more; besides the logical thought, which

was often a hindrance, a troublesome though inseparable accident,

besides the sensation, always a pleasure and a delight, besides these

there were the indefinable inexpressible images which all fine

literature summons to the mind. As the chemist in his experiments is

sometimes astonished to find unknown, unexpected elements in the

crucible or the receiver, as the world of material things is considered

by some a thin veil of the immaterial universe, so he who reads

wonderful prose or verse is conscious of suggestions that cannot be put

into words, which do not rise from the logical sense, which are rather

parallel to than connected with the sensuous delight. The world so

disclosed is rather the world of dreams, rather the world in which

children sometimes live, instantly appearing, and instantly vanishing

away, a world beyond all expression or analysis, neither of the

intellect nor of the senses. He called these fancies of his

“Meditations of a Tavern,” and was amused to think that a theory of

letters should have risen from the eloquent noise that rang all day

about the violet and golden wine.

“Let us seek for more exquisite things,” said Lucian to himself. He

could almost imagine the magic transmutation of the senses

accomplished, the strong sunlight was an odour in his nostrils; it

poured down on the white marble and the palpitating roses like a flood.

The sky was a glorious blue, making the heart joyous, and the eyes

could rest in the dark green leaves and purple shadow of the ilex. The

earth seemed to burn and leap beneath the sun, he fancied he could see

the vine tendrils stir and quiver in the heat, and the faint fume of

the scorching pine needles was blown across the gleaming garden to the

seat beneath the porch. Wine was before him in a cup of carved amber; a

wine of the colour of a dark rose, with a glint as of a star or of a

jet of flame deep beneath the brim; and the cup was twined about with a

delicate wreath of ivy. He was often loath to turn away from the still

contemplation of such things, from the mere joy of the violent sun, and

the responsive earth. He loved his garden and the view of the

tessellated city from the vineyard on the hill, the strange clamor of

the tavern, and white Fotis appearing on the torch-lit stage. And there

were shops in the town in which he delighted, the shops of the perfume

makers, and jewelers, and dealers in curious ware. He loved to see all

things made for ladies’ use, to touch the gossamer silks that were to

touch their bodies, to finger the beads of amber and the gold chains

which would stir above their hearts, to handle the carved hairpins and

brooches, to smell odours which were already dedicated to love.

But though these were sweet and delicious gratifications, he knew that

there were more exquisite things of which he might be a spectator. He

had seen the folly of regarding fine literature from the standpoint of

the logical intellect, and he now began to question the wisdom of

looking at life as if it were a moral representation. Literature, he

knew, could not exist without some meaning, and considerations of right

and wrong were to a certain extent inseparable from the conception of

life, but to insist on ethics as the chief interest of the human

pageant was surely absurd. One might as well read \_Lycidas\_ for the

sake of its denunciation of “our corrupted Clergy,” or Homer for

“manners and customs.” An artist entranced by a beautiful landscape did

not greatly concern himself with the geological formation of the hills,

nor did the lover of a wild sea inquire as to the chemical analysis of

the water. Lucian saw a coloured and complex life displayed before him,

and he sat enraptured at the spectacle, not concerned to know whether

actions were good or bad, but content if they were curious.

In this spirit he made a singular study of corruption. Beneath his

feet, as he sat in the garden porch, was a block of marble through

which there ran a scarlet stain. It began with a faint line, thin as a

hair, and grew as it advanced, sending out offshoots to right and left,

and broadening to a pool of brilliant red. There were strange lives

into which he looked that were like the block of marble; women with

grave sweet faces told him the astounding tale of their adventures, and

how, they said, they had met the faun when they were little children.

They told him how they had played and watched by the vines and the

fountains, and dallied with the nymphs, and gazed at images reflected

in the water pools, till the authentic face appeared from the wood. He

heard others tell how they had loved the satyrs for many years before

they knew their race; and there were strange stories of those who had

longed to speak but knew not the word of the enigma, and searched in

all strange paths and ways before they found it.

He heard the history of the woman who fell in love with her slave-boy,

and tempted him for three years in vain. He heard the tale from the

woman’s full red lips, and watched her face, full of the ineffable

sadness of lust, as she described her curious stratagems in mellow

phrases. She was drinking a sweet yellow wine from a gold cup as she

spoke, and the odour in her hair and the aroma of the precious wine

seemed to mingle with the soft strange words that flowed like an

unguent from a carven jar. She told how she bought the boy in the

market of an Asian city, and had him carried to her house in the grove

of fig-trees. “Then,” she went on, “he was led into my presence as I

sat between the columns of my court. A blue veil was spread above to

shut out the heat of the sun, and rather twilight than light shone on

the painted walls, and the wonderful colours of the pavement, and the

images of Love and the Mother of Love. The men who brought the boy gave

him over to my girls, who undressed him before me, one drawing gently

away his robe, another stroking his brown and flowing hair, another

praising the whiteness of his limbs, and another caressing him, and

speaking loving words in his ear. But the boy looked sullenly at them

all, striking away their hands, and pouting with his lovely and

splendid lips, and I saw a blush, like the rosy veil of dawn, reddening

his body and his cheeks. Then I made them bathe him, and anoint him

with scented oils from head to foot, till his limbs shone and glistened

with the gentle and mellow glow of an ivory statue. Then I said: ‘You

are bashful, because you shine alone amongst us all; see, we too will

be your fellows.’ The girls began first of all, fondling and kissing

one another, and doing for each other the offices of waiting-maids.

They drew out the pins and loosened the bands of their hair, and I

never knew before that they were so lovely. The soft and shining

tresses flowed down, rippling like sea-waves; some had hair golden and

radiant as this wine in my cup, the faces of others appeared amidst the

blackness of ebony; there were locks that seemed of burnished and

scintillating copper, some glowed with hair of tawny splendor, and

others were crowned with the brightness of the sardonyx. Then,

laughing, and without the appearance of shame, they unfastened the

brooches and bands which sustained their robes, and so allowed silk and

linen to flow swiftly to the stained floor, so that one would have said

there was a sudden apparition of the fairest nymphs. With many festive

and jocose words they began to incite each other to mirth, praising the

beauties that shone on every side, and calling the boy by a girl’s

name, they invited him to be their playmate. But he refused, shaking

his head, and still standing dumb-founded and abashed, as if he saw a

forbidden and terrible spectacle. Then I ordered the women to undo my

hair and my clothes, making them caress me with the tenderness of the

fondest lover, but without avail, for the foolish boy still scowled and

pouted out his lips, stained with an imperial and glorious scarlet.”

She poured out more of the topaz-coloured wine in her cup, and Lucian

saw it glitter as it rose to the brim and mirrored the gleam of the

lamps. The tale went on, recounting a hundred strange devices. The

woman told how she had tempted the boy by idleness and ease, giving him

long hours of sleep, and allowing him to recline all day on soft

cushions, that swelled about him, enclosing his body. She tried the

experiment of curious odours: causing him to smell always about him the

oil of roses, and burning in his presence rare gums from the East. He

was allured by soft dresses, being clothed in silks that caressed the

skin with the sense of a fondling touch. Three times a day they spread

before him a delicious banquet, full of savour and odour and colour;

three times a day they endeavored to intoxicate him with delicate wine.

“And so,” the lady continued, “I spared nothing to catch him in the

glistening nets of love; taking only sour and contemptuous glances in

return. And at last in an incredible shape I won the victory, and then,

having gained a green crown, fighting in agony against his green and

crude immaturity, I devoted him to the theatre, where he amused the

people by the splendor of his death.”

On another evening he heard the history of the man who dwelt alone,

refusing all allurements, and was at last discovered to be the lover of

a black statue. And there were tales of strange cruelties, of men taken

by mountain robbers, and curiously maimed and disfigured, so that when

they escaped and returned to the town, they were thought to be monsters

and killed at their own doors. Lucian left no dark or secret nook of

life unvisited; he sat down, as he said, at the banquet, resolved to

taste all the savours, and to leave no flagon unvisited.

His relations grew seriously alarmed about him at this period. While he

heard with some inner ear the suave and eloquent phrases of singular

tales, and watched the lamp-light in amber and purple wine, his father

saw a lean pale boy, with black eyes that burnt in hollows, and sad and

sunken cheeks.

“You ought to try and eat more, Lucian,” said the parson; “and why

don’t you have some beer?”

He was looking feebly at the roast mutton and sipping a little water;

but he would not have eaten or drunk with more relish if the choicest

meat and drink had been before him.

His bones seemed, as Miss Deacon said, to be growing through his skin;

he had all the appearance of an ascetic whose body has been reduced to

misery by long and grievous penance. People who chanced to see him

could not help saying to one another: “How ill and wretched that Lucian

Taylor looks!” They were of course quite unaware of the joy and luxury

in which his real life was spent, and some of them began to pity him,

and to speak to him kindly.

It was too late for that. The friendly words had as much lost their

meaning as the words of contempt. Edward Dixon hailed him cheerfully in

the street one day:

“Come in to my den, won’t you, old fellow?” he said. “You won’t see the

pater. I’ve managed to bag a bottle of his old port. I know you smoke

like a furnace, and I’ve got some ripping cigars. You will come, won’t

you! I can tell you the pater’s booze is first rate.”

He gently declined and went on. Kindness and unkindness, pity and

contempt had become for him mere phrases; he could not have

distinguished one from the other. Hebrew and Chinese, Hungarian and

Pushtu would be pretty much alike to an agricultural labourer; if he

cared to listen he might detect some general differences in sound, but

all four tongues would be equally devoid of significance.

To Lucian, entranced in the garden of Avallaunius, it seemed very

strange that he had once been so ignorant of all the exquisite meanings

of life. Now, beneath the violet sky, looking through the brilliant

trellis of the vines, he saw the picture; before, he had gazed in sad

astonishment at the squalid rag which was wrapped about it.

V.

And he was at last in the city of the unending murmuring streets, a

part of the stirring shadow, of the amber-lighted gloom.

It seemed a long time since he had knelt before his sweetheart in the

lane, the moon-fire streaming upon them from the dark circle of the

fort, the air and the light and his soul full of haunting, the touch of

the unimaginable thrilling his heart; and now he sat in a terrible

“bed-sitting-room” in a western suburb, confronted by a heap and litter

of papers on the desk of a battered old bureau.

He had put his breakfast-tray out on the landing, and was thinking of

the morning’s work, and of some very dubious pages that he had

blackened the night before. But when he had lit his disreputable briar,

he remembered there was an unopened letter waiting for him on the

table; he had recognized the vague, staggering script of Miss Deacon,

his cousin. There was not much news; his father was “just the same as

usual,” there had been a good deal of rain, the farmers expected to

make a lot of cider, and so forth. But at the close of the letter Miss

Deacon became useful for reproof and admonition.

“I was at Caermaen on Tuesday,” she said, “and called on the Gervases

and the Dixons. Mr. Gervase smiled when I told him you were a literary

man, living in London, and said he was afraid you wouldn’t find it a

very practical career. Mrs. Gervase was very proud of Henry’s success;

he passed fifth for some examination, and will begin with nearly four

hundred a year. I don’t wonder the Gervases are delighted. Then I went

to the Dixons, and had tea. Mrs. Dixon wanted to know if you had

published anything yet, and I said I thought not. She showed me a book

everybody is talking about, called the \_Dog and the Doctor\_. She says

it’s selling by thousands, and that one can’t take up a paper without

seeing the author’s name. She told me to tell you that you ought to try

to write something like it. Then Mr. Dixon came in from the study, and

your name was mentioned again. He said he was afraid you had made

rather a mistake in trying to take up literature as if it were a

profession, and seemed to think that a place in a house of business

would be more \_suitable\_ and more practical. He pointed out that you

had not had the advantages of a university training, and said that you

would find men who had made good friends, and had the \_tone\_ of the

university, would be before you at every step. He said Edward was doing

very well at Oxford. He writes to them that he knows several noblemen,

and that young Philip Bullingham (son of Sir John Bullingham) is his

most intimate friend; of course this is \_very\_ satisfactory for the

Dixons. I am afraid, my dear Lucian, you have rather overrated your

powers. Wouldn’t it be better, even now, to look out for some \_real

work\_ to do, instead of wasting your time over those silly old books? I

know quite well how the Gervases and the Dixons feel; they think

idleness so injurious for a young man, and likely to lead to \_bad

habits\_. You know, my dear Lucian, I am only writing like this because

of my affection for you, so I am sure, my dear boy, you won’t be

offended.”

Lucian pigeon-holed the letter solemnly in the receptacle lettered

“Barbarians.” He felt that he ought to ask himself some serious

questions: “Why haven’t I passed fifth? why isn’t Philip (son of Sir

John) my most intimate friend? why am I an idler, liable to fall into

bad habits?” but he was eager to get to his work, a curious and

intricate piece of analysis. So the battered bureau, the litter of

papers, and the thick fume of his pipe, engulfed him and absorbed him

for the rest of the morning. Outside were the dim October mists, the

dreary and languid life of a side street, and beyond, on the main road,

the hum and jangle of the gliding trains. But he heard none of the

uneasy noises of the quarter, not even the shriek of the garden gates

nor the yelp of the butcher on his round, for delight in his great task

made him unconscious of the world outside.

He had come by curious paths to this calm hermitage between Shepherd’s

Bush and Acton Vale. The golden weeks of the summer passed on in their

enchanted procession, and Annie had not returned, neither had she

written. Lucian, on his side, sat apart, wondering why his longing for

her were not sharper. As he though of his raptures he would smile

faintly to himself, and wonder whether he had not lost the world and

Annie with it. In the garden of Avallaunius his sense of external

things had grown dim and indistinct; the actual, material life seemed

every day to become a show, a fleeting of shadows across a great white

light. At last the news came that Annie Morgan had been married from

her sister’s house to a young farmer, to whom, it appeared, she had

been long engaged, and Lucian was ashamed to find himself only

conscious of amusement, mingled with gratitude. She had been the key

that opened the shut palace, and he was now secure on the throne of

ivory and gold. A few days after he had heard the news he repeated the

adventure of his boyhood; for the second time he scaled the steep

hillside, and penetrated the matted brake. He expected violent

disillusion, but his feeling was rather astonishment at the activity of

boyish imagination. There was no terror nor amazement now in the green

bulwarks, and the stunted undergrowth did not seem in any way

extraordinary. Yet he did not laugh at the memory of his sensations, he

was not angry at the cheat. Certainly it had been all illusion, all the

heats and chills of boyhood, its thoughts of terror were without

significance. But he recognized that the illusions of the child only

differed from those of the man in that they were more picturesque;

belief in fairies and belief in the Stock Exchange as bestowers of

happiness were equally vain, but the latter form of faith was ugly as

well as inept. It was better, he knew, and wiser, to wish for a fairy

coach than to cherish longings for a well-appointed brougham and

liveried servants.

He turned his back on the green walls and the dark oaks without any

feeling of regret or resentment. After a little while he began to think

of his adventures with pleasure; the ladder by which he had mounted had

disappeared, but he was safe on the height. By the chance fancy of a

beautiful girl he had been redeemed from a world of misery and torture,

the world of external things into which he had come a stranger, by

which he had been tormented. He looked back at a kind of vision of

himself seen as he was a year before, a pitiable creature burning and

twisting on the hot coals of the pit, crying lamentably to the laughing

bystanders for but one drop of cold water wherewith to cool his tongue.

He confessed to himself, with some contempt, that he had been a social

being, depending for his happiness on the goodwill of others; he had

tried hard to write, chiefly, it was true, from love of the art, but a

little from a social motive. He had imagined that a written book and

the praise of responsible journals would ensure him the respect of the

county people. It was a quaint idea, and he saw the lamentable

fallacies naked; in the first place, a painstaking artist in words was

not respected by the respectable; secondly, books should not be written

with the object of gaining the goodwill of the landed and commercial

interests; thirdly and chiefly, no man should in any way depend on

another.

From this utter darkness, from danger of madness, the ever dear and

sweet Annie had rescued him. Very beautifully and fitly, as Lucian

thought, she had done her work without any desire to benefit him, she

had simply willed to gratify her own passion, and in doing this had

handed to him the priceless secret. And he, on his side, had reversed

the process; merely to make himself a splendid offering for the

acceptance of his sweetheart, he had cast aside the vain world, and had

found the truth, which now remained with him, precious and enduring.

And since the news of the marriage he found that his worship of her had

by no means vanished; rather in his heart was the eternal treasure of a

happy love, untarnished and spotless; it would be like a mirror of gold

without alloy, bright and lustrous for ever. For Lucian, it was no

defect in the woman that she was desirous and faithless; he had not

conceived an affection for certain moral or intellectual accidents, but

for the very woman. Guided by the self-evident axiom that humanity is

to be judged by literature, and not literature by humanity, he detected

the analogy between \_Lycidas\_ and Annie. Only the dullard would object

to the nauseous cant of the one, or to the indiscretions of the other.

A sober critic might say that the man who could generalize Herbert and

Laud, Donne and Herrick, Sanderson and Juxon, Hammond and Lancelot

Andrewes into “our corrupted Clergy” must be either an imbecile or a

scoundrel, or probably both. The judgment would be perfectly true, but

as a criticism of \_Lycidas\_ it would be a piece of folly. In the case

of the woman one could imagine the attitude of the conventional lover;

of the chevalier who, with his tongue in his cheek, “reverences and

respects” all women, and coming home early in the morning writes a

leading article on St English Girl. Lucian, on the other hand, felt

profoundly grateful to the delicious Annie, because she had at

precisely the right moment voluntarily removed her image from his way.

He confessed to himself that, latterly, he had a little dreaded her

return as an interruption; he had shivered at the thought that their

relations would become what was so terribly called an “intrigue” or

“affair.” There would be all the threadbare and common stratagems, the

vulgarity of secret assignations, and an atmosphere suggesting the

period of Mr. Thomas Moore and Lord Byron and “segars.” Lucian had been

afraid of all this; he had feared lest love itself should destroy love.

He considered that now, freed from the torment of the body, leaving

untasted the green water that makes thirst more burning, he was

perfectly initiated in the true knowledge of the splendid and glorious

love. There seemed to him a monstrous paradox in the assertion that

there could be no true love without a corporal presence of the beloved;

even the popular sayings of “Absence makes the heart grow fonder,” and

“familiarity breeds contempt,” witnessed to the contrary. He thought,

sighing, and with compassion, of the manner in which men are

continually led astray by the cheat of the senses. In order that the

unborn might still be added to the born, nature had inspired men with

the wild delusion that the bodily companionship of the lover and the

beloved was desirable above all things, and so, by the false show of

pleasure, the human race was chained to vanity, and doomed to an

eternal thirst for the non-existent.

Again and again he gave thanks for his own escape; he had been set free

from a life of vice and sin and folly, from all the dangers and

illusions that are most dreaded by the wise. He laughed as he

remembered what would be the common view of the situation. An ordinary

lover would suffer all the sting of sorrow and contempt; there would be

grief for a lost mistress, and rage at her faithlessness, and hate in

the heart; one foolish passion driving on another, and driving the man

to ruin. For what would be commonly called the real woman he now cared

nothing; if he had heard that she had died in her farm in Utter Gwent,

he would have experienced only a passing sorrow, such as he might feel

at the death of any one he had once known. But he did not think of the

young farmer’s wife as the real Annie; he did not think of the

frost-bitten leaves in winter as the real rose. Indeed, the life of

many reminded him of the flowers; perhaps more especially of those

flowers which to all appearance are for many years but dull and dusty

clumps of green, and suddenly, in one night, burst into the flame of

blossom, and fill all the misty lawns with odour; till the morning. It

was in that night that the flower lived, not through the long

unprofitable years; and, in like manner, many human lives, he thought,

were born in the evening and dead before the coming of day. But he had

preserved the precious flower in all its glory, not suffering it to

wither in the hard light, but keeping it in a secret place, where it

could never be destroyed. Truly now, and for the first time, he

possessed Annie, as a man possesses the gold which he has dug from the

rock and purged of its baseness.

He was musing over these things when a piece of news, very strange and

unexpected, arrived at the rectory. A distant, almost a mythical

relative, known from childhood as “Cousin Edward in the Isle of Wight,”

had died, and by some strange freak had left Lucian two thousand

pounds. It was a pleasure to give his father five hundred pounds, and

the rector on his side forgot for a couple of days to lean his head on

his hand. From the rest of the capital, which was well invested, Lucian

found he would derive something between sixty and seventy pounds a

year, and his old desires for literature and a refuge in the murmuring

streets returned to him. He longed to be free from the incantations

that surrounded him in the country, to work and live in a new

atmosphere; and so, with many good wishes from his father, he came to

the retreat in the waste places of London.

He was in high spirits when he found the square, clean room, horribly

furnished, in the by-street that branched from the main road, and

advanced in an unlovely sweep to the mud pits and the desolation that

was neither town nor country. On every side monotonous grey streets,

each house the replica of its neighbor, to the east an unexplored

wilderness, north and west and south the brickfields and

market-gardens, everywhere the ruins of the country, the tracks where

sweet lanes had been, gangrened stumps of trees, the relics of hedges,

here and there an oak stripped of its bark, white and haggard and

leprous, like a corpse. And the air seemed always grey, and the smoke

from the brickfields was grey.

At first he scarcely realized the quarter into which chance had led

him. His only thought was of the great adventure of letters in which he

proposed to engage, and his first glance round his “bed-sitting-room”

showed him that there was no piece of furniture suitable for his

purpose. The table, like the rest of the suite, was of bird’s-eye

maple; but the maker seemed to have penetrated the druidic secret of

the rocking-stone, the thing was in a state of unstable equilibrium

perpetually. For some days he wandered through the streets, inspecting

the second-hand furniture shops, and at last, in a forlorn byway, found

an old Japanese bureau, dishonored and forlorn, standing amongst rusty

bedsteads, sorry china, and all the refuse of homes dead and desolate.

The bureau pleased him in spite of its grime and grease and dirt.

Inlaid mother-of-pearl, the gleam of lacquer dragons in red gold, and

hints of curious design shone through the film of neglect and

ill-usage, and when the woman of the shop showed him the drawers and

well and pigeon-holes, he saw that it would be an apt instrument for

his studies.

The bureau was carried to his room and replaced the “bird’s-eye” table

under the gas-jet. As Lucian arranged what papers he had accumulated:

the sketches of hopeless experiments, shreds and tatters of stories

begun but never completed, outlines of plots, two or three notebooks

scribbled through and through with impressions of the abandoned hills,

he felt a thrill of exaltation at the prospect of work to be

accomplished, of a new world all open before him.

He set out on the adventure with a fury of enthusiasm; his last thought

at night when all the maze of streets was empty and silent was of the

problem, and his dreams ran on phrases, and when he awoke in the

morning he was eager to get back to his desk. He immersed himself in a

minute, almost a microscopic analysis of fine literature. It was no

longer enough, as in the old days, to feel the charm and incantation of

a line or a word; he wished to penetrate the secret, to understand

something of the wonderful suggestion, all apart from the sense, that

seemed to him the \_differentia\_ of literature, as distinguished from

the long follies of “character-drawing,” “psychological analysis,” and

all the stuff that went to make the three-volume novel of commerce.

He found himself curiously strengthened by the change from the hills to

the streets. There could be no doubt, he thought, that living a lonely

life, interested only in himself and his own thoughts, he had become in

a measure inhuman. The form of external things, black depths in woods,

pools in lonely places, those still valleys curtained by hills on every

side, sounding always with the ripple of their brooks, had become to

him an influence like that of a drug, giving a certain peculiar colour

and outline to his thoughts. And from early boyhood there had been

another strange flavor in his life, the dream of the old Roman world,

those curious impressions that he had gathered from the white walls of

Caermaen, and from the looming bastions of the fort. It was in reality

the subconscious fancies of many years that had rebuilt the golden

city, and had shown him the vine-trellis and the marbles and the

sunlight in the garden of Avallaunius. And the rapture of love had made

it all so vivid and warm with life, that even now, when he let his pen

drop, the rich noise of the tavern and the chant of the theatre sounded

above the murmur of the streets. Looking back, it was as much a part of

his life as his schooldays, and the tessellated pavements were as real

as the square of faded carpet beneath his feet.

But he felt that he had escaped. He could now survey those splendid and

lovely visions from without, as if he read of opium dreams, and he no

longer dreaded a weird suggestion that had once beset him, that his

very soul was being moulded into the hills, and passing into the black

mirror of still waterpools. He had taken refuge in the streets, in the

harbor of a modern suburb, from the vague, dreaded magic that had

charmed his life. Whenever he felt inclined to listen to the old

wood-whisper or to the singing of the fauns he bent more earnestly to

his work, turning a deaf ear to the incantations.

In the curious labour of the bureau he found refreshment that was

continually renewed. He experienced again, and with a far more violent

impulse, the enthusiasm that had attended the writing of his book a

year or two before, and so, perhaps, passed from one drug to another.

It was, indeed, with something of rapture that he imagined the great

procession of years all to be devoted to the intimate analysis of

words, to the construction of the sentence, as if it were a piece of

jewelry or mosaic.

Sometimes, in the pauses of the work, he would pace up and down his

cell, looking out of the window now and again and gazing for an instant

into the melancholy street. As the year advanced the days grew more and

more misty, and he found himself the inhabitant of a little island

wreathed about with the waves of a white and solemn sea. In the

afternoon the fog would grow denser, shutting out not only sight but

sound; the shriek of the garden gates, the jangling of the tram-bell

echoed as if from a far way. Then there were days of heavy incessant

rain; he could see a grey drifting sky and the drops plashing in the

street, and the houses all dripping and saddened with wet.

He cured himself of one great aversion. He was no longer nauseated at

the sight of a story begun and left unfinished. Formerly, even when an

idea rose in his mind bright and wonderful, he had always approached

the paper with a feeling of sickness and dislike, remembering all the

hopeless beginnings he had made. But now he understood that to begin a

romance was almost a separate and special art, a thing apart from the

story, to be practiced with sedulous care. Whenever an opening scene

occurred to him he noted it roughly in a book, and he devoted many long

winter evenings to the elabouration of these beginnings. Sometimes the

first impression would yield only a paragraph or a sentence, and once

or twice but a splendid and sonorous word, which seemed to Lucian all

dim and rich with unsurmised adventure. But often he was able to write

three or four vivid pages, studying above all things the hint and

significance of the words and actions, striving to work into the lines

the atmosphere of expectation and promise, and the murmur of wonderful

events to come.

In this one department of his task the labour seemed almost endless. He

would finish a few pages and then rewrite them, using the same incident

and nearly the same words, but altering that indefinite something which

is scarcely so much style as manner, or atmosphere. He was astonished

at the enormous change that was thus effected, and often, though he

himself had done the work, he could scarcely describe in words how it

was done. But it was clear that in this art of manner, or suggestion,

lay all the chief secrets of literature, that by it all the great

miracles were performed. Clearly it was not style, for style in itself

was untranslatable, but it was that high theurgic magic that made the

English \_Don Quixote\_, roughly traduced by some Jervas, perhaps the

best of all English books. And it was the same element that made the

journey of Roderick Random to London, so ostensibly a narrative of

coarse jokes and common experiences and burlesque manners, told in no

very choice diction, essentially a wonderful vision of the eighteenth

century, carrying to one’s very nostrils the aroma of the Great North

Road, iron-bound under black frost, darkened beneath shuddering woods,

haunted by highwaymen, with an adventure waiting beyond every turn, and

great old echoing inns in the midst of lonely winter lands.

It was this magic that Lucian sought for his opening chapters; he tried

to find that quality that gives to words something beyond their sound

and beyond their meaning, that in the first lines of a book should

whisper things unintelligible but all significant. Often he worked for

many hours without success, and the grim wet dawn once found him still

searching for hieroglyphic sentences, for words mystical, symbolic. On

the shelves, in the upper part of his bureau, he had placed the books

which, however various as to matter, seemed to have a part in this

curious quality of suggestion, and in that sphere which might almost be

called supernatural. To these books he often had recourse, when further

effort appeared altogether hopeless, and certain pages in Coleridge and

Edgar Allan Poe had the power of holding him in a trance of delight,

subject to emotions and impressions which he knew to transcend

altogether the realm of the formal understanding. Such lines as:

Bottomless vales and boundless floods,

And chasms, and caves, and Titan woods,

With forms that no man can discover

For the dews that drip all over;

had for Lucian more than the potency of a drug, lulling him into a

splendid waking-sleep, every word being a supreme incantation. And it

was not only his mind that was charmed by such passages, for he felt at

the same time a strange and delicious bodily languor that held him

motionless, without the desire or power to stir from his seat. And

there were certain phrases in \_Kubla Khan\_ that had such a magic that

he would sometimes wake up, as it were, to the consciousness that he

had been lying on the bed or sitting in the chair by the bureau,

repeating a single line over and over again for two or three hours. Yet

he knew perfectly well that he had not been really asleep; a little

effort recalled a constant impression of the wall-paper, with its pink

flowers on a buff ground, and of the muslin-curtained window, letting

in the grey winter light. He had been some seven months in London when

this odd experience first occurred to him. The day opened dreary and

cold and clear, with a gusty and restless wind whirling round the

corner of the street, and lifting the dead leaves and scraps of paper

that littered the roadway into eddying mounting circles, as if a storm

of black rain were to come. Lucian had sat late the night before, and

rose in the morning feeling weary and listless and heavy-headed. While

he dressed, his legs dragged him as with weights, and he staggered and

nearly fell in bending down to the mat outside for his tea-tray. He lit

the spirit lamp on the hearth with shaking, unsteady hands, and could

scarcely pour out the tea when it was ready. A delicate cup of tea was

one of his few luxuries; he was fond of the strange flavor of the green

leaf, and this morning he drank the straw-coloured liquid eagerly,

hoping it would disperse the cloud of languor. He tried his best to

coerce himself into the sense of vigor and enjoyment with which he

usually began the day, walking briskly up and down and arranging his

papers in order. But he could not free himself from depression; even as

he opened the dear bureau a wave of melancholy came upon him, and he

began to ask himself whether he were not pursuing a vain dream,

searching for treasures that had no existence. He drew out his cousin’s

letter and read it again, sadly enough. After all there was a good deal

of truth in what she said; he had “overrated” his powers, he had no

friends, no real education. He began to count up the months since he

had come to London; he had received his two thousand pounds in March,

and in May he had said good-bye to the woods and to the dear and

friendly paths. May, June, July, August, September, October, November,

and half of December had gone by; and what had he to show? Nothing but

the experiment, the attempt, futile scribblings which had no end nor

shining purpose. There was nothing in his desk that he could produce as

evidence of his capacity, no fragment even of accomplishment. It was a

thought of intense bitterness, but it seemed as if the barbarians were

in the right—a place in a house of business would have been more

suitable. He leaned his head on his desk overwhelmed with the severity

of his own judgment. He tried to comfort himself again by the thought

of all the hours of happy enthusiasm he had spent amongst his papers,

working for a great idea with infinite patience. He recalled to mind

something that he had always tried to keep in the background of his

hopes, the foundation-stone of his life, which he had hidden out of

sight. Deep in his heart was the hope that he might one day write a

valiant book; he scarcely dared to entertain the aspiration, he felt

his incapacity too deeply, but yet this longing was the foundation of

all his painful and patient effort. This he had proposed in secret to

himself, that if he laboured without ceasing, without tiring, he might

produce something which would at all events be art, which would stand

wholly apart from the objects shaped like books, printed with printers’

ink, and called by the name of books that he had read. Giotto, he knew,

was a painter, and the man who imitated walnut-wood on the deal doors

opposite was a painter, and he had wished to be a very humble pupil in

the class of the former. It was better, he thought, to fail in

attempting exquisite things than to succeed in the department of the

utterly contemptible; he had vowed he would be the dunce of Cervantes’s

school rather than top-boy in the academy of \_A Bad Un to Beat\_ and

\_Millicent’s Marriage\_. And with this purpose he had devoted himself to

labourious and joyous years, so that however mean his capacity, the

pains should not be wanting. He tried now to rouse himself from a

growing misery by the recollection of this high aim, but it all seemed

hopeless vanity. He looked out into the grey street, and it stood a

symbol of his life, chill and dreary and grey and vexed with a horrible

wind. There were the dull inhabitants of the quarter going about their

common business; a man was crying “mackerel” in a doleful voice, slowly

passing up the street, and staring into the white-curtained “parlors,”

searching for the face of a purchaser behind the India-rubber plants,

stuffed birds, and piles of gaudy gilt books that adorned the windows.

One of the blistered doors over the way banged, and a woman came

scurrying out on some errand, and the garden gate shrieked two

melancholy notes as she opened it and let it swing back after her. The

little patches called gardens were mostly untilled, uncared for,

squares of slimy moss, dotted with clumps of coarse ugly grass, but

here and there were the blackened and rotting remains of sunflowers and

marigolds. And beyond, he knew, stretched the labyrinth of streets more

or less squalid, but all grey and dull, and behind were the mud pits

and the steaming heaps of yellowish bricks, and to the north was a

great wide cold waste, treeless, desolate, swept by bitter wind. It was

all like his own life, he said again to himself, a maze of unprofitable

dreariness and desolation, and his mind grew as black and hopeless as

the winter sky. The morning went thus dismally till twelve o’clock, and

he put on his hat and great-coat. He always went out for an hour every

day between twelve and one; the exercise was a necessity, and the

landlady made his bed in the interval. The wind blew the smoke from the

chimneys into his face as he shut the door, and with the acrid smoke

came the prevailing odour of the street, a blend of cabbage-water and

burnt bones and the faint sickly vapor from the brickfields. Lucian

walked mechanically for the hour, going eastward, along the main road.

The wind pierced him, and the dust was blinding, and the dreariness of

the street increased his misery. The row of common shops, full of

common things, the blatant public-houses, the Independent chapel, a

horrible stucco parody of a Greek temple with a façade of hideous

columns that was a nightmare, villas like smug Pharisees, shops again,

a church in cheap Gothic, an old garden blasted and riven by the

builder, these were the pictures of the way. When he got home again he

flung himself on the bed, and lay there stupidly till sheer hunger

roused him. He ate a hunch of bread and drank some water, and began to

pace up and down the room, wondering whether there were no escape from

despair. Writing seemed quite impossible, and hardly knowing what he

did he opened his bureau and took out a book from the shelves. As his

eyes fell on the page the air grew dark and heavy as night, and the

wind wailed suddenly, loudly, terribly.

“By woman wailing for her Demon lover.” The words were on his lips when

he raised his eyes again. A broad band of pale clear light was shining

into the room, and when he looked out of the window he saw the road all

brightened by glittering pools of water, and as the last drops of the

rain-storm starred these mirrors the sun sank into the wrack. Lucian

gazed about him, perplexed, till his eyes fell on the clock above his

empty hearth. He had been sitting, motionless, for nearly two hours

without any sense of the passage of time, and without ceasing he had

murmured those words as he dreamed an endless wonderful story. He

experienced somewhat the sensations of Coleridge himself; strange,

amazing, ineffable things seemed to have been presented to him, not in

the form of the idea, but actually and materially, but he was less

fortunate than Coleridge in that he could not, even vaguely, image to

himself what he had seen. Yet when he searched his mind he knew that

the consciousness of the room in which he sat had never left him; he

had seen the thick darkness gather, and had heard the whirl of rain

hissing through the air. Windows had been shut down with a crash, he

had noted the pattering footsteps of people running to shelter, the

landlady’s voice crying to some one to look at the rain coming in under

the door. It was like peering into some old bituminous picture, one

could see at last that the mere blackness resolved itself into the

likeness of trees and rocks and travelers. And against this background

of his room, and the storm, and the noises of the street, his vision

stood out illuminated, he felt he had descended to the very depths,

into the caverns that are hollowed beneath the soul. He tried vainly to

record the history of his impressions; the symbols remained in his

memory, but the meaning was all conjecture.

The next morning, when he awoke, he could scarcely understand or

realize the bitter depression of the preceding day. He found it had all

vanished away and had been succeeded by an intense exaltation.

Afterwards, when at rare intervals he experienced the same strange

possession of the consciousness, he found this to be the invariable

result, the hour of vision was always succeeded by a feeling of

delight, by sensations of brightened and intensified powers. On that

bright December day after the storm he rose joyously, and set about the

labour of the bureau with the assurance of success, almost with the

hope of formidable difficulties to be overcome. He had long busied

himself with those curious researches which Poe had indicated in the

\_Philosophy of Composition\_, and many hours had been spent in analyzing

the singular effects which may be produced by the sound and resonance

of words. But he had been struck by the thought that in the finest

literature there were more subtle tones than the loud and insistent

music of “never more,” and he endeavored to find the secret of those

pages and sentences which spoke, less directly, and less obviously, to

the soul rather than to the ear, being filled with a certain grave

melody and the sensation of singing voices. It was admirable, no doubt,

to write phrases that showed at a glance their designed rhythm, and

rang with sonorous words, but he dreamed of a prose in which the music

should be less explicit, of names rather than notes. He was astonished

that morning at his own fortune and facility; he succeeded in covering

a page of ruled paper wholly to his satisfaction, and the sentences,

when he read them out, appeared to suggest a weird elusive chanting,

exquisite but almost imperceptible, like the echo of the plainsong

reverberated from the vault of a monastic church.

He thought that such happy mornings well repaid him for the anguish of

depression which he sometimes had to suffer, and for the strange

experience of “possession” recurring at rare intervals, and usually

after many weeks of severe diet. His income, he found, amounted to

sixty-five pounds a year, and he lived for weeks at a time on fifteen

shillings a week. During these austere periods his only food was bread,

at the rate of a loaf a day; but he drank huge draughts of green tea,

and smoked a black tobacco, which seemed to him a more potent mother of

thought than any drug from the scented East. “I hope you go to some

nice place for dinner,” wrote his cousin; “there used to be some

excellent eating-houses in London where one could get a good cut from

the joint, \_with plenty of gravy\_, and a boiled potato, for a shilling.

Aunt Mary writes that you should try Mr. Jones’s in Water Street,

Islington, whose father came from near Caermaen, and was always most

comfortable in her day. I daresay the walk there would do you good. It

is such a pity you smoke that horrid tobacco. I had a letter from Mrs.

Dolly (Jane Diggs, who married your cousin John Dolly) the other day,

and she said they would have been delighted to take you for only

twenty-five shillings a week for the sake of the family if you had not

been a smoker. She told me to ask you if you had ever seen a horse or a

dog smoking tobacco. They are such nice, comfortable people, and the

children would have been company for you. Johnnie, who used to be such

a dear little fellow, has just gone into an office in the City, and

seems to have excellent prospects. How I wish, my dear Lucian, that you

could do something in the same way. Don’t forget Mr. Jones’s in Water

Street, and you might mention your name to him.”

Lucian never troubled Mr. Jones; but these letters of his cousin’s

always refreshed him by the force of contrast. He tried to imagine

himself a part of the Dolly family, going dutifully every morning to

the City on the bus, and returning in the evening for high tea. He

could conceive the fine odour of hot roast beef hanging about the

decorous house on Sunday afternoons, papa asleep in the dining-room,

mamma lying down, and the children quite good and happy with their

“Sundays books.” In the evening, after supper, one read the \_Quiver\_

till bedtime. Such pictures as these were to Lucian a comfort and a

help, a remedy against despair. Often when he felt overwhelmed by the

difficulty of the work he had undertaken, he thought of the alternative

career, and was strengthened.

He returned again and again to that desire of a prose which should

sound faintly, not so much with an audible music, but with the memory

and echo of it. In the night, when the last tram had gone jangling by,

and he had looked out and seen the street all wrapped about in heavy

folds of the mist, he conducted some of his most delicate experiments.

In that white and solitary midnight of the suburban street he

experienced the curious sense of being on a tower, remote and apart and

high above all the troubles of the earth. The gas lamp, which was

nearly opposite, shone in a pale halo of light, and the houses

themselves were merely indistinct marks and shadows amidst that

palpable whiteness, shutting out the world and its noises. The

knowledge of the swarming life that was so still, though it surrounded

him, made the silence seem deeper than that of the mountains before the

dawn; it was as if he alone stirred and looked out amidst a host

sleeping at his feet. The fog came in by the open window in freezing

puffs, and as Lucian watched he noticed that it shook and wavered like

the sea, tossing up wreaths and drifts across the pale halo of the

lamp, and, these vanishing, others succeeded. It was as if the mist

passed by from the river to the north, as if it still passed by in the

silence.

He would shut his window gently, and sit down in his lighted room with

all the consciousness of the white advancing shroud upon him. It was

then that he found himself in the mood for curious labours, and able to

handle with some touch of confidence the more exquisite instruments of

the craft. He sought for that magic by which all the glory and glamour

of mystic chivalry were made to shine through the burlesque and gross

adventures of Don Quixote, by which Hawthorne had lit his infernal

Sabbath fires, and fashioned a burning aureole about the village

tragedy of the \_Scarlet Letter\_. In Hawthorne the story and the

suggestion, though quite distinct and of different worlds, were rather

parallel than opposed to one another; but Cervantes had done a stranger

thing. One read of Don Quixote, beaten, dirty, and ridiculous,

mistaking windmills for giants, sheep for an army; but the impression

was of the enchanted forest, of Avalon, of the San Graal, “far in the

spiritual city.” And Rabelais showed him, beneath the letter, the

Tourainian sun shining on the hot rock above Chinon, on the maze of

narrow, climbing streets, on the high-pitched, gabled roofs, on the

grey-blue \_tourelles\_, pricking upward from the fantastic labyrinth of

walls. He heard the sound of sonorous plain-song from the monastic

choir, of gross exuberant gaiety from the rich vineyards; he listened

to the eternal mystic mirth of those that halted in the purple shadow

of the \_sorbier\_ by the white, steep road. The gracious and ornate

\_châteaux\_ on the Loire and the Vienne rose fair and shining to

confront the incredible secrets of vast, dim, far-lifted Gothic naves,

that seemed ready to take the great deep, and float away from the mist

and dust of earthly streets to anchor in the haven of the clear city

that hath foundations. The rank tale of the \_garderobe\_, of the

farm-kitchen, mingled with the reasoned, endless legend of the schools,

with luminous Platonic argument; the old pomp of the Middle Ages put on

the robe of a fresh life. There was a smell of wine and of incense, of

June meadows and of ancient books, and through it all he hearkened,

intent, to the exultation of chiming bells ringing for a new feast in a

new land. He would cover pages with the analysis of these marvels,

tracking the suggestion concealed beneath the words, and yet glowing

like the golden threads in a robe of samite, or like that device of the

old binders by which a vivid picture appeared on the shut edges of a

book. He tried to imitate this art, to summon even the faint shadow of

the great effect, rewriting a page of Hawthorne, experimenting and

changing an epithet here and there, noting how sometimes the alteration

of a trifling word would plunge a whole scene into darkness, as if one

of those blood-red fires had instantly been extinguished. Sometimes,

for severe practice, he attempted to construct short tales in the

manner of this or that master. He sighed over these desperate attempts,

over the clattering pieces of mechanism which would not even simulate

life; but he urged himself to an infinite perseverance. Through the

white hours he worked on amidst the heap and litter of papers; books

and manuscripts overflowed from the bureau to the floor; and if he

looked out he saw the mist still pass by, still passing from the river

to the north.

It was not till the winter was well advanced that he began at all to

explore the region in which he lived. Soon after his arrival in the

grey street he had taken one or two vague walks, hardly noticing where

he went or what he saw; but for all the summer he had shut himself in

his room, beholding nothing but the form and colour of words. For his

morning walk he almost invariably chose the one direction, going along

the Uxbridge Road towards Notting Hill, and returning by the same

monotonous thoroughfare. Now, however, when the new year was beginning

its dull days, he began to diverge occasionally to right and left,

sometimes eating his luncheon in odd corners, in the bulging parlors of

eighteenth-century taverns, that still fronted the surging sea of

modern streets, or perhaps in brand new “publics” on the broken borders

of the brickfields, smelling of the clay from which they had swollen.

He found waste by-places behind railway embankments where he could

smoke his pipe sheltered from the wind; sometimes there was a wooden

fence by an old pear-orchard where he sat and gazed at the wet

desolation of the market-gardens, munching a few currant biscuits by

way of dinner. As he went farther afield a sense of immensity slowly

grew upon him; it was as if, from the little island of his room, that

one friendly place, he pushed out into the grey unknown, into a city

that for him was uninhabited as the desert.

He came back to his cell after these purposeless wanderings always with

a sense of relief, with the thought of taking refuge from grey. As he

lit the gas and opened the desk of his bureau and saw the pile of

papers awaiting him, it was as if he had passed from the black skies

and the stinging wind and the dull maze of the suburb into all the

warmth and sunlight and violent colour of the south.

VI.

It was in this winter after his coming to the grey street that Lucian

first experienced the pains of desolation. He had all his life known

the delights of solitude, and had acquired that habit of mind which

makes a man find rich company on the bare hillside and leads him into

the heart of the wood to meditate by the dark waterpools. But now in

the blank interval when he was forced to shut up his desk, the sense of

loneliness overwhelmed him and filled him with unutterable melancholy.

On such days he carried about with him an unceasing gnawing torment in

his breast; the anguish of the empty page awaiting him in his bureau,

and the knowledge that it was worse than useless to attempt the work.

He had fallen into the habit of always using this phrase “the work” to

denote the adventure of literature; it had grown in his mind to all the

austere and grave significance of “the great work” on the lips of the

alchemists; it included every trifling and labourious page and the

vague magnificent fancies that sometimes hovered below him. All else

had become mere by-play, unimportant, trivial; the work was the end,

and the means and the food of his life—it raised him up in the morning

to renew the struggle, it was the symbol which charmed him as he lay

down at night. All through the hours of toil at the bureau he was

enchanted, and when he went out and explored the unknown coasts, the

one thought allured him, and was the coloured glass between his eyes

and the world. Then as he drew nearer home his steps would quicken, and

the more weary and grey the walk, the more he rejoiced as he thought of

his hermitage and of the curious difficulties that awaited him there.

But when, suddenly and without warning, the faculty disappeared, when

his mind seemed a hopeless waste from which nothing could arise, then

he became subject to a misery so piteous that the barbarians themselves

would have been sorry for him. He had known some foretaste of these

bitter and inexpressible griefs in the old country days, but then he

had immediately taken refuge in the hills, he had rushed to the dark

woods as to an anodyne, letting his heart drink in all the wonder and

magic of the wild land. Now in these days of January, in the suburban

street, there was no such refuge.

He had been working steadily for some weeks, well enough satisfied on

the whole with the daily progress, glad to awake in the morning, and to

read over what he had written on the night before. The new year opened

with faint and heavy weather and a breathless silence in the air, but

in a few days the great frost set in. Soon the streets began to suggest

the appearance of a beleaguered city, the silence that had preceded the

frost deepened, and the mist hung over the earth like a dense white

smoke. Night after night the cold increased, and people seemed

unwilling to go abroad, till even the main thoroughfares were empty and

deserted, as if the inhabitants were lying close in hiding. It was at

this dismal time that Lucian found himself reduced to impotence. There

was a sudden break in his thought, and when he wrote on valiantly,

hoping against hope, he only grew more aghast on the discovery of the

imbecilities he had committed to paper. He ground his teeth together

and persevered, sick at heart, feeling as if all the world were fallen

from under his feet, driving his pen on mechanically, till he was

overwhelmed. He saw the stuff he had done without veil or possible

concealment, a lamentable and wretched sheaf of verbiage, worse, it

seemed, than the efforts of his boyhood. He was not longer

tautological, he avoided tautology with the infernal art of a

leader-writer, filling his wind bags and mincing words as if he had

been a trained journalist on the staff of the \_Daily Post\_. There

seemed all the matter of an insufferable tragedy in these thoughts;

that his patient and enduring toil was in vain, that practice went for

nothing, and that he had wasted the labour of Milton to accomplish the

tenth-rate. Unhappily he could not “give in”; the longing, the fury for

the work burnt within him like a burning fire; he lifted up his eyes in

despair.

It was then, while he knew that no one could help him, that he

languished for help, and then, though he was aware that no comfort was

possible, he fervently wished to be comforted. The only friend he had

was his father, and he knew that his father would not even understand

his distress. For him, always, the printed book was the beginning and

end of literature; the agony of the maker, his despair and sickness,

were as accursed as the pains of labour. He was ready to read and

admire the work of the great Smith, but he did not wish to hear of the

period when the great Smith had writhed and twisted like a scotched

worm, only hoping to be put out of his misery, to go mad or die, to

escape somehow from the bitter pains. And Lucian knew no one else. Now

and then he read in the paper the fame of the great \_littérateurs\_; the

Gypsies were entertaining the Prince of Wales, the Jolly Beggars were

dining with the Lord Mayor, the Old Mumpers were mingling amicably and

gorgeously with the leading members of the Stock Exchange. He was so

unfortunate as to know none of these gentlemen, but it hardly seemed

likely that they could have done much for him in any case. Indeed, in

his heart, he was certain that help and comfort from without were in

the nature of things utterly impossible, his ruin and grief were

within, and only his own assistance could avail. He tried to reassure

himself, to believe that his torments were a proof of his vocation,

that the facility of the novelist who stood six years deep in contracts

to produce romances was a thing wholly undesirable, but all the while

he longed for but a drop of that inexhaustible fluency which he

professed to despise.

He drove himself out from that dreary contemplation of the white paper

and the idle pen. He went into the frozen and deserted streets, hoping

that he might pluck the burning coal from his heart, but the fire was

not quenched. As he walked furiously along the grim iron roads he

fancied that those persons who passed him cheerfully on their way to

friends and friendly hearths shrank from him into the mists as they

went by. Lucian imagined that the fire of his torment and anguish must

in some way glow visibly about him; he moved, perhaps, in a nimbus that

proclaimed the blackness and the flames within. He knew, of course,

that in misery he had grown delirious, that the well-coated,

smooth-hatted personages who loomed out of the fog upon him were in

reality shuddering only with cold, but in spite of common sense he

still conceived that he saw on their faces an evident horror and

disgust, and something of the repugnance that one feels at the sight of

a venomous snake, half-killed, trailing its bleeding vileness out of

sight. By design Lucian tried to make for remote and desolate places,

and yet when he had succeeded in touching on the open country, and knew

that the icy shadow hovering through the mist was a field, he longed

for some sound and murmur of life, and turned again to roads where pale

lamps were glimmering, and the dancing flame of firelight shone across

the frozen shrubs. And the sight of these homely fires, the thought of

affection and consolation waiting by them, stung him the more sharply

perhaps because of the contrast with his own chills and weariness and

helpless sickness, and chiefly because he knew that he had long closed

an everlasting door between his heart and such felicities. If those

within had come out and had called him by his name to enter and be

comforted, it would have been quite unavailing, since between them and

him there was a great gulf fixed. Perhaps for the first time he

realized that he had lost the art of humanity for ever. He had thought

when he closed his ears to the wood whisper and changed the fauns’

singing for the murmur of the streets, the black pools for the shadows

and amber light of London, that he had put off the old life, and had

turned his soul to healthy activities, but the truth was that he had

merely exchanged one drug for another. He could not be human, and he

wondered whether there were some drop of the fairy blood in his body

that made him foreign and a stranger in the world.

He did not surrender to desolation without repeated struggles. He

strove to allure himself to his desk by the promise of some easy task;

he would not attempt invention, but he had memoranda and rough jottings

of ideas in his note-books, and he would merely amplify the suggestions

ready to his hand. But it was hopeless, again and again it was

hopeless. As he read over his notes, trusting that he would find some

hint that might light up the dead fires, and kindle again that pure

flame of enthusiasm, he found how desperately his fortune had fallen.

He could see no light, no colour in the lines he had scribbled with

eager trembling fingers; he remembered how splendid all these things

had been when he wrote them down, but now they were meaningless, faded

into grey. The few words he had dashed on to the paper, enraptured at

the thought of the happy hours they promised, had become mere jargon,

and when he understood the idea it seemed foolish, dull, unoriginal. He

discovered something at last that appeared to have a grain of promise,

and determined to do his best to put it into shape, but the first

paragraph appalled him; it might have been written by an unintelligent

schoolboy. He tore the paper in pieces, and shut and locked his desk,

heavy despair sinking like lead into his heart. For the rest of that

day he lay motionless on the bed, smoking pipe after pipe in the hope

of stupefying himself with tobacco fumes. The air in the room became

blue and thick with smoke; it was bitterly cold, and he wrapped himself

up in his great-coat and drew the counterpane over him. The night came

on and the window darkened, and at last he fell asleep.

He renewed the effort at intervals, only to plunge deeper into misery.

He felt the approaches of madness, and knew that his only hope was to

walk till he was physically exhausted, so that he might come home

almost fainting with fatigue, but ready to fall asleep the moment he

got into bed. He passed the mornings in a kind of torpor, endeavoring

to avoid thought, to occupy his mind with the pattern of the paper,

with the advertisements at the end of a book, with the curious greyness

of the light that glimmered through the mist into his room, with the

muffled voices that rumbled now and then from the street. He tried to

make out the design that had once coloured the faded carpet on the

floor, and wondered about the dead artist in Japan, the adorner of his

bureau. He speculated as to what his thoughts had been as he inserted

the rainbow mother-of-pearl and made that great flight of shining

birds, dipping their wings as they rose from the reeds, or how he had

conceived the lacquer dragons in red gold, and the fantastic houses in

the garden of peach-trees. But sooner or later the oppression of his

grief returned, the loud shriek and clang of the garden-gate, the

warning bell of some passing bicyclist steering through the fog, the

noise of his pipe falling to the floor, would suddenly awaken him to

the sense of misery. He knew that it was time to go out; he could not

bear to sit still and suffer. Sometimes he cut a slice of bread and put

it in his pocket, sometimes he trusted to the chance of finding a

public-house, where he could have a sandwich and a glass of beer. He

turned always from the main streets and lost himself in the intricate

suburban byways, willing to be engulfed in the infinite whiteness of

the mist.

The roads had stiffened into iron ridges, the fences and trees were

glittering with frost crystals, everything was of strange and altered

aspect. Lucian walked on and on through the maze, now in a circle of

shadowy villas, awful as the buried streets of Herculaneum, now in

lanes dipping onto open country, that led him past great elm-trees

whose white boughs were all still, and past the bitter lonely fields

where the mist seemed to fade away into grey darkness. As he wandered

along these unfamiliar and ghastly paths he became the more convinced

of his utter remoteness from all humanity, he allowed that grotesque

suggestion of there being something visibly amiss in his outward

appearance to grow upon him, and often he looked with a horrible

expectation into the faces of those who passed by, afraid lest his own

senses gave him false intelligence, and that he had really assumed some

frightful and revolting shape. It was curious that, partly by his own

fault, and largely, no doubt, through the operation of mere

coincidence, he was once or twice strongly confirmed in this fantastic

delusion. He came one day into a lonely and unfrequented byway, a

country lane falling into ruin, but still fringed with elms that had

formed an avenue leading to the old manor-house. It was now the road of

communication between two far outlying suburbs, and on these winter

nights lay as black, dreary, and desolate as a mountain track. Soon

after the frost began, a gentleman had been set upon in this lane as he

picked his way between the corner where the bus had set him down, and

his home where the fire was blazing, and his wife watched the clock. He

was stumbling uncertainly through the gloom, growing a little nervous

because the walk seemed so long, and peering anxiously for the lamp at

the end of his street, when the two footpads rushed at him out of the

fog. One caught him from behind, the other struck him with a heavy

bludgeon, and as he lay senseless they robbed him of his watch and

money, and vanished across the fields. The next morning all the suburb

rang with the story; the unfortunate merchant had been grievously hurt,

and wives watched their husbands go out in the morning with sickening

apprehension, not knowing what might happen at night. Lucian of course

was ignorant of all these rumors, and struck into the gloomy by-road

without caring where he was or whither the way would lead him.

He had been driven out that day as with whips, another hopeless attempt

to return to the work had agonised him, and existence seemed an

intolerable pain. As he entered the deeper gloom, where the fog hung

heavily, he began, half consciously, to gesticulate; he felt convulsed

with torment and shame, and it was a sorry relief to clench his nails

into his palm and strike the air as he stumbled heavily along, bruising

his feet against the frozen ruts and ridges. His impotence was hideous,

he said to himself, and he cursed himself and his life, breaking out

into a loud oath, and stamping on the ground. Suddenly he was shocked

at a scream of terror, it seemed in his very ear, and looking up he saw

for a moment a woman gazing at him out of the mist, her features

distorted and stiff with fear. A momentary convulsion twitched her arms

into the ugly mimicry of a beckoning gesture, and she turned and ran

for dear life, howling like a beast.

Lucian stood still in the road while the woman’s cries grew faint and

died away. His heart was chilled within him as the significance of this

strange incident became clear. He remembered nothing of his violent

gestures; he had not known at the time that he had sworn out loud, or

that he was grinding his teeth with impotent rage. He only thought of

that ringing scream, of the horrible fear on the white face that had

looked upon him, of the woman’s headlong flight from his presence. He

stood trembling and shuddering, and in a little while he was feeling

his face, searching for some loathsome mark, for the stigmata of evil

branding his forehead. He staggered homewards like a drunken man, and

when he came into the Uxbridge Road some children saw him and called

after him as he swayed and caught at the lamp-post. When he got to his

room he sat down at first in the dark. He did not dare to light the

gas. Everything in the room was indistinct, but he shut his eyes as he

passed the dressing-table, and sat in a corner, his face turned to the

wall. And when at last he gathered courage and the flame leapt hissing

from the jet, he crept piteously towards the glass, and ducked his

head, crouching miserably, and struggling with his terrors before he

could look at his own image.

To the best of his power he tried to deliver himself from these more

grotesque fantasies; he assured himself that there was nothing terrific

in his countenance but sadness, that his face was like the face of

other men. Yet he could not forget that reflection he had seen in the

woman’s eyes, how the surest mirrors had shown him a horrible dread,

her soul itself quailing and shuddering at an awful sight. Her scream

rang and rang in his ears; she had fled away from him as if he offered

some fate darker than death.

He looked again and again into the glass, tortured by a hideous

uncertainty. His senses told him there was nothing amiss, yet he had

had a proof, and yet, as he peered most earnestly, there was, it

seemed, something strange and not altogether usual in the expression of

the eyes. Perhaps it might be the unsteady flare of the gas, or perhaps

a flaw in the cheap looking-glass, that gave some slight distortion to

the image. He walked briskly up and down the room and tried to gaze

steadily, indifferently, into his own face. He would not allow himself

to be misguided by a word. When he had pronounced himself incapable of

humanity, he had only meant that he could not enjoy the simple things

of common life. A man was not necessarily monstrous, merely because he

did not appreciate high tea, a quiet chat about the neighbors, and a

happy noisy evening with the children. But with what message, then, did

he appear charged that the woman’s mouth grew so stark? Her hands had

jerked up as if they had been pulled with frantic wires; she seemed for

the instant like a horrible puppet. Her scream was a thing from the

nocturnal Sabbath.

He lit a candle and held it close up to the glass so that his own face

glared white at him, and the reflection of the room became an

indistinct darkness. He saw nothing but the candle flame and his own

shining eyes, and surely they were not as the eyes of common men. As he

put down the light, a sudden suggestion entered his mind, and he drew a

quick breath, amazed at the thought. He hardly knew whether to rejoice

or to shudder. For the thought he conceived was this: that he had

mistaken all the circumstances of the adventure, and had perhaps

repulsed a sister who would have welcomed him to the Sabbath.

He lay awake all night, turning from one dreary and frightful thought

to the other, scarcely dozing for a few hours when the dawn came. He

tried for a moment to argue with himself when he got up; knowing that

his true life was locked up in the bureau, he made a desperate attempt

to drive the phantoms and hideous shapes from his mind. He was assured

that his salvation was in the work, and he drew the key from his

pocket, and made as if he would have opened the desk. But the nausea,

the remembrances of repeated and utter failure, were too powerful. For

many days he hung about the Manor Lane, half dreading, half desiring

another meeting, and he swore he would not again mistake the cry of

rapture, nor repulse the arms extended in a frenzy of delight. In those

days he dreamed of some dark place where they might celebrate and make

the marriage of the Sabbath, with such rites as he had dared to

imagine.

It was perhaps only the shock of a letter from his father that rescued

him from these evident approaches to madness. Mr. Taylor wrote how they

had missed him at Christmas, how the farmers had inquired after him, of

the homely familiar things that recalled his boyhood, his mother’s

voice, the friendly fireside, and the good old fashions that had

nurtured him. He remembered that he had once been a boy, loving the

cake and puddings and the radiant holly, and all the

seventeenth-century mirth that lingered on in the ancient farmhouses.

And there came to him the more holy memory of Mass on Christmas

morning. How sweet the dark and frosty earth had smelt as he walked

beside his mother down the winding lane, and from the stile near the

church they had seen the world glimmering to the dawn, and the

wandering lanthorns advancing across the fields. Then he had come into

the church and seen it shining with candles and holly, and his father

in pure vestments of white linen sang the longing music of the liturgy

at the altar, and the people answered him, till the sun rose with the

grave notes of the Paternoster, and a red beam stole through the

chancel window.

The worst horror left him as he recalled the memory of these dear and

holy things. He cast away the frightful fancy that the scream he had

heard was a shriek of joy, that the arms, rigidly jerked out, invited

him to an embrace. Indeed, the thought that he had longed for such an

obscene illusion, that he had gloated over the recollection of that

stark mouth, filled him with disgust. He resolved that his senses were

deceived, that he had neither seen nor heard, but had for a moment

externalized his own slumbering and morbid dreams. It was perhaps

necessary that he should be wretched, that his efforts should be

discouraged, but he would not yield utterly to madness.

Yet when he went abroad with such good resolutions, it was hard to

resist an influence that seemed to come from without and within. He did

not know it, but people were everywhere talking of the great frost, of

the fog that lay heavy on London, making the streets dark and terrible,

of strange birds that came fluttering about the windows in the silent

squares. The Thames rolled out duskily, bearing down the jarring

ice-blocks, and as one looked on the black water from the bridges it

was like a river in a northern tale. To Lucian it all seemed mythical,

of the same substance as his own fantastic thoughts. He rarely saw a

newspaper, and did not follow from day to day the systematic readings

of the thermometer, the reports of ice-fairs, of coaches driven across

the river at Hampton, of the skating on the fens; and hence the iron

roads, the beleaguered silence and the heavy folds of mist appeared as

amazing as a picture, significant, appalling. He could not look out and

see a common suburban street foggy and dull, nor think of the

inhabitants as at work or sitting cheerfully eating nuts about their

fires; he saw a vision of a grey road vanishing, of dim houses all

empty and deserted, and the silence seemed eternal. And when he went

out and passed through street after street, all void, by the vague

shapes of houses that appeared for a moment and were then instantly

swallowed up, it seemed to him as if he had strayed into a city that

had suffered some inconceivable doom, that he alone wandered where

myriads had once dwelt. It was a town as great as Babylon, terrible as

Rome, marvelous as Lost Atlantis, set in the midst of a white

wilderness surrounded by waste places. It was impossible to escape from

it; if he skulked between hedges, and crept away beyond the frozen

pools, presently the serried stony lines confronted him like an army,

and far and far they swept away into the night, as some fabled wall

that guards an empire in the vast dim east. Or in that distorting

medium of the mist, changing all things, he imagined that he trod an

infinite desolate plain, abandoned from ages, but circled and encircled

with dolmen and menhir that loomed out at him, gigantic, terrible. All

London was one grey temple of an awful rite, ring within ring of wizard

stones circled about some central place, every circle was an

initiation, every initiation eternal loss. Or perhaps he was astray for

ever in a land of grey rocks. He had seen the light of home, the

flicker of the fire on the walls; close at hand, it seemed, was the

open door, and he had heard dear voices calling to him across the

gloom, but he had just missed the path. The lamps vanished, the voices

sounded thin and died away, and yet he knew that those within were

waiting, that they could not bear to close the door, but waited,

calling his name, while he had missed the way, and wandered in the

pathless desert of the grey rocks. Fantastic, hideous, they beset him

wherever he turned, piled up into strange shapes, pricked with sharp

peaks, assuming the appearance of goblin towers, swelling into a vague

dome like a fairy rath, huge and terrible. And as one dream faded into

another, so these last fancies were perhaps the most tormenting and

persistent; the rocky avenues became the camp and fortalice of some

half-human, malignant race who swarmed in hiding, ready to bear him

away into the heart of their horrible hills. It was awful to think that

all his goings were surrounded, that in the darkness he was watched and

surveyed, that every step but led him deeper and deeper into the

labyrinth.

When, of an evening, he was secure in his room, the blind drawn down

and the gas flaring, he made vigorous efforts toward sanity. It was not

of his free will that he allowed terror to overmaster him, and he

desired nothing better than a placid and harmless life, full of work

and clear thinking. He knew that he deluded himself with imagination,

that he had been walking through London suburbs and not through

Pandemonium, and that if he could but unlock his bureau all those ugly

forms would be resolved into the mist. But it was hard to say if he

consoled himself effectually with such reflections, for the return to

common sense meant also the return to the sharp pangs of defeat. It

recalled him to the bitter theme of his own inefficiency, to the

thought that he only desired one thing of life, and that this was

denied him. He was willing to endure the austerities of a monk in a

severe cloister, to suffer cold, to be hungry, to be lonely and

friendless, to forbear all the consolation of friendly speech, and to

be glad of all these things, if only he might be allowed to illuminate

the manuscript in quietness. It seemed a hideous insufferable cruelty,

that he should so fervently desire that which he could never gain.

He was led back to the old conclusion; he had lost the sense of

humanity, he was wretched because he was an alien and a stranger

amongst citizens. It seemed probable that the enthusiasm of literature,

as he understood it, the fervent desire for the fine art, had in it

something of the inhuman, and dissevered the enthusiast from his

fellow-creatures. It was possible that the barbarian suspected as much,

that by some slow process of rumination he had arrived at his fixed and

inveterate impression, by no means a clear reasoned conviction; the

average Philistine, if pressed for the reasons of his dislike, would

either become inarticulate, ejaculating “faugh” and “pah” like an

old-fashioned Scots Magazine, or else he would give some imaginary and

absurd reason, alleging that all “littery men” were poor, that

composers never cut their hair, that painters were rarely public-school

men, that sculptors couldn’t ride straight to hounds to save their

lives, but clearly these imbecilities were mere afterthoughts; the

average man hated the artist from a deep instinctive dread of all that

was strange, uncanny, alien to his nature; he gibbered, uttered his

harsh, semi-bestial “faugh,” and dismissed Keats to his gallipots from

much the same motives as usually impelled the black savages to dismiss

the white man on an even longer journey.

Lucian was not especially interested in this hatred of the barbarian

for the maker, except from this point, that it confirmed him in his

belief that the love of art dissociated the man from the race. One

touch of art made the whole world alien, but surely miseries of the

civilized man cast amongst savages were not so much caused by dread of

their ferocity as by the terror of his own thoughts; he would perhaps

in his last despair leave his retreat and go forth to perish at their

hands, so that he might at least die in company, and hear the sound of

speech before death. And Lucian felt most keenly that in his case there

was a double curse; he was as isolated as Keats, and as inarticulate as

his reviewers. The consolation of the work had failed him, and he was

suspended in the void between two worlds.

It was no doubt the composite effect of his failures, his loneliness of

soul, and solitude of life, that had made him invest those common

streets with such grim and persistent terrors. He had perhaps yielded

to a temptation without knowing that he had been tempted, and, in the

manner of De Quincey, had chosen the subtle in exchange for the more

tangible pains. Unconsciously, but still of free will, he had preferred

the splendor and the gloom of a malignant vision before his corporal

pains, before the hard reality of his own impotence. It was better to

dwell in vague melancholy, to stray in the forsaken streets of a city

doomed from ages, to wander amidst forlorn and desperate rocks than to

awake to a gnawing and ignoble torment, to confess that a house of

business would have been more suitable and more practical, that he had

promised what he could never perform. Even as he struggled to beat back

the phantasmagoria of the mist, and resolved that he would no longer

make all the streets a stage of apparitions, he hardly realized what he

had done, or that the ghosts he had called might depart and return

again.

He continued his long walks, always with the object of producing a

physical weariness and exhaustion that would enable him to sleep of

nights. But even when he saw the foggy and deserted avenues in their

proper shape, and allowed his eyes to catch the pale glimmer of the

lamps, and the dancing flame of the firelight, he could not rid himself

of the impression that he stood afar off, that between those hearths

and himself there was a great gulf fixed. As he paced down the footpath

he could often see plainly across the frozen shrubs into the homely and

cheerful rooms. Sometimes, late in the evening, he caught a passing

glimpse of the family at tea, father, mother, and children laughing and

talking together, well pleased with each other’s company. Sometimes a

wife or a child was standing by the garden gate peering anxiously

through the fog, and the sight of it all, all the little details, the

hideous but comfortable armchairs turned ready to the fire, maroon-red

curtains being drawn close to shut out the ugly night, the sudden blaze

and illumination as the fire was poked up so that it might be cheerful

for father; these trivial and common things were acutely significant.

They brought back to him the image of a dead boy—himself. They recalled

the shabby old “parlor” in the country, with its shabby old furniture

and fading carpet, and renewed a whole atmosphere of affection and

homely comfort. His mother would walk to the end of the drive and look

out for him when he was late (wandering then about the dark woodlands);

on winter evenings she would make the fire blaze, and have his slippers

warming by the hearth, and there was probably buttered toast “as a

treat.” He dwelt on all these insignificant petty circumstances, on the

genial glow and light after the muddy winter lanes, on the relish of

the buttered toast and the smell of the hot tea, on the two old cats

curled fast asleep before the fender, and made them instruments of

exquisite pain and regret. Each of these strange houses that he passed

was identified in his mind with his own vanished home; all was prepared

and ready as in the old days, but he was shut out, judged and condemned

to wander in the frozen mist, with weary feet, anguished and forlorn,

and they that would pass from within to help him could not, neither

could he pass to them. Again, for the hundredth time, he came back to

the sentence: he could not gain the art of letters and he had lost the

art of humanity. He saw the vanity of all his thoughts; he was an

ascetic caring nothing for warmth and cheerfulness and the small

comforts of life, and yet he allowed his mind to dwell on such things.

If one of those passers-by, who walked briskly, eager for home, should

have pitied him by some miracle and asked him to come in, it would have

been worse than useless, yet he longed for pleasures that he could not

have enjoyed. It was as if he were come to a place of torment, where

they who could not drink longed for water, where they who could feel no

warmth shuddered in the eternal cold. He was oppressed by the grim

conceit that he himself still slept within the matted thicket,

imprisoned by the green bastions of the Roman fort. He had never come

out, but a changeling had gone down the hill, and now stirred about the

earth.

Beset by such ingenious terrors, it was not wonderful that outward

events and common incidents should abet his fancies. He had succeeded

one day in escaping from the mesh of the streets, and fell on a rough

and narrow lane that stole into a little valley. For the moment he was

in a somewhat happier mood; the afternoon sun glowed through the

rolling mist, and the air grew clearer. He saw quiet and peaceful

fields, and a wood descending in a gentle slope from an old farmstead

of warm red brick. The farmer was driving the slow cattle home from the

hill, and his loud halloo to his dog came across the land a cheerful

mellow note. From another side a cart was approaching the clustered

barns, hesitating, pausing while the great horses rested, and then

starting again into lazy motion. In the well of the valley a wandering

line of bushes showed where a brook crept in and out amongst the

meadows, and, as Lucian stood, lingering, on the bridge, a soft and

idle breath ruffled through the boughs of a great elm. He felt soothed,

as by calm music, and wondered whether it would not be better for him

to live in some such quiet place, within reach of the streets and yet

remote from them. It seemed a refuge for still thoughts; he could

imagine himself sitting at rest beneath the black yew tree in the farm

garden, at the close of a summer day. He had almost determined that he

would knock at the door and ask if they would take him as a lodger,

when he saw a child running towards him down the lane. It was a little

girl, with bright curls tossing about her head, and, as she came on,

the sunlight glowed upon her, illuminating her brick-red frock and the

yellow king-cups in her hat. She had run with her eyes on the ground,

chirping and laughing to herself, and did not see Lucian till she was

quite near him. She started and glanced into his eyes for a moment, and

began to cry; he stretched out his hand, and she ran from him

screaming, frightened no doubt by what was to her a sudden and strange

apparition. He turned back towards London, and the mist folded him in

its thick darkness, for on that evening it was tinged with black.

It was only by the intensest strain of resolution that he did not yield

utterly to the poisonous anodyne which was always at hand. It had been

a difficult struggle to escape from the mesh of the hills, from the

music of the fauns, and even now he was drawn by the memory of these

old allurements. But he felt that here, in his loneliness, he was in

greater danger, and beset by a blacker magic. Horrible fancies rushed

wantonly into his mind; he was not only ready to believe that something

in his soul sent a shudder through all that was simple and innocent,

but he came trembling home one Saturday night, believing, or

half-believing, that he was in communion with evil. He had passed

through the clamorous and blatant crowd of the “high street,” where, as

one climbed the hill, the shops seemed all aflame, and the black night

air glowed with the flaring gas-jets and the naphtha-lamps, hissing and

wavering before the February wind. Voices, raucous, clamant,

abominable, were belched out of the blazing public-houses as the doors

swung to and fro, and above these doors were hideous brassy lamps, very

slowly swinging in a violent blast of air, so that they might have been

infernal thuribles, censing the people. Some man was calling his wares

in one long continuous shriek that never stopped or paused, and, as a

respond, a deeper, louder voice roared to him from across the road. An

Italian whirled the handle of his piano-organ in a fury, and a ring of

imps danced mad figures around him, danced and flung up their legs till

the rags dropped from some of them, and they still danced on. A flare

of naphtha, burning with a rushing noise, threw a light on one point of

the circle, and Lucian watched a lank girl of fifteen as she came round

and round to the flash. She was quite drunk, and had kicked her

petticoats away, and the crowd howled laughter and applause at her. Her

black hair poured down and leapt on her scarlet bodice; she sprang and

leapt round the ring, laughing in Bacchic frenzy, and led the orgy to

triumph. People were crossing to and fro, jostling against each other,

swarming about certain shops and stalls in a dense dark mass that

quivered and sent out feelers as if it were one writhing organism. A

little farther a group of young men, arm in arm, were marching down the

roadway chanting some music-hall verse in full chorus, so that it

sounded like plainsong. An impossible hubbub, a hum of voices angry as

swarming bees, the squeals of five or six girls who ran in and out, and

dived up dark passages and darted back into the crowd; all these

mingled together till his ears quivered. A young fellow was playing the

concertina, and he touched the keys with such slow fingers that the

tune wailed solemn into a dirge; but there was nothing so strange as

the burst of sound that swelled out when the public-house doors were

opened.

He walked amongst these people, looked at their faces, and looked at

the children amongst them. He had come out thinking that he would see

the English working class, “the best-behaved and the best-tempered

crowd in the world,” enjoying the simple pleasure of the Saturday

night’s shopping. Mother bought the joint for Sunday’s dinner, and

perhaps a pair of boots for father; father had an honest glass of beer,

and the children were given bags of sweets, and then all these worthy

people went decently home to their well-earned rest. De Quincey had

enjoyed the sight in his day, and had studied the rise and fall of

onions and potatoes. Lucian, indeed, had desired to take these simple

emotions as an opiate, to forget the fine fret and fantastic trouble of

his own existence in plain things and the palpable joy of rest after

labour. He was only afraid lest he should be too sharply reproached by

the sight of these men who fought bravely year after year against

starvation, who knew nothing of intricate and imagined grief, but only

the weariness of relentless labour, of the long battle for their wives

and children. It would be pathetic, he thought, to see them content

with so little, brightened by the expectation of a day’s rest and a

good dinner, forced, even then, to reckon every penny, and to make

their children laugh with halfpence. Either he would be ashamed before

so much content, or else he would be again touched by the sense of his

inhumanity which could take no interest in the common things of life.

But still he went to be at least taken out of himself, to be forced to

look at another side of the world, so that he might perhaps forget a

little while his own sorrows.

He was fascinated by what he saw and heard. He wondered whether De

Quincey also had seen the same spectacle, and had concealed his

impressions out of reverence for the average reader. Here there were no

simple joys of honest toilers, but wonderful orgies, that drew out his

heart to horrible music. At first the violence of sound and sight had

overwhelmed him; the lights flaring in the night wind, the array of

naphtha lamps, the black shadows, the roar of voices. The dance about

the piano-organ had been the first sign of an inner meaning, and the

face of the dark girl as she came round and round to the flame had been

amazing in its utter furious abandon. And what songs they were singing

all around him, and what terrible words rang out, only to excite peals

of laughter. In the public-houses the workmen’s wives, the wives of

small tradesmen, decently dressed in black, were drinking their faces

to a flaming red, and urging their husbands to drink more. Beautiful

young women, flushed and laughing, put their arms round the men’s necks

and kissed them, and then held up the glass to their lips. In the dark

corners, at the openings of side streets, the children were talking

together, instructing each other, whispering what they had seen; a boy

of fifteen was plying a girl of twelve with whisky, and presently they

crept away. Lucian passed them as they turned to go, and both looked at

him. The boy laughed, and the girl smiled quietly. It was above all in

the faces around him that he saw the most astounding things, the

Bacchic fury unveiled and unashamed. To his eyes it seemed as if these

revelers recognized him as a fellow, and smiled up in his face, aware

that he was in the secret. Every instinct of religion, of civilization

even, was swept away; they gazed at one another and at him, absolved of

all scruples, children of the earth and nothing more. Now and then a

couple detached themselves from the swarm, and went away into the

darkness, answering the jeers and laughter of their friends as they

vanished.

On the edge of the pavement, not far from where he was standing, Lucian

noticed a tall and lovely young woman who seemed to be alone. She was

in the full light of a naphtha flame, and her bronze hair and flushed

cheeks shone illuminate as she viewed the orgy. She had dark brown

eyes, and a strange look as of an old picture in her face; and her eyes

brightened with an urgent gleam. He saw the revelers nudging each other

and glancing at her, and two or three young men went up and asked her

to come for a walk. She shook her head and said “No thank you” again

and again, and seemed as if she were looking for somebody in the crowd.

“I’m expecting a friend,” she said at last to a man who proposed a

drink and a walk afterwards; and Lucian wondered what kind of friend

would ultimately appear. Suddenly she turned to him as he was about to

pass on, and said in a low voice:

“I’ll go for a walk with you if you like; you just go on, and I’ll

follow in a minute.”

For a moment he looked steadily at her. He saw that the first glance

has misled him; her face was not flushed with drink as he had supposed,

but it was radiant with the most exquisite colour, a red flame glowed

and died on her cheek, and seemed to palpitate as she spoke. The head

was set on the neck nobly, as in a statue, and about the ears the

bronze hair strayed into little curls. She was smiling and waiting for

his answer.

He muttered something about being very sorry, and fled down the hill

out of the orgy, from the noise of roaring voices and the glitter of

the great lamps very slowly swinging in the blast of wind. He knew that

he had touched the brink of utter desolation; there was death in the

woman’s face, and she had indeed summoned him to the Sabbath. Somehow

he had been able to refuse on the instant, but if he had delayed he

knew he would have abandoned himself to her, body and soul. He locked

himself in his room and lay trembling on the bed, wondering if some

subtle sympathy had shown the woman her perfect companion. He looked in

the glass, not expecting now to see certain visible and outward signs,

but searching for the meaning of that strange glance that lit up his

eyes. He had grown even thinner than before in the last few months, and

his cheeks were wasted with hunger and sorrow, but there were still

about his features the suggestion of a curious classic grace, and the

look as of a faun who has strayed from the vineyards and olive gardens.

He had broken away, but now he felt the mesh of her net about him, a

desire for her that was a madness, as if she held every nerve in his

body and drew him to her, to her mystic world, to the rosebush where

every flower was a flame.

He dreamed all night of the perilous things he had refused, and it was

loss to awake in the morning, pain to return to the world. The frost

had broken and the fog had rolled away, and the grey street was filled

with a clear grey light. Again he looked out on the long dull sweep of

the monotonous houses, hidden for the past weeks by a curtain of mist.

Heavy rain had fallen in the night, and the garden rails were still

dripping, the roofs still dark with wet, all down the line the dingy

white blinds were drawn in the upper windows. Not a soul walked the

street; every one was asleep after the exertions of the night before;

even on the main road it was only at intervals that some straggler

paddled by. Presently a woman in a brown ulster shuffled off on some

errand, then a man in shirt-sleeves poked out his head, holding the

door half-open, and stared up at a window opposite. After a few minutes

he slunk in again, and three loafers came slouching down the street,

eager for mischief or beastliness of some sort. They chose a house that

seemed rather smarter than the rest, and, irritated by the neat

curtains, the little grass plot with its dwarf shrub, one of the

ruffians drew out a piece of chalk and wrote some words on the front

door. His friends kept watch for him, and the adventure achieved, all

three bolted, bellowing yahoo laughter. Then a bell began, tang, tang,

tang, and here and there children appeared on their way to

Sunday-school, and the chapel “teachers” went by with verjuice eyes and

lips, scowling at the little boy who cried “Piper, piper!” On the main

road many respectable people, the men shining and ill-fitted, the women

hideously bedizened, passed in the direction of the Independent

nightmare, the stuccoed thing with Doric columns, but on the whole life

was stagnant. Presently Lucian smelt the horrid fumes of roast beef and

cabbage; the early risers were preparing the one-o’clock meal, but many

lay in bed and put off dinner till three, with the effect of prolonging

the cabbage atmosphere into the late afternoon. A drizzly rain began as

the people were coming out of church, and the mothers of little boys in

velvet and little girls in foolishness of every kind were impelled to

slap their offspring, and to threaten them with father. Then the torpor

of beef and beer and cabbage settled down on the street; in some houses

they snorted and read the Parish Magazine, in some they snored and read

the murders and collected filth of the week; but the only movement of

the afternoon was a second procession of children, now bloated and

distended with food, again answering the summons of tang, tang, tang.

On the main road the trams, laden with impossible people, went humming

to and fro, and young men who wore bright blue ties cheerfully

haw-hawed and smoked penny cigars. They annoyed the shiny and

respectable and verjuice-lipped, not by the frightful stench of the

cigars, but because they were cheerful on Sunday. By and by the

children, having heard about Moses in the Bulrushes and Daniel in the

Lion’s Den, came straggling home in an evil humor. And all the day it

was as if on a grey sheet grey shadows flickered, passing by.

And in the rose-garden every flower was a flame! He thought in symbols,

using the Persian imagery of a dusky court, surrounded by white

cloisters, gilded by gates of bronze. The stars came out, the sky

glowed a darker violet, but the cloistered wall, the fantastic

trellises in stone, shone whiter. It was like a hedge of may-blossom,

like a lily within a cup of lapis-lazuli, like sea-foam tossed on the

heaving sea at dawn. Always those white cloisters trembled with the

lute music, always the garden sang with the clear fountain, rising and

falling in the mysterious dusk. And there was a singing voice stealing

through the white lattices and the bronze gates, a soft voice chanting

of the Lover and the Beloved, of the Vineyard, of the Gate and the Way.

Oh! the language was unknown; but the music of the refrain returned

again and again, swelling and trembling through the white nets of the

latticed cloisters. And every rose in the dusky air was a flame.

He had seen the life which he expressed by these symbols offered to

him, and he had refused it; and he was alone in the grey street, with

its lamps just twinkling through the dreary twilight, the blast of a

ribald chorus sounding from the main road, a doggerel hymn whining from

some parlor, to the accompaniment of the harmonium. He wondered why he

had turned away from that woman who knew all secrets, in whose eyes

were all the mysteries. He opened the desk of his bureau, and was

confronted by the heap and litter of papers, lying in confusion as he

had left them. He knew that there was the motive of his refusal; he had

been unwilling to abandon all hope of the work. The glory and the

torment of his ambition glowed upon him as he looked at the manuscript;

it seemed so pitiful that such a single desire should be thwarted. He

was aware that if he chose to sit down now before the desk he could, in

a manner, write easily enough—he could produce a tale which would be

formally well constructed and certain of favorable reception. And it

would not be the utterly commonplace, entirely hopeless favorite of the

circulating library; it would stand in those ranks where the real thing

is skillfully counterfeited, amongst the books which give the reader

his orgy of emotions, and yet contrive to be superior, and “art,” in

his opinion. Lucian had often observed this species of triumph, and had

noted the acclamation that never failed the clever sham. \_Romola\_, for

example, had made the great host of the serious, the portentous, shout

for joy, while the real book, \_The Cloister and the Hearth\_, was a

comparative failure.

He knew that he could write a \_Romola\_; but he thought the art of

counterfeiting half-crowns less detestable than this shabby trick of

imitating literature. He had refused definitely to enter the atelier of

the gentleman who pleased his clients by ingeniously simulating the

grain of walnut; and though he had seen the old oaken ambry kicked out

contemptuously into the farmyard, serving perhaps the necessities of

hens or pigs, he would not apprentice himself to the masters of veneer.

He paced up and down the room, glancing now and again at his papers,

and wondering if there were not hope for him. A great thing he could

never do, but he had longed to do a true thing, to imagine sincere and

genuine pages.

He was stirred again to this fury for the work by the event of the

evening before, by all that had passed through his mind since the

melancholy dawn. The lurid picture of that fiery street, the flaming

shops and flaming glances, all its wonders and horrors, lit by the

naphtha flares and by the burning souls, had possessed him; and the

noises, the shriek and the whisper, the jangling rattle of the

piano-organ, the long-continued scream of the butcher as he dabbled in

the blood, the lewd litany of the singers, these seemed to be resolved

into an infernal overture, loud with the expectation of lust and death.

And how the spectacle was set in the cloud of dark night, a phantom

play acted on that fiery stage, beneath those hideous brassy lamps,

very slowly swinging in a violent blast. As all the medley of

outrageous sights and sounds now fused themselves within his brain into

one clear impression, it seemed that he had indeed witnessed and acted

in a drama, that all the scene had been prepared and vested for him,

and that the choric songs he had heard were but preludes to a greater

act. For in that woman was the consummation and catastrophe of it all,

and the whole stage waited for their meeting. He fancied that after

this the voices and the lights died away, that the crowd sank swiftly

into the darkness, and that the street was at once denuded of the great

lamps and of all its awful scenic apparatus.

Again, he thought, the same mystery would be represented before him;

suddenly on some dark and gloomy night, as he wandered lonely on a

deserted road, the wind hurrying before him, suddenly a turn would

bring him again upon the fiery stage, and the antique drama would be

re-enacted. He would be drawn to the same place, to find that woman

still standing there; again he would watch the rose radiant and

palpitating upon her cheek, the argent gleam in her brown eyes, the

bronze curls gilding the white splendor of her neck. And for the second

time she would freely offer herself. He could hear the wail of the

singers swelling to a shriek, and see the dusky dancers whirling round

in a faster frenzy, and the naphtha flares tinged with red, as the

woman and he went away into the dark, into the cloistered court where

every flower was a flame, whence he would never come out.

His only escape was in the desk; he might find salvation if he could

again hide his heart in the heap and litter of papers, and again be

rapt by the cadence of a phrase. He threw open his window and looked

out on the dim world and the glimmering amber lights. He resolved that

he would rise early in the morning, and seek once more for his true

life in the work.

But there was a strange thing. There was a little bottle on the

mantelpiece, a bottle of dark blue glass, and he trembled and shuddered

before it, as if it were a fetish.

VII.

It was very dark in the room. He seemed by slow degrees to awake from a

long and heavy torpor, from an utter forgetfulness, and as he raised

his eyes he could scarcely discern the pale whiteness of the paper on

the desk before him. He remembered something of a gloomy winter

afternoon, of driving rain, of gusty wind: he had fallen asleep over

his work, no doubt, and the night had come down.

He lay back in his chair, wondering whether it were late; his eyes were

half closed, and he did not make the effort and rouse himself. He could

hear the stormy noise of the wind, and the sound reminded him of the

half-forgotten days. He thought of his boyhood, and the old rectory,

and the great elms that surrounded it. There was something pleasant in

the consciousness that he was still half dreaming; he knew he could

wake up whenever he pleased, but for the moment he amused himself by

the pretence that he was a little boy again, tired with his rambles and

the keen air of the hills. He remembered how he would sometimes wake up

in the dark at midnight, and listen sleepily for a moment to the rush

of the wind straining and crying amongst the trees, and hear it beat

upon the walls, and then he would fall to dreams again, happy in his

warm, snug bed.

The wind grew louder, and the windows rattled. He half opened his eyes

and shut them again, determined to cherish that sensation of long ago.

He felt tired and heavy with sleep; he imagined that he was exhausted

by some effort; he had, perhaps, been writing furiously without rest.

He could not recollect at the instant what the work had been; it would

be delightful to read the pages when he had made up his mind to bestir

himself.

Surely that was the noise of boughs, swaying and grinding in the wind.

He remembered one night at home when such a sound had roused him

suddenly from a deep sweet sleep. There was a rushing and beating as of

wings upon the air, and a heavy dreary noise, like thunder far away

upon the mountain. He had got out of bed and looked from behind the

blind to see what was abroad. He remembered the strange sight he had

seen, and he pretended it would be just the same if he cared to look

out now. There were clouds flying awfully from before the moon, and a

pale light that made the familiar land look strange and terrible. The

blast of wind came with a great shriek, and the trees tossed and bowed

and quivered; the wood was scourged and horrible, and the night air was

ghastly with a confused tumult, and voices as of a host. A huge black

cloud rolled across the heaven from the west and covered up the moon,

and there came a torrent of bitter hissing rain.

It was all a vivid picture to him as he sat in his chair, unwilling to

wake. Even as he let his mind stray back to that night of the past

years, the rain beat sharply on the window-panes, and though there were

no trees in the grey suburban street, he heard distinctly the crash of

boughs. He wandered vaguely from thought to thought, groping

indistinctly amongst memories, like a man trying to cross from door to

door in a darkened unfamiliar room. But, no doubt, if he were to look

out, by some magic the whole scene would be displayed before him. He

would not see the curve of monotonous two-storied houses, with here and

there a white blind, a patch of light, and shadows appearing and

vanishing, not the rain plashing in the muddy road, not the amber of

the gas-lamp opposite, but the wild moonlight poured on the dearly

loved country; far away the dim circle of the hills and woods, and

beneath him the tossing trees about the lawn, and the wood heaving

under the fury of the wind.

He smiled to himself, amidst his lazy meditations, to think how real it

seemed, and yet it was all far away, the scenery of an old play long

ended and forgotten. It was strange that after all these years of

trouble and work and change he should be in any sense the same person

as that little boy peeping out, half frightened, from the rectory

window. It was as if looking in the glass one should see a stranger,

and yet know that the image was a true reflection.

The memory of the old home recalled his father and mother to him, and

he wondered whether his mother would come if he were to cry out

suddenly. One night, on just such a night as this, when a great storm

blew from the mountain, a tree had fallen with a crash and a bough had

struck the roof, and he awoke in a fright, calling for his mother. She

had come and had comforted him, soothing him to sleep, and now he shut

his eyes, seeing her face shining in the uncertain flickering candle

light, as she bent over his bed. He could not think she had died; the

memory was but a part of the evil dreams that had come afterwards.

He said to himself that he had fallen asleep and dreamed sorrow and

agony, and he wished to forget all the things of trouble. He would

return to happy days, to the beloved land, to the dear and friendly

paths across the fields. There was the paper, white before him, and

when he chose to stir, he would have the pleasure of reading his work.

He could not quite recollect what he had been about, but he was somehow

conscious that the had been successful and had brought some long labour

to a worthy ending. Presently he would light the gas, and enjoy the

satisfaction that only the work could give him, but for the time he

preferred to linger in the darkness, and to think of himself as

straying from stile to stile through the scented meadows, and listening

to the bright brook that sang to the alders.

It was winter now, for he heard the rain and the wind, and the swaying

of the trees, but in those old days how sweet the summer had been. The

great hawthorn bush in blossom, like a white cloud upon the earth, had

appeared to him in twilight, he had lingered in the enclosed valley to

hear the nightingale, a voice swelling out from the rich gloom, from

the trees that grew around the well. The scent of the meadowsweet was

blown to him across the bridge of years, and with it came the dream and

the hope and the longing, and the afterglow red in the sky, and the

marvel of the earth. There was a quiet walk that he knew so well; one

went up from a little green byroad, following an unnamed brooklet

scarce a foot wide, but yet wandering like a river, gurgling over its

pebbles, with its dwarf bushes shading the pouring water. One went

through the meadow grass, and came to the larch wood that grew from

hill to hill across the stream, and shone a brilliant tender green, and

sent vague sweet spires to the flushing sky. Through the wood the path

wound, turning and dipping, and beneath, the brown fallen needles of

last year were soft and thick, and the resinous cones gave out their

odour as the warm night advanced, and the shadows darkened. It was

quite still; but he stayed, and the faint song of the brooklet sounded

like the echo of a river beyond the mountains. How strange it was to

look into the wood, to see the tall straight stems rising, pillar-like,

and then the dusk, uncertain, and then the blackness. So he came out

from the larch wood, from the green cloud and the vague shadow, into

the dearest of all hollows, shut in on one side by the larches and

before him by high violent walls of turf, like the slopes of a fort,

with a clear line dark against the twilight sky, and a weird thorn bush

that grew large, mysterious, on the summit, beneath the gleam of the

evening star.

And he retraced his wanderings in those deep old lanes that began from

the common road and went away towards the unknown, climbing steep

hills, and piercing the woods of shadows, and dipping down into valleys

that seemed virgin, unexplored, secret for the foot of man. He entered

such a lane not knowing where it might bring him, hoping he had found

the way to fairyland, to the woods beyond the world, to that vague

territory that haunts all the dreams of a boy. He could not tell where

he might be, for the high banks rose steep, and the great hedges made a

green vault above. Marvelous ferns grew rich and thick in the dark red

earth, fastening their roots about the roots of hazel and beech and

maple, clustering like the carven capitals of a cathedral pillar. Down,

like a dark shaft, the lane dipped to the well of the hills, and came

amongst the limestone rocks. He climbed the bank at last, and looked

out into a country that seemed for a moment the land he sought, a

mysterious realm with unfamiliar hills and valleys and fair plains all

golden, and white houses radiant in the sunset light.

And he thought of the steep hillsides where the bracken was like a

wood, and of bare places where the west wind sang over the golden

gorse, of still circles in mid-lake, of the poisonous yew-tree in the

middle of the wood, shedding its crimson cups on the dank earth. How he

lingered by certain black waterpools hedged on every side by drooping

wych-elms and black-stemmed alders, watching the faint waves widening

to the banks as a leaf or a twig dropped from the trees.

And the whole air and wonder of the ancient forest came back to him. He

had found his way to the river valley, to the long lovely hollow

between the hills, and went up and up beneath the leaves in the warm

hush of midsummer, glancing back now and again through the green

alleys, to the river winding in mystic esses beneath, passing hidden

glens receiving the streams that rushed down the hillside, ice-cold

from the rock, passing the immemorial tumulus, the graves where the

legionaries waited for the trumpet, the grey farmhouses sending the

blue wreaths of wood smoke into the still air. He went higher and

higher, till at last he entered the long passage of the Roman road, and

from this, the ridge and summit of the wood, he saw the waves of green

swell and dip and sink towards the marshy level and the gleaming yellow

sea. He looked on the surging forest, and thought of the strange

deserted city mouldering into a petty village on its verge, of its

encircling walls melting into the turf, of vestiges of an older temple

which the earth had buried utterly.

It was winter now, for he heard the wail of the wind, and a sudden gust

drove the rain against the panes, but he thought of the bee’s song in

the clover, of the foxgloves in full blossom, of the wild roses,

delicate, enchanting, swaying on a long stem above the hedge. He had

been in strange places, he had known sorrow and desolation, and had

grown grey and weary in the work of letters, but he lived again in the

sweetness, in the clear bright air of early morning, when the sky was

blue in June, and the mist rolled like a white sea in the valley. He

laughed when he recollected that he had sometimes fancied himself

unhappy in those days; in those days when he could be glad because the

sun shone, because the wind blew fresh on the mountain. On those bright

days he had been glad, looking at the fleeting and passing of the

clouds upon the hills, and had gone up higher to the broad dome of the

mountain, feeling that joy went up before him.

He remembered how, a boy, he had dreamed of love, of an adorable and

ineffable mystery which transcended all longing and desire. The time

had come when all the wonder of the earth seemed to prefigure this

alone, when he found the symbol of the Beloved in hill and wood and

stream, and every flower and every dark pool discoursed a pure ecstasy.

It was the longing for longing, the love of love, that had come to him

when he awoke one morning just before the dawn, and for the first time

felt the sharp thrill of passion.

He tried in vain to express to himself the exquisite joys of innocent

desire. Even now, after troubled years, in spite of some dark cloud

that overshadowed the background of his thought, the sweetness of the

boy’s imagined pleasure came like a perfume into his reverie. It was no

love of a woman but the desire of womanhood, the Eros of the unknown,

that made the heart tremble. He hardly dreamed that such a love could

ever be satisfied, that the thirst of beauty could be slaked. He shrank

from all contact of actuality, not venturing so much as to imagine the

inner place and sanctuary of the mysteries. It was enough for him to

adore in the outer court, to know that within, in the sweet gloom, were

the vision and the rapture, the altar and the sacrifice.

He remembered, dimly, the passage of many heavy years since that time

of hope and passion, but, perhaps, the vague shadow would pass away,

and he could renew the boy’s thoughts, the unformed fancies that were

part of the bright day, of the wild roses in the hedgerow. All other

things should be laid aside, he would let them trouble him no more

after this winter night. He saw now that from the first he had allowed

his imagination to bewilder him, to create a fantastic world in which

he suffered, moulding innocent forms into terror and dismay. Vividly,

he saw again the black circle of oaks, growing in a haggard ring upon

the bastions of the Roman fort. The noise of the storm without grew

louder, and he thought how the wind had come up the valley with the

sound of a scream, how a great tree had ground its boughs together,

shuddering before the violent blast. Clear and distinct, as if he were

standing now in the lane, he saw the steep slopes surging from the

valley, and the black crown of the oaks set against the flaming sky,

against a blaze and glow of light as if great furnace doors were

opened. He saw the fire, as it were, smitten about the bastions, about

the heaped mounds that guarded the fort, and the crooked evil boughs

seemed to writhe in the blast of flame that beat from heaven. Strangely

with the sight of the burning fort mingled the impression of a dim

white shape floating up the dusk of the lane towards him, and he saw

across the valley of years a girl’s face, a momentary apparition that

shone and vanished away.

Then there was a memory of another day, of violent summer, of white

farmhouse walls blazing in the sun, and a far call from the reapers in

the cornfields. He had climbed the steep slope and penetrated the

matted thicket and lay in the heat, alone on the soft short grass that

grew within the fort. There was a cloud of madness, and confusion of

broken dreams that had no meaning or clue but only an indefinable

horror and defilement. He had fallen asleep as he gazed at the knotted

fantastic boughs of the stunted brake about him, and when he woke he

was ashamed, and fled away fearing that “they” would pursue him. He did

not know who “they” were, but it seemed as if a woman’s face watched

him from between the matted boughs, and that she summoned to her side

awful companions who had never grown old through all the ages.

He looked up, it seemed, at a smiling face that bent over him, as he

sat in the cool dark kitchen of the old farmhouse, and wondered why the

sweetness of those red lips and the kindness of the eyes mingled with

the nightmare in the fort, with the horrible Sabbath he had imagined as

he lay sleeping on the hot soft turf. He had allowed these disturbed

fancies, all this mad wreck of terror and shame that he had gathered in

his mind, to trouble him for too long a time; presently he would light

up the room, and leave all the old darkness of his life behind him, and

from henceforth he would walk in the day.

He could still distinguish, though very vaguely, the pile of papers

beside him, and he remembered, now, that he had finished a long task

that afternoon, before he fell asleep. He could not trouble himself to

recollect the exact nature of the work, but he was sure that he had

done well; in a few minutes, perhaps, he would strike a match, and read

the title, and amuse himself with his own forgetfulness. But the sight

of the papers lying there in order made him think of his beginnings, of

those first unhappy efforts which were so impossible and so hopeless.

He saw himself bending over the table in the old familiar room,

desperately scribbling, and then laying down his pen dismayed at the

sad results on the page. It was late at night, his father had been long

in bed, and the house was still. The fire was almost out, with only a

dim glow here and there amongst the cinders, and the room was growing

chilly. He rose at last from his work and looked out on a dim earth and

a dark and cloudy sky.

Night after night he had laboured on, persevering in his effort, even

through the cold sickness of despair, when every line was doomed as it

was made. Now, with the consciousness that he knew at least the

conditions of literature, and that many years of thought and practice

had given him some sense of language, he found these early struggles

both pathetic and astonishing. He could not understand how he had

persevered so stubbornly, how he had had the heart to begin a fresh

page when so many folios of blotted, painful effort lay torn, derided,

impossible in their utter failure. It seemed to him that it must have

been a miracle or an infernal possession, a species of madness, that

had driven him on, every day disappointed, and every day hopeful.

And yet there was a joyous side to the illusion. In these dry days that

he lived in, when he had bought, by a long experience and by countless

hours of misery, a knowledge of his limitations, of the vast gulf that

yawned between the conception and the work, it was pleasant to think of

a time when all things were possible, when the most splendid design

seemed an affair of a few weeks. Now he had come to a frank

acknowledgment; so far as he was concerned, he judged every book wholly

impossible till the last line of it was written, and he had learnt

patience, the art of sighing and putting the fine scheme away in the

pigeon-hole of what could never be. But to think of those days! Then

one could plot out a book that should be more curious than Rabelais,

and jot down the outlines of a romance to surpass Cervantes, and design

renaissance tragedies and volumes of \_contes\_, and comedies of the

Restoration; everything was to be done, and the masterpiece was always

the rainbow cup, a little way before him.

He touched the manuscript on the desk, and the feeling of the pages

seemed to restore all the papers that had been torn so long ago. It was

the atmosphere of the silent room that returned, the light of the

shaded candle falling on the abandoned leaves. This had been painfully

excogitated while the snowstorm whirled about the lawn and filled the

lanes, this was of the summer night, this of the harvest moon rising

like a fire from the tithebarn on the hill. How well he remembered

those half-dozen pages of which he had once been so proud; he had

thought out the sentences one evening, while he leaned on the

foot-bridge and watched the brook swim across the road. Every word

smelt of the meadowsweet that grew thick upon the banks; now, as he

recalled the cadence and the phrase that had seemed so charming, he saw

again the ferns beneath the vaulted roots of the beech, and the green

light of the glowworm in the hedge.

And in the west the mountains swelled to a great dome, and on the dome

was a mound, the memorial of some forgotten race, that grew dark and

large against the red sky, when the sun set. He had lingered below it

in the solitude, amongst the winds, at evening, far away from home; and

oh, the labour and the vain efforts to make the form of it and the awe

of it in prose, to write the hush of the vast hill, and the sadness of

the world below sinking into the night, and the mystery, the suggestion

of the rounded hillock, huge against the magic sky.

He had tried to sing in words the music that the brook sang, and the

sound of the October wind rustling through the brown bracken on the

hill. How many pages he had covered in the effort to show a white

winter world, a sun without warmth in a grey-blue sky, all the fields,

all the land white and shining, and one high summit where the dark

pines towered, still in the still afternoon, in the pale violet air.

To win the secret of words, to make a phrase that would murmur of

summer and the bee, to summon the wind into a sentence, to conjure the

odour of the night into the surge and fall and harmony of a line; this

was the tale of the long evenings, of the candle flame white upon the

paper and the eager pen.

He remembered that in some fantastic book he had seen a bar or two of

music, and, beneath, the inscription that here was the musical

expression of Westminster Abbey. His boyish effort seemed hardly less

ambitious, and he no longer believed that language could present the

melody and the awe and the loveliness of the earth. He had long known

that he, at all events, would have to be content with a far approach,

with a few broken notes that might suggest, perhaps, the magistral

everlasting song of the hill and the streams.

But in those far days the impossible was but a part of wonderland that

lay before him, of the world beyond the wood and the mountain. All was

to be conquered, all was to be achieved; he had but to make the journey

and he would find the golden world and the golden word, and hear those

songs that the sirens sang. He touched the manuscript; whatever it was,

it was the result of painful labour and disappointment, not of the old

flush of hope, but it came of weary days, of correction and

re-correction. It might be good in its measure; but afterwards he would

write no more for a time. He would go back again to the happy world of

masterpieces, to the dreams of great and perfect books, written in an

ecstasy.

Like a dark cloud from the sea came the memory of the attempt he had

made, of the poor piteous history that had once embittered his life. He

sighed and said alas, thinking of his folly, of the hours when he was

shaken with futile, miserable rage. Some silly person in London had

made his manuscript more saleable and had sold it without rendering an

account of the profits, and for that he had been ready to curse

humanity. Black, horrible, as the memory of a stormy day, the rage of

his heart returned to his mind, and he covered his eyes, endeavoring to

darken the picture of terror and hate that shone before him. He tried

to drive it all out of his thought, it vexed him to remember these

foolish trifles; the trick of a publisher, the small pomposities and

malignancies of the country folk, the cruelty of a village boy, had

inflamed him almost to the pitch of madness. His heart had burnt with

fury, and when he looked up the sky was blotched, and scarlet as if it

rained blood.

Indeed he had almost believed that blood had rained upon him, and cold

blood from a sacrifice in heaven; his face was wet and chill and

dripping, and he had passed his hand across his forehead and looked at

it. A red cloud had seemed to swell over the hill, and grow great, and

come near to him; he was but an ace removed from raging madness.

It had almost come to that; the drift and the breath of the scarlet

cloud had well-nigh touched him. It was strange that he had been so

deeply troubled by such little things, and strange how after all the

years he could still recall the anguish and rage and hate that shook

his soul as with a spiritual tempest.

The memory of all that evening was wild and troubled; he resolved that

it should vex him no more, that now, for the last time, he would let

himself be tormented by the past. In a few minutes he would rise to a

new life, and forget all the storms that had gone over him.

Curiously, every detail was distinct and clear in his brain. The figure

of the doctor driving home, and the sound of the few words he had

spoken came to him in the darkness, through the noise of the storm and

the pattering of the rain. Then he stood upon the ridge of the hill and

saw the smoke drifting up from the ragged roofs of Caermaen, in the

evening calm; he listened to the voices mounting thin and clear, in a

weird tone, as if some outland folk were speaking in an unknown tongue

of awful things.

He saw the gathering darkness, the mystery of twilight changing the

huddled squalid village into an unearthly city, into some dreadful

Atlantis, inhabited by a ruined race. The mist falling fast, the gloom

that seemed to issue from the black depths of the forest, to advance

palpably towards the walls, were shaped before him; and beneath, the

river wound, snake-like, about the town, swimming to the flood and

glowing in its still pools like molten brass. And as the water mirrored

the afterglow and sent ripples and gouts of blood against the

shuddering reeds, there came suddenly the piercing trumpet-call, the

loud reiterated summons that rose and fell, that called and recalled,

echoing through all the valley, crying to the dead as the last note

rang. It summoned the legion from the river and the graves and the

battlefield, the host floated up from the sea, the centuries swarmed

about the eagles, the array was set for the last great battle, behind

the leaguer of the mist.

He could imagine himself still wandering through the dim unknown,

terrible country, gazing affrighted at the hills and woods that seemed

to have put on an unearthly shape, stumbling amongst the briars that

caught his feet. He lost his way in a wild country, and the red light

that blazed up from the furnace on the mountains only showed him a

mysterious land, in which he strayed aghast, with the sense of doom

weighing upon him. The dry mutter of the trees, the sound of an unseen

brook, made him afraid as if the earth spoke of his sin, and presently

he was fleeing through a desolate shadowy wood, where a pale light

flowed from the mouldering stumps, a dream of light that shed a ghostly

radiance.

And then again the dark summit of the Roman fort, the black sheer

height rising above the valley, and the moonfire streaming around the

ring of oaks, glowing about the green bastions that guarded the thicket

and the inner place.

The room in which he sat appeared the vision, the trouble of the wind

and rain without was but illusion, the noise of the waves in the

seashell. Passion and tears and adoration and the glories of the summer

night returned, and the calm sweet face of the woman appeared, and he

thrilled at the soft touch of her hand on his flesh.

She shone as if she had floated down into the lane from the moon that

swam between films of cloud above the black circle of the oaks. She led

him away from all terror and despair and hate, and gave herself to him

with rapture, showing him love, kissing his tears away, pillowing his

cheek upon her breast.

His lips dwelt on her lips, his mouth upon the breath of her mouth, her

arms were strained about him, and oh! she charmed him with her voice,

with sweet kind words, as she offered her sacrifice. How her scented

hair fell down, and floated over his eyes, and there was a marvelous

fire called the moon, and her lips were aflame, and her eyes shone like

a light on the hills.

All beautiful womanhood had come to him in the lane. Love had touched

him in the dusk and had flown away, but he had seen the splendor and

the glory, and his eyes had seen the enchanted light.

AVE ATQUE VALE

The old words sounded in his ears like the ending of a chant, and he

heard the music’s close. Once only in his weary hapless life, once the

world had passed away, and he had known her, the dear, dear Annie, the

symbol of all mystic womanhood.

The heaviness of languor still oppressed him, holding him back amongst

these old memories, so that he could not stir from his place. Oddly,

there seemed something unaccustomed about the darkness of the room, as

if the shadows he had summoned had changed the aspect of the walls. He

was conscious that on this night he was not altogether himself;

fatigue, and the weariness of sleep, and the waking vision had

perplexed him. He remembered how once or twice when he was a little boy

startled by an uneasy dream, and had stared with a frightened gaze into

nothingness, not knowing where he was, all trembling, and breathing

quick, till he touched the rail of his bed, and the familiar outlines

of the looking-glass and the chiffonier began to glimmer out of the

gloom. So now he touched the pile of manuscript and the desk at which

he had worked so many hours, and felt reassured, though he smiled at

himself, and he felt the old childish dread, the longing to cry out for

some one to bring a candle, and show him that he really was in his own

room. He glanced up for an instant, expecting to see perhaps the

glitter of the brass gas jet that was fixed on the wall, just beside

his bureau, but it was too dark, and he could not rouse himself and

make the effort that would drive the cloud and the muttering thoughts

away.

He leant back again, picturing the wet street without, the rain driving

like fountain spray about the gas lamp, the shrilling of the wind on

those waste places to the north. It was strange how in the brick and

stucco desert where no trees were, he all the time imagined the noise

of tossing boughs, the grinding of the boughs together. There was a

great storm and tumult in this wilderness of London, and for the sound

of the rain and the wind he could not hear the hum and jangle of the

trams, and the jar and shriek of the garden gates as they opened and

shut. But he could imagine his street, the rain-swept desolate curve of

it, as it turned northward, and beyond the empty suburban roads, the

twinkling villa windows, the ruined field, the broken lane, and then

yet another suburb rising, a solitary gas-lamp glimmering at a corner,

and the plane tree lashing its boughs, and driving great showers

against the glass.

It was wonderful to think of. For when these remote roads were ended

one dipped down the hill into the open country, into the dim world

beyond the glint of friendly fires. Tonight, how waste they were, these

wet roads, edged with the red-brick houses, with shrubs whipped by the

wind against one another, against the paling and the wall. There the

wind swayed the great elms scattered on the sidewalk, the remnants of

the old stately fields, and beneath each tree was a pool of wet, and a

torment of raindrops fell with every gust. And one passed through the

red avenues, perhaps by a little settlement of flickering shops, and

passed the last sentinel wavering lamp, and the road became a ragged

lane, and the storm screamed from hedge to hedge across the open

fields. And then, beyond, one touched again upon a still remoter

avant-garde of London, an island amidst the darkness, surrounded by its

pale of twinkling, starry lights.

He remembered his wanderings amongst these outposts of the town, and

thought how desolate all their ways must be tonight. They were solitary

in wet and wind, and only at long intervals some one pattered and

hurried along them, bending his eyes down to escape the drift of rain.

Within the villas, behind the close-drawn curtains, they drew about the

fire, and wondered at the violence of the storm, listening for each

great gust as it gathered far away, and rocked the trees, and at last

rushed with a huge shock against their walls as if it were the coming

of the sea. He thought of himself walking, as he had often walked, from

lamp to lamp on such a night, treasuring his lonely thoughts, and

weighing the hard task awaiting him in his room. Often in the evening,

after a long day’s labour, he had thrown down his pen in utter

listlessness, feeling that he could struggle no more with ideas and

words, and he had gone out into driving rain and darkness, seeking the

word of the enigma as he tramped on and on beneath these outer

battlements of London.

Or on some grey afternoon in March or November he had sickened of the

dull monotony and the stagnant life that he saw from his window, and

had taken his design with him to the lonely places, halting now and

again by a gate, and pausing in the shelter of a hedge through which

the austere wind shivered, while, perhaps, he dreamed of Sicily, or of

sunlight on the Provençal olives. Often as he strayed solitary from

street to field, and passed the Syrian fig tree imprisoned in Britain,

nailed to an ungenial wall, the solution of the puzzle became evident,

and he laughed and hurried home eager to make the page speak, to note

the song he had heard on his way.

Sometimes he had spent many hours treading this edge and brim of

London, now lost amidst the dun fields, watching the bushes shaken by

the wind, and now looking down from a height whence he could see the

dim waves of the town, and a barbaric water tower rising from a hill,

and the snuff-coloured cloud of smoke that seemed blown up from the

streets into the sky.

There were certain ways and places that he had cherished; he loved a

great old common that stood on high ground, curtained about with

ancient spacious houses of red brick, and their cedarn gardens. And

there was on the road that led to this common a space of ragged uneven

ground with a pool and a twisted oak, and here he had often stayed in

autumn and looked across the mist and the valley at the great theatre

of the sunset, where a red cloud like a charging knight shone and

conquered a purple dragon shape, and golden lances glittered in a field

of faerie green.

Or sometimes, when the unending prospect of trim, monotonous, modern

streets had wearied him, he had found an immense refreshment in the

discovery of a forgotten hamlet, left in a hollow, while all new London

pressed and surged on every side, threatening the rest of the red roofs

with its vulgar growth. These little peaceful houses, huddled together

beneath the shelter of trees, with their bulging leaded windows and

uneven roofs, somehow brought back to him the sense of the country, and

soothed him with the thought of the old farm-houses, white or grey, the

homes of quiet lives, harbors where, perhaps, no tormenting thoughts

ever broke in.

For he had instinctively determined that there was neither rest nor

health in all the arid waste of streets about him. It seemed as if in

those dull rows of dwellings, in the prim new villas, red and white and

staring, there must be a leaven working which transformed all to base

vulgarity. Beneath the dull sad slates, behind the blistered doors,

love turned to squalid intrigue, mirth to drunken clamor, and the

mystery of life became a common thing; religion was sought for in the

greasy piety and flatulent oratory of the Independent chapel, the

stuccoed nightmare of the Doric columns. Nothing fine, nothing rare,

nothing exquisite, it seemed, could exist in the weltering suburban

sea, in the habitations which had risen from the stench and slime of

the brickfields. It was as if the sickening fumes that steamed from the

burning bricks had been sublimed into the shape of houses, and those

who lived in these grey places could also claim kinship with the putrid

mud.

Hence he had delighted in the few remains of the past that he could

find still surviving on the suburb’s edge, in the grave old houses that

stood apart from the road, in the mouldering taverns of the eighteenth

century, in the huddled hamlets that had preserved only the glow and

the sunlight of all the years that had passed over them. It appeared to

him that vulgarity and greasiness and squalor had come with a flood,

that not only the good but also the evil in man’s heart had been made

common and ugly, that a sordid scum was mingled with all the springs,

of death as of life. It would be alike futile to search amongst these

mean two-storied houses for a splendid sinner as for a splendid saint;

the very vices of these people smelt of cabbage water and a pothouse

vomit.

And so he had often fled away from the serried maze that encircled him,

seeking for the old and worn and significant as an antiquary looks for

the fragments of the Roman temple amidst the modern shops. In some way

the gusts of wind and the beating rain of the night reminded him of an

old house that had often attracted him with a strange indefinable

curiosity. He had found it on a grim grey day in March, when he had

gone out under a leaden-moulded sky, cowering from a dry freezing wind

that brought with it the gloom and the doom of far unhappy Siberian

plains. More than ever that day the suburb had oppressed him;

insignificant, detestable, repulsive to body and mind, it was the only

hell that a vulgar age could conceive or make, an inferno created not

by Dante but by the jerry-builder. He had gone out to the north, and

when he lifted up his eyes again he found that he had chanced to turn

up by one of the little lanes that still strayed across the broken

fields. He had never chosen this path before because the lane at its

outlet was so wholly degraded and offensive, littered with rusty tins

and broken crockery, and hedged in with a paling fashioned out of

scraps of wire, rotting timber, and bending worn-out rails. But on this

day, by happy chance, he had fled from the high road by the first

opening that offered, and he no longer groped his way amongst obscene

refuse, sickened by the bloated bodies of dead dogs, and fetid odours

from unclean decay, but the malpassage had become a peaceful winding

lane, with warm shelter beneath its banks from the dismal wind. For a

mile he had walked quietly, and then a turn in the road showed him a

little glen or hollow, watered by such a tiny rushing brooklet as his

own woods knew, and beyond, alas, the glaring foreguard of a “new

neighborhood”; raw red villas, semi-detached, and then a row of

lamentable shops.

But as he was about to turn back, in the hope of finding some other

outlet, his attention was charmed by a small house that stood back a

little from the road on his right hand. There had been a white gate,

but the paint had long faded to grey and black, and the wood crumbled

under the touch, and only moss marked out the lines of the drive. The

iron railing round the lawn had fallen, and the poor flower-beds were

choked with grass and a faded growth of weeds. But here and there a

rosebush lingered amidst suckers that had sprung grossly from the root,

and on each side of the hall door were box trees, untrimmed, ragged,

but still green. The slate roof was all stained and livid, blotched

with the drippings of a great elm that stood at one corner of the

neglected lawn, and marks of damp and decay were thick on the uneven

walls, which had been washed yellow many years before. There was a

porch of trellis work before the door, and Lucian had seen it rock in

the wind, swaying as if every gust must drive it down. There were two

windows on the ground floor, one on each side of the door, and two

above, with a blind space where a central window had been blocked up.

This poor and desolate house had fascinated him. Ancient and poor and

fallen, disfigured by the slate roof and the yellow wash that had

replaced the old mellow dipping tiles and the warm red walls, and

disfigured again by spots and patches of decay; it seemed as if its

happy days were for ever ended. To Lucian it appealed with a sense of

doom and horror; the black streaks that crept upon the walls, and the

green drift upon the roof, appeared not so much the work of foul

weather and dripping boughs, as the outward signs of evil working and

creeping in the lives of those within.

The stage seemed to him decked for doom, painted with the symbols of

tragedy; and he wondered as he looked whether any one were so unhappy

as to live there still. There were torn blinds in the windows, but he

had asked himself who could be so brave as to sit in that room,

darkened by the dreary box, and listen of winter nights to the rain

upon the window, and the moaning of wind amongst the tossing boughs

that beat against the roof.

He could not imagine that any chamber in such a house was habitable.

Here the dead had lain, through the white blind the thin light had

filtered on the rigid mouth, and still the floor must be wet with tears

and still that great rocking elm echoed the groaning and the sobs of

those who watched. No doubt, the damp was rising, and the odour of the

earth filled the house, and made such as entered draw back, foreseeing

the hour of death.

Often the thought of this strange old house had haunted him; he had

imagined the empty rooms where a heavy paper peeled from the walls and

hung in dark strips; and he could not believe that a light ever shone

from those windows that stared black and glittering on the neglected

lawn. But tonight the wet and the storm seemed curiously to bring the

image of the place before him, and as the wind sounded he thought how

unhappy those must be, if any there were, who sat in the musty chambers

by a flickering light, and listened to the elm-tree moaning and beating

and weeping on the walls.

And tonight was Saturday night; and there was about that phrase

something that muttered of the condemned cell, of the agony of a doomed

man. Ghastly to his eyes was the conception of any one sitting in that

room to the right of the door behind the larger box tree, where the

wall was cracked above the window and smeared with a black stain in an

ugly shape.

He knew how foolish it had been in the first place to trouble his mind

with such conceits of a dreary cottage on the outskirts of London. And

it was more foolish now to meditate these things, fantasies, feigned

forms, the issue of a sad mood and a bleak day of spring. For soon, in

a few moments, he was to rise to a new life. He was but reckoning up

the account of his past, and when the light came he was to think no

more of sorrow and heaviness, of real or imagined terrors. He had

stayed too long in London, and he would once more taste the breath of

the hills, and see the river winding in the long lovely valley; ah! he

would go home.

Something like a thrill, the thrill of fear, passed over him as he

remembered that there was no home. It was in the winter, a year and a

half after his arrival in town, that he had suffered the loss of his

father. He lay for many days prostrate, overwhelmed with sorrow and

with the thought that now indeed he was utterly alone in the world.

Miss Deacon was to live with another cousin in Yorkshire; the old home

was at last ended and done. He felt sorry that he had not written more

frequently to his father: there were things in his cousin’s letters

that had made his heart sore. “Your poor father was always looking for

your letters,” she wrote, “they used to cheer him so much. He nearly

broke down when you sent him that money last Christmas; he got it into

his head that you were starving yourself to send it him. He was hoping

so much that you would have come down this Christmas, and kept asking

me about the plum-puddings months ago.”

It was not only his father that had died, but with him the last strong

link was broken, and the past life, the days of his boyhood, grew faint

as a dream. With his father his mother died again, and the long years

died, the time of his innocence, the memory of affection. He was sorry

that his letters had gone home so rarely; it hurt him to imagine his

father looking out when the post came in the morning, and forced to be

sad because there was nothing. But he had never thought that his father

valued the few lines that he wrote, and indeed it was often difficult

to know what to say. It would have been useless to write of those

agonizing nights when the pen seemed an awkward and outlandish

instrument, when every effort ended in shameful defeat, or of the

happier hours when at last wonder appeared and the line glowed, crowned

and exalted. To poor Mr. Taylor such tales would have seemed but

trivial histories of some Oriental game, like an odd story from a land

where men have time for the infinitely little, and can seriously make a

science of arranging blossoms in a jar, and discuss perfumes instead of

politics. It would have been useless to write to the rectory of his

only interest, and so he wrote seldom.

And then he had been sorry because he could never write again and never

see his home. He had wondered whether he would have gone down to the

old place at Christmas, if his father had lived. It was curious how

common things evoked the bitterest griefs, but his father’s anxiety

that the plum-pudding should be good, and ready for him, had brought

the tears into his eyes. He could hear him saying in a nervous voice

that attempted to be cheerful: “I suppose you will be thinking of the

Christmas puddings soon, Jane; you remember how fond Lucian used to be

of plum-pudding. I hope we shall see him this December.” No doubt poor

Miss Deacon paled with rage at the suggestion that she should make

Christmas pudding in July; and returned a sharp answer; but it was

pathetic. The wind wailed, and the rain dashed and beat again and again

upon the window. He imagined that all his thoughts of home, of the old

rectory amongst the elms, had conjured into his mind the sound of the

storm upon the trees, for, tonight, very clearly he heard the creaking

of the boughs, the noise of boughs moaning and beating and weeping on

the walls, and even a pattering of wet, on wet earth, as if there were

a shrub near the window that shook off the raindrops, before the gust.

That thrill, as it were a shudder of fear, passed over him again, and

he knew not what had made him afraid. There were some dark shadow on

his mind that saddened him; it seemed as if a vague memory of terrible

days hung like a cloud over his thought, but it was all indefinite,

perhaps the last grim and ragged edge of the melancholy wrack that had

swelled over his life and the bygone years. He shivered and tried to

rouse himself and drive away the sense of dread and shame that seemed

so real and so awful, and yet he could not grasp it. But the torpor of

sleep, the burden of the work that he had ended a few hours before,

still weighed down his limb and bound his thoughts. He could scarcely

believe that he had been busy at his desk a little while ago, and that

just before the winter day closed it and the rain began to fall he had

laid down the pen with a sigh of relief, and had slept in his chair. It

was rather as if he had slumbered deeply through a long and weary

night, as if an awful vision of flame and darkness and the worm that

dieth not had come to him sleeping. But he would dwell no more on the

darkness; he went back to the early days in London when he had said

farewell to the hills and to the waterpools, and had set to work in

this little room in the dingy street.

How he had toiled and laboured at the desk before him! He had put away

the old wild hopes of the masterpiece conceived and executed in a fury

of inspiration, wrought out in one white heat of creative joy; it was

enough if by dint of long perseverance and singleness of desire he

could at last, in pain and agony and despair, after failure and

disappointment and effort constantly renewed, fashion something of

which he need not be ashamed. He had put himself to school again, and

had, with what patience he could command, ground his teeth into the

rudiments, resolved that at last he would test out the heart of the

mystery. They were good nights to remember, these; he was glad to think

of the little ugly room, with its silly wall-paper and its “bird’s-eye”

furniture, lighted up, while he sat at the bureau and wrote on into the

cold stillness of the London morning, when the flickering lamplight and

the daystar shone together. It was an interminable labour, and he had

always known it to be as hopeless as alchemy. The gold, the great and

glowing masterpiece, would never shine amongst the dead ashes and

smoking efforts of the crucible, but in the course of the life, in the

interval between the failures, he might possibly discover curious

things.

These were the good nights that he could look back on without any fear

or shame, when he had been happy and content on a diet of bread and tea

and tobacco, and could hear of some imbecility passing into its

hundredth thousand, and laugh cheerfully—if only that last page had

been imagined aright, if the phrases noted in the still hours rang out

their music when he read them in the morning. He remembered the

drolleries and fantasies that the worthy Miss Deacon used to write to

him, and how he had grinned at her words of reproof, admonition, and

advice. She had once instigated Dolly \_fils\_ to pay him a visit, and

that young prop of respectability had talked about the extraordinary

running of Bolter at the Scurragh meeting in Ireland; and then,

glancing at Lucian’s books, had inquired whether any of them had “warm

bits.” He had been kind though patronizing, and seemed to have moved

freely in the most brilliant society of Stoke Newington. He had not

been able to give any information as to the present condition of Edgar

Allan Poe’s old school. It appeared eventually that his report at home

had not been a very favorable one, for no invitation to high tea had

followed, as Miss Deacon had hoped. The Dollys knew many nice people,

who were well off, and Lucian’s cousin, as she afterwards said, had

done \_her\_ best to introduce him to the \_beau monde\_ of those northern

suburbs.

But after the visit of the young Dolly, with what joy he had returned

to the treasures which he had concealed from profane eyes. He had

looked out and seen his visitor on board the tram at the street corner,

and he laughed out loud, and locked his door. There had been moments

when he was lonely, and wished to hear again the sound of friendly

speech, but, after such an irruption of suburban futility, it was a

keen delight, to feel that he was secure on his tower, that he could

absorb himself in his wonderful task as safe and silent as if he were

in mid-desert.

But there was one period that he dared not revive; he could not bear to

think of those weeks of desolation and terror in the winter after his

coming to London. His mind was sluggish, and he could not quite

remember how many years had passed since that dismal experience; it

sounded all an old story, but yet it was still vivid, a flaming scroll

of terror from which he turned his eyes away. One awful scene glowed

into his memory, and he could not shut out the sight of an orgy, of

dusky figures whirling in a ring, of lurid naphtha flares blazing in

the darkness, of great glittering lamps, like infernal thuribles, very

slowly swaying in a violent blast of air. And there was something else,

something which he could not remember, but it filled him with terror,

but it slunk in the dark places of his soul, as a wild beast crouches

in the depths of a cave.

Again, and without reason, he began to image to himself that old

mouldering house in the field. With what a loud incessant noise the

wind must be clamoring about on this fearful night, how the great elm

swayed and cried in the storm, and the rain dashed and pattered on the

windows, and dripped on the sodden earth from the shaking shrubs beside

the door. He moved uneasily on his chair, and struggled to put the

picture out of his thoughts; but in spite of himself he saw the stained

uneven walls, that ugly blot of mildew above the window, and perhaps a

feeble gleam of light filtered through the blind, and some one, unhappy

above all and for ever lost, sat within the dismal room. Or rather,

every window was black, without a glimmer of hope, and he who was shut

in thick darkness heard the wind and the rain, and the noise of the

elm-tree moaning and beating and weeping on the walls.

For all his effort the impression would not leave him, and as he sat

before his desk looking into the vague darkness he could almost see

that chamber which he had so often imagined; the low whitewashed

ceiling held up by a heavy beam, the smears of smoke and long usage,

the cracks and fissures of the plaster. Old furniture, shabby,

deplorable, battered, stood about the room; there was a horsehair sofa

worn and tottering, and a dismal paper, patterned in a livid red,

blackened and mouldered near the floor, and peeled off and hung in

strips from the dank walls. And there was that odour of decay, of the

rank soil steaming, of rotting wood, a vapor that choked the breath and

made the heart full of fear and heaviness.

Lucian again shivered with a thrill of dread; he was afraid that he had

overworked himself and that he was suffering from the first symptoms of

grave illness. His mind dwelt on confused and terrible recollections,

and with a mad ingenuity gave form and substance to phantoms; and even

now he drew a long breath, almost imagining that the air in his room

was heavy and noisome, that it entered his nostrils with some taint of

the crypt. And his body was still languid, and though he made a half

motion to rise he could not find enough energy for the effort, and he

sank again into the chair. At all events, he would think no more of

that sad house in the field; he would return to those long struggles

with letters, to the happy nights when he had gained victories.

He remembered something of his escape from the desolation and the worse

than desolation that had obsessed him during that first winter in

London. He had gone free one bleak morning in February, and after those

dreary terrible weeks the desk and the heap and litter of papers had

once more engulfed and absorbed him. And in the succeeding summer, of a

night when he lay awake and listened to the birds, shining images came

wantonly to him. For an hour, while the dawn brightened, he had felt

the presence of an age, the resurrection of the life that the green

fields had hidden, and his heart stirred for joy when he knew that he

held and possessed all the loveliness that had so long mouldered. He

could scarcely fall asleep for eager and leaping thoughts, and as soon

as his breakfast was over he went out and bought paper and pens of a

certain celestial stationer in Notting Hill. The street was not changed

as he passed to and fro on his errand. The rattling wagons jostled by

at intervals, a rare hansom came spinning down from London, there

sounded the same hum and jangle of the gliding trams. The languid life

of the pavement was unaltered; a few people, un-classed, without

salience or possible description, lounged and walked from east to west,

and from west to east, or slowly dropped into the byways to wander in

the black waste to the north, or perhaps go astray in the systems that

stretched towards the river. He glanced down these by-roads as he

passed, and was astonished, as always, at their mysterious and desert

aspect. Some were utterly empty; lines of neat, appalling residences,

trim and garnished as if for occupation, edging the white glaring road;

and not a soul was abroad, and not a sound broke their stillness. It

was a picture of the desolation of midnight lighted up, but empty and

waste as the most profound and solemn hours before the day. Other of

these by-roads, of older settlement, were furnished with more important

houses, standing far back from the pavement, each in a little wood of

greenery, and thus one might look down as through a forest vista, and

see a way smooth and guarded with low walls and yet untrodden, and all

a leafy silence. Here and there in some of these echoing roads a figure

seemed lazily advancing in the distance, hesitating and delaying, as if

lost in the labyrinth. It was difficult to say which were the more

dismal, these deserted streets that wandered away to right and left, or

the great main thoroughfare with its narcotic and shadowy life. For the

latter appeared vast, interminable, grey, and those who traveled by it

were scarcely real, the bodies of the living, but rather the uncertain

and misty shapes that come and go across the desert in an Eastern tale,

when men look up from the sand and see a caravan pass them, all in

silence, without a cry or a greeting. So they passed and repassed each

other on those pavements, appearing and vanishing, each intent on his

own secret, and wrapped in obscurity. One might have sworn that not a

man saw his neighbor who met him or jostled him, that here every one

was a phantom for the other, though the lines of their paths crossed

and recrossed, and their eyes stared like the eyes of live men. When

two went by together, they mumbled and cast distrustful glances behind

them as though afraid all the world was an enemy, and the pattering of

feet was like the noise of a shower of rain. Curious appearances and

simulations of life gathered at points in the road, for at intervals

the villas ended and shops began in a dismal row, and looked so

hopeless that one wondered who could buy. There were women fluttering

uneasily about the greengrocers, and shabby things in rusty black

touched and retouched the red lumps that an unshaven butcher offered,

and already in the corner public there was a confused noise, with a

tossing of voices that rose and fell like a Jewish chant, with the

senseless stir of marionettes jerked into an imitation of gaiety. Then,

in crossing a side street that seemed like grey mid-winter in stone, he

trespassed from one world to another, for an old decayed house amidst

its garden held the opposite corner. The laurels had grown into black

skeletons, patched with green drift, the ilex gloomed over the porch,

the deodar had blighted the flower-beds. Dark ivies swarmed over an

elm-tree, and a brown clustering fungus sprang in gross masses on the

lawn, showing where the roots of dead trees mouldered. The blue

verandah, the blue balcony over the door, had faded to grey, and the

stucco was blotched with ugly marks of weather, and a dank smell of

decay, that vapor of black rotten earth in old town gardens, hung heavy

about the gates. And then a row of musty villas had pushed out in shops

to the pavement, and the things in faded black buzzed and stirred about

the limp cabbages, and the red lumps of meat.

It was the same terrible street, whose pavements he had trodden so

often, where sunshine seemed but a gaudy light, where the fume of

burning bricks always drifted. On black winter nights he had seen the

sparse lights glimmering through the rain and drawing close together,

as the dreary road vanished in long perspective. Perhaps this was its

most appropriate moment, when nothing of its smug villas and skeleton

shops remained but the bright patches of their windows, when the old

house amongst its mouldering shrubs was but a dark cloud, and the

streets to the north and south seemed like starry wastes, beyond them

the blackness of infinity. Always in the daylight it had been to him

abhorred and abominable, and its grey houses and purlieus had been

fungus-like sproutings, an efflorescence of horrible decay.

But on that bright morning neither the dreadful street nor those who

moved about it appalled him. He returned joyously to his den, and

reverently laid out the paper on his desk. The world about him was but

a grey shadow hovering on a shining wall; its noises were faint as the

rustling of trees in a distant wood. The lovely and exquisite forms of

those who served the Amber Venus were his distinct, clear, and manifest

visions, and for one amongst them who came to him in a fire of bronze

hair his heart stirred with the adoration of love. She it was who stood

forth from all the rest and fell down prostrate before the radiant form

in amber, drawing out her pins in curious gold, her glowing brooches of

enamel, and pouring from a silver box all her treasures of jewels and

precious stones, chrysoberyl and sardonyx, opal and diamond, topaz and

pearl. And then she stripped from her body her precious robes and stood

before the goddess in the glowing mist of her hair, praying that to her

who had given all and came naked to the shrine, love might be given,

and the grace of Venus. And when at last, after strange adventures, her

prayer was granted, then when the sweet light came from the sea, and

her lover turned at dawn to that bronze glory, he saw beside him a

little statuette of amber. And in the shrine, far in Britain where the

black rains stained the marble, they found the splendid and sumptuous

statue of the Golden Venus, the last fine robe of silk that the lady

had dedicated falling from her fingers, and the jewels lying at her

feet. And her face was like the lady’s face when the sun had brightened

it on that day of her devotion.

The bronze mist glimmered before Lucian’s eyes; he felt as though the

soft floating hair touched his forehead and his lips and his hands. The

fume of burning bricks, the reek of cabbage water, never reached his

nostrils that were filled with the perfume of rare unguents, with the

breath of the violet sea in Italy. His pleasure was an inebriation, an

ecstasy of joy that destroyed all the vile Hottentot kraals and mud

avenues as with one white lightning flash, and through the hours of

that day he sat enthralled, not contriving a story with patient art,

but rapt into another time, and entranced by the urgent gleam in the

lady’s eyes.

The little tale of \_The Amber Statuette\_ had at last issued from a

humble office in the spring after his father’s death. The author was

utterly unknown; the author’s Murray was a wholesale stationer and

printer in process of development, so that Lucian was astonished when

the book became a moderate success. The reviewers had been sadly

irritated, and even now he recollected with cheerfulness an article in

an influential daily paper, an article pleasantly headed: “Where are

the disinfectants?”

And then—but all the months afterwards seemed doubtful, there were only

broken revelations of the labourious hours renewed, and the white

nights when he had seen the moonlight fade and the gaslight grow wan at

the approach of dawn.

He listened. Surely that was the sound of rain falling on sodden

ground, the heavy sound of great swollen drops driven down from wet

leaves by the gust of wind, and then again the strain of boughs sang

above the tumult of the air; there was a doleful noise as if the storm

shook the masts of a ship. He had only to get up and look out of the

window and he would see the treeless empty street, and the rain

starring the puddles under the gas-lamp, but he would wait a little

while.

He tried to think why, in spite of all his resolutions, a dark horror

seemed to brood more and more over all his mind. How often he had sat

and worked on just such nights as this, contented if the words were in

accord though the wind might wail, though the air were black with rain.

Even about the little book that he had made there seemed some taint,

some shuddering memory that came to him across the gulf of

forgetfulness. Somehow the remembrance of the offering to Venus, of the

phrases that he had so lovingly invented, brought back again the dusky

figures that danced in the orgy, beneath the brassy glittering lamps;

and again the naphtha flares showed the way to the sad house in the

fields, and the red glare lit up the mildewed walls and the black

hopeless windows. He gasped for breath, he seemed to inhale a heavy air

that reeked of decay and rottenness, and the odour of the clay was in

his nostrils.

That unknown cloud that had darkened his thoughts grew blacker and

engulfed him, despair was heavy upon him, his heart fainted with a

horrible dread. In a moment, it seemed, a veil would be drawn away and

certain awful things would appear.

He strove to rise from his chair, to cry out, but he could not. Deep,

deep the darkness closed upon him, and the storm sounded far away. The

Roman fort surged up, terrific, and he saw the writhing boughs in a

ring, and behind them a glow and heat of fire. There were hideous

shapes that swarmed in the thicket of the oaks; they called and

beckoned to him, and rose into the air, into the flame that was smitten

from heaven about the walls. And amongst them was the form of the

beloved, but jets of flame issued from her breasts, and beside her was

a horrible old woman, naked; and they, too, summoned him to mount the

hill.

He heard Dr. Burrows whispering of the strange things that had been

found in old Mrs. Gibbon’s cottage, obscene figures, and unknown

contrivances. She was a witch, he said, and the mistress of witches.

He fought against the nightmare, against the illusion that bewildered

him. All his life, he thought, had been an evil dream, and for the

common world he had fashioned an unreal red garment, that burned in his

eyes. Truth and the dream were so mingled that now he could not divide

one from the other. He had let Annie drink his soul beneath the hill,

on the night when the moonfire shone, but he had not surely seen her

exalted in the flame, the Queen of the Sabbath. Dimly he remembered Dr.

Burrows coming to see him in London, but had he not imagined all the

rest?

Again he found himself in the dusky lane, and Annie floated down to him

from the moon above the hill. His head sank upon her breast again, but,

alas, it was aflame. And he looked down, and he saw that his own flesh

was aflame, and he knew that the fire could never be quenched.

There was a heavy weight upon his head, his feet were nailed to the

floor, and his arms bound tight beside him. He seemed to himself to

rage and struggle with the strength of a madman; but his hand only

stirred and quivered a little as it lay upon the desk.

Again he was astray in the mist; wandering through the waste avenues of

a city that had been ruined from ages. It had been splendid as Rome,

terrible as Babylon, and for ever the darkness had covered it, and it

lay desolate for ever in the accursed plain. And far and far the grey

passages stretched into the night, into the icy fields, into the place

of eternal gloom.

Ring within ring the awful temple closed around him; unending circles

of vast stones, circle within circle, and every circle less throughout

all ages. In the center was the sanctuary of the infernal rite, and he

was borne thither as in the eddies of a whirlpool, to consummate his

ruin, to celebrate the wedding of the Sabbath. He flung up his arms and

beat the air, resisting with all his strength, with muscles that could

throw down mountains; and this time his little finger stirred for an

instant, and his foot twitched upon the floor.

Then suddenly a flaring street shone before him. There was darkness

round about him, but it flamed with hissing jets of light and naphtha

fires, and great glittering lamps swayed very slowly in a violent blast

of air. A horrible music, and the exultation of discordant voices,

swelled in his ears, and he saw an uncertain tossing crowd of dusky

figures that circled and leapt before him. There was a noise like the

chant of the lost, and then there appeared in the midst of the orgy,

beneath a red flame, the figure of a woman. Her bronze hair and flushed

cheeks were illuminate, and an argent light shone from her eyes, and

with a smile that froze his heart her lips opened to speak to him. The

tossing crowd faded away, falling into a gulf of darkness, and then she

drew out from her hair pins of curious gold, and glowing brooches in

enamel, and poured out jewels before him from a silver box, and then

she stripped from her body her precious robes, and stood in the glowing

mist of her hair, and held out her arms to him. But he raised his eyes

and saw the mould and decay gaining on the walls of a dismal room, and

a gloomy paper was dropping to the rotting floor. A vapor of the grave

entered his nostrils, and he cried out with a loud scream; but there

was only an indistinct guttural murmur in his throat.

And presently the woman fled away from him, and he pursued her. She

fled away before him through midnight country, and he followed after

her, chasing her from thicket to thicket, from valley to valley. And at

last he captured her and won her with horrible caresses, and they went

up to celebrate and make the marriage of the Sabbath. They were within

the matted thicket, and they writhed in the flames, insatiable, for

ever. They were tortured, and tortured one another, in the sight of

thousands who gathered thick about them; and their desire rose up like

a black smoke.

Without, the storm swelled to the roaring of an awful sea, the wind

grew to a shrill long scream, the elm-tree was riven and split with the

crash of a thunderclap. To Lucian the tumult and the shock came as a

gentle murmur, as if a brake stirred before a sudden breeze in summer.

And then a vast silence overwhelmed him.

A few minutes later there was a shuffling of feet in the passage, and

the door was softly opened. A woman came in, holding a light, and she

peered curiously at the figure sitting quite still in the chair before

the desk. The woman was half dressed, and she had let her splendid

bronze hair flow down, her cheeks were flushed, and as she advanced

into the shabby room, the lamp she carried cast quaking shadows on the

mouldering paper, patched with marks of rising damp, and hanging in

strips from the wet, dripping wall. The blind had not been drawn, but

no light or glimmer of light filtered through the window, for a great

straggling box tree that beat the rain upon the panes shut out even the

night. The woman came softly, and as she bent down over Lucian an

argent gleam shone from her brown eyes, and the little curls upon her

neck were like golden work upon marble. She put her hand to his heart,

and looked up, and beckoned to some one who was waiting by the door.

“Come in, Joe,” she said. “It’s just as I thought it would be: ‘Death

by misadventure’;” and she held up a little empty bottle of dark blue

glass that was standing on the desk. “He would take it, and I always

knew he would take a drop too much one of these days.”

“What’s all those papers that he’s got there?”

“Didn’t I tell you? It was crool to see him. He got it into ’is ’ead he

could write a book; he’s been at it for the last six months. Look

’ere.”

She spread the neat pile of manuscript broadcast over the desk, and

took a sheet at haphazard. It was all covered with illegible hopeless

scribblings; only here and there it was possible to recognize a word.

“Why, nobody could read it, if they wanted to.”

“It’s all like that. He thought it was beautiful. I used to ’ear him

jabbering to himself about it, dreadful nonsense it was he used to

talk. I did my best to tongue him out of it, but it wasn’t any good.”

“He must have been a bit dotty. He’s left you everything.”

“Yes.”

“You’ll have to see about the funeral.”

“There’ll be the inquest and all that first.”

“You’ve got evidence to show he took the stuff.”

“Yes, to be sure I have. The doctor told him he would be certain to do

for himself, and he was found two or three times quite silly in the

streets. They had to drag him away from a house in Halden Road. He was

carrying on dreadful, shaking at the gaite, and calling out it was ’is

’ome and they wouldn’t let him in. I heard Dr. Manning myself tell ’im

in this very room that he’d kill ’imself one of these days. Joe! Aren’t

you ashamed of yourself. I declare you’re quite rude, and it’s almost

Sunday too. Bring the light over here, can’t you?”

The man took up the blazing paraffin lamp, and set it on the desk,

beside the scattered heap of that terrible manuscript. The flaring

light shone through the dead eyes into the dying brain, and there was a

glow within, as if great furnace doors were opened.

THE END

Other books by Arthur Machen

Novels

The Hill of Dreams

The Great Return

The Terror

The Secret Glory

The Green Round

The Great God Pan

Kings of Horror

The Chronicle of Clemendy

The Great God Pan and The Inmost Light

The Three Imposters

The House of Souls

The Angels of Mons, The Bowmen, and Other Legends of the War

Fantastic Tales or the Way to Attain

The Shining Pyramid

The Glorious Mystery

Ornaments in Jade

The Children of the Pool and Other Stories

The Cosy Room and Other Stories

Holy Terrors

Tales of Horror and the Supernatural

Tales of Horror and the Supernatural Volume Two

The Strange World of Arthur Machen Black Crusade

The Novel of the Black Seal and Other Stories

The Novel of the White Powder and Other Stories