

PART II

CHAPTER XV

Francis Leslie Dawson did well at school. He was never, it is true, popular with a large circle, for he was no athlete, but in his own small clique of youthful intelligentsia, as a free man of modern literature and a contributor of sardonic articles to the school magazine he held already, at the age of seventeen, an acknowledged supremacy. Dawson also distinguished himself at school academically, in spite of certain dangerous habits such as the intrusion into his essays of irony at the expense of the authorities. On one such occasion, for instance, in a fit of generous, burning indignation of the kind which such boys experience, he had contrasted the actual behaviour of society in a certain manner with the bare principles of the Sermon on the Mount. It happened that another boy in his set overheard the headmaster discussing this essay with Dawson's form master, and he subsequently reported the discussion to Dawson. "He'll learn", the headmaster had said, "as he grows up, that these ideas don't work in practical life." And the form master, also, as it happened, a Doctor of Divinity, had nodded approvingly. For some reason Dawson never forgot this incident, and he often in later life recurred to the feelings it had aroused in him, as a source of inspiration.

Although he had not done nearly so well at the University as had been predicted for him, he had managed somehow to get a staff appointment during the War which had kept him busy, and relegated to the background a feeling that had already begun to take hold of him before war broke out. This was a sense of dissatisfaction, about which the odd thing was that he could not say what he was dissatisfied with. He had thought at first that it must be the state of the world, but when he tried, he found that he had no interest in ameliorative schemes. Then he thought it must be himself, until he found that he had no desire to become either better or richer. Nor, in the ordinary sense, did Dawson seem to want power. The dissatisfaction itself therefore appeared to be chronic, but temporary relief was afforded when he could fasten upon some temporary cause.

At the time of the meeting, at which John had been introduced to him, he had just begun to feel extremely dissatisfied with the whole circle of people who foregathered there — with the partial exception of Humphrey and Rollo. And a few weeks later, with the usual temporary sense of relief at casting off something unsatisfactory, he had packed his bag and departed to Italy, telling a fond but uncomprehending mother that it was for a "change", but actually, in order to join an institution run by a friend of Rollo's, at which he hoped to find what he wanted — whatever that might be. Incidentally, the precise extent to which the individual who ran the place was connected with Rollo remained a matter of doubt. Dawson's own estimate of it varied. At one time, from the way he spoke, or from what he overheard from others, he began to regard Rollo as being practically the English representative of this person; at another time it seemed as though they scarcely knew one another. This mystery added zest to life for Rollo's admirers.

The institution at which Dawson now found himself resembled in one respect that little group of people who met once a fortnight near Tottenham Court Road. It

had no name. For Scuola Internazionale was a pure invention of the innkeeper. As to the principles on which it was conducted, the only one which appeared to Dawson to be capable of formulation was evidently something like this — that jerks are good for the system. Exercises of all kinds were conducted, mental, physical, moral and emotional; and the one thing they all had in common was the introduction of violent jerks. Thus, the pupil would be led far into the study of some subject on ultra-Western lines, penetrating — if he were capable of it — into the last intricacies of thought, and then suddenly, snap would come the fiat from above, and all this would be laid aside, and the same subject would be approached from an ultra-oriental point of view. For instance, a cow might be taken; exact anatomical studies would be made of it; the reactions of its muscles to electrical stimuli observed, and the curves of its shanks at some particular point plotted out and determined with the aid of the calculus — then, all at once, the leader would appear among them and everybody would have to squat round cross-legged, while he read or recited a Vedic poem beginning “Oh Cow!”, which, to the ordinary Occidental consciousness would appear to be practically devoid of any meaning whatsoever. Or perhaps a group of devotees would come in exhausted after a practically fruitless day in the open air. They would settle down with sighs of relief and no other thought but the satisfactions of the next half-hour, to a good square meal, when suddenly minions would descend like the harpies in Prospero’s cave and carry everything away, leaving the unfortunate “students” to spend as profitable a night as they could on empty stomachs. Or, just as they were sinking happily to sleep they would be summoned up to dig (and fill in again) a large hole ten miles away.

But sometimes it would happen the other way round; just as a pupil was bracing himself for a task well-nigh beyond his strength, the whole thing would be abandoned and the bewildered fellow would find himself clothed in soft raiment, reclining on still softer cushions, and enjoying a sumptuous meal with well chosen wines and every other possible appurtenance of luxury.

These exercises were also graduated in such a way that the carrying out of them came to depend more and more on the candidate’s own will. Thus, in his earlier stages a pupil might have the following experience. He would be guided through a series of appropriately furnished and decorated rooms until in the last one he would find himself quite alone with a ravishing maiden who reclined, indolent, perfumed, inviting, on an enormous divan. Just as he approached the divan, however, a trapdoor would open under his feet, letting him down into a disused cellar among rats and stagnant water. Later on, a loud speaker might be substituted for the oubliette, calling out “Refrain!” or “Indulge!” at the psychological moment in Esperanto. And finally, even this guidance would be omitted, and he would have to decide everything for himself.

At the time when John passed him on the quay, Dawson was just beginning to feel once more that he had had enough. Semi-consciously, he was applying his usual criterion, that is, asking himself the question: Does this thing, this way of life, and above all, do these people I am among help me to feel superior to the other people I meet? As formerly, with the crowd who attended the meetings near Tottenham Court Road, he was now just reaching a stage at which the answer was emphatically “No”. Emphatically, because the effect they had on him was actually the opposite of

the one required. At the end of six weeks his connection with Scuola actually appeared to decrease his sense of personal standing and dignity in the world. If he did recover the superior, contemptuous feeling he secretly desired, it was always in spite of these things. In fact, it was these very people whom he despised.

The thing that finally decided him to return to England was the presence in the Scuola of one particular little bantam of a Frenchman who had a neat, silky moustache which he continually stroked, smiling to himself at the same time. On one occasion Dawson had positively caught him indulging this habit before a looking-glass. At the same time the Frenchman quite honestly believed himself to be a superman of the kind desiderated by Nietzsche. When he was at home he wrote superior books on the decay of virility, advocating a return to polygamy as the remedy. And he was always rude on principle to everyone except his intimate friends. At first Dawson got on with him very well; but then he began to see through him and the man became his 'bête noire', all the more rapidly for having first been his friend. There was something about his systematic rudeness in particular, which Dawson came to dislike very much; it seemed so transparently silly.

At last, when the Frenchman, and through him the whole affair had got on Dawson's nerves very badly, he suddenly had the usual sensation of something snapping inside his head, followed by a temporary feeling of relief. Under the influence of this feeling he packed his bag and took a ticket back to England.

CHAPTER XVI

Gerald Marston's prospects did not seem to be improving as he grew older. His hopes of obtaining regular literary work gradually grew fainter and fainter; for every year it seemed to be more impossible to find a journal which he sufficiently resembled in his own outlook and personality to be able to establish a connection with it. Meanwhile his position as a freelance was also getting precarious. Fat envelopes addressed in his own writing came back to him with unwelcome frequency, and before their contents were fit to try their fortunes elsewhere, stupid niggling little alterations had to be made in the manuscript in order to fit them to the personality of the particular journal he was now aiming at. The result usually was much irksome labour, which in the end had no effect but to destroy such life and coherency as his work originally possessed. Marston did not know whether the fault was his, or whether it lay outside him. All he did know was that it became increasingly difficult to write from his heart anything which stood a chance of being published. What he wrote from his heart nobody seemed to want. And when he did not write from the heart, well, nobody seemed to want that either; because then it was not good enough. He could not acquire the knack of "writing down" to his public; when he tried to do so, he would discover in the work he was imitating all sorts of efficient qualities which he could not after all counterfeit. His own work — when he was interested in it — possessed these qualities without his making any particular effort after them. When he was not, it looked crude and awkward — quite unlike the stuff he was trying to imitate, whereas on theory it ought to have been better; for was he not merely going back to something he had already got beyond? He began to doubt himself altogether, and to suspect that his own sense of having

“got beyond” the stuff he had once written with such enthusiasm was illusory — that it was a smokescreen of vanity thrown up to cover the hideous truth of intellectual decay.

He grew depressed, and at the time when he met John, was already thinking quite seriously of returning to his family in the North, to reduce the expenses of living and perhaps to try to get a different kind of job there. One thing seemed to become clearer and clearer to him; on the one side there were his own thoughts and feelings, and anything he could offer in free activity, and on the other side there was money; and there was no connection between the two. Money meant compulsion of some kind and any compulsion was better than the compulsion to write. Much as he cherished his independence and loved his London, it was impossible to suggest an increase in his allowance from home. Indeed, he was ashamed to take what he did, especially now that his father’s illness seemed to have become a permanency. It would be impossible to remain in London except on the definite theory that he was there to “make his way”. When the bottom was once and for all knocked out of this theory he supposed he would have to go home again with his tail between his legs. It must be said that his affection for his father lightened the burden of this prospect considerably.

As to marriage, the possibility of such a course really no longer occurred to him. Ever since his one and only serious love-affair he had regarded himself as sealed a bachelor. Not because he went on cherishing a romantic and hopeless passion, but simply because he had suddenly seen through the whole thing. His last letter to the object of his affection still made him feel hot, whenever he thought of it, although it had all happened three years ago. All that time he had felt an exciting warmth about the region of his heart, and on being quietly but firmly rejected, had written a great deal about his longing to be allowed to do something for her, either now or at any time in her life, and so forth. And she, being an extremely sensible girl, and having behaved absolutely irreproachably throughout the whole affair, had written a short, but nice letter, in which she returned the poems and thanked him. The twelve months that followed had been spent by Gerald in discovering that all romantic love is disguised selfishness. He had not enjoyed that twelve months (except for a few extraordinary moments) but — well — at least they were over! And the way was now clear to find out something about that other kind of Love, which is not romantic at all, and which always seeks out pain and ugliness instead of pleasure and beauty. If there was one thing he was absolutely sure of it was the lack of all connection between these two sorts of love — though, no doubt, the one might turn out to be a sort of preliminary training for the other.

About a week after John’s wedding, when he was sitting alone in his room, there was a knock at the door, which opened to admit Humphrey Trinder. Humphrey came straight to the point of his visit. He told Marston that he had decided to leave Westleigh and move nearer into town; and he had come to suggest that they should share rooms. He (Humphrey) would take on the labour of finding them; from Gerald’s point of view it would mean that he would be able to live in two rooms — a bedroom and communal sitting-room — instead of one as at present; at the same time he would be paying less.

“Don’t answer now!” said Humphrey with the quick, downward movement of his chin and the corners of his mouth. “Take your time, and let me know as soon as you have decided. You don’t mind my asking anyway?”

“Mind! It seems to me to be rather flattering! Look here, I — oh well, yes! I’ll let you know.” Humphrey nodded cheerfully and immediately left Gerald alone with his thoughts once more. He had been about to clinch the matter there and then, but on second thoughts had decided to take Humphrey’s advice and think it over. He liked Humphrey Trinder, but after all it was one thing to enjoy meeting a man occasionally and quite another to settle down and live with him. Gerald tried to look at the matter in all its bearings. From the financial point of view there was clearly everything to be said for it. Moreover, he was tired of living alone, and thought it quite possible that a companion might relieve his depression, but as to the personal aspect — Gerald began to ask himself what it was precisely that had attracted him to Humphrey and his “crew” in the first place — minds so very much unlike his own in every way. He began to pace up and down the room. The enquiry led him deep.

He now realised that all his life he had tended to divide the people he met into two sharply defined classes, sheep on one side and goats on the other. At first, the two classes had been clever and not-clever: the clever people were the sheep and anybody who was stupid and had read nothing was a goat — outside the pale altogether. This was at the time when he was first plunging into intellectual life, and the whole world of letters had shone with a sort of golden glory like a promised land seen from afar. One had imagined contemporary men of letters as a kind of gods sitting in Valhalla, and occasionally shouting to one another divine calls of wisdom and beauty across the stillness — until one came nearer and discovered a collection of dull and rather ignorant old men exchanging anecdotes to pass away the interval between dinner and bed-time. Then, about the time when he was getting over his love-affair he had ceased altogether to care about cleverness, and had gone back to a much older classification of good and not-good. Lately, however, as he now realised for the first time, this system of division had in its turn been superseded, or at any rather supplemented, by one of a rather different order. What was it that he now looked out for in people? How could he name it? Apparently he tended to classify them as awake and asleep, though in precisely what way “asleep” he could not determine. Yes. It was because they were in some undefined way “awake” that he liked his psycho-analytical friends, not because they had “self knowledge”, though this was the reason he had given to John, and it was certainly a quality on which most of them preened themselves. In actual fact they generally lacked this quality, together, of course, with the modesty it brings, in the most crude and elementary way imaginable. Still they were — awake!

But after all, the decision concerned Humphrey alone, not his friends. Gerald closed his eyes for a moment. Immediately he saw before him, not only Humphrey, but John and Margaret. Yes! Of course the answer was “Yes”! He decided to ring up Humphrey at once and hurried out to do so. As he sat waiting in the box with one of the two pennies already inserted in the slot and pressed against the side to prevent it dropping before the operator answered, he realised that it was extremely unlikely that Humphrey would have got home so quickly. He was right. Janet answered the call and informed him in reply to his enquiry that Humphrey was not back yet, had

not, in fact, been back since the wedding. He was about to explain why he had rung up, when he suddenly recollected that he had not the slightest idea why Humphrey should have changed his plans. The memory of his evening at Westleigh came back to him, bringing discomfort, and he contented himself with simply leaving the message "yes", to be given to Humphrey when he came in.

He then asked Janet if she had heard from the honeymoon couple. She replied that it was too early, whereupon something induced him to say, "Ah, They'll be back again before we know where we are!" She laughed an acknowledgment, and they said Goodbye and rang off.

As he walked back to his room, Gerald became more and more impressed with the toneless way in which Janet had spoken and laughed. He felt that something was wrong, and wondered for a moment if his consent to live with Humphrey would draw him into the position of taking sides in a domestic quarrel. Did she know, and was annoyance at the back of the expressionless voice? Was she the kind of person to get annoyed? Would it matter if she were? In his endeavour to find answers to all these questions his mind went back once more to the evening at Westleigh, and he began comparing Janet and Margaret in his mind. The act of comparison recalled his former train of thought, and immediately the judgment came to him — as an accepted and obvious truth — though he had never considered the matter before — that in spite of her apparently limited intellect and low level of attainments, Janet was the one who was "awake" in his sense, while Margaret, for all her vivacity, was still "asleep". This suggested the interesting question whether the classification could be applied to women at all. He decided (chiefly because of Janet) that it could; but was not sure whether it was a desirable quality in them, as it certainly was in men.

CHAPTER XVII

Janet went home from Klosters alone; for Humphrey had arranged to go on and stay a few days with a friend who lived near. When she arrived at the little station, with a sense of relief after an exhausting day, everything looked very quiet in the evening sun. The booking-office was not yet open, and the wooden platforms, stretched lazily alongside the endless rails, looked as though they had been left behind in a race and had made up their minds not to bother. Janet was looking forward to her three hours in the train; but suppose, she thought, it is crowded! She was at the end of the platform when this thought struck her, and after a few seconds she turned sharp on her heel and hurried back to see if the booking office was open. Then she did something she had never done before in her life: she took a first-class ticket to town. Immediately afterwards she wondered if she had been mad, and spent the remaining ten minutes before the train came in, debating with herself whether she should go back and ask the man to change it. In the end, however, she got into her first-class compartment, determined to enjoy her journey to the full, and finally crowned the whole affair by buying, at the first junction, a rather frivolous illustrated paper called The Rout.

Instead of reading it, however, Janet sank back luxuriously into her corner and began thinking about John and Margaret. There would have been some excuse

had a feeling of jealousy stirred in her breast at this moment. Actually, she found her heart warming towards Margaret more than it had ever done, and with her customary acute self-consciousness was even inclined to pat herself on the back over it. It was John whose star seemed to be shining more wanly than usual in the firmament of her affections. Rapidly her mood of luxurious enjoyment faded, giving way to a depression deeper than before. Whether she were "letting herself go" after the effort of the last few weeks to keep all unpleasantness from him, or whether it were for some deeper and more mysterious reason, all those little habits and mannerisms of John's which she found most irritating now came creeping into the foreground of her mind, making her feel coldly. She recalled particular instances of a certain rather aggressive optimism, which he seemed to have adopted lately on principle. Thus, if she read out of the paper an account of some horrible accident, he would receive the news in silence, with no exclamation of horror, and then he would remark in a solemn way, "It's lucky the man had no family dependent on him!" or "He's still got his right arm!" or something of the kind. Recently, however, John had discovered that this positive attitude annoyed Janet, and was careful to restrain himself in her presence; but unfortunately he restrained himself in such a way that she could almost hear him doing it, and this annoyed her all the more—partly, of course, because it made her feel that she was unreasonable. He would gaze at her with a stubborn ox-like expression as though he were saying to himself: There! You see what a difficult situation I am in with these weak, negative people, and how well I am dealing with it! Even his round, fat face—or a certain expression in the roundness and fatness—irritated her now as it hovered for a moment before her imagination; and she seemed to hear his voice recounting one of those enthusiastic mental experiences which he was so fond of clothing in bodily imagery. "It was as though the Christ himself were right inside one!" (The Christ!) "I felt as though I were flying out through the roof." "I simply couldn't eat a thing!" or—of listening to Wagner's music—"It was like being in a lovely warm bath!" In point of fact John did not use expressions of this kind nearly as often as she imagined, but, whenever he did, she at once noticed them and resented them. That was why they stood out so in her memory. The thing that was especially chilling about this habit of his was that, under the guise of a desire to compare notes and to share an enthusiasm, he really (she felt) laid subtle claim to a superior ethereality — seemed to suggest that his own spirit was more master of his body than other peoples'. Incidentally, he actually ate a good deal less than she did, and this too seemed to her to be conceited. Janet remembered the howling little boy she had so often bathed and put to bed, and cast back in her mind to try and determine the point at which he had first 'grown up', the point at which he had first begun to figure before the world as her equal — if not her superior — in the scale of human dignity.

These thoughts and feelings drifted through her mind as swiftly and uncontrollably as the fields and houses and hedges flowed back past the carriage window, and of course all the time another part of her, another Janet, was fully aware of their uncharitable quality. A feeling of pain on this account soon began to drive out everything else, which, when it had occupied the whole of her being for some time, passed into a still bitterer feeling of loneliness. It was that stark, brutal loneliness which comes over one in the form of a sudden, unutterable misgiving. The

tears came, and as the carriage was quite empty, she allowed them to go on rolling slowly down her cheeks; but they did not bring the usual relief, a fact which she herself attributed to the unloving feelings she had just been entertaining. She only felt more hopeless than ever. On top of all came the conviction of personal failure. There are certain moods in which such a conviction may cause very little suffering; we feel we have done our best according to our strength; circumstances have determined the outcome; and they were the responsibility of the gods. It was not one of these moods. On the contrary; the conviction came swooping in on Janet 'in the rearward of a conquered woe' just as she had already abandoned every other hope of finding any meaning in her life and had, indeed, actually fallen back on this very sense of the integrity of her personal will. When that is the case, the emphasis is placed rather differently, and the point is, not that we have done our best, but what a puling affair this 'best' is! Then the very knowledge that we have done our best is the last exquisite turn of the screw, that uncreates the whole soul into a craven shudder of weakness.

So it was with Janet now. She seemed to herself to have failed in everything — not only in the finding of happiness for herself but even in the simple little tasks which she might have performed apart from them. Above all, she felt that she could and ought to have done more to 'pull Humphrey and John together'; and — worst of all — failure here seemed like a kind of disloyalty to her father! She had the same guilty feeling of disloyalty, when she reflected that both brothers had fallen away from the first virtue which Erasmus had so patiently inculcated in them all — the honourable acceptance of 'stubborn and irreducible facts.' For both John and Humphrey were, in her estimation, 'believing what they wished to believe,' and in their total disregard of the findings of 'contemporary science' putting themselves on a level with the pitiful targets of Samuel Butler's or Anatole France's irony. Janet was not much inclined to enter into their excuses. For it was an excuse, and a weak one, that she had received it when John, for example, insisted on his distinction between genuine science and a 'lazy adherence to a particular nineteenth century metaphysic.' All his subtle distinctions between 'facts' and the 'interpretation of facts' ran, like water off a duck's back, from her solid instinctive conviction that something was wrong. In this respect Janet felt easier about Humphrey. He, it is true, had gone quite as far off the rails, though in a different direction; but at least he would not hedge over Science or try to explain it away.

But the thought of Humphrey revived the memory of all her recent troubles, and she fled from it with relief back to John and Margaret, whom she thought of now with renewed tenderness, striving to imagine just where they were and what they were doing, and thus to make herself feel one with them. For a moment the raw places in her soul were soothed, but then they quivered and shrank under another probe, as she came abruptly up against a new idea: that henceforth there would be a point beyond which her fancy could not or must not follow them. At this point Janet gave a kind of inward shudder and, abandoning the thought of John and Margaret, drew up her knees, huddled her shoulders together and sank her head forward between them. She began wondering how she could possibly get through the rest of her life — 30, 40, perhaps 50 years — more than she had lived already!

When she opened her eyes, they fell on the gay red and white cover of The Rout, and she decided to stay in her carriage and read it, instead of going along to the restaurant-car, as she had intended. As she turned over the pages and found the usual conglomeration of society-portraits, grinning actresses, and leggy sketches of pretty-pretty ladies, she wondered why she had bought the paper. Then her eye lit on a comic sketch done in a different, rougher style. It represented an elderly and very plain lady thanking a bored-looking young man in tennis-flannels for having escorted her home. "Girls can't be too careful!" she was saying. After this, Janet turned back to the beginning and tried to make herself read the paper through in detail, but when a quarter of an hour had passed, she gave up, threw it away and relapsed once more into her own dreams. Everything seemed to be upside down.

It was not in her manner to think out neat theories and apply them ruthlessly to life; but on many matters her views were decidedly definite. When she thought of human beings, for instance, she thought of them as being composed of two distinct halves, the body and the mind; mind had evolved from body and still depended on it entirely for its existence; there was no other connection between the two. To attach any real importance to the body, therefore, was a mark of barbarity, or at best, stupidity. Yet men's attitude to women, and indeed, the whole position of women in society, were largely determined by this misplaced emphasis. Here was a flat paradox, of which the solution was that Society was still in a state of 'evolution' and — just at present — of transition. The present being such a critical time, a heavy responsibility lay with those women who were sufficiently evolved to know that their minds were more important than their bodies, not, so to speak, 'to go back on it.' No greater disgrace could be imagined than that one of these fortunate beings should betray the cause of progress by giving way to personal weakness. Above all, under no provocation whatever ought they to behave in such a way as to justify the stupid generalisations about women which are assumed in Society and uttered in novels and after-dinner speeches. Thus, the mood in which Janet took up such papers as The Rout was usually that of a schoolmistress correcting a child's exercise — ready to be amused but quite without respect. Occasionally, however, it was quite different. And to-day was an occasion — the worst she had yet known. It was an occasion when everything she read and saw in this wretched paper, including even the advertisements of beauty-creams, seemed to have come out of a mysterious, tempting world all made of colour and light, a joyous world filled with laughter and warm feeling, where confident human beings passed to and fro in power and beauty and freedom.

Even the silly joke about the spinster lady — now that she read it again — appeared to mask a positively Homeric laughter. And was not her own quick, sharp criticism "vulgar!" merely another sign that she herself lived, and would live out the rest of her life on a little parochial patch excluded from this other world's air of ample tolerance. Her very feeling of personal superiority made its mocking bow as a sign of this; and a number of little incidents — things she had read and observed — suddenly joined hands in her memory and capered around, shrieking out that this same haughty superiority, seen from outside, was simply 'vieille fille'. It was the inevitable token of the slow withering within her of the natural woman — that dumb, silent, mysterious creature that craved incessantly for joy, and had never

known it, and never, never would know it, but instead, must die inchmeal of starvation amid the mockery of the crowd standing round the cage!

These thoughts of hers, never quite fully shaped, tumbling rapidly round on one another's heels in an endless circle — the moment she withdrew a little way outside her circle, these thoughts presented themselves as a general blur of horror and misery — and even fear. Once again, Janet huddled her shoulders, drew up her knees and sank her head; then she raised her head again and looked dismally out of the window at the darkening landscape. She was glad to be alone. For now she felt completely cut off from everybody, even from the jealously cherished memory of her father and mother — isolated by her own guilty imagination.

Gradually, as the train ran through the rows of jutting sculleries and dingy back yards that herald the approach of the world's metropolis, the cloud lifted a little. The gentle motion of the train, the equally gentle flow of tears, even her very misery itself seemed to have a soothing effect. The sharp pain turned into something more manageable; it turned to sorrow; and from that into a gentle melancholy. During the last five minutes before they pulled up in Paddington Station she was actually filled with a kind of exaltation — an exaltation that had come to her, she knew, because of her misery, and even out of its very depths.

But the moment Janet got out on to the platform, this precarious exaltation vanished. It was the old feeling of an adhesive garment worn next the skin; now that she had to rouse herself out of her melancholy and to take all sorts of practical steps, it clung to her viciously; every little exertion of thought meant pain.

The short journey out to West Leigh, during part of which she had to stand, did not give her time to sink back into her melancholy again, and she was heartily glad when she descended from her bus, to feel as tired as she did. This fatigue, she told herself, as she hurried along the dark road, would outweigh the depression of a return to an empty house after dark; for she would be only too glad to get in and go straight up to bed. Twice she started, as she suddenly passed close by a pair of lovers standing motionless and silent in the shadow of a wall; but the third pair was lit up brilliantly by the headlight of a passing motor-cycle, on the back of which, Janet caught a glimpse of a laughing girl in a white summer dress, sitting with her legs stuck out sideways. Janet had formed the habit of occasionally indulging Carlyle's trick in Sartor Resartus and mentally stripping the people round her of that important item in a civilised make-up — their clothes. She found herself doing this now with the couple on the motor-bicycle; but instead of the usual ludicrous result the picture that flashed into her imagination nearly swept her off her balance. It was a sudden flaming up of wild poetic life — Youth in the Prow and Pleasure at the Helm! She tried to laugh at her absurdity but could feel no amusement, only a stark, insidious, nameless fear. So strong did this fear become that her very breath grew irregular, and nothing she could think would calm it. She hurried on. Not till she was safe in bed did the last traces of the fear vanish from her heart. And then she looked round her little room in peace; her breathing gradually became slow, tranquil and very deep; she put out the light and sinking back on to the pillow allowed the grave-eyed god to kiss away sorrow and solitude in a breath.

CHAPTER XVIII

Throughout the following weeks Janet Trinder lived in the feeling that she was starting a new chapter in her life, and one for which she had no enthusiasm whatever. On the wedding-day itself, in spite of her depression, a certain excitement and novelty had contributed to sustain, if not her spirits, at any rate her will. But now, as the days passed, this sense of excitement, together with her little store of pride, seemed to fall away. At every turn, with each trivial activity to which she had set her hand, the unanswerable question would arise and confront her: — Why? — to what end? What force is moving me? she would ask herself, as she went out into the kitchen to fetch another meal, knowing that the sole result of her action must be the prolongation of this same endless and incurable depression. Often, however, she enjoyed the meal well enough once she came to the eating of it, and then when it was over, this very fact would oppress her still more, for then her sufferings, without losing their intensity, seemed to become meaningless, undignified. All human existence resolved itself into a horrible interplay of appetites.

Her work did not afford her much relief. It would have been better if she had been employed in an office, where she met other people, or could have at least taken her meals in company. She knew this herself and yet could not work up energy enough to take the necessary steps. And so every day, as she passed from the solitary work-room to the solitary meat-table, the insistent cui bono, the same mocking interrogation-mark pointed its crooked finger more and more derisively at her heart, and she could find no answer but to blot it out. If it were only a definitely established fact that someone really needed her affection or even simply her services, she felt fairly certain that she should be able to carry on indefinitely. Janet already knew what it was to live without hope for fairly long periods — say a month at a time; and she found it at any rate possible to conceive of the rest of her life as an indefinite extension of one of these short lines. But this feeling of having no reason to go on living was something quite new, and it seemed likely to get the better of her. The idea that there could be any purpose in her life other than what she herself could define had hardly ever occurred to Janet, or, when it had done so, had been promptly sent flying. For she regarded all such illusory notions as miserable subterfuges, disguises in one shape or another of the one essential self-deception — the theory that suffering in this world is compensated by happiness in another — which is really no theory at all, but the automatic reaction of human desires to the pressure of pain.

One afternoon, as she sat in the kitchen among the remains of the luncheon she had just finished eating, Janet suddenly realised the simplicity of the step which would end once and for all this irrational phenomenon of a body continuing to move without any known causes of motion. Her eye fell upon the gas cooker, and at the same instant she recalled vividly the luxurious sensation of sinking into unconsciousness, when she had come home so tired the night after the wedding. She immediately became frightened and a sort of suppressed contest went on within her between her fear and her fatigue. Very soon, however, this contest was interrupted by the telephone-bell, and when she came back from speaking to Gerald, things looked slightly different. She did not know whether fear had conquered or the

thought of the horrible shadow her suicide would cast over John's spirit or even some obscure, unacknowledged, moral scruple; but she said to herself brusquely, "I am not that sort", and never again seriously contemplated it.

Not long afterwards Humphrey came in. He had been wondering with some anxiety how she was getting on, though he did not say so, and he now asked if he could stay one or two nights. In spite of all she had said and felt, a gleam of hope at once came into Janet's mind that he would suggest going back on their agreement to separate. He did not do so, however, and she herself was too proud. Nevertheless, this new stimulation of her pride had its value. Before she went to bed that night Janet had made three courageous resolutions. She would begin to learn German and thus keep her mind more fully occupied, she would try to get a friend to stay with her for a week or so after Humphrey left, and meanwhile she would put the house up for sale and look about for a good boarding-house.

One mother-comfort remained true to her through all these dismal days — her sleep. So far from interfering with this, her present state of mind seemed to improve it. For there were hundreds of little actions and tasks that she had hitherto performed without effort, simply because her eye was fixed on the end in view beyond them. But now that all sense of purpose or desire seemed to have faded from her life, these ends became neither more nor less valuable than the means which secured them; everything was levelled down and each activity had to be under-taken for its own sake or not at all. Consequently, the day became more and more a series of little unsupported acts of will. And, as there is nothing more tiring than the exertion of will, Janet slept like a top every night. More and more she came to look forward to sleep, first merely as a temporary relief from the burden of consciousness, but later on — or so it seemed — almost as an intrinsic pleasure. And conversely, the early mornings were her worst times, the hour when she took up the burden again and lay in bed facing as best she might the thought that fifteen or sixteen hours of the meaningless succession of efforts, which was now her life, must intervene before she was again in the same position — that was the worst hour of the day. The presence of her friend, who came a few days after Humphrey's departure, did not much improve matters here; for, as their intimacy was not a deep one, the efforts required of Janet during the day were increased rather than diminished.

At last the day arrived on which John and Margaret were due back from abroad. When first Janet called on them in their new house at Dale End and saw the two brown and smiling faces, she felt as though she had lived through a whole epoch since she had said goodbye to them at Klosters. Both of them were obviously delighted to see her again, John being deeply attached to his sister and Margaret not the sort of woman who needs a honeymoon to convince her that it is pleasant to meet other people besides one's husband. They stood therefore one on each side and plied her with eager questions; Margaret took her all over the house, and during tea they talked of Italy. Afterwards there were photographs and pictures to be shown, and then it was decided — since they were on the other side of London from Westleigh — that Janet must stay on to supper.

But when supper was cleared away, the little party gradually grew more silent. Margaret began to ask Janet about her plans, for Humphrey, by agreement,

had written to John just before his return to announce their decision to separate. She suggested, therefore, that Janet should come and live near them. But Janet, taking it as a dutiful act, though in fact it represented a sincere desire, thanked her with a wise smile and said she would think about it. Her manner so clearly implied a negative decision that John openly pressed her further. Whereupon she hummed a little, and objected that all her friends were on the other side of London. "What friends?", asked John, and she evidently had some difficulty in thinking of an answer. At length she enumerated three or four mere acquaintances, each of whom, curiously enough, had some especially dismal circumstance in her life. The unspoken suggestion seemed to be that — little object as there now was in her existence — she could at least stay beside these unfortunately, and, so to speak, 'help them through this long disease, their life.'

For the rest of the evening they were all rather silent, and when at last Janet left them, both John and Margaret felt thoroughly depressed. She seemed to have spread an atmosphere of sombre gloom. Her whole manner — the great, wise, tender smile with which she had met their enthusiasms, her assumption (impossible to combat openly) that they did not want her, the significant, almost unctuous voice in which she had spoken of these unhappy acquaintances, even her very silences had seemed to John at least to be secretly murmuring all the time: 'How happy some or other some may be! Here are you, starting off your new life together — full of hope and anticipation — and for me there is nothing!' As he went to bed, John felt something approaching resentment, though he had forgotten it by the next morning.

CHAPTER XIX

Although it was on the other side of London, Onslow — the suburb in which John was to take up his curacy — was not altogether unlike Westleigh. It was one of those new mushroom affairs which grow up between the older suburbs — a splash of red amid the dingy Victorian greys, blues, and browns. John's vicar, whom he had found with Startop's help, had a small, new, red-brick church and a parish of about ten thousand souls, out of which, some five hundred commonly attended divine service. The 'suffering and evil', to which John had been so anxious to get back from his honeymoon, certainly did not seem in a hurry to materialise; for there was not a great deal of poverty in Onslow, and vice — if it existed — kept clear of the church. Most of the houses were designed for the kind of family which can just afford to keep one servant and a small car. Sometimes the car was left out, sometimes the servant: but rarely both. Young married couples came and settled there, and there was — so it seemed to John — a decided atmosphere of hope and anticipation in the place. Nevertheless it became increasingly evident, as the weeks passed, that the congregation — and especially that part of it with which he came into personal contact — consisted in the main, of elderly and middle-aged people.

Holroyd, the vicar, was a quiet man, well-meaning but rather deficient in tact and common sense, and with a somewhat narrow circle of interests. His one, genuine passion was the Anglican church, or, more properly, a particular tendency in it, and though he was by nature uncritical, he would occasionally wax ponderously sarcastic over the opponents of this tendency. He would have liked a

celibate curate, and particularly disapproved — though without discourtesy — of John's marrying just before his ordination. As a priest — and it was this that made it easy for John to get on with him — he placed the whole emphasis on the sacrament. To those who came to him for advice in their difficulties he would make the same suggestion over and over again: to communicate more often and more seriously. John, too, had long ago decided that this was the crux of the whole matter, and the only real stronghold against materialism. Accordingly, he was not disposed to be unduly critical of Holroyd's little shortcomings. And it pleased him very much after their marriage to find that Margaret also evidently looked for happiness and strength in this direction. She went often to the early service but without developing a mechanical regularity.

As a matter of fact, Margaret found it a great relief to be in a milieu where such behaviour was taken for granted. In the circle in which she had been brought up since her mother's death the church meant very little, though nothing was said or implied against it as in John's case. Margaret had long ago discovered that, after she had brought herself to the necessary pitch of self-elimination and had taken the Eucharist, the making of decisions and the coping with difficulties was a much simpler affair than at other times. But at home she had frequently choked down the initial impulse because of a certain vague awkwardness which its satisfaction had seemed to introduce into the atmosphere. Nobody disapproved, still less smiled, yet afterwards there was this indefinable awkwardness. Now, however, it was very different. She felt as though she had been released from a kind of captivity and enjoyed indulging her liberty to the full. But that, too, was an exaggeration. Her situation had not resembled captivity in any of the ordinary senses, rather a chafing at the bondage of ugliness. In fact, living with John was, in this respect, rather like arriving in the country after you had lived a long time in town. Nevertheless, she was glad that John rarely talked of the sacrament. What made both of them happy and confident was this very taking of it for granted — this feeling of its being an eternal but unspoken bond between them.

Out of the same impulse Margaret threw herself very willingly into the ritual side of the services. And here again, everything seemed to be in their favour. A certain combination of taste and caution in Holroyd, together with the fact that the church lacked funds for anything more elaborate, had caused him to decorate it to a large extent with good prints of the Italian masters. His leanings were pre-Raphaelite, and this exactly fell in with the Trinders' present mood. Italian art had always been a special enthusiasm with Margaret, and she had felt an added tenderness for it, since it had contributed so much to draw her nearer to John. John's own feeling for those wonderful marriages of form and light had been greatly enhanced by two things — the honeymoon in Italy, which had given him opportunities he had never known before, and, oddly enough, his conversation with Gerald Marston. For since the night of his visit there he had begun, without deliberately thinking out any theory on the subject, occasionally to take one of the pictures he knew best as a subject for his 'meditation' instead of the passage from gospel or prayer-book to which he had hitherto confined himself. Whether as a result of this, or because of his general state of mind, he had soon realised that he was beginning to enjoy certain things — for example, the Italian painters' lavish use

of gold — in rather a different way from before. Even the haloes were no longer a pretty convention to him but actually ‘meant’ something. That is to say, they linked themselves on to other experiences of his own. And this ‘linking on’ was the thing of which he was at present chiefly conscious, in his inner life as a whole. During the interval between his wedding and his ordination the golds and yellows, and sometimes the radiant flesh-tints, in the great masters, the misty arcs of light which he saw upon the altar when he half-closed his eyes, the working within him of the Holy Eucharist, and his own personal happiness with Margaret, all seemed to mingle together into a kind of luminous haze, in which he actually lived and breathed. Nothing offensive seemed able to come near him, for, did any object or person begin to irritate him, it contrasted itself at once with this invisible light or happiness, and by so doing, recalled his consciousness of the light itself, and so came into the sphere of it and was transmuted.

Yet if he ever stopped and tried to define more clearly what it was that this light really consisted of, he could get no further than some such phrase as ‘feeling that one is a part of things’ — a feeling that had very little to do with the apparently similar one which may come from philosophical or scientific ideas. It was not a theory of creative evolution. Indeed, John at once perceived that there were two quite distinct things — on the one hand, thinking about it, and on the other hand ‘it’. One could argue about evolution or the meaning of the sacrament or the relation between spirit and matter in a perfectly cool and detached way. But the merest suspicion of a breath of ‘it’ itself brought with it a cloud of incense, a breath of holiness and joy, which swept all pedantry to the winds.

At this time John was reading church history and he soon began to find that here too his present remarkable experiences had their affinities. He found, for example, that he could understand the great doctrinal disputes in quite a new way, even down to all sorts of subtle details which had hitherto seemed to him to be purely academic. Not only did he begin to understand them better but he felt as though he were actually re-living them. For, standing out clearly from all the minutiae, he could perceive one general principle. All the great heresies, he said to himself, boiled down to this: that the heresiarch and his followers (quite rightly) insisted on allowing full scope for ‘it’ in the forms of the church; while the orthodox (equally rightly) insisted on making it quite clear that ‘it’ was nothing human, but a gift of divine grace, and therefore no cause for personal arrogance and pride.

The day before he was ordained, John set aside two whole hours for private prayer and meditation. A fair amount of this time was, he knew, quite wasted; for neither his heart nor his mind were really at prayer. But he received one revelation, which moved him so much that he longed for some less silent and motionless way of expressing his gratitude than merely remaining on his knees. He relaxed the weight of his head and arms even more utterly than before on to the chair at which he was praying — as though he were sinking deeper — sinking his very bones into the breast of God — and yet how thin and reedy this ‘revelation’ sounded, when he sought to put it into words afterwards. For what was it? What had he seen? He had merely seen how this same ‘being a part of things’ was what gave their mysterious life and movement and inner resonance to the images he called up in meditation. They — these images — were halfway houses between himself and the nature he

was 'a part of'. They had a sort of vegetable life that threaded them all together; and he could perceive a significant analogy between a linked chain of images such as would now sometimes form itself in his own imagination and the linked chain of momentary forms that is the visible body of a living being.

As he had a great many small matters to attend to, those precious two hours had only been appropriated at the cost of a long and tiring day: tiring to the body indeed, though his spirit seemed to have been towering up and singing all the time in a rich excess of vitality and faith, until at last night came and it was free to dissolve, and, securely clasped in her arms, seemed to lose itself altogether in a summer sky of love, oblivion and repose.

Awakening early, they both strolled through the pale, crisp, September morning to Communion; and never afterwards through the whole of his life did John forget that morning's service. As he heard the sublime words of the Gospel, describing the breaking of the bread, he too seemed to have a glorious sensation of dissolution — of actual, physical dissolution — as though his brain were verily breaking asunder with the force of the spirit that poured through it.

On his way home John began puzzling over a tiny problem; but the puzzling began so imperceptibly that it was some time before he realised that it was going on. This sublime moment during the service had reminded him dimly of some other moment far back in his childhood, which he was now trying to recall. Suddenly it came back to him, and he laughed at the incongruity. This was indeed comparing great things to small!

It was late at night: he must have been about seven years old: and for four or five hours he had been tossing on his little bed, sleepless with the ear-ache. At last, however, the doctor had arrived with his syringe, and with him the moment towards which the tendrils of his memory were now groping so mysteriously backward in the darkness. It was the moment at which he had first felt the solid wax in his ear give and break and crumble to the little stream of warm water!

CHAPTER XX [i]

John's first sermon, which he preached at morning service on a particularly beautiful Sunday in early October, was prepared with great care and enthusiasm. He took as his text the words 'that your joy may be full' and strove with might and main to pour some of the fullness of his own heart into the hearts of the silent congregation beneath him, and at the same time to make it clear, from the start, that his Christianity was no gloomy warning, but a message of light. About a third of the way through it suddenly came to home to him, with an unpleasant shock, that he was addressing, not the English-speaking world, not London, not even Onslow, but one particular collection of elderly ladies! For a moment he had a sort of nightmare feeling, as if there were nothing at all in the church but rows and rows and rows of these old ladies — all grim looking, all seeing right through him, all totally unimpressed by his eloquence. All the same, he thought, immediately bracing himself to the shock, they may as well have it; and he went on without dropping his enthusiastic tone:—

“. . . that it was not to any gloomy renunciation of laughter and happiness that Our Lord summoned us — but rather that we should carry into all our relationships, all our activities, all our lives, the overflowing joy of requited love: ‘Suppose’, says Traherne — ‘Suppose a curious and fair woman. Some have seen the beauties of Heaven in such a person. It is a vain thing to say they loved too much. I dare say there are ten thousand beauties in that creature which they have not seen. They loved it not too much, but upon false causes. Nor so much upon false ones, as only upon some little ones. They love a creature for sparkling eyes and curled hair, lily breasts and ruddy cheeks: which they should love moreover for being God’s image, Queen of the Universe, beloved by Angels, redeemed by Jesus Christ, an heiress of Heaven, and temple of the Holy Ghost: a mine and fountain of all virtues, a treasury of graces, and a child of God. But these excellencies are unknown. They love her perhaps, but do not love God more: nor men as much: nor Heaven and Earth at all. And so, being defective to other things, perish by a seeming excess to that. We should be all Life and Mettle and Vigour and Love to everything; and that would poise us. I dare confidently say that every person in the whole world ought to be beloved as much as this: And she if there be any cause of difference more than she is. But God being beloved infinitely more, will be infinitely more our joy, and our heart will be more with Him, so that no man can be in danger by loving others too much, that loveth God as he ought.’

It is when we have understood such words as these, my dear friends, not superficially, but deep in our hearts and deep in our memories, it is then and only then that we shall begin to understand in all their immense significance those words of Christ, which I have dared to take as my text — “that your joy may be full!” If our Joy is to be infinite, then our Desire, too, must be infinite: that is what is brought home to us by the Mystics, and not least by that divine Seventeenth-century minister, Thomas Traherne, whose words I have just quoted. ‘Infinite wants’ (he says elsewhere) — ‘Infinite wants satisfied produce infinite Joys; and the possession of those joys are infinite Joys themselves . . .’ and again: ‘You never enjoy the World aright, till you see all things in it so perfectly yours, that you cannot desire them any other way; and till you are convinced that all things serve you best in their proper places. For can you desire to enjoy anything a better way than in God’s Image? It is the Height of God’s perfection that hideth his Bounty: and the lowness of your base and sneaking Spirit, that make you ignorant of His perfection.” . . .

Of course John had wildly exaggerated the number of elderly ladies in the congregation, as he realised when he discussed it with Margaret on the way home. Indeed the prospect of hearing the new curate had drawn an unusually mixed congregation, besides an unusually large one. Moreover he had actually prepared himself for this (only he had forgotten the preparation just before he started). His job was to say the best he could as well as possible to — whoever would listen; and that was all there was to it. If the congregation should gradually grow, of course, if,

for example, the church should eventually have to be enlarged . . . but enough! He whistled half a tune and disposed of an excellent lunch.

Gradually John came to know his parishioners personally. It was chiefly the ladies that he met, for the husbands hardly ever seemed to be at home. Before taking up his duties, he had vaguely imagined that he would find his first calls horribly awkward, that he would feel himself 'the pale young curate' and so on. But when he actually began, he quickly discovered that his interest in the people he was talking to and in the things they said, eliminated self-consciousness. John had a frank, instinctive desire to be sympathetic and to win sympathy, and this easily made him forget the externals — age or sex — of the person he was talking to; his being already married was undoubtedly an added advantage; it gave him caste.

On the whole, he was surprised how easy it was. He seemed to have a great deal in common with most of these ladies; many of whom evidently shared that obscure, oppressive feeling which had first turned his thoughts towards the Church. They too, it seemed, were aware of an atmosphere of social dissolution — decadence — degeneracy; and John felt, as always, a sense of relief and encouragement, at finding his own anxiety reflected. If there was a difference, it was that, with his lady-parishioners, the obscure feeling was less obscure. They tended to detach subversion and decadence in one particular quarter — such as dancing, or the cinemas, or the general indifference to religion. This he felt he could understand, but it made him a little uneasy, when they betrayed a tendency to assume that the whole trouble could be put right by legislation or compulsory measure of some kind directed to the point in question.

One afternoon he had been taking tea with an elderly married lady, the mother of two grown-up daughters, both of whom were out. Margaret had not come, so they were alone. They had come round to the subject of Jazz — and both had agreed pleasantly enough, and quite along the usual lines, that dancing in itself is an excellent thing and that there is no harm in ragtime, as such, etc. etc. but — and then out came their common distrust of the whole tone and quality of the average modern dance, as it actually is, with its hideous negroid contortions and its perpetual insinuation of the worst kind of self-surrender. Mrs. Goldbooth was particularly emphatic; she wished she could find some way of keeping her daughters at home, she said, but they were both mad on it, and what can one do?

"One thing", she added, "I have done. I have absolutely refused to let the maid take her evening out on Thursday — which is the night they dance at the club."

"And you still manage to keep her?"

"Well, I did lose the first one over it. The silly girl gave notice! But the new one is much more sensible; besides, her people are very poor, and she has no desire to be out of work — even for a short time."

Mrs. Goldbooth looked at him, evidently expecting his approval. John felt very uncomfortable. This was obviously all wrong, but what was he to say? He hesitated, and compromised, and felt young.

"Ah", he said, "you may be doing the best thing for her — er — to begin with. But — I'm not sure if it's of much value her staying away simply because she must stay away. That wasn't quite what — You — If —"

“Well,” (Mrs. Goldbooth came to his assistance) “if the thing’s ugly and bad, she’s better away! That seemed clear enough to me. Don’t you agree then?”

John began to perspire in secret. Was there no help for it? Must he really go on to enumerate an incongruously huge moral maxim over this question of whether somebody else’s housemaid ought or ought not to be prevented from going to a shilling hop?

“Yes, but you see”, he objected, idiotically, blushing, “you can’t cut out the question of freedom.” A smile broke out on Mrs. Goldbooth’s kindly face:

“You are like my nephew Harry,” she said, “he always looks at the philosophical side of things first. We have been a family of scholars for generations. Let me give you another cup of tea! But I do just wonder how many servants you have employed. One? and I expect Mrs. Trinder finds her hands pretty full at that! You simply don’t know how stupid they can be, Mr. Trinder, how absolutely hopeless!” Of course I believe in freedom — freedom to do right. But are you going to give a chit of twenty-three freedom to do what she likes?” John smiled weakly and made a faint movement with his head which might equally well have been a nod or a shake. Shortly afterwards he took his leave.

On another occasion Margaret was with him. The talk was of the empty churches, and John’s heart began to warm towards his parishioner, as he realised how she, too, felt the dismal gulf that yawned between the reality and his glorious inner vision of a sunny people, with overflowing hearts melting together in worship. But then it turned out that she would like the new recreation-ground, which was about to be opened in Onslow, to be closed on Sunday mornings (to pitchfork the people into church out of sheer boredom!, as Margaret put it afterwards). John’s sympathy began to wane, and a fruitless discussion ensued about ‘treating the disease and not the symptoms’.

“But irreligion is the disease!” insisted the good lady, “and where else are the people to get back their religion, if not in the churches.” There was silence. “Surely we are all agreed about that!” she said, looking from John to Margaret. There was silence again. “What do you call ‘the disease’, then?” she asked at last, and now it seemed to John that there was a positively suspicious note in her voice. However, he was not going to be bounced this time. “I think it’s irreligion, too”, he said quietly, looking her in the eyes. “But I like to think of the church as a place people come to because they are so full of happiness and love that they would simply burst if they didn’t!” “That is a beautiful thought!” said the lady non-committally, and the subject closed.

After several experiences of this kind John himself began to develop a certain wariness in his attitude. He began to feel that the way in which people said things was more important than the things they said; and nowhere was this more apparent than in their moral judgments. Sometimes his mind went back to the depth of feeling with which he had listened to Startop’s address, and he soon had reluctantly to admit that what he had taken here in Onslow for agreement and sympathy with this feeling was in fact an agreement with a subtle difference. At first he could not properly determine what this difference was, but gradually the diffused vapours began to draw into a kind of nebula which hung persistently about the little word ‘they’. John happened to be very fond, in his conversation, of talking in general terms

about 'this civilisation'. Now for his parishioners (those of them, that is, who bothered about the matter at all) the correct pronoun for 'this civilisation' was evidently 'they'; but to John himself it was always 'we'. If for instance, the empty churches were under discussion, the point of view from which the problem would be regarded by his parishioners was always that of a rescuer. You felt, as they talked, that you stood with them on a kind of shelf, from which the non-churchgoers, partly from misfortune but largely through their own shortcomings, had fallen off. It was both your duty and your inclination to stretch out a helping hand in order to hoist them up again to the shelf, and you rejoiced when you succeeded. But always you yourself were the hoister and 'they' were the hoisted. Nothing could alter that relation. That was not at all the sort of impression which Startop's earnest voice and manner had given him. Nevertheless John found it a point of view which it was extraordinarily difficult to combat. It was certainly the common-sense point of view.

He was very much disappointed (though he would hardly yet admit to himself the possibility of such a feeling) to find that even Margaret took the common-sense attitude here. "After all", she said at the end of the conversation in which he complained about it, "you can't smother away the fact that we do go to church and do all the things."

"Well, what if we do?"

"Oh yes, I agree it may not be as important as people are inclined to make out!" John stared at her.

"Of course it's important!" She grew uneasy and the tiniest bit defiant.

"After all" (and her eyes began to rove round the room), the fact remains that we don't — I mean you and I — spend all our spare time in cinemas, or read nothing but the Daily Snapshot, or dance all night to hideous music and so forth. I'm all for sympathy and understanding with people who do, but I can't see how it helps to talk as if we were the same!" John said nothing. "You can't be both decadent and not-decadent — can you?" She made it a personal appeal; and it was unanswerable. He professed acquiescence. But she knew there was still something he had not agreed with and she felt she had hurt him. For the rest of the day she went about the house, puzzling what it might be.

John, it is true, had gradually come to the conclusion that 'this civilisation' had become fundamentally hideous and rotten; but he had never, since he outgrew the early judgments of boyhood, been able to feel scorn, or even pity, for it. Indeed he did not feel himself as something apart from it at all; he was it and it was he. When he came across some especially typical piece of stupidity or saw the countryside desecrated with the salesman's or jobbing builder's abominations, even when he read of some horrible crime, he would generally feel a vague troubled sense of guilt, a feeling which often passed over to one of fear. So marked was this that he would no longer so much as open a newspaper from any other motive than a sense of duty. For all the time he sat reading it, he was on a sort of stool of repentance.

The very fact that in his tastes and recreations and daily life he, John Trinder, was so completely cut off from the huge hordes of modern democracy was an abiding shame and distress — a distress which had contributed as much as anything to his entering the church. He hated the word 'highbrow' — hated that there should

be such a word; and his work meant to him — almost before all things — the possibility of getting back into some kind of living touch with a curious creature who continually hovered about the fringes of his imagination — the average Englishman. Now John had been brought up in an intellectual atmosphere, which tended to cut him off from his fellow creatures. It was an atmosphere which, not through any innate egotism or indifference, but automatically by its predominantly critical and analytic trend, gradually isolated the minds it enveloped from the rest of the world, and even from each other. In a sense John had slipped through, at an earlier age, an experience which Janet was now taking with so much more pain — a kind of enforced egotism. Systematically, one regarded oneself, the individual, as of no importance whatsoever; indeed one was distinctly inclined to jeer at the uncritical or devout as being egoists in disguise. Actually, however, one was brought home more and more to a vivid sense of one's own isolated, individual existence, set eternally apart from all other individual existences.

It is in something the same way that the Copernican system of astronomy having set the earth as a speck among specks in empty nothingness, sometimes prided itself on its humility as against the old egocentric Ptolemaic system — forgetting that in the old system each planetary being was conceived as living in the other, and the life of the whole as working and throbbing in the being of each. Should the proletarian hordes of the Milky Way ever begin to see through this critical humility, might not they, too, stigmatise the monotonous and exclusive gyrations of the Copernican Solar System as 'highbrow'?

Not that John had ever argued all this out in his own mind — far from it — in him it all lived merely as a vague feeling that he had been cut off from the bulk of his fellow-beings, and would like to get back again. This was the obscure force that had drawn him, first into the porches and then into the pews of village churches, and had filled his soul with peace, as the congregation, himself among them, streamed out into the evening sun. The force was indeed obscure and the feeling vague, but one thing at least was clear; when he decided to take orders, he had certainly not conceived of himself as forming a special exclusive alliance with one small section of the population — quite the contrary. Hence his sensitiveness over the correct use of pronouns, and a resolve which he formed shortly after this conversation, to try, as soon as possible, to start some sort of club or study-circle, into which he would hope to attract men of all ages.

Their attempts to find musical people in Onslow had not yet been successful, and (though Janet had stayed a couple of nights with them) both began to feel the lack of outside companionship. Consequently Margaret agreed readily enough when John, who had not seen Marston since the day he had visited him in Bloomsbury, suggested that they should ask him to stay with them for a couple of nights. Before he came, they talked over the possibility of helping him, through Sir Otto, to get some better-paid literary work; and Margaret wrote off to her father.

"I am becoming quite a Trinder 'fan'", he laughed, when he arrived:—"rushing to and fro from brother to brother like this!"; and he gave them Humphrey's messages. Despite his bachelor existence, Gerald Marston had in secret a strong taste for domestication. He loved also that atmosphere of friendliness tempered with respect which hangs over the development of a new intimacy; and

the early winter, when the fireside and its virtues are still fresh, experiences, was just the season of the year to enhance these pleasures. Consequently it was with the utmost delight that he allowed himself to be slowly assimilated, as it were, into the Trinder household. They made no special effort to entertain him, and that was just as he liked it. As they sat in the evening round the hearth reading or writing letters, with an occasional rustle from Margaret's dress or a little tumble in the grate to emphasise the silence, the delicious atmosphere of security and affection seemed to him to grow almost tangible: he wanted to rub himself against it and purr, and he was in fact unable to say the most ordinary things to Margaret without smiling.

John also enjoyed his visit very much. He had been anxious to speak further of literature and especially poetry, in which Gerald had so remarkably awakened his taste. Since the last time they met, John had made several experiments with the English poets and had developed a special passion for Spenser, as to which he was anxious to compare notes with Gerald. He had read half way through the Faerie Queen and had formed the opinion that it was very unequal. He at any rate could read whole pages at a time, with only a certain somnolent pleasure, but then he would come on some stanza, whose liquid music lifted him straight up into "it", into that invisible glory of light, which was coming to mean so much to him, and he would go about the house murmuring the lines over to himself, in an attempt to hold the glory fast.

The joyous birdes, shrouded in cheerfull shade,
Their notes unto the voice attempred sweet;
Th' angelicall soft trembling voyces made
To th' instruments divine respondence meet;
The silver sounding instruments did meet
With the base murmure of the waters fall;
The waters fall with difference discreet,
Now soft, now loud, unto the wind did call;
The gentle warbling wind low answered to all.

Gerald was delighted to discover this taste in John. "Spenser!" he exclaimed when he first heard, raising his eyebrows: "the poet's poet! You ought to be flattered by that!" But he did not agree so easily about the unevenness, and John was quite willing to be told that the accidents of his own appreciation had more to do with this than he had thought. All the same, he wanted, if possible, to share with Gerald (who, he felt, would understand) the significant relation which he seemed to have found between the music of Spenser's verse and the luminosity of Italian pictures. But he soon saw that this would be impossible. It all came out one evening, when the three of them were together and talking, for some reason, about Van Dyck's portraits. John had confessed to a lack of enthusiasm, at which Gerald showed considerable surprise.

"There's no — no meaning in them," objected John.

"I don't quite see what meaning you want in a portrait — except the life of the sitter. And surely Van Dyck gets that!"

"Yes — well, I don't care for any portraits very much."

"Aren't you rather cutting yourself off? And what do you mean by 'meaning'?"

"Well, I mean they don't say anything!"

"Oh I see!" Gerald began to get a little bit sarcastic. "Every picture tells a story — or should; so that the Rake's Progress is greater than the Sistine Madonna!"

"No, not that! I mean" (John's mind was labouring) . . . "they're not symbols!"

"Bother symbols!" put in Margaret: "one looks at a picture for its own sake."

"What about 'still life' pictures?" said Gerald: "what about the Dutch school?"

"Oh well, isn't there something — something in the play of the light in those cases?"

"Something in the play of the light isn't a 'meaning'!" said Margaret. They were both looking at him. Evidently they had formed a little entente against him. He felt lonely and at bay and suddenly turned on Gerald with a certain impatience.

"Yes, but you must know what I mean! You remember that night — you said you first understood pictures on the analogy of poetry — you know: about the Rose and the Madonnas!"

There was no doubt that John had turned the tables. Marston simply writhed to hear his confidences turned into a sort of headline in this bald fashion. Moreover his feelings on that subject were all tied up in a highly complicated knot along with the old love-affair which still made him feel hot whenever he thought about it. John could not have chosen a worse point of appeal. To Marston, the idea that medieval chivalry and devotion could have a personal 'meaning' for himself other than the giving of 'aesthetic pleasure' was perhaps of all illusions in the world the most distasteful; and that, for the very reason that, for one unforgettable period in his life he had lived out every waking moment in that illusion. After a few seconds of silent suffering, therefore, he turned to Margaret with an engaging smile, and said:

"You'll have to keep an eye on your husband! Not content with displaying alarming tendencies towards aesthetic aberration, he twists the meaning of other people's words in the most extraordinary manner!" He turned to John: "I shall want a lot of convincing that I ever said anything of the kind!", and to Margaret once more: "Have any symptoms of this kind occurred before?"

Margaret answered in a clear voice like a bell: "I can't understand it! He really has very good taste!" She paused and then went on, still addressing Gerald: "I can never see why people want to put something into pictures that isn't there. It seems to me you are simply spoiling a good thing you have got by trying to turn it into something else."

Gerald began to feel that the offensive alliance was becoming too obvious and might really aggravate John by its half quizzical assumption of superior wisdom. So after a pause he changed the subject altogether and asked John if he had seen any more of Humphrey's intense friends.

"Yes, I saw Dawson —" began John, and checked himself — then he went on: "I saw him in Italy curiously enough." He explained where, and it appeared that Gerald had heard of the Scuola Internaziale, though under another name. He spoke of it as "Masarik's show" and immediately guessed that Dawson had been trying his luck there. John turned to Margaret. He now had to explain the simple little accident of his not having spoken to her of Dawson, when they had passed him on the quay. It was of course nothing in itself, but the mere fact that it required an explanation

seemed to impart a fictitious importance to it, and Margaret began to be secretly bewildered. She had an uncomfortable delusion of discovering all sorts of odd things in John, which she had never known were there, and which he perhaps wanted to conceal. For the rest of the evening she spoke in her laughing-polite manner and was very amusing. Gerald began watching her mouth. This was the first time that he had ever noticed its shaping beauty, and he thought he could never tire of seeing her speak. Moreover, the airy little graces of her countenance seemed to be repeated in the meanings of the words; for everything she said was chosen with a certain tact and sympathy for the two minds she was addressing. "She's wonderful!" he said to himself and was filled with a new affection and respect.

Then the party broke up for the night. As soon as he was alone upstairs John flung himself on his knees, but in an uncertain mood. He had been somewhat ill at ease during the latter part of the evening; for since the wedding he had perforce become more and more sensitive to all that lay behind Margaret's tiny outward changes of manner. He was like a local weather-prophet; he did not understand the causes of these changes, yet had a certain knack of entering into the atmospheric condition that brought them about. And this ignorant sympathy was often extremely painful. One the other hand, he, too, had come this evening under the spell of the lovely motions of her mouth, and this had made him extraordinarily happy. In a few moments all uneasiness gave way to another swelling wave of happiness. Now he was kneeling in the spirit as well as in the body, kneeling to the lap of the infinitely tender, divine Mother who was also his own wife. His heart filled with love for her and for all the creatures of the earth. Finding Margaret, awake in bed, he again sank on his knees and, without uttering a word, buried his head in the bed-clothes near her breast. She was deeply touched by his devotion; and began stroking his head; but still at the back of her mind she went on puzzling vaguely over what had been said earlier in the evening, so that the timid bewildered look never quite left her eyes. She half judged from John's actions that he, too, felt uneasy — possibly a little guilty about something. After all, was it not the attitude of confession? Timidly she went on smoothing the dark head and never broke through into the cloudless azure, where the clear spirit was tumbling and clapping its wings.

CHAPTER XX [ii]

[Note: Chapter XX heading used twice by Barfield.]

Janet often wondered in later life how she ever came through the months immediately after John's wedding at all. Like many women, she could not pass quickly in thought from the particular to the general; it was therefore not easy for her to identify her own unhappiness with the immense burden of humanity — an experience which relieves the intensity of suffering, even while it renders a recovery impossible. For years a perpetual sense of frustration, narrow and long-drawn-out, had been slowly changing her; but now her imagination, strengthened upon an unusually masculine diet, and stimulated by a fresh bout of experience, precipitated this change into a suddenness and violence unusual in her sex. For many weeks she was half distracted.

She saw her friends, sometimes she read, she went to concerts, and she did her work; and all the time she felt utterly wretched and without hope. A stroke of luck came, which would once have raised her spirits for days; now it left her absolutely apathetic. This was the obtaining of some new translating work, better than she had ever done before. A publisher, for whom she had previously done work, was interested in a new French short-story writer — a second Maupassant he insisted — and had resolved to try her for the English edition he was producing. Janet, however, could only grind away at this work with the same dogged self-compulsion with which she did everything else; and all the time she feared that her lack of enthusiasm must come out in the result. With the same blind and hopeless perseverance she forced herself to go on spending two hours a day at her German books — two hours, in which she usually accomplished about thirty minutes' genuine study, the rest of the time being spent in recalling and again recalling her wandering attention. She no longer had any real hope that a knowledge of German could give her either advantage or pleasure, yet out of this mechanical instinct to be active, to be active somehow in spite of the extra pain it gave her, she went on driving herself at it.

While the first sharpness of her distress still lasted, she did indeed know many brief moments of consolation. There were the moments just before sleep, and very soon others, in which she felt the same magical whiff of warmth and comfort. These others came mostly while she was listening to music, or reading poetry, which, like John (though for very different reason) she now began to comprehend in quite a new way. Thus, sometimes the most hackneyed lines — originally learnt and gabbled off at school — would suddenly stand before her re-clothed in all their pristine richness of experience, so that they brought tears to her eyes. The poets were in some ways a greater comfort than music; they seemed to enter with such an intimate sympathy into one's own private sense of solitude and bereavement and, by entering, to break it up for a moment into a music that was all its own. For the first time Janet realised what sort of invisible events must occur before a poet wins the power to put together such a childishly simple line as

Where but to think is to be full of sorrow!

But as she came to know her favourite anthology better, the sharpness of solitude, instead of being soothed, was sometimes redoubled. For it was slowly but relentlessly borne in on her that the reason why the poets were able to transmute heart-break into piercing melody was, that they invariably turned to it from another experience. And that experience was love — not a vague general Sankey and Moody kind of love either (Janet had tried for some time to pretend this to herself, but her honesty at last made her abandon it), but in each case the particular love of one particular breathing woman. In lyric after lyric, on page after page, in the choice of subject-matter, in the choice of imagery, over and over again the same thing kept recurring. It was overwhelming. There was no escaping it. No doubt the poets' loves were often unrequited; no doubt they brought, in general, more pain than happiness; oh, very likely, but that was not the point, and the thought gave her no relief. For it was a good pain: that was the trouble — a lovely poetic pain which

bestowed wisdom and grace and the piercing power to sing — while hers — hers was a silly 'left out' kind of pain, like a little pauper girl's as she watches the children going in to a Christmas party. It was like the pain of not being allowed to put your hair up.

Slowly, and not till her heart had many times gone black with a choking sense of injustice and personal defect, Janet brought herself to admit that there was a certain level of spiritual dignity, a certain lift of the soul, a laughing confidence in the face of life, to which she could never, however much she suffered, attain. To him that hath shall be given; and this fairest of all graces was reserved among their other benefits to the great freemasonry of lovers.

The other side of the picture — the meaning of failure to attain this quality — was only too clear. Janet now knew, as she had never known before, that the traditional 'old maid', fussy, puddingy, devoid of all sense of proportion, is by no means merely a convention. She called to mind certain women of her acquaintance, an aunt and an elderly governess, both of whom at about her present age had begun quietly and uncomplainingly to wither — and had gone on withering ever since. And then, with what little bravado she could summon, Janet would face up to the same prospect for herself.

The boarding-house, into which she moved about three weeks after John's return from his honeymoon, was very much like other boarding-houses. It had the indefinable atmosphere of all institutions which lie half way between a hotel and a private house. The people knew each other and did not know each other: they were at ease and not at ease. Then they greeted one another at meal times, they were like actors doing a family scene, and you had the impression that they were making a continual effort not to drop into sotto voce. Their silence sounded emptier than other silences; you were reminded of it every time it was broken — just as you are in a hotel, where, however, it is broken less often.

The male inmates included among others, a stockbroker, a schoolmaster, two half-pay officers, and a London University Student. Apart from two girls, who worked in an Insurance office, the women were mostly elderly — widows or unmarried. One old lady, who was accompanied everywhere by an angular 'companion,' always brought her private bottle of stout into luncheon and dinner and took it out with her again afterwards. The younger of the two insurance girls was engaged to a bank-clerk, everyone claiming a sort of share in the fiancé — at any rate for the purposes of conversation, in which the lady herself, when present, would participate with the pleasant, but satisfied smile of sole proprietorship.

In spite of everything, Janet quickly found herself getting interested in these people, with their various ailments and hobbies and plans for summer holidays. And occasionally she would even forget all her own problems in the absorption of the boarding-house round. After all, things did happen, even now. There was the attempted burglary, foiled by the indisputable courage of the University Student, and then again there was Miss Hancock's legacy —£300 — rejoicings! It was surprising how these things could engage the passions! Janet had a long talk with Miss Hancock about all she was going to do with the money, and by way of a preliminary celebration the two went off 'on the razzle' to a supper followed by a

Musical Comedy. To this day Miss Hancock is under the impression that Musical Comedy is one of Janet's favourite forms of entertainment.

From simple human relationships of this kind, Janet often derived a sense of tranquillity and contentment which seemed to her to be very good. But then, all of a sudden, her private preoccupations would rush back and tear her out of the contentment again with vindictive force. "Ah, yes," they would shriek, "of course you will get interested in the little things and contented with your lot, as time goes on. Quite, quite contented, my dear! Didn't we tell you? Don't you see this is just exactly what an old maid looks like from the inside! Don't you see? Oh yes, you see now; but very soon you won't be able to, you won't understand what there is to be discontented about, and then you'll just BE an old maid, yah! living a teeny-weeny little life all by yourself! Yah! Yah! Yah!"

And then the nice warm kindly feeling would vanish and give place to spasms of contempt and even hatred for her fellow 'inmates', so violent that she could scarcely keep them out of her face and voice; and she would rush away and try and work, or perhaps cry; for she hated these cold feelings more than anything else.

That was just the trouble. If she could have allowed the cold feelings to grow, they might have filled up the hollow places in her heart, and then she would have developed a sort of masculine vigour and strident contempt for the 'suburban rabbits' among whom she was living. Then she would very soon have found her way into different company. Janet was critical enough for this intellectually, and felt occasional leanings that way. But she could never move far, just because she did not like the coldness in her heart — was afraid of it, in fact. On the other hand, she did like human beings. And she liked liking them, and being liked by them. Consequently the suburban rabbits (a phrase that had stuck in her mind from some book she had read) were, for her, the kind of rabbits that come out of a hat; they were of the conjuror's breed; they would keep on turning into human beings and displaying all sorts of little altruisms and generousities, which suggested that perhaps they were bigger creatures than herself. It was this enforced wobbling between two attitudes, each of which alone would have made her more comfortable, but into neither of which she could definitely fall, that Janet found so exhausting. It did seem horribly cruel that she, feeling it all, should be buried alive among these placid folk, who seemed to be content, perfectly content to miss one side of life altogether. One side! What nonsense! It was the very heart of life that these nibblers had foregone; for was it not the only gateway to an understanding of the rest?

All this made it quite impossible for her to 'settle down' into any sort of routine existence; her mind because abnormally active and dissatisfied, and she lost even the lovely, if slender, consolation which she had just been beginning to find in sleep. Not that she actually suffered from insomnia, but she did often find great difficulty in falling asleep and woke frequently with an aching head. Absolutely silent were those mysterious rustlings of love and comfort, which had sometimes, since John's wedding, marked the first lifting of the curtains of night. As the winter gave way to spring, Janet began to shut herself up more and more, excusing herself on the score of work to John and Margaret and her friends. For many hours she sat in her room, doing absolutely nothing. She could no longer read novels, for all suffering, other than physical agony, appeared trivial beside her own. Her whole

sense of tragedy evaporated. How could she listen with respect to the whinings of betrayed or unrequited love, to the noisy egotistical self-pity of spoilt darlings, to whom life had done the honour of opening its heart? The nameless burden grew heavier, and the last straw fell on it when, in a single impulse of enthusiasm roused by the selections in her anthology, she bought a copy of Blake's works and began to try and read them. She could not grasp his point of view at all, and yet she forced herself to go on reading him out of a grim determination not to be shocked. For, once I begin to be easily shocked, she felt, it is all over with me!

At this time of Janet's life there seemed to be particular days, when everything went wrong, everything from beginning to end, as though some malignant power had been specially detailed by the gods to pile insult after insult on her bowed spirit, until it finally cracked. Such a day was the first warm Saturday of the year, which came early in April, and brought with it a foretaste of summer. Waking early, and unable to sleep again, Janet reached out for the volume of Blake which lay beside her bed, and opened it at the Gnostic Verses. One of the first which caught her eye was:

An Old Maid early ere I knew
Aught but the love that on me grew;
And now I'm covered o'er and o'er
And wish that I had been a whore.

By a curious inner subterfuge Janet pretended to herself that she had taken no more notice of these half-unintelligible lines than of the others on the same page. She strove hard to make herself go on reading. Soon, however, she gave it up and made further fruitless efforts to get to sleep. When the time came, she rose and went down to breakfast. Everybody said 'Good morning!' to her. Soon after she had sat down, a quiet widow, who had been doing a lot of rustling in the Times, remarked to the engaged Insurance Clerk: "I see the Operatic Society of the Great Central Bank gave a performance of The Gondoliers last night. Does Herbert go in for that sort of thing at all?" The girl smiled. "Oh no!" she said, "we don't like opera!" and Janet could almost have screamed at the smugness of that 'we'.

She went upstairs and tried to work, but gave it up, and decided to go into town — why, she did not know. But in an hour's time she found herself wandering through the National Gallery, where her attention was caught by a huge Rubens, which she began examining, until the acres and acres of fat flesh, and bursting breasts like white currants, made her feel sick. She fled to a restaurant and had a cup of coffee and some buns, and then unable to think of anything better to do, decided to go home again. But the lovely weather tempted her to travel back a different way, so as to get a walk through the local park or recreation-ground. She longed to see the trees and the bright expanse of grass. But when she got there, it was spoilt for her, because it was Saturday and the grass was covered with people. The whole way across she had to keep picking her steps between embracing couples, kissing protractedly and lying together in the abandoned attitudes which are de rigueur in London's open spaces. Janet felt an unaccountable agitation, as though she had never seen such a sight before; she had to keep tight hold of the squeamish horror

which began to possess her nerves. Envy was the very last thing she experienced at this moment — and yet — it was during this walk across the grass in the warm afternoon sun that she first admitted fully and openly to herself how a certain unspeakably base envy had had something to do with her ‘moral’ objection to Humphrey’s ways. As she reached the entrance gate a friendly dog came up to her, wagging its tail, obviously asking to be petted. She stooped with a sense of relief to its honest nakedness, and began idly examining its collar, which was a big one with a double row of little conical brass studs. And then suddenly these pairs of conical studs reminded her of the breast-plates worn by the half-naked odalisques in some pseudo-oriental entertainment she had once seen, and after which she had gone about for a day feeling that that was the sort of life she herself ought to have lived! Janet straightened her back with a sick feeling and walked on. She thought perhaps she might be going mad; for now her breathing had grown extremely irregular, and it was almost as if something was at her throat. Everything in the world was disgusting, and her own mind the most disgusting thing of all.

She got in, passed straight up to her room, and sat down on the armchair. Then she threw back her head and closed her eyes, while her hands grabbed the arm of the chair. She sat perfectly still. She was fighting something and did not even know what. But whatever it was, it was at her throat again, trying to overwhelm her. Now she was obliged to breathe in a series of short gulps — and always to breathe in more than she breathed out. It was as though a malignant power, which had been pursuing her all day, wanted to fill up her lungs, to lift her up, and carry her off. She thought to herself quite clearly and incisively, “I am going to have hysterics!” and then, “What have I done wrong?” and then, in a furious temper and shouting, as it were, into the face of the malignant power: “Very well, then, I will have hysterics — and I’ll do it properly!”

With that Janet began deliberately carrying on the process that had already been begun against her will, drawing the air, with her eyes still closed, in and in and again in. And then something very strange happened. For now it seemed to be something more than air that she was breathing — it seemed to be a kind of life and strength. Whatever it was, it gradually filled her whole chest and upper body, lifting it and expanding it, as though it sought to turn her lungs to very wings, and itself at the same time swelling to a great ocean on which her disembodied being floated outward in peace.

After the Titanic went down, one of the survivors told a story of how he had been sucked fathoms down by the sinking vessel, until suddenly an explosion in the darkness beneath him shot him up to the surface and saved his life. With every breath she drew Janet felt as if she were sinking into a bottomless abyss, the terrible source of all virtue and every vice — deep, deep, into the teeming waters of life itself. And all the time she knew that, however deep she sank, there was this force, deeper still, waiting to bring her up again into the light on the outward breath. She remained perfectly conscious throughout. Quite distinctly the thought came to her: “This is instead of hysterics!” And so heavenly was the feeling that she would have liked to sit precisely there in that very armchair all the afternoon, all the next day, for a year, for ever — simply breathing and breathing. But breathing deep — heavens, how deep! Deeper than she ever thought possible. At the sound of a light

knock on the door Janet reluctantly opened her eyes. "Sorry to disturb you miss! A visitor, Miss!"

"A visitor? Who is she?"

"It's a gentleman, Miss — a Mr. Marston." Janet would have been surprised, if anything could have surprised her at this moment.

"Oh — ask him to wait two minutes, will you, and I shall be down," she said, smiling at the girl. Thank heaven! she thought, as the door closed, that I didn't have to see anybody half an hour ago. Was the malignant power not so irredeemably malignant after all?

CHAPTER XXI

The illness from which Gerald's father had for some time been suffering had suddenly revealed itself as cancer, and he was rushed up to town for an operation. This was to take place in a nursing-home, not far from Dale End, which was run by some trusted friends of the family. Gerald went to see him the day after he arrived and, before leaving the flat, mentioned to Humphrey that he would be near Janet, asking if he thought she would like him to call. Humphrey jumped at the suggestion. Both he and John (whom he seldom saw at present) were rather worried about her shutting herself away, and could not properly understand her reasons. He explained this to Gerald and evidently hoped that the latter would operate as a kind of scout, spying out how the land lay.

The sight of his father was a great shock to Marston. He had not realised what the old man was suffering. And there were other reasons, too, why the visit was a painful one. For many years the deep affection between father and son had brought them both more pain than happiness owing to Gerald's emphatic dissent from his father's grim northern brand of Nonconformity. The whole unwilling cleavage seemed to be summed up and brought to a head in this painful half-hour by the bedside, throughout which, the two remained, in spite of all their efforts, in separate worlds.

Gerald arrived at the Boarding-House at about four o'clock, and Janet found him sitting on a small armchair looking vaguely at his hat. As a matter of fact he was disappointed to find her in, for after his experience he would have liked better to be alone. He shook hands cordially, however, and apologised for taking her by surprise.

"Have you had t-ea?" Janet asked.

"Well — as a matter of fact — I haven't really!"

"You can have some here! I haven't had mine yet!" Gerald smiled.

"I suppose," he ventured meekly, as they sat down at a table in the dining-room: "calling on anybody at exactly 4 o'clock is really rather like holding out a mug!"

"Sugar?" Janet enquired.

He told her what had brought him to the neighbourhood, and her obvious sympathy began to relieve his oppressed spirits. After tea they went up to the little room in which she typed, and he began to ask her about her work. She showed him the story she was doing and her own English version, as far as she had got with it. Gerald got out his spectacles and at once began to take a professional interest in the

work. Diffidently at first, but more confidently as he saw that she was not the kind who cannot bear criticism even when they have asked for it, he began to throw out suggestions. Here a word could be altered, there a whole phrase, and over and over again there were words that could very well be omitted altogether. She asked him to write down the suggestions in pencil between the lines, seeing at once how much more point and force they added to her English.

"It's awfully g-ood of you!" she said. "I only wish you could have helped me with the other two I have already done."

"Have you sent them off?"

"No — but, really — why ever should you bother?" He offered to take them home with him and go through them, and she, only too conscious of their weaknesses, was easily persuaded.

Gerald, glancing to the end of the story they had been working on, read the final pointed, snappy sentence. He laid the book down. "M-yes! very smart!" he said reluctantly. "But I think your publisher rather overrates the man!"

"Do you?" said Janet, opening her eyes in grateful surprise. "I don't like him myself a bit."

"I don't think he's anything like up to Maupassant, and even if he was — between you and me, I've not very much use for him." Gerald grew reflective, and seemed to be a little worried. "In fact I don't really care much for the French at all. I don't know — I've no doubt at all it's my own fault. But they do seem to be so absolutely stuck on one subject!"

"That's exactly what I say!" Gerald smiled at the emphatic expression and the little gesture that accompanied it. For a moment he had seen a female Humphrey before him.

"Great minds!" — he exclaimed, leaving the quotation to finish itself. There was a brief pause, during which he could feel instinctively that Janet was thinking hard, and perhaps also readjusting her idea of himself. Something prompted him to change the subject.

"How do you take to this Boarding-House existence?" he enquired brusquely.

"It was far the best thing I could do!"

"I only asked because I was thinking how very badly it would suit me!"

"Would you rather live alone, then?"

"Rather! Any day!"

"I like people!" Janet said abruptly; and a note of reproof in the abruptness caused Gerald to take her up in a half-bantering manner:

"What — all people?"

"I mean — you know — ordinary people." He thought she was a little angry.

"Ah, then it depends what you mean by 'ordinary'. I only know there are some absolutely colourless — mindless people I simply couldn't live with. Liking's rather a vague word."

"Some people may be colourless because they never had a chance to be anything else!" Janet's cheeks glowed, and she looked more disapproving than ever. Gerald was always sensitive to the character which he supposed was being attributed to him. To a certain extent, chameleon-like, he actually became it. And then, if it were an unpleasant character, he would go out of his way to counteract the

impression. He leaned back in his chair now and crossed his knees:— “You mean because of their poverty?” he asked, in a specially serious tone.

“Yes . . . and other things.” There was a pause. Gerald looked thoughtful; and half to himself he murmured:

Chill penury repressed their noble rage
And froze the genial current of the soul.

“Do you think that really happened to the lady who sat opposite me at tea?” he added.

“Opposite you? — oh, Miss Hancock!” Janet suddenly lost her disapproving expression and burst into an infectious little gust of merriment: “Why, she’s just had £300 left to her!” Gerald laughed too.

“Well, you’d better look out for the ‘noble rage’. It may break out at any minute! — especially if the pipes burst during the frost!

Warm legacy released their noble rage
And thawed the genial current of the soul!”

“I can’t say it’s leaked much yet!” Janet confessed.

“What — the legacy or the genial current? By the way, is a genial current a red currant or a black currant?” Gerald pulled himself up, feeling — as not infrequently — that he had been rather silly. He made an effort to restore the conversation to a more serious level. “Still I don’t see”, he maintained, “why one hasn’t a right to choose congenial company.”

“I don’t think we ought to run away!”

Once again Janet had perplexed him with her enigmatical abruptness; and for a moment he had a curious sensation. He felt as though he were plunging about beside her in a pitch-dark room, where both were trying in vain to do the same thing and continually bumping up against unexpected portions of one another in the process. Door-handles kept turning into elbows and bell-pushes into noses. Moreover there seemed to be something there in Janet which was not talking, which did not come out in her words at all; and Gerald felt a definite impulse to address himself precisely to this something and perhaps draw it out. So he purposely became equally enigmatic, and after a weighty pause, proclaimed slowly and with a specious air of mystery, “It’s quite all right as long as one is fully satisfied!” and in the longer pause that followed it seemed to him as though he had just whispered firmly through the darkness: “Look here, I’m going through this door!” and as though she were just debating whether she could bear to sit on alone or must go with him simply for company. Evidently she had decided to come.

“What do you mean?” she enquired slowly; and from that moment it was clear that all pretence of this being anything but a deadly serious conversation must be dropped. Gerald grew somewhat nervous and self-deprecatory: “I mean — in the affections — there are so many little self-deceptions possible — pin-point egoism, that one prides oneself on as great virtues, and so on. Why, I remember John and I talked about this before he was married. I only mean (but of course it’s obvious) you need to be very sure of yourself . . . when it comes to loving people on principle . . .” He stopped. Janet was listening to him with closed eyes: “Go on!” she said, “go on! I know what you mean.” And then, when he said nothing:— “Yes, but you see I’m so sure that one can’t have the other kind of love — you know, the easy kind — without

—” she paused, and now he took her up quickly. “You mean you can’t really love the people you do love till you can love the people you don’t love?”

“Yes, exactly!”

“Yes, It was rather well put, wasn’t it? So clear! A certain economy in the number of words!” Janet smiled, and then almost to herself she suddenly exclaimed: “I wish people weren’t so irritating sometimes!”

Gerald looked at her significantly. “That’s just the sort of thing I mean! Isn’t it perhaps a mistake to try and force oneself? I’d rather be like Dean Swift than like — oh well, the opposite.”

“Why, what was Dean Swift like?”

“Well, the ordinary humanitarian loves the human race like billy-o, but when he actually comes into contact with a particular member of it, he finds he can’t stand the way he smells, or snuffles, or holds his fork or something. Now Swift hated the human race, thought they were absolutely disgusting, whereas to the individual he actually came in contact with he could not help being kindness itself.” Janet did not seem to be much interested in the Dean’s idiosyncracies.

“I wish I understood why nice people should keep on getting on one’s nerves!” she said: and once again Gerald began murmuring, half to himself:

I wished I loved the human race,
I wish I liked its silly face,
And when I’m introduced to one,
I wish I thought ‘what jolly fun!’

“Is it perhaps because they are generally so unattractive physically?” he added. Now Janet had not meant this. It was he who had wrenched the problem in that direction, but all the same she said nothing, and he went on, as if she had agreed with him: “That raises the whole question of the beautiful soul in the ugly body!”

“I don’t think it is much of a question to me,” she replied, after a pause. “What does the body matter? It’s the mind inside him that makes a person beautiful or ugly!”

“Ah! I should like to believe that.” He laughed. (Janet had forgotten how ugly he was): “partly for personal reasons! — but does it really work out in practice?” “After all,” he went on, as she made no answer, “you can’t just dismiss the body! We have got them!” A remark which came home to Janet’s bosom only too painfully. Once more she took half-consciously a decision. She could easily have explained at this point that by ‘getting on one’s nerves’ she had not meant anything physical at all, and this would have effectively scotched the new turn in the conversation. But once more that whisper in the dark had said: “I’m going this way!” and she decided to follow.

“What do you mean?” she enquired. But Gerald had ‘meant’ a good deal more than he could ever explain.

It was a peculiarity of his that he lived a great deal in his own past. His intellectual life had therefore a sort of conscious coherence, and the moral or physical problems which preoccupied him now, at the age of twenty-seven, often presented themselves quite clearly as elaborated extensions of those which had once puzzled a little boy of eight or twelve. For example, one of the moments in his life which he had never forgotten and knew he should never forget, had occurred

during his thirteenth year. It had found him on the front doorstep of a neighbour's house, whither he had been sent with an errand; the door had been opened by a niece who was staying in the house for a few days, and who, immediately, by this mere act of opening the front door, transplanted little Gerald into Paradise. She was a fresh, pretty girl of about twenty-two, and in spite of unthinkably subtle and elaborate schemings, of which his parents guessed nothing, Gerald had never contrived to see her again.

But this was only the first and most memorable of a series of similar encounters, which had punctuated his adolescence, and which always brought the same mournfully unanswerable problem in their train. It had been impossible, for all sorts of good reasons, to speak to anybody else either of the encounters or the 'problem', and the latter had imprinted itself all the more deeply for that reason in his soul.

The problem was this: while he remained under the influence of the passing fair, the summit of all joys appeared to him to be the performance of some act of complete self-annihilation in her favour. Rewards such as kisses and embraces, and indeed anything more than the fair's occasional presence, never even entered his imagination. The act was to be its own reward, and would bring its own joy in the doing. But now the trouble began. For this feeling was so enormous and so important, that it was impossible to confine it to one particular member of the sex. All women, of whatever age or station, had a right henceforth to their portion of knightly devotion. And yet, in actual fact, when positively confronted with, for instance, the charwoman, the whole scheme fell through. The joy vanished, and with it the impulse. Therefore, he must have been deceiving himself; for it was literally unthinkable that any female should be debarred, for ever, by circumstances over which she had no control, from the inestimable boon of arousing this divine feeling in Gerald Marston, especially as the feeling was its own guarantee that the world is an honest world. And then, next time he saw her — or the next one — back it would all come over again. In other words, every beautiful woman filled him to his fingertips with a rich philosophy of life — into which, the plain woman simply did not fit. By rights the latter ought not to exist at all, and yet she was often (bother it) a great deal nicer than her sister.

And now, at the age of twenty-seven, this problem still remained for Gerald — when it occurred to him — equally devoid of any solution; only that its personal urgency was somewhat softened by experience, and by a detached philosophical interest. While the philosophical interest in its turn — the intricacies of a Platonic dialogue for instance — still went on drawing, like a tangled criss-cross briar, a certain sweetness and colour up out of these fragrant old roots in the rotting past.

In posing the problem of the beautiful soul in the ugly body, therefore, Gerald had really 'meant' all this; but the only sign which Janet could perceive of any additional interest was the easy but absorbed way in which at this point, he leaned further back in his chair, and put his hand into the coat-pocket which held his tobacco-pouch.

"By the way," she said, unconscious that his movements had brought the idea into her head: "I don't mind smoking! Do have a pipe or anything!" and he began to answer her previous questions, as he lit it.

"I mean — puff — all my instincts tell me to — puff — agree with you; but", (he paused while he pressed the tobacco down into the bowl, dropped the match into his saucer, and returned the pouch to his pocket) "you see, it leaves so many things completely unexplained. Look at the poets for instance! — puff — inspiration — puff — the Dark Lady of the Sonnets — you can hardly say it's only the mind that matters to them — and yet at the same time poetry is in some mysterious way the most important thing of all!"

"Yes" replied Janet, with a sort of sternness: "but the one kind of love is just a way to the other!"

"Aha! You're a Platonist like your brother! So am I — I think — only my trouble always is: why doesn't 'the other' produce poetry?"

"Do you mean to say it never does?" There was something oppressive to Gerald in the sharpness with which Janet said this. He now began to feel more powerfully than ever the invisible presence of that other part of her which was not talking. He considered for a moment.

"No, I can't honestly say that; but if you get 'the other' by itself, then poetry does seem to dry up in some way: at best it gets thin and mystical." There was a pause.

"There's nothing you can be s-s-sure of in the body!" said Janet at last, and the slight stammer, becoming somewhat noticeable, made Gerald realise for the first time how much more easily on the whole she had been enunciating than the last time he saw her. There was a pause.

"Sure of?"

"I mean when you're not sure of anything you want something you can feel sure of." Once more her colour was heightened, and Gerald had an uncomfortable feeling that she was making a kind of appeal to him. Like Margaret, he had a horror of conversational tensions. His usual method of dissolving them was quotation; but on this occasion he could think of nothing. Janet herself suddenly supplied the deficiency. "Do you know" she said anxiously, "that sentence in one of Keats' letters, where he says —" she stopped, and then went on with a determined bob of the head: "I am certain of nothing but the holiness of the heart's affections." Oddly enough, it was Margaret who had given her the 'Letters' at Christmas.

Janet was again deadly serious. Gerald looked at her and nodded, and all at once he remembered the day he had rung her up. By George, yes! — the thought flashed through his mind — she is 'awake' all right! and at last he began to understand something of what she was going through.

"You must have something certain" she was going on with a naked despair in her voice, "and you can only get that inside."

"Still," said Gerald firmly: "it's not enough!" and then a fresh thought struck him: "Incidentally, you haven't finished the quotation! What Keats wrote was: 'I am certain of nothing but the holiness of the heart's affection and the truth of imagination.'"

"Yes, but that was because he lived a long time ago; before they had discovered about the brain!"

“Discovered what about the brain?” — he checked his impatience: “You mean that, if he had lived to-day, Keats would not have believed in the truth of imagination?”

“Yes.”

“Ah, then I am sure you are quite wrong.”

“But how can an imaginary thing be true? That’s what imaginary means.”

“Yes, but imaginary is not the adjective for imagination. People who believe in the truth of imagination seem to conceive of imagination as being — m — I don’t quite know — ‘soul in terms of body’, if you like!”

“I don’t understand that.”

“Nor do I! But you can’t just dismiss it. Perhaps your brother John could tell you more about it than I can. He seems to have a new theory of imagination judging by an extraordinary conversation we had the other day — about pictures.”

“Oh, John and his pictures! Of course, I suppose pictures can help to make you feel! But — I don’t mean that!” Gerald bowed his head and thought for a moment:

“Pictures affect the question,” he said, raising it and looking at her, “because they ‘help to make you feel’ as you say so excellently, and yet their appeal is directly to the senses — which are the body.”

“Yes, but a picture is a picture of something — it’s the thing itself that’s real!” He was surprised at her dialectical tenacity; but he saw, too, that they were getting confused; trying to speak of two different things at once. He decided therefore to break new ground. “Take a dream!” he said suddenly. “Haven’t you ever felt after a specially vivid dream — a nightmare, if you like — that the images actually are the feeling? As though they were joined together? You don’t feel about what happens; your feeling is what happens. You don’t feel a bit like you do when you’re awake, otherwise you wouldn’t have that awful horror about the most trivial things, and trivial feelings about horrible things, as you often do in dreams — or at least I do!” Janet nodded: “So do I!” she said, and after a pause: “But in dreams you’re asleep!”

Gerald now began to realise with vague surprise that he had just been arguing in exactly the opposite direction to that which he and Margaret had taken with John! The sequence of ideas, or some driving force behind it, seemed to have run away with him, and he really could not have said how far the ideas he was putting forward represented his actual convictions, or even what these were. Janet’s last remark only served to enhance this process.

“Well, then, take sleep itself — dreamless sleep —” he began eagerly, and then suddenly he paused, bewildered again at his own loquacity. But, recollecting the understanding way in which she had quoted Keats’s golden words and the whole atmosphere of seriousness and sorrow which hung about her, he quickly resolved to reveal to her something he had never revealed to anyone before. “Don’t you feel sometimes, especially if you have been, well, unhappy, that sleep itself is feeling — I mean a kind of friendliness. The body seems to give the soul something, to become soul, as it were!” Janet happened to be looking at him as he said this. For the fraction of a second the two gazed hard into one another’s eyes. And then their frankness disappeared, and it became an uneasy, shy look which they were exchanging.

"Yes!" Janet said at last. "I did — at one time — perhaps" and she began to speak hurriedly, "But I don't think it's anything. It's just the nerves recuperating themselves!"

"Oh, very likely!" Gerald felt faintly annoyed — as if he had given himself away for nothing: "But I don't see what difference it makes to a thing to give it a scientific name. It's the feeling I am talking about."

"And you mean", said Janet slowly "that we can learn something from the feeling itself, that the feeling is just as real, whatever the explanation of it is? That's very difficult. I've sometimes thought that!"

"I mean," said Gerald, looking hard at her once more, and speaking the words very slowly and distinctly: "So much the better for the body!"

Really the atmosphere of this conversation had changed most remarkably, since its beginning. Gerald no longer saw reflected in her attitude towards him the blasé superficial young cynic. Almost, she seemed to have become a disciple. And this made him feel awkward, so that he looked at his watch now and said he must go. The memory of his father's condition also came back to him at this moment.

"Well", he exclaimed as he rose, "we've had a queer conversation! Quite different from anything I should have expected; but I for one have found it extraordinarily interesting."

"So have I!" said Janet. She discovered that she didn't want him to go. "What work are you doing yourself now?" she enquired.

"Writing the article on Carlyle for the new Encyclopedia!" he replied, "thanks to your brother!" And he explained how Sir Otto had kindly secured him an interview with Lord Bilbury, under whose auspices, among others, this encyclopedia was being produced. There had been a clear suggestion, he added, that if his article were found pleasing, he would be asked to do others; for the thing was still only in its inception. He brightened, and spoke with optimism; and Janet could not help noticing, as he stood opposite to her, the calm even way in which he breathed. On their way down stairs, and standing together in the hall, they spoke further of Carlyle, and Janet said she had once been fond of Sartor Resartus. He particularly asked her if she remembered the three chapters in the middle called the Everlasting No! the Centre of Indifference, and the Everlasting Yea. She had forgotten them. "So had I!" he said, significantly and strongly recommended her to read them again — as soon as possible.

It was already nearly dinner-time; and as soon as the meal was over, Janet hunted up a Carlyle and read the chapters Gerald had spoken of. As with the poetry, she discovered in them a wealth and depth of experience of which she had formerly had not the slightest notion, and she realised that no-one who had not been through some experience similar to her own could possibly understand what they meant. To her at any rate they were inspiration and power. She seemed to live in a dream the whole evening through. Only when she went up to bed, did symptoms of the old depression begin to reappear. She wondered anxiously if she should sleep easily. Gerald's speaking openly in that way of sleep had had the curious effect of making her own past experience seem much more real — more like an actual event; whereas hitherto her memory of them had seemed to be no more than that of passing moods. On the other hand, her own 'scientific explanation', which had once

seemed to settle the matter so definitely, now began to fade into the background. But she also remembered how quickly the experience had forsaken her. Was this loving approach of slumber something that had simply touched her once in her life and would never return? Loneliness swept down on her.

With unspeakable gratitude Janet discovered that night that neither this new mystery of breathing nor the older one of sleep had gone from her for ever. Until she slept, she lay in a mist of happiness, and when she awoke in the middle of the night, it was with the feeling that she had come from a long way off. She retained, too, an unusually vivid recollection of a dream. She had been in a walled garden, trying to block the door against an angry crowd which was threatening and shouting at her from outside because of something improper she was said to have done. At last it burst in, but instead of being terrified, Janet was surprised to find that she had the situation well in hand. She climbed up on a box and harangued the ugly mob in a bold, dignified speech. She enjoyed making the speech, and still more the feeling that she was holding the crowd with it.

Janet ran through this dream quite clearly in her mind and then had no difficulty in getting off to sleep again; but it was odd that, when she finally awoke in the morning, she could hardly remember anything about it at all.

CHAPTER XXII

During the next eight weeks Janet was very happy. Gerald called nearly every time he visited his father, and with his help she gradually grew more interested in her work. She no longer felt so much put off by the manner and matter of the French stories she was translating, for she seemed in some way to have succeeded in clearing up her own relation to them. This enabled her to tackle the work with a new energy and to become thoroughly absorbed in it. The same thing applied to her German studies, and here too Gerald's sympathy and love of literature played its part. Janet developed a new understanding and liking for German poetry, which led her into the language further and quicker than anything else could have done. The depth of sentiment appealed to her strongly; and indeed her attitude to poetry in general underwent something of a change. Instead of sadness and anxiety, she now often felt enthusiasm and delight, as she noticed how the lyrical mood returns again and again to the same fountain of inspiration. As before, it was in the poems inspired by longing and bereavement that made the strongest appeal; but besides these she now began to take pleasure in those which sang of requited love and the joy of possession. Hitherto such poems had frightened her. She had felt as if she understood them only too well. But now she began to feel the need of such songs, to reflect a certain joy which she sometimes felt in her own heart — different indeed from that of which the poets sang — and yet in a deeper sense the same. The more warmly they breathed of human passion, the better they served this purpose.

For the feeling they excited in her now seemed, instead of arousing any particular longing, to warm her whole being. She simply felt tender, sometimes almost unspeakably tender — but about what she could hardly say. Sometimes she sought relief for this feeling in little acts and expressions of affection for the people about her; and these were gratefully enough received. But more often, she could not

bear to be anything but alone; she would go out for a walk, strung up to such a pitch of sensitiveness that every breath tasted and every touch of the breeze upon her face felt like a caress. There was little enough of 'Nature' at Dale End, nothing, in fact, but the Park, and a few dusty trees along some of the roads, and yet Janet felt as if she had never looked at Nature before.

And when, as sometimes happened, this curious intensity of indeterminate feeling grew too much for her altogether, producing a kind of nervous impatience, so that she could not tell what to do, she could always — or nearly always — lean back in her chair, close her eyes, and — breathe! And then her heart would fill with warmth and the impatience itself would become a kind of tranquillity — as though she were reposing upon flames.

At night, too, she sometimes seemed to herself to be lying, not so much on her bed, as on this same mysterious warmth about her heart. And she was extremely surprised to find herself half assuming that this warmth was a kind of Promised Land, into which she and all her friends would float away after death, just as she was even now floating away on it to sleep.

But 'assumptions' of this kind, which became parts of her memory, before she had grasped them intellectually at all, and which, as soon as she put them into words, she firmly disbelieved, now became a curious and bewildering feature of Janet's existence. There were others; and one very persistent one concerning the whole nature of the experiences she was now having.

One of the ladies in the boarding-house had been describing to her an exceptionally moving story of some distant relative of hers who had led, during the Nineteenth Century, a more than usually drab and monotonous existence and had eventually taken to drink. Janet's tender heart filled with pity, but it was pity of that peculiar kind which we only bestow upon people who are less fortunately placed than ourselves. We have something which they need and we would have liked to share it with them. With her acute self-consciousness, Janet at once noticed this; she noticed how she had been considering the case of this unfortunate woman as though she herself stood on a superior eminence, from which she could watch the other groping about in the darkness. And then she again perceived that the special poignancy of her pity was due to the fact that she was 'assuming' something. She was assuming that this revelation which had recently been vouchsafed to her (Janet), this unsealing within her of mysterious sources of feeling — that all this had been inaccessible to that other, who so badly needed a rich inner life — and inaccessible simply because she had lived in an earlier time. If she had gone on thinking, instead of drinking, she would never have escaped hysterics, as Janet had done. That could only happen in the Twentieth Century.

This thought, confronted in all its nakedness, looked so unreasonable that Janet promptly dismissed it from her mind without a doubt of its falsity. Yet amid the plethora of experience that crowded the next few years of her life — most of it by no means as untroubled as this blessed eight weeks' interlude — the same pity for her less fortunate predecessors and the same 'assumption' as to the essentially 'modern' nature of her own experience kept coming back to her unbidden, perplexing and challenging her to produce a cause.

CHAPTER XXIII

About the time that Gerald was returning home from Dale End a refined and comely lady was sitting alone in her little flat in Chelsea, scanning the proof of a sonnet. She leaned back for a moment and stared absently at the coloured prints of Greek vases, with which the walls were decorated, and then she settled into her chair, bent over the little escritoire and, drawing back her teeth so that the tip of her tongue protruded between them, applied herself once more to the task in hand. For the tenth or eleventh time she read the poem, right through from the title at the top to the signature beneath the last line:

PHRYNE

Yes, it is true I have lain here and there
And given myself to one, or two, or three,
That Dionysus has unpinned my hair
And weary Phoebus rested on my knee!
Oh, you are sick with dreams! You are a fool,
Because your pain does her compassion move,
To measure Phryne with the Sapphic rule
And lacquer pity with the name of love!
Rather because my beauty is a charge,
Because of some boy-pathos in your smile,
Because the insolent world is very large
And we are only here a little while:
 Therefore, oh lover, find you this cold breast . . .
 Nay, but your pitiful hungers You shall rest

Adela Cranage

And then, once more, she tried taking the last two lines by themselves; and still she could not manage to decide whether they would look more significant with four dots, or only three, after 'breast', 'hungers' and 'rest'. So she read the poem all through again, and this time forgot all about the problem in her admiration of it. Her tongue disappeared, and her ample mouth had just curved into a rather self-satisfied smile when there was a knock at the door.

"Come in!" she called, in a pleasant contralto voice, without looking up from her manuscript, and then, as the door opened: "What, Humphrey: So soon back!" For a moment or two Humphrey Trinder stood outside the door, smiling at her rather vacantly. At the same time something occurred within him, of which she knew nothing. A strong feeling of revulsion shot through him, on to which his mind, like a man who at last succeeds in capturing a particularly lively flea, made a sort of vindictive pounce. It grabbed this feeling and nailed down for future reference its relation to the single word 'soon' among those which Adela had just spoken. Meanwhile the complacent smile gradually faded from the lady's face, giving way to

a certain rich presiding solemnity. She slipped away the proof into a blotter and turned half round.

"Come in, dear!" she said.

He turned and shut the door and, coming up behind her chair, looked over her shoulder at the blotter:

"What have you been writing, Adela?" She twisted her head, to smile up at him:

"I rather thought that was my affair, Humphrey!" With a sudden movement Humphrey caught the hand that was resting on the table and keeping it in a firm grip, proceeded to open the blotter with his own left hand, in such a way that her head remained, imprisoned between his arms, against his chest.

"Humphrey!" She really had not intended him to see it, but felt too complacent now to protest very vigorously. When he had carefully read the sonnet through twice, he let her go and walked a little way back. There was a slight pause.

"Is it like that with many of them?" he enquired curiously. She turned her chair until it was facing him, and then, pursing her lips and brightening and enlarging her eyes in a peculiar way, she nodded, making at the same time the slightest movement with her arms, as if she would open them. She waited for him to fling himself on his knees and lay his head between hers.

"Oh!" he said, sitting down on the edge of a chair. Adela gave him a quick look, which somehow impelled him to add after a second's silence: "That's extremely interesting . . ." and then again in a still vaguer voice: ". . . extremely interesting!" Humphrey said this in an exaggeratedly polite and attentive way, and at the same time so absently that no one but a child could have failed to observe that the attentiveness was a screen, behind which he wished to go on working out some private problem in peace.

Adela felt an exasperated desire to shake him out of his self-preoccupation. She would have liked to prick him with a needle and laugh when he jumped. Evidently she had entirely misinterpreted the mood of his first question. He was not going to say anything more about the sonnet. She threw him the same pursed-up look as before, only this time without the smile:—

"It's like that with you, you silly baby . . . only you don't know it yet!" Then she partly opened her lips and, still keeping her large lazy eyes on him, pointed half-commandingly to the ground at her feet. He did not move. She looked at him challengingly, hoping she had touched his pride. For a moment Humphrey met the challenge with a vindictive, hawk-like look, which leapt out of his eyes at her, as if it would like to crunch her bones. Adela saw the look. She allowed her lashes just to close and, making a slight motion with her legs, half turned her head away. Once more she waited. Yes, yes, she thought ecstatically, now he is going to turn into the other kind — the kind that was so desperately rare — the only kind that ever had the slightest effect in assuaging that gnawing loneliness.

"I tell you what!" jerked out Humphrey, in the same polite voice: "I've got a notion. Let's chat this evening . . . about things . . . about your poetry!" Adela opened her eyes with an effort and turned them back to him:

"Oh, Humphrey, I've been 'chatting' all day. I really can't be bothered to do any more of it!" She looked at her lap, and then up at him again with a smile. He was

still sitting on the edge of his chair. At last, in a still more uneasy and tentative way, as if she were a stranger whom he particularly wished not to offend, he said, looking at the distance behind her:

“Do you know, I think perhaps after all I’ll run along and do a spot of work this evening!” and added, as one who tries to improve a feeble excuse for discourtesy by making it into an appeal for sympathy: “There’s nothing like seizing the mood, when it comes . . . don’t you think?” This time Adela made no answer. Humphrey got up slowly from his chair and walked across the floor to her, seeming to plant each step deliberately in front of him, as if he were wading through invisible treacle. Bending with a sudden bright smile over her chair, he would have kissed the side of her neck, when Adela forgot herself entirely and delivered him a slap on the cheek like the crack of a carter’s whip. Humphrey staggered a little. The room contained silence and three crimson cheeks. Then he righted himself, looked at her once more with the same exasperatingly vague smile, and exclaiming: “Whew!” turned and left the flat.

When he reached home a few hours later, he found Gerald sitting reading in front of the fire, with a huge pair of horn-rimmed spectacles on, looking like a great owl.

“Listen!” he said, the moment Humphrey came in: “This ought to interest you: It’s really about the origin of language: but it seems to me to apply equally well to your business. Are you listening?”

“Fire ahead!”

Man shows conscious reflection, when his soul acts so freely that it may separate in the ocean of sensations which rush into it through the senses, one single wave, arrest it, regard it, being conscious all the time of regarding this one single wave. Man proves his conscious reflection when, out of the stream of images that float past his senses, he can gather himself up and wake for a moment, dwelling intently on one image, fixing it with a bright and tranquil glance, and discovering for himself those signs by which he knows that this is this image and no other.

There was silence

“Read it again, will you?” said Humphrey at last. Gerald did so. “Ha!” exclaimed Humphrey: “Attention!” Marston immediately threw the book on to the table, jumped up, clicked his heels together, and stood perfectly stiff with an expressionless face. He was glad to have Humphrey back again. “Ass!” said Humphrey: “Stand at ease!” Gerald sat down again.

“The dream of images that float past his senses” Humphrey repeated musingly. He screwed up his eyes, and for a moment Gerald saw the fierce, darting look that he was beginning to know flicker across his face. “Where does it come from?” he asked.

“A man called Herder.”

“Herder: I’ve never heard of him. Is it a very new book?”

“Oh, very! He is all the rage just now, he’s coming over to lecture at Eustace Miles’s next month.”

"Can we get tickets?"

"My dear Sir, he's been dead a hundred years! You really ought to be ashamed of yourself — a huge great German philosopher, miles long — a regular dachshund!" But Humphrey was perfectly unabashed.

"All right!" he said. "What are you doing with him anyway?"

Gerald explained how the attempt to 'get up' Carlyle and do his job for the encyclopedia really thoroughly had been leading him into the luxuriant jungle of German philosophy. It was while wandering there, he explained, that he had stumbled on Herder. Being especially interested in words, he had got hold of a translation of the philosopher's treatise on the Origin of Language, and was now reading it, though it took him a good way from his main object which was, of course, 'the origin of Carlyle'.

Humphrey asked him two or three intelligent questions about his method of tackling the article, but soon gave signs of being tired and preoccupied. Gerald returned, therefore, to his book, and the two sat silent, until at last Humphrey so far emerged from the contemplation of his own problem as to recollect where Gerald had been.

"Did you find Janet?" he asked — "oh yes, by Jove, and how is your governor?"

Gerald laid his book down on his knees and for a few seconds directed at Humphrey an almost expressionless stare, while he detached his mind from its train of thought and carried it back to the afternoon's experience. Then he explained exactly how things were with his father and answered the few questions which Humphrey put to him. They sat looking into the fire until, after a natural pause, Humphrey again asked after his sister.

"Yes!" said Gerald. "I found her in."

"How is she?"

Once more Gerald met him for a few seconds with that expressionless, almost offensive, stare which meant that he wanted to go on working out his thought. Humphrey, who had at first found this habit decidedly irritating, was now quite used to it.

"You're a remarkable family!" said the former at last in an abstracted way.

"Why?" asked Humphrey quickly: "Why do you say that?"

"Yes", said Gerald suddenly, with decision, and ignoring his last query "I thought Janet seemed very well — much better than the last time I saw her!"

"Good! Better in what way?"

"Well, she seemed to me to be less — less jerky, if I may put it that way. Apologies! You know what I mean. — less of the Trotwood touch."

"And what is the Trotwood touch?"

"Probably you've never read a book called David Copperfield!"

"Yes, I have!" said Humphrey, patient under the lash: "but I've forgotten it."

"Have you really read David Copperfield and forgotten Betsy Trotwood?"

"Why do you say we're a remarkable family?" insisted Humphrey. But Gerald, who was getting to know his companion better and better, had no intention of supplying fuel to his craze for introspection.

He made no answer, therefore, but began to give an account of the boarding-house and the work Janet was doing. Shortly after this, Humphrey went off to bed, expressing his intention of running along to have a look at her himself. Gerald sat on by the dying fire alone. They certainly were a remarkable family, and it seemed odd, the rapidity with which he had come to know all three of them so well. He reflected again on that significant quality of 'awakeness', and the extraordinary extent to which all the Trinders possessed it. All? Well, not perhaps John. John was something of a dark horse. At first you thought he was deeper than either of the other two — and then, somehow, you weren't quite so sure. But he was at any rate so awfully nice! And so were the others. And now, to-day, Janet had shown herself in this new light. Gerald realised how much he liked all three of them. As to Humphrey, whom he had at first regarded as rather a joke, he was just beginning to have a dim feeling that he might possibly end by liking him best of all. There was a pathetic something about him, which it was impossible to define; and then the man was so extraordinarily willing — always ready to take on the unpleasant little job. Jumpy as a racehorse and willing as a carthorse, thought Gerald — if only there wasn't this queer mess in his mind about sex. Well, it was queer, but was it really queerer than anybody else's mess? My word, who am I to talk? he said to himself suddenly, as though I'd got it all so nicely taped and pigeon-holed. He smiled a little sickly into the empty grate. It was too late to start on that tack now; but he recollected some of the devotional flights of his imagination, and then those other flights of a different kind. Lear's phrase 'that way madness lies' flashed through his mind. Oh well, one thing was certain anyway. It was a good thing! What was a good thing? Getting to know Humphrey.

Somehow he knew this intuitively, and quite apart from the question of any intellectual profit which either of them might derive from the relation. As to this last, he had recently somewhat revised his opinion. Until a few days ago, Gerald had secretly felt very little doubt that the advantage here would be Humphrey's. Now he was not so sure, and he had really read aloud that passage out of Herder because of a respectful notion lurking somewhere at the back of his own mind that Humphrey might understand it better than himself! Things seemed to happen inside that man in an extraordinary way; whatever nonsense he picked up, he never turned round afterwards to kick it, but always went on — contentedly taking his one percent of truth, and leaving other people to clear up the mess of error and win a reputation by proving cleverly that nonsense is nonsense. If Humphrey was so uncritical, the other side of the picture was that he wasted no energy on criticism; for the delicacies of irony and sarcasm all use up time and force. No-one knew this better than Gerald. There could hardly, he thought to himself, as he knocked his pipe out, be two people more utterly different than he and I. And here we are together! He began humming 'Drink to me only with thine eyes!' and went off to bed.

CHAPTER XXIV

A good many things had happened to Humphrey Trinder since the day of John's wedding, though by no means all of them were outwardly apparent. For one thing, Dawson's temporary absence in Italy had produced in him the habit of working on

his own account, and this in its turn had increased a vague feeling he already had, that he had now learnt from the latter all that he had it in him to teach. Dawson himself, with a show of modesty that surprised Humphrey more than a little, suggested on his return that the situation was nearing this point. If they differed, it was in their estimate of the absolute quantity of this 'all'. For Dawson tried hard to persuade his pupil to set up straight away as a practising psycho-analyst on his own account; but Humphrey, after a few moments' hesitation, stoutly maintained that he did not yet know half enough, and was deuced uncertain about the little he did know.

"Experience is the only remedy for that!" replied Dawson, and hinted that Humphrey's modesty was cowardice in disguise.

"Ah, you don't frighten me that way!" retorted Humphrey with a smile. "Your old trout ain't caught with tickling!"

"Of course not!" said Dawson. "because your funk is still in the unconscious." But at this Humphrey only grinned and whistled in a peculiar, jocund manner, which was quite new to Dawson and annoyed him very much. Instead, however, of allowing this annoyance to bias his judgment by expressing itself as contempt for Humphrey's intellect (as he would have done before he went to Italy) he asked himself coolly what was the precise significance of it, and why it annoyed him. And then it at once appeared that the whole intention of the whistle implied, as inoffensively as possible, that he (Dawson) had been mechanically repeating ideas he had not really thought out for himself. Without smiling or giving any outward sign to Humphrey, Dawson admitted to himself that the rebuke was justified. The whistling trick was new to him because Humphrey had only recently learnt it, having in fact unconsciously copied it from his new house-mate. Marston was already on sufficiently intimate terms with him to tease him a good deal about his pet enthusiasms, and often employed this peculiar whistle as one of his methods.

Humphrey now began to see much less of Dawson, and at the same time rather lost interest in the meetings of Rex Rollo's nameless society. But although he had broken in this way with his instructor, he still went on working on his own account along very much the same lines as before. Since joining forces with Gerald, he had started systematically psycho-analysing the written work of the great thinkers of the past. His method was this:— He would read as much of a man's writings as he thought necessary in order to understand his 'particular stunt', and then he would endeavour to explain away the particular stunt in terms of Psycho-analysis. Generally it was easy enough, in fact too easy; for the explanation often seemed to be of so much less value than the 'stunt'.

For example, he had of course no difficulty in reducing Nietzsche's two categories, the Dionysiac and the Apolline, to his own 'Sex' and 'Power', and yet, when it was over, the really important thing was not the reduction, but the whole way in which his own concepts had been enriched by Nietzsche's. This was quite remarkable. For weeks Humphrey went about dividing everything — even flowers — into Dionysiac and Apolline, and separating out the two impulses, where he saw them intertwined. He also began applying them to his own life. Hitherto he had conceived of this — unsatisfactorily, as he was now finding out — as the gradual acquisition of 'power' with occasional concessions to 'sex'. He could feel much more

enthusiasm for such a fundamental dichotomy, when the abstract 'power' and 'sex' were replaced, however dimly, in his imagination, by the sunny figure of a golden-haired Apollo, who stooped now and then, with a smile, to recruit his might from the elemental forces of the pregnant depths.

Humphrey found Marston's attitude to all this a puzzling one. The latter refused to take the two great categories seriously and was always applying them, or misapplying them, in an absurd and flippant manner. One morning at breakfast, confronted with a herring that was nearly all roe, he complained that it was 'rather Dionysiac'. Yet it was puzzling; for on another evening, when they had come to the subject by accident, Gerald spoke out with surprising confidence, related the categories to the more abstract 'Matter' and 'Form', and traced a corresponding conjunction of the Female and Male principles in every manifestation of Nature, Humanity and Art. Humphrey was pleased, as well as surprised, and he could not help noticing that it was somehow pleasanter to speak on such subjects with Gerald than with Dawson. In Dawson's case there was always a certain — well — what? Greasiness was the only word he could find.

Soon after this conversation Humphrey began to develop a rather different point of view; he now began to see people's temperaments and ideas, no longer merely as the resultants of their struggling 'Power' and 'Sex' instincts, but also as what he called the 'projection' upon the outer world (as if through a kind of magic-lantern) of their physical constitutions. In this new theory Gerald would positively take no serious interest whatever, and when Humphrey confided in him with an air of some importance that Nietzsche's vast oriental conception of an 'eternal recurrence' was probably the imaginative 'projection' of the peristaltic motion of his bowels, he leaned back in his chair and shook with laughter, till the tears came into his eyes.

Humphrey remonstrated, but nothing could sober Marston, who was now quite weak with laughter. "Oohoo" he gasped out, "oohoo, it may be true — but it's so funny!" And he was off again. Humphrey screwed up his eyes and watched him. He was decidedly perplexed. For while he felt quite sure that Gerald's imperviousness to such important ideas was the result of a defective understanding of them, yet there was also something about this laughter that rang true. What to think? He ended by joining in.

On the other hand Marston strongly encouraged the interest which Humphrey began to take about the same time in a more philosophical kind of psychology. The conception of a wilful light-bringing Apolline force everywhere arresting ruinous motion, fetching order out of chaos and imposing upon the formless the stern necessity of form, appealed to Humphrey with a peculiar personal insistence. He sought for traces of it everywhere, and found them again with delight in the psychologist's conception of 'attention' as the basis of self-consciousness. And this led him into somewhat different trains of thought, and as a result, into a different world of books.

A few days before his last visit to Adela Cranage, he startled Gerald by casually introducing the word 'apperception' into some conversation they were having. The latter asked him mildly what it meant, and the answer came too suspiciously pat to be anything but a quotation — "the process by which the

attention is concentrated on the image." As Gerald still did not look very bright, Humphrey fetched down the works of the American psychologist he had just discovered and began enthusiastically turning over the pages. He pointed to the sentence he had quoted, and read on . . . "the highest and most comprehensive form of active consciousness . . . that activity of synthesis by which mental data of any kind are constructed into higher forms of relation and the perception of things which are related becomes the perception of the relation of things."

From Humphrey's quick gestures it was apparent that he found this dull-looking stuff more exciting than a novel. Gerald looked at him helplessly.

"Why are you suddenly so interested in this?" he asked. "What has it got to do with your stunts?"

"Damn my stunts! I never understood before what thinking is, and now I believe I'm beginning to see!" He read another passage, his eyes positively flashing as he did so; and Gerald even fancied he saw a flickering of that long blue vein which had stood out on his forehead during the encounter with the pugnacious workman after the meeting. Yet the matter seemed sober enough.

"The regulative aspect of reason is exemplified in the intuition of power, as it arises in the exercise of attention. The necessary exercise of power in attention renders possible the conception of cause, in connection with all the apperceptive products of our perception."

Humphrey looked up from the book, with a significant expression, as much as to say tranquilly:— "There! You see!" And Gerald could only go on staring at him more helplessly than ever. He had until lately felt a positively paternal relation towards this intellect, whose simple workings he had supposed as easy to follow as the mechanism of a Grandfather clock. Well! apparently there had been a miscalculation. But, imperfectly as he comprehended what Humphrey was after, Gerald felt instinctively — and not without certain pangs of envy — that the latter had discovered something, in his own mind, which, now that it was no longer hidden from him, might carry him a long way.