EDWARDS ALBERT

A MAN'S WORLD

Albert Edwards

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Содержание

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BOOK I

I

All books should have a preface, to tell what they are about and why they were written.

This one is about myself – Arnold Whitman.

I have sought in vain for a title which would be truly descriptive of the subject and form of my book. It is not a "Journal" nor a "Diary" for these words signify a daily noting down of events. Neither "Memoirs" nor "Recollections" meet the case, for much which I have written might better be called "Meditations." It certainly is not a "Novel," for that term implies a traditional "literary form," a beginning, development and end. I am quite sure that my beginning goes back to the primordial day when dead matter first organized itself – or was organized – into a living cell. And whether or not I will ever "end" is an open question. There is no "unity" in the form of my narrative except the frame of mind which led me to write it, which has held me to task till now.

It is the story of how I, born at the close of The Great War, lived and of the things – commonplace and unusual – which happened to me, how they felt at the time and how I feel about them now.

"Autobiography" is the term which most truly describes what I have tried to do. But that word is associated with the idea of great men. The fact that I am not "great" has been my main incentive in writing. We have text books a plenty on how to become Emperor, at least they tell how a man named Napoleon did it. There are endless volumes to which you may refer if you wish to become President of these United States – or rival the career of Captain Kidd. But such ambitions are rare among boys over eighteen.

Even before that age I began to wish for a book like the one I have tried to write. I wanted to know how ordinary people lived. It was no help in those days to read how this Cæsar or that came and saw and conquered. I shared the ambitions of the boys about me. To be sure there were day-dreaming moments when we planned to explore Central Africa or found dynasties. But this was pure make-believe. We knew that not one man in thousands wins fame. For each moment we dreamed of greatness there were days on end when we looked out questioningly on the real world. We got no answers from our teachers. Most of the boys who were in school with me are today running a store, practicing law or medicine. They were prepared for it by reading Plutarch in class and Nick Carter on the sly.

As a youth I wanted of course to gain a comfortable living. I wanted mildly to win some measure of distinction, but all this was subordinate to a more definite desire to be a man, and not to be ashamed. A book about the ordinary life I was to enter, would have been a God-send to me.

This then is to be the story of my life as it appears to me now, and how, in the face of the things which happened to me, I tried to be decent.

I have only two apologies to offer. All the rest of my writing has been scientific – on the subject of criminology. I am unpracticed in narration. And I have been enough in courts to realize the difference between "evidence" and "truth." At best I can only give "evidence." Others who knew me would tell of my life differently, perhaps more truly. But it will be as near truth as I can make it.

And now to my story.

II

My earliest distinct memory is of an undeserved flogging. But from this grew my conception of Justice. It was, I think, my first abstract idea.

My parents died long before I can remember and I was brought up in the home of the Rev. Josiah Drake, a Cumberland Presbyterian minister of the Tennessee Mountains. He was my uncle, but I always called him "the Father." He was the big fact of my childhood and my memory holds a more vivid picture of him than of any person I have known since.

He was very tall, but stooped heavily. If he had shaved he would have resembled Lincoln, and this, I suppose, is why he wore so long and full a beard. For he was a Southerner and hated the Northern leader with all the bitterness of the defeated. And yet he was a Christian. I have never known one who served his God more earnestly, more devotedly. He was a scholar of the old type. He knew his Latin and Greek and Hebrew. And as those were rare accomplishments among the mountain clergy of Tennessee it gave him a great prestige. In all but name he was the Bishop of the country-side. His faith was that of Pym and Knox and Jonathan Edwards, a militant Puritan, fearless before the world, abject in humility before his God.

Of his wife, my aunt Martha, I have scarcely a memory. When I was very young she must have been important to me, but as I grew to boyhood she faded into indistinct haziness. I recall most clearly how she looked at church, not so much her face as her clothes. In all those years she must have had some new ones, but if so, they were always of the same stuff and pattern as the old. Sharpest of all I remember the ridges the bones of her corset made in the back of her dress as she leaned forward, resting her forehead on the pew in front of us, during the "long prayer." There was always a flush on her face when it was over. I think her clothing cramped her somehow.

I have also a picture of her heated, flurried look over the kitchen stove when she was engaged in the annual ordeal of "putting up" preserves. Even when making apple-butter she maintained a certain formality. The one time when she would lapse from her dignity was when one of the negroes would rush into the kitchen with the news that a buggy was turning into our yard. The sudden scurry, the dash into her bedroom, the speed with which the hot faced woman of the kitchen would transform herself into a composed minister's wife in black silk, was the chief wonder of my childhood. It was very rarely that the guests reached the parlor before her.

All of her children had died in infancy except Oliver. As the Father's religion frowned on earthly love, she idealized him in secret. I think she tried to do her Christian duty towards me, but it was decidedly perfunctory. She was very busy with the big house to keep in order, endless church work and the burden of preserving the appearances her husband's position demanded.

There was a large lawn before the house down to a picket fence. Mowing the grass and whitewashing that fence were the bitterest chores of my childhood. The main street of the village was so little used for traffic that once or twice every summer it was necessary to cut down the tall grass and weeds. Next to our house was the church, it was an unattractive box. I remember that once in a long while it was painted, but the spire was never completed above the belfry. There was a straggling line of houses on each side of the street and two stores. Beyond the Episcopal Church, the road turned sharply to the right and slipped precipitously down into the valley. Far below us was the county seat. About five hundred people lived there, and the place boasted of six stores and a railroad station.

That was its greatest charm to my schoolmates. From any of the fields, on the hill-side beyond the village, we could look down and watch the two daily trains as they made a wide sweep up into this forgotten country. There was one lad whom I remember with envy. His father was carter for our community and sometimes he took his son down with him. They slept in the great covered wagon in the square before the county court house, and came back the next day. The boy's name was Stonewall Jackson Clarke. He lorded it over the rest of us because he had seen a locomotive at close quarters.

And he used to tell us that the court house was bigger than our two churches "with Blake's store on top."

I think that as a boy I knew the names of one or two stations on each side of the county seat. But it never occurred to me that the trains down there could take you to the cities and countries I studied about in my geography. Beyond the valley were Missionary Ridge and Lookout Mountain. But none of the boys I played with realized that the world beyond the mountains was anything like the country we could see. It would have surprised us if the teacher had pointed out to us on the school map the spot where our village stood. The land over which Cinderella's Prince ruled was just as real to us as New York State or the countries of Europe, the names of whose capitals we learned by rote.

My cousin Oliver I disliked. As a youngster I did not know why. But now I can see that he had a craven streak in him, a taint of sneakiness, an inability to be bravely sincere. It was through him that I got my lesson in justice.

He was then about sixteen and I eight. His hobby at the time was carpentry and, as I was supposed to dull his tools if I touched them, I was forbidden to play in the part of the barn where he had his bench. He was going to make an overnight visit to some friends in a neighboring township and at breakfast – he was to start about noon – he asked the Father to reiterate the prohibition. A few hours later I found Oliver smoking a corn-silk cigarette behind the barn. He begged me not "to tell on him." Nothing had been further from my mind. As a bribe for my silence he said I might play with his tools. The spirit of his offer angered me – but I accepted it.

After he had left the Father found me at his bench.

"Ollie said I could," I explained.

"At breakfast," the Father replied, "he distinctly said you could not."

But I stuck to it. The Father had every reason to believe I was lying. It was not in Oliver's nature to be kind to me without reason. And I could not, in honor, explain the reason. The Father was not the kind to spoil his children by sparing the rod, and there was no crime in his code more heinous than falsehood. He tried to flog me into a confession.

There was nothing very tragic to me in being whipped. All the boys I knew were punished so. I had never given the matter any thought. As I would not admit that I had lied, this was the worst beating I ever received. He stopped at last from lack of breath and sent me to bed.

"Oliver will be back to-morrow," he said. "It is no use persisting in your lie. You will be found out. And if you have not confessed…" The threat was left open.

I remember tossing about in bed and wishing that I had lied and taken a whipping for disobedience. It would not have been so bad and would have been over at once. The next morning I sat sullenly in my room waiting for Oliver's return, wondering if he would tell the truth. I was not at all confident. Towards noon, the blackboard turned in at the gate, one of the negroes took the horse and I heard the Father call Oliver into his study.

Then suddenly a door slammed and I heard the Father's step on the stair. He was running. He burst into my room and before I knew what was happening, he had picked me up in his arms. And, wonder of wonders, he was crying. I had never before seen a grown man cry. He was asking me, I could not understand what he meant, but he was asking me to forgive him. Then I heard the Mother's voice at the door.

"What is the matter, Josiah?"

"Oh, Martha. It's horrible! I caned the lad for a lie and he was telling the Truth! Oh, my son, my son, forgive me."

At first all I realized was that I was not to be whipped any more. But all day long the Father kept me close to him and gradually from his talk I began vaguely to understand that there was such a thing as justice. I had always supposed that punishments were a matter of the parents' good pleasure. That it had any relation to cause and effect, that sometimes a father might be right and sometimes wrong in beating a child, had never occurred to me.

It is interesting how such things take form in a child's mind. The Father bought me a set of tools like Oliver's as a peace offering, and of course I was much more interested in them than in any abstract conception of justice. Yet in some gradual, subconscious way, the idea arranged itself in my mind. I began to judge everything by it. I suppose it marked the end of babyhood, the first faint beginning of manhood.

III

It Is not surprising that, in that austere home, my first fundamental idea should have been of justice rather than of love.

There may have been a time when the affection between the Father and Mother had an outward showing. I would like to think that they had tasted gayer, honey-mooning days. I doubt it. They were helpmates rather than lovers. The Mother was well named Martha, busy with much serving. Her work had dovetailed into his. It would be juster to say her work was his. Their all-absorbing business was the winning of souls to Christ, and anything of only human interest seemed to them of the earth, earthy. I never saw anything like a quarrel between them, nor any passage of affection – except that the Father kissed her when going on a journey or returning.

It is hard for me to understand such people. Everything which has given me solace in life, all the pleasures of literature and art, all the real as well as the written poems, they had rigorously cut off.

Oliver and I kissed the Mother when we went to bed. I never remember kissing the Father. Yet he loved me. Sometimes I think he loved me more than his own son. I doubt if I was often separated from his thoughts, ever from his prayers.

But all I knew as a boy about the affections, which expresses itself openly, was from Mary Button, my Sunday school teacher. She was brimming over with the joy of living and in every way the opposite of the austerity I knew at home. She was altogether wonderful to me. When the Mother was away at Synodical meetings, Mary used often to come for a whole day to keep the house in order. It was strange and typical to hear her sing rollicking college songs at our parlor organ – a wheezy contraption which seemed entirely dedicated to Moody and Sankey.

All through my childhood Mary passed as a celestial dream, a princess from some beautiful land of laughter and kisses.

When I was about nine, and she I suppose near nineteen, Prof. Everett, who had been with her brother in college, began to visit the village. I disliked him at once with an instinctive jealousy. He has since won a large renown as a geologist, and was no doubt an estimable man, but if I should meet him now, after all these years, I am sure the old grudge would come to life and make me hate him. After a few months he married her and took her away to a nearby college town.

About a year later, when the ache of her absence was beginning to heal, and, boy-like, I was in danger of forgetting her, a photograph came of her and the baby. It was such a loving picture! She looked so radiantly happy! It was set up on the mantel-piece in the parlor, and seemed to illuminate that sombre room. I remember exactly how it leaned up against the bronze clock, between the plaster busts of Milton and Homer. In those days I supposed one had to be blind to be a poet. The picture kept her memory alive for me.

Some months later Mary wrote that her husband was going away to attend a convention and she asked that I might come to bear her company for the week.

The excitement of that first sortie out into the world is the most vivid thing which comes to me from my childhood. The Father drove me down the mountain-side to the county seat and so at last I saw a train at close quarters. Even when I had watched them through the Father's campaign glasses I had not realized how large they were. He gave me in charge of the conductor, a man with an armless sleeve and drooping moustaches, who had been a corporal in his regiment.

There was a rattle and jerk – we had no air-brakes on the Tennessee trains in those days – and the railroad station and the Father slipped out of sight. Such an amazing number of things went by the car window! I counted all the fields to the next station. There were thirty-seven. The conductor told me I was not to get off till the eighteenth stop. I started in valiantly to count them all, but my attention was distracted by the fact that things near the track went by so much faster than things far away. In "physics A" at college I learned an explanation of this phenomena which seemed all right

on paper but even today it is entirely inadequate when I am in a train and actually watching the earth revolve about distant points in either horizon. Trying to find a reason for it on that first railroad trip put me to sleep. At last the conductor woke me up and handed me over to Mary.

I can recall only vaguely the details of that delectable week, the strangeness of the entire experience is what sticks in my memory. There was the baby, so soft and round and contented. There was the German nurse, the first white servant I had ever seen. And there were the armchairs in the living-room, curved and comfortable and very different from the chairs in the parlor at home. After supper, instead of sending me off to bed, Mary read to me before the open fire, read me the wonderful stories of King Arthur. When at last I was sleepy, she came with me to my room. It embarrassed me to undress before her, but it was very sweet to have her tuck me in and kiss me "goodnight."

Mary "spoiled" me, to use the Father's expression, systematically, she let me eat between meals and gorged me with sweets. One night it made me sick. I have forgotten whether "dough-nuts" or "pop-overs" were to blame. When the doctor had gone away, laughing – for it was not serious – Mary took me into her own bed. I would gladly have suffered ten times the pain for the warm comfort of her arms about me.

It was during this visit that all the side of life we call Art began to appeal to me. The King Arthur legends were my introduction to literature, Malory and Tennyson's "Idylls" were the first written stories or poems I ever enjoyed. And I think my first impression of Beauty, was the sight of Mary nursing the baby. I am sure she did not realize with what wondering eyes I watched her. I was only a little shaver and she could not have guessed what a novel sight it was for me. At home, everything human, which could not be suppressed, was studiously hidden. I think some of the old Madonnas in which the Mother is suckling the Child would have seemed blasphemous to the Father. Art has always seemed to me at its highest when occupied with some such simple human thing.

IV

I had two playmates in those days, Margaret and Albert Jennings. Their father had been on "Stonewall" Jackson's staff. "Al" was my own age, but seemed older and Margot was a year younger. Until I went away to school we were almost inseparable. Only in affairs of the church were we apart, for they were Episcopalians.

Our biggest common interest was a "Chicken Company." We had built an elaborate run in the back yard of the parsonage and sometimes had as many as thirty hens. This enterprise led us into the great sin of our childhood – stealing.

Why I stole I cannot explain. I never pretended to justify it. We would sell a dozen eggs to my household and then take as many out of the pantry as were necessary to complete a dozen for Mrs. Jennings. We did this off and on for four or five years. When the hens laid freely we did not have to. But if there were not eggs to satisfy the demands of the two families, we stole. I think we blamed it on the chickens. Al and I were always full of great projects for improving the stock or the run and so needed money. There was little danger of discovery, because housekeeping was a very unexact science in our southern homes. And just because the chickens refused to lay as they should, seemed a very trivial reason for sacrificing our plans. But we did not like to do it. We always searched the nests two or three times in the hope of finding the eggs we needed.

Al was a queer chap. I remember one time we were two eggs short.

"We'll have to steal them from your mother," I said.

"You may be a thief," he retorted angrily, as we started after the spoils. "But I intend to pay it back. It's just a loan."

There was a weak subterfuge to the effect that Margot knew nothing of our dishonesty. The three of us had decided upon this in open council, to protect her in case we were caught. If there were to be any whippings, it was for the masculine members of the firm to take them. But Margot knew, just as well as we did, how many eggs were laid and how far our sales exceeded that number. But the candy she bought did not seem to trouble her conscience any more than it did her digestion. I have met no end of older women, in perfectly good church standing, who are no more squeamish about how their men folk gain their income.

There was another very feminine trait about Margot. We divided our profits equally, in three parts. Al and I always put most of our share back into the business. Margot spent hers on candy. Al used to object to this arrangement sometimes, but I always stood up for her.

This was because I expected to marry her. I do not remember when it was first suggested, but it was an accepted thing between us. Col. Jennings used laughingly to encourage us in it. I spoke of it once at home, but the Father shook his head and said it would grieve him if I married outside of our denomination. The Baptists were his special aversion, but next to them he objected to Episcopalians, whom he felt to be tainted with popery.

This led to a quarrel with Margot. I told her flatly that I would not marry her, unless she became a Presbyterian. She was a little snob and, as the most considerable people of the county belonged to her church, she preferred to give me up rather than slip down in the social scale. For several days we did not speak to each other. I refused to let any misguided Episcopalians in my yard. As the chicken run was in my domain, Al, who was smaller than I, became an apostate. But Margot held out stubbornly, until her mother intervened and told us, with great good sense, that we were much too young to know the difference between one sect and another, that we had best suspend hostilities until we knew what we were fighting about. So peace was restored.

This calf-love of mine was strangely cold. Some of the boys and girls in school used to "spoon." But "holding hands" and so forth seemed utterly inane to me. I do not know what Margot felt about it, but I no more thought of kissing her than her brother. The best thing about her was that she also

loved King Arthur. Mary had given me a copy of Malory. Up in our hay-loft, Margot and I used to take turns reading it aloud and acting it. Only once in a long while could we persuade Al to join us in these childish dramatics. I was generally Launcelot. Sometimes she would be Elaine, but I think she loved best to be the Queen.

At fourteen I discovered Froissart's Chronicles in the Father's library. It had a forbidding cover and I might never have unearthed it, if he had not set me to work dusting his books in punishment for some minor delinquency. On the bottom shelf there were three big lexicons, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. Next to them was the great family Bible. Then came Cruden's Concordance, a geography of Palestine, "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," Motley's "Dutch Republic" – and Froissart! As I was dusting it gloomily, it slipped from my hands and fell open to an old engraving of the Murder of Richard II. There were twenty-four plates in that volume. Never did boy enter into such a paradise.

I can only guess what the Father would have thought of my filling my mind with such lore. I took no chances in the matter. With great pains, I arranged the books so that the absence of Froissart would not be noticed. Until I went East to school at sixteen, it reposed in the bottom of the bran bin in the loft, and when at last I went, I gave it to Margot as my choicest treasure.

When I saw her ten years ago, she showed me the old book. The sight of it threw us both under constraint, bringing back those old days when we had planned to marry. The funeral of a dream always seem sadder to me than the death of a person.

Permanent camp meetings, the things which grew into the Chautauqua movement, were just beginning their popularity. One had been started a few score miles from our village and the year I went away to school, the Father had been made director. We left home early in the summer, and I was to go East without coming back.

On the eve of my departure, I went to see Margot. It was my first formal call and, in my new long trousers, I was much embarrassed. For an hour or so we sat stiffly, repeating every ten minutes a promise to write to each other. I remember we figured out that it would take me ten years to finish the Theological Seminary and be ready to marry her. It was ordained that I was to study for the ministry. No other career had ever been suggested to me.

The constraint wore off when I asked her for a photograph to take with me to school. From some instinct of coquetry she pretended not to want me to have one. Boys at school, she said, had their walls covered with pictures of girls, she would not think of letting hers be put up with a hundred others. When I solemnly promised not to have any picture but hers, she said she had no good one. There was one on the mantel, and I grabbed it in spite of her protest.

She was a bit of a tomboy and a hoydenish scuffle followed. In the scramble my hand fell accidentally on her breast. It sent a dazzling thrill through me. The vision came to me of Mary nursing the baby and the beauty of her white breast. The idea connected itself with Margot, struggling in my arms. I knew nothing of the mystery of life. I cannot tell what I felt – it was very vague – but I knew some new thing had come to me.

Margot noticed the change. I suppose I stopped the struggle with her.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"Nothing."

But I went off and sat down apart.

"What's the matter?" she insisted, coming over and standing in front of me. "Did I hurt you?"

"No," I said. "But we mustn't wrestle like that. We aren't children any more."

She threw up her head and began to make fun of me and my new long trousers. But I interrupted her.

"Margot! Margot! Don't you understand?"

I took hold of her hands and pulled her down beside me and kissed her. It was the first time. I am sure she did not understand what I meant – I was not clear about it myself. But she fell suddenly

silent. And while I sat there with my arm about her, I saw a vision of Mary's home and the warm joy of it. Margot and I would have a home like that; not like the Father's.

I was under the spell of some dizzying emotion which none of our grown up words will fit. The emotion, I suppose, comes but once, and is too fleeting to have won a place in adult dictionaries. It was painful and awesome, but as I walked home I was very happy.

V

Of course I never questioned the Father's religious dogmas. I did not even know that they might be questioned. But two things troubled me persistently.

I had been taught that our Saviour was the Prince of Peace, that His chief commandment was the law of love. But when adults got together there was always talk of the war. I do not think there was any elder or deacon in our church who had not served. How often I listened to stories of the wave of murder and rapine that had swept through our mountains only a few years before!

I remember especially the placing of a battle monument just outside our village and the horde of strangers who came from various parts of the state for the ceremony. The heroes were five men in gray uniforms, all who were left of the company which had stood there and had been shot to pieces. One was an old man, three were middle aged, and one was so young that he could not have been more than sixteen on the day of the fight. The man who had been their captain stayed at the parsonage. After supper the principal men of the village gathered in our parlor. I stood by the Father's chair and listened wide-eyed as, in his cracked voice, the Captain told us all the details of that slaughter. I remember that in the excitement of his story-telling the old soldier became profane, and the Father did not rebuke him.

Somehow I could not feel any romance in modern warfare, there seemed no similarity between these men and the chivalric heroes of The Round Table. Perhaps if Launcelot had been a real person, there in the parsonage parlor, and had told me face to face and vividly how he had slain the false knight Gawaine, had made me see the smear of blood on his sword blade, the cloven headed corpse of his enemy, that also they might have seemed abhorrent.

As a little boy I could not understand how a follower of Jesus could be a soldier. I did not know that grown men were also asking the same question. Years afterwards I remember coming across Rossetti's biting sonnet – "Vox ecclesiæ, vox Christi" —

> "O'er weapons blessed for carnage, to fierce youth
> From evil age, the word has hissed along: —
> Ye are the Lord's: go forth, destroy, be strong:
> Christ's Church absolves ye from Christ's law of ruth."

I do not know what the Father would have thought of those words, for, like some of the Roundhead leaders of Cromwell's time, he had been Chaplain as well as Captain of his company. If the war had broken out again, as the "Irreconcilables" believed it surely would, and if Oliver had refused to enlist on the ground that he was studying for Christ's ministry, I think the Father would have cursed him.

The other thing which worried me was a "gospel hymn," which we sang almost every Sunday. It had a swinging tune, but the words were horrible.

> There is a fountain filled with blood,
> Drawn from Emanuel's veins;
> And sinners plunged beneath that flood
> Lose all their guilty stains.

Such a gory means of salvation seemed much more frightful to my childish imagination than the most sulphurous hell.

These things I was told I would understand when I grew up. This was the answer to so many questions, that I got out of the habit of asking them. I believed that the Father was very wise and was willing to take his word for everything.

At eleven he persuaded me "to make a profession of faith" and join the church. It is only within these latter, mellower years that I can look back on this incident without bitterness. It was so utterly unfair. The only thing I was made to understand was that I was taking very serious and irrevocable vows. This was impressed on me in every way. I was given a brand new outfit of clothes. I had never had new underwear and new shoes simultaneously with a new suit and hat before. Such things catch a child's imagination. I had to stand up before the whole congregation and reply to un-understandable questions with answers I had learned by rote. Then for the first time I was given a share of the communion bread and wine. The solemnity of the occasion was emphasized. But there was no effort – at least no successful one – to make me understand what it was all about. When I became old enough to begin to think of such things, I found that I had already sworn to believe the same things as long as I lived. Try as hard as I can to remember the many kindnesses of my adoptive parents, realizing, as I surely do, how earnestly and prayerfully they strove to do the best for me, this folly remains my sharpest recollection of them. It was horribly unfair to a youngster who took his word seriously.

But I never had what is called a "religious experience" until that summer in camp meeting when I was sixteen.

In after years, I have learned that the older and richer sects have developed more elaborate and artistic stage-settings for their mysteries. I cannot nowadays attend a service of the Paulist Fathers, or at Saint Mary the Virgin's without feeling the intoxication of the heavy incense and the wonderful beauty of the music. But for a boy, and for the simple mountain folk who gathered there, that camp was sufficiently impressive.

It stood on the edge of a mirror lake, under the shadow of Lookout Mountain, in one of the most beautiful corners of Tennessee. Stately pines crowded close about the clearing and beyond the lake the hill dropped away, leaving a sweeping view out across the valley. Man seemed a very small creature beneath those giant trees, in the face of the great distances to the range of mountains beyond the valley. There was nothing about the camp to recall one's daily life. The thousand and one things which insistently distract one's attention from religion had been excluded.

Every care had been taken to make the camp contrast with, and win people from, "The Springs," – a fashionable and worldly resort nearby. There was no card playing nor dancing, as such things were supposed to offend the Deity. The stage to the railroad station did not run on Sunday.

After breakfast every day the great family – a hundred people or more – gathered by the lake-side and the Father led in prayer. During the morning there were study courses, most of which were Bible classes. I only remember two which were secular. One was on Literature and the King James Version was taken as a model of English prose. No mention was made of the fact that much of the original had been poetry. There was also a course on "Science." A professor of Exigesis from a neighboring Theological Seminary delivered a venomous polemic against Darwin. The "Nebular Hypothesis" was demolished with many convincing gestures.

My little love affair with Margot had put me in a state of exaltation. Other things conspired to make me especially susceptible to religious suggestion. Oliver was back from his second year in the seminary. My dislike for him was forgotten. He seemed very eloquent to me in the young people's meetings, which he conducted.

Mary was there with her three children and had taken for the summer the cottage at one end of the semi-circle overlooking the lake. Her husband, Prof. Everett, had been away for several months on the geological expedition to Alaska, which was, I believe, the foundation of the eminence he now holds in that science. Mary also had been caught up in the religious fervor of the place. To me she seemed wonderfully spiritualized and beautiful beyond words. Oliver and I used often to walk home with her after the evening meetings and, sitting out on her porch over the water, talk of religion.

Sundays were continuous revival meetings. Famous fishers-of-souls came every week. All methods from the most spiritual to the coarsest were used to wean us from our sins. It was "Salvation" Milton, who landed me.

He was the star attraction of the summer's program. He stayed in the camp two weeks, fourteen days of tense emotion, bordering on hysteria. To many people "Salvation" Milton has seemed a very Apostle. His message has come to them as holy words from the oracle of the Most High. To such it may, I fear, seem blasphemous for me – a criminologist – to write of him as a specimen of pathology. But I have met many who were very like him in our criminal courts.

I have no doubt of his sincerity – up to the limit of his poor distorted brain. He had moments of exaltation when he thought that he talked face to face with God. He believed intensely in his mission. He had lesser moments, which he regretted as bitterly as did his friends who, like the sons of Noah, covered him with a sheet that his drunken nakedness might not be seen by men. He was pitifully unbalanced. But I think that if he had been given the strength of will to choose, he would have always been the ardent servant of God we saw in him at the camp meeting.

He was a master of his craft. By meditation and fasting and prayer he could whip himself into an emotional state when passionate eloquence flowed from his lips with almost irresistible conviction. He was also adept at the less venerable tricks of his trade.

It was his custom in the afternoon about four to walk apart in the woods and spend an hour or more on his knees. Once he took me with him. I remember the awe of sitting there on the pine needles, in the silence of the forest and watching him "wrestle with the Spirit." I tried to pray also, but I could not keep my mind on it so long. Suddenly he began to speak, asking Christ's intercession on my behalf. And walking home, he talked to me about my soul. For the first time I was "overtaken by a conviction of sin." That night he preached on the Wages of Sin.

I will never forget the horror of fear which held me through that service. Milton was in the habit of dealing with and overcoming men of mature mind. Such a lad as I was putty in his hands. When, out of the shivering terror of it, came the loud-shouted promise of salvation, immunity from all he had made me feel my just deserts, I stumbled abjectly up the aisle and took my place among the "Seekers." I must say he had comfort ready for us. I remember he put his arm over my shoulder and told me not to tremble, not to be afraid. God was mighty to save. Long before the world was made He had builded a mansion for me in the skies. He would wash away all my sins in the blood of the Lamb. Milton had scared me into a willingness to wade through an ocean filled with blood if safety lay beyond.

The next morning brought me peace. I suppose my overstrained nerves had come to the limit of endurance. I thought it was the promised "peace which passeth all understanding." I was sure of my salvation. Several weeks of spiritual exaltation followed. I read the Bible passionately, sometimes alone, more often with Oliver or Mary, for it was the fashion to worship in common. Whenever the opportunity offered in the meetings, I made "public testimony."

But I would have found it hard to define my faith. I had been badly frightened and had recovered. This, I thought, came from God. I had only a crude idea of the Deity. In general, I thought of Him as very like the Father, with white hair and a great beard. I thought of Him as intimately interested in all I did and thought, jotting it all down in the tablets of judgment – a bookkeeper who never slumbered. I was not at all clear on the Trinity. These mountain Presbyterians were Old Testament Christians. The Christ had a minor role in their Passion Play. They talked a good deal of the Holy Ghost, but God, the Father, the King of Kings, the jealous Jehovah of Israel was their principal deity. We were supposed to love Him, but in reality we all feared Him. However, I was very proud in the conviction that I was one of His elect.

Advancing years bring me a desire for a more subtle judgment on things than the crude verdict of "right" or "wrong." I look back on my religious training, try to restrain the tears and sneers and think of it calmly. I doubt if any children are irreligious. Some adults claim to be, but I think it means

that they are thoughtless – or woefully discouraged. We live in the midst of mystery. We are born from it and when we die we enter it again. Anyone who thinks must have some attitude towards the Un-understandable – must have a religion. And loving parents inevitably will try to help their children to a clean and sweet emotional relation towards the unknown. Evidently it is not an easy undertaking. For the adults who surrounded me in my childhood, in spite of their earnest efforts, in spite of their prayers for guidance, instead of developing my religious life, distorted it horribly. They were sincerely anxious to lead me towards Heaven. I do not think it is putting it too strongly to say they were hounding me down the road which is paved with good intentions.

I can think of no more important task, than the development of a sane and healthy "course of religious education for children." The one supplied in our Sunday schools seems to me very far below the mark. It is a work which will require not only piety, but a deep knowledge of pedagogics.

Certainly the new and better regime will discourage precocious "professions of faith." I do not think it will insist that we are born in sin and born sinful. Above all it will take care not to make religion appear ugly or fearsome to childish imagination. Even the most orthodox Calvinists will learn – let us hope – to reserve "the fountain filled with blood" and the fires of Hell for adults. The Sunday school of the future will be held out in the fields, among the flowers, and the wonder of the child before this marvelous universe of ours will be cherished and led into devotion – into natural gratitude for the gift of the earth and the fulness thereof. Surely this is wiser than keeping the children indoors to learn the catechism. I can think of nothing which seems to me less of a religious ceremony than those occasions, when Bibles are given to all the Sunday school scholars who can recite the entire catechism. What have youngsters to do with such finespun metaphysics? Oh! the barren hours I wasted trying to get straight the differences between "Justification," "Sanctification," and "Adoption" – or was it "Redemption." One would suppose that Jesus had said "Suffer the little children, who know the catechism, to come unto me."

But, of course, at sixteen, I had no such ideas as these. I knew of no religious life except such as I saw about me. I had been carefully taught to believe that a retentive memory and a glib tongue were pleasing to the Most High. I was very contemptuous towards the children of my age who were less proficient.

VI

In the midst of this peace a bolt fell which ended my religious life. Its lurid flame momentarily illumined the great world beyond my knowing. And the visioning of things for which I was unprepared was too much for me. I may not be scientifically correct, but it has always seemed to me that what I saw that July night stunned the section of my brain which has to do with "Acts of faith." Never since have I been able to believe, religiously, in anything.

It was a Sunday. At the vesper service, all of us seated on the grass at the edge of the lake, the Father had preached about our bodies being the temples of God. As usual, Oliver led the young people's meeting after supper. These more intimate gatherings meant more to me than the larger assemblies. Our text was "Blessed are the pure in heart." I remember clearly how Oliver looked, tall and stalwart and wonderful in his young manhood. He has a great metropolitan church now and he has won his way by oratory. The eloquence on which he was to build his career had already begun to show itself.

Mary sang. I have also a sharp picture of her. She wore a light lawn dress, which the brilliant moon-light turned almost white. Her years seemed to have fallen from her and she looked as she had done on her wedding night. In her rich, mellow contralto she sang the saddest of all church music: "He was despised."

Something delayed me after the service and when I looked about for Oliver and Mary they were gone. I went to her house but the maid said they had not come. The mystery of religious fervor and the glory of the night kept me from waiting on the verandah, called me out to wander down by the water's edge. But I wearied quickly of walking and, coming back towards the house, lay down on the grass under a great tree. The full moon splashed the country round with sketches of ghostly white and dense black shadows.

Two ideas were struggling in my mind. There was an insistent longing that Margot might be with me to share this wonder of religious experience. Conflicting with this desire, compelled, I suppose, by the evening's texts, was a strong push towards extreme asceticism. I was impatient for Oliver's return. I wanted to ask him why our church had abandoned monasticism.

How long I pondered over this I do not know. Perhaps I fell asleep, but at last I heard them coming back through the woods. There was something in Oliver's voice, which checked my impulse to jump up and greet them. It was something hot and hurried, something fierce and ominous. But as they came out into a patch of moonlight, although they fell suddenly silent, I knew they were not quarreling. Mary cautioned him with a gesture and went into the house. Through the open windows I heard her tell the negro maid that she might go home. I heard her say "Good night" and lock the back door. The girl hummed a lullaby as she walked away. All the while Oliver sat on the steps.

I do not know what held me silent, crouching there in the shadow. I had no idea of what was to come. But the paralyzing hand of premonition was laid upon me. I knew some evil was approaching, and I could not have spoken or moved.

"Oliver," she said, in a voice I did not know, as she came out on the porch, "you must go away. It is wrong. Dreadfully wrong."

But he jumped up and threw his arms about her.

"It's sin, Oliver," she said, "you're a minister."

"I'm a man," he said, fiercely.

Then they went into the house. It was not till years afterwards, when I read Ebber's book – "Homo Sum" that I realized, in the story of that priest struggling with his manhood, what the moment must have meant to Oliver.

I tiptoed across the grass to the shade of the house. A blind had been hurriedly pulled down – too hurriedly. A thin ribbon of light streamed out below it.

I could not now write down what I saw through that window, if I tried. But in the frame of mind of those days, with my ignorance of life, it meant the utter desecration of all holiness. Oliver and Mary had stood on my highest pedestal, a god and goddess. I saw them in the dust. No. It seemed the veriest mire.

I turned away at last to drown myself. It was near the water's edge that they picked me up unconscious some hours later. The doctors called it brain fever. Almost a month passed before I became rational again. I was amazed to find that in my delirium I had not babbled of what I had seen. Neither Oliver nor Mary suspected their part in my sickness. More revolting to me than what they had done was the hypocrisy with which they hid it.

Above all things I dreaded any kind of an explanation and I developed an hypocrisy as gross as theirs. I smothered my repugnance to Mary's kisses and pretended to like to have Oliver read the Bible to me. And when I was able to get about again, I attended meetings as before. There was black hatred in my heart and the communion bread nauseated me. What was left of the summer was only a longing for the day when I should leave for school. Nothing mattered except to escape from these associations.

I am not sure what caused it – the weeks of religious hysteria which accompanied my conversion, what I saw through the crack below the window curtain, or the fever – but some time between the coming of "Salvation" Milton and my recovery, that little speck of gray matter, that minute ganglia of nerve-cells, with which we *believe*, ceased to function.

BOOK II

I

Early in September Oliver took me East to school. It was not one of our widely advertised educational institutions. The Father had chosen it, I think, because it was called a Presbyterial Academy and the name assured its orthodoxy.

I remember standing on the railroad platform, after Oliver had made all the arrangements with the principal, waiting for the train to come which was to carry him out of my sight. How long the minutes lasted! It is a distressing thing for a boy of sixteen to hate anyone the way I hated my cousin. I was glad that he was not really my brother.

It is strange how life changes our standards. Now, when I think back over those days, I am profoundly sorry for him. It was, I think, his one love. It could have brought him very little joy for it must have seemed to him as heinous a sin as it did to me.

Five years later he married. I am sure he has been scrupulously faithful to his wife. She is a woman to be respected and her ambition has been a great stimulus to his upclimbing. But I doubt if he has really loved her as he must have loved Mary to break, as he did, all his morality for her. To him love must have seemed a thing of tragedy. But boyhood is stern. I had no pity for him.

His going lifted a great weight from me. As I walked back alone to the school, I wanted to shout. I was beginning a new life – my own. I had no very clear idea of what I was going to do with this new freedom of mine. I can only recall one plank in my platform – I was going to fight.

The one time I can remember fighting at home, I had been thrashed by the boy, caned by the school teacher and whipped by the Father, when he noticed my black eye. Fighting was strictly forbidden. After this triple beating I fell into the habit of being bullied. As even the smallest boy in our village knew I was afraid to defend myself, I was the victim of endless tyrannies. The first use I wanted to make of my new freedom was to change this. I resolved to resent the first encroachment.

It came that very day from one of the boys in the fourth class. I remember that his name was Blake. Just before supper we had it out on the tennis-court. It was hardly fair to him. He fought without much enthusiasm. It was to him part of the routine of keeping the new boys in order. To me it was the Great Emancipation. I threw into it all the bitterness of all the humiliations and indignities of my childhood. The ceremonial of "seconds" and "rounds" and "referee" was new to me. At home the boys just jumped at each other and punched and bit, and pulled hair and kicked until one said he had enough. As soon as they gave the word to begin, I shut my eyes and hammered away. We battered each other for several rounds and then Blake was pronounced victor on account of some technicality.

They told me, pityingly, that I did not know how to fight. But all I had wanted was to demonstrate that I was not afraid. I had won that. It was the only fight I had in school. Even the bullies did not care to try conclusions with me, and I had no desire to force trouble. I had won a respect in the little community which I had never enjoyed before.

In a way it was a small matter, but it was portentous for me. It was the first time I had done the forbidden thing and found it good. The Father had been wrong in prohibiting self-defense. It was an entering wedge to realize that his wisdom had been at fault here. In time his whole elaborate structure of morals fell to the ground.

The school was a religious one, of course. But the teachers, with eminent good sense, realized that other things were more important for growing boys than professions of faith. It seemed that, after my illness, my mind woke up in sections. The part which was to ponder over Mary and Oliver, which was to think out my relation to God, for a long time lay dormant. I puttered along at my Latin and Greek and Algebra, played football and skated and, with the warm weather, went in for baseball.

In the spring a shadow came over me – the idea of returning home. The more I thought of another summer in the camp, the more fearsome it seemed. At last I went to the doctor.

He was the first, as he was one of the most important, of the many people whose kindness and influence have illumined my life. He was physical director of the school and also had a small practice in the village. There were rumors that he drank and he never came to church. If there had been another doctor available, he would not have been employed by the school.

I never knew a man of more variable moods. Some days on the football field he would throw himself into the sport with amazing vim for an adult, would laugh and joke and call us by our first names. Again he would sit on the bench by the side-line scowling fiercely, taking no interest in us, muttering incoherently to himself. One day another boy and I were far "out of bounds" looking for chestnuts. We saw him coming through the trees and hid under some brush-wood. He had a gun under one arm, but was making too much noise for a hunter. He gesticulated wildly with his free arm and swore appallingly. We were paralyzed with fear. I do not think either of us told anyone about it. For in spite of his queer ways, all the boys, who were not sneaky nor boastful, liked him immensely.

One Saturday afternoon I found courage to go to his office. There were several farmers ahead of me. I had a long wait, and when at last my turn came I was mightily frightened.

"If I go home this summer," I blurted out, "I'll be sick again."

Oliver had told him about my illness. At first he laughed at me, but I insisted so doggedly that he began to take me seriously. He tried to make me tell him my troubles but I could not. Then he examined me carefully, tapping my knee for reflexes and doing other incomprehensible things which are now commonplace psychological tests. But for a country doctor in those days they were very progressive.

"Why are you so excited?" he asked suddenly, "Are you afraid I'll hurt you?"

"No," I said, "I'm afraid I'll have to go home."

"You're a rum chap."

He sat down and wrote to the Father. I do not know what argument he used, but it was successful. A letter came in due course giving me permission to accept an invitation to pass the summer with one of my schoolmates.

It was a wonderful vacation for me – my first taste of the sea. The boy's family had a cottage on the south shore of Long Island. The father who was a lawyer went often to the city. But the week ends he spent with us were treats. He played with us! He really enjoyed teaching me to swim and sail. I remember my pride when he would trust me with the main-sheet or the tiller. The mother also loved sailing. That she should enjoy playing with us was even a greater surprise to me than that my friend's father should. Whatever their winter religion was, they had none in the summer – unless being happy is a religion. I gathered some new ideals from that family for the home which Margot and I were to build.

In the spring-term of my second and last year in the school, we were given a course on the "Evidences of Christianity." It was a formal affair, administered by an old Congregationalist preacher from the village, whom we called "Holy Sam." He owed the nickname to his habit of pronouncing "psalm" to rhyme with "jam." He always opened the Sunday Vesper service by saying: "We will begin our worship with a holy sam." I think he took no more interest in the course than most of the boys did. It was assumed that we were all Christians and it was his rather thankless task to give us "reasonable grounds" for what we already believed.

It had the opposite effect on me. The book we used for a text was principally directed against atheists. I had never heard of an atheist before, it was a great idea to me that there were people who did not believe in God. I had not doubted His existence. I had hated Him. The faith and love I had given Mary and Oliver had turned to disgust and loathing. Their existence I could not doubt, and God was only the least of this trinity.

It would be an immense relief if I could get rid of my belief in God. The necessity of hate would be lifted from me. And so – with my eighteen-year-old intellect – I began to reason about Deity.

The pendulum of philosophy has swung a long way since I was a youth in school. To-day we are more interested in the subjective processes of devotion – what Tolstoi called the kingdom of God within us – than in definitions of an external, objective concept. The fine spun scholastic distinctions of the old denominational theologies are losing their interest. Almost all of us would with reverence agree with Rossetti:

To God at best, to Chance at worst,
Give thanks for good things last as first.
But windstrown blossom is that good
Whose apple is not gratitude.
Even if no prayer uplift thy face
Let the sweet right to render grace
As thy soul's cherished child be nurs'd.

The Father's generation held that a belief in God, as defined by the Westminster confession was more important than any amount of rendering grace. I thought I was at war with God. Of course I was only fighting against the Father's formal definition. Our text book, in replying to them, quoted the arguments of Thomas Paine. The logic employed against him was weak and unconvincing. It was wholly based on the Bible. This was manifestly begging the question for if God was a myth, the scriptures were fiction. Nowadays, the tirades of Paine hold for me no more than historic interest. The final appeal in matters of religion is not to pure reason. The sanction for "faith" escapes the formalism of logic. But at eighteen the "Appeal to Reason" seemed unanswerable to me.

I began to lose sleep. As the spring advanced, I found my room too small for my thoughts and I fell into the habit of slipping down the fire-escape and walking through the night. There was an old mill-race near the school and I used to pace up and down the dyke for hours. Just as with egg-stealing something pushed me into this and I worried very little about what would happen if I were found out.

After many nights of meditation I put my conclusions down on paper. I have kept the soiled and wrinkled sheet, written over in a scragly boyish hand, ever since. First of all there were the two propositions "There is a God," "There is no God." If there is a God, He might be either a personal Jehovah, such as the Father believed in, or an impersonal Deity like that of the theists. These were all the possibilities I could think of. And in regard to these propositions, I wrote the following:

"I cannot find any proof of a personal God. It would take strong evidence to make me believe in such a cruel being. How could an all-powerful God, who cared, leave His children in ignorance? There are many grown-up men who think they know what the Bible means. They have burned each other at the stake – Catholics and Protestants – they would kill each other still, if there were not laws against it. A personal God would not let his followers fight about his meaning. He would speak clearly. If he could and did not, he would be a scoundrel. I would hate such a God. But there are no good arguments for a personal God.

"An impersonal God would be no better than no God. He would not care about men. Such a God could not give us any law. Every person would have to find out for himself what was right.

"If there is no God, it is the same as if there was an impersonal God.

"Therefore man has no divine rule about what is good and bad. He must find out for himself. This experiment must be the aim of life – to find out what is good. I think that the best way to live would be so that the biggest number of people would be glad you did live."

Such was my credo at eighteen. It has changed very little. I do not believe – in many things. My philosophy is still negative. And life seems to me now, as it did then, an experiment in ethics.

My midnight walks by the mill-race were brought to an abrupt end. My speculations were interrupted by the doctor's heavy hand falling on my shoulder.

"What are you doing out of bed at this hour? Smoking?"

I was utterly confused, seeing no outlet but disgrace. My very fright saved me. I could not collect my wits to lie.

"Thinking about God," I said.

The doctor let out a long whistle and sat down beside me.

"Was that what gave you brain fever?"

"Yes."

"Well – tell me about it."

No good thing which has come to me since can compare with what the doctor did for me that night. For the first time in my life an adult talked with me seriously, let me talk. Grown-ups had talked to and at me without end. I had been told what I ought to believe. He was the first to ask me what I believed. It was perhaps the great love for him, which sprang up in my heart that night, which has made me in later life especially interested in such as he.

I began at the beginning, and when I got to "Salvation" Milton, he interrupted me.

"We're smashing rules so badly to-night, we might as well do more. I'm going to smoke. Want a cigar?"

I did not smoke in those days. But the offer of that cigar, his treating me like an adult and equal, gave me a new pride in life, gave me courage to go through with my story, to tell about Oliver and Mary, to tell him of my credo. He sat there smoking silently and heard me through.

"What do you think?" I asked at last, "Do you believe in God?"

"I don't know. I never happened to meet him in any laboratory. It sounds to me like a fairy story."

"Then you're an atheist," I said eagerly.

"No. A skeptic." And he explained the difference.

"How do you know what's good and what's bad?"

"I don't know," he replied. "I only know that some things are comfortable and some aren't. It is uncomfortable to have people think you are a liar, especially so when you happen to be telling the truth. It is uncomfortable to be caught stealing. But I know some thieves who are uncaught and who seem quite comfortable. Above all it's uncomfortable to know you are a failure."

His voice trailed off wearily. It was several minutes before he began again.

"I couldn't tell you what's right and what's wrong – even if I knew. You don't believe in God, why should you believe in me? If you don't believe the Bible you mustn't believe any book. No – that's not what I mean. A lot of the Bible is true. Some of it we don't believe, you and I. So with the other books – part true, part false. Don't trust all of any book or any man."

"How can I know which part to believe?"

"You'd be the wisest man in all the world, my boy, if you knew that," he laughed.

Then after a long silence, he spoke in a cold hard voice.

"Listen to me. I'm not a good man to trust. I'm a failure."

He told me the pitiful story of his life, told it in an even, impersonal tone as though it were the history of someone else. He had studied in Germany, had come back to New York, a brilliant surgeon, the head of a large hospital.

"I was close to the top. There wasn't a man anywhere near my age above me. Then the smash. It was a woman. You can't tell what's right and wrong in these things. Don't blame that cousin of yours or the girl. If anybody ought to know it's a doctor. I didn't. It's the hardest problem there is in ethics. The theological seminaries don't help. It's stupid just to tell men to keep away from it – sooner or later they don't. And nobody can tell them what's right. You wouldn't understand my case if I told you about it. It finished me. I began to drink. Watch out for the drink. That's sure to be uncomfortable. I

was a drunkard – on the bottom. At last I heard about her again. She was coming down fast – towards the bottom. Well, I knew what the bottom was like – and I did not want her to know."

He smoked his cigar furiously for a moment before he went on. He had crawled out and sobered up. This school work and the village practice gave him enough to keep her in a private hospital. She had consumption.

"And sometime – before very long," he ended, "she will die and – well – I can go back to Forgetting-Land."

Of course I did not understand half what it meant. How I racked my heart for some word of comfort! I wanted to ask him to stay in the school and help other boys as he was helping me. But I could not find phrases. At last his cigar burned out and he snapped the stub into the mill-race. There was a sharp hiss, which sounded like a protest, before it sank under the water. He jumped up.

"You ought to be in bed. A youngster needs sleep. Don't worry your head about God. It's more important for you to make the baseball team. Run along."

I had only gone a few steps when he called me back.

"You know – if you should tell anyone, I might lose my position. I don't care for myself – but be careful on her account. Goodnight."

He turned away before I could protest. His calling me back is the one cloud on my memory of him. His secret was safe.

For the rest of the school year I gave my undivided attention to baseball. The doctor was uniformly gruff to me. We did not have another talk.

Two weeks before the school closed he disappeared. I knew that she had died, he would not have deserted his post while her need lasted. On Commencement Day, John, the apple-man, handed me a letter from him. I tore it up carefully after reading it, as he asked – threw the fragments out of the window of the train which was carrying me homeward. There was much to help me to clear thinking in that letter, but the most important part was advice about how to act towards the Father. "Don't tell him your doubts now. It would only distress him. Wait till you're grown up before you quarrel with him."

II

Nothing of moment happened in the weeks I spent in camp meeting that summer. Luckily Mary was not there and Oliver, having finished the Seminary, was passing some months in Europe. I bore in mind the Doctor's advice, avoided all arguments and mechanically observed the forms of that religious community. No one suspected my godlessness, but I suspected everyone of hypocrisy. It was a barren time of deceit.

Even my correspondence with Margot gave me no pleasure. I could not write to her about my doubts, but I wanted very much to talk them over with her. While I could not put down on paper what was uppermost in my heart, I found it very hard to fill letters with less important things. Whenever I have been less than frank, I have always found it dolefully unsatisfactory.

I imagine that most thoughtful boys of my generation were horribly alone. It is getting more the custom nowadays for adults to be friends with children. The Doctor at school was the only man in whom I had ever confided. And in my loneliness I looked forward eagerly to long talks with Margot. I supposed that love meant understanding.

The serious sickness of the Mother took us home before the summer was ended. I had not been especially unhappy there during my childhood, but now that I had seen other pleasanter homes, my own seemed cruelly cheerless. Its gloom was intensified because the Mother was dying. I had had no special love for her but the thing was made harder for me by my lack of sympathy with their religious conventions. It was imperative that they should not question God's will. The Mother did not want to die. The Father was, I am sure, broken-hearted at the thought of losing her. They kept up a brave attitude – to me it seemed a hollow pretense – that God was being very good to them, that he was releasing her from the bondage of life, calling her to joy unspeakable. However much she was attached to things known – the Father, her absent son, the graves of her other children, the homely things of the parsonage, the few pieces of inherited silver, the familiar chairs – it was incumbent on her to appear glad to go out into the unknown.

It was my first encounter with death. How strange it is that the greatest of all commonplaces should always surprise us! What twist in our brains is it, that makes us try so desperately to ignore death? The doctors of philosophy juggle words over their *Erkenntnis Theorie*– trying to discover the confines of human knowledge, trying to decide for us what things are knowable and what we may not know – but above all their prattle, the fact of death stands out as one thing we all do know. Whether our temperaments incline us to reverence pure reason or to accept empirical knowledge, we know, beyond cavil, that we must surely die. Yet what an amazing amount of mental energy we expend in trying to forget it. The result? We are all surprised and unnerved when this commonplace occurs.

Christianity claims to have conquered death. For the elect, the Father taught, it is a joyous awakening. The people of the church scrupulously went through the forms which their creed imposed. Who can tell the reality of their thoughts? There is some validity in the theory of psychology which says that if you strike a man, you become angry; that if you laugh, it makes you glad. I would not now deny that they got some comfort from their attitude. But at the time, tossing about in my stormy sea of doubts, it seemed to me that they were all afraid. Just as well disciplined troops will wheel and mark time and ground arms, go through all the familiar manoeuvres of the parade ground, while the shells of the enemy sweep their ranks with cold fear, so it seemed to me that these soldiers of Christ were performing rites for which they had lost all heart in an effort to convince themselves that they were not afraid.

A great tenderness and pity came to me for the Mother. As I have said there had been little affection between us. All her love had gone out to Oliver. Yet in those last days, when she was so helpless, it seemed to comfort her if I sat by her bed-side and stroked her hand. Some mystic sympathy sprang up between us and she felt no need of pretense before me. I sat there and watched sorrow on

her face, hopeless grief, yes, and sometimes rebellion and fear. But with brave loyalty she hid it all when the Father came into the room, dried her tears and talked of the joy that was set before her.

There was also a sorrow of my own. Disillusionment had come to me from Margot. Why I had expected that she would sympathize with and understand my doubts, I do not know. It was a wild enough dream.

The first night at home I went to see her. The family crowded about with many questions. Al was attending a southern military academy and there were endless comparisons to be made between his school and mine. But at last Margot and I got free of them and off by ourselves in an arbor. She seemed older than I, the maturity which had come to her in these two years startled me. But I blurted out my troubles without preface.

"Margot," I said, "Do you believe everything in the Bible?"

I suppose she was expecting some word of love. Two years before, when I had left her, I had kissed her. And now —

"Of course," she said, in surprise.

If she had doubted one jot or tittle of it, I might have been content. Her unthinking acceptation of it all angered me.

"I don't," I growled.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean what I say. I don't believe in the Bible."

I remember so well how she looked – there in the arbor, where she had led me – her eyes wide with surprise and fear. I thought she looked stupid.

"I don't believe in God," I went on.

I expected her to take this announcement quietly. But two years before I had never heard of men who doubted the existence of God, except, of course, the benighted heathen. Margot's hair is almost white now, but I suppose that in all her life, I am the only person she has heard question the teachings of the church.

Now I realize the extent of my folly in expecting that she would understand. The two years I had been away had changed everything for me, even the meaning of the words I used. I had been out in a wider world than hers, had begun to meet the minds of men who thought. In that little mountain village, a second rate, rather mushy-brained rector had been her intellectual guide. It was insane for me to think she would sympathize with me. And yet, because I loved her, I did. I was only eighteen.

How the fright grew in her eyes as I went on declaiming my unbeliefs!

"It's wicked – what you are saying."

"It's true. Is truth wicked?"

"I won't listen to you any more."

She got up. Suddenly I realized that I was losing her.

"Margot," I pleaded, "you mustn't go. We're going to get married. I've got to tell you what I think."

"I'll never marry a man who doesn't believe in God."

We were both very heroic. There was no older, wiser person there to laugh at us. So we stood and glared at each other. She waited some minutes for me to recant. I could not. Then two tears started down her cheeks. I wanted desperately to say something, but there were tears in my eyes also and no words would come. She turned and walked away. I could not believe it. I do not know how long I waited for her to come back. At last I went home.

Sullen, bitter days followed. I suppose she hoped, as I did, that some way would be found to restore peace. But neither of us knew how.

If I might have my way, I would first of all arrange life so that boys should escape such crises. Sooner or later, I suppose, every human being comes to a point where to compromise means utter damnation. But if I could remould this "sorry scheme of things," I would see that this portentous

moment did not come till maturity. A Frenchman has said that after thirty we all become cynics. It is a vicious saying, but holds a tiny grain of truth. As we get older we become indifferent, cynical, in regard to phrases. The tragedy of youth is that it rarely sees beyond words. And of all futilities, it seems to me that quarrels over the terms with which we strive to express our mysticism – our religion, if you will – are the most futile. At eighteen I let a tangle of words crash into, smash, my love. Youth is cruel – above all to itself.

The mother's funeral seemed to me strangely unreal. It was hard to find the expected tears, and the black mourning clothes were abhorrent. I felt that I was imprisoned in some foul dungeon and was stifling for lack of air.

Release came with time for me to start to College. There was a lump in my throat as I climbed into the buckboard, beside the negro boy who was to drive me down to the county seat for the midnight train. The Father reached up and shook my hand and hoped that the Lord would have me in His keeping and then we turned out through the gate into the main street. I saw the Father standing alone in the doorway and I knew he was praying for me. I felt that I would never come back. I was sorry for the Father in the big empty house, but I had no personal regret, except Margot. The memory of the former leave-taking, how with her I had found the first realization of love, the first vague sensing of the mystic forces of life, came back to me sharply. All through the two years she had been a constant point in my thinking. I had not mooned about her sentimentally, more often than not, in the rush of work or play, I had not thought of her at all. But the vision of her had always been there, back in the holy of holies of my brain, a thing which was not to change nor fade.

The Episcopal Church was lit up, as we drove by I could hear some laughter. I knew they were decorating it for a wedding. Margot would be there, for she was one of the bride's maids. As soon as we were out of the village I told the negro boy I had forgotten something and jumping out, I walked back into the woods and circled round to the side of the church. I put a board up under a window and looked in. There were other people there, but I saw only Margot. She was sitting apart from the laughter, weaving a wreath of ground-pine for the lectern. Her face was very sad. Of course she knew I was going away, everyone knows such things in a little village. But she held her head high. If I had called her out onto the steps, she would have asked me once more to recant. I knew it was irrevocable. The fates had made us too proud.

I slipped down from my perch and made my way back to the buckboard. There was a wild west wind blowing, it howled and shrieked through the pines and I caught some of its fierce exultation. The summer had been bitter beyond words. The full life before me called, the life without need of hypocrisy.

When at last I was on the train, and felt the jar as it started, I walked forward into the smoking car. As a symbol of my new liberty, as reverently as if it had been a sacrament to the Goddess of Reason, I lit a cigarette. The tears were very close to my eyes as I sat there and smoked. But the pride of martyrdom held them back. Was I not giving up even Margot for the Cause of Truth?

III

The College was set on a hill top, overlooking a broad fair valley. There was none of the rugged grandeur of our Tennessee Mountains, it was a softer landscape than my home country offered. But the greatest difference lay in the close packed, well tilled fields. Here and there were patches of woods, but no forest. It was an agricultural country.

If I should set out to construct a heaven, I would build it on the lines of that old campus. Whenever nowadays I am utterly tired and long for rest, the vision comes to me of those ivy grown buildings and the rows of scrawny poplars. It is my symbol for light-hearted joy and contentment. The doleful shadow of my home did not reach so far, and I was more carefree there than I have ever been elsewhere.

I joined heartily in the student life, played a fair game of football and excelled in the new game of tennis. There is a period at the end of adolescence when if ever, you feel an exuberance of animal well-being, when it is a pride to be able to lift a heavier weight than your neighbor, when it is a joy to feel your muscles ache with fatigue, when your whole being is opening up to a new sensation for which you know no name. I remember glorious tramps in the deep winter snow, as I look back on them I know that the thrilling zest, which then seemed to me intimately connected with the muscles of my thighs and back, was the dawning realization of the sheer beauty of the world. I spent this period at college. I suppose that is why I love the place.

From the first only one subject of study interested me. It was not on the freshman year's curriculum. By some twist of fate "Anglo-Saxon" appealed to me vividly. I suppose it was an outgrowth from my boyish fondness for Malory's "Morte d'Arthur." In the library I found many books in the crabbed Old English of the earliest chronicles. They still seem to me the most fascinating which have ever been written. I deciphered some of them with ease. Before I could get the meat out of the others I had to master a grammar of Anglo-Saxon. All my spare moments were spent among the shelves. My classroom work was poorly done. But among the books I came into close contact with Professor Meer, the librarian and head of the English Literature Department. His specialty was Chaucer, but my interest ran back to an even earlier date. He was my second adult friend and many an evening I spent in his home. But our talk was always of literature rather than of life, of the very early days, when there were no traditions nor conventions and each writer was also a discoverer.

A phase of life which had never before troubled me began to occupy considerable of my thought. My attention was drawn to the women question by the talk of the football men. There were two very distinct groups among the athletes; the Y.M.C.A. men and the others. It was inevitable that I should feel hostile to the former. They used the phrases, spoke the language of the Camp Meeting. With great pain and travail I had fought my way free from all that. Many of them were perhaps estimable fellows, I do not know. I did not get well acquainted with any of them. But I was surprised to find myself often ill at ease with the others. Their talk was full of vague hints which I seldom understood. They had come to college very much more sophisticated than I. In the quest for manly wisdom, I read a book on sex-matters, which I found in my fraternity house.

It taught me very little. I have seen dozens of such books since and I cannot understand the spirit in which they are written. In the effort to be clean spirited and scientific the authors have fallen over backwards and have told their readers almost nothing at all. It was like a book which described the mechanism of a printing press without one word about its use or place in life. A printing press is a very lifeless thing unless one has some comprehension that not so much in itself but in its vast utility it is the most wonderful thing which man has made. The book which fell into my hands, described in detail, in cold blooded and rather revolting phraseology, the physiology of sex, but it gave no hint of its psychologic or social significance, it did not even remotely suggest that sooner or later everyone

who read it would have to deal with sex as a problem of personal ethics. It was a poor manual for one just entering manhood.

I had never been told anything about sex. I judged from the witticisms of the gymnasium that the others had discussed these matters a great deal in their preparatory schools. And with the added knowledge of later years, I am persuaded that my school had been unusually clean spirited. I never heard the boys talking of such things, and if any of them were getting into bad habits, they did it privately.

These college men boasted. Of course I hid my ignorance with shame. As the football season wore on the talk became more explicit. Some of the team, after the Thanksgiving Day game, with our rival college, which ended the season, were "going into town to raise hell." The Y.M.C.A. men expected to "come right home." A week or so before the last game, Bainbridge, our captain and a senior, showed some of us a letter which a girl in town had written him. The other fellows who saw the letter thought it hilariously funny. To me it seemed strange and curious. A woman, who could have written it was something entirely foreign to my experience.

Thanksgiving night – we had won the game – all of us, but the Y.M.C.A. men, went into town for a dinner and celebration. I happened to be the only man from my fraternity on the football team, and, when the dinner broke up, I found myself alone. My head was swimming a bit and I remember walking down the main street, trying to recall whether or not I had decided to launch out on this woman adventure. I was sure I had not expected to be left to my own resources. I was making my way towards the station to catch a train back to college, when I fell in with some of the fellows. They annexed me at once. Down the street we went, roaring out the Battle Cry of Freedom. They had an objective but every barroom we passed distracted their attention. It was the first time I had ever approached the frontier of sobriety – that night I went far over the line. Out of the muddle of it all, I remember being persuaded to climb some dark stairs and being suddenly sobered by the sight of a roomful of women. I may have been so befuddled that I am doing them an injustice, but no women ever seemed to me so nauseatingly ugly. Despite the protest of my friends, I bolted.

It is not a pleasant experience to relate, but it kept me from what might easily have been worse. I had missed the last train. Not wanting to spend the night in a hotel, nor to meet my fellows on the morning train, I walked the ten miles out to college. Somehow the sight of those abhorrent women had driven all the fumes of alcohol from my brain. In the cold, crisp night, under the low hanging lights of heaven, I felt myself more clear minded than usual. As sharply as the stars shone overhead, I realized that I had no business with such debauch. It was not that I took any resolution, only I understood beyond question that such things had no attraction to me.

It is something I do not understand. The Father had taught me that many things were sinful. But I do not think there was anything in my training to lead me to feel that drunkenness and debauch were any worse than card-playing. Yet I learned to play poker with a light heart. It was the same with theatre going and dancing. He had very much oftener warned me against these things than against drunkenness. The best explanation I can find, although it does not entirely satisfy me, is that vulgar debauch shocked some æsthetic, rather than moral instinct. It was not the thought of sin which had driven me to run away from those women, but their appalling ugliness.

Towards the end of the spring term, the long-delayed quarrel with the Father came to a head. I forget the exact cause of the smash-up, perhaps it was smoking. I am sure it commenced over some such lesser thing. But once the breach was open there was no chance of patching it up. In the half dozen letters which passed between us, I professed my heresies with voluminous underlinings. I had only one idea, to finish forever with pretense and hypocrisy.

I was foolish – and cruel. I did not appreciate the Father's love for me, nor realize his limitations. He was sure he was right. His whole intellectual system was based on an abiding faith. From the viewpoint of the new Pragmatic philosophy, he had tested his "truth" by a long life and had found it good. Perhaps in his earlier days he had encountered skepticism, but since early manhood, since he

had taken up his pastorate, all his association had been with people who were mentally his inferiors. He was more than a "parson," he was the wise-man, not only of our little village, but of the country side. All through the mountains his word carried conclusive weight. Inevitably he had become cock-sure and dogmatic. It was humanly impossible for him to argue with a youth like me.

In my narrow, bitter youth, I could not see this. I might have granted his sincerity, if he had granted mine. But for him to assume that I loved vice because I doubted certain dogma, looked to me like cant. But the men he knew, who were not "professing Christians," were drunkards or worse. He really believed that Robert Ingersoll was a man of unspeakable depravity. He could not conceive of a man leading an upright life without the aid of Christ. Peace between us was impossible. His ultimatum was an effort to starve me into repentance. "My income," he wrote, "comes from believers who contribute their mites for the carrying on of the work of Christ. It would be a sin to allow you to squander it on riotous living."

So my college course came to an end.

IV

In one regard the fairies who attended my christening were marvelously kind to me. They gave me the gift of friends. It is the thing above all others which makes me reverent, makes me wish for a god to thank. There is no equity in the matter. I am convinced that it is what the Father would have called "an act of grace." Always, in every crisis, whenever the need has arisen, a friend has stepped beside me to help me through.

So it was when the Father cut off my allowance. Utterly ignorant of the life outside, I was not so frightened by my sudden pennilessness as I should have been, as I would be to-day. Work was found for me. My friend, Prof. Meers discovered that he needed an assistant to help him on a bibliography which he was preparing. He offered me a modest salary – enough to live comfortably. So I stayed on in the college town, living in the fraternity house.

The library work interested me more than my study had done. Even the routine detail of it was not bad and I had much time to spend on the Old English which fascinated me. I was not ambitious and would have been content to spend my life in that peaceful, pleasant town. But Prof. Meers had other plans for me. Back of my indolent interest in old books, he was optimistic enough to see a promise of great scholarship. He was better as a critic of literature than as a judge of men. He continually made plans for me. I paid scant attention to them until almost a year had passed and we were beginning to see the end of the work he could offer me. I began to speculate with more interest about what I would do next.

Without telling me about it, Prof. Meers wrote to the head of a New York Library, whom he knew and secured a position for me. When he received the news he came to me with a more definite plan than I would ever have been able to work out for myself. He knew that a certain publishing house wanted to bring out a text book edition of "Ralph Roister Doister." He had given them my name and I was to prepare the manuscript during my free hours. This he told me would not bring me much money, but some reputation and would make it easier for him to find other openings for me, where I could develop my taste for Old English. I caught some of his enthusiasm and set out for my new work with high hopes.

Of my first weeks in the city there is little memory left except of a disheartening search for a place to live. After much tramping about I took a forlorn hall bedroom in a not over peaceful family. The quest for an eating place was equally unsatisfactory.

In the library I was put to uninteresting work in the Juvenile Department. But there, handling books in words of one syllable, I found a new and disturbing outlook on life. There was more jealousy than friendship among my fellow employees. The chances of advancement were few, the competition keen – and new to me. I did not understand the hostility, which underlies the struggle for a living. Once I remember I found a carefully compiled sheet of figures, which I had prepared for my monthly report, torn to bits in my waste paper basket. Another time some advice, which I afterwards discovered to have been intentionally misleading, sent me off on a wild goose chase, wasted half a day and brought me a reprimand from the chief. Such things were incomprehensible to me at first. It took some time to realize that the people about me were afraid of me, afraid that I might win favor and be advanced over their heads. I resented their attitude, but gradually, by a word dropped here and there, I learned how a dollar a week more or less was a very vital matter to most of them. One girl in my department had a mother to support and was trying desperately to keep a brother in school. There was a man whose wife was sick, the doctor's and druggist's bills were a constant terror to him. Very likely if I had been in their place, I would have done the little, mean things they did. Life began to wear a new aspect of sombreness to me. I could not hope for advancement without trampling on someone.

By temperament I was utterly unfitted for this struggle. My desire for life was so weak that such shameful, petty hostilities seemed an exorbitant price to pay for it. I would much rather not have been

born than struggle in this manner to live. I began to look about eagerly for some other employment. But I could find none which did not bear the same taint.

However it was there in that library that I encountered Norman Benson. He was near ten years older than I, tall and loose jointed. His face, very heavily lined, reminded me of our Tennessee mountaineers. But the resemblance went no farther. He was a city product, bred in luxury and wealth. He was variously described by the people of the library as "a saint," "a freak," "a philanthropist," "a crank." The chief called him "a bore." He was the idol of the small boys who ran errands for us and put the books back on the shelves. He gave them fat Egyptian cigarettes out of his silver case, to their immense delight and to the immense horror of Miss Dilly, who had the boys in charge.

His hobby, as he soon explained to me, was "a circulating library that really circulates." He had a strange language, a background of Harvard English, a foreground of picturesque slang – all illumined by flashes of weird profanity. Of course I cannot recall his words, but his manner of speaking I shall never forget.

"They call this a circulating library," he would shout. "Hell! It never moves an inch. It's stationary! Instead of going out around the town, it sits here and waits for people to come. And the people don't come. Not on your life! Only a few have the nerve to face out all this imposing architecture and red-tape. If there is anything to discourage readers, they don't do it because they've been too stupid to think of it. If a stranger comes in and asks for a book they treat him like a crook. Ask him impertinent questions about his father's occupation. Won't let him take a book unless he can get some tax-payer to promise to pay for it if he steals it! What in thunder has that got to do with it? Someone wants to read. They ought to send up an Hosanna! They ought to go out like postmen, and leave a book at each door every morning. Circulating? Rot!"

He had given his time and money for a year or two to bring about this reform. At first he had met with cold indifference. But he stuck to his point. He had put up his money as guarantees for any books which might be lost. He had persuaded half a dozen or more school teachers to distribute books among their scholars and the parents, paying them out of his own pocket for the extra work. He had established branches in several mission churches and in one or two saloons.

"That corpse of a librarian," he explained to me, "had the fool idea that his job was to preserve books – to pickle them! I've been trying to show him that every book he has on his shelves gathering dust, is money wasted, that his job is to keep them moving. The city's books ought to be in the homes of the tax-payers – not locked up in a library. The very idea horrified him at first. He was afraid the books would get dirty. Good Lord! What's the best end that can come to a book, I'd like to know? It ought to fall to pieces from much reading. For a book to be eaten by worms is a sin. I've been hammering at him, until he's beginning to see the light. He don't cry any more if a book has to be rebound."

Indeed, the "hammering" process had been effective. That year the chief read a paper at the National Congress on "Library Extension." Of course he took all the credit; boasted how the idea had come from his library and so forth. But Benson cared not at all for that. His plan had been accepted and he was content.

He interested me immensely. Why did a man with a large income spend his time, rushing about trying to make people read books they did not care enough for to come after? I could get no answer from him. He would switch away from the question into a panegyric on reading. It was a frequent expression of his that "reading is an invention of the last half century."

"Of course," he would qualify, "the aristocracy has enjoyed reading much longer. But the people? They've just learned how. The democratization of books is the most momentous social event in the history of the world. Think of it! More people read an editorial in the newspaper within twenty-four hours than could possibly have read Shakespeare during his entire life. There are dozens of single books which have had a larger edition than all the imprints of Elizabethan literature put together. Don't you see the immensity of it? It means that people all over the world will be able to think of the

same thing at the same time. It means a social mind. Plato lived in his little corner of the world and his teachings lived by word of mouth and manuscripts. Only a few people could read them, fewer still could afford to buy them. 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' swept across the country in a couple of years. Think how long it took Christianity to spread – a couple of hundred miles a century. And then think of the theory of evolution! It has captured the world in less than a generation! That's what books mean. We're just entering the epoch of human knowledge as compared to the old learning of individuals. It's gigantic! Wonderful!"

Benson, like many another, took a liking to me. I was lonely enough in that library. And finding no sympathy elsewhere, I improved every opportunity to talk with him.

One evening he asked me to come home with him to dinner. I accepted gladly, being more than tired of my pallid little room, and the sloppy restaurant where I ate. An evening with this rich young man, seemed attractive indeed. To my surprise he led the way to a downtown Bowery car. I did not know the city well and I thought perhaps this dismal street led to some fairer quarter. But the further we went the grimmer became the neighborhood. It was my first visit to the slums.

We got off at Stanton Street. It is so familiar to me now – with its dingy unloveliness, the squalor of its tenements, its crowding humanity, and the wonder that people can laugh in such a place – that it is hard to recall how it looked that first time. I think the thing which impressed me most was the multitude of children. Clearest of all I remember stepping over a filthy baby. It lay flat on its back, sucking an apple core and stared up at me with a strange disinterestedness. It did not seem to be afraid I would step on it. I wanted to stop and set the youngster to one side, out of the way. But I felt that I would look foolish. I did not know where to take hold of it. And Benson strode on down the street without noticing it.

A couple of blocks further, we came to a dwelling house with flower boxes in the windows. A brass-plate on the door bore the inscription, "The Children's House." So I was introduced to the Social Settlement. They were novelties in those days.

A tumult of youngsters swarmed about us as we entered. A sweet faced young woman was trying to drive them out, explaining with good natured vexation that they had over-stayed their time and would not go. They clambered all over Benson, but somehow he was more successful than the young woman in persuading them to go home. Her name, when Benson introduced me, gave me a start. It recalled a fantastic newspaper story of a millionaire's daughter who had left her diamonds and yachts to live among the poor. I had supposed her some sallow-faced, nun-like creature. I found her to be vibrantly alive, not at all a recluse.

The Settlement consisted of a front and rear tenement. The court between had been turned into a pleasant garden. With the hollyhocks along the walls and the brilliant beds of geraniums it was a strangely beautiful place for that crowded district. The men's quarters were in the back building. Benson had two rooms on the top floor, a small monastic bedroom and a larger study. It surprised me more than the courtyard. It was startling to find the atmosphere of a college dormitory in the center of the slums. The books, the fencing foils, the sofa-pillows in the window-seat – after my months in a furnished room – made me homesick for my fraternity house.

Downstairs in the cheery dining room, I met the staff of "Residents." The Rev. James Dawn, an Englishman, was the Head Worker. He was a graduate of Oxford and had been associated with Arthur Toynbee in the first London Settlement. His wife, also English, sat at the foot of the table. Benson introduced me rapidly to the others. "Miss Blake – District Nurse," "Miss Thompson – Kindergartner," "Long, Instructor in Sociology in the University," "Dr. Platt – of the Health Department." I did not begin to get the labels straight.

It was a very much better dinner than I could get in any restaurant, better than the food I had had at College and school. But the thing which impressed me most was the whizz of sharp, intellectual – often witty – conversation. The discussion centered on one of the innumerable municipal problems. I was ashamed of my inability to contribute to it.

It was to me a wonderfully attractive group of people. They enjoyed all which seemed most desirable in college life and added to this was a strange magnetic earnestness, I did not understand. I saw them relaxed. But even in their after-dinner conversation, over their coffee cups and cigarettes, there was an undercurrent of seriousness which hinted at some vital contact with an unknown reality. I was like an Eskimo looking at a watch, I could not comprehend what made the hands go round. I could see their actions, but not the stimuli from which they reacted. I knew nothing of misery.

That evening set my mind in a whirl. It was an utterly new world I had seen. I had never thought of the slums except as a distressful place to live. Stanton Street was revolting. I did not want to see it again. And yet I could not shake myself free from the thought of it – of it and of the strange group I had met in the Children's House. There seemed to be something fateful about it, something I must look at without flinching and try to understand.

On the other hand some self-defensive instinct made me try to forget it. The distaste for the struggle for life which had come to me from experiencing the petty jealousies of the library was turned into a dumb, vague fear by the sight of the slum. I turned to "Ralph Roister Doister" – on which I had made only listless progress – with a new ardor. The only escape which I could see from perplexing problems of life lay in a career of scholarship.

The Old English which had formerly been an amusement for me, now seemed a means of salvation. When Benson next suggested that I spend the evening with him, I excused myself on the ground of work.

But very often as I sat at my table, burning the midnight oil over that century old farce, the vision of that baby of Stanton Street, sucking the piece of garbage, came between me and my page. And I felt some shame in trying to drive him away. It was as though a challenging gauntlet had been thrown at my feet which I must needs pick up and face out the fight, or commit some gross surrender. I tried to escape the issue, with books.

BOOK III

I

Not long after this visit to the slums, when I had been in the city a little more than a year, I received a new offer of employment, through the kindness of Professor Meer. The work was to catalogue, and edit a descriptive bibliography of a large collection of early English manuscripts and pamphlets. A rich manufacturer of tin cans had bought them and intended to give them to some college library.

It offered just the escape I was looking for. I wrote at once, in high spirits, to accept it. However some cold water was thrown on my glee by Norman Benson. He was my one friend in the library and I hastened to tell him the good news. But when he read the letter he was far from enthusiastic.

"Are you going to accept it?" he asked coldly.

"Of course," I replied, surprised at his tone. "I hardly hoped for such luck, at least not for many years. It's a great chance."

"This really interests me," he said, laying down the books he was carrying and sitting on my desk. "What earthly good," he went on, "do you think it's going to do anyone to have you diddle about with these old parchments?"

"Why. It – " I began glibly enough, but I was not prepared for the question. And, realizing suddenly that I had not considered this aspect of the case, I left my response unfinished.

"I haven't a bit of the scholastic temperament," he said, after having waited long enough to let me try to find an answer. "It's just one of the many things I don't understand. I wouldn't deny that any bit of scholarship, however 'dry-as-dust,' may be of some use. I don't doubt that a good case of this kind could be made for the study of medieval literature. I don't say it's *absolutely* useless. But *relatively* it seems – well – uninteresting to me. It's in the same class as astronomy. You could study the stars till you were black in the face and you wouldn't find anything wrong with them, and if you did you couldn't make it right. Astronomy has been of some practical use to us, at least it helps us regulate our watches. But how in the devil do you expect to wring any usefulness out of Anglo-Saxon? Don't you want to be useful?"

His scorn for my specialty ruffled my temper.

"What would you suggest for me to do? Social-Settlement-ology?" I replied with elaborate irony.

But if he caught the note of anger in my retort, he was too busy with his own ideas to pay any attention to it. He got off the table and paced up and down like a caged beast, as he always did when he was wrestling with a problem. In a moment he came back and sat down.

"You don't answer my question," he said sharply. "You can stand on your dignity and say I have no right to ask it. But that's rot! I'm serious and I give you the credit of thinking you are. Now you propose to turn your back on the world and go into a sort of monastery. This job is just a beginning. You're making your choice between men and books, between human thought that is alive and the kind that's been preserved like mummies. Why? I ask. What is there in these old books which can compare in interest to the life about us. Truth is not only stranger than fiction, it is more dramatic, more comic, more tragic, more beautiful. Even Shelley never wrote a lyric like some you can see with your own eyes, perhaps feel. I like to know what makes people do things. I'd like to know what makes you accept this offer. I assume that you want to be useful to your day and generation. What utility do you hope to serve in tabulating these old books, which nobody but a few savants will ever read?"

I was entirely unprepared to answer his question. And I felt myself sink in his estimation. Why was I reaching out for the life of a bookworm with such eagerness? I understand now. I was a coward.

I was still sore from the wounds of my childish endeavor to comprehend God. I was afraid of life. I was afraid of the little child sucking the apple core on Stanton Street. The life about me, of which Benson spoke so enthusiastically, seemed to me threatening. It evidently laid an obligation of warfare on the people who entered it actively. I wanted peace. Books seemed to me a sort of city of refuge.

My new employer, Mr. Perry, the tin-can man, was a strange type. He had grown up in a fruit preserving industry and at thirty-odd he had invented a method of crimping the tops onto cans, without the use of solder. Good luck had given him an honest business partner and the patent had made a fortune for both of them. When the first instalment of royalties had come in, Perry had stopped stirring the kettle of raspberry preserves and had not done a stroke of work since. At forty he had built a "mansion" in the city and had gone in for politics. He bought his way to a seat in the State Senate, only to find that it bored him to extinction. After several other fads had proved uninteresting, he had set his heart on a LL.D. A friend had advised him to donate a valuable collection of books to some college.

He had sent a large check to a London dealer and this heterogeneous mass had been the result. As his interest in the matter had been only momentary he was decidedly penurious about it after the first outlay. That, I suppose, is why I, instead of a recognized authority, was chosen for the work. He had no idea what the catalogue should be like, and his one instruction to me, was to make it "something scholarly."

There was in his monstrous mansion an apartment originally designed for the children's tutor. But there had never been any children. These quarters were given to me. There was a private entrance, a bedroom, bath and study, where my meals were served, and there was a stairway down to the library.

In the three years I worked for him I did not see him ten times. His wife was dead, he lived away a good deal and, to my great satisfaction, he never invited me to his bachelor parties – the reverberations of which sometimes shook me out of sleep. Once every six months or so he would bring an expert to look over my work. As they found no fault and he could not understand it, he was convinced that it was scholarly.

It was a period of great content for me. The rut into which I fell was deep indeed. I saw no one. Almost my only contact with others was by mail. And my letters all related to my specialty. Eight full hours I worked in the library. The architect had not expected Mr. Perry to do much reading and, the windows being few, the room was gloomy. I had often to use artificial light. At five I went for an hour's walk in the park. At least this was my theory. But the least inclemency was an excuse to take some manuscript up to my room, to my shaded lamp and open fire. The daily eight hours on the catalogue was only a beginning. As soon as I had finished my edition of "Ralph Roister-Doister," I began a monograph on Anglo-Saxon Roots. My ambition was to win a fellowship in an English University. By the time my catalogue was finished, I would have enough money put by for a year or more of study in Oxford. My life was mapped out.

II

The darkness came unexpectedly.

Sometimes my eyes had been tired, but I had not taken it seriously. One afternoon, as I laid out a sheet of paper on the desk, the page was suddenly obscured by a dancing spider-web – a dizzying contortion of black and white – growing denser and denser. I clapped my hands over my eyes and felt so sudden a relief I was afraid to take them away again.

I got up slowly and felt my way with my foot to an easy chair. How long I sat there, my hands pressed hard against my eyes, I do not know. I had read somewhere of a man going blind with just such symptoms. It was fear unspeakable, fear that made me laugh. When one feels that the gods are witty it is a bad sign.

I was suddenly calm. It was accepted. I thought for a few minutes, my eyes still shut, and then felt my way to the telephone.

"Central," I said, and I remember that my voice was calm and commonplace. "Will you give me the Eye and Ear Hospital? I can't look up the number. I'm blind."

"Sure," came back the answer. "It must be hard to be blind."

A clutch came to my throat. It comes to me now as I write about it, comes every time I hear people complaining that modern industry has robbed our life of all humanity, has turned us into mechanisms. Such talk makes me think of the sudden sympathy which came to me out of the machine. Whenever I am utterly blue and discouraged, I go into a telephone booth.

"Hello, Central," I say, "tell me something cheerful. I'm down on my luck."

It has never failed. Always some joking sympathy has come out of the machine and helped me to get right again.

When the doctor came, he looked a minute at my desk, at the whole eye-straining mass of faded print and notes. He snapped on the electric light.

"I suppose you work a lot in this fiendish glare?"

"I need a strong light," I said.

He grunted in disgust.

"This will hurt," he said, as he made me sit down near the electric light, "but you've got to bear it."

He fixed a little mirror on his forehead and flashed the cruel ray into my eye. Back somewhere in the brain it focussed and burned. The sweat broke out all over me.

"Now the other eye."

I flinched for a moment, holding my hand before it.

"Come, come," he said gruffly, and I took my hand away.

When the ordeal was over, he tied a black bandage over my eyes, laid me down on the lounge and lectured me. When he stopped for breath, I interrupted.

"What hope is there?"

He hesitated.

"Oh! Tell me the truth."

"Well – I guess the chances are even – of your seeing enough for ordinary work. But they will never be strong. You'll have to give up books. You must keep your eyes bandaged – complete rest – six weeks – then we can tell how much damage you've done. It is only a guess now."

We talked business. I had enough money saved for a private room and good treatment, so he put me into a cab and told the driver to deliver me at the hospital.

It was an appalling experience, that ride. Try it yourself. Ride through the streets with your eyes darkened: you will hear a thousand sounds you never heard before, even familiar sounds will be

fearsome. Every jolt, every stoppage will seem momentous. I was glad the doctor did not come with me, glad that no one saw me so afraid.

At last we stopped and I heard the cabby call.

"Hey! there. Come out and take this man."

I revolted at my helplessness, pushed the door open and stumbled as I stepped out. I would have fallen heavily, if an orderly had not been there to catch me.

"You must be careful at first, Mister," he said. "You'll get used to it in time."

That was just what I was afraid of – getting used to the darkness!

However, his words jogged my pride. The ways of the gods seemed funny to me again, and I joked with him as he led me up some stairs and into a receiving room. The house surgeon, to me only a voice, was nervously cheerful. He kept saying, "It'll be all right." "It'll be all right." He seemed to be dancing about in all directions. My ears had not become accustomed to locating sounds. I suppose he moved about normally, but he seemed to talk from a different angle every time.

"This is Miss Barton," he said at last. "She is day nurse in your ward. She'll make you comfortable."

Mechanically I thrust my hand out into the darkness. It was met and grasped by something I knew to be a hand, but it did not feel like any hand I had ever seen.

"I'm glad to meet you," I said.

With some jest about people not usually being glad to meet nurses, she led me off to the elevator and my room.

"You've quite a job before you – exploring this place," she said with real cheer in her voice. "There are all sorts of adventures in this *terra incognita*. Everything is cushioned so you can't bang your shins, but watch out for your toes. At first you'd better stay in bed for a few days and rest. Have you all you need in your valise?"

"I don't know. A servant packed it."

"Well then. That's the first bit of exploring to do. I'll help you."

Her voice also jumped about surprisingly. There was something weird in being in a room with an utter stranger whose existence was only manifested by this apparently erratic voice and by hands which unsnarled my shoe laces, handed me my pajamas, and put me to bed.

"I must run off now and attend to Mrs. Stickney, next door – she is very fussy. The night nurse, Miss Wright, comes on pretty soon, at six. She'll bring you your supper. When you wake up in the morning, ring the bell, here over your head, and I'll bring you breakfast. Good night."

It was when she had gone and I alone there in the strange bed, that I first felt the awful void of the darkness. I do not like to think of it now.

It was probably not many minutes, but it seemed hours on end, before Miss Wright brought me my supper. She sat on the edge of my bed and helped me find the way to my mouth. She was considerate, and tried to be cheering. But I did not like her. Always her very efficiency reminded me of my helplessness. And her voice seemed too large for a woman. It gave me the impression that she was talking to someone several feet behind me.

They had, I think, mercifully drugged my food, for I fell asleep at once. When I woke I had no idea of the hour. For some time I lay there in the darkness wondering about it. I did not want to wake anybody up. But at last I decided that I would not be so hungry before breakfast time. After much futile fumbling I found the bell above my bed. In a few minutes Miss Barton's voice – even after all these years, I think of it as the type of sunny cheerfulness – announced that it was near eleven. When the breakfast was finished, with joking cautions against setting the bed on fire, she filled my pipe and taught my hands the way to the matchbox.

In the weeks which followed, I lost all track of the sun's time. I came to figure my days in relation to her. During the "nights," when she was off duty, the darkness was very black.

It would be impossible for me to give in detail the evolution by which Miss Barton, my nurse, changed into my friend, Ann. It began I think when she discovered how utterly alone I was. The second day in the hospital I was given permission to have visitors, and I sent for my employer's man of law.

"Whom do you want to have come to see you to-morrow?" Miss Barton asked when he had gone.

I could think of no one.

"Do you want me to write some letters to your relatives?"

"No. I haven't any near kin."

"Well. Haven't you some friends to write to?"

In the three years I had lived at Mr. Perry's I had severed all social connections. I had not kept up my college friendships. Benson had been so opposed to my leaving what he called active life that I had lost all touch with him. My only relations with people had been technical, by correspondence. I did not want to trouble even Prof. Meer with my purely personal misfortunes. This seemed utterly impious to Miss Barton. What? I had lived several years in the city and had no friends? It was unbelievable! Unfortunately it was true. I could think of no one to ask in to relieve my loneliness. And there is no loneliness like the darkness.

The next week was the worst, for the nurses changed and Miss Wright, who was on day duty, was not companionable. However, Miss Barton, taking compassion on me, used often to sit with me by the hour at night. How fragmentary was my contact with her! No one who has not been deprived of sight can realize how large a part it plays in the relationships of life. I could only hear. There was always the creak of the rocking chair beside my bed and her voice, sometimes placid, sometimes tense, swinging back and forth in the darkness. It did not seem to have any body to it. Whenever her hands touched me, it startled me.

But from her talk I learned something of the person who owned the voice. She had been born in a Vermont village, where no one had ever heard of a professional woman, but as far back as she could remember, she had set her heart on medicine. Her father she had never known. Her mother, a fine needlewoman and embroidery designer had brought up the children. A brother was an engineer and the older sister a school teacher. But there had not been enough money to send Ann to medical college. Nursing was as near as she had been able to get towards her ambition. But what could not be given her she intended to win for herself. She had taken this position because the night duty was very light and every other week she could give almost the entire day to study. Her interest had turned to the new science of bacteriology. Her vague ambition to be a doctor had changed to the definite ideal of research work.

Somehow the voice, so calmly certain when it dealt of this, gave me an impression of integrity of purpose, of invincible determination, such as sight has never given me of anyone. I did not, any more than she, know how she was to get her research laboratory. But I could not doubt that she would. She had unquestioning faith in her destiny. I find myself emphasizing this phase of her. It impressed me most at the time.

But her conversation was by no means limited to her ambition. She had read a thousand things besides her medicine, and spoke of them more frequently. She was constantly referring to books, to facts of history and science, of which I was ignorant. She talked seriously of ethics and the deeper things of life. It woke again in me all the old questionings and aspirations of prep. school days – the things I had hidden away from in my book-filled library. She was the first person I had met since the doctor at school who showed me what she thought of these things. Benson had talked copiously about the objective side of life, but he had never referred to his inner life. The people I had known wanted to make this world a prayer meeting, a counting house or a playground. Ann was no more interested in such ideals than I was.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.