

THE SENSE OF SIN IN GREAT LITERATURE.

III.

"LA MORTE."

THERE is a sentence in Nathaniel Hawthorne's most notable story which I recall from a remote memory, with which I may begin this study. The words are somewhat to this effect; God help two people, a man and a woman, if one or the other should ever learn that there is a more beautiful kind of love than that to which they have accustomed each other. He goes on, of course, to say that that higher way, once it has dawned upon one or the other, will make the lower way intolerable, and a tragedy, secret or open, will follow, unless those two can find some deeper foundation on which to rebuild the shattered fabric of their common life. Now I know of no idea which has expressed itself so persistently in the literature of the soul as just that idea, that there is a quality of spiritual light which, when it falls upon a human life, begins there and then to disturb, to provoke, to protest, to appeal, to arouse shame and anger, and at the same time hope and the passion to be different. When that ray of white light falls upon a soul of a certain quality,—and the great affirmation of Christianity is that every soul is at its depths of that very quality,—there begins to work at its centre a kind of revulsion which soon acquires such force as to tear a way out for itself, overturning, if need be, the habits of a lifetime, and facing as a very light and even grateful thing the retribution of society and the astonishment and forsaking of friends. Until the moment when that light dawned, the man was able to control his thoughts about himself. He had his times of uneasiness; but he had learned how to deal with himself at such times. It was enough simply to cease from some practice

which aggravated the uneasiness, or for a season to adopt some slight severity towards himself which seemed to have the effect of misleading, and, for the time, satisfying the inner demand of his nature. But when this white light falls upon him, when this predestined messenger knocks at his door, half-measures no longer meet his case. He must either rally all that is evil within him to insult and browbeat the messenger of God—as when Peter kept up his denial for a time by the help of oaths; or he must throw wide open his door, and say in any language which the stress of the occasion discovers to him: “My Lord and my God!”

There is no single fact about human nature to which one may quote such a unanimous testimony from all great literature as to this fact, that the soul of man lies open, with an incurable openness, to the challenge and appeal of the holier way.

The face of Beatrice let loose in Dante a moral tide which, I will not say made him drag his anchors, but compelled him to carry his anchors quite unconscious of their weight into that great sea whose further shore was Heaven.

Pagan as he was, Goethe also knew himself too well not to perceive that this was the deepest thing in man, his liability to be smitten to the centre of his being, and sent out upon his new career by the vision of something holier than had come into his philosophy. “Let me save you, Margaret,” he pleaded in the dungeon where his poor victim, crazed with grief awaited death, “let me save you.” “How save me?” she asked, “by the help of that low way of life which has been our bane?” “Yes, let us flee; let us resume life on the old basis,” Faust pleaded. To which Margaret answered: “Henry, I shudder at thee!” And in that shudder she placed a live coal on the altar of that not very honourable heart.

It is this very idea, and the fertility of his applications of

it, which for myself I have always held to be the distinctive message of Robert Browning. Caponsacchi can go on living his double life with only slight spasms of discomfort, until one day he sees the sweet pure face of Pompilia. Whereupon the world begins to give way under him. Away along the corridors of his life tapers begin to light up the darkness. The life he had been leading becomes in one moment impossible for ever.

Sebald could still hold down the man of God within him, could still confuse his conscience with reasons and examples from the behaviour of the world, until Pippa went by that Spring morning, singing. Whereupon there was kindled in him, and through him in Ottima, a moral fire which made death more desirable than one further hour of the old dishonour.

Ned Bratts and his wife could brazen out the disgrace and punishment of this and that, until in Bedford Jail, they met John Bunyan, who took down "the Blessed Book" and spoke to them about God, about Christ, about forgiveness; whereupon it was with them also as if something had been killed for ever, and something had been born.

In what will be the last of these studies we shall see how Bernard Shaw has made a handsome acknowledgement of this ultimate liability of the human soul, that, given the proper occasion, a beautiful, moral tenderness may be let loose in a most unlikely heart, by its contact with something gentle and uncorrupted; in the particular case, by the feeling of a child's fingers on a wild man's neck.

In the light of the literature of the soul we recover our confidence. There will be no apostasy of the human race. There may be experiments. There will be. There will, in consequence, be many a sore head, and many a sore heart. But "*securus judicat orbis terrarum.*" We never know the day of the Son of man, the day when here and there the

human soul may come to itself, when here and there man may cry out for a new bondage in God, as with a more strident voice; he has been crying for a freedom from God. For once again we have seen what we have seen, and we can never be as though we had not seen it. Each epoch of time has its own voice, its own emphasis: but there are ancestral voices to which man is for ever even terribly susceptible.

In a controversy between the wind and the tide the issue is never really for a moment in doubt. There may be much noise, but the deeper influence has its way. For a wind is local; whereas a tide is connected with the moon, and the Sun, and the stars: and there are great times when moon and sun and a group of stars are in conjunction and pull one way. In the firmament of the soul such great times are always coming.

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Octave Feuillet's "La Morte" may not belong to the very greatest order of fiction: the story is too conscious of its own moral. And yet the story deals with such a universal interest and does such justice to the conflicting standpoints that it will bear pondering for many a long day.

The author tells us explicitly that he has brought together two well-defined types of character, so that he may observe or predict how things will turn out with them. And so far as he is quite faithful to his own imagination he has shown us in miniature how similar lives on the wide scale of a general society will also work out. The story deals with a marriage; and there at once we are at the real heart of the controversy between the different ways of looking at life. For any way of looking at life which claims general acceptance is to be judged, and soon or late will come to be judged, by its ability to carry us through those elementary human functions, one of which is enshrined in Christian marriage.

“*La Morte*,” then, consists for the most part of letters in which Bernard, Vicomte de Vaudricourt (whom we shall simply call “Bernard”) tells his own story. He describes himself as one who quite early in his manhood had come under the agnosticism of the nineteenth century. He had tenderness enough to shed tears when it seemed to him no longer possible to believe. He bids us take his word for it, and we do, that it was not merely to justify his own way of living that he abandoned his faith. He describes himself, in short, to use a phrase, as an average man about town. Of an old family, rich, and the prospective heir to a wealthy uncle, he meets, with a view to marriage, Mademoiselle Aliette de Courteuse (whom we shall henceforth call Aliette).

Belonging to a family of equal standing, Aliette is a sensitive and ardent Catholic. She was the devoted daughter of a father who himself had been a recluse, defending himself from the contamination of the time in the history and literature and circumstances of what seemed to him an infinitely better time,—for it was by comparison an age of faith—the seventeenth century. But let me transcribe a scene. Aliette is showing Bernard the library of the Château. He has remarked upon the richness in materials of the seventeenth century.

“Your father must have had a great predilection for the century of Louis XIV?” I said.

“My father lived in it,” she replied gravely.

And as I looked at her with a somewhat uneasy surprise, she added—

“And he made me live in it with him.”

The eyes of this strange girl filled with tears as she spoke.

She turned away and took a few steps to repress her emotion; then, coming back, she pointed to a chair, sat down herself on the library footstool, and said—

“I must describe my father to you.”

She paused a moment, as if lost in thought; then, speaking with

unaccustomed freedom, hesitating, and blushing visibly whenever she was about to pronounce a word which might appear a little too serious from such young lips, she continued,

“ My father died from the effects of a wound which he received at Patay. To tell you this, is to say that he loved his country but he did not love the time in which he lived. He had a great love of order, and he saw none anywhere. He had a perfect horror of disorder, and this he saw on all sides ; more especially towards the end of his life, everything which occurred, all that was said and all that was written, was sorely opposed to his opinions, to all that he respected, and to all his tastes. Deeply grieved by the events of the present, he took refuge in the past ; the seventeenth century corresponded more particularly to the kind of society in which he would have preferred to live ; a society well-ordered, polite, believing and lettered. As time went on, he liked, more and more, to shut himself up with that period. He liked, more and more, to see the moral discipline and the literary tastes of his favourite century take precedence in his house. You may possibly have remarked that he encouraged this fancy even in the picture-frames and decorations. From this window you can see the long straight alleys, the boxwood edgings, the clipped yew-trees, and the wych elms of our garden. You can see that we have in our flower-border none but the flowers of that time—lilies, peonies, hollyhocks, marigolds, pinks—in short, those which are called parson’s flowers. Our old sylvan tapestries are also of the period. You see, too, that all our furniture, from the wardrobes and the sideboards to the consoles and the easy-chairs, is in the most severe style of the time of Louis XIV. My father had no taste whatever for the refined affectations of modern luxury. He believed that excessive comfort enervated the mind as well as the body. That is the reason,” added the young girl laughingly, “ that you have such uncomfortable chairs in our house. Yes, naturally. You are going to speak of compensations—Very good ! ”

Then resuming her grave tone—

“ In this way, my father tried to carry out the illusion of living in the epoch upon which his thoughts were always running. Need I say that I was my dearly loved father’s confidant—the sympathising confidant of his troubles, the indignant confidant of his annoyances, the happy confidant of his joys ! It was in this very room—amidst these books which we read together, and which he taught me to love—it was here that I passed the happiest hours of my youth. Together we sang the praises of those days of faith and tranquillity, of those safe and happy moments when the pure and beautiful French language, refined taste, and high-bred politeness were the mark and fame of our country, and which have since then ceased to be so.”

She paused, slightly confused by the warmth with which she had uttered the last words.

I said, merely for the sake of saying something—

“ You fully account for the impression often made upon me by your home, and which, at times, took the form of an hallucination—an agreeable one, I confess. The internal appearance, the style, and the whole keeping of the house carried me back so completely for two hundred years, that I should not have been much surprised to have heard Monsieur le Prince, Madame de la Fayette, or even Madama de Sévigné herself announced at your drawing-room door.”

“ Would to Heaven it could be so ! ” said Mademoiselle de Courteheuse. “ How I love all those good people ! What delightful company they would be ! What pleasure they took in elevated ideas ! How immensely superior they were to the fashionable people of the present day ! ”

I was anxious to try and calm down her enthusiastic retrospect, so little flattering to my contemporaries and to myself, so I remarked—

“ The time you regret certainly had exceptional merits, which I appreciate as fully as you do ; but still, we must admit that underneath this society which was so well balanced, so well ordered, and apparently so select, there existed the very same sorrows and disorders as in our own. I see here many memoirs of that time, but, of course, I do not know which of them you have read—or not read—and consequently I feel slightly embarrassed.

She interrupted me—

“ Oh,” she said simply, “ I know what you mean quite well. I have not read everything here ; but I have read enough to know that my ancient friends had their passions, their weaknesses, their errors, just like the people of to-day. But, as my father used to say, all these were founded upon a serious and solid basis, which always righted itself. Great faults were committed, but there was also genuine repentance. There existed an upper sphere, where everything came right in the end—even wickedness.”

On its becoming known to Aliette’s family that Bernard did not share their form of faith, and was not even a Christian, all thought of marriage between them is opposed. Bernard, on his side, most scrupulous as he is not to encourage the illusion that even such a marriage as this, which he greatly desires, will alter his mind on matters of belief, is nevertheless ready to pledge his honour that he will leave his wife entire liberty there, and will never by word,

or action, or innuendo, seek to injure or deflect her mind. On this basis the marriage is agreed upon and takes place. But not until an uncle of Aliette's, a high dignitary of the Church, has given his consent. This in his case rested upon the hope, which he communicated to Aliette herself, that there was no saying what influence such a wife might have.

Thus those two set out into life ; and we are asked again to confess by the witness of another illustration that two cannot go far together unless they be agreed.

They make their home in Paris, and there very soon comes the rift within the lute. Aliette tries bravely to live her own life, defending and nourishing her soul, and at the same time to go out with Bernard, meeting the world on its own ground. Bernard sees clearly what it is all costing his wife, and in course of time becomes impatient. Now and then he allows some reckless word to escape, for which he never fails indeed to rebuke himself. Aliette likewise, even more scrupulous than he, in terror of losing her husband's love, or of failing in her duty as a wife, makes heroic attempts to compromise with the higher insistences of her nature, and steels her spirit to mingle freely in her husband's world, which was just the world.

But it seemed to her like being on board a sinking ship where the officers instead of doing their duty were making themselves drunk with the crew.'

One day, their conversation having fallen upon the moral condition of the poorer classes, with whom Aliette's charitable disposition brought her into frequent contact, the young wife ventured to say that, unfortunately, lessons in materialism were given to the people only too often by the higher classes of society.

"You are quite right," said Bernard, "and I really do not know where we are all going to at this rate, nor what terrible things will happen next ; but, as we can do nothing, the best way is not to think about it."

"Like Louis XV. ?" replied Aliette. "But are you quite sure that nothing can be done ? Do you not think that the abolition of all religious belief, of all hope beyond this life, of all recourse to

God, has a great deal to do with this furious and all-absorbing eagerness for present enjoyment, at which you yourself are alarmed ?”

“On the contrary, I am convinced of it,” said Bernard. “But what then ? What are you driving at ? Is it my fault if the earth turns round ? Is it my fault if unbelief reigns high and low, and invades all classes ? Do you mean to insinuate that I ought to set an example to the people ? An example of *what* I should like to know, since I believe in nothing ? The example of hypocrisy and sacrilege ?”

Aliette turned very pale and made no answer.

“My dear,” he went on in a hard tone, “you are contending for the impossible. You are a Christian in reality in the midst of a society which is so only in name. You cannot reform the century in which you live. You cannot turn Paris of the nineteenth century into a Port Royal, of which you would be the Mother Angelique. Do for goodness’ sake give up the idea ! And especially I beg of you give up the idea of bringing me back, me personally, to your way of thinking. You are possessed with the mania of converting me, and, to speak frankly, it annoys me a little, for I am conscious of it under your slightest words and actions . . . Give up this idea once and for all : do not think about it any more, and you will see what a relief it will be to our two unhappy lives.”

Aliette could only look at him with the tearful, beseeching eyes of some dumb creature at the last extremity. His natural good temper returned to him, and sitting down beside her, he said in a gentler tone—

“I am wrong, dear. As to conversion, one must never despair of anything or anybody. Do you remember Monsieur de Rance, for instance, who is of our own day ? Well, before becoming the reformer of the Trappists, he had been like myself, a worldling and a great sceptic, what was then called a libertine. For all that, he became a saint ! It is true that there was a terrible reason. You know what brought about his conversion ?”

Aliette made a sign that she did not know.

“Well, he came back to Paris after an absence of some days and found her whom he loved dead . . . her head severed.”

“If I were sure,” said Aliette, “that my head would have the same power, I should be glad to die.”

One only needs insight to foresee how things will end. Aliette’s health gives way under the strain of this discordant life. On a certain night which brought incidents to which Bernard confessed he had no right to expose his wife, Aliette swooned away. It was long before she recovered, and

when at length she did regain consciousness, it was to beseech her husband with tears to allow her to live her own life.

They returned to the country. The days that followed were the happiest she had ever known. The quiet and regularity of her life, the care of Jeanne, her little girl, occupied and soothed her. Bernard too for a time seemed to be satisfied. But soon the weather of his soul changed, and events followed close upon one another towards the catastrophe. Their little daughter fell suddenly ill of a diphtheria which threatened to carry her off. An operation became immediately necessary. It was too late to bring a surgeon from the city. Bernard hastened to a neighbouring house where a stranger, a celebrated doctor, with his niece or cousin, was staying temporarily. This man, Dr. Vallehaut and his niece Sabine returned with Bernard, and the child's life was saved.

Dr. Vallehaut is a man of science who, like Bernard, has lost all faith in revealed religion ; but the absence of faith has not yet robbed his life of ideals. The quest of pure truth, the hope of devoting the results of his research to the good of man, serve in the case of one of his temperament to keep him free from cynicism and any low way of conceiving life. It is left, as we shall see in a moment, to his cousin Sabine to carry out the principles of religious negation to their logical issue in life and action.

Dr. Vallehaut has still effectively within himself the moral reminiscences of religion. Sabine, who belongs to the next generation, has no such reminiscences : she is the author's warning of what we are to expect in the *second* generation of a materialistic and irreligious community.

But to resume.—A friendship as deep as was possible among such discordant people grew up between Alette and her husband on the one hand, and the Doctor and Sabine.

Bernard in particular sees a good deal of the Doctor's cousin, and both of them hover on the edge of folly.

In consequence doubtless of the strain, Aliette's health gives way. At first there is no ground for alarm; the Doctor reassures them and leaves his cousin, who, by the way, is betrothed to him, to act as nurse, her duty being to give the patient a potion at intervals. Aliette, however, does not recover. One day Bernard, taking the potion from Sabine's hand, gives it to his wife, who, as she takes it, looks into his eyes with a searching gaze which almost 'freezes his blood. She drinks the potion, and next day dies. It had contained aconite, a slow and untraceable poison which had been placed there by Sabine.

According to his daily custom, Monsieur Tallevaut conducted his ward to the door of her room, kissed her forehead, shook her by the hand, and withdrew to his own apartment.

About an hour and a half afterwards, when he thought Sabine would be asleep, Dr. Tallevaut, who had not gone to bed himself, left his room with great caution, went down the long passage and descended the stairs. The candlestick, which he held in his hand, illumined the pallor and contraction of the face. He entered the large room, on the ground-floor, which served him as a drawing-room and library, and from there, raising a heavy tapestry curtain, he passed into the laboratory. He went straight to a kind of sideboard of old oak, which filled up one of the angles of the wall, and in which the dangerous substances which he used in making up his medicines and in his experiments were locked up. This sideboard was fastened by one of those locks which have no key, and of which it is necessary to know the secret combination. After he had turned the revolving plate of the lock, Dr. Tallevaut seemed to hesitate for some seconds before opening the panel of the cabinet;—then, with a violent gesture, he opened the panel. His pale forehead immediately became of a livid tint; in one of the rows of bottles which were ranged on the highest shelf his first glance revealed an empty space. At the same moment there escaped from his agitated and convulsed lips a word uttered feebly as a breath—

“Aconite!”

All at once it seemed to him that he heard a slight noise in the interior of the house. He extinguished his candle, and listened attentively. A few minutes afterwards, he distinctly heard the gliding of a furtive step, and the rustling of a silk dress in the next

room. He went quickly to the door and waited. The night was beautifully fine, and was illuminated by a crescent moon, which threw its white rays across the windows and into the laboratory. The curtain of the door was raised and Sabine appeared ; at the same instant the hand of Dr. Tallevaut was laid heavily upon the arm of his ward.

The young girl uttered a stifled cry, and in her first alarm dropped a small bottle which fell with a ring on the stone floor. She drew back, and ran into the next room. Near the large centre table, she stopped abruptly, and leaning heavily upon it with one hand, she faced her approaching guardian.

In the library, as in the laboratory, the windows opening into the garden had no shutters, and the polar clearness of the sky spread a half-light in patches across the room. Monsieur Tallevaut could perceive an air of wild bravado on Sabine's face and in her eyes.

"Unhappy girl," he said to her in a hollow voice, "defend yourself. Say that you have made some mistake ; aconite is also a medicine ; you have seen me employ it, myself, sometimes. You have perhaps been imprudent, careless, and you were afraid that I should blame you. That is why you were hiding yourself. Come speak !"

"What is the use ?" she answered, with a disdainful wave of the hand ; "you would not believe me ; you do not believe your own words."

The unhappy man sank down into the easy-chair in which he was accustomed to write, talking aloud to himself in his deep trouble.

"No," he murmured, "it is true. It would be impossible ; she could not have made so great a mistake ! Alas ! she knew only too well what she was doing. With what infernal skill she chose the poison, the effects of which should imitate the symptoms of the disease itself, be mistaken for them, and aggravate them, very gently, till death resulted ! Yes, it is a crime ; an odious, premeditated crime against that gentle, lovable creature !"

And after a silence—

"Oh what a miserable dupe I have been !"

Then, raising his head towards Sabine—

"Tell me at least that her husband is your accomplice ; that it is he who has induced you to commit this infamous deed !"

"No," said Sabine, "he knew nothing of it. I love him, and I know that I am loved by him. Nothing more."

Dr. Tallevaut, after minutes of speechless dejection, resumed firmly, but in a distinctly altered voice—

"Sabine, if you have counted on a criminal weakness on my part, you have not known me ; my duty, from this moment, is to hand you over to justice ; and however horrible such a duty may be, I shall perform it."

"You will think twice, uncle, before doing so," the girl said coldly, standing on the other side of the table, and facing her guardian, "for if you give me up to justice, if you give society the pleasure of witnessing such a trial in court, you must foresee what the world will say : it will say that I am your pupil, and it will say nothing but the truth !"

"My pupil, wretched girl ? Have I ever taught you other principles than those which I practise myself ? Have I ever given you, by precept or example, other lessons than those of uprightness, justice, humanity and honour ?"

"You surprise me, uncle. How is it that such a mind as yours has never foreseen that I might extract, from your doctrines and from our common studies, conclusions and teachings different from those which you drew from them yourself ? The tree of science, uncle, does not produce the same fruit upon every soil. You speak to me of uprightness, of justice, of humanity, of honour ? You are astonished, that the same theories which have inspired you with these virtues have not inspired me with the same ? The explanation is, however, quite simple ; you know, as well as I do, that these sham virtues are, in reality, free to be acquired, or not ; since they are only instincts, veritable prejudices imposed upon us by nature, because she requires them for the preservation and the carrying on of her work. It pleases you to submit yourself to these instincts, and it does not please me to do so, that is all."

"But have I not told you, and repeated to you a thousand times, you wretched creature, that duty, honour, even happiness consisted in submission to these natural, these divine laws ?"

"You have told me so : you believe it ; I believe the contrary. I believe that the duty, the honour of a human being is to rebel against such servitude, to shake off these fetters with which nature, or God, as you like, leads us and oppresses us, in order to make us work, in spite of ourselves, towards an unknown end ; towards a work in which we have no interest. Ah yes ! you have indeed told me, and repeated to me, that for you it was not only a duty, but a joy, to humbly contribute, by your works and your virtues, towards I know not what divine work, I know not what superior and mysterious point, towards which the universe is progressing. But, really, those are pleasures to which I am perfectly insensible. I care very little, I swear to you, to deny myself, to force myself to suffer all my life, in order to prepare a state of happiness and perfection for I know not what future humanity—a state which I shall not enjoy, festivals to which I shall not go, and a paradise into which I shall have no entrance."

Under the influence of the emotions which agitated her in this awful moment, her speech, at first calm and icy, became, little by

little, more animated, and gradually assumed a character of violent exultation. She had quitted her first attitude, and commenced to walk, with slow steps, from one end of the library to the other stopping at intervals to accentuate her remarks by an energetic gesture. Monsieur Tallevaut, still motionless in his easy-chair, answered her only by vague exclamations of indignation, and his eye appeared to follow, with an air of stupefaction, this spectral shadow now disappearing in the darkness, now plainly visible in the pale light which came from outside.

"Must I tell you everything?" she continued. "I was mortally tired: tired of the present, of the past, of the future. The idea of passing my life here, poring over your books or over your furnaces, with the perspective of the final perfection of the universe for my whole satisfaction and for all my comfort, this idea was insupportable to me. Such a life may suffice for a being who is all brain, like you; but for those who have nerves under the skin, blood in the veins, and passions in the heart, never. I am a woman, and I have all the aspirations, all the passions of a woman; these are even more powerful in me than they are in others, because I have neither the superstitions nor the prejudices which, with others, may deaden them. I dreamt of great love, I dreamt of a luxurious life, of amusements, of elegance, in the midst of the pleasures of society. I felt that fate had bestowed on me all the gifts which would enable me to enjoy these things in their fulness, and I was called upon to renounce them for ever. To what end would this independence of spirit which I had acquired have served me then? Of what use was all my science, if I did not extract from it some opportunity for my ambitions, some weapon for my passions? An occasion presented itself. I loved this man, and I felt that he loved me. I felt that, were he free, he would marry me. And then—I did what I have done! A crime? Nothing but a word! What is good, and what is evil? What is true, or what is false? In reality, you know very well that the code of human morality has to-day become nothing but a blank page, on which each one writes what he likes, according to his intellect and his temperament. Individual catechisms are the only ones left to us. Mine is the very same which nature teaches me by her example; she eliminates everything which annoys her with impassible egotism; she suppresses everything that opposes itself to her aims; she crushes out the weak to make room for the strong. And be assured, it is not now for the first time that this doctrine obtains with really free and superior minds. It has been said since all time, Good people are taken away.' No! it is the weak ones who disappear, and they only do what is their duty; and when one assists them a little, one only does after all the same thing as God. Read your Darwin over again, my uncle."

On reading such a passage as that one feels that, far from it being strange and irrational that people should ever have gone to war about religion, the one thing which men might at any time quite justifiably go to war about is just religion and the moral implications of religion. After reading such a passage,—and the inferences seem to me to be quite logical, and granted the premisses, quite inevitable,—one feels that thorough-going unbelievers may yet have to be exterminated for poisoning the wells and threatening to bring human life to a standstill.

After a suitable lapse of time, Bernard marries Sabine ; and once again we have the materials for a tragedy which will balance the earlier one. This later tragedy we shall not pursue.

A short time only is needed for these two to cease even pretending to respect one another ; and on Sabine's individualistic theories of life, the moment a relationship ceases to bind, it ceases to be binding. They separate. Bernard's heart turns to his little daughter whom he has left with Aliette's mother in the old Château. The child is in the care of an old nurse, Victoire, who had been Aliette's nurse. On Bernard's proposing to take away his child, Victoire vigorously objects, saying that if he persists in taking the child, she, Victoire, will then believe what she has not yet allowed herself to believe, that he, Bernard, was an accomplice with Sabine in the poisoning of Aliette.

The Pope in "The Ring and The Book" describes how once upon a time he stood in Naples. It was a night of the blackest darkness ; no town, no sea, no sky ! Suddenly there was a lightning flash by which for one moment he saw everything. Just so did those words of the old nurse light up the mystery of poor Aliette's last days. He remembered her last look, and in that moment something began to break, to melt, to yield within him,

“She died, believing me guilty! It is a frightful idea! I cannot bring myself to think of it; so fragile, so tender, so gentle a being. Yes, she said to herself, ‘My husband is a murderer. What he is giving me to take is poison, and he knows it to be so.’ And she died with this thought, her last thought: and never, never will she know that it is not true. O, Lord God Almighty, if You exist, You see what I suffer: have pity on me. Ah, that I could believe that all is not finished between her and myself; that she sees me; that she hears me; that she knows the truth.”

Thus the dead Alette began her reign. For, as I have said more than once in these studies, we do not know ourselves, and do not know how we shall behave in the great waters.

The race is older than the individual. It may need some great thing to break up that hard crust with which our conventional life overlays and conceals the qualities of our essential and abiding human nature. But life is full of experiences, any one of which may become such a plough-share in the hand of God.

Bernard, exhausted by grief, fell a prey to disease. Something sinister made its appearance in his throat. Feeling his end draw near, he sent for Alette’s uncle, the Bishop. He wished to die in Alette’s religion. And so she had her way; or, God had His way through her.

Here, once again, we have been considering a case which in its essentials need not be at all unusual or curious. It is another illustration, on the testimony and authority of a true imagination, that the human soul moves in an orbit round a central sun, so that at the limit of its apogee it is already coming back.

Of this also, we have had another illustration, namely, that a life of moral disorder is already discovering and creating its own tragedy, out of which it will at length cry out.

And of this, finally, we have had an illustration, and it prepares us for the studies which shall follow,—that for every one who in this world has wronged another there is but one way back to self-respect, to peace, to God, and it, by kneeling in perfect humility before the face, alive or dead, of that one whom he has wronged.

And there again we enter that Valley of the Spirit, at the head of which and against a wonderful sky, stands for ever, the Cross of Calvary.

JOHN A. HUTTON.

WHO WAS NIMROD ?

I. NIMROD AND AGADE.

THE tenth chapter of Genesis, the table of peoples, contains two apparently independent notices on the Kushites. According to the documentary hypothesis the first notice (v. 7) belongs to P, the second (vv. 8-12) to J. At any rate it is very probable that the pericope vv. 7-12 has not been written *uno tenore*. The author of the table of peoples loosely combined two traditions. On the one hand he knew the Arabian and African Kushites enumerated in v. 7. On the other he knew that Kush had begotten Nimrod. The text does not bear any trace of an attempt to bring the latter in connexion with the genealogy of the former. I believe the author intentionally avoided identifying the two bearers of the name Kush. And provisionally I leave v. 7 out of consideration when inquiring into the identity of that Kush who begot Nimrod.

It is clear that vv. 8-12 deal with the beginnings of the Babylonian and Assyrian powers. Let us regard these verses in the light of the cuneiform inscriptions. The latter tell us that the Assyrians and Neo-Babylonians regarded Sharrukin or Sargon of Agade or Akkad (about 2700 B.C., if not