

THE FATE OF THE CROSSWAYS.



HE roads met and crossed in front of an angle of wayside grass, across which ran the wall of an olive-farm. Along the top of this wall a dozen or more pollard cypresses grew together, the elastic forwardness of their growth restrained by informal wattles. Two cypresses, unstinted in height, stood erect at either end of the dark hedge, with beautiful formality like towers, a little in advance of the others, since the wall made a shallow curve just where they rose. Against the wall, half-way up its grey surface, a stone seat had been built, a seat transformed by weather and use almost to a natural object.

It seemed as if the builders expected that many people would sit down on the long bench at that place; yet as I approached I only saw one figure in the centre—a woman's. Her dress was dark and her thin fingers lay on it at the knee, quite white and without movement of any kind. Her feet had such hold of the ground they seemed to chain it. But the veil round her head was fluttering and milky, her pale eyeballs drew in the light till they were full of its beatitude, and the whole face conveyed to the beholder such activity of an indwelling mind, in spite of the unusual features, that the impression weighed down one's breath. She seemed to be a goddess, to belong to the universe just by the way she sat in that common afternoon glow, beside that bit of wall.

I could not speak to her, and she did not move to look at me, although I felt she drew me into her eyes, as she drew the light. I stood before her, because I had to choose my road, for I was at crossways in my journey. Should I turn to right or left? As I hesitated and cast about, a most singular sense came over me that the seat was crowded. I could see nothing; but as one feels there is teeming life in the grass, or in the stream, when one's perception is sensitive with its own life, so I felt that seat occupied by presences, from the woman's figure in the centre to the cypress towers at each end. And I knew that as I was drawn into the goddess's eyes like the light, so these unseen companions of hers hung on my choice as earthly things hang on the changes of the weather. With a fear that was nearly blind, and intensity that was actual anguish, I made my choice. . . . I will not say whether to right or left.

But I had not gone far along the road, before all the fierce dogs in the neighbouring farms began to howl in chorus, as if it had been midnight instead of afternoon. I looked back—the woman was gone and the seat was empty with the extreme voidness of a church at mid-day.

Then the truth came to me clear.

I had been in the presence of Hecate—the dogs howled again—of Hecate and the Souls of the Dead who wander with her.

I sank down on my new road—if with adoration or mere collapse I cannot tell.

Ye Fates of the Wheel of Necessity, Clotho, Lachesis and Atropa, ye are nothing as compared with the Fate of the Crossways, Hecate, who wanders with the Dead.

The dogs no longer howled, but whimpered, and I went on direct.