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DAVID GRAYSON

# Essays of To-day and Yesterday

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ESSAYS OF  
TO-DAY AND YESTERDAY

DAVID  
GRAYSON



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## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

DAVID GRAYSON, as Mr Ray Stannard Baker is known to very many thousands of readers all over the world, is the chronicler of happiness and goodwill. In a day when crime and the abnormal monopolize newspapers and novels it is refreshing to find a man of letters who is content to give his readers intimate records of goodness and simplicity. We go far afield seeking thrills and neglect the beauty that is at our doors. Kindly thoughts, humble aspirations, and unobtrusive self-sacrifice—these, as David Grayson shows us, are the precious things of life. So he draws revealing pictures of the countryside, the open road, the wayside farmhouse, and the little town. It is not strange that his message, coming fresh from the newly ploughed fields, should lure the jaded city-dweller with irresistible attraction. Yet David Grayson is no fanatical devotee of the simple life. He tells you how he went after false gods and came finally to the fullness of self-realization and contentment on his farm, but to another, he will freely admit, this contentment may be possible only in the hurly-burly of crowded streets. “Joy of life,” he concludes, “seems to me to arise from a sense of being where one belongs . . . of being foursquare with the life we have chosen.”

Born at Lansing, Michigan, in 1870, he studied agriculture, law, and literature before taking up journalism and writing the studies of country life that have become so popular.

Thanks are due to Messrs Hodder and Stoughton,



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Ltd., for permission to reprint "On Being Where You Belong," "The Open Road," and "An Old Man," from *Adventures in Friendship*; "Places of Retirement," "On Living in the Country," and "The Green People," from *Great Possessions*; and "We Begin the Subjugation of Nort," "Nort Sniffs," and "Fergus's Favourite Poem," from *Hempfield*.

F. H. P.

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*"Blessed of the Lord be His land, for the precious things of heaven, for the dew, and for the deep that coucheth beneath,*

*"And for the precious fruits brought forth by the sun, and for the precious things put forth by the moon,*

*"And for the chief things of the ancient mountains, and for the precious things of the lasting hills,*

*"And for the precious things of the earth and fullness thereof, and for the good will of him that dwelt in the bush."*

## ON BEING WHERE YOU BELONG

*Sunday morning, May 20th*

ON Friday I began planting my corn. For many days previously I went out every morning at sun-up, in the clear, sharp air, and thrust my hand deep down in the soil of the field. I do not know that I followed any learned agricultural rule, but somehow I liked to do it. It has seemed reasonable to me, instead of watching for a phase of the moon (for I do not cultivate the moon), to inquire of the earth itself. For many days I had no response; the soil was of an icy, moist coldness, as of death. "I am not ready yet," it said; "I have not rested my time."

Early in the week we had a day or two of soft sunshine, of fecund warmth, to which the earth lay open, willing, passive. On Thursday morning, though a white frost silvered the harrow ridges, when I thrust my hand into the soil I felt, or seemed to feel, a curious response: a strange answering of life to life. The stone had been rolled from the sepulchre!

And I knew then that the destined time had arrived for my planting. That afternoon I marked out my cornfield, driving the mare to my home-made wooden marker, carefully observant of the straightness of the rows; for a crooked corn-row is a sort of immorality. I brought down my seed-corn from the attic, where it had hung waiting all winter, each ear suspended separately by the white, up-turned husks. They were the selected ears of last year's crop, even of size throughout, smooth of kernel, with tips well covered—the perfect ones chosen among many to perpetuate the highest

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excellencies of the crop. I carried them to the shed next my barn, and shelled them out in my hand machine: as fine a basket of yellow dent seed as a man ever saw. I have listened to endless discussions as to the relative merits of flint and dent corn. I cast here my vote emphatically for yellow dent: it is the best nature can do!

I found my seed-bag hanging, dusty, over a rafter in the shed, and Harriet sewed a buckle on the strip that goes around the waist. I cleaned and sharpened my hoe.

"Now," I said to myself, "give me a good day and I am ready to plant."

The sun was just coming up on Friday, looking over the trees into a world of misty and odorous freshness. When I climbed the fence I dropped down in the grass at the far corner of the field. I had looked forward this year with pleasure to the planting of a small field by hand—the adventure of it—after a number of years of horse planting (with Horace's machine) of far larger fields. There is an indescribable satisfaction in answering "Present!" to the roll-call of nature: to plant when the earth is ready, to cultivate when the soil begins to bake and harden, to harvest when the grain is fully ripe. It is the chief joy of him who lives close to the soil that he comes, in time, to beat in consonance with the pulse of the earth; its seasons become his seasons; its life his life.

Behold me, then, with a full seed-bag suspended before me, buckled both over the shoulders and around the waist, a shiny hoe in my hand (the sceptre of my dominion), a comfortable, rested feeling in every muscle of my body, standing at the end of the first long furrow there in my field on Friday morning—a whole spring day open before me! At that moment I would not

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have changed my place for the place of any king, prince, or president.

At first I was awkward enough, for it has been a long time since I have done much hand planting; but I soon fell into the rhythmic swing of the sower, the sure, even, accurate step; the turn of the body and the flexing of the wrists as the hoe strikes downward; the deftly hollowed hole; the swing of the hand to the seed-bag; the sure fall of the kernels; the return of the hoe; the final determining pressure of the soil upon the seed. One falls into it and follows it as he would follow the rhythm of a march.

Even the choice of seed becomes automatic, instinctive. At first there is a conscious counting by the fingers—five seeds:

One for the blackbird,  
One for the crow,  
One for the cutworm,  
Two to grow.

But after a time one ceases to count five, and *feels* five, instinctively rejecting a monstrous six, or returning to complete an inferior four.

I wonder if you know the feel of the fresh, soft soil, as it answers to your steps, giving a little, responding a little (as life always does)—and is there not something endlessly good and pleasant about it? And the movement of the arms and shoulders, falling easily into that action and reaction which yields the most service to the least energy! Scientists tell us that the awkward young eagle has a wider wing-stretch than the old skilled eagle. So the corn planter, at noon, will do his work with half the expended energy of the early morning: he attains the artistry of motion. And quite beyond and above this physical accomplishment is the

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ever-present, scarcely conscious sense of reward, repayment, which one experiences as he covers each planting of seeds.

As the sun rose higher the mists stole secretly away, first towards the lower brook-hollows, finally disappearing entirely; the morning coolness passed, the tops of the furrows dried out to a lighter brown, and still I followed the long planting. At each return I refilled my seed-bag, and sometimes I drank from the jug of water which I had hidden in the grass. Often I stood a moment by the fence to look up and around me. Through the clear morning air I could hear the roosters crowing vaingloriously from the barnyard, and the robins were singing, and occasionally from the distant road I heard the rumble of a wagon. I noted the slow kitchen smoke from Horace's chimney, the tip of which I could just see over the hill from the margin of my field—and my own pleasant home among its trees—and my barn—all most satisfying to look upon. Then I returned to the sweat and heat of the open field, and to the steady swing of the sowing.

Joy of life seems to me to arise from a sense of being where one belongs, as I feel right here; of being four-square with the life we have chosen. All the discontented people I know are trying sedulously to be something they are not, to do something they cannot do. In the advertisements of the country paper I find men angling for money by promising to make women beautiful and men learned or rich—overnight—by inspiring good farmers and carpenters to be poor doctors and lawyers. It is curious, is it not, with what skill we will adapt our sandy land to potatoes and grow our beans in clay, and with how little wisdom we farm the soils of our own natures. We try to grow poetry where

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plumbing would thrive grandly!—not knowing that plumbing is as important and honourable and necessary to this earth as poetry.

I understand it perfectly; I too followed long after false gods. I thought I must rush forth to see the world, I must forthwith become great, rich, famous; and I hurried hither and thither, seeking I knew not what. Consuming my days with the infinite distractions of travel, I missed, as one who attempts two occupations at once, the sure satisfaction of either. Beholding the exteriors of cities and of men, I was deceived with shadows; my life took no hold upon that which is deep and true. Colour I got, and form, and a superficial aptitude in judging by symbols. It was like the study of a science: a hasty review gives one the general rules, but it requires a far profounder insight to know the fertile exceptions.

But as I grow older I remain here on my farm, and wait quietly for the world to pass this way. My oak and I, we wait, and we are satisfied. Here we stand among our clods; our feet are rooted deep within the soil. The wind blows upon us and delights us, the rain falls and refreshes us, the sun dries and sweetens us. We are become calm, slow, strong; so we measure rectitudes and regard essentials, my oak and I.

I would be a hard person to dislodge or uproot from this spot of earth. I belong here; I grow here. I like to think of the old fable of the wrestler of Irassa. For I am veritably that Anteus who was the wrestler of Irassa and drew his strength from the ground. So long as I tread the long furrows of my planting, with my feet upon the earth, I am invincible and unconquerable. Hercules himself, though he comes upon me in the guise of Riches, or Fame, or Power, cannot



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overthrow me—save as he takes me away from this soil. For at each step my strength is renewed. I forget weariness, old age has no dread for me.

Some there may be who think I talk dreams; they do not know reality. My friend, did it ever occur to you that you are unhappy because you have lost connection with life? Because your feet are not somewhere firm planted upon the soil of reality? Contentment, and indeed usefulness, comes as the infallible result of great acceptances, great humilities—of not trying to make ourselves this or that (to conform to some dramatized version of ourselves), but of surrendering ourselves to the fullness of life—of letting life flow through us. To be used!—that is the sublimest thing we know.

It is a distinguishing mark of greatness that it has a tremendous hold upon real things. I have seen men who seemed to have behind them, or rather within them, whole societies, states, institutions: how they come at us, like Atlas bearing the world! For they act not with their own feebleness, but with a strength as of the Whole of Life. They speak, and the words are theirs, but the voice is the Voice of Mankind.

I don't know what to call it: being right with God or right with life. It is strangely the same thing; and God is not particular as to the name we know Him by, so long as we know Him. Musing upon these secret things, I seem to understand what the theologians in their darkness have made so obscure. Is it not just this at-one-ment with life which sweetens and saves us all?

In all these writings I have glorified the life of the soil until I am ashamed. I have loved it because it saved me. The farm for me, I decided long ago, is the only place where I can flow strongly and surely. But

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to you, my friend, life may present a wholly different aspect, variant necessities. Knowing what I have experienced in the city, I have sometimes wondered at the happy (even serene) faces I have seen in crowded streets. There must be, I admit, those who can flow and be at one with that life, too. And let them handle their money, and make shoes, and sew garments, and write in ledgers—if that completes and contents them. I have no quarrel with any one of them. It is, after all, a big and various world, where men can be happy in many ways.

For every man is a magnet, highly and singularly sensitized. Some draw to them fields and woods and hills, and are drawn in return; and some draw swift streets and the riches which are known to cities. It is not of importance what we draw, but that we really draw. And the greatest tragedy in life, as I see it, is that thousands of men and women never have the opportunity to draw with freedom; but they exist in weariness and labour, and are drawn upon like inanimate objects by those who live in unhappy idleness. They do not farm: they are farmed. But that is a question foreign to present considerations. We may be assured, if we draw freely, like the magnet of steel which gathers its iron filings about it in beautiful and symmetrical forms, that the things which we attract will also become symmetrical and harmonious with our lives.

Thus flowing with life, self-surrendering to life, a man becomes indispensable to life; he is absolutely necessary to the conduct of this universe. And it is the feeling of being necessary, of being desired, flowing into a man that produces the satisfaction of contentment. Often and often I think to myself:

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These fields have need of me; my horse whinnies when he hears my step; my dog barks a welcome. These, my neighbours, are glad of me. The corn comes up fresh and green to my planting; my buckwheat bears richly. I am indispensable in this place. What is more satisfactory to the human heart than to be needed and to know we are needed? One line in the Book of Chronicles, when I read it, flies up at me out of the printed page as though it were alive, conveying newly the age-old agony of a misplaced man. After relating the short and evil history of Jehoram, King of Judah, the account ends—with the appalling terseness which often crowns the dramatic climaxes of that matchless writing:

“And (he) departed without being desired.”

Without being desired! I have wondered if any man was ever cursed with a more terrible epitaph!

And so I planted my corn; and in the evening I felt the dumb weariness of physical toil. Many times in older days I have known the wakeful nerve-weariness of cities. This was not it. It was the weariness which, after supper, seizes upon one's limbs with half-aching numbness. I sat down on my porch with a nameless content. I looked off across the countryside. I saw the evening shadows fall, and the moon come up. And I wanted nothing I had not. And finally sleep swept in resistless waves upon me and I stumbled up to bed—and sank into dreamless slumber.

*From “Adventures in Friendship”*

## THE OPEN ROAD

To make space for wandering is it that the world was made so wide.—GOETHE, *Wilhelm Meister*

I LOVE sometimes to have a day alone—a riotous day. Sometimes I do not care to see even my best friends: but I give myself up to the full enjoyment of the world around me. I go out of my door in the morning—preferably a sunny morning, though any morning will do well enough—and walk straight out into the world. I take with me the burden of no duty or responsibility. I draw in the fresh air, odour-laden from orchard and wood. I look about me as if everything were new—and behold, everything *is* new. My barn, my oaks, my fences—I declare I never saw them before. I have no preconceived impressions, or beliefs, or opinions. My lane fence is the end of the known earth. I am a discoverer of new fields among old ones. I see, feel, hear, smell, taste all these wonderful things for the first time. I have no idea what discoveries I shall make!

So I go down the lane, looking up and about me. I cross the town road and climb the fence on the other side. I brush one shoulder among the bushes as I pass: I feel the solid yet easy pressure of the sod. The long blades of the timothy-grass clasp at my legs and let go with reluctance. I break off a twig here and there and taste the tart or bitter sap. I take off my hat and let the warm sun shine on my head. I am an adventurer upon a new earth.

Is it not marvellous how far afield some of us are willing to travel in pursuit of that beauty which we

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leave behind us at home? We mistake unfamiliarity for beauty; we darken our perceptions with idle foreignness. For want of that ardent inner curiosity which is the only true foundation for the appreciation of beauty—for beauty is inward, not outward—we find ourselves hastening from land to land, gathering mere curious resemblances which, like unassimilated property, possess no power of fecundation. With what pathetic diligence we collect peaks and passes in Switzerland; how we come laden from England with vain cathedrals!

Beauty? What is it but a new way of approach? For wilderness, for foreignness, I have no need to go a mile: I have only to come up through my thicket or cross my field from my own roadside—and behold, a new heaven and a new earth!

Things grow old and stale, not because they are old but because we cease to see them. Whole vibrant significant worlds around us disappear within the sombre mists of familiarity. Whichever way we look the roads are dull and barren. There is a tree at our gate we have not seen in years: a flower blooms in our doorway more wonderful than the shining heights of the Alps!

It has seemed to me sometimes as though I could see men hardening before my eyes, drawing in a feeler here, walling up an opening there. Naming things! Objects fall into categories for them and wear little sure channels in the brain. A mountain is a mountain, a tree a tree to them, a field for ever a field. Life solidifies itself in words. And finally how everything wearies them: and that is old age!

Is it not the prime struggle of life to keep the mind plastic? To see and feel and hear things newly? To

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accept nothing as settled; to defend the eternal right of the questioner? To reject every conclusion of yesterday before the surer observations of to-day?—is not that the best life we know?

And so to the Open Road! Not many miles from my farm there is a tamarack swamp. The soft dark green of it fills the round bowl of a valley. Around it spread rising forests and fields; fences divide it from the known land. Coming across my fields one day, I saw it there. I felt the habit of avoidance. It is a custom, well enough in a practical land, to shun such a spot of perplexity; but on that day I was following the Open Road, and it led me straight to the moist dark stillness of the tamaracks. I cannot here tell all the marvels I found in that place. I trod where human foot had never trod before. Cobwebs barred my passage (the bars to most passages when we come to them are only cobwebs), the earth was soft with the thick swamp mosses, and with many an autumn of fallen, dead, brown leaves. I crossed the track of a muskrat, I saw the nest of a hawk—and how, how many other things of the wilderness I must not here relate. And I came out of it renewed and refreshed; I know now the feeling of the pioneer and the discoverer. Peary has no more than I; Stanley tells me nothing I have not experienced.

What more than that is the accomplishment of the great inventor, poet, painter? Such cannot abide habit-hedged wildernesses. They follow the Open Road, they see for themselves, and will not accept the paths or the names of the world. And Sight, kept clear, becomes, curiously, Insight. A thousand had seen apples fall before Newton. But Newton was dowered with the spirit of the Open Road.

Sometimes as I walk, seeking to see, hear, feel, every-

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thing newly, I devise secret words for the things I see: words that convey to me alone the thought, or impression, or emotion of a peculiar spot. All this, I know, to some will seem the acme of foolish illusion. Indeed, I am not telling of it because it is practical; there is no cash at the end of it. I am reporting it as an experience in life; those who understand will understand. And thus out of my journeys I have words which bring back to me with indescribable poignancy the peculiar impression of a time or a place. I prize them more highly than almost any other of my possessions, for they come to me seemingly out of the air, and the remembrance of them enables me to recall or live over a past experience with scarcely diminished emotion.

And one of these words—how it brings to me the very mood of a gay October day! A sleepy west wind blowing. The fields are bare, the corn shocks brown, and the long road looks flat and dull. Away in the marsh I hear a single melancholy crow. A heavy day, namelessly sad! Old sorrows flock to one's memory and old regrets. The creeper is red in the swamp and the grass is brown on the hill. It comes to me that I was a boy once—

So to the flat road and away! And turn at the turning and rise with the hill. Will the mood change: will the day? I see a lone man in the top of a pasture crying, "Coo-ee, coo-ee." I do not see at first why he cries, and then over the hill come the ewes, a dense grey flock of them, huddling toward me. The yokel behind has a stick in each hand. "Coo-ee, coo-ee," he also cries. And the two men, gathering in, threatening, sidling, advancing slowly, the sheep turning uncertainly this way and that, come at last to the boarded pen.

"That's the idee," says the helper.

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"A poor lot," remarks the leader: "such is the farmer's life."

From the roadway they back their frame-decked wagon to the fence and unhook their team. The leader throws off his coat and stands thick and muscular in his blue jeans—a roistering fellow with a red face, thick neck, and chapped hands.

"I'll pass 'em up," he says; "that's a man's work. You stand in the wagon and put 'em in."

So he springs into the yard and the sheep huddle close into the corner, here and there raising a timid head, here and there darting aside in a panic.

"Hi, there, it's for you," shouts the leader, and thrusts his hands deep in the wool of one of the ewes.

"Come up here, you Southdown with the bare belly," says the man in the wagon.

"That's my old game—wrestling," the leader remarks, struggling with the next ewe. "Stiddy, stiddy, now I got you, up with you, dang you!"

"That's the idee," says the man in the wagon.

So I watch and they pass up the sheep one by one, and as I go on down the road I hear the leader's thick voice, "Stiddy, stiddy," and the response of the other, "That's the idee." And so on into the grey day.

My Open Road leads not only to beauty, not only to fresh adventures in outer observation. I believe in the Open Road in religion, in education, in politics: there is nothing really settled, fenced in, nor finally decided upon this earth. Nothing that is not questionable. I do not mean that I would immediately tear down well-built fences or do away with established and beaten roads. By no means. The wisdom of past ages is likely to be wiser than any hasty conclusions of mine. I would not invite any other person to follow my road



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until I had well proven it a better way toward truth than that which time had established. And yet I would have every man tread the Open Road; I would have him upon occasion question the smuggest institution and look askance upon the most ancient habit. I would have him throw a doubt upon Newton and defy Darwin! I would have him look straight at men and nature with his own eyes. He should acknowledge no common gods unless he proved them gods for himself. The 'equality of men' which we worship: is there not a higher inequality? The material progress which we deify: is it real progress? Democracy—is it after all better than monarchy? I would have him question the canons of art, literature, music, morals: so will he continue young and useful!

And yet sometimes I ask myself: What do I travel for? Why all this excitement and eagerness of inquiry? What is it that I go forth to find? Am I better for keeping my roads open than my neighbour is who travels with contentment the paths of ancient habit? I am gnawed by the tooth of unrest—to what end? Often as I travel I ask myself that question and I have never had a convincing answer. I am looking for something I cannot find. My Open Road is open, too, at the end! What is it that drives a man onward, that scourges him with unanswered questions? We only know that we are driven; we do not know who drives. We travel, we inquire, we look, we work—only knowing that these activities satisfy a certain deep and secret demand within us. We have Faith that there is a Reason: and is there not a present Joy in following the Open Road?

And O the joy that is never won,  
But follows and follows the journeying sun.

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And at the end of the day the Open Road, if we follow it with wisdom as well as fervour, will bring us safely home again. For after all the Open Road must return to the Beaten Path. The Open Road is for adventure; and adventure is not the food of life, but the spice.

Thus I came back this evening from rioting in my fields. As I walked down the lane I heard the soft tinkle of a cowbell, a certain earthy exhalation, as of work, came out of the bare fields, the duties of my daily life crowded upon me bringing a pleasant calmness of spirit, and I said to myself:

“ Lord be praised for that which is common.”

And after I had done my chores I came in, hungry, to my supper.

*From “Adventures in Friendship”*

## AN OLD MAN

TO-DAY I saw Uncle Richard Summers walking in the town road : and cannot get him out of my mind. I think I never knew anyone who wears so plainly the garment of Detached Old Age as he. One would not now think of calling him a farmer, any more than one would think of calling him a doctor, or a lawyer, or a justice of the peace. No one would think now of calling him "Squire Summers," though he bore that name with no small credit many years ago. He is no longer known as hard-working, or able, or grasping, or rich, or wicked; he is just Old. Everything seems to have been stripped away from Uncle Richard except age.

How well I remember the first time Uncle Richard Summers impressed himself upon my mind. It was after the funeral of his old wife, now several years ago. I saw him standing at the open grave with his broad-brimmed felt hat held at his breast. His head was bowed and his thin, soft, white hair stirred in the warm breeze. I wondered at his quietude. After fifty years or more together his nearest companion and friend had gone, and he did not weep aloud. Afterward I was again impressed with the same fortitude or quietude. I saw him walking down the long drive to the main road with all the friends of our neighbourhood about him—and the trees rising full and calm on one side, and the still greenery of the cemetery stretching away on the other. Half-way down the drive he turned aside to the fence, and all unconscious of the halted procession he picked a handful of the large leaves of the wild grape.

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It was a hot day; he took off his hat, and put the cool leaves in the crown of it and rejoined the procession. It did not seem to me to be the mere forgetfulness of old age, nor yet callousness to his own great sorrow. It was rather an instinctive return to the immeasurable continuity of the trivial things of life—the trivial necessary things which so often carry us over the greatest tragedies.

I talked with the Scotch preacher afterward about the incident. He said that he, too, marvelling at the old man's calmness, had referred to it in his presence. Uncle Richard turned to him and said slowly :

“ I am an old man, and I have learned one thing. I have learned to accept life.”

Since that day I have seen Uncle Richard Summers many times walking on the country roads with his cane. He always looks around at me and slowly nods his head, but rarely says anything. At his age what is there to say that has not already been said ?

His trousers appear a size too large for him, his hat sets too far down, his hands are long and thin upon the head of his cane. But his face is tranquil. He has come a long way; there have been times of tempest and keen winds, there have been wild hills in his road, and rocky places, and threatening voices in the air. All that is past now : and his face is tranquil.

I think we younger people do not often realize how keenly dependent we are upon our contemporaries in age. We get little understanding and sympathy either above or below them. Much of the world is a little misty to us, a little out of focus. Uncle Richard Summers's contemporaries have nearly all gone—mostly long ago : one of the last, his old wife. At his home—I have been there often to see his son—he sits in a

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large rocking-chair with a cushion in it, and a comfortable high back to lean upon. No one else ventures to sit in his chair, even when he is not there. It is not far from the window; and when he sits down he can lean his cane against the wall where he can easily reach it again.

There is a turmoil of youth and life always about him; of fevered incomings and excited outgoings, of work and laughter and tears and joy and anger. He watches it all, for his mind is still clear, but he does not take sides. He accepts everything, refuses nothing; or, if you like, he refuses everything, accepts nothing.

He once owned the house where he now lives, with the great barns behind it, and the fertile acres spreading far on every hand. From his chair he can look out through a small window, and see the sun on the quiet fields. He once went out swiftly and strongly, he worked hotly, he came in wearied to sleep.

Now he lives in a small room—and that is more than is really necessary—and when he walks out he does not inquire who owns the land where he treads. He lets the hot world go by, and waits with patience the logic of events.

Often as I have passed him in the road, I have wondered, as I have been wondering to-day, how he must look out upon us all, upon our excited comings and goings, our immense concern over the immeasurably trivial. I have wondered, not without a pang, and a resolution, whether I shall ever reach the point where I can let this eager and fascinating world go by without taking toll of it!

*From "Adventures in Friendship"*

## PLACES OF RETIREMENT

Good God ! how sweet are all things here !  
How beautiful the fields appear !  
How cleanly do we feed and lie !  
Lord ! what good hours do we keep !  
How quietly we sleep !

CHARLES COTTON

*April 29th*

I HAVE been spending a Sunday of retirement in the woods. I came out with a strange, deep sense of depression, and though I knew it was myself and not the world that was sad, yet I could not put it away from me. . . . As I write, the wood seems full of voices, the little rustling of leaves, the minute sounds of twigs chafing together, the cry of frogs from the swamp so steady and monotonous that it scarcely arrests attention. Of odours, a-plenty! Just behind me, so that by turning my head I can see into their cool green depths, are a number of hemlock-trees, the breath of which is incalculably sweet. All the earth—the very earth itself—has a good rich growing odour, pleasant to smell.

These things have been here a thousand years—a million years—and yet they are not stale, but are ever fresh, ever serene, ever here to loosen one's crabbed spirit and make one quietly happy. It seems to me I could not live if it were not possible often to come thus alone to the woods.

. . . On later walking I discover that here and there on warm southern slopes the dog-tooth violet is really in bloom, and worlds of hepatica, both lavender and white, among the brown leaves. One of the

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notable sights of the hillsides at this time of the year is the striped maple, the long wands rising straight and chaste among thickets of less striking young birches and chestnuts, and having a bud of delicate pink—a marvel of minute beauty. A little trailing arbutus I found and renewed my joy with one of the most exquisite odours of all the spring. Solomon's seal thrusting up vivid green cornucopias from the lifeless earth, and often near a root or stone the red partridge-berries among their bright leaves. The laurel on the hills is sharply visible, especially when among deciduous trees, and along the old brown roads are patches of fresh wintergreen. In a cleft of the hills near the top of Norwottuck, though the day is warm, I found a huge snowbank—the last held trench of old winter, the last guerilla of the cold, driven to the fastnesses of the hills.

. . . I have enjoyed this day without trying. After the first hour or so of it all the worries dropped away, all the ambitions, all the twisted thoughts, and I have drifted about letting the spring flow through me.

It is strange how much thrilling joy there is in the discovery of the ages-old miracle of returning life in the woods: each green adventurer, each fragrant joy, each bird-call—and the feel of the soft, warm sunshine upon one's back after months of winter. On any terms life is good. The only woe, the only Great Woe, is the woe of never having been born. Sorrow, yes; failure, yes; weakness, yes; the sad loss of dear friends—yes! But oh, the good God: I still live!

Being alone without feeling alone is one of the great experiences of life, and he who practises it has acquired an infinitely valuable possession. People fly to crowds for happiness, not knowing that all the happiness they find there they must take with them. Thus they divert

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and distract that within them which creates power and joy, until by flying always away from themselves, seeking satisfaction from without rather than from within, they become infinitely boresome to themselves, so that they can scarcely bear a moment of their own society.

But if once a man have a taste of true and happy retirement, though it be but a short hour, or day, now and then, he has found, or is beginning to find, a sure place of refuge, of blessed renewal, toward which in the busiest hours he will find his thoughts wistfully stealing. How stoutly will he meet the buffets of the world if he knows he has such a place of retirement where all is well ordered and full of beauty, and right counsels prevail, and true things are noted.

As a man grows older, if he cultivate the art of retirement, not indeed as an end in itself, but as a means in developing a richer and freer life, he will find his reward growing surer and greater until in time none of the storms or shocks of life any longer disturb him. He might in time even reach the height attained by Diogenes, of whom Epictetus said, "It was not possible for any man to approach him, nor had any man the means of laying hold upon him to enslave him. He had everything easily loosed, everything only hanging to him. If you laid hold of his property, he would rather have let it go and be yours than he would have followed you for it; if you laid hold of his leg he would have let go his leg: if all of his body, all his poor body; his intimates, friends, country, just the same. For he knew from whence he had them, and from whom and on what conditions."

The best partners of solitude are books. I like to take a book with me in my pocket, although I find



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the world so full of interesting things—sights, sounds, odours—that often I never read a word in it. It is like having a valued friend with you, though you walk for miles without saying a word to him or he to you: but if you really know your friend, it is a curious thing how, subconsciously, you are aware of what he is thinking and feeling about this hillside or that distant view. And so it is with books. It is enough to have this writer in your pocket, for the very thought of him and what he would say to these old friends and pleasant trees is ever freshly delightful. And he never interrupts at inconvenient moments, nor intrudes his thoughts upon yours unless you desire it.

I do not want long books and least of all story-books in the woods—these are for the library—but rather scraps and extracts and condensations from which thoughts can be plucked like flowers and carried for a while in the buttonhole. So it is that I am fond of all kinds of anthologies. I have one entitled *Traveller's Joy*, another *Songs of Nature*, and I have lately found the best one I know, called *The Spirit of Man*, by Robert Bridges, the English Laureate. Other little books that fit well in the pocket on a tramp, because they are truly companionable, are Ben Jonson's *Timber*, one of the very best, and William Penn's *Fruits of Solitude*. An anthology of Elizabethan verse, given me by a friend, is also a rich companion.

It is not a discourse or a narrative we want as we walk abroad, but conversation. Neither do we want people or facts or stories, but a person. So I open one of these little books and read therein the thoughtful remark of a wise companion. This I may reply to, or merely enjoy, as I please. I am in no hurry, as I might be with a living companion, for my book friend,

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being long dead, is not impatient and gives me time to reply, and is not resentful if I make no reply at all. Submitted to such a test as this few writers, old or new, give continued profit or delight. To be considered in the presence of the great and simple things of nature, or worn long in the warm places of the spirit, a writer must have supreme qualities of sense or humour, a great sensitiveness to beauty, or a genuine love of goodness—but above all he must somehow give us the flavour of personality. He must be a true companion of the spirit.

There is an exercise given to young soldiers which consists in raising the hands slowly above the head, taking in a full breath at the same time, and then letting them down in such a way as to square the shoulders. This leaves the body erect, the head high, the eyes straight ahead, the lungs full of good air. It is the attitude that every man-at-arms should wish to take. After a day in the woods I feel some such erectness of spirit, a lift of the head, and a clearer and calmer vision, for I have raised up my hands to the heavens, and drawn in the odours and sights and sounds of the good earth.

One of the great joys of such times of retirement—perhaps the greatest of the joys—is the return, freshened and sweetened, to the common life. How good then appear the things of the garden and farm, the house and shop, that weariness had staled; how good the faces of friends.

*From "Great Possessions"*

## ON LIVING IN THE COUNTRY

Why risk with men your hard-won gold?  
Buy grain and sow—your Brother Dust  
Will pay you back a hundredfold—  
The earth commits no breach of trust.

*Hindu proverb, translated by*  
ARTHUR GUITERMAN

IT is astonishing how many people there are in cities and towns who have a secret longing to get back into quiet country places, to own a bit of the soil of the earth, and to cultivate it. To some it appears as a troublesome malady only in spring and will be relieved by a whirl or two in country roads, by a glimpse of the hills, or a day by the sea; but to others the homesickness is deeper seated and will be quieted by no hasty visits. These must actually go home.

I have had, in recent years, many letters from friends asking about life in the country, but the longer I remain here, the more I know about it, the less able I am to answer them—at least briefly. It is as though one should come and ask: “Is love worth trying?” or “How about religion?” For country life is to each human being a fresh, strange, original adventure. We enjoy it, or we do not enjoy it, or more probably we do both. It is packed and crowded with the zest of adventure, or it is dull and miserable. We may, if we are skilled enough, make our whole living from the land, or only a part of it, or we may find in a few cherished acres the inspiration and power for other work, whatever it may be. There is many a man whose strength is renewed like that of the wrestler of Irassa every time his feet touch the earth.

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Of all places in the world where life can be lived to its fullest and freest, where it can be met in its greatest variety and beauty, I am convinced that there is none to equal the open country, or the country town. For all country people in these days may have the city—some city or town not too far away; but there are millions of men and women in America who have no country and no sense of the country. What do they not lose out of life!

I know well the disadvantages charged against country life at its worst. At its worst there are long hours and much lonely labour and an income pitifully small. Drudgery, yes, especially for the women, and loneliness. But where is there not drudgery when men are poor—where life is at its worst? I have never seen drudgery in the country comparable for a moment to the dreary and lonely drudgery of the city tenements, city mills, factories, and sweat shops. And in recent years both the drudgery and loneliness of country life have been disappearing before the motor and trolley car, the telephone, the rural post, the gasolene engine. I have seen a machine plant as many potatoes in one day as a man, at hand work, could have planted in a week.

There are indeed a thousand nuisances and annoyances that men must meet who come face to face with nature itself. You have set out your upper acres to peach-trees: and the deer come down from the hills at night and strip the young foliage; or the field-mice in winter, working under the snow, girdle and kill them. The season brings too much rain and the potatoes rot in the ground, the crows steal the corn, the bees swarm when no one is watching, the cow smothers her calf, the hens' eggs prove infertile, and a storm in a day

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ravages a crop that has been growing all summer. A constant warfare with insects and blights and fungi—a real, bitter warfare, which can cease neither summer nor winter!

It is something to meet, year after year, the quiet implacability of the land. While it is patient, it never waits long for you. There is a chosen time for planting, a time for cultivating, a time for harvesting. You accept the gage thrown down—well and good, you shall have a chance to fight! You do not accept it? There is no complaint. The land cheerfully springs up to wild yellow mustard and dandelion and pigweed—and will be productive and beautiful in spite of you.

Nor can you enter upon the full satisfaction of cultivating even a small piece of land at second hand. To be accepted as One Who Belongs, there must be sweat and weariness.

The other day I was digging with Dick in a ditch that is to run down through the orchard and connect finally with the land drain we put in four years ago. We laid the tile just in the gravel below the silt, about two feet deep, covering the openings with tar paper and then throwing in gravel. It was a bright cool afternoon. In the field below a ploughman was at work: I could see the furrows of the dark earth glisten as he turned it over. The grass in the meadow was a full rich green, the new chickens were active in their yards, running to the cluck of the hens: already the leaves of the orchard trees showed green. And as I worked there with Dick I had the curious deep feeling of coming somehow into a new and more intimate possession of my own land. For titles do not really pass with signatures and red seals, nor with money changing from one hand to another, but for true possession one

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must work and serve according to the most ancient law. There is no mitigation and no haggling of price. Those who think they can win the greatest joys of country life on any easier terms are mistaken.

But if one has drained his land, and ploughed it, and fertilized it, and planted it and harvested it—even though it be only a few acres—how he comes to know and to love every rod of it. He knows the wet spots, and the stony spots, and the warmest and most fertile spots—until his acres have all the qualities of a personality, whose every characteristic he knows. It is so also that he comes to know his horses and cattle and pigs and hens. It is a fine thing, on a warm day in early spring, to bring out the beehives and let the bees have their first flight in the sunshine. What cleanly folk they are! And later to see them coming in yellow all over with pollen from the willows! It is a fine thing to watch the cherries and plum-trees come into blossom, with us about the first of May, while all the remainder of the orchard seems still sleeping. It is a fine thing to see the cattle turned for the first time in spring into the green meadows. It is a fine thing—one of the finest of all—to see and smell the rain in a cornfield after weeks of drought. How it comes softly out of grey skies, the first drops throwing up spatters of dust and losing themselves in the dry soil. Then the clouds sweep forward up the valley, darkening the meadows and blotting out the hills, and then there is the whispering of the rain as it first sweeps across the cornfield. At once what a stir of life! What rustling of the long green leaves. What joyful shaking and swaying of the tassels! And have you watched how eagerly the grooved leaves catch each early drop and, lest there be too little rain after all, conduct it jealously

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down the stalk where it will soonest reach the thirsty roots? What a fine thing is this to see!

One who thus takes part in the whole process of the year comes soon to have an indescribable affection for his land, his garden, his animals. There are thoughts of his in every tree: memories in every fence corner. Just now, the fourth of June, I walked down past my blackberry patch, now come gorgeously into full white bloom—and heavy with fragrance. I set out these plants with my own hands, I have fed them, cultivated them, mulched them, pruned them, staked them, and helped every year to pick the berries. How could they be otherwise than full of associations! They bear a fruit more beautiful than can be found in any catalogue: and stranger and wilder than in any learned botany-book!

Why, one who comes thus to love a bit of countryside may enjoy it all the year round. When he awakens in the middle of a long winter night he may send his mind out to the snowy fields—I've done it a thousand times!—and visit each part in turn, stroll through the orchard and pay his respects to each tree—in a small orchard one comes to know familiarly every tree as he knows his friends—stop at the strawberry bed, consider the grape trellises, feel himself opening the door of the warm, dark stable and listening to the welcoming whicker of his horses, or visiting his cows, his pigs, his sheep, his hens, or so many of them as he may have.

So much of the best in the world seems to have come fragrant out of fields, gardens, and hillsides. So many truths spoken by the Master Poet come to us exhaling the odours of the open country. His stories were so often of sowers, husbandmen, herdsmen: His similes and illustrations so often dealt with the common and

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familiar beauty of the fields. "Consider the lilies how they grow." It was on a hillside that He preached His greatest sermon, and when in the last agony He sought a place to meet His God, where did He go but to a garden? A carpenter, you say? Yes, but of this one may be sure: there were gardens and fields all about: He knew gardens, and cattle, and the simple processes of the land: He must have worked in a garden and loved it well.

A country life rather spoils one for the so-called luxuries. A farmer may indeed have a small cash income, but at least he eats at the first table. He may have the sweetest of the milk—there are thousands, perhaps millions of men and women in America who have never in their lives tasted really sweet milk—and the freshest of eggs, and the ripest of fruit. One does not know how good strawberries or raspberries are when picked before breakfast and eaten with the dew still on them. And while he must work and sweat for what he gets, he may have all these things in almost unmeasured abundance, and without a thought of what they cost. A man from the country is often made uncomfortable, upon visiting the city, to find two ears of sweet corn served for twenty or thirty cents, or a dish of raspberries at twenty-five or forty—and neither, even at their best, equal in quality to those he may have fresh from the garden every day. One need say this in no boastful spirit, but as a simple statement of the fact: for fruits sent to the city are nearly always picked before they are fully ripe—and lose that last perfection of flavour which the sun and the open air impart: and both fruits and vegetables, as well as milk and eggs, suffer more than most people think from handling and shipment. These things can be set down as one of the



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make-weights against the familiar presentation of the farmer's life as a hard one.

One of the greatest curses of mill or factory work, and with much city work of all kinds, is its interminable monotony: the same process repeated hour after hour and day after day. In the country there is indeed monotonous work, but rarely monotony. No task continues very long: everything changes infinitely with the seasons. Processes are not repetitive but creative. Nature hates monotony, is ever changing and restless: brings up a storm to drive the haymakers from their hurried work in the fields, sends rain to stop the ploughing, or a frost to hurry the apple harvest. Everything is full of adventure and vicissitude! A man who has been a farmer for two hours at the mowing must suddenly turn blacksmith when his machine breaks down and tinker with wrench and hammer; and later in the day he becomes dairyman, farrier, harness-maker, merchant. No kind of wheat but is grist to his mill, no knowledge that he cannot use! And who is freer to be a citizen than he: freer to take his part in town meeting and serve his state in some one of the innumerable small offices which form the solid blocks of organization beneath our commonwealth?

I thought last fall that corn-husking came as near being monotonous work as any I had ever done in the country. I presume in the cornfields of the West where the husking goes on for weeks at a time it probably does grow really monotonous. But I soon found that there was a curious counter-reward attending even a process as repetitive as this.

I remember one afternoon in particular. It was brisk and cool with ragged clouds like flung pennants in a poverty-stricken sky, and the hills were a hazy

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brown, rather sad to see, and in one of the apple-trees at the edge of the meadows the crows were holding their mournful autumn Parliament.

At such work as this one's mind often drops asleep, or at least goes dreaming, except for the narrow margin of awareness required for the simple process of the hands. Its orders have indeed been given: you must kneel here, pull aside the stalks one by one, rip down the husks and twist off the ear—and there is the pile for the stripped stalks, and here the basket for the gathered corn, and these processes infinitely repeated.

While all this is going on, the mind itself wanders off to its own sweet pastures, upon its own dear adventures—or rests or plays. It is in these times that most of the airy flying things of this beautiful world come home to us—things that heavy-footed reason never quite overtakes, nor stodgy knowledge ever knows. I think sometimes we thus intercept thoughts never intended for us at all, or uncover strange primitive memories of older times than these—racial memories.

At any rate the hours pass and suddenly the mind comes home again; it comes home from its wanderings refreshed, stimulated, happy. And nowhere, whether in cities, or travelling in trains, or sailing upon the sea, have I so often felt this curious enrichment as I have upon this hillside, working alone in field or garden or orchard. It seems to come up out of the soil, or respond to the touch of growing things.

What makes any work interesting is the fact that one can make experiments, try new things, develop specialities and *grow*. And where can he do this with such success as on the land—and in direct contact with nature? The possibilities are here infinite—new machinery, spraying, seed-testing, fertilizers,

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experimentation with new varieties—a thousand and one methods, all creative, which may be tried in that great essential struggle of the farmer or gardener to command all the forces of nature.

Because there are farmers, and many of them, who do not experiment and do not grow, but make their occupation a veritable black drudgery, this is no reason for painting a sombre-hued picture of country life. Any calling, the law, the ministry, the medical profession, can be blasted by fixing one's eyes only upon its ugliest aspects. And farming, at its best, has become a highly scientific, extraordinarily absorbing, and, when all is said, a profitable profession. Neighbours of mine have developed systems of overhead irrigation to make rain when there is no rain, and have covered whole fields with cloth canopies to increase the warmth and to protect the crops from wind and hail, and, by the analysis of the soil and exact methods of feeding it with fertilizers, have come as near a complete command of nature as any farmers in the world. What independent, resourceful men they are! And many of them have also grown rich in money. It is not what nature does with a man that matters but what he does with nature.

Nor is it necessary in these days for the farmer or the country-dweller to be uncultivated or uninterested in what are often called, with no very clear definition, the "finer things of life." Many educated men are now on the farms and have their books and magazines, and their music and lectures and dramas not too far off in the towns. A great change in this respect has come over American country life in twenty years. The real hardships of pioneering have passed away, and with good roads and machinery, and telephones, and news-

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papers every day by rural post, the farmer may maintain as close a touch with the best things the world has to offer to any man. And if he really have such broader interests the winter furnishes him time and leisure that no other class of people can command.

I do not know, truly, what we are here for upon this wonderful and beautiful earth, this incalculably interesting earth, unless it is to crowd into a few short years—when all is said, terribly short years!—every possible fine experience and adventure: unless it is to live our lives to the uttermost: unless it is to seize upon every fresh impression, develop every latent capacity: to grow as much as ever we have it in our power to grow. What else can there be? If there is no life beyond this one, we have lived *here* to the uttermost. We've had what we've had! But if there is more life, and still more life, beyond this one, and above and under this one, and around and through this one, we shall be well prepared for that, whatever it may be.

The real advantages of country life have come to be a strong lure to many people in towns and cities: but no one should attempt to 'go back to the land' with the idea that it is an easy way to escape the real problems and difficulties of life. The fact is, there is no escape. The problems and the difficulties must be boldly met whether in city or country. Farming in these days is not 'easy living,' but a highly skilled profession, requiring much knowledge, and actual manual labour and plenty of it. So many come to the country too light-heartedly, buy too much land, attempt unfamiliar crops, expect to hire the work done—and soon find themselves facing discouragement and failure. Any city man who would venture on this new way of life should try it first for a year or so before he commits himself—

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try himself out against the actual problems. Or, by moving to the country, still within reach of his accustomed work, he can have a garden or even small farm to experiment with. The shorter work-day has made this possible for a multitude of wage-workers, and I know many instances in which life because of this opportunity to get to the soil has become a very different and much finer thing for them.

A man who thus faces the problem squarely will soon see whether country life is the thing for him: if he finds it truly so, he can be as nearly assured of 'living happily ever after' as anyone outside of a story-book can ever be. Out of it all are likely to come some of the greatest rewards that men can know, a robust body, a healthy appetite, a serene and cheerful spirit!

And finally there is one advantage not so easy to express. Long ago I read a story of Tolstoi's called *The Candle*—how a peasant Russian forced to plough on Easter Day lighted a candle to his Lord and kept it burning on his plough as he worked through the sacred day. When I see a man ploughing in his fields I often think of Tolstoi's peasant, and wonder if this is not as true a way as any of worshipping God. I wonder if anyone truly worships God who sets about it with deliberation, or knows quite why he does it.

"My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as showers upon the grass."

*From "Great Possessions"*

## THE GREEN PEOPLE

I HAVE always had a fondness, when upon my travels about the world of the near-by woods and fields, for nipping a bit of twig here and there and tasting the tart or bitter quality of it. I suppose the instinct descends to me from the herbivorous side of my distant ancestry. I love a spray of white cedar, especially the spicy, sweet inside bark, or a pine-needle, or the tender, sweet, juicy end of a spike of timothy-grass drawn slowly from its close-fitting sheath, or a twig of the birch that tastes like wintergreen.

I think this is no strange or unusual instinct, for I have seen many other people doing it, especially farmers around here, who go through the fields nipping the new oats, testing the red-top, or chewing a bit of sassafras bark. I have in mind a clump of shrubbery in the town road, where an old house once stood, of the kind called here by some the 'sweet-scented shrub,' and the branches of it nearest the road are quite clipped and stunted from being nipped at by old ladies who pass that way and take to it like cats to catnip.

For a long time this was a wholly unorganized, indeed all but unconscious, pleasure, a true pattern of the childish way we take hold of the earth; but when I began to come newly alive to all things—as I have already related—I chanced upon this curious, undeveloped instinct.

"What is it I have here?" I asked myself, for I thought this might be a new handle for getting hold of nature.

Along one edge of my field is a natural hedge of

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wild cherry, young elms and ashes, dog-wood, black raspberry bushes, and the like, which has long been a pleasure to the eye, especially in the early morning when the shadows of it lie long and cool upon the meadow. Many times I have walked that way to admire it, or to listen for the catbirds that nest there, or to steal upon a certain grey squirrel who comes out from his home in the chestnut-tree on a fine morning to inspect his premises.

It occurred to me one day that I would make the acquaintance of this hedge in a new way; so I passed slowly along it where the branches of the trees brushed my shoulder and picked a twig here and there and bit it through. "This is cherry," I said; "this is elm, this is dog-wood." And it was a fine adventure to know old friends in new ways, for I had never thought before to test the trees and shrubs by their taste and smell. After that, whenever I passed that way, I closed my eyes and tried for further identifications by taste, and was soon able to tell quickly half a dozen other varieties of trees, shrubs, and smaller plants along that bit of meadow.

Presently, as one who learns to navigate still water near shore longs for more thrilling voyages, I tried the grassy old roads in the woods, where young trees and other growths were to be found in great variety: and had a joy of it I cannot describe, for old and familiar places were thus made new and wonderful to me. And when I think of those places, now, say in winter, I grasp them more vividly and strongly than ever I did before, for I think not only how they look, but how they taste and smell, and I even know many of the growing things by the touch of them. It is certain that our grasp of life is in direct proportion to the variety

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and warmth of the ways in which we lay hold of it. No thought—no beauty and no joy.

On these excursions I have often reflected that if I were blind, I should still find here unexplored joys of life, and should make it a point to know all the friendly trees and shrubs around about by the taste or smell or touch of them. I think seriously that this method of widening the world of the blind, and increasing their narrower joys, might well be developed, though it would be wise for such as do take it to borrow first the eyes of a friend to see that no poison ivy, which certain rascally birds plant along our fences and hedges, is lurking about.

Save for this precaution I know of nothing that will injure the taster, though he must be prepared, here and there, for shocks and thrills of bitterness. A lilac leaf, for example, and to scarcely lesser degree the willow and poplar, are, when bitten through, of a penetrating and intense bitterness; but do no harm, and will daunt no one who is really adventurous. There is yet to be written a botany, or, better yet, a book of nature, for the blind.

It is by knowing human beings that we come to understand them, and by understanding them come to love them, and so it is with the green people. When I was a boy in the wild north country, trees were enemies to be ruthlessly fought—to be cut down, sawed, split, burned—anything to be rid of them. The ideal in making a home place was to push the forest as far away from it as possible. But now, when I go to the woods, it is like going among old and treasured friends, and with riper acquaintance the trees come to take on, curiously, a kind of personality, so that I am much fonder of some trees than of others, and instinctively



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seek out the companionship of certain trees in certain moods, as one will his friends.

I love the unfolding beeches in spring, and the pines in winter; the elms I care for afar off, like great aloof men, whom I can admire; but for friendly confidences give me an apple-tree in an old green meadow.

In this more complete understanding I have been much aided by getting hold of my friends of the hedges and hills in the new ways I have described. At times I even feel that I have become a fully accepted member of the Fraternity of the Living Earth, for I have already received many of the benefits which go with that association; and I know now for a certainty that it makes no objection to its members because they are old, or sad, or have sinned, but welcomes them all alike.

The essential taste of the cherry and peach and all their numerous relatives is, in variation, that of the peach pip, so that the whole tribe may be easily recognized, though it was some time before I could tell with certainty the peach from the cherry. The oak shoot, when chewed a little, tastes exactly like the smell of new oak lumber; the maple has a peculiar taste and smell of its own that I can find no comparison for, and the poplar is one of the bitterest trees that ever I have tasted. The evergreen trees—pines, spruces, hemlocks, balsams, cedars—are to me about the pleasantest of all, both in taste and odour, and though the spruces and pines taste and smell much alike at first, one soon learns to distinguish them. The elm has a rather agreeable, nondescript, bitterish taste, but the linden is gummy and of a mediocre quality, like the tree itself, which I dislike. Some of the sweetest flowering shrubs, such as the lilac, have the bitterest of leaves and twigs, or, like certain kinds of clematis, have a seed that when

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green is sharper than cayenne pepper, while others, like the rose, are pleasanter in flavour. The ash-tree is not too bitter and a little sour.

I give here only a few of the commoner examples, for I wish to make this no tedious catalogue of the flavours of the green people. I am not a scientist, nor would wish to be taken for one. Only last winter I had my pretensions sadly shocked when I tasted twigs cut from various trees and shrubs and tried to identify them by taste or smell, and while it was a pleasing experiment I found I could not certainly place above half of them; partly, no doubt, because many growing things keep their flavours well wrapped up in winter. No, I have not gone far upon this pleasant road, but neither am I in any great hurry; for there yet remains much time in this and my future lives to conquer the secrets of the earth. I plan to devote at least one entire life to science, and may find I need several!

One great reason why the sense of taste and the sense of smell have not the same honour as the sense of sight or of hearing is that no way has yet been found to make a true art of either. For sight, we have painting, sculpturing, photography, architecture, and the like; and for hearing, music; and for both, poetry and the drama. But the other senses are more purely personal, and have not only been little studied or thought about but are the ones least developed, and most dimmed and clogged by the customs of our lives.

For the sense of smell we have, indeed, the perfumer's art, but a poor rudimentary art it is, giving little freedom for the artist who would draw his inspirations freshly from nature. I can, indeed, describe poorly in words the odours of this June morning—the mingled lilacs, late wild cherries, new-broken soil, and the

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fragrance of the sun on green verdure, for there are here both lyrical and symphonic odours—but how inadequate it is! I can tell you what I feel and smell and taste, and give you, perhaps, a desire another spring to spend the months of May and June in the country, but I can scarcely make you live again the very moment of life I have lived, which is the magic quality of the best art. The art of the perfumer, which, like all crude art, thrives upon blatancy, does not make us go to gardens, or love the rose, but often instils in us a kind of artificiality, so that perfumes, so far from being an inspiration to us, increasing our lives, become often the badge of the abnormal, used by those unsatisfied with simple, clean, natural things.

And as a people deficient in musical art delights in ragtime tunes, so a people deficient in the true art of tasting and smelling delights in ragtime odours and ragtime tastes.

I do not know that the three so-called lesser senses will ever be organized to the point where they are served by well-established arts, but this I do know—that there are three great ways of entering upon a better understanding of this magic earth which are now neglected.

I think we have come upon hasty and heated days, and are too much mastered by the god of hurry and the swift and greedy eye. We accept flashing pictures of life for life itself; we rush here and rush there and, having arrived, rush away again—to what sensible purpose? Be still a little! Be still!

I do not mean by stillness stagnation, nor yet lazy contentment, but life more deeply thought about, more intensely realized, an activity so concentrated that it is quiet. Be still, then!

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So it is that, though I am no worshipper of the old, I think the older gardeners had in some ways a better practice of the art than we have, for they planted not for the eye alone but for the nose and the sense of taste and even, in growing such plants as the lamb's tongue, to gratify, curiously, the sense of touch. They loved the scented herbs, and appropriately called them simples. Some of these old simples I am greatly fond of, and like to snip a leaf as I go by to smell or taste; but many of them, I here confess, have for me a rank and culinary odour—as sage and thyme and that bold strumpet of the garden, the scarlet monarda, sometimes called bergamot.

But if their actual fragrance is not always pleasing, and their uses are now grown obscure, I love well the names of many of them—whether from ancient association or because the words themselves fall pleasantly upon the ear, as, for example, sweet marjoram and dill, anise and summer savoury, lavender and sweet basil. Coriander! Caraway! Cumin! And “there's rosemary, that's for remembrance; pray, love, remember . . . there's fennel for you, and columbines: there's rue for you: and here's some for me——” All sweet names that one loves to roll under his tongue.

I have not any great number of these herbs in my own garden, but, when I go among those I do have, I like to call them by their familiar names as I would a dignified doctor or professor, if ever I knew him well enough.

It is in this want of balance and quietude that the age fails most. We are all for action, not at all for reflection; we think there are easy ways to knowledge and short cuts to perfection; we are for laws rather than for life.

And this reminds me inevitably of a mellow-spirited

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old friend who lives not a thousand miles from here—I must not tell his name—whose greatest word is ‘proportion.’ At this moment, as I write, I can hear the roll of his resonant old voice on the syllable ‘p-o-r’—‘prop-o-rtion.’ He is the kind of man good to know and to trust.

If ever I bring him a hard problem, as, indeed, I delight to do, it is a fine thing to see him square himself to meet it. A light comes in his eye, he draws back his chin a little and exclaims occasionally: “Well-well!”

He will have the facts and circumstances fully mobilized, standing up side by side before him like an awkward squad, and there’s nothing more awkward than some facts that have to stand out squarely in daylight! And he inquires into their ancestry, makes them run out their tongues, and pokes them once or twice in the ribs, to make sure that they are lively and robust facts capable of making a good fight for their lives. He never likes to see any one thing too large, as a church, a party, a reform, a new book, or a new fashion, lest he see something else too small; but will have everything, as he says, in true proportion. If he occasionally favours a little that which is old, solid, well placed, it is scarcely to be measured to him as a fault in an age so overwhelmed with the shiny new.

He is a fine, up-standing, hearty old gentleman with white hair and rosy cheeks, and the bright eyes of one who has lived all his life with temperance. One incident I cannot resist telling, though it has nothing directly to do with this story, but it will let you know what kind of a man my old friend is, and, when all is said, it would be a fine thing to know about any man. Not long ago he was afflicted with a serious loss, a loss that would have crushed some men, but when I met

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him not long afterward, though the lines around his eyes were grown deeper, he greeted me in his old serene, courtly manner. When I would have comforted him with my sympathy, for I felt myself near enough to speak of his loss, he replied calmly:

“How can we know whether a thing is evil until we reach the end of it? It may be good!”

One of the events I esteem among the finest of the whole year is my old friend's birthday party. Every winter, on the twenty-sixth of February, a party of his friends drop in to see him. Some of us go out of habit, drawn by our affection for the old gentleman; others, I think, he invites, for he knows to perfection the delicate shadings of companionship which divide those who come unbidden from those, not less loved but shyer, who must be summoned.

Now this birthday gathering has one historic ceremony which none of us would miss, because it expresses so completely the essence of our friend's generous and tolerant, but just, nature. He is, as I have said, a temperate man, and dislikes as much as anyone I know the whole alcohol business; but living in a community where the struggle for temperance has often been waged intemperately, and where there is a lurking belief that cudgelling laws can make men virtuous, he publishes abroad once a year his declaration of independence.

After we have been with our friend for an hour or so, and are well warmed and happy with the occasion, he rises solemnly and goes to the toby-closet at the end of his generous fireplace, where the apple-log, specially cut for the occasion, is burning merrily, and as we all fall silent, knowing well what is coming, he unlocks the door and takes from the shelf a bottle of old peach brandy which, having uncorked, he gravely smells of

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it and possibly lets his nearest neighbour smell of it, too. Then he brings from the sideboard a server set with diminutive glasses that have been polished until they shine, for the great occasion, and, having filled them all with the ripe liquor, he passes them around to each of us. We have all risen and are becomingly solemn as he now proposes the toast of the year—and it is always the same toast:

“Here’s to moderation—in all things!”

He takes a sip or two, and continues:

“Here’s to temperance—the queen of the virtues.”

So we all drink off our glasses. Our mellow old friend smacks his lips, corks the tall bottle, and returns it to his toby-closet, where it reposes undisturbed for another year.

“And now, gentlemen,” he says heartily, “let us go in to dinner. . . .”

As I think of it, now that it is written, this story bears no very close relationship to my original subject, and yet it seemed to follow naturally enough as I set it down, and to belong with the simple and well-flavoured things of the garden and fields; and recalling the advice of Cobbett to his nephew on the art of writing, “never to alter a thought, for that which has come of itself into your mind is likely to pass into that of another more readily and with more effect than anything which you can by reflection invent,” I leave it here just as I wrote it, hoping that the kinship of my genial old friend with simple and natural and temperate things may plainly appear.

*From “Great Possessions”*

## WE BEGIN THE SUBJUGATION OF NORT

HERE is a curious and interesting thing often to be noted by any man who looks around him, that we human creatures are all made up into uneven and restless bundles—family bundles, church bundles, political-party bundles, and a thousand amusing kinds of business bundles. It will also be observed that a very large part of us, nearly all of us who are old and most of us who are women, are struggling as hard as ever we can (and without a bit of humour) to hold our small bundles together, while others are struggling with equal ferocity to burst out of their bundles and make new ones. And so on endlessly!

If you see any one particular specimen in any one particular bundle who is making himself obnoxious by wriggling and squirming and twisting with an utter disregard for the sensibilities of the bundle-binders, you may conclude that he is affected by the most mysterious influence or power, or malady—whatever you care to call it—with which we small human beings have to grapple. I mean that he is growing. When you come to think of it, the most incalculable power in the life of men is the power of growth. If you could tell when any given human being was through growing, you could tell what to do with him; but you never can. Some men are ripe at twenty-five, and some are still adding power and knowledge at eighty. It is not inheritance, nor environment, nor wealth, nor position, that measures the difference between human beings, but rather the



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mysterious faculty of continued growth which resides within them. It is growth that causes the tragedies of this world—and the comedies—and the sheer beauty of life. Here are a husband and wife bound together in the commonest of bundles: one stops growing, the other keeps on growing; consult almost any play, novel, poem, newspaper, or scandalous gossip, for the results. Consider the restless bundle of nations called Europe, one of which recently began to grow tremendously, began to squirm about in the bundle, began to demand room and air. What an almighty pother this has caused! What an altogether serious business for the bundle-binders!

These observations may seem to lead entirely around the celebrated barn of Robin Hood, but if you follow them patiently you will find that they bring you back at last (by way of Europe) to the dilapidated door of the quiet old printing-office of the *Star* of Hempfield. If you venture inside you will discover, besides a cat and a canary, one of the most interesting bundles of human beings I know anything about.

And one specimen in this bundle, as you may already suspect, had developed a prodigious power of squirming and wriggling, and otherwise making the bundle-binders of the *Star* uncomfortable. I refer to Norton Carr.

The world, of course, is in a secret conspiracy against youth and growth. Any man who dares to be young, or to grow, or to be original, must expect to have the world set upon him and pound him unmercifully—and if that doesn't finish him off, then the world clings desperately to his coat tails, resolved that if it cannot stop him entirely it will at least go along with him and make travelling as difficult as possible. This

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latter process is what a friend of mine illuminatively calls the "drag of Mediocrity."

But this punching and pounding is mostly good for youth and originality—good if it doesn't kill—for it proves the strength of youth, tests faith and enthusiasm, and measures surely the power of originality. And as for the provoking drag upon their coat tails, youth and originality should reflect that this is the only way by which mediocrity ever gets ahead!

As I look back upon the history of the *Star* it seems to me it is a record of Nort's wild plunges within our bundle, and our equally wild efforts to keep him disciplined. I say "our" efforts, but I would, of course, except Ed Smith. Ed had a narrow vision of what that bundle called the *Star* should be. He wanted it no larger than he was, so that he could dominate it comfortably, and when Nort became obstreperous, he simply cut the familiar cord which bound Nort into the bundle: to wit, his wages. Ed had the very common idea that the only really important relationships between human beings are determined by monetary payments, which can be put on or put off at will. But the fact is that we are bound together in a thousand ways not set down in the books on scientific management. For example, if that rascal of a Norton Carr had not been so interesting to us all, had not so worked his way into the hearts of us, I should never have gone hurrying after him (at Anthy's suggestion) on that November day. And it might—who knows?—have been better in dollars and cents for the *Star*, if I had *not* hurried. No, as an old friend of mine in Hempfield, Howieson, the shoemaker (a wise man), often remarks: "They say business is business. Well, I say business *ain't* business if it's *all* business." Business grows not as it eliminates

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talent or youth, however prickly or irritating to work with, but by making itself big enough to use all kinds of human beings.

I recall yet the strange thrill I had when I left the printing-office that day to search for Nort. It had given me an indescribable pleasure to have Anthy ask me to help (her "we" lingered long in my thoughts—lingers still), and I had, moreover, the feeling that it depended somewhat on me to help bind together the now fiercely antagonistic elements of the *Star*.

It may appear absurd to some who think that only those things are great which are big and noisy, that anything so apparently unimportant should stir a man as these events stirred me; but the longer I live the more doubtful I am of the distinction between the times and the things upon which the world places the tags "Important" and "Unimportant."

As I set forth I remember how very beautiful the streets of Hempfield looked to me.

"Have you seen Norton Carr?" I asked here, and, "Have you seen Norton Carr?" I asked there—tracing him from lair to lair, and friend to friend, and thus found myself tramping out along the lower road that leads toward the west and the river. He had sent a telegram, I found in the course of my inquiry, which added a dash of mystery to my quest and stirred in me a curious sense of anxiety.

The very feeling of that dull day, etched deep in my memory by the acid of emotion, comes vividly back to me. There had been no snow, and the fields were brown and bare—dead trees, dead hedges of hazel and cherry, crows flying heavily overhead with melancholy cries, and upon the hills beyond the river dull clouds hanging like widows' weeds: a brooding day.

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At every turn I looked for Nort and, thus looking, came to the bridge. It was the same spot, the same bridge where some years before, the Scotch preacher and I, driving late one evening, looked anxiously for the girl Anna. I can see her yet, wading there in the dark water, her skirts all floating about her, hugging her child to her breast and crying piteously, "I don't dare, oh, I don't dare, but I must, I must!" Of all that I have told elsewhere.

I stopped a moment and looked down into the water where it reflected the dark mood of the day, and then turned along the road that runs between the alders of the river edge and the beeches and oaks of the hill. It was the way Nort and I had taken more than once, talking great talk. I thought I might find him there.

And there indeed I did find him—and know how some old chivalric knight must have felt when at last he overtook the quarry which was to be the guerdon of his lady.

"I shall take him back a captive," I said to myself.

Nort was sitting under a beech-tree, looking out upon the cold river. A veritable picture of desolation! He was whistling in a low monotone, a way he had. Poor Nort! Life had opened the door of ambition for him, just a crack, and he had caught glimpses of the glory within, only to have the door slammed in his face. If he had walked upon cerulean heights on Sunday he was grovelling in the depths on Monday. It was all as plain to me as I approached him as if it had been written in a book.

"Hello, Nort," said I.

He started from his place and looked around at me.

"Hello, David," said he carelessly. "What brings you here?"

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"You do," said I.

"I do!"

"Yes, I'm about to take you back to Hempfield. The *Star* finds difficulty in twinkling without you."

I told him what Anthy had said, and of what I felt to be a new effort to control the policies of the *Star*. But Nort slowly shook his head.

"No, David. This is the end. I have finished with Hempfield."

I wish I could convey the air of resigned determination that was in his words; also the cynicism. Pooh! If Hempfield didn't want him, Hempfield could go hang. He was at the age when he thought he could get away from life. He had not learned that the only way to get on with life is not to get out of it, but to get into it.

He told me that he had wired for money to go home; he drew his brows down in a hard scowl and stared out over the river.

"I've stopped fooling with life," said he tragically.

I could have laughed at him, and yet, somehow, I loved him. It was a great moment in his life. I sat down by him under the beech.

"I'm going to be free," said Nort. "I'm going to do things yet in this world."

"Free of what, Nort?" I asked.

"Ed Smith—for one thing."

"Have you thought that wherever you go you will be meeting Ed Smiths?"

He did not reply.

"I'm sorry," I said, "that you've surrendered."

"Surrendered?" He winced as though I had cut him.

"Yes, surrendered. Haven't you sent for money?"

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Haven't you given up? Aren't you trying to run away?"

Nort jumped from his place.

"No!" he shouted. "Ed Smith discharged me. I would rather cut off my right hand than work in the same county with him again."

"So you have balked at the first hurdle—and are going to run away!"

I have thought often since then of that perilous moment, of how much in Nort's future life turned upon it.

Nort's eyes, usually so blue and smiling, grew as black as night.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean just what I said"—I looked him in the eye—"you are running away before the battle begins."

For a moment I thought I had lost him, and my heart began to sink within me, and then—it was beautiful—he stepped impulsively toward me:

"Well, what do you think I should do, anyway?"

"Nort," I said, "only yesterday you were enthusiastic over the idea of getting the truth about Hempfield, of publishing a really great country newspaper."

"What an ass I was!"

"Wrong!" I said.

"David," he cut in petulantly, "I don't get what you mean."

"I'll tell you, Nort: the greatest joy in this world to a man like you is the joy of new ideas, of wonderful plans. Now, isn't it?"

"Yes. I certainly thought for a few days last week that I had found the pot at the end of the rainbow."

"It was only the rainbow, Nort: if you want the pot you've got to dig for it."

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“What do you mean?”

“You think that you can stop with enthusiastic dreams and vast ideas. But no vision and no idea is worth a copper cent unless it is brought down to earth, patiently harnessed, painfully trained, and set to work. There is a beautiful analogy that comes often to my mind. We conceive an idea, as a child is conceived, in a transport of joy; but after that there are long months of growth in the close dark warmth of the soul, to which every part of one's personality must contribute, and then there is the painful hour of travail when at last the idea is given to the world. It is a process that cannot be hurried nor borne without suffering. And the punishment of those who stop with the joy of conception, thinking they can skim the delight of life and avoid its pain, is the same in the intellectual and spiritual spheres as it is in the physical—barrenness, Nort, and finally a terrible sense of failure and loneliness.”

I said it with all my soul, as I believe it. When I stopped, Nort did not at once respond, but stood looking off across the river, winding a twig of alder about his finger. Suddenly he looked around at me, smiling:

“I'm every kind of a fool there is, David.”

I confess it, my heart gave a bound of triumph. And it seemed to me at that moment that I loved Nort like a son, the son I have never had. I could not help slipping my arm through his, and thus we walked slowly together down the road.

“But Ed Smith——” he expostulated presently.

“Nort,” I said, “you aren't the only person in this world, although you are inclined to think so. There are Ed Smiths everywhere—and old Captains and David Graysons—and you may travel where you like and you'll find just about such people as you find at Hemp-

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field, and they'll treat you just about as you deserve. Ed Smith is the test of you, Nort, and of your enthusiasms. You've got to reconcile your ideas with corned beef and cabbage, Nort, for corned beef and cabbage *is*."

I have been ashamed sometimes since when I think how vaingloriously I preached to Nort that day (after having got him down), for I have never believed much in preaching. It usually grows so serious that I want to laugh—but I could not have helped it that November afternoon.

I see two men, just at evening of a dull day, walking slowly along the road toward Hempfield, two grey figures, half indistinguishable against the barren hillsides. All about them the dead fields and the hedges, and above them the wintry grey of the sky, and crows lifting and calling. Knowing well what is in the hot hearts of those two men—the visions, the love, the pain, the hope, yes, and the evil—I swear I shall never again think of any life as common or unclean. I shall never look to the exceptional events of life for the truth of life.

The two men I see are friend and friend, very near together, father and son almost; and you would scarcely think it, but if you look closely and with that Eye which is within the eye you will see that they have just been called to the colours and are going forth to the Great War. You will catch the glint on the scabbards of the swords they carry; you will see the look of courage on the face of the young recruit, and the look, too, on the face of the old reservist. In the distance they see the fortress of Hempfield with its redoubts and entanglements. They are setting forth to take Hempfield, at any cost—their Captain commands it.



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Near the town of Hempfield, as you approach it from the west, the road skirts a little hill. As we drew nearer I saw some one walking upon the road. A woman. She was stepping forth firmly, her figure cut in strong and simple lines against the sky, her head thrown back, showing the clear contour of her throat and the firm chin. A light scarf, caught in the wind, floated behind. Suddenly I felt Nort seize my arm, and exclaim in a low, tense voice:

“Anthy!”

I thought his hand trembled a little, but it may have been my own arm. I remember hearing our steps ring cold on the iron earth, and I had a strange sense of the high things of life.

She had not seen us. She was walking with one hand lifted to her breast, the fingers just touching her dress, in a way she sometimes had. I shall not forget the swift, half-startled glance from her dark and glowing eyes when she saw us, nor the smile which suddenly lighted her face.

I suppose all of us were charged at that moment with a high voltage of emotion. I know that Anthy, walking thus with her hand raised, was deep in the troubled problems of the *Star*. I know well what was in the heart of Nort, and I know the vain thoughts I was thinking; and yet we three stood there in the grey of the evening looking at one another and exchanging at first only a few commonplace words.

Presently Anthy turned to Nort with the direct way she had, and said to him lightly, smiling a little:

“I hope you will not desert the *Star*. We must make it go—all of us together.”

Nort said not a word, but looked Anthy in the eyes. When we moved onward again, however, his mood

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seemed utterly changed. He walked quickly and began to talk volubly. Jiminy! If they'd let themselves go! Greatest opportunity in New England! National reputation—I could scarcely believe that this was the same Nort I had found only an hour before moping by the river.

As we came into Hempfield the lights had begun to come out in the houses; a belated farmer in his lumber wagon rattled down the street. Men were going into the post office, for it was the hour of the evening mail; we had a whiff, at the corner, of the good common odour of cooking supper. So we stopped at the gate of the printing-office, and looked at each other, and felt abashed, did not know quite what to say, and were about to part awkwardly without saying anything when Nort seized me suddenly by the arm and rushed me into the office.

“Hello, Fergus!” he shouted as we came in at the door.

Fergus stood looking at him impassively, saying nothing at all. He had compromised himself once before that day by giving way to his emotions, and did not propose to be stampeded a second time.

But the old Captain had no such compunctions, and almost fell on Nort's neck.

“The prodigal is returned,” he declared. “Nort, my boy, I want to read you my editorial on Theodore Roosevelt.”

Just at this moment Ed Smith came in. I wondered and trembled at what might happen, but Nort was in his grandest mood.

“Hello, Ed!” he remarked carelessly. “Say, I've thought of an idea for making Tole, the druggist, advertise in the *Star*.”

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"You have?" responded Ed in a reasonably natural voice.

Thus we were rebundled, at least temporarily. I think of these events as a sort of diplomatic prelude for the real war which was to follow. I was the diplomat who lured Nort back to us with fine words, but old General Fergus was waiting there grimly at the cases, in full preparedness, to play his part. For this was not the final struggle, not the most necessary for Nort. That was reserved for a simpler man than I am: that was left for Fergus.

*From "Hempfield"*

## NORT SNIFFS

I HAD thought the life in the office of the *Star* exciting enough before the explosion which resulted in the discharge of Norton Carr, as indeed it was, but it was really not to be compared with that which followed. No sooner had Nort returned than his spirits again began to soar. He felt that he now had Anthy's influence strongly behind him, and that, no matter what happened, Ed Smith could not interfere with him. Ed himself accepted the situation as gracefully as he could, and comforted himself with the reflection that Nort was, after all, receiving no more wages than before.

Nort had at least one clear characteristic that must belong to genius—he dared let himself go. He had supreme confidence in himself. Most men when they spread their wings and sail off into the blue empyrean more than half expect to fall, but Nort never cast his eye downward nor doubted the strength of his wings.

I have only to close my eyes to see him, his whole slim, strong body suddenly stiffening, quivering under the impact of an idea—a “great idea” it always was with him—his eyes suddenly growing dark with excitement, his legs nervously bestirring themselves to carry him up and down the room while he thrust one hand through his hair and with the other emphasized the torrent of exclamations which poured out of him. At these moments he was one of the most beautiful human beings that ever I have seen. And in the midst of his wild enthusiasms he was as likely as not, at any moment, to see some absurd or humorous angle of the

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subject he was talking about, and to burst suddenly into laughter, laughter at himself and at us for listening soberly to him. He never let us laugh first!

One of his early suggestions after he came back was the autobiography of the old Captain, of which I have already spoken. He knew it would be a success, as indeed it was, a very great success; but it was only one of a hundred things which Nort suggested during that winter.

"Say, Ed," he said one day, "why can't we get a new turn on our advertisements, make 'em interesting!"

Ed looked at him incredulously. "What do you mean?"

Ed considered himself a past master in the art of getting, writing, and composing advertisements, and he rather resented Nort's suggestion.

"Why," said Nort, "look at 'em! They're all just alike, and nobody cares to read 'em: 'respectfully informs,' 'most reasonable terms,' 'solicits continuance'!"

Nort spread open the paper with growing glee. Anthy was already laughing.

"And look here," he snorted, "'guarantees satisfaction,' 'large and elegant assortment,' 'lowest prices.'"

"Well," said Ed, "what would you have? They pay their good money for these ads. It shows that they're satisfied."

"No," said Nort, "it only shows that they don't know any better."

He walked quickly down the room and back again, all our eyes upon him.

"I'll tell you what! Let's publish the picture of every business man who advertises with us right in the middle of his advertisement, and then invite our readers

## NORT SNIFFS

to watch for the 'Hempfield Gallery of Business Success.' "

To this Ed had a thousand objections, and the old Captain, much as he liked Nort, frowned upon it, and even Fergus scowled; but Anthy said:

"Let's see what can be done."

So Nort confidently sallied forth, and went first to John G. Graham, groceryman, whose advertisements had been a feature of the *Star* for twenty years, and who always renewed his agreement with the observation that "he s'posed he'd have to, but he never seen the good it was to him." He was a large man, as flaccid as a bag of meal, with a rather serious countenance, hair smoothly roached back, and a big grey moustache. He was one of the select men of the town, and secretly not a little vain of his position and of his success.

"Your store is one of the best-smelling places in this town," said Nort. "I always stop when I go by to take a sniff of it. I should think it would make people who come in here want to buy."

He began to sniff, turning his head first this way and then that. To Mr Graham this was a novel and interesting suggestion, and in a moment's time he also began sniffing in a solemn and dignified way.

"It does smell good," he admitted. "Never thought of it before."

This was the opening that Nort wanted. He began explaining, with an air of repressed enthusiasm which conveyed a wonderful conviction of the importance of what he was saying, the new plans of the *Star*. He quite took Mr Graham into his confidence.

"We're now going to get the business men of Hempfield talked about, Mr Graham," said Nort, bringing down his fist upon the top of a cracker box. "We're

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going to make people trade here instead of sending away for their groceries!"

This was an important point with Mr Graham. If there was one thing he hated above any other it was the invasion of Hempfield by the mail-order houses. So he turned his head to one side, frowning a little, and listened to Nort.

"Trouble is," said Nort, "your ad isn't interesting. Same thing you've had for ten years, and people have got so used to seeing it they don't read it any more. Now those fellows out in Chicago are succeeding because they know how to advertise. If you keep up with them, you've got to change your methods. Bring your advertising up to date! I say, let's *make* the people read what the business people of Hempfield have got to say to them."

Mr Graham frowned still more deeply, wondering what all this meant and at just what point Nort would ask him to pay something. Mr Graham was cynically sure that it would all boil down sooner or later to a question of money, and he had not lived an entire lifetime in Hempfield without being equally sure that no one would get a dime out of him without earning every last cent of it.

Nort tore a sheet of wrapping paper from the roll and put it on the counter.

"See here now: This is how I'd do it—just for a suggestion." And he began to write on the paper:

Some of the Good Things one may smell  
upon stepping into

JOHN G. GRAHAM'S STORE

Delicious Coffee from Brazil

Molasses from New Orleans

Spices from Araby.

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"What's Araby?" asked Mr Graham. "My spices are all from Boston."

"Araby," said Nort, "is where they grow 'em."

"Oh!" said Mr Graham.

Cookies from Buffalo  
Fragrant New Cheese.

"What else is it that smells?" asked Nort, lifting up his nose and sniffing discriminatively.

Mr Graham also lifted up his nose and sniffed, and then, looking at Nort, solemnly remarked:

"Kerosene and codfish."

"Wouldn't make the list *too* long, would you, Mr Graham?"

"S'pose not, s'pose not," said Mr Graham.

When you come into our Store  
SNIFF—then BUY.  
Our Prices are the Lowest.

"How's that, now?" exclaimed Nort, stepping back and observing his work with delight. "Try that experiment, Mr Graham, and then watch the people as they come into the store. Just watch 'em. They will all be sniffing like pointer dogs! You'll *know* then that they have read your advertisement."

A smile broke gradually over Mr Graham's countenance. Nort's picture touched his slow imagination, and he could actually see old Mrs Dexter coming in with her basket, sniffing like a pointer dog. Nort had given him something brand-new in a humdrum world—and funny. In the country there is always such a consuming and ungratified need of something to laugh at. Anyone who can make the country laugh can have his way with it.

Nort saw that he was winning, and pursued his



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advantage closely. He explained with perfect assurance his plan of publishing what he called the "Hempfield Gallery of Business Success," a portrait with each advertisement; and, having already opened Mr Graham's imagination just a crack, was able now to enter with his larger plans. Having got a tentative promise to try this extraordinary innovation, and innovations were like earthquakes in Hempfield, Nort rushed over to see Mr Tole, the druggist, and, using Mr Graham as an opening wedge, got Mr Tole to the point of saying, "I'll see." Then he went into Henderson's dry-goods store and, using the promises of both Mr Graham and Mr Tole, worked Mr Henderson into what might be called a state of reluctant preparedness. Every time he got a new man he went back to all the others with the news, until they began to think themselves a part of the conspiracy—and Mr Graham afterwards considered himself the real originator of this daring scheme for the uplift of Hempfield.

From the way Nort worked at this scheme, coming back after each assault to tell us with glee of his experiences, one would have thought he was having the time of his life, as, indeed, he was. It was still a great joke to him; and yet I saw his eyes often turn toward Anthy, eagerly seeking her approval. And Anthy would sit very quiet in her chair, looking at Nort with level eyes, smiling just a little, and once or twice after he had turned away I saw that she still kept her eyes upon him with a curious, questioning, wistful look. Fergus saw it, too, always watching silently from the cases.

Well, we launched the "Hempfield Gallery" with tremendous effect. Nort had not only increased the number of advertisements but had actually succeeded

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in getting all the advertisers to pay for making the cuts of themselves. It was really very effective: and Ed, now that the plan was launched, was able to sell many extra copies of the paper. As for Nort, that irrepressible young rascal was in the highest of spirits. And every day when he came down the street he would look in at Mr Graham's store:

"Sniffin', are they, Mr Graham?"

"They certainly *are* sniffin'," that ponderous groceryman would respond.

Both would then sniff solemnly in unison and Nort would go on down the street laughing. A new joke in Hempfield! I do not wonder that he got them.

*From "Hempfield"*

## FERGUS'S FAVOURITE POEM

I RECALL now vividly the growing excitement of those winter days, the interest we all had. Each day brought something new, some surprised comment in a 'contemporary,' some quotation from a city paper, some curious visitor to see the old Captain, some new subscriber or advertiser, some necessity for adding to our order for 'insides.'

One of the best ways to attract and interest other people is by going about one's own business as though it were the most wonderful and fascinating thing in the world. People soon begin to look on wistfully, beginning to wonder what all this activity and triumphant joyousness is about, and are presently drawn to it as bees are drawn by a blooming clover field. So the printing-office began to be a place of importance and curiosity in Hempfield. The news spread that almost any surprise might be expected in the *Star*.

"It's that fellow Carr that's doing it," said old Mr Kenton, voicing the hopeless philosophy of the country when facing competition with the city. "One o' these days, you'll see, he'll get a better job in Bosting, and that'll be the end of *him*."

In the meantime, however, we were too busy to indulge in any forebodings, and as for Nort the whole great golden world of real life was opening to him for the first time.

No sooner had the interest in the old Captain's autobiography somewhat subsided, and the advertising scheme, with several lesser matters, been disposed of, than Nort's fertile brain began to devise new schemes.

## FERGUS'S FAVOURITE POEM

"Say," he exclaimed one winter day, coming in from one of his expeditions and looking us all over as though we were specimens of a curious sort, "this office is a pretty interesting place."

"Just found it out?" grunted Fergus.

"Well," said Nort, "I've suspected it all along, and now I know it. There's the Cap'n, for example. We didn't know we had a gold-mine in the Cap'n, now, did we? But we had! Great thing, the Cap'n's story! Finest thing done in country journalism anywhere, at any time, I suppose."

I exchanged an amused glance with Anthy, and we both looked at the old Captain. As Nort talked the Captain grew more and more erect in his chair, wagged his head, and, finally, arising from his seat, took two or three steps down the room looking very grand. Nort went on talking, glancing at the old Captain out of the corner of his eye, and evidently enjoying himself hugely.

"Now, I say, we've got other gold-mines here, if we only knew how to work 'em. There's David! Let's have a column from him—wise saws and modern instances. David will become the official Hempfield philosopher. And then there's Fergus——"

"Humph!" observed Fergus.

"There's Fergus. Everybody in town knows Fergus, and I'll stake my reputation that anything that Fergus writes over his own name will be read."

Nort was riding his highest horse.

"Miss Doane, let's announce it in big type this very week, something like this: 'The *Star* of Hempfield has arranged a new treat for its readers. We shall soon present a column containing the ripe observations of our esteemed printer, fellow-citizen, and spotless

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Scotchman, Mr Fergus MacGregor. We shall also have contributions in a philosophical vein by Mr David Grayson, and a column by that paragon of country journalism'”—here he paused and looked solemnly at the old Captain, and then resumed—“‘that paragon of country journalism, Mr Norton Carr.’”

We all thought that Nort was joking, but he wasn't. He was in dead earnest. That afternoon he walked home with me down the wintry road. It was a cold, blustery day with a fine snow sifting through the air, but Nort's head was so hot with his plans that I am sure, if his feet were chilled, he never knew it. He laboured hard with me to write something each week for the *Star*, and the upshot of the matter was that I began to contribute short paragraphs and bits of description and narrative which we headed

### DAVID GRAYSON'S COLUMN

It was made up of the very simplest and commonest elements, mostly little scraps of news from my farm—the description of a calf drinking, the sound of pigeons in the hay-loft. I told also about the various country odours in spring, peach leaves, strawberry leaves, and new hay, and of the curious music of the rain in the corn. I inquired what was the finest hour of the day in Hempfield, and tried to answer my own question. I put in a hundred and one inconsequential things that I love to observe and think about, and added here and there, for seasoning, a bit of common country philosophy. It was very enjoyable to do, and a number of people said they liked to read it, because I told them some of the things they often thought about, but had never been able to express.

## FERGUS'S FAVOURITE POEM

Nort found Fergus far harder to influence than he found me. A curious change had been going on in Fergus which I did not at first understand. At times he was more garrulous than ever I had known him to be, and at times he was a very sphinx for silence. It is a curious thing how people surprise us. In our vanity we begin to think we know them to the uttermost, and then one day, possibly by accident, possibly in a moment of emotion, a little secret door springs open in the smooth panel of their visible lives, and we see within a long, long corridor with other doors and passages opening away from it in every direction—the vast secret chambers of their lives.

I had some such experience with that prickly Scotchman, Fergus MacGregor. It began one evening when I found him alone by the office fire. He was sitting smoking his impossible pipe and gazing into the glowing open draft of the corpulent stove. He did not even look around when I came in, but reaching out one foot kicked a chair over toward me. Suddenly he fetched a big sigh, and said in a tone of voice I had not before heard:

“Night is the mither o’ thoughts.”

He relapsed into silence again. After some moments he took his pipe out and remarked to the stove:

“Oaks fall when reeds stand.”

“Fergus,” I said, “you’re cryptic to-night. What do you consider yourself, an oak or a reed?”

“Well, David, I’m the oak that falls, while the reed stands.”

I tried to draw him out still further on this interesting point, but not another explanatory word would he say. It was the beginning, however, of a new understanding of Fergus.

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A little later, that very evening, Anthy and her uncle came in for a moment on their way home from some call or entertainment, and not a minute behind them, Nort. I saw Fergus's eyes dwell a moment on Anthy and then return to his moody observation of the fire. And Anthy was well worth a second glance that evening. The sharp winter wind had touched her cheeks with an unaccustomed radiance, and had blown her hair, where the scarf did not quite protect it, wavily about her temples. She was in great spirits.

"Fergus," she cried out, "what do you mean sitting here all humped up over the fire on a wonderful night like this!"

Here Nort broke in:

"Fergus is thinking about what he will put into his issue of the *Star*."

"They're all my issues, so far's I can see," growled Fergus.

"But now, Fergus," persisted Nort, "if you were editing a column in the newspaper what would you put in it?"

Fergus began to liven up a little.

"Tell us, Fergus," said Anthy.

Fergus took his pipe out of his mouth and rubbed the bowl of it along his cheek, screwing up his face as though he were thinking hard. We all watched him. No one could ever tell quite where Fergus would break out.

"What is most interesting to you?" prompted Nort.

"That's easy," said Fergus, and turning in his chair he reached across to the shelf and produced his battered volume of *Tom Sawyer*. This he opened gravely and began to read the passage in which Tom beguiles the

## FERGUS'S FAVOURITE POEM

other boys in the village to do his whitewashing for him:

"Tom appeared on the sidewalk with a bucket of white-wash and a long-handled brush. He surveyed the fence, and all gladness left him and a deep melancholy settled down upon his spirit. Thirty yards of board fence nine feet high. Life seemed to him hollow and existence but a burden."

Fergus read it with a deliciously humorous Scotch twist in the words, a twist impossible to represent in print. Occasionally he would pause and bark two or three times, his excuse for laughter. When he had reached the end of the passage, Nort said:

"I've got it! This is the very thing: let's put it in the *Star*. Where's a pencil and paper? 'Fergus MacGregor's Favourite Passage from *Tom Sawyer*.' Everybody in town knows that Fergus likes *Tom Sawyer*."

"Humph!" said Fergus, but it was evident that he was not a little pleased. Do what he would, he could not help liking Nort.

"I know something that represents Fergus still better," said Anthy.

Fergus looked across at her, and then began thumbing his pipe.

"What's that?" asked Nort.

"'The Twa Dogs.' Isn't that your favourite poem, Fergus?"

"Whur'll you find a better one?" asked Fergus, putting his pipe back in his mouth.

"That's Number Two," said the irrepressible Nort. "We'll put that in some other issue headed 'Fergus MacGregor's Favourite Poem.'"

*From "Hempfield"*





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