

William Morris, "Frank's Sealed Letter" (1856)

Ever since I can remember, even when I was quite a child, people have always told me that I had no perseverance, no strength of will; they have always kept on saying to me, directly and indirectly, "Unstable as water thou shalt not excel;" and they have always been quite wrong in this matter, for of all men I ever heard of, I have the strongest will for good and evil. I could soon find out whether a thing were possible or not to me; then if it were not, I threw it away for ever, never thought of it again, no regret, no longing for that, it was past, and over to me; but if it were possible, and I made up my mind to do it, then and there I began it, and in due time finished it, turning neither to the right hand nor the left, till it was done. So I did with all things that I set my hand to.

Love only, and the wild restless passions that went with it, were too strong for me, and they bent my strong will, so that people think me now a weak man, with no end to make for in the purposeless wanderings of my life.

Yes, my life is purposeless now. I have failed, I know, but I know that I have fought too; I know the weary struggle from day to day, in which, with my loins girded, and my muscles all a-strain, I have fought, while years and years have passed away. I

know what they do not, how that Passion trembled in my grasp, shook, staggered: how I grew stronger and stronger; till when, as I stood at last quivering with collected force, the light of victory across my lips and brow, God's hand struck me, and I fell at once, and without remedy; and am now a vanquished man; and really without any object in life, not desiring death any more than life, or life any more than death; a vanquished man, though no coward; forlorn, hopeless, unloved, living now altogether in the past.

I will tell you how I fell, and then I pray you all to pity me, and if you can, love me, and pray for me that I may be forgiven.

I said, when I left her that day, that I would forget her, look upon her as if she had never been; coming and going to and from that house, indeed, seeing her often, talking to her, as to any other friendly and accomplished lady; but seeing Mabel, my Mabel, that had been, no more. She was dead, and the twenty years that I had lived with her, man and boy, and little child, were gone—dead too, and forgotten. No shadow of them should rest upon my path, I said. Meantime the world wanted help; I was strong and willing, and would help it. I saw all about me men without a leader, looking and yearning for one to come and help them. I would be that leader, I said; there was no reason for me to be bitter and misanthropical, for I could forget the past utterly, could be another man in short. Why! I never loved that woman there, with her heavy, sweeping, black hair, and

dreamily-passionate eyes; that was some one past away long ago. Who knows when he lived? but I am the man that knows, that feels all poetry and art, that can create, that can sympathize with every man and woman that ever lived—even with that cold, proud woman there, without a heart, but with heavy, sweeping hair, and great dreamily-passionate eyes, which might cause a weak man to love her.

Yes, I said so when I left her—nay, even before I left her, for in my agonized pleading I had said words that made her cold, selfish blood run quick enough to speak scornful things to me. “Mabel!” I said, “Mabel! think awhile before you turn from me for ever! Am I not good enough for you? Yet tell me, I pray you, for God’s sake, what you would have me do? what you would have me make myself, and I will do that thing, make myself such, whatever it is. Think how long I have worshipped you, looked on all the world through your eyes. I loved you as soon as I saw you, even when I was a child, before I had reason almost; and my love and my reason have grown together, till now. Oh! Mabel, think of the things we have talked of together, thought of together! Will you ever find another man who thinks the same as you do in everything? Nay, but you must love me. Such letters you have written me too! Oh! Mabel, Mabel, I know God will never let love like mine go unrequited. You love me, I know. I am sure of it; you are trying me

only; let it be enough now, my own Mabel, the only one that loves me. See, do not I love you enough?"

I fell there before her feet. I caught the hem of her garment. I buried my face in its folds; madly I strove to convince myself that she was but trying me, that she could not speak for her deep love, that it was a dream only. Oh! how I tried to wake, to find myself, with my heart beating wildly, and the black night round me, lying on my bed; as often, when a child, I used to wake from a dream of lions, and robbers, and ugly deaths, and the devil, to find myself in the dear room, though it was dark, my heart bounding with the fear of pursuit and joy of escape.

But no dream breaks now, desperate desperate, earnest. The dreams have closed round me, and become the dimmest reality, as I often used to fear those other dreams might; the walls of this fact are closed round about me now like the sides of an iron chest, hurrying on down some swift river, with the black water above, to the measureless, rolling sea. I shall never any more wake to anything but that.

For listen to what she said, you who are happy lovers. Can you believe it? I can scarce do so myself. I, not looking up from where I lay, felt her lips curl into a cruel smile, as she drew herself from my grasp, and said:

“Listen, Hugh. I call you ‘Hugh,’ by the way, not because I am fond of you, but because surnames never seemed to me to express anything; they are quite meaningless. Hugh, I never loved you, never shall, nay, something more. I am not quite sure that I do not hate you, for coming to claim me as a right in this way, and appealing to God against me. Who gave you any right to be lord over me, and question my heart? Why, for this long time I have seen that you would claim me at last, and your ‘love,’ which I now cast from me for ever, and trample upon, so—so,—your ‘love,’ I say, has been a bitterly heavy burden to me, dogging me up and down, everywhere. You think my thoughts? Yes, verily, you who think yourself the teacher of such an one as I am, have few thoughts of your own to think. What do I want better than you? Why, I want a man who is brave and beautiful. You are a coward and a cripple. Am I trying you? No, Hugh; there is no need for that. I think I know you well enough, weak and irresolute, you will never do anything great. I must marry a great man—

‘White honour shall be like a plaything to him,

Borne lightly, a pet falcon on his wrist;

One who can feel the very pulse o' the time,
Instant to act, to plunge into the strife,
And with a strong arm hold the rearing world.' ”

But before she had begun to quote, my life had changed. While I lay there, in I know not what agony, that which I have just said came suddenly across me. I became calm all at once. I began to bend my passion beneath my strong will; the fight I fought so bravely had begun.

I rose up quietly before she began to quote, and when she saw me standing there, so calmly, ay, and looking so brave too, though I was a “cripple and a coward,” she quailed before me, her voice fell, even in the midst of her scornful speech; then I thought, “so cool, and can quote pretty verses at such a time. Oh! but my revenge is good, and sure too, it is almost as if I killed her, stabbed her to the heart, here in this room.” Then my heart grew quite obedient, and my purpose began to work, so that I could speak with no shadow of passion in my words, and with no forced unnatural calm either. I could seem, and for years and years did seem, to be no hard cold man of the world, no mere calculating machine for gauging God's earth by modern science; but a kindly genial man; though so full of knowledge, yet having room for love too, and enthusiasm, and

faith. Ah! they who saw me as such did not see the fight, did not see that bitter passage in the room of the old house at Riston, where the river widens.

I stood there silent for a very short time; then, raising my eyes to hers, said, "Well, Mabel, I shall go up to London, and see the publishers, and perhaps stay there a day or two, so that I shall probably be back again at Casley by Tuesday; and I daresay I shall find time to walk over to Riston on Wednesday or Thursday, to tell you what we have determined on— good bye." She trembled, and turned pale, as I gave her my hand, and said, "goodbye," in a forced tone, that was in strong contrast to my natural-seeming calmness. She was frightened of me then, already. Good.

So I walked away from Riston to my own house at Casley (which was about two miles from Riston), and got ready to start for London; then, about an hour after I had parted from her, set out again across the fields to the railway, that was five miles from my house. It was on the afternoon of a lovely spring day; I took a book with me, a volume of poems just published, and my dead friend's manuscript; for my purpose in going to London was to see to its publication.

Then, looking at that over which so many years of toil and agony of striving had been spent, I thought of him who wrote it; thought how admirable he was, how that glorious calm purpose of his shone through all his restless energy. I thought, too, as I

had never done before, of the many, many ways he had helped me, and my eyes filled with tears, as I remembered remorsefully the slight return I had given him for his affection, my forgetfulness of him in the years when I was happy. I thought of his quiet, successful love, and that sweet wife of his, the poor widow that was now, who lived at Florence, watching the shadows come and go on her husband's tomb, the rain that washed it, the sun and moon that shone on it; then how he had died at Florence, and of the short letter he had written to me, or rather that had been written, just before his death, by his wife, from his dictation, and stained with the many tears of the poor heart-broken lady. Those farewell words that threw but a slight shadow over the happy days when I loved Mabel, had more weight now, both for sorrow and consolation; for the thought that that dead man cared for me surely did me good, made me think more of the unseen world, less of the terrible earth-world that seemed all going wrong, and which the unseen was slowly righting.

I had the letter with me at that very time. I had taken it out with the manuscript, and together with that, another, a sealed letter that came with it, and which, according to the dying man's wish, I had never yet opened. I took out both the letters, and turning aside from the path sat down under a willow by the side of the river, a willow just growing grey-green with the spring. And there, to the music of the west wind through

the slim boughs, to the very faint music of the river's flow, I read the two letters, and first the one I had read before.

“Dear friend, I am going the last journey, and I wish to say farewell before I go. My wife's tears fall fast, as she writes, and I am sorry to go, though, I think, not afraid to die. Two things I want to say to you: the first and least has to do with my writings; I do not wish them to perish: you know I wrote, thinking I might do some one good; will you see about this for me? Do you know, Hugh, I never cared for any man so much as for you: there was something which drew me to you wonderfully; it used to trouble me sometimes to think that you scarcely cared for me so much; but only sometimes, for I saw that you knew this, and tried to love me more; it was not your fault that you could not; God bless you for the trying even! When you see my wife, be kind to her; we have had happy talk about you often, thinking what a great man you ought to be. Yet one thing more. I send you with this a sealed enclosure. On the day that you are married to Mabel, or on the day that she dies, still loving you, burn this unopened; but, oh friend, if such a misfortune happen to you, as I scarce dare hint at even, then open it, and read it for the sake of, Frank.”

Then I remembered, sadly, how when I read this, I was angry at first, even with the dead man, for his suspicion; only, when I thought of him dying, and how loving he was, my anger quickly sunk into regret for him; not deep anguish, but quiet regret. Ah! what a long time it was since I loved Mabel! how I had conquered my raging passion! Frank will surely applaud my resolution. Dear heart! how wise he was in his loving simplicity.

I looked at the sealed letter; it also was directed in his wife's handwriting; I broke the seal, and saw Frank's writing there; it was written, therefore, some time before his death.

How solemn the wind was through the willow boughs, how solemn the faint sound of the swirls of the lowland river! I read—

“O Hugh, Hugh! poor wounded heart! I saw it all along, that she was not worthy of that heart stored up with so much love. I do not ask for that love, dear friend; I know you cannot give it me; I was never jealous of her; and I know, moreover, that your love for her will not be wasted. I think, for my part, that there is One Who gathers up all such wandering love, and keeps it for Himself; think, Hugh, of those many weary hours on

the Cross; in that way did they requite His Love then, and how do we requite it now?

Should He not then sympathize with all those whose love is not returned?

“And, Hugh, sweet friend, I pray you, for Christ’s love, never strive to forget the love you bore her in the days when you thought her noble, the noblest of all things, never cast away the gift of memory; never cast it away for your ease, never even for the better serving of God; He will help Himself, and does not want mere deeds; you are weak, and love cannot live without memory. Oh! Hugh! if you do as I pray you, this remembered love will be a very bright crown to you up in Heaven; meantime, may it not be that your love for others will grow, that you will love all men more, and me, perhaps, even much more? And I, though I never see you again in the body till the Day of Doom, will nevertheless be near you in spirit, to comfort you somewhat through the days of your toiling on earth; and now, Frank prays God to bless poor wounded Hugh!”

I ceased reading; a dull pain came about my forehead and eyes. What! must I be all alone in my struggle with passion? not even Frank to help me? dear fellow! to think how fond he was of me! I am very very sorry he cannot be with me in this fight; for I must kill her utterly in my memory, and I think, if he knew all, how very noble I thought her, how altogether base she really is, he would be with me after all. Yet, Frank, though I do not

do this that you pray me to do, you shall still be my friend, will you not? you shall help me to become more like you, if that is possible in any degree.

So, I determined to forget her; and was I not successful, at first; ah! and for long too? nevertheless, alas! alas! Frank's memory faded with her memory, and I did not feel his spirit by me often, only sometimes, and those were my weakest times, when I was least fit to have him by me; for then my purpose would give in somewhat, and memory would come to me, not clear and distinct, but only as a dull pain about my eyes and forehead; but my strong will could banish that, for I had much work to do, trying to help my fellow-men, with all my heart I thought. I threw myself heart and soul into that work, and joy grew up in my soul; and I was proud to think that she had not exhausted the world for me.

Nor did I shrink once from the sight of her, but came often, and saw her at her father's house at Riston, that the broadening river flows by always; nay, I sat at her wedding, and saw her go up to the altar with firm step, and heard her say her part in the unfaltering music of her rich voice, wherein was neither doubt nor love; and there I prayed that the brave noble-hearted soldier, her husband, might be happy with her, feeling no jealousy of him, pitying him rather; for I did not think that it was in her nature to love any one but herself thoroughly. Yet, what a Queen she looked on that

marriage-day! her black hair crowning her so, her great deep eyes looking so full of all slumbering passion as of old, her full lips underneath, whence the music came; and, as she walked there between the grey walls of that Abbey where they were married, the light fell on her through the jewel-like windows, colouring strangely the white and gold of her gorgeous robes. She also seemed, or wished to seem, to have forgotten that spring-day at Riston; at least, she spoke to me when she went away quite kindly, and very calmly; "Good bye, Hugh, we hear of you already; you will be a great man soon, and a good man you always were, and always will be; and we shall think of you often, and always with pleasure."

Yet I knew she hated me; oh! her hollow heart! The dull pain came about my forehead and eyes; somehow I could not keep up the farce just then. I spoke bitterly, a smile that I know now I should not have smiled, curling my lip. "Well done, Mabel! it is a nicely composed parting speech to an old friend; but you were always good at that kind of thing. Forget you?—no—you are too handsome for that; and, if I were a painter or sculptor, I would paint you or carve you from memory. As it is, I never forget beautiful faces—good bye:" and I turned away from her a little without giving my hand. She grew pale at first, then flushed bright crimson, like a stormy sky, and turned from me with a scornful devil's glance.

She was gone, and a sharp pang of memory shot through me for a single instant, a warning of my fall which was to be. For a single instant I saw her sitting there, as of old, in the garden hard by the river, under the gold-dropping laburnums, heard her for a single instant singing wildly in her magnificent voice, as of old:

“Wearily, drearily,

Half the day long,

Flap the great banners

High over the stone;

Strangely and eerily

Sounds the wind’s song,

Bending the banner-poles.

“While, all alone,

Watching the loophole’s spark,

Lie I, with life all dark,

Feet tether’d, hands fetter’d

Fast to the stone,

The grim walls, square letter'd,

With prison'd men's groan.

“Still strain the banner-poles

Through the wind's song,

Westward the banner rolls

Over my wrong.”

But it was gone directly, that pang; everything, voice, face, and all: like the topmost twigs of some great tree-limb, that, as it rolls round and round, griding the gravel and mud at the bottom of a flooded river, shows doubtfully for a second, flashing wet in the February sunlight, then, sinking straightway, goes rolling on toward the sea, in the swift steady flow of the flooded river; yet it appears again often, till it is washed ashore at last, who knows where or when?

But for me, these pangs of memory did not come often; nay, they came less and less frequently for long, till at last, in full triumph, as I thought it, I fell.

That marriage-day was more than two years after the day in April that I have told you of, when I read the sealed letter; then, for three years after her marriage, I went on working, famous now, with many who almost worshipped me, for the words I had said,

the many things I had taught them; and I in return, verily loved these earnestly; yet, round about me clung some shadow that was not the mere dulled memory of what had been, and it deepened sometimes in my drearier moods into fearful doubts that this last five years of my life had been, after all, a mistake, a miserable failure; yet, still I had too much to do to go on doubting for long; so these shadowy doubts had to hold back till, though I knew it not, a whole army of them was marching upon me in my fancied security.

Well, it was Spring-time, just about five years from that day; I was living in London, and for the last few months had been working very hard indeed, writing and reading all day long and every day, often all night long also, and in those nights the hours would pass so quickly that the time between night-fall and dawn scarcely seemed ten minutes long. So I worked, worked so hard, that one day, one morning early, when I saw through my window, on waking about six o'clock, how blue the sky was, even above the London roofs, and remembered how, in the fields all about, it was the cowslip time of the year, I said to myself, "No work to-day; I will make holiday for once in the sweet spring-time; I will take a book with some tale in it, go into the country, and read it there, not striving particularly to remember it, but enjoying myself only." And, as I said this, my heart beat with joy, like a boy's at thought of holiday. So I got up, and as I was

dressing, I took up a volume of Shakespeare, and opened it at Troilus and Cressida, and read a line or two just at the place where the parting comes; it almost brought the tears to my eyes. "How soft-hearted I am this morning," I said; "yet I will take this, and read it; it is quite a long time since I read any Shakespeare, and, I think, years and years since I have read Troilus and Cressida." Yes, I was soft-hearted that morning, and when I looked in the glass and saw my puny deformed figure there, and my sallow thin face, eaten into many furrows by those five years, those furrows that gave a strange grotesque piteousness to the ugly features, I smiled at first, then almost wept for self-pity; the tears were in my eyes again; but I thought, "I will not spoil my holiday," and so forbore; then I went out into the streets, with a certain kind of light-heartedness, which I knew might turn any moment into very deep sadness. The bells of a church, that I passed in my way Essex-ward, were ringing, and their music struck upon my heart so, that I walked the faster to get beyond their sound.

I was in the country soon: people called it an ugly country, I knew, that spreading of the broad marsh lands round the river Lea; but I was so weary with my hard work that it seemed very lovely to me then; indeed, I think I should not have despised it at any time. I was always a lover of the sad lowland country. I walked on, my mind keeping up a strange balance between joy and sadness for some time, till gradually all

the beauty of things seemed to be stealing into my heart, and making me very soft and womanish, so that, at last, when I was now quite a long way off from the river Lea, and walking close by the side of another little river, a mere brook, all my heart was filled with sadness, and joy had no place there at all; all the songs of birds ringing through the hedges, and about the willows; all the sweet colours of the sky, and the clouds that floated in the blue of it; of the tender fresh grass, and the sweet young shoots of flowering things, were very pensive to me, pleasantly so at first perhaps, but soon they were lying heavy on me, with all the rest of things created; for, within my heart rose memory, green and fresh as the young spring leaves. Ah! such thoughts of the old times came about me thronging, that they almost made me faint. I tried hard to shake them off; I noticed every turn of the banks of the little brook, every ripple of its waters over the brown stones, every line of the broad-leaved waterflowers; I went down towards the brook, and, stooping down, gathered a knot of lush marsh-marigolds; then, kneeling on both knees, bent over the water with my arm stretched down to it, till both my hand and the yellow flowers were making the swift-running little stream bubble about them; and, even as I did so, still stronger and stronger came the memories, till they came quite clear at last, those shapes and words of the past days. I rose from the water in haste, and, getting on to the road again, walked along tremblingly, my head bent toward the

earth, my wet hand and flowers marking the dust of it as I went. Ah! what was it all, that picture of the old past days.

I see a little girl sitting on the grass, beneath the limes in the hot summer-tide, with eyes fixed on the far away blue hills, and seeing who knows what shapes there; for the boy by her side is reading to her wondrous stories of knight and lady, and fairy thing, that lived in the ancient days; his voice trembles as he reads—

“And so Sir Isumbras, when he had slain the giant, cut off his head, and came to the town where the lady Alicia lived, bringing with him that grim thing, the giant’s head, and the people pressed all about him at the gate, and brought him to the king, and all the court was there, and the whole palace blazed with gold and jewels. So there, among the ladies, was the Lady Alicia, clothed in black, because she thought that through her evil pride she had caused the death of the good knight and true, who loved her: and when she saw Sir Isumbras with the head of the giant, even before the king, and all, she gave a great cry, and ran before all, and threw her arms round about him.”

“Go on, Hugh,” says the little girl, still looking into the blue distance, “why do you stop?”

“I was—I was looking at the picture, Mabel,” says the boy. “Oh! is there a picture of that? let’s see it;” and her eyes turn towards him at last. What a very beautiful child she is! “Not exactly of that,” says Hugh, blushing as their eyes meet, and, when she looks

away for a second, drawing his hand across his eyes, for he is softhearted, “not exactly of that, but afterwards, where she crowns him at the tournament; here it is.” “Oh! that is pretty though; Hugh, I say Hugh!” “Yes,” says Hugh. “Go and get me some of the forget-me-not down by the brook there, and some of the pretty white star-shaped flower; I’ll crown you too.” Off runs Hugh, directly, carrying the book with him. “Stop, don’t lose the place, Hugh; here, give me the book.” Back he goes, then starts again in a great hurry; the flowers are not easy to get, but they are got somehow; for, Hugh, though deformed, is yet tolerably active, and for her. So, when the flowers come, she weaves them into a crown, blue flowers golden-hearted, and white ones star-shaped, with the green leaves between them.

Then she makes him kneel down, and, looking at the picture in the fairy story-book, places him this way and that, with her smooth brows knit into a puzzled frown; at last she says, “It wont do somehow; I can’t make it out. I say, Hugh,” she blurts out at last, “I tell you what, it wont do; you are too ugly.” “Never mind, Mabel,” he says; “shall I go on reading again?” “Yes, you may go on.” Then she sits down; and again her eyes are fixed on the far-away blue hills, and Hugh is by her, reading again, only stumbling sometimes, seemingly not so much interested as he was before.

“Poor Hugh!” I said out loud, for strangely, the thing was so strong, that it had almost wrought its own cure; and I found myself looking at my old self, and at her, as at people in a story; yet I was stunned as it were, and knew well that I was incapable of resistance against that memory now. Yes, I knew well what was coming.

I had by this time left the brook, and gone through a little village on the hill above, and on the other side of it; then turned to my right into the forest, that was all about, the quaint hornbeam forest. There, sitting down, I took out the Troilus and Cressida I had brought with me, and began to read, saying to myself (though I did not believe it) that I would cast those memories quite away from me, be triumphantly victorious over them.

Yes, there under the hornbeams I read Troilus and Cressida, the play with the two disappointments in it, Hector dead, and Cressida unfaithful; Troy and Troilus undone. And when I had finished, I thought no more of Troilus and Cressida, or of any one else in the wide world but Mabel.

“O Mabel!” I said, burying my face in the grass as I had before, long ago, in her long robes; “O Mabel! could you not have loved me? I would have loved you more than any woman was ever loved. Or if you could not love me, why did you speak as you did on that day? I thought you so much above me, Mabel; and yet I could not have spoken so to

any one. O Mabel! how will it be between us when we are dead? O Lord! help me, help me! Is it coming over again?"

For as I lay there, I saw again, as clearly as years ago, the room in the old house at Riston, at the noontide of the warm sunny spring weather. The black oak panelling, carved so quaintly, all round the room, whereon, in the space of sunlight that, pouring through the window, lit up the shadowed wall, danced the shadows of the young lime-leaves; the great bay window, with its shattered stone mullions, round which the creepers clung; the rustling of the hard magnolia leaves in the fresh blast of the west wind; the garden, with its clusters of joyous golden daffodils under the acacia-trees, seen through the open window; and beyond that, rolling and flashing in the sun, between its long lines of willows and poplars, the mighty lowland river going to the sea.

And she sat there by the fire-place, where there was no fire burning now. She sat by the cold hearth, with her back to the window, her long hands laid on her knees, bending forward a little, as if she were striving to look through and through something that was far off—there she sat, with her heavy, rolling, purple hair, like a queen's crown above her white temples, with her great slumbrously-passionate eyes, and her full lips underneath, whence the music came. Except that the wind moved a little some of the folds of her dress, she was as motionless and quiet as an old Egyptian statue, sitting out

its many thousand years of utter rest, that it may the better ponder on its own greatness; more lifelessly far she looked than any one of the grey saints, that hang through rain, and wind, and sunshine, in the porches of the abbey which looks down on the low river waves.

And there was one watched her from near the door, a man with long arms, crooked shoulders, and pale, ugly-featured face, looking out from long, lank, black hair. Yes, his face is pale always; but now it is much paler than usual, as pale almost as the face of a dead man; you can almost hear his heart beat as he stands there; the cold sweat gathers on his brow. Presently he moves towards the lady; he stands before her with one hand raised, and resting on the mantel-shelf. You can see his arm trembling as he does this; he stands so while you might count twenty, she never looking up the while. Then, half choking, he says, "Mabel, I want to speak to you, if you please, for a moment;" and she looks round with a calm, unconcerned look at first; but presently a scornful smile begins to flicker about the corners of her mouth. Then that pale man says, "Ah! I have told you all the rest before;" for he knew the meaning of the flickering smile—and that was five years ago.

And I shall never forget it while I live—never forget those words of hers—never forget a single line of her beautiful, cruel face, as she stood there five years ago. All the

world may go by me now; I care not. I cannot work any more. I think I must have had some purpose in coming here; but I forget what it was. I will go back to London, and see if I can remember when I get there—so that day under the hornbeam trees I fell from my steady purpose of five years. I was vanquished then, once and for ever; there was no more fighting for me any more.

And have I ever forgotten it—that day, and the words she spoke? No, not for one moment. I have lived three years since then of bitter anguish. Every moment of that time has been utter pain and woe to me; that is what my life has been these three years. And what death may be like I cannot tell; I dare not even think for fear.

And I have fled from the world; no one of all my worshippers knows what has become of me, and the people with whom I live now, call me a man without a purpose, without a will.

Yes, I wonder what death would be like. The Eure is deep at Louviers I know—deep, and runs very swiftly towards the Seine, past the cloth mills.

Louviers! Louviers! What am I saying? Where am I? O Christ! I hold the sealed letter—Frank's sealed letter, in my hand, the seal just broken. Five years! Eight years! It was but two hours ago that my head lay before her feet; yet I seem to have lived those

eight years. Then I have not been famous; have not forgotten; never sat under the hornbeams by Chigwell; and she is sitting there, still perhaps in that same oak room.

How strange it is, fearfully strange, yet true; for here is Frank's letter; here is his manuscript, the ink on it, brown through the years of toil and longing. There close by my side the great river is going to the sea, and the wind goes softly through the willow-boughs this sunny spring afternoon.

And now what shall I do? I know my will is strong, though I failed so in that dream I have awoke from. I know too, "That a sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things." Shall I wear this crown then while I live on earth, or forget, and be brave and strong? Ah! it must be a grand thing to be crowned; and if it cannot be with gold and jewels, or better still, with the river flowers, then must it be with thorns. Shall I wear this or cast it from me? I hear the wind going through the willow-boughs; it seems to have a message for me.

Good and true, faithful and brave, loving always, and crowned with all wisdom in the days gone by. He was all this and more. Trust your friend Hugh—your friend who loved you so, though you hardly knew it; wear the crown of memory." Yes, I will wear it; and, O friend! you who sent me this dream of good and evil, help me, I pray you, for I

know how bitter it will be. Yes, I will wear it, and then, though never forgetting Mabel,
and the things that have been, I may be happy at some time or another.

Yet I cannot see now how that can ever come to pass.

Oh, Mabel! if you could only have loved me.

“Lord, keep my memory green.”

THE END.