

## THE MYSTERY OF THE LIGHT

I WAS NOT feeling altogether at one with the world and this, perhaps, as much as anything impelled me to turn my footsteps away from the bustle and confusion of my surroundings and to tramp onward, aimlessly, through a dreary region which lay at one side of the city whither for this summer, as for the summer preceding, my labors had called me. Now I do not believe to any great extent in "blind fate" or, in fact, in any fate. I would prefer if possible to believe in a well ordered system of affairs in this God's universe; but sometimes, when I think over that day's tramp and to what it led, I wonder if any ordered system comprehending great suns and planets swinging in their orbits and including the transmission of sound and heat and force, the creation of light and life, can extend to the minutest details of so seemingly unimportant a life as mine.

I shall not try to place the responsibility — thank Heaven it is not mine to settle such questions — but I have wondered why I pushed my way among those shadeless sand hills when I knew that to the east and

## CLUB PAPERS

south of the city, along a sparkling water course with level, winding banks, stretched mile upon mile of fruit and flower gardens, fragrant groves and grassy openings which reached far back from the mossy river banks. I knew very well the charm of that locality for in more satisfied mood I had wandered often in and out among the shady lanes, and often of a warm summer's day I had bathed my tired limbs in the secluded depths where a certain clump of willows and beeches cast dark shadows on the surface of the silver stream. I must here do myself the justice to say that my mood on this particular day was not of illtemper or of dissatisfaction; it was the craving mood of the unsatisfied. What a world of difference there is between those words. May Heaven have mercy on the dissatisfied soul. May Heaven help the unsatisfied to clearer light and broader truth, for by him alone are supreme heights attainable.

For hours I trod the treeless waste, holding communion with my inner self and carrying my bundle of yearnings. Of course I carried more substantial baggage for I am too good a traveler to venture out into a strange and especially into so uninviting a section of country without my lunch and flask and one or two companionable books.

It was well on in the afternoon — I had set out in the early morning — that I came to a realizing

sense of my distance from the city by a tired feeling strongly manifested in head and feet, and I must say that I did not relish the prospect of a return tramp that night. The country had become more hilly, some coarse brown grasses and weeds had spread patches of carpet here and there over the parched sand. Farther on the hills were higher and the carpet of grasses seemed more broadly spread and of finer texture, while I could see even at a distance that nature had woven flower patterns in soft colors into the body of dull green and brown.

I began to greet these grasses and banks of color in much the same spirit in which Columbus must have welcomed the floating landgrass and driftwood as he neared the golden strand of his new world. There may have been a slight difference, for I had not set out on a voyage of discovery; yet nevertheless I was soon to set foot on the borderland of a new world — a new life — and to learn of new possibilities of which I had never even dreamed.

Descending by a gentle slope into a valley, to my gratification and slight surprise I came upon a fairly well worn path. Into this I turned my steps and followed its windings for some distance as it wove in and out among patches of sunlight and shade, for it led now through a wooded country sweet with the perfume of plant and flower, where a laughing woodland stream sparkled between the trees and so

## CLUB PAPERS

touched me with a sense of delight that more than once I stopped to hear its tinkling and singing as it skirted rocks and rippled over pebbles, under fern and brake and hanging branch, till, suddenly emerging from a deep shade I rested my eyes on one of the loveliest scenes God and man, working in perfect harmony, ever produced.

The spot to which the path had led me was on a slight eminence overlooking a little valley carpeted with living green and hemmed in and sheltered on all sides by a dense growth of trees. The sun, just before me, was sinking into a most gorgeous bed of crimson and gold, while over him was suspended a fleecy canopy worked by the angels of the light in rarest tints of green and blue, orange and vermillion, while athwart them all the brilliant monarch shot radiating lines of purest gold which, weaving all the colors into one grand harmony, pierced beyond into the transparent blue of the dome overhead.

Below my feet lay at rest two little lakes, blue and transparent, and as deep as the heavens were high above them. Beyond them, nestled in the purple shadows of the forest trees, stretched a long low house with its out-buildings whose red roofs and chimneys were touched here and there with the mellow sunlight which, drifting over treetops and sifting through the leaves, bathed the lower part of the picture in its soft radiance. Through an open win-

## THE MYSTERY OF THE LIGHT

dow of the house floated strains from some musical instrument, and a voice was heard, tender and sweet, I knew, for I could just distinguish it at that distance.

A feeling of perfect contentment and satisfaction stole over me and it was some time before I could break the spell and make up my mind to go to the door and inquire the way to some tavern where I might pass the night for I felt sure that at no great distance there must be some small hamlet which could boast its genial wayside inn.

I was met at the door by a pleasant faced old black "mammy" who evidently was not in the habit of admitting early evening or indeed any other callers. In response to my question she spoke to someone within and in a moment an elderly gentleman stood before me. He did not seem to glance at me keenly, still I felt glad that I had nothing to conceal.

I never saw just such another face. It was full of strong manhood though the lines were soft. The eyes were calm and clear, almost penetrating, and an intense passion lurked in the corners of the lids. The nose was straight, the nostrils sensitive and the mouth, which was shaded by a drooping moustache, was firm and gentle. His whole bearing spoke of mental and physical activity and a life of calm restraint.

We did not stand in silence while each took mental note of the other, for I had soon made my wants

#### CLUB PAPERS

known and he had answered with slight delay. "I fear," he said with a kindly smile, "you will have some little distance to travel before you find a more comfortable bed than I can place at your disposal, if you are willing to accept. I can hardly offer my guests the social entertainment of the inn. However, if you care to share our simple meal, you will be welcome." Is there wonder that I was too surprised and delighted with this piece of seeming good fortune to express my thanks in words? However, I did not need to do that for he read my eyes and noting the dusty condition to which my tramp had brought me, said, as he led me across the hall, "There is the toilet room; and there are wanting some moments of supper time."

When I came out much refreshed into the broad hall, the evening shades were so deeply gathered that the light of the room was quite dim; but at the farther end reclining in a deep window seat I saw my host and a graceful young woman. As I came forward, they arose together and my host advanced saying, "Do not think we give you a cold welcome because we do not light the lamps. My daughter and I love the twilight hour and try to keep its gentle light unbroken." At his word, "my daughter," I bowed and she responded with a slight inclination of the head. This was our introduction. I could not distinguish the lines of her face, but her figure as it

showed in silhouette against the gray light of the window was simply perfection; and at that first movement of her head the blood surged to my temples. While her father and I were conversing she retired from the room.

I took from my pocket the books which hung rather heavily at my side and deposited them on the window sill. The keen eyes of my host were attracted to one of these and with a, "May I," he took it up. He turned the leaves noting here and there marked passages, and said quietly with a pleased look, "We may be entertaining an angel, etc., etc." Before I could respond otherwise than by a questioning glance, his daughter appeared and said in the gentlest voice I ever heard, "Father, our supper is ready;" and he led the way to the door. I went in to see her standing in the soft light which the electric lamp shed down from a panel in the ceiling of the room.

What can I say of her as she stood there in a graceful gown of soft white stuff with her calm, upturned face? My sensation on the first view of their home was repeated intensified. As the little lakes so calm and tranquil in the peaceful landscape had reflected to my eye the azure sky above, so did her blue eyes reflect the gathered light of heaven from the depths of her pure soul. And her hair! It seemed as if the sunlight had dashed up a spray against her white

#### CLUB PAPERS

forehead and, rippling back, kept falling in cascades of gold over the warm tints of her perfect neck and shoulders. When she moved it was as though with effort to keep her feet on the ground; so much she seemed a creature of clearer light and higher realms.

The conversation at the supper-table ran in pleasant channels. I hardly know if I did my share for I cannot use my eyes and lips to advantage at one and the same time and my eyes had all they could attend to. During the talk the father said to me, "The work which attracted my notice as you took the books from your pocket used to give me great satisfaction when I was a young student of these matters. Some of the marked passages seemed to indicate a certain appreciation on the reader's part that brought me into sympathy with him at once. — Hence my little pleasantries as to 'angels, etc., etc.," he added with a smile. "We entertain few 'angels,' as my daughter and I are pleased to denominate kindred spirits."

"What book is it, father?" asked the daughter and then added with a little wayward manner which charmed me to the quick, "Perhaps I do not care to be counted one of your band of angels."

"It is a volume of selections from De Vert," he said, "and the particular selection to which I refer is the essay on 'Old Truths Under New Lights.'"

"Indeed," she responded, and with so evident comprehension and appreciation that I wondered if



the mere girl she seemed could have puzzled her head with abstruse problems of philosophical speculation.

"Are you not afraid of mental dyspepsia if you take such heavy diet on your pleasure tramps?" she asked with a quizzical look in her eyes. At least that was the way I read their expression and answered in that vein:

"Perhaps I do not go as deeply into the thought at those times as I might," I said, "for I keep my eyes open to whatever of beauty may lie around me. You may be sure my eyes drink their fill of the loveliness which is set before them." She must have noticed that they did for the faint flush which came into her face told me plainly that she read my deeper meaning and I would best confine my conversation in conventional channels. So I continued: "But I do enjoy the book for the wonderful amount of suggestion it contains."

"It was always full of suggestion to me," said her father after a short lull. "Not perhaps in the line the author might have expected, but still full of suggestion; and I owe the author a great debt. His idea of spiritual truth always in some subtle manner suggested to my mind a parallel idea of physical light. How strangely these two words are bound together, and have been, ever since humanity began to seek after a higher life — and that you know was

#### CLUB PAPERS

early in the history of the race. Probably at first it was a poetical form of expression, this use of light for truth. At first the poetic seeker after God cried for light. He wanted truth. And now the unpoetic scientist seeks for light — he wants truth. They both are struggling toward the same goal; and frenzied poet and stern logician express their desires in the same word — light. Give us light. Is there not, then, some subtle, vital force in the light their physical eyes know to suggest to the mind's eye and to the eye of faith this same expression for ultimate truth — the light? It seemed so to me." Then the conversation turned on general topics till the conclusion of the meal.

"Will you sit with us a little while?" said my host when, after our cigars in the porch, we returned to the dining room. "We use this room for our general living room and, as you may have observed, our comforts and conveniences are near at hand."

I had noticed that the room contained much richly carved furniture and one or two antique cabinets. On shelves which ran around the room, which was paneled to the frieze in English oak, were displayed rare pieces of china and glass and decorated ware. A violin rested in its case by the music stand, while a piano against which a guitar was leaning stood at the farther end of the room. The pictures, which

were few, were chosen with fine taste. Along the lower shelves of the built-in cases were well thumbed volumes of the poets in proximity to the popular monthlies; and there were foreign and domestic scientific journals, with cut leaves, which evidently had been read.

My host had taken up a book with the sign that I was to make myself comfortable; and his daughter had arranged some unfinished fancy work in her lap where the light would best fall upon it. After a while the father closed his book, and I spoke to him of the perfect appointments of the house, so far as I had observed, especially in the matter of electric lighting which one would hardly expect to find carried to that state of completeness in a house so remote from mechanical centers. The panel lamp was no longer burning when we came in but side lamps filled the room with a gentle glow.

"Where do you get the power?" I asked. "I noticed no engine house as I came to the door."

"There is no engine house or steam plant," he answered, "for we make the water do the work after it has taken a rest in the little lakes."

"I wondered why those lakes looked so contented," said I. "Is it because they are conscious of doing work in the world?"

"Well, I hardly know about that," he answered,

#### CLUB PAPERS

"but it may be because it has done its work that our brook goes, like a school boy released from his tasks, laughing and dancing down the valley."

"What a musical little stream that is," said I. "I saw it sparkle among the trees and stopped to hear its tinkling and singing as I came along the valley path."

"You noticed our brook," said the daughter, looking up from her work. "Why, how charming of you. We take great delight in the little stream; we have studied its songs. Would you like to see it sparkle and hear it sing, here, now?"

"Most certainly," I answered with perhaps a tone of amusement in my voice, for my idea of what she had in mind was somewhat misty and the mist was not altogether cleared away by her next words.

"No," she continued with much earnestness, "I am not trifling. Now God's truth — which we were discussing at the supper-table — if it can touch to harmony the heart chords and stir to music the soul of him who by deep study and contemplation has come to realize something of its power and beauty — and it can — may not His light be found as potent in its way when one has come to learn something of the vital force it holds?"

She disposed of her fancy work and taking down a broad shallow case from a cabinet shelf placed it on the stand near which the violin was resting. It

was evidently some new or strange musical instrument with a sounding board over which were strung in a peculiar manner many fine chords, some so fine indeed that they seemed to be woven of spider web. On the stand which was designed especially to hold this instrument (and others of a similar nature as I learned afterwards) was an arm which held an electric lamp and a system of lenses, clear and colored. To this lamp she attached a wire from a wall switch, focused the lenses and, shutting off the light from the room, turned the current into the wire.

The effect was most marvelous and weird, for suddenly the room seemed filled with the pulsation of sweetest sounds which ebbed and flowed in rarest harmony. Sounds they were of nature; the babbling of brooks, the whisper of leaves and grasses, the whistle and song of birds; and through it all a chime as of distant bells as their clear tones flow down a valley of a peaceful Sunday morning. Where was I? I put out my hand to feel my chair from which I had involuntarily risen, when suddenly the music ceased and the lamps in the room were aglow.

"There is vital force in light, is there not?" said the father quietly.

I held my peace for the daughter was arranging a sort of keyboard near the instrument.

"Perhaps we can gather some of these sweet

#### CLUB PAPERS

flowers of sound," she said, "and weave them into a garland;" and, having refocused the lenses and deftly changed the stringing, she darkened the room again and directed the current to the instrument.

In the dim light, which was diffused like a faint halo, I could see her white hands wandering over the keys but her face was lost in the darkness. Strains from the "Spring Song" were swelling. I never knew what it meant till then; and then, too, I felt that I knew how the composer's imagination was fired and how passionately his heart strove to catch and crystallize the song which ran riot in his brain.

Other selections followed, all of the mystic order; snatches from the symphonies translating nature's gentler and more joyous moods — songs without words. Why attempt to describe them. What are words? If songs can be sung without them are they necessary to the closer communion of mind and heart? We three sat for some moments absorbed in a silence which I was the first to break, and then only to wish them good night and pleasant dreams.

In spite of the new and intense sensations which had been awakened in my breast, I had not long to wait before I was wrapped in slumber; and the early morning sun was peering into my window when I opened my eyes again to the world. I gave it only a glance of recognition and lay quietly in bed to collect my thoughts. Was last evening a dream?

Was her face on earth? and what of him? And then another question came to me, dimly at first, then appealing with greater and still greater force. I was tired after my long tramp and perhaps a trifle bewildered; he was so entertaining and she so beautiful that I did not give heed to what was set before me at supper, nor could I recall how the table was spread. The repast was simple I knew, white bread, a sip of wine — was there meat? Yes, there was cold meat and a dish of honey. That was all I could remember; yet as I recalled my sensations it seemed as if I had arisen last evening from the most delicate feast that ever tempted mortal appetite. Then, as I thought further, I remembered that the table was laid in a quaint, dainty fashion. The dishes were arranged near the edge, leaving a panel of snow white linen in the center and this panel was framed by sprays of running vines and plants, and delicately colored wild flowers showed their fresh faces in the rich green of the leaves. I remembered, too, that the light from the lamp in the ceiling played in soft colors on the white panel of cloth and I would have been more strongly attracted by this exquisite effect had not her face been in full view just across the table. I finally attributed it all to the grace of her presence — but why did it linger now that she was not with me? For about two minutes I made a vain attempt to free myself from the spell

## CLUB PAPERS

of her face and voice and form. How useless it was; for, as the faint breath of the newborn day bore to my ears the morning songs of the wood, the twitter of birds, and the heart throbs of awakened flowers, the wonderful mystic music of the last evening thrilled me through and through and I was a slave to my fancies.

I arose, dressed and descended to the large hall. The front door was standing open and I stepped out to take a few hasty strides to start my blood. I viewed the house from a little distance and in closer detail. It was a simple structure with broad-seated latticed windows. The walls were of blue-gray stone lightened up here and there with bands of brown and buff. Quaint dormers gave light and air to the chambers in the roof which let its broad spreading eaves come close down to the first story window-tops. Mosses clung to the joints, while roses and woodbine and ivy clambered up the walls and out to the edge of the eaves where the more timorous climbers, which dared not attempt the ascent of the roof, dropped back gracefully toward the earth. There was a portion of the house whose use I could not determine to my satisfaction from the outside. Afterward I found this to be the father's laboratory and studio. As I turned toward the door I saw my host coming to invite me to breakfast.

The morning sun kissed the violets, stopped to



play with the roses and geraniums in the window boxes and then came in through the opened lattice to light the room for the morning meal. The soft flickering sunshine reminded me of the evening light and when I looked up to where it was I saw that the panel was closed and the lamp was gone. The moments passed happily though I confess to feeling some little pain at the thought that I might never sit in their company again. However, that pain vanished when, as I stood on the doorstep shortly after, about to take my leave, the father expressed the hope that at some time I would visit with them again.

Need I say that as frequently as my duties would permit I visited that house? A warm friendship sprang up between the elderly man and myself. On one of my earlier visits he took me into the laboratory and, while showing me some of his instruments used in physical research, dropped fragments of his life's history. Later on he took me into his confidence in the matter of certain of his studies and experiments. His was indeed a rare nature. I had never imagined possible such a combination of the scientific mind and artist heart.

In his earlier years, then, as now, an earnest seeker after truth, he had for his companion a wife who was in every way fitted to aid him. They were just on the verge of contentment, it seemed to them,

#### CLUB PAPERS

when his wife left him and took with her the newborn son. The blow was terrible, I imagine, to one of his supersensitive nature, and for hours he lay on his face in the darkened chamber clutching at the shroud as if to keep them back. It was so stricken that his little sunny-haired daughter found him and touching him softly on the shoulder said, "Papa come out into the light. Take me."

"How could I," he said to me once in speaking of that time, "how could I have forgotten that little angel. Since then we have lived each for the other and she has been for me the embodiment of light."

And indeed I loved her so intensely that I could see how this object of his worship and adoration into whose heart he had poured all the love of his own strong nature, and into whose mind and around whose body he had thrown all the well ordered influences of his own powerful mental and physical life, should at last reflect itself in him and inspire him to lines of thought and activity beyond the grasp of natures less pure and strong than his.

One morning we were talking over a recently published theory of a certain so-called scientist which struck us as very narrow in its perception and treatment of a broad subject.

"O, these people," he exclaimed, "with their 'isms' and 'ologies' and 'ences' who build a whole world on the little grain of truth they have found

and then keep it so near their eyes that it obscures the great universe of truth which envelops them. In their minds they are right and everyone else is wrong! Why will not one soul add its grain of truth to that which another holds and so on, till all humanity is touched. Then we can all stand on the outside of a great sphere of truth with a clearer view of the universe of light which is above, below and all around us. Sometimes these scientists, in common with other seekers after truth, seem to me like lightning rods. If they really have gone deep enough to touch a fountain of living water, when the real truth, passing over, presses upon them, they let their surcharged spirits flow out toward the great spirit. If they have not gone deeply, have touched the surface of things only, they make just as much of a show in the world, but in the attempt to 'draw the lightning' — to bring down great truth and to fit it to their caliber — they are generally left blackened and distorted wires and the object they would have protected is destroyed. It were better, were it not, to let the soul flow out to God than to try to fit God into the chamber of an undeveloped soul? I think so. But in the matter of purely physical experiment, for years now I have been doing and the time is still far away when I shall be able to formulate tenable theories or understand so simple a manifestation of truth as light."

#### CLUB PAPERS

"But I have done something," he added with a smile in which there was a suggestion of pardonable pride.

"Yes," I said, "that wonderful instrument played upon by the light, which so carried me away the first time I heard it and still affects me greatly, would seem to tell something of what you had accomplished."

"That is very simple," he responded, "very simple compared with another instrument I have just recently brought to a point bordering on completion. I believe you have been affected by it though so subtle is it in its operation that you have hardly noticed it."

"What can you mean?" I asked in surprise.

"It has been a secret between two persons up to this moment," he said seriously; and added with a smile, "I believe it goes into safe hands."

He beckoned me to an alcove off the laboratory which he used as a dark room for experiments with light. At his bidding I seated myself at a table, and we were in silence for some moments while he arranged a small white screen directly before me. Having connected an instrument, which was a bulk in the darkness of the room, with a small dynamo, he took his seat at my side saying: "We will experiment."

"Oh!" I exclaimed with surprised excitement as a prophetic idea flashed upon me, "I shall know the mystery of the panel lamp."

"That was a mild form of it," he replied with an assenting nod which I could see for, as he had touched a key, the room was now light enough to make objects fairly distinct.

"I do not want to leave it entirely to your imagination," he said, as he handed me a piece of white bread. "Eat this and tell me what you taste." And the colored lights began to play upon the screen.

"I could swear that I am eating roast duck!" I exclaimed.

"I will not ask you to swear," he said, "for your brain in its present excited condition probably does not receive as truth the evidence of certain senses."

"But I am perfectly calm and cool," I affirmed, "my brain is not excited."

"Yes, it is," he said quietly.

"By what?" I asked, but the truth was beginning to dawn upon me.

"By the lights on that screen. They are carrying the same sensations to your brain through your eyes that are carried there by your nerves of taste when you eat roast duck. The same sensation would exist if there were nothing in your mouth. But the piece of bread makes it seem more real, perhaps, as

## CLUB PAPERS

that taste is connected in your mind with a solid substance. Now, what are you drinking?" and suddenly the combination of lights was changed.

"It is Burgundy," I said almost stupidly, for I could not believe my senses, "I am drinking Burgundy and I have not even a glass in my hand."

With his daughter's aid he had worked all this out to a point of absolute perfection and so it had come to him by degrees. I was the first to taste its ripe fruits; and the revelation was almost more than my excited nerves could bear. He noticed how it was affecting me and, throwing off the lights, raised the slide of the darkened window.

We conversed quietly for a few moments on other subjects and then returned to the instrument. Upon examination I found it to be a very simple affair when once understood, as all great things are. It was only a delicate arrangement of prisms and lenses, so disposed that by operating a cylinder the prismatic colors could be combined, intensified or modified at the will of the operator. Where the great achievement lay was in selecting the colors which should produce certain definite and desired effects.

All this he explained to me in a general way; for I was not a sufficiently advanced student of the organisms of the human body fully to comprehend a more technical explanation: The sense of sight, be-

sides being incomparably the finest of the individual senses, really comprehends them all so that the vivid image of an object with all its special attributes of form, feeling, etc., can be presented to the brain through the medium of the eye when we come to know the combination of colors necessary to produce the various effects; that is, to send the sensations of touch, hearing, smell and taste through the nerve centers of the eye to the brain. The specialization of the organism is feeblest in smell and taste and the color combinations of these senses he had determined to a high degree of accuracy. As yet, the application to the senses of touch and hearing lay beyond his achievement but not beyond his hopes. He regarded the work of Schwann and Schultz as authoritative, so far as it went, on the subject of ganglia or nerve centers; but, of course, they had not touched the borderland of the new science, and even Ranvier and the French School had not dreamed of it. Hence he was alone in his work, which up to that time had to be carried on by experiment mainly, for as yet no empirical rules could be laid down. However, he was so well grounded in the study of physics, chemistry, physiology and histology that no difficulty seemed too great to be encountered and overthrown, so that he had succeeded in obtaining many precise formulae and in making a subtle analysis of the special sense of taste!

## CLUB PAPERS

I may say, by the way, that he explained to me that I had not detected the power of light to create the sensation of taste since when the instrument had been in operation in the panel of the dining room ceiling, he had permitted only a suggestion of various dainty flavors to play in light upon the white panel of the cloth. I mention this rather to show the extreme perfection of the instrument in his hands than to excuse my dullness in not discovering some occult power in the changing lights.

As to that musical instrument to which I had listened many times since the occasion of my first visit, it was merely a mechanical contrivance of great delicacy, over the strings of which the lights played very much as the soft zephyrs play across the strings of the Aeolian harp. Of course it was a matter of some skill and study to arrange the instrument so as to produce desired tones and harmonies, as was effected when the daughter connected the keyboard. But this too was simple when one saw it! And all came about so naturally for, as the father told me, the whole scheme occurred to him one day while watching the blade of the radiometer revolving in the sunshine. If the light could make the blade revolve why could it not make strings to vibrate? and the result of his work was a complete demonstration that it could.

But in the matter of affecting the brain with the



sensation of taste, the study had been carried with successful results to a point far beyond what the father had shown to me. (Thank Heaven, I may remark parenthetically.) One day chance gave him an opportunity to test in an extreme degree the power of this sublime force in light; and then for the first time its power for evil struck with full force upon him, and I can hardly think of it now without a shudder.

A strange dog found its way into the valley and acted in so peculiar a manner that our suspicions were aroused. We were fortunate in getting it into a small pen where soon it exhibited symptoms of genuine rabies. The rage and suffering of the brute became intense; and as we knew of nothing which would furnish relief, the father decided to try an experiment. We brought out the instrument which had given us so many sensations of delightful taste and focused it on a screen which we placed at the side of the cage. The sun, which was shining with heated glare, gave us the light we now used. We who were watching protected our eyes with strongly colored glasses and even then, as the light played upon the screen, we experienced a sickening sensation, and it could not have been many moments before the brute lay dead in the pen.

As I said, now for the first time the awful capability for undetectable crime burst on the man and he

## CLUB PAPERS

was overcome with the thought that he had discovered and now held in trust, as it were, for humanity this great power for good or evil.

"O, God!" he cried, "how can I give this to a world which is not ready to receive it? to a world where man is selfish, where each cares more for his own advancement than for the good of others! Is it safe with me even, who this day in an act of mercy have demonstrated its awful power!"

We all turned away deeply moved and with sober faces. I forbore to ask questions; but with the father's consent I took the intestine of the brute to a noted chemist in the city and he told me, after some days, that the animal had evidently died of arsenical poisoning, though the microscope did not reveal an atom of the poison. For days I could not shake off the depressing effect of this last exposition of power and kept saying to myself, "Oh Heaven! what an engine of misery this would be in the hands of a man who had power over light and who knew not truth and love!" "But could that be?" I would ask myself. "Could a man gain power over God's great forces who had not the love of God in his heart?"

During that rich summer I hastened many times across the sandy waste to let my eyes rest on the quiet peacefulness of that low house nestled in the cool shade beyond the placid lakes. The vivid impres-

sions of my first visit never dimmed; but the feeling of supernal contentment, of complete satisfaction, grew ever stronger. You may be sure I never rested long to view the scene from a distance, but hurried to the door to receive the glad welcome which is accorded a friend one trusts, who has come to know one's dearest secrets. There was always the hearty hand clasp of the father, who after so many years of secluded working was glad to find an appreciative young mind into which to pour the riches of the past and the hopes of the future. There was the smile of welcome from the beautiful woman, who always would greet kindly one whom her father trusted with thoughts about his life's work. The frankness and simplicity of her greeting did not change from the first, so I could not say if she even dreamed of my devouring passion. Now and then, too, a guilty feeling would creep in to accuse me of a betrayal of trust. Was it a regard for her father and an interest in the future of his work which urged on my visits? Somewhat, yes! But there were stronger motives. I came to bask in the sunshine of her face, to drink in the rhythmic cadence of her voice, and with half shut eyes to float away in a dream trance as my soul swayed in the exquisite poetry of her motion.

But the day came too soon when duty called me to a distant land and on that day I sought her father, for I could not bear to add his condemnation of be-

trayer of trust to my own guilty conscience. As simply as I could I told him that I had loved his daughter from the very first. He raised his hand and resting it gently on my shoulder said, "I have known it almost as long as you have. I saw, too, that you would try in every honorable way to win her, and I was glad that from the first my heart could go out to you as a father's to a son. I have sometimes hoped I was mistaken, but that hope was born of a selfish wish for I would not know how to give her up. I give you my consent to woo her, I don't know that I give you a wish to win her! "

I sought her and found her reading in the porch. I opened my heart. There was a serious, almost sad smile on her lips as she responded in calm tones: "I have come to care for you very much during this summer, but not in that way! I could not bind you — No, I could not let you bind yourself. You are under the spell of this enchanting, this almost enchanted life. Would you think me worthy or beautiful out among the women of the world? Do I not need my setting of lovely nature, my rare flowers and " — this slowly — "the wonderful light which has shone on us in so many mysterious ways? " Then with a brighter look and a laughing voice, "Why, you have not seen me in perspective, and the only woman you have ever seen at my side to compare me with is the dear, good old black nurse of my childhood! "

It was not safe to be serious with her when that tone was in her voice; and so I only put both my hands on her head and bending over her drew one long sweet kiss from her pure forehead! I saw the spot my lips had touched turn white and then glow with a faint flame. How vividly this came back to me in the following years, for before my lips had touched her again a lightning courier of the storm kissed her and as long as she lives the faint flame will glow on her white forehead!

I will not speak of the letters that passed between us during the year I was abroad, other than to say that hers reflected in every word her beautiful spirit, and into its depths I could look more closely than when I had been with her. My distance from her dispelled one vicious, haunting thought which gave me many a sleepless night, and flashed around me for a time as I recalled her words in the porch, "And the wonderful light which has shone on us in so many mysterious ways!" Was there power then in physical light to create love? and had he — but at the thought I became wild. I learned then and I have never forgotten the lesson, that the light of love glows in the heart and external sunshine cannot add to it and storm and darkness round about cannot dispel it.

I shall speak of but one more visit to that earthly paradise and that the first one on my return home. The air was laden with an intense sultriness which

## CLUB PAPERS

was so oppressive that I could hardly keep my seat in the saddle as I followed again my way across the sand hills and up the valley path. The little stream was not singing that day but, showing now and then with a sullen light from which all sparkle was gone, it fell back with a sob and a moan. The trees swayed with sorrowful whispering and the flowers on lifeless stems drooped to earth.

As I emerged from the wood and gazed on their home how changed was the scene from the first day! All the calm and peacefulness were there in the little valley; but a frightful doom seemed to impend. Now the sun was hidden, and in the western sky lay great dark banks of clouds on which the gleam of lightning played at short intervals. I had never seen the heavens present so threatening an aspect, and after putting out my horse I sought the house with a sense of relief. The father met me at the door. His daughter had been overcome with the oppressive heat and had retired for a short time to her chamber.

Now the wind began to rise in fitful gusts; and, although neither hand was beyond the first quarter post on the dial of the tall clock, a darkness as of night was falling upon the landscape. The rolling thunder crept up steadily and rapidly from the black west and vivid flashes of lightning in chain and sheet swept over the tumbling clouds. The rooms were

## THE MYSTERY OF THE LIGHT

filled with weird sounds from the delicate instruments as the piercing light, forcing its way under the closed covers of the cases swept the sensitive chords. The rain fell in torrents, shutting the range of vision within the walls of the house. In the midst of a lull, bolt upon bolt of lightning fell and crash upon crash of thunder followed until it seemed that the roof of the house must give in and fall before the warring elements.

Just then his daughter, my love, came into the room faint, almost falling. I caught her in my arms and was about to put my lips to her forehead when, with a crash that rocked the foundations of the house, a blinding light came between us and we sank to the floor! I did not lose consciousness, although I was stunned and as she lay there in my embrace, seeming lifeless, I saw the flame playing about her forehead where I would have kissed her, where I did kiss her that day in the porch. For some time she was beyond our aid. We feared beyond recall. The storm abated and as she came back to strength, sunshine played upon the peaceful landscape; and in the eastern sky fragments of black clouds and irregular flashes of light, hangers on of the grand cloud army, were skulking away from the work of havoc that had been wrought.

For there was desolation in one part of the house, the laboratory. There the lightning had played

#### CLUB PAPERS

with the delicate electrical instruments, ruining some of them absolutely. In one corner, smouldering on the brick floor, were the charred remains of a cabinet which held many note books and all the formulae he had been so long in perfecting. I cannot describe her father's look of anguish, as he laid eyes on this precious wreck. Then suddenly his attitude and expression changed. "It was all for the best," I heard him say, and then he turned toward us with a calm, almost smiling face.

We were not long in repairing the damage to the house where we continued to pass many happy days; and the landscape was changing her golden autumn dress for one of sombre brown for winter wear, when I took my wife and her father with me to the city. In spite of his seeming calm and contentment, this sudden ending of his life's cherished work told heavily on him and he was glad when he was called away.

We often talk of her father, my wife and I — of his subtle intellect, his pure heart, his total indifference to worldly gain or applause; of his gentleness and kindliness and, above all, of his hopes to give the world the results of his study of the light — hopes which the light itself had so wantonly broken.

We have that musical instrument now; and, as my wife brings out its sweet harmonies, I dream of her father. "Oh!" I say to myself, "you away



from sordid strife and low, unhuman toil for gain — you lived with the masters in your study of the light, with the masters of painting and music and poetry. What heavenly manna was the light to them! What need of grosser human food had Angelo in those days of spiritual and mental activity on the scaffold of the Sistine Chapel, when the light flowed through his hand in flames of living color! What need of coarser food can touch the poet's thirst when the celestial light of some great truth is glowing in his heart to fill the unsatisfied craving of countless kindred souls! And the great composer — does he not quaff the nectar of the gods when heaven's sweet light sweeping across the tense chords of his brain makes them to throb with divinest harmonies, while, forgetful of earthly food and rest, he catches the musical mist and holds it in his mind till it is distilled in crystal drops and becomes food and warmth for us more common clay! ”