Casa
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THE BODLEY HEAD
THE GOLDEN KEYS
AND OTHER ESSAYS ON THE GENIUS LOCI

BY

VERNON LEE, Litt.D.

JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD LIMITED
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TO

MRS. TAYLOR

CHIPCHASE CASTLE

NORTHUMBERLAND

It is to you, dear Mona, indeed to an enigmatic telegram you sent me just now as I was leaving England, that I owe this little book's title. I had wanted to call it Peace and Goodwill, but had been warned that, so much having been talked about both during the war years, no one could stand their being mentioned now that the war was over without having brought either. So I cast about me for some less prohibitive title; and mentioning that of the first little essay in the series, you decided, with that imperious telegram, that the book should be called after the Street of the Golden Keys.

The Golden Keys in question were, I believe, nothing more generally interesting than the sign of an inn, giving its name, as so
Dedication

often occurred, to a back street in an old-fashioned town. But gold, we are told by recent anthropologists, is the oldest known of all metals, and prized by our remotest ancestors (sometimes also by ourselves) for its curative and magical virtues. And keys are surely among the most needed of implements, given the fact that the dishonesty of Man and the secretiveness of Nature join in keeping whatever we wish to have, and whatever we want to know, locked up and inaccessible save by their use. So Golden Keys may stand symbolically for pretty well anything you may value and are not very likely to get. Hence, in my own mind, at least, for just that peace and goodwill which our generation (despite your laudable propaganda for the League of Nations, dear Mona) can scarcely hope to see again; peace and goodwill whose expression is the only incontestable value of the following essays, written, as you know, before the war; all except the last one, which shows that value by agonized contrast.

And this leads me to what I have long wanted to say, and what will be understood by no one more readily than you, in the shadow
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of whose peel-tower and under whose beech-screened kitchen-garden of Chipchase we discussed so fiercely yet friendlily during the war, which you saw as a war to inaugurate peace, but I recognized as a war to bring about more wars.

Well, what I now want to say is as follows: the war brought home to me (with sundry weightier matters) that the Genius Loci, under whose invocation I have so often placed what at first sight might seem mere jottings of an idle wanderer, is, when you understand him, really the most decent, as he is the youngest and humblest, of the indwelling gods whom we make for ourselves. Since he has none of the appeals, however gloriously veiled, to savagery and self-righteousness which are made by, and for, most of his more venerable, or at least more authorized, fellow-gods. Like them, the genius of places exists not in the consistent, hence so often ruthless, Outer Reality, but in the human heart, as Milton put it, upright and pure. Indeed, a heart less ostentatiously upright and a good deal purer of violence and self-justification than was ever contemplated by Milton; a heart, at all events, more often
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uplifted in goodwill, more entirely dedicated to peace, than the old temple of our bosom is likely to be for many a year to come.

"We have taken to going abroad once more." Some people (not you, dear Mona!) will here demur—"and we travel even in enemy countries. Has not Bayreuth been reopened this very year?" No doubt. But you are not performing my small Divinity's rites by carrying national prejudices from hotel to hotel and gallery and theatre. Neither does the dear Genius Loci arise out of guide-books, however faked to look like historical treatises and poetic phantasies. Nor can you be initiated into his mysteries even by Bach, Beethoven and Brahms, so long as you regard those "three B's" (we were assured thereof in the war years!) as having been, at least potentially, pro-Ally.

Therefore in the teeth of those very Highest Principles on whose behalf all belligerent nations have slaughtered and been slaughtered so lately, I venture to assert that the poor little Genius Loci is a truly moral godhead—indeed, one of the few who cannot be used to mask our evil, and often preposterous,
Dedication

passions. His worship requires, not merely boasts of, a disinterested interest in Men and Things. And that is uncommon. For even at the moments when he lurks in mere woods and waters, and in relics of centuries so remote that the careless eye mistakes them for stocks and stones, the Genius of Places has taken his being in our contemplation of times and peoples not our own, but felt by our imagination and sympathy to be consubstantial with ourselves in whatever in us is not trumpery, deciduous or abominable.

He is transcendent and immortal. And whatsoever in a place or a people can thus appeal to our loving contemplation is that place's or people's purer essence, differing somewhat from that of us who contemplate it, but equal in value, our worthiness initiating us into recognition of foreign worth. The Genius Loci is that portion of nations and civilizations which, while it speaks aloud in their philosophy and poetry and music, and is written clearly in the shapes of their buildings, addresses itself to the initiate mind in their humbler habits, kindly and gracious, sometimes childish and funny: in the little boxes for winter-
starved birds in German and Swiss villages; the wheels for friendly storks, and the be-ribboned Christmas trees on newly carpentered roofs; in these as much as in the classic evergreen garlands which Italians and Greeks hang even now round their church doors, or the dionysiac bunch of grapes still placed by the vintners of Burgundy between the broken stone fingers of the Mother of Christ. Things, all these, which involve for their heartfelt recognition just what the war and its war-breeding settlement have made, for the time being, an end of; and what judicious persons warned me against mentioning on my title-page. To wit, Peace and Goodwill.

You doubtless remember that the English-speaking angels present at the Nativity ventured on the (rather rash?) announcement that peace and goodwill were coming upon earth; whereas the wilier angels of Latin speech made the proviso that men must possess goodwill before they could witness any such desirable novelty: Et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis, i.e. and on Earth Peace to, through or by reason of (dative or ablative), men of goodwill. But whichever way we choose to interpret
Dedication

this doubtful passage of Scripture, this much is, to me, certain—namely, that the Genius Loci is a little divinity whose delicate and protean manifestations betoken, nay require, the presence of that peace and goodwill. That is why I am glad to have consecrated so much paper and ink and passionate care to his, albeit seemingly frivolous, service.

Indeed, it suddenly strikes me that this may be the true symbol hidden in the title which you, dear Mona Taylor, have foisted upon me. Peace and goodwill. Why THEY are the Golden Keys to whatsoever is swept and garnished in our soul. And quite especially to the sanctuary of the Genius of Places.

Be this as it may; and whether you guessed it or not, the title has been given (along with so many lovely and comforting gifts) by you to me. So it is fitting that the book should now be given, with grateful old affection, by me to you.

Florence, October, 1924.
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I

THE STREET OF THE GOLDEN KEYS
THE STREET OF THE GOLDEN KEYS

THE other evening, going in the train round Lucca, while the sun set pale-gold behind the twin fangs of the Carrara range, I caught sight of the Guinigi tower, with the trees growing on the top of it, above the cathedral apse and the elms of the bastions.

"It is really disgraceful," I said to myself, "not to have found time, in all these years, to write out the story of the Lady and the Golden Keys."

The lady in question is, of course, Ilaria del Carretto, wife of Paolo Guinigi, whose tomb, by Jacopo della Quercia, we have all seen, not merely, let us hope, in some cast-museum, but where it really stands, close within the side porch of Lucca Cathedral: a sweet and stately lady, with the plumpness of her teens, and a
round, childish face and stray curls, which are framed, or, you might say, nimbus’d round, by one of those early fifteenth-century turban head-dresses, looking like cushions, and in this case really pillowing that dead or sleeping damsel. She has, you will remember, a wreath of tiny roses twisted round this turban; and, with the round folds about her feet and bosom, she looks like a full but still unclosed rose herself; moreover, four cupids are holding up a thick rope of flowers against the bier on which she is lying. That is Ilaria. And it was to her I alluded when I wondered, the other day at sunset, travelling round the walls of Lucca, why I had not written out the story of the Lady and the Golden Keys.

As regards these latter, they exist nowadays only in the name of a street in Lucca, a narrow lane behind the Palace of the Guinigi, and sheer beneath the tower with the trees upon it; Via delle Chiavi d’ Oro it is called, and the name has a lovely cadence for my ear. The palace, built of the finest rose-coloured brick and with many beautiful pillared Gothic windows, was that of Paolo Guinigi, at one time despot of Lucca; and it was, therefore,
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the dwelling of that Lady Ilaria who had been given him in marriage by the Marquess del Carretto, Lord of Massa Carrara, and her father; nay, the effigy, now in the cathedral, was for many years hidden in the cellars or vaults of this palace. Whether the beautiful great red-brick house was ever much of a home to the lady, is more than I feel sure of. Indeed, the story I ought to have written all those years ago turned upon this very doubt.

In trying to reconstruct the story, I have to gather up my many impressions of Lucca. If you have ever been there, you will remember it by two things: its having more wonderful views all round than any other town set on the flat; and an astonishing number of terraces and hanging gardens looking out on the encircling chains of the Pisan hills and the high Apennine, and chiefly of the marble mountains of Carrara.

If you have been at Lucca you will have walked at sunset under the trees of the bastions, and marked these two features of the town as you made its circuit; the ramparts being themselves a kind of circular terrace built out towards the mountains. There is one jutting-
The Golden Keys

out bastion especially, where you hear the
guttural song of the girls at a neighbouring
silk-mill, whose yellow skeins revolve and
catch the light in a high open loggia; along­
side is the ancient belfry and apse of a little
basilica, abutting on the terraced garden, with
hedges and statues and balconies and flights
of steps of a great palace-back. The ramparts,
as I have said, jut out terrace-fashion in that
place, and the Carrara crags sit round the
poplared plain in front of it, a closely perspec­
tived assembly, reclining, drawing themselves
up on their elbow, turning half round, like
the gods at their banquet; while all the other
ranges encircling us, olive-covered Pisan hills
and snowy Apennines, look like mere round­
backed, supine animals alongside of that
family of marble peaks risen straight out of
the Mediterranean. The ramparts strike one
as a hanging garden thrown out to watch the
hills with their clouds and sunsets, making
one understand all that number of real hanging
gardens, terraces, loggias, balconies, and roof
ledges, their vines, gourds, pot-herbs, ole­
anders, or plumbago meeting one's upward
glance in every square and street of Lucca;
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even an orange-tree on high closing the vista between tall, black, escutcheoned houses. And far, far above them all, overtopping the cathedral roofs and the high trees of the ramparts, rises that tower of the Guinigi, carrying on its ghibelline corbels a little grove of wind-stirred evergreens. A friend of mine once gained access to the tower-stairs—those stairs of which the Golden Keys unlocked the topmost door!—and, like the patriarch's dove, brought me a leaf for a token. It was a bay-leaf; but from below the trees have rather the look of very old dark olives, such as one sees westward of Lucca, Carrara-wards, or of ilexes; but maybe that more than one kind has been planted by the birds, or by the Lady Ilaria? on the top of that rose-coloured tower-stem. The matter of the planting of those trees, and whether the tower of the Golden Keys was built by Paolo Guinigi to soothe his young wife's home-sickness by that great view westward to her father's olive-groves among the marble mountains; or whether it was used for her prison, with that tree-set platform as her sole breathing-place—all this is, of course, part of the story; is, indeed, the whole of the
story, which I reproached myself for not having written all those years ago. And I don't see how, since I failed to do so, anyone else is to compass writing it.

Returning home, however, from that recent visit to Lucca, it has struck me that my old diaries of previous journeys might contain some reference to this matter; indeed I seemed to remember that some fragment of the story actually did get set down. And, sure enough, there is a fragment; but, alas! who can make head or tail of it? "Now, when Messer Pagolo saw his lady lying on the top of the tower, dead, but as if in tranquil sleep, and covered over, as with a veil, with leaves and blossoms of olive-trees brought by the swallows, who swarmed all round, his mind misgave him, and he said within himself, 'What if this woman whom I took to wife should have been either a great saint or a witch? '"

I give you the fragment, and leave each of you to puzzle out the rest of the story. As to me, I have brought back from my latest visit to Lucca only the impression of the Feast of Saint Zita, and the Blessing of scrubby little bunches of gillie-flowers and poet's narcissus,
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among the blazing tapers and gold of an old, old little basilica under the bastions. And, as I began with saying, the regret of not having written about the Lady and the Golden Keys.
II

"L'ART D'ÉVOQUER LES MINUTES HEUREUSES"
I HAVE been out of sorts of late, in soul even more than in body, a veil between myself and all I care for, as of the mugginess of the clayey Florentine fields. But yesterday afternoon, as I drove up to the Bishop's villa from Pistoia, a north wind arose, sweeping heaven and earth exquisitely pure, filling the skies with sunset magnificence, the hills and valleys also with the orange and silver of autumn, healing and renewing my spirit as this place has so often done before. And when, at dusk, I walked through the fallen chestnut leaves of the lower woods (where the gloom is scented as of violets, by some fern), and I saw the long white house spread out, terrace and steps and central tower, above its vineyards and box-hedges, it all came upon me with the sudden novelty of romance; yet, at the same
time, with the accumulated charm of many similar past emotions. How often in the last twenty-five years has not this exquisite old house appealed thus to me; and how grateful we should be for such storage of happiness, for whatsoever we may possess of that art of arts, the one of which Baudelaire speaks in his finest line:

“Je sais l’art d’évoquer les minutes heureuses.”

That thought returns to me this morning, as I sit on the shale bank in these sparse Apennine woods, tasting the sweetness of sun-dried autumn, the romance of fading, falling, and strewing leaves. The Genius Loci is, after all, a divinity requiring some of the most delicate human virtues, for there is always a measure of gratitude and attachment to familiar places in our thorough enjoyment of even quite new ones; indeed, an already beloved locality will hand us on to the unknown one we are destined to love, with a generosity which might well shame even our least selfish friendships with mere mortals.

My love for the Bishop’s villa and the vineyards and woods surrounding it is, of course,
nothing new, since, as I have already said, it dates a quarter of a century back. But, even now, I can disentangle in it the added grace, like the flavour of fine wine laid to ripen in the casks of older vintages, of an almost childish love for another old Tuscan house which I knew long before I ever saw this one. That other house, near the river Serchio, in the Lucchese hills, was called by the peasants "Desertolo"; and the name went for something, summing up the suggestions of its time-stained whitewash, which fell by patches, and let you see courses of delicate brick, pale geranium among the stone, laced with minutest silvery lichen. That house, like this villa of the Bishop's, stood on a hillside, and in its own quarry, as is so often and so delightfully the case in the Apennines; moreover, higher to the front than the back, where the garden was sunk in the hillside, square and much overrun with grass and ivy. There was a rickety wooden gate, shaded by an old walnut-tree, and through its cracks and its swinging postern one could catch glimpses of the old house. Excepting this, you could see it only from a distance, a dark, rather gaunt outline,
of noble proportions, among the hemp-fields and the vines. Of course I was never familiar with it, that furtive peep through the gate and that looming distant view making up the whole amount of my acquaintance; also it was just a little beyond my daily walk, and audibly guarded by wicked and wakeful sheep-dogs. The name of its owner and sole occupant was Fulvia. Just Fulvia, with no apparent surname. And I have a vision of her (though whether real or imaginary I cannot now tell) as a stately and solitary middle-aged woman with ample bosom and statuesque arms, dressed in a loose petticoat-bodice or camisole; a peasant, but, nevertheless (as peasant proprietors are in those hills) of ancient lineage; mysteriously derelict, like her house's name. You will understand that Desertolo was a place rather longed for than really known. And part of the fascination of this Bishop's villa, in whose woods I am now writing, has undoubtedly always been that it realized my longings after that other house, although, oddly enough, the longing for Desertolo remains quite distinct and unappeased in my heart, together with the remembrance of
the rough stone lane (black walls teethed with fern) leading to it, and strewn with the aromatic leaves of the sentinel walnut-tree to the back.

"L'art d'évoquer les minutes heureuses."

Yes, and in that act of evocation making those past sweetnesses sometimes much sweeter than they really were; our own emotion, our longing and clinging, playing so large a part in what we call the charm of things, even as our habit of loving goes for so much in our human friendships; so that resemblance to one friend will sometimes subtly blend with and increase our delight in another: a tuft of white hair, for instance, in the black; even a mere passing trick of eyes or hands, or a cadence in the speech. Thus, only just now, rambling below these woods, a whiff of unexpected olive smoke has filled out the pleasure of the place and moment, penetrating into my brain with a hundred vague associations of southern seas and rocks, becoming the material symbol of my emotion, nay, in a way, my emotion's material. For that olive smoke meant the Riviera. And a white weather-stained cottage, with a half-leafless fig-tree...
The Golden Keys

against it, took suddenly a new aspect and interest. . . .

Perhaps, when all is said and done, this art of evoking the sweetness of passed moments is not an art at all, but a grace rewarding that gratitude of disposition which comes, or ought to come, with age. For youth hurries and strains, while age broods and enjoys. The shrinking present and future can be replenished from the heaped-up past; and longing and regret turn into a more real presence in our spirit.
III

A SHRINE AND SOME DOGS' TOMBS
WE had a very delicious walk this morning early, leaving the vast palace rooms and courtyard still shuddery with the stored-up chill of night, precious as well-water or ice in these long days of Tuscan summer. Outside the sun was high and hot already, but everything still steeped in dew, and marvellously pure and new, smelling of ripening grain and vine-blossom, the breath of this pale blue and green world of fields and olive-yards.

At the turn towards the cypress woods of San Silvestro we stopped to notice a fine Renaissance shrine, with a Latin distich bidding Hecate avaunt, and putting these cross-ways under the protection of the divine Phœbe here enthroned. Now the figures in the shrine were visibly a Madonna and Child; but the classical-minded votary had felt it more con-
sonant with his Latinity to call her by the name of a pagan goddess, so long as she was a virgin one; and the Madonna, of course, would know quite well that it was she who was being invoked under this alias. Were not the ladies who came to visit at the villa called Nymphs? and the learned ecclesiastics and lawyers who read their verses after supper called, for all their broadcloth and starched ruffs, Shepherds? Were not even the dogs, on their tombs. . . . But of this more anon. The Madonna at the Crossways had meanwhile done her best to resemble, if not Phœbe in especial, at least some antique goddess. For she was weathered and worn, done into a mere Michelangelo outline of crouching limbs and encircling arms, with just a tiny ear and curl remaining of her little Christ-child. Indeed, it is odd that this defaced effigy, reverting to the mere weather-patina'd limestone of its native cypress-fringed hillsides, has acquired thereby a certain divineness of beauty and pathos; becoming, as she does, not merely one with nature, but consubstantial with so many antique gods similarly dealt with by the elements.
A Shrine and Some Dogs' Tombs

That Phoebe-Madonna of the Crossways turned out to belong to a small castellated villa on the slopes of Monte Morello, which my friend M. and I had chanced upon, years and years ago, while riding among the cypress woods. What tricks time plays with us, inverting the values of things! That remote little place, turreted and battlemented, with a vast jade-green fish-tank reflecting the frescoed hedges of cypress, and the vases, and strange inscriptions in its portico, had remained in my memory as something inexpressibly romantic. Yet now, the romance of the place seems rather in that ride on which we discovered it, in the long ago past which belongs not to it, but to me.

After a little, however, the imaginative charm of the villa asserted itself; and when we left it behind, and hastened down the hill to avoid the noontide blaze, I found myself companioned by a shadowy figure of its original owner, or rather of that owner who had turned it from a fortified farm into the delicate and scholarly place it still is. The inscriptions all over the house revealed him to be the same Latinist who, if one may speak in paradox,
had re-christened the Madonna of those Cross-ways by the name of a pagan goddess. Then Prince C——, with whom I was walking, drew from his inexhaustible store of local lore sundry dates and facts about the personage. His name was Matteo Carlini, well known as a jurisconsult about 1625, of a family of Florentine burghers owning that narrow high house opposite the Church of the Badia, which has carved over its door a wreath surrounding an open book instead of a coat of arms. But most seemed to result from the details of the house itself. One got the idea of a self-respecting and scrupulous man of law, a fine scholar withal, living retired among friends, very modestly, but with a certain research and finish in all he did, visible in that crossways shrine, in the clipped hedges, the elaborate sundials, even in the scalloping of a mere corner of wall enclosing the garden towards the oak-scrub of Morello. And then, in all those Latin inscriptions, there is none of the self-glorification or of the sycophancy towards princes, temporal or ecclesiastic, which chokes one in those days. A pleasant, grave man, this Matteo; such as looks out, a white face
A Shrine and Some Dog's Tombs

and hands and white ruff, from the thick blackness of seventeenth-century portraits; dialoguing very possibly with Galileo, making music with those first inventors of the opera, and to whose house (who knows? to this very villa!) that learned English youth, Mr. John Milton, may have been appropriately invited. Thus did I feel Signor Matteo to be, as we left his one-time residence above us, and hastened down the steep-paved road where the cicalas were already sawing loudly in the olives. And pleasanter still has he become since (in the afternoon stillness of my vast, cool, darkened room in this hospitable country-house) there has been borne in upon me the true meaning of certain mysterious Latin inscriptions in the pillared portico of Matteo Carlini's villa. They are, as usual, Latin elegiacs, inscribed upon funereal urns which are painted very exquisitely in fresco, with a jasmin spray across each, against a blue sky and fanciful landscape. Both bear the names of shepherds out of Theocritus or Tibullus. One tells of a Privignus so tenderly united in life to his Noverca that after death their ashes must be united; the other of another Privignus.
whose hatred to his Noverca lasted, alas! to their respective graves. Perhaps it was this second Noverca to whose manes yet another inscription bid us bring garlands—"Dis Manibus Deliae serta date." I have looked out (in an appropriate old Jesuit "Vocabularium Latinum et Italicum ad usum humaniorum litterarum juventutis," Venetiis, MDCCXCI.) Privignus and Noverca. They mean, as I thought, stepson and stepmother. And more than ever do I feel persuaded that those lovely painted urns in that portico are the gently-jested-over cenotaphs of Signor Matteo's dogs.
IV

SAN FRUTTUOSO
IV

SAN FRUTTUOSO

BEFORE closing the notes of my spring wanderings in Liguria, let me say a few words about San Fruttuoso.

Under the rubric of fact, those words would have to be: I never went there. But fortunately all is not fact in this life; so I can discourse quite pleasantly, and (as the saint's name warrants) even fruitfully, about San Fruttuoso. It used to be spoken of periodically all those years ago at Nervi, as a place one really must go to—(there were the Tombs of the Dorias). Unfortunately one could get there only by sea in a rowing boat, and the sea about San Fruttuoso was always too rough to row on or land from. An inaccessible creek in a high rocky promontory, with a sea ceaselessly raging around it; that was San Fruttuoso as I learned to think of it many years ago. This time I discovered that, although my companions did return by sea, and the sea
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was rough as it should be, one could also get to San Fruttuoso by land. But if the sea way was difficult, the land way was insurmountable, at least in my case: you had to climb to the top of the headland and thence down to the sea; and that climb became longer and longer and steeper and deeper with every moment of discussion, until it exceeded my own (and you might have thought all human) powers, and my companions decided I must be left behind. Whether by this I really lost going to San Fruttuoso, you shall presently judge for yourself. Meanwhile I also spent my day in an atmosphere of romance.

For I stayed behind in the company of the mother of one of my friends; and had the honour of taking her a walk in the fields above that Genoese fishing village. Old ladies, when they are not too full of worldly wisdom (and occasionally even then), attract some persons—to wit, myself—much in the same way as children. Like children they are fragile, a little helpless, more so than they know, and with the mystery and pathos of understanding nothing of the reality of their companions, and of wandering along our ways seeing neither
San Fruttuoso

to the right nor the left; nimbus’d round by a dim world of their own. This particular old lady walked, so to speak, in the gold dust of a mediæval saint’s halo, through which everyday things took delightfully unlikely colours and angles. She had borne many sons and daughters, married some and lost others; seen the growing up of numerous grandchildren; and had her share of responsibilities and troubles. Doubtless she had known, at the time, the heavy grasp, chilly or fevered, of real life, and looked into its dull or puzzling face as we now feel and see it. But of that there was now no indication about her, except as one guesses the real shapes which have been transmuted by the faded silks and gold thread of some lovely frayed brocade. It was, I cannot help fancying, with reference to some such embroidery, or sampler, botany that she took an interest in wild flowers; or else for the associations of their names in nursery rhymes and folklore. Anyhow, they were greatly in her thoughts, and we went to look for them on the terraced olive yards and the little ravines whose entrance is choked with orange groves.
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While we strolled along picking orchids and wind flowers she talked without ceasing; and yet I had the feeling, the repose, of silence: one's own silence, no doubt, as with a child, where one's thoughts look on, but do not penetrate, and do not matter. She spoke of distant, improbable places, which she had never been to, or which had never been such as she now remembered them. Also, being a great reader of memoirs, she talked much of historical personages, especially such as came to tragic ends, turning them into kings and queens of stained-glass windows. She even told me the plot of a modern novel, transfiguring its commonplaces, and indeed life in general, into such adventures as happen to the little saints and angels of those pious mediæval pictures, where they converse miraculously with birds and rabbits among daisies and strawberries a great deal bigger than themselves, picked out with gold, arranged in sampler patterns and with gilt suns and moons set symmetrical. We rambled about until sunset: the wild cherry-blossom floated star-like in the dusk of the grassy ravines, and the crumbling plaster of the little old houses faded to a ghostly
San Fruttuoso

opal and mother-of-pearl, where they stood forlorn above the rustling sea. I offered her my hand over the stone fence by the forsaken water-mill, but she sprang lightly up and down, leaving me to feel as awkwardly elderly as if I had solemnly proffered assistance to a little girl, or perhaps to a fairy godmother who had thrown away her crutch and spread her wings.

It was, as I have already remarked, that precipitous downward climb from the top of the promontory which had decided my friends to leave me behind on their expedition to San Fruttuoso; a climb growing ever longer and more rugged, a Dantesque descent from rock to rock to the level of the sea, which was somehow much lower down than the sea bottom. And when you could descend no further you came upon a creek turned northwards and so narrow between sheer mountain sides, that a ray of sun reached it, like Brand's parsonage in Ibsen's play, probably on only one day in the whole year, a circumstance even more sinister in the case of San Fruttuoso, by reason of its being situate not on an Arctic fiord, but on the Mediterranean. The tombs of the Dorias, as already mentioned, were there
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(which, what Dorias?), stone sarcophagi arched and canopied, but entirely nameless and dateless. Indeed, some persons added that a few years ago the bones of those Dorias had been lying about outside the tombs.

Of course, as I was not allowed to go to San Fruttuoso, I never did see those tombs, or any of it, with the bodily eye. But with the eye of the spirit I took stock of them: Gothic, like those one meets clapped into the walls of North Italian churches. Around them tibias were scattered in the rank grass and sand of the little cove. And across the stormy sea (and also the dateless centuries, heaven knows how many!) a black boat, a funeral Bucentaur, brought yet another Doria, with the pomp and circumstance of admirals and sea kings, to his last resting-place. But to receive and watch over him, when the boat with the black lateen sail pushed off once more, there remained only an old deaf man and his grandchild, who looked epileptic, and had to scramble an hour up the cliffs to his daily school in a dismantled stone cottage where the rocks were closest and the vegetation most dank. There was also an old woman. . . .
San Fruttuoso

“I am sure the woman maltreated that old man and also the child. She looked horrible,” said one of my friends to the other as they compared notes on their return.

“I’m positive she did,” was the answer.

“And oh—do you remember the Dying Hen?”

We were near the top of the headland, and I was trying to make them show me at least the direction in which, hundreds of fathoms below, San Fruttuoso was hidden by enclosing precipices. I advanced cautiously on a jutting-out ledge of rock, and craned as much as I dared over the myrtle and lentisk and the white-flowering Mediterranean heather. But all I could see were pines clinging with naked roots and a distant foam-streaked pool of sea.

“Is it down there?” I asked in hushed accents.

“Oh, dear no—much farther down,” was the contemptuous answer. “It’s no good your trying to see where it is.” But I had seen it, although I thought it quite unnecessary to tell them so; seen San Fruttuoso, the sunless Dead Men’s Creek. And perhaps the deserving reader may have seen it too!
V

AQUILEIA AND GRADO
I had wanted to see Aquileia and Grado long before I had any clear notion of their whereabouts, save that they lay somewhere on the confines of Italy, in a distant northern lagoon. Indeed, as sometimes happens, I had wanted to see them because their names had gathered round them my vague thoughts and wishes of an earlier, an earliest Venice; of some shifting historic driftwood and sea-foam, out of which that miracle of marble and water and gold had taken shape under the brooding crepuscular mists of the centuries. And one day, quite unexpectedly, there I was within reach of the two mothers (or, if you prefer, the mother and grandmother) of Venice. The impression of wandering at random into a district of the

1 And since the war very properly on the Italian side of that borderland.
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Past was unspoilt by trains and guide-books; for my hosts merely said, "Let's go to Aquileia and Grado;" and, accordingly, we drove for two days in a vague country, resting for the night at an old villa, of which I knew only that it was surrounded by dry maize-fields and green ditches, somewhere half-way between the mountains and the sea.

I have just said "Aquileia and Grado," but it was really Grado and Aquileia; for we drove past the site of the mainland city, embarking at once across the lagoon, and saw what there was to see only on our return. What there was to see of Aquileia when we came back there in the afternoon was a malarious little village, where the poorer Friulans and Triestines take their seaside outing: damp-stained pink and white Venetian casini, much like those which moulder along the canals of Torcello and Mazorbo, but turned into inns, with a greased pole and disconsolate merry-go-round, and a bandstand hung with tattered lanterns among the unharnessed brakes and shandrydans. From this you walk along a dusty road between the maize-fields and the yellowing vines till you
Aquileia and Grado

come upon a large vague square, a few farm buildings, squalid enough, at one end, and some old plane-trees; a flock of geese noisily waddling across the burnt-up grass. And there, dominating the fields and vineyards, rises the great belfry; and lies stranded, the long whitewashed basilica, some great horned sarcophagi sticking half out of the grass by its porch. Two of the vast portals were open; and, entering, one breathed, along with cool air still pure from the fields, a delicate cloud of incense left by the morning's Mass. A church not unlike the basilicas of Ravenna, with columns quarried from some Roman building, and altar still in the middle of the nave; reminding one also of the basilica of Classis in its surroundings, but without the fever greenness and dampness of Classis and its marsh-forlornness.

It is stranded, forsaken, but majestic and sweet with incense and the scent of sunburnt fields; and successive centuries have added each some grace to its bareness: a bit of balustrade as of the ducal palace, an altar delicately carved like those of the Miracoli at Venice; even an altar-piece of fine scarlet and pale
blue and gold; and some red marble tombs of patriarchs behind a grating. Aquileia itself, the twin capital of the Empire, older than Constantinople and almost as huge as Rome, has vanished utterly, leaving only, after furnishing the marbles for Ravenna and Venice, a museum—full of amphorae and rusty clasps, of finger-rings and bodkins and styluses, brittle and pathetic little things turned up by the plough where once rose the vast vaults of baths and stretched the colonnades of judgment halls, and rose the tiers and tiers of theatres, before Attila, as legend tells us, watched it all flame and fall from the castle hill of Udine. The basilica was rebuilt in the early Middle Ages, and became the metropolitan church of the great fighting Patriarchs of Friuli, heads of the feudal barons of the Venetian and Carinthian Alps. And, being the most venerable sanctuary of that furthest corner of Italy, it has been abandoned, but not disgraced; allowed to become, like the vanished city under foot, a thing of the fields, full of their sweetness, and kept pure by the sea wind and the sunshine.

We had spent the morning, as I said, at
Aquileia and Grado

Grado, a tiny group of islands and canals across the northernmost lagoon formed by the Tagliamento and the Isonzo, a miniature Venice, from which, indeed, the original Venice seems to have migrated to the middle lagoon made by the Piave and the Brenta, the fugitives of burnt-down Aquileia having taken refuge amongst those nearest islands, as the fugitives of Padua and Treviso had on the sandbanks of Torcello and Rialto. It is a poor little fishing village now, grown into a shabby Austrian bathing-place. From its sea-wall you see no longer the Alps as from the Lido, but the low line of Istrian hills, the promontory of Fiume and distant Dalmatian coast, very pale against the pure blue sea. The main church has a little Byzantine ambone, roofed, like that of St. Mark's, with an arab-looking kiosk; and from it the winged lion, a strange, rearing sort of nonsense-book Jabberwock, rather sad than solemn, looks down on the stucco and the paper flowers, the little congregation of Venetian women in shawls and wooden clogs, and of Austrian Bade-Gäste. On this particular Sunday, when Mass was over, that goggle-eyed monster
also watched, like me, the priest and sacristan unlock the money-box and shovel the piles of coppers into bags on the altar-rails and in front of the tomb of a Byzantine Bishop of Grado.

But my chief impression of Grado was that of the Baptistery. It is now a mere octagon church, its shape only telling its age and use. Mass was going on in the cathedral hard by, and the Baptistery was tenanted solely by three small children, whom their mother had evidently left there while attending to her devotions. It made a capital nursery. The three were neatly scaled in age, though of vague sex, with their little petticoats and shaven heads; but the eldest showed himself to be a boy. He led the band; the next baby, dressed all in red, imitated him, and was therefore, methinks, a girl; and the tiny one, just past crawling, followed to the best of its endeavour. They began by scampering across that sacred place and jumping up and down the steps of the altar. Then the eldest posted himself under the sacrament bell, and began to calculate, as it seemed, whether he could draw himself up to the end of the bell-rope, or
Aquileia and Grado

whether it would take several babies piled up; the other two meanwhile following all his movements and thoughts. At this moment he noticed my presence, and instantly walked past me. Then he took the youngest white-skirted thing, and, straddling on his bare feet, carried it across his stomach to where I was seated, and deposited it. The baby ran away. He went and brought it back, a little Hercules raising Antaeus, in front of me, while the intermediate child watched the operations. At last, after a lot of silent gambolling, the eldest sat down on the altar steps and became engrossed in contemplation of the melancholy wooden Christ, black and contorted, on the crucifix. The two others followed, looked at the elder brother, sat down, and, following his glance, tried in their turn to get some notions about that black hanging thing. And in this contemplation I left them, sole occupants of what is, I suppose, the oldest and most venerable monument of the Venetians, the place to which the earliest ancestors of the Orseolos and Zenos and Marcellos were taken, babies themselves, to be christened, at a time when the sandbanks of the middle lagoon
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were inhabited only by seagulls, hopping at low tide, as I had seen them an hour before, in this desolate northernmost lagoon of Grado.

The Baptistery—that is what I shall remember of Grado. And also, in the lagoon between it and Aquileia, and just before you enter the sedgy canal leading to the mainland, a belfry, quite, quite alone, its church long since slipped away, only a stack of rough grass along it, on the surface of the water. And that is all I have to tell, now I have been there, of Aquileia and Grado.
VI

THE OLD BOLOGNA ROAD
THE OLD BOLOGNA ROAD

A MOUNTAIN road, to be perfect, should run along crests and keep to open places, as it rises to the grassy dells of the pass; for it is thus that our fancy conceives that great and solemn thing, the crossing of a watershed, the passage from one great river system to another. That is what the road from Bologna to Florence by Pietramala and Loiano achieves in the most romantic manner; and what makes it, more than the importance of the cities at each end (for there are other roads between them), one of the world's great highways. Other Apennine roads are strangled in a viewless valley, crawling at its bottom in company with the dreary torrent bed, moving in a little back-of-beyond of their own, where you expect only the local diligence, full of peasants and priests, and the derelict-looking carabinieri on their beat; roads which seem to
call for smoky tunnels, and to be but a preparation for a goods train. This one is different. It scales at once to the crests and ledges, and snakes along them, looking down as from roofs and terraces upon wide valleys and distant chains of hills, and up at far more than its own piece of sky and its own flocks of clouds. It moves not through a district, a province, but through Europe, making you feel, in its high, sunny, stormy openness, that it connects not any two towns, were they even Rome and Venice, but the whole North with the whole South, carrying not merely Napoleon and Garibaldi with their armies, but Winckelmann and Goethe, Byron and Shelley and Browning, the thought and the passion of beyond the Alps drawn to the woman country, woo'd, not won.

Remote, aloof from all familiar resting-places. And, as it runs along the ledges, accompanied always by the high peaks and chains, ultramarine and snow-scarred, on either side. Moreover, on either side the dim valleys of ploughed earth and orange beech and pinkish oak-scrub; meadows also, widening like a cup to the brim, to where their sloping sides touch
The Old Bologna Road

the pure sky. A road remote not only in space, but in time; a road deep in the mountains' heart and deep in the days when our grandfathers coached through Italy and dreamed of brigands in its village posting-inns. Its villages are untouched since their passage, and sample the two so different regions which those passes separate; bits of Florence with pigeon-towers and flights of steps, yet not without a mediæval or fortress look, on the south side; bits of Bologna, of the Lombard plain, porticoed and extinguisher-belfried, on the north; each close down in its crocus-spotted meadows, guarded by its thin spinney of leafless trees; open to wind and sunshine, very old and serene and sweet on the mountain-tops. The snow was only half-melted off the peaks close above the road; and in shady bends heaps of it still lay heavy on the grass, which, where the snow had covered it, still kept the brown, burnt colour of last summer's droughts.

High, high up, where that adventurous road twists rapidly above deep valleys full of green meadows and blue hills and orange and russet scrub, facing now the great Central Apennine,
water-shed of Arno and Tiber, now the plain of Lombardy to the Alps' foot—in one of those black stone villages, we met, instead of Goethe or Byron in his post-chaise, a melancholy caravan of Dalmatian tramps, going from fair to fair. They were tattered, fever-stricken, wearily footsore, and dragged along with them a bear and two poor, poor little monkeys. And when I think of it, the most poignant emotion of that day along the mountain-tops was the stab of the misery of those poor people and beasts, as we put our pennies in their tambourines (one was all bloodstained from a woman's sore fingers!) and handed our remaining oranges to the bear and the monkeys. Beauty and wonder do not, after all, catch at one's vitals as such sights as these; and the name of that village makes me a trifle sore about the chest even in copying out this note...  

But to return to that road: what mysterious magic, nature's sleight of hand, there is in mountainous country! Here we sped along, a few miles only inland of Bologna, a few miles still, as the crow flies, from Florence; yet
isolated from all, in communion only with en-
circling valley-bottoms, blue and russet haze, and with the distant range of snowy peaks, with the shining blue flatness which is the far-off sea. This is what mountain roads should do for us: hide the everyday nearness of bodily presence, open the far-off neighbourhood existing for the eye and fancy. And for this reason, as I began with saying, a mountain road, to be perfect, should keep along the crests and high open places.

The Apennine road by the Futa and Pietramala does that. Then with what a sense of return from remote adventures, with what sudden tenderness of familiarity, one finds oneself again after an hour or two, down in the valley, sees the lines of cypresses, the white farms and villas, finds once more the crystalline streams between faint callow poplars, and the catkins of the willows in the water.
VII

“DUSKY, MANY-TOWERED BOLOGNA”
VII

"DUSKY, MANY-TOWERED BOLOGNA"

Sorge nel chiaro inverno la fosca, turrita Bologna.

Carducci.

ONCE or twice wandering about Bologna while my friends were at the Congress of Philosophers, I caught a glimpse . . . (or was it rather one of those sounds whose hearing is partly expectation?)—I caught, shall we say, the ghost of a mood, almost an emotion, of forty years ago.

Forty years ago my family used to come, pushed by my childish machinations, to Bologna on our way from the North to Rome. For Bologna seen between trains during a summer journey had become one of those places which exist only in childhood, where, in virtue of some one thing acquiring a supernatural value, all the most ordinary circumstances of life come to partake of its magic;
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rather as, under some summer full-moon, will happen with just such a town as this. At Bologna the wonder-working objects (like the ring you turn or the lamp you rub in fairy tales) were those gaunt rooms of the Music School whence issued for the earthly ear piano scales, fiddle exercises and vocal arpeggi of doubtful accuracy; but which, the walls being hung with the portraits of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century musicians, were filled for the ear of my childish fancy with their unheard music, or at least with their music’s charm. Thirty years afterwards I was taken by my hospitable Contessa Carmelita to a concert in the hall where these portraits for the most part hang. And while, alas, unable to see them otherwise than as lamentably ugly or unintentionally funny pictures, I swear that none of the music, however excellent, which I listened to with ears of the flesh in that, or indeed any other, place, has ever been a patch upon that silent music, or, as I have just said, music’s fascination (for there were neither consecutive sounds nor combined ones, nor anything save my own musical emotion) of all those years ago.
“Dusky, Many-Towered Bologna”

It is a very curious experience, this catching the tail of an emotion of long ago. It is like what happens when, by some trick of associative memory or of unconscious interpretation, you suddenly smell lemon flowers, or wine-vats, or some more personal perfume in places where there can be no vestige of any such things. In the case of emotion such as this old, old one of Bologna, what stands for the London street, where there can obviously be neither lemon-trees nor wine-vats, is your own elderly blasé self, to whom red-brick battlements and Renaissance-carved lintels and eighteenth-century bobwiggled portraits have become mere humdrum facts; and in whom, nevertheless, there suddenly arises the thrill of rareness and mystery which they once awoke, brief as the briefest lightning flash wherein one recognizes, in some inscrutable manner, that one is not one’s present self, but that child of long years past.

They have restored churches and palaces in Bologna, Rubbiani and sundry other of my
archæological acquaintances; and rebuilt or disengaged the Ghibelline battlements, like wild tulip petals, of the House of King Enzo, son of Barbarossa. But at the base of the two leaning towers there no longer hang those great basins and pudding-moulds and ewers and platters and pitchers which were more resplendent in their delicate copper rosiness and brass yellow, and in a way more mediæval also, than any knight's armour in the town museum. And on the closed shutters of those venerable booths I read a printed notice: "The Coppersmiths Ildebrando and Oliviero inform their customers of their removal to a shop alongside the new market building." The new market building, cast iron and disinfectants, excellent modern products. . . . But think that the predecessors of Ildebrando and Oliviero (fit names for the last of a chivalrous line!), or at least their copper-wares, had looked for seven centuries up the steep slanting sides of those two watch-towers; and had been there, no doubt, when Dante also looked up at the clouds passing atop of them, and made a mental note of the simile for his Giant Hunters in Hell.
One of my haunts at Bologna has been the Seven Churches round San Stefano. Seven they are called, though they seem far more numerous: a maze of low-roofed basilicas, chapels, crypts and shrines; cloisters also, and damp monastic yards under belfries, and mysterious corridors, with graves and tabernacles, tucked away in them; barrocco Gesù Morto shelved where you expect only broken chairs and derelict besoms, and the Three Kings, huge black Gothic chessmen, frightening you as you come suddenly up against them, with their goggle stare. Sanctuaries of all kinds, and one within the other, smelling of bats and rats, in which I also seemed to breathe the pent-up centuries. Or is it that what we call "the centuries" are those places themselves, those low basilical roofs, those squat Romanesque arches, those reticulated walls; and is it, on the contrary, our fancy and feeling which they enclose to grope among strange altars and horned sarcophagi and tinsel Madonnas and carved apocalyptic beasts and yellow tapers guttering upon paper flowers? For in these Seven Churches and their purlieus there returned to my mind the
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suspicion that what we think of and feel as the Past, as the Religion and History of Other Days, is in many cases only the buildings and sepulchres they have left behind: our emotion being in reality only artistic, due to lines and curves and lights and shadows, and echoing steps, the result of a *mise-en-scène* only the more subtly theatrical that it has been an accident.

These Seven Churches, and especially the Templar's Church called House of Pilate, are such a *mise-en-scène* as Wagner aimed at creating in his *Parsifal*. The Bayreuth Grail Church attempts to make us feel as we did in that marvellous little circular church, with the great altar, sepulchre, ambones, one knows not what to call that mysterious symbolical edifice within an edifice, which looms with its crucifix and flights of steps and votive lights under that flattened Byzantine dome. It is, this House of Pilate, a place of indescribable mystery and awe, compared with which Wagner's Grail-Music is scarcely less futile a sham than his cardboard architecture. It is a place whose appropriate sounds would not be plain-chants even, however archaic, but
mutterings and wailings and solitary footfalls; a building which has the shuddering nightmare quality of the moments before a wintry dawn.

There are not many such places as these Seven Churches, even in Italy. The Renaissance swept them away; and, even if only with Jesuitic plaster and whitewash and frescoed perspectives, brought light and space and air everywhere. And one must go to Flanders and Germany to find them tucked away, dark corners, labyrinthine chapels and Gethsemanes, for bruised souls clinging to darkness.

When I had, as I thought, done with all this hive of hidden sanctuaries, I came, turning a corner, to yet another little black chapel. And in it an old beldame insisted on unlocking the "Sacred House of Loreto," as she called it, and telling me its unintelligible story. It seemed a narrow space behind an altar, where she set down a taper in a niche and, turning a handle and rolling back a shutter, displayed a black Madonna cocooned in brocade, her star-crowned head barely emerging from puce and tinsel farthingale.

While looking at her I remembered that outside one of these same Seven Churches
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there is, let into the wall, and above a great horned stone coffin at the street corner, a Roman tablet, finely lettered with Domine Isidi Victrici. Is not the subterranean worship of the Nile-goddess still hidden in those churches and crypts and cloisters? May it not be the loin-cloth of ever-murdered, ever-resuscitating Osiris which hangs vague and white over the arms of the cross on that staircased sepulchral altar, under the dome of Pilate's House? And that black swaddled Madonna behind the shutters thrown open by the crone with her wax-dip, is not she perhaps the Victorious Lady?

Churches like these Seven Churches of Bologna (and probably whatever temples the subterranean cults of ancient times possessed) seem like the lairs, the hidden resting-places, where mankind has cowered in silence and darkness with its broken limbs and sores and fever visions, resting and healing itself between the real miseries of this world and the imagined terrors of the next.
How one does enjoy those fifteenth-century Bolognese painters, mediocre to a man, after the over-gifted, over-strenuous Tuscans! They have the romantic, in a sense Spenserian, quality of mediaeval poetry, and its preference for very young, almost childish, heroes in beautiful clothes. When one sees all these lovely beardless St. Sebastians and St. Georges, and even the wicked Roman Emperors presiding over St. Cecilia's martyrdom, even the executioners heating the furnaces, all so many curly Aucassins ready for Nicolettes, one wonders what the mentality of this provincial Renaissance can really have been. And only the more if one has been looking at the local tyrants, the family Bentivoglio portrayed by Costa in their own chapel, the rarest lot of half-fledged ruffians round a father looking like a renegade pirate. . . .
Towards sunset there came a long and heavy shower.

The steps one goes down to the House of Pilate church, and the little paved hole in which it stands deep below the level of the present city, were muddy and full of pools. The church itself was dark but for what came from the ill-lighted cloister within; and the great altar with its stairs and balconies, its look of being a temple, and a triumphal stage, and yet at the same time a pillory of some sort, loomed white in the dusk. At its foot, in an embrasure, flickered the only lamp, a glass cup with a nightlight, flat on the marble slab. There, I felt, was It. It. What? The something whose white drapery hangs limp like a corpse over the arms of the cross on the top of that church inside a church. The whole place was full of It: It, a vague terror and sorrow. But what frightened me was none of all this, but just a human being, a man, perhaps a tourist, standing still in the dusk before the altar. The sight of him almost made my
"Dusky, Many-Towered Bologna"

heart stop. All that is what religion must have been for primeval man; and this little Templar’s church (or whatever in Italy takes the place of such) seems to be oozing with the mysteries of times long before Christianity, or even paganism: the terror and sorrows of a nether world and of a nethermost soul.

The rain had stopped when I came out; and the sunset made the bricks of San Giacomo very rosy and lovely and put delicate shadows upon the coloured walls and white colonnades. And against the pure washed sky I noticed for the first time that the two leaning towers, which one thinks of as frowning dark, are really of an unsubstantial rose-colour weathered lilac, a colour like that of the leafless woods on the Apennines above Bologna, bare just now, but already quickening under their delicate bark. I sat for a long while, waiting for the rain to stop, in San Giovanni in Monte, where Raphael’s St. Cecilia still hung when Dr. Burney visited Bologna in 1770. This church also was dark; but the round window with Cossa’s fine John on Patmos was like a set out of jewels, coloured, luminous, blazing.

A few people came in. It is extraordinary
how soothing and solemn an empty church becomes at this hour: the worshippers felt rather than seen, their poor personalities obliterated, themselves turned into the mere shadowy embodiment of the sadness and hope and fear and consolation one imagines them to bring and to carry away.

Again, at evening I returned to those Seven Churches, their very names, Atrio di Pilato or San Sepolcro, wonderful; all those innumerable nooks and corners and gratings with a shrine, a Dead Christ, a Mater Dolorosa, something mysteriously suffering, hidden away. And in the little cloister, with damp-green pavement in the shadow of the high walls and the belfry, I came upon a column with Peter's Cock; no barn-door fowl, but a sort of bird-divinity, like the winged sphinxes and sirens which the ancients set on pillars at Delphi and elsewhere. That nightlight at the foot of the great balustrade and staircased altar between the symbolic ox and eagle of the Evangelists, flickered in its marble embrasure, lighting the side of the time-polished slabs as a fire with its last flare might do at-midnight.

As I was returning from my last regretful
look round Bologna, there suddenly came, from the beautiful tulip-shaped belfry of San Pietro, a volley of bells, and (the most unexpected occurrence in Italy) actually *chimes*. Their sound seemed to add to my old, or rather my childish, love of Bologna my more recent love of Oxford; the emotion special to that aristocratic swept and garnished English Past enhancing the emotion inspired by this Lombard city, so venerable even though so nobly alive.
VIII

OUT OF VENICE AT LAST
VIII

OUT OF VENICE AT LAST

OUT of Venice at last, and back once more in these most friendly Paduan hills. A north breeze after heavy rain; the clouds are turning these hill-tops into Alps. Between them are great, flat, green meadows, little bays and coves of the withdrawn Adriatic among its volcanic islands; and on them white cattle are browsing in the October freshness. Out of Venice at last! The wind stirs the sunburnt thistles on the rocks; the moving sunshine lights the first flame of yellow and russet on poplars and hedgerows; from unseen yards rise kindly farm noises. And the mists and languors and regrets and dreams of Venice are swept, are cleansed away, as by rain and wind, out of my soul! Alert thoughts begin to arise, binding the distant and future and me to them in orderly patterns, bringing me back into the life of other things, after
those days of moody isolation of my self, a self fluctuating and shifting in stagnation like the shallow and stagnant Venetian waters: those shallow waters of Venice, wherein the brooding sirocco vapours and the stormy sunsets put shifting iridescences and sanguine splendours and scales of unclutchable gold; all the dead greatness and the happiness which has never really been, and the crumble of endless neglect and the creepy life of obscure baseness, seem all to be in their ooze, never thoroughly rinsed by the storms and the tides and sending up faint miasmas in which the soul fevers and dissolves, as it rocks to and fro, vaguely queasy with the faint lurch of the gondola and its inhumanly slow progress.

Is it that such conditions of feeling exclude all remembrance of sounder life; or that there is really, to people like myself, a kind of poison of body and soul in Venice? For it seems to me that I have rarely been healthily happy in Venice, never quite free from regrets and from longings, or the delusive happiness which is streaked with them. The very beauty and poetry of Venice, its shimmering colours and sliding forms, as of a past whose heroism
Out of Venice at Last

is overlaid by suspicion and pleasure-seeking (the builders of St. Mark's succeeded by the Ridotto masquerade of Longhi), the things which Venice offers to the eye and the fancy conspire to melt and mar our soul like some music of ungraspable timbres and unstable rhythms and modulations, with the enervation also of "too much": more sequences of colours on the water, more palaces, more canals, more romance, and more magnificence and squalor. In Venice I catch myself trying to isolate, if I may use such an expression, the enough. I have to realize the charm of one detail, to live through one suggestion (the rigging and mirrored keel of a single boat, or the grace of a single house, or the perfection, say, of one piece of stone lattice-work or framed marble slab in the narthex of St. Mark's), before I can live it into my own life and keep it as mine. The virtue of paucity, the stimulus of the insufficient and the unfinished, the spell of the fragment forcing us to furnish what it lacks out of our own heart and mind, these enhancements of the world and of us are not called forth by Venice. Venice is always too much and too much so.
The Golden Keys

I cannot cope with it, it submerges me. It does not seem a mere association of fortuitous coincidences that Venice should make me understand what Wagner’s music is to some other folk: Wagner was right to die there, and Browning should have died in the Euganean Hills or at Asolo. Instead of the bracing effects of the other arts (its own earlier painting and its own Byzantine and Gothic carving), Venice, taken all in all, has the effect rather of music when music is least like them and most viciously itself. It brings up, with each dip of the oar, the past, or rather the might-have-been; it dissolves my energies like its own moist and shifting skies; it brings a knot into my throat and almost tears into my eyes, like a languorous waltz or a distant accordion, and into my mind the ignominious sadness of lovers’ quarrels, like Musset’s and George Sand’s, of the going to bits of Byron, and of its own long, shameful crumble, ending in sale of shrines and heirlooms, and dead women’s fans and dead babies’ shoes at the curiosity dealers.

And now, thank heaven, I am out of it all. On the top of the hill the oaks come to an
Out of Venice at Last

end, and the scrub of Venetian sumach; there is only thin grass and broken volcanic stone. Opposite are faintly outlined Alps, and at the end of the misty twilit plain one knows that there is Venice.

But I am out of it, and safe. That marvellous, more than Wagnerian symphony of sights and fancies, with its lapsing rhythms and insidious timbres and modulations, is out of earshot of my spirit. All I can hear is Alpine wind among the grasses, dimmed farmyard sounds, and the note of a cricket, delicate in the stillness. And in myself a certain melody of Beethoven's, one of a quartet, the words of which are . . . well, Out of Venice at last, or much to that effect.
IX

THE CHURCHES IN THE SILTED VALLEY
THE CHURCHES IN THE STEEP VALLEY
THE CHURCHES IN THE SILTED VALLEY

What with generations of serviceable sea-going shoes and the sea-fogs of the neighbouring valley, it took me some minutes to decipher that sepulchral copy of verses. They proved to run as follows:

Hark from this tomb a doleful sound,
Mine ears attend this cry:
Ye Mortals! all come view the ground
Where you must shortly lye.
Princes! this clay must be your Bed
In spight of all your powers.
The truly Wise and Reverend head
Must lye as low as ours.

Ours, to wit the heads of the Three Daughters of Thomas and Ann Pigge, whose tombstone having been thus lavished upon admonitory poetry, were allowed space enough to be recorded only in summary and collective fashion, thus:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>June 9, 1721</td>
<td>21 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frances</td>
<td>Dec. 5, 1723</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabth</td>
<td>Jan. 16, 1725</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Had Death, so handsomely dealt with in their epitaph, really contrived to hit each of the poor little sisters just in her twenty-second year? Or was the accumulated grief such that the broken-hearted parents were able to remember the age of only the last of those lost daughters, gathering the others, like profiles in an Egyptian relief, behind that nearest one?

I wondered. And made other reflections; and more and more, as you will hear, while I spelt out epitaph after epitaph in that place which will remain in my memory as the Silted Valley of the Three Churches. I had never heard of its existence, and had come upon it suddenly out of the tarnished little woods and dusty, tinder, hedgerows: a shallow, circular valley, enclosed, secluded, separate, marshy-green, with a flush and flowery stream. And there, beyond a few red cottages, was stretched a church, grey, stranded, shipwrecked on a low green slope of graveyard. Wrecked; for the transept and chancel were broken off and choked with dry grass and nettles; and the crosses and figures at the gable ends were battered into goblin shapes. Perhaps it was
The Churches in the Silted Valley

dthis which gave the church a fantastic, almost romantic air which its fine Early English would not warrant. There was, moreover, something lacelike in rose-windows and battlements, something as if it had come from overseas, from where Memling's Madonnas are throned under canopies carved with blossoms and thorns. The sea air had peeled the last patches of plaster from off the flint masonry, like alternated shingle and mother-of-pearl, which gives all the churches of this part of England, and this one particularly, a shimmering, bodyless appearance from a distance. The derelict church stood wide open on both sides; the air and sunshine of its porches making the grey chilliness of nave and aisles even more noticeable, with the suggestion of Italian marsh churches, Toscanella or Classe or Torcello, kept open all day long against the invading damp; the suggestion, also, of the open doors of houses where death has just entered. A very noble little church, with pathetic traces of colour on carved angels and escutcheons; and that rare adjunct, a sundial, which always increases so poignantly (as at a corner of Laon Cathedral) the sense of time's
inexorable lapse. The richly carved pews have had their apes and dragons and prophets' heads polished out of shape by generations of hands, horny with hauling at ropes and clasping of oars; for the stranded church in the silted-up estuary has belonged, nay belongs, to seafaring men. These "master mariners" and "able seamen," as their epitaphs declare them, lie beneath the worn and mouldy flags of the nave, and also, with even more diminished inscriptions, under the crooked headstones of the field outside, where an old, old man, who might be the Ancient Mariner or Father Time in person, was scything the rough churchyard grass.

And surely, I said to myself after copying out the epitaph of the three daughters of Thomas and Ann Pigge, surely after so much sea-spray and fog, and an occasional watery death (one poor lad of twenty-three "cast on this coast after shipwreck"), it is preferable not to lie under those cold church flags "awaiting the Day of Judgment" and its alarums, but rather outside, where the swallows are rehearsing their autumn flights in that grassy amphitheatre, with its river steeping the cress-
The Churches in the Silted Valley

beds and rose-coloured willow herb, and with two more churches, their towers and scanty trees outlined against the slopes and the sky, giving this green and sunny and empty region an ineffable piety as of some painted Heavenly Jerusalem, or some Island of the Saints, wherein a miracle should have allowed our trespassing.

How it has come about that this half-dismantled church should be thus derelict in that empty valley—indeed, how it and its battered architectural braveries have come to be there at all—is a riddle one guesses only after having passed the equally solitary second church half-way up that circular valley, and reached the third church, the one printing its wind-warped beeches against the sky. For beyond that ridge, sudden, unexpected on the other side, behold an estuary, salt marsh, and canals, a little red-roofed harbour, and the sea, receding further and further from that silted-up valley and those stranded churches.

This topmost of the three churches has been restored; and the trodden-out flagstones been scraped clean of the names of those able seamen and master mariners who must lie
under its nave as they do in the undesecrated church of the valley. But a number of them still rest beneath the burnt-up grass outside, with their due proportion of drowned:

"William Shepherd," for instance, "of Wisbech, who by a sudden violent storm on ye 16 day of March 17 . . . was forced on the shore in ye bay of S. . . . when himself and . . . of his ship's crew lost their lives. Aged twenty-three years"—all in the shelter of those beeches which I had noticed, printed on the sky, from the porch of the church below; beeches so thin and warped of branch by the gales, so black of leaf and trunk as almost to have turned into some unknown maritime vegetation.

Besides the square battlemented belfry which all the churches of this region carry on their front, this uppermost church, this church on the ridge, has another tower on its rear; round, slender, the tall lantern-tower of the beacon-light for showing those able seamen and master mariners (some, indeed, drowned, despite its help and warning!) their way among the sandbanks and marsh-channels up into that silted estuary which is nowadays the
The Churches in the Silted Valley

flowery bog, the cornfield-slopes around the stranded, forsaken lowest church.

The afternoon of my visit to the three churches was one of sun-suffused mists, the first day of autumn, such as steeps our spirit in sadness and yet serenity. I walked to and fro under that sea-warped beech avenue, picking up cornelian and agate-coloured flints alongside that church, and turning, upon that knife-blade of hill, now towards the sea and the salt-marsh and red seafaring village in front, and then towards the green pastoral valley of the three churches behind. The epitaphs I had copied and the many others I had spelt out had got blurring my soul, as that wide, misty, autumn sunshine blurred the landscape. All those able seamen, with their wives and children; yes, even the three daughters of Thomas and Ann Pigge, collected together as per double entry, their various dates of birth summed up under their common age of death; and all that harping (in letters worn down by so many years and generations of hobnails) upon the common, inevitable end, the grave we all are coming to, even if but a watery one; all this had, as I said, blurred my
thoughts into confused sympathy with all these people. So long ago, and all dead! The sea has receded, silted the harbour, stranded the churches; and all those folk are dead, whether prematurely, like the three Miss Pigges at one-and-twenty and the poor boy drowned at twenty-three, or at three score and ten and over; and whether or not the church beacon was built and kept alight; all their little lives, howsoever prolonged or curtailed, perspectived into indiscriminate equality, generation on generation, century on century, like the sand mounds and the mud pools of that estuary at my feet. And the sun goes on shining through the autumn veil, the sea breeze rustles salt in the beeches, the larks are rocketing and the swallows whirring, just as if they had never ceased doing it all, just as if the present moment were consubstantial with all that past: births, marriages, and deaths coming ceaselessly to be registered and sanctified in those three churches of the silted-up valley. Indeed, it is perhaps because men and women have always thought such thoughts as mine, even able seamen, master mariners, and the poor young daughters of Thomas and
Ann Pigge, that these three churches were built and consecrated in honour of those serene and ruthless powers to whom the centuries are but a perpetual present, and death but an inconsidered detail of everlasting life.
A MURDERED HOUSE
THEY had talked of Kilmenny House as a place I must be taken to see. And there had arisen in my mind, together with a faint disinclination to move, a bored vision of another of those old houses with old ceilings. It is good there should be an old house, with (or without) an old ceiling, in every region of the globe. But to the wanderer over the earth’s surface and partaker of its manifold hospitalities there comes to be a sameness, almost an irksomeness, in the emotions which such a place inevitably evokes, so that the suggestion of another such gets mingled with the equally inevitable proposal to see the improvements in one’s host’s own premises or grounds, and even in his stables and garage. Besides, once you have written about old houses or such like, there is apt to come the distaste for what savours of one’s trade, a vague reluctance also
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as towards one's own particular form of ex-
ploration, or let us say profanation, of God's
Universe. So I have shown no alacrity about
going to see Kilmenny House, and should
have felt no regret at leaving these Fifeshire
shores without seeing it at all. But yesterday
evening there, unexpectedly, it was—or more
properly, there we were in its presence.

We had prosaically tried to secure a walk
between the endless icy showers, and had
gone along the beach looking for shells among
the clammy green stones and the bands of
coal refuse which the faithful tide has returned
to this land polluted by gasworks and factories,
with a care and a regularity touchingly different
from the ruthless slatternliness of mankind.
After another day of blotted-out landscape the
sky was clearing towards sunset, and the
opposite coast appearing fitfully, with Arthur's
Seat and the Pentlands. Ranged against the
pale sea and paler land, with factory chimneys
and colliery mounds behind them, was a fleet
of cruisers and destroyers, for all the world
like black gulls tucked down on to the water.
Soon there were no more shells to be found,
but only nameless bits of metal and crockery;
rusted kettles also, even the ignominy (O! Amphitrite and all ye nymphs!) of a sea-tossed stays-busk. Then, as we made our way across the seaweed and shingle, the pines and beeches gradually came to an end, and were replaced by black outhouses, stacks of blackened timber, and the spread of rusty railway trucks, iron shanties, and tall smoking chimneys. The tide receded, defiled and languid, out of a forsaken quarry, even the greedy gulls disdaining such grimy human rubbish; and presently we were picking our way among rails steeped in inky puddles and inky mud. The landscape did not lack (such places never do!) for human habitations—black stone cottages with pathetic efforts at gardens; and we met two little girls wheeling a tiny baby in immaculate frills, the only flowers—children and frills—which industrial mankind still brings forth quite unstintingly.

For the vegetation had suffered not a sea-change: on the rocks and behind the wood-stacks and factory palings and railway lumber, tall beeches and great sycamores printed on the wet sky their leafless and blackened
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branches; blasted not by premature cold (for we are but in August, and all around is vivid green and richly leafy), but by the chemically poisoned air and soil. Even the ruins, dating from Cromwellian times, of Kilmenny Castle, step gables and turrets overhanging the water, looked only like another discarded factory shed. Among these dishonoured skeletons of trees, in rank grass, rose two tall gate-posts of floridly carved stone, pompously surmounted by shapes like crowns or birdcage clocks. And passing between them, across wet weedy lawns, we came, beneath those almost leafless trees, to Kilmenny House.

Looking seawards it has a flat balustraded front, of dignified Palladian kind. But towards the fields and the Fifeshire hills (hidden by the encroaching factories and their railway yards) there is a façade of the late seventeenth- or early eighteenth-century style, with two great square flanking pieces, roofed each of them with stately domes of silvery slate, fitted exquisitely over the exquisitely carved raftering one feels below.

The house, which has become uninhabitable by the encroaching propinquity of the factories
A Murdered House

and gasworks and goods station, with their appropriate screechings and belchings, now serves only as the warehouse of the adjacent linoleum works, those whose fumes of rancid tallow are wafted thence for miles across the fields. It is, moreover, eminently haunted, and the caretaker sleeping in that dismantled place has told of strange ladies seen and heard of nights, let alone a much more ancient ghost, known already in George Viscount and Wilhelmina Viscountess’s days, a green lady who once haunted a ruined well in the park, but who has doubtless long departed with the green leaves which were her rustling garment, withering away, as even ghostly ladies must, in the stench of chemicals and railway soot.

Few houses have so much the air of being built for delicate hospitality, divorced from the grosser pleasures of hunting or shooting; offering mere witty conversation, courtship, and at most such games as men and women partake in together, and which (at least so one thinks of them in the presence of this high-bred little place) serve merely to train in graceful yielding to one’s neighbour’s skill or luck, and winner’s chivalrous offer of a
revanche. And certainly I have never seen a house having less of the liveried dreariness of princely dwellings and their lean, humbled parasites. Here, at old Kilmenny House, under George Viscount and Wilhelmina his Viscountess, all must have been equals, and all of the same high-bred simplicity and grace. Persons, as I feel their vanished presence, of parts, as the eighteenth century phrased it, but of sensibility also, such as Sir Joshua paints, all unconscious of Hogarthian vileness. The passionate currents of Rousseau flowed in their souls, and the melancholy of newly-discovered Ossian, deep below the rippled surface, suddenly bursting forth with pathetic longings as in sonata adagios, to be checked into orderly energy of allegros, and ironical dainty scherzos; music, like that of Haydn and Mozart, seeming these people's appropriate ghost, and such as I can imagine haunting that murdered house.

Let alone all the noble dwellings which have decayed through poverty and neglect, half the houses ever built have, after all, died violent deaths from fire or warfare or what is called improvement, their very material often carried
elsewhere to serve for building. But this particular house has been murdered slowly, silently, and stealthily by poisoning. It looks inhabitable, with a fair show of order inside and out, but no one can inhabit it, and it has pined away, with beauty undiminished, like some romantic lady, doomed to lingering death by a low-born lord who had no use for so much dignity and sweetness.

It being Saturday evening the linoleum and all the other works were closed, not a creature about them stirring. The window-panes stared black from the uninhabited rooms. Except for the whiff of gas from the adjacent works, the air was smelling only of wet, spoilt hay and of distant seaweed. And only the rumble of an antiquated goods train, a rusty contemporary of the Puffing Billy which stands on the bridge at Newcastle, broke the silence as its cotton-wool steamed slowly forth and lay fleecy on the soaked pale fields and pastures towards the spectral Fifeshire Lomonds.

As already said, I had felt at once that what haunted this murdered house must be music; and (disgraceful to relate) I was already profaning the place and hour with a sketched-out
story; when reality, which is more imaginative than our poor fictions, did the thing for me, and banished the abortive tale of Kilmenny House into the limbo of untold tales. For when we had turned our backs to it, and were returning home on the other side along that very beautiful bay, we came to a tiny old village, saved from the accursed fumes of that murderous industry by a rocky promontory which hid Kilmenny, its house and its factories, from view. Just as we were turning up one of the steep flights of steps which (together with red roofs and nasturtiums against whitewash) give these Fife villages an odd air of Northern France, I was arrested by a jangle of music. It came from one of the cottages which proffer buns and bull’s-eyes to the Kirkcaldy trippers, and boats wherewithal to dabble among the seagulls in the muddy river-mouth. A jangle of chords and staccato one-two-three-four which sounded, for all the world, like that of a harpsichord, and which, to the ear of fancy, turned some music-hall ditty into something sonata-like and poignant. The ghostly voice, I recognized, of the weirdly poisoned house.
XI

A ROMAN ROAD ON THE DOWNS
A ROMAN ROAD ON THE DOWNS

TWO days of motoring across England have left in me, quite naturally, a sense of how English roads differ from those of other countries. I do not mean in the eyes of a chauffeur, but in those of the futile person looking about for the meanings and associations of visible things.

My dominant impression is that these roads traverse (I cannot say serve, since there is no one to be served!) a country void of inhabitants: perfectly kept roads, whether made by the Romans or newly metalled for motoring, and of perplexing superabundance; you can run along them for miles without ever meeting another motor, a carriage, a cycle, or a cart. Particularly without meeting a cart! Goods and letters come unseen by the railroads, hidden modestly in cuttings; and the produce
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of the land (for there are big horses and whirling reaping-machines on the sky-line) must be privately conveyed along field-tracks. In the course of a long day we met once or twice only, near Cheltenham or thereabouts, a pair of high-stepping horses airing some solemn old lady behind her liveried servants.

Empty, empty, this country seems, save where, as suddenly at Swindon, modern industry has heaped up human beings much as it heaps the cinders of forges or the refuse of mines, inevitable, unconsidered, by or waste products! The real owners of the roads, though even of them there are but few, are the blear and tattered tramps: they at least have use for them.

But as we rush on the feeling grows on me that the country belongs ostensibly to the winds and storms, and, after them, to the gentry whose houses lurk in the solemn privacy of oak and beech groves along the valleys. Even the Cotswold villages, with their fine old woolstaplers' houses and mediæval churches, look as if they had become the abode of the "Poor People," looked after by the Lady Bountifuls and the clerical younger sons of
A Roman Road on the Downs

those great houses hidden in the trees. Their exquisite flowers, bushy phlox and sweet peas scenting the road, look fostered by show-prizes vouchsafed by the Quality. I do not believe that all French peasants are fit for Millet, or Italian ones step out of the neglected pages of Ouida; still I confess, on these English roads, to a foolish longing to see an occasional tiller of the soil, or, indeed, anybody not a hanger-on of Refined Leisure.

It was refreshing in such a country suddenly to come upon woods which were neither park nor shooting, but just woods, as they exist in other countries; indeed, seemingly, the remains of a real forest in the foreign sense. It happened somewhere above Cirencester; we had mistaken the road, and the motor could not take a steep and muddy hill, so we walked. And there the woods were on either side, beech for the most part, but beech grown from the old, gnarled, mossy stumps, growing in straight, close taillis, telling of charcoal-burning days. It touched me with a sense of kinship with the Past and the Distant, almost as much as when we came, among the Wiltshire downs, unexpectedly on to a Roman road.
The Golden Keys

But first there was Swindon. In the midst of this airy, empty, idle, and exquisite country appeared rows of mean little houses, and more rows; an electric-tram, then streets crammed with drays and perambulators, theatre-posters, and all the red and blue pictorial mustards, meat extracts, and seaside resorts; shops of the sort only England produces, with canned foods, "footwear," cheap millinery and hosiery, warehoused tightly in their windows; in fact, a piece of London slum, as everything in England tends to be (at best a semi-detached London suburb!) when it is no longer part of what Mr. Wells has taught us to think of henceforth as "Bladesover."

After the Present (let us, pray not the Future!) at Swindon, the Past, genteel, decorous, as becomes England, at Marlborough. And then England's poetry, all "As You Like It" and "Fairy Queen," in the beech woods of Savernake; romantic glades, where the deer have been kept much as their owners keep their coats of arms and family traditions, not (as would happen on the Continent) by historic chance, but deliberately, as so much luxurious pomp and aesthetic prestige.
A Roman Road on the Downs

But the most English impression of those two days' motoring across England has been the couple of hours on the Solent, lunching and waiting for lunch at an old farm-house turned into an inn, but an inn, of course, no longer for farmers! There was a regatta on hand, with shooting-booths, and merry-go-rounds eking out attractions; char-à-bancs and dogcarts, broken-down station flies left about horseless everywhere; and strings of flags flapping madly in the fresh sea wind; the whole vague little place, village green and sands, overrun with holiday-makers. But moving about even among them were khaki'd soldiers and officers in mufti, those spare, lantern-jawed English officers with perfect manners and steel-blue eyes, and profiles like razors. And everywhere among the high grass and the gorse lay hidden forts, like huge man-traps; while in front, between the smoke of Portsmouth and the woods and villages of the Isle of Wight, destroyers sat at anchor; and striped forts, like magnified turret-ships, squatted by the water. No sentries, at least none visible; and none of those peremptory notices which ward off civilians from the haunts of Con-
tinental militarism. The bathers, with towels on their bicycles; the golfers, and the people come for shooting-galleries and merry-go-rounds, were moving freely among the furtive fortifications and discreet soldiers. It brought to my mind a similar impression, similarly incomprehensible, I take it, to all save Anglo-Saxons, during the autumn manoeuvres some years back. It was at Farringdon. The countryside, with motors and lunch-baskets, was drawn up along the hedges which the belligerent soldiers jumped and rolled over in hot pursuit of the imaginary enemy; cyclists and perambulators crowded under the pine-clump, elbowing the foreign military attachés and staff officers, watching the army advancing (only the Highlanders' sporrans glittering) invisible across a ploughed field. Loafers from the neighbouring town, nursemaids and children surrounded the little machine-gun, popping at intervals; and the lank, brown officers trotted up to talk to the ladies in the motors. Such things are inconceivably, admirably English, and as different from Continental militarism (I remember the aviation field at Le Mans, defended by a cordon of cavalry
A Roman Road on the Downs

ready for battle!) as those forts among the golf-links are from a Napoleonic fortress, with its eagles and gaping cannon. I sometimes wonder whether English people know how differently (in this case how much better!) they take certain sides of life. I wonder even more whether foreigners ever get sufficiently in touch with us even to perceive these differences. . . .

But, oddly segregated as we modern nations have more and more become, there was unity once in the world; and the Roman road bids one remember it. We struck it somewhere near Andover: narrow, between high hedges, running relentlessly up and down, rushing across those sheep downs, taking them as a rider takes a fence. It was getting dark on a squally day. The white road rose like a ladder in front of us, taking at moments the look of a tall, white tower, until our wheels flattened it down in passing. Dark creatures, ferrets, foxes, ran across from hedgerow to hedgerow, and night-birds flapped. It came home to me with a sudden strangeness that this road thus ruthlessly thrown across an alien country, thus solitary and enclosed among the empty
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English uplands, was a part of Rome, and led straight, both in intention and deed, to the northernmost gates of the Urbs. It was, I believe, the Ermyn street; but whatever its name while crossing these Wessex downs, one thing was certain: it became, later on its course, the Via AEmilia, and then the Flamminia, or perhaps the Cassia, the Via Triumphalis, descending through ilex scrubs and solitary, cypressed orchards, on to the Tiber and on to Rome.
XII

THE GORGONS IN THE
SURREY LANE
THE GORGONS IN THE SURREY LANE

I HAVE been staying at a village among the Downs, walking along the yew-trees of the Pilgrim’s Way, and at the same time reading Mr. Hewlett’s more mystifying than mystic *Lore of Proserpine*.

I do not like this new-fangled seeing of Fairies and Oreads, and am well satisfied I never have seen any; and that for me the spirits immanent in lawns and trees and waters should have remained trees and lawns and waters, disdaining human shape.

Among these chalk hills, in a deep lane between the ripening cornfields, I came a few days since on a mysterious aspect: two vast interlacing systems of coils and tentacles, clinging to the bank, tunnelling into the field’s side, spreading with vigorous thrusts from the great central plexus of heart-like fibrous
bosses, into the smooth erectness of the great trunk and limbs, the swelling, almost visibly palpitating, arteries laid bare on the bank’s surface; a sight which made my heart beat just a little faster, in somewhat of the awed amazement with which, last Easter, I looked at the denizens of the Naples Aquarium. The thing was but the roots of two big beeches which the lane’s scooping had spread naked upon its escarpment. Nor could they possibly have been mistaken for anything else. Yet instantly that obvious and never-lost reality of theirs was overlaid, entwined, even as they themselves were coiling in a clear but inex­tricable pattern, with recollections of Gorgon’s heads: the beautiful classic ones and the grotesque tongue-lolling ones of the oldest metopes of Selinus, and, more vivid still and terrible, the Gorgon shapes of the octopus vases of Cnossos. And these inner visions possessed, moreover, a fringe of uncertain images, and emotions sinking deep into my spirit like those roots’ invisible suckers. Now what would have been the gain of seeing in the place of these mysterious and potent layings-bare of the trees’ hidden, subterranean,
The Gorgons in the Surrey Lane

chthonian life and efforts, a real Gorgon, a snake-woman or woman at all, however snaky? Similarly, at the top of that selfsame lane (it led to the village school!), and with those Gorgon beech-coils but some hundred yards behind me, I came unexpectedly into a level and fairly open piece of wood, set with huge pines, as a spacious church is set with its vaulting-piers, and even as in a church, the enclosed space and light seeming far more spacious and clearer than the open. Here again was a very deep emotion; indeed, a deeper one, with less of associated images (I have introduced that of the church only as an after-thought and an illustration) and more of the immediate, intrinsic sense of the trees rising, spreading, enclosing that space, windowing that sunshine; more of such feeling also as architecture and music give by their very lack of suggestion of anything beyond themselves. Now, supposing that I, like Mr. Hewlett and his shepherds and bank clerks, had grown aware of some elf or sylvan among those trees, some shape copied vaguely from a picture or statue, but not worked in, as Böcklin works his Oreads and Nixes, with the
lines of the trees, since that would require immobility like the picture's; on the contrary, a creature with the quite dissimilar scheme of lines and accents and pressures, of even the loveliest unsculptured or unpainted human body? Would this intrusion of a bit of Russian Ballet have brought me any nearer to the living heart of Nature? Nay, suppose that instead of a robin, recognized suddenly within grasp of my hand, I had found myself face to face, as Mr. Hewlett did, with a small nude model torturing a rabbit, what deeper emotion should I have been enriched by? Rather, I should have had the horrid start of being faced suddenly by a fellow-creature where none is expected, surely one of the most devitalizing of possible experiences.

Intrusions and profanations, I should feel such occurrences, of that innermost sanctuary wherein lives mirrored in ourself all that is not ourself; vile bringing-down of our freed fancy to its stale haunts, assimilating things not to our essential modes of moving and willing (intensified, brought home by such comparison) but to our anecdotic experience of self and neighbours!
It is, I grant you, of such base assimilations that all primæval religion is made, with its oblations of tripe and mutton smoke to human-mawed bogies. But saints and artists and philosophers have all been working to cleanse this too-too human element out of religion, bidding us lift our eyes in serene contemplation, nor heed the ancestral queasinesses of bodily fear, the creeping horror premonitory of the panic sent by the shaggy Goat-God. And this is, I cannot help thinking, the cultus not of the Universe's austere abstract divinities, but of such skulking gods symbolizing our turbid kinship with the beasts, which Mr. Hewlett celebrates; ritual lore not of Proserpine, great Goddess of Life in Death, but of Pan and the rout of Comus sheltered in the creeping slime-darknesses of our—may I call it by its true name?—visceral consciousness. For the mysticism of our day, or rather our day's mystery-mongering, hankers after corporeal hauntings and half-disembodied materialities, rather than cherishes the clarified existence which dreamed-of things lead in the serene spheres of our imagination.
XIII

A PARISIAN SUBURB
XIII

A PARISIAN SUBURB

COUNTRIES, I said to myself, neither more nor less than fellow human beings, appeal to one not merely according to individual crotchets and habits, but also according to certain accidental first impressions upon one's feelings, which become the channel for all further ones, the pattern of all future perceptions and preferences. Preferences and, I should say also, anticipations. For, as with one's human friends, so also one's relations with places and countries are not, as should be the case with works of art, all idyll or lyric, but very fluctuating little tragi-comedies, in which not only liking and disliking alternate, but, what is as important, remembrance of past liking and disliking alternate also, and with them expectation, often hyper-sensitive, of the future. Since countries and places,
although partaking occasionally of the nature of art, are not, like art, made for the purpose of interesting and pleasing, but obey those same chances and contingencies which, even as in the case of human beings, concern themselves with anything rather than the satisfaction of the contemplative spectator.

These subtle remarks are intended to explain that, or rather why, I find myself more and more impressed by French localities as having a special quality equally opposed to the grandeur, running easily to dreary tragedy, of the South, and to the swept and garnished aristocratic (opposed to the mute plebeian) grimness of England; let alone France having none of the romantic homeliness of Germany. It is—how shall I call it?—a bourgeois quality, this French one. There is in French localities, as in, let us say, the pictures of Chardin, a certain humdrum meanness transfiguring itself unexpectedly as grace.

And now I have at length got to the little inner drama, the eminently French inner drama, of that visit of mine to that painting couple at Parthenay-les-Fleurs.

There was nothing of flowers in the journey
A Parisian Suburb

thither, either in the literal sense or the metaphorical. It was fearfully hot in that empty, dirty tram, with its gruff officials; and the quarters it passed through were depressing with their mean streets (mean, though, thank Heaven! not also smug, smugness being strictly English) and shops, and the untidy, burnt-up grass and trees of the fortifications. Those gates, or what do service as such, of Paris are especially depressing: you half expect triumphal arches and leafy bastions, and get instead mangy, sere grass, paper-strewn, and rusty octroi railings. Passing beyond which, between the allotments and dustheaps and the tiny suburban houses on that flat, high-lying ground, I became more and more depressed, until I found myself discharged from the tram in the untidy street of a shabby little town, and walking between the mean privacies of stunted suburban hedges, and up into a place labelled Villa Stanislas. It was a small, weedy garden of ill-grown apple-trees and harsh long grass, subdivided into smaller gardens still, each with its uninviting minute house. One of these I was led into; and, crossing a microscopic sitting-room, found myself in just such
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a garden, fenced and hedged, viewless: just tiny trees enough to sling a hammock and tether a cat on the rough grass; just gravel enough for a dinner-table under the kitchen window.

I felt even more depressed, especially as the occasion required a great output of exclamations of surprised pleasure. Dreadfully depressed. But . . . Was it the grace, the eminently French grace of that dear old couple? Or was it the bare getting one's sensibilities (for politeness sake) in apparent tune with the surroundings? I cannot tell. This much is certain, that, suddenly, after half an hour, I discovered this viewless, stuffy garden of rank grass and stunted trees to be a haven of refuge on that hot day; an abode of peace after that heartless Paris. I became aware of exquisite silvery slits of sky between the light-permeated leaves, of exquisite breezes and flickers on the grass; and at the same time of an incomparable sense of security and friendliness in the tiny house protecting us from the path; the walls and hedges protecting us from the road; the little, low hills and poplar avenues (remembered and felt) protecting this corner of France from the
rest of the world. A corner, a tiny, modest, humble corner, but delightful and eminently one's own; jealously kept, laid out by some of those jealously restricted quartets of French bourgeois families, such as we know them from Jean Christophe: nothing for the neighbours, the passers-by, the nation, the world, and with an odd concentrated, egoistic intimacy and grace and sweetness for oneself and one's dearest, undisturbed by that smug consideration for neighbour and community of the English middle-class living up to its proprieties.

The people of Parthenay-les-Fleurs had made up their minds that this particular couple, being manifestly childless and always walking and talking together, moreover suspected of literature and art, must be runaway, unmarried; although "Votre jeune homme," as a model had remarked to the wife, "est bien vieux." And, indeed, after an hour in the Villa Stanislas, I felt myself steeped in mild and comfortable romance.

So, when we went forth beyond the privet-hedge of that enchanted scrap of garden, the little town of Parthenay-les-Fleurs met quite
another eye in me; eye of the spirit, as well as of the body; it was really Flowery. Those mean, untidy streets revealed delightful bends and corners; those tiny bourgeois houses showed exquisite harmonies of grey wall, green shutter, and silvery slate; graces also of window-spacing, of house-step and attic; over the palings alongside, moreover, little plots of vegetables and flowers, delicate, almost epicurean, with melon frames and tonnelles of hornbeam. The impression culminated in a charitable institution, where the poor girls and their illegitimate babies sat under the cedars, screened by the clipped limes and mossy stone walls of a house having somehow belonged to Mme. de Maintenon, but which looked, for all the world, like a little Le Sidaner picture, needing only the table laid for two, with fruit and decanters and candles in the twilight.

That was Parthenay-les-Fleurs. And the strange thing about my visit to it was not only the ineffable sense of peace and leisure, of delightful lengthiness about that whole afternoon, but that I had a funny, indescribable consciousness of being touched; the whole
place, and the hours in it, steeping me in a mood of gratitude, as do certain pieces of music, which, under their quiet cheerfulness, are nevertheless oddly pathetic.
XIV

THE MARCHE AUX OISEAUX
THERE is something peculiar and worth remembering in the first days, or perhaps rather hours, of return anywhere, when the emotion of change of place is still in our nerves, making us see a town, not in its everyday commonplace relation to ourselves, our utilities and futilities, but rather with its historical and geographical significance, and the particular effects it offers to the artist. In the case of Paris, what strikes one is the water-colour quality, the washes of slaty blue sky and slaty blue river, the picking out with sharp Indian-ink of cornices and parapets, the touching-in with half-dry brush of roofs and cupolas and rainy pavement; all very discreet and delicate. Also, for so vast a place, something oddly small (for the traveller from Italy), human and, in a way, provincial, with nothing, at least in the quays and older streets, either of
Rome or New York: a bourgeois civilization
this which made Paris, no popes or princes;
and made it not so long ago, the outer aspect
of the houses answering to those little panelled
entresols (and all the floors are little more than
entresols!) and partitioned cabinets which we
see already in Chardin’s charming family
scenes. But, of course, I am talking only of
Paris of the left bank, and that portion of the
right, high up the Seine, which partakes of
the same character. As to what lies beyond
the boulevards and the Champs Élysées, that
is a case, not for “Guarda e passa,” but rather
for pass, and if possible in a taxi, and look
as little as need be.

It was in consonance with these views, and,
in order to savour the first impressions of
Paris, that I insisted on going not only to
Notre Dame, but, in spite of passing showers,
on foot to the Marché aux Fleurs, on the
opposite river-bank. Such poor common little
flowers, which English gardeners and Italian
nature would have disdained alike, but mises
en valeur, given importance and grace, every
tint and curve of them, by their immaculate
crisp hoods of paper, much like the faces of
The Marché aux Oiseaux

the women who sell them by their spotless starched caps. *Mise en valeur*; I cannot find the exact English equivalent; and it is the essence of French art, one might almost say of French nature: a row of poplars, a couple of roofs, the turn of a road, a solitary little apple-tree on a stubble-field, horizons barely undulating, but encompassing thoroughly; are not these the things which Corot has made into his silvery Elysium?

Behind the Marché aux Fleurs is that of birds: on the wet pavement tiers and tiers of cages of every flying biped; and crates of every breed of pigeon and barndoor fowl; cages of macaws and love-birds, and solitary nightingales and pathetic broods, cruelly crowded on to their perches, of tiny exotic birds whom you might mistake for the breast plumage, orange or emerald-green, or cobalt or amethyst, of some more natural-sized creature. And alongside of the cages and crates are booths for the sale of all the furniture and accessories of their poor prison-life: cages of all sizes, with their various baths and drinking vessels, things of rustic wicker, and gaudy crockery and shining, lacquered
metal. Moreover, trays of every imaginable minute grain, yellow, black, and white, and hung aloft, _galettes_ like crowns, and great orange sheaves of millet; a display suggestive of religious sacrifices and the bloodless rites of some benign Demeter metamorphosed into partridge or corn-crake, as Athena was, we are told, originally, a wise little owl.

From the Marché aux Oiseaux we went, that first day in Paris, to St. Etienne du Mont. It was Sunday; moreover the vigil of St. John Baptist, and a solemn service was preparing, with three gorgeous, gold-coped priests, looking for all the world like huge fairy tortoises, bobbing on their tail. Indeed, that whole fantastic church, with its walls of storied glass and flying galleries seemingly too narrow for grown-up people, struck me as some sort of fairy palace, which should be but a glorified version of the cages and crates of the Marché aux Oiseaux, with its queer childish quadrupeds, guinea-pigs, tame mice, and puppies, alongside the birds. Altogether for the happiness of children, this church seemed no less than that market; children of whom (marshalled by busy _bonnes sœurs_) the congregation
The Marché aux Oiseaux

did, in fact, mainly consist. A bell tinkled; the organ fluted and droned; and in swept, behind a suisse habited exactly like a polichinelle, a bevy of little scarlet-smocked choir-boys, who huddled together into their stalls much like the bullfinches on their perches. And then from their midst rose a chorister’s voice, dead in tune, white, warbling, like a fairy thrush’s song. It became evident to me that just as this church had been built when Gothic architecture, in the early sixteenth century, had become little more than a pastime, and its glass painting only a picture-book, so also nowadays its ritual had become a thing for little children, an adjunct, in their life, to the hoops and balloons and skipping-ropes set out for sale in the neighbouring Luxembourg garden. And that, somehow, there was no impiety involved in the transformation, but perhaps the contrary.

It was raining fitfully as we returned home, and the black weather-stains of Notre Dame told solemnly of storm and time above the ruffled dark waters. There were no more birds, and no more children to be seen. And childishness, with its fairy tales, had vanished
also out of my spirit. In the lurid lowering storm-sunset this corner of Paris had become once more the Paris of history and its terrible doings.
XV

ETHICS OF THE DUSTMEN
MADAME LE DOCTEUR hung her very modish hat on a peg, slipped her small person into a man's holland overcoat, tied a white apron over that, with just a width of her striped summer skirt showing to the back, did up her well coiffée head in a white kerchief, with gathers in front, and thus turned herself, in less time than it takes to describe, into the prettiest little woman out of a Chardin picture, silhouetted against the whitewashed walls and the presses and medicine-shelves of the consulting room. While she was rapidly preparing for the patients' admission, the door opened, and there entered a young man who, saluting with exquisite politeness, betook himself instantly to one of the big ledgers. He had a beautiful face, with that grave enthusiastic pathos, not without a certain intentional lyricism of hair, beard, and
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necktie, which one meets only in France; moreover, very shabbily dressed. But in his buttonhole I noticed the red rosette of the Legion of Honour; and I was told he had, as people here say, created the camp colonies for tuberculous children, to which he and the people he lived with, a printer’s typesetter and his wife, devoted all their leisure; for he earned his living by précis-writing in the Chambre. There was a brief exchange of notes between him and Mme. le Docteur and her assistant, and the consultation began.

It was all taking place, I should explain, up two pairs of stairs in a Paris hospital, which a philanthropic Farmer-General of Louis XV had, demising, installed in his palace, the grimness of its present uses (for there was nothing dainty about it all) contrasting with something ample, polite, almost festive, in the architecture. Mme. le Docteur, I reflected, might also have belonged to that eighteenth century. Not merely for that accidental look of stepping out of a Chardin, but also for her manner, very quick and decided with the poor people, yet with an enveloping charm, an air of absolute leisure,
Ethics of the Dustmen

as if there were no one else to examine and advise except that one particular patient, instead of a roomful all dressing and undressing at the same time. There were one or two tragic, eager-eyed adults; a Jewish hatter among others, who had come to be overhauled. But the examination was mostly of children, who were to be sent to the seaside or to the red-rosetted young man's camp colonies. And it was not a matter of single individuals: whole families were passed under review and pronounced "predisposed"; two workmen's families, for instance, of six each, dreadful little degenerates, but with such pathetic grace, some of them, in their restless, listless eyes and poor little thin shoulders and necks. These were mostly people coming for the first time for advice; but a subdued stir of welcome met the entrance of a big blond man in unspeakably dirty blouse, and leading a lamentable rickety little boy. The man had a magnificent head, and charming gay look. "Tiens, Lecocq! Bonjour, Lecocq!"

And the other patients instinctively made way for an old acquaintance of Mme. le Docteur's. She had known all about him for
some years, and when I accompanied her home after the hours of consultation she told me his story. He was a *chiffonier*—that is to say, not a rag-picker, but an unofficial dustman not employed by anyone in particular, and gaining his life by the sale of whatever he might find in the dustbins he emptied. He lived in a shanty on the fortifications, carrying thither the refuse he collected from house to house (I don’t know whether he had a donkey, like some of them), and there sorting out the contents, at the rate of ten or eleven hours a day. He had six children (his wife, expecting a seventh, had to stay at home that day), and was anxious, though in an odd, gay, resigned way, about the youngster he had brought. All his other children were more or less regular patients of Mme. le Docteur, for one’s father’s splendid physique does not count for much when he happens to be a *chiffonier* living in a shanty on the fortifications! But Lecocq had not brought only his own children to that hospital dispensary. Once he had arrived with a sick man, whom he had dragged and partly carried the whole way, and whom, after examination, he took back to the fortifications in the
same manner, having promised the man's wife.

... Now this man was no other than Lecocq's very particular rival in rag-sorting, his enemy of whom he had previously spoken to Mme. le Docteur as doing him all sorts of bad turns and making his life difficult for him. But Lecocq had found it quite simple to give up a day to lugging him to the dispensary and back. Such was Lecocq, a very handsome person, of the most handsome behaviour, and much too good for most of us to tie his shoes, although they are perhaps not a pair, but picked singly out of his dustheaps.

But while, as divines and poets have so often written (and I am afraid Wordsworth first and foremost!), it is intensely gratifying to us well-to-do people that the rarest virtue should occasionally exist in the lowliest persons and professions, there was in Mme. le Docteur's talk about Lecocq another point which pleased me more than the fact that one particular dustman might be a saint. And that was that all, or nearly all, dustmen, at least Paris dustmen, are honest, never taking undue advantage of their access to richer folks' premises, and invariably returning any unexpected valuables.
they may find. "They are honest," added Mme. le Docteur, "by a kind of natural selection, a species of social automatism." And she explained as we walked along the showery summer boulevards that among chiffoniers it is, of course, only the trustworthy ones who are given the privilege of entering the yards and houses and making a preliminary sorting of the refuse on the spot, saving themselves and their poor little donkeys a considerable amount of useless carting, and securing what one might call the pick of the rubbish. And this in its turn meant that mankind and the Recording Angels get, so to speak, the pick of the chiffonier's possible virtues....

As I walked along endeavouring to screen Mme. le Docteur's pretty hat (but not so really pretty as that Chardin kerchief!) under my umbrella, and listened to her ethics, not of the dust (like Ruskin's), but of the dustmen, I could not help thinking of M. Georges Sorel and his theory that myths were necessary for morality; indeed, of all the latter-day French intellectuals and Universitaires, all repeating after the arch-sceptic Renan that "les valeurs morales baissent." There they
were, there they are, and will be, these sincere though sanctimonious lay-priests, fussing for some soul to save, laying about them for "Lumière et Verité"—or, if disciples of Bergson, for obscurity and unreality where-withal to manufacture a modicum of just such virtue as the mere pressure of competition, what Mme. le Docteur called "automatic sociological selection," extracts, in a way, out of Lecocq and his fellow-chiffonniers' heaps of offal and rags. I confess I took great consolation in this thought. But then my friends and readers complain that I am "materialistic" and not much better than a "poor sceptic." And it is, unfortunately, quite true that I have never taken any pleasure in the thought of decent behaviour or human sympathy being artificial products so rare and difficult to raise that, like hot-house asparagus, one is almost ashamed to like them.

And so much for our talk about the dustmen.
XVI

SEMUR-EN-AUXOIS
XVI

SEMUR-EN-AUXOIS

The rather absurd gladness with which we had driven in the rainy autumn twilight along those endless avenues of the Burgundian tableland, and crossed the bridge beneath the looming Plantagenet towers of Semur, was justified by the delightfulness of our two days in this little town, much as the mood of Christmas- or birthday-eve is justified by the presents one is given. It had pelted all night, the rain descending in bunches on to the old posting yard of the Hotel de la Côte d’Or, and the sky was now washed and sun-dried into pellucid blue, against which the whitewash of the houses shone like clean linen. And the sunshine, rather seen than felt in that keen autumn air, penetrated as through the stained-glass histories of the church, into the very tissue of the fruit-trees and vegetables and vines of the little gardens terraced every-
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where among the city walls and their rocks. Autumn possessed this country, this sheltered, twisted gully between the granite tableland of Central Burgundy, giving it a wonderfully southern air, as if for some return of Bacchus as in Pater’s story of Denys l’Auxerrois. And what place fitter for such a mythological miracle than in this prosperous little old town of Semur, where the bees buzz in the ivy flowers among the scorched city walls; and where, in the porch of the funny, romantic church, among carvings all vine-leaf and ivy-poll, the statues of the Virgin and the Christ-Child have been given each a bunch of the finest grapes to hold, still black and fresh among their shrivelled leaves?

This matter of the votive grapes in the church porch, a sight I had never seen or thought possible in France, brings me to another peculiarity of Semur, and one that greatly increases its many charms for the eye and fancy. There are, heaven knows, old-world places enough in France, and alas! nests enough of clericalism, where advertisements of trains to Notre Dame de Lourdes, and slabs with “Reconnaissance à St. Joseph” or “A
Semur-en-Auxois

St. Antoine pour grâce reçue," and, worst, the shocking exhibition of the bleeding Sacred Heart, have replaced the venerable images destroyed by the Revolution's chisel and hammer. All that is the dead-aliveness of reaction. But Semur looks as if it had never ceased living its prosperous pre-Revolutionary provincial life; and its saints and Bonnes Vierges have been neither destroyed nor restored. Delicately carved little images niched in the city gateways, and between the Gothic windows, not without their geraniums, of the old, old burgesses' houses, they have been untouched save by the kindly, even if blurring, fingers of Time. They cluster, virgins and saints and angels, round the crucifixes at the steep cross streets; no symbols of latter-day clericalism, but rather ancient local divinities, descended from, mysteriously identical with, one knows not what Gallo-Roman gods of vineyards and harvest, protectors of the great vines trailed along the street front of the houses, and the pear-trees espaliered against the city walls.

Consonant with this, and with that bunch of freshly vintaged grapes in the stone Virgin's
hand, is the fact of Semur’s chief building [after that church, still full of carved wood and forged iron and historied glass] being in possession of friendly, beneficent, happy little nuns, after having belonged . . . but of that strange fact anon! It is the hospital, or rather hospice, built on the extremity of the neck of granite whereon Semur is clustered above the little river Armançon. On one side is a promenade, a mail, of lovely mossy lime-trees, where the little black-aproned children play at hide-and-seek, or discuss their gouter on the fine stone seats, or swing on the chains, which show that it was once the privileged rendezvous of the Governor and the quality alighting from their coaches. All round, at every odd angle and winding of lane, some Louis XIV or Louis XV house—once of those persons of quality—raises mysterious atticked roof, or vase, or voluted gateways above the walled and leafy gardens. Below, quite sheer below the hospital’s kitchen-garden, are mills and tanneries in the twisting river gorge; and beyond that gully, on the opposite bank, vineyards and garden houses of an old suburb, with behind them the tree fringe of the tableland, and
the granite slopes of the remote Morvan region.

The sister in charge—or could it have been the Superior herself?—met us in the majestic kitchen, where a vast iron range was cooking delicious food in front of the carved Renaissance fireplace. Thence we were led to the orangery, with a gruesome chambre des fous, where food used to be passed to the poor lunatics through a grating, but which now holds only a pleasant litter of drying seeds and garden tools. And in a flanking pavilion, with cocked-hat roof of exquisite rose tiles, she showed us the pharmacy and its gallipots, the linen presses, and last, but not least, the room where the nuns iron. They iron their linen, these nuns, upon a huge and ancient billiard-table, at which the wife of a whilom Governor of Semur, Mme. du Châtelet, of philosophic Newtonian fame, once played at billiards, in intervals of gallantries and mathematics, with no less a devil than M. de Voltaire himself. Think of that! And lifting a corner of the blue linen table-cloth, we saw (but did not tell the bonne sœur why we looked) a corner, all singed, blistered, cauterized by those pious
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flat-irons, of the green cloth once grazed by the cue of periwigged Satan in person. For this hospital or poorhouse is the former residence of the Governors of Semur; and the Governor of Semur, in 1740 or thereabouts, was M. le Marquis du Châtelet, and his learned Marquise was the "Divine Emilie," and M. de Voltaire was her guide, philosopher, and friend. Indeed, I am not sure whether it was at Cirey or here at Semur, and in a room painted with classic landscape and housing in its vastness the Mother Superior's austere little bed, that the poor, light and learned Marquise died in childbirth, with M. de Voltaire holding her hand. Or, if it was not here, it might, or ought to, have been; and I request that none of my readers, who have perhaps never been to Semur or read Voltaire's Correspondence in their lives, may turn out the matter in the Encyclopædia Britannica and write to tell me that it was not the case. For the billiard-table of M. du Châtelet is there, with the nuns' flat-irons burning out all traces of wicked eighteenth-century philosophers and philosophical ladies; and that is surely enough.
Semur-en-Auxois

It is enough, at least, when taken in connexion with that nuns' kitchen-garden, behind the pavilion in question, whose tiled roof has, by the way, the colours, and much the texture, of the orange and rose and faded brown zinneas bordering the cabbages and baby lettuces and asparagus bed. . . . The asparagus bed!—its silvery plumes were full of scarlet berries and glittering drops of last night's rain, something more wonderful than any Christmas-tree. Much of the present note (and hence whatever grace it may possess) was written in sight of that fairy asparagus bed, and that zinnea-tiled Louis XIV pavilion in the nuns' garden; also sitting on the broken city wall surrounding it, crushing the peppermint and wild fennel among the old stones, and looking over the bee-buzzing ivy flowers, over the river gorge, towards the Gothic spires of Semur church, the church in whose porch the Divine Mother and Child, carved out of stone in the fourteenth century, are enjoying the fresh bunches of grapes presented by the vintners. For I ought to explain that the dear Mother Superior, pathetically overcome by the munificence of our oblation of five francs
for her "Pauvres Malades," gave us permission to come and go freely through the garden; and come and go we did, so often, and at all times of the day, that our poor two days at Semur were multiplied indefinitely by all that coming and going, and came to feel like a month of happy familiarity through those repetitions.

One afternoon, however, of those seeming many, we went only twice to the nuns' garden, and instead, after the usual half-hour at the pâtissier which stood for tea, we went forth outside the town. Out, past the little Louis XIV houses white against that burning sky of autumn blue, out and between vineyards and orchards, each with its garden house and walls blossoming with ivy and blackberry; and thus, insensibly, into the fields, parched, but so sweet with wild herbs and sloes and rose-fruit hedges, and patched vivid green where the poplars revealed the little river. We asked our way of a pleasant man whistling very melodiously as he drove his dun cows before him; crossed two tiny arms of the Armançon into a grassy peninsula, and again asked our way of a fat kind woman at a keeper's
cottage—she had a retriever and a pugnacious dax. Then past a burnt-down mill, and a weir and a great washing trough under poplars; and then up leafy lanes beneath the ramparts of Semur, back into town by the bridge between two of the huge round Plantagenet towers, in time to see the sunset through the limes outside the nuns' garden. It all sounds very much like nothing at all when written down; may this bald inventory evoke in your mind, dear reader, the sights and sounds and scents of some such similar walk, kept precious in your own memory! For there are walks of this kind, in places one may perhaps never see again, but which, for that reason perhaps, and like those places themselves, become part of a little inner Elysian world—walks about Lenzburg, Rothenburg, and some French and Italian places also—unspoilt by everyday life's clumsy fingering, and wherein our spirit wanders refreshed, among smell of herbs and of autumn showers, during the safe and secret minutes of remembrance.

But before parting with Semur in Burgundy, dearest of little French towns, let me return (as we were continually doing) to that nuns'
kitchen-garden round the former residence of M. le Marquis du Châtelet, Lieutenant du Roy. And return in order to confess a breach of confidence towards those *Bonnes Sœurs* who had allowed us its freedom. For under a yellow laden tree I picked up a plum, bird-pricked, exuding a resinous drop, delicious, and ate it; which was not a right action. And the worst is that I felt no sort of shame or repentance, but only disappointment that no other golden windfalls had been left to steal, which was impenitence added to dishonesty. But the Madonna in blue and starry spangles, presiding from a throne of box and zinneas over the quincunxes of vegetables and the ropes of apple- and pear-trees, remembered the bunch of grapes on her effigy in the cathedral porch of that same town, and smiled benign acquiescence at that sin she thus became a party to.
XVII

THE NARTHEX OF VÉZELAY
AND GIRARD DE ROUSSILLON
THE NARTHEX OF VÉZELAY
AND GIRARD DE ROUSSILLON

THERE are in every country localities about which, owing maybe to a mere accident, like that of my never happening to have found myself within reach of Vézelay, or perhaps to some real affinity with the unheeded hankerings of one's spirit, we feel that they are in a peculiar sense remote, far from the madding crowd, brooded over and hidden by the Past; inaccessible to the tourist, even though his motor raises the dust of their highways. They seem to be there for us only; and one is incredulous and a little outraged when some chance conversation reveals them as being familiar and everyday to other folk. Certain it is that I recognized at once that the stony country round about Vézelay, with its frequent queer ancient churches and those distant belts of oakwood seen across the deep
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river ravines, was going to be one of those regions to which my idle fancy perpetually returns, conjuring with their mere names on maps and time-tables.

Something already in the mere situation of Vézelay, the southern air thereof, catches at the imagination as one winds up that long steep road to its walls. Perhaps it is the unexpected emergence out of those flat northern river basins of Yonne and Seine into a region of obdurate rock: has it not taken the Morvan granite to resist Time's smoothing down into French gentleness of outline? More unexpected still is the presence on this jutting-out hill of a great sanctuary and its little clustering town, sentinelling with belfries and towers the valleys and snaking roads, an array of lances and banners as of a miniature Siena. Besides this, I was struck at once by something even more intimately southern in the place's details. As, for instance, that the tiny city, unlike other French ones, is still enclosed by walls, gripping their consubstantial rock, so that you enter, at one end at least, under an escutcheoned gateway. The houses also—which seems distinctive of this region—are of rough-hewn
The Narthex of Vézelay

unplastered stone, presenting that somewhat savage aspect of wall and roof which makes Italian mountain towns look like heaps of rocky debris against the sky.

After a week of premature mists and icy dews, the morning happened to be of suffused, dim sunshine as of late autumn in the south, bringing home with its mellowness whatever in the place told of the road to Provence and to Italy: black archways, and, in the little huddled gardens you looked down on, not only parched potherbs and scorched wall-flowers, but bay-trees, sparse and straight, overtopping the loose masonry. Even the pigeons on the tiles seemed, somehow, southern.

There was a cattle fair going on outside the main gate: large bullocks, bred for the plough as in the south and pale almost to whiteness; cows also, suckling their calves in intervals of being overhauled by purchasers; also no end of lean, livid pigs driven and dragged hither and thither by old men and belles, who forced them up into dog-carts and chars-à-bancs, screaming massacre in a manner suggestive of the savage Past to which Vézelay belongs. Was it not here that

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St. Bernard started preaching his disastrous crusade?

For me the attraction and the historical interest of the Abbey of Vézelay—I own there are romanesque and Norman churches I find more attractive—reside in its great vestibule or narthex. My friend Desjardins, who can be trusted in the matter of monastic architecture—for is not his house built into one of St. Bernard’s abbeys?—my friend Desjardins tells me that the narthex in general is explicable by the pilgrimage to certain shrines having been a penance imposed before absolution from notorious sins; so that a church like this of the Magdalen of Vézelay, and in lesser degree the Gothic abbey church of Pontigny, afforded shelter for pilgrims still excluded from the consecrated building, and who could attend its offices only through doors open on to the outside. This also explains why, with the comparative secularization of religion in the later Middle Ages, and the transformation of the typical church from a monastic sanctuary and place of pilgrimage into the democratic centre of a township, the narthex dwindles into the porch, becoming
The Narthex of Vézelay

at last, as at Amiens and Rheims, a mere sculptured embrasure barely sufficient to shelter those leaving the church from a shower. It would be interesting to ascertain whether, as in the porticoes and arcaded yards of more modern Italian sanctuaries (Oropa, for instance, on the Alpine slopes above Biella), the narthex was not, likewise, the sleeping quarters of such pilgrims as overflowed the monastic hostels; let alone the mart of all manner of pious pedlars. I like to imagine that in the intervals of celebration, while the great round-arched nave was closed behind its brazen gates, only the aisle-doors admitting stray worshippers, the narthex may also have served for the recitation of lives of the saints, such as, in our days of printing, are huckstered, along with rosaries and tapers, in the purlieus of Catholic sanctuaries. And doubtless you might also have listened, under those half-enclosed vaultings and presided over by their stark images in tight-drawn crinkled vestments, to less meek narratives—chansons de geste arranged for religious edification, but still full of bloodshed and the clash of arms. Here in the Vézelay narthex it would as like
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have been that twelfth-century lay of Girard de Roussillon: how, after the mythical battle of Val Breton in the valley below, his warlike pride came to be humbled, so that he and his Countess, after misfortunes and works of humility without end, built with their own hands this same abbey church, the Countess starting out of nights to carry sand for mortar in company with a supernatural stranger, who caused the carrying-pole and the sack of sand to rise and stand upright without the touch of human hands—a clear proof that he was the lady's angel and not, as evil tongues averred, her lover.

The pilgrims, whom I like to think of as listening in that venerable place to that strange grave story of a feudal Job, would, of course, pay the minstrel to repeat their favourite episodes. Thus, those doing penance, like Paolo and Francesca in hell, for the gentler kind of sins, would want to hear over again how Girard de Roussillon, broken by all manner of calamities, stops the Queen of France on her way to church and reveals himself to her, who is the wife of his implacable enemy, by the ring she had given him when
she had been his own promised bride. The more ferocious pilgrims or the more disillusioned ones, would, on the other hand, have asked that minstrel for a more terrible episode: How a certain knight of Girard's train, fearful lest the Count of Roussillon's unbridled ambitions for his only son should involve him in fresh wars with King Charles the Bald, takes and slays the unsuspecting boy, "cutting his little throat like a lamb's," rather than that France should once more be plunged in strife. "It is time," the minstrel makes him say, "that wars should end and good works begin." And, echoing that pious and futile mediæval wish, we poor moderns, hardened sinners by omission and commission, looking down on a devastated world much as the folk at Vézelay looked down on their few acres of ravaged corn and vineyard, may ask ourselves, not without profit, whether the means adopted by our sages and rulers for the attainment of that virtuous end have been more efficacious or more lawful than this legendary old knight's sacrifice of an innocent lad to what, in our language, might be called the Ideal of Lasting Peace. Is not our prosaic
modern life perhaps as close-set with grotesque and frightful symbols as all the carved capitals and jambs of Vézelay abbey church, if only we could take their meaning? . . .

Let me escape from thoughts like these even as, having escaped from the dung and litter, the yells and oaths of that cattle fair outside the inn, I found peace in the solitary lime-walk skirting the town walls. It is one of the sweetest places I have ever seen: a broad, level, and gently turning path strewn with the yellow leaves of limes and of venerable walnuts; on one hand the rough stone walls, hung with traveller's joy and fringed, as a more northern wall would be with harebell, with wild mignonette and marjoram and borage; the walls behind which are hidden the little huddled town and the great spreading church. While, on the other side, you have brambles and already russet bushes, and those solemn, empty hills and valleys and roads snaking solitary among vineyards and stubble fields. As it follows the bend of the walls the avenue grows grassier, till you walk on delicate mossy turf strewn with fallen leaves from the slowly shedding limes and walnuts
which meet overhead. Then a widening, a
terrace with trees in quincunx; and, in a breach
of those city walls, there appear rough little
gardens and discreet little town dwellings,
nestled under the flying buttresses of the apse,
and the long, high flanks of the vast abbey
church: the Past, not as it really existed when
it was Present, but such as it broods over our
bruised and weary thoughts, a sheltering
spacious church, built by unpractical, im-
perious longings for everything which reality
denies.

And this brings me back to what I began
with, namely, that there are regions, like this
of Vézelay, which strike me as remote, inac-
cessible to others. That I explained by a mere
sentimental fancy on our part. But it is not
so. In reality, in the deeper reality affecting
our feelings, these places—that is to say,
whatever these places happen to be for us—
are, as often as not, untrodden save by our-
selves, shut off from our travelling fellow-
creatures, often from our own fellow-travellers.
How inaccessible, you may discover by hearing
them talked of or reading accounts of them.
Neither is this fact derogatory to other folk,
still less to reality. The world is the richer for its kingdoms being different to different persons in accordance with what they bring or seek, in accordance even with seasons, moods or illuminations, spiritual and climatic. Pater, for instance, who met a god in exile wandering through the rainy streets of Auxerre, down which I hurried in search of a pâtisserie and of picture-postcards—Pater has left us only an architectural guide-book account of Vézelay: the abbey church of the Magdalen, built at such a date, a typical monument of the transition from round-arched to pointed, and of the sculpture practised by the Cluniac Order before the advent of Cistercians and Gothic. And so on. While to me that little old hill-city, those stony valleys round it, remain, for all the tourists and archæologists, the motor-cars and guide-books, a region most intimately lived in and lived in only by myself.
XVIII

AVIGNON AND THE MEDLAR-FLOWER
XVIII

AVIGNON AND THE MEDLAR-FLOWER

Into my desire to see Avignon, making me stop there even on that hurried southward journey, there entered as chief ingredient a childish recollection of certain medlar-flowers. It dates back—over half a century, alas!—to the first time I was ever brought into southern parts. There was, I fancy, cholera at Marseilles; at any rate, we stopped the night not there, as we ought, but at Avignon; and, as I now feel sure, in this selfsame Hôtel de l'Europe. Of Avignon itself, except the words "Palace of the Popes," there has remained from that occasion no recollection whatever; indeed, it would have been quite in keeping with our family habits if our stay was limited to the bare night's sleep, my elders affecting a fine disdain for sights and sightseers. Yet Avignon gave me my first
impression of the South. For, as we got into the hotel omnibus for departure, I noticed, growing in the inn courtyard, a wonderful, an unknown tree, filling the chilly place with its sweet and fruity perfume. It was a large Japanese medlar. And, in answer doubtless to some childish exclamation of longing, the landlady broke off a twig of creamy blossoms set on brown velvet among ribbed, glossy leaves, and handed it to my mother. This was, I think, the first distinctly southern plant, except orange-trees in tubs, which had ever come under my notice, a miraculous, a rapturous winter blossom. I have never forgotten it; and some of its spicy sweetness still clings to the name of Avignon, filling its blankness.

This time—I mean the day before yesterday, not the year 1866!—when the omnibus clanked into the hotel yard, I looked round, of course, for the Japanese medlar. There was none! But there were other trees growing there, in just the place, it seemed, where such a tree might formerly have been. Oddly, in the little inner court, not without kitchen reek, and where the autumn rain splashed all night
long like a fountain, there grew a group of small medlar-trees. And I like to think they may have sprung, seeded themselves, as these trees will do, from the fruit of that magic southern tree of my childhood.

Having lost my time among the icy echoes of that grim white palace of the Popes, it was already late when I started in a cab across the bridges to Villeneuve-lès-Avignon. Under a white, a southern, rainy sky, the Rhone flowed vast and slow between rusty poplars, a river still of France, with a look of the Seine at Rouen in its greyish green mass of waters, but with something already of the Tiber, a turbid, tideless sullenness. It was, as I said, already late; and at Villeneuve it was too dark to see the details of the Enguerrand picture, which I had come to see, when the nun of the hospice led me into its presence. With a southern mingling of sympathy and a desire for lucre, my cabman insisted that I be shown over a ruined Chartreuse, turned into an unspeakable village of ragged labourers squatting in ruined cloisters and under crevassed church walls. Thence an amiable concierge (all the people are amiable in this south of France, and all the
women, in their Arlésien tiara caps, are goddesses) let me out on to the side of the hill of Villeneuve, at whose foot my cab, he decreed, should go and wait for me.

The short southern twilight had set in, and cast a delicate, an elegiac veil over the refuse-heaps among the huddled, half-ruined buildings. Above me spread a great white fortress; and towards it, obedient to the cabman and the concierge, I took my way up the rough barren hillside. It would be the matter of only five minutes, those out-at-elbows hidalgos had insisted with that southern friendliness eager to make things sound pleasant even at the sacrifice of a little truth; and added, as if speaking of some great avenue of trees: "Madame n'a qu'à prendre par les amandiers." The almond-trees were on the brow of the low hill, a stunted grove of almost leafless trees, gnarled and twisted with age. Once past them the path became a slide of loose white stones, not pebbles, but scales of that rock which makes the buildings white and the landscape noble with its sharp stratified cleavage; and among the black, square-cut olive-trees dotted here and there as in an early Corot landscape, the
Avignon and the Medlar-Flower

rock came through in great slabs, whiter than ever in the twilight, fringed with vegetation of parched herbs, peppermint, and that minute white candytuft which grows wild all over Provence (I noticed it first in Aucassin's Castle of Beaucaire!), scenting the evening with honey. Rock breaking through the thin soil, stunted aromatic plants, the signs of the real South, of something that is not merely France and Italy, but the whole ancient Mediterranean world! Above, in front, the massy walls and towers of the citadel rose white out of the rock, their corbels and battle­ments carved with Ionic fairness. And below flowed the great wan river, with a spectral Avignon beyond. Moreover, as if to mark the place and hour and print them deep into my heart, two poor little thin cypresses did sentinel against the pale sky.

Forsaken, warlike greatness, crumbling white stone, and pungent and sweet arid plants! It might have been Jerusalem. And I understood, but as music makes one understand, what that South means for me, its familiar never-ceasing strangeness of beckoning, vanished worlds.
Ragged-looking shadows of men flitted silently among the olives towards that defaced regal crown of white towers on the hill-top; and the ironical electric lamps lit up in the poor streets, among the mediæval archways and shrines of Villeneuve. It was quite dark when I found my cab and crossed the bridges back to Avignon.
XIX

AT THE ELEFANT INN
AT BRIXEN
XIX

AT THE ELEFANT INN
AT BRIXEN

I HAVE had two delicious summer days at Brixen, in Southern Tyrol, stopping there on my way out of Italy to meet a very dear old friend who lives up in those mountains. Perhaps it has been this consecration to friendship which filled those few hours (making them thereby ample) with all manner of other friendly meetings and revived familiarities; meetings with sights and sounds of which, as sometimes happens, I hardly knew how much I cared for them till that warmth of recognition revealed it to me.

Sights and sounds, and also vaguer, but not less potent, sensations and suggestions: after the sweltering splendour of an Italian June, the more than bodily impression of high cool air, of tender translucent skies, a veil of almost autumnal light and shade over
the mountains; perhaps, more than anything (since so much of the rest depends on it!), the alert carriage of one's own limbs after so many weeks of summer languor. For at the bottom of much of the poetry of natural aspects is our own increased capacity for living, a liberation of vital spirits, like that produced by sunny winter weather in the South, and, in my present case, by summer bracingness and coolness on return to the North. Since Brixen, although the Alpine barrier separates it from Germany, not Italy,\(^1\) is, in virtue of its mountains, its language, and old gabled houses, the North. In virtue also of many impressions which slake one's soul's perhaps unsuspected thirst, moral as well as material. Not only the lushness of meadows white with hemlock, the rushing and gushing of Alpine waters brimful on all sides, the unpollarded trees and unjaded, ungalled horses, but also the law-abidingness and decency of the little old town and its inhabitants; nay, even a certain homeliness and sadness, felt only as

\(^1\) And, alas! nowadays, since the Peace of Self-Determination, separated from German-speaking lands by a political frontier and the absurd name of Bressanone. (1924.)
At the Elefant Inn at Brixen

restraint and pathos, after the fine noisy exuberance of Italy.

The beauty and charmingness of such a place is intimately connected (and the word intimate comes naturally in writing of it) with its air of domesticity: no palaces, none of that castellated bravery of every meanest Italian village astride of its ridge. The place is carefully set down in the flatness of that Alpine valley, avenues of fruit-trees leading through meadows and orchards to its gates; and the step-gabled walls and towers are merely for the protection of peaceful arcaded streets of gaily painted houses within. And all that amusing gabling and turreting, that delicately festive rose-and-green plaster, stands out against the vast steepness, the diaphanous glitter of the great mountains all round about.

One gets also at Brixen the impression—familiar, funny, and pathetic—of Teutonic romance and piety, such as meets one in the woodcuts of the Little Masters. Let me explain that towards sunset we strolled together, my old friend and I, outside one of those gates, outside one of those avenues of cherry-trees, till we came to a little whitewashed church.
under huge walnuts. At moments like that one enters a church with no mere idle curiosity, but in search of a sanctity at least as genuine as any that is felt by its intended worshippers. This one was very old, dark, vaguely Gothic, and the scent of the meadows had mingled with that of old, old incense and the holiness of age and poverty. But, growing accustomed to the gloom, we became aware, not without amazement, of the church’s sole human occupants. Behind the altar, round the apse, in sentry-boxes of glass, stood so many richly robed knights, erect and sword in hand, with their appropriate ladies, in brocade farthingales, seated sentimentally, propping chin on palm. And skeletons all! Lives of maceration and hair shirts, perhaps final martyrdom, at length rewarded by state and splendour, making them rank with the most gallant and glorious lords and ladies of the land! After a preliminary shudder, I am almost ashamed to say that this unexpected grisly splendour gave me acute pleasure, in no wise detrimental to the venerableness of the place and the sweetness of the evening. There are days (fortunately for me!) when, let alone that beauty is more beautiful
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and holiness holier, grotesque and even grue­some things take the quality of fairy tales, in which (as in Humperdinck’s enchanting opera) even the witch’s cottage is made of slabs of gingerbread and rafters of barley sugar.

Those two days at Brixen, strolling about with the old friend I had not met since so long, were of that happy kind, made up, as I have said, of the delicious stuff of beloved memories and friendly sudden recognitions. Beyond what there was, opened always the tenderer joy of what had been. Thus the month I had once spent with that same friend in her chalet above Brixen seemed to look close into this present, much as the great green and blue mountain-sides encompass this valley with their visible detail of steep fresh-mown lawns and serried forest, their villages and churches among fruit-trees looking down on to the gables of the little town. And in this mood of noticing life’s enrichment by its own past, it struck me that it is one of the uses (in Ruskinian phrase!) of mountains to afford our spirit the direct knowledge, the refreshment, of other places and different climate by the mere exhibition of their vertical slopes; in
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contradistinction to the plain's depressing habit of hiding itself just in proportion to its flat extent. For mountains are not inaccessible to our eye and fancy, even if—or perhaps because!—we know how much of their wealth of beauty in lap and ledges is hidden from below. Thus, with the continual companionship of these steep forests and pastures from my window at the Elefant at Brixen, I compared the memory of an autumn afternoon in the plain of Venetia (it was at a little villa near Palmanova, where Napoleon had slept the night before Campoformio), with its hopeless feeling that, although one's feet might trudge all day between vines and maize and poplars, one's eye would never see anything but the leaves and aftermath, and the vast loosely clouded sky above. But such was the virtue of my Brixen mood, that while conjuring up that afternoon in the plain for its avowed disparagement, I caught myself looking back upon it with an unexpected fondness which merely added to the delight of those great Alpine slopes all around.

And since I have come to speak of this enhancement of present pleasantness by the
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suggestion of past, and even occasionally by the memory of things not felt as pleasant at the time, I turn to a little incident of my inner life which happened two years ago in this very Tyrol, and more particularly in that Alpine lap which I could see, or imagine I saw, from my window at the Elefant at Brixen.

I was sitting one morning under a larch upon that high hillside, in one of those dells of moss and boggy grass, starred with Par-nassus daisy, which make one long to take off shoes and stockings and taste the loveliness, so to speak, with one's feet. It was a wonderful blue day, an icy storm the previous afternoon having left a delicious sense of autumn in all things. A blue day; but not blue in the mere ordinary meaning of unclouded sky; for the sunlight was faintly filmed over by white haze, and the forget-me-not blue of the heavens was partly due to thin white vapours above the hill lines. Neither was it blue as we say so of a cake of cobalt or ultramarine, but blue as a chord of colour: darkness of fir forests, green of meadows, spectral amethyst of rocks, even brilliant white of distant snow, all united to give us their essential azure under this pale
luminous sky, which, on its part, refused the fullness of colour. That was the reality surrounding me. But note what things our loveliest impressions are made of! Mine, at that moment (for I wrote it down), and in that magic real world of my Tyrolese mountainside, were filled, nay enriched, with the recollection of the great tent, crammed with sweltering sightseers, of the Austrian Exhibition at Earl's Court; a tent whose sides were painted, under the electric light, into some kind of circus-panorama of upland meadows and peaks. The air was suffocating, full of dust, of the shuffling of feet from show to show, and the distant sounds of bands and gramophones. But that daubed amphitheatre of blue hills, against which echoed the zithers and songs of the exhibited or faked Tyrolese, had filled my heart with longing. And this past emotion awakened by the counterfeit mountains was now set vibrating by the real ones; nay, continued vibrating, making its remembered noises heard and enjoyed, beneath the silence of the faintly stirring grasses and branches, of crickets and distant waters; adding, with the half-remembered sensations
At the Elefant Inn at Brixen

of that airless tent, to the poignancy of the smell of drying hay and sun-warmed fir resin. For what strange things does memory oblige us to be grateful! But also, what things delicious and kindly in themselves must we not be grateful to memory for keeping and multiplying! And this was brought home to me at the Elefant at Brixen.
XX

A VILLAGE CHURCH IN THURINGIA
THE belated summer has come at last to this northernmost edge of Thuringia. They have been scything and stooking the corn along the flat hill ridges. And every afternoon since the first rift of blue, the swallows have begun their autumn manoeuvres, whirling about the round castle-tower, and settling, like black beads, on its green metal bulb and its flagstaffs.

I have been spending most of my time in my rococo room in the Schloss, reading the Wolframsdorf Chronicle while the summer storms beat the lilac-bushes against the greenish panes of the eighteenth-century windows.

This chronicle is no chronicle at all, but a little volume of extracts, which a studious schoolmaster had amused himself making out of the legal documents of the castle and village.
Besides quarrels about the church choirs and church fiddles and Sackbuts which the feudal lord was perpetually claiming for his chapel, and also occasional dealing with the Evil One (of which more anon), the public life of the Wolframsdorf of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries consisted mainly in hangings of thieves and other petty delinquents. These proceedings were dignified by a magnificent display of titles, the heraldry and insignia of the feudal lords enwrapping these sordid village tragedies as with the mantlings of their coat of arms and the collars of their knighthood. Listen to this, which I am translating, as far as possible, word for word. [Some sheep-stealers are being judged and executed under the village lime-tree, on November 13, 1732.]

"When the poor sinner Michael Seidl had been brought forward, the Head of the Tribunal took his sword in his right hand, likewise a white wand, and addressed the Sheriff to the left in the following words: 'I ask of you whether it is the fit day and hour for me to administer the High-Worthy and High-Born Count and Lord Herr Joachim
A Village Church in Thuringia

Friedrich, Count of the Empire, Knight of the Order of St. John, Commander of the Lordship of Schwelbein, his Royal Majesty of Poland and Elector of Saxony's Serenity's Senior, Superior General of Cavalry, Governor of Leipzig and of the fortress of Pleissenberg, Feudal and Civic Lord of Böck and Flatenten, moreover, also hereditary feudal Magistrate in Wolframsdorf, Postertum, Volmarhegen, Schewischen, and Lessin, my gracious Master and Lord his high-judicial-criminal Kneck-Sentence.' " The Sheriff to the left having understood what it took me considerable reading over to understand, namely, that the bearer of all these titles has the right to hang the unfortunate sheep-stealer who is not yet named at all—well, the Sheriff to the left having understood thus much, he answers the question affirmatively with an equally complete enumeration of titles. Yes; he approves of fulfilling the High-Judicial Kneck-Sentence in the name of the High-Born and High-Worthy Lord Joachim Friedrich, Count of the Empire, Knight of St. John, his Polish Majesty's and Electoral Saxon Highness's Senior Superior General of Cavalry, &c., &c., &c. The Head
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of the Tribunal then addresses the same question with the same complete enumeration to two other Sheriffs one after the other, each of whom answers similarly, with not a single one of Count Joachim Friedrich's titles omitted. And finally, no one having protested against the third reading of poor Seidl's sentence and Count Joachim Friedrich's titles, the Magistrate breaks his white wand, the benches under the village lime are upset, and the criminal handed over to the Hangman in the name of Count Joachim Friedrich and all his grandeurs in extenso, the whole of this poor sheep-stealing peasant's forcible exit from life being thus magnificently hidden from our view (and perhaps almost from his own dazed understanding) by all this waving of feudal honours and trumpeting of aulic glory.

The Wolframsdorf Chronicle includes, of course, repeated ravagings in the Thirty Years' War and the witch trial de rigueur in the seventeenth century. The witch, Margarethe, from the hamlet of Nickelsdorf, was accused of carrying on with "der böse Voland," anglice Satan. She was tortured and denied; tortured again and confessed, according to
the sagacious judicial methods of the time. She was locked up in the castle prison, whence she escaped, and locked up again, with more torturing, both insufficient and sufficient. As a result she retorted the accusation upon another peasant woman, the Peukerin, asserting that the latter had first introduced her to the Evil Voland. Then the two witch-wives were confronted privily in the presence of Frau Sabine, lady of the then reigning Count of Wolframsdorf, without any judicial advantage beyond a tremendous set-to between the two witches, bandying expletives like Dragons-wife and Raven’s Carrion at each other, regardless of the Lady Sabine’s high, well-born presence. Local justice proving incompetent to decide between the two alleged lemans of Satan, whose favours, by the way, never went beyond “two pots of milk daily, altogether about ten cans,” and the matter being further complicated by the striking likeness of the Evil One to the former village organist, the case of Margarethe of Nickelsdorf was deferred to the legal authorities of Leipzig. These learned doctors passed sentence upon Margarethe, but only of banishment; a piece of
clemency which probably meant that they did not think her much worse than her accuser the Peukerin, but deemed it advisable to remove an unpopular character from the neighbourhood, and at the same time show due respect for so religious and edifying a belief as that in witches. After all, did not some of our own most enlightened neighbours acquiesce in the sentence of Captain Dreyfus because he was evidently not a good sort, and because a faith in court-martials is necessary for the well-being of great nations?

The recollection, however blurred, of what I have read in that Wolframsdorf Chronicle, of all those humble tragedies of long ago, was probably stirred by last Sunday’s service in the village church, and may help to explain the deep impression which it made upon me. I went, I confess, from the mere idlest curiosity, to witness a Lutheran service in rural and, so to speak, semi-feudal surroundings. But what took place in me—unawares of course to my companions—was a little inner drama, very solemn and sacred, filling me with emotion as of the chords of an organ, and bringing to a focus, nay, in some way consecrating for
myself, my farewell impressions of Germany and Thuringia.

I have had such emotion once or twice before in my life. It is not exactly religious, although, as I said, charged with a sense of solemnity and sacredness, and I suppose it is somewhat of the kind which other people may get from Bayreuth; only in my case it has never been produced by any ready-made contribution of artistic suggestions (least of all Wagner’s!), but only by the play of my own silent thoughts (excited by music and the spoken word) among very poignant and complex memories of past centuries and thoughts of human destiny.

My first impressions in that village church were only of the difference between this service and those of the Latin and the Anglican churches: the congregation did all the singing, not psalms, but seventeenth- and eighteenth-century hymns (one was by Zinzendorf, the founder of the Moravians), broken into by the sermon and the reading of the one lesson, which was from the Gospel; the Pastor, said to be a masterful but excellent young man, dressed in cassock and bands, standing before
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the altar, and afterwards preaching from a balcony above its two lit candles, and below its stucco rococo cupids. There was no intoning of any kind; mere speaking, and in curt, pistol-shot tones, "Amens" and "Credos" (I mean whatever the German formula) given in the voice of a railway official announcing a train. The sermon, beginning with a philological criticism of Luther's translation of "Blessed are the Peace-Makers," was delivered in the tone and with the gestures of a lecture, the Pastor's whole personality suggestive rather of a schoolmaster than of what we associate with priesthood. His appeal was to the good sense, the sense also of discipline, and the goodwill of the congregation; but for this very reason it seemed to penetrate, with its homely allusions to everyday failings and village quarrelsomeness and envy and gossip, into the deepest conscience of the hearers. And their conscience answered (so at least I felt it must) not in the individual whisperings of the confessional, but in the great collective voice of the Chorals, in that imperative, transcending that of any spoken word, of the sung verse, of rhyme and chord.
A Village Church in Thuringia

All this was modern, suited to to-day's life and business. But the little church, Gothic still in its chancel, felt very old, the centuries not yet dispelled from it by the restorer's chisel and paint-pot. In the large box, or, rather, room, in the triforium, to which the Schloss inmates ascended by a private stairs, the Wolframsdorfs had sat before that peruked Joachim who had got Poland for Saxon Augustus, and helped thereby to kindle afresh the war in this poor country, still ruined by the hideous thirty years; before Friedrich, who had rebuilt the Schloss in its present shape, as of Welsch dancing-master's posturings copied by a Prussian grenadier; before that other Wolframsdorf, whose vaulted rooms still remain, their gables, alas! built up in that Italian plaster. The Wolframsdorfs had placed in this pew a great iron stove with their running stag and their antlered crest. A Wolframsdorf knelt, among cherubs and heraldry, on either side of a great crucifix on the church wall. And opposite to this monument hung the full-length portraits of Wolf von Wolframsdorf, this time not in armour, but in purfled doublet and trunk hose, and of his lady in stiff and
dark skirts and a ruff, looking fixedly out with her white oval face—who knows?—possibly that Frau Sabine who was present when the two witch-wives were confronted in the castle tower and accused one another of dealings with the Böse Voland. The little church has known all the doings of that chronicle; the Scharfrichter (executioner), perhaps allowed only at the door, unless—who can tell?—he may have had an honourable, isolated place like the gamekeeper in the pew opposite to ours. The parson who had comforted the sheep-stealers before hanging had been the predecessor of this one; and the procession, also mentioned in the chronicle, "carrying the coffin with the sack" of the drowned infanticide, had started from before this altar. From this pulpit under the stucco cherubs the village witches had doubtless been preached to and against before rumour insisted on racks and lawyers. And one likes to think, not only of those quarrelled-over seventeenth-century musicians, filling these arches with their fiddlings and trumpetings, but even more of the officers quartered in the castle on their way to the field of Leipzig, and whose names
are still scrawled on some of the bedroom doors, spending perchance their last Sunday in this church.

But one of the things which touched me most in that place was a portrait in the tiny vestry leading to our pew, the portrait of a little girl, pale, in a long, white dress and cap, whom an angel leads by the hand; the little daughter of Wolf von Wolframsdorf, and the last of the direct line; the same whose effigy the poor parents repeated in stone near the altar, a little hooded figure, as if ready for sledging, with round, sad face. Something stabs one with the knowledge of this short life, this long grief, across three hundred years; as if she would not, had she lived threescore years and ten, have been equally vanished by this time, lost under the apple-trees of the cemetery!

At the end of the service the Pastor, who had hitherto only spoken, sang the final benediction, one or two voices of the choir in unison with him. And when every one had closed their Prayer-book, and the little girls in front, the women behind, and the men and boys in the tribunes had got up, and all seemed
to be over, the organ suddenly burst out with "Mein gläubiges Herz," well played, with all its agréments. The splendid tune, so quiet and so poignant and stirring, was the fit summing-up of the service, the fit farewell to me of this old-fashioned Germany which I love. There had come over me in the last fortnight, more than ever before, the sense of the mixed homeliness and romance of scenery and architecture which is to me the explanation of Germany's supremacy in music. This Lutheran service in the old village church has made me understand the greatness of German Protestantism, with its lay mysticism and moral depth. And Bach's Pentecost song, sprung from it all, became the expression of all I had been feeling of late, and of what that last Sunday in Germany had driven straight to my heart.
XXI

THE GENIUS LOCI AT SCHLOSS WOLFRAMS DORF
THE GENIUS LOCI AT SCHLOSS WOLFRAMSDORF

As I have had occasion to say, it rained for days, and the greater part of all days, during my stay at Schloss Wolframsdorf; so that when it at last cleared up (and the moment of my departure approached) I had scarcely been beyond the hamlet surrounding the castle on its hill, and the village lying at its foot in that North Thuringian valley. But my passion for small local exploration has never chafed so little at restraint, or rather I have never found the Genius Loci within doors in the same undoubted and satisfying manner as at Schloss Wolframsdorf. He is immanent in every stone and every bit of stucco of this great feudal place rebuilt in the Italian style, and by Italian workmen, in the heyday of rococo. His presence thrills you in passing from the outer to the inner court by the arch-
way in the tower, and in coming face to face with a building painted to look like a Palladian palace, with plaster festoons, sham cornices and reliefs, and a wrought-iron balcony with the Wolframsdorf arms (their horns of hereditary Electoral Postmastership) in gold and colours. For owing to the inner court being entirely closed, and the decoration being in some mad Italian theatre-perspective, that house, which is the main block of the castle, looks for all the world like some old-fashioned opera background, as if behind the balcony there could exist nothing more substantial than a ladder for a roulade-singing *prima donna*, or the unreal ballroom of Don Giovanni with lights and minuets streaming through its windows. Whereas, in reality, there is the great staircase, monumental as in a Roman palace, and a resounding cloister-passage, with doors on which there still remain heroic scratchings!—the names of officers billeted here in 1813 on their way to victory and perhaps death at Leipzig.

The Spirit of Place is therefore an indoor divinity at Wolframsdorf. But what is more unusual still, and more mysterious, his par-
At Schloss Wolframsdorf

ticular holy of holies, or innermost cella is—it sounds absurd to say so, and yet so it is!—well, no other than the room in which I happen to be hospitably lodged. Do not, I pray you, misunderstand me, imagining that I have any share in this matter. I am not, like the Dionysos of Euripides, priest and divinity all mixed up; neither do I (as some perhaps suspect) carry the Genius Loci about in my suit-case, or carry at least implements for such sentimental hanky-panky as evokes a literary emotion of Localities wherever I happen to stay. The Genius Loci is no stage-property of mine; he is not brought (like esoteric tea-cups of Blavatsky’s), but found; and on the greater number of occasions not found at all or not induced to reveal his presence. Above all—and this I would have you understand—it is the rarest of rare occurrences ever to find him inside of any house which I inhabit: he is in that place, Scottish castle seen behind a belt of beeches, or Tuscan villa behind long-closed gates; but he vanishes, traceless, so soon as ever I am invited to stay there! And here, at Wolframsdorf, is perhaps the first occasion in my experience, and doubt-
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less also the last, that I have found him in my own room.

Why is a mystery. So, being unable to solve it, I will try, like some inexpert wizard's apprentice, to renew the magic by parrot-mumblings of the spell. I will give you the inventory of that room at Schloss Wolframs-dorf where my prosaic presence did not dislodge, but rather the contrary, the latent and elusive Spirit of Places. I will not describe my bed; it plays no part in the matter: these dreams are waking ones. But the dressing-table slab is of a fabulous and lovely cobalt-blue imitation of porphyry (the Italian who rebuilt and fitted up the Schloss filled it with imitation antique marbles, giallo, verde, and nero); and over the table are slender white sconces with oak garlands, and a white garlanded mirror with a Bacchus in a sort of Wedgwood medallion. There is a real Wedgwood, like an exquisite pale blue cameo, set in the escritoire. And over the doors are cameo-like reliefs in delicate stucco frames. Minerva and Bacchus and the Belvedere Apollo's head with the quiver-end over his shoulder, all white on forget-me-not blue.
At Schloss Wolframsdorf

The Louis XVI wallpaper, faint mignonnette, is almost hidden by old prints: Augustus the Strong, Rex Poloniae, in corslet and periwig, and other Saxon Electors; and Wolframsdorfs flourishing marshals' batons or propping dimpled jewelled hands on cuirassed ribs; also—who knows why?—Mr. Garrick as Richard III. And then views, in smoky mezzotint, a series of Wörlitz Park in 1769, with Grecian temples and Strawberry Hill Gothic castles, and even an imitation Vesuvius vomiting fireworks on occasion of some serene ducal gala... There is an eighteenth-century iron stove, built like a pagoda and decorated with Arcadian emblems, for the room is, you see, classic as a Gluck opera. That, with one or two appropriate chairs and tables, is all the furniture of the mysteriously meaningful room, and it certainly does not explain its mystery. There are four longish French windows with white bars, and nothing but green branches outside, except for a strip of straight cornfield against the sky; and the room is filled with a greenish light. Indeed, I am by no means sure that this delicate light, made visible by filtering through leaves, is
not the Genius Loci himself, closed into that viewless room, and turning his prison into his sanctuary, hanging in the air like the fine dust of centuries and the subtle scent of old, old woodwork. For whatever other bodies the gods may take, or stones or plants they may enter into, they love best to lurk in that most spiritual of all material things, the lights and shades of the temples which we have built or they have chosen.

Between the summer storms which lashed those windows with the green branches outside, I hurried out under the clock-tower with the flagstaff, and down into the village of old beamed houses (which have certainly seen thirty years' war and witch trials), set in apple and pear orchards, and in kitchen-gardens wonderfully sweet and gay with all manner of herbs and pale-coloured stocks. Apple-trees and grass surround likewise the church, with its fine old onion-shaped steeple, and grey walls set with escutcheons, the running stag and great antlered crest and Postmaster's Horns of the Wolframsdorfs. On one of my explorations the church door was strewn with fir, as if a legion of tidy squirrels
At Schloss Wolframsdorf

had been shredding branches. These fir-twigs led—a narrow green footpath—to a bridal house, at whose garden-door two Christmas-trees stood sentinel. The garden—it was the village tailor’s—was full of sweet herbs, and the house-door garlanded with fir in very classic fashion, in reminiscence, one might think, of the stucco garlands at the Schloss. Having, as the eighteenth century would have said, breathed a silent prayer for the newly married tailor and tailoress, I crossed the village in search of a garden which had caught my eye from the castle terrace: hedges and clipped trees round a small temple-like house. I went there along a track skirting a beautiful sedgy pond and a water meadow white with hemlock. On a board was notified that this road was forbidden to all vehicles save hearses; the attractive garden was the village cemetery! It was comparatively modern, and full of ugly monuments; but, with its background of straight reaped fields and blackish firwoods, not without rustic solemnity, moreover very sweet with flowers. And on most of the graves stood the words “Ruhe sanft”—“Rest gently,” which went straight into my
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heart on the melody to which Bach set them. Music always haunts me in such German places: the humble charm of this country, the homely soul of this people, seems to transfigure itself only in sounds, where other countries sing in the melody and counterpoint of mountain outlines and involuted valleys.

Leaving the village below I climb along the high road rising to the back of the castle, and sit down on the grass under one of the cherry-trees hung thick with scarlet fruit. What an orderly landscape! Cornfields and meadows and forest, all as if drawn by a tidy child on a ready-lined copybook; hill horizons drawn with the ruler, wooded hill-angles made with the T-square, washes of as few colours as possible, with no mysterious tints upon tints or messy passages; perspective itself unable to bring surprises or raise doubts as to the real shape of anything. It is a truthful, orderly country, made for and making God-fearing, prosaic creatures. But on to this, with disciplined deploying and tidy advancing of a vanguard of thin, straight fir-trees, there advance from all sides the forests. Dense, black, mysterious, their gleams more dis-
At Schloss Wolframsdorf

quieting than their darkness, viewless; forests of which you cannot say whether they end a few yards off in high road and cornfield or go on for ever, deeper and deeper, more baffling in sameness; forests silent yet full of inexplicable rustlings and mutterings and cries; empty but haunted by elusive shapes in the uncanny light and bewildering perspective. Such prose of cornfield and fruit-tree-bordered road; such poetry of forests: is not this the contradiction and the harmony of the great German soul? And must not this race make out of melodies and chords the patterns, the longed-for unreality, which this country cannot give them through the eye?

The last morning I spent at Schloss Wolframsdorf was a Sunday, so I accompanied my friends to the church down in the village. I went, I confess, from mere idle curiosity to witness a Lutheran service in rural surroundings. But what took place in me—unawares to my companions—was an inner drama, very solemn and sacred, filling me with emotion as of a great organ, and, bringing to a focus, in some way consecrating for myself, my farewell impressions of Thuringia and Germany.

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XXII

THE WOODS AROUND SIENA
THE WOODS AROUND SENA
ALREADY in a note written nearly fifteen years ago on returning to Siena, I asked myself where so much of its romance could have gone; and answered, even then, “Where one’s youth goes.”

Is it for this reason, or perhaps that old German and Swiss towns have given me the habit of a richer, more coloured, warmer and more intimate kind of picturesqueness? This much is certain, that Siena now strikes me as far more grim and gaunt, far more of the mere magnified mountain village, all black shafts and black archways, than my remembrance seemed to allow. Its colour has dimmed! For I remembered it as predominantly of rosy pink, and now even the Palazzo Pubblico and its tower are but the carnation of a faded threadbare Eastern carpet.

Yet the weather was cloudless during these two days and the swallows circled in pure
blue round that flower and flower-stalk tower. Where is the gayness of Siena, as of its own cobalt and rose frescoes and gold-stencilled panels? Or would those also, if I had gone to see them, have seemed tarnished to my changed eyes?

There is sadness and humiliation in such infidelity to places, all the more that the Genius Loci, alone perhaps of all friends, has never turned round with an "it is your fault." So, evidently it has been my fault.

But one thing has not faded (although the hills seen from the Lizza are very dim blue from heat-mist or mist of years), and that is the odd longing with which those low hills south-west of Siena have always filled me.

Indeed I remember as if it were yesterday, I can almost feel, the little stab-in-the-heart, of the ultramarine of those hills beyond the Lizza, as I first saw them some thirty-eight years ago: that special blueness against the ivory evening sky, identified itself with, became, so to speak, the colour of, longing for the unattainable, the colour of parting from the too briefly enjoyed.

And now, at last, thanks to the modern
The Woods Around Siena

miracle of motor-cars, I have been among those hills.

But first let me note down the accomplishment of a lesser wish, neglected, I scarcely know why, during those previous stays at Siena. I was taken, by the American novelist who has so great a knowledge of Italian gardens, to the Villa Gori outside Porta Ovile, whose little white rococo façade on the green hill opposite the station had attracted me, reproachfully, every time I left Siena, and left without having gone up to it.

The house itself is merely like a hundred other eighteenth-century Tuscan country houses. But a tunnel of clipped ilexes leads from it to a uniquely perfect open-air theatre, whose stage and orchestra and side scenes of clipped cypress stand out a vivid golden green in the sunshine at the end of that blackness. The theatre is quite small, and the speaking voice carries very easily. But from the solitary cypress projecting obelisk-wise above the stage, a full-fledged nightingale was singing to the blue sky and sunset-flushed cumulus clouds of that wide vault of sky above the low, green Sienese hills.
Besides the theatre, there was likewise cut out of evergreens a fowling place of the usual old Tuscan type, facing the town and its walls and towers. To it led another tunnel of clipped ilex which, with that dark murderous decoy-mound, instead of the sunny theatre, at its end, struck one as much blacker, more gnarled and wholly evil. Indeed, however cheerful such domed walks of green look from outside, this particular tonnelle (I think the tiresome English name is pleached walk) brought home to me the dreadfulness of trees thus tortured for shade, forbidden to turn a single green leaf to the earth, and displaying to those walking under their devastated uniting branches only black and writhing trunks and limbs, Laocoons, or as in Mantegna’s Allegory, black Daphnes trying to break loose and threatening to pursue the passer-by in the twilight. And here, no doubt, the only song would be that of the blinded decoy-birds in their little cages, and the shrieks of the netted and limed victims.

Ilex woods have always fascinated me, particularly unmixed ones, since seeing those back of Spoleto, or perhaps even earlier.
The Woods Around Siena

There is, as with the box of Box Hill, and the yew of Kingly Vale near Chichester, a special attractiveness when trees we associate with gardens, trees which almost trim themselves unaided, are offered as a free and ample gift by some spot still untouched by man. Even with the junipers on the chalk downs, the hornbeam and beech worn down by Apennine sheep and snows into a semblance of hedges, the mind hovers pleasantly between the idea of forsaken pleasures and the wild life of woods: one thinks of sylvans, but sylvans like those of marble or old lead.

At Cetinale, some fifteen miles south-west of Siena, all such hankerings are gratified. The natural ilex woods clipped regularly through centuries for charcoal, whose former ovens make everywhere fantastic soft black circles in the moss and fallen leaves, the ilex woods have there had a steep path or flight of steps (not unlike the ladders of waterfall at the highest points of Roman villas) cut vertically through their thickness, right up from the villa gates and bowling green to a square barrocco building, shooting lodge or hermitage, at the very top. And through the gentler
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slopes of the woods run wide roads past for­saken charcoal ovens, roads up which the Cardinal, who has glorified himself in huge inscriptions on the palace below, might at his ease follow the hunt in a litter slung between long-horned white bullocks, or even in a glass coach, what time the villa was in pristine order. In his day, some scant three centuries ago, or even much more recently, these ilex woods round Siena, continuous here and there with the then still-unshorn virgin forests of the Maremma, must have held deer and plentiful wild boar, and an occasional wolf pack strayed down in hard winters from the Amiata Mountains or the High Apennines.

It is in such woods of evergreens, naturally taking the aspect of formal gardens, and with some real formal garden like that of Cetinale, gates and statues not too far off, that I imagine the wonderful hunt of the Duke in Don Quixote, when the Wizard's chariots, drawn by black cattle and draped with black and silver like some "Triumph of Death," passed before the ducal court with masquers reciting verses among the flash of torches and the baying of
hounds, something between a pageant and a real bit of sorcery.

The Cardinal of Cetinale doubtless played such practical jokes as these (a trifle terrified thereat himself) upon the crazy knights there were sure to be among his hangers-on. And the disquieting remembrance of such taking the name and shape of Death in vain, dressing up actor-servants as skeletons and Souls in Hell, may have mingled with remorse for gallantries or ambition and oppression, when His Eminence waxed too old and gouty, or even prone to fits, to lust any more after the World and the Flesh. Then it was, I think, that he turned that hunting-box (or place of gallant rendezvous) at the top of his ilex woods into a place of spiritual retreat, toiling thither every now and then in his litter. And, lest the memories of its former mundane pleasures should perhaps awaken sinful regrets as he watched it from the palace window below, he took the strange precaution of covering its façade with a colossal cross, niches and busts of saints, dominating the neighbourhood and reminding himself that he had installed a holy hermit in the commodious rooms and kitchen
where, a sprightly prince of the Church, he had been wont to play at pastoral simplicity, dressing and cooking the game he had shot, with stomachered nymphs and high-booted gentlemen building up the fire and larding the roast meat.

And now real peasants live there, and the ilex woods of Cetinale are left to charcoal-burners, and to such leaf-eared sylvans as we suspect among the rustling foliage on stormy, moonless nights.

Returning from Cetinale I begged my American friend to halt her car at the foot of some other woods nearer Siena, those of the "Hermitage of the Ilex woods" ("Romitorio di Lecceto," (leccio, an ilex) which I had not seen since coming upon it unexpectedly in 1890. The hermitage is much larger than I expected, in fact a complete monastery, battlemented and towered for defence, among the exquisitely sweet woods of mixed ilex and oaks in young leaf, and scented, at the close of a hot day, with broom and honeysuckle. There is, which I did not remember, a whole cloister-and-porchful of those toy-box and picture-book frescoes which endear the Sienese
The Woods Around Siena

School; very faded, but letting you guess that the fortified towns were painted pure rose-colour, the seas a delicate pea-green and the people all represented in their teens and dressed, even patriarchs, in the most ravishing finery. An inscription tells us that here St. Catherine received for the first time her Divine Bridegroom! Perhaps at that moment the nightingales were vociferous in the ilex woods, even as we heard them at sunset.

All this was doubtless latent in my thoughts, this wish, now satisfied, for the south-west ilex woods, during those two days last week at Siena. What was uppermost was the sense, which I have had already years before, especially when looking down into the country from the unfinished cathedral-top, of the perfect appropriateness of a line of Swinburne's: Siena the bride of Solitude.

Had we approached, as we went away, and as in fact I did twenty-five years ago with my pony, not by the Poggibonsi but by the Radda road from Florence, we should have come suddenly on her slender towers and steep-paved lanes, on the great fountain of Porta Ovile, suddenly after some twenty miles of
almost uninterrupted woodland travel through the Chianti region. Even the south-westerly side, leading to Cetinale, though cultivated with corn and vineyard, has but few farmhouses and fewer villages, and those mostly on the heights: a pure, empty country beneath the wide dome of this hill-girt rolling tableland; great oaks along its dry torrent beds, and bounded by those ilex woods and by the thought of the fever-solitudes of the Maremma; while the southernmost roads traverse that wilderness of white clay hillocks, always in view of the great volcanic cones of the Amiata range.

For the Sienese territory has been the outpost of mediæval civilization, of the industrious free towns and the well-to-do Tuscany of the later Medicean Grand Dukes and the sons of Maria-Theresa, against what I call in my thoughts the South ("Italy," say many of its inhabitants, "ends at Terni," i.e. forty or fifty miles north of Rome); the South, that volcanic, half-barbarous, majestic and mysterious country of which Sicily is but the lopped-off end.
XXIII

THE VILLA OF TIBERIUS
THE VILLA OF TIBERIUS

ONE afternoon, half-way through my stay at Capri, I saw an ominous sight: and one which, re-reading what I then wrote about it in this fourth year of the war, I cannot but feel as an omen of the coming destruction of all our peaceful hopes and habits.

I had climbed as usual towards sunset up that semaphore hill behind my friend's villa, brushing the scent out of the lentisk and young myrtle and very green rosemary on the rocks; and got to the sheer ledge above the Mithras-Grotto, where you look down on to the sea as down the side of a well: those depths of azure which has flame somehow mixed in it, and the violet sea-weed shallows, and the cobalt water (like the sulphate of copper they spray over vines in this country) over the pure white sand. The day had been fine. And what I saw drifting across the narrow neck
The Golden Keys

of the island I took for smoke from some steamer on the northern side. But more came and more, drifting steadily southwards, sometimes veiling Solaro and sometimes separating the abrupt castle hill as if cut flat out of paper, from the mountains in whose steep mass it is usually merged. By this time mists were drifting also from the mainland, crossing the blue unruffled water and licking the jagged rocks of Tiberius's Villa.

In a minute or two not a tourist was left up there. The light faded, the air became chill above the little field of asphodels of that hilltop; and always more and more icy mists floated across that smooth water; and clung like clustered bats to the bare ragged rocks.

A sense of change and almost of fear came over me with that sudden chilliness. Could this be Capri? Or was there another Capri, an ill-omened place of Sabbath for antique witches?

With this sinister impression of that serene Odyssean island, contrasts that of another evening, when late and breathless I reached at last the top of Tiberius's Villa. The way climbs through vineyards with fig-trees and roses,
The Villa of Tiberius

the classic (or shall we say?), the Northern Tourist's South. And on the white Moorish-looking farm-walls are set forth, in huge German inscriptions, the attractions of a unique "Carolina" (or is it a succession of unique Carolinas?) and her genuine Tarantella. One's thoughts go to the appalling bourgeois couples of Ibsen, Nora dancing before the domestic Scandinavian stove that Tarantella brought back from the Capri honeymoon. To make this Ibsen impression complete, a stout jaeger'd and loden'd Barbarian was posing (was it?) a Carolina against a trattoria wall for a tardy snapshot.

But at the top of the hill all was solitary; only in the cold wind a small green bird kept flying in and out of the reticulated antique masonry. And above me, at the summit of the rock, the gilt statue of the Madonna looked in the evening light like some looming impaled victim.

Returning down, I noticed an English inscription on a wall, setting forth that it took I forget how many seconds for a stone to drop into the sea from the spot whence Tiberius was wont to cast his slaves, which 233
The Golden Keys

(the falling stone, at least) you could enjoy by ringing a bell, let alone you might partake of tea, coffee or chocolate at moderate prices. . . . What would Tiberius (garlanded Napoleonic Cæsar as we see him on coins!) have thought had he asked his wise men not (as Suetonius tells us) what song the Sirens sang? but what inscriptions would one day adorn his palace walls, and this had been the answer?

Thus do the tyrant and his orgies furnish forth innocent holiday joys for virtuous modern shop-keepers. Will our horrors also, so immeasurably greater and more scientific than those of poor artless Antiquity, amuse the leisure of peaceful future generations? Such at least seems the only durable result of wars and massacres: sale of souvenirs and motor trips to Marathon and Waterloo.
XXIV

AT THE CHALET
XXIV

AT THE CHALET

"Über alle Gipfel ist Ruh . . ."

We walked, after wading knee-deep in flowers, on the short Alpine grass, lawns girt with thin firwoods or dotted with solitary old larches; walked along one of those natural terraces which represent, no doubt, one of the successive beds of the Rhone now flowing fathoms below. We had to jump across adorable little soft brown bogs, full of Parnassus grass and minute reeds, as if the Snow-God had just that moment squeezed them into being with his tread. And in front, over the suddenly ending (or seemingly ending) ledge, rose and fell the intersecting lines of a valley full of silver mist, and there sat or reclined the dim silvery wraiths of the Dent du Midi and the mountains of Savoy; while, up one steep gorge, a storm blotted out every-
thing. Cows, looking as if carved of polished walnut, were strolling with clank of bronze bells and brass-studded collars; and snow-white goats chased one another and the cow-herd dogs among the tree-stumps and the grass-and-flower embedded stones.

Peace and Heaven's blessing!
XXV

IN TIME OF WAR
XXV

IN TIME OF WAR
(SUMMER, 1917)

THE three preceding notes on places were written in the three months before the war, and are likely enough the last of their kind I shall ever be able to write. For among the many things, spiritual even more than material, which the war will have wrecked and my generation can never see re-made, is the cult of the genius of places: frivolous, of course, compared with the hecatombs of life, wealth and virtue we are now offering to the Powers of Evil, but at all events decent and kindly, and needing, for its little chapels, hearts with nothing heroic about them, but swept clean of animosities and self-righteousness, let alone their being garnished with daily renewed flowers of sympathy and gratitude. Even if those hearts whereof they occupied a secret corner shall not have been
The Golden Keys

ravaged like so many of the Genius Loci's tangible abodes, the modest sanctuaries in question will remain locked up, and their keys mislaid, for many a year to come.

What has brought me to this conviction is the recent accident of re-reading one of my own little volumes of previous notes about Places. Reading one's own old books is always a queer sentimental experience, so much reviving in the writer's mind which does not stand printed in those, most often forgotten, pages. But on this particular occasion that has not been all. It was with an odd, new pleasure I found myself reading what I had written in former years: the relief of passing out of this devastated present into those tiny enclosures of happiness so safe in the Past; the consolation of thinking that, after all, the world of peace is still there, and that sooner or later this present captivity in Despair's Castle must be over, and oneself free to see and feel it all once more. Altogether, a sense of happiness, such as one had not had for a long while. Then, shattering it suddenly, came the shock of recognizing that this is not the case; that the Past is gone; and that when,
the war being over, we shall go out expecting to find it, that Past will no longer be there.

Though it sounds absurd when one says it, those beloved things of former peace somehow seem to exist alongside and separate, not yet merged in the horrors which now bear their name. Thus I find myself staring idiotically at the photographs of devastated Reims, much as I stared incredulously, when a child, at the illustrated papers showing the Tuileries and the Hotel de Ville, which the Parisian Insurgents had just burned down. I do not really believe in that Reims lying in ruins; the Reims in my mind is too familiar and credible: Reims where one halted on the southward journey to meet friends who had been away from England during one's stay there. One turned back a corner of curtain in the pleasant dining-room of the Lion d'Or, to see, opposite and aloft, the tiers and tiers of rigid kings and saints etched black and white by the October moon; also the pinnacle with the centaur archer, solitary among the few pale stars in the luminous blue. Similarly, the next morning, there was the great cathedral looking in at one's awaking. Then followed
the afternoon hours, before parting once more from those briefly-met friends, while the car-
buncle and emerald effulgences of the cathedral windows died away into sea-cave twilight filling the vast aisles. That Reims is still the real one. But it is there no longer. And some day I shall recognize that, and disbelieve in all except its ruins.

The same applies to Couci, at the foot of its château all flowery with borage. And to so many other little white-and-slate, one-storied towns of north-eastern France, with their pâtisseries and their patient fisherman on his chair in mid-stream; uneventful homes of modest egoistic virtues abhorrent of the heroisms at present thrust upon them. And that brings me to a north-eastern French town where I once shared that selfsame life, but touched with old-fashioned exquisiteness: the autumn sunshine glinted through discreet shutters, making pools and flickers on the parquet, while giving the grapes in the stony little vineyard to the back their finishing turn of ripeness; meanwhile a cool sound of beating of wet linen rose all day from the lavoir moored in the brimful river Marne. The
In Time of War

Marne! We English people scarcely knew its name and less its precise whereabouts in those days. And now, how much mourning in how many English homes does it not stand for! Marne and Aisne and Somme, and their thinly poplared tributaries, where one watched the barges, rising and sinking in the locks; a country it seemed so very uneventful, private, secluded. That country is gone; its very lie-of-the-land altered; become the abomination of desolation, new hideous hills and valleys of dead men as after an earthquake; for the rest, names on newspaper maps and bulletins.

And as to Belgium . . . The carillon I once listened to at Mechlin is silent in its lacework belfry; or did it go on jangling its old-world ditties, good heavens, over what?

Our recognition of present realities once fully awakened, one is prepared to learn any day that Verona or Venice has been dealt with as Morosini's own Venetians dealt with the Acropolis; or if you prefer, Darius in person.¹

¹ I found the following Venetian landscape in the Daily News of December 10, 1917:

"From the foot of the mountain range the ground slopes gently to the river bank for a space of some three miles. It is thickly wooded, and among the trees are many white
The Golden Keys

Or that those very ruins of Athens have been buried past all hope of excavation by future archaeologists. And beyond Venice, in the north-easternmost corner of her former dominions, I can see in my mind's eye the Land (la Patria they call it) of Friuli, where we drove and drove in the August evenings, refreshed with raisin wine and rusks at feudal castle (Arcano, Colloredo) after feudal castle; or at some eighteenth-century villa, faded yet dainty like old chintz, which looked as if a peruked, powdered wizard had lifted it from off a side-canal of Venice, balustraded windows, central gable and entrance hall for storing oars and gondola-hoods, all complete, and set it down, magically stranded, in that flowery moraine of incredible emerald-green, sloping from the Adriatic to cobalt Alpine crags out country houses standing out boldly in the Italian way instead of being hidden, as such places would be in England, behind high walls and in the recesses of a park.

“All these pleasant villas and country homes are shuttered and look thoroughly deserted now, at least on the side towards our lines, but I saw the calm on several of them suddenly stimulated to volcanic life by the arrival of a British shell which punched a neat round hole in the sunlit façade and set every window belching heavy black smoke from the explosion within.”

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of a Giorgionesque background. In those days no one seemed ever to have been there before; the Italians of other parts were not even decided on which syllable of its name to lay the stress: Friuli or Friuli. They have learned how to pronounce it now: for every other trainful of conscripts goes there; and from its tiny cities, remote in time as in space, Cividale, Venzone or Palmanova, there trickles ceaselessly the abominable stream of wounded men and of death-tidings down to the very ends of Sicily. So far for Italy, as I know it and shall, alas! know it.

But as to them, dear clean, old-fashioned German towns, from Treves and Münster to innermost Franconia and the Harz, in which we two English friends were wont to take, year after year, our happiest holidays; them I shall, most likely, never again set foot in. And, meanwhile, in all the talks of our past travel with which we try to forget these evil days, their name is never mentioned even by chance; and it is as if they had never existed at all. For though they stand intact in the material world and quite unchanged, no doubt, since we were there together, the thought of
The Golden Keys

them has been sacked, burnt, defiled ten thousand times over by millions of indignant wills and by imaginations thirsty for reprisals. At the mercifullest, the plough and salt of oblivion have gone over the place where they once stood in our thoughts.

This indeed is one of the worst sides of this bad business of war: this which implies the unconscious wrecking of our own soul's treasures and decencies, spiritual vandalism on which the stay-at-homes of all the nations (and priests, poets, sages at their head) have been incessantly engaged. Material damages can be made good, trees replanted, houses and churches built up once more in a few years, another Reims, for instance, replacing the old one. All visible traces may be covered up in our own lifetime. Besides, such damage is confined to frontier zones; and the immense bulk of Europe left as it was, cities and villages safe under their church towers; rivers undefiled and hills delectable as ever. Not so the landscape of the human soul. That is devastated on all sides, scarce a stone remaining in place of whatsoever we had built for our shelter, pride and joy, edifices of common

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wisdom, beauty and common hopes, of all that is too rare and needful to be a single people’s: all shattered, blasted, polluted, by the legion of devils, hoofed and snouted or slimily obscene, penned out of sight during the years of peace in subterranean places whose decorous bolted door War has set ajar, or thunderously thrown open.

A better world, at all events a safer one, is bound to rise in due course from these moral ruins. Let us hope it and do our best that it should be the case. But we of the older generations whose little hodfuls were brought to the building or patching of what has now gone under, will never see, except with eyes of faith, that new City of God, or rather of Man, that renovated moral landscape. And when once more we go forth, secretly, stupidly expecting the world’s familiar welcomings, we shall, instead, have to pick our way among wreckage still smoking with hate and defiled by fear and self-justification. So, like the people of Messina returning after the earthquake, we shall discover that the city which, from the ship’s bridge, looked for all the world just as we left it, is nothing but a shell
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of doors and windows, screening fallen and heaped-up streets, wherein we clamber up and down, unable to guess under which mound of plaster and of rags there lies our treasure and so much of our heart.
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