

return for their hearts? Only pain—longing for that which they may not have. It is as though they stood on the shores of a mighty ocean, looking out through the night, stretching out their hands over the sea. For what? For a star that will fade, for a love they may not have, for a life they may not live. And so they stand, longing for ever; their cry of passionate appeal rings up to the stars, and over the waters floats their long, wailing cry, ‘Oh! God! is it for ever?’” Then, laughing exultingly, he cried—“There, is an answer, but they cannot hear it!”

Seeing me glance shudderingly at the hearts on his girdle he continued—

“I will tell you whence they come, and why I hold them. See you how far my heart-girdle reaches? Far back till it is lost in the Ages! These are the hearts of the women in yonder valley. I have torn them out. That is why many are bleeding, and all are scarred and marked. For, though to human eyes the wounds seem to heal, the scars are there for ever. See!” he said, pointing to the bleeding heart on his spear, “I have just snatched it; I have no gentle touch!”

He ceased speaking and, glancing cruelly at me, turned and flew back to the clouds.

Whilst I wonderingly watched the clouds through which he had passed, I saw another angel fly towards me.

He was fair and shining, with a gentle, loving face.

Like the black angel he flew on until he touched the path-way at my feet.

He also had a girdle of hearts, but it was short and the hearts were not torn and scarred.

I wondered who he was, and like the former angel, he discerned my thoughts and said—

“I am Death. You wonder at my girdle and its shortness. It, too, is made of women’s hearts, but they have been gently won. I have taken their hearts to the Land Beyond, but they keep the sweet memory of them. When those women sleep and go to that Land, I give them back their hearts. That is why my girdle is so short. My brother, the



black
angel,

keeps his

for ever, till the

Day of Judgment, and

whether they will then be

healed from their wounds

is only known to the Great

King. Look again at the Valley!”

I looked and saw that the former multitude of women had vanished; in their places was a lesser multitude of patient, gentle women.

They, like the others, had no hearts, but in their stead they had Memory and Hope, those two great Comforters.

Then this angel also flew back to cloud-land, the women faded in the mist, and I felt a pain at my breast—I awoke and knew that it was all a dream—and yet not all, for I felt a dull, aching pain, and I knew then that the bleeding heart on the spear was mine—my heart was gone, and the pain would be there for ever!