



THE PASSIONATE FRIENDS

By H. G. WELLS

Q A story of the turbulent lives of one man and one woman—separated by the barrier of the law, yet attracted by something stronger than any law—stronger than themselves. A love story with a background of high idealism and prophecy of the future.

**The
Passionate Friends**

By H. G. WELLS
Author of "Marriage."



WITH FRONTISPIECE

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**TO
L. E. N. S.**

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Chapter the First

Mr. Stratton to his Son

§ 1

I want very much to set down my thoughts and my experiences of life. I want to do so now that I have come to middle age and now that my attitudes are all defined and my personal drama worked out I feel that the toil of writing and reconsideration may help to clear and fix many things that remain a little uncertain in my thoughts because they have never been fully stated, and I want to discover any lurking inconsistencies and unsuspected gaps. And I have a story. I have lived through things that have searched me. I want to tell that story as well as I can while I am still a clear-headed and active man, and while many details that may presently become blurred and altered are still rawly fresh in my mind. And to one person in particular do I wish to think I am writing, and that is to you, my only son. I want to write my story not indeed to the child you are now, but to the man you are going to be. You are half my blood and temperamentally altogether mine. A day will come when you will realize this, and want to know how life has gone with me, and then it may be altogether too late for me to answer your enquiries. I may have become inaccessible as old people are sometimes inaccessible. And so I think of leaving this book for you—at any rate, I shall write it as if I meant to leave it for you. Afterwards I can consider whether I will indeed leave it. . . .

The idea of writing such a book as this came to me first as I sat by the dead body of your grandfather—my father. It was because I wanted so greatly such a book from him that I am now writing this. He died, you must know, only a few months ago, and I went to his house to bury him and settle all his affairs.

At one time he had been my greatest friend. He had never indeed talked to me about himself or his youth, but he had always showed an extraordinary sympathy and helpfulness for me in all the confusion and perplexities into which I fell. This did not last to the end of his life. I was the child of his middle years, and suddenly, in a year or less, the curtains of age and infirmity fell between us. There came an illness, an operation, and he rose from it ailing, suffering, dwarfed and altogether changed. Of all the dark shadows upon life I think that change through illness and organic decay in the thoughts and spirits of those who are dear and close to us is the most evil and distressing and inexplicable. Suddenly he was a changeling, a being querulous and pitiful, needing indulgence and sacrifices.

In a little while a new state of affairs was established. I ceased to consider him as a man to whom one told things, of whom one could expect help or advice. We all ceased to consider him at all in that way. We humored him, put pleasant things before him, concealed whatever was disagreeable. A poor old man he was indeed in those concluding years, weakly rebellious against the firm kindness of my cousin, his housekeeper and nurse. He who had once been so alert was now at times astonishingly apathetic. At times an impish malice I had never known in him before gleamed in little acts and speeches. His talk rambled, and for the most part was concerned with small, long-forgotten contentions. It was indistinct and difficult to follow because of a recent loss of teeth, and he craved for brandy, to restore even for a moment the sense of strength and well-being that ebbed and ebbed away from him. So that when I came to look at his dead face at last, it was with something like amazement I perceived him grave and beautiful—more grave and beautiful than he had been even in the fullness of life.

All the estrangement of the final years was wiped in an instant from my mind as I looked upon his face. There came back a rush of memories, of kind, strong, patient, human aspects of his fatherhood. And I remembered as every son must remember—even you, my dear, will some day remember because it is in the very nature of sonship—insubordinations, struggles, ingratitude, great benefits taken unthankfully, slights and disregards. It was not remorse I felt, nor repentance, but a tremendous regret that so things had happened and that life should be so. Why is it, I thought, that when a son has come to

manhood he cannot take his father for a friend? I had a curious sense of unprecedented communion as I stood beside him now. I felt that he understood my thoughts; his face seemed to answer with an expression of still and sympathetic patience.

I was sensible of amazing gaps. We had never talked together of love, never of religion.

All sorts of things that a man of twenty-eight would not dream of hiding from a coeval he had hidden from me. For some days I had to remain in his house, I had to go through his papers, handle all those intimate personal things that accumulate around a human being year by year—letters, yellowing scraps of newspaper, tokens, relics kept, accidental vestiges, significant litter. I learnt many things I had never dreamt of. At times I doubted whether I was not prying, whether I ought not to risk the loss of those necessary legal facts I sought, and burn these papers unread. There were love letters, and many such touching things.

My memories of him did not change because of these new lights, but they became wonderfully illuminated. I realized him as a young man, I began to see him as a boy. I found a little half-bound botanical book with stencil-tinted illustrations, a good-conduct prize my father had won at his preparatory school; a rolled-up sheet of paper, carbonized and dry and brittle, revealed itself as a piece of specimen writing, stiff with boyish effort, decorated in ambitious and faltering flourishes and still betraying the pencil rulings his rubber should have erased. Already your writing is better than that. And I found a daguerreotype portrait of him in knickerbockers against a photographer's stile. His face then was not unlike yours. I stood with that in my hand at the little bureau in his bedroom, and looked at his dead face.

The flatly painted portrait of his father, my grandfather, hanging there in the stillness above the coffin, looking out on the world he had left with steady, humorous blue eyes that followed one about the room,—that, too, was revived, touched into reality and participation by this and that, became a living presence at a conference of lives. Things of his were there also in that life's accumulation. . . .

There we were, three Strattons together, and down in the dining-room were steel engravings to take us back two generations further, and we had all lived full lives, suffered, attempted, signified. I had a glimpse of the long successions of mankind. What a huge inaccessible lumber-room of thought and experience we amounted to, I thought; how much we are, how little we transmit. Each one of us was but a variation, an experiment upon the Stratton theme. All that I had now under my hands was but the merest hints and vestiges, moving and surprising indeed, but casual and fragmentary, of those obliterated repetitions. Man is a creature becoming articulate, and why should those men have left so much of the tale untold—to be lost and forgotten? Why must we all repeat things done, and come again very bitterly to wisdom our fathers have achieved before us? My grandfather there should have left me something better than the still enigma of his watching face. All my life so far has gone in learning very painfully what many men have learnt before me; I have spent the greater part of forty years in finding a sort of purpose for the uncertain and declining decades that remain. Is it not time the generations drew together and helped one another? Cannot we begin now to make a better use of the experiences of life so that our sons may not waste themselves so much, cannot we gather into books that men may read in an hour or so the gist of these confused and multitudinous realities of the individual career? Surely the time is coming for that, when a new private literature will exist, and fathers and mothers behind their rôles of rulers, protectors, and supporters, will prepare frank and intimate records of their thought and their feeling, told as one tells things to equals, without authority or reserves or discretions, so that, they being dead, their children may rediscover them as contemporaries and friends.

That desire for self-expression is indeed already almost an instinct with many of us. Man is disposed to create a traditional wisdom. For me this book I contemplate is a need. I am just a year and a half from a bitter tragedy and the loss of a friend as dear as life to me. It is very constantly in my mind. She opened her mind to me as few people open their minds to anyone. In a way, little Stephen, she died for you. And I am so placed that I have no one to talk to quite freely about her. The one other person to whom I talk, I cannot talk to about her; it is strange, seeing how we love and trust one another, but so it is; you will understand that the better as this story unfolds. For eight long

years before the crisis that culminated in her tragic death I never saw her; yet, quite apart from the shock and distresses of that time, it has left me extraordinarily lonely and desolate.

And there was a kind of dreadful splendor in that last act of hers, which has taken a great hold upon my imagination; it has interwoven with everything else in my mind, it bears now upon every question. I cannot get away from it, while it is thus pent from utterance. . . . Perhaps having written this to you I may never show it you or leave it for you to see. But yet I must write it. Of all conceivable persons you, when you have grown to manhood, are the most likely to understand.

§ 2

You did not come to see your dead grandfather, nor did you know very much about the funeral. Nowadays we do not bring the sweet egotisms, the vivid beautiful personal intensities of childhood, into the cold, vast presence of death. I would as soon, my dear, have sent your busy little limbs toiling up the Matterhorn. I have put by a photograph of my father for you as he lay in that last stillness of his, that you will see at a properer time.

Your mother and I wore black only at his funeral and came back colored again into your colored world, and in a very little while your interest in this event that had taken us away for a time turned to other, more assimilable things. But there happened a little incident that laid hold upon me; you forgot it, perhaps, in a week or less, but I shall never forget it; and this incident it was that gathered up the fruits of those moments beside my father's body and set me to write this book. It had the effect of a little bright light held up against the vague dark immensities of thought and feeling that filled my mind because of my father's death.

Now that I come to set it down I see that it is altogether trivial, and I cannot explain how it is that it is to me so piercingly significant. I had to whip you. Your respect for the admirable and patient Mademoiselle Potin, the protectress and companion of your public expeditions, did in some slight crisis suddenly fail you. In the extreme publicity of Kensington Gardens, in

the presence of your two little sisters, before a startled world, you expressed an opinion of her, in two languages and a loud voice, that was not only very unjust, but extremely offensive and improper. It reflected upon her intelligence and goodness; it impeached her personal appearance; it was the kind of outcry no little gentleman should ever permit himself, however deeply he may be aggrieved. You then, so far as I was able to disentangle the evidence, assaulted her violently, hurled a stone at her, and fled her company. You came home alone by a route chosen by yourself, flushed and wrathful, braving the dangers of Kensington High Street. This, after my stern and deliberate edict that, upon pain of corporal punishment, respect and obedience must be paid to Mademoiselle Potin. The logic of the position was relentless.

But where your behavior was remarkable, where the affair begins to touch my imagination, was that you yourself presently put the whole business before me. Alone in the schoolroom, you seem to have come to some realization of the extraordinary dreadfulness of your behavior. Such moments happen in the lives of all small boys; they happened to me times enough, to my dead father, to that grandfather of the portrait which is now in my study, to his father and his, and so on through long series of Strattons, back to inarticulate, shock-haired little sinners slinking fearfully away from the awful wrath, the bellowings and limitless violence of the hairy Old Man of the herd. The bottom goes out of your heart then, you are full of a conviction of sin. So far you did but carry on the experience of the race. But to ask audience of me, to come and look me in the eye, to say you wanted my advice on a pressing matter, that I think marks almost a new phase in the long developing history of father and son. And your account of the fracas struck me as quite reasonably frank and honest. "I didn't seem able," you observed, "not to go on being badder and badder."

We discussed the difficulties of our situation, and you passed sentence upon yourself. I saw to it that the outraged dignity of Mademoiselle Potin was mocked by no mere formality of infliction. You did your best to be stoical, I remember, but at last you yelped and wept. Then, justice being done, you rearranged your costume. The situation was a little difficult until you, still sobbing and buttoning—you are really a shocking bad hand at buttons—and

looking a very small, tender, ruffled, rueful thing indeed, strolled towards my study window. “The pear tree is out next door,” you remarked, without a trace of animosity, and sobbing as one might hiccough.

I suppose there are moments in the lives of all grown men when they come near to weeping aloud. In some secret place within myself I must have been a wild river of tears. I answered, however, with the same admirable detachment from the smarting past that you had achieved, that my study window was particularly adapted to the appreciation of our neighbor’s pear tree, because of its height from the ground. We fell into a conversation about blossom and the setting of fruit, kneeling together upon my window-seat and looking up into the pear tree against the sky, and then down through its black branches into the gardens all quickening with spring. We were on so friendly a footing when presently Mademoiselle Potin returned and placed her dignity or her resignation in my hands, that I doubt if she believed a word of all my assurances until the unmistakable confirmation of your evening bath. Then, as I understood it, she was extremely remorseful to you and indignant against my violence. . . .

But when I knelt with you, little urchin, upon my window-seat, it came to me as a thing almost intolerably desirable that some day you should become my real and understanding friend. I loved you profoundly. I wanted to stretch forward into time and speak to you, man myself to the man you are yet to be. It seemed to me that between us there must needs be peculiar subtleties of sympathy. And I remembered that by the time you were a man fully grown and emerging from the passionately tumultuous openings of manhood, capable of forgiving me all my blundering parentage, capable of perceiving all the justifying fine intention of my ill-conceived disciplines and misdirections, I might be either an old man, shriveling again to an inexplicable egotism, or dead. I saw myself as I had seen my father—first enfeebled and then inaccessibly tranquil. When presently you had gone from my study, I went to my writing-desk and drew a paper pad towards me, and sat thinking and making idle marks upon it with my pen. I wanted to exceed the limits of those frozen silences that must come at last between us, write a book that should lie in your world like a seed, and at last, as your own being ripened, flower into living understanding by your side.

This book, which before had been only an idea for a book, competing against many other ideas and the demands of that toilsome work for peace and understanding to which I have devoted the daily energies of my life, had become, I felt, an imperative necessity between us.

§ 3

And then there happened one of those crises of dread and apprehension and pain that are like a ploughing of the heart. It was brought home to me that you might die even before the first pages of this book of yours were written. You became feverish, complained of that queer pain you had felt twice before, and for the third time you were ill with appendicitis. Your mother and I came and regarded your touzled head and flushed little face on the pillow as you slept uneasily, and decided that we must take no more risks with you. So soon as your temperature had fallen again we set about the business of an operation.

We told each other that nowadays these operations were as safe as going to sleep in your bed, but we knew better. Our own doctor had lost his son. "That," we said, "was different." But we knew well enough in our hearts that you were going very near to the edge of death, nearer than you had ever been since first you came clucking into the world.

The operation was done at home. A capable, fair-complexioned nurse took possession of us; and my study, because it has the best light, was transfigured into an admirable operating-room. All its furnishings were sent away, every cloth and curtain, and the walls and floor were covered with white sterilized sheets. The high little mechanical table they erected before the window seemed to me like an altar on which I had to offer up my son. There were basins of disinfectants and towels conveniently about, the operator came, took out his array of scalpels and forceps and little sponges from the black bag he carried, put them ready for his hand, and then covered them from your sight with a white cloth, and I brought you down in my arms, wrapped in a blanket, from your bedroom to the anæsthetist. You were beautifully trustful and submissive and unafraid. I stood by you until the chloroform had done its work, and then left you there, lest my presence should in the slightest degree

embarrass the surgeon. The anæsthetic had taken all the color out of your face, and you looked pinched and shrunken and greenish and very small and pitiful. I went into the drawing-room and stood there with your mother and made conversation. I cannot recall what we said, I think it was about the moorland to which we were going for your convalescence. Indeed, we were but the ghosts of ourselves; all our substance seemed listening, listening to the little sounds that came to us from the study.

Then after long ages there was a going to and fro of feet, a bump, the opening of a door, and our own doctor came into the room rubbing his hands together and doing nothing to conceal his profound relief. "Admirable," he said, "altogether successful." I went up to you and saw a tumbled little person in the bed, still heavily insensible and moaning slightly. By the table were bloody towels, and in a shallow glass tray was a small object like a damaged piece of earthworm. "Not a bit too soon," said the surgeon, holding this up in his forceps for my inspection. "It's on the very verge of perforation." I affected a detached and scientific interest, but the prevailing impression in my mind was that this was a fragment from very nearly the centre of your being.

He took it away with him, I know not whither. Perhaps it is now in spirits in a specimen jar, an example to all medical students of what to avoid in an appendix; perhaps it was stained and frozen, and microtomed into transparent sections as they do such things, and mounted on glass slips and distributed about the world for curious histologists to wreak their eyes upon. For a time you lay uneasily still and then woke up to pain. Even then you got a fresh purchase on my heart. It has always been our custom to discourage weeping and outcries, and you did not forget your training. "I shan't mind so much, dad," you remarked to me, "if I may yelp." So for a day, by special concession, you yelped, and then the sting of those fresh wounds departed.

Within a fortnight, so quickly does an aseptic wound heal up again, you were running about in the sun, and I had come back, as one comes back to a thing forgotten, to the first beginnings of this chapter on my desk. But for a time I could not go on working at it because of the fear I had felt, and it is only now in June, in this house in France to which we have come for the summer, with

you more flagrantly healthy than I have ever known you before, that my heart creeps out of its hole again, and I can go on with my story.

Chapter the Second

Boyhood

§ 1

I was a Harbury boy as my father and grandfather were before me and as you are presently to be. I went to Harbury at the age of fourteen. Until then I was educated at home, first by a governess and then by my father's curate, Mr. Siddons, who went from us to St. Philip's in Hampstead, and, succeeding marvellously there, is now Bishop of Exminster. My father became rector of Burnmore when I was nine; my mother had been dead four years, and my second cousin, Jane Stratton, was already his housekeeper. My father held the living until his resignation when I was nearly thirty. So that all the most impressionable years of my life centre upon the Burnmore rectory and the easy spaciousness of Burnmore Park. My boyhood and adolescence alternated between the ivied red-brick and ancient traditions of Harbury (and afterwards Christ-church) and that still untroubled countryside.

I was never a town dweller until I married and we took our present house in Holland Park. I went into London at last as one goes into an arena. It cramps me and wearies me and at times nearly overwhelms me, but there it is that the life of men centres and my work lies. But every summer we do as we have done this year and go to some house in the country, near to forests or moorland or suchlike open and uncultivated country, where one may have the refreshment of freedom among natural and unhurried things. This year we are in a walled garden upon the Seine, about four miles above Château Galliard, and with the forest reaching up to the paddock beyond the orchard close. . . .

You will understand better when I have told you my story why I saw

Burnmore for the last time when I was one-and-twenty and why my memories of it shine so crystalline clear. I have a thousand vivid miniatures of it in my mind and all of them are beautiful to me, so that I could quite easily write a whole book of landscapes from the Park alone. I can still recall quite vividly the warm beauty-soaked sensation of going out into the morning sunshine of the Park, with my lunch in a little green Swiss tin under my arm and the vast interminable day all before me, the gigantic, divinely unconditional day that only boyhood knows, and the Park so great and various that it was more than two hours' going for me to reach its eastern fences. I was only a little older then than you are now. Sometimes I went right up through the woods to the house to companion with Philip and Guy Christian and their sister—I loved her then, and one day I was to love her with all my heart—but in those boyish times I liked most to go alone.

My memories of the Park are all under blue sky and sunshine, with just a thunderstorm or so; on wet days and cold days I was kept to closer limits; and it seems to me now rather an intellectual conviction than a positive memory that save for a few pine-clad patches in the extreme south-east, its soil was all thick clay. That meant for me only beautiful green marshes, a number of vividly interesting meres upon the course of its stream, and a wealth of gigantic oaks. The meres lay at various levels, and the hand of Lady Ladislaw had assisted nature in their enrichment with lilies and water plants. There were places of sedge and scented rush, amidst which were sapphire mists of forget-me-not for long stretches, skirmishing commandoes of yellow iris and wide wastes of floating water-lilies. The gardens passed insensibly into the Park, and beyond the house were broad stretches of grass, sun-lit, barred with the deep-green shadows of great trees, and animated with groups and lines of fallow deer. Near the house was an Italianate garden, with balustradings and statuary, and a great wealth of roses and flowering shrubs.

Then there were bracken wildernesses in which the does lurked with the young fawns, and a hollow, shallow and wide, with the turf greatly attacked by rabbits, and exceptionally threadbare, where a stricken oak, lightning-stripped, spread out its ghastly arms above contorted rotting branches and the mysterious skeletons of I should think five several deer. In the evening-time the woods behind this place of bones—they were woods of straight-growing,

rather crowded trees and standing as it were a little aloof—became even under the warmest sunset grey and cold—and as if they waited. . . .

And in the distant corner where the sand was, rose suddenly a steep little hill, surmounted by a wild and splendid group of pines, through which one looked across a vale of cornfields at an ancient town that became strange and magical as the sun went down, so that I was held gazing at it, and afterwards had to flee the twilight across the windy spaces and under the dim and darkling trees. It is only now in the distant retrospect that I identify that far-off city of wonder, and luminous mist with the commonplace little town, through whose narrow streets we drove to the railway station. But, of course, that is what it must have been.

There are persons to be found mixed up in those childish memories,—Lady Ladislaw, tall and gracious, in dresses of floating blue or grey, or thin, subtly folding, flowering stuffs, Philip and his sister, Guy, the old butler, a multitude of fainter figures long become nameless and featureless; they are far less vivid in my memory than the fine solitudes of the Park itself—and the dreams I had there.

I wonder if you dream as I dreamt. I wonder whether indeed I dreamt as now I think I did. Have I, in these latter years, given form and substance and a name to things as vague in themselves as the urgencies of instinct? Did I really go into those woods and waving green places as one keeps a tryst, expectant of a fellowship more free and delicate and delightful than any I knew. Did I know in those days of nymphs and dryads and fauns and all those happy soulless beings with which the desire of man's heart has animated the wilderness. Once certainly I crawled slowly through the tall bracken and at last lay still for an interminable while, convinced that so I should see those shadows populous with fairies, with green little people. How patiently I lay! But the stems creaked and stirred, and my heart would keep on beating like a drum in my throat.

It is incredible that once a furry whispering half-human creature with bright brown eyes came and for a time played with me near where the tall ferns foam in a broad torrent from between the big chestnuts down to the upper

mere. That must have been real dreaming, and yet now, with all my sanities and scepticisms, I could half believe it real.

§ 2

You become reserved. Perhaps not exceptionally so, but as all children become reserved. Already you understand that your heart is very precious to your own. You keep it from me and everyone, so much so, so justifiably so, that when by virtue of our kindred and all that we have in common I get sudden glimpses right into your depths, there mixes with the swift spasm of love I feel, a dread—lest you should catch me, as it were, spying into you and that one of us, I know not which, should feel ashamed.

Every child passes into this secret stage; it closes in from its first frankness; it carries off the growing jewel of its consciousness to hide from all mankind. . . . I think I can see why this should be so, but I cannot tell why in so many cases no jewel is given back again at last, alight, ripened, wonderful, glowing with the deep fires of experience. I think that is what ought to happen; it is what does happen now with true poets and true artists. Someday I think it will be the life of all normal human souls. But usually it does not seem to happen at all. Children pass out of a stage—open, beautiful, exquisitely simple—into silences and discretions beneath an imposed and artificial life. And they are lost. Out of the finished, careful, watchful, restrained and limited man or woman, no child emerges again. . . .

I remember very distinctly how I myself came by imperceptible increments of reservation to withdraw those early delicacies of judgments, those original and personal standards and appreciations, from sight and expression. I can recall specific moments when I perceive now that my little childish figure stood, as it were, obstinately and with a sense of novelty in a doorway denying the self within.

It was partly, I think, a simple instinct that drew that curtain of silences and concealments, it was much more a realization that I had no power of lucidity to save the words and deeds I sought to make expressive from complete misunderstanding. But most of all it was the perception that I was under

training and compulsion for ends that were all askew and irrelevant to the trend of my imaginations, the quality of my dreams. There was around me something unfriendly to this inner world—something very ready to pass from unfriendliness to acute hostility; and if, indeed, I succeeded in giving anything of my inner self to others, it was only, as people put it, to give myself away.

My nurses, my governess, my tutor, my father, the servants about me, seemed all bent upon imposing an artificial personality upon me. Only in a very limited sense did they want me. What they wanted was something that could be made out of me by extensive suppressions and additions. They ignored the fact that I had been born with a shape of my own; they were resolved I should be pressed into a mould and cast.

It was not that they wanted outer conformity to certain needs and standards—that, I think, would be a reasonable thing enough to demand—but they wanted me to subdue my most private thoughts to their ideals. My nurses and my governesses would rate me for my very feelings, would clamor for gratitude and reproach me bitterly for betraying that I did not at some particular moment—love.

(Only yesterday I heard Mademoiselle Potin doing that very same thing to you. “It is that you do not care, Master Steve. It is that you do not care. You do not want to care.”)

They went too far in that invasion of my personal life, but I perceive quite clearly the present need for most of the process of moulding and subjugation that children must undergo. Human society is a new thing upon the earth, an invention of the last ten thousand years. Man is a creature as yet not freely and instinctively gregarious; in his more primordial state he must have been an animal of very small groups and limited associations, an animal rather self-centred and fierce, and he is still but imperfectly adapted either morally or physically to the wider social life his crowding interactions force upon him. He still learns speech and computation and civility and all the devices of this artificially extended and continually broadening tribal life with an extreme reluctance. He has to be shaped in the interests of the species, I

admit, to the newer conditions; the growing social order must be protected from the keen edge of his still savage individuality, and he must be trained in his own interests to save himself from the destruction of impossible revolts. But how clumsily is the thing done! How we are caught and jammed and pressed and crippled into citizenship! How excessive and crushing is the suppression, and how inadequate!

Every child feels that, even if every child does not clearly know it. Every child presently begins to hide itself from the confused tyrannies of the social process, from the searching inspections and injunctions and interferences of parent and priest and teacher.

“I have got to be *so*,” we all say deep down in ourselves and more or less distinctly according to the lucidities of our minds; “but in my heart I am *this*.”

And in the outcome we all try to seem at least to be *so*, while an ineffectual rebel struggles passionately, like a beast caught in a trap, for ends altogether more deep and dangerous, for the rose and the star and the wildfire,—for beauty and beautiful things. These, we all know in our darkly vital recesses, are the real needs of life, the obediences imposed upon us by our crude necessities and jostling proximities, mere incidentals on our way to those profounder purposes. . . .

And when I write thus of our selves I mean our bodies quite as much as our imaginations; the two sides of us are covered up alike and put alike into disguises and unnatural shapes, we are taught and forced to hide them for the same reasons, from a fear of ourselves and a fear of the people about us. The sense of beauty, the sense of one’s body, the freedom of thought and of desire and the wonder of life, are all interwoven strands. I remember that in the Park of Burnmore one great craving I had was to take off my clothes there altogether, and bathe in a clear place among loosestrife and meadowsweet, and afterwards lie wet and naked upon the soft green turf with the sun shining upon me. But I thought also that that was a very wicked and shameful craving to have, and I never dared give way to it.

As I think of myself and all these glowing secrecies and hidden fancies within, walking along beside old Siddons, and half listening to his instructive discourse, I see myself as though I was an image of all humanity under tuition for the social life.

I write “old Siddons,” for so he seemed to me then. In truth he was scarcely a dozen years older than I, and the other day when I exchanged salutations with his gaitered presence in the Haymarket, on his way I suppose to the Athenæum, it struck me that he it is who is now the younger man. But at Burnmore he was eighteen inches or more above my head and all the way of school and university beyond me; full of the world they had fitted him for and eager to impart its doctrines. He went along in his tweeds that were studiously untidy, a Norfolk jacket of one clerically-greyish stuff and trousers of another somewhat lighter pattern, in thick boots, the collar of his calling, and a broad-minded hat, bearing his face heavenward as he talked, and not so much aware of me as appreciating the things he was saying. And sometimes he was manifestly talking to himself and airing his outlook. He carried a walking-stick, a manly, homely, knobby, donnish walking-stick.

He forced the pace a little, for his legs were long and he had acquired the habit of strenuous pedestrianism at Oxford with all the other things; he obliged me to go at a kind of skipping trot, and he preferred the high roads towards Wickenham for our walks, because they were flatter and there was little traffic upon them in those days before the motor car, and we could keep abreast and go on talking uninterruptedly. That is to say, he could.

What talk it was!

Of all the virtues that the young should have. He spoke of courage and how splendid it was to accustom oneself not even to feel fear; of truth, and difficult cases when one might conceivably injure others by telling the truth and so perhaps, perhaps qualify the rigor of one’s integrity, but how one should never hesitate to injure one’s own self in that matter. Then in another phase he talked of belief—and the disagreeableness of dissenters. But here, I remember, there was a discussion. I have forgotten how I put the thing, but in some boyish phrasing or other I must have thrown out the idea that thought is

free and beliefs uncontrollable. What of conformity, if the truth was that you doubted? “Not if you make an effort,” I remember him saying, “not if you make an effort. I have had my struggles. But if you say firmly to yourself, the Church teaches this. If you dismiss mere carping and say that.”

“But suppose you can’t,” I must have urged.

“You can if you will,” he said with a note near enthusiasm. “I have been through all that. I did it. I dismissed doubts. I wouldn’t listen. I felt, *This won’t do. All this leads nowhere.*”

And he it was told me the classic story of that presumptuous schoolboy who went to his Head Master and declared himself an atheist. There were no dialectics but a prompt horse-whipping. “In after life,” said Mr. Siddons, with unctuous gratification, “he came to recognize that thrashing as the very best thing that had ever happened to him. The kindest thing.”

“Yes,” urged the obstinate rebel within me, “but—the Truth, that fearless insistence on the Truth!”

I could, however, find nothing effective to say aloud, and Siddons prevailed over me. That story made my blood boil, it filled me with an anticipatory hatred of and hostility to Head Masters, and at the same time there was something in it, brutally truer to the conditions of human association than any argument.

I do not remember the various steps by which I came to be discussing doubts so early in my life. I could not have been much more than thirteen when that conversation occurred. I am I think perhaps exceptionally unconscious about myself. I find I can recall the sayings and even the gestures of other people far more distinctly than the things I said and did myself. Even my dreams and imaginings are more active than my positive thoughts and proceedings. But I was no doubt very much stimulated by the literature lying about my home and the gleams and echoes of controversies that played like summer lightning round and about the horizons of my world. Over my head and after I had gone to bed, my father and Siddons were talking, my cousin was listening with strained apprehensions, there was a new spirit in my father’s sermons; it

was the storm of Huxley–Darwin controversies that had at last reached Burnmore. I was an intelligent little listener, an eager reader of anything that came to hand, Mr. Siddons had a disposition to fight his battles over again in his monologues to me; and after all at thirteen one isn't a baby. The small boy of the lower classes used in those days to start life for himself long before then.

How dramatic a phase it was in the history of the human mind when science suddenly came into the vicarages, into all the studies and quiet places that had been the fastnesses of conviction and our ideals, and denied, with all the power of evidence it had been accumulating for so long, and so obscurely and inaggressively, with fossils and strata, with embryology and comparative anatomy, the doctrine of the historical Fall and all the current scheme of orthodoxy that was based on that! What a quickening shock it must have been in countless thousands of educated lives! And my father after a toughly honest resistance was won over to Darwinism, the idea of Evolution got hold of him, the idea that life itself was intolerant of vain repetitions; and he had had to “consider his position” in the church. To him as to innumerable other honest, middle-aged and comfortable men, Darwinism came as a dreadful invitation to go out into the wilderness. Over my head and just out of range of my ears he was debating that issue with Siddons as a foil and my cousin as a horrified antagonist. Slowly he was developing his conception of compromise. And meanwhile he wasn't going out into the wilderness at all, but punctually to and fro, along the edge of the lawn by the bed of hollyhocks and through the little green door in the garden wall, and across the corner of the churchyard to the vestry and the perennial services and sacraments of the church.

But he never talked to me privately of religion. He left that for my cousin and Mr. Siddons to do or not to do as they felt disposed, and in those silences of his I may have found another confirmation of my growing feeling that religion was from one point of view a thing somehow remote and unreal, claiming unjustifiable interventions in the detailed conduct of my life, and from another a peculiar concern of my father's and Mr. Siddons', to which they went—through the vestry, changing into strange garments on the way.