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THE LAST MAN

ALFRED NOYES

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CHAPTER I

The catastrophe that overwhelmed the inhabitants of this planet in the year ——, might have been foretold a hundred years earlier, from the increasing subtlety and skill with which the nations had devoted all the resources of science to multiplying the means of destruction. At the same time, for many generations, they had all been declaring that, in certain contingencies, they would "fight to the last man". The sincerity and seriousness of these declarations could not be doubted; nor could one suppose that all the nations of the earth would speak so emphatically of what they would do in a purely imaginary case. It was not bluff. They meant what they said; and, at last, they were confronted by the very case about which they had been talking: they must either prove their words and save their faces, or eat their words and save everyone else.

When Mark Adams swam ashore at Steephill Cove in the Isle of Wight, twenty-four hours after the general catastrophe, it was only gradually that he realized his unique position, and the grim irony of it all. His own survival, and the way in which he had escaped destruction, were indeed almost more remarkable than the catastrophe itself. Poems and works of fiction had several times been written about the annihilation of the human race by an invasion of monsters from another planet, or the generation of some noxious gas from the earth itself, or through the natural cooling of the sun. The last man had been pictured as pathetically dying in a snow-hut accompanied, oddly enough, by the last butterfly. In recent times, it had not occurred to the proposers of perfect schemes and agreements for a "new and better world" that evil was a reality, strongly enthroned in human nature, and that men, by their own deliberate act, might themselves precipitate a horror that no earthly contract could forestall.

For over a hundred years, the leading nations had been discovering more and more deadly poison-gases, more and more subtle ways of disseminating disease-germs among their rivals, with a view to the survival of the fittest. The naïve question—"fittest for what?"—was no longer asked by intelligent men and women. In the meantime, the mind and spirit of the whole race had been profoundly affected by the great discovery that the old distinction between right and wrong had no absolute foundations, as the more unsophisticated followers of outworn creeds had supposed; and that, in the eyes of the intelligentsia, right and wrong had long been regarded as entirely "relative". Indeed, for a large section of modern art and literature, in which the souls of nations are supposed to express themselves, the absolute imperatives of the moral law had become merely "public conveniences".

This liberating discovery, daily emphasized by most of the critical organs in the civilized world, had so intimidated large numbers of ordinary men and women that they were afraid to use their own more reliable faculties, and meekly accepted the current unmorality, lest they should be branded as "behind the times".

Very few, indeed, had the courage of the "laughing philosopher" who somewhat bitingly remarked that he was content to be behind the times when he saw the ghastly people who were abreast of the times, and the still more ghastly people who were in advance of the times.

It was when the general bewilderment had reached its chaotic climax, in every department of social life, that a further discovery was made which enabled the political gangs to bring the human race to the brink of the abyss. Ordinary men and women had no more say in the matter than the cat on the hearth, or the sheep in the fold. The bombs and poison-gases by which a great metropolis could be turned into a wilderness of charnel houses in a single night had suddenly become as out-of-date as the weapons of the flint man. The disease-germs and bacteria by which large sections of an unsuspecting populace could be scientifically eliminated in times of peace, without the fuss and formality of an open declaration of war, had become mere child's play. Considerable doubt had long been expressed by statisticians as to whether really satisfactory results had been achieved by the quiet introduction of bacteria into milk supplies and the mouth-pieces of public telephones. The dissemination of disease-germs in picture houses, where all the conditions of germ-culture—darkness, moisture, artificial heat and the breath of a closely packed crowd—were to be found at their best, had added to the death-rate of rival nations considerably, but it was doubtful whether it had diminished their man-power more effectively than the propaganda of birth-control. This was not even suspected of emanating from enemy sources, and was indeed regarded by many as highly advantageous to their own people and a remedy for unemployment. The only satisfactory result of the disease-germ attacks was a moral one. The very nations who were formerly disgusted and appalled at such methods, gradually came to accept the phrases of those who employed them; and whereas, in former generations, any clean-handed soldier would have called it plain cowardly "murder" to poison the food of unsuspecting populations, the new fashion, all the world over, in leading articles and platform speeches, blandly consented to call it

"bacteriological warfare". And now this, too, was elementary. Professor Hammerstein of Bonn had discovered a method of transmitting an all-pervasive ethereal wave which would instantaneously stop—not the engines of motor-cars and aeroplanes—but the beating of the human heart.

The only drawback to this discovery, immensely serviceable and curiously symbolical as it seemed, for it affected only the human heart, was that in the opinion of the supreme Kriegsacademie it was "too terrible for use except as a last resort". Its range was practically unlimited; and everyone, friend or foe, except those who stood behind the transmitter, would be killed. There was also the more serious danger that, when once it had been used, the secret might be revealed to another power; for, as Professor Hammerstein remarked innocently, "there are Powers to whom all hearts are open and from whom no secrets are hid".

It was after a series of international crises that the catastrophe occurred. The statesmen of no less than fifteen nations had declared that each was ready to fight "to the last man", for something about which the ordinary folk in all those nations knew absolutely nothing till the crash came. For several years before this final war broke out, there had been a system of alliances to guarantee peace. Under this admirable system, every nation in the world was pledged to defend every other nation against any act of aggression; so that, whenever such an act took place in any quarter of the globe, the entire world was at once involved in war. For, unfortunately, history shows that no nation has ever regarded itself as the aggressor in war; and the present case was no exception. All the nations, most nobly, fulfilled their pledges. They all took up arms, instantly, as agreed; but unhappily they took them up, in almost equal numbers, on opposite sides.

For several months, during the preliminary "war of nerves", both sides had been boasting that they possessed an "unknown weapon" which would bring all enemies to their knees, and annihilate all resistance on a scale hitherto unimagined. And it was not idle boasting. Professor Muck, who had been Professor Hammerstein's chief laboratory assistant, had surreptitiously copied the records of his invention, and sold them separately to agents of the British, French, Italian, American, Soviet, Turkish, Japanese and Chinese Governments, at a thousand marks a time. It was a small sum for a secret so important; but Professor Muck was a modest little man, and a great admirer of the English poet, Wordsworth, whom he often quoted in praise of "plain living and high thinking". His only other pleasure was angling, which is not an expensive sport.

The result was that all the combatants, in all parts of the world, possessed a secret weapon so formidable that, to do them justice, most of them would have shrunk with horror from using it, except—and this was the fatal reservation —*except in the last resort*.

The reservation was fatal; because there was one man, one fanatical leader in Europe, who really did believe himself justified in using any and every means to ensure victory. As historians of the twentieth century pointed out, on occasion after occasion, the world had been brought to the brink of a war involving a score of nations and scores of millions of lives, by the sole caprice of one individual, of third-rate intellect, and with the morals of a gangster. To the protagonist on this occasion the "last resort" was merely the correct and perfect application of science. It was the highest kind of "Realpolitik" to wipe out your enemies as completely as you would wipe out a wasp's nest. As soon as hostilities began, therefore, Herr Grumkow decided to use the formidable means at his disposal and, not in the least realizing that the enemy governments also possessed the "secret", he could not resist announcing his intention beforehand. Owing to the glorious success with which Science has "annihilated space", there was an immediate pandemonium of telephone messages between the allied nations on the other side, to the effect that a moment's delay might be disastrous. Within an hour, on that fine morning, in the first week of May, the fatal buttons had been pressed, almost simultaneously, in all the countries concerned. The "last resort", which knew no frontiers and would eliminate neutrals as impartially as it would eliminate friends and enemies if they stood in its way, had been brought into operation on all sides; and the war, which, as all sides so truly declared, was to end war, had itself come to an abrupt end.

The league-long sealike roar of the guns had shut off, suddenly, as a door shuts in a clap of wind, and left a silence far more terrible. The most certain of all the lessons taught by war had been taught for the last time on this planet—the lesson that in war there are no winners.

CHAPTER II

Mark Adams escaped the general annihilation because, during the crucial moments, he happened to be in a unique position. Neither the inventor of the new weapon, nor anyone else, knew that the one secure refuge from the "last resort" was a steel chamber, submerged under the sea, at a considerably greater depth than that at which submarines usually operate. Shortly before the wave of death swept over the upper world, the enemy submarine in which Mark was a prisoner had struck a sunken wreck, and for three days and nights thereafter it had been lying helpless at the bottom of the sea in deep water.

It was those three days and nights of living hell that saved him. The officers and crew of the submarine had gone out, on the first day, by the escape-chambers, which were of a far more efficient type than those of the generation before the war. On their way to the surface they had met the all-pervasive wave of death, and it was only their lifeless bodies that emerged, for a moment, like shining porpoises into the sunlight. Mark had been left to the last. The others had all gone in couples; and, when he approached the escape-chamber to take his place with the last remaining member of the ship's company, he had been greeted with an oath and a heavy blow in the face from that gallant officer, who required all the room he could get for his bulky frame, and certainly desired no enemy companion in the narrow cell.

Mark went down like an ox under the unexpected blow, and striking his head against an iron bolt, lay unconscious for a considerable time. When he recovered consciousness he was too weak and dazed to move for several hours. But the absence of the crew, and the automatic action of the air regenerators, had at least made it easier to breathe.

Gradually he recovered strength; and, at twelve o'clock by his watch, after washing the encrusted blood from his face, he was able to make his own preparations for escape. He was not sure, however, whether it was twelve midnight or twelve noon; and he decided that his chances of being rescued would be far greater if he came to the surface in daylight. To ensure this, therefore, he thought it would be better to wait till the hour hand pointed to six; for at that hour, whether in the morning or evening, there would be ample light.

He was a strong swimmer; and, when he came to the surface, he found himself only a few hundred yards away from the coast that he knew best in the world, the Undercliff of the Isle of Wight. The submarine had, in fact, been lying at the bottom of "St. Catherine's Deep". A strong tide from the south-west was carrying him towards Steephill Cove, so that he had no need to exert himself. By the time he had got rid of his "escape apparatus" he was already within wading distance of the land.

While he was still waist-deep in the water, Mark instinctively felt a certain strangeness, the faintest suggestion of something abnormal in the quiet familiar scene before him. Outwardly everything looked as he had known it and loved it for years; the fisherman's cottage under the cliff; the boats drawn up above the high-water line; the herring gulls clustering over their reflection in the wet sand; the dark heap of rusty-red fishing nets. It was all as lazily peaceful as a picture by Morland; and, oddly enough, it was the laziest and most peaceful detail of all that gave him the first startling hint of something sinister about the whole scene.

Nothing could be more usual on the English coast in an exceptionally early summer than the spectacle of two or three young women lazily sun-bathing on a slope of warm shingle; nothing more true to form, in every sense of the phrase, than those slender motionless figures, lying face downwards on the beach. They had probably not been swimming so early in the year, but there was one girl in a light blue bathing-suit, a delicate note of water-colour; and, a little further on, a dark-haired girl, in a bright red bathing-suit. Both of these were drowsily outstretched on a bank of tawny shingle, with their heads buried in their brown arms; and both, apparently, were absorbed in the same cat-like reverie.

The vaguely apprehended, but distinctly unusual thing was this. It was a pleasant summer evening; but the sunlight, which still sparkled on the bay, had already deserted the beach; and sun-bathers did not usually lie so contentedly in the grey lengthening shadow of the cliff, where the shingle must now be striking damp and cold.

Twenty yards farther on, he could see a third young woman now, in a pale gold bathing-suit. The water of the incoming tide seemed to be rippling over her feet. A moment later he saw something quite unusual and startling. A large seagull with brown-flecked wings swooped within easy reach of the girl's head, peered cautiously, and then fluttered to and fro, less than an arm's length above her sunburnt back, as though hesitatingly tempted to alight upon the bare flesh of a body so motionless. For a second or two Mark failed to grasp anything more than that he was witnessing one of those

uncommon incidents with which writers of popular "Natural History" amuse their readers. Then, with a gasp, he realized that the seagull was not departing, in the least, from the rules of seagull nature; and that any strangeness in the incident came from the human side.

Dashing out of the water, he ran towards the body, shouting as he ran. The seagull with a witch-like scream wheeled off into the sunset, and Mark Adams, kneeling by the girl in the pale gold bathing-suit, discovered that she was as cold and dead as the shingle on which she lay.

CHAPTER III

During the wars Mark had grown used to death; but a sense of something terrible beyond all use and wont crept over him now, as stealthily as the evening shadow crept over the waters of the bay. He ran, stumblingly, towards the other sun-bathers; touched them and found them dead. The face of one of them, vacuously pretty, was turned sideways. Her child-like mouth, still streaked with lipstick, was full of sand.

They had all been dead for hours. But why had nobody removed them? Why was everything so uncannily still? Why was no one stirring in the little fisherman's cottage under the cliff? He ran quickly up to it, and peered through the window. The light was fast fading now; but he could see a woman lying near the kitchen range, in one of the unmistakable attitudes of death.

Perhaps there had been a raid on Portsmouth. Perhaps a stray bomb had been dropped on this out-of-the-way village, a few minutes too soon for its real objective, seventeen miles away. But he felt that this was not the real explanation. There was no sign of an explosion, the windows were intact. There was no indication of gas. He hurried up the cliff-path to Ventnor, and, as he approached the town, he became increasingly aware of its uncanny stillness. There was no sound of traffic, no moving figure on the road or at the doors of the outlying houses.

As he drew near the first hotel on the outskirts of the town, he encountered something for which even the last five weeks had not prepared him. A large bus of the Vectis Company stood at the side of the road, as though waiting for passengers. Stealing up to it through the dusk, Mark found the driver lolling forward over his wheel, with the fixed stare of the dead. Inside, it was filled with a grotesque crowd of frozen gargoyles—men, women and children, with stony faces and gaping mouths. They were held—petrified—in their places by some abnormal rigor. The rising moon silvered their greyness and made them spectral. Averting his eyes, Mark again broke into a stumbling run in his search for something alive, until the sound of his own footsteps, echoing back from the walls of the hotel in that appalling stillness, pulled him up by its weird abnormality. He pushed back the swing-doors of the hotel entrance, almost stealthily, as a man tiptoes into a church; yet he felt instinctively what he was going to see. It was dark; but he knew where the switches were in that big lounge-hall. He remembered a jolly Christmas party there, ten years ago, when they put out the lights and told ghost stories round the fire, till they were all afraid to go home. Lights, lights, lights, one after another, he switched them on, as though he hoped that each new light would dispel the dreadful picture that the others had revealed only more and more clearly: the frozen little groups of the dead, in the big arm-chairs and couches; the old man with the newspaper still clutched in his stiff yellow fingers; his old wife with her head drooping on her breast. On the floor beside her there was a note which she had been scribbling to her daughter in London. Mark picked it up and read—

> *Such a lovely view from the window here, across masses of flowers to the sea. It seems too tragic that men should be killing one another in a world which might be made so full of happiness for everyone with only a tithe of the effort and energy used in war. I wish that you and Jack could be with us here and out of danger.*

He could see the bold headlines of the newspaper in the old man's hand. OUR CONSCIENCES ARE CLEAR.

Behind the desk in the office, two girl clerks were stretched on the floor, dead. The porter was huddled in his box, as motionless and cold as the rows of keys on their hooks behind him. He, too, had a newspaper spread out on his desk, and his dead face seemed to be heavily pondering the same headline. OUR CONSCIENCES ARE CLEAR.

And then Mark caught sight of a telephone-box at the back of the lobby. He dashed into it, and raised the receiver—the swiftest means of communication with the outside world, or so he thought and expected it to be.

He could not tell whether the drumming in his ears came from the telephone or from the blood in his own veins. But he dialled first "enquiry", and then "trunk". There was no reply. He dialled for the operator. Again there was no reply, only that steady drumming—the blood in his own veins.

He could not tell whether the silence indicated that everyone at the exchange was dead, or merely that there was a local breakdown.

In the parking ground, outside the hotel, there were two or three motor-cars. He chose the car whose gears he understood best, and started the engine. The human associations of that purring sound—memories of old happy journeys in the country, laughing faces at the doors of old houses, hands cheerily waving good-bye—almost overwhelmed him as he

drove off from that silent building, populated only by the dead.

His first halt was at Niton on the Undercliff, where his only near relations—the family of his Uncle Andrew—had lived for many years. He left the car at the outer gates, and as he went down the steep little road to the beautiful old house of island stone, he caught faintly luminous glimpses of innumerable primroses on the rocky banks to left and right. To the left of the house, he saw the orchard, ghostly with blossom. It was all breathlessly still as he entered the familiar porch. The door was wide open. He knocked and rang, but went straight in, without waiting for an answer. There was no sound anywhere except the trickling of a little stream outside and the humming of a bee who had lost his way home and was butting his head against a glass door in the hall.

Mark stood at the foot of the stairs and called his Aunt Christie and Uncle Andrew by name. There was no reply. He went into the sun-room, as they called it, a large verandah enclosed with glass, where the old people used to read their papers and have tea. His Uncle Andrew seemed to be taking an afternoon nap in his arm-chair. An illustrated paper lay on the floor beside him. His Aunt Christie was there, lying on a couch. They were both dead. She had that strangely blissful look which often seems to transfigure the faces of the old when they catch their first glimpse of another world. At her side, one of her grand-children, David, a boy often, was kneeling with a huge bunch of primroses which he had picked for her. One of her transparent old hands was half-outstretched to take it, while the other was resting on the boy's head. On a table near the head of the couch were some of the books she had been reading. He noticed a well-worn copy of the *Fioretti of St. Francis*. He knew that book so well. She used to read it to him when he was a small boy. Mark picked it up. It opened at a passage of which he remembered every word, the passage which describes how St. Francis, when he was dying, was taken from Assisi to the plains below; how he asked that his litter should be placed so that his face was turned towards his beloved city; and how he blessed it as he died.

> *Blessed be thou of God, O holy City; for through thee shall many be saved, and in thee shall dwell many servants of the Lord; and out of thee shall many be chosen for the kingdom of eternal life.*

He kissed the cold brow of the old lady and the little boy and stole quietly out of the sun-room.

He wondered what had become of his married cousin, Althaea, who had been staying with her mother, as he knew, for the birth of her first baby. He went quietly up the stairs. In the first room he entered he saw at once what had happened. Death, like a sculptor of surpassing genius, had caught one fleeting moment of divine beauty and forbidden it to go by. The new-born child was being laid in its mother's arms for the first time. Her face wore an expression of ecstatic peace. The young father—in the uniform of the air-force—was seated at her bedside, kissing her hand. His wife's face was turned towards him. The nurse, on the other side of the bed, had been leaning across to lay the child between them. She was a curiously hard-featured woman, as austerely above all sentiment, one might have supposed, as any veteran soldier. Mark happened to have heard that she was of a morose and quarrelsome disposition, though extremely efficient in her work. Neither of the parents seemed to be aware, and neither of them could ever have guessed, that as this hard-featured woman leaned over to lay the baby between them, she took the opportunity of secretly kissing the dark head of the young mother on the pillow. Nurse Hopkins would have been angry if that touch of tenderness had been noticed, but death had caught her in the act.

As Mark went up the steep little road to his car it was darker, but the primroses seemed to have grown more luminous.

He decided to make for Cowes, where he thought he was more likely to find the kind of boat he would need to take him to the mainland. He did not dare to formulate the growing suspicion that, over there, sixteen miles away, the same deadly silence would reign; but he instinctively felt that he would probably have to make his own way across the Solent.

This instinctive feeling became almost a certainty during his drive across the island; for, on the way, he saw no living form, no sign of life or movement; but, once, in a moonlit cottage garden he saw a prostrate figure and, twice, he had to swerve suddenly to avoid a dead body on the road. On both occasions he stopped, and looked at the bodies. He hammered at a cottage door and, receiving no reply, entered. He found a whole family, the mother with her knitting, the father with his newspaper, the children with their picture-books and toys, all stiff as marionettes in the silent puppet-show of death, yet without any sign of physical injury. Their fixed attitudes all had that strange petrified look. After three more investigations of this kind he decided to push on to Cowes without stopping again. Whatever the unknown weapon might have been, that "last resort" which had been hinted at in the newspaper headlines, there was clearly no room for any human life within its range; and whatever that range might have been, it certainly seemed to include the whole island.

At Cowes, as he now expected, he found another little town of the dead. Their bodies were so thickly strewn along the narrow main street that it was impassable. The moonlight here was dimmer, but it shone only too vividly on those frozen up-turned faces. He saw, in one sickening glance, townsmen, sailors, van-drivers, newspaper hawkers, policemen and smartly dressed women all jumbled and huddled together along the road and pavement. Several of the women were in yachting dress, though they had certainly not been sailing, and their blood-red finger-nails contrasted oddly with their thin yellow oil-skins. He saw two golden-haired children, lying under a newspaper placard which bore in large black letters the headline of the hour:

OUR CONSCIENCES ARE CLEAR

Mark backed his car, and drove up a deserted side-street, making his way round to the water-front by way of Egypt House. At the entrance to the Club House of the Royal Yacht Squadron he halted. He remembered that this conservative but highly efficient institution had recently made a concession to modernity by installing the best wireless receiving apparatus in the world. From one or another station, surely, he would be able to learn what had happened.

The man in the sentry-box, at the sacrosanct gate, did not lift his head as Mark Adams hurried through. Two elderly admirals were reposing in basket-chairs on the moonlit lawn. A newspaper, trailing from one of the claw-like hands, showed the last four words, now so obviously true: OUR CONSCIENCES ARE CLEAR.

Mark groped his way into the dark club lounge, turned on all the electric lights he could find and, watched by the stony faces of three dead members who were assembled there in arm-chairs as though to listen in, switched on the wireless. The Royal Yacht Squadron was not a place where defect of the apparatus would be tolerated, but there was not a murmur from National, Regional or Scottish Regional. He tried Paris, Berlin, Rome, Moscow, all the cities of Europe from which usually there would have flowed endless currents of contradictory propaganda, news bulletins, raucous jungle-music, or (since the air must be all things to all men) an occasional violin crying like a desolate angel over a lost world. But to-night, there was nothing. All those stations, all those cities, were utterly silent. He tried America. The Squadron and the New York Yacht Club made a practice at that date of listening to one another's news, and their apparatus was adequate to all transatlantic purposes. But New York and Chicago were both silent.

He left the receiving apparatus, and went to the notice-board in the entrance hall, where the last tape message had been pinned up, and there he obtained his first clue.

It was now Thursday, the 7th of May. The latest announcements pinned up on the green baize were these:

Tuesday, May 5th, 2.30 p.m. INTERNATIONAL RADIO:

Grumkow threatens use of secret weapon of incalculable power, as last resort. In some quarters this is regarded as bluff but it is now regarded more seriously by the French Government who are in telephonic communication with the British War Office.

2.45 p.m. An emergency meeting of the British Inner Cabinet is now considering Herr Grumkow's threat. The President of the United States is in consultation with his military advisers. A Tokyo message states that the Japanese War Office is seriously disturbed by the message. Moscow reports an immediate summons of the Supreme Council. It is believed that all the chief powers are acquainted with the nature of the secret weapon, and will take immediate steps to forestall its use. The President of France states that the Allies also have a secret weapon, which hitherto they have regarded as too formidable for use except in the "last resort". If they are compelled to use it, he says, the result will be conclusive: and this moment seems to be approaching. Further delay might be fatal.

Apparently there had been no further delay; but the consequences had been more fatal than anyone had expected. Immediately above these latest notices Mark saw telegraphic messages from the heads of four great nations, all of whom declared that they were prepared to "fight to the last man".

It suddenly burst upon him that this might be what had actually happened.

The human mind is an uncanny instrument, and does unexpected things. If there had been any living witnesses, they would probably have been surprised by Mark's behaviour at this moment. Flinging himself back upon a great leather couch he

talked to himself aloud, for the first time in his life.

"My God," he said, "I do believe they've really done it. I believe I'm the last man!"

Then, although his blood ran cold at the prospect, he burst into peal after echoing peal of ironic laughter.

CHAPTER IV

There was a swift reaction, and, for an hour, Mark went to the other extreme. Rushing from house to house, he entered one after another, sometimes battering open a locked door and discovering, on more than one occasion, a scandal that would have electrified Cowes, if Cowes had been able to hear it.

Wherever he found a wireless apparatus, he switched it on, desperately trying all the stations, hoping against hope that his former failures were due merely to exhausted batteries. But in all cases, and from all stations, there was utter silence.

He gave it up at last and returned to the sea-front. There, at least, the seagulls were wheeling and mewing, and the ripple of the tide kept up its quiet conversation with the shore.

He was shivering now with cold. His mental excitement hitherto had almost prevented him from feeling any physical sensation; but the wet clothes in which he had landed at Steephill Cove had not yet dried upon his body; and, in the night air, he was chilled to the bone. If he was to cross the Solent and continue his search without collapsing, he needed dry clothes and a hot drink. Within a stone's throw there were several shops which displayed the kind of outfit he wanted, and they were all at his disposal. In a few minutes he was warmly clad in grey flannel trousers, a flannel shirt, and a woollen jersey. Then he went into a hotel near the Squadron and, resolutely disregarding the blonde ghastliness of the barmaid among her bottles, and the facetious countenance of the petrified sportsman in the loud checks who still leaned towards her with an ogling eye, Mark put a kettle on an electric ring behind the bar and mixed himself a stiff glass of hot rum and water. This, with a glass-covered dish of ham-sandwiches, saved by their grease-paper wrappings from over-staleness, he carried into the lounge, which had no occupants, dead or alive. It was his first food for nearly forty-eight hours, and he wolfed the sandwiches down, feeling ashamed of his own hunger, but feeding it as he might have fed a ravenous animal to be rid of its importunity. Afterwards, at the tobacco-stall near the hotel entrance, he chose a pipe to replace the one he had lost, and filled a pouch with his favourite tobacco. Then he went down to the landing-stage, at which a small motor-launch was rocking. It was a beautiful little boat, which had belonged, two days ago, to one of the yachts at anchor in the Solent; but it was entirely at his own disposal now. As quickly as his present haste allowed, he was off and away, chugging across the Solent for the great sea-port which he could dimly see on the opposite coast. He had only one immediate aim, however—to get away from this fearful island of the dead, away into the clear, crisp lapping water. As the shore died away behind him, a hideous nightmare seemed to die away also, for a time. Beauty began to clothe the coast behind him as, for the present, it clothed the coast he was approaching. Which, he wondered, was the reality? In half an hour, the coast he had left looked as inviting under the summer moon as the island valley of Avilion, and the coast he was approaching filled him with a new and terrible apprehension.

There was no movement on any of the great sea-going liners. The wharves were deserted. But he caught glimpses of dark bundles on them which might or might not be what he feared they were. Once—a very unusual thing in the Solent, he had to swerve out of his course to prevent a derelict boat drifting across his bows.

He landed at the Southampton pier of the Isle of Wight Steam Packet Company, and almost the first thing he saw was the dead face of a steel-helmeted watchman, staring at him over an ironic rampart of sandbags by which the dead man's body was protected and propped on all sides.

The broad road at the end of the pier showed him that the "unknown weapon" had been as effective in Southampton as on the Island. There was just one place where, if any defence at all had been effective, he would be more likely to find survivors than anywhere else. At a naval dock near by, the moon had shown him the massive grey hull and turret and sky-pointing guns of H.M.S. *Implacable*, the most formidable fighting ship of the British Navy. He had that inborn faith of the British that, when it came to a final test, their Navy was invincible, prepared for every possible emergency, and that no surprise from sky or sea could ever put it out of action.

In a sense, this was still true, so far as the ship was concerned. H.M.S. *Implacable* was in perfect condition. But the sentries recumbent on the dock asked him no questions, and offered no opposition as he passed the forbidden gates. He walked up the gangway, which had obviously been placed in position for the little group of officers huddled in a grotesque heap on the gleaming moonlit deck. The Titanic guns lifted their dumb grey muzzles to the sky as though they were still expecting enemy wings from the north; but only the small grey clouds came flying over; and there was no sound anywhere except the lapping of the water against the bows and the eldritch mewing of the seagulls.

This, so far as Southampton was concerned, seemed to Mark conclusive. It would be useless to waste any more time there; and he determined to push on to London at once. Outside the dock gates there were several cars waiting. He chose an unoccupied one, tore the hoods off the headlights; and, in a few minutes, was driving along the London road as fast as the dreadful circumstances allowed.

In the open country there were fewer of those dark obstructions; but, as he approached Winchester, he had to slow down again. His lights, blazing through this new and more fearful black-out, seemed bright enough to wake the dead, and he had grown so used in recent months to the precautions that, even now, he felt himself to be recklessly breaking the law. But, nothing—in these hours—would have given him greater relief than to be challenged and arrested.

CHAPTER V

Fortunately, or unfortunately, Mark Adams was a highly civilized man. He would have suffered less, in many ways, if he had been nearer to the soil; but he was curiously fitted to carry on the memories of the race that had vanished. He came of an English father and a French mother. He had his father's fair skin and strong frame, and his mother's dark eyes and quick nerves. His father had been a biologist of distinction. He had encouraged Mark to become a medical student; for he thought that, in the world which was coming, the medical profession would be one of the very few to survive. Whatever the new tyrannies and revolutions might bring forth, dictators and revolutionaries alike, he said, will always want medical advisers for their own sakes. They will always have to recognize the value of that profession, and allow its members reasonable opportunities for study and the life of an educated man. Mark agreed; and, for more idealistic reasons, threw himself into hospital work with the ardour of a young Lister. War had swept him into the Red Cross service. (It was after the torpedoing of his hospital ship that he had been taken prisoner on the enemy submarine.) For some years before this, he had been fortunate enough to have ample time for reading. He had inherited from his mother a passion for literature, English, French and Italian, chiefly; and he had one of those minds which were constantly trying to arrive at real conclusions about the nature of the world in which they live, and the purpose and meaning of the individual human life, as well as the life of the race. He had a great fund of general knowledge—all the wider perhaps because he was not a specialist in anything. It was, of course, just such a man, at the age of twenty-nine, who would most fully and imaginatively realize the extraordinary position in which he now found himself, as he drove through the night towards London.

Near Bagshot he stopped abruptly at the gates of a house he knew—Chingford Wood—the abode of Sir Herbert Boskin, the well-known publicist, whose articles on literature and the drama, as well as on all kinds of public affairs, had secured him an immense following among readers of the more popular newspapers.

Mark did not know him well; but he had stayed in the neighbourhood, and had been taken by his hostess to several tennis parties given by Lady Boskin.

It occurred to Mark that in the house of a man so closely in touch with current events, there might be further clues to what had actually happened. He turned into the drive, along which the dark trees, in the moonlight, seemed towering to an unnatural height. At the front door he made a great clangor with the bell, though he knew it was the idlest formality. There was no reply, of course, and—after a very brief pause—he pushed the door open, and entered the dark hall. With the help of his electric torch he found the switches and began to flash the lights on.

Sir Herbert Boskin and his wife Annette had been regarded locally, and even nationally, as pillars—minor pillars, perhaps, but still pillars—of things as they ought to be. They supported all the good causes which might enhance this reputation. No breath of scandal had ever touched their private lives. Sir Herbert, naturally, had to be abreast of the times. He recognized that we had to move with them, in our conception of ethics as in everything else; for everything under the sun is subject to fashion; and a writer for the popular newspapers cannot afford to be "dated". But everyone admired the tact with which he made the "advanced" readers feel that he was being subtly ironical at the expense of the traditionalists, while at the same time he made the traditionalists feel that he was merely showing the "advanced" people the breadth of his mind and his underlying recognition of the more permanent values behind the traditional point of view. Indeed, he modelled himself upon the cat; and, while he was impartially ready to purr and rub himself against the boots of any party with a really popular or fashionable following, his velvet paw was equally ready, at any moment, and on either side, to expand into claws, if the expansion, and the resultant scratch, seemed likely to increase his reputation for wit or wisdom with a sufficiently large body of readers.

Mark went first into the drawing-room where he found Lady Boskin, dead, on a large Chesterfield sofa. She was in the arms of a dead man with a long, pale nose, and a red moustache, which gave a touch of macabre comedy to their attitude; for the dead man was certainly not Sir Herbert Boskin; and, no less certainly, he was what the more romantic Sunday newspapers, to which Sir Herbert contributed, would call an "episode in her love-life".

Feeling a little sick at the stomach, Mark walked out of the drawing-room. At the farther end of a long passage he pushed open a door and found himself in what Sir Herbert called his "den". Sir Herbert was reposing in a huge leather arm-chair, with his head on his breast, in a Napoleonic attitude, and as dead as Napoleon. On a table beside him there was a magnificently bound copy of a pornographic work which was then being smuggled into the country from Belgium at five guineas a copy. On the pretext that it was an "advance" in literary method, this monstrosity had secured a public which

would never have looked at it, and would certainly not have paid the requisite five guineas, if it had not been for the "beautiful" and "highly curious" obscenity of many of its pages.

However, Sir Herbert had clothed it in purple morocco. Some corrected proofs on his desk showed that Sir Herbert himself had acquired merit among the "advanced" by discreetly puffing this "highly curious" work. Discreetly, for though he made great play with "inhibitions", the "sub-conscious mind", the "Oedipus complex" and all the rest of the patter, he gave no examples of the really operative ingredients of the book, and he assured his audience that he read it for the style.

"When a fat major makes that remark in an Indian club, everybody hoots and laughs." So it was written, many years ago, in that buried masterpiece of youthful satire, *The Three Young Men*. In less grim circumstances, Sir Herbert's article might have elicited no more than a ribald chuckle of the same kind from some invisible Imp of Irony. But, unfortunately, on his desk there lay another article in proof. This was an eloquent indictment of the moral iniquity—private as well as public—of certain foreign leaders and officials. It made impressive use of the words "honour" and "truth"; it appealed to the Christian religion; and it ended with the inevitable quotation from Wordsworth, suggesting that Sir Herbert must be free or he would die. The reason suggested for this heroic attitude was that he—Sir Herbert Boskin—was one of those who "the faith and morals hold that Milton held".

Mark dropped both the proofs and the book into the waste-paper basket. He did it mechanically, hardly realizing what he was doing. It was so obviously natural a function of the hands. Then he walked out, without glancing at the dead man, but feeling even more sick at the stomach than he felt in Lady Boskin's drawing-room. It is not easy at twenty-nine to be completely cynical.

CHAPTER VI

He crept into London with difficulty in the early hours of the morning; for, in the great city, the jumble of motionless vehicles, many of which had crashed into one another or into shop-windows before stopping, and the dark huddled forms on road and pavement became so obstructive that he almost thought of abandoning the car and walking. Once indeed he stopped and alighted with that intention, but the attempt had a curious psychological effect upon him. He felt that in abandoning the car with its throbbing engine, he was somehow losing a friendly link with the living. Its animation was only mechanical, but the mechanism was the work of man. To leave it in the cold grey gloom of that early morning, with the motionless relics of that fearful cataclysm on all sides of him, was like going out of a lighted ship's cabin to explore the bleak darkness of a Polar desert. He re-entered the car more quickly than he had gone out. The lighted dash-board had a new friendliness as he shut himself in again. The illuminated face of the little ticking clock, where the hands now pointed to three-thirty, conveyed by sheer contrast a comforting sense, not of "cosiness" (for that word must imply contentment), but the hint of unconscious comradeship that a friendly hearth can give to a man in distress. In the car, at any rate, he felt that he was aboard his own small ship, commanding his own bit of the old civilized world. It would have taken a great deal to persuade him to abandon it at this juncture, though he knew he might find another, or a better, at any of the thousand parking places and garages on the road before him. He drove on slowly therefore, finding some offset to the difficulties in the fact that he need pay no attention to the traffic laws. He could take either side of the road, or use the pavements, if necessary. With these aids, and occasional circuits by a side street, he passed Waterloo Station and arrived at last within sight of the Houses of Parliament and Westminster Abbey.

The day was breaking as he drove slowly over Westminster Bridge. He wondered if he were going mad as he heard his own voice intoning in his own ears, "Earth has not anything to show more fair."

With a sudden swerve he avoided a dead hawker of matches who sprawled with all his stock-in-trade, in the shadow of a lamp-post, across the road. The broadening light showed him the brown dumps of wet sandbags round the entrances to the House of Commons and St. James's Park Station.

> This city now doth like a garment wear
> The beauty of the morning.

He repeated it to himself desperately, keeping time with the rhythm of the engine, and hardly knowing whether he was trying to drug his memory of a lost world or to revive it.

> The river glideth at his own sweet will.
> Dear God, the very houses seem asleep,
> And all that mighty heart is lying still.

He was not paying any attention to the meaning of his words—only repeating them with the kind of numbed restraint that might at any moment break down.

> And all that mighty heart is lying still.

He turned to the right up Whitehall. There were masses of flowers at the foot of the war memorial of 1914-18. The present war had revived the pity of the older tragedy, and the still fresh petals seemed to be glistening with the dew of the new-born day. A woman in black was lying prostrate among them, her dead face buried in them and her arms full of lilies.

A sudden impulse made Mark turn into Downing Street and pull up at the door of Number 10. There, at least, he might find some further clue—possibly some light on conditions elsewhere—in the form of a written message taken down from the transatlantic telephone (he had already begun to look beyond the continent of Europe for a ray of hope) or a late cable received before the catastrophe.

The two steel-helmeted policemen who had been on duty were stretched across the pavement, one staring upwards at the strip of sky and flying summer cloud that streamed like a blue and white pennant above the narrow street, the other with his face in the gutter. The front door was open. The dead butler lay cheek by jowl with a newly arrived visitor, who had apparently been handing him his hat, coat, scarf, gloves and umbrella, at the very moment when the wave of death had

arrived. The butler had his hands full of them; but, even so, in their present position, the butler's corpse looked the more dignified of the two; for the visitor's mouth was wide open, while the butler's lips were firmly closed in his clean-shaven and somewhat episcopal face.

Mark made a long stride over their bodies; went quickly up the narrow stair, opened a door at random, and found himself in the Cabinet room.

They were all there, those important ones, seated around a long polished table, in a frozen silence, as though this unprecedented intrusion of an obscure stranger had struck them dumb. They were all there—except one—the most important of all. The Prime Minister's chair was vacant. The light from the large window, overlooking the pleasant little garden, streamed cheerfully over them, and over the books on the shelves behind them, and on the portraits of former statesmen looking gravely down upon them from the walls.

To Mark it was the most uncanny sensation of his life, to steal like this into the most private, and perhaps the most important conclave of the modern political world, and find all those figures, so familiar to the press of five continents, at his absolute disposal, helpless and impotent as graven images or tailors' dummies.

It was almost like passing through the darkness of a more terrible and mysterious looking-glass, and discovering a more tragic Wonderland. There was something almost childishly pathetic about their neat little blotters; their neat little sheets of white paper laid beside them; and all the other neat little preparations for their task of setting the world to rights and rearranging the fate of the obscure millions outside. And here was he—one of those obscure millions—the only living survivor—stumbling into the private conclave of those Olympians, and finding them all at his mercy. He was able, if he chose, to read all their private notes; to search their pockets and examine their pocket-books, like a divinely appointed detective, acting on behalf of the Recording Angel. He could have no scruple about that now; for in twenty-four hours the world to which he belonged had grown as strange and remote as that of Tutankhamen, and Mark Adams had already all the justifications of the historical explorer.

In all of them he noticed again that strange appearance of petrifaction, or rather calcification, for the dead tissues had a curiously chalky texture. It was probably owing to this effect of the death-wave that the attitudes in which they had been caught were so little changed. With the exception of the Prime Minister, whose vacant chair had an expectant look, like the throne in melodrama, they were almost as vividly present as in life, those Olympians. The most dominating figure was the Secretary of State for War, whose statistics of the casualties up to the date of the cataclysm had been set forth so brilliantly and persuasively, and with so skilful an emphasis on the larger casualties of the enemy, that in high quarters his mathematical generalship was held to be of immense "propaganda" value, and indeed almost to have dulled the pain of the bereaved and fatherless. His huge cigar had slipped from his fingers, and had burned a large black blister on the shining mahogany table. Next to him was the First Lord of the Admiralty, who had settled a little in his chair, and was looking even more Napoleonic than the late Sir Herbert Boskin. His big head had sunk on his breast, and one white hand was thrust stiffly into his waist-coat, over the tightly buttoned but rebellious paunch. The Air Minister seemed to be looking at him with suppressed dislike. The Home Secretary and the Minister for Agriculture were bowed forward on the table with their heads on their arms; while the Chancellor of the Exchequer had almost slipped beneath it. The keen-faced Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs was the most efficient looking of all these dead men. He had drawn his chair closer to the table than the others, and it now held him more erect. His arms were resting on his blotter, and his body was almost as upright as in life, but his head lolled on his right shoulder with half-shut eyes which seemed to be looking sleepily at the Minister of Propaganda, while his slightly gaping mouth suggested that he was restraining a bored yawn. In life he had undoubtedly held more clues to the situation than any of the others; and it was to his notes that Mark turned first in his feverish desire for more information.

He took a bundle of these notes to a chair near the window, flung the window wide open, lit his pipe and, turning his back on the dead conclave, began to examine the evidence, while a thrush in the garden whistled as carelessly as it had whistled a week ago, or as other thrushes had whistled through all the calamities of twenty thousand years. Mark was conscious of this indifference of Nature in a strange new way now; for the enormity, the monstrosity of the calamity had this curious psychological effect upon him—that he seemed to be seeing and hearing the most ordinary sights and sounds for the first time.

He had become vividly aware of the mysteries that idle habit had cloaked and conventional names had hidden from the former civilized world, though they had been revealed to children and savages. As he looked into the sunlit garden he felt a new wonder at the fact that thrushes had not forgotten their pretty ways, and that birds were hopping in absolute

carelessness, and probably with an increased sense of happiness on the lawn below.

He turned over the notes of the Foreign Secretary. Some of them he was unable to understand for lack of technical knowledge. Others amazed and startled him, by their revelation of utterly unsuspected secret moves in the international game. At the bottom of the file he found two decoded telegrams. One was from the President of the United States, informing him of a secret service report from Tokyo that Japan was planning to use the "last resort", and advising him that the United States had decided, in the interests of Western civilization, to forestall the Japanese at three o'clock that afternoon.

The other telegram was from the British Embassy at Tokyo, reporting that the Japanese were certainly going to use the "last resort" at three o'clock that afternoon. Both nations had selected the same hour. There was nothing strange about that. Both were working against time and, like two competitors in a race, they found that there were only a few seconds between them at the goal.

Mark Adams found no clue, however, in any of the papers to the nature of this "last resort" until he turned to the notes of the First Lord of the Admiralty. There, scrawled in a big child-like fist, he found a question that—in less appalling circumstances—would have made him roar with laughter. It was this:

In the event of our bringing the "last resort" into operation, is there any known limit to the range of the wave, or anything to prevent it making the circuit of the entire globe, and taking us all in the back?

To this, various Sea Lords and Admiralty experts had appended comments serious and facetious.

Nothing. So far as I know.

What of it? This is a war to end war.

Strange as it all seemed, the world had been asking itself questions and giving itself answers of the same kind for more than a century now. Even in the preceding century, statesmen and journalists had asked solemnly whether any limits could be set to the bloody conflicts in which the nations were to be engaged; whether any nation could possibly stand out eventually; whether the killing could be limited to the armed forces of those nations; and finally, whether any civilian, old or young, man, woman or child, could escape the new and scientific methods of insuring the "survival of the fittest" by indiscriminate slaughter.

The nature of the new weapon was more or less clear from the First Lord's notes; and the peoples of the world were just as powerless in this matter as they had been in the attempt to prevent war itself. Having gone so far, they must go farther; from flint to steel; from steel to gunpowder; from gunpowder to poison-gases; from poison-gases to disease-germs; from disease-germs to the "last resort".

> The first step is with us; then all the road,
> The long road is with Fate.

Mark did not believe in that fatalism, but it represented what had actually happened; and now, at the last moment, in this mad predicament, the only hope of survival for any nation was to strike first, and apparently they had all struck together.

Fearful as the scope of the catastrophe had been, it was not until this moment that Mark really came to grips with the appalling possibility that it might be world-wide; and that his unique position at three of the clock on that doom-fraught afternoon had made him the "heir of all the ages" in a new and more terrible sense.

He had no scruple at all now in carrying his investigations further. He thrust his hand into the pockets of the dead men, dragging out notebooks, letters, telegrams. He opened their despatch-cases and read feverishly. Some of the things he read would have given a shock to the constituents of the Minister concerned; but there was a greater simplicity than he had expected about most of these men, and, on the whole, what he read made him feel proud of his country. In one pocket-book there was evidence that its owner had consistently used his official information to his own exceeding advantage on the Stock Exchange. But his method was very simple. Certain announcements were held to have a depressing influence on prices, and others a stimulating influence. Before the former kind of announcement his brokers had consistently sold for him, and before the latter, they had consistently bought. That was all. But he was the only

offender of the twelve, and as Mark reminded himself, even the disciples could not escape that proportion of evil. Moreover, there was no suggestion that this particular Iscariot would have sold his country for all the wealth of the world. Indeed, there was ample evidence in other ways, that he was unremitting in his efforts to serve her. But Mark could find no more light on the question which was making his brain reel—a question that would have seemed remote two days ago—though all the facts were now forcing him to ask it.

Was there any other survivor of the human race, or was he the solitary Crusoe of the entire planet, a Crusoe for whom there could be no hope of any sail from any other part of the universe?

The Prime Minister's empty chair caught his eye again. He wondered where Mr. Harrington could be, or whether his despatch-case or pockets would reveal any later messages. Leaving the Cabinet room Mark climbed another flight of stairs, and passed the open doors of two empty bedrooms. The next door was shut and he opened it himself. There he saw, and immediately recognized, the dead Prime Minister, in a kneeling attitude, at his bedside. The *rigor mortis* held him there, cold and stiff. But there was no doubt about it. In that almost entirely agnostic and highly sophisticated political world which, for all its conventionally sound principles, was essentially pagan at heart, the chief figure had been praying in private as simply as Abraham Lincoln, before discussing with his colleagues the decisions which had to be made. But it would never have been known to his biographer, or indeed to anyone, if Death had not struck him in the act.

For a moment, Mark felt like a new Hamlet who had expected to find a crafty, if not a secretly Machiavellian figure in any leading statesman, and had discovered instead a good and true-hearted man trying his best to serve his country and seeking for guidance from the Supreme Being.

As Mark descended to the front door again his mind was a whirl of conflicting ideas. He did not like politicians, as a rule; and, from what he had seen, he thought that this Prime Minister must have been one of those great exceptions who upset all preconceived ideas. He looked at the portraits of former Prime Ministers, steel-engravings most of them, on the wall of the lower flight of stairs. The earlier men were a fine-looking lot, and if they were as fine as their engraved portraits it would have been difficult to discover their equals in character and intellect anywhere. But he noticed that some of the later portraits, as he went down, had a different effect. He could not analyse it. They seemed to be trying to take up more room. The men of the last three decades occupied almost as much space as those of the two preceding centuries. In fact, they had filled up all the remaining space, as though they knew instinctively that they were bringing things to an end.

There were several first-rate men among them, but the most self-seeking and most oily-tongued demagogue of all the moderns had annexed thrice the space allotted to Pitt and Wellington.

Mark had a horrible feeling that some of the modern politicians had become "history-conscious", and that, in their ambition to inscribe their names in "history", which they confused with the lime-lit placards of "publicity" they might almost welcome earthquake and eclipse; for, in all such times of disaster, those who happen to be in office acquire a fortuitous importance. He had felt certain of this with some of the lesser men. He had watched them, in moments of crisis, when unity was essential, attacking the government simply because they themselves had not been included among the holders of office. He had seen them purring with approval over the same government, and over the same policy, as soon as they were included; and the spectacle had almost made him despair of politics. But the glimpse that he had caught of the dead Prime Minister had strangely restored the balance. There were many different Englands, he thought, but that glimpse was of an England for whose sake, a hundred times in history, God had refrained his anger.

CHAPTER VII

Every hour it became clearer to Mark that there was no hope of finding another survivor in Great Britain. He felt now, in his bones, that it would be the same on the continent of Europe, and perhaps even farther afield. Otherwise, surely by this time there would have been the roar of investigating aeroplanes overhead, or an inquisitive ship steaming up the Thames.

There had certainly been time for the first adventurous troop of awe-stricken explorers to reach London by one way or another. Even if no European had been curious enough to come and see why the whole of Great Britain had been plunged into complete silence, the European correspondents of the American press in all the capitals of the continent, would have been moving Acheron for information. They would have chartered a fleet of aeroplanes by this time, to secure a news-item which would change the face of history and make the destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum look like a children's Christmas party, with Pangloss playing Santa Claus. But nothing happened; nobody arrived. Once or twice, for five minutes at a time, he heard a wild yelping of dogs in the distance; but it soon relapsed into silence. There was no footstep in the street; no telephone bell ringing, far or near, in house or office; no sound of engines overhead, nothing but the silence of the wilderness and the mountains, which seemed to turn the grey inanimate buildings into crags and cliffs; a silence all the deeper by contrast with the remembered pandemonium of former days. Even at the dead of night, in London, when it had been populated by the living, the stillness was different from that of the mountains or mid-ocean. There had been footsteps echoing on stone pavements; there had been the rush and rattle of distant vehicles; the sullen rumble of an underground train; the blaring of a motor-horn; the clangour of a fire-engine; the steady droning of aeroplanes; the tolling hammer-strokes of Big Ben; dance-music in the distance, or the voices of strayed revellers raised in discordant caterwaulings on their way home. But now, for the first time in London, he was aware of the kind of silence which the poets have found in Nature at her loneliest:

> The silence that is in the starry sky,
> The sleep that is among the lonely hills.

For the first time he heard, from the Embankment, the flowing of the Thames. The cries of birds came to him, not as a thin treble struggling to make itself heard over the massive boomings of an orchestra, but crystal-clear as the call of a blackbird, alone on the topmost bough of a silver birch, among the hills of heather. A little way off in the Green Park, he heard the wide, uninterrupted rustling of leaves, the lapping of water, and the cry of water-fowl, just as he might have heard them on the untrodden shores of a lake in the woods of Maine or at Ponkapog, the beautiful pool of the Red Indian, before the coming of the white man.

He noticed, as the hours went by, while he explored churches and parks and private houses, and the Houses of Parliament, and doctors' houses in Harley Street, that the slight changes which were taking place in the appearance of these innumerable dead were curiously different from the normal. The petrifying effect of the death-wave, which he had noticed on the island, seemed to be progressive, and the flesh was acquiring a dry, chalky whiteness. At the end of four days, the fifth from the catastrophe, there were none of the usual traces of corruption. The bodies looked as though they were gradually turning to chalk. In the streets they had fallen hither and thither, where they had been touched by the wave; and he felt sometimes, as though he were driving through endless vistas of jumbled Chinese images in some Oriental bazaar.

He saw many strange sights in London. Some were of things that, in ordinary circumstances, would have been known only to the recording angel. Some—like that ineffaceable picture at Niton—were of an exquisite beauty, moments of the divine charity, caught and fixed by the arresting finger of death.

Others were as grotesque as Hogarth. He blundered once into the close of a wedding feast which had been caught and petrified, with all its chalk-white faces, at the very moment when the bride and groom were leaving the front-door for their honeymoon. They had sunk to their knees, and squatted there, on their heels, with their heads lolling against one another, as though the champagne had been too much for them, while the grinning guests, toppling over, or propping one another up in all directions, around and behind them, still seemed to menace them with the pink and blue confetti in their frozen hands.

Once he strayed into a famous hotel. Lunch had come to an end, of course, at the time of the death-wave; but coffee and liqueurs were still being taken in the palm-room. He stood in the middle of the room and stared around him. He seemed to be surrounded by an exotic jungle of horribly insistent silk stockings. They thrust themselves at him like serpents with

pointed heads of the daintiest enamelled shoe-skin from every corner of that luxurious lounge. Blood-red finger-nails gleamed at him on every side, as though they were trying to illustrate the line about "Nature, red in tooth and claw". He remembered the groan of a soldier who, after a long exile from civilization, had once lunched with him here. "My God, most of these women look as if they had been murdering babies." Mark knew some of them by sight. There was La-La Vivian, the film star, with her French poodle and her fifth husband, surrounded by a group of those "prominent leaders of Society" who had acquired national fame by way of flash-light photographs of themselves at night clubs with bottles in ice-buckets, equally "prominent", at their side. The poodle, Frou-Frou, snoring in her lap, looked the most intelligent of them. It was not its own fault that its nails had been dyed as barbarous a red as those of the other ladies in the group. La-La was surveying herself in a pocket mirror with an air of great satisfaction. Death, apparently, had been satisfied, too; and had fixed her in the act. Her fifth husband was evidently telling a story about her to the rest of the party, who were contorted with laughter. On the table before him, a private letter which he had obviously been making public, explained the laughter. It was an indignant protest from an eminent physician at the Children's Hospital in Chelsea. La-La, apparently, had summoned him by telephone, on the ground that her baby was at the point of death. Sir Rowland had postponed his visit to another case, a most serious one, and dashed to her hotel, only to find that her "baby" was no other than Frou-Frou, the French poodle.

For all Sir Rowland's indignation, the letter was dignified and brief. It threatened an action. Affixed to it, however, was a cable from La-La's publicity-agent to this effect—

> *Entire Press tickled to death. Advertisement worth twenty thousand dollars. Suggest you have Frou-Frou baptized.*

Mark escaped into a room off the lobby, where the "ticker" had been working up till the last moment. The announcement of the "last resort" had brought a group of cosmopolitan faces to watch the fluctuations of the market.

One man seemed to be staring at the news that a passenger ship, the *Oriana*, had been sunk with all hands, while the face of another seemed to be horribly appreciative of the effect of this disaster on the market-prices, which were recorded immediately below.

At one of the centres of his own profession—a great metropolitan hospital, scene after scene of a nobler drama had been caught and fixed, as in a series of vivid tableaux, by that strange artistry of death. Their fixity seemed to emphasize their significance, as when some fleeting gesture or expression is arrested by the hand of a sculptor. The petrifying effect of the wave had been so quietly instantaneous in some of these indoor scenes that—in many cases—there was hardly any sign of disturbance. Of the doctors and nurses who had been standing a few had fallen prostrate; but most of them had sunk to their knees and remained there, almost as if in prayer. Those who had been seated at bedsides were leaning forward only a little more than usual; and, where there was any departure from the normal attitudes of the body, it suggested rather that they had been overcome by a heavy sleep than that a disaster had happened. All in the day's work as it may have been, and overlooked as it undoubtedly had been by the fomenters of class-hatred, the compassionate cause which these men and women had been quietly serving to the utmost of their ability, touched their suspended and broken tasks with a beauty that the brush of Rembrandt would not have despised. Here at least were the images of men who knew their work; men who had a true and definite purpose; men who had been devoting infinite patience and incomparable skill to high and merciful ends. He went into one room, where they were grouped around the operating-table, on their knees, or bowing their heads on the ground, as though before some strange altar of suffering humanity. In another room, under eyes that still seemed to be watching for every chance to heal and save, a young man seemed still to be fighting for breath. In another the wondering faces of children looked up with a peaked and curiously old wisdom and trustfulness into the compassionate face of the physician. Wherever he looked, Mark saw here, or thought he saw, an integrity of mind and will that might have gone far towards the redemption of the race. In the very nature of things, a good doctor had no use for lying reports (physical, intellectual or political.) He could not play modernistic monkey-tricks with his cases. There was no room for Dadaism in diagnosis, or Gagaism in treatment. Nor would the most "advanced" of his patients have been anxious for surrealistic methods in surgery to be practised by a "sub-conscious" mind on his own body. Law, the lamp of knowledge and absolute precision, were the creed here, if nowhere else. It was apparent in the fine intellectual values, the look of self-control and keen efficiency, the firm lines of character, in face after face among the healers.

In amazing contrast was a scene into which he walked by accident. He had been looking for the offices of a man he knew, near the Temple; and, mistaking the number, he pushed back a door and discovered the Executive Committee of

the "Unity Movement" in conference. Eight dead men and four dead women were seated at a long table with their agenda before them. Round the walls there were rows of framed photographs representing the leaders of the diverse parties which were to be unified. They were of every nation, and every form of belief and unbelief. The founder of the Christian religion hung between Lenin and Stalin. St. Francis and Karl Marx were sandwiched in between Grumkow and Abraham Lincoln. Zoroaster, Luther, Cardinal Newman, Adolf Hitler, and an intimidating person named Mardok, led the eye cheerfully on to Moses, Brigham Young and Charles Darwin. Over them, on three of the walls, were inscribed the watch-words of the movement:

Truth is Undivided.
Let Us Be One.
Organize for Unity.

The minutes lay before the secretary, and made what they had been doing and saying quite clear.

James Harkness, the chairman, seemed to be looking at his own agenda with considerable perplexity in his chalk-white face. The meeting, apparently, had decided on only one clause in its programme. It was to be a society with which everyone could agree and co-operate. They were to have a basis of religion, but they must lay down no beliefs which would be unacceptable to an atheist. They were to support the British Commonwealth of Nations, but only in the most cordial co-operation with its most implacable enemies.

This broad-minded attitude made it essential that the Society should bear an extremely comprehensive name; and it appeared plainly enough, from the documents on the table, that the trouble had begun at this very early point. The Chairman wanted to call it the "Patriotic Unity Movement." He thought that this would engage the sympathies of an immense body of retired soldiers and sailors, who didn't think very much, but would subscribe; or at least the word "patriotic" could offend no one, since it specified no particular country, and would therefore be accepted by people of all nations, whether they were friends or enemies of our own.

Some of the members, however, contended that the word "patriotic" would be understood in the old-fashioned sense, and that this would certainly prevent all the left-wing undergraduates at the universities from taking the movement seriously. It would certainly be misunderstood by other bodies, like the I.R.A. and the anarchists whom it was specially desirable to influence in the right direction. A sharp-nosed lady, in immense tortoise-shell spectacles, had made a note on her programme, in question-form. "But what *is* the right direction?" Others, apparently, including two clergymen, wished to substitute the word "spiritual" for "patriotic". This would commit them to nothing and comprehend everything.

According to the minutes one opponent had replied that he could see nothing very spiritual about the bombs of the I.R.A. and that, in any case, he was a materialist and did not believe in the existence of spirits at all. The sharp-nosed spinster, whose tortoise-shell glasses, with their Crookes' lenses, looked strikingly effective on her chalk-white skin—had apparently supported this. She had pointed out that "Wells, long ago, had shown the astronomical inadequacy of a 'Friend for little children, above the bright blue sky'. Surely," she had appealed, "we can't go back to that!"

A thoughtful little man had replied that these considerations were hardly relevant to the scientific conclusions of Christian thinkers like Harnack, and that Origen, nearly two thousand years ago, had——

At this point, for some reason, the atheist had ejaculated *Pshaw!* in a tone that had led to a general squabble about manners, and the writer of the minutes had lost himself in the battle. When calm had been restored, Mrs. Beadle, a large phlegmatic woman, whose strong family likeness to Buddha had been curiously emphasized by the "last resort", suggested that they should call themselves the "*Higher* Unity Movement". As instances of the use of the word "higher" to overcome objections, she had mentioned the "Higher Pantheism"; the "Higher Mathematics"; the "Higher Criticism"; and —rather startlingly—the "Higher Continence".

The last phrase had apparently brought a profound silence upon the assembly; for, according to the minutes, the whole subject had been abruptly changed, so that the phlegmatic Mrs. Beadle had no opportunity to explain what she meant.

The source of the Chairman's perplexity, indeed, was more fundamental. He had been ambitious enough to hope for the co-operation of the Godless League on the one hand, and the Catholic Church on the other; for, after all, that was precisely the aim of the Higher Unity. But, on the table before him, there lay a letter from an English Cardinal.

Dear Mr. Harkness,

While I have every sympathy with your desire to help this bewildered generation, I feel that I must point out three inescapable facts.

1. Organization, for the sake of organization, can lead nowhere.

2. A definite belief (as I call it) or dogma (as you call it) is essential to any serious movement, secular or religious, for the betterment of the world.

3. A definite belief, no matter how small, necessarily rules out everything (no matter how big) which is in direct contradiction to it.

Wishing you every blessing, my dear Mr. Harkness,

I am,
Yours sincerely,
G. Cardinal Brodrick.

The Chairman's notes indicated that he profoundly regretted this obstinacy.

In another house which he entered quite casually, Mark was almost sure that he found evidence of a contemplated murder. It was a weird scene—the man whom he suspected, caught by the wave of death, just as he was about to administer the wrong medicine to the haggard woman in the bed....

But these were all daylight scenes. It was far worse after dark. On his first night in London Mark tried to sleep in a bedroom at the top of the Athenæum Club, which had been closed at the time of the catastrophe for some alterations, and had no occupants except one mute attendant on the ground floor. But it was too grim an experience to repeat. Every creak that he heard after midnight made him turn the lights on, and eventually he had to read, sleeplessly, till the morning broke. After that, he found a big car, outside the house of Sir James Brodie, the famous gynaecologist in Harley Street, who had brought so many royal babies into the world. It was fitted with a long couch on which Sir James used to rest while he was being driven to and from his cases in the small hours. In this car Mark drove far and wide into the country during the next week, making it a kind of travelling home. He explored Salisbury, Oxford, Birmingham, York and Edinburgh; and everywhere it was the same—silence and the rigid, innumerable hosts of silence.

From a shop in Birmingham he borrowed a large knapsack, specially designed for campers; and he stocked it with the various small things which civilized man has come to regard as "necessaries". In books of adventure the requirements of civilized man in these small matters are often overlooked. In this case, all the material goods of the world were at Mark's disposal; but he wanted to be as independent of the towns as possible, and to escape the hateful task of entering the doors of the dead whenever he wanted a tube of toothpaste. At first, of course, he was unable to think of such things at all; but, at the end of his first week, absurdly out of proportion as it may seem, he spent nearly half an hour in a chemist's shop, looking for a reel of dental floss and a pair of nail-scissors. He provided himself also with a lantern in which he could burn candles for reading purposes; a spirit lamp and its appurtenances; a flask of brandy; and a few unspoilable things to eat.

It was easier to eat and drink out in the country, and he could usually find some quite unspoiled meadow, or the bank of a brook where the running water talked to him with a bright unconcern. He found a strange comfort too, in the unperturbed grazing of the cattle in the fields, and the peaceful sounds of the innocent and unharmed animal life in country places: the rustling of a flock of sheep beyond a hedge; the child-like calling of the lambs; the clucking of hens in a farm-yard or the squattering of ducks in a pool. But he must not approach the farm-buildings too closely, or he would be sure to find some human scarecrow, pitchfork in hand, sprawling across a dung-heap.

At night, he would drive into some unfrequented country lane; roll his rugs about him, and try to sleep on Sir James Brodie's couch. But he made London his headquarters; for, if there were any survivors in the world, it was surely in London that the first enquiries would be made.

What had happened to Europe that it had become so incurious? If it were a case of victors and vanquished, where were the victors? By now, surely their triumphal marches into the great metropolis should have begun to flatter their own

people into forgetfulness of the price they too must have paid. Perhaps they thought there was no triumph when there were no longer any defeated alive to see it. Or was there a more fearful explanation? Like Oedipus in his questioning, he felt sure of the answer he dreaded. But he determined to go and see for himself.

There were plenty of sturdy motor-launches to be found at a hundred wharves on the Thames. He decided that his best way of crossing the Channel would be to choose one of these and work it round the coast to Dover. From there, on the first good day, it would take him only an hour or so to run over to Calais. He found exactly the boat he required, near Chelsea Embankment, pitched his knapsack into it, and set out at once. As it happened, on his arrival at Dover, the sea was so calm that it seemed to be filmed over with oil. In exactly an hour and a half he sighted Calais.

For a full minute, while he was nearing the coast, his heart had raced and thumped at the sight of a few figures clustering on the sand-dunes, as though to watch him. They were certainly alive; but a moment later they had taken wing and turned to sea-birds.

> Gannet or gull, whose wandering plaint is heard
> On Ailsa, or Iona, desolate.

When he reached the quay his first glance at the scene around him explained why no exploring party had come from France to England. Almost at his feet there were two French sailors, lying as motionless as those other unawakening sleepers on the other side of the Channel; and again and again he had the queer sensation of having passed through a dark, and more mysterious, looking-glass; and of finding himself among reflections that had become realities.

There was the same indescribable loneliness. It was not exactly silence, for there was the lapping of the tide, the swish of the seaweed in the wave along the wharf, the patter of falling water-drops as the wave sank to sleep again, and the witch-like calling of the gulls. But these sounds had the effect of deepening the solitude, as they do in wild Nature. They helped only to "make a lone place lonelier".

He put his knapsack into the best of the empty cars, a small cream-coloured two-seater, which stood outside the station and, as he drove through the town, he saw at once that conditions were exactly as they had been in England. Everywhere he saw the same motionless forms, apparently uninjured, but dead; and, everywhere, he saw the same chalk-like petrifaction, with no trace of corruption. Everywhere he found the same strange peace, in which there was not the slightest trace of any preceding havoc. The windows were unshattered by bombs or gun-fire. The French houses were smiling as bravely in the sun as a picture by Matisse, with their washes of pink and chrome-yellow and faded cornflower blue. He passed under an open window where a woman with a painted face leaned over the window-sill and leered down at him; but it was the fixed leer of the *rigor mortis*, and there was something almost Chinese about the dreadful lolling pose of the head. Incongruously enough, as he halted and looked up at her, he found himself mentally repeating the beautiful lines of a twentieth-century poet—

> Her face was like a window
> Where a man's first love looked out.

But all ideas of congruity had gone. Sometimes there seemed to be no difference between the merely irrelevant and the bitterly ironical; and the next moment, still looking up at the face of the dead harlot, he was haunted by another and more terrible echo of the vanished world:

And she painted her face, and tired her head, and looked out at a window....

And he lifted up his face to the window, and said, who is on my side? Who?

And the carcase of Jezebel shall be as dung upon the face of the field in the portion of Jezreel, so that they shall not say, this is Jezebel.

All the way to Paris it haunted him, as he drove along the straight poplar-bordered road:

"*And she painted her face, and tired her head, and looked out at a window.*"

CHAPTER VIII

In Paris it was as it had been in London. There were almost as many gargoyles on the floor of Notre Dame as there were grotesques of stone outside it. The Rue de la Paix looked like a gigantic toy street in which a Brobdingnagian child had left its black-dressed dolls lying untidily about the doorsteps and pavements in a hundred ungainly attitudes.

At Napoleon's Tomb, the Emperor's cocked hat looked more natural and human than the dead visitors around it; and the contrast in the Champs-Élysées between the prostrate relics of humanity and the rejoicing nymphs and naiads of marble, over whose polished shoulders and firm shapely bodies the fountains were flashing as brightly as ever, gave Mark a sudden sense of escape into the unchanging world. He was quick to seize that hint of a respite, brief perhaps, but still a respite, from the inhuman horror of what had once been the living world of men. He drove to the Louvre. There, at least, he would find great sunlit galleries peopled only by the bright immortals, among whom he would rest for an hour or two, collect his thoughts and re-discover his own soul.

At the turnstile he had to step over the dead body of the uniformed attendant; but, after that, he had the great palace of art almost entirely to himself. He had brought his knapsack with him, intending to lunch somewhere in those unoccupied rooms; but, for a long time, he wandered about, feeding his eyes and mind. On every side he was surrounded by those forms of loveliness which, because they had never lived in the earthly sense, can never really die. He passed up a long corridor towards that wonder of the world, the Venus of Milo, and for a moment as he advanced towards it, he felt through his whole frame that strange tingling which overcomes us in great music. Never before had he so keenly realized the sheer spiritual splendour of the great art which thus expressed itself in physical and sensuous form. Now, more than ever, in a world so full of grotesque horror, that serene and radiant goddess—Beauty—the daughter of heaven and the sea, conveyed a sense of eternal things. She seemed to be looking through endless ages, across the entire universe of change and decay, towards the land of the undying, which was in the beginning, before this mortal world was made; and shall be—in the end—when this mortal world has passed away. It was not merely the maimed body of Aphrodite, physically emerging from the physical raiment. It was an analogy in stone. As the body was to the raiment, so was the eternal loveliness—the soul that is form—to the veils of the material world. It was a parable, in stone, of Beauty, the eternal reality, emerging from the mists of time:

> The firm clear body, like a slope of snow
> Out of the slipping dream-stuff half with-drawn.

He climbed a flight of stairs and walked slowly through some of the great picture galleries. This journey had tired him, and he intended to find a seat in front of one of the pictures, where he could rest and think at the same time. He paused at the Gioconda; but, though it had fascinated him on former occasions, he was curiously repelled by it now. The faint mocking smile seemed to have a strangely sinister bearing on recent events, and he turned away from it with a creeping of the flesh. At last he composed himself on a comfortable seat, where he could rest and think at the same time, in front of that delicious picture by Murillo of the Monk's kitchen, in which the old lay-brother who should have been preparing the food for the monastery is caught up in an ecstasy while, to save him from the consequences of his neglect, the angels prepare the food and mix the salad, and the astonished prior peeps at the radiant scene from the cautiously opened door.

It was a picture that justified the opening of the knapsack, even among the immortals, and as good a lunch as Mark could make upon its contents. Afterwards, he felt that he might safely do what no one had ever done before in those august precincts, and he lit his pipe.

He had been sitting there for nearly a quarter of an hour, when he saw, at the end of the seat, a small silver handbag. It was so tucked into the back of the seat, that it had escaped his notice hitherto. In a world of the dead there was no longer any question of "property" lost or otherwise. He could take any of the Leonardos away in his car, if he liked, to any place that he cared to live in. But just because this particular and quite commonplace bit of property had obviously been "lost" by its former owner, it roused his curiosity. He picked it up and opened it. The next moment he was staring at something he found in it, staring and listening with all the amazement of a new Crusoe confronted by the solitary footprint in the sand. It was no more than a charming little wrist-watch, which its former owner had probably put in her bag for security because the fastening had been broken. It was a pretty trifle, set in brilliants; and, in one sense, it was a very trifling matter that startled Mark like a voice from the grave. Fourteen days had elapsed since the catastrophe. It was an ordinary twenty-four hour wrist-watch; but, as it lay there in the palm of his hand, the *tick—tick—tick* of its tiny

mechanism raced the beating of his own heart. He stared at it as though some small Egyptian jewel, a golden scarabaeus from the tomb of a dead queen, had miraculously come alive and was talking to him.

He laid it carefully down and examined the other contents of the bag. There was no card or clue to the owner's identity, except a small lace-bordered handkerchief with the initial E, some Italian paper money, a student's ticket to the Vatican galleries, and the address of an Italian Professor of the Fine Arts at Rome, who was also Vice-President of the Royal Academy of Italy. There was a letter, however, written before the date of the catastrophe. It was from a woman living in Paris and it began, "Dearest E."

Reading between the lines Mark gathered that the recipient was a young American woman who had been studying art in Rome. He thought she had probably motored to Paris in search of her friend. If the watch was any guide, she could hardly be very far away now. For a moment he wondered whether the watch had really stopped. Perhaps it had been set going again by his action in picking it up. But it gave the correct time—and it was almost fully wound. This, however, was not conclusive, and he knew no way of resolving the doubt. It seemed hardly possible that she was still in the Louvre. The world was so silent that he must have heard the faintest footfall in those echoing galleries and corridors. For a moment he listened; then, despite the deep stillness that reigned everywhere, he leapt to his feet and called again and again, "Is anyone there? Hallo! Is anyone there?" But only the mocking echo, flapping back at him from distant walls, replied, again and again, "Is anyone there? Hallo! Is anyone there?"

He hurried, almost running, through gallery after gallery, room after room, glancing rapidly round each in turn, under the quietly watchful eyes of the painted men and women on the walls. They seemed to look down upon the agitated intruder with the disdain of an alien and untroubled world. The sound of his footsteps filled the whole building with re-doubled echoes, and made him all the more certain that any other footsteps, no matter how light and ghostly, must have been audible to him, during the considerable time he had been sitting motionless before the Murillo, or even earlier in the lower gallery.

Three times he stopped, and called aloud, and stood listening. But there was no answer. He began to think that his first sceptical explanation must be true. Perhaps in picking up the watch, he had shaken it enough to dislodge some bit of dust in the works and so set it going again. But his recaptured peace among the immortals of the Louvre was gone; and, still holding the little silver bag, he began to retrace his steps in search of the exit. When he came to the seat in front of the Murillo it occurred to him for the first time that, if the owner of the bag was still alive, and remembered where she had mislaid it, she might very well come back for it. He scribbled a few words on half a sheet of notepaper:

I have gone to look for you outside, and shall probably be unsuccessful, but I hope you will come back for your bag. If so, will you please meet me here at four o'clock when I shall return.

A Fellow-Survivor.

To make sure that it would not be overlooked, he inserted his note in the clasp, together with his card which (as it gave his club) he thought might be reassuring. The woman at any rate would know she was not alone in the world with an Apache. Then he laid the bag down where he had found it, and hurried to the exit.

For a moment he stood at the top of the steps, looking down the Champs-Élysées, where those dark, motionless blots lay on the sunlit grass or the grey stones around the leaping fountains. He felt like a man awakening from a wild dream to sharp realities again. A piece of lost property, a ticking watch, might raise a momentary hope in that great Palace of the Imagination; but, outside, in the warm light of day, he realized only how great his need for the sound of a human voice must have become, before so slight a straw of evidence could send him tearing along the galleries of the Louvre like a madman.

He realized it well enough now; but, as he went down the steps towards the place where he had left his car, another and a more staggering surprise than that of the ticking watch awaited him. In the place where he had left his car, there was nothing. The car was no longer there. It seemed as incredible as anything in the Arabian nights; but, this time, there could be no doubt about it. The car had gone.

CHAPTER IX

There was another car on the opposite side of the road. He remembered that it had been standing there when he arrived. It was a large saloon car, one of the new Leicesters, and not in the least like the small cream-coloured car which he had left below the broad stairs, at the entrance to the Louvre. He was quite certain that he had left his own car at that particular place—the emptiness of which was now equally certain. The owner of the ticking watch might easily have taken for granted that the smaller car had been there all the time; and that, as it was more manageable for feminine hands, it was equally at her disposal. That would account for the exchange.

At his first glance through the window of the saloon car he discovered something else. There was a tiny red light showing on the dash-board, indicating that the former driver, with feminine carelessness, he supposed, had not switched off the ignition. If this had been left for more than a few hours the battery would have run down. He examined the engine and found it still hot. It had obviously been driven for some hours that morning.

Mark entered the car, settled himself down in the driver's seat and, in half a minute, was racing down the Champs-Élysées at sixty miles an hour, glancing to right and left in search of his fellow-survivor. But he saw nothing. There was nothing in the long, wide stretches between the posturing statues, nothing but those occasional dark blots, or the confused pile of motionless wreckage where two cars had crashed. Nothing but this, all the way up to the ironical Arc de Triomphe.

For the next hour he drove feverishly along the boulevards and avenues and across most of the great open spaces where he thought it most likely that he might meet his former car, or see it moving in the distance. But there was nothing and, suddenly, he realized with a shock that it was a quarter to four, and he would soon be due at the Louvre again.

At five minutes to four he rushed up the broad stairs and made his way along the echoing galleries to the Murillo. The little silver bag was where he had laid it. The unknown fellow-survivor had not returned. He began to ask himself the old question of the sceptics, whether it was not more likely that in his agitated state of mind he had made some mistake, rather than that a miracle could have happened. Perhaps he had left his own car somewhere else in the morning and walked to the Louvre, and forgotten it. After the strain through which he had passed it was only too likely that he had imagined the ticking of a watch in that appalling silence. Perhaps he had heard a death-watch beetle. He opened the bag and took out the watch. The steady ticking told him he had made no mistake here. But, as for the motor-car, the red light and the hot engine—he was still in a kind of trance about it. Perhaps he had switched a battery on unconsciously, or caught a gleam of the sun on the red disk, and hypnotized himself into believing the engine was hot. It was amazing what association of ideas would do. He remembered the tales about Indian conjurers. At the same time he determined to wait now till it grew dark, for he knew also what tricks doubt could play with the human mind. He was tired and he might as well rest there as anywhere else. The seat was broad and comfortable, and he thought he might even spend the night there. The great roomy palace, in that afternoon light, seemed like an untroubled harbour of refuge, serenely aloof from the world of the dead outside. He lay down on the seat and almost at once fell asleep.

It was eight o'clock when he awoke. The air struck cold, and the great gallery was darkening. He could hardly see the pictured faces on the walls, but they peopled the gigantic obscurity with phantoms. To remain there in the dark would be unbearable. It would be like trying to sleep in the enchanted woods of Westermain, where

> Thousand eyeballs under hoods
> Have you by the hair.

He hastily added a line to the half-sheet of notepaper—"*will return to-morrow morning at eleven-thirty*," and re-inserted it in the clasp of the bag. He groped his way out of the gallery and down the stairs to the exit, looking over his shoulder as he went,

> Like one that on a lonely road
> Doth walk in fear and dread.

It seemed an immense distance to the outer doors; and it was with a strange sense of relief that he found himself in the car again. For a reason that he was quite unable to analyse he drove into the middle of the most open space he could find in the Champs-Élysées. Then, he locked the doors, established himself in the roomy back seat, drew down the blinds,

turned on the interior lights, and opened a bottle of wine. He drank half of it before he could eat. But he was hungry, and in a very short time he had demolished most of the food that he had brought with him. He ended his meal with a draught of brandy from his flask, and lit his pipe. He then wrapped a great rug around him and prepared to read himself into drowsiness. He would turn off the lights when he felt that he could sleep again. In the meantime, however, a further thought occurred to him, and—leaning over the front seats, with his eyes fixed on the dash-board—he switched on the powerful headlights. If any survivor did happen to enter the Champs-Élysées, there was a good chance that they might be seen. But he had no sooner opened his book than he seemed to be filled with a terrifying sense of the vast darkness outside his little lighted cabin. All his attempts to shut it off seemed only to make the weight of darkness more appallingly palpable and crushing. It was like trying to live in a bravely illuminated egg-shell at the bottom of a midnight sea. With a snap of the springs, he raised the blinds, and that made it a little better, but not much, for the internal lights made it impossible to see through the black windows. He switched them off; and that was far better, for now he was himself sitting in darkness, and he could see dark trees and a few glittering stars beyond them. But, even so, the headlights of his lonely car, challenging the gigantic obscurity, had an indescribably frightening effect. It is only in the stupefying contact of their fellow-men that men can carelessly throw searchlights into the darkness around them. He felt that he would be safer (from what peril he could not tell) and certainly more ready to sleep if he were himself lost in the darkness. He climbed into the front seat to switch the headlights off, and as he did so he saw for the first time the dreadful picture which they had been flooding with an unnatural day. Fifteen yards in front of the car there was a fountain tossing myriads of liquid jewels into the air. At the foot of it, with their bodies propped against a stone basin, half sitting, half reclining, a dead man and woman were staring directly towards him, with eyes of hollow shadow, and faces that were turned by those intense rays to a leprous white.

Mark started the engine and drove madly away, he hardly knew where, till his lights showed nothing but grass and trees. There he stopped and shut his lights off completely. He found a certain respite, both from seeing too much and seeing too little, in the dim light of the crescent moon as it struggled through a grey fleece of cloud. He wrapped his rug round him again, and settled himself down as well as he could in the back seat of the car, wondering, wondering, wondering at the mystery of things, till, from utter weariness, his head sunk on his breast and he fell asleep.

CHAPTER X

He woke in the very early morning, so intensely relieved at the vanishing of the dark that he was actually able to think of breakfast. Perhaps at a café—preferably an open air one—he might even be able to brew a pot of tea or coffee. But he lost heart as he approached those horrible figures among the green chairs and tables. Macbeth might have supped on horrors; but it was not easy to breakfast on them. All that he was able to do was to seize some good, clean-skinned pears, a sealed packet of oatmeal biscuits, and a bottle of wine which, being still better sealed, seemed to be more secure from the dreadful world around him.

He breakfasted in the car, that little travelling home of his; and, when he had lighted his pipe, he tried to think out a more definite plan of action than he had hitherto formed. He made a further discovery. Feeling in a side-pocket of the car for a duster to wipe the wind-screen, he found a diary with an elastic-band around it, under which a road-map had been slipped. The diary—which he examined first—gave him the second initial of his fellow-survivor, but little more direct information, for it was of an unusual kind in those days. It was headed, on the first page, "Reading Diary of E. H.", and under the various dates, it recorded the books she had been reading, with occasional comments, and quotations of passages which had struck her as memorable.

It interested Mark immensely; for although the direct information was so little, he thought that he could almost picture her character from her choice of books and the passages she had transcribed.

One of the first that caught his eye was from *La Maison du Chat qui Pelote* by Balzac. She had been reading it, at the outbreak of war, and had transcribed one sentence of it. *Dans ces grandes crises le cœur se brise ou se bronze.*

Two others, which indicated a vein of humour, were from *Middlemarch*:

> *The world is full of handsome dubious eggs called possibilities.*
>
> *When she was a child she believed in the gratitude of wasps and the honourable susceptibilities of sparrows, and was proportionately indignant when their baseness was made manifest.*

A third, from the same book, was this:

> *The best piety is to enjoy—when you can. You are doing the most then to save the earth's character as an agreeable planet.*

Several more were on the tendencies of the time, in art and literature. One or two were biting; for instance:

> *There was not one of his fellow-men whom he did not feel himself in a position to ridicule and torment, confident of the entertainment he thus gave to all the rest of the company.*

This was George Eliot's comment on another character in *Middlemarch*; but E. H. had applied it thus. "Compare with the malice of the modern pseudo-intellectual, in conversation, and in print."

She was apparently—with the enthusiasm of her country—all for trying to appreciate rather than to condemn; and her criticisms were all directed against those who took the initiative in destruction or depreciation of what was good. Yet another instance of her dislike of what—alas—she called "the spirit of the debunker" came from George Eliot—

> *I am not sure that the greatest man of his age could escape these unfavourable reflections of himself in various small mirrors. Even Milton, looking for his portrait in a spoon, must submit to have the facial angle of a bumpkin.*

Most of her own comments took a similar line. This, for instance, was from E. H. herself:

> *Modern artistic circles* [she wrote] *have lost the old catholicity of appreciation, in which all real values could co-exist. They cannot accept apples as apples, but criticize them for not being pomegranates. They would "liquidate" roses for lacking the poison-fangs of the snake; and they lecture the lily on its smooth inability to imitate the strength and character of the octopus.*

He thought he recognized the note of New England in that, as also in the following:

We must move with the times. We can never go back, as the Gadarene swine said, when they were half-way down the hill.

That was E. H., too, and it amused him. The next was more serious:

Strange that, at the very moment when advanced thinkers were repudiating "super-nature" with contempt, they were about to worship the inventors of the super-man and the super-state. Unconsciously, they must have their God in one place or another, but they chose a most unlikely stamping-ground.

That last phrase puzzled him.

He gathered that she was repelled by the streak of falsity in Rousseau; but there were notes of romantic feeling here and there. One, from Renan, came to him like a strain of music. It was on the mysticism of love: *cette voix lointaine d'un monde qui veut être*.

Another passage was translated from Voltaire:

We must forgive the deaf who talk against music, and the blind who hate beauty. They are not so much enemies of society, conspiring to destroy what consoles and charms us. They are really unfortunate creatures to whom Nature has denied certain faculties.

Mark was fascinated by this little diary. It crystallized so much of what he had often thought and felt but had never been able to express so simply and lucidly. He felt that, even in this indirect way, E. H. had become a very real person to him.

He unfolded the road-map.

The road from Rome to Paris was under-scored in pencil, and, on the margin, in the writing of the diary, there was a list of places through which the road passed. Their more or less equal distances from one another suggested that they had been chosen as stopping places. This would hardly help him to find the traveller, for the journey was now over. But it confirmed the impression he had got from the letter in the little silver bag—that the driver of the car had come from Rome, in search of the friend who lived in Paris. If there was one survivor in Rome, perhaps there were others. Perhaps Italy, or some parts of it, had escaped. He determined that, if his visit to the Louvre this morning proved fruitless, he would push on to Rome at once. There were many things, however, which prevented him from being too hopeful about the result. Italy was an enterprising country, and if there had been any survivors there, it seemed almost certain that they would be exploring the devastated cities of Europe by this time. His whole existence for the last fortnight had been so much a nightmare that, again and again, he wondered whether he was not deluding himself with the idea of a fellow-survivor; whether he was not twisting the evidence to his own wishes.

At a quarter to twelve he was at the seat in front of the Murillo. The silver bag was still there, with the note in the clasp. It had not been touched. He examined the contents of the bag again. The watch was not ticking now. It had no more to tell him. He saw, however, that on the blank page, on the back of the letter from her Parisian friend, the recipient had noted another list of places between Rome and Paris, and that these places were different, and indicated a different route from those on the margin of the road-map in the car. Moreover, they were in the reverse order; and, amazed at his own obtuseness, he recalled that all roads lead in two directions. It was clear that the list of names on the back of the letter had been written in Rome, for they led off with Orvieto, Florence and Genoa. It seemed equally clear now that the list on the margin of the map had been written in Paris; for it began with the French names, as though the writer were planning her return journey to Rome and by a slightly different route. Moreover, it was a French map, and it bore the stamp of a French book-shop. This seemed to be conclusive. The whole picture became clear to him now. This fellow-survivor, with the intrepidity of young America, had come to look for her friend in Paris, realized the hopelessness of her search, and decided to return to Rome. He wondered whether this pointed to better conditions farther east, or whether it was due to the sheer bewilderment of a panic-stricken creature, bent only on returning to the surroundings which she knew best, and where she was most likely to be found.

In any case, his own course was now clear. He would push on to Rome, at once, by the route indicated on the map. To make sure that no possible chance was missed, he left the silver bag where he had found it, with yet another addition to

the note, which he inserted in the clasp:

As you have not come back to the Louvre, I am going to look for you in Rome, where I think you have gone already. If I am mistaken, and you find my message, this is to say that for the next month, every day, at twelve o'clock noon, I shall look for you at the top of the steps outside the main entrance to St. Peter's. If this fails I shall return to the Louvre on the 1st of July at noon, and I shall be there every day after that, at the same time, till the end of the month.

A Fellow-Survivor.

Half an hour later, after filling up with free petrol at the nearest garage, and making a few other preparations, he was putting mile after mile behind him on the long road to Rome.

CHAPTER XI

Three days later, at sunset, he entered Rome by the Flaminian Gate. All the way through Italy the wave of death had done its work, and he knew that Rome, like London and Paris, could now be only a city of the dead. But, a few minutes after he had crossed the Piazza del Popolo, with its great obelisk of so many memories, he was conscious of a strange difference. Here, for the first time, the catastrophe which had made no more of the entire human race than if it had been an ephemeral colony of ants, was itself dwarfed by the majesty of an historical record that, even in its ruin, seemed to transcend time.

It was through the Flaminian Gate that the first pilgrims from a barbarous little island off the western coast of Europe had entered the Imperial City; and now, after all those movements to the west, the final catastrophe seemed to have restored the historic mistress of the civilized world to her old eminence. In life, for a few fleeting centuries, she had lost it. In death, she re-assumed her reign.

He drove slowly, for the old dreadful reason, down the Corso, and turned to the left towards the Piazza di Spagna, where he halted for a moment outside the little house where Keats died. At its foot, on the pavement at the lowest of the broad steps of the Trinità de' Monti a group of dead flower-sellers were bowed together among great masses of withered blossom, like a piece of mournful sculpture. Even now the flowers had not lost all their original brightness, for some of them were in baskets of earth, and there had been some rain of late, while many of the leaves and faded petals had taken on a rich autumnal colour. On an earlier visit which he had made to Rome with his parents long before the disaster, the way in which those glistening clusters of blossom, violet and narcissus, daffodil and lily, hyacinth and mimosa, had been heaped before the dead poet's house, had possessed an unconscious symbolism for his hero-worshipping boyhood. Day after day, year after year, the flower-girls of Italy, not knowing what they did, had laid their tributes there. The young poet, who had died in the little room above them, had not known how his poems would be treasured after his death. He was convinced that his name was indeed "writ in water"; and now, as before, but with a deepening of its ironic indications, a line of the dead poet haunted the mind and heart of the one man left alive:

> I cannot see what flowers are at my feet.

The body of a young woman, probably the caretaker, for she had a key in her hand, was lying just outside the open door. It occurred to him that there would be no dead in the Keats House, and he might make up a couch and sleep there, for his first night in Rome. But, first, before the light went, he wanted to drive about the city, in the faint hope of meeting that other car, or seeing that other survivor.

The sun had gone down and the full moon was rising as he came suddenly, with a catch of the breath, under the shadow of the Colosseum. He halted and, drawn by an irresistible spell, got out of the car to look at it. When he last saw it, there had been chattering hawkers of cheap trinkets, and touting guides, and the whining voice of a beggar at his elbow. He remembered thinking that a little race of mean parasites seemed to be living on the prodigious relics of the past, like rats in a ruined palace of the Caesars. This evening there was utter silence, utter stillness. The remote past had resumed its power. The parasites were no more than dead flies in the dusk of those portentous arches; and the Colosseum, in its battered grandeur, looked as quiet and lonely as a crater on that other dead world, the slowly rising meteor-battered moon.

As he entered the monstrous arena that had once reeked with a still more monstrous furnace of brutal passions, the moon with its own dead craters rose above its ragged crest, touching the massive blocks of travertine with silver. He stared at the great empty circles of stone, rock above rock, from which the lords of the world had once heard the cry, *Ave, Cæsar, morituri te salutant!* and, in that awful silence and stillness, where the only movement was that of the moving sister-planet, he was appalled by the memory of the things which had happened there—monstrous cruelties, bestialities to which no beast but man had ever sunk, deliberately designed to satiate the blood-lust of a jaded and over-sophisticated world. There had been something very like it, all over Europe, in the intellectual atmosphere of the world before the war. There was only one explanation. It had been given, in poetical form, by the book of Genesis. Men had become as gods to themselves; but in the very act they had cut themselves off from their origin and had become acquainted with that evil which is unknown to the beasts of the field. In modern times, among the seekers for the new, there had been an all too easy and literal interpretation of the verses,

> Where shall we turn then for pastime,

If the worst that can be has been done.

They had made an intolerable hell out of a world in full possession of all the means of happiness; and, as he stood there, wondering at the Satanic perversity that had wrecked a world so full of hope, he became aware of something moving on the earth beside him and before him. It was only a long shadow, shortening at the same slow pace as the ascending moon, but as it stole back towards his feet and spread its two dark contracting arms around him it held him spellbound as though he were listening to a great piece of music; for it told him he was standing in the shadow of the one symbol that might have saved the world. He turned and saw it—the crude black wooden cross, erected there so long ago, in memory of the martyrs whose blood had soaked the sands of the arena. Its plainness, its crudity, its humility, in the midst of that imperial circus, were like a challenge from a world elsewhere. And, here, at least, it had been a conquering challenge. He remembered the story of the monk, Telemachus, who had travelled from the east to sacrifice his own life in protest against the gladiatorial butcheries. It was on this very ground that he had rushed into the arena, between the ranks of the approaching swords, and tried, in the name of God, to keep them apart with his own body, and his outstretched naked hands. From those great stone circles above, the Emperor in his purple and the senators on their ivory thrones had watched, with all the sophisticated curiosity of a modern cynic, while the infuriated rabble in the upper galleries had yelled like wild beasts for the mad intruder's death. "Kill! Kill! Kill!" they clamoured, like a horrible orchestra, in which the shriek of the women was no less ferocious than the roar of the men. The swords of the gladiators whom he had tried to save cut him down and ripped him open and tossed him aside like a dead dog. But something—perhaps in the lonely courage of his act; perhaps in his appeal to a higher Power; perhaps in the light on his face as he fell—so moved the mind of the Emperor, that henceforth the butchery of man by man was forbidden in the Colosseum.

There are moments when the utmost that an immortal soul can do is to hold out the hands or stretch out the arms of its all too mortal body—our "rood of every day". But, in so stretching them out, it may span the world and touch the Eternal. Love knows that gesture, and knows also the profound passion of those words, "I, when I am lifted up, will draw all men unto me."

Such things as these, and more, were among the costly remembrances of that crude black symbol. It belonged to an order of reality higher than "brute nature", an order to which at one time the spirit of man was able to aspire. Its full meaning then was too deep and universal to be expressed physically in anything but a very simple and abrupt hieroglyph. It symbolized all the real values of Christendom—chivalry towards the weak, the dignity of womanhood, the broad stone of honour, the beauty of holiness, and the splendour of that justice whose eyes are unbandaged, and whose sword is laid before the mercy-seat of God. It symbolized not worldly success, or the petty triumphs of materialistic science, but a supernatural victory accomplished, even in defeat, by "the broken heart and the unbroken word".

In the neo-paganism of recent generations, all these things had gone as utterly out of fashion as any of the other conventions about political "scraps of paper", the disregard of which were commonly held to have been the sole cause of the world's disasters. But the disease went far deeper than the breaking of the pledged word in politics. It was not generally recognized that, when the Dictators began to break their word, and to sneer at those who kept it, they were, in one fearful particular, more sincere than their enemies. For nearly half a century, the literature and art of western civilization had succumbed (partly out of intellectual snobbery) to the subtle propaganda of the new atheism. They had been glorifying the breaking of the pledged word in the most sacred relationships of the individual human life; they had been revelling in the analytical destruction of all the foundations of morality; and sneering at those who defended them as "out-of-date"; while the most leprous stigmata of degeneracy had again and again been upheld as a vital proof of new and advanced thought and original aims. As one critic said, in a leading journal, "their very obscenity is somehow beautiful, and if this is not high art, what is?"

As the one man left alive stared at the one symbol that might have saved the world, he heard in the far distance, beyond the Tiber, the howl of a wild beast. It may have been the howl of Manfred's watch-dog returning to the wild, but it sounded like the howl of the wolf returning to Rome.

CHAPTER XII

For the next hour he drove about at random by moonlit arch and stately column, and dark little winding street, hoping against hope for a glimpse of the fellow-survivor, whom he believed to be now in Rome. But in all that great echoing city of temples and tombs, he saw no sign of life among them, no movement in the intense listening stillness, except the flash of the glorious moonlit fountains over their marble naiads and sea-gods. He drove up the steep winding road to the Capitol, but found only the great equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius towering dark and motionless against a silver flock of flying clouds. Twice he passed the Pantheon, and the Forum of Trajan and the Forum Romanum. He passed the grim prison-like palaces of the Renaissance princes, and returned, by the dark and narrow Corso, to the wide moonlit stillness of the Piazza del Popolo again. There, he turned to the right by the steep winding ascent, between the old Hotel Russie, and the noble church of Santa Maria del Popolo, which had been built over Nero's tomb, but had failed to lay his ghost. He was on a beautiful road now, overhung on one side by orange-trees and vines, and overlooking the dusky moonlit city on the other. There were aromatic scents of eucalyptus in the air, and a breath of roses met him. It was the kind of road, he thought, where he might see that little cream-coloured car at a garden gate, or find the occupant asleep in it under a magnolia tree. The road had been named apparently after a famous poet of the twentieth century. He saw the inscription on one of its walls—*Via Gabriele d'Annunzio*. He drove along it slowly. His headlights made the leaves and boughs look as strangely artificial as the lime-lit scenery of a theatre, and in the rhythmic pulse of his engine, he seemed to hear a mocking echo of the superb verses in which d'Annunzio had called upon the stones of Rome, not to rise and mutiny, but to remember her past and wait for her re-birth:

> Il sole declina fra i cieli e le tombe.
> Ovunque l'inane caligine incombe.
> Udremo su l'alba squillare le trombe?
> Ricòrdati e aspetta.

But for all his artistic mastery, d'Annunzio had in himself the seeds of decay. Morality, however good it may be, is not art; but, in bad morality, there is always something inhuman, and as one of the greatest of critics observed, "in art, nothing inhuman can reach the heights". It was only from afar that d'Annunzio could see that resurrection: but with what passion he invoked it!

> È figlia al silenzio la più bella sorte.
> Verrà dal silenzio, vincendo la morte,
> L'Eroe necessario. Tu veglia alle porte,
> Ricòrdati e aspetta.

With that music throbbing through him Mark paused, for a moment, on the Via Pinciana to look at the dim expanse of the city beneath. Clearly as the moon shone in the sky he could not distinguish St. Peter's in the vast obscurity of the distance; nor was there any speck of moving light in all that mighty web of dusky streets.

A hundred yards further on he came to the Trinità de' Monti. There he left his car under the wall of the church and took what he thought he would require for the night, a couple of rugs, his electric torch, and his big knapsack. He flung the latter over his shoulder, and looking rather like a pack-laden soldier going into the trenches, he went down the steep flight of steps. At the foot of them he could see the dead flower-sellers and their gleaming baskets of withered flowers which he had seen earlier. He tried not to look at them as he entered the little doorway of the Keats House where, by the light of his electric torch, he shut and bolted the door behind him. He climbed the narrow little stair to the first floor. There, as he expected, and partly remembered, a friendly room, like a small English library, awaited him. It had a pleasant smell of good leather bindings.

He opened his knapsack and lighted the candle in his lantern. He had always been a book-lover, and it was good to see the friendly English volumes that so warmly lined the walls. There was Ernest De Selincourt's edition of Keats, for instance. Old as it now was, it had never been superseded; and there were hosts of books about the poet's contemporaries, as well as their own works. He took Leigh Hunt from the shelf and read, while he demolished what was left of the fruit and cheese in his knapsack, followed by half a flask of Brolio. Then, with two large chairs placed front to front, and the rugs from the car, he made himself a bed, lit a well-packed pipe, and prepared to read himself to sleep. But it was the music of the poet's own words that he chose for this:

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet.

It had been dulled—how often—by dull repetition; but the wonder of it was increased a thousand-fold now that it was about to be lost for ever. He could have wept as he read, for the fearful irony of it all. But, although he had not the courage to blow out his candle, his head grew heavy and his eyes closed. A minute later—perhaps because he was among the never-failing friends of the mind—he had fallen into the soundest sleep he had known since he waded ashore at Steephill Cove.

When he awoke the candle in the lantern had burned out, and it was broad daylight. He unpacked the remaining contents of his capacious knapsack; lighted his spirit-lamp; and in a few minutes the Keats House was suffused with the homely fragrance of an excellent pot of coffee. Fresh milk, of course, was lacking, but he had a good packet of it in powdered form and, for the first time since the disaster, he had what the normal Englishman might call a "reasonable breakfast". He might well have said a grace for it to John Keats who, in some mysterious way, had made him feel at home in the world again. He decided that, as long as he stayed in Rome, this should be his headquarters.

When he had lighted his pipe, he began to examine more closely the contents of the friendly room in which he had passed the night. Near the door there was a table on which a visitor's book reposed. He looked at it idly at first, thinking merely of the abrupt end which had come to that long series of names, recorded there for so many years. But, as he turned the latest page, his attention was suddenly riveted by the formation of the letters in the last recorded name, EVELYN HAMILTON. It was the same writing, he felt sure, as that of the little diary in his pocket. He compared it, letter by letter. There could hardly be any doubt, and the initial made it doubly certain. It would have seemed an impossible coincidence, but for one even more surprising fact. The date beside it showed that it had been written exactly a fortnight ago, when there was no one else in Rome or Italy who could have added a later signature. He could picture her in the appalling loneliness, coming into this little house, as many another of her fellow-countrymen would have done, and for exactly the same reason; and then, before leaving, with a hint of wistful irony, writing her forlorn little name as the last entry on that long and grateful record.

He looked through the earlier pages to see if she had made an earlier visit. He found her name twice in that year; and once in the previous year, when apparently there had been a special celebration of the poet's birthday, and there was a long list of distinguished names, including those of the British Ambassador, Sir Howard Mortimer, and his wife.

In two years, therefore, she had visited the Keats House four times. She evidently liked the place and its associations. This might be a clue to the character of the young American art student, but it did not help Mark very much in his task of finding her. There was no indication of where she had been living in Rome, and it might be a very long time before she came to the Keats House again. In fact, she had drawn a line under her last signature as though, with the curious feeling for such things that is so characteristic of the American mind, she realized that she was writing "Finis" to the whole volume of memories. Having done that, she might never return. But Mark knew that if he neglected the smallest possible link in the too thin chain of circumstances by which their destinies were at present connected, the chain might be broken altogether. Two survivors, one of whom was unconscious of the existence of the other, might wander through Europe and the world for a thousand years without meeting. Two raindrops, one of which fell in Paris and the other in Rome, might have a very long way to travel before they met, even after the sea had received them. The fact that, in this case, one of the raindrops was conscious and endowed with will and reason made a difference. But he did not intend to miss any chances.

Under her name, therefore, in the visitor's book, he wrote his own, dated it, and appended the message that he had left in the little silver bag at the Louvre.

Every day, at noon, for the next month, I shall look for you at the main entrance of St. Peter's. If this fails, I shall return to Paris where I have left the same message on the seat before the Murillo, where you left your silver bag. I shall look for you there every day at noon, for the following month. If this fails, I shall return to Rome, and continue my search. I shall stay in this house while I am in Rome, and a message left in this book will find me.

It would be simple now to suggest the Keats House as a meeting-place; but he could not alter the Louvre message, which it was just possible that his fellow-survivor might have found if her departure from Paris had been delayed. He tore a fresh page from the end of the visitor's book, and wrote, in large letters, a further message.

To EVELYN HAMILTON.

There is a message for you in the visitor's book upstairs.

A FELLOW-SURVIVOR.

This, with some drawing-pins from the notice-board, he fastened to the outside of the front door, which he carefully closed behind him as he went out. It seemed to him that if she happened only to pass the house again, and throw the most casual glance towards it, she could not fail to see that staring new notice. Then, in the vast sunlit stillness of the city, he mounted the great stairs—the *Scala di Spagna*—to the Trinità de' Monti, where he got into his car and set out for that strange tryst with one who might never receive his message or know of his existence.

CHAPTER XIII

It was only a little after nine when he crossed the Tiber; but he was making at once for the Vatican City, partly because he was in the state of tension which brings a man to the railway-station before his train is due, and partly because he had no other definite aim. But, being a good reasoner, he had also tried to put himself in the place of the person he was trying to find. One of her problems, undoubtedly, would be to escape, at night, from that fearful and silent company of the dead, which would await her in every private house, and every hotel. It was a mere accident that the Keats House had solved his own problem. Before that happened, he had actually thought of the private gardens of the Vatican which, in every sense, were lifted so high above the walls and roofs of Rome. In one of those quiet shelters from the summer heat, designed for the peace of their lonely ruler, the obscure but infinitely more lonely inheritor of all the palaces and gardens in the world might find at least a lodging for the night. No other place in Rome was so open and near to the stars, and so free, at night, from the shadowy terrors of the dark city below.

Everything was bathed in sunshine this morning, as he drove up to the great glistening square of St. Peter's. The fountains were flashing, and the pigeons preening their iridescent throats around them in the centre of the piazza; but this only intensified the silence and stillness of the vast colonnades that swept, on either side, up to the central church of Christendom. The sheer immensity of that world's wonder, for whose dome the titanic imagination of Michelangelo had "heaved the Pantheon into the sky", obliterated all traces of the wave of death on the earth beneath.

On the broad steps, and scattered about the piazza, there were a few dark specks and that was all. But the terrible cleavage in human nature, the war in the members, which at last had destroyed the race, was recorded here in a more portentous way. Over against the Christian basilica which had been so triumphantly raised on the very site of Nero's circus, there seemed to be a new and sardonic mockery in the towering of that gigantic healthy obelisk which had been old when Rome was born. After the sack of Heliopolis, where it had once been the central emblem in the worship of the sun, Caligula had brought it to Rome and stationed it here, to be splashed with the blood of the circus. During all those centuries it had been a dark and menacing reminder of the pagan abominations of which human nature was still capable. It was not an uncultured or primitive set of men who, on this very spot, had stimulated and glutted their jaded senses with the spectacle of women thrown naked to the beasts and children torn limb from limb,

> When with flame all around him aspirant
> Stood flushed as a harp-player stands,
> The implacable beautiful tyrant,
> Rose-crowned, having death in his hands.

The aesthetic "modernity" of those far-off days when Nero had a degenerate poet for "arbiter elegantiarum" had its counterpart in our own. Mark had as quick a sense of the presence of evil in human character and in art, as some men were said to have of the invisible presence of an adder. He remembered the cold touch of it in some words written at the outbreak of war by an over-sophisticated man of letters, who talked of his feeling of "release" and "refreshment" when at last the blood began to flow. The "modernity" of ancient Rome had "refreshed" itself in imagination, with "brutalities" which it mistook for strength, and with sexual perversities which it mistook for subtlety of mind. It had regarded these things as the stigmata of genius, and the mark of the supreme master in art and literature rather than as the mark of the beast; for truth itself, when these things held the intellectual stage, appeared naïve, banal and conventional. It was all here, for those who had eyes to see it. The central basilica of Christendom; and, over against it, the gigantic, sinister, obelisk which had once risen from the *spina* of the circus, and now figured with a pious inscription as a Christian monument.

The Swiss guards, with their pikes, and the orange and black stripes of that Renaissance costume which Michelangelo had designed as though for some strange harlequinade, were lying face downwards at the entrance gate on the left and under the *Arco delle Campane*, through which Mark drove into the grounds of the Vatican.

For half an hour he explored those great sun-flooded gardens which, in spite of their privacy, always conveyed an unusual sense of openness. This was partly because of their height. At one or two points, they not only overlooked St. Peter's and Rome, but really did convey the feeling that, in doing so, they possessed a strange centrality of their own, a privacy of glorious light from which the lonely watcher overlooked the world.

He drove along winding semi-tropical roads, over-shadowed by palm and magnolia. He passed a great sun-baked

rockery, where the lizards ran like swift tricklings of green fire, under flowering stone-crop and cactus. He passed fountains bubbling out of deep rock-crevices, through a mist of *Capelli di Venere*, or maidenhair fern; and others from which the naiads of Virgil and Horace had not been exiled. He had not hitherto found any place so aloof from the catastrophe, or with so secure an air of being "above the battle". He supposed that even the gardeners must have been away or indoors at the fatal hour, for there was no sign of them anywhere. But neither was there any sign of that human survivor for whom he was searching. He came suddenly on the beautiful little loggia, where the Pope sometimes dined in summer. With its pillared arches opening on four sides, and those tall daughters of the gods in the niches between them, and the quiet, rushing sound of the water from the cascade below, it was the kind of place in which Pliny and Cicero would have delighted to entertain their friends. The loneliness of the place was curiously emphasized by a small refectory table of the barest and plainest wood, one side of which bore the inscription in black letters:

Tavola da pranzo del Papa.

It was the kind of table that might have been found in the poorest peasant's cottage, but it was in perfect harmony with its classic surroundings, and somehow suggested the classic beauty of asceticism, the loaf of bread and the cup of wine.

But there was no human voice to break the loneliness or interrupt that sound of flowing water which, in lonely places, can so mysteriously convey the sense of immeasurable time, and the untroubled process of things that had no beginning and will have no end.

Nothing ever changes till the gods come again.
Water still will flow....

He left his car and walked on into what indeed might be called the Secret Garden, where only that lonely and august occupant of the oldest throne in European history had been used to walk and meditate. It was a place of exquisite silence, fragrant with flowers and memories, where Mark felt like the first explorer of a strange planet. The Pope used to be called "the prisoner of the Vatican"; but even in this secret garden there was a height which seemed to command and overlook the world. Fifty yards further on, he found the seclusion of a hermitage in the Forest of Broceliande; and he stumbled, like a man in a dream, into a dusky clearing among trees, where he saw something which held him spellbound. It was the quiet shrine dedicated to St. Thérèse, the Little Flower. The group of figures, the child-saint, and the old man kneeling and gazing up at her face, was so unexpectedly beautiful in design and colour; it was so vivid an expression of a deep and simple human heart calling upon other hearts to share its own devotion that Mark—for the first time since the catastrophe—felt that he was near to tears.

And then he saw something which almost suspended the beating of his heart. At the base of the figures, there was a bunch of flowers, and the flowers were as fresh and unwithered as though they had been picked that morning.

CHAPTER XIV

During the next hour and a half Mark hastily explored every corner of the Vatican Gardens in quest of his fellow-survivor. He walked along the Stradone dei Giardini, and under that most private sun-flooded wall, where huge grape-fruit were ripening, like the golden melons of the desert island in the Voyage of Maeldune. He called aloud, as he went, in his feverish excitement, "Is anyone there? Is anyone there?" And he heard only the echoes replying from the high walls of the Vatican galleries. He ran back to his car and driving along the Viale del Giardino Quadrato, turned to the left up the Viale del Bosco. At every point of vantage he stopped and examined the whole prospect. He entered every building in which it seemed possible that his fellow-survivor might have made a temporary home. The compact little observatory was one of the likeliest places. It contained a pallet-bed for the use of the astronomer in the intervals of his watching, but there was a great iridescent spider's web across the open doorway, and the long glistening threads of green and gold were all unbroken. He went into the tiny railway station, and the Casina Pio IV and the Accademia Nuovi Lincei where those odd "mediaevalists" of the Vatican—despite the common view of them—had studied the latest developments of modern science. But he found no clue, and only the mocking echoes answered his reiterated calls. He went into the Radio building and saw what had been the most efficient wireless station for its size in the world. He saw all that marvellous apparatus of communication lying utterly uncommunicative. The words of a great philosopher came mockingly into his mind: "Mechanism is everywhere; but it is everywhere subordinate." He wondered how long it would take him to master its intricacies, and send a message across the Atlantic, in a forlorn hope of a reply from the other side. But this was not his immediate concern. He called aloud, as he had called in all the other buildings he had entered—"Is anyone there?" and, as he did so, he caught sight, for the first time, in this lonely place—of a dead face staring at him across the machinery. It was the smudged and greasy face of one of the mechanics; but the fixed stare, and the posture of the body in its blue dungarees, half propped, half lying, among wheels and levers which were now as impotent as the valves, and pulleys and levers of its own heart and sinews, answered his question clearly enough.

He stumbled out, repeating stupidly, and hardly knowing what he was saying: "Mechanism is present everywhere; but it is everywhere subordinate." Subordinate to what? Not to man—in the long run, Man had been only its temporary master.

He was at the main entrance of St. Peter's ten minutes before the time appointed. For three-quarters of an hour he moved restlessly about the broad atrium at the head of the steps, gazing across the piazza. But there was no moving speck of human life on the long approach from the Tiber or the broad expanse before him. Before leaving, he took three cardboard notices that hung within the porch. On their blank white backs he wrote, in heavy blue pencil, the message to his fellow-survivor which he had left at the Keats House. He fastened them at the entrance doors so conspicuously that she could hardly miss them if ever she passed that way.

Then, in spite of all his preoccupation, Mark discovered that he was hungry. At the far side of the piazza he had noticed a small restaurant where he might be able to replenish his stock of food. He drove over to it and, undeterred by the two dead waiters who lay near the entrance, with napkins in their hands, and the afternoon light shining on their soiled shirt-fronts, he proceeded to fill his big knapsack. He chose only such edibles as were in glass bottles or hermetically sealed boxes. But there were plenty of those to choose from; and, with a tin of biscuits, boxes of dates and dry figs, and a flask or two of good wine, he revictualled his car for some days to come.

As soon as he had satisfied his hunger, he drove through the Porta Angelica to the great entrance on the right of the Vatican, and mounted the steep stairs. He was convinced that his fellow-survivor, when she went to the spacious and unfrequented room in the Louvre, was moved by the same desire as his own—to escape the crowded horror of the outside world. She was an art student and had been accustomed to work in the Vatican galleries; or so he supposed, from the student's pass which he had found in the silver bag, in conjunction with Professor Antonelli's card, and one or two references in her reading-diary. What would be more likely, therefore, than that she should have made a temporary sanctuary for herself in one of its many quiet rooms, overlooking gardens flooded with sun at daybreak, and glorified by her beloved painters?

But, again, as he went with echoing footsteps along those vast corridors, he felt the touch of an appalling loneliness. He passed through the Cabinet of Masks and the Gallery of Statues and the exquisite octagonal Court of the Belvedere,

where Apollo and Perseus and Hermes, and the Laocoön with its Virgilian associations, gleamed in the quiet sunlight like thoughts in the Eternal Mind.

They almost frightened him now with their silent and unaltering perfection. Their effect was infinitely more overwhelming than when he stood before them with a little group of his fellow mortals on his former visit to Rome. With the confidence which the small mind always finds in numbers, some of his companions had looked appraisingly at these serenely aloof immortals. They had even criticized them as if they had been merely the work of men's hands. But now, as the one man left alive on the planet, he found it almost impossible to think that hands like his own had created such beauty. He almost quailed before their splendour and all that it represented in the realm of ideal thought.

Having no communication with human minds and souls present in the flesh, he felt more keenly than ever before that these ideal forms were, in fact, the physical expression of an invisible spirit, and he was haunted by the deep inner truth of those great Platonic lines of Edmund Spenser:

> For of the soul the body form doth take;
> For soul is form, and doth the body make.

Perhaps for the same reason, and because he was searching for something more immediately human, it was a relief to return to the Pinacoteca and the warm colours of that glorious palace of painting. But he was very deliberate and systematic in his search. Without looking at the prostrate body of the uniformed attendant, he took two large coloured prints from the table where the reproductions had been laid out for sale, and wrote his message to his fellow-survivor on their blank backs. He fastened one on the door leading to the "Hall of Statues"; and the other on the entrance door to the Pinacoteca. Then he pushed back the latter door and walked on through room after glowing room. The chronological order of the pictures gave him a strange sense of passing through all the centuries of European civilization. He passed through the Byzantine Hall into the hall of Giotto; and, though in the new eagerness of his search he hardly glanced at the pictures themselves, he had a curious sense that he was drawing nearer to his own age, and to the hearts and minds of men like himself. It made him feel also that he was actually drawing nearer with every step to the object of his search.

He paused a moment in the room of Fra Angelico. The exquisite beauty of those small panel-pictures enthralled him, as though he had entered a room where slender little arched windows opened on the valleys of Paradise. When he was a small boy there had been a copy of one of them in his nursery at home, and he had been fascinated by its delicate colours. He remembered being vaguely annoyed by a pagan nurse who had described them as "pastel shades of rose and blue". He did not know what "pastel shades" were at the time; but the very sound of it was like having your hair brushed the wrong way with a hard brush. For a gentle voice had told him an old legend about that picture, which had made him feel the ethereal subtlety of a light and colour that might have suffused the wings of angels or glorified the walls of the celestial city.

It touched him with the old simplicity, and the tears rushed to his eyes. The pity of it, the tragedy of it, oppressed him like a physical burden, aching in the brain and wringing the heart; that men who had all this power of creation, all this capacity not only for happiness but for blessedness, men with all the intellectual and spiritual riches of the treasure-house of God at their disposal, should have done so fearful a thing with their inheritance. It seemed that even the infinite mercy and compassion of the Supreme Being had, perhaps, grown weary of them at last, and allowed them to obliterate one another from the face of the earth.

Room after glowing room, through the coloured pageant of the vanished centuries, he hurried on, seeing no indication of life in all that long vista of beauty, and hearing no sound but his own echoing footsteps. In the vast eighth hall, at the foot of those masterpieces of Raphael, the Transfiguration, the Madonna of Foligno, and the Crowning of the Virgin in Heaven, there were three bodies lying prostrate, as though in grotesque adoration. But it was not adoration. From the podgy hand of the central body (a large, fat man with the jowl of a pig) an "advanced" Art journal entitled *The Bomb* had slithered across the polished floor. Mark picked it up because he noticed some writing on the broad margin of an exposed page. The whole journal, apparently, was devoted to a painter who had recently caused an immense sensation with a work entitled "The Abortion". Reproductions of this work of genius were given from every possible angle; and, on the marked page, it was compared, to its own great advantage, with the insipidly beautiful conceptions of such idealistic, yet representational painters, as Raphael. One podgy fist of the dead man still held the fountain pen with which he had scrawled some further notes and comments on the passage which contrasted "The Abortion" with the effete work of the dead masters. At the head of the article there was a photograph of the author with two young women. They

were described as "The famous Art Critic, Hamilcar Pratt, with his talented disciples." Mark glanced at the faces of the young women, and at the face of the dead man. There was no doubt about it. This was the famous Art Critic, Hamilcar Pratt. Even in death his up-turned face wore that smile of which Phene spoke in *Pippa Passes*—

> That hateful smile of boundless self-conceit.

The poor little rabbit faces of the two young women were so painted and plastered with cosmetics that any expression of their own was obliterated, but they wore a very close imitation of their master's smile; and their narrow foreheads made it only too comprehensible. In support of its reversal of all values, *The Bomb* was be-starred with quotations from Dr. Arendzen's excellent translation of a famous twentieth-century Bolshevik hymn. The hymn was entitled "WE"; and the smile of the young women meant exactly what the hymn said:

> *We'll burn Raphael's paintings, in name of the dawn that is rising,*
> *We have forgotten the fragrance of fields and the flowers of the spring-tide.*
> *We at last have unlearnt to be sighing and home-sick for heaven.*
> *Here, in this world, must a man have his fill, without dreams of hereafter.*
> *We are the Judge and the Judgement. Our will is the law.*

Unfortunately, even in this world, they did not seem to be satisfied with their "fill". Nor had their association with Hamilcar Pratt crowned them with the dark and sinister haloes to which they aspired; for the illustrated papers, alas! irreverent even in the presence of sin, usually robbed their twin scandal of all its glamour by referring to them as Tweedledum and Tweedledee.

It was only in the last generation that the hymn of "WE" had come into its own. In any saner age its appeal to brute numbers and force would have seemed not only irrelevant to artistic values, but grotesquely false to the spirit of the world's real workers:

> *We, the overwhelming innumerable legions of labour...*
> *Shook from our shoulders the burden received from our fathers,*
> *Cast for ever away mad dreams of a world unknown to the senses.*
> *We'll burn Raphael's paintings in name of the dawn that is rising.*
> *We'll destroy the museums and crush with our heel the treasures of artists.*
> *Never again shall the tears flow from our eyes. We have killed pity within us.*
> *We love only the power of steam and the blasting might of explosives.*
> *We want the scream of the sirens, the rolling wheels of thundering metal.*

So far from being a hymn of labour (for labour might have been thought, in any age capable of real thought, to have had more than enough of the "scream of the sirens"), it was the kind of raving that might have frothed the mouth of an unusually brutal steel-king in a fit of *delirium tremens*. But it had impressed millions of the half-baked as "great and new". The word "new" was the fatal *Open Sesame* to immature minds. It had opened the door of the popular Press. It had held criticism spellbound, lest it should be labelled "reactionary". It had opened the capricious gates of fashion. It had opened even more widely those already wide open spaces—the minds of the "revolting and frustrated young" in the houses of the rich, and at the wealthier schools and universities. It had opened a door to the bitter and revengeful, and all who had grudges against their neighbours, and therefore preferred pulling down to building up. It had opened a way of escape to those who were too tired and disillusioned to trouble about thinking any longer. Moreover, any attempt to answer the new gospel of numbers, force and materialism, was at once checkmated by the desire of press and pulpit to be all things to all men. Nothing could surpass the large-minded tolerance with which they flattered and fawned upon the disloyal as "intellectual leaders", while they smote and suppressed the loyal from whom they had nothing to fear, and tossed their own supporters as an appeasement to the wolves. Nothing could be more generous than their belief—so ingratiatingly flattering to the common enemy—that out of the spirit of destruction and murder some newer thing, better and more valuable than the loyalties that had been destroyed, would eventually be born; or that in sheer wickedness we saw the beginnings of an infinitely better world to come. They persuaded themselves that the opening of the gates of hell was a foretaste of heaven; and the most horrible feature of the whole bewildered chaos was its absolute irrationality. It was not merely an insurrection of lower values against the higher. It was an insurrection of those swarming imbecilities which were generated only in the most loathsome circle of the whole political and intellectual Inferno. The fashionable

folk whose tongues had never conferred lasting fame, but had always been the organs of its ephemeral substitute, "publicity", had apparently decided that everyone who was anyone must see, admire, and talk about "The Abortion". Seeing it was not quite as necessary as admiring it and talking about it, but admiring and talking about it were essential for all who wanted to swim with the contemporary swim, or walk with that endless contemporary procession whose romantically rebellious originality was so clearly demonstrated by the complete standardization of all its members as exactly interchangeable parts.

An odd claim to "distinction" and "significant form" had been made for "The Abortion", on the ground that it was an "abstraction". But in actual and precise fact, this "abstraction" was a fairly accurate representation of the embryo of an ape. It was laid, like the head of Baptist John, on a large platter of "Art" pottery. It had a surgical instrument on each side of it, like a knife and fork; and round it there was a garnishing of sufficiently representative "phallic symbols".

It had been denounced by one bishop and praised by another. It had received columns in the Press, and was regarded as "important" and highly "intellectual" by the religious journals, even though they felt it to be a mistake. Its importance—apart from its "publicity value"—was not explained. The cheaper daily papers had pretended to condemn. Some of them had called for censorship, while obviously revelling in the common mud-bath, and profiting by their sensational headlines. The more serious daily papers and reviews, especially those of a conservative political tendency, had pointed out that "we must move with the times". They had severely snubbed more honest critics by telling them that they "must not expect to confine Art and Genius to the conventions of the past", an observation which was perfectly true, but absolutely irrelevant. They did not add that we must not expect to confine artists like Wainwright, the poisoner, to the antiquated science of Galen. As the conventional unconventionalists all said, with one voice, "We must accept the fact that the artists and writers of our day are in complete revolt". It was quite true, and they had become revolting.

It was not explained why these privileged rebels had to be accepted by those who disagreed with them; nor was it made clear what those far too comfortable sons of luxury and sophistication were really in revolt about. But their supporters in the conservative Press would tolerate no real criticism. "This revolt", they said, "went deeper in literature, than in art." It went deeper even than "the revolt against authority of the Renaissance", for it "repudiated all literary associations". It was not explained how the Renaissance had escaped the responsibility for its deliberate revival, not only of literary associations, but of the particularly old and formidable classic tradition. Neither was it explained whether a complete abandonment of language was advocated for the writers of the future; though what, alas! could be more "literary" than letters? But the patter of that chaotic hour had no relation at all to realities. It was the patter of the utterly incompetent, and of those rudimentary creatures of modern publicity among whom thinking had become almost a lost art. The conservative journals, whose editors-in-chief were too hurried and worried to consider such things, did not think there could be any real connection between the contemporary art and literature of a country and its political stability. With all the histories of all the revolutions to warn them they would allow their artistic and literary columns to prepare the minds of thousands for chaos, by dissolving in the acid of their cynicism or deriding as utterly out-of-date the very principles upon which their own political articles based the existence of the nation. They allowed them to set so sweeping a fashion of thought or thoughtlessness, that those who did not accept it were felt to have lost intellectual caste. They allowed them to impose it on helpless millions who at heart were utterly opposed to it, but had no means of protesting. In the journal which Mark now held in his hands all the poor old commandments, except those which were so out-of-date as not to be worth mentioning, were derided as the taboos of an ancient and ridiculous bourgeoisie. But, in a leading article, on the political situation, the writer's country was still described as "Christian"; and the breaking of political pledges by foreigners was denounced with hypocritical smugness, as a violation of precisely those "bourgeois" principles which—according to almost every other page and certainly in almost every book praised by their literary columns—could have no possible justification in reality. And all this while, Christendom—if they had only known it—was waiting with her replies to all their bewilderment; replies infinitely deeper and more complete than they had ever dreamed of; replies that embraced the depths and heights of the *philosophia perennis*, and carried with them a thousand subtle and true possibilities of really new discovery in art, thought and life.

Over them, the deep eyes of Raphael's "Mother and Child" looked through the ages, with that spiritual glory of which the human race had caught one fleeting glimpse, and then lost it for ever. But it had been no remote glory. It was a discovery of the essential worth and dignity of the individual human soul, where man—after his long evolution—had emerged into a higher order of reality, and recognized his own relationship to the spiritual world and to God. Every earthly mother, in that recognition, shared the hallowing secret of the *Magnificat*. Raphael had seen it shining in the quiet eyes of the Italian peasant girl—his Madonna—whose child was her king, and would lead the nations into the ways of peace.

Eyes of that quiet spiritual depth had not been uncommon once, especially in childhood and old age. But, recently, in the greater part of the human race, even the eyes had been modernized. Those deep altar-lights of the spirit had been replaced or hidden by glittering little electric lights, intensely quick and clever at seizing the immediate and superficial, especially if it were hurtful. In this new and dreadful silence, it seemed that the wonder of those eyes, though they could now be seen only as Raphael remembered them, might have convinced the modern world of its madness. Their sacred innocence, hallowed and hallowing, was a terrible answer to the wickedness of the mighty ones. But the sophisticated had grown tired of such things. At heart, they hated them as they hated the "vulgar beauty" of sunsets and flowers. They hated those loyalties of art, as they hated those other loyalties of the individual and the family, which were the foundation of all other earthly loyalties, but were themselves based on eternal values. They hated those things as the evil eye must hate the beatific vision, and therefore condemns itself, by its own desire and its own preference, to outer darkness and eternal exile. "We'll burn Raphael's paintings", in name of the night that is coming.

With an eye watching the minute-hand of the clock in the market-place, lest a faith should be held a moment longer than the fashion of the hour approved, such minds could understand neither the art nor the religion of any former age. "The true classic", said the greatest of French critics, "is a contemporary of all the ages." Perhaps that is why Christendom, in its transcendence of time, gave so catholic a home to the classics. But the volatility of the neo-pagans could never grasp the spirit of Christian Art. "That grand conception of supreme events and mysteries at which"—as a great agnostic said—"the successive ages were spectators, and in relation to which the great souls of all periods became contemporaries."

All those things rushed through the mind of the lonely survivor in a few moments while he stood in the hall of Raphael. He saw clearly how the new intellectual and spiritual incompetence had contributed to the modern chaos, and eventually to the catastrophic end of civilization.

But he could not see clearly where any remedy could have been found at any time in the last quarter of a century. The madness had gone too far. Fifty years ago the world might have been saved, by a profound change of heart, and the realization that unless men re-discovered their own roots in the eternal grounds of the moral law, their civilization and all that they had so laboriously built up through the centuries would come crashing down as inevitably as a tree falls when the axe bites through the last inch of the trunk. "Christianity has failed," said the cynics; but one of the most just replies ever made was that of the laughing philosopher who retorted in the true Voltairian spirit, "Christianity cannot have failed. It has never been tried."

It was obviously not in any reactionary return to an outward and insincere conformity with any religious creed that the remedy could have been found. Something far more radical had been necessary. It was in the heart, the inner man, that the change should have been wrought, before the mocking and bewildered modern world could ever be brought to believe again in real values, established on an eternal ground, or dare to act on that belief. In fact, no man who really did believe in those eternal values, would have dared to act in defiance of them, as the greater part of the world had been acting for nearly half a century. It was not merely that the world had grown more "wicked". In many ways it had grown less wicked. There had been no wickedness like that of the "ages of faith" in Italy. But, at least, it was recognized as wickedness. They were "purple of raiment and golden". They sinned like beasts and fiends, but they knew they were sinning like beasts and fiends. They even had a suspicion, as Faustus had, that the spirit of evil might be in alliance with them, and they gloried in the fact with a Satanic pride. They had nothing in common with the modern university professors who explained that fair is foul and foul is fair, or demonstrated to bewildered herds of the young that the perversities described in the first letter of St. Paul to the Romans were to be regarded with admiring sympathy as innocent complexes or inhibitions of the subtler forms of genius.

It was as Mark made his way through the darker Borgia apartments that the most startling experience of his life befell him. It was startling for a two-fold reason. The curious deepening presentiment that something, he knew not what, was about to happen, had risen to intense expectation. In the sub-conscious depths of his mind those dark rooms and winding corridors were associated with the most sinister legend in history of evil incarnate. The darkness, and the narrow doors, and the sudden twisting exits and entrances, almost physically symbolized the evil. The ghostly presences of that corrupt house hung upon the air like the heavy odour of stale incense from some old Satanic mass.

He passed on tiptoe through the doors to escape the echo of his own footsteps; and, in the very act, he felt that he might have come upon Alexander Borgia, God's Vicegerent in palpable form, mixing a cup of poison; or Cesare Borgia, wiping his brother's blood from his dagger; or Lucrezia Borgia, coiling her serpentine hair before a mirror. Once he thought he heard footsteps in the distance, and stopped to listen. His nerves were abnormally over-strained; and, in that

listening hush, the creak of a joint in the floor, or the tiny thud of a moth against one of the small dark windows, was intensified as though it came through a microphone. He could have sworn that he heard footsteps. He paused, and they seemed to have paused with his own. Then, above or below, as though from the far end of a long subterranean passage, there came a cry, the most terrible he had ever heard, the scream of a woman in mortal fear. It shivered and tingled through his frame and shook his heart to his heart's root. The next moment he distinctly heard footsteps. They seemed to be running and there was panic in the sound. But they gave him the direction. He felt sure that they were beyond and below the Borgia rooms. He ran, stumbling through the dark little labyrinth towards the further exit; rushed down a narrow passage which gradually descended like a very long winding stair; and suddenly he found himself at the entrance to the Sistine Chapel. To his amazement, as he pushed back the entrance door, there was a brilliant illumination within, as though all the power in the Vatican batteries had been reserved for the blood-freezing spectacle before him.

The Sistine Chapel was thronged from end to end by a great motionless conclave of the Princes of the Church. The whole college of Cardinals was assembled there in one blood-red furnace of colour. Many of them were kneeling, supported in their positions by their own crowded ranks. Others, rosary in hand, were lolling forward over the backs of chairs. Others had slipped to the ground as though overcome in some drunken orgy, with their red hats beside them. High overhead on his regal throne, with the great ostrich-feather fans—the *flabella* of Heliogabalus—on either side of him, sat a small wizened old man in white, with a white skull-cap. It was the Pope, the ruler of the Vatican City, and of those five hundred million souls beyond its walls who recognized him as the head of Christendom. One waxen hand was lifted up and frozen in the very act of giving benediction; while the finely cut cameo-like face, so exquisitely spiritual in life, had been so maligned by the anatomy of death that it was fixed in a grin of ghastly mockery—the *rictus* of the skull beneath the waxen skin.

Coming out of the darkness into that diabolical glare, in which all the pomp and glory of the world seemed at once to be summed up and annihilated, the mind and senses of the one man left alive reeled under the shock. He did a thing which he could never have done if he had been in full possession of his faculties, or, indeed, if the dead faces of that silent conclave had been turned towards him. He strode up the narrow aisle between all those ranks of violet and gold and fine linen and scarlet, until he reached the throne of the Pope. Then he leaned forward and looked up into the small waxen face. It seemed to leer into his own, and as though he expected some profoundly secret reply, he whispered to it softly, "*Is anyone there?*"

He could have sworn that there was a momentary gleam of mockery in that small, almost transparent mask.

He turned and faced the dead conclave, intending to go back along the central aisle, and then—he discovered a dreadful thing. He discovered that he could not move. The gleam of all those dead faces, rank behind rank, lolling towards him with their gaping mouths and glazed eyes, fastened him in a paralysed impotence of fear. Shaking from head to foot he whispered, more loudly than before, and in a hoarse voice that he hardly recognized as his own, "Is anyone there?"

Then he completely lost control and, like an animal baying at something which it dares not encounter, he hurled his question in a raucous shout at the dead faces and over their heads at the darkness beyond the entrance door.

He was not mad; for the last forces of his reason were still trying to rally and beat back the chaos that would obliterate them. He looked up to the painted ceiling where the brush of Michelangelo had depicted the First Man awakening at the touch of the Creator. He turned and saw that other titanic imagination opening, depth beyond depth, behind him—the flaming heavens of the Last Judgement. The struggling, gasping, imploring figures there were at least alive. Knowing it was madness, he lifted his hands and tried to shout his mad question to the painted Figure throned in its own eternal life above those surging splendours and terrors, but he choked on the words as though his throat were filled with dust. The lights and dead faces wavered and grew distant; and he fell fainting at the feet of the dead Pope, as though he were himself dead.

CHAPTER XV

He did not know whether he was waking in the Keats House, or in a submarine, or in some quiet bedroom on the Undercliff; but, as the light of consciousness began to glimmer again in his own mind, he became curiously aware that the external lights were growing dim. Suddenly they went out altogether; and the slight shock of their extinction roused him. He stood up, swaying a little at first. The darkness of the Sistine Chapel, in which the paintings on the walls seem to have thrust the windows up out of sight, was not complete. But it was a dense obscurity only faintly suffused with creepings and glimmerings of the late afternoon. He saw its motionless and terrible occupants as he might have seen them through a fog; and what he saw most vividly was a stretch of blessed daylight at the entrance beyond them, where there had been only a black contrasting darkness when the interior had been blazing with electricity.

The dusky veil drawn over that dreadful conclave enabled him to face them without looking at them. He steadied himself, took a deep breath and, like a man walking rapidly along a narrow path, with a precipitous abyss on either side, he kept his eyes fixed on the floor of the aisle between them and picked his way out.

As soon as he reached the outer door and what remained of the common light of day, he broke into a run, in what he supposed to be the direction taken by the fugitive, though it was only the most obvious of several possibilities. He dashed upstairs and pounded along galleries that seemed almost endless. He found himself, at one moment, in a section of the Vatican Library, and at another in the immense Gallery of the Maps. Some of the windows here overlooked the Vatican Gardens; and, as he paused for breath at one of them, he saw in the distance the small cream-coloured car moving rapidly along the Viale del Giardino Quadrato towards the exit in the Piazza of St. Peter's.

In five minutes he was driving his own car towards the Piazza of St. Peter's in the hope of intercepting and overtaking the fugitive. But she had too long a start, and when he drove through the Porta Angelica there was nothing to be seen in all the expanse of the square, or on any of the approaches to it. After ten more wasted minutes he turned towards the Tiber, intending to make his way back to the Keats House for the night, and feeling strangely saddened and a little ashamed of his breakdown. But his forehead was still cold and wet, and the sickness at his heart gave him an only too complete understanding of the fearful cry he had heard, and the panic in the sound of those flying footsteps. He cursed himself for the weakness which had prevented him from following the fugitive more promptly. But it was doubtful whether he could have overtaken her in any case; for of the many exits that she might have chosen from the labyrinth in that part of the Vatican (or what had seemed to him a labyrinth) he knew of none that led to the Gardens; and, by the time he had reached the door of the Sistine Chapel, she must already have been a great way off.

During those most critical moments, he had been curiously inhibited from calling aloud. But, since he knew the cause of her panic, he felt sure it would have been re-doubled, by a ghastly sense that the dead were pursuing her, if she had heard a voice echoing along the corridors. He seemed to be acquiring the strangest power of entering into the thoughts and emotions of this utterly unknown fellow-survivor. It was as though all the intuitive sympathies that, in a populous world, had been more widely diffused, had been intensified by their concentration on one object.

He pored long over her reading-diary before going to sleep that night.

> *Those extinct volcanoes of one's spiritual life—those eruptions of the intellect and the passions which have scattered the lava of doubt and negation over our early faith—are only a glorious Himalayan chain, beneath which new valleys of undreamed richness and beauty will spread themselves.*

That was one of her quotations in which he seemed to hear a whisper of new life. Several of them dwelt on the fact that human beings are not likely to have "sublimer thoughts than the universe can furnish into reality".

> *There is a sort of blasphemy in that proverbial phrase, "too good to be true". The highest inspiration of the purest, noblest, human soul, is the nearest expression of the truth.*

Here at last, he felt, was the true rebel against the world in which they had all been living.

In the early hours of the next morning, while Mark lay on his extemporized couch in the Keats House, there occurred to him one of those absurdly simple ideas which are so easily passed over. He was angry with himself for not thinking of it before.

Evelyn Hamilton had been living in Rome as an art student for a considerable time. There was a good chance that she had been staying, not in a hotel, but in a flat of her own and, if so, she would almost certainly, as an American, be in the telephone book. The telephone was useless, of course, but the book would give him the address. Quite possibly, the wave of death would have made this address untenable for her, but he would be likely to discover something which would help him in his search.

Before these extremely simple ideas had been formulated, he had his candle alight and was groping through the pages of the telephone book on the table near the door. He found the name so quickly that he could hardly believe his eyes. But there it undoubtedly was

HAMILTON, E., Signorina. *Via Margutta, 49. Int. 4.*

It was only a few hundred yards from the Keats House. "Int." he supposed meant "interno", the number of the flat in block 49. In a quarter of an hour he had dressed and was knocking at number 4. But it was as he half expected. There was no answer. At last, putting his shoulder to the door, and leaning his weight against it, he burst it open.

It was a pretty little flat of three rooms. In the centre of a table in the hall, where no searcher could fail to see it, there was a large envelope addressed,

TO ANYONE WHOM IT MAY CONCERN.
From EVELYN HAMILTON.

It contained this message:

If anyone comes to look for me, this is to say that I waited in Rome as long as I could bear it. But it has become too much for me. I have gone to the Palazzo Rufolo at Ravello, in the hills above Amalfi. It is a house belonging to the Brookes of Princeton, with whom I stayed last year. They have not used it this year; but I can easily open it up, and there will be none of the terrible things which make any occupied place unbearable. If any Americans reach Rome and read this, I hope someone will look for me there.

Evelyn Hamilton.

He looked for a moment into the little sitting-room, and felt as though he were surrounded by the living presence of its vanished owner. The pictures on the walls, some of them her own; the books on the shelves; gave him a clear indication of her mind. He noticed some of the books which she had quoted in her reading-diary.

But he could not delay. Something might interfere with her plans at Ravello, and then he might never find her. His best chance was to follow with all speed. In his higher-powered car he might even overtake her on the way.

CHAPTER XVI

He drove into Amalfi about three o'clock that afternoon, and, turning away from the sunlit beach, took the steep winding road, past the old convent to Ravello. Up into the hills he went, with the dark gorge of the Dragone on his right, and terraces of trellised vines on his left. Sometimes the vines gave place to gnarled and twisted woods of grey-green olive trees, or glossy-leaved and golden-fruited orange-orchards. But he hardly saw them; for on the dusty road before him there was the track of a small car. The tread of the tyres was so clearly imprinted that it could not have been more than a day old. A single shower would have obliterated it.

Endlessly up into the hills he went, catching occasional glimpses over lemon-trees or pomegranates of the deep violet Bay of Salerno. But he drank them in almost as unconsciously as he heard the sound of goat-bells among the rocks. His eyes hardly moved from the wheel-tracks in the dust. Only once, after the first mile of the ascent, did he see any trace of the disaster, when he had to avoid the body of a bare-footed charcoal burner, who was crumpled up in the middle of the road with his bag of charcoal beside him. But Mark hardly looked at the body; for the small car ahead of him had obviously been obliged to swerve also, and his assurance became doubly sure.

It was still broad afternoon when he drove into the small central square of the ancient hill-crowning city, which was now little more than a country village. He stopped abruptly in front of the bronze doors of the Cathedral of St. Pantaleone; but he did not even glance at their exquisitely sculptured panels, for there, under an acacia tree, was the small cream-coloured car. It had no occupant. Perhaps she had gone into the Cathedral. He pushed back the entrance door and looked. There was nobody to be seen. But there was one unexpected thing which touched him to the quick, and filled him with a strange sense of peace. There was a quietly flickering ruby-coloured flame in the little lamp before the sanctuary. She must have gone up to the altar and re-lighted it.

He returned to the piazza, and saw, on the side nearest to the sea, the tall wrought-iron gates of the Palazzo Rufolo. But he was so afraid of missing the object of his search that, before exploring further, he wrote a brief note and laid it on the front seat of the small car, lest she should drive away before he had found her.

> *I have followed you from Paris; and am now looking for you in the Palazzo Rufolo. If you come back to the car before I have found you, please wait for me here. I shall return in a quarter of an hour.*
>
> *A Fellow-Survivor.*

Then, as quietly as a shadow, for his heart was full of the dreadful cry at the Vatican, and he was afraid of frightening her —he stole through the beautiful wrought-iron gates of the Palazzo Rufolo. At the end of a short avenue between tall black cypresses, he passed, on his right, an exquisite little sunken courtyard, built by the Saracens, with slender columns and arches, through which he looked down, as from a tiny clerestory, into a chapel below. On his left, over pomegranates and lemon-trees, he saw the dark red ruins of an old watch-tower; and then, suddenly, he found himself in a wild garden of inexpressible beauty. The memories of the place alone would have suffused it with magic, as a sunset-cloud is suffused with colour. Nicholas Breakspeare, the only Englishman to occupy the central throne of Christendom, had walked here in the flesh; and Boccaccio had made it the scene of one of his most fascinating legends. Wagner had visited it and, at his first glimpse of its loveliness, exclaimed, "I have found Klingsor's Magic Garden!" It had inspired the scene and provided the setting of Parsifal's temptation by the flower-maidens.

Mark knew his Italy and had heard of all these memories; but he was not prepared for the sheer loveliness that now opened out before him in the garden itself, or for the glorious prospect of the foam-fringed coast so far below its glowing little sun-flooded terraces. The dark stone-pines to left and right stood up against the Gulf of Salerno, which looked like a sea of ruffled violets in the light southerly wind. Tall flame-shaped cypress and cloudy-headed cluster pine seem to draw height and majesty from that steep and magnificent distance as of an eagle's vision; and, where the garden ended, he saw vineyard below vineyard, descending with its grapes to the little villages of Majori and Minori, and the curve of the beach below and beyond them, where he caught the sparkle of the foam.

He went quickly down to the second terrace, by the winding stone steps, with a steep wall of rock on one side and a rock-garden on the other, where the green lizards rustled and streaked into hiding under the saffron-flowering cistus and rosy-petalled stock. And then, unseen, he saw her, standing on the parapet before him. She was gazing out to sea, with her light print dress fluttering round her like a flower in the wind from the south, and her shining head of flaxen hair like

a little sunset cloud against the stainless blue of the sky.

CHAPTER XVII

The winding stair had concealed him during his quiet descent; and, now, in his anxiety not to frighten her, he waited for a moment. Her position on the parapet might be dangerous if he startled her. She was so near that he could see the small white straps of her sandals, and the dark scratch of a thorn above one sunburnt ankle. But she stood like Echo on her mountain crag, or as Praxiteles might have imagined Ariadne on her lonely cliff in Naxos, watching the horizon for a sail.

He was about to call to her when she turned and saw him. Her dark grey eyes widened, and her lips parted without a word.

"I found your message," he said. "Don't be afraid."

She leapt down from the parapet and stood facing him.

He could see now the terrible strain which she had been enduring. Her lips quivered without speaking. Then she pulled herself together and said, with a desperate restraint that wrung his heart, "You went to my address in Rome? Have you any message from my people?"

He saw the light die out of her face as his own returned no answer to her hope; but he tried to bring the light back again. "It was only by an accident that I discovered your message. This does not mean that your people may not find it too."

"I had no one very near to me," she said, in a hard little voice, refusing the compassion in his eyes. Then, putting herself aside, she added more gently, "But you, probably, had many."

He shook his head. "The unknown enemy saw to that, in the glorious bacteriological war, ten years ago. They were in the bubonic plague zone."

"They escaped more than they knew," she said. "Science has advanced since then. But mine were luckier still. When the last war but one broke out, my father and mother, and an elder sister, were on a neutral ship. You know what that meant. I can just remember them. I'm glad they didn't live to see the war that actually accomplished it."

Every word of that bitterness knocked at the door of his heart with the bare knuckles of truth itself, and awoke a deep response there. She looked at him with hard eyes, while she spoke them, then turned her head away as if to look at the deepening west, which was already suffusing the hills and the sea with its mellow light. But her averted face was wet with tears. If a visitant from another world had seen these two, in that high hill-garden, between the sunset and the slowly brightening crescent moon, with the Bay of Salerno at their feet, and the dark pines and the pomegranates and the old red watch-tower looking down upon them, he would have said that they were in an unimaginably beautiful Earthly Paradise, a place exquisitely foreshadowing that other, of which it was written:

> *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.*

If the visitant had been a stranger to mankind, that terrible race, crawling between earth and heaven, he must have wondered to see the grey shadow of desolation on the face of the young woman; and that speechless agony in the eyes of the young man. He must have wondered still more if he had grasped the meaning of their broken and stumbling words.

"You have been very brave. But you were right to come here. It was terrible in the cities."

"Terrible; so terrible, that I almost feel it must be wrong to go on living."

"It was an entry in your own diary that helped me—hardened me, perhaps—to go on. You remember it? About those dark times when 'the heart must either break or turn to bronze'."

CHAPTER XVIII

Fortunately for the human heart it is almost the last thing to be broken, as many a defeated man has discovered to his amazement; and it is beyond the power of any alchemy, old or new, to turn that rebellious muscle into bronze. Certain nerves can be so punished that they are anaesthetized. But, in youth especially, others gradually take over their functions.

Mark's discovery that Evelyn Hamilton had been living on biscuits and water hastened this return to the normal. They were both of them ravenously hungry; and, on his male urgency, further discussion was postponed while they collected the food from the car. The only thing he allowed her to carry was the large grape-fruit which had been reposing on the back seat ever since he picked it up in the private garden of the Vatican. While Evelyn was setting these things out on the table in the verandah, he discovered half-a-dozen new-laid eggs in the nest-boxes of a chicken-run, and returned in triumph to boil them over the spirit-lamp. A further useful discovery was that the American owners of the Palazzo had ordered in a large supply of "things that would keep", in readiness for their summer visit.

By half-past seven, accordingly, the two survivors had made a surprisingly good attempt at a civilized dinner. They were sitting on the terrace outside the french windows of the dining-room. On the glass-topped table between them there was a bunch of black grapes, a bottle of wine, a box of cigarettes and a fragrant pot of coffee.

Happily for the future of this planet, the last feminine survivor of the great catastrophe was not only young and beautiful, but extremely capable, and—in many respects—an improvement on the original experiment in the Garden of Eden. This could hardly be otherwise; for modern science has confirmed Voltaire in his belief that our first parents were by no means the snow-limbed creatures that reposed under the cedars of Milton's Paradise. They probably had long black nails, hairy bodies and uncouth habits. Evelyn, on the other hand, had been born in Cambridge, New England, and educated at Wellesley College, near Boston. There, in addition to rowing on the lake, and winning most of the prizes for swimming and diving, she had acquired a special interest in the Italian Renaissance, and an ardent desire to see Rome, study art, and live intensely. But she could compose a salad almost as well as she could copy an old Master.

It was while they were helping one another to spread their first dinner-table that, with the brave irreverence of Transatlantic humour, and in her slight Bostonian drawl, she quoted that large simple phrase from "Paradise Lost",—"No fear lest dinner cool."

"It takes a strong man, like Milton or Beethoven, to say a thing like that in the middle of a sublime work of art," she added. The way in which she said it made Mark laugh; and he rejoined,

"It's very odd, isn't it, that your name should be Evelyn."

"The second syllable saves it; but do you realize I don't know yours at all?" she said.

"Mark Adams," he muttered, suddenly conscious, rather sheepishly, that this was odder still.

It was now her turn to laugh; but they made a duet of it. From that moment, in fiction, Mark Adams and Evelyn Hamilton must inevitably have begun to call each other Adam and Eve. In this more veracious history, they merely called each other Mark and Evelyn.

It was over the coffee and cigarettes that Evelyn told him of her own amazing escape from the wave of death. She, too, had occupied a unique position at the critical moment. Signor Antonelli, President of the Royal Academy of Italy, and a worthy successor to d'Annunzio and Marconi, had a remarkable friend in the political world, named Mardok, who had recently shown an extraordinary interest in a new kind of diving-bell, expressly designed for photographically exploring the floor of the sea. Mardok, in fact, had financed the experiment, stipulating only that the diving-bell should be at his disposal, whenever he wished to take a friend or two down to see these beautiful under-sea pictures. He had been urgent that the diving-bell should be at his disposal on May 6th, which (though Antonelli, of course, did not know it), was to be the fatal day. The diving-bell had transparent windows on all sides; and searchlights which enabled one to see every detail of the fantastically beautiful under-sea life. Antonelli had spoken rapturously to Evelyn of the rainbow-finned goblins that came and goggled at him through the windows, and the curved sea-horses, like the knights in chess, that flicked themselves over the shell-encrusted rocks; or glided through the lucid woods and gardens of his emerald water-world. They had a peculiar interest for her because she was then engaged upon her most ambitious work, a picture of the sea-king's palace. For Mark's benefit Evelyn quoted the lines in Keats which had suggested it to her:

A light as of four sunsets, blazing forth
A gold green zenith 'bove the sea-god's head.

Signor Antonelli had so roused her desire to see the poet's magical water-world for herself that she begged him to ask Mardok to take her down with him, on the final test of his elaborate apparatus. The test was to take place in deep water near Capri. At first, Signor Antonelli demurred.

"Mardok", he said, "is a strange and difficult man. He is a titanic genius; but—unlike most geniuses—he has a hatred of being known. This is partly because some of the most formidable scientific secrets of modern times, inventions that would be worth untold millions to certain great military powers, are entirely in his hands. He controls immense wealth, and he has the indifference which accompanies it. Mardok has the most powerful intellect of the century. He is the Leonardo of the modern world, and greater, perhaps, than Leonardo." (Signor Antonelli had all the southern enthusiasm.) "We have wonderful monographs from him in the archives of the Accademia, wonderful! But he is a man who never lets his right hand know what his left is doing. He seems to be above nationality. Nobody knows his origin; though he once said—in jest, perhaps—that he was descended from the ancient Babylonians. But he is guilty of—how shall I say?—a great blasphemy. He dislikes women, even young and beautiful women. Those, perhaps, more than any. It is absurd. No man has ever done great work without them; not even Leonardo. But some people have thought—for this very reason—that Mardok one day will meet a woman who will revenge the whole of her sex; and he will capitulate completely. However, I will introduce you to him; and you shall try to persuade him yourself. Who knows? Perhaps you may be the one who will tame him. But I warn you—it will be like trying to tame a king-cobra."

This was not encouraging; but Mardok apparently had reasons of his own for meeting her more than half-way. After half an hour's talk, he not only promised to take her down in the diving-bell, but made definite arrangements there and then, which almost bound her to come, whether she changed her mind or not. And she did almost change her mind; for there was something at once contemptible and frightening, she thought, about this dark man with the coarse features whom Antonelli appeared to admire so much. She felt instinctively that the admiration had been dictated by fear, and the urgent desire that anything which happened to be reported to Mardok should be satisfactory to him. The world had been full of that kind of thing in recent years. The brutal mouth and fanatical eyes of Mardok belonged to a type that, fifty years ago, would never have commanded admiration, except perhaps in the underworld. But the amazing conditions of world politics, as an eminent historian had pointed out, after the war of 1914, had more than once placed the destinies of Europe, and the lives of millions, at the mercy of one individual, contemptible in character, fifth-rate in intellect, and with the political philosophy of a gangster. Types that hitherto would have found their proper setting in the villainous underworlds depicted by Hollywood, suddenly began to strut and rant on the European stage. Their first desire was personal power. Sometimes they achieved it by the methods of the very "democracy" which they professed to despise. They studied the weaknesses of their fellow-men; and learned how to sway large numbers by appealing to those weaknesses. It never seemed to occur to the idealists of the Left-wing that the doctrine of ten to one might be just as base in the political world as it is in a stand-up physical fight. A faint suspicion may have crept into their minds when they saw the Russian hordes crawling over Finland like a vast army of bugs. But it never really occurred to them that numerical majorities were continually swamping the best that was known and thought in the world. No sooner had "leaders" like Mardok achieved their "power" however, than it went to their heads. Having obtained control of the governmental machine they would have driven it over the bodies of their intimidated multitudes as remorselessly as any imaginable Juggernaut could have crushed its own worshippers.

Mardok might be frightening as a gangster might be frightening to a helpless victim. He was incalculable, not because of the genius which Antonelli attributed to him, but because he had no standards. Power was in his hands, and he was unfit to use it. He had the explosive energy of an epileptic, and it was mistaken for strength, just as the fixity of his ideas was mistaken for strength of will and purpose. Their force was derived from the narrowness of the mental channels in which they ran, and this narrowness was, in some ways, the most frightening thing of all. It stared at Evelyn from the fanatical eyes which seemed to speak no recognizable human language. When they met her own there seemed to be no intercourse possible between her mind and his.

At a certain stage of their conversation she seemed to be instinctively aware that Mardok had suddenly made a decision; that it was a decision which vitally concerned her, and that he had made it to further his own plans, not hers. It alarmed her a little. She felt as if she had suddenly become part of a rather sinister scientific experiment, the nature of which she was unable to grasp. But, after all the persuasion she had used on Signor Antonelli, and the arrangements which had now been so firmly settled by Mardok for her special benefit, she would look foolish if she withdrew.

The first hour of their morning under the sea had been intensely interesting. Mardok seemed to have taken an almost morbid pleasure in fitting out his elaborate diving-bell with a fantastic luxury, so that his guest—and temporary prisoner—felt that she was enclosed in a gigantic illuminated jewel, a crystal room in a magician's palace. He made various experiments with coloured lights which he thought had a special attraction for certain kinds of rainbow-scaled fish, and he manipulated his illumination so skilfully that Evelyn obtained some enchantingly beautiful photographs of the under-sea woods and gardens and their glistening inhabitants.

After this they sat in comfortable chairs, and drank something very exquisite—she did not know its name, but it was the colour of Tokay, while they watched the lucid flocks—radiant as tropical birds—that floated and flashed through the long illuminated vistas of the strange world around them. Then Mardok made a statement so startling, that her flesh crept in sudden suspicion that there was a dreadful streak of insanity in him.

"All this is very pretty," he said, in his curiously low grating voice, "but now I want to talk seriously to you. I did not bring you here merely for artistic purposes. I brought you here to save your life."

He told her that at three o'clock that afternoon—it was then half-past—the unknown weapon had been brought into operation. He told her all he knew about it, and apparently there was very little that he did not know, for he had been largely responsible for its development, and he was the only person living who had really prepared any defence against it. His experiments with the diving-bell had simply developed out of his plans for his own safety, and the safety of anyone whom he chose to accompany him. It was still in the experimental stage, but he had been fairly sure of it.

"The world, when you return to it," he said, "will be a very different place."

Then, to her horror—for she was convinced now that he was a maniac—he explained why he had chosen her as his companion. At that moment, he did not know that the wave of death would be world-wide in its range; but he seemed to be quite certain that he would be in the position, afterwards, of an absolute dictator. He reminded her, with the vanity of a Hitler, that he had already, in secret, swayed the destinies of nations. The secret of several unknown weapons was in his possession. In the age to come, knowledge and experience of the kind that he possessed would not be merely power. The over-crowded planet would be almost de-populated; and, when the few survivors from the outlying parts of the planet had been brought together, his power would be absolute. "It was of the utmost importance," he said, "that I should have the right woman to share my destiny, and possibly—to bring a new dynasty into being." He knew as soon as he saw her that he need look no further. "You have youth, beauty, intelligence, and"—here he added a remark which made Evelyn's western eyes flash—"you have another gift which will be invaluable in the comparative isolation which is to be ours—you amuse me."

Signor Antonelli had warned her that this remarkable personage disliked and did not understand women. In other circumstances, if Mardok had merely praised her sense of humour she might have been flattered; but to tell her that he wanted her for his mistress because she amused him would have been altogether too Oriental in taste for a young American. In the horrible circumstances it was an atrocity. Moreover, he went on to explain that her health and excellent physique would be invaluable factors in the founding of his dynasty. Their descendants would be super-men and super-women; and, though their development would be fostered by scientific means, it was essential that they should spring from a sound mother. Cold-blooded as he seemed in his ophidian rationalism, his eyes riveted her attention as a snake is said to hold its prey spellbound; and then, with a strange passion, he began to paint the age to come as he saw it. It was to be a world from which the soul had vanished. Science and mechanism, in the hands of an autocrat, would solve all problems and control everything and everyone except the controller himself. But there were to be no more morals, or "taboos", as he called them; for science would replace the primitive inhibitions of conscience, and make it possible to enjoy many things which formerly were regarded as forbidden fruit. They would be as gods, above good and evil. Religion would be abolished. "Love" would be regarded for what it was—the magnetism of the life-force, drawing the sexes together for its own purposes. This magnetism, however, once recognized, would be controlled by the race to come, and turned on at their pleasure, exactly as they turned on the electric light. There would be no more broken hearts, for all those sentimental entanglements which used to be described as "affections" would be destroyed like so much poison-ivy by the higher intellect of the future. He thought that, eventually, they would master the secret of life and conquer death. After this, their main problem would be to discover some way of migrating to another planet, when our own became uninhabitable, and the dying sun could no longer warm it.

Then he began to practise an art on which he evidently prided himself. He asked her if she had ever heard of Menzel—the latest disciple of Freud—and he tried to explore her mind with detestable little questions and loathsome little

insinuations which—to his disappointment—she did not seem to understand. Through both the questions and the insinuations, however, there crept his own curious conception of love-making—the "magnetism" of his own "life-force". He found—with repressed fury—that, in this case, the effect was not attraction, but repulsion, to the point of horror. Evelyn was frightened, but she told him boldly enough that she now wanted to see the daylight again.

For over an hour Mardok refused. His science had not enabled him entirely to master his own passions, for his repressed anger smouldered fiercely enough in his eyes; and, when he found that he was making no headway with his pseudo-scientific love-talk, there was a moment when the beast looked out of them. He announced, however, that the new condition of the world awaiting them would soon change her outlook completely. "You do not believe in those new conditions—yet," he said. "Very well. Try for yourself. Press that button. It is supposed to communicate with our friends on the surface, and give the signal that we wish to return. Normally there would be a reply, and an answering bell would ring down here. Try it and see."

She pressed the button again and again. There was no reply. And now—for the first time—the dreadful fear seized her that what she had taken to be the extravagant talk of an unbalanced intellect might have more in it than she had imagined, though she did not for a moment think that his account of the disaster was true.

"Try to telephone," he said. She seized the receiver and listened. There was no reply. She turned and faced him. "What has happened to them?" she said.

"I have already told you," he answered, "but you did not believe me. The wave of death has come—and gone."

"Even if I could have believed that," she said, "you did not expect me to believe you would leave your own crew to be wiped out."

He shrugged his shoulders. "What is one small diving-bell among so many? And who am I to discriminate? Do you realize," he said, "what tragic scenes there might have been? Some of those poor men had families."

Evelyn scrutinized him carefully. It was not irony. He had not the faintest idea of his own atrocity. The venture would have been incredible if his type had not been exhibited to Europe again and again in the last fifty years, and on the high stage of world-politics.

The diving-bell was fitted with an elaborate system of doors which, if its occupants so desired, would enable them to go out for a short time in a diving-kit designed for the purpose of exploring the ocean bed. Mardok now produced two diving-dresses devised for the more important purpose of regaining the surface. He explained to her that this was now their only means of escape. They reached the surface with the greatest ease and divested themselves of their helmets, only to discover that one of those little things which have so often marred the schemes of the unscrupulously mighty had now seriously upset Mardok's plan. The yacht in attendance loomed high over their heads, with one member of the dead crew gaping at them over the side; but the small boat which had swung at the stern was no longer there. Mardok had been counting on this boat for their escape; for it was quite impossible to board the yacht without help. It was the kind of predicament which so often happens when a small detail is only of great importance to the unscrupulous. Honesty neglects it, and the unscrupulous pay the price. Possibly the captain of the yacht had sent someone ashore in the boat (a perfectly reasonable proceeding in view of the only facts in his possession) and the wave of death had prevented its return.

They were more than a mile from the coast, and Mardok was a poor swimmer. Indeed he was kept afloat only by his cork-jacket. His tone changed now, and he pretended to be shocked that his own predictions had come so terribly true. Evelyn did not suspect, at the time, that he was tortured by his own distrust, and that he was now playing a part because he seriously feared she might leave him to his fate, as he would certainly have left others. There seemed to be no hope of his reaching the shore, unless they could get a boat. Evelyn therefore volunteered to swim ashore and bring one back to him, while Mardok prevented himself from drifting away by holding on to the yacht's cable. When Evelyn landed, she discovered, of course, that Mardok's predictions were certainly true of the immediate neighbourhood and that no human aid was obtainable. She at once pushed out in a small rowing boat, but, to her horror, when she reached the yacht, she found that Mardok had disappeared. His cork-jacket would have kept him afloat, but there was no speck to be seen in the whole shining circle of the sea. She noticed, however, that there was now a very strong current, running like a river round the bows of the yacht. She thought that Mardok must have released the cable for a moment and been unable to reach it again. She let her boat drift with the current, thinking it would take her in his direction. It was carried at a great

pace towards a distant wooded promontory. In half an hour she herself landed on this, but she had to use the oars to do so, and she could see no footprints on the sandy beach, and no sign that anyone else had landed there. It seemed likely that Mardok had been carried past the promontory into the open sea—in which case—unless some other survivors of the death-wave picked him up, he was almost certain to perish.

It was growing dark now and she had to abandon her search. Her experiences during the next few hours were terrible enough, though with Mardok's predictions in her mind she realized more quickly than Mark the full extent of the catastrophe. Very soon, she found an empty car in front of a wayside *osteria*, and drove through the night back to Rome. She thought it best to return there. A little later, she had made the hasty journey to Paris, of which Mark already knew, in search of the friend whom she believed to be staying at the Hotel Matignon. She had found her, dead, in her bedroom.

Her own car had broken down on the way, and she had taken another from a garage, but exchanged it for the two-seater, outside the Louvre. She had failed in her quest, as he knew, and returned to Rome, where—at first—she had felt exactly as Mark had felt, a sense of relief and escape among those incorruptible forms of beauty; a sense of silent companionship with the ideas and imaginations of the most lovable branch of the human race.

And then—one afternoon—she had suddenly come upon the scene in the Sistine Chapel and it had frightened her. As she told him of her panic-stricken flight he longed to lay his hand on hers, but he checked the impulse.

Then Mark took up the tale, and told her of the ticking watch in the little silver bag at the Louvre, and of his long search for her. Three separate times, before nine o'clock that evening, he called her Eve, but it was only a cheerful abbreviation, with no more reference to their predicament than her own use of his name "Mark".

American efficiency, coupled with the fact that water-power had been available, enabled them to explore the house together, after dinner, by electric light. Mark, seeing the house for the first time, and Evelyn who had been reviving her memories of it for twenty-four hours now, soon became aware that nothing could be more perfectly adapted to their circumstances. If the disaster had to take place, they could have found nothing better on earth though they had been led by angels. From Evelyn's point of view the fact that it had belonged to an American who was not only an artist but had fitted it with every conceivable labour-saving device, was conclusive.

From Mark's point of view, the delicious library, with its bronzes, its rows of carefully selected books, and its windows opening on the most exquisite seascape in the world, was—as he said—the best thing he had seen for a very long time.

Evelyn herself had taken possession of the late owner's best spare bedroom, while Mark settled down in a room which belonged, apparently, to the Brookes' eldest son; for his college photographs were on the walls, and there were books containing his name on shelves near the bed.

Mark tried to read himself to sleep that night, with one of these; but sleep delayed long; for his heart and mind were haunted by his first glimpse of that lonely little figure on the parapet, gazing out to sea. They were haunted by the quiet voice that had been making music for him all the evening, in that silent house among the hills, and by the quiet, dark grey eyes that had already made the world less lonely to him, and more beautiful, than he ever expected to find it again.

He was awakened next morning by a knock on the door, and a cheerful voice calling "breakfast". It was all ready on the verandah when he got down, a little ashamed that he had not been in time to help.

It was a new Evelyn that appeared this morning—very charming, but very efficient, in a blue shirt and "slacks". She was one of the fortunate young women who could wear those sailor-like garments with grace. Her slender, young figure, with its belt of plaited cord, and the rope-soled raffia sandals, looked as trim as if she had been piped on deck for boat-drill and had somehow, quite carelessly, slipped into the most suitable garments in a few seconds, with one of those artistically right results which can only come by nature. She must have been up and about for some time. To Mark's amazement, breakfast included not only coffee, fruit, shredded wheat and eggs, but fresh milk.

"I found two cows, with calves, at the home farm," Evelyn explained, "and I thought we needed the milk more than the calves did. Look at the cream on it."

"And honey, too," he exclaimed.

"From our own hives. They had a huge harvest last year, and there are rows of pots in the store-room."

She appeared to be talking quite cheerfully, and he also, tried to play his part. Then the curious waxen pallor of the bereaved seemed to creep over her young face, and she murmured those bitter words:

We'll sit contentedly,
And eat our pot of honey on the grave.

Suddenly, she covered her face with her hands and, with a sharp, shuddering cry, as though she were protesting against some fearful memory, she put her head down on the table and wept.

Mark rose and stood beside her. "Don't do that," he said abruptly, almost harshly, for he was afraid of tenderness; and indeed it was the harshness of his tone that pulled her together.

"I'm sorry," she said, but the streaming eyes with which she looked at him were estranged and seemed to be wondering at the new hardness of his tone.

"Don't you realize what has happened," he said, and the hardness of his voice was re-doubled. "Don't you realize that, even before the disaster, things had gone utterly beyond the use of tears?"

She saw the torment of all the past weeks, and the memory of five years of war in his eyes; and she knew instinctively that, while he was trying to save her from breaking down completely, he was also trying to master his own tenderness towards her.

"Forgive me," she said, in a low voice. "Forgive me, Mark."

"Forgive you," he said. "It won't be easy to forgive you for making the world look like the happy place it was intended to be. How can I ever forgive you, unless—unless so far as the past is concerned—we adopt your own brave motto: *le coeur se brise ou se bronze*? It is one thing or the other now. If we mourn till doomsday, we could never mourn enough for all that has happened. And how are we to mourn for the universe? Let the angels of God do that. I could weep for one or two, or a hundred, or a thousand; but how is it possible to weep for all mankind? Thank God, there was no one very near to either of us. They have gone, by their own act, to their own place; and, if there is anything in what we believe, they've gone to a better world. When I was a child I used to think it would be difficult to find it, and God knows what they'll make of it, if they can't do better there than here. But they can hardly be looked upon as lonely. They've joined all their predecessors at one stride. They've all gone together, to the endless generations that persecuted and burned and slaughtered one another before them; and, if what you believe is true—they've got another chance of purging themselves or being purged."

He stabbed his own heart with the brutality of his own words; but it saved both of them, and in a moment she had regained her composure.

"You were right to pull me up," she said. "When an end comes as this has come, it is impossible to think of it in the old terms of human loss. It's too big for that. I saw that all along, in the first few days. My first lesson was about the fourth day. I was groping about in Rome, hoping to find some other survivor. It was about dusk, and just to escape for a moment from the awful spectacle of the streets, I went into the Thermæ of Caracalla. You know those gigantic walls—how they seem to shut out everything that belongs to time. Their height made it darker inside; and, to my amazement, where I expected to find myself absolutely alone, there seemed to be an immense crowd, some of them propped up on seats, others sprawling on the ground. They all seemed to be looking in my direction except those who were immediately around me; and then I realized that I had walked on to a sort of open-air stage, and I was standing in the midst of the dead players. You know they used to perform operas in the Thermæ during the summer. Just as I realized what they were doing, a ray of light struck through one of the arches, and lit up the faces of the players. One of them was made up as a clown. It was Pagliacci, and he was lying on his back, grinning up at me, with a face like a great white moon. I wasn't frightened that time, though it was the uncanniest thing I ever saw; but it gave me my first lesson. During those awful scenes, afterwards, I used to remind myself that it was only a matter of a few years before all those millions would have died, in any case."

"And however peaceful the politicians might have been," he broke in, "the lifetime of one human being was all that those millions upon millions could expect individually. Most of them had already had the greater part of it. Out of the whole population alive in the world at any given moment of the past, one or two must have been the last to die. So I suppose

they might be called the only survivors of their own world."

"It was a way they had down south," she replied. "Almost all the old people used to call themselves the only survivors, especially after the gulf between the young and old began to widen. They could hardly see each other across it latterly. The difference is that this time the two survivors are not old, and that the rest have all gone simultaneously, and a year or two earlier than the average."

"There's another mysterious thing about it," he said, in an almost awe-struck tone, as he looked out over the sunlit hillside to the immeasureable expanse of the sea, "when the war broke out, and those endless casualty lists began to be published, I remember being appalled by an article in a newspaper which said, '*At last we are seeing human life at its true value*.' I know now that it was said in bitterness; but, at the time, I thought I had never seen a more wicked lie or a worse blasphemy. It seemed like a cynical abandonment of the very values that made the sacrifice possible. It sounds like a paradox; but it was because the individual life was so eternally valuable that it was worth while laying it down, in this world of time, for its own freedom, and its own eternal distinctions between right and wrong. But, as the war went on, our enemies imposed their own totalitarian views on us in other forms. We began to talk almost with contempt of the value of the individual life and to squander it almost as recklessly as we squandered material treasure, despite all the efforts that were made to counteract it. The gospel of 'eat and drink for to-morrow we die' sprang up amongst us, and, inevitably, led to other kinds of squandering too. All the values of life were lowered. But now, in some mysterious way, when one might have expected the values to be obliterated altogether, the very bigness of the catastrophe, the end that stares us in the face, seems to have restored them."

"I know," she said. "Many things that I could only half believe in, when there were all those crowds around, seem quite clear to me now. Have you ever seen the Grand Canyon? It is like coming to the edge of the universe, and seeing depth beyond depth of beauty and terror in the abyss. And the Abyss, as you know, is one of the old names of God."

"I see one thing very clearly that I've only dimly seen before," he said. "When the visible world is so completely deserted by mankind, it almost forces one to believe that they've only struck their tents and gone elsewhere. It almost forces one to believe in the reality of the invisible world. When all those magnificent cities were putting out the stars with their electric lights, we took it for granted that we were the roof and crown of things. But it's impossible for two little human beings to stand alone on a deserted planet and think that the whole universe of human thought, all that world of beauty and goodness and truth, which depended upon the existence of conscious minds and spirits, now depends upon themselves alone, and has no existence apart from them. I've been an agnostic most of my life; but, lately, just when the old women were beginning to say they couldn't believe in a God who allowed people to kill one another in war, I found that I could not believe in anything without Him. Right and wrong had no meaning unless His creatures had a free choice between them. Freedom is a terrible thing; but it's the only foundation on which God and man can meet."

"And that," she said, "is the key to the whole disaster. I've been thinking, too, and pretty hard during the last few years. The race came to destruction, my friend, because a great part of it had ceased to believe in just that unchanging ground, the only ground, for the distinction between right and wrong. It used the words in all its international disputes; but it didn't believe in the only reality that gave them any meaning: It had lost the religion of Christendom. You could see the tragedy of it in my own country, by picking up almost any book that gave a realistic picture of young America in its cups. It was more or less the same all over the world; degradation; brutality; and cheap insidious propaganda against every code of honour in private life. How could such people stand up and preach, self-righteously, about 'international morality', when they were convinced that 'morality' itself was as out-of-date as the novels of Charlotte M. Yonge."

"Exactly. The Western democracies, as they were called, happened to be in the right; but they didn't realize that right and wrong had no meaning at all if they were merely a bi-product of a fortuitous concourse of atoms or were destined to end as they began, in a cloud of hydrogen gas. Absurd little ephemeral bubbles of that kind can't claim to make those imperative distinctions, or draw up declarations of their 'rights' either. On those premises, the totalitarian powers were absolutely logical. They realized clearly enough that, if Christendom was founded on a delusion, they could make their own morality. We didn't know it at the time, but the war was between Christendom and the heathen; and we confused our banners and went down to hell together. The whole thing turned on the rejection of religion, and it was a stupid rejection. It began with perfectly justifiable reasons for rejecting the literal truth of primitive poems like Genesis, which, incidentally, have their own deep poetic truth; and it ended in a shallow world-wide assumption that the reality of God, as it has been demonstrated again and again by the profoundest philosophy the world has ever known, had somehow been exploded or superseded."

"It was one of those fatuous journalistic waves of fashion, with about as much thought behind it as the latest nigger-dance," said Evelyn. "The politicians, of course, talked of our 'common Christianity', and made their propaganda points out of it, knowing perfectly well in their hearts that the great majority had gone absolutely pagan."

"I don't think they all realized the falsity of the position," he said. "In my country, and I think in yours, there were millions of really good, sound people who lived, as far as they could, by the codes they had inherited from Christendom. Nobody realized that it was only the inherent goodness of these people, and the codes they had inherited, that kept things going, by a kind of impetus from the past; and that, intellectually, if they thought at all, they had surrendered to the neo-pagans. There was no fundamental belief behind the mere natural goodness; and when the real test came, and they were challenged on the ultimate foundation of things, the conventions, unsupported by any vital religious creed, were bound to crash. The whole thing turned on the reality of religion. I'm not sure of very much; but I'm absolutely sure of that, agnostic though I've been. You are more fortunate. You're a Catholic, aren't you?"

She shook her head gravely. "I've sometimes wished I were," she said. "One of my cousins was. He married a French-Canadian girl from Quebec. They came to Rome last fall and we went about together a great deal. We motored to Subiaco, and Assisi, and other places. You remember Abt Vogler: '*Painter and poet are proud in the artist-list enrolled*.' Well, it had been like that with me. I had been having my little adventures among the masterpieces of art while I was in Italy; but they were external, the adventures of a spectator from outside. Oh, I was moved and stirred, to the quick sometimes. But hers was something different. She was not a spectator. She was part of it—the thing itself. It was all alive to her, yesterday and to-day and for ever. She was a part of its life, and its life was outside Time. Giotto's frescoes were only masterpieces to me. But they were more than pictures to her. They were glorious windows in the dark walls of San Francesco, letting her look through the ages at her personal friends. She recognized them, not from books, but because she knew them personally. She talked to St. Francis like a friend in the field where he made his hymn to the sun. For me, the churches and cathedrals were like glorious picture-books, great illuminated missals where I could read myself blind with lovely songs and stories. But she, with her little rosary, was a part of the spirit that made them and made Christendom."

CHAPTER XIX

During the next week, they found that the house and garden, and the little farm, which was only a few hundred yards away, kept them fully occupied. They attended to the scattered livestock, which had suffered severely from the absence of its human masters, and had also done considerable damage by breaking through hedges and palings into vegetable plots and vineyards. The straying cows and calves were enclosed in a good hill-pasture, with a stream of clear water running through it. Hens were lured back to their runs with handfuls of grain. A lean dog which had vacillated at first between frightened hostility, and ecstatic tail-waggings, was brought into the house and soon made it quite clear that he had adopted them as his gods, and did not intend to let more than one of them out of his sight in future. He was a sorely-bedraggled pariah when they found him, and seemed to have been living on garbage behind some of the peasants' cottages. But, in a few days, he was the glossiest of collies, and his brown eyes were not only companionable, but curiously comforting in their acceptance of the world as it was. They christened him Rab. Then there were half a dozen goats that had been working havoc among the growing vines, and feasting royally on the tender shoots and leaves. Their bells made it easy to round them up, and another good and well-enclosed pasture was found for them.

At six o'clock, for two mornings in succession, without saying anything to Evelyn about it, Mark went out, and with the aid of a small handcart, removed the few bodies which lay in the open. The famous little city of rebellion could hardly have ranked as a populous village in recent years; and the piazza, streets and churches, those memorials of its greater days, had been almost entirely free from the physical horrors of the catastrophe. Apparently, too, there had been a meeting in the town hall, where almost all the inhabitants were assembled, except those who had been caught drinking at the various inns. Mark brought his pitiful loads of petrified scarecrows to join one or other of these companies, according to where he found them; and then he locked the doors and fastened the shutters on them all. It was a dreadful task, but it had its own palliatives. The curious chalk-like petrification and the extraordinary lightness of the figures that he lifted into his cart, robbed them of their humanity. They might have been so many Egyptian mummies; and their lightness almost suggested that they had been consumed to a grey ash. It seemed to him that they were still undergoing some strange change which had replaced the ordinary process of dissolution. It was not corruption but a sort of spontaneous cremation, as clean as the process which consumes a beech log in a slow fire. In some mysterious way it seemed to be affecting even their clothes, which were strangely crisp to the touch. He couldn't be sure that this was progressive; for he had not handled them before; but, subconsciously, he made odd comparisons as he lifted them; an Egyptian mummy; lean, brown, leaf-like wrappings; a Havana cigar; and now—oh, careful, careful, or the fine ash may break.

At the end of a week, Evelyn might have walked anywhere in the streets of Ravello. She could have explored its three or four little shops and visited any of its churches without being physically reminded of the catastrophe.

In the evenings, after Evelyn had gone to bed, Mark explored the books in the library. He rejoiced to find that, by careful selection, almost everything that a book-lover could desire had been packed into its shelves. There was no rubbish. All the best of the modern work was there—much of it scientific and philosophic, the whole of Darwin and Huxley, as well as later men like Rutherford, Eddington, and the younger Thomson. Best of all, there was the whole company of the older and assured masters of literature. There was a good stock of Greek and Roman classics with special attention to the Stoics. Cervantes, Balzac, Voltaire, Dickens and Scott were there in full array; and, so far as he could see, most of the great poets. France and Italy were both represented. There was the glorious national edition of d'Annunzio, the Sussex edition of Kipling, and the continental editions of Mark Twain, Emerson and Hawthorne.

Sometimes, in the evening, after dinner, Mark and Evelyn would shut out the loneliness of the earth, and fill their little lighted room with old friendships, by taking it in turn to read their chosen poets aloud, matching passage for passage.

The very nature of their circumstances often led them, in their reading and their talk, to look beyond the moment, and try very seriously to arrive at some conclusion about the meaning of human life and the world in which they seemed to be so isolated. They found a strongly poignant happiness, a happiness that was half pain, in some of those poets for whom the beauty of earth hinted at an unearthly loveliness elsewhere.

"I suppose all this is very escapist," she said one night.

"Is there any reason why we shouldn't escape," he answered. "After all, we are probably only escaping to our native land."

"Strange, isn't it," she said, "what a part that old home-sickness plays in all the great poetry and music and painting of the world? I wonder if there really is anything in that idea of pre-existence in a better world, the sort of thing that Wordsworth talks about in his *Intimations*:

Not in entire forgetfulness."

"I've often wondered," he said, "whether the old tale of the Fall wasn't a parable of something that had really happened on a much bigger scale in a world elsewhere. Perhaps we all faintly remember a better world from which we are exiled. We may have been exiled by our own failings, or in some cases even self-exiled as auxiliary volunteers in the cause of world redemption. Origen was a heretic, I suppose, but he had the biggest mind of any of the Greek fathers, and he thought that the Fall might have taken place in another world. He thought or, at least, he hinted that the Paradise we had lost was elsewhere, and that our task here was to find our way back to it, and help as many as we could along the way."

"I don't know enough to reason about it; but my instinct tells me that something very like that must be true. It fits in so perfectly with so many inspired passages and gleams of vision in the poets and mystics. But what must we do now to find the way?"

"Some of the great old thinkers had an answer to that," he said. "One of those who struck deepest for me was Plotinus, at the close of his glorious treatise on Beauty, where he sees Beauty as one of the attributes of the Supreme Being, just as Keats did, unconsciously, and in his own simpler way, when he said, 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty.' But Plotinus says that the goal of life is to attain to that vision; and this, of course, fits in perfectly, too, with all the great conclusions of the poets and mystics about the search for truth."

"And also with what Christians described as the goal and reward of all their struggles—the Beatific Vision which was in itself Paradise regained."

"Perhaps. I don't see how all that agreement of so many different minds can be accidental." He took down a translation of Plotinus from the philosophy section. "Listen to this," he said, and began to read:

"In the vision and possession of so lofty a loveliness, growing to its likeness, what Beauty can the soul lack? For This, the Beauty supreme, the absolute and the primal, fashions its lovers to Beauty and makes them also worthy of love.

"And for this the sternest and the uttermost combat is set before the souls; all our labour is for this, lest we be left without part in this noblest vision, which to attain is to be blessed in the blissful sight; which to fail of is to fail utterly.

"For not he that has failed of the joy that is in colour or in visible forms, not he that has failed of power or of honours or of kingdom has failed; but only he that has failed of only This; for whose winning he should renounce kingdoms....

"But what must we do? Where lies the path? How shall we come to the vision of the inaccessible Beauty, dwelling as if in consecrated precincts, apart from the common ways where all may see, even the profane?...

"Let us flee then to the beloved Fatherland.... The Fatherland to us is there whence we have come, and there is the Father.

"What then is our course? What the manner of our flight? This is not a journey for the feet; the feet bring us only from land to land.... All this order of things you must set aside: you must close the eyes and call instead upon another vision, the birth-right of all, which few turn to use....

"Withdraw into yourself and look ... act as does the creator of a statue that is to be made beautiful. He cuts away here, he smoothes there, he makes this line lighter, this other purer, until a lovely face has grown upon his work. So do you also: cut away all that is excessive, straighten all that is crooked, bring light to all that is overcast, labour to make all one glow of beauty, and never cease chiselling your statue until you shall see the perfect goodness established in the stainless shrine.

"This is the only eye that sees the mighty beauty. If the eye that adventures the vision be dimmed by vice, impure or

> weak, then it sees nothing. To any vision must be brought an eye adapted to what is to be seen, and having some likeness to it. Never did eye see that sun unless it had first become sunlike, and never can the soul have vision of the first Beauty unless itself be beautiful."

"I don't know anything about philosophy," she said, "and Plotinus is only a name to me; but the amazing thing again is just that deep inner agreement with what the simplest Christian believer has it in his power to understand in a more perfect form. Every one of the phrases you have read to me was brought to its final perfection in the deepest and most beautiful book ever written, the fourth Gospel. I don't understand it as philosophers understand things, but it's more than a book. It's music, absolute music, from the first phrase to the last; and music strikes deeper than the understanding.

"Your philosopher says that 'the Fatherland is there whence we have come, and there is the Father', but the music says, '*Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid: ye believe in God, believe also in me*.'

"*In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.*

"*And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.*"

She said it so simply, and so impersonally, that he—too—felt it in the depth of his being as only music can be felt.

That night, after she had gone upstairs, he closed his Plotinus, and opened the most beautiful book ever written.

CHAPTER XX

But all human beings live in two worlds: and the practical affairs of every day filled up the greater part of their lives. Their happy division of labour disclosed the fact that Mark who, in two campaigns, had often had to forage for food and had learned to cook it for himself over a brushwood fire, was particularly good at roasting a chicken. This was useful, because Evelyn had that delightful gift in a pretty woman, a healthy appetite; and roast chicken, preferably roast guinea fowl (which she sinfully preferred to pheasant) was her favourite non-vegetarian dish. Moreover, chickens rambled and scratched over all the cottage-gardens at Ravello, and there was downy promise of generations to come.

It has often been noticed that roast chicken and a bottle of good wine have had a remarkable influence upon the spirit and thought of a philosopher. It has been observed that, after he has absorbed these pleasing substances through a hole in his head, a process which familiarity has robbed of its strangeness (though Dante himself never imagined anything more weird) the philosopher will confront the world with renewed courage. This is not a concession to materialism. It is merely a realistic warning to those who would ignore the subtler relationships between the two worlds.

It was after an unusually good lunch, in which roast chicken, asparagus and a bottle of *Episcopio*, deliciously redolent of the native grape, had played their part, that Evelyn began to talk with a new and almost contemptuous courage of her flight from Rome. In her haste she had left certain personal treasures at her flat. She asked Mark if he would go back with her to secure them and bring them to Ravello. There were letters, photographs, books that had been given to her by friends, pictures that she had painted herself, and many other things that she was loath to abandon.

He was glad, for another reason, that she had made the suggestion. Faint as the chance now seemed of there being any other survivors in the world, there was even less chance of establishing contact with them through the very inadequate clue which had been left at Evelyn's flat in Rome. The notices he had fastened at the entrances of St. Peter's and in the Vatican gave no hint of their subsequent movements; and unless some personal friend or relation, knowing her address, were to make direct investigations, her little flat might remain unexplored till Rome itself was drawn into the earth's breast and buried. He thought it was certainly desirable to leave more messages in Rome, where they could not be overlooked by any possible explorers.

He gave this to Evelyn as an additional reason for their journey; and she agreed. Personally he would have been content if, for the rest of their lives, they could remain undisturbed in this Paradise among the hills; but there was another side to the matter now, which troubled him greatly. It was not because, in the most literal sense, she was "the only woman in the world" that Evelyn had come to fill his heart and mind. But she did fill them.

Moreover, he was a civilized man and Evelyn was a civilized woman. The problem could not be solved as easily as it might have been in the revolutionary romances of Rousseau, by a return to animal simplicity and running about in the woods on all fours, with a Foundling Hospital in the background.

Also, he happened to love this gallant young comrade of his. He loved her in the real sense of the word, which had nothing in common with what Sir Herbert Boskin would have called his "love-life". It was the true Eros which had mastered him, a power enthroned beside the eternal laws, the winged and naked god of the *Antigone*, "Love, unconquered in the fight". But it had happened, as quietly and gradually, as the light comes at daybreak; and it had found a simpler language in his own heart than the Greek poet had found. The thought that she stood alone on the planet with no other help than his own, made him afraid of dying lest she should find no helping hand or human face beside her when her own time came. He had lain awake, once, for half the night, staring at that nightmare.

All this made him eager to fall in with her suggestion of re-visiting Rome; for, if there were any considerable number of survivors across the Atlantic (where he felt that the best chance lay) they would certainly explore that central city of the world's history as soon as any other in Europe. He thought it best to concentrate on this, and then keep to the one definite place at Ravello where they might be found, rather than go wandering on a ghastly pilgrimage through a devastated world. But there were one or two other places on the way—Naples, for instance, which were not likely to be overlooked by any exploring survivors; and he could leave messages also at these, on the doors of Government buildings, or on the high altar of the chief church.

They made Rab free of the farm-yard and, after seeing that he was well provided with food and water, they stocked the large car that afternoon with everything they thought they might need on their journey. They set out very early the next

morning. Before leaving Ravello, Evelyn made an excuse for visiting the church. She said that she wanted to make sure that the lamp was alight in front of the altar. But she knew very well that the lamp was alight; for she had attended to it the day before. Mark was watching her from the door, without her knowing it, and he saw that all she did was to kneel at one of the dark benches. A beam of dusky light from one of the painted windows touched her bent head and crowned it, all woman as she was, with a glory not altogether of this earth, though no eye could see it but his own—unless, as he could almost have believed at that moment—the blind eyes of the stone angels above her could see it. He remembered what she had said of her cousin: "*I looked at it from the outside; but she was a part of it, and a part of the life that had made Christendom*."

He, too, had thought of religion, from the outside, as a philosopher, but there was something here which annihilated all pride of intellect. It gripped him by the throat and tugged at his heart which, like the hearts of most modern men, was full of an unrealized hunger and thirst for something that the world had long lost, something that materialism could never satisfy. Humility had never been his virtue; but he felt it now to the roots of his being. He moved quietly forward, like a shadow through the shadows of that many-memoried place, and knelt at the dark bench beside her.

She had told him that she did not belong any more than he did to the Church in which she was kneeling; and, as for himself, he was sure of very little more than that he believed in God. He believed that the nature of God had been most perfectly revealed to man by the Founder of the Christian religion. He believed in the *philosophia perennis* as a guide through the chaotic bewilderment of modern thought, and the central depository of the deepest wisdom of the ages, the wisdom that is unaffected by the service of weight and measure. But here there was something more. There was no question now of the rites and ceremonies which had sometimes repelled him; there was no audible word to be misinterpreted or questioned or doubted. But, in this utter silence of a forsaken world, with only the lamp burning before the altar, and that lonely little kneeling figure beside him, there was a sense of something unutterably sacred, something that still spoke of God's tabernacle among men.

They rose together and went out to the car without speaking. It was not until they were winding down the road to Amalfi that she said, "I'm glad you did that."

"I'm glad I followed you," he replied. After a long pause he went on, "That lighted lamp gave me a sense of home."

"When I arrived in Ravello," she said, "I did what my cousin would have done, and went into the church. She called it 'making a visit', exactly as if she were going to have a few minutes' conversation with a friend. You can understand how that appealed to me at such a time. But when I got inside, it was all so dark and cheerless I missed that friendly little light. So I attended to it. I had a notion that it was never supposed to go out."

"I suppose no other light has ever seemed so friendly or filled so many troubled souls with peace," he said, "and I suppose it has been burning somewhere for over a thousand years. I'm glad you looked after it."

"I have another feeling about it," she said, "now that all the human disputations are gone, one sees the reality behind it all; and I somehow feel certain that the reality behind that little light is continuing somewhere else in the world at this moment. I can't explain it; and I've never felt it before in the same way; but the thing it represents was bound to go on. Protestants believed that as well as Catholics. Somehow, this new isolation brings us face to face with the fact that we do belong to two worlds, the ordinary world around us where things kill one another, and the world of light to which the best part of us belongs."

She broke off, hesitating for a word, and he gave it under his breath—the "*Civitas Dei*."

"Yes," she said, "and we're members of it, and it can't come to an end, even on the earth, while any human life lasts. Somewhere on the planet—at this moment, it's going on." Again she broke off, and after another long pause, he asked, "You really believe that?"

"It's one of the promises which can't be broken," she said, "and it reminds me of it to keep our own lamp alight."

"It would be a strange turn of events," he said, "if—one day—a ship arrived from the New World, bringing the Faith back to the Old."

They were turning out of Amalfi now, into the coast road for Sorrento, with the old monastery looking down upon them, on the right, and on their left the "immeasurable tremor of all the sea."

The moment seemed to have its own symbolism, conveying through their physical surroundings a strange new hope.

CHAPTER XXI

They reached Rome late in the afternoon and drove at once to Evelyn's flat. The unchanged state of the streets, where they both recognized certain huddled bodies that they had seen before in exactly the same positions, and certain cars that had crashed into shop windows, gave them a curious sense of entering a petrified city of arrested motion. It was the sinister opposite of the little town of the Grecian Urn:

> And, little town, thy streets for evermore
> Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
> Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.

When they arrived at the hall door of Via Margutta 49, Mark noticed that there was now no grim mask of death staring out of the porter's box. He peered into it, and saw only a crumpled copy of the *Osservatore Romano*, a bottle and glass, and a mound of fluffy grey ash, as though the slow process of that spontaneous cremation which he thought he had only imagined had here actually finished its work.

He inwardly thanked God for what seemed a real possibility that the death-wave was going to finish its work cleanly; and it seemed to be a good omen that the first completed instance of it should have happened at this particular door.

Upstairs, in her flat, Evelyn made tea; and, afterwards, while he smoked and looked at her pictures, she filled a trunk with what she called her "treasures". She introduced him, by photographs, to her father and mother, who had gone down with the neutral ship; and in both of their faces he discovered fore-shadowings of her own. She had the father's broad brow, and upright carriage; and the mother's spiritual eyes. She told him little anecdotes about them, as she remembered them in her New England childhood. While she talked and packed, he picked up a book that lay near him. It was an old edition of Whittier that had belonged to her father. It was inscribed, "To my darling little Evelyn, from her loving Dad, who hopes she will some day find as good a friend in this book as he did."

Turning the pages Mark could almost see her father and read his character, through the passages he had marked and annotated in the margin. At the head of one of the poems Evelyn herself had written in pencil, "This was my darling Dad's favourite," and she had doubly marked one of the stanzas in it, with a day of a month and year. One of these dates was far back in her teens when the neutral ship had been sunk. The second was a week after the wave of death. The stanza was a very simple one—to some modern minds it would have seemed almost childishly simple. To Mark's, and he had read more widely and deeply than the majority of his generation, it went as deep as the universe. It covered his own agnosticism as completely as it expressed her father's faith, a faith bequeathed to the child who now so sorely needed it.

> I know not where His islands lift
> Their fronded palms in air,
> I only know I cannot drift
> Beyond His love and care.

She was talking, almost gaily now, of a visit she had made, long ago, to Uncle John in Kentucky, and a corn-shucking dance she had seen there; and Mark bent over the book pretending to read on, lest she should see the mist in his eyes. She told him of the coloured people who lived on Uncle John's plantation, just as in the old slave days, but were as devoted to Uncle John as any Highland clan to its chief.

"There was a bell outside the house, and when you rang it, they all came together, exactly as in the old days. Uncle John called them one evening, and asked them to sing for us. We all sat in the porch and rocked in time—America invented the rocking-chair, you know—while they sang 'Swing low, sweet chariot', and the moon was coming up over the cotton fields like a big, red water-melon."

It was a photograph of Uncle John's "old colonial" house that recalled all these things, and she put it on the arm of his chair, so that he could look at it if he wished. He had never heard her talking with such apparent happiness of spirit. In the recovery of her "treasures", she had recovered at least a semblance of what must have been her natural light-heartedness. She was so utterly free from self-consciousness, and so confident in his own understanding, that he felt more poignantly than ever his own responsibility for her. The marked passage at which he was still looking became a

living whisper from the dead father—

> I know not where His islands lift
> Their fronded palms in air!

He longed to tell her of his human love, but he felt—only too poignantly—that, in their fearful circumstances, this might be to annul all the care that had been invoked by one to whom she had been everything. They must be friends, but they could be no more. Crushing the impulse to take her in his arms, he bent his head over the book as if he were absorbed in it, though he could hardly see the page. He answered her only in subdued monosyllables, and in a way that belied the aching intensity with which he was listening to what she said. Once or twice she had glanced at him, as though she were puzzled—or troubled. Suddenly she stopped her pretty flow of anecdote, in the middle of a sentence, and startled him by saying, "I won't interrupt your reading any more."

He looked up at her, and discovered that she was hurt and angry.

"What do you mean?"

"Only that I should not have inflicted all those reminiscences on you," she said. "There was no reason why you should be interested. But I thought, as we were so completely alone in the world, you might have liked to hear about one or two people who were once everything to me."

He stood up and held out the book to her. "This is what I was reading," he said. "I was looking at this marked passage by which you have twice written a day of the month and a year. The first was when the neutral ship went down. The second was a week after death had come to this world of ours."

"And the third?" she said.

"There is no third," he replied.

"You think I am afraid," she said. "Just as you thought I didn't know you loved me."

In all his thoughts, through all the silence and restraint of the last week, and the continual checking of words and phrases that might have revealed too much—his repressed love for her had been aching like a pulse of physical pain. It was only now, as she stood facing him, that he realized what had happened. He stood amazed at the glory of the knowledge in her eyes. He felt infinitely humbled at the discovery that, while he had been pretending to read a printed page, she had been reading his very heart.

She took the printed book from his hands. With a little silver pencil she wrote, for the third time, the day of the month and the year, on the margin of the marked passage. Then she gave it back to him.

"The first," she said, "was when that neutral ship went down. The second, as you pointed out, was a week after death had come to this world of ours. But the third? Is that death, too?"

"Oh, my dear, dear love," he cried, and he knew not how, but she was in his arms.

"He is not a blind god," she said.

CHAPTER XXII

The next morning, immediately after breakfast, they made a dozen large copies of the message they were to leave in Rome, giving their names, and the place at which they were to be found—the Palazzo Rufolo, Ravello.

As soon as they were completed they took them down to the car and set out on their task. Perhaps it was because they were happier this morning, but there seemed to be fewer of those dreadful obstructions in the streets. Several times, Evelyn touched Mark's arm and pointed to what appeared to be little mounds of grey ash, hardly larger than mole-hills.

They went first to the entrance to St. Peter's, where Evelyn stood silent for a moment before the messages which Mark had placed there on his former visit.

"Those can be torn up now," he said, as he fastened the new messages to left and right of the inner doors, where weather could not affect them.

"Torn up," she said. "They are going with my other treasures to Ravello."

They drove next to the Quirinal, where everything, at first, seemed to be deserted; for the sentries, if they had been there, were now represented only by a few of those small grey mounds of soft ash. Apparently the process was quicker in the open air than indoors, for they passed one or two uniformed bodies which showed no signs of change in the stately rooms of the palace. They fastened the largest of their notices to the frame of a Velasquez, from which the features of a former king of Italy looked down on another king who was crumpled up at his writing desk, and seemed to be on the point of crumpling up as completely as the poor porter at number forty-nine.

They intended to leave another notice at the headquarters of the Duce; but, on their way there, they happened to pass the best jewellers' shop in Rome. The sun was streaming into the windows, and making so pretty a play of colour over the Aladdin's garden within that Mark stopped the car and made Evelyn alight.

"This is the place for the ring," he said.

"Idiot!" said Evelyn, laughing, but she did not refuse the invitation.

It was a very handsome establishment that they entered. The only attendant was a shrivelled mummy whose ashen body seemed to be held together only by its once fashionable and well-fitting morning-coat, and this was already crumbling as though it had been scorched in a fire. Mark drew a Chinese screen before it, so that it should not distract Evelyn's attention. Then he began to open the glass cases and spread the stones of Aladdin's garden before her—'*all-coloured clustering gems instead of fruit*'—engagement rings, ear-rings, bracelets, necklaces, and all kinds of dainty brooches under her pretty little nose.

> Le superflu, chose très nécessaire
> A réuni l'un et l'autre hémisphère.

"It is very important," he said, "that you should choose something you really like."

Eve toyed for a moment with a five-hundred-guinea diamond ring, and a pearl necklace that would have laid the Queen of Sheba in a brown lump at Solomon's feet. Then remembering that there would be no other woman to outshine, and only Mark to dazzle, she laid them down and asked him a somewhat impertinent question. "Were you a frightfully rich man, Mark?"

He replied with an absurd gesture, a sweep of the hand, indicating that all the jewels in the place, as well as Rome, were hers if she desired them. But fooling was checked by a light hand on his arm; and looking into her face, he saw to his surprise that her eyes had grown moist and dark and that she was looking up at him with a child-like gravity.

"I want to know what you could have afforded."

"In the old days, you mean. Oh, very little, I suppose. This, perhaps, at a pinch." He pointed to a ring valued at about sixty pounds. "I was making only about three hundred a year when the last war broke out. Of course, I hoped to make more later on."

Evelyn picked up a modest little ring, with a single sapphire set in tiny diamonds. "It's terribly extravagant of me, Mark," she said. "It would cost nearly twenty pounds; but, as I'm to wear it all my life, I think I should like to have this."

And then, oddly enough, Mark became aware of a lump in his throat which he could only disguise by saying, rather croakily: "Very well, Eve, if you like it; and now, what about a pearl necklace."

She gave him the prettiest smile in the world, and deliberately chose a string of coloured beads, valued at about three English pounds.

"Will you please give me this," she said. Mark linked it round her neck. "Now I feel I have a real present," said Evelyn. "So I can say 'Thank you, darling'."

Mark kissed her.

Before they went to the car Mark picked out another ring, a small band of gold which he asked her to try on. It fitted perfectly, and he put it away in his breast-pocket; for Evelyn decided that the ceremony was to take place at Ravello, with the little lamp as witness.

As they drove away, to the headquarters of the Duce, there seemed to be no obstructions at all on the streets, and he heard her humming quietly, under her breath, to the rhythm of the engine:

> "I will make you brooches and toys for your delight
> Of bird-song at morning and star-shine at night.
> I will make a palace fit for you and me
> Of green days in forests, and blue days at sea."

The next of their messages in Rome they laid on the sacrosanct table of the Duce himself, at the end of that long shining room, where the bronze head of his formidable predecessor—Mussolini—glowered down on them, with outthrust jaw.

Evelyn stood unconcernedly staring at that grim visage of hammered bronze.

"You don't really mind, do you?" she said, and patted it, as though it had been a pet mastiff.

"Look, Mark," she said, "he's rather a dear. He's not really scowling. It was only the sculptor's idea of making him look brutally strong. If you take him sideways, like this"—she drew Mark by the arm to look at the bronze from another angle—"you see, he was really an idealist, and a bit of a poet."

The last of their messages they left at that radiant palace of the Renaissance, the Palazzo Farnesina, which had been the home of the Royal Academy of Italy for over a hundred years. One of their messages they fastened at the entrance; and one in the private room of Evelyn's friend, Professor Antonelli. As President of the Academy Signor Antonelli was the successor of a long and illustrious line. This room was one of the places to which scientific explorers would certainly go, if any of them had survived; for the Royal Academy of Italy had always been in the tradition of Leonardo. Art, literature and science there went hand in hand; though the marble face of Galileo, with his blunt Socratic nose, seemed to be looking somewhat enviously at the more handsome marble features of Marconi, while, behind him, the "Polyphemus" of Sebastiano del Piombo pleaded for the love of Galatea on the painted wall.

As Mark and Evelyn entered the big sun-flooded room on the ground floor, with its tall windows opening on to the garden, he stood silent for a moment, looking up at the exquisite rendering of the story of Psyche, designed by Raphael, which seemed to dissolve the ceiling into another world with a radiant Greek sky. For a moment, in their strange isolation, he felt that Evelyn and himself had wandered into the lovely old legend, and that their own story was a kind of play within the play of that radiant palace. There, through sunlit clouds, he caught glimpses of her wanderings on earth, and her ascent to the dwelling-place of the gods. There, he saw her arrival on the mountain height of the gods; and there, on Olympus, she drank the cup of immortality. There, in the last scene of all, Psyche—the human soul—became the bride of love, the undying; and at her wedding, too, the gods were the only guests, and all the Muses sang.

Every one of those things passed through his mind; but, being very much a mortal himself, he could only feel his own unworthiness of the goddess beside him; and, like the bluntest of Englishmen, despite his Parisian mother, he could only grunt, "I didn't know Raphael had painted you." The next moment he was hastily calling her attention to the head of Marconi, for he suddenly realized that the Psyche on the ceiling was not only entirely beautiful but entirely Greek.

In Professor Antonelli's room, when they had fastened their placard to the only picture, they casually examined a glass-fronted book-case in which a number of documents, some of them rather beautifully bound, had been preserved. One entire shelf in more workmanlike bindings related to inventions for use in war. They were mostly monographs by Mardok.

"Had we but life enough and time," said Mark, "I should like to go all over Europe, destroying every record of that kind."

"We can make a beginning, anyway," said Evelyn, and set the example by tearing to pieces a masterly treatise on the strategic posting of waiters in foreign restaurants where, of course, they would be of almost decisive effect in any future bacteriological war. As the writer said, it was remarkable that nobody had thought of so simple a device hitherto.

This masterpiece of military science they patiently tore to very small pieces, and then frightened a black cat in the garden by scattering the fragments to the breeze through an open window. It was only a symbolic gesture, but their youthful exuberance found some satisfaction in it.

On another shelf they found a bound volume of letters from d'Annunzio, a former President; and this, with a collector's eagerness, Evelyn decided that she must add to her treasures for Ravello. There was also a volume of documents relating to the Keats House, mostly reports of speeches that had been made there on various occasions by Italian and English men of letters. Not far from this, they found a book beautifully printed, in a limited edition, for private circulation by the Academy itself. It had been issued with Mussolini's portrait as a frontispiece, eight months before the war of 1939. It was an Italian translation of a poem by an English writer of that generation, whose name was unknown to Mark and Evelyn, and it had one or two very odd historical points about it. Some extremely private letters from Mussolini were bound up with the volume. In one of these he made a caustic remark about the famous Italian poet who had almost anticipated his leadership: "*d'Annunzio is a rotten tooth. He must be filled with gold or extracted.*"

Another expressed his personal dislike of Hitler, a dislike almost amounting to repulsion. He said, regretfully enough, "*It is a tragedy that France has thrown Italy into the arms of Prussia. France is our natural ally, and England our natural friend.*"

Another was to the translator of the poem, telling him he wished it might also appear in the *Giornale D'Italia*, so that it might be "read by the poorest Italian peasant over his evening meal of polenta", as well as by the recipients of the finer edition.

The poem was entitled "*L'Inghilterra all' Italia*", and one of its most puzzling features to Mark and Evelyn was this. Italy, in the early part of 1939, was generally assumed to be supporting the Nazi programme of aggression and broken pledges. But this privately printed book had been prepared in 1938. It had been issued by the Royal Academy of Italy at Mussolini's personal wish in January 1939; and it had been circulated privately by the Academy, during the most critical months before the war of that year. It dwelt, primarily, on the value of England's pledged word, in a world where pledges were daily broken. The reference to Nazi methods were quite clear; and the conclusion was that the friendship of England and Italy, with their common regard for law, "The Roman law that lives in England's mighty spirit still", might even yet save the world from chaos.

"Odd, isn't it," said Mark. "Almost everyone in England at that time thought that Mussolini was on the other side. They all coupled him with the Nazis. But look at the foreword to this book, written when the Axis was supposed to be at its strongest, by one of Mussolini's most ardent henchmen, the Vice-President of the Academy of that day. He finds the verses about England's pledged word 'prophetic'. 'E non moranno' (And they will not die) he says."

"'E non moranno,'" said Evelyn. "Poor poet; and we didn't even know his name. Probably he was like all the others.

> "And ever was the heart within him hot
> To gain the land of matters unforgot."

"Well, it seems to have come true, for the present," said Mark. "He little thought that, a few generations later, the entire population of the world would be reading his book."

"And in the limited edition, too," said Evelyn.

They had a picnic lunch in the garden of the Academy, under the dark floating rafts of the great cedar. Afterwards, when Mark had lit his pipe, Evelyn read extracts from the poem in Italian, and Mark echoed them in English. They made a duet of it, quite unconscious of the fact that with perfect naturalness they were doing exactly what Theocritus and Virgil made their lovers do, two thousand years ago. Evelyn began it with,

"*Quando la primavera tomo*
All' Italia quest' anno,"

and Mark, interjecting "Not too quickly", replied,

"When spring turned home
To Italy this year."

Then they kept it up alternately, Evelyn (as befitted her sex) supplying the southern music, and Mark the plain northern words.

"*E fra le sue rocce*
E gli anfrattuosi colli
I colti di frumento
Rinverdirono tutta la bruna terra."

"And in among her rocks
And craggy hills,
The plots of wheat
Made all the brown earth green."

"*Quando sui pergolati delle corti*
E sulle bianche mura
Ciocche di glicine
Stesero in lungo i delicati germogli."

"When over the trellised court-yards
And white walls,
Wistaria clusters
Trailed their delicate blooms."

"*E fiorenti ciliegi*
Coruscarono come rosee nubi
Di tra gli argentei ulivi."

"And flowering cherry-trees
Gleamed like rosy clouds
Among the silvery olives."

"Oh, but 'gleamed' isn't nearly so good a word as 'coruscarono'," she protested.

"What English word *could* equal the Italian just there," he said.

"None. I agree."

"*Quando la vigne*
Le vecchie e nodose vigne
Ringiovanirono."

"When the vines,
The old and knotted vines,

Grew young again."

"*E quelle giovani,*
Lungo migliaia di valli
Distesero, esultanti,
Le braccia, e si presero per mano;
Grandi memorie si destarono——"

"And the young vines
Along a thousand valleys,
Stretched out their arms exulting
And caught hands
Great memories woke."

"*E di su i mari suoi foschi*
L'Inghilterra ricordo e rimiro
L'Italia, ancora——"

"And over her dim seas
England remembered also, and beheld
Italy, once again."

"*Ma ora,*
Il nostro ricordare, O Italia,
Non è di cose transitorie."

"But now
This deep remembrance, Italy, is not
Of things that pass away."

"*Perchè da te, da te*
Agostino porto la croce,
Ed espiro il verbo
E tu fosti per noi, in arte e in poetare,
Italia, una seconda Terra Santa."

"Because from thee, from thee
Augustine bore the cross, and breathed the word
And thou hast been for us, in art and song,
A second Holy Land."

"*Noi sappiamo di chi i piedi*
I trafitti piedi, fra i cipressi,
Comminarono presso Assisi sui colli umbri
E lasciarono quello splendore di bellezza
Sulle tue mura
Simile all' ultima luce del nostro Paradiso perduto,
Al morente tramonto dell' anima dell' uomo."

"We know whose feet,
Whose pierced feet, between the cypresses,
Walked by Assisi, on the Umbrian hills.
We know whose passing shadow cast that glow
Of beauty on thy walls,
Like the last light of our lost Paradise,

The dying sunset of the soul of man."

"*Sia luce, O Italia, una volta ancora!*
Non una gloria che muore,
Ma un giorno nato di fresco."

"Let there be light, O Italy, once again.
No dying glory,
But a day new-born."

Then came a passage which described how a large part of the world had ground its altars into dust. It had proclaimed that there were no religious or ethical foundations in the universe; and had thus destroyed the basis of every real and imperative distinction between right and wrong, by declaring such distinctions to be merely "anthropomorphic". In such a world, the poet asked, when it was really put to the test, what word, what bond, what oath could hold or bind?

Historians in distant ages, he hoped, might be able to look back and say, "la parola dell' Inghilterra"; that England, at least, had kept her word; and that Italy re-arisen, was at her side.

"*Che, in questa fede*
La fiaccola della legge fu piantata
Nel centro del mondo, pari alli fiamma di un ara
Ardente per sempre nella Citta di Dio."

"That, in this faith,
The light of law was set
At the world's centre, like an altar-flame,
Burning for ever in that City of God."

"You see," said Evelyn, "he had his altar-flame, too. I think we ought to take him back to Ravello with us. Besides, I must have the Duce on d'Annunzio for my collection."

"It throws a curious light on the mind of Mussolini, and on the English bewilderment about it," said Mark. "I'm beginning to think that nobody, in these international matters, could ever have known what his opposite number was really thinking about."

"The classical instance," said Evelyn, "was Colonel House, the right-hand man of Wilson, in the war of 1914. He was greatly troubled, as I believe you English were, about the phrase 'too proud to fight'; but he was not troubled enough to look up the speech and discover what the rest of the sentence was. Neither he, nor the English, nor any of Wilson's friends, ever asked if there happened even to be a verb in that sentence. My father had a volume of Wilson's speeches; and it was one of his dear old marked passages. Can you guess what that phrase led up to? I've asked hundreds of people, and they never can. It leads directly up to this: *America must not be looked upon as a country that will not fight*. Think of all the tauntings, and maliciousness, and international bad feeling caused by the omission of that context, in the cabled report."

"It could not have been a deliberate omission," said Mark, "unless the cable was sent by enemy propagandists. We had everything to lose by it."

"Of course, it was not deliberate," said Evelyn. "It was just that horrible thing, the journalistic mind, so quick on the trigger that it usually shot the cat instead of the cat-burglar. It was all done by brains that had no time to think. It had nothing to do with journalism as a profession. My father was a journalist, and he edited a great newspaper—the *Boston Evening Transcript*—for more than a quarter of a century. After that, for ten years, he edited the *New York Times*. He used to say that the journalistic mind was the disease of true journalism, and death to the greatness of any newspaper. It was certainly one of the things which brought civilization down. It was deadly to truth. It formed its opinions on books by cutting the pages and smelling the paper-knife. It labelled its contemporaries in politics, art and literature with ready-made labels and stuck them on in a hurry, like a railway porter in a rush hour, and then judged them and all their sayings, doings or writings by the label and the label alone.

"It jumped to all its conclusions like that, and it didn't care a hoot if they were wrong, for nobody read yesterday's newspaper; and, if the readers themselves went off the rails in the general fog, well, a railway accident makes good copy for the next morning. It had to produce scores of headlines every twenty-four hours whether there was any real news or not; and every foreign office in the world was continually being rattled by its habit of ringing all the bells and running away. It provided the entire mental food of the greater part of the population, and the casualties were appalling. My father used to say that poison used scientifically and in small quantities might be medicinal, but you can't use it as a breakfast food."

CHAPTER XXIII

With all the treasures of Rome at their disposal, there was very little that they wanted to take back to Ravello, except the personal "treasures" at Evelyn's flat.

"And I used to think there were all kinds of things I wanted," she said, as they drove about the fashionable shopping district, while shining mile after mile of plate-glass windows, with all their contents so cunningly disposed to entrap the heart of woman, went streaming by unheeded.

"There is just one picture, not very large, in the Pinacoteca at the Vatican, I should like to take back with us. You can give it me for a wedding present, if you like, Mark. It's that lovely 'Repose during the Flight into Egypt' by Barocci. Oh, and there is that exquisite head of a sleeping child in the Museo Nazionale. No other bit of marble has ever breathed so sweetly and drowsily. I watched it once until I thought I saw the lashes moving on the cheek. It's quite small. We *must* take that with us. I should love to have it in the room which is to be my studio, on the north side. It shall sleep on a purple cushion near the window. But, isn't there anything *you* want to take?"

"Nothing, I can think of," he said, "except you, and of course your treasures."

"Mark," she said, "I believe you're rather a darling. I was afraid you might vote for the Laocoön. Do you mean to say there isn't even a book you'd like?"

"There seemed to be everything at Ravello."

"Well, there's just one rather shabby little book in the Keats House I've always thought I should like—Leigh Hunt's *Jar of Honey from Mount Hybla*. It's worth about thirty lire, and it could easily be replaced, anyway. I think we might take that, don't you?"

There was not much more, and they were all "quite small things"; but, before the afternoon was over, it was clear that they would require a larger car. For ordinary purposes there was always the small cream-coloured car which they had left at Ravello; but a bigger and really good car might be useful in many ways.

So they went to a glittering showroom, near the Piazza Colonna, where the latest motor-cars were looking at their own reflections in half an acre of polished floor. Three smart scarecrows in morning-coats and patent-leather shoes were taking a dusty siesta among the latest models; and theirs was probably the first dust that had ever drifted on to that immaculate floor. One of the scarecrows must have been irresistible as a showman before his flesh and bones had begun to flake into ash. The ingratiating grin was not wholly obliterated, and he had a way with him even now. He seemed to be pointing with a sketchy forefinger of delicate emphasis to a Rolls-Royce coupé, as the very thing for a honeymoon.

"For the occasion, Signora, what could be more appropriate." But Mark shepherded Evelyn to another part of the showroom, and as there was no need to consider ways and means, they speedily decided on the best car in the place.

That night there was a wild thunderstorm. About one o'clock Mark started up from the couch in the sitting-room at the flat, thinking—for one awful moment—that the former world had returned, and that hell was being rained from the skies on sleeping children, as in the old days. There was something very terrible about this rending of the midnight skies over the deserted planet; but it was not so terrible as the memory of what man had done to man, and to the soul of man. Indeed, its terror was only in its vivid illumination, its endlessly echoing resurrection of those appalling memories. There were moments when the whole block of buildings, and Rome itself, seemed to reel under a crackling and bursting barrage of high-explosive; and the intervals of silence made so strange and profound a contrast that—to a less-imaginative man than Mark—they might have seemed to be waiting for the annihilation of the planet. It was as though the earth were being bombarded by the whole implacable circle of the fixed stars.

In the midst of one of the fiercest detonations, the door of the sitting-room opened and Evelyn appeared in her nightgown, carrying a lighted candle. Her eyes were wide open, but she was walking in her sleep.

"They've begun again," she whispered, "they've begun again——"

Her voice was drowned by another thunderclap, but Mark knew only too well the fearful thought that was in her mind. He was afraid of startling her by a reply, and he watched, without speaking, while she carried the candle across the

room to a niche containing a small statue of the Madonna and Child. She placed the lighted candle before this; and Mark felt, in an amazing way, that the room was transfigured and filled with a strange peace, in which the quiet symbolism of her unconscious act, as in a little illuminated picture by some world-comprehending master, counted for more than all the physical vastness and material forces of the midnight universe that surrounded them. He was amazed at the beauty that seemed to flow from that simple act of hers, as peace and light flowed from the very stillness and smallness of the candle-flame amid so huge a conflict of the elements. The real and deeper values of the cosmos, by contrast with the outer chaos, had somehow been focused into clear visibility, in the little circle of untroubled light which enclosed the blue-robed Madonna and the Holy Child, and the lit face of Evelyn gazing up at them, under its luminous crown of misty gold.

Gradually the thunder died away in the distance, leaving only the steady rush of the rain behind it, as though—at last—the overburdened heart of the universe had found relief in a flood of tears.

Evelyn listened to it gravely; then, quietly as she had entered, she stole back to her room, leaving the candle alight before the Mother and Child. He could see, by her face as she went, that peace had returned to her.

It was a "blest candle" that had been given to her at the Sacred Heart Convent of the Trinità de' Monti, on Candlemas day. Curiously enough, there was a custom, in Catholic countries, of lighting a "blest candle" during a thunderstorm. Mark knew nothing of this at the time; and, if he had known it, he would have felt certain, of course, that it made no difference to the thunder, or to the danger—if there had been any danger—from the lightning. Nevertheless, he was conscious of another and deeper difference that really had been made. Perhaps it was like the effect of drawing curtains across a window, to exclude the night and the nothingness outside, and to enhance the human values within. Perhaps it was like the friendly firelight on the floor or wall of a room—he remembered it so vividly—at home in England, when he was a boy convalescing from some illness.

He thought of it in medical terms. "It was a psychological alternative", which was only another way of saying that it really had made a difference, after all—not to the storm and the desolate night outside, but to his own inward peace, and the current of his thoughts, and the way in which he looked at things. The blind chaotic storm outside was as nothing to the values represented and illuminated here, values that were strangely reassuring about the nature of the universe. In that small circle of light there was not only a representation of the Mother and Child. There was a quiet reminder, a quiet assertion of the supreme values of humanity against the menacing and immense darkness without. He remembered some boyish verses of his own.

The moon that sways the rhythmic seas
The wheeling earth, the marching sky,
I ask not whence the order came
That moves them all as one.
These are your chariots. Nor shall these
Appal me with immensity.
I know they carry one heart of flame
More precious than the sun.

It was useful, sometimes, to be reminded of such things. There, of course, was one of the secrets of the difference that it had made to himself. It was because of his amazing discovery of love in a shattered world that his thoughts were streaming so endlessly on. But they were streaming through light now, in a broad peaceful river, instead of through darkness in a turbulent and broken torrent.

For a long time he lay awake, watching those softly illuminated figures, which so simply conveyed their suggestion of the vital communion between the Supreme Being and His creatures. It had been the central idea of Christian Art for nearly two thousand years. Sometimes he had thought that, if the modern mind, so bewildered with its new accumulations of physical knowledge, had been big enough to survey and grasp the whole of its own gains, it would have recovered its lost centre in the divine. There had been fleeting signs of this in many isolated thinkers. He remembered a sentence from Marett, one of the anthropologists at whose feet his father had sat:

"*It is no sacrifice of the mother to suckle her child. Nay, it is the nearest thing to communion on God's earth, and may therefore stand as the perfect symbol of peaceful and bountiful love, as it might be, not only in the*

Communion of Saints, but likewise among us poor human beings. Charity is no late message sent down to civilized folk. It is something that whispers in the very life-blood of the race...."

Perhaps this was why women had so intuitive an understanding of the sacramental side of religion, an understanding so much more vital and realistic, so much richer and deeper, than any intellectual analysis. Their own bodies were the gates through which the mystery of new life was brought into the world. It was their own direct experience of Motherhood, its pangs and its joy, at once so mysterious and so realistic, that gave them their immediate grasp of the incarnational and sacramental elements of religion, and left so many of them on their knees before the incarnate Word, when the rest of the world had gone its pagan and materialistic way.

The softly illuminated figures on which Mark's eyes were fixed seemed to bring all that mystery into clear focus. They gave form and definition to the secret of the whole creation; a secret utterly lost in the dim unending vistas of Space and Time. It was only a representation in painted wood, just as—in one sense—Milton's Paradise Regained was only printer's ink and paper; but, at least, it conveyed and symbolized the way in which human love might enfold the divine.

Then, as his eyes closed at last for sleep, the face of Evelyn came back to him again ... her face, asleep to earth, but awake to heaven, gazing up at the Mother and Child. He had almost ceased to believe that there was anything good in human nature; but his eyelids pricked with tears at the recollection of her look, in that little circle of heavenly light.

Very early the next morning, for they wished to reach Ravello the same day, they loaded up the car, and drove southward, along the Appian Way, between those broken memorials and tombs of ancient Rome, which, after so many centuries, could still touch the human heart so intimately.

Southward, through the broad Campagna, they went, with the blue mountains in the distance, and the giant arches of the ruined aqueducts striding across the plain. Here and there in the foreground a couple of great white oxen were still dragging their useless yoke; or a group of black buffaloes pawed at the ground and stared with wild eyes across the masterless world that had once more become their pasture.

The sun was growing hot, and the heat-mist shimmered everywhere from the moist hollows and marshy patches between the dry sunburnt bents and tufts of feathery grass. The lovely lines of a poet who had depicted the Campagna from the Alban hills came into Evelyn's mind, and she quoted:

> O'er the Campagna it is dim warm weather.

"A careless reader might think that the word 'dim' was used only because it sounded poetical," she said. "But how exactly true it is."

"How does it go on?" said Mark, to whom it came like music.

> "With wild spring-meanings hill and plain together
> Grow pale, or just flush with a dust of flowers.
> Rome in the ages, dimmed with all her towers,
> Floats in the midst, a little cloud at tether."

They reached Naples about noon, and drove slowly through the dead city, stopping only for ten minutes to leave one of their notices at the National Museum, from which Evelyn wished also to collect two more treasures. In the library at Ravello there was a bronze replica of the head of Dante, and another of the Narcissus which had been found at Pompeii.

"I love them both," she said, "but why should we have copies when the originals are so easily taken with us."

In that part of Naples the process of spontaneous cremation had done its work, and even the mounds of ash had been obliterated by a thunderstorm on the previous night. But, curiously enough, the rate of the process seemed to vary by districts, and the streets through which they drove southward were not a pleasant sight. Whatever may be the lure of the underground catacombs to inquisitive minds, a great modern city, blazing with sunshine, and populated only by a prostrate crowd of scarecrows that once were men and women, is no spectacle for lovers on the eve of their honeymoon.

Strangely enough, their new cheerfulness was hardly diminished by it. They had already done all their thinking and sorrowing, over that aspect of the matter; and not only the grief but the horror of the disaster had somehow been almost eliminated by its completeness. The word "finis", when it was as final as all that, made sensitiveness about it absurd. One might shudder at seeing a chicken killed slowly: but, if the planet suddenly exploded and all its inhabitants dissolved instantaneously into gas, there would be more than a touch of titanic comedy about it, which could only be enhanced if it happened at a peculiarly solemn moment, during a broadcast by the Archbishop of Canterbury, or on some great occasion like the reading of the King's Speech at the opening of Parliament. When Mark and Evelyn had faced the world alone, they had lived in a waking nightmare; but, now that they were together, this was replaced by a haunting sense of wonder at the sheer mystery of the universe.

All those bleached scarecrows and mummies with their brown wrappings and ashen faces, collapsing in chairs, or propped up in the corners of benches, or grinning wanly from upper windows like Chinese dolls; or laughing at the sky where they lay on their backs among the little green tables outside a café; or leaning forward over a bottle and glass, as though silently contorted by some paralysing jest; all those dumb relics had become so harmless, and were so obviously free themselves from any painful emotion, that Mark and Evelyn might have driven through endless vistas of them now as carelessly as they might have explored some gigantic street of Chinese temples, decorated with grotesque puppets of ivory.

Oddly enough, though some learned psychologist might have shown reason for it, they felt only one real shiver of horror, and that was caused, not by the lifeless relics, but by a sudden insurrection of horrible life, when a brown river of enormous rats came rippling up the street towards them, and divided into two whirling torrents round the advancing car. Mark accelerated fiercely, and the shrill squeal of the rats under the wheels made Evelyn put her fingers in her ears.

"If that is what the world is going to be like, I'm afraid we can't escape war," said Mark.

"Ugh," said Evelyn, shuddering. "If *they've* had orders to increase and multiply, what are we to do about it?"

"Leave it to the cats," said Mark. "Naples is full of hungry cats, thank God."

In a quarter of an hour they had left Naples behind them; and, after that, they saw no more relics of the catastrophe. Between Naples and Herculaneum, the thunderstorm of the previous night had almost obliterated the mounds of white ash, and the only traces were the occasional old shoes, of the coarser kind, which had resisted destruction. But there were few of these in what had been a bare-footed countryside. Buttons had apparently survived; but these were hardly noticeable in the dusty roads of summer.

When they reached Pompeii, the world had become very beautiful again, and Mark did a good deal of driving with his right hand, for his left was entwined with Evelyn's. But the miles went on very swiftly as they talked and made plans for beginning the world again on that high and lovely hill to which they were going. They proposed that the wedding should take place next morning. They would read the essential parts of the service together, in their church where the lamp was burning, as a visible sign of their unseen witness; and then, as God meant them to be happy, they would drive to Paestum, which Mark had never seen, and they would have their wedding picnic there, in that divine solitude, under the columns of the old Greek temple of Poseidon.

It was to happen, but it was not to happen as they planned; for their grimmest trial was still to come.

After they had passed Pompeii, Evelyn asked Mark to change places with her.

"I'll drive now," she said, "I know the way from here, and there are some misleading cross-roads near Sorrento." But she had another reason.

It was in Sorrento itself, not far beyond the statue of Tasso, which stands in the market-place of that magical old town of the sea-witches, that she unexpectedly turned into a private road on their right.

"Do you believe in dreams, Mark?" she asked, as they glided between lemon-trees and magnolias, up to a low white house with green-shuttered windows. She stopped at the door and they alighted.

Mark gave a gasp of pleasure at the beauty of the garden-orchard in which they were standing.

"I believe in this dream," he said.

"So do I," she said. "That's why I wanted to drive. I had a dream about this place last night. It came back to me only a little while ago. There was trouble in it; and this place was to help us, in some way. I was afraid we might miss the turning; but the car seemed to know the way, as if we were being piloted. I suppose we are, don't you?"

"I'm sure of it. But what was the dream?"

"Wait till you see the other side," said Evelyn, taking his hand and drawing him quickly round the corner of the house. There, dipping their heads to pass under a glorious myrtle, they groped through bushes that smelt like lemon-verbena and flowering shrubs that dizzied them with their fragrance.

They came out on a terrace which, between two cloudy-headed stone-pines, looked across the dark purple of the Bay to where, as Goethe said, the shadowy cone of Vesuvius rose "like a peak of hell out of the garden of Paradise". It was faintly smouldering; but the distance concealed its grimness. The black coils of congealed lava which—at close quarters—had suggested the writhings of the damned in Doré's illustrations to the Inferno, were veiled in amethystine beauty; and, as for the dark wreath of smoke (although it might be stained red when night fell), Evelyn found an unexpected friendliness in it. She said it was what Pittsburg would look like, if it ever went to heaven. The smoke coming out of the chimney made her feel that "things were still going on in the old foundry" under the earth.

"I like to have it there," she said, "at that distance."

She seemed to feel very strongly that this place was some kind of refuge from the nameless forebodings of her dream; and, indeed, the stillness of the garden, with its shuttered house, had a curiously protective effect, as though it were enfolding them both with a friendly though invisible arm.

"You say you dreamed about this house," he said. "Had you ever seen it before?"

"Oh, yes," she said. "Often. It belonged to a retired English admiral, Sir John Roscoe. He was a great friend of the Brookes. He used to come here in the autumn and winter, and write books about the British Navy. He was a dear old man, and a bit of a mystic. He was the only man, except my father, that I ever heard talk of those lines of Whittier. It was one of those curious coincidences. When that neutral ship went down, I was at Ravello, and he came over to see us. He didn't know anything about my father, except that he had gone down in the ship. And he just sat with us there saying nothing, and smoking his pipe on the verandah. Every now and then he cleared his throat, as if he were going to speak, and then he'd fill his pipe again and go on smoking. After a while, Mr. and Mrs. Brooke went into the house, and I was left alone with him, and then he looked over his shoulder as if he were afraid of being overheard, and he said, 'There are some lines, of which I'm very fond, by Whittier. Do you know them?

'I know not where his islands lift
    Their fronded palms in air,
I only know I cannot drift
    Beyond his love and care.'"

"Things have happened to me, like that," said Mark. "Probably there are many more happening all the time, but we don't notice them. Has it ever occurred to you how very remarkable it was that you should have taken that little car of mine, out of all the cars in Paris?"

"What does it mean, do you think?" said Evelyn.

"I can only think it means exactly what the verses say," he replied.

"Perhaps we shall notice such things more, now that we are alone in the world."

"Anyway, I believe it. But what was it you dreamed?"

"I can only remember part of it. Something very terrible had been happening to you and me; and, somehow, I had escaped and was being hunted; and suddenly I saw dear old Admiral Roscoe standing bare-headed at the entrance of the road to this house. He was staring down the road with a troubled look on his good old bull-dog face, as if he were expecting me and anxious about me; and as soon as he saw me he made a signal with his hand to drive in quickly. And I did, and when

I looked round for him he wasn't there, and I was standing alone here on the terrace in the night. I seemed to be horribly frightened because you weren't here, and something terrible was happening to you; but, all the time, something was saying, '*Don't be afraid. It's all right. Don't be afraid. It's all right.*' And sometimes I thought it was my father; and sometimes I thought it was Admiral Roscoe, or his ghost; and sometimes I thought it was the wind in the trees; and then it seemed to be growing light quite quickly, and you were standing quite near me after all; but it wasn't here. It was in some high place among the hills, and St. Francis was holding out his hands to us and saying '*Buona Ventura*'. I wonder if it means that we are to make Assisi our final home. I did think of it as the best alternative to Ravello."

"Assisi must be the one place in the world where no harm could happen to anyone," said Mark. "But this is the place to sight a ship from, if ever those unlikely explorers come from the new world."

The flag-staff, at the end of the garden, stood on a high cliff promontory, of which one rocky facet looked towards Naples and the other towards Capri.

"A flag there could hardly be missed by any ship coming into the Bay," said Mark. "Perhaps the dream drove us here just to make us hoist it; and the terrible things were only whips to make us go faster. I wonder where the Admiral keeps his colours. We must certainly run our flag up."

A look of fear came into her eyes, and she begged him not to do it. "Not now," she said.

Women had always been rather puzzling to Mark; but he had considerable respect for their intuitions; and Evelyn, who could not have explained her uneasiness in the very least, was so clearly affected by something in their environment that he could no more doubt its reality than he could doubt the pointings of the magnetic compass.

At that moment, as they stood silent, they heard on the main road through Sorrento, a hundred yards away, the soft rushing sound of a powerful motor-car. It was once a sound so familiar that it would have passed unnoticed; but it froze them to stillness now as though the wings of an archangel had gone by.

"Good God!" said Mark. "Did you hear that?" He was about to run to their own car and follow, when Evelyn seized him by the arm and clung to him.

"No," she said. "Don't move. There's something wrong out there. I don't know what it is; but there's something wrong. There's evil in it."

She looked at his face beseechingly, and he saw with amazement that she was horribly frightened, so frightened that her eyes had rings of white.

"Eve, my darling," he said, holding her closely in his arms, "you mustn't let a dream trouble you like this. That sound could only mean that your belief has come true. There must be some other survivor."

"I didn't tell you," she said, "I didn't tell you, because I was afraid you would think I was crazy; but, just before I drove in here, I thought I saw the dear old Admiral standing bare-headed in the road and signalling to me to come in quickly, exactly as he did in my dream."

"It was just your dream repeating itself, Eve. It often happens."

"Oh, no. I know now he was trying to save us from whatever it was that passed. He was trying to save us from meeting it."

She was so convinced, and so stricken by her shadowy apprehensions that Mark himself began to feel a phantom fear of something unknown.

"If anything should happen to separate us, Mark, or if you can't find me," she said, "I want you to come here. I may be—hiding."

Then—for the first time—something in the way she used that last word—"hiding"—touched him with the cold hand of fear. But he must not let her know it.

"Eve," he said, "the last two days have been too much for you. You are tired out. It probably wasn't a car at all that passed; and, if it was, it's half-way to Naples by this time. It will soon be dark. I'm going to drive you home."

He led the way to the car and, with the sunset behind them, and his hand from time to time touching her own or giving it a reassuring clasp, they drove in silence along the beautiful cliff-road to Amalfi, and up through the hills to Ravello. A single star was shining brightly over the little town as they approached it.

At Evelyn's wish, they stopped at the doors of their cathedral and went in. Curiously enough, it was not so dark at this hour as in the daytime, for the late evening light struck in a level shaft through a western window. They thought, at first, it might be this dusky beam that prevented them from seeing their light before the altar. Light in light is not so clear as light in darkness. But, as they approached the chancel, Evelyn gave an abrupt, inarticulate cry.

Their lamp, which was never to go out, had been wrenched from its chains and hurled—as though in some evil anger—at the crucifix on the high altar. Patches of oil stained the altar-cloth below the crucifix, and all around it there were fragments of ruby-coloured glass. There was no new mark upon the ivory figure of the Christ; but ruby-coloured sparkles and grains had lodged in the dark crown of thorns. They looked like beads of fresh blood.

CHAPTER XXIV

Before leaving the church they removed all traces of the outrage, and replaced the broken lamp with another which they found in the sacristy. Then they went down to the Palazzo Rufolo.

The French windows leading into the house from the verandah were wide open. Mark had shut them himself before they went to Rome. They went all over the house; but nothing seemed to have been touched except—curiously enough—a New Testament which Mark had left on a writing-table in the library, after their reading of Plotinus a week or two ago. He did not tell Evelyn where he found it, or of the pages that had been torn out of it.

Nor did he tell her that, when he explored the grounds, half an hour later, he found the dog Rab had been shot, and thrown into the bushes under the Saracen watch-tower. Reticence itself, however, can be communicative when the nerves are tensely strung.

Evelyn glided quietly about, with a pale set face and frightened eyes, making hardly any comment. It seemed to Mark that she had caught the very look of some of the refugee women that he had seen during the war, streaming out of countries occupied by the totalitarian powers.

"Don't take it too seriously, Eve," he said. "All that has happened is that some other survivor has found his way here. He was probably half-mad, poor devil. I don't suppose he realized our existence, and now he has cleared off; and I'll admit, from the little we know about him, it's an exceedingly good riddance."

"Mark," she said, "there's something more than that. We are being rounded up. There's something evil trying to close in on us. I've dreamed and dreamed about it, as I told you at Sorrento, and sometimes I almost remember it, and then it goes. I ..."

She covered her face with her hands, and shivered from head to foot. Mark took her in his arms, and held her against his heart.

"I only know it was terrible for you, and for me," she went on. "It can't just be coincidence, all these things fitting together like this, and my dreaming about them beforehand. I'm not superstitious. I hate superstition. There may be all sorts of explanations of the way dreams work; but, just once or twice in a lifetime, they seem to make a sort of window for us into the future. There's a mist on the window, and you can't see things very clearly, but you can get glimpses. My mother had them, too, but hers were happy glimpses. She used to call it 'opening the gates of distance'. I'd forgotten all about it until we were quite near that turn in the road. But all this can't be just accident. Out of all the millions of places on this earth, with no other survivor as far as we know, why should this one lonely little place among the hills have been picked by that evil thing out there. When we left those messages in Rome, we never asked ourselves what sort of survivors might read them. The thing that has happened to the world is so fearful we took it for granted that any survivors would have—friendly human eyes. I feel we are being rounded up by the very thing that wrecked the world."

"It's the kind of thing that Mardok might have done," he said. "It's possible that he might have escaped after all. If he did, he's almost certain to have gone mad. But you mustn't let it worry you. If that was his car we heard, he is half-way to Rome by now. But why should he have gone back in such a hurry?"

"He may have seen my diary. I left it in my room. The entry in it said that we were going to Rome. If that's it—he'll find the message at the Via Margutta, and——"

"The Brookes very considerately left a revolver and some cartridges here."

"There'd be no help in that," she said. "He has no scruples, and he has weapons of his own. You might think him perfectly friendly; but, without warning, he could paralyse you where you stood, before you could fire a shot, just as he could bring your car to a halt, if his Alata were within five miles of it. It's not Mardok. It's the power behind him that frightens me. There's something evil trying to close in on us."

The deep underlying strain to which Evelyn had been subjected during the last month was already making itself felt. It had not been lessened by the exertions and fatigue of their journey to Rome and back.

"What you really need is something to eat and drink," he said. It was the usual male prescription, and most doctors

would have endorsed it in the circumstances. They had, in fact, travelled all day with no food, except the light lunch which they had nibbled in the car as they went. Mark made her eat while he ransacked the larder for cold chicken.

Afterwards, in the library, where they had their coffee, he tried to persuade himself that all was well, for the pallor had gone and she made no allusion to the unknown visitor. Thinking it would keep her mind off the subject, he explored the Brookes' collection of gramophone records, and discovered among them a well-documented group, produced in Rome for historical purposes. They recorded the speeches of most of the political leaders of the chief countries during the critical weeks before and after the outbreak of war.

"It might be rather interesting to hear what they sound like now," he said, and he put one of them on.

The windows of the library were wide open to the stars and the tranquil darkness of the Gulf of Salerno; and, commonplace as the mechanical instrument had become, the night and the loneliness made it an uncanny sensation to hear those voices from a lost world, the voices of the men who had brought it to destruction, recalled to life at the touch of a steel needle.

"Justice," cried an emotional voice in German, "Justice is all that we ask; and justice has been denied to us. A grave injustice, an intolerable injustice, has been riveted like an iron chain upon the necks of a hundred million Germans. Our enemies for years have admitted the injustice. It began at Versailles. It continued after the war of 1939; and to-day, after all these years, though their own publicists have constantly declared it to be intolerable, they have made no practical proposals for its removal. Whenever practical proposals have been suggested, they have looked the other way. We decided, therefore, that we would win with our own strong hands that rightful place in the world which has been denied to us. And then what happened? The very men who had evaded every proposal, for a century, had the audacity to tell the rest of the world that—at the very last moment of the century—Germany was about to receive justice and had wilfully thrown away the chance of peacefully obtaining it. They forgot the long years of patience, the endless rebuffs; and when—at last—the patience broke down, they announced that the blood-guilt was ours and ours alone. We are fighting to bring about a new European order of peace and justice. Our consciences are clear."

It was uncanny indeed in that quiet night to hear the tumultuous clapping of thousands of vanished hands, and the well-drilled rhythmic cries of "*Heil! Heil! Heil!*"

The voice on the next record delivered a speech from the other side. It was more restrained and comprehensive than the first voice.

"History," it said, "did not begin with the Treaty of Versailles. The Treaty of Versailles was a consequence as well as a cause. The plea of our opponents sounds impressive only if we forget what they did to Poland in 1939, to Belgium in 1914, and to France in 1870. They speak as if the many million square miles of the British Commonwealth of Nations were inhabited entirely by the comparatively small population of the British Isles, while the larger population of the Reich was forced to exterminate its neighbours in order to obtain living-room in Europe. They ignore the fact that the British Commonwealth of Nations has over seven hundred million inhabitants; and that by far the greater part of it is now entirely self-governing. For economic co-operation we are prepared; but, even though Germany may have been born late, there is no room here for her racial theories, or for the extermination of those who have anticipated her. We are at war," the voice went on—and here the vicious circle in which both sides were involved seemed to become more evident than in the old days of stress—"we are at war because we are opposed to the use of force. We do not believe that anything can be settled by physical force. That is why we mean to meet this threat with the whole of our incomparable physical resources on land, at sea and in the air, until the reign of right has been restored."

The speaker was certainly on the right side. He was defending his country against an evil thing; but like many another well-meaning opponent of scoundrelism, he was cutting the Gordian knot rather than solving it. What else could he do, seeing that he was ensnared in that political riddle to which no statesman and no merely temporal philosophy has ever offered a real solution? He assumed, however, that the right cause, in the last resort, would always have the big battalions at its disposal, and would always have the physical power to win. This was the very proposition which he wished to discredit and disprove. He might have stated an infinitely better case—a case that would have held good in the most overwhelming physical defeat, since it was possible—and only too probable—that very small minorities indeed might sometimes be in the right, with nothing to support them but "the broken heart and the unbroken word". The fortunate position of his own country hitherto had made it possible for him to remark that "with the whole might of our armed forces we intended to establish the solemn fact that force could settle nothing". It was indeed possible to argue that the

right cause must in any case rally the forces of the world around it in the long run; but it seemed increasingly improbable in the modern world, which had so supped on horrors that it had lost its sensitiveness, and had become almost cynically incapable of righteous anger. Moreover, honest strength, no matter how great, can never be proof against cunning and treachery, the poisoned cup, the assassin's dagger, and their more deadly intellectual and spiritual equivalents. Lacking the one thing needful in the world, the eternal ground of right and wrong which had been so contemptuously smashed to pieces by the pseudo-intellectuals of western civilization in recent years, there was now no other appeal that he could make. But he had at least the practical justification that the appeal to force had been the "last resort" of his own country; and that, if we could still have believed in the eternal validity of anything, his country was still—somehow—fighting for that.

The enemies' ambassadors in London had reported again and again on her unpreparedness. Foreign statesmen had pointed to her unwillingness to fight, as a sign of her decadence, and a signal of encouragement to the Bandar-log. Even friendly neutrals had somewhat vicariously reproached her for not taking up the challenge to international morality, by force of arms, at an earlier date. In America there had been many head-shakings over the decadence of the old lion. The American press had been full of it. More than one leading American paper indeed had to remind the others that, if the eagle was to be no more than a highly moral spectator, there was a touch of grim comedy about the way in which the eagle had been deploring the lion's obvious reluctance to fight for general principles in two hemispheres simultaneously.

The lion blinked at some of the remarks, but continued to sprawl at full length. He accepted the compassion accorded to his senility by his friends; and he patiently endured, from his enemies, all kinds of whisker-tweakings, face-slappings, and peltings with many varieties of dirt. These attentions were accompanied by a running commentary to the effect that the lion was worn out and that he had lost his teeth—an effete condition which was, of course, highly tempting to the Bandar-log. And then—quite quietly and undramatically, the lion stood up and stretched himself. He gave his mane a shake and yawned, in that insufferably lazy way of his; and, at the first sight of that red interior, there was so rat-like a scurrying among his enemies, so loud a squealing of complaints about this brutal and bellicose monster; so instant and complete a reversal of everything his enemies had been saying for weeks and months and years past, that the eagle—whose spectatorial habits had not impaired its sense of humour—began to laugh. The laughter of America had always had a salutary effect hitherto on all forms of humbug.

All these things were evident in the recorded speeches. One of the most amazing things about them was the evidence they unconsciously offered of the innumerable cross-purposes of those who were at war. It was apparent even within the individual nations. One party in the nation X believed that it was fighting for a new "scientific" world from which religion would be banished. Another party in the same nation, believed that it was engaged in a Holy War for the restoration of Christianity to Europe. But the contradictions were even more apparent between the nations that had initiated the appeal to force. More than once it had happened that nations who were allies on one front, were deadly enemies on another. The rich confusion of 1940, when Germany limited her support of Russia in the air, because her ally—Italy—was supplying airmen to the other side, was even more richly confounded in this later and more murderous chaos. If—for political reasons—it seemed better that an ally whose help on land was useful should not be allowed to become too prosperous at sea, her totalitarian friends had no hesitation in surreptitiously torpedoing her merchant-ships, especially if they could secure a "total loss" of ship and crew, and so attribute the disappearance more plausibly to the devilish cunning of the other side. War, in the old straight sense, had in fact come to an end as far back as 1918. After that, it often meant a wholesale massacre of civilians, without any formal declaration; or the cowardly sinking of light-ships (a perfect symbol of the whole bestial process) and the turning of machine-guns on their helpless crews. Up to then, there had been a code of comradeship and generous courage among the fellow seamen of most of the civilized nations. It was reserved for a totalitarian power to smash this and to distinguish herself by shooting the helpless occupants of small life-saving ships and lifeboats. "War" was no longer "war" among the totalitarian nations. It was state-organized crime. Neither friend nor foe, within or without their borders, was safe from "liquidation" (their gangster slang for murder) if it suited the book of any seeker after "power". It had begun early in the century; and the mistake of 1918 was not in any injustice of the Treaty of Versailles (unwise as that treaty may have been in some respects). The mistake was in the failure to recognize that an appalling series of crimes had been committed by various persons to whom the destinies of helpless millions had been entrusted. These helpless millions had been deceived again and again; but every one of the criminals was able to retire and live in luxury and honour for the rest of his life, while blinded men, in their innocent thousands, who had sacrificed everything for the ideal country in their own hearts, were forced to beg their bread in the streets. This terrible mistake, this glossing over of the most fearful crimes in history, led directly to a world-wide cynicism, which made it infinitely easier later on for the political gangsters to abolish all distinctions

between right and wrong. It would have been infinitely better for the world if there had been no whisper of those material "reparations" which could repair nothing; and a stern demand for a solemn court of enquiry, the most solemn and impressive that the whole world could assemble. Before this the individual criminals should have been tried; and, if guilty, they should have been sentenced and executed as an example to the whole world, exactly as criminals are punished within the nation. As long as the double standard of political and private life was tolerated, those crimes against humanity would continue. It should have been no matter of small or petty revenge, or "making a martyr" of a misunderstood man who had dipped his hands in the blood of millions by an error which "charity" would overlook. We did not discuss martyrdom before punishing a drunken motorist on a high road who blindly kills a single individual. We did not talk hypocritically about "charity" then. To shrink from the methods of justice in the greater and infinitely more terrible crime is not charity, but a deadly—and perhaps a cowardly—suppression of truth. If innocent, the accused should have been set free, and those who were really responsible should have been indicted. But it was utter madness to compare the most just of wars with an international "police-operation"; and then, when the criminals, the responsible leaders, had been cornered, to dismiss them with a bunch of flowers, and as many thousands a year as they wanted, while the unfortunate members of the "police-force" who had been conscripted to hunt them down, were in thousands of cases condemned to a maimed and poverty-stricken remnant of existence, or to beat their heads against the charitably padded walls of lunatic asylums. But the world had chosen not to mark, firmly, the distinction between good and evil in 1918; and the inevitable result followed. Gangsterdom grew, and the world watched it growing, with the general loss of all religious belief. It had come to its inevitable conclusion in a chaos of abominations.

> Coldly they went about to raise
> To life and make more dread
> Abominations of old days
> That men believed were dead.

On their own premises, the new power-politicians were logical enough in their demand for a godless world. There was no possible answer to the philosophy of gangsterdom if the individual life were an ephemeral bubble, or if it were deprived of the eternal significance which Christendom had once given to it. There was no possible answer to their unmorality if there were no absolute ground for the distinction between right and wrong. Christendom had its answer; and it was a complete answer. The moral relationship of the Supreme Being to His creatures was asserted and demonstrated only in the Christian religion. There was no other and there could be no other. The hypothesis on which Christendom had been set aside was the hypothesis of universal relativity in morals as in everything else; and the theory that, ultimately, there was only the night and nothingness. There was only one thing that the gangsters overlooked in their cynical rush to embrace the "godless" opportunity of doing anything they pleased in a world which owned "no power above the state." They fully realized that evil was destructive. They used it as a weapon. But they forgot that evil was also self-destructive.

The last of the records that Mark put on had apparently been made on one of the red-letter days of the lost world. The Federation of European Powers, to which the idealists of 1939 had looked forward as one of their "war aims", had been perfectly worked out on paper. It had been universally accepted in principle; and it had broken down in practice simply because the men who had worked it out had ignored the reality of evil, or what old-fashioned people used to call "original sin". The record dealing with this disaster had been made apparently from a broadcast of the news; for the announcer's voice broke in at the end, with that ineffable calm of a refined soul at ease in Zion; and the announcement he made, in circumstances less horrible, might have been regarded as a masterpiece of unconscious humour. As it was, it merely summed up the almost Bedlamite confusion of the world.

> "*M. Solnikoff, the Russian President of the Federation of European nations, has ignored the protest of the Germans, which was supported in this case by Great Britain, against the distribution by Russian airmen of bubonic plague germs in Bavaria. That is the end of the news. The studio-orchestra will now give a rumbling*"—Here he cleared his throat and said, "beg pardon"—"*will now give a rendering of the old favourite 'Hitchy Koo.'*"

"What a ghastly resurrection of those awful nights," said Evelyn. "It seems incredible now that the whole world used to sit listening to that kind of thing on the air. You had to listen if you wanted the news, and sometimes you desperately wanted it. They developed a cunning trick to make people listen, by giving them the first lists of casualties and survivors in the middle of the propaganda talks. It was all too devilish. You turned a knob and heard loud raucous voices, in all the languages of Europe, bawling their contradictory lies into the air and abusing one another, like a lot of competitive

cheap-jacks on tubs, or bookies offering odds at an international slaughter-match. It was one of the most degrading and degraded things that ever happened to civilized men and women. Let's forget it. I think I'll unpack."

It was an attempt to distract her own mind, and Mark knew it. She knelt by the trunk which he had brought into the library, and began to unpack some of the personal "treasures" she had brought back from Rome. Mark lit his pipe and began to read, but his thoughts came between him and the printed page, and he found himself re-reading the same paragraph over and over without understanding. The "ghastly resurrection" of the old hateful conflict at the touch of a steel needle had been too vivid. It seemed almost incredible in its tragic triviality and unworthiness, now that the planet had gone back to the majestic silence and loneliness of its beginnings. In a flash, he saw the essential meanness of all that mechanized life which the superficial had confused with "progress". Loneliness and silence are great philosophers. He remembered how, in boyhood, certain words of a lonely thinker in the desert, thousands of years ago, had overcome him like a midnight heaven.

> "*When I consider the heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained—Lord, what is man that Thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that Thou visitest him?*"

He wondered whether it would all happen again if there were another chance—all the fatuous and self-contradictory chatter about "rights" in that mechanized state where every fundamental distinction between right and wrong had been obliterated; "rights" without reference to duties, or even to the nature and worth of the claimant, and the character of the universe in which the claimant happened to be living. The political "thinkers" at the beginning of the nineteenth century had almost been prepared to assert the "rights" of every man to good weather. Minds of that calibre were quite able to ignore the fact that no Government could insure those rights, and that no Englishman—however free—could ever obtain them between January and March in his own country. They did not explain what became of your title-deeds if you happened to be a shipwrecked sailor on a raft, or what became of your "rights" to a congenial life if a somewhat harsh universe grew only a little more stubborn, or afflicted you with cancer. An older, deeper and more comprehensive philosophy had its answer; but the new theorists did not ask whence the title-deeds came or where they were deposited. They ignored their complete dependence—for every breath they drew—on the Supreme Power in which all things live and work and move. They reduced the human individual to complete insignificance by chatter about the physical vastness of the universe, denying the one thing in man which towers above all physical vastness. They were sure that he had no soul, and died as the beasts die; and then they ascribed "sacred rights" to him, and attached an almost mystical and quite unexplained importance both to himself and those "rights", as though he were still set apart from the bleak and callous physical universe, and were a kind of god. But this last assumption was the very stone which the new builders thought they had rejected. It dangled in the air from the end of their mechanical crane. They didn't recognize it when they saw it; and they didn't know where to place it. This, indeed, was the tragedy of the modern intellectual world, that, when the late nineteenth-century evolutionists might have seized the most triumphant illustration of their own theory, and the most glorious instance of emergence into a higher order of things, at the very point where the human race had attained to its first great glimpse of the real nature of the divine, these evolutionists—of all people in the world—became as blind as bats to the significance of that moral and spiritual ascent in their own scheme of thought. They turned their backs on the ascending way, though it gave a meaning and an aim to the whole of the strange progress whereby man seemed to have stepped out of the blind process of nature into a new and higher ethical order. They had already ignored the one essential Factor working through the whole process, the Supreme Being, ever present to it, as the permanent ground, the origin and end of all its changes. By ignoring it, they had led the popular mind to suppose that "evolution" meant getting something out of nothing, or plus out of minus; and they had involved their own theory in all kinds of unnecessary contradictions and difficulties which confused the whole matter. They did this, though the omitted Factor, even if admitted only as the Unknowable X of the agnostic Spencer, with the "supernatural" and "perfect" attributes that he so insistently gave to it, would have discovered a meaning and an aim in the whole process, and opened out an immeasurable future. They passed it over, though everything that was best in our civilization was derived from the aspirations and remembrances which had been born of it. They seemed to think that, if they traced the orchestral symphony back to the wood and cat-gut of the physical instruments, and announced in correct detail the pedigree of the cat, they had explained away not only the music, but the Composer. The prophets of this philosophy explained everything away, by deriving it from something less than itself. Love on these terms was merely lust. Morality was a relic of primitive taboos. They would have been very angry if they had been told that they were breaking down the walls of civilization as well as of the *Civitas Dei*; but almost everyone had been cowed by the cry "We must move with the times", regardless of the direction in which they were moving. If anyone had the courage to speak these truths they would have been far in advance of their time; but they would have been regarded by the pseudo-intelligentsia and the immense army of their half-educated followers as "out-of-date".

Many centuries ago the Greek poet—Pindar—had summed it all up.

> "*Even for the feeble it is an easy task to shake a city to its foundations, but it is a sore struggle to set it in its place anew, unless God becometh promptly a guide unto its rulers.*"

The most tragic thing of all was that the complete answer to all those disputations and conflicts was there, all the time, in the *philosophia perennis* of Christendom. It was ignored, partly out of ignorance, and partly out of prejudice—the survival, sometimes, in Protestant countries, of a just prejudice against its human instruments and exponents. But in recent times, the wisest and truest things ever said about the relations of capital and labour, the most just allotment of the proper dues to each, and the most fair analysis of their faults, were to be found in some of the modern encyclicals. This was most certainly true also of the encyclicals about international relations, and of those about the place of the family in the State, and of those about Christian marriage. Those great Christian solutions had been ignored, largely because of the neo-paganism of the modern world and the schismatic dissensions of Christendom. No matter how great the proffered truth might be, or how great the world's need of it, there were large numbers of people all over the world so prejudiced that, if it came to them from the head of the Catholic Church, they would avert their faces and stop their ears, and refuse either to read or to consider it. This, quite apart from any religious grounds, was a tragic mistake on political and moral grounds; for, whatever its human faults and blunders in the past may have been, the Church was the one institution in the world which concerned itself with the administration of the moral law, and regarded all sociological questions, first and foremost, from the ethical standpoint.

And now, all that the survivors could do was to keep one small light burning, one small light to act as a "remembrance", where the spoken word was so inadequate.

The only spoken words, in fact, while Evelyn was unpacking, expressed very little of what was passing through their minds.

"Odd, isn't it?" said Mark, "how all those vanished moderns omitted the real richness and depth of life from their reports, and how the ancients managed to include it all. The modern world missed the real lesson of the Renaissance. Compare Leonardo, for instance, with Darwin; and compare Leonardo's command of both the scientific and the aesthetic imagination with Darwin's frank confession that the details of his work had gradually robbed him of all power to appreciate the things that count for most in humanism. One doesn't have to be a Christian to see the change for the worse there. It's quite clear on purely humanistic grounds."

"I suppose specialization had something to do with it, the kind of specialization that 'knows more and more about less and less'. It was a lad at Princeton who uttered that great truth, though statesmen and bishops passed it off as their own afterwards."

"It was specialism that led to the divorce of science from natural philosophy, at the end of the nineteenth century. Like bad artists, its exponents assumed that the photographic correctness of their minutiae gave them a kind of superiority in far more important things, which had been magnificently stated in the older 'parables'. And then, after all, it turned out that their minutiae—their atoms and electrons and all the rest of the new scholastic formulas were themselves only 'parables', or as they preferred to call them, 'mathematical abstractions', convenient representations of a truth which could never be seen as it really was, by any finite mind. And, all the time, they went on explaining all the best things away by deriving them from something less than themselves; biology, ethics, psychology—in all of them they forgot the splendid saying of the old Greek that if you want real explanations you must reverse the order of nature and look at the last term of the series, not at the first. In other words you must look at man, and where he is going, not at the ape or the primal slime or the cloud of hydrogen gas in which the solar system originated."

"I remember," she said, "how the 'psychology' we used to be taught maddened me with its assumptions. It reduced everything that ever seemed worth while to nothing; and it took it for granted, with the most appalling conceit, that its anaemic little textbooks and outlines had somehow registered an advance on the psychology of *Oedipus Rex* or *Macbeth*. The very latest, of course, was always the best. We had one lecturer with a Slavonic beard and a prognathous jaw. All the faculty used to sit at his feet with eyes of frog-like adoration, and we used to troop into the room like lambs to hear him wipe out the spiritual experience of two thousand years, and give us the nightmares of a sanitary inspector in exchange."

Among the personal "treasures" which Evelyn had been unpacking, there was one small object which at this moment

caught Mark's eye. It was a slim book, bound in vellum, which Evelyn's cousin had sent from Quebec, as a memorial of her wedding there—a pretty little "marriage-service" bearing the initials of the bride and bridegroom in silver on the white cover. Mark rose and picked it up. The beauty of the noble old words—the promises that were meant to be kept—stole into his mind like a healing music as he read them.

"If they had only known," he said, "if they had only known the beauty and truth of it. There was nothing in the greatest poetry of the world to touch it; and it was all the greater because it sometimes involved hardships and sacrifice. If they had only known. 'The broken heart and the unbroken word' might have been the most priceless gifts that any redeeming spirit could have made to our bewildered and pledge-breaking generation."

Evelyn stood up at his side to look at the passage he was reading. He put his arm round her and pointed to the responses which, according to the rites of the church, the bride and bridegroom were to speak. They were moved to it by no plan of their own; but they began, in low voices, to read them aloud, as though they were making their own responses, there and then. It was Mark himself who began to read the first question—inserting his own and Evelyn's name. Then he suddenly found that the quiet words were coming from what was deepest in him, subduing his voice, and misting his eyes, so that he could hardly speak or see.

"*Mark, wilt thou take Evelyn here present, for thy lawful wife, according to the rite of our holy mother, the Church?*"

"*I will.*"

"*Evelyn, wilt thou take Mark here present, for thy lawful husband, according to the rite of our holy mother, the Church?*"

"*I will.*"

"*I, Mark, take thee, Evelyn, to my wedded wife, to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, till death us do part; and thereto I plight thee my troth.*"

And, as they said the words, they knew that there was nothing more that they could say on the morrow. They had been moved to it by no plan of their own, but this was their real wedding, and the end for which there and now those twain were met.

With this ring I thee wed. With my body I thee worship....

CHAPTER XXV

Immediately after breakfast next morning, they prepared their picnic basket for Paestum. They stopped the car at the entrance to the church, and went in to confirm, before the altar, what they had already promised on the previous night. Among the passages they had marked for reading together, were some of those beautiful old Latin responses which are the best answer to the charge that the world grew grey and the roses lost their colour and fragrance when Paganism made way for Christendom. Substitute Calvinism for Christendom, and the roses might well die; but they are fresh with morning dew in this cry from Joyous Gard, which is the central citadel of the Civitas Dei.

Introibo ad altare Dei. I will go unto the altar of God.

Ad Deum qui laetificat juventutem meam. To God who giveth joy to my youth.

Quia tu es, Deus, fortitudo mea. For thou, God, art my strength.

Emitte lucem tuam et veritatem tuam, ipsa me deduxerunt. Send forth thy light and thy truth. They have led me.

Et introibo ad altare Dei. And I will go unto the altar of God.

Ad Deum qui laetificat juventutem meam. To God who giveth joy to my youth.

The day they spent at Paestum was as perfect as a lyric from the Greek Anthology. They travelled through a country which had been so long a wilderness that it had nothing to remind them of disaster. Wherever they looked they saw beauty, in that wide and level land of whispering reeds between the mountains and the sea, where the Greek colonists from Sybaris had once built them a city. The city had long vanished. Herds of black buffaloes stood gazing across the marshy hollows as the lovers drove southward, and then, suddenly, there were roses; and, on a stretch of dry sunburnt wilderness, the tawny Doric columns of the temple of the sea-god and its two radiant companion temples, in all the loneliness of their own massive survival from a vanished world, stood up against the dark amethyst of the distant hills. Snow still covered the distant crags, while dark red snapdragons blossomed in the crevices of cornice and architrave; and when Mark saw Evelyn standing between those massive double rows of fluted columns, with her shining head and slender body poised like a vision of youth immortal, he could have believed that the gates of distance had indeed been opened, and that the modern girl, in her sailor-like attire, was an avatar of the Greek. It was as though Nausicaa herself had returned, in all her breathing human sweetness, from the land of the undying.

Now, for the first time, he understood that glory of the Greek world, and why men had loved it better than all the frowning majesty of Rome. The smile of the immortals is not less majestic than their power, but its radiance makes men happier; and, for all the austerity of those massive columns, there was a radiance in their beauty which touched the heart with love as well as with awe, and stirred the spirit as well as the senses.

They had their wedding feast in the Temple of Ceres, among those tapering columns of travertine, mellowed by age to a russet gold. Beautiful little green lizards eyed them and rustled away among the dry grasses and hot fragments of stone. Jackdaws wheeled and chattered overhead, and wondered if they dared swoop on the remains of their feast. They drank Falernian, but they were trying it for the first time, and they thought it had been overpraised by the poets. So they made a libation of what was left, to the daughter of Ceres; and, afterwards, as Eve stood on the higher level, Mark lifted up his hands to help her down to his own, then changed his mind and held her by her brown ankles, and took off her canvas shoes to kiss her bare feet.

They explored Paestum for another hour. Then they went down to the sea, half a mile away, and swam out through the shallower sunlit green into the colder and deeper blue. They dried themselves in the sun and the sand, and returned to Paestum and, caring not a straw for the anachronism, poured their tea from a thermos flask into green enamelled cups. After tea, they lay on a grassy knoll where acanthus grew wild instead of being carved on stone; and, as they lay, hand in hand, looking up at the blue heavens, a sky-lark made lyrics for them. There was a scent of roses in the salt air, for there were roses all about them. Paestum of late had recovered the lost pride of which the poets had sung for nearly two thousand years; and to-day, as two thousand years ago, the rose of roses crowned their feast; for they found, as they had already found a score of times, that their friends, the poets, who so hauntingly lived on in memory, had the strangest power of counteracting the havoc that had been wrought by the materialists. They could repeople a wilderness; and they were the happiest of guests. They could appear when they were called upon, and make the prettiest of speeches and

propose the prettiest toasts, and crowd the feast with friends; and then, when they were not wanted, they would retire, finger on lip.

It was Mark who called on Landor, to whom Evelyn had not hitherto been introduced, and it was Landor who made the prettiest speech of all:—

"Paestum, thy roses long ago
  Were prized, the rest above:
Twice in the year 'twas theirs to blow
  And braid the locks of Love."

They lay side by side and hand in hand, looking up at the blue sky as he repeated it. Then they turned to one another; Mark folded her in his arms, and her lips met his own.

At this moment all the poets discreetly vanished, with the exception of Theocritus, who merely retired behind a fallen column and murmured something in Greek to a small green lizard.

It sounded like this:

Ὣς οἱ μὲν χλοεροῖσιν ἰαινόμενοι μελέεσσιν
ἀλλήλοις ψιθύριζον
ἀνίστατο φώριος εὐνή.

CHAPTER XXVI

Not until their long and happy day was nearly over did either of them allow the thought of that ugly episode at Ravello to spoil their pleasure.

Mark hoped that it would fade into the past now, as one of those mysterious episodes which, being inexplicable, are better forgotten. But, on the way home, it was clear, from Evelyn's face, that the shadow had returned, and that she was dreading what they might encounter.

"We needn't stay at Ravello," said Mark. "We have all the world before us where to choose, as Mr. Milton said, on a former occasion. We might go to your alternative—Assisi; but I must confess I hate the idea of being driven out of our southern Paradise."

"I love the place," she said, "and ever since I lighted our lamp in the church, I felt that Ravello was my home. And now, it's yours, too. It's no use, it's never any use, running away from fear. It would only follow us, unless we can defeat it. But it doesn't make it any the less frightening. There's something quite abnormal about it."

He laid his hand on hers and said, "Eve, you are taking this thing in the wrong way. You are quite right about defeating fear. But you talk of the ugly episode as though it were something far more than it really is, something out of the natural order of things. We must pull ourselves together, or we shall be imagining all sorts of ghostly terrors. I see, exactly, what has been happening to your thoughts, and mine during the last few weeks. The whole world, now that we are alone in it, has become immeasurably more mysterious than it was before. All sorts of quite simple things have begun to look cryptic and inexplicable. In the old days we could leave the inexplicable to be explained by other people; but, when we have to cope with it ourselves, we can't evade the touch of mystery on every side. There's nothing new about it. Everything in the universe is and always has been mysterious. What could be more mysterious than you are yourself? I've often found an abyss opening under my own feet when I've lain awake and simply asked myself what I mean when I call myself 'I'. We don't know what anything is, or where it comes from or where it is going to. Birds are mysterious; flowers are mysterious, and the way grass grows is absolutely creepy when you have time to think about it. There were moments before I found you, when I looked at trees, those mysterious monsters waving a hundred arms in the air, with something like panic. Only a flash, of course. It came and went."

He was talking to distract her thoughts. He could see that the episode at Ravello had made her afraid of some new discovery on their return; but he really did also feel that their isolation in the world had made everything about them more mysterious, and had thus abnormally heightened the effect of that mysterious episode on Evelyn. She—on the other hand—had a more definite dread, which she could not explain to him.

"In the old days," Mark went on, "there were plenty of scientific people to explain all these things away in a mist of words. But the plain truth is, that their explanations explained nothing. The scientific folk were much more in the dark than most of us realized. They didn't know what matter is, or what thought is; and still less could they explain why anything should be in existence at all. The only natural thing, the only really reasonable state of affairs (if I may be Irish for the moment) would have been complete nothingness—that there should be nothing at all, absolutely nothing. But we are here in existence, surrounded by an immense universe, which, from the point of view of reason—ought not to be here at all. Its existence is against reason. It defies reason. It's the fundamental paradox of things. Nature—ultimately—isn't natural."

"Exactly," said Evelyn. "And that is what frightens me. Ultimately, it's all supernatural."

"But it has always been so," he said, "only in the crowds we didn't feel it so keenly. Now that we are alone in the world, we're intensely conscious of it. Nothing has changed; and we mustn't let our isolation change our way of looking at things too much. We're not meant to focus our minds on ultimate explanations. The way in which the human will can lift the human hand is as uncanny as seeing a dead man rise and walk, only we are used to the one and we've never seen the other. And this ugly episode at Ravello, mysterious and senseless as it seems, has nothing more uncanny about it than that. We'd got used to the idea of being alone and at peace, and it was abruptly and horribly broken. It's some brutal fellow-survivor, a man brutalized by the war, and driven mad by his own isolation, who just happened to be passing our way. That's all."

Evelyn shook her head. "It's part of something bigger than that. It frightens me. Our little bit of Paradise has been invaded

by exactly the same thing that has wrecked every other Paradise. Why is it that men could never be kind to one another? Why did every attempt to bring peace on earth fail? What was it that broke down all the Leagues and Federations that men could contrive, although they knew their failure would make a hell of earth? Why have all the wise for generations said that only a profound change of heart could enable us to build a better world; and why, in spite of all those rivers of tears and blood, have there always been so many obstacles, malicious obstacles, wickedly selfish obstacles, to the goodwill that might have made everyone on earth so infinitely more happy?"

"That's the darkest mystery of all," he said, "and the oldest of all. Men made their schemes, and up to the last, they thought that, if they could produce the perfect scheme, it was bound to work perfectly. They ignored the most terrible reality in the universe, the reality of wickedness in the heart and mind of man. Christendom fought it; and sometimes succumbed to it. But—when she convinced men of sin—she held the key to the mystery. When Europe lost its religion, it lost the only key, and the only means of coping with a reality which threatened the existence of the civilized world."

"I used to believe in Abt Vogler," said Evelyn. "'*The evil is null, is nought, is silence implying sound.*' I know better now. It's a reality, and like the other realities, ultimately, it's——"

She hesitated and shivered.

"It's the work of man," he said.

"Its agents here are flesh and blood," she returned, "but it's beyond nature, all the same. Men have been possessed by it, as no brute beast was ever possessed. Books and pictures have been possessed by it. Statesmen have been possessed by it. What else can explain the blasphemies against humanity, and the tortures and cruelties and persecutions, which make the innocence of the wild beast almost Paradisal in comparison with the wickedness of man. It is exactly as St. Paul described it—a warfare against the spirit of evil in high places. But he didn't mean kings and queens, or even dictators. He meant the powers of darkness."

It was rapidly growing dark when they reached Ravello. While Mark was putting the car away, Evelyn told him that she was going into the church for a moment, and asked him to join her there. She thought that, as their little lamp was so near, she would like to say, "Thank you, for a happy day" with her evening prayers, in what she now regarded as their own chapel.

CHAPTER XXVII

That night it was Mark who, alternatively, lay awake and dreamed.

At about three in the morning he stretched out his hand to make sure that Evelyn was still sleeping beside him; and he found—or dreamed—that she was no longer there.

He seemed to remember that she had whispered to him—an hour ago—that she had been dreaming about the light in the Cathedral. Perhaps she was walking in her sleep again. Apparently, she had dressed, and gone down. Immediately he, too, dressed and went down to the stone-paved hall. It was very dark; he could only vaguely distinguish an uncurtained window; but he became aware—perhaps by some faint sound or cat-like step behind him—that he was not alone. He turned sharply, and as he did so there was a faint click. A tingling sensation crept through his brain and seemed to concentrate in his eyes. He could see nothing—not even the faint glimmer from the uncurtained window. He was not sure whether a sudden blindness had overcome him, or whether the night had grown blacker. He groped his way across the hall and found the electric switch. It had no effect. He felt for the door and found it open, but he could see no glimmer of light outside—not a star in the sky, not even one thing darker than another. He brought his hand within an inch of his face, and he could not see it. He remembered the hideous threat of the enemy—*we have weapons that will leave them neither eyes to see nor ears to hear*.

"They've blinded me," he gasped, hardly knowing that the thought had escaped into words. But it was heard and answered.

"Not yet," said a low grating voice. "You may recover your sight, on conditions. Tell me where she is."

"Why do you ask? What right have you to ask that question?" Then, in the same low grating tone, as of one stone grinding against another, the voice packed into three brief sentences the essential iniquity that had wrecked civilization.

"*You possess something which I do not possess. I have the power to take it. Therefore I intend to take it.*"

It was as simple as that; as simple as a fable; as simple as the doctrine of *Mein Kampf*.

"You will not find her here," said Mark.

"I am going to look for her," said the voice, and Mark cried out to it in desperation.

"Give me back my sight."

"On the contrary," said the voice. There was another faint click, and again a tingling sensation crept through Mark's brain. It seemed to numb the sides and the lower part of his face. His lower jaw dropped as in paralysis, and he could not articulate. Then everything became blank.

It may have been half an hour before he began to struggle back to life. It was certainly more than an hour before he could grasp, even faintly, what had happened. Everything still appeared to be pitch-dark and, as he painfully tried to raise himself, it flashed upon him, like a bullet through the brain, that something must have happened to Evelyn. He found it was almost impossible to move, and his arms and legs were so numbed that he felt as if he were still paralysed. He tried to pray for help; and found that he could at least articulate. It was a strange prayer that he made. He seemed to realize that no miracle was to be expected, but—only some kind of wide resolution of discords. "God help us," it went up from some great depth within him. "If it is possible along the roads of law, smoothe away these difficulties." And, as he prayed it, he somehow felt that it could and would be done. Then he relapsed into semi-consciousness for half an hour. After this, gradually, the power of movement seemed to return. He caught a faint glimmer of light from a window. The numbness gradually left his brain and facial muscles. He rose to his feet, tottering a little. He groped his way out through the door and past the courtyard, feeling the Saracenic stonework with his hands, and then—more stumblingly up the avenue of cypresses, blundering into tree-trunks, and continually losing his sense of direction; so that, once, when he thought he was touching the pillars of the entrance gates, he discovered that he was feeling round the ruined wall of the old Saracenic watch-tower.

And then—still half-dazed—he had found the electric torch in his pocket and groped his way out and was moving more quickly, across the piazza. Everything there was utterly silent, and there was a new emptiness about it that struck him

cold. He went through the bronze doors into the church. It was quite dark within. He could see only the little ruby flame before the invisible altar. He called, in a hushed whisper that seemed to carry further and hold more than any cry —"*Eve!*" and the whisper came back to him from the walls like a cold breath. "Eve! Eve! Eve!" he called, not expecting her to answer now, but out of his own bursting heart. The wavering light of his electric torch glanced from side to side, momentarily illuminating now some fragment of old mosaic, or picking out on the walls one of the coloured Stations of the Cross.

He caught the flash of marble—the six spiral columns of the ancient rostrum, and the crouching marble lions from whose backs they rose.

He examined more closely with his electric torch everything in the neighbourhood of the dark bench where she used to kneel. Hitherto he had been looking for Evelyn herself; now he was looking only for some clue, however faint, which might help him to trace her. The only unusual thing which he noticed was that a missal which had been left on the bench by some former owner, and had lain there on their various visits, was now lying open and face downwards on the ground. He felt instinctively that she had brushed it from its place in some startled movement, possibly when the unknown assailant appeared. The little religious pictures which had been tucked into its pages were scattered around it on the floor, like the feathers which show where a hawk has fallen on a white dove. He felt sure that, in any normal circumstances, Evelyn would have picked them up and replaced them.

As he went out through the bronze doors, the light of his torch fell on one of those tiny picture cards which had evidently been dropped there, separately. He tried to picture how it had happened; and the blood rushed through his veins at the thought suggested by some old story of his childhood—that it had been dropped there designedly. He picked it up and recognized that it was one of the pictures that had been in Evelyn's own missal, when he had glanced at it, a week or two ago. It was a picture of the crucifix at Assisi, from which, according to the ancient legend, the lips of the Crucified had whispered to St. Francis the words which were printed in Italian above the picture "*Va, Francesco, e ripara la mia casa che, come vedi, va in rovina*." (Go, Francis, and rebuild my house, which, as thou seest, is falling into ruin.) Mark had been moved by this sentence when he first saw it; for, in this new ruin of the whole world of men, they had a new poignancy.

Under the picture there were some more words printed in Italian—*Crocifisso che parlò a S. Francesco, Assisi*, and, under the word *Assisi*, pointing to it, there was a small arrow indented in the card as by a finger-nail. He felt sure that this mark had not been there when he saw it last.

Mark tried to re-construct in his mind what had happened. She had been kneeling at her bench, when something startled her. After that, he supposed that she must have been confronted by her unknown assailant, and something must have been said to her that made her certain of two things. First, that she would not be able to communicate directly with Mark; and secondly, that—if she escaped—the house in Sorrento was no longer a possible meeting-place. The tiny picture of the crucifix was slightly crumpled, as though it had been twisted in her hand. He imagined her standing in the dark church (it had not been so dark then as it was now) confronting the unknown assailant. She had slipped the picture card out of her missal. It had an indented line around it, so that even in the dark, she would be able to distinguish between the top and the lower part. She knew exactly where the word *Assisi* came, at the lower corner, on the right; and she had taken advantage of the very fear with which her fingers were twisting to make that arrowhead by digging a finger into the card. She had a plan, therefore, of escape; and knowing that Sorrento was now—for some reason—a closed door, she was pointing to Assisi, the very place they had discussed as an alternative to Ravello.

He was not sure how much of this was reasoning and how much was merely the desperate hope which insists on picturing possibilities when the reason has no ground to work on. But there was enough reason in it to make him determine that, if he could find no other clue, to Assisi he would go.

But he must make quite sure that he was overlooking nothing here. He had a ghastly fear that he might find her lying dead. He searched through the silent village, and the farm; and again, as the day was breaking, through all the garden, and the old red watch-tower. He examined the dusty road leading down to Amalfi, and he discovered the tracks of a large car which must have gone that way since their return from Paestum; for the tracks of the small car had been obliterated at the first corner, where the large car had passed over them and left the clear imprint of its own tread. He felt certain that Evelyn must have been taken away in the car, and that she was counting on being able to escape later. He began to catch glimpses of her purpose. The motive for getting him away from Ravello was obviously that they might throw the pursuer completely off their track. But the clue on the card was so slight that he did not dare to stake everything on it. He went

into the house, therefore, and left a note on her writing-table, worded carefully, so that only Evelyn would understand:

I am looking for you at our only other alternative, where I think you have gone. If I fail to find you there I shall return a fortnight from to-day.

He added the second sentence and dated it, to prevent their crossing one another on the journey. Then, without further delay, he set out in the small cream-coloured car. At first he had some wild thought of following the tracks of the larger car to its destination; but there were long hard stretches on the winding road to Sorrento where the tracks faded out, and he felt sure that, further on, it would be impossible to follow them. Nevertheless, it was his only direct clue, and—as far as he could—he meant to follow it. At Sorrento, in spite of what he took to be her cancellation of her former injunction that, if ever they were separated, he should look for her at the Admiral's house, he intended, as a precaution, to carry it out before going on to Assisi. To his amazement, when he reached the entrance, the tracks of the large car turned quite clearly into the private road to Sir John Roscoe's house; he could see no sign that it had come out again. Mark left his own car at the gate, drew his revolver, and went quietly up the drive, under the shadow of the lemon-trees. The green shutters were all closed on this side of the low white house; but the big car—a forty horse-power Alata—was standing in front of the door. Mark went up to the door, tried it, and found it locked. Before exploring further he carefully punctured the two front tyres of the Alata with one of those sharp adjuncts of the pocket-knife for which he had hitherto discovered no use. He discovered a most valuable one now. The quiet, escaping hiss of the air assured him that there would be considerable delay before the Alata could be used again; for there was only one spare tyre.

Then, he went round quietly to the front of the house, through the thicket of shrubs that smelt like lemon-verbena. His mind ached with the memory of his former visit there with Evelyn. The door from the terrace into the house, which had been shut then, was wide open now. He stole in, cautiously, and found in the first room he entered no sign of any recent visitor. There was a thin coating of dust on polished tables, and a ghostly glimmer of light on the dust-covers of chairs; but no sign that anything had been disturbed since the Admiral had left it. In the dining-room, however, he discovered, on a side-board, a coffee-pot and two cups, which had evidently been used that morning; for what was left in the pot was still tepid. There were used plates, too, on the dining-room table which indicated that two persons had made a light breakfast there. His blood ran cold at the thought of Evelyn in the clutches of—he knew not what or whom.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Several times in her childhood, Evelyn had walked in her sleep; but it was only the stress of the last few weeks that had induced the two later occasions, at Rome and Ravello. She had some confused dream about the smashing of the lamp in the Cathedral, and its replacement, which made her think she must go out and see that all was well. She had only half prepared for this. The sailor-suit, as Mark called it, had been easily slipped on; but her feet were bare; and, as she went up the cold aisle, she was on the verge of waking. For some time, however, she knelt in a half-trance at her usual place, near the chancel, looking at the tiny flame which was never to go out.

The sound that startled her was not a footstep or the opening of a door. Both of these sounds she had heard with complete tranquillity, in her half-dream, taking them to mean that Mark had discovered her absence and was following her. In fact, she had actually been moving a little further along the bench, making room for him to kneel at her side, when she heard her name pronounced in a low grating voice that made her start to her feet and awoke her. (It was this sudden movement that brushed the missal from the bench beside her, and scattered its pictures on the floor, where Mark found them, later, when he was frantically hunting for a clue.)

She could not see the features of her interlocutor, though he stood facing her; but, even in the darkness, she seemed to be aware of the penetrating fanaticism of his eyes. The low grating voice she knew only too well. It was the voice of Mardok.

"At last I have found you," he said. "You will come away with me now."

She tried to interrupt him, by telling him—quite conventionally—how matters stood between herself and Mark; but, as the words left her lips, she felt, with a paralysing fear, that they had become strangely irrelevant. She knew, instinctively, that something had happened to Mark; and, for a moment, her heart failed her. She remained silent and motionless as a bird hypnotized by a snake.

"I gather," the low grating voice renewed, "from what I read in your diary while I was waiting for you, that you regard yourself as married."

"What have you done to him?" she whispered. Then, suddenly, she called aloud, again and again. "Mark! Mark! Mark!"

Her cry, in the silence of that lonely place, must have echoed far and wide. The agony of it must have wrenched an answer from anyone capable of hearing or replying. But Mardok made no effort to restrain her; and the silence, as the echoes died away, closed in again, so implacably, that it seemed to clothe him with a more formidable power.

"You have killed him," she cried.

"Certainly not," said Mardok, with all the blandness of a dictator discussing his kindly feelings towards the helpless. "He is too useful for that. His future depends entirely on your own choice, your own free will. I should explain that, since we last parted, I have been on a long journey. It was necessary for me to discover the extent of the destruction. I visited Berlin and Moscow, as well as Paris; and it was the same everywhere. You have therefore become more necessary to me than ever, and I began to search for you as soon as I returned to Rome. You probably thought I was dead. Possibly you hoped I was dead."

"I went back to look for you," she said, "as soon as I could find a boat. But you had gone. I thought you had been drowned."

She was sure in her heart that the only hope, for herself or Mark, was to propitiate Mardok. Her desire to do this was conveyed, with feminine subtlety, in the softening tone of her voice.

"Would it have made any difference," he said, "if you had known that I was alive? Would you still—after I had offered you so much—would you still have chosen as you have? You think perhaps you would. But I tell you it is not so. I should have claimed you, because I had the power to claim you; and all women, in the end, prefer power to weakness."

She appeared to assent to this last statement, and she was not lying. There were higher forms of power than the physical or even the intellectual. But the propitiatory effect on Mardok revealed to her, as by a lightning-flash, the blind spot in his brain.

"Marriage, in the world as it used to be," he said, "was always a very elastic institution. In the world as it is now, there can be neither marriage nor giving in marriage. No contract that you have made can be valid, for it was made in ignorance. Pledges are necessarily subject to varying circumstances, especially when they deprive others of their opportunity. You do not pretend, or wish to pretend, that there is any binding quality in this marriage of yours."

"It was ratified here," she said, hardly realizing—till the words were out—how they would infuriate him.

"Now that the world has been swept clean of its idiotic superstitions," he replied, "we can estimate the real virtue of that. There is nothing here but wood and stone. There is no power in the world now above mine. I have the right, therefore, that has always belonged to supreme power, in any state, to annul any contract you have made."

He was mad, of course; but that was not quite all. He focused in his own person the madness that had walked in the high places of civilization and had destroyed the world. The words he used were their words.

Then, with a hint of passion that seemed to be absolutely sincere, he once more packed everything that had been wrong with the modern world into three sentences, spoken very slowly, and in that low grating tone which was like the grinding of granite on granite.

"I will be plain with you," he said. "This man acquired something before my own opportunity came. I have the power to take it; and therefore I am going to take it."

"Must it all depend on power?" she murmured again. She saw, more clearly now, that she must take every advantage of this blind spot; and her remark was instantly effective. She shivered to feel him drawing nearer through the dark.

"I was enchanted with much that I found in your diary," he said. "The account of your dream, for instance, about the house at Sorrento. I will take you there. It is a far more Paradisal place than Ravello. That is where you and I will begin the world again."

It was while he was talking in this vein that she slipped the picture of the crucifix at Assisi out of her prayer-book and, with her finger-nail, made that tiny arrow on it, pointing to the word *Assisi*. She was already forming her plans, preparing to go away with Mardok, in the hope that she might escape later and rejoin Mark at their "only alternative", to which their enemy would have no clue. She hoped that in this way he would be thrown completely off the track. She hoped that, if she could gain time, Mark would escape; but, at all costs, she wanted to prevent him from following her to Sorrento now, for she knew that Mardok's boast was not an idle one, and that Mark would be powerless against his weapons.

Mardok desired, apparently, to convince her of the truth of his theories. He did not want a rebellious slave. He wished her to share his "kingdom" as he called it, and though her will was to be absorbed in his own, it was to be willingly absorbed. At the same time, exactly as in the old political tyrannies, he seemed to feel that his strongest hold upon her would be to keep her lover alive and hint at the ghastly things that might be done to him, if she did not rejoicingly accept the conditions. He told her that Mark was his prisoner, and that he was lying unconscious in the house. He would recover consciousness in an hour or two. He had suffered no real injury. It was one of Mardok's less lethal weapons that had put him to sleep. "I will take you to a window," he said, "through which you can hear him breathing."

As they went out of the church, she dropped the little Assisi picture in the porch, and believed that Mardok had not noticed it. He gave no obvious sign; but a moment or two later he warned her—in veiled, but unmistakable terms, that if she disobeyed him, the result might be fatal to Mark. Then he took her to a window, opening into the stone-paved hall of the Palazzo Rufolo, and bade her listen. It was quite dark within, but she could hear the steady somnolent breathing of her unconscious lover. She thought that, if only she could gain time for him, he might escape. In fact, her chief anxiety was to get Mardok away, lest he should change his mind and decide to kill.

She told Mardok that she would go with him willingly to Sorrento, and he took her to his car, which was standing in a dark side-street. When she had obediently taken her place, next to the driver's seat, he shut the door and, to her surprise, strode off into the piazza. She tried all the doors of the car and found that they were locked; but, in any case, she would not have attempted to escape at the moment; for she believed that—if she did—he would certainly have killed Mark. She wanted to get Mardok well away from Ravello, before she attempted anything further.

In a few minutes he returned with a rug over his arm.

"I borrowed this from your own car," he said. "My big rug at the back is too clumsy for the front seat; and I've had no occasion hitherto for any other."

He gave her no hint that he had really gone back to look at the card she had dropped in the church porch. He had examined it, observed the arrow pointing to Assisi, wondered with a chuckle if it were intentional and—not dreaming for a moment that Mark would ever be able to pick it up—had let it fall again where he found it. The faintest suggestion of a sardonic smile, as he arranged the rug around her, made her heart sink with the feeling that something was hidden behind this unusual politeness. It was only a blind instinct; but it filled her with a new fear.

On the way down to Amalfi, she tried to think of further ways of gaining time. She wondered if she could obtain a weapon and kill him. A woman had opportunities, especially in the relationship which he desired of her. The death of Mardok floated before her in a mist of whirling thoughts, while she sat shivering at his side, on the front seat of the car, and he murmured his love-talk like a great panther.

Theirs was to be no common love, on the old conventional pattern. They were to share the secrets of the life-force and shape the world to come. He tried to tempt her with promises that she took to be indications of his madness, though some of the strange statements he made were undoubtedly true. He told her he had mastered some of the most recondite secrets of life, and that he could promise her at least a hundred years of youth and beauty. Before that time had expired, he said, there would be more knowledge at his disposal, and they two would be the first of a race of immortals, who would rule the planet like the gods of Olympus.

It sounded like madness to Evelyn; but it was the kind of madness that had possessed several of the world's leaders in recent generations; and the awful thing about it was that, on its own premises, it was absolutely logical. She listened, playing up to him in her desperate anxiety to gain time; and repeating, mechanically, that he must give her time to think. Once, by hardly more than a slip of the tongue she raised the question of right and wrong. She realized it was a mistake as soon as the words were out, and it seemed to goad him into a frenzy.

"Hypocrisy!" he cried. "If I have the power, I have the right. Were not all your political measures grounded on the powers of ten, fifty, a hundred to one. Did not all your noble democracies act on that axiom, even towards their own citizens? Oh, I studied them closely, closely, for years. Did not your politicians bribe your electors at the expense of the few? Did not your large towns absorb outlying parishes against their will? Naboth's vineyard! Did not your railway companies drive their lines across the poor man's field without the slightest compensation? They paid for it? Well, if payment is everything, I too will pay for it. Did not your own people exterminate the original owner of your country—the Red Indian? Is there a single department of modern life which considers right and wrong in such matters when *force majeure* can settle them? I must read Schopenhauer to you. The life-force, the will to live, is like this," he said; and he gave her a horrible imitation of some primeval monster advancing through the universe by swallowing and absorbing everything it encountered. It was indescribable. His mouth opened and shut; and he used both his arms as though they were gigantic crab's claws, sweeping the whole world into his maw. He looked absolutely insane while he did it, and again the awful thing was that it was all absolutely logical, and that he was merely focusing in himself a madness that had controlled the most formidable armies and armaments of the modern world.

When they arrived at the Admiral's house, Mardok took her to a room on the second floor where, he said, she might finish her thinking. The next day, he said, he would expect her decision. He managed to hint, in the subtlest way, that the future of Mark would depend on it; yet he attached great importance, apparently, to the voluntary nature of her choice. It was another characteristic instance of the blind spot in his brain.

The "future of Mark", she gathered, was not necessarily a matter of life and death; but something more appalling—his usefulness in a more or less helplessly enslaved condition, a physical subjection from which he could never escape. It was the old story of Europe, focused this time into the sharpness of a fable by its embodiment in two or three persons.

By the next morning, Evelyn had her plan, though it was almost entirely opportunist, and there seemed to be little hope of success with all the material odds so overwhelmingly against her. But she had grasped the first principle of strategy, and she would at least exact the fullest possible advantage from any discoverable weakness in the enemy.

Moreover, she understood now that the blind spot in Mardok's brain—his absolute unawareness of any moral law—was a real weakness, and she concentrated upon it. Mardok himself would have felt no insecurity, no danger, in the fact that he was unaware of any moral imperatives. Indeed—if it had been pointed out to him—he would have mistaken this

unawareness for strength, as had so often happened in the world that had gone. But now, when the issues were less complicated, it was clear enough to Evelyn that it was the one factor by which he might be defeated. At the very outset, it completely prevented him from seeing that this newly attractive woman was not being her real self.

Very soon after it was light she heard Mardok moving about on the floor below and—shortly afterwards—there was a faint fragrance of coffee. It gave her the kind of excuse that would appeal to Mardok, the excuse she needed, in her desperate anxiety to waste no time; and, in a few minutes, she had joined him in the dining-room, where he had prepared a light breakfast.

At the sound of her light step he turned abruptly, ready for her antagonism, and confident of mastery. At the same time he was not in the least surprised to see her smiling at him, from the doorway, a little enigmatically. Nor, although her lover might even then be at the point of death, was he in the least surprised at the casualness of her attitude, or the apparent callousness of her opening remark. "I thought I smelt coffee."

The remark pleased him, and she knew it pleased him. It gave him a warm inner sense of satisfaction—almost physical—as though she had poured him out a cup with her own hands. He responded at once by filling a cup for her, almost as though he were rewarding a refractory pupil for her return to normal common sense. She watched him as he did it. She fully realized now that this moral blindness of his made her real self almost invisible to him. The only question was whether there would be time for her to play her part. At this point an idea flashed into her mind. Her plan began to shape itself more and more clearly—suggested perhaps by her vivid remembrance of that former occasion, off Capri, when she had the advantage over him.

Her apparent submissiveness and anxiety to please had confirmed all Mardok's theories of the essential nature of woman; and, though even he was hardly prepared for the still more decisive confirmation which her next move gave to these theories, it was so completely in accord with them that he could have no possible ground for suspicion. Moreover, it threw him completely off the scent. He might have expected some agitated reference to the prisoner at Ravello. He was taken on his blind side, however, and incidentally delighted when, after finishing her light breakfast in apparently contented silence, she calmly turned to him and said, "I studied myself in the looking-glass this morning. You said last night that you had a wonderful scientific receipt. The woman you loved would never grow wrinkled and old. She would have almost endless youth. Is that really true?"

"It is really true," he said. "The last researches were completed—by a strange irony—only a few days before the human race decided to annihilate itself. I cannot say that it will be endless. But—a hundred years hence your eyes——"

They shone at him as he spoke.

"Your eyes will still be clear, your teeth will still be as white as almonds, your skin will still be like honey and milk, and your mouth as like a flower as it is to-day. Afterwards? Well—in a hundred years from now—who knows? We may have discovered the secret of immortality!"

"Immortality," she whispered; and for a moment there was a look in her eyes which might have enlightened him. But it was not for Mardok to suspect anything deeper. Mardok saw all that he could understand in that look; but he took it merely as an indication of her desire for the temporal results of his "scientific receipt". Her next remark seemed completely to justify him.

"Before I accept your offer, will you do something to please me?" she said.

"Make yourself willingly mine," he replied, "and we will go up to Ravello together, and set the prisoner free."

"No," she said, "forget him. It will be kinder to let him know nothing. If I'm to break with the past, we'll make it a clean break. After all, I'd known him only for a few weeks."

They were in the verandah now, looking over the sea, towards the Island of Capri. The dark amethystine coast looked astonishingly clear this morning. It seemed hardly a mile away. She remembered something that Admiral Roscoe had told her about this, and its meaning, when the wind was from the north. It was a very light wind at present, but it seemed to be breathing from that quarter.

"That's where I should like you to take me," she said, pointing to Capri. "I should like to see the place where Tiberius amused himself. I believe you are his re-incarnation. It will be amusing to hear what you have to say to me among the

ruins of your wicked old palace. Do you remember the Goat's Leap—the precipice over which your slaves used to be thrown for your diversion, a sheer drop of a thousand feet into the green water? Do you remember how you laughed at their contortions and the crazy faces they pulled before they went over the edge? Do you remember—Tiberius?"

She spoke the last word softly, and in a semi-mocking tone which to the ears of Mardok only enhanced its caressing appeal. She continued, in the same vein of artificial rhapsody. She found, instinctively, the very note that appealed to him and "amused" him, as other young women had found it—again and again—for very different purposes, with those other paranoiac masters of Europe. But Evelyn was able to do it only because she was intensely overwrought, and Mardok mistook one kind of emotional vibration for another. He was stirred by the almost hypnotic rhythm of her voice, the curious automatic rhythm in which so many different states of nervous tension may express themselves. For him, it was only pleasing evidence of what he called "temperament". New England has always had a touch of Deborah the prophetess in its Puritanical blood, and he did not in the least suspect that there might be a touch of Jael in it also, or that a voice so delicately Bostonian could be offering him "butter in a lordly dish". What was gall and wormwood to herself was honey of Hybla to Mardok. His eyes smouldered at her. There was something very remote from his usual associations about that slim, bare-footed, almost boyish figure in the sailor-like "slacks". There was something indeed quite alien to his understanding in those troubled grey eyes, under the cloud of bright hair; the pleasure-loving, yet almost childishly innocent red mouth; and the straight little Greek nose, so faintly and charmingly freckled, in just one small place about the size of a fritillary's wing. It was all very remote indeed from any suggestion of the hammer and the nail.

"It would be wonderful," she went on, "to have you making love to me out there. We might find some marvellous unspoiled corner of one of your palaces, Tiberius; perhaps the undiscovered one from which the secret stair went down to the bathing-pool of the sirens, in the Blue Grotto. No one has ever found that winding stair again; but, somewhere on the cliffs above, we might find a corner of the old palace, with the little green lizards asleep on it in the sun. I think I must have been one of your dancing girls in the old days, Tiberius. Perhaps we could find a smooth piece of the old marble floor—a few shining yards of *giallo antico*; and I would dance on it again for you. Afterwards—I suppose—I ought to lie at your feet on a leopard-skin. You should have a broken pillar of blood-red serpentine for your throne, and you should tell me of your old cruelties, Tiberius. Do you remember how the messenger came one day from your pro-consul, in Judea, a certain Pontius Pilate—wasn't that his name?—and how you laughed at his tale of that crazy King of the Jews? And then—perhaps—we should grow tired of remembering and—who knows?—we might find the secret stairs and go down to the bathing-pool of the sirens, in the Blue Grotto."

She had thrown herself so completely into the crazy exaltation of the part she was playing that she seemed to have become a flattering feminine echo of his own megalomania. He replied in almost the same key.

"And then," he said, "in the Blue Grotto, where the *ragazzi*—the little fisher lads used to dive for copper coins, so that—far down—you could see their bodies turn to glistening silver, you who are so beautiful a swimmer should dive for me, and I should see you floating up to me like a slender crescent moon in a bath of liquid sapphire."

"Let us go," she said. "I will give you my answer there." Unquestioning, unsuspecting and more than a little elated he followed her, as she led the way through the garden to a steep rock-stair in the cliff. In a tiny cove at the foot of this there was a small boat which had belonged to Admiral Roscoe. Evelyn remembered something he had told her about it, and the entrance to the Blue Grotto. She looked at the sky. The wind was still light, but it was now clearly blowing from the north. The boat was fitted with an auxiliary motor, and Mardok pronounced it to be in working order. In five minutes, with Evelyn at the tiller and Mardok acting as engineer, they had set off at a great pace across the strait of dark blue sea, and in a very short time they were rocking under the tall cliffs of Capri.

Mardok did not know the island well, and Evelyn had deliberately steered for a point not far from the small and difficult sea-entrance to the Blue Grotto. She noticed with satisfaction that one or two other small boats were obtainable at no great distance. Their own boat was rather large for the cramped and low-arched passage into that amazing sea-cavern; but, by crouching level with the gunwale and ducking their heads, they were just able to ferry it through with their hands. Even so, the slight swell of the water, when they were half-way through, jarred and splintered a row-lock against the top of the rocky vault. The next moment, they were floating in the jewelled twilight of that marvellous cavern or sea-temple, the *Grotto Azzura*. The greater part of the arch through which they had entered lay under the water. It was only through this gate of sea-water that the light could enter and, with all the magic of the sea behind it, diffuse itself in that amazing opalescent blue through the clear depths within, dyeing the rocks where the ripples washed them, as though they had been washed with blue and silver, and tingeing even the upper air of the great cavern with the luminosity of a dark sapphire. It

was this light from beneath the water that gave the unearthly beauty to the scene, and transposed the natural order of things so that you saw the dark fish moving over the blue and silver sand in the depths more clearly than you could see your neighbour's face in the upper air.

"It was this enchanting light from beneath the water," said Mardok, "that in the old days made so wonderful a setting and earned so many lire for the young Italian divers. But to-day the Blue Grotto will be transfigured. Something more beautiful than it has ever seen before will dive into those enchanted depths."

Evelyn's eyes were fixed on the low-arched entrance into the cave, as though she were watching for something. A close observer might have thought that her face lightened a little when the slight swell of the sea momentarily filled the opening.

"You will keep your promise," Mardok was saying, "you, who are such a beautiful swimmer, will dive for me?"

"And if I do," said Evelyn, "you will promise me that a hundred years hence I shall still be a beautiful swimmer."

Mardok laughed. He was feeling very well pleased with himself, and the way in which he had obviously supplanted his rival. Moreover, this young woman was certainly going to amuse him.

"You shall be more than that," he said. "I have told you that you and I will shape a new world, over which we shall reign together as no king and queen have ever reigned."

"But there will be no subjects," said Evelyn.

"You need have no fear of that," said Mardok. "I have not found them yet; but, somewhere in the world, I am convinced there are other survivors. We shall find them, and they will serve us. We shall be as gods." He said it. He used the very words.

She was still watching the entrance. The swell of the sea was clearly increasing, and the opening was more often filled by it.

Mardok, however, was set upon her promise, and he thought her delay was merely provocative. This was a point of view that he understood, and it did not displease him.

"Tell me first," she said, "why you delayed to look for me, after you had escaped from the diving-bell."

"I went to Berlin and Moscow," he said. "I wanted to discover whether there were any other survivors. They were both cities of the dead; and so were all the other cities I visited on the way."

She led him on with hero-worshipping questions to tell her of his adventures on that journey. He might almost have thought that she was in the mood of Desdemona, loving him for the dangers he had passed. He liked to see her gazing at him, while he told that tale. She hung upon his words as though she were enthralled. At last, after another glance at the entrance, she remarked,

"And you began to look for me again only when you had discovered that there was nobody else."

He laughed that low grating laugh of his; but he denied the charge. "I am quite sure there are others," he said, "but they will be few and isolated, as you were isolated, and therefore not easy to find. But about you I had made up my mind from the beginning; and I could not run the risk of losing you."

Her eyes were fixed on the entrance. During the last minute it had been filled three times in quick succession.

"But you promised to give me your answer here," he said. "You must not put me off any longer."

"I wonder how deep it is," she said. "This clear water is very deceptive."

He chuckled to himself.

At the bottom of the boat there were half-a-dozen plump sandbags, ballast for the rare occasions when a sail had been used. Quietly, while they had been talking, Evelyn had succeeded in emptying most of them over the side, as though she had been interested in watching the sand turn to amethyst and silver as it sifted down. The last two bags she now

dropped overboard intact. "Look at your divers," she said. "The last of the *ragazzi*."

She had lightened the boat with all this. It would ride still higher when she had left it. She looked at the entrance again. It was filled almost continuously now. The swell of the sea had evidently increased outside as she had been hoping. The wind from the north had arrived, and the Admiral had told her that, at such times, no boat could get through the low-arched passage to the Blue Grotto.

"Well. You know the depth now," he said. "What is the answer?"

"I'm quite ready," she replied, and suddenly stood up.

Before he could speak, she had dived neatly towards the entrance and, swimming deeply under the water, disappeared through the luminous arch.

It was several seconds before he grasped the fact that he had not only been fooled but trapped. Even if the boat had not been riding several inches higher, it would have been quite impossible to get through the sea-choked passage. In his anger, he tried to do it, during a momentary subsidence of the swell, but the next moment the bow of his boat was heaved and crashed against the rocky vault with so many crunchings and splinterings that he was afraid of foundering altogether. For a poor swimmer like himself there was no way out until the sea subsided and the wind changed. He was a prisoner in the Blue Grotto. It was only a "temporary" imprisonment, but it might last for hours. The savagery which it roused in him boded ill for his antagonists; but all he could do at present was to let it accumulate.

CHAPTER XXIX

At the Admiral's house Mark had failed to find any further clue. He had taken possession of the Admiral's binocular glasses and gone up to the cliff promontory, under the flag-staff, from which he could see long stretches of the coast in either direction, as well as long strips of the road along the coast. He scanned these closely, and then—by accident more than design—looked across the sea towards Capri. Half-way across, to his amazement, he saw a small boat, with a lateen sail, moving towards him. To the naked eye it was almost invisible, the merest speck, no larger than a seagull. But through the glasses, he could see the foam crisping round the bow. The curve of the sail concealed the occupant or occupants. The fact that the boat was heading straight for the point on which he stood made him hesitate for a moment as to whether he should conceal himself and await its arrival, or try to find another boat on the beach and meet it. He did not want to run the risk of seeing it turn round and escape.

Suddenly the sail flapped in the wind, and he caught sight of the occupant. There was only one; and he recognized her at once. He could see the tensity of her attitude, and he leapt at once to the truth. She had somehow escaped, and was in danger of pursuit. Instantly he dashed down the steep rocky stair to the beach and pushed off in a small fishing boat. Its large spread of sail rejoiced him as he hoisted it, and in a quarter of an hour the combined speeds of the two boats had brought them racing up within hail. Evelyn turned up into the wind, and Mark came alongside. They hung there just long enough for Evelyn to scramble into Mark's boat, which was the larger and faster; and then, with hardly a word spoken—they were off and away for Sorrento.

Evelyn was shivering in the fold of his arm, as though she were chilled to the bone by her wet clothes; but the sun was already hot, and he knew by the pallor of her face that it was more the reaction from the strain than anything else. He was afraid, every moment, that she was about to faint; but she pulled herself together; and, when they reached the beach, the colour had returned to her face.

He helped her up the rock-stair to the cliff-top, and told her that their car was outside the gate, on the main road.

Her only reply was to seize him by the arm and draw him on more quickly.

"Quick," she gasped, as she scrambled into the car beside him. "Quick, or he will be on our track again." Then, as the car moved off, she fell against his shoulder, and buried her face there, crying, "Oh, thank God, thank God."

It was not until they had passed Pompeii that she was able to talk consecutively of what had happened; and she was still in mortal fear of pursuit. Mark told her he was armed, but she swept this aside as futile. "You know his weapons. And he has no scruples of any kind. He believes that his power to do these things gives him the right to do them. When he came upon me suddenly in the church at Ravello, he tried to make a hideous bargain with me. He knew that we were married; and that was one of the things that had roused his fiendish hate. It was just then, while he was talking——"

"That you slipped a picture of a crucifix at Assisi out of your missal," said Mark, "and indented a tiny arrow on it with your finger-nail, pointing to Assisi. This is the road. I'm still following the instructions of your dream, you see."

"You found it then," cried Evelyn, "I thought it was hopeless." He lifted her hand and kissed it.

"It was the dear old Admiral's house, after all, that brought us together again," said Evelyn. "Perhaps dreams come true like prayers, by roundabout ways. Have you ever noticed that about prayers?"

"Perhaps it's like music," said Mark. "The composer can't always solve a problem directly; but he gets there at last by a series of modulations."

"We've been piloted, so far," said Evelyn, "and I hope we shall be piloted to Assisi. I can't believe that we shall be followed there. It's the last place that Mardok would think of. Everything came all right in that nightmare, when St. Francis held out his hands. Faster, Mark."

They were quite certainly being piloted; but they did not yet know their harbour.

CHAPTER XXX

They were well on their way to Orvieto when the thing from which they thought they were now secure happened. For no apparent cause the engine stopped; and nothing that Mark could do had the least effect upon it. There was nothing visibly wrong. Evelyn was convinced that Mardok's wireless apparatus was responsible, and that, as its range was limited, he must be hard upon their track.

Their only course was to abandon not only the car, but also the main road; for, on this, if Mardok was following them, they certainly would be overtaken in a few minutes. A little way ahead, on the right, there was a small road leading up into the hills, and they ran together up this, hand in hand, until it began to wind through the wilder woods and rocks of tufa among which they could take cover at a moment's notice, if necessary. In two minutes or less, they heard that unmistakable sound of the Alata—like the rushing of wings—along the main road below them. It stopped somewhere near the place where they had left their own car. Mardok was evidently investigating; but he did not delay long. In half a minute they heard that formidable rushing sound again. It swept along the main road towards Orvieto.

Mark drew a deep breath of relief; but Evelyn had no illusions about this enemy.

"Quickly," she cried, leading the way up the hillside. "He will soon know that he's on the wrong track, and then he'll come back and look for us."

Their respite was longer than she expected. At the next turn of the road they came upon some farm buildings, in which a mixed company of goats, mules, and two hill-ponies, were busily pulling a rick of hay to pieces. The ponies turned their heads and stared at Mark and Evelyn, then with a whinny of pleasure trotted up to them. Mark had an apple in his pocket which Evelyn divided between them, while he searched the buildings for saddles and bridles.

They were soon mounted and clattering up into the hills, between crags and oak-woods, at a pace which gave them a new hope of out-distancing their pursuer along that rough road; for the ponies were obviously enjoying the change from their masterless freedom, and Mark and Evelyn were young enough to be infected by their high spirits.

In something over an hour, the winding road straightened itself out for twenty yards and then came to an abrupt end, at the brink of a dark abyss which might well have been one of the gulfs of the Inferno. It was the prodigious crater of Balneum Regis, as awe-inspiring in its dark blue depths as the Grand Canyon. From the centre of this profound circular gulf there rose a towering hill, a monstrous column of volcanic rock, crowned by a walled city, which clasped its topmost crags and riveted itself into their savage clefts like a fortress. The only road to this amazing city seemed to run along a narrow strait of rock which—from where they stood—seemed hardly more than a knife-edge, with a dizzy precipice on either side.

Mark caught at Evelyn's rein to draw her back from the overhanging and crumbling promontory on which their ponies stood; and, at that very moment, behind them, sweeping the road, they heard the rushing sound of their pursuer's Alata. They turned swiftly to the right, and urged their ponies down a rough declivity, intending to cross the narrow rock-bridge to Balneum Regis, which was the only road now left to them. It seemed like entering a trap, for there was no other way out; but it was a trap which might be defended.

The last of the sun dropped behind the raw amethystine rampart of the hills, and the air darkened, as though a thunder-cloud were over-shadowing them. The rushing sound came up the mountain path like an eagle's wings, and then, in an instant, ceased completely, not as when a car pulls up, but as though it had suddenly vanished. There was an interval of perhaps a quarter of a minute, though it seemed interminable, and then, from below in the gulf, a muffled concussion, so dull and distant that, if they had not been listening intently, they would hardly have heard it. And then—there was one of those intense silences in which the listeners might have thought they heard the grass growing, or the clouds crisping.

For one minute, two minutes, three minutes, they stood, looking at one another and listening intently, but there was no sound. They then dismounted, tethered their ponies to a sapling oak, and stole quietly back to the point where the road ended and the abyss began.

The dark cloud moved away from the west as they reached the level ground, and the sky was suffused with glowing colour. They saw clearly what had happened to Mardok. The changes of light over that dark precipice would have made it almost impossible for him to see what lay before him and below him until it was too late. The tracks of the Alata went

almost straight to the edge of the abyss. At the very last moment it looked as if Mardok had tried to turn sharply to the right, but that something slippery on the road had caused the Alata to slither, for it had gone over at an angle. A great piece of the overhanging promontory had broken away and gone down with it, into the gulf. Glistening green across one of the wheel-tracks there was the slippery body of a dead snake.

Neither Mark nor Evelyn had known where their mountain road was leading them; but the words *Balneum Regis* and Bagnorea had come to their lips as soon as its unimaginable beauty and terror had opened out before them. The abyss might be dark as any circle of the Inferno; and that strange hill-crowning city in the centre, which still caught the last of the light, had indeed been incorporated by Dante in his epic. It was not in the Inferno, however, that he referred to it, but in the *Paradiso*; and he glorified it as the birthplace of St. Bonaventure, that great friend and follower of St. Francis; St. Bonaventure, of whom Alexander of Hales said he "seemed to have escaped the curse of Adam's sin".

Hand in hand, Mark and Eve stood looking at that famous walled city, across the abyss.

"This is the place to which we were meant to come," said Eve, "and it wasn't only in my dream that St. Francis said *Buona Ventura*!"

Then she went through a curious little ritual of her own. She took off her wedding-ring and gave it to Mark.

"When Mardok pulled me out of the car at Sorrento," she said, "he was blind with fury at his failure to make me anything more than his prisoner. He tore the ring off my finger, and threw it away. I didn't see where it went; but I found it again. I saw it shining at my feet, as we turned the corner of the house. It was lying at my feet where it had fallen—among the bushes that smelt like lemon-verbena. You remember them? I want you to put it on again, with a wish; and, perhaps, the friend of St. Francis will make it happen."

As she held out her hand, Mark noticed that the fourth finger was still bleeding. He slipped on the ring and kissed it.

"*Buona Ventura*," she said.

CHAPTER XXXI

There was nothing now to prevent them from going back to their home at Ravello, but they were well on their way to Assisi. It would seem a little ungrateful to turn back now, and the original impulse that had set their faces towards the light of Umbria was still strong within them. It was more than an impulse. It was almost a longing—the desire of the pilgrim for the distant city on a hill. During the flight from their enemy, they had seen it shining before them as a sure place of refuge, and, though this might have originated only in Evelyn's confused dream, and the strange importance which she attached to it might seem now to have vanished, the desire persisted, with the urgency of an instinct. Both of them felt it, and felt that more than they knew might be involved in their obeying that impulse. For the first time, they became conscious of a process which the whole modern world had forgotten in the chaotic and crowded life of the cities, though it was illustrated, daily, under their eyes, by the migration of birds across the sea or by a thousand natural phenomena, by the orderly swinging into position of the inconceivable hosts of "electrons" involved in the development and opening of a flower. It was a process that led myriads of unthinking creatures, animate or inanimate, to arrive at ends, purposed ends—which they themselves could never have purposed or discovered or reached by their own will or reason.

As they rode down the returning way towards the main road, they agreed that they would push on to Assisi the next day. It was a beautiful evening, warm and clear, and full of stars; and, when they reached the farm from which they had borrowed the ponies, they decided to sleep there for the night. They were so tired that they did not trouble about food. After a draught of clear water from a rocky spring in the hillside, they climbed on to the haystack, which the ponies and goats had been pulling to pieces, and fell asleep in each other's arms, with the stars looking down at them.

Early the next morning, after robbing the hen-roost of half a dozen fresh eggs, they went down to their car. They had no difficulty in starting it now, and they drove on at once to Orvieto, where they raided one or two of the little shops, and, with the aid of a new spirit-lamp, boiled their eggs and made themselves a delicious breakfast on the old ramparts overlooking the steep-down valley.

"I still feel that we are being piloted to Assisi," said Evelyn. "But yesterday was another instance of dreams and prayers coming true by a roundabout way. Do you think Freud would have explained how *Buona Ventura* came into my dream?"

"He would have explained it all right; but neither of us would have been able to eat any breakfast."

"The old artists were the best kind of dream interpreters," she said. "They had a knack of discovering the secret pattern in things. They understood that idea about the modulations in music. They used the unexpected and roundabout ways of the composer as lovely notes of surprise."

"Like an unexpectedly perfect rhyme in poetry, which brings everything into an order of a more beautiful kind," said Mark, "so many of their best works have the effect of a parable."

"That was their secret in dealing with some of the old legends, which were really dreams of a sort, and had exquisite meanings for the right interpreters, like Simone Martini, or the Maestro delle Vele d'Assisi."

Her voice lingered on the last words as though the influence of her dream was still with her, and all her thoughts were flowing to that one small city.

As they drove on through the great hills, and the sunlit woods of grey-green olive-trees, Evelyn returned more than once to their discussion of the unexpected ways in which dreams may come true and prayers be answered.

"Do you remember the legend of Joachim of Fiore," she said. "We're not far from his country now. It's a dear little fable which I think must have meant something like that. Joachim of Fiore used to go and pray alone in the woods, and it was said that a strangely beautiful flower grew out of the naked rock where he had been kneeling. The fame of it spread through all the countryside. One evening a woman picked the flower and took it away with her, thinking that it might heal a sick friend—which, indeed, it did. But the peasants of the neighbourhood were disturbed at losing the mysterious flower, and begged Joachim to pray at the rock once more, so that the flower might be restored to them. Joachim did not wish to be regarded as a worker of miracles, and at first refused; but the peasants were so urgent with him that, at last, he went into the woods alone and knelt to pray, on the rock, as they wished. The next day, to their delight, the peasants found the prayer had been answered. But it was not a flower that broke out of the rock, it was a little fountain of clear

water, more beautiful in form than even a flower; and this, of course, would flow on for ever, and could not be taken away from them."

"It's a beautiful little fable," said Mark, "and as true inwardly as it is fabulous outwardly. The only thing I know about Joachim of Fiore is that enigmatic saying of his: '*The Kingdom of the Father has passed; the Kingdom of the Son is passing; and we are now about to enter the Kingdom of the Spirit*.'"

"His Eternal Gospel was supposed to be heretical; but they forgave him after a time," said Evelyn.

She had always been interested in Joachim of Fiore, because he seemed to understand what many sensitive spirits in modern times had felt about the inner and outer aspects of Christianity. Those who looked at the outer aspects alone might find themselves, as so many of the moderns did, in a world of materialistic ceremonies and empty superstitions. But there were inner values, quite unfathomable, in what Joachim called the Eternal Gospel, values that transfigured everything, from the stones of the churches to the text of the Bible. They filled everything with endless meanings, exactly as—on a smaller scale—a picture or poem from the hand of a master might have almost infinite meanings.

As they drove down to the great Valley of Spoleto, birds began to fly across the road more frequently. They heard them singing in the olive-trees, and they seemed steadily to increase in number as they neared the birthplace of St. Francis.

It was late in the afternoon when they came through the wide Umbrian plain to the foot of the hill on which Assisi stands.

They halted for a moment by St. Mary of the Angels, the Church of the Porziuncola, which watches over the little room where St. Francis died.

"I've always felt that there was some deep meaning in that last strange wish of his," said Mark. "It was like a supreme act of renunciation which somehow more than regains all it renounces. One might have expected that he would have wished to die at Assisi. Yet he asked them to carry him down on a litter to the plain, so that he might see the place he loved best, far off, above him. It must have been like renouncing heaven."

"There was all his Master in it," whispered Evelyn, under her breath. Tears filled her eyes, as they had filled Mark's, in the place that he called home, two months ago, remembering how St. Francis asked that his litter should be placed where his eyes might see his little city on the hill. In her own longing for the place her heart was full of the unearthly beauty of the words which had broken from the lips of St. Francis in the supreme moment, when Sister Death drew near him; and, without speaking a word, both of their hearts pulsed with the same remembered cry: *Blessed be thou of God, O holy City; for through thee shall many be saved, and in thee shall dwell many servants of the Lord; and out of thee shall many be chosen for the kingdom of eternal life*.

As they drove up the steep winding road to the walled town and the great monastery on its dominating crag, there were flocks of birds on all sides of them. It was impossible not to think that the small feathered friends of that kindly saint must have been protected by his beneficent shadow. It was not a miracle, except in the sense that everything is a miracle; but, after all those ages, it was certainly true that the memory of one man's kindliness had so influenced his neighbourhood that the wild birds, which had been mercilessly exterminated in some parts of the country, had found a sanctuary here. Their increasing numbers had a curiously cumulative effect, leading up through the tangled vineyards to Assisi in ever-increasing bursts of song, which induced a strange sense of expectation as though the hill-crowning citadel they were approaching were a fountain of life and compassion.

They left their car at the first stone arch of that strong fortress, and entered it on foot. As they went up the twisted climbing streets, their strange feeling of expectation was enhanced by something else. The sun was sinking; but, as the great plain below grew dimmer and dimmer, Assisi on its hill seemed to be growing into the light. In the distance its walls had looked grey; but, seen from within at sunset, it was transfigured. A translucent colour glowed in the stone—the beautiful native stone of its own hill—an exquisite and ethereal rose-colour, luminous as a sunset-cloud.

Suddenly Evelyn caught at Mark's arm and pointed to an arched shrine in the wall of one of the houses. Before a figure of the Madonna and child, a lamp was burning.

The door of the house was open and Mark went in, followed by Evelyn. In the one small room, on the ground floor, there was a table laid for an evening meal, with wine and bread. Evelyn laid her hand upon a crust of the bread, and found it warm. But there was no one in the house.

They went out into the street again and, although it was completely deserted and there was no sign of any living inhabitant, they felt that there was some strange difference about the place, some quality in the very colour and texture of the stone, an indescribable loveliness in the very light that seemed to fill it like a living presence and separate it from any other place that they had ever seen.

By narrow street and winding stair of rose-tinted stone they went right up to the ancient arched gateway, beyond which they saw tall cypresses, black in the evening light, towering like sentinels over the deep valley below, and, above these, only the bare hill, rising steeply to its bleak summit.

They were standing still for a moment, near the old gateway, scrutinizing the houses below them—from this high point of vantage—for any sign of a living inhabitant. The immense plain of Umbria had almost vanished in the violet twilight beyond and beneath the hill; but Assisi itself, still catching the evening light, and still brightening as the darkness below it deepened, seemed almost to be detached from the earth. It hung there in a rose-coloured nimbus of its own, like a celestial citadel of shining rocks and winding ethereal streets. While they were looking at it, the most amazing thing happened. There resounded, from the square-towered monastery below, the deep note of a great bronze bell. The two listeners stared at one another as though a phantom had passed on the wings of the wind. But it was no phantom. The great slow hammer struck again and again, and the deep vibrating waves of sound went throbbing out like a challenge to the gathering night. But it was more than a challenge—it was a masterful and dominant proclamation—or so it seemed to those two, through whom every note of it shivered with an unearthly power—a proclamation that here was something above the night, and stronger than death. Leonardo said, once, to his disciples, that in the sound of a bell they would find every name and word (*ogni nome e vocabolo*) that the mind could imagine. To-night for these two, in the universal stillness, which seemed as though it were being broken for the first time, it spoke—not of the hour, but of things eternal.

Only two or three hundred yards below them, to the west, the monastery and church of San Francesco looked like a fortress commanding the universe—an effect which was again intensified by the light on the square-cut tower, and the vast dimness of the almost invisible Umbrian plain in the shadowy gulf beneath. It was intensified also by the way in which the triple strength of San Francesco was clamped into the rock on three levels; the upper church, as it was called; the lower church; and the crypt, which was the heart of the whole fabric, being itself a great vaulted church over-arching the rock-tomb in which St. Francis was originally laid so long ago. Its fortress-like aspect was intensified again by the low bright ramparts, which ran along the western side of the level and open spaces before both the upper and lower entrance-doors. Over the ramparts, half an hour ago, the old enemy of Assisi, the warrior-city of Perugia, might have been seen, miles away, on its own challenging hill; but it was lost now in the violet dusk, and all the light of the world seemed now to be concentrated on this one high citadel.

Without a word, Mark gripped Evelyn's hand, and they made their way, almost running, down the steep descent to the first of the two levels, the open space before the tall doors of the upper church. They entered, and found no one—only those great scenes from the life of St. Francis, on the painted walls, and the echo of their own footsteps. Evelyn's eyes were drawn to the sanctuary lamp, at the far end of the church.

"It is lighted," she said, "I believe it is lighted."

They went towards it, doubting and uncertain whether the ruby-coloured gleam came from within or without, until they stood almost beneath it, when they saw that the little flame was burning as steadfastly as the star that steers the ships, or their own small lamp at Ravello.

Then, as they were about to go and search elsewhere, a sound reached them, so overwhelmingly beautiful that it robbed them of all power to move, and held them breathless. It was the Magnificat chanted (as it seemed, in their strangely broken solitude) by a great choir of male voices. The whole Order of St. Francis seemed to be quietly singing together, in some glorious gathering outside space and time, while other voices, less firm and clear, but not less beautiful—voices of men, women and children—gradually broke in, as though all Assisi were accompanying them.

The two listeners looked at one another with quivering lips for a minute; then the tears came, and they fell on their knees, and let the voices of Assisi carry them where they would. In the world that had vanished, the words to which they were listening had been so familiar that their heart-rending beauty had been forgotten. The glorious old Latin had at least saved those who adhered to it from that loss. But as it pulsed around those two listeners the words that beat with the beating of their own hearts were the words of the equally glorious old English version. Their childhood was in it; their schooldays were in it; the lost religion of Christendom was in it, with all its deep meanings and half-forgotten hopes.

And now, in their new and strange world, the deadening familiarity had dropped away, and they could do no more than bow the head before a revelation of infinite beauty.

As the music died away, Mark whispered to Evelyn, "We must go down and find them."

They went out into the sunset-coloured air again; and, making their way down to the second level, entered the lower church. Near the door everything was in darkness; but at the far end there was a blaze of light. As they moved nearer to it, they felt that one of the great pictures of the old masters had somehow come to life, and that they were being quietly drawn into it from the formless night outside. It seemed to hold everything that was now of value in the world. At the altar which was built immediately over the tomb of St. Francis in the crypt below, two Franciscans were going through the rite of "benediction". Immediately below and around them were rows of illuminated faces of their Order—old and young, many of them grave and austere, like those of men engaged in a stern and tremendous enterprise, yet all strangely illuminated from within, as well as by the soft radiance of the candles. Behind these, there seemed to be gathered all the dwellers in Assisi—men, women and children, who in that hour and place looked as though they had been assembled from the peasants of Cimabue or Giotto.

There was no longer a gulf between the high imaginations of art and the common life of every day. The celebrants at the altar, their utterly impersonal symbolic actions, their symbolic vestures, the symbolic lights, the symbolic incense; and, beyond these, the faces of the peasants, with their dark imaginative eyes, drinking in all that this vital art and music and drama so exquisitely directed to its true end could give the soul of man—all this made one picture. It was what Giotto and the Maestro delle Vele had spent their lives and every faculty of their minds in trying to paint, and it was alive. To eyes no longer blinded by use and wont, this life of every day, though it was only revealing its own wonder and beauty, was transfigured.

Two or three bare-footed children had stolen up to the steps of the altar. Their brown up-turned faces and dark shining eyes were filled with a childish wonder. Nobody paid any more attention to them than if they had been sparrows who had made their home there at the invitation of St. Francis himself. But their innocent little faces, and indeed the whole picture, seemed to be the living foreground of the masterpieces on the painted wall. It was this, perhaps, that gave the scene its timelessness—a timelessness in which the present was reconciled to a past more remote even than the beginnings of Christianity. The rite that they were watching had elements in it far older than history. They went back to the earliest days of that Eastern people whose religious genius was at least as unique as the aesthetic genius of the Greeks, and whose monotheism and sense of universal law formed the rock-foundations not only of Christendom, but of knowledge itself. The mind would have to traverse endless deserts and many thousands of years before it found at some rude altar on a high mountain, or beyond the black tents at the edge of some Arabian wilderness, the beginnings of that symbolic prayer of the mass, in which the voice of supplication is said to ascend like incense, and the hands are raised as for "the evening sacrifice".

As Benediction was drawing to its close, a Franciscan came quietly up to Mark and Evelyn and drew them away to the Cappella di San Martino, a side-chapel, nearer the doors.

"So you have found us," he said in English. "It must have been terrible out there. You have nowhere to go to-night, of course. There is a small house waiting for you, if you wish. My sister will get everything ready for you."

Mark thanked him, feeling that this man too, for all the vitality in his dark eyes, had stepped out of those faintly discernible pictures on the wall—where St. Martin is giving his cloak to a beggar, and then—in a dream—sees Christ Himself wearing it.

Their new friend contributed to the timelessness of it all, not only by his Franciscan garb, but by giving them his name as "Brother Juniper". He led them up the narrow street that they had climbed earlier. The rose-coloured light was fading now, but the scent of roses drifted to them over the walls of narrow gardens, where the cypresses towered like black flames to the stars. To their amazement Brother Juniper stopped under the shrine where the light burned before the Madonna, and took them into the very house they had already entered. He pointed to the table, with its loaf of bread and flask of wine.

"It is already half prepared for you," he said, with a smile. "My sister—Jacoba—will be here soon."

Then seeing the look of astonishment on their faces, he added: "Don't be afraid. You are not dreaming. We have several houses ready for—those who have been chosen. My sister broke off her work here to go to Benediction. There was no

miracle. These things belonged to her; but, of course, she will leave them now and provide whatever else is necessary. Tomorrow, if you wish, we can discuss plans for the future."

They murmured an incoherent gratitude. He seemed to take it for granted—or to have some private knowledge—that Assisi was, in fact, the only place that had escaped the disaster. Mark asked him how this had happened. He remained silent, for a moment. Then, very gravely and simply, putting the question by, he said, "Not all who lived in Assisi have been saved. San Francesco, you must have seen, was by no means full. Many of those who were working in the valley below have not returned. Among them was Jacoba's husband. But if the world is to begin again we could hardly do better than with the help and inspiration of St. Francis."

At this moment his sister, Jacoba, returned—with a basket on her arm, and her children, a little boy of five and a little girl of three; holding on to her skirt. They were all bare-footed, and in good clean peasant dress. Jacoba held herself and spoke like that Princess Poverty in the celestial marriage-scene.

While she busied herself, with Evelyn's help, in making everything ready, Brother Juniper asked Mark many questions, and replied to many others. Their community at Assisi, he said, included all that was necessary for a good beginning. They had excellent vineyards, and fields of wheat, and plenty of experienced men and women to cultivate them. They had good craftsmen, wood-carvers, workers in wrought-iron, a printing-press, two young sculptors, one of great promise, four or five excellent painters. Please God they would never again be caught in the mechanical wheels of the industrial system. When Mark told him that he had a medical degree, Brother Juniper gripped his hand and shook it. "I knew," he said, "that you must have been sent to us for a purpose. We had women who were good nurses, but we had no doctor."

Brother Juniper spoke very simply of his own hopes for the future and the new beginning that was to be made at Assisi. There, at any rate, no conflicting questions of sovereignty would arise, for there was only one Ruler of the Universe. Christendom had returned, though on the smallest of scales. Its continuity was unbroken. That strange conclave in the Sistine Chapel, anticipating the disaster, had sent them a provisional message. The light would not go out.

It was not until Mark and Evelyn had been left to themselves for the night that they realized how Brother Juniper and Jacoba had drawn them out upon their own adventures, but had evaded every question about the way in which Assisi had escaped the disaster.

"Once," said Mark, "I suspected him of irony. He began to talk about the peculiar texture of the native stone, as though he were suggesting a scientific explanation. I'd half expected Brother Juniper to suggest that it was a miracle."

"That's why, of course, he cut the ground from under your feet. Perhaps he's more certain of his own ground than we know."

"You were right about the lamp at Ravello."

"You hadn't much faith in that superstition of mine, had you, Mark? Poor darling, you loved me, and you were afraid to marry me. But I knew we should find our home at last. One of these days I suppose we shall have to go over to Ravello for some of our treasures; but that can wait, until we're thoroughly settled in here."

They woke early the next morning to the sound of the great bell of San Francesco. They leaned out of their open bedroom window and looked at the sunlit slope of tangled vines dropping steeply down behind the house to St. Mary of the Angels, the lily of Umbria.

Evelyn drew deep breaths of the sunlit air, with its faint redolence of wood-smoke and roses. Already they could hear the pleasant sounds of reawakening human life. A cart drawn by great white oxen was coming slowly up the winding road from the valley. A hammer clinked at the iron-worker's forge. Then——

"Listen," said Evelyn, "oh, listen," and Mark's hand took her own.

In one of the vineyards below them a melodious Italian voice had begun to sing one of the lovely old songs of Tuscany:

"*L'è rivenuto il fior di primavera.*

L'è ritornata la verdura al prato
L'è ritornato chi prima non c'era
È ritornato lo mio innamorato——"

"*It has come back—the flower of youth and spring.*
It has come back—the green leaf to the plain.
It has come back—the heart that once took wing,
My true love's heart has found its home again."

[The end of *The Last Man* by Alfred Noyes]