

THE WARP AND THE WOOF OF THINGS.

XXXIII.

At the dinner table the Angel told the Vicar the more striking of his day's adventures.

"The strange thing," said the Angel, "is the readiness of you Human Beings--the zest, with which you inflict pain. Those boys pelting me this morning----"

"Seemed to enjoy it," said the Vicar. "I know."

"Yet they don't like pain," said the Angel.

"No," said the Vicar; "they don't like it."

"Then," said the Angel, "I saw some beautiful plants rising with a spike of leaves, two this way and two that, and when I caressed one it caused the most uncomfortable----"

"Stinging nettle!" said the Vicar.

"At any rate a new sort of pain. And another plant with a head like a coronet, and richly decorated leaves, spiked and jagged----"

"A thistle, possibly."

"And in your garden, the beautiful, sweet-smelling plant----"

"The sweet briar," said the Vicar. "I remember."

"And that pink flower that sprang out of the box----"

"Out of the box?" said the Vicar.

"Last night," said the Angel, "that went climbing up the curtains---- Flame!"

"Oh!--the matches and the candles! Yes," said the Vicar.

"Then the animals. A dog to-day behaved most disagreeably----. And these boys, and the way in which people speak----. Everyone seems anxious--willing at any rate--to give this Pain. Every one seems busy giving pain----"

"Or avoiding it," said the Vicar, pushing his dinner away before him.

"Yes--of course. It's fighting everywhere. The whole living world is a battle-field--the whole world. We are driven by Pain. Here. How it lies on the surface! This Angel sees it in a day!"

"But why does everyone--everything--want to give pain?" asked the Angel.

"It is not so in the Angelic Land?" said the Vicar.

"No," said the Angel. "Why is it so here?"

The Vicar wiped his lips with his napkin slowly. "It is so," he said.

"Pain," said he still more slowly, "is the warp and the woof of this life. Do you know," he said, after a pause, "it is almost impossible for me to imagine ... a world without pain.... And yet, as you played this morning----

"But this world is different. It is the very reverse of an Angelic world. Indeed, a number of people--excellent religious people--have been so impressed by the universality of pain that they think, after death, things will be even worse for a great many of us. It seems to me an excessive view. But it's a deep question. Almost beyond one's power of discussion----"

And incontinently the Vicar plumped into an impromptu dissertation upon "Necessity," how things were so because they were so, how one had to do this and that. "Even our food," said the Vicar. "What?" said the Angel. "Is not obtained without inflicting Pain," said the Vicar.

The Angel's face went so white that the Vicar checked himself suddenly. Or he was just on the very verge of a concise explanation of the

antecedents of a leg of lamb. There was a pause.

"By-the-bye," said the Angel, suddenly. "Have you been pithed? Like the common people."