THE ODOR OF THE OINTMENT

BY ZONA GALE

ASCENSION lilies were everywhere in our shabby drawing-room. They crowded two tables and filled a corner, and rose, slim and white, atop an old Sheraton cabinet. Every one had sent Peleas and me a sheaf of the white blooms—the Cleatams and the Chartres, Miss Willie Lillieblade and Enid and Lisa and Hobart Eddy, had all remembered us on Easter eve, and we entered our drawing-room after breakfast on Easter morning to be almost greeted with a winding of the silver trumpets. The sun smote gloriously across them, and some were like a heavenly kind of candle, their light secretly diffused, premonitory of spring, of some far-off resurrection of light itself into a newer, sweeter element. It was a wonderful Easter day, and, in spite of our absurd white hair, Peleas and I were never in fairer health; and yet, for the first time in our forty-eight years together, Easter found us close prisoners. Easter morning, and we were forbidden to leave the house!

Peleas walked to the window, and lifted and touched among the blossoms, and shook his head sadly.

"Ettare," he said, with some show of firmness, "there is no reason in the world why we should not go."

"Ah, well now," said I, with a sigh, "prove that to Nichola. Do I not know it perfectly already?"

It is one sign of our advancing years, we must suppose, that we are prone to blame each other for the trifles that heaven sends. The sterner things we long ago learned to accept with our hands clasped in each other's; but when the postman is late, or the hot water is cold, or the gas is poor, we have a way of looking solemnly sidewise, with our souls tried.

Yet the night before we had gone upstairs in the best of humors, Peleas carrying an Ascension lily to stand in the moonlight of our window—for it always seems to me the saddest injustice to set the sullen extinguisher of lowered lights upon the brief life of a flower. And we had looked forward happily to the hallowed hour of the morning when the service is, as it should always be, inseparable from a festival of spring.

Then, lo! when we were awakened there was the treacherous world one glittering coat of ice. Branches sparkled against the sparkling blue, the wall of the park was a long rampart of silver, and the faithless sidewalks were mockeries of slipperiness. But the sad significance of this did not come to me until Nichola entered the dining-room with the griddle-cakes and found me dressed in my gray silk and Peleas in broadcloth.

"Is it," said our old serving-woman, who ruled us as if she had brought us from Italy, and we had not, forty-odd years ago, tempted her from her native Capri, "is it that you are mad, with this ice everywhere, everywhere?"

"It is Easter morning, Nichola," said I, with the mildness of one who supports a perfect cause.

"Our Lady knows it is so," said Nichola, setting down her smoking burden; "but the streets are so thick with ice that one breaks one's head a thousand times. You must not think of so much as stepping in the ar-y."

She left the room, and the honey-gold cakes cooled while Peleas and I looked at each other, aghast. Miss our Easter service for the first time in our life together! The thought was hardly to be borne. We argued it out with Nichola when she came back, and Peleas even stamped his foot under the table; but she only brought more cakes and shook her head—the impertinent old woman who has conceived that she must take care of us.

"One breaks one's head a thousand times," she repeated, obstinately. "Our Lady would not wish it. Danger is not holy."

To tell the truth, as Peleas and I

looked sorrowfully out the window over the Ascension lilies, we knew that there was reason in the situation, for the streets were perilous even to look at None the less we bitterly resented it, for it is bad enough to have a disagreeable matter occur without having reason on its side too. As for our carriage, that went long ago, together with the days when Peleas could model and I could write so that a few were deceived; and as for a cab to our far downtown church and back, that was not to be considered. For several years now we have stepped, as Nichola would say, softly, softly from one security to the next, so that we need not give up our house; and even now we are seldom sure that one month's comfort will keep its troth with the next. Since it was too icy to walk to the car, we must needs remain where we were.

"I suppose," said I, as if it were a matter of opinion, "that it is really Easter uptown too. But some way—"

"I know," said Peleas. Really, of all the pleasures of this world, I think that the "I know" of Peleas in answer to something I have left unsaid is the last to be foregone. I hope that there is no one who does not have this delight.

"Peleas—" I began tremblingly to suggest.

"Ah, well now," cried Peleas, resolutely, "let us go anyway. We can walk beside the curb slowly. And, after all, we do not belong to Nichola." Really, of all the pleasures of this world, I think that the daring of Peleas at moments when I am cowardly is quite the last to be renounced. I hope that there is no one who has not the delight of living near some one a bit braver than one is one's self.

With one accord we guiltily slipped from the drawing-room and toiled up the stairs. I think, although we would not for the world have said so, that there may have been in both our minds the fear that this might be our last Easter together, and if it were, to run away to Easter service would be a fitting memory, a little delicious human thing to remember among austerer glories. Out of its box in a twinkling came my violet bonnet, and I hardly so much as looked in a mirror as I put it on. I fastened my cloak wrong from top to bottom and seized two right-hand gloves and thrust them in my muff. And then we opened the door and listened. There was not a sound in the house. We ventured into the passage and down the stairs, and I think we did not breathe until the outer door closed softly upon us. For Nichola, we have come to believe, is a mystic, and thinks other people's thoughts. At all events, she finds us out so often that we prefer to theorize that it is her penetration and not our clumsiness that betrays us.

Nichola had already cleaned the steps with hot water and salt and ashes and sawdust combined—Nichola is so thorough that I am astonished that she has not corrupted me with the quality. Yet no sooner was I beyond the pale of her friendly care than I overestimated thoroughness, like the weak character that I am, and wished that the whole street had practiced it. I took three steps on that icy surface and stood still, desperately.

"Peleas," I said, weakly, "I feel—I feel like a little nut on top of a big, frosted, indigestible cake."

I laughed a bit hysterically, and Peleas slipped my arm more firmly in his, and we crept forward, like the hands of a clock, Peleas a little the faster, as became the tall minute hand. We turned the corner safely, and had only one interminable block to traverse before we reached the haven of the car. I looked down that long expanse of slippery gray, unbroken save where a divine janitor or two had interposed, and my courage failed me. And Peleas rashly ventured on advice.

"You walk too stiffly, Ettare," he explained. "Relax, relax! Step along slowly but easily, as I do. Then, if you fall, you fall like a child—no jar, no shock, no broken bones. Now relax—"

And Peleas did. Before I could shape my answer Peleas had relaxed. He lay in a limp little heap on the ice beside me, and I shall never forget my moment of despair.

I do not know where she came from, but while I stood there hopelessly reiterating, "Peleas—why, Peleas!" on the verge of tears, she stepped from some

door of the air to my assistance. She wore a little crimson hat and a crimson collar, but her poor coat, I afterward noted, was sadly worn. A the moment of her coming it was her clear, pale face that fixed itself in my grateful memory. She darted forward, stepped down from the curb, and held out two hands to Peleas.

"Oh, sir," she said, "I can help you. I have on rubber boots."

Surely, no interfering goddess ever arrived in a more practical frame of mind.

When Peleas was upon his feet, looking about him in a dazed and somewhat unforgiving fashion, the little maid caught off her crimson muffler and brushed his coat. And Peleas, with bared head, made her as courtly a bow as his foothold permitted as she was standing somewhat shyly before us with the prettiest anxiety on her face, shaking the snow from the crimson muffler.

"You are not hurt, sir?" she asked, and seemed so vastly relieved at his reassurance that she quite won our hearts. "Now," she said, "won't you let me walk with you? My rubber boots will do for all three."

We each accepted her arm without the smallest protest. I will hazard that no shipwrecked sailor ever inquired of the rescuing sail whether he were inconveniencing it. Once safely aboard, however, and well under way, he may have symbolized his breeding to the extent of offering a faint, polite resistance.

As "Shall we not be putting you out?" inquired Peleas, never offering to release her arm.

And "I'm afraid we are," I ventured, pressing to her all the closer. She was frail as I, too, and it was not the rubber boots to which I pinned my faith; she was young, and you can hardly know what safety that bespeaks until you are seventy, on ice.

"It's just around the corner," informed Peleas, apologetically, and for the first time I perceived that, by common consent, we had turned back toward home. But neither of us mentioned that.

Then, while we stepped forward with beautiful nicety, rounding the corner to come upon the avenue, suddenly, without a moment's warning, our blackest fears were fulfilled. We ran full upon Nichola.

"Ah, I told you, Peleas!" I murmured; which I had not, but one has to take some comfort in crises.

Without a word Nichola wheeled solemnly, grasped my other arm, and made herself fourth in our singular party. Her gray head was unprotected, and her hair stood out all about it. She had thrown her apron about her shoulders, and great patches in her print gown were visible to all the world. When Nichola's sleeves wear out, she always cuts a piece from the front breadth of her skirt to refurbish them, trusting to her aprons to conceal the deficit. She was a sorry old figure, indeed, out there on the avenue in the Easter sunshine, and I inclined bitterly to resent her interference.

"Nichola," said I, haughtily, "one would think that we were obliged to be wheeled about on casters."

Nichola made but brief reply.

"Our Lady knows you'd be better so," she said.

So that was how, on Easter morning, with the bells pealing like a softer silver across the silver of the glittering city, Peleas and I found ourselves back in our lonely drawing-room considerably shaken and hovering before the fire which Nichola stirred into a leaping blaze. And with us, since we had so insisted upon her coming, was our new little friend, fluttering about us with the prettiest concern, taking away my cloak, untying my bonnet, and wheeling an armchair for Peleas, quite as if she were the responsible little hostess and we her upset guests. And presently, the bright hat and worn coat laid aside, she sat on a hassock before the blaze and looked up at us in her delicious shyness, like a little finch that had alighted at our casement and had been coaxed within. I think that I love best these little bird-women whom one expects at any moment to hear thrilling with a lilt of unreasonable song.

"My dear," said I, upon a sudden, "how selfish of us! I dare say you will have been going to church?"

She hesitated briefly.

"I might 'a' gone to the mission," she

explained, unaccountably coloring, "but I don't know if I would. On Easter."

"But I would have thought," I cried, "that this is the day of days to go."

"It would be," she assented, "it would be—" she went on, hesitating, "but, ma'am, I can't bear to go," she burst out, "because they don't have no flowers. We go to the mission," she added, "and not to the grand churches. And it seems—it seems—don't you think God must be where the most flowers are? An' last Easter we only had one geranium."

Bless the child! I dare say I must be a kind of pagan, for I understood.

"Your flowers are beau-tiful," she said, shyly, with a little breath of content. "Are they real? I've been wantin' to ask you. I never saw so many without the glass in front. But they don't smell much," she added, wistfully; "I wonder why that is?"

Peleas and I had been wondering that very morning. They looked so sweet-scented and yet were barren of fragrance; and we had told ourselves that they were, perhaps, lilies of symbol, without mission or message beyond the symbol, without hue or passion, or, so to say, experience.

"Perhaps if one were to make some one happy with them, or to put them in a bride's bouquet, they would no longer be scentless," Peleas quaintly said.

But now my mind was busy with other problems than those of such fragrance.

"Where do you go to church, my dear?" I asked, gravely, not daring to glance at Peleas.

"To the mission," she said, "over—" and she named one of the poorest and most struggling of the East Side chapels. "It's just started," she explained, "an' the lady that give most, she died, and the money don't come. And poor Mr. Lovelow, he's the minister, and he's sick—but he preaches, anyhow. And pretty near nobody comes to hear him," she added, with a curious, half-defiant emotion, her cheeks still glowing. It was strange that I, who am such a busybody of romance, was so slow in comprehending that betraying color.

Peleas and I knew where the mission was. We had even peeped into it one Sunday when, though it was not quite finished, they were trying to hold service from the unpainted pulpit. I remembered the ugly walls, covered with the lead-pencil calculations of the builders, the forlorn reed organ, the pushing feet upon the floor. And now "the lady who give most" had died.

"Last Easter," our little friend was reiterating, "we had one geranium that the minister brought. But now his mother is dead, and I guess he won't be keeping plants. Men always lets 'em freeze. Mis' Sledge, she's got a cactus, but it hasn't bloomed yet. Maybe she'll take that. And they said they was going to hang up the letters left from last Christmas, for the green. They don't say nothing but 'Welcome' and 'Star of Bethlehem,' but I s'pose the 'Welcome' is always nice for a church, and I s'pose the star shines all year round, for that matter. But they don't much of anybody come. Mr. Lovelow, he's too sick to visit round much. Last Sunday they was only 'leven in the whole room."

"Only 'leven in the whole room." It hardly seemed credible in New York. Yet I knew the poverty of some of the smaller missions, especially in a case where "the lady that give most" has died. And this poor young minister, this young Mr. Lovelow whose mother had died, and who was too sick to "visit round much," and doubtless had an indifferent, poverty-ridden parish which no other minister wanted—I knew the whole story of the struggle in an instant. I looked over at our great banks of Ascension lilies and I found myself most unreasonably angry with the dear Cleatams and Chartres and the rest for the self-indulgence of having given them to us!

At that moment my eyes met those of Peleas. He was leaning forward looking at me with his adorable expression of both daring and fear of my disapproval, and I saw his eyes go swiftly to the lilies. What was he contriving, I wondered, my heart beating. He was surely not thinking of sending our lilies over to the mission, for we could never get them all there in time, and Nichola—

"Ettare!" said Peleas—and showed me in a moment heights of resourcefulness to which I can never attain—

"Ettare! It is only half after ten. We can't go out to service—and the mission is not four blocks from us. Why not have our little friend run over there, and if there are only two dozen or so in the church, have that young Mr. Lovelow bring them all over here, and let it be Easter in this room?"

He waved his hand to the lilies waiting there all about the walls and doing no one any good but a selfish old man and woman. He looked at me, almost abashed at his own impulse, certain that I would believe him mad. Was ever such a practical Mahomet, proposing to bring to himself some Mountain Delectable?

"Do you mean," I asked breathlessly, "to let them have church in this—"

"Here with us, in the drawing-room," Peleas explained. "Why not? There were fifty in the room for that morning Lenten musicale. There's the piano for the music. And the lilies—the lilies—"

"Of course we will," I cried. "But, oh! will they come? Do you think they will come?"

I turned to our little friend, and she had risen and was waiting with shining eyes.

"Oh, ma'am," she said, trembling, "why, ma'am! Oh, yes'm, they'll come. I'll get 'em here myself. Oh, Mr. Lovelow, he'll be so glad . . ."

She flew to her bright hat and worn coat and crimson muffler.

"Mr. Lovelow says," she cried, "that a mission church is just as much a holy temple as the ark of the government—but he was so glad when we dyed the spread for the orgin—oh, ma'am," she broke off, knotting the crimson scarf about her throat, "do you really want 'em? They ain't—you know they don't look—"

"Hurry, child," said Peleas, "and mind you don't let one of them escape!"

When she was gone we looked at each other in a frightful panic.

"Peleas," I cried, trembling, "think of all there is to be done in ten minutes."

Peleas brushed this aside as a mere straw in the wind.

"Think of Nichola," he portentously amended.

In all our flurry we could not help laughing at the frenzy of our old servant when we told her. Old Nichola was born upon the other side of every argument. In her we can see the history of all the world working out in a miniature of wrinkles. For Nichola would have cut off her gray hair with Sparta, hurled herself fanatically abroad on St. Bartholomew's Day, borne a pike before the Bastile, broken and burned the first threshing-machine in England, stoned Luther, and helped sew the stars upon striped cloth in the kitchen of Betsy Ross.

Peleas once said that old Nichola proved to him that Liberals and Conservatives, galley-slaves and Pharaohs, are but a kind of geometrical progression in nerves from a fixed base of our common consciousness.

"For the love of heaven," cried Nichola, "church in the best room! It is not holy. Whoever heard o' church in a private house, like a spiritualist see-once, or whatever they are. An' me with a sponge-cake in the oven," she concluded, fervently. "Heaven be helpful, ma'am, I wish't you'd 'a' went to church yourselves."

By means of chairs drawn from the library and dining-room and frantically dusted with Nichola's apron, we were quickly ready, with the lilies turned from the windows to look inward upon the room, and a little table laid with a white cloth and set with a vase of lilies, for the Bible. And, in spite of Nichola, who every moment scolded and prophesied and nodded her head in the certainty that all the thunders of the church would descend upon us, we were ready when the door-bell rang. I peeped from the drawing-room window and saw that our steps were filled!

"Nichola," said I, trembling, "you will come up to the service, will you not?"

Nichola shook her old gray head.

"It's a nonsense," she shrilly proclaimed. "It will not be civilized. It will not be religious. I'll open the door on 'em, but I won't do nothink elst, ma'am."

The sun was slanting madly across our shabby drawing-room, and the lilies were a glory in the light, when we heard their garments in the hall and the voice of Little Friend. Then Peleas threw open

the door, and there was our Easter, come to us upon the threshold.

I shall not soon forget the fragile, gentle figure who led them. The Reverend Stephen Lovelow, with his soul aflame in his luminous face and deep eyes, came in with outstretched hand, and I have forgotten what he said, or, indeed, whether he spoke at all. But he took our hands in his hot, thin hand, and greeted us as the disciple must have greeted the host of that House of the Upper Room. We led the way to the white table where he laid his worn Bible, and then stood in silence while the others found their places, marshaled briskly by Little Friend, who made as efficient a captain as she had a deliverer. There were plenty of chairs and to spare, and when every one was seated, in perfect quiet, the young clergyman bowed his head:

"Lord, thou hast made thy face to shine upon us—" he prayed, and it seemed to me that our shabby drawing-room, with its windows of sun and white bloom, was suddenly glorified and quick with a presence more intimate than the lilies.

When the hymn was given out and there was a fluttering of leaves of the hymn-books they had brought, five of our guests, at a nod from Mr. Lovelow, made their way forward. One was a young woman with a face ruddy, but ruddy with that strange, wrinkled ruddiness of age rather than of youth, and she wore a huge felt hat laden with flaming roses evidently added expressly for Easter day. She had on a thin waist of flimsy pink, with a collar of beads and silver braid, and there were stones of all colors in a half-dozen rings upon her hands. She took her place at the piano with an ease almost defiant, and she played the hymn not badly, I must admit, and sang in a full riotous soprano. Meanwhile, at her side was ranged the choir. There were four—a great watch-dog of a bass, with swelling veins upon his forehead, and erect reddish hair; a little round contralto in a plush cap, and a dress trimmed with the appliquéd flowers cut from a lace curtain; a tall, shy soprano who looked from one to another through the hymn as if she were in personal exhortation; and a pleasant-faced tenor who sang with a will that was good to hear, and was evidently the choir leader, for he beat time with a stumpy, cracked hand set with a huge black ring on its middle finger. The little woman next me offered me her book, and I had a glimpse of a pinched side-face, with a displaced strand of gray hair and a loose linen collar with no cravat, but I have seldom heard a sweeter voice than that which up-trembled beside me—although, poor little woman! she was sadly ill at ease because the thumb which rested upon the book next me was thrust in a glove fully an inch too long. As for Peleas, he was sharing a book with a youngish man, stooped, long-armed, with a mane of loose black hair, whom Mr. Lovelow afterward told me had lost his position in a sweat-shop through drawing some excellent cartoons on the box of his machine. Mr. Lovelow himself was looking over with a mother and daughter who were afterward presented to us, and who embarrassed any listener by persistently talking in concert, each repeating a few words of what the other had just said, quite in the fashion of the most gently bred talkers bent upon assuring each other of their spontaneous sympathy and response.

And what a hymn it was! After the first stanza they gained in confidence, and a volume of sound filled the low room—ay, and a world of spirit, too. "Christ the Lord is risen to-day, Hallelu—jah! . . ." they caroled, and Peleas, who never can sing a tune aloud, although he declares indignantly that in his head he keeps it perfectly, and I, who do not sing at all, both joined perforce in the triumphant chorus. Ah, I dare say that farther down the avenue were sweet-voiced choirs that sang music long rehearsed, golden, flowing, all compact of spirit and sweet sound, and yet I think there was no more fervent Easter music than that in which we joined. It was as if the other music were the censer-smoke, and we were its shadow upon the ground, but a proof of the sun, for all that.

I cannot now remember all that simple service, perhaps because I so well remember the very glory of the hour. I

sat where I could glimpse the sunny park stretching away, black upon silver and silver upon black, over the tops of sheaves of Ascension lilies. The face of the young minister was illumined as he read and talked to his people. I think that I have never known such gentleness, never such yearning and tenderness, as were in him for that handful of crude and careless and devout. And though he spoke passionately and convincingly, I could not but think that he was like some dumb thing striving for the utterance of the secret fire within—striving to "burn aloud," as a violin beseeches understanding. Perhaps there is no other way to tell the story of that first day of the week—"early, when it was yet dark."

"They had brought sweet spices," he said, "with which to anoint Him. Where are the spices that we have brought to-day? Have we aught of sacrifice, of charity, of zeal, of adoration—let us lay them at His feet, an offering acceptable unto the Lord, a token of our presence at the door of the sepulcher from which the stone was rolled away. Where are the sweet spices of our hands, where the pound of ointment of spikenard wherewith we shall anoint the feet of our Lord? For if we bring of our spiritual possession, the Christ will suffer us, even as he suffered Mary; and the house shall be filled with the odor of the ointment."

"And the house shall be filled with the odor of the ointment," I said over to myself. Is it not strange how a phrase, a vista, a bar of song, the thought of God beneath the open stars, will almost pierce the veil?

"And the house shall be filled with the odor of the ointment," I said silently all through the last prayer and the last hymn and the benediction of "The Lord make his face to shine upon you, the Lord give you peace." And some way, with the rustle of their rising, the abashment which is an integral part of all such gatherings as we had convoked was not to be reckoned with, and straightway the presentations and the words of gratitude, and even the pretty anxiety of Little Friend fluttering among us, were spontaneous and unconstrained. It was quite as if, Peleas said afterward, we had some way magically been reduced to a common denominator! Indeed, it seems to me, remembering the day, as if half the principles of Christian sociology were illustrated there in our shabby drawing-room; but, for that matter, I would like to ask what complexities of political science, what profound bases of *solidarité*, are not on the way to be solved in the presence of Easter lilies? I am in all these matters most stupid and simple, but at all events I am not blameful enough to believe that they are exhausted by the theories.

Every one lingered for a little, in proof of the success of our venture. Peleas and I talked with the choir and the pianiste, and this lady informed us that our old rosewood piano, which we apologetically explained to be fifty years old, was every bit as good and every bit as loud as a new golden-oak instrument belonging to her sister. The tall, shy soprano told us, haltingly, how much she had enjoyed the hour, and her words carried with them all sincerity in spite of her strange system of over-emphasis of everything she said, and a carrying down the corners of her mouth, as if in deprecation. The plump little contralto thanked us, too, with a most winning smile—such round open eyes she had, immovably fixed on the object of her attention, and, as Peleas said, such *evident* eyes.

"Her eyes looked so amazingly like eyes," he afterward commented, whimsically.

We talked, too, with the little woman of the long-thumbed gloves, who had the extraordinary habit of smiling faintly and turning away her head whenever she detected any one looking at her. And the sweat-shop cartoonist proved to be an engaging young giant with the figure of a Greek god, classic features, a manner of gravity amounting almost to hauteur, and the most pronounced East Side dialect that I have ever heard.

"Will you not let us," said I to him, after Mr. Lovelow's word about his talent, "let us see your drawings some time? It would give us great pleasure."

Whereupon, "Sure. Me, I'll toin the whol' of 'em over to youse," said the

Greek god, thumbs out and shoulders flickering!

But back of these glimpses of reality among them there was something still more real; and though I dare say there will be some who will smile at the whole affair, and seek to "rationalize" upon it, and call that interest curiosity and those awkward thanks mere aping of convention, yet Peleas and I, who have a modest degree of intelligence and had the advantage of being present, do affirm that, on that Easter morning, countless little doors were opened in the air to admit a throng of sweet presences. We cannot tell what it may have been, and we are helpless before all argument and incredulity, but we know that a certain stone was rolled away from the door of the hearts of us all, and there were with us those in shining garments.

In the midst of all I turned to ask our Little Friend some trivial thing, and I saw that which made my old heart leap. Little Friend stood before a table of the lilies, and with her was young Mr. Lovelow. And something—I cannot tell what it may have been, but in these matters I am rarely mistaken; and something—as she looked up and he looked down made me know, past all doubting, how it was with them. And this open secret of their love was akin to the mysteries of the day itself. The gentle, sad young clergyman and our Little Friend of the crimson muffler had suddenly opened to us another door and admitted another joyous presence. I cannot tell how it may be with every one else, but for Peleas and me one such glimpse—a glimpse of two faces alight with happiness on the street, in a car, or wherever they may be—is enough to make glad a whole gray week. Though, to be sure, no week is ever wholly gray.

I was still busy with the sweet surprise of this, and longing for opportunity to tell Peleas, when they all moved toward the door, and, with good-bys, filed into the hall. And there in the anteroom stood Nichola, our old servant, who brushed my elbow and said in my ear:

"Mem, every one of 'em looks starvin'. I've a kettle of hot coffee ready an' there's fresh sponge-cake in plenty. I've put cups on the dinin'-room table, an' I thought—"

"Nichola!" said I, in a low and, I must believe, positively ecstatic tone.

"An' no end o' work it's made me, too," added our old servant, sourly, and not to be thought in the least gracious.

It was a very practical ending to that radiant Easter morning, but, indeed, I dare say we could have devised none better. Moreover, Nichola had ready sandwiches and a fresh cheese of her own making, and a great bowl of some simple salad dressed as only Nichola's Italian hands can dress it. I wondered, as I sat in the circle of our guests, a vase of Easter lilies on the table, whether Nichola, that grim old woman, who scorned to come to our service, had yet not brought her pound of ointment of spikenard, very precious.

"You and Mr. Lovelow are to spend the afternoon and have tea with us," I whispered Little Friend, and had the joy of seeing the tell-tale color leap gloriously to her cheek and a tell-tale happiness kindle in his eyes. I am never free from amazement that a mere word, or so humble a plan for another's pleasure, can give so much joy. Verily, one would suppose that we would all be so busy at this pastime that we would almost neglect our duties!

So when the others were gone these two lingered. All through the long, spring-gold afternoon they sat with us beside our crackling fire of bavin-sticks, telling us of this and that homely interest, of some one's timid hope and another's sacrifice, in the life of the little mission. Ah, I dare say that Carlyle and Hugo have the master's hand for touching open a casement here and there and letting one look in upon an isolated life, and, sympathizing for one passionate moment, turn away before the space is closed again with darkness; but these two were destined that day to give us glimpses hardly less poignant, to open to us so many unknown hearts that we would be justified in never again being occupied with our own concerns. And when, after tea, they stood in the dusk of the hallway trying to say good-by, I think that their secret must have shone in our faces too, and, as the children

say, "we all knew that we all knew," and life was a thing of heavenly blessedness.

Young Mr. Lovelow took the hand of Peleas, and mine he kissed.

"The Lord bless you, the Lord make his face to shine upon you, the Lord give you peace," was in his eyes as he went away.

"And, oh, sir," Little Friend said shyly to Peleas as she stood at the top of the steps, knotting her crimson muffler, "ain't it good, after all, that Easter was all over ice?"

That night Peleas carried upstairs a great armful of the Ascension lilies to stand in the moonlight of our window. We took lilies to the mantel, and set great stalks of bloom upon the table, with their white trumpets turned within upon the room. And when the doors had been made fast and the lower lights extinguished, and Nichola had bade us her grumbling good-night, we opened the door of that upper room where the moon was silvering the lilies; and, on a sudden, in the dimness we stood still, smitten by a common surprise.

"Peleas," I said, uncertainly, "oh, Peleas! I thought—"

"So did I," said Peleas, with a deep breath.

We bent above the lilies that looked so sweet-scented and yet had been barren of fragrance because, we had told ourselves, they were, perhaps, flowers of symbol, without mission or message beyond the symbol, without hue or passion, or, so to say, experience. ("Perhaps if one were to make some one happy with them, or to put them in a bride's bouquet, they would no longer be scentless," Peleas had quaintly said.) And now Peleas and I were certain, as we stood hushed beside them, that our Easter lilies were giving out a faint, delicious fragrance.

I looked up at him almost fearfully in the flood of spring moonlight. The radiance was full upon his white hair and tranquil face, and he met my eyes with the knowledge that we were suddenly become the custodians of a strange, exquisite secret. The words of the young servant of God came to me understandingly.

"'And the house shall be filled with the odor of the ointment,'" I said over, softly. "Oh, Peleas," I added, tremulously, "do you think . . ."

Peleas lifted his face, and I thought that it shone in the dimness.

"Ah, well," he answered, "we must believe all the beautiful things we can."

Comment on Current Books

New Books of Importance Among the books of special interest just published, and on which comment will be made later on in The Outlook, may be mentioned: Mr. Horace Traubel's "With Walt Whitman in Camden" (Small, Maynard & Co.), a volume of personal reminiscences by one whom some reviewer has termed Whitman's Boswell; Professor John C. Van Dyke's "The Opal Sea" (Scribners), which, like Professor Van Dyke's "The Desert," is a study in impressions and appearances; "The Memoirs of Archbishop Temple," by "Seven Friends" (Macmillan); Mr. Stephen Phillips's "Nero," a drama in blank verse: and a new volume in the standard reference-book, "Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians" (Macmillan).

The Art of Keeping Well A sensible book of advice out of a half-century of experience. The cheerful, spiritual tone of the writer is more fully accounted for in the biography filling half of the book, and in the tributes paid to her high character and great usefulness from men and women who came within her influence during her long and busy life. Her usefulness and her charities are perpetuated in the lives of her many friends, though she has entered the "upper room." (The Art of Keeping Well. By Cordelia A. Greene, M.D. Dodd, Mead & Co., New York. $1.25, net.)

Bruges and West Flanders One of a satisfactory series of illustrated descriptions of picturesque lands. The fascination of the "dead cities" of Flanders has been felt by many travelers, who will be eager to read these bits of history and comment by Mr. Osmond, and enjoy at the same time the admirable colored plates done by Amedée Forestier. Each one of these quaint, often despoiled towns has remaining some romantic relics and picturesque buildings—belfry, market-place, Hôtel de Ville—old