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THE MYSTIC QUEST

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A Tale of Two Incarnations

BY

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‘THE HIGHER SCIENCE,’ ‘THE ESOTERIC BASIS OF CHRISTIANITY
AND OTHER ESSAYS, &c.

GEORGE ALLEN

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*Never the spirit was born , the spirit shall cease to be never ;
Never was time it was not , End and Beginning are dreams !
Birthless and deathless and changeless remaineth the spirit forever ,
Death hath not touched it at all, dead though the house of it seems !*

* * * * *

*Nay, but as when one layeth
His worn-out robes away,
And, taking new ones, sayeth,
" These will I wear to-day !"
So putteth by the spirit
Lightly its garb of flesh,
And passeth to inherit
A residence afresh.*

BH.IG.1VAD-GĪ.Ā.

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CHAPTER I.

THE PROBLEM OF LIFE.

Cain. We knew already that there was death.

Lucifer. But not what was beyond it.

Cain. Nor know I now.

BYRON—*Cain.*

DOES anything happen by chance?

What a wide field for speculation this question opens out! I have known some people to whom life appeared to be but a series of chances, coincidences, accidents, from the day of their birth to the moment of their death, when they passed from this world's stage without a single ray of light or hope of future life. I have known others whose whole life has seemed to them the continuous intervention of a special providence, guiding and regulating the sequence of events down to the minutest detail, and preparing them for a glorious life of eternal bliss hereafter. Each individual will doubtless answer this question according to his own experiences and idiosyncrasies, and as

our experiences are ever varying, so our ideas are constantly undergoing modification and change to cover our new and extended range of consciousness.

Up to the time of the events I am now about to relate, I had no experience which would enable me to give any definite answer to this question. It is true I was more of an optimist than a pessimist, but that was the result of natural disposition rather than of conclusions derived from actual experience or reason.

That which altered the whole course of my life would doubtless be called a chance circumstance by many people, and dates from the day of my meeting with Alfred Nirman.

It was during the summer of 188-, and I had been engaged for several months in some engineering work in the large manufacturing town of Hellborough, in the North of England, one of those great centres of industry which are the boast and pride of our mercantile age. I loved my profession for its own sake and as a science, but I thoroughly detested all commercial transactions. I was not to the manner born of modern competitive industry, but had been forced by circumstances into the business mould and the money-making world, and had to fight the battle as best I might. I was a poet and an artist by temperament, rather than a man of business; but my early aspirations in this direction had never been realised, and now a fair amount of knocking about in the world had

to a great extent blunted my finer perceptions, while at the same time I had acquired a deeper insight into human nature, and a practical experience of the world; and this, together with my scientific training, enabled me to formulate a philosophy which served me in place of any deeply rooted religious convictions or creed.

I was, however, always conscious of an ideal which as yet I had failed to realise. I have said that I loved my work for its own sake, yet I had no particular ambition to make a name in my profession, and still less did I aim at making a fortune. I knew well enough that in these days of competition a man must bend all his energies in the direction in which he wishes to succeed, and subordinate everything to the one object of his desire; but although naturally energetic and sanguine, I found myself not merely without a sufficient motive for success from a worldly point of view, but often with a singular consciousness of some object in my life which had not yet disclosed itself, and which lay altogether apart from those interests which absorb the energies of the man of the world. What it was that I was destined to do or to become I could not even guess, but certain it was that this feeling prevented me from concentrating my energies in any special direction, or striving after a successful career as a man of business. I had indeed an intuitive feeling that what the world counted of most value was not worth striving after, and that there was some course of action in store for me in

the future which would lead me entirely away from the beaten track of human ambition.

I was a problem to myself in this respect. My friends were kind enough to prophesy a successful life, for I was naturally energetic and of steady business-like habits, but I smiled and kept my own counsel. Once, indeed, I unconsciously betrayed myself, in the course of a friendly conversation with a gentleman with whom I had been closely connected in business, and who was himself a successful man of the world. "Ah! I can see that your ambition is to become a millionaire," he had said, and without thought or pause I replied: "I have no such ambition, but a work to do in the world which neither you nor I know of yet." I said it almost as if the words had been put into my mouth, nor could I explain myself any further when pressed for my meaning. Yet it revealed the existence of some latent principle, some hidden destiny which was slowly but surely evolving out of the heterogeneous elements of my life. I scarce understood it myself at that time, though I can do so now, for life is no longer an insoluble problem, a chance, a caprice—but I must not anticipate.

It was the month of August, and I was feeling the need of a holiday. The penalty of living in a manufacturing town was weighing heavily upon me. I could not at any time catch the enthusiasm of commercial enterprise and money-making, which enables some men to feel a keen delight in the hum and roar of machinery, the ceaseless grind of

wheels, and the fierce competition of buying and selling. Though living in the midst of it, I looked upon the battle and strife altogether from an outside point of view. I could not but ask the why and wherefore of this terrible struggle for existence, this relentless law of supply and demand, in which human life and human nature count for nothing, and gold is the only standard. Alas! for the millions who toil, hopelessly, cheerlessly, driven by hunger and necessity, to drag the great gilded car of the god Mammon. What room is there in our huge commercial system, in our age of iron and steel, for that soul in man which is more than half divine to assert its supremacy, or claim its birth-right. One man's necessity is another man's opportunity, and the devil takes the hindermost. There is scarce human sympathy enough to hide with a cloak of so-called *charity* the victims who fall by the thousand, crushed down, mangled, and trodden to death by their stronger or more successful fellows.

There may be those who can walk the streets of our great cities, unconscious of the grim phantoms which meet them at every turn, and give the lie to our boasted civilisation and our Christian creed. There may be those whose ears are closed to the great cry, the great need of humanity; those whose organisms are adapted by nature or by long habit to the noise, and strife, and smoke, and dirt which are the elements in which they live, the very breath of their nostrils. But with me it was far other-

wise. I was painfully conscious that the atmosphere I was breathing was not merely physically impure, but thick with human passions and human degradation. The black pall which hung over the city was not one of smoke merely, but a terrible aura, wherein was reflected much which to the mere physical eye was put out of sight by the *respectable* portion of the community, in back slums and nameless dens of infamy. Put out of sight, and as much as possible out of mind: a problem to be solved by those whom it might more immediately concern—not to be considered save as touching the pecuniary interests of the capitalist, or the stake of the politician.

There were times when I felt these problems of life keenly, not so much on my own account, for life had been comparatively easy to me, but because I could not separate my own individual life or future destiny from that of humanity as a whole. I felt that in some way the solution of the smaller problem must be contained in the larger one. The individual units of the human race must all be subject to some universal law, there must be some generalisation which will cover all the phenomena of humanity, some such law as that of the conservation of energy, acting on the moral as well as the physical plane. The phenomena of nature were to us but a chaos before this great law was enunciated: what are the phenomena of humanity now but a mass of isolated experiences, with no common law to bind them into a comprehensible

whole? Can it be that the realm of natural law is so inflexible, so orderly, while there is naught but caprice governing our human nature? Is there no grand generalisation which can give us the key to the situation, and enable us to collect all the varied experiences of humanity, all its hopes, fears, failures, and achievements, now and in all ages, under one common law of cause and effect? Is it all chance that we are born, and live, and suffer, and die—it may be in one way as a spoilt child of fortune, it may be in another as an outcast and a beggar?

I could not believe it, but neither could I solve the problem. Science and philosophy seemed but blind guides, while religion covered but a very small portion of the problem by reason of its being individual and exclusive: not based upon natural law and universal experience, but upon fallible authority and individual prejudice. Every religious fanatic will die for his faith, though that for which one man will die is looked upon by another as essentially and fundamentally erroneous, and far removed from true enlightenment and salvation. Viewed from a strictly impartial point of view, all religions have an equal claim, inasmuch as they represent to their respective devotees the highest aspect of truth which for the time being they are capable of understanding. But there must be some underlying law which will account for these different manifestations of the same principle: the religious *instinct* in man. One religion offers one

solution, another a different one, but none cover the whole ground of human experience.

These problems were weighing somewhat heavily upon my mind at the period of which I write. It was glorious summer weather, and I was longing to be away from the heat and smoke of the town. In the winter, when nature lies dormant, and does not woo us in a thousand attractive moods, our souls may also sleep, and the dull mechanical round of daily life be performed less consciously as a burden and a task. But in summer we awake to a realisation of our limitations. The larger life of nature unfolding around us touches a responsive chord within our hearts, and we feel more or less intensely that there is a great soul and a great joy in nature, which lies beyond and above our everyday life. Is not this joy our birthright? Must we always be creatures of sense, blunting our finer faculties in the ceaseless struggle for bare existence?

Thus it is that in the summer-time our souls seek to respond to the fully awakened activities of nature, and we long to be away in the woods and the fields, scenting the fresh sweet air, or climbing the mountain, at the summit of which, the larger prospect meeting our view, seems to dwarf for the time being our individual experiences and trials. Would it not be well if we could fix our mental attitude permanently on some such height, looking at our individual life through the reverse end of the telescope, instead of isolating it in time and space, and making it appear the one object of interest within

the field of observation. To lose sight of our individuality in the great life of humanity, is perhaps after all the wisest philosophy.

But who is there who does not look forward to his summer holiday with anticipations of the greatest delight, and look back upon it as the one bright spot in the passing year, the period when he comes nearest to realising what life might be, if freed from the necessity of wasting its energies in the ceaseless strife to get the better of his fellows?

I had been looking forward to my liberation for some time, and now it was close at hand. My portmanteau was packed, and on the morrow I would turn my back on the smoky chimneys and grimy buildings of Hellborough, and seek for pure air and fresh inspiration at the quaint little seaside resort of Fairlea.

CHAPTER II.

ONLY A DREAM.

Go forth, for thou shalt see what I have seen,
And break thro' all, till one will crown thee King
Far in the spiritual city.

* * * * *

Then Galahad on the sudden, and in a voice
Thrilling along the hall, to Arthur call'd,
"But I, Sir Arthur, saw the Holy Grail,
I saw the Holy Grail and heard a cry—
'O Galahad, and O Galahad, follow me.'"

TENNYSON—*The Holy Grail.*

LATE in the evening of the day previous to my departure for Fairlea, I was sitting in my armchair, smoking and thinking. I was thinking of what I had just been reading: Tennyson's "Holy Grail." The poem had a great attraction for me; it seemed to correspond to my own ideal of something great and noble lying far beyond the conditions of life in this world, some Great Quest worthy to be sought out at all hazards; which, indeed, we could but half understand, but which might be realised by the few of lofty and pure ideal.

I did not attach any particular religious signification to the poem; indeed it was somewhat of a

problem to me how little my conceptions were moulded on the strictly orthodox forms of belief in which I had been brought up. But I had failed to find the motive for this Great Quest in any of those religious ideals to which some people cling with so much tenacity. I could not tell as yet what the Quest might mean, or what form it would take in my own life; nevertheless, I fully believed that there was some kind of reality corresponding to the ideal.

But now, as I sat thinking somewhat dreamily over the matter, I passed into a state of sleep, without, however, losing the thread of my meditations; so that what I dreamed seemed to be connected in some way with the Great Quest of which I had been reading.

At first my dream took no definite form, but I felt as if I were preparing myself for some enterprise which would demand the exercise of all the strength and enthusiasm which was stirring within me, and which seemed to gain in intensity every moment. I felt a great exultation, a great hope; it was as if some darkness, some cloud, had been lifted from my life, revealing a destiny and a purpose which had hitherto been concealed. More than that, I was conscious of a subtle kind of life pervading my being, which at the same time seemed to be part of everything around me, though I was not conscious of being in any particular place, or in the presence of any one. It was as if all around me were filled with a strange mysterious conscious *life*,

of which I myself was a part, my own individual life pulsating in perfect harmony with a great ocean of life, which, indeed, seemed to be the very root and innermost source of all existence.

Gradually, however, this feeling passed away, and it appeared that I was being separated out and individualised, while as I became more and more self-centred I lost touch with the great life of which I had just been a part, and which now seemed to sink back, to pass in a mysterious way beyond the reach of my faculties. Soon the sense of personality became the predominant one, though I still retained the impress, the aroma, of that perfect state of unconditioned life from which I had emerged. I felt an intense peace, a great calm; I was strong, collected, self-possessed, as if naught in the universe could shake my mind, or cause me trouble, doubt, or fear.

And now I became aware of the presence of others. I was in a small room or chamber, the walls of which seemed to be of stone, but hung with some kind of tapestry. The room was lit by means of a single oil lamp of antique workmanship, suspended over a table in the centre. On the table were a great variety of scrolls and parchments, containing strange writing, hieroglyphics and geometrical figures. I was standing near the foot of the table, while at the head sat a venerable old man. Two other persons were present, a young man and a maiden. We were all listening to the words of the old man, though when I awoke I could not recall

what he had said. It seemed as if he were instructing us in some ancient lore, some mysterious occult knowledge; and, moreover, it appeared to be a solemn leave-taking, as if he were giving us some last instructions prior to a long separation. I was conscious that I and the others with me were pledged to some great purpose, some high enterprise. It was as if we had taken a vow which was stronger even than death, a pledge which could only have its fulfilment in eternity, an enterprise which would be followed down the ages.

But now the scene changed. I was lying upon a couch in a different room, and I knew that I was dying of a mortal wound. How I had come there or received the wound I did not remember, but bending over me and holding my hand was the young man I had seen in the previous part of my dream. A great sadness at parting from him seemed to pervade my mind, a great sadness and at the same time a strange, exultant joy. I knew that I was dying rapidly. I could not speak, but I feebly returned the pressure of his hand, smiled on him, then closed my eyes. My life was sinking back to some deep, mysterious source. I felt once again that I was losing my individuality in the great ocean of Being. The same feeling as in the first portion of my dream was gradually stealing over my consciousness. Again I was entering that celestial atmosphere which seemed to radiate and pulsate with the very essence of one's conscious existence. Could this indeed be death? Yes, I knew that it was death

I knew that life and consciousness were parting from the body, the earthly garment. One last glance of recognition of him I loved, and then—I had given myself up entirely to the bliss of perfect life, found only in death.

Thus in my dream I passed the gates of death, the portals of the grave. "Only a dream," I hear some say, a baseless, airy, insubstantial fabric, valueless and meaningless ; but let us see.

My sensations on awaking from my sleep were very curious. For some time after opening my eyes I could not tell where I was, whether it was morning or night, what day it was, or what were the events which lay nearest my waking life. The impression of my dream was so strong upon me that, though conscious that it was but a dream, it still seemed to hold all my faculties in a state of perfect control. My mind was still pervaded by that exquisite harmony of life into which my very soul seemed to have melted. Very gradually my waking consciousness returned. I remembered that I had fallen asleep in my chair ; it was quite dark when I did so, and I had not lit my lamp or pulled down the blind, and now the room was flooded with the rays of the moon, which accounted for the strange soft light which appeared to my eyes, when I first opened them, to be part of that beautiful essence in which I had been living. Then I remembered what day it was, and that on the morrow I was starting for my holiday. The book I had been reading was lying on the table beside me, my pipe was still in my hand. I was stiff and cramped with

sitting so long in one position. Looking at my watch I found that it was past midnight. But I was reluctant to move, for the impression of my dream was still vividly real, and even now I was conscious of a great repose, a great joy, such as I had never before experienced in my waking moments.

But what of the dream itself, and the part I had played in the scenes which had passed before my vision? I could not connect them with any events in my life; and what could be the explanation of that deep sense of rest and satisfaction which I was still experiencing? I felt as if I had come through some great crisis in my life, had successfully surmounted some obstacle, some barrier which had hitherto been holding me back. My exultation was such as a man might feel who had been struggling for years against adverse fortune, and who woke up one morning to find the world at his feet. And yet there was nothing to account for this strange delight. It was only a dream which had produced it. Only a dream! What is a dream? Reflex action of the brain, science replies. A fig for science: my dream was something more than reflex action, for I could not associate it with any events in my life, any words, thoughts, or actions. True, I had fallen asleep thinking of the Great Quest, and in some way my dream seemed to be connected with that. But how? Strangely enough, I could not remember any words spoken, or the faces of the actors in my dream. My own personality even I could not recall, except that I appeared to have been some one else, and not

my present self. The events had no relation to my present life, nor was there anything in my history or even in what I had read which could suggest them. Neither was I conscious of any new light, any new truth; the vision did not appear to be either a prophecy or a revelation; I could not connect it with any intellectual process—it seemed rather to be a state of consciousness transcending that mental activity which governs our waking consciousness, and which connects our life inseparably with the ideas of time and space.

Yet there was one word I did remember, one name which was still ringing in my ears as if it had been spoken aloud at the moment of waking, and which was strangely familiar to me, as if it lay far back in the depths of my memory, where I could not reach its associations.

That name was *Alcides*, the name of the companion from whom I had been parted by death. Who could he be? What, indeed, could it all mean?

Long I remained trying to solve the problem. Of one thing only I could be certain, that I had somehow in my dream found the great source of all life, and mingled my own being in that deep fountain of pure existence where, freed from the conditions and limitations of our physical senses, we can enter into a state of perfect bliss. Could it be that in my dream I had really entered a state of post-mortem life? Had I not, indeed, in one part of my dream consciously passed into that state through the gates of death? It seemed impossible to realise such a

state of existence on this earth, in any physical body. It was pure and spiritual, it lay far beyond our reach in this life of struggling sinful human passions. No taint of earth, no bonds of sense could enter into such a pure flame of life, yet surely such a life must be attainable, else how could I have realised it, even in a dream ?

Long did I meditate upon the mystery, but could not find an answer, and when at last I went to bed, I did not dream again ; no further vision was vouchsafed, but only dreamless sleep ; while the bright morning sunshine, promise of a glorious day, quickly dispelled the lingering fancy of my dream, which indeed would not be recorded here, did it not bear strangely upon the events of the next few days.

CHAPTER III.

ALFRED NIRMAN.

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting :
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar.

WORDSWORTH—*Ode to Immortality.*

WHEN I took my seat in the 10.40 express there was no other occupant of the second-class smoking apartment I had selected, but a few minutes before the train started another passenger took possession of the corner opposite to me. He was a somewhat handsome-looking man, with dark almost black hair which seemed to curl naturally and profusely, and a well-trimmed beard and moustache. I judged him to be somewhat past thirty, and he had the appearance of a man who had seen a good deal of the world. But his face was pleasant, intellectual, and attractive, while there was a reserve of strength about it which told of character, eloquence, and refinement.

I did not notice these particulars immediately, for I was watching an interesting group on the platform, and absorbed in my own reflections.

Presently, however, the train moved out of the station. For about three miles the railway passed through, or rather over one of the most miserable quarters of the town. There was nothing to be seen but rows upon rows of black, desolate, tumble-down dwellings, upon which even the sunshine could not put a single touch of colour or joy. The air was clouded with smoke and soot, and as far as one could see was a wilderness of tiled roofs, with not a single object upon which the eye could rest to relieve the monotony. Looking down at the narrow streets and courts immediately under the railway arches my soul sank within me to think that human beings should live year after year under such conditions of poverty and dirt. I knew that much of it was the result of vice and depravity, but I also knew that there was many a brave and honest heart there, striving to keep above water, to retain self-respect—worthy indeed of better circumstances, yet barely able to earn a living for wife and children.

And these children, these wretched children! Ah! what cruel fate could it be which would plunge an embryo human soul into such an environment? There must be a terrible fallacy in our orthodox Christian creed, for it offers no solution to such a problem as this; no solution which can appeal to our most elementary sense of justice. Many a time I had passed through this district, and on every occasion the problem would rise before me as it did now, demanding a solution in the name

of all that I held most divine and sacred in human nature.

We may indeed close our minds to the problem, we may shut our eyes and stop our ears, and go about our daily business or pleasure with no concern save for our own affairs, or may perhaps salve our conscience with a few charitable donations, but the problem must be solved if we would know our own destiny, and no thinker can ignore it. It stands face to face with our great ecclesiastical religion, with our ponderous machine for man's salvation, and demands an answer in terms of justice and love.

I was roused from my meditations by my traveling companion addressing me and asking my permission to smoke. This was such an unusual courtesy on the part of one who appeared to be an Englishman, more especially as we were in a smoking compartment, that I looked at him with some curiosity, at the same time giving a ready assent to his request. Since the ice had thus been broken I determined not to be behindhand, for I was taken with his appearance and manner. I pulled out my cigar-case and offered it to him, but he had already produced a pipe and declined with thanks. I selected a cigar myself and proceeded to light it, while my companion filled his pipe. Prepared thus to be sociable I was about to make an introductory remark concerning the weather, that Alpha and Omega of polite conversation, when he anticipated me in a way which rather took me by surprise.

"Pardon me," he said, "but I have been reading

your thoughts ; you have been looking upon the dark side of human nature, and are inclined to regard it as a hopeless problem."

"You have made a very good guess at what was in my mind," I replied. "Look at these miles and miles of wretched streets, they are hardly suggestive of bright or hopeful reflections."

"Perhaps not, but we are already leaving them behind and getting into the open country," he said. "After all, they only occupy a very infinitesimal space on the face of the globe."

"A festering sore does not cover much of the body," I replied, "but it is a sure indication of disease in the blood which circulates through the whole system. These dark spots are not mere local maladies, they are centres where the rottenness of our civilisation comes to a head."

"I think you are right there," he answered. "I take a considerable interest in such questions, and should be glad to hear your views somewhat more fully."

"I am afraid I have no definite opinion to offer," I replied. "The hopelessness of the matter appears to me to be just this, that all that philanthropy, or charity, or Christianity can do, does but touch the surface of the evil."

"What then do you suppose to be the root?" he asked.

I smiled and said: "Can you give me a solution of the problem of man's depravity, or the origin of evil?"

“I cannot profess to do that,” he said; “but I think we may see the more immediate cause to be ignorance and selfishness. The majority of the community are simply trying to make the best of this life for themselves individually, regardless of what may be the consequences to their fellows; and this because there is no real knowledge of the interdependence and relation of the individual units to humanity as a whole. Universal Brotherhood is a mere name, not a living principle governing men in their relations one with another.”

“Universal Brotherhood is all very well in theory,” I replied; “but how are you going to make men act up to such a standard? The Christian religion above all others professes to teach this principle, but it is a dead failure so far as the practice is concerned; for is not England the most ‘*Christian*’ country in the world?”

“We must not look at this question merely in relation to one particular religion, nor judge of what humanity may be able to accomplish simply by the history of a few thousand years,” my companion replied. “If the principle of Universal Brotherhood be the right one, or, in other words, if this principle be really and fundamentally the basis of our humanity, the natural law of our existence as humanity, it is bound to be recognised and become the governing principle in the end.”

“What end?” I asked.

My companion smiled, and said: “When humanity shall have accomplished that for which it is

humanity. But do not let us confuse the main question by going too rapidly to ultimates. You see I am labouring somewhat under a disadvantage in not knowing exactly what your view of human nature is, whether you are a scientist or a religionist, and I must find out how far we are agreed as to first principles before I can advance any theory. Suppose I lay it down as a fundamental axiom that the progress of humanity as a whole is governed by the same principles of evolution which we see in operation around us in every department of Nature. Or shall I put it in another way, and say that man in all his aspects stands so related to that great system which we call *Nature*, that you cannot separate any single phase of his existence, or any single part of his being, whether physical, mental, or spiritual, from the operation of natural law."

He paused as if for me to reply.

"Pray continue," I said; "I can readily grant that proposition."

"If then this principle be accepted," he said, "it follows that man's well-being depends upon his knowledge of those laws by which he is conditioned, while his growth or evolution is in the same ratio as his acquirement of this knowledge, whether we look at it from its highest or from its lowest aspect, whether we regard him as a spiritual being or simply as an animal. The history of the race in this respect is the same as that of the individual. Apply your own individual experience to that of humanity as a whole, and you have the nearest

possible solution of the problem you can obtain."

"But it seems to me," I replied, "that it is just because each one applies his own individual experience that we have so many varying solutions of the question."

"Quite so, but that is not exactly what I meant," he answered. "No one can go beyond his own individual experience in those principles upon which he bases his conduct or opinions. But what I intended to convey was this: that the experience of the race is analogous to that of the individual, inasmuch as the race must work out every problem by actual experience, in the same way that we do so individually, finding the best conditions for our well-being by repeated failures. Our life is a continual process of readjustment to meet the ever widening range of our experience, and history shows us the same process in operation in regard to the whole human race."

"Your view would seem to imply that our only hope is the attainment of scientific knowledge," I said.

"Not in the narrow sense in which the term *scientific* is used at present," he replied. "Science deals simply with physical man, and altogether ignores his mental and spiritual principles, or makes of these simply the outcome of brute matter and blind force. Man's evolution and perfection, according to the view I am taking, depends, broadly speaking, upon three factors; physical development,

or the perfection of his material organism and environments; knowledge, or the development of his mental faculties; and wisdom, or the attainment of spiritual discernment. This latter is the most important for two reasons: first, because it is the perfecting of spiritual humanity which is the great effort of Nature in her evolutionary processes, and the final goal of all life; and secondly, because without wisdom, the lower qualities, however perfect, may be used for evil as well as for good, and the attainment of knowledge only make the individual or the race more wicked. But since we have already laid down the principle that man in all his relations comes within the scope of natural law, it follows that an understanding of these relations must be strictly a matter of scientific knowledge, using that term in its widest and fullest sense."

I did not reply immediately, and he continued:

"You will see that in this view *evil* is the natural result of our limited knowledge, for our progress, development, or evolution is strictly experimental, and it is only by repeated failures, resulting in suffering, that we discover what is the right course of action."

"It appears to me that this applies to our individual experience to a very limited extent," I replied. "As individuals our experience seems to be a mere accident of birth."

"Why should you regard the circumstances of your birth as mere accident?" he asked.

I looked at him questioningly. "Pardon me," I said, "I do not quite see what you are driving at."

"In other words," he said, "you have no experience to show you that the circumstances of your birth were anything but the merest chance."

"I certainly do not see how I had any sort of choice in the matter," I replied.

"Perhaps you will one day learn that you had a very distinct choice," he said. "But I will endeavour not to mystify you. May I ask whether you believe in a future life, and if so under what conditions?"

"I do believe in a future life," I replied; "though I have no idea as to what its conditions will be. I think, however, that we must begin in the next world just where we left off here, and that our future life will be progressive."

"Have you anything in the nature of experience or evidence to warrant this belief?" he asked.

"No, I must confess that it is rather an inference, a general deduction from the principle of evolution perhaps, rather than anything else," I said.

"Exactly so," he replied; "in other words, the inference drawn from your experience up to this particular period of your life is, that when you die you will be born into another state, which will be the natural sequence of, and the conditions of which will depend upon, the life you have led here. Should you not similarly deduce from analogy,

that the conditions of your birth here must be the natural sequence of your life in a prior state of existence?"

I was somewhat startled, and said: "The idea of a state of existence prior to birth is quite new to me."

"That may be so," he replied. "Such a possibility has not yet come within the range of your experience, even as a theory; yet the doctrine is as old as the oldest record of humanity."

"I have certainly heard of the doctrine of the transmigration of souls, if it is that to which you refer," I said.

"The doctrine has been taught in many different forms," he replied; "but let us look at the principle apart from any particular form, and see if it will not throw some light on the problem we have been discussing. The principle stated briefly is simply this: that if man possesses an immortal soul, which is the real experiencer or knower, that soul must have had a past experience, as well as having a future one in store, and that just as the future will be the natural sequence of the present, so the present must be the natural sequence of the past. In other words, man is at any given moment the result of all his past experiences."

"But we have no recollection of any experiences prior to this life," I urged.

"That is by no means incompatible with the fact, as you will find when you come to study the matter

scientifically," he replied. "But all I want to put before you now is this, that the inequality in the conditions under which human beings come into existence, and the great diversity of their characteristics, intellectual and moral, is fully explained in the supposition that the real Ego or Soul is immortal and progressive, and subject in all its conditions to natural laws of cause and effect. Where is the justice of the unequal lots which fall by birth to human beings, unless the circumstances of each man's birth are the natural result and sequence of the way in which the man has spent his previous life, his previous opportunities? 'Whatever a man sows that shall he also reap' must be the key to his position at any moment. Moreover, every individual is born with a distinct character, and various predispositions, even if these are not strongly marked in some particular direction in cases of what we call *genius*."

"But is not that merely the result of heredity?" I asked.

"In general it may follow certain broad principles which are termed *heredity*," he replied; "but heredity does not by any means cover all the facts of the case; besides which, *heredity* is merely a term to cover certain phenomena, it is not an explanation of the phenomena. But the explanation is a very simple one on the hypothesis of an already existing entity, seeking to become incarnated or born into this world, for such an entity would naturally be attracted to the parents and general conditions which

corresponded with its own individual character. Thus there is no chance or haphazard in the various circumstances under which we are born ; everything is governed by natural laws of cause and effect operating from the highest spiritual plane down to the lowest physical or material world."

I remained silent, thinking over the matter deeply. A thousand ideas crowded into my mind, some confirming, some contradicting this doctrine, which I had now heard stated so fully and clearly for the first time as a possible key to the problem of life. And yet—was it for the first time? In those few moments of concentrated thought the idea seemed to become perfectly familiar to me, as if it were a well-known fact revived in my memory, a long-forgotten story once more brought back to light. My intuition seemed to grasp it by a rapid process and acknowledge its truth. What a strange sense of familiarity! Where could I have learnt it? I taxed my memory in vain ; nothing that I could remember to have heard or read could account for it.

Does not every one experience at times some such strange flashes of intuition, when a person or a place or some words heard or read for the first time in this life, come to us with a strong sense of familiarity, the cause of which we vainly endeavour to trace? I could not have remained more than a few moments thus lost in the depths of my inner consciousness, but in that short time what cannot the mind accomplish, even as in a dream the events

of a lifetime may pass in a single moment. But when my mind returned again to the surface, it brought back a consciousness of familiarity with the ideas just presented to me which was irresistible. There could be no doubt about it, I was treading on old ground ; all that I had now heard I had heard before, and not merely heard but recognised as truth and fact.

“ Will you kindly tell me where or how this doctrine is taught ? ” I said. “ I am not aware that there is any literature on the subject. ”

“ There is a very extensive literature, ” he replied ; “ but perhaps you would not be likely to come across it unless your attention was particularly directed to works on mysticism. The doctrine, as I said before, is as old as the oldest records of humanity, but the form in which it has been taught has varied in different ages and in diverse religions. I think you will find it set forth most clearly in the religion of Buddha, but you will also find it in both Old and New Testaments if you possess the necessary key to interpret them. ”

“ What is that key ? ” I asked.

“ It is known to very few, ” he replied. “ It was once known to the Church, but they have now utterly lost it, and read the Bible simply in its dead letter form, in spite of the explicit teachings of their great Apostle Paul. Have you ever heard of the Brothers of the Quest ? ”

“ No, ” I replied ; “ what of them ? ”

“ Very much, ” he said, “ if you are a born

Mystic, and much even if you are only a seeker after truth."

• "What do you mean by a born Mystic?" I asked.

"I mean one who in his previous life has acquired such a knowledge of, or tendencies towards, the secret mysteries of Nature, that the natural bent of his mind in this life leads him sooner or later into the right path for the acquirement of a still deeper knowledge," he said.

"But what have the Brothers of the Quest to do with the matter?" I asked.

"They are the custodians of the secret knowledge," he replied; "men who were once Mystics themselves, but are now Initiates and Masters of occult science, and can teach those who are fitted to receive such instructions, mysteries of Nature and of humanity of which science or religion know nothing whatever."

"Pardon me yet another question," I said—for the train was already slowing into the junction where I should have to change, while I had seen by the label on my companion's bag that he was going further—"you have interested me too deeply to permit of my losing the clue you have given me. May I ask you to tell me how I may follow it up?"

"I see you are going to Fairlea," he replied; "how long are you staying there?"

"I hope to be there about a fortnight," I said.

"In that case I shall see you again, for I am going there the day after to-morrow," he said, "and

we can then renew our discussion. I shall stay at the Cliff Hotel, here is my card."

I thanked him, and took the card he handed to me. We shook hands, and I hurried after the porter who had already taken my luggage.

Before slipping the card into my pocket, I glanced at it and read, *Mr. Alfred K. Nirman.*

CHAPTER IV.

GUESSES AT TRUTH.

Behold, we know not anything ;
I can but trust that good shall fall
At last—far off—at last, to all,
And every winter change to spring.

TENNYSON.

FAIRLEA is about an hour's ride from the junction, but so absorbed was I in my thoughts and reflections that I scarcely noticed the time or the scenery through which I was passing. I have a dim recollection that there were two other people in the compartment with me, a lady and a gentleman, but I could not have identified them again had my life depended upon it.

The words and arguments of Nirman had made a deep impression on my mind, and more than that, I had been strongly attracted by the man himself, and strangest of all was the sense of familiarity both with what I had heard and with the man who had told it to me. Here was an apparently chance meeting with a total stranger, who in the course of a brief conversation had presented to my mind a new solution of certain problems which had quite

recently been pressing themselves on my attention with more than ordinary force. He had given me quite a new light, a new clue, and yet the whole thing had now impressed itself so strangely on my mind, that I might have been discussing well-known facts and theories with a confidential friend, rather than new and startling ideas with a perfect stranger.

I could not account for it. I had a feeling as if I had entered a new phase in my life. There was a sense of anticipation, of renewed energy, of the removal of some oppressive shadow. I argued that it was simply a natural exhilaration in anticipation of my holiday, but that explanation was not wholly satisfactory, the cause seemed to lie far deeper.

At the end of my journey, however, I was obliged to rouse myself from my reverie, and quickly transferring myself and my belongings to a conveyance, I directed the driver to proceed to the Cliff Hotel.

The rest of the day was spent in rambling about the cliffs and beach, enjoying to the full the fresh air and glorious sunshine, and the sense of relief and freedom from the responsibilities and drudgery of business. It was to me one of those perfectly happy days which we can so rarely experience, when the discords of life are resolved for a brief space into perfect harmony, and we can touch and realise that deeper soul in Nature which it is the province of the poet, the painter, or the musician to interpret to us in their own symbolic language.

Now that I look back upon that day it appears as the turning-point of my life, when the mysterious

influence which had hitherto remained latent in my consciousness awoke to life and activity, and became the key-note to all my thoughts and actions.

How well I remember the evening of that same day, when I strolled along the cliffs, watching the beautiful after-glow in the sky, a peculiar light which I loved well ; for in my earlier days, before the contact with the busy world had blunted my romance, I used to climb a hill and watch the sunset, and remain long after looking at this same pale glow, gradually fading out of the West.

I loved the light of fading day, and now I walked slowly along until I reached the extremity of the little town, where the road led off across the moor, and here I seated myself. The full moon was rising over the sea, and soon her light began to replace the fading after-glow. It was, indeed, a lovely night, an ideal time for lovers.

Shakespeare's scene in "The Merchant of Venice" came into my mind, where Lorenzo and Jessica vie with each other in describing the events which each imagined to have taken place "in such a night as this."

Lor. The moon shines bright : in such a night as this,
When the sweet wind did gently kiss the trees,
And they did make no noise, in such a night
Troilus methinks mounted the Troyan walls
And sigh'd his soul towards the Grecian tents,
Where Cressid lay that night."

Who is there who has not felt the influence of "such a night as this ?" It stirs our deepest senti-

ments, and makes us realise that there is a larger, fuller, purer life than that which we live in the world from day to day. In such a night as this we exist for a brief space in our ideals, making them realities, building an airy fabric of imaginings, far removed from the hard facts of our everyday life. What can be the secret of this influence, and what are those chords within us which respond to Nature's subtle touch, in such a night as this?

Why, indeed, should we call such emotions ideal? Is it indeed true that they can have no existence, no possibility outside of the grey matter of our brain? Perish the thought! our whole nature revolts against it. Can we truly say that the ideal is non-existent *de facto*, or is it simply the limitations of our faculties which prevent us from grasping it and making it the real? That which we call real is simply that which comes to us through the avenues of our senses, but surely dreams are real enough while we are dreaming them? What then is the ideal, and what the real? When we awake we relegate our dreams to the realm of the ideal; we look upon them as baseless fabrics, empty nothings. Science would make consciousness simply the response of the mind to external stimuli, and the mind a mere function of the brain, talking learnedly about *reflex action* and *unconscious cerebration*. But such materialism can satisfy very few minds, if indeed it can be said to satisfy any. Whatever may be the arguments for or against the materialist's position, logically or scientifically, the majority of

thinking men will not refuse the evidence of that deeper instinct which is implanted in our nature, and which, though it may assume idealistic or religious forms which at times are fantastic enough, is still the witness of latent possibilities in our nature, and represents that motive or effort to realise the ideal which lies at the root of all evolution.

Does not the ideal exist *before* the real, and does not the ideal *become* the real in due time? Look at the ideal of a perfect humanity of which Christ was the witness and prototype; will any dare to assert that that ideal cannot be realised, that it was merely the fortuitous result of a blind force producing a certain arrangement of the grey matter of the brain!

But neither religion nor science as they now exist can help us to solve the problem of consciousness. The one offers us blind faith, the other blind force. Blind guides both. Religion presents a thousand contradictory dogmas; science a thousand antagonistic theories. What shall a man do, save follow his highest ideal, his noblest aspirations? What shall he do, save be true to that light which shines in the innermost sanctuary of his heart? That light will grow and expand as he watches and worships, till one day it may become a radiance which will illuminate the darkest problems of his being.

Let each man be true to his religion, if indeed that be the highest measure of truth which he can compass, nor let him despise those gods before whom others bow, for even the poor fetish worshipper

does well, not knowing any other truth. The form is nothing; the spirit everything. Yet a thousand fanatic sects cry daily, "Lo here! or lo there!" in this form shalt thou worship, in this temple which we have built; all outside are thieves and robbers!" Religion truly makes a few converts, but nowadays makes more agnostics.

And if we turn from religion to science, hoping there to find the solution of the problem, the result is no better, perhaps worse; for when we knock at the portals of the temple of science, we hear naught but an empty hollow mocking sound, as if beyond were an abyss of hopeless void. Where then shall that man turn to whom neither Religion nor Science can give the key which shall open to him the portals of truth, and place him in a sanctuary of peace and certainty, where the storms of life cannot enter, and the vain contentions and evil passions of the world cease to vex his soul? In how many minds to-day, wrung with anguish and doubt, the echo answers only—*Where?*

Something in the nature of these reflections passed through my mind as I sat there in the glorious moonlight. Something of this kind I say, for how can one recount in words the flashes of thought which rise and vanish when the mind is lost in contemplation? A thousand images, similes, facts, arguments, hopes and fears, pass and repass in ever varying forms. Yet, in spite of the purely negative answer which seemed to be all that could be obtained to the deepest questions of the human

mind, I felt neither fear nor despair, but rather hope and exultation. I remembered Goethe's words, in what Carlyle calls "a kind of road-melody or marching-music of mankind":

"The Future hides in it
Gladness and sorrow ;
We press still thorow,
Nought that abides in it
Daunting us,—onward."

"And solemn before us,
Veiled, the dark Portal ;
Goal of all mortal :—
Stars silent rest o'er us,
Graves under us silent !"

"While earnest thou gazest,
Comes boding of terror,
Comes phantasm and error ;
Perplexes the bravest
With doubt and misgiving."

"But heard are the Voices,
Heard are the Sages,
The Worlds and the Ages :
'Choose well ; your choice is
Brief, and yet endless.

"Here eyes do regard you,
In Eternity's stillness ;
Here is all fulness,
Ye brave, to reward you ;
Work, and despair not."

It seemed indeed as if the depths of my soul remained unmoved, as if it were but the surface which could ever be touched by the strife of controversy; and though I could not penetrate to those

depths, nor find the source of my hope and confidence, the consciousness of its existence was there, and the possibility of some day standing in the light of truth seemed hardly to be doubted. It was only that the way that was closed for the present. Could it be that the morning of our hope would only break on the other side the grave; was the entrance indeed only through the gates of death, as so many imagine? Would the truth suddenly burst upon our vision in that mysterious realm beyond the veil? Is it not rather here, now, in this present life that we require the truth? Is it not struggling, sinning, suffering humanity which requires it? What have we to do with our dead; what does it avail to those who are left, to those who will follow, whether they who have gone are blessed or cursed? How can we be any nearer *Truth* after death than before? Every atom bears the impress of the Eternal Verity, and carries the history of the whole Universe, had we but the faculty to discern it. Yea; and though a man flee to the uttermost parts of the Earth, he shall be no nearer and no further from *Truth*; though he live a myriad years, he shall not overtake the Kingdom of God; for that Kingdom is now, here, in his own heart—or nowhere.

What is this Great Quest in which the whole Creation groaneth and travaileth together? Every religion and sect cries with anathema and maranatha "Lo! here is the path, cursed are ye if ye follow it not!" Science cries, "No path at all!" False guides both. There must be a path, a path that

lies outside all partial light, all forms of doctrine ; that lies in *action*, not belief. Does not right stand everlastingly opposed to wrong, as action, not belief ? Belief is individual, isolated, differentiated into a hundred thousand varieties ; it is never exactly the same individually or collectively from one moment to another, but is ever being changed and modified as the result of—experience. Belief is like the broken reflection of yonder moon on the surface of the restless sea—type of unstable human nature. The light is one, the reflections many. Could we but purge our soul of passion and desire, might we not see therein the light of truth eternal, in one pure steady ray ? Is this, then, the path of action ; the strong will to hold in check the lower nature, letting all causes die which make our life a restless storm-tossed sea of helpless passion ? Might not this Earth itself become a paradise, did but each human being follow the golden rule of love, doing unto others as he would that they should do to him ? What hinders ? Why this ceaseless strife of man against his fellow-man, rich against poor, nation against nation, creed against creed ?

Poor, weak, storm-tossed humanity ; surely the way to all happiness is straight before you could you but see it. Has it not been preached and practised by a few of noble life, whom ye indeed have crucified, and still do crucify ? Has not Christian *dogma* supplanted Christian *life*, so that to-day the Christian faith is but a synonym for bigotry and persecution ? Men are taught that they

can be "saved," even at the eleventh hour, simply by a profession of belief; it is so easy to be saved, is the continual cry; what wonder, then, that men delay the process, and practise mammon worship, six and a half days in every seven!

Why does Humanity fail to learn the lesson, fail to grasp the good? Is not the solution of the problem the same for all the world, as for an individual life; is it not experimental? Do not we fail, and fall, and sin again and yet again, in face of all experience? Yet if life has any value at all, it must be an experimental one. Is it then simply a matter of evolution; must we still struggle and fail, until—the lesson well learnt—we shape our course in harmony with Nature's laws, instead of ever breaking them?

But all these guesses at truth, what are they worth, what do they bring save profound sadness? Aye sadness, and in some cases horrible blank despair. But in my case only sadness, not despair. In spite of all the seeming contradictions of life, the central belief in the existence of law and order, of truth and justice in the government of the universe, never left me. But I sighed to think how little hope there appeared of any real solution of the problem, how little there was to guide us save contradictory theories, or traditional beliefs. Yet I could not rid myself of the conviction that somewhere, somehow, there was an open path which would lead out of all uncertainty into perfect knowledge of the truth. Was I

about to find this path? Did Nirman indeed possess a clue, or was that which he had to tell me only like so many other theories, based on mere inference?

I could well believe what he had told me of a prior existence, it seemed only reasonable once the existence of an immortal soul be granted; but there was no more satisfaction in that belief than in the idea that I should live hereafter, unless I could know something of the conditions, unless some solution of the why and wherefore accompanied that knowledge.

Thus I meditated in the old, old problem, which every man must face sooner or later; must face and answer ere he can step into those lofty realms of thought where dwell the great ones of the earth. Thus I sat, while the moonlight danced upon the water, and the hush of night was over sea and land; and the stars looked down upon the sleeping earth, and beyond the stars the depths of space eternal echoed back the problem of the infinite.

CHAPTER V.

THE STANTONS.

Horatio. O day and night, but this is wondrous strange !

Hamlet. And therefore as a stranger give it welcome.

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.—*Hamlet.*

I HAD been looking forward to my visit to Fairlea for more reasons than one. It will often happen that our ultimate motive for any particular action is one which we do not altogether acknowledge even to ourselves, unless indeed we make a constant practice of rigorous self-examination. In the present case my real motive, had I confessed it, would have been found in my desire to meet again with Ethel Stanton, who indeed I had seen but seldom within the last three years, but whose image I found continually within my mind. Thus in going to Fairlea to meet her—for I had heard that the Stantons were spending the summer there—I was deliberately courting my fate, for I knew that if we were again thrown together, the fire which had been so long smouldering would burst into flame, and make me the most happy or the most wretched of beings.

I could now reasonably ask Ethel to be my wife, if I found my love returned ; but would that be the case? I had seen so little of the family of late that I did not even know whether Ethel might not be already engaged, and I had never appeared in any way in the character of a likely suitor.

It was indeed only because I found my mind so constantly recurring to her, as the one woman I had ever seen for whom it would be possible for me to entertain a strong and lasting affection, that I resolved to tempt my fate on this occasion.

I had known the Stantons more or less intimately for about six years. Mrs. Stanton was now a widow, her husband having died two years ago, leaving her, however, in very comfortable circumstances. The only children were the two daughters, Harriet the elder, and Ethel some two years younger.

At one time I had been a constant visitor at their house in Holland Park, where they dispensed a hospitality which was much valued by those who were privileged to enjoy it. Mr. Stanton was a literary and scientific man, well known to a large circle in London, but he never strove after position or effect, neither did Mrs. Stanton or her daughters make any effort to compete in that empty show of fashionable life, so-called *society*, which is the highest object and ambition of so many.

Mr. Stanton was devoted to science and literature, and fond of the society of young people ; and thus it came about that he attracted to himself a circle of the younger generation, many of whom would

probably make their mark in the world later on. The Stantons kept open house for those who enjoyed their friendship and confidence, and almost every evening was a social one, devoted to science, literature, or art. Every member of the family contributed to the genuine feeling of kindness and sympathy, combined with refinement and culture which was the characteristic of the home circle.

The two girls were well educated, and able to hold their own in any subject that might be brought forward. Any new discovery in science, or work of literary merit was quickly taken up by them, and would form the subject of discussion, and often of experiment also at their evening "at homes." At one time they had been greatly interested in so-called *occult* phenomena, and I had myself taken part at their house in many experiments in mesmerism, clairvoyance, and some of the spiritualistic phenomena which at that time were attracting much attention. We did indeed satisfy ourselves as to the genuineness of many of the phenomena, for our experiments were always made among our own circle, and we never employed a professional exponent; but we were very far from coming to any conclusion as to the true explanation of them, and many an evening had been spent in discussing various theories, without, however, any definite result. I believe, however, that we were generally unanimous in rejecting the current doctrine as to the agency of the spirits of departed friends. Some

of our experiences indeed had been startling enough, and appeared to give a great air of credibility to such a theory, but on philosophical and moral grounds we had been unable to give it credence, while the general result of our investigations seemed to point to natural powers which could be developed and controlled by living persons, which would account for most if not all of the phenomena.

These interesting experiments however, so far as I was concerned, had been cut short by my departure from town on professional work some three years ago, and during that interval Mr. Stanton had died. His loss was a sad blow to his family, and was deeply regretted by many, who, like myself, had been intimate with him.

Mrs. Stanton, as a widow lady with two marriageable daughters on hand, was very far from being one of those designing mothers whose first aim in life is to make a *good match* for the girls, from a worldly point of view. The charm of their society consisted greatly in a total absence of worldliness or striving after effect, combined with freedom from conventionality, and perfect sincerity in all they did or said. There was, indeed, no temptation to make what is called a good match for either of them, for they were provided for by their own settlements; yet in the social marriage-market daughters are bought and sold for other things besides money. It had come to my knowledge indeed that Harriet had already refused an offer which many girls would have eagerly accepted, and I felt sure that Ethel

also would never be tempted to marry, save where her judgment and her heart alike concurred.

The two sisters were in many respects of very different dispositions. Harriet was thoughtful and meditative, while Ethel was bright and vivacious, clever and talented, but not so persevering or methodical as her sister. Harriet was somewhat tall and dark, a very near approach to her mother, whom she greatly resembled in character as well as appearance. She was good-looking rather than handsome, but gave me the impression of a strong character, capable of doing great things as a matter of duty and with great perseverance. Ethel, on the other hand, was decidedly handsome; not so tall as her sister, and with a slight though graceful figure, she was the embodiment of life and spirits. Her vivacity showed itself plainly in her bright and merry eyes, and a mouth which was a perpetual smile.

Harriet had literary tastes, and considerable talent; she had written a good many short stories and some poetry, and contributed more than one article on social and historical subjects to some of the magazines; indeed, her friends looked upon her as likely to become a popular authoress in the near future. Ethel, on the other hand, was not plodding or persevering enough to win her laurels by steadily working at small things as a prelude to greater efforts. Hers was more the mercurial temperament of a child of nature and an artist; and in this direction she had not merely talent, but

real genius. She was equally facile in sketching with pen, pencil, or brush, while she excelled also in music, and could improvise with great taste and skill. She was by no means behindhand, however, in literary or controversial subjects, but she seemed to grasp these rather by a rapid intuitional process, than by close application or study.

Ethel had, moreover, some peculiar psychic and clairvoyant faculties which had been repeatedly tested in the course of the experiments I have mentioned. On many occasions I had seen her *psychometrise* very accurately various letters which had been brought to her, and of the writers of which she could have no knowledge whatever. She would describe the personal appearance of the writer, and even the room in which the letter was written. Under the mesmeric influence of Mr. Stanton, who possessed considerable skill in this direction, she would pass rapidly into the somnambulic and clairvoyant state, and by a series of tests arranged with some friends in Edinburgh it had been proved beyond doubt that, while in that state, she could see just as easily what was going on in their house, four hundred miles away, as she could what was being done in the room in which she was seated.

These mesmeric experiments however had been discontinued in an abrupt and startling manner, showing that there are dangers connected with this class of investigation which may baffle even the most careful and practised operator. The

incident which led Mr. Stanton to discontinue the experiments was as follows :

Ethel had been mesmerised one evening in' the presence of a few friends, myself included, and as was usually the case she passed quickly into the clairvoyant state. She was then handed a sealed envelope, the contents of which were not known to any one in the room, and she was asked to find the person to whom the article contained in the envelope had belonged. This was an experiment which had often been made before, with articles belonging to various people who lived at a distance, and Ethel had seldom failed to find the person with whose peculiar magnetic influence the article was imbued, and to describe where they were or what they were doing ; particulars which had afterwards been verified. On this occasion Ethel behaved strangely from the very commencement of the experiment. Usually she would reply quickly and readily to the questions put to her by her father, but now it was some time before she spoke at all, and she gave no answer to his repeated inquiry as to what she saw.

At length in reply to a more urgent question, "Where are you?" she said.

"In Egypt," but the answer was given hesitatingly, and as if with reluctance.

"What do you see?" was the next question, but Ethel made no answer.

"What do you see?" Mr. Stanton repeated, in a more authoritative tone.

"I see a low building among a lot of ruins; there is a small door, and no windows; a man is standing at the door, with his gaze fixed on me"— Here she paused.

"Describe the man," said Mr. Stanton, but Ethel was silent.

"Describe the man," he repeated more commandingly.

"He is dressed in a long brown robe, and wears a red turban; he has a long beard, and dark piercing eyes. I do not like him, but his will is strong—he is drawing me towards him—I must go to him—his will is stronger than yours."

I saw a momentary look of deep anxiety pass over the face of Mr. Stanton, but he was too experienced a mesmeriser to give way to alarm. It had been evident from the commencement that Ethel was not under complete control, and now she seemed to be slipping away altogether, under the influence of the unknown power in the person of the Egyptian.

Mr. Stanton, though evidently deeply alarmed, did not lose his self-control.

"His will cannot be stronger than mine," he said, "and I forbid you to go to him. Do you hear?"

"Yes," said Ethel, very hesitatingly.

"Now you will come back," said Mr. Stanton, removing the envelope from her grasp, and concentrating all his will to give effect to his words.

"I will you to come back," he continued, making

reverse mesmeric passes in order to awaken her. In this he was ultimately successful, though only by great exertion, whereas usually no effort whatever was required.

"Thank Heaven!" he exclaimed, when Ethel once more opened her eyes.

"What is the matter?" she asked, putting her hand to her head. "I have such a headache."

"I have had great difficulty in bringing you back," said Mr. Stanton, who was himself much exhausted. "Do you remember anything?"

"Nothing whatever," she replied. "Where have I been?"

"In Egypt," said her father; "but thank Heaven, my child, you are safe back again. I will never mesmerise you again, for there are dangers which I do not understand, and I will not run any further risks. But what is in the envelope?" he said, turning to the gentleman who had brought it.

"I do not know," that gentleman replied. "It was given to me by a friend who is, I believe, a stranger to every one here. I had been discussing the subject of mesmeric clairvoyance with him, and he was very sceptical. Ultimately he asked me to experiment with a packet he would give me. I have his permission to open the envelope after the experiment is over, so let us see at once what is in it."

The package was immediately opened, and in it was found a small splinter or chip of painted wood,

wrapped up in a piece of paper, on which was written, "Portion of an Egyptian Mummy Case."

An exclamation of surprise was uttered by most of those present.

"There is some mystery here which we must try to solve," said Mr. Stanton. "I am convinced that the Egyptian Ethel saw is a real person, and that he did actually try to obtain control over her. Do you know anything about the history of your friend's Mummy Case?"

"Very little," the gentleman replied, "except that it has brought him nothing but bad luck, or, at all events, he considers that he has had nothing but misfortune since he took it into the house. It was given to him by a brother, who brought it from Egypt himself, and so convinced was he that there was some bad influence about it that he sent it to a repository a short time ago, as he would not keep it in the house any longer. I would not like to pronounce an opinion as to its influence; it may have been a mere coincidence that his luck has changed since he sent it away, and he has won a law-suit which had been dragging on for years, while, on the other hand, the unfortunate man who superintended the removal died a fortnight after."

"That is certainly very singular," said Mr. Stanton; "but do you not know anything of the circumstances under which the case was found and brought to this country?"

"I do not," he replied, "but I do not think it has been here more than two years."

We discussed the question from many points of view, but could not arrive at a satisfactory solution.

“It is a new fact to me,” said Mr. Stanton, “that a subject under mesmeric control can be influenced by a third person altogether unknown, and at a great distance. I will not run any more risks until I know something more about the matter.”

Thus the mesmeric experiments were discontinued, and were not renewed up to the time of Mr. Stanton’s death.

Had we known anything about the Brothers of the Shadow we should have had less difficulty in accounting for what took place that evening.

I had not seen the Stantons at all since Mr. Stanton died, but I had no doubt that I should receive a cordial welcome from them whenever I chose to call. On the first day of my arrival at Fairlea, however, I felt more inclined to spend the time in my own company, and it was not until eleven o’clock the following day that I set out to pay my intended visit.

CHAPTER VI.

DOLPHINTON.

When we, O Mejnour, in the far time, were ourselves the Neophytes and Aspirants, . . . we commenced research where modern conjecture closes its faithless wings. And with us, those were the common elements of science which the sages of to-day disdain as wild chimeras, or despair of as unfathomable mysteries.—*Zanoni*.

I SOON discovered the Stantons' address in the visitors' list; it was *Dolphinton Villa, Leabury Road*.

Leabury Road is the main road leading out of the town in a southerly direction, and follows for some miles the general outline of the coast. The country here is for the most part moorland, and the little town of Fairlea ends in a number of scattered villa residences. *Dolphinton* I found was one of the latter, a charming old-fashioned place facing the water, with a garden in front entered from the main road.

I paused for a moment before opening the gate, to admire the situation: the blue sea in front, dancing in the sunlight; away to the right the line of dark rugged cliffs, suggesting caves and pools and cool retreats on the sandy beach; inland the undulating moor, with heather and gorse, and sweet-

smelling peaty turf ; while in front of the house the garden was bright with old-fashioned flowers, roses and honeysuckle, mignonette, stocks, nasturtiums, pansies, and fuchsias, giving both colour and scent ; and everywhere the hum of bees and insects, living their brief life in the paradise of nature, dancing in the sunshine and glory of a perfect summer day. Would, indeed, that all our days and all our lives could be bright with such sunshine.

But I turned at last and entered the garden, and knocking at the front door I sent in my card, and was quickly shown into a prettily furnished morning-room, where I found the two girls, the one apparently engaged in writing, and the other in reading a novel.

They both received me with evident pleasure, and we had hardly shaken hands when Mrs. Stanton entered, and in her pleasant hospitable manner bade me welcome. Mutual inquiries followed as to what each had been doing since we last met, and I was taken to task for deserting them for such a long time.

I found that they were spending the greater part of the summer at Fairlea, and would remain about six weeks longer.

"I am only down here for a fortnight," I said ; "while, to tell you the truth, I was very much envying you just now for being able to idle away the summer days in this delightful spot."

"Oh ! we shall not allow you to call us idle," Ethel exclaimed ; "look at that pile of MSS.

Harriet has been scribbling for a three-volume novel, and as for me—well, if you will promise not to be too critical, perhaps I may let you have a peep at some of my sketches presently.”

“ I shall be delighted,” I replied ; “ but I do not know that I shall absolve you from the charge of idleness all the same, for I suppose you just make your sketches when and how you like, and it would be the perfection of idleness for me to spend my time here, following my own inclinations in an artistic way, whereas I am compelled by fate to slave from morning to night, in the dirty stifling atmosphere of a manufacturing town, where everything is iron and steel ; hard, relentless, practical materialism crushing all the soul and poetry out of one’s nature.”

“ Poor fellow,” said Ethel, pretending to be serious ; “ what a dreadful Karma you must have.”

“ Karma, what is that ?” I asked.

“ Oh ! don’t you know ?” she said. “ It is Fate, or Nemesis, only it’s not exactly either of these. Here is a novel I am just reading called ‘ Karma,’ a most delightful muddle of a book.”

“ Indeed,” I said, laughing ; “ I wonder whether the author would take that as a compliment or otherwise. But pray tell me what is the subtle distinction between Karma and Fate, or Nemesis.”

“ Oh, you must study a lot of philosophy and Esoteric Buddhism, before you can understand that,” Ethel replied “ But if the subject is new

to you we shall have to set about converting you in a systematic manner."

"I do not think you will get me to spend my holiday in studying philosophy," I said. "I have never heard of Esoteric Buddhism, and therefore the subject is quite new to me, and I must certainly protest against spending my holiday in puzzling over metaphysics. If however you try to convert me by the force of your eloquence, I will at all events promise to be a patient listener."

"We shall certainly try and convert you," said Ethel, "and I shall be much surprised if we do not succeed, with Alfred's aid."

"Who is Alfred?" I asked.

"Oh, do you not know?" Ethel said, glancing with a smile at her sister.

"Pray enlighten me as to the mystery," I said, detecting some hidden meaning in her look.

"Well, as it is no secret, I suppose I may as well tell you at once," Ethel answered. "Mr. Alfred Nirman is"——

"Alfred Nirman," I exclaimed, "how singular; but I beg your pardon, Mr. Alfred Nirman is—what?"

"Is Harriet's *fiancé*," Ethel replied. "Do you know him?"

"Yes, but our acquaintanceship only dates from yesterday. Permit me to congratulate you," I said, turning to Harriet, "I was not aware that you were engaged. I am much interested in Mr. Nirman, and am looking forward to seeing him again.

We travelled together yesterday as far as the junction, and entered into a conversation, in the course of which he put several matters into quite a new light for me; and now I think of it, it must be this same philosophy you were speaking about, to which he was referring."

"Most likely, and I am glad he has already succeeded in interesting you so much," said Harriet.

"It's capital," cried Ethel; "now, Mr. Siltou, I am sure we shall make a convert of you, and you will study philosophy in spite of your protest."

"Well, I must confess that I am anxious to hear something more of the subject," I replied. "Mr. Nirman said that he was coming here to-morrow, and it is certainly a delightful surprise to find that he is so closely related to you. May I ask you to tell me something about his history, for he seemed to me to be a man who had gone through a good deal of experience."

"You are quite right," Harriet replied. "His family were old friends of ours, though we have not seen much of them for a long time, as they lived in Scotland. Alfred was the eldest of the family. His father died many years ago, and since the death of his mother he has been abroad a great deal, in fact, nearly all over the world."

"He used to tell us that he was looking for the Philosopher's Stone and the Elixir of Life," said Ethel. "At that time we did not understand what he meant, but since he has taught us some of the

things he found out in India we know what it was he was looking for."

"This is very interesting," I said. "Has he then succeeded in finding these much desired objects of search?"

"In one sense he has," Harriet replied, "but in another sense he is still following the Great Quest, as indeed we all are, though we may not all be doing so consciously."

"Of course that all depends upon what you mean by the Great Quest," I said; "but I have certainly hitherto regarded the Philosopher's Stone and the Elixir of Life as altogether mythical and imaginative objects. Do you mean to tell me seriously that such things really exist?"

"Yes, I do," Harriet replied; "but not in their commonly accepted meaning. When you understand what those terms meant to the alchemists who used them, it becomes quite another matter. Alchemy was simply a veil of chemical symbolism used to disguise some of the deepest secrets of Nature. The real alchemist needs no chemicals or crucibles; but alchemy shared the fate of all other symbolisms, the key was lost, or rather it was known only to a few Initiates, and that which was intended merely as a symbol came to be regarded as a reality. There are men even to-day who are seeking in chemical operations for what they suppose to have been the secret of the alchemists."

"I have heard of such," I replied, "and looked upon them as harmless dreamers; but still we owe

much of our present knowledge of chemistry to the labours of such men."

"Very likely," Harriet said. "Men can hardly work and experiment in any direction without obtaining some results, even though their search be due to a mistaken idea."

"But I do not understand about these secrets which you say were hidden under this chemical symbolism," I said. "What is the nature of these secrets, and why indeed should they be kept secret at all?"

"The nature of the secret is simply the nature of man himself, and his relation to the universe around him," Harriet replied; "but a knowledge of these relations are only secret to those whose mental and moral calibre is such that they are not yet prepared to learn them."

"And who is the judge of any man's fitness?" I asked.

"No one but the man himself," she answered. "If a man does not believe in spiritual things, or in any laws governing his existence and relation to the unseen universe, he will make no efforts in that direction, but in proportion to his efforts so will be his success. 'He that seeketh shall find, and to him that knocketh shall be opened,' was said by one of the greatest spiritual teachers the world has ever known."

"Then by spiritual things you mean simply those ideals with which religion deals," I said.

"That is exactly what I do not mean," she

replied. "Religion has a thousand different ideals, but the actual fact must be ever the same. I used the term *spiritual* in its broad sense to express the invisible or subjective side of Nature, but the spiritual world *per se*, as the subjective extension of the visible world of our physical senses, has no more relation to the innumerable religious ideas which men have formed concerning it, than that which we call the *natural* world of cause and effect has to the ever varying theories of our scientific men. There can be no line of demarcation such as religion draws between the *natural* and the *spiritual*. The one is the objective, and the other the subjective side of that which is a *unity*. That which is visible is so simply in relation to our physical faculties, and what we call natural laws, are as truly *spiritual* as they are *natural*."

"I am quite willing to grant that," I said; "but the great question with regard to the spiritual world is as to the existence therein of conscious intelligences, and of our own individual relation thereto in our present life, and when we die."

"Quite so," Harriet replied; "but do you not see that you can be no nearer the spiritual world when you die than you are at the present moment, and that the question of entering that world in consciousness is simply a matter of the development of the necessary faculties to cognise that which is now invisible, while this, according to all analogy, is that process of development or extension of consciousness which we term evolution? What is vaguely termed

the *spiritual world* is simply the invisible side of the visible universe, and that invisible or subjective side is not a locality, but a state. Every atom of matter has its spiritual as well as its objective side; nay, what is the atom of matter itself in its ultimate essence but *spirit*? Spirit and matter are simply the two poles or aspects of one and the same thing."

"What you say agrees very closely with my own conclusions," I answered; "but still I do not see how that enlightens us as to the question of our post-mortem condition or consciousness."

"The question of post-mortem consciousness is just one of those very secrets we were talking about," she said. "What we shall be hereafter cannot be understood by anything short of a knowledge of man in all his relations, spiritual as well as material. All that religion imagines or teaches about a post-mortem state has nothing whatever to do with the actual fact, for no two religions teach the same in this or in any other matter."

"You will find it difficult to teach the Christian that his idea of heaven is not correct," I replied.

"Nor would I endeavour to do so," she said. "You can only teach the man who is in search of truth, and who is able to put aside all preconceived ideas; you cannot teach a man who has cut and dried theories which he regards with superstitious awe as infallible truth."

"Then I understand from what you say that there is a possibility of learning the secret of our

spiritual nature, not as a matter of theory or belief, but as an experimental science," I said.

"That is just it," Harriet replied; "and it is such knowledge as that which is concealed under the symbology of the alchemists."

"But why keep it secret?" I asked; "why not teach humanity the laws of their spiritual nature, and put an end to ignorance and superstition?"

"You cannot teach the higher until men have understood the lower," she replied. "Moreover, knowledge is power, and if mankind in their present undeveloped state were put in possession of the higher secrets of Nature, they would use them as they do gunpowder and dynamite, in order the better to destroy one another. Men must first learn to practise the laws of morality and universal brotherhood. If the world has understood so little of the sublime teachings of Christ after two thousand years, that we have the Church openly teaching that it is impossible to practise the principles laid down in the Sermon on the Mount, do you think that men are fit to be taught secrets of Nature which would put into their hands forces, compared with which our modern scientific achievements are but child's play?"

"There is doubtless something in what you say," I replied, "if such knowledge does indeed exist. But still I do not see why men should not be taught the real truth with regard to their spiritual nature, as opposed to the conflicting theories of religion and science."

“Men have been taught the real truth in all ages,” Harriet replied, “but they have invariably degraded the truth to their own level of selfishness, even as the teachings of Christ are degraded to-day. All the various religious ideas that exist to-day, or that have or will exist, are but individual and partial expressions of the one central truth which man is ever striving to reach, but which as yet is far off and visionary, simply by reason of his undeveloped and imperfect nature, though he lives and moves and has his being in it. Do you not see that the term *truth*, like the term *spirit*, is only relative to our perceptive powers, and expresses rather our limitations than our attainments? All such relative distinctions must vanish in the attainment of perfect knowledge; there can be neither truth nor error, spirit nor matter in the absolute.”

“Doubtless not, as a metaphysical abstraction,” I said. “But religion makes a great point of being able to touch man’s spiritual nature, and effect his regeneration and salvation altogether apart from mere intellectual knowledge; it claims that the most ignorant and simple can lay hold of its fundamental doctrines, and find true life therein. No doubt there are many objections to this from the standpoint of philosophy, but it has always seemed to me a very strong position in the influence which it exercises, and I should like to know how you reconcile the fact of man’s inability to understand his nature by the exercise of his intellect or reason, with the apparent necessity of his

doing so before he can step out of the circle of illusions in which he lives."

"If one lifetime were all that a man had at his disposal for the finding of truth," Harriet replied, "and this one lifetime were to be followed by an eternity of bliss or woe, then, indeed, it would be necessary that salvation should depend upon something altogether different from real knowledge. But once you have rejected this idea, as, indeed, many of the leading men in the Church itself have now done, you are compelled to make man's future life a progressive one, and what can that progress be save a continuation of the experimental education by which our present powers have been developed? No doubt the Christian religion does exercise a great influence over the ignorant and simple for the reason you have stated, but all that is proved by that is, that it is in a certain way fitted for their apprehension at the present stage of their evolution. It is no proof of the absolute truth of any religion that it appeals to a considerable section of humanity; it is still only true relatively to that section, and may be quite false to the experience of another section. In this question we cannot separate any one portion of humanity and take their evidence alone, and the great fallacy which religionists are constantly falling into, is in isolating their own experiences and claiming for them some special kind of value as evidence. Our apprehension of truth is necessarily an intellectual one so far as it is related to our capacity for expressing it in language, and reasoning

upon it. The religionist who denies the necessity of knowledge or intellectual apprehension of the doctrines he professes to believe, is right so far as he himself is concerned, for he has not yet reached the point where knowledge becomes a necessity for farther progress. Such progress, however, is obtained by the experience gained in a great number and succession of lives or incarnations, the Ego, or real man, coming back again and again to this earth, to continue his education where he left it off, and also to reap the reward or punishment for the good or evil deeds done in his past incarnation. Karma waits for the reappearance of the man, and his lot in his present life is just that which he has himself made by his past actions."

"That is exactly what Nirman explained to me," I said. "The theory appeals very strongly to my reason, and I suppose you hold that it is possible to demonstrate it as an actual fact."

"Certainly the truth of reincarnation can be proved to be an actual fact by those who will follow the necessary course of training, for the memory of past incarnations may be recovered under certain conditions," Harriet replied.

"And what are the necessary conditions?" I asked.

"You must talk with Alfred about that," she said. "He can tell you far more than I can."

"I do believe you are a born Mystic, Mr. Silton," said Ethel, laughing. "Please let me look at your hand."

"My hand!" I exclaimed, extending it to her.

“Are you going to make me believe in palmistry also?”

“Oh yes, and astrology, and necromancy, and ghosts, and all sorts of queer creepy things,” she replied, laughing. “But look here, you are certainly a most thorough-going Mystic; look at the line of Heart running up into Jupiter, and the line of Head into the Moon, and these crossings on Mercury; oh yes, we shall have no difficulty in making a convert of you.”

We all laughed, and then Harriet proposed that we should adjourn our discussion, and go out for a ramble, to which we all assented, and were soon clambering down the cliffs and over the rocks, seeking for treasures in the pools, and enjoying ourselves as happy mortals should, when once they can leave behind both care and philosophy.

CHAPTER VII.

A HIDDEN KEY.

The curtains of Yesterday drop down, the curtains of To-morrow roll up ; but Yesterday and To-morrow both *are*. Pierce through the Time-element, glance into the Eternal. Believe what thou findest written in the sanctuaries of Man's Soul, even as all Thinkers, in all ages, have devoutly read it there : that Time and Space are not God, but creations of God ; that with God as it is a universal *HERE*, so it is an everlasting *NOW*.—

CARLYLE.

I READILY accepted Mrs. Stanton's invitation to dine with them that evening, and after dinner we sat outside in the front garden, and sipped our coffee. We were all in good spirits, Ethel bright and merry, and ready as ever with a quick repartee or a quaint remark ; Harriet quiet and serious, but smiling at her sister's impetuosity ; and Mrs. Stanton also listening rather than talking, for it was always Ethel who did most of the latter when the conversation was general.

Gradually, however, as the twilight deepened, our thoughts and remarks turned upon more serious subjects. We discussed some recent books on social

science, and some new novels turning upon magic and mystery.

“The number of novels bearing upon occult phenomena is quite a sign of the times,” Harriet said. “Some of them are absurdly fantastic, and professedly sensational, while others have a much higher aim, and are based upon actual facts and phenomena which as yet only a few have studied and verified. They all go to show, however, that in spite of the materialism of the age, and the denials of science, the so-called supernatural world cannot be banished, and that there is a possibility in much which has hitherto been regarded as miracle and myth.”

“That is probably the case,” I replied. “Even science is beginning to investigate phenomena which a few years ago were regarded as fit subjects for ridicule. But I must confess that I do not see where all this is leading us to, or what is to be the religion or philosophy of the future, based upon our extended knowledge; or, indeed, whether there is to be any religion or philosophy at all. It seems to me rather that science and criticism are destroying the old order of beliefs, the very root and basis of dogmatic theology and authoritative religion, without having anything to offer in place of it. How do these occult phenomena bring us any nearer the solution of the great problem? All that will be accomplished when they are fully recognised by scientific investigators will be to bring them within the category of natural laws, and to push a little

further back the line of demarcation between the natural and the supernatural."

"I think it will do something more than that," Harriet replied. "I think it will break down altogether the distinction between the natural and the supernatural."

"And is not that just the position which the materialists are trying to claim to-day?" I said. "When that distinction is abolished, what is to be the creed of the future?"

"Not materialism certainly," Harriet answered; "for that gives us only dead matter and blind force; of necessity also it cannot be anything approaching our present theology, for that is based essentially on the supernatural; I should rather reply that it will be once more what it was before the key to man's spiritual and divine nature was lost, and the sacred mysteries materialised into their present form."

"I do not quite understand you; pray explain," I said.

"I refer to a fact which as yet is only known or suspected by a very few," she replied; "and that is, that however much we may boast of our modern achievements and civilisation, we are only recovering lost ground, and that at one period of the world's history the race was far in advance of what it is now. We have lost the records of our greatness in prehistoric times, yet not altogether lost them, for they may still be read if the proper key be used to interpret the ancient legends and allegories. Let

us take the Bible, for instance, as the ancient record round which pre-eminently the controversy between science and religion has raged from the very commencement of our present era. We have broadly two problems in reference to this book—firstly, how did it come into existence, and, secondly, what does it mean? Of course, I am leaving out of the question now the orthodox solution of the problem which attributes to the book a supernatural origin and literal historical validity. I am supposing that you have accepted the proposition that the Bible must be treated as we would treat any other book whose credentials and authority we are examining, that we must bring to bear upon it our reason and our knowledge, scientific, literary, and historical. Well, what has been the result of doing this up to the present time? It has simply landed men in Agnosticism, Atheism, and Materialism, but it has not solved the problem. Stated broadly, the result of modern criticism has been simply to attest that the Bible is eminently untrustworthy as matter of history, that it is childish and false as matter of science, and that it is superstitious and unreasonable as matter of religion. In fact, to sum up the position, modern criticism has been directed towards the breaking down of the orthodox theory, rather than towards the formation of an independent one; it has been destructive, not constructive, and men for the most part have been content with this. Having decided that the orthodox theory is untenable, they come to regard the Bible as simply

representing the crude ideas of men who lived in an age when science was unknown, and when phenomena which are now recognised as taking place in accordance with an ordered sequence of natural law, were regarded as direct manifestations of a personal deity. This being the case, they put the book on one side, together with their belief in religious dogmas, and turn their attention to other matters, becoming quite indifferent to controversies which perhaps at one time—when they were struggling with doubt in the effort to free themselves from orthodoxy and supernaturalism—were of the most vital importance to them. Have I not sketched pretty accurately what has gone on in your own mind, and the position you at present occupy ?”

“ You have really made a very near approach to it,” I replied. “ I am certainly no longer interested in matters of religious controversy, over which at one time I had a very hard struggle ; and I suppose I have virtually, as you say, put the Bible on the shelf, for what use can it be when once you have rejected its veracity or authority ?”

“ That is just the point to which I am coming,” Harriet said. “ Your state of mind is representative of thousands who have gone through the same process, and who are now therefore prepared for a further step. But that step must be constructive ; you have finished the destructive work, you have fought your way out of orthodoxy and custom,

out of dogma and religious emotionalism. You may indeed have sunk into pessimism and utter negation, as so many do, though even for these there is more in store than for the man who dare not cut himself adrift from the old formulas; but it is more likely that you are simply holding your forces in reserve, that you have not lost faith in human nature and human aspirations, but are simply waiting for the next step, for a new light, though you know not in what direction to look for it. Out of the chaotic mass of conflicting opinions through which you have fought your way, you have shaped for yourself certain first principles, though as yet you may not have formulated them, but which nevertheless determine your mental attitude at the present moment, and which you will bring to bear later on for the purpose of reconstructing your practical religious philosophy. One of these principles is that which I have already stated in reference to the distinction between the natural and the supernatural. You do not believe that there can be such a thing as supernatural agency at all. If any person at any period of the world's history is credited with certain acts, commonly called miraculous, and can be proved beyond dispute to have really performed these acts, you hold that he did so simply by reason of a knowledge of natural law or forces not yet understood, but still capable of being discovered and exercised in the same way that science deals with other phenomena and natural laws. You must

check me if I state anything with which you do not agree."

"You are perfectly right so far," I said; "pray continue."

"Very well, how do you apply this principle to the Bible? You have probably come to the conclusion that the so-called miracles, both of Old and New Testaments, are not historically true. You reject the idea that the age of miracles is past, because you do not believe that it ever existed, or that in any age the laws of Nature could be played fast and loose with, any more than they can now. What you do believe is, that in an age of ignorance and credulity, men believed in the supernatural interference of their gods, or of God, with the course of Nature, and the history of the world; and that they have recorded their beliefs in a great many books such as the Bible, which are crammed from beginning to end with supernatural incidents. Under this view, and without any further light, it is only natural for you to put aside the Bible, together with the whole system of theology which is based upon it. But there is another alternative, another hypothesis which is gradually forcing itself upon the minds of thinkers and scholars, as the result of researches among ancient monuments, inscriptions, and hieroglyphics, and more particularly by the study of Sanscrit literature. Very gradually this new light has been breaking, as in all revivals; many men adding a stone here and a stone there to the new

edifice, without knowing what it was they were helping to build; while a few of larger intuition and more comprehensive sight, have foreseen more or less clearly what was behind all this uprooting of old ideas, and in front of the gradually accumulating stores of knowledge. And now it stands fully revealed to all who care to search out the truth, to those who are the pioneers of that larger knowledge which shall take possession of men's minds, and dominate the coming cycle of human thought and progress. The old conceptions of the antiquity of man have been utterly swept away, and the race is credited with millions of years, where previously a few thousands were tardily conceded. Side by side with this we have the evidences of prehistoric civilisations, wherein art, science, and religion were far in advance of our modern achievements. But far more important than all this is the fact which is now gradually dawning upon the minds of thinkers and writers, that there has always existed in the world, from the very remotest ages of which we have any record, and even far back into prehistoric times, a degree of knowledge and human attainment which, by ordinary mortals, would be regarded as altogether transcendental and divine; and that this knowledge may be obtained under certain conditions of initiation, by all who strive after it with fixed and unalterable will to achieve the highest perfection of their nature; nay more, that this knowledge has now, and has ever had, its

living representatives, who hold it in trust for the race; watching the course of human evolution, unknown and in silence, yet ever ready to help the individual who, seeing the light, and learning the divine secret of his birthright, steps out in front of his fellows with firm resolve and will to follow the Great Quest. And when the race, like the individual, shall have reached that maturity when they may lay claim to it, it shall stand fully revealed; for the man of clay will then be face to face with the divine man, that *Christos* which is his own higher self, dwelling truly in every man, though he knows it not—the Church teaching something wholly different with regard to this same Christ—but even as taught by the Apostle Paul, himself an Initiate: “When Christ who is our life shall be manifested, then shall ye also with him be manifested in glory.” Those who hold this divine knowledge in trust have been known in all ages under various names: Initiates, Sages, Philosophers, Adepts, Rishis, Buddhas, Messiahs. They came to the world, but the world received them not. They endeavoured to teach the world some measure of the truth, to lead mankind up the heights of that sacred knowledge they had themselves attained; but the world persecuted them and put them to death. Yet their teaching was not altogether lost, never utterly in vain. Some few there have always been who could lay hold of the real meaning of their message, and in many cases their teaching became the basis of some

great religious system ; perverted and overlaid it is true with superstitious conceptions and miraculous details, but nevertheless with a substratum of eternal truth which could not altogether be effaced. In all ages the true nature of this transcendental wisdom, and the way to acquire it, has been perceived by those whose spiritual insight was not darkened by the allurements of the world, by passion, fear, or ignorance. Mystics, these men have often been called, and looked upon for the most part as dreamers and visionaries. Mystics they are to-day, those who have seen the possibilities and glories of their divine nature ; and though there be a false as well as a true mysticism, as in everything else, how can the man who has seen the vision of those gates of gold which lead out of all human experience, express to his fellows, or formulate for those whose sight is still closed, that for which there is no expression in human language, save only in the language of symbolism, which none can read but those who hold the key."

Harriet paused. She had spoken impressively and with deep conviction, with an eloquence indeed with which I had not suspected her to be gifted.

She paused, with her gaze fixed on space, as if indeed she could see the far-off vision of that highest goal of human aspiration, the radiance of that golden age when man shall stand once more in the light of that truth which is eternal. We

did not break the silence, and she continued, bringing herself back by a visible effort, and again addressing herself to me.

“Yes, and it is indeed the Bible, and many another sacred book, which contains this symbolism, did men but hold the key to interpret them. The world’s history, that which has been, is, and will be, is written there in many a fable, many an allegory which men for centuries have taken as literal history; worshipping the dead letter, but ignorant of that vaster store of knowledge which only he can reach who breaks the outer shell and throws away the husk. This it is which will shortly claim men’s minds and hearts with no uncertain sound, for now once more the age is ripe with promise. Men have risen out of that bondage in which for centuries the Church has held them. Everywhere they ask for freedom, for fuller knowledge, clearer light, and in proportion to their need so surely shall it be given them; and those Great Ones who hold the sacred mysteries in trust shall once more raise the lamp of truth, and point the way. This is the grand secret of the ages, which even now is stirring in men’s hearts and minds; this the dawn which even now is breaking in the East. The East shall once more teach the West, and men, having now indeed learnt to question Nature fearlessly, shall once more learn to question their own soul, to lay hold of the glorious promise of their own inmost divine nature; and having already turned from those who cry: ‘Lo, here! or Lo, there!’ they shall once more learn

that 'the kingdom of God cometh not with observation,' that it exists neither in time or space, but is verily, as a scientific fact, within each man's heart; not in any secondary sense, or as a mere theological conception, but as an immutable law of Nature. Once more they who will shall read the Bible by the aid of that key to Nature which those possessed who wrote it; veiling the sacred mysteries in many a fable, lest unhappily they should have cast their pearls before swine.

"Yet even now, when the light is once more seen, it shall still be true that many are called, but few are chosen; for unless a man be born to this knowledge—having through sin and suffering in many previous lives learnt well the lesson which teaches him to distinguish between that which is transitory and that which is eternal, between things of form and sense, and that unchanging root from whence these spring—the light which shines beyond our little systems, which have their day and cease to be, will be but a light shining in darkness, with naught therein to reflect it. The heart must be pure, and purged from human passion ere it can reflect the light, and this indeed it is which is the secret of our suffering. Men are slow to learn the lesson, because suffering now is apparently meaningless, and they ask in despair, 'is life worth living?' Show them the necessity of suffering, show them far back at the beginning of our present humanity the divine soul entering consciously into its cycle of

incarnation; the divine *Word* becoming flesh, that it might mould the man of clay into the image and likeness of the 'Sons of God;' show them the immutable law, that all knowledge, all progress, all achievement is by experience, by that which is now called *evolution*; that though now man has lost sight of that goal, to attain which he started on his long pilgrimage, yet that pilgrimage, that *fall* of the spirit into matter, was necessary in order that he should reach a higher grade of life and consciousness; show them all this and much more as a scientific fact, and not as a theological dogma, and you will give once more a motive and a hope, for you will satisfy alike the sense of justice and the religious instinct of the race.

“ And this larger knowledge it is which shall be the possession of the twentieth century, which shall be built up among the ruins of that ecclesiasticism which is now tottering to its fall, and even of those very materials which have been built into that edifice which some would fain believe will last until the crack of doom. This is much, but not all. For the true Mystic there is still a higher knowledge. When he has learned to read aright those universal laws which operate in Nature as now he sees it, when he has understood the course of cyclic law, and that great law of laws, the law of correspondence and analogy, which operates in great and small alike; which places system within system

in ever widening circle; space within space, and time within time, without end or limit; birth and rebirth of all that lives, rising out of lower forms to higher and still higher in endless sequence; all that is visible issuing out of darkness and void, to run its course, then disappear once more—when all this is learnt, there is a further step which leads beyond this law. For truly time and space and all we see and know are but *illusion*. In this phantom world of objectivity, we are as those who stand between two mirrors, and see therein an endless series of reflections of *themselves*. But the higher, truer mysticism transcends illusion; yet how indeed can the true Mystic speak of that which lies beyond the language which men can understand. Did not Carlyle indeed catch a glimpse of this higher mysticism when he wrote: ‘Know of a truth that only the time-shadows have perished, or are perishable; that the real Being of whatever was, and whatever is, and whatever will be, *is* even now and for ever. This, should it unhappily seem new, thou mayest ponder at thy leisure; for the next twenty years, or the next twenty centuries: believe it thou must; understand it thou canst not.’ Yes, it is to reach this real Being, to reach that which is the ‘universal *HERE*, and the everlasting *NOW*,’ which is that further step which only the true Mystic can take. You may call this ‘Being’ *God* if you will, for a mere convenient term, but the God which is conditioned and limited to a theo-

logical system is as far removed from the reality, as the illusions of time and space and matter.”

“And now I have surely given you enough to think about for one evening,” Harriet continued. “If you are one of us, as indeed I believe you are, I shall not have spoken in vain. Let us go indoors and have some music.”

CHAPTER VIII.

EVOLUTION.

Throughout this varied and eternal world
Soul is the only element, the block
That for uncounted ages has remained,
The moveless pillar of a mountain's weight
Is active living spirit. Every grain
Is sentient both in unity and part,
And the minutest atom comprehends
A world of loves and hatreds.

SHELLEY.

THE Stantons had invited me to dine with them again the following evening, when Nirman would also make one of the party, so I did not go over to Dolphinton in the morning, but devoted it to a long ride in the country.

I did not know what time Nirman would arrive, but soon after lunch he entered the smoking-room in search of me, and shook my hand warmly as I rose to greet him.

"I am at your service for an hour or two," he said; "and then we can go together to Dolphinton. You see I know something about your movements, and you have doubtless heard from Harriet something of my own history."

"Yes, and I was very glad to find that we were

all mutually acquainted with each other," I replied.

"Let us go outside on the balcony," Nirman said; "we are not likely to be interrupted there, and you must tell me what further information you require in the matter we were discussing, or what are the difficulties or objections which present themselves to you now that you have had some time to think it over, and have received some further instruction from Harriet."

"There are certainly several points which seem to me to call for further explanation," I said; "though very much that I have heard has appealed to me most forcibly."

"That is because it is not new to you," Nirman replied. "You do not remember where or how you heard it before, because it belongs to your experience in a past incarnation. Have you not had a strange feeling in reference to this which is something more than a mere intellectual conviction?"

"I must admit that what puzzled me most after our last conversation was a strong sense of familiarity with what you had told me, an impression such as we sometimes catch of having been through it all before," I replied. "Of course, if reincarnation be a fact, that may account for it, but I should like you to explain more fully to me why it is that we do not remember our past incarnations, and how the sequence of our consciousness is preserved from one incarnation to another."

"In order to understand that fully," Nirman

answered, "one has to grasp the full meaning of what is called *consciousness*, and know how it, is related to the physical organism ; and here at once we come upon the great distinction between physical and occult science. Physical science, if not actually denying the possibility of consciousness apart from the physical body, at all events denies the possibility of knowing anything about such a state of consciousness, or of individual life apart from the physical organism. Occult science, on the other hand, begins just at this point where physical science leaves off, and, by a method quite unknown to materialism, demonstrates the existence of planes of consciousness which are superphysical, and trains the individual to a knowledge and use of these higher states. Physical science seeks for the life-principle in a certain arrangement of cells and molecules, by dissecting the various parts of the organism. Occult science, on the other hand, proceeds by a method of awakening and developing certain faculties which are latent in every individual, and by means of which a real experimental knowledge is obtained of those higher planes which lie beyond the reach of our mere physical senses. This, of course, will be a matter for you to verify for yourself, if you are induced to commence the study. Now, occult science recognises seven different planes of consciousness, reckoning from the purely spiritual down to the physical or material. These *planes* must not, however, be mistaken for localities. The highest or spiritual plane is not a place outside of or removed

from the physical. It is rather an aspect or condition, for it interpenetrates every part of what we call *space*, and every atom of what we call *matter*. Metaphysically, *spirit* and *matter* are but the two poles or manifestations of one and the same thing. Man in his totality consists of seven principles, each principle corresponding to, and functioning on, and having its own particular consciousness relative to each of the seven planes. Now, what is usually termed *consciousness* is only relative to the physical plane, and we invariably associate it with physical sensation and memory, which is only another way of saying, that in our waking state the consciousness is entirely centred in, and active through the physical body. But what is it that takes place during a state of sleep, when that which we call consciousness ceases to function, so far as the physical faculties are concerned? What becomes of it; is it really inactive for the time, or does it transfer its activity to some other plane? This latter is the explanation given by occult science, and there is plenty of evidence to show that such is really the case, apart altogether from the methods or teaching of that science. In sleep the consciousness is transferred to a higher plane, and takes cognisance of a much wider range of experience than is possible during the waking state, when it is limited and conditioned by the physical faculties. Now, that which is present to the consciousness in a state of sleep can only come to our mind in the waking state as that which we call a dream; but here it must be observed that our

dreams are merely that portion of our sleep consciousness which we actually remember when we awake, or which becomes impressed on the physical organ of memory; and we may have been fully awake on another plane of consciousness during the sleep of the physical faculties, and have passed through a great variety of experiences, only a few, or perhaps not any, of which we are able to recall when we awake to physical life. Not only is this so, but in most cases our actual dreams are merely a fantastic mixture of our real sleep consciousness with the sense impressions of the brain at the time of waking. We are able to study the same phenomenon in a different way by means of mesmerism. There are, as you are doubtless aware, many phenomena of mesmeric clairvoyance which go a long way towards proving this theory, for in the somnambulant state the mesmerised subject will describe events which are transpiring at distant places, showing an exalted state of consciousness, and a much wider range of faculties than those of the physical body; but on awaking from the trance, the subject will seldom remember what he has witnessed, or what he has been saying or doing during the mesmerised state. Such experiments as these are very conclusive to those who have studied them, as to the possibility of exercising faculties which are super-physical, and they can only be explained on the occult hypothesis of the various planes of consciousness.

“ You can easily see now, that if we cannot bring

back from our sleep state, or from the mesmeric trance, a perfect recollection of that which was present to our consciousness in those states, it is much less likely that we should do so after we awake from the sleep of death to commence a new incarnation. Death is sleep; a sleep in which we lose our old physical body, by reason of its being worn out or damaged, and have to take a new one before we can again play our part in the drama of life on the physical plane.

“Have I made the matter clear to you so far?”

“The theory appears to be consistent with facts, so far,” I said; “but I understood you to say that some persons do remember their past incarnations; how can that be accomplished?”

“By bridging the gulf which at present exists between the lower and the higher consciousness, so that the lower or personal consciousness may become a participator with the higher or individual consciousness. This is the real object of occult training. The immortal Ego, or spiritual individuality of the man, overshadows, so to speak, the personality of the present earth-life; and just as the personality remembers the series of days and nights which go to make up its limited cycle of existence, so the individuality remembers the ‘days and nights’ of its cycle; and these days and nights are made up of the sequence of its earth-lives, and the period of ‘sleep’—otherwise death—which intervenes between each, or, in other words, its alternate life of objectivity and subjectivity. This is the immutable

law of all that exists; to our present conceptions, this change of state appears as an alternate life and death, as an alternate day and night, in ever widening cycles; so that not only each individual object of our perception appears to have its own particular periods of such changes, but the smaller individual cycles are parts of a larger one, and these again of a still more extended period, the whole visible universe itself having its period of outbreathing, or manifestation, or issuing out of subjectivity, and its inbreathing, or withdrawal back again into subjectivity, or what is to us *Darkness*.

“In Eastern philosophy this eternal cyclic motion is called the *Great Breath*, or the outbreathing and inbreathing of Brahmâ. Remember, however, that this is only in relation, to our present limited faculties; philosophically this is all illusion, for behind this is the great Reality—that which ever has been, is, and will be—the unknown Deity.

“Now see how this great cyclic law, having its analogy in everything that comes under our observation, is the key to that problem of life and death which is ever such a mystery to the uninitiated. Note how that which we call evolution is simply an expansion of consciousness to include a series of objective and subjective states which were previously isolated from each other. To some of the lower forms of life the little cycle of a single day is all that they can reach in consciousness; and with the setting of the sun the world goes out in darkness. To others, more advanced, the cycle of

their life may last for a brief summer, but when the sun withdraws its warmth they droop and die. Man, having passed through all these lower forms of consciousness, having been in turn 'a stone, a plant, an animal,' stands now midway between the animal and the divine. What is the next step in his evolution? He has transcended many minor cycles which fill the whole sequence of consciousness for lower forms of life. For him no longer the sun sets in darkness, he knows that it will rise to-morrow; it is no mystery now which locks the earth in deadly sleep, when the chill hand of winter lays an icy touch upon the life of Nature; he bears within his consciousness the memory of many summers, many winters. But still for him the world goes out in darkness when he dies; he dreads the portals of the grave, not knowing where they lead; the cycle of his consciousness is broken there, he cannot see the larger cycle of which his birth and death are but a part.

"Is not this then the next step in his evolution, by every power of reason, logic, science, or induction which you choose to bring to bear upon the question? And in order to take this step he must unite this lower life, this consciousness which now is centred in the personality, with that thread of individual life which runs through the whole sequence of his existence upon this globe, which runs through incarnation after incarnation, from birth to death, and death to life. And having done this, men will be as gods upon this earth, for then they will know how sorrow

and sin spring from ignorance and selfishness ; and, no longer worshipping in ignorance they know, not what, or stumbling blindly, painfully, along the path of life, the golden age shall dawn once more, and the second coming of Christ be accomplished. But observe this is only in relation to Humanity on this planet. The Earth is but a speck in the universe, and the whole history of mankind on this globe is but a small cycle within a still larger one. Yet it is enough now if we consider the immediate step in the evolution of humanity, that which it will accomplish as a whole in the next few million years ; that which each individual may accomplish in his next few incarnations, if indeed he have the strength and will to achieve, instead of drifting with the sluggish stream. This then is the Key which you must employ to unlock the hidden mysteries of your nature."

"What you say does indeed seem to be based upon a most profound and comprehensive system of induction," I said, as Nirman paused in his exposition. "It opens up to the individual a vast, and indeed apparently interminable cycle of evolution, which may well daunt and appal the weak or irresolute, or those who have been accustomed to console themselves with the idea of an eternity of bliss as a reward for a very small measure of belief which they may have exercised in their present life. I am half inclined to think that if you could make the majority of men truly realise the vastness of that path of evolution which they are treading, it

would have no other effect than to drive them into utter madness."

"It would," Nirman replied; "and it is just that which makes the study of occultism so dangerous, and which is the root of that policy of secrecy which has always been followed in connection with these mysteries by every great teacher. You will doubtless remember that Jesus told his disciples that he had many things to tell them which they were not yet able to bear; while Paul—himself an Initiate—writes very explicitly to the Corinthians that he had only fed them with milk and not with strong meat. Fortunately by the very reason of their being babes, the weaker minds are *not* able to realise these great laws of Nature, when they are stated as mere intellectual propositions; and as long as this is the case it is of course absolutely impossible that they should undergo any initiation, or that their inner sight should be opened; for were this to be accomplished by any occult means, and the man brought really face to face with his own nature, it would indeed—unless he is strong enough to bear the ordeal—make him a madman for the rest of his life. The danger of dealing with occult forces before the mind and will have been properly trained, is well set forth in *Zanoni*, which is no fiction, but sober reality, save that the true secrets are hidden under an allegorical form. Yet the vision of the inner mysteries of his nature has naught to terrify the man of pure ideal, of lofty, noble, and unselfish purpose; the man who seeks nothing for himself,

but merges his own interests in the general good of humanity, has conquered the Dweller on the Threshold."

"There is another point on which I should like you to enlighten me," I said; "for it appears a very important one in connection with these grades or planes of consciousness. Are these higher planes in any sense material, or what relation do they bear to matter as we know it?"

"They are material, but they necessarily consist of matter in other states and under other conditions than those which pertain to our physical senses. But what is matter? Can any physicist say of what the ultimate particle of matter consists? Yet here, as in so many other instances, the speculations of scientists are gradually approximating nearer and nearer to the teachings of occult science and philosophy. This must necessarily be so, because occult science is pre-eminently a knowledge of the laws of Nature; and modern science is only rediscovering that which was well known ages ago. That which we call matter is so closely related to our state of consciousness—just as our ideas of time and space are so related—that the seven planes of consciousness necessarily correspond to seven great divisions or states of matter, or rather not matter but *substance*. On the seventh or higher plane we should have what can only be termed the *subjectivity* of matter; it is the one primordial undifferentiated substance, out of which all the world-stuff has been formed, and to which it will again return when

the hour strikes for the 'Death,' or return to subjectivity of the whole universe.

"On each of the seven planes there are seven subdivisions, so that matter exists altogether in forty-nine different and distinct differentiations or states. On the plane of our physical senses we are only cognisant of three out of the seven states which belong to this plane, and these are the solid, the liquid, and the gaseous. But science has recently added a fourth, which has been termed *radiant* matter, and is even now seeking for the seventh, or that homogeneous substance from which all our chemical elements have differentiated out. But you will see that when this has been found, there will still remain six higher planes, each with its seven subdivisions; of which nothing can be known by the aid of the physical faculties alone, or without a transfer of consciousness to the higher plane. Thus science, relying upon physical observation merely, must inevitably fail to solve those deeper questions of the mind and consciousness which are of the first importance if we are to have any real knowledge of man's spiritual nature."

"But science will deny all this, and ask you for proofs," I said. "What proofs have you to offer?"

"If by proofs you mean phenomena, then I would say that we have none which materialists would accept, yet very direct proof to those who will study occult science on its own lines," Nirman answered. "The attitude of our modern

scientific luminaries towards occult phenomena is not encouraging to any one who would seek to teach a higher science than that of Materialism. When phenomena are denied and ridiculed, it is hardly likely that any serious teaching in reference to them will be respected. The phenomena are *facte*, though the theories of many who have dabbled in them are sometimes fantastic enough when mixed up with the religious element; and indeed these theories are largely responsible for the discredit thrown upon the phenomena themselves. A phenomenon once verified, however, becomes a scientific fact, which must either be included under known laws, or form the basis of a new departure. Now it is exactly this new departure which science refuses to take, having pledged itself to explain everything by a theory of dead matter and blind force. It is, however, merely a matter of time. Orthodox science, like orthodox religion, merely holds back those men who are not yet prepared to take a further step, and the heterodoxy of to-day becomes the orthodoxy of to-morrow, in science as well as in religion.

“ If the proof required, however, be simply one of reasoning from the known to the unknown, then I say that the teachings of occult science, when rightly understood, present a comprehensive and coherent system of philosophy which is approximated more and more nearly by every advance which is made in scientific generalisations or modern thought. It is easy to see that the immediate result

of modern scientific discoveries upon the thought of the age, is to divest men's minds of the idea of the supernatural, of any region or portion of the universe marked out as an exception from the operation of those laws of Nature which are regarded as eternal and immutable.

“Unity in diversity, the same laws operating in the small as in the great, is the key-note of modern thought. And it is also the key-note of occult science, but modern science has not yet learnt to apply it to the same range of phenomena that can be dealt with by the older science. Man's nature in its spiritual, psychic, and mental aspects is still a *terra incognita* to modern scientific thought; yet if science would deal honestly with a few phenomena which at present are abnormal, and apply the principle of evolution—which it spends such a vast amount of pains in tracing *backward*—to the *forward* progress of the race, it would be able to answer with no uncertain voice, many of the problems of the future of the individual and the race. Is it not eminently absurd to regard abnormal faculties or powers, such as clairvoyance or mesmerism, as a state of disease or hallucination? Science must either deny to humanity any further evolution, or the possibility of advancing any higher in the scale of life; or if it is not prepared to do this, then it must seek for indications as to the line of advance, in abnormal phenomena. And where is the limit beyond which evolution cannot go? Even on the strictest lines of modern

materialism one may ask: On what basis would science trace man's evolution up from the lowest forms of sentient life to his present point, and leave him stranded there? Is it not evident that if evolution be still the law of our life, there must be a few at least who are indications of the direction which we are taking, some few at least who can see that which is as yet invisible to their fellows, who can sense that which as yet has no effect upon the duller organisms. Science is pre-eminently inconsistent with its own methods and postulates, when it deals with problems of the future. Not so with occult science, which traces an unbroken line of evolution throughout the whole universe, seen and unseen. The unseen becomes the seen, the subjective becomes the objective, by that same process of modification and development as the result of experience, which can be traced in every form of life. The unseen or spiritual world is so simply because man has not yet developed the faculties to cognise it, nor can those faculties be developed by any other process than that which has resulted in the development of our present powers. The idea that man will enter the spiritual world at death is entirely illusory. The spiritual world is here, now, at every point in space, and in every atom of matter. Science should at least teach men this by analogy, that the unseen is but an extension of the seen, and is governed and ordered by analogous laws and processes.

“ But the unseen, the so-called spiritual world, has

always been the mystery of mysteries to poor struggling human nature, unable to reduce to law and order that which it does see. And so it must be in the minds of the masses, of those who are unable to carry out a connected series of deductions, who are unable to understand the demonstration of a natural law, being for the most part fettered in their mental conceptions by some special system of supernaturalism, misterm'd *religion*. These will ever be unable to regard the unseen as anything but a mysterious *locality*, having no connection as cause and effect with the visible universe, and governed by the will of a supernatural being. In dealing with what we do not see, analogy is our surest guide. 'As above so below,' is an occult axiom. Bear in mind that from the standpoint I am now placing before you, the universe is a *unity*, there is no part of it marked out as an exception. A religionist may say that this is a bare assertion, and that no proof can possibly be educed in support of it. Perhaps not, but what you are asked to do is to apply all that you do know, all that your reasoning faculties will enable you to formulate, and tell me if you can conceive of the universe in any other light. If you cannot grasp this grand generalisation, this law of laws, then you must be content to grope your way among the innumerable systems of supernaturalism which have flourished in all ages, as the result of an inadequate conception of this unity in Nature, and a superstitious awe of the invisible and unknown."

“Inasmuch as this principle appears to be thoroughly in accordance with scientific methods, and the tendencies of modern thought, I do not see why by means of scientific research, all those secrets of Nature which you say have been so carefully concealed by occultists should not in time be disclosed,” I said.

“As a matter of principle, as a matter of reasoning from what we do know to what we do not know, this method is undoubtedly in harmony with the tendencies of modern thought,” Nirman replied. “But in practice it is a very different matter. It is one thing to hold the principle as a mere metaphysical abstraction, that the spiritual is but an extension of the material; it is quite another matter to train and develop the spiritual faculties. Materialists deny that men have any such faculties, or the germs even of such faculties which may be capable of this development. In doing so they really take up a mental position on a level with any of those lower forms of life to which they are so fond of tracing their own ancestry, and who may well be supposed to have argued among themselves that there was no possibility of transcending those conditions under which they existed. If a mollusk may become a man, may not a man become a transcendental being such as he now terms a *God*? And does not this very fact show that he will so become—viz., that his highest and noblest aspirations are fixed on that which he calls *Divine*? Everything must exist

as an ideal before it becomes the real, and it is just this striving after the ideal, after that which at present can only be *sensed*, which is the motive power of all evolution. I say again, all that man strives for, hopes for, of beauty, love, perfection, *divinity* if you will, all that is highest and most spiritual in his nature, he can and shall realise. It is his destiny. Even as the light of the sun, seen with our physical eye, is to lower organisms but a dim radiance, felt rather than seen, so is the light of that spiritual sun in whose rays the future humanity shall glory; though it be to them now merely a dim reflection, an unseen presence, influencing their hearts and minds. And even as our physical organ of sight has acquired its range and power, adapted and modified by millions of years of effort to expand, under the influence of these rays which at first were unseen and subjective, so must our higher spiritual faculties grow and expand by incessant striving after that spiritual nature which is to us now but an ideal, but which shall become real when we have attained to the measure of the stature of the Divine man.

“ Each man in this world builds his own prison house, determines his own limitations: intellectual, moral, and spiritual; aye, and physical too, for what is this body of sensations, affinities, and desires, save the natural effect and sequence of his past thoughts, of those *ideas* which he has succeeded in realising. And each man must be his own saviour. Within himself lies the way to save

himself from himself. But it is his divine Self whom he must take as his ideal and guide, even that *Christos* which is his own Higher Self, but whom now he daily crucifies and puts to an open shame."

"But come," Nirman continued, rising from his seat; "it is nearly time for us to go over to Dolphin-ton, and I have one or two letters to write first. If you will give me a quarter of an hour, I will join you again."

"Thank you much for what you have told me," I said. "It has certainly given me a much broader view of human life and destiny, and I will think it over carefully."

He passed into the hotel, but I remained seated on the balcony, gazing across the sea to the far distant horizon.

CHAPTER IX.

THE HORIZON WIDENS.

Hieroglyphics old,
Which sages and keen-eyed astrologers
Then living on the earth, with labouring thought
Won from the gaze of many centuries :
Now lost, save what we find on remnants high
Of stone, or marble swart ; their import gone,
Their wisdom long since fled.

KEATS—*Hyperion*.

NIRMAN and I walked quietly to Dolphinton, chatting together about the Stantons, whom he had known ever since he was a boy.

“ You know that Harriet and I are engaged,” he said ; “ but it will probably be some years before we can marry ; perhaps not at all. We have both work to do, and responsibilities which we cannot shirk, which make it out of the question to think of marriage for an indefinite time.”

“ Am I right in supposing that what you allude to is connected with your interest in these occult studies ? ” I asked.

“ You are right,” he replied. “ We are both pledged to the Great Quest, as that to which all other matters in our lives are subservient. But the bond between us is one which no earthly union

could make any stronger, nor any earthly loss sever. Friendships and affections, and that deeper-bond which is a true union of souls, spring from causes generated in past incarnations. The new personality does not disguise from the inner sight the individuality of the one loved long ago. The ever-changing forms of death and birth hide from our mortal eyes those causes in our lives which bind us to our fellows, in loves and hates, likes and dislikes, good friends or bad. Yet to the sight of the true Ego which watches far above and unentangled in this world of sense, all these lie open. You must learn to live consciously on the higher plane before you can transcend the illusions of the senses. There are many people who can accept as a mental proposition that this earth is but a speck in the universe, and that the whole duration of a solar system, which we reckon by millions of millions of years, is but a moment in the unthinkable duration of eternity. But how many are there who can daily, hourly, momentarily place themselves consciously in this transcendental position, and view their own life and actions from this standpoint; remaining a calm and undisturbed spectator of their own joys and sorrows, nor be shaken from their firm centre though worlds should fall in ruin. Yet this is but a part of the task which he must accomplish who would rise above the illusions of this world, and gain the full and glorious consciousness of the Adept flower of Humanity."

“Truly you make the goal unreachable by our weak human nature,” I said.

“Yes, if weak human nature could see the road before it, and the heights which it must scale, it would but be filled with terror and despair,” Nirman answered. “But these are hidden from the weak by the very nature of their weakness, because their sight is not yet strong enough to gaze into the future. For them the events of the hour or the day are all-sufficient; and one brief lifetime of suffering seems to require the compensation of an eternity of bliss. Yet even these shall reach the final goal by gradual development. Many a man accomplishes in after-life that which in his younger days he would have regarded as impossible. Many a man to-day stands in a position which at one time he would not have dared hope to attain. The great cyclic law of progress will carry on the race and the individual without much conscious effort; it is when a man steps out in front of his fellows, with intent to reach the goal by the straight and narrow way, to take the kingdom of Heaven by violence, that the real struggle begins; for then the man has to look his own nature in the face, and kill out one by one those passions and desires, yea, the very love of life itself, as the cause of that which brings him back again and yet again to the life of sense. But I am talking pure mysticism to you, and here we are at Dolphinton.”

So saying, we turned in at the little gate, and the girls came down the garden to meet us.

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After what Nirman had said of his engagement to Harriet, I was somewhat curious to observe the relationship which existed between them. There was little demonstration of affection, but evidently a deep feeling of mutual trust and confidence. Perhaps an outsider might have judged them to be cold, but the look in Harriet's eyes as they met his, must have been amply sufficient for any man.

Turning to Ethel, Nirman kissed her also affectionately.

After dinner we again sat on the lawn, and soon began to discuss the subject which was uppermost in our minds. Ethel asked Nirman in a bantering way, whether he had been able to finish my conversion, pretending at the same time that I was a very unenlightened heathen. .

"You had better ask Mr. Silton himself what he now thinks of the matter," Nirman said.

"I do not know what is the exact stage at which you would say that a man had become a convert," I answered; "I almost think that I must have been one all along without knowing it, for all that you have told me appears to be merely a formulating of principles which I have long recognised. It seems to me that we are quite at one on first principles, and as regards your deductions from those principles you appear to follow a method which is both logical and scientific, and which by its appeal in every case to actual experience, places the matter far above the ordinary limits of controversy. I certainly feel that you have given me a key which harmonises much in

human nature which was previously an inexplicable problem, and throws an entirely new light upon the question of religion, by making each and every form of belief a necessary stage or phase in the development of the individual and the race."

• "Yes, you are quite right," Nirman replied. "Once you have grasped the universal principles on which the ancient philosophy is based, it is no longer a matter of decision between the truth or untruth of any particular form of religious belief. You have raised yourself to a position which lies far above the field of strife between creed and creed, between sect and sect, with all the evil passions which have ever found their easiest prey among such combatants.

"In principle you have raised yourself above all forms; but still, living in the world of forms, physical and mental, you are able to use those forms for what they are worth, as the reflection merely of that absolute truth which is unchangeable, and therefore formless. It is no longer possible for you to accept any form as a dogma, but still you recognise that you yourself must formulate the truth by reason of the limitations of your mind and perceptive faculties; and recognising this in yourself, you understand the more readily how the great majority of mankind, who are unable or unwilling to deal with these questions, cling to that form of religion which comes easiest to them, and are quite content to place their trust in dogma and authority. Even those who do think and reason about their religious beliefs, are for the most part unable to get

beyond the proposition that their own religion is true and all others false, and they spend their energy in defending one or other of the minor sects into which their particular faith is split up. They take up this position because they are unable as yet to view their own religion from an outside standpoint; they are unable to place their own creed on the same level as all other creeds, and then examine them all impartially in relation to humanity as a whole in all ages. Their starting-point is the axiom that they are right and all others wrong. Take the case of the average Christian for instance, who has been brought up from his childhood to regard the Bible as the whole record of God's dealings with mankind, in connection with a certain scheme of salvation. How difficult it is for such an one to step outside of those lines of thought in which he has been trained. To him the Jewish race represents the whole of humanity of whom it is worth while to take any account prior to the birth of Christ. He sees the whole of humanity in the history of one small section of the race. All that God made the world for is recorded in the Bible narrative of this particular nation. It matters not that contemporary with the Jewish race, and ages before any of the events concerning them recorded in the Bible (the average Christian perhaps does not know this), there were other races far in advance of the Jews in all that constitutes the highest criterion of progress. It matters not that the problem of man's relation to the spiritual world was

one which was felt and sought after as keenly by those other members of the great human family, as it was by the little section with whose history the Bible deals. All the races of the world outside of the Jews are classified as *heathens*, with whom God had no purpose of love, but who simply served as a dark framework through which to bring into relief his special favour to his chosen people.

“This exclusive standpoint is nothing more or less than a survival of the old conceit, which at one time made it the orthodox belief that the world was the centre of the universe. Every man thinks his own religion, nay, his own particular denomination or sect, to be the centre of God’s favour and providence, and imagines that the supreme being looks very doubtfully upon all the rest of mankind.”

“And yet from one point of view I suppose you would say that they are right,” I remarked.

“They are right up to the limit of their experience,” Nirman answered. “The God they conceive of is this exclusive and partial being. They worship that which is the highest they can conceive of—that is, a limited and personal being of their own nature. Where they are wrong is in postulating that this God is absolute in the universe. They cannot understand that that which is exclusive and differentiated, that of which you postulate certain qualities, cannot be the All, the absolute; and that the very fact of their making Jehovah the special God of the Jews, makes him a minor power. They are unable to grasp the proposition that the Absolute can have

neither centre nor circumference, nor any finite relations. There can be no such thing as divine favour from a being who is the absolute All, nor can such repent that he had made man. But in spite of the grossly immoral God depicted in the Old Testament, who is continually changing his mind, and who causes his servants to commit the most abominable and bloodthirsty atrocities, the writers of the Bible knew well the difference between the absolute and the relative divine powers, between Ain-Soph and the Sephiroth, between Elohim and Jehovah. How it came about that the historical Jehovah came to be regarded as the supreme and only deity in the universe, the creator of all things, and afterwards identified with the God of the New Testament, the 'Father,' it is difficult to say at this late period; but certainly there has been nothing more terrible in human history than those results which have sprung from this anthropomorphic conception. It can only be seen in its true light by those who study the Bible by the aid of one or more of the esoteric keys."

"I should like you to give me some idea as to what these keys are, and how they are employed," I said.

"I can easily give you the clue to one of the keys," Nirman replied. "The most simple in its application is the numerical key. Every letter of the Hebrew alphabet has a numerical value, so that every word represents a combination of numbers. Let us take for example the word translated 'God'

in the very first verse of Genesis. The Hebrew word is *Alhim*, or *Elohim*, and the numerical value 31415. Now these figures, as you are probably aware, constitute the π value of unit diameter to circumference of a circle. By applying this principle in certain ways to the various God names, proper names, and localities in the book of Genesis, we find that the compiler or compilers of that record have embodied in their apparently historical, but in reality allegorical narrative, various ratios which enter into the question of the quadrature of the circle. We find three values given for the ratio of diameter to circumference—viz., 3.1415 to 1, which, as you know, is only approximately correct; another, 355 to 113, which is somewhat nearer; and a third, 20612 to 6561, which is supposed by some to be a perfect value. To show further that these values were not merely incidental or capricious, this value 20612, with a decimal point making it 20.612, is found to be the exact value in inches of the ancient standard of measure, the 'cubit. It is a very striking confirmation of the deliberate intention of the writers to record these values, that we find them also built into that mysterious monument of ancient knowledge and science, the Great Pyramid. The same keys which will unlock the secret meaning of the Bible will also solve the mystery of this monument; for one was a literary and the other an architectural record of the Ancient Wisdom Religion, of which all other religions are but materialised remnants; the original being based on a real knowledge of

those principles which lie at the root of Nature, and which operated to bring the world and its humanity into existence, and which continually operate to carry it through its appointed course of evolution.

“ Again you may apply the astronomical key, and find in the history of the patriarchs, and of the twelve tribes of Israel, the record of the sun’s progress through the twelve signs of the zodiac, with a proper method of correcting the calendar to harmonise the lunar and solar years. Both the Bible and the Pyramid are the record of a perfect system of numerical, geometrical, and astronomical values, based on the relation of the circle to the square, and lying at the very root of the formative principles of Nature. Again, you may apply the physiological key, and find in the Biblical narrative the history of man’s physical evolution ; or the psychic or spiritual keys and trace the evolution of his mental and spiritual principles, from the time when he was an ethereal and godlike being, through the history of his descent into matter, when he became invested in his ‘ clothes of skin,’ and far into the dim future, when he shall once more become a Divine Being.”

“ All this is very singular,” I said ; “ and is certainly outside of what one has usually been accustomed to regard as the scope or meaning of the Bible.”

“ No doubt it is,” Nirman replied. “ You must understand, however, that to the Initiates of old

this knowledge was sacred, inasmuch as they did not separate as we do the material from the spiritual, the seen from the unseen. To them the universe was a unity, and the lower merely a reflection of the higher. They understood the real relation between man and the universe, between the microcosm and the macrocosm. All the seven keys to man's nature, his relations to those seven planes of which I have already told you something, are to be found in the Bible; and they are all correlated and interblended, because such is the very constitution and essence of deity, nature, and man. To-day men study astronomy merely as a branch of physical science. The science of the stars has to-day no spiritual meaning, save the most superficial one of serving as an occasional reflection upon the wonderful works of the creator. But the Initiates acquainted with the connection between man's inner principles and the great cosmic forces of the universe, acquainted with the great law of correspondence and analogy, could read in the operation of cyclic laws in the visible universe, the working of the same laws in the spiritual world. In the progress of the sun through the signs of the zodiac, in the precession of the equinoxes, and in other astronomical cycles which modern science has not yet discovered, they recognised the major and minor cycles of man's evolution and initiation. The knowledge of the zodiac was and is to this day the most sacred and secret of all the mysteries."

“What I do not quite understand,” I said; “is why this knowledge should have been lost to mankind; or rather—since you say that it has never been lost—how it is that it does not now form the basis of our science and philosophy; for one would think that in accordance with the general law of evolution, humanity to-day would certainly have advanced upon the knowledge of the past, whereas from what you say it would appear that we are very far behind indeed.”

“That is easily explained in accordance with the law of cycles,” Nirman answered. “Let us look for a moment at the general working of this law, the type of which as I have just said is to be found in the movements of the heavenly bodies. Everything that exists in time and space has its birth, maturity, and death. When I say, everything that exists in time and space, you will of course understand that I mean everything to which, in our mental conceptions, we attach the idea of time and space, though that idea itself is purely illusive. But since nothing can come out of nothing, that which appears to us to begin, or to have its birth into the phenomenal world, is simply the result of antecedent causes which are removed from our observation; or in other words, birth is simply a change of state. The same with death. Both are illusions, the result of our relative consciousness, which is only cognisant of a limited range of phenomena. Now this cyclic law of birth, maturity, and death, with all the intermediate

grades and stages, operates in every portion of the phenomenal world. It was expressed symbolically by the ancients in the representation of a serpent bent into a circle, and swallowing its own tail. The past, the present, and the future are *one*, but we who travel round the circle, and cannot view the whole, imagine that we are travelling in a line which has no beginning and no end. In the popular conception of the middle ages the earth was flat; and though to-day men are more enlightened on this point, their ideas are just as absurd in reference to the creation, duration, and destiny of the earth and its inhabitants. When the real science of the stars comes to be known once more, when instead of merely dealing with a few mathematical relations between the various members of the solar system, it deals with the principles which operate in the birth and re-birth of suns and planets, and their relation to those manifestations of life for which they form the field of evolution, then the present ideas of creation and providence will become as obsolete as the science of the mediæval ages. Now observe this same cyclic law of birth, maturity and death, operating in the history of the individual, the family, the tribe, the nation, the race; each of these forming a small cycle within a larger one. Within historic times we can trace the rise and fall of several nations, not to mention the smaller units—each having its own characteristic features and civilisation. But it takes many nations to make a race,

and several races to make up the sum of human history on this globe, ere the earth itself shall die, preparatory to re-birth for other humanities. When a nation or a race dies, that particular portion of mankind sinks into a state of ignorance and darkness. But the seed causes remain, and in due time take root and grow in other soil, producing, at the middle point of the new cycle, results which are far in advance of what was previously attained. This law holds good in the largest as in the smallest cycles. It takes many nations to make a race; and though the race itself may extend over periods of time which are only guessed at now by a few geologists, it was preceded by others, all of which have followed this cyclic law which will one day, be fully recognised, and once more acknowledged. Now this occult knowledge of which I have been speaking—the record of which is to be found in the Bible, in the Great Pyramid, and in many, as yet little known, Sanscrit works—belonged in its perfection to a race which has long since passed away, leaving only the vaguest traditions and legends of their existence. The present race of humanity has several thousand years to run before it can recover the lost ground, or reach that higher point which is its destiny before it also shall decline and die, to make room for yet another race. This is the ebb and flow of the human life tide, and is determined as certainly by cosmic laws, as the ocean tides are determined by the influence of sun and moon.

And though the mass of humanity appears as helpless in this great sweep of eternal motion as is the ocean itself under the influence of those laws which cause its rise and fall in periodic time, yet after each high water mark there are some, a few it may be, the 'elect' of humanity, who are not swept back by the receding wave, but escape out of the region of illusion where this law operates, into a higher state."

"And this higher state, what of it?" I asked. "What lies at the root of all this cyclic change? Is there no limit, no goal, nothing but ever widening circles?"

"This grand order of the universe, this mystery of the ages, this immutable law of human progress," Nirman answered, "is but a reflection within the sphere of our consciousness of that absoluteness, that unmanifested ever concealed causeless cause, which is the root of all things both subjective and objective. Call it God if you will, IT is *Itself* the universe, though the universe is but *Its* reflection. Ever present yet never manifested; the root of all action, yet *Itself* actionless; the source of all Being, yet *Itself* Beingless; absolute motion, yet ever at rest; in IT all opposites are united. IT is *Itself* past, present, and future, yet has no relation whatever to time. As every atom and every manifested thing exists in space, yet is not space, so IT exists as space, yet space is but *Its* symbol. All that we see, and hear, and know, and think proceeds from IT. In IT we live, and move, and have our being.

Call IT *God* if you like, and give IT attributes of love or hate, of good or evil, but the moment you do so—behold! IT, which was before infinite and unrelated, has become finite, relative, conditioned, personal. Space is *Its* symbol. Can you postulate of space the *qualities* of length, and breadth, and height, and depth? These are but qualities of our finite consciousness, not of IT. That of which you postulate a quality is no longer absolute; there is still *something beyond*. So of this *Rootless Root*. Make of IT a personal God; give IT qualities and attributes, and immediately IT is no longer infinite, absolute, immutable, but finite, limited, and changeable as human thought itself.

“ Yet just as the idea of dimension is to us the manifestation of space, so the personal God idea in all its variants, is the manifestation in the human mind of that which is unconditioned as absolute space itself. From IT all things proceed, and to IT all things shall return. Our little day and night, our little life and death; birth and re-birth, summer and winter, in ever widening cycles, are but a finite reflection of that infinite motion which in *Itself* is perfect rest. The whole manifested universe shall one day return to IT; be indrawn to darkness and silence and no-thing-ness, from whence it came; once more to be outbreathed as a new universe *from* IT, yet not *by* IT; for all this is illusion, while IT remains eternal, ever present, without centre or circumference.

“ To reach IT, to live above illusion, to free oneself

from bonds of time, and space, and sense; this is the glorious goal of conscious effort for the true Mystic. Yet how can language tell what this goal really is; nay, there exists no language can speak of that which lies beyond all human thought, all human consciousness. The mere religionist may speak of heaven, and tell of golden harps, and angels' songs, and shining robes; but the true Mystic—recognising the finite idea from which these spring—passes to a further goal, and leaves these tempting shows behind. Then indeed it is that his language becomes incomprehensible, for that which he speaks of is *no-thing* to human understanding; his goal lies in that which is to others darkness, and silence, and void. Thus he stands accused in all ages of talking profound inanity; yet even as the manifested forms of time and space are but the reflection of IT, so all human systems of religion are to the Mystic but a blurred imperfect image, reflected in the turbid media of finite and conditioned human consciousness.

“This is the goal and the accomplishment; this the mighty power that moves in all things. There is no single speck of matter, no tiniest organism, no meanest flower, or plant, or creeping thing, that is not what it is because it is outbreathed by IT; and through the long pilgrimage of life, from mineral to plant, from plant to animal, from animal to man, from man to God, from God to IT—an ever-widening sphere of consciousness—the mighty breath of life which is *Itself* pulsates; and

all shall one day, by few or many stages, re-become that which IT was, and is, and will be. Man stands midway in the great cycle of existence. His involution is complete; the spirit falling into matter has passed the lowest point, and now by conscious effort, though hardly knowing yet what is the goal, seeks to return to the Eternal All from whence it came. Evolution is but the ever-widening sphere of consciousness, which in the end becomes the All, the Absoluté. Naught that is finite or conditioned can mix with that which is Eternal. Each individual must learn to live and breathe in conscious unison with all that lives, for only in proportion as he merges self in the *One Life* shall he be near or far from IT. And herein is the saying true, 'He that loseth his life shall find IT.'

Nirman spoke earnestly, impressively, solemnly; and we who listened did not break the silence for several moments after he had ceased.

The daylight had faded from the sky, save along the northern horizon a glow which hardly faded out through the short night, showed where the sun was passing round upon his course. The silent watchers of the night looked down upon us, and we looked up to them; while to me they spoke that night as they had never done before, often as I have gazed and pondered on their mystery.

Thus for some moments we sat in silence; each feeling that the subject had passed beyond the reach of language; then, as if by mutual consent, we rose to enter the house. Harriet took Nirman's

arm affectionately, and led the way, while I offered mine to Ethel; Mrs. Stanton having retired some time before.

“What do you think of Alfred?” Ethel whispered to me.

“Of what he has been saying, rather,” I replied.

“Well then of both,” she said.

“More than I could tell,” I answered; “but of this I am convinced, that some such path as he has indicated does exist, and is the key to human hopes and efforts.”

“I am so glad,” was all she said; but her grasp on my arm seemed to tighten; nor was it merely fancy that at that moment a strange mysterious wave of sympathy passed over both, so that her heart and mine beat fast with sudden influence of love and hope.

CHAPTER X.

THE QUEST DISCLOSED.

Yet some there be that by due steps aspire
To lay their just hands on that golden key,
That opes the palace of eternity ;
To such my errand is.

MILTON—*Comus*.

“ Now let me ask you,” Nirman said, as we walked back to the hotel that night ; “ are you not so much attracted by what I have told you, that you already feel a new life within you ; are you not already in your heart pledged to follow the Great Quest ? ”

“ Yes, you are right,” I replied. “ Perhaps I should not confess this so quickly, lest it should appear that I have formed a hasty judgment ; but what you have told me appeals to me so strongly that I should be false to my highest consciousness of truth, did I not earnestly seek to follow the path you have indicated.”

“ Do not be afraid of trusting your intuition in the matter,” Nirman said. “ Those who desire the truth are bound to follow it in whatever form it may present itself. The form is not the truth itself, but merely its expression ; the danger lies

in mistaking the form for the substance, the phenomena for the noumena. The form is ever changing, for it is but the product of our ever changing state of consciousness ; but the ultimate Truth, that which is Eternal and changes not, is independent of all form, of all human expression.

“What we need to accomplish is to free ourselves from the illusion of mental formulas as well as from the illusion of our senses which give rise to the phenomenal world. Everything is limited, relative, and conditioned on this plane of existence ; nevertheless, once a man has grasped the proposition that that which is relative and conditioned is also finite, and that the only real life must transcend the finite with all its illusions of time and space, he is not likely to be misled by the ever varying forms in which the human mind gives expression to its finite and limited ideas. Such a man will look with complacency upon all forms of religion, for he knows that each and all are but the temporary expression of the one universal spirit. He has raised himself above all controversy, above all formulas and creeds ; and though he is obliged to formulate his ideas in order to give expression to them, he is no more bound to that particular form which he uses, than he is to any of the dogmas and creeds to which the mere religionist holds so closely. Nevertheless the religious devotee who believes in his infallible dogmas, is quite right in acting upon his convictions, if indeed these forms are the highest expression of truth which he is as yet capable of grasping.

“ Now if I have put the truth before you in a new form, in a form which enables you to obtain a deeper insight and a broader grasp of the great problems of life, you will not commit the mistake of simply making for yourself a new creed or a new dogma. If I have enabled you to include in one great generalisation all the scattered experiences of human nature, you must bear in mind that there is a vast field for experience outside of anything that has yet come within the reach of human effort, or of your own individual life, and that your present conceptions must later on give place to still wider ones.

“ The man of one religion looks upon all others as false ; but as soon as he is able to step outside of his own particular form, and enter into the experiences of others, he sees that that which he previously considered false is only so relatively, and is as true and as sacred to others, as his own particular religion previously was to himself. The next step is to find the basis for all these relative aspects of truth, to find a generalisation which shall include all human aspirations, and their religious forms of expression ; and this I have put before you in the doctrine of human progress from one incarnation to another in connection with the law of Karma. When you have grasped clearly this law of cyclic progress in its individual aspect, you are prepared for the still wider idea of the essential unity and solidarity of the whole of humanity, in all its multifarious experiences

in all ages: in other words, the fundamental principle of the Brotherhood of Humanity, and the unity of the race from the birth of our planet to its final consummation. Beyond that again you may follow the same law in a still wider generalisation, where the whole evolution of humanity becomes but a part of a still higher expression of the great principle which ensouls the universe. This, however, I must leave you to work out for yourself; it is enough if I have enabled you to grasp the principle which will carry you far above the region of controversy, doubt, and speculation, and enable you to see plainly the path you must follow in the Great Quest."

"And that you have indeed already done," I said. "I feel now that the mists of uncertainty are passing away, and disclosing once more the path of progress, the possibility of acquiring true knowledge."

"Do not mistake mere knowledge for that which is the real object of the Quest," Nirman said. "To *know* is comparatively easy, to *be* is far more difficult. Side by side with the knowledge you acquire, which to a great extent is a mere intellectual process, you must develop that spiritual power which will enable you successfully to combat evil in every shape and form, and especially that evil which you will find inherent in your own nature, and the bad Karma which you have generated in previous incarnations. These must be utterly rooted out, for it is these which draw the Ego

back into re-birth. The lower self, the animal nature, must be utterly subordinated to the Higher Self ; the personality to the individuality ; otherwise your mere knowledge, instead of helping you, will bind you with chains of Karma a thousandfold stronger than those of the mere illusions of ignorance. For knowledge brings responsibility, and to whom much is given of him much will be required.

“ Hitherto I have said little of the higher spiritual aspects of the Quest, and indeed these are so sacred that I could not at this stage speak of them to you. No one who has once gained a knowledge of their real nature will speak of them to any save his fellow initiates ; and you will find as you progress that it becomes more and more a matter of difficulty for you to disclose to others what you have learnt, because in the very nature of the case you would not be understood.

“ You will become what men call a Mystic, for there is no language in which you can speak of that you have learnt. If you aspire to the sacred mysteries, if you set out on this Great Quest, you will be following a path which will isolate you more and more from the sympathy of your fellow-men ; you will be taking that path of separation from the world of which Jesus spoke so much, but which is so little understood, that professing Christians will be the first to revile you. You will be denounced by orthodoxy in every shape and form, and perhaps will have to suffer at the hands of those who are

nearest and dearest to you. But this trial, having once been successfully overcome, will not recur again in any future incarnation in an acute form. Having once learnt to stand alone, having once overcome in the conflict with custom and prejudice, you will in each succeeding re-birth be able to take an independent position without going through that terrible conflict with doubt which we see in the case of some who are trying to free themselves from the fatal meshes of dogma and authority. Trials which we have once met and overcome lose their force ever after, for you must understand that this Quest is one which must be followed steadily and unwaveringly from one incarnation to another, until final liberation from all illusion is attained. It is uphill work all the way, even to the very last step. Temptations and difficulties which have been overcome in their grosser forms will recur in a more subtle shape; but each step of the way must be secured as you proceed, and nothing left undone on the lower planes which would tend to drag you back.

“The process of initiation is difficult and dangerous not because of any arbitrary tests, such as one may read about, but in the very nature of the case. The awful ceremonies of initiation which have sometimes been described are but typical accounts of a very real and deadly struggle which the candidate has to fight with certain evil and maleficent forces with which sooner or later he must come face to face in an objective form. In each succeeding

re-birth, moreover, we have to pass through all the previous stages of our initiation, but this is accomplished with more and more facility every time, until at last we are hardly conscious of the process. The knowledge we have previously acquired becomes intuitive, and is analogous in its action to those characteristic physiological functions which we now perform quite automatically or without any distinct effort of will. Nevertheless, there is not a single function of our body or mind which has not had to be acquired in the first instance by continuous efforts extending over immense periods of time. Ages and ages of evolution have been required to develop the physical man as he now is, and still he stands but little more than midway in the cycle of his progress. So also it is with our higher nature, with our spiritual faculties and organism. That for which we are now striving by conscious and painful effort will one day become our "second nature"; for the physical is but a type of the spiritual, and analogy is our surest guide from one plane to the other. Thus we may observe in the development of the physical organism out of the embryo seed, that it passes rapidly through a great number of transformations, each typical of its early stages of evolution. That which previously required thousands of years for its accomplishment is now done in a few days. Those physical organs which now perform their functions with so much ease are the result of cycle upon cycle of effort on the part of the organism to adapt itself to its environment. And as it is

with our physical faculties, so also it is with our mental and spiritual principles. The law of evolution is the same in the natural and the spiritual, for there does not exist any line of demarcation between the two; it is merely the limitations of our senses which leads us to conceive of such a division. The universe is one in every part; in the seen and the unseen, the objective and the subjective; and the law of laws is the law of perfect analogy and perfect correlation in every part.

“There is but one goal, one truth, one evolution, one law of progress for all and everything; but on the long upward road are many stages, and the finite sight will often place the goal where there exists merely a resting-place. When we set out to climb a mountain, we see before us what we fancy to be the summit; we climb until we reach the point we had in view, when lo! beyond is still another and a higher ridge. Confident again that this must be the goal, we climb once more, only to find the same illusion. So it is with the successive stages of our evolution, and he who would conquer this illusion must learn to distinguish between time and eternity, between that which is finite, as being merely the creation of a passing phase of consciousness, and that which is ever present and unchangeable. The religious devotee clings to his idea of a state of eternal bliss, following such a brief span of life that it is not appreciable in that great boundless circle named ‘for ever.’ It is an illusion to which he fondly clings, and builds thereon a theory by

which he damns his fellow-men while he himself is saved in virtue of his faith. Yea, and though his creed shall seem to sway the world, though the authority of his dogma shall be upheld by millions, and rule men's minds for ages, it is not thereby one whit less an *illusion*, if it measure the universe with a two-foot rule, and eternity by the rising and setting of the sun.

“It is to those who are freeing themselves from this illusion, to those who are looking to the whole range of Nature and humanity, that you and I must speak of that larger knowledge which is to be won by the man who dares to stand alone. Great and terrible is the first ordeal, is the isolation of the man who dares to free himself from bonds of custom and credulity. Friends and relatives desert him on every side, and the world points at him the finger of scorn. But when his courage has once been tested, when he has learnt the secret strength of his own soul, even perhaps when the fountain of human kindness and sympathy seems for ever closed, he finds that others have gone before him on the same path; and these now hold out helping hands, and welcome him to a Brotherhood which knows no such distinctions of creed or rank by which the world has judged him.

“Those who have passed through this period of probation in any incarnation will be able to claim the larger knowledge as their birthright in each succeeding life; while now by conscious effort they work their way to that higher region from whence

the man returns no more to this physical life of pain and toil. But it takes many lifetimes of strong and persevering effort to accomplish this. All your old Karma must be patiently endured and exhausted, and no new Karma generated which would tend to bring you back to reincarnation. The merely physical and animal nature must be completely held in control. The mind must be unruffled by any events, either of pleasure or of pain. You must free yourself from every taint of selfishness. But no mere goodness, no mere virtue, will suffice. You must acquire real knowledge, and develop by patient training certain faculties which will enable you to test the truth of those occult laws of Nature, which, however much they may appeal to the mere intellectual faculty, must nevertheless remain but theories, so long as you have not the means to test them experimentally.

“The time has now arrived for you to decide how you will act in reference to these matters of which I have been reminding you ; for all that I have as yet said is simply putting you in remembrance of that which you have learnt in a previous incarnation. It is easy for you to pick up all this, for it appeals directly to your intuition ; but your real difficulties will commence when you have fully recovered all that you previously learnt, and have to take a further step forward. Then comes the saturation point, the test of the real vitality of your spiritual principles. It is at this point that so many grow weary of the struggle, and deeming

that they have accomplished enough for one lifetime, sink into a fatal lethargy, having in reality not advanced one single step beyond the point they gained in their last incarnation.

“It is you yourself alone who can decide what further step you will take. Your Karma is your own to make the future what you will.”

We had reached the hotel, and were standing outside while Nirman was thus speaking. Now we turned to enter it.

“Wait here for me a few minutes,” he said; “I must go to my room for something I have to give you.”

He soon returned with two rolls of MSS., each tied and sealed, and handing them to me he called my attention to the fact that they were marked I. and II.

“I would not be at liberty to give you these,” he said, “did I not know that you must now make a conscious choice, which will influence all your future life. If you have still any doubts as to the existence of the path I have indicated, do not read either, for once you have read them they will become a powerful influence for good or evil in your life, according to the choice you make; for by putting you in mind of certain occult truths, you will incur a responsibility for their right use which you cannot evade. If, however, you are determined to follow the Quest, read the first MS. to-night, but do not break the seal of the second

until the following night. May you meet with true enlightenment."

He held out his hand, which I grasped warmly, and we parted for the night; I, indeed, little dreaming what a mystery the next twenty-four hours would reveal.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MYSTIC MS.

Yet if the "Doctrine of the Heart" is too high-winged for thee—then thou of timid heart, be warned in time; remain content with the "Eye Doctrine" of the Law. Hope still. For if the "Secret Path" is unattainable this "day," it is within thy reach "to-morrow." Learn that no efforts, not the smallest—whether in right or wrong direction—can vanish from the world of causes.

• *Book of the Golden Precepts.*

At some time or other in every man's life, there is probably a turning-point, a conscious choice of two ways, marked off from each other by some distinction of right and wrong. The good and evil in his nature struggle for final supremacy, and whatever form this conflict may assume in individual cases, the principle is always the same—the man is tempted to be untrue to his highest spiritual instincts, and must stand or fall according to the choice he makes.

Such a turning-point for me was that night when I received the MSS. from Nirman. How can I reveal what my peculiar temptations were, when I sat alone in my room with the first MS. in my

hand, still unopened. How can I describe those subtle forms which battled with me that night, striving to turn me from the Quest.

Those who have passed through the same trial will understand it without any words; from those who have not, it is better concealed. How many hours I sat thus before I broke the seal I cannot tell, but I transcribe here a part of the contents of the MS. if perchance the words may strike a responsive chord in the hearts of some. I cannot tell how it may appeal to those who read. To many no doubt it will be quite meaningless; to others it may serve to bring back to their consciousness the memory of the path of that initiation which is the final triumph of human life and human suffering—the perfected man, the *Christos* Initiate. Let those who do not understand this MS. pass it in silence, lest perchance they should be found to condemn that which is most sacred in their own nature.

MANUSCRIPT I.

“These first words are written, O thou aspirant
“to truth, lest too lightly thou should’st seek to pene-
“trate the mystery of thy being, which is for ever
“hidden from the eye of sense, from the ear which
“heareth not the voice which speaks in silence, from
“the mind which dwelleth not on the Divinity within.

“For, until the eye has ceased to look upon the
“things of sense, until the ear has ceased to listen to
“the outward sounds, until the mind has ceased to

“ dwell upon the outward forms, the way is closed
 “ which leads thee to that perfect knowledge, which
 “ will set thee free. * * *

“ Immersed in matter, entangled in the illusions
 “ of the senses, the Divine within thee strives in
 “ vain to shed its radiance on thy life.

“ Know that thou art of dual nature, Human and
 “ Divine. That which is Divine seeks ever to raise
 “ the Human out of its darkness and illusion, into the
 “ glorious life of pure Being ; that which is Human
 “ seeks to drag the Divine into the mire of sense,
 “ clings to illusion, and is for ever crucifying the
 “ Divine, which would redeem and save it.

“ That which thou sowest thou shalt reap. There
 “ is no other law of life than this. Like springs
 “ from like ; sense breedeth sense ; desire, desire.
 “ What brought thee to this world of sense is that
 “ desire which corresponds thereto ; that which can
 “ set thee free is that desire which lies in the Divine,
 “ and hath no part with things of sense.

“ Choose now which thou wilt have : the things
 “ of sense, or that diviner life which can be reached
 “ only by killing sense.

“ This moment is thy conscious choice, whether
 “ to follow the Divine, or turn again to things of
 “ sense ; to weave new Karma, new chains to bind
 “ thee to the illusive world of forms.

“ And—lest too hastily thou make thy choice—
 “ learn now what each implies. * * *

“ This world of matter, this life of change which
 “ men call real, is but a passing show. It is not

"real ; it is a snare and cheat of forms which are
 "no more substantial than the wind-driven clouds.
 "Only that which changes not is real ; what is the
 "pleasure worth that ends in pain ? There is not in
 "this world one thing thou canst retain. Its plea-
 "sures fade, and leave only desire for more, or end
 "in pain. Death levels all ; wealth, friends, ambi-
 "tion, power and fame. Hast thou love of wife or
 "child, behold ! the more thou lovest, the keener is
 "the pang of death which leaves an aching void.
 "Why should ye cling to things of sense, and forge
 "new chains to bind thee to this whirling wheel of
 "strife, and sin, and death ; of birth and re-birth in
 "endless sequence. Like springs from like, illusion
 "from illusion. This world of sense, of sense is
 "fraught ; and while men cling to sense, the world
 "of forms shall be their pfison-house.

* * * * *

"Yea, and if thou hast not learnt this much ; if
 "now thou knowest not the illusion of the senses,
 "but fondly cling to human life, content if but to
 "grasp the pleasure of the flying moments ; then
 "'tis not for thee to know the secret of the truer
 "life, which waits for him who puts aside the false.

"He who would scale the heights must leave
 "behind all useless loads ; and if thou cherish in
 "thy heart one fond desire for earthly life, it will
 "most surely bind thee to the lower world.

* * * * *

"Be warned in time. Seek not to climb by
 "hazardous ascent, but seek a safer road ; thou who

“art still the slave of sense, who hast not yet perceived how liberation must be wrought.

“Virtue, and truthfulness, and gentle lovè, and charity are good ; and he who, living in the life of sense, hath power to practise these, shall find reward thereby according to his merit. He doth sow that which shall yield in each succeeding life a harvest plentiful, in love of friends and kindred. Thus shall he pass by easy steps, making even of his weaknesses a way to rise to clearer heights.

“But, if thou hast learnt that this world’s pleasures are as illusive as its ills—’tis well.

“If thou hast learnt to value lightly what men prize the most—’tis well.

“If thou would’st free thyself from bonds of sense, though yet a slave, not knowing how to burst thy chains—’tis well.

“Learn now what is that life Divine which none can reach save by renunciation of the lower life to which men cling.

* * * * *

“This life is free from all conditioning ; it is the Great Soul of the Universe that lives and breathes in every living thing. Its name is * * * and perfect harmony and timeless bliss were but a faint reflection of its unmeasured Being.

* * * * *

“This is a mystery which few can understand. Only by renouncing life canst thou find *Life* ; only by renouncing self canst thou find *Self*. Thy

“separate life is but a part of the *One Life*, whose
 “name is * * *

“That which thou call'st thyself is but a phantom,
 “born of sense and matter.

“Thou must lose this life in the *One Life*. * * *
 “Many are the steps, thou Pilgrim of the Ages, by
 “which thou shalt attain this perfect Life.

“The final mystery cannot be known to mortal
 “mind ; the final stage leads out of all human
 “thought.

“Kill out Karma ; cease from re-birth ; this is the
 “first stage on the Path. * * *

“Deem not that this thou canst accomplish by
 “any sacrifice alone, by any mere quality of good-
 “ness, by any mere faith, or righteousness, or creed,
 “or observation of religious ordinance. These are
 “but lower forms by which men may attain a smaller
 “share of bliss ; yea, and each hath its place and
 “good, so that all do well who worship in whatever
 “form, striving to follow that dim star which burns
 “within, leading them through the night to that
 “far Eastern land where breaks the dawn of truth.
 “These have their own reward according to their
 “strife. Yet, not thus can man be freed from bonds
 “of human life. The way that leads out of this lower
 “world hath no religious quality ; there is no creed
 “in TRUTH ; and thou must see the truth, and know
 “it dwelling in all forms, perceiving how it modifies
 “according to the quality of that which doth reflect
 “it, ere thou canst free thyself from that illusion
 “which mistakes the reflection for the light itself.

“ Yet must thou practise every virtue, ere thou
 “ canst attain the liberation that thou seek’st.

“ Nor shalt thou even practise virtue because
 “ thou would’st attain.

“ Nor shalt thou seek attainment through thought
 “ of what attainment brings to self.

“ The thought of self will isolate thee from the
 “ *Self*.

“ Thou hast to kill the thought of self.

“ Thou hast to kill the sense of life before thou
 “ canst find *Life*.

“ Canst thou attain to perfect purity in word and
 “ deed? nay, even if to outward seeming thou
 “ walkest earth a Saint: canst thou attain to perfect
 “ purity in thought and mind?

“ No thought of self, nor taint of earth shall stain
 “ the white robe of thy soul. Like to a clear steady
 “ flame must be its radiance. Behold! within thy
 “ inmost *Self*, shrined in the secret chamber of thy
 “ heart, there burns the light Divine. Thou canst
 “ not see that light, because thy senses are a veil
 “ which hide the sanctuary.

* * * * *

“ Learn thou to still thy restless mind, which now
 ‘ is tossed and swayed by every breeze of human
 ‘ joy, hope, fear; or lashed to fury by its passions.
 ‘ Naught that the world can give or take shall stir
 ‘ thy soul. Pleasure and pain, sorrow and joy,
 ‘ alike must lose their power over self. Not for
 ‘ thyself, but for *All Self*, shall thou find sorrow
 ‘ deep, and joy beyond all human thought. * * *

“Then shall the flame reflect itself in steady
 “radiance within thy soul, and thou thyself becomes
 “that radiance; until at last the radiance itself
 “becomes the flame, and all is merged in that
 “Divinest Light which is the All, the Uttermost,
 “the * * *

“Hast thou learnt this?—’tis well; yet now
 “beware lest thou should’st lose thyself in phantom
 “realms of thine own fancy. Thou must live in
 “*action* as well as thought. The first step is thy
 “*Duty*. Thou must reap that which was sown in
 “former lives, nor fret or chafe at bonds thyself
 “hast tied; patience will wear away the bonds and
 “set thee free.

“Do well thy duty by all men, whate’er thy lot
 “may be.

“Next, thou must kill within thyself the root of
 “evil, that root from whence thy lower self draws
 “sustenance in lives innumerable. This is the
 “hardest of all tasks; desire for self that root is
 “called. Like to the Hydra-headed monster, so is
 “that self which thou must slay. The love of self
 “shall be replaced by love of all mankind. Am-
 “bition, pride, and lust; doubt, error, fear, shall
 “no more find a place within thy mind.

* * * * *

“Behold, thou hast thy choice.

“Two ways lie open to thy choice.

“Thou canst live such lives as those who seek all
 “earthly good, content if but the moment bring
 “their senses satisfaction; heedless of others’ pain,

“ of others’ loss, so that themselves shall lack for
 “ naught ; ambitious, proud, ruled by desire, passion,
 “ and lust ; seeking worldly goods, and place, and
 “ power ; looking for praise and worship from their
 “ fellow-men ; using all things, even the name of
 “ virtue and religion, as stepping-stones whereby to
 “ pinnacle their pride.

“ Such is the way of those who have not seen the
 “ light ; yea, and even those who have perceived a
 “ higher and a nobler path will take this way ; dark
 “ and evil, fraught with retribution, is the Karma
 “ of those who, having seen the light, turn back to
 “ tread the lower road.

“ Be not thou such as these, O seeker after
 “ truth. For unto thee is given a fuller knowledge
 “ to perceive a higher truth ; and if thou try and fail,
 “ thou yet may’st try again, so that thou lose not
 “ sight of truth, but ever strive.

* * * * *

“ Canst thou unread what thou hast read ? Yea,
 “ deep shall be thy sin if to the truth thou hast
 “ perceived thou be not true.

“ Yet even now thou art not pledged to take
 “ that path of toil which only strong ones choose.
 “ Be warned in time and take an easier road.
 “ Live thou in practice of all charity, bearing good
 “ will to all that lives, in kindness and sweet con-
 “ tent ; so shalt thou lighten Karma, and come in
 “ future birth by easy stages to the commencement
 “ of the path. There is a human love, pure type of

“ the Divine ; let such love be thine, if yet thou art
“ too weak to grasp the infinite.

“ But, if thou takest now the path of sorrow, the
“ path of toil and suffering, not to be endured save
“ by him whose will is fixed in stern resolve ; great
“ is the reward if thou do'st conquer ; dark and
“ terrible thy fate if thou do'st fail.

“ But, if now thou art resolved to choose this
“ way, if to the highest effort thou would'st pledge
“ thyself, thou may'st demand the knowledge which
“ shall unclothe thy sight, which shall reveal the foes
“ thou hast to conquer.

* * * * *

“ Be warned again. Take one more day before
“ thou break the second seal. Seek no advice of
“ any friend, but search in thine own heart.

“ Peace be unto thee, and to all men.”

CHAPTER XII.

DROWNED.

I became dead, and behold, I am alive unto the ages of the ages, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.

The Revelation of St. John.

WHAT a different colour the mind gives to its ideas, and what a different view do we often take of our actions in the broad light of day, and freshness of the morning, to that which pertains to the influences of the night. The night brings mystery and enchantment. The consciousness is thrown inward, and clothes itself in the ideal; and as we become more and more detached from the external world, there is danger lest we should lose our judgment, and commit ourselves to words or actions which can appear nothing but folly in the light of day. Many indeed have had cause to repent in the morning, words which have been spoken under the subtle glamour of the night spell.

And how did that strange MS. I had read appear to me now, with my faculties wide awake, and the busy matter-of-fact world of everyday life most prominent in my consciousness? Was it not well that the MS. had directed me to take one more day

for consideration before I finally committed myself by breaking the second seal? Might not that ideal which had been so strongly influencing me over night, fade in the light of day, and leave only fear lest I had pledged myself to a vain Quest?

I sprang out of bed and drew up the blind. It was a glorious morning, promise of a long delightful summer day. How one might drink one's fill of the great life of Nature in such a day as this; would not the repetition of such days, freed from the necessity of toiling for one's living, be all that a man might need to wish for on this earth? Alas! for human ambition; how many would be satisfied with such conditions?

There was the MS. lying on the table as I had left it overnight; would it have the same meaning for me this morning as it had then? Well, I would read it again; I would examine its statements in every way during the day; I would take the same precautions in judging of it as I should do of any other course to which I might be asked to pledge myself. Mine should be no hasty judgment, but wholly the dictates of my reason. And yet, as I resolved to do all this, I knew that I was really pledged already. I felt that my destiny was stronger than any resolve I might now form, that it was no question of choice or will, however much it might seem possible to accept or to reject. Welling up from my inmost consciousness, and obliterating all mere intellectual judgment, came again the strange mystic intuition of the Quest, the pledge to

which had been taken ages ago, the true object of which was now revealed; and I knew—though my worldly wisdom bade me pause and consider—that no pause, no consideration, no pledge was necessary.

I dressed myself leisurely and went down to breakfast. Nirman was not at the table, but I found a note from him, which ran as follows:—

“He who would tread the highest path must learn to stand alone, in his own judgment. To-day seek no advice or company. To-morrow let me hear your choice.

“A. N.”

I had the day before me then for solitary meditation, so I determined to walk along the coast in the opposite direction to Dolphinton, taking something with me for lunch so that I might not have to return for that meal. I did not intend to walk far, but simply to find some solitary spot where I might be undisturbed. Such a place I found when I had walked about a couple of miles. It was a small plantation which grew right up to the edge of the cliff, where I could lie in the shade, while at the same time I had an extensive view of the coast-line. Here I threw myself down on the heather, and remained for several hours, re-reading the MS., and passing in review the events of my life in relation to my new-found hopes.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon before I rose to go. I was tempted by the look of the sea, and determined to go down to the little harbour

and take a boat. I walked slowly back to the town, keeping a look out for the Stantons, as I did not wish to encounter them, and I knew that Nirman would account to them for my absence during the whole of the day. I got safely into the boat, however, without meeting any one save two or three strangers, and was soon some distance from the shore. There were a few other boats out in the bay, but too far off for me to distinguish their occupants; and presently I put up my sculls, and drifted idly at the will of the waves.

Suddenly I was aroused from my reverie by a sharp scream, followed by a shout for help. A rapid glance in the direction of the cry showed me an overturned boat, and three or four people struggling in the water. I seized my sculls, and pulled as rapidly as possible towards the spot, but I was a considerable distance off, and I felt that I should hardly be there in time to save any one who could not keep afloat.

When at last I did reach the overturned boat, I found a gentleman clinging to it, and supporting a lady who was apparently insensible. The gentleman seemed self-possessed, and in no immediate danger, but he shouted to me, "Another lady, look out for her," and almost immediately I saw her come to the surface about twenty yards from where I was. She was evidently quite unconscious, and I knew that she would sink again immediately, and probably for the last time. More help was at hand, for another boat was pulling rapidly to the rescue, and, afraid

lest I should lose sight of the drowning girl, I jumped out of the boat, and swam towards her; but she disappeared again before I had barely time to reach the spot. There was nothing left but to dive in the hope of finding her, though I was already much in want of breath with rowing so hard.

I collected what breath I could, however, and then dived. It was a mere chance, as the water must have been very deep here, but fortune favoured me, and I did find her, and clutched her by the skirt of her dress. How long I was under I do not know, or how deep I had gone, for under such circumstances all is confused and uncertain; but as soon as I had caught her dress, I passed my arm round her waist, and struck out for the surface.

But that surface, and the much-needed air, I seemed unable to reach. Whether I was really rising, or whether the weight was too much for me, exhausted as I already was, I cannot tell; I remember only the struggle to get to the surface, and then the conviction that I could not do so. One desperate effort, and then I could hold my breath no longer; my lungs gave way, and I gulped down the choking water instead of the air I needed so much.

I felt that I should drown, yet I do not remember that I let go my hold, though I must have done so, or I should have sunk to the bottom without rising again; yet from the moment when I lost my breath I do not remember what I did, or what happened;

I can only recall the ideas which passed through my mind.

There was a sort of momentary shock, a kind of darkness passing over my consciousness, and then my mind assumed a most surprising activity. I knew that I was drowning, and my first ideas were connected with this circumstance, as I thought what would be the immediate effect of my death on my friends and relatives. Then I viewed it in relation to the events of the past few days, and that new motive which had just entered into my life. Was this then to be the end, just as I seemed to be really commencing? Probably the most curious part of this experience was, that I felt no emotion, neither pleasure nor regret, as I thought of this. I reviewed the strange developments of my ideas during the past two days, since I had met Nirman, almost with a feeling as if I had no personal concern in them, and then in the same way my consciousness passed rapidly back over the whole of my history, reviewing every event and circumstance in the minutest detail. But though I am obliged to write this as if the process were one of reviewing a sequence of events, it was not so in reality. The whole of the past seemed to become the present, seemed to be presented simultaneously to my mental vision, the different events being but parts of a picture which one sees as a connected whole.

How long this retrospect may have occupied, I cannot tell. Probably, as in the case of dreams, the whole occupied but a moment, but in looking at

it now it appears again in the light of a long and deliberate mental process. But after dwelling thus upon the events of my present life, the idea of reincarnation seemed to start forward as the key-note into which everything was blended. The events I had been reviewing had their source in a previous life, and then with the predominance of that idea, my memory seemed to pass over a gap, as if from the events of one day over the intervening night to those of the preceding day, and I knew that I was recalling a life which had been lived on this earth centuries ago. I saw myself, yet not myself; the same individuality, yet a different personality, living this past life which was as naturally connected with the one I had just closed, as the events of yesterday were with the events of to-day. And from this I passed back to still another, and yet another, and I know not how many more, for I do not remember the events of all of them distinctly, but only that life immediately preceding my present one; and that is clear and connected in all its details.

And what a revelation it brings, what a widening of the horizon of life, what a solution of the mysterious problem of existence, of the whence and wherefore of our fleeting consciousness. For what is life but a passing phase of consciousness; of what account are the joys and sorrows of one brief lifetime in that great sum-total which we name *for ever*? And here verily is the great mystery of our inner nature; that whereas the life we live in this world is relative, conditioned, finite, there is

that within us which transcends our consciousness of time and space, and notes the little cycles of our lives as but a part of a diviner whole. To unite the lower consciousness with the higher, the human with the divine, the individual with the universal ; that is the goal of our Initiation. For what is this higher consciousness but a portion of the great Universal Soul, which lives, and moves, and breathes in ALL. What is the great illusion, the cause of all our doubts and sorrows, our sin and ignorance, save our separation from this larger life which is the conditioning not the conditioned ; the noumenon not the phenomenon. Call this Soul of All by what name you will, but beware of the fatal mistake of theology, which makes of this principle a personal Being of love and hate, placing him *outside* man ; a God whom men must worship and propitiate. God himself is lost if there be one soul that is not "saved." For that soul *is* God, if indeed God be All and in All. . And if the term *God* be not used to express this principle as a *scientific* fact, then it merely represents a finite human idea, to be used as a bogey by cunning and priestcraft. He who would find the source of his being must go behind all that is finite, and find that which is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever ; that which changes not amid all the flux of sentient life and human thought. " Within yourselves deliverance must be sought, each man his prison makes." Yea, truly the great secret of emancipation lies in each man's heart. IT is there ; can only be reached

and worshipped there ; only attained by looking inward, not outward through the senses. IT is found only as we free ourselves from the illusion of separateness ; only as we lose our individual life in IT can we find LIFE ; only as we lose sight and touch of the outer world, can we sense that inner world on which the outer rests.

It is this, and this only, which is the object of that Mystic Quest, recorded in language more or less comprehensible in all ages ; sometimes embodied in an extravagant religious idea, and often finding expression in individual lives, which—when reviewed apart from the fundamental principle which guides the Mystic's progress from one incarnation to another—appear a mere series of purposeless and wasted efforts. And because the world does not understand this principle, it does not understand the Mystic ; because it does not understand that initiation of which Christ is the final type, but has hardened the words, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," into a dogma, and forced it into a theological system, it has obscured and obliterated the central fact that the *Christos*, the divine man, dwells in every human soul, and overshadows with its influence every human life. The personal *Christ* had naught to do with our salvation. He stands but as the prototype of that which all men may become, which all men *must* become, ere they can attain to oneness with the "Father," and claim their birthright as "Sons of God." "Why

seek ye the living among the dead?"—is the question which may well be asked in this nineteenth century of dead and dying formulas; for now verily men return on the first day of every week—with or without spices—to the sepulchre of a dead Christ; nor do they ever gain thereby a vision of the *resurrected* one.

Yet the Mystic, having seen this vision, passes on towards a fuller knowledge, and gains a closer union with that living power which is his Higher Self; until at last—the work of redemption now fully accomplished—he rises triumphant over death, the perfect man, the Christos or Anointed, the full Initiate.

All this and much more I rediscovered during that interval of drowning, when my lower consciousness became united with that thread of individual life which runs throughout the larger cycle of our life, from birth to death, and death to birth; for all this and much more I had learnt in previous lives, which now stood before me in their true relation to that present life, which up till now had been an unsolved riddle. And how natural it all appears, now that I have the key. No wonder that Nirman's teachings seemed so familiar to me; no wonder that the MS. had struck a chord in my soul, and woke to new life the energies of a great purpose; speaking as it did in mystic tones which were to me like long forgotten melodies, heard in the hush and stillness of the night.

Ah me! would that I could bring to each and all

the knowledge of this sacred Quest ; teaching all men the greatness of their nature, the possibilities, which lie within each soul ; freeing them from ignorance and fear, which makes them ready slaves to superstition and credulity, to custom, habit, and every self-assumed authority of book or priest. Yet even these are not without their use, for now they act as beasts which guard the entrance to the inner sanctuary of the temple, lest any fool or coward entering there, defile with selfish purpose the sacred mysteries, even as the outer court is now defiled. Yet the man of noble purpose, facing these, finds them powerless to harm, and passes by ; gaining the secret of his life, the fellowship of those great souls—the Brothers of the Quest.

CHAPTER XIII.

OLD FRIENDS IN NEW BODIES.

Ah ! now my senses close,
But memory passes swiftly back :
I know you once again,
In lives deep buried in the past.

* * *

ALTHOUGH the physical sensations of drowning cannot be said to be painful or even unpleasant, those of returning consciousness are such as one would not often care to experience. When I again opened my eyes on the external world, I found myself lying on a mattress on the floor of a strange room, and Nirman was seated beside me, holding my hand. I was aching in every limb, as if I had been soundly thrashed. Everything in my mind was confused, and I tried vainly to account for my sensations, or to remember where I was, or how I came there.

I closed my eyes again, but it was a considerable time before the events of my physical life began to shape themselves in my consciousness. I had been living over again most vividly, a life which had completed itself, so far as this world is con-

cerned, hundreds of years ago ; and my mind seemed most reluctant to return from the past to the present personality. Probably it was my extreme physical discomfort which ultimately predominated, and forced me to collect my scattered senses, until at last the events of the day took form and sequence in my memory.

But as these became more and more clear, the full significance of what had taken place, and of that state of consciousness into which I had passed at drowning, and of those events which I now remembered as it might have been in a vivid dream, gradually dawned upon my mind ; until at last it flashed into a full conviction, which thrilled me through and through with the most intense emotion.

For a few moments I lay there, lost in the wonder and the glory of it ; my whole body pulsing with the great wave of emotion which had rushed through me at the moment of realising what I had gained ; then with tears of joy in my eyes I raised myself, and drawing Nirman down towards me I cried : " Alcides, my brother, now I know you."

" Do you indeed remember now, tell me quickly, how much do you remember ? " he eagerly inquired, as he bent over me.

" All, I remember all as clearly as if it were but yesterday," I answered ; " and I know that you were Alcides and I was Menas. Ah ! why did you not tell me when first we met ? "

" And would you have believed me if I had told you ? " he answered, smiling. " You forget that

we were utter strangers, and had I done so you would probably have taken me for a lunatic, for you did not know anything about reincarnation even as a theory; besides, you perhaps remember now the rule."

"Yes, I remember, of course you could not tell me," I replied. "But is it not strange that I should find it out in this way; it might have taken me a very long time by the ordinary methods."

"The gods have been good to you, you see," Nirman answered, smiling; "and to me also in that they have granted an answer to my prayer, and returned my Menas to me. For the last three hours I have been doing all I knew to help you to retain the memory of the past when you returned to consciousness, for I clearly saw what was passing in your mind. You were so busy with your past experiences that your consciousness did not return, even after we had completely restored physical animation. You opened your eyes for a few moments, but it was evident that your mind was far away, for there was no look of recognition in your eyes, and you passed almost immediately into a state of trance. The others who helped to bring you round did not understand it, and I don't know what they would not have done, had I not taken the authority into my own hands, and cleared the room. And now my efforts are successful, and you my Menas once more become my friend and brother."

"You knew then from the very first that I was

Menas; how did you know? How came you to meet me in the train; who are the Brothers now; one of them must have told you, and sent you to me?"

"Who should it be but Thytus, our old Master. Three years ago I found him, and the Path, after wandering half over the world in search of what I knew not then, but knew when I had found it, as you know now," he said.

"Yes, now I know, now all the mists are cleared away. And Thytus, where is he?" I asked.

"In the far East, where now for many centuries the home of ancient wisdom has remained, unknown to the world in its dark cycle. Thytus sent me word of you, and bade me meet you and lead you once again into the Path. You see how rapidly you have progressed under the influence I was able to impart. When I met you three days ago, you were only an average conventional Englishman, with a good deal of prejudice and plenty of scepticism, and now you are a full-fledged Mystic, in heart and soul and will."

"Yes, indeed, now I see in its true light the meaning of all my doubts and questionings and mystic tendencies; and then to have found you once again, you dear old Cid—Ah! stay; now I remember, Harriet called you by that name; it must be surely that she is Chlindra, and does she also know?"

"Yes, she was Chlindra, and she also knows," Nirman replied. "We have no secrets from each

other, so of course she knew when I did who you were. She will be overjoyed to hear that now you have regained your memory. But there is Ethel, do you not remember who she was?"

The tell-tale colour mounted to my face when Nirman asked me this. I had forgotten Ethel and my love, in the great joy of finding once again him who in my former life was more than friend or brother to me. But now the love I bore for Ethel seemed to return with tenfold force, as the thought flashed through my mind that she might be——

Nirman was looking at me with a smile, waiting for my answer, as I paused, trying to recall and fix her past identity.

"Can it be true, is she indeed Dione?" I asked him eagerly.

"Yes, but she does not know it yet," he answered, smiling still at my confusion.

"Then it will be my task to teach her to remember," I said, "Dear Ethel, no wonder I loved her at first sight."

"Ah! now you are making confessions," Nirman said, laughing outright.

"Oh! I quite forgot I had not confided in you," I said, laughing also. "It seems so natural to have you back again, that I can hardly credit that we have not been friends all our lives, and that I only met you three days ago."

"Nevertheless I guessed your secret," he replied; "though like most people who are in love, you probably thought you were concealing it well."

"Then what do you think of it?" I said. "Is Ethel practising a like dissimulation?"

"I have very little doubt of it," he answered; "indeed her anxiety about you just now could hardly be mistaken."

"Can't I see her to-night?" I asked eagerly.

"Don't be quite so impetuous," Nirman said, smiling. "She knows that you are all right, and it is getting late, it is past ten o'clock. Besides you must be content to behave as a conventional lover for the present, and remember that she does not know what you now know of your past histories, nor must you tell her until you have gained a confession of her love."

"And that shall not take me long," I said; "but you are quite right, it will not do to tell her. Am I to remain here all night?"

"Yes, you had better do so," he replied. "Mrs. Vine is a good nurse, and I have no doubt you will be comfortable. To-morrow you will get about again all right, but it would be a great risk for you to go out again to-night. I shall go up to Dolphinton and make my final report, and will come round again early in the morning and have breakfast with you. Now I must go and get some beef-tea for you, and introduce you to your nurse."

"Tell me first how I came to be saved, and where I am now," I said.

"You are in a cottage close to the pier," he replied. "It happened in this way. I was out in a boat at the same time, and witnessed the acci-

dent, though I was further off than you were, and did not reach the spot so soon as you did. I saw you dive, however, and waited to help you when you came up again, but you were such a long time under that I feared something had happened, and when you did rise I saw that you were quite unconscious. I was, however, just able to clutch you, and drag you into my boat, and as there was more help at hand for the others, I rowed you as quickly as possible to the shore, and you were taken to this house at the suggestion of one of the fishermen."

"You dear old fellow, so it was you who saved me," I said; "and you have paid me back for saving you last time."

"No, I have not paid you that debt," he said. "You sacrificed your life for me, but I have sacrificed nothing in saving you now."

"But you have enabled me to find the Path, which is much more," I said. "You have brought me to life in a double sense."

"You were bound to find the Path sooner or later, with or without my aid," he answered. "Now I will fetch Mrs. Vine; she is a most loquacious woman, but certainly knows what she is about in a case of drowning."

He left the room, and returned in a few minutes with a stout, good-natured looking woman, whom one felt at first sight to be one of the right sort.

I began to thank her for her kindness in taking me in; telling her that as I had no choice in the

matter I hoped she would accept my apologies for coming without first saying by your leave.

She, however, would not hear of any obligation in the matter. "Lord bless you," she said, "I've had more nor one drowned man in my cottage in my time. I've lived here most all my life, and the place being handy like for the harbour, and me well known for a good nurse, they brings 'em to me when any accident happens, as sometimes does to the visitors, and more often to the fishing cobsles. I know just what to do, and there's more nor one man walking about in this place as I've helped to bring back to life afore now."

"Then you have earned the life-long gratitude of many besides myself," I said; "and in my opinion there is no happiness in life which can compare with the knowledge that we have been of some service to our fellow-creatures. May Karma reward you."

This last sentence seemed to puzzle her, and Nirman took advantage of her momentary confusion to press the necessity of my taking the beef-tea which she had brought, and which, to tell the truth, I was very much in need of.

"I do not think our patient will want anything more to-night," he said; "but I have no doubt he will be desperately hungry in the morning. I propose to come round and breakfast with him, if you can provide us with a good basin of porridge at eight o'clock."

"That I can, and I'll guarantee you never tasted

better," Mrs. Vine answered. "If Mr. Silton wants anything in the night, just let him ring this bell, and I'll be with him before he can turn round."

"Very well, now we will say good-night," said Nirman.

"Good-night, old fellow, good-night," I said, pressing his hand. "Good-night, Mrs. Vine, I do not think I shall trouble you till the morning."

The door closed and I was left to myself, but it was long before I shut my eyes. I was too happy to sleep. My life had blossomed into a fulness which far exceeded any ideal I had ever dared to set before myself. I contrasted my mental position now, with what it had been three days ago, before I had met Nirman. What had been mere hopes and aspiration, dimly and vaguely understood, were now full realisations. The cloud had rolled away, the veil had parted; matter and custom no longer shadowed from my sight that source of life which has its roots in the eternal soul of All.

That night I read the second MS., although it lay fast locked within my trunk; but that which it contains is sacred, nor can it be revealed save to those whose inner sight has opened on the world of spirit, whose inner ear can catch the sounds of other worlds, the "music of the spheres."

CHAPTER XIV.

ALCIDES AND MENAS.

There is no great and no small
To the Soul that maketh all ;
And where it cometh all things are,
And it cometh everywhere.

I am owner of the sphere,
Of the seven stars and the solar year,
Of Cæsar's hand, and Plato's brain,
Of Lord Christ's heart, and Shakespeare's strain.

EMERSON.

IN order that some of the events alluded to in the last chapter may be understood, we must go back about 1600 years to a small town or village on the coast of ancient Thessaly, washed by the waters of the Ægean sea. Behind lie the lofty and precipitous hills, from which rise, on the south Mount Pelion, and on the north Mount Ossa ; while further north again are seen the wooded slopes of Mount Olympus, the immortal home of Greek mythology ; upon whose summit, lost in clouds and mystery, the gods were said to dwell. These hills have changed but little, and still they stand like silent watchers through the centuries, as once they stood, ages before the genius of the Grecian world gave

them their legendary lore; and as they still shall stand, when that which now men worship shall fade and die, and in its turn become an ancient fable. He who would understand the eternal verities must learn to live upon Olympus with the gods, nor deem the fate of the whole universe to be decided by the brief authority which rules a mere passing phase of human thought. Like to the drifting clouds which wreath themselves around the summit of the sacred mount, so are those forms of thought in which men seek to clothe the infinite; but like the clouds they only serve to hide the heights, and veil in deeper mystery the secret of the ages.

It is eventide, and the sun is sinking behind the range of hills. Two youths are walking on the margin of the sea, conversing in low and earnest tones. The name of one is Alcides, the other is Menas.

By their appearance and manner we should judge that they do not belong to the plebeian class, though both are dressed plainly, and without any of those distinctions which were usually adopted by the wealthier classes.

Alcides, who is somewhat the elder of the two, is the owner of a small estate in the neighbourhood, and would be considered superior to Menas in social position, as the latter had been born of shepherd parents, and reared among the Pelion hills. But they are both men now, and between them there is no thought of any artificial distinction

of birth. Both are orphans, but in no way related to each other, though they have been inseparable and more than brothers for many years. They differ from each other very much, however, in character. Alcides is the more brilliant of the two, possessing more ardour and enthusiasm, more of those qualities which go to make a successful man among men. Menas, on the other hand, though in no way inferior to Alcides in mental qualities, is of a retiring and romantic disposition, loving solitude better than society; a student and poet, rather than a leader of men.

Their conversation has some reference to this, for Menas is saying to Alcides :

“ I cannot but feel sad, Alcides, to leave this spot with all its old associations, and quiet peaceful days. Thou dost eagerly embrace the call to action; the life of the great city with all its human interests hath a charm for thee, but not for me, who love but Nature and the mystic lore, as well as thou know'st.”

“ Yea, I know it, Menas. I have the faculty which loves to measure wit with wit, whilst thou dost shrink from contact with the busy world. But thou knowest it were but selfish to lock in our own minds the sacred truth. We must share our knowledge with our fellows, and play our part in the great struggle between ignorance and light. For knowledge is not all, character is more, and Karma most of all if we should shun our duty.”

“ Nay, I do not shun it, Alcides; yet I cannot

feel elated as thou dost at the call to action. I am a child of Nature, while thou wast born to govern men. Thou hast already lived in the great city, and mixed with men, while I never left my native hills."

"Thou wilt soon learn to love the life of action, Menas; and at least we are not called upon to stand alone; we shall have each other, and many who like ourselves are pledged to the Great Quest. But come, it is the hour when Thytus bade us go to him."

"Aye, and when shall we again meet our beloved master? I fear nevermore."

"Nevermore is a long word, Menas, and does not fit with our philosophy. Thou art despondent, and forget'st that life and death are but a day and night. What if we see him not in the to-day of this our present life, to-morrow we may meet, or in some future day when we can stand as he does, among the great souls of whom the world knows not."

"Yea, I also hold that hope, Alcides; yet still the parting now is hard."

"I do not find it hard, and yet thou know'st I love him full as well as thou."

"That is because thy heart is set on action, mine on repose. Duty calls us now to action, which thou dost love, but calls me away from that I love. But thou art right, there is no room for sadness or regret in minds which view this changing world from lofty heights of pure philosophy.

Sadness and joy touch not our deepest soul, even as the storms which lash the surface of the sea to fury, filling men's hearts with dread and fear, cannot penetrate or stir the depths, the great foundations of the mighty waters. 'Tis when we live but on the surface, forgetful of the depths of our own being, that we partake of these emotions, the fitful moods of joy, hope, fear, which are like storm and sunshine on the restless surface of the sea."

"Yea, now thou speakest well, Menas; yet one must needs hold well the balance between the inner and the outer. We need each other's help, for thou art too ideal, shunning the world of action, I too apt to live in action."

Speaking thus the young men passed up the main street of the little town, and reached a stone building somewhat larger and better constructed than the majority of the houses on either side. Entering the front gateway they crossed the inner court, and reached a short passage on the further side, and pausing before a heavy curtain which concealed a door, Alcides lifted the curtain at one side, and struck three times on a small bell placed in a niche in the wall. In a few moments the signal was answered by a single stroke on the same bell, and pushing aside the curtain Alcides opened a heavy door which was disclosed. They both entered the apartment, making a respectful obeisance as they did so to a venerable old man who was seated at the table in the centre of the room,

and then took their seats at the same table without speaking.

The sage Thytus acknowledged the youths' salutation merely by a slight movement of the head. He was engaged in writing, and the table was covered with a great variety of MSS., parchments, rolls, and mathematical instruments. The room or chamber was constructed of stone, and the walls were hung with tapestry; while an oil lamp suspended in the centre seemed to be the only means of lighting it.

At the foot of the table was seated a maiden of about eighteen summers; a beautiful girl she would doubtless be called, with her dark, almost raven black hair and eyes, and a thoughtful and intellectual cast of features, rarely to be met with in the pure Eastern type of beauty. She was engaged in reading when the youths entered, and looked up only for a moment to greet them with a smile.

No word was spoken for some time after Alcides and Menas took their seats; all proceeded with their studies in silence.

At last the Sage laid aside his writing, and speaking to the others, he said:

“Put aside your books now, my children, and listen to my words.”

Alcides, Menas, and the maiden, whom we must now know as Chindra, and who is the sister of Menas, and the *fiancée* of Alcides, did as they were bidden, at the same time rising to their feet, and standing in a respectful attitude

awaiting the words of Thytus, who thus addressed them :

“ Long and carefully have I watched over you, my children, and instructed you in that wisdom which is more precious than silver or gold. I have taught you many mysteries unknown to the profane. I have instructed you in the meaning of many an ancient fable and myth, which the ignorant regard as idle tales, or upon which they base a superstitious and degraded form of worship. But the knowledge you have thus acquired is held but as a sacred trust. Knowledge is not the end, but the beginning, and knowledge is a curse if wisdom follow not as fruit of knowledge. This also I have taught you, and the path of wisdom as well as knowledge. Your knowledge must be used for others, not put away like hoarded treasure ; so shall it enrich the world, and thou thyself the richer grow, the more thou givest away. It is for you to help those who are struggling to the light, and take your part with those who strive to keep the lamp of truth still shining on the dark and troubled waters of humanity. What you have learnt is much ; what still remains to learn is more. The test of fitness is in practice, the test of character in action ; and you must win your right to further knowledge by action and experience.

“ The time has come when you must quit your studies, and test their value in the field of active life. There is much for you to do. The dark

cycle of the Western nations is closing rapidly. The sacred mysteries have been degraded by proud and selfish men who seek only for power to bind men's souls in superstitious fear, for their own ends. The sacred trust which makes a man a priest, and consecrates the office to the highest act of self-renouncing service, is now betrayed and made subservient to the lust and pride of worldly life and power. The spiritual is everywhere degraded, the symbol worshipped without a knowledge of that which it presents. The Christian Church is gaining ground on every hand. Its leaders' pride and lust for power know no bounds; yea, and they will gain the power they covet, and sacrifice the world to their ambitious schemes. The history of the Church shall be a history of fire and blood; a history of fiends incarnate; a black and blood-stained page which one day men will wish to tear from out the record of their life. Well hath it been written, 'Woe unto that man through whom the Son of Man is betrayed.' Woe indeed to those who have degraded the most sacred principle of human nature, even the divine mystery of the *Christos*, teaching the worship of a personal *Christ*; making the eternal principle of the Logos, the Father through a human virgin of a human son; and striving to give their system further credence, by identifying this 'Father' with the Jewish God, *Jehovah*. But even lower than this the Church shall sink, causing their dupes to bow in worship to the virgin, and teaching that the

Church itself is God ordained, infallible, and holy. Yea, and that canon of authority which now they have concocted, those dogmas which they have pieced together from fragments of the ancient sacred mysteries, shall become of such authority that men shall worship the very letter of the book in slavish ignorance, and grant divine authority to every dogma which the Church shall choose to place upon them. There is no end, no measure, no depth of degradation of all that is divine in man which shall not be accomplished during the coming age. The very light of reason which raises man above the brutes shall be extinguished by the Church, and men shall deem that they can buy with gold a life of endless happiness.

“It must needs be that this dark age should fall upon this race of men. “It is the Karma of long neglect of the Divine, of degradation of the sacred mysteries. But woe to those who now degrade the sacred truths for their own selfish ends; to those who now are laying on their fellow-men a cloak of superstitious ignorance which must be worn for centuries. Mighty indeed shall be the power of that Church which now they found. Not all the mightiest conquerors the world has ever seen have equalled in their bloodiest wars, in rapine, fire, or famine, the cruelties through which the Church shall wade to gain and to maintain its power. And they themselves, these men who now have seized the power which superstition and authority must ever wield over the masses, shall fall themselves under

its blackest curse. Behold them now, masking their lust and pride under a cloak of zeal for Christ. For a few years they have their way, and then they disappear from our sight. The wheel of birth and death turns round; once more they come to reap what they have sown. They have sown the storm, and they must reap the whirlwind. Born in the darkest age of cruelty and ignorance, caught in the snare which they themselves laid for their fellows, we shall see them perish by the thousand, tortured to death by every means which human fiends can invent, those fiends being the very representatives of that succession of apostles which now they seek to institute, to give themselves a brief divine authority. But you, my children, have learnt the truth, and now I tell you what shall come to pass, lest using your knowledge for a selfish end, you should yourselves become entangled in that fatal current which now is whirling millions down into the darkest depths of matter and illusion.

“ Be true to the great trust reposed in you, and you shall safely pass this fearful cycle which now is closing in. Not until the worst is past shall Karma lead you to re-birth; not until humanity has risen from its throes and suffering, as from a dreadful nightmare dream, and shaking off the fatal spell of fear and authority, shall once more strike for freedom, and question Nature with confidence and trust. Then shall you once more be found, ready to carry on the lamp of truth, to

teach once more the sacred laws of life, which have been, are, and shall be through all the cycles. .

“Your duty now is simple. It is to help the few who still oppose the spread of these perverted doctrines. All through the cycle there shall be a few who still retain a knowledge of the truth ; the path shall still be open to those who seek, though few indeed will be their number in the coming age. Yet still the lamp shall burn, though flickering low, fed by a few of lofty mind and noble soul. It is for you now as ever to sow the seeds of truth, heedless where they root, or how they grow ; in due time they will spring to life according to the eternal law of Karma. Look not for fruit of that you sow, lest you should deem the fruit your own reward.

“Those to whom you go in Alexandria are like yourselves instructed in the ancient wisdom. You must work with them under the rules which govern the fraternity to which they now belong. Tomorrow you will depart. Pledge yourselves now in solemn oath to follow the sacred truths which you have learnt, in life or death, and to keep inviolable the secrets with which you are entrusted.”

First Alcides, then Menas, then Chlindra took the oath the Sage repeated ; and were then instructed in certain signs and passwords. Finally laying his hands upon the head of each in turn, the Sage invoked a blessing on them ; while they bowed their heads, and reverently kissed his hand ; passing out of the room without another spoken word.

CHAPTER XV.

SIXTEEN HUNDRED YEARS AGO.

Some moon-struck sophist stood
Watching the shade from his own soul upthrown,
Fill Heaven and darken Earth, and in such mood
The Form he saw and worshipped was his own,
His likeness in the world's vast mirror shown ;
And 'twere an innocent dream, but that a faith
Nursed by fear's dew of poison, grows thereon.

SHELLEY.

WE must now take a glance at the city of Alexandria, some five years after the events narrated in the last chapter. Alcides and Chindra have been married about three years ; and as Alcides with his superior qualities and energy has risen to a position of considerable influence and prosperity, they are now taking their place among the best and most cultivated society of that renowned city, in which at that time so many antagonistic forces were struggling for predominance over the future of the Western World.

Menas, who resides with his sister and brother-in-law, has devoted his time to literary pursuits, and has already made his mark in some works in the older philosophies. Less gifted in social qualities

than the others, he does not mix to the same extent as they do in social activities, but is even more retiring in disposition than when we first made his acquaintance.

There is one event which has contributed very greatly to this, and which we must not pass without noticing. Shortly after coming to Alexandria, Menas formed a deep attachment to one who was, in every respect, his *alter ego*, and, like himself, pledged to the Mystic Quest. Poetic and romantic in disposition, a child of Nature, and withal a natural Mystic, Menas found in Dione all that was complementary to his highest ideals; and these two were united by those affinities which alone can sanction a true marriage. The bond between them was one which had not begun, nor could it terminate, in one short lifetime; it was a bond which made the one necessary to the other in that mystic life which they alone can understand who have passed the barriers of forms and customs, and entered that hidden stream which leads to perfect liberation.

But in the life of Menas and Dione there were certain influences at work which precluded at that time a long continued and full realisation of their union. Love like all else is only purified by suffering, and these two, though far above the reach of those illusions which pass for love with the great mass of humanity, had still many lessons to learn before becoming one with that which is not the shadow but the substance of Eternal Love. Before

two years had passed in the human history of their love, K̄arma stepped in ; decreeing for Dione a passage out of this lower world, for Menas the loss of her he loved. Let us not ask why, nor seek to fathom the inner mystery of this law to which the Mystic bows in silence ; acknowledging its justice even while he suffers, and thereby gathering the perfect fruit which suffering brings.

Menas had sorrowed, as all must sorrow who have loved and lost ; but had risen through his grief to higher realms of thought, had learnt some deeper secrets of that unseen world from whence all causes issue. His loss had driven him deeper into contemplation, had detached him more than ever from the busy world of purely human interests ; and now we see him as a man of letters, a poet and philosopher, not indeed without some note, and looked upon as likely to influence very considerably the tendencies of thought and speculation in those times.

But while these three, Alcides, Chlindra, and Menas, were to all outward seeming but ordinary citizens, living in the modes and fashions of the day, the main object of their life was in reality connected with the preservation and continuation of those sacred truths of which at that time the traces were rapidly being obliterated by the growing influence, ecclesiastical and civil, of the so-called Christian Church. But let us not hold the Church wholly responsible, terribly as she sinned in her perversion of the truth, deeply as her votaries and

victims have suffered, and vast as has been her responsibility for ages of darkness and degradation. Abject slaves to superstition though she has made a great portion of mankind, she was but the agent of *Karma*. Men's sins and vices, and contempt of all that was divine and sacred in their nature, found a terrible retribution in the materialisation and brutalisation of that ancient wisdom which they had learnt to neglect and despise. Every sacred principle was dragged down into a hard and rigid dogma, clothed in grossest sensual form, and subsequently seized upon by men of unbounded ambition, amalgamated with the civil power, and used to govern with a terrible despotism, those human units whose Karma cast them in re-birth into that seething caldron of evil passions which has everywhere marked the so-called triumph of the Cross. And if the age of fire and blood has now happily passed, there still remains the spirit of intolerance, of pride and bigotry, and the professed followers of the Divine Master still find means to persecute, to kill a name and reputation, where they have lost the power to injure in any other way. Still there remains the pomp and pride of Church preferences, and that priesthood which professes to draw its inspiration and example from the lowly teacher of Nazareth, is the living embodiment of all that is most arrogant and potent in human pride of place and power. The "Church" is indeed nowadays a most respectable profession, with many prizes, from the comfortable country parsonage upward; if

only the candidate who takes refuge in "holy orders" as his only chance in life, can succeed in getting some little interest to put him in possession of a "living." Little do these men know that they are but straws, swept down one of the blackest psychic whirlpools which has ever formed a vortex round the iniquities of man. All the more do we honour those whose pure motives and noble lives can still be pointed to as living embodiments of the teachings and example of the Divine Master; those to whom *Christianity* is of more importance than *Churchianity*.

But the day of a larger, nobler purpose is at hand; a day of fuller knowledge, when the light which the few have kept shall once more shed its radiance upon this priest-ridden, devil-driven earth. The great cyclic law of human progress brings once more the dawn; for in that progress, mental, moral, spiritual, we find, as in the natural world, cycle within cycle of day and night, of light and darkness, of life and death, of knowledge and ignorance. And let those whose Karma it is to be born now into a new day of human evolution, look to it that they spend not the opportunity in selfish purpose, lest they be thrown back once more into the darker cycles.

History repeats itself; why? Because this law of cycles operates in great and small; and Karma, which adjusts the balance, ever brings about cause and effect with never failing certainty. Before this law of Karma, human units are powerless as drops of rain dashed by the storm from tempest-

riven clouds. It brings about judgment of good or evil with unerring certitude. Let no man deem the judgment day far off; it is here, now; the man stands judged already in every word he spoke, and every thought he ever cherished. History repeats itself, therefore let a man beware; for human units cannot separate themselves and stand alone, they have a fellowship which they must share with all the race. Humanity is ONE through all its cycles; the units are but the atoms, having no existence save in relation to the whole. The units of to-day are the units of yesterday, and will be the units of to-morrow; each man in his appointed place, that place which he himself now makes, by choice at every moment of his life. History repeats itself. Look at the savage races of to-day; some of them are remnants of a bygone age whose glory is dimly traced in myths and legends of a golden cycle, long, long ago. And then as now, men failed to grasp the higher law which binds them to their fellows; then as now the great and strong oppressed the weak, and the vain and proud laughed in their confidence and power. But now—these men who laughed at right, and trusted in their might, and trampled under foot their fellow-men, are found as the last dregs of that great race to which they once belonged, perchance as kings and priests. And such shall be the fate of those who now oppress; of all who flourish on the weakness or necessity of others; rolling in wealth wrung from their human brothers in drops of sweat

and agony ; or fattening on the spoils of those who deem that God is worshipped in temples made with hands. The wheel of birth and death turns round unceasingly, and those who disappear from our sight to-day, shall reappear to reap what they have sown. In smaller or in larger cycle of light or darkness, their fate is cast by their own choice. For Karma is the law which helps to further good ; the law which, recognised and wisely used, leads on from point to point until the final goal is reached—as well as that which casts the evil back upon itself.

“ It will not be contemned of any one ;
 Who thwarts it loses, and who serves it gains ;
 The hidden good it pays with peace and bliss,
 The hidden ill with pains.

“ It knows not wrath nor pardon ; utter-true
 Its measures mete, its faultless balance weighs ;
 Times are as naught, to-morrow it will judge,
 Or after many days.

“ Such is the Law which moves to righteousness,
 Which none at last can turn aside or stay ;
 The heart of it is Love, the end of it
 Is Peace and Consummation sweet. Obey.”

Yea, truly, history repeats itself ; and it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God—the living Law. Men recognise this principle in the “ natural world.” Nature is either a kind mother or a terrible foe, according as we range ourselves on her side, or place ourselves in opposition to her ; and when once men have understood

that the "natural" is an integral part of the "spiritual," when once they have really grasped the principle that spiritual laws are not merely analogous to natural laws, but that they are the *same laws*, then they will recognise this law of Karma and Re-birth, which is the *spiritual law* underlying all the varied phenomena of human evolution and cyclic progress. There are a few intuitional writers, however, who have caught a glimpse of these higher laws; among whom to-day we may rank Carlyle and Emerson; but for the most part the so-called spiritual laws are still synonymous with the arbitrary and authoritative dogmas of the Church; they have no basis in, or reference to, the visible universe, but stand outside as the great exception.

In those early days of Church history, however, in the fourth century of our era, there were still many representatives of that "Wisdom Religion" which can trace its unbroken line of doctrine all through the ever-changing modes of worship and outward forms of religious observance, which come and go with the rise and fall of cycles; some short, some long. There were still many mystic brotherhoods, teaching their doctrines more or less openly, and all connected more or less closely with the one central source, in which, unknown to the world, the highest and profoundest secrets of humanity have been preserved. Many of these brotherhoods were directly presided over by one of the High Initiates; many of them were

known as Gnostic sects, whom the Church denounced as heretics and strove to crush, since they possessed the key to the inner meaning of those mystic allegories which the Church was endeavouring to harden into historical facts, and infallible dogmas. All was uncertainty in those days. The Church had not yet learnt the full extent of its power, had not yet decided upon the canon of authority. The Church Fathers themselves, the bishops of those days, were not agreed as to the authority of writings and dogmas which have since come to be regarded as necessary to salvation. The war was raging wildly round the doctrine of the Trinity; the Arians and the Athanasians struggling for supremacy with varying success. For a time it seemed as if the Arians would succeed, but Athanasius finally triumphed, and a belief in the creed called by his name came to be regarded as the central and fundamental basis of Christian faith. Events were moving rapidly; however, and every day the Church was gaining power and influence; nor could those who still retained a knowledge of the true meaning of those so-called *heathen* mysteries and ceremonies, out of which were fabricated the Christian creeds and rituals, do aught to check the fatal current. All they could do and did was to preserve some trace of the source from whence these were derived. One Gnostic gospel was at least placed among the canonical books, and some others preserved; while the teachings of Paul, in spite of their mutilations and emendations, still bear evidence that he be-

longed to the Occult Brotherhood, and taught that mystery of man's inner nature which has since been materialised into the doctrine of a personal saviour.

Little does the orthodox world of conventional religion know of that light which shines beyond their creeds and faith. Little do they know of that life which opens out to those who pass the barriers which priestcraft raises 'twixt man and God. Little do they know of that unbroken line of truth, preserved inviolable and sacred through ages of human evolution; that truth of man, his origin and destiny, which lies in fact, not fiction, is based on knowledge and experience, not on authority. This is for ever hidden from those who merely drift with the prevailing current of opinion, knowing not whence that current comes, or whither it is bearing them. The orthodox in all ages are those who are furthest from the "Kingdom of God"; for he who gets nearest to the source of his own being, is not the man who cases himself in a hard shell of formulas and creeds, but he who, leaving the world of form, can dive into the mystic depths of his own nature, and find his true relation to the Universal Life.' It is but vague reports which come to the outer world of that great Mystic Brotherhood to whom belong the secrets of the ages. Vague stories of initiation, of ancient Sages, Rishis, Adepts, of Gnostics, Mystics, Rosicrucians, Alchemists—all these are rumours of that deeper current of spiritual knowledge which runs throughout the history of the race,

and which only he can understand who has himself entered the stream.

Alcides and Menas were active members of one of the Occult Brotherhoods, all of whom were more or less united in the common object of counteracting the influence of those who were seeking to construct a new ecclesiastical religion out of the remnants of the ancient Mysteries. Alcides, by reason of his influence and qualifications, was an important member of the Fraternity. But it was a time of uncertainty and insecurity; their foes were numerous, fanatical, unscrupulous, and treacherous. The existence of the Brotherhood, and the connection with it of Alcides and Menas, was somewhat more than suspected by the leaders of the Church party; for they recognised some subtle influence continually at work in counteracting their personal and selfish schemes, and they were determined to crush it at all hazards.

But to go back to our narrative. We find Alcides and Menas returning home one evening, long after dark, from a secret meeting of the Fraternity. They are making their way through a number of by-streets towards the eastern portion of the great city, that quarter in which were to be found all the principal buildings connected with the Government, the wealth, and the learning of the age, and where they reside within a stone's-throw of the celebrated Museum and Library.

“What dost thou think, Menas, of this new edict of the Emperor's,” Alcides is saying. “Does it not aim directly at the extinction of the Gnosis?”

"No doubt it does," Menas replied; "they are anxious that every trace of the origin of their dogmas shall be destroyed, but they can hardly do that unless they burn the whole library as it stands, and even then you know we have copies preserved which are not likely to fall into their hands."

"They will not hesitate to burn the whole library, and ourselves also if they dared," Alcides said. "Even now we are in considerable personal danger, of which I have had secret warning. They are treacherous and unscrupulous, and would not hesitate to use the dagger or the poison cup if they could find no other means. I have been trying to devise some scheme by which Chindra might be removed to a place of safety, where we could quickly follow, should the danger become more pressing."

"I have thought that matters would soon come to a head," Menas replied. "Since they succeeded in driving Arius out of Alexandria they have become more arrogant than ever, and backed up as they now are by the Emperor, they will doubtless feel safe to adopt measures which they would not have dared before."

"We must be on our guard. Dost thou think that we have traitors in our camp?" Alcides said.

"Not in the inner group," Menas replied; "but I like not some who have lately joined the outer. We shall have to make our rules still more strict, for every day it becomes more and more difficult to distinguish friends from foes."

While thus conversing they were passing down a narrow street which would lead them directly into a large open square, on the further side of which was the house in which they resided. They were just on the point of entering the square, when a man stepped suddenly out of a doorway close against them. Alcides, who was nearest, did not perceive him, for his head was turned towards Menas, who was on the further side, but Menas saw the man, saw also the rapid movement of his arm, and the sudden gleam of steel.

Quick as thought, he seized Alcides by the shoulders and swung him round, so as to interpose his own person between him and the assassin. But he was too late to arrest the blow; the dagger intended for Alcides fell on his own breast.

Menas sank to the ground, while Alcides, realising rapidly what had taken place, tried to seize the murderer. But the latter, aiming another blow which Alcides warded off, turned quickly and fled down the silent street; escaping in the dark beyond a chance of detection.

Alcides knelt by the prostrate form of Menas, and raised his head upon his knee. But Menas did not speak, his eyes were closed. Lifting him now in his arms, Alcides bore him rapidly across the square to his own door, and telling the servant in attendance to follow him and raise no alarm, he carried him into an inner chamber and laid him on a couch; then hastily opening his dress, he examined the wound, and laid his hand upon his heart. A faint

flutter was all that was still perceptible, and it was evident that life was ebbing fast. "

A passionate cry escaped Alcides, as he realised that his brother was dying. That cry brought back for a moment the flickering consciousness. Menas opened his eyes and smiled. A look of infinite love came over his features as again he closed them; a faint pressure of the hand which Alcides held, a spasmodic sigh, and all was over. The soul of Menas had taken flight.

When Alcides realised that his friend and brother was really dead, he gave way for a few moments to a terrible burst of grief. But not for long. Alcides was a philosopher, he was more than a philosopher, he was a Mystic. He knew the meaning of life and death. For a few moments it is true he forgot all but the immediate fact, as most of us will forget at times the deeper principles of our life. The shock of sudden loss swept for the moment all else from his consciousness; but only for a moment. He quickly rose to his feet, calm, self-possessed. Tenderly he bent over Menas, and arranged his body in a reposing attitude; then drawing the coverlet over his face, he signed to the servant, who had stood a mute and horror-stricken witness of the scene which had passed so rapidly, and left the chamber.

"Return to your post," he said; "and do not admit any one to-night on any pretext, nor speak of what you have seen until I give you leave." The servant silently signified his assent; then Alcides, crossing the inner court, entered an apartment on the further side.

In the room were seated Chlindra and her maid. Alcides signed to the latter to retire, pausing at the door for her to do so; then advancing to Chlindra, he took both the hands she extended to him, and drew her to his bosom.

“Husband mine,” she said, “why art thou so stern and silent; what weighty news is it thou would'st impart?”

Alcides, still retaining both her hands, now looked steadily into her eyes, long and thoughtfully, as if to impart the strength she needed, while she returned his gaze inquiringly.

At last he spoke. “Yes, my news is that which will require all thy fortitude to bear. Dost thou remember Krishna's words: ‘Sages do not grieve for the living nor the dead. Never did I not exist, nor you, nor these rulers of men; nor will any one of us hereafter cease to be.’”

“Yea, I remember,” Chlindra said; “but why dost thou remind me now of this?” Then with a sudden look of alarm she exclaimed: “Not Menas, say it is not Menas.”

“Hush,” he said, placing his hand upon her shoulder. “Though we know that the body is but the garment of the soul, that life and death are but a sleeping and awakening, that each hath his appointed time; still it is a loss when one we love departs, a loss we cannot help but feel, though whether waking or sleeping we know that it is well with him we love.”

“Then it is even so; Menas is dead,” Chlindra said, in a choking voice.

"Thou hast spoken truth," Alcides replied.

For a few moments they stood thus, gazing into each other's eyes, Chlindra's full of tears, but gathering strength from the steady gaze of her husband.

At last she spoke, faintly, the single word "How?" Then Alcides told her briefly what had happened, adding that he was convinced the blow was meant for him, and that Menas had really sacrificed his life in the attempt to save him. When he had finished Chlindra hid her face in his breast, and her grief found vent in sobs and tears.

Alcides said naught, but held her there and let her weep. His own grief was as keen as hers, but he knew that, like himself, she soon would conquer it.

Presently Chlindra raised her head. "Now it is past," she said; "take me to him."

Together, hand in hand, they crossed the court, and entered the chamber where Menas lay.

Alcides raised the coverlet, and both gazed in silence on that peaceful face, on which the dying smile still lingered.

The silence was at last broken by Chlindra. "Our Brother sleepeth well--come," was all she said; and hand in hand they left the chamber of the dead.

CHAPTER XVI.

SCIENCE AND RELIGION.

It is impossible there should be inhabitants on the opposite side of the earth, since no such race is recorded by Scripture among the descendants of Adam.

ST. AUGUSTINE.

WHEN I awoke, the morning after my drowning adventure, it was some time before I could quite identify myself. I had been dreaming confusedly of the various events I have already narrated, and I could not quite tell at first which lay nearest to my consciousness in order of time. I had always been a vivid dreamer, and now that I had recovered the memory of my past incarnation, I had no difficulty in tracing many of my more frequently recurring dreams to the events of that life which had been buried too deep in the inner consciousness to be reached by the temporary self-consciousness of the waking "I." That waking consciousness, indeed, which seems to us the noonday of our mental powers, does but serve to fix our sight within a smaller range, and hides the transcendental universe; even as the noonday sun hides from our

view the depths of space with all its million stellar worlds.

I remembered now the dream I had had on the evening before leaving Hellborough, and smiled to think how simple was the explanation now that I had the key. My dream, then, was but a foretaste, an anticipation by a few days of that knowledge of which I was soon to become fully possessed. It had needed a stronger stimulus, the shock of drowning, something different from the state of sleep, in order to impress the more extended memory of the Ego on the physical organs of memory of the personality; but this having once been done, it remained as a permanent possession of the personality, my present physical self.

There are probably few who have not at some time or other had dream experiences which have impressed them strongly with a sense of their reality and basis in fact, although they did not appear to be connected in any way with the incidents of their present life. This happens when the waking physical consciousness is able to identify itself strongly, or become continuous with the sleep consciousness. As a rule the two states of consciousness, being on different planes, are not identified one with the other. The consciousness on returning from the higher plane to the physical, immediately becomes identified with the sense impressions of the physical organs of perception and memory, and the dream state thereby becomes a subjective, and apparently purely ideal and fanciful

one. Yet there is evidence enough for those who will study the subject, even if they have not had personal experience in this direction, that the sleep consciousness is far more exalted and real than the waking, and that much which is a closed book, and utterly beyond the power of the physical faculties to cognise, is open to the perception of the transcendental Ego. It is merely a matter as to whether the higher can impress the lower, or, perhaps more strictly, as to whether the lower can place itself *en rapport* with the higher. This can only be done by a conscious effort at the moment of waking, an effort to keep back the mind so to speak on the higher plane, and prevent the rush of ideas connected with the physical life from obliterating the higher state of consciousness. As an extension of this process it is merely a matter of occult training to be able to transfer the consciousness at will to the higher plane, and impress upon the physical brain the knowledge thus acquired. This phenomenon of a dual consciousness is well marked in the state of somnambulism.

Let the materialistic scientist talk as learnedly as he may about "unconscious cerebration" or "reflex action"; every advance made in psychology and scientific investigation, is leading nearer and nearer to a demonstration of this dual or transcendental consciousness. Materialism is but the swing of the pendulum in the reaction from the gross supernaturalism which has ruled the world of thought for so many ages. But the universe is too

deep, too profound ; there is too much of it admittedly lying outside the range of our mere physical faculties, to satisfy the mind for any length of time with a purely physical and material explanation of its varied phenomena.

In its ultimate analysis of matter and force, *Science* stands before a seemingly impenetrable barrier, a wall of densest adamant, a veritable prison cell, round which the prisoner gropes in vain for egress. Why does he seek for egress ; why does he know and feel that outside this prison there is light to see, and air to breathe, and truth to know ? What is it that tells him that this dense wall of matter is that which separates body from spirit, time from eternity, space from infinitude ? *Religion* seeks to satisfy this innate consciousness ; does satisfy this consciousness in many ways—up to a certain point. Religion speaks with the voice of authority of that supersensuous world of spirit which lies beyond the prison walls of matter ; and men, eager for some word, some hope beyond the veil, beyond the grave, give ready ear.

But Religion, like Science, is found in its ultimate analysis to be equally shut in by the restrictions of matter and sense. Religion does but paint the walls of man's prison-house with various pictures, and having converted the blank wall into a perspective landscape, or heavenscape, according to its fancy, it presently comes to persuade itself that its ideals are the reality of that which lies beyond. Nothing is truer of poor deluded human nature

than that men do find consolation in these pictures, however varied they may be, however fantastic, however antagonistic to each other in their ideas and representations.

But science is continually rubbing out the pictures which religion paints, and religion is continually painting them in again in some modified form, deeming each time that now at last the colours are fixed and permanent.

Here, then, we have these two: on the one hand Science, disclosing a dead wall of matter which it appears impossible to pass, and which indeed it flatly denies our ability to pass, or any region beyond the wall; on the other hand, Religion, in response to the innate consciousness in man that there is a transcendental region, a place of truer fuller life, is continually painting on the wall representations of this beyond, and finally deluding itself that by so doing it has obliterated the wall itself, and that its pictures are the actuality of that which transcends our finite faculties.

But if the representations of Religion are illusive, as indeed is well seen by their varied character and continual readjustment, what shall we say of the wall itself, of that barrier which seems to hem us in on every side? How shall we answer the question of questions as to whether there is a beyond, and if so, what are its conditions? If we are bold speculators, and real thinkers, untrammelled by any preconceived ideas or accepted dogmas, scientific or otherwise, it might suggest

itself to us to ask whether the wall itself is not an illusion, a mere product of a state of consciousness. Seeing that a large section of humanity can be brought to believe in the reality of one illusive picture, while an equally large section believe in the reality of quite a different representation, and a third and a fourth in others again; it would appear that it is not a question of mere numbers or of received opinion—however much that opinion may appear to be confirmed by the experience of a section of humanity—in deciding what is reality and what is illusion; and it is quite possible that that which we now call *matter*, the blank wall itself, which seems so impassable, so palpable and real to our mere physical senses in the present stage of our evolution, is itself but an illusion, from which it is just as possible for the man of courage to free himself, as it is for him to cast aside the bonds of custom, prejudice, and orthodoxy.

And for those who have done this, for those who have had the strength to look their nature in the face, to penetrate into the hidden regions of their own consciousness, there is nothing more certain than this: that the barrier we raise is one of our own making, belongs merely to our external conditioned consciousness, and that we have been unable to transcend this illusive consciousness simply because we never set before ourselves the possibility of doing so. Science denies the possibility, and thereby draws an arbitrary line, which in the very nature of the case it is unable to pass.

Religion also draws an arbitrary line of another kind, one which is even more fatal to progress than that of science, for it encloses man within the narrow limits of a fixed idea, which not merely obliterates from his sight the infinite possibilities of his nature, but fills his mind with hatred and bitterness towards those who dare to step outside his narrow circle, or who live in some other mental environment.

Why should the oyster abuse, or seek to proselytise the whelk, because he does not live in the same kind of shell? The oyster needs his shell because he is an oyster; for him indeed there is no safety or certainty outside that shell. Yet even to his dim consciousness there may at times come some vague notion of a world of larger life which he might enter, could he but free himself from customs and habits of the oyster world.

Even so it is with those protective shells of creeds and faiths in which men case themselves, holding with desperate tenacity to some rock which seems the only refuge from the storm; lest the relentless ocean tides, the mighty sweep of Cosmic laws should bear them out into a shoreless waste of madness and despair.

A man must be a sceptic before he can find truth; he must doubt the evidence of his own senses before he can apportion their value as means of observation. He must have faith in the existence of the unseen before he can reach out towards the possibilities which await him there. What are

those possibilities? They are to our normal faculties what the possibility of seeing is to a blind man; what the possibility of moving at will through the great ocean depths would be to the oyster. To talk about them is to talk mysticism, and mysticism is to the ordinary mortal but a synonym for all that is vague, unreal, and unsubstantial. Mysticism has usually been associated with extreme and exaggerated religious emotionalism; but one of the phenomena of the twentieth century will be a *scientific* mysticism. Can you tell the blind man, in any language he will understand, what are the beauties of colour and form? Even so those whose sight has opened on the inner world can scarce be understood by those who have not seen that which eye doth not see, nor ear hear.

Yet observe the analogy still further. The light of the sun does not exist for the blind man, simply because he has not the faculty to cognise it. Yet he lives and moves in it, he is surrounded by it, soaked through and through with its magnetic influence, sustained and nourished by it, as every other living organism is. So it is with that spiritual sun which radiates its influence upon the inner world, and from the inner to the outer. The inner and the outer are but terms of our perception. The spiritual or inner is the ever present *here and now*. It is the *root*, the *inwardness*, of all that *is*; of every point in space, and every moment of eternity. We live and move and have our being in IT now. IT soaks us through with vitalising energy. There

is no line which separates the natural from the spiritual, no limit such as science or religion postulates. The limit is that of our conditioned consciousness, of our perceptive faculties alone.

A world of illusion truly is this our waking life, since all that causes it, the changeless, causeless cause of all, is hidden from our sight, and things are nowhere what they seem. Yet, seeing that the root and source of all lives and breathes *in* all, seeing that *objective* man is but a part, an *aspect* of that which is neither subject nor object, but includes both; seeing indeed that at no point are we disconnected from the spiritual world, why should we not be able to traverse the whole line of our being—root, branch, and flower? Because we do not understand this unity; because at every point we seek for separateness, not for unity; because in every act and thought we minister to the false self, to that which blooms and perishes, our individual human life, which in itself and by itself is but a flower which opens for a day, then falls and dies. But the parent plant which bears the flower lives in eternity. And if this be so, and we are but parts of a Great Whole, then true knowledge is the knowledge of our relation to the Whole—the Universal. Once grasp this thought, once learn that the spiritual world is an ever-present reality from which we are only isolated in our own thought, and you have removed the most formidable obstacle which lies in your way towards passing that barrier which seems to separate the

natural from the spiritual, the seen from the unseen.

And when you have removed this barrier in thought, then it becomes possible to do so in action, and not till then. Then it becomes possible to explore that unseen universe which is a *terra incognita* to the materialist who denies its existence, and the religionist who only looks to enter it through the portals of the grave.

But to explore the higher planes of consciousness it is necessary to develop the faculties and senses which operate on those planes; faculties which are atrophied or dormant in most individuals of the race at the present time, but which have their physiological organs by which they are related to the physical plane, and which may be roused into activity by proper methods of occult training. It is sufficient to observe here that this training and knowledge is in the strictest sense of the word *scientific*, and if it be termed mystic, occult, fanciful, it is only so to those who having eyes see not, and having ears they hear not, neither do they understand.

These higher faculties, however, often come into operation to some extent during sleep, when the consciousness is withdrawn from the physical organs of sense; for these outer avenues being closed, it then falls back upon the higher plane, higher in the sense of being nearer to the root of all consciousness, the universal mind; unaffected by the illusions of time and space which operate in the

little circle of ideas in which the personality moves.

The knowledge of the spiritual world then, the knowledge of the transcendental Ego, of the immortal spiritual principle in man, is strictly a matter of scientific investigation, in so far as science is a study of the laws of Nature; for the laws of the spiritual *are* the laws of the natural, and he who would reach the spiritual world must do so along the lines of natural law, along those lines of development which are marked out by these laws for every living thing—the great law of evolution. And because Humanity as a whole is still little more than a thinking animal, because it stands little more than half-way in that great cycle which is raising it from the animal to the divine, it becomes a matter of the greatest difficulty for the individual to reach that perfection of his nature which is the ultimate goal of all. For the knowledge, the revelation, of those latent powers which every individual possesses, is hidden from a race in which self-seeking is the highest aim, in which the fundamental principles of ethics and morality are but little understood and still less regarded; while the law of human solidarity, the principle of Universal Brotherhood, that “New Commandment” which Christ gave to the world as the highest revelation of the Divine Will, seems to become more and more utopian and visionary, crushed out of existence on the one hand by a religion which places creed before conduct, and on

the other by a science which recognises nothing but dead matter and blind force, laws of supply and demand, and the survival of the fittest. To place spiritual powers in the hands of such a generation, would be but to make them spiritually wicked, instead of merely intellectually and morally so. Gunpowder and rum are forces quite potent enough to be wielded by a "Christian" country seeking to proselytise and "civilise" the world.

The race like the individual must pass through many incarnations, through many cycles. How often have not we as individuals to pay for our experience in years of bitterness and pain! Do we not often mourn for years of wasted efforts, of unworthy motives, of illusive pleasures, which when accomplished only leave the soul in deeper want and more unsatiable desire? So with the race. Thousands of years of wasted effort are but a day in that great evolution which humanity accomplishes, even as the individual, in throes of birth and death, in suffering and pain. Happy the man who—having before him the larger hope, and recognising the deeper spiritual laws which operate through all these cyclic changes—can exclaim with St. Paul: "Our light affliction which is for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

And to those now who possess this larger hope, yet know not how to attain—being indeed much in doubt between these two guides, Science and Religion—we would offer this triple key of unity in diversity :

The Intellectual Key, or the unity of Nature.

The Moral Key, or the unity of Humanity.

The Spiritual Key, or the unity of all in the Divine.

He who would find the TRUTH must learn to free himself from those illusions which seem to isolate his life in time and space ; those modes of thought, born of conditioned life, which bind the race to formulas and customs. He must learn to find in his own soul, which is a faithful mirror of the universe, “ the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PROBLEM SOLVED.

The Books say well, my Brothers ! each man's life
The outcome of his former living is ;
The bygone wrongs bring forth sorrows and woes,
The bygone right breeds bliss.

SIR EDWIN ARNOLD—*The Light of Asia.*

AND now to return to my personal narrative. For some time after I had fully awakened I did not move, but lay thinking over the events of the past few days. Even now it seemed as if I might have dreamt it all, and should find myself back in Hellborough without ever having set out for my holiday. Yet it was no dream, save in so far as life itself is a dream. Four days ago I had met with a man who was a perfect stranger to me ; in the course of an apparently casual conversation he had advanced certain theories which were new and startling, though they were almost immediately followed by a strange sense of familiarity, which at the time I could not account for, but which led me at once to accept his hypothesis as the key for which I had been seeking in the solution of the problem of life. And now I was in possession of

the full secret. I could trace the sequence of cause and effect in all the events of my life, and in my inmost aspirations and hopes. I could see how it was that I had puzzled over the problems of life and religion, and rejected all the ordinary orthodox ideas, as falling far short of the true solution. I could see how my Karma had led me into the busy world of commercial life, which though so distasteful to me, was a necessary factor in the development of my character, and the acquirement of a practical knowledge of human nature.

But now my sight was opened, the preliminary work was accomplished, and I could take up once again the real life task, the Great Quest, just where I had dropped it in my previous incarnation. And then to have found again my old associates, what joy was there. It was but as one night since I received the fatal dagger thrust; one night of dreamless sleep. Yet 1600 years had past, and that dark cycle which Thytus had foretold, had nearly run its course. But what are 1600 years out of eternity; 'tis but a single day in the perception of that higher consciousness with which the Ego reunites, when it has thrown off the limitations of the flesh.

And now also I had discovered the meaning of that strange intuition, which was constantly telling me of a purpose in life which lay outside of all that men most strive for, and which had prevented me from becoming—what, alas! is the fate of so many—a mere calculating, money-making machine. Now

I knew why I had been indifferent to fame or fortune, though both seemed within my grasp had I but concentrated my energies towards acquiring them ; for, had I done so, the Mystic Quest would soon have faded from my consciousness. Each individual is overshadowed by a higher consciousness, by his own Higher Self ; but the link between the higher and the lower may wear away, becoming paralysed and dead for want of use. Nor is this a mere figure of speech, it is an actual psycho-physiological process. Whatever ideal religion may present as to the relation of the individual to the spiritual world, or to *God*, the actual fact is a process of Nature. The laws of the spiritual *are* the laws of the natural. And the final result for the individual is as certain as that which will follow the misuse or disuse of any physical function. The physical organ whose function it is to serve as the bridge of communication between the higher and the lower consciousness becomes atrophied or dead ; and then there no longer exists the possibility of a reunion between the two, and the individual walks the earth a *soulless* being. "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and tlfou art dead." Life, we are told, as a modern scientific definition, is "correspondence with environment," but the soulless man has no longer any correspondence with his spiritual environment, and for such an one there is no immortality possible. When death lays its hand upon the physical body it does but touch an empty shell. Dust to dust, and

ashes to ashes ; but all that was spiritual was dead long ago, though the man had a name that he lived.

Precious beyond price was indeed the key which I now possessed ; every circumstance in my life, every thought and aspiration seemed to fit into its proper place. Long did I remain meditating on the glory and wonder of it, but was roused from my reverie by hearing Nirman's voice in the passage. I looked at my watch and found that it was nearly eight o'clock. Nirman came into the room, and with his assistance I was soon dressed, though I was still very stiff and sore, and moreover desperately hungry. Our worthy hostess had, however, prepared a bountiful breakfast, to which we both did ample justice, and, much to her gratification, we could conscientiously declare the porridge to be the best we had ever tasted.

When we had finished, however, and I had again thanked her for her hospitality, and with some difficulty induced her to accept a sovereign for the expense she had incurred, Nirman and I set out for Dolphinton.

"You dear old Cid," I said, as I linked my arm in his ; "I shall always call you by the old name. Did you tell Harriet last night that I had regained my memory ?"

"Yes, I found an opportunity to do so just as we were parting," he replied. "I need not tell you what a deep source of gratification it is to both of us, for now you can join us in the great work,

and be brought once more into the Brotherhood. I have no doubt you will soon be able to tell Ethel, and then perhaps we may also be able to take Mrs. Stanton into our confidence."

I did not reply immediately, for I was thinking of Ethel as Dione—"Di," as we used to call her—and my mind had gone back to the old, old times when we wandered in the groves and gardens of Alexandria, or on the margin of the blue Mediterranean, each finding in the other the counterpart of those ideals, born of our love of beauty and Nature :

"The light that never was on sea or land,
The imagination, and the poet's dream."

conceivable

In a flood of deepest joy came over me the recollection of those days of old, as I knew that now once again I should clasp her in my arms, and once again our thoughts should mingle in all that is best and noblest and most divine in human love ; that pure love which, welling up from the deepest source of our nature, is an earnest that that source is Love itself. In a few minutes I should meet her again, yet how should I be able to do so as a mere friend, as a mere conventional Englishman, who had hardly as yet dared to hint to her of any deeper feeling than that of simple friendship.

"Look here, Cid," I said, "it's all very well to talk about keeping this secret from Ethel until she has confessed her love, but I am in a deuced awkward position ; I have got to find out by all the roundabout methods of conventionality, whether she

is as much in love with me as I am with her. I cannot even go on my knees in approved fashion, and protest the constancy of my devotion by telling her that I have been true to her for 1600 years."

Nirman laughed, and said : " Don't be afraid, you may take my word for it that no such protestation will be necessary, and you may take the first opportunity of popping the question, with a certainty that you will be successful. Then you may tell her all, and help her to remember for herself. She is very clairvoyant, as you know, and you know also the dangers as well as the advantages of possessing that faculty. I have discouraged rather than encouraged her to use her powers, because she has not yet sufficient knowledge of occult science, but she will be quite safe under your guidance, and our united influence."

We had now reached the cottage, and my heart was beating fast with emotion, not merely at the thought of meeting Ethel, but Harriet also, for whom my affection was deep and strong.

They saw us coming up the garden path, and met us at the front door. To Ethel first I gave my hand, while Harriet greeted her betrothed ; nor was I dissatisfied with the light in her eyes, and the blush which overspread her face, as her eyes fell before my gaze, while she tried to tell me in ordinary language how glad she was that I had not been drowned.

Then I turned to Harriet and exchanged with

her a look and pressure of the hand which was more to each than either could have said.

Mrs. Stanton quickly joined us, and added her congratulations, and we were soon all talking and chatting over the event. It appeared that the accident happened owing to the ladies who were in the boat endeavouring to change seats. In doing so one of them caught her foot, and losing her balance she fell and overturned the boat. The one who was drowned, and who had so nearly drowned me, was a niece of the gentleman who was in the boat, and cousin to the other lady. It was a very sad event for them, as she was engaged to be married to her cousin, the brother of the lady who was saved.

While others are sorrowing, however, we are often rejoicing. We could not but feel deep sympathy for those who were thus bereaved; but the fact of my having been saved was naturally uppermost in our minds. I was called upon for a minute account of my sensations while drowning, which I gave as best I could in view of what I had to conceal.

After lunch it was proposed that we should go for a ramble, to which we all assented, Mrs. Stanton excepted, as she was not strong enough to accompany us in our walks.

What was more natural than that Harriet should be with Nirman, while Ethel and I are together a little in the rear; or that soon we should fall still further behind, till presently we are quite out of

hearing of the others. Did not each of us know that this was but dallying with our fate; did not each know that the moment was at hand for that sweet confession which each was longing to hear, yet fearful to make? We are both unusually silent, making only a commonplace remark now and again, for there is a sort of desperate lump in one's throat which will only come away by saying a certain word, and which yet seems to prevent that word from being said. It is the man who must have the courage in such a situation; and those who have gone through with it know—though heaven alone knows why it should be so—that it does require a vast amount of pluck.

I am turning over in my mind what I shall say which will lead up to the subject which must be broached now, if I am not to think myself an ass, and have been silent for some time, when Ethel comes to the rescue with one of her quick chaffing remarks. She seems suddenly to have thrown off the restraint under a desire to take refuge in forced vivacity and banter.

“You are very entertaining this afternoon, Mr. Silton,” she says, “I declare you have not spoken three words for the last half-hour. I am afraid you are still half drowned.”

I catch eagerly at the opening thus afforded, and reply laughing: “No, I am quite alive again, with many thanks for your compliment. But as a matter of fact my drowning experience has given me much to think about; for to tell you the truth,

I did not tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth when I recounted my adventure to you this morning; and though I would willingly tell you now, I have some difficulty in doing so unless I first exact a promise from you; but still I would not exact that promise as a condition of telling, nor would I offer the telling as a bribe for the promise."

"What an enigmatical speech," she said; "please explain yourself a little more coherently."

"Well let us sit down here, and I will endeavour to do so," I said; for I felt that now or never was the time to speak.

"What I mean is this," I continued, as we seated ourselves; "that before I can tell you what lies deepest in my mind, I must receive from your lips a confession of that which indeed my heart already tells me. It means indeed," I said, taking her hand, "that I must tell you now how much I love you, and that you must tell me that you also have loved, and do love, and will love me; with a love which will unite our very souls in many lives, while together we tread that path of initiation which leads out of all lower forms of love. And if you tell me this, then I can explain the deepest secret of my life."

Ethel remained silent for a few moments, letting her hand indeed remain in mine, and with her head half turned away to hide her drooping eyes in which the tears were standing when at length she raised them, and replied.

“Are you quite sure that I am worthy to stand by you in the Great Quest? Oh! Arthur, indeed I love you,” she continued, placing both her hands in mine; “and I will stand by you, if indeed you think me worthy.”

“My own loved one, I could not have asked you did I not know you to be worthy,” I replied. “But indeed we are but working out our Karma, for you and I were lovers long ago, and now that we are once again united, I can tell you the deep secret of your life and mine.”

Then, while she listened wonderingly, holding her in my arms, I told her all the story of my former life, and of the part that she had played therein; and how my love ran deep and strong, stronger than death, in that it sprang to life again when first our glances met, though then I knew not of the deeper source from whence it came. And now, Ethel was “Di,” my long-lost love, the same yet not the same; and she now told me that her love like mine had kindled at a glance, and she had loved me since we first had met, and waited, wondering if perchance such happiness might be for her, that I should know her love, and give her mine.

Thus we sat, and talked of all the past, and of the wondrous unfolding of our lives, and of our future hopes. The time passed all too swiftly, and hours were gone before we thought again of joining Harriet and Nirman. Not knowing where to look for them we retraced our steps,

and found them sitting in the garden awaiting us.

“Have you two been establishing a precedent for our future walks?” Nirman asked.

“No, the precedent was established some time ago by you and Harriet,” I replied.

“Well, we have guessed your secret,” Harriet said. “You were so deeply interested in each other when we turned back to look for you, that we thought we had better let you alone.”

“How horrid of you to find it out like that,” Ethel said.

“Never mind, I am so glad,” Harriet replied, putting her arm round her sister and kissing her. “It is just what Cid and I have been most desiring.”

“It seems almost too good to be true; and—oh! I am so happy,” Ethel said, leaning her head on her sister’s shoulder, and returning her caress.

Reunited thus, we were indeed happy; happy in each other’s affections, and in that great life work to which each was pledged—The Mystic Quest.

What need have I to add more? In a week’s time I returned to Hellborough to resume my duties; yet what a different man I was than when I left that place twelve days ago. The whole world had changed for me. My life had opened out and blossomed, had taken shape and form; it was no longer a meaningless riddle, a baseless fabric issuing out of darkness and returning to the unknown.

And if perchance aught that I have here recorded prove to be the key for which others have been searching long and anxiously, my narrative has not been penned in vain.

- That which ye sow ye reap. See yonder fields !
The sesamum was sesamum, the corn
Was corn. The Silence and the Darkness knew !
So is a man's fate born.



