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By Thomas Wentworth Higginson

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The Art of Life Series



*Things Worth While*





THE ART OF LIFE SERIES  
*Edward Howard Griggs, Editor*

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## Things Worth While

BY

THOMAS WENTWORTH HIGGINSON

*“Ce n'est pas la victoire qui fait le bonheur des nobles cœurs  
—c'est le combat.”* [Not in victory lies the joy of noble souls,  
but in combat.]—MONTALEMBERT.

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## TO THE READER

The germ of this little volume may be found in a brief paper under a somewhat similar name which was printed by the author in the Boston *Congregationalist* (December 7, 1907) and received some kindly approbation. He is now making a modest effort to follow up the same theme a little, taking that earlier paper, with some slight modifications, for his first chapter. In doing this he has, of course, the kind consent of the original publishers.

THOMAS WENTWORTH HIGGINSON

CAMBRIDGE, MASS., U. S. A.



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# *Things Worth While*

## I

THE THINGS THAT ARE WORTH WHILE

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AMID a constant series of lamentations on what life takes away, one rarely sees any attempt to do justice to what it gives. There are doubtless various temperaments; some adapt themselves to events better than others; some have a tendency to look on the dark side rather than the light. These are, it is to be presumed, matters of inheritance, and inheritance is a thing beyond comprehending.

I have known a whole family fearfully punished by the inheritance of intemperate habits from a grandmother whom none of them had ever seen; I

have also known a smaller household made terribly sad by the fact that the mother and daughter were both hopelessly intemperate, though the only son had utterly escaped the evil, and supported them all. But whatever the extremes or the variety of condition, we may claim that the great majority of human beings are more or less happy in the mere fact of existence, and that the taking away of life is generally regarded as the greatest of evils. Let us consider some of the points which explain this ardent clinging to life.

There is, for instance, a stereotype lamentation over "The Flight of Youth," a song best sung, perhaps, by Lord Houghton in his fine poem under that name. This fact stands for the one unavoidable calamity, if such it really be, which seems greater with every succeeding birthday. But there is, on the other hand, a series of compensations for all this, a balm which every year



brings. Age, for instance, teaches patience and charity. We see before us the spectacle of men and women whom the temptations of life have injured, but also that of others who have grown, without a visible struggle, more disinterested, more honest, more truthful than they were during a passionate and ungoverned period of youth. "I have been through all that," says the anxious mother, "and have seen the vanity of it"; and the daughter herself is apt to reply, "That is just what I wish, mother, to go through it and see the vanity of it, for myself." The longing suggests that of a little boy, eight years old, whom I knew, who, when a desire for Heaven was appealed to, expressed a strong wish to go to the other place first and see what it was like. Even the rich man finds not merely the opportunity for great benefactions; but, if he prefers, for smaller ones, as one of the Rothschilds is reported to have been fond of

saying to his friends, "I advise you to give a penny to a beggar sometimes; it is very amusing."

Let us consider pleasures more substantial than this millionaire's penny represents. One of the first joys accessible in life is friendship. "Friendship," says the French motto, "is love without his wings" (*l'amitié est l'amour sans ailes*), and Lowell could find no symbol so comforting for death itself as when he wrote:

"Death is beautiful as feet of friend  
Coming with welcome at our journey's end."

With friendship, or above it, is to be ranked the love of family, of parents, of children, and of those wedded partners of whose love, at its highest, the children themselves are but a symbol. But even these types of love do not yield quite its highest expression. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down

his life for his friends." Yet He who said this was yet to show a higher love when He gave His life for His enemies also.

It is a point as yet unsettled by moralists whether personal friendship at its highest, or even the mutual affection of the sexes at its best, is to be ranked higher, either morally or as a means of happiness, than that vaster emotion which the Buddhist sacred books describe tersely as "identifying one's self with others," without thought of return. "Wherein does religion consist?" asks one of the pillar inscriptions of King Asoga, which date back two centuries before our era. The answer that follows is, "In committing the least possible harm. In doing abundance of good. In the practice of pity, love, truth and likewise purity of life."

It is common to say that a man's highest duty is to his wife and children. Yet we call it a still higher piece of self-

devotion when he leaves a blissful home for the defense of his country in war; or when the life-saving crew puts off, at risk of death, to save the families of utter strangers. Does it not show the essential goodness of human nature when one finds its noblest standards in acts like this? Think how widely remote they are from that merely mercenary view of Paley's, where he defines virtue as consisting in "good done for the sake of everlasting happiness."

Then come the pleasures of public life, of literature, of science; all at their highest in the hands of the unselfish; at their lowest among those who receive them selfishly; yet we see people to whom the mere participation in such things is joy forever. No single thrill among them all is perhaps to be compared to that of the orator at his best, when his aim is lofty and momentous, and his grounds of argument are utterly unselfish.

On the other hand, the influence of oratory is more temporary in its nature than any other, both on speaker and audience; so that the scholar's peaceful study in this respect gives daily the more permanent happiness of the two, and one that can be enjoyed almost at his will. Both combine to give a large-minded man happiness, even though he be personally laid upon the shelf, for he watches the progress of human events and sees that on the whole all things work together for good. The increasing breadth of thought which he sees around him really supplies an added companionship as earthly friends grow fewer; and he finds himself accompanied, and sometimes even praised, by those who disapproved and perhaps stoutly resisted his earlier career.

That is moreover true which Cicero has so well pointed out in his book on "Old Age" (*De Senectute*), that as old age has less of strength than youth

possesses, so it has less need of it. Poverty becomes unimportant to those who have no longer strength to spend, and luxury to those with whom all but the simplest living disagrees. That is true of age which was pointed out by that keen observer, Lady Eastlake, as being sometimes true of the high-born and rich, who often, she writes, "return to the simplest tastes; they have everything that man can make, and therefore they turn to what only God can make."

## II

### THE CONUNDRUM OF HUMAN LIFE

LOWELL says of the hero in his "The Courtin'," an event described in a poem as local and lasting as anything by Burns:

"He was six feet o' man, A-I,  
Clear grit and human natur'."

It is creatures like these who, appearing sometimes, though not daily, in real life, carry all before them as inevitably as the hero in a novel by Scott or Dumas. This simple insuperable quality of vigorous human nature is, whether for good or for evil, the part that remains still perplexing in all the devices for making the world over. Fourier thought that he had thoroughly analyzed the gifts and passions of man; he

was perfectly sure that among a certain number of carefully chosen persons—call it 1680, or whatever his complete group was—you would find every possible shading of character and temperament so perfectly represented that the whole would at once blend together and work like a charm. All the faults and virtues of these people would just balance each other; and you would have nothing to do but set that squad apart in a family party to be happy, and proceed to pick out the next. He provided for no alternatives—there never were any alternatives for Fourier—and he did not make it clear what to do while you were waiting; or, still worse, what to do if you made a mistake and got one wrongly combined person into your association. If you got only 1679 who were the right persons and one who was the wrong person, it is plain that you might have to begin your work all over again; supposing, for instance, that the one



person out of place happened to be Napoleon Bonaparte. It is clear that one misplaced individual might wreck the prospects of the whole enterprise. In such a case numbers are nothing, for Josh Billings has pointed out that "a healthy hornet, that feels well, is more than equal to breaking up a whole camp-meeting."

One may recognize, as many are coming to see, that certain tendencies toward socialism are already modifying platforms and parties and people. One may also wonder, in reading the expounders of these tendencies, who prophesy such vast transformations as being a thing so easy and speedy—one may wonder what they also are going to do with the sometimes inconvenient fact of human nature. Grant that universal suffrage, and shorter hours of labor, and collective ownership, and equalized incomes will remove many of the existing temptations to evil, what is to become of the

temptations that remain? Grant every struggle in the world removed, what is to become of those of the flesh and of the third member of the proverbial trio? Giving everybody bread and shelter will not give them protection, except from the comparatively few sins which grow out of the want of bread and shelter. Looking through the columns which record crime in the newspapers, we find that only the minority among penal offences come from any such causes. Love and jealousy, hate and malice, ambition and treachery—these contribute most largely to swell the list.

In a country village where all are very nearly on an equality, and there is such an absence of poverty that the arrival of a distressed family is hailed with joy as a convenient outlet for old clothes, some terrible crime may at any moment come to the surface. It may equally come in the most carefully

selected circle of millionaires, where each man may, if he will, give \$20,000 for a new dressing case. Some forms of peril and temptation may diminish through the mere changes in social institutions; thus, for instance, it is already noticeable how rare a theme for a novel in America is the seduction of the poor but virtuous girl by the rich employer or the powerful landholder, while this still remains a stock situation in modern English novels. In general, this class of peril diminishes as the feudal conditions vanish from the world. But, after all, the main fact of sin and temptation, as incidents of human nature, remains. Nor is it yet plain what socialism, in its best estate, expects to do about it.

This does not imply any revival of Calvinism or any special theories of depravity. Calvinism in the strict sense, has had both its confirmation and its worst blow in the study of the laws

of heredity—a study which has practically superseded it. Here is the tremendous fact of alcoholism in the blood, for instance, the parent of more varied crimes than any other single source. Social grades have absolutely nothing to do with it. There is quite as much of it among the rich as among the poor. In the vast majority of cases the victim is not driven into it by poverty or discomfort; it is quite as often the cause of these calamities. It visits the sin of the parents on the children to the third and fourth generation. Grant that long periods may eliminate this yearning from the blood, and that improved habits in society may diminish, if not wholly banish, the temptation. This, at any rate, must be a very prolonged process. We are told, moreover, that the German socialist usually refuses to banish beer, and Mr. Bellamy expressly provides wine for the dwellers in his paradise. If his imaginary year

2000 could not suffice to bring about a change so moderate as this, can it have so transformed human nature that no two men shall woo the same woman, and that nobody shall have any enemies?

The final problem, what to do with the obstinately idle or quarrelsome or vindictive, is one with which the most advanced theories fail as yet to grapple. For years we have held social science conventions, and the outcome of it all is that some of the express champions of humanity still maintain it to be a sacred duty to punish troublesome prisoners by personal application of a "paddle" on the bare body. Mr. Bellamy, in his reformed world, when the question is asked what to do with the obstinately rebellious, can only say that they will be "cut off from all human society," whatever that may mean. It means either forcible banishment from the earth or else prison bars within it, and in either case what is to become of the

millenium? It implies as long and patient a working and waiting as did the abolition of slavery or of the feudal system. And meanwhile we must accept the facts of human nature and make the best we can of the conundrum they offer.

### III

#### HOW TO ELEVATE THE AVERAGE MAN

LET us grant, for the sake of argument, that we are a nation of average men and women, comfortable in a worldly way, but wanting in what is distinctive and interesting; unable to produce anything but beef, cotton, and mechanical inventions. Thus say some of our visitors and, being visitors, they must not be contradicted, even if we believe them quite wrong. The next question would seem to be how to elevate ourselves out of this lowly condition?

In some ways the proper answer would seem—at least to our critics—very easy. Instead of trying to write books, for instance, and taking our own literature seriously, these critics would say that we should import books

written for us in England, and should read those. Instead of cultivating our own oratory, we should introduce English lecturers, and compare their voices and manner of delivery with those of Everett and Phillips and Curtis. It would seem a simple remedy, but at once we encounter difficulties. For one thing, we are a composite nation; with the immigration of the old world, we already have a cosmopolitan lineage. "What then, is the American, this new man?" asked Crèvecoeur, in his "Letters of an American Farmer," more than a hundred years ago. "I could point out to you a man whose grandfather was an Englishman, whose wife was Dutch, whose son married a French woman, and whose present four sons have now four wives of different nations. He is an American, who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new govern-



ment he obeys, and the new rank he holds. . . . The American is a new man, who acts upon new principles; he must, therefore, entertain new ideas and form new opinions."

Grant now that we are humble, lowly, and altogether unpromising. What better can we do than to go to work in our own way, and in the new spirit necessarily involved in this situation to raise ourselves? The mixture of blood which Crèvecoeur found in 1782 is now far more complicated. There is hardly a living American who has not several European nationalities, at least, commingled in his veins. Grant that we must look to Europe for light (*ex oriente lux*), to what part of Europe shall it be? No doubt the identity of language and the genealogy of institutions binds us first of all to England. Is it not evident that to be a mere transplanted England is not enough? Even if there is no chance left for originality, we are

clearly placed here to select, not to duplicate; to choose from all civilizations what suits us, not to be a servile copy of any one among these. When England itself has borrowed from Germany its one great philologist, Max Müller; when it obtains from France the suggestion and the very title of its one humorous periodical, *Punch, or the London Charivari*; it is absurd to suppose that we, a far more mixed nation, shall not borrow what hints we need wherever we can find them. If we can obtain a better President through the Dutch blood than through the English, let us have him and stand by him. If our young artists learn more in France than in England, we shall send a hundred to Paris and not one to London; if our college graduates can acquire more in Germany than in England, it will be at Berlin, not Oxford, that they are registered. The more we need to learn, the more absolutely it is our duty to judge

for ourselves under what teaching to put ourselves; nor will the advance of time or knowledge make us less resolute in this selection. *Voir le monde, c'est juger les juges.*

So much for what we are to take from others, and as for ourselves, what better can the average man do than to try to educate the next generation of his race, and provide for an improved civilization? To complain that we have not old castles; to point out indignantly, as Renan did twenty years ago, that the whole United States cannot yet claim to have produced as many great pictures as some third-rate Italian towns—this is as unreasonable as if one were to twit England or France with not possessing the series of fossil horses found by Professor Marsh in Wyoming Territory. Each nation must begin with what it has; if we have not Carnarvon Castle, it is something to have had the Dinornis and the Serpent Mound—"an ill-fav-

ored thing, but mine own," as *Touchstone* says of his bride. For the rest, we are trying to form collections of art, that they may teach us art; to form libraries, that we may modestly learn something from books. When I entered Harvard College the library proper contained 38,000 volumes, and was the largest in the country; it now contains about half a million, and is not the largest. All over the nation the means of self-training have increased in something like this proportion within less than half a century. It would seem a very modest and innocent method for a nation to improve itself; and there would seem to be something almost meritorious in the effort, could we but venture to trust our own poor judgment.

But some of our critics, such as the late Matthew Arnold, set aside all this as a thing so unimportant as to be almost valueless. "Partial and material

achievement is always being put forward as civilization," he complained. "We hear a nation called highly civilized by reason of its industry, commerce, and wealth, or by reason of its liberty or equality, or by reason of its numerous churches, schools, libraries, and newspapers. . . . Do not tell me of the great and growing number of your churches and schools, libraries and newspapers." But if these institutions are not a means of civilization, what constitute such means? Grant that a church is not religion, it certainly represents the impulse toward religion. Grant that a library is not education, it certainly implies the desire for it. It is easy to object, to criticise; but in my opinion the most ignorant young man who pinches himself that he may give a book to the public library of his town; every mechanic who subscribes half a dollar, as many a one did half a century ago, to found the Boston Art

Museum or the Chicago Observatory, does more for real civilization than the foreigner who comes among us for a short visit and goes home to vent his spleen because a few more dollars than he expected had to be spent on cab hire.

Nay, more, to use the word just now brought into fashion, the myriad of unknown men and women who are now laboring as best they know how to build up a true civilization in America, are, in the highest degree, "interesting," and the man who fails to find them so is the man who is unworthy of the civilization of his time. The writer happened once to be one of the custodians of four great gifts, proceeding from one single man, to the city of his birth—a new city hall, a new public library, the land for a new high school building, and the land, building, and outfit for an industrial school, to be sustained for four years by the donor. The whole amount of these donations was about

half a million dollars, and they proceeded from a young man of thirty, whose wealth, though large, was not by any means enormous, tried by the modern standard, and who spent his life in California, and had but one glimpse at the buildings for which he had paid. No matter about the amount of the gift, its spirit represents that of a vast series of similar donations which are being distributed from multitudes of sources over our land. It is in this noble way that America wars against the ignoble; by this modest and unwearied effort that it proves itself to be—not at the top of civilization—far enough away from that—but at least patiently laboring on the ascent. It is not, perhaps, to be expected that every foreigner should have the discernment to see all this, but that only offers the more reason why we should see it for ourselves. What we need as a nation, is not less self-confidence, but more; to hold on our

appointed way, though a thousand critics fail to comprehend what we aim at. The American who does not see this casts himself off from all the inspiration of his country, from all hope of original production. Fields are won by those who believe in the winning.



## IV

### UNCONSCIOUS SUCCESSES

NO BETTER social maxim has been uttered in our times than that laid down fifty years ago by the veteran English reformer, John Jacob Holyoke, in his newspaper, *The Reasoner*, namely this: "The unconscious progress of fifty years is equivalent to a revolution." The older one grows, the more the truth of this doctrine is felt. Another English reformer, on a somewhat higher social plane, the late Honorable Mrs. William Grey—to whom was largely due, with Lady Stanley of Alderley, the establishment of Girton College in England—told me some thirty years ago, that when she looked back on her youth and counted over the reforms for which she and her friends had then labored, and

saw how large a part of them had triumphed, it almost seemed as if there were nothing left to be done. It is the same with many Americans who suddenly have the thought come over them anew that, no matter what happens, negro slavery is dead on our soil. In movements that affect whole nations, we hardly appreciate the changes that have come until we look back and wonder what brought them about. When we reflect that Pope Alexander VI once divided the unexplored portions of the globe between the Spaniards and the Portuguese, as the two controlling nations of the earth; that Lord Bacon spoke of the Turks and Spaniards as the only nations of Europe which could claim real military greatness; that the Dutch admiral, Van Tromp, once cruised with a broom at the masthead to show that he had swept the British forever from the seas; it sometimes impresses us as being something almost as

remote as the days of the Plesiosaurus or the Mylodon in zoölogy.

Later still, we saw before our eyes, the utter vanishing of the French military prestige. There was a time when merely to be French was to be formidable, even though Napoleon was gone. The tradition lasted really unbroken down to the Crimean war, during which the French still seemed, compared with the English, like trained men beside brave but clumsy schoolboys. In 1859, Matthew Arnold wrote from Strasburg, then still French, "He [Lord Cowley] entirely shared my conviction as to the French always beating any number of Germans who came into the field against them. They will never be beaten by any other nation but the English." When our American Civil War began, every tradition of our army, every text-book, every evolution was French. The technical words were often of that language—*échelon*, *glacis*, *barbette*. There

sprung up everywhere zouave companies with gaiters. A few years later this whole illusion suddenly broke and subsided almost instantly like a wave on the beach. Since the Civil War our entire system of tactics has been modified and simplified, our young officers are sent to Germany to study the maneuvers, and our militia men are trained by German rules. Then came our easy victory over Spain; in short, there has passed before our eyes a change of position as astonishing as that under which Turkey and Holland had previously become insignificant powers. It is to be further noticed in such cases, that our eyes are kept veiled up to the very moment when the thing occurs. At the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War, a deluge of war maps suddenly appeared, both in London and in Paris. They were invariably, however, maps of North Germany and the Rhine provinces and were, of course, utterly use-

less. No one had dreamed for an instant that the war would take place wholly on French soil.

Lord Shelburne, chief of the English ministry, predicted that with the loss of the American colonies "the sun of England would set and her glories be eclipsed forever." Edmund Burke, whom Macaulay declares to have probably ranked above all others in foresight, pronounced France to be in 1790 "not politically existing" and "expunged out of the map of Europe." Mr. Gladstone thought that Jefferson Davis had created not merely an army but a nation. An acute English book, Pearson's "National Life and Character," after mentioning these and other instances of the blindness of statesmen, goes on to add to them two equally striking of the author's own. Writing in 1893, and therefore before the war between China and Japan, he predicts that China is likely to be organized into a

great power, her flag floating on every sea, but that she will gradually acquire new dominion, and that we cannot imagine such a thing as a foreign conquest of China. Thus much in respect to the history of nations, but his prediction in regard to science goes even beyond this in its failures. It is his favorite conclusion that human life is destined to grow in the end more comfortable but less enjoyable, since all the fine thoughts will have been thought, and all the really interesting discoveries made: "Even if the epoch of great discovery is not exhausted, the new results are almost certain to be less simple, less sensational than the first revelations of astronomy and geology have been." Thus wrote Mr. Pearson in 1893, and three years later came the *x*-rays and wireless telegraphy. The wit of man could not have devised a greater anticlimax, whatever we may think of the deserts and alleged canals of Mars.

When we turn to social progress, we find similar high expectations, not always proved true by direct results, while the aims and ideas represented often reappear in some higher form. Fourier, having announced that he would remain at home every noon to receive offers of a million francs to carry out his vast designs, kept faithfully the tryst for twelve years, without a single visitor. Robert Owen, disappointed at the failure of Parliament to take up his suggestions for prompt action, said sadly, "What! postpone the happiness of the whole human race to the next session?" The late Thomas Hughes admitted that when Maurice and the Christian Socialists first formulated their plans, they all believed that the results would develop very quickly. The American Socialists of the Brook Farm period confidently believed, as one of their leaders assured me, that the national workshops of the French Revolution of

1848 would be a complete success, although Louis Blanc, who had charge of them, told me in later years that he personally had never shared this belief. Brook Farm was in some ideal and social ways so attractive, that I never met any one who did not look back with enjoyment on the life there; and all the faithful believed that such experiments would be multiplied on a larger and larger scale, until they molded society. Every succeeding effort in the same line has broken down with great regularity, after a period of promise; and yet who can deny that the vast development of organization among workingmen, the growth of public ownership and of philosophic thought, has come indirectly as the fulfillment of what Fourier and Owen and Maurice dreamed?



## V

### “ WISE THROUGH TIME ”

—POPE'S *Homer's Iliad*, III: 197

A LADY living in the suburbs of an American city heard, one day, just before breakfast-time, a timid knock at her front door; opening it she saw before her a beautiful Italian boy, perhaps ten years old, and looking as if he had just stepped from a canvas of Raphael or Francia. His soft eyes, his tangled hair, his trustful smile won her instantly; and when he stated in a voice as lovely as his face, that he desired some breakfast, she ordered everything in the house to be set before him. He ate with deliberate and comprehensive appetite, while she sat at his side, rewarded occasionally by a flash of the same seraphic smile. Even breakfast has its limita-

tions, and she at last dismissed him from the door with a sigh of regret. Happening to go out some two hours later, she found him sitting peacefully on the steps, smiling upon her as trustfully as ever. "Why," she said with surprise, "I thought you had gone away long ago!" "Oh, no," he said in the same heavenly voice, "What for go away? Plenty time go away!"

What followed is not known. Every story worth telling stops before the finish and leaves the performers still on the stage. Yet for an absolutely vast and unrestricted view of the resources of the universe, this answer takes rank with that of Thoreau's Indian who had, as he said, "All the time there was." It shows some real advantage to our nervous and hurried race in the importation of another people who have plenty of time for everything, and can put an absolutely undoubted leisure into the simple process of going away. But that

little story yields also a more commonplace moral: that it is far easier to begin an interference with other people, even to the extent of a breakfast, than to get them out of our lives afterward. Once open relations, for instance, with a high-minded but persistent crank, and who knows what summer hours must be lavished, what sheets of good paper spoiled, before you can detach yourself from that connection? Once engage yourself to find a better tenement for a poor family, and you feel yourself responsible for every inconvenience in the dwelling to which you remove them. Once subscribe to help a bright boy to college, and you feel, with dismay, that you are not only involved by conscience in the cost of all future term bills, but even in the ultimate problems as to whether he ever ought to have gone to college and to what vocation he shall turn himself after he obtains his diploma. The most simple and

unquestionable deed of virtue may bring upon us results far beyond counting; and fate resembles that formidable piper in Longfellow's "Spanish Students," who asked only a *maravedi* (or farthing) for playing, but charged ten for leaving off.

We must remember that every phase of human life in America, at least, has its joys and its cares. As a rule, in our climate and social life, people find pleasure in toil. Our leisure classes have to invent some form of hard work for themselves in the way of golfing or automobiling, and aside from this the mere social duties, when taken at their highest, develop gradually enough occupation to frighten any innocent rustic, and sometimes to discourage even the votaries themselves. Where is social pleasure supposed to be carried to a higher point than in Newport, R. I., in summer? Yet a lady, one of the very leaders there, said to me some years ago, "It takes my four daughters and myself

every atom of our time and strength from day to day simply to keep up with our social obligations; this lasts all summer and then we return to the city"—in this case Philadelphia—"and we commence precisely the same life there, and it will last all winter, with only a slight mitigation in Lent." It is safe to say that no farmer's or miner's daughter would be able to tolerate such an existence for a month, and yet all these ladies were cultivated, independent, and full of higher impulses that remained ungratified through want of leisure. For men of the same class, there is a shade of freedom with, perhaps, less refined tastes. What can be imagined in the way of conversation more vapid than the talk which may easily go on for a whole morning at a club of fashionable men. My most vivid impression of social drudgery goes back to a day when I happened in at the chief club at Newport, and three or four gentlemen of this

stamp were sitting together and debating the question of servants' liveries. Two hours later, I chanced to look in again and they were still at it, a little refreshed by the suggestion of a change of tailors. They were all, I believe, worthy men, but what must their ordinary existence be, if this was their relaxation! As a rule, the most enjoyable pursuits in life are, so far as I can see, those which bring the least intercourse with money, so long as they afford an earnest subsistence and one for which even their drudgery is a pleasure. "The artist is," said Goethe, "the only man who lives with unconcealed aims." Haydon, in his diary, says that when he gets a large canvas up and goes to work on a new historical picture, kings are not his superiors. The old German professor in Longfellow's "Hyperion" hoped to die with a proof sheet in his hand, and the utmost desire of the brilliant French author, Stendhal, was to

spend his life in a Paris garret writing plays and novels. Elmsley, the Greek critic, when asked by Lady Eastlake why the Germans beat the English in scholarship, replied, "Because they never go out to tea."

The only great and permanent fame comes from great gifts which seem, at least to their admirers, well used. In one of Heinrich Heine's fragmentary papers on England, there is a fine passage which may or may not be imaginary, describing how he came among the London docks to some great ship just from an Oriental port, breathing of the gorgeous East and manned with a crew of dark Mohammedans of many tribes. Weary of the land around him, and yearning for the strange world from which they came, he yet could not utter a word of their language, till at last he thought of a mode of greeting. Stretching forth his hands, he cried "Mohammed!" Joy flashed over their dark

faces, and assuming a reverent posture, they answered, "Bonaparte!" These names stood for greatness, and yet there is a greater greatness.



## VI

“HEAVEN’S BEST TREASURES, PEACE  
AND HEALTH ”

—GRAY’S *Ode on Vicissitude*.

“TAKE from our lives the strain and stress,” said Whittier. The words were uttered amid the calm of a Quaker home and in a quiet village, not yet given over to manufacturing. If this was his prayer, what must that of the world at large be? Yet he himself loved at least the thought of adventure and never could forget how in early childhood the solemn organ-roll of Gray’s “Elegy” and the lyric sweep and pathos of Cowper’s “Lament for the Royal George,” fascinated him with a sense of mystery and power, felt rather than understood. “A spirit passed before my face, but the power thereof was not discerned,” he says, quoting it in his preface to “Child-

Life in Prose." He says elsewhere, and truly, that "the happiest people in the world are those who still retain something of the child's creative faculty of imagination, which makes atmosphere and color, sun and shadow, and boundless horizons, out of what seems to prosaic wisdom most inadequate material—a tuft of grass, a mossy rock, the rain-pools of a passing shower, a glimpse of sky and cloud, a waft of west wind, a bird's flutter and song. . . ."

"Whittier had a great deal of the natural man left under his brown homespun waistcoat and straight collar. He had the reticence and presence of an Arab chief, with the eye of an eagle." Thus said his life-long neighbor and student, Robert S. Rantoul, and no man ever portrayed Whittier with such keenness.

If this was Whittier's early prayer, what would be his prayer to-day! It is not much more than fifty years since the

people in our country villages lived by farming, the men mostly making their own sleds, shingles, axe handles, scythes, brooms, ox bows, bread troughs, and mortars; the women carding, spinning, braiding, binding and dyeing. They sat around great fireplaces with hanging crane, fire-dogs, and a spit turned by hand or by clockwork; they made their own tallow candles, and used, even on festive occasions, wooden blocks or raw potatoes for candlesticks; they ate from pewter kept bright by the wild scouring-rush (*Equisetum*), they doctored their own diseases by fifty different wild herbs, all gathered near home, and all put up in bags for the winter, or hung in rows of dried bunches. They spun by hour-glasses; they used dials, or had noon-marks at different points on the farm; in many cases they did not sit down to regular meals, but each took a bowl of milk, and helped himself from the kettle of mashed potatoes or Indian

pudding. Soap was made at home; cheese, pearlash, birch vinegar, cider, beer, baskets, straw hats. Each farm was a factory of odds and ends—a village store in itself, a laboratory of applied mechanics. Now all that period of sturdy individualism is as utterly passed by as the government of the Pharaohs. The railroad has killed it all. Every process on the farm has been revolutionized by science or mechanical invention; every article can now be bought more cheaply than it can be made at home. The very mending of clothes now hardly marks the good housewife; you are told that it is cheaper for the elder daughter to go to work in the factory, and to buy with her wages new suits of ready-made clothing for the boys. The difference between city and country life is no longer a difference of kind, but only of degree. All have become a part of a swiftly moving machine.

One of the best things that ever happened to the wives and daughters of American country farmers was the muster of both sexes into the Farmers' Grange, where they have an equal sway in choosing officers; and if they are dressed with some especial decoration and the women are called by the old Latin names of Ceres and Pomona, it is so much the better. It takes them from those absolutely quiet lives on remote hill-sides which have driven insane, as observing physicians tell us, so many women of that rural class. "It is vain to say," says Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, "that human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquillity; they must have action, and they will make it if they cannot find it. . . . They [women] suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer."

Taken in moderation, self-restraint is admirable. One of the most cultivated

and attractive women whom England ever sent to this country, could never express her astonishment on finding Americans so calm and never in a hurry, as she had expected to find people "hustling" everywhere. This was in Boston, however, and after Chicago travelers had told her friends in England that it would "take but little time to make culture hum" in that vigorous city. Yet my friend found culture seeming to hum and peace prevailing. On the other hand, another friend of mine of wide local experience and who had spent a winter in a stagnant Southern village wrote that her one desire was to stand on a corner in Buffalo and "see things hustle." But the modern mail carrier is so rapidly spreading himself over the rural regions that he does the hustling for all. He comes daily to the humblest cottage with newspapers and gay circulars and pictures from publishers, and at any rate briefly informs the

cottagers what the world is doing, even if their children are grown up and gone away.

Thus the very Ceres and Pomona of the Grange have company. Even in the intervals of the Grange meeting, they are not wholly banished from the world. In their imaginations Ceres can protect all the fruits of the earth like her Roman ancestress, and so can Pomona pick up pears beneath the trees. In cities, on the other hand, noise and tumult increase with modern civilization, and neither the artist nor the author is free for five minutes from the most puzzling duties or perplexing questions. The country resident, however remote, hears messages once a day and has twenty-four hours in which to decide upon his reply to them. He cannot consult with his friends so instantaneously by mail, nor perhaps even by telephone, but he can be guided by second thoughts instead of first impulses, and the pine

woods or brooksides may be a better adviser than the whirl of the city. Truly said old John Dryden:

“ Better to hunt in fields for health  
    unbought,  
    Than fee the doctor for a nau-  
    seous draught.”



## VII

### TRUTH IS TRUTH

“Truth is truth  
To the end of reckoning.”  
—*Measure for Measure*, Act v, Sc. 1

EMERSON somewhere says that at every moment of a man's life it is he himself and nobody else who fixes his position. Coleridge was fond of an anecdote concerning a silent stranger who sat next him at a public dinner, and who would have remained a dignified and commanding figure in his memory, had not the excellence of some apple dumplings called him for a moment from his shell of silence. Coming out of it, he ardently exclaimed, “Them's the jockies for me.” After that he might have been a saint or hero at heart, but the case was hopeless in the mind of Cole-

ridge. There may be whole grades of social standing in a single sentence. If a stranger begins by saying in our hearing, "We was," or "He done it," we regard him as distinctly uneducated, even though he be a college professor or a member of Congress. Of a little higher grade would be the errors, "I don't know as," or "a great ways," or "cute." I remember when an ardent young friend of mine, who had climbed to the top of an old-fashioned stage coach in order to be near a certain celebrated orator, and presently heard him remark to his little daughter, "Sis, do you set comfortable where you be?" At the next stopping place, my young friend decided that the day was very windy, and thought she would get down again and ride inside.

Yet there is no doubt that we learn language mainly by ear and speak good or bad English long before we have looked into a grammar. Truth is truth,

and correctness is correctness, but who shall decide what correctness is? It is to be remembered that the English language itself is a peculiarly whimsical and inconsistent one. The educated American says, "It is he," while the educated Englishman still perversely says, "It is him," and tries to defend it. Just so an Englishman says "different to" instead of "different from"; or "directly I went," rather than "directly after I went." The most curious of all is the way in which an American phrase like that of "I expect" is used instead of "I think" by good talkers and writers in England, whereas it is now nearly abandoned in this country, whence it sprung.

As it is with mere words, so it is with all observation and thought. We must never forget that our children have to learn by actual life what is true and what is not. Mere words from the grown-ups are not enough. My little

daughter in her childish years was always filled with a desire to reach the stars, and during our early morning gossip she looked with perpetual longing upon the next-door neighbor's chimney. On my explaining to her that even should she reach the top of it the stars would seem not much nearer, she meditated a moment and then said, "What should you think of a ladder?" and lost a good deal of confidence in me when I doubted the possibility of reaching the stars by a device so simple. The changes in children's imaginings often prove, however, the most effectual way of removing them from their woes. In Hans Andersen's story, the old hen assures her chickens that the world is very much larger than is generally supposed; that, indeed, it stretches to the other side of the parson's orchard, for she has looked through a hole in the fence and has seen. But to a child the whole realm of knowledge is like the parson's

orchard, and all experience is only a glimpse through some new hole in the fence.

The actual facts gradually observed in the social world outdo all imagination, and would seem incredible to those who had not seen them with their own eyes. William Austin, a Boston lawyer, the author of the once famous story "Peter Rugg, the Missing Man," visited London more than a hundred years ago, and records it as no uncommon thing to see in the streets of that city a chariot and eight, namely a vehicle drawn by four horses and with four liveried servants in lace and gold, one on the box and three standing behind the carriage. Some carriages, he reports, had four straps behind them, with room for four of these lackeys. Nothing in "Peter Rugg" seems quite so incredible as this, and London liveries have now ceased to be even ludicrous, because the servants would no longer

bear it, and in America, they have never been ludicrous at all. They are now regarded as simply a badge of office, like the uniform of a railway official, which was, within my memory, much disliked by those who wore it because it seemed too much like being under orders.

They tell in Cambridge a story of a small boy of a distinguished professor who, having been deprived of his dinner as a penalty for a mis-statement, met the punishment somewhat philosophically by the vigorous avowal, "I guess I'll truth it for a while." We all come back to this at last, that truth is the surest ground and makes its way.

Even religious thought and institutions develop themselves in much the same manner. Emerson, in his Divinity Hall address in 1838, when giving that description, never to be forgotten by any reader, of his attendance in a country church during a snowstorm when the

snow was real and the preacher merely phenomenal, drew the conclusion that the popular interest in public worship was gone or going. Walk the streets on Sunday, seventy years later, and see if you think so. Yet I remember well that all who passed for radicals then held this view; I know that I expected, for one, to see a great diminution in the building of churches and in the habit of attendance. Practically the result has not followed; even the automobiles have not emptied the churches. The difference is not in the occupants of the pews, but of the pulpits; that course has been adopted which Henry Ward Beecher recommended at a ministers' meeting—not to scold the people for sleeping in church, but to send somebody into the pulpit to wake up the minister. There is now a prevalence of larger thought, of braver action than formerly. One of the most brilliant women in Boston, who had been brought up under the strict

sway of the Rev. Nehemiah Adams, once complained to me that the greatest injustice had been done by unfair critics to that worthy pastor. "He was," she said, "the greatest and kindest of men. He was never heard to say a harsh or unkind word about any one—except, indeed, the Almighty. He drew the line there." But it is now a rare thing even for the heretic to go into church and hear anything that makes his blood run absolutely cold; and as for the real things of life, can any one doubt that he will hear more about them than in those sterner days? In no direction is this change more astounding to the reformer than in the American Episcopal Church. I can look back on the time when it was, distinctly and unequivocally, the church of decorum, and had in that direction, doubtless, a certain value. No one looked there for a reformer; whereas now all the younger Episcopal clergy seem everywhere to



take their place in the ranks of active philanthropy; whether High Church or Low Church, they are all strong on the practical side. Note also the spirit of the Roman Catholic Church in its Washington University—how it adapts itself to American needs and to modern days; how it grasped, for instance, the opportunity of sending delegates to the Chicago Parliament of Religions, which the Episcopal Church missed.

That mighty gathering in 1893 of men of various nationalities and opinions was in itself an outcome of unconscious revolution. What the Free Religious Association had humbly imagined for twenty-five years, and had ventured to represent as far as it could, was suddenly taken up and swept into magnificent realization with the resources of Chicago and under the admirable guidance of a Presbyterian Doctor of Divinity. There are tides of thought on which we float and which are constantly

bringing about, though usually in unexpected ways, the good of which the brave and wise have dreamed. The higher criticism of the Bible, for instance, is already giving back the book as sacred literature to multitudes who had outgrown the conviction of its infallibility. In the church where I was bred, the First Parish in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the prescribed reading of the Old Testament had almost died out and disappeared from families and it looked as if the magnificent strains of David would be left unknown by the young, when Professor Toy came, full charged with modern knowledge; and how soon the greater part of the large congregation was ready to remain an hour after church every Sunday to hear him lecture about Ezekiel and Jeremiah! They took their Bibles with them to be used in a way to remind one of those old congregations in Scotland, where all hearers finger over the leaves for every text

that is cited, as if to make sure that the preacher is not cheating them. This is unconscious revolution and if it has been obvious through any given half century, the same probably will hold good during much longer periods. That, however, is much harder to estimate, for as Joseph de Maistre well says, "One may watch sixty generations of roses, but what man can live to see the whole development of an oak." (*"On peut voir soixante générations des roses, mais quel homme peut assister au développement total d'un chêne?"*)

## VIII

### CONCLUSION

IN THE successive chapters of this little volume, it is to be hoped that the author has made its aim clear as well as the line of thought which he has followed, giving as he hopes to each chapter, the character of an unit. The first chapter seeks to indicate what those things are which make human life on the whole worth living. The next seeks to condense these same things into a conundrum, to be practically solved in life. This may involve, without doubt, some alteration of habits and tastes in many readers; and with the changes involved by these the third chapter seeks to deal. The fourth chapter aims to show how this is to be done, not by following up

these changes alone, but by ways leading to solid success. This being made clear, the fifth shows also how quickly it gives a new and sunny aspect to our lives when we are wise in the use of time; the sixth shows that the result develops human life in two essential aspects, those of peace and health; the seventh sums it all up by a strong affirmation that truth is truth, and we are left, so far as this prevails, where the very loftiest souls have found strength. That some readers, at least, may find themselves helped both in joy and in sorrow by this sincere effort is the earnest wish of the author.



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