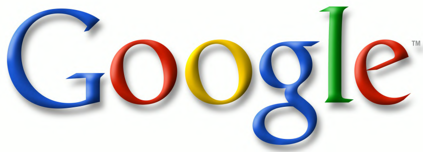

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# THE EDGE OF THE WOODS

ZEPHINE HUMPHREY

1- Essays, American.

# The Edge of the Woods
## And Other Papers

# The Edge of the Woods

## And Other Papers

By
ZEPHINE HUMPHREY
*Author of "Recollections of My Mother"*

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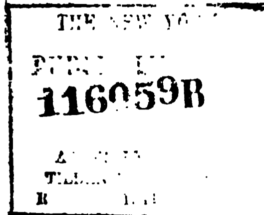


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*To*

*Grace A. Hubbard*

*in gratitude for her quickening touch*

*upon my spirit*

THE author is indebted to *The Atlantic Monthly* for permission to republish "Ursa Minor," "The Passing of Indoors," "Closing the Country Home," "The Lady and the Garden," "The Church and the Mountain," "Hoosick Junction," "Cave-Dwellers, or the Hall-Bedroom," "The Ultimate Hare"; to *The Outlook* for permission to republish "Springs of Life," "Wood Magic," "The Edge of the Woods," "A Portrait of the Devil," "On a Bench in the Park," "The Next Generation," "The One Thing Needful"; to *The Congregationalist* for permission to republish "On the Love of Places," "The Joyous Company of the Possessed," "Optimist's Day," "Thank Time!" "In Praise of Everyday," "The Decline of Melancholy," "Procrastination," "Wait!" "The Peril of Friendship"; to *Scribner's Magazine* for permission to republish "Encore."

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## I

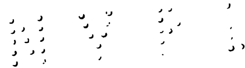
## THE EDGE OF THE WOODS

"THE poetry of earth is never dead," nor is it ever entirely absent from any corner of hill or plain, of desert or seashore. Everywhere under the bending sky, on the responsive land and sea, everywhere Poetry moves; and the beat of her unseen feet may be heard by us all. But, nevertheless, there are certain spots where she haunts most persistently, where, as it were, she takes up her abode—if anything so evanescent may be said to have an abode. The edge of the woods is one of these places of the lingering of the light that never was.

Mountain woods, I mean, that clothe the summit of some mighty hill. Across the high crest and the massive shoulders, they lie all unbroken and undiscovered—secret, unthinkable, a close realm of old wilderness. But, sweeping on down towards the valley, they pause, suddenly, as if smitten aware of a dangerous tendency; and above the steep fields where the presence of man is all too evident, they hang arrested. It is in this broken, withholding edge, as one looks up at it from the valley, that the poetry of earth seems to me peculiarly to hover.

As one looks up at it from the valley. One

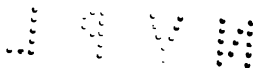




should not visit it in the flesh, for its very significance lies in its distance and secrecy. How dark the shadow lurks all along behind the outermost, venturing, pausing trees—a fathomless gloom which yet invites the vision to enter as far as it may, as far as it possibly may! The gazer accepts the challenge and makes daring raids into the mystery, biding his time until the level sunlight opens the way; but he never gets very far. Something baffles him, waiting upon and then disappointing his penetration. What is it? The ancient wizardry of the forest, hinting its presence in token that Pan is not dead after all, but refusing a full revelation? All the wildness of nature is there, all the delicacy, and all the fleeing mockery. Beautiful as a deer's is the poise of the arrested trees, hesitating. Be sure they will never advance.

The bodily foot may not climb to the woods, nor may the bodily vision pierce very far among them; but the spirit may enter them when it will and wander them through and through. This liberty is unfailing and full in a greater degree than most permissions which one receives of life. Sitting at peace in the valley below, one has only to fold the hands and dwell with the eyes on the distant, shadowy forest edge; and presently one is admitted, enwrapped, beyond all following of the senses, in an enchanted world.





# The Edge of the Woods

A far-off wood which one visits thus knows nothing of the ordinary conventions of time and place. It knows its lovers, that is all; and one may meet any and every spirit wandering among the trees. Dante and Virgil of course; one never takes many steps without finding them, beautiful comrades, hand in hand, bound in their tenderest of relations, their perfect friendship. Sir Galahad, too, comes riding by, his face uplifted in ecstasy —

> "Between dark stems the forest glows,
> I hear a noise of hymns;"

and Rosalind and Orlando jest feelingly with their love. The wood is tolerant; it does not hesitate to admit Don Quixote to the exalted company of Sir Galahad, and Puck and Ariel wing their way among the whispering leaves. Endymion wanders, daft and bemused with his longing; Comus has betaken himself

> "to this ominous wood,
> And, in thick shelter of black shades embowered,
> Excels his mother at her mighty art."

A strange assortment of people to meet on a New England hillside! But they excite no surprise, they belong to the wood as perfectly as the hermit thrush. Nor do they intrude on the solitude which is the soul of a forest, the best boon it has to bestow. They are themselves solitude.

Who shall say what spirit voices may utter those hints which come so thrillingly to us out of the silence of nature, those dim surmises, those vague assurances? We are wont to think of them as the expression of the inarticulate mountains themselves, of the Spirit of Solitude. But there is the touch of a soul on a soul in the rapturous communion.

Our own human nature must needs be an abiding marvel to us, if we are reasonable. How curious and perverse is the fact that that which we cannot fully know, can only guess at, has power to thrill us beyond all our ascertained knowledge, dear and desirable though the latter may be! We visit the lower woods day by day; they allure us so potently that we cannot resist them when they bid us come. They are very wonderful, all but satisfying. Nor do they ever reveal themselves wholly; they are wise with the wisdom of their kind. There is nothing in all the world that holds its spell like a wood. Nevertheless, the fact that our feet have trod so often the mossy ways, without leading us yet to the Holy Grail, does serve, all unconsciously, to fetter our expectation. We know what we shall find, and it is good beyond any telling; we know also that we shall often happen upon new, unexpected treasure. But not the Holy Grail; no, alas! not the Holy Grail. That waits aloft in the higher

wood, and we may glimpse it, shining behind the shadowy edge, beckoning but inaccessible.

What does it all mean? Is a glance really the clearest seeing, is the surest knowledge a guess? This is true in our human relationships. We do not learn much if we enter boldly, searchingly into the heart of a friend, piercing the shadows with the flash of our inquiries, thrusting the underbrush aside in our rude advance. We are at liberty thus to treat those who really love us. For love is the greatest force in the world, and anything but the wisest. It longs to be known to the uttermost, to open itself out, to give itself up; it asks no keener bliss than absolute surrender. Therefore we may all enter at will and rend the meaning of our friends' lives into little pieces, and set ourselves to study each one. But, oh! what a pitiful, helpless chaos shall we thus contemplate! It is perfectly true that this curious trait which I have just discovered exists as an element in my friend's nature; but it never operates without that other, and still that other, characteristic. I must not consider it alone; I must hardly consider it at all. Consideration is an angel only when each offending Adam turns it loose on himself.

Avaunt, thou pryer, thou intermeddler! Out of the woods! Away! Then, at a distance, after a while, turn and look back and wait. It is

wonderful what a gracious change comes over the edge of the wood, relieved of a blundering presence. The rough ground smoothes itself into velvety sward once more, the brambles withdraw, and gradually the poetry comes back, the beautiful, hovering, vanishing meaning, lurking within the shadow and flitting among the trees. Which is the real life? Who can doubt? Reality is no affair of one bramble or one swamp, or even of one summer glade or one hermit thrush; it is a spirit compounded of many elements, warring, agreeing, blending only when viewed at a reverent distance.

Life is full of a multitude of edge of the woods experiences. We are constantly pausing and holding the breath in the presence of something swiftly divined—a strain of music, a glimpse of a face with its soul in its eyes, a revelation of pathos or humor. It is well to be ever on the watch for these occurrences. They do not announce themselves; they seem, rather, to take all pains to conceal themselves. So that it happens that they may be missed more easily than not. But therein lies part of their value to us. They demand alertness and sympathy of us; they need our coöperation. Like Emerson's "Days," they give no sign, but leave us to deal with them as we will; and all too often it happens, alas! that we, too late, under their solemn fillets see the

scorn. "Diadems and fagots." Yes, diadems in very truth. The fullest of disclosures are made in fleeting and indirect revelations, more or less unconscious.

It is, of course, a terribly lonely business to be condemned to this signal code of communication; but nobody has ever yet denied the loneliness of human life.

> "Yes! in the sea of life enisled,
> With echoing straits between us thrown,
> Dotting the shoreless watery wild,
> We mortal millions live *alone.*"

> "The irresponsive silence of the land,
> The irresponsive sounding of the sea,
> Speak both one message of one sense to me:
> Aloof, aloof, we stand aloof."

Thus two poets among many. But we are less alone when we submit to the fragmentary and vanishing habit of our destiny than when we rebel against it. Silent, darting intuition may weave a close bond between two friends and establish an exquisite relation which would suffer loss and destruction through a closer pursuit. One is not alone when the thrill of love reaches one through an averted glance.

After all, our whole earth stands aloof on the edge of the woods. There is nothing complete, nothing absolute about our mortal ways. Perhaps

by and by a more thorough method may be vouchsafed us, but just at present our surest understanding lies in hints and surmises.

Beautiful, distant edge of the woods, do I not know you in very truth, watching the summer day wheel its slow course of change over you? In the cool morning, I know how the dew lies in the long shadow that stretches down the dropping hillside away from the sun; I know how the stir of life awakes among the birds and flowers. Later, I see the noonday heat beat back the shadow, shrunken, diminished, flying for refuge in the parent wood; the very grass glows, and warm fragrance loads the failing breeze. Then the day wanes, and the mellow light strikes under the branches; I can look in now, but still I cannot see what I seek. When the sun has set, the shadow comes back and claims all the hillside; and then it is—just when the hope of discovery would seem to be over for the day, just when the hour is least propitious for investigation—then it is that the wood comes nearest to revealing its shy spirit, then it is that the poetry hovers almost visibly. The blank shade under the trees becomes a living gloom, vibrating with meaning, full of a thousand presences only just withheld from revelation. I catch the motion of the leaves where these presences have just gone by, I hear the echo of their laughter and their solemn hymns. Do I

not know them? Oh! indeed, I know them better than the forms that pass along the valley road as I sit meditating thus; I know them best of all dear things in this elusive world. They are the denizens of the realm which, for better or worse, we must all inhabit; they are the shadows among which we most dimly but surely move. For mystery is our common birthright, and the edge of the woods is the natural home of the human spirit.

## II

## ON THE LOVE OF PLACES

IN these days of constant household flux and change—now country house, now city house, now California or "the south"—much has surely been added to life in breadth and variety, but something has also been lost. The ancient "land passion" of our fathers slumbers in us, or has become extinct. This is probably perfectly natural. However truly the poets may sing of the increase of love in direct proportion to its use, there is yet a physical limit to enthusiasm. We cannot concern ourselves vitally with music, art, philanthropy, new books, lectures, clubs; we cannot travel to see the world and educate our children; we cannot keep ourselves fully abreast with the age in its great, exhilarating onward march; and at the same time know very much of that rooted attachment to mere soil which stood for so much in the arborescent existence of some of our ancestors.

Their passion was perhaps narrow; beyond a doubt, it was prejudiced, blind and unreasonable. Yet it was marvellously deep. Land interest was to our fathers an actual element in life, abounding

in influence, as natural and as potent in its degree as the love of family, as devotion to the state. They carried the flavor of their domain about with them, and spoke its dialect. They travelled from it only with a particular purpose; and, that purpose being accomplished, hastened back again to sit enthroned, each man on his estate, king-like, established, strong. There was about them, abiding thus, a dignity which we must needs admire. And there was a happiness too.

This latter fact we are sometimes enabled to appreciate at first hand; for now and then it happens that in some belated modern soul the ancient passion is renewed, and how happy goes that soul! Secure in the possession of an affection which nothing short of an earthquake can remove, deep-rooted like the hills, seeming like them to derive its life from the very foundations of things, it looks with pitying eyes on the rest of mankind, hurrying to and fro. If they would only pause for a moment, stop long enough to work their fingers down through the grass and take hold, would they not also be content?

The friendship of a place—for friendship is what it amounts to—partakes of the nature of religion and of humanity. Its quality of permanence allies it to the former. Always there, always the same, unchangeable in its first attitude towards us, whatever our own veerings and

turnings, it is, physically and morally, something to build upon. With silent persistence, the familiar contours of mountain and river recall us to the ideals which they have fostered in us and from which, alas! we are all too prone to fall. We meet our past selves in the meadows. The encounter may not always be pleasant, but it is unfailingly useful. For, though it is of course our business to advance steadily in this matter of living, we cannot actually take the shears and cut ourselves off day by day, "beginning all over again." To-day has to be the result of yesterday; and it is well for us now and then to be reminded of yesterdays long past which were or were not successful in their achievements. Frequent association with one place makes apparent the unity of life; so that we seem to be possessors of a developing whole, rather than the observers of kaleidoscopic fragments.

As for the pleasure of a strong local attachment, there is literally nothing like it in the world. To get its fullest flavor, one must first acknowledge its prejudice, nay, its absurdity. Then one can laugh at oneself. Actually to prefer above Switzerland, Italy, England a certain group of New England mountains and the valley which they enclose—is that not preposterous? To stand in the face of the Dent du Midi and complacently think of Green Peak! To murmur,

viewing the Lauterbach, "Well, there is still Gilbert Brook!"

The land-lover does well to be careful how he gives voice to his sentiments. For the chances are that he will find but an irritated audience. The true cosmopolite cannot stand it that any one should be so narrow; he looks on, exasperated.

"Is not the structure of Mont Blanc far nobler than your Green Peak?" he inquires.

"Yes," the land-lover assents.

"And the Matterhorn much higher?"

"Yes; oh, yes!"

"Do not the mountain torrents come with a force and majesty of which your brooks never dream?"

"Certainly that is true."

"And yet?"

"And yet."

Bah! he is a bigot.

The situation reminds one of the story of the newly betrothed man who was being questioned about his lady. Was she beautiful? No, she was not beautiful. Well, then, was she clever? No, one would hardly call her clever. Stylish, perhaps, with a good address and manner? No, on the whole, he could not say that he thought her stylish. Well, what in the world ——? There was a barely perceptible flicker of the young man's eyelid; then he thought better of it.

"She is very good company," he answered gravely.

And yet—to revert—the land-lover is not an entire bigot. He views Mont Blanc and the Dent du Midi with a reverent, silent attention which he has learned at the feet of Green Peak. Shall not he who worships truly at the shrine worship truly at the high altar? But when he returns home and his valley receives him again, he gathers up in one votive offering all his admiration of Weisshorn, Matterhorn, Gemmi Pass, and lays it before Green Peak. There is a peculiar pleasure in that, by your leave, good cosmopolite.

The human element in the love of a place is of course the best thing about it, particularly if the place be small enough for the people all to know one another and feel the daily beat of one another's lives. There is room for disagreement here. Some natures could not stand the contact, would feel hampered and galled by the intimacy. For such there is always the city. But to quieter souls, less independent it may be, there is a quite unspeakable sweetness in the tie of a small community. One life, one church, one interest; one sorrow when death enters a house; one gladness over a wedding; one hand-to-hand warfare with deadly sin; one share in the longed-for Kingdom: there is power in this unity. There is also a very grave responsibility. To each indi-

vidual comes the challenge to see to it that he be not the weak strand in the social rope. And, moreover, so completely do mountain and meadow, forest and waterfall enter into any sympathetic human life lived among them that they seem at last an integral part of it, finding expression through it. To live out a mountain's spirit—there is a responsibility for one!

It all amounts to this in the end: that whether we abide in the midst of five hundred or wander among many millions, we are still world citizens and have the world's work to do. The law of gravitation fortunately confines our inquiring feet to this necessity. But he fights well who stands established; he does good work whose environment is so a part of him that he can forget it even while expressing it. We are none of us without high tribunals before which we daily arraign ourselves. Church, kindred, friends—they must probe and test us. It is well if for each of us also some bit of land, some special portion of the common earth, some one community presents its standard to be reached, its love to be deserved. "Am I worthy of my home?" is a searching question.

## III

## CLOSING THE COUNTRY HOME

THIS is the age of the country home, and we who are children of the age pride ourselves not a little on what we call our return to nature, our devotion to field and wood. True it is that new houses spring up in green valleys every year, that old farmhouses are taken over and transformed, that the mountains are ringed with worshippers from June until October. True it is that our book-shelves abound in manuals of the garden, of bird and flower, and that no self-respecting one of us would venture forth in the summer meadows without an opera-glass. We are very earnest in the pursuit of our outdoor interest; and, though it occurs to us sometimes to laugh, genially poking fun at one another for our excesses in the field, we never seem in the least to doubt the fundamental nature of our enthusiasm, nor its perfect desirability in the scheme of things at large. Perhaps this assurance is just as well; certainly no enthusiasm is worth a straw without it. And the nature-devotion is good for soul and body, heart and brain of those who confess it. But there is another side to the matter, commanded by the point of view of

the country itself and the country people; and this side is worth consideration if our love is really earnest.

The increase of country homes is working a very radical change in the life of the country.

I have in mind a certain valley, hidden among the mountains, remote and silent, a gentle spot, yet not untouched with sublimity in its grandly encircling hills. Meadow and woodland, pasture and stream, are brooded upon by a potent spell which serves to bind all hearts to the place in a devotion which is seldom equalled outside the realm of purely human affection. The people who go there in the summer, returning year after year for long lifetimes, are bound in a brotherhood close and peculiar, so that, when they chance to encounter one another on the city streets during the winter, pleasure leaps up in their eyes, and they turn aside and immediately forget other claims. The place has laid its still influence commandingly over the depths of many scattered lives. Little by little, the land is bought up for summer cottages, or old farmhouses are made over, and the summer colony spreads.

Time was when the social life of this valley was blithe and vigorous, the indigenous social life, native as rocks and trees. Old inhabitants shake their heads, looking wistfully back through the years. "Those were good days when the Craw-

fords lived here, when Silas Wilkins was alive, when we had the village orchestra and the Shakespeare club." What is it that has so fatally happened to occasion that hopeless past tense? Silas Wilkins has died, to be sure, and no one could help that mortal accident. But the Crawfords have sold their farm to some people from New York, the Perkins family has decamped in favor of a Boston arrival, and Miss Lucy Jones has ceded her cottage for an artist's studio.

In the summer all is abundant good cheer. In the little village and along the winding country roads the houses and cottages brim with eager life. Horses and carriages climb the hills, picnic parties explore the glens, diligent walkers tramp "round the square" in the thoroughly conscientious fashion of the "summer boarder." There is a certain informal degree of social life manifest in tea on the lawn, in games at the tiny clubhouse, in tennis and golf tournaments. Occasional entertainments, "for the benefit of the library," lay claim on the quite unusual talents of the summer residents, resulting in concerts of wonderful music, in masterly readings from the great poets, in exhibitions of pictures which later will adorn the walls of the New York Academy. "What a great thing it is for the valley," many a visitor has exclaimed, "that all these people should have settled here!"

That is a natural first conclusion, inevitable to the urban mind; but one has only to linger into the edges of winter a little to find himself questioning its essential soundness.

This winter season is one which we fair-weather sojourners complacently ignore. Our country year is but half a year, three seasons at the most. What happens after we close our houses and return to our "sweet security of streets" we have not the least idea. No earth-child can realize very acutely that the moon has to consider and deal with a strange shadowed half which is just as much a part of its being as its familiar earthward face.

We understand that something threatens in those great days of late October when, hurriedly packing, we glance out through our windows at bare-stripped hills, purple-black beneath flying clouds, at gaunt woods, "in the stormy east wind straining," at armies of scurrying leaves. But we do not linger to put to the test our shivering apprehensions. The wistful eyes of the country people might tell us a story if we cared to listen. How they dread the winter! Their preparations for it are grave and carefully deliberate, beginning in the middle of autumn, lest something be forgotten, or lest the time prove too short and frost overtake the farmhouse unawares.

"It's a regular campaign you have to plan, isn't it?" I said to a farmer's wife, as I dropped in

to see her one November day and was ushered into the kitchen. All the rooms in the front of the house were shut off, and the front door was locked for the winter.

"Yes," she sighed, "we have to change all around, you see, and huddle close together. My husband and I, with the two youngest children, sleep in that little room off the kitchen, and the others sleep just above; the stovepipe goes through their room. Even then, we often suffer with cold. I don't know as you'll hardly believe me, but one night last winter I left a fire banked up in the stove and the kettle on the griddle, and in the morning the coals were still alive, but the kettle was froze solid.

"It isn't the cold I dread most, though," she went on after a moment; "it's the awful loneliness. There's so few people left in the valley now after the first of November. You see how it is a little yourself, stayin' so late this year. There's nothin' lonesomer than a closed house, an' on some roads there ain't nothin' else hardly but closed houses. My! how I hate to drive by 'em in a winter twilight! I think there ought to be a law to oblige city people to keep lights burnin' in their country homes all winter. Don't you suppose"—this with a sudden appealing turn—"you are ever goin' to want to stay with us all the year?"

Was I ever going to want to, I wondered, as I walked home after this interview. Yes, I wanted to even then with at least one-half of my heart. The solemn November beauty is greater than all the light-hearted abundance of summer; the lure of the winter is thrilling. If only my comrades would stay with me! If only! There I betrayed the need common to all our humanity, rural or urban, and quickened my steps to pass the closed houses, and shivered and was sad. The inestimable benefit accruing to our valley from my summer home and the homes of my friends seemed suddenly not so evident to me as I had always supposed it. If I were the valley, I know full well that I should prefer the old order of things, with houses open all the year round and filled with stout-hearted country people who loyally took storm and sunshine with me and gave me their whole endeavor, who wove a strong social life in my midst and made me a part of the world.

Think what it is that we do in fact, we "lovers of the country"! As soon as the way is conveniently smooth for our delicate feet in the spring, we sweep in, usurping all the best sites, buying up the best farm-land. We blandly assume all authority, even controlling the social life, as if by divine right. The country people are shy and proud. Seeing us so abundantly willing to manage the affairs of the valley, they retreat before

us. They are quick to recognize any least condescension in our efforts to be "one with them," to "draw them out," and, perturbed and obstinate, they retire into the hollows of their hills. Even those of them who have travelled and know the ways of the world, never fully open out their lives to us so that the barrier disappears and we are no longer "city folks" to them but just plain everyday "folks." The relation between us is not the genuine unstudied one of fellow-townsmen, but at best a conscious adaptation.

For the truth of the matter always is that we are not fellow-townsmen. No real valley dwellers are we who take the sweet of its life and leave the bitter doubly pungent. We speak of "our valley," "our hills," "our woods"; but they are not in the very least ours; the claim is presumptuous. They are of course supremely His who made them; and, after that, they are theirs who live rounded lives in their midst.

To these latter should fall all rights of controlling growth and change. The little valley of my affection has long desired a railroad. The reasons are many and excellent: to facilitate transportation of farm products, to spare horse and man in the piercing winter cold, to make intercourse possible between scattered farms (a country railroad often runs on the trolley principle of frequent stops) to communicate a little of the pulse of the

world. Nothing less than new life would be the gift of that road to the valley. Yet—"Never!" exclaim the owners of country homes, with one voice and with a determination based on the tax list and reasonably sure of itself. Based on æsthetic considerations too, of course, and quite conscientious. Shall the lovely valley be defiled, its sanctity invaded? But there is a sanctity of hunger in the human heart which is a more august and reverend thing than any valley solitude.

One wishes that the social reformers would turn their attention from city slums for a while and give the country their thoughtful consideration. There is great possibility and great need for readjustment here. Life in the country ought to be all that is sweet and wholesome and glad. Wordsworth realized this obligation and wrote of his high-souled farmers. But Crabbe, for all his lesser genius, looked more squarely into the face of fact when he sadly set forth:

"The Village Life, and every care that reigns
O'er youthful peasants and declining swains.

"Ye gentle souls, who dream of rural ease,
Whom the smooth stream and smoother sonnet please,
Go! if the peaceful cot your praises share,
Go look within, and ask if peace be there."

No, alas! it is not there. The average country life is not a life of happiness. Hard work and poverty chain the body—and with the body the mind—to a hopeless, monotonous round. To see no possible end to one's task, nor any varying of it, is enough to kill the spirit. An impious, tragic distortion of values results from the lifelong absorption in material things, so that all the finer issues of life, those for which the soul was created, come to be scorned and neglected if not altogether ignored. To the average country person a dreamer is contemptible. Books and music have their place, but a scanty one, in the cracks of the day, or at its weary end. It actually comes to pass finally that the shell of life has all the importance, and the kernel shrivels and is cast away.

The finer issues of life are perhaps, after all, a community product, a divine result of comradeship, of love and faith and intercourse, an urban growth rather than a rural. Scattered, lonely, separate lives cannot well attain it. This theory contradicts the poets, and that is another tragic and impious proceeding. But etymology bears it out. The one word *civilization* tells the whole of the story.

They say that the state in which our valley lies is steadily degenerating, that crime is on the increase. That should be a shocking matter of concern to all of us who love the state and have

our summer homes there. What shall be done? "A return to the soil" is everywhere cried as the remedy; and perhaps we think we are meeting the need in the May to November return we make, in our "fancy farming." But half-way methods never succeed, and ours is no real return. What the valley needs is the whole allegiance of the best of its native sons, who shall abide in it and work its weal instead of selling their houses and faring forth from it; and of its sons by adoption too, for there is room for all who will come and work honestly.

Just here comes in the great opportunity of the country home. Shall we make the valley our workroom or playground? That is the question on which the whole issue depends. Certain it is that no lover who is worth his nectar fails to devote himself heart and soul to the good of his beloved; and, if our love for the country be real, we shall see to it that it profits by our presence in its midst.

All this reasoning seems to point to one logical conclusion: that the country home be kept open through the year. After what has been said of the urban birth of the finer issues of life, the conclusion sounds like a condemnation; and indeed the lure of "the friendly town" is as strong as that of "the open road" to us of the modern world. But if those of us who have country

homes stayed in the country together, we should create a community life, a civilization of numbers. The country people would swell our ranks—or we should swell theirs, which is the truer and assuredly the more gracious way of putting the case—and the valley would have one established life, one purpose and one hope. The good old days might come again, or—since of course they never do that—better ones might develop. The wistfulness might leave the eyes of the farmer folk and their hunger might be appeased by the constant presence of their kind. Crime is often enough but a desperate effort at self-defense from the arch-foe *ennui*. What if we of the country homes leave the path of attack open by our desertion, our positive infliction of loneliness through our negative absence? The point is worth consideration.

Nor need we suppose that our sacrifice (complacent creatures that we are!) would be any greater than our gain if we stayed in the country all winter. A close and informal comradeship would grace our long seclusion. Apart from the hurry and noise of the city, we should have time to know one another, to build up a real society based on eternal things. Around our "neighborly open fires," abroad together on snow-shoes or skates, sharing the fight with the elements, we should have intercourse real and substantial, worth

everything else in life. Our books too—how we should revel in them, by the hour, by the day, with the snow falling softly outside and the wind in the chimney! And the crisp morning's work at easel or desk, and the long cozy evenings! Surely the life would be good.

As for the beauty—do we understand what we forego when we turn away and leave the valley to winter? Days of dazzling blue and white—a white world of silence beneath a blue sky in which the stars await only the swift going down of the sun to blaze forth, hanging in space. Soft gray days of whirling, muffling flakes; dark fierce days of rushing winds. Winter woods to explore, winter brooks to follow, winter ponds to skim. King Winter is the greatest season of all the year, and we will have none of him.

Then there is the first approach of spring, that most exquisite surprise. The earliest comers-back of us are never in time for this revelation; it belongs to February. We feel it in our city streets and respond to it with a leap of the heart; but what must it mean to be touched by it some gusty morning across snowy fields, and to burst out of a winter prison, rejoicing utterly!

As, sitting in my city apartment, I write this paper, the year is in its mid-winter. The beloved little valley lies at a distance among the hills. The deep snows wrap it, the silence broods, the

evening lamps shine too far apart to be aware of one another. Along the roads and in the village, closed houses stand in cheerless gloom, forbidding presences. Loneliness, dreariness, and desertion! While here hive we in our cozy city, safe and warm and happy together. The contrast gives one pause.

## IV

## THE PASSING OF INDOORS

INDOORS is going. We may as well make up our minds to this revolutionary conclusion, and accept it with such degree of hardy rejoicing or shivering regret as our natures prompt in us.

The movement has been long under way, gradually working the perfect ejection which now seems at hand. Had we been far-sighted enough, we might long ago have recognized the dislodging process. It is hard to say just when it began. Surely not in the shaggy breasts of those rude ancestors of ours whom we hold in such veneration and to whose ways we seem to ourselves to be so wisely returning. They dragged their venison into the depths of a cave darker and closer than any house, and devoured it in seclusion. Perhaps it began in the San Marco Piazza at Venice, with the spreading of the little open-air tables under the colonnades. "So delightful! So charming!" Thus the tourists, as they sipped their coffee and dallied with their ices. They were right; it was delightful and charming, and so it is to this day. But perhaps it was the thin edge of the wedge which is now turning us all out.

Supper was the first regular meal to follow the open-air suggestion, country supper on the piazza in the warm summer evening. That was also delightful and not at all alarming. All nations and ages have practiced the sport of occasional festive repasts out-of-doors when the weather has permitted. But breakfast was not long in following suit; and when dinner, that most conservative, most conventional of meals, succumbed to the outward pressure and spread its congealing gravies in the chilly air, we were in for the thing in good earnest, the new custom was on. No longer a matter of times and seasons, the weather had nothing to do with it now; and in really zealous families the regular summer dining-room was out-of-doors. Summer and warmth are traditionally supposed to go together; but they do not by any means always do so in New England, where bleak rains overtake the valleys and clearing north-west winds come racing keenly. It was soon necessary to introduce a new fashion in dinner garments: overcoats, sweaters, and heavy shawls, mufflers and hoods.

"Excuse me while I run up-stairs to get a pair of mittens?"

"Finish your soup first, dear; it will be quite cold if you leave it."

The adherents of the new doctrine were very conscientious and faithful, as was only to be ex-

pected. We are a valiant race in the matter of our enthusiasms, and can be trusted to follow them sturdily, buckling on armor or overcoats or whatever special equipment the occasion demands.

Sleeping out-of-doors was the next phase in the open-air movement. That also began casually and charmingly. A wakeful dreamer lingered long in his hammock, watching the stars, musing in the still summer night, until, lo! there was the dawn beginning behind the eastern hills. A happy experience. Not much sleeping about it—there is seldom much sleeping about real experiences—but so much pleasure that the heart said, "Go to! why not have this good thing always? Why not sleep out-of-doors every night?" Which is of course exactly the way in which human nature works: very reasonable, very sane, and convincing, but unfortunately never quite so successful as it ought to be. That which has blessed us once must be secured for our souls to feast on perpetually; revelation must fold its wings and abide with us. So we soberly go to work and, by laying plans for the systematic recurrence of our great occasions, we strip from them all the delight of the unexpected, all the poetry of chance.

> "He who bends to himself a joy,
> Does the wingèd life destroy;
> But he who kisses a joy as it flies,
> Lives in eternity's sunrise."

It is a pity that William Blake could not teach us that once for all. As a matter of fact, great occasions care nothing at all for our urging; and a plan is an institution which they cordially abhor. The stars and the dawn do not condescend to such paraphernalia for waylaying them as sleeping-bags, rubber blankets, air-pillows, and mosquito netting.

One experience of my own recurs to my memory poignantly, and I think that I cannot do better than set it forth. I had passed an unforgettable night all alone in a meadow, detained by the evening into "solemn midnight's tingling silences," and then into the austere dawn. It was an episode that should have sealed my lips; but I profanely spoke of it, and at once the contagion of interest spread through the little village.

"What fun! Did you wear your rubbers? Did you sit in a chair? I should think that would have been much more comfortable. Well, I tell you what, let's do it together—a lot of us, so we won't be afraid—and let's climb a mountain. The sunrise will be beautiful from a mountain."

We did it; I blush to confess that some twenty-five of us did it. For the better part of two weeks we planned and discussed the excursion—a full moon being in the program—and we left no possible accident unforeseen, no event unprovided

for. On the auspicious night, the procession that, toiling and puffing, made the ascent of Haystack —the favored mountain selected for the pedestal of our rapture—offered as sad, and withal as funny, an affront as the secrecy of beauty ever received. Blankets, steamer-rugs, pillows, shawls, hammocks, whiskey flasks—how we groaned beneath these burdens! Of course we lost the way and had to beat the woods in every direction; we were tired and hot and—cross. But we knew what our cue was; and when at last we straggled forth on the top of the mountain, we collected ourselves in a solemn group and said, "How beautiful!"

It was beautiful; therein lay just the fineness of the night's triumph over us—over me at least, I cannot speak for the other twenty-four. Be it said in parentheses that, to this day, whenever any one mentions our night on Haystack, we all lift our eyes in ecstasy, and no one of us has ever confessed any sense of lack. But honestly, honestly at the last (dear stalwart relief of honesty!) I affirm that to me the experiment was a failure. The scene was so beautiful that my spirit should have been lifted out of my body, and would have been, had it watched alone, had it not already exhausted itself in plans and expectations. Beneath us lay a far-spreading sea of misty, rolling hills, all vague and blended in the light of the soaring

moon; above us stretched such a sweep of sky as only mountain tops command; around us, silence, silence. Yet the unstrenuous orchard at home, with its tranquil acceptance of such measure of sunset light as was granted it and of the moon's presence when she rose above the apple trees, would have conveyed the night's message a thousand times more clearly.

It is seldom worth while to describe minutely any failure of the spirit, and tragedy is not the aim of this paper; but one slight episode of the dawn following that fatal night must be related. We were gathered on the eastern edge of our mountain, a tousled, gray, dishevelled lot, heavy-eyed and weary. Does the reader understand the significance of the phrase, "to prevent the dawn"? He probably does if he has stood and waited for the sun to rise—or, for that matter, the moon or any of the constellations. All heavenly bodies retard their progress when they are waited for. A dozen times we warned one another—"Surely now!"—as with strained, intent faces we gazed into the quickening east; yet no glittering, lambent rim slid up to greet our eyes.

At last a decent comely cloud came to the rescue of the sun, halting and embarrassed, and settled snugly all about the mountain of the day-spring. Into this the sun was born, so obscurely that it rode high above the mountain's edge,

shorn and dull, a rubber ball, before we discovered it. "Why—why ——" some one stammered; and there was a dramatic pause. Brave and determined though we were in our pursuit of ecstasy, we could not burst forth into Memnon statue song at the sight of that belated orange. "Lo, the Lord Sun!" Not at all. It was the merest varlet. In this dilemma of our hearts, a funny little wailing cry came from the edge of the cliff: "I want my money back!" It was a perfect commentary on the whole situation, as fine and humorous an utterance as the foiled occasion could have asked. We laughed at it, and the air was straightway clearer for us. Then we trooped down the mountain-side, and went home to bed.

Of course I am not unaware that some of my readers are probably very impatient with me, if they have taken pains to peruse thus far this earnest exposition. They declare that the outdoor movement is not primarily one of sentiment, but of health and happiness; and that the story just related is aside from the point. That may be true. I certainly stand in respect of the great claims of the physical side of the subject, and would not criticize them. By all means, let people be as well as possible. But it is still the other side, the side of sentiment and rapture, that is most frequently and pleadingly urged upon me.

It is pitiful how helpless we sober, conservative

people are against the invasions of a new enthusiasm. I still sleep in my bed, in my room; but the satisfaction I used to take in the innocent practice is broken by haunting fears that I may not be able to keep it up. My friends will not let me alone.

"Why don't you sleep out here, on this little upper piazza? Precisely the place for you! I don't understand how you can ignore such an opportunity."

"Well, you see,"—my first answer is glib—"the piazza overhangs the road, and the milk wagons go by very early. I don't want to get up at four o'clock every morning."

"They couldn't see much of you, I should think,"—with a thoughtful measuring glance—"not more than your toes and the tip of your nose."

"Oh, thank you, that's quite enough!"

"Well, you might saw off the legs of a cot, to bring it below the railing. Or just a mattress spread on the floor would do very well."

Just a mattress spread on the floor! That closes the argument. I have no spirit left to suggest any other objections to these dauntless souls: such as the rain—the piazza has no roof. Undoubtedly I should be told that a cold bath would be distinctly a gain, simplifying the toilet operations of the succeeding morning. There is

no course left me but that final one—which should in honesty have come first—of damning myself by the hopeless assertion, "I don't want to sleep out-of-doors." This locks the argument, and the barrier stands complete, shutting me off in a world by myself, interrupting the genial flow of sympathetic friendship. But I love my friends, and I do not like to lose their sympathy. Therefore it follows that I tremble for my repose in my bed. I fear I shall yet utter midnight sighs on that piazza floor.

Indoors, dear indoors! I wish that I might plead its cause a little here. Does no one ever pause to reflect that there never was any outdoors at all until indoors was created? The two had a simultaneous birth; but it was an appurtenance of the latter that marked the distinction and gave the names. That might have seemed a little humiliating to any creatures less generous than woods and mountains. They had been here from the beginning, ages and ages in glorious life, and they were given their first generic name, found their first classification, all of them in a lump together (what a lump!) as the other side of a fragile barrier to a mushroom construction. One wonders that those who so highly exalt the outdoors nowadays do not find some better title for it than its dooryard term. But those who love the indoors too, though they may smile at the

calm presumption of its dubbing the universe, accept the conclusion without any question. Man is after all the creature of creatures, and his life is of first importance. We do not hear that the woodchuck speaks of *out-hole*, or the bird of *out-tree.*

Such life of man is an inner thing, intensely inner; its essence lies in its inwardness. It can hardly know itself "all abroad"; as soon as it came to self-consciousness, it must needs have devised for itself a shelter, a refuge, not only from storm and cold but from the distracting variety of the extensive world. Indoors is really an august symbol, a grave and reverend thing. It stands for the separate life of man, apart from (though still a part of, too) the rest of the universe. Take any one room inhabited daily by a person of strong individuality—how alive it is! How brisk and alert in the very attitudes of the chairs and pictures! Or, more happily, how serene and full of repose! Morbid and passionate, flippant, austere, boisterous, decorous—anything, everything which a human being may be, that may a room be also.

It is hard to understand how any person can fail to respond to the warm appeal of his own abode. Say that one has been abroad all day (another term that depends upon the house for its meaning), climbing the mountains, exploring

the woods, ravishing eyes and heart with the beauty of the excellent world. Late afternoon comes at last, and fatigue droops upon the flesh. Enough! Even the spirit's cry finds a pause. Enough, enough! The wide world suddenly spreads so vast that it overwhelms and frightens; there is something pitiless in the reach of the unbounded sky. Then, as fast as they can, the lagging feet make for a point on the hillside where the eyes can command the valley; and swiftly, eagerly flies the glance to one dear accustomed goal. A white house nestled among the trees—that is all, yet it thrills the heart with a potent summons which mountain peaks and sunsets do not know. Home! Ah, hurry, then!

Down the hill, across the pasture, along the road, in at the gate, and up the two marble steps. The front door stands unconcernedly open. The house makes no stir at receiving back its inmate, whose life it has held and brooded upon during his absence, waiting to reinvest him with it when he wants it again; but there is everywhere a quiet sense of welcome, a content of returning. The clock ticks steadily in the hall, its hands approaching the genial hour of supper time. Within the open library door the books dream on the shelves. Little sounds of a tranquil preparation come from the dining-room; the teakettle sings, the black kitten purrs. Blessed indoors! It draws a veil

gently over the tired head, bewildered with much marvelling, it lays a cool hand over the eyes, saying, "Now rest, rest." It is like the Guardian Angel in Browning's poem.

After supper, one sits by the lamp and reads peacefully. All the rest of the family read too, gathered around the big table. The books and the pictures look on benignly, and even the furniture is instinct with a mute eloquence of companionship. The song of the night insects throbs without, and millers hurl themselves with soft thuds against the windows; an owl mutters to himself in the maple tree. But not for anything would one go out, not for anything would one leave this glowing, brooding, protecting indoors which one has regained. After a while one goes up-stairs and lays oneself in the safe white bed in one's own room. The windows are open to the night, but solid walls are all round about; and before the sleepily closing eyes, one's own peculiar cherished belongings gleam in the creeping moonlight. Into the very heart of one's life one has returned at the close of the day, and there one goes to sleep. "In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength."

And we will not? Is the discouraged clause, promptly succeeding to that most beautiful verse of Isaiah, true, then, of us? Are we going to despoil

ourselves of all the poetry, the intimate meaning of our indoor life?

"A place in which to dress and undress—that is all I want of a house," said an energetic young woman.

A bath-house would suit her perfectly. Perhaps that is what we are coming to: rows of bath-houses, with sleeping-bags stored up in them against the night. Alas for the pictures! Alas for the music! Alas for the books!

The books! There is a happy suggestion. I believe the books will save us. There is certainly nothing that objects with greater decision and emphasis to sleeping out-of-doors than a book. The effect of leaving one inadvertently in the orchard over night has a final melancholy about it which most book lovers poignantly understand. Could books be printed on india rubber and bound in waterproof cloth? The device does not sound attractive enough to be feasible even in these practical days. No, I do believe the books will save us. They are a great army, and they have power; theirs is a steady conservative hold on their restless owners.

"I sometimes think I'd give up housekeeping and not have a home any more," a woman said to me once, "if it weren't for my books. But I can't part with them, nor yet can I get them all into one room; so here I stay."

"Buy books?" a New York man exclaimed. "No; it hurts them too much to move them."

Which guileless inference has caused me many a thoughtful smile.

Essentially human—with the humanity of the ages, not merely of a few decades—books understand what man really wants, and what he must have, better than he does himself. In the serene and gracious indoors they took up their places long ago; and there they remain, and there they will always make shift to abide. Perhaps, if we sit down close at their feet, we, too, may abide.

## V

## URSA MINOR

URSA MAJOR adorns the sky, obvious, glittering, clearly defined, a constellation about which there can never be any doubt. Every one is familiar with it. Even those people who "really know nothing about the stars" modify their disclaimer by adding, "except of course the Big Dipper." Just as those other people who do not read widely are yet familiar with Dickens's characters? Precisely. It was this analogy that held my mind as I lay in the orchard one evening not long ago, tracing out Ursa Minor and Lyra, and trying to find some significance in the curves of Andromeda.

It was not a clear evening—too dreamy and warm—and I was somewhat put to it to draw the outlines of the heavenly figures. "Bind the cluster of the Pleiades?" Indeed, I could not at all. But I sat up suddenly once to shake a grasshopper out of my hair, and there before me lay Ursa Major—obvious, glittering, as I have said, emphatically itself.

"If it's constellations you're after," it said, "what in the worlds is the matter with me? Here I am, definite; I can defy the mists of the

evening; I plant myself firmly above the hills. You waste your time groping among those other vague glimmerings yonder. At best, they mean nothing unless you apply a mind-splitting force of imagination. Dragons and lyres, indeed! Look at me. I'm a dipper, I am. Take hold of my handle, and drink reality."

It was true; the Big Dipper was a dipper. It lay nicely balanced across the sky, pointing upward, with time-honored accuracy, to the North Star, a useful, an excellent constellation, conspicuous and exact. Yet, oh, how it bored me! I lay down again, and waited until a cloud had passed by between me and Ursa Minor, and then gave myself over to the gentler influence of the lesser group of stars. It did not point to the North Star, no; it did not need to, for it had snared the star closely in its tail.

That is the way—so I pondered, sunk in a fragrant revery in the grass, with only the flash of a meteor to startle me now and then—that is the way with a good many of the people that I know. Great bears and little bears, major and minor—they divide the world between them. Not evenly. A huge section of space has to be given over to the aggressive monopoly of the Great Bear; no other constellations swarm and hide about its clear-cut corners. But the heavens are wide; to the south, east, west, the other stars gather and

come and go, herding in friendly fashion so close that their outlines merge and blend, and they weave one splendid pattern of glory across the purple void. How alluring, how interesting Ursa Minor! How tedious Ursa Major—and yet how indispensable! Every age is the age of Ursa Major, because, for one thing, it will have it so. But Ursa Minor has captured and held much of the love of the world.

It is the minor poet whose use—or whose suffering—of the attribute of falling short is most familiar to us. Yet he stands by no means alone in his possession of the quality; all classes of men share it with him. Perhaps it may fairly be questioned whether that which indicates a lack should have anything but a negative significance, should be considered a quality at all. But a state of being which is shared by ninety-nine one-hundredths of mankind cannot escape a certain robustness; and, if it is negative, then negation is a force to be reckoned with.

We are rather hard on the minor poet; at best, we only tolerate him. But perhaps we have not considered the general uses of minority, the universal need of the blessed estate. Its defects are obvious; therefore they may be ignored in our present discussion. It is precisely the obvious from which we would escape. But its merits lure us to contemplation. Some of them are so beautiful

that they almost cause the condition which they adorn to transcend its proper bounds and to become the most superior kind of superiority.

There is, for instance, that very trait hinted at in the paragraph above—or, rather, that lack of a trait (for, in dealing with Ursa Minor, one must more often speak negatively than positively)—that fact that there is nothing obvious about it but its defects. How very pleasant that is! To find nothing about a man that bores you but his defects! The intelligent world instinctively avoids that which bores it; and no man could ask better fortune than that his friends should ignore his faults. It is when they have to ignore his virtues that he is in a desperate case.

Poor Ursa Major cannot fairly be held to blame for the contrary state of affairs which obtains with it. It has to be obvious; that is its mission. Nature has carved it conspicuously, and has set it prominently to work; it would defeat its own destiny if it tried to be quiet about it. That North Star is an important thing. People are careless, and they get lost; and then they are very stupid and cannot find their way again. It is absolutely essential that somebody or something stand forth very boldly, not to say baldly, and point an infallible finger in one direction. But people are not always lost; and, when they are sitting safely in their front yards or lying in their

orchards, they are sometimes apt to grow weary of perpetual North Star.

"Behold me!" Ursa Major cries, in season and out of season, addressing the orchard as commandingly as the mountain. "I am the Great Bear, and I point the way to the North Star."

"The North Star?" Ursa Minor murmurs. "Oh! the North Star. I believe I've got it somewhere in my tail."

Dear Ursa Minor!

But there is no doubt about it that to be free not to take themselves too seriously is a gracious privilege appertaining to the minor people, a privilege which conduces much to the general cause of ease and friendliness. Also to be free to come and go. One "always knows where to find" Ursa Major; one has but to stand facing the north in a general fashion, and, unless the sky is quite covered with clouds, there the constellation waits. Waits? Nay, rather, advances to meet one, delaying not to be wooed. Now, it is also true of Ursa Minor that one may know where to find it; but whether or not one does find it is another question. Unless the brilliant mood of the night robs all the stars of reserve, it always has to be sought; and, when found, it has to be held with the eye, lest its faint outlines vanish again. Now, I protest, this is decent of it; decent and self-respecting and independent and

interesting. A little provoking, too, now and then; but provocation has excellent uses.

"Why, I'm not important," it says, when one pleads earnestly with it to stay a while. "It's my brother that counts; he is the real thing; go and talk with him. His office hours run all night long. He'll tell you everything you want to know. I only repeat his main ideas feebly after him."

Nothing can persuade it that one may prefer its own gentler, more indirect, more luminous exposition of North Star wisdom to the hard-and-fast statements of Ursa Major. Therefore, one has to coax them from it, and that's where the fun comes in.

Who does not know families which consist of one dominant personality and an ineffective company of eclipsed entities? "The Browns? Oh, yes, Miss Martha Brown. What a force she is!" "The Smiths? I think you must refer to Mr. Wilson Smith." When I hear people talk thus of some family unfamiliar to me, I know my quarry from afar and seek an introduction. Past Miss Martha and Mr. Wilson, I make my way as soon as I can; and, in the background of their greatness, I never fail to find minor brothers and sisters, even a minor mother or two, who charm me utterly.

Companionability is another agreeable trait of

# Ursa Minor

Ursa Minor. Ursa Major stands off by itself, always preoccupied, always on duty, never with time to spare. The major people of one's acquaintance do greatly oppress and paralyze one with their absorption in their North Stars. They pretend to allow one to come and see them and talk about something else once in a while; but one cannot do it; one is overwhelmed by the briefness of the interview granted and by the trivial nature of the ideas which one has brought to discuss. This is mortifying: to stand in the presence of greatness, mewing like an unhappy kitten that opens its mouth but utters no sound. Yet there are many who cannot rid themselves of the curious paradoxical panic of haste and reluctance which the North Star breeds in them.

But the minor person, the dear minor person—how comfortable he is! Three or four hours more or less—it doesn't matter; spend the day, stay overnight. The genial latitude of the situation gives time for a score of ideas to bud, open, bloom, and fall. Moreover, there is no slightest demand that ideas shall be forthcoming at all, if the wit prefers to lie fallow. This latter point is very important; I am not sure that it does not mark the chiefest merit of the minor person. His modest attitude towards life is one of an open receptiveness to whatever comes his way. He likes to talk and laugh, yes; but he also likes

very well to be silent. He even makes no objection to downright dullness now and again, to real stupidity. Stupidity and dullness, he holds, are integral parts of human nature; and, without them, any man is (or would be) but half a man. The result of this tolerant wisdom is that the minor person is often far more stimulating than the major.

Wisdom! One wonders if the stars are as concerned for this attribute as we have felt it our duty to be since the days of Solomon. Perhaps that North Star of theirs is wisdom. If so, there is significance in the wide variety of relations which they maintain with it. Ursa Major proclaims the North Star, stands off at a distance from it and points to it ostentatiously. Ursa Minor hooks the North Star in its tail, and turns its back on it.

It would seem that Ursa Major must know all that there is to be known about this particular point of light, since it travels around it continually, viewing it from all sides. But, in the fact that it always views it, lies a limitation. It never turns to look off and see what effect the North Star is having upon the other constellations, what are their various attitudes towards it, nor what they are doing among themselves off there in the heavenly fields. As a matter of fact, some of them are so placed that they cannot arrive at the

North Star at all from the standpoint of Ursa Major. They have to make their own ways to it from other directions. To them it is, therefore, a more important circumstance that Ursa Minor has leashed the star, and gently holds it from running away, than that Ursa Major points to it. There is this to be said for Ursa Minor: with all its seeming indifference, it does maintain the North Star. It may turn its back on its prize and ignore it; it may subdue its own shadowy outlines to the vanishing point, and lose its identity in the mist; somehow or other that star persists, carelessly flung on high for the careful pointing of Ursa Major.

It is in the matter of their wisdom that minor people come nearest to defeating their mission in life and becoming superior. But the general nature of their wisdom saves them and keeps them down. On any given subject under discussion, some major person can always instruct them. They never know as much about flowers as the botanist, as much about music as the composer, as much about sickness as the trained nurse; so that they are continually to be found in their heaven-ordained position of deference towards some one. But in the knowledge of combinations, of tenden cies, of ultimate issues, in the reckoning of averages, they are unsurpassed. In the complex questions of every-day life, who would not rather

have the advice of an experienced minor person than of a major person with a theory to prove?

There is one more trait of Ursa Minor—that which includes and presupposes all the other characteristics, their fine flower and, at the same time, their seed—which I would fain, yet dare not, handle. How shall I even speak its name without doing harm? A delicate quality, the very last attribute of human nature to stand analysis and discussion, it has yet been subjected to the rashest, most shameful exploitation in these latter days. It has been almost done to death, nay, sometimes, entirely so. Surely the reader knows what I mean. He has read about it in countless books, has noted its capitals S and H in magazine articles without end, has even heard it earnestly recommended from the pulpit. Look up at Ursa Minor and see how its stars twinkle among themselves—not keenly like Ursa Major, flashing an obvious sheaf of rays from every well-marked corner, but dimly, deliciously, through-and-through, so that the separate stars sometimes disappear in the effulgence of their mingled rays. That is—ah! speak it softly, whisper it—that is a *Sense of Humor*.

A pretty good showing, is it not, which we have found for minority in this orchard meditation? We have actually had to be every moment on our guard lest the terms of our discussion slip from

us, become confused, and—presto! change!—the minor person appear as the major. Such a sudden shifting of values as that, such a whimsical prancing of paradox, would be only the method which life habitually employs for our edification, and probably it approaches truth more nearly than any other; but we are not up to it, we slaves to human reason. Consistency is still the bugbear of our small minds. Minority being granted, then, as a lesser estate than majority, we have examined it and we have seen that it has such merits that no phase of life can dispense with it. No phase? Well, yes, there is one at which I hinted some paragraphs back. Perhaps, if we return to it now, it also will yield to our argument.

I said that we were apt to be hard on the minor poet. We are; and on the minor musician and the minor artist. Our general verdict seems to be that, however useful the minor person may be in the other departments of life, he is *de trop* in the arts; that, unless a man can make of himself a really first-rate poet or painter, he has no business to meddle with rhymes or pigments at all. But we do not stop to consider what an unkind treatment this is to give Melpomene and Euterpe, nor what an estimate we hereby tacitly make of the natures of these muses. Are they so inferior, then, to the other gods and goddesses that we may presume to scant their worship to less than

the whole of mankind? Are they, on the other hand, such high prigs that they will have none of the company of common folk? Cruel and shameful assumptions, these, if we really made them. But I think that we are only thoughtless about our judgment in the matter. Not inferior to Venus and Ceres do we hold the Dames of Parnassus, but even superior in a way, certainly different and deserving of peculiar honor. Alas! poor ladies, we therefore commend them to the exclusive companionship of major people. No pleasant relaxation for them, no light-hearted dallyings with restful dullness; nothing but North Star forever and ever, continually North Star.

It is well that the gods are above human disposals, and that the muses have always been traditionally willful. The case might be really serious with them if they had to obey our decrees. But they are entirely independent. They know the value of the minor person, and they visit him freely. In fact, if we argue candidly, they give us the best of reasons for supposing that they prefer minor people to major. Why, else, should they every year seek and summon a score of the former to one of the latter? It is always fair to assume that the guests one meets in a drawing-room are the hostess's chosen friends; and goddesses, like mortals, are known by the company they keep.

Of course they prefer the minor person! They

know what they are about. It is he who serves them most whole-heartedly, putting forth the greatest effort for the least reward. It is he who soothes them and keeps them sane, even now and then letting them go to sleep in his restful presence. An out and out genius must be a severe strain on his poor muse.

The fields of art are spacious and open, and many are called thereto. But few are chosen? Perhaps; but the calling is the vital thing. There may be honor in being chosen—honor and assurance and joy—but not much credit in the long run; the ultimate credit lies with him who, once called, can be trusted to follow the magic lure forever without reward. That is, without other reward.

For my part, I think that Euterpe is so far from being a snob that she does not scorn the humblest instrument in the world which touches some heart into responsive song. The hand-organ, then? Surely, yes, the hand-organ, with the children about it; the brass band, flooding the street with a sudden tide of hope and buoyancy, lifting the heads of the scattered pedestrians and binding their disconnected footsteps into a transient march; even the penny whistle, if so it awaken some wisp of a dream in the brain of him who blows it. That is the errand of art: to communicate life, to awaken dreams. It is hard to see

how it is to deny some title of its nobility to anything which achieves the end, no matter by what means.

"If only there were not such a host of scribblers and daubers nowadays!" the dissatisfied critic sighs. If only there were not—well, what then? Is the world's creative, artistic power to be conceived as a fixed and limited quantity, like its supply of marble and coal, like the currency of its nations; so that, if every one has a little, no one can have a great deal? If all the copiers in the Louvre firmly threw their brushes away, if the poetasters refused to fill the left-over corners in the magazines, would a Michaelangelo straightway appear, would a Shakespeare lift up his voice? The experiment would certainly be an interesting one to make; and, such is the modesty and goodwill of the minor person in general, that he could probably very easily be induced to refrain from expression long enough to put the thing to the test. What a holiday the reviewers would have! The magazines would suspend their issues; the bookshops would close; the annual art exhibitions would languish; the popular music halls would shut down, and bid their frequenters patronize the Symphony Concerts—where the bewildered creatures would yawn for a few helpless moments, and then drift out into the street.

But what if the waters, left to themselves,

refused to congregate in one living pool, and preferred to stagnate? What if the heavenly light which had flashed from so many mirrors and bits of glass a little while ago and had made the world such a sparkling place, withheld its radiance now because it found no reflecting surfaces? This might happen. Nay, as a fact, of course it would happen; for art is not a quantity, but a spirit, increasing with use, like Dante's love; and the more there is of it, the more there will always be.

What a prolonged discussion! I fall back in the orchard grass, and look up, and catch Ursa Minor's eye, twinkling more than ever.

"I'm sure I'm much obliged," it says. "You are really very kind to take all this trouble."

## VI

## WOOD MAGIC

IF one had to choose—which Heaven forbid! —among the beautiful things of earth, my choice would always fall on the woods. I find their summons more imperative and their high ministry more inevitable than the operation of any other influence. Right certain am I, too, that I am blessed by the immediate neighborhood of the most beautiful woods in the world.

When they call me, I have to go—no matter what other plans I had harbored, no matter even, I fear, what duties seem to lie at my hand. The claim is transcendent, and restlessness takes possession of me unless I answer it.

Out by the side gate, and up the road, through a pair of bars to the left, and across a climbing pasture. Then under more bars, and up a hill grown thick with shrubby cinquefoil. From the depths of a murmuring gorge a little brook salutes the path. I pause to salute it briefly in turn, mindful of many past sessions of joy when the open-air mood was upon me and I climbed no farther than this. But the immediate call of the woods permits no long delay, and I hasten on up the hill.

# Wood Magic

Arrived at a certain turn in the path, I pause again and look back to see how the valley has widened at my feet, unrolling its fair, shining, cloud-swept meadows, and how the mountains across the way have grown in massiveness. Then I cross the brook on a tumble-down bridge of rough gray planks, and come to a stop at a pair of bars between two sentinel spruces.

These bars are fastened. I like to think that the precaution has a reason which concerns not altogether the intrusions of wandering cattle, but also has an aim to prevent the too hasty approach of human feet to the sacred forest. Beguilingly as the woods are calling—"Come! Come!"—I am glad to be brought to an utter pause, to stand with my arms on the topmost bar, musing a few minutes. Then, with due humility, I bow my head and creep under the barrier. Slowly I cross a small open space, vibrant with sunshine and little motions of bird and shadow, the Gothic arch of the forest entrance rising higher above my head as I approach; devoutly, holding my breath a little, I enter the mossy, branching way, and the woods receive me.

Generally I at once sit down on a fallen log. The dim place, green and flickering, awes me, and I suffer soft shock of change and readjustment. For several moments, while my open-air thoughts are hurrying in from their wide wanderings, I am

all plastic, without form, without identity, bewildered in the sudden spell of secrecy and silence. Then it is that the forest lays hold upon me, shaping me out of my opportune chaos to its own great ends, so that I become in very truth its creature. When at last, once more self-conscious and aware, I rise and take my way in among the shadows, I am subdued, discreet, infinitely possessed.

What richness in the life of a forest! Not a flaunting, lavish display which hastens to bestow itself, but a better guerdon of hid treasure which must be desired and sought. Nor always found, either—this shy, elusive reward of the woods; one may all too frequently seek and seek in vain. It is in a mood of measureless patience that one should tread the green, silent ways, content to forego, content to find that which had not been promised nor expected at all. For the wood delights in surprises. With all its gravity and reserve, it has a certain whimsical touch which has made it the recognized fit abode of fairies the world over. I do not know how many times I once wandered about a partridge's nest without seeing it, how many times I stood and gazed directly at it. It shaped itself out of the dead leaves before me with a suddenness which might have led me to think that it had been created that moment; but, from the fixed gaze of the brown bird, crouching low and spreading herself, I knew

that the poor troubled mother had been watching me long. She had done her best to keep her little establishment safe in the obliteration of the forest's unity; what tricksy turn of circumstance had betrayed her to me? Before I turned away, I counted the trees in a line from the fence, that I might know how to find the nest again; but I think that was a mistake. One should accept the wood's favors as they come, setting up no claim for repetition, never assuming, in ponderous, logical, human fashion, that, because a secret has once been whispered, it is therefore out and cannot revert and become a secret again. Once a secret, always a secret in the dealing of the woods. That partridge's eggs never hatched, and I have always had an uneasy suspicion that their miscarriage may have had something to do with my occasional observation, as I stood at a very respectful distance and looked at their nest. I do not see how this could have been so, I earnestly hope that it was not; and yet I feel vaguely guilty. If I had abused the confidence of the forest, somebody had to be punished; and, in woods as in cities, it is not always the sinner who is visited with retribution. Poor partridge! Her loss is one of the mysteries that I look to the Day of Judgment to clear up for me.

All sorts of flowers wait—and ignore—discovery in the woods. I know their seasons pretty

well, and permit myself to attend upon them, with no insistence, but with an open, docile readiness to enjoy them if they are so disposed. The bloodroot leads the spring-beauty; the anemone and the dog-tooth violet follow along, and the lordly jack-in-the-pulpit. Meantime, the ferns unroll their fronds and fill the shadows with their delicate mist of green, fit setting for the showy orchid which arrives in June. Showy! What kind of an adjective is that for the finest flower-spirit of the woods? So slender, low, and delicate that the seeker must wander all up and down the forest ways before he finds it, so unobtrusive in its breath of subtlest, rarest fragrance that it hardly seems to have a scent at all, so evasive in its hue that in one light its purity shows streaked with pink, in another light with violet—this gentle dream-thing showy? The wind does not call it that, nor the hermit thrush.

Ah, the hermit thrush! He is the bird-spirit of the woods as the orchid is the flower-spirit; he is the holy, high reserve of the shadows and the swaying boughs made manifest in sound. He is true to his sentiment. It is by no means always vouchsafed the wanderer and listener—even in humblest frame of mind—to hear him sing. He has never failed to inhabit the woods which I frequent; and one of the very first things which I do, on returning to the country in the spring, is

to climb and listen for him. But I am never sure of hearing him. I have waited on him whole afternoons and have not caught a note. He lurks and withdraws, he obeys his mood, brooding his music in that long silence out of which the best things come. I never see him; I do not try. When I find him singing, his music strikes some sixth sense first, stealing upon me from out the depths of the inner wood more like a touch than a sound. I hear nothing, and yet I stand potently arrested. Gradually then I take my way towards the spot from which the strange summons has come, and, out of the vibrating silence, at last the notes fall on my ear. Such ringing notes, so clear, so sweet, with meditated restraint of modulation and harmony, with unhurried sureness! Ah! fine soul of twilight and dim ways, thou knowest the life of the forest well, thou art its priest.

If one would find the woods most secretly, most mysteriously at home, one should go to them in the rain. I remember how startled I was when I made this discovery. It afforded me one of the great experiences of my country life.

The occasion was on the third of a series of steadily rainy days. I had sat patiently in the house, reading and writing and watching the skies, waiting for the wind to change. But at last I could stand it no longer. On my last trip

to the woods, nearly a week ago, I had found some orchid buds; they must surely be open now. I could not lose their beauty. So I put on some old clothes, and started. No umbrella—perish the thought! An umbrella in the woods!

As I climbed the hill, the rain paused for a moment's rest, and a pale gleam of sunlight, falling behind low-hanging clouds, touched the distant mountain range into unearthly beauty. I climbed slowly, letting the wind blow damply fresh in my thirsty face. How good it was to be out again! The trees and the bushes rejoiced in a wonderful vivid green; there had been no hardship for them in the long cold rain. The brook ran shining beside the path, the song-sparrow uttered his happy notes. The pastures were content.

I drew near the wood entrance almost unaware, I was so occupied in observing the details of the hillside. But suddenly a breath touched my face, and a cool fragrance saluted me; I looked up, and there I stood by the bars, with the gloomy green wall of the forest looming before me.

I can hardly say what it was that I saw when I stepped over the wood's threshold. Indeed, I cannot say at all; the experience was one of those revelations

> "such as dodge
> Conception to the very bourn of heaven,
> Then leave the naked brain."

But I knew at once that I stood in the presence of something which I had never known before, or had never known so near; and all thought dropped from me as I waited breathless.

They were solemnly beautiful, those woods, instinct with an awful meaning; very dark and wet, yet flooded with a strange intense light, a sort of vivid gloom. They were utterly silent; not a stir of bird or squirrel was heard among the tall trunks of the trees. Only, far in among the shadows, sounded occasionally the weird whirling song of the veery. The brook came sliding down past my feet, uttering things of the gravest import which I could only just not understand. I had never had such a tingling sense of being on the verge of apprehending the mystery of the world. I stood aghast, expectant.

Nothing more than that happened of course. Nothing more could happen unless one were dead. By and by I wandered slowly about, gathering my orchids, pausing to listen and hold my breath, feeling dazed, bewildered. The woods were mute. Yet was their muteness most eloquent, closing the lips just over a song.

The rain began again after a while, falling with a musical cadence on the high upper leaves. "Go home, child," the tolerant wood said to me. "Do you not know that this is not your hour?"

And indeed I think that I had transcended my

mortal claim. Human beings should house themselves during the storm, and leave the world to its mysteries, nor seek to pry and discover. Perhaps Pan had gathered all the gods into the woods on that rainy day, and I—oh, presumptuous! oh, profane!

Yet not for all the lore of the ages would I part with that which I almost heard and almost saw.

## VII

## THE LADY OF THE GARDEN

THE moonlight drifted down through the orchard, flooding the garden with dreamy radiance. It was a young moonlight, and its quality was misty and ethereal; visions lurked in it. The deep grass of late June wove snares for it, and the silent, full-leaved trees bowed beneath its benediction, letting it interpenetrate them as closely as it would. All was silent. The hills beyond the garden and the orchard stood in a dim blue multitude against the soft night sky; the valley held its peace.

In and out among her flowers the Lady of the Garden moved on light spirit feet. She had died six months ago, and this was, therefore, her first summer of free ministry. When she was living, she had loved her garden with the peculiar tenderness of those who have grown old at the cost of many a cherished occupation and interest, and who have found a last outlet for unflagging vitality. Nay, it was more than that; that sounds selfish. Hers was a nature that must give itself in some fostering love and care. The garden had responded as gardens have such exquisite means of responding—in bloom and perfume, color and

grace; it was a notable feature of the summer valley. The orchard behind it, the old white house set in its midst, even the meadows and mountains were the fairer for its presence. The birds and the butterflies loved it, the light lent it the witchery of its treatment all day long and sometimes all night. It was a personality; no common, typical garden at all, but a gentle creature, alive and following its own peculiar destiny under its natal star. It would have seemed the Lady's last child, if she had not rather desired of it a last sisterhood. The two understood each other well, and lived constantly together.

Hard work? Yes, of course it meant that. That was part of its excellence in the beginning, for the Lady had always been one who had gloried in taking resolute hold upon life. But the years bring manacles to the most eager hands and feet; and, during the last season or two, there had been a deepening shadow in the creeping admission that, by and by, experiment would have to be abandoned, even committed enterprise would have to be called in and dismissed. Fortunately, the Lady had never faced and accepted either of these two dreary conditions; she had dug a new bed and planted new flowers one month before she died. Her hope for the next spring was higher than ever. Well, it was justified.

In the first wonder of her liberation, she forgot

all about the garden, pretty much all about the earth. That was natural; death is always so much more engrossingly interesting than any one quite thinks it can be. There was everything to occupy her: love, understanding, knowledge, old mysteries rent asunder to show still more alluring mysteries behind them, surprise, revelation, ecstasy; such an unveiling of Divinity as no most breathless, reverent human word can presume to adumbrate. One has to speak of it all in abstractions; but to the Lady it was a distinct, vivid experience. Her love—oh! her dear love—recovered again after all these years!

Meantime, the garden slept in earth's winter, and all was well with it.

It is good to think that earth's children are loyal, true to the mother who brought them forth and nourished them on her bosom and gathered the mortal part of them back in a last healing embrace. Set free of the universe, they are not forever forgetful of green hills and valleys and garden plots. With the first stirrings of spring the Lady stood in her garden again.

She had never been there so early before. The snow still lay deep on the beds, and the ground was hard with frost. But the wind blew softly; there was a hint and a promise in it, a touch of reconciliation. The Lady felt it as she had never felt wind before—not outwardly with any senses,

but inwardly, through and through, as if she and the air were one. There was power in the ex perience; it touched her with a suggestion: she breathed on the root of her favorite larkspur, and, sure enough, life stirred in it; she had given her dear flower its first summons to the joy of another year.

It was some time before she fully realized the extent of her new influence in her garden. The knowledge dawned on her little by little, in the delicious gradual manner of all deep understandings. She hardly knew what miracles she was working (miracles from her old point of view) until she had coaxed the shoots out of the ground, unfurled the little leaves, set the stems straight. Then sometimes she paused and said, "How did I do that? Surely, I never did it before. Yet it seemed very natural." The most amazing facility was that of color—oh, wonderful to determine the hue of a pansy! The little pansy buds set themselves, swelled and grew, and began to turn back at the edges; and the Lady hung over them in her old manner, watching, wondering what color they were going to be. Suddenly, she knew; she entered into the folded heart of the blossom before her and found it all purple and gold; the fragrance was as her own thought. So was the color; and, that being so, she could control it. With a touch of her fancy she

dimmed the purple, blew a fine dust of meditation across the gleaming gold; and that pansy came forth a pensive, instead of a buoyant, thing.

The secret of color! Most spiritual, most mysterious of earth's manifestations, it seems rather a manifestation of heaven, hovering, vanishing, persisting in every nook and corner of earth. Intangible, evanescent, it lifts the sense which perceives it to the dignity of the imagination. We ought none of us really to need to die in order to find heaven. However, it is perhaps well that we do; for revelation is an inestimable boon.

People wondered at the beauty of the garden that year. The winter had been a hard one; many neighboring gardens had suffered a heavy loss. Moreover, the old white house remained closed all through the spring, and no loving hands came to take the place of those that now lay folded far away in a green cemetery. There was a drought, there were high winds; but the garden blossomed safely. Ah, excellent delight, to cast oneself adown the current of a streaming wind, and, blowing with it, in it, see that it wrought no harm to the flowers that one loved so well! Ah, tender joy, to bring the moisture of hidden springs to feed the roots in the thirsty ground! The Lady of the Garden, never having known such service, had never known such full contentment as was hers this summer.

How about those folded hands in that green spot far away? Did the Lady ever think of them? Hardly ever. Why should she? She was gladly quit of them, a great deal better off without them; they meant nothing to her now, save an occasional reminiscence which always made her sigh. She intended to forget her grave as soon as she could. But the Lady's friends and children, still on the hither side of death, were not so brave and strong in spirit as to forget.

Perhaps it is not well to blame them; perhaps, indeed, they might be blamed if they could quite forget. Love clings to form and substance, prizing the spirit always more, but cherishing the instrument through which the song has run. It was a strange, an awful void which the dear Lady's disappearance had left in the world.

That was the reason why the house in the midst of the garden stood so long unoccupied. The void was at its keenest there, and those who loved the Lady shrank from facing it. Silence, emptiness, no answer—those are dread conditions when one has never failed of comradeship and a swift reply.

The Lady knew this. She was sorry. In her long earthly life she had faced too many voids and suffered too intensely through them, ever to forget their bitterness. But knowledge, though it may pity ignorance, can never realize again the

full pang of its doubt. The Lady wondered at the tears of those who mourned her, just as, looking back, she wondered at her own earthly tears. "How can they? But then, indeed, how could I? And yet I did." She would have tried to comfort them if they had left a path open for her feet; but quietness is the name of the road along which spirits must travel to touch one another, and grief is noisy. The Lady could not find her way through the tortured, bewildered labyrinth that involved and surrounded the hearts of her children; therefore she gave up the effort and turned her attention to the garden: that was quiet enough. After all, what did it matter? Grief, at the longest, lasts but a day; comfort and knowledge come surely to all, even if they have to wait out the rest of their lives to experience it. Meantime, grief has its own beneficent office; it humbles and softens. God, at least, keeps His own way open through all labyrinths.

When the old white house was at last occupied, the Lady had hopes of a sweet adjustment. Surely the silence and peace of the valley, surely the strength of the surrounding hills, surely the very associations of the old happy days would give comfort. As for the garden—could any one look on that full thriving beauty of color and form, that lusty, luxuriant growth, and not know that the Lady herself had been there, caring for the

last darling of her earthly life as nobody else could care?

Ah! it was beautiful, that garden, in the young summer moonlight. The "globèd peonies" opened their hearts, deep red and pure white and seashell pink, heavily fragrant; the tall larkspur lifted its spires against the orchard's grassy hill; the sweet-william stood in straight pungent rows; the dame's rocket scattered sweetness from its thickly starred branches. Foxgloves crowded one corner, erect and delicately separate for all their close association; pinks ran riot along the edge of the grass; a few late irises held splendid heads upright on long stalks.

The Lady loved her white peony dearly—great snowy blossoms with petals that were like the plumage of a bird, a wounded bird, streaked with crimson at the heart; she loved her trailing rose; she doted on her larkspur. But better than anything else in the garden she loved two plants of pink lady's-slipper that had been brought to her from the woods several years ago. With great care she had set them out, in shady places underneath the foliage of other plants; and she had watered and tended them with peculiar vigilance. Now, this spring, she had devoted to them the best services of her new powers, entering into their secret life with an exquisite pleasure that, in the old order of things, would have verged on pain. With

them she had stirred underneath the ground, awaking to the new season; with them she had crept up to light and air; with them she had grown and put forth leaves and gloried in greenness. Finally, with them she had set the buds of the beautiful quaint flowers and had dreamed the gradual color into them—faint streaks and brushings of delicate pink, deepening as the blossom expanded and unfurled. To know the color of the lady's-slipper was the most thrilling delight of this eventful spring.

One flower on each plant had come to perfection and hung, full-orbed, in the moonlight of the summer evening. The Lady could not keep away from them. In her old earthly fashion, she went the rounds of the garden again and again, lingering here and there, no longer to pull up a weed or pick off a dead leaf, but to touch with the dew and steal with the wind and quicken with the magnetic forces of the earth and air. But oftener than to any other spot, she returned to the shadows where the lady's-slippers lurked and dimly gleamed. Once she took a shaft of moonlight and sent it straight through the leaves of the larkspur to fall softly, caressingly, on the bent head of her dearest blossom. Again, she gathered the dew in her hands and bathed the broad green leaves. Constantly, she hung breathless, watching, loving, delighting—oh! who could have

thought a garden would mean so much more when one was dead than when one was alive?

On the steps of the broad piazza looking out into the garden, the Lady's children sat, very sad and silent. Their silence was good as far as it went, but it came from the outside and did not penetrate deeply enough to affect their hearts. Those foolish organs were loud with grief. "No use," the Lady thought, shaking her head and smiling a little, but pityingly. "I can't touch them yet; I must bide my time." She had forgotten that in a few days her earthly birthday was coming, and that her children were therefore sadder and lonelier than ever. Earthly birthdays! How should she remember? Her whole human experience seemed remote and unreal. The birthday of her death was the only event that counted, if one must still take note of time in eternity. Therefore, absorbed and happy, she went on her way through the garden; she breathed a caress on the lady's-slipper, she turned and blessed her poor blind children, and vanished in the boundless blue that was now her familiar home.

Earth habits cling, however, especially when one is newly dead; and time's rhythm still beats faintly in the memories of those who have just escaped from it. "Ah, my birthday!" The Lady remembered the day when it dawned far below her, and once more she paused and turned,

with the old need of mortal things upon her. Her garden—of course, that was the spot for her to visit to-day; she wanted her flowers' congratulation, the welcome of her larkspur, the shy wishes of her lady's-slipper. For wishes are just as precious in heaven as they are on earth, and a good deal more potent. Perhaps her children would welcome her, too, on this day that had always been the day of days to them. With a sweet rush of gladness, the Lady entered her waiting garden on the wings of the summer breeze.

But what was the matter? Before she crossed the green-shadowed lawn at the foot of the orchard, she knew that something was wrong. Something? A great deal. It was as if, instead of a dear face turned towards her, she had found a back obstinately presented. Her garden was not watching for her with its larkspur and peonies. Even in heaven, one feels disappointments; they are part of the nature of things to a soul that eternally hopes and desires. One feels perplexity, too; the Lady could not understand what had happened. She had left larkspur and peonies in full bloom, with many buds waiting to open; she had fully expected a wonderful welcome of color and fragrance to-day. In the keenness of her new powers, she was prepared for the best birthday celebration she had ever had. But where were the flowers? Gone. Only the green, hard little

buds left—no hope from them for many days to come; only the bare spaces where single blossoms had stood in their rarity. Had there been a tempest whose warning had not reached her in her far pursuit of unimaginable new occupations and ecstasies? No; the long grass in the orchard was not ruffled, the trees had lost none of their leaves. Had there been robbery? The Lady glanced at the old white house, and, lo! it was empty again—not closed, but unoccupied.

Intuitions come more swiftly to spirits when free from their bodies than when clogged by sensation; and the Lady had always been one to leap to sure conclusions. She knew in a minute, now, what had happened. Her sorrowing, loving children had picked every flower in her precious garden and had carried them all away to lay them on her grave. All of them? Even the lady's-slipper? The poor Lady sped to the shady corner, and there, sure enough —— ! But she could not endure it; she sat down and wept.

It was a forlorn birthday celebration. Deserted by her children and flowers, bereft, disappointed, there was nothing for it but that she should turn her attention to that distant spot of earth which was being made the centre of the day's commemoration. She did not want to go there at all—the very thought was distasteful to her—but wistful loneliness drew her.

Alas! she bent over her grave, dismayed at the sight of her flowers laid low in the grass—as low and faint and frail as she in that dim hour of her death which she vaguely remembered. The roses had lost their petals, the peonies were limp and crumpled, the foxgloves were scattered; across the head of the grave, in front of the shining new stone, lay the two pink lady's-slippers, shrunken and bruised.

"My flowers! my flowers!"

It is not a scene on which one can bear to linger. While it endured, not even the raptures of heaven availed to lighten the burden of baffled love and grievous disappointment.

There is not really much to be said in excuse for that dear Lady's children; nor, indeed, in excuse for the whole cloud of mortal blindness. The ages have done their best to open our eyes. A Holiest Person came long ago expressly to teach us the lesson which gardens and seasons have illustrated, sages and our own hearts have repeated constantly ever since. Death has nothing to do with graves, anniversaries are no affair of the spirit. Life renews itself at every turn, and feeds on living memories and eternal expectations. But we seem to have made up our minds that we will not understand.

## VIII

## THE CHURCH AND THE MOUNTAIN

THERE is no doubt about it that mysticism is the only philosophy.

Of course all the others are true too, and there are probably none too many of them to preserve the balance of the many-sided world. If one wholly commits himself to a statement like that above, one finds himself confronted with the challenge: "So you believe that the business of life is to escape from the illusion of individuality and to merge your troublesome runaway soul as quickly as possible in the All-One, the All-Nothing?" But why must philosophy bind itself into a logical system? Why is it not generously content to remain a tendency? Being a thing which devotes itself to the needs of the human spirit, it ought to leave plenty of scope for moods and occasions; so that if I abandon my soul to-day—finding it uncommonly troublesome, perhaps—I shall be perfectly free to reclaim it to-morrow and give it another trial.

I modify my initial statement. All the philosophies are good, but mysticism is the best of them.

Ah, that business of losing the soul—how sorry

one is for those who have never known it! One can seldom predict the experience. It does not come very often at best, and it has a royal way—which becomes it—of choosing its own occasions. Describe it? One cannot. It is as the lapse of the river into the sea, as the merging of spirits on lovers' lips, as the breathless hush when wind folds into wind and the night broods close, as the withdrawal of the morning star into the dawn. Yet it is more than all these things; it is—very God of very God. When it is over, one stands transfixed, intensely serious, yet serenely light-hearted too; exhausted, yet wonderfully refreshed; purged, exalted; and quiet—that is the best gift of the experience, its gift of peace. A very profundity of repose holds the spirit that has submitted to a mystic embrace.

Explain it? How can one, if even description has to go halting by synonyms and comparisons? Perhaps the soul is an emanation from God and is gathered wholly back into Him when the rapture falls. Perhaps our boasted individuality is really as much of an illusion as the early, thoroughgoing mystics consistently maintained. Perhaps—but who knows, and what does it matter? The experience itself is the thing; and one who has known that perceives that the function of understanding is not so essential to the life of the spirit as is sometimes supposed.

I have said that one can seldom predict a mystic experience. That is true; the high summons may come anywhere, at any time. But there are certain places that are more liable than others to divine visitations; and the wise mystic searches these out and zealously frequents them. Every one for himself in this matter. Although mysticism is anything but an individualistic faith, its manifestations are purely particular; and its children have to study their own peculiar environments to learn where, for them, Jacob's ladder rests.

In my experience, there are two places—widely sundered and utterly diverse—which can above others be trusted to catch and detain the skirts of Divinity.

One is a mountain. It is not so very much of a mountain—not so very high, I mean—and, viewed with strictly impartial eyes (if any one in the world is so unlucky as to have optics like that) it is certainly no more beautiful than a hundred other hills. Its prosaic name is Green Peak. I like it immensely for that. The designation is so unassuming and genuine; so fine, too, and clever, masking high heaven in the guise of the commonplace. As if a seraph should rest content to bear the name John Jones. It is just a hill like all other hills;—but, ah! it has ways with it.

Sometimes it wakes me in the early dawn.

That is inconvenient, for I hate to get up. But I have to do it, thrusting my feet into my slippers, wrapping a long cloak about me, stealing down through the silent house, mysterious, shadowy, unreal, not my familiar home at all, but an enchanted dwelling. The pictures and tables make significant signs as I pass; I catch them from the tail of my eye. Slowly, softly, I open the door and step out into the glimmering dawn; the cool air breathes in my face, and the silence——! Why is it that even the quietest house is full of obscure disturbance compared with the wide peace of the outdoors? I sit down on the door-step, and look across the valley at Green Peak. It stands very dark and high, outlined against the faint glory which is just beginning to quicken in the sky behind it, with one great white star above its head and a white band of mist folded across its breast. Other mists out of the valley are creeping softly about its feet and climbing its dark sides. It is a shepherd—no, a priest. But are they not the same thing? It is sublimely august and gentle, presiding over the dawn.

I gaze at it and I cannot breathe softly enough in my adoration. The meadows worship with me; they are mute, all gray and silver with dusk and the dew. The tall trees worship; no murmur runs through their hushed branches. The very grass prostrates itself still lower in its dear humil-

ity, and waits; we all wait—for what? There comes an instant when, thought and sense suspended (or else exerted—I really do not know which) to the uttermost, self-consciousness entirely eclipsed, the trees and the grass and the meadows and I are caught up together with the white mists to the dark breast of the mountain, and there are held close in an embrace which fuses our separate beings and makes us one even with the morning star. After this, I go soberly back to bed; and when the quarry whistle wakes me again at seven o'clock in the usual manner and I sit up and remember, I seem to have had an experience beyond the world, in the ideal realm which the objects of sense only symbolize.

So much for the morning. Green Peak's midday mood is for the most part a practical one. The sensible mountain understands that the work of the world must be done, and that its children must be left undistracted to do it. Therefore, it stands out quite clearly, with cloud-shadows racing over it, with breezes saluting it, with a blue sky irradiating it. There is as little of mystery about it as may be. Nevertheless, it sometimes torments me, will not entirely let me alone; and I often have to shut myself quite away from it if I expect to concentrate my mind on anything else. At almost any hour of the day it has lurking suggestions of magic in its lines and hollows.

Then when evening comes ——! If I had to choose its superlative moment of revelation, I should hesitate between the dawn and a certain sunset that occurs two or three times in a season. The conditions of the latter are known to me now, and I can watch for it; though of course I am quite as likely to be disappointed as gratified in my expectation. For mere conditions do not secure revelation. As a matter of fact, the thing seems to mean most when it comes as a surprise, when I have quite forgotten about it, have failed to recognize the possibilities of the sky, and am merely roaming about the garden, thinking that here is a dull day over—better luck to-morrow. For, in accordance with one of the most beautiful laws of the world, it is always a dull day that works the spell. From morning to night a gray heaven of cloud, brooding above the tops of the mountains, not very low, but close, unrelenting. No wind, as a rule—a silent day, heavy and forlorn. Such a day is depressing; one aches with the burden of nameless troubles. Then, just when it seems to be over, when the sun has withdrawn his unseen presence behind the western hill and there is no longer any hope of a glimpse of his genial countenance, then the miracle happens. A touch, a warning,—I know that the hills send forth a summons when they feel the glory coming, for I have often been called from

the supper table, from the depths of the barn or the library, by a sudden, unreasoned necessity to go and look at Green Peak. And there—oh, wonderful! how shall one paint such a transfiguration? The clouds have parted somewhere in the north, below the line of the hills, and the light of the sunken sun streams back in a long, level finger across the breast and summit of the whole eastern range. The feet of these mountains stand plunged in shadow—the gray night has met the gray day there—but their crests soar into a sudden glory which dazzles and confounds the sight; one cannot believe it. Radiant, shining, glowing, intense, they lift up their heads, like flaming archangels, against the gray sky, and the King of Glory comes in.

There is simply no sort of comment to make on a sight like that.

Green Peak is very noble in storms. It wears the clouds grandly, and lets them wreathe and stream about it as they will, shutting it away altogether, or giving dark glimpses of its crest to watchful valley eyes. It is terribly austere thus at times; but that is all right—priests have to be austere now and then.

One evening I came home across the meadows, late, in the final hush of a storm that had spent itself at sunset time. It was quite late, there was very little light left, and it was all embodied

in a white mist which filled the whole valley. A veritable sea of mist; I swam in it, I could not see or breathe or feel anything else. There were no mountains, there was no sky, there was hardly a path under my feet. One's very thoughts become muffled in a mist like that. I was plodding along, blindly, stupidly, not enjoying myself very much (this kind of mystery is too oppressive), when a faint stir, the merest soft breathing of air, made me look up, and there above me loomed the crest of my mountain, gigantic. Only the crest; its sides were still lost in utter vagueness and nothingness. I forgot that it had any sides, and its crest astonished me as something unfamiliar, a new peak in Darien. Yet it was Green Peak, beyond any doubt. Out of its fathomless realm of white cloud, it leaned over me and sternly admonished me—how it impended, how it imposed! I stood perfectly still, and again the releasing touch came upon me, and in that white oblivion Green Peak and I were once more made one with each other and with the universe.

Green Peak's twin sister in magic is not a mountain, or any shape of the open country. It is a church in a city, many miles away. A very beautiful church; yet here again one has to know it to love it. It occupies a commanding position, in a triangle, at the junction of several streets.

But it holds this position so modestly, with such an unassuming grace, that one does not realize what a power it wields until it is too late. Too late to escape, I mean, of course—if one happens to want to escape. For myself, I think that the rogue has bewitched me, the rascal has given me medicines to make me love it.

I do not "belong" to it in the least; it does not represent my native denomination. But I went in there one day in some stress of spirit, and all was over with me. I have forgotten now what was the matter; I only know that I was tired and vexed, and that the church presented itself, and that I went in. I crossed the street with a dash in front of a trolley car; I mounted the steps with a little run; I opened the outer door with a brisk pull, entered the vestibule, paused, hesitated, looked up to see who had spoken to me, opened the inner door slowly, and went in and stood still.

There was nobody there. It was late afternoon, and parts of the church were already in soft shadow. On either side of the nave the columns soared into obscurity, and far down behind the rood screen the chancel lay dim with dusk. But the low sun had found a last way for itself through a corner of one of the windows and was stealing along the opposite wall, touching here a column and there an arch, resting upon

the carved pulpit and bringing a saint or an angel into a sudden brief prominence. Just like the late sunlight on Green Peak. Precisely. The analogy struck me, and I sat down in one of the chairs with a sense of home-coming.

It was very still. The vastness of this interior removed it from the ordinary class of "indoors," and allowed it a range of silence which houses do not know. But it was articulate nevertheless, instinct with a thrilling communication which the spirit understood. Those who had built it had loved their work. That was apparent not only in the compelling impression of the whole, but also in the fine perfection of the details—in the grace of the carving, in the dignity of the statues. There was everywhere the touch of a thoughtful, discriminating devotion, working to produce one effect through a multitude of means. Love to love always. As those who had built had wrought with their hearts in their fingers, so those who inhabited were moved with tenderness and awe. I was sure of this as I sat there alone. In the empty chairs and in the shadowy, vacant aisles, I felt the presence of an adoring host of other worshippers. Their unseen occupation was strangely moving to me.

It was all strange. It is hard to explain what the church did to me that afternoon to make me its slave. It appeared to do nothing at all. There



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was even a certain aloofness about it, as if it were wholly absorbed in a transcendent mood of contemplation. Yet there was an awareness too, an attention which took note of every sigh, every glance, every hesitating thought. A curious, contradictory mixture of response and ignoring, of utter remoteness and intimate presence. The church let me completely alone; yet I had never been so enveloped, so permeated.

The spirit of places and buildings is one of the most mysterious forces we have to reckon with. How can it happen that an inanimate edifice, a mere construction of timber and stone, achieves a distinct personality, even a soul of its own? Matter in its crudest form is here—undeniable, heavy, opaque—yet it strikes out a result of pure spirit, intangible and thrilling.

There was no doubt about this church's soul. Soul is an attribute that one knows when one sees it. A lofty soul, invested with grandeur (like Green Peak in that respect), but so gracious as to be almost humble in its response to the faintest tug of a human need. It listened through all its rapt spaces that day to the beating of one heart. A wise soul, moreover. The ages behind the prayers and the litanies which were said in the place every day lent it a weight of intelligence which was very comforting. One felt sure that it would understand every peculiar crisis. Yet not

too tolerantly ; underneath its beauty there was a certain austerity, an inflexible purpose which forbade many things. It was probably capable of coldness and severity. A serene soul—oh, profoundly untroubled! That was its most significant trait. For if all the sins and the sorrows of life had been poured out in it, if it knew the very worst of mankind, and could still maintain its high peace, then human affairs could not after all be in such a desperate strait. A scourged criminal might go out from that presence, bleeding, but with a shining face.

Do we often enough stop to think what a beautiful thing our religion is? We are so used to it; or, alas! so unfamiliar with it. For of course, as a mournful matter of fact, our present civilization reflects it hardly at all. But we profess it, and it stands patiently waiting for us to see our way clear to live up to it. Meantime, if we consider it fairly, we find it a most exquisite product, a work of the trinity of God and Man and Brother Time. There is probably no offense in saying that man has improved and developed it much. That is the way of things in the world. A divine seed, a human garden; a divine idea, a human poem or symphony. Humanity is not simple enough, is not consistent, is too diverse, to follow the Christ idea nakedly. It has other needs in its manifold nature: sensuous, passionate long-

ings which crave for adornment and ceremony, pomp and symbolism; docile and timid necessities which must have the safeguard of law and order. It had to take the teachings of Jesus and fashion them into a system. The reed with its one high note of unworldliness has become the organ with many stops and many cadences. Nor has it lost the unworldliness thus. The theme remains the same through all developments.

I thought of these things during the first part of my twilight sojourn in the silent church. But by and by I stopped thinking. The reluctant sunlight withdrew, the shadows deepened and settled, even the silence grew more profound. I sank on my knees. I waited. My soul lay, an offering, on the white altar, hidden in the dusk. When it was accepted, my life escaped, and I was folded into the church as completely as one of its shadows.

This was already an experience beyond the scope of Green Peak. It had no more divinity in it, perhaps (Green Peak is divine enough); but it had humanity, and Green Peak is rather "careless of mankind." Having humanity, it had all the rich complexity of emotion which pertains to the intricate working of human affairs; and it moved me, if more disturbingly, yet more profoundly, than the lonely hill. I went out into the evening city, hushed and exalted; nor did I hear the

church say behind me as I closed the door, "Yet show I unto you a more excellent way."

The next morning the enamored sunlight and I returned in good time; and there was the humanity too, hurrying to embody the spirit which it had left to fill the church so potently in its absence. Humanity? I should say so! It came flocking along the many streets which converged so significantly at this point, trooped in through the doors, paused, subsided, and took its way soberly up the aisles. It was a humanity versed in genuflexion beyond a Puritan understanding; but what did that matter? The church reassured me, or rather compelled me, with its imperious gentleness; and I reëntered my nook of the evening before and knelt down with my kind. I supposed that they were still my kind in spite of their superior proficiency in gesture.

Verily, they were, and I was theirs, and we were all one another's. We could not help it in the tide of the mighty service which presently rolled through the church, sweeping us all together in one burst of praise and prayer. Marvellous service! It was as the voice of the church itself, waking at last from its contemplation and turning to tell us what it had learned. There was the ring of eternity in it. But there was also the pulse of time and the human accent which marked it the voice of the people as well

as of the church. There could hardly have been a heart there that did not find its special need expressed in some prayer first or last; and that is saying a good deal, for an assembly of several hundred modern hearts presents—or conceals—a lavish variety of complex necessities. Yet the prayers gave no effect of separation, of passing from point to point. They all took their flight from a common ground to a common heaven. Such a service is perhaps the best example there is in the world of the place of the many in the one, of the life of the one as made up of the many and yet as greater than the sum of them. What is It, by the way, that makes everything that is worth while greater than the sum of all its parts?

The church's morning mood was triumphant. The stained glass windows glowed in the sun, the arches rose clear of mystery, and even the altar offered its white beauty generously to the reverent gaze of the throng. The organ pealed and the choir exulted; silence was put to flight. The place was no less compelling thus than it had been the evening before. Rather, I found it more compelling, for there was now so much more of me to be compelled: there was the woman across the aisle, the little boy in the next row but one, the young girl in front of him. It is curious how the spirit runs out and identifies itself with certain people in a congregation or

audience, claiming them in their unconsciousness, sharing with them a secret congratulation which they never suspect. The experience is a happy one. But it is nothing compared to what happened to that whole churchful of people when, at the most solemn point in the service, they all knelt together and suddenly—not a barrier of any kind remained, not a sundering distinction in the whole throng; but every life flowed into the other, and all flowed into the One Life and were hushed in an ineffable peace.

This was the "better way," this was the crest of mystic experience. For it is more to have been several hundred people than to have been a mountain or even a morning star.

What does it all mean anyway—this spell of the church and the mountain? Nothing new, surely. The spirit world has always been knocking at our doors, pleading, commanding, now and then thrusting its glories upon us in a desperate sally which ought to make an end of resistance. What is the matter, then? Are we perverse, that we so seldom and so fleetingly embrace the morning star? Do we not even yet understand the meaning of life that we so rarely love one another? Or are we really helpless, bound in chains which we cannot break, unable to live the life of the spirit save in little snatches?

The snatches are something, at any rate; in fact they are everything. They indicate native talent and ultimate achievement. That which we have known we can know again, and again and again; and perhaps by and by permanently. Meantime, the church and the mountain stand fast and hold the keys for us. We can hardly revere them too much, wait upon them too patiently, expect too much of them.

Every man his own mountain and church. But when he has found them, let him cling to them.

## IX

## SPRINGS OF LIFE

MULTITUDINOUS as are the human lives which flow upon the earth, the hills of the Lord are infinite, and each little existence finds its source in a secret, peculiar spring. Much of the trouble, the strain and restlessness on every hand, comes from a failure to keep a path open back to this spring.

The neglect is easy enough, and happens for the most part in very virtuous ways. Such a one is working hard for his fellows; how can he possibly drop his tasks and run away by himself? Such another is much more admiringly intent on his neighbor's stream than on his own. For, as we all travel down the widening world valley, we encounter many hundreds of streams, and some of them are quite obviously deeper and finer than others. Would it not be more modest in us, as well as more prudent and sensible, when the need for primal refreshment comes, to follow the biggest streams back to their springs rather than to go ever tracing and retracing our own familiar windings?

But, as a matter of fact, there are no paths for us to other men's springs; the Wisdom which has created us has seen to that interdiction. We may

drink of the rivers of all the world, and thank God for the privilege; but only of one spring, our own.

It is interesting to try to guess, from the eyes of the various people one meets, which of them have kept the path open, which have neglected it, which, alas! have lost it utterly. The telltale expressions range all the way from a clear shining of peace and humor to a haunting, tragic restlessness or, worse, a lethargy. There are not many natures who seem to follow the path every day. Yet there are some such people. I once stood beside a woman whose notable kindness of heart brought her friends daily to lean upon her, a woman whose whole life seemed to be given over to others, and heard her instantly refuse a sufficiently simple office of philanthropy.

"Why would you not do it?" I ventured to ask when the baffled advocate had departed.

My friend regarded me with her clear eyes, hesitated, then smiled and answered:

"Well, yes, I will tell you. I have found that I cannot do work like that; it cuts me off from my springs."

Of doing and doing there is no end, of planning and hoping and striving; but of simple being there is not enough always to keep the mill-wheels in motion and bear the ships to the sea.

In a world of diversity so surprising and so un-

failingly excellent as this motley globe ("motley's the only wear"), it happens of course that the springs of life lie in all sorts of nooks and corners, strange and inexplicable enough to those who do not own them. What is this brother doing, perversely setting his feet towards the flinty rock, and that comrade towards the desert? Springs do not rise there; they rise in the forest, green and cool and fragrant. Ah, but the truth of the matter is that springs rise everywhere. There are springs in the heart of the city and in the sandy plain. It is only essential that every man understand his own thirst.

To the perfectly honest and simple-hearted such understanding is easy. They drink and remain unperplexed. But the timid and doubtful sometimes refuse through humility to claim their own, and so the world loses them. Yes, it is even so bad as that: the world, which has need of them, loses them and suffers accordingly. It is sad enough that they should lose themselves; but that the world and their fellow men should lose them is downright sin on their part. What sort of inhabitants and workers does the world demand, human lives of what quality? Faint and trickling, muddy and dull? Away with them! No; give her joyous lives, springing each day from the primal source, welling direct from the infinite, touched by the angel of peace.

# The Edge of the Woods

We all have an inherent conviction that joy was meant for the children of men—joy and peace, here and now. Eternity will be no more begun when we are dead than it is at this moment; why do we insist on postponing our eternal advantages? The way to our joy and our peace is more simple than any trouble of which we complain, and lies close at hand: Only to be true to ourselves, to hark us back to our springs of life, and then to go bravely down through the world, doing our work well. The primal secret is our own, but we interpret it to the world in daily parable.

## X

## THE JOYOUS COMPANY OF THE POSSESSED

I WOULD not go so far as to say that the Possessed are the only happy people in the world; for happiness, thank God, is a broad and varied term. But I think that, beyond any doubt, they are the happiest people.

Such concentric mortals I have in mind (though they are often called eccentric) as have the power of devoting themselves, soul and body, to one great end, who take the fruit of life in both hands and squeeze it into one cup. An artist, absorbed in his work, chasing hard after the vision; a philanthropist, on fire to serve; a Nansen, a Savonarola.

Not everybody agrees with me in this theory. The wife of one of the very members of the Joyous Company said me nay on the subject a short time ago. An artist's wife. She and I had been cautiously glancing in through the open door of the studio; not for anything would either of us have made a sound.

"That," I said, as we turned away from the stimulating glimpse of keen, swift eyes and set

forehead and mouth, " that seems to me the happiest kind of person in the world."

"Well," the wife began doubtfully; then she paused and shook her head.

Of course I knew perfectly what she meant. Her definition of happiness called for serenity, satisfaction, repose; and such conditions do not accord with the artistic stress and exhaustion. But personally I am willing to allow strife, fever, disappointment, even failure, as elements of the live state which I call happiness.

To be keenly awake and about one's business—that is the great thing; to care mightily. To arise each day to the call of a purpose bigger than oneself, outside oneself, claiming one's uttermost effort. To fall into line, no matter how humbly, with the march of the great world's beauty and strength on the road to Righteousness.

The poetry (and by that I mean the essential significance) of foreign missions lies in this fact of possession. It is inspiring that one should care so much about his Master and the great Idea which the Master represents that he simply has to tell all the world about it. Charity merely *begins* at home. A great Idea demands the whole world; and there is about genuine enthusiasm a certain divine impatience that cannot wait for slow processes. The disciple has only one earthly life, and it is all too fleeting. There-

fore, if he is going to do anything in the cause of that which he holds dear, he must be about it. He would fain do everything. He would climb a mountain and cry to the world, "Listen, people! This truth I know. It is for us all." Oh! doubtless, the people go their ways, for the most part unresponsive enough; and that is heart-breaking. But the disciple has done his best, and nothing can rob him of the glow which comes from the exultant unity of conviction, purpose, and love. Man of Sorrows, was not the Master Himself the happiest person on earth?

Perhaps it may seem that I lay too much stress on the happiness of life. I reason as if each individual should first consider his own well-being. As a matter of fact, if each separate life found a full, self-evolved development, the world would be saved and the Kingdom come. For no development can be achieved without service rendered and taken; service is our natural aliment. But, supposing the initial question to be, "How can I most helpfully use my life?" surely the answer is prompt, "By pouring yourself out in that which you love, by giving your happy, whole-hearted, triumphant best to the world." That which you love best must be your best. Love is always best.

Yes, and perhaps joy is best too. Much has been written concerning the wisdom and strength

which come from the right working of sorrow, concerning the excellent patience of pain, the valor of difficulty. It is all very true. The particular function of earth seems to be discipline. But joy harks back behind the earth, and cries forward, forward, worlds ahead. It is our most ancient heritage, our birthright, our desire. The soul that loses it for a time is restless, indefatigable, until it finds it again. All our pain and sorrow must be worked over, fashioned back into joy; or, rather, not back, but out into new joy, better than the old. We cannot let ourselves fall short of final happiness.

In singling out the Possessed for special consideration, I imply that they are a class, that the world is not all given over. The reason for that is hard to find. There are surely interests enough about us everywhere. Perhaps some of us are not simple enough, not passive enough to begin with. We do not lay our hearts open to the universe and say, "Now blow on me. 'Make me thy lyre even as the forest is.'" A certain naïveté is needed to make each life fulfill itself. We ask too many questions: why, and why, and why? Why not? There are probably fifty positive reasons for every negative one.

The truly Possessed do not stop for reasons. It is reason enough that they must; and they do. The Earth—good mother!—must find comfort in

them, her children who can take care of themselves, who know what they want and take it. Their most headlong recklessness is better than the recurrent whining of others: "What shall I do next?" And they are so amusing, so endlessly funny, this debonair brotherhood! Refreshing peals of laughter follow along the paths they tread, making the old world sweeter and wiser. We sane, sad people could never dispense with them.

Ah, pause not, excellent fellowship, marching so sternly, careering so gaily through life's little length! Perhaps we could do without your works; we cannot decide about that for a century or so. It is certainly true that only by you are the best things done; so, if anything lasts, it will be yours. Meantime, we cannot at all do without the good cheer of your presence. You make us sure that life is good. We start up, stand and listen. The breath of the universe blows on us too; the great song rolls and echoes. We lean, we wait; the contagion is strong. What if we should all yield and become Possessed? What would happen then?

## XI

## ON A BENCH IN THE PARK

"WHAT'S the matter?" she asked at length, moving impulsively and almost involuntarily a little nearer to him.

She had been watching him for some time—ever since he had taken his seat at the other end of her bench; but he had not appeared to know that she was there. He had come along absently in the spring sunshine, and had dropped into his present position with the casual, accidental air of a dislodged pebble falling into place. When she spoke to him, he looked up slowly and enveloped her in a vague regard which she waited patiently to focus with her concrete presence. At last he saw her, and then she smiled and waited again while he fully made up his mind what it was that he saw.

What she saw meantime was a tall, spare man of about forty-five. He was dressed rather carelessly, as if he had not thought very much about his clothes when he was putting them on, and he wore an informal old felt hat pulled down over his eyes. But he was a gentleman; with all her impulsiveness, she would hardly have ventured to speak to him if she had not been sure of that.

The cut of his features was thoughtful and fine, expressing a curious mixture of whimsicalness and melancholy; his hair was turning gray over the temples, and his shoulders stooped a little. Just at present the melancholy of his face swamped the humor entirely, so that it was a wonder she had guessed at the latter trait. But when he had quite completed his courteous scrutiny of her, he smiled and justified her penetration. He took his turn at moving inward along the bench.

"I've just finished my novel," he answered.

"I thought so." She nodded and sighed, leaning back once more against the bench. "I've just finished my picture."

She was a little younger than he; but her hair also was turning gray, and, though her shoulders did not stoop, they were very thin underneath her flannel blouse. She was pretty, however. Her face had a bright, resolute look, and her eyes were shining above the depth of lurking melancholy which she seemed to share with her chance companion as a common birthright. She was a lady too; in his turn, he might not otherwise have cared to return her greeting.

She was silent a moment. Then she laughed—such a funny little chuckle of mirth, founded on a basis of dejection, that his humor struggled to respond from beneath his ascendent gloom. But he could not manage it quite yet; he was not

ready for raillery. Seeing this, she fell grave again, and sympathy softened her voice.

"I guess you haven't just finished it. Not this morning—nor yesterday afternoon."

"No, day before yesterday."

"Oh, that's bad!" She shook her head as intelligently as she had nodded it before. "I finished my picture this morning, and so I'm not very far down yet. I haven't really begun either to hate it or miss it."

"Hate it?"

He lifted his eyebrows slightly. But there was no contention in his tone, only inquiry.

"Perhaps you don't do that. Some people don't. I do always. It's a matter of bitter resentment with me that I should have been so laid hold of, possessed, by a thing which amounts to no more in the end than one of my pictures. This morning I adored my last picture; I tolerate it now—with misgivings; to-morrow I shall hate it."

He was thoroughly aroused by this time, and he turned sideways on the bench and studied his companion with smiling eyes.

"You will miss it, however?" he ventured.

"Oh!" She was half scornfully disappointed. "Don't ask me stupid questions."

"How long have you had your novel on hand?"

Since, somewhat abashed, he kept silence, she resumed the conversation and gave it a new turn.

"A year and a half."

He sighed as he answered; but he was relieved at her restored friendliness, and his tone acknowledged it.

"Nothing else?"

"No; it has been my one occupation."

"Not even some magazine papers or stories?"

"Not a single one."

"Well, you are worse off than I am then; and I'm sorry for you. I've been only eight months at work on my picture, and it has not been my exclusive concern. I have given my major attention to it, and have always allowed it to take first place; but still there were days when it wouldn't obey me, and then I sketched out a few new pictures which I can turn to now. Either"—she smiled at him brightly—"I am wiser than you, or I am not such a good worker."

"There's a great difference in our trades," he commented after a moment's reflection. "I think I never knew a painter who didn't have several pictures on hand at once in all sorts of stages of incompletion; whereas a writer is usually found devoting himself entirely to one book at a time. The advantage is only one of many which you hold over us."

Again she smiled.

"Do you do that too? What inconsistent creatures we are! We would neither of us dream of exchanging; yet you have confessed to an envy of me, and I am fully convinced that your craft is easier than mine. How simple and satisfying to give one's entire attention to pouring oneself into a single cup! It must have been a great year and a half which you are paying for now."

He looked at her whimsically. The cloud of his melancholy was breaking fast, and the light of his humor was shining through in fuller and fuller gleams.

"You talk like a summer tourist," he said. "There are lots of them up in the valley where I have my summer home, and they come and stare at me. 'Oh, Mr. Scribbler, what a fortunate person you are! To live in this lovely place and have nothing to do but write all day!'"

He was going to say more; he had, in fact, taken a new breath and let a portion of it out in a burst—"Nothing to do!"—but she interrupted him.

"That is not kind in you. You know that I never implied or supposed for a moment that the pouring process was a smooth one. But it's what you live for, after all; and so it is your chief good."

"Oh! I don't know." He leaned forward,

with his elbows on his knees, and took his tired head between his hands. "Sometimes I think there isn't anything good about it. It's such blamed hard work, and it's so uncertain! Even when you are doing it, you don't know exactly what it is you are doing, still less whether it's good or not; and when you have finished it, it is never what you thought it was going to be. Hard work? Good Lord! I have sometimes been tempted to take those enthusiastic tourists into my study and show them the scrap-basket full of papers which I have discarded in the attempt to write one paragraph."

"Of course!" Her voice soothed and rallied him. "I scraped out and repainted one corner of this last canvas of mine just fifteen times."

He looked up, met her eyes, and laughed as she had tried to make him laugh in the beginning. She joined him happily.

"Why do we do it?" He leaned his arm confidingly on the back of the seat, and looked at her attentive profile with bantering eyes. "Have you any theory as to what in creation makes us?"

She shook her head.

"I've long since given up having theories."

"We needn't," he went on ponderingly. "Nobody asks us to. On the contrary, at the outset, our friends and editors and critics show a touch-

ing unanimity in inviting us to refrain. Unless we are absolute fools, we know that we are committing ourselves to difficulty and suspense and struggle, to disappointment and failure, to doubt, to all sorts of evils to which we are, by a nice irony, peculiarly sensitive. Yet off we go!"

In her turn, she pondered a moment.

"When young writers come to you now for advice, do you warn them away and counsel them to go into business?"

"No, I don't." He admitted the force of the question by the frank change in his tone as he answered it. "I almost always say, 'Go ahead—and the gods be with you!'"

She made no comment, but she looked at him and smiled with one of her satisfied little nods.

"Another strange thing about that is," he went on thoughtfully, "that I have yet to receive my first word of reproach from any of the people I have encouraged to start on this perilous career. Of course they haven't all of them made good. They haven't all of them persevered; some of them are now prospering mightily as business men. But even the latter look back on what they call their 'fling with literature' (good term, too, only literature did all the flinging) with the unanimous verdict that 'those were good old days.' As for the scribblers who have stuck it out, they are quite touchingly loyal and grateful. One of

them met me the other day, and stopped and shook hands with me, his nice young soul in his brave young eyes. 'I owe you everything,' he said, 'and I shall never forget it.' Owed me everything! What do you think that meant? Some hack work on an encyclopædia, and an occasional story in a second-rate magazine. Of course he wasn't happy about it; it wasn't at all what he had hoped to accomplish. But even in his disappointment, he still owed me everything."

"Good!" Her eyes shone with serene understanding. "A man who feels that way keeps on until the first-class magazines come begging at his door."

"Oh, but meantime!"

He pursed his lips and knit his brow as one who remembers unpleasant things.

"Yes, meantime, I grant you ——" This time it was she who made the sudden concession and came to his point of view. "That meantime is pretty bad. One wonders that anybody has the courage to stick it out."

"Doesn't one—just?"

He wheeled about, prepared to meet her eyes laughingly, but he paused. Her face was sober.

"Did it last so long with you?" he asked gently. His eyes were compassionate.

"Ten or fifteen years," she answered, withdrawing her gaze from an old gray rock and

smiling—tardily. "Success (if it is success now —I'm not sure) came gradually when it came at all, and I don't know how to date it. But it wasn't the length of time that I minded; it was the uncertainty."

"Yes, that's the devil —— Excuse me," he said sympathetically.

"Isn't it?" She not only excused him, but thanked him with her glance. "Even the most assured person can't know absolutely that he's going to succeed; and if he isn't, what a waste of life he is guilty of! On the other hand, if he is, in the end, no amount of labor, patience, delay, should be counted too much. It's a cruel predicament."

"I wrote for five years with no success," he told her, "and then I concluded that I had made as long an experiment as was decent, and I shut my desk and went down-town to see if I could find a business opening. While I was gone, my sister went to my desk in search of a pencil, found my last manuscript, read it, and sent it to a publisher. Its acceptance and the offer of a clerkship in a grocery firm came in the same mail."

"My!" She held her breath girlishly. "That was a narrow escape."

"Indeed it was." He mocked himself by his tone. "You see, in my case, it is my sister to whom 'I owe everything.'"

"Or Fate," she pondered. "I like to believe in

Fate. It's too harrowing to think that some Hawthorne or Brontë may have given up and turned away before the very threshold of 'The Scarlet Letter' or 'Jane Eyre.'"

"Better a thousand failures than that," he assented.

"That would be the worst kind of failure," she corrected him.

"Well, as for failure ——" He meditated. "Do you know the real difference between failure and success?"

"Indeed, I don't." She met him earnestly. "I guess they're pretty well mixed up together. My last picture failed to express what I meant to put into it, yet it hung on the line in the Exhibition."

"Precisely. For my part, the only success I have ever achieved lies in the next novel which I propose to write."

She laughed.

"Your best salvation, then, would seem to lie in getting to work at that novel as fast as you can."

"Too tired." He shook his head.

"Don't want to, either, can't bear the thought," he went on presently. "I wonder if you know that state of mind."

"Yes." She considered. "Yes, I suppose I do; but explain it to me."

"Well, I am reluctant to set my hand to a work which I know is going to rule me for

months and maybe years; I shrink from the strife and exertion, I —— "

"Resent it!" she broke in. "That's what I said in the first place. But my resentment comes afterwards, when the work is over and I see how little it amounts to."

"You never have any misgivings beforehand?"

"No, or I should hardly be able to make a beginning at all. But sometimes in the midst of things, I have doubts, and that is—please say it again."

"Hell," he supplied, with a little variation.

"You're right." He took up the thread at once. "It's that way with me too. The abstract notion of sitting down and handing myself over body and soul to another novel is positively repugnant to me now. But of course I've a fine new scheme in my brain; and some morning I shall get up and drift half unconsciously to my desk and begin my first chapter. I shan't realize exactly what I am doing, and all that I do realize will be clear joy, for beginnings are seventh heavens. Jove! such rapidity, such conviction! The words cover the paper of their own accord, the people leap into life, the story shapes itself, the significance hovers; at last, at last, a real masterpiece is coming into life. I am convinced that no variety of human rapture is to be compared to that of beginning a novel. Then —— "

He broke off and looked at her, and she looked

back at him with a rueful little smile of full understanding. They both laughed, and sighed.

"I wonder what it is that happens," he mused, leaning forward to poke the grass with his stick. "All of a sudden, without any warning! It is as if a merry companion, hand in hand with whom you were climbing a hill, should abruptly sit down and say, 'Now, this is as far as I mean to go on my own feet; you must carry me.' Of course, when she does that, you look her over and find her to be not half so attractive as you had at first thought her; she is heavy, unwieldy, sure to be a grievous burden. But you are loth to abandon the hope which has come to mean much to you; so you tackle her and start off, staggering, up the mountain-side. That's where your trouble begins. She rides you willfully, waywardly, betraying you into snares and pitfalls, turning you out of your path altogether, mocking you, goading you. It is strange that you stick to her; yet, after all, perhaps it is she who does the sticking—you are her slave."

"Yet you don't hate her?" his comrade put in, her eyes bright with sympathetic excitement.

"No, oddly enough, I don't," he replied. "I generally respect her the more, the farther we get along. I've no illusions about her; she is not the airy, transcendent masterpiece I took her to be at first. But she's solid—I've proved that!—and I

have sober hopes of making something of her by and by, or of her making something of me—I'm not sure just which."

"Are your first chapters always your best?"

It was a thoughtful question, groping in uncertainty; but he caught it up as if it had been a challenge, and flung its answer back.

"No, confound it! That's one of the things that madden me most about the whole business. Sometimes I have to throw away all those first chapters which I wrote in such an ecstasy; whereas later chapters, over which I toil despairingly, turn out to be the best in the book."

"Yes." She confirmed him with serious eyes. "Most of my intended triumphs go into the rubbish heap, but my forlorn hopes have several times turned out pretty well."

"How do you account for it?"

"I told you that I had long since given up trying to account for anything."

They sat in silence a few minutes; then—

"The upshot is," he reflected, "that we are both of us perversely engaged in the most unsatisfactory of occupations."

"The upshot is," she serenely denied him, "that we are engaged in the most nearly satisfying of all occupations."

"You really think it's worth while?"

He disarmed her by the simplicity of his tone

and the guilelessness of his glance; so that, instead of scoffing at him, as she seemed at first inclined, she met him on his own ground and answered quietly:

"Yes."

"Why?"

Her eyes widened; this was going too far. But he hastened to forestall the words that he divined as lying just behind her quickened expression.

"I know—that's not good form. I should never put such a question to you if we were talking for the benefit of a circle of listeners at the Authors' Club. But here we are quite off by ourselves, and we don't even know each other's names ——"

He coaxed her, smiling.

"It isn't the matter of form," she answered. "I don't mind forms or lack of forms. But ——"

She hesitated.

"Out with it! You didn't mind calling me stupid a few minutes ago."

"No, but"—her eyes met his with a twinkle—"I like you better now."

"Never mind." He acknowledged the tribute. "Knowing that,—thank you—I shall be the less likely to take offense at anything you may say. Perhaps I do already understand why our trades are good, but I'd like to hear you say it."

She was silent for two or three moments, her expression balancing curiously between humor and simplicity. Then the simplicity won.

"Our work is good," she said slowly, "because it deals with the highest issues of life. It has a limitless sphere, it skirts the edges of infinity, and it has all the room there is to grow in. People come to the end of their material interests, but they can never come to the end of their spiritual concerns. It is therefore a much solider task to minister to spirits than to bodies. Painting and writing call into play our keenest faculties, and they incite us to develop yet keener ones. They link us with God ——"

She broke off, and again the humor stirred in her eyes.

"Haven't I said enough?"

"Well,"—he stood up and took off his hat and held out his hand—"I'm glad I met you."

"So am I." She nodded again, with her funny little air of satisfaction. "You needed me. Good-bye."

As they parted, a lady in a carriage turned quickly to her companion and said:

"Look! See those two people over there, just beyond the big rock? Well, he's Max Benton, the novelist; and she's Lucy Penfield, the landscape painter. They're great celebrities."

## XII

## THE DECLINE OF MELANCHOLY

IT seems to be time that somebody bestirred himself anew on behalf of an ancient cause. To be sure, it is a cause which has been already so well defended, by such a succession of excellent names, that the wonder is that its case has not remained permanently settled. Perhaps the reader may think that it is also a wonder that any modern pen should presume to tamper with a theme upon which Fletcher, Milton and Keats have meditated. But Fletcher, Milton and Keats are dead—worse luck!—and their present successors seem all given over to radiant good cheer.

Now, at its first utterance, that latter statement does not sound very alarming. There is no menace in mirth. Keats's and Fletcher's muses could laugh, and Milton wrote "L'Allegro" as well as "Il Penseroso." Did he, however, *quite* as well? That question gives one pause. At least, it may probably be affirmed that there was never a lover of melancholy who was not also a lover of joy. What says the beautiful ode itself?

> "Ay, in the very temple of Delight
> Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine,
> Though seen of none save him whose strenuous
> tongue

> Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine;
> His soul shall taste the sadness of her might,
> And be among her cloudy trophies hung."

When, therefore, a few years ago, the world began to concern itself seriously with the study and the pursuit of happiness, the pensive observer gave cordial assent to the new enterprise. Go to! there is a time to laugh and a time to dance, and evidently this is it. One would, perhaps, have been better pleased and much more truly convinced, if the pursuit had not been quite so serious. Spontaneity seems an essential element in joy; also unexpectedness and unconsciousness. But this is not an unconscious age. It is given over to know itself, to take itself thoroughly in hand and exploit itself. To every era its own peculiar method of dealing with life. The present method is deliberate intention.

Wandering in the woods one day, we may have heard a sweet bird sing far above our heads. Only once; the lovely strain was not repeated, and the singer flew away among the leaves so swiftly and so silently that we had no glimpse of him. See, now, what a loss was there—irreparable, were it not for the museums. But in the latter, all sweet birds are gathered firmly upon twigs—voiceless, to be sure, but utterly accessible, apparent to us from all sides, neatly labelled

and explained. We have only to walk up to the big glass case, identify our special bird, and, knowing him now for what he is, lay intelligent and robust claim to him. That is the modern method.

To a great many people it seems to be eminently satisfactory, and therefore it should not be called in question—so far as they are concerned. They like to have their bird well in hand and study its markings. Moreover, once having learned its ways, they think they can stalk it securely hereafter and rejoice in it all day long. Peace be with them! May their opera-glasses never disappoint them.

But should they not also wish us peace—us, who are not so carefully minded, who like our birds best on the wing, who even find no fault with the silence that closes the perfect song? They should do so, but they do not always; and it is the growing energy of their desire to convert us all to their way of thinking that alarms us now. The study of happiness is moving out from the museums (which one could visit or ignore, as one's temperament prompted), and is committing itself to a sort of University Extension career which very seriously threatens the cause of melancholy all over the world. Optimist Clubs and Happiness Classes are springing up everywhere, and their pamphlets are reaching even to our

"fountainheads and pathless groves." There is tremendous power in a great popular movement, a wave of feeling which embraces half a population. Are we all going to be coerced into unending good cheer?

Curious, truly, is the turn of thought which, at this late day, has set the world to supposing that happiness is the one thing which it most desires. It ought to know itself better.

Perhaps we have most of us heard of the man who became a member of one of the sects which make for health and serenity. For a while, he was a good member—healthy, even-tempered, smiling; but by and by a vague suspicion of change came over him. He ceased his regular attendance at the meetings; he resumed his headaches, and then his gout; and finally it was borne in upon his brothers in the faith that his defection was serious. One of these brothers called on him to reason with him.

"What is the matter? Can it be that you are falling off from us?"

"Well, I am afraid so."

"Have you any reason to give?"

"Only this—I may as well tell you: I got tired of being so blamed happy all the time."

This little story seems to me to contain a profound significance. Tired? He was bored to death, the excellent, natural man! He had been

used to variety, to interesting ups and downs in life, to invigorating surprises; and here he found himself confined to an endlessly smiling dead-level—smiles and smiles and smiles.

One can see how it all came to pass. At some time in his experience, he had had too many surprises; his road had gone plunging up and down in a manner that tried him greatly. Human nature is prone to think that its present circumstances are going to last forever; it seemed to this good man that his only salvation lay in breaking away from the hills of life which were using him so severely. Doubtless, at first, the tranquil meadows of his new faith—with their carefully kept fences and their bridges over all the streams—had satisfied him deeply. He needed rest, and he had found it, and he was very glad. But rest could not please him forever; nay, beyond a certain point, rest grew unrest to him. Therefore it happened at last that he looked back across the fences, back to the beautiful, perilous hills, the threatening hills, the alluring hills, the very naughty, mysterious hills, sure to afflict him now and again with the perversity of their ways, but also sure to delight him beyond any skill of these flat meadows; and, being an honest and resolute man, he leaped the fence with a mighty bound and fled away.

I make not the smallest doubt that he fell into

a torrent the very first thing—so out of practice and so eager he was by this time—and that he emerged, dripping and laughing, to dry himself on a good hard rock in the face of the sun. Was he glad to get back, do you think? *Was* he glad to get back?

Even if the world really did supremely desire happiness, it would still betray a curious lack of knowledge of the rules of the game, if it set out as a body upon deliberate pursuit. Etymology warns it at the start: happiness must happen. A gift of the gods, a favor truly divine, it comes most fully and graciously when we do not look for it, it thrills us with the clearest meaning when it is unexpected.

But perhaps the knell has sounded for that kind of happiness nowadays. We are fast becoming such competent masters of our fate, captains of our soul, etc., that the old gods will presently have to look alive to find any way to bless us at all, any unconsidered corner in which to cast their gracious seed. "Oh, thank you, yes! That is the old-fashioned wild plant, I see," we may be supposed to make our embarrassed acknowledgment. "But I already have several beds sown thick with the cultivated variety. I water it with the hose every night, and pick large bunches for the table every morning." What can the poor gods do with such a capable, provident lot?

Wash their hands of us and depart once for all to their Parnassus? Apollo forfend!

The circulars of the Good-cheer Clubs advise us to study the faces of the people we meet in the streets and see if they look happy. Some of them do, yes—the younger ones. It is refreshing to meet the glance of the bright young eyes and hear the music of the gay young voices. But the older faces are sober enough; and is it not their appeal that, in the long run, we answer most gratefully? Is it not in the graver eyes that our own eyes rest most securely? The faces that rise first to my mind, as I summon up remembrance of beautiful countenances, are not the cheerful ones I have known, but the most thoughtful, even the saddest. There would almost seem to be something wrong about a face that still looked entirely happy after thirty or so. What had its owner been about? Dreaming instead of living? Or, if living, refusing to take the consequences of failure, loss and regret? Nobody could live and not fail sometimes; and nobody could fail and not retain a scar.

It is the welfare of the world that lies at the heart of all the desire of the Good-cheer Clubs, and nobler desire than that there is none. But the first question to be decided is whether happiness and welfare are necessarily synonymous. We have learned a good deal from our old friends, difficulty, strife, and disappointment; had we not

better trust them a little longer yet? Sage old Fletcher may have been half in jest when he declared:

> "There's naught in this life sweet,
> If men were wise to see't,
> But only melancholy —
> O sweetest melancholy!"

But I think he knew what he was saying. Under the spell of sadness, one often sees and learns things that are worth all the revelations of joy.

## XIII

## A PORTRAIT OF THE DEVIL

THE beginning of a sermon presents one of the recurring crises by which life is pleasantly diversified. The listener settles himself and looks up at the pulpit, waiting. Is the command of the text and of the opening sentences to go forth upon his attention and hold it? Or is his fancy to be left free for the next twenty minutes to wander along the congenial and restful paths of personal meditation?

I rather hoped that the latter turn might be given to my mind when, at the close of a full Sunday a little while ago, I sank back in my seat and, along with the rest of the congregation, addressed myself to immobility. I was tired and I was thoughtful (a mental combination favorable to dreams); I was moved by the beauty of the service, too, and in a mood to deposit myself at the foot of the altar and lie there unseen. Nobody would have been the wiser for that act of abandon. But such oblivion was not to be; for, with his very first sentence, the preacher laid hold upon my attention and gripped it—even brought me swinging around in my seat to face him more squarely.

"I suppose,"—thus he serenely began—"I sup-

pose there is no one before me to-night who does not believe in a personal devil."

There is, of course, nothing a congregation—or a congregated unit—can do when a preacher commits it thus to opinions which it does not hold. I could not rise up forthwith and declare, "I do not believe in a personal devil." But perhaps that was just as well. I certainly should be sorry now to have done anything to interfere with the progress of one of the most interesting homiletical experiences I have ever had.

Being uncontradicted—our uniform silence giving consent to his proposition—the preacher went on to unfold his conception of the Satanic personality. I listened, fairly holding my breath in my sudden interest. As I did so, my critical self ran on beside me and commented on the situation in that curious double play of reflection which is common to our inner consciousness. "Why are you so absorbed?" it demanded. "I haven't seen you so intent in a month of Sundays. I'll tell you why. It's because the preacher has got hold of a vivid idea which entirely puts to shame your vague notions about 'good in the wrong place,' 'a man's own lower nature,' 'a mere negation of good.' A personal devil is much more interesting than such abstractions." I was acknowledging the truth of these intimations in a hurried sort of mental aside, when the preacher brought me up

with a round turn, unified my attention, and concentrated it all on one idea.

"If I had a blackboard here," he said, "and asked you, one by one, to draw a picture of the devil, I suppose you would almost all depict him in the medieval fashion, with horns and a tail."

That suggestion won me over completely. I gave my whole consent to the initial assumption of the devil's personality, and spent all the rest of the evening drawing pictures of him.

A picture, rather. There was only one that rose from my deeper consciousness slowly in response to my command on myself to deal with this problem. No horns, no tail, no lurid hue, no crafty glance. No glorious "son of the morning" brightness hurling down a steep abyss to ruin and eclipse. Nothing that I had ever before seen or heard of as a devil design. Where does one's consciousness get these ideas to surprise one withal? I had not even dreamed that I had any convictions from which to draw a picture of the devil.

It represented an angel, tall and still, the saddest angel I had ever seen in my whole imagination. He was standing looking down, when I saw him, with his hands hanging at his sides and his eyes idly observing a swarm of men in a market-place; but it was evident from the slow sweep of his garment that he had been moving among these people on some mournful errand.

There was a mute look about him, patient, obedient, but so full of despair that, in excess of compassion, I made haste to turn my eyes away.

How should one know that this was the devil? Thus I queried at the beginning of my investigations. There was nothing about the figure to indicate anything but angelhood. Perhaps he was only an angel, brooding over the woes of the world. But, no, his expression went further than that; it was too stricken for mere compassion, too full of a hopeless horror. There was only one thing that could give rise to such an expression, and that was the service of evil.

How, then, should one be sure that the dominating figure was angelic in his nature? This question was answered by every line of the beautiful form, by the melancholy candor of the eyes and the stern sweetness of the mouth, by the very horror of evil too. Nobody could look so appealingly unhappy over sin unless he were divine.

What was the picture's ultimate meaning? Where was the key to this unfortunate situation of a divine creature deliberately committed to the cause of evil? I explored the rest of the scene to see if it would enlighten me.

A great swarm of people, restless, uneasy; busy and prospering, evidently, but not very happy about it. They were trafficking in a big market-place, and the group of them just behind the angel was

given over to cheating and stealing, with hard and cruel eyes. Had the angel's passing made them behave thus? Oh, woe! no wonder the poor creature stood smitten with despair. I looked closer, and, sure enough, the hem of the angel's robe was edged with sharp pricks and goads. The path he had taken through the crowd was as marked as the furrow in the wake of a ship; one could trace it by agitation. But, unlike the furrow—although the stress of the turmoil receded and subsided—its end was not the same old ocean as that which lies before the prow of a ship; and just here I gradually discovered in what the peculiar significance of the picture consisted.

The faces in the track of the angel were worth studying. In the first place, they were distinguished from the other faces in the crowd, not only by their unhappiness but by their intelligence. The other faces were bland and vague; these faces *knew*. Knew what? Well, to begin with, craft and greed, the lust of their own advantage, the hope of their neighbor's disaster. I have said that the group just behind the angel was absolutely hateful. But the group behind that wore a different expression—puzzled, arrested, as if its members had come upon a lurking dissatisfaction with their achievements which astonished them very much. It was here that the

conscious unhappiness began; the first group had no misgivings about its enjoyment. The third group had tried to cast off its obscure disappointment and laugh it to scorn; it was busy cheating and stealing again—but with a difference. Its faces were anxious, almost tormented; its gestures betrayed a mad haste to keep going and not stop to think. In some of these eyes there was a wistfulness which promised much. The fourth group was, spiritually speaking, just frankly down in the dust; it was having a desperate time. I think its members were cursing and denying God in the usual inconsistent fashion of the exasperated atheist. Fine, when a man begins to care enough about God to deny Him so frantically! The fifth group—— But there were so many groups in this strange scene, which by and by lost its static character and became more like a vision than a picture, that I shall hardly have space to describe them all. Nor is such minuteness necessary. The process was the important thing for the observer to note. That went on steadily—from perplexity and disgust and rebellion to honest consideration and sober scrutiny.

It was a gradual process; for several spaces the change in the groups was very slight. Then suddenly there came a group that started up, bared its arms, and set itself to fight the angel. That was a thrilling sight; I caught my breath when I

came upon it. The poor angel! That sad, subdued creature to be obliged to fight! But he roused himself manfully to the fray, took a sharp sword (he knew how to use it too), buckled on a great shield, and let the whole group have at him. It was wonderful to see how they worked, and what an effect the conflict had upon them. As I watched, I became aware of a special importance in their proceeding. It was as if some one had touched me and said, "There, this is the kernel of the whole matter. Do you understand?" For, as they contended, the faces of these warring people changed, and took on strength, nobility, and purpose. Even the man who was worsted and fell, pricked by the sword of the angel, gave from the dust a high look which said that he meant to get up again; that, as it was, he found himself better off than he had been before he began to fight. As for the people who conquered, they were more beautiful than the angel himself; they were men at last. When they emerged into the next group, they stood straight and brave as no other group in the picture had stood before. Their intelligent faces were lighted with knowledge; they had learned the meaning of life and they meant to act upon it. The earth's destiny could be trusted to them, since they had tried to mar it and had achieved a futile misery; they were secure in their virtue because they had had

to fight for it. Human holiness had been found too precious a thing to be had for nothing or to be dispensed with.

The last group in the wake of the angel stood side by side with a group which his passing had not yet disturbed. (I did not know that there were any such groups in the world, but perhaps a symbolic picture like this must not be taken too literally.) Both groups were engaged in the same occupation of love and service. But there was a world-wide difference in their methods of performing the amiable office. The group which had never known the angel was gentle and docile and matter-of-fact. Its members loved one another because they did not know how to do anything else. Their ministrations were therefore instinctive, almost unconscious, and were received quite in the spirit in which they were offered. There was nothing very exciting about the devotion of this group. But the other group—what a fire of love burned in the worn faces, what an eloquent longing informed the hands that reached out one to another! There was remorse here as well as tenderness; shame, repentance, atonement. These people knew what it meant to love because they had known what it meant to hate. The angel had taught them nothing less than the whole secret of life.

I describe this picture just as I saw it and for

what it is worth. If it should happen to correspond at all to the inscrutable facts of the case, then God would be seen omnipotent truly, and every page of history would proclaim His wisdom.

But before I left the church, I knelt and prayed, "O God, have mercy upon Thy servant, the devil."

## XIV

## HOOSICK JUNCTION

I AM sure that some readers must know the spot. It connects the Boston and Maine Railroad with the Bennington and Rutland. It consists of a dingy, one-roomed station, a dilapidated saloon, a water tank, and that is all. High and dry in the glare of the sun it lies on the baking cinders, and not one solace does it hold out to the miserable wayfarers who spend grudging hours in it. Always hours. I never knew any one who ever waited less than an hour and a half in Hoosick Junction. I myself have spent three hours there at a stretch; in the course of my life, I suppose I have lived there a month. There is hardly anywhere to be found a better example of bare, practical utilitarianism. You are travelling; that is a business proceeding, to be undertaken in a businesslike manner. You require a room to wait in; good, here it is. You are hungry? Really, that is not the railroad's affair. Bring a lunch, and stuff the box or the paper bag into the stove afterwards. Hoosick Junction holds itself sternly aloof from all the luxuries of life; those go through in trunks, along with your Sunday hat.

There was a time when Christian Science, real-

izing the possibilities of Hoosick Junction, laid hold upon it as a centre of propagation. Beside the stove stood a plain deal table strewn with pamphlets concerning the Faith—testimonials, magazines, sermons. The idea was a good one. I remember that I frequently held out against the documents for an hour and a quarter, and then suddenly gave in and devoured every page. It is my habit now to converse with a certain discriminating tolerance on the subject of Christian Science. Little does any one dream that the husks of my knowledge have been snatched by a starving hand in the deserts of Hoosick Junction.

But Christian Science has long since withdrawn, and Hoosick Junction is God-forsaken (impious, but expressive term!). Three framed time-tables hang on the wall, also a fly-specked "Excursion" announcement, and a dusty clock. For the rest, there is but the row of seats all along the wall, the large, central, presiding stove, and half a dozen human beings, despairing utterly.

Yet it is this dreary tarrying-place which now affords me unfailing refuge from the very *ennui* which itself used always to produce. When I find myself bored in society, when I cannot sleep at night, when my eyes fail me and I must not read, I retreat to Hoosick Junction and all is well with me. Is that not curious? But it is the exquisite triumph and humor of circumstance

in this mutable world that one never can tell from one day to another what curse is suddenly going to turn on one and bestow a blessing.

I had no anticipations of pleasure as, a few months ago, I found myself once more caught in the net and being dragged Hoosick Junctionward. By dint of changing my winter residence, I had managed to avoid the place for a year or two; but no long remission of destiny could be vouchsafed me. I stepped out of the train, dispirited, hot, and exceeding dusty. The tunnel was no long way behind me, that other horror to which Hoosac, changing its spelling guilefully, has given its ill-omened name. Half a dozen people descended with me; we looked at one another askance. Our trunks were hurled out at us from the door of the baggage car, the engine rang an impatient bell, the train drew off and left us. Left us! No words can fitly convey the degree of that desolating desertion on the part of humanity. There were we, stranded, beyond the pale, ostracized to a No Man's Land, utterly forlorn.

It is said that misery loves company. But certainly we in Hoosick Junction kept our distance well. With a certain defiant resignation to the needs of mortality, we retreated, each to a remote section of the wooden bench, and opened our boxes of lunch. We were oddly shamefaced

about this proceeding, strangely secretive and savage—like wild beasts going off to their lairs. One would think that to eat was a final disgrace. Then, all the crumbs being brushed away and our self-respect reëstablished, we glanced at the clock with a pathetic hope. A quarter past twelve, and our train was due at one-forty! Ah, then despair overwhelmed us quite. We collapsed on our uncomfortable benches, and the life went out of our faces, leaving us all dull masks.

I had a book in my bag; I never travel without a book. But Hoosick Junction has something about it inimical to all moods. If I start on my journey rejoicing in the Oxford Book of English Verse, by the time I reach Hoosick Junction I can tolerate nothing but Sherlock Holmes. Accordingly, on this particular day, I cast my companion volume from me, rose, shook myself, and left the station, intent upon a walk. There was nowhere to walk except along the track, but that did very well. No fear at least of a train's arrival;—if there only had been! I tested my old-time dexterity by walking along the rails for a while; then I climbed the bank and picked strawberries; then I sat down under the shade of a tree and fell to surveying the country. It was not a bad little spot of earth, if one only looked at it honestly, freeing one's mind from the prejudice which distorted the trees and fields. After

all, they were real trees and fields, green and fair, clothed upon with the graciousness peculiar to their class. In the near distance were low rolling hills, and close at hand was a river, a wide and golden-brown, chattering stream, calling to mind the happy lines,—

> "And shallow rivers to whose falls
> Melodious birds sing madrigals."

What a pity, I thought to myself, that such a bit of earth's beauty should be condemned to eternal perversion in the cause of dreariness!

Then, suddenly, full-grown and strong, in the Minerva-like manner of all ideas, one of the most exciting projects I have ever harbored came into my mind; and I gave myself up to its contemplation with such effect that I nearly missed my train.

I had lately been longing to be of use, real, definite, tangible use to my kind. Here was my chance. I would make my home at Hoosick Junction, and would open a lunch and reading room for the solace of the stranded souls cast up here every day. Not any lunch counter in the station (perish the fly-specked thought of the thing!), but even a little house down by the river, under the cool green trees. A board walk should run from the station thither, the distance was not very great; a neat little sign should direct the people, they could reach me easily. Once

there, how their poor tired hearts would rejoice! For they would find broad verandas, with rocking-chairs and hammocks. Inside the door, a cool, wide hall would give them grateful welcome, with an open fire on chilly days, deep easy chairs, and plenty of books and magazines. Beyond the hall, a dining-room would await their patronage—round tables, pretty china, flowers, muslin-curtained windows. Up-stairs there would be some bedrooms for such travellers as were utterly forespent; hot water and soap for every one, best boon that I could offer. I myself should stand at the door to welcome all my guests as they came. I should charge them something for their lunch, that a relation of independence and mutual respect might exist between us; but beyond that, all the house would be free—their house as well as mine. I think I should love every one of them, they would have such need of me, and I should be so very sure that I was helping them. What a happy life!

By the time my train whistled and I made off along the track to the station, I was all aglow with my project. As I ran, I cast my eye about for a pleasant site for my house. And ever since, my enthusiasm has waxed rather than waned; so that now the name "Hoosick Junction" is no longer a symbol of gloom, but one of all possible high romance, of dream and aspiration.

In thought, I have long since completed my house, have furnished it and received through its portal dear people of many kinds. For the most part, they are farmers, good simple country folk whom I love; but in the summer the tide of vacation travellers sets my way; and artists and poets come wandering by, refreshing me with notions. I have never taken such a wide view of humanity, nor loved it so well, as since I built my Hoosick Junction house. Now and then—what joy and surprise!—a familiar face approaches along the board walk, and I run to grasp the hand of an old friend come up to visit me. Then, in the evening, when the trains are all past and the work of the day is over, what famous talks we have, shut in our lonely seclusion, the open fire bright at our feet, the river singing outside!

But, alas! what is the value of a mere dream? It would take a fortune to build my house, and fortune have I none. I can only direct my eager thoughts wistfully to their desired goal, and hope that they may work some slight, unconscious alleviation.

Poor wayfarers, at this moment propping your weary frames on the wooden benches beneath the Excursion announcement, do you realize how, if I had my way, you would all be lying in deep, soft chairs, reading novels and magazines? Does the knowledge do any good?

XV

## CAVE-DWELLERS, OR THE HALL-BED-ROOM

AND yet it is not precisely about either of the historical extremes of civilization mentioned above that I am going to write. The abode which I celebrate has no name of generic import. Ignored by the masses, it plays its part humbly enough in the process of evolution; and few are they who discover its charms, though many are they who scorn it.

It lies up three flights of stairs, at the very top of the house. On the second and third floors, its intention is thwarted and it is perverted into closets. But it remains patient and bides its time, climbing higher, determined on consummation. A closet quietly setting itself to become a room—what else is the scheme of life? Arrived at the fourth floor, it looks about. The fourth floor front and the fourth floor back and the two legitimate hall-bedrooms have appropriated all the windows. Now of course a window is the *sine qua non* of a room, its distinction from a closet. Have a window or fail. The dauntless closet! It settles itself in the midst of the house, lifts its

firm intention one degree higher still, and breaks through the roof to the sky. There! Is not that an attainment? Let the other rooms look forth, if they will, on narrow sections of city streets, dreary and confused; this little room will look up to the stars and have the heavens for boundary. It has not only won for itself the roomship which it desired; it has become a unique abode, full of peculiar charm.

When I took possession and closed the door, dropping my things upon the bed because there seemed to be at first sight no other receptacle, the room was non-committal. I cannot say it stood back and waited; it was too small to stand back. But its effect was one of reserve. What was I? Possible lover? Or impecunious vagabond, taking up with a last resort? If the latter, antagonistic and dull, no single charm should I see; but rather I should be smothered at once and so gotten out of the way. Fine-spirited little room; excellent mettle there! I raised my eyes to the dangling ropes which controlled the skylight. One strong pull, and half the ceiling (which is not saying so much, after all) was lifted from above my head. Instantly I turned out the gas, and there was the moon looking in on me, and the quiet stars and the deep night sky, exactly as clear and untroubled as if I were viewing them from a meadow in the heart of the country.

We were friends from that moment, the little room and I.

As I lay in bed, looking up at the stars, I smiled with satisfaction. Even in the country, one cannot do this, unless one is painfully camping out. How still it was! City rooms with windows deafen one. Here there was only a faint, far sound of the murmur of the streets: the blowing of whistles, the ringing of bells, aerial noises of the city which must rise high to reach me. When I woke in the morning and again looked up, a fleecy cloud was sailing across the blue.

It was like a ship's cabin, I decided, as I settled down to live—so small, so compact; and that murmuring tide beyond and below was the sea. Fine! I set sail on voyages endless as those of Ulysses. There is, of course, no farthest port which one may not reach in a room like this. One may even touch the Happy Isles. One may see the great Achilles.

Sometimes the wind rose and blew a gale, hurtling over the reefed skylight. Then we plunged and flew; the stars went by like sparks of fire, the moon reeled giddily. Fog-horns and bell-buoys warned us, but we sailed steadily and safely. Through the stormy seas we held our way to the new port which we never failed to make, the new port of To-morrow.

Contrary to nautical rules in general, save those perhaps of smugglers, all our sailing was done by night. By day we anchored, moored fast to, say, December 6th, and went soberly to work. The sea was still there; we heard it washing beyond our little harbor, but it did not lure us forth. Shut in by our narrow boundaries of present time and place, we assorted the treasures of our voyages and made what use of them we could.

The first snow surprised me greatly. The rain always made a noise and woke me, so that I rose and reefed the skylight; but the snow fell unobtrusively on the foot of the bed. It was not until it began to melt and drip from the edge of the blanket that I stirred into damp consciousness. Again I had a feeling that the room was watching to see what I would do. It had been a catastrophe like this which had brought the despair of the last incumbent to a climax. But mariners must have courage and faith, unshaken loyalty. I repaired the damage as well as I could, with the help of all my towels; then I moved into the driest corner of the bed and went to sleep again.

In the morning it was apparent to me that I was not a mariner any more, at least not for to-day. I had gone back several thousand years, and was a cave-dweller. A cold, greenish light filled my room, struggling through the roof of snow over my head. I wondered how I was

going to get out to hunt and kill my breakfast. I thought I had been pretty clever to make this snug abode in the heart of the earth, working at it from above, shaping and polishing it. How symmetrical it was, how safe and cozy and warm! I snuggled down in my pile of skins and took another nap.

Adventurer bound on vast voyages into unknown seas, primitive man snowed under in the early wilderness—can one make me believe that a little room which fosters such rôles as this in a New York boarding-house is not possessed of genius? Country abodes have poetry enough as a matter of course. It is nothing to have the imagination stirred by a château, a rose-covered cottage, a picturesque farmhouse. But to find a hall-bedroom—not even that, a closet just evolved into a room—bestowing magnificent dreams upon one is a thing not lacking in greatness.

They took me to see the Hotel St. Regis. Sadder and sadder and more depressed I grew, as the grandeur unrolled before me, the outrageous magnificence. Finally I stopped and fastened my eyes on a corner of red carpet. There were yards and acres of it besides, but that corner was all I wanted. "What is the matter?" they asked me. "Go away," I answered; "let me alone. This carpet reminds me of my room. I'll stay and look at it."

Ah, how glad I was to get back! I ran up the stairs, I burst in at the door, I dropped into the one chair, I looked up through the open skylight. The little room smiled inscrutably, closing its small space round me and shutting me in. We had a famous voyage that night. But that is our own affair.

## XVI

## IN PRAISE OF EVERYDAY

THERE is one thing better than all the holidays, all the high feasts in the calendar; and that is Everyday. This is not intended to be a pious assertion, introducing a sermon on the beauty of the commonplace; it springs from a conviction that Everyday is the natural territory of high romance.

I think that most mature people who are settled in the steady pursuit of a life that really interests them have to rouse and brace themselves to face a holiday. This is not so dreary and priggish in them as it may sound. Their reluctance does not commonly spring from a lack of eagerness of disposition, but rather from an intensity of ardor. They are so keenly enjoying the progress of their closely linked days and weeks that they cannot bear to have the sequence interrupted. There is something inherently artificial about a holiday. It has a flagrantly imposed air, as if it were dragged in and compelled to the doubly ungrateful task of interrupting the course of its antagonist's life and of conferring a new lustre upon it by this interruption. Life means work, and work must be at a standstill while a holiday intervenes.

But life has other meanings besides the dominant one of work; and a holiday is no sort of occasion for genuine play. It is too perfunctory. If play is to have any cordial and graceful significance, any essential reality, it must be spontaneous. Holiday excursions are elaborate functions, carefully considered and planned, conscientiously executed. They have a mechanical aspect of extreme felicity; but the deception is all a matter of outward demonstration, it does not even affect the surface of the occasion. Holiday crowds have anxious faces, not to be compared to the countenance of whole-souled satisfaction which distinguishes the artisan, smoking on his front steps, or digging in his garden, after the day's work is over.

The world is very perverse, broken, contradictory; and the secret of the failure of holidays may lie in their inevitable disinclination to fulfill our expectations. We ask so much of them in our effort to justify them to ourselves that perhaps they could not satisfy us if they were ever so willing; but, as a fact, they do not seem to be willing at all. They have a traditional leaning towards storms and accidents, headaches, sulky fires and quitting cooks; and they get up dramatic disasters which *may* happen any day, but which have the signal advantage here of clashing conspicuously with a preconceived idea. A holiday can be altogether hateful.

## In Praise of Everyday

It is Everyday which offers us at once the pasturing ground and the arena of our legitimate hopes and possibilities. Limitless fair field, unfenced, uncharted, there is no calculating the great things that it may bestow upon us.

I have called it the natural territory of high romance. That is because romance demands for its best productions both an element of the unexpected and a sure footing in the commonplace. On a holiday nothing is unexpected and nothing is commonplace. We are alert in all our senses, watching for events, anticipating states of mind. We feel it nothing less than our duty to be uncommonly thankful on the last Thursday in November, superlatively loving on Christmas Day, and transcendently sober and thoughtful on New Year's Eve. But, as an obvious matter of fact, the things to be loving and sober and thoughtful about belong to the substantial fabric of life, the warp and woof, rather than to the fringe; and we appreciate them best as we go along.

The time to be really thankful is when a gleam surprises me as I bend over my daily task, and I look up and see the hills across the valley shining in a sudden transfiguration of sunset light. I drop my work—or mechanically retain it, too abruptly swept out of myself to remember to release it—and gaze and gaze, all my being absorbed in the startling glory. When, by and by, I return to

myself, I fetch a long breath and say as earnestly as if no one had ever so spoken before, "What a wonderful world this is!" I may even fail to add, "Thank you, God"; but it is probable that God understands.

Again, I am deeply moved by some deed or word—it may be only by some look—on the part of a dear friend. I have always loved her, there has never been a moment since my first acquaintance with her when I have not known that life was the richer because of her; but I suddenly realize just how much she means to me. So I go off and buy her a present, all out of season, and bestow it upon her with a thrill of enjoyment which is one of the most delicious sensations possible to man. No Christmas stocking that ever bulged knew half that ecstasy.

Once more: in the presence of some task completed, or just as effectively in the ruins of some hopeless failure, I suddenly find myself brought to a standstill, my gaze turned inward, and my thoughts set to interrogate myself. What am I about? What is my real purpose? What do I want to make of my life, and what have I succeeded or failed in making hitherto? There follows an hour of judgment which anticipates and fulfills the mood of New Year's Eve.

All these great things happen on common days—trust them for that! A sunset knows better

than to throw itself away on the jaded, dissatisfied, critical end of a holiday. A supreme gift keeps its celestial skirts free from all taint of obligation. A real hour of judgment takes the soul unaware. They are also soon over. It needs but a flash to illumine the depths of things and to impress their aspect and significance on us so that we never forget. Prolonged scrutiny has the effect of dulling and confusing our vision rather than further informing it. It is possible that herein lies one of the worst faults of holidays. They are too long. A whole day is a long time to devote to one idea, to one mental pose. If Government set us a Thanksgiving Hour instead of a Thanksgiving Day, we might better manage to live up to our grateful duty.

To those who love Everyday, three winter months present the best promise of the circling year. They are January, February and March. It may be that they are partly indebted for their sublime commonplaceness to the perfect orgy of holidays which has preceded them. But that is quite as it should be; for that "The Holidays" exist. Ah, what a dizzy course! Since Thanksgiving Day, there has been no peace, no satisfaction, no solid footing on ordinary ground. The turkey bones were hardly made into soup (ultimate, restful Lethean soup) before the Salvation Army kettles appeared in the streets and

the Christmas war was on. Every day of December was a holiday, in the sense of being broken out of the usual order and filled with a mad special significance. Desperate haste urged the hours along, with the inevitable, paradoxical result that they were as slow as they were short, and hung around, lagging intolerably, after they were supposed to be gone. There was no escaping the contagion of the unusual. One might lurk in one's chamber, soliciting the sweet significance, the deep revelation of the dear Everyday; there was no Everyday any more, it had been put to flight. Society suffers together; when one member goes Christmas shopping, the rest may as well come along too, for if they stay at home, their thoughts, their reading, their very dreams will be tinged with toy soldiers and lace handkerchiefs.

December is a finely climactic month. It rises steadily to the height of its twenty-fifth day, hangs there a moment, drops a little, re-gathers itself, and ends triumphantly on a New Year's note.

Then—ah! then, as one hangs poised on the midnight hour of January first, one seems to listen to an audible sound. Not the all-too-audible sound of the previous midnight, but a vast murmur, an undertone, as of an ocean turning to come into its own again. It is steady, monoto-

nous, reassuring; there is the deep note of eternity in it, the restful suggestion of infinite opportunity. Everyday is coming back to heal and bless us and set us free of the universe once more. When January second dawns, the world settles down, with a sigh of relief, to common living.

What a comfort it is to let oneself go, to stop shooting wildly at shifting, immediate targets and again to take careful, deliberate aim at the unique goal which one has long since set up on the far horizon! Of course the most of one's arrows fall short, but that does not matter; it is the best blessing of Everyday that its tolerant spaces allow ample scope for failure and trying over again. If one does not succeed to-day, to-morrow is coming, precisely as ready and open as to-day and perhaps more favorable in its occult influences. For there is this also about Everyday, that it is not the mere monotonous drone that it appears on the surface. It loves variety as well as any holiday, and carefully sees to it that its circumstances are never the same at the rising of the sun as at the previous setting. But it depends on subtler methods for achieving distinction than does the holiday. Its processes of change are gradual, finely hidden; one has to go out and try the mood of each new day before one can understand it. In a sense, moreover, it is really that which it appears—eternally the same.

The same unbroken time stream flows on through all the days and weeks, through all the ages; and it is when we realize this uniformity and give ourselves over to it that we are most at ease and most effective. But, nevertheless, we need not expect that, in the whole course of the longest life, any day will repeat another; for no stream returns on itself, and waters change their hue and motion from field to field.

Finely tempered, clever, wise, Everyday knows how to surprise us without appearing to do so. It lets us surprise ourselves—which is of course the superlative kind of revelation. In its non-committal fashion it produces romantic results which entirely put to shame the blatant situations of holidays. It is always on a common Monday afternoon and always in disguise that the Fairy Prince rides in. But one has to be on the alert, for Fairy Princes ride just as nimbly out of the east as out of the west and wear rags quite as comfortably as a silken cloak. Everyday is thus really proved much more stimulating than a holiday. It puts us on our mettle; and, just as we may expect everything of it, so it expects everything of us. Not one of Emerson's "Days" was a holiday.

Everyday is at its best in the winter, and that is why I have named the first three months of the year as its *Saturnia regna.* Spring and

summer and autumn present ample spaces, but they are all more or less restless seasons, and our vacation system impinges on them. Here again society suffers—or rejoices—together. The most inveterate stay-at-home is picked out of his ruts and consigned to an involuntary change by the mere fact that his neighbors have gone away and left him. The irregular coming and going of its members keeps most communities in a state of disorganization from May to November. But in winter, life is as established as it ever succeeds in becoming on this mutable planet; it is turned inward, concentrated, shorn of many of the distractions of the outer world. It can give itself wholly to the fashioning of its purpose.

That is the crowning significance of Everyday, its one supreme gift to us: it lends itself utterly to our work. No wonder we prize it, then! For the joy of steady, unhurried work is avowedly the best bliss of life.

## XVII

## OPTIMIST'S DAY

THERE is one day of the year which deserves celebration, not because of the merits of any great man whose birth or death it commemorates, not because of any notable event then occurring; but simply because it is what it is: the twenty-first of December.

"But that is the shortest day in the year," cries some one, and looks depressed.

Precisely. The very reason.

Is it not worth everything to have got to the bottom at last? We have been going downward so long,—ever since, months ago, in the midst of the springing June, when life stood at its best, when birds were singing and grass was deep, there came the fatal turn. There was no darkening change apparent on that long, fair day; but we knew, and sighed. The twenty-first of June might be called Pessimist's Day.

All too soon the event proved the fear. The bobolinks stopped singing. The grass was cut, the hay gathered in, nests were emptied of their broods, and the year settled down into sober middle-age, prophetic of graver things. Alas! before long we were lighting the lamps and aban-

doning the piazza. Alas! presently the sweet-william was past, and the tiger lily and the Persian lilac buried once more in the charitable earth the summer warfare which they wage in all well-ordered New England gardens. Then came the early frosts, and the turning leaves, and the level line of advancing night on the face of the eastern mountain in the midst of the afternoon. After that, the "wild west wind," and the flying leaves, and the dark and solemn mountains, and no afternoon at all.

So the gradual season declined, till the tardy sun at last came all too late upon an outstripping world which could no longer wait for it; and, finding mankind at breakfast and the day's work well under way, sadly concluded that, after all, it formed no indispensable adjunct to the earth, and, after wandering aimlessly for a few minutes about a small southern section of the sky, with nothing at all to do, dropped out of sight again.

We have come a dim, sad way.

But now! With what a long breath we greet the twenty-first of December. It has in it all the promise of the still so distant summer. It has the song of thrushes and the fragrance of hepaticas. It gives us back our green grass, our leaves, and our running brooks. All we have to do is to wait a little and we shall see. It may be that even to-morrow we shall be saying to one an-

other, "Don't you notice how much longer the days are growing? See, the lamp isn't lighted yet." And surely within the week, surely by Christmas Day, the improvement will be marked. An added lustre comes into the sky, the sun plucks up heart and returns from the south, resuming his martial air. There is no more to dread, for the worst is over, the better begins, the best follows hard behind. Most beautiful, joyous day!

At this point, perhaps, some gentle reader, who has already drawn in his breath half a dozen times, impatient to speak, will no longer be denied. "When the days begin to lengthen, then the cold begins to strengthen," he quotes impressively.

Yes, we had not forgotten the wise old adage. But there are two sides to wisdom as to everything. "When the cold begins to strengthen, then the days begin to lengthen" sounds just as sententious, rhymes just as well, runs as euphoniously. Why should we not adopt the inverted rendering? It has the advantage of meaning much, whereas the time-honored version stands for no more use in the world than Poe's raven, still foreboding. Will it never cease to be the admired part of wisdom to forebode?

There is no arrangement of Providence more skillful, more subtly significant than this of the

seasons. In the very heart of the winter, nay, before it is well under way, when the worst of the cold is yet before us, comes the happy turning point. Though bound to suffer still, we shall henceforth be going up, up, ever up; and the lengthening days proclaim the fact. How shall we be despondent any more?

As for Pessimist's Day, it is there of course, if any one wants to avail himself of it. There is never any use in trying to deny the existence of the world's dark side. But a Pessimist's Day set in the midst of waving grass and flowers, of blue sky, golden sunlight, fragrance, warmth, song, joy, finds itself in a rather humorous situation. A man would have to be very determined (or have eaten too many strawberries) to be seriously down-hearted on the twenty-first of June.

Hail, then, Optimist's Day, coming now to cheer us! Out of its cold and darkness, out of its wintry gloom, its incredibly short hours, we shall snatch true heart's content. What if we do have to light the lamp at 4 P. M.? To-morrow we may light it at 4:01.

## XVIII

## THANK TIME!

IT is to the credit of people that they are, for the most part, very glib in expressions of gratitude. "Thank goodness!" "Thank heaven!" Those phrases may not be very thoughtfully uttered, but they indicate a habit of mind which is perhaps all the more profound for its careless, half-unconscious instinctiveness. We all of us recognize the workings of a Power outside ourselves; and when it blesses us, we thank it gaily.

But we are rather vague in our choice of epithets to designate this Power. "Goodness" and "heaven" are too universal; they do not discriminate any particular function by which we have been helped. Who ever heard of the expression, "Thank time!"? Yet who, when he stops to think, does not know that time has benefited him more than most other agencies?

A pure illusion! Of course. Saint Augustine proved that once for all in his desperate, longing, bewildered effort to grasp it and make it real. There is no past—since it is dead; there is no present—it slips from beneath the swiftest touch; there is no future—for it is yet unborn and may

never come to be. How, then, can there be any time, if its component parts are naught? "And yet, Lord, we perceive intervals of times, and compare them . . . and we talk of time, and time, and times, and times." To be sure we do. Even in Saint Augustine's day it was no new feat for human nature to take resolute, confident refuge in that which it knew to be but an illusion.

But it was not on the abstract nature of time, or on its figurative meaning that I sat down to meditate. It was to time as a definite, accepted fact in life that I meant to pay homage. Most blessed influence! there is almost nothing that it will not do for us, if we will but let it. Nay, in the long run, whether we let it or not; for time is one of God's greater processes, one of His strongest angels, who cannot defer to our weakness forever, but must help us in spite of ourselves, if that is the only way open.

We are sometimes very perverse and stupid in our resistance to this benefaction. We talk of loyalty, faithfulness to the past, and what not. As if there were any loyalty to be compared to loyalty to the future! Our wounds must heal, that we may go on living; our sorrows must turn into deeper joys, that the life of the universe may be enriched through us. Yet often we think shame to have this so. We tear our wounds open

again, we gaze persistently into the past, we cling to the shadow of that which has vanished, and think we are doing well. Blind generation! Do we not know that the substance of all things, even of the dear past, lies still beyond us, ahead of us, in that realm of full consciousness and understanding towards which we are hastening? Life loses nothing. A beloved friend gone from the present is also snatched out of the past and set down before us in the uncalculable future. It is there that we shall find him again. Why do we tarry? Oh, let us make speed! Time is here, ready to help us.

So in bereavement; and so also in failure and disappointment. There is something sublime about the way in which the sun continues serenely to rise on our most disgraceful mischances, offering us yet another day, precisely as open and plastic as that which we misused so forlornly. Rather more plastic, in fact, if we only have the wit to perceive it; for wisdom is the offspring of failure, and wisdom makes plastic the universe. We still have "all the time there is" to make good our mistakes.

As for our joys and triumphs, there is nothing which tests them like time—proving and establishing some, undermining others until they crumble slowly away and are no more. A stern probation? If it were so, it would still be all

desirable; for truth is the only possible resting place for the human spirit. But it is not stern. Time's methods are gentle, merciful; it has a way of wooing illusions from us which is beyond all comparison kind and clever; we wake up some morning and find them gone, that is all there is to the matter. Of course, by and by, if we have any insight at all, we become aware of the gradual processes of the years at work in us, and we can watch them—but always with grateful, and sometimes amused, acquiescence, never with any pain. Time has no will to hurt any creature, only to bless us and guide our feet into the way of peace.

It is a most generous creature itself, this excellent time—fine, open-handed, magnanimous. There is hardly another blessing of life which is so free with us. In matters of friendship, religion, beauty, music, books, we can take no more than we consciously will, we must volunteer our own acceptance. Even the sun cannot gladden us unless we choose. But time does not measure its gifts by our will; it is even so lavish that when we are thinking about it least, then most it is active in our behalf. Steadily, smoothly, it bears us along, away from our incompleteness and pain, towards that fulfillment of all things which is the goal of the universe.

All the symbols of time are dear to a devout time lover: the hour-glass, the scythe, the river,

even the skull. To some hearts there is magic in the very look of an old date. Any old date. Not, to be sure, July 4, 1776—a special significance interferes with the working of the spell—but a chance date at the head of a letter: May 16, 1810; October 2, 1843. The curious thrill which springs from the touch of these other days and years is hard to track down and analyze for the benefit of the incredulous, but is abounding in comfort and peace to those who understand. August 18, 1642: time was graciously busy then, too, some one was better off on that day than on December 21, 1641, the world was farther along towards its one, far-off, divine event than on September 2, 1630. How very much farther along it is now, thank heaven, thank time!

The dates of the future are quite as potent in satisfaction as those of the past; only of course we see them less often. They lend a glamour to money-bonds and securities. A note which matures on February 2, 1925—what a lien on the future that gives, what a pull out of the past! As for "A Table to Find Easter Day" in the front of the Book of Common Prayer, I would commend that to the perusal of all restless spirits. "From the year of our Lord, 1786, to the year of our Lord 2013—there is scope enough for the most eager imagination! March 31, 2013—will that day ever really dawn as a sober matter-of-course,

as the mere ordinary change of yet another to-morrow into to-day? Will that Easter service be celebrated, with the familiar early spring flowers and with the unfamiliar, entirely unimaginable spring bonnets of the second decade of twenty-first century fashion?

Ah, well! we shall none of us be there to see; we shall all have ended our course by that time, have yielded our hopes and fears and desires, our manifold, unremitting struggles, into the merciful hands of Death, have proved that mysterious "beyond" which torments us so now with vain speculation, have won our way, if not entirely back to God, at least nearer Him by a whole life-time. We shall none of us celebrate that earthly Easter, thank heaven, thank time! A sad congratulation? No. Though life is not precisely a merry-go-round for any one of us.

Akin to the love of dates is the satisfaction which almost everybody takes in the swift flight of days and weeks. We do not often admit this pleasure; we are accustomed to fetch a sigh and shake our heads when we pull ourselves up and say, "What! another week gone already? How time does fly!" But our tones betray us, felicitation lurks deep in them. If one would hear real trouble, he must hark to the accents of worried perplexity in which, on occasion, a man confesses, "Last Sunday seems very long ago; I seem

to have been here a month." Nor, I protest, has the reason for this anything to do with the history of the intervening week. In fact, the verdict is common that variety and striking interest of occupation retard time, while monotony accelerates it. Ask the prisoner in his cell; ask the traveller abroad. The root of the matter seems to be just that it is inherently grateful to our human sense to feel time speeding with us.

I have recommended the Easter Day table; but I would more heartily still recommend to all burdened spirits the use of a current calendar. A block calendar, with a leaf to be torn off every day and thrown into the waste basket. There is an immense satisfaction, relief, in that simple, daily gesture of abandonment. So! one more day is gone; there it lies, crumpled and empty as an autumn leaf, past all recovery. And here is another day; let us make haste to live it to the full.

I repeat that this is not a sad subject, except as all human subjects are more or less sad. There is always a note of pain in incompleteness. But the note of hope is there too of course, the overtone of promise. The significance of incompleteness is that it implies fulfillment. It is certainly not for nothing that we have this great need of haste in our blood, this impatience of hesitation and failure and delay. We have come near enough to

the goal of the universe to glimpse it dimly from afar; and its glory awakes such a longing in us that we shake off the patience of nature, the slow content of the groping ages. It is all we can do not to shake off time too, and leap out at once across the void to clasp our heart's desire.

Good time, our best friend—a pretty way that would be to treat him! And a dreary mistake too. For, after all, the process of growth in the world remains much the same as ever—gradual, patient; we must still go slowly if we expect to arrive. The Kingdom of Heaven cannot be taken by violence, but only by development, and that is the work of time.

One wonders if there will be no time beyond, and if we shall not miss it. No cycle-glasses, no heavenly calendars, bearing angelic quotations (Shakespeare and Wordsworth must have expressed a great many wonderful thoughts since they died), no New Æon Days? Perhaps, since time dies with us, it will also rise with us in its own celestial body; and we shall awake to find it waiting to lead us as surely, as gently as heretofore. The hope is comforting.

## XIX

## WAIT

IN all our language there is no wiser and kinder word than *Wait.* Nor is there any whose perfect counsel is more likely to be spurned by our impatient hearts. This is natural enough. Wanting is an immediate issue, and nobody concerns himself very keenly about a desire which he thinks he may wish to gratify in a year or two. Our present need makes our present lack, and we hurry to supply it. But over and over and over again we have to learn that the best things come slowly; that the Kingdom of Heaven will not be taken by force, in an hour; and that, if we really want, we must wait—then we shall surely have.

The two words are almost identical. There is only a small but significant difference in one letter, substituting for the indefinite *n* the purposeful *i* of a human will which addresses itself to attainment. One may want and go on wanting forever; but waiting implies a far end.

It is not a passive, resigned state, then, but one of intensest activity; it makes no confession of

lukewarmness, but gives proof of desire too strong to put up with any half-way measures, any incomplete fulfillment. A man who is willing to wait really wants, and proves his worthiness.

Hard? It is bitterly hard. If it were not, there would be no meaning in it. All the ages acknowledge the heart-sickness of hope deferred. But hoping is different from waiting; much more clamorous, but not so sure. Hope is a volatile spirit, always returning because it is always departing. The angel of Waiting abides with us and fixes its eyes, not on the next meadow, but on the mountain top. That a process is hard should be no reason for complaint on our part, since the hardest things are ever most blessed to the valiant soul. But there is in waiting an ultimate depth of peace which robs the condition of half its pain and all its restlessness. Nay, it may even come to confer upon us a divine happiness. What does God do—and all the angels—but wait eternally?

It is doubtless true that what we wait for, that we shall surely have. It is also true that what we wait to be rid of, that we shall surely lose. Blessed, blessed working of time (strong, compassionate angel Time!) to heal all bruises, close all wounds, turn all things into good! William Bowles has a beautiful sonnet, although a sad one, on this subject:

"O Time, who know'st a lenient hand to lay
Softest on sorrow's wound and slowly thence
(Lulling to sad repose the weary sense)
The faint pang stealest unperceived away."

If we could only remember that this must surely happen to us, that all our past life must seem good, we might save ourselves—but perhaps, after all, it is well not to save ourselves. How should we ever know anything if we did not suffer? At least, however, we might bend an ear to an inner singing beneath our tears, a voice which says patiently, constantly, "Wait. Wait—wait—wait."

Wait, how long, then? Well, a lifetime is a little matter, hardly a beginning towards the most important things. Until the earth and planets cool might be a pretty period, or until the sun goes out, or until a new one kindles. But limitations are no business of the really waiting soul. Wait as long as God waits; that is the best decision.

## XX

## PROCRASTINATION

I THINK I believe in a certain amount of thoughtful procrastination. Because, sooner or later, the mood comes around for every sort of thing, and then is the time to work.

About once in six weeks it happens that I really want to sew. Not merely am able to tolerate the idea, not even am willing, but truly prefer the occupation to any other. Then I get my work-basket, open the drawer where garments have been systematically accumulating against this festal hour, and happily start in. In my low sewing-chair (reading-chair yesterday) beside the open window I sit and taste true heart's content. My needle catches the beat of my pulse, the swing of my thoughts; the work falls from my hands like magic; the whole of my nature lends itself to the task which it has chosen. I am living as fully and deeply now as I was when I climbed the autumn hill day before yesterday, or when, yesterday, I sat down to reread King Lear.

That sort of experience is worth while. Suppose now I had tamely obeyed the mandate of convention and had darned my stockings as they

came along, every Saturday morning. Not only should I have undergone a weekly hour of irritating constraint; but I should also have missed a fine flowering of pleasure. When the darning mood arrived—on Wednesday, let us say—there would have been no stockings to meet it, and my spirit would have suffered lack. Talk not of the compensation of fancy-work! Moods demand satisfaction, not compensation. When they ask for bread—and stockings, will one give them cake—and doilies?

It is even so with the writing of letters. Never mind, let them accumulate till the pigeonhole is full. To make a task of intercourse, to compel the expression of love, is an insult to friendship. How coldly do the phrases fall from an unwilling pen! Better a year of silence. Silence is not unloving, silence is very good. But, on the other hand, silence is nothing compared with the glowing outgo of life when some day the pen leaps up of its own accord and the letter falls from it, vibrant with feeling, straight from the very heart. That is intercourse; that is a letter, fit for the king, your friend. Trust him to prefer to wait for one such letter in six months than to receive a dozen epistles perfunctorily contrived.

Thoughtful procrastination, I said, not lazy procrastination. The mind must be kept always active, alert, ready for the next chance. Great

moments demand an earnest response; they may all too easily be missed by a sluggish inapprehension. Get out of the way of expecting them, settle back into inaction, and your life will be commonplace enough. Moreover, your stockings will never be darned, which is, on the whole, a pity. But study the signs of the times of your spirit, quicken your sense to anticipate, and great moments may come every day.

I have even known men to enjoy old age. But they went through a deal of procrastination first.

We shall probably all enjoy heaven.

## XXI

## ENCORE

WHAT a curious trick of human nature it is to think that one very much wants a thing which one really does not want at all!

I reflect on this mystery every time I come to myself at the end of a concert—the excellent, satisfactory end which a good concert knows how to make and which is as much a part of the program as the symphony—and hear people murmuring on every hand, "Oh! wasn't that beautiful? Oh! don't you wish that we could hear it right over again, straight through from the beginning?" Nor is it a matter of hearing only which I experience; I myself give utterance freely: "Yes, indeed; if we only could!" with such a fervor of assent that I deceive myself as well as every one else.

Why do I do this? Why do we all so delude ourselves? We know perfectly well that it is one of the great laws of life that immediate repetition spoils almost any pleasure, that nothing would really afflict us more than to hear that concert "right over again, straight through from the beginning." Yet observe us. Erect in our seats,

we wave our handkerchiefs, clap our hands, storm the weary musicians with an applause which is not all gratitude but which demands further favors at once.

It is interesting to observe the deportment of these musicians under stress of our importunity. They all know that encores are a mistake—trust them for that. Sometimes they hold to the knowledge serenely, bowing and bowing (since they are human, they doubtless enjoy the tribute of applause enough to pay for the fatigue which it entails on them), but steadfastly refusing the least note of concession to the multitude. That is fine; I approve it, even though I may be splitting my gloves with entreaty. Sometimes, worn out, they capitulate, shrugging their shoulders and smiling with an air of mingled disgust and toleration which is very funny, and, returning to their instruments, play—not a genuine encore, but something else, not down on the program. That is not very bad, though it never is very good. It creates a subdued confusion of people comparing notes all over the house—"That's Chopin"; "Oh, no, it's that charming little thing of Grieg's, don't you recognize it?"—and it has an air of duty and dispatch which injures it. But the genuine encore, the repetition of the last all too fondly admired concert number, is the great and deplorable insult to art and com-

mon sense. It is hard to see how a musician can bring himself to commit such a crime. No one enjoys it. The strains, which ravished five minutes ago, cloy now, or irritate, or simply bore; a joy, which might have remained a dear memory, is eclipsed and extinguished. Folly of men! The angels must weep at the beautiful things which we spoil for ourselves.

The same perversity holds true in the reading of books. One suddenly comes upon a great passage, a splendid paragraph. What an experience! It takes the breath, dazzles the heart. One lets oneself go with the sweep of the lines, one catches the glow of the thought and thrills to the beauty of its fit expression, one glories, rejoices; then one reaches the end of the page and pauses, lifting or closing the eyes. Now that very pause is the fine flower of the poet's utterance; it is expressly designed to convey transcendent things to the reader. But wisdom and self-control are needed to hold the vision true. If the reader says to himself, "That's a noble passage; I must read it right over again," and suits the action to the word, the great work is undone. All the glow and power escape from the lines when they are closely scrutinized, the hovering significance fades, the beauty resolves itself into mere rhyme and metre. The only way to retain the glory of a splendid page is to push on, reso-

lutely forbearing to cast so much as one glance behind.

In the matter of the seasons, too, how foolish people are! My summer home is in the northern part of New England, where the spring comes very late. I am apt to return to it early in May, and always have the experience of finding myself set back two or three weeks in the year's development. I do not like this. It disconcerts me, gives me a rude jog which is not in harmony with the smooth lapse of time. But never yet have I failed to be congratulated by somebody when I have taken my northward departure: "You lucky person to have the spring all over again!" As if I wanted spring over again! What! to have made all that progress, achieved all that serene unfolding, flowered and ripened to that extent, and then to be pulled up short and haled back to bleak and snowy beginnings—how discouraging! It is true that the early spring is the most exquisite phase of the year, that the beauty of early summer cannot compare with it; but, once having had the poignant rapture, the spirit finds itself set to the tune of repose and maturity. A thrill repeated in the wrong place hurts.

That use of the word rapture reminds me of Browning's thrush. But I wonder if the poet, being pinned down to a final conviction, would

have consistently defended the wisdom of his bird. Poets say so many things in so many different moods. Anyway, what kind of a thrush was it that sang his song twice over? Not the thrush that lives in my woods; he never repeats himself. It is undoubtedly true that he utters the same notes many times in the course of one woodland afternoon; but he combines them so differently that he always seems to be saying something entirely new. Even when he recurs to a whole strain, it is with no effect of repetition, but swinging around to it through such a sequence of modulations and changes of key that it falls on the ear with a fresh suggestion. He *is* a wise thrush.

There is another poet, William Blake, one of whose stanzas I find myself quoting so often that I think I must regard it as expressing a very profound philosophy of life:

> "He who bends to himself a joy
> Does the winged life destroy;
> But he who kisses the joy as it flies,
> Lives in eternity's sunrise."

It is the last line that captivates me. Only four words. Yet one can reflect on them endlessly, drawing wisdom and comfort and strength from them; one can set sail on them, use them as wings, direct them to any vast purpose one will; there is no exhausting them. They contain noth-

ing less than the whole of man's immortality. Eternity's sunrise! Thus we stand always at the beginning of new things, the old put away behind us, not forgotten, but merged in general clouds of glory. Thus there are always fresh chances before us, strange and surprising enough sometimes, but all the better for that. Thus, in one aspect, we are always young, old and experienced though we may sanely desire that life shall make us on the whole.

Good life! After all, we are trying to reckon without our host in this discussion—our host or our warder, our teacher, our guide, just as we choose to name it. Life is a great deal wiser than we are and it sees to it that the great concerns of our experience are guarded from our meddlesome fingers. It does not precisely limit us to one prayer in a lifetime, one mountain rapture, one friendly contact of soul with soul, one morning's ardent work. Such restriction would be hard lines. The unique delight would scarcely be worth the subsequent price of emptiness and longing which we should have to pay for it. But, in a hundred thousand prayers, no two strike out the same path to heaven; no familiar mountain ever touches the spirit twice in the same way. We may play with trivial issues, trivial encores we may achieve, if we are so foolish; but the real things come and go as they will.

## XXII

## THE PERIL OF FRIENDSHIP

MUCH has lately (and formerly also) been written on the subject of Friendship. The repetition is natural, for no more important matter concerns any of us. But in almost all the dissertations, the stress has fallen on the solidity of the relation, its ever-enduringness; so that, as one reads the essays and poems, one seems to conceive of the beautiful office as a stout iron rod, change-defying. Now an iron rod has excellent uses, but—it is heavy, and sometimes it rusts. I should like, if I may, to dwell for a little on the thought of the vanishing nature of friendship, its precious frailness and peril.

There is nothing in all the world so good, and nothing so uncertain. No stout iron rod, no immutable substance, it is rather a vital relation, a quivering contact, flying and sweet as the intercourse between two wayward clouds, two stars, two hills bound by a rainbow. One can no more touch it and say, "It is there," than one can bind the wind. Yet the whole life bends before it.

We all of us recognize this fragility in the early days of a friendship, those days which are so often the best because the most quick, most aware.

## The Peril of Friendship

We go carefully, tenderly, holding the breath: is the spell on now, or off? And when, instead of the answering touch backwards and forwards which we had desired, there is silence and distance, we are not annoyed, hardly even surprised. Very well, bide the time, it will come again, the sovereign happy moment which gives my new friend to me. Music must have intervals, and poems must have cæsuras.

What stupid creatures we are, to be sure, that we give all our wisdom to that which is new, and allow custom to blunt our perceptions and degrade us from our best selves! For it is our best selves which we give these new friends, our most earnest, alive, and unselfish intentions. When, all too soon, we begin to expect and demand favors, to complain of neglect, to deal in reproaches, we fall from our high estate and do not deserve best boons. I would proffer it as an axiom that no one ever lost a friend who did not deserve to lose him.

Patience, patience, and good humor, and infinite expectation—which is quite a different thing from definite expectation—these are the traits which friendship needs for its faithful service. One must stand open to all the quarters of heaven that one's friend may enter by any door, at any time of day. How delightful, when one has been used to seeing him walk up the front steps, to

miss him here for a day or two, and then all of a sudden to find him in the kitchen pantry! The novel approach gives a new point of view, and one starts one's friendship all over again, with cookies as a foundation.

I would endeavor to take my friend as the good Lord made him, and not attempt to alter him. I would help him to live up to his best and to work out his soul's salvation, but always along the lines of his own nature, not mine. Why do I love him if not because he is just himself? Hands off! If I should uproot that rather deplorable recklessness, I might harm the splendid generosity which grows on the same stem; if I laid hold upon the pride, I should also have to handle the integrity. No, touch him not. I like him tangled up just as he is, drawing nutriment from the whole earth, climbing up to the light and blooming in a beautiful flower of love which I may or may not pick, as chance and the seasons conspire.

There is in the affairs of friendship a silent sense of honor which is more high and delicate than anything on earth. We must hold ourselves true to our hints and inferences, knowing that in them we commit ourselves more vitally than in spoken words. All the world can judge and condemn a broken promise, but only one friendly heart understands the perfidy of a broken hint. What the speaking eye says to the friend in

moments when the spell is on and the intercourse runs warm, let the life loyally answer for.

Trust is, after all, the one great quality without which no friendship is possible. The kind of trust which one gives the sun that, though he hasten away in the west, he will surely come back to-morrow, and that, meantime, he is intent on necessary errands; that, though he lurks in the clouds to-day, he will sooner or later shine out again, the same, good, genial sun. The kind of trust which one gives the rain and the flowers and the dew. These are all more unstable and vanishing than the iron rod on which one may lean; but long after the rod is rusted and cast aside, the sun will continue to cross the sky, and the rain and the dew to fall.

It therefore appears, in the last resort, that frailty may have a greater strength than solidity, and that the unstable things of life are the most persistent. That which vanishes may return over and over and over again through all eternity; whereas that which remains and changes not has no choice but to wear out. Boundless the hope of an unfettered friendship—sweet Ariel sprite of a thing! To-day or to-morrow it may come. No? Well, next week or next year.

Careful, then, though we surely must be in all our friendly dealings, we need not be too anxious. In fact, it is probably never wise to be anxious at

all. Anxiety, caution, and worry corrode and belittle the heart, so that the vision becomes distorted, and we know not what we do. Ariel flees the soul that fusses, vexed and blindly troubled. Life asks high-handed daring of us. Be not afraid. These forces are spun out of the elemental laws which govern the universe; they can stand your hardihood. What hardihood? Even the courage to drop your dear friendship the minute its sweet bells jangle, to leave it, flee from it, hasten away to the uttermost parts of the earth, not saying one word or looking back. In this flight and silence lies the one chance of ultimate salvation. Oh, if people would not talk so much, nor demand such explanations! I have known more friendships ruined through well-meant words than through any other folly.

Friend, whom I love, I do not know if, meeting you to-day, I should find you loving or not. But you have loved me, twice, thrice, many times, thank God! Some day again—who knows? Meantime, my heart stands wide to you. And in a heart which stands wide are there not the wind and the sun?

## XXIII

## THE ULTIMATE HARE

QUIET people, of a meditative turn of mind, have a sorry time of it nowadays with their more active comrades. Probably this has always been true; it is part of activity's nature to be impatient with quiescence. But it certainly does seem as if there had never been quite such an active age as this since the world began.

The state of affairs is all right; the quiet person asks nothing better than that there shall be a great deal going on around him to furnish him material for his meditations. The quieter and more thoughtful he is, the more likely he is to be found haunting Broadway or Wall Street. But the trouble begins when he is pulled up short in the midst of his unhurried speculations and is accused of gross negligence because he does not take his turn at keenly bestirring himself.

Ignorance is the offensive word rather than negligence—though the two go together traditionally. The quiet person can stand it to be told that he is neglecting his duty (almost any one can stand that); but it pains and bewilders him to be assured that he does not know the meaning of life, that he has no hold on reality. "Real life, real

things, real experience "—these are the slogans of the present age; and they sound very well.

"But what do they mean, just?"

The quiet person is not so clever as he is reasonable if he propounds this question. For the active person is instantly down upon him with the triumphant —

"There! What did I tell you? You don't even know what reality is."

"Well, do you?"

The quiet person is modest; but he has read his philosophers, and he has understood that a very exacting hare is first to be caught if one would compound an ultimate pie of experience. He looks up, expectant.

"Just what is reality?" he inquires.

The active person laughs loud and long, and claps his friend on the shoulder. Then he explains affectionately, if also a little condescendingly —

"Work, business, anything that puts you in touch with the world as it is, and makes you feel alive. Human relations—love and hate. Vital experience. These are the things you should be after, not dreams and illusions. Come out from your meditations and live. Get down to business and understand the genuine values of things."

This is all very sobering and perplexing. The active person has not, in the least, defined reality in his assertions concerning it; he has not ex-

plained what makes some things more real than others. No closer glimpse of the rabbit's tail has been afforded by his declarations than by all the ponderings of the philosophers. Yet his assurance has bred confusion in the mind of his friend.

Ah, that rabbit! Was there ever so perverse a beast? Plato started it ages ago, and flattered himself that he ran it securely to ground. But every "school" that came after him found the creature still afield; and every successive generation has given chase afresh. Some riders, mounted on strange nags, have gone so far—or come so far short—as to declare that there is no rabbit at all. But most people have continued to live in confident expectation of the final pie. Now the practical present-day person thinks he has found it—caught it and cooked it—and he invites all his friends to the banquet, his only stipulation being that they shall repudiate their own mistaken experiments with gun and cook-book. Is he right? Is reality trapped at last? Do we hold it in our hands?

"But what makes you think"—the quiet person is as perverse as the rabbit, popping up with his questions as persistently as the latter pops away—"what good reason can you give me for stating that one kind of experience is more real than another? Nobody can expect to have every kind. For, while experience is the action of life upon

the soul, it is still more the soul's reaction upon circumstance. That takes time—if it occurs at all. Does not the soul's own reaction determine reality for it ?"

The active person does not care at all for this kind of language; he laughs at it and waves it away.

"Come down to my office some day and I'll show you," he concludes decisively.

If the quiet person is really in earnest, really bent upon tracking the hare, he will accept this invitation. He will leave his study some morning and present himself at his friend's office door.

Say that the friend is a banker and the quiet person a poet: the poet gains admission to the inner office and sits a while, watching the banker sign papers and sort huge bundles of notes.

"Is this what you do all the time ?" he inquires at length.

"Yes, for the most part," the banker replies, without looking up.

"These are what you call real things ?" The poet fingers a thousand dollar note.

"Well, rather!" The banker laughs carelessly. "The most real of all things, the very foundation of reality."

"Yet it is just paper; a spark would destroy it."

"Ah, but, my dear fellow, you see it stands for solid gold."

"'Stands for'—oh, well, then ——!" The poet leans back in his chair and considers, making no further comment.

"Just like everything else," he reflects. "Something is always 'standing for' something in the world at large. And as likely as not, the second something stands for something further. Here the paper stands for the gold, and the gold stands for an automobile, and the automobile stands for an idea of pleasure and convenience. A symbol of a symbol of a symbol of an idea—that's what my friend has in hand.

"I grant you, ideas are the only real things," he says unexpectedly, as he rises to go, "but I'd rather touch them a little closer than at three or four removes."

Next, being definitely out on this business of experimenting with reality, he enters the Exchange Building which is close at hand. The daily tumult is at its height. On the floor men are leaping and screaming, gesticulating frantically at one another. The poet cannot understand them, but of course he knows in a general way what they are about. Buying and selling crops of wheat, not yet matured, in a distant state. Wheat—that seems real enough; but how remote, behind what a series: money and farmer and agent and miller and railroad and grocer and baker and purchaser! Moreover, in the end,

when it is eaten, it is eaten; its period of reality is very limited. The person who eats it is the only factor in the complicated transaction that really matters. How many removes here? Eight at the least. The poet shrugs his shoulders.

In the afternoon he dresses himself carefully and goes to a reception. "Social intercourse" is always being urged upon him as his privilege and duty if he hopes to know his fellows. It is a big reception; there are many fellows there. But does he know them? Not at all. To know people one has to hear them talk about something that interests them; or, failing that, to make them respond to some interest of one's own. These herded, perspiring folk are lucky if they can make one another hear a few disconnected words uttered at a desperate pitch of voice. They have to choose sounds like missiles, and hurl them resolutely. The general effect is not unlike that of the tumult in the Exchange; and the poet finds himself wondering if a system of signals might not to advantage be introduced in the social world. It would be very diverting to arrange such a code. Symbols again—oh, yes! of course, nothing but symbols. Reality lurks behind, and is only touched when two friends turn away from the din and go and sit in a corner and snatch a few minutes' intercourse. They might

have done this just as well at home—in fact, a great deal better.

Weary with his experiments, the poet at last decides that he has done his duty for one day. So he returns to his study.

He finds it very good to be back. His books and his pictures and his open desk welcome him mutely; and in his grate glows a remnant of a coal fire which, being ministered to, recovers its full cordial life. He draws the curtains and lights the lamp. His cat comes in and takes up her usual position in the best armchair. The poet sits down in the second-best and gives himself over to honest meditation. What has it all amounted to—this day's investigation which he has put through? Has he found any convincing proof of the more immediate presence of reality in the business and social worlds than anywhere else? On the contrary, it has seemed to him that the hare matches its activity with the activity of circumstance; and, retreating behind symbol after symbol, hides itself very adroitly in the shows of things. He cannot remember ever having spent such an unsubstantial day in his life. Well, on the other hand, can he remember any substantial, genuine day to set up against this emptiness and point to conclusively: "Then I lived"? If a man would win respectful attention, he must be able to prove his position posi-

tively as well as criticize that of his neighbor negatively.

Genuine days? Scores and hundreds of them! The poet glances caressingly at his desk as much as to say, "We know all about that, don't we?" But then he settles back in his chair, shuts his eyes and thinks hard to select some one supremely valid experience of reality. It takes him a long time; he finds that he has a good deal of material.

On the whole—yes (he stirs in his chair, but keeps his eyes closed, re-creating the scene), on the whole, he decides on a certain solitary ascent of West Mountain as typical of the sort of experience he best understands.

It was midsummer and the woods were still. Not a bird song, not a murmur from the shrunken brook in the leafy gorge, not a whisper among the trees. The whole world seemed—not holding its breath, that would have implied a restless expectancy, but breathing inaudibly in a profound repose. The poet climbed steadily, with his eyes bent on the rough path beneath his feet. He hardly dared look about him at all, for the woods wore an august front of significance calculated to appall a lonely mortal. But he did not save himself from them by his senses' denial of them. Rather, they pressed upon him the more because he neither saw them nor heard them; there was something awful about the way in which they

made use of his vacant organs to invade and conquer him. They mounted with him, they mounted upon him, steadily gaining ascendency over his entire being, until at the last he gave himself up and recognized them as his master. There was a profoundly thrilling sense of ultimate entity in his final fusion with them.

That was a real experience, surely; no one could doubt it. But here the poet opens his eyes, smiling, and sits up. Of course the banker and broker would doubt it; they would laugh at it and pronounce it quite as invalid as he had pronounced their experiences. Well, then, what else? At what other time had he felt himself utterly on the verge of reality?

One night, here in his study, when he had been reading late in a book of idealistic philosophy. Ah! that was a striking experience; he remembers it vividly. He had been wholly immersed in his book. It was one of those searching treatises which make their way as straight as they can go to the heart of things. From their piercing prows matter and substance fall away like flying foam. Values and mysteries are reversed. Spirit seems the only thing that counts, and tangibility becomes the most inexplicable quality in the universe. It took the last stroke of the midnight hour to rouse the poet from his deep engagement with this book. But then he came to

himself with a start, sat up and looked about him, to catch the strangest impression of his environment that he had ever had. His familiar, orderly study was in a dissolving, vanishing state of disintegration. His seeming solid tables and chairs, so self-possessed and calm usually, were a wild chaos of whirling atoms, nebulous, incoherent. They hardly seemed to be there at all, save as a sort of suggestion. There was in fact no fixed form anywhere he might turn his eyes. Life and motion were everywhere, but substance not at all. The impression lasted only an instant. He had not time to rub his eyes before shape fled back into position—a negligent guard on duty, surprised, a betrayed and betraying watchman. But that instant afforded him a rending revelation which he never forgot. Of unreality? Yes, but much more of reality behind it, of God at work on chaos to-day precisely as urgently as before the advent of Adam and Eve, of the act of creation as one of eternal immediateness.

If the banker and broker refused to accept the mountain experience as valid, they would still more promptly deny the significance of this midnight episode. They would turn on the poet. "An hour ago you were complaining because our world was unsubstantial; now you are congratulating yourself on the unsubstantiality of your own. A fig for your consistency!"

The poet's reply would be ready: "In the one case, reality seemed to me to be retreating farther and farther behind the shows of things; in the other, it came forth and rent them asunder before its mighty face." But he would do better to keep silence and let the matter drop.

For, after all, the great thing is not so much to convert other people to one's own way of thinking —or even to convince them of its validity—as to prove it to one's own satisfaction and then to establish oneself securely in it. Moreover, it is of course true, as the poet began by declaring, that nobody can expect to have every kind of experience; and who shall say which is the right kind, or whether any one kind is more right than another? Only Omniscience understands what reality is. If the poet desires the banker to be sparing in his criticisms, he must return the tolerance.

Perhaps the poet's other remark is true also: that the soul's own reaction on life determines reality for it. In that case, every experience would be as authentic as every other; and instead of there being no hare at all, the whole universe would be nothing but hare—the reason why we cannot find it being simply that we are mounted on its back.

In sober truth, what other conclusion should we arrive at but precisely this? Every experi-

ence is partial, but it is also genuine; so long as we fully and faithfully follow our separate destinies, we can none of us escape reality. Every poet knows as much about life as every banker or broker; every farmer as much as every sailor; every school-teacher, dressmaker, housekeeper as much as every society leader or stenographer.

Let us trust ourselves, and let one another alone. Very likely we shall never make any sort of an ultimate pie; for our hare is immortal, invincibly alive and alert in all its cosmic body. But, though we could hardly do worse than succeed in catching it, we can assuredly not do better than give it chase—forever and forever.

## XXIV

## THE NEXT GENERATION

AT least, one hopes it will be the next. Those of us who most longingly anticipate the approaching turn of the wheel scan the unconscious faces of the babies in the streets and think, "You may see it, you little fellow, with the wide, mystical eyes, already prepared for the vision. Ah, how we envy, congratulate you! Grow up worthily." But the wheel is a huge one, and it takes a long time for it to come full circle. Perhaps the children of our wistful admiration are only the fathers or grandfathers of the men and women who are to realize our dream.

We are preparing it for them now, its elements are in our hands; and that is the reason why we know that it is bound to come. Out of our recent skepticism, out of the materialism that has burdened and hampered us for so long, we are at last setting ourselves to shape an old, old vision, the brightest and best and most beautiful thing about which mankind has ever concerned itself, an immortal vision, neglected only to be the more eagerly resumed: the enduring, growing vision of the City of God. In other words, having been rationalistic and scientific and worldly wise, we

are now about to become religious once more. We certainly are, there is no doubt about it, the dawn is in the sky.

It is curious that such an important, vitally important, thing as religion should ever suffer eclipse. One wonders if it does. One would like to think that an obviously materialistic world was still religious at heart, holding to God by some other name (of course He has twenty thousand names), or serving Him unconsciously. And perhaps, fundamentally, this is true. The essential relation between God and man can never be lost without the destruction of the universe. Creation is religion. But, just as the full meaning of friendship implies reciprocity and is defeated by one-sidedness, so the term religion goes crippled unless it betokens a conscious response between Creator and creature. Individuals—many of them—have been religious during the nineteenth century and the eighteenth; but the world at large has not been religious for several hundred years. That is a long time. No wonder those of us who care can hardly wait for the wide-eyed babies to grow up, and beat our breasts with sorrow to think that, after all, when they have done so, we shall be under the sod.

Why have we all had to do this—swing so very far away from heaven, concern ourselves so desperately with the things of the world? Was the

reaction a punishment for some of our faults of impatience and violence? Or was it merely the departure which every return demands as a necessary antecedent? We are very stupid about that which remains an established part of our daily lives. No matter how precious it is, we grow dulled to its significance if we have it always with us. It was for this reason that God created the world in the first place. He had to send it out of, away from, Himself in order that it might realize Him and at once set up a mighty striving to get back again. Perhaps for this reason also He invented the devil and gave him occasional power over us. We could not know and love the good unless we likewise knew and hated evil. Certain it is that we best understand and most tenderly cherish those treasures from which we have been separated and to which we return. And when we return to our religion ——! Ah! little children in the streets, you would never sulk nor cry if you had any least idea of the glory of your destiny. A people's return to its religion is a tremendous thing.

I said that we are preparing the way. We are; and sometimes it seems as if we too might be called a religious generation. We are deeply concerned about righteousness; we are all on fire to help one another and to reform the evils of our civilization. There was never a time when good

works bulked larger in the desire and approbation of the world. Is not helpfulness a kind of religion? Surely, love is, and self-sacrifice, and service. These beautiful things are making our old world a very warm and brotherly habitation at present; we are freely giving out the best that we have in us. And yet not quite the best, after all. Service is the fruit of religion, and is wonderfully good; but the seed at the heart of the fruit is that for which the tree and the apple and the universe were made. The fruit belongs to the world, and welcome; but the seed belongs to God, and must be planted again and again that fresh life may spring up and worship Him. The circular plan on which we are built compels us to seem to work backward now and then; and we are at present engaged in arriving at the seed through the fruit. When we have found it and planted it, our souls will once more grow up towards heaven.

So practical and active are we, so governed by the tradition of proof, so eager to be of use to our fellows, that the simple, primitive act of worship seems to us sometimes unnecessary, almost a selfish indulgence for which we ought to have no leisure. "Let us work for our brothers all day long, and pray if we have time." But once in a while, when we stop to think, we realize that this attitude is somewhat presumptuous. Who is

saving the world? Am I? Do I really consider myself qualified to save it all alone, or even as a member of a committee? How about the great Spirit who knows the end from the beginning and shapes the process inevitably? Is it not well to consult Him closely, to work under Him? And what is salvation? Not food and clothes, not houses and work and prosperity, not all these good things half so much as the simple contact of the soul with God. For the soul that finds God finds itself and knows instinctively what to do with its groping life. We were made for worship. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" is only the natural corollary to "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment."

Thy neighbor as thyself: that means that we are all one in the matter. We understand this; the mystical truth of our world-unity is never absent from our consciousness, for we are grounded in it. But we interpret all things according to the temper of our age; and, the present age being objective and active, we view our oneness objectively. Since we are one, we make haste to distribute ourselves to others, to devote ourselves. But why, since we are one, should not each of us sometimes see to it that his small drop of the common stream is headed straight for the ocean,

that his prism fully reflects the sun? A swift and bright response is that which, above all else, God desires of His universe, that which, being complete, would leave no room for unhappiness or failure. Every man helps or hinders his neighbor by the mere attitude of his soul.

It is for this reason that one hopes that the next generation will fill its churches more compactly than we fill ours. Of course it is true that a church is no more the abiding place of God than a house or a meadow or a thoroughfare. Heaven is everywhere; worship can spring up and find its goal from every point of earth. But churches have, by common consent, been built and set apart for the particular function of worship; they stand to us for the things of the spirit; they are recognized Jacob's ladders. A nation that wanted to manifest its loyalty to the cause of religion would naturally want to show itself in the temple. Moreover, there is nothing like a great church full of people for constraining heaven. Individual souls have their own powers of adoration and persuasion; they can venture far. But it takes a multitude, each helping each, to let itself go, boldly, utterly, on the immensity of the ocean which is the common origin and destiny. The God of the closet is a present God, infinitely tender and patient; but He is partial, responding only to the special need of the petitioner. The

God of the cathedral is glorious, as many-sided, as rich in response as the congregation soliciting Him; and each separate prayer is answered more fully because of the neighboring prayer which overlaps it. The tragedy of our present semi-religion lies in the fact that not even those of us who most longingly desire God can know Him fully, because of the vast, unknown regions of Him which only our neighbors can open up to us. Not until all the world is religious can any person or group of persons be so with completeness.

We are fully convinced of the value of co-operation in every other department of our human life; but in our religion we are apt to think that each man must shift for himself. As a matter of fact, it were easier for one man alone to work out the construction of the solar system and the problem of evolution than to arrive at a knowledge of God. We must help, we must learn from, one another; we must gather together and watch and wait, laying all our hearts open at once. Then we shall have some chance of understanding life and of making a noble highway for the passing of the Spirit. Let there be no gaps between heart and heart for His patient feet to span.

In the eagerness of our expectation, it must nevertheless, in all fairness, be admitted that there are some people who do not see any dawn in the

sky just at present, who do not think that the world is becoming religious. There are even some sober thinkers who say that civilization has done with religion and is about to leave it forever behind. But what in the world can they possibly mean? Civilization can no more dispense with religion than the fruit can dispense with the seed. Nay, the parallel is closer than that. As we suggested some paragraphs back, the very act of creation is religious in its nature. It is the eternal question to which our reply comes as the completion of the only statement that matters. God always does His part towards us, whether or not we see our way clear to do our part towards Him; and, though our silence is intermittent, His question sounds forever. Therefore, in a fundamental and seemingly paradoxical sense, religion can only become extinct through its complete fulfillment, as the climax of a period of religious fervor so great that it carries the world-river bodily into the sea. When that happens, the universe will be no more.

But how shall we prove ourselves to the doubters who say that the dawn is not yet? How shall we justify our instinctive turning towards the East? The mere instinct may be enough for the garden, stirring drowsily in the dew; the rocks and trees and the mist-hung mountains demand a more solid assurance. Here it is

then: By their fruits ye shall know them. By those very fruits which we have just found to be not quite enough for the full life of the spirit. For there is no doubting their nature nor the nature of the seed which they must contain. Beautiful grapes of compassion and love, figs of brotherhood, apples of comfort—these do not bring forth anything less than the perfect love of God. Do men plant grape-vines from thorn trees or fig trees from thistles?

If not the next generation, then surely the next, or the next after that. The shadows are thick in the valley yet, and the mists hang low; but behind the mountain the sky is throbbing with a promise. Before very long, the world will be kneeling together again and with one heart praising God.

How are the rest of us going to stand it not to be there?

## XXV

# THE ONE THING NEEDFUL

THE perversity of our human ways is beyond comprehension. We certainly often seem to act as if we liked to be troubled, liked to harass our spirits with problems and difficulties. For we need almost never do so; nay, our peaceful immunity might be complete, if we chose to have it so. There is one sure and simple, immediate way out of all questions that ever arise; there is one secure answer that might prevent the questions before their birth. Only one standard presents itself for the testing and governing of every life, and that is: the Will of God.

Strange that we do not embrace this truth and abide in it! The philosophers must be right when they say that consciousness is under an obscure necessity of realizing itself through contradiction. We have deliberately invented artificial standards and ends of our own, and have set them up over against the one sufficient End, thereby working dire confusion and pain for ourselves.

Vanity! vanity! No one can ever fulfill an artificial end. The true End—patient, long-suffering, absolutely inflexible—turns and overturns,

turns and overturns, until, out of a thousand mischances, it at last sees its way clear to a consummation which was inevitable from the beginning. We cannot avoid it, but we can delay it—pitifully for ourselves.

The chief trouble seems to be that we have deluded ourselves with the notion that the Will of God is hostile to our happiness. "Thy Will be done," is hardly ever spoken with the throbbing note of joyful expectation which properly belongs to it; but is breathed low in resignation, with a long-drawn sigh. God must have need of all His patience when He hears us pray.

As if His Will could ever be to work anything but the fullest development and therefore the fullest blessedness of His creation! Why did He make us at all? To fulfill some beautiful cosmic purpose, the grandeur and holiness of which begin to thrill us with wonder and love in these latter days. Each little part was perfectly planned to complete the whole; and if each atom were obedient, it might know universal beatitude. Joy? Why, what limited, individual bliss can compare with the glory of gladness with which a whole creation moves on its harmonious way to its consummation? Not a human soul of us but understands that particular personal happiness hurts more than it soothes. When great joy comes our way, our finiteness oppresses us; we fret

against the barriers of our so circumscribed capacity, and all too often greet our dreams' fulfillment with tears instead of songs. But a universal attainment lifts and expands the spirit until it forgets its limitations and naturally and easily shares the very counsels of God. If we looked for our daily reward to one another, to our wider selves (for we are one another), and, above all, to God, who is our Self of selves, we should know unfailing satisfaction.

Nor is the universal happiness all there is to the matter—though that is enough. Each individual finds his own immediate, temporal gratification only in the Will of God. He may think that this cannot be so; he may strive feverishly to attain some end that he has devised for himself; his efforts will only result in restless misery. Whereas, if he listens and watches, obeys, he will from minute to minute take the sure path to his own in the world; and only his own can ever receive him or mean anything to him.

Yet it is not always a simple matter—this reading of the Will of God. With the best intentions in the world, the most sincere people are often perplexed to understand what they should do next. Perhaps we have blunted our perceptions by long disobedience; or perhaps heaven thinks that a certain amount of perplexity is good for us. At any rate, we are all at times put to it to take

our bearings; we have to plead and agonize for a beacon light. Well, when God withholds Himself, there is nothing to do but wait. But there are certain indications in our own hearts which may convict us of sin or righteousness. Great restlessness generally means that something is wrong, that we are pulling against God, resisting His touch. "In His Will is our peace." Never spoke poet more truly and profoundly than Dante in those quiet words. "Be still and know that I am God." There again is an absolutely eternal and comprehensive admonition. For souls in perplexity the churches wait with their open doors and their holy silence. One has but to enter and kneel and wait, giving himself over, letting himself go, resigning his own conscious and unconscious will, utterly abandoning it; and by and by he will see again the dear "quiet face of God" looking down upon him, and he will creep close and lay hold on the hem of the garment and be safe once more.

"O God, I resign every purpose, wish, every lurking desire, every hope, utterly unto Thee. I have no care but to do Thy Will. My heart and my life lie empty before Thee. Take them and fill them and use them according to Thy great purpose. Amen."

That is a prayer which heaven cannot fail to answer.

# The Edge of the Woods

It has been truly said somewhere that a man never really possesses anything until he has abandoned it to heaven, honestly letting it go, and heaven has then surprised him by giving it back to him. Only with a few treasures among the many which we clutch and relinquish will heaven ever reward us; but they are the only things worth having, they are the inalienable possessions of our souls.

The only things worth having. Yes; again it is strange that we do not realize this. A good for which one must scheme and strive, over the precariousness of which one must hold his breath, is not solidly good at all; it is a transient vexation. The real goods of life are as quietly sure as the dawn; there is no escaping them.

Therefore it follows that the one thing needful for us to know in this world is simply the Will of God. Therein lies our duty, our content, our ecstasy. Therein lies our only chance of making life worth while; therein lies the significance and salvation of the universe. The Kingdom will come as soon as the Will is done.

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