

The Body of His Desire

A Romance of the Soul

BY

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The Body of His Desire

A Romance of the South

By
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TO THE
COMPREHENDING SYMPATHY
OF MY FRIEND
ESTHER LADY BLOMFIELD
I DEDICATE
THIS SIMPLE STORY OF
THE STRUGGLES OF A SOUL



“ His head bent nearer to the divan ” (*see page 187*).

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

CHAPTER I

"Great problems of existence show us human creatures tried by the old passions and quivering with the old pains."—JUSTIN MCCARTHY.

AT the top of a block of mansions in the Bloomsbury region lived Donck Van Dreen—if indeed that curious person could be described as living anywhere, for Van Dreen had inhabited many cities but had never stayed long in one of them.

This block of flats was not so high as some sky-scrapers in New York and Chicago, where he had recently resided, but he was sufficiently near the heavens to obtain certain things essential to his well-being—pure air, comparatively speaking, and freedom from inquisitive observation. He disliked comment upon his habits and movements, and for this reason kept no servant. The lift boys attended to his simple requirements. These youths usually began by jeering at Van

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

Dreen as a crank, and almost invariably ended by becoming his devoted slaves. They denied him to any callers who presented themselves uninvited, carried up messages, and, occasionally, when it did not suit Van Dreen to go out for his meals, did a bit of "jackalling," as he termed the process of provisioning, having picked up the phrase among Anglo-Indians. For Van Dreen had lived in India, as well as in America and any number of other places.

Van Dreen was a busy man in his own way, which was not the way of most people. His Bloomsbury flat served him just now as a convenient base for certain philanthropic work he had undertaken—work which obliged him to be absent from home often for considerable periods, while at other times it necessitated his remaining for weeks together at his flat.

Yet there was little of the typical recluse about Donck Van Dreen, and though, in some respects, his habits suggested the mystic, yet in appearance and manner he was cheerfully human. A short man, having a breadth of shoulder out of proportion with his other-

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

wise slender make, swift and silent of movement, with an aggressive outward action of the shoulders, a forward poise of the head, and an inquisitive sort of nose—concave, with a fine tip that seemed to wander in advance of the rest of his features and gave him the look of a wiry hound whose muzzle is pointed straight on the scent. As to his nationality, the pale brown of his skin might have been due either to exposure in tropical climes or to an admixture of southern blood in his veins. On the whole, his general aspect suggested the Asiatic rather than the Western, but he had, besides his name with its “Knickerbocker” ring, many tricks of phrase and accent that were distinctly American. In face and frame he was lean and strongly built. His intellectually shaped head was covered with a generous growth of coarse black hair, and he had a black scrubby moustache and a short black beard. His eyes, dark grey, shadowed by stubbly, coal-black brows, were extremely keen and characteristic. At times they would take on a filmy, unfathomable expression as if the real man were ever so far away; then

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

suddenly they would blaze out and fix themselves in a concentrated fashion on someone or something, showing that indeed Mr. Van Dreen was very much on the spot. Commonly speaking, however, they were alert and shrewdly penetrative, dancing vivaciously if anything tickled the man's sense of humour. And that was pretty often, for Van Dreen had a knack of seeing even in the tragedy of life some compensating gleam of comedy. Nevertheless the tragedy of life often weighed heavily upon his spirit, especially during one bitter winter in London. It was at this time that a strange drama of the soul, set forth in the following pages, came within the sphere of his ministrations.

That was a terrible winter of fog, frost, snow and bodily privation. The hunger-wolf prowled through London streets, looking from the fierce eyes of gaunt-featured, workless men, and the miserable faces of starving women and children. The Thames was partially frozen; greedy gulls circled in St. James's Park. Famine-stricken waifs of humanity were found lying dead on the Embankment; and then arose the regular

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

outcry in the papers and the appeal to the wealthy, the pouring in of funds and the usual red-tapish delay in relief organisation. Meanwhile Van Dreen descended from his eyrie and walked in the gloomy by-ways, rendering help, spiritual and material.

Now, in the course of his charitable peregrinations Van Dreen heard a great deal about a Revivalist preacher—one Reginald Chalmers—over whose sermons it appeared that a large part of the community was going fairly mad.

All over London, on street hoardings, he saw placards announcing addresses to be delivered by this preacher at a church or conventicle called St. Matthias and the Evangels, situated not very far from his own flat. From the wording of the placards Van Dreen judged Chalmers to be somewhat of a hot gospeller. Nevertheless, the headings of his discourses suggested that he was a man of culture, and, from the letters after his name, Van Dreen inferred that he had taken a university degree. He also gathered that Mr. Chalmers had been for some little time located in the West Central district,

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

and that he was reputed one of the most eloquent and impressive orators of recent days.

Van Dreen soon made an opportunity to observe this for himself. As he often passed the opening of the cul-de-sac street in which St. Matthias' was situated, he turned one evening down it, attracted by the crowd coming out after the service. He found politicians, club-men, and Bond Street dandies elbowed in the porch by cabmen, chimney-sweeps and artisans; ladies of the great world jostled by charwomen; seamstresses and factory girls, and middle-class Pharisees, walking forth side by side with Magdalens; while, judging by their strained, absorbed faces, it seemed as if all had caught the infection of some emotional epidemic.

Of course it was clear to Van Dreen that no ordinary preacher could thus play upon the varied feelings of such a mixed assemblage. There must be, he decided, some powerful spirit behind the oratory. He wondered, and felt vaguely interested over it all, as he bent his steps homeward.

That night, when he was sitting alone in

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

his flat occupying himself by certain exercises in mental concentration, the Inner Voice—which, since long before the days when Socrates' *daimon* instructed that philosopher in the will of the gods, has issued command to certain privileged instruments selected for service to humanity—spoke to Van Dreen.

Next night found him again in the dim little street leading out of the great artery of traffic. The night was bitterly cold. Over the city lay a dun veil, half fog, half congealed vapour, through which gas-burners flared luridly and electric arc-lamps shone like phantasmal moons. To Van Dreen, coming out of the garish highway into this dim little street, buildings looked curiously unreal, and the hurrying throng, seen as through a shroud, might have been a pack of ghosts.

The church rose at the end of the cul-de-sac, dark and solemn, with a squat belfry and a roomy porch supported on massive, stuccoed pillars, almost black with London grime. Two lamps on each side of the porch, and a feeble glimmer from within the church, when the baize-covered doors opened

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

to admit fresh comers, seemed only to intensify the shadowy gloom.

Van Dreen slackened his pace when he drew near the porch, and slipping behind one of the massive pillars, waited, in order to scrutinise the people passing within. Their faces did not show clearly through the mist, but in the gait of each one might be seen the same purposeful eagerness. As on the previous occasion, he was amazed at the diversity of types. Women of fashion could be distinguished by their slender grace and unobtrusive elegance, and men from the smart clubs were as easily picked out. So, too, were thinkers, and women of the working-bee order, with strong jaws, odd-looking hats, and ready-made coats and skirts. There were literary and artistic people as well, and a good sprinkling of Americans. Added to these, a multitude from the poorest classes, and it appealed to Van Dreen's broad sense of equality that no one seemed to resent the social medley. Now a man brushed by, wearing a sumptuous furred coat, the collar turned up for comfort, or perhaps disguise, and closely behind him

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

traped a disreputable hag, holding the corner of her threadbare mantle over her mouth to keep the cold air from her drink-ravaged lungs. Here bustled a comfortable matron with a respectable householder in broadcloth, and there a derelict student of the sort which haunts the Museum Reading-Room. Shrinking behind a cheerful party of suburban young people walked a drooping widow in shabby weeds, while an energetic working woman pushed herself before two opulent dames who had left their carriage at the entrance of the narrow street. After them, impatiently curbing his pace, strode a strong-featured City merchant; next, an ascetic-looking, hollow-cheeked individual slipped dreamily by—a wraith of the fog-world, obscuring for an instant the long lines of a nurse's uniform-cloak beyond. And here hobbled a spectacled, white-haired old woman; and there slouched a man with a big forehead, wearing his hat pushed back, and with a tired look about his eyes.

There was no end to the variety and number of these human samples, and the peculiar, hungry, hankering look he discerned

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

in all worried Van Dreen a little as he asked himself with what kind of spiritual food the Reverend Reginald Chalmers was feeding these diverse souls.

Van Dreen did not leave the shelter of the pillar until the stream of people had flowed into the building. He had gathered a good deal from his inspection of Mr. Chalmers' congregation. He did not move at the sound of the organ, nor even when a well-trained choir began to sing a hymn. The music could be heard clearly through the baize doors; it was good enough to satisfy cultivated ears, and still sufficiently catchy to please the ignorant listener. It had the same note of emotional fervour as the faces of those going into the church, and Van Dreen himself liked it much better than if it had been of a severer style. When the hymn was over he went in, and took the only vacant place he could find in view of the pulpit. The preacher had mounted it, and was silently praying, his head buried in his hands. Van Dreen's gaze, which had already taken in the plain and sombre outlines of the building, in which there was small

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

attempt at decoration, became riveted upon a most striking and beautiful object on the altar. This was a large ivory crucifix of superbly artistic workmanship. Later, Van Dreen learned that it had been the gift of a rich woman, one of Mr. Chalmers' devotees. By a careful arrangement of lamps, the light was concentrated upon the fine attenuated limbs and on the drooping, majestic head, crowned with thorns, whose expression of sublime anguish must have recalled to every heart present the Immemorial Sacrifice on Calvary.

That same arrangement of lamps brought into relief the figure of Mr. Chalmers. He had risen from his knees, and as he stood there, against the dim background of the chancel, Van Dreen saw one of the most singular and impressive countenances he had ever beheld.

CHAPTER II

"The dead never die utterly. They sleep in the darkest cell of tired hearts and busy brains—to be startled at rarest moments only by the echo of some voice that recalls their past."—LAFCADIO HEARN.

MR. CHALMERS preached in his cassock. His face, which Van Dreen studied with absorbed attention, was large, massive, bony-featured, having deep-set eyes like caves of mysterious light, and with a strange fixity of expression. The eyebrows were long and strongly marked. The forehead, extremely high and rather narrow, receded slightly at the top—a characteristic the more noticeable because of the breadth, horizontally, from the outer end of each eyebrow, and the width and prominence of the high cheek bones. This part of the face was rudely, almost barbarically, moulded. It had a look of inscrutable calm, not by any means suggesting insensibility, but rather immense will force and an enormous reserve of elemental passion. The cheeks were hollow ;

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

the nose long, faintly aquiline, and with inflexible up-cut nostrils. The mouth was large, with wide, fleshy lips, the upper one drawn tightly over rather protruding teeth, the lower one full, yet strong in its own way. The square chin had a cleft in the middle and was clean shaven. On the high forehead, the hair went back, producing an effect of premature baldness, though at that time Chalmers could not have been more than thirty-five. It grew down diagonally towards the temples, and hung behind the fleshily lobed ears in wiry locks that had a wave at the end. The crisp black filaments seemed to possess a life of their own, and indeed the whole form of the man, gaunt and lean as it was, gave an impression of extraordinary virility.

Van Dreen leaned forward, his eyes under their black pent-house brows, gazing at the preacher, and taking on that glazed, distant look which made them seem the eyes of a seer. He became at once aware of a species of electrical energy which streamed from every pore of the preacher. In this Van Dreen recognised the man to be a living conductor

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

of one of the most vital forms of magnetism. But there was a contradiction between the quality of that force and the passionate personality through which it was fated to manifest itself. Cold, yet emotional; self-contained, but with an immensely powerful will, an enormous egoism, an overmastering craving for knowledge and spiritual dominion; with, moreover, psychic faculties far fuller developed than their possessor was probably himself aware—that was how Reginald Chalmers manifested himself before this earnestly scrutinising student of human nature. Indistinguishable by an ordinary observer, all was nevertheless plainly revealed to Van Dreen by means of the magnetic aura or vaporous cloud surrounding the preacher, which varied in hue, shape, and consistency according to the mental attitude he showed in his discourse. And as Van Dreen watched its changing aspects, he found reason to suspect that all was not well with the soul of Reginald Chalmers.

For a little while Van Dreen was far more interested in the personality of the preacher than in the matter or even actual

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

manner of its delivery. He was affected by the music of Chalmers' elocution, though considerably less so than the rest of the congregation, or even the preacher himself, who appeared to be as much carried away by the power of his own oratory as any emotional woman among his hearers. Chalmers' gestures thrilled by their spontaneity. His whole personality seemed to respond to the spirit of eloquence that swayed him. It was as though that eloquence belonged not only to the present, but to a mighty past. From his strange, deep-set eyes, there flashed forth at moments a fire intense and mysterious, as a flame that has burned through dead ages in some rock-tomb holding the secrets of a remote antiquity. Never pausing for a word, his eloquence swept along like a flood, absorbing, overwhelming, but changeful as a river which has its deeps and shallows, its rapids and its whirlpools. His voice vibrated with repressed excitement as it painted the dangerous frivolities of the rich and the insidious temptations of smart society. It boomed rhythmic thunder in denunciation of the

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

Mammon of Iniquity, then softened to the piercing sweetness of a melody in a minor key as it pleaded for the austere life of the soul. All the devices of oratory appeared at Chalmers' command, yet, through every variety of subject and intonation, his gripping intensity remained. The marvellous voice and charm of the man were irresistible. Faces grew whiter, eyes dilated with tears; men and women sank involuntarily upon their knees, and, here and there, sounded the hoarse murmur of a strangled sob.

Van Dreen watched the spell working for some minutes, then he began to analyse the substance of the sermon. Mr. Chalmers presented an unusual blend of the popular Revivalist and the man of letters. The emotional quality in his delivery touched both the cultured and the uneducated, while his reputation for having taken high honours at college, and for being an authority in his special line of Biblical research, gave him an intellectual platform from which to address the learned. To Van Dreen's surprise, however, Chalmers' scholarship seemed confined within the lines of a narrow ecclesiasticism.

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

There was a lack of those broadly human principles and of that sweet tolerance conveyed in St. James's definition of pure and undefiled religion. And apart from Chalmers' musical elocution, a certain literary quality in the substance of the address, the picturesque of his imagery and, above all, the indescribable effect of that personal electric quality, his discourse would not have struck an impartial listener as profoundly original.

Its subject was the Cross, viewed in the different aspects of that sacred emblem presented since the opening of the Christian era. The Cross sacrificial ; the Cross militant ; the Cross as a motive in politics, as a regenerative social power ; as an influence in Art. But primarily, the Cross in its symbolism of fleshly renunciation. "For only," said the preacher, in fluty, poignant accents, "only in dying had the Cross lived, only when steeped in blood and agony had it been able to rise glorious and conquering. As the badge of pomp and worldly power, it had failed. As the support of luxury and temporal supremacy, it had tottered. In poverty, humility and chastity, its soldiers had

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

triumphed; in greed, lust and self-seeking, they had ever been overthrown."

Ignoring the cosmic and pagan significance of the symbol, Chalmers reviewed the history of the Cross from the darkness of Calvary, when the Roman instrument of degradation was exalted for all time into humanity's holiest emblem, until the present day, when the Cross rears itself proudly in every city of the world, bearing magnificent witness to the triumph of the crucified Galilean. The preacher seemed to stretch a vast Shadow Sheet upon which wraiths of the mighty past came and went, vitalised for a few seconds by the magic of his eloquence. In lightning-like scenes of gorgeous horror the early martyrs re-enacted their martyrdom. Here was pictured the last Christian sacrifice in the Colosseum, and Telemachus the monk was stoned once more. Parenthetically, Chalmers described the tall black Cross he himself remembered seeing in the grass-grown arena within the desolation of those crumbling grey walls which had echoed the roars of wild beasts impatient for their human prey. There, on the Shadow Sheet, shone

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

the Vision of Constantine, changing the fate of Europe. There was unfurled the sacred Labarum, deposing the old-time victorious eagles of Rome. There, when the glittering pageantry of emperors and bishops of the East had set, not to rise afresh, the Cross, which had been lowered before the Crescent, floated aloft again, and the banner of the Crusaders signalled a reign of religious chivalry. Through the mediæval night of ignorance and crime he showed the Cross gleaming, one single constellation of hope; in days of violence and despair sealing the orphan to its service, promising shelter to the outcast, offering comfort to the dying. Then kings of the world dragged down the Cross into the murk of intrigue and, placing it on crowns and sceptres, turned it into the symbol of an unrighteous domination, so that as a power political its glory was dimmed. Defiled by the lusts of the Borgias, it had need to be cleansed with the blood of saintly votaries and purified in the flames of Savonarola's pyre. Then, on the canvas of vision, its rays illumined anew those rough, darkened ways along which St. Francis toiled, barefoot,

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

rope-girdled, striving after his Master's perfect example of renunciation. In majestic imagery the preacher described that road of thorns and sacrifice, along which the arms of the Cross had pointed to the ineffable splendours of the Heavenly City; and he told of chastened souls bending thitherward and seeking to portray the beauties their spiritual eyes beheld.

And on the preacher's Shadow Sheet, Art came to its new birth, when the people of Florence bore Cimabue's Madonna to be enshrined, and the painter-monks, kneeling before the Cross, wielded their brushes while they prayed.

So far Van Dreen had listened with admiration mixed with impatience, for rhetorical ornament did not appeal overmuch to his practical mind. His attention was, however, fully arrested when Mr. Chalmers began to apply the lesson of the Cross to modern social life. Chalmers' doctrine was that only by fiercest self-denial might men hope to attain any spiritual height; and it appeared that, the height gained, not a comfortable square inch would be left them

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

to stand on. Van Dreen knew well that necessary suffering rightly borne is a beautiful thing, and fruitful of priceless experience for the soul. But suffering that comes from flagellation of all human instincts, implying that the Creator must necessarily be at war with Nature—that exquisite Expression of Himself—appeared to Van Dreen a mistaken method for the fashioning of Christians. For Donck Van Dreen—a specimen rough hewn, as it were, from humanity in the matrix—had the clear insight which discerns God's face in that of all His creatures and in the mirror of every creed.

Now, as Van Dreen watched Mr. Chalmers more and more closely, he was filled with a deep pity for the priest. There was something infinitely pathetic to him in the contrast between the intellectual and magnetic forcefulness of that strange personality and its very apparent human weakness. A troubled pucker every now and then between the long brows reminded Van Dreen of the perplexed look upon the face of a new-born babe which seems old with the hoar of ages and is yet pitifully young. Despite these

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

observations, Van Dreen had the impression that in the Reverend Reginald Chalmers was embodied a power with which it might be his business to contend. Of what nature he could not yet see. It was a problem that exercised him exceedingly.

Suddenly, in the midst of fiery adjurations to austerity of life, the preacher paused, and in the silence all the people strained to him. He turned dramatically towards the Crucifix on the altar. Pointing to the sublime, thorn-crowned Figure, he invoked the power of the Cross for his people, and himself, that they might have strength to crucify the lusts of the flesh. Not merely the grosser appetites did Mr. Chalmers call on his flock to renounce. His demands were stringent. He interpreted with absolute literalness the injunction to forsake father, mother, wife, children, brethren, and lands, for the gospel that promised everlasting life. More especially did he inveigh against the love of man for woman, and of woman for man. All earthly affections must be plucked out by the roots and freely offered up in purification of the soul of man, though,

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

according to him, man personified but the merest rudiment of Divinity—a rudiment that must be starved and beaten into a maimed growth entirely contradictory, in Van Dreen's view, with the benignant purpose of a God of Love whose will it is that man shall blossom into the image of His perfection. Van Dreen fancied that in Chalmers himself he saw a specimen of that maimed growth. Powerful though the man was, and overflowing with vital force, it seemed as if that very force, shut off from natural efflorescence, had pushed forth unhealthy shoots bearing morbid blooms which had a certain pernicious quality. Whenever Van Dreen tried to pierce the intricacies of this singular development, he found himself baffled by an impenetrable barrier. It was as if in the recesses of Chalmers' being lay a garden of strange enchantment, round which its owner had, by sheer will force, built a wall, the door in which he had resolved no one should discover. Van Dreen wondered whether there grew in that secret garden the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. He did not over-estimate his gift of intuition ;

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

nevertheless Van Dreen was a little puzzled as to why it should not flash a clearer light upon the subtleties of Chalmers' nature, since, on former occasions, when he had had the call to interest himself in any particular person, that power of intuition had invariably come to his assistance, explaining the need for and justifying any action he felt compelled to take.

Presently, however, Van Dreen realised that his gift had not failed him. The peculiar magnetic or etheric emanations issuing from the priest became liberated in denser volume by the enthusiasm of Chalmers' eloquence, and these now appeared to Van Dreen like vaporous billows wreathing and fluctuating to the extent of a yard or so around the preacher. In this billowy formation Van Dreen found the clue for which he had been seeking. It was an apparition so vivid and so lifelike that, for a moment, Van Dreen felt absolutely staggered by its clearness—the apparition of a woman's head. This vision did not disappear in a flash as apparitions are wont to do, but remained floating among the vaporous waves behind the

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

priest's left shoulder. It was a phenomenon which, to any uninstructed person capable of perceiving it, would have seemed either an optical delusion or an unexplainable mystery. But, as Van Dreen reflected, there probably was nobody else in the church capable of perceiving it. He set himself to observe the vision with the closest attention.

From what could be seen, to where, just below the shoulders, her form melted into mist, the woman appeared to be sleeping. Her face was very beautiful. The closed eyes, faintly oblique, showed their almond shape beneath the long and curiously subtle yet simple sweep of brow ; the lids, delicately veined and fringed by thick black lashes lying upon the soft pink cheeks. Her red lips, of the scarlet of a pomegranate, were slightly parted over a gleam of pearly teeth in a deliciously provocative pout, such as might be on the mouth of a girl who, in her sleep, kisses a dream-lover. In every respect her beauty was flawless and her expression seductive ; yet it seemed the expression of perfectly innocent nature-passion. Van Dreen had the fancy that this was a woman

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

who had lived and loved keenly, and had rejoiced in the fulfilment of her love. The rounded outlines of her shape seemed to suggest the fancy. So, too, the untranslatable language of the perfect oval face, un-English in type, its long brow, delicately aquiline nose, and the modelling of lips and chin, having indeed something of that archaic touch which Van Dreen had noticed in Chalmers' own countenance. Both faces might have belonged to a far-past civilisation. The woman's hair, dark, crisp and glossy, was parted in waves above the oval brow, being bound there by a band of gold. From this was suspended a curious, antique-looking ornament, a crescent of moonstones with, in its curve, a small looped cross of gold; while round the neck was a slender chain from which hung a great ruby heart looking like a gout of blood.

Van Dreen had ample time to notice each detail, for the apparition seemed to intensify in semblance of corporeality, gaining life as it were from the vital force shed by Chalmers. The woman's breast, heaving like the breast of a living person, seemed to

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

pulsate in unison with the breathing of Chalmers, rising and falling in rhythm with the inflexions of his voice, going faster when his oratory became more fervid, and slower as it dropped and slackened.

Was this then the secret of that walled garden of enchantment of which Van Dreen had suspected the existence in Chalmers' soul? And, if so, of what nature was the bond between the priest and his phantasmal associate? For, Van Dreen reflected, the desire-links between this man and this woman must be very strong for her ghostly counterpart to companion him in so close a fashion. Van Dreen became involved in a labyrinth of speculation.

CHAPTER III

"Gifts differ, but the Spirit is the same: ways of serving differ, yet the Master is the same: results differ, yet the God who brings about every result is in every case the same."—
THE TWENTIETH CENTURY NEW TESTAMENT.

THE sermon had come to an end. The preacher had disappeared. Van Dreen stayed in the church, and, when the bulk of the congregation had departed, he went up a side aisle towards a door which seemed to lead into a vestry. Several other people had also remained behind. Some were seated near this vestry door, and others were noiselessly drawing near it from different parts of the church. A lady came out just then, and passed down the aisle with a rapt expression on her face. As she did so, another well-dressed woman got up and went hastily into the vestry.

Van Dreen placed himself among the foremost of those waiting outside. An old man with a white beard and an expression

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

of furtive greed shambled up to him and inquired in a confidential whisper if he wished to speak to Mr. Chalmers.

"Why, yes," returned Van Dreen.

The old man shuffled softly from one foot to the other.

"Mr. Chalmers is engaged, sir. He sees people by appointment after the services, and to-night he's pretty full. But I dare say I could manage."

Van Dreen glanced down at the protruding hand surreptitiously extended, the horny fingers curving, cup-like, upward. "Thanks. I'll take my turn," he said simply.

Much disappointed, the old man withdrew, protesting that he might have long to wait. Van Dreen thereupon put his mind into connection with that of Chalmers. And soon the preacher, who still wore his cassock, appeared in the doorway. He was ushering out the lady visitor, his glance meanwhile wandering over the heads of the people. It fell upon Van Dreen, as the latter had intended it should, and the preacher signed him forward.

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

"Were you wishing to speak to me?" he asked.

"That's so—if you are at leisure," replied Van Dreen, as he promptly entered the little vestry which was apparently appropriated to the priest's personal use.

"I am seldom at leisure," said Chalmers, closing the door behind them, "but I can spare you a few minutes." He pointed to a seat, and took another himself. The room was small and bare, it had an inner door, evidently leading into the chancel, and was simply furnished with a sort of office-table, which had writing materials and some papers on it, two chairs with wooden arms, and a kneeling stool placed before a large painting of the Crucifixion that filled one of the walls. To Van Dreen, who was no connoisseur of paintings of the Italian School, the composition of this one did not appeal, and he found the face of the priest a more interesting study. Chalmers was looking at his visitor. His eyes had lost their luminosity, and had a weary, preoccupied expression. He spoke in a tired voice, scrupulously gentle.

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

"I presume, sir, that you have been perplexed on some especial point in one of my sermons, something which I have failed to make clear? If so, I shall be pleased to help you to a fuller comprehension of the question, whatever it may be. Were you among the congregation to-night?"

"I was," said Van Dreen, "and I was considerably struck by the substance of your sermon, and more especially by your way of putting it. So I came along to say this: I know very well it's not light work getting others into line for the Grand March, and even the best of us that lead the van have their own difficulties. We all want a word of friendly advice now and then. Seems to me you're that way yourself, Mr. Chalmers, and if, as I surmise, you want a friend, well, I'm here; you can count on me."

"Am I addressing a brother-cleric?" inquired Chalmers, impelled to scrutinise the odd, forceful personage before him, who he could not fail to see was very much in earnest. "I should be interested in knowing to what denomination you belong, and in what districts you have worked."

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

"Don't do much in denominations," returned Van Dreen evasively. "And if you come to districts, it would be a bit stiff to put a landmark of time or place to my work."

"Indeed!" said Chalmers with freezing aloofness.

"But I didn't come here to talk about what *I've* done," added Van Dreen hastily. "My object was to find out what I could do for *you*."

In Van Dreen's homely vernacular, Mr. Chalmers curled up at that, and, as a fact, Donck Van Dreen's way of breaking ground at the outset was often too crudely straightforward to suit refined sensibilities. Thus it sometimes happened that he had to go back and smooth over fields he had furrowed roughly.

"I am obliged to you, sir," replied the clergyman, visibly nettled. "Your intentions are of the kindest, no doubt; but I am already fortunate in numbering among my friends fellow-priests of saintly lives, to whom I should naturally apply were I in need of spiritual counsel."

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

Van Dreen nodded a second time, but he did not remove his eyes from Chalmers' face. There was a pause which Chalmers broke, saying suavely :

"Moreover, I feel well assured that He who has sent me forth to labour in His vineyard will not leave my own soul unwatered by His grace."

"Your faith is fine," said Van Dreen. "But it seems to me that most of us have to do a bit of digging in our home-patch."

Mr. Chalmers assented impatiently. "If it be any relief to your mind to discuss religious questions with me, I shall have pleasure in listening to what you have to say," he said. "I may conclude that you would not have sought me out unless we were agreed on essential doctrines—for example, that of the Atonement, in which lies our only hope of ultimate union with Godhead."

"Well, I surmise that on broad principles we're within speaking distance," replied Van Dreen, "supposing that you mean the At-one-ment, and by that, I take it, is signified the presence in all flesh of the Divine element, which constitutes man's real life, whether in

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

the body or out of it. I calculate we both admit this belief, whatever form it takes, to be at the root of all religious doctrine."

A slight frown came upon Chalmers' brow. He bent his head in dubious acquiescence.

"On broad principles, and within distinct limitations," he said, "such a statement might be admitted, though to my mind your definition inclines too closely towards a form of pantheism, which the late Canon Liddon rightly denounced as neither more nor less than atheism. For my part, I hold that the cleavage-line between finite humanity and infinite Divinity can only be crossed by devout faith in our Lord's redemption of man from the wrath of God and the curse laid on the flesh. You, I imagine, would place man on a nearer level with his Creator."

Van Dreen replied with bold directness, yet in a manner singularly reverent :

"I opine, Mr. Chalmers, that the cleavage-line is not so strictly fixed as you infer. We are all potentially divine, since we are sons of God in as real a sense as was Jesus of Nazareth. But most of us are conscious

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

only in brief flashes of the divinity latent within."

Chalmers made a gesture of dissent, and the frown on his face deepened. Van Dreen went on at once :

" Might I make bold, however, to ask whether, at your stage of evolution and mine, you consider humanity fit for that ultimate union with Godhead to which, just now, you referred ? "

Chalmers looked at Van Dreen with vaguely resentful interest. He assumed a polemical tone.

" I confess, sir, that the exact drift of your question is not clear to me. Your remarks imply that you are a convert to certain ideas very much in the air at present concerning the immanence of God in all creation. For myself, I regard these notions as heretical, and consider them to have arisen from a blasphemous application of the Darwinian theory of organic evolution to the soul of man, which was bestowed by God after He had created the rest of the universe."

" Evolution ! " repeated Van Dreen.
" Well, *I* take evolution to be a mani-

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

festation of the Divine Life inherent in all creation, by means of which God will, in His own time, transmute matter into spirit, evil into good."

Chalmers inclined his head this time with an air of lofty tolerance.

"I see, sir, that you use the catchwords of what is called the New Thought, though in reality there is nothing new about it. The old Stoics and the followers of Epicurus said exactly the same sort of things. In fact, the theological agitation of to-day is merely the revival under another name of the Pelagian heresy condemned at many Councils thirteen hundred years or more ago. Perhaps I should say at once that for my part I adhere implicitly to the Articles of Faith handed down by the Early Fathers of the Church. I stand by the formulary of Archbishop Anselm in regard to the Church's custody of those sacred beliefs which have been strenuously maintained in this country by the most profoundly learned thinkers of our orthodox Christian School."

"I guess," said Van Dreen, "that there exists in this country at the present time a

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

wider and more advanced school of Christian thought than the one you mention."

Mr. Chalmers rejoined warmly :

" Yes, unhappily there *does* exist a more advanced school, as you term it, which is doing its best to attack the Church in her most vital part. But false doctrine has been crushed before, and it will be crushed again."

" That's so," returned Van Dreen equably. Chalmers went on :

" What can one say of ordained ministers of the Reformed Church, who call in question Biblical inspiration, and who, in disavowing the Fall and denying the Divinity of the Saviour, undermine the whole grand scheme of our Lord's propitiatory sacrifice ? "

" You'll allow," put in Van Dreen, " that your Church is fermenting at its centre. That's what was to be expected. Evolution works from within, not from without."

" I cannot deny, in face of modern evidence," replied Chalmers, leaning forward with some eagerness, " that the Church has a canker at her core, in the shape of that very class of so-called advanced religionists about whom we have been speaking. Nor

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

can I deny that the canker is spreading, and that the whole body of the Church is suffering in consequence. Even among members of the priesthood still free from the imputation of heterodoxy, I might instance many whose pulpit utterances are speciously subversive of the pure Gospel teaching. Realising this, I am the more bound to hold before my flock that high, it may seem stern, conception of the lesson of the Cross which you heard from my lips this evening. And, indeed, I do not think that one in my position of an elected shepherd of souls can take too definite a stand against the present-day tendency towards loose private interpretation of the Scriptures, and the weighing, by secular testimony, spiritual truths which can be judged only on spiritual evidence."

There was something suggestive of an intense egoism in the way Chalmers extended his long white hands and put the points of his taper fingers together as he proceeded.

"Alas! alas!" he said. "It is those within the Church who should have been her faithful defenders that are now helping to undermine her foundations. What, sir,

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

is all this cry about the unification of religion and science but an impious assault upon our sacred citadel? I consider the German Monism, which frankly identifies mind with matter, as less dangerous than the more subtle Monism of the school of thought I deplore, which defines Matter and Spirit, Evil and Good, as but different aspects of the same Creative Energy. What, then, becomes of the sublime significance of the Cross and Passion of Christ? Where, then, lies the need of a Mediator between God and sin-bound man?"

The preacher's voice rang again in the oratorical music which had thrilled the nerves of his congregation.

"You asked me," he went on, "do I consider myself fit for fusion with Divinity? No, my friend; through the merits of my Redeemer alone can this body, which, sown in corruption, shall be raised in immortality, dare to hope for union with the Godhead. For, am not I a sinner? How great a sinner—only Heaven and my own heart know?"

The emotional stop came into Chalmers' voice. "Nevertheless am I assured," he

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

added, "that by Redemption I shall be delivered from the just consequences of my misdeeds!"

His expressive hands relaxed and drooped. The weakness of his mortal nature seemed to have been suddenly and incongruously borne in upon him. His head drooped too.

Van Dreen struck in after his brisk, simple fashion.

"Well, I reckon that I've done more than my fair share of iniquity since I began existence on this whirling pea-nut in space. But my view is that I shall have to worry through the consequences of my misdeeds until I've worked 'em out."

Chalmers raised his head and looked with faint horror at Van Dreen.

"A dangerous creed, my dear sir! Unworthy of one living in enlightened times and in a Christian country." Then, rousing himself, he became again the preacher and expounded at fuller length the doctrine of salvation through faith as opposed to that by works.

Outside, the verger's unctuous, pacificatory accents might now be heard mingling

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

with the aggrieved murmurs of wearied suppliants for admission.

"I guess some of those folks out there are getting tired," broke in Van Dreen. "Perhaps you'd prefer to see them first?"

"Not at all, not at all," smiled Chalmers indulgently. "It is my custom to give without distinction and to the full measure of my capacity to any person requiring my ministrations."

"Right you are!" acquiesced Van Dreen, "but I shouldn't ask a hard-worked man like you to take up his valuable time in telling me things I'd heard pretty often already."

Chalmers made a movement of badly controlled impatience. "Then, if that be so, and I can do you no good, I think, my dear sir, that I had really better summon the sacristan and terminate this interview."

"Not just yet," pleaded Van Dreen with a whimsical smile. "And if you mean that old chap who charges a dollar to everybody who's willing to pay it, for ten minutes' talk with you—well, I guess I've got no use for the sacristan. Look here, now, Mr. Chalmers, I don't presume to say you're wrong about

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

renouncing all the enjoyments of life—that is, with regard to those who have evolved up to a particular point—the point, say, of understanding that the *motive* of self-denial is of more consequence than the action. But what I'd like to put before you is, that your doctrine doesn't seem to pan out all right for some who haven't got so far."

"There are, of course, lame sheep who must be led, and others who have to be driven," returned Chalmers. "The weak and the strong alike should be shown the road to the Cross."

"They'll find it soon enough," exclaimed Van Dreen, with sudden vehemence. "There are two places to which man's feet turn of their own accord—his Eden and his Calvary. I should say no one knew that better than *you*."

Chalmers attempted to answer, but his lips twitched convulsively, and then closed again in their sphinx-like calm.

"Anyway," continued Van Dreen, "what *I* say is this: Here's a powerful orator spreading doctrine that might serve its purpose all right, if people didn't happen to be

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

a good bit under their physical bodies at this period of their progress. But he doesn't seem to see that folks have to make the best use of the tools they're given to work with, and I reckon the flesh is one of them. Useful sort of tool, too, if you look at it fairly. In fact, evolution couldn't get on without it. Now it appears to me that human nature is better than it knows, splendid stuff to develop if we don't devitalise it by squeezing all that's human out of it. And that's what *you*, my eloquent preacher, are doing. You've led your little multitude, so to speak, out into the wilderness of dogma; and there they are, starving. Didn't I see the hunger in their faces to-night? It came into my mind, Mr. Chalmers, that there was a Teacher in Galilee nigh two thousand years ago who not only fed His listeners' souls, but, when their bodies were an hungered, gave them loaves and fishes to eat. *He* understood the need of their mortal nature. *He* knew that starving flesh will clamour for bread, and, mind you! when the flesh cries out, man has got to listen, for it speaks with the Voice of Him who gave it life."

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

Chalmers sat with moveless lips, an ominous light gathering in his deep-set eyes.

Van Dreen went on: "Your doctrine of mortifying the flesh may have been a useful counterweight in those old roaring Middle Ages you were preaching about, but though man is pretty low down yet, he's gained a step or two in the School of Evolution since then. We're beginning to realise that there's the whole universe for us to learn our kindergarten lessons in. And I calculate there's a more dangerous side to this question," continued the speaker. "Deny the human energies their legitimate issues and they'll be apt to burst out in unlawful directions. It's a tricky business generating force and damming up its natural action. That means setting it loose in the world of thought to become infinitely more powerful, and to take form maybe in subtle and devilish temptations. I guess, Mr. Chalmers, you must have discovered something of this for yourself."

Chalmers tried to meet Van Dreen's clear gaze, but failed.

"I do not understand you," he said in rasping tones.

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

"No? All the same, I reckon you've got an inkling of what I mean. But I'll speak plainer. I was watching you carefully during your oration, and I saw some very peculiar signs of that creative thought-force I mentioned."

"Of what kind?" exclaimed Chalmers sharply.

"Well, a sort of cloud or emanation around you, which, as I looked, took form; the sort of thing that matter-of-fact people would put down to liver or the fog. But *I* shouldn't; nor, I presume, would you. We both know too much, I take it, of other planes of being to suppose that things not ordinarily visible on this one are therefore non-existent."

Chalmers passed one white hand over his brow, on which the damp had risen.

"You must be a singularly gifted person," he said slowly. "I have sometimes heard of appearances such as you describe. We have, of course, authentic records of supernatural signs having been granted at critical periods in the history of the Church. I could not presume, however, to associate any such

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

signs with my own insignificant cure of souls."

"No?" said Van Dreen again, in his dry, interrogative tone, and added, "*I* did, though, this evening. And it's because of that cure of souls, which I do *not* regard as insignificant, that I'm here now to put the truth before you."

Van Dreen went closer to the clergyman and laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"Mr. Chalmers, I saw enough to-night, when you were preaching so eloquently about renouncing the lusts of the flesh, to make me pretty certain that you hadn't always acted up to your own teaching. I saw enough to show me that you, to whom so many look as their spiritual guide and mainstay, are a wanderer and tempest-tossed; that you, to whom sick souls come for medicine, are yourself in dire need of healing; that you, who bid others crucify their passions, are nourishing yours on the very life-force within you."

A violent tremor went through Chalmers' frame. He tried to speak, but could not bring out anything. At last he stammered huskily:

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

"Sir, sir, you presume in a most unwarrantable fashion."

"Guess I do," returned the other imperturbably. "That's what I'm here for. Come, Mr. Chalmers, be honest with me. Make a clean breast and give me a chance to help you."

Van Dreen's manner became one of friendly entreaty. He pressed his hand kindly on Chalmers' shoulder.

"See here. I'm ready to stand by you as a man and a brother if you'll only be frank with me. I don't talk without book, remember. Those that have eyes to see, *can* see, and *I* saw a strange thing to-night."

There was a low moan. Chalmers flung himself forward, free of Van Dreen's detaining hand. He sank upon his knees and made a rapid sign—the sign of the Cross—on brow and breast, and prayed aloud.

"From all evil and mischief, from sin, from the crafts and assaults of the devil, from Thy wrath, and from everlasting damnation, Good Lord! deliver us."

"Amen," exhorted Van Dreen, and devoutly bent his head.

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

The brief prayer was full of poignant entreaty. Chalmers' face, as he uttered it, had whitened to the yellowish white of old ivory, the muscles were taut and knotty; his lean hands were strained together. Then, as he rose slowly and with a shivering movement from his knees, there came imperative sounds at the outer door, the handle of which rattled, and, coughing asthmatically, as if to give warning of his entry, the sacristan appeared.

He glanced with furtive curiosity from one to the other. Van Dreen, alert and forceful, stood motionless. Chalmers, his long limbs huddled loosely in his chair, kept stirring faintly like one recovering from the effects of shock. The sacristan spoke; there was a tinge of indignant surprise in his manner.

"If you please, sir, Lady Harrold asked me to inquire whether you could make it convenient to receive her now?"

Obtaining no answer, he added:

"You remember, sir, Lady Harrold had an appointment for this evening."

Chalmers did not seem to hear. The

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

old man solemnly repeated the substance of his communication. Still receiving no answer, he proceeded :

" Besides Lady Harrold, sir, there's several of 'em waiting. Alderman Petrie and Sir James Battersby and Dr. Winton Forbes desired me in especial to remind you that they're there. They've *all* got appointments, sir."

Chalmers struggled to rouse himself. He picked up a pen from the table, played with it thoughtfully, and then flung it from him.

" My compliments and regrets to Lady Harrold and the gentlemen, but unexpected business prevents me from seeing them this evening."

" *Am* I to tell 'em that, sir?" The verger hesitated. He threw a scowl at Van Dreen, and looked urgently at the priest. " I was to mention from her ladyship, sir, as how you would be aware that she had a very particular matter to speak about."

" My compliments and regrets," repeated Chalmers mechanically. " I am unavoidably prevented from seeing her ladyship this evening."

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

The sacristan's bleared eyes scanned the priest in a puzzled manner, and he threw another venomous scowl at Van Dreen as he shuffled out and shut the door of the vestry sharply behind him.

CHAPTER IV

"The Spirit of God pervades the universe, but we have not learned how to get into contact with it. When we discover that secret, our lives will be so changed that for the first time in this world's history we shall feel that we are made in the image of God and are little lower than the angels."—GEORGE H. HEPPWORTH.

"Men's concern under this ampler view will no longer be to work out a system of penalties . . . but to understand and participate in this great development that now dawns on the human understanding."—H. G. WELLS.

VAN DREEN waited until the door had closed behind the sacristan and the faint murmur following the announcement to the disappointed devotees had subsided. Then he turned his kindly, penetrating eyes on Chalmers, and held out his hand.

"Buck up," he said in his simple way.
"We'll face the music, shoulder to shoulder."

Chalmers did not take the outstretched hand. He was stooping over the table, restlessly pushing about the papers upon it, and shook his head, answering with difficulty, for he was still under the influence of strong emotion.

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

"I thank you for your good intentions, but you must excuse me. I am not one of those who can open their hearts to strangers."

"Eh? Strangers!" echoed Van Dreen. "I've read that there was once a man who got rough handling from thieves and was looked after in a neighbourly way by a stranger, while his own kin went by and didn't do a hand's turn to help him. But there! Quit beating round the bush and let us talk as man to man."

There was a short silence. Van Dreen seated himself anew, and Mr. Chalmers, by putting visible constraint on himself, seemed to recover something of his former lofty urbanity.

"I should be pleased, as I said before, to interchange theological views with you, if I thought that discussion was likely to be productive of benefit to either of us," he answered. "But it appears to me, sir, that you do not profess the creed of Christ—at least, as I and my fellow theologians interpret it."

"That may be," returned Van Dreen pleasantly. "I don't say that there's not a difference of opinion between us as to what

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

the creed of Christ really was. To my mind the leaves of that tree are for the healing of all nations. But if you'll pardon my saying so, I consider that your interpretation of the Lord's creed makes deadly food for weaklings, which the general run of us are. It takes folks most of their time to learn how to live, and you're only teaching poor devils how to die."

The priest made a scarcely audible murmur to the effect that preparation for death was the chief need of man.

"Well, I guess not," breezily rejoined Van Dreen. "Every blessed thing in the universe with a spark of life in it has got to cross that black river, whether it will or no. So how people get through that passage don't seem of first importance, since it's a short one, and they're bound to come out on the other side. It's their condition before they go into it that matters; it's the life they've lived which makes the crossing easy for them or no. . . . Now, if you preachers would only tell out what life really is—its powers, its beauties, its unending glory, its sanctification—its sweetness! . . . If, instead of

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

shutting poor children of humanity up in a dark cupboard to cry over dry bread and water when there's a bountiful meal spread, with plenty of lights and music and sparkling wine to make good cheer, you'd take 'em out and teach 'em how to turn God's good gifts to joy and profit—well, *I* hold, you would be training finer men and women; fitting them, not only for the one little night which you call death, but for the everlasting round of glorious days and restful nights that make the soul's eternity."

Chalmers listened, the inner man interested—against his will.

"It is my most earnest endeavour," he said fervently, "to prepare my flock for participation in the eternal life which will be theirs after death."

"Friend!" cried Van Dreen, "*all* life is eternal. Nothing you may say or do can make it less. There is no such thing as death. Here and now, we are every one of us participating in Life Eternal. It has been ours since the beginning of existence, and for each of us thinking existence began a long way farther back than you or I can con-

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

sciously remember. Did we always, in the ages gone, pule and whine and draw a long face? What was our human nature given us for but to tap its sources of happiness? How else were our bodies developed to be the splendid things they are? And why were they developed thus far—saying nothing of what they will be—but that we might use them rightly and glory in their capabilities? Man! our race was born into a magnificent heritage, but you and such as you are turning those fine pastures into a barren waste. Get out of your darkened churches. God cannot be confined within pillars and arches. Our ancestors knew *that* when they worshipped beneath the blue sky—setting up altars to Nature which, when all's said, is the will of God made manifest. The divine attributes of Beauty and Joy still call for their due meed of honour. Why should we deny it to them? Better far go out into the groves and sacrifice fruit and flowers than build altars of dogma on which to sacrifice the souls of men."

"That old Pagan creed has been tried and found wanting," said Chalmers, warm-

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

ing to argument. "At its best, it failed to satisfy more than the senses. Not even Julian the Apostate, powerful emperor as he was, could succeed in reanimating the dead Nature deities. For a greater God has taught the soul through suffering to overcome the lusts of the flesh."

"Aye; but by love, not by flagellation of the God-given instincts of humanity," retorted Van Dreen. "Teach the soul how to make of the flesh a willing servant, not a tortured slave. There are boundless possibilities in the flesh," he continued, with an enthusiasm that contrasted oddly with his usual unemotional bearing, "powers which men of science as well as psychologists are now beginning to discover; secrets of life through which the flesh can be purified and reinvigorated. But no man, until he has controlled the body of his flesh, the body of his desire, the body of his mind, can figure about in his naked soul."

Chalmers looked up thoughtfully at the painting of Calvary, and said in a low voice:

"If a man would be saved, he must crucify all the desires of the flesh."

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

Van Dreen leaned forward, his keen eyes piercing the other through and through.

"Suppose there were *one* desire—dearer, sweeter than all the rest—which remained hidden in the man's bosom, clinging closely there and, vampire-like, sustaining its life by his? Suppose that man—sickened by the wholesale martyrdom of his natural yearnings, weak from self-inflicted wounds, with no strength to shield himself against the spears of evil passion—suppose that he feeds his imagination upon that one dear desire, which, purified and sanctified, might have been the crown of his manhood and the light of his home—till he has made of it an unnatural thing, an evil enchantment of the senses, its tender charm turned to terror, its touch the seal of madness and perhaps of crime—suppose all this, and then tell me how would it be with that man?"

"*'The perfect victory is to triumph over ourselves,'*" quoted Chalmers abstractedly, his gaze still on the Calvary, his face a strange, white mask.

Van Dreen replied promptly.

"*'For he that keepeth himself subject in*

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

such sort that his affections be obedient to reason . . . he truly is conqueror of himself, and lord of the world.' But remember that '*If thou desire to mount unto this height, thou must set out courageously and lay the axe to the root that thou mayest pluck up and destroy that hidden, inordinate inclination.'*' "

"I see," said Chalmers, smiling rather wistfully, "that you are well acquainted with the writings of St. Thomas à Kempis. Therefore, doubtless you will remember all that he says concerning the royal way of the Holy Cross. There only may true peace be found."

"Aye," said Van Dreen again. "If one is worthy of it."

"We must cling to the Cross," said Chalmers feverishly. "Cast our burdens at its foot, and pray that temptation be removed from us."

"Shirk things—eh?" said Van Dreen. "No, no. Better be a man. Be sure that until you become one in the best and fullest sense, the glory of that supreme consummation with the Divine of which we are speaking is not for you. Meanwhile your Calvary

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

waits, as it waits for every man. In the words of your friend à Kempis, '*the Cross is always ready.*' Who knows in what far age you sowed the seed which produced that mighty tree for your own back to bear?"

"Would you tempt me?" murmured Chalmers, with trembling lips.

"No; I would save you from that against which you prayed just now—'*from sin, from the crafts and assaults of the devil, from God's wrath, and from damnation.*'"

"You do not understand," said Chalmers fiercely. "Assuming that I have one special temptation, at least it does not take mortal form."

"That so? A certain face I saw near you a while ago seemed to me a fair likeness of mortality. Mr. Chalmers, I saw *Her* to-night, so close to you and so lifelike that, with every breath you drew, *her* breath came and went."

Chalmers gave a quick, gasping sound, and a shudder went through his frame—a long, slow shudder, which he had great difficulty in stilling. His voice, when he spoke, sounded in his throat.

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

"You—you saw Her?—Whom did you see?"

"A woman. An uncommonly beautiful woman, who seemed to be asleep," rejoined Van Dreen. "Good job, too. Such women are safest asleep."

Chalmers' usually calm features were contorted with emotion.

"Describe the woman," he said in hollow tones.

"Not our type, though perhaps more yours than mine," continued Van Dreen; "but she was no shoot of Western civilisation; soft rounded lines, nearly perfect. I saw the head and bust."

Chalmers' teeth chattered. "Tell me of the face," he cried.

"A delicious, dreaming face: a face that could be proud or tender, or both at once—long, oval, curiously fascinating. Waves of black hair, bound up by a gold band; transparent bluish eyelids and lashes like black silk fringe. Skin, pale, yellowy pink; carmine on the cheeks and lips. Mouth! Aye! such a mouth! Well, perhaps I'd better stop there."

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

"Go on, go on!" gasped Chalmers hoarsely.

"There was a queer gewgaw hanging from the gold band in her hair down to the middle of the forehead—a cross fixed into a crescent—a cross with a loop at the top. Perhaps you know the emblem?"

"The *Ānkh*!" ejaculated Chalmers. "The Egyptian *Ānkh*!"

"Just so: the Egyptian *Ānkh* or the *Tau*, as you may like to call it. . . . That wasn't her only ornament. Round the woman's neck hung a heart made of rubies—a cluster of them, flaming red and lying between her breasts, like a great gout of blood."

Chalmers sprang up in extreme agitation.

"A ruby heart, did you say? I swear that I knew nothing of that. Heaven alone can tell how you saw the rest. But the ruby heart had no place in my imaginings."

"That point seems immaterial," observed Van Dreen, "beside the fact that your imaginings are a creative force, which from the immense storage of vital energy in your-

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

self, is more powerful than you have any idea of."

"And that is how you account for—for the apparition you describe?"

"Well, there are three ways of accounting for it," said Van Dreen. "This woman may be merely a creation of your fancy—which I don't believe; or she may be a woman in the flesh connected with you in your present life; or she may be the ever-living soul of a woman with whom you have been linked in some life of the past."

Chalmers listened eagerly. "Well?" he asked.

"Well! Do you want to know what you must do? That's easy to tell you. You've got to give her up. This connection is unnatural. You're working black magic—consciously or unconsciously—and that way madness lies. Don't you see? You are too strong a power to be allowed to drift into the Dark Army. I'm here to help you cut this bond. But I can't help you unless you desire it and will unburden yourself to me frankly."

Chalmers straightened his long, lean frame

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

to its full height. The man's natural egoism came to his aid.

"I am indebted to you for your offer," he replied. "It is, however, quite unnecessary. Your assumptions are based on pure conjecture or illusion, and I prefer not to discuss the subject."

Van Dreen nodded grimly.

"That settles it then—for the present. Before very long, though, you'll want me, and, if so, I shall be at your service."

Chalmers looked at him for a minute without speaking. Then he said abruptly:

"*Who are you?* Where do you come from? I asked you before to what body of religious thought you belong?"

"I reckon that I belong to the Universal Body of Divine Purpose expressed in Man," replied Van Dreen.

"But that tells me nothing. I should like to know your name, your nationality."

Van Dreen gave a dry, amused chuckle.

"Nationality is a kind of costume one puts on and takes off according to circumstance," he said. "A man ought to have no abiding city. As for me, I'm cosmopoli-

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

tan. But here's my present address, which will serve for practical purposes."

He took a little leather case from his breast pocket, extracted a card, and handed it to Chalmers, who read :

*"Donck Van Dreen,
"102 Carwardine Mansions, W.C."*

"I confess, Mr. Van Dreen, that you interest me."

"Think you'd remember me?" returned Van Dreen.

Chalmers' cavernous eyes flashed another long look at his visitor.

"Yes, I shall remember you. . . . And it—it is just possible that—I—might—want you."

"Then you've only got to let me know, and if I'm at my present diggings I'll be with you in less than half an hour," said Van Dreen.

Chalmers dropped his eyes and fingered the pasteboard reflectively.

"Are you on the telephone?" he asked.

"Oh, I believe there's some archaic in-

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

vention of that sort hanging up in my place," answered Van Dreen. "But you don't surely suppose that a man of progress has no more secret, surer, and quicker mode of communication than the common or garden telephone?"

"I don't know what you mean." Chalmers' tone was blank, but he glanced tentatively at Van Dreen.

"Don't you? That surprises me, but I'll explain. Sure you'd know me again?"

"Yes. Certainly."

"Then you've only got to sit down quietly and raise up an image of me before your mind's eye—much as you've raised up, times without number, that other elemental image of which we were speaking just now. Put out your desire to communicate with me, command the communication—and I've a shrewd suspicion that you can do *that*, though you mayn't understand the method—and you may depend upon my answering right away."

Chalmers looked bewildered. He sighed deeply, and passed both hands over his face before he spoke.

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

"You are a most extraordinary person," he said. "I don't know what to think of you. And yet—Heaven sometimes chooses strange messengers." He paused: a change came over him. Beads of moisture rose anew on his brow, and he breathed heavily.

"Mr. Van Dreen, there is something I feel impelled to say," he began with evident hesitation. "I was not honest when I denied the truth of what you told me. You took me aback. . . . You disturbed me more than I can convey. You could not have any idea how painful to me is the subject on which you touched."

"Ah! I've a rough hand and a rough tongue!" said Van Dreen, with a ready remorse. "Forgive me, and believe that I have not a rough heart."

"That I *do* believe. Indeed, your candour and evident sincerity excuse the somewhat unconventional mode of your address. Mr. Van Dreen, I am compelled to own that your strange gift of second-sight baffles my understanding. For you described accurately—a—a—Vision of which I am myself sometimes conscious, the secret of which

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

was, I believed, hidden from all the rest of the world."

"And now you find that the thought-body is as real as the material body, for those who have eyes to see it."

Chalmers shifted uneasily. "I do not pretend to knowledge in the matter of these abnormal gifts," he said; "but I cannot, I will not, believe that I am involved in traffic with any powers of darkness."

The thrill in Chalmers' voice and the gleam in his eyes told Van Dreen that he had touched the spring of a hidden dread.

"I tell myself," continued Chalmers, "that the face you saw is but a phantasm, a dream that may have grown out of my thoughts in some mysterious manner as you suggested. For I admit that this strange haunting causes me much distress and trouble of mind. Yet I know that many a man of holy aspirations and blameless life suffers from certain carnal imaginings that he can only strive with in his secret soul, but which may well cast a kind of image invisible to the commonplace observer, though perhaps

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

plain to one who, like yourself, sees below the surface of things."

Chalmers paused, but Van Dreen still made no reply.

"We have the witness of St. Augustine," proceeded Chalmers hurriedly, "that the carnal afflictions of youth may take years, even a lifetime, to overcome."

"He is lucky if he do it in one lifetime." Van Dreen rose, pulling down his coat. Then, hat in hand, he approached the priest.

"If you have already set about disposing of this inconveniently attractive phantom," he said bluntly, "I'm out in my reckoning—that's all. It's got to be done somehow. If you can manage it in your own way—well and good. If you want my assistance, you know where to find me. Good evening."

He bowed, walked to the door, and opened it. In the church were still several waiting figures. There was a slight stir among them as Van Dreen opened the vestry door. He glanced back. Chalmers had moved swiftly. He knelt on the praying stool before the picture of Calvary which

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

hung portentous and shadowy on the wall. He seemed to be striving to stamp the impress of that sacred scene upon his soul. A species of spiritual exaltation apparently possessed him. Lightning-like flashes of intense feeling illumined his haggard face and kindled fresh fire in his tense form. Van Dreen, filled with a great pity for both priest and people, softly closed the door between them.

CHAPTER V

"Human society is based upon the sacrifice of man, or of each man for all other men : and sacrifice is the very essence of all true society."—LAFCADIO HEARN.

SEVERAL weeks went by, during which there was no direct communication between Van Dreen and Chalmers, yet the currents of destiny slowly but surely drew them together.

Van Dreen pondered a good deal upon the case of Mr. Chalmers. Apart from its psychical and emotional aspects, which any commonplace person would have dismissed at once on the supposition that the priest, or possibly Van Dreen himself, was mad, Chalmers' doctrine was puzzling from its extreme narrowness, rare even among ecclesiastics in these days of broad theology, and still more surprising in a popular preacher with an enormous following. This, as Van Dreen had already surmised, was accounted for by the man's magnetic personality and undoubted oratorical gift. Yet in the matter

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

of oratory, Van Dreen felt that much more might have been made by the preacher of the dramatic contrast between those two familiar codes of existence—"Annihilate yourself!" "Enjoy yourself!" In exalting the former, Chalmers had failed to touch such lofty spiritual heights as are reached by either the Buddhist or the Christian mystic; nor, with all his erudition, had he shown the ordinary scholar's grasp of the frank old Greek hedonism, or the more philosophic arguments in favour of cultivated pleasure of the followers of Epicurus.

Not that Van Dreen was himself a scholar. He dealt in universals rather than in particulars. But his intuitive faculty gave him unsuspected knowledge of the roots of things and of the progress of ideas. And in his dealings with the inner workings of various minds he had acquired a range of view that stood to him in the stead of scholastic learning. Thus it surprised him that with Mr. Chalmers' imperfect grip upon certain vital truths of religion he should yet be the adored shepherd of so many aspiring souls.

Now, however, it began to be whispered

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

about that Mr. Chalmers' power was failing him. People said his voice was weaker, that he was no longer as eloquent as he had been, that his sermons were less interesting, his delivery less impressive.

Van Dreen did not go again to St. Matthias' to judge for himself how far the reports were true. He waited for the priest to make some sign, and in due course the sign was given.

One evening, just after Van Dreen had finished his frugal meal, there came a furious ringing at the telephone in the little hall of the flat. Van Dreen abominated the telephone, though he admitted its occasional usefulness. Now he went out, put the tube to his ear, heard the usual metallic buzz and the usual reiterated shout—"Hallo! Are you there? *Are you there?*"

"Yes—yes. I'm here. Who are you?" returned Van Dreen.

The wires whirled. Something seemed to have gone wrong, and, after several efforts, Van Dreen gave up trying to get any sense out of the instrument. It had flashed into his mind that the message was from Mr.

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

Chalmers, so he just yelled through, "All right, I'm coming," and rang off.

There was no difficulty in finding the Reverend Reginald Chalmers' address in *Who's Who*; and soon Van Dreen was standing on the steps of a wide, lofty house in one of those quiet, old streets round Bloomsbury Square.

It was a mansion which long ago must have been a fashionable residence, and its remaining relics of Georgian days—a great pillared portico with extinguishers for link-lights—told of the fine train of powdered and patched ladies and periwigged gentlemen who had once descended from sedan chairs at the imposing entrance. There was no suggestion of such fine company now. Two or three miserable, slouching men, looking half starved, and a tattered woman with an infant in her arms, stood pressing against the heavy double door which was thrown hospitably open just before Van Dreen touched the bell. The shabby people were let in without question. Then the man-servant, perceiving the new visitor behind them, spoke.

"Excuse me, sir. They were in front of

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

you, so I thought they'd better go along. Dr. Sam Green, sir? You're expected, but Mr. Chalmers is still engaged with his secretary, Mr. Manning, and I had orders that if you'd like to see the guest-rooms, you were to be shown through them before going up to the study."

"I should like to see the guest-rooms," said the visitor, with his whimsical smile, "especially if those are some of the guests," and he jerked his head in the direction of the disappearing figures. "Only I may as well mention that my name is Van Dreen."

The servant was profuse in his apologies.

"I'm sure I beg pardon, sir. Mr. Manning it was who asked me to telephone, and I dare say I didn't quite catch the name. Mr. Chalmers had been so much occupied of late, and he has so many of all sorts who come to see him, that sometimes it's a trifle confusing about the names."

"And what's yours?" inquired Van Dreen affably, as he allowed himself to be helped off with his coat.

"Me, sir? I'm Willard, sir," said the servant.

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

He was a plain-faced, elderly man with a slight stoop and a gentle, hurrying manner. Van Dreen noticed a nervous twitch about the corner of his clean-shaven lips.

"This way, if you please, sir."

Sounds of subdued talking came through the doors opening off the hall, and turning into one of these, the servant led Van Dreen through a series of barn-like apartments that had beautiful friezes and carved woodwork, but were otherwise bare except for long deal tables, and some chairs and wooden benches. These were occupied by a miserable crew of wasters, a few of whom showed the ghostly reflection of decayed gentility, while the rest were the veriest scum of a great city. All had the same pinched, starved appearance, and the same hungry gleam shone in the eyes of each at sight of the steaming bowls of soup which were being handed round by hobbledehoy youths—supernumerary helpers, clumsily performing the part of table-servers.

"The regular supper is over, sir," explained Willard. "Mr. Chalmers usually comes down to that with Mr. Manning, and any other gentlemen who may happen to

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

be here. But there's always some of these drop in the last thing, and want a meal, and they're served, as you see, by volunteers."

"And how long do you keep them?" inquired Van Dreen, whose broad sympathies were at once aroused.

"For bed and breakfast, sir, if they like."

"Good!" nodded Van Dreen. "And does this sort of thing go on every night?"

"Most evenings, sir. It's Mr. Chalmers' orders that nobody is to be turned away if it's anyhow possible to take 'em in. We always have our store-room full, and a good stock of soup going, so that we can generally provide a basin of it apiece and a bit of bread. Then, as for sleeping, we've a lot of hammocks; you can see the hooks, sir. We just sling up as many as are wanted, and there's a stack of blankets."

Van Dreen observed that all round each of the big rooms were stout beams with iron hooks protruding, set beneath the Adams frieze. The whole plan delighted him, more particularly a large tiled bathroom built out at the back of the house, with plenty of hot

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

and cold water-taps. He beamed approbation.

"I reckon all this must keep your hands pretty full," he said to Willard. "Who bosses the show?"

"Well, sir, of course Mr. Chalmers himself. It's he who started it and keeps it going, but he's so busy that he can't give much time to details. Mr. Manning overlooks things, and I do my share."

Van Dreen liked the man's modest pride in the concern. He put a leading question which had been cropping up in his mind.

"You have queer specimens of both sexes coming in, no doubt," he said. "But I don't see any female attendants about. Don't you have a matron or anybody of that sort to deal with such as those?"

He pointed to a group of women, some of whom had children, and who had been joined by the woman he had seen entering. She, having taken off her bonnet and placed her baby on a bench, was pinning up her tattered gown, and, by the aid of a broken piece of comb, endeavouring to arrange her roughened hair before sitting down to table.

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

Willard glanced round uneasily, and then, ducking his head nearer, whispered: "You see, sir, Mr. Chalmers is terrible averse to females; sets his face against 'em. His orders are that they're to be fed, but got rid of as soon as possible."

"Seems hard," said Van Dreen. "It's worse for women to be hustled than for men."

"You may say so, sir, but that's Mr. Chalmers' way. He don't take no count of women. Being single himself, he has only men to serve him, and we daren't employ so much as a cook or a scullery-maid that's female."

"Curious fellow!" thought Van Dreen.

"Are none of you married?" he asked.

Willard drew a long sigh, and shook his head. "Wouldn't venture to be, sir. The only difference me and Mr. Chalmers has ever had was due to me mentioning that I was thinking of getting married. I'd no wish to leave his service, and was prepared, as I told him, for my wife to lodge out. But when Mr. Chalmers said that he couldn't keep a married man in his employ, of course

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

I had to reconsider the question with my young lady, and I'm sorry to say, sir, she took it altogether amiss, said she wasn't going to have no nasty monk, and it led to a complete split between me and her."

"Poor chap! What a damned shame," said Van Dreen sympathetically.

Willard, a little shocked, drew himself up with an air of tried loyalty that was infinitely touching.

"I wouldn't go so far as to say that, sir, though a man's a man. Matrimony leads to many things, and you never know what may happen, once you've stepped into it. Mr. Chalmers himself once said in one of his sermons that Eve and the devil made a kind of partnership against Adam, and they've kep' it up ever since. That's *his* way of looking at it, sir. But what I often think is a man can't *help* being a man. And that's where the awk'ardness comes in."

Van Dreen jerked his chin silently.

Willard led him up the uncarpeted stone stairs to the first floor. On the half-way landing they met a thin, earnest-looking young cleric in severe black garb, coming

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

down from the upper story, who paused and saluted Van Dreen in an uncertain manner.

"Doctor Van Dreen, I think? Mr. Chalmers asked me to telephone for you. I am very glad that he has decided to take advice. He has not been like himself at all lately. I trust you may be able to prescribe for him."

Van Dreen saw there was some mistake, but he merely nodded.

"My name's Manning," proceeded the other. "Perhaps you'll tell me if there's anything I can do?"

"Thanks," returned Van Dreen. "With your permission, I'll first see Mr. Chalmers."

"Certainly. I left Mr. Chalmers in his study. Willard will take you there."

The secretary bowed and passed on down the stairs. Willard, who was in advance of Van Dreen, went forward along a passage leading from the upper landing to a room at the back of the house. Here he gave a significant-sounding knock, but, receiving no answer, pushed the door open. The room was large and bare, furnished only with the merest necessities. There was a big plain table covered with oil-cloth, and strewn with

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

papers and writing materials; a couple of severe arm-chairs, and a few straight-backed ones; a set of deal shelves, crammed with books, and a battered mahogany bureau; but the room had no pictures or ornaments of any kind. The walls were distempered and bare in uniform ugliness. A small fire was burning in the grate, and before it lay a shabby rug, the only one upon the floor, which was carpeted with some geometrically patterned linoleum, dull brown, and much worn. The place was empty. Willard gazed round in blank surprise, then a look of dubious enlightenment stole over his face.

"I can't think where Mr. Chalmers can have gone, sir. Leastways, I dessay he'll be back directly. I shouldn't wonder if he's forgotten you were waiting. Mr. Chalmers is so apt to forget things at times. And then he—he hasn't been well lately."

"Oh, a bit under the weather, I suppose," said Van Dreen.

"I suppose so, sir," assented the servant doubtfully, for it was plain that the phrase was unfamiliar to him. Before withdrawing, he pulled one of the larger chairs forward

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

for the visitor—a cane-bottomed affair with wooden arms, distinctly uncomfortable in the opinion of Van Dreen, who, when he had done his day's work, preferred to ruminate over it on a padded seat. He had not long to wait, but in the two minutes that he was alone, his quick eyes ran round the room, and his attention was at once caught by a curious kind of door near one corner, a baize-covered door, studded with brass nails placed according to an apparently intricate design—the kind of door that sometimes leads to a strong room, or to a cold-storage place. He was gazing intently at this when he saw the door move slowly and heavily as if by machinery, and, in the aperture, clad in his priestly cassock, appeared the Reverend Reginald Chalmers.

Van Dreen was struck by the priest's peculiar look. Chalmers seemed half-dazed, but one of his hands was running over the pattern of nails on the door. His fingers found at last the particular part he wanted, for he pressed certain nails, before stepping forward. As he did so, the huge panel moved again, and with a smooth click, fell into place behind him.

CHAPTER VI

"Life is much more than the occupations of life, and until we know what is the object, meaning and reason of life our occupations are in vain."—HAROLD BEGBIE.

MR. CHALMERS advanced and held out his hand, saying simply,

"I felt sure you would come."

"Why certainly!" said Van Dreen. "I said I would if you wanted me. But why not have used the mental telephone?"

"I really wanted you," replied Chalmers. "So naturally I was not inclined to try risky experiments."

"H'm! Well, I guess the mental telephone is a considerably less risky apparatus than two receivers with a length of wire between them that's always getting damaged by the weather, to say nothing of a lot of silly lady operators at the Exchange, who've most of them got their wits elsewhere. You try *my* instrument another time. I think

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

I can safely promise you a correct demonstration."

"I've no experience of such ultra-physical demonstrations," said Chalmers rather impatiently.

"Excuse me, I fancied you had," replied Van Dreen, "but we won't contest the point. Now, what's your use for me?"

Chalmers made a few hurried paces up and down the room. Then he stopped by the fireplace, where he turned and stood staring at Van Dreen, his face drawn and twitching. There was a great change in the man: his gait, as well as his gaze, had become restless; his striking features and prominent cheekbones were more bony; his frame more emaciated. The caverns of his eye-sockets were deeper and darker, and the orbs had a queer, shifting gleam. His manner was highly nervous, and he seemed to have lost altogether his former inflexible expression.

"I have sent for you," he said at length, "because you impressed me very much by your talk that evening in my vestry. I need not now go over the points we discussed, but

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

there was one thing you said that I have often since thought about. We were speaking of sacrifice. You said—do you remember?—that after all else had been given up, one dear desire might still cling too closely to be torn away, and that it would nourish itself with the man's life, and gain strength as he grew weak, till, like a vampire, it ended by destroying him."

Chalmers' voice was hoarse. "Do you remember?" he repeated.

"Yes, yes; of course, I remember. Well?"

"Well, that is what things are coming to with me. You found it out. You put your finger on the canker-spot in my soul. Heaven must have revealed it to you, for how else could you have gained your knowledge? Heaven must have sent you as an instrument for my aid."

"Shouldn't wonder," said Van Dreen quietly.

"You appear to be instructed in matters of which I am ignorant," proceeded the priest. "I have never attempted to follow the line of thought of which you spoke that night. Frankly, because I have always been half

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

afraid of it. At the present time, however, my distress of mind is the greater because of my ignorance of such forces as those you mentioned—forces which it occurs to me may be the cause of that—that—peculiar phenomenon of which you know.”

“ You mean the woman’s face which shaped itself in your thought-aura ? ”

“ Yes, yes. I am unfamiliar with your manner of phrasing, but that is of no consequence. You apprehend my difficulty ? It presses closer upon me every day. I don’t know how to deal with it. The unusual nature of it appals, while it attracts me. I am afraid—afraid of the consequences—afraid of the thing itself—horribly afraid.”

“ Stop—stop ; don’t be afraid. That’s fatal,” interjected Van Dreen.

“ I cannot help it. I am shaken—unnerved. I find myself in a country where I have no landmarks—no guide. But now it has occurred to me that you have come in answer to my prayers for assistance. I repeat, you are Heaven’s messenger. You said you would help me ? ”

Van Dreen bent his head.

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

"I will, to the best of my ability," he answered solemnly. "But as you have appealed to Heaven, I must ask you to meet Heaven's humble agent fairly. I bargain for your full confidence."

"You shall have it," cried Chalmers, grasping the friendly hand held out to him. "I will be frank with you. I'll make a clean breast of everything. How it happens that I should trust you like this, I cannot tell. Nevertheless, I *do* trust you entirely. So prepare to hear the strangest story that has ever reached your ears."

Van Dreen smiled his odd, humorous smile. "I've heard some queer stories in my time," he said dryly. "I guess yours won't beat 'em."

"It will, it must," exclaimed Chalmers. "This thing is outside ordinary material existence."

"Quite so. There's a good deal outside that. I conclude you've been dabbling in what is to you a sea of mystery, and have been drawn out of your depth. But let me hear your tale from the beginning. I'm all attention." Van Dreen leant back in the

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

stiff, comfortless chair in which he was sitting, and waited. Chalmers remained standing. He seemed to have a difficulty in disburdening himself.

"Come," said Van Dreen, "you'll find it a relief to speak out. First, *Who is she?*"

"That is what I want you to tell me. Honestly, I don't know."

"You don't know," repeated Van Dreen, but there was neither surprise nor interrogation in his tone.

"On my oath, I do not," replied Chalmers. "I was going to say that these eyes have never looked upon her in the flesh, only that to me she seems as much flesh and blood as you yourself who sit before me. More so, indeed. Besides, the fact that she was visible to you—a stranger to us both—proves that she can be no mere figment of my disordered brain. Moreover, is it possible for one to love with all his senses that which has no existence? And I tell you, incredible though it may seem, that I love her. I who have shunned women all my life; I who have never before known love. I love *her*. And what is more, my love for this extraordinary being

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

is to me perfectly natural, without taint of sin."

"Natural love between man and woman is not sinful, though you have taught that it is so," remarked Van Dreen quietly.

Chalmers' hollow eyes gleamed. "I have preached that which I believe to be the wisest discipline for men and women. But is she woman in the ordinary sense?"

"No," said Van Dreen unhesitatingly. "She is not woman, nor are you man, in the ordinary sense."

A look half of wonderment, half of gratification, crossed Chalmers' face.

"I think you may understand me better if I describe my life from its beginning," he said. "That is, if you will have patience to hear me."

Van Dreen gave his humorous little chuckle, in which there was a note of compassionate friendliness.

"Seems a large order, but the night is young, and I make no doubt that I shall find your recital uncommonly interesting. A tale of success, I opine, from the time when you were first breeched?"

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

“That is true, conceited as it may seem to say so. But the fact is that from my earliest boyhood I have been gifted with a dangerous power of realising my wishes and ambitions, and this without strenuous effort. I had only to put my mind on a thing, and I achieved it. As a schoolboy, if I tried for a prize, I invariably got it. In athletics, if I wanted to be first in a match, I was certain to come in ahead of the other competitors. So in higher studies. I did not need to gain scholarships, for my people were well off, and I have ample means of my own. But my college education might have been carried on entirely free of cost to my parents and guardians.”

“Your special line being eloquent declamation, I presume?”

“Yes. It was in school and college debates that I discovered my faculty for public speaking. My hearers soon let me know that I had the gift of oratory, and as I went on, I found myself listened to with more and more encouraging deference. There was upon me the curse of fatal facility.” Here Chalmers stopped, adding apologetically: “Excuse

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

me, if I seem egotistic, but if you are to be of service to me in explaining *Her*, it is necessary that I should fully explain myself."

"Why certainly," said Van Dreen. "That's what I'm here for. Go on and be as egotistic as you please."

"Well, of course I saw that for a career in oratory, the orator must have something in particular to talk about. Now, the only subjects which lend themselves to that continuous training, by which the lesser orator grows into the greater, are politics and religion. Politics were outside my sphere. I had no political connections, nor was I drawn towards that field of usefulness. The government of the National Soul has always appealed to me as a more desirable vocation than that of governing the National Body. I perceived that one was the mainspring of the other, and I preferred to deal with the first. Then as regards the Church I had certain family interest. No doubt circumstance and inherited predilection had something to do with my choice—though I am beginning to feel that heredity and environment are mere accidents and that any persons of independent

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

habits of thought can control the one and create the other."

"Not quite right as to accidents," put in Van Dreen, "but correct in your conclusion."

"Be that as it may," continued Chalmers. "I maintain that my heredity, so far as I have been able to trace it, has had comparatively little to do with my religious bent. To be honest, I attribute that chiefly, if not entirely, to the determination that I would make myself a Voice, a Leader, a Power. Understand me, a power for good; a leader of the higher, purer impulses in man, to which I have always been as fully alive as to those brute instincts which it has been my object to repress. I wish to make this clear, allowing that you may be right in your criticism of my methods. Thus, I took up the Church."

"An expressive phrase," observed Van Dreen. "Just about conveys what you mean. So you took up the Church, meaning that particular religious institution sanctioned by your State, I suppose; permitting yourself only such liberty of conscience as might

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

keep you secure from imbroglios with ecclesiastical authorities. Yet, notwithstanding your extreme caution, you have scarcely found the choice satisfactory ? ”

“ I have not. But do me the justice to believe that I was sincere in my adoption of it, and that, save perhaps in this one departure from orthodox conventions, I have myself held vigorously to the line of conduct I felt it my duty to lay down for others. I determined from the day I became a deacon that I would eschew all the soft indulgences against which I warned my flock. I have endeavoured to regulate my daily life so that it might be an example to my weaker brethren. And that this has not been easy, you, Mr. Van Dreen, who pride yourself upon understanding human nature, must be fully aware. In one direction I have found special difficulties.”

“ Females, I presume ? ” said Van Dreen with his customary bluntness.

“ Well, yes. My office brought me into touch with many emotional women who take up spiritual questions with an interest that is often somewhat neurotic. Frankly, I have found myself compelled to avoid women,

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

except when the plain duties of my ministry were concerned."

"Quite so."

"I employ no female servants in my household, mainly in order that there should be no excuse for feminine intrusion in the name of charity. For the same reason I confine my charitable work as far as possible to men. You will exonerate me, I hope, from undue desire to belittle women. I merely mention these points so that you shall the better comprehend my peculiar position."

"It's quite comprehensible," remarked Van Dreen dryly.

A dull red mounted to Chalmers' face, leaving him paler than before.

"The—the Vision you saw near me," he said slowly, "represents the one single case in my life of—of—*rapport* with a woman. And that," he added, "not on the material plane."

Van Dreen made no comment, except by a half audible grunt. He saw it was no moment to interrupt. Chalmers went on, with slight hesitation.

"I have always felt that the English

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

system of relations between the sexes does not tend to the mental or spiritual advancement of the man. Naturally, I have not considered the question from the other aspect. But it appears to me that much might be said in favour of Eastern modes of dealing with the question. Even in the beginning of my career, when I shrank less from feminine society, and when I suppose I was as much troubled as most young men by those elemental passions which disturb the male organism, I found that it was absolutely necessary for me, if I hoped to preserve my intellectual powers at their best, to shun the excitements which arise from too free companionship with the opposite sex. I was careful to observe the effect produced by the male on the female and vice versa, and I saw plainly that if I permitted women to interfere they might do so to a serious extent with the career I had planned. I therefore determined to secure myself against disastrous complications of the kind."

"It surprises me," said Van Dreen, "that you did not seek safety within the barriers of the Roman Church."

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

Chalmers' features stiffened, and his brow grew dark.

"Any surrender of personal independence has always been distasteful to me," he said. "I prefer to put up my own barriers of protection. To say nothing of the differences in faith, any such outward restrictions as the Roman Church enforces—and which may not be broken through without causing scandal—would have proved to me irksome in the extreme."

"Ah!" murmured Van Dreen.

"To return, however, to what we were saying about women," continued Chalmers in his curiously self-analytical manner. "I cannot plead insensibility to female charms, but rather over-susceptibility to them, and in consequence I have felt disappointment at finding that women fell so far short of what my imagination had pictured and desired. According to my experience, the generality of women are not given to show themselves in a very attractive light, whether you consider them in the domestic circle, or in the social round, or as they present themselves to the priest. Now it used to seem to me

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

even in my earliest youth that woman should be a sort of goddess for man to worship, a goddess veiled in mystery and panoplied in beauty—a never-ending joy to the senses, and a poetic delight to the mind. My fancy fed itself upon such imagery. I ought to explain that my imagination has a peculiar power of visualising. Thus in my imagination I enjoyed all that I could desire or dream of Love. It was to me as the opium-eater's Paradise, only that no drug was needed to unbar to me the chamber of my beloved. I had but to go into my secret place, to call in my heart 'Open to me, my dove, my undefiled!' and lo! I entered into my garden and ate of its pleasant fruits."

Van Dreen made a grave affirmative gesture, and Chalmers continued, more calmly.

"Of course, most people would argue that I might have found a mate; I might have found some beautiful and innocent girl-child fit to satisfy even my fastidious cravings—secluded her from the world, educated her according to my own plans, and then taken her to share my life. But as my ideal Eve grew more definite in the garden of my fancy,

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

the more I shrank from supplanting her by a material spouse. I dreaded disillusionment in any flesh and blood woman, and, more than this, I had an intense disinclination to bind shackles upon myself that I might hereafter regret. Therefore, I preferred my visionary Paradise and the ideal I had myself created."

"Therefore," said Van Dreen with his dry little crackling laugh, "you stole Promethean fire to feed the furnace of your human passion. In short, my friend, you have contrived to materialise out of your own vital essence and the all-pervading Ether of the old philosophers, that which you are pleased to call your ideal—in reality the Body of your Desire."

CHAPTER VII

"Seek not the end of love. . . . But seek acts whose end is love. So shalt thou at last create that which thou now desirest."

* * * * *

"The art of creation, like every other art, has to be learnt."
—EDWARD CARPENTER.

"You spoke of feeding the furnace of my human passions!" exclaimed Chalmers. "Look round my room," he waved his hand at the bare walls, at the sparse and shabby furniture. "Is this the abode of a Sybarite? Observe my surroundings; they are in harmony with my mode of life. I drink no wine. I rarely eat meat. I expend little on myself, and I am no hypocrite. For I realise to the full that man's mind and soul are the most powerful part of him, that too much prominence is given to the needs of the flesh. In these days, people either lead bustling and sordid lives for the acquiring of money, or they pamper their bodies, fattening on the labour of others. I, on the contrary, like

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

the Stoic philosophers of old, have endeavoured to show by the fashion of my own life, that it is far more healthful to live on bare boards with merely the simplest necessities, than to dwell in the soft lap of luxury. But when I thought I had conquered the body, imperious Nature rebelled. I own it. I struggled against the hunger for love and the thirst for beauty. I turned in disgust from my bare boards, from my dull grey walls. My aching flesh crept whimpering away, and a voice within me, which would not be silenced, cried for some gratification of the senses. Yet I knew that I should fail to find what I desired among the ordinary so-called pleasures of life. I craved more subtle enjoyments. Then at last, through my imagination, I reached a land of fuller happiness—that magic border-land where sense and spirit merge into each other. Now,” Chalmers added, “I will tell you the exact manner in which *She* made herself visible to me. Do you know,” he asked, bending towards Van Dreen, “what it is, when lying half awake, to see pictures unfold before you—a kind of biograph of life-like

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

scenes, changing all the time, but intensely vivid, any one of which you can arrest by an effort of will, and hold so long as your will remains strong enough to retain it ? ”

Van Dreen smiled.

“An A B C lesson in concentration, my friend, and one of the rudimentary forms of psychic power.”

“Well, whatever it may be, that was a common diversion of my childhood, and when I grew a man and found myself gradually able to increase and regulate the faculty, it became my most absorbing interest. When dull or dissatisfied, I would turn to this wondrous realm for consolation. From the time of my entrance into the ministry, I had made it a custom to withdraw myself during certain hours for the practice of meditation, and as these moods of dissatisfaction grew upon me, I began insensibly to relax the severity of my discipline, and would allow my thoughts to drift into the sphere of romance. By degrees, I acquired the power of controlling my visions, and of holding them fixed for appreciably longer periods. Also, I found that by resolutely turning my will upon

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

images of beauty, either in landscape or human form, I could evoke the shadowy shapes of many things I had often longed to see." Chalmers paused for a moment, his voice lowered as he resumed his tale.

"One evening my mind had been dwelling on the thought of love, and on its most complete and rapturous form of expression. Then through my craving, there came to me a flashing but most distinct remembrance of having once, in some far past, loved and been loved as I desired. How or when I could not tell, but I knew, as certainly as I know the fact of my individuality, that in some past time, all the passion pent in my nature had found an outlet which entirely satisfied me. It is impossible to describe that glimmering realisation of once-felt bliss. The sensation was so delicious that I was eager to experience it again, and by deliberate effort I succeeded in bringing it back. You will wonder how I did this. I can scarcely tell; it seemed to be by force of will. Perhaps I can best explain by instancing the faint flashing sense which many a person has for the fraction of a second—the im-

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

pression, gone almost before one can put it into definite thought, that one has seen, felt, said, or done some particular thing before. You know the Platonist doctrine of Intellection? Would you describe that, too, as the A B C of psychology? ”

Van Dreen made a rapid affirmative movement. He was listening with profound interest.

“ The sensation I mean,” continued Chalmers, “ was something like that, but a million times intensified. For when I found that I could fix it, prolong it, recall it, then truly it seemed to me as a piece of solid ground in an ocean of phantasy. Soon I ceased to regard my feeling as a freak of the imagination——”

“ Imagination ! ” cried Van Dreen. “ Stop there a moment. What is imagination? Merely a trick of the brain—something to be ashamed of, rather than not—eh? Most people think so. Well, you grant that it’s a magic wand which can turn dull bricks and mortar, the most prosaic details of everyday life—into beautiful dreamland. Ay, and it’s much more. Imagination is the profoundest

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

attribute of the ingrained God of the soul ; the strongest proof of the divine element in man. You can't get away from it. But mark—only the mind capable of creating ideals can *exercise* imagination. And remember, too, no invention has ever been carried out in the material world that did not first take form in someone's imagination. On the other hand, you can't imagine anything which never has been and never could be. This is a stupendous fact. Whatsoever your finite intelligence can evolve out of its own feeble inner consciousness, that very thing, I tell you, exists *somewhere*. Because we don't know *where*, is no argument against its existence. You may be very sure that what your poor thought-instrument can shape in vague imperfect fashion, has been created in full form and colour by the Thought of God. So your imagination is something like a child's unconscious imitation of the action of the Parent Mind."

Chalmers looked surprised. Then he gave a bland assent.

"The same idea has often occurred to me," he said. "Indeed, I have ventured to

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

express something of the sort in my sermons. But I scarcely expected to hear it from you, Mr. Van Dreen. Yours is a remarkable character, and deeply imbued with spirituality, I see that now. To proceed, however. I gave myself up more and more unreservedly to my imagination, or memory, as in truth it seemed to me; and one evening when I was wrapped in this ecstatic dream-condition, there came a different and even more definite impression of once-being—this time in connection with a landscape more vivid and real-looking than any I had yet seen. It was a landscape quite unfamiliar to me——”

“I’d like you to describe it as closely as you can,” said Van Dreen.

“That is easy. The scene was gorgeous with colour, brilliant hues interblending with a wonderful softness—gold, orange, purplish-pink, and an exquisite rose, like what I have heard described as the after-glow of the East. There were wide stretching distances, feathery palms drawn against the glow, the outlines of massive buildings and rows of huge black statues with calm faces and the Sphinx smile. I cannot convey to you the sense of

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

lapping warmth, of dreamy exhilaration, of unutterable sweetness. As I tried to hold the scene in my interior vision, it changed, and the glorious colours faded slowly into night. But such a night ! The sky an unfathomable blue filled with immensely brilliant stars, and an Arabian Nights' enchantment in the air."

Chalmers seemed too much moved by the remembrance to command his language.

"Van Dreen," he went on excitedly, "doctors say that one of the most common symptoms of insanity is a sense of boundless immensity, of exaltation and inward power which makes the madman believe himself to be a sovereign ruler or a divine personage. Well, on the occasion of which I tell you, I, too, had an indescribable sense of inward power and of world-transcending immensity—a feeling of exaltation so extraordinary that I wondered if I were going mad, and yet I knew myself to be absolutely sane. I was one with the glorious night of my vision, one with the vast throb of the universe. The whole earth and heavens were mine. I had become, as it were, able to accomplish miracles, if I should so desire. It seemed to

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

me that the planets were under my dominion ; that I could command the stars and they must obey. What I should will, that I knew *must* be. My will gave the fiat by which destiny should be controlled. And I *willed*, with the whole strength of my being. I *willed* with the utmost force of my soul. I willed that the most perfect beauty should be revealed to me in woman's form. I willed that I should attain the rarest pleasure man can experience. I willed that love, in its most subtle sweetness should be given to me to enjoy. I *demand*ed this thing : and in the very demanding I knew it to be mine. For was I not one with the Power which bestows all gifts on man ? Oh ! how can I make you understand that marvellous sense of potency ? Bear with my rhapsody, Van Dreen. The power was real, as results will show. I felt myself the central point of a vast Force which had concentrated itself into one insistent Will—one supreme demand. I knew that the demand went vibrating through measureless waves of ether. And the vibrations struck, it may be, on some distant world. Response came back to me. My demand was answered. I tell

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

you that *I heard* the answer. Out of the measureless ether it came—a long drawn note of ineffable sweetness—such a sound as might have been the broken chord of Memnon's lyre or the wail of the lost Pleiad yearning for her mate. And I knew that the voice cried to me and to *me* alone. I had called on Love, and Love replied. From out of the great Heart of Life she answered—"I come, I come." Chalmers' features were tense with emotion, and his pale face was as that of a statue lighted by an inward fire.

"And she came?" said Van Dreen quietly.

"She came," Chalmers repeated in a rapt tone. "Her loveliness shone forth from the dying glory of the after-glow, and with these eyes I saw my ideal of beauty, joy, and love, personified in a woman's tender shape before me. She came with the mystic sign upon her forehead—the emblem of life—the *Ānkh* within the Crescent."

"Are you acquainted with the meaning of that old Egyptian symbol?" asked Van Dreen.

Chalmers stared at Van Dreen with a

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

bewildered air. He started and appeared to be making a violent effort of memory. Whatever it was, the rigid but rapturous expression fell again like a mask over his features. Suddenly he relapsed into a semi-somnambule manner, and recited in an odd chanting way :

" I—Tha-an, priest of Rā, give praise and worship to Him, the Self-Created One, Who resteth ever on the Unchanging Law. Hail, Rā ! the Unbegotten, the Begetter. Hail in Thy Emblem of the Life. In Thy Glory of the Disk. In Thy Spouse by Whom are Birth and Love. Hail, Isis-Hathor ! Virgin of the World ! Mother of Gods ! Moon-Lady of Heaven ! Hail ! thou Queen of the Serpent, Who ariseth in Sirius and giveth corn to man. Hail, Rā and Isis—in the Ānkh, and in the Crescent ; in the Disk and in the Star."

The rhythmic cadence closed, and Chalmers stood with arms outstretched.

" I guess that's fairly correct," observed Van Dreen in his matter-of-fact tones which sent a little shiver through the priest.

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

Chalmers sank back in a chair, his head drooping. Van Dreen, thoroughly alert, sat forward, his keen eyes fixed upon the priest's face.

"Yes," he said. "It's pretty much what I expected. *She* is the embodiment of all that your brain, your soul, and your senses craved for. You brought her to birth out of the womb of space by the power of your will and desire. Genius, my friend, is no more than a pin-point escape of creative force, and will and desire are the human valves it dribbles through. You just got hold of a bit of embryonic matter, and kind of quickened it. Matter is nothing but unevolved spirit. And so, there you see is Haeckel's doctrine, twisted round, and we're Monists after all."

Chalmers started, and made a sweeping movement as though he were brushing away clouds. "What have I been saying?" he asked hesitatingly.

Van Dreen smiled and pointed to the fire which had gone low. "Put on a bit more coal," he said. "There's some superstition that one mustn't poke a man's fire till one

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

has known him for seven years, so I suppose it is not my place to tilt that scuttle."

Chalmers got up and, taking some pieces of coal, one by one, with the tongs, he laid them on the fire. He seemed purposely to prolong the operation, and while performing it, managed to regain his composure. Then, re-seating himself, he crossed his knees, clasped his hands together, and looked straight at Van Dreen.

"If I am the victim of hallucination, you must be so likewise," he said. "Since you also have seen my vision——"

Van Dreen jerked his chin.

"That's so. Well—after that first time?"

"I tried to reason with myself that I could not have been in my sober senses, but I had kept my consciousness, all through, too clearly to doubt that. Nevertheless, I watched myself carefully for any other signs of brain disorder, and even consulted a brain specialist—in so far as I could, without telling him what troubled me. He could find no symptom of mental disease, and attributed any suggestion of delusion to nervous strain

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

and over zeal in my work. He advised rest and change, which I tried. Needless to say they made no difference. Had they done so, it would have been to my bitter regret ; for, as time went on, my vision became ever less phantasmal—ever more of a living delight, and to lose it would have been to lose my dearest joy. Life was no longer a mere valley of dry bones, stirred at rare intervals by the wind of the spirit—a toilsome journey, illumined occasionally by the lamp of religious enthusiasm. Alas ! self-examination often compels me to trace my religious enthusiasm to a deeply-grained root of gratified egoism.”

“ I guess egoism is the root of a good many fine things,” observed Van Dreen.

“ I think you are right. But who can analyse the subtle temptations that assail man’s spirit ? ” proceeded the priest. “ I must admit that those which come with the power to sway a crowd are to me peculiarly insidious. But to continue. Soon her presence became more intensely real to me. It seemed that in some mysterious fashion her life-stream flowed from mine. As I breathed, so she breathed. As I thought tenderly of

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

her, an answering shade of tenderness would steal over her features. She appeared to be conscious of me, though her eyes were always closed. She looked like a woman in healthful sleep dreaming some happy dream, and in my heart I knew that it was of *me* she dreamed. Indeed, I wondered could she be the phantasm of a living woman whose soul was visiting me in a dream ? ”

“ No impossibility there,” remarked Van Dreen.

“ But I knew of no such woman. I had never seen anyone in the least like her, either in life or in a picture. Then another explanation occurred to me—a horrible explanation.”

“ What was that ? ”

“ You would know about the mediæval *succubi* of whom one has read in monkish books. And there are the old stories of evil spirits in the shape of beautiful women tempting the anchorites of the Thebaid. If such trials were ordained as a test for the saints of God in those days, why not in these ? ”

“ Why not ? Except that when a man finds himself haunted by demons, he may

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

be very sure that it is *his own* evil passions which have created them."

The priest shuddered.

"I feel it impossible to account for her by any such theory. If she be the embodiment of passion, it is surely the purest passion that ever breathed in woman. Were she evil, could she dwell thus in the quiet deeps of my inmost being, answering even in her silence to my thoughts, inspiring me, as I am certain that she does when I preach, with eloquent words which voice all that I feel to be best in me? No, do not tell me that this dear perfection of womanhood is a shape of sin. I cannot believe it."

There was something very kindly in the sound of Van Dreen's crackling laugh.

"My dear sir! When God gave our grandfather Adam a beautiful woman to be his helpmeet, would you have it that he turned to the Almighty and said: 'Why bring along this temptation?' However, we are told that it was through that very woman he got notice to quit the Garden."

Chalmers' eyes, feverishly bright, searched Van Dreen's countenance. "Do you agree,

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

then, that I am not at fault in permitting myself—how can I define it—this quasi-materialised commune ? ”

“ The Lord forbid ! I didn’t say that. Quasi-materialised ? ” Van Dreen’s gaze met that of Chalmers. Something in it made the priest blench and a look of fear rose in his face.

“ What do you mean by that term ? ” Van Dreen asked.

Chalmers stammered in reply.

“ Ah ! there—there—— That’s what frightens me. It is the crux of the situation. I dare not face it.”

“ So ! I opine, then, that something fresh has occurred lately in connection with this affair ? ”

“ You are right,” said Chalmers in a low, earnest tone. “ Something has lately occurred which has startled me most painfully—something which presents a problem profoundly interesting—one that would fill me with the keenest pleasure were it not for the uneasiness which accompanies it.” He paused, and glanced apprehensively behind him. His voice dropped to a tremulous whisper, and his

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

limbs began to shake. Van Dreen laid a reassuring touch upon his arm.

"Calm yourself, my friend. We may be in a country unknown to you, but it doesn't follow that no one has ever traversed it before. Besides, God's sun shines everywhere."

Chalmers caught at his hand. "How strong you are!" he said. "I am weak; I know it. And that is just what I fear. I have not the strength to cope with this new development. I feel depleted of force, mentally and physically. Besides, there has been something else," he added agitatedly; "something which I will tell you of. That is, too, a kind of supernatural happening—outside the question of the apparition—trivial in comparison, but so strange that it helped to unman me."

"Just so," gently answered Van Dreen. "Well, I guess we'll get down to the bed-rock of that little business likewise."

"Oh, you shall hear all. I will hide nothing from you, but I don't want to speak about that matter for the moment—as I said, it is insignificant in comparison. Only

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

it gave me a sensation of sickening terror, and made me feel that I am not as other men."

"Oh! Come, everyone who discovers for himself that there's a fourth dimension is apt to lose his way at first. Set your mind at rest about any side-happening which may have disturbed you. I want to hear all that you can tell me about your sleeping lady?"

"Sleeping!" echoed Chalmers. "She used to appear to me sleeping, but now—*now*, she has awakened."

Van Dreen gave a long, low whistle.

"So that's the way of it! Well we must send her to bye-bye again."

"Do not jest," implored Chalmers. "Can you not understand how terrible this is to me? There are moments when I could almost believe that the miracle has been accomplished by the powers of darkness."

Van Dreen pursed up his lips and nodded. "When did this change occur?"

"Last night, between twelve and one. It is my custom to consecrate the midnight hours to *Her*. Last night as usual I had called to her and she came. I told you that her life seemed to be dependent upon mine, that

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

she breathed with my breath, thought with my thoughts, smiled in response to my tenderness. But I argued falsely in supposing that she had only a subjective existence; I deceived myself in daring to fancy that I could keep her under my own control. She has a life, and a will independent of mine. That I saw when she opened her sweet eyes and spoke. Heavens! Her looks! Her voice!"

"She spoke! In what language?" inquired Van Dreen.

"I cannot tell. It is unknown to me."

Van Dreen started up from his chair and stood, thinking deeply. Chalmers also rose and feverishly paced the large bare room. Van Dreen looked after him with a grave anxiety in his eyes.

"May I ask," he said, "whereabouts you meet this lady?"

Chalmers stopped and turned.

"In the shrine that I have prepared for her. I will show it to you. Come and see."

CHAPTER VIII

"We are at last beginning to realise that the range of human nature is illimitable, that the depths of the 'buried life' are unfathomable, that the possibilities of man's development are infinite."—"THE CREED OF CHRIST."

CHALMERS moved quickly to the baize-covered door studded with brass nails, and Van Dreen followed him. The priest pressed, one after another, several of the small bright knobs which formed the pattern upon the door, making precise regular movements of different lengths, like the tapping out of a message by the Morse code. His manner of doing this was certain and intimate, as though he were well accustomed to the cryptographic device which gained him entrance to the secret chamber. Presently the door swung noiselessly on its spring, and Chalmers, after signing to Van Dreen to go in, closed the panel behind them. They were now completely shut off from the rest of the house, and stood in absolute darkness, until Chalmers pressing an electric button in the wall beside

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

him, set free a flood of softly radiant light, revealing a room, the like of which Van Dreen had never seen before.

The contrast was extraordinary between this place and that which they had just left. On *that* side the door, lay the bare, barrack-like study without a single redeeming feature of grace or comfort. On *this* side was an Oriental paradise. It seemed almost impossible that the scene Van Dreen now beheld could be contained within a Bloomsbury dwelling-house. The most extraordinary thing about it was an effect of vast space, and of almost tropical atmosphere. Here was presented what appeared the reality rather than the similitude of gorgeous desert wastes steeped in the mellow brilliance of sunset, and stretching away in luminous distances to meet the deep blue, starry canopy of evening sky, pellucidly clear as are the skies of those golden regions south of the Mediterranean. So realistic, indeed, was the likeness of sandy plain lost in the warm haze of heaven that it was difficult to understand by what mechanical means had been contrived the marvellous interblending of colour which

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

without any visible junction of walls and ceiling, produced the appearance of earth and sky melting into one another. It would have seemed quite natural to see the great outline of the Pyramids in the foreground, or a string of camels winding their long, flexuous necks against the seemingly far-off horizon. But there was nothing to disturb the dazzling isolation—nothing but the soft bewilderment of golden light and rich colour.

As Van Dreen gazed, he became aware that the counterfeit of desert space and effulgence was obtained by the use of variously tinted semi-opaque glass and by an arrangement of electric lamps, invisible to the spectator, which cast a powerful, diffused light resembling more the sun's rays, when near its setting, than any artificial illumination. The ceiling was dome-shaped to represent the sky, and the hollow of it was of that cerulean blue which one may see in old stained glass. This glass was jewel-like in depth and lustre, the joins in it cleverly hidden by a semblance of the constellations. For, shining there, were the ghosts of stars,

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

palely luminous, as stars are before daylight has quite gone, while below, the likeness of far-stretching sand was shown in the hue of the carpet—a warm orange, the texture of it silk pile, soft and sheeny.

There was not much furniture in the room, the chief being a long curved divan set in the round of the wall, broad and low, upholstered in rich Persian embroidery, and strewn with down cushions. Near the divan stood a low stand inlaid with mother-o'-pearl and thickly encrusted with large pieces of matrix turquoise. On this were costly jars filled with hot-house flowers—roses, lilies, gardenias, stephanotis—giving out a delicious blend of perfume. Another beautifully carved table near the door supported a lamp, its odorous wick floating in scented oil. Close to this table was an ancient-looking stool, but the room had no other seat except a large arm-chair which faced the divan. This chair was of archaic design, and differed from those in the sitting-room next door in that it looked delightfully comfortable. Its long, low curve was cushioned, and it had broad, padded arms, each ending in the carved head

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

of a sort of fabulous serpent, the bowed coils supporting the seat, the tails forming the legs of the chair, before and behind. Two similar reptiles twined at the back, their fore-parts holding a cushioned neck-rest at the exact angle for comfort, while between the serpents' heads, which met above it, was a jewelled disk meant to represent the sun.

Van Dreen remarked on this curious chair, and Chalmers answered at once, evidently pleased that he should have succeeded in impressing a person outwardly so unimpressible.

"I found this chair in Paris, at an old curiosity shop across the Seine, which I don't suppose many people know about. It took my fancy, and I paid rather a large sum for it. In fact, I outbid the curator of a certain museum for which it had been originally intended. Now, Mr. Van Dreen, I see that you are struck by my conception of a sanctuary for my Ideal. What do you think of it?"

"I guess there's nothing like it outside the Gobi desert. Your architect must have known the East pretty well."

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

"My architect was myself. No mortal eyes save mine have seen my shrine in its completed state till now. Of course, I was obliged to employ skilled artisans to carry out my scheme in its earlier stages, but I chose men from Italy who could not speak a word of our language. I was not going to trust in the British workman's clumsy fingers and garrulous tongue. It took quite a long time collecting the materials. The glass I had specially tinted, and the lights were fixed by an expert electrician. But practically my own hands, by slow degrees, did the rest. I am, as I said, my own architect and designer, and it has been a dear labour to build up this home for my Beloved."

There was an eager note in Chalmers' voice, but Van Dreen did not answer.

"This has all been arranged as I thought she would have wished," went on Chalmers wistfully. "The warmth, the brilliancy, and yet the soft tenderness of those hues seemed suggestive of her. As I said, I do not know the East except by repute, but I could not forget the landscape which I saw with my interior vision on that wonderful occasion

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

when I called for my beloved. The mystery of its colouring and the enchantment of its atmosphere are inseparably associated with *Her*, and I tried to gather the same atmosphere about her here. Somehow, she seems to belong to it, and here she has come night after night, at my bidding, to that couch which I prepared for her."

"My friend," said Van Dreen gravely, "did you ever chance to read a story about a prince who had longed all his life to visit the Garden of Paradise, and who persuaded the East Wind to bear him thither?"

Chalmers looked at Van Dreen blankly.

"I am not sure—I think so."

"Well, if you have, you'll remember how a beautiful fairy—the Fairy of the Garden—showed that prince the Tree of Knowledge, which was still growing in its old place. And the wonder of that tree and the beauty of that fairy were, as the old poet puts it, 'a snare for gods and men.' Anyhow, they were more than the prince could stand. Well, the fairy gave him a good time, with songs and dances and what-not, and when night came she beckoned him back to the

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

Tree and let him watch her go to sleep under its scented branches. And while he watched her she smiled on him so sweetly in her sleep that he was sorely tempted to stoop and kiss her, but he had been warned that that would be sin. It's only a child's story, but we are all more or less children, you know."

"I've heard the tale," said Chalmers, turning away, while a faint flush spread over his face. "It is curious that you should have mentioned it, for I have longed, I cannot tell you how madly, to kiss my fairy. For oh! how can I help loving her?"

"Pretty much what the prince in the story thought," replied Van Dreen. "And he kissed his fairy, which I guess he wished afterwards he hadn't done. For, you remember, there came a clap of thunder, and the prince saw his beautiful garden and the lovely fairy vanish like a falling star. *He, too, had sinned as Adam sinned, and Paradise was lost.*"

"Poor fool!" cried Chalmers; "and yet there are times when I feel willing to lose Paradise if I might possess my beloved."

He gazed upon the divan as though the

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

outline of the form he loved were visible to him, his face quivering in womanish fashion.

"I crouched here last night," he continued dreamily, "watching her—a perfect woman well fitted for man's love. Then, while I looked, I saw the flicker of her eyelids. It made me tremble. I thought I had been tampering with unlawful things. I was amazed, confounded, and yet thrilled—ah! Van Dreen, how I was thrilled! Her lips parted! The breath came through fitfully. Her breasts heaved, she stirred, and turned towards me. Sweet soul! What a benediction beamed on me from her eyes! I could never have imagined such eyes. So deep and pure! So guileless and yet so tender! It was an angel's passion, if that might be, but there was something utterly human in the way she stretched out her arms to me. Van Dreen! She is no saint nor fiend. She is a living, breathing woman, and she loves me."

"Undoubtedly she loves you," said Van Dreen. "Well, what happened then?"

"I bent over her. I felt a swooning sense

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

of rapture. Then an awful fear fell on me. It was as if a cold hand drew me back. I tore myself away, I dared not look at her again. She called after me. The tone was like strange music. Still I fled. I heard her moan faintly. The sound pierced me like a knife, but I dared not linger. Yet since I left her, I have suffered the tortures of the damned. This morning I went out and tramped for miles like a man possessed. And in truth it appears that I must have been possessed—by whom, by what, I cannot tell. Only I think it could not have been I myself who walked across Regent's Park and up Primrose Hill and over Hampstead Heath. My remembrance is confused. All the way, when I fancied I was walking, I seemed to see before me that tender face, those bewitching eyes, those hands that beckoned. Ah! Was it to *me* that she beckoned, or to some other in my form?"

Chalmers spoke wildly. There was frightened questioning in his look.

"Some other! How is that?" asked Van Dreen quietly.

"You remember that I spoke to you of

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

a second horror which had helped to unman me—a sort of supernatural happening ! ”

“ Yes ; let me hear it. ”

“ While I was, as I thought, away on my tramp, Manning, my secretary, sat transacting our church business with *Someone*, whom he took for me—*Someone* in full possession of my brain, who dictated letters to him, of which I knew absolutely nothing until Manning brought them to me for my signature an hour or so ago ! Explain this new mystery to me if you can. *Who* was it that tramped the Heath and the streets ? I myself, or some spirit that had taken my form ? If it were indeed I, then *what* was the Intelligence which dictated those letters ? We hear a great deal nowadays about cases of multiple personality,” the priest went on as Van Dreen did not answer. “ *Can* a living man duplicate himself so as to be in two places at the same time ? ”

CHAPTER IX

"What scientific investigation discloses is an initial and fundamental order continually unifying itself afresh through a process which we call evolution, the best flower of all the process being the developing human spirit."—J. ARTHUR THOMSON.

"Spirits are but pilgrims, sometimes like the swallow—of return."—LADY ARCHIBALD CAMPBELL.

VAN DREEN was taciturn and thoughtful, while Chalmers rambled on, alternately appealing and declaiming, his frame bent, his lean hands extended, the spasmodic twitchings of his body showing his nervous agitation.

They were back in the study now, having left the baize-covered door securely closed. The shrine within and all its Eastern glow and glory might have been but figments of a dream. It was getting late, and the house seemed wrapped in silence, but neither Van Dreen nor Chalmers thought of sleep as they seated themselves over a handful of smouldering coals. It did not occur to the priest that his visitor might care for refreshments.

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

Van Dreen put curt but kindly interrogations and listened sympathetically, while, in hoarse, jerky accents, Chalmers described how he had questioned the secretary closely as to the manner and look of that strange double which had dictated the letters; and how Manning had stared at him in wonder at first and then with a kind of pained pity when Chalmers had protested that he remembered nothing of that morning's work.

"If this kind of thing should happen again," said Van Dreen quietly, "don't be drawn into discussing it. Find out what you can from personal observation, but ask as few questions as possible about what puzzles you in yourself. You're apt to mystify people, and it only upsets their calculations to no purpose. Man thinks he knows everything, and, in reality, he doesn't know the first letters of the alphabet of psychology, and he won't begin to learn until he's a little less cocksure of himself. I reckon, however," added Van Dreen, "that this fellow Manning is a bit of a seer, without being aware that he is so."

And Van Dreen proceeded to explain that

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

the secretary had probably beheld Chalmers' thought-form employed on the dictation of the letters, and had mistaken it for physical substance.

"But how can that be?" exclaimed Chalmers. "A thought-form, as you call it, cannot speak; and Manning took the words of the letters down from my lips."

"The words were impressed upon his mind, and he *thought* he heard them," said Van Dreen. "That was the action of the subliminal self."

The priest shook his head impatiently. "Oh! I don't think much of all these nebulous modern theories about the subliminal self."

"Call things what you like, my friend," returned Van Dreen. "Names don't alter facts."

"No, I cannot deny the fact that there are unaccountable mysteries of existence, outside ourselves, for am not I, myself, a living example of them?" said Chalmers, with a touch of his old didactic manner. "But I have never inclined to the modern psychology which would appear to sub-divide man into various separate entities."

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

Van Dreen smiled.

"It takes time to convince folk that we're composed not of one body, but of several, each one of which can do work in its own particular sphere of being. I surmise you've never realised that a man may carry on the ordinary occupations of his life, to all appearance his complete self, while by force of mental concentration, perhaps unconscious, he may at the same time send his thought-double ahead of his physical body to do mental work, or, at any rate, to prepare the rough draft, so to speak, for his physical hands. And another person who happens to be *all there*—everyone of his vehicles in good order—and able to use his inner eyes, though he may not know it—as I suspect to be the case with your secretary, Manning—will, as likely as not, see the mental man and take that for the physical counterpart. There's the explanation of your difficulty in a nutshell. Do you take it?"

"I apprehend your meaning," replied Chalmers. "But I would attribute the phenomenon—if I should, in part, accept your explanation—as a result of the co-

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

ordination in ourselves of complex combinations of cells."

Van Dreen smiled again. It struck him that Chalmers had been imbibing psychology from popular sources.

"Let it go at that," he said. "We'll call it a pretty bit of mechanism. Yet it's simple—perfectly simple. A deal of the world's work is done in that very way. For, you see, thought-vibrations, once set up, are like any other vibrations, and carry along of themselves until the force that charged them has been exhausted. The immense power of thought, and an understanding of the laws which govern it, are only just dawning on mankind. It's a question of transmuting force into rarer forms of matter. You haven't got beyond a dim conception down here of the ether which one of your big men has called the boundary of science. But imagine the Marconi system operating in an even subtler medium than the ether, and at an inconceivably higher rate of vibration, and you get an idea of thought-dynamics. The fact of the matter is that we are much bigger and more complex than we know, and it

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

follows that only a comparatively small part of the real individual need necessarily be in manifestation on the physical plane at a given time."

But Chalmers was obviously befogged. It was odd, reflected Van Dreen, that a man so far advanced as to be able to make use of the finer forces of his being, should yet be so ignorant of their scope.

"I see you're all adrift," he said. "You can't comprehend how it is that you can be in two places at the same time; and yet it has probably happened to you more often than you're aware. Look here, in most cases, work which one person has wilfully neglected is turned over to somebody else to do, but by a practical arrangement on the part of the Supreme Mechanician who runs the puppets, men, certain portions of the Ego, are capable, when called on, of filling up the deficiencies of other parts. Well, the business belonging to one plane mustn't be ignored for the attractions of another. And so you had to accomplish, by this means which so alarms you, the task routine which you would otherwise have got through in the

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

ordinary way. . You can take it from me that there's nothing diabolic in the process. You'll understand it in due time. Your development has been lop-sided, that's all."

Chalmers appeared relieved. He had begun to lose his ghastly look, and the nerve-tremors which had shaken him were subsiding.

"You've been dipping into a lead that's taken you where you didn't expect," went on Van Dreen. "You're like a larrikin of an inquiring turn of mind—been meddling with mechanism that's beyond you, and if we don't turn the brake on your machine, you will come a crasher—and not only you, but some of those other folks you've been hauling along what you'd call the 'Narrow Way.'"

"Alas! Alas!" cried Chalmers. "If I have indeed fallen under the dominion of Satan, have I drawn my hapless flock with me?"

"'No man liveth to himself nor dieth to himself,'" quoted Van Dreen gravely. "Your word is law to quite a good many, remember. But, mayhap, things are not so bad as you

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

think. Now, can you stand my taking the pulpit for a few minutes? "

Chalmers looked up, puzzled. " Say what you will," he said. " You're doing me a real kindness. I am afraid, though, you're not very comfortable," he added, as he saw Van Dreen wriggling, ill at ease, in the hard, cane-bottomed chair.

" No matter," laughed Van Dreen. " Only I guess that's how your desire-body got the pull of you in there." And he jerked his chin towards the baize-covered door. " You wouldn't give it a comfortable chair to curl round on, so it was bound to break out somewhere. But now, listen to me, if you can command patience."

Van Dreen covered his face with one hand, and remained silent for a few moments as if in commune with his soul.

" Here's for my sermon," he said, looking up, bright and alert again, " though I shan't outshine *you* in oratory, Mr. Chalmers. Well, the fact is, that man—the real man, with all his motor power for good or evil—is contained chiefly in those super-physical bodies we've been hinting at, and which, as

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

a rule, he hasn't the ghost of an idea that he possesses. That's where the difficulty comes in. Now, let's take a homely simile. Suppose you compare yourself to a teapot. The spout stands for your physical body through which thought and desire-activity are poured from the receptacle behind. That's where they're brewed and brought to perfection at the right evolutionary moment. You know that the quality of the tea depends as much upon whether the water was at boiling point as upon the ingredients of the brew. Now, my friend, the fact is, that, in denying yourself outlet, you've been stewing up a brew that's got a bit acrid—too much metaphysical tannin in it."

Chalmers smiled mechanically.

"Of course you didn't realise the stuff inside you," Van Dreen resumed. "You're accustomed to consider yourself a mere miserable animal. Just remember that you don't belong any more to the brute creation. You're on the human line now—made in God's own image, and that, as far as we know at present, is the highest form of evolution on this little globe. Well, it appears to me

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

that you've been stultifying your praiseworthy attempts at bettering the world, by not appreciating the primal god-like principles of your own being. You poor little particle of Divine Life!—what *do* you suppose you're made of? Just tell me."

It was strange to hear the once self-confident priest reply as simply and almost as much by rote as a Sunday-school child might have answered.

"Of soul and body—the natural man and the spiritual man—born into sin, yet trusting through penitence to be restored to grace."

"Penitence is much," said Van Dreen solemnly, "but understanding is more, and right action is greater still. Broadly, then, and setting aside the more complex distinctions, we agree that you are made of soul and body, and I presume you will admit that your soul is the best part of you—the real one, the real you, which urges your body hither and thither, and compels it to do its work. Well, your body owns sense-instruments—sight, hearing, smell, and so on. Logically, therefore, why should you deny corresponding faculties to your soul, which is

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

its spiritual counterpart? It often strikes me as extraordinary that people who take so much trouble to specialise differing forms of religion should not make a more scientific study of their own souls. But you don't. You keep 'em shut up in a dark fleshly prison, instead of sunning 'em in the light of heaven."

"I know too well," returned Chalmers sadly, "how seldom the soul can receive true illumination—how terribly it is steeped, as it were, in matter. But such periods of dryness and darkness are the experience of all who endeavour to lead the spiritual life."

"Well, I conclude that if folks choose to live in a city house they'll enjoy considerable periods of fog. Let 'em move into a clear atmosphere—say, some hill-top—and, naturally, they get more air and sunshine. Seems to me, Mr. Chalmers, that your soul has been spending the best part of this life, so to speak, in a little, built-up, city house among a lot of smoky chimneys. Just bring it along with me to the top of a hill, and we'll give it fresh air. Your body needs trains, tubes, and omnibuses to convey it about. Your soul doesn't require that sort of thing. Listen,

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

then. *Your* physical organs happen to be a good deal finer than most people's. Your soul organs, however, are immeasurably superior. They've got quicker means of locomotion, senses more developed, better lungs to inhale with. Your soul-body is *all* lung, and takes something in at every one of its cells. It's like sorts of fish that breathe all over. And if it didn't—if any set of those cells got blocked, and your mental circulation were consequently obstructed, you'd set up diseased growth in some part of you. Lop a portion of your plant, and it will put forth abortions or else shrivel up. Take your fish out of water, and it will gasp and die."

Van Dreen waited a moment or two, but Chalmers only made a sign to him to continue.

"You remember our talk about crushing out natural desires?" Van Dreen went on. "If you do that, unnatural ones will come in their place. You've been letting those in: that's what's the matter with you. You've rejected normal conditions, and so you have developed in an abnormal way. In your little home-patch, that you've deprived of

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

sun and air, you have grown a fine monstrosity. . . . Oh! no offence, my friend. Hear me out, if you please.

"Now, to touch on the Creation story, which I conclude you teach in your church, I'd like to ask you whether such a course as this you've adopted was the original Divine intention. When the Almighty planted His Garden of the World, did He make it dark? Did He keep it cold? Did He allow neither warmth, nor sunshine, nor healthful love to enter it? I reckon good old gardener Adam would soon have been obliged to strike work if that were so. But that wasn't the Creator's way. He poured into His garden mighty elemental forces from the sole reservoir of all Good: that which you, and I, and men everywhere existent, of any creed—whether Christian, Buddhist, Parsi or Mohammedan—call God."

Van Dreen's thin-pitched and ordinarily unresonant voice rose in reverberating cadences. His winged words darted through the silence of the room, striking, each, as they passed, upon the attentive mind of Chalmers, who listened in mild wonder, too interested to be resentful of unorthodox

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

theories. Van Dreen sprang from his stiff-backed chair. He paced the room with quick strides, then paused, and spoke anew.

“The unchanging Law ordained that man can only make beneficent use of those tremendous elemental forces in a diluted or transmuted form. Just so much the more powerful are they—so much the more dangerous—in proportion to their nearness to the Original Source. For example, electricity can be adapted to the working of the most delicate instrument. But electricity, unregulated, becomes the direst of destructive energies. So with the sun’s rays. Diffused, they are the agency for keeping life on the globe. Concentrate them to the focus of a sufficiently strong burning glass, and they could set a forest on fire or burn up a city. Put a child to play with such a glass—even a toy one—beneath a tropical sun, and the chances are he’ll get singed. And that, my friend, is what has happened to you. You’ve been playing with the strongest power in the Universe—the power, mark you, which is God’s accepted means for the continuation of life. You can’t go

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

behind *that*. All the primal passions in man are elemental forces of the kind which I have attempted to describe. Use then rightly, and they sustain life. Use them improperly, and they deal death."

"Go on," exclaimed Chalmers as Van Dreen paused again.

"Not tired out yet? Well, take the breathing question. It's commonly understood that the human creature cannot live without a certain proportion of oxygen in the air he breathes. Now, what oxygen is to the physical body, love is to the spiritual body. Just as oxygen is the essential component of the ordinary atmosphere, so is love the element needed to keep up the life of the soul. And that, because God Himself is Love. He cannot exist outside Himself. Nor can human entities—those immortal Particles of Himself which He has projected into matter to fulfil their appointed Cycle of Experience, in order that each may become in entirety as Himself—these cannot exist, I say, without the chief element that went to form them. When, therefore, you close the cells of your nature by which this life-giving

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

element is legitimately shed forth, re-vitalised and re-absorbed, you destroy the balance of distribution, and are liable to take into certain parts of your being—with concentrated and deadly effect—an undue amount of that which, if gently diffused, would have produced natural and beneficial results. Do you see? Most modern scientists, I imagine, would allow that what we might call the science of the soul has only of late years received any particular attention. Since the Dark Ages, science and religion have unhappily been divorced, and no children of their union have been born into the world. During the Dark Ages, men of intellect and aspiration recognised that their sole means of gaining suitable instruction in such things was by the adoption of the religious vocation. You had better bear this in mind, for here, I believe, you will find the key to your own position."

"I have persistently followed the religious vocation," interrupted Chalmers eagerly. "So far as my daily life is concerned, I have certainly endeavoured to keep the flesh in complete subjection to the spirit."

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

“ Ay, but what of the life of the mind, which, of course, includes the life of the imagination ? ” asked Van Dreen. “ Canst thou bind Leviathan with pack-thread ? You have bridled the flesh, but have given loose rein to the mind. Here’s another case of Phaeton and the steeds of the Sun—your chariot has run away with you. Oh ! believe me, those old Greeks and Egyptians knew a lot more than we do about the power of thought. Under the ancient systems of spiritual training, neophytes were instructed that since all action is the outcome of thought, the control of thought is of far greater importance than the control of action.”

Chalmers gave a faint murmur of protest, but Van Dreen scarcely noticed the interruption.

“ Why, see here, everything in the Universe has been made by thought. You must know the Platonic doctrine of Ideas, which sets forth the matter better than I know the interpretations of it. God chose thought as His method for starting worlds, and evolution consequently proceeds in ratio with the power of thought—whether in man, beast,

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

or the lower forms of life. Instinct, tendency, are degrees of thought. Even inanimate nature contains the germ of thought. Minerals and metals are living matter. Some of your modern professors—to mention Bose and Leduc among others—have got at a fact—which was no new thing, mind, to the old philosophers—that crystals are formed by a process of growth, movement and reproduction. Of course, plants have their degree of consciousness. Nobody doubts that. Haven't you noticed the differences of character in plants? Two of the same family, growing under precisely the same conditions of soil and aspect, will show different peculiarities. Plants have their sympathies, their antipathies, their strange affinities with humanity. Animals in a more marked degree. Consciously or unconsciously, man is continually moulding and recreating forms of life. If there were no thought, the material world would go to pieces."

Again Chalmers gave his slight dissenting gesture, and again Van Dreen brushed it away.

"Well, breed a race of lunatics, and confine

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

them to some particular locality with absolute liberty to do what they please—then see what would be the result? A tribe of monsters, and final extinction of the species! Deterioration would be followed by decay. There would be cessation of building and cultivation. The land would become unfruitful, and the rough tangle of vegetation would dwindle and die. Kill out thought, and you kill out life—at least the material expression of it. Not the true ultimate Life, for so long as Love exists, it will manifest as Life in other forms. And Love, being Divinity itself, is eternal. But, now, you have not been killing out thought—quite the contrary. You have so fed up your desire-engine with this fuel that it has run away with you. Your thought, concentrated upon an immense, though illusory passion, has moulded a visible embodiment of your ideal.”

“That is true,” said Chalmers, “impossible as the thing appears.”

“No, the faculty of building a likeness of some person in one or other state of being is not so very rare. Tradition of all ages teems with stories of black magicians who

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

have created by the power of Will certain materialised shapes for their own delectation. But such creatures were mere automata, doomed in due time to disintegrate. That which is real can never die, for God alone can create the real. Man has a certain command of elemental matter, but the Life-Essence comes from God alone, since, potentially, it always existed in Him. Man's work is at best the feeblest imitation of the genuine article. Therefore I doubt very much whether you could have produced your dream-lady in such perfection had she never lived before. It appears to me that she is no soulless creation, but has existed and still exists somewhere in Space. You have called her back from beyond the tomb, and, for you to have done this, there must have been some very strong bond between you."

"Ah! That is what I feel," cried Chalmers, "though I have told myself over and over again that it is a madman's fancy, for I have no knowledge of her in this life, no memory of her in another. When she first appeared to me, I was sensible only of the overpowering longing—the command of

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

my soul—that out of the womb of Space there should come to me something, some being, who would satisfy the yearning of my body, my mind, and my spirit.”

“And this lovely woman—whom your subconscious mind remembered, though your conscious mind did not—responded to the command your will was strong enough to enforce. That was no subjective vision, my friend. The ever-living soul of a woman of the past, putting on the vesture you had once known, came in answer to your call. And now there is a grave, ethical question to consider. Having awakened this woman from her timeless sleep, what is your duty towards her?—towards yourself, towards Heaven?”

Chalmers groaned.

“There is only one straight thing to do,” returned Van Dreen. “Screw up your courage, and ask the woman who she is, and all about herself. If she can give you some explanation of her coming, you’ll be in a better position to judge what to do for her.”

Chalmers gazed up at him, eagerness mingled with fear in his eyes.

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

"Do you mean," he asked, "that I should be justified in taking her to myself?"

"No, I don't," returned Van Dreen sternly. "God has appointed times and seasons for all His creatures. He has set the boundaries of life and death, and man is defying the Eternal Law when he tries to disregard them. He must pay the penalty for anticipating his heritage."

"To be as gods," murmured Chalmers, "knowing good and evil."

"I guess the old Serpent was quite aware what he was about when he persuaded Eve to pluck the apple in Eden. He knew what a mess there would be if Baby Man were allowed to meddle with affairs he didn't, and couldn't, understand. The wisest of us are but infants in the nursery. But magic has always been the favourite plaything of precocious children, and the apples on the Tree of Knowledge have tempted all mankind to pluck and eat."

"Is it not natural when the fruit is at our hand?" exclaimed Chalmers bitterly.

"What a poor excuse for theft! Man

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

doesn't seem to have acquired much wisdom by the theft, however. His bite of the apple ought at least to have given him some comprehension of eternity—the knowledge that death is no more than a recurring night of sleep with new life on each new morning. But with regard to that question you asked me, what I mean is that, since your love for this woman, and hers for you, appears not to be vicious in itself, but is probably part of the swing of the eternal pendulum, you're fully justified in taking it into consideration. You ought to treat the lady fairly, and clear up this confusion of her rights and your liabilities, which can only be done by approaching her frankly on the matter. You owe this to her, and to yourself; but you've got to remember that the pleasure which belonged to yesterday, and may perhaps be a part of to-morrow, should not, on that account, be unlawfully snatched at to-day. If you so snatch it, you presume to set aside the Almighty's ordinance of Time."

At that moment the clock in St. Matthias' tower boomed out the first note of midnight. Chalmers started up, feverishly alert. He

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

hastened towards the baize door, but paused half way, and, shuddering as though a sudden blast had caught him, turned with an irresolute look at his companion. He seemed in the grip of some almost uncontrollable impulse against which he was fighting. As he stood there, the clock went on slowly striking till the last number of the hour had tolled forth. Then Van Dreen rose and went to him.

"She wants me," Chalmers exclaimed excitedly. "I feel her summons. To-night it is *she* who calls—not I. I did not desire her presence—I swear it—but nevertheless I must go to her. Van Dreen, I must go to her, I say, even though she call me to perdition."

"Not to-night," said Van Dreen quietly, and put a firm hand on Chalmers' twitching shoulder.

CHAPTER X

"Is there anything or perhaps everything in personal magnetism . . . of the spiritual kind which affects minds, hearts and souls? No one, I think, can read history and doubt the existence of such a mysterious force, whether you call it magnetism, hypnotism, or inspiration."—"T. P."

"Why should not the impact of soul on soul, the processes of thought suggestion and thought transference, the wireless telegraphy by which we consciously and unconsciously affect each other, afford the medium by which the Divine Spirit . . . produces wonderful changes on the whole equilibrium of the inner life?"—DR. WILLIAM JAMES.

CHALMERS tried to shake off Van Dreen's detaining hand.

"Let me go," he cried. "I tell you that she is calling me; she is waiting for me. She is there, in the place I made for her. She wonders why I have not kept the tryst. Let me go! You said I ought to speak to her. You can come with me. You shall hear what she has to say. You shall support me. But come. If I am to have this interview, let it be to-night?"

"No, not to-night," said Van Dreen firmly, his hand still on Chalmers' shoulder.

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

He compelled the preacher to meet his eyes. The touch and the gaze took effect. Chalmers' limbs ceased twitching, and his features settled into a calmer expression.

"Not to-night," repeated Van Dreen. "There must be proper preparation for this ordeal. My friend, it *will* be an ordeal, and you need to be fortified by all the spiritual help you can procure. I, also, if I am to assist you, must seek spiritual aid. Now—do you trust me? Will you be guided by my advice?"

Chalmers submitted without further protest.

"I trust you," he said, "though why, I cannot tell."

"Never mind that. This is what I want you to do. Dismiss from your mind, as far as you are able, the sense of shock and perplexity from which you have been suffering and commit yourself to the Wisdom and Love that never fails. Remember that the Master you serve is human, and comprehends the heart's passions as no lesser man can comprehend them. He is the Spring and the Exemplar of all Love. Love, my friend

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

is as a mighty river sending forth innumerable streams to water the earth. But every stream, whether it be the love between brother and brother, parent and child, priest and flock, or the closer passion between man and woman, flows from the Original Source and becomes merged again at last in the great ocean of Love which is God Himself."

Chalmers made no answer. He dropped into a chair and plucked feebly at his wristbands. Now that the paroxysm had passed, he seemed dazed and completely worn out.

"Get to your bed," said Van Dreen kindly. "You will sleep like a child, and you'll wake refreshed, take my word for it. To-morrow, have a day off duty. Don't do any church work. Pray as much as you please, but breathe some fresh air while you are about it, if this beastly climate will let you. If I were you, I should play a good game of football with a pack of schoolboys—nothing so fine as schoolboys and football for invigorating the system. Then come home, and eat a decent dinner. Mark, though—you are not to go inside *there* on any account.

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

I should prefer that you avoided even this room, until you see me again."

"When will that be?" asked Chalmers.

"To-morrow evening, when I am free, and through with what I've got to do first."

"Then will you come and share our evening meal with us? I can't call it dinner, but there'll be food served in the refectory below at seven o'clock. That is—should you mind sitting down with our casuals?"

"I should enjoy it. I'll come with pleasure. By the way, Chalmers, I wasn't fair to you at first. Your eloquent oration in favour of mortifying the flesh misled me a bit, but this casual ward of yours has taught me a lesson in hasty judgment. Go on feeding starved folks, my good chap. Their souls, as well as their bodies, will be the better for it. But don't you forget to feed yourself as well. And that lean secretary of yours looks as though he could put away half a dozen mutton-chops. After supper to-morrow night, we'll come up here and get to business. Meanwhile, I'll think things over, and see how I can help you. Seems to

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

me, it's absolutely necessary that you should ascertain the lady's mind on the matter."

"I don't know how to talk to her," said Chalmers. "The only words I heard her say were unintelligible to me."

"I rather fancy that obstacle can be overcome," said Van Dreen reflectively. "Your chief difficulty lies in her personal charm, and against that you must guard yourself."

"It affects me to an incredible degree," cried Chalmers. "I have tried to steel myself against it, but I am drawn towards her by something stronger than my own will. She seems so essentially a part of myself that, over and over again, I have been almost compelled to snatch her to my arms and defy the Universe—ay, and its Maker—for her sweet sake."

Chalmers dropped his face upon his folded arms. "Heaven pardon this blasphemy," he muttered in broken accents.

Van Dreen thoughtfully patted the bowed head.

"My friend, it's just because she *is* a part of yourself—because she shared your being

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

once in some past time—that you can't get rid of her now. Don't you see that if you feel like this about her, God, of whom both you and she are most surely parts, must yearn over you both in like manner? Trust in Him."

Chalmers put his hand up blindly and caught at Van Dreen's.

"What a comfort you are," he cried. "You'll have to remain with me, Van Dreen. I dare not rely upon myself."

"Right-o!" said Van Dreen simply. "Now, I'm off for to-night. Suppose I see you to your room?"

Chalmers' bedroom was on the same floor. Several other rooms appeared to open on that corridor. The fanlight of one of these was faintly illuminated, and, as they passed, the door swung upon its hinges, and Manning, pale and austere, showed himself.

"Can I do anything?" he asked, glancing anxiously after Chalmers, who, with an absorbed look had passed on, without noticing his secretary.

"Mr. Chalmers is considerably overdone," said Van Dreen, lowering his voice. "I've

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

recommended him to lie abed late, and take a holiday to-morrow."

"Of course—yes. I'll see there's no occasion for Mr. Chalmers to be disturbed."

Van Dreen nodded good-night.

It was clear to him that he was still mistaken for a medical man, but he did not trouble about that matter. Chalmers had just entered, at the end of the passage, a small bare chamber lighted by one electric globe and furnished with a pallet bed and most meagre toilet appliances. Into this chamber Van Dreen followed him.

"Let me have your hands—palms upwards," he said. Chalmers obeyed without a word, and Van Dreen, breathing upon his own hands, spread them upon the hands of the preacher. The result was remarkable. It was as though a strong vital current were being passed through the exhausted man. By degrees his body became braced. The mask of his face relaxed, his strained mouth assumed its ordinary lines, and his eyes lost their troubled stare. Van Dreen's face wore a tense look. He seemed to be making a tremendously concentrated effort of will, but

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

his expression was exalted; it had grown peculiarly sweet, even sublime.

"Open yourself out to what I am giving you," said Van Dreen softly. "Lean on it, my friend. Draw it in. It's a force that comes from far beyond *me*. Have faith in its power."

Van Dreen removed his hands, breathed on them anew, and placed them on Chalmers' forehead, saying slowly, and pausing between the sentences:

"Sleep to-night in perfect tranquillity, and in faith that strength and counsel will be given to your soul. So shall you learn something of the true and godlike meaning of Love; and the mysteries of Life in Death and of Death in Life shall gradually become clear to you."

He left Chalmers kneeling calmly beside his bed. Van Dreen noiselessly shut the door behind him. He crept along the passage, and down the broad stone stairs, guided by a solitary burner on each landing. From below came the heavy breathing of humble wayfarers at rest. Someone was stirring in the hall. As Van Dreen came nearer, a man

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

rose from the porter's chair, and he saw that it was Willard.

"Your coat, sir? Yes, sir." The servant produced the garment, helping its owner into it with professional suavity, but there was a gleam of diffident inquiry in his eye, as he handed hat and muffler.

"Want to know how I think your master is?" said Van Dreen bluntly.

"Indeed, sir, I should be glad to hear that you've left him more in his ordinary," answered Willard with a ghost of a smile. "He's given us a good deal of anxiety of late."

"I guess so," said Van Dreen. "He's not very fit, and he's bothered with business just now. You must take no notice if he seems odd and absent."

"To be sure, sir," said Willard, drawing himself up. "But glad I am you was called in, Doctor."

"Well, they wouldn't own me in your College of Physicians," said Van Dreen, "though I've cured some sick folk in my time. You seem fond of your master, Willard?"

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

"Who wouldn't be, sir, and him the saint he is? Not but what I don't deny he's trying at times."

"Saints generally are, I find," smiled Van Dreen. "Other people have to keep sweeping up after 'em, eh, Willard?"

"And proud to do it, sir," said Willard with an air of gentle reproach. "Such examples lead to higher ends."

"Glad you think so. Personally, I'm not keen on saintship. Indeed I question whether a man ought to leave the road littered for folk that follow him. Shouldn't wonder if a few saints won't have to come back some day or other to pick up the broken hearts and ambitions they've scattered."

"Oh, sir! I'm sure, sir——" murmured Willard, not quite knowing what to say.

Van Dreen hunched up his shoulders and stood by the door-way, scanning the humble adherent with his kindly, quizzical smile.

"At all events, Mr. Chalmers wants someone to stand by his interests just now," he said. "So stick to him, Willard. Does your devotion compel you to combine the post of night-porter with your other duties?"

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

"Well, sir, of course with all this riff-raff about we must 'ave a night-watchman. They'd as like as not burglar us if we didn't. But the fact is, our watchman's mother was took to-day with a stroke, and he naturally wanted to go and sit up with her, but was disinclined to acquaint Mr. Chalmers—she being a female you see, sir. So I thought I'd be on the look-out."

"That's all right. Keep an eye on things, but leave your master to himself. I fancy he likes to come and go without anyone paying particular attention. By the way, let him sleep as long as he can. He needs rest."

"Certainly, sir; and if ever a gentleman has earned it, that's him. No one knows what a power of good he does."

"I'm sure of it," said Van Dreen sympathetically.

"Yes, sir," said Willard, a hand upon the door-latch. "I only wish"—and Willard tumbled over his low-toned words in his eagerness—"I *do* wish Mr. Chalmers could induce himself to take up with some nice young lady who'd look after him as only a

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

wife can." The man stopped short, seeming horribly shocked at his own suggestion. "Well, there," he finished lamely. "Perreps St. Paul's views are safest."

Van Dreen pursed up his mouth in amused fashion.

"You see we're not all built alike, Willard."

"No, sir, but being 'uman, and women put with us into the world, it *has* seemed to me, if I may say so, a kind of questioning of the Almighty's provision for us."

"I dare say it does," Van Dreen nodded. "But don't you worry, my good fellow, Mr. Chalmers is going to get better, and wiser too, perhaps—who knows? He'll do all right, provided he's not too venturesome. Man's but a child, you know, and Nature's his nurse. A kind enough nurse; but when he bothers her she punishes him, and smartly too. Good-night."

CHAPTER XI

"Long before Darwin brought the matter to a head, hundreds of men had been conscious of something in their midst, something gigantic, yet ignored, something omnipresent and yet invisible, a strange kinship and a strange relativity amid all created things. In the shape of a tree, in the fragment of an old sculpture, in the grimace of a baby, in the backbone of a fish eaten at breakfast, they caught a glimpse of some tremendous unity, they knew not what, for it was not yet christened evolution."—G. K. CHESTERTON.

THE next evening, when Van Dreen went again to the house in Bloomsbury, he saw at once that Chalmers was more composed. His whole mien suggested a sense of spiritual peace, as though, in the quiet after the storm, his soul had heard the still small voice. He had, too, the wind-swept look of one who has been alone upon a height.

"I can't imagine what you did to me," he said in answer to Van Dreen's inquiry as to how he had fared. "There must have been some healing power in the touch of your hands, for I slept as I had not slept since boyhood. My man Willard, as he says

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

you directed, did not call me, and Manning kindly arranged to take my early service, so that it was quite late when I awoke."

"Excellent! And did you dream at all?"

"Not in the ordinary sense, but I had a queer consciousness of something helpful having happened to me in my sleep—I don't know what, for I brought back only the faintest, vaguest remembrance of it. I am sure, however, that it was very real, for it left me with a profound impression of comfort. I am no longer haunted by that ghastly terror. Yet, Van Dreen, it has been borne in upon me that I must make an important decision to-night. I have been preparing for it."

"So I see."

"I went up, as you bade me, to a hill-top. There, like Jacob, I wrestled with an angel, and I may say that, like Jacob, I prevailed. But the Lord smote me, Van Dreen. His mark is upon me. Pray for me, my friend, that I may have strength to conquer in the battle which is to come."

"We'll fight it together," said Van Dreen.

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

"I am confident of success. But tell me, where have you been to-day?"

"I took the train to Haslemere, and walked up to Hindhead. I went past the Gibbet Cross, and along that stretch of downs to the end of a sharp spur with a few twisted firs upon the point of it. Do you know the place? These Scotch firs seemed to me typical of myself. The wind has torn and bent them as I have been torn and bent by the tempest of my desires. Yet, looking over that great grey weald, my unrest abated, though there still remained some inward turbulence, the kind which craves relief in movement—the mood in which you *want* to be buffeted by the elements and swept from your moorings, so that you are compelled to strike out as for very life. Have you ever felt what I mean?"

"I have."

In Van Dreen's voice was the echo of some long past passion which had left its trace behind. Chalmers turned on him a confiding look.

"I stayed all day in the country," Chalmers said. "There's always to me some-

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

thing inexpressibly soothing in overlooking a wide expanse—especially in winter—the shadows flying over sharp-cut hills and valleys where the grass is brown and frost-bitten—the belts of naked wood and spinney making no pretence of a smiling face: the gnarled trunks of the Scotch firs with scarred arms outstretched, begging a benison from the sun. And there were villages and farms nestling in the hollows and telling of peacefully ordered existences with no forbidden mysteries to disturb their even flow. On these hills, there seemed nothing between me and Heaven. It was a beautiful day, away there. The sun shone out in clear pale gleams, and the wind drove right through one in cleansing gusts. It filled me with a sort of sublime determination—I don't know how to describe it. I turned along the spur and back to the Devil's Punchbowl. I clambered down into the glen, and then up into the wilder hill country. I raced the wind; I breasted it. And all the time I prayed, Van Dreen. I prayed, deep down in my heart. No bended knees. Not even, I fear, a single *mea culpa*. I conversed, if I may put it so,

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

with my Maker ; it was more than prayer. I pleaded the claim of my manhood. I pleaded the right of love."

Van Dreen's eyes were solemnly compassionate as he listened.

Just then a bell clanged through the house.

"We ought to go down now to the refectory," said Chalmers courteously. "Our party will be assembling."

In the passage they met Manning with a sheaf of documents in his hand.

"Mr. Chalmers," the secretary said, "will you excuse my detaining you—may I ask your attention for a minute before the post goes? I have not troubled you to sign anything to-day, but this is urgent. I have drafted a letter to Lady Harrold that I think will only need your signature; and these are the plans for her Women's Retreat, in which she seems to have had all the alterations made that you suggested. She is leaving town to-morrow, and the architect is waiting for her to ratify the instructions."

Chalmers bowed his head, and motioned

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

Manning forward into the study. The secretary went in and sat down at the corner of the table close by the chair which Mr. Chalmers usually occupied. The priest was about to follow, but stopped short when he crossed the threshold, seized by a sudden, nervous tremor. He turned a scared face, and beckoned to Van Dreen, who was behind him.

"You see," he said hoarsely.

Van Dreen had already seen, seated at the table in Chalmers' own chair, an exact, if somewhat shadowy representation of the preacher. Manning, talking earnestly, with the papers spread out on the table before them both, was evidently under the impression that he was still addressing his chief.

Chalmers stared at this strange double of himself, the old frightened look growing on his face.

"What—*what is that?*" he whispered.

"Merely an illustration of what I was trying to explain to you last night," answered Van Dreen quietly. "Your thought-form has, by force of habit, flown in advance of your fleshly one. The peculiarity is that both you and that good secretary yonder happen

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

to be able to see it—that's all. Don't worry yourself. Go and take your seat."

Forcing himself forward by a strong effort, Chalmers went towards the chair. As he sat down, Manning glanced up in a puzzled way; then naturally supposing that the priest had moved previously, unobserved by him, and being absorbed in his subject, he asked no questions, save in relation to the business in hand. Its various points were duly dealt with. Then Chalmers took up a pen and signed the documents rather shakily; after which he rose, as though glad to be quit of the matter, and led the way down stairs.

The casuals had mustered in considerable number. Van Dreen was delighted to see that no distinction was made among them except on the ground of cleanliness. Those who were sufficiently washed sat at the upper table, set crosswise to the other. There the host presided, supported at one end by Manning, at the other by Van Dreen. The unwashed were ranged at a lower board, placed lengthways, with one of Chalmers' staff at the lower end. The host said grace,

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

and did the honours of the meal with austere urbanity. Van Dreen had not expected that he would contribute so much sociable conversation to the entertainment, but it was manifest that Chalmers was making great efforts to throw off his private worries.

There was no doubt that everybody enjoyed their dinner. The food was first-class of its kind—good, meaty mutton broth, with bread and vegetables in plenty, and a substantial suet pudding full of plums. Van Dreen purposely tried to prolong the feast in order to fill up the time. So he told amusing stories, and was altogether the life of the party. After supper he sang a song or two in a queer, cracked voice, unmelodious, perhaps, but with a cheering ring of good fellowship, and led rousing choruses such as had never been heard in the old house at Bloomsbury. As the evening wore on, other visitors dropped in, and were entertained in an uncere-
monious fashion. The important business of feeding at last over for all, an hour or so was spent in going round, talking to those who remained, and seeing their hammocks slung. Thus it was well on to eleven o'clock

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

when, having said "Good-night" to Manning and the rest, Van Dreen and Chalmers ascended to the barrack-like study. By this time, Chalmers could scarcely control his nervous impatience. He moved jerkily about the room, creating an atmosphere of disturbance and apprehension. Van Dreen also paced the floor, but he walked composedly, and, as he did so, cast around him curious, peering glances.

"Do you mind my smoking?" he asked suddenly.

Chalmers looked surprised.

"No, of course not; but, somehow, I never thought of you as smoking in the ordinary way."

"Guess I don't smoke in the ordinary way," returned Van Dreen. "I consider that a healthy man has no use for tobacco. If he has asthma, say, smoke of sorts may help to clean the coating of his throat and nostrils. But though you may burn out a pigsty because it stinks, you won't burn out your house unless you've had an infectious disease in it. Fire's a first-class cleanser, however, and that holds good on all planes

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

of nature. Fire will drive away spiritual unpleasantnesses as well as material ones, so that, as you'll see, there's a specific reason behind the use of incense. I observed you didn't have it in your own church, Mr. Chalmers, and I guess you've not thought out the question of why the burning of scented herbs and gums and such-like has always played an important part in any sort of religious ceremonial, from ancient times upwards. Now here," Van Dreen pursued briskly, drawing from his pocket a small flat box of dull metal, "here are some Eastern cigars, which I always carry about with me for the purpose. With your permission, we will each smoke one of 'em."

Van Dreen opened the box, which contained what appeared to be cigarettes in one compartment, and in another a yellowish powder. He handed the case to his host.

"It's years since I have smoked a cigarette," said Chalmers, eyeing it doubtfully.

"You won't find these injurious," replied Van Dreen. "But first, have you got a pastille-burner handy?"

Naturally, there was nothing of the sort

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

in the room, not even an ash-tray. Finally, Chalmers fetched a soap-dish, into which Van Dreen poured some of the yellowish powder. Setting this alight, he placed the dish in front of the door into Chalmers' shrine, and the fumes soon arose round it in thick curls.

"I reckon that will keep off disagreeable intruders," remarked Van Dreen. "Now we'll light up, and if you don't mind we'll stop talking and attune ourselves to the work before us, which isn't exactly an everyday job."

Chalmers nodded, and the two men puffed away in silence, emitting spiral clouds of smoke which made a dense haze in the room, a haze that, ascending in wreaths, seemed to take fantastic shapes, and to mingle with other shapes in distant corners till the whole room appeared to be peopled by unearthly forms. Van Dreen paid no heed to these, but he watched his companion attentively.

The first effect of the cigarette on Chalmers was soothing, but, as he grew more accustomed to it, his former excitability returned. The muscles of his face began to twitch,

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

and Van Dreen saw that the strain of anticipation was becoming almost unbearable. He suggested movement, as a relief, and again they paced the room together, still keeping silence. There was little enough furniture to impede their progress, and, putting his arm within that of Chalmers, Van Dreen regulated the walk to a slow, steady stride. The rings of smoke, curling from their cigarettes as they moved along, seemed to collect chiefly around the baize-covered door, and, like a ghostly army of goblins, to guard the portal. It was well for Chalmers that he could not see the elemental forms, grotesque, hideous, often malignant, which were clear to Van Dreen's quickened vision. After a time, however, the atmosphere grew less dense, the fantastic smoke-shapes round the sanctuary door died down, and the gruesome wraiths fluttered away.

Just before the toll of midnight, Van Dreen directed Chalmers to open the door of the shrine, and the two men entered. Chalmers at once turned on the light, illuminating that gorgeous similitude of tropic sky and far-reaching golden desert. The

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

air was heavy with the fragrance of the drooping flowers, and was pervaded by an indescribable aroma of the East. The sense of warmth, amplitude and mellowed sunshine made a curious contrast with the scene they had just quitted. The poetic, other-world associations, and the brooding mystery of the place lifted even Van Dreen to an unwonted pitch of romantic fervour. Pointing to the arm-chair in front of the divan, Van Dreen bade the priest take his usual place, while he seated himself on the cushioned stool.

"I'll engage the lady doesn't see me unless I put myself forward," he said.

CHAPTER XII

"All matter has energy and force which is sometimes manifest and sometimes concealed, but always existing. Energy is both physical and mental. There is no matter without force, and no force without matter. . . . Science teaches that both matter and energy never die. Energy only changes from one kind to another, but is never lost. . . . Death is, therefore, unreal."—N. K. RAMASAMI AIYA.

THEY had not long to wait. Chalmers flung himself back in the ancient chair, his arms upon the serpentine arms of it, his head against the jewelled disk of the Sun. His eyes were closed, and his whole attitude one of intense, if unconscious, concentration. Gradually a change came over him. Only trained sight could have perceived the magnetic emanations thrown off by the man, but to Van Dreen's clarified vision the priest's form became rapidly veiled in a sort of opaline mist, through which the limbs and features appeared spiritualised in outline and expression. Rays of colour played through the mist, a deep rose predominating, while round the head shone beams of a luminous

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

yellow showing a touch of violet about the brow. These indications caused deep interest and some surprise to Van Dreen, for, until now that he saw him under this transfigured aspect, he had not realised how highly evolved a being was the real Chalmers, masked in these modern days under the garb of a Calvinistic divine.

It was patent that the present personality made a painfully cramped prison for the Ego confined within its narrow limits, and Van Dreen's chief feeling was one of intense pity for the erring spirit which had earned for itself a fleshly tenement that could be no better than a torture chamber. As Van Dreen gazed, Chalmers' stiff clerical garb faded from him, and in its stead the observer saw the vestments and demeanour of some high dignitary of the past. There was the suggestion of rich, ceremonial habiliments falling to the feet, of golden emblems upon the breast and brow, and of a pointed, Pagan-looking head-dress.

And now Van Dreen discerned a subtle process of disintegration—such as his own knowledge and experience would have led

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

him to expect—going on in certain particles of Chalmers' physical body. This he knew to be necessary in order that the soul summoned out of the invisible world might be provided with a quasi-corporeal shape. But here plainly lay the cause of that loss of nerve power and vital force which had been so often remarked of late in the preacher. Van Dreen shuddered at the thought of the inevitable disaster—madness, paralysis, or even death—which this course of devitalisation must, if persisted in, bring about.

The process of creating that mysterious embodiment of his desire had been so frequently performed by Chalmers that now, as Van Dreen perceived, it took place almost automatically. Chalmers drew his breath at rhythmic intervals, slowly at first, as if he were drawing force from the very depths of his being, then with an increasing speed and always with unerring precision in the rate of inhalation and exhalation, until, growing swifter and swifter, the breaths resembled rather vibrations of electricity than any system of in-breathing and out-breathing. And as these vibrations quickened, the

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

vaporous exudation from Chalmers' body became more billowy and dense. The clouds seemed to flow in the direction of the couch, where they wreathed and spread with a curious folding, caressing movement, as if they were being shaped by tender, invisible hands. Hovering above the couch, these etheric waves softly spread over it, making the diaphanous semblance of a woman's graceful form. Then the tender stirrings which had agitated the vaporous mass ceased, and it grew more and more definite in consistency and outline. Gradually the milky cloud that lightly enveloped the ghost-woman's shape dispersed like veils of morning mist melting beneath the sun, and there she lay fully revealed on the divan, a veritable Sleeping Beauty, exquisite in shape and dazzlingly fair.

She wore a gauzy Oriental-looking robe, its filmy draperies confined at the waist with a jewelled belt and fastened on the shoulders by golden clasps in the design of a bird's head between two outstretched wings. Her dusky hair was parted and waved low upon either side of her face,

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

flowing from beneath a golden fillet which encircled her head. On her brow lay the mystic symbol of the goddess Isis-Hathor, while between her breasts hung the ruby heart like a gout of blood.

It was the same face, only more corporeal, that Van Dreen had seen hovering beside Chalmers in the pulpit. There was the same look of innocent sweetness, the same skin of rose and pearl, the same long-arched brows and shadowy, closed eyes with the slightly oblique turn, the almond lids and sweeping fringe of lash. There was the same provocative mouth, showing a gleam of white teeth between the scarlet lips.

Van Dreen told himself frankly that this materialised apparition was the most enchanting creature he had ever looked upon, and he did not wonder that Chalmers was enthralled by the loveliness of his dear dream-Galatea, whom, like another Pygmalion, he had himself built up, not from passionless stone, but from the elements of his own pent passion. Though she were indeed a denizen of the ghost world, there appeared nothing ghostly in this embodiment of Chalmers' desire.

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

Rather it was he who seemed the ghost as he crouched beside the divan, pale and faint from loss of vitality. The will-power and the life-force that had gone from him for the clothing in semblance of flesh of this glorious type of womanhood must have been so enormous that it was small wonder he should be depleted of vital energy.

The woman's eyes were closed as yet, but her face showed signs of dawning consciousness. Van Dreen turned to Chalmers. The priest had dropped forward in his chair, and now sat in a huddled posture, his face ghastly, his features convulsed, his gaze averted.

Now that the great magic had been accomplished, Chalmers gave no indications of that powerful personality of the past. The transcendental Chalmers had withdrawn, and here in possession again was the Anglican priest, familiar to Van Dreen, in his formal, black habit, and with the lean, ascetic countenance—the same, but etherealised from loss of physical strength. Anxiously concerned though he was with the issues at stake, Van Dreen still found it deeply

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

interesting to observe how, as the influence of the Egyptian lover of long ago and of the orthodox ecclesiastic of to-day strove together for mastery in Chalmers' mind, the outward aspect of the individual showed phases of each personality. As he watched this subtle interchange, the question naturally occurred to Van Dreen—How much of the immortal man can, in earthly manifestation, discover itself beneath the multiple sheaths of tendencies which are its inheritance from physical ancestry and soul experiences of the past?

CHAPTER XIII

"Our true affinities must determine our companionships in a spiritual world."—W. H. MYERS.

THE sleeping woman had awakened! Chalmers drew a gasping breath and turned slowly to her. But he made no demonstration, hard as it must have been to resist the appeal in those eyes—the rapturously confiding look she gave. She lifted her arms and tried to raise herself towards him. In the beginning, she drew from him all her vitality, and the force in him, fluctuating as it did with his frequent change of mood, scarcely as yet enabled her to perform an independent action. Gradually, however, there came a fresh phase in this curious interchange of life-force, and, as she grew more conscious, she became also more of a separate individuality, the power of her own love and her own will tending to complete the vitalising process he had begun.

So by degrees her strength increased, and she enticed him with gestures, at first faint

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

and feeble, but full of the poetry of passion. They drew him down to her against himself. His head bent nearer to the divan, and presently he dropped on one knee beside it, adoring her as one might adore the image of a saint.

And now she spoke in a wooing murmur, words which her listeners did not understand, but of which the intention was clear. Her voice was like nature-music. No human accents had ever sounded wilder, sweeter harmonies. Bereaved Halcyone could not have called more tenderly to her lost mate. Each note was a caress. She put forth her slender hand, the nails like jewels, a faint network of blue veins showing beneath the pearly skin. Chalmers shivered as the delicate fingers brushed his own.

She smiled at him and then sighed, a sigh of childlike content. Her smile might indeed have been the smile of the Fairy in the Garden of Paradise. Torn by fear and yearning, he rose slowly and stood gazing on her, his features working, his body a-quiver. His involuntary glance backward conveyed to Van Dreen that he remembered certain

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

injunctions given him. When the woman seized his hand and would have pressed it to her lips, he withdrew it in tender rebuff, and then laid it gently on her forehead. The hand trembled, but its touch seemed too soothing for her to realise the rebuff, and she gazed up at him, heaving another sigh of content.

"Life of my life!" he exclaimed. "For that indeed is what you are. I pray Heaven that no harm may come with this strange new life to you. Speak to me and explain how and why you are here."

A look of wonder came into her eyes, and her beautiful brows puckered in the endeavour to comprehend his words. She murmured some musical phrases in her foreign tongue, all unintelligible, but the tone of each an endearment. Then, lifting her body slightly, she raised her joined hands to her breast in a charming movement, implying submission.

"Speak to me," Chalmers said huskily. "Speak to me, but not in that strange tongue. Speak the language of to-day that I myself speak, and tell me why you have come."

The perplexity deepened in her eyes for

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

a moment, and then with evident effort, she obeyed in a halting, stammering manner. But the words, falling very slowly, and with a peculiar intonation, were quite distinct.

“ You—called—me.”

He contrived to still his trembling delight, and with his hand laid yet upon her forehead, said gently :

“ That is well. As by my life you live, and as your thought answers to my thought, so should your speech be the same as my own. Therefore I desire that you talk to me in my own tongue.”

“ What is—that ? ” she faltered. “ I—do—not—understand.”

“ Yes, you do understand,” he answered firmly. “ You can follow my words, and you will reply to them in *my* language. It is my command.”

Once more she made the touching sign of submission.

“ As—my lord wills.”

She questioned no further. But when he drew back, taking away his hand from her brow, and seated himself in the antique chair, she stretched out her arms with an inarticulate cry.

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

Chalmers' eyes were riveted upon her, but he preserved rigid self-restraint, and when he spoke it was in a dull, mechanical fashion. He did not answer at first, and she remained for a few moments in silent wondering. Then she spoke again, still with slight uncertainty, the hesitation in her speech gradually giving place to fluency. Yet it was curious to note how a tendency to Oriental figures of speech conflicted with the modern mode of locution impressed upon her by the master mind, so that her phrasing, naturally rhythmic in cadence, would often half lose its measure, producing a somewhat jarring effect of anachronism and unequal feet.

"Why seek for words?" she cried. "What need of words? Has not love its own language? Why trouble about speech, while we can embrace each other? We are not twain, but one."

"Alas!" he answered sadly. "Once it may have been as you say; but if it were, those days are long ago."

She raised herself and gazed over the seeming distance of yellow sand which ap-

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

peared to stretch out illimitably, and lose itself in roseate mist on the horizon.

"I know not what my lord means," she said again. "Are not all things here as we know them? See—the desert spreads around and the Wheel of Heaven is setting in its tent. See yonder—the crimson glow where the glorious boat of Rā has sunk down in the west. Behold—above, the sky is dark and clear, and the stars shine forth to be our lamps and light us to our couch. Ah! Well-beloved, it cannot be that *you* alone are changed?" Her gaze went confidently back to his face, but as she looked at him, a puzzled gleam crept into her eyes. "You are no longer like yourself," she said. "Why, do you look at me in so strange a way? And why must I talk to you in this unfamiliar speech?"

Her eyes searched his doubtingly. His eyes drooped before them, then were suddenly lifted in a burning gaze which she took for reproof, and she cried out in eager contrition:

"Heart, my heart! For love of the gods, what ill have I committed to deserve this anger? Has sorrow left me of evil

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

favour, so that my beauty no longer pleases my lord? Ah! once you said my kisses were sweeter than the dates of Hathor, and my voice more musical than the wedded melody of lyres and harps. Lo! here am I, beloved. Am I not clay to shape as you, the Potter, choose? Say, what would you have of me, Tha'an?"

"Tha'an!" he repeated wonderingly. "Why call me Tha'an?"

"My lord is Tha'an," she exclaimed. "Tha'an—once priest of Amen-Rā."

A flash of struggling memory illumined his features.

"Ay! ay! And you? *Who* are you?"

"Am I not your slave, lord of my soul? Neseta of Hathor's temple, with whom you fled beyond the Tombs."

There was exquisite humility, and yet the tenderest reproach, in her accents.

"Neseta!" he repeated in still greater wonder.

"My lord doth jest, which he was seldom wont to do," she said. "Not so could Tha'an forget Neseta, and all the story of their love."

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

"Tell me the story. For I have grown old, Neseta—if that be indeed your name—and memory fails me, so that I cannot count the years nor recall the time when our love was young."

"Love is always young," she cried. "Love cannot age, nor change, nor die. By what strange hap have you forgotten, Tha'an? For have you not said, yourself, that love could never die? Did you not often tell me that when they should ferry you across the river and lay your body within the Caves, most surely would your soul return to earth and, seeking mine, would love and wed me as before?"

"Did I tell you that, my dear? Then this strange meeting of ours proves me to have been no lying prophet."

Neseta's whole face became irradiated as Chalmers, deeply impassioned, bent over her. Their breaths mingled; the gaze of each was drowned in the other's gaze. It was a crucial moment; then Chalmers sank back in his chair and covered his face.

Neseta looked sweetly disappointed. She made a tender little sound, half moan, half

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

that wooing murmur which fell so naturally from her lips. Chalmers took no notice. She stroked his fingers, trying to push them down from his face with the pretty perversity of a child, and yet with an adorable womanliness. Suddenly he dropped his hand within hers. Moisture stood upon his brow, and she winced before his look. There was in it so stern, so solemn an appeal for strength—an appeal to something which she intuitively understood to be beyond herself.

“What ails you, Tha’an?” she asked. “Come to me, my beloved, and let me comfort you as I have ever done.”

He shook his head.

“No, Neseta, I must come no nearer. But talk on, my dear. The sound of your voice is my best comfort.”

Again her face grew radiant.

“My well-beloved has found the lyre still sweeter in his ears than Memnon’s chord,” she crooned softly, drawing close to the edge of the couch. “But words alone are poor comfort, Tha’an—and I would that I might embrace my love.”

Again he gently rebuffed her.

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

"Believe me that your voice must always be to me the sweetest sound that I can ever hear," he said with deep feeling. "No, no," as she crooned on in her foreign tongue, "continue to speak as before, for though my language may seem to you harsh and cold, I want you to use the speech familiar to me. No words can be cold that go straight from your heart to mine and from my heart to yours, Neseta. For they only tell of love; and love, in whatsoever language it is uttered, has truly its own winged fire. Since therefore we love, and must needs love each other for ever, tell me in the tongue that is mine, and must therefore be yours as well, the story of our early love."

She responded readily.

"Ah! now you speak like my Tha'an, my priestly Tha'an, who was never light of speech like other men. Gladly will I tell you of our love, and you shall hear how swift and sure the words of your strange tongue come to me at your bidding. For Neseta was ever willing to obey—until the end. And as I remember that sad end, it does not seem strange that memory should have failed

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

you. For well it might be that you lost remembrance of all that happened before your waking from that three days' deathlike sleep within the great stone Tomb."

He looked at her inquiringly.

"It may be so," he answered. "But first let me hear the beginning of the tale. Put your mind back into the past, Neseta, and pictures of that past must surely rise before you. Describe them to me. Tell me how all things seemed when you and I loved each other in far-back Egypt."

A soft flush of remembered happiness suffused her face.

"Open then to me the gate of memory, for my beloved alone may open it. Does it not come back to you, Tha'an, that beautiful blue night when first you told me that you loved me?"

He pressed her hand without speaking, and eagerly watched her face as her eyes took on a rapt, distant look, and she spoke in a dreamy, disconnected manner.

"Oh, the beautiful night—so still! So blue! See the thin crescent of the moon—sign of our Lady Hathor! See all the

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

glittering constellations shining high above us ! See them mirrored likewise, shining low beneath us, in the deep, dark waters of holy Nile—there where we sat, our hearts aflame, our tongues made mute, in the great shadow of the Pylon. And on went the heavenly Wheel which tells its tales to no man. And love alone was dear : all else seemed worthless.

“ See, Tha’an, the marble steps, and hear the tiny wavelets that softly kissed our feet as the tide arose and lapped the shore. See the fair, green fringe of the ever-living stream. So tall the rushes seemed that night, for they had grown apace—quick as our love, you said—since the falling of the waters when the overflow was past. And it was mating-time, you know, and the wild marsh birds had set to build their nests, and were calling to each other, as your heart called to mine, beloved. Do you behold the place ? ”

“ Yes,” he answered in a low, absorbed tone. “ Now I can see in my mind the place that you speak of.”

Neseta went on dreamily : “ No bird was happier then than I, for, like the mating

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

birds, I cared for naught but love—and love meant Tha'an. And you, my heart, said likewise the world was naught save the cup of love alone. For when that nectar flows into the soul, all care departs. And dearer then was Neseta's kiss to you than all the priestly lore you once had held so precious. Enough for us that we were man and woman. Why strive, you said, to be as gods in power, since being man and woman, we might be gods in love? And then you told me of the shorter, steeper path to knowledge and dominion won by renouncement of all fleshly good—the path you had forsaken when you chose the slower, gentler way of love. And you taught me, too, how in many lives of single-souled allegiance to one beloved, the fleshly bonds are cast at length, and flesh is changed to spirit, and gains dominion among the first-born sons of Nut.

“Then, Tha'an, we talked together of the mighty goddess Isis, and of Osiris slain and scattered. And of how our Lady wandered forth to seek the members of her spouse. And of how by power of love she called Osiris back from dark Amenti, even in the form

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

wherein he had been made. And then you said that we two, like the Lord Osiris, and our Lady of the Moon, should conquer death by love, both in the upper heaven and in the nether hell. So, like the gods, should we live on through countless æons until the last judgment of the *Khus* and the rising up of joy in Tem. Does not my lord remember that thus he vowed unto his beloved? "

She waited anxiously, but Chalmers did not answer except to say :

"Tell me more, Neseta. Tell me what happened when I took you from the temple."

There was pain and fresh wonder in her voice as she answered.

"My beloved has surely not forgotten the night on which I fled with him from the holy Hathor's care—when I stole down in the darkness, clad in my priestess' robe, and with Hathor's emblem on my brow. And you put a cloak about me, and led me to the steps, and brought your boat from where you'd hid it amidst the rushes. And now I remind me of that poor wild bird that had fallen in the prow pierced by some hunter's arrow,

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

and of how we heard its piteous cheeping, and feared lest it should betray our flight. And I would not let you kill it, but tended it, until it died. Ah! dear love, oft, when desolation fell upon me, did I liken myself to that wild bird, for on that day the shaft of love was sped and drew the life-blood from Neseta's wounded heart."

A low groan broke from Chalmers' whitened lips. Faint though it was, the sound stirred Neseta to remorse, and she cried out :

"Heart, my heart, who art more precious than the life that quickens me! Grieve not. For love's sake have I suffered. But now I need not suffer any more, seeing that I have proved that love endures for ever. Verily the gods lied not. Blessed was the slumber into which they cast me till the hour should come for you to call me again to your breast. And behold, I have come at your summons; and triumphant, I awake. Now—shall we not enter into the fullness of our joy, having gained the mastery over death?"

Again he groaned, smitten to the heart by her pathetic faith. But so great was the constraint he put upon himself that when

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

he answered, his voice sounded dull and toneless.

"Describe what led to your death, Neseta," he said.

"Nay, I know not if I died," she answered. "It was painless, and all so very strange. But naught will I hide of the pain that went before, my Tha'an, for it may be that my tale of woe will bind your heart more closely unto mine. Most grievous was my wandering when you left me, sadder than that of Isis searching for her spouse; and more than hers my agony when at last the sun revealed you to my watching eyes. Oh! wherefore did you drive me from you and shut upon me the gates of doom?"

"How can I say?" he cried. "I do not know the tale. I wish I understood. Help me to understand, Neseta. I was a priest, you say—and you a temple-maiden. How did we dare to love each other? Surely in those days priests were bound by an oath of chastity, and was it not shame and death for a temple virgin to break her vows?"

But Neseta, smiling, answered unabashed.

"Nay, for Hathor's maidens there can

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

be no shame in love, seeing that our Lady is Queen of Love and Fire. The wrong I did—if wrong there were—was that I fled her shrine. But for you there was no other way, since the priests of Āmen-Rā cry scorn on all save power and knowledge. And you were fiercest in your scorn until you learned from me, beloved, the dear delight of Hathor's worship. But now, once more, we'll eat the cakes of Hathor, and burn sweet incense to our Lady of the Flame, seeing that she has brought you back to me, who am of her pure following. Ever were you made of fire as well as ice, beloved; and though the fire, alas! could never wholly melt the ice, the ice could never wholly quench the flame. And this the goddess knew. She has fanned the flame, while she lulled me into blessed sleep until the fire on your soul's altar should leap anew and meet the spark within my slumbering breast."

"Nevertheless was I a priest of Āmen-Rā," he muttered. "And the rule of Rā is strict, as you well know, Neseta."

"Naught I know, save what you told me, Tha'an, of Rā's dread ritual. But this

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

I know—that Hathor, too, is great, and gives to man his heart's desire, and succours all true lovers. Moreover, Tha'an, you used to say that though the rule of Rā be strict for lower votaries, he who is placed high priest, knowing the wisdom of the gods, and the beginnings and ends of time, need not be bound in conduct that is kept secret from the people. Enough it is for him that he should observe the ceremonial and uphold the priestly law in outward seeming. 'Twas *knowledge* counted most, you said, and to gain the higher knowledge you had made yourself a priest, since only in the temple may one desiring wisdom be instructed. Yet, you were a priest at heart, delighting in the rites of sacrifice, and in the sepulchral feasts and all the pomp of priesthood. Often have I deemed it strange you should have abandoned power and pride even a little while for sake of Neseta's kisses."

"Notwithstanding, that I did do," he said, and added, in the words of a later scripture: "*If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would be utterly condemned.*"

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

"I know not whose saying that is," she answered thoughtfully. "But it seems wise and beautiful."

He looked down upon her sadly.

"Continue the tale, Neseta," he said. "You told me that I took you from Hathor's Temple, and that we fled beyond the Tombs. What tombs were those?"

"The sepulchres of the ancient kings," she replied, "whither great Father Nile did bear us on his tide; and beyond them lies the Greater Desert. There we abode during many days, and dreamed our dream of love—ah! woe is me, a dream that too soon ended."

Neseta's voice trembled, and her beautiful eyes softened with the tears that filled them.

"Alas! the unslaked thirst for knowledge came again upon you, Tha'an. You wearied of the ways of love, and sighed for the path of priestly wisdom."

"Aye, once a priest, always a priest!" Chalmers struck in heavily. She gave him a startled look.

"It was thus you spoke before the wild fit seized you and made you wander forth into the desert, seeking to be alone. Then

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

many a time, remorse would turn your steps, and lead you back into my arms again. And you would stab my heart with gifts of gems you'd bought from caravans and begged I'd wear. Ah, Tha'an, do you remember *this*, the last you ever bought me?"

She pointed to the heart of rubies hanging on its slender chain between her breasts.

"You bade me wear the rubies, nor ever remove them from my bosom—red stones that you said were symbols of your burning love for me. Yet though the red fire burned upon my breast, the torch of my joy was extinguished. Those were desolate days and lonely nights of weeping. For my beloved departed from me, and I wandered, journeying southward until I came to the great stone Images and the Mighty Mound of Stone nigh to the Wise Men's Temple, whither I guessed that my beloved had bent his steps."

Chalmers started violently, and put his hand to his forehead, as though he were trying to grasp and retain some flashing recollection.

"The Wise Men's Temple!" he repeated.
"Help me, Neseta, help me to remember."

CHAPTER XIV

"Memory is not an affair of brains only. Its essential, the element of repetition and reproduction, is wrought into the very structure of things. Not a single element of any man's thought or deed is ever lost or forgotten. It goes with all its mixture of quality, to vivify or burden the soul-atmosphere which the future has to breathe."—J. BRIERLEY, B.A.

NESETA bent forward on the couch and laid her hand on that of Chalmers. He shivered at the contact of her fingers, but did not repulse her, for it seemed that her touch quickened his glimmering recollection of the past.

"The Wise Men's Temple!" he said again. "Some faint memory comes to me, but I cannot put it into shape. Tell me, Neseta, who were those Wise Men?"

She answered meekly.

"Surely, my lord, they were those priestly sages whom all your life you had been seeking, till I—poor, fond Neseta—hindered you in your quest."

"Yes, yes," he said impatiently. "But tell me why I sought them?"

"My lord must know that they were

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

guardians of the secret wisdom delivered by the gods and garnered by the priests in that ancient land of heroes and strange magic which was swallowed by the ocean so many thousand years ago? My lord, being chief high priest to Rā, had learned of that tradition and of the hidden uses for which those guardians reared the Mounds of Stone when their golden city and holy temple sank beneath the waves and they fled to Egypt with the emblems of the gods."

"I have heard—I have read," he replied confusedly. "You mean the sinking of Atlantis—the old tradition of which Plato wrote?"

"Plato? I know not him whom you call Plato. Was he one of those at Saïs who told you, Tha'an, that still in Egypt there dwell, unknown to men, descendants of the Ancient Ones—those Wise Men whom you sought? They who guard the emblems of our gods and keep the knowledge of life and death, of good and ill, which in mercy the great gods hid from man—secrets that none may seek, save in drear and dreadful chambers of Amenti, the dark Underworld."

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

"Is it so?" said Chalmers. "I have forgotten."

She gazed at him incredulously.

"Forgotten! Why, Tha'an, 'twas *you* that told me how the body of him who seeks that magic must seem to die, and all his senses be suspended, while his *Ka*, being freed from mortal bonds, descends to roam Amenti. There he may learn, you said, the mysteries of Osiris, and of the hidden habitations of the dead. When I was forsaken, I knew that the Wise Men had drawn the footsteps of my beloved. I knew that you would enter in at the Hidden Door in the Mound of Stone and be partaker in the mysteries of the gods. The hand of your beloved was powerless to stay your steps. The voice of your beloved could not call you back to her side."

Anguish thrilled in Neseta's tones. With a rapid gesture, Chalmers signed to her to proceed.

She went on piteously.

"Naught could my love avail, since I knew not the secret spell of Isis, nor had I been in the commune of Rā. Yet was I well assured that the Wise Men had led you by

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

the single door within the great Mound of Stone, and would keep you in the chamber of their magic until they deemed your spirit pure for descent among the dead. Three days and nights, I knew, must your body lie entranced while your soul went down into the Underworld and learned the wisdom of the Shades. All this I understood, for often had you told me, Tha'an, of that strange rite by which in the body's seeming death and burial is signified the new birth of the soul."

"How could that be, and yet my body return to life again?"

"How should I tell you, oh! beloved? I, a woman knowing not the mysteries, save that which you yourself have taught me. I marvel, Tha'an, that a thing so great as this Initiation should leave no lasting impress on your mind. And yet I've heard that medicine made of herbs is given to those about to pass the dread ordeal to blunt their senses, and so, perhaps, 'tis scarcely strange you have forgotten."

"No matter," he said. "Go on, Neseta."

She proceeded.

"I stayed without the Mound of Stone

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

wherein the One Door is. Ah! woe is me—I waited long. Day grew to night and night turned into dawn; and every dawn I rose to watch for your re-birth to life again. I knew that when the three days' trance was ended, they'd bring you to the Outer Place of Stone, and there the risen sun would strike your sealed eyelids, and wake you from your magic slumber. But day and night went on, and still each dawn I watched the boat of Rā mount upward into heaven, and when its glory swept the vacant Place of Stone, I knew that for poor me that day was empty."

Neseta sighed and paused. Her eyes went roving round the pictured desert. Chalmers recalled her by an eager question.

"You watched alone beneath the Pyramid?"

She started and resumed:

"Alone I watched, and shunned the face of man, but dared not go too near the Mound of Stone, fearing the Wise Ones' wizardry. By day I hid myself like some wild beast crouching in its lair; by night I prowled for food. There was a well near by the Mound

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

where date-palms grew, and thither some priests would come at times to draw water. At sight of them I fled, and waited until my Lady Hathor rode unveiled in heaven, and then I got me drink, and gathered dates to nourish me. For meat I snared the wild birds, which did not fly before my steps, for they had never seen a woman. I was as one that dwelt within the tombs, and the dust of caves was upon me. In my sorrow I cared not how I looked, for I knew my lord had said that love can never change nor die. Oh, woe is me! Then came the night wherein the Wise Men brought your body from the tomb, and laid it where the rising sun might give it life anew. I lurked near by those great three-pointed walls. I beheld the Sun-god rise, whom all men worship—a fearsome god who slays in wrath and claims the hearts of men and women for offerings on his altar. Yea, but a god most good and gracious—thus I thought—if he would give me back my love. Then I saw the eastern gate of Aalu stand wide for Rā's approach, and all the sky above blushed red before his coming. There, went the flame which

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

mounteth from the horizon to prepare a pathway for the god, and beneath the flame the desert glowed, and the face of Rā looked down upon the world. From the disk of Rā great beams sped forth across the desert and lighted on the Mound, and there on the Place of Wakening I beheld the form of my beloved. Stretched on the stone, your limbs were bound. Bound was your head in swathings of the tomb; naught was unbound except your face, the eyes closed—sealed in trance—till straight a sun-beam sped and touched your eyelids and bade them lift, for Rā ordained the Awakening. Fleet as his golden shaft, I reached the Mound and stood ten paces distant from the Stone. Beyond, I could not go, for some mysterious magic stayed me from your side. But as I stood, I saw your eyelids slowly part, and your gaze was lifted upward to the shining east. A wondrous joy was in the gaze—a rapture all divine, having no trace of earthly passion. I bent me, fearing, hoping, praying, that your gaze might turn to earth again, and light upon Neseta, and that your heart would call to mine in the silence of that mystic dawn.

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

None stood between us then. The Wise Men came not forth, since it is the rule of Rā that in this Great Awakening the soul must face its god alone. I called your name. Nearer I could not creep; naught could I do save call.

“ You heard me not ! You saw me not ! You felt me not ! The Sun-god’s glory filled your soul. Then I cried with a strong and bitter cry, and drew myself up so that my shadow fell between you and the eastern sky. Alas ! ’twas no avail. The Sun-god claimed his own ! Now, from within the Mound a band of priests came forth. And one old man—the chief, whose look was like the lightning, and whose voice was as a thunder-bolt, lifted his arm and cursed me in the name of Rā. Then he made the Sign of Power before my face ; and as I crouched in dread, he commanded that I should depart, nor dare profane the mysteries of the gods. ’Twas vain for me to call on Hathor. She answered not—she gave no shield to save me from the dart of Destiny. Nor had I e’en the power to raise my hand, beseechingly. Dumb was I stricken when I sought to beg for

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

mercy. Nor could I stir one step before. Only hindward might I move. None smote nor pushed, yet by some magic power the Wise Man drove me back, and reared a wall invisible between us, against which, strive as I would, my arms were like bruised reeds, my strength as naught.

“And when, at last, I found my voice and cried aloud, you did not seem to hear, but gazed enraptured towards the East. Then the Wise Men stooped about you and tore the swathings off your limbs, and set them loose. Your eyes came down to earth, all wondering, and turned to where I kneeled. Fiercely the old man pointed at me.

“‘Behold the Embodied Sin!’ he cried. ‘Behold the wanton witch whose beauty lured you from the path of wisdom that leads to heights divine. See her who snared your heart and bound your soul in chains. Behold her as she is! See the marred, unlovely face, the limbs befouled, the garments stained with dirt and blood. Is *this* the fleshly joy for which you would have bartered all the wisdom of the gods and life eternal in the glorious realm of the Ṭuat?’”

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

Neseta's voice was raised in dramatic simulation of the ancient sage's fierce invective, but suddenly she faltered, and her utterance became faint. The strain had evidently exhausted her borrowed strength. Chalmers sat rigid, his face tense, showing no sign of emotional wavering. His tones were measured and almost cold, as he inquired :

"And I—what answer did I make?"

"You answered not," she said. "And though you looked towards me, it was as towards a stranger. I thought your eyes were dazzled by the glory of the Sun-god's boat, and that the brightness of the vision had made them blind to things of earth. But then I knew it was not that, for when the High Priest gave command to get me hence, you raised your hand and motioned me away. Then I saw the priests lift you in their arms and bear you to the door within the Mound—and then—the door was shut."

Neseta's voice died in a moan, and there was silence until Chalmers signed to her to continue her tale.

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

“My lord! What remains to be told? Stricken and desolate I stood. The fiends of Set were loosed upon me, and anguish rent my spirit. The sky grew black. Rā hid his face. Then there came to pass a wondrous thing. A mighty wind arose and rocked the desert, and made it like the sea. But the tempest harmed me not. The whirling sand, though it came nigh in clouds around me, did not choke my breath nor cover me, as I expected, with a winding-sheet. Instead, the wind encircled and supported me like some great folding arm. It held me firm, and bore me through the shifting sands as though the gods had sent it as their messenger for me. I was thus carried far from the Mounds of Stone, far from the abodes of men, and beyond the sepulchres of kings. And, as I went, a healing magic seemed to soothe my woe. Caught up high upon the wings of that great wind, I soon saw no more the yellow sands nor brazen sky. All became blue and deep and still. It was an uttermost Place of Peace to which I had been led. And there I floated in deep, strange blueness, and sank into a dreamless sleep. How long I slept

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

I cannot tell; but, at last, the blue deeps stirred, and some sound swept to where I floated—a soft, far sound, which reached my slumbering senses like an echo from a dream, but did not waken them. Again and yet again, there came that call, and brought a vague dream-joy into my peace. Sweeter grew the dream, more alive the joy, and louder came the call—till I knew it for the voice of my beloved—calling me to him. And lo! I have answered my beloved. Heart, my heart! I am come to your embrace.”

Neseta raised herself, and held out her arms in an exquisite gesture. Her dark eyes melted in passionate appeal. But, though there was agony in Chalmers’ voice, he resolutely refused the proffered endearment.

“Neseta, forgive me if I seem cold and ungrateful. I dare not be otherwise, though there is no coldness in my heart, but only deep remorse. The Past is past, my dear. There is nothing left for me but to ask your pardon, for I have done you a dreadful wrong.”

“My pardon!” she repeated blankly. “Why should you ask my pardon, Tha’an? Love may not pardon, for love can do no

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

wrong. It is enough that you have called me back. And why should you have called me, if it were not to share your life again? Lo! I am here. Let all else be forgotten. Take me then, beloved. Take me." She still held out her arms. "Kiss me, Tha'an," she pleaded, but he averted his eyes. Her wistful smile faded.

"Are my kisses no longer sweet?" she cried. "Have you then ceased to love me, Tha'an?"

"No, no," he answered despairingly. "Heaven help me, no!"

"Then why——?"

She faltered and blushed. It was plain that though love had made her very humble, this ghost of old Egypt had as much innate dignity as any proud flesh-and-blood woman of to-day.

"Why will you not take me, beloved? Am I not yours to do with as you will?"

"I must not, Neseta. It would be sin."

"Sin! Sin! You speak as that old priest spoke. What have I done that is sinful?"

"You have done nothing—nothing but

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

what is sweet and noble and true. It is *I*, Neseta, who am sinful."

She shook her head, touching his arm shyly. As she did so, she seemed to notice for the first time his severe black coat.

"Why do you wear this stiff, strange habit? You used to like soft robes of rich, deep colours. I do not know you in this dress. Is it some garb of penitence?" She stopped and looked at his face. "You have changed, Tha'an, not only in your garb. You have grown stern and grey. You speak to me as though I no longer delight you. Oh! can it be that the Ancient One spoke truth, and that my beauty has gone for ever? Have I no grace or charm? Speak to me, beloved. Tell me, that Neseta still is fair."

She hung upon his answer eagerly. It came in slow, firm sentences.

"Be assured, Neseta, that you are more beautiful than any woman I have ever seen."

"And yet you shrink from me? Why then did you call me to you? It was cruel!"

"Yes, it was cruel. You are right, my dear." He staggered to his feet. "You cannot blame me more than I blame myself."

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

I was cruel to disturb your soul in its resting-place, and bring it back to earth to be tortured afresh. For that I ask your pardon. Forgive me, if you can. But do not think it any fault of yours. I have been blind to the danger—to the risks I ran for us both—but never blind to your goodness and your sweetness. Nor ever blind to your beauty.”

He leaned heavily on the entwined serpents which formed the back of the great chair, and gazed at her. He seemed dazzled by the vision of fairness. In his face was something of the look that Moses might have worn gazing on the Promised Land which was not for him. And Neseta’s lovely womanliness softened and sweetened again before his eyes.

“You are even more fair than I pictured you in my dreams,” he said simply.

“Ah! So you dreamed of me?”

“They were sinful dreams,” he answered.

“Sinful!” And all her gladness went.

“That word again! Oh! how it hurts me.”

“Neseta! I *must* hurt you in order to make you understand. *You* have not sinned.

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

I, alone, have sinned. For I have committed the crime of trafficking with the dead. You are no living woman, my beautiful love, but a disembodied spirit, clothed out of the substance of my life, and quickened by my fond desire. It is only by me and through me that you have any life at all."

She listened attentively, and, to his supreme astonishment, answered with the calmest confidence :

"But that is well, and as it has always been. Your love sustained my life, and when you took away your love I slept as one that had died. Now that you have given me back your love I wake, and am alive again."

Chalmers stood in sheer bewilderment, baffled by her child-like trust, and tortured by an almost overwhelming desire to snatch her to his breast—a desire which belied his own assertion of her incorporeality. What could be more sentient than the loveliness before him? He drew back with a wild laugh.

"I think I am going mad," he cried. "I have no power to reason nor convince. How can I reason on what is beyond reason ?

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

Neseta ! I call you so, as you call me Tha'an ; and yet there is no Neseta, there is no Tha'an. Both are dead—if they ever lived—dead, it may be, five thousand years ago. What I have to do with Tha'an, I can only dimly conjecture. It is possible that I am the soul of Tha'an, born again into the world. I have no proof of it except the shadowy images which arise and elude my memory before my mind can grasp them. But if that be true, and we did indeed live together in old Egypt those thousands of years ago, you are no more than a ghost of that dead, forgotten past. You have nothing to do with my life of the present. Try to realise this. Try to understand what I am saying, and you will be content to return whence you came."

She, too, had begun to laugh while he spoke, but in a different way from him. Hers was the wondering, incredulous laugh of a child, yet of a child who is not to be easily coerced.

" If I needed proof that you are Tha'an, you give it to me now," she said smiling. " For it was in just such fashion that you talked long ago—though not so long, I think,

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

as you would have me believe. But you used to prate just as gloomily of the mystery of life, and of how the priests said that birth and death were never-ending, and that man could have no certain knowledge of immortality until he had by will and learning mastered the secret of creation. Oh! Heart of me, never will you learn that secret without love! For the wisdom of the wise counts as naught to love. Come, then, make yourself a heaven here, upon Neseta's breast."

The tender voice ranged in its music all the gamut of feeling. In the passionate depths of her eyes there seemed to lie all the mysteries of earth and heaven, waiting to be revealed, while the heaving bosom promised as sweet a resting-place as the Fairy of the Garden could have offered to the prince whom the East Wind bore to Paradise.

Chalmers made a tottering movement forward, but turned and clung again to the carved chair. As he turned, his eyes encountered the keen, but compassionate gaze of Van Dreen. Neither spoke, but Van Dreen understood and answered the desperate appeal of Chalmers' look. He came quietly

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

across, and now for the first time Neseta saw the stranger. She gave a startled ejaculation, and cowered down among her pillows, staring up at him in a frightened way. Van Dreen held up his hand in a commanding gesture that seemed oddly at variance with the homely manner of his address.

"Sorry to disturb you, ma'am," he said briefly. "But I'm interested in your friend here. He's tired. I reckon you can spare him now for a rest."

"Let him rest with me," cried Neseta. "I will soothe his weariness: none ever soothed him so well as I."

"Quite believe that," replied Van Dreen. "But it's not your turn now. Come, come, ma'am. You're too sensible to interfere with his comfort. If you wouldn't mind taking yourself off, you shall see him again by and by."

Neseta's lips quivered. "But I do not want to go," she said. "Why do you speak to me so strangely? I know not who you are, but he—he—is my husband."

"I'm a friend of your husband's, as it happens," said Van Dreen tolerantly. "If

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

I may venture to say so, I think I know what's best for him. You've had a nice long talk, and you can have another to-morrow. Now suppose you get to sleep again." Van Dreen kept his hand up, the fingers outspread, and a change came over Neseta's face. Her life-like colour faded ; she turned imploringly to Chalmers :

" Help me—hold me ! "

But Chalmers was already kneeling beside her, all his own failing strength concentrated in one last putting forth of his will.

" Sleep, sleep, beloved ! Sleep in peace and be at rest. To-morrow you shall come to me again."

And even as she stretched her arms towards him, the dear dream-vision melted slowly out of sight, dissolving into pearly mist, and she was gone !

CHAPTER XV

"Man, beginning as raw material, ends as a kind of radium, the glorious force which, drawing into itself the subtlest essence of all manner of lower substances, lifts it to use on an immeasurably loftier plane."—J. BRIERLEY, B.A.

VAN DREEN seized Chalmers by the shoulders as he sank, almost swooning, and promptly pushed him to the door, which he bade him open without delay. Leaning against the lintel, Chalmers fumbled mechanically with the brass studs, and, practice having made the process easy, he managed to release the spring.

The two men stumbled together across the threshold, and as the heavy door swung on its hinges behind them, Van Dreen dragged Chalmers to a chair. Here he collapsed, his arms over the table, his head upon his breast. Van Dreen turned on all the electric lights, revealing, in strange contrast with the scene they had quitted, the bare ugliness of the study. Then he took a flask of brandy from his pocket, and with a good deal of

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

difficulty succeeded in getting some of it down Chalmers' throat. Chalmers spluttered and protested, but was forced to submit. The strong spirit, to which he was unaccustomed, soon revived him, and he looked blankly at his friend.

"You'll be all right directly," said Van Dreen. "We'll have some fresh air," and going to the window he flung up the casement. Chalmers staggered towards it, gasping under the inrush of air—that chill but subtly invigorating air of the small hours preceding dawn. The window faced east, across a quiet side street of comparatively low houses. The light of the stars, shining frostily, made a pale radiance. The sky was extraordinarily clear.

"That'll soon pull you together," said Van Dreen. "You're taking in fresh life with every whiff. People have no idea what a moral and physical regenerator they've got in the early morning air. These are the only hours out of the twenty-four when this sin-begrimed old city doesn't give out miasmic mind-exhalations. Has it never struck you," he went on, "what a peculiarly lustral quality there is in the atmosphere at this

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

time? It's life-giving to such as are able to absorb it, but apt to be a bit strong at times for weakly folks. That's why sick people take a turn at dawn—for better—or worse. And that's why sunrise has invariably been the best time for religious meditation. The heart is emptied of yesterday's passions and prayers, and is ready to take in stock for another all-round sale. Cheer up, my friend. I reckon we're switched right on to that life-giving current."

A curious reverence came into Van Dreen's tones, but he spoke without expectation of answer. He was talking for the purpose of steadying Chalmers' nerves. Chalmers was clinging dizzily to the sash-frame, drinking in long draughts of the night air, and though seized with a fit of nervous shivering he would not leave the window. A breeze blew lustily upon him, and he craned his gaunt neck and lifted his haggard face to meet it. Both men gazed out over the sleeping city where gas-lamps twinkled in scattered constellations, and, here and there, the moony lustre of an electric arc-globe shed a ghostly circle of white light.

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

One of these circles of pale luminosity took in the low square tower and heavy portico of St. Matthias and the Evangels. Van Dreen saw Chalmers' mouth twitch, and a gleam of despair come into his face as they turned towards the scene of his ministry. Then suddenly, with trembling arms upheld against the cold, clear sky, he burst into a fervid appeal to Heaven—the magnificent words of Solomon.

“ Have thou respect unto the prayer of thy servant who shall know the plague of his own heart and stretch forth his hand towards thy house. If any man trespass against his neighbour and an oath be laid upon him to swear, and the oath come before thine altar . . . hear thou in heaven and judge thy servant . . . justifying the righteous to give him according to his righteousness . . . And when he be smitten down because he hath sinned against thee, and there is no man, oh! Lord, that sinneth not . . . and shall turn again to thee and confess thy name and make supplication unto thee before thine house . . . then hear thou in heaven and forgive, and give to

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

that man according to his ways . . . whose heart thou knowest, for thou alone knowest the hearts of the children of men . . . Hear thou in heaven . . . and when thou hearest forgive the sin of thy servant, and teach him the good way wherein he should walk . . . Hearken thou unto his cry . . . and unto his prayer, oh! Lord, my God . . ."

Chalmers sank upon his knees by the window, his bowed head on the ledge. Van Dreen waited a few minutes, then touched him on the shoulder. Chalmers looked up blankly.

"Come along," said Van Dreen, and led him to the fire, now a mere smouldering heap of ashes. "Sit down," he said, and carefully coaxed this into a blaze. "Now"—having put on a few fresh nobbs of coal—"we'll take stock of the situation. You see your persuading the young lady to talk has got us a good bit forrarder. I reckon that what Neseta told us is a true story. You allow that, on the face of it?"

"I am as certain of its truth as that I am alive," exclaimed Chalmers. "But what can I do next?"

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

"There are two courses open to you—renunciation or indulgence. You can put away this love, which in its present form is unnatural, and therefore unlawful and injurious. Or you can enjoy it, and take the consequences."

"You imply that the consequences would be disastrous?"

"Guess you've come to that conclusion yourself," answered Van Dreen in his dry tone.

"I have come to no conclusion," returned Chalmers stormily, and sat silent. His expression became distant and absorbed; his eyes glowed darkly. "I can scarcely tell what to think or what to believe," he said at length. "And yet certain illuminative ideas flash through my mind. I know that many a spiritual teacher has been subjected to ordeals transcending ordinary experience in order to test his fitness as the medium for some great revelation. It may be intended that I should be a living proof of the fact that man possesses superhuman powers—a chosen witness to the truths underlying Neseta's story. Van Dreen! Suppose that

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

I should be destined to solve the problem of physical resurrection—that crux of Christian theology.”

Chalmers braced himself as he spoke. His whole frame, which only a few minutes before had seemed shrunken, appeared to become inflated as he went on in something of his former lofty manner.

“Van Dreen! *You* must take the responsibility of having enlarged my mental horizon. I have been lamentably ignorant, but now I begin to see that there may be no limit to the potentialities in man. In giving me the clue to some of the mysterious things which puzzled me, you have suggested further miraculous possibilities. It seems to me that there may be some foundation in fact for such legends as that of Pygmalion and Galatea.”

“Oh! Aye! And of Prometheus,” put in Van Dreen.

“Yes. You implied that the fire which Prometheus is said to have stolen from heaven signified the power of creating life? I can fully believe that. It may even be possible that other men besides myself have called

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

beautiful women into existence by the force of their will and desire."

"Well, as I said, I believe it was a common achievement of black magic in old days, before what you call the Flood. But tradition shows that a stop had to be put to such unlawful experiments."

"If God endowed humanity with these powers, the employment of them should not be unlawful," persisted Chalmers.

"We discussed that point, but I thought you'd bring it up again. Now, look here. Man can't expect to be fully endowed with transcendental powers until he is fit to employ them properly. By and by, he may learn how best to acquire and utilise them. No doubt he possesses in embryo all divine powers, else he wouldn't have been urged to perfect himself 'even as his Father in heaven is perfect.' Our race has already produced human beings with faculties and powers transcending those of ordinarily advanced humanity at the present rate of evolution, men who have earned the right to be called elder brothers of mankind. Every scientific psychologist who admits evolution must see

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

the logical necessity of that inference. It's very likely, too, that these advanced beings are entrusted with a share in the guiding of child-humanity, and some of them might even be allowed such a stupendous privilege as the one you're hinting at. But I guess it doesn't come within *our* sphere of practical usefulness," added Van Dreen with his little crackling laugh. "First thing man has got to get at, is a right understanding of the eternity of life—the realisation that death is but a sleep recurring like the shorter sleep when our day's work is ended. Each one of us, mark you, is the net product of his yesterday. You yourself could not be, as Reginald Chalmers, the type of man you are, if forty or sixty centuries back you had not given up the emotional things of life, including Neseta, in order to develop your intellect in a lop-sided fashion."

"But, how is it that I have not brought back whatever mystic knowledge I gained?" asked Chalmers eagerly.

"Because, my dear fellow, when the pendulum swings too far on one side, there's bound to be a corresponding lurch on the

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

other. Also, because the moral aspect of the matter is a very grave consideration. Broadly speaking, the acquiring of knowledge does not necessarily imply the forming of a good moral character, though the formation of a character may easily be altered in the process of gaining knowledge. Moreover, you took the kingdom of Wisdom by storm before you had paid your footing, and Nature is a strict tax-gatherer. You may get up early and go to bed late, but, in the long run, you'll never cheat the old dame out of her dues."

Van Dreen laughed shortly. He had been walking to and fro. Now he went over to the window, and stood there, thinking deeply.

"The long and short of it is," he said, coming back, "that man has free-will, but he's got to abide by it. When he makes a decision, he has to see the results through. That's only fair. The Creator Himself chooses to abide by what He has done."

Across the smouldering fire, Van Dreen looked gravely at Chalmers, who sat facing him with strained eyes.

"Having put your hand to the plough,

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

you can't look back, eh ? ” he said. “ You gave up the life of love—the lower life, as it seemed to you—in Egypt, for what you felt to be the higher life of religion and learning. Subsequently, you've made links with other souls, who look to you for guidance. You owe them something. You've taught them a false understanding of love. Teach them the true, but don't let their faith receive the shock which it must if you continue your nefarious intercourse with Neseta. For, however sedulously you might try to cover up the tracks, they would become manifest and be misunderstood. No force operating on the spiritual plane can remain wholly inoperative on the material. Like volcanic fire, it will break forth sooner or later. So don't do unnecessary damage. Turn this passion of yours into a blessing for your people and yourself.”

“ How ? ”

“ Through the love itself. Love is the greatest dynamic force in the whole almighty scheme—the root of the God-given impulse towards self-expenditure, which begins in mere brute instinct to reproduce the species ;

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

and ends in divine self-surrender for the salvation of the world."

"You speak strangely," said Chalmers in a puzzled tone. "At one moment you appear to reprobate love; at another you exalt it. I must say that I cannot even remotely compare my human passion for Neseta with the sublime passion for humanity of Him in Whom all earthly desire was crucified."

"No, because you understand little of the spiritual meaning of love," returned Van Dreen sharply. "You have shred all the humanity from your conception of love, leaving only dry bones of asceticism which need the Wind of the Spirit to quicken them into life. You have never fathomed Christ's broad, sweet sympathy with the human side of all love-relationships."

Chalmers shook his head doubtfully.

"Well, you see, it was wisely ordered that the love-instinct should be implanted in the human race. Else, folk would shrink from it, and there'd be a shortage in the human product. True love, I tell you, is literally the giving forth of self—whether material or

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

spiritual—for the individual or for the mass. The root-instinct is the same through all modes of expression. Degrees differ according to every creature's susceptibility to finer vibrations. In undeveloped man, love is a mere gratification of the senses; in the highly evolved, it approaches spiritual ecstasy. Yet all are part of the divine scheme—the lower fundamentally necessary for the production of the higher, till man becomes a perfected being. Hello! I'm taking the rostrum again. But you follow my argument?"

"Logically, yes—admitting the theory of soul evolution along the ordinary lines of human experience. That, however, I am hardly ready to allow. I prefer to believe that there is a special descent of the Holy Spirit into a heart duly purified and prepared to receive it."

"And what is it that constitutes such preparedness and purification but the spiritualising of daily life?" said Van Dreen, his face intensely earnest, his voice deepening. "What but the gradual growth of the soul through realisation of moral responsibility.

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

And how can that come about, except by an increasing sense of the God-element inherent in man, without which there could be no true descent of the Holy Spirit? Fusion of the divine with the human depends upon the soul's capacity for co-operation with its Creator. And how has the soul acquired that capacity? How has it grown? That seed-spark of godhead sent forth at the beginning of creation by cosmic love-energy in a process so ineffably mysterious, so transcendently sublime that we may only approach the suggestion of it with, as it were, veiled faces and bowed heads. How has this divine germ evolved from the brute form to that of the savage, from the savage to civilised man, and again from the average citizen to a Plato, a Newton, a Dante? How, if not like all things in the universe—by many successive stages of development, as the nebulae becomes a planet, the acorn grows into an oak, the infant into the man? In physical nature there are no miracles, no leaps nor bounds. Therefore there can be none in the realm of spirit. Evolution advances in alternating periods of manifestation and quiescence: of

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

activity and rest : of building up and taking down and recombination. Seasons wax and wane and return. Day succeeds night ; night follows day. For life renews itself in the dark. Corn germinates in the ground ; it is sown and harvested and sown again. The tree sheds its leaves and puts forth fresh leaves, and the branches are each year more vigorous until they, too, decay, and the life seeks a fresh form. But it is ever the same life that is increased and renewed. So with the life of the soul. At each shedding and renewal of the fleshly garment, the divine element within, rightly nurtured, grows, and is increased. But since it manifests in the body, it can develop itself on higher lines only through the natural means provided. And those are the social ties and human affections which refine the brute instincts and suggest the first elementary idea of sacrifice—the subordination of self to the family welfare.”

“ Oh ! I am ready to allow that your plea for the body is reasonable, but when you deny me Neseta, you deny my body’s claim,” cried Chalmers bitterly. “ You’d feed the

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

multitude, but you will not feed *me*. You've taken away my crumbs of comfort, and you don't give me bread. Perhaps," he added, "I, who have refused the bread of the heart to others, don't deserve it myself. But I want it, I want the bread of human passion, I want human heart-food. I'm starved, Van Dreen, and starvation makes a man forget all but the satisfaction of his craving. I crave for Neseta. The claim of that one dear desire to which I gave shape, excludes all other claims. And I recognise the justice of that claim. Once, I put it aside wantonly, cruelly. Now, Neseta comes back to demand her own. You asked me how I had decided. Suppose I have decided not to renounce Neseta, but, as the marriage service says, to forsake everything else and to cleave only unto her?"

CHAPTER XVI

"There is no love without self-sacrifice. Creation was the self-sacrifice of the Absolute."—ARCHDEACON WILBERFORCE.

"Conditions are never causes in themselves, but only the subsequent links of a chain on the plane of the pure ideal."—T. TROWARD.

"I GUESS you'd find difficulties in contracting marriage with a ghost," remarked Van Dreen bluntly.

"Why should there be any greater difficulty than has occurred so far?" returned Chalmers. "Neseta's existence cannot really hinge on my own, since it was plain to-night that she has a very definite individuality. It is absurd to call Neseta a ghost. For the time being, she is as much alive as any ordinary woman of my acquaintance."

"For the time being!" repeated Van Dreen significantly.

"In fact," said Chalmers abruptly, "I am beginning to ask myself, did Neseta ever really die?"

Van Dreen shrugged.

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

"May it not be conceivable," continued Chalmers, "that through these thousands of years her body has been in a state of suspended animation? There are authenticated records of bodies which have revived after having been dead, in all physical appearance, for lengthy periods—of fakirs entombed during a time sufficient for crops to be sown and harvested above their graves—of persons who have recovered from cataleptic trances of extraordinary duration. Why should a trance that has lasted thousands of years be more impossible than one which has lasted for twelve months? In ancient Egypt they had methods unknown to modern science for preserving the body from corruption. They may have had other secrets, such as the indefinite suspension of the vital principle in a still living body, equally unknown to us."

"Quite likely. But three or four thousand years is a considerable time to keep any living physical body in a state of suspended animation. Besides, there are other objections to your theory. You haven't even the basis of a mummy to stand it on. For I

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

should infer from her story that Neseta's physical body was disintegrated and scattered to the winds of the desert. No, my friend, a certain school of mystic philosophers would tell you that the form we saw move, and heard speak, is a simulacrum of Neseta, cast off by her, as a snake sheds its old skin when it has grown a new one—one of those shadow-selves which drift, without volition, hither and thither in the world of shades, and which you attracted and materialised in a remarkably complete manner. However, we need not go into that question for the moment. It remains a fact that Neseta's material existence is chiefly sustained by your life-force, and that it must cease, for all practical purposes, when that life-force is withdrawn into yourself again. Have you reflected that to prolong such a process must mean sooner or later the exhaustion of your own vital principles ? ”

“ Yes, I have been compelled to think of that. I was indeed, fully conscious of the exhaustion just now. But I should be prepared to run that risk. Then again, I have been considering whether in ethical justice

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

I do not owe Neseta the life and love of which in a former existence I unjustly deprived her ? ”

Van Dreen nodded grimly.

“ Besides I feel that the exhaustion is as much due to the combat going on within me as to the actual expenditure of vitality. You can see for yourself, Van Dreen,” Chalmers went on vehemently, “ that I cannot cast off Neseta without wrenching away a portion of myself. She is my spiritual and physical complement, and I cannot live without her.”

“ Then I’m uncommonly sorry for you,” said Van Dreen.

“ Of course it would be necessary to arrange conditions,” continued Chalmers eagerly. “ The matter should be put plainly before Neseta. She would understand that there must be limitations. But it is preposterous to suppose her a mere simulacrum, animated by me. She has her own thoughts and feelings. She might even be capable of carrying out a line of action opposed to my wishes.”

“ That is unfortunately true,” replied Van Dreen.

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

"But she has a right to be consulted. You have made that clear to me. And I seem to see that a union of this kind would be less of a hindrance in my work than if I were to burden myself with a wife in the ordinary way. You have blamed me for thwarting Nature in preaching renunciation of human affections. Then why should I not thankfully take the joy that has come to me in so miraculous a manner?"

"You ask me why not," said Van Dreen, "and I will answer you. Because no man has any right to commit moral and physical suicide. Nor has he any right to interfere with the divine purpose in regard to another soul. You have stolen the soul of Neseta from the protection of her gods, in the same way that you stole her body in old Egypt from the protection of her guardians in Hathor's temple. But this is a more impious theft than that one. For we may assume without irreverence that it was the divine intention to spare her further suffering through you, at least until the Wheel of Birth should in its turning bring you lawfully together again, and give

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

you opportunity, in some other human relationship, to atone for the wrong of the past. You frustrated that design in calling her from the blue Place of Peace where she slept. Your command awoke her, and the force of your will and the strength of the love between you constrained her to obey your summons, since love is all-powerful."

"Ah! there you touch the truth, and refute your own arguments," cried Chalmers triumphantly. "If love be all-powerful it cannot be that God demands the sacrifice of my love for Neseta."

"God demands that man, who shares His free-will and its requirements, should stand by the decisions he has made. What you have done, you have done. It is now for you to persuade Neseta to await the hour when you shall have earned the right to reunion. Your part is to teach her the true Christ-lesson of sacrifice."

"I cannot—I have never learned it. Love to me is more than sacrifice."

"My poor friend, you speak of love as opposed to sacrifice. Do you not realise that love is sacrifice? For love is the life

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

that gives power to sacrifice, and love that is not sacrificial is but a passing thing. Through sacrifice alone can love gain immortality. Christ showed forth *that*. Being man, He gave Himself as man ; while, being God, He knew that in that Supreme Sacrifice was released a force so stupendous as to lift not only those whom with His human nature He loved into closer communion with Him, but to transmute the whole world-energy of love into a divine sustaining power available through all time. Every love partaking of sacrifice perfects its own consummation. You cannot be required to give up your love for Neseta. That love is yours through all eternity if you do not violate its own eternal law."

"And if I should violate love's eternal law, as you put it, by which I presume you mean my clinging to Neseta at the present time?" said Chalmers in shaky tones.

"Death would soon separate you from Neseta on the material plane, and a second and worse death would infinitely retard your reunion in the spiritual sphere. For you would have raised an impassable barrier

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

between yourself and your beloved which could not be crossed until the results of your sin against Nature were fully worked out. And not only against Nature, but against the soul of Neseta herself. Think, too, of those other souls whom you would have left worse than shepherdless. Ah ! my friend, there can be no more dreadful hell for the disembodied spirit than to be dogged after death by the victims of its wrong-doing on earth."

"And what of Neseta ? " asked Chalmers hoarsely.

"It is not possible for me to judge of the measure of suffering you may have brought, or may still bring, upon her. The scales of justice are weighed by Hands high above me. But this I *do* know, that whereas Neseta's passion for you was formerly pure as a child's, it would be a very different matter were she to partake with you in this unlawful intercourse. Open her eyes to what is called sin, and she becomes a creature at war with the Universe, a fugitive from retributive justice—such as were Adam and Eve in their aprons of fig leaves. Before sin and

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

death entered their garden, they were unashamed. Afterwards—well, you know how it was with them. And so it would be with Neseta. When your own hand had barred the gates of the Spiritual Paradise where your beloved might have welcomed you—when you knew her to be a lost soul, shut out from her heart's Eden, tortured by unnatural desires: earth-bound, despairing, desolate — then, my friend, how about hell? ”

“ Oh, stop, stop,” cried Chalmers wildly. “ What is the use of telling me all this? Find me a way which is wise that I may walk in it.”

“ You must see Neseta,” said Van Dreen quietly. “ You must persuade her to leave you here alone. Tell her to go back to that blue Place of Peace and sleep out her time. If she refuse, there's only one way in which you can save the situation. You've *got* to get rid of Neseta in this life.” Van Dreen's voice deepened to a solemn note. “ For your love to rise immortal, it must be crucified in the flesh and laid in the tomb; then will your beloved remain your spiritual bride for

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

ever. To save Neseta's soul and your own, you must destroy the body of your desire."

Chalmers shuddered. "How can I do that?" he groaned.

"Your will was strong enough to create, and so it is strong enough to destroy," answered Van Dreen firmly. "If you choose you can do this thing, but there must be no faltering nor looking back. You must abstain from thinking of her in any way that could attract her to you. You must close every avenue by which she can approach you. You must make her homeless in order that she may seek the shelter more mercifully afforded her. You must demolish the shrine."

Chalmers protested in dumb anguish. It was the hour of his Gethsemane. He bowed himself in his chair, his hands over his face, his frame writhing as though torn by an evil spirit which fought fiercely against expulsion. Morning was breaking, and the eastern sky had a faint, mysterious lightening on the horizon against which the grim tower of St. Matthias and the Evangels stood out glorified by the spreading radiance. The pale grey dawn came glimmering in, gradually

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

illuminating that bent figure in the chair. Van Dreen watched silently, for he knew that the conflict was nearly ended, and he believed that victory must come at last.

Suddenly Chalmers lifted his head. His face was pale, his features set, but his eyes gleamed with exceeding brilliancy. Raising his hand, he pointed to the window in a strange, rapt manner.

"Leave me," he said huskily. "The light is coming."

And in silence, Van Dreen went out.

CHAPTER XVII

"Element is merely a convenient name for a substance that we have not yet succeeded in breaking up into two or more simpler ones."—SIR WILLIAM RAMSAY.

VAN DREEN purposely put off his return to Chalmers' house that night until a much later hour than on the previous evening. When he arrived, the portico was empty, and there were no signs of other visitors. The evening meal was long over, and the casual guests were reposing snugly in their hammocks beneath the Adams frieze. In spite of the general quietude, however, there was a sense of something portentous about the place. Willard had a harassed look when he opened the door, and his expression of relief at the sight of Van Dreen showed that in his estimation things had not been going well.

"Pray come in, sir," he said. "I'm thankful you're here. I was just asking Mr. Manning whether he didn't think I'd better get on the telephone to you, and if

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

you hadn't happened to come round I should have sent you word."

"What for?" inquired Van Dreen imperturbably. "Anything amiss with your master?"

Willard pursed up his lips. He took Van Dreen's overcoat with agitated hands.

"I should say there's a deal amiss, doctor; but sorry I am that it's beyond me to inform you exactly what it is, for not one of us has seen Mr. Chalmers since you did. When I took up his water this morning he wasn't in his room, and the bed hadn't been slept in."

"Oh! that's all right," rejoined Van Dreen. "We sat up late, talking. I stayed with him till pretty near sunrise."

"I guessed as much, sir. But Mr. Chalmers hasn't swallowed bite nor sup to my knowledge the whole day, nor yet been outside his study. Mr. Manning has had to take the services, and to see everyone that's called. The study door has been locked, and we couldn't get no answer. Mr. Chalmers hasn't had no fire either, for there's been no smoke coming out of the chimney-top,

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

because I looked up. No doubt the study scuttle is empty, me not being able to get at it. I'd have made bold to burst the door open—fearing Mr. Chalmers might be ill—if it hadn't ha' been that I could hear him, sir—I could hear what he was a-doing." Willard's gentle agitation deepened.

"Well, and what was he doing?"

"Dragging about the furniture, as though he'd taken leave of his senses, and, what's worse, breaking things and smashing glass—that's what's he's been a-doing, sir; at least, that's what it sounded like. But when I went outside and looked up at the study windows, being uneasy, as you may suppose, why, there were no panes gone, nor nothing different from ordinary."

"Smashing glass," murmured Van Dreen ruminatively. "Good! good!"

Willard paused, perplexed. "Did you speak, sir?" He thrust his worn grey head attentively forward. "Might I ask, sir, what *you* think?"

"Tut, tut, man! Didn't you say your master had been smashing glass? Well, what more?"

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

"I'm sure *I* don't know, sir," said Willard, with a slightly offended air. "The breakage couldn't ha' been altogether in the study either, for there's very little there that anyone could break, and the noise—a dreadful noise, sir—has been going on a long while." Willard paused for some expression of Van Dreen's opinions, but none came.

"Perreps it was partly in the strong room, sir—that big cupboard; I dessay you remember the door with the brass-headed nails?"

Van Dreen nodded.

"It's a strong-room, I'm told," Willard went on mysteriously, "having been given to understand that there's a deal of plate in Mr. Chalmers' family, but that in accordance with his principles as to the right way of living, he don't make no use of it."

"Oh! a strong-room," observed Van Dreen.

"Yes, sir. My master had it fitted up by foreigners. They came over some time ago with a lot of large cases. It seemed odd for a strong-room, sir."

Van Dreen did not respond, and to do

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

Willard justice, he was far too genuinely anxious to waste time on unimportant details.

"Excuse me, sir, for seeming to go beyond my place. I wouldn't mention my fears except to you, but there's been uncomfortable things thought and said. Do oblige me, sir, by your professional opinion. Is Mr. Chalmers exactly what you might call right in his mind? I had a friend once who was attendant in a 'sylum, and he give me to understand that the religious ones was the worst. Ofttimes they'd be taken bad sudden, and *then*," whispered Willard earnestly—"they'd break out, smashing things. Is Mr. Chalmers taken so, do you think, sir? It's terrible that a saint like him what's helped so many sinners should be tempted of the devil himself—and that with nothing in his stummick, and the wind in the east."

Van Dreen patted the distressed retainer on the shoulder.

"Good old boy! Don't be alarmed. Those poor folk you speak of are a little bit short in the shilling; but, take my word for it, your master's all there. Just leave

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

him to me. You'd better bring up a big bowl of hot soup, with plenty of bread and meat in it, and if you can tumble on a pint of dry champagne in this teetotal establishment, produce that, too. We shall want coals, of course. There's nothing like food and warmth for developing common sense in a sick soul."

"Yessir. Certainly, sir."

"Well, trot along, Wizard—or whatever your name is. Fetch the magic potion, and I'll go straight up. Mr. Chalmers will let me in, I'm sure."

Visibly consoled, Willard hurried off to obey orders. He met Mr. Manning coming out from one of the lower rooms, and told him cheerily that the doctor had arrived. Van Dreen did not stop to speak to the secretary, but nodded from the stairs as he ran up. Outside the door of Chalmers' study, he stood listening. All was quiet now. Van Dreen's face grew tense, then relaxed into an expression of pity. "Poor chap!" he muttered, and knocked loudly.

"It is I, Van Dreen, come to see you."

There was a long silence, then a slow

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

dragging movement across the chamber. The door was noiselessly opened, and Chalmers, drawing back at once into the deep shadow, answered in a hollow voice, "Come in."

The air struck piercingly cold, and a draught caught up some papers and set them whirling. Van Dreen hastily shut the door. The room was in darkness, except for such light as came in from the street-lamps through the open, uncurtained window, so that he could only see, like a moving shadow, Chalmers' lean form, which had begun to walk to and fro in the space between the table and the blank fireplace. Groping about the wall, Van Dreen turned on the electric light; and Chalmers, stopping for a minute, stood revealed—a miserable spectacle, his face white and haggard, his hair awry. There were patches of white dust on the cassock he wore, and a jagged tear in the skirts of it, while his usually immaculate linen was stained, and his hands scarred and bleeding. His eyes glowed sombrely in their cave-like sockets, but they had not the shifty gleam of yesterday, and his face and limbs were free from the twitching movements which had been so

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

painful to witness. What seemed most apparent was the spiritualisation of his features. This was a new spirituality far purer than the religious ecstasy by which from the pulpit he had been wont to stir the hearts of thousands, and was particularly noticeable in that feature which had most betrayed his weakness. The full under-lip was drawn tight, and the firmness of his curiously contradictory mouth matched the steadfastness of his gaze, while yet it had a curious new sweetness in its old-world inflexibility. Van Dreen realised that a change was come over the man, and knew intuitively that Chalmers had gone through his Gethsemane, and that for him the hill of Calvary was almost scaled.

But Van Dreen said nothing, and did not attempt to interrupt the measured stride. He merely took the opportunity to close the window, and then began to clean up the hearth. The east wind shrieking down the chimney, blew the ashes into spirals, and set the cowls above rattling.

The din did not, however, drown the sound of Willard's gentle, but insistent tap.

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

Van Dreen went to the door, and took from the butler's hands a tray on which was a covered tureen of soup, some rolls, and a pint bottle of *Heidsieck*. Then he handed out the coal-scuttle to be replenished, and presently took it back with some kindling the butler had brought up. Chalmers meanwhile cowered in a corner, and as Van Dreen closed the door, he exclaimed "Bolt it, please."

Van Dreen drew the bolt accordingly. Then he went back to the grate, laid some sticks beneath pieces of coal, and set them alight, giving Chalmers time to recover himself.

At the sight of the flame Chalmers appeared to become conscious that he was cold. His rigidity relaxed. He came to the table, shivering violently.

"Sit down," said Van Dreen, kindly authoritative. "You've got to take that soup and some champagne before I talk to you."

The steam of the soup and its savoury odour brought a faintly avid look into the worn eyes. Chalmers sat down, but his

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

hand shook so that he could not hold the spoon, and Van Dreen was forced to feed him like a baby. Even then, the chattering of his teeth almost prevented him from swallowing. He protested weakly at the champagne which Van Dreen poured out, and held to his lips; still, he ended in drinking it, and presently fed himself, finishing off the broth, which was exceedingly good and nourishing. But he seemed ashamed of the indulgence, and pushed away the tray angrily.

"I've been fasting and praying that the spirit might conquer the flesh," he said. "And now you tempt me with meat and wine."

"A good job, too," said Van Dreen bluntly. "I guess there's plenty of waste of tissue to repair. You seem to have been taking it out of yourself pretty considerably. What on earth have you been doing to get into this state?"

"I have done what you advised," said Chalmers concisely. "I have broken up the shrine."

He spoke with extraordinary composure.

"I have had an inspiring experience since

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

you left. Van Dreen, you have been Heaven's agent, employed to help me in this tremendous crisis of my fate. I became convinced that your view is the right one, and that, if I would save my soul and the soul of Neseta, I must, as you said, slay the body of my desire. It is true that that desire arose and rebelled in me, pleading for dear life as Neseta will, I know, rebel and plead when she learns her sentence to-night. But I seem to hear God's voice in the whirlwind of passion and pain, and I knew that I must not falter. I felt that it would be dangerous for me to see Neseta again until I had destroyed the environment which helped to link her to me."

Van Dreen's tongue clicked appreciatively against his teeth, but he answered nothing.

"You said that I must make her homeless in order that she might more readily go back to rest," continued Chalmers. "Well, to-night when she comes, Neseta will find herself in the midst of desolation, and I shall no longer be her lover, but—her executioner!"

Chalmers' manner was profoundly im-

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

pressive. With unshaking steps he led the way to the inner door.

"Come and see," he said.

They passed together into what had been Neseta's shrine, and the heavy door swung behind them. The light was burning, and Van Dreen, as he moved forward, could scarcely repress an exclamation of dismay. He had not been prepared for so literal an interpretation of his counsel, but when he beheld the work of destruction his appreciation of Chalmers' will-power increased, for the sight made him realise what a frenzy of renunciation must have possessed the priest. It was easy now to understand how the impulsive forcefulness of the man gave him sway over his fellow beings, and Van Dreen was more than ever struck by the complexities and contradictions of a nature that seemed to him the most curious mixture of strength and weakness, of egoism and self-abnegation, of sensuous idealism and spirituality that had ever come within his experience.

CHAPTER XVIII

"The material world exists purely in the mind or imagination of those who are conscious of it, and according to the mind of the seer, so that the character of the object seen varies."—EDITOR OF "THE OCCULT REVIEW."

"The whole creation around us is the standing evidence that the starting point of all things is in thought-images, or ideas, for no other action than the formation of such images can be conceived in spirit prior to its manifestation in matter."—T. TROWARD.

HERE was desolation indeed. The glory of the desert, the golden distances, the reflection of the after-glow, the deep blue sky, and the pale radiance of stars, all alike, were gone. In their stead, Van Dreen beheld a havoc of splintered glass, great broken pieces of exquisite colouring and glittering chips, like powdered gems, swept roughly up against the walls of brick and plaster that the sheets of glass had covered. Lying about were torn bits of embroidery, shreds of silken hangings, cushions ripped open, the down from them strewing the yellow-brown carpet which had presented so realistic an imitation of desert

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

sands steeped in sunset glow. There was wreckage of smashed furniture, the framework of the couch and of the ancient stool on which Van Dreen had sat; the incense-table was in pieces, there were overturned flower-stands and vases, and, conspicuous among the debris, were the fragments of Chalmers' antique Egyptian chair, the flat heads and carved bodies of the serpents being almost the only whole pieces remaining. Here and there, were iron supports wrenched from their sockets to serve as instruments of destruction. Only abnormal strength could have accomplished the task so effectually, for there was scarcely any recognisable trace of the former languorous scene with its tropical charm. Nor was there any longer the sense of the lapping warmth freighted with luxurious perfume. One cluster of electric globes—an unshaded arrangement of considerable candle-power which had formerly shed a soft diffused light through the fine stained glass—now exposed with horrible clearness the havoc that had been wrought.

Both men surveyed the ruins in silence, Van Dreen seeming the more concerned of

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

the two. Chalmers' look was that of a zealot—utterly pre-absorbed. But midnight was drawing near, and even whilst they gazed at the violated shrine, both became conscious of Neseta's approach. Van Dreen turned to Chalmers. He stood rigid and absorbed, his eyes fixed on vacancy. Drops of sweat had risen on his forehead. His lean frame seemed to have shrunk visibly as if it were being depleted of the vital elements necessary for the clothing of Neseta's spirit. Van Dreen understood that the process of materialisation had already begun, though the glare of the electric light made it less easy for him to distinguish the milky vapour exuding from Chalmers' form. But as the billowy cloud continued to pour forth, Van Dreen perceived that its consistency grew denser. And he could plainly see it gather itself with the same caressing, folding movement as before, only this time into a pillar-like shape, a few paces distant from the priest. Gradually this cloudy pillar defined itself into the outline of a woman's form, and, in a minute or two, Neseta stood before them.

At first she seemed scarcely alive—no

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

more than a creature of mist and dew. Her body swayed like a flower in a faint breeze. Her arms were extended on either side, her tapering fingers groping feebly as if for the supporting cushions to which she was accustomed, and which she could not find. Uneasy shivers seized her, as she became sensible of the unwonted chill. Her arms fell. From the dark, alluring eyes the almond-shaped lids lifted slowly, showing their shadowy rims. The pearly skin was paler than before, pale as the petals of a white camellia. But the lips were scarlet as pomegranate buds, and pouted like the lips of a child, puzzled and offended. Between the waves of black hair divided on the oval forehead, the Egyptian symbol trembled, and, at the swell of the bosom, her ruby heart shone like a great drop of blood. Gradually, the rounded contours beneath her gauzy robe grew more distinct, more dazzlingly fair, and the beautiful eyes widened gravely, their child-questioning turning to blank wonder, into which crept a fearful apprehension.

Chalmers remained silent, rapt, spiritually remote, while Van Dreen withdrew himself

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

as far as he could into the corner of the room. But Neseta's eyes passed both of them by unseeingly. Her gaze went wildly round the defaced walls, and up to the shattered ceiling. Then her eyes quailed beneath the glare of the electric light, and she shrank as if it caused her physical hurt. The wonder and the horror in her face deepened. Again she groped with unavailing hands. Incredulously, she stared at the floor, and at the spot where the couch had been ; then once more her distraught gaze went rapidly round the walls, which had shreds of glass clinging here and there, and gaping holes where the plaster had been torn away. She reared herself to peer at these, shaking her head as if to throw off the mad terror that assailed her. Then she crouched, a huddled, frightened waif—herself a thing of dreams, yet, as it seemed, expecting to awaken from these nightmare surroundings, which she could not understand. All the time she peered about piteously. A low, questioning murmur came from her lips, a sound of distress that must have pierced the hardest heart ; then—for the individual will and consciousness in her

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

seemed to increase with her desperate need—she thrust out one hand to touch tentatively a piece of wreckage; but in making a step forward she stumbled and cried out in anguish, having struck her foot against one of the serpents broken from Chalmers' chair. Her horror at the sight of the flat head and jade eyes roused Chalmers' sympathy. His face suddenly softened, he made a movement towards her, but fear and pain had apparently blinded Neseta. She did not seem to see him, and his impulse was checked by her evident unconsciousness of his presence. Van Dreen, watching her with immense compassion, realised that with the destruction of the shrine, Neseta's world had vanished like a soap-bubble, and, at finding herself amid such unfamiliar and alarming surroundings, her mind had jumped to the conclusion that she had come into some fearsome region of Amenti, the Egyptian Hades.

"What manner of place is this?" she cried. "Is this the Place of Slaughterings, the abode of him who hath lips that gnaw? Retreat from me, thou serpent-fiend, Nák! Get thee back, oh! Tormentor, who art an

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

abomination to Rā ! Am I not of the pure following of Hathor, beloved of the great goddess upon whose brow is the crown of the two asps, and whose charm hath been given unto me her servant ? ”

Neseta stretched out her hands with the palms outward as if in exorcism of the serpent, whose head, supported on one of the broken bits of the chair had a curious semblance of life. Then, bending herself in an attitude of profound supplication, she raised her arms on high, and implored the protection of her gods in tones of agonised invocation.

“ Oh ! Sekhet-Bast-Rā, Mistress and Lady of the Tombs, give me not to the Great Destroyer who dwelleth in the Valley of the Grave. Oh ! Mighty One of Enchantments, Lady of the Bandlet, deliver me from the God-of-the-Terrible-Face ! Oh ! Fire Goddess Ani-Tesket, let not the Flame be against me ; let not the venom of Nák be upon my head. Oh ! Hathor, Divine Queen, Dweller in the Spacious Disk, vivify the Heart of the Still Heart, and grant that the calamities of the Underworld fall not upon me. Oh ! Osiris Auf-ānkh, who at the call of thy spouse

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

didst return from the realm of the Tuat !
Speak fair words for me, oh ! Osiris-Nu-
triumphant, that the gates of Amenti be
opened unto me, and that I remain not in
the Torture Chamber of Set ! ”

Thus she prayed in her own tongue that
was like barbaric music. Though Chalmers
could not understand her words, their meaning
was made evident to him by the despairing
gestures ; and the sight of this distress was
more than he could bear. Now again Van
Dreen beheld that mysterious transformation
of the man's personality from the austere
Anglican priest to the robed Egyptian hiero-
phant — splendid, sensuous, commanding.
The Egyptian spoke in thrilling accents, very
different from the voice of Chalmers.

“ Neseta ! ”

At the sound, Neseta became aware of
her lover's presence. She lifted her head ;
a gleam of joy flashing into her face, and
recognising him, she gave an ecstatic cry.

With a swift gliding movement she sank
at his knees, and would have embraced them,
but that he put out his hand, restraining her.
As he did so, and with the effort of will re-

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

gained control over himself, Van Dreen could have believed the Egyptian to have been an illusion of his fancy, for here was Reginald Chalmers again, the Anglican clergyman, gaunt and cold in his straight black cassock, with eyes fanatically stern and with a countenance of marble rigidity. It was the Anglican priest who made a rebuffing gesture. Neseta was instantly aware of the change. All the joy went out of her face ; her arms dropped, and she recoiled, whimpering in a way that was inexpressibly pathetic. Then, slowly she raised herself. Her terror and bewilderment returned.

"Is it by the magic of the Wise Ones," she asked, "that the form of your features and the manner of your garments become altered as I look upon you? And why may I not approach even to kneel at your feet, Tha'an?"

"I dare not let you come too near me," he replied slowly, "lest my strength should fail. Listen to me, Neseta; I am not Tha'an."

"Not Tha'an!" she interrupted. "Ah! beloved, you cannot deceive me. I know

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

you even in that strange garb, and with that forbidding look. But a moment since you stood before me in your robes—the robes that I remember—yes, I saw you as I used to see you. Most surely you are Tha'an—*my* Tha'an."

He sighed heavily as he answered:

"Love has made the dead things of the past to seem alive. Nevertheless, Tha'an is dead; and you, Neseta, are the ghost of a dead woman. The Wise Men of whom you speak are dead, too—long, long ago."

The beautiful lines of her brow drew together in a troubled frown.

"I know not how these things can be. Have I not drunk of the Cup of Oblivion, and now that I am quickened and alive once more, am I not again one of those that may walk the earth?"

As he did not answer, she exclaimed in sudden remembrance:

"I fear me we have been guilty of neglect to the gods in the joy of awakening. For we did omit to offer the sepulchral cakes, and to beseech the Lord Osiris that my *ka* should not pass again between the pylons of

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

Āmenti. Oh! pray to the gods for me, Tha'an."

But his face remained mask-like, and her terrified eyes, roaming round the desolation of the room, looked up at the glaring cluster of unshaded electric burners. Shuddering, she cried out:

"Oh! what cold sepulchre is this, where the cruel Eye of Set sends fire that gives no heat? Where is the tent to which I came in answer to your call? Where are the silken hangings, the couch got ready, the warm soft loveliness of day, and all the sweet, wild joys of night? Oh! take me hence, Tha'an, take me from this dreadful chamber. Lead me to the camp that you have prepared, where my eyes first opened from their long sleep and beheld your dear eyes watching for my awakening. Take me back to the desert, Tha'an, where the south wind's breath is warm as your kisses used to be. Let me see again the yellow sands, the wide blue sky, and the Sektet boat wherein Rā journeys to the west. Oh! come, beloved! Seal my life to yours with offerings and oblations, so that the Four Flames enter into my *ka*

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

and make it strong to abide among the living. Then shall happiness be ours again. Oh! come, beloved—come.”

She turned towards him, her sweet face lifted. But Chalmers spoke in resolute tones.

“I cannot, Neseta, I may not. I told you that I had done that which is forbidden in calling your spirit down from its heavenly rest. It is a crime to hold commerce with the dead. I want you to remember that you belong to Death, and I to Life, and that to join the two is a wicked act which can only bring down upon us the curse of Heaven. We must not be united again until the work appointed for me to do here has been worthily done, whereby I shall have won the right to claim you for ever as my own. Then most gladly, my dear, will I obey Death’s summons, and we shall meet, I hope, never to be parted. But now you must leave this body which my sinful desire has created, and your spirit must return to the blue Place of Peace and take its rest.”

CHAPTER XIX

"The evolution of the soul is the central movement of Nature and constitutes the inmost meaning of existence—the drama that is really being enacted on the stage of the Universe."
—"THE CREED OF CHRIST."

"REST! And without my beloved!" Neseta cried in pitiful derision. "Why will you mock me, Tha'an? What do I want of rest when for me all peace and joy are locked in your embrace? How can Death work harm to Love, seeing that Love is stronger than Death? Tremble not for the wrath of the gods, beloved, for know you not that the goddess whom I serve—she of the Hornèd Crown—will surely avert from us the anger of Rā. Clasp me then, without misgiving, and hold me close that the Flame may pass from your heart to mine, and the breath of your body be in my nostrils, and so shall I be knitted with you in strength to abide among the living ones."

Her eyes besought him even more elo-

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

quently than her lips. So, too, her gestures, each one of which was a prayer. So, too, every curve and outline of her exquisite form. But passion seemed burnt out in Chalmers' breast.

"No, Neseta," he said firmly, "it is impossible that you can remain. You have no rightful place among the living."

Her only answer was in the anguished repetition of his name.

"Tha'an, Tha'an!"

"I have told you that I am no longer Tha'an, priest of Rā. If ever I were Tha'an," he said, "I do not remember my Egyptian life. My soul has been born again in a new fleshly form. I dwell among a new race of men, who serve a different god—the one great God, whose priest I now am."

"They taught us in the Temple," she said, "that the Wheel of Life goes on for ever. Thus your soul may be born again. If so, what matter? Your people shall be mine, and, if you bid me, I will lay an offering on the altar of your god."

He shook his head and made a gesture of reproof, as though the idea were to him sacrilegious.

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

"Nay, then," she replied humbly, "if that be forbidden by your rule, I will not seek to pass the pylons of your god's temple. I will abide within the tent beyond the city walls. There will I wait your pleasure, and there will you come when the priests, among whom you serve, shall have made due sacrifice and done homage to their strange god. To me, his worship is naught. I did but desire to please my lord."

She touched her breast with her joined hands, making that same graceful sign of submission.

"Each night, I'll watch for you, beloved, and some day mayhap you'll show me the temple wherein your god is worshipped by this strange race in which you are born anew. But send me not forth alone again! Last night, I knew not where to bend my steps in this gloomy city. Foul were the ways in which I strayed, and grim and dark the habitations. This race of men are builders who love not light and beauty. And when I would have left the town and gone to the desert that I knew, I found no stars to guide me, for even the stars are changed. Oh!

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

take me from these streets of tombs. Let us journey back to our own abiding-place, where the desert stretches wild and wide, and where the Sun-god does not veil his face from men. Haste, beloved! The time is short since last we parted, but oh! how long a night it seems."

"A long, long night—a night that is not ended," Chalmers replied solemnly.

"Yet it was but yester-eve we met and parted," said she, wistfully—"yester-eve when you sat beside my couch, and I saw your face against the after-glow which Rā had spread behind him on the desert."

"The desert is far away, Neseta. There is no desert near this city. That which you saw last night—the yellow sands, the deep blue sky, the afterglow—was all illusion, a scene I had created to cheat our fancy, and to make my sinful love the sweeter. But now that painted picture is destroyed. The tent I made for you has been pulled down. The couch on which you lay is broken. All is gone."

"Gone!" she wailed. "Are we then

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

wanderers with nothing to shield us against the wind and storm? Oh! cruel Tha'an!"

"I must be cruel in order to be kind, Neseta," he said in harsh, choking tones. "With my own hands I destroyed the shrine of our love that it might be more easy for me to send you from me."

"What have I done to deserve this fate?" she cried. "Was it not in obedience to your call that I came? And when I woke from sleep, verily it was in this place that I knew of old. I am no babe to be cheated. Then, at least, was nothing changed."

"Everything is changed," he answered; "even in the place of old that you remember. The cities that you knew lie buried deep beneath the sand, and the desert winds have swept them for thousands of yesterdays. The pylons have crumbled into dust; the temples are overthrown, and only a few broken stones remain to tell what once they were. The old race has vanished from the earth, and the old gods are dead, and well-nigh forgotten. Now a mightier god—a more glorious and a holier god—reigns in their stead."

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

“ A mightier god ! ” she repeated. “ What god can be more mighty than Rā, the giver of life ?—what god more glorious than Osiris the risen Lord, or holier than Horus, the Babe divine ? This stranger people, know they not the god of manifold form ? He who is Rā, king of the Disk in his Boat of Millions of Years—he who is Osiris Āuf-ānkh victorious—he who is Horus the son of Isis, begotten of the Lord of Death. Know they not the Three-in-One ? ”

And as she spoke, Neseta bent in profound reverence. Then with uplifted hands and transfigured face, she cried :

“ Hail ! Three-in-One ! Hail ! Divine Ptaḥ ! And hail to thee, oh ! Isis-Hathor, dear, divine Mother. Virgin Mother ! hail ! ”

Chalmers watched her with intense interest, but seeing that he made no sign of reverence or participation, she turned on him with a touch of scorn.

“ Shame on you, Tha'an, to have forsaken our ancient faith.”

“ Faiths change and cast their outworn garments,” he said, in self-excuse. “ The ancient god-forms have faded even as the

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

red dawn-clouds melt away at the rising of the sun. The dawn foreshadows sunrise, Neseta, and the old faith did but herald the more perfect revelation. I long to teach you the creed of Christ, the true Virgin-born. I long to tell you the story of His sacrifice of Himself for the salvation of the world. Oh, that you might learn from me the meaning of the Cross."

Sweet compliance smiled instantly on Neseta's face.

"Behold, I am ready to learn whatsoever my lord wills to teach me," she answered. "I did but speak according to the knowledge that I had, which is not enough, I know, for one so wise as my lord. If it please you, Tha'an, tell me what came to pass concerning this god whom you call Christ."

The modern Anglican replied in the formula that at once suggested itself.

"He was crucified, dead, and buried. He descended into Hell, the third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into Heaven, and sitteth on the right Hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead."

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

Neseta's eyes widened as he spoke. Sudden understanding shone in them.

"Ah! now I know that it is verily the god Osiris whom you worship, though by another name. Of a truth was Osiris slain and descended into the darkness of Amenti, and rose again in the glory of Rā, the Father. And to him was it indeed given to judge the souls of the living and the dead. Most surely is it *him* of whom you speak, my Tha'an."

"No, Neseta. There is but one Christ. In Osiris we saw the shadow forecast of Him, who by His death and resurrection made sure the hope of Life Immortal."

Neseta's beautiful brows were furrowed by fresh perplexity.

"'Tis truly a wondrous similitude," she murmured. "For did not Osiris do the same? I see no difference. And as to the meaning of the Cross, Tha'an, I know *that* well."

"You know the meaning of the Cross?" he questioned in astonishment.

"I know it well," she repeated. "Was I not instructed in Hathor's temple concerning the meaning of this emblem which all the

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

temple maidens wore? See, I wear it still." She touched the jewel on her forehead, the cross within the crescent. "It was joy to me," she continued, "to find the self-same sign, though of slightly altered shape, set up by your strange people. Last night I saw it against the sky over several buildings in this forbidding city. And I rejoiced, for it made me feel less lonely."

Her dark eyes swam with tears.

"Tell me, Neseta, what you learned the meaning of the Cross to be?" said Chalmers softly.

"The Great Teachers of long back time gave this holy emblem," she said, and pointed reverently to the jewel on her brow, "to be a mystic token of the secret of life and love. The Ānkh or Cross, for sign of Rā the Generator; the Crescent to signify Isis-Hathor, Virgin Spouse. In the Cross is symbolised that descent of Spirit into virgin matter by which the worlds are made, and the Universe kept in being. Thus in giving forth his life divine, Rā, the All-Father, was born anew as living man in the form of his son Osiris. And thus, it being ordained that

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

love should conquer death, was the Lord Osiris slain, that of him should be born Horus, the heavenly child. Strange that I should instruct my lord," added Neseta. "For was not *this* that sign that doomed me, the sign with which, by its promise of deeper wisdom, those Wise Men sealed you in the Mysteries within the hidden chamber of the Great Mound of Stone? Was it not upon a cross they stretched you like some shameful malefactor, while for three days and nights your spirit mingled with the shades? And was not *this* the sign of power that the old priest made that morn to drive me from you, desolate? Ah! the Cross means the Descent of Love, but it also means Death and Sacrifice. And its lesson is written on my heart in tears and blood. Will you not make me Love's atonement, beloved of my heart?"

Neseta's loosened hair fell over Chalmers' feet as she knelt to him. Her flexible hands had a language of their own, infinitely pathetic; but though he had listened intently to all she said, he schooled himself to resist her beseeching gestures.

Stung by his coldness, she sprang back

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

and drew herself up with proud resentment. Fresh power had entered her frame.

"I will stoop no more to plead," she cried. "No light-of-love am I, praying a beggar's dole of favour. I am your spouse to whom you are bound by every law of loyalty. I claim my right to share your life. By the Cross, for the sake of which you once denied me—by this most holy symbol of our gods, I now demand my due."

She seemed to have grown extraordinarily strong. The play of her lovely features, the curves of her perfect form, quivered with the force of her emotion. On her breast the ruby heart scintillated roseate fire, throbbing with the quick breaths she drew. The mystic emblem on her forehead flashed warm light.

Fascinated by this vision of her beauty, Chalmers stared at her like a person under magnetic influence. Her gaze seemed to draw him, he swayed towards her.

Neseta grasped her advantage. With exquisite tenderness—the adorable action of a passionately devoted woman combined with childlike self-abandonment—she raised her arms and clung to Chalmers' neck, drawing

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

down his head to hers. Her ardent eyes upon his face, she whispered low, endearing words in her melodious old-world tongue. And Chalmers seemed to understand them, although he did not speak. The Egyptian lover in him was assuming dominance again. The natural sorcery of the woman was working its spell.

The situation seemed impossible even for a St. Anthony. Chalmers' face was drawn and passion-white. His arms clasped Neseta's yielding shape. She leaned against his breast, the life he had given her beating in unison with his own tumultuous heart-beats. Round the two the air seemed thick with ghostly forces engaged in combat, while Neseta crooned laughing satisfaction in her lover's arms. But one barrier remained intact. Not yet had Chalmers sinned as the Prince in the Garden sinned. Not yet had his lips touched the lips of Neseta. And Van Dreen well knew that it was this kiss which should seal her his that Neseta desired. Van Dreen understood that battle raging between the higher and the lower man and all the ghostly elemental partisans of both. Van Dreen's own face

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

went white as he called down aid for the priest's nobler self.

Suddenly, into that tense atmosphere of strife there crept the sense of an arresting Force. It was as though an angel had raised his flaming sword. Silence fell upon the woman. Chalmers' arms relaxed, and an indescribable change swept over his face.

Neseta appeared painfully sensible of that arresting Force. As Chalmers' arms dropped from about her body, she straightened herself, and, with a low moan, stood—an image of despair, gazing at her lover as if she would read his inmost heart. But he was looking beyond her, his eyes enchained by some beatific vision. The doubt, the passion, the anguish, had gone from his face; it was transfigured by a holy fervour. He had the ecstatic, listening look of one who hears the call of a divine voice. Van Dreen saw the look and knew that the battle was won.

But out of the silence came Neseta's bitter cry :

“ Away from me, these vain pretences !
We have broken our vows and closed alike
the gates of good and evil fame. Better is

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

it to break the seals of a thousand oaths than to be faithless unto love. Oh! my well-beloved, deny me not. In life and in death I am thine alone. Forsake me not, forsake me not!"

Chalmers looked down upon her with eyes that were utterly tender, yet in their sacrificial solemnity most utterly remote.

"Never may I deny or forsake you, Neseta, for you are mine, and I am yours both in this present life and beyond the gates of deliverance which open on fullness of life eternal. Nevertheless, the law of God ordains that we be parted here on earth—I, to remain and labour amidst my flock, and you, beloved, to return and end your broken rest. Sleep sweet, and wait the Dawn, when I shall reawake you with a kiss. Then, together we shall live anew—a fuller and more glorious life than that of old. Till then, sleep sweet, my dear. Morning and night I'll kneel before the Cross, the sign that we both worship, and pray that no unholy thought of mine go forth to trouble your pure dreams."

But Neseta's mien had grown sombre. Now she blazed with sudden wrath.

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

"Cease babbling silly prayers," she cried. "You fear your own weakness, Tha'an. Yes, and you shall have cause to fear my strength!"

"Beloved!" he implored, "do not embitter our last moments. Grant me your pity and your pardon for the sin I have sinned against you. Dear love, forgive! And then go back and wait my coming in God's blue Place of Peace."

But Neseta's fiery individuality leaped afresh. Fury flamed in her eyes; scorn and anger changed her features, the wild music of her voice rose and fell in the passionate defiance of a woman who has played and lost, and who snatches at the only possible means of revenge.

"If *that* be to forgive, then will I not forgive," she cried. "If to pardon require that I leave you, then I will not depart. You called me, Tha'an, out of the Kingdom of the Dead, over which the Lord Osiris rules. And till he, the Risen One who governs in Amenti, shall summon me back among the shades—here with the living will I abide. You called me, Tha'an, and, lo! I came,

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

But no power is yours to send me away, and I will not go of my own free will. You gave me life from the substance of your life, but the life has become my own, and I refuse to yield it back. You built my tent and spread my couch; and though the arm that should have sheltered me has destroyed my habitation, nevertheless I will not wander homeless. For where you dwell, there likewise will *I* dwell, and whatsoever work your hand is put to, in that will I, too, have a share. You offered not my *ka* the sepulchral cakes which should have been its sustenance; therefore will I prey upon you and take my strength from that which makes you strong. At your board will I sit; and on your bed, beside you, shall I lie. Neither in your waking nor in your sleeping shall you be parted from your spouse. Though unseen by other eyes, I will remain ever at your side. When you preach of your crucified Lord my face will recall to you the old-time might of Osiris-Nu-triumphant. When you kneel at the foot of your Cross, there will I stand between you and the emblem you falsely adore. When you call on Christ to hear you,

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

the cold presence of dead Neseta shall freeze your lips. And when you likewise die, my arms shall receive your shrinking spirit, and at *my* hands shall Anubis bestow your winding-sheet."

The torrent of words ceased, and Chalmers shrank before such blasphemies. Yet, was not Neseta faithful to the only creed she knew? Oh! that he might teach her the religion of Christ and baptise her with the baptism by which he was himself baptised! Something of the compassion which must have shone on the face of the Master in Galilee glorified at this moment the face of His disciple. Putting out his hand, the priest made the sign of the cross on Neseta's forehead, and repeated swiftly and earnestly.

"Oh! merciful God . . . the Helper of all that need . . . grant to this woman that which by Nature she cannot have. . . Grant that all carnal affections may die in her, and that all things belonging to the Spirit may live and grow in her. . ."

While he spoke, Neseta trembled and turned pale. A milky mist veiled her limbs rapidly like a thickening cloud. Through

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

the mist, the sharpened lines of her face shone wanly, its angry scorn and heart-broken yearning showing plainly to the last. Then, that, too, faded, and, save for Van Dreen's silent presence, Chalmers stood alone.

CHAPTER XX

"That which is alive hath known death, and that which is dead can never die, for in the Circle of Spirit, life is naught and death is naught. Yea, all things live for ever, though at times they sleep and are forgotten."—H. RIDER HAGGARD.

It happened that just then Van Dreen had occasion to leave London for a considerable period, and it was almost a year later when, one winter's evening, he found himself standing once more outside the church of St. Matthias and the Evangels, waiting for the service to begin.

Judging from the number of persons already collected for the same purpose, it appeared that the Reverend Reginald Chalmers' popularity had in no wise suffered diminution. The groups showed the same mixture of class and diversity of type, but there was a subtle difference of expression on their faces from that displayed a year ago—nothing of the nervous, half-famished look Van Dreen had seen then; nothing

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

either of the oppressed gait or the hysterical exaltation which he had remarked before. These people seemed more sympathetic towards each other, more contented with life in general. They stood about in little parties round the porch, talking together in a friendly, eager way, as though some strong bond of interest united them. He saw with surprise that many cast wistful, apprehensive glances towards the baize-covered door leading into the church, and he speculated as to the cause of this solicitude. Snatches of conversation reached him where he stood—references to a sermon Chalmers had delivered on the previous evening that seemed to have deeply touched his hearers.

While he was pondering over these comments, a voice sounded at his elbow—a thin, deprecatory voice. Van Dreen turned.

“Hallo! Willard, that you?”

“Yes, sir. Glad I am to see you, Doctor Van Dreen. You’ve been away a long time.”

“I’m only about an hour off the cars now. But I’m glad to see you, Willard, and your——” Van Dreen paused. A sympathetic twinkle shone in his keen eyes.

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

"Your good lady, Willard?" he added in an undertone. A conscious blush rose on the cheek of Willard's companion.

"Yessir, my wife, sir, Mrs. Willard," announced the butler with immense pride. "Emily, my dear, this is Doctor Van Dreen that you've heard me speak of."

Mrs. Willard bowed stiffly, but Van Dreen, relinquishing Willard's hand which he had warmly grasped, held out his own to the lady, who thereupon extended a very well-gloved one in response.

"Pleased to make your acquaintance, ma'am," said Van Dreen. "I guess I don't know which is to be the most congratulated, my old friend Willard or yourself."

At that, Willard beamed, and his bride smiled primly. Mrs. Willard was not young nor was she handsome. But she had dark, flashing eyes, a good carriage, and a youthful figure garbed in well-cut clothes. She wore her greyish hair turned back à la Pompadour under a neat fashionable toque, and was altogether a most genteel person, looking what she had been—a lady's maid in a good place. She had smartened up Willard, and

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

it was evident that she made him happy. He had lost much of his harassed appearance. His scanty beard was trimmed, and he wore a clerical-looking overcoat and a silk hat with the air of one who knows himself to have become a pillar of society. His manner, too, had more self-assurance as he explained that Mrs. Willard had always been a great admirer of Mr. Chalmers' preaching, though on account of circumstances—and here Willard gave an embarrassed little cough—she had not attended St. Matthias' at one time. But now that they were married, he hastened to add, and no differences of opinion in any respect dividing them, they made a point of going to church together whenever it was possible.

Van Dreen put in a tentative inquiry after Chalmers, but Willard's evasive reply and diffident glance at his wife checked questioning. Van Dreen came to the conclusion that Mrs. Willard knew very little about his master. He judged Willard to be of the fibre that does not betray a trust. But presently Mrs. Willard moved a few steps to greet an acquaintance.

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

"Why, Willard, I had no idea you were married," said Van Dreen bluntly.

"Well, sir, I 'ardly knew it meself at first," returned Willard. "It come upon me as a downright surprise. You'll remember me speaking to you on the subjeck, sir, and mentioning how Mr. Chalmers made difficulties about my young lady, who was living as maid to Lady Harrold then."

Van Dreen nodded, and gave his amused chuckle.

"And how did it all come about, Willard, eh? Mr. Chalmers took his veto off, I suppose."

"Jusso, sir. 'Twere about eleven months back that Mr. Chalmers of his own self said to me, 'Willard,' says he, 'I know that a little while ago you were thinking about getting married. I objected at the time, and you were good enough to respeck my view of the matter. Well, I've reconsidered the question since then, Willard,' says he, and spoke up like the gentleman he is, sir, and always has been, notwithstanding his ways. 'I've no desire, Willard,' says he, 'for to stand between you and the lady of

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

your choice.' Well, Doctor, I was that took aback, it made me shy of saying much. But I did mention that though I had been desirous for to try the state as seemed holy and decreed by Heaven, yet if it were a case of matrimony coming between me and him who meant the narrer road to me, I was willing for to give it up. 'Don't you do that,' says he, 'You foller your own instincks, Willard. With your judgment they won't lead you astray. It shan't make no difference between you and me. For, Willard,' says he, 'there's none but Heaven and a man's own heart that has any call to decide a question like that.' . . . So, though unbounded astonishment best describes what I felt at Mr. Chalmers' change of front, still, Doctor, I *did* foller my instincks, and they led me——" Willard coughed and glanced complacently sideways.

Van Dreen filled in the hiatus by a jerk of his chin.

"They led me, sir," continued Willard impressively, "straight to the feet of my Emily. Mr. Chalmers hisself it was that married us, and I assure you *I* should be

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

perfectly happy if it wasn't for feeling troubled over him. But I do wish he'd seen his way to something of the same. For he looks as piney as a linnet without a mate."

"What's wrong?" asked Van Dreen sharply.

"I can't exactly say, sir; but the old sperrit's gone out of him. He's not near so down on sinners, and to see him in the pulpit, you'd say there's not much left of Mr. Chalmers that was, except his voice."

"*The voice of one crying in the wilderness,*" quoted Van Dreen. He had not time to say more, for Mrs. Willard intimated just then that it was time they took their seats. Van Dreen was conscious of critical scrutiny on the part of Mrs. Willard, and suspected more than a doubt in her mind as to the class of society to which he properly belonged. Van Dreen smiled to himself as he watched the pair enter the church. Clearly, their union supplied a lack in the life of each, and to Van Dreen's humanitarian view even such sentiment as theirs shed a faint halo of romance.

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

He went in presently and found an unoccupied corner near the bottom of the church, most of the pews being by this time filled. Van Dreen was struck by the change in the physical and the mental atmosphere of the place. The building was better warmed and ventilated, and gave a sense of comfort entirely lacking before. There were other changes, too. Whiffs of perfume floated down from the altar, which was banked on either side by masses of white flowers, while many candles converged their lights upon that thorn-crowned Figure in ivory which seemed to gaze down with sublime compassion on the worshippers.

Chalmers entered, as was his wont, by the small door leading from his own vestry into the chancel. Mr. Manning read the opening portions of the service; thus, not at first was Van Dreen enabled to realise what Willard had meant by his description of the change in his master. It made a powerful impression upon him, however, when he heard Chalmers' voice—an impression which gradually deepened. Chalmers had always been noted for his magnificent

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

intonation. To-night there was an unusually pure and bell-like quality in his voice. It gave a suggestion of the wings of the dove and the longing to flee away and be at rest. That new note came with dramatic unexpectedness as Chalmers intoned the first verse of the Canticle:

"Lord! now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace."

Van Dreen was unable to escape from the feeling that Chalmers' delivery of the *Nunc Dimittis* meant not only a prayer, but a valediction. The thought affected him painfully, and he waited with some trepidation for the time when Chalmers mounted the pulpit. Then he was amazed by the alteration in his friend's appearance and gait. It was this last which, at the moment, struck him most. The preacher had been in the habit of stepping firmly, head erect, body squared, and a certain prelatical pride in his movements. Now, all suggestion of this was gone. It would have been impossible for Chalmers not to look dignified, but his dignity now was that of the humble and meek—so unobtrusive his movement,

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

that it resembled a glide more than a walk as, with eyes downcast and head bent, he slipped along like some pale ghost. When he had reached the pulpit he sank at once upon his knees and remained motionless for a minute or two, his head bowed on his hands; then rising, he stood, still silent, for another minute, and gazed out with drooping eyes over the heads of the congregation. His countenance was greatly changed. Worn and chastened though it was, the contours were yet less lean and hard. The features, though their rugged modelling was no less noticeable, seemed much softer; and while the mouth retained its old-world inflexibility, the full under-lip showed a strain of benevolence. The strongly-marked brows, however, still made prison-like arches to the cavernous eye-sockets, in which the orbs glowed with the same sepulchral fire, while the high forehead seemed more than ever the brow of an idealist.

Van Dreen's quickened vision again perceived the thought-emanations surrounding the preacher. There was now no sign of Neseta's presence. The vaporous exuda-

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

tion of a year ago, with its confused blend of tints, appeared to be of a peculiar and pale luminosity, having scarcely a trace of colour in its silvery radiance, except where around the priest's head there was a slight play of violet. Chalmers' thought-atmosphere had undoubtedly undergone a process of purification from its grosser elements and the egosim by which it had been tinged. A new spirit seemed to have entered into him. Even in his oratory Van Dreen discovered a like purification from those elements which had formerly betrayed the mind-proud self. His address was couched in language of extreme simplicity. The old display of ecclesiastical erudition was altogether lacking. Van Dreen waited in vain for the scholastic allusions, the ornate metaphors, the vivid painting of austere practices and the contrasting fulminations against pleasure, which he remembered as characteristic of Chalmers' style. He heard now no inexorable condemnation of harmless enjoyments, but rather promise of pardon, full and sufficing, for all human error. And yet the effect of the preaching was, he saw, not less

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

arrestive and piercing because the preacher appeared no longer to trouble himself about producing flowers of rhetoric. Chalmers seemed to have forgotten the tricks of accent and gesture, and the peculiar turns of phrasing that had been so powerful an adjunct to his eloquence. One would have thought that now the desire farthest from him was that of creating a sensation. Often, his voice was scarcely raised above the conversational pitch; nevertheless, his lowest utterance had a certain poignant sweetness—a vibrant, though diffident, appeal which thrilled to the farthest of his listeners. In its music was an indescribable pathos, and, underlying the pathos, there was always that solemn suggestion of finality and farewell.

The key-note of the sermon was love, with its inseparable counterpart—pain. The preacher spoke of the beauty of pain. He told his hearers that when the soul is able to bear pain, not as a burden, but as a crown of joy, then, and then only, may that soul learn the real meaning of love and pain. Then, out of the anguish of those

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

bitter pangs will spring new shoots of life by which the soul shall experience that mystic sense of closeness with the Divine which is suffering's great reward. For, by an everlasting law, he said, the primal germ of spirit sent forth by divine love at the beginning of the worlds must needs descend into the deeps of matter, must clothe itself in all that seems to human eyes vile and terrible, enduring shame and suffering. But in that shame and suffering it learns to know itself, and all that lives, as parts of the eternal Whole—drops of life-blood from the great pulsating Heart of Love Divine—Love which may never therefore disdain its offspring, whether clad in robes of glory or rags of shame.

At this point the preacher touched upon a question agitating the churches of to-day. First, he dealt briefly, but with a fashion of delivery distinctly suggestive of his more polemic discourses of a year or so back, upon the heresies of earlier centuries which had been censured by the great Councils of Christendom, and which some say are revived at the present time.

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

“We hear much just now,” Chalmers said, “of the immanence of God in man and nature. Let us think what this question of Divine Immanence means—whether it be not verily the Love-principle which is the supreme attribute of God Himself. We know that the Divine has other attributes, other principles to which the human cannot as yet attain. But let us ask ourselves what is the one God-like attribute of which every single creature has the germ, the one Divine principle that is universal throughout creation? What but the Love-principle, that vital spark, the evolving seed—nay, the evolutionary force itself—the divine cosmic heritage. Ah! there, in the universality of the Love-principle lies the Word of the enigma of existence. And the fact that Love is the only absolutely all-pervading primal principle which the created share with the Creator—no matter in how rudimentary a degree—proves that Love is Divine and eternally immanent in the Universe. Well was it said, ‘Cleave the wood and ye shall find me. Lift the stone and I am there.’ He who spoke those words

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

gave no parable to His disciples. He declared the literal truth that wherever Nature works, Love works also—by the law of duality, by the attraction of atoms, by chemical affinities, the sympathies of minerals, the wedding of plants; in the selective tendency which rules the animal kingdom, and in the emotions governing the kingdom of man, until there is reached a yet more highly evolved order of Being, beyond our mortal ken.

“Think, then, of this evolving Love-principle as it is shown in its graduating ascent from the blind impulse of the lowest worm crawling the earth and the elementary instinct of the brute—to the self-sacrificing passion of the noblest man and woman. Then compare the purest expression of Love, as we know it in the flesh, with its sublime expression in the Saviour of the world. And thus regarding Love in its lowest and its most exalted aspects imaginable by us, we may gain a dim perception, perhaps, of what the loftiest human love may seem in the eyes of those great Spirits who have attained far higher in the scale of

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

being, and before whom the noblest of mankind must seem little more than the beasts which perish. And yet there can be neither high nor low, neither great nor small in the mighty Circle of existence, where all things merge into each other, and all things tend to the final good—where the Beginning is the End and the End is the Beginning—God within and encompassing all, revealing Himself in love and evolution, by which the indwelling soul that is a part of Himself becomes changed and expands to larger growth. Yet always in the ever-ascending cycle there must be the lower evolving populace ready to turn upon and rend each other in the brute passions they have not learned to curb. These have sense of the depth and majesty of Love, only in the degree to which each soul among them has developed the God-implanted germ. They are but infants of the race—that raging crowd which casts stones and shouts ‘blasphemer’ at Him who would show them the mark of true sonship which they bear. He whom they call ‘blasphemer’ must needs mourn over the spiritual blindness that

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

hides from them the understanding of that wonderful thing which belongs to their ultimate peace. The love for His younger brethren, though too far above their level for them to grasp its large compassion, is great enough to comprehend the ideals behind their foolish strivings, and all the roughnesses of their coarser nature, which must be shed like root-husks before the immortal germ can quicken and burst its fleshly sheaths till, in perfect growth and blossom, it shows forth, manifesting the immanence of God in man.

“Brothers, this is no narrow creed, but wide as heaven’s doors. Nay, creed it is not, since uncircumscribed by form. For the external expression of any manner of belief can only be the limited expression of an inward and eternal verity. Man incarnate is no more than the small part of a great, evolving individuality. To reach the full expression of that whole, one would need to explore planes of being inaccessible to humanity at the present stage of evolution. Man is a temple, but not yet has he been given the key to that inner holy of

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

holies where his divine self sits enshrined. And as visible man is but the outward symbol of undying life behind, so our redemptory drama of the Cross is but the limited expression of a vast cosmic Mystery, signifying the redemptory sacrifice of Divinity in the birth and growth and purification of the world—a sacrificial drama repeated in the growth and purification of every individual soul. The true meaning of that redemption-story is for all time and for all eternity—in little as in great—if there be any small or great, where in the ultimate both are one. The Love of God evolves and sustains the Universe: the Love-principle of God—the Christ within—evolves and sustains the immortal self of man.

“Christ the God, out of His passion of love for the children of earth, renounced Divinity that He might share the burden of flesh, and, in so sharing it, teach mankind the spiritual mystery of sacrifice—that except the corn of wheat die, it cannot bring forth the blade and the ear: that out of death comes life, and that only through renunciation of personal desire may the perfected

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

Christ-Element dwelling in the soul be lifted to the Divine Life of all-embracing Love.

“This is the mystery of Love behind all creeds that are and ever have been. But with the creeds of the past we need not now concern ourselves, since to us has been given the sufficing revelation of a Divine and all-comprehending Unity, in which time is not, and space is not, and finality is not, but only change and growth and renewal—the quickening of the seed that has been sown, the unfolding of the leaf, the blossoming of the tree, the gathering in of the fruit—all in the ever-present Now. Yesterday and to-morrow as to-day, and suns and systems and planets and the blade of grass, the creeping caterpillar, the glorified saint—all in the Consciousness of God—all ensouled by the Love of God.”

CHAPTER XXI

"The Self is inwardly, beginningless, endless, immortal. Outwardly it becomes manifest as three lesser selves, each with its own vesture ; its own world.

"Lowest of these is the physical self, with its physical vesture, in the waking world.

"Next, the emotional self, with its emotional vesture, in the dreaming world.

"Highest, the intuitional self, with its radiant vesture, in the Dreamless World."—SHANKARA'S TEACHING OF THE THREE VESTURES.

IN the silence that followed the benediction, Van Dreen asked himself many questions. He watched the congregation depart noiselessly till all had left, including Mr. Manning, who passed down from the vestry, looking worried and apparently too perturbed to notice the solitary figure seated beside a pillar on one of the lower benches. When he, too, had gone out, Van Dreen went softly up the aisle and placed himself near the door of the smaller vestry appropriated to Chalmers' private use.

The old sacristan was moving about,

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

adjusting chairs and footstools. He saw Van Dreen, but did not recognise him.

"Mr. Chalmers is unable to see anyone to-night, sir," he whispered, and there was a note of regret in his voice.

"Mr. Chalmers will see me, I think," said Van Dreen simply. At that moment Chalmers, in his cassock, came out from his vestry by the inner door opening upon the chancel. Van Dreen got up and went towards him. Chalmers paused by the chancel railings, with a slight remonstrant gesture, as if he were unwilling that his solitude should be disturbed.

"It is I—Van Dreen," was the simple greeting.

"Van Dreen!" exclaimed Chalmers; then, with his old, courteous manner, he held out both his hands.

"My friend! It is, indeed, good to see you again, and perhaps as well that you should have come at this time, though I confess that you surprise me by your unexpected appearance. But you never did things like other men—did you, Van Dreen?" he added, with a wan smile. "Come this way."

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

Van Dreen followed the priest towards the little vestry, into which just then the old sacristan was shuffling. Chalmers stopped to speak to him.

"Put out the lights in the church," he said, "and then you need not wait. I will lock up when I leave."

Van Dreen, meanwhile, went into the bare little room, which he well remembered. He saw the same table with writing materials and paper on it, the same seats, and the same mediæval painting filling up one side of the wall.

Chalmers came in, carefully closing the door behind him.

"So!" said Van Dreen straightly. "How goes it with you, friend?"

Chalmers did not answer at first. He motioned to Van Dreen to be seated, and he himself stepped to the table and stood there, beginning restlessly to move about the papers upon it—a trick of his, as Van Dreen recollected.

Following on the sacristan's shuffling steps along the aisle came the extinguishing of the lights everywhere in the church

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

except here—where one shaded gas-lamp hung over the table. Beyond the other doorway leading into the chancel, and which had been left open, could be seen the outlines of the white-trimmed altar, pale and fragrant beneath the stained east window, shining faintly through the gloom. After the lights had been put out, the sacristan's footsteps died away with the swinging sound of the distant baize-covered door and the clang of the heavy oak one leading into the porch. Not until the two men were quite alone did Chalmers cease from the nervous movement of his hands among the papers. Then he pulled himself up, and looked across at Van Dreen in a fixed manner, his eyes burning with their slow, deep fire.

"You have come just in time," he said deliberately.

"Good!" returned Van Dreen. "In time—for what?"

"To see me here. I am leaving this place to-night."

"Ah! Some other call?"

"Just so—another call."

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

"Of what nature?" asked Van Dreen quietly.

"That is a question which cannot be answered in a moment. . . . Van Dreen! Do you remember all that happened before you went away?"

"I am not likely to forget," replied Van Dreen.

"No—no. Well, then, you will understand."

"Perhaps—when I have heard your explanation."

"It is simply this." Chalmers drew himself up, with both his hands clenched behind his back. "Life under the old conditions has become unbearable."

"And so you propose to change the conditions? Let us hope for the better."

"I hope so. I cannot tell." Then Chalmers' forced calm broke a little. "Van Dreen," he exclaimed, "I suppose that you will blame me—any man would. But you are not as other men. Surely you—*you*—can have mercy and understanding."

"I trust that I can," Van Dreen answered.

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

"I'm at a loss, however, at present. What has been going on? Has Neseta——?"

Chalmers started and lifted a hand as though to check the speech. His glance round the room was that of one who fears to mention a name lest it should bring the presence of its owner.

"Hush—hush!" he said. "I scarcely dare speak of her. . . . And yet I must tell you everything."

"Why, certainly. Do you want help again?"

Chalmers shook his head.

"I'm past human help—even such help as yours, Van Dreen. But it would be a comfort to feel that you knew all and that I had your sympathy. Though, when a man has made up his mind to such a step as that which I now contemplate, other considerations surely matter little."

"Come, out with it all, man," exclaimed Van Dreen. "Let's hear the story."

Chalmers took a couple of hurried steps; then, turning, drew close to Van Dreen. He stooped and thrust his face to within an inch of his friend's ear.

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

"She—*she kept her word!*" he muttered huskily, in a manner weighted with intense meaning.

"I reckon she would," returned Van Dreen. "Neseta was a woman of her word, or I'm much mistaken. But, what then? Weren't you strong enough to prevent her companionship from becoming inconvenient?"

Again Chalmers shook his head sadly.

"Van Dreen, you yourself told me that when a man dabbles in the mysteries of being, he lends himself to enchantments from which he may find it difficult to escape. Neseta has proved that you were right. She has developed a will as strong as my own, and a pertinacity of purpose that has made her more my terror than my delight."

Van Dreen nodded as though the news were no surprise to him.

"Not that she is a whit less lovable," went on Chalmers hastily. "Had she been mortal woman, and could I have made her mine according to God's holy ordinance, I can conceive no greater earthly bliss. But to see her day after day standing between me and my bounden duty, silent yet accusing,

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

adorable even in her cruellest mood, maddeningly seductive even in her coldest. Man! man! can there be a sharper ordeal than this? ”

Van Dreen said nothing. He had no words ready.

Chalmers continued :

“ Day by day, at all times and in all places, I have seen her near me—beside my bed, beside my board, in my visitations to the sick, and in my walks. Alike amid throngs of people and in the solitude of my study her face has been before me, alluring, taunting, mutely upbraiding. Not even at the altar have I been secure. In administering the Blessed Sacrament, the cup has sometimes trembled in my hand, and my voice has failed me as I became conscious of her sacrilegious presence. No self-abasement, no prayers, have availed me against her. And I—I—Heaven forgive me! haunted by that unholy vision, how dare I point the way of the Cross to my flock ; how dare I teach them the lesson of love that I have never truly learned ; how dare I preach the creed of self-sacrifice that I have not properly prac-

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

tised, while her accusing eyes arraign me as false to love, false alike to her gods and to mine? ”

Chalmers sank into a chair, his arms on the table, his face in his hands. Van Dreen looked at him commiseratingly, but did not speak. Slow shivers seized Chalmers. His whole frame became convulsed. Van Dreen gave him time to recover himself somewhat. Then he sat down near him, and laid a soothing touch upon his shoulder.

“Go on,” he said softly. “There is more to tell.”

Chalmers raised his head, and with a shaking hand wiped the moisture from his brow.

“I would not mind so much,” he said—and there was a note of despair in his voice—“if she would but leave me during sacred hours that should belong solely to God and to my people. I have done my best to serve my flock, Van Dreen, and they respond with a confidence that but adds to my burden. There are moments when my people’s trust seems to me hardest of all to bear, since I may never proclaim myself what I am—

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

moments when to live the double life that I am compelled to live seems more than I can endure. Neseta comes to me most often when I am engaged on the work of my ministry, and, alas ! I find all my efforts powerless in face of her mocking smile. When I am preaching in the pulpit yonder, she rises before me, a flaming brand, as it were, between me and those of whom I am the unworthy shepherd. And yet how exquisite she is, inviting me with the scoffing sweetness of her lips even while she repels me with the deep-seated scorn in her eyes."

"Stop there !" Van Dreen put in sharply. "Was she listening to your sermon this evening ? "

"I don't know. I scarcely think so," answered Chalmers hesitatingly. "The fact is, I am almost afraid to lift my head after going into the pulpit, for—too often, alas !—her eyes fascinate me. To-night, I did not observe her. But she was present last evening when I preached upon the mystery of sacrifice."

Van Dreen drew an abrupt breath. "I gathered that your last night's sermon had

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

made a considerable impression on your hearers."

"It may have been so. I felt it myself in a strangely deep way. For the words seemed to be put into my mouth." Chalmers's faltering voice deepened as with profound remembrance. "I was completely carried away last night, Van Dreen—carried beyond the fear of Neseta. Even the sense of her presence did not cripple my speech. I was enabled to soar above it, though I was conscious of her nearness all the time. Indeed I saw her distinctly, and towards the end of my discourse it appeared to me that, in some indefinable fashion, her expression altered. She looked at me with more of the innocent tenderness of old. There were tears in her eyes, but while I wondered what could have affected her, she disappeared, and I have not seen her since."

"Don't you think it possible," asked Van Dreen, "that something in your sermon may have affected her? You see, all these months she must have been feeling your influence."

Chalmers shook his head dejectedly.

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

"I wish I might think so, but I fear the time is past for building on any such slender hope. She has seemed impervious to spiritual influence. You do not know how I have suffered. Daily, nightly, Neseta has planted a sword in my breast. Surely she has taken payment for the debt I owe her, even to the uttermost farthing."

"Eternal justice exacts full dues," replied Van Dreen.

"That is what I tell myself. God is just, and I know that no pang I have suffered has been undeserved. And, strange to say, all the pain Neseta has caused me has but increased my love for her. It seems to have transmuted the passion of my flesh into a veritable passion of the soul. I no longer crave for my own joy. I desire only that she may be satisfied and at rest. For this, indeed, no sacrifice would be too great. Do you understand, Van Dreen? I would count it little to lay down my life if by so doing I might secure her peace."

Van Dreen jerked his chin in grim acquiescence. But Chalmers needed no reply. He was rapt in his own reflections.

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

His brows were knitted as he stared straight before him. Times and conditions seemed to be wiped out of his mind by his engrossing thoughts.

"My friend," observed Van Dreen with a gentle gravity, "you talk about not having learned the lesson of love nor practised the creed of sacrifice. Nevertheless, I guess you're nearer the understanding of love and sacrifice than you've ever been in this life or any other."

Chalmers looked at Van Dreen vaguely.

"It's odd you should have come to-night," he said.

"Not at all," returned Van Dreen. "Merely a trick of mine to turn up unexpectedly."

Chalmers leaned across the corner of the table, his elbows upon it, and his head between his hands, while in his cavernous eyes leaped that dull fire.

"Let me give you some idea of how it is with Neseta," he went on. "She is not what she was: there's the horror. She has changed—terribly changed. And I suffer from the most intense remorse in having

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

brought that change about. My flesh and spirit groan in anguish and repentance for all the wrong that I have done her—the terrible tendencies that I seem to have awakened in her.”

“I can understand that,” said Van Dreen.

“Yet it is scarcely possible to understand so great a change in her. I tell you frankly, Van Dreen, that there have been times when this being of strange allurements has seemed to me almost a thing of evil. The Neseta I loved long ago was so gentle, so sweet, and innocent, so child-like even in her moments of deepest feeling. Now she is like some vindictive sorceress bent solely on her relentless purpose. There is nothing too small, too mean, too trivial for her to seize upon if it will assist her in her revenge. Van Dreen, how do *you* account for this terrible deterioration. Could my sin against her so deeply change the soul of Neseta?”

“Well, yes. Remember that you forced Neseta’s soul back into a world where there are mean and trivial things. But remember, too, that the Neseta you brought back was

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

not her spiritual self, but merely the lower principles of her being."

"The lower principles of her being!" repeated Chalmers in amazement. "How could that be?"

"In this way," answered Van Dreen. "Man, my friend, is made up of several parts. For the purpose of argument, however, we'll classify him as body, soul and spirit. It was Neseta's body—her beautiful young body—that you desired when by the power of thought you recreated your ideal of female loveliness. And, at your command, Neseta brought you back the likeness of her body to be again your joy and stumbling-block. But the soul of Neseta informing that fair semblance of mortality could only be the lesser or animal soul which actuates our flesh on earth in all its lesser deeds—the part of us which, if it be not carefully guided, will lead men and women on to crime; and which can become either the faithful servant or the vile master of man's instincts. Neseta's *spirit* dwells far beyond your reach, my friend, for the angels of the innocent do always behold the face of our Father which is in heaven."

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

"But who? . . . *What*, then, is this Neseta?" Chalmers asked troublously, fear in his eyes.

"I have told you. It is Neseta, and yet not Neseta. Does that seem a thing incredible? Consider. How many of the friends around you on earth do you truly know beneath their outward mask? I suspect but very few. And in those few, you can see no more than a feeble glimmer of the real Self—that greater Self—with all its capabilities, not all incarnate, which is hidden behind the corporeal body. Sometimes it shines through the fleshly walls that are its temporary prison; but the best of us are but very faint reflections of the larger individuality—of which you yourself spoke just now from the pulpit. She who dogs your steps and hinders you in your ministry—she, I tell you, is nothing but an earth-bound part of the ultimate spirit-self. It was the animal soul of Neseta which first awoke at your call, the second of those three vestures of the Self described by Indian mystics. They call this second vesture the emotional Self, which has its home in the dream-world.

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

You summoned that passion-shell of Neseta, clothing it and feeding it with your own concentrated passion, so that it has developed a separate will which must needs come into collision with yours, since by the inevitable process of evolution the animal soul must gain a certain kind of individuality. Well, inasmuch as you gave this soul of Neseta's a body, it is reborn of your desire, and condemned to live the lower life until able to rise and to unite again with its eternal spirit-self."

Chalmers moistened his lips, which had grown dry and ashen.

"My misdeed has been visited sorely upon us both," he said. "Oh! that Heaven would in mercy accept from me the price of my error."

"My friend, you are paying that price each hour that you live," said Van Dreen earnestly. "You are paying the price in every expiatory pang you suffer, in every sacrificial act you perform, in every practical illustration you show of the everlasting Law of Love. You are paying it in many ways of which you will reap the benefit hereafter."

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

"Benefit! Hereafter!" Chalmers cried, flinging out his hands in passionate rebuttal. "What do I want of benefit except this one boon—that I may be allowed to bear *alone* the burden of my wrong? What do I care for the hereafter, when it is in the present that I implore redemption—not for my own unworthy soul, but for this one which is more to me a millionfold than my own? How can existence be endurable while I doom the woman I love, and for whom before Heaven I am responsible, to suffering and to sin? It is *my* unworthy life that binds her to earth! How can I continue to be her destroyer? No, Van Dreen, *no*. At any cost, I have decided to break Neseta's earthly chains."

"And how?" asked Van Dreen simply. But he bent forward, gripping the arms of his chair, keenly anxious for the answer.

"I am determined to make it impossible for her to haunt this earth any longer," replied Chalmers with extraordinary composure. "If she will not return to the spirit-world without me, then we will go forth together into the land of darkness. There

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

shall be no more of this death in life for us. It may be that we shall discover some better life in death."

"You will be disappointed in that supposition," replied Van Dreen with a return of his usual dry manner. "When a man chooses to anticipate the word of release, he finds no path prepared for the passage of his soul, nor any welcome on the other side. You call it rightly a land of darkness. The horrors of remorse you suffer here are as nothing compared with the horrors that will await you there."

"Well, it seems to me," replied Chalmers, "that where the organs of sense do not exist, the sufferings of the senses cannot be so severe."

"My friend," said Van Dreen impressively, "take it from me that you would find yourself over there the exact counterpart of what you are here, except that, like your Neseta herself, you would be built up of ethereal matter. Not until Heaven wills that Reginald Chalmers shall cease to be, can he become non-existent. Let me warn you that you'd be extremely ill-advised to divest yourself

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

of your physical body under the notion that you were going to be more comfortable in any other."

"I'll take the risk," answered Chalmers doggedly. He rose and stood at the end of the table, his tall form sharply braced. "Can't you realise," he exclaimed, "that I dwell upon a border-land in which there is no place for me? God has shut me out from Heaven; Neseta holds the gates of Hell. One or other, I will win; there can be no intermediate course for such a man as I. Van Dreen, I have decided to die by my own hand."

Van Dreen rose likewise and straightened himself. He looked Chalmers full in the eyes. The two men faced each other unflinchingly, and for a moment neither said a word. The only sign of weakness Chalmers gave was a nervous fidgeting of the fingers of his right hand with the handle of a drawer in the writing-table by which he stood.

Beyond the open doorway, in front of them, a pale stream of light stole athwart the shadow of the chancel. The moon, which had been rising slowly in the sky, was shining

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

through the tinted glass of the east window, and sent down a diamond beam through one of the upper panes. This silvery shaft stretched down, softly illuminating the space in front of the altar. There the shimmering rays broke and regathered, giving some suggestion of the faint outline of a form, so that there might have seemed to be an angel present, guarding the sanctuary. To neither of the men, however, did this thought occur.

Van Dreen's voice stirred the silence in accents of stern rebuke.

"There spoke the coward! I thought better of you, Reginald Chalmers. I knew you for an egoist, and a presumptuous meddler, but I calculated that you'd pluck enough to face your difficulties. I believed you to be a brave man. Well! I can only tell you that if you do such a thing you'll forfeit alike the respect of God and men. What right have you to destroy this vehicle of the life that is not yours, but belongs to Him who gave it you for the purpose of developing all its powers for good?"

Chalmers' eyelids dropped before Van Dreen's piercing gaze.

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL.

"I know all the things that you would say. They are the conventional arguments against suicide, which, however, I scarcely expected from you. For you know perfectly well that mine is an exceptional case. You know the motives which actuate me. They are not the motives of a coward."

"What are they, then?"

"Van Dreen, I hoped that *you* would understand. Is there need for further explanation? Can erring human love do more than offer body and soul for the salvation of its beloved? I am ready to make the uttermost expiation for my sin—to go down everlastingly into hell, if my sacrifice will open to Neseta the doors of heaven."

He pulled open the drawer beneath his hand, and took from it a small revolver. "This is loaded," he said calmly. He poised the small, bright weapon on his fingers.

"It will be over quickly," he said. "One touch, one pang—and then——"

"Aye—and then?" asked Van Dreen solemnly.

Chalmers lifted his face. It was white, but determined.

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

“Then—*at last*—Neseta will be free.”

Again silence. But this time there floated through it a sweet sighing sound like the murmur of a harp-string played on by the wind.

Van Dreen turned at the sound. He looked through the open doorway into the chancel, which was now flooded with a soft unearthly light. The moon-ray shining through the east window had widened, and shed a pale effulgence over the steps leading to the altar. There, in the centre of that pure soft light, knelt a figure which Van Dreen recognised.

Surely no being in human likeness and yet more utterly removed from the common ways of earth had ever knelt in that holy place—one so strangely garbed after the fashion of a long dead age, so sweet and womanly and yet so divinely spiritual. It was Neseta, clad in the filmy robes of her Egyptian past, the emblem of Isis-Hathor upon her forehead, the red jewel on her breast. But this was no impious avenging ghost. This was a new Neseta : a creature of pure spirit, chastened, penitent, with pale arms crossed upon her breast, and angelic eyes.

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

Chalmers' gaze was bent upon the weapon that he fingered. Van Dreen quietly took the revolver from his grasp with one hand, while he pointed with the other through the open doorway.

"Do you not see?" he said.

Chalmers, staring blindly into the circle of light, started violently and clutched Van Dreen's arm.

"She—*She has come!*" he hoarsely whispered.

Neseta had risen from her kneeling posture, and stood, a gleaming shape, at the foot of the altar. Her face was turned on Chalmers. She spoke in accents of thrilling sweetness, low, but clear.

"Beloved, Neseta is free—eternally free! You have released my soul. You have taught me the true lesson of the Cross."

A cry of wonder and delight broke from Chalmers' lips. He tottered towards her, his arms outstretched, but she motioned him back.

"Do not touch me, Tha'an. The days of our union are over. As you told me, man living in the flesh may not take part with spirits who should be at rest. But we shall

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

not long be severed. Have no fear, my dear lord, for we shall surely meet and dwell together in dim Āmenti, till we reach the shining fields of Āālu, where the night which you call death is day. And here again we shall return when, after unnumbered years, the fiat shall go forth, and we, re-born into flesh, shall tread the earth together again. For the never ceasing ebb and flow of Time, it seems, tosses all things into Oblivion's vast abyss; and thus one power alone remains, all-conquering, mightier than Time or Change or Death or Sin—*Love the Divine.*"

"Dearest, who has taught you this?" murmured Chalmers.

She smiled in answer.

"Have I not said? It was yourself, my Tha'an. When you cast me from you, and my heart burned in wrath, I swore to follow your steps by day, to haunt your dreams by night, to companion you for your hurt, to drain your strength and draw into myself your substance until the flame of life should perish in your breast. And then, methought, at last you would be mine, and I would bear away your *ka* through the gates of the

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

Underworld. There would I pray my Lady Hathor to vivify the heart of the Still Heart, that it pay due homage unto him who is Keeper in the House of the Dead—Osiris Auf-ānkh-triumphant. But this thing could not be. The Mighty One of Manifold Names, Whose Form is secret, King of Everlastingness and Ruler of all in heaven and on earth : He Who setteth in their places the gods of men : He Who knoweth the hearts of His children and chooseth even the sinful desires of their hearts wherewith to teach them the one true Law—that All is One and All is Love—He it was Who decreed that from the lips of my beloved should I, Neseta, learn the mystery of Love and the hidden meaning of the Cross.

“Day after day, I came to listen and to scoff. But, though you knew it not, your gracious self compelled me against my will. The holy life you lived, by word and deed, pierced my heart : but, most of all, the tale I heard you often tell of that meek God, made Man, Who suffered for the world. And while I scoffed, I wept and blindly prayed that light might come to show me my own self. It was but yesterday the

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

darkness broke. Light came, and heavenly dew descended on me. But it was in *your* voice, beloved, that the God you worship spoke unto my soul, and in your pitying eyes that meek God's mercy shone. Then did I understand at last the mystery in this faith of yours, and I knew it for the self-same mystery of Love ever renewing itself through Sacrifice. Thus I learned that Love has no real life within which will not shed its outer form for the beloved. And so I took my chastened love and laid it in my heart's inmost tomb. And now I know of very truth that not till Love be nailed upon the Cross, and bleeding flesh surrenders all to ransom spirit, does Love achieve its own—so that from throes of pain new life be born, new grace and power come forth to beautify the world.

“ ’Twas thus I think my Lord Osiris, in his day, gained mastery over quick and dead. And thus for love of her dead spouse did Isis bear Horus, the holy babe . . .

“ Last night I dreamed a dream, my Tha'an. ’Twas strange and very sweet. Methought that I, too, mothered a fair babe—child of my love for you. And, lifted up between

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

the heavens and the earth, I saw my child. Clothed in the garments of the spirit, himself the spirit of Love pure and eternal, our child, like holy Horus, seemed both man and God, and drew our poor, fond hearts to heaven.

“And then I saw a pageant passing by, a vision of heavenly beings clad in fine array. The gods of all the earth they were, and they came in one unending stream that went from east to west. And as they appeared, I saw a star arise and go before each great one on its way. I knew the names of some, but there were many gods of whom I had no knowledge—gods from olden time, far back beyond remembrance, each rising in the east and passing westward like the boat of Rā. And each one left the heavens brighter for its passing.

“On and on they came: gods of the land below the sun; gods of the east and south and north; gods of the sea and upper air. Ea, of the mighty deep, and Bel, the great Sun-god, and Ishtar, the Moon-god's daughter, who likewise learned through love and sought the Land of Gloom whence none return, to

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

bring the living waters for Tammuz, her dead spouse, that he, too, might become immortal.

“ And, chief among the lords divine, my Lord Osiris came, with Mother Isis at his side and their blessed babe between. They lingered long, but they, too, did depart at last, when the world that had worshipped them thought it had grown too wise to bow to their faith any more. Then others passed : great Zeus and Heré, king and queen of gods and men, having a glorious train ; and with them walked Demeter, showering fruits upon the earth ; and Aphrodite, goddess of the flesh, and fair as youth’s wild dreams could make her. There came Athené, too, a thousand truths abrim in her bright, dawning eyes. Among these last, there played a blind, winged boy called Eros, who made sport with the frail hearts of men.

“ But over all there brooded still a holy child. East, south, and north, he rose with glory on his brow and compassion in his eyes, breathing purity and love.

“ At last I saw a Star arise of greater radiance than the rest. From the far east it came, and hovered over a humble shed,

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

where a human Babe was born who had no outward claim to royal state. But Wise Men followed that fair Star, and so did simple shepherds of the plains. They came to worship that human Child because they knew that in Him the Divine was verily made manifest in man.

“ And I remembered the story that I’d often heard you tell of the little Child Who grew up both wise and meek, Who loved and served all men, until at length He gave His Life upon the Cross for many. And so it seemed to me that only when that which we love best is crucified in us shall we become like that little Child. But Love shines always over all, and in human form it lightens our lives whenever we return to earth. We know not what lies beyond this world. Eye hath not seen nor hath ear heard, as yet. Sphere upon sphere waits for us to climb ; and step by step we rise, through many dreams and many deeds, in lives that pass like yesterday. We rest and sleep through the brief nights between, only to bring to birth with us fresh hopes, fresh faiths, and sometimes, the old ties ! Thus you and I, my Tha’an, both put our

THE BODY OF HIS DESIRE

trust in that mystic Sign of Power by which the Spirit of the All-Father entered into Flesh.

“And now I go, beloved, back to that blue Place of Peace from which the striving of what is mortal in you recalled me for a time. Farewell, oh ! heart ! my heart !—yet not farewell. For us to-morrow waits, and many a dear to-morrow—since we are one in Love and Love in us.”

Slowly the vision faded, the sweet wistful face lingering to the last. Chalmers gazed upon it as long as it could be seen. His limbs had ceased trembling. The last vestige of weakness had now entirely gone. He stood erect, his face aglow with some reflection of the light that had shone upon Neseta's. When she had passed from sight he went forward, and sank upon the steps where she had stood. There he remained kneeling in silent prayer. For a few moments Van Dreen waited, then went up to him.

“The night is getting on,” he said. “Come, let's bestir ourselves, my friend. I'll warrant there's work in plenty for you to do.”