

# FLYNT JOSIAH

MY LIFE

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# Josiah Flynt

## My Life

### DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to all those human beings, who, like myself, have come under the spell of that will-o'-the-wisp, *Die Ferne*, the disappearing and fading Beyond, and who, like myself again, are doomed sooner or later to see the folly of their quest, *Die Ferne* receding meanwhile farther and farther away from their vision. "It is the way of the World," says the Philosopher. That my fellow dupes in the fruitless chase may all become sweet-natured philosophers in the end, is my earnest wish and prayer.

# INTRODUCTION

## I

It seems a long time since the day when Josiah Flynt came to me in the Temple, with a letter of introduction from his sister, whom I had met at the house of friends in London. The contrast was startling. I saw a little, thin, white, shriveled creature, with determined eyes and tight lips, taciturn and self-composed, quietly restless; he was eying me critically, as I thought, out of a face prepared for disguises, yet with a strangely personal life looking out, ambiguously enough, from underneath. He spoke a hybrid speech; he was not interested apparently in anything that interested me. I had never met any one of the sort before, but I found myself almost instantly accepting him as one of the people who were to mean something to me. There are those people in life, and the others; the others do not matter.

The people who knew me wondered, I think, at my liking Flynt; his friends, I doubt not, wondered that he could get on with me. With all our superficial unlikeness, something within us insisted on our being comrades. We found out the points at which undercurrents in us flowed together. Where I had dipped, he had plunged, and that aim, which I was expressing about then, to "roam in the sun and air with vagabonds, to haunt the strange

corners of cities, to know all the useless, and improper, and amusing people who are alone very much worth knowing," had been achieved by him. I was ready for just such a companion, hesitating on the edge of a road which he had traveled.

We went together, not only about London, but on little journeys to France and Belgium, and on a longer visit to Germany. All that was ceaselessly entertaining to me, and came as a sort of margin to the not more serious enterprises of "The Savoy," the days of Beardsley, Conder, and Dowson. Flynt never quite fitted into that group, but he watched it with curiosity, as part of the material for his study of life.

I have been reading over his kindly and playful sayings about me in this book, which are veracious enough in the main substance of them, and it hurts me to think that I shall never go round to the Crown with him any more, or sit with him again in a café in Berlin. It was there, at the Embergshalle, that I found a poem of mine which is called "Emmy," but it was not for the sake of "material," or for those "impressions and sensations" of which he speaks, that I went about with him, but for the sake of the things themselves; and I wondered if he realized it. So what pleases me most now is when he says that he never thought of my books, or of myself as a literary man, when we were together. It was because he was so much more, in his way, than a literary man, that I cared for him so much, and it was of things more intimate than books that I liked to talk with him.

His ideas were always his own, and seemed to most people to

be eccentric. He had come to them by way of his own experience, or by deduction from the experience of others whom he had learned to know from inside. His mind was stubborn; you saw it in his dogged face, in which the thin lips were pressed tightly together and the eyes fixed level. He was rarely turned out of his ground by an argument, for he avoided debating about things that he did not know. I never saw him conscious of the beauty of anything; I do not think he read much, or cared for books. His talk was generally cynical, and he believed in few people and few opinions.

Flynt had no sense of style, and when he began to try to write down what he had seen and what he thought of it, the first result was at once tedious and formal, the life all gone out of what had so literally been lived. I was a fierce critic, and drove and worried him to be natural in his writing, to write as he would talk, in a dry, curt, often ironical way. His danger in writing was to be too literal for art and not quite literal enough for science. He was too completely absorbed in people and things to be able ever to get aloof from them; and to write well of what one has done and seen one must be able to get aloof from oneself and from others. If ever a man loved wandering for its own sake it was George Borrow; but George Borrow had a serious and whimsical brain always at work, twisting the things that he saw into shapes that pleased him more than the shapes of the things in themselves. I tried to get Flynt to read Borrow, but books were of little use to him. He did finally succeed in saying more or

less straightforwardly what he wanted to say, but his work will remain a human document, of value in itself, behind which one can divine only a part of the whole man. There was far more in his mind, his sensations were far subtler, his curiosity was more odd and rare, than any one who did not know him will ever recognize from his writing. His life was a marvelous invention: he created it in action, and the words in which he put it down are only a kind of commentary, or footnote to it.

Human curiosity: that made up the main part of Flynt's nature; and with it went the desire to find out everything by trying it, not merely by observing. None of the great wanderers of letters, Borrow or Stevenson, was so really a born vagabond; none had so little in the way of second thoughts behind him on his way through the world. The spectacle, the material, all that was so much to these artists, was to him only so much negligible quantity, an outer covering which he had to get through. He went to see Tolstoy in Russia, and was taken into his house, and dugged in his garden. He went to see Ibsen at Munich. To neither did he go for anything but that for which he went to the tramps and convicts: to find out what sort of human beings they were at close quarters.

Whatever he has written of value has been the record of personal experience, and after several books in which there is much serious instruction as well as external fact and adventure, he ended with this candid story of himself, of what he knew about himself, and of that larger part which he did not



understand, except that it led him where he had to go. The narrative breaks off before he had time to end it, with what was really the comedy of his life: the vagabond, ending by becoming so fantastically useful a member of society; the law, which he had defied, clever enough to annex him; he himself, clever enough to take wages for doing over again what he had done once for nothing, at its expense. Was it a way of "ranging" himself a little, and would he, if things had gone well, have answered the question, which I was fond of asking: What would remain for him in the world when he had tramped over all the roads of it? As it happened, he got short benefit from the change of position. He made more money than was good for him, out of detective service, first for the railroads, then for the police, and what had been one of the temptations of his life was easier, indeed seemed to him now necessary, to be succumbed to. He had an inherited tendency to drink, which had been partly kept down; now this new contact, so perilous for him, reawakened and strengthened the tendency into permanence. Gradually things slipped through his hands; the demand for books, articles, lectures, increased, as his power of complying with that demand ebbed out of him. He had friends, who held by him as long as he would let them. One of them was the only woman whom he had ever seriously cared for, besides his mother and his sisters. For three years he was rarely sober, and drink killed him. At the end he shut himself away in his room at the hotel in Chicago, as Dowson shut himself away in his lodgings in Featherstone Buildings, and Lionel Johnson in

his rooms in Gray's Inn; as a sick animal goes off into a lonely corner in the woods to die in.

## II

Josiah Flynt was never quite at home under a roof or in the company of ordinary people, where he seemed always like one caught and detained unwillingly. An American, who had studied in a German university, brought up, during his early life, in Berlin, he always had a fixed distaste for the interests of those about him, and an instinctive passion for whatever exists outside the border-line which shuts us in upon respectability. There is a good deal of affectation in the literary revolt against respectability, together with a child's desire to shock its elders, and snatch a lurid reputation from those whom it professes to despise. My friend never had any of this affectation; life was not a masquerade to him, and his disguises were the most serious part of his life. The simple fact is, that respectability, the normal existence of normal people, did not interest him; he could not even tell you why, without searching consciously for reasons; he was born with the soul of a vagabond, into a family of gentle, exquisitely refined people: he was born so, that is all. Human curiosity, which in most of us is subordinate to some more definite purpose, existed in him for its own sake; it was his inner life, he had no other; his form of self-development, his form of culture. It seems to me that this man, who had seen so much of humanity, who had seen humanity so closely, where it has least temptation to be anything but itself, really achieved culture,

almost perfect of its kind, though the kind were of his own invention. He was not an artist, who can create; he was not a thinker or a dreamer, or a man of action; he was a student of men and women, and of the outcasts among men and women, just those people who are least accessible, least cared for, least understood, and therefore, to one like my friend, most alluring. He was not conscious of it, but I think there was a great pity at the heart of this devouring curiosity. It was his love of the outcast which made him like to live with outcasts, not as a visitor in their midst, but as one of themselves.

For here is the difference between this man and the other adventurers who have gone about among tramps, and criminals, and other misunderstood or unfortunate people. Some have been philanthropists, and have gone with the Bible in their hands; others have been journalists, and have gone with note-books in their hands; all have gone as visitors, plunging into "the bath of multitude," as one might go holiday making to the seaside and plunge into the sea. But this man, wherever he has gone, has gone with a complete abandonment to his surroundings; no tramp has ever known that "Cigarette" was not really a tramp; he has begged, worked, ridden outside trains, slept in workhouses and gaols, not shirked one of the hardships of his way; and all the time he has been living his own life (whatever that enigma may be!) more perfectly, I am sure, than when he was dining every day at his mother's or his sister's table.

The desire of traveling on many roads, and the desire of seeing

many foreign faces, are almost always found united in that half-unconscious instinct which makes a man a vagabond. But I have never met any one in whom the actual love of the road is so strong as it was in Flynt. I remember, some ten years ago, when we had given one another rendezvous at St. Petersburg, that I found, when I got there, that he was already half-way across Siberia, on the new railway which they were in the act of making. But for the most part he walked. Wherever he walked he made friends; when we used to walk about London together he would get into the confidence of every sailor whom we came upon in the pot-houses about the docks. He was not fastidious, and would turn his hand, as the phrase is, to anything. And he went through every sort of privation, endured dirt, accustomed himself to the society of every variety of his fellow-creatures, without a murmur or regret.

After all, comfort is a convention, and pleasure an individual thing to every individual. "To travel is to die continually," wrote a half-crazy poet who spent most of the years of a short fantastic life in London. Well, that is a line that I have often found myself repeating as I shivered in railway stations on the other side of Europe, or lay in a plunging berth as the foam chased the snow flakes off the deck. One finds, no doubt, a particular pleasure in looking back on past discomforts, and I am convinced that a good deal of the attraction of traveling comes from an unconscious throwing forward of the mind to the time when the uncomfortable present shall have become a stirring memory of the past. But I am speaking now for those in whom a certain

luxuriousness of temperament finds itself in sharp conflict with the desire of movement. To my friend, I think, this was hardly a conceivable state of mind. He was a stoic, as the true adventurer should be. Rest, even as a change, did not appeal to him. He thought acutely, but only about facts, about the facts before him, and so he did not need to create an atmosphere about himself which change might disturb. He was fond of his family, his friends; but he could do without them, like a man with a mission. He had no mission, only a great thirst; and this thirst for the humanity of every nation and for the roads of every country drove him onward as resistlessly as the drunkard's thirst for drink, or the idealist's thirst for an ideal.

And it seems to me that few men have realized, as this man realized, that "not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end." He chose his life for himself, and he has lived it, regardless of anything else in the world. He has desired strange, almost inaccessible things, and he has attained whatever he has desired. Once, as he was walking with a friend in the streets of New York, he said suddenly: "Do you know, I wonder what it is like to chase a man? I know what it is like to be chased, but to chase a man would be a new sensation." The other man laughed, and thought no more about it. A week later Flynt came to him with an official document; he had been appointed a private detective. He was set on the track of a famous criminal (whom, as it happened, he had known as a tramp); he made his plans, worked them out successfully, and the criminal was caught. To

have done it was enough: he had had the sensation; he had no need, at that moment, to do any more work as a detective. Is there not, in this curiosity in action, this game mastered and then cast aside, a wonderful promptness, sureness, a moral quality which is itself success in life?

To desire so much, and what is so human; to make one's life out of the very fact of living it as one chooses; to create a unique personal satisfaction out of discontent and curiosity; to be so much oneself in learning so much from other people: is not this, in its way, an ideal, and has not this man achieved it? He had the soul and the feet of a vagabond. He cared passionately for men and women, where they are most vividly themselves, because they are no longer a part of society. He wandered across much of the earth, but he did not care for the beauty or strangeness of what he saw, only for the people. Writing to me once from Samarcand, he said: "I have seen the tomb of the Prophet Daniel; I have seen the tomb of Tamerlane." But Tamerlane was nothing to him, the Prophet Daniel was nothing to him. He mentioned them only because they would interest me. He was trying to puzzle out and piece together the psychology of the Persian beggar whom he had left at the corner of the way.

Arthur Symons.

# FOREWORD

This book explains itself in most ways, I hope, and a prefatory portico almost seems superfluous. In general, such addenda are distasteful to me; they look like an apology for what the author has to offer later on. No portico would be attached to the edifice I have now constructed were it not that there are two points I want to make clear and have failed to do so sufficiently to my satisfaction in the narrative proper.

First, it is fair to state at the outset that an autobiography coming from a man under forty is, to say the least, an unconventional performance which requires some explanation. I believe it was no less a genius than Goethe, however, who hazarded the remark that what a man is going to do that's worth while he does before thirty. Goethe's own life gives the lie to the statement, but there is a kernel of truth in its suggestiveness. In my case there happens to be much more than a mere kernel of truth in the remark. What I am going to do as a passionate explorer of *Die Ferne*— the ever-disappearing Beyond — has been done for all time, so far as the Under World is concerned. The game is over and the dealer retires. My dead Self I herewith put aside, and begin afresh with a new world. The old Self died hard. I can hear its bones rattling yet. But there came a time when it had to go, and now that I know that it is really and truly gone, that to-morrow morning, for instance, to find peace and contentment



for the day it will not be necessary for me to take up my staff and go nervously through the same antics and searchings as of old, a sweet satisfaction steals over me and I am glad to be alive. This book puts a finish for the present, at any rate, on all that I have heretofore written about the Under World, and sums up what I won and lost during my wanderings.

The second point to be cleared up I will put interrogatively – Was it worth while, after living the life, finishing with it, and passing on to pastures new and green, to tell the story? Benvenuto Cellini, that cheerful romancer, declares that a man, on reaching forty, if he has done anything of value and importance, is justified in putting his exploits down in writing, that he is morally bound to do so indeed if he would hold up his head among his fellows. For nearly forty years I chased the Beyond – that misty and slippery sorceress, ever beckoning onward to the wanderer, yet never satisfying, never showing herself in her true deceitful colors, until after long years of acquaintance. The chase is made by many travelers of the Upper World, hypnotized as I was, but by me perforce in that strange Under World from which so many explorers never return. This, it seems to me, is worth telling about. I have made the story as simple and direct as possible. May he who reads it, if perchance the sorceress is tempting him, too, hold fast to a better ideal, although his life be narrow and his task to fulfill a tiresome routine.

# CHAPTER I

## EARLIEST REMINISCENCES

My old nurse once told me that I came into this world with a "cowl," which had to be snatched off quickly, else I should have laid there to be a prophet. Why a state of blindness at one's birth should premise extraordinary vision, spiritual or otherwise, later on, is not clear. No such vision has ever been vouchsafed to me; on the contrary, as my story will reveal, that early blindness continued in one form or another all through my search for *Die Ferne*.

My very earliest remembrance is a runaway trip, culminating in the village lockup. Although my mother declares that I was at least five years old when this happened, I have always believed that I was nearer four; at any rate, I remember that I wore dresses. The circumstances of the truancy and imprisonment were as follows: My parents were in the neighboring city for the day, and I had been left at home with the nurse. She had punished me pretty severely for some slight offense, and had then gone to the lake for water, leaving me in a lane in front of the house, very much disquieted. A sudden impulse to run took hold of me – anywhere, it did not matter, so long as the nurse could not find me.[Pg 3][Pg 4] So off I started with a rush for the main street of the village, my little white panties dangling along after me. That

was my first conscious and determined effort to see the world in my own way and at my own discretion. It was the beginning of that long series of runaway excursions which have blessed or marred my life ever since. No child ever had a greater measure of unalloyed joy in his soul than I did when I dashed down that village lane, and no later escapade has ever brought me quite the same fine shade of satisfaction.

In the main street the village police officer stopped me, and on learning who I was, took me to the lockup for safe-keeping until my parents returned in the evening. I was not actually put in a cell – the lockup was fire station and village prison in one, and I was given the freedom of the so-called engine room. I remember that I spent most of the time sucking a stick of candy and marveling at the fire apparatus. Nevertheless it was imprisonment of a kind, and I knew it. It was the only punishment I received. My parents picked me up in the evening, apparently much amused. Could my father have realized what that initial truancy was to lead to I should probably have received one of his whippings, but fortunately he was in a mood to consider it humorously.

My father died at the early age of forty-two, when I was eight years old (1877). He was a tall, slender man, lithe, nervous and possessed of a long brown beard which always impressed me when looking at him. He was the editor-in-chief of a Chicago daily newspaper, which died six months after his demise. I have heard it said that he was the only man who could have made the paper a success, and trying to do this probably wore him out.

He had experimented with various activities before taking the newspaper position, but he thought that he had at last found his life-work when he developed into an editor. The last year of his life he became very much interested in church matters. He came of good New England stock, his American progenitor helping to found the town of Concord, Mass.

I have often heard it said that my father was a brilliant man gifted with a remarkable sense of humor. He did not favor me with his humorous side very often, but I do recall a funny incident in which he revealed to all of us children a phase of his character which my mother probably knew much more about. Although my father had to leave the old brown house early in the morning in order to catch his customary train for the city, he insisted rigidly on holding family prayers before leaving. These prayers did not mean much to me whatever they may have stood for with him, but there was one morning when they did please me. My old cat had brought a litter of kittens into the world over night, and at prayer time had deposited them in father's chair. Not noticing them, he took the Bible and proceeded to sit down. There ensued a great deal of miyowing and spitting. "Damn the cats!" exclaimed my father, springing up, and then taking another chair he continued with the prayers. I laughed over this happening all day, and my father never again exposed himself to me in such human garb.

Perhaps my older sister was his favorite child, if he played any favorites. Whether she understood him better than the rest of us

did I cannot say, but her whippings seemed to me to come very infrequently. Her ability to get him out of a punishing mood is well illustrated by the following incident.

Something that she had done had vexed him, as I remember the story, and she was in a fair way to be punished – "whaled," indeed, my father being unwilling to distinguish between the sexes in whippings as they applied to children. My sister had an inspiration as we considered it at the time – climbing into her father's lap, and gently stroking his almost straight hair, she said softly: "What lovely, curly locks you have, Papa!" The incongruity of her remark made him smile, and when he had once passed this Rubicon in his punishing moods he became friendly. I was never as clever as my sister in interviews of this character. What boy is as clever as his sister, when it comes to acting?

My father gone, the battle of life for us children shifted to my mother. My father left very few funds behind him, and it was necessary for my mother to be mother and bread-winner at the same time. I shall not enter into an account of her various activities to keep the family together, but she did this somehow in most honorable and useful ways for nearly ten years, departing then for Germany with the two girls to engage in educational work. No man ever made a braver struggle against fearful odds than did this mother of mine, and when I think of my almost unceasing cussedness throughout her struggle a remorse comes over me which is best not described. We stayed in the village

during the ten years in question, and I grew to be a youth well on in my teens, but never looking my years, nor do I to-day in spite of the hard life I have led, and a great many days and nights spent in hospitals. This is not said to coddle my vanity. I merely mean that I got from my parents a wonderful constitution. I hardly think that the average man, had he risked his health as I have done, would have pulled through so well.

Our village, since developed into one of Chicago's most beautiful and fashionable suburbs – I sometimes think it is the most entrancing spot near a large city, so far as nature alone goes, that exists – was a strange locality for a wanderer of my caliber to grow up in. Settled originally by sturdy New Englanders and central New Yorkers, it early became a Western stronghold of Methodism. My people on both sides were early comers, my mother's father being a divinity professor in the local theological institute. My father's people inclined to Congregationalism I think, but they swung round, and when I knew my grandmother she was an ardent communicant among the Methodists. Such church instruction as I could stand was also found in this fold – or shall I say party? Some years ago an ex-governor of Colorado was saying nice things about my mother to the United States Minister in Berlin, and to clinch his argument why the Minister should look out for my mother, the ex-governor said: "And, Mr. Phelps, she belongs to the greatest political party in our country – the Methodist Church!" It never interested me very much to look into the church's machinery – I had what seemed much

more important and seductive work in planning and carrying out my runaway trips – but in later years I must confess to having been impressed with similarities in Methodism as a religious policy and politics as a business. Methodism considered simply as a religious organization, ought to be described by some one who can study it impartially. The struggle for the high places in the church at conferences is woefully like that in political conventions. Men who want to be bishops pull wires and secure supporters in almost identically the same way that office seekers in conventions make their arrangements, and the fat jobs in the ministry are as earnestly coveted by aspiring preachers as are political offices in the nation at large. Perhaps this is all right; certainly, if figures, churches and converts count, the Methodists have done a great work; but Methodism as a religious cult had to pass me by.

The good villagers tried numberless times to have me "converted," and officially I have gone through this performance a number of times. Strangely enough, after nearly every one of my earlier runaway trips and my humble return to the village, bedraggled and torn, some revivalist had preceded me, and was holding forth at a great rate in the "Old First," where my people communed. My grandmother, my father's mother, invariably insisted on my attending the revival services in the hope that finally I would come to my senses and really "get religion." As much as anything else to show that I was sorry for the anxiety I had caused my mother during the latest escapade, I would take

my grandmother's advice and join the mourners at the mercy seat. Two or three visits usually sufficed to effect a change in me, and I would hold up my hand with those who desired conversion. I was not insincere in this, far from it. It came from nervousness and a desire to go home and be able to say honestly that I meant to mend my ways. I shall never forget the last time I attempted to get Divine grace and healing at one of these meetings. The preceding escapade had been woefully bad, and it was very much up to me to atone for it in no unmistakable manner. The relatives were all looking at me askance, and the neighbors were cautioning their children more particularly than usual to keep out of my company. Indeed, I became at a jump the village "bad boy," and I never really got over this appellation. I have heard good Methodist mothers say, as I passed by in the street: "There goes that awful Flynt boy," and I came to look upon myself as the local boy outcast. In later years I have changed considerably in my attitude toward people who criticise and revile me, but at the time in question I was a timid, bashful lad in temperament, and the ruthless remarks made by the Methodist mothers – the Methodist fathers also discussed my "case" pretty mouthily – made scars in my soul that are there yet. The truth of the matter is, I was not so innately bad as my persistent running away and occasional pilfering seemed to imply. I was simply an ordinary boy possessed of an extraordinary bump for wandering, which, when the "go-fever" was in me, sent me off to strange parts and peculiar adventures before any one had time to realize that I was



in one of my tantrums. The attack would come so suddenly that I was off and away before I had myself fully realized that I had been seized with one of the periodical fits.

But to return for a moment to that last revival, and my last "conversion." "Josiah," said my grandmother, "there is a good man holding forth in the church to-night, and do you go over and get good from him." I was prepared to do anything to stop the critical glances of the village, and that evening I made what was supposed to be a full surrender and declared myself "converted" forever more. Whether the "good man" hypnotized me into all this, whether I consciously made public declaration of conversion from selfish motives, or whether it was all sincere and upright I can't tell now. Probably all three agencies were at work at the time. A retired captain in the army, himself a convert of not many months, put my name down in his book among those who had experienced a change of heart. "Josiah, this time you mean it, don't you?" he asked, and I said "Yes." I walked out of the church in a warm glow, and felt purged from sin as never before. A few weeks later I was off on another *Wanderlust* trip of exploration.

It is a pity in such cases that the truant's wanderings cannot be directed, if wander he must. In my case there was plainly no doubt that I possessed the nomadic instinct in an abnormal degree. Whippings could not cure it, shutting me up in my room without any clothes only made the next seizure harder to resist, and moral suasion fell flat as a pancake. Revivals and conversions were serviceable merely in reinstating me temporarily in the

good graces of my grandmother. The outlook ahead of me was dark indeed for my mother, and yet it was from her, as I have learned to believe from what she has told me in later years, that I probably got some of my wandering proclivities. There was a time in her life, I have heard her say, when the mere distant whistle of a railroad train would set her go-instincts tingling, and only a sense of duty and fine control of self held her back. This call of *Die Ferne*, as the Germans name it, this almost unexplainable sympathy with the slightest appeal or temptation to project myself into the Beyond – the world outside of my narrow village world – was my trouble from almost babyhood until comparatively a few years ago. The longing to go would come upon me without any warning in the dead of night sometimes, stealing into my consciousness under varying disguises as the years went by and the passion required fresh incentives to become active and alert. In the beginning a sudden turn of the imagination sufficed to send me worldwards, and I would be off without let or leave for a week at least, usually bringing up at the home of relatives in northern Wisconsin. They would entertain me for a time, and then I would be shipped back to the village to await another seizure. On one of these return trips I traveled on one of the most unconventional railroad passes I have ever known. The relative who generally superintended the return to the village was an editor well known in his locality and to railroad men on the road. On one of the last visits paid to his home he determined not to trust me with the necessary money

for the ticket, but to give me a personal note to the conductor, which he did. It read: "This is a runaway boy. Please pass him to – and collect fare from me on your return." It was as serviceable at the time as any *bona fide* pass, annual or otherwise, that I have had and used in later years.

As I got well on into my teens and was at work with my school books, it naturally required a different kind of appeal to start me off on a trip from the simple call of the railroad train which had sufficed in the earlier years. For periods of time, long or short, as my temperament dictated, I became definitely interested in my books and in trying to behave, for my mother's sake, if for no other reason. I knew only too well that my failing caused her much anxiety and worry, and for weeks I would honestly struggle against all appeals to *vamose*. Then, without any warning, the mere reading of some biography of a self-made man, who had struggled independently in the world from about my age on to the Presidency perhaps, would fire me with a desire to do likewise in some far-off community where there was the conventional academy and attendant helps to fame and fortune. There was an academy in our own village and I attended it, but the appeal to go elsewhere carried with it a picture of independence, midnight oil and self-supporting work, which fascinated me, and at an age when most boys have got over their gusto for wandering, I would start off in secret, to return famous, some day, I hoped.

One of the last excursions undertaken with an idea of setting

myself up in business or academic independence is worth describing. There had been considerable friction in the household on my account for several days, and I deliberately planned with a neighboring banker's son to light out for parts unknown. I was the proud owner of two cows at the time, furnishing milk to my mother and a few neighbors at an agreed upon price. I had been able to pay for the cows out of the milk money, and my mother frankly recognized that the cows were my property. The banker's boy was also imbued with the irritating friction in his family – he was considerably older and larger than I. We put our heads together and decided to go West – where, in the West, was immaterial, but toward the setting sun we were determined to travel. My companion in this strange venture had no such property to contribute toward financing the trip as I had, but he was the proud possessor of five greyhounds of some value, several guns and a saddle. We looked about the village for a horse and cart to carry us, and we at last dickered with a young man who owned a poor, half-starved, spavined beast and a rickety cart. I gave him my two cows in exchange for his outfit, a deal which netted him easily fifty per cent. profit. The cart loaded, our outfit was the weirdest looking expedition that ever started for the immortal West. The muzzles of guns protruded under the covering on the sides, the five dogs sniffed uneasily at the cart, and the dying steed threw his ears back in utter horror. In this fashion, one bright afternoon in spring, our hearts throbbing with excitement, we started forth on our Don Quixote trip, choosing

Chicago as our first goal. We arrived in that city, twelve miles distant, after four days' travel and a series of accidents to both cart and horse. It was a Sunday morning, and we had found our way somehow to the fashionable boulevard, Michigan Avenue, about church time. Our outfit caused so much embarrassing amusement to the people in the street that we turned city-wards to find the station where the C. B. & Q. R. R. started its trains West. We knew of no other way to go West than to follow these tracks, I having already been over them as far as Iowa. We came to grief and complete pause in Madison Street. I was driving, and my companion was walking on the pavement. Suddenly, and without any warning, a stylishly dressed man hailed my companion, and asked him if his name was so-and-so, giving the young man's correct name. The latter "acknowledged the corn," as he afterwards put it to me, and I was told to draw up to the curb, where I learned that the dapper stranger was none other than a Pinkerton operative. Our trip West was nipped in the bud then and there. The cart was driven to a stable, and we boys were taken to the Pinkerton offices, where I spent the day pretty much alone, except when one of the Pinkertons, I think it was, lectured me about the horrors and intricacies of the West, and exhorted me to mend my ways and stay at home. Our horse succumbed to his wanderings soon after being returned to his original owner, and my cows were got back by process of law.

Later on, a good old major, a friend of my mother's, recommended that she send me West in regular fashion, and let

me see for myself. "A good roughing-it may bring him to his senses," said the major, and I was shipped to a tiny community in western Nebraska, consisting of a country store about the size of a large wood-shed, and four sod cabins. An older brother had preceded me here, and had been advised by letter to watch out for my coming. I shall never forget the woe-begone look on his face when I slipped off the snow-covered stage and said "Hello." He had not yet received my mother's letter of advice. "*You* here?" he groaned, and he led me into one of the sod houses. I explained matters to him, and he resigned himself to my presence, but I was never made to feel very welcome and in six weeks was home again, chastened in spirit and disillusionized about the West.

I must confess to still other runaway trips after this Western failure, but I have always felt that that undertaking did as much to cure my wandering disease as anything else. Dime novels soon ceased to have a charm for me, and home became more of an attraction. In spite of all this, however, in spite of some manly struggles to do right, my longest and saddest disappearance from home and friends was still ahead of me. It belongs to another section of the book, but I may say here that it wound up the runaway trips forever. The travels that followed may have been prompted by the call of *Die Ferne*, but they were aboveboard and regular.

Now, whence came this strange passion, for such it was, found in milder form probably in all boys and in some girls, but uncommonly lodged in me? My pilferings and tendency

to distort the truth when punishment was in sight I account for principally by those miserable whalings my father gave me. Punishment of some kind seemed to await me no matter how slight the offense, and I probably reasoned, as I have suggested above, that if "lickings" had to be endured it was worth while getting something that I needed or wanted in exchange for them. My mother very charitably accounts for my thefts and lies, on the ground that shortly before I was born the family's material circumstances were pretty cramped, and that this state of affairs may have reacted on me through her, producing my illicit acquisitiveness.

But that insatiable *Wanderlust*, that quick response to the lightest call of the seductive Beyond, that vagabond habit which caused my mother so much pain and worriment – where did *that* come from? It was a sorry home-coming for my mother at night when the runaway fever had sent me away again. She would come into the house, tired out, and ask the governess for news of the children. The latter would make her daily report, omitting reference to me. "And Josiah," my mother was wont to say, "where is he?" "Gone!" the poor governess would wail, and my mother would have to go about her duties the next day with a heavy heart. Now, why was I so perverse and pig-headed in this matter, when I, myself, the fever having subsided, suffered real remorse after each trip? Even at this late day, after years of pondering over the case, I can only make conjectures. I have hinted that probably I inherited from my mother a love of being

on the move, but she could control her desire to travel. For years I was a helpless victim of the whims of the *Wanderlust*. All that I have been able to evolve as a solution of the problem is this: Granted the innate tendency to travel, living much solely with my own thoughts, bashful and timid to a painful degree at times, and possessed of an imagination which literally ran riot with itself every few months or so, I was a victim of my own personality. This is all I have to offer by way of explanation. I have never met a boy or man who had been plagued to the same degree that I was.



## CHAPTER II

# YOUTHFUL DAYS AT EVANSTON

That Western village in which I grew up and struggled with so many temptations and sins deserves a chapter to itself. Doubtless there are some very good descriptions extant of small Middle West communities of twenty-five and thirty years ago, but I do not happen to have run across any which quite hit off the atmosphere and general make-up which characterized my village on the western shore of Lake Michigan. Yet there were probably many other settlements very similar in structure and atmosphere all through Illinois and southern Wisconsin, peopled by sturdy New England folk and charged with New England sentiment.

As I have already said, my village was singularized from other near-by communities of the same size on account of the Methodists having selected it for one of their Western strongholds. The place stood for learning, culture and religion in sectarian form in very pronounced outlines, and even in my childhood it was called the Athens of the West, or at any rate one of them. They are so numerous by courtesy to-day that it is difficult to keep track of them.

The village of my childhood was bounded for me on the north by a lighthouse and waterworks, and on the south by the main street, or "store" section. To the east was the lake, and to the

west the "Ridge," a sloping elevation where the particularly "rich" people lived. This was all the world to me until my sixth or seventh year, when perhaps I got a fleeting glimpse of Chicago, and realized that my world was pretty thin in settlement at least. But I did not see much of Chicago until I was well on into my teens, so I may practically say that the village was the one world I knew well for a number of years in spite of my runaway trips, which were too flighty to permit me to get acquainted, except superficially, with the communities visited.

Our house was a rambling old frame affair about midway between the main street and the lighthouse, built very near the lake. Here I grew up with my brother and sisters. The territory between the house and the lighthouse was "free;" we children could roam in the fields there without special permission, also on the shore and in the university campus immediately in front of the house across a lane. But beyond these limits special passports were required; the main street we were not to explore at all, innocent affair though it was.

The lake and the shore were our particular delight, and on pleasant days it is no exaggeration to say that my brother and I spent half our time roasting in the sand and then dashing into the cool water for a swim. Other boys from the village proper – real citified they seemed to me – joined us frequently, and at an early age I had learned to smoke cigarettes, and had a working vocabulary of "cuss" words, which I was careful, however, to exercise almost exclusively in the sand. Whether I took to these

habits earlier than most boys do now, I cannot say, but by nine I was a good beginner in the cigarette business, and by ten could hold my own in a cussing contest. My mother once washed my mouth out with soap and water for merely saying "Gee!" What she would have done to me could she have heard some of my irreverences in the sand is pitiful to think of. Right here was one of the main snags we boys ran up against – in being boys, in giving vent to our vitality, we offended the prim notions of conduct which our cultured elders insisted upon; and to be ourselves at all, we had to sneak off to caves in the lake bank or to swimming and cigarette smoking exercises, where, of course, we overdid the thing, and then lied about it afterwards. I learned more about fibbing and falsely "explanationing" how I had disposed of my time at this period of my life than at any later period, and I boldly put the blame now on the unmercifully strict set of rules which the culture and religion in the place deemed essential. My mother, and later on, my father, were steeped in this narrow view of things just as badly as were my grandparents. The Sunday of those days I look back upon with horror. Compulsory church and Sunday school attendance, stiff "go-to-meeting" clothes, and a running order to be seen but not heard until Monday morning is what I recall of my childhood Sundays. Church-going, religion and Sunday school lessons became a miserable bore, and it is only in very recent years that I have been able to get any enjoyment out of a sermon, no matter how fine it may be.

My parents were to blame for all this secondarily only,

as I think of it now. They were unconsciously just as much victims of the prudery and selfish local interpretation of the Ten Commandments as we children were consciously *their* victims. They had conformed to the "system" in vogue as children in other similar communities, and they literally did not or would not, know anything else when they were in the village. My father very likely knew of many other things in Chicago, but he did not ventilate his knowledge of them in the village. Before my parents, my grandfathers and grandmothers had been among the main stalwarts in supporting the "system."

The intellectual life of the place centered, of course, around the university and the Biblical Institute. How broad and useful this intellectual striving may have been I did not know as a boy, and in later years absence from the place has made it impossible for me to judge of its present effectiveness. The village was saturated with religious sentiments of one kind or another, and I am inclined to believe that overdoing this kind of thinking dwarfed the villagers' mental horizon.

The university had a clause in its charter from the State authorities which forbade the sale of all intoxicating liquors within a four-mile radius of the university building. A small hamlet four miles to the north and a cemetery village four miles to the south were the nearest points where the village boys could get any liquor. The village fathers have always been very proud of the prohibitory clause, and in my day were much given to flattering themselves, that, thank God! they were not like other

people. Now, what were the facts as I learned to know them as a boy? I have referred to the "Ridge," the slope on the west, where the richer people lived. I make no doubt whatsoever that the "Ridge" families that wanted wine and beer had it in their homes – the university charter could not stop that – but their boys, or many of them, for the fun and lark of the thing, made pilgrimages to the northern and southern drinking stations, and at times reeled home in a scandalous condition. Those old enough to go to Chicago would also stagger back from there late at night. Of the boys and young men, from the "Ridge" as well as from down in the village, who participated in such orgies, I can remember a dozen and more, belonging to the "nicest" families in the place, who went to the everlasting bow-wows. I say a dozen offhand, there were in reality more, because I have heard about them later, after leaving the village. Far be it from me to put the blame on the university charter, but I am compelled to say that in all such communities the existing drunkenness and lewdness at least *seem* worse than in communities where liquor is sold and drunk openly. Perhaps they seem so because a drunken person is theoretically an anomaly in prohibition towns and villages, but whatever the reason, our village, with all its goodness, learning and piety, turned out much more than its share of ne'er-do-wells. As I have tried to show, I gave every promise of becoming one of the failures on whom the refining village influences had worked in vain, and for years I am sure that the neighbors prophesied for me a very wicked career and ending, but I do not recall ever

having made a trip to the drinking bouts, north or south.

The educational facilities, public school, high school, the academy (preparatory to the university), and the university itself, all in the village, made it easy for those boys who would and could, to complete their academic courses within call of their own homes. My public school attendance was short, and I was then taught at home by my mother or by tutors. I ran away from school as regularly as from home. Finally, to have a check on me, my mother and teacher hit upon this plan: The teacher, every day that I appeared in the classroom, was to give me a slip of paper with "All Right" written on it, which I was to show to my mother on returning home. One day, when I was about ten years old, the "hookey" fever captured me, and I paid a visit to my grandmother – my father's mother – whose doughnuts were an everlasting joy to me. When the noon hour arrived, and it was about time for me to show up at home, I said to my grandmother: "Grandma, you write something for me to copy, and see how well I write." "All right, my boy," said my grandmother, who took much interest in my school progress. "What shall I write?"

"Suppose you write the words 'All Right,'" I replied. "I have been practicing on them a good deal." The good old soul wrote for me the desired "copy" quite unsuspectingly, and to allay any suspicions that she might otherwise have had, I dutifully copied her writing as best I could. Then I thanked her, and on the way home, trimmed my grandmother's "All Right" to the size of the slips held by the teacher. I did not seem to realize that the teacher

wrote any differently from my grandmother, or that my mother was well acquainted with my grandmother's handwriting. Indeed, for a lad who could be as "cute and slick as they make 'em," when it came to a real runaway trip, I was capable at other times of doing the most stupid things – to wit, the "All Right" adventure. My mother detected the trick of course, and I was reported to my father, but he seemed to see the humorous side of the affair, and let me off with a scowl.

Winter underclothing and overcoats assisted in making my public school attendance a trial. For some reason I abhorred these garments, and my mother very rightfully insisted on their being worn, particularly when I trudged to the schoolhouse in winter. The coat was shed as soon as I was out of my mother's sight, and the underclothing was hidden in an outhouse in the schoolyard until time to go home. At home also I discarded such things whenever possible, and, one day, I was caught in the act, as it were, by one of our family physicians, a woman. I was sitting on her lap, and she was tickling me near the knee. She noticed that my stockings seemed rather "thin," and began to feel for my underclothing. "Why, where is it, Josiah?" she finally exclaimed.

"Oh, it's rolled up," I replied nonchalantly. Again the good woman tried to locate it, but without success. "Rolled up where?" she asked. "Oh, 'way up," I answered, trying to look unconcerned. Pressed to tell exactly how "high up" the rolling had gone, I finally confessed that the garments were rolled up in my bureau drawer. Again the humor of the situation saved

me from a whipping, and I gradually became reconciled to the clothing in question.

Village playmates, the cosmopolitans of the main street as I considered them, entered very little into my life under ten, and I associated principally with my brothers and sisters and a neighbor's boy – the nephew of a celebrated writer – who lived very near our great brown house. Whether other children quarreled and wrangled the way we did it is hard to say – I hope not – but without doubt we gave our mother a great deal of trouble. Strangely enough, for I was very prone at times to assert my rights and fight for them, too, I once outdid my older brother and sister in a competitive struggle to be good for one week. It was while my father was still alive. He had promised us a prize, and when anything like that was in sight, I was willing to make a try for it anyhow. So I shut off steam for a week, minded my p's and q's pretty carefully, and lo, and behold! when Saturday night came, and my mother was asked to give the decision, I was the lucky competitor. The prize was the New Testament – a typical gift – bound in soft red leather, with a little strap to hold it shut when not in use. On the fly-leaf my father wrote these words: "To Josiah, from his father, for having behaved for one week better than his older brother and sister." The victory over the older children was my main gratification, but I found the Testament useful also, committing to memory from it for twenty-five cents, at my grandmother's request, the fourteenth chapter of John.



I can only account for a very "soft" thing that I let myself into not long after winning the prize to the weakening process in being good for the week in question.

My father had a cane, a twisted and gnarled affair, which he seldom used, but preserved very carefully in a closet off the "spare room" of the house. I have always believed that my brother and sister broke it, but they got around me, and wheedled me into saying that I had done it. Indeed, they bribed me with marbles and a knife, and said that the voluntary confession would be so manly that my father could not possibly punish me. Consequently, I did not wait for the broken cane to be discovered, but went boldly to my father, one night, and told him that I was the culprit, and how sorry I was. He looked at me earnestly with his immense blue eyes for a moment, and then, putting his long, thin hand on my shoulder, said: "Noble lad! to have come and told me. Perhaps we can mend it somehow," and that was the last that was ever heard of the matter.

My playmate over the fence, the celebrated writer's nephew, was my most intimate companion during all this period; I was nearer to him in play and study than to either of my sisters or brother. Although a good boy in every way, as I now recall him, I fear that our companionship did us both harm for a while. He was stockier and taller than I was, and if he had realized and been willing to exercise his strength, he could have put me in my right place very soon, but he did not appreciate his power. The consequence was that he allowed me to bully him

unmercifully, and his accounts of my prowess gained for me a fighter's reputation in the village, a fictitious notoriety which clung to me strangely enough for several years. Besides being called a "bad" boy I became known as a youngster who knew how to use his fists – a myth if there ever was one – and I was enough of an actor and sufficiently cautious in my encounters to be able to give some semblance of truth to this report. The evil effects of this posing on me were that I allowed myself to be put in a false light as a "scraper," and I was continually on the watch not to risk my reputation in any fair struggle; my companion over the fence lost confidence in himself, and allowed me to bully and browbeat him, his manliness suffering accordingly.

Many and varied were our escapades in our part of the village, and for years we were seldom seen apart. The most reckless adventure that I can recall now occurred when my companion's house was being built, a three-story affair. The other boy and I were exercising our skill one day on the floor timbers of the third story, or garret, walking across the beams, a leg to a beam, the space between the beams running through to the cellar. Suddenly I made a misstep, and fell through the open space to the cellar, partially breaking the fall by my hands clutching madly at the cellar-floor beams. I escaped with a few scratches, but I now count the escape one of the narrowest of several that I have had.

As a playmate I was generally tractable and willing, but I never lost an opportunity to "boss," if I could do so without loss of prestige. Bird-nesting, baseball, riding bareback on an

old farm horse, swimming and walking were the main summer pastimes; in winter, there was skating, sledding, snow-balling, and "shinny" – both sets of amusements being typical of a Middle West boy's life twenty to thirty years ago. There was also fishing and hunting, but I was too fidgety to fish successfully, and I was never presented with a gun. "Vealish" love affairs with girl companions were indulged in by some of the boys, but my uncertain reputation and a "faked" or natural indifference to girls, I know not which, kept me out of such entanglements; probably bashfulness had as much to do with the indifference as anything else. That I was so bashful and at the same time a bully and would-be leader sounds inconsistent, but at the time of my father's death, there was probably not a boy in the village who could be made to shrink up, as it were, from social timidity, as I could. Indeed, this characteristic impresses me now, on looking back over my childhood, as the predominant one in my nature at that time, and even to-day, it crops out inconveniently, on occasion. A friend, who knows me well, recently remarked to a common friend of both of us: "Why is it that Flynt draws into his shell when strangers join us at dinner. When we three are alone, he talks as much as any of us. Let an outsider or two drop in, and he shuts down instant. Can you explain it?" I can. Those silent fits are an aftermath of the exaggerated bashfulness of my childhood – I simply cannot overcome them.

## CHAPTER III

### REST COTTAGE

Not long after my father died our family deserted the old brown house which remains in my memory still as the one independent home I have known in life. The old building has long since flown away on wings of fire and smoke, but I recall every nook and cranny in it from cellar to garret. There we children came to consciousness of ourselves, got acquainted with one another as a family, and played, quarreled, made up again until the old house must have known us very intimately. I prize very highly having had this early love for a house – it redeems somewhat those bad traits in my character which were so deplored.

An interim home was found for us in the village proper until an addition for our use could be built to my grandmother's house, not far from the main street.

One of my teachers, while we lived in the interim house, was a distant relative, who had a home a few doors removed from ours. I also went to the public school, at intervals, but of my teachers at that time I remember best Miss B – . She taught my older sister and myself such things as it interested her to teach, and in a way we got a smattering knowledge, at least, of History, Art, Mathematics (a plague on them!) and, I think, French. Nothing

that the good dame taught us, however, ever made the impression on me that certain of her mannerisms did. She was a spinster, no longer young, and her mannerisms were doubtless the result of living much alone. An expression which she constantly used, in and out of season, was "For that." Putting a book down on the table, or straightening a disordered desk, called forth a "For that" after every move she made. It had no significance or meaning at any time that I heard her use it, but if she used it once in a day she did so a hundred times at least. I finally came to call her "Miss For That."

She was furthermore the cause of my coining a word which is still used in our immediate family. Some one asked me, one afternoon, how Miss B – impressed me, and I am alleged to have replied: "She's so *spunctuated*." To the rest of the family it seemed a very good characterization of the lady, they understanding the word apparently quite as well as I thought that I did. Later I was often asked what I meant by the word, and it has never been easy to tell exactly; our family took it in and harbored it because they knew Miss B – and seemed to grasp immediately my meaning. What the word conveyed to me was this: that Miss B – was inordinately prim and orderly, and that as in a written sentence, with its commas, and semi-colons, her verbal sentences needed just so many "For Thats" to satisfy her sense of neatness. I even found her form of punishment for me, when I had been unruly, "spunctuated." I had to sit in the coal hod on such occasions, and the way Miss B – ordered me into the

bucket, with an inevitable "For that" or two, sandwiched in with the command, increased her "spunctuatedness" in my estimation very noticeably.

The good woman eventually married, and I think lost some of her painful primness; but the word she helped me to invent still survives. I have been told that friends who have visited our home and could appreciate the word's meaning, have also incorporated it in their vocabularies. In some ways human beings the world over could be divided up into the "spunctuated" and the "unspunctuated."

In the annex attached to my grandmother's home my village life and early boyhood found their completion. When we left this home the family became scattered, one going one way and the others some other way; we have never all been together since the break-up. My brother, for instance, I have not seen in nearly twenty years, and have no idea where he is to-day. He also was possessed of *Wanderlust*, indeed we might as well call ourselves a *Wanderlust* family, because every one of us has covered more territory at home and abroad than the average person can find time, or cares, to explore. While living in the interim house my mother tried an experiment with me. She sent me away to a boys' boarding school about fifty miles north of Chicago. There had been a general family council of grandparents, uncles and aunts, and it was hoped that a change of control and discipline would achieve changes for the better in me.

The school was in the hands of an old English pastor and his

wife, and they had succeeded in giving a certain English look to the old white building and grounds. My mother and I arrived at this institution of learning, so-called, one evening about supper time. The other boys, twenty-odd in number, ranging in years from ten to eighteen, were in the dining room munching their bread and molasses. It seemed to me at the time that I should certainly die when my mother left, and I should be alone with that rabble. Compromises and taking a back seat were to be inevitable in all intercourse with the larger boys, and the lads of my own age looked able to hold their own with me in any struggle that might occur. It was plain that I could bully no longer, and there was a possibility that the tables would be turned, and that I should be the one bullied. These thoughts busied me very much that night, which I spent with the master in his room. By morning I had half-a-dozen escapes well planned, leading back to the home village, and they lightened the parting from my mother, who seemed quite pleased with the school.

Getting acquainted with the other scholars proved a less arduous task than I had anticipated, which may be partly explained by the fact that my room-mate had arrived on the same day that I did, and we were able to feel our way together, as it were. As a lad, and to-day as well, if there is any strange territory to be covered, or an investigation is on, I feel pretty much at a loss without some kind of a companion, either human or canine.

The experience at the school, however, fairly pleasant and instructive though it became as I got over a preliminary

homesickness, made such a faint impression on my character, one way or the other, that there is but little of interest, beyond my abrupt French leave-taking, to report. There had been several abortive attempts to get away before the final departure, but we – I always had companions in these adventures – were invariably overhauled and brought back. A well-meant "lecture" followed our capture, that was all. Indeed the days spent in the school were the only days of my early boyhood free of whippings. They were sometimes promised, but the good old pastor relented at the last moment and let me off with a reprimand.

The runaway trip that finally succeeded was most carefully planned and executed. For days four of us discussed routes, places where we could get something to eat, and railway timetables; and the boy who knew Chicago best arranged for our reception there, if we should get that far. This time we were not going to take to the railroad near the village; we had failed there too often. We knew of another railroad some eight miles inland, and this became our first objective. We left the school at night when the master and the scholars were asleep. Carrying our shoes in our hands, our pockets stuffed with surplus socks and handkerchiefs, we stole out of the old white building unobserved, and on into a cornfield, where we put on our shoes and made sure once again that we had not been followed. Then, light-hearted and happy in the thought that we were free, we tramped rapidly to the railroad. Reaching a good sized station about one o'clock, we awaited an express train due in an hour or so. It came



thundering along on schedule time, and two boys "made" the "blind baggage," while the Chicago boy and I perched ourselves just behind the cow-catcher. After this dare-devil fashion we rode into Chicago, arriving there just as the milkman and baker-boy were going their rounds. The darkness, of course, had helped us immensely. We had no money for car-fare, and had to pick our way through a labyrinth of streets before we found our Chicago companion's barn, where we rolled ourselves up in some very dirty carpets on the floor and fell asleep to dream of freedom and its delights.

This escape, so thorough and cleancut, satisfied my mother that the school was not the place for me, and I was taken back to the village, the new home adjoining my grandmother's, and handed over to the tender mercies of tutors again. A new life began for me, a new life in a number of ways. Although the two houses were connected, and our family could pass over into grandmother's quarters and *vice versa*, we children were cautioned to keep on our own side of the fence most of the time. Nevertheless, our grandmother was almost always accessible, particularly when her daughter, our noted aunt, was away on a lecturing tour. This was a great boon in many respects, because our mother was in the city all day, and we certainly used to get tired of the governess.

This grandmother of mine stands out in my memory of childhood more distinctly than any other character, except, of course, my mother. She was one of the most remarkable

women it has been my good fortune to know well. A famous English lady, who visited my aunt years after our particular family had scattered, insisted on calling my grandmother "Saint Courageous," and I have always thought that she well deserved this title. For years, while my aunt was traveling over the country, lecturing on temperance and woman's rights, my grandmother would live patiently alone with a Swedish servant, glorying in her daughter's fame and usefulness, and carefully pasting press notices of her work in a scrapbook.

My brother, "Rob," was grandmother's pet. He was her son's firstborn and her first grandchild, and what Rob did, good or bad, found praise and excuses in her eyes. We other children had to take a back seat, so to speak, when Rob was at home, but this was only intermittently, after he undertook to be a civil engineer. When I last saw him he had experimented with about as many activities as he had lived years, and he was still very undecided about any one of them. In a way this has been a family characteristic among us children, at any rate among us boys. Mother early noticed this tendency, and literally begged of us to let her see us through college, as did our grandmother, so that, whatever we undertook later on, we might have educational qualifications for any opportunity that presented itself. She was doomed to disappointment in this matter in the case of all four. Each one of us has experimented with college life, and I, as will be told later on in detail, smuggled myself into the Berlin University as a student of political economy, but there is not a

diploma to-day among the four of us.

My grandmother's room on her side was in the front, and here she spent most of her time, reading, tending her scrapbook and flowers, keeping track of her famous daughter's travels, and nearly every day receiving visits from some of us children. I have spent some of the happiest hours of my life in that quaint room, telling grandmother about my school life, what I wanted to be, and reading to her such things, usually verses, as she or I liked. She thought that I read well, and if the "piece" was pathetic, I used to gauge my rendering of it by the flow of tears from grandmother's eyes. I watched them furtively on all pathetic occasions. Gradually the lids would redden, a tear or two would drop, her dear old lips would quiver – and I had succeeded. Grandmother seemed to enjoy the weeping as much as I enjoyed its implied praise. These "sittings" in her room have overcome many and many an impulse on my part to run away; and I can recall purposely going to her room and society to try and conquer the temptation that was besetting me, although I did not tell her what I had come to her for. What she meant to the other children I do not know, but, my mother being away so much, and the governess representing solely discipline and control, grandmother became almost as dear to me as my mother. Strange to relate, however, I was never demonstratively affectionate with her, nor she with me, whereas I was very distinctly so with my mother when I was trying to be good. They tell a story about me to-day of how, when after supper mother had settled herself

in one of the large chairs near the stove, I would climb into her lap and say: "Hug me, mother, I need it." Probably no lad ever needed mothering more than I did, but out on the road, curiously enough, while still quite young, I could dig a hole in a hay-stack and fall asleep as easily as at home in my own bed, which goes to show what a bundle of contrasts and mixtures I was. One day, as tractable a scholar and playmate as the village contained; the next, very possibly, irritable, cross, moody and wavering, like a half-balanced stick, between a vamoise or home.

Grandmother's visits to our side of the house were comparatively infrequent – she loved to be in her room – but when we children got to fighting, her tall, majestic form and earnest face were sure to appear. "Children, children!" she would cry, "'tis for dogs and cats to bark and bite. Josiah, leave Robert alone!" On one occasion the governess had been utterly powerless to control us, and my older sister and I were determined to "do up" Rob, grandmother's pet, once and for all. We thought that he had been teasing us unmercifully, and we went at him, sister unarmed and I with a stove poker. How I managed it at the time I cannot say now, for he was decidedly stronger and larger than I was; but I succeeded somehow, with sister's help, in getting him down on the floor, where I was whacking him manfully with the poker, sister looking on well satisfied, when grandmother appeared. "Josiah!" she shouted, stamping her foot, "let your brother up." Whack went the poker, and, of course, Rob yelled. Indeed, the noise made during

this fisticuff exceeded that of any previous encounter, and the neighbors probably said: "Those Flynt children are at it again." "Josiah!" my grandmother roared this time, "I'll have the police, this can't go on. Release your brother instantly." I gave him a final whack, and judiciously retreated with the poker and my sister. Rob was for renewing the attack, but grandmother led him off to her room for repairs, and the physical victory at least was ours.

But all of our days were not accompanied by battles. Several days, perhaps, could go by, without even harsh words being spoken, and peace reigned on both sides of the house, which, before we children got into it, was gladly known as and called "Rest Cottage." In name, and except when our quarrels went echoing through the older side, grandmother's part was also in fact a haven of rest for herself and my much traveled aunt. But I have often thought that if some of the many pilgrims who have gone to the village merely to see the house could have surprised us children in one of our quarrels, they would have scouted the propriety of the cottage's name.

When my brother was away, which was the case more often than not, after he refused to continue his schooling, I was inclined to idealize him, and when he had been absent, say for several months and news came of his home-coming, I was very proud and happy. On one occasion he came back with his voice much changed, it had begun to take on a mannish tone, and I was prodigiously impressed with this metamorphosis, running secretly to grandmother, and whispering: "Rob's back!

His voice has gone way down deep," and I put my hand on my stomach by way of illustration. My brother's elevation on a pedestal in my imagination, however, never lasted long, because we invariably crossed tempers within a few days, and that meant vulgar familiarity.

For years, nevertheless, I persisted in using him as a bluff in all threatening fisticuffs with playmates of my size, whether he was at home or not. "If I can't lick you," I was wont to say, "Bob can, and he'll do it, too." For a time this boast kept me out of all serious entanglements, but I had posed so long as a winner, and had bragged so much about what Bob could do, that a Waterloo was inevitable, and at last it came. Bob was unfortunately for me away from home at the time.

The fight was a fixed-up affair among three brothers, the second oldest being desirous of giving me a good hiding as a preliminary advertisement of his prowess. The four of us met by agreement in the alley behind "Rest Cottage," and my antagonist and I were soon at it. He was easily a half-head taller than I was, and a good deal stockier, but I think that I had said that I could whip him, and I honestly tried to make good. He remained cool and collected, delivering well directed and telling blows on my physiognomy. The gore ran from my nose, and tears of rage from my eyes, as never before or since. But I fought on blindly, hitting my adversary only occasionally, and even then with very little force. At last, utterly beaten and exposed, I ran from the field-of-battle, shouting back over my shoulder, "Bob'll do you

all up, you spalpeens." My grandmother mopped my battered face, and tried to console me, but it was a hard task. I knew what she didn't know, that my bluff had been called, and that I was no longer an uncertain quantity in the village fighting world; I had been "shown up." For days I shunned my regular playmates, and I can say that after that defeat I never fought another mill, and I never expect to fight one again. In five minutes I was completely converted to the peace movement, and have earnestly advocated its principles from the day of the fight to this very moment.

When my aunt was at home "Rest Cottage," or rather her side of it, was a regular beehive of industry. Secretaries and typewriters were at work from morning till night, while my aunt caught up with her voluminous correspondence in her famous "Den." Although we did not always get on well together, almost invariably through my waywardness, I desire to say now, once and forever, that she was one of the most liberal minded women I ever knew; and as a speaker and organizer, I doubt whether in her time there was any woman who excelled her. Had she devoted her life to more popular subjects than temperance and woman's rights, literature, for instance, she would take very high rank to-day in the lists of great orators and writers. She preferred by conviction to devote herself unreservedly to the unpopular agitations, and her following was therefore found principally among women who agreed with her at the start, or who were won over to her opinions by her persuasive gift of language. In England, she was not infrequently likened unto Gladstone, and in Edinburgh, where

she spoke during one of her visits to Great Britain, the students, after the meeting, unhooked the horses and themselves pulled her carriage to her hotel. Her statue in Statuary Hall in the capitol at Washington is the only statue of a woman found there; it was presented by the State of Illinois.

To live in a celebrity's home of this character was a privilege which, I fear, we children did not appreciate. It was a Mecca for reformers of all shades and grades from all over the world, and we children grew up in an atmosphere of strong personalities. The names of many of the men and women who visited our house have escaped me, but I recall very distinctly John B. Gough. On this occasion he was entertained by my mother, my aunt being absent from home. He was an old man with white hair and beard, and was in charge of a niece, if I remember correctly, who tended him like a baby. A local organization had hired him to speak for them in the "Old First." His speech was as successful as usual, and the church was crowded, but the old gentleman was tired out when he got back to the house, and was rather querulous. My mother had prepared a light supper for him of milk, bread and butter and the like, but it was not to his taste. "I need tea," he declared in no uncertain tones, and tea had to be made, the delay increasing the old agitator's impatience. On getting it, he found it too weak, or too strong, or too hot, and the upshot of the affair was that he left us rather out of sorts, but not before receiving \$200, his fee for the lectures. He tucked the roll carelessly into a small overcoat pocket, and then took his leave. Old age had



begun to tell on him very plainly, and not many years after he died.

Francis Murphy, John P. St. John, nearly all the later candidates for the Presidency on the Prohibition ticket, and of course the prominent women agitators of the time, found their way to "Rest Cottage," sooner or later. The place itself, although comfortable and cozy, was very modest in appearance, but it probably sheltered at one time or another during the last fifteen years of my aunt's life, more well-known persons than any other private home of the Middle West. My aunt also kept in touch with a great many people through her correspondence. She believed in answering every letter received even if the reply were shipped back with deficient postage, and she knew by letter or personal acquaintance all the great men and women of her day, that I have ever heard of. If an author's book pleased her, she wrote him to that effect, and often *vice versa*. On the appearance of Edward Bellamy's "Looking Backward" she was distressed that he had not eliminated alcoholic beverages from the programme of his Utopia, and wrote him to this effect. He replied, very simply, that the thought had not occurred to him, which must be his excuse, if excuse were necessary, for overlooking the matter.

In the village my aunt was easily the main citizen of the place so far as fame went. There were many who did not agree with her notions of reform, but the village, as a whole, was proud to have such a distinguished daughter.

When criticising my escapades and backslidings, my aunt, I

have been told, was wont to say that, "Josiah has character and will power, but he wills to do the wrong things." No doubt I did. If companions joined me in a runaway bout, it was I, as a rule, who planned the "get-away"; only on one or two occasions was I persuaded by others. More or less the same motives actuated me in running away from "Rest Cottage" as had formerly prevailed when living in the old brown house, but I am inclined to think now that, consciously or unconsciously, I would get tired of living entirely with women, and that this also may have had something to do in starting me off. Except when my brother was at home, which was at this time only infrequently, I was the only male human being living at "Rest Cottage"; from grandmother down to my younger sister all the other inmates were females, and there was a feminine atmosphere about things which used to get on my nerves more than my mother realized. My dogs – I generally had two – were males, and many is the consolatory stroll we have taken if for no other reason than to consolidate our forces.

My love of dogs goes back as far as I can remember, and I have always tried to have some representative of this species around me. The dog who stood by me at "Rest Cottage" and helped me to increase the masculine forces, was called "Major." Not only because he was my constant companion, but also because he was the source of one or two "spats" between my aunt and myself, determines me to tell his story, or at least what I know of it.

One evening, my mother returned late from the city accompanied by a burly, black dog. I afterwards decided that

he was a cross between a Shepherd and a Newfoundland. "I've brought you a dog," said mother, and I jumped up with glee, being quite dogless at the time. The dog snarled, and drew close to my mother. In fact, he sat at her feet throughout the evening meal, refusing to have anything to do with me, although he accepted in very friendly fashion the advances of my sisters. I concluded with disappointment that he had been a *woman's* dog. My mother told us how she had come by him. "On leaving the depot in town," she said, "and starting for my office, this dog jumped suddenly before me, barked, and evidently, from his actions, took me for his mistress. I patted him, and went along to the office – the dog followed. He went up to my office, and when I took my seat at my desk, he made a place for himself near-by. At noon time I shared my lunch with him. He spent the afternoon very decorously either under or near the desk.

"When it came train time I thought that surely the dog would scent his way home, but no; he followed me to the station, as if I was the only one in the world that he knew, or cared to know. It seemed too bad to cast such a dog adrift, and I asked the baggageman of the train what he thought I ought to do. 'Take him home, Missus,' he said, 'he's worth while and'll make you a good beast.' We got him into the car, and he lay quiet until we got here. The minute he was turned loose, however, he scooted around in front of the engine and up toward the Ridge as hard as he could go. I said to the baggageman: 'There goes both dog and the quarter for his fare.' 'The ungrateful beast,' the baggageman

replied, 'but perhaps he'll come back,' and sure enough he did, after the train had pulled out again. He followed me here to the house all right, and, Josiah, I am going to give him to you."

It was the biggest dog I had ever owned, but possession, despite my mother's statement, looked doubtful – the dog had decided that he belonged to mother. That same evening my mother and I went out to call, taking the dog with us. It was very dark, and before we had gone a block, we missed the dog. "There," I exclaimed, when we moved on after fruitless whistles and calls, "there, I told you to leave him at home, and now you see I was wise. He's lit out." "Oh, I guess not," my mother consoled me, and she was right, for, on returning to our home, there was that big, black dog on the rug waiting to be let in.

He stayed with us without a break for seven years, learned to accept me as his master, and whip him though I would at times, he won my respect and love as no other dog ever had at that time. He was not young when we got him, probably six years old at least, so he lived to a respectable old age. In saying that he was companionable, honest, more or less discreet, and fond of us all, I have told about all that is necessary about his personality. Tricks he had none, and he was too dignified and rheumatic to learn any from me. He merely wanted to be sociable, keep guard at night, and, if it suited our convenience, his "three squares" a day, but he very seldom asked for them, nor did he need to. He had his likes and dislikes of course, like all dogs, but if left alone, except when unusually rheumatic and irritable, he bothered nobody.

He came to cause trouble between me and my aunt in this way: She was at home a good deal, one winter, when I was vainly trying to teach "Major" to haul me on my sled. He disliked this occupation very much, and the only way I could get him to pull me at all, was to take him to the far end of the village, near our old brown house, hitch him to the sled, and then let him scoot for home. It's a wonder that he didn't dash my brains out against trees and passing vehicles, but we always got home without a mishap.

One morning, I was bent on a ride, and "Major" was on the back porch, nursing, or rather pretending to, as I thought, his rheumatic legs. I treated him rather severely, convinced that he was shamming, and he set up a most uncanny howling. My aunt came rushing down the stairs, saw what I was trying to do, and gave me one of her very few scoldings – a chillier one I have seldom received. Unless I could be more merciful to dumb animals, she warned me in her clearcut way, "Major" would be sent away; at any rate I was to desist immediately from all further sledding with him, and I did.

"Major's" end came after I had left the village. He took a violent dislike to the groceryman, and when the latter appeared in the backyard, was wont to snap at the man's heels. Complaint was lodged against him with the police, and one morning the chief came up, and ended "Major's" rheumatism and further earthly struggle with a bullet.

If I loved anything or anybody sincerely, and I think that I did, I loved that dog. He was the first to greet me when I would return

home from my travels, and he was usually the last to say good-bye. I hope his spiritual being, if he had one, is enjoying itself, rheumatic-less and surrounded by many friends.

My liking for children, particularly young boys, between three and five, if we can get on together, has developed as my wandering tendencies have died out. In early youth I cannot be said to have been very fond of them. Indeed, I recall a most cruel thing I did to a little baby girl, living near our old brown house. As I look back over the disgraceful affair now, it seems to me one of the insanest things I ever did; but I have heard another member of my family complain of being similarly tempted at least, when young. The girl was perhaps two or three years old, a chubby little creature with fat, red cheeks, and large blue eyes like saucers. She used to sit every morning in a high chair alone in her mother's bedroom. I was at liberty to roam over this house quite as freely as over our own, and was accustomed to make early morning calls to find out what my friend "Charley's" plans for the day were, and if the coast was clear, to visit the little girl upstairs. Only infrequently was I tempted to make the child cry, but when this temptation came, I would pinch the girl's red cheeks quite hard. At first she would look at me in astonishment, a captivating look of wonder entering her eyes. Another pinch, and still harder. The child's little lips would begin to tremble, and the look of wonder gave way to one of distress. I watched the different facial changes with the same interest that a physician observes a change for the better or worse in

his patient. Sometimes it seemed as if I were literally glued to the spot, so fascinating did the child's countenance become. A final pinch of both cheeks severer than either of the other two, and my purpose was achieved, the aggrieved girl giving vent to her pain and sorrow in lusty screams and big, hot round tears. Then I would try to pacify her, usually succeeding, and take my departure, nobody the wiser about it all in spite of the crying. I can only compare this cruel performance on my part, in purpose and intention at least, to the alleged cannibal feasts which certain African explorers have been accused of ordering and paying for. They obviously wanted to see a human being cooked, served and eaten out of curiosity. A similar motive impelled me to make those early morning calls and pinch that innocent child's cheeks – her velvety skin seemed to me to be made for pinching, and it was interesting to watch her preliminary antics previous to yielding completely to her emotions. I am glad to report that this cruelty was not long practiced by me, and that to-day actual physical suffering in man or beast distresses me very much.

By the time our family had moved into the annex to "Rest Cottage" my younger sister had grown in years and stature so that she made a very acceptable playmate. I recall very distinctly memories of her childhood which show that the spirit of independence was pretty strong in all of us children.

On the first occasion my sister was perhaps six years old. My mother had sentenced her to confine her play to the front and back yards for the day; under no circumstances was she to be

seen in the street. I had received a similar punishment.

What was my horror, or what I pretended to be such, to discover "Mame" in the afternoon, well outside the prescribed bounds, hobnobbing unconcernedly with her girl friends as if punishment was something utterly foreign to her life. Pointing my finger scornfully at her, I shouted: "You unexemplified hyena, come back within bounds. You'll get licked to-night."

"Mame" barely deigned to look at me, remarking proudly:

"You don't suppose that I am one of those girls that always mind, do you?"

On the second occasion my mother was at home and able to correct my sister's disobedience instanter. The day before, without a word of counsel with my mother, "Mame" had gone to her particular girl friends, perhaps twenty in number, and invited them to a party at our house, a party which existed solely in her imagination. At the appointed hour, on the day following, the children began to appear in their best clothes, asking naturally for their young hostess. It did not take my mother long to find out the truth, but she bided her time until all the guests had arrived. Then, my sister being forced to be present, the young ladies were told that "Mame" had invited them to something which did not exist, and, although she was very sorry, she would have to send them away with that explanation. A severer rebuke to "Mame" could not have been administered, and the party escapade was one of the very few disobediences I remember her being connected with. She was without doubt the most tractable



and well-behaved member of our quartette.

I shall never forget her conduct at my grandfather's – my mother's father – deathbed. An uncle had come to "Rest Cottage," warning us that grandfather was dying, and telling us to go over to the sickroom where grandmother and many of the other relatives were gathered. "Mame" and I took rear seats, on a doorstep, if I recall correctly. My grandfather was unconscious, and his sweet wife, my mother's mother, an invalid, sat in her rolling chair, watching her mate and father of her children, dying, the most lovely embodiment of resignation and desire "that God's will be done," that I can recall having seen. Of course, the women and children were sobbing, and "Mame" and I joined them. Pretty soon, I noticed that there was a lull in the sobbing – my grandfather had breathed his last and his suffering was over – but "Mame" had not noticed it, and continued to cry pretty noisily. "Let up, Mame," she claims that I whispered to her. "The others have stopped." I don't remember making this observation and advising "Mame" about it, but no doubt I did, for "Mame" was nothing if not honest.

## CHAPTER IV

### EARLY COLLEGE DAYS

In the foregoing chapters I have tried to give some idea of the kind of boy I was, say by the time I had reached my fifteenth year, or the calendar year 1884. There is no use denying that such wickedness as I displayed was due more to willful waywardness than to hereditary influences. Consequently, I have always felt justified in replying to a distant cousin as I did when she took me to task for making so much trouble and causing my family such anxiety.

"Can you imagine yourself doing such dreadful things when you get your senses back and are able to think clearly?" was the way her question was worded. My reply was: "In my senses or out of them, I certainly can't imagine any one else as having done them." And I can truthfully say that, as a boy, I was very little given to trying to shift the blame for my sins on other boys. I was not a "squealer," although I was an expert fibster when necessity seemed to call for a lie in place of the plain, unvarnished truth.

In the spring or early autumn of 1884 my mother and sisters went to Europe, and I was sent to a small Illinois college. The village home was broken up and for better or for worse, the five of us, in the years that were to follow, were to be either voluntary exiles abroad, or travelers at home or in foreign parts. Since that

final break-up our complete family has never again been gathered together under one and the same roof.

In spite of a manly effort to overcome them, two traits dogged my steps to college as persistently as they had troubled me at home – the love of the tempting Beyond, and an alarming uncertainty in my mind about the meaning of the Law of Mine and Thine. It was going to take several wearisome and painful years yet before I was to become master of these miserable qualities. They were the worst pieces of baggage I took away with me. My better traits, as I recall them, were willingness and eagerness to learn when I was not under the spell of *Die Ferne*, a fair amount of receptivity in acquiring useful facts and information, and for most of the time a tractable well-weaning, amenable boy disposition. All of these good qualities were scattered to the four winds, however, when the call became irresistible. I stood to win as a student, if love for distant fields could be kept under control. Otherwise there was no telling what I might become or do. Under these circumstances I began my collegiate career in a denominational college in the western part of Illinois. My mother, of course, hoped for the best; and at the time of her departure it looked as if I had definitely struck the right road at last.

I remained for a little over two years at college advancing with conditions to my sophomore year. I paid for my board and lodging by "chore" work in a lawyer's home in the town, so that the expenses my mother had to meet were comparatively

light. The studies that seemed to suit me best were history, historical geography and modern languages. Mathematics and Greek and Latin were tiresome subjects in which I made barely average progress. Mathematics were a snare and a delusion to me throughout my school and college life in America. I mean sometime to pick up my old arithmetic again and see whether maturer years may have given me a clearer insight into the examples and problems that formerly gave me so much trouble.

History, Geography and German, interested me from the start, and I usually stood well in these classes. History took hold of me just as biography did, and I used to read long and late such works as Motley's "Dutch Republic," Bancroft's "History of the United States," Prescott's books on Mexico and South America, and an interesting autobiography or biography was often more appealing to me than a novel or story. Indeed, I read very little fiction during the time I was at college, preferring to pore over an old geography and map out routes of travel to be enjoyed when I had made enough money to undertake them as legitimate enterprises, or, perhaps, as a hired explorer, whose services commanded remunerative prices. For a while the ambition to be a lawyer struggled with my traveling intentions, and I seriously considered taking a course in law in my benefactor's library and office when my academic course should be finished; but this resolve never came to anything because my academic studies were never finished.

For two years, and more, I had struggled as hard as any of

my fellow students to support myself, keep up with my class, and probably harder than most of them to be "on the level," and above all things not to let *Die Ferne* entice me away from my new home and pleasant surroundings. Many and many a time *Die Ferne* would whistle one of her seductive signals, and it was all I could do to conquer the desire to go and answer it in person; but my studies, the work at home, and pleasant companions helped me to resist the temptation, and, as I have said, for about two years I attended strictly to business, hearing *Die Ferne* calling, from time to time, but closing my ears to the enticing invitation.

My undoing at college had a most innocent beginning, as was the case with so many of my truanacies. Often as not the impulse which drove me to the Open Road was, taken by itself, as laudable and worth while as many of those other impulses which inhibited runaway trips. My ambition, for instance, to go to some distant town, make my own way as a bread-winner and student, and eventually become well-to-do and respected, was in essentials a praiseworthy desire; but the trouble was that I insisted that no one should hear from me or know about my progress until I had really "arrived," as it were. I always demanded that the thing be done secretly, and only as secrecy was an assured factor did such a runaway project really appeal to me.

What broke up my college career, and eventually impelled me to vamose was a simple trial contest of essayists in the literary society of which I was a member. The winner in the contest stood a fair chance of being chosen by his society to compete with the

essayist of the rival society in a general literary contest in the opera house; this was really the event of its kind of the year. I was selected, along with two others, to try my skill as an essayist in the preliminary family bout. Our society was divided into two closely allied cliques, I belonging to the "Wash B" coterie, and the most formidable contestant that I had to meet, being connected with the "Camelites," as we used to call them. These two really hostile camps made the society at election time and on occasions when contestants for the preliminary and opera house contests were to be chosen, literally a wrangling, backbiting and jealous collection of schemers and wire-pullers. The "Wash B" set had all they could do to secure for me the place in the preliminaries, which would doubtless determine the selection for the real contest later on between the two distant societies. But chosen I was, and for six weeks every spare hour that I had was religiously devoted to that wonderful essay. I forget the title of it now, but the matter dealt tritely enough, I make no doubt, with the time-worn subject – "The Western March of Empire." The writing finished, "Wash B" himself took me in hand, and for another month drilled me in delivery, enunciation and gesture. My room-mate, when the drilling was over, said that I was a perfect understudy of "Wash B," who was considered at the time the finest reader our society, and the entire college in fact, contained. This criticism naturally set me up a good deal and I began seriously to entertain thoughts of winning the prize, a small financial consideration. At last the fatal night arrived, and we three contestants marched to our seats

on the platform. In front of us were the three judges, formidable looking men they seemed at the time, although I knew them all as mild-mannered citizens of the town with whom I had often had a pleasant chat. A neutral – one who was neither a "Wash B" nor a "Camelite" – was the first to stand up and read his essay. As I recall the reading and subject matter of this first effort I remember that I thought that I had it beaten to a standstill if I could only retain all the fine inflections and mild gentle gestures which "Wash B" had been at such pains to drill into me. I was second, and stood up, bowed, and, as friends afterwards told me, so far as delivery was concerned I was "Wash B" from start to finish. The third man, an uncouth fellow, but endowed with a wonderfully modulated voice – he was really an orator – then got up and read almost faultlessly so far as intonation and correct and timely emphasis were concerned, a dull paper on Trade Unionism. This student was the one I particularly feared, but when he was through and the three of us took our places in the audience so many "Wash B's" told me that I had won hands down, as they put it, that I gradually came to believe that I had acquitted myself remarkably well. The judges, however, were the men to give the real decision, and they thought so little of my effort that I was placed last on the list – even the neutral with practically no delivery had beaten me. Later he came to me and said that he never expected to take second place. The uncouth "Camelite" with the banal paper, but wonderful voice, carried the day, and was declared winner of the prize. My chagrin and

disappointment seemed tremendous for the moment, and the fact that a number of "Camelites" came to me and said that I ought to have been given the prize did not tend to lessen the poignancy of the grief I felt, but managed to conceal until I was well within the four walls of my room. There I vowed that never, never again would I submit an essay of mine to the whims of three men, who, in my judgment, were such numbskulls that they let themselves be carried away by a mere voice. "They never stopped to consider the subject matter of our essays at all," I stormed, and for days I was a very moody young man about the house. The "Wash B's" tried to console me by promising to elect me essayist for the grand contest in the opera house in the autumn, but although I deigned reconciliation with my defeat, the truth was that I was brooding very seriously over this momentous failure as it seemed to me. I shunned my former boon companions, and was seen very little on the campus. The defeat had eaten into my soul much more deeply than even I at first imagined possible, and as the days went by, a deep laid plot for a runaway trip began to take form and substance. As soon as I realized what was going on I struggled hard to drive the plan out of my head, but while I had been mourning over my failure as an essayist and particularly as a "Wash B" essayist, the subtle, sneaking scheme had wormed its way into my very sub-consciousness, and before I knew it I was entertaining the tempter in no inhospitable manner. After all, it was a consolation to know that at a pinch I could throw over the whole college curriculum, if necessary, and quietly vamoose and,



perhaps, begin again in some other institution where my crude, but by me highly prized, literary productions would receive fairer treatment. I had a feeling that a runaway trip would be the end of my college career, and there were influences that struggled hard to hold me back; I have often wondered what my later life would have been had they prevailed. Never before had I been so near a complete victory over *Die Ferne*, and never before had I felt myself the responsible citizen in the community that my college life and self-supporting abilities helped to make me. Then, too, my good friend and counselor, the lawyer, was a man who had made a very great impression on me – an achievement by no means easy in those days of rebellion and willful independence. I knew about the hard fight that he had made in life before I went to his home. He had often visited in our home, and I had been much impressed with his set, cleancut countenance. Some would have called it hard unless they knew the man and what he had been through. I studied it with particular interest, because I knew that every now and then I also struggled hard to do right, and I wondered whether my face after complete mastery of myself, if this should ever come to pass, would some day take on the terrible look of determination and victory which was so often present in that of the lawyer.

All of his victories I cannot report upon, because there must have been many, very many, of a minor character, that he had to work for every day of his life. But the one that took him out of the gutter, and gave him strength to quit, at one and the same

time, over-indulgence in liquor and the tobacco habit, was *the* one that took hold of me, although I hardly knew what whisky tasted like myself and was only intermittently a user of tobacco. The fact that the man had overcome these habits by sheer will-power, "without getting religion," as had often been told me, was what took hold of my sense of wonder. Both in my home, and in the lawyer's, so far as his good wife was concerned, I had been taught to believe, or, at any rate, had come partially to believe, that all such moral victories, indeed, that all conquests over one's rebellious self, had to come through prayer and Divine assistance, or not at all. I had never wholly accepted this doctrine, although it probably had a stronger hold on me than I knew. But the lawyer — ah, ha! here was at last a living, breathing witness to the fact that prayer and Divine help were not indispensable in gathering oneself together, putting evil habits aside, and amounting to something in the world. I did not say anything about the discovery I had made; but I studied my hero closely, and treasured highly all facts and fancies which rather intimate contact with him called forth, and which substantiated the original and primal fact — *i. e.*, that will-power and not "conversion" had made him one of the noted citizens of his community and one of the prominent lawyers of his State.

I do not know whether he knew in what great respect I held him or not. This much is certain, however; he almost never looked at or spoke to me severely, and he was constantly doing something kind or useful. I wish now that I had been old enough

to have had a square talk with him about will-power and Divine help. He was not a very communicative man, and it is possible that he would not have consented to enter into such an interview, thinking perhaps that I was too young to discuss such matters from his point of view. So I lived on, looking up invariably to him as an example when it was necessary to grit my teeth and overcome some slight temptation. His wife, who was really a second mother to me, saw to it that I attended church and studied my Bible – the college authorities demanded attendance at church, and on Mondays called the roll of all those who had or had not been present at church the day before – but somehow she never had the influence over me that her white-haired, clean-shaven stalwart husband did. It was her constant prayer and hope that "Gill," as she called him, would eventually get religion and be assured of heavenly peace. He frequently attended church with her, and certainly his efforts were as exemplary as the college president's, but I have heard it said that, if he believed in any theology at all, it was in that miserable, foolish doctrine – silly creation of weak minds – that a certain number of souls are predestined to damnation anyhow, and that his was one of them on account of the wild life he had led in his younger manhood. This "story" about my hero also took hold of me very perceptibly, and I often used to look at the man's fine face surreptitiously, and wonder what could be going on in a mind that had become resigned to eternal punishment. I could not follow him this far in his philosophy, but I have long since come to the conclusion that

the man was too sensible to entertain any such theory, and that the "story" was the mere patchwork of a number of wild guesses and injudicious surmises on the part of relatives, and his lovable, but not always careful, wife.

One day, a relative of mine, known as "The Deacon," came to the town at my hostess's request, and held some revival meetings, or, perhaps, they were called consecration meetings. "The Deacon," although an ardent Methodist, I believe, and a determined striver for the salvation of men's souls, was not one of the conventional boisterous revivalists whom we all have seen and heard. He was quiet and retiring in his manner, and seemed to rely on the sweet reasonableness of the Bible and his interpretation of it to convince men of the need of salvation, rather than on loud exhortation and still louder singing. He was very deaf, and when I called him for breakfast, mornings, I had to go into his room and shake him, when he would put his trumpet to his ear and ask "what was up." I would tell him that it was time for him to be up, and he would thank me in that strange metallic voice which so many deaf people have, or acquire.

He spent much of his time talking with his hostess, and, one morning, rather injudiciously, I think, he told her of a friend of his, "just your own husband's size, weight and years," who had suddenly dropped dead in Chicago. This incident took hold of the good woman in an unfortunate way, and when I saw her, she had been crying, and was bewailing the fact that her "Gill" might also drop off suddenly before getting religion. There was nothing that

I could say beyond the fact that he seemed to me good enough to drop off at any time; but with this his wife was not to be consoled. "Gill must give himself up to God," she persisted, and I retreated, feeling rather guilty on these lines myself, as I was not at all sure that I had given myself up to God, or would ever be able to. He was such a myth to me, that I found it far more practicable to study the character and ways of the lawyer whom I knew as a visible, tangible living being.

It may be that my adoration for my benefactor – I really think it amounted to that – was not the best influence that might have been exercised over my mind; it has been suggested to me in later years, for instance, that it was probably at this time that I laid the foundation for that firm belief in will-power, which, for better or for worse, has been about all that I have believed in seriously as a moral dynamic for a number of years. Be this as it may, for years after leaving college and the lawyer's home, my recollection of him, of his brave fight to do right, and of the friendly interest he took in me, contributed more than once to help tide me over a spell when *Die Ferne* was doing her utmost to persuade me to throw over everything and chase foolishly after her.

Now, that the good man is gone, I regret more than ever that I allowed that miserable essay contest to stampede me as it did. The first departure from college and the lawyer's home was a failure. I halted foolishly an entire day at a town not far from the college, and the lawyer, suspecting that I might do this, sent on two of my college friends – older than I was – to scout about

and try and locate me. They succeeded in their mission – one of them was the noted "Wash B," who had tried so hard to teach me how to read an essay. They did their utmost to persuade me to return, but I was obdurate, and they went back without me. In an hour or two the lawyer himself appeared on the scene, and then I had to go back and knew it. He said very little to me, beyond asking me to give to him such funds as I possessed. In the afternoon he called on a brother lawyer who, as I could judge from the conversation, was in some serious legal difficulty. When we were in the street again my captor said: "Josiah, there is a man who is going to the penitentiary." He spoke very slowly and impressively, but did not offer to tell me why the man was going to be shut up or when, and I was sensible enough not to ask.

Returned to our home the lawyer made no reference to my unconventional leave-taking, and apparently considered the matter closed. It was decided, for the sake of my feelings, that I should not return immediately to college, and I hugged my room as much as possible, anxious to keep out of sight of my classmates, who, I felt sure, knew all about my escapade. There I brooded again over my poor success as an essayist, my lack of will-power to bear up under defeat, and I also tried to plan out another escape from what seemed to me a terrible disgrace. One afternoon, when I was particularly gloomy, the fat, cheerful president of the college knocked at my door. He had come to have a heart-to-heart talk with me, I learned, and I was soon on the defensive. He laughed at my bashfulness about going

back into college, pooh-poohed my assertion that I was "no good anyhow and might better be let go," and in general did his utmost to cheer me up and make the "slipping back" into my classes, as he put it, as simple and easy as could be. But, good man, he labored with me in vain. The next day, some funds coming to hand, I was off again, for good and all. The well-meaning president has long since gone to his final rest. The following morning I was in Chicago, and very soon after in my grandmother's home. *Die Ferne* was only indirectly to blame for this trip because I made for the only home I had as soon as I decamped from college, refusing to be lured away into by-paths. *Die Ferne* was only in so far to blame that she originally suggested the desertion of my studies, offering no suggestions that I paid any attention to, about an objective. I – poor, weak mortal – was terribly to blame in throwing away, after two years' straight living, the chance that was offered me to complete my college course, and later to go and become a lawyer. And yet – balancing what was considered a golden opportunity at the time, against the hard school of experience it has since been my lot to go through, and what the teaching that I have had means to me now, I confess to a leaning in favor of the hard knocks and trials and tribulations of the road as the more thorough curriculum for me at the time of life they were endured, than would have been the college course and a lawyer's shingle. It is difficult, of course, to decide in such matters, but somehow I think that the world means more to me in every way to-day, in spite of what I have pulled out of, than it

ever could have meant on set academic and professional lines.

The stay in the home village was not a prolonged one, long enough, however, to ponder over the change in my life which I had so domineeringly brought about – to go back to college was out of the question, and the lawyer did not want me back. My capriciousness had exhausted his patience, and he frankly said that he washed his hands of the "case." To remain in the home village was also out of the question, according to my aunt. It was there that I had first shown my dare-devil proclivities, and in her opinion it was best to get me as far away from former village associations as possible. Besides, it was not thought wise to have me in the care of my aging grandmother, who could only incidentally keep track of me.

I wondered myself what was best to do, not caring for another runaway trip right away, and temporarily regretting very much that I had been so silly over that picayune essay. There was nothing I could think of that seemed feasible, and it was just as well that I did not lose my head over some personally cherished plan, because my resourceful aunt had already found an asylum for me. It was a farm in western Pennsylvania, owned by some distant relatives. Here I was to help care for crops and stock, and see what living in the open would do for my over-imaginative head. I was to receive my board and twenty-five dollars for the season's work, a huge sum it seemed to me when first mentioned, for I never before had possessed such wealth in actual cash. I went to work with zeal, and determination to learn all I could about



farming. For a number of weeks all went well, in fact, until I made an excursion with an older friend and his fiancée, and a girl, who was the first, I believe, that I thought I really liked. I never told her name to my family, beyond calling her "Jeminy Jowles," which was as much a real name as mine was. For some reason, for years after this temporary attachment, which on my part, at least, was genuine and spontaneous, I never wanted my family to know that I was interested in any particular young lady, and as I told above, I feigned indifference to nearly all girls rather than be thought "teched" with admiration for any one or two. After our return from our outing, "Jeminy" returned to the lake to help take care of one of the villas there, as a number of girls did at that time, and are doing now, I have no doubt. "Jeminy's" departure made the village very dull for me, and the farm absolutely distasteful. So, one day, I asked my cousin to give me what he thought was my due, out of the promised twenty-five dollars. I told him that I was going to New York State to see if I could earn more money. He knew about "Jeminy" being there, and as he thought that something profitable might develop out of our friendship, I was given my money and then hied away to the New York resorts, and "Jeminy." The latter had to work so hard all day and well on into the evening that I saw very little of her, but I remember dreaming and thinking about her, when I had to wander about alone. I spent very little time in looking for a job on account of my moving, and before long I determined to look elsewhere for work. What was my chagrin, when returning on the day that the faithless

"Jeminy" was about to depart for her home, to see her coming down the wharf from the boat with a former admirer, clothed in fine raiment, whom I had ousted in "Jeminy's" affections in the little farming village in Pennsylvania. I surmised him to be possessed of a fat bank-roll, judging by his independence and "only board in this sidewalk" manner of appropriating "Jeminy" for his very own, and of his giving me a very distant and critical look, which my somewhat worn clothes no doubt deserved. That was the end of my first and last real love affair. Jilted, funds very low, and no employment in sight – here was a situation worthy of any boy's best mettle. Perhaps the jilting hurt worse for the time being, but the necessity of replenishing my funds helped me to forget it somewhat. By rights I should have returned to Pennsylvania and gone to work again on my relative's farm. But there I should have seen the faithless "Jeminy," perhaps her old admirer as well, and I was in no mood for such encounters. No! I was not going to allow the village to make fun of me, even if I starved elsewhere. Besides, what chance would my old clothes have in a competitive contest with those of my rival? Obviously a very slim one. Fate was temporarily against me in that direction, I was sure, and I cast my eyes toward the north – probably because "Jeminy" and the farm meant south. The west did not attract me just then, and the east – New York constituted the greater part of the east to me in those days – seemed too complicated and full of people.

One night I "hopped" a freight train bound for Buffalo, and

secluded myself among some Standard Oil Company's barrels in a box-car. In a wreck I should probably have come to grief in the midst of all that oil, but no wreck had been scheduled for that ride. My possessions consisted of what I had on my back and a few nickels in my pocket. In this fashion I hoped to impress the mighty north. That old dream about disappearing from the view of friends, making my way alone in the world, and then returning independent, successful and well-to-do, buoyed me up, even when "Jeminy's" desertion of me was most tantalizing.

I finally fell asleep on top of the mighty Trust's property, to dream of honest efforts to succeed, if not of wonderful triumphs. At heart I desired that the realization of my dream of future prosperity and fame should come through honorable toil and struggle. Indeed, during this period of youth, and even earlier, I cannot recall any disappearance or runaway trip on my part which did not presuppose a "square deal" in my account with the world; theoretically, at any rate, honesty was as dear an asset to me as to the boys who staid at home and were regular. That sitting on the mighty Trust's barrels and "hooking" a ride in a car which had been chartered and paid for by others was not a "square deal" did not occur to me. And to deliver myself of a confession on this score once and for all, I can say that I have never had any serious pricks of conscience on this account. There is no defense to offer for such obtuseness, any more than there was for my using half-fare tickets, when I had the wherewithal to buy them, until I was over seventeen. I merely report the fact as

symptomatic of all passengers, good, bad and indifferent, who "beat" their way on our railroads. I have read of a "freak" who notified a railroad company that he had stolen a certain number of rides on its trains, estimating the probable cost of tickets for the computed mileage, and enclosing a post-office order for a small amount of the entire sum, as his preliminary payment in making good. Perhaps this man actually existed, but it is more likely than not that he was either a reporter's invention or, if real, that he merely tantalized the railroad company with a statement of his indebtedness, omitting to enclose the post-office order. No "hang-out" gathering of hoboes would ever believe such a yarn – not even about a "gay-cat."

My freight train stopped very early in the morning in the railroad yards at East Buffalo, and there I got out. Stumbling over tracks and dodging switch engines, I made my way to what turned out to be the yardmaster's headquarters; his office was upstairs in the dingy wooden building, while below was a warm room where switchmen could rest. It was a cold September morning, the sun not yet up, and that warm room looked very inviting. I finally screwed up enough courage to enter, and I found myself all alone. Switchmen came in later, but they barely noticed me until I excused my bold entrance, and frankly confessed that I was looking for work. My clothes – they were not good enough to court "Jeminy" in, but never mind! They saved the day or the situation in that shanty. It was plain to the switchmen that I was not a tramp, and my subdued manners evidently made a good

impression also. Later the night yardmaster, a jovial German, came in and learned of my plight. He looked me over carefully, quizzed me rather minutely about my last job and my travels, and finally told me to make myself comfortable near the fire until quitting time, when he promised to have another talk with me. That second talk was the beginning of a series of mishaps, which, could the good yardmaster have foreseen them, would certainly have made him hesitate before securing for me the position which his influence enabled him to do. The mishaps will be described later on, but I must refer to them here on account of that second interview with the German. Whatever else we may or may not wonder about in life, it has always seemed to me interesting to speculate about what might have happened to us of a momentous nature had certain very trivial and insignificant circumstances in earlier life only been different. How many men and women, for instance, on looking back over their lives, discover just such slight events in their early careers, and realize, long years after, how important these events were, after all. Only the other day I made the acquaintance of a man, now a resident of Hawaii, who explains his present success and permanent home there by a much-advertised eruption of a local volcano. He was a poorly paid telegraph operator in Oregon at the time of the eruption, which occurred just as he was thinking about what to do with his vacation. He finally decided to see the volcano, even if it cost him all his savings, and off to Hawaii he sailed – and there he stayed. Opportunity after opportunity came

to him, and he had succeeded. Why? The man says, "On account of that derved old spouter." *Qui lo sa?*

What would have happened later if that yardmaster had not looked me up again and put me through another series of questions I, of course, cannot say. But it is easily possible that something very different from what I have to report upon in Part Second might have happened. The immediate result of that second interview with the yardmaster was that he promised me a position as "yard car reporter," and took me into his own home at the very cheap rate of \$15.00 a month for board and lodging, there remaining for me to save or spend, as I saw fit, \$20.00 out of the \$35.00 which was my monthly stipend – a princely sum I thought, at the time, not exceeded in its wonderful effect as a salary, until years after, when \$300.00 a week, for two months or so, once again gave me more or less the same inflated sense of joy which the \$35.00 a month had formerly also been able to achieve.

The car reporting proved more difficult for me than the yardmaster had anticipated. First of all I had to learn the names and location of all the different tracks in the yards at East Buffalo. I studied them mainly at night, because this was when I was on duty. It ought to be stated immediately that I never mastered their geography or nomenclature satisfactorily, and that my reports about the numbers and ownership of the cars were very faulty. As I recall these reports to-day I fear that officially I sent many a car out of the yards that remained at home, and that I unintentionally

reported as safe in port an equal number of cars that, for aught I know, may to this day be wandering about aimlessly over the prairies. However, I was not to hold this position long, so no great damage was done, I hope.

Writing about my early years and bidding good-bye to them here in print has been a harder task than I expected. Bidding good-bye to them formally and physically years ago was not difficult. To reach twenty-one, then thirty, then – I always looked on thirty as a satisfying goal, the years seemed to come and go so slowly. Then, too, I realized, after a fashion, that my youth was considered pretty much of a fiasco, and I wanted to get just as far away from failure and disaster as possible. Now – well, perhaps it is better that I keep my thoughts to myself. I will say, however, that retrospection can bring with it some of the most mournful hours the mind has to wallow in.

# CHAPTER V

## MY FIRST IMPRISONMENT

A friend, on receiving word that this book was being written, and that it was intended as a wind-up, for the time being at least, of my Under World reportings, wrote to me as follows:

"Whatever else you do or don't do, don't forget to get some romance into the story. I mean that you should try to get some poetry – oh, yes, I mean poetry – into your account of yourself. Merely a string of dates and facts will not go."

Perhaps the reader may be able to find some scattered bits of intended "poetry" in this Second Part, but on looking it over myself the "bits," if they exist at all, are so widely scattered that I cannot locate them. Yet I had to write this section of the book to make it coherent and connected, "poetry" or no "poetry."

My car reporting in East Buffalo lasted just a week. Then my benefactor, the night yardmaster, and I went to Buffalo proper one day. The yardmaster soon found other friends and, telling me to amuse myself, left me to my own devices. Perhaps, if we had remained together this second part of my book would tell a very different story than it does, perhaps – But something in me says: "What is the use of 'perhapsing' at this late hour? Go ahead and blurt out the truth." I am not sure that there is much use in "perhapsing," but somehow it seems impossible for me to



throw off the habit. At times it is so strong that I have caught myself going back to my lodging three times to make certain that no coals had fallen out of the grate – when there was no more probability of such a thing happening on the third inspection than on the first. "And yet," I have reasoned, "*perhaps* a live coal might have fallen out and burned up the whole place had I not taken a last look and made sure."

So it is in looking back to that day alone in Buffalo – the inevitable *perhaps* comes to my mind, and I wonder what would have happened if I had simply staid with the yardmaster, which I was very welcome to do had I been so minded.

What I did during the morning and early afternoon I do not recall now; probably I merely wandered about the streets and took in such sights as attracted me. Of this much, however, I feel certain: there was no great *Wanderlust* in my intentions. My work on the railroad interested me not a little, and I had already begun to calculate the amount of savings I should have at the end of the year. As the day wore on I remember measuring how much time I should need to get back to supper and work, and up to the middle of the afternoon it was my firm determination to report for work early. Then – ah yes, then! I saw a horse and buggy standing idle in one of the main thoroughfares. What it was that prompted me to get into the buggy and drive blindly onward I cannot say, even now. As I have remarked, my job was satisfactory, I was my own "boss" in the daytime, the horse and buggy no more represented personal wealth to me at the time

than did one of the stores, and there was no reasonable excuse for a wandering trip. But something, strict church people might say the devil, prompted me to throw over the job, run the risk of being sent to prison as a horse thief, and to ride away with buggy and horse for parts unknown. There is no wish on my part to palliate this crime in the least; I merely want to know why I committed it. At the moment of driving away it no more occurred to me to turn the outfit into gold than it did to turn back. On I went for a good hour, regardless of direction and the police. Then the seriousness of my offense gradually began to dawn on me. What should I do? At first I contemplated leaving the horse with some farmer, thinking that its owner would eventually locate it. But I threw over this plan. It was too late to report for work, and the growing darkness brought on a mild attack of *Wanderlust*

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