

him, at the heart first, but reaching down into unfathomable depths, and growing as it searched the abyss. He was a babbling child again, and worse was coming. When the little door opened at last, there would be left behind a dead body, shortly to be laid away in the mould. Although he knew this body was not himself, still, it being dear to him, he raged that he could not secure its annihilation, could not save it from vulgar handling, from the wretched pageant of death and burial and monumental stone. At this point something in him revolted and made war on the fact called death. He cursed it so fluently that Miss Farnsworth would have been scandalised had his words been distinct. Seth Morton soon to become a clod! While a host of common creatures—dirty laborers, foolish and poor and without hope in this world—would live on robust and joyful. This thought gnawed him even when time had given him back some strength, a little speech, and hope.

'You are a lucky chap,' said the medical man. 'You will get well, and be around again as brisk as ever, when you should have been dead a month ago. But you will have to be careful for years.'

'Just live with the sword hanging over my head?' he replied. 'I would have preferred to die.'

'Part of your sickness, my dear chap,' said the doctor. 'You'll be glad enough next year to enjoy life on half-decent terms.'

'I'm enjoying it now,' he admitted; 'but only when I avoid thinking.'

He detested the doctor for his robust strength, his ruddy face, active body, and strong voice. What right had any one to such qualities when he lived without them? He quarrelled with his visitors on this score, and they did not know the cause. He tilted even with Monsignor—for whom he had greater respect than ever—while he sneered at him for his energy and vivacity. What right had the prelate to this surplus vigor, while he lay half alive in his chair? Monsignor read the feeling in his eyes, and gave him an antidote.

'Do not be envious of the healthy,' said he. 'Their time of shame and humiliation comes even as yours. Let that thought kill your envy.'

'It never occurred to me, Monsignor, and of course it is so. The gayest and happiest and strongest will come to this terrible moment. In a hundred years not one of all these millions will be alive. They will have passed through the little door, suffered the shame and the humiliation.'

'You did not suffer much pain?' said Monsignor.

He thought it over before answering. Looking back to the last night of health, and the long space between, he seemed to be staring into the depths of Dante's Inferno, where no fires blazed, where only a black atmosphere choked the laboring breath. Pain! After the confusion of his brain had departed, was there a single moment waking or sleeping devoid of pain? And the varieties of suffering! One morning he looked at his room, for which he cared little, and a wave of anguish swept over his heart at the thought that all these trifles of use and ornament might next day be thrown into the auction room. In health he would have made little of selling them, but now they had become inexpressibly dear. He thought of the house, the grounds, the horses and cattle, the books and pictures, and every thought added to his suffering. Rather than endure it, he would see that all were destroyed by fire. The night tortured him. Others slept and he could not, and the slow hours beat him as with scorpions. Would morning never come? He remembered that his dear mother had slept only briefly for weeks before she died. She was old, worn out, and such suffering was to be expected. How precisely he had uttered that statement. No one could help her, and the rest of the world had to sleep, no matter how wakeful the sick. And he had slept while his mother dear sat in her chair, scant of breath, sure of death, praying for it; yet condemned to count the seconds till the dawn, and to look forward to further pain.

'Yes, I suffered considerable pain,' he replied, in his precise way; for now he had control of himself.

'I am quite able now to believe in some kind of hell; for I went through it, Monsignor.'

'Mostly of the mind, I fancy.'

'A child without a child's unconsciousness and innocence,' he quoted smiling. 'It would take a book to tell all that I suffered. It is much like being buried alive.'

The tears suddenly streamed down his cheeks, and Monsignor comforted him.

'These hot tears are not for my own pain, but for the foolishness of the past,' said he. 'I must have been a hard character in my other day. I look to myself now like a brass machine, which thought and felt mechanically, and ignored more than half of life, and cackled and disputed as such a machine would, with brass brains and feelings. I settled my exit from life in machine fashion, as a matter of a few weeks at most, and of no feeling; and here I have been through such an inferno as Dante with all his powers could not describe.'

Monsignor spoke to him soothingly, but feeling and exhaustion had overcome him, and for a few minutes he lay back, deathly pale, hardly breathing, so that Monsignor beckoned for the nurse in the next room. He stretched out his hand for Monsignor and murmured:

'Oh, the darkness! That is the worst of all!'

Life ebbed for a few minutes, then came slowly back again. Some force within him seemed to be fighting for expression, or deliverance, and insisting that he should help in the struggle—he who was so weary that the mere sight of effort tired him still more. This battle went on tirelessly, and at times, as now, he murmured:

'If I could only give up and die!'

'Life is too strong within you, and it is a good sign,' said the priest.

'But life is not worth so much suffering.'

Monsignor remained silent. Seth looked at him wistfully.

'You must have had experiences which help you to understand what I have endured, what I am suffering now,' he said.

'And which help me to bear it,' replied the priest.

'Your case is so simple: a rich man, surrounded with aid and comfort, whose illness gives no one sorrow or trouble, whose death means wealth to his heirs, and who is about to get well and to live for many years. But I have seen a young man dying with full knowledge of the end, whose eyes looked on a helpless wife and five little children, soon to be handed over to the poor-house. What is your suffering to that, my friend?'

'And how did he die?'

'Peacefully, somewhat helped by exaggerated Catholic sentiment.'

Seth laughed at the irony before he answered:

'I know now that there is no exaggeration in your case of the sick and the dying, Monsignor.'

His convalescence ended in September—the month beautiful in the Adirondacks, where the maple and oak forests flamed with autumn glory, and the dark, stately pines and spruces put on a deeper green by contrast. The physician gave him a rule of life. All his precision returned, his poise resumed its ancient sway, the clocks were wound up at the proper hour, and vagrant papers pursued to the dust-heap. The villagers perceived no change in him, pronouncing him as sound as ever, while Monsignor was in doubt for a time. He sensed some deep change in the man, but the signs flitted by like shadows. The late illness was never mentioned, still less discussed. Seth Morton knew every soul in Westport, and it was not remarkable, therefore, that he should sit for half an hour by a sick man's bed, or chat with such invalids as crawled sadly about the streets, or listen patiently to an old man's complaints of his ills. Monsignor, however, found it remarkable that he should follow the course of one parishioner's fatal sickness, and be present at the administration of the last rites: yet more, that he should read the prayers for the sick and the agonising with relish, and inquire about them; and that, in addition, he should quote