An Unfinished Communication

By Charles H. Hinton

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Mr. Smith, Unlearner

I was traversing a quarter of New York in which the streets, winding and squalid, with low buildings on either hand, resemble the alleys of an old world city. Turning a corner, I was in the most dejected of all that I had passed. Some vigorous, successful effort no doubt had its origin here, but the street was more like the last halting-place but one in a weary and dispirited struggle.

Yet even here were signs of that feverish activity which makes even the most squalid streets of our land different from those of the old world. Little stores wedged themselves in the basements; narrow, strip-like eating-houses thrust themselves into impossibly small spaces. Here and there a bell-pull wrenched off betokened the common lodging-house, while scattered over all the grimy windows and doors were the notices of decaying trades, the signs of struggling hand industries, the advertisements of professors in the last stage of indigence. Bootmakers, flower-makers, a dancing mistress, piano lessons, shorthand in five weeks, all these I read. Jetson Street seemed a favorite camping-ground for the cheap lesson-giver. Wearied with these sordid details, I passed rapidly on, buried in my thoughts.

But even in the least attentive mood an unusual word, a misspelling, an incongruity of any kind has the power to attract the eye and cause it to send a signal to the brain. There was a house opposite which, by its carefully patched and preserved paint, its unbroken railings, seemed to suggest that it had struggled painfully to preserve appearances, and only succumbed finally because after all it was in Jetson Street. On the door was the unusual notice that took my eye. A plain drab board had the words

MR. SMITH,
UNLEARNER

Of all the misdirected efforts towards earning a livelihood this, I thought, is the most futile, and I paused to smile at the foolishness that put it up. What weary, dull-eyed failure was it who, unable to succeed in any pursuit, advertised himself as willing to impart his incapacity to others? But as I stopped there somehow came into my mind the idea, that genuine services such as this foolish creature pretended to offer might not be unacceptable to myself. How pleasant it would be to let pass away some of that verbiage I learnt at school--

learnt because teachers must live, I suppose. The apeing and prolonged caw called grammar, the cackling of the human hen over the egg of language--I should like to unlearn grammar. The sense came over me, faintly at first, but gathering strength, of how much I should owe to any man who would rid me of what I learned at college--that plastering over of the face of nature, that series of tricks and devices whereby they teach a man knowing nothing of reality to talk of it as if he did. There passed before my mind that pallid series of ghosts, ghosts of what had once been some man's living, practical work, the books by which professors--because they must live, I suppose--keep younger men from life and work.

A gleam of hope came over me that I might forget my philosophy lectures and the teachings of that bespectacled Doctor of all the sciences, who always turned the handle the wrong way, while he told us the principles by which things go. The line at infinity, it would be nice to forget that; and the unconscious will--the principle of being and not being too, which, not much in itself, yet, like an active commercial traveller, makes business at both ends.

It would be pleasant too to forget the Darwinian theory, which tells me things are as they are because they are not something else; and astronomy, which kicks the globe into companionless cold space; and physics, which tells us we are but the result of multitudes of moving particles. If all these were to sink and disappear from me, then perhaps I should be face to face with something not a specter, not an instance and example of a phase, a formula, a barren set of words.

The letters stared me in the face unmistakably, for I had approached close to the house. When seen near, its apparent superiority to its surroundings vanished. But the inscription on the board was clear, emphatic, and, as paint was estimated in that street, of not such very ancient date.

Perhaps here, in this obscure corner, is some neglected philosopher, who, like Socrates, can teach a willing listener that he does not know. Perhaps at his words that hollow crust will crumble away, that is each man's idea of himself and his fellows, letting the man himself be known.

Could he really teach me not to know--to be as though I had not known--would not that be to forget? To pass out of those shades of vast and poisonous thoughts coeval with the race? Could he wipe out those foul ideas that pollute man's strength and woman's beauty--can he make the mind as though they had never been? Can he take away those thoughts that cast their withering shade over earth's fair flowers and turn the man to brute? Can he put an end to divided endeavors and self-contemptuous indifference?

If I could forget--lose consciousness of those ineptitudes which show me too plainly what I am; forget the helpless ending of all hope, the hollow emptiness that fills the place in me, of friendship, love, and truth.

Hastily I stepped up to the door and pulled the bell. But instead of a vigorous peal the wire creaked far in its bearings. I stood looking at the door--the paint had long lost all trace of its original color; it was covered with marks, chipped here and there in flakes, worn through where it had been rubbed and kicked by entering feet.

A curious gate, but it opened. In the dark passage I saw a woman, a little child was hanging to her gown; another smaller still she carried in her arms; from far beyond there came the

sound of crying.

"Is Mr. Smith in?"

I looked with interest at this porteress of the porch. She was fastening her dress at the neck, her hair came straggling over her face, and her gown was shabby; but her form, strong and substantial, had a touch of antique grace. Comely but unanimated features surmounted her deep bosom. Her eyes moved slowly towards me like the placid eyes of a browsing ox, as she answered me with deliberation. "He's left here." "Where has he gone?" "Jenny," she called out, "where's Mr. Smith's trunk gone to?" "Don't know," returned Jenny's voice.

Here was an end of my inquiry, but I asked--"Had he much to do?"

"I don't know that any one came to see him, though perhaps he let them in himself."

"Did he say anything to you?" He wasn't the kind that talks much; he kind of kept to himself."

"Do you remember anything he said?"

"Well, he did say as I was a better one in his line than he was himself, but I guess that was one of his ways."

"What sort of man was he?"

"Oh, nothing in particular; you sort of felt you'd seen him before. He'd a black beard and kind of looked you through."

Jenny's voice came from the upper landing. "His trunk ain't gone yet." In obedience to a howl from below, she moved off to little Harry or Susan or Jane or one of the swarm.

As I walked away I was glad that I had avoided meeting some seedy individual ready to spout his nonsense. But it was not clear to me what he meant by his signboard. And what did he mean by his remark to the woman? Was it a joke at his unsuccess? He said she taught better than he did--taught unlearning better. What did he mean?--learning, forgetting! Why, I thought, of course the woman is an infinitely better professor of the art than he could ever be. For what is childhood save a vast forgetting, all the piled-up pack of cards, the theories, aims, strifes, emulations of a generation cast down in one sweep of oblivion, no vestige remaining. Yes, Mr. Smith is capable of a shrewd remark. Is it not as if mankind longed for the same thing that I do, and sought for it from woman? Forgetting, wiping out, the capacity of beginning again. Remorse wiped out, the ignominy of being sunk lower than any conceivable degree of unmanliness--this faded completely away! Is this then the secret of the tendency of man to woman--the longing for forgetfulness of the race? She, the soft Lethe, wherein all errors are forgotten? Love, the desire of forgetting? Are we but falsely what we think we are, this wrapped-up system of membranes, arteries, vessels but a secondary part of life, the real thing that passing on, that birth and re-birth, the proceeding to happy oblivion after oblivion: and man an eddy in the current, a loitering, a delay, a complicated error, a worked-up stage with a horrible power of mismanagement, himself a mistake, his chief passion to be forgotten? Strange that most reasons for wishing to forget come through women, and woman is the means of forgetting--woman her own antidote. But

I had rather see what Smith has to say.

In Search of the Unlearner

On my left was the grey sea; before, behind, and on my right stretched an unbroken waste of sand, level and smooth where it approached the ocean, but beyond the last line of the sweep of the storm rising in little grass-covered hills. All around was monotonous and still. The clouds hung low in a great darkening veil, and the thick, blurred air was laden with fog. It was one of those days on which Nature makes herself all alike, letting all the jarring differences fall away and presenting an image of rest and peace. The only breaks in the great sameness were the furrows left by the ripples of the falling tide, and myself, a black speck, troubling the immensity. The marks on the sand would soon be swept into oblivion by the rising ocean in its advance. But I--well! If it were to happen, no one in the world would care, no wheel of business or friendship would be hampered so little was there in my life that I had come fifty miles out of my way, had given up a day and accepted the prospect of a night at a miserable boardinghouse, in order to meet an individual from whom I could by no possibility get any good, who probably was an impudent pedant. I had sent to his landlady for Mr. Smith's address, on the eve of starting for a journey to the south had received a scarcely legible scrawl, in which she informed me that the professor was at the little out-of-the-way fishing village which I had just left. I had arrived in the morning; singularly enough the little steamer which set me down at this remote spot bore two other passengers for the same place. We had exchanged words. One of them was an artist who had his sketching things with him, a man of a singularly refined and pleasing expression; a brow beautifully moulded; and a mobile countenance, but worn--a bohemian evidently, who mingled the delights of art with the chance pleasures of a careless crowd. The other was a contrast in every way; he was robust and square cut, carefully dressed, speaking in a slow, deliberate manner, with an air of thought about him which was contradicted by the paraphernalia he put into the boat that took us off--the sample cases of a commercial traveller. We all three came to the boardinghouse, which was the only accommodation the village afforded. I made inquiries as to Mr. Smith's presence, and learnt that he had gone out early that morning, intending to walk to a still smaller village farther along the coast and return in the evening. Accordingly I had determined to go out and meet him on his return journey. I had no fear of not recognizing him or not meeting him; there was but one path, and the sandy vista of coast presented no figures but those of fishermen near at hand waiting by their boats.

The path left the level sands and wandered up and down amongst the sand hills--hills produced by nothing but the ceaseless winds, but made permanent by the coarse and straggling grass. At a turn in the winding path I suddenly came face to face with the man I sought. He was tall, dark, and walked rapidly; his eyes were keen and piercing, hut he did not look at me till, standing directly in his path, I said, "Mr. Smith, I believe." With a gesture of his arm he arrested my hand, which I had involuntarily raised; he looked me in the face and said, "Excuse me, we have not met before." This was not the indigent professor of a purposeless art whom I had expected to meet; the glance was full of concentration and energy--the glance of a man accustomed to seize an occasion, not of a waif and dreamer, but of one who directed the destinies of others. Still it must be the man I sought, so I continued, "I called on you in New York, attracted by the singularity of your notice."

In what do you consider it singular?" he asked.

"Unlearner," I said, "that is not usual."

"Some mischievous boy, no doubt, has put an 'un' before a word of a very usual significance."

"The significance may be common enough, but 'learner' is never seen on a door plate; the more usual designation is 'teacher'--learner in such a position has no significance."

"In that case you do not better it much by putting 'un' before it."

"It is perfectly intelligible," I replied; "in composition the word learner retains its primitive significance of an importer of learning, and unlearner is one who relieves others of the burdens of knowledge."

"Admitting that," he replied, "a man may profess elocution or Greek in New York and yet not be willing to impart instruction wherever he goes.

"Certainly," I answered, "but as I am not likely to see you again, perhaps you will satisfy a natural curiosity on my part as to the nature of the profession of which you are the most eminent representative."

"You do me too much honor," he replied; "I am at the very bottom of the calling."

"To do justice to both our views, in brief, you are the only representative of the profession."

"You are right," he answered, "unless you would include in it those who contribute their services by teaching something in an inefficient manner."

"Omitting those who hardly count, I can understand that the demands on your services are so incessant that you hardly care to interrupt your brief period of rest," I said.

"Indeed, I do not find myself much in request--I would gladly welcome a competitor or two, if there were more demand for the kind of service I render; it is I that have to seek, not I that am sought. But what is it you wish to know?"

There was, if not in his words, at any rate in his expression of countenance, an air of aloofness and superiority which I judged inappropriate coming from a struggling teacher, so I said--"There is a certain absence of display and ostentation about your profession which is commendable. A dancing master, a teacher of the flute, in offering to instruct tacitly lays claim to the possession of skill in dancing or flute playing, whereas you, in offering to aid in unlearning, lay claim to proficiency and ability in nothing."

"I am quite willing to admit," he answered, "that you possess intelligence, if that is the object of your remarks, but at present I am not exercising my profession."

"Perhaps your indisposition to exercise your profession has something to do with my possession of intelligence," I interrupted.

His manner changed--for the first time he looked me full in the face; I felt as if I was called on for a combat. Not that there was anything unfriendly in his look, he might be on my side

or against me, but it was a face that took away from me in a moment any inclination for trifling insincerity or pretense--it was like the face of battle.

"Are you sure," he said, "that you want to unlearn? Look at the sea. From here we can see a multitude of small waves; if we were on a high eminence we should see the larger ocean billows on whose surface merely these small disturbances are. From a still greater height we Should see the great wave of the tide, whose great sweep might mean life or death to a swimmer, buffetting the tumultuous little waves. Is it not the greater tides that you should strive to learn, forgetting the momentary disturbances?"

"No," I said, "that is more learning, not less--and there need be no forgetting in that learning, for from a close and intimate knowledge of the little waves the larger movements could be discovered, depending as they do on the larger movements."

"And yet," he replied, "it is the path to that which you seek, for in unlearning, as well as in everything else, there is a certain heedlessness and recklessness which defeats its own end, a desire of grasping the all which lays hold on nothing."

"There is no need for you to tell me that," I answered, as my past thrilled through me.

"Then wherefore forget? What you have been is the food on which your soul lives. Think how closely connected memory and self-consciousness are; snap the last chord of recollection and you would lose the sense of personal identity."

"I do not want these stale moralities," I said, "we are fettered and bound by the past, and oblivion--utter oblivion--is a cheap price to pay for freedom."

"So you know that you are fettered and bound, but you have got to learn that you act in doing nothing; you do not see where freedom lies. But have you ever lived? For life is where man takes up the work of nature and forms a network of close personal knowledge, linking each to each, preparing that body in which the soul of man lives. Three people came to me once, whose destinies were influenced by each other. One of them, a farmer in New England, had committed a murder. Up to forty years of age he had lived among the people of his little village, as one of them, as in these rural communities they carry on their lives. But he fell into difficulties, and, going one day to the house of his largest creditor, he found him inexorable. A quarrel arose; there was no one about. He killed the man, and taking a sum of money, sufficient to relieve him from his difficulties, he went away unperceived. The murder was attributed to roving vagrants. But the farmer found a sense of isolation and aloofness creeping over him. At last, when he could bear it no longer, he went to a neighbor and told him of his crime. 'Least said the soonest mended,' said he, and counselled the man to keep silence. 'But,' said the murderer, 'I want you to help me; you, to whom it does not matter, can be quite open and perfectly known by every one, then I being linked on to you and you to them, I shall be joined again.' But his neighbor hesitated--there were several things quite inconsistent with his position as a deacon which prevented him from acceding to this request. Being moved by the man's eagerness he explained everything fully to him and finally convinced him that what he asked was impossible. The murderer let some time go by till, finding himself sinking still deeper in his isolation, he told a young and lovely girl of what he had done. She was very sorry, and told him that he must live a very good life ever afterwards. 'But I want you to help me,' he said; 'it Will not cost you anything. I want you to be perfectly open, so that every one knows everything about you; then you, knowing

everything about me, I shall be linked on.'

"'But,' she exclaimed, 'I could not tell John all about James,' and pitying the man she told him all about herself. He, seeing that he was unreasonable, went away, and after a time gave himself up, and was executed. Then his neighbor felt a new earnestness and cheerfulness come over him, and the girl--she was married then--threw her arms round her husband and in a flood of tears felt a weight and oppression removed--he had done for them what he had wanted them to do for him."

> [The artist and the other man, named Clement, join the narrator and the Unlearner; and the two latecomers tell their life stories. The Unlearner starts giving advice.]

His next words were addressed to Clement: "You belong to a modern school which finds reality in the fulness of the relations in which a thing is; you do not conceive it as existing apart from its relations. Now, as the events and circumstances in which you know an individual disappear in time, you cannot believe that he continues to exist. But why should you say that the events and circumstances which are past in time exist no longer, making your consciousness a measure of existence? Thought is a path which it is difficult to retrace. You must go on. You believe in the permanence of matter, the conservation of energy. Take the next step and recognize the conservation of events. Every event which you experience is a permanent thing, altering but always existing. Think of yourself, this is the conception of the soul for you, as always existing in every act and circumstance of your life, so that you--your complete self in your whole life--are continually changing and altering, the present being that part on which you are now engaged. In this way you can come into substantial agreement with the one who is to be your life's companion."

"But," said Clement, "there isn't room for any more than I can see in space."

"Here you introduce a conception which has been made for utility into a discussion in which we have need of certainty. You cannot observe anything which is not analogous to an activity of your own. For purposes of use you have gained an intuition, by means of which you observe the world in space. If you want to know more of existence, you must not take the conceptions of the arts and manufactures without criticism, but you must form a higher intuition by means of which you can observe more."

"I see what you mean," said Clement; "though I have always before dismissed such notions as chimerical." Then turning to me, with that conviction of his words being valuable which so seldom leaves a man who has gained his living by talking, he said--"It is perfectly possible that what we experience as fleeting, passing events in time should be permanent, altering things. Imagine this piece of wood"--he took up a piece of driftwood a few inches long--"passing through a sheet of paper, but paper of a curious kind, which closed up round all the irregularities of the wood. A creature living on the paper, and having no experience beyond it, would think of the successive sections of the piece of wood as a piece of matter in his limited world, while the face of the piece of wood would appear to him as a series of changes affecting the contour of the section. He only knows the surface as a series of changes. Now if the piece of wood is altering itself, that surface which, perceiving it under his conditions, he calls a fleeting series of events may be changing and altering, and similarly Nothing was to be gained by continuing a discussion of this kind. Mr. Smith had refused to do anything for the artist, and he was now trying to devise a modus vivendi for Clement--a matter which did not interest me at all. So I turned to him and said:-- "I shall be

stopping on this coast for a few days; perhaps I shall have the opportunity of meeting you again. He answered me by an inclination of his head.

"Do you know," I continued, "if I can find accommodation in the village farther on?"

"Yes," he answered; "there is one house where you can make yourself comfortable, if you do not object to simple fare. You will find it a very interesting place."

"I will go on there. May I ask you," I added, turning to Clement, "to have the kindness to tell the people on your return to send my things after."

"I'll see to that," said he.

"Before many days are over I will meet you again," said the Unlearner, and we turned in opposite directions.

A Warning

Dark clouds hung around, hastening on the obscurity of night; the little footpath went wandering in and out between the sand hills, and wearied of it, I left it, striking far out to where the line of the sea was visible. Walking on and approaching nearer to this sure guide, I wondered what would happen if, pressing on and on, I entered the looming waters, and, passing beyond the possibility of return, were swallowed up. Were I to be dropped out of the world really and for ever, who would care? Some people, perchance, would faintly wonder what had become of me. But none of the wheels of business or of life would be stopped--the irrevocable end of all would come, closing upon a life of wasted opportunities, of heedlessness, fraught with bitter pain to others, of real disappointment irrevocably suffered, for death has placed its seal on them. How is it and wherefore that I have been landed in such an unreal world, one in which I could welcome any greed, any passion, as a god giving me life, and wiping away the dull emptiness that fills all things?

There must be reality somewhere. But all I have ever sought has been fictitious--sham knowledge was all I learnt and empty aims were all I conceived. And when I began to live in the world I could not distinguish feigned love: I did not understand the signs of deceit and mockery. Rather, was I not a deceit and mockery myself? Forget--if I could but forget! No atonement, no re-doing possible! What I envy most is these sands, whose miserable furrows are washed away by tomorrow's tide. Oblivion, whose image is the great, dark wall of cloud and shifting, barren sand--that is what I long for, the only possible beginning.

A singularly clear and musical cry came to me. I looked, but saw nothing. The immense waste stretched to right and left, on and behind. Far on my left was the white line of the living waters, far, almost undistinguished, on my right were the low sand hills of the shore. From somewhere between me and them came the cry. It was repeated, and at length I discerned a figure far in shore--though whether it were a woman or a boy, I could not tell.

Turning, I began to walk towards the creature who, starting out of this barren immensity, hailed me, and wished to speak to me. But it did not await me; it came towards me, making signs and movements, from which I gathered that I was to retrace my steps. I went back, always tending in shore, and it moved parallel with me. At length it beckoned to me, and approaching directly I saw that it was a girl. "The sands are very dangerous out there," she

said, "this is your best way"; and keeping some distance in front of me, she led me to the path which ran among the sand hills. Almost before I could thank her, she had turned off along another trodden way, and was lost to sight.

> [In the village, the narrator takes a room in the house of a fisherman who turns out to be the guardian of the girl, named Natalia, who warned him of the quicksand. He begins to teach Natalia what he knows of the world, and kindles in her a desire to go and see it for herself. As she is a foundling, rather than a native of the village, no one objects when he buys her clothes and a steamer ticket to the city. He has fallen in love with her, although he does not fully realize this.]

An Unexpected Result

No picture of solitude can be greater than that of the long, fading line which lingers still when the vessel that left it marked on the sky has vanished. The steamer was gone, bearing Natalia to her new life, carrying her to her destination. At last every vestige of the long, thin line had disappeared. I arose and turned, uncertain where to go. I wanted to see the place again where she had lived, to talk to some of the little fellows with whom she had talked so often, to hear their unconscious repetition of her words. I turned and walked by the sea. It was growing dusk; the tide was low. In that level, monotonous waste I guided myself as I walked by the dim meeting of land and water; the rising wind blew chill.

I had walked for an hour or so, when I thought I heard a cry; it was like the musical cry with which she had hailed me--it must have been about at the same place. I looked around; there was no one there. Suddenly about my feet came the foam of a wave; the wind whistled, all the sea was a sheet of foam.

Trying to reach the dry land, I came on a treacherous place and sank up to my knees. I extricated myself with difficulty. Then, striving to remember the directions she had given me, I began to retrace my steps. But the waves were upon me--waves such as one could not hope to swim through; a storm was blowing, and all the sea was a sheet of foam. I struggled on for some distance, when all at once the sand seemed to suck my feet down. I felt that I must make haste if I did not want to get into serious danger. Resting my body on the water, I freed my feet, and found my way to a firmer place. But, proceeding, the waves suddenly seemed to me higher. I had come to a depression in the sand, and at last one wave went over my head.

For some seconds I held my breath, then I felt the air again, but at the moment I was breathing a long roll of foam came. My mouth was full of water. Choosing my time, I tried to get a breath from beyond the foam by leaping up from the bottom, but I only gained momentary inhalations, and before long my breath refused to be controlled. Water--there was nothing but water; it was in my eyes, in my ears, over my head. But I became calmer, not more excited, fighting my way step by step, when I could find the ground in the direction in which I judged the shore lay. "This predicament," I thought--"will be a good one to think about when I am safe by my own fireside in the evenings. It will make me relish safety and comfort." A larger wave, which gathered without these awful foaming tops, lifted me up. I saw that I had been struggling along instead of inshore. Then it was all a period of confused gasps and determined struggles, I becoming all the while calmer and more sure of reaching the shore by steady swimming. I gave up trying to keep my head

above. I trusted to chance, and swam steadily through the water, with a slow, methodical stroke. I seemed to make hardly any exertion at all about it. "How strange it is," I thought, "that I have not seen the boat that will rescue me, provided I cannot reach the shore myself."

Then, perfectly plainly and clearly, though I knew I was struggling in the water, I heard my father's voice: "Come, old boy," he said, "and sit on my knee." I saw the fire burning, the tea things were on the table. At that moment I felt the air again, gasped a great breath, then down--down. At my side I felt there was a little girl in black--yes, it was she, my sister; we were following my brother to the grave. "So both of us are lost," I thought; "poor mother, if she had known this was to be the end of all!" Then I became aware of the overpowering pressure of the water; my body seemed to hang limp and flaccid. How do I know which is the direction of the land? What is the use of struggling? All I can do is to keep my mouth shut and trust to the waves throwing me on shore.

My mother's hand was on my shoulder I had my hat in my hand--there were crowds of people. I had on my new blue knickerbockers; there was some dust on my shoes, as I sat down I wiped it off. There was a crowd of well-dressed persons--why, I was in church! But there was a dimness about it all; instead of being there I was riding with my father in a car. There was an old horse with a big head toiling and toiling along outside the window, but always going backward. Then, as in a dream, I saw a downcast face--Gretchen's; how I longed to know what the look on her face meant! But the scene changed to a street in New York and a curious notice on a door. Then I was walking with Natalia the steamer went and then--why, here really I was drowning!--the water deep, deep above me. "At any rate she will be with good friends," I thought; "she will be cared for"; and I was thankful for my forethought. Suddenly it came over me that this was what the unlearner meant, saying he would meet me here. And thinking thus, I, too, pass beyond life, awaiting, like all the others, what meets us there.

* * * *

All the vagueness as of a dream passed away. I was actually with my father, sitting by his side. Through a window I saw a horse's head jogging up and down. The horse was trotting; I could see the motion of every step--yet it was going backward all the while. I asked my father--we sitting in the street car together--"Why does that horse go backward when he is going forward?" But my father was reading his paper and did not answer me. I went on looking with amazement at the horse going backwards, though he was trotting on. Then my father said, "We'll get out here." The car stopped, and I saw with satisfaction the horse go on, dragging his load quite fast after him.

* * * *

Then I find myself lying down, trying to go to sleep in the woods. I know Scotchy is near me, though I cannot see him. We call him Scotchy because he comes from Scotland; he is at the technical school with me. There is no doubt about my being really with him, though it seems only a moment from the last scene. I know my father is dead and my mother is very poor; my uncle sends me money every month. Scotchy is lying wrapped up in his thick cloak; I'm in my waterproof blanket. The sounds of the night woods are mysterious around us, full of a nameless influence. Out of them comes distinctly the noise of a larger animal moving. The footstep of the fox is of all sounds that I know the most tense upon the ear. The pit-pat of his footfalls comes so quick and regular, then it stops. I lie perfectly still, but the animal waits, suspicious. Then he comes on again and stops. When he moves the

footfalls come regularly, mechanically; then they stop absolutely, suddenly. I feel his readiness for sudden flight, for sudden spring also. In the dark stillness of the night I do not know what size I am, and there close beside me is fear and ferocity, changing into one another so quickly. It might be a tiger, and I a hind. From nothing so quickly as from a footfall spreads Nature's contagion of fear or fury. At length in the silence I can bear it no longer. "Scotchy," I say, "are you asleep?" "No." "Tell me something to break the silence."

Scotchy says: "I will tell you about Anstruther, who was ruined in the bank failure; all his people were ruined together; there was no hope of recovery. He did not sit down to repine, but went into a foundry as an apprentice. He settled down, hoping to become a regular hand, getting, if he were lucky, in the course of time his two pounds a week. One day, as he was filing at his bench, a party of ladies and gentlemen came through the shop. When one of them was opposite his bench, she looked at him. It was the old look and the treasured smile. She put out her dainty gloved hand for him to shake, but he could not take it in his oily hand. She said, 'I am so glad you are going bravely to work,' and then the party of visitors moved on. Soon after that there came a parcel to his lodgings. Opening it, he found it was her writing a little cylinder; a round, oblong piece of iron. It was quite plain and simple, accurately turned; but nothing, not designed for anything, except it might be a paperweight. So he used it for a paperweight.

"But presently the piece of iron began to come in his dreams. It occurred persistently. She came, too, by flashes and gleams, seeming to point with meaning in her gesture to the round piece of iron. In his dream he took the cylinder in his hand, weighing it, and it seemed lighter than it should be if it were solid iron. Waking, he remembered his dream, and looked with interest at the iron keeping a few pieces of paper down. It was a simple object enough, yet night after night it came persistently, she always appearing--also bidding him do something, and pointing to the piece of iron--she with her old smile, and a touch of new, winning, beseeching loveliness. At last, in his dream, he put the thing in a lathe, and turned the end off. Out of it, for it was hollow, began to drop rubies and pearls and precious stones of many kinds; it was full of jewels, inestimable, rare jewels. Always with the jewels falling out his dream ended."

"Did he weigh the real paperweight in his hand Scotchy?" I asked.

"Yes, he did."

"Was it light?"

"Yes, it was."

"Did he turn the end off?"

"No, he knew the workman who made it had cored it out with sand; he saw them every day at the works putting a core of sand inside their coating to save metal."

"Is there any ending to the story?"

"Yes--he did not see her ever again."

* * * *

I pass suddenly and vividly into another night. I am sitting with my arm round Nellie's waist, her head is leaning against my shoulder; sometimes I pass my other hand through her long hair, sometimes I press her face to mine. In the New England village where my mother and I are living all the people are engaged in making boots. I am talking about my prospects. I was living at home because my uncle had fallen into difficulties, and could send me no more money. "Nellie," I say, "I will get a place in the factory; then we can get a cottage of our own."

"Yes, Teddie," she says, "father can get you a place where he's foreman--"

"Oh! I shan't go there, because I'm going to be foreman myself, and I won't turn him out."

"Brave, kind Teddie,it won't turn father out, will it?" she says.

Then the clock strikes one, and she lets me out. That evening is followed by other evenings, and all alike are filled with the delicious clasp of her soft waist, till one evening I say, "I'm not going to be a shoemaker all my life," and she bids me goodbye at two o'clock, crying and sobbing.

* * * *

I find myself in a little room. It is a lodging; I know it well. My clothes are all torn, and there is rage in my heart, for a farmer in New Jersey set his dog at me when I only tried to sell him a book. On my table is a letter; I take it up. My mother writes to tell me Nellie is married; she breaks it to me gently, but I know she is glad; she never liked Nellie.

* * * *

I am sitting in a room upstairs; it is a large, well-lighted room, with bookshelves all around. I know that I am in Cambridge, living with my mother in a house that we have taken, while I go to the University. A brother of my father's has left us all his money. Much of my time I spend with my mother, the rest over my books. There is a kind of difference and aloofness I feel with the other boys. I am just opening a great parcel, reflecting that it is better to buy books than to try and sell them. I have no friend like Scotchy; I am wishing that I had.

* * * *

It is a dark, cloudy night, in which but a little space overhead the beams of the street lamps are lost. I am stepping briskly along, carrying a cane. The pavement seems elastic, a breeze sweeps up from Central Park, while in my ears floats the music I have just heard, changing itself into scenes and the rapid passing of figures. Before me are the spacious courts of heaven, wide with the width of a sunny landscape, gleaming with the white illumination of marble. Across the great court comes a heavenly messenger, a boy, bearing on his candid lips a message. Two of the blest souls who were sitting there, speaking on some high theme, look up when he approaches. The one is St. Paul, the other I know is St. Simeon Stylites. For his sake the tide of high argument breaks and repeats itself. Beneath the heavenly peace of St. Paul's grand face you still can see the trace of his spiritual wrestling, the marks of the intellectual athlete, the all-encompassing, dominating mind. The far-reaching vision St. Paul was explaining to him had occupied the whole of St. Simeon's attention, and the puzzled, almost anxious, look on his face as he raised it towards the messenger reminded one, though

it was heaven, of what his look on earth must have been.

"There is some one come to bejudged," said the boy, "a woman.

"Who is she?" asked St. Paul. "What does St. Peter say?"

"St. Peter," the messenger replied, "does not know anything about her, she did not come that way."

"Then she is not a mortal; Simeon, shall we see her?"

"What is she like?" asked St. Simeon.

"I cannot tell," said the heavenly messenger; "she is covered all over and hides her face. She bears a bundle in her arms."

"I think," said St. Simeon, "we can judge her, Paul; it seems to be some penitent; to veil her face is good."

A figure drew near with a mean robe flung all about her, and in her arms a great bundle. But her walk was as the walk of a humbled queen, and in her voice there was the ripple of the waters, the sighing of the winds, the song of the birds, as she prayed, "Judge me, I have stolen these."

'"Tis well," said St. Paul, "that thou bringest them back. What are they?"

She stooped, rested the bundle on heaven's floor, and opened it. The mean, worn covering was folded back, and there was nothing and yet every thing--everything that men have seen of color in the sunset or in the deep sky. There were the grace of the dappled limbs of the fawn, the lines of strength of the tiger, the wonderful green of the forests, the all-burying forests in their wonderful mazes, the delicate blue of the distance, the depths of the ocean, the semblance and likeness of everything there has been on earth. There, without the substance and body of them, were the grace and beauty of human countenances, the bloom on the cheeks, the vermeil lips, the glance of loving, passionate, ardent, alluring eyes, and the quiet, long, still gaze of dark eyes. There was the glamour and grace and beauty of all that man has ever loved to gaze upon the tendril-crowned boy Bacchus, in his radiant appeal to the eye, was there, though he was not. There were the flash of white limbs through translucent water, the raised arms of Venus, her head waving like a flower between them. All was there; not the substance of things, but the show of them--all color, all sights; and the wonderful-voiced woman spoke. Her speaking was like a song, like all the music that ever sounded, like all the sounds that ever were, so rich and full and deep it was--calming, soothing, passion-arousing, awakening, mocking, loving, enticing the cadence of wind-swept forests, the laughing of a girl, all were in it as she said, "All these are not mine, and I have taken them, all the sounds of my voice, and these I have brought here. Henceforth I will be mute and without all these. Oh, judge me."

St. Simeon hid his face in his hands, for he had never thought to see that in heaven which he had avoided as much as in him lay on earth. But St. Paul, the ardent tent-maker, the endurer of toils, familiar with many climes and men, looked at the mingled show of the wonderful bundle, awake, alert, and ready to inquire how the question that arose should be settled in

accordance with his system. He did not listen to St. Simeon, who exclaimed, with still averted eyes, "Thrice happy man! Oh, cast all down into the deepest hell, that--there being no more of those on earth, men may save their souls."

But asked wherefore, these being not hers, she still had taken them, bedecked herself with them, "It was mine," she answered, "at the creation to keep the busy atoms dancing, to turn and twist them on their moving course, playing the shuttle of vibrations in all the system. But men wove robes and garments, inventing light and color, placing light and color and sound before me. They praised me, calling me Nature and wonderful, beautiful. I, because I liked their praise, put on these robes that were none of mine, making pretense to be as they would care to see me; all that you see I put on, feigning to be what men praised--I, who all the while have no part in any of these things, whose it is to move the atoms on their ceaseless wheeling."

St. Paul was silent, not for the moment discerning how the law and sin bore on all this, when the greater light of a Presence made them know that another was there.

For thus it is in heaven, if perplexity or doubt assail any of the blest spirits, such is the order of that happy world, the higher spirits there, that dwell in greater illumination and glory of light, reveal themselves, and at their words all lies plain and clear.

To Nature standing suppliant there, begging for judgment and peace, with all that made her fair in man's eyes surrendered by her, the Judge of all spoke: "Child, know that, because thou caredst for man's praise, there is that in thee wherewith thou canst be to him all he longs for. Leave here these feigned garments and the voice he has lent thee; go thy way, be to him as thy awakening heart tells thee."

Nature turned and went. On earth a new day began. The light of dawn, the sunset of even, no longer were what man put on her, but were of Nature's own. In all the visible world, in all the joys and beauties of the earth, she began to be herself, not clothed in the feigned robes she wore before, in which, because man had woven them, there was of his evil.

In that new day no more was there deception in the joys men clasped, no longer did the glamour hide an emptiness within, no rose fell crumbling and withered the moment man pressed it to his lips. No longer in all his joys did man perpetually grasp his own imaginations and beyond them--emptiness; no longer did he chase the mask of pleasure for its own sake, see king but himself. For behind all joys, all delights, was she filling his soul more full of her, there herself squandering each hour more pleasures than he had ever dreamed of, each almost unmarked, each lost and overwhelmed in the unfolding glory of her awakening heart.

"Very pretty, white limbs flashing through the water is good," says a voice by my ear.

There by my side is my intimate friend, whom I know better than I do any one else.

"It has nothing to do with you. I was thinking of an escape from you," I say.

"And so you made a pretty picture to please me. Lord, what a time we would have in that renovated world!"

And the creature puts out his tongue, licking like an animal licks round its chops--a perfectly beast-like, unconscious gesture--then he goes a step or two ahead, wheels round and faces me.

"Foul brute, shall I never escape you?"

"You don't want to," he says, with an insinuating grin on his animal countenance.

"Keep your place at any rate. I have thoughts you have nothing to do with. You touch and influence me but by a corner of myself."

"We won't quarrel about that," he says. "We are old friends, you know, and you are always thinking about me, really, however much you may seem to go after other things."

He is still standing opposite me. I look straight in his face--a thing I seldom do--looking at him searchingly, inquiringly.

"Ah! But I remember you different," I say, as I look, "or rather there were two of you, who came to me together; you, yes, but you were different when the other was with you, you were different. He had so quiet and intense a look on his uplifted face, it was as if he saw an angel. I knew you both, when I felt the heavenly wonder that Nellie should speak to me the day we met outside her father's gate."

The low face of the creature before me looks perplexed and troubled, as if some human feeling could penetrate him too. "Yes," he says--"there were two of us, but he hadn't my vitality." Then, with a leer, he adds, "Come with me; I am left you."

"To heel, dog!" I say, and he comes crouching after me. As I walk, I see one and another of his kind following or arm in arm with men like myself, and I know that the city is full of them. There comes by a wretched man in rags, blear-eyed, his intimate beside him, so distorted and deformed, I wonder he can crawl. The two are quarrelling. I hear the man say, "You've brought me to this, have you? But see what a fine thing I've made of you."

I turn to him who is following me, saying, "I, calm-lipped, self-controlled, can let all pass wherein you live. I belong to that band which strive for objects you know nothing of."

"Making yourself endlessly wretched," he returns. "You know you have no joy in life save for me, and all you think or do is to give me pleasure."

"It is not so," I say. But he is close to me; he takes my arm familiarly; I know I shall never be rid of him, and do not want to.

* * * *

"A singular talent you have for making inappropriate observations," says Paget in his drawling voice. "I know them well. The worthy pair of burghers you have just pointed out as living a simple, patriarchal life have just signed an agreement for their simple Gretchen, whom you appreciate so highly, at Hoffner's Colosseum. Their other girl was a great disappointment to them, she went lame; but they count on this one."

I do not doubt Paget. He employs his leisure, which is ample, in the study of the *personnel* of the Viennese music halls, but I cannot help remarking: "A pure, innocent girl like that! It is impossible that they mean to give her over to that life."

"They know what they are about. They have been very careful of her; it is faces like that which are most charmingly provocative in the right setting; they lose their value if they begin too young. Come over; I'll introduce you."

We join the trio. The man looks like a respectable subofficial in a Government department. But he has no reserve in discussing his daughter's engagement with my friend. Gretchen sits silent, her eyes cast down. It is a pretty, simple face, fresh and charming.

"Madam," I say suddenly, addressing the mother, "cannot you keep your daughter from that place?" She looks at me offended. I am aware of a look of amusement in Paget's eyes. But in Gretchen's--what is it?--he glances at me, and in that glance there is something which moves me strangely. What is it, appeal, gratitude, interest? But her eyes are cast down again before I can read anything for certain.

* * * *

Into my room comes Paget. "Here's the old fox's answer to your proposal; he says he won't accept any assistance from you to help Gretchen to study for a different branch of the profession; and he won't take a sum to enable her to marry. He considers she has good and honorable prospects in the line he has chosen for her, and he requests you not to see them again, unless you will marry her. He's got an idea--"

"No more of this," I say. "I should be glad to discontinue our acquaintance in future." A feeling of repulsion against these traffickers in maiden innocence and modesty, and against Paget, who had become callous to this kind of thing, comes over me. Gretchen's look is in my eyes--it is appeal, yes, it is a desperate appeal. Paget stands still a moment, then he says, "All right," and goes away. I remain standing--Gretchen my wife! If so, what a horror it would be that she should remain a moment in her present surroundings!

* * * *

It is my home--this room I find myself in with the fire burning brightly--there Gretchen sitting opposite, looking at it, like me. Her face is an enigma to me still; she does not care to speak in English, and mv German does not interest her. All at once, as I am watching her, I hear a voice speaking to her. It is he--that other part of myself that I call my friend. "Gretchen," I say, "it was not I who spoke to you just now."

"There is no one else here."

"Do you think that was I myself?"

"Yes, of course."

"Gretchen," I exclaimed,"it was to save you from such as he that I married you."

"Ich verstehe nicht was du meinest--Liebst du mich nicht?"

"Why, Gretchen, don't you know the kind of love I love you with? I love your happiness, your good, first of all; I would have done anything to make you happy. If it would have made you happy you should have had any money you liked without me.

Her eyes gleam for a moment with a happiness, a gleam as of an imagined happiness, such as I had never seen them shine with before. Then she turns to me and says: "Ach! Scherze doch nicht. Die Männer sind alle gleich."

The sudden illumination of her face brings it home to me; I might have known it any moment before. There was a young actor whom I had sometimes seen at her parents' house--it was he whom she loved. She had married me, as' she would have danced before the footlights, because she must get money.

And I know that this friend, this part of me, had fooled me; it was he who had directed every move that led me to my marriage, when I thought my motives were so different. You can blame me, you who have never been fooled by this Pan creature, who weaves the exhalations of earth into the shapes he wills, who assumes the garb of pity, duty, sacrifice, speaks in the name of utility, common sense, sanctity, and whatever he finds will gain his ends.

In a moment I know I am to Gretchen but the man who bought her, deprived her of that spark of love at which she warmed her little hands, which might have become a flame and irradiated her whole life.

There are moments when you realize how absolutely true all your friends say of you is, how false is the impression of yourself you have been living under. I know that the reasons my acquaintances assigned for my marriage were the true ones. Gretchen was a simple little beauty whose charms would certainly have made her a success in her destined profession. Because she had looked at me as a girl cannot help looking at a man who takes an interest in her--no, because my friend had led me, had taken possession of me, I had married her; had very likely spoiled her life too, for she had conceived the idea that, because she gave up the man she fancied, she would have every luxury money could give her.

* * * *

"Now he's putting his frills on, says Adela Stephenson.

Opposite her is sitting her husband, my old friend Scotchy, concocting in an impressive manner in the tin brazier a welsh rabbit of his own invention, in which bananas replace the cheese.

"He must be a great assistance to you, Mrs. Stephenson."

"Oh, he is."

"I think," said Stephenson, "we might have sherry" he is evidently deliberating with what fluid he could replace beer.

"I think I said sherry," he repeated, looking at her.

"It is in the cupboard," she replied, with an ostentatiously unconcerned air.

With the air of a martyr he gets up, finds the sherry, pours in a glassful, and proceeds with his stirring.

"If anything gets very desperate," says Adela, continuing her conversation with me, "I call him in. Louie was desperately naughty yesterday; she's his niece, not mine, so I told him he must punish her. I had punished her enough myself, for she always says something to make me feel mean when I punish her, and I felt very small, for she had been very naughty. So Robert said he would punish her. I told him she would say something to make him feel small, but he was nobly willing. He told her she was to go without her orange for a week at breakfast--she always has one. She said, 'Many children don't have an orange ever.' I don't think he was a bit more successful in his punishments than I was."

Walking away, I reflect that, because of me, Gretchen will never tell any one he's putting his frills on, or its equivalent in German. It doesn't do me good, seeing the little nook Stephenson lives in. What do I care for all the aims or institutions of men? Those with whom I would join, in a desire for rational good, what do they do but push me down into the void and emptiness of my union with Gretchen? All good objects and good people--much more likely I care for bad objects and people: they at least promise me freedom. What good did all that ever I learned do me? It is all barren words, artificial, all a sham, making me so that I cannot know a sham from a true thing, even when it is myself. I catch sight of a notice with a curious word on it. It is the board with UNLEARNER written on it. I approach.

* * * *

I see the look in Natalia's eyes as she listens, see the cottage walls recede as she lives in the palace--home the poets have made for such as she.

* * * *

The last thread of smoke has vanished; how long it hung suspended in the air! The very last sign and token of her now gone, and solitude enfolding from the air, the sky, the sea wrapping in folds and folds upon my heart.

* * * *

The waves are over me; I lie moving in the rushing waters, a sodden, inert mass. My meager existence is over; no thing achieved, nothing done; empty, worthless. Was it worth while that my father and mother should have tended me, loved me, cherished me, for this? The bright dewdrops of the spring of life shone; how different from this I thought I was, but it is over now.

* * * *

Stay, what is this sudden surprise? Just as truly as I am lying here, rising and sinking with the heave of the waters, so I am in each of the scenes and places I have ever been in, living and acting in them. It has been coming over me in scenes which I thought were vivid memories, but now I know they are actual presences. I am a child again with other children. I see my father: each step, each act, each little thing, I go through again, living the very life

I lived before. I am a man with other men and women. I am moving, speaking with them, and they with each other--not only I, but all are living as they ever lived. My whole life has become to me as my body was in the life just finished. In any part of my life I can be with whomsoever I will: I walk with my little sister, I talk with Scotchy. But an oppressive bond is on me; I do exactly the same things I did before; I say the same things. I cannot get out of the chain of events; cannot say, "How strange it is, Scotchy, that I should have died, and yet you and I be talking here!" Yet though the bond--the fetter of unalterability--is on me, all feeling of loss and of the irrevocable passes away, for all are here; once together I know for ever together.

But watching closely with so eager a curiosity, I see that each of us is not doing exactly the same--and see, our lives are altering.

And a new consciousness comes over me. I see that, like everything else in Nature, our lives are altering, developing, our whole lives in every event and circumstance. I see my life suddenly transformed from the pitiful thing it is. I see that it is changing--the whole of it. It is the body of a higher will, changing, moving, altering in a new direction wherein death does not lie. 'Tis life, indeed, for what may not my life become? I feel that sudden touch which Nature lays on all those that die, saying to them, "Know! I am ever changing, altering. With me everything is in a state and stage of development. I allow not anything to be cast in a rigid mould, not even thy past life in thy imagination."

And the will that acts along the whole line, the will whose body is the whole life--that I catch, fragmentarily present here and there in my life that will, shown, not in great things, but in minute, almost invisible changes, that will is what I prize and treasure, for it is the means whereby my life alters, the means by which it is what it has become.

But I long to pass from this wide consciousness; for, while I have it, I am not in the work of altering my life. To do that I must give up this wide view, and, plunging in it part by part, let all else of my life save the present seem like mere memory or expectation.

To this I pass. Meanwhile I see that once I did not fall into my error, and again I shall not. From one state to another I proceed, and in my life, as it now is, I welcome all its life-long burdens as a step upon the way, the necessary attendants upon a progression. My aversion to all the piled-up fabric of human thought, level with the clouds, reaching the foundations of the earth, I understand it well; was not Natalia hidden from me then? For all thought, all questioning of the unseen, is but a step towards her whose soul moves with ours; all is unable to be understood by those incapable of love. Well did Dante picture wisdom as, for him, the light of the countenance of her who spelt her name really and actually with a B and E. The cold, keen blade of the intellect is beaten from the sorrows of lives on lives. It is only as life after life each differing from the last in virtue of the will, that has the whole of life for its body that we in life can picture our true destiny.

And in this brief vision between life and life, in which the soul sees how from life to life events mould and shape themselves, I see that my life has not ever been as it was in this one course. All is slowly altering from life to life, and in my higher consciousness I see wherefrom, whereunto it moulds itself. I see how each little thing is different, and how in just this, that now I have lived, I grasp the realized results of ages of the higher transverse growth. Once I did not turn back, when the steamer took Natalia on its evanescent water-path, but went with her, leading her to a life which her intolerant spirit could not brook. I know that once I held her hand in death, and she, unmoved by life's failure, turned to me

and smiled a look of hope. That lives within me, and I feel that horror of betraying her noble innocence, which is all that remains in life's consciousness of the ghastly ruins of an error in the past. Now I know that I have attained, attained so much as makes me nearer, many a step nearer, to my life with Natalia; for it is only in the world-regard in the care for all life that souls can walk together perfectly, and only so now will Natalia and I walk together. And we shall walk together. Were it not so, I would not tell you this. For we ourselves are larger than the limited life we think is all, and that most holy union of soul and soul, not in one of our fleeting lives, not in many, is it attained. The great personal ends of the world pass over fleeting lives and lives, each life giving us that task which, unless done faithfully, is an inseparable barrier, which, accomplished, is a step. And maybe for a period, as I pass again and again in life through the changes that we in life's concentration think are all, I may not see Natalia. But I know she awaits me. How long it will be I know not, but each moment of silent earnestness, each trace of that great will which alters all, in all my life, I prize and worship, for it brings me nearer her.

And Gretchen, too, I see her growing--feel that the refusal to bend her instinct of love to time and circumstance is slowly awakening, will gather strength, and sometime she will not be the creature of her parents' wish.

Behind the visions of my unfinished, ended life, I see the figure of the Unlearner, not standing as he did that day upon the sands, but receding, becoming larger, more and more remote, till he is like that space which lies beyond aught we can ever think of, and he seems to say: "Thou shalt attain at last, but so much must first be done."

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