# THE WHITE ISLAND

MICHAEL WOOD

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE
WILLOW WEAVER
AND SEVEN OTHER
TALES

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# THE WHITE ISLAND

BY

MICHAEL WOOD

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TO ALL WHO KNOW THE WHITE ISLAND
AND TO ALL WHO DWELL THERE

"Try now . . . and thou wilt not be able to think of aught but God. For I am He alone, Who can bind fast the mind."—B. Angela of Foligno.

"We adore Thee . . . causing light and life to thrill through the dark void of chaos; breathing into man the Breath of Thy Divinity."—*Short Office of the Holy Ghost.*

"The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels; and the Lord is among them, as in the holy place of Sinai."—*Psalm* lxviii. 17.

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# PROLOGUE

## TO THE ANGELS OF THE NATIONS

Lords of the nations! ye who lead
By ways of peace and ways of strife,
Content to yield a passing good
To serve the glory of the Life,
Ye lead your peoples through the gloom;
They writhe beneath your heavy rod,
That they may rise again and rest
In the still Glory of their God.
In earthly glory, bliss and ease
Ye see a foolish passing show.
Upon your course ye sternly press,
By ways of failure steadfast go.
Ye see the Purpose great and high;
The marvel of God's Plan ye know;
Why should ye heed the fretful cry
Of frail and foolish babes below?
To lead the nation of your lot,
To serve unmov'd the Hidden Plan
For which alone all nature lives,
Both plant and angel, beast and man;
This is your task, ye mighty Pow'rs,
Servants of Him Whose perfect Love
Leads men and nations by the Cross
To rest within the Height above.
Our life is death to you, great lords;
And this is Life and this alone—
To stand within the Light of God,
Upon the footsteps of His Throne.

# THE WHITE ISLAND

## CHAPTER I

FATHER ANTHONY STANDISH TO HIS NIECE, CATHERINE ARBUTHNOT

"My dear Catherine,—You say you have ceased to believe that Justice is the underlying law of the universe. You are not content with a 'finite God'; your God must be infinite, eternal, all-powerful, changeless, and without beginning. Well, I agree with you! Anything less than this is not God. But, you say, if He be thus, He is not Justice.

"I have heard many a one say this, Cathy, but I have never yet heard any one give the reason you give for your conclusions. I have heard of those who rested in faith in God's Justice in a world of pain, until pain touched them. When

the anguish was their own, and not that of their neighbour, all was changed. They cried, 'He is not just, that *I* should suffer.' But you, my niece, complain that He is not just because He has spared you suffering. That is what I might have expected from the Catherine Standish of twenty years ago, who turned upon my conscience-stricken brother with crimson cheeks, brimming eyes, and little feet that stamped with rage because he had weakly suffered his youngest daughter, who had participated in the crime of Alice and Teddy, to escape the retribution which fell upon them: namely, bed at 4.30 on a summer day! You say your husband was needed to do important work at home, that your boy is but five years old; that your income is untouched. The world's anguish has passed you by; and there is nothing you have done, or are ever likely to do, to deserve it.

"Let us avoid the question as to whether pain is necessarily an evil, and prosperity an invariable blessing. But I would suggest to you that we can't dogmatise when we do not know all the

facts. The world we see is but a small corner of all there is to see. Because I know this, I am going, with the permission of those chiefly concerned, to tell you a story. You and I have this in common with Peter Pan: we refuse to grow up—at any rate where stories are concerned. We shall never outgrow our greed for them.

"The hero of my story is not unlike him, either, in making the same refusal, though from a different cause.

"I shall tell you the tale, premising that it will make demands on your credulity, and may even shake your belief in the truthfulness of

"Your affectionate uncle,

"ANTHONY STANDISH."

## CHAPTER II

### "TRULY" STORIES

It was in the early summer of 1899 that I received a letter from Lady Lansworthy—you know her, I think? She is Jesse Cameron's aunt, his father's sister. She wrote to tell me she had let a house which belonged to her to Mr. and Mrs. Clinton.

The house in question—One Holly—is about a mile from Brent if you walk "as the crow flies" across the Forest. Lady Lansworthy said the Clintons wanted a house to which they could run down now and then from town. They had taken One Holly for the summer from the present tenants, with the idea of leasing it, if it suited them, when the lease now running expired, as it would do at Christmas.

Lady Lansworthy went on to say the Clintons would like to make my acquaintance and visit

Brent. She asked me whether I would call upon them. She said, using a phrase I dislike, that Mrs. Clinton was "quite a good Churchwoman," but she feared Mr. Clinton was "rather indifferent to religion, as so many intellectual men appear to be."

Of course you know Mr. Clinton by repute. At that time he was just beginning to attract attention as a brilliant essayist and writer on some burning questions of the day. He had, I believe, an exceptionally distinguished career at Oxford. Altogether he was somewhat of a personage. He was member for Stacktown at the time he took One Holly; people were beginning to predict he would one day be in the Cabinet, a prediction which has never been fulfilled.

He married a very wealthy woman; she was also handsome, and possessed of just the kind of cleverness which is useful in the wife of such a man as Clinton was. She had all the domestic virtues; and in addition was a social success, tactful, agreeable, a good listener, a woman who knew when to speak and when to be silent. And

she was ambitious, not for herself, but for him.

I went to call on the Clintons in obedience to Lady Lansworthy's request. The house is not in Brent parish, therefore it is probable I should not have visited them had she not wished me to do so. They were at home; I found them sitting on the lawn under the cedars. One Holly is a pretty house, not large, but with charming gardens full of old trees. The back gate opens directly on to the Forest.

The Clintons were just a family party; Mr. and Mrs. Clinton, the three children, and the French governess. There was a little girl of ten —Margaret; Jane, aged eight; and the boy, Réné, who was six years old. Mr. Clinton's mother was a Frenchwoman; her Christian name was Rénée, and the little grandson was named after her.

The girls were delightful children; frank, simple, natural, quite at their ease but not at all forward; they were evidently excellently brought up. Nevertheless, charming as they were, it was the boy, Réné, who drew my atten-

tion. I do not think I ever saw such a strange little face. He was a little thin shrimp of a child, who had just outgrown the round curves of babyhood. His face had the most curious pallor, and his grey eyes were pale, too.

I once saw a milk-white mist-wreath lying athwart the Cornish coast; the sun's rays smote it without dispelling the mist, so that it lay —luminous life-filled whiteness—veiling the coast-line and the rolling, incoming sea.

Réné Clinton's pallor was like that mist. There was a wraith-like quality about the whole quaint little personality. His hair—a thick shock of hair, very fine, and with no curl in it—was of a dull gold like that used for aureoles in old missals. But the most curious thing about his whole appearance was that his dominant characteristic was neither colour nor form—but light. I am well aware that this sounds like incipient insanity, therefore I must explain further my reason for making such a statement.

With some people it is their colouring which strikes the eye; with others their form and out-

line. With Réné it was neither. I gained an impression of luminosity; when I proceeded to investigate and analyse impressions, I realised that the face was small and insignificant, the eyes very light grey, and the hair an unlustrous pale gold.

When he had shaken hands with me he slipped away from the group and climbed on to the low bough of an old cedar. I could see him, as I talked with his father and mother, sitting there in his little holland blouse and knickers, his thin sunburnt legs and little bare feet dangling from the bough. He was evidently in a private dreamland of his own, and his moving, crooning lips testified that he was "telling himself a story."

Presently he climbed down and vanished into the bushes; but when I was saying good-bye to Mr. Clinton at the gate which opens into the Forest, Réné suddenly flitted out of the laurels like an elf, and slipped his hand into his father's.

"Well, Réné," said I, "did you finish the story you were telling yourself in the cedar?"

He looked up at me with his odd light eyes—he had a very steady direct gaze—and answered without a trace of shyness:

"Yes. But it was only a pertence—that one!"

"Will you come over to Brent and tell me a story one day?" said I. "I'm very fond of stories. Come before the strawberries have gone."

"I'll come," he answered solemnly. "Do you like truly or pertence stories best?"

"It's very kind of you, Father Standish," said Clinton. "But it is a little rash. You must not let him be a nuisance to you. You're perilously near our back gate, you know. Réné, you must not run over to Brent, except when Father Standish is kind enough to ask you."

"Father Standish *did* ask me," said Réné, with no abatement of his solemnity. "And I are *not* going to be a nuisance."

"That's all right," said Clinton, laughing. "I hope you will let me come too, Father Standish; though I am afraid I only deal in hard facts."

I assured him I should be glad to see him, re-

peated my invitation to the mist-child, and took my way home across the Forest.

Three days later, I was just leaving the chapel when I saw a small holland-clad, sandalled figure standing motionless in the cloister, staring earnestly at a figure of S. Michael which stands in a niche. It is a very fine piece of work.

We do not talk in the cloister; so I smiled and nodded, took the child's hand and led him into the turf quadrangle where the Cornish cross stands; you remember it, a big cross of grey granite.

"That's right, Réné," I said. "That's very kind of you. You've come to tell me my story."

"I are come to tell you," he said seriously, with a heavy sigh as of one who has successfully combated difficulties. "I 'tickerlily wanted to. I couldn't make them let me before. They said I should be a bother."

"They were mistaken," I replied. "We will come and have our strawberries in the little garden of the Holy Child, and there you shall tell me my story."

The garden of the Holy Child is a garden within a garden; it is walled round by an old box hedge, ten feet high, and very closely clipped. The garden has turf walks, and the only flowers in it are a profusion of different kinds of lilies and roses, save in the spring, when snowdrops and scillas reign there in great masses. At one end is a broad grey stone bench facing a little shrine at the opposite end of the garden, which takes its name from the shrine, for therein is a Figure of the Holy Mother with her Divine Child.

The Child bends forward from His Mother's arms, His little hand raised in blessing; it is a lovely, gracious and very child-like figure; it is the work of a woman.

Réné and I sat on the bench, and I had the strawberries brought there, in a big cabbage-leaf, by a gardening boy.

"Now," said I, "we'll begin with our strawberries and go on to our story, shall we?"

I said this because I supposed the immediate attraction of the red juicy berries would be hard

to resist. I saw this was a mistake on my part. Réné was very polite and assented at once; but evidently the strawberries were to him an unimportant detail; he loved better his dreamland.

He ate the crimson fruit slowly; and as he ate I talked a little; asking him questions to draw him out. At last I asked him what he was going to be when he was a man. He paused with a strawberry in his hand and said slowly:

"I've never thought."

Then, as though striving to make up to me for his own deficiencies, he said:

"Margaret says it would be nice to write books; but Jane says it would be nicer to be an engine-driver, 'cause then you'd be always going away somewhere."

"It's very useful to be an engine-driver," said I.

"Y-yes," he said doubtfully. "But I shouldn't like always to be going away. And truly stories are useful too."

"True stories?" said I. "Well, yes! Sometimes they are."

"Not true stories," he said quickly. "Truly stories, not pertence."

"Réné," said I, "what's the difference between true and truly stories?"

"If I was to say there's a drefful dragon to eat you in that bush," he replied, "that's all a pertence; and you needn't be frightened—not unless you like to be."

"I see!" I answered.

"Jane likes to be frightened," he said. "But if she gets too frightened she screams, and Margaret tells her she's a silly."

"But what's a truly story, Réné?" I asked.

"If I tell you a very brave thing," said Réné, "that's a truly story; because there *is* very brave people, and it makes you feel *so*."

He waved his arms skywards with a spacious gesture.

"And a true story?"

"If I say what we had for dinner, that's true."

"I see. A little dull?"

"Well! True stories is *gen'rally* duller than truly stories."

"And which will you tell me?"

"I should like," he answered slowly and thoughtfully, letting the strawberry he held fall on the grass, "to tell you about the White Island."

"Is it truly or pretence?"

"It isn't either. The White Island is true."

"Is it dull?"

"No. It's the very truliest place there is."

"I should like to hear about it. Where is it?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know! Who told you about it?"

"Not nobody," said Réné with much earnestness.

"Have you been there, then?"

"Yes."

"Often?"

"Two times."

"How did you get there, Réné?"

"I didn't."

"Didn't get there?"

"No. You don't get there. You're there."

"There, without knowing how you get there? Do you get there after you go to sleep, is that it?"

"No. That's when you dream."

"And you don't get to the White Island when you dream?"

"No. There's dream things there. But you don't dream."

"Well," said I. "Suppose you tell me what it looks like, Réné."

"There's water all round it. And it's white as white."

"Yes?"

"And the cliffs all round are white."

"Yes?"

"And the stream is white."

He paused, and his eyes roved over the roses, glowing pink, crimson, white and golden in the June sunshine.

"All the colours come from the White Island," he said.

The words startled me. I began to wonder

what lay behind this queer working of a child-brain.

"Is there no colour there, then?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied. "There's green pastures."

I thought I had the clue. Some one had been reading the Twenty-third Psalm to the dreamy, sensitive little boy. I was right; in so far that I found he knew it.

"Sheep in the pasture, I suppose?" I said.

"Yes. Black ones and white. And there's a little house. But it's a dream-house. No one lives there."

"Why is it there, then?"

" 'Cause it means a secret."

"What secret does it mean?"

"What houses do mean."

"And what do houses mean?"

"I telled you. They're a secret."

I felt I was getting out of my depth, and I hastened, as I thought, into the shallows.

"Is there anything else there?" said I.

"Yes," answered Réné. "There's the Joyous Shepherd."

The words were uttered with such swiftness and certainty, and were so strange from the lips of the child, that I exclaimed involuntarily:

"Who told you that?"

"No one telled me," he answered.

"How do you know the shepherd is joyous, and what does the word mean?"

For I felt sure the little boy was using a word without knowing its precise meaning. Children often do this; sometimes attaching to a word thus spoken an undisclosed meaning of their own.

"I *don't* know," he answered. "And I don't know just what joyous means. But it's what he is. He's the Joyous Shepherd."

"What does he do? Watch the sheep?"

"I s'pose so. And I s'pose he makes music."

"Why do you suppose that?"

"'Cause there is a *big* music. An' there's no one else there to make it."

I determined to lead the conversation to another subject. After a while I made him tell me a "pertence" story of an extremely thrilling

character, and then I took him to see the Persian kittens, and promised to give him one of them later.

I walked home with him across the Forest, and saw him safely into the back gate at One Holly.

## CHAPTER III

### THE SPRITE FROM ONE HOLLY

A FEW days later Mr. Clinton came over to Brent to see the farm. I spoke to him of Réné, saying how much I had been struck by the child's play of fancy and quaint thought. He answered with a little touch of fretfulness.

"Yes, yes," he said, "there's too much play of fancy. However, I think he will soon get rid of all that at school. I shall send him to school as soon as he is eight. He is very backward."

"But he is only six years old."

"True! And I do not think nursery children should be pressed with lessons. Their brains suffer for it later. But he is backward, for all that. The governess can get nothing into his idle little head. I doubt if he can read. But I think all will be well when he is with other boys."

He hesitated. Then he said:

"Father Standish, did the child tell you his queer 'White Island' fancy?"

"He did," I answered.

"Now I should like your advice as to how to deal with that," said Clinton. "My wife's mother, who is of the old school, is terribly shocked. She thinks the child ought to be whipped for lying. I won't allow that. I should be severe in a case of genuine lying, but I do not think this is one. I believe I am fairly tolerant; but I should not like a boy of mine to be a liar. If I thought Réné lied, I should punish him for it. But he is truthful. He is the most accurate in his thought and careful in his statements of the three children. I never hear him make loose and exaggerated reports of anything which has happened."

"I noticed," I answered, "the perfectly clear distinctions he drew between actual occurrences, tales which were simply personifications of possibilities, and tales with no possible foundation in the world of facts, which were sheer and con-

scious creations of fancy. I thought it meant an instinct for truth, and a clarity of thought rather unusual in a child of six."

"It is true," he said. "I gather you think with me. The boy ought not to be punished for lying?"

"I think you would do him a great injustice," I replied. "When a truthful person makes an inexplicable statement, you owe it to him to treat his statement with respect, though you may find it impossible of credence. Réné's 'White Island' is real to him. To punish him as a liar would be a gross injustice. Don't let him feel that injustice lies at the root of things in his little world."

"I am glad you feel that," answered Clinton. "I shall take your advice. I'm sure it's sound. This 'island' idea of his is a queer thing, and I don't like it. But I expect the better plan is to take no notice of it; the fancy will die or get crowded out by facts."

I assented. At the same time I wondered,

just in passing, whether Réné's White Island was a root fact.

"There is one thing to be said," went on Clinton cheerfully. "The child is a remarkably good boy. He is very obedient, and never out of temper. He is unselfish; he never wants to keep anything he can give up to the girls. And the little chap has any amount of pluck. I do not know of anything, real or imaginary, that he is afraid of."

I gave Réné the freedom of Brent, and the quaint little boy took a great fancy to the place. He used to come over alone from One Holly, for he was very independent in his ways, and, as his father said, quite fearless. We became used to the sight of the quiet little figure. He never claimed our attention, nor did he seem to want it.

Once I found him in the chapel, standing motionless, with his eyes fixed on the white veil of the Tabernacle. But for the most part he flitted about the gardens and the farm lands.

One day my friend, David Alison, who has

rooms in the guest-house, came to my room off the cloister.

"What is there about that sprite from One Holly that makes me feel Eternity to be man's natural dwelling-place?" he said suddenly.

I looked up from my desk with a sense that Alison had given expression to a vague thought which had been lurking in the back of my mind, and troubling me because I could not put it into form.

"My dear David," said I, "I'm grateful to you. That is what small Réné Clinton does make me feel. That is precisely it! But why? I fear I cannot answer you that."

"I came across him just now," said Alison. "I went into the garden of the Holy Child to look at the lilies. I saw Réné sitting cross-legged on the grass before the shrine. I said, 'Hullo, little chap, what are you doing?' He scrambled up, and said in his portentously solemn way: 'I are telling a truly story to the Holy Child, Mr. Alison.' He looked more like

a little white flame than a flesh-and-blood child."

Alison's words made me think of the legends I had heard of child saints whose gambols the Holy Babe deigned to join. I wondered whether He had gathered up Réné's little offering of faith and love, his "truly story," and garnered it among His Treasures.

There came a night, the fourth of September, in the summer of 1917, when I felt sure He had done so.

## CHAPTER IV

### A WASTED LIFE

At the end of the summer the Clintons left One Holly and did not return there. I do not know whether they did not like the house, or whether some hitch occurred in their arrangements with Lady Lansworthy.

They went away, and I heard nothing of them for fourteen years. When I say I did not hear of them, I mean I had no personal communication with them. I heard of Clinton from time to time. I read some of his writings. People who came to the guest-house mentioned him, for he was increasingly in the public eye. I heard that his daughter Jane was remarkably beautiful, and I saw in the papers that she was married. It was what is called a "good match."

I often thought of little Réné; and I prayed

for him, especially during the years in which I knew he must be growing from youth to manhood.

In the spring of 1913, while we were yet living in our fool's paradise of a false peace, I received a letter from Mrs. Clinton. She wrote as follows:—

"DEAR FATHER STANDISH,—I think you will scarcely remember me; it is fourteen years, I believe, since we were your neighbours at One Holly. You were very kind then to my boy; I suppose that is why my mind turns to you now. A very bitter sorrow has fallen upon me and upon my husband. The most bitter and cruel, I think, we could possibly have been called upon to endure. It has utterly undermined my faith. I do not believe in God's Love, nor in His Justice. Perhaps when you read these words you will refuse to help me. For Réné's sake I entreat you not to refuse. You are the one hope I have. My husband has none. But I have just

a little hope that you will make my cup less bitter. May I come and see you?

"Yours very sincerely,

"THERESA CLINTON."

I wrote at once, expressing my sympathy, and asking her to choose her own time for coming to Brent. She came to stay at an hotel in Lexminster, and came to Brent in a hired car. She arrived at the guest-house, and I went to her at once. She was a very handsome, dignified, and graceful woman; she was then forty-four, and she did not look very much older than she did when I saw her at One Holly.

Her manner was composed and restrained; she did not display her emotion during the first five minutes of our interview. She asked after David Alison, and spoke of his books; commented on the spring flowers in our gardens, and spoke of the marriage of her daughter Jane to an American.

Then came a silent pause; during which she sat with her eyes fixed on the floor. I broke it,

"Mrs. Clinton," I said, "I hope you know that if there is anything I can do——"

She rose and walked to the window. Standing with her back to me, she spoke.

"You have not heard of our great trouble?" she asked.

"Only from you, and you gave me no details."

"No," she said, "you are not one to hear gossip. There is gossip enough about it, but they do not readily bring it to you."

Then she turned. Her face was working with agony. Her hands were clenched.

"O," she cried, "the pain of knowing the talk and chatter is the least part! Father Standish, if there be a God, He is cruel! What can it be but cruelty that stabs us through our child? What can it be but incompetent folly or malignant cruelty? O, I shock you! I shock you! But just look at it! A wasted life! Exquisite pain to me and to my husband. We were not neglectful parents. We were prepared to spare neither pains nor expense to make him a credit

to us, and a useful member of society. And *this* happens—this! How can you wonder if my faith is dead?"

"Faith never dies," I answered, "Faith is that which is brought to birth when God's Touch falls on the spirit of man. It is an immortal thing. Belief is sometimes a name for the non-critical acceptance of statements in which we are not sufficiently interested to inquire whether they are true. That kind of belief cannot weather a storm."

She looked at me for a moment.

"You've hit home, Father Standish," she said. "I have accepted things without inquiry because I was not very deeply interested in them. I own that. I am worldly. If the choice had been put before me as to whether Réné should be a S. Francis of Assisi or Prime Minister of England, I should have chosen the latter. I know that. But doesn't that make it harder for me now?"

"It does," I answered. "I gather that your sorrow is caused by Réné. Is it not so?"

She nodded silently. She could not speak for the moment. When she spoke, her lips trembled; and she found it hard to form her words.

"You remember him," she said. "He was a strange, dreamy little boy, wasn't he?"

"He was. He interested me very much."

"My husband so built on him," she went on. "We had two girls, and he was so delighted when the boy came. He is an ambitious man, Father Standish, but his ambitions for our son were greater than for himself. You know—though I am his wife, I must say it—he is very able."

"Every one knows that," I replied.

"Margaret is like him," she continued. "You may have heard how brilliant his career was at the University. Hers has been equally so. She went to Newnham; she carried off everything she could. There was no man of her year who did so well as she. My husband does not care much for that kind of cleverness in a woman. He likes a clever woman. He likes a woman who can 'tenir un salon' and help her husband so-

cially. Jane is more of that type. But he was pleased about Margaret, too."

She paused for a few seconds.

"But all his real hopes were for Réné. Think, Father Standish, what an awful blow it was when he found they could never be realised."

"Why could they not?"

She sobbed—mastered herself by a great effort—and went on.

"It has been quite impossible to teach him anything," she said.

"Why not?"

"Because he is not able, apparently, to concentrate his mind on any of the things he ought to learn. He cannot grasp nor remember them. He could not be sent to a school, nor, of course, to the University. A private tutor was useless too. He has none of the interests, none of the knowledge proper to a boy or a young man. Imagine what it meant to us! My husband was very angry with him at first. He thought it was wilful idleness. It was terrible for Réné; terrible for us all! But when my husband knew it

was not his fault, he ceased to be angry. He is always fair, and reasonable, and just."

"But did you not consult a doctor?" I asked.

"*A* doctor, Father Standish! There's not a brain and nerve specialist in Europe or in America we've not consulted."

"And what is their verdict?"

"All agree they have never seen such a case. A few—the very greatest men—men who know too much to mind saying they are ignorant, say frankly they do not understand it, and decline to diagnose. But most say that, for some inexplicable reason, there has been arrested development of the brain."

"You thought I might be of some service to you, Mrs. Clinton."

"I hoped you might. Do you remember my poor boy's fancy of the White Island?"

"I do. I was much struck by it."

"He has never lost that childish fancy. He still speaks of it at times, and maintains it is an actual place. That, of course, is an hallucina-

tion which shows there must be something wrong with the brain."

I did not answer. I did not feel wholly sure of that.

"My husband says he cannot have Réné at home any longer. He is just twenty now. My husband says it is not solely the fact that the intense pain of seeing him is injuring his own work, but he cannot bear that people who come to the house should see his son is mentally defective. He suggests that Réné should be placed with a doctor."

"Not in an asylum?"

"Not that. But there are doctors who take what are called 'borderland cases.' We went to see such a place last week. It was a nice house and garden and tennis courts, and the doctor and his wife were kind and pleasant. There were three unhappy, queer-looking people who were patients. Oh! I couldn't bear it! I couldn't have Réné sent there as one of them! My husband says I am not reasonable. I don't

care! A mother *can't* be reasonable about her boy."

"Thank God she cannot!"

"I was ambitious for him too. I feel that pain as my husband does. But that pain is *all*, or almost all, he feels. He loved Réné when he thought he should be proud of him. Now he can't be that, he does his duty by him, and is quite fair and gentle with him. But I love him just as much, though my ambition is dead and my pride in him disappointed; do you see?"

"I do. So does God love His children, in whom He is disappointed every day. He is very patient with us!"

"I felt I could not bear it. When I came home and was looking through a drawer in my desk, I came upon an old photograph of One Holly. It was like an inspiration. I thought of you. O Father Standish! You were so good to my poor Réné once; will you let him come here now?"

"For a visit, most gladly," I answered. "I would not promise that Brent should be his

home till I had seen and talked with him. But if he will come here for a month——"

"O," she broke in passionately, "God has some mercy after all; I could bear to think of him with you, in this beautiful still place."

"If Mr. Clinton will consent to it," said I, "I will gladly receive your son in the guest-house for a month."

## CHAPTER V

### RÉNÉ

RÉNÉ CLINTON arrived at the guest-house one Saturday afternoon. There was nothing in his appearance to suggest "arrested development of the brain," or any want of co-ordination of mind and body.

He was, in some ways, very little changed. He was of medium height and very slim and lissom. The peculiarities of appearance which I noticed in the child of six had increased rather than diminished in the youth of twenty years. He had the same quiet friendly manner, free from all distrust; the same dreamy air of abstraction; the same solemn way of fixing his eyes intently on people before he spoke, as though he was slowly travelling towards them from an enormous distance.

I asked him whether he remembered One Holly and Brent.

"Yes," he replied, "I do. And I remember you."

He was silent for a moment; and finally said slowly:

"It is because you and Brent belong to the things I can remember."

It was a curious speech. I did not ask him to explain it. I was trying to keep an open mind with regard to Réné; I was anxious not to accept any pronouncement which had been made concerning him; but to remain quite unbiassed in the whole matter.

He asked me that night whether he might receive Holy Communion the next morning.

"I always do on the first Sunday in the month," he said, simply.

I expect this had been his custom since he was confirmed. He was reverent; but he displayed no outward signs of special devotion or fervour. I have no doubt he said his prayers morning and

evening; but I do not think he prayed at any other time save at Mass and Evensong.

He gave no external signs of great piety; he simply did what his mother, who was, as Lady Lansworthy said, "a good Churchwoman," taught him to do when he was a child and a young boy.

Noel Cardross, the playwright, was at Brent for the week-end. I am very fond of Noel. He did not know Réné Clinton's name; but he sat opposite to him at the supper-table. That evening I walked a little in the quadrangle with Noel, and he said suddenly:

"I say, Father Anthony, that boy who was opposite me at supper is a new guest, isn't he?"

"Yes," I replied. "It is his first visit here."

"He looks fitter for your 'house of peace,' doesn't he?" said Noel.

"Do you think so?"

"Do not you? He gave me the queerest feeling as I sat opposite to him."

"What was that, Noel?"

"All the world suddenly became a sort of

shadow of some other world which was the real thing—a sort of Plato's cave."

"That is rather interesting. Did you feel this long?"

"Whenever I thought of the boy. I didn't like it. I like to be on solid ground, not shadow-land. What is that fellow's name?"

"Réné Clinton."

"Réné Clinton! Not *the* Clinton's son?"

"Yes. *The* Clinton's son."

"But he is half-witted, isn't he?"

"I do not know, Noel. That is Réné Clinton, at all events."

Noel Cardross stared at me silently. I suppose he had heard much chatter and gossip concerning Réné Clinton. He knew he must not import them to Brent, for gossip is totally forbidden here. It is almost the only rule I never relax. He began to talk of other matters. His words rested in my mind; they fitted in with those uttered years ago by Alison respecting "the sprite from One Holly."

I had no opportunity of talking with Réné

on Sunday. On Monday afternoon I asked him whether he would walk a little way with me in the Forest.

The salt air from the sea, five miles distant, blew through the pines. There was no sound save the coo of a wood-pigeon, and the soft chanting of the boughs overhead. On the "open Forest" beyond the pines a herd of ponies were feeding.

We walked in silence. I noted it was a very sympathetic and speechful silence. Both Réné and I were happy in it; we felt no need to talk. We came to a great circle of barked oaks, ringed round by the pines. They were big trees, and they looked as though carved from frosted silver. One of them had fallen.

"Let us sit down," said I.

We did so. There were bushes of blackthorn, white as snow, in the circle. A squirrel skurried across the turf and dashed up a pine tree. Réné broke the silence.

"I am very glad you have let me come here," he said. "I am very glad my father has not sent

me to the doctor's. I think I can tell you what I am not able to tell any one else. Something ties my tongue—paralyses me. I cannot explain to them. I know their pain. I long to speak. But I cannot. I think I can make you understand. I shall find words. And you will find words to tell them, won't you?"

"I will try to do so," I said.

I noticed several things about him as he spoke thus. Firstly, the balanced quietude of his voice and manner. Secondly, I saw he entirely realised the position in which he would have been at the doctor's, and it did not trouble him. That is to say, he was not troubled by any feeling of personal pain or wounded vanity at being classed with the mentally unsound. He was quite free from pain which was rooted in self-consciousness, self-assertion or pride. His pain was solely for the pain of his father and mother. That he desired to soothe.

"Father Standish," he said, his solemn luminous eyes resting steadily on mine, "I cannot learn the things they want me to learn,

nor remember those they want me to remember."

"Why not?"

"Because I am held fast by something else. It is something so tremendous, and I am such a speck in comparison, that I do not know how it is I am not blotted out in it entirely. It claims all I am, and all I have; there is not a single thing in me, mind and body, it does not claim. I cannot learn nor remember things which seem to have no real value, no real existence, no life in themselves. That is to say, I cannot learn or remember them while this tremendous Something holds and claims me."

"What is this Something?" I asked in a low voice.

He suddenly blushed like a shy girl.

"I think," he said, in a whisper, "it is God."

"Do you mean," I said gently, "that you are always thinking of Him, René?"

"No," he answered in the same whisper, "I am not thinking of Him, Father Anthony. It is He Who is thinking of me. His Power flows down on me, and I—I drown in It!"

I answered in a voice almost as low as his. It seemed natural to whisper mysteries in that enchanted circle of the Forest.

"What has this to do with your White Island?"

"When He holds me so close it is agony not to see Him," said Réné in a mere breath of sound. "Then—sometimes—I—am there."

"In the White Island?"

He nodded.

"Has it changed since you told me of it before?"

"It could not change. Because I change I see it differently. That is all."

"In what way do you see it differently?"

"I do not see it as an island now. But it is the same place as that in which I was as a child. The only thing I see now is the Whiteness that is Life. In the whiteness I see the Joyous Shepherd. And I hear music."

"Do you know now why you call Him thus?"

"Of course!" he said with a look of surprise. "Victory is joyous."

He bent a little towards me on the oak and sang under his breath these words:

"Call home My dreaming sheep,
My sheep that stray;
Lost in the dreams they fashion day by day.
Sheep black and white are Mine,
I shepherd all.
I hear their crying when for Me they call.
I am the Shepherd of all flocks that be,
Nor any craft may part My sheep from Me."

"Do you hear those words?" I asked.

"No. No words. But that is the message of the whiteness and the music."

"Réné," said I, "when you and I know each other even better than we do now; when you have been here a little longer, then I will go and see your parents and try to tell them the truth as far as I see and understand it."

We sat a little longer in the still oak circle. While we were there we did not speak. But as we walked homewards I spoke of an idea which was slowly shaping itself in my mind.

The sight of the boy, with his illuminated face, and the hearing of his strange words, re-

minded me of the legends of those saints of the desert, who, caught into the embrace of God in deep contemplation, had yet woven with their hands palm mats, which they sold, less to supply their own small needs than to fulfil the duty of almsgiving to the poor.

"Réné," I said, "do you think you could do manual work?"

"If I did not have to think about it very much, I think I could," he replied.

"Do you remember the little garden of the Holy Child?"

"Quite well," he answered. "Yesterday I went in there, and I remembered it at once."

"Could you keep the grass cut, and the hedges clipped in that garden? We have a gardener, and he would show you what you must do. He needs help; many of those in the 'house of peace' work in the gardens in their spare time. Would you take care of that little garden?"

He assented, and seemed to be pleased. The next day I moved him from the guest-house to the House of Peace. He fell into the quiet life

there readily and naturally. Those in that house, though unvowed, are bound by some few and simple rules, more especially of silence.

I did not tell Réné of those rules. He preserved silence by reason of that invisible constraint which held him. He glided in and out of the still house as though it were his natural home and abiding-place. He worked in the garden day by day, and his face grew more and more luminous with a kind of inner rapture. "Despised and rejected of men," he seemed to have found his haven of waiting. I use those words "haven of waiting" designedly; I was persuaded then, and I know now, that my duty to God was to provide that haven, where a chosen vessel might wait till the appointed hour; might wait, hidden then as now, till the storm burst and the Day of the Lord declared itself.

The silent work of God! The silent, veiled workers in His Vineyard! How little we know of either, and how little we heed them! The Eternal Sacrifice goes on; the sacrificial cups are brimmed and poured out to His Glory, and we,

knowing nothing of the heart of things, pursue our shadow-tasks and say, "See how our works endure."

There is a man in our house of peace named Gereth Fenton. God has given him a gift. He has a power of intercessory prayer which has, ere now, wrought miracles in souls and bodies. He had lived in our house here for fifteen or sixteen years when Réné Clinton came to live under the same roof.

I saw there was an instant unspoken recognition of each other between these two. They said nothing; but somewhat which lay beyond speech met, and metaphorically clasped hands. They were comrades.

Fenton works a good deal in the garden in his spare time.

He was working there one day when I passed by; he was cutting the grass near the garden of the Holy Child. At the same moment I saw Réné. He was standing on a low step-ladder clipping the box hedge; I could smell the pungent scent of the severed boughs.

I paused by Fenton.

"Gereth," said I, "do you know Réné Clinton is 'a case of arrested development'?"

Our eyes met; and we both smiled. Finally Fenton said:

"It is a case of a crystal cup for Living Water, Father Anthony."

I nodded; and passed on in silence.

## CHAPTER VI

### MRS. CLINTON ASSERTS HERSELF

THE month of Réné's probation at Brent ended early in June. I wrote to Mrs. Clinton saying I was obliged to come to town on business during the first week of August. I said I wished to see her and Mr. Clinton, and to speak with them concerning their son; in the meantime I should be very glad for him to remain at Brent as a guest.

I received a letter from her, and also one from Clinton. They said, as I expected them to do, that they would be in the country, but would come up to town to meet me.

I went to their house on the day they appointed. It was a large house; it was filled with the beautiful superfluities with which rich people, possessed of artistic discrimination, burden themselves.

Mrs. Clinton was occupied in some kind of elaborate fancy work. Her daughter Margaret was with her. She was a very handsome, graceful girl; she certainly looked very vigorous and intellectual. She knew, of course, the object of my visit; her mother was obviously nervous and acutely anxious. Margaret took command of the situation; she talked with me easily and naturally, so that her mother could maintain silence; and almost immediately after her father's entrance she slipped unobtrusively into the conservatory and vanished. I realised how intensely painful to Clinton must be the contrast between this capable and self-possessed girl and the boy on whom he had built such hopes. He was very courteous in his manner to me, though rather ceremonious. I guessed the courtesy and ceremony veiled an intense annoyance; springing, not from antagonism to me, but from wounded pride.

He hated to feel that Réné was with me at Brent. He yielded to his wife in the matter; partly because he loved her, and desired to miti-

gate her pain, though in doing so he increased his own; partly because he was just; he recognised her rights in the child she bore and reared; and he recognised, too, that he owed much to her wealth and her social tact.

But he would rather Réné had been with a little known physician in a quiet country place, and one among two or three "borderland cases" calling for no remark, and exciting no special interest. A great many people come to Brent. Many of them know Clinton personally. All know him by repute. He felt that at Brent Réné's "deficiency" was kept before the public eye. However, his words showed he expected this annoyance was about to end.

"I told my wife, Father Standish," he said, "that we have been most selfish and inconsiderate towards you."

"In what way, Mr. Clinton?" I asked.

"Brent is obviously not the proper place for Réné," he answered. "We place you in the unpleasant position of having to tell us so."

"But Brent is precisely the place where your son ought to be," I replied.

I saw Mrs. Clinton twist her elaborate work into a bundle, and toss it into a basket with a reckless hand.

"Ah!" said Clinton.

He put up his eyebrows in a startled fashion. Then he fitted his finger-tips together judicially, and prepared to listen, analyse and detect flaws in my discourse.

For he saw I was going to discourse, and prepared himself with the stolid resignation with which some men brace themselves in their pews when the text is given out.

"Your son is not in the guest-house now," I said. "I ought to tell you that. I hope you will not disapprove of the arrangement I have made."

I thought he looked relieved, and rather pleased.

"Certainly not," he said. "I feel sure we shall approve of anything you have seen fit to

do. I can well understand that with your other guests——"

Mrs. Clinton broke in:

"Father Standish," she said, "where is Réné?"

"He is in the other house, Mrs. Clinton," I answered placidly.

It was rather wicked of me. I am afraid I enjoyed launching a thunderbolt at Clinton.

"The other——"

"The House of Peace," I said.

"But that is for—for——"

"For people who have special and definite vocation," said I. "Precisely! That is why I have put him there."

She leaned forward breathlessly. Her eyes were swimming with tears.

"O tell us! tell us!" she sobbed.

"Theresa, my dear," said Clinton, rather irritably, "surely it is a pity to give way to emotion. The matter is so exquisitely painful to both of us, as Father Standish will understand, that I feel we need to guard against

natural emotion, and try to judge the whole distressing question reasonably and impersonally."

Then he turned to me.

"I am, of course, very anxious to hear your view, Father Standish," he said politely.

"I think I understood from Mrs. Clinton," said I, "that the most distinguished amongst the physicians you have consulted were frankly puzzled by your son's case?"

"Yes."

"They declined to diagnose. They said they had seen no case like it, and had no data upon which to go?"

"That is true."

"The lesser authorities also admitted they had never encountered such a case?"

"They did."

"But they were rather more dogmatic. They did diagnose. They thought the development of the brain must have been arrested."

"That is what they said must have happened."

" 'Fools rush in where angels fear to tread,' " I said. "That is my own case. For I am going to diagnose."

"Have you special medical knowledge, Father Standish?" said Clinton, suavely. But there was an edge in his voice, as though he felt instinctively I was about to say something he would oppose.

"None," said I. "But I've had some little experience along other lines."

He bowed, and became attentive.

"So far from your son's brain being underdeveloped," I went on, "I believe it is ultra-developed. I believe it is an instrument more delicately fashioned and more truly balanced than those of his contemporaries. It is a brain and nervous system in advance of his age. It is abnormal indeed—abnormally healthy and sane, or it could not sustain the strain of the prodigious spiritual energy which has been brought to bear upon it. It is a case

of an exceptionally pure, healthy and stable body, brain and nervous system."

"You do not seriously maintain this, Father Standish?" said Clinton slowly.

"Your son," I continued, "is in touch with a tremendous Reality; with a Reality so great, so overpowering in its claims, so insistent in its demands, that he is incapable of answering any lesser claims or demands."

"Do you mean," broke in Mrs. Clinton, "do you mean—God?"

"My dear Theresa!" said Clinton.

He seemed to feel she had been guilty of a breach of good taste. It was almost as though she had tactlessly introduced the name of an undesirable acquaintance.

"I do mean that," I said quietly. "The same Power which said, 'Go thy way, for he is a chosen vessel unto me,' has spoken to you through Réné, if you would hear His Voice."

"The White Island?" said Clinton in a low voice of intense contempt. "Are we to understand—er——"

"When the intensity of the Touch of that unseen Power becomes intolerable," said I steadily, "when the thirst of the soul is such that it becomes an imperative need, it should be in some measure relieved, if it cannot be quenched; then it is sometimes able to share imperfectly in the abiding knowledge of the spirit; it becomes aware of something which it can express, imperfectly it is true, in earthly terms."

"But you do not think," said Mrs. Clinton, "he really goes to—to—an island?"

I smiled.

"Mrs. Clinton," I answered, "if I dream I am walking through the Forest in deep snow, I see the snow, I hear the cracking of the branches, I feel the cold. Then I wake. The wind has shifted to the east. It blows strongly in at my window. I am cold. As cold as snow could make me. That cold is a reality. My dream is my own expression of the reality which has touched me. In dealing with visions I think people make two errors. They either

take the picture the mind has formed for the Reality which inspired it; or, in rejecting the picture as untrue and fallible, they also reject the Inspiration which may be truth and infallibility itself."

I ought to say here that I am not a man of visions. I have had but one vision in my life; and I shall describe it later. I lived for sixty-one years without visions till that experience came to me.

My friend, David Alison, is a man of knowledge in these strange matters. I know him to be sane and truthful; therefore I take his word for it that things unknown to me are possibilities. Alison says my explanation of Réné's childish vision of the "White Island" is, in his view, correct.

But he also says "visions" are varied in source and nature, and may not be classified under one heading.

Nor, being a very free-thinking person, is he wholly satisfied by the explanations given

by great mystics and ecstatics, and the classifications of S. Teresa.

Alison holds that my vision, which I shall tell later, was not, strictly speaking, a vision at all, but simply an exaltation of the physical senses, so that I saw as we shall see when we "rise glorious," or are "caught up to meet the Lord in the air."

In other words, he believes that what I saw is ever about us as a concrete fact, and not as an image of the mind; that I saw, in effect, the subtler reaches of that divine mystery, the material world, under different conditions of space and time.

Alison holds matter to be as holy and glorious as spirit. So that when he speaks of anything as being "material" he intends no lowering of its holiness and worth. Nor does he necessarily mean that a thing is holy when he speaks of it as being spiritual. For, as he says, we have the authority of the Apostle to the Gentiles that this is not so; and one whose experience and history were as astounding as those of S.

Paul has a right to be listened to, apart from all question of inspiration. Thus far Alison—I return to my tale.

"I fear," said Clinton, acidly, "I am at a disadvantage. I am so lamentably ignorant of these matters." (It would be impossible to describe the superiority and rejoicing pride with which he made this humble statement.) "I really know nothing save of facts as they are; of things which are real."

Mrs. Clinton gave an unsteady laugh; it was evident her nervous tension was increasing. She pressed her hands together, and her eyes gleamed.

"I amuse you, Theresa?" said Clinton, severely.

"I think Father Standish would say we know nothing of facts as they are, nor of things which are real; and hence our opinions are not worth having."

"Mrs. Clinton," said I, "you have put some very discourteous and sweeping statements into my mouth."

Clinton made no comment upon his wife's words. His lips set a little harder. I could see he was much displeased, and with some reason.

"Since I am ignorant," he said, "I have perhaps no right to speak. Nevertheless I hold we have no means of knowledge save that of experience through the senses and by the exercise of the reason. To me there is no evidence that your theory is more than the weaving of imagination. You will not, I hope, think me lacking in courtesy if I say this."

"By no means," I said. "It is a very natural view for you to take."

"I am grateful to you, Father Standish," went on Clinton. "Exceedingly grateful! Do not doubt that. But I so entirely disagree with you, I so entirely deny the soundness of your conclusions, that I feel Réné ought not to remain at Brent."

I was prepared for that. I thought and prayed much before I decided to speak. But I was sure I was not justified in concealing my

view; and I was pledged to Réné to try whether I could explain his condition to his parents. I was, moreover, quite sure he was in the Hands of One Who would do with him according to His Will.

"That is, of course, for you to decide," I said gently. "I have told you my view. Réné is living in great peace and contentment at Brent, and he is doing useful work in the garden. I find he can do simple manual work in spite of his intense absorption. But whether he remains where he is or not, is for you to decide."

"Certainly," said Clinton. "I feel I must decide to remove him."

Then Mrs. Clinton rose. She was a handsome, dignified woman, as I have said; but at that moment she was transfigured into a majesty of passion that, I think, startled her husband, as it startled me.

"It is *not* for you to decide!" she cried in a voice that thrilled with passionate command. Her eyes were stern, her whole figure dilated. "It is not for me, either. It is decided, and not

by us! Who are we to decide? Who are you? Who am I? What is our life, our work, our use in the world? We dress up our personal desires and worldly ambitions in fine phrases, you and I! We talk of our social service, our patriotism, our additions to the sum of human knowledge. Is there any real problem of life or death you and I can solve? Could we help our own child in his need as Father Standish has done? Who is the more likely to be right—you and I who only live for this world, its cares, its needs, its petty hates, and pettier loves, or this man who only lives for God and His Life in his neighbour? It is *not* for you to decide for my child. And you shall not decide it! At your peril you decide it!"

## CHAPTER VII

### ANDERSON'S MONGREL

THERE was a hush in the great luxuriously furnished room after Mrs. Clinton had spoken. The distant rumble of the London streets seemed to make the quiet more apparent. It was as though a great tide of power had rushed through the room, and, sweeping away all opposition, left silence behind it.

Mrs. Clinton sat down and took the crumpled work out of the basket into which she had flung it. Her hand was shaking.

Presently Clinton spoke. He spoke with dignity and quietude of manner.

"I did not know, Theresa," he said, "you took so unfavourable a view of the result of my well-meaning efforts. I am quite aware I cannot solve the problems of life and death. I never pretended to do so. Nor, with all

respect to Father Standish, do I think any one else has, or is likely to do so. That is beside the question. I fully grant you have a right to have a voice with regard to Réné. I have always done so. I have never unfairly imposed my will on yours, nor claimed more than my due share of authority over our children."

She did not answer him. For the moment he had the advantage of her; his manner was calm, his words just and right. I think she was a little ashamed of the passion she had shown; of the lifting of the conventional veil from the real woman beneath it.

"Father Standish," said Clinton, "we owe you an apology. You have been kindness itself. We ought to apologise, not only for an apparent ingratitude on my part, but for an unedifying scene. If you are good enough to keep Réné at Brent, and my wife desires this, I withdraw all opposition to the plan. I do not agree with you. But it is only opinion against opinion. There's no proof either way; though I think the evidence is on my side. I

leave Réné in my wife's hands and yours. I must go now. I have an appointment. You will stay a little longer, will you not? My wife will want more news of Réné, I know."

He shook hands and went away. I think he certainly behaved extremely well. Mrs. Clinton looked up at me. There were tears in her eyes.

"Perhaps I spoke too strongly," she said. "I fear I did. But I could not bear to think of Réné leaving you. I felt desperate. It is wonderful to me that you should learn from him what neither his father, nor I, nor the doctors could learn. Do you say he is happy and at work in the garden? Has he talked to you of these things? He never seemed to be able to talk freely nor coherently to us. I suppose it is a kind of spiritual freemasonry."

I talked awhile with the poor anxious mother; and I returned to Brent the next day.

The harvest was garnered early at Brent in the autumn of 1913. It was the last harvest my dear son Jesse Cameron reaped. He man-

aged the farm for me till he left me a year later. He reaps no earthly harvests more; but I think he has store of sheaves otherwhere. They were stacking the corn as the reaping-machine cast the sheaves forth. The long shadows lay athwart the stubble. I saw Réné in the harvest field. I went to him and told him I had seen his parents, and satisfied them concerning him as far as I could.

He listened quietly, thanked me, and said he was very glad and grateful. He stood there staring dreamily at the sheaf-stackers. The scene made me think of some lines I once read. They were a recluse's song, the work of a writer of no note. I repeated them to Réné:

"The little leaves unfolding on the tree
Beneath my window, clap their hands to Thee;
Softly a-flutter through the purple hours
Of midnight stillness; while the milk-white flow'rs
Of yon night-blooming bush send sweetness up,
Till voiceless songs to Thee fill my heart's cup.
The list'ning air is hanging round the eaves
To hear my song to Thee, beloved One;
As in the fields they bind the golden sheaves,
So garner me and hide me in Thy Heart.

Thy hidden Heart is changeless; from Its peace
Perfume of myrrh and spices flow.
Lord, cause their holy incense to increase
Within this bitter heart, that I may know
The secret fountain whence my life doth flow."

Réné listened.

"I think I shall remember them," he said. "I never am sure what I shall remember and what I shan't. It is not in my choice, apparently. I suppose that is because I do not really know what is worth remembering and what is not."

"I should suppose that practically none of us does," I answered.

Alison met me as I crossed the fields towards the gardens.

"A queer thing has happened in your absence, Father Anthony," said he. "Do you remember the story of John of the Desert and the tigress?"

"I do not think I do," I replied.

"John was a little monk who belonged to a Laura in the desert," said Alison. "There was a tigress who seriously interfered with the

comfort of the brethren. The prior, desiring to test John's obedience, told him to bring to him the aggressive beast."

"Well?" I asked.

"John, armed with a palm-leaf rope, went in search of the tigress, and led her back in triumph to the prior, to his extreme dismay."

"Why do you tell me that story, David?" I asked.

"Because of what happened yesterday," he replied. "It made me think of S. Francis and the wolf."

"What was it?"

"You know that savage mongrel of Anderson's. He generally keeps it on the chain, and he is the only person who can go near the brute. It broke loose; his cottage in the village was locked up, and he was away in Lexminster. The dog went hunting in the One Holly woods where they set steel traps for the rabbits, and tore through the gardens here on three legs, howling, with the teeth of the trap fast in his paw. The dog was half mad with pain and

terror; I suppose he tore up here looking for Anderson. He lay down (he's a huge beast, you know) exhausted, dripping with blood, panting and snarling. No one cared to touch him. Anderson was away, and I don't know where Cameron was. Réné came mooning through the garden, and became aware of the dog. He walked up to him; he was, of course, a perfect stranger to the beast. 'Look out, Clinton!' I said. 'Don't touch him, sir,' said one of the men. 'He ain't safe any time, and he's half mad now.' Réné didn't seem to hear. He knelt down, took the dog's leg in his hands, opened the trap, released the paw, examined it a little to see whether the bone was broken, laid his hand on the beast and 'gentled' him all down his back, flung the trap into a bush, and walked away as though he was in a brown study. The dog snarled at us like a demon, and limped back to the village. The men gasped silently, save one who remarked, 'I'm blowed!' "

I smiled. Alison said: "Why do you smile?"

"I was wondering what theory Mr. Clinton would have evolved if he had been present," I answered. "What would his reason have manufactured from the evidence of his senses to account for it? It would be vain to tell him the story. He would not believe it."

Nevertheless I told it in a letter to Mrs. Clinton. She wrote in reply:

"I believe it on your word; but I understand nothing. What is the purpose of this strange dealing? It causes bitter pain, and seems to waste a life which might be of service. What is the *use* of it, Father Standish? What is being done? It seems sheer waste. Forgive me if I blaspheme."

I wrote in answer:

"You have asked me a question I cannot answer. If I ever can answer it I will do so. There must come a day when we shall see what was done. If I ever see it in this life I will tell you what I see."

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE LITTLE BRETHREN

I was not surprised by that question of Mrs. Clinton's. "What is the use of it? What is being done?"

There are many records of human lives caught into close union with God. But such lives have not been ineffective in action. Mystics—and also ecstatics—have been fruitful of thought. They have not always been able to express in words their highest flights; but on the whole they have had an astonishing power of expressing experiences which transcend those of the normal mind. Many were learned in theology. They were voluminous writers, and eloquent preachers. For example, we have the writings of S. John of the Cross, Ruysbroek, Tauler, and Angela of Foligno. We have the wisdom of Julian of Norwich, the keen psycho-

logical insight of S. Teresa; the "Dialogues" of that Catherine who swayed the course of history by her will and intellect.

If some modern critics have suspected them of delusion and hysteria, no one has called them half-witted or ineffective in action. They produced mighty effects on their age: effects which have reached down to the present day.

But in Réné Clinton there was nothing of this. He had no revelations; his mind seemed to be preoccupied.

Nor was he outwardly very devout. He came frequently to Mass. He made his Communion once a month. But he was rarely in the chapel at other times. He could not meditate. He could not use intercessory prayer, save in the brief simple words of a child; and with no fervour of mind or heart. He read next to nothing; if he tried to do so, he either became abstracted and unable to comprehend the words, or he went to sleep. His strange condition of absorption bore no visible fruit.

He spent much time out of doors. I never

interfered with his coming and going. Very often he slept in the Forest; he was particularly fond of sleeping in the great circle of dead oaks. Alison sympathised with him in this; for he too is fond of sleeping under the sky.

I think every one—save Gereth Fenton—was surprised that he lived in the House of Peace.

But there were certain things about him which all noted, which caused them to think him remarkable.

The incident of the dog, for example, did not stand alone. No wild creatures were afraid of Réné. I am aware that this has been noticed in the case of some people of weak intellect.

I have seen birds, not robins or sparrows which are easily tamed, but a shy bird like a wood-pigeon, fly down from a tree and light on his shoulder as he gardened.

In the summer of 1913 I was standing on a heather-covered barrow in the open Forest, from which I could see rabbits playing in a

warren. Réné walked through the warren; no rabbit ran away. He stooped, picked up a young one, and looked at it.

The little thing did not struggle. When he set it down it skipped happily about his feet.

Alison told me he met him in the Forest carrying a fox-cub; the vixen trotted beside him like a dog, quite untroubled. She scented Alison and bolted; Réné set the cub down to run after her, which it did with speed.

Once, in the early spring of 1914, when the Forest was full of primroses, Alison and he walked to the oak circle together. It was warm and sunny. On the fallen oak there lay, sunning itself, a little shiny brown snake.

"That's an adder," said Alison, and looked for a stick.

Before he found one, Réné picked the thing up. It writhed round his wrist but did not bite him. He uncoiled it, laid it on the heather, and it slipped away.

"Don't kill it," said Réné, "it likes to live."

Fear, twin brother of Hate, fled before him.

He brought with him the peace of the City of God.

We never discussed these things at Brent. We rarely mentioned them among ourselves; whenever we did so it was but by a passing reference. Outside Brent we never spoke of them at all. We have an unspoken, unwritten law which forbids it.

We were content to wait. We were not eager to understand. The sense of the presence of a veiled power continually at work is so familiar to many in this place, that they have ceased to be eager to know concerning much which is real and ever-present, but not visible nor tangible.

It gave me at times a sensation partly of surprise, partly of amusement, partly of sadness, when I heard people who took all things at their obvious or face value speak of Réné. It is strange how many there be who take their convictions on many matters from carelessly uttered words, which they have heard, at the time, as carelessly.

It makes me wonder whether it is possible to write history, even contemporary history, correctly. We live on the outside of things. We have no measure to gauge the deeps below the surface. We do not know a tithe of what is happening in our very presence.

In November we had our cottage chrysanthemum show. There was a large marquee in the vicarage garden to hold the exhibits. As I walked through and admired the bitter-smelling blooms, I met Mrs. Finch.

She is the wife of the vicar of a neighbouring parish; she has many excellent qualities. But she has not, perhaps, a very deep insight into life and character.

Mrs. Finch said to me:

"We all think it so *very* good of you, Father Standish, to take care of that poor half-witted young man."

"Who is that?" I asked.

"Why!" she replied, "this poor young Clinton, of course. So good of you! Every one says so. Every one is talking about it!"

I made an attempt, at this point, to protest against erroneous ideas. Mrs. Finch thought it was an attempt inspired by my modest deprecation of praise, and she went on in spite of me.

"You know," she said, "I am always sure it is a direct judgment upon Mr. Clinton for his pride of intellect and neglect of religion."

It is always an abounding source of amazement to me to note the light-hearted way in which many good people refer to that most awful fact of the judgments of God; as though we were in any way capable of differentiating between His judgment and His Mercy. For I cannot but think that much which we call judgment is mercy, and those things we hail as mercy are, in truth, judgments.

"Mr. Clinton *never* went to church when they were at One Holly," said Mrs. Finch.

"Mrs. Clinton did," said I, "she and the children came regularly to Brent church."

"Mrs. Clinton! Yes, poor woman! Lady Lansworthy says she is a good Churchwoman. But her husband never went, I'm told."

"But the judgment, if it be a judgment, falls just as heavily on her, doesn't it?"

"That is true; and very sad. But I am persuaded I am right. People cannot neglect religion with impunity."

"That is an undoubted fact," I replied. "But have you reflected that if the result of non-attendance at church is to have half-witted sons, the larger part of the male population of England would be mentally deficient?"

"Of course judgments vary in their nature," said Mrs. Finch, with great decision. "But now, Father Standish, do you think you are *entirely wise?*"

"I am quite sure I am not," I answered. "Why do you suspect me of such a vain-glorious delusion?"

"You are laughing at me," said Mrs. Finch. "It's too bad of you! But, seriously, do you think it *safe* for him to wander about in the Forest? I understand he sometimes slept out there during the summer."

"Why, there's nothing to hurt him in the

Forest, unless it's an adder, or an occasional viper," said I; "and they do not constitute a serious danger, for any one who is moderately careful. There are a few snakes in most country places in England. I don't know of anything which could hurt him."

"Not to hurt him! But suppose he hurt some one else."

"Hurt some one else!" I exclaimed. I really did not see what she meant. It was dull of me.

"You can never tell what a poor afflicted creature like that may do," said Mrs. Finch. "He might suddenly take it into his head to kill some one."

"He might, certainly," I replied. "So might I. So might you. But I do not think we shall, do you?"

"O, but it is not the same! A half-witted person, poor creature! is never to be depended upon."

"True!" said I. "But Réné Clinton is not half-witted."

"Not! O Father Standish! Not? You don't mean that, surely?"

"I certainly do mean it," I answered.

"O, but surely he is! They all say so!"

"They are all wrong," I replied, "and you may tell them so decisively on my authority. But I must not discuss the matter. I never discuss those who live at Brent, you know. It is against my rule."

## CHAPTER IX

### WRECKAGE

I THINK the culmination of the story of Réné will be more easily understood, if I describe one or two incidents which took place at Brent during the winter of 1913 and onwards till the summer of 1917, when the culmination to which I have referred was witnessed by me. When I use the word "culmination" I apply it to the point at which I understood the whole matter much more clearly. For of course his story has not culminated and could not do so. The mystery of Réné is one which does not change and therefore cannot culminate.

I will now select two or three things which came to pass during the period I have mentioned. I will set them down in order, so that the nature of the "strange work" may be better perceived.

In the winter of the year in which Réné came to Brent, that is to say in November, 1913, a man was brought to the guest-house who was in a terrible condition of mind and body.

His story was briefly this:

He was a man of good birth and education, and some means. He was brought up by his mother, who was a widow, as a strict Calvinist. There was a strong affection between her and her child, but very little understanding on her side. She never guessed how her religious teaching at once impressed and terrified his imagination, till it was a real blight upon his soul. He broke away from this form of faith at Oxford. For a while he was without religion; but he lived a clean and upright life.

It was a foregone conclusion he would find some form of faith. He was a man to whom life would not have been life without it. He was naturally enthusiastic and idealistic, a man to lead a forlorn hope, or throw away his life recklessly for a noble idea. As a matter of fact he has done so. He lies to-day in an hon-

oured grave in France; and we, for whom he gave his life, pray in love and gratitude for his soul's peace.

When he left college and went to London he became a Catholic. He was deeply in earnest; and he believed, after a while, that he was called to the priesthood. He may have been right.

Just as he was preparing to begin his theological training he met a man, older than himself, who had a strong influence over the minds of others. He had a most curious and sinister influence over the minds of men younger than himself. He seemed to dazzle and glamour them; he was extremely brilliant in conversation, I believe, and had a great faculty for making black seem white, and *vice versa*.

He was either a brilliant madman or abnormally wicked; for he had an insensate hatred of anything of the nature of religion. If he met a man who had faith, he strove with all his might either to undermine that faith, or to cause the person who adhered to it to do

something to disgrace it, and discredit it in the eyes of the world. For you know how a religion is often discredited simply because its professors live in defiance of its teachings; and people cry out that such and such a faith has failed, when it has simply never been put into practice but merely professed with the tongue.

In the case of the unhappy young fellow whose tale I am telling—I will call him Lester; it is not his name nor anything like it—he succeeded in doing the latter.

It is not needful to give details. If I did, you might trace the matter, which I do not desire. Suffice it to say that he succeeded very thoroughly indeed.

There was a terrible scandal. Lester disappeared, in an agony of shame and remorse, from the ken of all who knew and loved him. He was very lovable; and there were many who cared for him greatly. His mother, I am thankful to say, was dead.

At the end of a year one of his friends found

him. He was in a most deplorable condition; not in poverty, for he had some means.

He was living with the very dregs of the people—with the totally submerged. He slept in the lowest common lodging-houses. Sometimes he walked the streets all night, and slept on the grass in Regent's Park all day.

You have probably seen those people—regular habitués of that park. I have seen them sleeping on the sodden wet ground in November and December; lying on the dank grass with a black-yellow fog brooding over them like a pall. At night when the park closes they rise; they drift out and go on their way. They walk the streets by night; they earn their living during the dark hours by strange and sometimes terrible shifts.

With these, our unheeded brethren, Lester was living—herding with them, rather—when his friend found him. He had not taken to drink, thank God! nor yet to drugs.

He was clad in filthy rags; he was unwashed,

and his face was covered with a stubbly beard. He looked like the lowest type of tramp.

In that condition he was brought to Brent. He was in no state for the guest-house. His nervous condition alone would have forbidden it. When he was clean, and shaven, and decently clad, I put him in the little flat for invalids.

At first he seemed to be plunged in a depression too deep for speech. He sat, numb and impassive, in the porch room of the flat, looking straight in front of him. If I asked him a question he just answered me. Sometimes he did not answer at all, save by an impatient shrug of the shoulders.

But one day he raised his heavy eyes to my face and said:

"What sheer waste of time!"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

He replied:

"Waste of your time! What on earth can it matter whether I'm clean and fed and decent in appearance?"

"I suppose," I answered, "it matters as much for you as it does for any one, Lester."

"That's just where you're wrong," he answered.

"Wherein am I wrong?" said I.

"Don't you see what has happened?" asked he. "Do you really not know?"

"Know what?" I asked.

"Know that my soul's past praying for," he replied. "Don't you know it is damned here and now in time, and nothing you or anybody else can do can save it? If you don't know, you must be stone blind!"

I was very thankful he had begun to talk at last. I found out little by little the ghastly notion which possessed his tortured brain. The old Calvinistic leaven of his babyhood, which terrified his childhood, and had been rejected by his manhood, was at work.

Those early impressions made upon the brain and nerves are terribly indelible. They are like the searing of red-hot irons upon the flesh.

Reason may reject them; they may be forgotten in the press of life; but there comes an hour of weakness, a time of overstrain, and they creep back—cruel ghosts!—out of the shadows, to haunt and bewilder. It was thus with poor Lester. In the weakness produced by his bitter shame and remorse the old beliefs returned. He was quite convinced he was predestined to damnation.

"No," he said, shaking his head, "no argument you can use will persuade me. Look at it for yourself! If I, a Catholic in belief, a Catholic in practice, could, in spite of my faith, in spite of the Sacraments, in spite of prayer, fall into mortal sin, it is a sign that I am willed by God to perish. You sin in trying to save me."

"That is a most outrageous belief," I said.

"It is reasonable," he answered. "If it is God's will I should be lost, and you try to save me, you are opposing His Will, and putting yourself in great peril."

I spoke to him of the Sacraments—of penance and absolution.

"There is no absolution for me," he replied. "If I received Holy Communion, it would be sacrilege; I should increase my eternal torture."

"Surely," I said, "God is all-powerful. He can save you."

"He could," he answered, "but, as I tell you, He does not will to do so."

"What of repentance?" I asked.

"Repentance does not avail for me," said Lester. "I do repent. I loathed my sin directly I realised its hideousness. But that makes no difference to my future fate."

"How can you dishonour God's Love by such a terrible thought?" I said.

"His Love is for others," he answered. "For me there is nothing save His Wrath. I think I am glad."

"Glad!" I exclaimed.

"Glad," he answered. "My betrayal of my faith, and my sin, are so abhorrent to me, I

am *almost* glad to know my anguish and my punishment will never cease."

This terrible condition of mind lasted throughout the winter. I said all I could think of to help him. I assured him that pardon was his if he repented. I laid before him all the arguments I could, to show how monstrous was the doctrine which possessed his mind. Gereth Fenton spent whole days and nights in prayer for him. Nothing availed. His condition grew worse; and I never encountered before such marvellous facility as he possessed for inventing horrible and fantastic possibilities which might result from his supposedly hopeless condition.

There came one of those days which sometimes come in February. It was very mild, and the wind was soft and balmy. It was warmer than it often is in June. The little spell of warmth lasted during two or three days. There was a pale blue sky, and the clouds, very light and tenuous, flew low, frail wreaths of white mist, floating in midair just

over the pine-tree tops; the blue of sky was not veiled by them. We often get such clouds here; blown in, in light streamers from the sea.

The catkins were out on the nut-boughs; we have an avenue of old nut-trees in the garden. The "palm" began to show buds like mother o' pearl, not yet dusted with golden pollen. The Garden of the Holy Child was white from end to end with snowdrops. A few golden crocuses peeped up in the gardens; the winter aconite showed its pale green frills and yellow blossoms. In sheltered places in the Forest primroses were in bud.

Those last few months before the storm broke, and wreckage strewed the world!

I persuaded poor Lester to stroll with me in the gardens. It was very difficult, as a rule, to get him to do this.

As he sat continually brooding, he invented a dreadful fancy that his supposedly lost condition could infect others and drag down their souls to hell with him.

When he was strongly obsessed by this awful

thought he refused to leave the little walled garden attached to his flat. Sometimes he would declare he was having this effect upon me; and he would adjure me solemnly to fly, and leave him.

But on this occasion I induced him to walk to the Garden of the Holy Child; and we sat down on the broad stone bench where Réné and I ate strawberries nearly fifteen years before.

As we sat there, Réné came into the garden. He looked intensely absorbed, as though he did not notice us. He had a basket in his hand; he knelt down and began to pick snowdrops. I found afterwards he was picking them for the chapel of our Lady of Light which Jesse Cameron built in the little pine-wood here.

It had a brass plate on the wall to the memory of Paul Cameron, Jesse's father. It has another now, to the memory of Jesse himself, he who built the place and hallowed it by his vigils and his penitence.

As Réné knelt in the garden, picking busily the snow-white green-tipped flowers, I became

aware that Lester was leaning back against the closely clipped box hedge which rose like a wall behind the bench. He was slipping sideways, and beginning to breathe very slowly and rhythmically. I looked at him. His eyes were shut; his face was very peaceful; he was going to sleep. I rose softly and lowered him inch by inch on to the bench, without waking him. He was in a profound sleep. I fetched a cushion and slipped it cautiously under his head, and covered him with a rug. He did not stir. He was sleeping very quietly, and his face looked younger; the lines were smoothed out which were carved between the brows and round the mouth.

I listened to his slow deep breathing, like that of a child. It was a restful, dreamless sleep and it lasted for more than six hours. It was ten o'clock in the morning when it began, and the sun was just setting when he woke.

Réné left the gardens with his snowdrops about twenty minutes after Lester went to sleep; but he came back again, and was in and

out of the garden all day; he was making a little rockery at the foot of the shrine, and preparing there a place to grow some little creeping plants.

When Lester woke, Réné was no longer there. Lester raised himself slowly, looked about him, and drew a long breath.

I watched him anxiously. I felt sure something had come to pass, during that strange and sudden sleep, which would change the situation in some way. But I had no idea what had been effected, nor how it had been done.

I saw his whole expression was changed. He was another man. He seemed to search his memory for awhile. Then he rose slowly, raised his arms high above his head and stretched his muscles. He looked all round the garden, looked at the pillow and the rug, and then at me.

"Have I been asleep, Father Standish?" he said.

His voice was changed. The dull, leaden, hollow sound was gone.

"Yes," I said, "you slept very soundly."

"When did I go to sleep?"

"This morning, after breakfast. It was about ten o'clock."

"What time is it now?"

"I think it is nearly five."

"And how long have I been out of my mind?"

I hesitated.

"When was I brought here—to Brent?"

"It was in November."

"And this month is February, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Father Standish," said Lester, "I do not know whether I have really been mad, or possessed by a lying spirit. Perhaps it is the same thing. But I am sane again now. I have sinned, God forgive me, and I shall carry that sorrow to my life's end when I think of it. But I know Who is the Way for me, as for all sinners; I know the way back to Him; I can arise and go to my Father, and He won't cast me out. I know that now. And I know, too,

what you have done for me. I can say thank you, and God bless you for it."

That night, as I knelt before the Tabernacle and gave Him thanks for this great deliverance of poor Lester, I saw in a flash, or thought I saw, what had happened to him. I mean I saw wherein his trouble lay, though not the method of his relief.

The man's soul had long been shriven; it was clean, it was at rest in its repentance, and His pardoning, re-creating Life. But the trouble was with the body, the tortured brain and nerves.

A Power had touched him which healed them; and the torture ceased. In some fashion which I did not then understand at all, Réné was connected with that bodily shriving.

I wondered whether he was aware of it. I thought I would try to find out whether he knew what had taken place.

I met him the next day, going about his work as usual. I stopped him, and asked whether he knew Lester by sight.

He looked at me in his solemn way, performed his customary feat of travelling from a vast distance to speak with me, and said:

"I think not, Father Anthony."

"I mean the man who was in the Child's Garden all day yesterday," said I.

Réné searched his memory carefully.

"*Was* there a man there?" he said.

"There was. He was sleeping on the bench all day. Did you not see him?"

"I must have done, I suppose. But I did not realise it, I think; and I have forgotten it. I am very inattentive and unobservant. I don't notice things. Sleeping there?"

"Yes."

"Was he ill?"

"Yes. He was not at all well."

"I hope I did not disturb him?"

"No," said I, smiling. "Do not be troubled about that. You did not disturb him at all. He was greatly the better for his sleep."

"I am glad of that," said Réné.

## CHAPTER X

### RALPH FORBES

In the month of March, about three weeks after poor Lester left us, I received a letter exquisitely spaced, written in a very minute and beautifully legible hand, on very good paper which bore a crest. It was signed Ralph Forbes, and it enclosed a letter of introduction from the Duchess of Garrydale.

The writer said he wished to spend a short time of quiet and seclusion at Brent, of which he had heard so much. Would I consent to receive him for a fortnight at the guest-house? He would, of course, strictly conform to the rules which prevailed there, whatever they might be. He greatly desired to have a period of reflection and freedom from worldly disturbance; he had heard much of the helpful influences and peaceful atmosphere of Brent. I

did not like the letter; there was something about the phrasing which did not ring true. I disliked the praise of the place, which had in it a tone as of personal flattery.

But I have never yet refused to receive any one at the guest-house. Whatsoever may be their class or character—whether it be high or low—I receive them.

There was no reason why I should refuse to receive this Ralph Forbes. His reason for wishing to come was a legitimate one; his reference—the Duchess of Garrydale, whom I know and respect—was unexceptionable.

I wrote to him accordingly, saying I should be glad to welcome him at the guest-house for a couple of weeks.

He duly arrived.

He was a tall, lean, fine-looking, "well-groomed" man of thirty-five. He had very good features, alert eyes, and most agreeable manners. I think some people might have said they were a little too suave; but that is a matter of taste. Suavity does not mean insincerity

and ulterior motives; though it is true it sometimes suggests them. But the suggestion is, more often than not, a wholly false one.

I afterwards found out a good deal about Ralph Forbes; which I will set down here.

He was an Englishman. His father was English, though I suppose his family came originally from Scotland; his mother was an American. He had no profession. He was well off; and he was unmarried. He was educated at Eton and Oxford. He had travelled all over the world, and lived in France, Germany, Italy and America; therefore he was very cosmopolitan. He spoke many tongues, was conversant with many customs and ways of living, and did not carry the stamp of nationality as most men do.

He was a man who, having pretty well exhausted sensations procured by the obvious and customary, turned, in order to satisfy his craving for knowledge and for sensation in some form, to the less obvious and more unusual.

Therefore he "went after strange gods."

The worship of God was the one thing it had never occurred to him to try; I think if he had ever thought of it he would have attempted to develop the faculty of worship, simply as a form of self-indulgence.

He investigated spiritualism, studied Christian Science, joined strange underground sects and cults; cults that avowed themselves to be devil-worshippers; cults that aimed at penetrating and reviving the mysteries and "magic" of Egypt.

He had a morbid craving for wonders, an insatiable curiosity, and an extremely profane mind, veiled by perfectly decorous phraseology.

He met, as a fellow-member of one of his burrowing expeditions into the extraordinary, the man who was mainly responsible for the fall of poor Lester.

He knew what happened to Lester, and the state he was in. When he returned from Brent, calm, steadfast, ready to face the world, and hopeful in his repentance, this man, Ralph

Forbes, became curious and interested. Of spiritual life, of spiritual power, he knew nothing. He called anything spiritual which was inexplicable or "uncanny." He suspected a mystery of "magic" at Brent. He came down to investigate it.

He was extremely deferential to me; regarding me as the high-priest of an unfamiliar cult. He thought there was an inner organisation at Brent, hidden under orthodox observance.

He spent a great deal of time in the chapel, kneeling in the most reverent way, after profound genuflexions, before the Tabernacle. He would kneel, absolutely immovable, for three or four hours at a stretch. His perseverance and power of self-discipline were admirable; I must say that in justice to him. But it was terribly painful to see him; because, though there was nothing to find fault with in his behaviour, I knew well he was simply experimenting in some way. I did not know, at the time, that it was to him a new form of magic. I was sure of this, however, when I

learned what I afterwards learnt. While he was at Brent I knew none of the details I have just set down. But I was certain there was something amiss, in spite of the blameless, and even praiseworthy, outer practice.

He was like a miasma in the guest-house. He was the first guest I ever had whom I wished away with all my heart. By the way, I have not given you his real name.

At the end of three or four days he came to me as I walked across the quadrangle. He had been watching for me from the cloister.

"Could I speak with you, Father," he said with an air of great reverence and deference. "Your time is precious, I know well——"

"I am quite at your service," said I. "Come to my room, will you not?"

We left the quadrangle together, and walked silently through the cloister. There is a great Ober-Ammergau crucifix hanging there. Forbes bowed very reverently as he passed the Figure.

We entered my room, and he declined to sit

down till I was seated. It was done a little ostentatiously.

He began by lauding the "atmosphere" of Brent; during the course of all his talk and his song of praise, he slipped in, adroitly, little unexpected questions, as though he thought to surprise some secret, and lead me to betray a knowledge which I wished to hide.

It puzzled me at the time, because I believed, in my ignorance, that he came to Brent for the reason he assigned; though I realised his long hours in the chapel were not prompted by devotion, but by some other reason which I could not fathom. It was not until the following day I realised what the reason was.

There was no mystery at Brent which I could have betrayed had I desired to do so. Therefore, of course, he surprised nothing and made no discoveries.

But because he did not believe this, his mind being full of "magic" and "occult secrets," he thought I had deliberately baffled him, and was annoyed.

At last he said very suavely:

"I am going to be very presumptuous, Father."

"I am sorry to hear that," I said, smiling.

"Will you permit me—I know I am asking much—will you allow me to hold a vigil in the chapel all night?"

Since the autumn of 1914 there has been an uninterrupted watch in the chapel at Brent. Although we were short-handed on the farm and in the gardens, so that many, who were commonly employed otherwise, learned to lend a hand in work foreign to them, we nevertheless maintained our watch night and day, uplifting souls in the storm and stress of the world to God, in Whom is neither storm nor change. Prayer has never ceased for these, since the tempest burst upon us.

But at the time when Ralph Forbes made his "presumptuous" request, that is to say in March, 1914, the watch was only kept from Prime till Compline. Prime was said at six, and Mass at seven; after Mass the watch went

on till Compline. After Compline, until two o'clock when we met to sing Matins and Lauds, the chapel was unwatched by any visible worshipper.

Gereth Fenton often kept an all-night watch there; I also kept a vigil on occasion; but as a regular thing the chapel was empty from nine till two A.M. In any case I never allowed a guest to watch there alone at night; unless it was for some very special reason. I said this, as politely as I could. Forbes was the last man to whom I would have given permission to do what he desired to do. But there was no need to tell him this; I stated the fact of my usual rule. He was very courteous; declared he quite understood the wisdom of the rule, and then added, tactlessly, that he was, of course, a comparative stranger to me. This little slip on his part showed me he did not believe my words, and thought I was inventing a rule for my own purposes. He was inwardly annoyed at being thwarted.

We never lock the chapel. In this little

quiet place, where I know well every man, woman and child, and we are all one family in our Father's house, there is no reason it should be so. Our Lord keeps open house there night and day for all who would draw near Him.

I suppose Ralph Forbes found out the chapel was left open. I also suppose he did not know we sang the night office there. The day after I refused him the permission he asked, Gereth Fenton came to me.

"Father," he said, "I saw something in the chapel last night which you ought to know."

"What's that, Gereth?" said I.

I thank God we have no sojourner in our house of peace who is a gossip or a tale-bearer, nor an idle critic of other people's actions; so that I knew Gereth would not come to me thus without very solid reason.

"I went there at ten o'clock," he replied. "I meant to watch in the Lady Chapel till matins."

Gereth Fenton often did this, and he had perfect freedom of action from me to do as

he chose in all matters of devotion; for he was wise and discreet; he knew his own powers and limitations, and moreover I knew him to be guided of God.

"I saw some one was already there," went on Gereth. "Some one was kneeling at the fald-stool immediately before the altar. It was rather dark; but I saw at last it was Mr. Forbes."

"Forbes!" said I.

"I think that is his name. A tall man, and rather striking in appearance."

"There is a man of that name staying in the guest-house," I answered.

"I suppose you had given him leave to watch there?" said Gereth.

"I refused him leave to watch there," I replied.

"Ah! Well, he was there, Father. Since there was already a watcher before the Tabernacle, I did not draw nearer. I knelt at the back of the chapel. I think Forbes thought he was alone."

"Why do you think that?"

"Because of his behaviour."

"Well! Go on."

"He got up, and walked up the altar steps. He walked slowly and cautiously, but without making any sign of reverence. He drew back the Tabernacle veil, and tried the door to see whether it was open or locked. I can't guess his purpose in such an act."

"I can," I replied. It was that report of Gereth's which made me understand Forbes' motives; I had felt before that he was exploring a new country; but I did not know, till then, his particular line of research.

"If you understand, so much the better, Father," said Gereth. "I did not; and I don't want to. I thought the action an atrocious piece of sacrilege; but perhaps it was not one in his eyes. When he found the door was locked, he walked back and knelt down again. He kept absolutely immovable, save that I could sometimes hear him draw his breath very slowly and deliberately. He never stirred

hand or foot. There was not the slightest suggestion about the man either of prayer or adoration. He might have been conducting a scientific experiment."

"Precisely!" said I. "So he was!"

"He was!"

"Go on, Gereth," I said.

"At five minutes to two I got up and began to ring the bell for Matins. I think he did not know we sang the night office in choir. I saw him leap up in a startled way, and go stealthily and quickly out of the chapel. That made me wonder whether you had given him permission to be there. He got away before you came in."

"I am glad you were in the chapel last night," I said. "You will not, I know, speak to any one of what you saw."

"No, Father. Certainly not. I should not dream of doing so."

I reflected a little. Then I said:

"I will not mention either his attempted act of sacrilege, or his abuse of hospitality to

Forbes. He will know some one saw him in the chapel. He will probably feel sure I know of it. Did he see and recognise you?"

"No. The bell is in shadow, as you know. He could not have seen me."

"You and I will arrange between us that the chapel is never unwatched at night while Forbes is here. No such affront shall be offered Him here again if we can guard against it. I ought to have been more watchful. But I did not suspect Forbes of this. I promised him hospitality for a fortnight. He shall have it. And we will guard the chapel all night till he goes."

## CHAPTER XI

### THE INCARNATE HATE

DURING the next twenty-four hours I became aware that a very extraordinary change had taken place in Forbes. I must try to explain the nature of that change, for it was a very subtle one, and made itself felt by degrees.

It was not an external change; his expression was the same; his manner suave and agreeable as usual. Moreover, and this is the chief point to notice, he was himself wholly unaware of it. It is important to notice this, because it is the pivot of the whole thing. The case of Ralph Forbes was, if I may so phrase it, the same case as that of Réné Clinton—only at the opposite end of the pole. The law that governed Réné applied equally to Forbes, but with a difference. Neither was his own. Both were equally unconscious of what was be-

ing done through them. The source of the power in Réné's case was Love; in the case of Forbes it was Hate. Hate, as a living, conscious power, became incarnate in him, with the object of bringing about certain definite results at Brent.

I should think, perhaps, that what I have stated was simply the weaving of my own imagination, were it not for three things which forbid me to reach that conclusion. In the first place, there were the external effects which were obvious to all; as plain to those who did not suspect the cause as to those who did suspect it. These effects ended as suddenly as they began; they ceased with the termination of Forbes' visit. In the second place, both Alison and Fenton confirm my opinion; they arrived at their conclusions independently of me, and of each other. In the third place, there was the startling conclusion of Forbes' sojourn with us.

The first time that he and I met after Gereth Fenton told me of what took place in the chapel,

I felt sure Forbes suspected that I knew what he had done. He was a little on the defensive, though he hid it very cleverly. He felt ill at ease, and he felt angry, as one who had been placed, albeit by his own act, in a somewhat humiliating position. It was not pleasant to have been "caught" like a boy out of bounds. It was undignified, to say the least of it. I think he was the more annoyed because I said nothing, and was scrupulously polite.

But above all things he felt baffled; he thought I was keeping the "secret of Brent" from him; the secret which had power to restore Lester, and raise him, as it were, from the dead. He did not know that no human creature can either keep or reveal the secret of this place from or to any living soul.

It is that secret which each man must know in himself; it will never be told to him from without, if it be not revealed to him from within. For the secret of Brent is a Royal Secret; it is the Secret of the Kingdom which cometh not by observation.

Ralph Forbes was angry. His anger sprang from a natural human pique and irritation. He was angry with me. He was angry with himself for having been detected in a false position.

But gradually his anger was merged in something much greater; something which was cold, implacable, deadly, and crafty. It was a poisonous power, like the very breath of death.

It was not till much later, when the storm-clouds burst, and the Kingdom of Hate was let loose upon the shuddering earth, that I understood what that Hate, which was not human, attempted to do through the personality of this unwise, curious, shifty man.

I understood then better the silent patient building of places of peace. They are not built in a day. The building goes on steadily through the years—aye! and through the centuries—in order that there may be centres of power, pools of the waters of peace, houses not made with hands, whence help may go out to storm-rent souls, in the days when the great water-floods of anguish, fear, hatred, and sin bid fair to en-

gulf the children of men. It is the office and glory of such places to help—unseen—unknown—unglorified by human tongues.

Humanity at large cannot realise these things, and few people suspect them. But the powers of hate realise them well and fully; and hence the incarnate Hate went forth to battle against Brent, and all for which Brent stood, in those early months of the year 1914.

It went forth to destroy, if it might; but at least to establish there a spot of turmoil, bitterness, fear, and, if possible, doubt. During those days the forces of the Kingdom of Hate could be felt sweeping through the place in great waves, like the waters of a sea of savage unrest. They would ebb a little, and then return to the assault.

Sometimes, in the chapel, the assailing power became almost tangible and visible; like an ice-cold mist of darkness engulfing us. This state of affairs lasted during three days; growing more and more intolerable.

Every one in the place—with one exception

—felt the strain. Most of them attributed it to their own moods. They thought it was due to their natural temptations; to their tendencies to gloom, depression, doubt, restlessness, irritability, envy, despair, anger, and so forth. It was a power which tore apart, stirred up difficulties, changed true values for false ones, befogged the mind, and made for unrest and disintegration.

It was Hate, in short, in its countless ramifications, directed by a will which was not human, through a human tool and pivot of action.

One person remained unaffected by it. That person was Réné. He remained rather abstracted, as usual. He had no varying moods; he experienced no change, and no struggle. His path seemed to be always simple and clear.

There were about five or six days left of the fortnight Forbes was to spend with us; and the strain was waxing terrific.

It was a clear windy March day; I came out of the chapel after Terce. The wind was tearing through the cloister, and blowing with it

the smell of sweet-briar. There are big bushes of it in the turf quadrangle.

Forbes was close behind me. As I passed the great Ober-Ammergau Crucifix he came level with me and walked by my side. I was going to my room to attend to my letters.

Forbes was very punctilious about observing all the rules of the house. He had not expected his deliberate defiance of me in the matter of the chapel to be discovered. One of the strictest rules is that there is to be no talking in the cloister.

Therefore I was amazed when the man at my side suddenly called out loudly:

"Great God! What's that!"

I looked at him. He was death-white—green-white—and he was shaking all over, so that I thought he was struck with palsy.

Then I looked down the cloister in front of us. I saw nothing save Réné. He was at the far end. Réné, in his old gardening suit, his hands covered with earth stains, and carrying a trowel. A more unalarming, insignificant fig-

ure could hardly be imagined. He was too far off for that which was striking in his appearance to be noticeable; and at all times he was not an impressive or terrifying figure.

Réné came on quietly, his trowel in one hand, some auricula roots in the other.

As he passed I saw Forbes shrink flat against the wall. His lips were drawn back in a snarl; his eyes turned with a sidelong glance, he half crouched.

He reminded me of Anderson's savage mongrel when he expects Anderson will thrash him; and cowers, half threatening, half in dread.

I felt certain from Réné's face that he did not notice him. I feel sure Forbes himself did not realise what his attitude and expression were. I am equally sure that what he saw *was not Réné.*

Réné went into the quadrangle towards the big grey granite cross.

Forbes straightened himself with an effort and walked through the cloister and out through the doorway into the guest-house garden. I re-

member my feeling of the incongruity of the scene with the extraordinary incident I had just been watching.

The broad stretch of turf in front of the guest-house; the two old cedar trees; the daffodils springing in the grass, and the fantail pigeons and the white peacock under the cedars being fed by one of the guests. It all looked natural and unsensational.

Forbes realised I had followed him. I do not think he saw Réné, but I believe he was beginning to realise that some one passed us in the cloister; also that his manner had been unusual.

"Who was the—the person who passed us just now, Father Standish?" he asked. "I—I was a little startled—I—I seemed—to know his face—and——"

His voice trailed off vaguely. I knew he told a lie. He had not seen Réné's face.

"Sir James Clinton's son," I said. Clinton had been lately knighted. Forbes seemed to be startled.

"The half-witted son?" he asked.

"Sir James Clinton has but one son, Mr. Forbes," I said, gravely.

"I beg your pardon," he said apologetically. "I should not have spoken so bluntly."

Then he suddenly reeled, and clutched his left side.

"A sudden pain!" he said, gasping. "A—a heart attack to which I'm liable."

"Come to my room," I said. "Let me support you. I will get you some brandy."

"No," he said, with white lips. "I'll go to my room. I have—medicine there.

He went to his room in the guest-house, and would not let me go with him. He wrote me a note to say he would lie down and keep quiet for the rest of the day. The following morning I received another note to say he had passed a restless night. He feared he must cut short the visit he had so much appreciated. He must go up to town at once to see his doctor; the pain was persistent, though not now severe.

He left Brent within the hour. He wrote

me a very polite and complimentary letter from town. He sang the praises of Brent; he said he earnestly hoped I would permit him to visit the place again. I thought, as I read it, that nothing would ever induce him to set foot again in these precincts; and, so far, I have been right.

I asked Réné whether he noticed the man who was in the cloister with me. He replied:

"I saw there was some one with you, Father. Ought I to have recognized him?"

"No," I said; "you do not know him. He said he thought he recognised your face."

I thought I would not mention to any one the episode of the cloister; for I believed no one heard the outcry of Forbes save myself. But I found Alison, who was in the quadrangle, heard it. He was at Terce, and like myself, had but just left the chapel. When I knew he heard Forbes' voice, I told him exactly what happened, so far as I knew it.

"What do you suggest as the meaning of it, David?" I asked.

Alison answered:

"I think, Father Anthony, that Ralph Forbes was the weapon of a great rebel; and what he felt was the touch of S. Michael's sword."

## CHAPTER XII

### A KNIGHT OF HEAVEN

In the month of May in that year, Sister Mary Monica, Jesse Cameron's sister, came to visit her aunt, Lady Lansworthy. Sister Mary Monica was, when "in the world," Monica Cameron. Her parents were dead. When she had her brief holiday she came to the house of her father's sister.

Lady Lansworthy, who owned One Holly, lived in a house just beyond Lexminster. It was only a short motor run to Brent. Monica came there, not solely because Lady Lansworthy was her nearest relative save Jesse, but because it enabled her to see her brother, for whom she has a great love, as he too has for her. For death does not sever love, but strengthens it, if it be truly love; so that I am well as-

sured Jesse loves her still, as I know she loves him, sorrowing not as one without hope.

Lady Lansworthy, who is an excellent specimen of a good, honourable, and somewhat prosaic English gentlewoman, refused to see her nephew, though she willingly brought her niece to Brent to visit him. She did not see him, she said, not because she was not fond of him, but as a matter of principle; of protest against the life he led.

As you know, Jesse Cameron thought, and in my opinion thought rightly, that he was wilfully responsible for the death of his father, and for that of another man; hence he was leading a life of penance and reparation. Lady Lansworthy disapproved of this very strongly; mainly, I think, because of the gossip and scandal which was talked concerning it, and also because he had renounced all this world's goods.

Lady Lansworthy dislikes unusual and unrecognised methods of life. She said, "Jesse's proceedings were *outré* and unheard-of." She regretted that her niece took the veil; for, she

remarked, "Monica might just as well have been ugly if she was going to do that." However, "to become a Sister," especially one of an active community, was a recognised and not unusual course of action; therefore Lady Lansworthy only sighed over Monica with a shadow of regret.

She saw Jesse and was wholly reconciled to him after the event took place which I am about to describe. After the battle of the Somme was fought she was glad to remember their reconciliation.

Lady Lansworthy was what she called "a good, but moderate, Churchwoman." To doubt any article of the faith was as grievous to her as dropping her h's would have been. I do not use this comparison flippantly; I use it because the two things really did stand level in Lady Lansworthy's mind; though she did not realise this, and would have been shocked to hear the comparison I have just made. Nevertheless, it is a just one. Religious belief was to her a part of the seemliness of life; just as correct gram-

mar and pronunciation were. Religion as a dominant passion—Religion as a consuming fire —she did not understand.

If the logical effects on life of certain facts in which she believed were pointed out to her, she would deny they were logical.

"If So-and-so were permitted to impose his extreme views on society at large," she said, "the world could not possibly continue on its present lines."

"But people who, as you admit, are members of a fallen race are largely responsible for its present lines," I replied. "Does it matter if their arrangements are upset?"

"Oh, Father Standish," she answered, "I feel sure you are too good a man to desire anything of a revolutionary nature."

"That depends on what you revolutionise," I said.

"O, but revolutions are always horrid!" she cried.

"What about the conversions of S. Paul and

of S. Augustine?" I asked. "Those were revolutions."

"O Father Standish!" she exclaimed. "How can you say so!"

Lady Lansworthy also disliked extremes in the matter of piety; she would have been greatly averse to anything of the nature of mysticism, if she had known more of it than the fact that the dictionary contained such a word. She objected to the mind dwelling on any subject connected with the thought of death, or of the unseen worlds.

"It is much better," she said, "and far healthier, to be moderate in all things. It is a great mistake to get morbid. It is far better to think of those things which are real; things we can see and really deal with."

"But you go regularly to church, Lady Lansworthy," I said.

"Of course!" she replied. "That is a duty I should never neglect, Father Standish. But you can see a church, and hear the prayers and the singing, and the sermon. It is quite right to

go to church at least once a day on Sunday. And it is very nice and right to pray in moderation. What I deprecate are extremes. They are always bad and unpractical."

She brought her niece to Brent one day in May. When I heard they were in the guest-house I went to them at once. As it was a fine day, I suggested that the Sister should see her brother in the garden, under the cedars on the lawn. They agreed to this. Lady Lansworthy said it was quite wicked to be indoors on such a fine day; she would stroll in the gardens, if I did not mind, till her niece was ready to leave.

We went to the cedars. Lady Lansworthy left us, and disappeared among the bushes.

Monica Cameron (for so I always think of her still) sat on the bench below the tree. Réné was not far off. He was cutting the grass with a little lawn-mower, and I called to him.

He came at once. I noticed he was far less abstracted than he used to be.

"Réné," said I, "I wonder whether you would be good enough to go to the farm, find

Jesse Cameron, and tell him Sister Mary Monica is here, and he will find her under the cedars on the guest-house lawn?"

"Certainly I will, Father," said Réné.

He left the lawn at once. I saw the eyes of Monica follow him.

"Father Anthony," she said, "what a marvellous face! It seems to shine with white light."

"Yes," I answered. "It is a very striking face when it is observed near at hand. He is the son of Sir James Clinton."

"Of Sir James Clinton!" she said. "I am surprised."

"Why so?" I asked.

"Lady Clinton is one of our associates," said she. "She is very generous to our poor. I know her. Aunt Helen was speaking of her as we came; she said they were heavily afflicted in their only son; he was mentally deficient; and you, with your usual readiness to help those in trouble, had made a home for him here."

"That is the young man in question, Sister,"

said I. "Do you think he looks mentally deficient?"

The beautiful nun—Sister Mary Monica is very beautiful—remained thoughtful for a few seconds. At last she said:

"I think he is a knight of Heaven, Father. I think he is one of S. Michael's warriors, bound on a quest."

At that moment we saw Jesse coming towards the cedars. I rose and left the brother and sister together.

I intended to seek Lady Lansworthy at once; but at that moment some one brought me a note which needed an immediate answer. It was not until ten or fifteen minutes later that I went to search for her.

I looked in one or two places where I thought she might be. At last I turned in the direction of the Garden of the Holy Child. As I drew near Lady Lansworthy dashed out of it. I use the word advisedly. It was a frenzied dash, as of one in extreme terror. She was running at full speed. She is a woman of fifty; but she is

very strong and lithe; she plays golf, and skates, and is still a good horsewoman. Nevertheless she is dignified; and I was surprised to see her racing through Brent gardens like a ten-year-old girl; I could not suppose that anything could have happened to alarm her.

She rushed up to me, fell on her knees before me, and clung with both hands to my arm.

"Father Standish!" she screamed. "O Father Standish! Monica! O help!"

"Lady Lansworthy!" I exclaimed. "What has frightened you?"

She stared up at me; her face was drawn with fear; she cried out hysterically:

"Show me something that I know! Monica, Monica! Show me something that I know!"

Then she went into hysterics; she screamed, laughed and cried at the same time.

I was very loth to disturb Jesse and his sister; for their meetings are few and far between; but they heard her cries, and came to us in haste.

Lady Lansworthy clutched her niece and cried out:

"Take me away! Monica, take me away! Show me something that I know!"

"You are quite safe, Aunt Helen," said Monica tenderly. "All the things you have about you are things you know quite well. There's nothing here strange or unfamiliar to you. Look for yourself; did you fall asleep and dream?"

"Take me away!" shrieked her aunt. "O Monica, take me away!"

"Yes, yes, dear Aunt Helen," said Monica. "We will go at once. Will you tell the chauffeur, Jesse, to bring the motor down the drive? —then we need only cross the grass. Come, Aunt Helen!"

Jesse did as she asked him to do. Monica and I supported Lady Lansworthy on either side and placed her in the motor. She leaned back, closed her eyes, and clutched Monica's hand.

"I will send for the doctor the moment we get home," said Monica in a low voice. "Tell the chauffeur to go quickly. Good-bye, dear

Jesse. Good-bye, Father Standish. I will send a messenger with Dr. Merton's report. Yes, Aunt Helen, we are going."

For Lady Lansworthy moaned and repeated her strange words:

"Show me something that I know."

As the motor moved swiftly away we could hear her uttering the same entreaty.

## CHAPTER XIII

### A STRIPPED SOUL

JESSE and I stared at each other. The whole thing moved so swiftly that we were bewildered. At last I said:

"Come along with me, Jesse; we must search the gardens. We must try to find out what startled Lady Lansworthy."

"Where was Aunt Helen when she was frightened, Father?" said Jesse. "We ought to go straight there."

"She was running out of the Garden of the Holy Child," I replied.

We entered the little garden. No human being was there. The high box hedges filled the air with pungent perfume, for the sun was drawing out the scent. We saw nothing save the turf walks, the tall lily stalks on which green buds were appearing, the roses, already

blooming in that sheltered spot, a white fan-tail pigeon running up and down on little red feet on the old, lichen-splashed, grey stone bench; two more white pigeons cooing upon the roof of the little shrine of the Mother and Child.

Nothing else save sunshine, warm air, and great stillness.

"There is nothing here to alarm the most nervous person," said I.

Lady Lansworthy was by no means nervous. She was vigorous, matter-of-fact, and thoroughly sensible.

We searched the gardens through and through, but could find nothing that was not quite familiar and peaceful. Réné, who had returned to his grass-cutting; the gardener and two boys working in the vegetable garden. An old priest, who was staying in the guest-house, reading placidly under a pergola covered with wistaria and climbing roses. More pigeons, the white peacock, and a Persian kitten which, counterfeiting great terror, tore up a tree and

spat at us. There was nothing more alarming than these.

"It's a most extraordinary thing," I said. "Do you think your aunt could have been dreaming?"

I caught an expression on Jesse's face which made me say:

"You have some theory, Jesse? What is it?"

"I'm not sure whether it is right to give it, Father," said Jesse.

"Why not?"

"Well! I've no business to criticise Aunt Helen; she's a downright good sort; she's as honest as daylight; and I'm not fit to black her boots."

"Well!"

"She was always as kind as she could be to me when I was a boy; and she is very fond of Monica."

"But——?" I asked.

"But—" said Jesse slowly, "you know she doesn't live in God's world at all. It sounds

a queer, almost blasphemous thing to say, Father. Of course in one sense it is not true. I mean she is not *aware* of any world save one which is purely man-made. She even sees nature from that standpoint."

"How is that?"

"I have heard her say what a mistake it is that nature, left to itself, does not produce a few big peaches on a tree instead of a lot of little ones. She only looked at a peach-tree, you see, with an eye to dessert; so that nature is not to her 'the handmaid of the Lord,' but a sort of 'universal provider' for man."

"Then what is your theory?"

"I think she was suddenly touched by something which was absolutely real; it cut all her moorings; she was adrift and terrified."

Monica kept her promise and sent a messenger to Brent after the doctor's visit. The man brought a letter from her. Monica said Lady Lansworthy regained grip of herself before she reached home; she sent for the doctor but would not let Monica see him save in her presence.

Lady Lansworthy herself told Dr. Merton she had received a shock which for a while unnerved her. She would not tell the details; she asked him to give her a sedative to calm her nerves so that she might sleep.

The next day she wrote to me and asked me for an interview. I replied that I would see her most gladly, but I thought she would be wise to allow me to visit her. Her answer was that she always maintained women had no business to give way to their nerves; she was not going to shift her position because the nerves in question happened to be her own. I gave her an appointment in accordance with this Spartan resolution, and she arrived punctually. I saw her in my room off the cloister. Her account of the incident which so unnerved her was as follows:

"I went," she said, "into the little garden which has the box hedge all round it. No one was there. I sat down on the bench, and thought how pretty it all was, and how still. I thought, to tell the truth, that you had a very easy, comfortable life here. I thought the men

at the 'house of peace' were a little shirking their duty to society."

I smiled.

"Yes, yes," she said, "I was wrong. I know it now. I did not then. I watched the pigeons, and thought I would ask you to give me a pair. They look so nice, running about on the grass. Then I began to think over some of my little plans. I never go up to town for the season now; the girls are married; and I am getting to be an old woman. But I was planning to go up for three or four weeks. I thought I would stay at a very comfortable little hotel I know; I would just see old friends, see some pictures, go to a few theatres and concerts, and get myself some clothes. You can't buy anything to wear in Lexminster; at least *I* think not. I never shop there if I can help it. I was just making these little harmless plans quietly and comfortably—there was no harm in them, surely?"

"Certainly not. They sound quite harmless and justifiable."

"Yes—but then—why did it happen?"

"What *did* happen, Lady Lansworthy?"

"A most extraordinary feeling came over me. A horrible feeling!"

"What was it?" I asked.

"It is hard to describe it," she said slowly. "It was just as though I—a part of me I did not seem to know, but it was still veritably I—myself—began to look on at all I was doing and planning. Look at it critically, I mean."

"What then?"

"Everything I knew or ever had known was just like a marionette show; I could *almost* see the queer little strings that jerked the figures about. Everything I thought was real, was not real at all. It was perfectly idiotic. If you can imagine being on a treadmill, the revolutions of which, in the nature of things, took you nowhere in particular, and being there in company with a collection of the ghosts of idiots, that would give you some idea of the feeling it produced."

"And it was this which frightened you?"

"No. This did not frighten me. What followed frightened me."

"What was it?"

"It is very hard to describe. I don't think I can do it."

"Try."

"Yes. I wish to try. All that was suddenly blotted out. It went in a flash. It was blotted out by something tremendous. At first it was ——" She paused.

"It was whiteness," she said at last. "It was a dazzling whiteness—it—it—burnt into me——"

She stopped again and looked at me helplessly.

"You will think me mad," she said. "I say it was dazzling whiteness, but I did not see it. How could I know what I did not see? And yet it was—what I tell you."

"I accept what you tell me," I said quietly. "I am not criticising nor doubting."

"Try to imagine," she went on, "something which you could not see, nor hear, nor feel, and

yet which was real, appallingly real. Something that went down to an unthinkable depth, and up to an unthinkable height, and yet there was neither depth nor height, because it had nothing to do with space. Something that stretched back to an unthinkable past, and forward to an unthinkable future, and yet did neither, because it had nothing to do with time. Something that was nearer than I was to myself, and yet had nothing to do with near or far. It blotted everything out—except me. I was not blotted out. I was enfolded in this gigantic Something. I could not get away from it; and yet it was the most utter isolation you can imagine, because I did not know that which held me. It was all there was; but for me it was nothing. It had swept away everything I knew anything about. It was the only thing there was to know; and I did not know it at all. Then, with a most awful sense of terror and desolation, there came to me this thought: Creation has gone. This in which you are wrapped is Eternity. There is no Time. There is no Space.

This is Life uncreated; and because you know nothing of it, for you it is death and desolation. Monica says you met me running. I did not know I was running. I did not know I had moved. I was madly searching for something —anything—that I knew and could recognise. Then I saw your face. I clutched hold of you, and I shrieked for Monica."

She leaned forward at this point; she laid her hand on my arm and gripped it.

"You, who know something I do not know," she said; "you, who are citizen of a country in which I have just learned I am an alien, tell me this: When the fashion of this world passes wholly away, *can* we know that enfolding Life?"

"We can," I answered. "Because that enfolding Life has come to meet us here, and His Name is Love. We can know God here and now, because we have in us that which is like unto Him; and because one of the Powers of His Nature is Humanity. He has shown Himself as Man, that He might destroy the evil

which hides from us that truth, and be for us the Bridge to knowledge. In Eternity His Manhood abides, enfolded, as you were, in His Boundless Life."

"But," she said in a faltering voice, "we must learn now? We must begin to know now?"

"If we are wise," said I, "we shall begin now."

This is the story which, with Lady Lansworthy's consent, I include in the story of Réné. Alison said Forbes was touched by the sword of the great Archangel whose name betokens "Who like God." Monica called Réné one of his warriors. Perhaps Lady Lansworthy, too, was touched and fired by his flaming sword. It certainly helped to effect in her the thing she once so much deprecated—a revolution.

## CHAPTER XIV

### CHANGES AT BRENT

If I were to say that the autumn of 1914 brought no changes to Brent, I shall be misunderstood. Those who know the place will say my statement is not true. Those who do not know it will say if it is true it ought not to be so. They will both of them be right.

Therefore in making such a statement—for I do make it—I must try to explain my meaning.

The heart of the place did not change, simply because it could not do so. I want to make this specially clear, because, if I do not, the meaning of Réné Clinton's life, the very core of its mystery, will be missed and utterly misunderstood. Every life, I suppose, has its secret, its mystery, its inner meaning and purpose. Réné's was no more mysterious than any other.

But it is the one I have undertaken to explain; if I can do so, which I sometimes doubt.

The whole reason for the slow building and establishment throughout the earth of places like Brent, is precisely that they may not change in times of crisis, when the rest of the world rocks, and the minds of men are shaken.

It is in order to maintain a balance, and establish a pivot round which powers of good and evil may reel in a death-grapple. In such places the Power of God is poured out through angels and men elected for such world-service.

Brent, then, did not change, and has not changed. But the visible working of the place was altered in some measure.

In the third week of August of that year, my dear son, Jesse Cameron, went away. He and I alike believed he did the Will which was his law. He went away, and it was a blow to the farm, for he was a good bailiff, and was my right hand in all the outdoor work.

It was a foregone conclusion that when he went he would draw after him the four farm

pupils, and practically all the young men of this small village; Jesse's was a name to conjure them by.

Anderson, a middle-aged man, took Jesse's place, and the farm boys stayed where they were.

Our little company of the house of peace began, like monks both of the past and the present, to labour on the land. They are not monks, as you know; they are all unvowed. They are men called of God to surrender their lives to Him, chiefly in the way of prayer and meditation; and they do such other work to His Glory as He has given them capacity for doing. They are all laymen.

David Alison remained with us. For this I was grateful; for thereby he solved a practical difficulty.

Anderson is, as he says, "no scholar." The farm accounts were a terror to him. Alison took them off his hands. Moreover, class distinctions loom large in the eyes of Anderson. He told me when I engaged him that he "leaned

very much to the gentry." When he learned that "the gentlemen," as he calls the sojourners in the house of peace, were going to lend a hand on the farm, this "leaning" caused him to be struck with an awe so great, that reverence forbade him to point out their mistakes and stupidities.

He could severely reprove error in little Dick Jones from the village, but he could not even mention it to Réné Clinton or Gereth Fenton. Consequently they had no chance of learning what it was needful for them to know if they were to be of any use.

Here Alison was very useful. As you know, he has a reputation as a writer on matters touching country life and nature. He has great subtlety and delicacy of observation. Living here, as he has done for many years, and making a close study of all matters pertaining to his craft, he has, by watching the farming operations at all seasons, and the life of men living on the land and by the land, gained a real, though theoretical, knowledge of such matters.

It is real, because it is obtained at first hand, and not from books or in a lecture room. It is theoretical, because he has never worked on the farm himself.

He knows what should or should not be done, and the way to carry out all farming operations, as well as Anderson himself does. Hence he made a useful bridge between the awestruck farm bailiff and the distinguished neophytes.

Gereth Fenton did his best to help. He told me he found the work was no hindrance to the steady current of his prayer, so long as he worked silently.

He was not really adapted for the work; the others did better than he. All were willing and anxious to save expense, and help on the work Jesse Cameron built up during the years of his long penance.

But Réné was really valuable. For one thing, he had an extraordinary aptitude for dealing with the animals. He was the best milker on the farm; no cow, however ill-tempered or nervous, refused to "give down her

milk" in response to the touch of Réné's slender, supple fingers. He taught the infant calves to drink, as though by magic. The prize bull, whose temper was commonly uncertain to his friends, and a continual menace to strangers, became quite philanthropic in his mood under Réné's guidance.

Réné never had to drive the sheep, or call upon the dog to round them up. He led them. In changing pastures, Réné walked before his flock, whistling a little tune which seemed to appeal to their musical taste; the sheep scuffled softly along after him with their lambs. With horses, too, he could do anything; and Anderson's savage dog was, with him, quite gentle. He came up to the farm, whenever he got loose, to look for Réné, and followed him to and fro; he would lie at his feet; growling when any one else came near. Réné rarely took any notice of him, save when the dog pushed him with his head, or thrust his muzzle into his hand, asking for some recognition.

So we went forward during those years of

the world's agony. We maintained our watch night and day in the chapel; and we laboured with our hands. We ploughed, sowed, reaped; we grew vegetables and fruit in greater abundance than ever. The poultry yard enlarged its borders. The flocks and herds throve. Our bees hummed and droned in the purple heather and ling, and we took honey at the appointed hour. The open Forest was a sheet of heather, over which the hot air shimmered and drove in gleaming waves; therefore we had great store of heather honey. The apples shone on the orchard boughs; and were stacked later on the grass in great heaps—scarlet-crimson, crimson, yellow, and russet-brown.

The fruitful earth, with room for all to live at peace, with rich abundance of food sufficient for the reasonable needs of all men!

During the hard winter of 1916 the earth lay buried in snow, and many of the Forest ponies died. But when spring came again with springing blades of young corn, when the swallows returned, and the open Forest was rosy with blos-

soming bog myrtle and snowy with bog cotton, we remembered not the cold and death, but only recalled the holy whiteness of the snow-bound land, and the solemn crying and chanting of the wind in the pines, when even the owls were silent in the bitter frost, and every pool and streamlet like iron.

During those years I threw open the doors of the guest-house and vicarage to all who had suffered or were suffering in body or mind, if they cared to enter in and seek rest, comfort, and healing. I ministered to them so far as in me lay.

Many did enter, and found what they sought; for the peace of the place waxed mightily. It waxed in proportion to the storm without. He Who abode with us gave in abundance of Himself; and the very trees and earth seemed to pour forth balm.

## CHAPTER XV

### LADY CLINTON COMES TO BRENT

In the summer of 1916 Lady Clinton came to Brent to see Réné. She came to stay with Lady Lansworthy.

Lady Clinton often came to see her son; I think she came three or four times a year. His father never came. Lady Clinton said he felt the pain of his disappointment more intensely than formerly. He shrank from it more. He could in some degree forget Réné if he did not see him; he could almost think of him as one dead, and he found that more endurable. But to visit him and endure the memory of the hopes he once cherished was more than he could bear.

It must be remembered that not only did Clinton utterly scout the view I held concerning his son, but he had really great reason to disbelieve it. Not only was the attitude of mind,

which made it possible for me to think of Réné as I did, utterly opposed to his own habitual attitude, but there was real and solid evidence available that I was mistaken.

To begin with, the existence of a living, active, potent, conscious world which was immaterial, was to him a mere fairy-tale. I know very many to whom such a world is theoretically a fact, to whom it is practically as unreal as it was to Sir James Clinton, who denied its existence. There are people who, while affirming such a world exists, will clutch almost eagerly at any pretext for denying the reality of its operations and its influences when evidence of either crosses their path.

But the strongest reason which Clinton had for rejecting my view lay in the fact that Réné, as we know him at Brent, was practically non-existent for both his parents. Réné, as I knew him when, on rare occasions, he tried to put into words his sense of the reality of the Life which claimed him, was absolutely non-existent for

his father. His parents could not respond to him; he could not express himself to them.

I believe it to be true that the conditions, both of space and time, under which they lived actually differed as far as their consciousness was concerned.

During the years in which Réné lived at Brent I saw he was growing to be far less abstracted. This does not apply to some occasions of special and intense absorption. His environment was suited to his inner state. He could express himself in it. When his surroundings, especially as regards the trend of thought, were quite incapable of harmonising with that which was going on in his mind and soul, he was in a state of bewilderment, and apparent unintelligence. It was simply because all that was within was pent up. It could not express itself, any more than clear water could pour out freely through a wall of stiff clay. It was, therefore, natural that Sir James Clinton should think my theory a fantastic imagination; I think it shows his kindly and just nature that

he should have yielded in the matter and allowed Réné to remain with me; for there is no doubt he disliked to do so.

The periodical visits of the poor mother were an exquisite pain to her. I think they were also an acute suffering to Réné.

When she was away from him she believed I was right. She longed to believe it, and it became for her truth. But when she came to Brent, having built up an image of Réné as I thought of him in her mind, and found him inarticulate and confused in speech, she began to doubt.

Her mother-love brought her to Brent. Her mother's heart craved to understand her boy, and when she failed to do so she suffered intensely. Réné, knowing she suffered and powerless to help her, was tortured too. It was very pitiful to see. She was a good-hearted and generous woman. She had much natural compassion for the needy and suffering. But I think the reason she became an associate of the Community to which Monica belonged, was because

she thought she might gain something which would help her to understand Réné.

She dreamed of some deepening of her inner life which would open a door of illumination for her.

I think Lady Lansworthy helped her. Lady Lansworthy, who was now the leading spirit in all the patriotic works undertaken by the women of the neighbourhood, remained outwardly much as she used to be. She was a good-natured, sensible woman of the world, extremely practical and competent. Inwardly she was not the same; the revolution had been thorough.

The searching depth and reality of that experience in the garden, the stripping of soul she underwent there, made her a different woman. Something woke in her which never slept again. Her absolute certainty of the existence of something which lay beneath and beyond all vicissitudes of time and space, communicated itself to Réné's mother. It made her feel a vague comfort; and a strength which gripped her

tremulous thought and doubting mind and steadied them.

All genuine spiritual experience, whatever form it may take in the consciousness of those who receive it, gives a power of carrying at any rate temporary conviction to minds which are not absolutely closed against it. Sometimes it may cause antagonism, but that is because its truth is felt, and for some reason resented.

When Lady Clinton came to Brent in June, 1916, she was happier concerning Réné than I had seen her. I think this was partly due to Lady Lansworthy, who, it appeared, told Lady Clinton her firm conviction that my view was the one to be received as the truth.

But when I saw Lady Clinton after her interview with her son, I knew at once that she was troubled and full of doubts. I did not speak of Réné, nor ask her opinion concerning anything at Brent. I asked after Sir James Clinton and her daughters.

"Margaret is very well," she said, "and, of course, immensely busy. Jane is in America,

naturally, with her husband, and her children. She has two such charming babies."

"And Sir James?" I asked.

"My husband is working terribly hard," she replied. "He is working at such high pressure. I fear he will break down. He is a strong man; but there is a limit to all things. He allows himself very little sleep."

"Some people require very little, you know," I said.

"I think he requires more than he gets," she answered. "He is working feverishly hard. I sometimes think he does it because he dares not give himself time to think."

We were sitting in the guest-house when she said this. She was about to leave. Réné had gone to cut some roses for her.

"I believe many feel that they dare not think," I said. "Hence they give themselves no time, but work till they are tired enough to ensure sleep. But I think they are not wise."

"I know the feeling myself," she answered. "I should like to work till I dropped. But that

would trouble my husband and Margaret. I dare not think about Réné after I have seen him."

"Why not?" I said.

"It is such an *utter* puzzle to me," she replied. "Why could he not have led a good life —even a holy, consecrated life—without being cut off like this from all we planned for him? My husband would have been sorry, but if Réné had wished to live here like Mr. Fenton he would not have opposed it. It would not be the agony to him it is."

I pointed out to her certain things such as I have set down here, showing there was some evidence that Réné's life was not wholly ineffective, though its effects were produced in a different field of action from that his father would have chosen for him.

She sighed.

"I am sorry," she said, "but all that seems to me so utterly unreal, Father Standish. It—you won't think me rude—it is all like a fairy tale to me."

Réné came in just then with the roses. She took them, kissed him very tenderly, and went back to Lexminster to Lady Lansworthy.

I could see that Réné, too, was very sad. She had tried hard to get into touch with him; and he tried to talk with her as he did sometimes with me. Both failed; he was not able to speak freely; he seemed to be paralysed in thought; and what little he said was an unknown tongue to her.

I think the fact that he was working on the farm gave her an added pain. She did not realise that high work is the task God gives, and low that which we take for ourselves in defiance of Him.

If Réné had chosen to come to Brent as a farm pupil, or said he wished to farm in Canada or ranch in California, she would have been willing he should do so. If he was now working on the land because of his country's need, that would have satisfied her. But to feel that the only thing he *could* do was simple

manual work, such as a boy from Brent village could do easily, gave her a pang.

It is true that Réné's skill with beasts was his own peculiar gift; but his mother did not realise this; nor did she know its significance.

She stayed for a week with Lady Lansworthy, and visited Brent thrice.

On her second visit she was much depressed. When she came the third time the gloom was gone. She told Réné she wanted to have a talk with me alone, and when he left us she spoke freely.

To me that which she said is as much a question of supernatural dealing as the more startling things which came to pass with regard to Lester, Forbes, and Lady Lansworthy. But it took a quiet, gentle form.

She went into Lexminster with Lady Lansworthy, who was going to the hospital. Lexminster is a quaint old town, lying at the foot of great downs which curve smoothly away, slope upon slope, tier upon tier, towards the sea.

There is in it a large quiet old church, S.

Itys-in-the-Wall. Legend says its patron was a recluse who had a little chamber in the city wall, which wall has long since crumbled away. However that may be, the peace of the good hermit abides in the church to this day, and I trust the worshippers yet have the help of his prayers.

Lady Clinton, waiting for her hostess, went into the big, cool old church, and sat there, while her sad, puzzled mind reviewed her own sorrows and those of her friends.

"Gradually," she said to me, "the great hush of the place, the dim light, and the sight of the tall grey pillars stretching up into the shadows of the roof, seemed to soothe me a little. But my mind was very much puzzled. Suddenly it was just as though some very patient, gentle person began to rearrange my ideas for me. It was as though my mind was not myself, but a machine which I had got badly out of order. It was being gently set right, by some one who understood the machine, and could deal with it. I began to see a great Plan; I began to see how

people were being used to further it, and were also being dealt with as individuals, with the most astounding skill, patience, and wisdom. It was a real, careful, personal dealing with each one. Wonderful! This gentle explanatory process went on in my mind till we reached Réné. There it stopped! There came no explanation of Réné. The puzzle remained. The matter was just laid down at that point; I was so afraid I should lose the clearness and quietude that I got up and left the church."

"Has the quietude remained?" I said.

"Yes. But to-day I gained more. I drove to Brent village in a little pony-cart, left the cart in the village and walked through the woods to the little chapel—Mr. Cameron's little In Memoriam chapel among the pines."

"The shrine of our Lady of Light?"

"Yes. I went in there and sat down. The peace and balance of my mind remained, but the puzzle was there too. Réné had not been explained. I saw a little barefooted girl in a very faded blue cotton dress coming towards

the chapel. She was a little sunburnt thing, with sandy hair. She had a big sheaf of white fox-gloves under one arm; and she held in her hand a dull blue jar full of water, which she was carrying very carefully."

"It was little Maisie Anderson," I said, "a little village girl who adores Jesse Cameron. She goes up there and says a prayer for him every day, and puts some flowers as an offering to the Holy Mother."

"She did that now. She arranged her fox-gloves very carefully in the jar; she placed the jar at the foot of the statue of our Lady which is at the door. Then she knelt down, folded her little sunburnt hands, and said her prayer. It was then, through the child's prayer, that a thought came to me. It was this: 'A message from a Woman to a woman; "I, too, was amazed, and sought My Son sorrowing."' There and then, Father Standish, I was content to be puzzled; and there and then, being content, bewilderment became rest."

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE GUARDIAN OF BRENT CHURCH

DURING the last week of September, 1916, a young priest came to Brent. He was a member of a Community, and he was *en route* for France. He has great skill as an artist. He said to me that he should like to paint the interior of the village church. That church is dedicated to S. Michael.

The priest said he wanted to give the sketch to his mother. She has a great love for the church, it seems; she used to stay in Brent village when she was a young girl; I think she met the man she married when on one of these visits, and had memories of the church which were connected with him. She has also a special devotion for the Archangel Patron.

I think, though he did not say so, that this young priest was specially anxious to leave

something for his mother, which he had painted just before he went away; since he felt it might be his last gift to her.

The village church at Brent is small. It is very ancient and rather dark. There is an old rood beam, on which the Figures have now been replaced. Those of our Lady and S. John are singularly beautiful. The grief-stricken figure of the Mother stands with bowed head, and helplessly drooping hands; the sword has pierced to the very centre of the stricken soul. But the Beloved Disciple is gazing in ecstasy on the Figure of the Crucified; his eyes—the eyes of the seer of Patmos—are piercing, eagle-like, beyond the veil; and in the Crucified Man he sees the Word, eternal and triumphant in the Bosom of the Father. It is a very fine piece of work, and has a wonderful life and power in it. The church has a low doorway. There is in the chancel an old tomb—the tomb of a Crusader.

This young priest—my guest—has special skill in painting the interiors of churches. He

proposed to sketch the altar and the east window, in which there is some old glass and some beautiful stone tracery.

It was the Feast of S. Michael, our Patron; and we had a Sung Mass in the church at eight o'clock. The young priest, who had said Mass at seven in the chapel, served at the eight o'clock Mass in the Church of S. Michael. When I left the church he was still there. He came back to breakfast, which is with us a silent meal. He went to the church with his painting materials immediately after breakfast.

I saw him no more till the evening. I supposed his artistic frenzy replaced meat and drink.

When he did come back his eyes looked dazed, as though he had been staring at the sun.

"Have you sketched the church?" said I.

"No," he replied, "I have not sketched the church. I have been in the porch trying to paint from memory—something else."

"I thought you particularly wanted a sketch of that church for your mother," I said.

"So I do," he answered. "I will try to make one to-morrow for her. This one I shall leave here with you, if you will have it. You can do with it what you please."

He took the sketch out, and held it for a few minutes without showing it to me.

"I saw this," he said slowly, "just as I had got my easel into position and was going to begin. I do not know in the least how long I saw it. I know I fell on my knees and remained there for a long time after it all vanished."

With these words he handed me the sketch.

At first I thought it was nothing save whiteness. Then I saw the chancel was sketched there; it was very faintly indicated. But the altar and the window were invisible. They were hidden—blotted out—by a turmoil of white light. The artist had shown great skill in giving the impression of intense, dazzling

and pure whiteness, and an extraordinary radiance and activity.

Very faintly outlined—scarcely visible indeed—in the centre of the light was a tall figure. It was a man in white armour, with a drawn sword, cross-handled and flashing, in his hand. Such was the life of the sketch that it seemed to move; the light appeared to pass in billows over the figure, so that the face was hidden by it.

I looked at the picture for a long time before I spoke. This recurrent idea of whiteness struck me; I lingered over the sketch, searching out all the significance of the recurrence.

"You saw this?" I asked at last.

"I saw it," he answered. "This only suggests what I saw. It was the Glory that veils the Presence, and the angel who guards It."

## CHAPTER XVII

### SIR JAMES CLINTON COMES TO BRENT

THE harvest of 1917 was a good and early one at Brent. The fields, which we then knew Jesse Cameron would never reap again, bore fruitfully. When our corn was garnered, preparatory to thrashing, that is to say just before the last week in August, there came to us a little appeal, a cry for help.

It came from an old farmer who rented a farm beyond Lexminister. It was eight miles from Brent village. It lay, tucked away in a fold of the downs, very close to the sea.

The farmer's sons all left him years ago for work in town. But he had worked his land with hired help up to now. Labour, he said, was scarce; the men that were left were claimed by other farmers. He asked whether we would lend him a hand to get in his harvest. He also

made a personal appeal to me to come over and see his eldest daughter. She, poor girl, was in great sorrow. Her husband was a Brent man, and I knew him well. When he went away she returned to her father's house. Now she was a widow with a young baby, and in great distress of mind and feebleness of body. The old man, her father, asked me to come "and comfort her a bit."

Alison and Réné said they would go over and lend a hand in the harvest field. It was settled they should work there for three days, and I should go there on the second day—I could not well leave Brent before then—and return with them the next evening. They started before daybreak on September the third. On the day I was to join them—the fourth—I found it would be impossible for me to start until late in the day. Both the guest-house and vicarage were filled with those who had need of me.

I intended to walk the eight miles through the Forest and over the Downs; for despite my

sixty-one years I was capable of much more bodily exertion than that. We have never had a motor here; and the pony was needed by my guests. Therefore I determined to walk, and was looking forward to the quiet solitary journey through the pine forest and over the still bare downs.

As the day wore on I saw I should possibly not reach the farm till dusk. It was obvious I should not be able to start on my way till towards evening, so that, in spite of "summer time" the sun would probably be setting before I reached the farm. I am a steady, but no longer a swift walker. But even if I could not start till evening was come, there would, I knew, be a moon; therefore I could find my way easily across the Downs. Since I was to stay the night and spend the day there, I could see and try to comfort the poor young widow the next morning, if I was too late to talk much with her on my arrival.

In the afternoon, immediately after saying None, I left the chapel to go to the guest-house.

I saw a tall man, with a little knapsack slung on his back, enter the quadrangle. I thought I knew him, but I was not quite sure. I went into the quadrangle and walked towards him.

It was Sir James Clinton. He was rather greyer than he was four years before, and he looked tired and worn. The lines on his brow and round his mouth were deeper and harder. His eyes had a cold glassy look which they never used to wear. Do you know the look which is sometimes in the eyes of one who has seen a sight which has revolted the whole nature? It is a kind of fixed glare, the eyes glassily bright, as though they were looking steadily at an object a few feet away.

The look in Clinton's eyes was like that. He was clad in a very shabby suit; he wore a flannel shirt, thick comfortable-looking boots, and he carried a heavy stick.

"This is a very uncermonious visit of mine, Father Standish," said he, as he shook hands. "I hope you don't mind my inroad."

"I am very glad to see you, Sir James," said

I. "You will stay here, of course? I am obliged to go away for the night; but I shall be back to-morrow."

"No, no," he answered, "thank you very much. It is only a flying visit. To tell the truth, I am here by accident."

"You did not plan to come here, then?"

"No," he replied, "I did not. I have been fool enough to overdo it. My sleep failed me. I thought I would try a week in the fresh air, walking hard, to try and get it back. I don't want to begin drugs. I know what that means."

"You're very wise," I answered.

"Not particularly, I fear," he said. "But I am not yet, I believe, an utter ass. I used to be very fond of a walking tour when I was a young man."

"It is the best way of seeing the country," I remarked.

"The only real way," he answered. "Besides, to walk in the country restores sanity as nothing else does."

I noted that he spoke as though sanity had departed from him and must be wooed back; but I naturally did not show I noted it.

"I am particularly fond of the Forest," said he. "It has a unique charm."

"Do you know those Downs beyond Lexminster?"

"They are an old love of mine," he replied. "I am *en route* for them now. I started yesterday. I took an ordnance map to help me to steer my course. I hate asking my way. I got a little at sea, though. Suddenly I found myself at the back gate of One Holly. Then I knew I was close to Brent. I thought I would come and see Réné—" He checked himself, and added, "And you, Father Standish, of course. Can I see him?"

"This is very unlucky!" I exclaimed. "For Réné is not here. He will be back to-morrow if you could stay. It is the first time he has been away from Brent, even for an hour, since he came here more than four years ago."

Clinton was certainly in a contradictory

frame of mind. I saw a look of genuine relief cross his face. Then it faded, and was replaced by a shade of disappointment.

I think he came to Brent in a mixed mood. He shrank from seeing his son, because his ambition for him was thwarted.

But One Holly gate brought before him the memory of the holland-clad, bare-legged sprite he had loved. That tender memory drove him to Brent.

When he asked to see Réné the memory of the child faded, and he shrank from that which would bring the prick of pain.

But directly he knew he could not see him, the tender thought which sent him here reasserted itself. He was a little sorry Réné was away.

"It is very unfortunate," he said. "Has he gone far, Father Standish?"

"No," I answered. "He and my friend, David Alison, have gone together to help to get in the harvest for an old fellow who has a farm on the Downs beyond Lexminster."

"David Alison the writer?" said Clinton. "I know his books."

"Yes," I replied. "He lives here. He and Réné have gone about eight or nine miles to lend a hand on this farm. I was going there to-night myself, to see the farmer's daughter, who is ill and in sorrow. I shall return with Réné and Alison to-morrow. Could you not stay here till Réné comes?"

"No, no, thank you," said Clinton. "I must push on. You have got in your harvest here, then?"

"It was carried ten days ago," I answered. "It was an early and a good one, thank God."

"I am glad Réné is able to do some useful work," said Clinton. "At least"—he gave a queer, unpleasant little laugh—"if it is useful."

"Surely it is so," I replied. "It must be useful to gather in the corn, Sir James. Without bread the people would starve."

"Do you think that would be a serious evil?" he said, with an intense cynicism in voice and manner.

"Surely! Do not you?"

His only answer was a shrug of the shoulders. I let the matter drop. I saw the man was in some evil strait of mind, rather than of body.

At that moment a thought entered my mind with a decision and clarity which gave me a startled sense that it was one of urgent importance. I mean I had a clearly-cut conviction it was a matter of vital importance to Sir James Clinton that it should be put before him, and also that he should fall in with it.

Most people, I believe, have these flashes at times. Women have them more frequently than men do. Some people call them "intuitions," others call them "guidance." In nine cases out of ten I think it is best to disregard them. In the tenth, perhaps, it is advisable to follow them. Those who regard them as supernatural leadings are commonly led astray by them. I have noted that few such people accept "guidance" which is wholly opposed to their personal wishes, so that it becomes for

them a sort of supernatural sanction for self-will.

When, therefore, this conviction entered my mind I turned it over and considered it, while I chatted with Clinton. I thought the idea was certainly a harmless one. It seemed to be almost impossible that it could be as enormously important as it seemed to be. But it could do no harm if it were carried out. Perhaps it might comfort Clinton to see Réné at work with other men. He might feel it was better for him to be at Brent than with the doctor. When I had reached this conclusion I spoke.

"It is a great pity, isn't it?" said I, taking care to speak rather carelessly, for I knew that if Clinton thought I was urging it upon him he would refuse at once. "Pity, when you came on purpose to see Réné, your plans should be thwarted like this."

"It is very annoying," he assented.

I believe the idea that he had an intention which was suddenly opposed by circumstances made him feel a genuine annoyance in the mat-

ter. The annoyance took birth from the idea. He began to feel a desire to surmount obstacles and carry out his originally lukewarm determination to see Réné.

"You do not want to delay here," said I. "But I don't see, after all, why your intention should be crossed. You might take the farm on your way across the Downs."

"Well, really!" said he, "I think I might do that."

"It's in a most fascinating corner, tucked away in a fold of the Downs. A delightful old farm! The Downs rise above it towards the sea."

"How far did you say?" he asked.

"About eight miles," I answered. "It takes me something under three hours to walk. You would probably be quicker."

"Could I put up there for the night?"

"I am sure you could. It is a big, rambling old house, and they are homely, hospitable people, old-fashioned farmers. There is a tiny hamlet a quarter of a mile off. The vicar there

is a bachelor with a most amiable cook-housekeeper. I know him. He would give you a bed, if you don't care for the farm."

"You are walking there yourself?"

"I am," I answered. "I shall start about four o'clock. Would you care to walk with me, or is solitude a part of your programme? Do not mind saying if it is so. I shall fully understand."

"Solitude is by no means a part of my programme if I can get your company, Father Standish," replied he politely.

I hope this speech was as truthful as it was courtly. He said he would stroll in the gardens till I was ready. At five o'clock that afternoon we set out side by side through the still sun-embroidered Forest paths (alas, the trees are dwindling fast!) towards the smooth curved slopes of the Lexminster Downs.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### A PILGRIMAGE

We walked slowly. It was warm, and a glorious day. We timed our starting by "summer time," and the sun set that night at 7.40 by the same computation. The Downs, when we reached them, were bathed in golden light. The lower slopes were cultivated. Most of the corn was cut, though some was not yet carried. Here and there were fields of barley, oats and wheat yet unreaped. Some were injured by the heavy rains and gales of that August. I remember standing a long time watching the tremble of the wind across a sunlit field of golden barley. Butterflies were skipping over a field of clover through which we passed. It must have been a second crop, I suppose. It was crimson clover. I saw fluttering over the flowers tortoiseshell, orange-tip, and little

azure-blue butterflies; and one gorgeous peacock slowly opening and shutting its wings, perched on a tall grass stalk. We passed a dew-pond on a slope of the Downs; there were dragon-flies flashing to and fro over it; big blue ones, and a smaller, golden brown.

We talked very little. Clinton seemed to desire silence. I fell in gladly with his mood. It falls to my lot in life to talk a good deal; but I prefer silence.

Little by little the exquisite peace and beauty of the Downs began to jar on Clinton. He glanced at me. The sight of those Downs, of the smooth curving lines, the great arch of the sky, the living creatures, both plants and insects, always makes me realise more intensely that the earth is the Presence Chamber of God. I suppose he saw this in my face. It roused in him a spirit of challenge and revolt.

He suddenly stopped short, leaned on his stick and spoke:

"You were surprised when I doubted whether it would be an evil if the people starved?"

"I was," I answered.

"Why were you surprised?" said Clinton. There was a nervous, irritable snap in the tones of his voice.

"Partly because I thought you would not wish it from motives of humanity."

"And——?"

"And mainly because it was strange doctrine from you!"

"Why—from me?"

"Because you are notoriously and confessedly working yourself to the last notch for your country."

"It is true," he replied. "So I am. But why?"

"I suppose from patriotism."

"Nothing of the sort!"

I looked at him in surprise, and was silent.

"It is partly from habit," he said. "It is a trick. It does not spring from conviction. But it is mainly because if this machine"—he touched his brow with his fingers—"were not given grist to grind, it would grind itself.

I don't want it to do that, for my wife's sake. She's suffered quite enough already."

He leaned forward a little, looking at me.

"Since she came back from seeing Réné about a year ago she has been at rest," he said. "I see that, and I am glad of it. Though her reason for restfulness appears to me to be quite inadequate. Still—she's a woman. It satisfies her."

"Women are more easily satisfied than men, you think?" I asked.

He looked at me more keenly than ever; and the fixed, glassy look in his eyes deepened.

"Hear a confession!" he said at last, bitterly. "Hear a confession from an impenitent sceptic! I have never believed in God. But I did once believe in man. Now I believe in neither."

He paused for a second, as though to see how I should take this. When I remained silent and attentive, he went on.

"Humanity," he said slowly and deliberately, "is not worth working for, fighting for, thinking for, living for, dying for, or praying for.

The 'other world' is to me a madman's dream; and this world is an idiot's nightmare. There's my poor boy, Réné, about whom—I am not going to make pretty speeches now—you talked that amazing balderdash four years ago. It was an awful blow to me, once, that he is as he is. It hurts me now to think of it. But it is utter foolery in me to be hurt. He may just as well be thus as any other way."

Again he paused, as though for my comment. When I made none, he went on.

"The whole show is an utter failure, an abject futility! My wife was right when she said so four years ago. Look for yourself! Brutality and lying, hypocrisy, greed, intrigue, chicanery, and filth of all kinds! I had 'faith' once; not in God, but in man. I have none now in anything in heaven or on earth."

I was still silent. He watched my face for a few seconds.

"You are shocked, of course," he said. "That goes without saying in a man of your cloth. I suppose you are surprised. I notice

that most people's faith in humanity seems to be increased. It is not so with me. I don't doubt the virtue and heroism of individuals. But humanity in the aggregate seems to me to be a foul, raging sort of a beast; and all human schemes come to naught in face of that fact. I think mankind is a failure."

Then I spoke.

"I am not shocked," I said. "And I am not in the least surprised. I do not see how you can believe in man if you don't believe in God."

"Why not?"

"Because God and man are joined together in indissoluble marriage. If God goes, man goes with Him; he has lost his root. My faith in man abides, because my faith in God Who sustains him abides. If I started by not believing in God, I should never have believed in man. Therefore I think you must really have a greater capacity for faith than I."

"I did not suppose you would take that attitude," he said slowly. "You—" he seemed

to search his mind for the right word to express his thought— "you are the most unshakable person I have ever met. It is not that you are outwardly unshaken, nor even that you are inwardly unshaken. You are unshakable. That is the point."

He punched the turf reflectively with his stick.

"It's queer," he said, as though to himself. "It's uncommonly queer."

"What is queer?" I asked. He looked at me again.

"Your attitude," he answered.

"What is there in my attitude that strikes you as queer?"

"You astound me, Father Standish," he replied. "I tell you so frankly, and I'll tell you why. I think you are a man of unquestionable ability. I think you are sane and well-balanced, as men go. Therefore by what miracle of utter irrationality you seriously maintain the amazing——"

He stopped.

"You know," he said apologetically, "I am a bit overstrained. My tongue has a trifle run away with me. I really have no right to insult your faith, especially as I suppose it has prompted your kindness to my boy."

I laughed at that.

"Sir James," I said, "my faith will not be injured by any man's insults. I should like you to speak quite candidly what is in your mind."

"Then I cannot imagine how you seriously believe the amazing statements—" he checked himself—"the statements you made about Réné, for example," he continued. "I cannot imagine how you come to believe in a supernatural order, for the existence of which you have no vestige of proof, so far as I can see. I am not surprised at my wife. Women have extraordinary minds; they do not work on the same principles as those of men."

"Your elder daughter?" I suggested.

"Margaret?" he said. "Yes. But there are extraordinary gaps and inconsistencies in her

reasoning, too. I should not be surprised at anything she believed; and indeed she has some extraordinarily illogical views. But when I see a man like yourself—well! it astounds me!"

"You must admit," said I, "that to have such a belief is a great economy of energy."

"How so?"

"There is a large amount of nervous wear and tear which one is spared. Hence one has more energy to devote to other things."

"How do you make that out?"

"I make it out on your own showing. You say you are suffering from overstrain and lack of sleep, because you are compelled to go on working as on a treadmill; partly from force of habit, but mainly to prevent thought which tends to madness. You have nothing and no one on whom to depend either as a sustainer or as a colleague, because God does not exist, and man is a failure."

"And you?" said Clinton.

"I am absolutely convinced that man is not a failure."

"Why have you that conviction?"

"Because I see God taking infinite pains over his training. I am also absolutely convinced that if I am willing to do God's Will He will help me to do it. Those two convictions, which are, as you said, unshakable, save me a great deal of wear and tear."

Clinton did not speak for a little while. At last he said:

"Well! I suppose we must be going."

We walked on slowly. We loitered, so that the sun had just set when we reached the farm. It was a large grey stone house; the roof was covered with lichen, moss and stone-crop. Swallows built under the eaves. There was a sheltered kitchen-garden at one side, in which grew a jumble of vegetables and flowers. For there were dahlias and blush-rose bushes, and masses of lavender and southernwood growing side by side with rows of French beans and scarlet runners. There were apple-trees, too, and trees loaded with ripe plums.

We saw Alison leaning on the gate with an air about him as of honest toil.

"We thought you were lost, Father Anthony," he called out.

"I could not get away from Brent till rather late," I replied. "And we have come very leisurely."

Then I introduced him to Clinton, and explained that Réné was the object of his quest.

"He has gone up to the Downs above the sea," said Alison. "He would not stay for the excellent supper you can now smell cooking. He was off directly we struck work."

"When will he be back?" asked Clinton.

"Not till morning," said Alison. "He ate a chunk of admirable barley bread which our good hostess bakes; he drank some milk from her dairy, filled his pockets with plums from her garden, and was off. He shares my passion for sleeping under the sky. He has found a little heap of ruins on the Downs overhanging the sea. It was once S. Michael's chapel,

and there is a glorious view from it of the coast-line."

"Will he sleep there to-night?" said Clinton.

"He is sure to do so. It is still half-roofed and can defy a rain-storm. He slept there last night. But you might seek him there after supper, Sir James; he won't have turned in yet. The sun is only just down."

The farmer came out at that moment, full of kindly welcome and hospitality. He would not hear of "Mr. Clinton's father" going to the vicarage for the night. He said there was plenty of room at the farm, if "the gentleman could put up with their plain ways."

It was a new position for Sir James Clinton to be regarded merely as "Mr. Clinton's father."

The farmer was full of regret because "the young gentleman had gone off with nothing to eat, like."

"I will eat his share and my own too, Mr. Allan," said Clinton, cheerily.

I think he was beginning to feel the sooth-

ing magic of the quiet, sweet-smelling, homely place.

We had a very good supper in the big, clean, farm-house kitchen.

"And now," said Clinton, when we rose, "we will go and hunt down this shy game—this erratic young relative of mine."

"It is not more than a quarter of an hour's walk," said Alison. "Across a field or two, over the stile yonder, and then up the slope."

Clinton looked at me. I saw he wished me to go too.

If he had not done so I should not have gone.

I had supposed he would go alone, and I should see the poor girl I came to visit. But she was ill and in her room. It was possible, though it was still early, that she was settled for the night. Moreover, I saw Clinton plainly desired to have my company. Therefore we went forth together in the sweet-smelling dusk. We went forth—he and I—to look for Réné.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE WHITE GLORY

THE great gale which had recently swept the land was over. It was a still night. In that sheltered hollow of the Downs we felt no wind. It was fair and clear, save for some light clouds which were beginning to drift upwards from the horizon. The dew lay thick and heavy on the grass. The moon was up. As we went out, the church clock struck, and the carillon rang out slowly "The Sicilian Mariners' Hymn." Moonlight and the light of evening fading into night were blended. We walked through a reaped field full of sheaves waiting to be carried when day should return. Both at Brent, and hereabouts, the rain and storms did little harm. We passed through an unreaped field of oats. The oats rustled softly in a little breeze that touched them. Then we climbed

a stile and walked through a bit of pasture where we could hear the cows feeding.

A cow-bell at the neck of one of them tinkled as she moved. A dog barked far away on the Downs behind us. A white owl skipped by like a pale shadow; a night moth flew past.

We left the pasture for the slopes and began to climb. We climbed silently. The hush was so great that it held us by its unspoken mystery. It was only broken by a drowsy noise of distant waves, and the murmur of a sheepfold very far away on a farm beyond the hamlet. The sounds which broke the quiet of the night only seemed to intensify the silence.

At last we reached the summit, and paused for a second, looking at the sea and the long line of the coast.

We could see the broken half-roofed walls and a heap of stones; and we could also see Réné.

He stood by the stones, looking seawards. He looked very small and insignificant, stand-

ing alone on the great deserted sweep of the down, under the night sky.

He was not very tall, and he was thin and lightly built. He looked a little thing—an atom of no consequence—a thread of humanity lit by a tiny spark of easily extinguished life.

The scene is extraordinarily clear and vivid in my memory. I see each detail:

The moonlight on the water and the Downs. The ruined chapel and the heap of stones. Réné standing there with a khaki-coloured blanket lying in a heap at his feet. I can feel, in memory, the cool bitter-sweetness of the wind from the sea, and see the thin grass-stalks and the harebells bending in it; and a night bird that flung itself silently into space from the cliff summit.

Clinton moved to go forward, and I followed him.

He walked a few paces, and stopped with a jerk; his stick fell from his hand on to the springy turf with a little thud. I came up

level with him and looked at his face. He was staring straight in front of him with a look in his eyes of utter and stunned amazement. I felt a great awe and wonder; and I remember how, even as I looked and marvelled, for I saw he could see something I did not see, my ear was caught by the little familiar sound of a field-cricket's cry on the turf at our feet.

The next moment the angel of the Lord opened my eyes, and I saw too.

The place where Réné stood was wrapped in a turmoil of white light, such as had blazed before the eyes of the priest-artist in Brent Church.

It was the divine Substance of Life; it was a living Body, the Handmaid of Him Who made It. I saw it did not wrap Réné round. It flowed through and through him; so that the pure body and childlike soul became an expression and instrument of the White Glory. I gazed, as I thought, on a foreshadowing of the mystery of the resurrection of the body. I saw holy, divine Power linked in an eternal

marriage with perfected and glorified matter.

This I saw first; and then I saw something else. For this unspeakable Glory, this white world of the Life of God, was everywhere. I know it is not less there, as I write, because He Who opened my eyes has seen fit to close them again.

It gleamed like a living rampart along the headlands blazing into life, it shone over the waters of the sea. Over the sleeping fields, the cattle, the little church, the lonely farms it passed; the Glory of God, the Power of the Lord, creating and sustaining.

As I looked I saw Réné, wholly unseeing of the Glory, kneel down and with folded hands and bowed head say his brief and simple night prayers. I saw him rise, take off his coat and roll it into a pillow for his head, lie down by the stones, pull his khaki blanket over him, and cross himself. He lay there, a little, dark, quiet figure, in the billows of white light.

Before the vision left me I saw one other thing.

Even as before the altar a holy figure shone forth from the whiteness, so now I saw a great and fair company shine forth. To and fro, coming and going, in ceaseless worship and ceaseless service, I saw them.

The mighty angels, the mighty dead, and with them the "spirits and souls of the righteous," purified and at peace. I saw the watchful guardians who serve the joyous Shepherd of the child's vision. I saw the untiring patrol of land and sea, the watchers who cease not to worship and lift up souls to God in their prayer.

I saw living and dead, men and angels, bound together in the Communion of Saints, and I saw the binding of them in a Body held as a common heritage, the holy Whiteness of the Life of God. I saw them as the channels of His Power and of His Will patiently and ceaselessly toiling to fashion the visible into the likeness of the invisible.

Then my eyes were closed again. I saw only the sleeping earth, the star-lit sky, the

heaving sea, the figure covered by the khaki blanket, and the moonlight resting on it all. And I heard the insect's sharp, fine cry from the dew-wet turf at my feet.

Clinton turned and stumbled blindly down the slope. I knew he had seen what I saw. I followed him.

"My God!" I heard him whisper. "My God!"

As we went our way by the path we had come, I heard him muttering again and again to himself those words:

"My God! My God! My God!"

I think it was both a Confession and a Prayer.

## CHAPTER XX

### FATHER ANTHONY'S POSTSCRIPT

AND now, Catherine my niece, you will say: "How does such a story as this prove that the world is governed by Justice?"

It does not prove it. It did not aim to do so. It suggests—it does not give proof, but it suggests—that we are not able to judge or decide as to what constitutes justice, when the Justice we are trying to understand has so gigantic a field of operation, and an all but infinite gradation of causes and effects to balance.

The tale of Réné also suggests to you that as there are no two leaves alike in a wood, so are there no two souls precisely the same, that each has its purpose and its office in the mighty Plan, and is being slowly shaped for that office. If that is so, the question of God's

justice in differing lives sinks out of sight. We are not solely watching the proceedings of an administrator of justice (not that I do not believe in an exact and awful Justice; I simply say I cannot judge of its working, because its scope and sweep are too great for me); we are watching a Creative Artist. This story of Réné tends to show an individual care, a considered mode of dealing with each soul brought within the range of a certain influence. Each was different, and each was dealt with according to its need

Therefore I say we do not know enough to doubt; we only know enough to believe.

And as the doors swing wider we see the same stupendous working stretching on into the white reaches of the worlds invisible, until thought drops dead, and vision fails before the Truth of that Eternity in whose most secret Shrine abides Justice.

## L' ENVOI.

TO THE ANGEL OF THE FLAMING SWORD

KING of an age most mild,
When we shall know the Child,
  The Babe of wondrous power;
Who in our hearts as One,
A little secret Sun,
  Dwells at this hour.
Fire these dull hearts, O Lord!
Touch with thy flaming sword;
Till to the Babe All-Wise
We lift adoring eyes;
  Giving to Him life's sum,
All that we be.
Crying: "In Thee we see
Perfect simplicity.
O Babe! the warrior's Lord,
Great Michael's King ador'd,
  Thy Kingdom come!"