ELIZABETH VON ARNIM

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Содержание

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July 22nd.

I want to be quiet now.

I crawled up here this morning from the valley like a sick ant,—struggled up to the little house on the mountain side that I haven't seen since the first August of the war, and dropped down on the grass outside it, too tired even to be able to thank God that I had got home.

Here I am once more, come back alone to the house that used to be so full of happy life that its little wooden sides nearly burst with the sound of it. I never could have dreamed that I would come back to it alone. Five years ago, how rich I was in love; now how poor, how stripped of all I had. Well, it doesn't matter. Nothing matters. I'm too tired. I want to be quiet now. Till I'm not so tired. If only I can be quiet....

July 23rd.

Yesterday all day long I lay on the grass in front of the door and watched the white clouds slowly passing one after the other at long, lazy intervals over the tops of the delphiniums,—the row

of delphiniums I planted all those years ago. I didn't think of anything; I just lay there in the hot sun, blinking up and counting the intervals between one spike being reached and the next. I was conscious of the colour of the delphiniums, jabbing up stark into the sky, and of how blue they were; and yet not so blue, so deeply and radiantly blue, as the sky. Behind them was the great basin of space filled with that other blue of the air, that lovely blue with violet shades in it; for the mountain I am on drops sharply away from the edge of my tiny terrace-garden, and the whole of the space between it and the mountains opposite brims all day long with blue and violet light. At night the bottom of the valley looks like water, and the lamps in the little town lying along it like quivering reflections of the stars.

I wonder why I write about these things. As if I didn't know them! Why do I tell myself in writing what I already so well know? Don't I know about the mountain, and the brimming cup of blue light? It is because, I suppose, it's lonely to stay inside oneself. One has to come out and talk. And if there is no one to talk to one imagines someone, as though one were writing a letter to somebody who loves one, and who will want to know, with the sweet eagerness and solicitude of love, what one does and what the place one is in looks like. It makes one feel less lonely to think like this,—to write it down, as if to one's friend who cares. For I'm afraid of loneliness; shiveringly, terribly afraid. I don't mean the ordinary physical loneliness, for here I am, deliberately travelled away from London to get to it, to its spaciousness and

healing. I mean that awful loneliness of spirit that is the ultimate tragedy of life. When you've got to that, really reached it, without hope, without escape, you die. You just can't bear it, and you die.

July 24th.

It's queer the urge one has to express oneself, to get one's self into words. If I weren't alone I wouldn't write, of course, I would talk. But nearly everything I wanted to say would be things I couldn't say. Not unless it was to some wonderful, perfect, all-understanding listener,—the sort one used to imagine God was in the days when one said prayers. Not quite like God though either, for this listener would sometimes say something kind and gentle, and sometimes, stroke one's hand a little to show that he understood. Physically, it is most blessed to be alone. After all that has happened, it is most blessed. Perhaps I shall grow well here, alone. Perhaps just sitting on these honey-scented grass slopes will gradually heal me. I'll sit and lick my wounds. I do so dreadfully want to get mended! I do so dreadfully want to get back to confidence in goodness.

July 25th.

For three days now I've done nothing but lie in the sun, except when meals are put in the open doorway for me. Then I get up reluctantly, like some sleepy animal, and go and eat them and come out again.

In the evening it is too cold and dewy here for the grass, so I drag a deep chair into the doorway and sit and stare at the

darkening sky and the brightening stars. At ten o'clock Antoine, the man of all work who has looked after the house in its years of silence during the war, shuts up everything except this door and withdraws to his own room and his wife; and presently I go in too, bolting the door behind me, though there is nothing really to shut out except the great night, and I creep upstairs and fall asleep the minute I'm in bed. Indeed, I don't think I'm much more awake in the day than in the night. I'm so tired that I want to sleep and sleep; for years and years; for ever and ever.

There was no unpacking to do. Everything was here as I left it five years ago. We only took, five years ago, what each could carry, waving goodbye to the house at the bend of the path and calling to it as the German soldiers called to their disappearing homes, 'Back for Christmas!' So that I came again to it with only what I could carry, and had nothing to unpack. All I had to do was to drop my little bag on the first chair I found and myself on to the grass, and in that position we both stayed till bedtime.

Antoine is surprised at nothing. He usedn't to be surprised at my gaiety, which yet might well have seemed to him, accustomed to the sobriety of the peasant women here, excessive; and nor is he now surprised at my silence. He has made a few inquiries as to the health and whereabouts of the other members of that confident group that waved goodbyes five years ago, and showed no surprise when the answer, at nearly every name, was 'Dead.' He has married since I went away, and hasn't a single one of the five children he might have had, and he doesn't seem surprised at

that either. I am. I imagined the house, while I was away, getting steadily fuller, and used to think that when I came back I would find little Swiss babies scattered all over it; for, after all, there quite well might have been ten, supposing Antoine had happened to possess a natural facility in twins.

July 26th.

The silence here is astonishing. There are hardly any birds. There is hardly any wind, so that the leaves are very still and the grass scarcely stirs. The crickets are busy, and the sound of the bells on distant cows pasturing higher up on the mountains floats down to me; but else there is nothing but a great, sun-flooded silence.

When I left London it was raining. The Peace Day flags, still hanging along the streets, drooped heavy with wet in what might have been November air, it was so dank and gloomy. I was prepared to arrive here in one of the mountain mists that settle down on one sometimes for days,—vast wet stretches of grey stuff like some cold, sodden blanket, muffling one away from the mountains opposite, and the valley, and the sun. Instead I found summer: beautiful clear summer, fresh and warm together as only summer up on these honey-scented slopes can be, with the peasants beginning to cut the grass,—for things happen a month later here than down in the valley, and if you climb higher you can catch up June, and by climbing higher and higher you can climb, if you want to, right back into the spring. But you don't want to if you're me. You don't want to do anything but stay quiet

where you are.

July 27th.

If only I don't think—if only I don't think and remember—how can I not get well again here in the beauty and the gentleness? There's all next month, and September, and perhaps October too may be warm and golden. After that I must go back, because the weather in this high place while it is changing from the calms of autumn to the calms of the exquisite alpine winter is a disagreeable, daunting thing. But I have two whole months; perhaps three. Surely I'll be stronger, tougher, by then? Surely I'll at least be better? I couldn't face the winter in London if this desperate darkness and distrust of life is still in my soul. I don't want to talk about my soul. I hate to. But what else am I to call the innermost *Me,* the thing that has had such wounds, that is so much hurt and has grown so dim that I'm in terror lest it should give up and go under, go quite out, and leave me alone in the dark?

July 28th.

It is dreadful to be so much like Job.

Like him I've been extraordinarily stripped of all that made life lovely. Like him I've lost, in a time that is very short to have been packed so full of disasters, nearly everything I loved. And it wasn't only the war. The war passed over me, as it did over everybody, like some awful cyclone, flattening out hope and fruitfulness, leaving blood and ruins behind it; but it wasn't

only that. In the losses of the war, in the anguish of losing one's friends, there was the grisly comfort of companionship in grief; but beyond and besides that life has been devastated for me. I do feel like Job, and I can't bear it. It is so humiliating, being so much stricken. I feel ridiculous as well as wretched; as if somebody had taken my face and rubbed it in dust.

And still, like Job, I cling on to what I can of trust in goodness, for if I let that go I know there would be nothing left but death.

July 29th.

Oh, what is all this talk of death? To-day I suddenly noticed that each day since I've been here what I've written down has been a whine, and that each day while I whined I was in fact being wrapped round by beautiful things, as safe and as perfectly cared for *really* as a baby fortunate enough to have been born into the right sort of family. Oughtn't I to be ashamed? Of course I ought; and so I am. For, looking at the hours, each hour as I get to it, they are all good. Why should I spoil them, the ones I'm at now, by the vivid remembrance, the aching misery, of those black ones behind me? They, anyhow, are done with; and the ones I have got to now are plainly good. And as for Job who so much haunted me yesterday, I can't really be completely like him, for at least I've not yet had to take a potsherd and sit down somewhere and scrape. But perhaps I had better touch wood over that, for one has to keep these days a wary eye on God.

Mrs. Antoine, small and twenty-five, who has been provided by Antoine, that expert in dodging inconveniences, with a churn

suited to her size out of which she produces little pats of butter suited to my size every day, Switzerland not having any butter in it at all for sale,—Mrs. Antoine looked at me to-day when she brought out food at dinner time, and catching my eye she smiled at me; and so I smiled at her, and instantly she began to talk.

Up to now she has crept about softly on the tips of her toes as if she were afraid of waking me, and I had supposed it to be her usual fashion of moving and that it was natural to her to be silent; but to-day, after we had smiled at each other, she stood over me with a dish in one hand and a plate in the other, and held forth at length with the utmost blitheness, like some carolling blacks bird, about her sufferings, and the sufferings of Antoine, and the sufferings of everybody during the war. The worse the sufferings she described had been the blither became her carollings; and with a final chirrup of the most flute-like cheerfulness she finished this way:

'Ah, ma foi, oui—il y avait un temps où il a fallu se fier entièrement au bon Dieu. C'était affreux.'

July 30th.

It's true that the worst pain is the remembering one's happiness when one is no longer happy and perhaps it may be just as true that past miseries end by giving one some sort of satisfaction. Just their being over must dispose one to regard them complacently. Certainly I already I remember with a smile and a not unaffectionate shrug troubles that seemed very dreadful a few years back. But this—this misery that has got me now, isn't

it too deep, doesn't it cut too ruthlessly at the very roots of my life ever to be something that I will smile at? It seems impossible that I ever should. I think the remembrance of this year will always come like a knife cutting through any little happiness I may manage to collect. You see, what has happened has taken away my faith in *goodness*,—I don't know who *you* are that I keep on wanting to tell things to, but I must talk and tell you. Yes; that is what it has done; and the hurt goes too far down to be healed. Yet I know time is a queer, wholesome thing. I've lived long enough to have found that out. It is very sanitary. It cleans up everything. It never fails to sterilise and purify. Quite possibly I shall end by being a wise old lady who discourses with, the utmost sprightliness, after her regular meals, on her past agonies, and extracts much agreeable entertainment from them, even is amusing about them. You see, they will be so far away, so safely done with; never, anyhow, going to happen again. Why of course in time, in years and years, one's troubles must end by being entertaining. But I don't believe, however old I am and however wisely hilarious, I shall ever be able to avoid the stab in the back, the clutch of pain at the heart, that the remembrance of beautiful past happiness gives one. Lost. Lost. Gone. And one is still alive, and still gets up carefully every day, and buttons all one's buttons, and goes down to breakfast.

July 31st.

Once I knew a bishop rather intimately—oh, nothing that wasn't most creditable to us both—and he said to me, 'Dear child,

you will always be happy if you are good.'

I'm afraid he couldn't have been quite candid, or else he was very inexperienced, for I have never been so terribly good in the bishop's sense as these last three years, turning my back on every private wish, dreadfully unselfish, devoted, a perfect monster of goodness. And unhappiness went with me every step of the way.

I much prefer what some one else said to me, (not a bishop but yet wise,) to whom I commented once on the really extraordinary bubbling happiness that used to wake up with me every morning, the amazing joy of each day as it came, the warm flooding gratitude that I *should* be so happy,—this was before the war. He said, beginning also like the bishop but, unlike him, failing in delicacy at the end, 'Dear child, it is because you have a sound stomach.'

August 1st.

The last first of August I was here was the 1914 one. It was just such a day as this,—blue, hot, glorious of colour and light. We in this house, cut off in our remoteness from the noise and excitement of a world setting out with cries of enthusiasm on its path of suicide, cut off by distance and steepness even from the valley where the dusty Swiss soldiers were collecting and every sort of rumour ran like flames, went as usual through our pleasant day, reading, talking, clambering in the pine-woods, eating romantic meals out in the little garden that hangs like a fringe of flowers along the edge of the rock, unconscious, serene, confident in life. Just as to-day the delphiniums stood brilliantly

blue, straight, and motionless on this edge, and it might have been the very same purple pansies crowding at their feet. Nobody came to tell us anything. We were lapped in peace. Of course even up here there had been the slight ruffle of the Archduke's murder in June, and the slight wonder towards the end of July as to what would come of it; but the ruffle and the wonder died away in what seemed the solid, ever-enduring comfortableness of life. Such comfortableness went too deep, was too much settled, too heavy, to make it thinkable that it should ever really be disturbed. There would be quarrels, but they would be localised. Why, the mere feeding of the vast modern armies would etc., etc. We were very innocent and trustful in those days. Looking back at it, it is so pathetic as to be almost worthy of tears.

Well, I don't want to remember all that. One turns with a sick weariness from the recollection. At least one is thankful that we're at Now and not at Then. This first of August has the great advantage of having all that was coming after that first of August behind it instead of ahead of it. At least on this first of August most of the killing, of the slaughtering of young bodies and bright hopes, has left off. The world is very horrible still, but nothing can ever be so horrible as killing.

August 2nd.

The only thing to do with one's old sorrows is to tuck them up neatly in their shroud and turn one's face away from their grave towards what is coming next.

That is what I am going to do. To-day I have the kind of

feelings that take hold of convalescents. I hardly dare hope it, but I have done things to-day that do seem convalescent; done them and liked doing them; things that I haven't till to-day had the faintest desire to do.

I've been for a walk. And a quite good walk, up in the forest where the water tumbles over rocks and the air is full of resin. And then when I got home I burrowed about among my books, arranging their volumes and loving the feel of them. It is more than ten days since I got here, and till to-day I haven't moved; till to-day I've lain about with no wish to move, with no wish at all except to have no wish. Once or twice I have been ashamed of myself; and once or twice into the sleepy twilight of my mind has come a little nicker of suspicion that perhaps life still, after all, may be beautiful, that it may perhaps, after all, be just as beautiful as ever if only I will open my eyes and look. But the flicker has soon gone out again, damped out by the vault-like atmosphere of the place it had got into.

To-day I do feel different; and oh how glad I'd be if I *could* be glad! I don't believe there was ever anybody who loved being happy as much as I did. What I mean is that I was so acutely conscious of being happy, so appreciative of it; that I wasn't ever bored, and was always and continuously grateful for the whole delicious loveliness of the world.

I think it must be unusual never to have been bored. I realise this when I hear other people talk. Certainly I'm never bored as people sometimes appear to be by being alone, by the absence

of amusement from without; and as for bores, persons who obviously were bores, they didn't bore me, they interested me. It was so wonderful to me, their unawareness that they were bores. Besides, they were usually very kind; and also, shameful though it is to confess, bores like me, and I am touched by being liked, even by a bore. Sometimes it is true I have had to take temporary refuge in doing what Dr. Johnson found so convenient, —withdrawing my attention, but this is dangerous because of the inevitable accompanying glazed and wandering eye. Still, much can be done by practice in combining coherency of response with private separate meditation.

Just before I left London I met a man whose fate it has been for years to sit daily in the Law Courts delivering judgments, and he told me that he took a volume of poetry with him—preferably Wordsworth—and read in it as it lay open on his knees under the table, to the great refreshment and invigoration of his soul; and yet, so skilled had he become in the practice of two attentivenesses, he never missed a word that was said or a point that was made. There are indeed nice people in the world. I did like that man. It seemed such a wise and pleasant thing to do, to lay the dust of those sad places, where people who once liked each other go because they are angry, with the gentle waters of poetry. I am sure that man is the sort of husband whose wife's heart gives a jump of gladness each time he comes home.

August 3rd.

These burning August days, when I live in so great a glory

of light and colour that it is like living in the glowing heart of a jewel, how impossible it is to keep from gratitude. I'm so grateful to be here, to *have* here to come to. Really I think I'm beginning to feel different—remote from the old unhappy things that were strangling me dead; restored; almost as though I might really some day be in tune again. There's a moon now, and in the evenings I get into a coat and lie in the low chair in the doorway watching it, and sometimes I forget for as long as a whole half hour that the happiness I believed in is gone for ever. I love sitting there and feeling little gusts of scent cross my face every now and then, as if some one had patted it softly in passing by. Sometimes it is the scent of the cut grass that has been baking all day in the sun, but most often it is the scent from a group of Madonna lilies just outside the door, planted by Antoine in one of the Septembers of the war.

'*C'est ma maman qui me les a donnés*,' he said; and when I had done expressing my joy at their beauty and their fragrance, and my appreciation of his *maman's* conduct in having made my garden so lovely a present, he said that she had given them in order that, by brewing their leaves and applying the resulting concoction at the right moment, he and Mrs. Antoine might be cured of suppurating wounds.

'But you haven't got any suppurating wounds,' I said, astonished and disillusioned.

'*Ah, pour ça non*,' said Antoine. '*Mais il ne faut pas attendre qu'on les a pour se procurer le remède.*'

Well, if he approaches every future contingency with the same prudence he must be kept very busy; but the long winters of the war up here have developed in him, I suppose, a Swiss Family Robinson-like ingenuity of preparation for eventualities.

What lovely long words I've just been writing. I can't be as convalescent as I thought. I'm sure real vigour is brief. You don't say Damn if your vitality is low; you trail among querulous, water-blooded words like regrettable and unfortunate. But I think, perhaps, being in my top layers very adaptable, it was really the elderly books I've been reading the last day or two that made me arrange my language along their lines. Not old books,—elderly. Written in the great Victorian age, when the emotions draped themselves chastely in lengths, and avoided the rude simplicities of shorts.

There is the oddest lot of books in this house, pitchforked together by circumstances, and sometimes their accidental rearrangement by Antoine after cleaning their shelves each spring of my absence would make their writers, if they could know, curdle between their own covers. Some are standing on their heads—Antoine has no prejudices about the right side up of an author—most of those in sets have their volumes wrong, and yesterday I found a Henry James, lost from the rest of him, lost even, it looked like, to propriety, held tight between two ladies. The ladies were Ouida and Ella Wheeler Wilcox. They would hardly let him go, they had got him so tight. I pulled him out, a little damaged, and restored him, ruffled in spite of

my careful smoothing, to his proper place. It was the *Son and Brother*; and there he had been for months, perhaps years, being hugged. Dreadful.

When I come down to breakfast and find I am a little ahead of the *café au lait*, I wander into the place that has most books in it—though indeed books are in every place, and have even oozed along the passages—and fill up the time, till Mrs. Antoine calls me, in rescue work of an urgent nature. But it is impossible, I find, to tidy books without ending by sitting on the floor in the middle of a great untidiness and reading. The coffee grows cold and the egg repulsive, but still I read. You open a book idly, and you see:

The most glaring anomalies seemed to afford them no intellectual inconvenience, neither would they listen to any arguments as to the waste of money and happiness which their folly caused them. I was allowed almost to call them life-long self-deceivers to their faces, and they said it was quite true, but that it did not matter.

Naturally then you read on.

You open another book idly, and you see:

Our admiration of King Alfred is greatly increased by the fact that we know very little about him.

Naturally then you read on.

You open another book idly, and you see:

Organic life, we are told, has developed gradually from the protozoon to the philosopher, and this development, we

are assured, is indubitably an advance. Unfortunately it is the philosopher, not the protozoon, who gives us this assurance.

Naturally then you read on.

You open—but I could go on all day like this, as I do go on being caught among the books, and only the distant anxious chirps of Mrs. Antoine, who comes round to the front door to clear away breakfast and finds it hasn't been begun, can extricate me.

Perhaps I had better not get arranging books before breakfast. It is too likely to worry that bird-like Mrs. Antoine, who is afraid, I daresay, that if I don't drink my coffee while it is hot I may relapse into that comatose condition that filled her evidently with much uneasiness and awe. She hadn't expected, I suppose, the mistress of the house, when she did at last get back to it, to behave like some strange alien slug, crawled up the mountain only to lie motionless in the sun for the best part of a fortnight. I heard her, after the first two days of this conduct, explaining it to Antoine, who however needed no explanation because of his god-like habit of never being surprised, and her explanation was that *c'était la guerre*,—convenient explanation that has been used to excuse many more unnatural and horrible things during the last five years than somebody's behaving as if she were a slug.

But, really, the accidental juxtapositions on my bookshelves! Just now I found George Moore (his *Memories of my Dead Life,* with its delicate unmoralities, its delicious paganism) with on one side of him a book called *Bruey: a Little Worker for Christ*, by

Frances Ridley Havergal, and on the other an American book called *The Unselfishness of God, and How I Discovered It.*

The surprise of finding these three with their arms, as it were, round each other's necks, got me nearer to laughter than I have been for months. If anybody had been with me I *would* have laughed. Is it possible that I am so far on to-day in convalescence that I begin to want a companion? Somebody to laugh with? Why, if that is so....

But I'd best not be too hopeful.

August 4th.

This day five years ago! What a thrill went through us up here, how proud we felt of England, of belonging to England; proud with that extraordinary intensified patriotism that lays hold of those who are not in their own country.

It is very like the renewal of affection, the re-flaming up of love, for the absent. The really wise are often absent; though, indeed, their absences should be arranged judiciously. Too much absence is very nearly as bad as too little,—no, not really very nearly; I should rather say too much has its drawbacks too, though only at first. Persisted in these drawbacks turn into merits; for doesn't absence, prolonged enough, lead in the end to freedom? I suppose, however, for most people complete freedom is too lonely a thing, therefore the absence should only be just long enough to make room for one to see clear again. Just a little withdrawal every now and then, just a little, so as to get a good view once more of those dear qualities we first loved, so as to be

able to see that they're still there, still shining.

How can you see anything if your nose is right up against it? I know when we were in England, enveloped in her life at close quarters, bewildered by the daily din of the newspapers, stunned by the cries of the politicians, distracted by the denouncements, accusations, revilings with which the air was convulsed, and acutely aware of the background of sad drizzling rain on the pavements, and of places like Cromwell Road and Shaftesbury Avenue and Ashley Gardens being there all the time, never different, great ugly houses with the rain dripping on them, gloomy temporary lodgings for successive processions of the noisy dead,—I know when we were in the middle of all this, right up tight against it, we couldn't see, and so we forgot the side of England that was great.

But when she went to war we were not there; we had been out of her for months, and she had got focussed again patriotically. Again she was the precious stone set in a silver sea, the other Eden, demi-Paradise, the England my England, the splendid thing that had made splendid poets, the hope and heart of the world. Long before she had buckled on her sword—how easily one drops into the old language!—long before there was any talk of war, just by sheer being away from her we had re-acquired that peculiar aggressive strut of the spirit that is patriotism. We liked the Swiss, we esteemed them; and when we crossed into Italy we liked the Italians too, though esteeming them less,—I think because they seemed less thrifty and enjoyed

themselves more, and we were still sealed up in the old opinion that undiscriminating joyless thrift was virtuous. But though we liked and esteemed these people it was from a height. At the back of our minds we always felt superior, at the back of our minds we were strutting. Every day of further absence from England, our England, increased that delicious sub-conscious smugness. Then when on the 4th of August she 'came in,' came in gloriously because of her word to Belgium, really this little house contained so much enthusiasm and pride that it almost could be heard cracking.

What shall we do when we all get to heaven and aren't allowed to have any patriotism? There, surely, we shall at last be forced into one vast family. But I imagine that every time God isn't looking the original patriotism of each will break out, right along throughout eternity; and some miserable English tramp, who has only been let into heaven because he positively wasn't man enough for hell, will seize his opportunity to hiss at a neat Swiss business man from Berne, whose life on earth was blamelessly spent in the production of cuckoo-clocks, and whose mechanical-ingenuity was such that he even, so ran the heavenly rumours among the mild, astonished angels, had propagated his family by machinery, that he, the tramp, is a b—Briton, and if he, the b—b—b—Swiss (I believe tramps always talk in b's; anyhow newspapers and books say they do), doubts it, he'd b—well better come outside and he, the tramp, will b—well soon show him.

To which the neat Berne gentleman, on other subjects so

completely pervaded by the local heavenly calm, will answer with a sudden furious mechanical buzzing, much worse and much more cowing to the tramp than any swear-words, and passionately uphold the might and majesty of Switzerland in a prolonged terrific *whrrrrr*.

August 5th.

I want to talk. I must be better.

August 6th.

Of course, the most battered, the most obstinately unhappy person couldn't hold out for ever against the all-pervading benediction of this place. I know there is just the same old wretchedness going on as usual outside it,—cruelty, people wantonly making each other miserable, love being thrown away or frightened into fits, the dreadful betrayal of trust that is the blackest wretchedness of all,—I can almost imagine that if I were to hang over my terrace-wall I would see these well-known dreary horrors crawling about in the valley below, crawling and tumbling about together in a ghastly tangle. But at least there isn't down there now my own particular contribution to the general wretchedness. I brought that up here; dragged it up with me, not because I wanted to, but because it would come. Surely, though, I shall leave it here? Surely there'll be a day when I'll be able to pack it away into a neat bundle and take it up to the top of some, arid, never-again-to-be-visited rock, and leave it there and say, 'Goodbye. I'm separate. I've cut the umbilical cord. Goodbye old

misery. Now for what comes next.'

I can't believe this won't happen. I can't believe I won't go back down the mountain different from what I was when I came. Lighter, anyhow, and more wholesome inside. Oh, I do so *want* to be wholesome inside again! Nicely aired, sunshiny; instead of all dark, and stuffed up with black memories.

August 7th.

But I am getting on. Every morning now when I wake and see the patch of bright sunshine on the wall at the foot of my bed that means another perfect day, my heart goes out in an eager prayer that I may not disgrace so great a blessing by private gloom. And I do think each of these last days has been a little less disgraced than its yesterday. Hardly a smudge, for instance, has touched any part of this afternoon. I have felt as though indeed I were at last sitting up and taking notice. And the first thing I want to do, the first use I want to make of having turned the corner, is to talk.

How feminine. But I love to talk. Again how feminine. Well, I also love to listen. But chiefly I love to listen to a man; therefore once more, how feminine. Well, I'm a woman, so naturally I'm feminine; and a man does seem to have more to say that one wants to hear than a woman. I do want to hear what a woman has to say too, but not for so long a time, and not so often. Not nearly so often. What reason to give for this reluctance I don't quite know, except that a woman when she talks seems usually to have forgotten the salt. Also she is apt to go on talking; sometimes for quite a little while after you have begun to wish she would

leave off.

One of the last people who stayed here with me alone in 1914, just before the arrival of the gay holiday group of the final days, was a woman of many gifts—*le trop est l'ennemi du bien*—who started, therefore, being full of these gifts and having eloquently to let them out, talking at the station in the valley where I met her, and didn't, to my growing amazement and chagrin, for I too wanted to say some things, leave off (except when night wrapped her up in blessed silence) till ten days afterwards, when by the mercy of providence she swallowed a crumb wrong, and so had to stop.

How eagerly, released for a moment, I rushed in with as much as I could get out during the brief time I knew she would take to recover! But my voice, hoarse with disuse, had hardly said three sentences—miserable little short ones—when she did recover, and fixing impatient and reproachful eyes on me said:

'Do you *always* talk so much?'

Surely that was unjust?

August 8th.

Now see what Henry James wrote to me—to *me* if you please! I can't get over it, such a feather in my cap. Why, I had almost forgotten I had a cap to have a feather in, so profound has been my humbling since last I was here.

In the odd, fairy-tale like way I keep on finding bits of the past, of years ago, as though they were still of the present, even of the last half hour, I found the letter this morning in a room

I wandered into after breakfast. It is the only room downstairs besides the hall, and I used to take refuge in it from the other gay inhabitants of the house so as to open and answer letters somewhere not too distractingly full of cheerful talk; and there on the table, spotlessly kept clean by Antoine but else not touched, were all the papers and odds and ends of five years back exactly as I must have left them. Even some chocolate I had apparently been eating, and some pennies, and a handful of cigarettes, and actually a box of matches,—it was all there, all beautifully dusted, all as it must have been when last I sat there at the table. If it hadn't been for the silence, the complete, sunny emptiness and silence of the house, I would certainly have thought I had only been asleep and having a bad dream, and that not five years but one uneasy night had gone since I nibbled that chocolate and wrote with those pens.

Fascinated and curious I sat down and began eating the chocolate again. It was quite good; made of good, lasting stuff in that good, apparently lasting age we used to live in. And while I ate it I turned over the piles of papers, and there at the bottom of them was a letter from Henry James.

I expect I kept it near me on the table because I so much loved it and wanted to re-read it, and wanted, I daresay, at intervals proudly to show it to my friends and make them envious, for it was written at Christmas, 1913; months before I left for England.

Reading it now my feeling is just astonishment that I, *I* should ever have had such a letter. But then I am greatly humbled; I

have been on the rocks; and can't believe that such a collection of broken bits as I am now could ever have been a trim bark with all its little sails puffed out by the kindliness and affection of anybody as wonderful as Henry James.

Here it is; and it isn't any more vain of me now in my lamed and bruised condition to copy it out and hang on its charming compliments than it is vain for a woman who once was lovely and is now grown old to talk about how pretty she used to be:

21 Carlyle Mansions,

Cheyne Walk, S.W.,
December 29th, 1913.

Dear—

Let me tell you that I simply delight in your beautiful and generous and gracious little letter, and that there isn't a single honeyed word of it that doesn't give me the most exquisite pleasure. You fill the measure—and how can I tell you how I *like* the measure to be filled? None of your quarter-bushels or half-bushels for *my* insatiable appetite, but the overflowing heap, pressed down and shaken together and spilling all over the place. So I pick up the golden grains and nibble them one by one! Truly, dear lady, it is the charmingest rosy flower of a letter—handed me straight out of your monstrous snowbank. That you can grow such flowers in such conditions—besides growing with such diligence and elegance all sorts of other lovely kinds, has for its explanation of course only that you have such a regular

teeming garden of a mind. You must mainly inhabit it of course —with your other courts of exercise so grand, if you will, but so grim. Well, you have caused me to revel in pride and joy—for I assure you that I have let myself go; all the more that the revelry of the season here itself has been so far from engulfing me that till your witching words came I really felt perched on a mountain of lonely bleakness socially and sensuously speaking alike—very much like one of those that group themselves, as I suppose, under your windows. But I have had my Xmastide *now*, and am your all grateful and faithful and all unforgetting old Henry James.

Who wouldn't be proud of getting a letter like that? It was wonderful to come across it again, wonderful how my chin went up in the air and how straight I sat up for a bit after reading it. And I laughed, too; for with what an unbuttoned exuberance must I have engulfed him! 'Spilling all over the place.' I can quite believe it. I had, I suppose, been reading or re-reading something of his, and had been swept off sobriety of expression by delight, and in that condition of emotional unsteadiness and molten appreciation must have rushed impetuously to the nearest pen.

How warmly, with what grateful love, one thinks of Henry James. How difficult to imagine anyone riper in wisdom, in kindliness, in wit; greater of affection; more generous of friendship. And his talk, his wonderful talk,—even more wonderful than his books. If only he had had a Boswell! I did ask him one day, in a courageous after-dinner mood, if he wouldn't take me on as his Boswell; a Boswell so deeply devoted that

perhaps qualifications for the post would grow through sheer admiration. I told him—my courageous levity was not greater on that occasion than his patience—that I would disguise myself as a man; or better still, not being quite big enough to make a plausible man and unlikely to grow any more except, it might be hoped, in grace, I would be an elderly boy; that I would rise up early and sit up late and learn shorthand and do anything in the world, if only I might trot about after him taking notes—the strange pair we should have made! And the judgment he passed on that reckless suggestion, after considering its impudence with much working about of his extraordinary mobile mouth, delivering his verdict with a weight of pretended self-depreciation intended to crush me speechless,—which it did for nearly a whole second—was: 'Dear lady, it would be like the slow squeezing out of a big empty sponge.'

August 9th.

This little wooden house, clinging on to the side of the mountain by its eyelashes, or rather by its eyebrows, for it has enormous eaves to protect it from being smothered in winter in snow that look exactly like overhanging eyebrows,—is so much cramped up for room to stand on that the garden along the edge of the rock isn't much bigger than a handkerchief.

It is a strip of grass, tended with devotion by Antoine, whose pride it is that it should be green when all the other grass on the slopes round us up the mountain and down the mountain are parched pale gold; which leads him to spend most of his evening

hours watering it. There is a low wall along the edge to keep one from tumbling over, for if one did tumble over it wouldn't be nice for the people walking about in the valley five thousand feet below, and along this wall is the narrow ribbon of the only flowers that will put up with us.

They aren't many. There are the delphiniums, and some pansies and some pinks, and a great many purple irises. The irises were just over when I first got here, but judging from the crowds of flower-stalks they must have been very beautiful. There is only one flower left; exquisite and velvety and sun-warmed to kiss—which I do diligently, for one must kiss something—and with that adorable honey-smell that is the very smell of summer.

That's all in the garden. It isn't much, written down, but you should just see it. Oh yes—I forgot. Round the corner, scrambling up the wall that protects the house in the early spring from avalanches, are crimson ramblers, brilliant against the intense blue of the sky. Crimson ramblers are, I know, ordinary things, but you should just see them. It is the colour of the sky that makes them so astonishing here. Yes—and I forgot the lilies that Antoine's *maman* gave him. They are near the front door, and next to them is a patch of lavender in full flower now, and all day long on each of its spikes is poised miraculously something that looks like a tiny radiant angel, but that flutters up into the sun when I go near and is a white butterfly. Antoine must have put in the lavender. It used not to be there. But I don't ask him because of what he might tell me it is really for, and

I couldn't bear to have that patch of sheer loveliness, with the little shining things hovering over it, explained as a *remède* for something horrid.

If I could paint I would sit all day and paint; as I can't I try to get down on paper what I see. It gives me pleasure. It is somehow companionable. I wouldn't, I think, do this if I were not alone. I would probably exhaust myself and my friend pointing out the beauty.

The garden, it will be seen, as gardens go, is pathetic in its smallness and want of variety. Possessors of English gardens, with those immense wonderful herbaceous borders and skilfully arranged processions of flowers, might conceivably sniff at it. Let them. I love it. And, if it were smaller still, if it were shrunk to a single plant with a single flower on it, it would perhaps only enchant me the more, for then I would concentrate on that one beauty and not be distracted by the feeling that does distract me here, that while I am looking one way I am missing what is going on in other directions. Those beasts in Revelations—the ones full of eyes before and behind—I wish I had been constructed on liberal principles like that.

But one really hardly wants a garden here where God does so much. It is like Italy in that way, and an old wooden box of pansies or a pot of lilies stuck anywhere, in a window, on the end of a wall, is enough; composing instantly with what is so beautifully there already, the light, the colour, the shapes of the mountains. Really, where God does it all for you just a

yard or two arranged in your way is enough; enough to assert your independence, and to show a proper determination to make something of your own.

August 10th.

I don't know when it is most beautiful up here,—in the morning, when the heat lies along the valley in delicate mists, and the folded mountains, one behind the other, grow dimmer and dimmer beyond sight, swooning away through tender gradations of violets and greys, or at night when I look over the edge of the terrace and see the lights in the valley shimmering as though they were reflected in water.

I seem to be seeing it now for the first time, with new eyes. I know I used to see it when I was here before, used to feel it and rejoice in it, but it was entangled in other things then, it was only part of the many happinesses with which those days were full, claiming my attention and my thoughts. They claimed them wonderfully and hopefully it is true, but they took me much away from what I can only call for want of a better word—(a better word: what a thing to say!)—God. Now those hopes and wonders, those other joys and lookings-forward and happy trusts are gone; and the wounds they left, the dreadful sore places, are slowly going too. And how I see beauty now is with the new sensitiveness, the new astonishment at it, of a person who for a long time has been having awful dreams, and one morning wakes up and the delirium is gone, and he lies in a state of the most exquisite glad thankfulness, the most extraordinary minute

appreciation of the dear, wonderful common things of life,—just the sun shining on his counterpane, the scents from the garden coming in through his window, the very smell of the coffee being got ready for breakfast. Oh, delight, delight to think one didn't die this time, that one isn't going to die this time after all, but is going to get better, going to live, going presently to be quite well again and able to go back to one's friends, to the people who still love one....

August 11th.

To-day is a saint's day. This is a Catholic part of Switzerland, and they have a great many holidays because they have a great many saints. There is hardly a week without some saint in it who has to be commemorated, and often there are two in the same week, and sometimes three. I know when we have reached another saint, for then the church bells of the nearest village begin to jangle, and go on doing it every two hours. When this happens the peasants leave off work, and the busy, saint-unencumbered Protestants get ahead.

Mrs. Antoine was a Catholic before she married, but the sagacious Antoine, who wasn't one, foreseeing days in most of his weeks when she might, if he hadn't been quite kind, to her, or rather if she fancied he hadn't been quite kind to her—and the fancies of wives, he had heard, were frequent and vivid—the sagacious Antoine, foreseeing these numerous holy days ahead of him on any of which Mrs. Antoine might explain as piety what was really pique and decline to cook his dinner, caused her to

turn Protestant before the wedding. Which she did; conscious, as she told me, that she was getting a *bon mari qui valait bien ça*; and thus at one stroke Antoine secured his daily dinners throughout the year and rid himself of all his wife's relations. For they, consisting I gather principally of aunts, her father and mother being dead, were naturally displeased and won't know the Antoines; which is, I am told by those who have managed it, the most refreshing thing in the world: to get your relations not to know you. So that not only does he live now in the blessed freedom and dignity that appears to be reserved for those whose relations are angry, but he has no priests about him either. Really Antoine is very intelligent.

And he has done other intelligent things while I have been away. For instance:

When first I came here, two or three years before the war, I desired to keep the place free from the smells of farmyards. 'There shall be no cows,' I said.

'*C'est bien*,' said Antoine.

'Nor any chickens.'

'*C'est bien*' said Antoine.

'Neither shall there be any pigs.'

'*C'est bien*,' said Antoine.

'*Surtout*', I repeated, fancying I saw in his eye a kind of private piggy regret, '*pas de porcs*.'

'*C'est bien*,' said Antoine, the look fading.

For most of my life up to then had been greatly infested by

pigs; and though they were superior pigs, beautifully kept, housed and fed far better, shameful to relate, than the peasants of that place, on the days when the wind blew from where they were to where we were, clean them and air them as one might there did come blowing over us a great volume of unmistakeable pig. Eclipsing the lilies. Smothering the roses. Also, on still days we could hear their voices, and the calm of many a summer evening was rent asunder by their squeals. There were an enormous number of little pigs, for in that part of the country it was unfortunately not the custom to eat sucking-pigs, which is such a convenient as well as agreeable way of keeping them quiet, and they squealed atrociously; out of sheer high spirits, I suppose, being pampered pigs and having no earthly reason to squeal except for joy.

Remembering all this, I determined that up here at any rate we should be pure from pigs. And from cows too; and from chickens. For did I not also remember things both cows and chickens had done to me? The hopes of a whole year in the garden had often been destroyed by one absent-minded, wandering cow; and though we did miracles with wire-netting and the concealing of wire-netting by creepers, sooner or later a crowd of lustful hens, led by some great bully of a cock, got in and tore up the crocuses just at that early time of the year when, after an endless winter, crocuses seem the most precious and important things in the world.

Therefore this place had been kept carefully empty of live-

stock, and we bought our eggs and our milk from the peasants, and didn't have any sausages, and the iris bulbs were not scratched up, and the air had nothing in it but smells of honey and hay in summer, and nothing in winter but the ineffable pure cold smell of what, again for want of a better word, I can only describe as God. But then the war came, and our hurried return to England; and instead of being back as we had thought for Christmas, we didn't come back at all. Year after year went, Christmas after Christmas, and nobody came back. I suppose Antoine began at last to feel as if nobody ever would come back. I can't guess at what moment precisely in those years his thoughts began to put out feelers towards pigs, but he did at last consider it proper to regard my pre-war instructions as finally out of date, and gathered a suitable selection of live-stock about him. I expect he got to this stage fairly early, for having acquired a nice, round little wife he was determined, being a wise man, to keep her so. And having also an absentee *patrone*—that is the word that locally means me—absent, and therefore not able to be disturbed by live-stock, he would keep her placid by keeping her unconscious.

How simple, and how intelligent.

In none of his monthly letters did the word pig, cow, or chicken appear. He wrote agreeably of the weather: *c'était magnifique,* or *c'était bien triste*, according to the season. He wrote of the French and Belgian sick prisoners of war, interned in those places scattered about the mountains which used to be the

haunts of parties catered for by Lunn. He wrote appreciatively of the usefulness and good conduct of the watch-dog, a splendid creature, much bigger than I am, with the lap-doggy name of Mou-Mou. He lengthily described unexciting objects like the whiskers of the cat: *favoris superbes qui poussent toujours, malgré ces jours maigres de guerre*; and though sometimes he expressed a little disappointment at the behaviour of Mrs. Antoine's *estomac, qui lui fait beaucoup d'ennuis et paraît mal résister aux grands froids*, he always ended up soothingly: *Pour la maison tout va bien. Madame peut être entièrement tranquille.*

Never a word, you see, about the live-stock.

So there in England was Madame being *entièrement tranquille* about her little house, and glad indeed that she could be; for whatever had happened to it or to the Antoines she wouldn't have been able to do anything. Tethered on the other side of the impassable barrier of war, if the house had caught fire she could only, over there in England, have wrung her hands; and if Mrs. Antoine's *estomac* had given out so completely that she and Antoine had had to abandon their post and take to the plains and doctors, she could only have sat still and cried. The soothing letters were her comfort for five years,—*madame peût-être entièrement tranquille*; how sweetly the words fell, month by month, on ears otherwise harassed and tormented!

It wasn't till I had been here nearly a fortnight that I began to be aware of my breakfast. Surely it was very nice? Such a lot of milk; and every day a little jug of cream. And surprising butter,

—surprising not only because it was so very fresh but because it was there at all. I had been told in England that there was no butter to be got here, not an ounce to be bought from one end of Switzerland to the other. Well, there it was; fresh every day, and in a singular abundance.

Through the somnolence of my mind, of all the outward objects surrounding me I think it was the butter that got in first; and my awakening intelligence, after a period of slow feeling about and some relapses, did at last one morning hit on the conviction that at the other end of that butter was a cow.

This, so far, was to be expected as the result of reasoning. But where I began to be pleased with myself, and feel as if Paley's Evidences had married Sherlock Holmes and I was the bright pledge of their loves, was when I proceeded from this, without moving from my chair, to discover by sheer thinking that the cow was very near the butter, because else the butter couldn't possibly be made fresh every day,—so near that it must be at that moment grazing on the bit of pasture belonging to me; and, if that were so, the conclusion was irresistible that it must be my cow.

After that my thoughts leaped about the breakfast table with comparative nimbleness. I remembered that each morning there had been an egg, and that eggy puddings had appeared at the other meals. Before the war it was almost impossible to get eggs up here; clearly, then, I had chickens of my own. And the honey; I felt it would no longer surprise me to discover that I also had bees, for this honey was the real thing,—not your made-

up stuff of the London shops. And strawberries; every morning a great cabbage leaf of strawberries had been on the table, real garden strawberries, over long ago down in the valley and never dreamed of as things worth growing by the peasants in the mountains. Obviously I counted these too among my possessions in some corner out of sight. The one object I couldn't proceed to by inductive reasoning from what was on the table was a pig. Antoine's courage had failed him over that. Too definitely must my repeated warning have echoed in his ears: *Surtout pas de porcs.*

But how very intelligent he had been. It needs intelligence if one is conscientious to disobey orders at the right moment. And me so unaware all the time, and therefore so unworried!

He passed along the terrace at that moment, a watering-pot in his hand.

'Antoine,' I said.

'Madame,' he said, stopping and taking off his cap.

'This egg—' I said, pointing to the shell. I said it in French, but prefer not to put my French on paper.

'*Ah—madame a vu les poules*.'

'This butter—'

'*Ah—madame a visité la vache.*'

'The pig—?' I hesitated. 'Is there—is there also a pig?'

'*Si madame veut descendre à la cave—*'

'You never keep a pig in the cellar?' I exclaimed.

'*Comme jambon,*' said Antoine—calm, perfect of manner,

without a trace of emotion.

And there sure enough I was presently proudly shown by Mrs. Antoine, whose feelings are less invisible than her husband's, hanging from the cellar ceiling on hooks that which had once been pig. Several pigs; though she talked as if there had never been more than one. It may be so, of course, but if it is so it must have had a great many legs.

Un porc centipède, I remarked thoughtfully, gazing upwards at the forest of hams.

Over the thin ice of this comment she slid, however, in a voluble description of how, when the armistice was signed, she and Antoine had instantly fallen upon and slain the pig—pig still in the singular—expecting Madame's arrival after that felicitous event at any minute, and comprehending that *un porc vivant pourrait déranger madame, mais que mort il ne fait rien à personne que du plaisir.* And she too gazed upwards, but with affection and pride.

There remained then nothing to do but round off these various transactions by a graceful and grateful paying for them. Which I did to-day, Antoine presenting the bills, accompanied by complicated calculations and deductions of the market price of the milk and butter and eggs he and Mrs. Antoine would otherwise have consumed during the past years.

I didn't look too closely into what the pig had cost,—his price, as my eye skimmed over it was obviously the price of something plural. But my eye only skimmed. It didn't dwell. Always Antoine

and I have behaved to each other like gentlemen.

August 12th.

I wonder why I write all this. Is it because it is so like talking to a friend at the end of the day, and telling him, who is interested and loves to hear, everything one has done? I suppose it is that; and that I want, besides, to pin down these queer days as they pass,—days so utterly unlike any I ever had before. I want to hold them a minute in my hand and look at them, before letting them drop away for ever. Then, perhaps, in lots of years, when I have half forgotten what brought me up here, and don't mind a bit about anything except to laugh—to laugh with the tenderness of a wise old thing at the misunderstandings, and mistakes, and failures that brought me so near shipwreck, and yet underneath were still somehow packed with love—I'll open this and read it, and I daresay quote that Psalm about going through the vale of misery and using it as a well, and be quite pleasantly entertained.

August 13th.

If one sets one's face westwards and goes on and on along the side of the mountain, refusing either to climb higher or go lower, and having therefore to take things as they come and somehow get through—roaring torrents, sudden ravines, huge trees blown down in a forgotten blizzard and lying right across one's way; all the things that mountains have up their sleeve waiting for one —one comes, after two hours of walk so varied as to include scowling rocks and gloomy forests, bright stretches of delicious

grass full of flowers, bits of hayfield, clusters of fruit-trees, wide sun-flooded spaces with nothing between one apparently and the great snowy mountains, narrow paths where it is hardly light enough to see, smells of resin and hot fir needles, smells of traveller's joy, smells of just cut grass, smells of just sawn wood, smells of water tumbling over stones, muddy smells where the peasants have turned some of the torrent away through shallow channels into their fields, honey smells, hot smells, cold smells,—after two hours of this walking, which would be tiring because of the constant difficulty of the ground if it weren't for the odd way the air has here of carrying you, of making you feel as though you were being lifted along, one comes at last to the edge of a steep slope where there is a little group of larches.

Then one sits down.

These larches are at the very end of a long tongue into which the mountain one started on has somehow separated, and it is under them that one eats one's dinner of hard boiled egg and bread and butter, and sits staring, while one does so, in much astonishment at the view. For it is an incredibly beautiful view from here, of an entirely different range of mountains from the one seen from my terrace; and the valley, with its twisting, tiny silver thread that I know is a great rushing river, has strange, abrupt, isolated hills scattered over it that appear each to have a light and colour of its own, with no relation to the light and colour of the mountains.

When first I happened on this place the building of my house

had already been started, and it was too late to run to the architect and say: Here and here only will I live. But I did for a wild moment, so great was the beauty I had found, hope that perhaps Swiss houses might be like those Norwegian ones one reads about that take to pieces and can be put up again somewhere else when you've got bored, and I remember scrambling back hastily in heat and excitement to ask him whether this were so.

He said it wasn't; and seemed even a little ruffled, if so calm a man were capable of ruffling, that I should suppose he would build anything that could come undone.

'This house,' he said, pointing at the hopeless-looking mass that ultimately became so adorable, 'is built for posterity. It is on a rock, and will partake of the same immovability.'

And when I told him of the place I had found, the exquisite place, more beautiful than a dream and a hundred times more beautiful than the place we had started building on, he, being a native of the district, hardy on his legs on Sundays and accordingly acquainted with every inch of ground within twenty miles, told me that it was so remote from villages, so inaccessible by any road, that it was suited as a habitation only to goats.

'Only goats,' he said with finality, waving his hand, 'could dwell there, and for goats I do not build.'

So that my excitement cooled down before the inevitable, and I have lived to be very glad the house is where it is and not where, for a few wild hours, I wanted it; for now I can go to the other when I am in a beauty mood and see it every time with fresh

wonder, while if I lived there I would have got used to it long ago, and my ardour been, like other ardours, turned by possession into complacency. Or, to put it a little differently, the house here is like an amiable wife to whom it is comfortable to come back for meals and sleeping purposes, and the other is a secret love, to be visited only on the crest of an ecstasy.

To-day I took a hard boiled egg and some bread and butter, and visited my secret love.

The hard boiled egg doesn't seem much like an ecstasy, but it is a very good foundation for one. There is great virtue in a hard boiled egg. It holds one down, yet not too heavily. It satisfies without inflaming. Sometimes, after days of living on fruit and bread, a slice of underdone meat put in a sandwich and eaten before I knew what I was doing, has gone straight to my head in exactly the way wine would, and I have seen the mountains double and treble themselves, besides not keeping still, in a very surprising and distressing way, utterly ruinous to raptures. So now I distrust sandwiches and will not take them; and all that goes with me is the hard boiled egg. Oh, and apricots, when I can get them. I forgot the apricots. I took a handful to-day,—big, beautiful rosy-golden ones, grown in the hot villages of the valley, a very apricotty place. And, that every part of me should have sustenance, I also took Law's *Serious Call*.

He went because he's the thinnest book I've got on my shelves that has at the same time been praised by Dr. Johnson. I've got several others that Dr. Johnson has praised, such as Ogden

on *Prayer*, but their bulk, even if their insides were attractive, makes them have to stay at home. Johnson, I remembered, as I weighed Law thoughtfully in my hand and felt how thin he was, said of the *Serious Call* that he took it up expecting it to be a dull book, and perhaps to laugh at it—'but I found Law quite an overmatch for me.' He certainly would be an overmatch for me, I knew, should I try to stand up to him, but that was not my intention. What I wanted was a slender book that yet would have enough entertainment in it to nourish me all day; and opening the *Serious Call* I was caught at once by the story of Octavius, a learned and ingenious man who, feeling that he wasn't going to live much longer, told the friends hanging on his lips attentive to the wisdom that would, they were sure, drop out, that in the decay of nature in which he found himself he had left off all taverns and was now going to be nice in what he drank, so that he was resolved to furnish his cellar with a little of the very best whatever it might cost. And hardly had he delivered himself of this declaration than 'he fell ill, was committed to a nurse, and had his eyes closed by her before his fresh parcel of wine came in.'

The effect of this on some one called Eugenius was to send him home a new man, full of resolutions to devote himself wholly to God; for 'I never, says Eugenius, was so deeply affected with the wisdom and importance of religion as when I saw how poorly and meanly the learned Octavius was to leave the world through the want of it.'

So Law went with me, and his vivacious pages,—the story of Octavius is but one of many; there is Matilda and her unhappy daughters ('The eldest daughter lived as long as she could under this discipline,' but found she couldn't after her twentieth year and died, 'her entrails much hurt by being crushed together with her stays';) Eusebia and her happy daughters, who were so beautifully brought up that they had the satisfaction of dying virgins; Lepidus, struck down as he was dressing himself for a feast; the admirable Miranda, whose meals were carefully kept down to exactly enough to give her proper strength to lift eyes and hands to heaven, so that 'Miranda will never have her eyes swell with fatness or pant under a heavy load of flesh until she has changed her religion'; Mundamus, who if he saw a book of devotion passed it by; Classicus, who openly and shamelessly preferred learning to devotion—these vivacious pages greatly enlivened and adorned my day. But I did feel, as I came home at the end of it, that Dr. Johnson, for whom no one has more love and less respect than I, ought to have spent some at least of his earlier years, when he was still accessible to reason, with, say, Voltaire.

Now I am going to bed, footsore but glad, for this picnic to-day was a test. I wanted to see how far on I have got in facing memories. When I set out I pretended to myself that I was going from sheer considerateness for servants, because I wished Mrs. Antoine to have a holiday from cooking my dinner, but I knew in my heart that I was making, in trepidation and secret doubt,

a test. For the way to this place of larches bristles with happy memories. They would be sitting waiting for me, I knew, at every bush and corner in radiant rows. If only they wouldn't be radiant, I thought, I wouldn't mind. The way, I thought, would have been easier if it had been punctuated with remembered quarrels. Only then I wouldn't have gone to it at all, for my spirit shudders away from places where there has been unkindness. It is the happy record of this little house that never yet have its walls heard an unkind word or a rude word, and not once has anybody cried in it. All the houses I have lived in, except this, had their sorrows, and one at least had worse things than sorrows; but this one, my little house of peace hung up in the sunshine well on the way to heaven, is completely free from stains, nothing has ever lived in it that wasn't kind. And I shall not count the wretchedness I dragged up with me three weeks ago as a break in this record, as a smudge on its serenity, but only as a shadow passing across the sun. Because, however beaten down I was and miserable, I brought no anger with me and no resentment. Unkindness has still not come into the house.

Now I am going very happy to bed, for I have passed the test. The whole of the walk to the larches, and the whole of the way back, and all the time I was sitting there, what I felt was simply gratitude, gratitude for the beautiful past times I have had. I found I couldn't help it. It was as natural as breathing. I wasn't lonely. Everybody I have loved and shall never see again was with me. And all day, the whole of the wonderful day of beauty, I

was able in that bright companionship to forget the immediate grief, the aching wretchedness, that brought me up here to my mountains as a last hope.

August 14th.

To-day it is my birthday, so I thought I would expiate it by doing some useful work.

It is the first birthday I've ever been alone, with nobody to say Bless you. I like being blessed on my birthday, seen off into my new year with encouragement and smiles. Perhaps, I thought, while I dressed, Antoine would remember. After all, I used to have birthdays when I was here before, and he must have noticed the ripple of excitement that lay along the day, how it was wreathed in flowers from breakfast-time on and dotted thick with presents. Perhaps he would remember, and wish me luck. Perhaps if he remembered he would tell his wife, and she would wish me luck too. I did very much long to-day to be wished luck.

But Antoine, if he had ever known, had obviously forgotten. He was doing something to the irises when I came down, and though I went out and lingered round him before beginning breakfast he took no notice; he just went on with the irises. So I daresay I looked a little wry, for I did feel rather afraid I might be going to be lonely.

This, then, I thought, giving myself a hitch of determination, was the moment for manual labour. As I drank my coffee I decided to celebrate the day by giving both the Antoines a holiday and doing the work myself. Why shouldn't my birthday

be celebrated by somebody else having a good time? What did it after all matter who had the good time so long as somebody did? The Antoines should have a holiday, and I would work. So would I defend my thoughts from memories that might bite. So would I, by the easy path of perspiration, find peace.

Antoine, however, didn't seem to want a holiday. I had difficulty with him. He wasn't of course surprised when I told him he had got one, because he never is, but he said, with that level intonation that gives his conversation so noticeable a calm, that it was the day for cutting the lawn.

I said I would cut the lawn; I knew about lawns; I had been brought up entirely on lawns,—I believe I told him I had been born on one, in my eagerness to forestall his objections and get him to go.

He said that such work would be too hot for Madame in the sort of weather we were having; and I said that no work on an object so small as our lawn could be too hot. Besides, I liked being hot, I explained—again with eagerness—I wanted to be hot, I was happy when I was hot. '*J'aime beaucoup,* I said, not stopping in my hurry to pick my words, and anyhow imperfect in French, '*la sueur*.'

I believe I ought to have said *la transpiration,* the other word being held in slight if any esteem as a word for ladies, but I still more believe that I oughtn't to have said anything about it at all. I don't know, of course, because of Antoine's immobility of expression; but in spite of this not varying at what I had said

by the least shadow of a flicker I yet somehow felt, it was yet somehow conveyed to me, that perhaps in French one doesn't perspire, or if one does one doesn't talk about it. Not if one is a lady. Not if one is Madame. Not, to ascend still further the scale of my self-respect enforcing attributes, if one is that dignified object the *patrone*.

I find it difficult to be dignified. When I try, I overdo it. Always my dignity is either over or under done, but its chief condition is that of being under done. Antoine, however, very kindly helps me up to the position he has decided I ought to fill, by his own unalterable calm. I have never seen him smile. I don't believe he could without cracking, of so unruffled a glassiness is his countenance.

Once, before the war—everything I have done that has been cheerful and undesirable was before the war; I've been nothing but exemplary and wretched since—I was undignified. We dressed up; and on the advice of my friends—I now see that it was bad advice—I allowed myself to be dressed as a devil; I, the *patrone*; I, Madame. It was true I was only a little devil, quite one of the minor ones, what the Germans would call a *Hausteufelchen*; but a devil I was. And going upstairs again unexpectedly, to fetch my tail which had been forgotten, I saw at the very end of the long passage, down which I had to go, Antoine collecting the day's boots.

He stood aside and waited. I couldn't go back, because that would have looked as though I were doing something I knew I

oughtn't to. Therefore I proceeded.

The passage was long and well lit. Down the whole of it I had to go, while Antoine at the end stood and waited. I tried to advance with dignity. I tried to hope he wouldn't recognise me. I tried to feel sure he wouldn't. How could he? I was quite black, except for a wig that looked like orange-coloured flames. But when I got to the doors at the end it was the one to my bedroom that Antoine threw open, and past him I had to march while he stood gravely aside. And strangely enough, what I remember feeling most acutely was a quite particular humiliation and shame that I hadn't got my tail on.

'*C'est que j'ai oublié ma queue*....' I found myself stammering, with a look of agonised deprecation and apology at him.

And even then Antoine wasn't surprised.

Well, where was I? Oh yes—at the *transpiration*. Antoine let it pass over him, as I have said, without a ruffle, and drew my attention to the chickens who would have to be fed and the cow who would have to be milked. Perhaps the cow might be milked on his return, but the chickens—

Antoine was softening.

I said quickly that all he had to do would be to put the chickens' food ready and I would administer it, and as for the cow, why not let her have a rest for once, why not let her for once not he robbed of what was after all her own?

And to cut the conversation short, and determined that my birthday should not pass without somebody getting a present, I

ran upstairs and fetched down a twenty-franc note and pressed it into Antoine's hand and said breathlessly in a long and voluble sentence that began with *Voilà*, but didn't keep it up at that level, that the twenty francs were for his expenses for himself and Mrs. Antoine down in the valley, and that I hoped they would enjoy themselves, and would he remember me very kindly to his *maman*, to whom he would no doubt pay a little visit during the course of what I trusted would be a long, crowded, and agreeable day.

They went off ultimately, but with reluctance. Completely undignified, I stood on the low wall of the terrace and waved to them as they turned the corner at the bottom of the path.

'*Mille félicitations*!' I cried, anxious that somebody should be wished happiness on my birthday.

'If I *am* going to have a lonely birthday it shall be *thoroughly* lonely,' I said grimly to myself as, urged entirely by my volition, the Antoines disappeared and left me to the solitary house.

I decided to begin my day's work by making my bed, and went upstairs full of resolution.

Mrs. Antoine, however, had done that; no doubt while I was arguing with Antoine.

The next thing, then, I reflected, was to tidy away breakfast, so I came downstairs again, full of more resolution.

Mrs. Antoine, however, had done that too; no doubt while I was still arguing with Antoine.

Well then, oughtn't I to begin to do something with potatoes?

With a view to the dinner-hour? Put them on, or something? I was sure the putting on of potatoes would make me perspire. I longed to start my *transpiration* in case by any chance, if I stayed too long inactive and cool, I should notice how very silent and empty....

I hurried into the kitchen, a dear little place of white tiles and copper saucepans, and found pots simmering gently on the stove: potatoes in one, and in the other bits of something that well might be chicken. Also, on a tray was the rest of everything needed for my dinner. All I would have to do would be to eat it.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.