A
GIFT BOOK
FOR
MY MOTHER

HARRISON
RHODES

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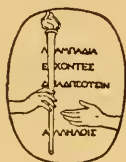
BY
HARRISON RHODES



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I

THEY were building yesterday a preposterous small rustic bridge over what is little more than a drainage ditch, though the gardener has planted it with the wild purple iris and set a Devoniensis rose to clambering over the lattice that runs along one side, so that it is very pretty. The bridge is about four feet long and is really a quite absurd engineering operation, since even in the most tropical of Floridian rainstorms it spans a torrent only about four inches deep. We had, however, talked of it for days, and when the actual construction work began there were three men engaged in it—the gardener; a carpenter of the village, highly skilled in "rustic work," as the art is called; and the black chauffeur. It was a moment in which my mother would have excelled, directing her cohorts

with masterly generalship as she sat upon the patch of lawn near by in a small wicker-seated rocking chair which was set up, like the throne of Xerxes, wherever she marshaled her horticultural forces for weeding or planting seeds, or for such great moments as this of bridge building; indeed, the spanning of the Hellespont would be no more important in Asia Minor than is the conquering of this shallow ditch in our garden. But, alas! for the third spring now the garden is without a general. This is why it gave me an odd turn yesterday when, coming along between the orange trees to observe the great event, I discovered that the small wicker-seated rocking chair, the general's seat, had been placed upon the patch of lawn near by, though she is no longer here to sit there.

Neither the gardener nor I said anything to each other about the "rocker." We understood, and there are certain things one does not talk about, especially if there are others by. I think he believes, in some way of his own, in her actual presence

there. I believe less surely, and at any rate much more mystically and symbolically. But for both of us, and for my sister, too, the small green back yard is a haunted place. We all know about the rocking chair. When it rains, whatever may happen to the other garden furniture, this must be brought to shelter. Every night it, at least, must sleep in the woodshed. If it is ever forgotten we apologize to each other, though we do it in a businesslike way as if we mustn't be too sentimental about things.

Yet the garden is forever haunted with memories, with such a cloud of them that I want to set some of them down in a haphazard, unpretentious chronicle which will have, perhaps, no importance to anyone except me (and of course my sister). Yet there may be some others who will like to hear of just simple happinesses and affections. It is, because I write it, a book for sons. It is, also because I write it, a book for her and perhaps for all mothers.

If indeed it should turn out to be a

book at all—which I can scarcely say as I start to write. Nor can I promise that it will be much or mainly about gardens. It must be about the seabeach, too, when I now actually first put pen to paper. It is a blue-and-silver morning, with the sun slowly dissipating the light mist that hangs over the tide-drenched sands, by the side of which, on the dunes, stands my small workshop cottage. There is a bicycle on which I came, blue, too, by the way, and nickel if not silver. A sack as well, with papers and pens and ink. So perhaps there will be a book. The southeast wind is blowing from the Gulf Stream and the Antilles, and as often in the past, under the spell of this Floridian spring magic and in such soft airs, the world from which I have come, first on the railway train and then on the blue bicycle, seems to shimmer like a mere mirage. But memories are more real than this real world. Even the southeast wind cannot blow them away.

Indeed, this loveliest of winds must always now and again remind

me of her about whom and for whom I am to try to make this book. I remember just a day or two before she died in New York, when a rough blizzardish storm was raging outside, and in the room where I sat by her bedside she was finding it hard to breathe, she said to me that she felt if she could only be in Florida with the southeast wind a-blowing it would be so easy. We used to laugh at French people who exclaimed, "*Enfin, on respire,*" usually when, driven by approaching suffocation, they had lowered a railway carriage window a full quarter inch. But that day we did not laugh. Here am I breathing, and she is not. Yet now she is—just because of this small speech of hers—she will be for me forever in the southeast wind. And for a while, as I think of her, all my life which was not concerned with her, and is not now, when she has gone, concerned with her, seems to shimmer like a mere mirage.

Since she spent every spring for so many years in our insignificant garden and was its general, gardens are

a good and pretty entrance to the uneventful country of her life and ours where I am to play guide.

We were, as children, brought up in an atmosphere of gardens. But perhaps if I am to be honest and accurate I should say back yards. Northern Ohio nearly half a century ago did not talk much of gardens, unless it meant vegetable patches. There was no gardener employed regularly to embellish our back yard, no cohorts for mother to direct. There was John Eck, who came, if we could induce him to live up to his contract, once a week to mow the lawn, front and back. My father was of an incredible incompetence in such matters, and his son had inherited this quality. Yet because my mother had given me at my birth a small share of her passionate love of flowers I attempted, most ineptly, indeed (and my sister, in due time, as she stopped being a baby), to add some horticultural charms to the long, narrow yard with its nubby and infertile soil. My mother, though she was younger then, was

never physically strong. We were her cohorts of that day, but, with us only, she could accomplish nothing like that later Floridian beauty.

A bed of ground in a sheltered corner facing south between the kitchen and the dining room was in earliest childhood my domain; as my sister grew up to a small spade and rake and trowel, I ceded a part to her, the less favorably exposed and less desirable portion, be it said at once, as befitted one younger and a female. The only permanent equipment of my garden was a patch of day lilies and a border of pink clove pinks which had been transported in my tenderest childhood—and theirs—from my grandmother's garden in the country. My gardening lacked both dash and industriousness. It was done in a way so unimaginative and cowardly as to be in itself a confession of failure. I saved my pocket money as spring approached, and begged for a special floricultural grant from the parental authorities, and then purchased, with a lavishness which varied with the

sum so accumulated, potted plants at the greenhouse, and set them out in my plot. I had no nonsense with seeds and cold frames and transplanting; I just turned the plants out of their pots, finding the balls of earth with their roots in a matted mass a very agreeable sight, and, lo! my garden was. I was indeed a rank amateur.

John Eck himself had a greenhouse, of lower prices than the one kept by a crabbed and frightening old fellow named Fehn, who, however, purveyed more varied and rarer plants. I do not defend my gardening methods; they would be frowned on by all modern educational authorities. But I will say that the spring spending at the greenhouses, artfully dividing my money between Eck and Fehn, trying to get the best plants and yet hold the favor of each of them, was a very thrilling time. It might have been foundation training had I ultimately embraced either a commercial or a diplomatic career.

As time went on our ambitions flew higher. Mother had secured a cata-

logue of a nursery near Philadelphia, and we attempted rose culture with named new varieties—I must insist that this was not a commonplace thing, as it is now; it was, for northern Ohio, novel, almost adventurous. The roses were miserable little bushes and never throve very well. But I came to know La France and General Jacqueminot, which I pronounced in four syllables—Ja-quim-i-no, and somehow the horizon broadened and glimpses of a world outside the Western Reserve were to be obtained. The mere easy use of French words, even as I guessed at their pronunciation, gave a sense of personal distinction, of a being, if not a man, at least a gardener of the world.

There was in the catalogue a freakish and mysterious "green rose" given as a prize when one bought twenty others. I insisted upon this. Its arrival was a feverish moment. It was not a rose in the proper sense at all; its flower was a mass of stiffish green leaves that were not of the texture of petals. It was (after all these years one may be honest) singularly

ugly, its only virtue being an odd, spicy odor which it exhaled. But we proudly made much of it and showed it to visitors as a rare exotic which we occasionally imposed upon the softer-natured as an object of admiration. There is philosophy to be distilled here, I feel, but I prefer to go straight on to the more disillusioned and cynical view of life which came to me with the quince tree.

There was a so-called "Japanese quince" with dark, brilliant-red flowers set thickly along a brown branch, but I do not mean that. My father, as suited a grown-up man, had a broader vision of the back yard. He saw it as an orchard, and in an expansive moment he ordered little fruit trees which he left to mother to have planted out. There were cherry, apple, peach, and one quince, and we made two rows of them. They all did very badly except the quince, which was a most intrepid tree, flowered prodigiously every spring, and almost broke in the autumn under the weight of its hard yellow fruit. But the thing which gave one

the gravest doubts of the wisdom of Providence and of its kindliness was that we all longed for cherries, peaches, and apples, while none of us could "abide" quinces. Yet quinces were what fortune showered on us. The questions here raised have never been answered to my satisfaction to this day. I got a hint, however, of the great doctrine of compensations when a cousin named Mary Bentley came to live for a time with us, and we children discovered that it was quince seeds put to soak in water in a saucer which produced the mucilaginous balm which enabled Cousin Mary to paste her hair down in marvelous parallel "waves," as they were called, and to adorn her smooth white temples with the flat, almost imperishable, locks of hair, like hooks, which were so agreeably termed "beau-catchers" then. Certainly there was a beau caught and ultimately married, and I had a momentary vision of the possible place of the quince in the scheme of creation. But so much wisdom was almost oppressive to a child so young.

Part of the masculine "wider vision" for the back yard was its availability for producing food supplies. At my father's request offers to buy fresh vegetables were made me by the kitchen, and every year in a remoter and even more infertile part of the yard I constructed a few beds. I usually heaped them so high that they looked painfully like graves, which indeed they were—of hopes. For by some strange fatality radish culture seemed my only success, and that root or tuber or whatever it may be, produced such a general indigestion in the family that the whole question of the advisability of vegetable raising remained unsolved. In this matter my mother remained serenely noncommittal, but somehow one felt that her doctrine was being driven home, that the service of pure beauty as represented by flowers was even more valuable than that of utility, which radishes stood for. Perhaps there is no need to linger in that back-yard garden, although I long at least to celebrate the admirable

stove and oven combined which I used to build of brick, and in which the boys of the neighborhood roasted potatoes and occasionally the succulent and saucy English sparrow laid low by a sling shot. (I was glad to recognize this bird years later in an expensive French restaurant in Chicago as a *mauviette*.)

My father was a better walker than my mother, and so more devoted to country rambles, in which I participated, quite like a grown man, so I fondly imagined. And on these excursions I knit some of the strongest ties which now bind me to the generation which preceded me, to that notable period of American history which precedes and includes the Civil War; indeed, to the very sources of that Americanism which so many of us long to recapture now.

This book—I seem to be assuming that it will turn out to be a book—will be, it is probably already evident enough, very personal. Yet I would like to feel that in the portraits of those whom I knew and loved best in that generation which

preceded us (who are now middle-aged ourselves) I had in some sense made a picture of their great time in America. If we can and will remember our immediate predecessors we shall drink at the clearest fountains of national pride. Great days were theirs of simplicity and frugality, of eager life and unquestioning patriotism. Great days of war and of Abraham Lincoln. Are not we, who are their sons and daughters, most highly privileged because we inherit directly their traditions, have heard of them at our parents' knees? Were there not grandparents, too, and at their beck did not mistier figures from a still earlier America step forth and become real for us?

I would like to ask my brothers who were children in the 'seventies to remember that to us were handed torches lit at great fires in America. If dark days shall come to our country we must at least lend some of the light in which our fathers lived, strove, were happy, and then died.

Nothing in the history of one's country is too trivial to be worth

setting down somewnere. Particularly in America, where civilization—at least so called—is forever slowly spreading over the whole land, are all kinds of minor dates in danger of being lost. When did olives arrive in northern Ohio and when did we stop dressing lettuce and tomatoes with sugar and vinegar? *Have* we all stopped? Such matters, if I could remember them accurately enough, I would brazenly set down, believing them of some importance some day to some one.

A history of the progress of domestic decoration and taste should be written by some one. And bad taste is as significant—and perhaps as important historically—as good. My mother, as her mother before her, and as in fact most American women (not always their husbands), stood eagerly waiting for the novelties in art as they slid down the western slope of the Alleghanies. We never had a gilded milking stool in the parlor, but we did possess a Chianti bottle painted with iridescent colors and adorned with a blue bow.

I can remember, through seeing my mother engaged in the enterprises, first of all "air castles" constructed of perforated cardboard and beads; then a strange rough hempen lace called, I seem to remember, macramé, though I doubt whether there is such a word in French. Then rickrack, wasn't it a braid? And *repoússé* brass—there was a panel of iris framed in red plush which for a considerable period adorned the parlor. And in an interlude what I seem to have called "scratchella" painting done on velvet with a skewer. And in due time "Kensington" embroidery and cat-tails in a Japanese jar, the far wash of æsthetic London. Every American family has such an art history, certainly in the Middle West. It is comic, but I like it. I think it gay and gallant, too. And through it all, American women, my mother among them, were making their way to a true love of beauty in which, give them time, they will be excelled by no women in the world.

This will be a book about a

thousand things, though chiefly my mother. And in writing of her I have another wish, of which I must speak humbly. My father went when I was seventeen. My mother lived on till I was approaching what had been my father's age. I have never married, and in the years that went by my relationship to my mother stands, among many happy relationships, as the best. It is not always so in families, that I know. And last summer, under a pine tree by the edge of the blue waters of Long Island Sound, a tried and dear friend of mine asked me if there were any secret of the relation between mother and child which I could share with her. Her mother and she had not always understood each other, and she wondered, and her eyes grew wet, whether her own children would grow up always to love and to understand her. If by chance I have any secrets I would like to tell them.

It would be arrogance to say of any friendship or relationship of one's own that it was perfect. And I

know that even for what share of perfection came to me I have no concrete, easily discovered secret.

I can perhaps, however, suggest a partial formulation of what family affection should afford one. The world is a gay, diversified place of contending interests. Happiness is to come home to some one (or to more than one) for whom you always wish well, who it is inconceivable could ever wish for you anything but success and happiness. Here is something steadfast in the shifting phantasmagoria of the world, Gibraltar firmly set among the treacherous currents of life's tides.

There could never have been in my mother's mind any conflict between her children's happiness and her own; they were to her one and the same thing. It was not that she in the least sacrificed hers to us or we ours to her. Happiness was merely the unconscious adjustment of our varying interests; the balance had already been struck before she herself had ventured to formulate her

own demand for happiness. I speak of her only; I would not claim this for us. Is this perhaps part at least of the secret of being a mother for which my friend asked me?

II

IT is always pleasant to me to think of my mother and it feeds my pride to believe that many of her qualities were typical of the America in which she mostly lived and of the American women of that day. Her great sense of personal elegance in her clothes endears a whole century to me. Anyone who cares to browse in the innumerable books of impressions of and travel in America written during that so little remembered first half of the nineteenth century will find that however horrid and crude our visitors found the country, and particularly its male inhabitants, they had to admit that the ladies were beautifully dressed. Unsuitably, perhaps, the critics sometimes maintained. They could not understand how in the vulgar publicity of the hotel ladies' parlor females of refinement should choose to appear nightly in the latest and love-

liest toilettes from Paris. But why, we may well ask, should the American ladies of that day or any other wait for the country to grow up to their frocks? I think it one of the finest of our national traditions, and I boast that when my mother went away to school she had the prettiest dresses of any girl there.

This was not because she was rich, though her father had probably an income of quite twenty-five hundred a year. He bought and shipped the cheese produced in the region around the little northern Ohio village where he lived. (He would probably be called a "cheese king" now, wouldn't he?) There had never been, there never was even to the end, any tremendous amount of money for my mother's clothes. She regretted this, for she would have liked always to be perfectly well dressed. If I can make it comprehensible, there was here, I think, very little personal ambition or desire for superiority. She merely thought every woman should always be perfectly well dressed, and thought it distinctly a

woman's fault if she were not, or her husband's or father's if her failure were at all the result of lack of funds. Isn't that America? Isn't it precisely what we all really think, bless us?

Nothing, indeed, could have been more firmly founded in my mother's mind than the duty of every woman to look her best. And when anything is a duty one has at once respect for it. To us as children it was interesting, a historical subject worth study, what mother had worn as a child. I remember what a piquant paradox it seemed that she had never been permitted to have a high-necked dress until she was grown up. There are some extremely pleasant pictures of the little Adelaide with the childish gown demurely low over the shoulders. It is amazing of how remote a world such photographs already seem. Would a portrait of an Elizabethan child or of a small Roman of Cæsar's day seem really any more old-fashioned?

Less than a half century will produce the same effect of immemorial

antiquity. As I write there comes into my mind a picture of my mother taken when I was a child—and this, I must protest, is not quite immemorial antiquity. She is in a marvelous dress of black silk (I hope it would "stand alone") with a neat, tight-fitting bodice and a great, beautifully *bouffant* skirt of great puffs and cascades and Heaven knows what. Her hair is a marvel of puffs, too, and curls and ringlets, and she stands in a pose of incomparable elegance by a proudly isolated "pedestal" crowned by what would seem a gas jet in a lovely globe. This is perhaps forty years ago, yet if I didn't know her and you asked me to believe that she was, say, the Empress of the Brazils in the eighteenth century, I should.

If the ladies of our nation are elegant, are they not as traditionally good as they are beautiful? Is that not our special national blend? There is a glass box with a curved glass top within which lies a lovely nosegay of cloth flowers, which was used to contain the childish treasures of the little

Adelaide. There was chiefest of all a tiny glass mandarin duck in an attached black-glass boatlike support which enabled it to float majestically upon, say, a goldfish bowl. This was extravagantly admired by the little Adelaide's children; it still is. What should perhaps have been more admired were the school prizes, rewards of merit, ordinarily inscribed merely "To Addie, for being a good girl." These were usually just small cards, shiny and of an obvious elegance of quality, on which were painted little knots and garlands of bright flowers, the inscription written very small with a pen which traced a line of hairlike fineness. The writing of the day seems to indicate a ladylikeness which has quite vanished in modern life. Indeed, my mother's handwriting expanded with the times, though it was never metamorphosed into the great scrawl of England which came so much into vogue with her sex in the late 'eighties.

If my mother was good—and indeed I believe she was—she appeared

to be quite unconscious of it. It was merely what a woman naturally would be—it was like being well dressed. I do not remember that she ever exactly taught or tried to teach her children to be good; she seemed merely to assume that of course they would be. There was a fear which haunted all American ladies of that day, that an accident should cause them to be conveyed to a hospital and it would be found that their underwear was torn or ever so slightly soiled. I imagine that any of life's accidents which might have disclosed an ever so slightly sullied morality would have seemed in the same class. It was a thing to be guarded against by the simple expedient of being clean and good.

Immorality, in all its varieties, there undoubtedly is in the world—my mother would have gone quite that far in admitting the existence of evil. As she grew up—or perhaps rather as her son did, she came into contact at times with a varied world, that of the theater for example and the arts generally. It may safely be

assumed that the people she met sometimes had not quite the standards of the northern Ohio where she won the school prizes for being a good girl. She was very friendly with them, very undeceived by them, very understanding, very forgiving. That was the way they were, and perhaps they could not help it; and they had other excellent qualities and charm and gayety and many things which go to make life agreeable. She was indeed glad to see them when they wanted to see her. But her relationship to them all seemed also comic to her. If a famous lovely actress now living with her fourth husband rushed up and kissed her under the arc lights of Broadway as the theater crowd struggled for carriages, she was pleased enough, but she was apt to remark, as we drove away, that it was possibly an unusual thing to happen to a daughter of Solon. (This was the northern Ohio village where the "cheese king's" father had settled when he went west from Connecticut.) It was pleasant to see all these

people, but of course it was not necessary to emphasize the fact that your own standards remained quite unchanged. Is this not just the way American women have gone through the life of different worlds and continents, more especially Europe, quite understanding and often sympathizing, but, to the despair and bewilderment of foreigners, keeping their original standards quite intact?

Marriage, whatever strange and comic things other people and these newer generations might make of it, was for her a decorous and happy relationship. I never heard my father and mother quarrel. It was to be assumed that it had been a love match, though this would not perhaps be just the thing one would tell young children about. Is this not America, too? We saw father and mother often enough with other men and women in the simple neighborhood society of those days, in Cleveland, at card parties and informal "droppings in" of an evening, and at occasional dances. But I never saw an instant's flirtatiousness

on the part of either of my parents; no later-acquired knowledge of the world leads me to believe there was any such; it was not then *dans les moeurs* in northern Ohio.

To a childish mind it seemed so certain that the affection of our parents could have no ending that it seemed as if it could have had no beginning. In the sense, at least, that the most startling discovery of my early childhood was that my father had been married before. I learned this by accident, I forget how, and that he had loved his first wife, who was, it appeared, a sweet young creature who had died early in their married life. It is odd, perhaps, that I never spoke to him of all this. It was not that I approved or disapproved; it was merely that my new knowledge made my father a mysterious, almost romantic, figure. It gave me a feeling that grown-ups had indeed lived as children certainly had not.

It inspired me in the end with the courage to ask my mother who was the original of a colored portrait

which hung modestly in the upstairs hallway. And she told me at once, with great simplicity, that it was the man she had been engaged to and that he had been killed during the war. Indeed, that was almost all she ever told me to the end of her life, though of course I gradually came to learn a little more.

I realized that his sisters were called my aunts and his nephews and nieces my cousins. And to-day they all feel that it is only by the sad chance of war that this is not our relationship—though they all loved my "truly" father. There was an enchanting Aunt Mary whose visits pleasantly punctuated all my childhood. She had been a great beauty, and I imagine a great flirt, when she was younger. But a disappointment had come and she had never married, and she was growing old in a kind of gay, lovely tenderness which seems to me, as I look back, to have so often been the way with what we called "old maids" in those days. She was responsible for the rose culture because it was she who discovered

the address of the nurseries near Philadelphia. And she did the loveliest embroidery which I came later to realize was like the detailed sward of flowers spread before the Virgin in a primitive Italian picture. She was deeply religious, yet her most engaging trait was a genuine wit which most quaintly manifested itself in unbelievably apt and funny quotations from the Bible which she made at the most seemingly inapropos moments of life. I wish I could remember them—but then I wish I could remember the Bible.

Once there came to visit us a mysterious lady from Cincinnati with her daughter. They seemed to be old friends of my mother's, though she had not seen them since the daughter was a little girl. Then I learned from them that when Augustus W—— had been wounded and was brought from the hospital to Mrs. O——'s house in the old part of Cincinnati to grow well, my mother came down from the northern part of the state to be with him till he recovered. He died, instead,

and I think perhaps he was always the romance of my mother's life. I learned only the other day for what a long time she wore mourning for Augustus W——. And after she died my sister showed me a silk scarf faded to magenta, part of a uniform, which had always been among my mother's treasures. We sent it to his family, but was it, after all, more theirs than ours? There are more than blood kinships.

My father knew more of all this than I do. I have some letters of his, urging marriage, in which he so completely understood. I still know very little. There is a packet of Augustus's letters, tied, as all such packets should be, with narrow blue ribbon. We have never read them. I think perhaps we never shall, though they will be treasured quite as of old. This was the only thing in her life of which my mother never talked to her children, though we can guess that, except for the final sorrow, it was all happiness. Both our parents seemed to have judged it wise to present to us merely a

peaceful domestic picture, with no sorrows of youth which had preceded final happiness.

I liked Augustus W——'s colored portrait in the upper hallway. I came to have a feeling half filial for him. He looked dashing, and I was proud that he had died in the war, though equally glad that my father had not. He was, he is even now, one of my ties to that war. I think of him even now sometimes when people talk of the uselessness of wars and the unworthy motives which drive nations into them. I still believe the war was fought, as far as northern Ohio went, from a generous and gallant wish to free a race which was held, unjustly, so northern Ohioans believed, in slavery.

As to what war does to individual lives, did it not give us a different father? This was the perplexing problem that I sometimes busied my child's mind with. It had endless possibilities of speculative thought. I only feel now that I should like to derive, if I could, from all the brave

Americans of that generation just before me.

The O——s, mother and daughter, since they had lived, were a more comprehensible, if slightly less heroic, tie with the war. Mrs. O—— had grown fat, and she was an impassioned letter writer. Even then my mother struck a most modern note and was ahead of the times in the matter of not answering letters—to-day the almost universal rule. Her correspondent in Cincinnati came invariably to commence her communications with the sonorous and dramatic phrase, "I cannot understand your long silence," which became a family catchword and was quoted in chorus by my sister and me for years afterward.

If this sounds as if we "made fun" of mother, then this is the place to admit that it is so. We did, as we grew up, in quite the nicest and most affectionate way. I am proud rather than otherwise of it. I think the filial and parental attitudes are, as it were, interchangeable, and that as one grows up one begins to be nat-

urally a little the parent of one's parent. If I may put it that way, my mother became, as she grew up—or down—a charming child to her children. We invented, when we were still in our teens, preposterous pet names for her which even here seem too foolish and too intimate to be set down. We were ravished to be able a little to protect her, probably even more ravished at rare intervals to be able to make her obey us as—at rare intervals—we had sometimes obeyed her. As children grow older should not parents grow younger? Should they not fairly soon become the same age and go on to the end, however that end may come, as companions, playmates? Is there not here perhaps some hint of that secret that was asked of me under the pine tree by the blue waters of the Sound?

I hope I seem to no one to speak of senile decay, for my mother, at least, never grew, except in certain bodily infirmities, old. It was not that she wanted to "dress young" or to "behave young." There was

never, so far as I could see, any abatement of a firm, though quite uninsistent, dignity which naturally increased with her years. But she *was* young and gay and interested in those who were young and gay, and interested till the very end.

This tendency of mind has a disadvantage; indeed I am quite willing to call it a fault. After my mother reached forty she began to find that her contemporaries were growing to be dull dogs; later she found them coming to be unpleasantly and unreasonably old. She was bored with them. She found younger people fresher and more interesting. She behaved a little as if it were the fault of old people that they should grow old. Perhaps it is, when you come to think of it. Relatives who persisted in growing old she found particularly annoying; she felt almost responsible for them, though she knew it was really not her fault, but theirs. Yet since to say that anyone was old was indeed the final insult, she rarely used the word. No, she would say, So-and-so was not an old lady; she

was only seventy. When she herself was seventy she thought possibly there might be old people of eighty. When she was seventy-five the aged had come to be those of eighty-five. She herself did not look young; her hair grew a soft and lovely white and her face wrinkled with wisdom and long years. But there was always a patch on her cheeks of the same color which had stained those of the good little Adelaide at school. And within, her heart was blithe, as hearts are not always, be it said, even when the breasts that inclose them are young.

Perhaps part of the secret of being a mother is to keep oneself young; perhaps the secret of being a good child is to aid in this lovely conservation. The Chinese more than any other race have thought and felt deeply on these questions of filial piety. There is a whole literature, so they tell me, of instances of how good sons behave. Of the few stories from the Chinese I know there is one of a middle-aged man whose father and mother had grown to be

so very old that their minds had crumbled within them until their only feeling was one of sorrow at their great age. And to relieve this the son, bent and middle-aged though he already was, procured for himself toys and, though he did so awkwardly, romped and played before his parents like a very young child, so that they might have the sweet delusion that they were young and in the first happy years of their marriage. The people of the village mocked and scoffed at him, yet he persisted, and his parents, very old, died still young. As a rule of conduct this would set an exaggerated and ridiculous standard. Yet there is something poignant about the story's ingenuous simplicity. There seems to lurk in it some profound philosophy of how the family tie should bind us closely together to fight off the threat of that unknown beyond old age toward which our paths lead.

The adaptability of American women is, it has long been recognized, one of their most amazing character-

istics. As is undoubtedly already evident, this is to be no record of a brilliantly diversified triumphant career; indeed, it is the peaceful record of one who lived content with obscurity. Yet if we remember the quiet northern Ohio village where were my mother's origins, it will be easy to see that in many circumstances of her uneventful life she was, to employ the chaffing and affectionate phrase we always used, "the first daughter of Solon" to have ventured so far into the great world. As she stood beneath the dome of St. Peter's at Rome, or motored up Riverside Drive in New York to dine at Claremont, or was admitted to visit a harem in Algiers, we children always boasted shamelessly that she was indeed that "first daughter" to whom this adventure had come. She always agreed to this, wholly without pride, because it was so, although she was sometimes assailed by doubts as to whether a certain Frances (commonly called Frankie) M——, who had married in Chicago and, it was thought, might have

traveled, had not, perhaps, sometimes had this great distinction of being the first daughter of Solon to buy, shall we say, a Paris hat in the Rue de la Paix.

Are family jokes always silly? I suppose they are. There was another extremely elaborate one, a sort of *pendant* to the first-daughter-of-Solon joke, which I despair of making seem comprehensible, least of all funny, to anyone. There was all these years a dearly loved cousin of my mother's, named Alice, who was living in the sleepy, already decaying, village, and seemed, indeed, the last daughter of Solon ever likely to leave it and go forth. It was on this fact that the *soi-disant* joke was founded. If, for example, we drove up the long ridges that lead to Monte Oliveto, south of Siena, we would remark that it was the most probable thing in the world that we should find Alice had already been there a month and was a great connoisseur of the famous frescoes. There was a variant of this in which, for example, we protested to mother

that she was wrong, that it was really not at all likely that if we went to sup at the Savoy in London we should find that Alice *always* had the table in the corner to the right of the entrance. All this was satirical, but if it had an object beyond permitting us to be nonsensical, it was with affectionate satire to point out to mother how delicious it was to be from Solon and now to be where she was.

Isn't this all profoundly American? Doesn't Europe still make us all feel more or less that we are from Solon, and does it not add to the pleasure of understanding and appreciating and loving Europe to be so derived? How many years Henry James affectionately and delightfully studied the impacts of Solon upon an older world. Nowhere else than in his earlier books is there a record of so many instances of our inexplicable readiness for Europe. How preposterous and incredible it is, for example, that when my mother came to London and Paris people discovered that she looked like Madame Réjane!

No stranger, perhaps, than it was for me to hear as a child my mother tell, after returning from a trip to California with my father, how, when they had gone to San Diego, he had protested that he realized for the first time that he had married a Spaniard. Who but an American could ever come of purest New England parentage and yet look like a Spanish Réjane? (I remember on my first trip abroad—I was thirteen and had gone with my father, not my mother—I cried with homesickness at Edinburgh because a dark-haired, slender, white-faced lodging-house mistress looked, so I thought, like my mother.) Does the American air, while it makes foreigners into Americans, also make Americans into foreigners?

My mother never went abroad till she was over fifty. She had been restrained by an excessive fear of "that old ocean" and by the impracticability of leaving us children behind. She would not go with father, but when, after his death, we, being now a little grown up, I, indeed, having

finished college, announced that we were going abroad, she came at last without a question. My maternal grandfather had gone abroad for the first time with me when I was seventeen and he over seventy. Perhaps I come of a late-flowering stock. After that first trip, though she never lost her fear of that venerable and yet abhorrent Atlantic, she made the crossing many times.

III

FOR an American lady of even over fifty, as my mother was, Europe is almost sure to be a forcing house. In her case it brought out suddenly all sorts of lovely tastes and appreciations. It is my belief that there are many Americans who have, as it were, dormant within them a sense of beauty, sometimes nipped by native chill airs and arid environment, yet springing to sudden life and growth under French or English or Italian skies. It is this quick power of developing innate tastes which has brought about the astonishing transformation of our towns and cities during the last decade or two, the swiftness of which change must be wholly incomprehensible to any European—to anyone, in fact, who cannot understand about Solon and what it means to be its first daughter to see the fair, strange lands and lovely treasure houses across the sea.

My mother's development was as fresh and delightful—as our own, shall I say? Except that I think it was more so, for I judge her taste as intrinsically surer and finer than ours. Of course, at her age, she did not, for example, plunge into the study of the history of the arts, nor did she wrestle with the languages with quite our shouts of glee. She was already, I can guess, a little tired. And here—it was her graceful and distinguished manner of acknowledging her age—she said that she had children to learn foreign tongues and to struggle with the technic of traveling; she resigned that to them. She never attempted to speak any of the languages beyond that achievement of every American woman of asking for hot water wherever she may be. She gradually came to understand some French and more Italian. As for English, as pronounced in the rural districts or in Scotland, she always maintained that it was for her just slightly more difficult than the continental tongues.

It was not merely as regards the

arts that her native adaptability showed. We were not—so many American families are not!—destined to shine in the courts of Europe. But all the everyday life of these strange peoples, as far as it lay open to our observation, we could study. To all this my mother brought an extraordinarily sympathetic and humorous eye. She never abated anything of her personal dignity, yet I can remember her observing with delight a Venetian street festival in a remote quarter where gondoliers were dancing in the streets, or noting any of the thousand delightful minutiæ of Italian life. I remember, the last time she was in Venice, the month's protracted and philosophic study which she made, while she sat eating ices or drinking tea in the Piazza, of the methods of the lace merchants under the colonnades—"lace hawks," she technically termed them, from the way they swooped forth from their shops and seized any passer-by who had, to their keen eye, the look of a buyer. The chapter of such minor adaptabilities and compre-

hensions would of course prove endless. I could not choose instances, nor, indeed, tell why I remember them. I recall, for example, a spring in Geneva, when my sister was unromantically laid low with chickenpox, and my mother and I used to go every Sunday afternoon to some village festivity in the adjacent country, to see peasants dance and to drink a *picholet* of *vin rouge*, the *picholet* being a local measure that now looks in memory ridiculously small and insufficient. Through it all she was in some incredibly delightful way the child of northern Ohio. We went once to North Africa, and I think the thing that most delighted and amazed her there was when in southern Tunisia, near the holy city of Kairouan, she saw the Arab farmers plowing with camels. She had, as the good little Adelaide, seen Ohio farmers at the plow; now she saw in Africa a custom the quaintness of which she was completely competent to appraise. She saw something in that camel silhouetted against the African sky which we of the later city-born

generation missed. It was an earlier America than ours smiling comprehendingly at the holy city, and I felt, though I shall probably not convey my feeling to anyone else, an epic note—as if my country in this little incident ranged itself beside all the older civilizations of the world's history, and the great East linked hands with little Solon.

Travel is a great developer of leadership; what little I have I perhaps owe to playing courier. My mother's leadership was intermittent; it was exercised only in emergencies. May I hint that here perhaps I come close to another of the secrets of how families may grow old—or young—happily together? I remember once in Venice, intoxicated by the reading of the red Baedeker, I had projected a trip to all kinds of little cities along the Adriatic's shore and then across the hills to Umbria. It was all feasible enough—in the guidebook. The practical difficulty was that I spoke almost no Italian, and all the wiseacres of the Venetian hotel parlors warned us that in these little-

visited regions we should find no one who spoke either English or French. I hesitated, though I protested that my hesitation was due to my anxiety for the comfort of the ladies of my family. My mother may have suspected that in my heart I distrusted my own abilities, felt that I lacked dash, courage. At any rate, she said smilingly that she thought we should go. She was, after all, she asserted, the one about whose comfort I was, she assumed, chiefly concerned, and if she could risk it why could not the rest of us?

We risked it. Never has an experience been more salutary for me; even now I sometimes bolster up my courage with the thought of it. We had an enchanting trip, and—this is the miracle—I arrived at Rome a month later, speaking something—I fondly thought it was Italian—with a fluency and speed which I have attained in no other language except my own; the speed is scarcely equaled even in that. I decided to take lessons immediately—a few might be needed, I was humble enough to

admit, to give the final polish. Alas! when my *professore* started to make me grammatical and Italian the fluency went, the pace slowed down, so that by the time I struck the subjunctive and the *passato remoto* of verbs I crawled like a snail. But I had gained something of courage, self-reliance, independence, in those crumbling cities. I should like to pay my respects to the hotel proprietor of Pesaro, whose son I was to know later as a fashionable head waiter in New York. And to the parish priest—if he is still alive—of Senigallia who patiently endured a conversation in Italian for two hours with me while the express train, running quite ten miles an hour, descended from Urbino to the plain of Foligno.

I remember another time when my mother suddenly took the reins of the family into her hands. We had been spending the winter in a Paris *pension*, modestly enough, God knows. I had just been graduated from college, and an aunt of my father's had promised to pay my ex-

penses for a year abroad. Now she wrote that her own affairs had gone badly and that she must withdraw her offer. A family panic ensued. My father had been dead only a couple of years; we had not at all grown used to managing our own affairs. We were in even ordinary cases rather distressed and tremulous about them. We were at least determined not to go home till the year was over, but we did not see how we could afford to stay. My sister and I inclined to a passionate economy. We countermanded an order for a new and smart hat for mother, and informed her, with real brutality, I doubt not, that she must continue to wear a shabby old bonnet—I think she never quite forgave us that. Then we packed her on a night train and, like war refugees, we fled to Geneva, where, so the rumor of those days had it, there were obscure *pensions* in which, out of season, one might live for almost nothing.

The *pensions* did exist; to set down their prices now would only

throw me into a frenzy of regret for the cheap living of yesteryear. We established ourselves, and then the second blow fell, with the news that a wretched country bank in Mississippi in the stock of which was part of the tiny fortune my father had left us, had failed. This seemed the end, black despair. I remember after a scene of gloom I caught up my hat and flung out of the house for a solitary stroll by the lake's edge, to be recalled by my little sister, sent after me. They had actually been afraid, so I extracted from her, that I was going to make way with myself. This suspicion, so foolish and ill judged, I asserted, threw me into a frenzy of angry rage and I came back to the obscure *pension* with wild words and reproaches on my lips. It was indeed the moment for some one to assume the leadership of our disorganized little family group.

I had left my mother as plunged in gloom as any of us. I came back after a scant half hour to find her calm and smiling. She had a plan, she said. We were all, she feared,

inclined to be blue and depressed, and Geneva out of season was at best a dull place. She thought if we started for Italy the next week and had a nice trip there we should all feel better. I gazed at her in amazement. The Italian trip was, of course, what we all wanted, but even before the arrival of the second, or Mississippi, blow we had judged it so expensive as to be quite out of the question. Yes, she realized that, she admitted, but then, she went on, we hadn't then needed it so much. Besides, she went on in conclusion, and she laughed lightly, it "would all be the same in a hundred years."

She was right, it probably will be. It was the phrase which, almost traditionally, indicated her most reckless moments. It was gallant and it was, I think, characteristically American. We set our national standard of living where it seems decent it should be, and then somehow we find the funds. There is a kind of miserly and squalid economy, a sort of cowardly cutting of the coat according to the cloth, which comports

ill with that bright national optimism of ours which says that the best is not too good for an American. Our family best on that Italian trip was not too extravagant. (We lost the friends we started with, the second night out, at Pisa, because we *would* go to the cheapest hotel on the guidebook's list.) But it pulled us out of gloom which would have wasted for us almost half of our precious European year. And somehow the financial crisis adjusted itself, as crises often will if you make it plain that you will stand no nonsense from them.

I have a perpetual delight in the memories of our European adventures. It was fortunate for us, as in my wisdom of to-day I look back, that there was not always—almost never, in fact—money enough to allow us to go to the most expensive and fashionable hotels. That spring's economy in Geneva, though it came to so agreeable a tragi-comical end, was like a chapter in a story book as I remember it. For in such cheapish continental retreats still lurked

the English left over from the era of Dickens and Thackeray—almost one would say from the time of Miss Austen, decayed gentlewomen still feeding upon the Peerage and bravely having afternoon tea though the skies might fall. There was, too, a private hotel—boarding house, to be accurate—where I actually heard the "Battle of Prague" played by a maiden lady who at the age of fifty-five was making her first trip away from her remote Yorkshire village. In such strange scenes my mother's dignified amiability made her quite at ease. And it seemed to her as remarkable to be the first daughter of Solon to visit them as it would have been to have been the first to stand on the summit of Mont Blanc —which of course she never did.

IV

I SHOULD like to return this once to the native elegance of American women, and the inelegance of American men. My father represented another school of national thought, that of the instinctive distrust of "style." In my maternal grandfather as well I saw the flowering of this deeply American tendency. One of my grandfather's favorite stories—it seemed to him brilliantly satirical—was about a man who in a fatal moment allowed his wife to buy a new Brussels carpet for the parlor, with the result that gradually everything in the house had to be replaced in a style that "went with" the fashionable Brussels, until in the end the wretched protagonist of the ominous yarn had dissipated his fortune and ruined his life. The anecdote, though it was always excessively agreeable to induce grandfather to tell it, had never exerted

much influence over the ladies of his family. You may be sure that at the earliest opportunity my grandmother had secured a floor covering purporting to come from Belgium's capital. American women were long ago on the march. Even in the little villages of northern Ohio they meant to move with the times. There was a dashing anecdote in our family concerning the first coming of the famous "Black Crook" to Cleveland. The legend was usually, of course, of fathers of families who suddenly found urgent business calling them to town, and there flew to witness the Amazonian marches from the front row. In our family it had been my grandfather who had set his face against such follies, and my grandmother who had gayly gone to town for the Saturday matinée, just to see how fast the world was moving!

My grandfather disapproved violently of the "swallow-tail," and my father did not much like to wear it. He thought it quite suitable for his wife and him to start off to an evening party on foot, even in the Ohio snow.

His wife would certainly have liked him to be claw-hammered and convoying her in a carriage. Not that there were any quarrels over this; during the honeymoon my father had told my mother that if there were to be any quarrels in their married life she would have to make them. And it had not occurred to her that she could quarrel with her husband. Indeed, as far as I know, neither ever precipitated such an event. Perhaps both of them recognized in the other, as we may now, inevitable, though conflicting, forces in American life. I am extremely glad to have been placed to see both from the tenderest age; it helps me constantly to understand my compatriots.

Why do American—indeed, any women—dress well? The question is old and there is no pretension here to having found a new answer to it. I would not say that my mother dressed for either men or women, but merely because it was the nice thing to do, just a natural and pleasant instinct. Of course she was

not like a woman of whom I knew later, who was content to dress superbly in a hotel sitting room, have her dinner in this magnificent solitude, and conclude a delightful evening by planning in what gown she would dine alone the following night. Mother would have preferred that her children at least should see her if she were well dressed. But, broadly speaking, she had no other social end in view.

In fact, quite apart from clothes, I do not think I ever saw her do anything with social success as its object. I will be honest, I do not know that I ever saw her attain much social success, so that we may, perhaps, as the world judges things, be touching on a fault. She was always pleasant to the people who came in contact with her, and among them she picked out with a very sure taste the pleasantest people, and would have liked to see them rather than the others. But she was what the French call very *recueillie;* she never made that step forward which social success perhaps demands. But there

are enough people in America making steps forward; it can do no harm to remember for a moment one who stood smiling and unambitious where life had placed her—in circumstances quite fairly pleasant, be it said.

We were, however, talking about a pretty taste in dress—were we not? —my mother's and the American woman's in general. Dress for dress's sake is not a bad motto. Did they ever aspire to anything beyond perfection?

We children used to assert laughingly that our mother had never seen a sleeve which wholly pleased her, and that she never really liked any dress until it was almost worn out, by which time usage had given her a certain affection for what had been inevitably a partial failure, to which *a priori* all dresses seem foredoomed. Are women like that? Is there some radiant vision of being perfectly well dressed which always swims before them?

To dress well and to live becomingly—this does not mean ostentatiously—seemed to my mother in

those days part of woman's duty; she never questioned it. In these matters no qualms troubled her—did they trouble anyone then?—as to other women fated to dress less well and live less becomingly. We hear a great deal of talk of such qualms in these days, but do social and radical ideals seem to abate at all our twentieth-century ladies' love of dress? However, I may as well admit that my mother had little social consciousness, as we understand the phrase in these days of the reconstruction of the world. And she was typical of the greater part of the good women of her day—a day that already to us seems centuries ago. It is because so many of our mothers were like this that I venture to speak of mine.

She was incapable, I take it, of thinking other than kindly of any class in the community in the sense that she wished them to have no suffering and to enjoy a suitable degree of comfort. She was, when I was a small child, I can remember, as active as her health permitted in

the local Dorcas Society. Dorcas Society indeed! Does that not date the ladies enlisted in it? Does it not almost bring back the eighteenth century with ladies bountiful themselves carrying baskets of calf's-foot jelly or arrowroot to old Goody Two-Shoes in her humble cottage? My mother never consciously put forth much of a plan for the betterment of the world, beyond kindness to the deserving poor who came near your gate.

She represented, as do now all the women of that time, a point of view which to modern people seems to savor of a dark age. And yet miracles do not exactly happen overnight in a nation's consciousness. I would urge that something in the social attitude of that day is not so remote from the most characteristically American thought of our day. For example, my mother strongly disapproved of all slums; she detested even passing through them. But, oddly enough, as we of the younger generation thought even then, she did not waste time censur-

ing landlords and municipal authorities; she merely blamed the poor for living in such horrid places. And if we chaffed her about Marie Antoinette and cake for the starving in Paris, she replied, with some show of justice, that the poor ought to go to live in the suburbs, where there were cottages and gardens, and that they should be educated to do that. Perhaps you couldn't destroy slums, she thought, but you could destroy the willingness to live in them. Isn't this sound, characteristically American, and really very modern doctrine?

She had that very American belief in the advantages of raising the standard of living, and when she came to live a good deal in the South she extended this doctrine—as is not always done—to the colored race. She believed that if the negro lived better he would have to work harder—and to her both seemed desirable. She was pleased when her children became interested in a school for black girls in our village, and she sent her prettiest slippers, when they

grew ever so little rusty, to one of the colored teachers, an elderly woman herself, who had a very appealing elegance and quiet, ladylike distinction. If we had suggested to our mother that her lovely slipper buckles might stir unduly luxurious ambitions in some young black girl's breast, she would have answered that if the girl really wanted such things she would, when she left school, work harder to get them. And in this point of view I have noted with amusement and pleasure that she was lately joined by Miss Pankhurst in England when the spendthrift tastes of the London workingwoman were under discussion.

It never irked my mother that some of the modern social doctrines eluded her. As I grew older and observed the modern tendencies in myself with pride, I wondered a little that, since my mother kept abreast of the times in so many ways and almost seemed to grow younger as she grew older, she did not see, with me, that alleged wider

horizon. Now that she is gone I am inclined to be wholly grateful to the lack of social consciousness which permitted the women of her generation so to concentrate themselves upon their homes and their children. I do not urge it upon the mothers of to-day. I only feel that it is well to find what we can that is lovely and touching in each period of the world's development, and that if it were a fault of my mother's which left her the leisure to be more intimately my friend I will not now complain.

She would, however, in a way, have been the first to recognize that the restrictions put in her girlhood on women's activities had resulted in serious losses to the world—notably in her own case. She could have been—and she knew it—an excellent boss carpenter or mason or builder or contractor. Not that she did anything with her own hands—and is this not of the very essence of Americanism?—but that she knew how things should be done. I remember once discovering her directing a bricklayer.

"Why, mother," I said, "I didn't know you knew how to lay brick!"

"I don't," she answered, with an agreeable crispness which increased in her with years. "But I observe and I have used my mind."

She had a passion for alterations and remodeling; it gave her more pleasure to fix over a house than it would have given her to build a new one. She was always wanting to cut a window or "throw out" a bay or find space for a new bathroom, and our tiny house in Florida was always in metamorphosis.

Directing labor seemed to her an admirable occupation for women. I remember how proud she was of my sister once when a black boy who had been beating carpets and so forth said:

"Mis' Rhodes, if Miss Margaret had enough of us colored boys she could jes' clean up the whole world."

I am putting off as long as I can the confession that in all mechanical arts I was, as my father had been before me, a bitter disappointment to my mother. How intolerably

must competent women like her suffer from men who are not "handy" about the house! It had always been the prerogative of the male, the proud insignia of his sex, that he could drive a nail straight. Indeed, perhaps it will always be. And here we had failed her. Sometimes it must have seemed to her my worst fault. It was not my worst fault—she must have known that—but it was a fault that almost until my coming of age she could not be silent about.

My worst fault really was, at least in the childish period to which I seem instinctively to be reverting again, "being a good boy." It is the most unpleasant confession I have to make; it is perhaps the most degrading anyone can have to make. I say this not only because it is the truth, but because, I admit, I hope thereby to rouse interest in this rambling writing which will otherwise be to the end so lacking in sensational disclosures. I feel that I am not wholly lacking in a certain startling courage in admitting how good

a little boy I was. My mother cannot have deceived or flattered herself, she must have known I was, yet she bore with me with the utmost patience.

The Autobiography of a Good Boy, if it could be written with brutal honesty, might stir readers, though they would think it too depressing and morbid, as it needs would be. I have no intention of setting down in completeness such a narrative here. But I would like to protest in behalf of all unfortunate good little boys that no one need think that good boys enjoy being good! They almost always feel what bad style it is, how offensive to any true worldliness or cultivated taste. They despise good children when they read of them in edifying books, and they think nothing of them when they encounter them in real life. But if a child is naturally honest, for example, or not quarrelsome, no one but those who have been good children can know how tragically hard it is for him to be bad. In vain the child tells himself how cowardly

it is to be good—even at my present distance from childhood I have something of this feeling. The conscientious good child goads himself on to badness, not knowing, poor wretch, that badness is a gift from God which no struggles on his part can bring within his reach.

The parent of a good child is most unhappily situated. A mother especially can scarcely venture on urging a child to be bad, even though she secretly knew it ought to be. This will explain, I suppose, why my mother never very strongly urged me to be good and never very bitterly reproached me when I had attained a mild, tame half badness. I remember how I once desperately engaged with several other boys in my first theft (I might perhaps pretend that this was the beginning of a splendid series, but I may as well admit that so far as I know I have only stolen twice). We nabbed two pigeons belonging to some boys with whom we were in feud, inhabiting a contiguous but inferior street. So far so good; indeed, some details of

the raid were to the credit of my inventive talent. But almost at once vengeance overtook me. The miserable birds we incarcerated in the loft of a disused barn at the back of our back yard. This accomplished, the whole affair ceased to interest anyone but me. I, their jailer, had to feed the dreadful greedy things, since my too tender heart would not let them suffer. Of course I was soon longing to release them, but, alas! all too cleverly, we had clipped their wings and made flight impossible. I had to purloin food from the house and buy grain with my pocket money; none of the other boys, who knew and despised me as good, would contribute a penny. I had constantly to invent pretexts for slinking to the barn. And worst of all, the pigeons seemed to be growing tame and fond of me. This was more than could be borne, and at the end of perhaps a fortnight I sobbed out the whole absurd story to my mother.

What she really thought I suppose it was out of the question that I should know; to the end of her life

my goodness—fortunately a little mitigated with the years—was still a subject upon which, in the interests of our friendship, we both preserved a decent reticence. I remember I asked wildly what, oh, what should I do, expecting, perhaps, reproof for my badness. But I know she only smiled a little and said that she should think that I would merely put the pigeons back in the place they came from and say no more about it. She even helped me make a plan whereby I, unaided by my former accomplices, could convey the birds in secrecy, and so, incognito, make restitution.

It was years before I had courage to steal again. This time it was from the house at the seashore which we took furnished. There I purloined, with the knowledge and I suppose the acquiescence of my mother, a corkscrew, presumably from gay Paris, the handle of which was made by a lovely pair of female legs striped crosswise as if they wore a *maillot* of bright green and black. I trust it was with satisfaction that

my mother observed my now greater aplomb and ease in badness. But even now I have occasional twinges of conscience, and if the lady from whom we took the house, whose legs they are, will write to me I will send them back.

My mother, it must be evident, made very little fuss about life. It was, I think, an engaging trait. I had, not so long ago, a stiff neck which finally turned into a mild rheumatism and into an aching back which fretted me for some six months. I grew nervous, a little frightened, I suppose, and impatient. And I remember how I exclaimed to her one day that I hoped I wouldn't have a pain in my back all the rest of my life, and how she at once replied, very cheerfully, indeed:

"You probably will."

It made me laugh, made me, too, see backaches in their true relation to the whole scheme of life. Mine suddenly became, what of course it was, a trifle. And when it left me it was scarcely noticed.

V

I PROMISED earlier that this should be a book somewhat about gardens. But it can only be about one very small and unpretending garden; there is enough to say about that tiny patch to fill all the space I can venture upon taking. I do not envy people with large gardens; their riches of ground and their individual rose bushes can never mean as much to them as they do to a more modest Candide. It is almost incredible that there should be so much lore concerning just a village back yard.

There is a sort of summerhouse at one side, overhung by a myrtle tree, thatched with palmetto leaves, and overrun with honeysuckle. The myrtle is a lovely tree with drooping, wandering branches, but it is not, on the whole, as romantic as its name. Its real usefulness is that a spray of it in leaf, placed in a room, will drive

away fleas. So they say. My mother once thought that the ownership of such a tree made it possible for her to permit a Boston terrier named Doctor to sleep in her bedroom. But she decided ultimately that the myrtle was loveliest growing in the garden and protecting the summerhouse—if it could, indeed, so protect—from a too abundant insect life.

The summerhouse is really called the *bosquet*, because at a small fishing village near Trouville they used to call small green inclosures in the garden that. We wanted to call it after the chief pride of the Hôtel des Parisiens, *Le Parasol de Robinson*—(*Crusoe* is understood). But we couldn't in decency do this, because our *bosquet* was not really a *parasol*, which is inclosed on all sides by green coming down to the very ground, and entered by a small opening on one side, while our *bosquet* was accessible on two whole sides.

There is a table in it with a palmetto-trunk support and a top which was once natural wood neatly var-

nished. It is now green, painted so in a sudden fine emotional and artistic frenzy by a fellow named Camille, who was a Frenchman and for a while our butler. He was old, rather falsely and badly preserved, yet he moved with great vivacity, and he confided to us that when he had served at the Café Martin in New York he was commonly termed by his associates a butterfly, *le papillon.* He was almost stone-deaf, which I believe a *papillon* is, and this rather pathetically had relegated him again in his advancing years to the humble position of bus boy. This, I imagine, stung his pride, and he accepted to come to Florida with us.

He was the least important part of a *ménage.* He had a wife named Jeanne, younger and much handsomer than he, a high-spirited creature who, five minutes after her arrival, asked my mother where the garlic was kept, and cried, melodramatically:

"My God! a French *cuisine* without garlic!"

The poor *papillon* adored her, but not she him. She made no secret of it. She had in France loved the *chèf de gare* at Nancy, but circumstances, possibly his high social position as station master, had made it impossible for him to marry her. Jeanne had in anger fled to Paris, and there, almost on the first caprice, married the humbly adoring Camille. We used to picture to ourselves the magnificent *chèf de gare*, gorgeous in a uniform, and be sorry for Monsieur Butterfly. And much later, after they had disappeared into the limbo of servants who will not stay, and the German guns were pounding that gallant and distinguished Nancy, we used to wonder if at the *gare* a handsome man, now middle-aged, stood bravely at his post. We wondered, too, if he ever thought of the good-looking Jeanne who, but for his pride, would have cooked so well for him.

The adventures, even the simplest, of French people in America always give me furiously to think. Never did I view our simple Florida village with such a cold, disillusioned eye as

under the influence of Camille. I was going one week-end to Palm Beach, and Camille, as he carried my bag to the rather ramshackle local conveyance which was to take me to the station, remarked, temperately:

"*Amusez-vous bien, monsieur. On ne s'amuse pas ici.*"

I was struck cold, as it were, in a moment. I saw what a desert of dullness to a Frenchman must seem an unsocial American village with nothing of the equipment which the smallest hole by the seaside provides for the Parisian *en vacance.*

It was, indeed, on a plea of this same dullness that they left us.

"What will you?" asked Camille, with the air of a greater world. "*Il n'y a pas de casino, il n'y a pas de musique, en somme il n'y a rien!*"

The village has grown to a city. *Il y a un casino et de la musique.* And one might meditate philosophically on the stride that has been made in America during the last decade in providing small towns with *des agréments.* When people talk of the

difficulty of inducing anyone to be or to continue to be an agricultural laborer I wonder whether there is not wisdom in the French system of small villages, from which the hands go forth in the morning to the farm a few miles away and return at night, if not to a casino and *la musique*, at least to some social companionship. Now that the moving picture has become the supreme American amusement, it would be possible to make the smallest village habitable. If the world is to work harder, must it not also play harder?

In a small garden you become acquainted with all your plants. There is a small, mossy-looking one near the *bosquet* which is called the "artillery plant," so the gardener asserts, because at a certain season of the year—always when she wasn't there, my mother remarked—if water is poured on it it sends up puffs like steam. It may be so; we tried to believe it was. It is always much pleasanter to believe everything the gardener tells you. There was another tree the leaves of which,

"mashed," were an excellent poultice for any "risings," which meant boils and so forth.

In a small-enough garden small events become great; I am sure there is some great secret of happiness hidden here. Bridging the ditch or covering an already existent bridge with a pergola upon which a cloth-of-gold rose used to attain the importance to my mother which the building of his pyramid may perhaps have had to Cheops. This, at any rate, is the way to enjoy bridging ditches!

The birds drop a good deal of seed into a Florida garden, besides which are the "self-sown" plants which the gardener, who invests the vegetable kingdom with personality, calls "volunteers." I remember how, only a little while back, it seems, a slender sapling, bird sown, I imagine, pushed its way up by a favorite little bridge where we had filled the ditch with wild iris. This stranger was a pleasant-enough little fellow, but he was distinctly an intruder and my first impulse was of extermination.

But my mother, the essence of whose everyday wisdom was the avoidance of quick decisions, decided, after a night which brought counsel, on sparing him. Hers was a broader garden vision; she saw in the future a big tree giving just the green shade that this part by the woodshed lacked. Now when she has gone what she saw has come true. I sat yesterday by the sapling, now grown to the pride of its full strength. The spring had waked it and the tender green of its young leaves and feathery tracery of its fringelike blossoms were lovely against the cloudless southern blue. And there, in some sense that I cannot quite make clear, there in that vigorous life of the young tree was, for me, my mother. Is not this perhaps immortality, to have caused something to happen which lives on after you? A slender, intruding sapling that you have saved? A cool shade under which those, perhaps, who know nothing of you may rest and be for a passing moment happier? In this sense the small garden is, for her children,

forever haunted. There is no planting of rose bushes, no simple tracing of a border's edge by violets, no tangle of red rose and trumpet vine which climbs up to what was her window, but tells me, who now must potter about her garden alone, that I am not alone.

My sister believes a little something in the communications that sometimes seem to come, through those attuned to catch them, from the newer existence. And oddly enough, the thing that would come nearest to convincing me is the apparent triviality of the messages my mother is said to send, one especially, for example, urging my sister, who has always nourished a kind of prejudice against this flower, "to plant petunias." They gave color, my mother used to say, and placed in a discreet distance they made a garden gay.

I have now some German petunia seed, the first, I think, that has come out of the enemy land. It is of that marvelous deep-purple flower—*veilchen-blau*, they call it—which we

had admired so at Baden-Baden. And if they bloom I shall perhaps believe the war is over. There are such things as mechanical aids to one's feelings. I am trying to bury, if I can, the bitterness of the conflict in deep-purple petunias. My mother lived through the first war years, and the proper attitude toward German roses was difficult to know. We were almost glad, I think, when Kaiserin Augusta Victoria languished. It was, on the other hand, almost impossible to dislike Frau Karl Drusckki when she flowered white with huge magnolialike bloom. Even now, when war is over, I view with suspicion Freiherr von Mareschall, who seems to carry on over the vicissitudes of a wet spring better than any English or French or American rose. And I find an ominous significance in the very bad condition—of Bon Silène. Unhappy Silenus these days!

Somehow we came to think and talk of the inhabitants of my mother's garden as if they were alive; but are they not alive? I have never seen

anyone who loved flowers quite so much as my mother. If you wanted really to hurt her feelings, you had only to suggest that she had been brutal or unsympathetic or cruel to one of the children of her garden, some rose or hibiscus or orange tree. If this sounds silly, I do not very much care. At the heart of all deep human affections there is just this kind of fond folly. The things a mother murmurs to the child at her breast are foolish babblings, yet sacred. And lovers' talk is not all wisdom if you were to print it. And I am glad that even when we both grew up my mother's talk and mine would possibly often have seemed to outsiders like that chatter of fools.

Let us go back to that young sapling which was saved.

The process was part of our family history. As the tree grew up, to our intense delight it turned out that its indigenous name was—on account of its fringelike blossoming—"grandfather's beard." This preposterous appellation convinced my mother—if conviction had been needed—that

her intervention had been right. But then about the fourth or fifth year, when the tree had attained a fairish size, it became the object of the impassioned attentions of a kind of woodpecker called sap sucker, who simply would not leave it alone. We drove him away with cries and sticks, and both mother and I descended to the childishness of talking to him and arguing the point. But unless some one stood guard all day long he was sure to be found pecking away at the trunk of his chosen friend. We did not begrudge him a sustenance, but we feared he would girdle the tree and kill it. But a certain wise woman, visiting the garden, told us that sap suckers, however elaborate a pattern they might etch into bark, never made the complete circle which destroys. And so it proved. For two successive years the sap sucker's love lasted; the proo of his devotion may still be read upon the tree's trunk, but he worked no harm. A mysterious instinct, not common in nature, I should guess, made him want to spare life and per-

mit the tree to bear seeds, which should perhaps be carried by birds to other gardens, there in time to yield green shade to human beings and sweet sap to new generations of wandering birds.

The birds know gardens well—I suppose as we know the pleasure and health resorts of men. I am sure, as they come north with the spring, some of them plan to rest a day or two behind our house There was in the garden next door a great mulberry tree which one could go under as into a tent and find the green canopy hung thick with purple fruit. At the moment of the berries' greatest lusciousness there was for almost a week a great concourse of birds in the gardens, and they went round the great mulberry bush not only so early in the morning, but all day long, with a deal of chatter and gossip. My mother termed it the mulberry festival; it was a date in her garden calendar like the vernal equinox. Everyone should have such a private calendar of the year, marked with the events that are really great,

like the coming of new asparagus and oysters, and the children back from school, and one's mother perhaps coming to town to visit her children and to dine about in pleasant restaurants and go to the play.

There are always great events in even the smallest garden. Blooming of century plants, for example, which fortunately happens every five or ten years, instead of every hundred. It is exciting to watch the great, reddish flower stalk shoot up at the rate of six to nine inches a day almost as high as the house's roof. This blossoming, it must be said, is the end of the plant. It withers down and leaves only a litter of tiny plants like it, the likeliest of which we choose and set in its lamented parent's place. The generations of century plants scarcely know one another. That is badly contrived. It is an instance of how we human beings have done well not to be vegetables.

The garden's corners are filled with a large-leaved shrub with great white bell-flowers. It is called datura and it has always, I suppose, been in

Florida gardens. But we by some chance had not seen it until once we were in Algiers and saw it in the *Jardin Botanique* there, in a long *allée* with Algerians in wonderful Arab costumes walking gravely there. My mother, abetted by me, determined that this lovely giant lily, which they called Justitia, should adorn the back-yard *botanique* in Florida. We got prices and florist's address and investigated questions of shipping and customs duties, and thus prepared elaborately for the order that should go another year from the Floridian to the African coast. And then returned to our village to find Justitia, inadequately described, so we felt, as datura growing in almost everyone's garden but our own. I feel as if here again a profound philosophical truth about life and gardens is just eluding me.

A Frenchwoman, born and reared in the far Seychelles in the Indian Ocean and cast by the strange tides of life upon our shores to eke out a difficult existence by classes and *conferences*, found, growing wild and

unconsidered upon our sand dunes by the sea, a green herb which is in that remote East considered a rare table delicacy. It is called "bred," and out of it she cooked a singularly distasteful dish which, eaten with a terrifically hot chutney, gave her the most exquisite pleasure. Here, too, one sees that same philosophical truth just around the corner.

If, indeed, wisdom were our goal, doubtless much might be found in simple garden lore. Why, my mother used to ask, is the most delicate of begonias, the frail pink blossoms of which, borne on slender translucent stems, rest like a sunset cloud all around the *bosquet*—why, indeed, is this called a "beefsteak begonia"? Is it because beefsteak from Chicago is the luxurious ideal of the native Floridian cracker for dinner? Why, we used to ask her, did she so value a potted palm, purchased at great expense, when it could scarcely be distinguished, except for its inferior beauty, from the palmetto scrub which grew wild everywhere? Far fetched and dear bought, my grand-

father would have sagely quoted! Why could house painters and such folk never see the beauty of her favorite tangle of red roses and trumpet vine and star jasmine which climbed by her window to the roof, and there, so they asserted, harbored mosquitoes and tore down the tin gutters?

The garden was often a battlefield between beauty and utility, though I scarcely know whether I can thus describe the regular yearly discussions as to whether the croquet court should be made into a rose garden. I think it was in the end spared to sport—a temperate form, indeed—because we sometimes played upon it a game called golf-croquet I had learned one afternoon in England from James Matthew Barrie, and because my mother once had met him there and wished, I think, that he was her son.

The garden is just nothing at all, I suppose, but when the sea breeze coming from the Indies farther south pours over it, and red birds twinkle by, and "mockers" sing, and roses

(mostly pink—she liked that) burst into riotous bloom, it seems something. At night in the late spring, as one looks out on its shadowy stretch, seemingly greater in darkness, and the west wind blows the scent of orange blossoms into the little house where she lived, and, if the moon is full, silly mockingbirds, deluded into the belief that they are nightingales, sing almost till the sun rises, it is to us who live in it a small patch of paradise.

The gardener—have I already said so?—believes in very truth that she walks there, and that sometimes early in the morning when the dew is on the lawn—we have lawns indeed, rare in Florida!—he can sometimes catch her voice giving him the simple orders of the day, that he shall trim a rose bush, or transplant spinach, or pull up an intruding pepper plant. It is just the humble routine things he hears that make me half believe in them. I know that if she lives she wants to know every detail of her children's lives and that she will want us to know

that she thinks I had better plant petunias, and that my sister's new skirt, which the gardener's wife is constructing, would be prettier with two flounces instead of one.

That is the kind of thing she would communicate to us, not some vague description of what life upon a higher plane is like. I know that if she can bridge the chasm it is for the simple purpose of being with us in each trivial moment of our lives. And there is no idle half hour of my existence when just to think of her is not the lighting of a flame upon the altar that she would wish. If I will let her, she will be in every rose I cut and in every shirt and sock I put on of a morning, living in some real sense in all the material world that is around me.

Is it very differently—I say this in all reverence—that one thinks of God and of His saints, who color the universe, if one will let them, with something of comradeship and love? Now that she who was the first source and fountain of my life is gone, I feel sometimes that I am left

among strangers; there is no affection except the mother's for her child that can creep so close in every trivial, tender detail of life. But can that love die, even if death is indeed the end of the individual, if even personality shall vanish and be scattered like ashes to the wind? Is there not a kind of immortality in the power of the living to bestow? Does not memory forever work a miracle?

The mulberry festival has commenced this week, and in the soft airs of spring which blow the world away it seems as important an event as those more disturbing ones of which those strange agitated newspapers from the metropolis are full. I wonder if death is not a little like the southeast wind, that blows life away and yet leaves together those who have loved one another.

VI

IT is the tradition of biographers, not quite so commonly of autobiographers, that it is the faults of a character which make it human and living. I have always rather doubted this, though the doctrine gives one an agreeable excuse for pointing out the defects of others. Yet I mean to conform to the tradition. As I remember my mother it is not bad qualities which stand out. Indeed, I am inclined to believe she was very good. But I shall do my best to blink at this goodness.

My parent's persistent and outstanding fault was of being by nature and, so I affirmed, by intention late. She could not and she would not be on time. It was a necessity for her, but it was, too (so it seemed to a person like myself, passionately on time), always a pleasure. Not to be on time gives a person of my temperament a hurried, hunted feeling;

it gave her a sensation of ease. To be on time would have been to be a slave; to be late was to be master of your soul.

It was a family tradition, my mother's lateness; it began, so the story went, at her birth. My grandmother's birthday was on the 17th of January. My mother arrived on the 18th, just one day too late, my grandmother always said, to be a birthday gift.

The gap between promise and performance was reduced as the good little Adelaide grew up; instead of a day late she was sometimes only a quarter or a half hour or even only ten minutes. But she was always late, bless her.

My temper did not always stand the strain upon it. At such moments I used ironically to point out to her that she always caught trains, proving that she could. And she answered, smilingly, that of course she could be on time for trains—one had to be. But one hadn't to be for one's son whom one loved. I asked her despairingly if my wishes could

make promptness seem compulsory. I pointed out the inefficiency of wasting my valuable time by keeping me waiting. I begged her wildly to consider the wear and tear upon my nerves, the depletion of my vital energy. And she listened patiently, even tenderly—and was late next time. The nearest she ever came to making out a case for herself was once when she told me, with almost a touch of hauteur, that it was excellent discipline for me to control my nerves and that possibly she was doing me a real service in keeping me waiting.

How can one ever know how many eccentricities of women are devised for the purpose of disciplining men, or how many times, when ladies are late, it is at the cost of considerable inconvenience to them, but for our good? Such things are possible; such thoughts may lurk in the recesses of the female mind. This question of being on time is one which has divided the sexes from time immemorial. And the great logical advantage which the sex

which is late has over the one which is prompt is that they, quite obviously, lose no time waiting. We, as a sex, are constantly in danger of being destroyed by the time we consume at restaurant entrances and in hotel lobbies.

I gladly absolve my parent of any deep-seated plan to be late; it was indeed the lovely, instinctive flowering of her nature. My sister, who is herself no bad hand at not being ready, always maintained that mother had no sense of time. And I believe this was perhaps so, that she measured it only by the pleasure she was finding as it passed, or by the fatigue which indicated that somehow it must already have passed. And I detect here, in spite of my coarser masculine instinct for promptness, the beginnings of a higher wisdom, of a measurement of time by some higher standard than that of the gross mechanical pendulum.

I used to assert that my mother's ideal would be to start to dress for dinner as dinner was announced, and she would reply, her eyes shining,

that it would certainly be the way to eliminate waste of time.

I dare say in her heart she admitted that never to be on time was a fault. But she had too great a sense of humor to believe for an instant that it was a very grave fault. And what shall I say? I started to prove her faults, but the first one I tackle now somehow looks engaging to me, and in a world where there is too little charm if a thing is engaging is it a fault? Even in one's mother?

I think a sense of the proportionate value of things was at the heart of her wisdom. For I think that, with all her love of the sparkle of life, she was deliberate and wise. There are a few of her girlhood friends still who can talk to me about her. And the thing I like most to hear, aside from her having had the prettiest clothes, is that they all came to her for counsel, knowing that Addie had a sound common sense well poised amid the storms of their girlhood.

Not that the storms were much. Girlhood was, I believe, a very sweet

and simple and natural thing in those days in America, and the problems brought to my mother that was to be were not of the kind which shake the world. I knew at the beginning that I was starting to write a chronicle "of small potatoes," as they would have said when my mother and my father were young. But I believe that the lives of so many good and happy people are mostly spent in dealing with these small potatoes. I believe, too, that out of the serene, clear sunshine of such a period in our national life came the strength and heroisms of the Civil War. And of something akin to this simplicity of young lives must come, I believe, the happiness of a more simple, more democratic, less luxurious life in the future now.

I remember being told of a visit to some Kentucky cousins made when my mother was a quite young girl, before the war. A brother of my grandfather had, with some queer Connecticut eccentricity, settled there on the westward migration instead of in northern Ohio.

There was a white-pillared house that was set in a blooming garden, and the one night my mother loved to tell of was when by moonlight a band of young men and young ladies pelted one another with roses as if they were snowballing in the colder North. I think of that flowery, romantic night as typical of all that serene period. Even then alarums and excursions were not far away. Uncle Augustus had been loyal to his Northern bringing-up, and there was a legend, delight of my boyhood, of how he had lain a week hidden from the Confederates in the shock of corn in one of his own fields, while by night one of my mother's girl cousins secretly brought him food. Such stories were the perquisite of little boys born in the 'seventies.

I cannot remember many convincing anecdotes of my mother's girlhood wisdom, though I do remember a delightful and terrific anecdote which, as girl and boy, my sister and I delighted to hear. I am a little vague about it, but I know it took place at a picnic and an exuber-

ant and delightful cousin—she is still, at eighty, all that—in what may seem an excess of girlish gayety, launched a piece of pie at a gentleman with peculiarly glossy straw-colored whiskers. The anecdote had to deal, I believe, with the attitude apologetic or otherwise which the all-too-lively Sophia should have adopted, a matter upon which she at once sought Adelaide's advice. I ought, I know, to be chiefly interested in that advice, but my mind has always dwelt rather on the pie-throwing itself, and as the movies came into vogue I was glad to see what an eternally sound comic value pie had.

The picnic had taken place at Nelson's Ledge, a favorite spot for such simple pleasures, where rocks broke picturesquely through the pretty northern Ohio woods and there were caves and dangerous almost mountainous paths—"lovers' lanes," no doubt. Picnics should never go out of vogue; they are typical of two pleasures of which no distracted condition of the world can ever deprive

us—the happiness which comes from contemplating the beauties of nature and the gayety which wells as from the heart of youth when young men and women meet.

Our fathers and mothers had less paraphernalia of pleasure than we of the generation after them have had. It has to do, I suppose, with the history of American morals and with the attitude, perhaps, of the churches toward certain of the devil's devices. But there must have been a period in northern Ohio when dancing was out of vogue. My maternal grandfather had been rather famous at it. At balls he had worn knee breeches, and it was evident from the way, even in old age, he spoke, that he "had had a leg." He talked of fiddlers, and of the tune of "Money Musk," and of balls in log cabins to which he went horseback on winter nights through wolf-infested woods, carrying his lady, generally Maria Kent, whom he married when she was eighteen, behind him on a pillion. Is it not incredible that in northern Ohio pioneer and

colonial days lay so close behind us, who are not even yet quite superannuated in the world? My mother has been of another period. As a girl she does not seem to have danced. So it happened that she and my father learned to dance about the same time I as a child at dancing school did. I say "learned" with hesitation about my father—he never really did. But my mother seemed to me to waltz especially with a quite ineffable grace and dignity. Their dancing class was in the evening in a house so magnificent as to have a ballroom where ordinary houses only had attics. And their season ended always with a fancy-dress evening. The excitement was for my sister and me intense. Once my mother went as a Spanish girl, once as "Night" with a great black tarlatan veil sewed thick with silver stars. (Didn't everybody's mother, in that Victorian day, go at least once as "Night," so sweetly and symbolically attired?) My father, who had suffered torments at the idea of fancy dress, went both times as a

monk. (Didn't embarrassed gentlemen for a whole century go so disguised?)

That my mother and I were beginning to be dancers at about the same time was amusing. I owe what was my facility in the waltz to a great deal of practice at odd moments with her—if I had a minute before dinner was ready I waltzed to the dining room, an informal but pleasant comradeship.

Comradeship is what I would especially recommend to mothers anxious to win their children's hearts. Comrade is what my mother was—to the end. Any recommendation of perfection is made with more hopefulness to mothers than to their sons, because I humbly realize that, though I was perhaps a good son, she was always a better mother—perhaps the superiority of mothers is divinely implicit in their very existence. My mother would have rewritten the Latin *nihil humanum*—restricting it to merely that nothing that had to do with her children could ever be alien to her.

She wanted always to be with us, always to do the things we were doing, if they were consistent with her dignity of a mother. Yet she never gave us, nor anyone else, I think, the impression that she wanted to be young, only that she wanted to be with young people like her children.

This was the real flattery with which she enchained us to her—that she made us feel that we always held her interest. She rarely praised us; she never told me, I'm sure, that I was anything exceptional or wonderful, though I have suspected that to others she expressed a more exaggerated appreciation. But with us her tone was rather as if she never said we were anything wonderful because, considering the matter temperately, she knew we weren't, of course, but that, nevertheless, we interested and delighted her more than anyone else in the whole world; and if this were a weakness, a personal idiosyncrasy, she felt sure we would forgive it. With such tactics she was of course irresistible.

It is a small thing, but we never sat through a meal in that silence which so often seems to grip families. People in strange hotels sometimes told us afterward that they had not supposed we could be related we seemed so interested in talking to one another. I would not convey the impression of anything chilling or formal. There was plenty of informality, and not always, I am afraid, at least on my part, very good manners. I am sometimes forgetful, and again often unduly proud of being a reasonable being and despising *les petits soins*. I don't believe in gentlemen who lay stress on always rising when their wives enter a room and then go home and beat them to a pulp. I say I like to believe that I abound in a kindness beyond form. Mother, if she were here, would probably say again that I am like Eugene. This needs explanation.

Eugene was a happy-natured negro, now serving a term in stripes on the Florida roads because of an ingenious method of burglary he

practiced. He was engaged one day in trying to borrow two dollars from my mother. This was to help pay his fare to a mythical Babtown, New York, whence he claimed to have come. He dilated upon the tender feelings which drew him back, and finally in a climax depicted the admirable family life he had led by saying:

"Why, Mis' Rhodes, I had fourteen sisters and I never hit a one of them!"

I agree with my mother that I am a little like that. I may have failed sometimes in courtliness of manners to her and to my sister, but I really never hit a one of them.

Talking and writing are, I suppose, what I have chiefly been concerned with in life. And I know I talked my best for my mother. She never failed of giving me that ultimate flattery of being a good audience. And I know that, however poor a proof of her intelligence it may be, her interest in what I might have to say was at least fresher and more genuine than anyone else's.

But for all this, I think I felt all along that she expected not to be put off with anything short of my best in thought and speech. I think, with all the perfect informality and intimacy she made both her children feel that being with her was a social event, and that because she preferred our society to any other she expected us to do what we could to justify her in this odd choice. If I have made myself in the least clear, I have, I believe, told one of the secrets I would like to tell to sons and mothers.

The assistance which my mother could give me in my trade of writing was chiefly as a critic of English style, and if I dwell upon her taste in the language it is not because I think her services to me bulk large in the cosmos, but because I think it is agreeable and significant that a daughter of Solon could render them. She had not been brought up in a reading community, nor educated, either at the village school or later at the Eclectic Institute at Little Hiram on the hill, much beyond what is the ordinary high-school

standard of to-day. But I think that the famous power of adaptation of the American woman is partly a certain sense of personal fastidiousness, a kind of uncultivated distinction of mind which is implicit in American blood of the old stock, which comes almost unconsciously into play if any attempt at literary criticism is demanded. I don't know whether my mother remembered any rules about split infinitives, but she would have been vaguely irritated by the presence of one in my writing, and in subtler less codified questions of taste she was quite sure to be right.

She belonged, of course, to a generation which had an impassioned belief in education and an almost childish reverence for the great achievements of the mind. My father had had an exuberant delight in literature—he plunged about in it with loud cries, rather like a boy enjoying the surf. But his taste, as masculine taste should perhaps be, was a little riotous. He, too, had been a writer, his chief achievement

having been a series of letters from Europe to the Cleveland paper, in that happy age when the simple transatlantic trip was a great adventure for Ohio and one could indulge oneself to the full in descriptions of the Strand or the Boulevard des Italiens, sure that to one's readers they would seem new and wonderful.

Again I am struck with the great part of American history which is the story of the effect of Europe, and am glad that in my parents as well as in myself I saw its workings. We have perhaps come now into a period which will rather be of the effect of America on Europe. And if we as a nation are in danger of being too proud of the benefits we are about to confer upon that continent, it would be well to remember in some humility what we and our parents and our grandparents derived from over there.

I believe it gives a certain tonic quality to life, as well as a sense of standing on foundations, to realize how in ourselves there are traits of

those who have gone before. And now, almost more than ever, it is well that we should all think occasionally of our parents and our grandparents in order that we may more self-consciously be American and add to our own sense of obligation toward the world—if happily we feel that—the sense of the country's debt to other countries. It makes for nationalism and internationalism at the same time, which paradoxical goal is really aimed at by the most generous-hearted to-day, is it not?

But I am perhaps venturing far afield, since I was trying only to tell something of the pleasant intimacy there may be between a mother and her children.

I know what I got out of being a son. I can, after all, only conjecture what her rewards were for being a mother. One thing, for example, the child is given, is the sense of being young; he is, after all, always young to her, even as his hair grows gray. But does his mother have the complementary feeling that she is always old, and does this sense deepen and

become oppressive as real old age slowly creeps on her? At how much of inner sacrifice of herself does she buy for her child his eternal youth? What is the inner truth, told only in the inner chamber of a woman's soul, about the happiness that comes from sacrifice? There is not much sacrifice about being a child, even a fairly affectionate and kind child. But the potential sacrifices of those who bear us are without limit.

With my mother went my youth. I do not say this to ask any sympathy. I do not mean even to assert that it is a sad thing. I only observe it as a thing which I had not known was bound to happen to me, though I now suppose it happens to everyone. I do not feel that there is now anyone much older than I am in all the world. I have, at any rate, grown up at last; I am wholly responsible for myself. As a matter of fact, I have been wholly responsible for years, and I have almost never asked advice. So that it is perhaps being alone that I mean instead of being old.

We never talked of the possibility of death for her. I suppose we did not much think of it. If that were to inhabit a fool's paradise, I really cannot see much that could have been gained by facing the inevitable. Perhaps, though, she faced it, and faced it alone—and that this is part of the measureless tragedy and sacrifice of motherhood, to hide from one's children the coming of the day when they must be left alone.

I can only remember one occasion when she spoke of the possibility of death to me. As she grew older it seemed as if a swarm of minor weaknesses and ailments buzzed about her, and pain seemed to be always lurking, ready to pounce upon her tired body. Pain grew not to be so much unbearable as, in one form or another, continuous. That I am sure is what happens to old people as they go to ruin. I suppose we younger people do not understand. This once she was a little tired, and so told me that she sometimes wondered whether, if the pains grew greater, it would really be much pleasure to

live. I assured her almost lightly that it would be, and we dropped the subject. But I wonder sometimes whether it is not easy to bear another's pain.

It would be perhaps too much to ask of a mother to live into too much pain and too many years. Yet there is not much children do not ask. And nothing mothers do not try to give. I am sure she would have tried to live forever, for our sake.

VII

IT is a very common thing to say that the edge of grief wears dull with years, and that it is a blessed thing. Perhaps it wears dull, perhaps it is blessed that it should be, if it is so. I am still at the stage of wondering.

The paroxysms pass, both mind and body fall back into something of the old routine activities. Life is not intolerable without those who have gone. But it is forever different.

Life is for most of us rather like a picture which composes around certain personalities. When one has grown old enough to be used to the picture the blotting out of one of its chief elements seems to make what is left ill composed and meaningless. The significance of half the minor events, of the trivial gayeties, of the small jokes, of all the detail of everyday life which made it bearable, is gone without my mother's answering

gleam in the eye, her pleasant passing comment.

Of course we try to keep her with us (we do this only half consciously, I think) by bursting forth about many a small and absurd event that it is a shame that she should be missing it. It is in the minor happenings of life that one misses an absent comrade. In the great crises, in the moments of great happiness or of great suffering, one is somehow willing to stand alone. It is when the laundress has said something amusing about the condition of my underwear that I want to share the fun with my mother.

Without the comradeship of one who has been a gay dear friend the world's events seem to fall into new and perhaps wiser valuations. That, it seems to me, is something of what people mean by the lesson of sorrow, the greater sympathy which one wins by suffering, merely that one sees that few things have much importance beyond what comradeship gives them. In a revalued world it is not so hard as it once was to go

without things. The deeply and genuinely bereaved man is the serener for his loss. He is, so long as his memory lasts of the beautiful thing he has lost, poised somehow above the minor good and evil of the world. He has less wish to live and so less fear to die, through a greater willingness to do either, as fate shall decide.

For most people, I think, the question of immortality only arises really from the grave of some dead loved one. And life, at any rate, takes on a new and solemn interest. The sun never again sets in somber glory without asking you to contemplate the world as something which may be a mere veil. If eyes that once looked at us with love are looking at the odd pattern of human life from the other side, we must at least hope that it seems to them better designed than it sometimes appears to us.

The question of the life after death would take more than one little book, as it has already taken its thousand thousands. Here there is not wisdom

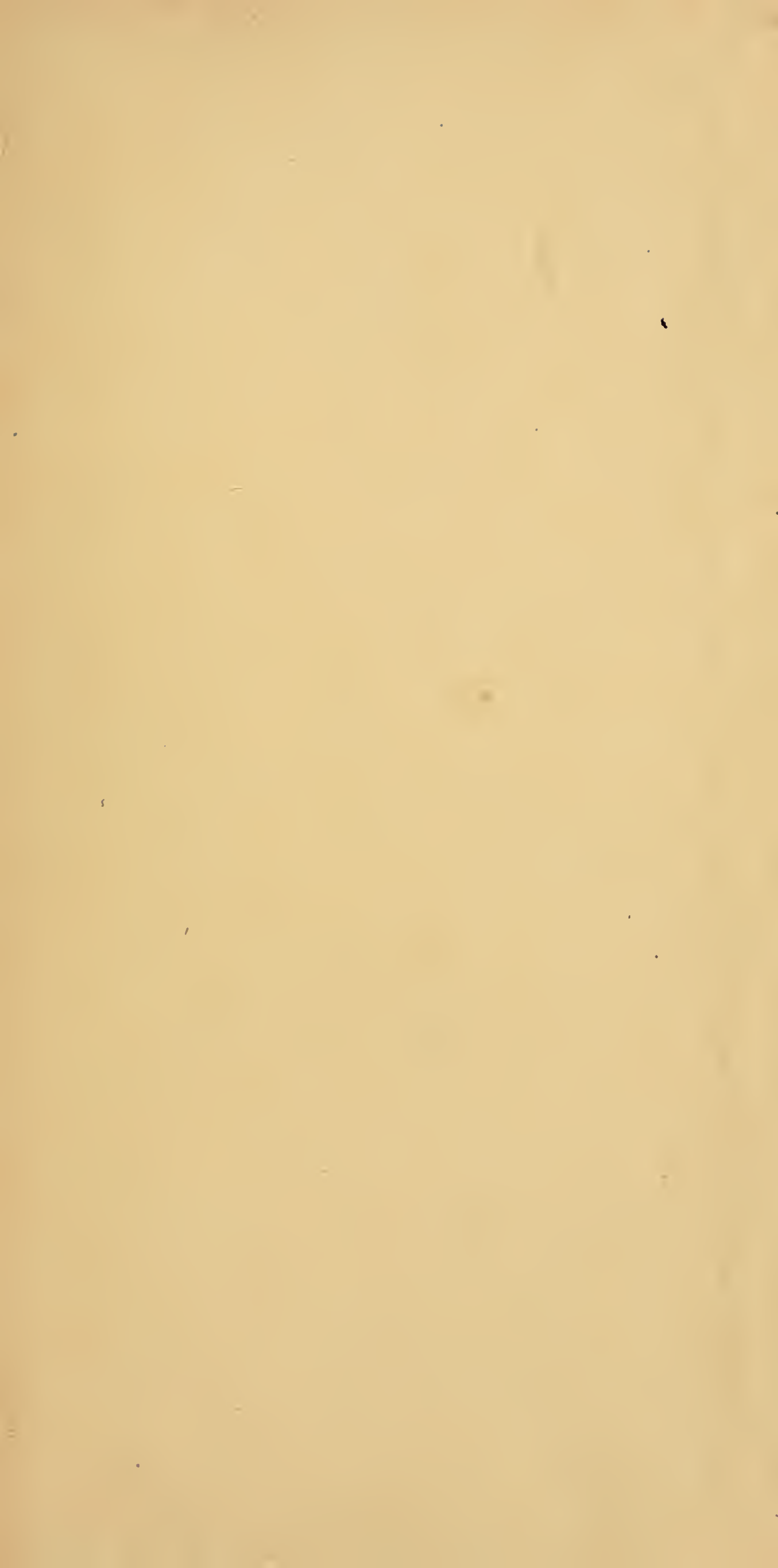
or science enough to make even one chapter. But I do know that because love has gone there is no ruin of the beauty of love which has been. Every great human affection is immortal; so, perhaps, is every smallest. Memory is the miracle worker. If you can remember the dead with a heart passionate enough, they do not die at least until you so go yourself. And then if you, too, sleep eternally, shall they not sleep as well?

There was in our garden a red climbing rose which my mother had planted and then despaired of because it would never bloom. It grew riotously, and upon wires strung for it between the fig trees it clambered almost the whole length of the croquet court. But for four years or more it never showed traces of flowering, and my mother had finally condemned it. That last autumn she told me that if in the coming spring it still refused to blossom it was to be removed from the garden, and a more docile bush set in its place.

She died in January, and in April

the Hiawatha rose flowered for the first time, a blaze of scarlet and gold, as she had meant it should be. It has not blossomed since. Was it a signal? It is not altogether preposterous to me. There is something which, every gardener knows, makes plants grow, not sun nor soil nor rain, but something the gardener himself brings to the garden. If anything could know that she wandered down the old paths it would perhaps be a rose bush. I had rather that it had been one of her children. But I disdain no hint that the rose is my brother and that the whole shining green world is bound together in some confraternity of love beyond my power to apprehend. If moods come when the comrade I have liked most still seems for me to live in the budding bush and the southeast wind and the redbird's twinkling song, why, then, I am glad.

THE END



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