

LONDON

November.—I have come out of my theatre, I have left my concert, to face the splashing mud and the dirty omnibuses of the street.

All the tapestried fantasy is over. My procession of powdered footmen have melted away like the chorus of a comic opera. Fact, the brutal fact of money, has me by the throat, thrusts me into Bloomsbury, opens the door by a housemaid, pours hot water out of a coarse can into a tin bath tub in the morning, refuses me carriages, stalls, champagne, flowers, and the gentle quiet of the things I want. I have packed away all my pretty dresses. The long trails of chiffon and crêpe de

THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

chine were like sprays of arbutus turning brown and curling up at the edge.

The house is full of Canadians. They know me, of course—everyone knows the Knowleses of Deans Park; but I feel like a vulture in a nest of canaries.

They consider it improper for me to be travelling alone, and only overlook it because I am supposed to be an artist.

But the familiarity of the standpoint suffocates me. It is the mental temper that I once held so passionately myself. The social code of Canada is contemptuous of even the appearance of anything not right.

Cigarettes, bridge, cocktails, the very chiffon on my dressing-gown, seem out of focus, immoral. But it gives me nevertheless an interesting feeling of being something secretly wicked. I have com-

THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

menced to wear a black dress with a bunch of white tulle at my throat.

How I want money! The Rich, the Rich, the Rich: they can take each nerve and moment and instinct, and set it in a park, in a conservatory, under an orchestra, out in the sun, and cheerfully breed every luxuriance our minds and frames can demand. The only limit to their satisfaction is the fact that they are finite. They inherit the mental attitude of the Emperor who tried to get around his limitations in the matter of suppers. Only millionaires live. The others only have a more or less satisfied struggle for existence, to form substrata of society, so that those with money can have their flare up on top.

If I had been born in the slums I would have been an anarchist. How can the poor possibly come out of their fetid dens,

THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

and see carriages and flower-banked windows, without longing to seize the rich by the throat and choke the power of enjoyment out of them? I can never turn aside to let a carriage pass without a mental snarl.

And wealth is for brains and the brave; for those who can get it, it's there to be had. Those who haven't got it are, generally speaking, fools.

But all the things I want are barricaded in by money. Life is no use to me unless I have them. Life indeed in itself is of no value to anyone. Why should one spend existence in earning money, merely to eat and to have a roof under which to sleep? I do not want to earn a living, I want to live. If I have talents they are for my own pleasure, to increase the number of things in the world that are beautiful and interesting to me; why should I turn them into loaves of bread?

THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

The very fact of being a woman makes earning a living an absurdity. We want to be consoled by all the lovely things of existence—soft cushions and flowers and lace and music—for the chain of our oblique life.

And they are all in the world, they are all to be had, these things I want so passionately, this paradise of beauty! No imagined, vague heaven, but living, palpable things, the luxury of the earth, the quiet of mind to feel it, to fathom it, to go deep into it, smothering the senses in flaming skies and perfume and voluptuous furs.

I am human, I live, I am of the world; and the beauty of the world is supreme and I want it.

The poor are just as much mutilated as though they had an eye gouged out, an ear cut off, fingers lopped off: as if they only had the sense of smell for onions,

THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

sewer gas, and the nastiness of dirty streets.

No, no, I shall live completely; be capable of having all the pleasure life can give, or else pitch away the castrated thing they have given me as life.

Monday.—The pigeons in the courtyard of the British Museum are like those in the piazza of St. Mark's in Venice—flexible, iridescent, smooth. I paused on the steps, and they came near me without fear, making their soft, cuddling sound, their exquisite throats arching with life, the silver feathers glistening in the wet, the one beautiful living thing there.

Human things made of squalor, semi-poverty, grey faces, ugliness, crawled up and down the steps, stood like noisome pools under the mute wide stone: but the Museum stood open, huge, impersonal,

THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

while the diseased streams went in and out between its columns.

Inside the reading-room the dust of dreams has fastened on the place like a cloud of mental parasites. No one is young, none of them will ever be old, they are petrified in eternal wonder.

Kisses, and clouds, and the music of grass, and the little waves of the sea—what have they, or will they know, of these? I too felt shut out. I too am poor. I some day would be—what was that phrase? It was Tennyson of all people—I too would be “old and past desire.”

It was intolerable. I swept out and almost stumbled all over the ugly, waddling, stupid pigeons, and telephoned to Jim that I would go with him to Claridge's for tea.

I'm not—old yet. Not yet, not yet, not yet. . . .

THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

I am afraid of life. I don't want to live, to prove that Life is unreal, and that dreams are the only truth. I know I could let my mind use my life with absolute unscrupulousness for its own amusement;—make it a dress to masquerade in, wines to excite, lights to dazzle, while Mind would sit aside, like a grinning Chinese god, watching the effect of the differently expressed spasms of instinct.

If I once chose reality, I would not like to think that there was any pleasure, any excitement of emotion, no matter how forbidden, that I could not know. But are the emotions of humanity after all so extreme, so intense? Passion, love, honour, lust: they are the motives of Art; but how literally would these things affect me if put into the shape of actual days and flesh?

We human beings play the children to

THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

the Pied Piper of Hamelin of the Poets. We are led an absurd dance to the tune of pain and desire and regret. The mental pace is set for us of tears, of stated sorrows, and penitences. But it's all lies. There is no trouble, no regret, no pain, but what is functional, physical, machine-made, automatic. We should be as blithe as the beasts, except for the finger- and tooth-ache they have too, if we didn't deceive ourselves about the permanence and quality of our appetites.

I don't; I know that, outside physical accident, I could never have what is called sorrow, except the grinding grief of not having enough money to get the beauty out of the world, the joy of living. I even almost wonder if it is worth while to put the automatic humanity of me into motion, whether the amusement I would get out of it would pay for the risk I would

THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

run of being found out in stealing its strings.

A winter fog is creeping over London, a shuddering fog, trembling with phantom hands that wave before the eyes; shivering with ghost faces that grin in the bubbling lights. It steals through the iron lacework of boughs to fawn on the leaden outline of the water.

It is hard to come out of the cloister of books and music to the raw world of men and women. To have all the bloom of the world's genius rubbed off by seeing the realities of what it pretends to describe.

We want to have everything always at the fever point of some artist who has seen it when it massed in with some extreme mood of his own. As well see in every sooty, suburban train the railway painting of Turner. You suspend yourself by elastic to the height of an inspira-

THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

tion, and rebound in sickening jolts from cathedral pinnacles to the mud on the street.

I am restless; I am consumed with restlessness; and I do not know what I want. London called, and I came back; but I am stronger yet than any power that is forcing me. I belong to myself; I will go away. The adventurer's blood is like that. We Colonials were all bred of adventure at some time.

All Europe is waiting, and the tempting South—but still I do not want to go. Every new country, every new interest for the eyes, alters us; and I want to be the myself of to-day for a while yet—the myself that knew the London of the hawthorn.

Dear London of the parks, the golden river, the towers of St. Stephen's! But

THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

even the Devil hadn't sufficient common sense to stay in Heaven.

The luxury of London, its strength, hold me. I walk down on the Embankment, and watch the red and yellow sails dragging down on the sun-netted river; and I wonder, if I had been a man, what adventure I would have staked for the things I want. I would be a pirate in a red cap and a belt stuck with daggers.

The big slow squares, the mute houses that I knew such a little time ago—all marble and paintings and silk—the lustrous park, empty of the muslin and talk and lace, and with only moving masses of huddled sheep, and the mist wavering through the trees.

And yet it is the same London, my London, the velvet sound of the wheels, and the elusive yellow light, as globe after globe melts into the secret mist.

THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

It is all a theatre, a play. I wonder if the people over here realise their scenic effect—that their lives are things to look at with their castles, their titles, their traditions? They are always bending to their traditions, and a Past is about as big a drag to a nation as it is to a woman. But we Colonials are always impatient over precedent. To remember a precedent is to remember it is time for change. To change—a change at a risk perhaps—but anything, only change! To stay still is to die. To desire to stay still is to be emasculated before you die.

I loathe London. I hate the rich more than any Socialist ever hated them, because I want what they have, for the beauty of things, the soul of things; not just for the mere crass fact of a bank account. I hate people who have money with the part of me that is everlasting;

THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

it is not money that is denied me, it is life.

I suppose if I chose to work for it, if I wasted years in going around with my hair half down and my collar unfastened—my throat always swells up when I pretend to think—I could get it if I would use my brains. But I don't choose to use them. I detest my brains. If a woman wants to make money, the front row in the chorus is the place for her. Work is as unnatural to a woman as virtue to a man. Women who make money by their brains always seem to me like the unhappy monkeys who career round in a circus on ponies' backs, in the futile attempt to emulate the appearance of a jockey.

When I go out and see the carriages, the motors, the women wrapped up in priceless furs; when I see the diamonds at night; when I get glimpses of the marble-walled houses; when I get the breath of

THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

orchids; when I see carvings and paintings and lace and brocade that I want, my soul sickens. I love it all; it's so fathomlessly lovely; it is the climax of loveliness that man has made; it's all the beauty our brains can conceive of, and I love it, and I want it.

I won't be shut out. That is what life is. If I can't have these things, I can die.

I am going to Monte Carlo, and I am going to gamble for it. I am glad it is considered wicked, I am glad I consider it wicked, I am glad it is dangerous. I kiss the idea that I shall force Fate.

I must have them—three months, six weeks again of the glamour, brocade walls and motors and orchids, costly dresses, little fragile lace fans with mother-of-pearl sticks.

To see Oscar again. I can play it again, have it again, know it again. My blood

THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

is flaming. I have a big bunch of Parma violets in front of me, and the window is wide open, letting the wind sweep in over me. I am burning with fear, desire, excitement. My veins are humming like electric wires.

What was it Lady Macbeth said—"To unsex her"—to empty her body of a woman's nature. Well, I renounce my country while I am doing these things; while I touch even the borders of black things, I denationalise myself. We wastrels of atavism are better in Europe than at home. I am no longer Canadian.

But I must say that half the pleasure that I am getting out of going to Monte Carlo is because I was brought up to look on it as the climax of immorality. A rigorous early training is necessary to impart a good deal of the sparkle into life.

It will be a hideous world when everything is permitted. Our nerves can't sup-

THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

ply all the dynamics, we need laws to break in order to give our vitality exercise.

MONTE CARLO

December.—Beside the train at the station red geraniums dripped over the wall. The sea was purple; a broad band of vermilion barricaded the sky, and, as we poured from the train, there was an even cry from somewhere of "ascenseur, ascenseur!"—raucous, unchanging. I think that on some who knew Monte Carlo very well that cry would be permanently marked.

Behind the station, a white sweep of steps curved up into a garden of palms. Little constellations of lights glittered through the trees.

The horses swept me up the steep hill. Their blood, too, was going fast; the whole atmosphere was quick.