

us try to see with the eyes of her soul!

### V.

She is a woman of no more than thirty years of age, though she looks older. She comes here at irregular intervals, once a week or once a month; but when she comes she sits down to get solidly drunk on that alternation of beer and gin which the best authorities in England deem so efficacious.

As to her story, it is simplicity itself. She was kept in luxury for some years by a wealthy cotton broker, crossed to Europe with him, and lived in London and Paris like a queen. Then she got the idea of "respectability" and "settling down in life"; so she married a man who could keep her in mere comfort. Result: repentance, and a periodical need to forget her sorrows. She is still "respectable"; she never tires of repeating that she is not one of "those girls," but "a married woman living far up-town," and that she "never runs about with men."

It is not the failure of marriage; it is the failure of men to recognize what marriage was ordained to be. By a singular paradox, it is the triumph of the bourgeois, who is the chief supporter of marriage, that has degraded marriage to the level of the bourgeois. Only the hero is capable of marriage as the church understands it; for the marriage oath is a compact of appalling solemnity, an alliance of two souls against the world and against fate, with invocation of the great aid of the Most High. Death is not the most beautiful of adventures, as Charles Frohman said, on the "Titanic" ere she plunged, for death is unavoidable; marriage is a voluntary heroism. That marriage has to-day become a matter of convenience is the last word of the commercial spirit. It is as if one should take a vow of knighthood to combat dragons — until the dragons appeared.

So this poor woman, because she did not understand that respectability is a lie, that it is love that makes marriage sacred and not the sanction of church or state, because she took marriage as an asylum instead of as a crusade, has failed in life, and now seeks alcohol under the same fatal error.

Wine is the ripe gladness which accompanies valor and rewards toil; it is the plume on a man's lance-head, a fluttering gallantry — not good to lean upon. Therefore her eyes are glassed with horror as she gazes uncomprehending upon her fate. That which she did all to avoid confronts her; she does not realize that, had she faced it, it would have fled with all the other phantoms. For the sole reality of this universe is God.

The Old Absinthe House is not a place; it is not bounded by four walls; it is headquarters of an army of philosophies. From this dim corner let me range, wafting thought through every air, salient against every problem of mankind; for it will always return like Noah's dove to this ark, this strange little sanctuary of the Green Goddess which has been set down not upon Ararat, but by the banks of the "Father of Waters."

### VI.

Ah! the Green Goddess! What is the fascination that makes her so adorable and so terrible? Do you know that French sonnet "La légende de l'absinthe?" He must have loved it well, that poet. Here are his witnesses.

Apollon, qui pleurait le trépas d'Hyacinthe,  
Ne voulait pas céder la victoire à la mort.  
Il fallait que son âme, adepte de l'essor,

Trouvât pour la beauté une alchimie plus sainte.  
Donc, de sa main céleste il épuise, il éreinte  
Les dons les plus subtils de la divine Flore.  
Leurs corps brisés souspirent une exhalaison d'or  
Dont il nous recueillait la goutte de — l'Absinthe!

Aux cavernes blotties, aux palais pétillants,  
Par un, par deux, buvez ce breuvage d'aimant!  
Car c'est un sortilège, un propos de dictame,  
Ce vin d'opale pale avortit la misère,  
Ouvre de la beauté l'intime sanctuaire  
— Ensorcelle mon cœur, extasie mon âme!

What is there in absinthe that makes it a separate cult? The effects of its abuse are totally distinct from those of other stimulants. Even in ruin and in degradation it remains a thing apart; its victims wear a ghastly aureole all their own, and in their peculiar hell yet gloat with a sinister perversion of pride that they are not as other men.

But we are not to reckon up the uses of a thing by contemplating the wreckage of its abuse. We do not curse the sea because of occasional disasters to our mariners, or refuse axes to our woodsmen because we sympathize with Charles the First or Louis the Sixteenth. So therefore as special vices and dangers appertain to absinthe, so also do graces and virtues that adorn no other liquor.

The word is from the Greek *apsinthion*; it means "undrinkable" or, according to some authorities, "undelightful". In either case, strange paradox? No; for the wormwood draught itself were bitter beyond human endurance; it must be aromatized and mellowed with other herbs.

Chief among these is the gracious Melissa, of which the great Paracelsus thought so highly that he incorporated it as the chief ingredient in the preparation of his *Ens Melissa Vitae*, which he expected to be an elixir of life and a cure for all diseases, but which in his hands never came to perfection.

Then also there are added mint, anise, fennel and hyssop, all holy herbs familiar to all from the Treasury of Hebrew Scripture. And there is even the sacred marjoram which renders man both chaste and passionate, the tender green angelica stalks also infused in this most mystic of concoctions; for like the *artemisia absinthium* itself it is a plant of Diana, and gives the purity and lucidity, with a touch of the madness, of the Moon; and above all there is the *Dittany* of Crete of which the eastern Sages say that one flower hath more puissance in high magic than all the other gifts of all the gardens of the world. It is as if the first diviner of absinthe had been indeed a magician intent upon a combination of sacred drugs which should cleanse, fortify and perfume the human soul.

And it is no doubt that in the due employment of this liquor such effects are easy to obtain. A single glass seems to render the breathing freer, the spirit lighter, the heart more ardent, soul and mind alike more capable of executing the great task of doing that particular work in the world which the Father may have sent them to perform. Food itself loses its gross qualities in the presence of absinthe, and becomes even as manna, operating the sacrament of nutrition without bodily disturbance.

Let then the pilgrim enter reverently the shrine, and drink his absinthe as a stirrup-cup, for in the right conception of this life as an ordeal of chivalry lies the foundation of every perfection