

Marx Hardy Machiavelli Joyce Austen  
Defoe Abbot Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo  
Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm  
Garnett Engels Schiller Byron Maupassant Schiller  
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka  
Cotton Dostoyevsky Hall Willis  
Baum Henry Kipling Doyle  
Leslie Dumas Flaubert Nietzsche  
Stockton Turgenev Balzac  
Burroughs Vatsyayana Crane  
Curtis Tocqueville Verne  
Homer Tolstoy Gogol Busch  
Darwin Thoreau Twain  
Potter Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato Scott  
Kant Freud Jowett Stevenson Burton Harte  
Andersen London Descartes Cervantes Wells Hesse  
Poe Aristotle James Hastings Voltaire Cooke  
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# **The Prodigal Returns**

Lilian Staveley

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# THE PRODIGAL RETURNS

By

Lilian Staveley

The Author of "The Golden Fountain" and "The Romance of the  
Soul"

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1921



## PART I

Sunshine and a garden path . . . flowers . . . the face and neck and bosom of the nurse upon whose heart I lay, and her voice telling me that she must leave me, that we must part, and immediately after anguish—blotting out the sunshine, the flowers, the face, the voice. This is my first recollection of Life—the pain of love. I was two years old.

Nothing more for two years—and then the picture of a pond and my baby brother floating on it, whilst with agonised hands I seized his small white coat and held him fast.

And then a meadow full of long, deep grass and summer flowers, and I—industriously picking buttercups into a tiny petticoat to take to cook, "to make the butter with," I said.

And then a table spread for tea. Our nurses, my two brothers, and myself. Angry words and screaming baby voices, a knife thrown by my little brother. Rage and hate.

And then a wedding, and I a bridesmaid, aged five years—the church, the altar, and great awe, and afterwards a long white table, white flowers, and a white Bride. Grown men on either side of me—smilingly delightful, tempting me with sweets and cakes and wine, and a new strange interest rising in me like a little flood of exultation—the joy of the world, and the first faint breath of the mystery of sex.

Then came winters of travel. Sunshine and mimosa, olive trees against an azure sky. Climbing winding, stony paths between green terraces, tulips and anemones and vines; white sunny walls and lizards; green frogs and deep wells fringed around with maiden-hair. Mountains and a sea of lapis blue, and early in the mornings from this lapis lake a great red sun would rise upon a sky of molten gold. In the rooms so near me were my darling brothers, from whom I often had to part. Beauty and Joy, and Love and Pain—these made up life.

At ten I twice narrowly escaped death. From Paris we were to take the second or later half of the train to Marseilles. Late the night

before my father suddenly said, "I have changed my mind; I feel we must go by the first train." This was with some difficulty arranged.

On reaching an immense bridge across a deep ravine I suddenly became acutely aware that the bridge was about to give way. In a terrible state of alarm I called out this fearful fact to my family. I burst into tears. I suffered agonies. My mother scolded me, and when we safely reached the other side of the bridge I was severely taken to task for my behaviour. The bridge broke with the next train over it—the train in which we should have been. Some four hundred people perished. It was the most terrible railway disaster that had ever occurred in France.

A few weeks later, death came nearer still. Having escaped from our tutor, with a party of other children we ran to two great reservoirs to fish for frogs. Laughing and talking and full of childish joy, we fished there for an hour, when all at once I was impelled, under an extraordinary sense of pressure, to call out, "If anyone falls into the water, no one must jump in to save them, but must immediately run to those long sticks" (I had never noticed them until I spoke) "and draw one out and hold it to whoever has fallen in." I spoke automatically, and felt as much surprised as my companions that I should speak of such a thing.

Within five minutes I had fallen in myself. My brother remembered my words, but before he could reach me with the stick I was under the water for the third and last time. It was all that they could do to drag my weight up to the ledge, for the water was a yard below it. Had my brother jumped in, as he said he most surely would have done had I not forewarned him, we must both have been drowned, for they would have had neither the strength nor the time to pull us both out alive. I was not at all frightened or upset till I heard someone say that I was dead; then I wept—it was so sad to be dead! The pressure put upon me to speak as I did had been so great that I have never forgotten the strange impression of it to this day. On both these occasions I consider that I was under immediate Divine protection.

I believed earnestly in God with the complete and peaceful faith of childhood. I thought of Him, and was afraid: but more afraid of a great Angel who stood with pen and book in hand and wrote down

all my sins. This terrible Angel was a great reality to me. I prayed diligently for those I loved. Sometimes I forgot a name: then I would have to get out of bed and add it to my prayer. As I grew older, if the weather were cold I did not pray upon the floor but from my bed, because it was more comfortable. I was not always sure if this were quite right, but I could not concentrate my mind on God if my body was cold, because then I could not forget my body.

I saw God very plainly when I shut my eyes! He was a White Figure in white robes on a white throne, amongst the clouds. He heard my prayers as easily as I saw His robes. He was by no means very far away, though sometimes He was further than at others. He took the trouble to make everything very beautiful: and He could not bear sinful children. The Angel with the Book read out to Him my faults in the evenings.

When I was twelve years old my grandmother died, and for three months I was in real grief. All day I mourned for her, and at night I looked out at the stars, and the terrible mystery of death and space and loneliness struck at my childish heart.

After thirteen I could no longer be taken abroad to hotels, for my parents considered that I received too much attention, too many presents, too many chocolates from men. I was educated by a governess, and was often very lonely. My brothers would come back from school; then I overflowed with happiness and sang all day long in my heart with joy. The last night of the holidays was a time of anguish. Upstairs the clothes were packed. Downstairs I helped them pack the "play-boxes," square deal boxes at sight of which tears sprang to my eyes and a dreadful pain gripped my heart. Oh, the pain of love at parting! there never was a pain so terrible as suffering love. The last meal: the last hour: the last look. There are natures which feel this anguish more than others. We are not all alike.

I had been passionately fond of dolls. Now I was too old for such companions, and when my brothers went away I was completely alone with my governess and my lessons. I fell into the habit of dreaming. In these dreams I evolved a companion who was at the same time myself—and yet not an ordinary little girl like myself, but a marvellous creature of unlimited possibilities and virtues. She

even had wings and flew with such ease from the tops of the highest buildings, and floated so delightfully over my favourite fields and brooks that I found it hard to believe that I myself did not actually fly. What glorious things we did together, what courage we had, nothing daunted us! I cared very little to read books of adventure, for our own adventures were more wonderful than anything I ever read.

Not only had I wings, but when I was my other self I was extremely good, and the Angel with the Book was then never able to make a single adverse record of me. And then how easy it was to be good: how delightful, no difficulties whatever! As we both grew older the actual wings were folded up and put away. The virtues remained, but we led an intensely interesting life, and a certain high standard of life was evolved which was afterwards useful to me.

When, later on, I grew up and my parents allowed me to have as many friends as I wanted, and when I became exceedingly gay, I still retained the habit of this double existence; it remained with me even after my marriage and kept me out of mischief. If I found myself temporarily dull or in some place I did not care for, clothed in the body of my double, like the wind, I went where I listed. I would go to balls and parties, or with equal ease visit the mountains and watch the sunset or the incomparable beauties of dawn, making delicate excursions into the strange, the wonderful, and the sublime. I gathered crystal flowers in invisible worlds, and the scent of those flowers was Romance.

All this vivid imagination sometimes made my mind over-active: I could not sleep. "Count sheep jumping over a hurdle," I was advised. But it did not answer. I found the most effective way was to think seriously of my worst sins—my mind immediately slowed down, became a discreet blank—I slept!

I grew tall and healthy. At sixteen I received my first offer of marriage and with it my first vision of the love and passion of men. I recoiled from it with great shyness and aversion. Yet I became deeply interested in men, and remained so for very many years. From that time on I never was without a lover till my marriage.

## II

At seventeen my "lessons" came to an end. I had not learnt much, but I could speak four languages with great fluency. I learnt perhaps more from listening to the conversation of my father and his friends. He had always been a man of leisure and was acquainted with many of the interesting and celebrated people of the day, both in England and on the Continent. I was devoted to him, and whenever he guided my character he did so with the greatest judgment. He taught me above all things the need of self-control, and never to make a remark of a fellow-creature unless I had something pleasant or kind to say. There was no subject upon which he was unread; and when my brothers, who were both exceedingly clever, returned from college and the University, wonderful and brilliant were the discussions that went on. Both my parents were of Huguenot descent, belonging to the old French noblesse. I think the Latin blood had sharpened their brains, and certainly gave an extra zest to life.

My father was a great believer in heredity, and the following personal experience may show him somewhat justified in his belief. In quite early childhood I commenced to feel a preference for the *left* side of my body: I washed, dried, and dressed the left side first; I preserved it carefully from all harm; I kept it warm. I was, comparatively speaking, totally indifferent to my right side.

As I grew older I observed that the place of honour was upon the right-hand side: I understood that God had made the world and ruled it with His right hand! I was wrong, then, in preferring my left hand. I determined to change over. It was very difficult to do: so deep was the instinct that it took me some years to eradicate the love for my left side and transfer it to my right, and when I had at last accomplished it I was still liable to go back to my first preference. No one ever detected my peculiarity.

I was already eighteen or nineteen years old when one day I entered my father's room, ready dressed to go out. I had on both my gloves. Suddenly I remembered that I had put on my left glove first. Immediately I took off both my gloves—then I replaced the right one, and then the left. My father was watching me and asked me for an explanation. I gave it him, and he looked very grave, almost alarmed. After a moment of silence he said, "I want you to give that habit up—I want you to break yourself of it immediately. I had it

myself as a youth: it took me years to conquer. No one should permit himself to be the slave of *any* habit."

I asked him which side he had loved. "The *left* side," he said. At five-and-twenty he had conquered the habit, and I was not born till he was almost sixty-one! yet I had inherited it. We never referred to it again, and in two years I, also, had conquered it.

We spent the winter of the year in which I was seventeen in Italy, to which country a near relative was Ambassador, and there I went to my first ball. That night—and how often afterwards!—I knew the surging exultation, the intoxication of the joy of life. How often in social life, in brilliant scenes of light and laughter, music and love, I seemed to ride on the crest of a wave, in the marvellous glamour of youth!

This love of the world and of social life was a very strong feeling for many years: at the same time and running, as it were, in double harness with it was a necessity for solitude. My mind imperatively demanded this, and indeed my heart too.

It was during this year that I first commenced a new form of mental pleasure through looking at the beautiful in Nature. Not only solitude, but total silence was necessary for this pastime, and, if possible, beauty and a distant view: failing a view I could accomplish it by means of the beauties of the sky. This form of mental pleasure was the exact opposite of my previous dreamings, for all imagination absolutely ceased, all forms, all pictures, all activities disappeared—the very scene at which I looked had to vanish before I could know the pleasure of this occupation in which, in some mysterious manner, I inhaled the very essence of the Beautiful.

At first I was only able to remain in this condition for a few moments at a time, but that satisfied me—or, rather, did not satisfy me, for through it all ran a strange unaccountable anguish—a pain of longing—which, like a high, fine, tremulous nerve, ran through the joy. What induced me to pursue this habit, I never asked myself. That it was a form of the spirit's struggle towards the Eternal—of the soul's great quest of God—never occurred to me. I was worshipping the Beautiful without giving sufficient thought to Him from Whom all beauty proceeds. Half a lifetime was to go by before I realised to what this habit was leading me—that it was the first

step towards the acquirement of that most exquisite of all blessings—the gift of the Contemplation of God. Ah, if anyone knows in his heart the call of the Beautiful, let him use it towards this glorious end! Love, and the Beautiful—these are the twin golden paths that lead us all to God.

### III

Certainly we were not a religious family. One attendance at church upon Sunday—if it did not rain!—and occasionally the Communion, this was the extent of any outward religious feeling. But my father's daily life and acts were full of Christianity. A man of a naturally somewhat violent temper, he had so brought himself under control that towards everyone, high and low, he had become all that was sweet and patient, sympathetic and gentle.

About this time a devouring curiosity for knowledge commenced to possess me. What was the truth—what was the truth about every single thing I saw? Astronomy, Biology, Geology—in these things I discovered a new and marvellous interest: here at last I found my natural bent. History had small attraction for me: it spoke of the doings of people mostly vain or cruel, and untruthful. I wanted truth—irrefutable facts! No scientific work seemed too difficult for me; but I never, then or later, read anything upon the subject of religion, philosophy, or psychology. I had a healthy, wholesome young intelligence with a voracious appetite: it would carry me a long way, I thought. It did—it landed me in Atheism.

To a woman Atheism is intolerable pain: her very nature, loving, tender, sensitive, clinging, demands belief in God. The high moral standard demanded of her is impossible of fulfilment for mere reasons of race-welfare. The personal reason, the Personal God—these are essential to high virtue. Young as I was, I realised this. Outwardly I was frivolous; inwardly I was no butterfly, the deep things of my nature were by no means unknown to me. I not only became profoundly unrestful at heart but I was fearful for myself, and of where strong forces of which I felt the pull might lead me. I had great power over the emotions of men: moreover, interests and instincts within me corresponded to this dangerous capacity. I felt that the world held many strange fires: some holy and beautiful; some far otherwise.

Without God I knew myself incapable of overcoming the evil of the world, or even of my own petty nature and entanglements. I despaired, for I perceived that God does not reveal Himself because of an imperious demand of the human mind, and I had yet to learn that those mysteries which are under lock and key to the intelligence are open to the heart and soul. But indeed there was no God to reveal Himself. All was a fantastic make-believe! a pitiful childish invention and illusion!

My intelligence said, "Resign yourself to what is, after all, the truth: console yourself with the world and material achievements." The heart said, "Resignation is impossible, for there is no consolation to the heart without God." I listened to my heart rather than my intelligence, and for two terrible years I fought for faith. I was always reserved, and never admitted anyone into the deep things of my life—but when I was twenty my father perceived that I was going through some inward crisis. He knew the books that I read, and probably guessed what had happened to me. At any rate he called me into his room one day and asked me, out of love and obedience to himself, to give up reading all science. This was an overwhelming blow to me: yet I loved him dearly, and had never disobeyed him in my life. Again I let my heart speak; and I sacrificed my mind and my books.

I threw myself now more than ever into social amusements, and in my solitary hours sought consolation in my "dream-life." I was afraid to turn to the love of Nature—to my beautiful pastime,—for the pain in it was unbearable.

Towards the end of two years my struggles for faith commenced to find a reward. Little by little a faint hope crept into my mind—fragile, often imperceptible. A questioning remark made by my younger brother helped me: "If human life is entirely material and a part of Nature only, then what becomes of human thoughts and aspirations?" Science had proved to me that nothing is lost—but has a destiny—in that it evolves into another form or condition of activity. Evolution! with its many seeming contradictions to Religion—might it not be merely a strong light, too strong as yet for my weak mind, blinding me into temporary darkness? What raised Man above the beasts but his thoughts and aspirations; and if even a

grain of dust were imperishable, were these thoughts and aspirations of Man alone to end in nothing—to be lost! It was but a reasonable inference to say No. These invisible thoughts and aspirations have also a future—a destiny in a, to us, still invisible world—in the Life of the Spirit. To this my mind was able to agree. It was a step. In the realm of Ideal Thought I might find again my Faith. I had indeed been foolish to suppose that a system which provided for the continuation of a grain of sand should overlook the Spirit of Man. This was presupposing the existence of a spirit in Man; but who could be found to truly and reasonably hold that the mysterious high and soaring thoughts of Man were one and the same thing as mere animalism? they were too obviously of another nature to the merely bovine, to the solids of the flesh: for one thing, they were free of the law of gravity which so entirely overrules the rest of Nature—they must therefore come to their destiny in another world, another condition of consciousness.

#### IV

That winter we again spent in Italy, in continuous gaiety amongst a brilliant cosmopolitan world of men and women who for the most part lived in palaces, surrounded with art and luxury. Here in Rome on every side was to be found the Cult of the Beautiful. Wonderful temples, gems of classical sculpture, masterpieces of colour in oil and fresco—the genius and the aspirations of men rendered permanent for us by Art; but the Temples, those silent emblems of man's worship of an Unknown God, with their surroundings of lovely nature, affected me far the most deeply: indeed, I do not pretend that sculptures and pictures affected me at all. I was interested, I greatly admired—they were a part of education, but that was all. But in the vicinity of those Temples what strange echoes awoke in me, what mysterious sadness and longing, what a mystery of pain! Something within me sighed and moaned for God. If I could but find Him—if I could even truly Believe and be at peace! But already I had commenced to Believe.

During the late winter we went to one of the great ceremonies at the Vatican: we had seats in the Sistine Chapel. It was an especial occasion, and the number of persons present was beyond all seating accommodation. To make way for someone of importance I was

asked to give up my seat and go outside into the body of the great Cathedral; here I was hurriedly pushed into the second row of a huge concourse of waiting and standing people. Already in the distance the Pope was approaching. Lifted high in his chair on the shoulders of his bearers, he came slowly along in his white robes, his hand raised in a general blessing upon all this multitude. As he came nearer I saw the delicate ivory face—the great dark eyes shining with a fire I had never seen before. For the first time in my life I saw holiness. I was moved to the depths of my being. Something in my gaze arrested his attention; he had his chair stopped immediately above me, and, leaning over me, he blessed me individually—a very great concession during a large public ceremony. I ought to have gone down on my knees—but I had no knees! I no longer had a body! There was no longer anything anywhere in the world but Holiness—and my enraptured soul.

Holiness, then, was far beyond the Beautiful. I had not known this till I saw it before me.

Life hurried me on: glowing hours and months succeeded each other. In the autumn I fell in love. I came to the consciousness of this, not gradually, but all in one instant. I had no chance of drawing back, for it was already fully completed before I realised it. I came to the realisation of it through a dream (sleep-dreams were always exceedingly rare with me): on this occasion I dreamed a friend showed me the picture of a girl to whom she said this lover (he had been my lover for a year) was engaged. I awoke, sobbing with anguish. I could not disguise from myself the fact that I must be in love. When the time came to speak of it to my parents, my mother would not hear of the marriage—there was no money: I must make another choice. Two brilliant opportunities offered themselves—money—position; but I could not bring myself to think of either. Love was everything: a prolonged secret engagement followed. I went into Society just as before. At this time an aptitude for "fortune-telling" showed itself: it amused my friends—I told fortunes both by palmistry, which I studied quite seriously, and by cards. With both I went largely by inspiration. I found this "inspiration" varied with the individual. There were many persons to whom I could give the most extraordinarily accurate details of past, present, and future; others moderately so; others were a total blank, in

which case I either had to remain silent or "try to make up." I got such a reputation for this—I was so sought after for it by even total strangers—that in a couple of years I pushed it all far away from me as an intolerable nuisance.

## V

The Faith that had been growing up in me was of a very different form from that which I had had before: wider, purer, infinitely more powerful, and, though I did not like to remember the pain of them, I felt that those struggling years of doubt and negation had been worth while—without those struggles I felt I never could have had so powerful a faith as I now had. God was at an indefinite and infinite distance, but His Existence was a thing of complete certainty for me.

Of the mode and means of Connection with Him I had no smallest knowledge or even conception. I addressed Him with words from the brain and the lips. An insuperable wall perpetually separated me from Him.

Now my father became ill with heart trouble. Doctors, nurses, all the dreaded paraphernalia of sickness pervaded the house. During two terrible years he lingered on. Heart-broken at the sight of his sufferings, I hardly left his bedside. Finally death released him. But my health, which had always been good, was now completely broken down; I became a semi-invalid, always suffering, too delicate to marry. Under pressure of this continued wretchedness I sank into a nerveless condition of mere dumb endurance—a passive acceptance of the miseries of life "as willed by God," I assured myself.

I entered a stagnant state of *mere* resignation, whereas accompanying the resignation there should have been a forward-piercing endeavour to reach out and attain a higher spiritual level through Jesus Christ: a persistent effort to light my lamp at the Spiritual Flame to which each must *bring his own lamp*, for it is not lit for him by the mere outward ceremony of Baptism—that ceremony is but the Invitation to come to the Light: for each one individually, *in full consciousness of desire*, that lighting must be obtained from the Saviour. I had not obtained this light. I did not comprehend that it was necessary. I understood nothing; I was a spiritual savage. Vague, miserable thoughts, gloomy self-introspections, merely fatigue the

vitality without assisting the soul. What is required is a persistent endeavour to establish an inwardly felt relationship first to the Man Jesus. His Personality, His Characteristics are to be drawn into the secret places of the heart by means of the natural sympathy which plays between two hearts that both know love and suffering, and hope and dejection. Sympathy established—love will soon follow. Later, an iron energy to overcome will be required. The supreme necessity of the soul before being filled with love is to maintain the will of the whole spiritual being in conformity with the Will of God. In the achievement of this she is under incessant assistance: in fact everything in the spiritual life is a gift—as in the physical: for who can produce his own sight or his own growth? In the physical these are automatic—in the spiritual they are accomplished only, as it were, "by request," and this request a deep all-pervading desire.

We cannot of our own will climb the spiritual heights, neither can we climb them without using our will. It is Will flowing towards Will which carries us by the power of Jesus Christ to the Goal.

## VI

With recovered health, I married, and knew great happiness; but as a bride of four months I had to part from my husband, who went to the South African War. Always, always this terrible pain of love that must part. Always it was love that seemed to me the most beautiful thing in life, and always it was love that hurt me most. He was away for fifteen months. I made no spiritual advance whatever. Mystified by so much pain, I now began to regard God if not as the actual Author of all pain, at any rate as the Permitter of all pain. More and more I fell back in alarm at the discovery of the depths of my own capacities for suffering. A tremendous fear of God now commenced to grow up in me, which so increased that after a few years I listened with astonishment when I heard people say they were afraid of *any* person, even a burglar! I could no longer understand feeling fear for anyone or anything save God. All my actions were now governed solely by this sense of weighty, immediate fear of Him. This continued for some ten years.

When my husband at last returned from the War we took up again our happy married life, and we lived together without a cross word, in a wonderful world of our own, as lovers do. It was re-

markable that we were so happy, for we had no interests in common. My husband loved all sports and all games, whereas interest in those things was frankly incomprehensible to me. In the winter, when he was out in the hunting-field, I spent much time by myself; but I was never dull, for I could walk out amongst Nature and indulge in my pastime, if the weather were fine: and if not, I could observe and admire everything that grew and lived close at hand in the hedgerows and fields, and I would work for hours with my needle, for then I could think; I worked hard in the garden.

A dreadful question now often presented itself to me: Had I really a soul at all, or was I merely a passing shadow, here momentarily for God's amusement? If I had an eternal soul, where did it live—in my head with my brain as a higher part of my mind?

Men had souls, I was sure of that; and they asserted the possession of them very positively—but women? I understood Mahomed grudgingly granted them a half-soul, and that only conditionally. Scriptures spoke harshly of women; Paul was bitter against them; all the sins and troubles of the world were laid upon their delicate and beautiful shoulders. In Revelation I found no mention whatever of Woman in the life of the Resurrection.

All this hurt me. What profound injustice—to suffer so much and to receive no recognition whatever whilst men walked off with all the joys after leading very questionable lives! Why continue to struggle to please God when His interest in me would so soon be over? I went through very real and great spiritual sufferings, and temptations to throw myself again solely into world-interests, to console myself with the here and now, for I had the means: it was all to my hand. I swayed to and fro: at one time I felt very hard towards God, terribly hurt by this love-betrayal. But when I looked at the beauties of Nature and the glories of that endless sky, ah, my heart melted with tenderness and admiration for the marvellous Maker of it all. Truly, He was worthy of any sacrifice upon my part. If my poor, tiny, suffering life afforded Him amusement, I was willing to have it so. After all—for what wretched, ugly, and miserable men women frequently sacrificed themselves without getting any other reward for it than neglect and indifference. How much better to sacrifice oneself to the All-Perfect, All-Beautiful God!

I finally resigned myself entirely and completely to this point of view, and, having done so, I thus addressed, in all reverence and earnestness, the Deity:—

"Almighty God, if it is Thy Will to blot out Woman from Paradise I most humbly assure Thee of this—Man will miss her sorely; and Thou Thyself, Almighty God, when Thou dost visit Paradise, wilt miss her also!"

After this I seldom said any private prayers, for I was not of the Acceptable Sex. But I paid a public respect to God in the church, where I worshipped Him with profound reverence and great sadness. But I thought of Him in my heart constantly, with all those tender, loving, longing thoughts which are the heart's bouquet held out to God.

Happiness for me, then, must be found entirely in this world, and I found it in my love for my husband. Happiness was that which the whole world was looking for; but I could not fail to notice more and more the ridiculous picture presented by Society in its pretences of being the means of finding this happiness. None of its ardent devotees were "happy" people; they were excited, egotistical, intensely vain and selfish, often bitter and disappointed, filled with a demon of competition, jealous, and full of empty, insincere smiles. I perceived the chagrins from which they secretly suffered—the tears behind the laughter. I was not in the least deceived or impressed by any of them, but wondered how they managed to hang together and deceive each other. More and more I looked for purely mental pleasures. Mind was everything. I now began to despise my body—I almost hated it as an incubus! Social successes or failures grew to be a matter of complete indifference to me, and social life resolved itself into being solely the means of bringing mind into contact with mind. The question of fashionable environment ceased to exist for me, but the question of how and where to meet with thinking minds was what concerned me: it was not an easy one to solve in the usual conditions of country life, with its sports and its human-animal interests.

Finally, total mental solitude closed around me. In spite of my doubt as to the existence of a woman-soul, I still felt the same piercing desire and need for God—the acquisition of knowledge in no