

AN
AGNOSTIC'S PROGRESS
FROM
THE KNOWN TO THE UNKNOWN

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ERIC S. M. BOSHER

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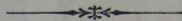
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AN AGNOSTIC'S PROGRESS

FROM THE KNOWN TO THE UNKNOWN.



METHOUGHT in the visions of the night, or in some waking trance in which my soul was freed from the encumbering body, and from all limitations of time and space which under ordinary waking conditions restrict its flight, I wandered through the streets of a great city, standing in the midst of a vast region. My spiritual eye could at once see the city and the wide tract in which it lay, and could even perceive that though it appeared like our own familiar earth, with plains, mountains, and valleys, with forests growing and rivers flowing, and all varieties of life and activity within it, it was nevertheless surrounded on all sides with a strong and high wall, where no door or gate was visible. Save at the death of some human being, the wall was fast closed; but now and then one saw, or imagined one saw, as the soul passed through, infinitesimal openings, which closed again, and left the wall strong and blank as before. The

body indeed lay inside; but the soul, the breath, the life, had departed. Nothing remained for the survivors but to cover up or destroy what had been but a moment ago fraught with beauty, or energy, or love; or perhaps powerful for evil, and threatening death or destruction. Once the vital principle had crossed the dividing wall, the envelope began to decay, and neither love nor hate, hope nor fear, concerned it more.

These openings were sometimes so sudden that the victim was snatched away without his having any idea of it, or his friends suspecting his danger; but in the generality of cases there was an irresistible attraction which slowly and gradually drew him away from his business or his pleasures, which enfeebled his senses, lessened his enjoyments and increased his pains, so as to make his departure less regretful. It mattered not where the doomed man was situated. He might be hundreds of miles from the boundary wall, and fancy that he had a long life before him; but from the Beyond the fiat went forth, and he was dragged with more or less rapidity to the fatal circle. Bystanders wished him a kind reception on the other side; and there were some who made a business of trying to drag him back with charms and potions and unguents, and who stood watching

by the encircling wall. One was as safe near it as at a distance; for until the summons came, one might hold the hand of his departing friend with impunity. But all had to go at length; and those who went never returned. Willing or unwilling, some with the laugh on their lips, but most with wet eyes and sad hearts, the victims left for ever their homes and companions, their wives or husbands, their parents and children, too often with their work half done, their mistakes uncorrected, their sins unrepented of. I thought that the summons came most frequently and most suddenly to the poor and wretched, and that there was a condition of body which seemed to lay the inhabitants more open to this searching sucking wind (as they called it), which drew them to ways known by the name of the Borderland.

To people of all conditions and of all temperaments the Unknown is always full of interest; and in this region, and especially in this city, this inevitable fate gave rise to many speculations. No watchful friend, let him strain his eyes to the uttermost, could see what the departing soul alone saw, when the instantaneous opening was made. No heart-broken wife, no despairing husband could hear even the faintest echo of

the voices which some said greeted them in that supreme moment. No message had ever come back, at least in historic times, though old legends were everywhere believed in firmly that glimpses had been caught of old familiar faces and forms, and that words had been audible from those who had crossed back from the Borderland for a brief time, and then vanished from sight and hearing for ever.

I was not surprised that great curiosity was felt by all the inhabitants of the Within as to what could be Without; and the surmises, the reasonings, and the confident assertions I heard as to their fate and that of their fellow-creatures were various, and to me as a stranger exceedingly curious. The Unknown must always inspire more or less of fear; and this fear leads to a strong desire to do something, and to avoid some other things, which might make the exit from present conditions easier, and future conditions better. Those of cheerful temperament were disposed to think that the same sort of conduct that made them useful and respected and happy here, would be the best preparation for any new kind of existence Beyond; but the thoughtful and the fearful, seeing that there was much suffering, evil, and injustice in the present

state of things, and that the passage to the Beyond was almost always attended by great pain and apprehension, augured that worse was sure to follow. And those of the latter class were the stronger in this city, and could draw far more vivid pictures of terrors to come than the cheerful or hopeful class could draw of possible happiness; and in this particular quarter of the Within where I first found myself, the fears preponderated so overwhelmingly over the hopes, that how to escape from the "Wrath to Come" seemed to be the main object of this present life.

This Religion of Fear called itself by various names, and took many shapes; but it always laid down laws and taught Shibboleths which might delay the passage to the Beyond, or, if that was impossible, might make the outward-bound soul feel safe and hopeful. How various, and to me how absurd even, were the objects extolled by each class of advocates as having a sovereign and potent charm! Here was a fetish, shapeless and ugly, but kissed and worshipped or worn on the person as a preservative from all evils Within, and as a guardian from all dangers in the Beyond; there was a beautiful sculptured image or painted picture meant to symbolize youth and beauty, or might and majesty, which

could do as much and more for its votaries. Here was a building over which charms had been muttered, into which people crowded to do obeisance to the powers or power which ruled in the Beyond. Some thought the Power was one; others thought the Powers were many; some sought by some casuistic reasoning to combine several Powers in One. Here was a hierarchy to whom the secrets of the Beyond were revealed; there a Book which contained them all in an infallible form. Here was a black-robed, and there a white-robed priest, each believed by his followers to have authority from Beyond the wall, who could say potent words and could anoint the departing with magic unguents, and who could comfort the fearful and support the weak. Here was a garment, there a lock of hair; here a tooth, there a bone—relics of some who had crossed the Borderland in faith and triumph, and who were believed, I could not tell on what grounds, to be strong in the Beyond to help those who trusted in them.

I moved about from place to place. I could not tell whether I was seen by the inhabitants; but I seemed able to move through crowds without disturbing them, and to my great delight, I found I could understand their

language. I ventured to speak; and then I perceived that they were aware of my presence, and, to my still greater satisfaction, I found that they could understand me. Something about me, however, must have appeared strange to them; for a crowd collected round me, and asked me if I had come from the Beyond. I thought to say "Yes;" for I certainly had come from some other region of the universe than that in which I found myself, but my voice failed me, and I answered "No," which to them was the true answer, for I had never crossed their wall. Unless I wished to converse, and thus called attention to myself, I was unobserved. My curiosity led me close to the boundary wall, which I found on examination to be as smooth as glass, and higher than anything in the way of mortal masonry I had ever seen. Scaling ladders had been planted against it in vain; for those who sought to climb over had been thrown lifeless at its foot, and the spirit had found its way through the wall, telling no tale as it departed.

It was quite possible to hasten the time of departure for oneself by eagerly rushing against the Borderland; and some out of love with life, some unable to endure protracted disease or

bodily pain, some who could not face disgrace or punishment, and some out of mere bravado, rushed to meet the Unknown, who never refused a willing victim. But the volunteers could tell as little of that campaign as the pressed men. It was possible also for these inhabitants of the Within to hurry their fellow-creatures Without, sometimes dragging them by violence, sometimes luring them by wiles; but this was accounted the greatest of crimes, and punishable by the same treatment. Thus by common consent it was considered good to remain Within; and though there were a considerable number who said it was much better to be Beyond they yet maintained that it was right to wait till the appointed time had come.

As I went over this city, I saw that the people in it had much ado to live. For the greater part of the inhabitants, hard and unremitting toil was needed to secure a bare subsistence for themselves and those dependent on them. Some worked with their heads, but the greater number with their hands. A few appeared to do nothing at all, but to accept the services of others. It appeared to me that the very best people in the city were more desirous of making the inhabitants prepare for the Borderland and

the Beyond, than of making things better for them in the Within. There were many reforms needed to produce certain amelioration of the condition of the poor and the laborious, which were either utterly neglected or only slightly attempted; while the whole of these well-meaning people directed their thoughts and efforts towards what was at best but distant and uncertain.

There was one day in the week which I was glad to see set apart for rest, but scarcely for refreshment to the toilers; for by common consent, and by established law, it was appropriated for those exercises which, in the opinion of the religious chiefs of the citizens, would make the departure, when it came, easy, nay triumphant, and would secure for the soul inextinguishable bliss and glory. For the long six days of the working week, the toilers had but little respite, and the seventh had no brightness. If the priests and bonzes of the city could have veiled the sun, and silenced the songs of the birds and the prattle of the children, they would have been pleased with their work. The more worshippers they could collect together on that day in great gloomy buildings, to sit with solemn faces to hear denunciations of mirth and pleasure, the better.

It seemed to these good people that in order to have a good chance, or any chance at all in the Beyond, it was necessary to sacrifice much in the Within. True, all service partakes somewhat of the nature of sacrifice; but here the sacrifice was not demanded for the good of their fellows, but as something paid down in order to secure a large reward hereafter. There was, along with this, much good morality inculcated, much stern virtue, much patience, forbearance, and self-watchfulness. The atmosphere was not one of ignoble ease; but yet errors and crimes were regarded less as deserving of punishment here than as incurring some unknown and exaggerated retribution, when the naked, solitary soul crossed the wall and passed under the ultimate and final judgment of the Unknown and the Absolute. From bonze and priest, from dervise and obiman, were heard terrible accounts of the doom of the impenitent, of the unbelieving, and of the misbelieving; while each brought forward his own penance for mitigation or escape.

I was told that this great city was known in other regions as the City of Superstition; but the inhabitants maintained that it should be called the City of Faith. But the faiths were so various

that the votaries of each called the others mere idle superstitions. To me it appeared that this religion of Fear, by whatever name it was called, was Superstition and not Faith. If I had been compelled to make choice of my temple, I should have found advocates without number, each recommending one and only one as the true and the trustworthy, and each prepared to support his opinion by documents and traditions which I could neither altogether accept nor satisfactorily refute. And not only was each prepared to recommend his own superstition, but also to discommend every other, which, though it might give blind confidence to its votaries while they remained Within, so that they might even say farewell with words of hope on their lips as they neared the mysterious opening, the blackness of despair would be their portion when they crossed the threshold of the Beyond. All their sacrifices would be of no avail, because they had been offered to the wrong fetish; and to fix hopes on a false basis was the most fatal mistake of all. All over the great city were temples, various as the wealth, the taste, and the skill of those who reared them, and each called itself the Temple of Faith, the abode of the religion of Love.

The bitterness with which the worshippers in one temple, the believers in one fetish, spoke of the aims and the lives and the final doom of the worshippers at another shrine,—the fierceness of the controversies waged about matters which to me seemed doubtful and unimportant, but about which it was maintained on all sides that the slightest error of judgment would bring down infinite and endless punishment, made one think that, under some aspects, this religion of Fear was also the religion of Hate. What they imagined the Power or Powers in the Beyond would not tolerate, they felt they themselves should not tolerate in the Within. When I questioned the citizens as to the past history of this City of Superstition, they recited such horrible things which had been formerly done in the name of Faith and Zeal, that I could see that there must have been some softening of their old rigours.

In front of one of the temples in the city, plain and severe in its style of architecture, and in its forms of worship, I saw a man standing, irresolute whether to go in or to turn away. He had a pale, anxious face, his eyes were sunk, his hair and beard were neglected, and his raiment was mean and ragged: his whole air was that of

a man out of suits with fortune, and harrassed from within and from without. Yet the face was to me singularly attractive. It was like that of one who had an interesting history which was not yet ended. He had moved lamely through the crowd which had gone in before him, and he now stood alone but for me, whom he did not seem to see, but I was near enough to hear him say in a voice of despair—

“Oh, wretched man that I am! how shall I escape from this doomed race, from this prison from which there is but one escape, and that no escape? Behold! I sleep, but I am not refreshed; I eat, but I am not nourished. My friends and my kindred are strange to me. Who knows when I shall be called to the Beyond, and who knows what shall befall me there? I have given of my substance till I have brought myself to poverty. I have wearied myself with prayers, but I know not if my offerings have been accepted, or my prayers have been heard. ‘The horror of darkness has fallen upon me, and I see no fruit of all my doings. My sins are ever before me.’ Will the Unknown be angry for ever? Have I darkened all that might have cheered me while I was spared, only to have no blessed memory to take with me to the terrible Beyond?”

Then I looked and saw a man of a grave and calm aspect go up to the miserable man from behind. He plucked him by the ragged sleeve, and put into his hands a scroll, and on the scroll was written in letters of light, "Flee from the Fear that Kills." And the man turned round quickly, and fixed his haggard look on the deep, steadfast eyes of the stranger, and said to him, "Whither shall I flee?"

And the stranger said, "Go straight on towards the East in the path which you see before you till you reach the Wicket Gate of Doubt, and it shall be shown you what alone you have to fear."

"Surely," said the man, starting back in horror, "that is a strange and a dangerous path to follow. The Wicket Gate of Doubt is what I have been all my life-long taught to avoid, as leading to every conceivable peril to the soul."

"Only through Doubt can Faith in the true be reached. Blind superstition is no faith. The Wicket Gate of Doubt is the first stage in the pilgrimage to the Home of Truth, and that is where your real home is. Look before you, and you see your road."

And the man looked, and saw before him a straight and narrow path, which I had not before observed, and which I could perceive was as new

to the miserable man. It led out of the city into green fields, along rivers and streams, over mountain heights, till even my charmed gaze could follow it no further.

"I cannot walk fast, I am lame. Some strange paralysis has stricken me in hands and feet."

"Take my staff in your hand. It will help you on your way, my poor crippled friend; and as you move on with its help the lameness will gradually lessen and disappear." And as he reached forth his hand to grasp the staff, somewhat of vigour seemed to enter into the man; he stood up firmly and more erect, and moved his limbs more easily.

"Who are you, and what is your calling?" he asked.

"My name is Experience, and I am a teacher of men."

"I have heard of you and your lessons," was the rejoinder. "Your field of action is a wide one. Do you reap a great harvest?"

"Here and there a hundred-fold, but many will not learn from me at all. In this great City of Superstition but few will open their eyes to see the light that I bring from the past to guide them in the present and the future. What is your name and calling?"

"My name is Quaester, and my business—all

my thought and care—is to save myself from the Powers of the Beyond. For this I have given up all solicitude for the Within and the Present, for sensual pleasure, for worldly ambition, for friends and kindred. They appeared to be all hindrances to me in the difficult task that lay before me—at least I thought so, but perhaps I have been mistaken. Leaning on this staff, a new spirit seems to have entered into me; and when I look upon your face I am strengthened. I will follow your direction. I will set forth on my journey to the Wicket Gate of Doubt, that in time I may rest my weary tempest-tossed soul in the Home of Truth.”

As he turned round to go, with a flush of hope in his pale face, I saw one come hastily out of the temple, who caught hold of him and sought to wrench the staff out of his grasp. The new-comer was dressed in sober garb, and was indeed the chief priest of the congregation which met in this square building.

“Brother Quaester,” said he, eagerly, “listen not to this tempter, who, with fair words, would lead you on to destruction. The letters on the scroll you hold in your hand are written in the lurid fires that burn eternally in the Evil Beyond for unbelievers and miscreants, who scoff at holy

things and holy men. Whither do you flee?”

“I flee from the Fear that Kills,” was Quaester’s reply. “Poor blinded brother, the Fear that this blasphemer says kills is the Fear that saves. But for Fear, what would be our woeful case? Bad as the Within is, it would be infinitely worse—it would be a scene of horrors unspeakable—but for the terrors of retributive justice hereafter in the Beyond. These terrors restrain the sensual, the unjust, and the cruel, and make life here tolerable for the saintly and the weak. What can this stranger tell you, what credentials does he bring, that you should take his advice and scorn that of one who has been as a spiritual father to you for many years?”

“His name is Experience; and it has been my own fault that I have not listened to him before.”

“But what can Experience tell you of the Beyond, of what he never saw, and never heard and never felt?”

“His words are fair and his face is noble; and I have heard of him as just and wise.”

“The emissaries of the Evil Beyond can put on the fairest appearances; and no words are so deluding to us who are Within as those which tell us not to fear.” Then, addressing Experience

somewhat arrogantly, the priest, whose name was Metus, asked by what right he interfered with one of his flock.

"Because my mission is to fight to the death with the fears of ignorance and superstition," said Experience.

"And do you fear nothing?" asked Quaester.

"So he boasts," interrupted Metus; "and while he moves about freely in the little space and time lent to him in the Within, he puts on a bold front and leads all who trust in him to defiant rebellion against all our holy traditions and ordinances. But when the keen searching wind finds him out, and draws him from his admiring crowd of disciples to the Borderland, we shall hear him cry for help; but all in vain, as you, too, will do if you lean on his staff and follow his counsel."

"Nay," said Experience, "you are wrong in saying that I fear nothing. I fear that if I put my hand into the fire it will be burned, and that if I venture beyond my depth in yonder river I shall be drowned. But I do not fear your Borderland, nor what lies beyond it."

"But have you not heard the words of Him who has crossed it and returned, who still holds out to us the only way of safety—that way in

which our brother here has tremblingly walked so long—with faltering steps, no doubt; for his faith, though sincere, was weak? And this safe path you would have him abandon, for your easy road which leads to destruction, of which He who came from the Beyond and was of the Beyond Himself, warned us so solemnly."

"He taught us nothing which He learned from the other side," answered Experience. "Even your traditions tell us nothing."

"Do you doubt our traditions, handed down by voice and pen for thousands of years," asked Metus; "miraculously preserved for our guidance here and now?"

"We know that at each different temple in this wide City of Superstition we hear a different story, often with a different hero. All those whom your traditions tell us of as speaking with their returned Master in the short space during which He revisited the Within, have long since gone forth to learn for themselves what truth was in His story. But even your traditions tell us nothing of the Beyond as He had seen it: only of His ideas about it before His departure."

"Where wast thou, Lazarus, those four days?" said Quaester, earnestly. "Wherefore did not the Master's followers question him, in the brief

interviews they had with him, as to the conditions of the Beyond?"

"It was not His mission to satisfy idle curiosity. He told enough to satisfy all faithful souls before He left the Within," said Metus.

"They were mere guesses," said Experience; "guesses, no doubt, of a pure and noble soul, but yet no more infallible than yours or mine as to the Unknown, and to us the Unknowable."

"Guesses! Listen not to the blasphemer!" said Metus. "He Himself was the Power of the Beyond, and needed not the ordinary experience of poor finite mortals to teach Him its secrets. Come back with me, Quaester, to worship at the shrine of Faith, and avoid the Wicket Gate of Doubt, to which he directs you, as you would shun destruction."

Something of the old influence was felt by Quaester. His hold on the staff of Experience relaxed, his limbs trembled, and he half turned round; but Experience turned on him the full light of his countenance, and spoke solemnly thus:—

"My friend, I again counsel, I again entreat you to flee from the Fear that Kills. What has this Fear done for you but paralyze your limbs, and poison your life? Exercise your limbs freely

and they will strengthen by use. Use your life temperately and you will find it good. Here in this region, in which Fate or Providence has placed you, are pleasant things, enjoy them; new and wonderful things, learn and understand them; true things, rest upon them."

"Mean, low, ephemeral pursuits, soon to be relinquished and extinguished," said Metus, "instead of the glories our Faith offers!"

"Poor and ragged and crippled as you see me," said Quaester, "this is all I have gained by many years of waiting and of effort under your direction."

"Oh, Quaester, my heart bleeds for you!" said the priest. "It is not I or my Divine faith which has brought you to rags, poverty, and infirmity; it is because you will not accept the raiment, the wealth, the strength, which are freely offered and received by faith alone. It is your pride that will not accept a free gift; it is your intellectual obstinacy that will not humble itself to subject reason to faith. Our sacred books offer you an eternity in place of a short and uncertain lifetime, and a Divine hope instead of a carnal self-seeking."

"Self-seeking?" said Quaester, leaning firmly on his staff, and with an expression on his face as if he had made some great discovery. "Surely in

all your exhortations it was always, and it is even now, my own soul that I was to labour to save or to get saved. It is the fear for myself that you have worked upon, though fears for others have helped to weigh me down to the earth. If this new friend delivers me from selfish fears I may be able to serve and help my fellow-men to some better purpose than I have done heretofore. I go now straight for the Wicket of Doubt."

"Mad—mad, and blind!" groaned Metus. "How can you help others if you yourself are a castaway? Without the faith in the Beyond all apparent goodness is deceptive, all so-called benevolence and philanthropy is a deadly snare to both giver and receiver."

"Experience speaks the words of Reason," said Quaester.

"Worldly Experience and Carnal Reason are now the deadliest enemies of the soul," said Metus.

"I have heard of him all my life as a man to be trusted in," said Quaester; "as a wise, good and just man."

"All the worse," said the priest. "In former times the foes of our faith put on no such fair disguises, but showed plainly by the evil lives they led why they denied the existence of the

Beyond. But now they put on the appearance of candour and justice, and many souls are ensnared by them. And if you, too, Quaester, go on in this perilous journey, your fair and honourable character will make your perversion the more mischievous to all hesitating souls. There are even in my flock those who may follow you. There is Gracious, for instance, who is always coming to me with her difficulties, and who, as you saw, absented herself from our last love-feast, not because she had any enemies whom she could not forgive, but because she said her faith was failing; she will be still more stricken if she hears of your departure for the Wicket Gate of Doubt. It is easier to deal with the openly wicked than with the self-righteous."

"Gracious is not self-righteous nor am I. Perchance in time I may have some righteousness on which I may have some satisfaction. My path is laid out for me; let those follow who see good." And Quaester stepped on in the narrow path.

"All that I can do, then, is to pray for you," said Metus; "and when you return, like the prodigal, from the unsatisfying husks of carnal delights and false security, I shall be ready to receive you back into the congregation of the faithful. The temple still stands ever open, and

the record of names is not yet closed and sealed, and I, as the priest of the Beyond, will receive you again on repentance with tears of joy."

The last words of Metus were scarcely heard, for Quaester was moving away from the speaker as fast as his lameness would allow him to do. He did not wonder at the grief and horror of his old guide, but he was not checked by them. He had been so long tossed hither and thither in his mind that he wanted rest. He had been exhorted and entreated to believe as Metus did, and that was not in his power; but now Experience called on him to act, and that he could do. The plain directions to keep firm hold of his staff and to pursue the narrow pathway on which he had entered, were definite things that could be done, and could be done at once; and an unwonted peace fell upon his soul. Something had been thrown off, something of hope and energy animated his frame as he steadily stepped forward in the sunshine. He gathered his poor raiment round him in more seemly fashion than before, he smoothed his brow, his eyes shown with new light, his lips relaxed into something like a smile. He recollected some old childish rhymes familiar to him long ago, altogether free from the grave perplexities and struggles of his later years, in which

there was no echo of the despairing penitential hymns which he had chanted in the temple, or murmured in his daily walks. The old rhymes set themselves to the old careless tunes, and he hummed them as he went along.

I know not how long he kept this cheerful mood. As I have said, space seemed to me in this vision to be only bounded by the encircling wall, and it was much the same with regard to time. I only took count of time by the things that I saw happening; and it was for me to accompany my pilgrim unseen and unheard and undreamed of by him all along his line of march. After a period longer or shorter, but to me indefinite, the sun became clouded, a sort of searching mist or small rain fell; the path did not show out so clearly as it did at first, and, so far as I could see, it led straight into a quagmire, into which Quaester sunk first to the ankles, then half-way up the leg, and then to the knees. As he advanced he seemed to sink the deeper; but still the path was faintly visible on the surface of the quagmire, and at the other side it showed itself more distinctly.

In this slough, Quaester found his lameness was a sad disadvantage to him; but he kept hold of his staff which always showed a firm bottom for the next step, and struggled forward panting from

the efforts he made. His limbs seemed to get chilled to the bone, and to stiffen in spite of his best endeavours to use them manfully for progress.

And I looked, and behold one came to him from the City of Superstition, and hastened to the edge of the quagmire, and beckoned and called out to him in a loud voice. It was Metus, who had followed him till he met with his first difficulty, and who now hoped to take him at a disadvantage.

"Come back! come back!" he exclaimed. "See what woeful trouble your fair spoken friend has led you into. This is the first taste of the perils of your journey. And what is this Slough of Irresolution compared with the terrible things that are in store for you before you reach the poor goal he sets before you. There are steep mountains to climb, and waterless deserts in which you will pant and faint with drought. There is the Mountain of Difficulty, with lions in the path, and where the air is so keen and thin that you cannot satisfy your lungs with breathing though you fill them to their fullest extent. There is the Valley of the Shadow of Death, full of nameless horrors that will unman you, whence you are likely to be summoned to the Borderland at a time when you are least fitted for it. There is the pillory perhaps awaiting you, and the dungeons of Giant

Despair have been tenanted by many who were as foolhardy in their first setting out as were you but now. Here, in this Slough of Irresolution, there is still time to turn back. Here the keen searching wind finds thousands of victims; well for them if their faces are turned towards the Temple of Faith and not to the Wicket Gate of Doubt, when they are summoned by the Borderland and the Beyond. Turn now, Quaester, and I can help you as I have already helped many out of this terrible quagmire."

Something of old habit, something of new difficulty, affected the mind of Quaester. He turned round, and beheld his earnest and zealous guide picking his way towards him on some stepping-stones which had been covered from my sight and from that of Quaester with the mud in which they lay, but which Metus appeared to be able to find and rest on.

"Give me your hand," said he joyfully. "These stepping-stones of Promises have helped many an erring and desponding one back to his home, his duty, and his faith. See how securely I stand upon them. Throw down your staff, take my hands and I shall lead you from promise to promise safe to dry land."

The old instinct again had power. Quaester

relaxed his grasp of the staff, took one hand of Metus, and took a backward step; but, lo! the stepping-stone which had supported Metus, sank with the weight of Quaester, and he fell back deeper into the slough than before. "Try the next," said Metus; "hold firmly by me, you cannot sink; the next step is broader, and gives a better foothold;—spring on it, it will bear you safely." But the result was the same. What stood firm under Metus utterly gave way when Quaester essayed to rest upon it.

"I will carry you in my arms," said Metus, earnestly. "Trust to me; I am strong in this cause."

"That would be to sink us both," said Quaester. "No stepping-stones such as these are of any avail for me now. Let me trust to my staff again, and go on in my own way, and farewell!" And Quaester again felt the bottom of the slough, and went back on the straight path as he best could.

In vain did Metus lament and implore; in vain did he tell Quaester of the many he had rescued who had blessed him for his helpful zeal. Our pilgrim steadfastly set his face towards the Wicket Gate of Doubt.

"It was cowardly to take even those two steps backward," said he. "I had begun a new course

altogether. The pilgrimage is harder than I thought, but it is really no harder than what I have gone through for years back."

"The way of transgressors is hard," said Metus.

"And is the way of the righteous easy," rejoined Quaester. "Whatever I may have to go through in the Within, if I only lose my fears of the Beyond, all can be endured or conquered."

"But you go from bad to worse. Is not the Gate of Doubt worse than the Slough of Irresolution?"

"It is only through the Gate of Doubt that I can hope to escape from the Fear that Kills. Thanks all the same, for your well-meant concern and efforts on my behalf, but I am determined to struggle through."

Quaester lamely struggled through. After he had regained his staff, and set his face steadfastly in the right way, the slough appeared to be less deep, the mud less tenacious; and as the mist and rain gradually cleared away, the sun actually shone again brightly when he got out on the other side, and the narrow path showed distinctly before him. There was a clear stream running almost parallel with the path, and in it he was trying to wash the dirt off his limbs, when

he was accosted by a middle aged, well-dressed, complacent looking gentleman, an old acquaintance, who thus addressed him :—

“Ah, ah!” said he, “you have been in the slough with a vengeance. You had better have come on one side of it as I did. See, I have not got a speck on me.”

“Are you, too, bound for the Gate of Doubt through which we may hope to escape from the Fear that Kills? Are you like me guided by the counsels of Experience, and is the staff in your hand given to you by him for your support?”

“Not exactly so,” said the man whose name was Compromise. “I am not so fond of extremes either way as you are, and though one may have private opinions of one’s own, it will never do in these times openly to profess unpopular notions, or to outrage what the bulk of our fellow-creatures reverence as sacred. I shall get the same advantages as you do by going quietly through the back way, and cause no scandal.”

“I should scarcely think you could,” said Quaester, continuing the work of removing what traces he could of his late condition.

“Well, I derive as much advantage as I care for,” answered Compromise. “I could not bear to have my wife, and children and neighbours holding

me up to reproach and ridicule; and if you once give these priests a handle, you know what a character they will give you, and swear to it. I saw Metus going back to the city after his ineffectual parley with you; and I warrant he has told fine tales about you to your friend Gracious and the rest of them.”

“I trust that they will take his account of me not altogether literally,” said Quaester.

“It is just like you to rush to extremes,” said Compromise. “If you had minded your own affairs as I have always done, you would now be rich whereas you are poor; and I dare say you would also have escaped the crippling you now suffer from. And now you rush as blindly the other way, and throw off everything in the way of credit you have obtained from your previous conduct—which we all know was noble and disinterested, though not very reasonable. You will end by being an Atheist who does not believe in anything at all. Now, though I know that Metus and the rest of them talk a lot of rubbish and boast of their knowledge of the Beyond, of which (between you and me) they know no more than we do, still it would never do to say so, or to throw doubts on the terrible retributions that, they say, await those who act or believe wrongly. This is what

Experience and his disciples do; and you are just the likeliest man I know to go to the greatest lengths in these dangerous and revolutionary opinions. How could we keep the poor in check without the prospect of better things for them when they cross the Borderland? What profit would there be in being honest and sober and so forth, if there was no reward in the Hereafter? You know that Faith (or Superstition as I suppose you may call it now) is really a sort of police; a cheap sort of police for preserving order, and for the protection of life and property. Things would all go to the dogs if the poor did not believe in the Beyond."

"But if what they are taught about it is not true?" said Quaester.

"Oh, you know there must be some truth in it," answered Compromise. "From time immemorial it has been believed."

"And it has been questioned," said Quaester, standing up and setting his face eastward, leaning on his staff.

"Questioned? Yes; questioned by the people who wanted to shake off restraints. The consensus of human judgment has been in favour of its truth. We see our friends drawn away suddenly or gradually, and their vital principle snatched

through the Borderland to the Beyond. Something must feel or think—enjoy or suffer there; for what is left behind cannot. Something must become of it. On the face of the matter the priests of Faith have a very strong case; though of course I don't hold with all they say, and I object very much to their interference with a man's business or his family. There's my daughter Myra—her head has been turned completely by one of them."

"Not Metus?" asked Quaester.

"Oh, no! not Metus, but the new young priest who officiates at the restored temple not far off,—Chasuble is his name. There is a lot of tomfoolery going on there; and that not in reason once a week, but all the week through. What with early service and evensong, there appears to be a constant succession of performances. Your friend Metus is not attractive to young people, though you have long been a somewhat dismal adherent of his. Myra wonders why her friend Gracious clings to him. She has had many a hot controversy with her on the subject; but Gracious has too much good sense to go in for the new-fangled fussing that all the young women make about Chasuble. She is a great deal safer where she is—in my opinion at least. I saw Metus trying

to take you out of the slough. He is really much concerned about you."

"Yes; he sought to get me back by the stepping-stones of Promise. Is that how you crossed so cleanly?"

"Oh, no! I never went into the Slough of Irresolution at all. It is quite unnecessary, and it makes a man look so foolish to be floundering in the mud. As I told you, I kept to one side all the way; and here I am quite as far on as you are. You look in very poor case, I must say."

"I want to get rid of my lameness, and Experience tells me, that if I only use my limbs freely and boldly in the cause of my pilgrimage, it will wear off. I have been always too fearful of going about by myself; but now this hard struggle through the bog, out of which I have extricated myself, has proved to me that I have more strength than I thought. Experience tells me there is nothing organically wrong with bone or muscle; but it is disuse that has caused the lameness."

"Oh no, Quaester! your lameness is only owing to the stiffness of your joints, and they appear to me to be as stiff as ever. I have a famous embrocation called Conformity, that will soon cure

that. Come, let me try it on you. I should very much like to see you like other people. A man with brains like yours, should not be allowed to go headlong and throw them away. When I think of all the chances you have had in the world, and lost them, this mad quest, or pilgrimage as you call it, appears to me to be a crowning blunder. I am glad, however, that you have shaken yourself free from Metus; for he has been able to do what he pleased with you, and he really carries matters with too high a hand. Surely he does not keep the Keys of the Beyond any more than Chasuble does; though to hear the men talk, one would think each fancied it to be a private preserve of his own. Come, Quaester, and rest in my house, and I shall rub your joints with my wonder-working embrocation. I have never known it fail when applied in time. My house is on your way, so you need not hesitate."

And Quaester yielded to the persuasion of Compromise which was kindly meant, and went with him to his house. It stood facing that Temple of Faith which the master professed to account the true one; but the back door and the windows of the room in which Compromise generally sat, faced the Wicket Gate of Doubt, which now that Quaester had floundered through the slough,

appeared very distinctly in sight. The house had a very fair appearance, and the man himself was well-to-do. Myra at first thought her father was bringing home a beggar, and was interested in him, but when she recognized Quaester, and heard from his own lips that he was bound for the Gate of Doubt, she shook her head gravely, and said that she would pray for him at evensong, to which she hastened.

Compromise refreshed his guest with food and drink, and then laid him on a couch, and with his own hands he began to rub his knee and ankle joints with the embrocation which had given relief to so many. As he rubbed, he talked, and his talk was of various things which Quaester might do, and what success he might obtain if he would only submit to be like other people, and not suffer his notions of the Beyond, whether in faith or in doubt, to lead him too far. But strange to say, the embrocation which had acted like a charm to so many, only caused additional pain and irritability to the pilgrim, and the talk had a like effect. The more conformity was imposed upon him from prudential motives, the more rebellious he felt. At last he started up suddenly, took his staff in his hand, and said: "You mean well, Compromise,

no doubt; but one man's meat is another man's poison. I must go on my own way, which is not yours." And renewing his walk in the fading light he came to the Wicket Gate and knocked.

And there came to the gate and opened it, one whose name was Suspense; and he courteously invited Quaester to pass through. And it appeared to me that there were many on the other side, who seemed to hesitate as to which path to take next.

Although, to our pilgrim, there was only one straight and narrow path which led to the Wicket Gate, there were many others which led from it—one absolutely straight from the entrance, some nearly straight, and others at widely differing angles, taking circuits which would in time lead them back to the City of Superstition itself, from which each pilgrim had professed to flee.

I looked and saw that some of these found their way back to the very temples they had left, but that the greater number found their way to others, or began to rear a new temple for themselves, to which with all the eloquence in their power they strove to attract worshippers from the other older shrines, or from those who were heretofore careless and unconcerned as to these things. After having once passed through the Gate of Doubt, there was always some difference in their gait, and in their modes of devotion. Much of the paralyzing fear

of old days was gone; their attitude was more erect and their language more hopeful. Indeed, all the founders of the newer temples in the city had gone as far as our pilgrim had now reached in the course of his journey to the Home of Truth, and had made, with more or less boldness, a sweep onwards from it before they returned to their old haunts. The brethren whom they had left had believed that they were going headlong to destruction; but when they returned with some of the glorious light from the East on their faces, and some of the new language of personal assurance on their lips, they seemed to forget the spirit of the lessons they themselves had learned. They gathered together a band of rejoicing disciples; and then they warned these converts as solemnly against travelling for themselves to the Wicket Gate of Doubt, as if that was not where they themselves had learned the most living truths of their new faith.

There appeared to Quaester to be something stimulating in the air on the other side of the gate. He there recognized some of his old acquaintances; but he saw many from very different temples whom he did not recognize. All sorts of things were in question; though they were not thoroughly discussed or analyzed. Facts, or what appeared to be facts, relating to the mysteries of the Within, of the Borderland, and of the Beyond

were asserted, and theories, often the wildest and the most improbable, propounded in order to account for them. Every one was eager to offer a solution, often hasty, always inadequate, of the problem which was so old and yet so new to each inhabitant of the City of Superstition. All were disposed to speak and to speak at once. Quaester, bewildered by so much confused babble, recalled the fact that Experience had told him to seek for further direction at the gate, and ask Suspense which road he should take; but he himself felt that without direction he would take the straight one.

"The road for you depends on what you wish for above all things. Is it the Truth, or is it anything short of the Truth, such as social position, domestic happiness, edification, or peace of mind?" said Suspense.

"The Truth," answered Quaester. "The Truth above all."

"Then," said Suspense, "take the straight path which is as straight as a rule can make it, which will take you to the Interpreter's House. He will show you many excellent things. This is only the first stage of your journey; but many come here who never go any further—many who talk glibly the language of Doubt, who never reach the Faith which this Doubt was intended to lead them to.

The Interpreter's House is the great school in which those who are bound for the Home of Truth must needs study."

"It is there, then, rather than here that I may look for directions. One called Experience, on whose staff I lean, counselled me to ask it at this gate."

"Many come hither directed by Curiosity, or by Vain Glory, or by Licence, who never go any further. Met you aught of difficulty in the first stage of your pilgrimage?"

"Yes, the Slough of Irresolution tried me sorely; and I was turned a little out of the road by a fair spoken man of my acquaintance called Compromise, who sought to cure my lameness by the embrocation of Conformity. So that I cannot feel confident in my steadfastness when I have been so easily discouraged and deceived."

"To such as you," said Suspense, "the first stages of this pilgrimage are the hardest, and you will grow stronger as you advance. But to such as these," and he pointed to some young people of both sexes who were disporting themselves close by, adorning themselves with flowers, and laughing, singing, and dancing, out of the reach of the rigid police of the City of Superstition, "the first stage is easy enough; but though they shake themselves free from the old faith,

they put nothing in its place. You will meet such as these are again and again in the course of your pilgrimage. They may escape your trials, but they will not rise to your level."

"My lameness makes me go but slowly; can you give me any cure for it?"

"It must be borne for a while," answered Suspense; "but, depend upon it, it will gradually disappear."

"So Experience told me, but he also told me to ask for help and counsel at every stage."

"And you will always obtain both, though not perhaps as much as you look for. It is by steadily advancing that you go from weakness to strength—if you do not depart from the right path."

"Then is there a danger that having undertaken a solemn pilgrimage of this kind, one may nevertheless fall back? Is there only safety in the straight way?"

"There is only truth to be reached by the straight way," said Suspense.

"And is the way always as clearly to be seen as it is at this stage? It is unmistakable here."

"No, it is not always clear. It is often very difficult to see it."

"Then there is no infallible guide. Can one

drift into destruction when one is really earnest and eager to do the best one can?"

"No, assuredly not;" said Suspense. "Leaning on the staff of Experience, and with the great helps you will receive in the Interpreter's House, there is no fear that any real evil will befall you. But if you seek an infallible guide, you must go back to the City of Superstition which you have left, and ask a priest to give it to you. No such infallible guide can be offered at the Wicket Gate of Doubt."

"I spoke unwisely;" said Quaester. "All I have to do is to travel straightforward, as far as I can see, in the straight path. But can two roads ever appear equally straight?"

"Sometimes, strange to say, they do; but try them both by the staff of Experience, and choose the one which offers the firmest foothold. Let nothing and let nobody tempt you from what you believe to be your right path. Many may seek to turn you aside to the right or to the left—some who may be older, wiser, better than yourself; but yield not to their entreaties. By yourself you must stand or fall. Farewell; the Interpreter's House is your next stage."

After courteous farewell to Suspense, Quaester went on his appointed path; but not without

earnest solicitations from some of the graver ones who had but recently passed through the gate, that he should take some other path. Each assured our pilgrim that his own way led to Truth and Safety, whereas Quaester's led to Danger, and might never lead to Truth.

"I do not turn my back to Faith as you are doing. I shall return triumphantly to Faith when I have learned on what basis it rests, and then I shall enlighten, guide, and comfort the poor blinded votaries of Superstition," said one, who was the most earnest among them all.

"Surely," said Quaester, "the place to learn on what sure basis Faith may rest is in the Interpreter's House, and thither I am bound."

"Nay," rejoined the other; "spiritual things are spiritually discovered, and the mode of operation in the Interpreter's House is gross and material. Few, very few, pass through the course of study there without losing hold of Faith altogether. These few are our great champions, who can reconcile for us the old sacred traditions and the new discoveries of men, and thus make natural phenomena, spiritual intuitions, and revealed truths all work one way to strengthen our faith in the Beyond, and in the rewards or punishments which await us

there. I am satisfied with their experience and their arguments, and do not care to go through the perilous discipline for myself. Hundreds and thousands like me go as far as this, and find our faith enlightened but not weakened. Hear our champions or read their writings. You cannot fail to be convinced when you note how marvelously they prove spiritual truths with the carnal weapons of their adversaries."

"No, I can take no man's word. I must learn for myself," said Quaester.

"You must take the word of the teachers at the Interpreter's House. You are not a universal genius, who can judge of the various matters which they study so boldly, not to say so irreverently, there. You must go by opinions which you are not able to test, conclusions which you cannot trace from the premisses. Be wise and take the same course that I do."

"No;" said the pilgrim. "I must get as near to the basis of Truth as I can. It were of little avail to pass through the Gate of Doubt if I go back by a round-about way to the very Superstition I am fleeing from."

So he went on; and though the other paths seemed at first not very much different in direction, as he moved on they diverged more and more till

at last he could see no one; but I saw and marked the turning points at which his late adviser and many others swept round to take the backward way.

At last, not only I, but the pilgrim himself could see the Interpreter's House, a large and goodly mansion, where the great door always stood hospitably open. Though it appeared, even to those advancing from the Gate of Doubt, a vast structure, floor above floor, it appeared more and more extensive from the other side; and it was still more bewilderingly large to those who were within. At first there appeared to Quaester to be little or no order in the place; but on closer observation he found there were three great Halls, each of which led to different suites of apartments, some of low level and others many stories high. Each of these Halls opened out to a large tract of ground, which was partly cultivated and partly left in a state of nature; and in each of these Halls and in the grounds attached to it were many students learning under trained and zealous masters. The Interpreter himself was Quaester's guide in his first survey of this marvellous place. He first led the pilgrim into the Stone Hall and the quarries connected with it, where men were busy with hammers and pick-

axes, with chemicals and microscopes trying to find out what the solid rock and crumbling soil told of the history of the earth on which they lived. Then Quaester was conducted into the Hall of Plants, and the Herbarium which opened into grounds laid out as garden and forest, where grew every sort of tree, bush, fern and fungus, which gardeners tended, and some who were not gardeners catalogued, analyzed, and experimented upon. This again led into the Hall of life, containing the Menagerie, the Zoological Garden, and the Lake, where all sorts of living creatures were seen in their natural state, and the Museum where artificial means not only preserved the lifeless forms of creatures with which the spectators were familiar, but built up creatures of land, water, and air long extinct. Each was presented in its own time; and a constant series of progression, alternated, however, sometimes with retrogression, showed the ascent from the lowest creature which rose above the plant, up to the most highly-developed in body and mind known to the collectors—man himself.

Perhaps the Halls themselves were less curious than the two dimly-lighted passages between them—one leading from the Stone Hall to the Hall of Plants, and, most interesting of all, that

between the Hall of Plants and the Hall of Life. In both of these passages were to be found the most highly-skilled workmen and observers in the Interpreter's House, engaged in analysis and comparison of some doubtful objects, here with failure, and there with success.

Nor were these things all that were to be seen in this wonderful School. Over the Hall of Life were ranges of apartments for study of a different kind. Here was the great Library where every book known to those who inhabited the Within was kept, with divisions and sub-divisions for convenience of study. Close by was the Manuscript Room, where Quaester saw many eagerly trying to verify the authenticity of a book, or the correctness of a text, by comparing its present form with what it had in its writer's own hand, or as near to that as could be obtained. Among those manuscripts, his attention was specially arrested by those of the Sacred Books of the various temples in the City of Superstition; and he tried to trace back to their origin the traditions that had added to or taken from them, or had put new meanings into the old words. In many cases it was difficult, and in some it appeared to be impossible, to be certain who the original writers were, or what were the objects

they had in view; and this obscurity lent itself easily not only to priests, who gave their own views as with authority, but also to private judgment interpreting such vague statements as it pleased. In different places and in different ages and states of society, the same words seemed to have had quite different meanings. Quaester delighted in this room; and he tried to think and to judge for himself. His old friend Thorough, who had lived in a suburb of the City of Superstition and who had left the place in disgust long ago, had been for years studying in the Interpreter's House. His favourite resort, however, was not the Library, but the great Laboratory, where all sorts of experiments were ever being conducted. Daring speculations were advanced there as to the Borderland and the Beyond; but the opinions, though not nearly so various as those held in the City of Superstition, were far from being unanimous. The eager learners had carried their microscopes and their chemicals to the circling wall, but had learned nothing beyond that it was neither to be sealed nor to be annihilated. They watched the departing one, they analyzed the lifeless lump that was left behind, and they only differed as to how the wall could open, or if it really opened at all. Though the mysteries of departure appeared

inscrutable, the mysteries of arrival had been revealed; and child life, both before and after birth, was a favourite branch of study in the Hall of Life.

I know not how long Quaester remained in this wonderful school. It must have been some time, for he learned much; and though he never felt himself qualified to teach any one of the branches of study, he yet went conscientiously through all the Halls with open eyes, ears, and soul, and learned much in a general way. He would have tarried longer, but the Interpreter himself advised him to depart; for his mission was to teach and work in the world, and not to study in the schools. And that he might teach with better heart, the Interpreter took him to a chamber in the topmost story, whence he could see his onward path; and as he looked he felt eager to go. But first the Interpreter showed him many significant things, such as he shows to pilgrims like Quaester.

He saw a man who was so occupied with a star that stood over his head, which he wished to seize on for his own, that he took no heed to his feet, and trampled down the loveliest flowers, and crushed his own most precious possessions, and then fell into a deep pit. And he saw a

man who trembled for a dream of the Beyond, and his knees knocked together, and his teeth chattered in his head for terror at the horrible vision. And he saw a man shut up in the iron cage of Despair; and his anguished countenance made Quaester weep for pity. But the Interpreter suddenly opened wide a window which looked to the east, and behold the man found the star which had appeared so far above him lying among the flowers at his feet, and his little child playing with it; and the dream faded away in the fuller light and the second man took heart and courage again; and the iron cage opened of itself, and the third man walked out into the sunshine.

But the pleasantest sight of all was a stately Palace held by Evil Ones, through whom a brave valiant man hacked his way, and delivered the prisoners they had ensnared and subjected to their evil lordship.

"That is what I would fain do," said Quaester; and a bright light shone in his eyes.

When the time to depart drew near, Quaester bathed for the last time in a fair bath, by which he was mightily refreshed; and the Interpreter gave him new and seemly raiment for the journey. As he had moved up and down the halls and

passages, through the gardens and libraries, he had scarcely felt conscious of his lameness, though it was still there. In addition, however, to the staff of Experience, the Interpreter gave him a mirror in which, if he looked long and steadily, he could at any time see whatever portion he wished of the wonders of the school in which he had loved to study, and which would also serve as a guide to him when he was in any difficulty or perplexity as to his path. It could also be used as a missile against enemies; for it was hard as adamant and indestructible. It was not large nor cumbrous, and he could put it in his pocket. When he held it to the light, he could read in it as in a book, but not at a glance; he must look fixedly and resolutely in it till the picture or the words became visible, and sometimes it was a long time before they showed themselves distinctly.

"Attention," said the Interpreter, "is the prayer of the intellect; and whatever of Truth you wish to learn or to hold fast, you must take earnest heed thereto, and not let it slip. The old words of your Sacred Books concerning Wisdom were never truer than they are now. 'They that seek me earnestly shall find me.'"

"The words are they that seek me 'early' not

'earnestly,'" said Quaester. "I have lost much time in the city of Superstition, which I might have better spent on my pilgrimage."

"No time is altogether lost to a sincere and earnest soul," said the Interpreter. "You will acknowledge by-and-by that you were not idle when you seemed to be so. But now, farewell! Pursue your journey to the Home of Truth; but as you journey, endeavour to teach to others what you have rightly learned here."

Quaester felt satisfied—nay, eager to set forth again. The last bath in the Interpreter's House had wonderfully refreshed him outwardly and inwardly. His lameness was comparatively trifling now; he moved almost swiftly in a pleasant path where there was no doubt nor hesitation as to its being the right one.

At noon he sat down to rest beside a spring of pure and sparkling water, which gushed from a rock; and he pulled some fresh ripe fruits which grew overhead. There was no bitter after-taste in the water, no worm at the core of the fruit, as he had experienced in his old home of Superstition. All the simple natural pleasures of life had been too often forbidden to him, or poisoned by the Fear that Kills. Now he felt thoroughly light-hearted, and as if nothing could henceforth

greatly trouble him. Bathed in the warm glorious sunshine, with the cool breeze blowing from the distant mountains, with the song of birds in his ears, and the sight of flowers and foliage and of happy living creatures all around, it seemed to him as if all Nature was instinct with a Divine Spirit—a spirit of joy akin to his own. Surely, there was life and feeling and consciousness of happiness not only in himself, but in the birds and beasts, in the flowers and trees and waving grasses, in the falling dews and the running streams. Nay, was not the earth on which he stood, and which drew all things towards itself, the gracious and sentient Mother of all life? All around him and within him seemed to breathe a benediction. With his head uncovered he looked upward through the shadowing branches and watched the clouds pass over the sun, or shift their shapes at the will of the wind in the blue immensity. His pleasant thoughts were presently interrupted by the sudden appearance of two men who came tumbling over a wall not far off, and who now came up to Quaester.

"Who are you, and where do you come from?" asked the taller and stronger of the two, whose name was Impatience.

"My name is Quaester, and I have come thus

far from the City of Superstition in search of the Home of Truth."

"So are we," said Impatience.

"I marvel at your tumbling over the wall, and not taking the straight road. Experience was my guide."

"My kinsman Frivolity and I take the easiest and the safest path out of the City of Superstition, short cuts when we can,—round-about when there are bad roads. I warrant you have not been so wise, and that you have been up to your neck in the Slough of Irresolution, creeping through the shabby Wicket Gate of Doubt, and bored to death with the lectures and the jargon of the big-wigs in the Interpreter's House. And what the further are you on in your journey than we are, who came comfortably by this pleasant green lane till we reached this wall over which our legs were quite strong enough to carry us? We have said good-bye to Superstition and Faith, and Fear, and all that rubbish, and are just as near the Home of Truth as you are. What more freedom have you got for all your trouble than we are enjoying?"

"I have got this staff from Experience," said Quaester.

"A staff! we need no staff. As I said before we have better legs than you," said Impatience.

"And if we need a staff we can buy one," said Frivolity, with a laugh.

"I have got this mirror from the Interpreter."

"A queer gift, indeed; let me look at it," said Frivolity. "Why, I could buy a better out of a pedlar's pack. I cannot see my own face in it."

"It is a guide for me on my way. When I am at all puzzled or perplexed, it will show me where to go."

"I do not believe it is of the least use," said Impatience. "I do not see anything at all in it."

"Nor do I, if I only take a hasty glance. It needs patient attention in order to see anything."

"We have got something better than that stupid bit of glass—something where all is put down in black and white," said Impatience, and he took a little book out of his pocket, called "The Guide to Thelema," the newest and the most fashionable thing out, as he said. It was partly in poetry and partly in prose; and it was full of illustrations, some plain and others highly-coloured. It appeared to both of the young men to be mightily entertaining; but the face of Quaester became grave and sad as he turned over its pages.

"What sort of refreshment are you having here?" presently asked the two.

"Pure water from the spring and fresh ripe fruits," answered our pilgrim.

Impatience and Frivolity, however, cared little for such simple fare. They mixed the water with spirits from a flask which they carried with them, and they seasoned the fruits with hot and pungent spices in order to take off their insipidity. They seemed disposed to linger; but as their society was in no way congenial to Quaester he soon rose to go. They followed till they reached the face of the hill Difficulty, which was steep and high. The road which Quaester knew he must follow led straight to the top; but there were two bye-paths which led round on either side of the hill, the name of that to the left being Destruction, and the name of the one to the right, Danger. As these appeared to lead gently round the hill, they seemed much more tempting to the two newcomers. "The longest way round is the shortest in the end," said Impatience, but the two roads appeared so equally easy that he was some time in making his choice. "Let us toss for it," said Impatience; "that is the best way of settling all difficulties." And the toss gave for the path called Danger, which Impatience took, and Frivolity, as before, followed; for he never appeared to be able to strike out any course for himself. The path

they took led them round the hill into a great wood, and they were soon quite out of Quaester's sight. While he could see them he warned them, but they only laughed at him, and at the toil and stress that it cost him to go up the steep hill.

He was indeed sorely put to it; for the road was not only steep, but very stony, and oftentimes, when he seemed to have taken a forward step, he found he had set his foot on a rolling-stone, which slipped back with him, farther than the place he stepped from. And what was more distressing still, the further he climbed up the hill, the more rarefied the air became, and, as Metus had warned him, he found it hard to satisfy his lungs with breathing. He had in the course of his pilgrimage lost many of his old associations, and many of them had tender and purifying influences over him; and, although they had been greatly poisoned by the Fear that Kills, he seemed to shiver without them in the cold, thin piercing air that searched him through and through, and opposed his upward progress. His new clothes, too, though much more seemly to the eye, did not fit him so well as the old, nor did they feel so warm. He felt chilled to the bone, as in the Slough of Irresolution, in spite of the panting efforts he made. Fatigued both in body and mind, he was glad to

see an arbour on the way, apparently made for the rest and refreshment of pilgrims. He turned in and found a bench softly cushioned where he could stretch and rest his weary limbs, and then he fell into a sweet deep sleep of an hour or more. When he woke, he felt that he had lost the daylight, and hurried out for a fresh start; but he had not gone very far when he discovered that he had left his mirror in the arbour. The mirror was not only valuable in itself, but it was one of his credentials for a good reception in the Palace Beautiful; so he must needs go back to secure it, which he did with fear and remorse for his carelessness. The backward journey was a trial for him, but he plucked up heart on looking at his recovered mirror, and seeing not only his plain direction onwards, but a wonderful picture of the great School of History in the Interpreter's House. There he saw that all the great heroes, all the helpers and the saviours of men, had gained strength in the ascent of this hill; and had found the last half, though the steepest, the more exhilarating than the beginning.

It was really so with Quaester. Although the shadows deepened and the air was still thin and chill, he moved on courageously and he found his lungs became accustomed to the attenuated air.

In sunshine or in darkness, this road must lead to the Palace Beautiful, where he would find rest and food and counsel. When he felt he was not far from the summit, he was surprised and somewhat dismayed to meet a youth and maiden running down the hill as fast as their legs could carry them. He asked them wherefore they fled, and by the voices in which they answered, "The Lions, the Lions," as well as by what he could see of their faces in the fast-fading light, he knew them to be Faint-heart and Timida, brother and sister, who had been scared by the terrible appearance and the roaring of the lions at the gate of the Palace Beautiful. He urged them to pluck up spirit and return in his company; but they were too much affrighted to venture again into such danger, so Quaester pursued his way alone. It was now quite dark; but he pressed forward till he saw a glimpse of the moon rising over the top of the hill in the east. It showed the pinnacles and turrets of the Palace Beautiful looking more like carven silver than aught else, just in front of him. His road lay right between the lions who kept sentinel at either side of the gate. They were huge and strong, and roared like thunder; but he feared them not, for, indeed, they were chained and could do no evil to pilgrims.

This Faint-heart and Timida also knew, but even chained lions who can roar, affright fearful souls.

Standing at the gate, Quaester knocked; and while he waited for it to be opened, he marvelled to find how soft was the air, how mild the temperature, and that the angry roar of the lions could not discompose him. When the porter, whose name was Watchful, opened for him, Quaester felt all fatigue depart from his body and all fear from his mind. The porter at once summoned a grave and beautiful damsel, who asked the pilgrim his name and his old abode.

"My name is Quaester," he replied, "and I am going on pilgrimage from the City of Superstition to the Home of Truth. My witnesses for my good faith are this staff, given to me by Experience on my first setting out, and this mirror, given to me by the Interpreter after my sojourn with him."

"And your raiment also speaks for you," answered the damsel; "for so are they arrayed that go on pilgrimage. But you seem as if you were not altogether at ease in it."

"It fits me ill," answered Quaester.

"It will perchance fit you better ere you leave us," said the damsel. "Truly you are welcome."

And she ran to call the other members of the family, who, like her, were pleasant of

countenance, sweet of voice, and graceful of movement. And they entertained him at supper with pleasant and profitable talk, and sweet music. They asked him concerning his journey, and the troubles he had met with, and the wonderful things he had learned. They grieved much to hear of such as Impatience and Frivolity pretending to go on pilgrimage; and as for Faint-heart and Timida, they sent forth a brave servant of the Palace Beautiful to find them and bring them under his escort safely past the lions. They said that they would not show to Quaester the wonders and the beauties of their Palace-home till the morrow, for he needed rest. So they gave him a little chamber to sleep in, and the name of the chamber was Peace.

After a long deep sleep, Quaester was awakened by the songs of birds and the sound of falling water; and as he arose and put on his pilgrim-garment, he felt a strange joy and exhilaration thrilling through him. As the Interpreter's House had been a school of knowledge, so was this Palace a school of beauty. Here Quaester saw even more than he had done when he sat by the wayside before he was disturbed by the so-called pilgrims tumbling over the wall, how beautiful everything had been made in its time.

Upon this mountain top lay a lovely plateau in the midst of which the palace stood. There grew the most beautiful flowers and the most picturesque trees; crystal springs gushed from the rocks to feed the streams in the valleys. He looked up and thought he had never before seen such a sky or such sunshine. He looked down, and on every side he could see wooded heights or green valleys, or sunny slopes. One of the damsels, whose name was Nature, was his guide and showed him the loveliest views, and made him watch the shifting clouds on high, or varying lights and shades below.

In doors were other things to be seen. Here he was first guided by a damsel called Art, who led him through the great picture gallery, and the hall of sculpture, and the music hall, where voices and instruments made perfect harmony of sound, such as thrilled and elevated the senses and the soul; she made him mark the noble architecture of the whole building as a whole and its perfection in every detail. She also showed him how poetry and fiction reveal to us truths often hidden from history and science, and how ideal beings sometimes cheer and aid us more than our nearest and dearest and wisest friend.

Another damsel, the fairest of all the three, whose name was Carita, showed him the goodness

and the beauty of which human nature was capable. In the City of Superstition it was averred, and more than half-believed, that fear alone would keep men and women from becoming sensual as swine and fierce as tigers, and that the little infant came into the world paralyzed as to good, but actively disposed towards all evil. In the Palace Beautiful, Carita held a different faith. She opened to Quaester the lovely side of many characters apparently unlovely. She told him true tales of human patience of heroic endeavour, of tender devotion, and of self-sacrificing love.

"Others," she said, "seem to find all that they need for their journey in the Interpreter's House and never think to look into our palace at all. But your desire, Quaester, is to be a helper of men. You cannot help them unless you sympathize with them; you cannot sympathize with them unless you in some measure understand them. People never can hate what they thoroughly understand. In the bottom of every human heart you will find, if you seek it with patience and love, some spark of goodness that you may kindle to greater strength. Some are satisfied to give alms to the poor and the suffering. Those who learn from me as you seek to do, give themselves to the cause."

As Quaester moved from room to room, and

from hall to hall, and from garden to wood, under such guidance, he felt as if he could weep for pleasure; and here, if it had been permitted, he would gladly have remained for a season. But his mirror told him, and the damsels corroborated its evidence, that his path was onward and upward. Before they sent him on his way, they took him on a fine clear day to the highest peak accessible to human foot in these regions, in hopes of a view of the Delectable Mountains which were not very far from the Home of Truth which he desired to reach. With the help of a glass which belonged to the Palace Beautiful, he saw at a great distance the sunny heights crowned with woods, in which many happy creatures seemed to be disporting themselves.

The tears welled into his eyes as he gazed. The sight seemed to beckon him forward. Faint-hearted and Timida, who had been found and guided, could see nothing at all, even with the aid of the glass; and so it was settled that they should tarry at the palace, and learn of the damsels till they grew stronger of sight and of courage.

The three damsels next took Quaester to the armoury, where they armed him for his defence against the dangers of the road; and they accompanied him a little way on the downward slope of

the hill, encouraging him with all the powers at their command, and giving him a picture in which he could see the wonders of their palace. They also gave him a loaf of bread, a cluster of grapes, and a bottle of water as parting gifts, and then they turned back to their happy and beautiful palace. So long as Quaester was in their good company, the descent was not merely easy, it was delightful; there was not the tension needed for going down that had been put on all his muscles in ascending the hill. There was no cutting wind in his teeth. But when he was left to himself, he found the same discomfiture from slipping-stones that had vexed him in going up. No doubt this rather shortened the journey, but it sometimes threw him down bruised and jarred and crest-fallen.

How soon after the glories of the Palace Beautiful came the Valley of Humiliation! This was wet and slippery; and though there was here no possibility of missing the path many yards, for the gorge was narrow, still it was not easy to find a good foothold. Here and there it opened a little; but for the most part the valley was pent in between frowning perpendicular rocks, or overhung by enormous trees, black of stem, thick of foliage, that darkened the light of day.

The feeling of joyous, sentient life in all things, which had so exhilarated him before he ascended the hill Difficulty, and when he was under the inspiring guidance of the damsel Nature in her joyous domain, deserted him when all the objects which he looked on were so gloomy, so tremendous, and so forbidding. A sense of his feebleness and nothingness oppressed him. The mirror, which he consulted again and again where he could get sufficient light upon it, reflected nothing but the interminable halls of the Interpreter's House, with one generation coming and another going, with the march of progress trampling down one race and bringing forth another in a sequence of which he could not grasp the key. He felt himself but an atom in the midst of the infinite series of life, past, present, and to come. The sun, when he could get a glimpse of it, was only one among the many myriads and millions of such, and himself but an infinitesimal speck in one of the little worlds which waited on that larger fraction of the universe. Unconscious and uncaring, the sun warmed and regulated the unconscious and uncaring earth; and the only intellect which could comprehend the smallest portion of its wonders was hemmed in by such restraints of space and

of time, by temptation from without and weakness from within, that his only certain discovery was how little he could know. He could not see the picture he had so lately received in the light that was vouchsafed; even the looking at a picture would have cheered him in his present disconsolate condition. His staff, which had helped him so well in the steep ascent, slipped or sank deep in the soaked valley path. Rain fell steadily, and still more darkened the sky. The vastness and the pitilessness of Nature seemed to crush him to the earth. How insignificant was man, and, of all men, how less than insignificant was he himself! Whence had he really come? Whither was he really bound? As he moved on, he could not refrain from groaning now and then. In the very darkest and gloomiest part of the valley there appeared overhead a strange shape. It was the incarnation of the Superstition from which he had fled. Dark, with huge brooding wings, the Shape covered the whole of the heavens. The outlines of its form were vague and shifting; for wherever between wing and body there was a little light visible for a moment, they closed at that point suddenly, and a faint light opened in another direction. The Shape echoed Quaester's last unspoken

thoughts. "Whence come you? Whither are you bound?" asked a voice that made his ears to tingle.

"I come from the City of Superstition, and I am on my way to the Home of Truth," said Quaester, with as much courage as he could muster.

"By this I know you to be one of my subjects," answered the Shape. "Wherefore have you run away like a traitor from your King? Who can lead you to the Home of Truth but me? Have you not had enough of warnings to drive you back from this perilous and ruinous journey that you, forsooth, in mockery of better things, call a Pilgrimage. Back! back! with me; for with me only can your feebleness be supported by Omnipotence, and your sinfulness be hidden in the spotless robes of righteousness offered to you again and again, but stubbornly and haughtily rejected. Is this not true?"

"I could not accept what I could not believe in," answered Quaester.

"Surely now," said Superstition, "when you find what a poor lost worm you are when you are left to yourself, you would do well and wisely to bend your rebellious spirit, and find peace, safety, and honour under my strong sheltering

wing. I shall bear you back to your old home and your old faith a better and a wiser man."

"Nay," said Quaester, "that cannot be. I have begun my pilgrimage, and I must endure to the end. During the many years that I dwelt in your city, I never could find rest or peace for my soul. I never could place my confidence in you, and I can still less hope to do so now."

"But what can you do without me?" said Superstition; and his voice was like the sound of many waters, and seemed to rush on Quaester's senses with a bewildering, yet converging force and mastery, so that he could scarce stand up beneath it. "Your new masters offer you nothing at all."

"Nay," said Quaester, "they offer me light and liberty, and a life of service and noble deeds."

"And what reward after?" said Superstition. "I offer you safety in the Within, and eternal bliss and glory in the Beyond, if you only bend your stubborn will to accept my gifts, instead of, poor worm that you are, trying to work by yourself. Cannot you see that you are making a losing bargain? Even supposing (monstrous as it is) that you should be in the right, you yourself believe that you would suffer nothing in the Beyond for holding with me; whereas if you are mistaken

in your new-fangled notions, and the verdict of all the wisest and the best of your fellows is against them, you will be doomed to eternal misery and torment in the Beyond—aye, and eternal uselessness too, which to a busybody like you, eager to make his mark in his age, is worse than all. Surely any prudent man would make some insurance against this tremendous risk.”

“Nay, where there is no fear there need be no insurance,” said Quaester, stilling the beating of his heart, and trying to speak firmly.

“You pretend there is no fear; I can see your limbs tremble as you speak, and I know that your heart is full of terror.”

“Terror which you, Superstition, cannot soothe. I have held on my course so far; and if I have some doubts still unsatisfied, yielding to you would only bring them back with tenfold force.”

“It is pride and presumption and self-will and self-indulgence that lead my subjects astray; but they are all glad to creep under my wings at last. It is moral perversity that blinds you to the faith that saves. It is because you would fain live at ease in your sins that you hate and thwart my faithful ministers and messengers, who, like

Metus, would warn you to flee from the wrath to come.”

“Nay,” said Quaester, taking courage, for he knew his ground here, and felt the strength of that breastplate of righteousness that Carita had armed him with. “You belie me. Weak I am, and ignorant, but I hate sin with a perfect hatred; and it is because Superstition is such a cloak for sin that I have burst altogether from its charms and nostrums.”

“I tell you, Quaester,” said Superstition solemnly, “that though you think you have begun fair, you will infallibly fall off; and when you have convinced yourself that you can sin without punishment you will sin with delight. Would that you had begun, as you are sure to go on, by sinning with a high hand before your conscience is scared by these benumbing notions; for then I might hope to awake you to repentance, and you would return gladly to your old allegiance. But now you are puffed up with self-righteousness, and say to yourself, “Behold, I am rich and full, and have need of nothing.”

“Nay,” said Quaester, on whom this irony struck home; “I never felt less like that than now. I feel as if I was but a tiny drop in the ocean of infinity. I feel fatherless in the universe.”

"Aha!" said Superstition, flapping his mighty wings triumphantly; and with the force of this motion poor Quaester reeled to and fro like a drunken man. "Aha! and you have come to this already! What will you do when you pass through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, which is your next stage? What will you do in the dungeon of Giant Despair? What will you do when you are drawn to the Borderland, which draws most of its victims from that dark and terrible valley? Even if you escape its horrors and reach the strong Castle of Despair, the searching wind will find you out there, and the giant will give you every facility for hastening that final journey. Then you will call on me, stretch out your trembling hands in supplication, that I may take pity on your future condition. Do better, turn to me now."

And with these words, Superstition swooped down, and caught in his talons the poor Quaester, who just at that moment had slipped and fallen. But the breastplate of righteousness prevented Superstition from catching hold. The very action which was intended to make him a prey and a captive helped him to his feet, and our pilgrim stood up manfully and confronted his quondam Lord. Superstition essayed to wound him on

the side that was lame; but Quaester defended himself with the staff of Experience. In vain did Quaester hack at his mighty wings: they seemed to have the power of reproduction, and like a tree that is pruned they spread wider with every blow. The vulnerable part of Superstition, as Quaester well knew, was the head, and thither he directed the blows of his staff, and they appeared to tell. Then bethinking him that the Interpreter's mirror would serve not only as a guide but as a missile, he first flashed it in the great dull eyes of Superstition (for it caught a stray ray of sunlight at the moment), and half blinded him, and then he struck him straight between the eyes with it. With a mighty groan Superstition drew in his wings, and falling supine, allowed the light to penetrate on every side. He appeared but a sorry shape, thus shorn of his vast pinions; and he seemed to shrink from the light and to move away slowly and gradually. Then with a struggle he spread again his wings for flight; but Quaester no longer felt dismayed. The vast Shape above him grew gradually more and more indistinct, and instead of flying bodily away, seemed to melt into a thick cloud, and gradually to become thinner and lighter, till it disappeared altogether, and

no longer intervened between Quaester and the sun.

The sunlight now played freely in the opening valley, and made even the rugged rocks look cheerful, and clothed with light and beauty the foliage of the gigantic trees. So he moved cheerfully forward, till he heard a slight rustling noise behind him, and turned round and beheld a woman following him. He recognized her to be Gracious, who had been, like him, one of the flock of Metus in the plain temple with the square-built benches and preacher's desk, and who was known and approved by all for her good works among the poor, the sick, and the sorrowful in the City of Superstition. She was fair of face and winning of aspect; and her voice had a thrill in it that went straight to the heart. Quaester recollected the fears of their old spiritual guide as to his hold on the tender conscience of the maiden; and his heart could not but rejoice to think that she had left the ranks of Superstition on such a pilgrimage as this. He greeted her courteously, and asked her what had induced her to leave her home and friends, and how it had fared with her on the way.

"Truly," said she, "my mind has been tossed to and fro of late as to the doctrines that are

taught and the lives that are led in our great benighted city; and when I heard from Metus of your falling away, which he laments even into tears, I thought I might make bold to follow, for I believe you to be not only much wiser than myself, but also an honest and good man, who would not willingly do wrong or lead anyone astray."

"Truly not, and least of all you, my sister. Then you have come the straight way, and not tumbled over the wall like certain idle triflers I have met with, who never passed through the Wicket Gate of Doubt, and never looked at the Interpreter's House, and who took the left-hand and side road at the foot of the hill Difficulty? I should not meet with you here if you had not kept to the straight path to the east."

"I essayed to follow where you led. I was sorely perplexed when I had passed through the Gate of Doubt, for I feared I was going too far from Faith, the great strength of the soul. It is Superstition that I am fleeing from, but it is Faith that I am reaching out for—Faith and Service. I tarried not long at the Interpreter's House, for it seemed to me all too bold, all too cold, all too material, and at times nearly as cruel as Superstition itself. But I delighted in the Great Library, and spent much time in it; and in the

Manuscript Room I took some curious notes there which made me eager to go on. Surely Metus has strangely interpreted our Sacred Books. No such terrible dogmas were in them when they were originally written."

"Why, did not I see you there?" said Quaester. "I must have been at the Interpreter's House at the same time as you were."

"The place is so vast that one is lost in it. I knew you were there, but you would never think of looking for me. But I came very near to you in the Third Hall, the Hall of Life. O, there are hard and cruel things done there! I did not mind the hammering and grinding in the Stone Hall and its quarries, or the experiments in the Hall of Plants and its gardens; but those practised in the Hall of Life made me shut my eyes, stop my ears, and turn and flee, so that I was long before you at the Palace Beautiful. There I would have stayed for ever, if it had not been that there was no work for me to do. In such a palace of beauty and art there is no suffering to relieve, and the lessons of Carita needed to be translated into action elsewhere."

"Then I missed you in the Palace Beautiful too, and they told me not that you had gone on before." "O, I am nobody," said Gracious,

humbly, "they would never think of telling you of me."

"Where did you get your mirror?" said Quaester, who observed that she had one shaped like his, in a side pocket near her heart. "Let me see it to compare it with mine which I got from the Interpreter."

"He gave me nothing of the kind," said Gracious, "though he showed me many significant things. This I received from a shining one at the other side of the Wicket Gate, whose name was Mercy."

Quaester, however, could see but little in the mirror of Gracious, only a soft warm light in the middle, breaking into rainbow tints all round the edge; while Gracious could see in his only a dazzling central light. The scroll round Quaester's was "Buy the truth and sell it not," while that of the maiden bore the device, "Feed my Lambs."

"And you have no staff," said Quaester. "You were not guided by Experience, and only sought to follow me. But you were not lame; you needed no staff to support you. I used to see you moving about the streets of Superstition as if you had wings to your feet."

"Sometimes heavy-hearted enough, however,"

said Gracious; "but when the sick and the poor needed me, I forgot my troubles, and hastened to scenes which made me often blush for my anxieties. Yet these grew so strong that at last they drove me forth."

"Did any accompany you?" asked our pilgrim.

"Yes; my friend Novelty went a little way; but she turned back after the first step into the Slough of Irresolution."

"Did you see anything of Compromise?"

"Yes, he and his daughter Myra came to help me out of the slough; but as they pulled different ways, I was more hindered than furthered by their well-meant efforts. However, they took me home to their house and treated me kindly. I am ashamed that I hesitated so long before starting fairly for the Wicket Gate; but truly my friends and my kindred would have been very pleased if I had followed the advice either of the father or of the daughter. Anything was better than going on pilgrimage through Doubt in search of Faith. My relatives told me it is bad enough for men to shake off the old bonds, but it is altogether unbecoming and highly perilous for women; so that my mind misgives me sorely at times."

"How about the hill Difficulty?"

"I climbed it fairly well, and was most kindly

received by the generous damsels who show the wonders of the palace. The weather was too cloudy or my sight too weak, for I could not catch a glimpse of the Delectable Mountains."

"I saw them plainly."

"Your heart is bolder and your vision stronger than mine."

"Why did they not keep you till I came up," said Quaester, "as they kept Faint-heart and Timida till they could see the mountains?"

"I was somewhat impatient to go. My mirror told me that onward I should find my work, and, indeed, Carita said the same."

"I must have passed you somewhere in the valley if you left the Palace Beautiful before I did," said Quaester.

"Yes, you did, but you moved swiftly as if possessed by some eager spirit. I felt you brush past me in the darkest part of the valley, and I would have spoken but lost the opportunity through over diffidence."

"How like you this valley?" asked Quaester.

"It does not trouble me much; I have been in it for many days. There are grass and flowers to be found if you look carefully for them; and even in the darkest places, I could always see a bit of blue sky overhead."

"It has tried me sorely," said Quaester. "My feet slip and my heart sinks. Saw you not that terrible Shape overhead, which threatened me not far back—Superstition himself who sought to bring me back to his realms?"

"I saw that it was darker where you were leading than where I was following; but to me what you recognized as Superstition was only a shapeless cloud."

"And you heard nothing—not the horrible voice, nor the flapping wings of Superstition, nor our hand to hand combat?"

"No, I heard nothing. But let us give thanks and rejoice that you have conquered and can go on. But, alas! there is worse to come; for after we get out of this Valley of Humiliation, we must pass through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and I would rather tarry here for twelve months than face its horrors."

"Did you seek for any armour from the maidens in the Palace Beautiful—armour of defence, I mean, against the perils of the way?"

"None of their armour would fit me; but I have my one old weapon of All-Prayer, which can be used both ways. But you appear to me to be quite unarmed."

"Armour is now not worn outside, but within,"

said Quaester; "and some of the old defences as well as the old weapons are of no avail for conflicts with the new foes. But still I may have my loins girt about with Truth, and I have the breastplate of Righteousness, which but now saved me from the deadly grasp of Superstition."

"But I see no shield of Faith. Alas! it was all too heavy for my weak hands to grasp, and the helmet, the Hope of Salvation."

"I have shield and helm enough for my needs," said Quaester.

"I feel stronger as I walk with you," said Gracious. "But I shall need all the strength I can muster or that I can borrow from you to take me safely through the approaching gloomy valley. I have had dear friends who lost themselves here, and who were never heard of more. Evil beasts may have devoured them, or they were snatched to the Borderland out of the sight and hearing of their dearest ones."

"So Metus says," said Quaester. "He declares that everyone who goes on this pilgrimage meets here with devouring monsters and shapeless hobgoblins that tear the heart out of him. But you must have seen in the Manuscript Room in the Interpreter's House, how even the priests of Superstition distrust the records they call sacred."

"Sacred, indeed!" said Gracious. "I shall ever account them sacred; and, if they were read aright, I think we should find many of our fears vanish. Much of the horrors that we have been taught as Holy Writ are mere traditions or additions made by fallible men. Still there can be no doubt that in this gloomy valley the searching wind which calls us to the Borderland is constantly blowing, and few escape it. Metus says that all who think with him, and have the same firm faith in the Beyond, triumph over its horrors and can even sing for joy. I feel very unlike singing for joy. How is it with you, my friend?"

"If I cannot triumph I can endure, and so can you, my sister," said Quaester; and they entered the dark narrow gorge together.

Different as was the outward aspect of the Valley of the Shadow of Death from the steep slopes of the hill Difficulty, there were certain qualities which they had in common; such as the aridity of the soil, and especially the excessive dryness and thinness of the air. There was not a flower or a bush or a tree of any kind to be seen. Bare rocks thrust their abrupt and jagged edges half-way across the narrow path; and the pilgrims had much ado to avoid them. No harmless living animals were to be seen, no high-

winged insects or singing birds ever visited the inhospitable scene; but beasts of prey were howling from far and near, and vultures screamed aloft. More terrible than all, pattering feet seemed to follow the pilgrims—something shapeless and nameless, but full of horrible suggestion. The wind moaned and sighed, and sometimes shrilly whistled up and down the valley; and the sound of this wind came to the startled ears of the pilgrims like articulate or half-articulate words of fear. When the wind swept up the valley, it brought with it memories of the bitterest; when it swept down the narrowing gorge it brought apprehensions for the future, vague or distinct, but always distressful. And this wind, in whatever direction it blew, was always of that quality which drew men, women, and children through the Borderland to the Beyond. It alternately chilled the pilgrim to the marrow, or burned him up with fever.

There were others in the valley at the same time as Gracious and Quaester; but owing to the narrowness of the path and its countless obstructions, everyone had to walk alone, and a yard's distance seemed to sever one from another as completely as a mile. A feeling of intense solitude marked the passing through this stage of pilgrimage; and though the two

pilgrims had walked close together, and, indeed, hand in hand as they entered the Valley, they soon fell apart, save when a lightning flash now and then revealed to each a pale and anguished countenance. Nor could they hear each other's voices, save as a kind of moan which the wind mingled with other moans. To each other they appeared to be much more sorely distressed than they felt; for after Quaester's victorious struggle with Superstition, he was not dismayed at heart, and Gracious had betaken herself to her good old weapon of All-Prayer, and felt it aid her mightily.

It was night when this terrible journey had to be taken; and all the light cast on the path was that of lurid lightning, wild and jagged, which sometimes revealed one of their fellow-wanderers as he was swept away to the Beyond. The bottle of water and the other provisions given by their friends on parting had all been consumed in the Valley of Humiliation; and now, with stumbling steps and panting breath, Quaester and Gracious pushed through the arid gorge: until they were out of it there was no hope of a drop of water to moisten their parched lips.

Now and then the maiden Gracious heard faintly the words, "What cheer, Sister?" and essayed to answer. Now and then Quaester heard

in soft, tender tones, "What cheer, Brother?" and sought to give her courage by a brave answer; but the answer died away in a pathetic wail.

As the lightning-flash distorted the countenance it fell upon, so even triumphant songs of joy would have been changed to lamentation when borne along by those terrible winds.

As for the Evil Ones of whom Metus had warned them, Quaester could see some fitting forms which changed from the weird to the fantastic; but none had the might or the majesty of the brooding shape of Superstition. They brought forward the same arguments as he had done; and they sometimes startled the pilgrim by assuming his own voice, and adopting his own methods of reasoning, so that he knew not whether the temptation came from within or from without. These doubtful whispers ran thus: "What is the profit of this pilgrimage? of what avail are these hardships? Take an easier road if Superstition has no terrors; but if he has, make friends with him while you may. If there is no Beyond to be feared, make yourself amends for the youth you have been cheated of; snatch when you can pleasure and profit; seek only such knowledge or such truth as will bring you pleasure and profit. The race is to the swift and the battle

to the strong. Is not every step harder than the last? Every danger evaded or conquered only leads to another and a greater. What can the staff of Experience or Experience himself do for you here? Everyone must taste of this bitterness himself, just as if no one had trodden the valley before; and he can take none of the bitterness out of it for those who have to follow. What cheer can you give to Gracious or Gracious to you? There are but twenty yards between you, and each is absolutely alone. Hist! list! this wind draws you both into the Borderland—you, as you fancy, into absolutely changed conditions, of which you cannot frame the slightest notion; her into a sort of better Within. But neither of you have the slightest warrant for your hopes, such as Metus and his followers have. They are perfectly certain and perfectly safe. Even if they are mistaken, in what respect are you better off than they are?"

Still Quaester stood upright, still moved steadily onward. Every now and then he felt the strong, keen wind searching him through and through, as if his hour was come, and he clasped his hands on his breast and said, "I am ready. Truth and righteousness shall bear me up; and whatever the Unknown seeth fit for me that will I do, that will I endure." And gradually the voices lost their

power; and as the wind lulled, some measure of calm fell on his spirit, and he breathed more freely.

To the young woman Gracious the temptations came differently, but they were much more difficult to resist. It was not mocking friends who assailed her; the voices seemed to come from angels of light. All the old traditions of her childhood, the kindly forms of those who had loved and cherished her, and especially of her mother who had been summoned to the Beyond not more than a year ago; the saints she had read and dreamed of; the familiar words of the Holy Books which she had almost by heart—all pressed around her, and warned her back from this perilous, this unwomanly pilgrimage. When the searching wind found her out, a horror of great darkness fell upon her. She felt she would have been safer praying in the temple of Metus, or with her old friends and companions in the great City of Superstition, than under Quaester's doubtful guidance, through unknown dangers and disheartening difficulties in search of the Home of Truth. She was shocked by the answers which she appeared to give to the solicitations which pressed upon her. It was now a suggestion from the Wicket Gate of Doubt, now a hint from the manuscripts in the Interpreter's House, now

a reply gathered in the Palace Beautiful, now a speech of Quaester's, now one heard from Thorough, an old tutor of hers, who was even more bold than our pilgrim, which took on her own voice and made her responsible for them. In her horror at herself, she turned more and more fervently to her weapon of All-Prayer; but this, far from silencing the voices, made them stronger and more pertinacious. Tender memories and old remorse, combined with her fears as to whether she had done well to leave all on this enterprise; but through all she heard the horrible noises of the wild beasts and birds of prey, and saw, by the lurid flames that seemed to burst forth at her feet, things formed and formless, but awful. Even the pale, resolute face of Quaester, when she could see it, gave her little comfort.

The night seemed to both of the pilgrims as if it were a hundred nights in one. It came to an end at last, though the dawn never crept more slowly on an arctic sky than it did on this valley. Whether from the presence of heavy clouds which darkened the sky, though they rarely burst into showers on the arid ground, or from the overhanging and changing hills and precipices that closed on both sides, it so happened that many times they thought they had been deceived

by the first appearance of the dawn, and that the welcome day was still afar off. Just as they drew near the end of the valley a black cloud broke over their heads, still further darkening the sky. But they rejoiced in the rain and drank it as it fell down from the rocks at either side. Gracious found relief in tears from her overwrought emotions; and Quaester's own eyes were moist when at last in the daylight each could see and recognize the other. He was on a little way in front, and he paused a little to give her time to come up to him. The road was now so wide that they could walk side by side; but the companionship did not give such confidence to Gracious as it would have done before her recent experience. Her face was troubled, while Quaester's had regained its old serenity with something of dignity added.

That he was happier from having begun and persevered in his so-called fruitless pilgrimage was obvious; and I, recollecting his weakness when Experience exhorted him to flee from the Fear that Kills, thought that he looked altogether a different man—a grand, strong, heroic man—one to whom all who were in distress or difficulty would naturally turn for sympathy and aid.

Gracious conversed with him in the growing

light, and told him her experience in the valley, her apprehensions, and her remorse. He chid her for her self-depreciation, and reminded her of the saintly life she had led; how she had been eyes to the blind and feet to the lame, and had visited the widows and the fatherless in their affliction while she dwelt in the City of Superstition.

"It seems to me as if I was better and safer there than here," said she. "May God forgive you if you have led me astray. But pardon me the thought; you have done me no wrong. It was I myself who followed your track without your seeking me or saying even a word to lead me on. The blame rests on my own head."

"Nay, my sister," said Quaester, "there is no blame for either of us; but rather praise, if you are like me, eager for Truth. Truth is the principal thing."

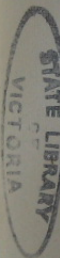
"Nay, Service is the principal thing," said Gracious; "and here, in this pilgrimage, I seem to have been of no service at all."

"You will find opportunities for service as you go further on," said Quaester. "Hitherto in our onward march, we have been, as it were, working altogether for self. But I feel assured that we both have gained strength to work for the future. Doubt not that the scroll on your mirror

will be obeyed, and that lambs will be found for you to feed ere long. Meantime is it not good to be alive? We have both escaped unharmed out of this Valley of the Shadow of Death."

"And you are stronger than before. You are a changed man altogether from the time when I last saw you in the fold of Metus."

"And you, Gracious, are fairer than before," said Quaester, who heretofore had given little thought to the love of woman, but who now believed that he saw the one maiden in the world who could fill his heart, satisfy his imagination, and be the true complement to his nature. One, too, who had followed where he had led, and who held, though with womanly timidity, much of that Truth which was so precious to him. It was but a little way that they seemed to have been journeying together; but in such experiences as theirs they seemed to have been living years in a few hours. Now, when soul opened to soul, and they revealed and compared, as only the closest and dearest of friends and lovers can do, all their thoughts, fancies, recollections and aspirations, their devout dreams, and their trembling doubts, what wonder was it that Quaester hoped that this was to be his life's companion—he the supporter and she the soother, while they



marched together hand in hand towards Truth and Freedom. Never had either met before such perfect sympathy; never felt such strange yet solemn happiness as when they slowly passed together through the fitful dawn at the farther end of the valley. There was with their joy a pathetic tenderness, a sort of wistful looking back to the years in which they had known each other by sight and voice and reputation, but had never dreamed of this union of heart and soul. Gracious rested in the present, but Quaester knew what his hopes were. Her troubled countenance gained some serenity as she moved with even step by his side; and Quaester looked on his mirror, and received from it encouragement, for, at each stage of his journey, it appeared as if Gracious too was there. But it was not to be as he hoped; for hereafter, having been near to each other through the hardest part of the journey, their paths were to diverge.

At the outlet from the Valley of the Shadow of Death, as we all know, stand the camps of Giant Pagan and Giant Pope. Those who write of this pilgrimage are wont to say that these two old enemies of the Truth are well nigh dead: that they can only stand outside their dens, and make grimaces at pilgrims as they pass by, biting their

nails in impotent rage that they cannot pursue them and capture them, for they are crazy and stiff in their joints from age and decrepitude. In olden times these giants had been notable enemies of pilgrims; and the place in front of their dens had been strewn with the blood, bones and ashes of their victims. However, when Quaester and Gracious passed things were mightily changed. Who so great and so strong all along the line of march as these two giants with their youth renewed, their strength revived, and their tactics changed?—inducing many pilgrims of their own free-will to leave their path towards the Home of Truth, to turn into one or the other camp. All the bones and ashes had been cleared away, or buried under the green sward which looked so tempting to pilgrims as they issued from the arid valley; all the instruments of torture were destroyed or at least put out of sight. There was neither the arena for the combats of wild beasts with pilgrims on the one side, nor the dungeons and racks of the Question Chamber on the other; but each mighty giant had made for himself here a camp or a court which offered to the passing wayfarer much that was pleasant to the eye, to the ear, and to the senses; and by this means they succeeded in enlisting recruits to their service.

There were neither threats nor terrors to drive pilgrims off their path; but persuasions on honeyed lips to lure them to a new allegiance. And surely no contrast could be greater than between the barren stifling gorge which Quaester and Gracious had just quitted, and the soft air, the flowering plains, and the liberal sunshine which they now came to.

Gracious turned away in horror from Giant Pagan, who reposed his huge body on a vast couch in the sun. His head was crowned with flowers, and a wine flagon stood beside him from which he took deep draughts, pledging his courtiers and the officers who sat round him. All manner of singing-men and singing-women, and players on instruments, and painters and carvers and sculptors, and dancers and mimics were round him. Quaester was minded to see what Giant Pagan, thus transformed from his old character, had to say for himself; and, greatly to the dismay of Gracious, he stood in the path with his eyes and his body turned towards what she esteemed to be a godless drunken rabble. She dropped the hand she had held while they walked together, and turned herself round to the opposite camp, that of Giant Pope.

Quaester saw among the crowd surrounding the giant, many of rare gifts in poetry, in song, and

in music, and in all the fine arts. Few, very few, of those who attached themselves to the jolly potentate had ever gone on pilgrimage at all. Many of them had no doubt left the City of Superstition; but they had reached the camp by other ways than that by which Quaester had come.

Giant Pagan laughed him a welcome, and quaffed a bumper to his health. Then, turning to a poet at his elbow, he said,

“Our new-come friend has still on his face the clouds from the Valley of the Shadow. Our gay brotherhood give a wide birth to these unwholesome Valleys of Humiliation and Death. We are not self-tormentors, but take the easiest and the smoothest way through life that is possible to us. Ah! I have sharp eyes. I can see the mire from the sloughs you have waded through clinging to you still, and the blue devils you have encountered have left their mark on your eyes and brow. Come, pledge me in this delicious wine, sweet and rich and strong as my friend Horace's old Falernian, and be free of our company. This is the realm of Welcome, where every one does as he or she pleases.”

“I am on a pilgrimage,” said Quaester, “and I cannot tarry.”

“What can you gain at the end of a long and toilsome pilgrimage that you cannot enjoy here,”

said Pagan. "This is the home of liberty, love, and music. Here our poets catch inspiration from Nature alone; here the musicians play tunes to the contented ear; here painters draw and colour from the living model; here sculptors rival in marble the perfect beauty of form. Here, too, we all eat, drink, and are merry. Pray, friend, what do you go on pilgrimage in search of?"

"Truth," answered Quaester.

"Beauty is Truth; Truth, Beauty. This is all we know on earth, and all we need to know," said Pagan. "What more can you learn after you have toiled over hundreds of miles of rough ground full of snares and pitfalls, and beset by enemies of all kinds on the way? Let well alone; abide with us in this pleasant realm of Thelema. We want a philosopher to make our band complete; be our philosopher."

"I fear my philosophy would be unpalatable to this gay throng," said Quaester, as he looked on the numerous pleasure-seekers each intent on his own gratification.

"Then they will none of it," said his huge interlocutor, with a stentorian laugh, that shook not only the couch on which he lay, but the solid ground beneath it. "But you can make it palatable. Improve on Epicurus, who is not Epicurean

enough for our modern times. We use his name freely, but we do not care to read his works or follow his maxims. How old are you, my friend?"

"I am thirty years old," answered Quaester.

"You are just the right age for a philosopher; and as you have been in bondage to Superstition all those years you can warn us against that grim foe of natural pleasure more effectually than those who have not had such experience. Our young friends get out of their difficulties sooner." And Quaester noted how many young men and young women surrounded the giant.

"Here come two who wear our colours," continued Pagan, greeting cheerfully Impatience and Frivolity who had tumbled over the wall, and had turned off the straight way rather than climb up the hill Difficulty. They had reached this camp by a very different route from that of Quaester, but they had reached their desired haven of Thelema, and came joyfully to swear allegiance to the jovial giant who governed it.

"Well, friend Quaester," said Impatience, "we are again as soon at our goal as you are, and our road was pleasanter. I see your raiment is torn by briars and your feet cut with the stones of the road, and your countenance is more doleful than ever."

None of the young revellers round Pagan could see or approach the grave dignity of Quaester's face and bearing; but the poet, who was older, was much struck with it, and longed to make a proselyte of him, and it was partly owing to his whispered entreaties that Pagan was so insistent.

"Here we are," said Frivolity, "trim and fresh. Our path was smooth as a bowling-green; and if we had not waited here and there to rest in very comfortable quarters we should have been here much sooner than this Knight of the doleful countenance. And this is Thelema? Well, it is as fine a place and as merry a company as our book promised to us."

And Impatience and Frivolity wound garlands round their heads, quaffed wine from Pagan's ever-flowing flagon, and, choosing partners, joined in the dances that went on continually to the sound of lively or languishing music.

What a great domain was that on which Quaester gazed in wonder and curiosity. Here, under sheltering hedge-rows and shady trees, were pairs of whispering lovers; there were groups of friends, or what appeared to be friends, carousing as boon companions. Here were artists of various kinds, doing their best for the amusement of knots and crowds of people collected round them.

There were shows without end, from the peep-show to the theatre. Clothes of all shapes and hues, and ornaments of every description, were displayed on the persons of the Pagan court or offered for sale. Over all these votaries of pleasure there was a careless sort of grace, a recklessness and an audacity, which had a certain charm to one like Quaester, whose nature had long been repressed and stifled. As I have said, the company were mostly young, and therefore they were full of the natural attractiveness of youth. Not only were there youths and damsels, but even little children there, who had never heard the names of Faith or of Superstition, who were taught no prayer and acknowledged no duty, but had their own way in all things. And their sole aim was to amuse themselves.

But as Quaester looked more intently at the gay throng, the sensuousness and even the sensuality of the giant and his followers offended his sense of propriety. In all that concerned the relations of the sexes there was a laxity of speech and conduct which shocked him. The exceeding selfishness which lay under their pleasure-loving and pleasure-seeking lives, often took the form of downright cruelty, against which his whole nature

rose in protest. If there were any sick and sorrowful amongst them (and even in Thelema such will sometimes intrude) they were put at once out of sight and hearing. Old age met with no reverence, wailing infancy with no tender care. So long as anything or anybody ministered to pleasure it was cherished;—when it brought truth or pain, away with it! Whenever pleasure was no longer attainable, a reputation threatened, or disgrace or poverty impending, the sufferer rushed to the Borderland; and all his old friends and companions said it was the best thing that he could do. Now the lessons of his early life, even though in many ways they had been erroneous, had taught Quaester to admire and to practice a heroic patience in adversity, and perseverance in the face of difficulty; and his pilgrimage had only strengthened his desire and his power to give sympathy and active help to the weak, the suffering, and the bewildered.

“In Thelema here, do you nothing for others?” he asked solemnly of Pagan, standing still in the path just as he had planted himself at first; for though he wished to learn some of the ways of this lawless place, the more he saw the less was his desire to swerve from his own] straight path.

“Wherefore should we?” answered Pagan. “Let each man pursue his own happiness and pleasure. Surely that will produce better results than if each man looked after other people’s to the neglect of his own. What can any one, even a philosopher like you, do for another man which he cannot do better for himself? Your sort of happiness may be misery to another man.”

“But happiness comes most surely when it comes indirectly,” said Quaester. “Nothing could bring less amusement to me than to be continually thinking and planning how I could be amused.”

“Amusement is indeed a social thing,” said Pagan. “You see how our young friends rush at it in bands. But it is not really amusement you are thinking of,—it is edification, which is the bane of all pleasure, and of all art that is worthy of the name. Edification, faugh! let me take the taste of it out of my mouth,” and he drank again. “In the words of a poet, who is no doubt familiar to you, though we in Thelema count him as but a prig who clings to the old wine in the new bottles;—

‘No man can save his brother’s soul
Or pay his brother’s debt.’

And when there is really no soul to be saved, and no debt to be paid, the healthy natural man simply takes the world as he finds it. Whereas you, friend Quaester," and he laughed softly and sweetly, and all around him echoed the laugh, "are as crazed with Superstition as if you still leaned on the crutches of Faith, and not on the staff of Experience. You look as if you had had a tussle with Superstition but now, and had come off the worst. Shake off your old-fashioned terrors and join us. Your garments are somewhat straight-laced, I see; but we can give you more easy robes in which you will feel at perfect liberty. You can fill your mind and your fancy, aye and your arms too, with Beauty. You have been cheated out of your youth by Superstition; but at thirty a man is still in his prime. There are flowers of all sorts to be gathered yet. We are the votaries of the Beautiful, the Graceful and the Agreeable." And Pagan turned his huge but well-shaped form on his luxurious couch. Then shaking out his golden locks in the sun, he stood up to his full height, towering over all his courtiers, who looked like pigmies beside him, and he would have taken Quaester by the hand to place him by his side.

As the giant moved forward, Quaester noted that he trod on a little dog which had lain

beside his couch, and that when the creature howled in agony, Pagan picked it up, and hurled it to a distance with such violence that it died on the spot. A minute before he had caressed the dog, which amused him; but he had no patience with anything like suffering.

"That was cleverly done," said he with a laugh. "I make short work with my patients. We shall arrive at Euthanasia for the old, the decrepid and the stupid ere long. Why should they cumber the ground, and abridge the pleasures of the young, the vigorous, and the witty? What is the use of wasting money on hospitals and refuges to keep such wretched creatures alive, when it is for their good, and especially for our own, to put an end to their troubles at once?"

Quaester disliked the action, but he hated the boast of it still more.

"I shall not tarry with you any longer," said he firmly, "I must go on. Surely I have fled from Superstition and conquered him but lately for better purposes than to eat and drink, to sing and to dance, with flowers round my head, among your careless throng."

And he turned to go on his way, when his glance was arrested by an incident. One of those who caroused with Giant Pagan was caught

by the searching wind and drawn away, as he himself knew, and as every one around knew, to the Borderland.

"Bon voyage," said Pagan, "let us quaff a bumper to his safe arrival at Nowhere;" and the band laughed as they drained the bowl. Quaester turned all the more resolutely away, and stepped onward on his own narrow path.

Meantime the fair damsel Gracious had felt no temptation to turn towards Pagan's side of the way. The careless laughter, the feasting and carousing, were, on the contrary, repugnant to her. Her gaze, however, had been rivetted on the display on the other side, which, though very different from that of Giant Pagan, was as extensive, and even more varied. Her experiences had been different from those of Quaester in the recent ordeal which they had gone through, and the temptations which awaited them both when they re-entered the common path and the work-a-day world were well suited to their different moods. He had been tempted to license; she had yearned for shelter from the perils of self-will and self-guidance. And Giant Pope, who here did not wear the triple crown, or brandish the crosier sceptre with which he had humbled kings and emperors, or threaten the terrors of

fire and sword to all who doubted or disputed his authority, had a far more winning aspect to Gracious than he had worn in the City of Superstition. There she had been warned of his pride and his cruelty, and there she thought she saw for herself the atmosphere of darkness in which he kept his followers. But here, as she moved into the sunshine, she saw the old bugbear of her childhood in the guise of a venerable old man, whose whole air and demeanour was rather that of a meek martyr than that of a denouncing judge; and he ruled over bands of various races as numerous as those of his rival opposite. But there were exchanges often made between the two camps—each was glad to enlist recruits from the other side. Not a few of those who were on pilgrimage, and who had gone as far as this stage, were won to the camp of Giant Pope by means of gentle persuasion in the first instance, and increasing surveillance afterwards. Gracious felt his eyes upon her, and submitted to their power, his words crept into her ears and took possession of her as, until recently, those of Metus had done.

All around were nooks for silent prayer, and one great building stood ever open for worship. There were priests in attendance who could warn, encourage, confess, and absolve.

There were relics of saints long since departed; there were emblems and symbolic ornaments and decorations to suit every taste and to please every fancy, which were worn on the person or placed round the altars and oratories. Gracious was captivated by the long array of saints and martyrs whom Giant Pope boasted of as his faithful adherents, and especially by the prominence given to the feminine element in this far-reaching hagiology. Yet she had heard all her life such hard things of the giant himself, that she said to herself she would not join herself to him, but she would look and go. It was not well, she said, without a fair hearing. So she moved on through this new scene, interested, and perplexed.

There appeared to be a repose and a satisfied look about these votaries which she could not help envying. She gazed wistfully at those who prayed on their knees, apparently lost in devotion; and saw the young and the old and the feeble creep into the ever-open temple and pray while they felt in the mood for devotion, going out strengthened and encouraged to do or to suffer. Still more did she envy those who seemed to live in prayer. She moved on as if drawn by an invisible magnet, far away

from the narrow path, and while perplexed, and doubting lest she had gone too far, she met with a black-robed priest, who appeared to her to have the countenance of a saintly guide. His voice was kind and grave when he thus addressed her,—

“My daughter, how is it that you are wandering so far from home?”

“I have come on pilgrimage,” said Gracious.

“Alone?” asked the priest.

“Alone,” she replied, “as far as the entrance to your dreadful valley, where I had the company of a good brave man, named Quaester.”

“It is not well to go on such a momentous journey alone, especially for a woman. Here let your solitary pilgrimage terminate, my daughter. Let me be your guide along the straight and narrow way that leads to safety and to glory. With me you will find rest which, if I mistake not, you have not found either in your solitary march or with your friend. And it is rest for your soul which you need above all things.”

“It is true,” said Gracious, who felt all the terrors of her old superstition, and those brought so recently to her in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, borne in upon her soul at once.

“You have come from yonder,” and he pointed with his finger to the end of the Valley, “and

you are alive to tell the tale. Let your ransomed life be spent henceforth to show your gratitude."

"That is what I desire," said Gracious.

"Only in Faith can you hope for repose."

"I have sought it there all my life, but I could not find it."

"Because it was not the true Faith, but a mere pretender to it. It is to the venerable mother Church, the assembly of the faithful from the earliest traditions of our common faith, that you should turn, and not be a revolted and traitorous offshoot from it. I marvel not at your breaking away from such feeble and false teaching, which could not make you feel safe."

"It was Truth that I sought, and not safety," said Gracious.

"And where is Truth if not with the True Church? What you call freedom is only freedom to err. Behold your late companion, whose footsteps you have followed, parleying with yonder godless blaspheming crew who keep up continual orgies around Pagan. You will soon see him casting in his lot with them. I know what attractions this domain of Thelema has for the selfish self-willed men, who make their perilous start through the Gate of Doubt, and go straight

on the road that leads to the destruction of the whole spiritual being."

"Quaester is not selfish nor self-willed," said Gracious, warmly; "I cannot always go with him;—he is stronger and bolder than I am, but he is noble of soul, and pure in heart."

"And he loves you," said the priest, whose experience had taught to know human nature in its strength and its weakness. "But for you there are higher and better things than an alliance with him; and in such alliance there would be no rest—only trouble and perplexity, and fear for him and yourself. Here we can promise you rest for your soul, occupation for your mind, work for your hands. Would you cultivate your talents? Do so to the uttermost, but sanctify them in their application. Let Music be consecrated to sacred song, and solemn hymn, and choral chant, or to those splendid organ strains that seem to waft the soul to the Beyond on the wings of Sound. Let Art find a body in the forms of saints militant, saints suffering, and saints triumphant, and in those symbolic decorations that clothe the wood and the brass, the stone and the iron of the temple with a sort of divinity. Even the humble labours of the needle may be made holy service in ornamenting the robes of the

priests and the shrines of prayer. Your soul shivers in the loneliness which you call independence. Come with me, and rest your weary body, bathe your bleeding feet, and warm your chilled heart." And the tones of the priest's voice had in them infinite tenderness.

Gracious hesitated, and made no reply.

"Come, stray lamb," he continued, "and seek the ancient fold. Our mighty mother receives the penitent and the believing. Come and lead a life of prayer, of contemplation, or of service. Service, I see by your eyes, is the life of your choice, and it is the best and the highest of the three."

Gracious was soothed by the sympathy of the priest, and especially touched by his appreciation of her desire for service. Still she was not altogether convinced.

"But I fled from Superstition," said she. "His yoke was too hard to be borne; and to yield to your persuasions, and to put myself under your guidance would be to fall back lower and deeper into its benumbing power."

"Nay, my daughter," said the priest, "to yield to false prophets and teachers would be superstition: to yield to true prophets and teachers is intelligent faith. See round my neck this sacred

badge: I belong to the Church one and indivisible, which has never erred and never can err, and which has never once betrayed a repentant sinner who trusted in her."

"But Metus told me to beware of you above all. It was my earliest lesson, taught at my dear mother's knee, to avoid the seductions of Giant Pope and his emissaries. They never thought to warn me against the Wicket Gate of Doubt, but they feared my being led away as you seek to lead me. Metus told me that you and yours have no power over the Beyond at all; but only the soul with delusive lies."

"And have you forsaken Metus on those few matters in which he is right, to cling to him blindly on those in which he is wrong?" said the priest, in a tone of grave remonstrance. "Ah! we have power over the Borderland and what lies beyond it. There is another probation; and for those who, out of our earthly sight, are enduring it, all our holiest ones are continually praying."

"But how do you know this?" asked Gracious. "Our sacred records, which you as well as Metus accept as your guide, say nothing about such a second probation."

"Not distinctly, I confess, though there are many passages much more favourable to our

views than to his. Metus makes up his own case of finality for himself; whereas we have the whole traditions of the Church, and the inextinguishable voice too on our side. It *must* be so. What is the exact turn of the scale which is to decide whether the departing soul is to spend eternity as a saint or as a devil? Of what avail is a Church or congregation of faithful souls if they can only pray for those on this side of the Borderland? Prayer must avail with the powers of the Beyond wherever there are ears to hear, and sorrow or pain or sin to be removed. Was not the doctrine of Metus too cruel for you? Behold, now, a better way! Turn in with us, and your life will flow on peacefully and honourably in the midst of good works. Choose which life of service you will. Will you nurse our little ones, and teach them holy things? or tend our sick, and bind up the wounded? Or will you visit among the poor with almsgiving and kindly aids and spiritual counsel, comfort the bereaved, and prepare the aged for their coming change and the summons to the Beyond? To the bereaved you can ever speak with better heart when you can give your sympathy to the living, and your prayers for the departed. *Laborare est orare* for you and such as you; and those of us who work less will pray

for you, that your hands may be strengthened and that your faith may not fail. Why, at the word Faith I see that you take new courage."

It was indeed true. Gracious felt herself irresistibly drawn towards the camp with its ancient banners. She sighed to see her friend still parleying with Giant Pagan; but when she saw him turn with disapproval and horror from the jolly potentate after his cruel treatment of the dog and his careless farewell to his departing comrade, and about to proceed on his straight path again, she broke from Father Boniface (for that was the name of her new guide) and went up to Quaester and plucked him by the sleeve, saying:—

"Well done my friend. I was afraid for you, lest you should be ensnared by that godless rout. But pray turn with me to the other side. Here we can find repose, work, companionship and the true faith. Here we can help each other best. I can breathe here. This is the oldest faith and the best," she said, kissing a sacred symbol which the priest had hung round her neck.

"Nay," said Quaester, "it is the oldest superstition and the deadliest. All the outward traces of cruel prosecutions have been cleared away; but if you could see what really has happened here, not

Pagan himself could show such a mighty mass of cruelty and injustice. The martyrdoms for truth and liberty and honesty have been legion that lie heavy at this door. Did you not hear of them from Metus? Did not the record stand in the most prominent place in the Interpreter's House? Did not the damsels in the Palace Beautiful tell you that this ancient superstition saw temptation in everything that is natural and lovely, and walled up its best in cells where the light of day scarcely entered, where no sweet love of man and woman was crowned by the gracious gift of little children? Beloved Gracious, let me plead for your soul; let me fight for light and freedom and hearth and home." And Quaester's eyes were full of the love of which he spoke. Gracious trembled and hesitated. He pressed his advantage.

"Come with me, let my arm support you when you flag. Henceforth, I can aid you better than I have been able to do. You too love truth and courage and spiritual freedom; henceforward let our aims and our lives be one."

"Nay," said Gracious, "can two walk together unless they be agreed? Accept the old path with me and then I will yield to your entreaties, for I shall save your soul."

"That cannot be," said Quaester sadly. "But

what has paralyzed your judgment, and blinded your understanding? Have you not learned from the history of the past that this giant with his soft voice and his iron heel, has always led his followers into abject slavery, and crushed in the dust all those who ventured to dispute his pretensions?"

"The times are changed now," said Gracious, eagerly. "In those old days, all differences of opinion as to the Beyond and the Unknown were accounted damnable heresy; and the predecessors of Metus, when they had them in their power, imprisoned and killed those of the older faith with as little remorse as the followers of Giant Pope would have persecuted them. It was the barbarousness of the times, and not that of the faith, that caused the cruelty. Now all people of all faiths are more tolerant; and surely the old faith as to the Beyond was the best: that by effort and prayer and purification, the faulty and the guilty have a chance even after they cross the encircling Wall that hides them from our sight, and that our tears and prayers here may help them there. Surely that is better than the horrible doctrine of Metus."

"Yes, it is much better, as you put it; but it was a monstrous engine in the hands of the priesthood,

whose prayers were bought and sold for the benefit of those who, they alleged, were suffering in the purifying fires. They worked on the best feelings of human nature for the meanest ends."

"Ah! my friend, Quaester, I fear you do not believe in a Beyond at all," said Gracious; the tears standing in her sweet soft eyes. "I fear you are too like that rabble across the road—not in your life, for that is pure and noble, but in your want of faith. Do you believe in retribution in the Beyond at all?"

"I do not know," said Quaester, the big drops standing, not in his eyes, but on his forehead. "Whether or not I believe in this final settlement of accounts between us and the Unknown, I do not fear it. I am in His hands, let Him do with me what seemeth to Him good: use me with all my capacities if He can—disperse me to the elements from which I sprung if from them He can make a better instrument."

"Oh! my friend, I could not give up faith in a Beyond," said Gracious, with clasped hands. "No, no! I would rather fear much than cease to expect something. What mean, dwarfed creatures we should be if there was nothing to come to our very selves after we crossed the Borderland. O love such as I felt for my mother—"

"Love such as I feel for you, Gracious," said Quaester, solemnly.

"Such love must be immortal," said Gracious. "It cannot be all at an end when we here in the Within cease to see it."

"I know not under what new conditions we may be placed," said Quaester; "but I am sure that neither Metus nor your new-found, old, infallible guides, know anything about them. For me, I must go on my own path towards the Home of Truth."

"Would that your path were mine," said Gracious.

"Amen," said Quaester.

"But seeing that our paths are different we must part," said Gracious. "For you I can pray, and I will pray without ceasing, that you be brought to see the right way; for if you only see it, you will at once walk in it."

Quaester essayed to reply, but nothing articulate could be heard from his lips; only a groan met the ear of Gracious.

"Let the priest—let Father Boniface speak to you. I thought no one could have persuaded me to go against all the prejudices of my lifetime. But he has done it; and I feel now a Divine peace in my soul. Oh, Quaester, to win your soul to

the right fold and the true path, would I give up my own vocation for the higher life, to which my wise and pious guide would lead me. Listen to him for my sake, if you will not listen for the sake of your own eternal happiness in the Beyond."

"If you cannot convince me, Gracious, no soft-tongued priest could have any effect on me. Ah! I recollect well the words of Suspense when he sent me on from the Gate of Doubt, that some older, some wiser, some better, would seek to turn me aside from my progress towards Truth. I have now met with my hardest temptation. Beloved Gracious, farewell! May your life be so happy and so helpful that you may never regret sending me forth alone this day."

She took his hand, and they looked each other in the face for a time with a sad tender gaze. Then they parted, she to press onward; she to betake herself in all haste to the priest who commended her that she had withstood this supreme temptation. He then allotted to her her work, and continued to do so from day to day.

She needed warier handling than those who crossed from the other camp, or who had arrived by other roads at this outpost of the old faith, which had stronger followings in the City of Superstition, and no mean court in the busy City

of Vanity Fair itself. She had gone alone far on her pilgrimage. She had gone through the Wicket Gate of Doubt, and had had some glimpses of significant things in the Interpreter's House. She had learned lessons in the Palace Beautiful that she could not forget; and for the last two critical stages of her journey, she had had the companionship of a man whose ideal was lofty and whose life was pure. She had not been strong enough to bear the full weight of the lessons offered to her; but she could not cast them aside as evil and impious, and throw herself blindly into spiritual slavery.

It was only by filling her hands with work, and her life with interests outside of herself, that the priest could prevent her from recollecting the old sense of freedom, and keep her from bitter regret, when she thought of Quaester going alone on his perilous way. To Father Boniface, she unburdened her soul in confession, and told him that if she had been free to love, this was the man she would have chosen, but that now she could only pray for him. And in this exercise she found a relief and a support which was denied to Quaester. The priest had it once on his mind to permit her to marry the man she loved, for he had a great faith in the subtle and constant influence which such a woman as Gracious could exercise over a man like

Quaester. In many homes, such unions existed; and the children, at all events, would be brought up aright, for the parent who holds the positive faith is ten times stronger than the parent who holds the negative. But when Boniface ventured to suggest this marriage, Gracious, who was pliant when the matter was self-sacrifice, was as adamant to what pointed to self-gratification. Never would she injure her usefulness and perplex her spiritual sight by so close a bond between herself and one whose errors were so fatal, and whose influence over her was so strong; nor had she faith in her own power to influence him to think and feel with her, so long as he was in the pride of his health and strength. "But," said she to the priest, "when he grows old and feeble and draws near to the Borderland, I pray that I may be near him to offer the Divine hopes and consolations of our faith, and meantime I can pray and I can work."

The priest respected her decision, and, on the whole, was satisfied with it. He had every day more and more cause for congratulation that the choice had been made once and for ever; for no convert in all his fold brought more honour to him for obedience, loyalty and unweariedness in good works.

Quaester moved on from the two camps with a sad heart. It seemed to him as if half of the

good had gone out of his pilgrimage when he had left Gracious in the hands of Father Boniface as a servant of Giant Pope. The companionship had been so sweet to him, and yet he hardly knew until it was lost to him how precious it was. He pined for company of some sort. But he was doomed to solitude for a long line of march through uninteresting country; and he was not sorry when, as he was going up an ascent, he saw one a little way ahead walking swiftly. He desired the man to pause, so that he might come up to him. But he answered, "I may not stop or delay on my way; take heart and make up to me." So Quaester put forth all his strength, and came up with the man whom he thought he knew, and was sure of it when they stood face to face. His name was Thorough—one who had set out on pilgrimage before Quaester, but he had stayed long at the Interpreter's House, where, indeed, both Quaester and Gracious had seen him. All the wonders of that school of knowledge so delighted him that he would fain have taken no further step. But the Interpreter himself had sent him away saying that he must teach that which he knew to those who had made short stay, or to those who had not visited the house at all, and that his chief field of action was the great City of Vanity Fair, which

was the next stage on the journey. So Thorough thought every step lost which lay between him and his work, and was so eager and rapid in his pace that Quaester, who was panting and out of breath with the effort he had made to get on a level with Thorough, was hurried on without pause to catch his breath. Thorough took him by the hand, but that was slight assistance. Quaester recollected when Gracious and himself had walked hand in hand in the valleys, and how he had accommodated his pace to hers, and he sighed half in regret and half in utter weariness.

The two fell into discourse, but Thorough had the most of it. Though Quaester half envied his companion's strong assurance and his rapid progress, his talk was not so pleasing nor so winning as that of Gracious. Indeed, he wondered that Thorough had not turned into the camp of Giant Pagan; for he spoke mockingly and cruelly of all things excepting knowledge, for the sake of which every other consideration he flung to the winds. The lower animals had no rights as against the increase of the knowledge of man. He was as strongly in favour of Euthanasia, or the systematic putting an end to useless or wretched lives, by some easy and painless method, as Pagan himself. However, he would have placed

stricter limitations on the practice than Pagan, and he would have made it useful in the way of gaining knowledge, so as to diminish the number of such deaths in the future.

The frivolousness of the Pagan crew, however, had aroused his disdain as much as the slavish superstition of the opposite camp. Thorough cared little for sensual pleasure or idle revelry; and though he would not object to any enjoyment that came in his way, he despised from his soul the making a life-pursuit of pleasure. He was possessed of one strong master passion: the desire to know all that was knowable; but as for the obscure dreams of priests and devotees and mystics about the Unknown and Unknowable, he laughed them to scorn with a bitterness that pained Quaester. This he soon perceived, and was much amused by it. He laughed at his panting companion, whom he forced to keep abreast with him. He called a tender conscience a relic of barbarism. He had a great battery of arguments against what he called conventional morality; and he was disposed to consider all sorts of morality conventional. All his arguments on these matters were drawn from things which he had seen and heard at the Interpreter's House. I knew that Quaester had been nearly as long there as his new found comrade.

The Interpreter had told him that his mission was onward, but it was hard for him to be lorded over by this hard-headed, strong-lunged, loud-voiced Thorough.

"Of all the useless things in this world," said Thorough, "remorse is the worst. Conscience is merely a development of public opinion as often wrong as right; and, while it does not trouble real hardened sinners at all, it whips feeble souls with scorpions, and often paralyzes the wholesome effort after moral recovery. The wise man may do wrong, but he should never brood over it. The only time when what we call conscience can be of any service is in the way of warning; but instead it is usually silent and inactive, and reserves its strength for useless reproaches and lamentations after the mischief is done."

Quaester had been a great puzzle to Thorough when he was in the hands of Metus; for he had much more understanding than the bulk of that priest's congregation, and Thorough had rejoiced to hear of his escape and his going on pilgrimage, though he went rather at a snail's pace. Thorough himself had made short work of the hill Difficulty; but he had passed by the Palace Beautiful without once looking in. As for the Valley of Humiliation he had simply rushed through it. Mighty trees and

overhanging precipices, gloomy skies and slippery paths, gave to him no sense of his own insignificance. He had analyzed such rocks over and over again; he understood the whole process of vegetable life as well as of animal life. He absolutely loathed the idea that there was in the Within or the Beyond any Power or Force superior to the intellect which he himself possessed. He had walked unconcerned through the Valley of the Shadow of Death. He was sure he could pull through somehow, and get to his work in Vanity Fair. He had only to walk warily, and not run his head against the jutting rocks on either side. As for the winds that blew up and down the valley, he attached no superstitious meaning to their wails and shrieks. One great difference between him and Quaester was that he could breathe with ease and pleasure the attenuated air which made the other pant for breath, and his ears tingle and buzz, and threaten sometimes to make the blood vessels burst. Thorough could also pass through the arid valleys without suffering from thirst. Possessed with one passionate idea, to fight to the death with ignorance, folly, and superstition, he cared not when or where or how he deals his blows; whereas Quaester had strong affections and a tender heart, and pitied and sympathized with even those whom

he felt bound to oppose in fitting time and place. But strange to say, Thorough had loved, as much as he could love any body, the maiden Gracious, and had sought her for his wife; but she would have none of him.

"Surely," said Thorough, "Gracious was in your company for a stage or two of your journey."

"Yes," said Quaester, "we were together in the Valley of Humiliation, and we passed through the Valley of the Shadow of Death as near to each other as that awful solitude will allow. When dawn appeared after that interminable night, we found we were not far apart, though it had been impossible to hold converse together."

"I had a little moonlight on my way," said Thorough; "but even if it had been pitch dark, I defy the hobgoblins to terrify me. Creatures merely of imagination—invested with shape and voice and sting only by the credulity of the passengers through that ill-lighted valley. But tell me, wherefore did Gracious, who had gone manfully, or womanfully, through the worst, fall back afterwards? Perhaps she found it as hard to keep up with your pace as you seem to find it to keep abreast with me."

"No, we walked at an even pace together. I was willing to tarry for her if she found my pace

hard; but after we had passed through the Dark Valley, she thought she had gone far enough, and was, I grieve to say, won over to the camp of Giant Pope."

"And you let her be cajoled into that blackest den of superstition?" said Thorough indignantly. "I think I could have held her back if she had been in my hands."

Quaester felt the remorse which his companion thought was so useless and so absurd. Had he really done all in his power to save her? Had he exhausted all the arguments for truth and freedom at his command? Well, if he had been remiss, he was the heaviest sufferer for his fault.

"Well," said Thorough, after a pause, "after all, I suppose she has found her place. All her crying out against Superstition and the religion of Fear, was only because Metus was not subtle enough to keep her in his meshes. Who has got the direction of her soul now?"

"One of the black-robed priests most in favour with Giant Pope; Father Boniface is his name."

"Ah, he has got her sure enough," said Thorough with something like a groan. "He is the director of the working bees of the hive, and in him she has met with her master, and she is lost for ever, I fear, to reason and common sense."

"Her life will always be a beautiful and unselfish one," said Quaester.

"Beautiful fiddlesticks," said Thorough impatiently. "When I saw her at the Interpreter's House, I had hopes of that woman. You know I always had a fancy for Gracious as the sort of wife for me."

"For you?" said Quaester in astonishment.

"Yes, even in Metus's hands, she showed signs of better things than the silly gossiping crew she was mixed up with. She is not only the most unselfish and sweetest tempered of women, but she is sincerity itself, and the heart of her husband could safely trust in her. I asked her to be my wife then, and not once, but twice over; but she refused me. I asked her again in the Interpreter's House to think over it again, but she said it was not worth thinking over; and now you see what has come of it." And Thorough seemed as if his anger with Quaester was just.

"Metus," continued he after a pause, "let her go because he did not give her enough to do, or motive enough for doing it. After all, to such a woman as Gracious, what is the use of working here when there is so much to do and when there is so little time for us to do it in, if it makes no difference in what they call the Beyond." And

Thorough almost snorted in contempt. "If I could have engaged her in the great work of liberating the race from the bondage of fear and superstition and ignorance, what a helper she would have been! She would go through fire and water if she thought it was right. But you know, even in her most advanced periods she always had a belief in the Beyond and in the Powers that govern it, and in the possibility of propitiating these powers; so that truth and progress in the Within were nothing to her in comparison. Well, to think of the regard I have wasted on that poor, weak woman, who wants to save her own soul and the souls of others, and thinks nothing else is worth living for! I should have liked to have been near you in the Valley of the Shadow. You gave her back groan for groan, I'll warrant."

"We appeared to each other to be more distressed than we really were. We discovered that when we compared notes afterwards," said Quaester.

"I suppose she betook herself to All-Prayer, and recommended it to you too," said Thorough. "Well, she is a born disciple, as most women are; and perhaps Boniface is the best of that black gang. But you are a poor-spirited fellow

to lead her thus far to so little purpose. I cannot tell whether Metus or Boniface is the worse of the two now-a-days. In olden times, I should have said that our poor Gracious had made a change decidedly for the worse."

"When she was with Metus she was the sweetest soul I knew," said Quaester; "and even Boniface will not dare to turn her to anything but the highest uses. She has an instinctive horror of all deceit, cruelty, and arrogance."

"If these things are needed, Boniface and his brotherhood must employ other instruments. Poor Gracious! how hard for her to give up everything, even her own will, when one thinks of all she might have had for nothing."

"And what might she have had?" asked Quaester.

"She might have had *me*," said Thorough, throwing back his head proudly, "and a life of light and liberty, and a wife's honourable position, and a mother's hopes and pleasures. To think of that woman, whose maternal instincts are the strongest in her nature, dedicating herself to celibacy under the direction of Father Boniface. It is a loss to the race too, for her constitution is splendid, and what children could look for hereditary good qualities if the children who

might have been born to me and Gracious could not? But of course she would not care for husband or children, friends or lovers, if she could not hope to meet with them again in the Beyond. And she knew I would not be where she vainly hoped to go."

"I should have thought such a marriage most incongruous," said Quaester.

"Nothing of the kind," said Thorough. "Other women take the risk every day; the severance between the much-believing wife and the unbelieving husband is simply intellectual. They live in the same house and have the same daily interests, share the same bed and board, and love and cherish the same children. Now and then comes a little jar; but in the ordinary affairs of life Gracious and I would have pulled together very well, especially after she had left Metus and fancied she was in search of Truth. Do not you think so, Quaester?"

His companion made no reply, for indeed speech failed him. Every word spoken by Thorough fell like an irritant on an open wound, reminding him of what he had lost, and of what he might possibly have done to prevent this severance from Gracious.

Thorough's eager, rapid talk did not cause him to slacken his speed, and he scarcely cared for a

reply to his questions. He was so perfectly satisfied with her own statement of the case, and with the position of pitying tenderness with which he regarded the greatly mistaken Gracious, that he needed little acquiescence, and would probably have been angry with his friend had he disputed his statements.

Somewhat to Quaester's relief, Thorough changed the subject, and held forth at great length concerning some of the sights in the Interpreter's House, and especially on some curious experiments and investigations on brain disease as connected with superstition.

At last they came to an arbour, evidently meant for the rest and refreshment of pilgrims. Thorough needed no rest, and was wont rather to despise those who did. Here he was obliged to leave Quaester behind as a weakling; and our disheartened, disappointed, and exhausted pilgrim gladly stretched his limbs on a bed of moss and heath, and fell into a long, deep sleep.

Night must have passed while he rested, for when he woke it was broad day. Quaester felt in no way displeased to think that Thorough must now be a long way in advance. It was much better for our pilgrim to go at his own pace, though it might be a slow one, than to have all his sinews

strained, and his heart distressed by such over rapid movement. In fact, he scarcely felt at home in the part of the road to which his forced march had brought him; and he wondered if Thorough had really taken the right path. Confident as the latter had been in his own judgment, he had not been able to inspire a like confidence in Quaester's mind. And now as he moved with difficulty, slowly, avoiding or removing the frequent obstacles in his path with his staff, he looked again and again on his mirror to ascertain if he was right. It gave no certain answer, but looked blurred and confused till, after an interval of this painful travelling, he seemed to come up to the point which he might have reached at his own natural pace. Then he could see clearly, and he could walk freely, and he felt sure of his position. As he journeyed in this cheerful frame of mind, he met one coming in the opposite direction and walking with even more speed than himself.

"Whither so fast, my friend?" said Quaester, and wherefore are you going backward on pilgrimage?"

"I have been sent back by the rulers of the great City of Vanity Fair, the roofs and chimneys and towers of which you can see before you;" and sure enough, when Quaester looked he saw shining

in the sun the spires and turrets and domes—all that was highest in a city that seemed so vast that it reached from horizon to horizon. Where had Quaester's eyes been that he had not seen this before?

"Surely you are mistaken, my friend," said Quaester; "this straight road, as you see, leads directly to the city."

"Yes, but there is a far better approach from the other side, and if I wish or if you wish to gain any credit, or to do any good in Vanity Fair, we must enter in at the proper gate," said the man whose name was Audax.

"I thought the pilgrim's way was always as straight as a rule could make it," said Quaester. "This is the road that I am sure my friend and townsman, Thorough, has taken a little before me, and my guide, Experience, instructed me not to depart from this path. We must needs go through Vanity Fair."

"We must all do that, and most of us must spend the greater part of our lives in it; and so it is needful that we should make a good and creditable beginning, and not unnecessarily bring obloquy on a good cause," said Audax.

Quaester looked in his mirror, and saw that it plainly indicated that he should enter in at the

Gate of Reform, to which this narrow path lead straight up. He saw, too, that as Audax had told him, his mission was to tarry there for a period of which neither he nor I could see the end.

"Do as you please," said he to Audax, "my course is plain, as I said before; I hold to my original course."

"We need not be so foolish as to be scratched with brambles and made foot-sore with rough roads, if we can escape by going by an easier path. Not that I myself care about these things; but I do care about my chances of usefulness and distinction. I dare say you, as well as I, heard at the Wicket Gate that our course was not always perfectly straight. Even Giant Pope, much as he thinks of such asceticism as yours on the part of his saints, grants an easier dispensation and a more advantageous entrance to his secular followers. And you and I are seculars, eager to engage in practical work, and to leave Vanity Fair a little bit better than we are like to find it. The best way to enter into the city is by the Gate of Wealth, but that I fear I cannot do; the janitors only open that gate for a bribe far beyond my means. I shall take the easiest portal that is open to me, and that is the Gate of Assurance which I can burst open for myself. I fancy that is your gate too, for

Wealth does not seem much in your way. Nor, indeed, does Vanity Fair appear to be a congenial abode for you."

"Perhaps not," said Quaester, "but my mirror says I must dwell there long."

"All who wish to live at all, and not to hedge themselves away from the struggle and the battle and the triumph of life, must make a sojourn in Vanity Fair," said Audax.

"In olden times, the best and noblest were wont to keep out of its turmoil and sin," said Quaester, thinking whether Gracious's new directors would allow her to enter the city.

"It was a grievous loss to the city, which then was a good deal worse than it is now; and, I think, a loss to the pilgrims themselves not to have a longer or shorter term of probation there, as well as a time of service," said Audax. "Well, a wilful man must have his way, and so you go on straight to the Gate of Reform—a stiff one to open, let me tell you, and you will find all Philistia on the inner side, striving to keep you from what you aim at, with every weapon at the command of power, stupidity, and mockery, levelled at your devoted head."

"And what do you aim at?" asked Quaester. "Is not Reform what Vanity Fair wants most?"

"My aims are the same as yours," said Audax; "but I do not rush at them blindly like a bull at a gate. I must adjust my means to my ends. If I am to do any good in Vanity Fair, I must first win consideration and respect. Vanity Fair will not listen to penniless philosophers, or to prophets in rags. There is no means of usefulness like money, and money I must and will have. With daring and assurance, which I possess, and with prudence to check these when they fly too high, which I flatter myself I also possess, Vanity Fair is the place where a fortune may be made, and that quickly. When I have the money and the confidence which money inspires, you will find that I can effect more in a day, than you can do in a year without these advantages. You appear to me to have a cool head and some judgment; try my plan, and take my course."

"Nay," said Quaester, "I fear I should lose my zeal for the greater end in pursuit of the less."

"Well, don't say I did not give you good advice when you find your success is but meagre. I kept better out of the thorns and brambles than you appear to do even when I was taking the same road. Well, there will be one comfort in Vanity Fair: there is none of that sickening talk about

the Beyond, that we used to hear constantly in the City of Superstition. The people are busy looking after the Within—either for business or pleasure. I dare say I shall see you again from time to time; perhaps, by-and-bye, I may be able to help you.”

So, with a patronizing nod of farewell, Audax passed our pilgrim, and soon found a branching road which led to his Gate of Assurance. Quaester, when he had made up his mind, departed on his course, feeling stronger and happier, even though he had no doubt of the truth of what he had heard of the difficulties of entrance. When he reached the Gate of Reform, he found it fast closed, and he heard the same warning and the same advice that had been given to Audax, that he should take some other gate. This did not in the least daunt or discourage him; he turned the ponderous lock, for the key was on the outside, a huge and heavy key, moving in rusty wards, that taxed all his power of hand and wrist. At last the bolt seemed to slip, and he put his whole strength to the door to force it inwards, but the hinges were as rusty as the lock, and turning the bolt was a very small part of the task. One came up after him who watched his efforts with interest, as he, too, desired to enter; but the entrance to this gate was so

straight and narrow, that only one could work upon it at the same time.

The stranger was older, but he was more impetuous than Quaester; he exclaimed with joy, or he groaned with disappointment, as he saw our pilgrim apparently gaining or losing ground in his efforts. As each man had to wait his turn, it behoved him to stand outside to wait, and to remain an inactive looker-on at the efforts of another. But at last with a mighty effort the gate was opened; and Quaester, breathless from exertion and half-stunned by the confused noises, mostly unfriendly, that saluted him, stood inside. No sooner had he passed through than the gate closed with a loud bang; and as if automatically, the bolt turned in the lock at the same instant, leaving to the older man the same difficulty in unlocking it and forcing it open, to the disappointment of Quaester, who had thought to have opened for both. The man outside, whose name was Sanitas, called to Quaester to remain and give what help he could from inside; but this was but small, if indeed it was anything, for the gate opened inwards. Still, it was cheering to Sanitas to know there was a friend so near, and Quaester was too much interested in his success or failure to move from his post. As he stood, he

was assailed by much abuse of tongue and other more tangible missiles from the Philistines, who, as Audax had said, formed a serried phalanx round this strong and rusty gate.

When Sanitas at last stood beside Quaester, breathless but courageous, the two men found they had to force their way through the opposing crowds before they could begin their real work in the city. Quaester advanced with quiet force evenly exercised. Sanitas moves by jerks forward, and pushes to the right and to the left. But as the latter moved, he spoke vehemently. His mission was one of health; he burst forth into angry denunciations of the rulers and the builders of this crowded city, of their dirty neglected houses, foul drains, the want of fresh air and of pure water, the adulterated food and drink by which the poor were poisoned wholesale, and the mischievous luxuries of the rich, as well as the health-destroying vices by which rich and poor sapped their vital forces, shortened and saddened their lives, and transmitted to their posterity all sorts of diseases named and nameless. With his keen eager face and his impetuous gestures, he wanted to feel every pulse, to sniff up every stink as he moved crying, "Woe, woe, to the pestiferous lazar-house of Vanity Fair!"

According to Sanitas, every virtue seemed to reside in sound health, and in sound health alone. He could see no spiritual grace in the confirmed invalid, no beauty of soul in the slowly-moving cripple: no compensating sense of moral beauty existed for him, where physical well-being was absent. But the kindness of his heart, his enormous zeal, and the sacrifices of time, money and ease he was willing to make for the objects which he had at heart, impressed Quaester profoundly, in spite of his lamentations. Sanitas wanted two things for the success of his important mission; a sufficiently broad platform to preach from, and no small amount of money to carry out his plans. These were only to be obtained by energy and perseverance, and in these he was not lacking. The definiteness of his aims, and the many illustrations which he could draw from the scenes around him of the need of reform in this direction, aided him to obtain gradually a wider and wider hearing; and the monetary desideratum he could plead for by showing that a large expenditure might be more than repaid by the reduction of the disease, vice and crime, which accompany filth and squalor everywhere, and nowhere more than in the enormously wealthy city of Vanity Fair.

With most of his ideas Quaester fully sym-

pathized, and was willing to give him what help he could ; but his own special mission was for truth and justice, which he saw grievously forgotten or denied in that city. His sometime comrade, Thorough, had entered the Gate of Reform before him, and had both opened it and had passed through the hosts of Philistia with ease. He was not beset by so many opponents and hindrances as Quaester or Sanitas, because his teaching of pure science, though it led to reform, and that of the most fundamental kind, appeared to the rulers and prosperous ones of the city to be merely speculative, and not practical. So long as the inhabitants of Vanity Fair are not called on to alter their lives, or to purify their business and their pleasures, or to put their hands in their pockets, they do not object to theories, the newer and the more startling the better,—especially to theories relating to material things, to which Thorough mostly confined his attention. And Thorough, with curious inconsistency, was satisfied that when crowds of people listened to his instruction, and saw the folly of the traditional stories of creation currently believed in the City of Superstition, and admired his classifications of phenomena, they would be wiser and better in the future. He indeed took the credit of much that was done

by other advocates of reform in other directions. He boasted that Sanitas has learned everything from him, and that Quaester was only a backward and timid disciple of the same great school, and, in fact, that his own methods of thought and his own principles of action were the only infallible ones for all time and for all circumstances.

Quaester for his part saw much to marvel at and to deplore in Vanity Fair. Perhaps the first thing that struck him was the enormous disparity of conditions between the wealthy pleasure lovers and those who ministered to their necessities, their pleasures, or their caprices. Vanity Fair, as we know, is the great vortex into which all are drawn by various human desires,—for wealth, power, pleasure, distinction, and notoriety. In the great lottery, there are many blanks and a few prizes. Those who win the prizes believe, not without apparent good grounds, that they dazzle all eyes ; but if one falls from his high estate, his place is at once seized by another, and the first is forgotten or despised. Luxury is displayed with all possible ostentation in the public streets, and the ornamented parks and pleasure grounds belonging to the city. There are miles upon miles of streets in Vanity Fair, inhabited by people so rich that they need to do no work them-

selves, but have swift, silent, and perfect servants to obey and ever anticipate their bidding, and with invention on the rack all over the city to supply what may take their fancy in food, drink, clothing, decoration, furniture, and amusement.

There were prizes for the ambitious too—to hold kingdoms in their grasp, or guide or change the destiny of millions with a stroke of the pen. There were shows and pageants ever new in form, but yet wearisomely monotonous to many of those who hurried from one to another to be amused from without. All these things necessitated the work of scores and hundreds to minister to one; and in back streets and blind alleys, housed with the horses of the rich, or crowded almost out of standing room by the encroachments of business or traffic, lived these families of working people in the miserable dens which Sanitas thought it his mission to purify or to demolish. And in this aim Quaester sympathized fully; for the misery of the poor and the difficulties in the way of remedying it, and the wretched condition of the workers in this busy hive, cut him to the heart.

But there were other things that sickened him still more. As if impelled by the god or the demon within him, he walked through every street,

he took note of the dwellers and the passers by, he listened to every chance conversation between two or three, he attended public meetings and social gatherings; finding that the bulk of the inhabitants of Vanity Fair were profoundly indifferent to its evils, while a few offered various panaceas for the evils they acknowledged and deplored. The strange power of sympathy which he possessed, seemed to give him an intuitive knowledge of the sorrows, the failings, and the sins of the people.

By no choice of his own did he slowly walk up and down Beer Street and Gin Lane, daily and nightly—up one side of the street and down the other. As if drawn by some magnet, he sat down on the bench beside the boon companions, and tried to discover what pleasure they found in draughts that drained them of money and repute, that unnerved even the skilful hand, and confused the regulating head. As if by magic too, he was impelled to follow the besotted victims to their homes, where he often found a lovelessness and cheerlessness which might have driven them abroad for light, warmth and companionship. The two evils acted and reacted on each other; the dull home offered no attraction, and the wasteful expenditure elsewhere kept the house bare, cold, and stupid.

Here and there, however, he found homes that might have kept the prodigal within them, or lured him back by the tender love and patience that waited for them, but, alas! in vain.

There were streets where other vices flourished—some of them so rich and luxurious as scarce to be looked on as disreputable; while others were so foul that even Vanity Fair was ashamed to own them, but the evil stamp of Meretrix was on them all. For in these streets women lost their self-respect and their feminine modesty, and men thought that the dearest gifts of love are to be bought for money.

Vanity Fair was the great mart where everything in the Within that is desirable and desired can be bought, and where everything, even the most sacred, is eagerly and shamelessly offered for sale. Not only in the foul lanes of Meretrix, or in the flaunting streets and crescents of Hetaira, but in the great temple of Hymen itself, love or the pretence of it was bought and sold. In this last highly respectable place did youth and beauty ally itself with hoary age, or with men younger in years, but worn out by precocious and persistent vice, for the sake of luxurious living, fine clothes and jewels, carriages and servants, or title and precedence. Here, too, but more rarely,

did ardent youth vow life-long love and fidelity to ugliness, age, and stupidity, for the sake of gambling debts paid, or solid money in hand to be spent in other society. Every one seemed to act as if Vanity Fair was their only possible abode for the future as for the present, and that to secure a good place in it, was worth any sacrifice. For though the ostensible motto of the place was to make no sacrifice, nowhere were such heavy prices paid down for benefits so short-lived and illusory.

Never before in his pilgrimage did Quaester feel such a desire for the faith which he had lost, as on his first introduction to Vanity Fair. He felt as if, with his old views, he could work to better purpose, could hold forth more powerful motives, could urge more effective deterrents. But faith never comes by wishing for it; and gradually he learned that by leaning on the staff of Experience and looking at the Interpreter's mirror, and especially by the insight and sympathy which had been his test lesson in the Palace Beautiful, he could impress his fellow-men for good.

By day the voice of bargaining and chaffering filled the streets, and after nightfall, the shops and the gin-palaces were lighted up artificially in a way that made their wares and their decorations look ten times gayer than during the day; and in

all directions, places unknown and unseen in the hours of sunlight were opened for public amusement. There were singing-men and singing-women, and those who played on instruments singly and in bands; there were all sorts of mimes and actors, and conjurors and performers, and lecturers, ready to sell amusement or even instruction at various rates. The beat of the dancers' feet to gay and sparkling music, was heard by Quaester from public halls and private houses. He looked in upon them and I with him. We were privileged creatures: no one turned his head at our approach, or noted when we withdrew. We saw men gravely and women gaily attired, whirling together in such dances as he had noticed close by Pagan's court, in attitudes and with expressions all unfamiliar to him in his old puritan training. Under the guidance of Metus, he had suspected evil and destruction in all sorts of dances. But as he listened to the talk, though it was empty enough, it was perhaps as innocent as any that could be heard in Vanity Fair.

When he visited the great theatres, which were in his old home of Superstition as much taboo'd as the dancing—though he was of the nature which does not crave for amusement—he often saw and heard what he admired very much. He could

conceive of no harder life than that of rushing everywhere in search of a stimulant or an opiate in the shape of amusement. Still, he did not judge others too hardly. Perhaps the denizens of Beer Street and Gin Lane might be won from their worst vices by such idle and harmless spectacles, though, indeed, at and around all such places of public entertainment, the myrmidons of Drink were in close attendance, and Meretrix and Hetaire were never absent.

But perhaps of all the things he saw in Vanity Fair, Quaester watched with most eager interest the gambling, which in every various form was carried on in every quarter of the great city; for it is not only the place where all things are bought and sold, but the place where all things were risked on the hazard of the die, literal or metaphorical. It appeared to be a huge gambling saloon, with tables for all classes, from the ragged children who played pitch and toss in the gutter for coppers, to the great magnates who staked fortunes, reputations, and kingdoms. But with regard to every vice in Vanity Fair, there appeared to be its high life, middle-class life, and low life; but it wore a different aspect, and was often called by a different name when practised by the poor and the ignorant in foul, evil-smelling

dens, from that which it had in palatial mansions, or luxurious club-houses and hotels. What was stigmatized as debauchery among the poor, was excused as the exuberance of youth, as "having one's fling," and "sowing one's wild oats," if it was done by the rich or well-born;—and what if pursued with loaded dice and marked cards in a low gambling hell was disreputable and illegal (even in Vanity Fair), was overlooked as sharp practice, or as one of the clever dodges of speculation and enterprise, when greater pillage was reaped by means of lying prospectuses, false reports, and "salted" invoices.

It was not only into the business of the city, but into all its amusements also, that the spirit of gambling entered. Even the most idle and empty pleasure-seekers sought excitement in the betting-ring, and fancied that no trial of strength, skill, or endurance, had any zest unless there was some personal risk of gain or loss in it. From the great field days when fortunes were staked on the swiftness of a horse, and necessarily also on the skill and honesty of his rider, down to the little risks and chances of ordinary daily life, the foolish were always ready to take odds, and the wary to give them. A sort of passion for unearned money seemed to possess the poor,—a desire for

something to stir their languid pulses animated the rich; and the betting market took its place in the corn market, the meat market, and the share market in those broadsheets, which daily chronicled the doings and the opinions of Vanity Fair.

And this share market was a marvellous thing. Of all the resorts of the city, that which in our tongue is called 'Change, and in another "La Bourse," was the noisiest and the busiest. Quaester strove to learn its language and its peculiar terminology, to comprehend its fluctuations, and the causes which ostensibly, and the causes which actually, led to rise and fall, inflation and collapse. He studied the methods and motives of those who held for a rise, and those who manœuvred for a temporary fall in that strange world of paper and credit, where a few words written or printed and a signature represented vast sums of money. In this eager, pushing, yelling crowd, Quaester moved an interested spectator and listener; and amongst lies of every shade, from the faintest grey to the deepest black, he watched the processes by which fortunes are made and lost with bewildering rapidity, reputations blackened and whitewashed, extravagant show to-day, sudden ruin to-morrow; and advantages seized and held by audacity,

persistency, and unscrupulousness. Now and then he was hustled and trodden on by the eager feet of the votaries on 'Change, who hurried to prostrate themselves in body and in spirit before the symbolic image of Mammon carved in solid gold, and set on high over the great archway.

Many things that these people brought forward were good things in themselves, for the convenience and comfort of all classes, for the furtherance of commerce and the interchange of thought; but into all their plans the spirit of self-seeking entered so largely that the main object was too often lost sight of, or deliberately sacrificed, for private gain. In this hubbub, as Audax had anticipated, Quaester missed altogether any thought or speech about the Beyond. In the drunkard's gloomy reactions he had watched for these things and found them; even in the streets of Meretrix there were those who believed firmly in the Beyond, and dreaded its possibilities; but in this awful Babylon, Mammon, the god of the Within, ruled supreme and unrivalled.

Not seldom amongst these eager votaries he saw Audax himself, who had had little difficulty in entering by one of the gates which open into this quarter of the city, the Gate of Assurance. All the pilgrim look had gone off his face. He

wore the raiment, he spoke the language, he seemed to think the thoughts of this feverish arena as if he had been a denizen all his lifetime. He smiled somewhat contemptuously at Quaester's aloofness; for though there in the body, our pilgrim had no portion or risk in the dealing. He told Audax that he had not been mistaken, for there were golden chances for the bold, the quick, and the cool. But Audax did not invite Quaester to join him now, for he considered him neither bold, quick, nor cool, but one quite unfit for the great game of life.

"I am making my fortune, as I said I should do, and even faster than I hoped for," said he, after the two had met several times.

"And after the fortune is made, what then?" asked Quaester.

"Ah! then we shall see," said Audax. "I doubt not I shall make an excellent use of it. To help the world, you see, friend Quaester, you must begin by knowing the world."

"That is what I am at," said our pilgrim, "else my tastes would never lead me here."

"Ah! but to really know the world we must have personal experience, and not merely that of a looker-on. There are fifty things that I have wanted to go in for in my youth that I now see

to be quite visionary and impracticable. Look at Chartus on his political stump; Sanitas, rabid about health, who would compel everyone to wash and be clean by stringent laws; Temperans, who would level Beer Street and Gin Lane to the ground; Purgator, who would do the same with the haunts of Meretrix and Hetaire; Thorough, who would make the whole city one vast laboratory for his experiments; and yourself, such a visionary about truth, justice, and sincerity. Upon my word, when I see to what extremes all you enthusiasts who entered by the Gate of Reform go, in behalf of objects that I myself once thought so good and important, I feel half inclined to turn into the ranks of *Laissez Faire*, and let things mend themselves in time. You see 'all overs are vice,'—a good old proverb which never was thoroughly understood till now. In all reforms for which this city is not prepared, the rebound, the reaction, is often so mischievous that things are worse than before. In the old myth, you recollect, when one devil was cast out, seven others, and these worse, took his place. You know human nature can never become very good or very bad all at once."

"But surely all reforms are brought about by degrees. Each man does perhaps less than he

expects, or than he hopes for; but the expectation has strengthened his hands and encouraged his heart, and he *does* something. Each man can lend his aid to any good cause, if it were only by the assertion of his conviction, and by the sympathy with which he may encourage others."

"Certainly, certainly," said Audax; "I sympathize to a certain extent with you there, and if I were more at leisure I might lend a little countenance to some things of which I approve; that is, always providing they are not carried too far. But at present my countenance is worth nothing. By-and-bye I hope to give assistance both in money and influence to such as you and Sanitas, and that good little Gracious, who moves through the most wretched streets with her charms and her nostrums; but it is really her smiles and her tears and her sympathy that do the good. With such want and poverty as she daily meets with—often want brought on by vice and improvidence and laziness—she finds her purse but lean. Of course, as you know, she depends on voluntary aid, for all her own little fortune was absorbed, as all her gifts and her powers have been absorbed, by her spiritual masters."

In Vanity Fair it behoved Quaeaster to abide long; and after he had looked around the great

city he settled down to earn his own living. This necessary duty was the best excuse which the selfish and unscrupulous had to offer for being of no service, and often for being of positive dis-service to their fellows; but our pilgrim knew his vocation better, and in his hours of work and of leisure he felt the claims of his brethren and his sisters always strong upon him. The calling which he chose for himself was that of a writer; for in this great mart, where all things were bought and sold, a price was given for such books and broadsheets as people desired to read. And many, who were capable of better things, spent their lives in making up foolish stories and jest-books, because these things were much prized in Vanity Fair; and, as we have said, Giant Pagan had his favourite poets and romancers, and Giant Pope had chroniclers and advocates who produced a very different kind of literature. The people in Vanity Fair when Quaester abode in it accounted themselves in the very vanguard of intellectual progress; and yet, notwithstanding, the book market, like all its markets, was swayed hither and thither by the restless waves of fashion and caprice. But it was in the broadsheets that came out day by day in thousands, that the inhabitants found their favourite literature. Here

were chronicled the events of the day, the names of those who came in and went out of the city; who were born, who were married, who were called away to the Borderland; the gay doings and the evil doings, the business and the pleasures, the political palaver of the day, the accidents and the crimes, the sports and the fashions, the racing and the gambling of all kinds; and, above all, in these broadsheets dealers praised their wares, and invited the readers to buy from them. One might have thought that Quaester would not have found a hearing in such a frivolous and selfish community, but Vanity Fair is not only the chosen resting-place of those who see nothing beyond it; it is a stage, and often a very long one, in the life-journey of all sorts and conditions of men, whether they go from the city of Superstition in the west, the city of Indifference in the north, or the city of Ease on the south; and here Quaester met with nearly all those whom he had seen or known in his former life, who had not in the meantime been called away beyond the encircling wall. In Vanity Fair the summons was as frequent and as swift as elsewhere; though those who were busy on 'Change, or engrossed in the pomps and pleasures of other parts of the city, kept the ugly wall well out of sight and memory.

It interfered little either with business or enjoyment. One man or woman removed, another came to fill the place in the twinkling of an eye. No one was of so much importance that he could not be easily dispensed with.

If Audax had seen Gracious from time to time in his busy life, Quaester had seen her far oftener. Under the guidance of Father Boniface, she and several others of the same sisterhood had entered bravely in at Help Gate and found their work, while our pilgrim was only looking about in search of his. Giant Pope now knows better the secret of his strength than to shut up such valuable instruments in oratories, or drive them to deserts and hermitages; he sends them forth boldly to combat the brute forces of wickedness and unbelief. Wherever Quaester moved among the poor, the sick, and the sinful, he was wont to meet Sanitas and Gracious, each eager and zealous in a different way. To his spiritual sense there always appeared to be a halo round the fair face of Gracious, although it was always shrouded in a most unbecoming head gear.

With regard to dress and to personal asceticism, as well as unwearied service, Gracious was a most submissive disciple; but there were some points which her astute director dared not to insist on,

and one of these was the absolute separation of his spiritual daughter from the sceptical and uncompromising Quaester. Although in most respects she was weaned from secular things, she could not be prevented from the daily reading of that particular broadsheet with which her friend was now connected. She instinctively recognized whatever he had written. If they met by chance and had any conversation, she was sure to find some trace of it, some allusion unknown to all others, in what was apparently written for the general public of Vanity Fair; and even her director could not but acknowledge the value of the work he did.

"He took such cognizance of men and things,
If any beat a horse, you felt he knew;
If any cursed a woman, he took note,
Yet stared at nobody—they stared at him."

To her he seemed "the general-in-chief"—

"Doing the world's work all the dim day long,
In his old coat, up to his knees in mud."

His courage and his enterprise, if there was any wrong that could be righted at once; his patience and his persistence if there was aught that could only be remedied after long delay, and perhaps not by himself, but by others coming after, for

whom he might clear the way some little; his forbearance with the stupid and the illogical; his trenchant denunciations of evil that was strong and set up in high places; his inspiring encouragements to those that were weak and faltering—all created in the mind of Gracious a strange moral confusion, which, though it was disquieting to herself, made her work better, and her own influence of a higher character than if she had blindly walked in the path marked out for her by Boniface. Nay more, her own influence thus modified reacted on Boniface himself; and though he kept up the language of the old times, the meaning of the words was different.

As Gracious moved through the murky dens of sin or the darkened dwellings of sorrow and bereavement, with the sacred symbol of love, endurance, and eternal hope in her hand, she counselled patience with the wickedness and violence of men, and resignation to the powers of the Beyond; and she gave her prayers for those who were Within and those who were Without the dreaded Borderland.

By some strange chance, four friends met in the poor room whence the nominal head of the family had been summoned, with scarce an hour for preparation, to the dreaded change. Sanitas

was anxious to cleanse the filthy dwelling, and to let in fresh air;—he looked to the water-tap and the drains, and bade Quaester note down how vilely the poor were served. Chartus seeing the misery and neglect of the house, and indeed of the whole quarter of the town, inveighed against the leaders of political and municipal palavers, who let the poor rot in their holes while the enormous wealth of Vanity Fair was expended on conveniences and luxuries for the rich, or used for purposes of bribery and speculation.

Gracious meanwhile, with prayers and tears, had aided the soul in its flight; and now spoke words of hope and peace to the weeping wife and astonished children. Quaester felt as if he stood with no help in his hand, and no consolation on his lips. A vicious and brutal life had resulted in squalid misery, rags, and semi-starvation to wife and little ones. On the woman's face and arms were the blue marks of blows inflicted on her in drunken fury; on the faces of the children was seen the hereditary taint of the blood of a sot and a profligate.

To Quaester, the soul of the man appeared neither worth saving nor damning; and the life of the dependant ones was likely to be happier without him. But the fear of the Beyond had

inspired the eager, anxious prayers of Gracious, and a word of penitential regret, an act of sudden faith, prompted by the terrors of the near Unknown, had thrilled with ecstasy the pure soul of Gracious, and she believed that this naked bankrupt soul had entered on salvation; that this soiled life was being transformed into saintly purity in the Beyond.

"Ah, my friend," said Gracious, turning to the silent Quaester, with streaming eyes, "is not this worth living for?"

"To comfort and aid the mourners,—to try to make their future condition more human and more hopeful? Yes, it is well worth living for."

"Nay, more than that—ininitely more than that—to save a soul, as a brand is plucked from the burning," said Gracious.

"Think you that your coming has made this difference? A chance brought you here, a chance might have detained you, or might have sent you elsewhere, where you were as much needed, and where now for want of you a soul may be perishing," said Quaester, appealing to what he considered the most vulnerable point in the loving superstition of Gracious.

"Nay, a Providence, my friend. All is laid

down for me. I am but the weak human instrument in the hands of the All-Wise."

"But do you think," said Quaester, dropping his voice, "that the sensual brutal nature of this man is fit for the occupations, the companionship, and the glory of the blessed ones in whom you believe?"

"Not now," said Gracious eagerly, "not now. There Metus was altogether in the wrong. Even the salvation wrought for us by the Lord of whom this symbol speaks (and she kissed it reverently) does not do such jugglery; but when the first step is taken in the Within, sincerely, however feebly, the discipline Beyond will lead him on and on, and he shall have my prayers and the prayers of that congregation of faithful souls who feel with me. And those too of the wife and the children he has injured will avail for his salvation."

"If they forgive," said Quaester thoughtfully; "surely the Unknown and the Absolute may well forgive the creature he has made with such a nature and placed in such surroundings. Though whether even He can make any use of him after such forgiveness is a different question."

"Alas!" said Gracious, "what chance have these poor creatures in this terrible city to learn

the right; and what difficulties lie in the way of their practising it!"

"It is a clear case of hereditary vice," said Sanitas. "He was born and brought up to evil things—he was bound to go wrong."

"If there was a fair representation of the people," said Chartus, "such lives would become more and more impossible; but no one cares for the poor. I do not suppose this poor fellow knew of what political rights he had all his life long been defrauded. It is only through the right and equitable distribution of political power that social and moral reforms can be compassed."

"Nay," said Sanitas, "first let us improve the health and the homes, and then we prepare the people for their rights as citizens. Let the Government of this Vanity Fair pull down these rookeries, and cleanse these streets, and flush these drains; let them teach and train the young, not only in book-learning, but in the all-important laws of their own bodies, so as to counteract the hereditary tendencies to evil, and in the course of two or three generations we shall see Vanity Fair very different—a place to be proud of instead of the foul blot on creation that it is."

"Two or three generations!" sighed Gracious. "My business is with this one;" and she gave

to the woman food out of the scrip she always carried, and promised her some work for the morrow, and called the little ones to her and taught them the words and the air of a holy hymn, laid her hands upon them, took them in her arms, and kissed and blessed them, and went on her way to some other abode of want and woe, leaving Sanitas and Chartus half contemptuous, but Quaester more than half envious of the faith which led to such lovely works.

In addition to the co-operation of Gracious and hundreds of such charitable workers in Vanity Fair, Giant Pope had a footing in the city, held by very different disciples in a very different manner. He had once been much more powerful outwardly there than he was at this time, and he had bestowed at his will wealth and honours and even kingdoms on those who were his friends and allies, or those whom he hoped to win to his service. It was not wise to shut up such proselytes as Sisters Gracious and Evangeline and Dorothea, and the unwearied Brother Boniface to spend their lives in barren prayers and penances, while the other and the secular side of the Church compounded with the strong powers of the city—the World, the Flesh, and the Devil—for certain advantages.

Too many had passed through the Wicket Gate of Doubt and carried on their pilgrimage towards the Home of Truth, for a longer or shorter portion of the way, for this fugitive, inactive and cloistered virtue to be of any service. Rather was it necessary for all the forces whom the ancient giant could muster to sally out and do battle for him with unbelief and with wickedness. Although many of the rich and great and self-indulgent might secretly compound with the three evil powers and have easy rules to follow, and charms and nostrums to ward off penalties when their rules were broken, the works of the pious, the humble and the devoted were boasted of as the true fruits of the faith. As Giant Pope had in times past claimed credit for all the learning, all the arts, all the science and all the piety of the Within as reared and sheltered in his cloisters, so now he boasted of the zeal, the love and self-sacrificing devotion of their more active adherents, as altogether due to the faith they held, and to the organization they were absorbed into.

There were, however, other workers, not so wise or so whole-hearted, who brought the giant but little honour, and, in some cases, no little trouble and danger. Such was Cecitas, who

would fain have taught in all the schools, but who was himself ignorant, and whose zeal was not tempered to his knowledge; and Auscultus, who stirred up quarrels in families by hearing and repeating idle and foolish stories. And against such, those who entered into Vanity Fair singly by the Gate of Reform, fought to the death. And other emissaries too went cautiously through the city feeling their way, and not forcing it as of old, leading captive many silly women, and by motives of hope or fear, of vanity or ambition, by yielding here and commanding there, they won their allegiance;—through the mothers they governed the children, and pulled all the strings of family arrangements. For all things that happened, all things that were happening, and all things that were likely to happen, were laid bare to those skilful questioners as to the disciple's own soul. To such more mundane followers was offered an easier life than was set before Gracious: unhesitating submission in matters of speculative belief covered with them many sins of practice.

I cannot tell how long Quaester dwelt in Vanity Fair, for, as I have said, to my spiritual senses in this dream or vision, space appears to be well nigh infinite, so that I could see the Borderland from any point of the journey which I had

followed step by step, and so was it with him. It must have been many years, for not only did I see great effects spring from causes which were slow in operation, but I observed the brown locks of Quaester becoming gradually grey and greyer, and the lines deepening on the fair face of Gracious, but every line seemed to tell its tale of loving service. Though but few of their friends and acquaintances had gone on the same pilgrimage with them, many of them had reached the city by other paths, and they often met in business or pleasure resorts. Here was to be seen Compromise, doing a little cautious business on 'Change, or taking the chief part, a moderating one, at a meeting. Here was to be seen his daughter Myra, following the guidance of Chasuble, who shook his head a little over Gracious's submission to Boniface, but who showed a spirit not dissimilar. Myra did not follow such hard paths, nor had she the same halo round her head, which I noticed in her former friend.

Here Frivolity and Impatience squandered their means and their time and their health. Here the maiden Novelty followed the rapidly changing fashions of Vanity Fair in dress and speech, in conduct and in creed, and finally allied herself in marriage to one Talkative, who boasted to be a wise

man, and in his boast proved himself to be a fool. But here above all, Giant Pagan held continual court; for the camp at the exit from the Valley of the Shadow of Death, where Quaester and Gracious had first seen him, was only an outpost, and his main strength was in this city, and here his band of followers indulged in their boldest excesses. Here speech was lax and gesture free. Here pleasure, worldly knowledge, and what the reckless votaries called experience—oh, how different from that of Quaester!—were bought and sold openly. No law was too sacred to be violated, nothing human or divine was too solemn to be ridiculed.

Next to money, the most potent weapon in Vanity Fair was ridicule; and the highest instincts of the soul, the noblest ambitions of the intellect, and the purest affections of the heart, were all brought to this terrible test by people who could not comprehend or imagine anything better than themselves and their own selfish and petty motives. To every unsympathizing nature, the most elevated, the most tender, and the most tragic of human circumstances and emotions, have their absurd side. Nay, the egoism which refuses to be raised to such things, imperatively demands that they shall be lowered, if possible, to its own level.

One of the favourite spectacles and amusements of Vanity Fair, not only of the populace, but of those who stood high in consideration and in office, was to put such enthusiasts as had entered through the Gate of Reform into the pillory, and to make them endure all the jeers and ribaldry that could be levelled at them by the populace. The real opponents of these enthusiasts were generally those whose vested interests were attacked and endangered; but they were generally able to stir up the ignorant, the stupid, and the scurrilous, who knowing little and caring less for the real matters in dispute, were delighted to see those who were wiser, brighter and better than themselves completely at their mercy. Frivolous fools who would not hear argument, and solemn fools who could not understand it, were ever ready with abusive words and offensive missiles, and fought the battle of those who were keen enough to see how dangerous the enthusiasts really were.

I had noticed that Quaester's first opponents were the compact hosts of Philistia; and they, though the most respectable of the mob who surrounded him when he had his experience of the pillory, were perhaps the most effective. They had not much idea of fun in general, but they had

one great source of amusement, which was the contrast between the lofty aspirations of the victim and his sorry appearance in the pillory, where any ignorant ragamuffin or drunken rough might pelt him to his heart's content.

Sanitas had had his turn, so had Purgator, and so had Temperans; such hot-headed one-ideaed disturbers of the *status quo* of the ordinary and necessary condition of things in so great a city, must needs go through the ordeal. Against works of pure charity, like those of Gracious, there could be no popular cry got up; and not even vested interests, however they might tremble, could arouse any demonstration against Chartus, for the people had an instinctive belief that he was their friend. But Quaester went so far with the other three specialists, and had a mission to ferret out abuses and to right wrongs, not only from the outside, but from the very roots, that he became obnoxious to the strong, and their influence was easily exercised over the many. He stood the pillory well, all the better because Gracious was by, and cheered him with her sympathy. However unpleasant this pillory experience was at the time, all those who stood it bravely, came out of it stronger and fairer, with their faces set more steadfastly on their own way, and their work

afterwards appeared to be better and more successful.

It was no doubt somewhat irritating and exasperating to the magnates of this lordly city to be reproved and advised and threatened by such humble and powerless agitators as Quaester and his coadjutors. But when the agitators had worked hard and long, they saw some fruit of their labours. Indeed there have been great things done even in Vanity Fair by one voice calling to itself many others to support it, and after a while, even the powerful and the frivolous and the stupid are forced to acknowledge that great men have their uses. And Philistia, which opposes to the death the solitary man at the gate, bows down to him in reverence when he has collected an armed band strong enough to carry his point, and even accepts his point as fixed and final;—opposing however in the old manner, and with the old intensity, the next solitary thinker who enters and advocates a further advance.

In the crowded market place, I one day saw a white-haired prophet who had had much experience of the pillory in his day, but who by this time had conquered the right of open speech. Even then he denounced Vanity Fair and its rulers in no measured terms. He spoke with withering con-

tempt of the traffic and the shares, of the selfishness and the stupidity of all the people about him, from the Philistine in his gig to the lazy tramp, or the dangerous rough lounging by the road side, who would rather beg or steal than do honest noble work. His words pierced the ears of all who had ears to hear, but the main body of the offenders listened to him with unconcern, or did not listen to him at all.

I one day saw Quaester, Gracious, Sanitas, Chartus, Purgator and Temperans, standing intently listening to his burning words, which seemed to them as goads to stir them up to more zeal and more activity than before. They looked to him to bid them in his own prophetic language, "God speed;" but he scorned all their aims and all their methods. What could pure justice, benevolence, health, chastity, temperance, political rights, as preached by one man or by many men, do for the salvation of the wicked troubled city of Vanity Fair, in which he groaned, being burdened? Although he could do nothing himself but speak, he looked on the speech of other men as idle and of no avail.

He waited for a strong man or for a mighty conqueror to come in great power, and sweep through Vanity Fair with the besom of destruc-

tion, and bring about in this unmistakable way a new reign of righteousness, in which the timid should lean on the valourous, and it should be the unextinguishable privilege of the foolish to be governed by the wise. Many such he had heard of in the times past who had entered with battering rams through the Gate of Reform, or oftener still, through the Gate of Revolution, both rustier on their hinges then than now; who had made the city resound with their deeds, and who had shaken the oppressors and the hypocrits out of their high seats of honour. But it was not until the victory was accomplished and the work was done that this venerable prophet could see aught a-doing. It seemed to me as if he could not recognize his own strong man at his work, and his indignant and prophetic "Woe unto Vanity Fair!" seemed to be without outcome on his own part, and without encouragement for the younger and more vigorous who were eager to carry on war against oppression and ignorance. Still he had done good service in his day; and though he would not acknowledge his own disciples, they all gratefully owned their obligations to him.

Perhaps Quaester offended him less than any of the others; for his aims were less definite than

theirs, and his zeal was not excessive in any direction. But Thorough, who of all the new blood that entered into Vanity Fair while I was watching it, was the most successful and the most popular—for his experiments and his speculations appeared to the inhabitants to bear on what they called practical life and not on spiritual, moral, or social matters—was to the old prophet the most obnoxious innovator of all the quacks who had ventured to prescribe for the body politic. What he called the "Gospel of dirt," stunk in his nostrils; and when he saw that Thorough drew to him the powerful and the weak, the thoughtful and the frivolous—that Sanitas, Purgator, and Chartus, and reformers of all descriptions counted their work more than half done if Thorough was their ally; he considered that his last days were worse than his first, and that after a long life spent in efforts towards the regeneration of the city, he would, when he crossed the impenetrable wall, leave it more deplorably in error than he found it.

It must have been indeed many years that I spent in watching these proceedings, and it certainly seemed to me as if the city was the better for even the one-sided efforts of so many faithful souls. When Quaester got

used to the din and the bustle, the eager competition and the reckless extravagance of those who were most prominent in Vanity Fair, his eyes were opened to recognize kindred souls at work, openly and secretly. The city was as it were honeycombed with mines which might in time bring down the high places of wickedness, and allow a better and fairer, and juster fabric of society to be reared on their ruins.

At first he could scarcely see anything governing the city but the three great powers which have from time immemorial held sway in it:—the World, the Flesh, and the Devil. They were never unfriendly or antagonistic to each other, but worked into each other's hands to the advantage of all, and exchanged subjects on occasion.

The World's chief administrators were Pride and Oppression and Ambition, reckless of whom it crushes in its upward march. War with blatant trumpet in front, carrying carnage and conflagration on his march, and leaving ruin, famine, and desolation behind, was perhaps the noisiest and the most imposing of the World's servant, but he had others gentle in appearance but perhaps quite as strong in Wealth and Influence.

Giant Pagan and his band presided over the

Kingdom of the Flesh; and there is no need to tell who his servants and ministers were. I recognized the meats and the drinks and the perfumes, the sights and sounds and tastes which had been offered to Quaester aforetime, spread out in all their tempting array to the dwellers in Vanity Fair.

Slander, Spite, Cruelty, and Revenge were the active agents of the Devil. But the World's ministers could use the Devil's agents to compass their own ends, and could make the ministers of the Flesh do their bidding too. Giant Pagan and those devoted to the pleasures of the Flesh, could be as cruel from selfishness and lack of consideration as the Devil himself, as we have already seen; and they admired and longed for the baubles and the treasures, and the power of the World, though they were too indolent and self-indulgent to make the necessary efforts to acquire them. The World indeed always demanded sacrifices of time, of pleasure, and of toil from its votaries, and laid down laws and regulations for their conduct, often hard and vexatious enough. The Devil, too, gave not the sweets of revenge and gratified spite for nothing; and the price had to be paid down beforehand. But the price exacted by the Flesh, though it was always paid and that in

full, followed after a longer or shorter period the indulgence of desire. In the palsied hand and the paralyzed will, in the ravages of disease and the horrors of delirium, could be seen the physical price exacted and paid; while the beggared purse, the tarnished reputation, and the lovely uncared-for old age, added still more to the bodily misery.

But in all these woful kingdoms, allegiance was exacted by their potentates in consideration of the enormous gratification which they offered to the egoistic or selfish part of human nature. A man's own importance, or pleasure, or repute, or safety—his retaliation for some injury real or imaginary, or vindication from some charge, or rescue from some danger, were in these three kingdoms of far more account than justice or generosity or mercy to the rest of the world. In Vanity Fair, nothing succeeds like success. Worship the rising sun! Forget the sun which has set! Hail the conqueror! Woe to the vanquished! This worship of success led to a sort of moral code which was especially repugnant to Quæster—that material success was its own justification, both as to the means by which it was won, and as to the manner in which it was enjoyed.

The low gambling shops were rightly enough

called "hells;" but in a higher sphere men talked of their debts of honour. The wretched boozing dens of Beer Street and Gin Lane had representatives in fine streets or palace-like buildings, where richer men might drink to excess. Poor pawnshops, where the reckless and the destitute pledged their scanty possessions at ruinous rates of interest, had first cousins of an outwardly decent character in better localities. While low bullies, and burglars, and pickpockets made a precarious living with violence and cunning fingers, and were in the end generally severely punished by a law which showed little mercy to the poorer classes of criminals, gigantic swindlers, singly or in bands, appeared to rob whole communities unchecked and unpunished. While Meretrix stood nightly under the gas with painted cheeks and tawdry finery, Hetaira, richly dressed, rolled in a luxurious carriage in the parks, or had an elegant establishment in a pretty suburb of the city.

Still, the longer I watched my pilgrim in his life-work in this whirling, seething, vortex of Vanity Fair, the more I could see that he learned, marked, and inwardly digested. Though in the mass the whole of society seemed selfish and corrupt, individuals, when he came to know them, won

upon him. In spite of the sneers of the powerful, and the dissuasions of those who had either no hope, or believed in a different panacea for the evils of the place than Quaester's one of simple truth, justice, and sincerity, he saw profit of his labours. He grew stronger, too, through his conflict and his victory. He lost his limp altogether, and walked about swift and vigorous and helpful. All his own struggles with error and superstition aided him in his work; he was quick to see and keen to feel where others were blinded and misled. For in Vanity Fair Superstition had by no means lost power, and some kinds of religion could be in fashion there as well as other things. There Superstition won allegiance by putting form instead of substance; and the World, the Flesh, and the Devil winked at his pretensions, which did but little to shake their actual sovereignty.

It grieved Quaester to see that Gracious unconsciously strengthened the hands of Superstition by her life and her teaching; though the World, the Flesh, and the Devil had no part nor lot in her. To my spiritual sense there was a halo round the head of Quaester—not perhaps so effulgent as that round Gracious, but steady and constant; whereas that of the woman faded and disappeared in

the presence of intellectual difficulties. It was strangely touching to see the regard which these two felt for one another; that of Quaester towards Gracious exulted in as a strength, while that of Gracious towards Quaester was held up to her by her spiritual director as a temptation.

It could scarcely be said of her that she grew stronger by her work;—the sorrows and the sins amongst which she laboured oppressed her with an almost intolerable sympathy. At the same time she was so fearful to lose her early horror for the vice and the violence which she saw, that if use deadened her sensations, she repented in dust and ashes, and did penance for her sin. During any lull in her work, she ingeniously tormented herself, and questioned herself as to whether she succoured the poor and ministered to the sick because she loved to do it, or because it was the command of the Powers of the Beyond; for she believed that this last was the higher and the only pure motive of action. What she sought after was complete self-surrender,—that she might lose her human personality by absorption into what to her was Divine. Quaester seemed to bring to her some consciousness of the worth and value of her own individuality, and sometimes occasioned in her a feeling of

regret, which she chid as sinful, that she had not accepted and returned his love. But as Bonaface knew every thought of her heart, he kept her hard at work as her only safety, and as far as it lay in his power he endeavoured to keep her out of the path of the man who in his eyes was her most dangerous companion.

Still they met—and never without some exchange of confidence, some hint or suggestion that rested in the memory of both. On one occasion I watched them when they worked together for the rescue of a poor girl from the streets and haunts of Meretrix, where Gracious never feared to tread, and where even the vilest could not help owning the presence of a saint. The methods of the two were different. Gracious sought to produce humiliation and penitence, and to persuade the sinners to believe in the love of the Powers of the Beyond who had sent her to plead with them. Quaester tried to re-awaken self-respect and honest ambition by telling them that degraded as they were, he himself and all good men and women would take them by the hand, and help them in their upward struggle. Gracious had brought this young sinner to her feet by her prayers and her tears; and as the penitent kissed the symbol of endurance and forgiveness, she

smiled to Quaester, and “Another soul saved!” burst from her lips. Quaester essayed to raise the fallen one, with her hitherto misused capacities for good, as near to his own level as he could. The grief of the one, the faith of the other, touched two strings of human nature for good; and they next united in the task of providing a decent home and honest work for the lost one, who truly owed her new birth to both of them.

They had left their charge in trustworthy hands; and as their way lay together for some time they did not part. Their hearts were full, but they were silent for a space. Then Gracious turned to the enigma which puzzled her more and more in her association with Quaester,—

“How is it that we who are so unlike in our aims are so alike in our work? How is it that you will do as much and endure as much for time as I will do for eternity? Ah, my friend! your zeal chides mine, which ought to be tenfold, when the results I have in view are infinitely greater. You are better than your creed. You cannot be far from the great heart of the Beyond when you show so much of His spirit in the Within. What reward do you expect for your labours and your sacrifices?”

“I think no more of reward than you do,” said

Quaester. "What reward do I need for walking in Light and Liberty, for having the privilege of serving my fellows, for making this city a little better and happier than it was when I came to it? Surely, Gracious, you tend the poor and the sinful because you love them, and not for any thought of reward either in the Within or in the Beyond?"

"True," answered Gracious, "no reward for myself; but it is because I wish to save them from the terrors of the Beyond, and make the dreaded Borderland to them the very gates of Paradise, that my work is to me so precious and so imperative. What have you to put in the place of that mighty motive?" and her tender eyes met his beseechingly.

"Only this, that what I see to do I must do it now, and I must do it with all my might. This is the only time in which I am sure of any opportunity of service to these who are now my fellows. To-morrow I may be summoned to the Borderland, and see them and you no more."

"It is the same with me," said Gracious. "I always feel when I plead (feebly, alas! but sincerely), with you, that this may be my last opportunity."

"But you hope to continue service in the

Beyond and in the eternal Hereafter. What omissions you have made may there be filled up; the mistakes you have made, rectified in a region of greater light, where you have greater strength given to you. It is not a future of inaction, but one of service, you long for and anticipate."

"I know not," said Gracious. "Neither the sacred records nor the sacred traditions are definite on the subject; but I hope and pray that He who calls me to the Beyond, may use me for His own great and good purposes, and that I may, as you say, make up for my deficiencies to you and to others. But if I could, like you, see no more before me in the day's work than the day given, I should flag and fail. Oh, my friend and brother! if the summons came to-night, as you say, are you ready?"

"Ready, yes," answered Quaester, firmly.

"Are you willing and eager to go as I am, to that region where there will be no more pain to trouble our bodies, or sin to vex our souls?"

"No, I am not eager to go. My work is not done," said Quaester.

"Nor mine," said Gracious; "but oh! I sometimes long for the wings of a dove, that I may fly away and be at rest."

"Perhaps a world where there is no sin and no

sorrow and no mistakes, would not be really so good a sphere for us as this," said Quaester, thoughtfully. "Where would be your mission of service, where would be my hopes of progress?"

"Of course there must be progress," said Gracious, eagerly.

"Progress without effort, without difficulty, without self-sacrifice," said Quaester, as if speaking to himself. "As finite beings all we learn, all we accomplish costs us something."

"This is being altogether too metaphysical," said Gracious. "You speculate on an utterly different condition of existence. I take the assertion of my spiritual guides that there will be bliss, there will be sinlessness, and there will be progress, even after the purifying fires have purged away the mortal taint which the best of us take with us from the Within. But I look beyond these with infinite longing for the safety and the repose of the Higher Beyond, for a fuller insight into Divine things, and a full satisfaction in Divine love. You despise these longings as womanish. Thorough calls them hysterical. To me they are the best and the noblest aspirations of my soul."

"Nay," said Quaester, "I do not despise them, I rather envy them."

"Why not share them then," said Gracious,

eagerly. "Read, meditate, pray, and the light will shine into your soul—the blessed light of faith."

"My sister," answered Quaester, "one cannot have all the things which one envies. Belief is a thing which we cannot command at will; it is founded on evidence. If I could believe because I wished to do so, of what value would that belief be?"

"May I ask one question?" said Gracious, after a long, sad pause. "Why make an open profession of your want of faith? Thorough boasts of you as holding entirely with him, and you are so different."

"Intellectually, I certainly hold with Thorough. Spiritually, I believe, I am more akin to you," said Quaester.

"Can there be spiritual life without faith in the Beyond?" said Gracious, doubtfully.

"Surely a matter of opinion does not make one soul differ so much from another as that," said Quaester. "If you have a soul so have I. Its immortality, I mean its conscious immortality, does not affect its spiritual nature."

"Opinion?" sighed Gracious. "But Thorough strengthens his hands by quoting you as his disciple, and all your noble life as the fruit of the scepticism he sows broadcast all over the Within. Could you not disguise your opinions, and save

weaker souls from the license you yourself disdain to take?"

"Truth is not in my power, Gracious, though I reach forward ever in search of it; but sincerity is. Woe is me if I pretend to be what I am not, or to believe what I feel to be baseless!"

"Baseless!" said Gracious, with enthusiasm, "when it is fast rooted in the intuitions of all the purest and noblest souls who have lived since history left any chronicle. Preached by sages and prophets, testified to by triumphant martyrs, the guiding principle of all life, the only strength of the departing soul, the only consolation of the bereaved;—it seems to me altogether strange and monstrous that this new-fangled reasoning on things altogether material should be applied to spiritual intuitions. But I pray for you, Quaester, I pray for you. You may laugh at my prayers as vain and idle. I care not. I shall continue to pray for you while I breathe this inner air, and in the outer air of the Beyond, I shall pray for you with double power."

"I do not laugh at your prayers, Gracious, I thank you for them."

"Ah, but you think they do no good. They amuse me and cannot hurt you. That is what you say to yourself."

"If I could pray, Gracious," said Quaester, solemnly, "I would pray for you, that you might be happier, more at peace with yourself and with the world."

"More at peace with my weak faltering self and with a world that lieth in wickedness! That is scarcely the prayer of one whose watchword is progress. But I am really happier than you are in the Divine hopes which support and cheer me. With the world I am at war as you are."

"Scarcely as I am. I want the wiser and better part of the world to assert itself, to put forth all its strength to redress the wrongs, to amend the evils under which the whole community groans. I want the better part of each man and woman to fight against, and to conquer, the worse part; and I believe that this conquest is possible, as you saw by what I said to one poor waif this very night. I look for no miracle coming from outside to transpose evil lives to good. I trust not in the motives held out in the Beyond, eloquently as you bring them forward; for these have been tried with but little effect ever since we have had any records of human history. I want to make the most and the best of this life Within for all of us—the only life that I can see, the only life that I am sure that I can work in.

If there is another world Beyond, we shall be none the worse for the efforts we have made for the amelioration of this. If we neglect to do this and there is no other conscious existence, we have missed the substance in chasing the shadow."

"That is as hard as if Thorough himself had said it," said Gracious.

"There are harder things than these said by your apostles of the Beyond. For example, that the Powers there have put our race into circumstances of temptation without giving them strength to resist, and will torment them eternally for what was inevitable."

"I say no such thing," said Gracious.

"But it is the unspoken faith in such things that stimulates your zeal, and the absence of which causes mine to lack so sadly. If there ever was any one better than her creed, it is you, and such as you."

Gracious was silent in grieved displeasure.

"Forgive me," said Quaester; "when I am with you I am apt to forget these old bitter controversies, and to see myself in the sense that we have so much in common. As for the Beyond, I neither affirm nor deny it, but I do not know."

Gracious raised her eyes, and I could see by the light of a street lamp that there were tears

in them. "Look! Quaester," said she, "at the steadfast stars above us. Thorough tells us, and in these matters I believe he is perfectly right, that some of these are so far away that the light which meets our gaze to-night has taken three thousand years to reach us, and that at the almost inconceivable velocity with which light treads through space. Suppose that these stars appeared and disappeared as children are born to us here, and as we die and are seen no more when we cross the encircling Wall; would not that appear a strange universe in which such precious things were made and extinguished without law or sequence? But we know that a human soul, such as yours or mine, is the most precious thing in the universe, partaking of the Divine nature in intellect and affection. Such a soul must be dear to its Creator, and what He loves He must desire to keep alive that He may continue to love it. Our poor human loves last long beyond the departure of their object across the Borderland to the unseen and silent Beyond. As the poet sings—

'The sun is but a spark of fire,
A transient meteor in the sky.
The soul, immortal as its Sire,
Can never die.'

"I suppose it cannot," said Quaester. "If

matter be indestructible, so must spirit be. It must return to Him who gave it."

The light on the face of Gracious was angelic to behold; I could it see through the darkness. The halo round the two heads met and converged in a strange glory. "I knew it," said she, with rapture. "I knew you were not far from God when your fellow-men and women were so near and so dear to you."

"I am as near to God as I can reach," said Quaester.

"You feel after Him, then?" said Gracious.

"Those who desire to worship the Creator must worship Him through the created," said Quaester.

"Nay, that were idolatry," said Gracious.

"Idolatry, which those who think they are far from my errors, practice habitually. If I indulge my highest conceptions of human perfection as the nearest approach to the Divine, surely your idea of the Divine is also with parts and passions like those of men: he is angry or he is loving, he punishes, he forgives; he is avenging, or he is long-suffering; he is jealous for his own honour, he is partial to his own favourites. Surely there is a marvellously human representation of what you consider to be ineffable and infinite."

"Nay, you understand not these things," said

Gracious. "I like not your speech when it flows in this direction. Being spiritually blind, you cannot tell the true colours of the life of faith. But, Quaester," and she again looked up to the star she had pointed out to him before, "if that star were to be suddenly extinguished, it would really be no greater loss than your ceasing to be—absolutely ceasing to be, and leaving no monument."

"Only like the star and like you, Gracious, I might leave this monument—

'While she lived, she shone.'

What better record could we leave behind?"

"Oh, my friend! you are not far from the true light," said Gracious. "I must now say farewell, for my rules are to be within ere the bell rings for prayers." And they parted till their next conference for the further help of the city waif, their spiritual child.

Audax was partly mistaken when he said that in Vanity Fair he would not hear anything of what he called that stuff about the Beyond. Certainly in that walk in life in which he sought for wealth and influence, it was completely ignored; but, as I have said before, Vanity Fair is not to be taken all in a lump, and its pursuits and its desires are

as various as human nature itself. Quæster not only found enthusiasts and reformers who might have leavened its hard materialism, by the force of their grand ideas; but he discovered that even among many of its oldest inhabitants, there was a certain curiosity about the Borderland and the Beyond. Many, too, who had thrown off the bondage in which the priests of Superstition had held them, were not yet quite prepared to abandon as non-existent, or unknowable, the mysteries of the Unseen. In Vanity Fair, the strong high wall that separated the Within from the Without, was as plainly to be seen by those who looked for it as in the City of Superstition itself, and whether looked for or not, from the bustle of 'Change, from the pomps of power, from the toys of fashion, as well as from the homes of want and vice, the summons drew daily their busiest and gayest votaries; and it was but natural that many should speculate on the fate of those who were thus snatched away. Led by curiosity, first one or two and then more numerous bands gathered together to some point in the inner side of the great wall, and tried to question the friends who had departed by old methods, or by new modifications of such methods. And many averred that they received answers from those on

the other side of the wall, showing new knowledge, or, at any rate, strange insight into the minds of their questioners, quite unaccountable by any ordinary processes of thought. These answers were not delivered in articulate speech, even to the believing ear, as the traditions of old-time visions and revelations represented tidings from the Beyond as coming, but in faint taps on the other side of the wall, which were interrupted after some conventional manner, supposed to be understood both Within and Without. This was undoubtedly a tedious and inadequate method of communication, compared to the ordinary converse amongst those who were Within, and it was aided by neither look nor gesture; nevertheless, these messages were eagerly received and accounted as absolute truth by many of the curious, the mystical and the bereaved.

The bands who clustered together near the wall always needed what they called a Medium to evoke the answers from the spirit-friends or acquaintances on the other side; and this medium was not by any means the most saintly, or wise, or healthy person in the city, but a young man, or more frequently a young woman, physically weak and mentally excitable. The spirits thus summoned told their eager friends vaguely that

they were happy, and that they remembered with affection those whom they had left. They threw no light on the duties of the Beyond, or on the character of its enjoyments; but yet those who received these faint assurances of life and love from the outer world, held them forth as giving sufficient consolation to the bereaved, and sufficient courage for the departing soul. Sometimes, indeed, there were said to be stronger manifestations than these taps, and the credulous averred that spirit hands, faintly visible and feebly tangible, reached through from the solid wall, touched the hands of their friends, and played softly on musical instruments as diaphanous as themselves. Invisible hands were also supposed to guide pens in the writing of words of consolation and wisdom; but to all but the devotees, who accepted the revelations as something beyond criticism, the communications appeared to be so puerile and foolish that the future existence thus revealed seemed in no way desirable. Far from having learned anything or made any advance under new conditions, the spirits appeared to have forgotten much, if not all, that they knew when Within. The most masterful spirits of the past, the kings of science, art, and literature, appeared to be at the beck and call of the foolishlest of their

acquaintances in the Within, or even of those who knew them only by their name and their works; and when summoned they answered idle questions in the most childish and ignorant manner.

Most of the religious organizations opposed these things to the death as blasphemous and profane. The last thing that Metus did in his life was to enter a solemn protest against them, which he considered unanswerable, built up from the Sacred Writings, and then, full of years and honours and strong in faith, he was summoned to the Borderland. He had time to send for Quæster and Gracious, that they might see how triumphantly a true believer could depart. He had all his lifetime avoided Vanity Fair, but this terrible delusion brought him there to fight his last battle for truth. He was succeeded in the City of Superstition by one holding an easier doctrine, who was not unfrequently to be seen in Vanity Fair. He had once made a pilgrimage as far as the Wicket Gate of Doubt, and had taken a pretty wide circuit, even looking in at the Interpreter's House, where he learned a milder way of Interpreting the Sacred Writings, and then he returned to the City of Superstition. He was half-brother to Compromise, and though

some of the older members of the flock considered him dangerously latitudinarian, he pleased the young and the middle-aged very much. The plain church was made more beautiful to the eye, and the services more pleasing to the ear; and many wondered why Quaester was not attracted by his liberality and his fairness. My pilgrim, however, had gone beyond all compromise of this kind, though perhaps at an earlier stage of his progress he might have been retained by such means. But the new pastor was as unbending as Metus himself in his opposition to the wall-rappings and the spirit hands.

Novelty and Talkative, to whom she was married, were quite carried away by these wonders; but they appeared to Gracious to be impious delusions. The scientific, such as Thorough and his disciple Savan, interpreted the phenomena, when they were not frauds, by the laws of reflex action, and conscious or unconscious delusion.

Many, indeed, held that though no light could be obtained through them from the Beyond, there must be some little intercommunication between the devotees themselves and the medium which put the latter in possession of their secrets, and that some unknown and obscure laws of mind

might be discovered through this agency. As for Quaester, though he could not account for many of the tales he heard on good authority, he was perfectly certain that it was not the departed spirits who spoke out of the Beyond by means of taps and other communications, and he himself cared not for such a future existence as they pretended to reveal. In all ages in this vast region of the Within, hope, fear, and curiosity had inspired, had listened to, and had believed tales of wonder of this kind. By some the oldest tales were persistently clung to, while the new ones were scouted as absurd or blasphemous; and others denied the ancient legends, and accepted as absolute truth the modern revelations.

Though there were many who professed to make a business of summoning and questioning the departed, and holding communion through the dividing wall, they did not attempt to work any beneficent miracle in attestation of their authority. Useless miracles, such as the moving of solid bodies without apparent hands, and even the floating in the air of some of the votaries were firmly believed in by many; but the spirits could not heal the sick, or give sight to the blind, or feed the hungry, as was reported in the older narratives. And the broad light of day, as well

as the presence of the incredulous, discouraged the manifestations. When Quaester went with Thorough and his disciple Savan to a *séance*, he heard and saw nothing. When he went by himself, he could not follow the raps, and in the dim light affected by those who stood in a semi-circle close to the particular point of the dividing wall from which they expected the spirits, he could not be certain that one or other of the believers did not unconsciously give the signals. In many cases, money was asked for admission to a *séance*; and in Vanity Fair, where all things are bought and sold, and where all the arts of delusion and all the machinery of illusion are carried to their highest points, who could tell what modicum of truth would remain if the facts were thoroughly sifted? In the Interpreter's House, where the most sincere and competent men had used the most perfect instruments, no response had ever been given to any inquiry or searching experiment as to the Beyond. The followers of Pope denounced these experiments as impious, the followers of Pagan laughed at them as childish, while those who had been true pilgrims, like Quaester, held their revelations to be unproved. But a large number both inside and outside of Vanity Fair believed in their authen-

ticity, and fancied that life would not be worth living if they lost their faith in the spirits; and in the dim light, the credulous atmosphere, and the sympathetic companionship they built up a whole literature in which no one but believers could see any merit.

To Quaester it seemed no advance, but distinctly a retrogression, to leave the ordinary life, the honest earning of his daily bread, the articulate speech, the helpful activity, and the inspiring search for truth, to stand outside of the great wall, and—so far as the revelations showed—to be inactive till some teasing friend or curious stranger summoned him by name to give feeble and inadequate response to idle questions. Compared with such work as he and Gracious and Sanitas and Thorough did, such an existence was paltry and servile. "Let me return to Thee, O thou Unknown," said he from his soul, "and be lost in Thine Infinitude, rather than drag out so poor a separate existence!"

But the time came at last when it behoved Quaester to leave Vanity Fair, and to proceed on the remainder of his appointed way. He went with the more regret because he must leave Gracious behind; but he had other companionship for a part of the journey, that of Savan, who

had stood beside him when he was in the pillory, not mocking but really sympathizing with his unpopular views, and after a fashion respecting his courage and endurance, but wondering how any sane man could now-a-days put himself in such a woful and absurd position. Martyrdom in all its shapes was, to Savan's mind, a very unnecessary duty. If people are not prepared to receive the truth to-day, they may be better disposed to-morrow. The world waited thousands of years before the truths of astronomy were discovered and accepted, and there was no need to go to the dungeon or the stake to hurry matters. Indeed the teaching of matters purely scientific had lately been very successful without martyrdoms.

As he walked with Quaester, they had pleasant and profitable talk. Though he was no enthusiast he was a just and honourable man, and his recent researches into the manifestations of the rappers had been full of interest. As they walked, they overtook one who was walking in a leisurely way to his country-house a little out of Vanity Fair. He, too, he said, was bound eventually for the Home of Truth, but his time had not yet come. He had not yet received marching orders, but he knew that he would be very well received, for he

was one who had made truth more winning in appearance and in language than could have been thought possible.

"Our people back there," and he pointed in the direction of Vanity Fair, "are not very receptive to truth naked and unadorned. I think I recollect seeing you," addressing Quaester, "receiving sorry treatment in a certain pillory; that was a great hindrance to your usefulness, and a discredit to truth itself. I hold rather with our friend Savan, and do not rush blindfold against a rusty gate. The Gate of Reform wants to have its hinges lubricated by the oil of persuasion. If you want the pill swallowed, you must sugar-coat it. If you want the strong meat to nourish and not to choke your patient, you must dilute it, nay sometimes you must counteract its effects by an antidote."

Savan recognized the man as a shallow pretender, who stole the ideas of greater men, and made a hash of them with his own notions, which he called popularizing truth; and he resented being claimed as a brother and a coadjutor. He could hardly be civil to the man, but Quaester spoke courteously, as follows:—

"It seems to me as if I have known you before I came on pilgrimage. What part of our old city and territory of Superstition did you come from?"

"My name is Simulation," answered the stranger, who was much better-looking at a distance than close at hand; "and I lived to the north of the city looking towards the region which is called Indifference, in the Valley of Appearances. Surely you came from the same neighbourhood?" he continued, addressing himself to Savan.

"Not very far off," answered Savan; "on the hill-side where the shadows do not fall so deceptively as they do in the valley. My life-business has been to separate the shadow from the substance of what I call not Appearances, but Phenomena."

"It is all the same in the Greek," answered Simulation, with a laugh. "In a world such as we have Within, the shadow is an inseparable quality—is, in fact, a part of the substance."

"Nay, the shadow depends altogether on the position of the light with regard to it, and the point of view of the gazer," said Savan. "It varies in extent and in intensity as the sun or the moon or any artificial light you may use strikes it, whereas the substance remains the same. The desideratum is to strip off all accidental appendages of this kind, and to abide by realities and constants."

"This would deprive truth of much of its

grace," said Simulation. "The stronger the light, the deeper the shadow; the more obliquely the light falls, the vaster is the shadow. It is not always noon, nor would I wish it to be. I delighted in the long morning shadows of my youth, and hope to delight also in the equally long and graceful shadows which come with old age. I do not like the fierce vertical light which you affect."

"The hazier the better for you, no doubt," said Savan, with some contempt in his tone.

"Well, I popularize what all your efforts cannot make acceptable to the vulgar crowd, or even to the mob of gentlemen and ladies who like to think with ease. I throw some lightness and brightness into what in its abstract form is absolutely distasteful. You ought to be very grateful to me."

"Grateful!" said Savan. "There is nothing so damaging to pure science as the feeble, confused, grandiloquent mumbling about it which some people indulge in. I can wait till the world is ready for the truth more patiently than our friend Quaester. Either to me, or to those who come after me, who will be wiser and better than I am, the great heart of the world must open at last. If I brave no pillory, I never lose faith in the ultimate triumph of truth. I leave you

with him as you cannot walk at my pace, and I cannot moderate more to suit you."

So Savan walked away with great strides, and Quaester would have followed him, but Simulation held him back by the wrist, saying he would explain to him his admirable method. Our pilgrim rarely shook off rudely those from whom he differed, for either the stranger learned from him, or he learned from the stranger; therefore, though he was in no way attracted towards Simulation, he was disposed to hear what he had to say.

He had been a popular lecturer, and could always keep his audience pleased with him and with themselves. His wife and family as well as himself were well known in Vanity Fair. The wife wrote on History and especially on Biography, and kept all unpleasant stories out of both, so that her books were eagerly recommended to the young as well as agreeable to the relatives and the descendants of the subjects of her works. The eldest son was a portrait painter, who caught every sitter at his best, and improved upon that, though all the likenesses had the radical fault of self-complacency which he drew from himself. The second son was a composer of light melodies set to ephemeral words. The third son was a poet

well known and admired by Pagan and his court; his decorous father objected to the style and subject, but hoped he would outlive his youthful exuberance. Two daughters were married to rising men in Vanity Fair, and two were single and lived at home.

This family always desired to stand well with all sorts and conditions of men, and Quaester was astonished at the attention they paid to one so obscure as himself. But his fame, which was greater than he knew, had preceded him; and the wife of Simulation thought he would by-and-by be a good subject for a biography, while to the poet and painter he had some interest as a man of note. The family prided themselves on never making any enemies, but always winning golden opinions. Simulation boasted that he was superior to the current talk of Vanity Fair; but his heart was in it, and his feet daily carried him thither, and all the household was steeped to the bone in its spirit.

When the wife of Simulation, whose name was Smoothness, asked Quaester some particulars about his pilgrimage, and appeared interested in all the work he had done in Vanity Fair, he naturally thought she cared about the subject; whereas she only thought she might make use of

the information by-and-by. No idea that she was incapable of comprehending a nature so much greater and stronger than her own, entered her mind. She had written lives of great men and women before now, and had brought them as far as she could down to her own level. The house was a new and showy one, and the furniture and decorations fashionable though not substantial. Quaester slept very badly in the great chamber, which was more showy than comfortable, and he was not sorry to leave his entertainers in the morning and go forward on his way.

He went on in his pilgrimage somewhat sorry to leave the life and bustle of Vanity Fair, and his work in other hands. The conversation in the house of Simulation tended to depress him; there was so much of the language of truth without the reality; and yet it struck him that such maimed and dwarfed and distorted views of human life and human duty were those which the ordinary public were more eager to receive than the pure high ideal which had impressed itself on him. As he moved along a delicate plain called Ease, a strange sadness fell upon him. In the press and conflict of Vanity Fair he had borne him like a man, and so long as there was error or wrong to combat, or man, or woman, or beast to

help, the action kept him not only faithful but hopeful.

And suddenly, as he came to the end of the Plain of Ease, he came upon a rough hard road, and his feet were tender, and his limbs ached with the strain of travel. He saw at one side, just over a stile, a shady tree, under which he might rest, and he lay down, and hoped to lose his sad thoughts in sleep.

It was not broad day when he awoke; dawn was slowly creeping over the east, enough to see by, but not to see clearly. He was aroused by a horrible noise in his ears, and he saw bending over him, between him and the place where the sun might be expected to rise, a great and terrible giant. Quaester looked into his eyes, and there needed no one to tell that his name was Despair. Oh! to have borne up so long and bravely under so many trials and difficulties, and to fall into these terrible hands at last. They laid hold on him as if he had been an infant, and he followed where Despair led, and that was to his huge, dark, strong Castle of Pessimism. Into one of his wretched dungeons he dragged Quaester, and then left him alone, turning the key on the outside with a harsh grating noise. He spoke not a word, but his look and his touch seemed

to paralyze our pilgrim. When Despair had departed, Quaester thought he might have remonstrated, but words had failed him. It was indeed a woful den in which he was immured, lighted dimly by one high narrow window, with a deep ledge, which looked not on the free space round the castle, but into the central court-yard. Quaester instinctively struggled for the light, and he could by standing up get his face on a level with the window. But there was nothing to be seen except blind men stumbling over great stones and sharp instruments, and over each other; and as they rose up bruised and bleeding, they spoke angrily against their companions in misfortune, blaming them as the cause of their disasters, and cursing themselves and each other. Into this court-yard there entered but little of the blessed light of day. It was small, and the surrounding walls were so high and massive that only at noon-tide could the sun pour down its light and heat. But in the dim light Quaester could see that the damp cold ground was strewed with the bones of those whom Despair had captured and devoured. There were some, not blind but crippled, who hobbled in the narrow space with groans and sighs; there were others who made melancholy songs of the miseries of this life, and the utter

vanity of all its pleasures, saying that pain and grief were the only realities, that friendship was false, that love was hollow, that patriotism was a sham, that virtue was an empty name, and that death was better than life. It was strange that Quaester should see so many things distinctly in the dim light, and that he should be able to hear every word of their melancholy strains, as if he was not separated by thick walls and a closed window; but his senses seemed now abnormally quickened to see and to hear everything that would disquiet and discourage him, and to supply the gaps from his own excited imagination.

In particular, there was one hymn in praise of Despair that seemed to burn itself into his soul. It was sweet in sound, with balanced periods and poetic imagery. It had scarcely ended when he found himself engaged in trying to count, with another of the court-yard prisoners, the stones which built up the Castle of Pessimism, each stone cemented to the other with the blood of a human victim. Then he turned to listen to the reasonings of one calling himself a philosopher, who analyzed all human pleasures and all human virtues, bringing the former to the level of a brute's appetite, and the latter almost to the results of a devil's selfishness. "Vanity of

vanities! all is vanity and vexation of spirit!" was the old refrain played on various instruments by these woful fellow-prisoners, from whom Quaester felt himself separated for all purposes of help and comfort, but by whose words and actions he felt himself to be profoundly affected.

His own lot was comparatively tolerable. He had room to turn in, a pallet to rest on, bread and water for his bodily sustenance, and no gnawing remorse at his heart. The breastplate of righteousness still lay in its old place;—why should he tremble now, when all the terrors of the Valley of the Shadow of Death had found him courageous? But he could not shut out the great wail of the other prisoners from his ears. From this melancholy court-yard, from the corridors, and from all directions sounds of misery and of despair pierced through closed windows and thick walls, and through the long day; and the still longer night that followed, the great burden of the world seemed all to press upon him as it had never done before. Surely all his pilgrimage was a delusion. How little he had done of all that he had set himself to do, and how badly he had done that little! What was one here and one there whom he had been able to help and cheer, compared to the great mass of misery which he could

not reach. And if the knowledge of truth only leads to the knowledge of misery, and all intellectual progress only increases the capacity for suffering, 'twere better perhaps to sit under the hazy clouds of Superstition, or to idle time away in the artificial lights of Vanity Fair, than to stand in the cold clear atmosphere of Truth, where we see how poor, how weak, how distorted our best and bravest really are.

In the morning, Giant Despair himself came with the prisoner's dole of bread and water; but his chief errand was to ask Quaester why he did not make away with himself.

"No one ever escapes from my dungeons," said he; "and after I have kept you till I find for your cell a new tenant trespassing as you did on my domains, I shall put out your eyes, and turn you into the court-yard to amuse yourself with the others. Sooner or later they all put an end to their miseries. Life is a long torture everywhere, but people learn that fact more thoroughly in my academy. There is every opportunity here to go at once to the Borderland; the encircling wall lies just at the back of my castle, and there is easy access to it from the courtyard, into which I shall introduce you whenever you please. The saying is 'from Despair to Death,' and both the

foolishest and the wisest of my prisoners are not long in seeking the way."

"Whom do you account foolish, and whom do you account wise?" said Quaester, looking less at the Giant than at a poor prisoner whom he carried in one hand, and whom he rapped occasionally with the huge key he held in the other, as if to give emphasis to his arguments.

"The foolish are those who look for something better Beyond, and who, out of patience with the miseries of this Within, fancy that there may be happiness Beyond. The wise are like our friend here, who is quite sure there is nothing Beyond. That is your case, too, Quaester. The beginning and the end of your quest is to get rid of all superstitious terrors of the Beyond."

"Nay," said Quaester, "I am not at all sure that there is nothing Beyond, but I fear nothing."

"Then there is nothing to prevent you from going to discover what it is," said Despair.

"Nay, so long as I am Within, there are hopes of better things."

"Not here; you are too much within for that," laughed the Giant, with another stroke of the key on the face of his pale, emaciated prisoner. "Speak, Negatio, tell our brave pilgrim your experience."

The captive turned his haggard eyes upon Quaester, and said, with difficulty, "Let Despair speak."

"Have you been a pilgrim like me?" asked Quaester, eagerly. "Did you flee from the superstitious fear that kills, and go through the Wicket Gate of Doubt, learn from the Interpreter, and the maidens of the Palace Beautiful, escape the snares of Pope and Pagan, and despise the gewgaws of Vanity Fair, only to be caught in this horrible fashion, and immured in the Castle of Pessimism?"

"He had fairer hopes than you had," said Despair; for the man himself was silent, though he looked as if he fain would speak. "He had rank and wealth and genius, and yet he says that death is better than life. He walked into this castle of his own free-will; I ensnared him not. If life is thus intolerable to him, what must it be to others?"

"Speak for yourself, man!" said Quaester, scanning still more earnestly the countenance of the man, and trying if he could see any traces of his earlier and better life in it. He had, indeed, heard Negatio's name, and some of his fame, though he had never been a denizen of the City of Superstition, but had lived quite out of the town

in the direction of the north, looking towards the region of Indifference. "You used to be eloquent in old times; have you lost your tongue?"

"This comes of disuse," said Giant Despair; "he has now been long in solitary confinement, and has had none to speak to. These walls are not social; they are only used to echo sighs and groans, and now, when I kindly give our friend Negatio an opportunity for speech, he does not seem to appreciate it. Sit up, man, and let us see how handsome you are!" And so saying, Despair flung the poor wretch on to the window-ledge with such violence that he writhed in agony.

Despair had probably a double object by this action—to darken the little light by the wretched figure perched perilously on the narrow ledge, as well as to show what a mere play-thing the captive was in his hand; but as he did it, Quaester's watchful and indignant eyes noted that there was a loose stone just where the forlorn creature sat. With a quick movement, he seized this missile with both hands, and dashed it with all his might at the forehead of the giant, who fell in an instant prone to the ground with a mighty crash. Quaester avoided the falling body, which would have crushed him, and crying out, "Now, my

friend, for liberty!" he lifted Negatio down, and took from the powerless hands of the giant his ponderous key.

"Know you how many are confined in this castle?" he asked of Negatio.

Negatio, for all answer, grasped the key, and dashed it against the narrow window from which he had been removed. "Look, look!" he said, and stopped short.

"Ah!" said Quaester, "there are not nearly so many in the court-yard as I supposed. The glass in this Castle of Pessimism cannot be a true one, but a multiplying one. Of blind and lame and miserable victims, there are not one-tenth part of what I seemed to see out of my cell."

"It was the same with mine," said Negatio.

"Few or many, let us set them all free," said Quaester; and opening the door of his cell, he went out, slowly followed by the delivered captive. It seemed as if one key opened all the doors. He soon moved out of the corridors to the great door into the court-yard, and standing upright, he called out with a loud voice:—"Which of you will stay here, when I can open the doors and gates and set you free? Giant Despair has fallen by my hand, and now lies in a death-like swoon, and cannot now pursue you."

"We must open for ourselves," was the reply, "or we cannot escape."

"Then push against the gates with all your might, while I turn the key in the wards," said Quaester, cheerily.

Strange to say, there were some in this Castle of Pessimism who were so in love with their captivity, or so thoroughly used to it, that they made no effort to escape, or to second the exertions which Quaester and those whom he aroused made to obtain liberty for all. Some clung to their cells, others kept to their monotonous exercise in the court-yard. Still there were many who pulled off bandages from their eyes, and discovered that they had not been really blinded, but only blindfolded, and that they could again rejoice in the light of day. And some of the cripples took heart, and walked forth, half astonished, and yet all together rejoiced to see the world once more before them. Perhaps of all the prisoners who were that day released from the power of Despair, Negatio was the saddest case. Sight and speech and power of movement had all been enfeebled by disuse, so that if it had not been for the help and guidance and cheerful talk of Quaester, he would not have ventured forth at all. At first, for a little way, the released prisoners

kept together, and followed where their deliverer led, and a strange band they formed. By far the most part of them had never been on pilgrimage at all, but had reached this Castle of Pessimism from other parts of the Within than the City of Superstition. Most of these had been all their lives denizens of Vanity Fair, and had fallen into the clutches of Despair when they had been disappointed in ambition, or sated with pleasure. And now that they were set free, they were eager to turn back to their old haunts to make a new start in life, though a few of them felt that their safety lay in the direction of the City of Superstition, which offered something in the Beyond to make up for their previous miseries, and also laid down a hard and fast rule of life which they could not rest in and follow. Some turned towards the north, some towards the south, and but few took the eastward course with Quaester; and of these there was none who could keep up his pace, so they entreated to be left behind to follow as they felt able. Negatio alone essayed to move on. He had been a pilgrim, though a somewhat erratic and inconsistent one. He felt more bound to his deliverer than the others, and he leaned heavily on Quaester, who was glad to aid him in this and other

ways. Quaester tried to induce him to tell his story, but it was not easy for him to speak. He preferred to listen to Quaester's experience, and appeared to derive strength and solace from the narrative, especially of what he had done in Vanity Fair. At nightfall, the two companions turned into a house built for the refreshment of pilgrims. In this house there was a fire, of which one would have thought that Negatio could never have enough. He stretched out his limbs, and spread his hands out before the cheerful blaze, and his features relaxed into something like a smile, and his tongue was loosened.

"Aha! this is good, this is good," said he. "I have been chilled to the bone by cold, by damp and by frost. Felt you ever anything like the bitter cold of Pessimism? You but dwelt in that dark chill dungeon for a day and a night. I cannot tell how many years I have withered in that gloomy abode. I took no account of time, but it must have been years since I left Vanity Fair in disgust, and, as the giant said truly, gave myself up voluntarily into his power."

"And wherefore did you not rebel?" asked Quaester. "Surely what I did, you might have done. Despair only wants to be confronted by a resolute man; the Castle of Pessimism, massive as

it appears to be to those who are shut up within it, is not so strongly built but that there are loose stones to be found all over it to hurl at its master. Did you not see many such as you passed through?"

"Yes, I did; but I had never seen them before. I knew not where my eyes had been, but all my senses appeared to have been paralyzed by the awful gloom and the foul atmosphere of my dungeon, and the woful sights seen from the cell-window magnified as we now know enormously, as well as the sounds of misery by the echoing walls. But I believe it was less for your own sake than for mine that you struck the blow at Despair."

"It was indeed your terrible condition that imperatively demanded some immediate effort, but I wished for freedom for myself too. No sane man can voluntarily accept of Despair as his lifelong doom."

"Then I must have been insane," said Negatio, "and indeed I have often thought so, and that was one of the saddest of my reflections. But seriously and soberly, tell me, is life worth living after all? With youth, and health, and fortune, and friends, I found it scarcely endurable. Now youth is gone, health is impaired, fortune is spent, friends are

estranged. Why do not I put an end to my misery and rush to the Borderland?"

"If you did not take this step when you were urged to it by Despair, you need not be so rash as to do it when you are counselled against it by a friend, who would fain take the place of those whom you fancy are estranged from you. I have heard of you in old times, and of your fair promise. Surely I have not rescued you for nought. There is something still for you to do."

"Is there?" said Negatio. "I fear that such hope would only lead to such disappointments as embittered my existence in the past. Hope seems dead within me!"

"When I dwelt in the City of Superstition and accepted the teachings there as authoritative," said Quaester, thoughtfully, "they used to tell me, as if out of the Sacred Books, that of all the graces, Faith, Hope, and Love, the last was the hardest of achievement, but this was because they got at it in such a round-about way. The series which they laid down for the soul to follow was, first—Faith in the Unknown; second—Hope from the Unknown; third—Love to the Unknown, from which alone could proceed right love to our fellows, all other supposed love being only disguised selfishness. But since I left that dimly

lighted region, in search of Truth, I find in my experience that the series is reversed. If I can reach Love to the Unknown at all, it must be through Love to those of my fellows whom I can see and serve. With me, too, I feel as if Faith and Hope were far harder of attainment than Love. I have Faith and Hope enough to walk by from day to day, but neither of them stretch into the infinite and the eternal as is the case with my dear friend Gracious, and with many others who cling to much that I have outgrown. To you, with this long experience of Pessimism, I suppose Hope will be the hardest of all the graces to achieve."

"Truly I think so," said Negatio. "They say that the Evil Spirits of the Beyond believe and tremble; and in a Within so much out of joint as ours is, that seems easier than believing and rejoicing. The wonder is not that the Unknown interferes sometimes between the tyrant and his victim, between the poor man and his oppressor, but that the Unknown interferes so little. That is, if one believes in a just and merciful Unknown at all, and if not, what a useful congeries of atoms we are. Hope! what hope is there for us?"

"It is possible for us to go through our pilgrimage cheerfully and usefully without the

kind of Hope which the theologians preach; but it is not possible for us to go through it at all without Love for our fellows. Society would fall to pieces without Love, and Love is the only healer of its wounds."

"My wounds are too deep and sore," said Negatio.

"My friend, we must find some work for you to do. You can warn summary travellers against Giant Despair better than I can do. Recall your old gifts, your old powers, and come to the help of humanity. Here beside this genial fire, and with human companionship, you have recovered the great gift of speech. Is not that a conquest to rejoice in? This gift must be consecrated to the highest uses. It must have been inaction that led you to Pessimism."

"And you—what led you thither? If you fell into the clutches of the giant when so far on your way on a true pilgrimage, who can escape?"

"My friend and brother," said Quaester, tenderly, "I think no one can escape altogether a sojourn in that home of darkness; but it need not be a long one if we keep our reason and our active energies. There are so many hard questions to answer, so many troubles of our own and of other people's which appear altogether inexplicable."

"Even to one who has sincerely sought after truth and justice as you have done," said Negatio, "the enigma of the Within seems hard."

"This dungeon of Pessimism which has taken the place of Giant Despair's old Doubting Castle is not altogether an evil sign of the times," said Quaester, thoughtfully. "The prisoners in the first, as you will gather from the records of ecclesiastical history, and some curious spiritual autobiographies written by escaped captives, were altogether occupied with fears as to personal salvation in the Beyond, and the superstitious terrors as to the Unknown as affecting themselves. Their escape from this strong castle was like the stepping-stones which Metus offered me as a means of extricating myself from the first slough I fell into. It was a promise in the Sacred Records on which I was to place my foot; it was a similar promise applied by the individual soul to its own needs that would open every door of Doubting Castle."

"A promise?" said Negatio, to whom this language appeared absolutely new.

"Yes, a promise by the Unknown that He would help and deliver all who trusted in Him. But the present castle owes its strength to other

causes. If I may speak for myself, what I felt there was the contrast between my ideal and my performance, the sense that poor as my work was, some of the best of it had been misunderstood and misapplied, and that when I had apparently succeeded best, a reaction had followed. Now our ideal ought always to be higher than our attainment, and no sensible man ought to blind himself to the shortcomings and drawbacks of his work. Even stronger than this, however, was the consciousness of the enormous mass of human ignorance, misery, and sin which neither I nor any other appeared to have touched. It was the wail from Without while I was powerless Within that was so heart-breaking. This is sad, my friend, but it is not ignoble."

"Perhaps you were allowed to fall into the power of Despair for a season in order to help me and others out of it," said Negatio.

"Not only so," said Quaester, "I hope to be the better for it myself. In our future intercourse, I shall be able to see a little with your eyes, to feel with your nerves, from having experienced a little of your sufferings."

"You say that Faith is the hardest grace for you to attain?" said Negatio, after a pause.

"I know not; Hope is very weak, but I have

always been cheerful since I turned my back on Superstition. I can always see my next step, and that is enough. As for the Beyond, I know not what may befall me there, but I believe all will be well. That is a sort of Faith, enough to walk by, and I would not exchange it for the certainties of Superstition. The promise of eternal glory is the reward offered for intellectual slavery."

As they talked by the fire, a man came out of the darkness into the shelter and light, and sat down beside our pilgrims. He looked reprovingly at Quaester, and shook his head gravely.

"How *can* life be endured without a firm faith in the Beyond?" said he.

Quaester and Negatio did not resent this interference as an impertinence. All along this pilgrimage I noted that people got to the heart of things at once; there were none of those conventional reserves which we see among the inhabitants of this ordinary world, where men and women may know each other for a lifetime without ever finding out each other's thoughts and feelings respecting spiritual things. All who were in earnest, whether they were wise or foolish, spoke to each other without ceremony, on the progress

they made, the halts they found necessary, the stumbling-blocks and the helps they encountered, and all were willing and eager to hear what might be said on all sides. The new comer, whose original name was Ignorance, but who had recently taken the name of Knowall, had not come to this resting-place by the straight path which Quaester had pursued, but had come along a narrow crooked green lane, called Error. He had been sent on this road by an earnest and zealous preacher who he believed had aroused him from a spiritual slumber almost as deep as death, so that he had been suddenly inwardly enlightened as to all things necessary to salvation. He continued his remonstrance in these words:—

“What you call Superstition, I call Saving Truth; and if, as you say, you have snatched this poor man from the dungeons of Giant Despair, it is all in vain, unless he will loose himself from your dangerous counsel and example.”

Negatio being weak, felt wretched by the advice, but did not reply.

Quaester looked Ignorance in the face firmly but mildly, and said, “It is for my friend to judge for himself. My grey hairs and experience gives me no right to command his course, but they give me a right to advise.”

The brisk youth who came from the country of Concert, lying a long way to the left of the Delectable Mountains, was very complacent at the thought that he was as far on his pilgrimage as those who had travelled far and long. He had been for some time in great concern as to his chances in the Beyond, and had wept, and as he said, wrestled in prayer with the Unknown until he had found acceptance. In his old, and what he called his unregenerate days, he had been frivolous and talkative as to the things which were Within, and now in his converted state, he was confident as to his perfect knowledge of all things in the Beyond. He was eager to tell unquestioned all about his short pilgrimage, and scoffed at the counsels and the staff of Experience and the lessons of the Interpreter's House; for by the instantaneous enlightenment revealed within him on his conversion he was all at once as wise and as good and as advanced as those who had been toiling for a lifetime in the straight path. All things, he said, had been added to him; all his past insufficiency and unworthiness, which he frankly acknowledged, and indeed rather boasted of, had been supplied from the unexhaustible fountain of spiritual gifts, purchased ages ago by the Lord of the Beyond; and received by faith

alone. He was now prepared to controvert all the arguments of the aged Quaester, and to prove to him how dangerous and how morally wicked his position was.

Ignorance had studied neither man nor books at any period of his life, but for the last few weeks he had made himself very familiar with the Sacred Writings, and could repeat many detached passages from them, which he applied indiscriminately to settle all questions as to human character, or to affairs in the Within, or in the Beyond. No suspicion of his incompetency entered his mind. Once enlisted in the corps, he considered that he took rank with the veterans.

Ignorance thought that Negatio, who let him run on without protest, was a likely convert, for his haggard eyes and mournful expression showed his dissatisfaction with old things. To him there might be, by means of this providential meeting, a revelation of the Unknown and the Infinite, of whom Ignorance spoke in these terms while he in his heart felt that he could know and measure Him. He indeed spoke of the Beyond as if he had himself lived in it, adding much to the little written on the subject in the Sacred Books, quoting dreams of his own and other people's,

and speaking with rapture of the time when full enjoyment of all that heart could desire should be entered on by the redeemed.

Negatio stretched himself before the fire, and listened as one in a dream. He had never in his life heard such confident assertions, such vehement appeals; and partly from indolence and partly from contempt, he let the man speak all that was in his heart, so that the inexperienced preacher thought he had made a profound impression, and in this happy frame of mind he fell asleep with thanksgiving to the Unknown who had chosen him to speak this seasonable word. When it was evident that the new comer was asleep, Negatio started up, and said eagerly,

"Speak, Quaester, speak, something like common sense, give me some practical counsel—touch my heart with your magical sympathy. Great Powers! an eternity in such company as that of this self-complacent idiot, would be even worse than life in the Within."

Quaester smiled at his friend's impatience. Even the release from the dungeons of Pessimism did not make Negatio tolerant to ignorance and presumption. He had no thread of experience or of recollection which could make him conceive the mental position of the self-sufficient Knowall.

Quaester endeavoured to explain the manner in which these sudden converts are led to overestimate their own importance both as to the danger they have escaped, the miraculous agency by which they are saved, and the eternity of glory that awaits them.

"After all," said Negatio, "is not an eternity, whether of bliss or woe, somewhat too much for limited creatures like ourselves to expect or even to desire? Let a man live in his children, in his great works or in his good deeds, but in mercy let him die himself. He," continued Negatio, pointing to the sleeping Ignorance, "fancies that the extinction of his miserable little soul would be so dire a catastrophe that all the powers of the Unknown were strained to prevent it, and that now all the hosts of the Beyond are rejoicing over the great event of a week or two ago—his conversion. Come, let us take short views, Quaester. Whither are we bound to-morrow? Look at your mirror by the light of the fire."

"We should reach the Delectable Mountains," said Quaester, after looking long and intently into his mirror by the flickering flames. "I saw a distant view of them from the hill near to the Palace Beautiful. You came that way, did you not?"

"Truly I did, and I recollect some of the lovely sights, but many of them have faded entirely from my memory. I certainly have no recollection of that distant view. Yet you, as you tell me, tarried far longer in the busy noisy haunts of Vanity Fair than I did. The later years I was languishing in the dungeons of Pessimism. Can I look in your mirror? Mine, which I received from the Interpreter, has not been consulted for so long, that either it has lost its power of indicating the way, or I have lost the power of seeing it."

Negatio looked long at Quaester's mirror, but he could see less in it than in his own. It was of no use except to the owner, as has been shown in the case of Gracious. Quaester recollected the good use that he had made of his mirror in his conflict with Superstition, and wondered if it would have had any effect on his later foe.

"I completely forgot all its uses when I was in captivity," said he.

"Ah, my friend!" said Negatio, "knowledge may wound or even slay Superstition, but it is not so with Pessimism. I think you found the only missile that could wound Despair, in hurling at his head the stone against which he had bruised me. I fancy, now that I look again at my own

mirror, that I can see a faint outline of mountains or it may be clouds. This looks as if I was recovering my powers a little under your good influence. And now for sleep—the sleep of the free, if not of the hopeful.”

And sleep was sweet to all three. Ignorance had visions of ineffable bliss, which he told on the morrow; the others enjoyed the deep dreamless sleep of the weary.

In the morning, they all started on their way, but they did not go together. The road indicated by the mirror of Quaester and Negatio, to the sunny slopes, the heaven-kissed peaks of the Delectable Mountains, where the shepherds would entertain them with country fare and good counsel, was, as had been the case with all their course heretofore, straight to the east, but Ignorance said that his direction given by the Sacred Books, as he understood them, was different, and lay much to the left; therefore the eastward route was utterly wrong. He entreated, even to tears, that they should go with him, and escape danger and destruction, but in vain. Our two pilgrims held on their way even more cheerfully than on the preceding day; for an invigorating wind blew from the Delectable Mountains, and Negatio breathed more freely in the open air and

glorious sunlight. Flowers too were abundant, the sight and perfume of which stirred old memories in the captive's heart, and caused tears to flow from his long dry eyes. Here and there were magnificent trees, whose grateful shade overhung the path they were bound to follow, and wild fruits of exquisite flavour were to be gathered by the way side. Negatio still felt it somewhat difficult to keep up with Quaester, but the zeal of his heart helped him on. His bent frame grew more upright, his eye keener, his voice firmer.

“I am surely on the right path and with the right comrade,” said he. “But, Quaester, who is this so strangely accompanied, who is coming to meet us full in face?”

“Ah!” said Quaester, “This is one Turnaway; and the damsels who lead him are well known in Vanity Fair. Their names are Sloth and Pleasure.”

Turnaway laughed at Quaester, and said he had better turn back too, and his gloomy friend with him.

“Pilgrimage is a game that is not worth the candle,” said he. “We are a great deal more likely to find truth if it is worth finding (which is very doubtful) in the world of practical life, of

which Vanity Fair is the heart and centre, than in wild-goose chases over the world of theory and Utopian schemes."

Negatio looked at the recreant, and could see no trace of the dungeons of Giant Despair on his careless brow or in his vacant smile. Turnaway went back more swiftly than he had gone forward, and he was soon out of sight and hearing with his two gay companions, and would not be long in reaching his goal.

"What becomes of those who turn back—of those who have had some light and some good impulses, but who cannot hold out to the end? Is there any punishment for them, do you think?" asked Negatio of Quaester.

"Only this, that there is loss," said Quaester, deliberately. "Every backward step is a lowering of our possibilities. Though I do not see, and scarcely believe in whips and scourges, material or mental, to punish the cowardly and the faithless, there is always less in the being after each failure in duty."

"But surely there must be mental scourges. Shame and remorse must fall upon the recreant who belies his previous noble career, and fulfils none of the promise of his youth. These I felt in my long sojourn in the dungeons of Despair,

alternating with disgust at the circumstances that had been too hard for me, and indignation at the coadjutors who had deserted me. For till I stood alone I did not despair."

"And while this feeling of shame tormented you there was hope, but such as Turnaway feel no shame. If he gives the matter another thought it will be that we are a pair of quixotic fools, and that he is the wise and practical man who objects to all extremes."

"Then if he is satisfied with himself—more satisfied with himself than you and I are—and in a different way Ignorance has the same self-complacency,—why should we hold them both so inferior to ourselves? For, low as I am, I do hold them inferior."

"Ah!" said Quaester, "when we are satisfied with ourselves we have begun to decline. Ever and ever higher before us stands our ideal, and any step towards it ought to make it expand or enlarge beyond our present attainment. As soon as our aspirations are no higher than our lives, we fall back. We ought not to encourage a morbid dissatisfaction with our best efforts which, as I said, leads sometimes to Pessimism, but we should not rest too complacently on them;—even our own happiness lies in this. Recollect, Negatio,

the poet sings, 'Things won are done, life's joy lies in the doing.'

"This is striking upon the old string," said Negatio. "This was what I seemed to forget since——" and he remained in thought.

"Progress," said Quaester, "is not made by the contented, nor by the discontented, but by the uncontented. Like the holy man so much quoted and misquoted by Ignorance, I would not think I have attained, or that I am already perfect; but this one thing I do—forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forward unto those things that are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of my high calling."

"But your prize is different from that which the holy man you speak of held in view."

"Something different is desirable to each man to what is wished for by another. People like Ignorance talk glibly about the Beyond, but even they conceive very different existences in it. To one the wish is for safety, to another for glory, to a third for work, to a fourth for peace. To me what the Unknown wills will be good."

"To me at present," said Negatio, "bliss seems to be rest, but that is not your paradise."

"Here," said Quaester, "rest alternates with effort, and each gives an added charm to the

other. I think, too, that in all conceivable conditions of existence a finite creature must both have labour and rest."

"And to-night," said Negatio, "we shall rest with the Shepherds in the Delectable Mountains, the fairest halting-place, you tell me, you have had yet. Surely I see some figures approaching as if to meet and welcome us."

And it was indeed the Shepherds, whose names were Knowledge, Experience, Watchful, and Sincere, who had seen them advancing, and came to meet them. Quaester rejoiced to see again his old friend and adviser, and on his part Experience was glad to meet so far on his pilgrimage the noble faithful disciple whom he had rescued from the bondage of Fear, and who in his turn had rescued a fellow-mortal from even worse straits. With one or other of the shepherds as a guide, the two friends spent many days in these pleasant hills and valleys, watching the happy peaceful flocks that grazed on the abundant herbage, or reposed on the soft green turf, listening to the birds that sang overhead and made their nests in the branches of the trees, or to the murmuring streams of this well-watered land. They were, however, delighted most of all with the bands of little children, brought up by the shepherds,

mostly orphans and deserted children. Here they missed no loving care, here they had full freedom for innocent play, and here they were taught the ways of all living creatures. Sincere and his wife, whose name was Love, were, as it were, the father and the mother of these little ones, Watchful was their physician, and Knowledge their schoolmaster, and all of the shepherds tried to train the children so as to make them more and more fit for the Home of Truth. No one was harsh with them, though they were all trained to strict obedience.

Nothing had so good an effect on the old captive of Giant Despair as the sight and the companionship of these little children. His own childhood had been very different, his home had been harsh and tyrannical. In his education his vanity had been stimulated and his jealousy of rivals worked upon to produce enormous efforts. He had never breathed this serene atmosphere of love and truth, which drew out the best, and which starved and repressed the lower feelings of human nature. In his manhood he had despised children as foolish and uninteresting, of no consequence but to their own parents, and too often a curse and not a crown to them. Here, therefore, Negatio would fain have cast off the slough of

years of hard living, and hard thinking, and dull despairing, and he would have liked to begin life again with these little ones at the feet of the shepherds of the Delectable Mountains. He had learned the alpha-beta of many languages, and he had in old times accounted himself skilful in men, books, and affairs; but now he wanted to learn the alpha-beta of happiness, and to forget all his old disappointments, disenchantments, and ingratitude.

"Let me tarry here," he said to Quaester, "and learn of the shepherds. I only delay you by my laggard pace, and fret you by my unreasonable requirements. You have leaned on the staff of Experience all through your pilgrimage. I scarce know how to lean on it now. You can read clear in the Interpreter's mirror, I can scarcely see the outline of my course there. Here, a child amongst children, I shall learn much, and I hope to forget more. Go on your way, I shall follow when I have gained strength. We are bound to meet again, ere we are summoned to the Borderland."

"We must neither of us go till we have climbed the highest peak of these ranges," answered Quaester; "to try if we can see a glimpse over the Borderland. Many pilgrims who have gazed, have reported glorious things as distinctly visible."

On the day following, which was a clear one, Quaester and his friend climbed this peak and looked forth. Yes, Quaester could see the other side of the Borderland over the top of the high wall. There appeared a region of cerulean blue with something like hills in the distance, but the outlines were so soft and faint that they might have been clouds, or even shadows of clouds. Ever and anon through the blue darted forms of infinite variety, flame-like, star-like, flower-like, tree-like, but some like nothing seen, recollected, or imagined by Quaester in the Within. They moved swiftly, they met, coalesced, they separated. It seemed to him as if he could almost hear a murmurous sound when they met or parted. Most of these shapes, whether darting, soaring or melting, were so diaphanous that he could see through and beyond them, but many of them were solid and stationary, and about these the lighter shapes appeared to play. As for Negatio, he saw a more leaden sky, a duller atmosphere, and scarcely any distinguishable objects, and these not instinct with life and movement as they appeared to his friend.

"You see I must tarry here till my sight is keener. They say that Beauty is in the eye of the gazer; I shall go to school till I learn to see."

Accordingly on the morrow, Quaester set forth somewhat sorrowfully on his way alone. On parting, the shepherds warned him of the remaining dangers of the road.

"You may think," said Experience, "that there is so little of your pilgrimage left to be accomplished, that there is no peril. But while life lasts, there is Hope, and while life lasts there is always some Fear; not the fear which kills, but the fear which warns and stimulates."

"I am now growing old," said Quaester. "The eager impatience of youth was over before I began my pilgrimage, and I lost somewhat in not giving the morning of life to its highest purposes; but my danger now is probably in the other direction of coldness and indifference."

"While you continue on this side of the great wall," said Experience, "there is ever a choice of action, ever a right way and a wrong way, or a higher or lower plane to move on. When people pray as so many do, that on this day they may fall into no sin or danger or temptation, they pray that on this day they shall not live at all. What new conditions may exist for us in the Beyond we know not, but here we know that

'We rise on stepping-stones
Of our dead selves to higher things.'

On the whole, my friend, this is how you have advanced hitherto. And on the whole, this pilgrimage has been to you a good and a happy one."

"It has," said Quaester. "I should not have smiled at poor Ignorance, when he said that since his illumination he has been made to know all things, for until I met with you, and took my course from your direction, life had no meaning and no sweetness. Since that time, it has been well with me, and ever better the further I advance."

Quaester, leaving his friend in the kind hands of the shepherds, had not gone far when he again fell in with Ignorance. He felt more tenderly to him than before, partly because he was now alone, and partly from the thought which he had just confided to Experience. Ignorance said he had spent many blessed days among the Delectable Mountains, but not with the shepherds, who were all too worldly for his higher flights of faith. One named Presumption had been his guide, and had given him a powerful telescope with which he took over the great wall from one of the highest peaks of the range. By this aid, he had had a far more distinct and definite view of the Beyond than had been vouchsafed to Quaester. He had seen clearly a celestial city, built like a city in the

Within, but with the walls and the streets inlaid with gold and precious stones. He had seen glorified human creatures with crowns on their heads, and flying hither and thither with the swiftness of birds on wings of light, till they settled round a great white throne, that reached the sky. He had distinctly heard the sounds of harps and trumpets, and the praise of an infinite number of voices of these supernatural human beings, among whom he had recognized friends and relatives whom he had lost, who had crossed the Borderland years ago, and he had been distinctly told by some external or internal voice that there was awaiting him a golden crown, and harp, and glory for ever among these blessed re-embodied spirits. Ignorance smiled with contempt at the answers which Quaester gave as to his glimpses into the Beyond, but felt more hopeful when he heard that Negatio had been left behind among the mountains, where there was every chance that he might fall in with Presumption, and obtain a sight of the glorious things in the Beyond through his wonderful telescope.

"He is better with the shepherds and the children, I think," said Quaester.

"Nay," said Ignorance; "you are in the

deepest error. What would you not give for such firm and joyous faith as mine is?"

"I would not have it as a gift," answered Quaester; "though, indeed, faith cannot be transferred. It is a matter of evidence. The evidence which satisfies you cannot satisfy me, and that which satisfies me does not yet satisfy Negatio."

"Mine is the only faith that carries us through the Borderland triumphantly," said Ignorance.

"Mine is, on the whole, the more cheerful faith of the two," said Quaester.

"Nay, that is absurd and impossible," said Ignorance.

"If I continue in my present way of thinking until I cross the great dividing wall, and am launched into the Beyond, what do you think will befall me?"

"Everlasting misery and torment," said Ignorance; "and, therefore, I urge upon you to repent and accept, like me, the free gift which you have presumed to despise."

"Now," said Quaester, "although I think you are as much mistaken as you believe me to be, I have no such fear for your future. All our mistakes are those of Ignorance, but we shall have no torture on account of them."

"Your faith is entirely negative, mine is fixed and positive. You speak to me as if my name was still Ignorance, whereas I have an unction from the Beyond and know all things."

"All things?" said Quaester; "why, you have never passed through the Wicket Gate of Doubt, the first portal of Knowledge. You never set foot in the Interpreter's House or saw the wonders there, or the lovely things in the Palace Beautiful."

"But these are merely things of the Within," said Ignorance; "I care not for these transitory concerns. All things concerning the Beyond have been revealed to me, and these are eternal."

Quaester could not help smiling at this boast, and Ignorance observed it, and said:—

"The spiritually-minded always suffer persecution. Formerly, it was with the rack and the stake and the dungeon; but now it is with the weapons of contempt and mockery that they are assailed. We had better part and go each his own way, lest you should be further tempted to levity and profanity."

Quaester agreed to separate; and as he moved aside Ignorance marked his worldly friend lift a snail out of his path lest it should be trodden on, and he caught the expression of the face. Something of the courageousness, the sincerity, and

the tenderness of his nature was revealed, even to Ignorance; he recollected that Quaester had stood in the pillory at Vanity Fair, and had never flinched, and he felt ashamed of himself for calling his smile persecution. At this juncture, both of the men felt themselves entangled in a net of which neither of them were aware, which had been spread for them by a man, black of skin but wearing a white robe, who was lying in wait for pilgrims, and had entangled these two of such widely-different views and characters.

So, perforce, Quaester and Ignorance had to move on together as they best could. The net was strong; to Ignorance it appeared that it was made of the meshes of theology. A sort of haze came over his late confident faith. His imper-turbable fellow-traveller, perhaps, after all, might be—not exactly right—that was impossible—but not so very far wrong as to be in such extreme peril of his eternal future. How far from the true faith might one be, and yet escape the awful punishment of misbelievers? He struggled with these internal thoughts, and with the external net, but they seemed to hold him the faster. At last, he thought of the trenchant weapon of All-Prayer, which cut through the meshes, knots and all, and allowed him to escape, while simultaneously

he went back to his old beliefs and rested on them. But the deliverance was for himself alone; his fellow in the entanglement appeared as much embarrassed as ever. Ignorance did not like leaving Quaester in such sorry case, and offered his serviceable tool, either in his own hands or in that of the captive, which would have been better, for such difficulties are best attacked from Within; but Quaester said that time and patience alone could release him. The net spread for him had affected him somewhat differently; he was conscious that he had thought of his companion with too much contempt; he did not feel sufficient pity for that condition of Ignorance, which made him the ready prey of Superstition. As to his warnings and remonstrances, from his own point of view, Ignorance would have been much to blame if he had not expostulated with fellow-creatures whom he believed to be in so much danger. If he did not warn wisely, that was because he knew no better. Though still entangled in the net, Quaester thought that he might drag it with him, and as he pressed onward and endeavoured to keep the net from fixing on anything in the path, milder thoughts of Ignorance came with every step. By means of dragging over rough and smooth, against trees

and stones which bordered the path, the net became frayed and chafed. At last a hole appeared, through which Quaester could thrust a hand, and by patience and perseverance and sometimes by the use of main force, he at last extricated himself, and walked forth a free man. But Ignorance had gone out of sight before he was finally free.

Never had Quaester felt more light and cheerful than now. The air in that region sometimes blows from the Delectable Mountains, and sometimes is wafted full of perfumes from the Land of Beulah. Quaester felt something like the buoyancy of youth in his veins. Those who dread old age, know not how sweet and pleasant the decline of life is to those who have lived well. But while he was occupied with pleasant memories and cheerful anticipations of the rest that awaited him, he was surprised to see a man whom he had known in Vanity Fair, and had thought well of, walking swiftly and alone in a direction diametrically opposite to that which all good pilgrims take.

"Ah, Quaester!" said he, "whither bound?"

"To the Home of Truth," was his answer.

The man laughed aloud and said, "There is no such place. I have been on the same wild-goose

chase, but I turned back when I saw what nonsense it all was. Truth, absolute Truth, does not exist, and that you should know as I do. Everyone thinks that his own fancy is the Truth, whereas it is only the thing that he troveth; the word contains its own definition. I have just met with an idiot who gave himself the name of Knowall, who thinks his own little mind is the veritable Home of Truth—I went as far as I could go to the utmost limits of the Within, and I found no such place, so you may take my word for it and spare your old legs the journey. I am making my way back to Vanity Fair as fast as I can, to give an account of my travels, and I know that I can prove beyond the possibility of a doubt that all such pilgrimages as yours are utterly useless and vain."

"Absolute truth is for the Unknown alone," said Quaester; "but I ever struggle on to come as near to its perfection as is attainable within. I expect not the Home of Truth which some call the Land of Beulah to be a final resting-place, but my last school where I shall wait until my change comes."

"My mind misgave me somewhat when I started," said the man, "and my doubts have been confirmed by all I have seen and heard, and by all

I have not seen and not heard since I left Vanity Fair. Come with me and return to the world if you have any common sense. I have wasted too much time already on this fruitless quest; and I am sure the people in Vanity Fair will be glad to hear that there is really nothing to be learned, and they are sure to show their appreciation of my genuine experiences in a substantial manner."

"My mind did not misgive me from the first," said Quaester; "and as I seek in faith, I hope to find."

So Quaester had no mind to accompany this man in his backward course. I know not how long the stage was from the Delectable Mountains to the Land of Beulah, but it appeared to me to be long and beautiful. Ere our pilgrim completed this last portion of his journey, he was joined by Negatio, who was to him a pleasant and profitable companion. The shepherds had entertained Giant Despair's old captive most hospitably, and he had learned so much from them and from the children that it was thought good to send him by forced marches to make up to his friend, from whom the shepherds said he would soon learn more than from themselves.

Now the place where they came together again was a green valley, beautiful to the eye, and shady

from the noonday sun, but where the air was somewhat drowsy. Through the valley along their path flowed a rippling stream, whose murmurs invited to sleep; on its banks the lotos grew laden with fruit and flowers, whose taste and odour overpowered our pilgrims, and they lay down on the soft turf and slept heavily while the bees and beetles hummed drowsily in their ears. Quaester was the first to awake, and he bethought him of the warning of the shepherds to beware of the Enchanted Ground, and he also saw in his mirror that it behoved him to make haste, for the Land of Beulah was at hand. He aroused his sleeping companion, who could scarcely believe that he was so near the last stage, but on consulting his own mirror, of which he had recovered the use, he found his friend's words corroborated.

"I could not have thought it was possible for me to be on the same level as you. Perhaps I have learned by your experience; they say that those are happy who learn by the experience of others, and wise who learn by their own."

"I know not," said Quaester. "I should think that in ordinary speech those would be considered the wise who could apply the experience of others to their own case most effectively. But so far as

my own life has taught me, I think that all we learn of life and duty costs us something either in effort or in suffering. At the moment we fancy we pay very dearly for it, but once learned, we never think to count the cost—we would not be without it for the world. And though it appeared to you that you learned nothing in the dungeons of Despair, I am sure that you learned much. Do you still feel drowsy?"

"Indeed I do, strangely drowsy," said Negatio, "but yet we ought to be up and doing. Let us fall into some good discourse to keep each other awake in this stage of our journey."

"With all my heart!" said Quaester. "Tell me if you can, how you, with all your gifts and opportunities and your lofty aspirations for the good of your people and your race, threw yourself so completely into the clutches of Despair, and continued so long his captive."

"It puzzles me myself oftentimes," said Negatio. "I had thought to rouse up a nation to liberty; but the time had not come and I spoke to deaf ears. Some friends in whom I trusted were cold, some ungrateful, and some proved treacherous. Instead of being hailed as a prophet and a deliverer, I was jeered at as a fool. All my projects failed, I lost my fortune partly in national

enterprises, and partly in private risks, which perhaps I ought not to have taken. But from both the public and personal ventures, I had entertained the highest expectations of wealth, power and glory. When all failed, my hot fit was over for ever, and I fell into a cold fit, and would trust no one, and serve no one. The body which I had neglected and weakened was revenged upon me, and the mind which I had almost regarded as a god, became warped, and I fell into that condition of indolent cynicism which made me the easy prey of Despair."

"You were in Vanity Fair for part of the time of my long sojourn there," said Quaester. "I heard of you, but I never saw you."

"Yes; I was battering at the Gate of Revolution when you, wiser or happier, forced your way through the Gate of Reform; but in my country there appeared then to be no access to Reform until the Gate of Revolution had been forced. The work of my hot-headed youth was repulsed, and I became so dispirited and so disgusted that I could do nothing further. You did some good solid work."

"Not nearly so much as I hoped for," said Quaester, "but yet as much as kept me still eagerly continuing my efforts."

"The vastness of my schemes made the disappointment of doing absolutely nothing all the more bitter. I do not so much wonder at my captivity as at my rescue," said Negatio.

"But you never were in bondage to Superstition," said Quaester.

"No, never! I despised all who were from the bottom of my soul. All my revolutionary efforts were towards the liberation of the body and of the mind, and the priests of superstition always appeared to me to be leagued with the despots who trampled on man's inherent rights. If I hated the tyrants, I despised their smooth-tongued allies."

"No one knows," said Quaester, "how much both despot and priest are self-deceived. We must oppose them, but I have learned on my pilgrimage to regard them with pity. The one considers that order and public safety depends on the maintenance of his old irresponsible power; the other that only in believing in his shibboleth can the favours of the Unknown be won, and the terrors of the Beyond be escaped."

"But where the despot knows better, and the priest does not himself believe in his shibboleth, as was the case with those whom I opposed, what then?" asked Negatio.

"Then he has no excuse, except the instinctive desire to maintain the *status quo* lest worse should follow. As I said before, we must resist their pretensions to the death, but still pity the individuals."

"A great poet has said that at the bottom of every man's heart we will find something to make us hate him," said Negatio. "I thought I had found it, and I hated my kind. But I met with you, and you have won me back to some of the old enthusiasm for humanity."

"I should rather say that at the bottom of every man's heart we should find something that would make us love him," said Quaester. "If not," he continued after a pause, "should we not regard him with infinite pity—such pity as the Creator ought to feel for creatures who are failures? But as things stand, we can only partially know each other. Each individual is rounded into a sphere, and can only come in contact with his fellows at one point."

"And on this point of superstition," said Negatio, "I cannot trust you. I have never heard of your earlier troubles before Experience met you. Were you as wretched as I was in the dungeons of Despair?"

"I think by no means," answered Quaester.

"The condition was not so blank and inactive. I was not altogether despairing, but I was disconsolate, as if nothing in the Within could make me happy. There was relief, however, to be found in action, even in indifferent action; and the restlessness, which was the most marked characteristic of my state, was not without some gleams of hope that I might some day come to accept what Metus and such as Metus offered, and then find repose. But there was great moral confusion and perplexity intermingled with these hopes. Things that would be wrong in me or in my fellows to do, were said to be absolutely right in the Unknown Power, which absolutely fixed and controlled our destiny."

"How do the shadows from that time affect your memory?" asked Negatio. "Mine are strangely bitter recollections; I should like to turn down the leaf of the book of the past, and never to look at it again."

"I think I am altogether of a more cheerful temperament than you are," said Quaester. "Past evils are no longer evils, because they have been conquered, or at any rate outlived; past satisfactions I can recall with delight as if they were present."

"Enviably philosophy," said his friend.

"I feel like a man who awakes out of a fearful

dream, more thankful for the relief than oppressed by the recollection of impending horrors. I think that these old days of Superstition come back to me half with a sense of amusement at the groundlessness of my fears, and half with a sense of relief that these fears are done with for ever," said Quaester.

"Amusement!" said Negatio. "I took you for one of those earnest, serious souls who needed no amusement, and despised the weaker creatures who rushed after it."

"Many things amuse me," said Quaester, "though I feel no desire to rush after what the world calls recreation. When once the vague, nameless terrors of the Beyond are dispelled, one feels free to enjoy the absurd and the odd. I recollect Metus telling me that the Sacred Records discountenance mirth, that the Lord whom he believed to be from the Beyond, and whose revelations he counted as authentic, had been seen to weep, but never to laugh or even to smile. All sacred writings are grave from the nature of the subjects they deal with; but old writings of all kinds appear to me to be grave. The new, such as the Pagan school affect, jest at everything, which is unseemly; a jest in fit place and season may be quite as good as a sermon."

"Men would not call you a prosperous or successful man," said Negatio. "You have gained neither wealth nor power, and your few simple pleasures the world would despise. What you have really gained is in your own words 'quantity of being;' it is not what you have but what you are that gives you that inward peace and that helpful strength. The shepherds were right. By your side I feel stronger and happier. 'Infinite is the help which man can give to man!' But the help all goes in one direction. Wherever can I help you?"

"Much, in many ways. None, save one from whom I have been separated, has stirred my soul to its inmost deeps as you have done. Your experience, different from my own, fills up gaps in my life-work. But look, is not Ignorance again on our track?"

It was, indeed, Ignorance, eager to impress Negatio; for of Quaester he had now no hope. He spoke to the rescued captive of the great visions he (Knowall) had seen of the Beyond and of its blessed inhabitants, from the Delectable Mountains, confirming his old faith, and supplying all that he needed. While confessing himself to be by nature a miserable sinner, and indeed almost gloating over his former vileness, he asserted

that he was now supernaturally and vicariously a triumphant saint, and while pouring contempt on all that man could know or learn by means of patient search and study, he laid down the law of faith and the law of life to pilgrims who had not been favoured by the inner life in which he himself walked.

While Negatio listened, there was no thread of association in the past to make him see where Ignorance had taken hold of something which to him was precious, what had reformed his careless wicked life, and given to him a strengthening hope. What was good in it was, as it were, in a foreign tongue, what was absurd and offensive was plain enough.

"In my country," said Negatio at last, "they shut up such men as you in monasteries, where they can do little harm."

This suggestion was most repugnant to Ignorance, who looked on the idea of monasticism and enforced celibacy as devilish. He turned away, half in sorrow, half in anger, and went his own way, which diverged more and more from that of my pilgrims.

How pleasant was the land into which they now came. Here the song of birds is heard continually, and every day fresh flowers showed themselves, some tall and glorious, but for the

most part sweet and lovely. In this country the sun was never too fierce, nor the nights too chill. The mornings and the evenings were soft-footed, and came and went with a long dawn and a lingering twilight. This country is out of the reach of Giant Despair, nor could one so much as see his great castle from the highest of the lovely hills. Here, nevertheless, sometimes rested something like the Shadow of Death; but it was not terrible like its shadow in that arid howling valley of old times, but something solemn, grand, and peaceful. Those who dwelt in the Land of Beulah awaited their summons, and were not disquieted. Quaester found here many whom he did not look to meet, many who did not recognize him, but whom he knew well—old workers, old thinkers, old fighters, and some young in years who seemed to have reached these happy regions with less toil and conflict; many who had come to this resting-place by other paths, but who now, with peace and goodwill in their hearts, worked with him in an unknown brotherhood. Sanitas knew and recognized him, and to him *Negatio* clung strangely, and received much good service at his hands. But how the heart of Quaester leaped within him to see Gracious here, and to be recognized and acknowledged by her.

Here her troubled and desponding soul found repose. In this blessed Land of Beulah what is the command of the conscience is the delight of the soul. Self-questioning seems to cease, and the better nature expands in the kindly air. And here Quaester found that he had reached the Home of Truth—at least, as far as truth could be contained in any locality; for it is ever enlarging and widening, and he even at this latest stage of his journey was still a modest learner, who reached forward to higher and greater issues than he had attained to. And here Gracious felt that her Life of Service might fitly close; for while she lived she must serve, but her faith was more assured now that her heart, mind, and soul were at peace. In this region the Borderland seemed very near, and no one cared to thrust it out of sight; for though elsewhere it might look blank, and cold, and pitiless, it here appeared like a shelter rather than a terror. It was in answer, Gracious said, to her prayers that the summons came to Quaester when she was by. As the four friends conversed on the bank of one of those peaceful rivers which flow through this pleasant land, his countenance changed.

“What aileth you, my friend?” she asked tenderly.

"I must go," said he; "my time has come."

And the searching wind caught him, and bore him away to the not distant wall. She took his hand, and went with him to the side of the great wall, while Negatio and Sanitas followed hard. Sanitas tried to rally him with stimulants to contend against the doom that threatened, but these were of no avail.

"My brother, my friend," said Negatio, "what shall I do without you?"

"She will supply my place till her time comes," said Quaester.

Gracious accepted the charge, but she was too much occupied with her departing friend to think much about him who was left.

"As I would have it it has come," said she. "Now tell me, Quaester, what do you see and hear?"

"Nothing," said Quaester.

"Not the heavenly messengers with the angelic voices who are borne in that searching wind, whom I seem to see and hear?"—and Gracious held up the symbol of her faith before his eyes, and with clasped hands, implored help from the Beyond.

"Cannot you see the heavenly light round the sacred token of our redemption?" she asked.

"I see nought but you, Gracious, and heaven in your countenance. Though my eyes are fast dimming I shall see you to the last."

"Your face is calm, your voice steady," said Gracious, "and yet you touch that supreme moment when the Here and the Now change for the Infinite and the Eternal. Would you not fain escape this awful test?"

"Truly I would fain rest with the Known, which is so fair and so dear; but I fear not the Unknown. The old familiar days are dear to me, the faces and the voices I have lived with so long. How I shall fare elsewhere I know not."

"Say not so," said Gracious, with a pathetic ring in her voice. "Say not you know not when I know so well. All would be well with you if you would only believe it. If I cannot conquer your invincible ignorance surely the All-Powerful will forgive it."

Quaester lay on the verge of the wall for a time, and his friends ministered to his wants tenderly, and cheered him as best they could. Gracious, when she was not serving, was praying, and watching for the last change that might come. At last, just at daybreak a strange smile passed over his face, and ere they could count five, he was gone. Gracious asserts that as

the wall opened, she had a glimpse of a Glorious Being who took Quaester by the hand, and that she distinctly heard the words, "Saved at last." But Sanitas and Negatio saw and heard nothing, and I who unknown to them, stood close beside, though I strained my eyes to the uttermost, saw but an instantaneous opening in the wall, and no visible thing escaping through it. And now I saw Sanitas and Negatio stand gazing on the blank wall and Gracious kneeling before it.

"Farewell good and noble soul," said Negatio.

"He shall indeed farewell," said she with solemn hope.

And I awoke, and behold it was a dream.



