

THE FIDDLE ROCK

SET in the cliffs that look over towards Lundy are here and there bands of a hard stone better defying the Atlantic, and running out to sea in jagged ridges, where the crumbling shillett of the shore has been worn away. A few of these are uncovered even at high water and in stormy weather, and stand up like black and broken teeth among the breakers. That long known as the Fiddle Rock, from its rough resemblance, as seen from the heights above, to a violin, lies some five miles south of the river mouth, with its neck turned landward and thrust into the huge slope of pebbles that form the beach.

For about an hour at low water you may scramble out along this neck to the body of the fiddle. Its resemblance there to any of man's making is of the smallest. The strata composing it are all on edge, and its surface is rather like that of a gigantic currycomb. Among the gaunt slabs is a nook or crack, you may hardly call it a cave, sheltered from all winds but the south-east off shore, some twelve feet long by five broad, at the entrance of which stands an old iron stove, such as those used for roasting chestnuts.

For upwards of ten years a man stood in that crack for the space of a tide each day, and played the violin to the shags and sea-gulls so that now the rock has a better title to its name.

I first knew Thomas Dalton at Cambridge. We called him Terrible Tom. He was an enthusiast and something of an outcast. Not being a public-school man, he lacked the ballast which convention demands even at the University. He had spent most of his life till then learning to play the fiddle, and reading the classics with an antiquarian uncle somewhere in Wales; and he came to Cambridge because he had persuaded himself that he had a call towards the ministry, and wanted a degree therefor. Yet, like most of us, he was idle, and little inclined for set courses, and all his time suffered from an inability to get up in the morning. I have found him breakfasting at three or four. Then he would sit up all night reading indiscriminately, or playing, with muffled windows, and go for a walk as soon as he could leave his rooms in the morning, tramping about till eight, when he would come in and go to bed.

By consequence he was the enemy of all routine, and was constantly interviewing deans and tutors. He played no games, although, except for a dreadful stoop, he was one of the finest men I have seen; with a deep, soft voice and a chest capacity, as I remember on an anthropometrical occasion when he tried the spirometer, about a third larger than anybody else's there;

which he accounted for by his singing so much in the open air. He had the long thighs of a foot-baller, and arms two yards across, with feet that would have helped him to wondrous jumping, and hands that could stretch elevenths, which was one of the distracting feats he delighted in, running up and down your piano with both of them in a triumph of discord. Despite his height, which was not quite six feet, he gave you the impression of a giant; and despite his gauntness, he had the gracefulness of a peculiar aptness and precision in all his movements that made them almost womanly. Those long fingers were as clever as a girl's in arranging the flowers with which his room was always filled, and on his violin seemed verily possessed. His face was thin and bony, his eyes set close together and deep, his nose straight or slightly aquiline and sharply pointed, his mouth little bowed and very wide; altogether the face of an aristocrat with a touch of the Jesuit in its expression, which was one of intense self-control and power of patience and purpose. His hair was blackish then and quite flat, and he always shaved clean—and very blue.

We called him Terrible Tom because of his social uncouthness, and a certain habit of his of inflicting his dogmatic views on out-of-the-way subjects at inordinate length and inappropriate times; and partly because, in spite of his manner of life, he was possessed of a natural and reckless austerity and strange indifference to custom that we could not catalogue. We did not think him mad—only a bit cracky. He never drank anything but water or milk, never smoked, was almost a vegetarian, not on principle but from choice. He had long been an orphan, and had about 600*l.* a year under some settlement, quite a third of which he spent, I believe, in charities; a heap on flowers, old books, and music; next to nothing on clothes; and what was left over from college bills on what he called freaks, which took the form of elaborate practical jokes with a present at the end. As once when he wagered he would ride down the King's Parade in his cap and gown and a donkey cart, selling apples in company with an old woman known as Mrs. Gummidge, who kept a greengrocer's shop in a back street, and made a very poor thing of the business, until this performance brought her notoriety and custom, and the donkey cart to deal with it. Again, when a young lady, a don's daughter, and not of his acquaintance, had sung 'Cherry Ripe' charmingly at one of the Wednesday 'Pops,' she was bombarded in her house in Trumpington Street by little boys bearing baskets of cherries at intervals of a quarter of an hour the whole of one summer's day.

He had a passion for 'Poker.' And though this might seem inconsistent with his aims, he never admitted that it was so, nor argued at all about it. He did not play for money's sake nor love of gambling, but purely because he took pleasure in the exercise of the faculties requisite. He played it extraordinarily well, with a sphinx-like impenetrability; and was the only one of us who, so far as I remember, was never detected bluffing. He won pretty often, and kept account of his winnings, adjusting these every term. If he had lost, he played on through the next light-heartedly; if he had won, as was usually the case, he took pains to find out odd ways in which he could make

return to those who had lost to him, or set aside the money for the next freak. And the amount of method he would put into some matters was as startling as his carelessness in others. He was always shabby, except as to his cap and gown, which seemed to excite in him a respect we kept for any other garments by preference.

He was a year senior to me, and so remained on the superior footing that gives, apart from other reasons; and I think it was owing to the fact that I played accompaniments to his liking that we became as intimate as we did; perhaps also to the fact that I was receptive and impressionable, and willing to listen and say 'yes' with interest, if not intelligence, while he talked. I was, however, always conscious of a condescension on his part and an inequality on my own. And so, though I became aware of the strength and weakness of his character, which was a fine mixture of determination and pride and passion, I never felt that I had the smallest influence upon it, nor indeed was entitled thereto. His purpose in life was the passionate self-sacrifice of an ideal priesthood, and his pride would not admit of any human quality that could not be bent to absolute subservience for this end. Proportionably he looked for reward not of any ordinary sort, but that reward which is the knowledge of wise influence and the natural effect of sweet power. He was immensely ambitious for the effect of a good, of the possession and development of which in himself he had never a doubt. And this did not seem in him so much arrogance as an unwarrantable optimism and belief in human nature and its capacities. The reward he looked for was love, and the thought of it consumed him. He would declare that no man ever did anything for nothing, that effort for nothing was fictitious and impossible; that 'Right' and 'Duty' were only words that hid our real object, which was that we might be loved by God or man; and that this was the only thing worth doing anything for, or indeed possible to do any real thing for. As to his own love for God he was always very reticent, and seemed to treat the declarations of others, with reference to theirs, as of too subjective and self-evolved a nature to be regarded as considerable realities. He denied that it had any necessary bearing upon the question of one's life-work. And as to his love for man, he said once quietly, and as if to put an end to any further inquiry, 'I think, I say, I think it will be enough.' Only by what he did could one judge that it was at all events of a more practical kind than with many who protest more.

He attended no lectures that he could avoid, never entered into discussions, and joined no club but the Union. At twenty-one he was more independent than most men at thirty. How he managed to keep the necessary countenance of the authorities to his life's purpose I do not know; for I read for law, and did not come across him in his work. But his theology was so liberal that he must have had considerable difficulty in conciliating them. I fancy the Jesuit in him came to his aid then. He recognised that the path to his end lay through the Church of England, and this being so, he did not scruple to acquiesce outwardly in any tenets that might be required of him. He considered all creeds as necessarily of the nature of temporary makeshifts, and that the laws

of evolution applied to them as to all else. And so, although he felt himself at liberty to advance as his individuality dictated, partly for policy's sake and partly out of pure complaisance towards what he regarded as essentially immaterial, he submitted to such acknowledgments as were conditions, and such methods as precedence and custom necessitated. This he did with no disdain or mockery of others or himself. His reverence for human nature was too big. If human nature regarded many things as perfected or unmistakable, he was ready to agree, in order that, like St. Paul, being all things to all men, he might by any means save some. The efficacy of works was paramount; the dogmata of the church like clothes, which wear out, to be renewed on a different pattern with the progress of time.

His views likewise underwent such constant modification that even while he had immense confidence in his personality, he fettered it not at all with a craving for consistency. He recognised that he too must develop, and by consequence change continually. Yet this led to an intimate doubt of the passing theory he could assert, and at the same time divided him between honour and mistrust of those who were content to accept any system as permanent and unimprovable. He was in fact a free-thinker, with a keener sense than is usual for the worth of things that are, because they are; for the worth of charity, because it is, like honest policy, not only the best to choose, but vitally so, the instinct of the future; for the worth of faith, because at least we see through its glass darkly. He temporised therefore, not from motives either good or evil in themselves, but because he felt, and very deeply, that to temporise is the only essentially true and consistent course for any man born into the world, where time and circumstances are the necessary conditions of his existence; where a soul, if eternal, is by implication but on its way.

And as he made no public parade of unorthodoxy, and his behaviour, though eccentric, was unimpeachable except on the insufficient ground of its unusualness, he passed through his time at Cambridge without any open rupture with authority, took a decent degree in classics, and about a year afterwards was ordained.

His first curacy was in Bristol, but he afterwards passed on to East London. He wrote to me once or twice, but I did not see him for some years after he left Cambridge, and knew nothing of his success or mental development, his letters telling me little beyond the commonplace of his surroundings and fellow-workers. In truth we had been friends of occasion rather than choice, for there was that in his morality which jarred upon an ordinary man, and made me gasp too often for whole-hearted confidence. I remember that once when I was bold enough to ask him seriously whether, considering his attitude towards the creeds, he could affirm that he had a 'call,' or assent to the declarations required by the Church, he replied by asking me in turn if any one had ever been able to prove that he had a call otherwise than by his personal assertion; and on my inability to answer, he added that neither could he, and that such personal assertion was of the usual value of human evidence. We were on a week's walking tour at the time, four of us, one Easter, along the coast of Devon. The two others were on ahead, having chosen the road; but Dalton had

persuaded me to do a big scramble by the cliffs, and we were standing looking out over the Fiddle Rock when he said this. I remember I made no reply, and we both of us stared at the rock for some time. And then he suddenly turned upon me: 'If ever I was convinced that I was mistaken,' said he, 'I'd go and live on just such a place as that. How can anybody know?'

It was more than six years afterwards, and nearly five after he had obtained his second curacy, that I saw him again. By that time he had passed, as I thought, quite out of my life, like so many others of one's college friends. An old school fellow of mine, who had been with us at Cambridge, happened to call on me in Lincoln's Inn one day, and mentioned Dalton. He had come across him in connection with some mission work. Dalton was in a bad way, he said: he could make nothing of him. He seemed breaking up. He had worked himself to death, and was in a state of mind bordering on lunacy. And yet he refused to consult a doctor, or indeed any one, and was consumed with some great spiritual trouble, that nothing could abate.

So I took his address and went down to Bethnal Green at once, and there I found him in a little dingy room lying on a sofa. There were no flowers here, and on the four walls nothing but a broken crucifix.

Seeing me, he sat up, but he gave me no greeting, nor offered me his hand. Yet his indifference touched rather than chilled me. I do not know why I should be half ashamed to own it (besides, my mother was French) I sat down beside him, and before he could speak I put my arm about him and kissed him. He flushed and bowed as he sat, and then he hoisted himself up by his hands and stood by the table, swaying slightly. He steadied himself a moment, but immediately recognising that I might take his doing so for physical weakness, he stood straight up, and pointing to the crucifix said, his face quite white again, but absolutely calm: 'I did that. Hadn't you better go?'

But as I made no motion, being quite uncertain how to act, and only desirous of gaining time, he walked up and down the room for a while as if debating with himself. His clothes hung loose about him, he stooped worse than ever, and I could see that he was terribly wasted. He was not thirty then: he looked double. His forehead was ruled with lines and a sickly shining white; his cheek bones were like knobs, his lips barely visible for the habitual tension that had drawn two long furrows down each side of his face. His eyes I could not see until he presently flashed them upon me; and then I did not understand. They were almost devoid of expression, and his face, though so worn, was imperturbable: as sometimes we see in those who have travelled much in the tropics, a multitude of puckers and wrinkles, which give a permanent look of pain that is not being felt.

'A pitiful thing to do,' said he, stopping opposite the crucifix; 'I keep it there to remind me. We do such pitiful things at times.' And he resumed his walk. Again I waited.

'I may as well tell you,' said he, 'as you are here—there's no reason against your knowing—I've resigned.' Still I had nothing to say, and after a space he went on deliberately:

'This is not enough for me. That's what's the matter, and so I do not

choose to continue. The vicar does not understand, and I dare say you will not understand. He thinks me everything that is good, and will give you an excellent account of me, I don't doubt, if you care to ask him. He knows nothing of me. I have not chosen that he should. He will say I am his right hand, and all that sort of thing. And perhaps I am. As they reckon success hereabout I am successful. Well, I've worked for it, fourteen hours a day have I worked getting on for five years. I've not spared myself; I see that you can see that; I've given it a fair trial. So far as the folk here can worship any one they worship me. And I don't care that for their worship. I might as well have tickled their rickety babies all the time.' A long pause, then again:

'I find words difficult. I know I cannot make myself clear. Roughly the thing is like this: here am I close on thirty, and I've the half-animal homage of, say, a thousand mixed indescribables. It is not good enough. I'm not going to pay the price. That sounds commercial may be, and not very deep. Yet it goes deep enough too. I am conscious of a power within me that may not be used, that is just so much waste. I don't find fault with them. They're average human beings, some better, some worse. And don't think I consider myself thrown away because I work in Bethnal Green instead of Belgravia. I am thrown away because I was born. There, I told you I had not words. That sounds portentous nonsense, doesn't it? I am not alone. We are all mocked with the possession of a power—to waste. Every man has it, but few realise that they have it, and fewer that they may never use it. I don't arrogate to myself any quality I do not share with our fellow men, but simply I revolt against our inability to use what we have for proportionate ends. We are a contradiction in terms. We have been given infinity, limited with the finite! We are immortal—that we may cook our dinners! We are a living testimony to a superhuman joke, a set of dolls made in the God-like image, with the God-like attributes, but denied the means to employ them like gods; as we might be said to deny our dolls ought but their outward resemblance to ourselves. Or, to take another idea, I am like a man trained as a clockmaker and set in a land where there is no time. Like sheep, we submit because there is no escape. Only the heathen could imagine the man who dared raise a hopeless defiance. But in spite of his hopelessness he is the finest creation of man's brain, and the most profound.'

'And yet,' he went on presently, and in the same calm tone, 'men do retort unconsciously. Every soldier that dies in battle retorts in a way. For some silly squabble (the origin of which lies where?—in this human nature!) he flings back his life in God's face. He has done what was expected of him. There is at bottom no greater retribution for the fowler than that the game fall into his snare. Have you never laid a trap yourself? But I am shocking you horribly, I'm afraid. You must remember that my God is not your God, not the God of your New Testament and of love and all tenderness, but that Almighty who is beyond our ideas of benevolence, as our ideas of benevolence are beyond the social instincts of ants or bees, though, indeed, they have been put in the same catalogue, and "utility" written above them. Utility for

what? For life in general. We call pain Process now, but it hurts all the same. We recognise its utility towards a goal of which we can just conceive, and so hesitate to call even evil evil, for the definition of evil must be opposition to God, and we cannot face a duality. The old dilemma persists. But just by so much as our benevolence or morality is below God's, by so much is He removed from fatherhood. The more we think, the less anthropomorphic becomes that terrific Personality, the more removed are we from any sense but that we learn by looking at the stars. And yet are we conscious of this divinity within us, and the size of the mockery too. I, like every man, must fail; I will fail in my own way. I have given life a trial. I have succeeded as they think; but *I* know that I have failed, and must fail. And so I will waste my life.'

'And what good will that do?' I mumbled.

'How absurd of you!' said he.

'Then who will be mocked?' I cried in desperation. 'You don't imagine that this Omnipotence you speak of will be—be—damaged.'

'Of course not,' said he; 'I forget how many millions there are in the world just now, and I am sure I can hardly conceive of the millions that have been or will be. They are all assisting Process, unconsciously more or less. They are the means for evolving a future type. Is there not then something unique, if one but considers one's vanity, in standing consciously aloof from every dictate of instinct or experience, so far as they may by any possible means be so abandoned? One unit shall hinder Process to the extent of his individual capacity! Surely Nature must be anxious! She whose regard for life in general is so great, that to preserve it she has evolved all these incessantly complicated methods, physical and moral and intellectual, is yet absolutely reckless of the unit, or even the type, as you know well enough. I refuse to go to school. She will come and whip me, no doubt. Well—' and he laughed, 'let her whip.'

'You acknowledge the infinite littleness of the result then?'

'Yes,' said he. 'But that a created being should be so little is a reflection of rather a subtle character on creation, is it not? I had thoughts of suicide when I was at Cambridge. You never knew, of course. But suicide is petty. Suicide is but refusal to live. I will do more, I will live, if I am permitted, in order that I may insult this thing men bless as life. And even if that be like the ridiculous profanities of a naughty child, remember who made the child. Is it only the child who is ridiculous?'

'I cannot understand,' said I, 'how any man——' But he broke in:

'I did not suppose you would. There is no need. This thing is between me and the dark. "Work while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work." What a strange reason to give for work! For five years have I wasted my life more or less in God's way. I say more or less, for perfect success, of course, is withheld even thus. I have lived half my life, I shall waste the rest of it in my own way. There's but one thing in the world to stop me, and that is like Pharaoh, King of Egypt; so don't ask.'

Throughout all this declaration he was as collected as if he had been

discussing a change of domicile, perfectly free from embarrassment or compunction. If he had displayed a trace of emotion I could have appealed to him. I recognised something of the impotence he spoke of in my own heart, as I struggled to think of any argument to touch him. But his impassivity froze me. However, I made an effort.

'Dalton,' I cried, 'I'm going to pretend this is all morbid rot. You've been overdoing yourself and knocking up all round, and imagining the universe a manure heap to get on top of and crow. Now you just come back with me into the West, away from all this, and come and have a jolly good dinner, and see "Our Boys" (which was running then).'

Rather to my surprise he said at once: 'Right you are.' And the rest of the evening he was as gay as in the best of the old days at Cambridge. I remember we talked of Hammond and his engagement to a certain Miss Chanter, who afterwards married Lord T——.

The air seemed clearing, so that suddenly I ventured between the acts to suggest that he should take advantage of his present resignation to do a fortnight's walk abroad with me; and I named Holland, because I remembered he loved old cities once. But he laughed.

'You're not a bit satisfied,' said he. 'Here have I come out and spent a whole evening with you, and now you want me to spend a fortnight.'

'Yes, I do,' said I.

'I thought you didn't understand a bit,' he replied. 'Good night,' and he got up, and went straight out of the theatre. I was so nonplussed and annoyed at my own helplessness that I let him go; and when I went down to Bethnal Green in the morning he was gone, and had left no address. There seemed nothing to be done. I was deeply sorry for him, but I confess I was not sorry to be free of a task for which I felt myself so unequal, however I wished to serve him. I might more easily have attempted to play his fiddle.

And so for the second time I lost sight of him.

I am aware that I have given above but the shadow of what he said, for although I made notes next day of all I could remember, with the idea that I might submit them to some one spiritually able to help him, the thoughts were unfamiliar, and dealt with matters so far beyond the commonplace of my life, that I missed much of his meaning, and am not at all sure that I have adequately represented his difficulty, even if I have understood it. And when I came to read them over, they seemed so insufficient that—I did nothing. Somehow I was ashamed. And besides, I should not have known whether to take them to the Cowley Fathers or the doctors at Hanwell.

Many years afterwards I was on a cricketing tour one summer with some old school-fellows. We were most of us well getting on in life, and only played what might be called second or third-rate teams. We had spent a week playing near Barnstaple, and on the Sunday afternoon, remembering my walk along the coast, I went for a long tramp westward over some of the old ground, recalling old times and Cambridge by the way. It was a fine, hot August day, and when I came above the Fiddle Rock I was seized with a boyish longing to

scramble out and have a bathe among the pools. The invitation of the low-tide and the beautiful air was irresistible. So down I went by a path a little way back, which seemed well-worn, and out over the pebbles on to the rocks and strewn seaweed.

And there, as I paused to look for the easiest way, came through the hot air to the lazy swash of the swell the tone of a violin, and with it stole into the beauty of earth, and sky, and sea a human horror that I recognised at once, and gasped. The sound was of the air of the flute solo in the *entr'acte* of Gluck's 'Orfeo,' that lamentation of an exquisite despair. Dalton's words on the cliff above came back wailing. Dalton was here playing his life away! I stood stock still and waited and listened, and as I listened the tide crept up about my feet.

Presently the sound ceased, and there clambered out from among the rocks the man himself. Seeing me he came rapidly towards me, waving his violin case; but on his face was no greeting, as there had been none that other time. The face was weather-worn now, but not as lined as when I saw him last. I cannot describe its expression, which was too vacant for cynicism, a sort of placid weariness as of a hero asleep. But the eyebrows rose as he called out banteringly: "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" Did you hear the old tune we used to play? The day is abominably still. I always play that last—when the tide turns.'

My face must have betrayed something of the shame I felt for the thing I knew had come to pass, for he frowned slightly, and then looked upwards towards the cliff as if to go. So I stifled all but sympathy.

'My dear Dalton,' I cried, 'what the ——'

'I owe you a dinner,' said he, 'as you're here, come and have it. It won't match yours at the Monico. Still, you've let yourself in for it. Come along.'

When we had climbed to the top he stayed a while, and looked me over with some amusement. 'Professional whiskers,' said he; 'otherwise the same old W.G., I'm thinking. I thought of growing a beard too, but it hinders one's playing.' He looked down at the rock below, and the smile faded. 'Yes,' said he, 'you have let yourself in. Like the American, you "want to know." It'll save us both some bother perhaps if I tell you. But there's nothing much to tell, you can't guess for yourself. I've been here since you saw me last, that's all. How many years ago is that?'

'Is it nine?' said I.

'That's about it. I live close by here, at a farm. At low water I can get over into a sort of cave on the rock there, and there I play for about eight or nine hours every day—to nobody. That is my life.'

'About eight or nine hours a day of it,' said I, more for the sake of steadying my nerves than anything.

'Yes,' he said. 'Then there are meals and sleep—and the rest! Oh, I read the paper to see what's going on, and do acrostics and puzzles and things to keep my wits going,' and he almost laughed again. 'The people round here, what there are, think me a bit mad, of course, but most of them imagine

I am taking inordinate pains to become a professor on the violin. So I am, but not for their reasons. No one here has ever heard me play. The sea usually makes too much noise for the sound to come across when the tide's up, and no one interferes, so that all is as convenient as possible.'

He spoke lightly, as if by the commonplace mention of such things he would hinder me from kindling, and I felt more than half inclined to bid him good-bye then and there, and hear no more. He must have divined my thoughts instantly.

'As you please,' said he. So I walked on with him.

'But why play the violin?' I asked. 'That seems rather a refined way of—of spending the time.'

'Exactly,' said he, 'as refined as I could manage. Think—no one hears. To play as well as I do now—and no one hears! Isn't that exquisitely futile enough?'

'You fiend!' I exclaimed, but I clutched his coat as I cried. 'Dear old chap,' I cried again, 'haven't you a spark of manhood left?'

He put up his hand and released his coat.

'For some time after I left London,' he went on imperturbably, 'I sat thinking how best to carry out my purpose. I had various ideas, all more or less impracticable. I did not think of the fiddle at first, I had not touched it for years. Instinct naturally suggested publicity. To have by some means held up human nature to ridicule elaborately and systematically would have pleased me beyond measure. But I required that there should be consciousness of the ridicule. An audience, however, would have either been conscious and avoided me, or it would have heard me in ignorance; and so I should have missed my aim either way. I do not think I could possibly have made disciples—I am too different,' he added: 'and besides, to have tried would have involved me in endless worries and pesters, and I did not care about such trouble. I know human nature pretty well. It would have had no appropriate sympathy with my wishes. I know myself, too, pretty well, and I knew I could win with myself. And so I was content, perhaps more than content, to deal with myself alone. Isolation magnifies. My single isolated victory is more than a dozen modifications. And yet to have mocked them, even without their consciousness, would have been much. To have played before them as a splendid triviality would have been exaltation. Still the notion was too subtle, and I abandoned it. I had thoughts of doing worse.'

'How possibly worse?'

'You know the power of music over sensuous London,' said he. 'To prostitute a magnificent gift to sensuality would have been worse. Imagine all my thoughts, knowing as you do my fixed intention of insulting Nature (with a capital N), as I could have done by the choice of the music I might play. Perhaps you wonder why I refrained; simply for this reason: we are possessed of passions. Essentially their utility is for the multiplication and perpetuation of life. Foster them in however degraded a form, you still foster them. My aim would have been rather for their freezing and death. In any other direction I should have but pandered to Nature after all, and in

that one direction I recognised at once my absolute impotence. No: with myself alone could any reasonable satisfaction be obtained. But my method, of course, has serious drawbacks. It is extremely dull. I have to fight that, and it takes some fighting. Mere physical apathy is my danger, and that is why I compromise so far as to read the paper, lest my brain should take to jibbing. To rise daily and go forth to be useless is only possible with a brain thoroughly alert. But I always loved music for its own sake, and that helps me much. I can play for hours without a thought of aught but playing well, and the beauty wrapping me about. I play pretty well now,' he said proudly. 'I have the sense to see that my victory is limited and partial, and must be; that I am bound and encompassed with a heritage I can never be free from. But such as it is, my defiance goes up continually; and as long as I can stand upon the rock there—it will.'

The path still wound by the cliff, and he looked seaward.

'It is grand,' said he, 'to be there when one of our south-westers is flinging the Atlantic up, and I can hardly hear my notes for the tremendous smashing of the sea; to feel that in presence of all that power I am still as strong. And I never play wildly then, as you might think. But when the storm is gone, and the after-swell comes thundering in, then I play my wildest, for I have outlived it, and feel the right to boast. And it is almost as grand in some still winter mornings, when the light is very faint, to be awake and playing there unsubdued amidst that dead tranquillity. Or again, in the summer evenings, such as we have had lately, to sit and play towards the setting sun, and feel above all part with it! The gulls and the curlews and the oyster-catchers have lost their wonder at me, and the shags will sit near me while I play. But often just at the best that wretched little string snaps, for the sea air plays havoc with them; and then I laugh, for the vanity of it never fails to catch me then, I hardly know why.'

'But sometimes,' he continued slowly, with his eyes far away, 'I have a deep doubt that I am, after all, in an odd way, submitting myself like others to the great object of all process, even by this futility of my own, since all is futile finally. And in my antagonism I grow conscious of a deep communion with all about me. That rock there on which I sit, I seem to see it forming slowly in layers of deposit, flat and gradual. I see it overlaid in the ages and crushed by layers above and metamorphosed by heat and masses of which one can hardly conceive. I see it buried and raised again, and crushed sideways and bent and contorted, and left and contorted again, while ceaseless other changes have played about its bed. And again I see it worn away by streams from above and the sea from below, and the still slower might of the air, till all but the hardest is left to stand out into this Atlantic of our times. Then come I, and sit my days upon it with this mortal immortal mockery. And I see myself gone, and itself worn away in time, and strewn afresh upon the sea floor, to be made up perhaps again and again. And so all is change and an endless making to unmake, an endless, endless futility. And I am a part, but by scorn I am conscious.'

He was unhasping an old rickety gate, and suddenly looked me full in the

face. His eyes were inscrutably tender as he uttered the words, as if with a pity that seemed to me divine. But seeing my utter want of comprehension he added with a smile, 'Here is the farm.'

The farm was a slated, whitewashed barrack, set in mud. I have hardly ever seen a place muddier—and it was August. He led me upstairs to a long room bare as a prison, and then went down to make arrangements with the farmer's wife for my entertainment.

The window looked out on a grass slope lined at the top with a row of Scotch firs, crippled with the salt wind. It had neither blind nor curtain. The walls were plastered blue, and patches had fallen away. The boards were bare except for a strip or two of carpet, and a worn sheepskin before the tiny hearth. A bed, a chest of drawers, a washing-stand of stained wood, a small table, and a few Windsor chairs completed the furniture. There were no bookcases nor cupboards, only a large pile of papers in a corner. Over the mantel was a card with the misapplied words upon it, 'Do what thou dost as if the stake were Heaven, and that thy last deed ere the Judgment Day.' There were two photographs upon the table, one of an old man with a kind intellectual face and hoary beard, the other of a most spiritual and tender-looking woman. Stamped on her frame in gold letters was 'La Belle Dame sans Mercy'; upon seeing which I began to think things of Dalton which had never occurred to me before. It was all very cheerless even on that bright evening, and my spirits fell to zero. What were the winters like here? I was overwhelmed with pity as I sat and waited for him.

He returned with some gaiety. 'Pork chops and cold figgy pudding,' he cried; 'there's glory for you! And you may try the cider. My meals are usually rather unconventional. You see, to catch the tide, I have to go out at such odd hours sometimes. I often sit playing hours before sunrise by the light of my stove there. In the winter I have to carry a regular load of wood and coal down with me in a sack on my back; and then it gives out before the tide's up, and my fingers have to give in.'

The feast was brought upstairs on a tray by an untidy woman, who looked at me with a furtive curiosity, but said nothing. He ate well, and I had a holiday appetite in spite of my surroundings, and so did not betray myself.

When we had finished, and I was smoking, he took up the portrait of the spiritual-looking woman, and put it into my hands.

'She stood between me and this once,' he said. 'But that is long ago. Is it not a beautiful face? Her character was like it, but she was human. She failed. I will tell you about her. When I was in Bristol I met her, and fell in love with her. She shared my views about my vocation; she was a saint. She, too, felt that priesthood and celibacy were inseparable. It was her will, as it was mine, that every sacrifice should be made for Heaven's sake. And so we separated. But I loved her, I told her so; and she loved me, she told me so. I knew it when I foreswore her. She had been to me the sister of Sir Percivale, and I believe at one time I was her Galahad until then. But then she gave way, and I knew what I know now. It was a terrible time.

There is no conflict beside it, this daily fight is nothing, the fight in London was nothing beside it. But we won—that we might fail later! We parted. I went to London, she gave her life behind in Bristol, and so the years ran on. Well, when I gave up my work at last, you see what happened—I was free—to marry her—but upon what conditions? She only in fact stood between me and this. I did not go to her—I wrote to her. That was folly, the world would say; it was heroism. I wrote to her fully all my thoughts, as fully at least as one can write; and I wrote because I wanted her to judge the whole matter calmly, and without that personal appeal my presence would necessarily have brought. She wrote to me the letter I have upon me till I die. It is a most extraordinary letter. I shall never understand it. It is a splendid lie. It contains an official version henceforth to be accepted. She told me she had never loved me, not that her love was dead, but that it never existed. You see the position was hopeless on all accounts. If I continued priest I forswore her by the very act; if I ceased to be so, I became for ever unworthy of her. I forsook my calling, and she could not stoop. She is magnificent for not stooping. And yet the magnificence is that of failure. Had she been better than mortal she could have stooped; but she knew she was mortal, and that mortal strength was insufficient. It was not she but her human nature that was, by God's grace, inadequate. And so, probably that the matter might be finally closed by an impenetrable misunderstanding, she wrote me this official version.'

'But perhaps,' I interjected, 'it was, after all, the true one. Perhaps she had been carried away before, and it was you that misunderstood her when you thought she loved you.'

He opened a drawer and took from it a book, the fourth volume of Mrs. Browning's poems, and opened it at the thirty-eighth of the Portuguese sonnets. I read it, and a date, and two sets of initials pencilled below, Dalton's and another's, not in Dalton's handwriting. He regarded me scornfully.

'That's contemptible of me,' said he. 'But why should not I be contemptible? I was not contemptible then, nor when I wrote to her. I paid her the grandest compliment possible to man. I likened her love to her God's, a thing which could never fail, however contemptible I might become; a thing which could live on for ever for me however fallen. An ordinary woman could not rise to that. But she was not an ordinary woman. Her power of forgiveness I thought limitless as His. A strange compliment, but a big one. She could not take it—and I am here. I installed her as divinity. She did not cavil at my conception of divinity, but by a lie she made polite disclaimer—poor human soul—and I am here.'

'And yet I could have won. By the flesh I could have won. I might have gone to her, and put my arm about her; and that had been stronger than pen or tongue, and a kiss had conquered where prayer failed. She knew not that in God's sight my appeal made, standing aloof, was more pitiful than bent knees and cries for mercy. Her human nature stood by her, and she was humanly wise. Yet this same human nature would have bowed at the breath of a lover, and human eyes mixed her tears with his. I, who could not win by

the spirit, might yet have won through the flesh ; for on earth the flesh reigns paramount, and beside it the spirit must content itself with its immortality ! Impotence ! Impotence ! Once Sir Percivale's Sister, again The Blessed Damozel, and again La Belle Dame sans Mercy for ever. And now,' he cried with a laugh, into which stole that same divine pity that still haunts me at times, till something of his own madness catches and chokes me, 'you can understand better why "the sedge is withered from the lake, and no birds sing."'

Yes, I understood. As I looked at the patience, and pity, and indomitable defiance on his beautiful face, I understood that for any help I could give him I was as impotent as he considered me.

He took the photograph from my hand, and with a bow put it back on the table. The matter was ended.

'I managed to get my money sunk in the Panama business,' said he presently. 'That seemed as useless as any other. There are labourers employed certainly who live feverishly ; but nature is putting things on the old footing fast. I kept 100*l.* a year for my life. I have no relations. My uncle died four years ago. I never saw him after I came here. He was beautiful. I shall not see you again,' he added, 'when you leave me to-night. You will not give me the trouble of avoiding you, it is such a nuisance to be moving. Chance directed you here. You will not take advantage of it. When and if any change occurs, you shall know.'

What could I do but promise ? But when we parted in the mud at the gate I caught his hand.

'Dalton, Dalton,' I implored, 'dear old Tom, is there nothing I——' But his hand was upon my mouth. Then he pointed upwards to the new moon. 'She is as good as dead,' said he. 'They say she was once alive, as we think of life. I am as good as dead. And you might as well think of warming her up again with a gas kitchener.'

With what a healthy selfishness did I not enjoy the cricket and good humour and homely happy commonplace of next day ! It was like stepping from a sepulchre into the sunshine.

That was August. The following June I had a letter from him. Here it is :—

'DEAR G.,—When I leave here you will come and take the book I showed you and the photograph. I am giving instructions that you may be informed when I am gone. You will come and take possession of my effects and destroy them all, except the photograph and the box of violin strings you will find labelled. You will advertise for a lady to claim them, you will know her by the photograph. For many reasons I did not tell you her name. You will present her with both. The strings are those I have broken in my playing here. They are the sort of things a woman would care to keep.

'Yours,

'THOMAS DALTON.'

And about a couple of months later—something tells me that the time was

pecially arranged with reference to my holidays—I received a scrawl from his landlady. Dalton was gone, would I be pleased to come?

No one knew anything more. His violin had been picked up smashed upon the beach one morning, and suicide was a natural inference, or perhaps misadventure. But I have my doubts of his suicide, and an accident with the tide to him, who knew it so well, seems unlikely. Moreover, the weather had not been particularly boisterous. Neither his body nor any trace of him has appeared; yet there is a strong current southward, and it may be he was washed away.

The silent slovenly woman helped me to carry out his requests. We burnt his things in the yard. Of all places upon earth that muddy farm is the most horrible to me. She hoped that I would be able to recommend her other lodgers in the place of the one she had lost. She had no fault to find with him.

It is no use accusing myself now. It almost seems to me that if I had been able to help him he would not have confided in me as he did. He is gone, and nothing remains but to do as he requested.

Who is the lady who will come to me and claim her photograph, and 2766 pieces of broken fiddle string?

GRAILY HEWITT.

