Hocking Joseph

The Passion for Life

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Содержание

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I
THE DOCTOR'S SENTENCE

I am in a restless mood to-night. There seems nothing to explain this, except that perhaps I am growing tired of the life I am leading, or it may be that there are influences at work of which I have no cognizance, but which affect my nerves. As I look out of my window I can see storm-clouds driven across the wild sky, while distant lights on the heaving sea are suggestive of mystery. The wind howls around my little wooden tenement, while above the roaring of the waves I can hear the dismal screech of the sea-birds, which, for some reason or other, have left their rocky resting-places. I do not know why it is, but the cry of the sea-birds is always suggestive of the wail of lost souls as they fly through the infinite spaces.

I did not mean to begin this way at all, for I want, as far as I can, to put all sad thoughts behind me.

Let me begin again then, and, if possible, strike a more cheerful note. I want something to interest me, and it has struck me that if during these long, dark evenings when I have to be

alone I can place on record some of the events which have taken place since I have drifted to this part of the country, I shall be able not only to forget the shadow which hangs over my life, but to see streaks of blue sky amidst the storm-clouds, and to catch the bright rays of the sun which are constantly shining, even although the world says that we are living in a dark time.

But I am writing this also because, as it seems to me, the happenings of the last few months are of sufficient importance to record. Even although I were sure no one would read what I am going to write, I should still go on writing. Some one has said, I do not know who, that the life of a village is the life of a nation in miniature; and even although that may contain only a suggestion of the truth, certain am I that if I can faithfully record the events which have taken place in the little village of St. Issey, I shall have written something of the history of the great world outside.

Now that I have started writing, however, I immediately realize that, if I am to make my narrative comprehensible, I shall have to give some kind of personal explanation. Who am I, where am I, and why am I here? I promised just now that I would, as far as possible, avoid the sad things of life and dwell on the sunshine rather than on the shadow. But why should I? Life is made up of sunshine and shadow, and no one can give a faithful account of life without dwelling on both. Besides, what are the things we call sorrow and joy but contrasts? And life without contrasts would be unbearable. I will tell my story just as it is, then: its light and its shade; its hope and its despair.

"Simpson," I said to my one servant and factotum, who has been with me for several years, and whom I regard more in the light of a friend and counsellor than as a paid hireling, "the doctor tells me that I have at most a year to live."

I was sitting in my chambers in London as I mentioned this interesting piece of information. Simpson had just placed my coffee and bacon before me. He stopped suddenly as I spoke, as though the news had startled him. Then he went on with his work.

"I beg your pardon, sir."

I repeated the information.

"The doctor tells me I have at most a year to live. I may not last so long. Possibly a month will see the end of me."

I thought Simpson's hand trembled, but he repeated the formula which had almost become second nature to him:

"Yes, sir; thank you, sir," he said.

"I have been thinking, Simpson," I went on, "that as I have but such a short time before me in this world I may as well spend it comfortably and in a congenial place; indeed, the doctor insists that I should."

"Yes, sir; thank you, sir. Is there anything more you want, sir?"

"Simpson," I said, "you don't appear to believe I am serious. I am simply telling you what Dr. Rhomboid told me last night. By the way, how did he ever get the name of Rhomboid? A rhomboid has something to do with mathematics, hasn't it?"

To this Simpson made no reply.

"How long did you say, sir, that the doctor gave you?" he asked

presently.

He seemed by this time to have quite recovered himself.

"He is of opinion that a year at the outside will see the end of me," was my reply, "but it may be that I shall only last a month or two. There is something wrong with my inside. He gave it some sort of a name, but I won't try to repeat it. I might pronounce it wrongly. But why do you ask?"

"Well, sir, you have got an important case on, and I heard that it would last a long time. It would be a pity if you didn't live to see the end of it."

"I shall have to drop the case, Simpson," I said.

"What, Mr. Francis, drop the case? That would be a terrible pity, and you having had to wait so long for cases, too."

"You seem more interested in the case than in the tenure of my existence, Simpson," was my response.

"Yes, sir; thank you, sir," replied Simpson, after hesitating some seconds.

"How long have you been with me, Simpson?" I asked.

"Ever since you went to Oxford, sir – eleven years ago last October."

"That is a long time, Simpson."

"Yes, Mr. Francis. Your father – that is, Mr. Erskine – made me promise that I would stick to you. That was before he died, sir."

I may here remark that my father, John Erskine, died just as I left Winchester. He did not make any fuss about dying.

He simply called me to his side and said, "Frank, I have sent you to a good school, and you have done very well. I have left you enough money to go to Oxford, where I want you to take a good law degree. After that, I want you to read for the Bar, and, if possible, rise to be Lord Chancellor. There will not be very much money left when you finish at Oxford – something over a thousand pounds, I believe; but that should last you until your briefs begin to come in. Simpson, our old servant, will go with you. I think that is all, my boy."

The next day my father died, and I, as arranged, took Simpson to Oxford with me. Simpson is not very handsome, but he is a very valuable friend, and in his way has glimmerings of sense.

I toyed with my breakfast, for although I spoke calmly enough about it, I was not altogether pleased at the idea of dying so soon. After all, I was only just thirty, and, as Simpson had said, the briefs had only just begun to come in.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Francis, but will you be leaving London soon?"

"I have decided to leave at once," I replied, "but the question with me is, Where shall I go? I have been thinking a good deal about it during the night, and I cannot decide. Where would you suggest?"

"Well, Mr. Francis," replied Simpson, "if you will forgive me for making a suggestion, sir, I should say that, as yours is a Cornish family, Cornwall would be a suitable place to – "

Here he stopped, and seemed in a difficulty as to how he

should conclude the sentence.

"That is, sir," he went on, "would it not be appropriate?"

"Exactly," was my answer. "Cornwall it shall be, then; but I don't know Cornwall, although, as you say, I am of Cornish stock. You are also Cornish, Simpson?"

"Yes, sir; thank you, sir."

"I have been looking through my accounts," I went on, "and I find that by economy I can manage to pay my way for about a year. That fits in exactly, as you see; but I am afraid it won't include you, Simpson. You have rather a good appetite."

"My appetite can depend very much on the state of your funds, Mr. Francis," he replied.

"That means you are inclined to go with me?"

"Certainly, sir; I could not think of leaving you alone."

I confess that I was somewhat relieved at this, because, although I determined to put a brave face upon everything, the thought of spending my last days alone was not pleasant.

"That is awfully good of you, Simpson," I remarked, "but if you come with me, although, as you say, your appetite can be regulated, we shall have to be careful. I like your idea of going to Cornwall, but I don't know what part of the Delectable Duchy to go to. The doctor suggests that, in order to extend my existence as long as possible, I ought to go to some spot where the air is warm, yet bracing; that I must have no excitement, but at the same time must have interesting and pleasant companionship; that, while I ought to be out of the world, I must at the same

time be in it. This fellow with a mathematical name seems to be intensely unreasonable."

"Excuse me, sir, but could you give me a short holiday?" asked Simpson.

"For how long?"

"Say four days, sir. I will arrange for you to be well cared for while I am gone, sir."

I didn't ask Simpson why he wished to go away, or where he was going. I am afraid at that moment I hadn't sufficient interest to inquire. Of course, I gave my consent, and that same day Simpson packed up his bag and left me. Here was I, then, Francis Erskine, aged thirty, barrister-at-law, member of the Inner Temple, who, a week before, had good prospects, alone, with my death-warrant signed. I hadn't felt very well for some time, but had paid no heed to my ailments. For the past twelve months I had been, for a young barrister, very busy. It so happened that I had been engaged upon a case which appeared hopeless. All my brothers at the Bar declared that my client had not the ghost of a chance, and then, by what people called a stroke of genius on my part, but which was really a pure fluke, I carried off the thing triumphantly. From that time briefs came in fairly rapidly, and I was more than once referred to as a rising young man of brilliant parts. Then came the doctor's verdict, and there was an end to everything.

What I did during Simpson's absence I cannot remember. I tried to take a philosophical view of the situation, and although

the disease from which I suffered was, the doctor declared, past all cure, and had made great ravages upon my constitution, I went about as usual. After all, what was the use of bothering about death?

At the end of four days Simpson came back. I thought he appeared somewhat excited, but his manner was quiet and respectful as usual.

"Enjoyed your holiday, Simpson?" I asked.

"Yes, sir; thank you, sir. When will you be ready to start, sir?"

"My tenancy of these chambers expires in three days, Simpson."

"I hope Mrs. Blandy looked after you all right while I was away, sir?"

"I really don't remember," was my reply. "I dare say."

"Could you start to-morrow morning, sir? I can get everything ready by that time."

"Where are we going, Simpson?" I asked.

He looked at me as if in surprise.

"To Cornwall, sir."

"You have made arrangements for me, then?"

"Yes, sir; thank you, sir."

I did not ask him any further questions. I did not think it worth while. After all, when one came to reflect, nothing was worth while. If Simpson had suggested the Highlands of Scotland or the Flats of Essex, I should have made no demur. On the whole, however, I was pleased that we were going to Cornwall. Both my

father and mother were Cornish people, and although I had never visited the country, it seemed less disagreeable to me to go there and spend my few remaining days than to any other place. I knew that Cornwall was a narrow strip of land at the extreme west of the country, and I had heard vague reports about the fine coast-line and beautiful air, but, beyond that, very little.

"Perhaps, sir," said Simpson, "we had better put off our journey until the day after to-morrow."

"Why?" I asked.

"You will want to say good-bye to your friends, won't you, sir?"

"I think I have a remembrance of doing that, Simpson," I replied.

"You have a lot of friends here, haven't you? Excuse me for asking, sir."

"I have a lot of acquaintances, Simpson," I replied, "but only two friends – Bill Tremain and Tom Esmond. The rest don't count. I should not be surprised if they came to see me when I am in Cornwall – that is, if their wives will allow them. Have you ever reflected, Simpson, that marriage is a tremendous hindrance to friendship? Wives always make it difficult."

"Excuse me, sir, but what a pity it is you have not got a wife."

"I have never regarded the matter in that light, Simpson. Why do you say so?"

"Women always save a man from brooding. They never give him a chance of being quiet, sir," and Simpson shook his head

impressively.

"You speak as one having authority. Have you ever been married?"

"Yes, sir," replied Simpson.

"I didn't know that. Why have you never told me? How long were you married?"

"Two years, sir. I never talk about those two years, but I shall never forget them."

I asked Simpson several questions, but his replies did not contain much information.

"You don't seem to be very communicative with regard to your married life."

"There's nothing to say, sir, besides what I told you. Women save a man from brooding. You see, sir, they don't give him time to brood. I have never noticed that you have paid much attention to young ladies."

"Not very much," I replied. "I don't seem to have had time. I have always been too busy with my work."

"If you had married, sir – at least, if you had married the woman I did – you would never have had any time for your work."

Next morning I found that all my bags were packed, while a taxi stood at the door. I made no inquiries as to Simpson's intentions or plans. When he went to the booking-office at Paddington I did not even ask him the name of the station for which he was booking. I remember entering a first-class carriage, where Simpson made me as comfortable as possible, after which

I saw him talking to the guard, and heard him tell that worthy official that I must not be disturbed if it could possibly be helped.

Of my journey to Cornwall I remember practically nothing. I think I slept a great part of the distance. Towards evening we stopped at a little wayside station, where Simpson appeared and told me I was to alight.

"Have we come to our journey's end?" I asked.

"To the end of the railway journey," was his reply.

"I seem to smell the sea, Simpson," I said.

"Yes, sir, we are close to the sea."

He led the way to the station-yard, where a carriage stood, evidently waiting for me. This I entered, while Simpson, after attending to the luggage, and expressing the hope that he was not inconveniencing me, took his seat by my side. Once in the carriage I began to take more interest in my surroundings. I saw that we were in a beautifully wooded country, while away in the distance rose giant hills and rocky tors. I heard the roll of the waves, too, while the air was like some life-giving elixir. Presently we entered a village, which nestled among the trees.

"Simpson," I asked, "what is the name of this village?"

"This is St. Issey, sir."

"It is a very pretty place."

"Yes, sir; thank you, sir."

I saw a number of cottages, built in higgledy-piggledy fashion, each surrounded by its own garden. I saw the villagers standing gossiping with each other, heard the laughter of little children as

they played in the lane, smelt the sweetness and purity of the air. After all, it was good to live.

"Is there no hotel here?" I asked.

"No, sir; no hotel, sir."

I did not ask him where we were going, or how I was to be accommodated. After all, it was not worth while. One place was as good as another. We passed some lodge gates, which evidently appertained to a big house, and I noted the great granite pillars and the heavy palisading.

"The Squire of the parish lives there, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir, Squire Treherne. That, sir," pointing to a comfortable-looking house which stood back from the road, "is the Vicarage. Mr. Trelaske lives there. And that, sir, is the Wesleyan Chapel. I am of the Wesleyan persuasion myself – at least, I was when I was a boy."

"That is a long time ago, Simpson."

"I am fifty-five, sir, but it doesn't seem long since I was a boy – that is, except for those two years when I was married; those seem very long."

Simpson's face looked so comical that I could not help laughing. It was the first time I had laughed since my interview with the doctor.

We passed by a great square tower and a low, many-gabled church, with the churchyard around it. I turned my eyes away. The place was not pleasant to me. Presently we began to descend a steep hill, and the sound of the waves rolling upon a hard

and sandy beach became more and more clear. The carriage entered a narrow lane, which ended in a kind of copse close to a rugged cliff. A little later I saw, built within a few feet from the edge of the cliff, a wooden house. At the back of it a steep and almost precipitous piece of country, covered with brushwood, rose skyward. In front was the Atlantic. The house was in a bay looking towards the sea. The cliffs on the right side were not very high, but on the left they rose up almost perpendicular, rugged and imposing. I noticed that the rocks of which the cliffs were composed were in one place discolored, and I pointed it out.

"Yes, sir," replied Simpson. "When I was a boy there was a copper-mine here. There's a level under the hill now – at least, I believe so, sir. This is the house I have settled on, sir."

I alighted from the carriage and looked more closely at what was to be my future dwelling. As I have said, it was a wooden erection, and was evidently built with some care. All along the front was a veranda, the floor of which was roughly paved with granite slabs. The few yards of land between the veranda and the edge of the cliff had been cultivated, and flowers grew in wild profusion. At the back of the house many kinds of wild flowers bloomed. In the near distance, on the top of the cliffs, the land was covered with furze bushes and heather. I stood and took a deep breath and listened while the waves rolled on the golden sand hundreds of feet down.

"Won't you come into the house, sir?" asked Simpson. "I have paid the driver, and there is a man coming along with the luggage

in a cart."

"Not yet," I replied. "I want to take my fill of this. This is wonderful – simply wonderful. I want to live."

Simpson stood watching me. I thought I saw his lips tremble.

II
MY NEW HOME

I liked the house the moment I entered it. It was snug, cozy, and warm. It had the feeling of home, too, and felt so quiet and restful that I threw myself into an armchair with a sigh of relief.

"You spent your holiday in getting this, I suppose, Simpson?"

"Yes, sir; thank you, sir. I hope you like it, sir. It is not altogether what I would like, sir, but directly I saw it I thought it would suit you."

"To whom does it belong, Simpson?"

"Well, sir, I would rather not tell you, if you don't mind. You may rest assured that I got it on favorable terms, and everything is in order."

"But I do mind," I said, for by this time I had quite an interest in my surroundings. For days nothing had seemed to matter, but now I was quite eager to know how Simpson had happened upon this quaint yet comfortable place.

"You are sure you wish me to tell you, sir?" and Simpson looked at me almost beseechingly.

"I insist on it," I replied.

"Well, sir, I am afraid it was built by a kind of madman who came down to St. Issey about six years ago. Who he was I don't know. No one seems to know. But he took a lease of this piece of

ground from the Squire and built the house with his own hands."

"He must have been a carpenter," I suggested. "It seems very well built. But what has become of him?"

"He is dead, sir."

"Was he old or young?"

"Quite an old man, I think, sir. Anyhow, he built it himself and would have no one near him. After it was built he lived here alone for several years, speaking to no one but the village idiot, who went by the name of Fever Lurgy, who bought all his food and did all his errands. No woman was allowed near the place, sir."

"Then he cooked his own food and did his own house-work?" I asked.

"It would appear so, sir. He seems to have made himself very comfortable, too. As you see, the furniture is not at all bad, and nearly everything is just as he left it."

I must confess to being interested. The thought of a man coming to this place and building a house for himself and living there without companionship of any sort appealed to me. I wondered how he spent his days and nights.

"Let me have a look around the place," I said, rising from the chair. "I want to see what rooms it contains."

"Yes, sir; thank you, sir," was Simpson's reply.

The room in which I had been sitting was about fifteen feet square – it might be a little more – and looked out upon the veranda, beyond which stretched the great Atlantic. It was comfortably furnished, and possessed an old-fashioned fireplace,

evidently intended for logs of wood, and revealed the fact that the builder was not only ingenious in the matter of house-building, but that he possessed a good deal of taste. The whole apartment was carefully match-boarded, and was, as I said, snug and comfortable.

"This, sir, is the bedroom," said Simpson, opening the door at the end of the living apartment.

It was much smaller than the other, but quite big enough for a single bed, together with the simple necessities of a man living alone.

"And did he die here?" I asked.

"Yes, sir; no, sir – that is – I don't know, sir."

"What do you mean, Simpson?"

"Well, sir, that is why I didn't want to tell you about him; but there are all sorts of stories afloat. You don't mind, do you, sir?"

"Not a bit," I replied. "Whatever my ailments are, nerves don't trouble me."

"Well, sir," went on Simpson, "the fact that he lived here all alone caused people to talk about him – especially the women. You know what women are, sir, and people used to come and look from the hill above and see what he was doing. One day two women were bold enough to come close to the place, and they knocked at the door. There was no answer, sir. They knocked again and again and made a great noise. Still there was no answer. Then they rushed away to St. Issey and gave it as their opinion that something had happened to him. They hadn't been back in

the village more than half an hour when Fever Lurgy came, pale as a ghost, and trembling like a leaf. He had gone to inquire whether he was needed for errands, and, on being unable to make any one hear, had burst open the door. In this bedroom he found evidences of a great struggle. He found blood, too, but the man was nowhere to be seen."

"That's interesting," I said. "What was the name by which this old fellow was known?"

"Fever Lurgy called him Father Abraham," was Simpson's reply.

"Well, go on," I urged.

"There's nothing more to tell you, sir. From that day he has never been seen. People believe, however, he was murdered here; that some tramps came and found him alone, stole his money, killed him, and threw his body over the cliff."

"And how long was this ago?"

"About four months, sir."

"And since that time no one has lived here?"

"No, sir, no one. Most people have been afraid to come near the place. That is why none of the things have been touched; besides, the Squire, as soon as he discovered what had taken place, told his men to keep an eye on it."

"And so you thought, Simpson," I said, "that this was the sort of place I would like to come to and end my days?"

"Well, Mr. Francis," was Simpson's response, "for one thing you told me you wanted a place that was cheap, that you wanted

a place that was out of the world and yet in the world, and I immediately thought of St. Issey. When I came down here, however, I found that any lodgings you might like would be rather dear, and then, hearing of this place, I determined to come and see it."

Here Simpson stopped.

"That's not quite answering my question, Simpson," I remarked.

"Well, sir, I have not lived with you going on for twelve years without knowing something of the kind of gentleman you are. I have never known you trouble once, sir, about ghosts or anything of that sort, while your nerves have always been as steady as old time. Besides, I was able to get it dirt cheap, sir – in fact, the Squire's steward was glad to have it tenanted at any price. The place is very pretty, too, sir. There is not a finer view along the coast of Cornwall, and that is saying a great deal. It is out of the world, and it is only half a mile from the village. Still, sir, if you don't like it, we can easily leave. Over at St. Eia there's a nice cheap hotel where – "

"Hang the hotel," I interposed. "I am going to stay here."

"I think I ought to tell you, sir," went on Simpson imperturbably, "that people say they have heard curious noises around here of a night, and it is believed by many that the ghost of Father Abraham haunts the place."

Simpson looked so solemn as he said this that I laughed again. I don't know why it was, but, in spite of his dreary story, my

spirits rose unaccountably.

"The ghost of Father Abraham doesn't trouble me a bit, Simpson," I said. "This place suits me down to the ground. But this is not all? Surely there must be a kitchen somewhere."

"Oh yes, sir. This way, sir," and Simpson spoke quite eagerly. Evidently my approval of his choice removed a load from his mind.

Father Abraham had evidently determined to make himself comfortable, for the kitchen, though small, seemed to have every requisite. As I entered it, an old woman rose from her chair and curtsied in the old time-honored way.

"This," said Simpson, "is Mrs. Martha Bray. I asked her to come in and make everything spotlessly clean for you by the time you came."

"And Mrs. Martha Bray has obeyed orders," I remarked. "Everything is as perfect as a new pin. But, Simpson," I continued, "where will you sleep?"

"There's a little place here behind, sir, where I have made up a bed for myself," replied Simpson. "It will be nice and handy for my work."

"Yes, sur, and plase, sur, I can come in an' help 'ee any time," remarked Martha Bray. "I do'ant live fur away, an' I can come 'cross the fields in a few minutes."

"Excuse me, Martha," was Simpson's rejoinder, "but we shall need no one. I can do all that is necessary for Mr. Francis."

"Oh, plase yerself," replied the old woman, "but it'll be ter'ble

wisht for 'ee doin' everything yerself without a woman to help 'ee. I do always say that a man wethout a woman to do his chores for en es like one side to a pair of scissors. I have got some tay ready, sur, and I have toasted a piece of ham rasher. It's raal ham, too, not like the stuff you buy in the shops. I do'ant hold with these new-fashioned notions about feedin' pigs, and do always feed mine meself like my mother and grandmother used to do before me. And you'll find, sur, that tes deffrent from the ham you do buy in the shops. My b'lief, sur, es that ef old Father Abram had had a woman to look after en, he wouldn't be dead now."

Having delivered herself of this long speech, the old woman curtsied once more, and prepared to take my meal into the little living-room.

"Excuse me, Martha, I will do that," said Simpson, "and there's no reason why we should detain you any longer. Here are your wages, and thank you for what you have done."

"All right," said Martha. "Ef you can do without me, I can do without you. The tay is in the caddy up there. There's some bread in the cupboard there, and the other things be in this drawer. Good-night, sur. I will look over again to see whether there is anything I can do for 'ee."

I returned to the sitting-room, and sat while Simpson prepared my evening meal.

"I want to wash, Simpson," I said, when he had nearly completed his work. "Besides, it has struck me that there is no

such thing as a bathroom in the house. What are we going to do?"

"This way, sir," said Simpson, and I followed him out of the house towards what I call the cliff end of the building. Here I found, gurgling out of the hillside, a stream of the purest water I had ever seen, which flowed into a pond.

The idea of outdoor ablutions appealed to me, and I almost forgot my ailments as I bathed my hands and face in the pure spring water. A few minutes later, I was eating the sweetest ham I had ever tasted.

"If this is the result of the old-fashioned way of feeding pigs," I remarked to Simpson, "I shall make a closer acquaintance with Mrs. Martha Bray, and shall buy all the hams she can dispose of."

The time was spring. To be exact, it was the 14th of May, and although the evening air was somewhat chilly, the days had become long, and I remembered standing a long time at the front of my little wooden hut, looking at the giant cliffs at whose feet the waves of the broad Atlantic rolled. When I had returned to the house, Simpson had lit a lamp, while in the grate a wood fire burnt cheerfully.

"Do you think it will do, sir?" asked Simpson.

"Do!" I replied; "it's just perfect."

"Then, sir, if you don't mind, I will go to bed. I am a little tired, sir. There's nothing more I can do for you, is there?"

"Nothing, thank you, Simpson. Good-night."

A few minutes later I judged, from the silence which prevailed in the kitchen, that Simpson had retired, and that I was practically

alone in the little wooden hut.

I was still in utter ignorance of my whereabouts, beyond the fact that I was somewhere in Cornwall on the edge of a cliff, and close to a little village called St. Issey. Where St. Issey was situated I did not know. Cornwall, I reflected, was a county nearly a hundred miles long, with the main portion of it surrounded by the sea. I knew that I must be somewhere in the vicinity of the main line of the Great Western Railway, as I did not remember changing anywhere, but beyond that I had little or no knowledge. Still, this did not trouble me. I reflected upon what Simpson had told me concerning the cheapness of my place of residence, and I had absolute trust in him concerning all arrangements for the future.

The night was very quiet, I remember. Scarcely a breath of wind stirred, although the air which came into my open window was pure and exhilarating. The splash of the waves was still heard on the sandy beach, although I judged the tide had receded somewhat. Now and then the cry of a disturbed sea-bird reached me, but beyond that, nothing. Somehow I could not make up my mind to turn in for the night. I had too many things to think about, while my new surroundings drove away all desire for sleep. I took one of the books I had brought with me from London, and tried to read, but that was impossible. I could not scan a dozen lines without my mind wandering from the printed pages. After all, when one comes to think about it, my position was somewhat strange. It is easy to talk about coming to a place to die; but

when one has actually heard the death sentence pronounced, and is told that, at the most, he cannot live more than a year, it is not a pleasant experience, and, in spite of all my endeavors, my thoughts were constantly reverting to Dr. Rhomboid's verdict.

Presently I could bear my thoughts no longer, and, quietly opening the door, I went out into the night. How still, how solemn it was! On my left hand the great beetling, rugged cliffs rose, imposing and awe-inspiring. Behind me, the hillside rose steep and high. In front was the wide Atlantic. I could see the waves breaking into foam some little distance from the shore. I could, in the pale light of the moon, see the discolorment in one place in the rocks, which reminded me of the mine which Simpson had told me was working there when he was a boy.

How long I stood there I do not know, but presently, in the silence of the night, I heard a cry. It might be that of a sea-bird, although it made me think of other things. A little later I heard what might be described as a moan, although that does not truly convey the impression it made upon me. In spite of myself, my mind reverted to the story which Simpson had told me about the man who had built the house, and of his supposed tragic end. Could it be, I wondered, that this man's spirit visited the scene of his death, drawn there by some laws yet undiscovered by the student of psychic phenomena?

I had no superstitious fears; indeed, I had no belief in a life beyond this present existence. If ever I had believed in this, the belief had died years before. In a vague kind of way I imagined

that death was the end of everything. Perhaps that was why the doctor's verdict was so grim and forbidding.

I heard another cry, not loud, but quite distinct; and then I thought I saw forms moving along at the base of the cliff some little distance away, but the moon, which was on the wane, gave me insufficient light to be certain. A cloud passed over the sky, and then I could see nothing.

"Surely I could not be mistaken," I said to myself, "yet who could be crawling along at the base of the cliffs? No. It was all pure fancy."

As if in contradiction of my thoughts, however, I heard noises which seemed to be directly under my feet. These noises seemed to continue for three or four minutes, and then all was silence.

"Events have been too much for me," I reflected, "and in spite of all my boasting about my nerves, they are playing me tricks."

I turned and looked at the little house, and I doubted whether, in spite of all my brave words, I should be able to continue living there. To be alone day after day and night after night, with no one to speak to me and no one to care for me, save this unimaginative man, was, to say the least of it, anything but exhilarating. Then I felt the gnawing, deadly pain which had led me to visit Dr. Rhomboid.

"I must not be a fool," I reflected. "What has to be has to be, and I must go through with it. Besides, one place is as good as another. I will go to bed."

All the same, I made up my mind that I would not live like a

hermit, and that I would become acquainted with the life of this little village into which I had been cast.

III
THE CHURCHES' ANSWER

I suppose my long journey must have tired me, for I slept soundly, and on the following morning when I awoke the sun was shining through the windows, while the splash of the waves sounded pleasantly to my ears. A few minutes later I was up and dressed. Walking to the edge of the cliff, I looked towards the spot where, the previous night, I fancied I had seen dim forms moving; but in the light of the sun nothing was visible. The shadows, too, of a few hours before had entirely passed away. The fresh, pure spring air exhilarated me in spite of myself. I almost forgot Dr. Rhomboid's verdict. Indeed, so far did I ignore his instructions that I found my way to the highest point of the cliff and looked seaward. Never in my whole life had I been so entranced as on that morning. The blue sky was reflected in the water in such a way that I felt I had never really seen the sea until then. To the right and to the left of me stretched the giant cliffs until they were lost in the horizon. At their feet rolled great waves. Landward, hill rose upon hill, and the whole countryside was fast assuming its garments of summer glory.

In a sense, Cornwall did not seem a beautiful county to me at all. At least, it did not possess the beauty I had expected. Compared with Surrey, it looked bare, and in some senses almost

drear, and yet it possessed a charm which I could associate with no other place. There was something in the air one breathed, some strange charm, something in the very essence of the county which differentiated it from the rest of the world. Cornwall is as different from other counties as England is different from Spain. I felt my blood tingle as I looked, and realized that a mysterious hand had been laid upon me. Perhaps it was because there was Cornish blood in my veins, and that for many generations my ancestors had lived amidst associations similar to these. In any case, my heart thrilled its recognition, and I knew that I was a part of what I saw, that the spirit of my county was speaking to me, and that the innermost depths of my being realized my homeland.

Years seemed to slip from me, and with a recrudescence of youth came a passionate desire for life – more life. While I had been in London I seemed to be largely indifferent to the doctor's pronouncement, even although I was beginning to sip from the goblet of the world's success. But a numbness had possessed my being, and I had been able to speculate grimly upon my approaching demise. Now, however, it was different. The world seemed wider, the sky higher, and life promised infinite things. I could not formulate them into words; nevertheless, they surged up in my being like a mighty torrent, and I longed to live. My whole soul revolted against cessation of life, and all the time I knew that a dread disease was slowly working within me.

But I would not think of it. By an effort I threw my forebodings

from me, and, seeing a precipitous pathway down to the beach, made my way thitherward. I wanted to interest myself in the happenings of the world.

A little later I found my way to the base of the cliffs where, on the previous night, I thought I had seen living beings. No marks of them were evident. The hard, yellow sand was smooth and trackless. There was a stretch of a hundred yards between the foot of the cliffs and the foam-crested waves, and, calling to my mind my impressions of the previous night, I determined to put them to test. Without avail, however.

The great heap of débris caused by the working of the mine which Simpson had mentioned had now become covered with verdure. I saw the green stains on the cliff which Simpson had said betokened copper, but nowhere could I see the level which he had mentioned. I peered curiously around, but in vain.

Presently I saw a fissure in the rocks which ended in a cave. This I entered and made my way for a few yards, peering curiously around me. Nothing of importance struck my eye. I reflected that this might be almost immediately under my house, and it was here, according to my fancies, I had heard voices on the previous night. I fancied, too, that, except in the case of very high tides, this cave would always be dry. I lit a match, and, looking at the sand at my feet, discerned footmarks. This struck me as somewhat curious, especially as these footprints were apparently fresh, and some of them gave evidence that they had been made by a woman. Still, there was nothing to wonder

about. I had frequently heard that the Cornish cliffs were honeycombed by caves, and that pleasure-parties visited them out of pure curiosity.

Then something bright caught my eye, and, stooping down, I picked up a woman's brooch. I went outside and examined it, and saw immediately that it was apparently of value. It was quaintly formed, and suggested great age. I concluded that it was composed of dull gold fashioned centuries ago, while two stones of considerable value had been set in it. I speculated a little to whom it might belong, and, thinking that I might hear of some one who had lost such a valuable trinket, I placed it carefully in my pocket so that I might be able to return it to its owner.

The sun by this time had increased in power, and, as the place was warm and sheltered, I sat on a great rock near, and gave myself up to fancy. How long I sat there I have no conception, but presently I was awakened to the fact that Simpson had become anxious about me.

"It's all right, Simpson," I shouted in reply to his call. "I will come immediately."

"Breakfast is quite ready, sir," I heard him say, "and I have been wondering where you had gone."

As I made my way towards the lower part of the cliffs, where I thought I saw an easier way to my house than that by which I had descended, I happened to look back, and there, seated in a crevice at nearly the highest point of the cliff, I saw what seemed the form of a woman, and that she appeared to be watching me.

A few seconds later I was hidden from her view by the copse into which I had entered. When I had descended half-way towards my house I was able to catch another glimpse of the place where she had been sitting, but she was no longer there.

"I hope you haven't been anxious about me, Simpson?" I said, when I returned to the house.

"Well, sir, I was a bit worried. You see, the cliffs are dangerous, and you didn't tell me you were going out. I am glad you are all right, sir. Breakfast is quite ready, sir. I cooked some more of that ham, as you seemed to like it so much last night, sir."

"That's all right, Simpson; but before I have breakfast I must have another wash at the fountain." When I had taken off my coat I looked at my arms, and was shocked at their thinness. I looked into the little pond and saw the reflection of a tall, thin, attenuated man. I was positively ghastly. When I had finished my toilet I again glanced in the direction where I had seen the woman's form, but the place was hidden from my view. Nearer to me, however, and swayed by the breeze, I saw what I thought was like a woman's dress fluttering. It might be that she was interested in my movements. "I expect the people of the village have fears about me, as they had about Father Abraham," was my thought as I entered the house.

No visitors called to see me, and I spent several days in absolute quietness. Although I had at first made up my mind to do so, I paid no visits to the village, and beyond the furtive watcher I have mentioned, I saw no one but Simpson.

My first feelings of exhilaration had passed away, and I settled down, in spite of my resolve, to a kind of hermit's life. I still rejoiced in the beauty of the scene and took short walks in the neighborhood of my little dwelling-place, but saw no one.

When I had been there a week a bad attack of my malady sent me to bed for three days. Simpson urged me to send for the doctor, but this I would not do. Rhomboid, who was at the head of his profession, had warned me that I should be subject to these attacks, and that they would come to me with increasing frequency until the end. He had also given me general instructions as to what I must do. What was the use, then, of calling in a local practitioner who would be utterly ignorant as to what to do in such a case as mine?

At the end of three days I was better, and informed Simpson that I intended getting up.

"Simpson," I said, as I sat in the comfortable chair which he had prepared for me, "you told me on the night we came here that you had been brought up a Wesleyan Methodist."

"Yes, sir," was Simpson's reply.

"Are you of that persuasion still?"

"Well, yes, sir; I suppose so, sir."

"Have you been to any of their chapels lately?"

"Not very often, sir."

"Is there a Wesleyan minister who lives at St. Issey?"

"No, sir. You see, St. Issey Chapel is only one of the little places in the circuit. A minister, sir, lives five miles from here,

and only comes about twice a quarter. I have the circuit plan here, sir. Would you like to see it?"

"It would be a curiosity, anyhow," I replied, and a little later Simpson put a sheet of printed paper in my hand. This sheet informed me that St. Issey was in the Lanhydrock Circuit, and, with twelve other chapels, was supplied by two ministers and a number of other men called local preachers.

"I see that the superintendent minister is called Mr. Bendle. Have you ever met him?" I asked.

"No, sir; but I have heard that he is a very good man. When I was a boy, sir, St. Issey Chapel was crowded; but people don't go to Chapel as they used to."

"No? How is that?" I asked.

"Well, sir, it seems as though people have become very worldly, and many have given up Chapel-going altogether."

"And the Parish Church – do many people go there?"

"Just a few, sir; but not many, I am afraid."

"I should like to know," I said.

"Indeed, sir?"

"Yes. The truth is, Simpson, seeing that the doctor tells me I have to die very soon, I should like to know whether any one could tell me about what happens after death."

"I have a Bible here, sir," said Simpson. "It tells you all about it there."

"Indeed," I said, "I have not read the Bible for years. I don't think I have looked inside one since I left Oxford. Do you read

it, Simpson?"

"Yes, sir. I read a chapter every night before going to bed."

"Are you a Christian, Simpson?"

"I hope so, sir," and he looked at me curiously.

"Excuse me for asking," I said, "but as you are a Christian you will have ideas about these things."

Simpson hesitated a few seconds, and then called to his aid his old formula, "Yes, sir; thank you, sir."

"That being so, Simpson," I continued, "I want your opinion. Supposing I were to die to-night, what would become of me?"

Simpson gave no answer. I think he wanted to be polite, but could not be truthful at the same time.

"You see, Simpson," I interposed, "I have just had a severe shaking up, and, as Rhomboid told me that these attacks would come with increasing frequency and hasten the end, I have a natural curiosity as to what will happen when the end comes. It is not pleasant to think of becoming nothing, and as a belief in a future life is one of the tenets of the Christian faith, and as you tell me you are a Christian, I want to know, from your standpoint, what you think my destiny will be."

"Excuse me, sir," said Simpson, "but you will not be offended if I ask something?"

"Oh, no," I said, "go on."

"Well, then, sir, have you ever been converted? Forgive me for asking, sir; I know you have always been a well-conducted young gentleman, and you have never gone wild like lots I know of,

but all the same, sir, I have been taught that there are two places to which people go when they die – heaven and hell. The sheep which are on the right hand go straight to Abraham's bosom, and the goats which are on the left go into outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. The question is, sir, whether you belong to the sheep or the goats."

"Exactly," I said; "but what constitutes the sheep and what constitutes the goats?"

"That is where the question of conversion comes in," replied Simpson. "Except we become converted we cannot go to heaven."

"Then your opinion is, Simpson, that as I have not been converted I must go to hell?"

"Yes, sir; thank you, sir. I don't mean to offend, sir."

"No, I am sure you don't, Simpson. Besides, I wanted a straight answer. Just now, however, the question of heaven and hell does not trouble me at all. It is rather a question as to whether there is anything at all after the grave."

"Do you doubt it, sir?"

"I am afraid I have had no opinions about it in the past, Simpson. You see, I have been so busy with my work that I have had no time to think about it. Now, however, when death stares me in the face, I am – well, a little bit curious. How do I know, and how do you know, that the millions of people who are dying every week in this world do not die just like flies? How can we prove that we are any better than they? Do we not sport in the

sunshine during a brief space and then cease to be?"

"Life would be a miserable one-sided business if it were so, sir. Wouldn't it?"

"That is the question, Simpson. Did you ever read Omar Khayyam?"

"What is it, sir?"

"Ah, I see you have not read him. Omar Khayyam was an old Eastern poet who, in his philosophy and poetry, taught that we are just a part of an eternal round of things. We are born, we live, we propagate our species, we die, and so the thing goes on. But it is not a very cheerful doctrine, Simpson, and that was why I wondered if you, who profess to be a Christian, could give me some information."

Simpson was silent.

"Ah! I see," I said with a sigh. "You have a sort of traditional hope that there may be a sort of future life, and that you may get to what is called heaven, but you are not sure about it."

"Well, sir, I am a very ignorant man on such matters," replied Simpson, "and, to tell you the truth, religion doesn't seem to be the fashion nowadays. All the same, it would be a grand thing if it were true."

"Just so," I said, and for the first time I realized the necessity for some sort of faith which should be an anchor amid the storms of life.

"Are you better now, sir?" asked Simpson.

"Oh yes, considerably better," I replied. "I shall be able to walk

about for the next few weeks, I hope."

"Then, sir, may I advise you to go to Church or Chapel? The preachers there might be able to tell you."

"A good idea," I cried. "I have not been to Church or Chapel since I left Oxford, and while there I only went because I was obliged to. I did enjoy the singing, though. Yes, Simpson, I will take your hint. I will go to Church on Sunday."

"It's Sunday to-morrow, sir," was Simpson's reply.

"Is it? I had forgotten. Then I will go to-morrow."

"Where will you go, sir, to the Established Church or the Wesleyan Chapel?"

"I will go to both, and hear what they have to say at both places."

The next day was gloriously fine. A cool breeze blew, and out at sea "white horses" rode on the crests of the waves. Near the coast-line, too, was a long streak of foam. The air was pure and invigorating. In sheltered places it was warm and gracious.

I allowed myself plenty of time to reach St. Issey by eleven o'clock, and, if the truth must be told, I was a little excited. I felt as though I was going on a tour of exploration.

I had never been what is called a religious boy, and though I inherited from my father a high code of honor, religion made no appeal to me. I suppose that at the back of my mind I had an impression that there might be a life other than this, and that some great Eternal Force, which might or might not be personal, had created this and all other worlds. As to whether

this Eternal Force had any interest in created life I did not trouble. The question was too remote, and, as far as I could see, admitted of only a conjectural answer. After leaving Oxford, I was too absorbed in my plans and ambitions to trouble about what seemed to me to be something really apart from life.

I had never been a bad fellow. I had, as my acquaintances said of me, gone straight. Not that I had been a recluse in any way. For two or three years I went a good deal into society. I never had any serious love affairs, although I am afraid I indulged in some mild flirtations. I had a fair knowledge of current literature, and, although far from being a scholar, I had at the same time scholarly instincts. I had travelled on the Continent of Europe, had a fair knowledge of German and French, and during a long visit to Italy had managed to pick up the language of the people.

I had also visited the old churches on the Continent, but had never troubled about what these churches stood for. As far as I could see, the old, stately cathedrals represented something that might have been a power at one time, but which had now passed away. They were interesting from an architectural and from an historical point of view; but as for anything deeper, it never came within the horizon of my vision. I was young, and, as I thought, healthy, and death seemed a long way off. Therefore, why should I trouble?

But now death had come near. I do not know that I was frightened, and I was able calmly to face the prospect of annihilation. Nevertheless, that prospect was grim. I longed for

life, more life, the completion of life. The life I had lived was, it seemed to me, fragmentary, incomplete, and, to a certain extent, chaotic.

I do not know that I attached very much importance to my visit to the little Wesleyan Chapel. All the same, I was curious. If there should be anything beyond, if the man who got up to preach could tell me something which had been hidden from me, I would like to hear what he had to say.

I walked very slowly and rejoiced in the glorious morning. As I drew near the village I noted the quiet restfulness of everything. The Church bells were ringing, and a few people were wending their way towards the old time-honored building. Very few people seemed to be making for the Wesleyan Chapel. Groups of youths were lounging around the lanes, smoking cigarettes and passing rustic jokes. Women were gossiping with each other from their cottage doors. There was no squalor anywhere, no poverty visible. Every one seemed to have enough to eat and drink. Every one seemed to be comfortably housed.

I entered the little Chapel – a square, plain building, capable of seating perhaps three or four hundred people. It was five minutes to eleven when I entered, and not a soul was there, except a man whom I took to be the Chapel-keeper. He looked at me curiously. By eleven o'clock there might be, all told, thirty people there, mostly elderly men and women. Some young girls were there, and a few children; young men were conspicuous by their absence. When eleven o'clock came perhaps a dozen more came

from some vestry, and entered what I took to be the choir-seats. They were nearly all young women. Perhaps during the first ten minutes of the service half a score more came into the Chapel. I am giving these details because I want to tell exactly what I saw, especially as I have discovered that from a religious standpoint St. Issey village is typical of hundreds more all over the county. At about three minutes after eleven a man entered the pulpit. As far as I could judge he was a working man, or he might be a farmer, a carpenter, or a tradesman of some sort.

Let it be understood that I came to this place of worship hungering to know something of the deeper things of life. I wanted to be assured that there was another life greater than this, a life which should be the consummation and explanation of this.

The preacher commenced by announcing a hymn; a lad at the harmonium played over the tune, and the people sang. Let me confess here that the singing moved me. The Cornish people, whatever their defects or virtues, possess the gift of song. They had sweet, musical voices, and they sang heartily. The words, as I remember them, were of an emotional nature, and were evidently written by some one who deeply believed in what he wrote; but it was evident that very few of the congregation realized the meaning of the words they were singing. There was no sense of reality, no great assurance, no vision. It seemed to be a repetition of something which had been, rather than the expression of something that was vital to them then.

Still, I was interested. The hymn made me think of far-

away things. At any rate, while no mighty conviction possessed the singers, they accepted the words as containing a kind of traditional truth. I reflected that the hymn *had* meant something, whatever it might mean now.

While the last verse was being sung, I noticed that the congregation turned round, as if some one of importance had entered. I also turned, and saw a man and woman just making their way into a back pew. The man was about fifty years of age, and was evidently a personality. At first I did not know how to classify him. He might be the Squire of the parish, but I was sure he was not. There was something lacking in him; something positive, too, which did not suggest an old landed proprietor. That he was prosperous and important there could be no doubt. He looked like one accustomed to command, and suggested a big banking account.

His companion was, as I imagined, his daughter, a young woman of, say, twenty-three or twenty-four years of age. I saw by her dress that she did not belong to the class of which the rest of the congregation was composed. Although by no means a connoisseur of such things, I knew enough of woman's attire to be sure that her clothes had been made by an artist, and probably came either from London or Paris. During the next few minutes I gave furtive glances towards her, and was not impressed favorably. She was good-looking, almost strikingly so; but she seemed to me to have no soul. She looked around the building as though she had come there under protest. She gave

not the slightest evidence that the service meant anything to her.

The man in the pulpit was, I suppose, of more intelligence than the ordinary man of his class, and having said that, I have said all. I did not want to be critical. I hungered for food, for light. I reflected that Simpson had told me that congregations had fallen off and that there seemed to be no eagerness about religion as there had been thirty years before. I did not wonder at that if this man was a fair exponent of it. By what right or by what authority he was there I do not know, and how he dared to pretend to tell people about the deep things of life I could not imagine. After he had been preaching a few minutes he appeared to get, according to the phraseology which I have since heard, "warmed to his subject." This meant that he shouted, and on two or three occasions struck the Bible; but, taken as a whole, it was the parrot-like utterance of an ignorant man. I am almost tempted to give a detailed description of his discourse, but I will not do so. I am too heart-sore at the thought of it. What help was there for me, a poor wretch with his death-warrant signed? What help was there for the people who sat stolidly in their pews? Why should the boys and girls of the villages or the toil-worn laboring men and women go there? I could see no reason.

As far as I could judge, the presence of the man and his daughter in the back pew and I myself, the stranger who had taken up his abode in a wooden hut, attended only by a man-servant, was of far more interest to the people than what the man had to say.

I left with a heavy heart. At any rate, I received no assurance of any life after death. I was no nearer conviction of anything which goes by the name of spiritual. As I made my way to the door an old man came up and spoke to me.

"Mornin', sir. Glad to see you."

"Thank you," I said.

"You bean't from these parts, be you?" he asked curiously.

"No," I replied.

"I hope you enjoyed the service," he ventured.

"I enjoyed the singing very much," was my reply.

The old man's eyes twinkled. I saw that he understood.

"You ded'n feel the presence of the Maaster, ded 'ee, then, sir?"

I was silent. He seemed to be on the point of saying something more, but he refrained. Perhaps he thought he would be taking too great a liberty. As I left the building and walked quietly away, I noticed that the man and the girl whom I took to be his daughter were watching me. They evidently wondered who I was.

I did not say anything to Simpson on my return about my experiences at the Chapel, and he asked no questions.

When evening came I made my way to the Established Church. Somehow, the memory of the old man's eyes when he spoke to me at the Chapel door remained with me. I had a feeling that he knew more than the preacher. Directly I entered the time-honored building, which had stood there since pre-Reformation days, a feeling of restfulness came into my heart.

Architecture has always made a strong appeal to me, and this low-roofed, many-pillared edifice, with its worm-eaten pews, its granite flooring and its sense of age, brought a kind of balm to my troubled spirit. I noticed that time had eaten away even the old gray granite of which the pillars were composed, that the footsteps of many generations had worn the hard Cornish granite slabs which floored the aisles. The evening light was subdued as it shone through the stained-glass windows. The ivy which grew outside, and partially covered some of the leaded lights, somehow gave a feeling of restfulness to everything. I heard the birds twittering in the tree-branches in the churchyard, while the bell which called the people to Church was reminiscent of olden time. In my imagination I saw people who lived hundreds of years before, with the light of unquestioning faith in their eyes, coming to worship in the Church of their fathers.

A few people entered, and my vision vanished. This old Church represented only something that *had* been; something that had had its day, and was gone; something that was maintained because of its past, and because nothing better had appeared to take its place.

A dozen choir-boys found their way into their stalls. The clergyman assumed his appointed place. The congregation was very small. All counted, I suppose there would not be forty people present, and most of these looked to me like servant lads and girls.

I remembered the clergyman's name. Simpson had told me he

was called Trelaske. A good old Cornish name, and I reflected that, anyhow, he would be a gentleman. I watched him closely, and I saw a fine, aristocratic-looking man, with a clean-cut, almost classical face. He conducted the service with dignity. He read the sentences of which the Church service is composed correctly and with intelligence. While he read in his natural voice, I was interested; when he intoned, a sense of unreality possessed me.

As we went through the service a thousand memories flooded my mind. I had heard these prayers, and read the Psalms a hundred times at Oxford and at Winchester. Memories of old days came flashing back to me, and I was a boy again in the school chapel, listening to old "Thunder and Lightning," as we used to call him, preaching to us. Presently Mr. Trelaske entered the pulpit and gave out his text: "If a man die, shall he live again?"

"Now," I thought to myself, "I am going to get something. Here is a man who is set apart to teach people the Christian faith, and he is going to deal with that phase of his faith in which I am really interested."

I think he noticed me in his congregation, for he looked curiously towards me more than once. I rather liked him, too. As I said, he was evidently a gentleman, and doubtless had been to Oxford or Cambridge. Possibly he had been at my own College.

In about ten minutes his homily was finished. When I try to remember what he said, I am reminded of a story I have since heard. A popular preacher came to Cornwall and preached

to a crowded congregation. On the following day this popular preacher saw an old miner, to whom he spoke in a familiar fashion.

"Well, Tommy," he said, "what did you think about my sermon last night?"

"What ded I think about it?" repeated Tommy.

"Yes," said the popular preacher, "what did you think about it?"

"I ded'n think there was nothin' to think about," was Tommy's reply.

That was my summing-up of Mr. Trelaske's sermon. There was nothing to think about. I had come to Church curious to know – ay, and more than curious; I was longing to know if life promised anything beyond the grave, but the Church gave no answer to my question. In place of burning conviction, there were empty platitudes. In place of vision, there was only the sound of a child crying in the night.

"In God's name," I asked myself as I went back to my little habitation, "why should people go to Church or to Chapel? What is there for them but boredom?"

I did not want argument, I did not want learning; but I wanted conviction, light, vision – and there were none of these things.

When I got back to my house I found that Simpson had returned.

"Have you been to Chapel, Simpson?" I asked.

"Yes, sir; thank you, sir. People have been asking a lot of

questions about you, sir."

"Oh, indeed!"

"Yes, sir. Mr. Josiah Lethbridge asked me about you, sir. He lives in that big house up by Trecarrel Lane. He is a great mine-owner and ship-owner, sir."

"Indeed," I said. "Has he any children?"

"Yes, sir. One son and one daughter. Is that all you need, sir?" And Simpson gave the finishing touches to his arrangement of my supper-table.

Before I went to bed that night I stood under the veranda of my little house and looked seaward. In the dying light of the day I could still see the giant cliffs stretching away northward. I could also see the long line of foam where the waves broke upon the shore. I heard the sea-birds crying, too. "If a man die, shall he live again?" I said, repeating the words of the text I had heard that night, but no answer came. I went to bed wondering.

IV
THREE VISITORS

On the day following nothing happened, and excepting Simpson I did not see a single person. Indeed, but for one occasion, when out of curiosity I clambered down to the beach, I did not leave the house; but on the Tuesday I had a regular influx of visitors. No less than three persons came to see me, to say nothing of Mrs. Martha Bray, who, in fulfilment of her promise to Simpson, came over to see whether her services were further needed.

My first visitor was an entire stranger. He came ostensibly to ask for a drink of milk, but really I believe out of curiosity, for when Simpson had, at my request, supplied him with the milk, he showed no desire to leave. Rather he appeared much interested in my reasons for coming to St. Issey. He was a middle-aged man, say from forty-five to fifty, and lived, he told me, at St. Eia. He proved a rather clever conversationalist, too, for in spite of myself I found myself talking to him freely. There were all sorts of rumors about Father Abraham, he told me. Some had it that he was mad; some said that he was a refugee; others, again, thought he had in the past committed some crime and was hiding from justice, while more than once it had been whispered that his end was the result of a kind of vendetta which was sworn against him

because of something he did in his young manhood.

"Have you any theories yourself, sir?" he asked.

"No," I replied, "I have no theories. I must confess, however, to being a little interested. The old man evidently had a purpose in building the house, and, I think, intended it to be a permanent residence. As you see, although it is composed of wood, it is very carefully built, and was intended to last. For the life of me, however, I can hardly believe he was murdered. Of course, there was blood found upon the floor, but it is not easy to dispose of a body even so near the sea. From what I can hear no one has been washed up here, and but for the marks of struggle and the blood no one would have thought he was murdered."

"Exactly," replied my visitor. "But many things are going on of which we know nothing, and many people have purposes in life which they have no desire to make known. What is your opinion of European politics?"

"I cannot say I have any very fixed ideas," I replied.

"A section of the Press," went on my visitor, "would have us believe that we are on the verge of war, and certainly there have been indications these last few years that we are standing on the brink of a volcano. Do you believe in the stories told about Germany?"

"What stories?" I asked.

"Oh, that the Germans are preparing for war, and that they mean to go to war with England."

To this I gave no answer.

"Have you read those articles in *The Daily*– ?" he asked. "I mean those articles which told us frightful stories of German preparations for war, of their avowed determination to bring about war with England, and of the toast which the military and naval people in Germany drink on every great occasion."

"You mean the toast to 'Der Tag'? Of course, one has heard such stories, but what do they amount to, after all?"

"That is my own attitude," was his answer, "and as far as stories about German spies are concerned, I think they are worked up by the Press in order to increase the circulation of the papers. By the way, have you ever seen anything suspicious in this neighborhood? This," and he looked towards the bay, "would be a splendid spot for German boats to land if they wanted to do so."

"Why should they want to land in a remote corner of the world like this?" I asked.

"Exactly," he replied, "only I was wondering whether you, who live here alone, had ever seen or heard anything which aroused your suspicions?"

"No," I replied, not thinking it worth while to tell him anything about the brooch I had found.

"You have seen nothing and heard nothing, then?" he persisted.

"I have only been here a short time," I replied. "Why do you ask?"

"I only wondered, that is all. The people over at St. Eia say

that foreigners have been sneaking around trying to pick up information, and I wondered whether you had heard anything."

"No," I replied, "nothing at all."

"I suppose," he said, "that these cliffs here are honey-combed with caves? Have you seen any of them?"

"Yes," I replied. "I saw one the day after I came here. I came upon it suddenly, for the entrance to it is only a fissure in the rocks."

"Ah!" he cried. "Did you enter?"

"Yes," was my reply, "but it was not at all mysterious. I could see all round it by the aid of a match, and it contained nothing. Of course, it was very curious and very interesting."

"But you saw nothing suspicious?" he asked.

I shook my head.

My visitor did not remain long after this, and although for a time I wondered why he should be so interested, I soon ceased to pay attention to his questions.

Perhaps I should have thought more about him, but just before noon I had another visitor. This was a young fellow about twenty-two years of age, whom I knew to be an Oxford man before he had spoken a dozen words.

"My name is Lethbridge," he said. "My people live up at Trecarrel yonder, and I came – well, I came really at my pater's request."

"Indeed," I said, looking at him curiously.

"Yes; you were at Chapel on Sunday morning, weren't you?"

"I was," I replied.

"Well, my pater and sister were there, and the pater wondered very much who you were. In the evening, contrary to his usual custom, he went a second time, and saw your servant, who told him who you were. Directly the pater mentioned your name, I remembered hearing it in Oxford. You are an Oxford man, aren't you?"

"Yes. I was at Balliol."

"So was I. I left last June. You are often spoken of by the men. Indeed, I had your old rooms. You will excuse the liberty we took in talking about you, won't you? but really we have very little to interest us in this corner of the world."

"You are very kind to come," I replied.

"When I told my father who you were, he suggested that I should come down and ask you to come up to dinner. You see, we had heard of some one coming to live in old Father Abraham's hut, and when it turned out to be you, we got interested. You will forgive this informal method of procedure, won't you? But if you will come up and spend an evening with us soon, we shall all be jolly glad."

"I am afraid I am too ill to come," I replied.

"You do look a bit seedy," was his response, "but the air down here is ripping. It will soon set you up again."

"I am afraid I am too far gone for that," was my reply, "but if I am well enough, I shall be only too glad to come."

"Say to-morrow night," he said.

"If you will leave it an open question," was my reply, "I will say yes, but if I am too ill, you will understand the reason for my absence."

He looked at me closely.

"Is it as bad as that?"

"I am afraid it is," and I sighed when I spoke, for at that moment a wave of desire for life rolled over me.

"May I smoke?" he asked, pulling out his pipe.

"Please forgive me," I said. "I will tell Simpson to bring some cigars."

"Oh no, thank you. A pipe for me, please. By the way, I did not know you were of the Chapel-going order. The one reason I doubted it was you was because my father said you were at the little Wesleyan Chapel."

"I went there out of curiosity, I am afraid. I was wondering whether these people had anything to say to a man whose days were numbered."

"I go there twice a year," was his reply. "I used to go regularly when a boy. Do you intend to stay long down here, by the way?"

"To the end, I expect," I said, shrugging my shoulders.

"Come, now, we will not talk like that. I am sorry to see you looking so seedy. You were always spoken of in Oxford as an athlete. You got your Blue, didn't you?"

"Yes," I replied; "but one never knows what germs of disease one has in one's system. However, we will not talk about that. It is awfully good of you to ask me to come up to your house."

"Rather it will be awfully good of you if you come," he replied. "What a jolly fine view you have here. The old man who built this hut chose one of the most beautiful positions on the whole coast. How did you find it out?"

"Simpson, my man, did that for me," was my reply. "He was a boy down here, he says, and when I told him I had to get away from London, he came down here on spec. I consider myself very lucky."

"I am afraid you will find it a bit lonely in the winter, won't you? The sea is all right when the sun is shining on it, but in winter, when the clouds are black, I know of nothing more dismal. Besides, those black, beetling cliffs are enough to strike terror into one's soul."

I must confess to liking young Lethbridge. He was an athletic, healthy-looking young fellow, tanned by much exposure to the sun, and his every look and movement suggested frankness and honesty. I did not judge him to be very clever, but he was certainly likeable.

"You were doing very well at the Bar, weren't you?" he went on. "Our chaps at Balliol spoke of you as one who would bring added lustre to the old College."

"I was only just beginning to see light," was the reply. "I was lucky in one of the cases I had, and won it by a fluke. That was why briefs were beginning to come in. But I have got to the end of them now. What do you do with yourself?"

"That is the hang of it," he replied. "I am doing nothing. The

pater wanted me to go in for the Law, and then try for Parliament. He has an idea that I ought to represent one of the Cornish constituencies, but I am not cut out for that sort of thing."

"What would you like to be?" I asked.

"Oh, a farmer," he replied. "If, instead of spending all the money he has spent in sending me to Oxford, the pater had bought a thousand acres of land and set me up farming, I should be as happy as a king, but law books are just Sanskrit to me. I love an open-air life, and I love horses and animals generally. The pater won't see things in my light, however; that is why I am doing nothing. I wish you would tell him when you come up that none but brainy men can do anything at the Bar. Well, it is close upon lunch-time, and I must go. But you will be sure to come, won't you? Look here, let's have an understanding. I will send the motor down to the end of the lane to-morrow evening at seven o'clock, and then, if you cannot come, you can send your man out to tell the chauffeur. But be sure to come, if you can."

When he had gone I somehow felt better. His very presence was healthful, and I looked forward with pleasure to meeting him again.

"You have been quite busy this morning, sir," said Simpson when he came in to lay the table for my lunch. "Two visitors in one day in a neighborhood like this is something wonderful."

"Yes," I replied, "and I like young Lethbridge."

"I hear he is a great trouble to his father, sir."

I did not reply to this.

"You see, sir, old Mr. Lethbridge wants him to marry into a county family. The truth is, when I was a boy down here he was only a poor lad. How he has got on in the way he has is a mystery to every one. Somehow or other everything he touched turned to money, and now he is richer than Mr. Treherne, the Squire. He is very ambitious, too, and wants to get in with the county people. That is why people wonder at his sticking to the Wesleyan Chapel."

"But how has young Lethbridge caused him trouble?" I asked.

"Well, sir, it is said that he's in love with a farmer's daughter, and that the old gentleman says he will cut him off with a shilling if he doesn't make up to Miss Treherne. Of course, people will talk, and maybe it is only gossip."

I felt more interested than ever in young Lethbridge after this, although I was rather annoyed with myself that I had listened to servants' gossip. All the same, I believed there might be some truth in what I had heard. There was a look in the young fellow's eyes which suggested that the deepest longings in his heart were unsatisfied.

Before the day was over, the old adage which says that it never rains but it pours was fulfilled in my case. Simpson had only just brought my tea when he came to me with an important look on his face.

"Mr. Trelaske, the Vicar, has called to see you, sir."

"Good!" I replied. "Show him in."

"I hope you will forgive the liberty I am taking," said the Vicar

on entering, "but, as you are one of my parishioners, and I was told you were at Church on Sunday evening, I thought I might call."

"It is very kind of you," I said. "You have just come in time for tea, too. Won't you sit down?"

Mr. Trelaske did not look so imposing, as he sat in my little room, as when wearing his clerical robes in Church. He seemed a smaller man, not simply physically – his personality seemed less as he drew a chair up to the table and took a cup of tea from Simpson.

"I suppose you know that you are the subject of a great deal of discussion in St. Issey?" he said presently.

"I'm very flattered," was my reply.

"Well, for a man to come to St. Issey with a man-servant, and take up his abode in old Father Abraham's cottage, has set all the gossips in the village working overtime."

"Mrs. Grundy lives here, then?"

"Well, you know what we country people are. St. Issey is out of the beaten track of tourists, although there isn't a prettier spot in England, and no healthier for that matter. As for the coast scenery round here, it is, in my opinion, the most beautiful in the whole country. Anyhow, a stranger attracts a great deal of notice. Then, you see, this hut is a mystery."

"Yes, I have heard all about that," I replied, "but I dare say a great deal of the mystery has been magnified. Anyhow, it suits me entirely; it is situated in one of the most lovely spots in the

vicinity. It is utterly quiet, and yet it is not altogether out of the world."

"Might one ask, Mr. Erskine," he said, turning to me suddenly, "why you came to this part of the world?"

"I came here to die," I replied.

He stared at me curiously.

"To die, Mr. Erskine?" he said.

"Yes," I replied. "I have been given a year to live – at the outside. It may be that I shall only last a month or two. When I told my man Simpson about it, and said I wanted to die in the most pleasant place possible, and to do it rather cheaply, he came down here and took this house."

"Y-you do look rather seedy," he stammered. "But surely it is not so bad as that?"

"Dr. Rhomboid, who is at the head of his profession, examined me very carefully, and that was the verdict he passed. That was why I went to Church last Sunday night."

"I don't think I quite understand you," and the Vicar looked at me as though he doubted my sanity.

"You are an Oxford man, aren't you?" he went on. "At least, that is what I have heard; and you were a barrister, and have won some repute in that direction?"

"With the exception of your last sentence, you have been correctly informed," was my reply. "What I have told you is quite true, nevertheless. It is also true that I went to Church last Sunday night because of what Dr. Rhomboid told me," and I looked at

his face curiously, because I wanted to see how he would take it.

"No," I continued, "I am not an illustration of the old rhyme:

> "The devil was sick, the devil a monk would be,
> The devil was well, and the devil a monk was he!

It is not that at all; but do you know, Mr. Trelaske, when a man is suddenly told that he has only a year to live, and may possibly die in a few weeks, he is, to say the least of it, somewhat curious to know what will happen after he is dead. I repeat, that is why I went to Church last Sunday night."

"Yes, yes, certainly," and I thought he seemed a little bit uneasy.

"Mr. Trelaske," I said, "what happens to a man after he is dead?"

He was silent for a few seconds, and again he looked at me as if he doubted my sanity.

"I am not joking," I persisted. "After all, it is a matter of some interest to me, and as you are a clergyman, and as a belief in a future life is one of the articles of the faith you preach, I thought I would ask your opinion about it."

"But surely, Mr. Erskine," he said, "you are not a heathen. You are an old 'Varsity man. You took an arts degree, and would, to say the least of it, have had to study the Greek Testament. You know what is taught there."

"Excuse me," was my reply, "but that doesn't quite meet the

situation. It is quite true, as you say, that I had to study the New Testament at Oxford, and also while at school at Winchester I was in a Confirmation Class; but all that kind of thing is a long way off. It is simply traditional, and when a man comes down to the depths of life traditions don't count. It is true that I have not read the New Testament lately, not, indeed, since I left Oxford. I am like thousands of other fellows, who, on going out into the world, give these things the go-by. Years ago I suppose I held to the traditional faith, although I have troubled very little about it; but now, as things are, I am interested – I am more than interested. What will happen to me a few months hence, when I am dead? Anything?"

I could quite see that he was surprised at the course the conversation was taking, and that he had no expectation of being asked such questions; but now that I had spoken, I meant to know all that he could tell me.

"Our state in the future," was his reply, "depends on the life we have lived here."

"Isn't that rather begging the question?" I asked. "You are assuming something which, as it seems to me, is a matter of doubt. No, do not mistake me, I haven't lived a bad life. I have not descended to the vulgar vices which are supposed to be so common to men in these days. I have, as my acquaintances say of me, 'gone straight.' I listened very attentively to your sermon on Sunday night. You see, I was more than ordinarily interested. Your text was, 'If a man die, shall he live again?' Will he, Mr.

Trelaske?"

"Of course," was his reply.

"Are you *sure*?" I asked, emphasizing the word.

"Hasn't it been the teaching of the Church from its earliest history?" and he looked a little indignant.

"Excuse me, but if you will forgive me for saying so, the teaching of the Church is the very thing in question. As you may imagine, I do not ask the question out of idle curiosity; I am deeply interested, vitally interested. Mr. Trelaske, are you sure, if I were to die to-night, that there would be anything after? Mind you, I do not ask for a mere opinion; we all have those, but is it a matter of certainty with you?"

"As I said on Sunday night," he replied, after some silence, "spiritual things are spiritually discerned; and immortality is a matter of the spirit, isn't it?"

"I am afraid I don't follow you," I replied. "As you said just now, I am a lawyer, and my business for several years has been to test evidence. After I have tested the evidence that has been brought in support of any particular case, it has been my business to convince the jury that the evidence is conclusive. If I don't convince the jury, of course I fail to win my case. Your answer suggests that I lack the qualities to understand the proofs in support of the doctrine you taught on Sunday night. Perhaps you are right; probably I have so neglected what you call the spiritual part of me that it has become atrophied. I will put it in another way, then, and, believe me, it is furthest from my desire

to be impertinent. Supposing you were to die to-night – you, an ordained clergyman – are you *sure* there is a life beyond?"

Mr. Trelaske was silent.

"Forgive my asking you," I said. "I am afraid I have been frightfully rude; but you see, living here alone, with the doctor's verdict constantly before me, I am curious to know."

"Not at all, not at all," he said hastily, "I am very glad you asked me; but the question is so sudden. I do not think that during the whole time I have lived in St. Issey any one has asked me such a thing before, at least not in the same way."

"I was wrong," I said; "please forgive me."

I could see that I had made him miserable. The look in his eyes told me that. As I said before, Mr. Trelaske was evidently a gentleman, and he wanted to be absolutely honest with me. All the same, his silence made my heart heavy.

Although I had, in a way, made up my mind that there was nothing after death, the thought of becoming nothing was grim and repellent.

"Look here, Mr. Erskine," he said, after a somewhat painful silence, "you must come to the Vicarage and see me. I will think over what you have said, and then perhaps I shall be better prepared to meet the situation."

From that time the conversation drifted to general matters, and when the Vicar left me, it was on the understanding that I should, at an early date, spend an evening with him.

V
AN EMERGING MYSTERY

After the Vicar had gone I suffered a slight reaction. My mind was almost abnormally active, but physically I felt utterly languid and depressed. I could see that Simpson was watching me closely, and when I did not do justice to the dinner he had provided he was almost as depressed as I.

"I could not help hearing what you and the Vicar were talking about, sir," he said presently. "I tried not to listen, but some things came to me in spite of myself."

"You heard nothing very edifying, Simpson."

"No, sir; all the same, I was sorry for you."

"Sorry for me! Why?"

"Well, sir, I think I understand how you feel. I am only a poor, ignorant man, sir, but I think I should feel something the same myself. Mr. Trelaske did not help you much, did he?"

"Well, he did not seem any more sure than you did, Simpson."

"Yes, sir; I cannot understand it. I was at the death-bed of my father, sir; he was what you would call an old-fashioned Methodist. He was not clever or learned, or anything of that sort; but he was very sure, sir."

"Sure of what, Simpson?"

"Sure that he was going to heaven; sure that this life was only

a school for a greater life, sir. I am afraid I have not put it very well, but he was what the Vicar says he isn't – sure. What I can't understand, sir, is that religion seems to have no meaning nowadays. I was hoping that when I got down here I should find things the same as they were when I left home forty years ago. Then, sir, religion meant something; it doesn't now. They say the same words at Chapel as they used to say, but they do not mean the same things."

"You mean that religion is dead altogether, then, Simpson?"

"I don't mean that, sir. I only mean that people seem to have lost it. It seems a terrible thing, doesn't it, sir, that when a young gentleman like you wants to know something, and you go to Chapel, and to Church, to learn the thing they ought to be able to tell you, you find out that they know no more than you do? However, sir, it isn't for me to criticize. Is there anything more I can do for you, sir?"

"No, nothing at present, Simpson;" and I turned to the book-shelves that he had fitted up, hoping to find a book that would interest me. In this, however, I utterly failed. I turned from volume to volume, but could fasten my mind on nothing. Books which a few months ago would have enabled me to pass a pleasant evening seemed meaningless and absurd. I turned from one writer to another, but always with the same result. What they had to say meant nothing. Of course, my mind was in an abnormal condition, but that was not my fault. Here was I, face to face with death, hungering for reality, hungering for truths that were vital.

My law books repelled me. What did I care about old Acts of Parliament, passed hundreds of years before? Of what interest to me were the decisions of old judges, long since dead? They affected only some nice points of law, which, as far as I could see, mattered nothing. They never touched the depths of life at all. Then there were novels, many of them written by men and women I knew personally. But they had nothing to say to me. I did not care a fig about paltry intrigues, neither was I in the slightest degree interested in *risqué* situations.

I went to the door, and looked out into the silent night. Daylight had just gone, and that kind of atmosphere which can only be felt just after sunset and just before sunrise, pervaded everything. The air was full of mystery. The wondrous depths of the sky, the wide sweep of the Atlantic, the cry of the sea-birds, and that deep hush which accompanies the dying day, aroused infinite longings. What was life, its meaning, its mystery, its destiny?

Simpson came to my side.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but you are not going out, are you?"

I had not thought of it, but his words caused me to determine to go for a walk.

"Yes, Simpson, I am," I replied.

"Shall I go with you, sir?"

"No, thank you, Simpson, I will go alone."

"Excuse me, sir, but are you not foolish? Walking in the night might do you harm, sir; it might shorten your days."

"What does that matter?" I asked. "As the end is so near, of what consequence are a few days, or, for that matter, weeks? The sooner I die, the sooner I shall solve the great mystery of the Beyond, if there is a Beyond; if there isn't, what have I to live for here?"

"I beg your pardon, sir, I am very sorry." And Simpson sighed.

I put on a light overcoat, and made my way to the highest point of the cliffs. Beneath me, far down, perhaps three or four hundred feet, the waves rolled on the black, rugged rocks. As I looked seaward, the water, as it seemed to me, became darker and darker. The lines of foam, which stretched along by the coast, became more and more distinct. Night had now fallen. The sky was star-spangled. I had never seen such a sky in England before. Once or twice down by the Mediterranean I had seen something similar, but never in my own country. I felt as though invisible presences were near me, as though they were trying to speak to me; but I could not understand the language.

Unmindful of consequences, I sat down on the heather, and gave myself up to fancy. I tried to pierce the veil which hung between me and the Beyond. I tried to understand the meaning of the far-off voices which were wafted to me by the night breezes. I wanted to read the riddle of Life and Death.

Then, suddenly, I heard voices, and I was brought back from things intangible and mysterious to things mundane.

"You are sure he knows nothing?" It was a woman's voice I heard.

"Perfectly sure. I questioned him closely this morning. I so framed my questions that he could have no suspicion – but always with the same result."

"But why should he choose a place like this? Surely, if he is ill, dying, he would never come to a madman's hut, in a place where murder was supposed to be committed."

"I tell you that there is no need for fear; he suspects nothing – he is just what he seems to be."

The voices died away. The man and woman whom I had heard talking, and whom I had dimly seen, descended the hill, and were lost in the darkness. Then it was that, in spite of myself, I became interested in things mundane. Why they should do so I could not imagine, but I felt that they had been talking about me. But why should they? What was the purport of their conversation? How had I become mixed up in the plans of people of whom I knew nothing? I felt myself at the centre of a mystery, and my interest in that mystery caused the greater mystery of Life and Death to lose its hold on me.

I recognized the voice of the man. He had been to see me soon after my arrival; but who was the woman? What interest could my movements have to her? She spoke like one having authority, and it was evident that she feared I should discover something.

I forgot my ailments, forgot the tragedy of my life, in trying to solve this new riddle. I could not help connecting it with the old-fashioned brooch I had picked up in the cave accidentally the day I had come to Cornwall. The activities and interests in this

life again became paramount.

"I will get to the bottom of this, anyway," I said to myself as I made my way back to my hut. "It will be better for me, too, than to be forever brooding about myself. And, after all, while I am alive I will live, and I will keep my eyes and ears open until I have discovered what this means."

When I reached my little room again, Simpson awaited me eagerly.

"Please, sir," he said, "I have had visitors."

"More visitors, Simpson?"

"Yes, sir, a gentleman and a lady."

"Do you know who they are?"

"No, sir; they are both complete strangers. They came and asked to see you, and I told them you were not to be seen, sir. They asked a good many questions about you, but I told them nothing."

"And then, Simpson?"

"The gentleman gave me his card, with his compliments, sir."

I took the card and read the address:

MR. JOHN LIDDICOAT,
THE HILL TOP,
ST. EIA.

"All right, Simpson," I said. "I shan't want you any more to-night."

"Please, sir," said Simpson, "I have some books here which I think might interest you."

"Hang books!" I replied. "I don't feel like reading." Then, feeling ashamed of myself for not appreciating Simpson's kindness, I added, "It's awfully good of you, Simpson, and I might like them after all. What is it you have got?"

"John Wesley's *Journal*, sir. He came to this part of Cornwall, and I thought you might like to read about it. Not that I should advise you to read to-night, sir, if I might take such a liberty, but perhaps to-morrow. Good-night, sir." And he left me.

I was just on the point of going to bed, when, on opening one of the volumes he had placed on the table, I came upon a passage which interested me. I saw that the name of St. Issey was mentioned, and a description given of this very neighborhood. In a few minutes I had become utterly absorbed. Hitherto John Wesley had only been a name to me. I had had no interest either in his life or work. I had looked upon him as somewhat of a fanatic, who had appealed to the fears of a superstitious people, and had founded a sect. Now, however, he revealed himself to me in a new light. This diary was the work of a thoughtful man, and a cultured man, too, who had lived his life to the full, and who faced its issues squarely.

My word, religion had meant something to him! It was not a mere name, a tradition, a set of dogmas, a respectable institution. It was something real, vital, pulsating with life. To him the Founder of Christianity was not a mere mystic and social reformer, who lived nineteen hundred years ago on a little strip of land on the Eastern Coast of the Mediterranean, but a

Divine Person, Who lived now. This John Wesley, who was an educated man and a thoughtful man, spoke like one who knew, and because of it he had authority and power.

I went on reading page after page, until, looking at my watch, I found it was past midnight.

VI
THE LETHBRIDGE FAMILY

We had adjourned to the smoke-room, and for my own part, I was feeling better than I had felt for some time. Opposite me sat Mr. Lethbridge, while by my side sat young Hugh Lethbridge, who had been to see me the day before. I had eaten a good dinner, and felt inclined to take a bright view of everything. Mr. Lethbridge had played the part of host perfectly, and had done his best to make me feel welcome, not only as a visitor in the neighborhood, but in his house. I had the opportunity, moreover, of making the acquaintance of his wife and daughter.

The former was a well-meaning lady, whose *métier* was to manage other people's affairs. While we were at dinner she gave her husband a great deal of information as to how he should manage his men, how he should work the mines he owned, and how the vessels he controlled should be utilized. She also informed her son how he should spend his time, what his amusements and avocations should be. She greatly amused us all by describing what she would do if she were a girl again. She had opinions about everything in heaven above and on earth beneath. I found that she knew intimately the history of every family in the neighborhood, and she took it upon herself to manage the affairs of those families. She might be rather a tiresome person

to live with, but for my own part I found her vastly entertaining.

Young Hugh Lethbridge told her that he intended writing to the Prime Minister, offering her services as general adviser to the Government, while her daughter laughingly remarked that she would wear herself out in attending to the affairs of people who had a distinct preference for attending to their own business. Mrs. Lethbridge took it all in a good humor, however, and seemed to regard it as her chief business to be a universal helper. She even went so far as to instruct me how I might deal with Simpson, and gave me a great deal of valuable advice on housekeeping.

I found that Isabella Lethbridge was entirely different from her mother. On the whole she puzzled me. That she was intelligent there could be no doubt whatever. In many ways she was attractive, but on the whole I did not like her. For one thing, I thought she showed bad taste in holding up her mother to ridicule, while more than once I thought she revealed an almost sullen disposition. Still, she was interesting. She was more than ordinarily good-looking, and at times became quite animated.

The family, as a whole, did not strike me as ideal. They seemed to be at cross-purposes with each other. I could see that Mr. Lethbridge did not at all understand his son, and resented any difference of opinion which might exist between them. He apparently regarded Hugh as a boy who should unquestioningly obey his father's behests without regard to his own feelings and opinions; and yet he seemed to be angry with him for not being something in the world which would give him a position among

his fellow-men.

And yet I am sure Mr. Lethbridge meant well. He was, as I have before suggested, a strong, capable man, and fully bore out what I had heard concerning him. He could never have been a nonentity, wherever he was placed, and whatever he took in hand he would do with such conscientiousness and thoroughness as to make it succeed. Consequently, it was no wonder that he had risen from a poor lad to be a man of wealth and of eminence in the county. That he was exceedingly ambitious there could be no doubt, and I judged that he was a little bit sore that all his ambitions had not been realized. He seemed composed of contradictory elements. On one hand, he seemed a man of the Napoleonic order, who would make everything and every person yield to his desires. On the other, I judged him to be a man who wanted to be strictly honest and conscientious, a man who would not give up one iota of his convictions, even if by so doing he could gain the things he desired.

Although no plain statement was made at the dinner-table to that effect, I gathered that he had suffered socially because of his adherence to what he termed his Nonconformist principles, and that he would have taken his position among the county families had he not remained true to the Chapel he had attended as a boy. On the other hand, however, that same Chapel, as it seemed to me, was a fetish rather than something which vitally affected his life.

I am spending some time in recording my impressions about

this family, because I was brought into close contact with it in later days, and also because the various members of it affected me considerably.

"Yes," said Mr. Lethbridge, as we sat in the smoke-room, "I am an old-fashioned man, Mr. Erskine. I do not believe in giving up my early convictions simply because they are not popular."

"What are your early convictions?" asked Hugh.

"I mean my Nonconformist principles. See what Methodism has done for Cornwall, see what it has done for the whole country for that matter."

"Yes, what has it done?" asked Hugh.

"It has changed Cornwall from being drunken and godless into the most sober and God-fearing part of the country."

"Admitted," replied the son. "But who cares anything about Methodism now?"

"I am surprised and ashamed of you, Hugh, talking like that," said the father. "What is your opinion about it, Mr. Erskine?"

"My opinion about what?" I asked.

"Don't you think a man should stand by his principles?"

"His principles, certainly," was my reply, "especially if, after having tested them, they proved to be vital; but I am rather interested in what your son says. I have been reading John Wesley's *Journal*, and I cannot help realizing the tremendous influence he wielded over a hundred years ago in this very county; but what troubles me is that it seems to mean comparatively little now."

"I don't understand you," he said, rather brusquely.

"What I want to know," I said, "is this. Does Methodism, or for that matter, does religion of any sort, vitally affect the lives and outlook of people now? If it does, why is it that its hold seems to be weakening day by day? I am told that your Chapel used to be crowded, and that while the people were ignorant, Methodism vitally influenced their lives; but now it seems a kind of corpse. It has a name to live, but is dead. This afternoon, Simpson, my man, brought me a book which belonged to his father. That book describes what the people used to do for their faith. Even the women worked to bring stones to build the chapels, while the men toiled hours after their ordinary work was over, as a labor of love, in order to erect the buildings which their children and their children's children neglect and often despise. Everything seems stereotyped. Most of the people seem to care little or nothing about what their forbears would die for, and those that do care seem to regard it in a half-hearted way, and talk about it as something that has been rather than something that is."

"Yes," said Mr. Lethbridge, with a sigh, "I am afraid you are right. The old fire has gone, faith has largely died out, real earnestness seems a thing of the past; and yet what can one do?"

"I am afraid I am not the one to ask," I replied. "You see, I am a rank outsider so far as that kind of thing is concerned."

"For that matter the Church of England is no better," said Mr. Lethbridge.

"Should that console one?" I asked. "Cornwall, as I

understand, used to be the home of religious activity, of unquestioning faith, of devoted fervor; but to-day people are careless, materialistic. Faiths which at one time were held tenaciously, doctrines which were believed in unquestioningly, are now apparently a dead letter."

"I suppose you are a Churchman, Mr. Erskine," said Mr. Lethbridge.

"I am afraid I am nothing," I replied. "For several years I did not put my foot inside a Church of any sort."

"Indeed, how is that?"

"I suppose I had no interest," I said. "That was why going to Church on Sunday was something new to me. I felt like a man witnessing a strange thing, and trying to understand something which was unfamiliar."

"Yes, and how did it impress you?"

"Everything was so unconvincing," I replied. "The note of reality was never struck at all."

"But surely," said Mr. Lethbridge, "you are not an atheist?"

"I am nothing," was my answer. "I wish I were. I suppose you know why I came here?"

"Yes, I have heard," he replied, "and I am very, very sorry for you, and you such a young man too, and life opening up all sorts of possibilities. Perhaps, however, it is not as bad as you think; the doctor may have made a mistake."

"I am afraid there is no hope of that," was my reply. "The man who examined me has the reputation of being the most eminent

diagnostician in his profession; but if you religious people are right, it does not matter. If John Wesley, whose diary I have been reading, is right, what we call life, that is, life here, is a very small matter; it is only a fragment of life. Death, according to him, is only an episode; but the worst of it is that here, in a county where he is so largely represented, and in a village where he has visited, his power is gone. The old words are used, but the old convictions are gone – that is why such a man as I am left stranded. But really, I am ashamed of myself, talking like this. Believe me, I am not in the habit of boring people with my ailments and foolish speculations."

We joined the ladies shortly after, and our conversation, I am afraid, was of a very uninteresting nature. I noticed all the time we were talking, too, that Mr. Lethbridge was paying no attention whatever. He seemed to be thinking deeply about something else. Presently, while his wife was engaged in a long harangue about the inferiority of girls, comparing them with what she used to be when she was a girl, Mr. Lethbridge broke in suddenly.

"Yes, Mr. Erskine," he said, "you may be right in what you were saying – that is, up to a point – but you don't go deep enough."

"I am afraid I never do go very deep," was my reply. "The deeper one goes, as a rule, the greater the muddle."

"Not in this case," and he spoke quite eagerly. "Why, the whole life of the county is what John Wesley and Methodism have made it. People, as a whole, may seem to have discarded

his teachings, but they are in the very air we breathe; the people's thoughts, the people's lives, are what they are to-day because of the work he did."

"I dare say," I replied, for, to tell the truth, I was anxious to avoid anything like a theological discussion.

"Yes, don't you see? In the background of people's minds there is the impress of his work; his influence is felt everywhere. Even the people who never enter a place of worship have been shaped and moulded by Methodism."

"In what way?" asked Hugh.

"Well, take such a question as war," replied Mr. Lethbridge. "John Wesley killed the very possibility of war."

"I wish I could see it," I could not help exclaiming.

"It is plain enough," he replied. "Methodism and war cannot go together. The love of peace has entered into the very essence of people's lives. Is not that something to be thankful for?"

"I am not so sure," replied Isabella Lethbridge. "May not war be a very good thing?"

"A good thing!" cried her father – "a good thing! Why, it's hellish! I would rather see a son of mine dead than a soldier! And that is the feeling Methodism has created throughout the county. You scarcely ever find a conscientious Methodist becoming a soldier. A soldier in this county is looked upon as a kind of legalized murderer."

"Surely," I said, "it is not so bad as that?"

"It amounts to that," was his reply. "For my own part, I have

an utter abhorrence of anything which savors of militarism, and I know it is because of the impressions I received as a boy."

"But supposing war were to break out?" I said.

"War break out!" he interrupted. "How can it break out, unless some of our so-called statesmen make asses of themselves? No one wants war."

"No," I said – "that is, as far as the general feeling in the country is concerned; but supposing war were thrust upon us?"

"Who would thrust it upon us?" he asked, almost angrily.

"Germany, for example," was my reply.

"Impossible!"

"Not so impossible, I am afraid," I could not help replying. "Why, during the last few years we have twice been on the brink of war with Germany, and, unless I am mistaken, a war with that country is bound to come, sooner or later." This, I am afraid, I said rather for the sake of argument than because I really believed it. "Take that Agadir incident. We were within an ace of war then. Indeed, had Germany been as ready as she is now it would doubtless have come off."

"I do not believe it," was his reply. "The people of England would have refused; the whole nation would have risen up in protest against it, and not even the Government could have forced the country into a war which it detested."

"Not if we were attacked?" was my answer.

"I do not believe in the possibility of it at all," he replied. "We are essentially a peace-loving people."

"That may be, but even a peace-loving people may be obliged to defend itself."

"But we shall never be called upon to defend ourselves."

"I am not at all sure," was my answer. "Germany is just spoiling for war. Ever since she beat France she has been longing for expansion, and the military party in Germany maintain that the English people keep them from occupying their rightful place in the world."

"Yes, the military party," he said; "a negligible section of the country."

"Excuse me," was my answer, "but the military party in Germany is practically the nation. It is true there are a few Socialists who disclaim war, and profess to be at enmity with the military party; nevertheless, that party rules the nation, and if war should break out every Socialist would be obliged to fight for his country – and Germany means that it shall break out."

"And what then?" he asked.

"Then," I replied, "the power and solidarity of the British Empire will be tested as it has never been tested before. There will be such a struggle as has never been known in the history of the world. Every ounce of power that we have will be requisitioned; every able-bodied man in the country will be called to arms."

"But the country will refuse to respond," was his reply.

"If you are right, and the men of England refuse to respond, England will cease to be. There will be no England, and Germany

will rule the destinies of the world."

"You seem to be very sure of what Germany will do," he said, rather impatiently.

"No one can travel in Germany, or read German literature, without knowing it. It is a nation under arms. The love of war is bred in the people. Militarism is glorified. They have such an army as was never known before, and they have utilized all their discoveries in science to make their army a perfect fighting machine. They have huge factories devoted to the making of air-ships and guns, and all that appertains to guns, and I tell you that if war breaks out between Germany and England, our country will be tried as it was never tried before. Do you mean to say that England would stand still while Germany sought to destroy us?"

"I mean that we are not a military people, and never will be." It was at this point that young Lethbridge sprang to his feet, like a man angry.

"I do not believe that you are right, pater," he said. "If England were in danger the young men of England would fight to the last man."

"No, they would not," replied the father, "because war is a devilish thing. It is opposed to the teaching of Christianity."

"But where would our Christianity be, where would everything we hold dear be, if Germany dominated the world?" protested Hugh. "Why, if I had a hundred lives I would give them for the defense of my country."

"Then patriotism would be more than your religion?"

"I cannot argue the matter from that standpoint," replied young Lethbridge. "I only know that I am an Englishman – every drop of my blood is English. God made me English, and if I have a love for my country, God gave me that love, and if there were a call for men I would respond."

"You would be no son of mine if you did," replied the father.

"But he would," cried Isabella Lethbridge. "Why, father, you are a fighter; you know you are, and I should be ashamed of Hugh if his country called him and he held back. There doesn't seem to be much in life worth being interested in, but if anything would arouse me, it would be the thought of England in danger."

"And would you believe in war, even if we were in the wrong?" asked her father.

"I cannot conceive of our being in the wrong," was her reply. "Besides, it can never be wrong to defend one's native land." The girl's eyes flashed as she made this reply, and I saw possibilities in her nature which I had not recognized before. Her lips quivered, and her features became animated with a kind of new life.

"But do you really believe, Mr. Erskine, that Germany means to force war on England?" she went on.

"No one who has been to Germany, and has studied the life there, can help knowing that they have been preparing for war for forty years, and no one can help realizing that the Germans hate the English with a deadly hatred. It may be only because of their jealousy, or it may be, as they say, that our Navy keeps them from realizing their rightful position. Anyhow, the fact remains.

Our statesmen are doing their best to put off the evil day, but it is a recognized fact among those in high places that Europe at this moment is sitting on a powder magazine; and, mark you, if war does come it will not be a picnic."

"I tell you the people of England will never allow such a thing," urged Mr. Lethbridge doggedly; "we are a peace-loving people. Besides, we cannot go to war; we have no army worth calling an army, and I, for one, thank God for it."

"Of course there will be no war," said Mrs. Lethbridge confidently; "the Powers would not allow it, my dears."

"Are we sure that we have yet realized what Germany is, or what her people mean to do?" I asked. "During the last thirty years she has simply forced herself upon the life of the world; her commerce has progressed by leaps and bounds; she has placed her foot everywhere. Before Bismarck's days she had practically no voice in the counsels of the nations. To-day her voice is a dominant one, her commerce is still increasing; she has succeeded, in spite of our protests, in building a navy second to none but our own. Why did she build that navy? She can command an army of, perhaps, eight or ten million men, more perfectly equipped than any other army known in history. She has munitions, implements of war, which can practically laugh at those of any other nation."

"That shows her foolishness," said Mr. Lethbridge.

"How?"

"Because she does not know what other countries possess."

"Is not that where you make a mistake? Germany has a Secret Intelligence Service, which enables her to know the strength of every army and navy in the world. England at this time, for example, is simply riddled with spies. Germany knows the strength of our Navy to a nicety. She knows our every port, every harbor, every fortress; she has made it her business to do so, and Germany means war. Do you think that when the time comes England will sit idly by?"

"No! by heavens, no!" cried Hugh Lethbridge. "I doubt whether what you say is true, Erskine, but if England is ever in danger, Englishmen will be true to their name and their country."

"Yes, and Englishwomen too," cried Isabella Lethbridge. "I tell you nothing can destroy the old fighting instinct, which will protect home and Motherland. Dad," and she turned to her father almost fiercely, "do you mean to say that if we were in danger you would advise us to do nothing?"

Mr. Lethbridge laughed scornfully. "How can there be any danger?" he asked. "War cannot come about in these days, as it did in the old times. War depends now on the whole of the people; the democracy rules – not a few men in high places."

"Democracy does not rule," cried the girl, "and never will. Democracy is a mob which is forever calling out for leaders. No Government is democratic, it is always autocratic."

"You are talking nonsense, child," said her father. "You can do nothing to-day against the voice of the people, and the voice of the people is against anything like war. I repeat what I said

just now – I would rather see a son of mine dead than that he should be a soldier! But there, there! There is no chance of it. Whatever England has been, she is to-day at peace, and as far as Cornwall is concerned, as I said just now, John Wesley has killed militarism."

He left the room as he spoke, while Hugh Lethbridge looked meaningly towards his sister.

"I am afraid I shall have to be going," I said, looking at my watch. "I have stayed too long already."

"No, no!" protested Hugh. "Stay a little longer. Do you know, Erskine, it is like a fresh breeze from the mountains to hear what you have been saying to-night. We live a starved, narrow life down here, and – and I'm sick of it. I almost wish war would break out."

"For shame, Hugh!" said his mother. "What good would you be as a soldier? No one can be an officer in an army unless he is trained; and as for your becoming a private, why, think how ridiculous you would look in a private's uniform."

"I am afraid I must be going," I persisted, moving towards the door.

"I will have the car out and drive you home," said Hugh Lethbridge.

"No," I said, "it is a beautiful night, and I think I would rather walk."

"But in your state of health, Mr. Erskine, it would be very foolish," said Mrs. Lethbridge. "Really, we cannot allow you."

"I would rather walk," I persisted. Whereupon Hugh announced his intention of accompanying me.

When Mr. Lethbridge bade me good-night he had quite recovered his equanimity, and expressed the hope that I would soon come to see them again.

"I feel like a toad in a hole," said Hugh, after we had walked some minutes in silence together.

"How is that?" I asked.

"What has life to offer a fellow? The pater insisted upon my going to the University and reading for the Bar. I am not fit for it – I know I am not fit. Then, although he pretends to be a man of the people, he is also socially ambitious. You would not believe it, would you? I know it is wrong for me to talk in this way, but somehow I cannot help it. You know, Erskine, as my father said just now, he was a poor man, and made money rapidly, and he is disappointed that the doors of the county people are not open to us. I do not care a fig about the county people myself; do you?"

"Some of them are very nice," I replied.

"You will not take it amiss of me if I tell you something, will you? And, of course, you will regard it as a confidence? It is something which means a lot to me."

"Do you think you know me well enough to tell me?" I replied. "After all, we have only met twice."

"I must tell you," he persisted. "As you say, I have only met you twice, but I seem to have known you all my life. Besides, a fellow must tell his thoughts to some one. I am in love, Erskine."

"That is interesting."

"Yes, but don't you see, everything is at cross-purposes. Old Treherne, down here, has a daughter several years older than I am. You have heard of Treherne, haven't you? He is the Squire."

"Yes, I have heard of Mr. Treherne."

"His daughter is on the shelf – has been for several years. He is as poor as a church mouse, is the Squire; but then, he is one of the big people in the county, and the pater has an idea that if I were to marry her … well, you can see, can't you?"

"The lady might not be willing," I suggested.

"Quite possible, of course; but the pater seems sure she would be. You see, she's thirty, if she's a day, and as ugly as they make 'em, and the pater wants me to sell my soul and marry her. By so doing, old Treherne would be able to pay off the mortgages on the estate, and I, in time, would become the Squire. Just think of it!"

"I thought he wanted you to read for the Bar?" I interposed.

"Yes, he does, but that is only one of his many schemes. He wants me to marry Treherne's daughter. Celia, they call her – Celia Treherne. Good, isn't it?"

"Why, isn't she an estimable lady?"

"Estimable! Estimable enough. But, as I told you just now, I am in love with a farmer's daughter, one of the class my family really belongs to, and the pater – well, I need scarcely tell you what he says."

"And this farmer's daughter's name?" I queried.

"I wish you would let me introduce you to her," he cried eagerly. "A sweeter girl never lived. I used to think of her as a sweetheart ten years ago, when the pater was poorer than he is now. I fought several boys about her. Mary Treleaven is her name. Do you think that you could persuade the governor? You see, he refuses to countenance it, and, without him, I haven't a penny with which to bless myself."

"My dear fellow," I said, "if you care anything about the girl you will make yourself independent of your father."

"Yes, but what am I fit for – what can I do? He professes to have democratic notions, and yet he has given me the education of a gentleman; sent me to a public school, where no one learns anything of any use, and then to Oxford, where I just scraped through, and got a pass degree. What is the good of all that to me? There is not a single thing I care anything about, except farming, and that needs capital. What would you advise me to do?"

"I am afraid I can't advise anything just now. You see, I know so little about either of you. Perhaps when I have been here a little longer I may be able to help." By this time we had reached the little wooded lane which led to my hut.

"You will come and see us again soon?" he pleaded.

"You are very kind," I replied. "If I am well enough, I will."

"I cannot believe you are so ill as you think," he said eagerly.

I did not answer him. Of what use was it for me to tell him of the gnawing pain which I could feel just then – pain which told me that my very life was being eaten away?

"Won't you come in?" I asked.

"No, I mustn't. Besides, you will be tired. I say! what is that?" and he pointed towards the highest part of the cliff, the base of which pushed itself out into the sea. I looked, and in the dim light saw what I felt sure to be a boat approaching the shore.

"Some fishermen, I expect," I replied.

"No, fishermen do not hang so close to the rocks as that," was his answer. "Besides, the boat is making directly for us. No one was ever known to land a fishing-boat on this beach. Fishing-boats go direct to the harbor at St. Eia."

We listened intently, and heard the steady splash of the oars, and presently I thought I heard low, murmuring voices, but I was not sure.

VII
ISABELLA LETHBRIDGE

During the next few days nothing happened, and, if the truth must be told, I am afraid I got very lonely and depressed. Simpson did his best to interest me, but failed. My books, too, seemed dull and colorless. I suppose it was natural. I was passing through a phase in my life which was the inevitable consequence of what had hitherto taken place. The malady from which I was suffering was taking rather an acute form just then, and I had neither the strength nor inclination for exercise. Thus, although the weather was glorious and the air pure and bracing, I found that sitting day after day amid the same surroundings was anything but exhilarating. Moreover, although I cannot explain it, a sense of dread possessed me. I felt sure that something was going to happen, and that I was going to be at the centre of some untoward event.

I expect I felt all the more irritable because my desire to live became stronger and stronger. It appeared to me that I had nothing to live for, and yet I hung on to life, and the hope of life, grimly.

"Simpson," I said one day, "you told me when we came here that an idiot lad, who went by the name of Fever Lurgy, waited on old Father Abraham and did his errands. What has become

of him?"

"Don't know, sir."

"Does no one know?"

"Don't know at all, sir."

"It seems strange, doesn't it, that this lad, who was the first to tell of what had happened to the old man, should not have come here when he heard that the house was occupied again?"

"I did hear something of his running away, because he was afraid; but I know nothing."

"Afraid? Afraid of what?"

"You know what these idiot boys are, sir. I suppose he almost worshipped old Father Abraham, and when he knew his master was killed he feared to stay in the same neighborhood."

"Is that your conclusion too, Simpson?" I asked.

"I never thought of it before, sir."

That day I went out for a walk. Somehow the lethargy which had possessed me for a long time was gone, and my body for the time was instinct with a new life. My fancies about Fever Lurgy had laid hold of me, and I began asking myself all sorts of questions. I found my way into the village, and, seeing a group of men standing by the pump, joined them. I found them very willing to talk with me, and while at first they showed no desire to impart any information, they asked me countless questions. This, I have found since, is a characteristic of the Cornish people. They are exceedingly friendly, and are willing to show kindness to a stranger, but they will not take him into their confidence.

They are curious to know everything he can tell them, but they will tell him nothing in return. While they believed I was simply a stranger from "up country," their only interest in me was to know who I was, where I came from, and all about my affairs generally. When they got to know that I was of Cornish descent, however, there was an entire change in their demeanor towards me. I was one of them.

In the course of a few minutes we got talking about Father Abraham and of his tragic end.

"It 'ave bin said, sur, that th' ould man's ghost do wander round the plaace, where you d' live, sur. Es et true?"

"I have never seen him, anyhow. Have you?"

"Well, sur, ted'n for we to say. Oal the saame, I heerd curious noises wawn night near your house."

"What kind of noises?" I asked.

"Oh, a kind of moanin' and cryin', like a gull in pain."

"Maybe it *was* a sea-gull," I suggested.

"No, sur, we d' know what gulls be like. Twad'n that. We be sure there was foul play, sur."

"What about that lad, Fever Lurgy?" I asked. "Does he live in the neighborhood now?"

"Bless you, sur, Fayver Lurgy a'n't bin seen since th' ould man was killed."

"No!" I said. "Isn't that strange?"

"Oa, he was a funny chap, was Fayver Lurgy. Do you know whay he was called Fayver Lurgy, sur?"

"Not the slightest idea," I replied.

"Well, sur, down 'long 'ere wi' we, when a great lousterin' chap wa'ant work, and do ait a lot, we d' say 'ee've got Fayver Lurgy. That es, two stomachs to ait, and noan to work. Tha's 'ow Fayver Lurgy got 'is name. He's as strong as a 'oss, but he wudd'n work. 'Ee wadd'n such a fool as 'ee made out. 'Ee allays was a button short, was Fayver Lurgy, but 'ee wadd'n no idiot, as people d' say."

"So you think he was afraid of being killed?" I suggested.

"Tha's what we d' think, sur."

"Who were his father and mother?" I asked.

"Nobody doan knaw, sur. He comed 'ere years and years ago, sur, weth an ould woman, who said she was 'is grandmother. When th' ould woman died, sur, Fayver Lurgy jist lopped round by hisself. Sometimes he ded a bit of work, and sometimes nothin'; but 'ee scraped up a living some'ow. When ould Father Abraham comed, he kipt with 'im reglar, and direkly 'ee was killed, Fayver Lurgy left the neighbrood, and nobody doan knaw where 'a es."

"Did you ever see old Father Abraham?" I asked.

"Yes, sur, I've seen 'im, but never to spaik to. Curyus ould chap he was. He 'ad long white whiskers and ter'ble bright eyes. Wan man I d' knaw spoke to 'un. Billy Barnycote 't was. Billy did say as 'ow he believed that ould Father Abraham was a furriner."

"I suppose he never went to Church or Chapel?" I asked.

"What! ould Father Abraham? Not 'ee. 'Ee ded'n go nowhere,

so to spaik."

"And you," I said. "Do you ever go?"

"Sometimes, maaster, when there is a good praicher; but why shud us go when the praichers doan knaw more'n we do? I a'ain't bin since last Sunday-school anniversary. They 'ad a praicher from up to Plymouth. Clever chap 'ee was, too. Ef we cud allays git praichers like 'ee, we'd go every Sunday, but when a man like Tommy Coad d' git up and craake, we ca'ant stand it."

The day was beautifully fine, and, as I felt more than ordinarily well, I took a long route home. I had not gone far when, passing a stile, I saw Miss Lethbridge leap lightly into the road. I could not help reflecting how handsome she appeared in her light summer attire. When visiting her father's house a few days before she had struck me as being hard and repellent. Even now there was nothing winsome or girlish about her, but that she presented an attractive figure I could not deny. More than ordinarily tall, and finely formed, she carried her well-fitting clothes to perfection. Her features, too, while not exactly beautiful, were striking; and, flushed somewhat as she was by her walk through the fields, she seemed a part of that bright, early summer day.

"I hope you are better, Mr. Erskine," was her greeting.

"Yes," I replied, "I feel well enough to take a fairly long walk. I have been down into the village talking with some of the people there, and trying to discover some of the romance for which Cornwall is famous."

"And have had your labor for your pains," was her reply.

"Not entirely. I feel as though I have happened upon something which will lead to interesting developments."

"Believe me, you will not, Mr. Erskine."

"No? Why?"

"If ever there was a false tradition, it is the tradition that Cornwall is romantic. I have lived here all my life, and there is no more romance in the county than in that mine-heap," and she nodded towards a discarded mine which lay in the distance.

"The Cornish people," she went on, "have no sense of the mysterious, no sense of the romantic. If ever they had it, it has all died. I suppose that years ago, when the people were entirely ignorant, they believed in all sorts of superstitions, but now that they are better educated they have discarded everything but what they can see, and feel with their own hands. I am inclined to think they are right, too."

"I am not so sure," was my answer. And then I told her of the conversation that had taken place a few moments before.

"And do you imagine, Mr. Erskine, that any romance surrounds the old man who built the house you live in, and lived like a hermit away there by the cliff? Do you think that any romance is associated with the idiot lad who ran his errands and did his bidding?"

"Why not?"

"Because none exists."

"Pardon me if I do not agree with you. After all, there is something romantic in the thought of that old man coming there

alone and building his hut in a lonely place, and spending years of his life there."

"Yes, it may seem so; but, pardon me, is there anything romantic in your coming there, Mr. Erskine?"

I shrugged my shoulders.

"I am afraid not," I replied.

"And I dare say the reason why he came there was just as unromantic. As for Fever Lurgy, every village has its idiot who is a butt for rustic jokes."

"And what about old Father Abraham's mysterious disappearance?" I asked.

"What you call a mysterious disappearance," was her reply, "I regard as a sordid crime. I expect the old man had a little money hoarded up, some tramps heard of it, and, for the sake of that money, murdered him and threw his body over the cliff."

"At any rate," I said, "it is more pleasant to think that some mystery surrounded his life, and that he left the neighborhood from some romantic cause. Do you know, I am inclined to think that he is still alive, that he will turn up some day, and that the whole thing will be the talk of the countryside."

"And yet you are a trained lawyer, and have lived in London!" she laughed.

"Perhaps that is why. Lawyers get weary of hard thinking. Besides, when one comes to think of it, hard thinking is only responsible for a tithe of the discovery of truth. Far more of it is discovered by intuition than by logic."

"Do you know, you are very refreshing, Mr. Erskine. It is delightful to think of a man coming from hard, matter-of-fact London to Cornwall, and believing in the things that we simple rustics have discarded for a generation or more."

"Then you don't find life either romantic or mysterious?"

"I find it the most prosy, uninteresting thing imaginable. There is no mystery and no romance in the world; everything is hard, matter of fact, commonplace."

"Come, come, now, you cannot believe that," I laughed.

"One believes as one finds." And I thought her eyes became hard. "The other day I read what is called a romantic novel. It had gone through numberless editions, and was, I suppose, the rage of reading circles. It told of all sorts of mysterious happenings and romantic adventures. Then I reflected on what had actually happened to myself and to girls with whom I am acquainted. I went to school in France and Germany, as well as in England, and, do you know, I really cannot find one bit of romance that has ever happened to me or to the girls I have known. I can't remember anything mysterious."

"Isn't life one great mystery?"

"Yes, mystery if you like, but simply because of our ignorance. When the mystery is explained, the explanation is as prosy as that cottage." And she looked towards a cottage door, where a woman stood by her wash-tub. "Do you ever find life mysterious, Mr. Erskine?"

"Yes, it is mysterious from end to end. Sometimes, as I sit

in my little wooden hut, facing the sea, at night-time, and hear the wind moan its way over the cliffs and across the waste of waters, when the solemn feeling of night broods over everything, I feel that life is one great mystery. What is behind it all? What is the meaning of everything? Is there a Creator? What lies beyond what we call death? Surely, that is mystery enough. You may say, if you like, that this feeling of mystery is because of our ignorance; nevertheless, it is there."

"Yes," she replied. "But the trouble is that, in so far as we have discovered mysteries, they turn out to be of the most prosy and commonplace nature. Things that were once unknown, and appealed to the world as romantic, now that they are known are just as prosy and uninteresting as the commonplace. Directly a thing is known it becomes humdrum. I went to a lecture one night given by a scientist – an astronomer, in fact. He was lecturing on the planet Mars. He said that he himself had examined the planet through a powerful telescope, and he had seen what to him were convincing proofs that there were canals cut through a piece of land which was similar in nature to the Isthmus of Panama. As a consequence the planet Mars was inhabited – inhabited by thinking, sentient beings, who lived in a world millions of miles from this world. It seemed very wonderful at that time, but, when I came to think of it, it was all very prosy. What if it were inhabited? It would simply mean that people somehow exist there, just as they exist here, and think and suffer, and struggle and die. Can anything be more prosy and unromantic than that?"

"Isn't the very mystery of death itself attractive – wonderful?" I asked.

"Do you think so?" And she looked at me curiously.

"Sometimes," I replied, "although I dread the thought of death, I have a kind of feverish curiosity about it, and I would like to die just to know."

"Yet it would be disappointing in the end. When that so-called mystery comes to be explained, there will be nothing but great, blank darkness."

"And that is your creed of life and death?"

"We can only argue from the known to the unknown," was her reply.

"And do you not long for something more?"

"Long!" And there was passion in her voice.

"Then, to you, religion, immortality, have no interest?"

"Yes, interest," was her reply, "but, like everything else, it is because of my ignorance. I know I am very ignorant, Mr. Erskine, and I dare say you will laugh at me for talking in the way I do; but, so far as I have read of the origins of religions, they are simply the result of a fear of the unknown. People are afraid to die, and they have evolved a sort of hope that there is a life other than this. I know it is a cheerless creed, but don't facts bear out what I have said? In different parts of the world are different religions, and each and all of them are characteristic of the people who believe in them. Wasn't Matthew Arnold right when he said that the Greeks manufactured a god with classical

features and golden hair, while the negroes created a god with black skin, thick lips, and woolly hair?"

"Do you go far enough back, even then?" I asked. "You are simply dealing with the shape of the god. What is the origin of the idea?"

"I suppose man invented it," was her reply.

"Yes, but how? After all, knowledge is built upon other knowledge. Imagination is the play of the mind around ascertained facts. 'No man hath seen God at any time.' How, then, have people come to believe in Him, except through some deeper and more wonderful faculty, which conveyed it to the mind? For the mind, after all, is only the vehicle, and not the creator, of thought."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"You get beyond me there, Mr. Erskine. When you dabble in metaphysics I am lost. Still, is it not a fact that the more intellectual the race the less religious it becomes? Take France, for example. Paris is the great clearing-house of ideas, and yet the French are an unbelieving people."

"Is that altogether true?" was my reply, for I was led to take up an attitude of the soundness of which I was far from being convinced. "Is not France literally sick and tired of the atheism which surged over the nation at the time of the Revolution? France no longer glories in hard unbelief, and, as far as I know, the French people are simply longing for faith, and, for that matter, are going back to faith. Not, perhaps, the faith which the

Revolution destroyed, but to something deeper, diviner."

She seemed thoughtful, and for some time neither of us spoke. Then she burst out laughing merrily.

"Don't things seem reversed?" she said. "Here are you, a scholar of Oxford, and a clever lawyer, upholding tradition, imagination, intuition, superstition, while I, an ignorant girl, am discarding it all."

"Perhaps," I replied, "that is because life is long to you, short to me. When one comes to what seems the end of things, one looks at life differently. There," I went on, for at that moment we had passed a lad with his arm round a girl's waist, "that boy lives in heaven. He is with the girl he loves. Suppose you tried to convince that boy and girl there was no such thing as romance, would they believe you?"

"Perhaps not," she replied; "but I could take you down the village yonder, and show you men and women who, twenty years ago, were just as romantic as those two cooing doves; and to-day the men loaf round the village lanes, smoking, or, perhaps, are in the public-house drinking; while the women are slatternly, discontented, standing at the wash-tub, or scrubbing out cottages. Where now is the romance, or, for that matter, the love?"

"Then you don't believe in love either?"

She was silent, and I watched her face closely, and again I was struck by her appearance. Yes, no doubt, Isabella Lethbridge was more than ordinarily handsome. Her features, without being beautiful, were fine. The flash of her eyes betokened intelligence

beyond the ordinary. At that moment, too, there was a look in them which I had not seen before – a kind of longing, a sense of unsatisfaction, something wistful.

"Love?" she repeated. "No, I don't think I believe in it."

"Surely," I said, "that is going a little bit too far."

"Yes, perhaps it is," was her answer. "There is love – the love of a mother for her child. You see it everywhere. A lion will fight for her whelps, a hen will protect her chickens. But I suppose you were meaning the love which man has for a woman, and woman for man?"

"Yes," I replied, "I was. I was thinking of that lover and his lass whom we have just passed."

"I do not know," she replied. "All I know is that I never felt it, and yet I confess to being twenty-four. It is an awful age, isn't it? Fancy a girl of twenty-four never having been in love! Yet, facts are facts. I do not deny that there is such a thing as affinity; but love, as I understand it, is, or ought to be, something spiritual, something divine, something which outlasts youth and all that youth means; something which defies the ravages of time, that laughs at impossibilities. No. I do not believe there is such a thing."

"Then what is the use of living?" I asked.

"I hardly know. We have a kind of clinging to life, at least the great majority of us have, although I suppose in the more highly cultured States suicides are becoming more common. We shudder at what we call death, and so we seek to live. If, like the

old Greeks, we surrounded death with beautiful thoughts – "

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.