

FULL CYCLE

by *RIPLEY WEBB*

*The story of Twin Souls,
their incarnation down to Earth from the Spiritual Realms
and of their later transition back up to the Spirit Worlds.*

Part 1: **GENESIS**

Many, many years ago God called to Him one of His Servants, by name Tendor, a spirit who had served Him long and faithfully, and was now to receive a new commission. Into the arms of Tendor God placed a tiny flame, burning pure and bright with never a flicker, a spark of divine Love which was destined to travel through experience and learn of its Father's Love. Tenderly God's servant nursed this tiny flame, rejoicing in his heart that God had entrusted him with the task of guarding and guiding the path of this tiny babe.

As time passed, the embryo spirit gathered form and intelligence, scarcely discernible at first but gradually drawing to itself the substance of the Spirit World as an earthly seed draws the means to manifest as a plant.

Issuing from the Eternal Father-Mother of all Creation, the tiny spirit knew only perfection, lacking any form of experience. Only love and truth and beauty surrounded it, but it could not fully appreciate these as it had as yet no means of comparison with their opposites. One cannot paint a picture with only white paint! It is from shadow that we find the meaning of sunlight. If we had lived only in the Arctic, tropical heat would have no meaning for us. If there were no opposites to love we should take it for granted and be unable to appreciate it.

During its descent into experience the young spirit was forced to undergo the painful experience of parturition into its masculine and feminine characteristics, as has been explained in the preface. Thus there grew up two spirits, twin souls, to whom Tendor gave the names of Michael and Ann.

These heavenly twins knew not evil, knew nothing that was not a direct attribute of God the Perfect. In accordance with their Father's inscrutable purpose they were sent forth that they might partake of the fruits of knowledge and, after refinement by the fires of experience, *know* themselves to be pure and good through deep knowledge of the meaning of those terms. And because they were children of God they knew within themselves that they carried an assurance of their eventual return to the place that was theirs.

Through long ages Tendor brought up his children, for so he thought of them. As they descended step by step into denser and still denser form, he watched over the fashioning of the bodies most suited for the manifestation in each deepening state of density, for the Spirit World has as many

distinct planes of existence as an onion has skins, each forming an outer protecting skin to the previous one and providing a means of contacting the experiences which that particular plane has to offer. These planes are co-existent with our physical world, invisible to our slow reacting sense of sight, yet as real and concrete as the invisible waves which carry our wireless programmes.

As a spirit descends, plane by plane, into the depths of experience, a body, complete with the organs of sense suitable for manifestation in that particular sphere, has to be donned in order that those senses may respond to the vibration of things comprising that sphere. Without such a garment it would not be found possible either to express oneself or to receive impressions in local surroundings, and the experiences in that particular plane would be fruitless.

Not so many years ago such an idea would have been ridiculed. But as we begin to understand something of atomic structure, that all matter is fluid, composed of electrons and protons in varying number and degree of cohesion, we see that spirit form is just as comprehensible as material form. This is no place for a scientific discourse but the facts are there for all to search and find, proven and accepted. The heresies of yesterday are the facts of today.

The earlier stages of spirit education are of *too* rarefied a quality to bear description here so we will watch the progress of Michael and Ann from the time they reached realms more approximating our own. So far they had acquired the elements of wisdom, the principles of truth and the significance of sanctity. The bodies which now formed their external covering were of etheric structure but of Human shape. Certain organs found in physical bodies were non-existent or vestigial but otherwise the forms were almost exact replicas of Human forms, the principal difference being in the density of the atomic structure, that is to say, in the composition of the atoms forming the etheric body and the relation of the protons to the electrons in those atoms. To Michael and Ann their bodies were as substantial as that of any mortal is to its owner and they would have laughed heartily at being described as phantoms.

Like all others on their plane of existence they wore robes of handsome design and made of a delicately textured material not unlike silk in its quality and sheen though infinitely finer and in endless shades of colour of far wider range than is to be found in earthly existence. In the Spirit World an individual is known by the degree of light he radiates and by the colour of his garments. The divine spark within the spirit radiates so strongly as to cause the clothing to glow with an opalescent light which gives a wonderfully beautiful effect. The higher the degree of a spirit the finer are the colours he can use. It is not possible therefore, for a spirit of a low standard of evolution to robe himself in garments of high degree any more than it is possible for him to endure for any time a state of existence higher than that for which he is equipped.

It was during their present state of existence that Tendor explained to Michael and Ann that Earth was destined to be the place in which both of them would experience the densest form of life. He had pointed out that their present habitat was the anteroom where dwelt those who were on their way to inhabit the Dark Star of bitter experience, an adventure that affrighted not a few of the more timid ones but which drew evolving souls as a flame draws moths in the night. These were aware that in this most material of all planes of endeavour they could learn all that their hearts yearned to know in a far shorter time than would be possible had the same experience to be undergone vicariously in a school less hard.

When Michael heard of their objective he was thrilled beyond measure as he always was at the prospect of some new venture. Ann took the news more quietly. Being in affinity with Michael, eternal feminine to his eternal masculine, she viewed anything that might involve their separation, with dismay. The very thought of life without Michael was, to her, anathema, it was the negation of the first principle of their lives. For the love that bound these two was fundamental, having its roots in pure Spirit and as such it was unquestionable.

The two were living together in a house of their own design and construction. This dwelling was the subject of much tumult and not a little light-hearted merriment in their lives. In this plane of Spirit, house-building is scarcely less difficult than it is on Earth. On Earth thought precedes activity; in Spirit thought *is* activity. True, the spirit materials do not have to be manufactured or quarried and there is no problem of space or expense, for all the materials of the building are assembled by the power of thought. Lest this statement sound impossible to finite ears, let it be remembered that all substances have their atomic composition fixed by natural law. Steel, bricks, glass, wood, all obey a prescribed law. To assemble their etheric counterparts therefore, it is only necessary to know the formula for their atomic composition and to use the power inherent in all spirits, of ordering the atoms of the Spirit World to re-arrange themselves in the manner desired. This is done by concentrated thought.

In mortal life houses are first constructed in thought and then the thought is transferred to paper, thus gaining the first semblance of form. When the plans have been approved materials are prepared and brought to the site; building can then commence. In the World of Spirit from construction in thought to construction in material is but one step. The builder concentrates his mind on the quality, shape, colour, etc., of the material he wants and it assembles itself by atomic re-arrangement before his eyes. Each course of bricks, the fashioning of the woodwork, the correctness of angle or elevation is affected by the power of thought of the spirit builder. And in accordance with his skill so is the result. But he has one great advantage over his brother in physical life, the spiritual house, being created by thought, can be "undone" by the same method. The beginner can "rub out" his mistakes and start again.

Michael's and Ann's first efforts at house building were subject to many "rubbings out" and reconstruction and they would wrangle happily together as they laboured, for all the world like two children building sand castles. It was noticeable, however, that Michael's was the dominant mind, especially in the exterior design, though he gave Ann pride of place in the interior decoration and furnishing. It is easy to imagine the pleasure to be obtained in the arrangement of colour schemes in such a home. One shade after another could be tried and compared, in materials resembling silks, brocades, damask and others unfamiliar to our earthly minds, conjured up, tried, discarded or altered as the mood dictated.

There was of course no kitchen in this spirit home, for spirit bodies do not require to be fed, the rays of Spirit power which flow freely in the atmosphere do all that is needful in that respect. But in the main a visitor from Earth would find little difference from a modern, tastefully furnished house designed to the order of a cultured and wealthy occupant. From the first Michael had been the gardener. Though he had studied the subject intensively at the horticultural college he found it difficult to settle upon a suitable layout for the extensive grounds. Time and again he would "rub out" his previous efforts and start entirely afresh. So many attractive designs could be assembled and so many flowers, many of which have never bloomed on Earth, could be planted.

In Spirit, flowers do not grow and die, there is no cycle of the seasons. If full blooms are created, full blooms they remain as long as the owner desires, drawing their sustenance from the all-pervading Spirit power and giving in return their lovely essences to the atmosphere. In all it was very good fun, and Tendor, who had his being in a higher plane than this, would drop in at odd times to inspect the work in progress and listen gravely to the ideas that filled the eager minds of the young creators. For this is how education progresses in the land of Spirit, through the inherent desire of the spirit to create.

Inside the house they each had their own set of rooms. One room in each suite was designed so that they might withdraw and rest, one being used as a study or work room where they could be alone with their thoughts or their books if they wished, and a third for robing, where they kept the garments they used for special occasions. In the centre of the house was a long room running the whole length of the house, in which they would receive their visitors or occupy when they sought each other's company. There was not much furniture, the *decor* being mainly through colour schemes, aided by flowers and a few paintings they had done. But there were couches on which they could recline and chairs on which to sit.

Tiredness, as such, is unknown in the Spirit World. But there is a form of mental depletion due to various causes, which enjoins the remedy of rest and recuperation. On such occasions a spirit will be glad to retire into seclusion and recline upon a couch while rays of healing power are directed upon the depleted body, revitalising it. There is no sun and therefore no day and night, the light being provided by the all-pervading Spirit radiance. But a depleted spirit, or one who wishes to meditate at length will often withdraw within himself, building up a sort of misty cloud round his person which has the effect of shutting out all external influences. Anyone found thus is seldom disturbed.

Spirits are just as careful about their dress as when they inhabit a physical body. Though spirit robes do not wear out, a change in colour or texture is often made for aesthetic reasons while special excursions demand special robes. A descent into the realm of physical matter for whatever reason or an ascent into a higher realm for a temporary visit, will require a special robe of a lower or higher vibration to be consistent with the conditions to be found there. Low Astral influences can tarnish a robe and it has to be renewed, while one for visits to superior planes requires lengthy preparation and needs much skill. An existing robe can either be dematerialised if no longer required or stored in the robing room for future use.

There was a lake close to the house where Michael and Ann used to swim and dive happily together or with their friends. Distance being no object and climatic variations unknown, a visit to the seashore presented no problem. The waters of Spirit are always pleasantly warm and exhilarating and the drops dry off the body just as spirit evaporates from the human skin. Michael had a boat on the lake in which they sometimes made voyages. It was of graceful lines having neither sail nor engine for it was propelled by the universal motive power of thought. After some practice it becomes quite easy to propel a boat and carry on a conversation at the same time.

Movement on land is by two methods. The first is by walking as we do on Earth but progress is effortless and can be speeded up as desired, far beyond the capabilities of an earthly body. When great distances are to be covered or another plane of existence is to be visited, the usual method is to concentrate the thoughts on the destination, hold that thought firmly fixed in the mind, and then take a leap into space, as it were, so that the spirit body follows the thought and arrives.

There is a method used sometimes on Earth in equitation when training riders to jump. The instructor will say to the pupil: "Throw your heart over and your body will follow." It is something like that only easier because there is no fear of physical injury.

The education of Michael and Ann was progressively planned in consultation with advanced spirits who had made the subject their speciality. In the Spirit World education is voluntary like every other pursuit, in fact the main problem is to restrain eager students from trying to absorb more knowledge than they are capable of assimilating. There is no fixed scholastic curriculum as in earthly schools, instruction being given more on the lines of our university training. The object is to provide a wide experience of matters pertaining to the line of evolution the student has before him rather than mental exercises designed to develop mind and memory.

Facts do not have to be memorised for it is only necessary to concentrate upon a question for the facts to come into the mind. This is done by tapping the Akashic Records. Every spoken word, every framed thought, every event that ever happened in the Universe, is recorded upon the screen of time at the moment it occurred. By directing the thoughts upon some desired fact an adept may cause laws of selection to work directing the enquiry to the pigeon hole where the desired information is recorded. The higher the development of the enquirer the more profound will be the information thus obtained. Educational organisation can therefore be concentrated upon the application of facts to life without the strain of collating or memorising facts.

The instruction is far, far wider than any given on Earth. For example, spiritual mathematics have twice the octave of the subject as at present understood by Human minds. Good government is studied but in principle rather than practice. Geography and its allied subjects are not confined to the terrestrial globe but embrace the Universe. The Arts are studied and expressed in terms of the undimensional aspect of the Spirit World. Perspective, for instance, will have a totally different meaning in conditions not subject to three-dimensional time or space.

Moreover, the scope of expression is far wider for there are colours in use which would be beyond the range of physical receptivity together with infinite shades of each colour, growing in range and depth as the consciousness of the individual expands. Sound expands infinitely beyond the range of Human ears and with the aid of thought transference instead of Human speech, it is easy to realise that the field of expression is almost boundless apart from the state of development of the individual. Added to this is an almost infinite capacity for appreciation. Art in Human existence can only be viewed through a keyhole; not until the individual is freed from Human restrictions will its full beauty be comprehended.

Lost in wonder at all they saw, seeing with the untarnished vision of pure Spirit, Michael and Ann wandered at will through this land of marvels. There were halls to visit in which were shown the etheric counterparts of Earthly machinery used since the dawn of history. Here could be studied the principles of applied engineering underlying each machine. Here would assemble scientists lately returned from Earth who were eager to study certain aspects of their craft which had eluded them during their incarnation. For it is in the realm of Spirit that the underlying principles of all great inventions have their genesis.

When it is time for some great new invention to be externalised into the hands of Mankind, some spirit incarnate who is judged sufficiently knowledgeable is chosen and invited to visit the laboratories of Spirit during his sleep state when the spirit is able temporarily to free itself from its mortal prison.

Thus the conception is implanted in his mind, later to be externalised into his physical mentality through his creative faculty. It is not the fault of the spirit designers if the invention is used as a means of destruction instead of construction.

There were many classes for instruction in the Arts to choose from and at some of these the great artists of history would demonstrate their skill for the benefit of students. At rare intervals Tendor would thrill his charges by taking them to some vantage point whence they could witness the movements of the constellations of the Universe. They would stand in amazement at the prospect displayed before them, the endless array of stars and planets, evolving, changing, growing, decreasing, in perfect obedience to the cycle ordained by God.

It was while Michael was in his study examining a chart of certain planetary aspects of the Universe, that he sensed the near approach of Tendor. Hurrying out to greet his beloved Guide, Michael saw at once from his expression that he had come on no ordinary mission. Michael's eyes lighted in anticipation, he was always ready for something new. Answering an enquiry from Tendor he sent out his thoughts questing for Ann's whereabouts. He found that she was resting in her room. Though Tendor would have waited patiently for her to appear Michael impatiently demanded that she be wakened. Entering her room he found her reclining on her couch surrounded by the cloud-like screen which denoted that she was in the spiritual equivalent of sleep.

With all his force he concentrated his thoughts in an endeavour to pierce the cloud. With no result. In the end Tendor took a hand and because of his powerful personality he succeeded. There were signs of movement in the misty cloud and, like a child pushing its head out of the bed-clothes, Ann's tousled head appeared out of its concealment. With one flash of his mighty mind Tendor acquainted her of his mission, then the two left her to complete her toilet and returned to the central room.

It is not easy to paint a pen picture of a Human being; it is far more difficult to describe adequately a Spirit being. To begin with all Spirits are of one age, there are no old folk or youngsters except those who have just returned from life on Earth and these gradually rejuvenate or grow up until they reach an age corresponding to our age of thirty or so. Then there are no imperfections of physique, for spirit bodies are well set up and proportionate. Yet there is no commonness of type for it is far easier to distinguish character and it is this which makes the distinction together with the state of development of the individual.

Although Tendor and Michael had the same well-developed bodies there was a wealth of difference in their appearance. It was easy to see that Tendor was a being of wisdom and high degree because of the character apparent in his august features as well as the colouring and radiance of his robes. In Michael's features was depicted the clear, eager innocence of youth, his eyes moved restlessly to and fro as if seeking some new thing while he had not the assured grace of movement of the more advanced spirit.

Presently Ann appeared to join the party. In contradistinction to Michael's dark locks she was fair, and she wore her hair in the Grecian style, bound by a fillet. Her complexion was ivory-clear and delicately coloured and she had long artistic hands with tapering fingers. She was dressed in a robe draped in the Grecian style and cut with what we might call expensive simplicity. It was, of course, designed for her and created by those who make a speciality of such matters, though any Spirit can provide themselves with a robe by the mere effort of thought

creation. But there are robes and robes and a special robe needs special skill and instruction in its creation. The clinging folds of the garment showed off the lines of her figure to perfection and gave her added grace as she moved. The colours she had chosen were pastel shades of apple green and the colouring was skillfully used to accentuate the folds of the material. The effect was both charming and graceful, glowing as it did with her own natural brightness.

When they were all three seated Tendor began to speak. It must be realised that in the Spirit World the larynx is only used for speaking to those who have just passed over. No one would dream of confining himself to the clumsy and limited mode of communication used by mortals, when the infinitely variable method of thought-transference is available. When we mortals wish to speak we first conceive of an idea. This may be a wonderful conception, say, the colouring of a sunset. We have to fit that idea into the bottle-neck of words, our vocabulary being ill-designed for such descriptions. Moreover we cannot be certain that the idea we wish to convey has in fact been transmitted to our listeners.

In the Spirit World the thought is projected and received in its original conception, as if we had painted a good representation of the sunset and handed it to our listeners by way of description. Such freedom of communication is essential when one considers that not only are the spirit senses infinitely more sensitive than ours but range of colours, sound tones and other external stimuli are far wider in scope than anything we know of on Earth.

To the Twins Tendor's voice came as a beautifully modulated range of mental impressions. He understood the art of painting a mental picture in a way that delighted the mind, for his powerful wisdom enabled him to people his pictures with living impressions. And he could present his hearers with a vision, lifting them up and carrying them with him into a world that had every aspect of reality except its concrete presence. It is quite impossible to translate such pictures within the compass of words. We Humans are almost inarticulate in comparison with the artists of the land of Spirit.

He spoke to the two young Spirits of their preparation for their forthcoming incarnation on Earth. He sketched for them the type of experience he thought would be best for the development of each of their characters. Always he stressed that whatever they decided must be to a large extent dependent on their own free will. Michael expressed little anxiety as to the future. It was an emotion he knew little of and that only vicariously, while the attractive prospect of experiencing through acute physical contact enthralled him. He was not aware that this urge was shared by all evolving spirits in greater or less degree and was the motive power that impelled them through existence and kept them on their way back towards the Source from which they emanated.

"If you decide that you would like to have this experience now, Michael," explained Tensor, "an opportunity is opening up that I consider most suitable. I have discussed the matter with the Sages and we find that there is a thread in the scroll of Destiny that will bring you the experience best calculated to teach you the lessons you need for your advancement. There is also another thread which interweaves with this one that would be suitable for Ann. But she would incarnate some time after you, Michael, about three years of Earth time." He smiled reflectively as he added, "This time business. It is like a dragging chain about the feet of Earth folk, it sets a limit upon everything that they do and dominates their very minds. But try and remember when you get there that time is an attribute of Human existence only."

"Why is it so difficult to remember these things when we are in Human bodies?" asked Ann.

"If incarnating spirits could carry with them even a faint recollection of the joys and beauties of this sphere it would make it impossible for them to remain in tenancy of a physical body. To drink deep from the cup of experience it is necessary to contact life in its lowest form of manifestation. In order to do this you have to slow down your vibrations to a very slow rate and come under the cumbersome laws which govern that form of matter. To one who remembered what life really is, the ache to return would be so intolerable that no spirit could hold down an Earthly body. It is a merciful provision of God that such memories are temporarily veiled."

Michael was still struggling with the implication of the time factor. At length he gave it up and decided to leave it to actual experience. "Tell us about the experiences we shall have," he begged.

"I will tell you this," said Tendor, smiling at Michael's eagerness. "Before you can come into contact with Earth experiences it is necessary for you to wear an additional body, an intermediate one between the one you are now wearing and the physical form that you must inhabit. The difference in the rate of vibration of these two is so great that they could not function together in close contact. It would be like over-filling a balloon. Between the two there must be a soul body, or as some call it an *emotional body*, which functions in a higher plane than the physical, yet lower than the spiritual. It is at once a means of more easily contacting the mortal body and of forming a protection to the spirit body to which it acts as a kind of cushion against the harmful influences of Earth. You will find it a very difficult body to wear for it is the seat of the emotions, it is the engine that will drive your physical body. It will try and take control and take you anywhere but where you want to go. You must learn to be its master and not its servant. That is done by exercising your spirit will through the etheric mind of this soul body and if you are not careful you will find the soul body getting the message all wrong and doing something quite different from what you intended."

"It sounds terribly complicated," confessed Ann, with a little frown of puzzlement.

"I think it sounds marvellous," said Michael, his eyes a gleam. "You will find," continued Tendor, rather grimly, "that the mind of this soul body through which you will have to filter your real intentions, will operate equally in the direction of evil as for good. The object of this is to enable you to strike a balance between the Light of Knowledge and the darkness of ignorance," A sad little smile played about his features as he added, "The Powers of Darkness will see to it that you have the aspect of evil, or ignorance as I prefer to call it, well and truly placed before you."

"Supposing we fail to control this body with such a lot of names?" queried Ann.

"There is no such thing as failure. You have a test to pass, one which you have set yourself to accomplish. When you pass it depends upon the effort you make. If you do not pass the test in the experience you are about to undergo you will have other chances of doing so. You will always find fresh opportunities opening out before you. In time you will accomplish what you set out to do, however many distractions may deter you from your object. The power of the Spirit can and will win in the end. It is like a powerful magnet drawing you on. You might even return to Earth if during your first incarnation you had created so many obstacles to your progress, made so many mistakes, that only in that same condition could you undo and overcome them. It is the effort that counts, the responsibility is yours, no other can accomplish your mission for

you. The scales of divine justice are accurately balanced, there must be nothing owing if you are to progress. "

"Will we be conscious of this emotional body?" enquired Michael.

"You will not be conscious of any body but your physical one," replied Tendor. "But you will be conscious of being swayed by your emotions. You may find them to be violent at times but remember that they are not meant to be utterly suppressed. Rather should they be controlled, like spirited horses."

"But," protested Ann, "I don't see how we can control this excitable body if our memories are clouded over and we cannot remember what you are telling us."

"You will know," observed Tendor with a tender smile. "There will be the Spirit speaking through you, the divine voice of Conscience. If you exert the desire to know and to understand what perplexes you, you will get the answer from within, for by enquiring within you will contact your real self, which knows. It is the power of the Spirit within you that you must try and tap, that power which accomplishes nearly everything for you here. You are apt to take that power for granted but you will find that the Earth folk often deny that such a thing exists, so cut off are they from realities. Many of them deny that we, as spirits, have any existence. Some deny that there is a God."

The twins gazed at their guide in amazement. This was altogether beyond them. If they had known the meaning of exaggeration they would have accused him of it.

"Remember," he went on, investing his words with all the force of his being, "that the driving force that will guide you safely through incarnation is the power of the Spirit. But you will not be conscious of it as you are here. You must try and remember to contact it within and let it flow freely through your being. Let it flow consciously through your three bodies, spirit, soul and physical. If you do not, the soul body may sway out of alignment with the other two and then the channel of Spirit power will become choked and the power distorted. Then the power is unable to flow freely and the soul and physical bodies will be starved.

Eventually some parts of those bodies may become atrophied and illness or disease may result. Or the brain of the soul body and later, that of the physical body, may get sick from being insufficiently supplied with power and thus get unbalanced. The ideas which the Spirit tries to get through will get distorted or biased because part of the brain is not working properly. In this way some fine spiritual ideal may be wrongly represented, inverted as it were. The results may be terrible and very far from what the Spirit intended. Which shows that you must not judge entirely by appearances nor condemn another without knowing the whole circumstances. God reserves to Himself the onus of judging and condemning, no one else is capable of doing so not being in possession of the full facts."

Feeling that he had given his beloved children enough food for prolonged thought, Tendor now took his leave. It was characteristic of him that he always treated the Twins with the same respect he would have shown to an advanced spirit. He never displayed his authority over them nor did he allow his parenthood by adoption to become possessive.

After he had gone Michael and Ann remained in thoughtful discussion on what he had said. For the first time the magnitude and the potentialities of the task before them came into prominence. Then feeling that they were in need of spiritual inspiration and refreshment they went off to a Spiritual World concert. Though music of any kind can be 'switched on' by thought processes, nevertheless concerts of many kinds are given which are eagerly attended. It is only necessary to throw out one's thoughts in order to ascertain when one is due for presentation.

This concert was held in the open, in some gardens designed for such entertainments. After a swift approach the Twins alighted at the edge of the flower gardens which bordered the immense amphitheatre in which the concert was to be given and made their way through the banks of glorious blooms. These flowers are specially selected and arranged according to their quality so that the scents they give off bring the visitor into a suitable frame of mind for the entertainment which is to be given. Soothed and uplifted by the lovely scene, Michael and Ann reached their seats in the amphitheatre. At one end was the stage for the musicians who were already tuning their instruments. Behind them was a background of trees, surely the most magnificent drop scene that could be devised. The foliage was dense and of a dark green with the branches so intertwined that there was an appearance of solidity and yet there was the knowledge that they were alive, for the gentle breeze made an almost imperceptible movement among them.

Presently the conductor arrived and after exchanging greetings with the orchestra and audience, began to explain the melodies he was about to present and the symbology of their arrangement. Then he tapped with his baton and the first work commenced.

How shall the beauty of that scene be expressed? To compare it with Earthly music would be like comparing a Festival Hall symphony with the strummings of a beginner. The spirit ear is attuned to a vastly wider range of sound than an Earthly one and this fact alone makes it impossible to convey any conception of the heights that are attainable. It is entrancing to those who have an infinite capacity to be entranced, that is all one can say. But to the harmony of sound is added a new delight. It is beginning to be understood on Earth that the sound vibration of a note of music has its counterpart in colour. There are some incarnate spirits who can see these colours and interpret them, albeit they are a sorry representation of the original. But in the freedom of Spirit these colour harmonies are clear and lovely to watch.

In the Spirit World the love of the Great Spirit is very near and dear to everyone, for a Spirit knows the truth, that God *is* all these wonderful things that make up the joys of existence. But nowhere is the sense of the omnipresence of God more real than in the experience of a colour-harmony such as this, the audience is indeed bathed in Spirit, the experience is more of a Sacrament than an entertainment. So to Michael and Ann there came a glorious sense of easement and at-one-ment with each other and with all other spirits, a wonderful sense of Brotherhood, as they watched the lovely symphony of colour playing upon the dark background of living trees in consonance with the aural harmony of the orchestra. The lighter passages of music were represented by darting shafts of brilliant colour while the deeper notes and more sombre passages were seen as broader and slower moving bands of deeper shades. Throughout this melody of colour were golden threads indicating the *motif*.

By means of this kaleidoscopic display of sound and colour the composer was able to take his audience with him into unimagined heights. Through this expressive medium he was able to interpret the meaning of Spirit as it appeared to him, in a way that was impossible even through the free channel of thought-transference.

The language of symbology is the language of Spirit in its highest aspect and only through artistic channels can it be expressed. When the last sweet notes of the symphony had died away through the trees the audience stood for a while in grateful praise of the Great Spirit for this lovely manifestation of Himself. In conclusion they sent out a grateful thought to composer, conductor and members of the orchestra for the part they had played in this spiritual treat. Then they made their way out of the crowded auditorium. There is no overcrowding in the World of Spirit. For one thing there is no need for haste, no last bus to catch. And there is none of that flatness which greets those who emerge into a workaday world after such a spiritual treat as Earth can afford. Those who desire can, of course, use the swift means of dispersal at their command and take instant flight to their homes. But on this occasion Michael and Ann preferred to make their way slowly out through the banks of flowers greeting friends and discussing the symbology of the symphony they had just witnessed.

Soon after this Tendor called to explain to Michael that he proposed to escort him to a higher plane for the purpose of making his decision regarding his forthcoming incarnation. Michael expressed himself ready to accept this responsibility and after certain preparations Tendor and he sat together in Michael's study. After a prayer Tendor took both Michael's hands in his and told him to lift his thoughts as high as he could. Michael did as he was told and presently began to feel as if he was being drawn out of himself. He remained thus in a semiconscious state for some little time. Then he heard Tendor telling him to open his eyes. Immediately he found himself blinking at the sudden increase in light. The Cosmic rays were much more intense in this higher sphere but after a few minutes he got used to the new conditions and began to look about him.

He discovered that they were in a large building standing under a central dome. It was of vast proportions made of stone of a restful shade of grey-green and Michael found that gazing up into its dim recesses was a comfort to his eyes. The walls were covered with a tracery of design which betokened a very high degree of skill while the roof was supported by fluted columns, the design of which accentuated the height and grandeur of the hall.

Presently Tendor introduced him to a Professor who had come to greet them. The newcomer looked Michael over keenly and then asked him to accompany him to his room. Here he underwent a strange sort of examination. The Professor did not examine his body but produced queer-looking charts which appeared to record his progress somewhat on the lines of a horoscope. It was all quite meaningless to Michael, nevertheless from the charts the Professor was able to give him a clear and lucid statement of his abilities and weaknesses, the conquests and the defeats which made up his progress to date. From the same source the professor worked out the type of problem that was likely to face him in accordance with his destiny and explained the course of an incarnation that would be likely to provide the lessons he most needed. Deeply interested Michael followed him to the end. Then he watched the other take up a sort of tablet in which he inscribed certain symbols which, he explained, represented the essential factors required by his incarnation. Finally, he got up and went to the end of the room where he inserted the tablet into a slot. Then he came back and resumed his seat.

"We shall have to wait a little while," he remarked, smiling at Michael's puzzled expression. Then he went on to explain. "I will try and make clear what I am doing. You must understand that every incarnating spirit is doing so in accordance with his destiny which has been worked out for him by the Great Spirit, the whole thing being carried out by the Lords of Karma. These are great beings who are entrusted by God with the task of administering divine justice. It is they who consult the Akashic Record and weigh up the progress of each spirit and decide upon his

further opportunities. They trace the destiny of each one of us, and there is no appeal against their decision. In accordance with that destiny each spirit is allowed free will to progress according to his ability. So it is that you are allowed to select the manner in which you will learn the lessons the Earth has to offer you. Your destiny is recorded in our archives and the tablet I have just prepared will be received by our workers and by a process of selection they will abstract an incarnation which, according to destiny, follows a line that promises to provide what you require. When you see that record presently you will be able to judge whether you think you are ready to face the difficulties it offers, if you are not, why then we will find something easier." He smiled with a confidence that Michael found inspiring at this profound moment in his career.

"What about Ann?" Michael ventured to ask. "Will we have to be parted?"

"That depends entirely upon you," observed the Professor.

"Upon you and Ann. If you decide that you will learn your lessons to the best advantage by incarnating together then no doubt you will do so. There is no compulsion either way." As he spoke there was the silvery tinkle of a bell.

The Professor got up and went over to the slot whence he took what appeared to be a roll, somewhat like the scrolls used in an automatic piano.

At his request Michael followed him out of the room and into another in which the bright rays were much subdued. Greatly interested, he watched the professor insert the roll into a machine he had never seen before. A moment later a screen at the other end of the room became diffused with rays from the machine. By manipulating certain controls the Professor caused these rays to condense into a clearly defined picture. As Michael watched enthralled, he saw a number of threads of different colours moving endlessly across the screen into what might be a loom or weaving machine. On the other side of the loom appeared a piece finished material woven in intricate pattern from the coloured threads.

The Professor kept up a running commentary as the picture unrolled itself. He showed Michael the thread representing the incarnation suggested for him and to his intense relief pointed out another that might be selected by Ann. He showed how their threads met and crossed and how other threads met and influenced their own. Finally he came to the pattern, running the picture through again for the purpose of explaining its meaning.

"This shows you what you should aim to accomplish during your incarnation. Though what you actually attain may be some. thing quite different. You cannot escape your destiny, but you are master of the manner in which you handle that destiny and the time you take to accomplish it."

With breathless interest Michael watched the unfolding of the future. It was a tremendous moment in his life. When the picture was ended the Professor ran it through a third time and now Michael was able to pick out the points where faults were indicated in the weaving of his suggested incarnation, indicating crises which would give him opportunities for overcoming obstacles and thus gaining a step in his evolution.

There was a final talk with the Professor, who pointed out that his acceptance of this incarnation at this time was entirely voluntary. But Michael was definite in his acceptance and only too eager to commence his new experience.

The Professor smiled understandingly. "They are mostly the same, they all want to get on with the business." He wished his visitor a happy visit to Earth and then rose to conduct him back to the hall where Tendor awaited him. Eager to acquaint Ann with all that had transpired, Michael was not sorry when Tendor aided him to make the transition back to his own realm. He was fast becoming overwhelmed by the intense light and high rate of vibration of a sphere in which he was not equipped to dwell.

Soon Michael and Ann were alone in their house where he retailed with infinite enjoyment the experience he had just undergone. Ann began to feel rather miserable as she realised from the recital that her beloved was to be taken from her for a period, into a dark tunnel which led to goodness knew what terrible experiences. But Michael knew not fear and revelled in the thought of what lay before him. Thrilled by what he had seen, he longed to get to grips with the substance of this queer world of matter, which could be fashioned into symbols of such portentous nature and such far-reaching results. When the recital was over the two Twins, as if by common consent, stood for a moment in silent meditation and allowed themselves to be caught up in a blissful at-one-ment with the Great Spirit, an action so usual in the Spirit World and yet so vitally renewing on every occasion. Not only did Michael and Ann feel that they were individually at-one with their Father but were mutually drawn together into a state of complete unity. It seemed as if they had indeed melted their personalities into one. It is the purest form of attraction of male and female which we call love, manifesting in lower or higher degree according to the plane on which it is expressed.

It will be realised that sexual attraction, as we understand the term, has no place in the realm of Spirit, being an attribute of physical expression manifested through the emotional body. In the higher realms the same urge manifests as a pure expression of love, which means unity with the object loved, just as loving God means unity or at-one-ment with Him. The realisation of this fact throws a powerful light upon our understanding of that much abused word, love.

There is therefore a direct connection between physical desire and the pure flame of love. But it varies in its mode of expression because of the emotional stimulus exerted by the soul-body which is avid for the deepest form of experience and, if its influence is allowed to operate unchecked, may drive the individual to depths of perversion. It has truly been said that love turns the wheels of the world, but the real power behind it is the eternal Spirit force which emanates from God.

Soon after this Michael began to experience what he called "funny fits". There being no illness on the Spirit plane and tiredness being easily corrected, it was something new to him. He found that his thoughts would suddenly and without cause become accentuated in a certain direction, or he would lose control of them. Accustomed as he was to having complete control over himself, he found this most disconcerting. On one occasion he and Ann were visiting an exhibition of garments and materials in current use on Earth. Some of these they tried on and shook with laughter at the sights they presented, especially when the curator told them that they had got the male and female garments mixed up. Suddenly Michael's features became convulsed and he went a fiery red. Tearing off the garments he was wearing, he stamped on them. Then he turned blazing eyes on Ann and - vanished.

Sorely troubled, Ann fought back the sympathetic emotion she felt and sent out a thought ray to contact her beloved. Finding that he had gone home she swiftly followed. He was lying exhausted upon his couch, too depleted even to withdraw into the mists of oblivion. Anything

less than radiant health was a stranger to Ann, and in her distress she summoned the being who never failed her. Tendor came on the instant and after a glance at Michael sensed the trouble. Bending over the couch he placed his hands upon his forehead. Ann, watching, could see the shafts of power and healing that passed into the body of her beloved, rekindling the radiance within him which had become dulled. At length the guide desisted and turned to her with a reassuring smile.

"You have no reason to worry over this event," he said; "in fact, I expected it. It is due to the fact that he is beginning to assume his new emotional body of which I told you. This ferment, which is merely uncontrolled emotion, is a sign that Michael's time is rapidly approaching." He turned again to the couch. "You, my dear son, will soon accustom yourself to this new garment so that it does not get stretched, as it were. Do not struggle or resist, you will only make it more difficult to assume. Just remain poised and calm and all will be well."

"I don't like it," complained Michael, still affected by the new and disturbing sensation.

Tendor's eyes twinkled. He did not offer any further aid.

Ann supposed that he wished to make Michael use his own will to overcome his troubles. At length Michael made the effort and sat up. Very soon he was his old laughing self. Tendor was obviously pleased.

"If you go on like that," he said, "you will find no difficulty in controlling your emotions on Earth."

"It was a nasty experience," admitted Michael. "It just seemed to take hold of me and shake me; I was quite helpless."

Ann, recovering from her alarm, observed, "It does seem a dreadful place we are going to. I don't like this idea of not being able to control oneself."

Tendor said, "It is only dreadful to those who dread, to those who shut Spirit out of their lives. Fear is a greedy weed which entwines itself round the mind till the unfortunate victim comes to believe the bonds are real and cannot be loosened. Remember that there is a lovely side to physical life. The emotional mind which is developing in you now, together with the emotional body, will pull both ways. Just as you may savour the deep shadows so you will taste of the bright side of earthly life. There is family life, for instance, you have not yet experienced the joys of mother love, the sweet love that a mother gives to the child she bears. The early years of parenthood can be a supreme joy. I trust that you will both be parents on Earth. Try and remember that you are custodians of those young lives even as I am your custodian. You must not be possessive of your children nor exact from them a loyalty you have not earned. You may win the love of your children, you may not demand it. They will be a sacred trust given into your care by the Great Spirit and your treatment of them will be by way of a test of your progress. It will be for you to guard and guide them until they are as well equipped as you can make them to accept responsibility for themselves."

The words sent a thrill coursing through Michael's being. He had forgotten the storm which had passed. The thought that he was about to become a man, a begetter of men, filled his mind with longing for this new experience. Hitherto his love for Ann had been on such a high plane that he

had accepted it as he accepted all other aspects of life. The idea of loving someone else gave him rather a shock. He looked across at his beloved and saw that she was regarding him thoughtfully. Afterwards she confessed that she had been entertaining similar thoughts.

"I just couldn't think of our loving anyone else but each other," she said simply, in the face of a great wonderment. She did not realise it but she was face to face with one of the first fundamental lessons of her young life. Love, to her, meant the great overwhelming at-one-ment she was conscious of in her relation to the Great Spirit she worshipped, and it meant the bond that held her and Michael together as one being. The thought of separation from him was as yet unreal because she had not experienced it. There was also a deep and abiding love she held for Tendor, the love of a child for a parent. To her friends she gave affection, but being in the same stage of spiritual development as herself, they made no demands upon her, they did not call forth love. She had yet to learn how to love, how to feel at-one with all the fellow-children of the Great Spirit, how to experience the unity of the Human family in its larger sense. She pondered long over the problem but it seemed there was no answer here.

The boy, become man in embryo, now felt it incumbent on himself to study the manly pursuits of his sex. He spent long periods at the colleges reading up stories of the great deeds of Human accomplishment, the age-old story of man's conquests over the elements and over his fellows. The morality of the tales rather bewildered him, but the theme of triumph over obstacles seemingly insuperable, filled him with a welling pride. The saga filled him with a new thirst for accomplishment and he could scarcely wait for the incarnation to begin but must needs plague Tendor to hurry it up. But the Guide damped his ardour by explaining that the laws of God are not to be altered at the whim of one of His children. There could be no alteration from the destined course.

But by way of appeasement Tendor announced shortly after that he had arranged for both the twins to visit Earth. They were both immensely excited at the prospect. Michael especially so because of the difficulty he found in handling his new emotional contact. At the appointed time Tendor arrived and by means of his great power transported the three of them to a distant part of the Spirit World. When they had alighted they saw before them a building of severe design very unlike the beautiful buildings they were accustomed to see. Looking round, they saw that the surroundings too, were very different, being arid and devoid of vegetation. There was a subtle chill in the air and it was noticeably darker.

At the door of the building an assistant in a white tunic suggestive of laboratory work, met them and invited them to enter. As they passed through the hall Michael's questing eyes noted strange machinery and instruments that filled his mind with wonder and desire to know of their use. The Assistant saw his interest and explained that this was a laboratory devoted entirely to perfecting means of communication between the different planes of existence, in particular with that of the Earth. After a short conversation with Tendor, in which both used many queer technical terms that had no meaning for the Twins, the Assistant invited the party to enter a room. When they had done so he closed the door. Ann gave a gasp of fright, for it was pitch dark except for the glow given off by their own radiance. Michael had experienced gloom when he witnessed the unrolling of the scroll of his fate, but this was far more intense and occasioned him some uneasiness. But his interested mind noted how in this new element their bodies glowed far more brightly than ever they did in ordinary Spirit light. The Assistant now produced some robes of a dark material.

"I want you each to put on one of these robes, and I must warn you that we shall be in complete darkness, for these robes will almost entirely cover up our own light."

Obediently the Twins put on their garments, Ann at least finding the operation distasteful. She exclaimed with dismay when she saw the bright form of her beloved disappear within the folds of the hateful robe. But he was seemingly enjoying the experience for she could hear him chuckling in the darkness.

"Do not be afraid," cautioned the Assistant, "There is nothing to be afraid of, and any display of fear might affect the vibrations and spoil the experiment." He went on to give them some technical directions as to how to proceed in the new environment they were about to contact. Then he offered up a prayer to the Great Spirit to guide and guard this party which was actuated by no desire other than to labour in His service.

Soon Michael began to feel a queer sensation in his solar plexus. The tension increased until Tendor began to speak, when the sound of his beloved voice relieved the tension somewhat. Presently he became aware that the light was increasing, for he could distinguish the dim hooded figures of his companions. Slowly the grey dawn increased until he was able to see that the walls of the room no longer existed. He and his companions were standing in a garden.

As his eyes became accustomed to the new light Michael felt the Assistant touch his arm. "Come with me," said the other. He led the way to where a figure was seated on a chair. Michael stood in wonder. Then he began to recognize the garments the figure was wearing and realised that he was beholding what he had so long desired to see, an incarnate soul.

"Will she mind if I go nearer?" he whispered.

The Assistant laughed. "She can neither see nor hear you, though she may possibly sense your presence. Go close and look into her face, for that is your Mother-to-be."

The words sent a thrill through Michael's heart. Before him was the object of all the secret longings of his heart. He was to be her son, born of her body; would he be the beloved of her heart? Unable to rid himself of the idea that he must be visible to the lady who already occupied such an important place in his mind, he crept forward and peered into the face of the woman who was sitting so quietly knitting. At first sight he had rather a shock, for she appeared to him as intensely ugly. Then he remembered that he had always found pictures of Human beings to be crude and ugly to eyes which had only beheld beauty. For all spirits are intrinsically beautiful, they are not subject to the imperfections of the Human form. Michael continued his inspection and noted that his destined mother had good colour in her aura, for he was knowledgeable in such matters. There appeared to be no unnatural colouring or uneven radiance which indicated health and even temperament and the absence of evil or ultra-selfish thoughts.

His scrutiny ended, he looked up and round him with eager gaze. Without a doubt this was the house into which he was to be 'born', and this garden in which he stood would be his first playground. He would have liked to linger there absorbing this new and delightful sensation, but the Assistant was at his elbow and he knew he would have to go.

"We may not linger here," said the Assistant, "we are using up the power and we have another visit to make."

Michael found himself back in the dark room once more and the garden faded out of sight. While he was yet turning over in his mind what he had seen he noted that it was becoming light again. This time it was a room they were in and the Assistant gave his attention to Ann. Michael stepped forward and found himself in a long room, furnished most strangely to his mind. There were so many things in it that he became lost in wonder as to what could be their possible use. In material fact it was a drawing-room over-furnished in Victorian style. It was apparently the home of a family which still clung to the old life and the old things.

As Michael's eyes roamed round the room they were arrested by the sight of a woman, little more than a girl, standing at the far end. Something in her attitude made him stare in growing astonishment. To his untutored mind her features were plain and homely, yet they were distinctly familiar to him. He recognized that the clothes she wore were of the kind affected by the Earth folk. Then the girl turned her head towards him and he realised with a shock that it was his own beloved Ann. Why, he wondered, had she chosen to dress herself up in those queer unsightly garments, and why was she wearing the mask of physical features?

The voice of Tendor broke in upon his thoughts. "That is your Ann as you will see her when you first meet her on Earth."

For a moment Michael was crestfallen. He didn't like his Ann dressed up in this way; it was unfair to him and to her. Then he recollected that his dear one was merely inhabiting that dull form; she had not really changed for the worse. He laughed, and the act seemed to break the vision, for first of all Ann disappeared and then he felt himself being drawn back into the darkness.

The return journey was similar to the outward one, but in reverse. After removing the dark cloaks, the party stepped out of the dark room into the brightness of the world they knew. Back in their own home Michael begged Tendor to explain the mystery of his vision of Ann in earthly guise.

"It was a little trick we played with this strange element called time," explained Tendor. "Ann was permitted, for a moment, to project herself into the future and show herself as she will be when you both meet for the first time in incarnate life."

"Then we are going to incarnate together," exclaimed Ann, an intense relief in her voice.

Tendor nodded gravely. "It is written that you shall. But when your turn comes it will rest with you whether you accept the incarnation."

"Oh, I shall, I shall," she averred. Then she turned mischievously twinkling eyes on Michael. "What did you think of me?"

Michael replied with youthful candour. "I thought you were terribly ugly. So was my mother."

Ann was rather taken aback, when Tendor broke in. "You, too, will be ugly, my son. All incarnating spirits have to inhabit bodies designed to cope with the conditions on Earth. To the mind of Spirit, which responds to something nearer perfection, those bodies are not beautiful, either in form or grace. But without them you could not deal with the climatic and other conditions of Earth."

"It seemed to me that I had become someone else." exclaimed Ann. "It was a most curious condition. I knew it was myself inside the body, but I seemed to be shut in and unable to do anything I wanted. I wanted to take a lot of notice of the things I saw around me, but my mind sort of took it all as natural and wouldn't show any interest."

Tendor explained. "That is because you were not fully in occupation of a Human body but only a thought-form of the body that will some day be built for you. You saw the things around you clairvoyantly, but you couldn't express your thoughts about them because you were hemmed in by the mind of the body you were in. You haven't learned how to use that yet."

"I am not sure that I understand all that," laughed Ann. "I Shall have to read it all up at the university."

Michael now became more than ever anxious for the great experiment to commence. Tendor had explained that he would have to enter a clinic for the final period before his physical birth. This period was to correspond to the period of Human gestation and was made necessary by the strain imposed upon the incarnating spirit at this time. For himself he did not care, but he was still a little resentful that his beloved Ann was to appear so much less beautiful than she really was. As time went on Ann noticed that she was becoming depleted, she no longer had the happy thoughts which had made their joint lives so delightful, her light was definitely becoming dim. In order to discover the reason she went into meditative retreat in her room and on returning to consciousness found that she had been allowing herself to worry over the impending separation. With the aid of the ever-present spiritual power she made the effort and overcame the temptation to imagine herself to be upset, and thus gained her first victory over the self she was beginning to assume in preparation for her own incarnation.

There was one other puzzlement which she was not so successful in combating. Both she and Michael were aware of something new in their relations. She would sometimes find Michael looking at her with an expression in his eyes that was strange and rather disturbing. There was something strange about him, too, causing a new sensation to rise within her. As a result a gulf widened between them which promised to separate them even before the inevitable fact. Ann made an appeal to Tendor for an explanation. He readily gave it, pointing out that it was entirely illusory, for nothing could separate them in reality. It was part of the price to be paid for incarnation, being due to a fundamental difference between the sexes which had to be assumed with the emotional body.

It soon became time to make the final preparations for Michael's departure to the Clinic, but just before the event Tendor appeared to announce that he was able to take the Twins on a visit to a higher sphere. He would not explain the object of the visit but gave instructions regarding certain purifying ceremonies and the preparation of special robes.

At the appointed time Tendor joined them and they sat together in the central room of the house. He explained that they were about to visit a very high plane of existence and would have to leave their present bodies in order to do so. He instructed them how to sit in meditation, concentrating on a certain vision he presented to their mind's eye.

Michael felt himself wonderfully uplifted and then slowly lost consciousness. He awoke to find himself standing on a lawn of velvety grass. He felt unusually light and volatile, and he noticed that his robes were of an unusual brightness.

Beside him were Tendor and Ann, equally resplendent. As he looked round he saw that everything was of a brightness and vivid vitality he could not remember having seen before. Tendor led the way in the wake of other spirits as brightly arrayed as themselves. Finally they reached a Temple of such splendour as to be quite incomprehensible to Earthly minds. The Temple was no stone structure, cold and impersonal, for it was composed of living trees planted in rows so that they arched majestically to form a vast arboreal nave greater than that of any Earthly cathedral. At one end was a stone altar on which was a Spirit light that glowed and radiated. The peace and beauty of the scene were such that Ann gave a little gasp of wonder.

"Oh, isn't it lovely," she exclaimed. Then her voice was hushed as a heavenly orchestra began to play and the tone-rays lit up the whole interior with their symphonic interplay. The party took their seats at the direction of one of the attendants. Presently the music ceased and Tendor explained what was about to take place.

"We are about to experience a great privilege. It is the custom, before spirits incarnate, for them to meet the Master in Person. Now that you two, and these others here, are acquiring stronger personalities, it is the Master's wish that you should meet Him in His Personality so that the memory may abide with you and form a source of inspiration to you in times of trial and difficulty. It is a form of Initiation."

As he spoke the music began again and presently a great stillness and feeling of peace stole over the assembly, broken only by the soft strains of the music and the gently weaving colours. Presently the tempo changed and the colour theme became predominantly silver-blue.

"The Master's Ray," murmured Tendor.

The music was now vibrant with a new life, and its *motif* was the song of a bird that is pouring out its heart in joyous praise of the spring sunshine. It was a symphony of pure love that called forth a corresponding emotion from the spirits gathered there. Everyone felt instinctively that He was coming. The part of the Temple near the altar glowed with silver-blue light and then He appeared. From the depths of the trees He came, alone and radiating the peculiar vibration of love that He alone can give out, lifting them all up into a wealth of joy and gladness they had not believed possible. He was smiling and it seemed to each one that His special regard reached out for that one individually.

Michael's heart leapt when he saw Him first. "Why I know Him," he cried exultingly to himself. He felt sure that he knew this radiant Being as one who had a part in his life. He had no conscious memory of having seen Him before, it was rather that the Master was familiar to him through the beauty of the landscape, through the scent of the flowers, through the very power that vitalised the atmosphere. Surely the Master had managed to weave His Personality into the very fabric of existence; it was impossible to regard Him as a stranger.

The Master began to address the assembly. There are no words in which to describe the wonder of that voice. It was rich and full and vibrated with such compelling power that its cadences carried the people away into a joy unspeakable.

"My children, soon you are going to fold your brightness and creep into the environment of birth, deep into the life of Earth which my Father has made my particular care."

He went on to tell them of His own visits to Earth from time to time and what He had accomplished there. He told them of the blindness and ignorance that had spread over the face of the Earth till the people were lost in illusions which had become so concrete that few were able to break out of their self-imprisonment. He explained how their selfish thoughts, generation after generation of them, had formed a mist so dense that it was difficult to make contact with them and generate the spiritual power needed for their awakening to a knowledge of the Truth. He pleaded with those about to incarnate to strive to carry with them a memory of their divine origin and their ability to spread the knowledge of the glorious and inevitable destiny of mankind among the needlessly suffering peoples of the Earth.

"The children of God walk in the darkness of their own ignorance," He said, with an intensity of feeling that affected all His listeners. "They are so immersed in the selfishness and greed accumulated down the years that they no longer look to my Father for help, they no longer draw on the only Source that can give them help. They seek to solve their problems by the light of Earthly wisdom, and in that they cannot hope to succeed. The evil of ignorance is too strong to be overcome without the aid of the Spirit. My Father did not create evil; it was His wish that Earth should be a place of happy experience in which His children might learn to know themselves. Evil is made by man when he uses his free will selfishly, producing that which will harm his fellow-men. And it can only be transmuted by good, by the good of the Great Spirit which is the Father of us all. Century by century man has accumulated evil till it mounts up into a great insurmountable obstacle. Only by the power of God can that obstacle be removed, and only at the earnest desire of man can that power be unleashed. That is my Father's just law."

He paused. Then His voice rang out, full and deep and strong. "Remember the Divine Obligation of God. He gave you life, you are part of Him. Because that which is His cannot die, cannot become lost, therefore He must redeem you in the end. You can have no life apart from Him and He is incomplete without you. You and I and my Father are One!"

There was a silence, deep and overpowering; the very atmosphere was surcharged with dynamic power which swept in great waves over the assembly. There was not one present who did not feel that those words of living truth were stamped upon the core of his being.

"It is my Father's Will and Law," the Master continued, "that His children should learn their lesson of incarnation, and in the doing redeem that which has been wrongly created on Earth. Do not condemn these for their evil, their ignorance, for condemnation is my Father's work, not yours. A great period of Earthly manifestation is drawing to a close and a new and greater era opens out before you who are to incarnate at this time. Go forth now and you will find opportunity opening out before you as a flower opens to the sun. You take with you my Father's precious gift of *free will*. Use that gift to labour with me as I work to bring my Father's Light to the people of Earth. Take heed lest you find yourselves caught in the web of selfish desire, the sparkling tinsel illusions which lure my beloved ones from their quest of the real gems. Keep your eyes fixed, on the jewels from my Father's casket, the jewels of love and service, of tolerance and sacrifice.

"Already you have begun to assume that cloak of protection in which my Father wraps His children that they may not be burned too severely by the fires of experience. Guard well this soul body for it is vulnerable and its brightness is easily dimmed. Yet remember that without it you could not fulfill your destiny."

Now He allowed His gaze to travel round the assembly and it seemed to everyone there that He had a special regard for each.

"I shall be with you always. I shall never leave you. Take you my hand and we will overcome together. Call to me and I will help you. Think not that you call to empty space when I cannot speak into those physical ears; My voice would shatter them. The eyes of Earth cannot behold Me as I am, for I should blind them. When you need My help come to Me by way of the Spirit, meet Me on the ground where I can and will help you over the obstacles that strew your path. But if we are to meet in this way the channel by which we can reach each other must be kept clear. Do not let it become blocked by foolish thoughts, by lack of faith in the reality of Spirit. Keep the channel clear that I may bring you the gifts of the Great Spirit, the health, wealth and happiness for which you will crave.

"I shall bring with Me, too, fresh duties, new work for you to do, new opportunities for doing it. Keep, therefore, these three bodies of yours, spirit, soul and physical, in as perfect condition as you can, make them serve you as your feet serve you, but care for them as you care for the members that carry you step by step. Do not punish them for they are loyal workers of the Spirit, love them as you love those that serve you well. Then shall you be lighthouses in the darkness, beacons of power that nothing may harm, and every step that you take shall be a benediction. You shall be worthy tools for My Father to use that the land of Earth may be tilled and the seeds of knowledge and wisdom broadcast upon its surface.

"My children, I am conscious only of My Father's Will. Be you only conscious of that guiding star within you, that Light which must ever burn within your heart, part of the God who made you, an ever-living promise that must be redeemed."

When He had finished speaking He moved about among those present, and as He approached each one, he or she felt drawn by the power of those gentle yet commanding eyes into a feeling of at-one-ment with this glorious Being, who was so great and yet so humble, so inspiring and yet so approachable, so ready to help those who would let Him. When He came to Michael he gazed into the Master's eyes, so strange and penetrating that they seemed to look right into his heart, yet so loving and tender that they sent a thrill of joy and gladness through his whole being. In the intensity of that benediction he felt himself welded to this great Exemplar in service. He felt that there could be nothing he could not accomplish for His sake.

None could say that they saw Him go. It seemed to Michael that He had not gone at all. The memory of Him lingered when the silver-blue light had faded and the music increased in volume and then burst into such a paean of praise and worship of the Great Spirit that the whole temple became one glorious crescendo of colour and sound.

They all prayed. That is to say, they stood, uplifted into the consciousness of the Great Spirit, and Michael and Ann found the nearness of God to be even more imminent here than on their own plane. They did not utter words, they did not express themselves through the

spirit language of thought, for God does not need such forms of address. They simply let their own consciousness open out so that the divine spark within them became One with its divine Parent. It was a moment of deepest ecstasy, beyond compare, for it was of the peace that truly passes understanding.

Michael and Ann came to in their own room. Tendor had disappeared. It took them some little time to recall all that had occurred.

At length Michael looked thoughtfully across at Ann. "Well, we cannot fail after that."

"I am not so sure," said Ann. "If the Master had not known how easy it is to fail I do not think He would have been so insistent on the necessity to strive with all one's might."

Michael sprang to his feet, charged with a sudden access of emotion. "We cannot fail," he cried; "oh, how could we possibly fail? Look at what He told us. Think of the power that we can summon to our aid. We have only to keep the channel clear, as He said."

But Ann could not rid herself of an uneasy doubt that a great test lay ahead of them. Yet she could not help basking in the warmth of that great love which still seemed to wrap her about. And she felt, too, that this bewilderingly happy event had drawn Michael and herself closer together. For did they not share a tremendous secret, did they not share a common task? And behind it all was that wondrous thought that some time, whatever happened, reunion with each other was inevitable, to be followed by a move forward into that eternal Love of which they had had but a glimpse through the eyes of the Master.

The final preparations for Michael's departure were soon made, and at length came the warning for which they had waited. Together Michael and Ann made a last tour of the garden in which they had toiled so hard. Michael gave a few last-moment instructions as to certain minor changes he had had in mind. Ann agreed, trying to keep this strange new sense of emotion in hand. It was almost with relief that they became aware of the near approach of their Guide.

They looked at each other helplessly, for they did not know how to say goodbye. This new and potent expression of their mutual love was proving difficult to handle. Then with a tender boyish smile Michael took her hands in his. "I have been learning how to say goodbye in the Earthly way," he said, rather self-consciously. And clumsily, for it was a physical gesture alien to the Spirit World, he put his arms around her and drew her to him. Then he kissed her on the lips.

Wonderingly, Ann returned the greeting. Her eyes were shining, for she found the emotional stimulus exciting. Never had Michael paid her such a tribute as this, little though she understood the import of the symbol. She took hold of his hands and held them as if she would never let them go. Then, in a sudden and inexplicable desire to make a sacrifice she pushed his hands back to his breast and released them. At that moment Tendor appeared at her side. He took in the situation at a glance.

"Do not let this new emotion blind you to the truth," he said.

"This separation is partly an illusion. You will not be really apart. When Michael has incarnated he will be able to come over here and rejoin you while his physical body sleeps."

The journey that Tendor and Michael took was soon accomplished, and the two found themselves in the same district whence they had paid their previous visit to Earth. But the building they now entered had a more homely appearance than the laboratory. The staff appeared to consist mainly of women who wore the garb of spirit nurses. But presently a doctor appeared and to him Tendor gave Michael in charge. Then he took his leave.

"Here we must part, my son," he said. "I know that you will be in excellent hands and you will find it easier to accomplish your mission successfully if you remain undistracted by thoughts of your old environment." He regarded Michael gravely, giving no hint of his feelings. But he was well aware that the work of countless years of striving was about to be put to the test. While incarnation is the lowest point on the arc of man's journey through the Universe, it is also the crowning achievement. It is here that the finest opportunity of forging character is presented, it is in the crucible of the material experience that the character is refined and the dross eliminated, providing only that the spirit is strong enough to face up to the task. At no other stage in the spiritual career is this longed-for victory over self so easy to attain, for the reason that nowhere else is it necessary to exert so much effort to overcome, and it is this expenditure of effort which gives the achievement its real value. It is this fact more than any other which impels a spirit to undergo incarnation more than once.

Tendor knew that, for the time being, his guardianship must be relaxed. His children must now learn to stand alone, this child of his heart must face his own destiny and encompass his own future without direct aid. By carrying the burden of personal responsibility he would find the key to progress. With a final blessing he left Michael with his new friends.

For a while Michael was afflicted with nostalgia owing to his separation from Ann. He knew that he had only to will himself back in the house with her and the desire would become fact. But he knew, too, that such a course would wreck his chance of assuming the incarnation he had selected. As time went on he found that resistance to the desire lessened its pull and he threw himself into a study of the problems that arose in connection with the clinic with a whole-hearted interest. He liked his doctor and found the nurses charming and helpful. He was allowed to wander at will through the wards and grounds, and he was surprised to find what a complicated business was this approach to physical birth. There were lectures to attend where much was explained to him.

He learned that a successful culmination was dependent on several factors. Chief among these was the fact that it is a co-operative business between mother and child. It is essential for the expectant mother to keep in as fine a state of health as possible and to care for her body at this time. He also found to his surprise that he himself could exercise a considerable effect on the embryo body which was being built for his use. He was required to concentrate at stated periods on this aspect alone, to direct his thought on the perfection of physique and the correct assimilation of atomic substance into the tiny form. Examples were shown of the difficulties encountered where the mother-to-be was careless of her role, or who resisted the idea of motherhood either through fear or lack of desire. Even worse was the situation to be dealt with where there was severe physical illness or a body whose etheric envelope was distorted by narcotics or other abuses. In these cases the incarnating spirit had a very trying experience, usually being prostrated throughout the period of gestation.

Sometimes the attempt had to be abandoned because the mother-to-be so ill-used her mortal body. The unfortunate spirit struggled to the last to incarnate with the object of establishing even

a brief acquaintanceship with physical life; in the event of failure it was forced to relinquish its hold upon the embryo body and slip back into Spirit life once more. The whole process of selection and preparation then had to be repeated.

It was usually the case, Michael found, where difficulties were most severe, that the spirit had deliberately accepted the risks, knowing that by overcoming them he would progress so much the faster.

As time went on he began to feel the magnetic pull of Earth. It began to manifest as a downward attraction from the feet, much the same as the pull of gravity, except that he was more conscious of it. It was hardly perceptible at first, but as time went on it increased to an uncomfortable extent. He realised that the use of such a clinic as this was almost imperative if distress was to be avoided. He was relieved to hear from his doctor that in his case a perfectly normal birth was anticipated, for his mother was a spiritually minded woman and the thought of his coming was a source of delight to both parents. Michael thought sympathetically of the unfortunate spirits around him, many of whom were already aware that they were unwelcome visitors in the family circle awaiting them, that they had a poor chance of experiencing the love they so longed to feel.

"If only the people of Earth would realise," the doctor explained, "what depends on their attitude to parenthood, it would make the whole affair so much safer and easier in both worlds."

"What conditions would you consider the best for an ideal birth?" asked Michael.

"Why, I should say that physical health and a well cared-for body are the first essentials. Next comes the desire to have a child and lack of anxiety about the trials of physical birth. Without these there is bound to be sub-conscious resistance to the event which will hamper our efforts and react on the child. But transcending all these in ultimate importance is the desirability of the Would-be parents having developed a spiritual outlook. If they view marriage as a supreme gift from God in that it gives them the opportunity to perpetuate themselves in accordance with His will, and if they approach Him with love in their hearts and a request that their bodies may be used in His service, then I am convinced that a happy birth is almost inevitable, and, moreover, the incarnating spirit will be one of high spiritual development with great ideals of service. But so deep is the ignorance on Earth that seldom is such a state of affairs obtainable."

Michael was allowed to be present at several cases where the birth was finally accomplished. Most of these were normal, successful affairs, but there were some where the dictates of destiny interfered. At first he was terribly distressed to see spirits depart into physical life with crippled limbs or lacking the use of one of the senses, such as sight. The doctor pointed out that in most cases it was pure destiny, though sometimes it was due to inherent causes which could have been prevented by the parents.

"These questions of ignorance and destiny are so bound up together," he said, "that it is difficult to see where the dividing line is. But we have to realise that the spirit has selected that condition and hopes to profit by the fact. That is all that we can concern ourselves with here, but we do know that it is the plan of all workers to foster a return to better conditions, that is the object in view. These bad conditions are certainly used by spirits who have elected to try and set right something of their own *karma* by this means, but that is no excuse for their continuance. We must all work to improve the conditions, otherwise we are simply contributing to a vicious circle."

The Earth attraction was now becoming so strong that Michael found it better to keep to his couch. More and more his thoughts were bound down to the Earth level. His favourite nurse spent much time with him and promised that she would stay with him until the transition was complete.

The Doctor made a final examination and expressed himself as satisfied. He gave Michael some final advice.

"You must remember that in the first stages of your Earthly life you will not be able to manifest very freely. Your growth into manhood will be in three stages. From birth to the age of seven years your spirit will only indirectly influence your mortal life; at the age of seven you will take a step forward and the etheric coalescence of your soul and physical bodies will become more marked. That will enable you to manifest more positively. At the age of fourteen you will take another step forward, into the difficult age of adolescence. At this stage your emotional body will become stronger and will require careful control. Finally, at the age of twenty-one, you will be able to draw fully upon Spirit power and commence to manifest to the highest spiritual degree that you are able."

Soon after the doctor's visit Michael began to lose some of his consciousness. He was only partially aware of what was going on around him except that from time to time his nurse would bend over him and smile confidently at him. Gradually the room got darker, the nurse took tight hold of his hand. The pull at his feet became almost intolerable, he felt he must be dragged off his couch. He heard the nurse telling him to let go mentally, not to cling to his present state. He felt himself slipping, there was a rushing sound in his ears, then complete darkness and swift oblivion

Somewhere in the house a door opened and shut. Footsteps began to descend the stairs slowly, terribly slowly to the man who was seated in the study below. The footsteps completed the descent and came to the door where they halted for what seemed to the man who awaited their advent, an eternity. He rose impatiently and was about to call out when the door handle turned and the doctor entered.

"Well, Mr. Blair," announced the doctor, a trifle pompously, "I have some very good news for you." He smiled benignly.

The man who faced him relaxed slightly. Then he burst out, "Well, what is it? Don't keep me in suspense."

But the doctor was not to be denied his moment. His smile, however, became a little more understanding and he bent his head to gaze at the other over his glasses.

"You are a proud father, Mr. Blair, and both your wife and the child are doing well."

Mr. Blair sank back into his chair, overcome by the anticlimax to his weary vigil. His eyes asked one more question.

"A son, my friend, a fine boy," beamed the doctor. "Have you thought what you are going to call him?"

Mr. Blair was of that school which considers it to be tempting Providence to name a child as yet unborn. Now he searched his mind. He had no notion how the name came into his mind, but without a moment's hesitation he replied, "Michael, that shall be his name."

Part 2: **INCARNATION**

The Youth

Robert Blair was a miller at heart as well as in fact. He had been born in the shadow of the old mill, and the sound of its great throbbing heart was his first conscious memory. It had been built by his grandfather and carried on by his father, both of them men of acute business instinct and frugal habits. It was natural, therefore, that he should regard the business as a family affair with corresponding obligations.

When he married Mary Wontner, spinster of the same parish, he made it reasonably clear that he expected a son to carry on the business, perhaps two for good measure. He only got one, and then after some years of anxious expectation, but he was prepared to admit that Mary had clinched the deal in a satisfactory manner and left him no ground for complaint.

In all his life he had rarely left the little town of Belchester. He had at least a nodding acquaintance with most of its inhabitants and knew quite a deal of their family history, as is the way in these small communities. Mary, on the other hand, was counted a stranger in Belchester, for her family had come to the town when she was five. She had been brought up by a code which demands rigid obedience to certain rules of life, beyond which little is expected but a passive acquiescence in whatever fortune is doled out by fate. She knew that attendance at chapel admitted of few excuses; cleanliness of the home was as important as the wearing of the Sunday best; she respected the sanctity of the clothes line of a Sunday; and she brought to her husband unquestioning obedience in certain defined matters. Apart from these conventions she was free to drift along with her neighbours in the current of respectability.

Outwardly she did so. Inwardly she was sensitive under the seeming placidity. There were intimate moments with her son, whom she adored and completely failed to understand, that revealed depths of spirituality which had never seen the light of external expression. One of the jewels that never leaves its case.

On this sunny morning in May, one of those mornings that seem to have slipped out of August by mistake, the Blair parents were awaiting the return of their son from the grand university in London where he had just completed his education. Blair himself was over in his office, pretending to be extra busy, but in reality having little better to do than whistle to himself and gaze out of the window down the road along which Nesbitt's noisy old car would presently bring his son. He glanced at his watch, got up and went over to the old mirror on the wall and studied his reflection. He was proud of his fifty odd years, though he was getting nearer to sixty than he liked to admit. He thrust out a determined chin as he glanced up at the greying hair. He turned to look through the window at the mill which made up his life and which, indirectly, had made him. The rhythm of its ancient machinery was in his blood, it regulated his thoughts, his ideas, which came and went in consonance with the thud-thud of the great driving wheel and the relentless, ever-greedy maw of the hopper.

Not old yet, thudded his thoughts, not old yet. But it's time the youngster took a hand; there's a deal that can't be learned all at once about milling. A nice little business to take over, too, when the time came. He patted the pocket in which he kept his note-case as if to assure himself of the permanence of its integrity, then went out of the door and across the yard to the house.

Just as he rounded the building Nesbitt's car wheezed up to the gate. The front door opened and Mary appeared on the step, her face beaming and shining like a polished apple. A youthful figure leapt out of the car and began dragging an assortment of battered suitcases, sports gear and sundry parcels on to the pavement.

Born in a hurry was Michael, smiled Mary to herself proudly.

She found herself almost swept off her feet as her tall son charged upon her and gathered her up in an armful of bag and baggage. Then it was father's turn. Dropping everything, Michael grasped his father's hands with his own, shooting breathless greetings at him, none of which made much sense. Michael was home.

The boy had come tumbling into Mary's life at a time when she was beginning to fear that she might be childless. And although she loved him intensely she had always been just a little afraid of this hectic creature who grew so rapidly, both in mind as well as body, so that she felt left behind early in the race. She had never caught up with him again. They loved each other, that was never in doubt. But apart from those lovely intimate moments which were becoming fewer as the years drew him from her, there seemed a gulf between them, a mental gulf which she felt incapable of bridging. She put it down to her own ignorance, for in her day there was little to inspire in the teaching that the little school in Timm's Road had to offer. And now he seemed further away than ever, for was he not a graduate of the grand big school they called a university? As she watched the boy empty the car of his possessions her thoughts went back to that bewildering day when Robert had taken her to London and to the great mass of buildings in which her son had acquired all this knowledge. She could remember little of it but the rooms where he lived and the woman who looked after him. These had met her critical scrutiny.

She turned to follow him as he went charging into the house sniffing into odd cupboards, like a dog that remembers the bones he has buried, and she found herself wondering whether he would ever settle down to the humdrum life that management of the mill had to offer.

"It's grand to be home, mother," he cried as he met her at the top of the stairs, his arms full of gear.

"It's fine to have you, boy," she gave him back, her eyes shining like a maiden's.

He bent over to kiss her and then staggered off to his room with his load, while she went blushing down the stairs to get the meal she had planned for so long a while.

Alone in his room, Michael kicked the door to with his foot and heaved his burden on to the bed. Then he went to the open window and leant out to survey the familiar scene. The mill, which had seemed so big and important and noisy when he was a little chap, had shrunk more than ever. The thud of its busy heart had assumed a minor key since his acquaintance with the great city and all the marvels it held.

Funny old-fashioned outfit, he reflected, and Dad would like to tie me down to those wheels so that I would go round and around for ever and ever, amen. He turned in the other direction, towards London. It was the rhythm of that great heart that stirred his pulse rather than this familiar thud. From early youth he had been conscious of an insistent desire to get to grips with life. He felt that deep within its mysteries there was something for him, something he wanted to know. He knew that he would not find what he sought in Belchester. He began to hum some half-forgotten melody as he turned back into the room.

At supper that evening Michael found himself pressed to tell of his life at the university. Robert Blair had paid what he considered a mint of money for the privilege of sending his son to be educated there, and incidentally proudly telling his friends about it, and he felt that it was only due to him that he should share vicariously in his son's success. As he listened, his mind toyed with the idea of testing the boy's views on his future, here and now. But he put the notion aside resolutely. That question would have to be discussed in the sanctuary of the office, and perhaps, yes why not? celebrated in a glass of the old sherry he and his forebears had laid down for the sealing of important deals.

Mary Blair's mind was in a tumult. There was so much she wanted to ask Michael, all the intimate and domestic details that her motherly heart craved to know. But Michael had got on to industrial problems, a subject in which he had specialised. Dull and boring she thought them as the boy discoursed on technicalities that he rolled round his tongue with the relish of a connoisseur for his favourite wine. Robert Blair began to feel uneasy. Michael seemed to be getting away from familiar ground. All this talk of production technique made him acutely conscious of how small the family business must appear in Michael's eyes. He cleared his throat noisily, and that seemed to cut across his son's talk. For a while there was silence until a question from his mother roused Michael to laughter.

"Did you meet any nice ladies where you were?"

"Mother, you old dear, you are a marvel. They don't have nice ladies nowadays; they've all become beloved mothers like you or else they are sour old spins. The young 'uns would scream with laughter if you called them ladies."

Mary felt rather shocked and her eyes said so. Michael leaned forward and put his hand confidingly over hers. "I know what you want to know, mother mine. You want to know if some bold, bad creature has stolen my heart away and left none for you. Well, you needn't worry. I haven't met any girl I care two hoots for, so far."

And as that was the answer she wanted, Mary was satisfied and content to bask for the rest of the evening in the radiance of this her son, while he and his father went over local gossip.

For the first few days after his return Michael roamed the neighbourhood of his home, picking up old threads, greeting old friends, visiting old haunts, some of them with poignant memories of boyhood's joys and alarms. He went into the mill and tried to feel impressed with the minor improvements that his father pointed out. There was nothing here to satisfy his growing instinct for industrial problems, it was all too pitifully inadequate. He talked with Josh Clark, the grim, narrow old foreman, and asked after his daughter Vera. Vera and he had grown up together, played and quarrelled together. Then as adolescence approached they had drifted apart, following diverging interests.

During recent brief homecomings he had seen little of the girl. He recollected that she must be nineteen now, for she was two years his junior.

As the days drifted by Michael felt a growing uneasiness at the prospect of the interview which was impending. There was no longer any doubt as to the wishes of Blair senior. He didn't want to hurt the old man's feelings but the thought of burying himself in this old backwater for life just couldn't be entertained. If only the old chap wouldn't make such a religion of the inheritance business. It would be so simple to get a decent manager in when his father was unable to do the work himself. Why, Josh could do it on his head.

One morning he swung out of the garden gate and almost bumped into a girl. "Oh, I'm ... ," he began, then, "why, if it isn't Vera! Well, how are you?"

The abruptness of their encounter robbed them of any shyness they might have displayed, and Vera curved her red lips in a dazzling smile.

"I heard you were back, Michael. Seems a long time you've been away."

They exchanged platitudes and discussed mutual friends in the way people do who come back fresh to an old friendship. Michael dropped into step beside the girl. He glanced now and again at her and wondered at the way in which the child had become the young woman. Vera was a pretty girl despite the cheap cosmetics and the too brazen curls and the cheap but colourful costume. But she wore these with an air which deceived Michael, to whom the veneer of assurance gave an impression of character.

He told her of his life in London and something of his ambitions, and the recital was obviously of absorbing interest to her. She questioned him shrewdly.

"I suppose you'll soon be off on your travels again, then," she queried. "I can't see you settling down at the mill." She had always known Michael to be headstrong, but she realised that his impetuosity was likely to run away with him. It would take a strong-minded woman to hold him.

Michael laughed, with the clean joy of a future flung out before him. "What do you think? I don't see myself being buried here." As an afterthought he added, "Don't you ever want to get out of this place?"

She turned a dazzling pair of eyes on him as she replied, "Guess it depends on where I was going." With which enigmatical remark she smiled a good-bye to him and turned in at her own gate.

They saw a good deal of each other after that. It seemed that Vera had frequent messages for her father at the mill. Robert Blair used to watch her trotting in at the gate and he would smile understandingly. Nothing would have delighted him more than to see Michael married to the daughter of his foreman. Mary was more farseeing, she knew that there was little room in Michael's mind for thoughts of matrimony at the present time.

In the end it was Michael who brought the interview with his father to a head. He had met Vera in the yard and they had stood talking for a considerable time. When she went, Michael entered his father's office.

