

THE SEA CLIFF.

XLIII.

The Angel lay upon the summit of the cliff above Bandram Bay, and stared out at the glittering sea. Sheer from under his elbows fell the cliff, five hundred and seven feet of it down to the datum line, and the sea-birds eddied and soared below him. The upper part of the cliff was a greenish chalky rock, the lower two-thirds a warm red, marbled with gypsum bands, and from half-a-dozen places spurted jets of water, to fall in long cascades down its face. The swell frothed white on the flinty beach, and the water beyond where the shadows of an outstanding rock lay, was green and purple in a thousand tints and marked with streaks and flakes of foam. The air was full of sunlight and the tinkling of the little waterfalls and the slow sougning of the seas below. Now and then a butterfly flickered over the face of the cliff, and a multitude of sea birds perched and flew hither and thither.

The Angel lay with his crippled, shrivelled wings humped upon his back, watching the gulls and jackdaws and rooks, circling in the sunlight, soaring, eddying, sweeping down to the water or upward into the dazzling blue of the sky. Long the Angel lay there and watched them going to and fro on outspread wings. He watched, and as he watched them he remembered with infinite longing the rivers of starlight and the sweetness of the land from which he came. And a gull came gliding overhead, swiftly and

easily, with its broad wings spreading white and fair against the blue. And suddenly a shadow came into the Angel's eyes, the sunlight left them, he thought of his own crippled pinions, and put his face upon his arm and wept.

A woman who was walking along the footpath across the Cliff Field saw only a twisted hunchback dressed in the Vicar of Siddermorton's cast-off clothes, sprawling foolishly at the edge of the cliff and with his forehead on his arm. She looked at him and looked again. "The silly creature has gone to sleep," she said, and though she had a heavy basket to carry, came towards him with an idea of waking him up. But as she drew near she saw his shoulders heave and heard the sound of his sobbing.

She stood still a minute, and her features twitched into a kind of grin. Then treading softly she turned and went back towards the pathway. "'Tis so hard to think of anything to say," she said. "Poor afflicted soul!"

Presently the Angel ceased sobbing, and stared with a tear-stained face at the beach below him.

"This world," he said, "wraps me round and swallows me up. My wings grow shrivelled and useless. Soon I shall be nothing more than a crippled man, and I shall age, and bow myself to pain, and die.... I am miserable. And I am alone."

Then he rested his chin on his hands upon the edge of the cliff, and began to think of Delia's face with the light in her eyes. The Angel felt a curious desire to go to her and tell her of his withered wings. To place his arms about her and weep for the land he had lost. "Delia!" he said to himself very softly. And presently a cloud drove in front of the sun.