

LORE OF PROSERPINE

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Lore of Proserpine by Maurice Hewlett

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MAURICE HEWLETT

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PROSERPINE**

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BY

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"Thus go the fairy kind,
Whither Fate driveth; not as we
Who fight with it, and deem us free
Therefore, and after pine, or strain
Against our prison bars in vain;
For to them Fate is Lord of Life
And Death, and idle is a strife
With such a master . . ."

Hypsipyle.

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
NEW YORK : : : : 1913



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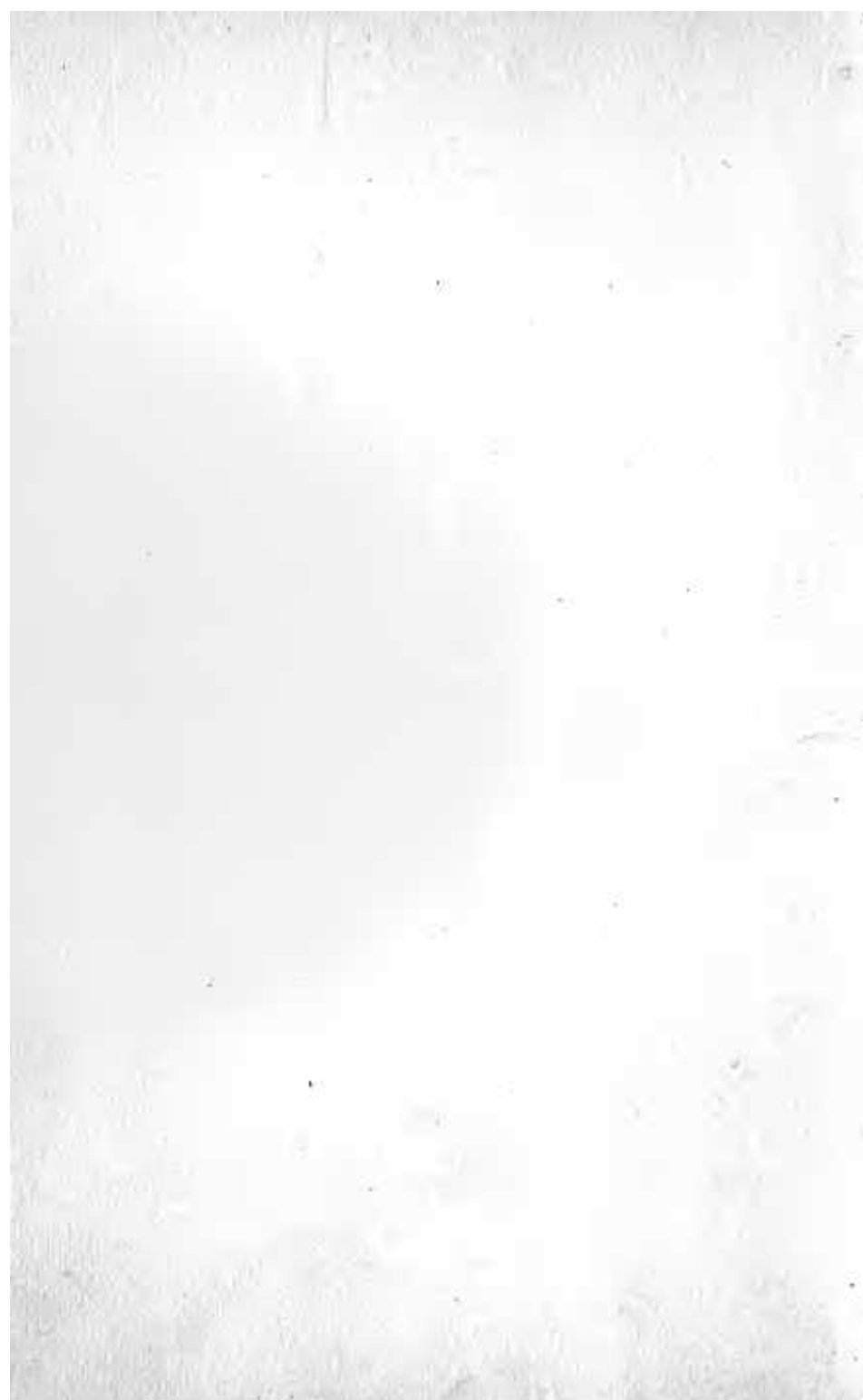
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TO
DESPOINA
FROM WHOM, TO WHOM
ALL



PREFACE

I HOPE nobody will ask me whether the things in this book are true, for it will then be my humiliating duty to reply that I don't know. They seem to be so to me writing them; they seemed to be so when they occurred, and one of them occurred only two or three years ago. That sort of answer satisfies me, and is the only one I can make. As I grow older it becomes more and more difficult to distinguish one kind of appearance from another, and to say, that is real, and again, that is illusion. Honestly, I meet in my daily walks innumerable beings, to all sensible signs male and female. Some of them I can touch, some smell, some speak with, some see, some discern otherwise than by sight. But if you cannot trust your eyes, why should you trust your nose or your fingers? There's my difficulty in talking about reality.

There's another way of getting at the truth after all. If a thing is not sensibly true it may be morally so. If it is not phenomenally true it may be so substantially. And it is possible that one may see substance in the idiom, so to speak, of the senses. That, I take it, is how the Greeks saw thunder-storms and other huge convulsions; that is how they saw meadow, grove and stream—in terms of their own

fair humanity. They saw such natural phenomena as shadows of spiritual conflict or of spiritual calm, and within the appearance apprehended the truth. So it may be that I have done. Some such may be the explanation of all fairy experience. Let it be so. It is a fact, I believe, that there is nothing revealed in this book which will not bear a spiritual, and a moral, interpretation; and I venture to say of some of it that the moral implications involved are exceedingly momentous, and timely too. I need not refer to such matters any further. If they don't speak for themselves they will get no help from a preface.

The book assumes up to a certain point an autobiographical cast. This is not because I deem my actual life of any interest to any one but myself, but because things do occur to one "in time," and the chronological sequence is as good as another, and much the most easy of any. I had intended, but my heart failed me, to pursue experience to the end. There was to have been a section, to be called "Despoina," dealing with my later life. But my heart failed me. The time is not yet, though it is coming. I don't deny that there are some things here which I learned from the being called Despoina and could have learned from nobody else. There are some such things, but there is not very much, and won't be any more just yet. Some of it there will never be for the sorry reason that our race won't bear to be told fundamental facts about itself, still less about other orders of creation which are suffi-

ciently like our own to bring self-consciousness into play. To write of the sexes in English you must either be sentimental or a satirist. You must set the emotions to work; otherwise you must be quiet. Now the emotions have no business with knowledge; and there's a reason why we have no fairy lore, because we can't keep our feelings in hand. The Greeks had a mythology, the highest form of Art, and we have none. Why is that? Because we can neither expound without wishing to convert the soul, nor understand without self-experiment. We don't want to know things, we want to feel them—and are ashamed of our need. Mythology, therefore, we English must make for ourselves as we can; and if we are wise we shall keep it to ourselves. It is a pity, because since we alone of created things are not self-sufficient, anything that seems to break down the walls of being behind which we agonise would be a comfort to us; but there's a worse thing than being in prison, and that is quarrelling with our own nature.

I shall have explained myself very badly if my reader leaves me with the impression that I have been writing down marvels. The fact that a thing occurs in nature takes it out of the portentous. There's nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so. With that I end.