

THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

places, to disclose the marvel of things hidden from us in the mystery of fact.

On the other side of bread and butter knowledge exists a marvellous world of permitted curiosity. Why should these things be closed to me? I have in myself the possibilities of them all: all literature only mirrors the changing impulses of instinct. Even the laws of Leviticus were framed against things done. No one legislates against the imagination. The Thousand and One Nights glitter gaily, serenely, through things unsaid, unwritable, which were accepted as facts—laughable facts—for the retailing under a July moon.

Yet I don't want to share the flames of Semele as the price of seeing human nature as it is.

FOURTH DAY

THE sea is a glamour of iridescent foam. The ship is surrounded by a whirr of white wings as the gulls hover in flashes; now and then they poise with wings extended, like visions of the Holy Grail.

I suppose we must all serve some altar, and sacrifice ourselves for some uncomprehended power—the Trappists, Devil Worship, the Salvation Army, all to exhaust the unused vitality of men and women; Nature insists on that shudder of energy traversing the world in some way.

Sensuality, the Cloister, Art, they throw mankind bleeding against the bars of sense. We cannot feel to the extent of our desire, enjoy to the depth we know

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pleasure exists. We strain and shudder and pant before the possibilities our senses shadow for us. It has all been said. "For now we see as in a glass darkly."

The boundless power religions, creeds, have had over women consists in the promises they all have of a future life.

Our life in reality is so short. Just as women learn the value of living they are reduced to the level of sexlessness. But the grateful creed seduces the mind by the unacknowledged hope of eternal youth, eternal beauty, eternal pleasure.

The churches are warped even into my life. The early Nonconformist church in America, with high, black oak pulpit, and panellings of black oak, behind the seats for the ministers. I have looked up at this, and felt my blood shrivel under the warnings of a physical Hell of fire; and then my eyes in weariness would wander to the

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grey tablets on each side of the pulpit, with the Ten Commandments written on them in gold letters. People who could break one of these in actuality were somehow out of the scheme of ordinary creation to me then—red impalpable figures of immortal Sin, figures wavering in a premonition of eternal flame.

On the Pacific Coast that one, white, solitary mountain dominated the river, and the church was near the river—the church, with the new mysteries of lilies and stained windows and gold for the altar. It made a benediction for me when I would pass it, going to Chinatown, to the hall where the occasional musicians from Europe played—where Alf of my romance of cloud played. He would give as encores the things he played for me at my lessons. Those lessons!—the perfume from the bowls of daffodils that filled my music room, the glimpses through the long

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windows of the wonder-mountain, the languor of Chopin, the intermittent flame and ice at my heart . . . those biting Chopin waltzes and smother of the Nocturnes . . . Schumann—he taught me enough to translate the complexity of Schumann, not perhaps quite as he wanted. After the *Nachtstücke* or the *Kinderscenen*, when the lesson would be over, I would fly to my room, and turn to the Book of Jude, and kneel and read, though my eyes smarted with the tears: “Ye who are tempted with the temptation of your flesh—”

I thought it would be very wrong of me to let him kiss me, I did not intend to marry him—and then, the next Sunday in the church, the majesty of the service would calm down all the half pretence, half real, anguish. I could kneel there openly, while those magnificent prayers were being made—prayers all suited, I felt, to the tragedy of my renunciation.

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“And now he who is able to keep you from falling—present you faultless . . .” I have forgotten how it ends, but it was very beautiful, and I felt it keenly. But perhaps Alf’s kiss would have saved me from Oscar’s. I might not have been so curious.

Then Westminster Abbey. The churches rose in grandeur, in keeping with the extent of my emotional crises. I have no doubt the gods play with us and provide adequate settings for our marionette passions.

I cannot say I voluntarily chose Westminster Abbey as my only church in London, because it was near the House of Commons; but that, and its splendour, its insufferance of anything known there but the climax of emotion, made a background to that phase of my love pose.

“The chapel of St. Faith’s is open for

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private prayer." I would go and pray to be delivered from my stupendous temptation. I pictured myself in the little dim chapel, as the marvellous music of the evensong service raptured my soul, with tears over my wickedness. I couldn't feel in the least wicked, that's why I wanted to go to St. Faith's and pray, so that I could get some of the suitable and exciting sense of Sin.

But instead my heart blazed a way for itself through the walls; it saw into the palace opposite, the long stone corridors, the stained windows, the men, my lover. And, as a general rule, I went over after my prayers and had tea on the Terrace. The Abbey was so convenient.

FIFTH DAY

I LIKE the roar of the wind against the cabin behind me. I like being safe in this sheltered place. The storm whirls close, but I am as still as though in the clasped centre of a maelstrom. One does not realise the sea till it is seen in this mood, nor the sea's power and the winter of the air meeting in a mist of snow—a Circe who draws near to the waves till they are changed to ice.

It puts in front of the eyes the mood that I love, the unmatched power, the clanging fury, straight from the limits of the world. It is like the violence of ourselves of which I am curious, the great motives, great brains, great crimes, the