

# **WILLIAM HOWELLS**

YEARS OF MY  
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*Years of My Youth:*

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# William Dean Howells

## Years of My Youth

### I

IT is hard to know the child's own earliest recollections from the things it has been told of itself by those with whom its life began. They remember for it the past which it afterward seems to remember for itself; the wavering outline of its nature is shadowed against the background of family, and from this it imagines an individual existence which has not yet begun. The events then have the quality of things dreamt, not lived, and they remain of that impalpable and elusive quality in all the after years.

# I

Of the facts which I must believe from the witness of others, is the fact that I was born on the 1st of March, 1837, at Martin's Ferry, Belmont County, Ohio. My father's name was William Cooper Howells, and my mother's was Mary Dean; they were married six years before my birth, and I was the second child in their family of eight. On my father's side my people were wholly Welsh, except his English grandmother, and on my mother's side wholly German, except her Irish father, of whom it is mainly known that he knew how to win my grandmother Elizabeth Dock away from her very loving family, where they dwelt in great Pennsylvania-German comfort and prosperity on their farm near Harrisburg, to share with him the hardships of the wild country over the westward mountains. She was the favorite of her brothers and sisters, and the best-beloved of her mother, perhaps because she was the youngest; there is a shadowy legend that she went one evening to milk the cows, and did not return from following after her husband; but I cannot associate this romantic story with the ageing grandmother whom I tenderly loved when a child, and whom I still fondly remember. She spoke with a strong German accent, and she had her Luther Bible, for she never read English. Sometimes she came to visit my homesick mother after we went to live in southern Ohio; once I went with my mother to visit her in the little town where I was born, and of that visit I have

the remembrance of her stopping me on the stairs, one morning when I had been out, and asking me in her German idiom and accent, "What fur a tay is it, child?"

I can reasonably suppose that it is because of the mixture of Welsh, German, and Irish in me that I feel myself so typically American, and that I am of the imaginative temperament which has enabled me all the conscious years of my life to see reality more iridescent and beautiful, or more lurid and terrible than any make-believe about reality. Among my father's people the first who left Wales was his great-grandfather. He established himself in London as a clock and watch maker, and I like to believe that it is his name which my tall clock, paneled in the lovely *chinoiserie* of Queen Anne's time, bears graven on its dial. Two sons followed him, and wrought at the same art, then almost a fine art, and one of them married in London and took his English wife back with him to Wales. His people were, so far as my actual knowledge goes, middle-class Welsh, but the family is of such a remote antiquity as in its present dotage not to know what part of Wales it came from. As to our lineage a Welsh clergyman, a few years ago, noting the identity of name, invited me to the fond conjecture of descent from Hywel Dda, or Howel the Good, who became king of Wales about the time of Alfred the Great. He codified the laws or rather the customs of his realm, and produced one of the most interesting books I have read, and I have finally preferred him as an ancestor because he was the first literary man of our name. There was a time

when I leaned toward the delightful James Howell, who wrote the *Familiar Letters* and many books in verse and prose, and was of several shades of politics in the difficult days of Charles and Oliver; but I was forced to relinquish him because he was never married. My father, for his part, when once questioned as to our origin, answered that so far as he could make out we derived from a blacksmith, whom he considered a good sort of ancestor, but he could not name him, and he must have been, whatever his merit, a person of extreme obscurity.

There is no record of the time when my great-grandfather with his brothers went to London and fixed there as watchmakers. My tall clock, which bears our name on its dial, has no date, and I can only imagine their London epoch to have begun about the middle of the eighteenth century. Being Welsh, they were no doubt musical, and I like to cherish the tradition of singing and playing women in our line, and a somehow cousinship with the famous Parepa. But this is very uncertain; what is certain is that when my great-grandfather went back to Wales he fixed himself in the little town of Hay, where he began the manufacture of Welsh flannels, a fabric still esteemed for its many virtues, and greatly prospered. When I visited Hay in 1883 (my father always call it, after the old fashion, The Hay, which was the right version of its Norman name of La Haye), three of his mills were yet standing, and one of them was working, very modestly, on the sloping bank of the lovely river Wye. Another had sunk to be a stable, but the third, in the spirit of our New World lives, had

become a bookstore and printing-office, a well-preserved stone edifice of four or five stories, such as there was not the like of, probably, in the whole of Wales when Hywel Dda was king. My great-grandfather was apparently an excellent business man, but I am afraid I must own (reluctantly, with my Celtic prejudice) that literature, or the love of it, came into our family with the English girl whom he married in London. She was, at least, a reader of the fiction of the day, if I may judge from the high-colored style of the now pathetically faded letter which she wrote to reproach a daughter who had made a runaway match and fled to America. So many people then used to make runaway matches; but when very late in the lives of these eloping lovers I once saw them, an old man and woman, at our house in Columbus, they hardly looked their youthful adventure, even to the fancy of a boy beginning to unrealize life. The reader may care to learn that they were the ancestors of Vaughan Kester, the very gifted young novelist, who came into popular recognition almost in the hour of his most untimely death, and of his brother Paul Kester, the playwright.

## II

My great-grandfather became “a Friend by Convincement,” as the Quakers called the Friends not born in their Society; but I do not know whether it was before or after his convincement that he sailed to Philadelphia with a stock of his Welsh flannels, which he sold to such advantage that a dramatic family tradition represents him wheeling the proceeds in a barrel of silver down the street to the vessel which brought him and which took him away. That was in the time of Washington’s second Presidency, and Washington strongly advised his staying in the country and setting up his manufacture here; but he was prospering in Wales, and why should he come to America even at the suggestion of Washington? It is another family tradition that he complied so far as to purchase a vast acreage of land on the Potomac, including the site of our present capital, as some of his descendants in each generation have believed, without the means of expropriating the nation from its unlawful holdings. This would have been the more difficult as he never took a deed of his land, and he certainly never came back to America; yet he seems always to have been haunted by the allurements of it which my grandfather felt so potently that after twice visiting the country he came over a third time and cast his lot here.

He was already married, when with his young wife and my father a year old he sailed from London in 1808. Perhaps because

they were chased by a French privateer, they speedily arrived in Boston after a voyage of only twenty-one days. In the memoir which my father wrote for his family, and which was published after his death, he tells that my grandmother formed the highest opinion of Boston, mainly, he surmises, from the very intelligent behavior of the young ladies in making a pet of her baby at the boarding-house where she stayed while her husband began going about wherever people wished his skill in setting up woolen-mills. The young ladies taught her little one to walk; and many years afterward, say fifty, when I saw her for the last time in a village of northwestern Ohio, she said "the Bostonians were very nice people," so faithfully had she cherished, through a thousand vicissitudes, the kind memory of that first sojourn in America.

I do not think she quite realized the pitch of greatness at which I had arrived in writing for the *Atlantic Monthly*, the renowned periodical then recently founded in Boston, or the fame of the poets whom I had met there the year before. I suspect that she was never of the literary taste of my English great-grandmother; but her father had been a school-teacher, and she had been carefully educated by the uncle and aunt to whom she was left at her parents' early death. They were Friends, but she never formally joined the Society, though worshiping with them; she was, like her husband, middle-class Welsh, and as long as they lived they both misplaced their aspirates. If I add that her maiden name was Thomas, and that her father's name was John Thomas, I think I have sufficiently attested her pure Cymric origin. So far as I know

there was no mixture of Saxon blood on her side; but her people, like most of the border Welsh, spoke the languages of both races; and very late in my father's life, he mentioned casually, as old people will mention interesting things, that he remembered his father and mother speaking Welsh together. Of the two she remained the fonder of their native country, and in that last visit I paid her she said, after half a century of exile, "We do so and so at home, and you do so and so here." I can see her now, the gentlest of little Quaker ladies, with her white fichu crossed on her breast; and I hesitate attributing to her my immemorial knowledge that the Welsh were never conquered, but were tricked into union with the English by having one of their princes born, as it were surreptitiously, in Wales; it must have been my father who told me this and amused himself with my childish race-pride in the fact. She gave me an illustrated *Tour of Wales*, having among its steel engravings the picture of a Norman castle where, by favor of a cousin who was the housekeeper, she had slept one night when a girl; but in America she had slept oftener in log cabins, which my grandfather satisfied his devoted unworldliness in making his earthly tabernacles. She herself was not, I think, a devout person; she had her spiritual life in his, and followed his varying fortunes, from richer to poorer, with a tacit adherence to what he believed, whether the mild doctrine of Quakerism or the fervid Methodism for which he never quite relinquished it.

He seems to have come to America with money enough to lose a good deal in his removals from Boston to Poughkeepsie, from

Poughkeepsie to New York City, from New York to Virginia, and from Virginia to eastern Ohio, where he ended in such adversity on his farm that he was glad to accept the charge of a woolen-mill in Steubenville. He knew the business thoroughly and he had set up mills for others in his various sojourns, following the line of least resistance among the Quaker settlements opened to him by the letters he had brought from Wales. He even went to the new capital, Washington, in a hope of manufacturing in Virginia held out to him by a nephew of President Madison, but it failed him to his heavy cost; and in Ohio, his farming experiments, which he renewed in a few years on giving up that mill at Steubenville, were alike disastrous. After more than enough of them he rested for a while in Wheeling, West Virginia, where my father met my mother, and they were married.

They then continued the family wanderings in his own search for the chance of earning a living in what seems to have been a very grudging country, even to industry so willing as his. He had now become a printer, and not that only, but a publisher, for he had already begun and ended the issue of a monthly magazine called *The Gleaner*, made up, as its name implied, chiefly of selections; his sister helped him as editor, and some old bound volumes of its few numbers show their joint work to have been done with good taste in the preferences of their day. He married upon the expectation of affluence from the publication of a work on *The Rise, Progress and Downfall of Aristocracy*, which almost immediately preceded the ruin of the enthusiastic author and of

my father with him, if he indeed could have experienced further loss in his entire want of money. He did not lose heart, and he was presently living contentedly on three hundred dollars a year as foreman of a newspaper office in St. Clairville, Ohio. But his health gave way, and a little later, for the sake of the outdoor employment, he took up the trade of house-painter; and he was working at this in Wheeling when my grandfather Dean suggested his buying a lot and building a house in Martin's Ferry, just across the Ohio River. The lot must have been bought on credit, and he built mainly with his own capable hands a small brick house of one story and two rooms with a lean-to. In this house I was born, and my father and mother were very happy there; they never owned another house until their children helped them work and pay for it a quarter of a century afterward, though throughout this long time they made us a home inexpressibly dear to me still.

My father now began to read medicine, but during the course of a winter's lectures at Cincinnati (where he worked as a printer meanwhile), his health again gave way and he returned to Martin's Ferry. When I was three years old, my grandmother Dean's eldest brother, William Dock, came to visit her. He was the beloved patriarch of a family which I am glad to claim my kindred and was a best type of his Pennsylvania-German race. He had prospered on through a life of kindness and good deeds; he was so rich that he had driven in his own carriage from Harrisburg, over the mountains, and he now asked my father to

drive with him across the state of Ohio. When they arrived in Dayton, my father went on by canal to Hamilton, where he found friends to help him buy the Whig newspaper which he had only just paid for when he sold it eight years later.

### III

Of the first three years of my life which preceded this removal there is very little that I can honestly claim to remember. The things that I seem to remember are seeing from the window of our little house, when I woke one morning, a peach-tree in bloom; and again seeing from the steamboat which was carrying our family to Cincinnati, a man drowning in the river. But these visions, both of them very distinct, might very well have been the effect of hearing the things spoken of by my elders, though I am surest of the peach-tree in bloom as an authentic memory.

This time, so happy for my father and mother, was scarcely less happy because of its uncertainties. My young aunts lived with their now widowed mother not far from us; as the latest comer, I was in much request among them, of course; and my father was hardly less in favor with the whole family from his acceptable habit of finding a joke in everything. He supplied the place of son to my grandmother in the absence of my young uncles, then away most of their time on the river which they followed from the humblest beginnings on keel-boats to the proudest endings as pilots and captains and owners of steamboats. In those early days when they returned from the river they brought their earnings to their mother in gold coins, which they called Yellow Boys, and which she kept in a bowl in the cupboard, where I seem so vividly to have seen them, that I cannot quite believe I did

not. These good sons were all Democrats except the youngest, but they finally became of my father's anti-slavery Whig faith in politics, and I believe they were as glad to have their home in a free state as my father's family, who had now left Wheeling, and were settled in southwestern Ohio.

There were not many slaves in Wheeling, but it was a sort of entrepôt where the negroes were collected and embarked for the plantations down the river, in their doom to the death-in-life of the far South. My grandfather Howells had, in the anti-slavery tradition of his motherland, made himself so little desired among his Virginian fellow-citizens that I have heard his removal from Wheeling was distinctly favored by public sentiment; and afterward, on the farm he bought in Ohio, his fences and corn-cribs suffered from the pro-slavery convictions of his neighbors. But he was dwelling in safety and prosperity among the drugs and books which were his merchandise in the store where I began to remember him in my earliest days at Hamilton. He seemed to me a very old man, and I noticed with the keen observance of a child how the muscles sagged at the sides of his chin and how his under lip, which I did not know I had inherited from him, projected. His clothes, which had long ceased to be drab in color, were of a Quaker formality in cut; his black hat followed this world's fashion in color, but was broad in the brim and very low-crowned, which added somehow in my young sense to the reproving sadness of his presence. He had black Welsh eyes and was of the low stature of his race; my grandmother was

blue-eyed; she was little, too; but my aunt, their only surviving daughter, with his black eyes, was among their taller children. She was born several years after their settlement in America, but she loyally misused her aspirates as they did, and, never marrying, was of a life-long devotion to them. They first lived over the drug-store, after the fashion of shopkeepers in England; I am aware of my grandfather soon afterward having a pretty house and a large garden quite away from the store, but he always lived more simply than his means obliged. Amidst the rude experiences of their backwoods years, the family had continued gentle in their thoughts and tastes, though my grandfather shared with poetry his passion for religion, and in my later boyhood when I had begun to print my verses, he wrote me a letter solemnly praising them, but adjuring me to devote my gifts to the service of my Maker, which I had so little notion of doing in a selfish ideal of my own glory.

Most of his father's fortune had somehow gone to other sons, but, whether rich or poor, their generation seemed to be of a like religiosity. One of them lived in worldly state at Bristol before coming to America, and was probably of a piety not so insupportable as I found him in the memoir which he wrote of his second wife, when I came to read it the other day. Him I never saw, but from time to time there was one or other of his many sons employed in my grandfather's store, whom I remember blithe spirits, disposed to seize whatever chance of a joke life offered them, such as selling Young's *Night Thoughts* to

a customer who had whispered his wish for an improper book. Some of my father's younger brothers were of a like cheerfulness with these lively cousins, and of the same aptness for laughter. One was a physician, another a dentist, another in a neighboring town a druggist, another yet a speculative adventurer in the regions to the southward: he came back from his commercial forays once with so many half-dollars that when spread out they covered the whole surface of our dining-table; but I am quite unable to report what negotiation they were the spoil of. There was a far cousin who was a painter, and left (possibly as a pledge of indebtedness) with my dentist uncle after a sojourn among us a picture which I early prized as a masterpiece, and still remember as the charming head of a girl shadowed by the fan she held over it. I never saw the painter, but I recall, from my father's singing them, the lines of a "doleful ballad" which he left behind him as well as the picture:

A thief will steal from you all that you have,  
But an unfaithful lover will bring you to your grave.

The uncle who was a physician, when he left off the practice of medicine about his eightieth year, took up the art of sculpture; he may have always had a taste for it, and his knowledge of anatomy would have helped qualify him for it. He modeled from photographs a head of my father admirably like and full of character, the really extraordinary witness of a gift latent till then

through a long life devoted to other things.

We children had our preference among these Howells uncles, but we did not care for any of them so much as for our Dean uncles, who now and then found their way up to Hamilton from Cincinnati when their steamboats lay there in their trips from Pittsburg. They were all very jovial; and one of the younger among them could play the violin, not less acceptably because he played by ear and not by art. Of the youngest and best-loved I am lastingly aware in his coming late one night and of my creeping down-stairs from my sleep to sit in his lap and hear his talk with my father and mother, while his bursts of laughter agreeably shook my small person. I dare say these uncles used to bring us gifts from that steamboating world of theirs which seemed to us of a splendor not less than what I should now call oriental when we sometimes visited them at Cincinnati, and came away bulging in every pocket with the more portable of the dainties we had been feasting upon. In the most signal of these visits, as I once sat between my father and my Uncle William, for whom I was named, on the hurricane roof of his boat, he took a silver half-dollar from his pocket and put it warm in my hand, with a quizzical look into my eyes. The sight of such unexampled riches stopped my breath for the moment, but I made out to ask, "Is it for me?" and he nodded his head smilingly up and down; then, for my experience had hitherto been of fippenny-bits yielded by my father after long reasoning, I asked, "Is it good?" and remained puzzled to know why they laughed so together; it must have been

years before I understood.

These uncles had grown up in a slave state, and they thought, without thinking, that slavery must be right; but once when an abolition lecturer was denied public hearing at Martin's Ferry, they said he should speak in their mother's house; and there, much unaware, I heard my first and last abolition lecture, barely escaping with my life, for one of the objections urged by the mob outside was a stone hurled through the window, where my mother sat with me in her arms. At my Uncle William's house in the years after the Civil War, my father and he began talking of old times, and he told how, when a boy on a keel-boat, tied up to a Mississippi shore, he had seen an overseer steal upon a black girl loitering at her work, and wind his blacksnake-whip round her body, naked except for the one cotton garment she wore. "When I heard that colored female screech," he said, and the old-fashioned word female, used for compassionate respectfulness, remains with me, "and saw her jump, I knew that there must be something wrong in slavery." Perhaps the sense of this had been in his mind when he determined with his brothers that the abolition lecturer should be heard in their mother's house.

She sometimes came to visit us in Hamilton, to break the homesick separations from her which my mother suffered through for so many years, and her visits were times of high holiday for us children. I should be interested now to know what she and my Welsh grandmother made of each other, but I believe they were good friends, though probably not mutually

very intelligible. My mother's young sisters, who also came on welcome visits, were always joking with my father and helping my mother at her work; but I cannot suppose that there was much common ground between them and my grandfather's family except in their common Methodism. For me, I adored them, and if the truth must be told, though I had every reason to love my Welsh grandmother, I had a peculiar tenderness for my Pennsylvania-Dutch grandmother, with her German accent and her caressing ways. My grandfather, indeed, could have recognized no difference among heirs of equal complicity in Adam's sin; and in the situation such as it was, I lived blissfully unborn to all things of life outside of my home. I can recur to the time only as a dream of love and loving, and though I came out of it no longer a little child, but a boy struggling tooth and nail for my place among other boys, I must still recur to the ten or eleven years passed in Hamilton as the gladdest of all my years. They may have been even gladder than they now seem, because the incidents which embody happiness had then the novelty which such incidents lose from their recurrence; while the facts of unhappiness, no matter how often they repeat themselves, seem throughout life an unprecedented experience and impress themselves as vividly the last time as the first. I recall some occasions of grief and shame in that far past with unflinching distinctness, but the long spaces of blissful living which they interrupted hold few or no records which I can allege in proof of my belief that I was then, above every other when,

Joyful and free from blame.

## IV

Throughout those years at Hamilton I think of my father as absorbed in the mechanical and intellectual work of his newspaper. My earliest sense of him relates him as much to the types and the press as to the table where he wrote his editorials amidst the talk of the printers, or of the politicians who came to discuss public affairs with him. From a quaint pride, he did not like his printer's craft to be called a trade; he contended that it was a profession; he was interested in it, as the expression of his taste, and the exercise of his ingenuity and invention, and he could supply many deficiencies in its means and processes. He cut fonts of large type for job-work out of apple-wood in default of box or olive; he even made the graver's tools for carving the letters. Nothing pleased him better than to contrive a thing out of something it was not meant for, as making a penknife blade out of an old razor, or the like. He could do almost anything with his ready hand and his ingenious brain, while I have never been able to do anything with mine but write a few score books. But as for the printer's craft with me, it was simply my joy and pride from the first things I knew of it. I know when I could not read, for I recall supplying the text from my imagination for the pictures I found in books, but I do not know when I could not set type. My first attempt at literature was not written, but put up in type, and printed off by me. My father praised it, and this made me so

proud that I showed it to one of those eminent Whig politicians always haunting the office. He made no comment on it, but asked me if I could spell baker. I spelled the word simple-heartedly, and it was years before I realized that he meant a hurt to my poor little childish vanity.

Very soon I could set type very well, and at ten years and onward till journalism became my university, the printing-office was mainly my school. Of course, like every sort of work with a boy, the work became irksome to me, and I would gladly have escaped from it to every sort of play, but it never ceased to have the charm it first had. Every part of the trade became familiar to me, and if I had not been so little I could at once have worked not only at case, but at press, as my brother did. I had my favorites among the printers, who knew me as the Old Man, because of the habitual gravity which was apt to be broken in me by bursts of wild hilarity; but I am not sure whether I liked better the conscience of the young journeyman who wished to hold me in the leash of his moral convictions, or the nature of my companion in laughter which seemed to have selected for him the fit name of Sim Haggett. This merrymaker was married, but so very presently in our acquaintance was widowed, that I can scarcely put any space between his mourning for his loss and his rejoicing in the first joke that followed it. There were three or four of the journeymen, with an apprentice, to do the work now reduced by many facilities to the competence of one or two. Some of them slept in a den opening from the printing-

office, where I envied them the wild freedom unhampered by the conventions of sweeping, dusting, or bed-making; it was next to camping out.

The range of that young experience of mine transcends telling, but the bizarre mixture was pure delight to the boy I was, already beginning to take the impress of events and characters. Though I loved the art of printing so much, though my pride even more than my love was taken with it, as something beyond other boys, yet I loved my schools too. In their succession there seem to have been a good many of them, with a variety of teachers, whom I tried to make like me because I liked them. I was gifted in spelling, geography, and reading, but arithmetic was not for me. I could declaim long passages from the speeches of Corwin against the Mexican War, and of Chatham against the American War, and poems from our school readers, or from Campbell or Moore or Byron; but at the blackboard I was dumb. I bore fairly well the mockeries of boys, boldly bad, who played upon a certain simplicity of soul in me, and pretended, for instance, when I came out one night saying I was six years old, that I was a shameless boaster and liar. Swimming, hunting, fishing, foraging at every season, with the skating which the waters of the rivers and canals afforded, were my joy; I took my part in the races and the games, in football and in baseball, then in its feline infancy of Three Corner Cat, and though there was a family rule against fighting, I fought like the rest of the boys and took my defeats as heroically as I knew how; they were mostly defeats.

My world was full of boys, but it was also much haunted by ghosts or the fear of them. Death came early into it, the visible image in a negro babe, with the large red copper cents on its eyelids, which older boys brought me to see, then in the funeral of the dearly loved mate whom we school-fellows followed to his grave. I learned many things in my irregular schooling, and at home I was always reading when I was not playing. I will not pretend that I did not love playing best; life was an experiment which had to be tried in every way that presented itself, but outside of these practical requisitions there was a constant demand upon me from literature. As to the playing I will not speak at large here, for I have already said enough of it in *A Boy's Town*; and as to the reading, the curious must go for it to another book of mine called *My Literary Passions*. Perhaps there was already in my early literary preferences a bent toward the reality which my gift, if I may call it so, has since taken. I did not willingly read poetry, except such pieces as I memorized: little tragedies of the sad fate of orphan children, and the cruelties of large birds to small ones, which brought the lump into my throat, or the moralized song of didactic English writers of the eighteenth century, such as "Pity the sorrows of a poor old man." That piece I still partly know by heart; but history was what I liked best, and if I finally turned to fiction it seems to have been in the dearth of histories that merited reading after Goldsmith's *Greece and Rome*; except Irving's *Conquest of Granada*, I found none that I could read; but I had then read *Don Quixote* and

*Gulliver's Travels*, and had heard my father reading aloud to my mother the poems of Scott and Moore. Since he seems not to have thought of any histories that would meet my taste, I fancy that I must have been mainly left to my own choice in that sort, though he told me of the other sorts of books which I read.

I should be interested to know now how the notion of authorship first crept into my mind, but I do not in the least know. I made verses, I even wrote plays in rhyme, but until I attempted an historical romance I had no sense of literature as an art. As an art which one might live by, as by a trade or a business, I had not the slightest conception of it. When I began my first and last historical romance, I did not imagine it as something to be read by others; and when the first chapters were shown without my knowing, I was angry and ashamed. If my father thought there was anything uncommon in my small performances, he did nothing to let me guess it unless I must count the instance of declaiming Hallock's *Marco Bozzaris* before a Swedenborgian minister who was passing the night at our house. Neither did my mother do anything to make me conscious, if she was herself conscious of anything out of the common in what I was trying. It was her sacred instinct to show no partiality among her children; my father's notion was of the use that could be combined with the pleasure of life, and perhaps if there had been anything different in my life, it would not have tended more to that union of use and pleasure which was his ideal.

Much in the environment was abhorrent to him, and he fought

the local iniquities in his paper, the gambling, the drunkenness that marred the mainly moral and religious complexion of the place. In *A Boy's Town* I have studied with a fidelity which I could not emulate here the whole life of it as a boy sees life, and I must leave the reader who cares for such detail to find it there. But I wish again to declare the almost unrivaled fitness of the place to be the home of a boy, with its two branches of the Great Miami River and their freshets in spring, and their witchery at all seasons; with its Hydraulic Channels and Reservoirs, its stretch of the Miami Canal and the Canal Basin so fit for swimming in summer and skating in winter. The mills and factories which harnessed the Hydraulic to their industries were of resistless allure for the boys who frequented them when they could pass the guard of "No Admittance" on their doors, or when they were not foraging among the fields and woods in the endless vacations of the schools. Some boys left school to work in the mills, and when they could show the loss of a finger-joint from the machinery they were prized as heroes. The Fourth of July, the Christmases and Easters and May-Days, which were apparently of greater frequency there and then than they apparently are anywhere now, seemed to alternate with each other through the year, and the Saturdays spread over half the week.

## V

The experience of such things was that of the generalized boy, and easy to recall, but the experience of the specialized boy that I was cannot be distinctly recovered and cannot be given in any order of time; the events are like dreams in their achronic simultaneity. I ought to be able to remember when fear first came into my life; but I cannot. I am aware of offering as a belated substitute for far earlier acquaintance with it the awe which I dimly shared with the whole community at a case of hydrophobia occurring there, and which was not lessened by hearing my father tell my mother of the victim's saying: "I have made my peace with God; you may call in the doctors." I doubt if she relished the involuntary satire as he did; his humor, which made life easy for him, could not always have been a comfort to her. Safe in the philosophy of Swedenborg, which taught him that even those who ended in hell chose it their portion because they were happiest in it, he viewed with kindly amusement the religious tumults of the frequent revivals about him. The question of salvation was far below that of the annexation of Texas, or the ensuing war against Mexico, in his regard; but these great events have long ago faded into national history from my contemporary consciousness, while a tragical effect from his playfulness remains vivid in my childish memory. I have already used it in fiction, as my wont has been with so

many of my experiences, but I will tell again how my mother and he were walking together in the twilight, with me, a very small boy, following, and my father held out to me behind his back a rose which I understood I was to throw at my mother and startle her.

My aim was unfortunately for me all too sure; the rose struck her head, and when she looked round and saw me offering to run away, she whirled on me and made me suffer for her fright in thinking my flower was a bat, while my father gravely entreated, "Mary, Mary!" She could not forgive me at once, and my heart remained sore, for my love of her was as passionate as the temper I had from her, but while it continued aching after I went to bed, she stole up-stairs to me and consoled me and told me how scared she had been, and hardly knew what she was doing; and all was well again between us.

I wish I could say how dear she was to me and to all her children. My eldest brother and she understood each other best, but each of us lived in the intelligence of her which her love created. She was always working for us, and yet, as I so tardily perceived, living for my father anxiously, fearfully, bravely, with absolute trust in his goodness and righteousness. While she listened to his reading at night, she sewed or knitted for us, or darned or mended the day's ravage in our clothes till, as a great indulgence, we fell asleep on the floor. If it was summer we fell asleep at her knees on the front door-step, where she had sat watching us at our play till we dropped worn out with it;

or if it had been a day of wild excess she followed us to our beds early and washed our feet with her dear hands, and soothed them from the bruises of the summer-long shoelessness. She was not only the center of home to me; she was home itself, and in the years before I made a home of my own, absence from her was the homesickness, or the fear of it, which was always haunting me. As for the quick temper (now so slow) I had from her, it showed itself once in a burst of reckless fury which had to be signaled in the family rule, so lenient otherwise, by a circumstantial whipping from my father. Another, from her, for going in swimming (as we always said for bathing) when directly forbidden, seems to complete the list of my formal punishments at their hands in a time when fathers and mothers were much more of Solomon's mind in such matters than now.

I never was punished in any sort at school where the frequent scourging of other boys, mostly boys whom I loved for something kind and sweet in them, filled me with anguish; and I have come to believe that a blow struck a child is far wickedder than any wickedness a child can do; that it depraves whoever strikes the blow, mother, or father, or teacher, and that it inexpressibly outrages the young life confided to the love of the race. I know that excuses will be found for it, and that the perpetrator of the outrage will try for consolation in thinking that the child quickly forgets, because its pathetic smiles so soon follow its pathetic tears; but the child does not forget; and no callousing from custom can undo the effect in its soul.

From the stress put upon behaving rather than believing in that home of mine we were made to feel that wicked words were of the quality of wicked deeds, and that when they came out of our mouths they depraved us, unless we took them back. I have not forgotten, with any detail of the time and place, a transgression of this sort which I was made to feel in its full significance. My mother had got supper, and my father was, as he often was, late for it, and while we waited impatiently for him, I came out with the shocking wish that he was dead. My mother instantly called me to account for it, and when my father came she felt bound to tell him what I had said. He could then have done no more than gravely give me the just measure of my offense; and his explanation and forgiveness were the sole event. I did not remain with an exaggerated sense of my sin, though in a child's helplessness I could not urge, if I had imagined urging, that my outburst was merely an aspiration for unbelated suppers, and was of the nature of prayers for rain, which good people sometimes put up regardless of consequences. With his Swedenborgian doctrine of degrees in sin, my father might have thought my wild words prompted by evil spirits, but he would have regarded them as qualitatively rather than quantitatively wicked, and would not have committed the dreadful wrong which elders do a child by giving it a sense of sinning far beyond its worst possible willing. As to conduct his teaching was sometimes of an inherited austerity, but where his own personality prevailed, there was no touch of Puritanism in it.

Our religious instruction at home was not very stated, though it was abundant, and it must have been because we children ourselves felt it unseemly not to go, like other children, to Sunday-school that we were allowed to satisfy our longing for conformity by going for a while to the Sunday-school of the Baptist church, apparently because it was the nearest. We got certain blue tickets and certain red ones for memorizing passages from the New Testament, but I remember much more distinctly the muscular twitching in the close-shaven purplish cheek of the teacher as he nervously listened with set teeth for the children's answers, than anything in our Scripture lessons. I had been received with three or four brothers and sisters into the Swedenborgian communion by a passing New Church minister, but there were no services of our recondite faith in Hamilton, and we shared in no public worship after my mother followed my father from the Methodist society. Out of curiosity and a solemn joy in its ceremonial, I sometimes went to the Catholic church, where my eyes clung fascinated to the life-large effigy of Christ bleeding on His cross against the eastern wall; but I have more present now the sense of walks in the woods on Sunday, with the whole family, and of the long, sweet afternoons so spent in them.

If we had no Sabbaths in our house, and not very recognizable Sundays, we were strictly forbidden to do anything that would seem to trifle with the scruples of others. We might not treat serious things unseriously; we were to swear not at all; and in the matter of bywords we were allowed very little range, though for

the hardness of our hearts we were suffered to say such things as, "Oh, hang it!" or even, "Confound it all!" in extreme cases, such as failing to make the family pony open his mouth for bridling, or being bitten by the family rabbits, or butted over by the family goat. In such points of secular behavior we might be better or worse; but in matters of religious toleration the rule was inflexible; the faith of others was sacred, and it was from this early training, doubtless, that I was able in after life to regard the occasional bigotry of agnostic friends with toleration.

During the years of my later childhood, a few public events touched my consciousness. I was much concerned in the fortunes of the Whig party from the candidacy of Henry Clay in 1844 to the fusion of the anti-slavery Whigs with the Freesoil party after their bolt of the Taylor nomination in 1848, when I followed my father as far as a boy of eleven could go. He himself went so far as to sell his newspaper and take every risk for the future rather than support a slave-holding candidate who had been chosen for his vote-winning qualities as a victorious general in the Mexican War. I did not abhor that aggression so much as my father only because I could not understand how abhorrent it was; but it began to be a trouble to me from the first mention of the Annexation of Texas, a sufficiently dismaying mystery, and it afflicted me in early fixing my lot with the righteous minorities which I may have sometimes since been over-proud to be of. Besides such questions of national interest I was aware of other things, such as the French Revolution of 1848; but this must have been wholly

through sympathy with my father's satisfaction in the flight of Louis Philippe and the election of the poet Lamartine to be the head of the provisional government. The notion of provisional I relegated to lasting baffle in its more familiar association with the stock of corn-meal and bran in the feed-stores, though I need but have asked in order to be told what it meant. The truth is I was pre-occupied about that time with the affairs of High Olympus, as I imagined them from the mythology which I was reading, and with the politics of Rome and Athens, as I conceived them from the ever-dear histories of Goldsmith. The exploits of the Ingenious Gentleman of La Mancha had much to do in distracting me from the movement of events in Mexico, and at the same time I was enlarging my knowledge of human events through *Gulliver's Travels* and Poe's *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*.

My father had not only explained to me the satire which underlay *Gulliver's Travels*; he told me so much too indignantly of De Foe's appropriation of Selkirk's narrative, that it long kept me from reading *Robinson Crusoe*; but he was, as I have divined more and more, my guide in that early reading which widened with the years, though it kept itself preferably for a long time to history and real narratives. He was of such a liberal mind that he scarcely restricted my own forays in literature, and I think that sometimes he erred on that side; he may have thought no harm could come to me from the literary filth which I sometimes took into my mind, since it was in the nature of sewage to purify

itself. He gave me very little direct instruction, and he did not insist on my going to school when I preferred the printing-office. All the time, perhaps, I was getting such schooling as came from the love of literature, which was the daily walk and conversation of our very simple home, and somehow protected it from the sense of narrow means and the little hope of larger. My father's income from his paper was scarcely over a thousand dollars a year, but this sufficed for his family, then of seven children, and he was of such a sensitive pride as to money, that he would hardly ask for debts due him, much less press for their payment; so that when he parted with his paper he parted with the hope of much money owing him for legal and even official advertising and for uncounted delinquent subscriptions. Meanwhile he was earning this money by the work of his head and hand; and though I must always love his memory for his proud delicacy, I cannot forget that this is not a world where people dun themselves for the debts they owe. What is to be said of such a man is that his mind is not on the things that make for prosperity; but if we were in adversity we never knew it by that name. My mother did the whole work of her large household, and gave each of us the same care in health and sickness, in sickness only making the sufferer feel that he was her favorite; in any other case she would have felt such a preference wicked. Sometimes she had a hired girl, as people then and there called the sort of domestic that in New England would have been called a help. But it must have been very seldom, for two girls alone left record of themselves:

a Dutch girl amusingly memorable with us children because she called her shoes *schoes*, and claimed to have come to America in a *skip*; and a native girl, who took charge of us when our mother was on one of her homesick visits Up-the-River, and became lastingly abhorrent for the sort of insipid milk-gravy she made for the beefsteak, and for the nightmare she seemed to have every night, when she filled the house and made our blood run cold with a sort of wild involuntary yodeling.

Apparently my mother's homesickness mounted from time to time in an insupportable crisis; but perhaps she did not go Up-the-River so often as it seemed. She always came back more contented with the home which she herself was for us; once, as my perversely eclectic memory records, it was chiefly because one could burn wood in Hamilton, but had to burn coal at Martin's Ferry, where everything was smutched by it. In my old age, now, I praise Heaven for that home which I could not know apart from her; and I wish I could recall her in the youth which must have been hers when I began to be conscious of her as a personality; I know that she had thick brown Irish hair and blue eyes, and high German cheek-bones, and as a girl she would have had such beauty as often goes with a certain irregularity of feature; but to me before my teens she was, of course, a very mature, if not elderly person, with whom I could not connect any notion of looks except such as shone from her care and love. Though her intellectual and spiritual life was in and from my father, she kept always a certain native quality of speech and

a rich sense in words like that which marked her taste in soft stuffs and bright colors. In the hard life of her childhood in the backwoods she was sent to an academy in the nearest town, but in the instant anguish of homesickness she walked ten miles back to the log cabin where at night, as she would tell us, you could hear the wolves howling. She had an innate love of poetry; she could sing some of those songs of Burns and Moore which people sang then. I associate them with her voice in the late summer afternoons; for it was at night that she listened to my father's reading of poetry or fiction. When they were young, before and after their marriage, he kept a book, as people sometimes did in those days, where he wrote in the scrupulous handwriting destined to the deformity of over-use in later years, such poems of Byron or Cowper or Moore or Burns as seemed appropriate to their case, and such other verse as pleased his fancy. It is inscribed (for it still exists) *To Mary*, and with my inner sense I can hear him speaking to her by that sweet name, with the careful English enunciation which separated its syllables into Ma-ry.

## VI

My mother was an honored guest on one or other of my uncles' boats whenever she went on her homesick visits Up-the-River, and sometimes we children must have gone with her. Later in my boyhood, when I was nine or ten years old, my father took me to Pittsburg and back, on the boat of the jolliest of those uncles, and it was then that I first fully realized the splendor of the world where their lives were passed. No doubt I have since seen nobler sights than the mile-long rank of the steamboats as they lay at the foot of the landings in the cities at either end of our voyage, but none of these excelling wonders remains like that. All the passenger boats on the Ohio were then side-wheelers, and their lofty chimneys towering on either side of their pilot-houses were often crenelated at the top, with wire ropes between them supporting the effigies of such Indians as they were named for. From time to time one of the majestic craft pulled from the rank with the clangor of its mighty bell, and the mellow roar of its whistle, and stood out in the yellow stream, or arrived in like state to find a place by the shore. The wide slope of the landing was heaped with the merchandise putting off or taking on the boats, amidst the wild and whirling curses of the mates and the insensate rushes of the deck-hands staggering to and fro under their burdens. The swarming drays came and went with freight, and there were huckster carts of every sort; peddlers, especially

of oranges, escaped with their lives among the hoofs and wheels, and through the din and turmoil passengers hurried aboard the boats, to repent at leisure their haste in trusting the advertised hour of departure. It was never known that any boat left on time, and I doubt if my uncle's boat, the famous *New England No. 2*, was an exception to the rule, as my father perfectly understood while he delayed on the wharf, sampling a book-peddler's wares, or talking with this bystander or that, while I waited for him on board in an anguish of fear lest he should be left behind.

There was a measure of this suffering for me throughout the voyage wherever the boat stopped, for his insatiable interest in every aspect of nature and human nature urged him ashore and kept him there till the last moment before the gang-plank was drawn in. It was useless for him to argue with me that my uncle would not allow him to be left, even if he should forget himself so far as to be in any danger of that. I could not believe that a disaster so dire should not befall us, and I suffered a mounting misery till one day it mounted to frenzy. I do not know whether there were other children on board, but except for the officers of the boat, I was left mostly to myself, and I spent my time dreamily watching the ever-changing shore, so lost in its wild loveliness that once when I woke from my reverie the boat seemed to have changed her course, and to be going down-stream instead of up. It was in this crisis that I saw my father descending the gang-plank, and while I was urging his return in mute agony, a boat came up outside of us to wait for her chance of landing. I looked

and read on her wheel-house the name *New England*, and then I abandoned hope. By what fell necromancy I had been spirited from my uncle's boat to another I could not guess, but I had no doubt that the thing had happened, and I was flying down from the hurricane roof to leap aboard that boat from the lowermost deck when I met my uncle coming as quietly up the gangway as if nothing had happened. He asked what was the matter, and I gasped out the fact; he did not laugh; he had pity on me and gravely explained, "That boat is the *New England*: this is the *New England No. 2*" and at these words I escaped with what was left of my reason.

I had been the prey of that obsession which every one has experienced when the place where one is disorients itself and west is east and north is south. Sometimes this happens by a sudden trick within the brain, but I lived four years in Columbus and as many in Venice without once being right as to the points of the compass in my nerves, though my wits were perfectly convinced. Once I was months in a place where I suffered from this obsession, when I found myself returning after a journey with the north and south quite where they should be; and, "Now," I exulted, "I will hold them to their duty." I kept my eyes firmly fixed upon the station, as the train approached; then, without my lifting my gaze, the north was back again in the place of the south, and the vain struggle was over. Only the other day I got out of a car going north in Fourth Avenue, and then saw it going on south; and it was only by noting which way the house numbers

increased that I could right myself.

I suppose my father promised a reform that should appease my unreason, but whether he could deny himself those chances of general information I am not so sure; we may have both expected too much of each other. As I was already imaginably interested in things of the mind beyond my years, he often joined me in my perusal of the drifting landscape and made me look at this or that feature of it, but he afterward reported at home that he never could get anything from me but a brief "Yes, indeed," in response. That amused him, yet I do not think I should have disappointed him so much if I could have told him I was losing nothing, but that our point of view was different. The soul of a child is a secret to itself, and in its observance of life there is no foretelling what it shall loose or what it shall hold. I do not believe that anything which was of use to me was lost upon me, but what I chiefly remember now is my pleasure in the log cabins in the woods on the shores, with the blue smoke curling on the morning or the evening air from their chimneys. My heart was taken with a yearning for the wilderness such as the coast-born boy feels for the sea; in the older West the woods called to us with a lure which it would have been rapture to obey; the inappeasable passion for their solitude drove the pioneer into the forest, and it was still in the air we breathed. But my lips were sealed, for the generations cannot utter themselves to each other till the strongest need of utterance is past.

I used to sit a good deal on the hurricane-deck or in the pilot-

house, where there was often good talk among the pilots or the boat's officers, and where once I heard with fascination the old Scotch pilot, Tom Lindsay, telling of his own boyhood in the moors, and of the sheep lost in the drifting snows; that also had the charm of the wilderness; but I did not feel the sadness of his saying once, as we drifted past a row of crimson-headed whisky barrels on a wharf-boat, "Many a one of those old Red Eyes I've helped to empty," or imagine the far and deep reach of the words which remained with me. Somewhere in the officers' quarters I found a sea novel, which I read partly through, but I have not finished *The Cruise of the Midge*, to this day, though I believe that as sea novels go it merits reading. When I was not listening to the talk in the pilot-house, or looking at the hills drifting by, I was watching the white-jacketed black cabin-boys setting the tables for dinner in the long saloon of the boat. It was built, after a fashion which still holds in the Western boats, with a gradual lift of the stem and stern and a dip midway which somehow enhanced the charm of the perspective even to the eyes of a hungry boy. Dinner was at twelve, and the tables began to be set between ten and eleven, with a rhythmical movement of the negroes as they added each detail of plates and cups and knives and glasses, and placed the set dishes of quivering jelly at discrete intervals under the crystals of the chandeliers softly tinkling with the pulse of the engines. At last some more exalted order of waiters appeared with covered platters and spirit-lamps burning under them, and set them down before the places of the captain

and his officers. Then the bell was sounded for the passengers; the waiters leaned forward between these when they were seated; at a signal from their chief they lifted the covers of the platters and vanished in a shining procession up the saloon, while each passenger fell upon the dishes nearest himself.

About the time I had become completely reconciled to the conditions of the voyage, which the unrivaled speed of the *New England No. 2* shortened to a three-days' run up the river, I woke one morning to find her lying at the Pittsburg landing, and when I had called my father to come and share my wonder at a stretch of boats as long as that at Cincinnati, and been mimicked by a cabin-boy for my unsophisticated amazement, nothing remained for me but to visit the houses of the aunts and uncles abounding in cousins. Of the homeward voyage nothing whatever is left in my memory; but I know we came back on the *New England No. 2*, though we must have left the boat and taken it again on a second trip at Wheeling, after a week spent with my mother's people at Martin's Ferry. My father wished me to see the glass-foundries and rolling-mills which interested him so much more than me; he could not get enough of those lurid industries which I was chiefly concerned in saving myself from. I feigned an interest in the processes out of regard for him, but Heaven knows I cared nothing for the drawing of wire or the making of nails, and only a very little for the blowing of the red, vitreous bubbles from the mouths of long steel pipes. With weariness I escaped from these wonders, but with no such misery as I eluded the affection of the

poor misshapen, half witted boy who took a fancy to me at the house of some old friends of my father where we had supper after the long day. With uncouth noises of welcome, and with arms and legs flying controllessly about, he followed me through a day that seemed endless. His family of kindly English folk, from the life-long habit of him, seemed unaware of anything strange, and I could not for shame and for fear of my father's reproach betray my suffering. The evening began unduly to fall, thick with the blackness of the coal smoke poured from the chimneys of those abhorred foundries, and there was a fatal moment when my father's friends urged him to stay the night and I thought he would consent. The dreams of childhood are oftenest evil, but mine holds record of few such nightmares as this.

## VII

After my father sold his paper and was casting about for some other means of livelihood, there were occasional shadows cast by his anxieties in the bright air of my childhood. Again I doubt if any boy ever lived a gladder time than I lived in Hamilton, Butler County, Ohio: words that I write still when I try a new pen, because I learned to write them first, and love them yet. When we went to live in Dayton, where my father managed to make a sort of progressive purchase of a newspaper which he never quite paid for, our skies changed. It was after an interval of experiment in one sort and another, which amused his hopeful ingenuity, but ended in nothing, that he entered upon this long failure. The *Dayton Transcript* when he began with it was a tri-weekly, but he made it a daily, and this mistake infected the whole enterprise. It made harder work for us all than we had known before; and the printing-office, which had been my delight, became my oppression after the brief moment of public schooling which I somehow knew. But before the change from tri-weekly to daily in our paper, I had the unstinted advantage of a school of morals as it then appeared among us.

The self-sacrificing company of players who suffered for the drama through this first summer of our life in Dayton paid my father for their printing in promises which he willingly took at their face value, and in tickets which were promptly

honored at the door. As nearly as I can make out, I was thus enabled to go every night to the theater, in a passion for it which remains with me ardent still. I saw such plays of Shakespeare as "Macbeth" and "Othello," then the stage favorites, and "Richard III." and evermore "Richard III." I saw such other now quite forgotten favorites as Kotzebue's "Stranger" and Sheridan Knowles's "Wife," and such moving actions of unknown origin as "Barbarossa" and "The Miser of Marseilles," with many screaming farces such as helped fill every evening full with at least three plays. There was also at that time a native drama almost as acceptable to our public everywhere as "Uncle Tom's Cabin" afterward became. It seemed as if our public would never tire of "A Glance at New York," with its horribly vulgar stage conceptions of local character, Mose the fireman and Lize his girl, and Sikesy and their other companions, which drift up before me now like wraiths from the Pit, and its events of street-fighting and I dare say heroic rescues from burning buildings by the volunteer fire companies of the day. When it appeared that the public might tire of the play, the lively fancy of the theater supplied a fresh attraction in it, and the character of Little Mose was added. How this must have been played by what awful young women eager to shine at any cost in their art, I shudder to think, and it is with "sick and scornful looks averse" that I turn from the remembrance of my own ambition to shine in that drama. My father instantly quenched the histrionic spark in me with loathing; but I cannot say whether this was before

or after the failure of a dramatic attempt of his own which I witnessed, much mystified by the sense of some occult relation to it. Certainly I did not know that the melodrama which sacrificed his native to his adoptive patriotism in the action, and brought off the Americans victors over the British in a sea-fight, was his work; and probably it was the adaptation of some tale then much read. Very likely he trusted, in writing it, to the chance which he always expected to favor the amateur in taking up a musical instrument strange to him. He may even have dreamed of fortune from it; but after one performance of it the management seems to have gone back to such old public favorites as Shakespeare and Sheridan Knowles. Nothing was said of it in the family; I think some of the newspapers were not so silent; but I am not sure of this.

My father could, of course, be wiser for others than for himself; the public saved him from becoming a dramatist, but it was he who saved me from any remotest chance of becoming an actor, and later from acquiring the art of the prestidigitator. The only book which I can be sure of his taking from me was a manual professing to teach this art, which I had fallen in with. The days of those years in Dayton were in fact very different from the days in Hamilton when I was reaching out near and far to feed my fancy for fable and my famine for fact. I read no new books which now occur to me by name, though I still kept my interest in Greek mythology and gave something of my scanty leisure to a long poem in the quatrains of Gray's *Elegy* based upon some

divine event of it. The course of the poem was lastingly arrested by a slight attack of the cholera which was then raging in the town and filling my soul with gloom. My dear mother thought it timely to speak with me of the other world; but so far from reconciling me to the thought of it, I suppose she could not have found a boy in all Dayton more unwilling to go to heaven. She was forced to drop her religious consolations and to assure me that she had not the least fear of my dying.

It was certainly not the fault of the place that we were, first and last, rather unhappy there. For one thing, we were used to the greater ease and simplicity of a small town like Hamilton, and Dayton was a small city with the manners and customs of cities in those days: that is, there was more society and less neighborhood, and neither my father nor my mother could have cared for society. They missed the wont of old friends; there were no such teas as she used to give her neighbors, with a quilting, still dimly visioned, at the vanishing-point of the perspective; our social life was almost wholly in our Sunday-evening visits to the house of my young aunt whose husband was my father's youngest brother. The pair were already in the shadow of their early death, and in the sorrow of losing their children one after another till one little cousin alone remained. I had not yet begun to make up romances about people in my mind, but this uncle and aunt were my types of worldly splendor in the setting of the lace curtains and hair-cloth chairs of their parlor, with her piano and his flute for other æsthetic grace. He was so much younger that he had a

sort of filial relation to my father, and they were both very sweet to my mother, always lonely outside of her large family.

As usual, we lived in more than one house, but the first was very acceptable because of its nearness to the canal; the yard stretched behind it quite to the tow-path, with an unused stable between, which served us boys for circus-rehearsals, and for dressing after a plunge. As in a dream, I can still see my youngest brother rushing through this stable one day and calling out that he was going to jump into the canal, with me running after him and then dimly seeing him as he groped along the bottom, with me diving and saving him from drowning. Already, with the Hamilton facilities, I could hardly help being a good swimmer, and at Dayton I spent much of my leisure in the canal. Within the city limits we had to wear some sort of bathing-dress, and we preferred going with a crowd of other boys beyond the line where no such formality was expected of us. On the way to and fro we had to pass a soap-factory, where the boys employed in it swarmed out at sight of us stealing along under the canal bank, and in the strange outlawry of boyhood murderously stoned us, but somehow did not kill us. I do not know what boys we played with, but after we had paid the immemorial penalty of the stranger, and fought for our standing among them, the boys of our neighborhood were kind enough. One, whose father was a tobacconist, abetted our efforts to learn smoking by making cigars flavored with cinnamon drops; I suppose these would have been of more actual advantage to me if I had learned to like

smoking. When we went from his house to another, in what may have been a better quarter, we made no friends that I can remember, and we were never so gay. In fact, a sense of my father's adversity now began to penetrate to his older children, with the knowledge of our mother's unhappiness from it.

I am not following any chronological order here, and I should not be able to date my æsthetic devotion to a certain gas-burner in the window of a store under the printing-office. It was in the form of a calla-lily, with the flame forking from the tongue in its white cup; and I could never pass it, by day or night, without stopping to adore it. If I could be perfectly candid, I should still own my preference of it to the great painting of Adam and Eve by Dubuffe, then shown throughout our simple-hearted commonwealth. This had the double attraction of a religious interest and the awful novelty of the nude, for the first time seen by untraveled American eyes; the large canvas was lighted up so as to throw the life-size figures into strong relief, and the spectator strickenly studied them through a sort of pasteboard binocle supplied for the purpose. If that was the way our first parents looked before the Fall, and the Bible said it was, there was nothing to be urged against it; but many kind people must have suffered secret misgivings at a sight from which a boy might well shrink ashamed, with a feeling that the taste of Eden was improved by the Fall. I had no such joy in it as in the dramas which I witnessed in the same hall; as yet there was nothing in Dayton openly declared a theater.

The town had many airs of a city, and there were even some policemen who wore a silver-plated star inside their coats for proof of their profession. There were water-works, and there was gas everywhere for such as would pay the charge for it. My father found the expense of piping the printing-office too great for his means, or else he preferred falling back upon his invention, and instead of the usual iron tubes he had the place fitted with tin tubes, at much less cost. Perhaps the cost was equalized in the end by the leaking of these tubes, which was so constant that we breathed gas by day as well as burned it by night. We burned it a good deal, for our tri-weekly was now changed to a daily, and a morning paper at that. Until eleven o'clock I helped put the telegraphic despatches (then a new and proud thing with us) into type, and between four and five o'clock in the morning I was up and carrying papers to our subscribers. The stress of my father's affairs must have been very sore for him to allow this, and I dare say it did not last long, but while it lasted it was suffering which must make me forever tender of those who overwork, especially the children who overwork. The suffering was such that when my brother, who had not gone to bed till much later, woke me after my five or six hours' sleep, I do not now know how I got myself together for going to the printing-office for the papers and making my rounds in the keen morning air. When Sunday came, and I could sleep as late as I liked, it was bliss such as I cannot tell to lie and rest, and rest, and rest! We were duteous children and willing; my brother knew of the heavy trouble hanging over us

and I was aware of the hopeless burden of debt which our father was staggering under and my mother was carrying on her heart; and when I think of it, and of the wide-spread, never-ending struggle for life which it was and is the type of, I cannot but abhor the economic conditions which we still suppose an essential of civilization.

Lest these facts should make too vivid a call upon the reader's compassion, I find it advisable to remember here an instance of hard-heartedness in me which was worthier the adamant conscience of some full-grown moralist than a boy of my age. There was a poor girl, whose misfortune was known to a number of families where she was employed as a seamstress, and the more carefully treated because of her misfortune. Among others my mother was glad to give her work; and she lived with us like one of ourselves, of course sitting at table with us and sharing in such family pleasures as we knew. She was the more to be pitied because her betrayer was a prominent man who bore none of the blame for their sin; but when her shame became known to me I began a persecution of the poor creature in the cause of social purity. I would not take a dish from her at table, or hand her one; I would not speak to her, if I could help it, or look at her; I left the room when she came into it; and I expressed by every cruelty short of words my righteous condemnation. I was, in fact, society incarnate in the attitude society takes toward such as she. Heaven knows how I came by such a devilish ideal of propriety, and I cannot remember how the matter quite ended, but I seem to

remember a crisis, in which she begged my mother with tears to tell her why I treated her so; and I was put to bitter shame for it. It could not be explained to me how tragical her case was; I must have been thought too young for the explanation; but I doubt if any boy of twelve is too young for the right knowledge of such things; he already has the wrong.

My wish at times to learn some other business was indulged by a family council, and my uncle made a place for me in his drug-store, where, as long as the novelty lasted, I was happy in the experiments with chemicals permitted to me and a fellow-apprentice. Mainly we were busied in putting up essence of peppermint and paregoric and certain favorite medicinal herbs; and when the first Saturday evening came, my companion received his weekly wage over the counter, and I expected mine, but the bookkeeper smiled and said he would have to see my uncle about that; in the end, it appeared that by the convention with my father I was somehow not to draw any salary. Both my uncle and he treated the matter with something of the bookkeeper's smiling slight, and after an interval, now no longer appreciable, I found myself in the printing-office again. I was not sorry, and yet I had liked the drug business so far as I had gone in it, and I liked that old bookkeeper, though he paid me no money. How, after a life of varied experiences, he had lodged at last in the comfortable place he held I no longer know, if I ever knew. He had been at one time what would once have been called a merchant adventurer in various seas; and he had been wrecked

on the Galapagos Islands, where he had feasted on the famous native turtle, now extinct, with a relish which he still smacked his lips in remembering.

This episode, which I cannot date, much antedated the period of my father's business failure, though his struggles against it must have already begun; they began, in fact, from the moment of his arrival in Dayton, and the freest and happiest hours we knew there were when the long strain ended in the inevitable break. Then there was an interval, I do not know how great, but perhaps of months, when there was a casting about for some means of living, and to this interval belongs somehow the employment of my brother and myself in a German printing-office, such as used to be found in every considerable Ohio town. I do not know what we did there, but I remember the kindly German printer-folk, and the merry times we had with them, in the smoke of their pipes and the warmth of their stove heated red against the autumnal cold. I explore my memory in vain for proof that my father had some job-printing interest in this German office, but I remember my interest in the German type and its difference from the English. I was yet far from any interest in the German poetry which afterward became one of my passions, and there is no one now left alive whom I can ask whether the whole incident was fact, or not, rather, the sort of dream which all the past becomes when we try to question it.

What I am distinctly aware of, through a sense of rather sullen autumnal weather, is that a plan for our going into the country

evolved itself in full detail between my father and uncle. My uncle was to supply the capital for the venture, and was finally, with two other uncles, to join my father on a milling privilege which they had bought at a point on the Little Miami River, where all the families were to be settled. In the mean time my father was to have charge of a grist-mill and sawmill on the property till they could be turned into a paper-mill and a sort of communal settlement of suitable people could be gathered. He had never run a sawmill or a grist-mill, much less evoked a paper-mill from them; but neither had he ever gathered a community of choice spirits for the enjoyment of a social form which enthusiasts like Robert Owen had dreamed into being, and then non-being, in the Middle West in those or somewhat earlier days. What was definite and palpable in the matter was that he must do something, and that he had the heart and hope for the experiment.

## VIII

I have told the story of this venture in a little book called *My Year in a Log Cabin*, printed twenty-odd years ago, and I cannot do better now than let it rehearse itself here from those pages, with such slight change or none as insists. For my father, whose boyhood had been passed in the new country, where pioneer customs and traditions were still rife, it was like renewing the wild romance of those days to take up once more the life in a log cabin interrupted by many years sojourn in matter-of-fact dwellings of frame and brick. It was the fond dream of his boys to realize the trials and privations which he had painted for them in rosy hues, and even if the only clapboarded dwelling at the mills had not been occupied by the miller, we should have disdained it for the log cabin which we made our home till we could build a new house.

Our cabin stood close upon the road, but behind it broadened a corn-field of eighty acres. They still built log cabins for dwellings in that region at the time, but ours must have been nearly half a century old when we went into it. It had been recently vacated by an old poor-white Virginian couple, who had long occupied it, and we decided that it needed some repairs to make it habitable even for a family inured to hardship by dauntless imaginations, and accustomed to retrospective discomforts of every kind.

So before the family all came out to it a deputation of

adventurers put it in what rude order they could. They glazed the narrow windows, they relaid the rotten floor, they touched (too sketchily, as it afterward appeared) the broken roof, and they papered the walls of the ground-floor rooms. Perhaps it was my father's love of literature which inspired him to choose newspapers for this purpose; at any rate, he did so, and the effect, as I remember, had its decorative qualities. He had used a barrel of papers from the nearest post-office, where they had been refused by people to whom they had been experimentally sent by the publishers, and the whole first page was taken up by a story, which broke off in the middle of a sentence at the foot of the last column, and tantalized us forever with fruitless conjecture as to the fate of the hero and heroine.

The cabin, rude as it was, was not without its sophistications, its concessions to the spirit of modern luxury. The logs it was built of had not been left rounded, as they grew, but had been squared in a sawmill, and the crevices between them had not been chinked with moss and daubed with clay in true backwoods fashion, but plastered with mortar, and the chimney, instead of being a structure of clay-covered sticks, was laid in courses of stone. Within, however, it was all that could be desired by the most romantic of pioneer families. It was six feet wide and a yard deep, its cavernous maw would easily swallow a back-log eighteen inches through, and we piled in front the sticks of hickory cord-wood as high as we liked. We made a perfect trial of it when we came out to put the cabin in readiness for

the family, and when the hickory had dropped into a mass of tinkling, snapping, bristling embers we laid our rashers of bacon and our slices of steak upon them, and tasted the flavors of the wildwood in the captured juices. At night we laid our mattresses on the sweet new oak plank of the floor, and slept hard – in every sense.

In due time the whole family took up its abode in the cabin. The household furniture had been brought out and bestowed in its scanty space, the bookcase had been set up, and the unbound books left easily accessible in barrels. There remained some of our possessions to follow, chief of which was the cow; for in those simple days people kept cows in town, and it fell to me to help my father drive ours out to her future home. We got on famously, talking of the wayside things so beautiful in the autumnal day, panoplied in the savage splendor of its painted leaves, and of the books and authors so dear to the boy who limped barefooted by his father's side, with his eye on the cow and his mind on Cervantes and Shakespeare. But the cow was very slow – far slower than the boy's thoughts – and it had fallen night and was already thick dark when we had made the twelve miles and stood under the white-limbed phantasmal sycamores beside the tail-race of the grist-mill, and questioned how we should get across with our charge. We did not know how deep the water was, but we knew it was very cold, and we would rather not wade it. The only thing to do seemed to be for one of us to run up to the sawmill, cross the head-race there, and come back to receive the

cow on the other side of the tail-race. But the boy could not bring himself either to go or to stay.

The kind-hearted father urged, but he would not compel; you cannot well use force with a boy when you have been talking literature and philosophy for half a day with him. We could see the lights in the cabin cheerfully twinkling, and we shouted to those within, but no one heard us. We called and called in vain. Nothing but the cold rush of the tail-race, the dry rustle of the sycamore-leaves, and the homesick lowing of the cow replied. We determined to drive her across, and pursue her with sticks and stones through the darkness beyond, and then run at the top of our speed to the sawmill, and get back to take her in custody again. We carried out our part of the plan perfectly, but the cow had not entered into it with intelligence or sympathy. When we reached the other side of the tail-race again she was nowhere to be found, and no appeals of "Boss" or "Suky" or "Suboss" availed. She must have instantly turned, and retraced, in the darkness which seemed to have swallowed her up, the weary steps of the day, for she was found in her old home in town the next morning. At any rate, she had abandoned the father to the conversation of his son, for the time being, and the son had nothing to say.

I do not remember now just how it was that we came by the different "animals of the horse kind," as my father called them, which we housed in an old log stable not far from our cabin. They must have been a temporary supply until a team

worthy our new sky-blue wagon could be found. One of them was a colossal sorrel, inexorably hide-bound, whose barrel, as horsemen call the body, showed every hoop upon it. He had a feeble, foolish whimper of a voice, and we nicknamed him "Baby." His companion was a dun mare, who had what my father at once called an italic foot, in recognition of the emphatic slant at which she carried it when upon her unwilling travels. Then there was a small, self-opinionated gray pony, which was of no service conjecturable after this lapse of time. We boys rode him barebacked, and he used to draw a buggy, which he finally ran away with. I suppose we found him useful in the representation of some of the Indian fights which we were always dramatizing, and I dare say he may have served our turn as an Arab charger, when the Moors of Granada made one of their sallies upon the camp of the Spaniards, and discharged their javelins into it; their javelins were the long, admirably straight and slender ironweeds that grew by the river. This menagerie was constantly breaking bounds and wandering off; and was chiefly employed in hunting itself up, its different members taking turns in remaining in the pasture or stable, to be ridden after those that had strayed into the woods.

The origin of a large and eloquent flock of geese is lost in an equal obscurity. I recall their possession simply as an accomplished fact, and I associate their desolate cries with the windy dark of rainy November nights, so that they must at least have come into our hands after the horses. They were fenced into

a clayey area next the cabin for safe-keeping, where, perpetually waddling about in a majestic disoccupation, they patted the damp ground down to the hardness and smoothness of a brick-yard. Throughout the day they conversed tranquilly together, but by night they woke, goose after goose, to send forth a long clarion alarum, blending in a general concert at last, to assure one another of their safety. We must have intended to pluck them in the spring, but they stole their nests early in March, and entered upon the nurture of their young before we could prevent it; and it would then have been barbarous to pluck these mothers of families.

We had got some pigs from our old Virginian predecessors, and these kept, as far as they could, the domestic habits in which that affectionate couple had indulged them. They would willingly have shared our fireside with us, humble as it was, but, being repelled, they took up their quarters on cold nights at the warm base of the chimney without, where we could hear them, as long as we kept awake, disputing the places next to the stones. All this was horrible to my mother, whose housewifely instincts were perpetually offended by the rude conditions of our life, and who justly regarded it as a return to a state which, if poetic, was also not far from barbaric. But boys take every natural thing as naturally as savages, and we never thought our pigs were other than amusing. In that country pigs were called to their feed with long cries of "Pig, pig, poeee, poe-e-e!" but ours were taught to come at a whistle, and, on hearing it, would single themselves out

from the neighbors' pigs, and come rushing from all quarters to the scattered corn with an intelligence we were proud of.

## IX

As long as the fall weather lasted, and well through the mild winter of that latitude, our chief recreation, where all our novel duties were delightful, was hunting with the long, smooth-bore shot-gun which had descended laterally from one of our uncles, and supplied the needs of the whole family of boys in the chase. Never less than two of us went out with it at once, and generally there were three. This enabled us to beat up the game over a wide extent of country, and while the eldest did the shooting, left the others to rush upon him as soon as he fired, with tumultuous cries of, "Did you hit it? Did you hit it?" We fell upon the wounded squirrels which we brought down on rare occasions, and put them to death with what I must now call a sickening ferocity. If sometimes the fool dog, the weak-minded Newfoundland pup we were rearing, rushed upon the game first, and the squirrel avenged his death upon the dog's nose, that was pure gain, and the squirrel had the applause of his other enemies. Yet we were none of us cruel; we never wantonly killed things that could not be eaten; we should have thought it sacrilege to shoot a robin or a turtledove, but we were willing to be amused, and these were the chances of war.

The woods were full of squirrels, which especially abounded in the woods-pastures, as we called the lovely dells where the greater part of the timber was thinned out to let the cattle range

and graze. They were of all sorts – gray, and black, and even big red fox squirrels, a variety I now suppose extinct. When the spring opened we hunted them in the poplar woods, whither they resorted in countless numbers for the sweetness in the cups of the tulip-tree blossoms. I recall with a thrill one memorable morning in such woods – early, after an overnight rain, when the vistas hung full of a delicate mist that the sun pierced to kindle a million fires in the drops still pendulous from leaf and twig. I can smell the tulip-blossoms and the odor of the tree-bark yet, and the fresh, strong fragrance of the leafy mold under my bare feet; and I can hear the rush of the squirrels on the bark of the trunks, or the swish of their long, plunging leaps from bough to bough in the air-tops.

In a region where the corn-fields and wheat-fields were often fifty and sixty acres in extent there was a plenty of quail, but I remember only one victim to my gun. We set figure-four traps to catch them; but they were shrewder arithmeticians than we, and solved these problems without harm to themselves. When they began to mate, and the air was full of their soft, amorous whistling, we searched for their nests, and had better luck, though we were forbidden to rob the nests when we found them; and in June, when a pretty little mother strutted across the lanes at the head of her tiny brood, we had to content ourselves with the near spectacle of her cunning counterfeit of disability at sight of us, fluttering and tumbling in the dust till her chicks could hide themselves. We had read of that trick, and were not deceived;

but we were charmed the same.

It is a trick that all birds know, and I had it played upon me by the mother snipe and mother wild duck that haunted our dam, as well as by the quail. With the snipe, once, I had a fancy to see how far the mother would carry the ruse, and so ran after her, but in doing this I trod on one of her young – a soft, gray mite, not distinguishable from the gray pebbles where it ran. I took it tenderly up in my hand, and it is a pang to me yet to think how it gasped once and died. A boy is a strange mixture – as the man who comes after him is. I should not have minded knocking over that whole brood of snipes with my gun, if I could; but this poor little death was somehow very personal in its appeal.

I had no such regrets concerning the young wild ducks, which, indeed, I had no such grievous accident with. I left their mother to flounder and flutter away as she would, and took to the swamp where her young sought refuge from me. There I spent half a day wading about in waters that were often up to my waist and full of ugly possibilities of mud-turtles and water-snakes, trying to put my hand on one of the ducklings. They rose everywhere else, and dived again after a breath of air; but at last one of them came up in my very grasp. It did not struggle, but how its wild heart bounded against my hand! I carried it home to show it and boast of my capture, and then I took it back to its native swamp. It dived instantly, and I hope it found its bereaved family somewhere under the water.

The center of our life in the cabin was, of course, the fireplace,

whose hugeness and whose mighty fires remained a wonder with us. There was a crane in the chimney and dangling pothooks, and until the cooking stove could be set up in an adjoining shed the cooking had to be done on the hearth, and the bread baked in a Dutch oven in the hot ashes. We had always heard of this operation, which was a necessity of early days; and nothing else, perhaps, realized them so vividly for us as the loaf laid in the iron-lidded skillet, which was then covered with ashes and heaped with coals.

I am not certain that the bread tasted any better for the historical romance of its experience, or that the corn-meal, mixed warm from the mill and baked on an oak plank set up before the fire, had merits beyond the hoecake of art; but I think there can be no doubt that new corn grated from the cob while still in the milk, and then molded and put in like manner to brown in the glow of such embers, would still have the sweetness that was incomparable then. When the maple sap started in February, we tried the scheme we had cherished all winter of making with it tea which should be in a manner self-sugared. But the scheme was a failure – we spoiled the sap without sweetening the tea.

We sat up late before the big fire at night, our faces burning in the glow, and our backs and feet freezing in the draught that swept in from the imperfectly closing door, and then we boys climbed to our bed in the loft. We reached it by a ladder, which we should have been glad to pull up after us as a protection against Indians in the pioneer fashion; but, with the advancement

of modern luxury, the ladder had been nailed to the floor. When we were once aloft, however, we were in a domain sacred to the past. The rude floor rattled and wavered loosely under our tread, and the window in the gable stood open or shut at its own will. There were cracks in the shingles, through which we could see the stars, when there were stars, and which, when the first snow came, let the flakes sift in upon the floor.

Our barrels of paper-covered books were stowed away in that loft, and, overhauling them one day, I found a paper copy of the poems of a certain Henry W. Longfellow, then wholly unknown to me; and while the old grist-mill, whistling and wheezing to itself, made a vague music in my ears, my soul was filled with this new, strange sweetness. I read the "Spanish Student" there, and the "Coplas de Manrique," and the solemn and ever-beautiful "Voices of the Night." There were other books in those barrels, but these spirited me again to Spain, where I had already been with Irving, and led me to attack fitfully the old Spanish grammar which had been knocking about our house ever since my father bought it from a soldier of the Mexican War.

But neither these nor any other books made me discontented with the boy's world about me. They made it a little more populous with visionary shapes, but that was well, and there was room for them all. It was not darkened with cares, and the duties of it were not many. By this time we older boys had our axes, and believed ourselves to be clearing a piece of woods which covered a hill belonging to the milling property. The timber was

black-walnut and oak and hickory, and I cannot think we made much inroad in it; but we must have felled some of the trees, for I remember helping to cut them into saw-logs with the cross-cut saw, and the rapture we had in starting our logs from the brow of the hill and watching their whirling rush to the bottom. We experimented, as boys will, and we felled one large hickory with the saw instead of the axe, and scarcely escaped with our lives when it suddenly split near the bark, and the butt shot out between us. I preferred buckeye and sycamore trees for my own axe; they were of no use when felled, but they chopped so easily.

They grew abundantly on the island which formed another feature of our oddly distributed property. This island was by far its most fascinating feature, and for us boys it had the charm and mystery which have in every land and age endeared islands to the heart of man. It was not naturally an island, but had been made so by the mill-races bringing the water from the dam, and emptying into the river again below the mills. It was flat, and half under water in every spring freshet, but it had precious areas grown up to tall ironweeds, which, withering and hardening in the frost, supplied us with the darts for our Indian fights. The island was always our battle-ground, and it resounded in the long afternoons with the war-cries of the encountering tribes. We had a book in those days called *Western Adventure*, which was made up of tales of pioneer and frontier life, and we were constantly reading ourselves back into that life. This book, and Howe's *Collections for the History of Ohio*, were full of stories of the backwoodsmen

and warriors who had made our state a battle-ground for nearly fifty years, and our life in the log cabin gave new zest to the tales of "Simon Kenton, the Pioneer," and "Simon Girty, the Renegade"; of the captivity of Crawford, and his death at the stake; of the massacre of the Moravian Indians at Gnadenhütten, of the defeat of St. Clair and the victory of Wayne; of a hundred other wild and bloody incidents of our annals. We read of them at night till we were afraid to go up the ladder to the ambuscade of savages in our loft, but we fought them over by day with undaunted spirit. With our native romance I sometimes mingled from my own reading a strain of Old World poetry, and "Hamet el Zegri" and the "Unknown Spanish Knight," encountered in the Vega before Granada on our island, while Adam Poe and the Indian chief Bigfoot were taking breath from their deadly struggle in the waters of the Ohio.

## X

When the spring opened we broke up the sod on a more fertile part of the island, and planted a garden there beside our field of corn. We planted long rows of sweet-potatoes, and a splendid profusion of melons, which duly came up with their empty seed-shells fitted like helmets over their heads, and were mostly laid low the next day by the cutworms which swarmed in the upturned sod. But the sweet-potatoes had better luck. Better luck I did not think it then; their rows seemed interminable to a boy set to clear them of purslane with his hoe; though I do not now imagine they were necessarily a day's journey in length. Neither could the corn-field beside them have been very vast; but again reluctant boyhood has a different scale for the measurement of such things, and perhaps if I were now set to hill it up I might think differently about its size.

I dare say it was not well cared for, but an inexhaustible wealth of ears came into the milk just at the right moment for our enjoyment. We had then begun to build our new house, and for this we were now kiln-drying the green oak flooring-boards. We had built a long skeleton hut, and had set the boards upright all around it and roofed it with them, and in the middle of it we had set a huge old cast-iron stove, in which we kept a roaring fire. The fire had to be watched night and day, and it often took all the boys of the neighborhood to watch it, and to turn the

boards. It must have been cruelly hot in that kiln; but I remember nothing of that; I remember only the luxury of the green corn, spitted on the points of long sticks and roasted in the red-hot stove; we must almost have roasted our own heads at the same time. But I suppose that if the heat within the kiln or without ever became intolerable, we escaped from it and from our light summer clothing, reduced to a Greek simplicity, in a delicious plunge in the river. We had our choice of the shallows, where the long ripple was warmed through and through by the sun in which it sparkled, or the swimming-hole, whose depths were almost as tepid, but were here and there interwoven with mysterious cool under-currents.

We believed that there were snapping-turtles and water-snakes in our swimming-holes, though we never saw any. There were some fish in the river, chiefly suckers and catfish in the spring, when the water was high and turbid, and in summer the bream that we call sunfish in the West, and there was a superstition, never verified by us, of bass. We did not care much for fishing, though of course that had its turn in the pleasures of our rolling year. There were crawfish, both hard-shell and soft, to be had at small risk, and mussels in plenty. Their shells furnished us the material for many rings zealously begun and never finished; we did not see why they did not produce pearls; but perhaps they were all eaten up, before the pearl disease could attack them, by the muskrats, before whose holes their shells were heaped.

Of skating on the river I think we had none. The winter often

passed in our latitude without making ice enough for that sport, and there could not have been much sledding, either. We read, enviously enough, in Peter Parley's *First Book of History*, of the coasting on Boston Common, and we made some weak-kneed sleds (whose imbecile runners flattened helplessly under them) when the light snows began to come; but we never had any real coasting, as our elders never had any real sleighing in the jumpers they made by splitting a hickory sapling for runners, and mounting any sort of rude box upon them. They might have used sleighs in the mud, however; that was a foot deep on most of the roads, and lasted all winter. For a little while some of us went two miles away through the woods to school; but there was not much to be taught a reading family like ours in that log hut, and I suppose it was not thought worth while to keep us at it. No impression of it remains to me, except the wild, lonesome cooing of the turtle-doves when they began to nest in the neighboring oaks.

Our new house got on slowly. The log cabin had not become pleasanter with the advance of the summer, and we looked forward to our occupation of the new house with an eagerness which even in us boys must have had some sense of present discomfort at the bottom of it. The frame was of oak, and my father decided to have the house weather-boarded and shingled with black-walnut, which was so much cheaper than pine, and which, left in its natural state, he thought would be agreeable in color. It appeared to me a palace. I spent all the leisure I had

from swimming and Indian-fighting and reading in watching the carpenter work, and hearing him talk; his talk was not the wisest, but he thought very well of it himself, and I had so far lapsed from civilization that I stood in secret awe of him, because he came from town – from the little village, namely, two miles away.

I try to give merely a child's memories of our life, which were nearly all delightful; but it must have been hard for my elders, and for my mother especially, who could get no help, or only briefly and fitfully, in the work that fell to her. Now and then a New Church minister, of those who used to visit us in town, passed a Sunday with us in the cabin, and that was a rare time of mental and spiritual refreshment for her. Otherwise, my father read us a service out of the *Book of Worship*, or a chapter from the *Heavenly Arcana*; and week-day nights, while the long evenings lasted, he read poetry to us – Scott, or Moore, or Thomson, or some of the more didactic poets.

In the summer evenings, after her long hard day's work was done, my mother sometimes strolled out upon the island with my father, and loitered on the bank to look at her boys in the river; one such evening I recall, and how sad our gay voices were in the dim, dewy air. My father had built a flatboat, which we kept on the smooth waters of our dam, and on Sunday afternoons the whole family went out in it. We rowed far up, till we struck a current from the mill above us, and then let the boat drift slowly down again. It does not now seem very exciting, but then to a boy whose sense was open to every intimation of beauty, the

silence that sang in our ears, the stillness of the dam where the low uplands and the fringing sycamores and every rush and grass-blade by the brink perfectly glassed themselves with the vast blue sky overhead, were full of mystery, of divine promise, and holy awe.

I recollect the complex effort of these Sunday afternoons as if they were all one sharp event; I recall in like manner the starry summer nights, and there is one of these nights that remains single and peerless in my memory. My brother and I had been sent on an errand to some neighbor's – for a bag of potatoes or a joint of meat; it does not matter – and we had been somehow belated, so that it was well after twilight when we started home, and the round moon was high when we stopped to rest in a piece of the lovely open woodland of that region, where the trees stood in a parklike freedom from underbrush, and the grass grew dense and rich among them. We took the pole, on which we had slung the bag, from our shoulders, and sat down on an old long-fallen log, and listened to the densely interwoven monotonies of the innumerable katydids, in which the air seemed clothed as with a mesh of sound. The shadows fell black from the trees upon the smooth sward, but every other place was full of the tender light in which all forms were rounded and softened; the moon hung tranced in the sky. We scarcely spoke in the shining solitude, the solitude which for once had no terrors for the childish fancy, but was only beautiful. This perfect beauty seemed not only to liberate me from the fear which is the prevailing mood of

childhood, but to lift my soul nearer and nearer to the soul of all things in an exquisite sympathy. Such moments never pass; they are ineffaceable; their rapture immortalizes; from them we know that, whatever perishes, there is something in us that cannot die, that divinely regrets, divinely hopes.

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