FINDING YOUTH

NELSON ANDREWS

FINDING YOUTH

FINDING YOUTH

A Human Experience

BY

NELSON ANDREWS

THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY PRESS
BOSTON

The reader of these pages need scarcely be told that there is truth in them, and a deeper truth in the lesson that they teach. For this chronicle, in its essentials, might have been written of many a life other than his whose simple story is here set down.

FINDING YOUTH

I

THIS STORY is told because others need to know it. They need to know it now, when all the world is making a blind struggle to find youth — a new creative spirit.

It is the experience of just a common, everyday man — myself. But thousands of others have gone through my same experience. They are not finding the help, though, that I found. It is because I found this help — found something that man has always been seeking — that I feel impelled to tell my story.

My name is Harvey Allen. I was born in New York City and had lived there all my life. When the Big Thing happened, I was sixty years old. My wife and I had two sons, both married. We had six grandchildren.

We had lived in the same Harlem apartment for twenty years — with front

windows looking out on the street, side air-shafts, and a rear view of clothes-lines and fire-escapes. I never see a clothesline now that I don't think of that day in October.

The neighborhood had changed since our coming. The Ghetto had expanded and taken us in. The color-line was drawn just a block away, in the next street. But the place was home, and we had stuck there.

One of our sons, Walter, lived in Yonkers. The younger son, George, lived over in Brooklyn. We did n't see either of them often. They both worked hard to support their families. Evenings and Sundays they had their different family interests; and their wives had their own relatives to visit.

My wife, however, made frequent trips to their homes. She helped our daughters-in-law by doing most of the sewing for the grandchildren. But she always returned in time to have my dinner ready at night, when I got home tired from my day's work. She has

never neglected me. Our youthful love affair was a good deal romantic, and we have always been real pals. She is a descendant of one of the old New York families of the best American pioneer blood.

Sometimes of an evening we went to a picture-show. But we had dropped into the habit of spending most of our evenings at home. Occasionally some old friend would call; or Miss Marsh, who had a small room in the apartment across the hall, would drop in for a few minutes. But I usually read aloud, and my wife sewed. We both have always been great book-lovers.

I have never lost my youthful satisfaction in just being with my wife. I liked to look and see her seated there by the table, her white head bent above her sewing, and the rays from the droplight falling across her hands. Her slight figure always carried an air about it; and her hands were shapely and delicate, in spite of all the hard work she had done. Her hair still kept its girlish curl, and she

wore it in a loose Grecian knot at the back of her head. She wore her cheap clothes, too, with the distinction of a New Yorker.

Whenever she felt my gaze, she would lift her eyes and smile at me across the table. I waited for this smile. A certain light in her soft brown eyes has never failed to fascinate me.

Whenever Miss Marsh dropped in, I would let my wife entertain her. I would smoke my pipe and read to myself. Miss Marsh got on my nerves. She was from the South; had seen better days, but was now clerking in a dry-goods store on One Hundred and Twenty-Fifth Street. She was a thin, little old maid, who tried to be girlish. She laughed and gushed a good deal, and dyed her hair and painted her face. But my wife, who is kind to everyone, always defended her.

"Poor little thing! If she did n't try to keep up her spirits and look as young as possible, she 'd lose her position in the store. And she does say some sharp,

bright things. She leads a lonely life. And I don't believe she has enough to eat."

I can tell these things now about Miss Marsh; for later she and I came to understand each other better.

I worked in a downtown printing-plant. It was an old established concern, and I had worked there for years. I had been foreman in one of the departments until they put in a younger man. When the old proprietor died, and his son stepped into the father's shoes, a good many changes were made. The son was a modern efficiency man.

It cut pretty deeply into my pride to be shifted around from one job to another — each a little inferior to the former and commanding less pay — and then being always finally misplaced by a younger man. But I swallowed it all and stayed on. I knew that jobs were not lying around loose for men of my years. My long experience mended a good many blunders made by the younger chaps in the plant. They acknowledged it, too,

whenever I jokingly told them. But at the same time they smiled indulgence of "old Pop," as they all called me.

I took this title goodnaturedly, but something in me always shrank from it a little. It was from the patronage of youth that I shrank — a patronage just tinged with contempt for my years. But I shrank more from their pity the day that I finally got my discharge. And they did pity me, for they all liked me. I know that my sense of humor made me popular with them.

The discharge came unexpectedly, though I had been fearing and dreading it for a long time. This fear and dread had begun to look out of my eyes. I caught it sometimes in the mirror, and felt a pride of resentment against it, as something that hurt my self-respect. But what hurt me worse was the knowledge that my wife saw it, too. I shrank sensitively from any depreciation of myself in her feelings. My masculine pride wanted to keep her always impressed with my strength.

She never said anything; but at times I could feel her anxiously watching me. There was a sympathetic encouragement in her smile, and in the press of her hand on my arm after she had kissed me good-bye when I was starting to work in the morning. I always met this smile with one of whimsical reassurance. But we both had the feeling of bluffing some menacing calamity. And when I walked away, my shoulders drooped under this cringing new self-consciousness, and my feet shuffled heavily. I had always walked upright and with a spring. I realized these changes in myself and resented them. But somehow I didn't seem to have the power to throw them off.

The boss who discharged me hated to do it, and was as kind about it as he possibly could be. He assured me that it was not because I was n't doing my work well. Then, realizing that this was an unnecessary thing to say, he cleared his throat, embarrassed. They all knew there was no part of a printer's work that I didn't understand and couldn't do.

But the new management's policy was for young men. My only fault was accumulated years.

"You've done your share of work, anyhow, Pop," he said; "now it's up to your two boys to take care of you. You worked hard for 'em, and fitted 'em with the best kind of training to make their own way."

That's the conventional balm always put on this kind of hurt. Guess I smiled a little ironically. My two boys were having a pretty hard struggle to take care of the responsibilities they already had. George had had a good deal of sickness in his family, and Walter was supporting his wife's parents. I had been letting them both have money.

It would n't have been quite so hard if they had waited until Saturday night to discharge me. But they did n't. It was Tuesday morning. And they were going to give me a full week's pay because of my long service. They meant to be kind, of course, in their way — trying to let me down easy. But the offer of the full

week's pay added to my humiliation and stirred in me a lot of bitterness. My head went hot for a minute and the blood drummed in my ears. But I managed to speak quietly, and smiled when I said, —

"I only want what 's owing me. I 've always worked for all I got."

In going over this scene so many times since, I know that I felt something deeper than just my own bitter resentment. I had a vague sort of feeling that it was up to me to stand for the justice due to other men of my years, in my same fix. These fraternal bonds are in our blood.

The boss tried to expostulate. I stood firm. And they finally made out my time. I took what was due me, and the boss and I shook hands. I could feel him watching me until I got out of the office. I knew the kind of look that was in his face, but I did n't turn around to see.

II

LEAVING the plant that day was the hardest thing I have ever done. My first impulse was to get my coat and hat and just slip away. But my pride would not let me do that. So I braced and went back to the room where I had been working. I told some of the fellows with whom I was the best acquainted that I had been fired; and shook hands with them in farewell.

There was a pretty tight feeling in my throat. But they helped me to try and carry the thing off as something of a joke. I could see the pity, though, in their eyes.

It was raining — a cold, drizzling, late-October rain. But I did not notice it. I took the same old route I had taken for years, to the Sixth Avenue Elevated station.

I did not remember, however, until I started up the station steps, that it was

forenoon and not my usual time for going home. Then I halted and moved back again to the sidewalk, and stood there in the rain. I understood later why I had done this. I had been suddenly jerked out of a deep rut of habit, and was dazed at finding myself in new conditions. Then, too, I was weighted, groggy, with the aching depression that I was done for, out of the game — old.

I dreaded to go home and tell my wife. If I had been a drinking man, I should have gone off on a drunk.

People jostled by me on their way up the stairs to the Elevated. Dripping umbrellas swished against me. My overcoat was wet, and the rain trickled from my hat-brim. But I stood there lost, dead — like one just sent out of life.

Then my gaze was suddenly caught by an old chap who sold newspapers in this district. I often bought my evening paper from him. He was a little old fellow, with watery eyes, a stubby beard, and straight gray hair that grew a little long. He had one incongruous feature,

though — good teeth that were kept clean. I had always noticed them. My vague interest in him had tabulated him a boozer. But to-day I watched him with a new and curious fascination.

He had halted in a doorway, and stood there, hunched up, with his newspapers under his arm. He still wore a summer's stained and battered straw hat, and a dirty bandana handkerchief was tied about his neck. He was wet and pinched with the cold. He had turned up the collar of his old coat, and stood with one hand in his trousers pocket, as with the effort to coax a little warmth. For the minute, he had forgotten everything but his own discomfort. The hopeless misery of the man looked out of his watery eyes.

A dull sympathy of understanding stirred in me. The next instant I resented this feeling. I resented it because it put me in this old chap's class. Then the man's necessity to live pushed him on again to work. He started in my direction, calling out his papers in a cracked and wheezy voice.

I bought a paper from him and started across the street. I had the feeling of hurrying away from something that was clutching at me — as a man, using his last spurt of strength to swim for his own life, tries to keep away from the reach of another who is drowning. But I could n't get away from this old fellow. The picture of him filled my inner vision. The feeling of him pulsed through my blood. We truly *were* in the same class— both old, and both on the edge of life making our struggle.

It was noon. I went into a Child's restaurant and bought a cup of coffee. That brought me back nearer to normal. I decided to look for another job. Having secured that, I could face my wife with more of encouragement.

All that afternoon I went from one printing-office to another But they all turned me down. Of course, my rain-soaked appearance did not inspire much confidence. Had I waited, and gone the rounds looking a little less down-and-out, I might have met with success. But

later experience has made me feel that it would have made small difference.

After each refusal I grew a few years older. I tried to make my sense of humor work a little. But it would n't. That and every other part of my being was caught in the grip of a shrinking fear. By the time I turned into the doorway of my own Harlem apartment house I was a shuffling old man.

The halls of the house, as usual, were filled with the odors of Kosher cooking. I dragged up the one flight of stairs and fumbled the key into the lock of my own door. Downstairs the front door opened and closed. Someone had come in. A quick panic seized me that it might be Miss Marsh. I hurried into my own apartment to escape her. I was feeling now a new shrinking from Miss Marsh.

My wife was not at home. I remembered that she had said at breakfast that she was going over to Brooklyn to see the two grandchildren who had been sick. She might have been held up in the sub-

way. But I was home more than an hour earlier than my usual time.

My first feeling was one of relief, not to find her there. It gave me the chance to change my wet clothing before she came. The rooms smelled of the newly generated steam hissing up in the pipes. The heat felt good. I took off my wet clothes and hung them on two chairs by the front-room radiator.

When I had finished dressing, my wife had not yet come. I filled the tea-kettle and put it on the gas-range in the kitchen. Then I turned on the light in the dining-room, and sat down by the table to read the want advertisements in the evening paper.

But my thoughts were not on the advertisements: they were seething with other things. Here, in the seclusion and comfort of my own home, they began to work more clearly. I finally threw the newspaper on the table, rose, dropped into the old rocker by the window, and let myself think. I have always been something of a philosopher; and I faced

my situation now with more of that spirit.

I, Harvey Allen, was sound and well, with fair intelligence, and a thorough knowledge of my work, gained by long experience. I had never been a drinking man, but had worked steadily, and had always been reliable. Yet, because I was sixty years of age, I was being thrown on the dump-heap. My father had lived to be eighty-four. In all probability I should live to be as old. That would mean twenty-four years on the dump-heap. Twenty-four years! — over a fourth of my existence. It was not good social business. Something was wrong. We don't allow that waste with a horse or cow.

I had worked steadily for wages ever since I was seventeen years old. Most folks would say that I ought to have laid up enough to take care of myself and wife during our old age. Perhaps I ought. But I had n't. My present bank-account was about a hundred dollars.

During the twenty years in which we

had lived in this little dark New York apartment I had paid between ten and eleven thousand dollars in rent. Then there had been the expense of educating our two boys. It had been a big expense. For both my wife and I had wanted them to have the best. We had given them both technical educations at Cornell. Of course, they themselves had helped some. Then they had married young. Babies had come fast. I had had to help tide them over some financial rocks. And of late years my wages had been steadily decreasing.

Perhaps I had not been as provident as I should. But we had never spent money very wildly. I sent a look around the apartment. Everything we had was old. No new thing had been bought in the home for years. The only real extravagance had been the piano. But that had seemed almost a necessity to my wife, who loved music, and tried to keep up a little in her playing. And I had paid my debts; had always taken pride in never owing any man a cent. In fact,

nothing had ever worried me more than indebtedness. But now — I cringed.

The boss had said that it was up to my two boys to take care of me. Why should it be? They had their children to care for and educate, just as I had had mine. Their first duty was that of fathers. Besides, even though they could, I did n't want them to take care of me. All I asked was the opportunity to work and take care of myself and my wife, who was dependent upon me.

Then my gaze turned out of the window. It was still raining. The woman in the apartment up above had left some washing hanging on the line — some suits of men's underwear. The lights from the back windows shone upon them. They flopped about weakly in the drizzling storm. Somehow they brought back to my mind the picture of the old chap standing that morning in the downtown doorway, his newspapers tucked under his arm, a helpless victim of the storm. It stirred, too, a vague, uneasy sense of affinity in me.

The clock struck. I roused from my thoughts and began to feel a little anxious about my wife. It was most unusual for her to be as late as this. I decided to telephone over to George's and learn if she had started. I was just taking down the receiver, when I heard her key scrape in the lock. I went quickly and opened the door for her. She came in breathless from having hurried. I followed her into the dining-room, and saw that she was looking white and anxious. George was sick. Had pneumonia. He had been sitting up nights with his sick children, was all worn out, and had taken cold. George, who is the younger, has always been the less robust of our two boys.

"I should have gone over and relieved him of the care of the children," my wife said, with the pain of self-censure in her face. "But I 'm going back now to take care of him. I 've come home to get some things that I need."

"Why did n't you telephone," I reprimanded, "and have me bring over what

you wanted, instead of making this long trip in the rain?"

But she had thought that I would n't know where to find the things. And she wanted to see, too, that I was fixed all right, as she might be gone for several days.

"You must have something to eat," I said, "then I 'll go back with you."

I carried her wet umbrella into the kitchen, and she went into the bedroom to gather up her things.

I decided not to add to her worry by telling her now about my day's experience. But she herself made the discovery. I have never been able to conceal anything from her for long. She went into the front room, and saw my wet clothes hanging on the chair by the radiator. Then she came out to the kitchen, where I was making a clumsy effort to brew her a cup of tea.

"How did you happen to get so wet to-day?" she asked.

The question took me unawares, and I hesitated before making the excuse that

I had had no umbrella. She did not speak again, but stood there watching me. My hands trembled so that I spilled the hot water when I tried to pour it into the teapot.

Finally, I turned and met her gaze. Then there was no need of further words between us. When her eyes looked into mine, she seemed to know the whole story as fully as if I had told it to her. I could never describe the look that came into her face. It was something like the mother-look that I had seen there when she was nursing one of her babies. But it was intensified. She moved toward me, put her arms around my neck, and gazed up into my face.

"Don't worry, Harve; you 'll find something else soon."

I think it was the fine instinct of the thoroughbred in my wife that made her now call me "Harve." It had been a long time since she had called me that. We had grown to be to each other just "Dad" and "Mother." But the "Harve" brought with it a certain re-

assurance of youth — an encouragement to the personality that was mine irrespective of my fatherhood; to the *me* who had been her lover, husband, pal. It sent a thrill through me that braced my spine. I put my arms around her, drew her to me, and laid my face down against hers.

Since then I have learned that the lover always is young.

From this time on my wife and I fell back into the old habit of calling each other "Harve" and "Mattie."

During the days that followed I missed her more than I could ever tell. But we were both a good deal worried about George, who was pretty sick. I went over to Brooklyn each evening, to see how he was, and to do what things I could to help. The days I put in looking for work. George's sickness, which was going to be a big expense, added to my feeling that I must find an immediate job.

It happened that Walter was not at home just at this time. He is an elec-

trical engineer, and his company had sent him out in the state to do some work.

I trailed around to printing-offices, little and big. As yet I had made no attempt to find work outside of my own trade, in which I had had a lifetime of training. But nothing offered. A good many printers happened to be looking for jobs at this same time; and the younger man was always given the preference. I had two or three promises from bosses — men whom I had known. But these promises all turned out disappointments.

Then, one night, I was going home after having traveled the rounds all day in Harlem. I was tired and pretty well discouraged. After having paid my next month's rent and some other small bills, and taken money over to Brooklyn to help out with the expenses of George's sickness, I had only about ten dollars left in the bank.

By this time I had come to understand that I must look for some kind of work aside from a printing-office. So

this day I had made the try for a job in several stores, and other places. But with no success. They had no jobs for men of my years. If I had been a cook, I might have got a place in a Third Avenue restaurant. There seemed to be more demands for cooks than for any other kind of labor.

As I walked along now, I saw a "Janitor Wanted" sign on the area railing of an apartment house. I halted and looked at it. After having lived all my life in New York apartments, I knew what a janitor's job was like. It would mean taking my wife to live in a dark garbage-smelling basement. But I had come to a state of desperation — of almost panic. I hesitated, then swallowed my pride, braced myself, and went down the area-steps to the basement. This janitor's job might tide over until I could find something else.

The wiry little Yiddish superintendent of the building was there, just inside the basement door, talking to two other applicants — a big negro and an Italian.

When I arrived, the superintendent turned to me.

"How about this janitor's job?" I asked; and my manner might have shown a little something of patronage.

He looked me over critically. The negro and Italian watched anxiously. Then the superintendent gave a Jew shrug, shook his head, and dismissed me with a belittling smile.

"I vant a man dat could lif' de garbage cans und big tings. You vas too old."

The last drop of gall was added to the bitterness of my humiliation. I was too old to be the janitor of even a third-rate Harlem apartment house. As I stumbled back up the area-steps, I heard him hire the big negro for the job. Every atom of me tingled so with humiliation that I forgot to take a street car, but walked the rest of the long distance home. By the time I reached there, I was trembling and pretty well all in.

III

AND then came the happening which led to the final big experience of my life.

I had halted in the lower hall, to rest a minute before climbing the stairs to my own apartment. I stood with my foot on the lower step, leaning heavily against the banisters. The outside door opened and Miss Marsh came in. I was too tired to try and escape her. She stopped beside me and asked anxiously:—

"What 's the matter, Mr. Allen?"

"Nothing. Just a little tired," I answered, and started on up the stairs.

She followed. In the hall above I stopped at the door of my apartment, and she moved on toward hers. Then she turned suddenly, and came back to me.

"I sure would like to do something for you if I could, Mr. Allen," she said, in her Southern way of speaking.

I turned and looked at her. In her

face was an expression different from any that I had ever seen there — more sincere and earnest. It commanded a respect that I had never felt for her. I mumbled something or other in the way of thanks, to which she paid no attention, but went on to say:—

"I know it must be mighty hard to have to look for a new job after you have worked for so many years in the same place."

I cringed, and I think I must have scowled. For I was wondering how she had found out that I was looking for another job. I thought that I had kept the fact pretty carefully concealed. But I guess the most of us are ostriches, stretching our heads down in the sands of our own secret conceits. While I stood there, wondering, she kept on talking. The next thing that I caught was:—

"Don't reckon you'll want to take any advice from me, but you can't afford to let yourself grow old like this, Mr. Allen. Nobody wants us if we're old."

I tried to laugh. It was a sickly attempt. What she had said hit me in so many sore spots that I squirmed to get away. But inside my own apartment, the thing that she had said repeated itself in my thoughts.

"You can't afford to let yourself grow old."

I smiled satirically. How folks can fool themselves. That little old maid, with her dyed hair and painted face, thinking that she was hiding the fact of her age!

But still the thing kept repeating itself — "You must n't let yourself grow old."

"*Let! Let! Let!*"

That word finally got to hammering itself in my tired brain. I tried to get away from it, but I could n't. There was something accusing about it, like the gesture of a pointed finger. It seemed to put the blame of all my failure up to me — some wrong understanding in myself.

And then came my first experience with the Voice!

I call it the Voice, for I don't know what else to call it. But I know that some Power outside a man's own being can speak to him in the time of his need; when his ego is weakened by the discouragement of defeat. When he listens, he learns and is helped. For this Voice teaches *Life!* Our schools and churches have taught us systems and creeds.

I had pulled up a chair to the kitchen table, on which I had set out a scrambled sort of supper. I was going over to Brooklyn as soon as I had finished eating. The "*Let! Let! Let!*" was still pounding away in my thoughts. Finally I halted in my supper, set down my coffee-cup and asked:—

"Have I let myself grow old?"

And the Voice replied quickly:—

"Yes. You should be now right in your prime, knowing how to use and enjoy life. If you are thrown on the dump-heap, it is because you have put your own self there."

You may laugh. You may say that I was tired and a little woozy in the head.

But I *know* the Voice did speak. It spoke to my inner consciousness, but the thoughts were not my own. I even winced from some of the things it said.

It makes no difference whether or not you believe in the Voice, you must be impressed by the results of its teachings as applied in my own life. For I followed its teachings and learned the Great Lesson.

This first night only the glimmering light of a new understanding came to me. But that light grew. I saw that, up to now, I had been putting upon others all the blame for my own weaknesses — and thought of myself as a helpless victim of an unenlightened social order. I was slumping into a slough of self-pity. Worst of all, *I was losing my sense of humor.* I know that this is the big calamity. As long as a man can laugh humorously — laugh with his mind as well as with his mouth — he has the vitality to create new brain-cells.

And, after this first talk with the Voice, *I smiled at myself!* — a thing of

big encouragement! One has caught at a strong life-saver when he can rise above the swamping power of self-pity long enough to laugh at his own weaknesses.

When I was putting on my overcoat, getting ready to go over to Brooklyn, I took a critical survey of myself in the bedroom mirror. I had been considered a pretty good-looking man — was tall and broad-shouldered, and had been quite athletic in my day. But I could see now that in many ways I had let myself grow old. There was no necessity for me to be so stooped, with such a caved-in chest and protruding abdomen. I pulled myself up and saw that I could stand straight. And I realized at once more command of myself when I stood right, with my chest up and my abdomen pulled in. Yes, I could stand straight when I made the effort.

Then, in quick response to this thought, the Voice again spoke:—

"*When you make the effort!* It is the *you* inside that must make the effort."

And I finally came into this understanding.

I want to impress the fact that I did not learn at once all the things I am now telling. This knowledge grew. But I'm going to state some things before I go on to tell of how I found my life's big opportunity.

I gained the understanding that old age is a matter of the *ignorance* of Life. New laws of Nature are continually being discovered. In the last century science discovered electricity. This century will see the discovery of Life.

Man has both the mental and physical power to keep young, *if he will use that power*. Instead of being a thing on the dump-heap, *man may grow in power as he grows in years*. His body is made by food, drink, air, and *thoughts*. Its cells are constantly rebuilding. By understanding his own power, he can direct this rebuilding to an increased Life-capacity.

His power to do so has been limited by his own ignorance. Once men said that

there could never be a steam-engine. Later they scoffed at the possibility of building a flying machine. In his discovery of new laws, man is learning that he has hindered his own growth through his lack of understanding. A man can never *grow* old. He may *stop* growing, and stagnate. That is what I had done.

The first lesson that I had to learn was the difference between youth and old age. Both are really matters of the spirit, rather than of years. One may be aged at twenty, and a youth at eighty.

The spirit of youth has courage, is venturesome, progressive, optimistic, *creative*. The spirit of old age is afraid, reactionary, pessimistic, and stagnant. Youth laughs. Old age sighs. Youth is eager to discover new paths. Old age wants to stay in the prison of habit and travel the same old ruts.

I had been traveling in ruts. And I had worn them *deep*. For twenty years I had *let* myself live in the same old dark apartment, and take the same old route to the same old printing-plant. And I

had wanted to cling to the same old ways of doing work. The time came when I realized that I must have been something of a proposition to the printing-plant's young management. For I had stubbornly opposed the new efficiency system.

Because I felt tired at night, I had *let* my wife give up all other associations to keep me company. I had *let* myself lose interest in my old friends, and I had shunned making new ones. I selfishly clung to just my own immediate family. That meant heart-stagnation. The man is old who has let himself lose his heart-interest in *people*.

The man who loves most, lives most. Youth loves.

I had *let* myself drop out of touch with all the big public issues. I felt no interest in any country but the United States, and that meant very little to me outside of New York City. And here in New York, where every opportunity offered, I never went to a lecture, or to a concert. I had stopped going to see the new

plays; I talked about the superior old days of the theatre, when Daly's was in its prime. I did n't even read the new books, but prided myself on sticking to the old ones. All of which made for brain-stagnation.

I had grown afraid of adventure.

This revelation came to me suddenly, the next day after my first experience with the Voice. It sent a tingle of protest through me, and I cringed with something like shame. But I halted on the sidewalk and faced the fact squarely. Then I rebelliously pulled myself together, quit my hunt for a job, forgot my poverty-stricken bank-account, and went for a trip through Central Park and the Metropolitan Museum. I had not been there for years. It all seemed like a new world to me. It stirred my stagnant emotions and filled me with new interests.

We are continually losing these life-building values that lie right at our elbow. A man will travel the same old route day after day to his business. If, once in a while, he would go even a block out

of his way, he might have the feeling of new adventure — get a new view, or some experience to stimulate new cell-activity in his stagnating heart and brain.

When I got home that night, I was several years younger.

IV

HAVING conquered my fears and tasted adventure, I was hungry now for more. My wife felt the change in me when I saw her that evening in Brooklyn. In fact, she has always declared that it was the influence which I brought into the house that night — the feeling of new vigor and of new hope — that made George take a turn for the better and get well.

As usual, on my Brooklyn subway trip, I read the want advertisements in the evening papers. An office over in a small New Jersey town was advertising for a printer! I read it two or three times. But if I had not taken that Central Park adventure trip, I don't believe I should have answered this advertisement. I had never thought of going to New Jersey to look for a job. I felt all the self-centred New Yorker's prejudices against New Jersey. But I did go.

I was up and on my way early the next morning.

And that was how I happened to meet Ben Hutchins and find my life's big opportunity.

The first time I saw Ben Hutchins, I laughed. I knew at once that he was a crank. He was an old-school printer, like myself. For years he had run this little job office and published a weekly newspaper. Afterwards, I learned that he had plenty of money — was, in fact, rich — and that the only reason he kept on publishing his paper was that he did n't quite know how to get out of the habit.

His little old one-story building stood off by itself, in the business section of this small New Jersey town. To get to it, you had to cross a bridge and follow a narrow dirt path. The path this morning was muddy, after a short flurry of wet snow. The paint was worn off the building. One of the old-fashioned shutters was loose and flapped in the November wind. On the roof was a rooster

weather-vane that looked as if it might have been crowing into the teeth of a half-century of storms.

I opened the door and went in. It was one large room — a typical, old-fashioned, country-newspaper office. Its assortment of junk looked as if it might have been accumulating there since the American Revolution. An antiquated roll-topped desk stood in the corner, by one of the front windows. A tipsy old swivel-chair stood in front of it. Near it, a lop-sided old waste-basket spilled its overload of newspapers on the floor. In the centre of the room a rusty base-burner stove glowed with a red-hot coal fire.

Ben Hutchins, in his shirt-sleeves, and wearing a printer's dirty apron, stood in front of one of the cases, setting type. He was a stockily built man of about seventy, with a belligerent shock of gray hair that stood up straight on his head.

When I entered, he waited to space out a line before recognizing my presence. Then he turned and glowered at me over

his glasses, which hung on the tip of his bulbous nose.

"Well — ?" he said, finally, after a critical sniff.

Then, as I said, I laughed — a laugh born of my feeling of new confidence, gained from the teachings of the Voice. It caught Ben Hutchins's interest and made him take a liking to me from the start. I have learned that he is very quick and very decided in his likes and dislikes. In fact, he never does anything half-way. He is either stubbornly for a thing or against it. No argument can ever convince him either way. And down under all his surface peculiarities he has a keen and most original sense of humor. It was the liking that he conceived for me from the start which made him let me do the things that I have done.

He gave me again the once-over; then he, too, indulged in a faint grin.

"I've come for that job," I informed him, with all my new courage of adventure. "And I'm just the man you're looking for."

"Oh, are you?" and he gave another of his critical sniffs, which I soon discovered to be habitual. "Well, come and sit down, and we'll see. I may not be of your opinion."

With his composing-stick still in his hand, he led the way to the corner where stood the ancient roll-top desk. He seated himself heavily in the creaking swivel-chair, and I pulled up another old chair that stood near. All this time he was studying me closely over his glasses.

"I've got the reputation," he told me, after I was seated, "of never keeping a man very long."

He waited to see if this was going to discourage me any. But it did n't, and so he went on to say:—

"But the ones that come out here for a job are generally no good. Or, if they are, they get discouraged and don't want to stay."

"Well, I 'm going to stay," I said, "you can't get rid of me. And I 'm all to the good."

Again he met my laughing gaze, and

again he grinned. Then after studying me once more, he came to a decision. He rheumatically pulled himself to his feet and said: —

"Well, take off your coat and go to work."

And that ended our conference. We made no sort of bargain, said nothing whatever about the pay I was to get, or what I was expected to do. It was like Ben Hutchins — that snap sort of conclusion. But once he has made up his mind, you may be sure that he will carry his part of the bargain to the end. Of course, I had to learn this about him. I thought then that he was just going to try me out, give me a chance to make good if I could.

I took off my overcoat and other coat, and hung them up with my hat. Then I found another printer's dirty apron, and started in to work.

It may be hard to understand how a man, after having been employed for years in one of New York's big printing-plants, should have finally found his

life's opportunity in that little country junk-shop of a printing-office. But that is what I did. I could not have done so, however, without having had the experience of the previous few days, as well as the new lessons I was learning all the time from the Voice.

It was because I was finding youth that I found my opportunity. Youth, which is courageous, venturesome, progressive, optimistic, and *creative!* Cowardly old age, pessimistic, stagnant, and traveling in ruts, never finds a big life-opportunity.

V

I HAD been at my new job two weeks. We had issued two editions of the weekly paper. I had done the work of editor, reporter, compositor, proof-reader, pressman, and mailing clerk. Every day I was growing more and more in love with my job. I whistled again like a boy, at my work—this, in spite of the fact that I was taking that long trip each night and morning to and from New York. It is not work—the kind that is made creative—but stagnation, which wearies.

New demands were stirring every part of my being into new activities. My faculties were all alert. So were my emotions, my imaginations, *and my sense of humor.* Values were being aroused in me that, for lack of something to call them into use, had all my life been lying dormant. I had never known that I could do some of the things which I now did. I had begun to take an interest in

national and world affairs, about which I had to furnish copy. I also had begun to take more interest in people.

For years, when making my daily trips on the Elevated, I had most of the time kept my eyes glued to the latest criminal sensation in the newspapers. When I was not reading a newspaper, my thoughts were occupied with my own small interests.

The thing always of big importance was that I should beat someone else to a seat in the car. But now I began to watch and study that mass of humanity packed into the car with me. The mass resolved itself into individual beings. I picked out those having the old-age spirit from the ones who had the spirit of youth. By far the larger number — regardless of the years they had lived — were caught in the grip of the old-age fear, and were traveling in the old-age ruts. A good many, like little Miss Marsh, were trying to camouflage their old age by artificial means.

A new sympathy began to warm in

my heart for mankind — so pitiably ignorant of Life and of the ways to gain its *real* joys. My New Yorker's reserve began to relax, and I let myself do little helpful things for my fellow travelers. One night I helped an old East-Side Jew struggling under a load of second-hand clothing. The poor old chap's surprised smile of appreciation brought a quick lump into my throat; and a kindlier feeling for the whole Jewish race warmed in my heart. I was growing tensely interested, too, in all the doings of our little New Jersey town. Each day I was making new friends. All of which meant a vitalizing of my heart's stagnation.

My son George was well again, and had gone back to his work. Mattie — my wife — had come home. I had rented a small house not far from the printing-office, and we were getting ready to move to New Jersey.

Then, after I had been working for him two weeks, Ben Hutchins was seized with a bad attack of lumbago, and was laid up at home for a month. At the end

of that time his daughter had persuaded him to go to California and spend the rest of the winter.

When he reached a final decision relative to this California trip, he sent for me to come and see him. I had been several times, during his sickness, to the big, old-fashioned house, where he lived with his widowed daughter. His wife was dead. When I went now we had another of our brief talks. He was going to leave the printing-plant entirely up to me.

"Run it as well as you can, and keep me posted how you're coming on."

He gave no further instructions. But by this time I had learned that he liked to be met in his own brief way of doing business — never wanted any fuss of words; when he felt justified in trusting a man, he trusted him absolutely. And I knew now that he felt this trust in me. When, on leaving, I shook hands with him, I gave him a tight grip of appreciation, and we exchanged a look of mutual understanding.

I had already hired another printer. And Mattie, now that we had moved over to our new home, came every day to the office and helped. I made a number of changes in the old plant. I even put into operation some of the modern efficiency methods which I had scorned in the New York plant. Our job printing was growing; and we were getting new subscribers and more advertising for the newspaper.

One day a peculiar thing happened. I had run over to New York, to get some new parts for our old press. This errand took me down town, in the neighborhood of the Sixth Avenue Elevated station, which had been a part of my daily rut for so many years. The sight of it now took me back to the day when I got my discharge. I smiled when I thought of how helpless I had stood there in the rain. It made me realize how far from the old rut I had traveled.

Then I thought of the old chap who had sold newspapers, and wondered if he was still working on his beat. I

looked about for him and, sure enough, there he was, wearing the same ancient discolored straw hat. I followed and spoke to him. I had lost all fear now of being submerged in his old-age class. It was noon, and I asked him to go to lunch with me. He gazed in a daze of questioning surprise, then accepted the invitation.

I took him to a quiet little place, where we might have a table to ourselves. During the meal I learned more about him. His name was James Shaw, and he was alone in the world. He talked well — used good English. I had always felt that there must be something of intelligence back of his good clean teeth. And he, too, *was an old printer*. Probably that was why he had drifted naturally to the selling of newspapers. It is hard for a printer to keep away from the smell of printer's ink.

Well, the upshot of it was that I hired Jimmy Shaw, and took him back with me to New Jersey. And Jimmy has made good. After he was barbered and had

put on a new suit of clothes, and had his first lessons in Finding Youth, he was as spry and dudish as anything on Broadway.

Then, the final Big Adventure was brought about by my articles in our weekly newspaper.

I had been running a series of articles on my Finding-Youth revelations. Some of them were copied in other newspapers. Ben Hutchins, out in California, read them in our own paper, which we sent him each week. Afterwards, his daughter told me that he showed them to the different guests in the hotel where they were stopping.

Then I wrote an article on the old-age problem. I headed it, "Why the Dump-Heap?" Among other things, I said that one of the biggest social wastes was the waste of the latter years of the lives of men and women. Instead of being a waste product at eighty, a man should be a Life masterpiece — *still creative*. But we cling — theoretically, at least — to the savage belief that man possesses

no other creative power than the sex-function; and that, after they have passed the age of race-propagation, men and women are of no further social use. Savages, not knowing what else to do with their people of years, kill them. We let them stagnate.

By this time we should have learned that Life here, and always, is a thing creative. We are incidentally parents. We are creators always. For if God made us in His own image, then He made us all creators. As creators, we grow. And growth is the law of life. Stagnation is decay and death. We must have new educational methods. We must have new ideals — a new heaven. And this new heaven will be a place filled with creators, instead of with stagnant resters.

Then I went on to suggest that society might organize Youthland colonies, instead of relegating each year so many thousands of men and women to the fate of dependence and stagnation. These colonies might be made centres of big

usefulness, of broad education and creative growth.

I outlined my scheme of a Youthland colony. It should be a place of individual homes, with certain coöperative community buildings — an auditorium and recreation centre, a hotel and laundry, and other things, to make living easier and cheaper. The members of the colony themselves would support all these institutions. For there would be different light industries for the ones who wished to work and earn their own living.

There would be lectures, music, dancing, and classes in science, sociology, politics, psychology, literature, languages, and the arts. Everyone would be given the chance and encouraged to take up any kind of creative work in which he might feel himself capable of qualifying.

Well, Ben Hutchins read this article, and it struck instant fire in him. He didn't even wait to write. Instead he telegraphed: —

"Youthland colony good scheme. California right place to start one. Am

writing my lawyer to sell printing-plant. You come out here."

I laughed. Of course I had no idea that he really meant this. I had believed everything that I had written about my colony, but I had painted it with my own imagination. Then I worried. He might be taking this way of selling his plant and letting me out. I lay awake nights, trying to figure some scheme whereby I myself might make a small payment and get hold of the plant.

I had a proposition all framed, when I received a letter from Hutchins. It was — for him — a long letter, dictated to a stenographer. In it he gave me to understand that he was in earnest about the Youthland colony scheme. Indeed, he had already bought a tract of land and was setting to work on the project. He wrote a lot of instructions: informed me that, if he could not sell the newspaper to advantage, he meant to have the plant shipped to California. It would be a necessary adjunct to the colony. He was enthusiastic. His health had greatly

improved; he was in love with California, and both he and his daughter wanted to stay there. But he must have something with which to busy himself; and this colony scheme had made a big hit with him.

Well, that is how our California Youthland Colony came into existence. It is another story, but I must tell you a few things about it. It is located in a beautiful spot — where "the ocean and the mountains meet."

We are now a group of five hundred, all owning our own homes. Some of these homes are larger and more pretentious than others; for some of our colony members have good big incomes. Others are poor. But we are all inspired by the same ideals. The poorer ones are given the opportunity to pay for their homes on easy monthly installments.

We have a small canning factory; and we make a fine grade of candied California fruits. We do some rug-weaving and pottery work. We have a dairy and

poultry yards. All of these industries are coöperative in character—owned in common. The same is true of our small inn and laundry. They give employment to the ones who want to make their living. But we have no drones. Every Youthlander works. He also plays. Some devote themselves to raising small-fruits and English walnuts on their individual land tracts. Some teach in our school.

We have all kinds of classes in our school. We have expert instruction in diet, exercise, rest, and the things which make for the best physical condition. It is my intention to incorporate some of these lessons in another book — the methods which we have worked out to our own advantage. We have almost no sickness. Our members are a vigorous, useful, busy lot of folks. They live out-of-door lives twelve months of the year. They are filled with all sorts of progressive interests. *They think right thoughts.* In connection with our physical work, we have dancing classes, also a hiking club that makes interesting trips.

An ex-college president has charge of our educational work. A retired manufacturer is general director of our industries. And these two men are not using any back-number methods. Both are inspired by the spirit of youth. They combine with the modern the best values brought out of their long experience.

Some of our members have been encouraged to write. A number are studying music. Mattie, my wife, is enjoying that privilege. One woman of seventy, who never before had the time or chance to study the piano, has displayed considerable musical ability. In a good-sized French class, no member is under sixty. And there are two art classes.

Ben Hutchins is the colony's shrewd buyer. He drives his own car out through the country, and contracts for the fruit that is put up in our cannery. They made me the first colony president, and each year have insisted on reëlecting me. Next year I am going to decline. I don't want to get into the presidential rut. Jimmy Shaw is foreman of the job de-

partment in our printery. Jimmy has had a romance which he has given me permission to tell some time.

My son George and his family are with us. This year we are expecting Walter and his family for a visit. I was able also to bring Miss Marsh out to our colony. I feel that I owe her a very big debt.

Miss Marsh has let her hair grow gray; and the color now in her cheeks has been put there by the Californian sunshine. But she looks years younger than when she was trying to live an artificial youth. She is, in fact, quite radiant. For she is satisfying a big heart-hunger. My wife always contended that she was a lonely little creature. But even Mattie was surprised to discover that Miss Marsh's loneliness was due to a craving motherhood. She is now one of the nurses who have the care of the colony's children. For we have about thirty children — orphans who would have been sent to state institutions. We have adopted them, and are bringing them up and educating them. We father and mother, uncle

and aunt, and grandfather and grandmother them. Happy little Miss Marsh is seldom seen without one of our colony babies in her arms.

VI

IT is Christmas Eve. I have seated myself by my typewriter in my cozy study, to write the last lines of this story. Mattie is down at the Auditorium, helping to trim the Christmas tree for the children. I just came up from there. Our picturesque little vine-covered bungalow is on the hill. The Christmas tree had so many helpers that I was not needed. Miss Marsh is joyously superintending the whole thing. Our different members are coming and going. Each brings an armful of presents.

I stood a while and watched their beaming, happy faces. Most of them have known a good many Christmas Eves. One — a hearty old Pacific sea-captain of eighty — showed me some toy ships he had whittled out with his knife. He called my attention to all the proper nautical detail. No builder of big ocean liners could have felt more pride

in his accomplishment. I watched him carefully place the toy ships with the other presents underneath the Christmas tree; and the fact was impressed upon me that he had caught the *real* Christmas spirit. He had *created* something, which would carry his own creative joy into the lives of others. And is not this — *the carrying of one's own creative joy into the lives of others* — the very essence of the thing which we vaguely call "service"?

When I reached the brow of the hill on my way home from the Auditorium, I halted and looked back at our little Youthland Colony, lying there in the moonlight. Out beyond, the moonbeams made a glistening pathway to it across the dusky waters of the old Pacific. At the back, rose the dim shapes of the mountains. The sweet odor of orange-blossoms filled the air. In this beautiful spot our little group was trying to realize the creative life — the life of continued growth and usefulness. Deep emotion stirred within me.

My gaze traveled out over the moon-

lighted ocean, and I thought of the many peoples of the globe celebrating this Christmas Eve. Gratitude for my own wonderful opportunity made me want to help these others. For I knew that nations, like individuals, were suffering in the grip of the old-age spirit—that effort of fear to strangle growth and progress. If only mankind might learn that the value of a nation depends upon the *usefulness* of all of its men and women, upon the youth-spirit, which is courageous, venturesome, and optimistic enough to make the whole human race one great world-family.

Off in the distance the old mission bell began to ring. It was sending out its mediæval understanding of the Christmas message, which the Voice spoke to the Shepherds of old. But we, in our Youthland Colony, have learned that the Voice, all down through the years, has been trying to make man understand that he must follow the guiding star and find the tidings of great joy in the birth of *his own creative self* — the God Power

within his own being. When a man gains this interpretation of the Voice's message he becomes an influence for growth and progress in the Great Life-Adventure —

HE FINDS YOUTH!

Form L9–100m-9,'52(A3105)444