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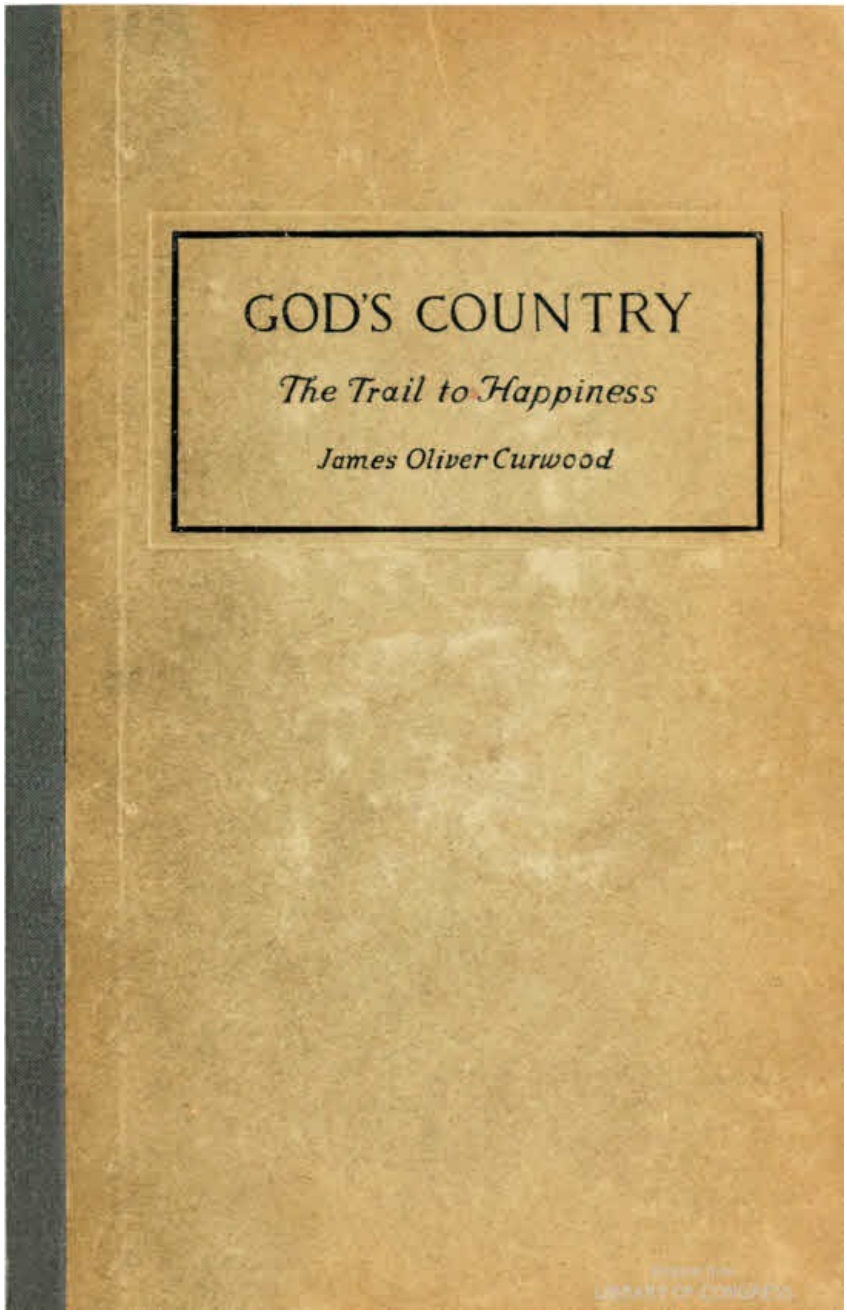

GOD'S COUNTRY

The Trail to Happiness

By
JAMES OLIVER CURWOOD
Author of
The Valley of Silent Men
The River's End, etc.

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The Four Trails to Happiness

The First Trail

MY SECRET OF HAPPINESS

The First Trail
MY SECRET OF HAPPINESS

[3]

To-night I am in a little cabin in the heart of a great wilderness. Outside it is dark. I can hear the wind sighing in the thick spruce tops. I hear the laughter of a stream out of which I took my supper of trout. The People of the Night are awake, for a little while ago I heard a wolf howl, and, not far away, in an old stub, lives an owl that hoots at the light in my window. I think it's going to storm. There is a heaviness in the air, and, in the drowse of it, the sweetness of distant rain.

I am strangely contented as I start the writing of this strangest of all the things I have written. I had never thought to give voice to the things that I am about to put on paper; yet have I dreamed that every soul in the world might know of them. But the task has seemed too great for me, and I have kept them within myself, expecting them to live and die there.

[4] I am contented on this black night, with its promise of storm, for many reasons—though I am in the heart of a peopleless forest fifteen hundred miles from my city home. In the first place, I have built, with my own hands, this cabin that shelters me. My palms are still blistered by the helve of the ax. I am the architect of the fireplace of stone and mud in which a small fire burns for cheer, though it is late spring, with summer in the breath of the forests. I have made the chair in which I sit and the table on which I write, and the builder of a marble palace could take no greater pleasure in his achievement than have I.

I am contented because, just now, I have the strange conviction that, in this wild and peopleless place, I am very close to that which many peoples have sought through many ages and have not found.

In the distance, I can hear thunder, and a flash of lightning illumines my window. A cry of a loon comes with the flash. It is strange; it is weird—and wonderful. And also, in a way, it has just occurred to me that it is a fitting kind of night to begin that which I have been asked to write. For this night, for a short space, will be like the great world at large—a world that is rocking in the throes of a mighty tumult—a tumult of unrest, of discontent, of mad strivings, of despair, and lack [5] of faith—a world that is rushing blindfold into unknown things, that is seeking rest and peace, yet can never find them.

It is, I repeat, a strange night to begin the writing of that which I have been asked to write, and yet I do not think that I would have the night changed. It seems to picture to me more vividly the unrest of the world fifteen hundred miles away—and fifteen thousand miles away. I seem to see with clearer vision what has happened during the past two years—the mad questing of a thousand million people for a spiritual thing which they cannot find. I see, from this vantage-point of the deep forest, a world torn by five hundred schisms and religions, and I see not one religion that fills the soul with faith and confidence. I see the multitudes of the earth reaching up their arms and crying for the Great Mystery of life to be solved. Questions that are racking the earth come to me in the whisperings of the approaching storm. Can the ghosts of the dead return? Can the spirits of the departed commune with the living? Is the world on the edge of an inundation of spiritualism? Does the salvation of humanity lie there—or there—or there? What shall I believe? [6] What *can* I believe?

The rain is beginning to beat on the roof of my cabin and, in number, the drops of the rain remind me of the millions and the tens of millions of restless men and women who are reading avidly, in the pages of magazines and books, the "experiences" of those who are giving voice to new creeds and new beliefs or reviving old ones long lost in the dust of forgotten ages.

Ghosts have been revived; spirits are on the move again. New generations are drinking in with wonder and suspense the whole bagful of tricks worn out ten thousand generations ago. To-morrow it may be the revival of witchcraft. And the next day new prophets may arise and new religions take the place of the old. For so travel the minds of men; and so they have traveled for hundreds of thousands of years before Christ was born and Christianity was known; and so they will go on seeking until God is found in a form so simple and intimate that all humanity will at last understand.

The storm has broken. It is like a deluge over the cabin. The thunder and crash of it is in the spruce tops—and such is the dreadfulness of the tumult and the aloneness of the place that I am [7] in, that I would cease where I am did I think that anything I am about to say might be sacrilege. But when a mind gives expression to that which it holds as truth, there cannot be sacrilege.

I have been asked to put on paper something of that religion which I have discovered for myself in nature. There are many who will laugh; there are many who will disbelieve, for it will be impossible for me to make myself entirely clear in such a matter as this. For I have found what, to me, is God; and I cannot expect to startle the world, even if I desired to do so, for what I have found has been found in a very simple way—without bringing spirits back from the dead, or hearing voices out of tombs, or gathering faith through the inspiration of mediums.

I have found the heart of nature. I believe that its doors have opened to me, and that I have learned much of its language. Through adventure and bloodshed I have come to a great understanding; and understanding has brought me health and faith and a joy in life. And because these things will do the world no harm, and may do some good, I am undertaking to write the story of a great and inclusive God whom men and women and little children should be made to [8] know, but to whom, unfortunately, the swift pace of the times has made most of us strangers.

I fear that I am going to shock many people, and so I am of a mind to get the shock over with and come to the meat of what I have to say. But I shall start with something which those who read this must concede—that everyone in the world seems to be looking for something which will bring him more comfort and more happiness from life. That, I think, is the reason the Catholic Church is the only Church which is growing to any extent. It is growing because it is the only Church which is holding out its arms as a mother and giving a human being a breast upon which to lay his head when he is in trouble. Yet I am not a Catholic. Neither am I a Protestant. I do not belong to the High, Low, Broad, or Free Church. I do not confess to Romanism, Popery, or Protestantism any more than I do to Mohammedanism, Calvinism, or the doctrines of the Latter-Day Saints. I am not a sectarian any more than I am a Shaker or a Restitutionist. I do not believe that one necessarily goes to hell because he does not accept Christ as the Son of God. I believe [9] that Christ was a good man and a great teacher of his times, just as there have been other good men and great teachers in their times. I can look upon the Mussulman at prayer, or the Parsee at his devotion, or the Eskimo calling upon his unseen spirits with the same feeling of brotherhood and understanding that I can see a congregation of Baptists or Methodists singing their praise to the God on high. I do not pity or condemn the African savage and the Indian of the Great Barrens because they see their God through another vision than that of the Christian. There were many roads that led to old Rome. And there are many roads, no matter how twisted and dark they seem to us, that lead to the better after-life.

I wish that some mighty power would rise that could show to man how little and how insignificant he is. Only therein, I think, could the thorns and brambles be taken out of that path to peace and contentment which he would like to find, and would find if he were not blinded by his own importance. He is the supreme egoist and monopolist. His conceit and self-sufficiency are at times almost blasphemous. He is the human peacock, puffed up, inflated, flushed in the [10] conviction *that everything in the universe was made for him*. He looks down in supercilious lordship on all other life in creation. He goes out and murders millions of his kind with his scientific inventions; yet he calls a tiger bad and a pest because the tiger occasionally kills the two-legged thing that hunts it. If he kills a man illegally, it is called murder, and he is hanged and goes to hell. If his government tells him it is proper to kill a thousand men, he kills them, and is called a hero—and a chosen place is kept waiting for him in heaven. His conceit blinds him to fact. He thinks our little earth was the chosen creation of the Supreme Power—forgetting that the earth is but a fly-speck compared with the other worlds in space. He thinks that Christ was born a long time ago, and that time began with our own knowledge of history—when, as a matter of fact, he has no reason for disbelieving that man lived and died hundreds of thousands of years ago, and that countless religions have come and gone in the eons of the past. He does not stop to reason that, in number, he is as a drop in the ocean compared with other beating hearts on earth.

To me, every heart that beats is a spark from the breath of God. I believe that the warm and [11] beating heart in the breast of a singing robin is as precious to the Creator of things as the heart of a man counting money. I believe that a vital spark exists in every blade of grass and in every leaf of the trees. It is the great law of existence that life must destroy in order to live, and when destruction is inevitable and necessary, it ceases to be a misdemeanor. But to let live, when it is not necessary to destroy, is a beautiful thing to consider.

Before men find a satisfying faith and peace, they must come to see their own littleness. They must discover that they are not *alone* in a partnership with God, but that all manifestation of life, whether in tree or flower or flesh and blood, is a spark loaned for a space by that Supreme Power toward which we all, in our individual ways, are groping. There is one teacher very close to us, as close to the poor as to the rich, to show us this littleness and make us understand. That teacher is nature—and, in my understanding of things, all nature is rest and peace. I believe that nature is the Great Doctor, and, if given the chance, can cure more ills and fill more empty souls than all the physicians and preachers of the earth. I have had people say to me that my creed is a beautiful one for a person as fortunately situated as myself, but that it is impossible for the great [12] multitudes to go out and find nature as I have found it. To these people, I say that one need not make a two-thousand-mile trip along the Arctic coast and live with the Eskimo to find nature. After all, it is our nerves that kill us in the long run, our over-restless minds, our worrying, questing brains. And nature whispers its great peace to these things even in the rustling leaves of a corn field—if one will only get acquainted with that nature. And my desire—my ambition—the great goal I wish to achieve in my writings is to take my readers with me into the heart of this nature. I love it, and I feel that they must love it—if I can only get the two acquainted.

“Fine line of talk for a man whose home is filled from cellar to garret with mounted heads and furs,” I hear some of my good friends say.

Quite true, too. It is hard for one to confess oneself a murderer, and it is still harder to explain one’s regeneration. Yet, to be genuine, I must at least make the confession, though it is less the fact of murder than the fact of regeneration that I have the inclination to emphasize, now that I have the opportunity. There was a time when I took pride in the wideness and diversity of my [13] killings. I was a destroyer of life. Now I am only glad that these killings ultimately brought me to a discovery which is the finest thing I have to contemplate through the rest of my existence.

In my home are twenty-seven guns, and all of them have been used. Many of the stocks are scarred with tiny notches whereby I kept track of my “kills.” With them, I have left red trails to Hudson’s Bay, to the Barren Lands, to the country of the Athabasca and the Great Bear, to the Arctic Ocean, to the Yukon and Alaska, and throughout British Columbia. This is not intended as a pæan of triumph. It is a fact which I wish had never existed. And yet it may be that my love of nature and the wild things, at the last, is greater because of those reckless years of killing. I am

inclined to believe so. In my pantheistic heart, the mounted heads in my home are no longer crowned with the grandeur of trophies, but rather with the nobility of martyrs. I love them. I commune with them. I am no longer their enemy, and I warm myself with the belief that they know I am fighting for them now.

In this religion of the open, I have come to understand and gather peace from the whispering [14]
voices and even the silence of all God-loving things. I have learned to love trees, and there are times when I put my hands on them because I love them, and rest my head against them because they are comrades and their comradeship and their might give me courage. There is a gnarled old cripple of an oak in the yard of my Michigan home, a broken and twisted dwarf which many people have told me to destroy. But that tree and I have “talked over” many things together; it has pointed out to me how to stand up under adversity, has shown me how to put up a man’s fight. For, eaten to the heart, a deformity among its kind, each spring and summer saw it making its valiant struggle to “do its best.” It was then I became its friend, gave it a helping hand, stopped its decay and death, and each season now the old oak is stronger, and often I go out and sit with my back against it, and I hear and understand its voice, and I know that it is a great friend that will never do me wrong.

It is thus that this religion of mine finds its strength from the sources of great and unknown power. But before it comes in all its peace and joy, man must bring down his head from out of the [15]
clouds of egoism, and say, “The oak is as great as I—perhaps greater.”

Not long ago, it seemed to me that my world had gone dark and that it would never grow completely light again. In perhaps the darkest hour, I flung myself down upon the ground close to the bank of a stream. And then, close over my head—so close I could have tossed a pebble to it—a warbler near burst its little throat in song. And the miracle of it was that it was a dark and sunless day. But the warbler sang, and then he chirped in the boughs above; and when I looked at the ground beside me again, I saw there, peeping up at me out of the grass, a single violet. And the bird and the violet gave me more courage and cleared my world for me more than all the human friends who had told me they were sorry. The violet said, “I am still here; you will never lose me,” and the little warbler said, “I will always sing—through all the years you live.” And stronger than ever came the faith in me that these things were no more an accident of creation than man himself.

Once I saw this Great Doctor of mine a burning, vibrant force in a room of a crowded tenement, from the roof of which one could not see a blade of grass or a tree. In fact, that force filled three [16]
rooms, in which lived a man and woman and five children. I spent an hour in those rooms on a Sunday afternoon, and the experience of that hour in a hot and crowded tenement was a mightier sermon than was ever preached to me in the heart of a forest. At every window was a box in which green stuff was growing. There were flowers in pots. A pair of canary-birds looked down upon the smoky roofs of a great city and sang. What interested me most was two contrivances the man had made to force oats into swift germination and growth. In a week, he told me, the green sprout of an oat would be two inches long. Then I saw why they were grown. Several times while I was there would a dove come to a window and wait for a bit of the green. I could see they were different doves. They told me at least a dozen were accustomed to come in that way. They were the children’s pets. A little baby in arms cooed at them and waved his arms in delight. I have seen many poor tenement families, but that, I think, was the only happy one. The singing of the birds, the coming of the doves, the growing of green things in their room were their inspiration, their hope, the promise of dreams that would some day come true. Nature had become their religion, [17]
and yet they did not know it as such. It was calling them out into the great open spaces—and they were living in anticipation of that day when they would answer the call.

Because I have spent much of my time in adventuring in distant wildernesses, and exploring where other men have not gone, it has been accepted by many that my love for nature means a love for the distant and, for most people, the inaccessible wilds. It is true that in the vast and silent places one comes nearer, perhaps, to the deeper truths of life. Of the wild and its miracles I love to write, and when I come to that part of my story, I shall possibly be happiest. But I would be unfair to myself, and the religion of nature itself, if the great truth were not first emphasized that its treasures are to be possessed by mankind wherever one may turn—even in a prison cell. I was personally in touch with one remarkable instance of this in the Michigan State Penitentiary, at Jackson, where a canary-bird and a red geranium saved a man from madness and eventually gained him a pardon, sending him out into the world a living being with a new and better religion [18]
than he had ever dreamed of before.

But the open skies and the free air were intended from the beginning of things as the greatest gifts to man, and it is there, if one is sick in body or soul, that one should seek. Whether it is a mile or a thousand miles from a city makes little difference. For nature is the universal law. It is everywhere. It is neither mystery nor mysterious. Its pages are open; its life is vibrant with the desire to be understood. The one miracle is for man to bring himself down out of the clouds of his egoism and replace his passion for destruction with the desire to understand.

I have in mind a case in point.

I had a very dear friend, a newspaper man, whose wife had died. I don’t know that I ever saw a man more utterly broken up, for his love for her was more than love. It was worship. He grew faded and thin, and a gray patch over his temple turned white. The mightiest efforts of his friends

could do nothing. He wanted to be alone, alone in his home, where he could grieve himself to death by inches. I knew that his case was harder because he was merely tolerant of religion. One [19] day, the idea came to me that resulted in his spiritual and physical salvation. I took him in my auto, and we went out into the country four or five miles, opened a gate, drove down a long lane, and stopped at the edge of a forty-acre wood.

“Fred, I am going to show you a wonderful city,” I said. “Come with me—quietly.”

We climbed over the fence, and I led him to the heart of the wood, and there we sat down, with our backs to a log.

“Now, just to humor me, be very still,” I said. “Don’t move, don’t speak—just listen.”

It was three o’clock in the afternoon, that wonderful time of a summer day when nature seems to rouse herself from midday slumber to fill the world with her rustling life. The sun fell slantwise through the wood, and here and there, under the roofs of the trees, we could see golden pools and streams of it on the cool earth.

“This is one of the most wonderful cities in the world,” I whispered, “and there are hundreds and thousands of such cities, some of them within the reach of all.”

The musical ripple of a creek came to our ears. And then, slowly at first, there came upon my [20] friend the wonder of it all. He understood—at last. About us, through all that forty acres of wood, the air seemed to whisper forth a strange and wonderful life. Over our heads, we heard a grating sound. It was a squirrel gnawing through the shell of a last autumn’s nut. On an old stub, a woodpecker hammered. Close about us were the “cheep, cheep, cheep,” and “twit, twit, twit,” of little brown brushbirds. A warbler burst suddenly into a glorious snatch of song. A quarter of a mile away, a crow cawed, and between us and the crow we heard a fox-squirrel barking, and, a little later, saw it, with its mate, scrambling in play up and down the trees. My friend caught my arm and pointed. He was becoming interested, and what he saw was a fat young woodchuck passing near us on a foraging expedition to a neighboring clover field.

For an hour we did not move, and through all that city was the drone and voice of life, and that life was a soft and wonderful song, soothing one almost to sleep. And when, at last, my friend whispered again, “It sounds as though everything is talking,” I knew that the spirit of the thing had got into him. Then I drew his attention to a colony of big black ants whose fortress was in the [21] log against which we were resting. They were working. Two of them were trying to drag a dead caterpillar over my friend’s knee. When we rose to go, I led him past a little swale in which a score of blackbirds had bred their young. On a slender willow, a bobolink was singing. A land-turtle lumbered back into the water, and the bright eyes of green-headed frogs stared at us from patches of scum. Under a bush, a score of toads were teaching their tiny youngsters to swim. When my friend saw the little fellows clinging to their mothers’ backs, he laughed—the first time in many months.

When we went back to the car, I said:

“You have seen just one ten-thousandth of what nature holds for you and every other man and woman. You haven’t believed in God very strongly. But you’ve got to now. That’s God back there in the wood.”

That was four years ago. To-day, that man not only lives in the heart of nature but, from a special assignment man, he has risen to the managing editorship of a big metropolitan daily. He has only his summer vacation in which to get out into the big woods, but he has made room for nature all [22] about him. From early spring until late autumn, his front and back yard fairly burst with life. And it is not, like most yards, merely for show and passing pleasure to the eyes. He has brought himself down out of the clouds of man’s egoism, and is learning and taking strength from nature —which he now worships as the great “I am.” He has developed a hobby for “interbreeding plants,” as he calls it, and especially gladioli. Each morning in spring and summer and autumn, he goes out into his garden, and, from the thousand living things there, he receives strength for his nerve-racking duties of the day; and at night, after his task is done, he returns to his garden to seek that peace which is the great and vibrant force of the life that is there. During the months of winter, he has his little conservatory. And this man—for more than thirty years—hardly knew whether an oak grew from an acorn or a seed!

Yet has he one great regret. And more than once he has said to me, with that grief in his voice which will never quite die out: “If we had only found these things before, she would be with me now. I am convinced of it. It was this strength she needed to keep her from fading away—to build [23] her up into joyous life again. Sometimes I wonder why the Great Power that is above did not let her live to go into the wood with us that day.”

Hours have passed since I first sat down to write these thoughts that were in my mind. The storm has passed, and, following it, there has come a marvelous silence. Both my door and window are open, and there is rare sweetness in the breath of the rain-washed air. I can hear the near-by trees dripping. The creek runs with a louder ripple. The moon is shimmering through the fleecy clouds that are racing south and east—toward my “civilized” home, fifteen hundred miles away. Over all this world of mine there is, just now, a vast and voiceless quiet. And if I were superstitious, or filled with the imagination of some of the prophets of old, I am sure I would hear a Voice speaking out of that mighty solitude, and it would say:

“O you mortal, blind—blind as the rocks which make up the mountains!

“Blind as the trees which you think have neither ears nor eyes!

“Made to see, yet unseeing; making mystery out of that which was born with you; seeking—yet [24]
seeking afar for that which lies close at hand!

“You want peace. You go in quest of a Breast mightier than all life to rest thy tired head upon. And thy quest is like the drifting of a ship without a rudder at sea. For you think that the world is young because thou livest in it now—and it is old, so old that thousands and tens of thousands of peoples lived and died before Christ was born. You think that civilization has come to pass, and ‘civilization’ has died a thousand times under the dust of the ages. You believe you are treading the only path to God—yet have a million billion people died before you, unknowing the religions which you now know.

“O you mortals of to-day, you are small and near-sighted, and hard of hearing—even more than they who lived a million years before you, when the world was an hour or two younger than now!

“What are you? Proud of thy purse, vain of thy power, conceited in thy self-glorification—yet you seek a simple thing and cannot find it. You cannot find *rest*. You cannot find *faith*. You cannot find *understanding*. You cannot find that Breast mightier than all life upon which to rest thy head [25]
when the end comes and when you go to join those trillions who have gone before you.

“And, in your despair, you cry out that you know not which way to turn, that you seek in darkness, that the world is a wilderness of schisms and religions, and that you cannot tell which is the right and which is the wrong. For you know that worlds have lived and died through the eons of centuries before Christianity was born. And you are oppressed by doubt even as you grope!

“Yet you know deep in thy soul that the heavens were not an accident. You know that hundreds and thousands of worlds greater than thine own have traveled their paths in space for eternities. You know that the sun was set in the skies so long ago that all the people of the earth could not count the years of its life. And you know that a Great Hand placed it there. And that Hand, you say, was God.

“Yet you seek—and you seek—and you seek—and doubt everlastingly clouds thine eyes; and when darkness comes and you stand at the edge of the Great Beyond, you look back, and—lo!—the path you have traveled seems very short, and it is cluttered with brambles and thorns and the [26]
wreckage of shattered hopes and wasted years.

“And then you see the Light!

“And, as thy spirit departs, the mystery unveils—the answer comes.

“For that which you sought, you looked too far. Close under thy feet and close over thy head might you have found it!”

The Second Trail

I BECOME A KILLER

The Second Trail
I BECOME A KILLER

[29]

This morning is a glory of sunshine and peace after last night's rain. It seems inconceivable that the blue sky above the forest was filled a few hours ago with the crash of thunder and the blaze of lightning. I was up at dawn, wakened by a pair of red squirrels playing upon the roof of my cabin. Together we watched the sun rise, and after that they chattered about my open door while I prepared my breakfast. We are becoming great friends. One of them I have given the name of Nuts, and for no reason in the world unless it is because there are no nuts up here; and the other, the sleek, beautiful little female, I call Spoony because she looks at me so slyly, with her pretty head perked on one side, as if flirting with me.

It is only eight o'clock, yet we have been up nearly four hours. At the edge of the creek, less than a stone's throw from the cabin, I have built me a narrow table of smooth-hewn saplings between [30] two old spruce trees, and this is my open-air studio when the weather is fine. Word of it has gone abroad, though I am many hundreds of miles from civilization. Many kinds of wild things have come to get acquainted with me, fascinated chiefly, I think, by the marvelous new language of my clicking typewriter. The welcome and friendship of these little wilderness-hearts are growing nearer and more apparent to me every day; and with each day the Great Truth speaks to me even more clearly than the day before—that each of these beating hearts, like my own, is a part of that nature which I worship and is as vitally a spark of its life as the heart which is beating inside my own flannel shirt.

These friends of mine, gathering about me more intimately and in greater number with each passing day, are individuals to me because I have come to understand them and know their language. There is the Artful Dodger, for instance—I sometimes call him Bill Sykes or Captain Kidd—screaming close over my head this very moment. In very intimate moments I call him Arty, or Kid, or Bill. He is a big blue jay. In spite of all that has been said and written against him, I have a very brotherly affection for Bill. He is a man's man, among birds, notwithstanding that he [31] occasionally breakfasts on the eggs of other birds, and kills more than is good for his reputation. Also, he is the greatest liar and the biggest fraud and the most brazen-faced cheat in the bird kingdom. But I know Bill intimately now, where I used to kill him as a pest, and I love him for all his sins.

He is a pirate who never loses his sense of humor. He is always raising a disturbance just for the excitement of it, and when he has drawn a crowd, so to speak, he will slip slyly away to some nearby vantage-point and laugh and chuckle over the rumpus he has raised. Right now, he is screaming himself hoarse forty feet above my head. Two others have joined him, and they are making such a bedlam of sound that Nuts and Spoony have ceased their chattering. There!—I have fired a stick at them, and they are gone. They have had their joke, and are quite satisfied—for the present.

I can hear the musical rippling of the creek again, now that Bill and his blustering pals are gone, and my typewriter is like a tiny machine gun sending its clicking notes out into the still forest. A pair of moose-birds, almost as big as the jays, are hopping about, so near that, at times, they are [32] perched on the end of my sapling table. They are the tamest birds in the wilderness, and within another day or so will be eating out of my hand. Unlike the jays, they make no disturbance. They are soft and quiet, never making a sound, and their big, beautiful eyes fairly pop with their intense interest in me. I like their company, because there is a philosophy about them. They never tire of looking at me, and studying me, and at times I have the very pleasant fancy that they are bursting with a desire to speak. They are very gentle, and never fight or scold or commit any sins that I know of; and just now, as the two look at me with their big soft eyes, I find myself wondering which of us is of most account in the final analysis of things.

Ten or fifteen rods above me, the creek widens and forms a wide pool overhung with trees, so that, in the hottest weather, it must be a delightfully refreshing place. I can see it plainly from where I am sitting, for the creek twists a little, so that it is running directly toward me when I look in that direction. Many wild things come to that pool. This morning, I found a bear-track there, and the fresh hoof-prints of a doe and fawn. Yesterday, a pair of traveling otters discovered [33] it, but when I tried them out with the voice of my typewriter, they turned back. I am confident they will return, and that we shall get acquainted.

At the present moment, in looking toward the pool, I am struck by what at first thought I might consider a discordant note in this wonderland of quiet and peace that is about me. At the edge of the pool, rigid and watchful, a hawk is poised on a dead limb projecting from a lightning-struck stub. He is hungry and eager to kill. I have seen him launch himself twice after a victim, but each time without success. Finally, he will succeed. He will kill a living thing that he himself may continue to live. Yet I have no inclination to shoot him. For to live, and to cherish that spark of life that is in him, is as much his right as it is mine. He is not, like man, a killer for the love of killing. He wants his breakfast.

And in fairness to him I think of two tender young spruce-partridges which I shot late last evening, and which I shall roast for my dinner, along with a potato and a flavor of bacon. My religion does not demand vegetarianism any more than it does flesh; for that, too, is life. For the trees whispering above me now are as alive to me as the moose-birds perched at the end of my [34] table, yet when necessity comes I cut them down with an ax, and make a cabin or cook my food with them. All nature cries out that life must exist upon life, that one tree must grow upon the

mold of another, that for each green blade of grass another blade must die. It is not against a wise and necessary destruction that the God of all nature cries out. The crime—the crime greater than all other crimes—is destruction without cause.

That is what I must come to now, even in this glory of peace that is whispering about me—I must face the task of confessing my own sins as a killer, as a destroyer of life for the love and thrill of killing. I was born, like all the children of men, a monumental egoist. My parents were egoists. My forefathers for ten thousand generations were egoists before me, and I was the last product of their egoism—one of the billion and a half people who are living to-day in the blindness of a self-conceit that has filled their worlds with schisms and religions as false and as unstable as the treacherous sands of human "almightiness" upon which they have been built.

From the beginning, I did not need argument or education to tell me that I was the greatest of all [35] created things—that my particular brand of life, of all life on the earth, was the only life that God had intended to be inviolate. That fact was pounded home to me in the public schools; it was preached to me in the churches. I was part and parcel of the great "I Am." For me, all the universe had been built. For me, the Great Hereafter was solely created. All other life was merely incidental, and created especially for my benefit. It was mine to do with as I pleased. In a mild sort of way, the school and the church told me to have a little charity, and not to "hurt the poor little birdies."

But church and school did not tell me, and has never told its pupils, that all other life on the earth was as precious as my own, and had an equal right to fight for its existence. It is true I was told that never a sparrow falls that God does not see it, but it is also true that, for six years, my state urged its children to kill sparrows for a bounty of two cents a head. I found no course in school or college that attempted to teach me that the spark of life animating my own body was no different from the sparks which animated all other living things. Both religion and school instilled into me [36] that I was next in place to God. All other life, from the life of trees and flowers to that of beasts and birds, was put on earth for my special benefit. No other life had a right to exist unless the human egoist saw fit to let it live. And all this simply because human life happened to be the most powerful life, and cleverest in the art and science of destroying other life.

I wonder what would happen if for ten generations the churches and schools would teach their little children and their grown-ups that there is a heaven for flowers and trees and birds and butterflies just as surely as there is a heaven for man! What would happen if the teaching of the Great Truth of nature began in the kindergarten, and went on through the lives of men and women, growing stronger in the race as generation added itself to generation? It is something to think about in these days when, in our madness for a faith, we are reviving ghosts and phantom voices and are frightening our children again with the diseased and weird belief that the spirits of the dead can come back to us. We want something that is clean and healthy and inspiring, something that is beautiful to contemplate, and which is not an overwhelming insult to that Great [37] Power of the universe of which we are so small a part—and in the kindergarten we could plant the seed of that thing, so that, through the school and the church and all life, it would continue to grow stronger with each generation, until, at last, man would shake off that deadliest of all his enemies, his own egoism and self-conceit. Then, and not until then, will he find contentment and peace and happiness in the brotherhood of all other life that is about him.

But I seem to be evading the issue—my own confession as a monumental egoist and a killer. I have said that my parents were egoists, like all their forefathers before them. Yet the world never held a better mother than mine. I do not except any who may sit in heaven at the present time. And my father, as a man, was far better than his son will ever be. He was a gentleman of the old school, living, as he died, an example of courage and fearlessness and honor to all who knew him. Yet did these two splendid people, like all other parents, foster and cultivate my egoism from the beginning. They did it unconsciously, blindly, as hundreds of millions of other parents are doing to-day.

My father loved hunting and fishing, and at eight years of age I possessed my own gun. I [38] remember with what pride he taught me to shoot and to stalk my first living victims; and when we returned from a hunt, if I had killed anything, it was always to me that my beloved mother gave her greatest attention and commendation. We lived on an Ohio farm then, and I became a sort of boy prodigy in the art of hunting. When I was nine years old, a newspaper in a near-by city published a story of my prowess, and I do not think I was more puffed up over it than my father himself. By the time I was twelve, I had lost all respect for that life which the laws of our state said I might take. I had a fine collection of birds' eggs, and another "splendid" collection of birds' wings. My room was decorated with the wings.

I always recall with an odd sort of feeling that at this particular height of my boyish slaughter of life I "got religion," and got it hard. At Joppa, a "four-corners" two miles from our farm, a series of revival meetings was going on that winter, and I cannot remember anyone in all our community who did not get the religious fever, except most of the youngsters. But it hit me hard. I felt that I was actually inspired. So deeply did the excited preachings effect my mind that [39] frequently, when I was alone, I felt that angels were with me. One moonlight night, in returning from a revival, I actually saw an angel, and the beautiful thing with white wings and white raiment and wonderful flowing hair walked halfway home with me. When I told that story at school the next day, and insisted that it was true, I had five different fights. My mother said that it probably was true, for she was delighted that I had become religious. So I fought, and licked—

and got licked—for about a month because of my faith.

But what I am coming to is this: Though practically our whole township was converted, at no time did this religion tell me to stop killing. So inspired was I that Mr. Teachout, the revivalist, had me give a short “sermon” one evening—and I recall vividly how, in “introducing” me, he said, in a loud voice and with a great flourish of his arms, that I “was the best hunter in all Erie County and could kill more game in a day than almost any grown hunter there.” Whereupon there was a mighty applause from the hundred people present, and I was the proudest youngster in Ohio.

Why? [40]

Because from a church rostrum I was hailed as the greatest boy killer in that county! No one of all those Christians told me that I should stop killing. They made a hero of me because I was already becoming a master in the art of killing. They built up my egoism to a point where it became blasphemous—to a point where it more than offset my mother’s pleadings that I stop shooting birds for their wings. Then came a thing which, as I look back upon it now, seems to me monstrous. There was to be a big “hunters’ supper” to end the revival. The men chose sides, and on a certain day all these men set out to kill. They were to kill nothing “outside the law.” But all life not protected by law might be sacrificed. I remember that a rabbit counted five points, a squirrel four, a hawk six, a blue jay two, and so on. The side that lost out on “points,” or, in other words, destroyed the least life, was compelled to furnish the supper. How I did slaughter! When I came in to the “count” that night, my game-bag was filled to the brim with dead things. Among other creatures I had killed seventeen blue jays! Any wonder that Captain Kidd and his pals screamed over my head this morning?

And yet good Christian people still regard with horror the day when pagan Rome burned the martyrs. [41]

My education in the art of destruction increased as my years grew in number. I was not alone. All the human world was destroying, just as it is destroying to-day. We moved back to the little city of Owosso, in Michigan, where I was born. In Erie County, Ohio, my nickname had been Slippery—just why I don’t know; now, in Michigan, it became Nimrod and Wildcat Jim. I haunted our beautiful Shiawassee River as ghosts are now haunting some of our scientific writers. I trapped and hunted and fished more than I studied—so much more, in fact, that I became decidedly unpopular with our high-school principal, Mr. Austin, who is now my very good friend. At last, I stood at the splitting of the ways—and I chose my own course. I trapped a season, and, with the money earned, started in on a special course at the University of Michigan. Things went well. I slipped through college with the ease of an eel, took up newspaper work in Detroit, became a special writer and a magazine writer and the youngest metropolitan newspaper editor in Michigan. I felt inclined to believe that I was a wild and uproarious success. [42]

But under it all burned my desire to get back to my old job of destruction, and this desire led me into my long years of adventuring into the far northern wildernesses.

As I sit here now, clicking my typewriter in the still heart of the forest, it is a wonder to me that some colossal spirit of vengeance does not rise up out of it and destroy me. And yet, when I consider, I know why that vengeance does not come—and in the face of this “great reason,” I see my littleness as I have never seen it before. It is because, very slowly, my egoism is crumbling away. And as it crumbles, my big brother—all nature—grips my hand ever more closely, and whispers to me to tell others something of what I have found. And that big brother is not only the spirit of the heart-beating things about me, but also the spirit and voice of the trees, of the living earth that throbs under my feet, of the flowers, the sun, the sky. It is all reaching out to me with a great show of friendliness, and I seem to feel that fear and misunderstanding have slipped away from between us. It is inviting me to accept of it all that I may require, yet to cherish that which I [43] cannot use. It is telling me, as it has whispered to me a thousand times before, the secret of life; that the life in my own breast and all this that is about me are one and the same—and that, in our partnership for happiness, we each belong to the other. And there must be no desire for vengeance between us.

Yet, to me, it does not seem like justice, looking at it from the warped and narrow point of view of my human mind. It is the human instinct to demand an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. And I cannot see why my God of nature should give me such reward of peace and friendship after what I have done. It has always been my logic that life is the cheapest thing in existence. There is just so much earth, so much water, so much air about us; but of life there is no end. So we go on destroying. If nature would keep this destroyed life unto herself for a few generations, instead of giving it back to us in her unvengeful way, the earth would soon become a desert. Then we would learn our lesson.

I am thinking, as I write this, of a beautiful little forest in a wonderful valley in the heart of the British Columbia mountains. It was a glorious thing to look down upon that day when I destroyed [44] it. I call it a forest, though there was not more than an acre of it, or two at the most. And the valley was really a “pocket” among the mighty peaks of the Firepan Range. It was of balsams and cedars, rich green, and densely thick—a marvelous patch of living tapestry, vibrant with the glow and pulse of life in the sunset of that day. Into its shelter we had driven a wounded grizzly which had refused to turn and fight. And so thick and protecting was the heart of it that we could not get the grizzly out. Night was not far away, and in its darkness we knew our game would escape us. And the thought came to us to burn that little paradise of green. There was no danger of a spreading fire. The mountain walls of the “pocket” would prevent that. And it was I who struck the match!

In twenty minutes, the little forest was a sea of writhing, leaping flame. It cried out and moaned in the agony of conflagration. The bear fled from its torture and its ruin, and we killed him. That night, the moon shone down on a black and smoldering mass of ruin where a little while before had been the paradise.

In our camp, we laughed and exulted. The egoism of man made us feel our false triumph. What it [45] had taken a thousand years to place in that cup of the mountains we had destroyed in half an hour—yet we felt no regret. We had destroyed a thousand times more life than filled our own pitiable bodies, yet did the false ethics of our breed assure us that we had done no wrong—simply because the life we had destroyed had not possessed a form and tongue like our own.

"This man must be losing his reason," I hear some of my readers say. Is it that, or is a bit of reason just returning to me, after a million years of sleep? If it is madness, it is of a kind that would comfort the world could all be mad as I am mad. Life is Life. It is a spark of the same Supreme Power, whether in a tree, a flower, or a thing of flesh and blood. To me, as I view it now, the wanton destruction of that little paradise was as tragic as the destruction of life carried about on two legs or four. I feel that the crime of its destruction was as great as that of another day which I recall most vividly in these moments.

I was in another wonderland of the northern mountains, and my companion was a grizzled old hunter who had learned the art of killing through a lifetime of experience. With our pack-outfit of [46] seven horses, we were hitting for the Yukon over a trail never traveled by white man before. So glorious was the valley we were in on this day of which I write that at noon we struck our camp. So awesome was the vastness and beauty of it that my soul was held spellbound with the magic of it. On all sides of us rose the mighty mountains, with snow-crowned peaks rising here and there out of the towering ranges. The murmur of rippling water filled the soft air with soothing song; green meadows, sweet with the perfume of wild hyacinths, violets, and a hundred other flowers, carpeted the rich earth about us; on the sun-warmed rocks, whistlers lay in fat contentment, calling to one another like small boys whistling between their teeth; the slopes were dotted with ptarmigan; a pair of eagles soared high above us, and from the patches and fingers of timber came the cry and song of birds. With my back propped against a pile of saddles and panniers I carefully scanned the slides and slopes through my hunting-glasses. High up on the crag of a mountain-shoulder, I picked up a nanny-goat feeding with her kid. Still farther away, on a green "slide" at least two miles from camp, I discovered five mountain-sheep lying [47] down. And after that, swinging my glasses slowly, I came to something which sent a thrill through my blood. It was a mile away, a great, slow-moving hulk that I might have mistaken for a rock had my eyes not been trained to the ways and movement of game. It was a grizzly.

Alone I went after him, armed with man's deadliest weapon of extinction, a .405 Winchester. Inside of half an hour I was well in the teeth of the breeze coming up the valley, and almost within gunshot of my victim. I came to a coulee and crept up that, and when I reached the table-land meadow where it began, a thousand feet above the valley, I found myself within a hundred yards of the grizzly.

He was digging like a dog for a gopher. And, then, suddenly, my heart gave a thump that almost choked me. In a twist of the mountain-bench, not more than seventy or eighty yards above me, were two more grizzlies. I hesitated, and looked back down the coulee, for a moment doubtful whether to retreat or declare war. Then I decided. In my hands was a killer of the deadliest and surest kind. I was an expert shot and my nerves were steady. I began. I think I fired five shots in perhaps thirty seconds, and the three big grizzlies died almost in their tracks. A conqueror [48] returning in his triumph to old Rome could not have been more elated than I. I remember that I leaped and danced and shrieked out at the top of my voice in the direction of camp. I was mad with joy. Three thousand pounds of flesh and blood lay hot and lifeless under my eyes, and I, the human near-god, with my own two insignificant hands and a mechanical thing, *had taken the life from it*!

I sat down on one of the huge carcasses that still breathed under me. I wiped my face, and my blood was running a race that heated me as if with fire. And the thought came to me: "Oh, if the world could only see me now—here in my glorious triumph—with these great beasts about me!" For it was a mighty triumph for man, the egoist. In thirty seconds I had destroyed a possible one hundred years of throbbing, heart-beating life, a hundred years of winter, a hundred years of summer, a hundred mating-seasons, and the thousand other lives that now would never be born! I stood up, and shrieked again toward the camp, and far above me out of the blue of the sky I heard an answering cry from one of the eagles....

Yes, as I sit here, looking back over the days that are gone, I wonder that the spirit of vengeance [49] does not rise up out of the forest and destroy me, even as I have destroyed. It would be justice, according to that justice which man the egoist metes out. And yet, even as I wonder, the answer comes to me very clearly. I am no different than hundreds of millions of others. I have destroyed in my own way, while others have destroyed in theirs. And nature, the most blessed of all things, is not vengeful. God forgives. And nature is God. It is God that lives in the rose, in the violet, in the tree, just as he lives in the heart of man. It is God that breathes in the grass which makes the earth sweet to tread upon, and it is God that lives in the song of birds. His "life" is all-encompassing, the vital spark of all existent things. Instead of sending ghosts back to earth to prove his power, he gives us all these things, and lives and breathes in them, that we may have him with us in physical things all the days of our lives if we will only rise out of our egoism—and understand.

And now I have come again to the parting of a way. I have bared the black side of my ledger, and

it has not been pleasant work for me. To-morrow begins the joyous part of my task—the beginning of that story which will tell how at last my eyes were opened, how understanding came to me, and with that understanding a new faith which will live with me through all the rest of the years of my life. [50]

The Third Trail
MY BROTHERHOOD

The Third Trail
MY BROTHERHOOD

[53]

To-day is Sunday, and I have just returned from a week's hike up the mysterious little creek that runs past my cabin. It seems good to be home again, and Nuts and Spoony and Wild Bill, the blue jay, have given me a royal welcome, and I am almost convinced my pop-eyed moose-bird friends are trying to tell me who was the thief in my cabin while I was gone. On that "to-morrow" when I had promised myself another day of writing, the *Wanderlust* came to me, and I packed up a kit and a week's supply of grub and started out to explore my creek. It is a very individual sort of creek—it has character, even, if it hasn't a name. It comes out of deep, dark, and unexplored masses of forest to the north, and I have fancied it bringing down all sorts of romance and tragedy out of the hidden places if it could only talk. So I went to the end of it to find out its secrets for myself. And there was so much of interest that I could fill a book with it. I don't think [54] any other white feet have ever traveled up this creek, which I now call "Lonesome." Surely not even an Indian has been along it for at least a generation, for I did not find the mark of an ax or sign of a fire or vestige of deadfall or trap-house.

But it did take me forty miles back into a country of such savage wilderness and dense forests that I have almost determined to build me another cabin there a little later, if for no other reason than to live for a while with the hundreds of owls that inhabit certain parts of it. I have never seen so many owls anywhere in the Northland, and I figure this is because the big snow-shoe rabbits have been multiplying for several years past, and now exist there literally in thousands. At many places along the creek, the earth was beaten hard by their furred feet. By all the signs, I have predicted that next year, or the year after, the "seven-year rabbit-plague" will come along and kill off ninety out of every hundred. Then the owls will scatter, and most of the lynxes and foxes and wolves will wander off into other hunting grounds, for the rabbit is the staff of life of the flesh-eating birds and beasts of the big northern forests, just as all the world over wheat is [55] the mainstay of human stomachs.

But I am wandering a bit from the point in mind—which is to say that, in leaving on my journey of exploration, I forgot to close the window of my cabin, and through that open window entered the rascally thief whom the pair of moose-birds are trying to tell me about. I think Bill knows also, but I don't believe he would give a brother robber away, even if he did have four feet and a tail. By tracks and two or three other signs, I know the thief is a wolverine, who, like the pack-rat over in the mountains, steals almost entirely for the fun of it. This mischief-making humorist, among other things, has carried away a hat, one of my two frying-pans, several tins, half a slab of bacon, and my favorite fish-cleaning knife during my absence. But I know this clever fellow's ways, and have hope that I shall soon recover my property if I keep my eyes open and listen with both my ears.

And I shall not kill him, no matter how red-handed—or red-footed—I catch him. A few years ago, I would have planned to ambush him with a rifle. But now I have the desire to become as intimate with him as possible and learn a little more definitely what he wants with a knife, a skillet, and [56] my pans. I feel that, for his theft, he should in some way be rewarded and not slain, for he has added to my interest in life by rousing a keen and harmless curiosity. His is only one way in which nature is constantly adding fullness of life and greater contentment to my years. Everywhere, even to the smallest things under my feet and at my hand, I am learning more and more of the marvelous ways and life of all creation, and the more I learn the more I am convinced that I am simply an atom in its vast brotherhood, and I am finding a great happiness by making myself actually a part of it.

Heretofore, I have been a self-expatriated spark of life, so to speak; in my human egoism, I have held myself apart from all other sparks of life that were not formed in my own poor and unlovely shape—and, even then, I considered myself considerably better than those who did not happen to be of my particular color and breed.

Two very simple things are adding to my pleasure in life this early afternoon, and illustrate the point I have in mind—if one can bow one's head down to the level of understanding. I am writing [57] again between the two big spruce trees, but during my week of absence other sparks of life have, in a way, taken possession of my table. From between two of the hewn saplings that form the top of this table, where the big storm of wind must have flung a bit of earth and a seed, a tender green sprout of something has started to grow. It is a single spear now, not of grass, and its green is the whitish green of the lower part of an asparagus shoot. To me, it seems fairly to pulse with life, and I have the very foolish feeling within me that nature planned this little surprise for me while I was away, and that, if I give it a bit of brotherly attention, I am going to have a flower on my table, not transplanted or plucked, but there deliberately through friendship for me. However foolish this notion may be, it is a very pleasant one to have, and its effect is to bring me much nearer to the Creator of things than any sermon I could hear preached from a pulpit; for I am not listening merely to words about God, but I am looking directly at a physical part of God, and I find a great satisfaction in this faith.

A second interesting thing that has happened to my table is that it has become a plain across [58] which now runs the trail of a big tribe of ants. These ants, I have found, climb up the farthest right-hand support of my table and proceed straight across to the big spruce on my left, up which they disappear; and a returning file of the workers come down the spruce and hit it "cross-country" to the table-leg again. They don't seem to be bearing any burdens, yet they move with precision and purpose, and I have come to understand that, when ants move in this way, they

have something very definite in mind. I am convinced they are moving from one fortress home to another, or at least that every “working” individual in the tribe is personally investigating some new discovery that has been made either up the spruce or in the direction of the creek. Later, I will know more about it.

But the point that impresses itself upon me most is that, in my destroying days, I would have swept the friendly little green sprout from its cradle, and would have driven the ant tribe from my property, destroying as many of them as possible. Again I want to emphasize that I am not a crank, or narrow-minded in my religion of “live and let live.” If this same tribe of ants had invaded my cabin, and were preying on things necessary to me, I would destroy them or drive [59] them away. That is my nature-given privilege—to protect myself and what is mine. It is also the privilege of every other spark of life. These same ants, were I to stand on their fortress, would attack me desperately. But now they do not molest me. And I do not molest them. It is the beautiful law of “live and let live”—so long as the necessity for destruction does not arise.

When I sat down at my typewriter an hour ago, I had planned to begin immediately the telling of what I have wandered somewhat away from—the story of a few incidents which helped to bring about my own regeneration, and which at last impressed upon me this great Golden Rule of all nature—live and let live. The big dramatic climax in that part of my life happened over in the British Columbia mountains, where my love of adventure has taken me on many long journeys.

But the change had begun to work in me before then. My conscience was already stabbing me. I was regretting, in a mild sort of way, that I had killed so much. But I was still the supreme egoist, believing myself the God-chosen animal of all creation, and when at any time I withheld my [60] destroying hand, I flattered myself with a thought of my condescension and human kindness.

At the particular time I am going to write about, I was on a big grizzly-hunt in a wild and unhunted part of the British Columbia mountains. I had with me one man, seven horses, and a pack of Airedales trained to hunt bear. We had struck a grizzly-and-caribou paradise, and there had been considerable killing, when, one day, we came upon the trail of Thor, the great beast that showed me how small in soul and inclination a man can be. In a patch of mud his feet had left tracks that were fifteen inches from tip to tip, and so wide and deep were the imprints that I knew I had come upon the king of all his kind. I was alone that morning, for I had left camp an hour ahead of my man, who was two or three miles behind me with four of the horses and the Airedale pack. I went on watching for a new campsite, for the thrill of a great desire possessed me—the desire to take the life of this monster king of the mountains. It was in these moments that the unexpected happened. I came over a little rise, not expecting that my bear was within two or three miles of me, when something that was very much like a low and sullen rumble of far- [61] away thunder stopped the blood in my veins.

Ahead of me, on the edge of a little wallow of mud, stood Thor. He had smelled me, and, I believe, it was the first time he had ever smelled the scent of man. Waiting for this new mystery in the air, he had reared himself up until the whole nine feet of him rested on his haunches, and he sat like a trained dog, with his great forefeet, heavy with mud, drooping in front of his chest. He was a monster in size, and his new June coat shone a golden brown in the sun. His forearms were almost as large as a man’s body, and the three largest of his five knifelike claws were five and a half inches long. He was fat and sleek and powerful. His upper fangs, sharp as stiletto-points, were as long as a man’s thumb, and between his great jaws he could have crushed the neck of a caribou. I did not take in all these details in the first startling moments; one by one they came to me later. But I had never looked upon anything in life quite so magnificent. Yet did I have no thought of sparing that splendid life. Since that day, I have rested in camp with my head pillowed on the arm of a living grizzly that weighed a thousand pounds. Friendship and love and [62] understanding have sprung up between us. But in that moment my desire was to destroy this life that was so much greater than my own. My rifle was at my saddle-horn in its buckskin jacket. I fumbled it in getting into action, and in those precious moments Thor lowered himself slowly and ambled away. I fired twice, and would have staked my life that I had missed both times. Not until later did I discover that one of my bullets had opened a furrow two inches deep and a foot long in the flesh of Thor’s shoulder. Yet I did not see him flinch. He did not turn back, but went his way.

Shame burns within me as I write of the days that followed; and yet, with that shame, there is a deep and abiding joy, for they were also the days of my regeneration. Day and night, my one thought was to destroy the big grizzly. We never left his trail. The dogs followed him like demons. Five times in the first week we came within long shooting-range, and twice we hit him. But still he did not wait for us or attack us. He wanted to be left alone. In that week, he killed four of the dogs, and the others we tied up to save them. We trailed him with horses and afoot, and never [63] did the spoor of other game lure me aside. The desire to kill him became a passion in me. He outgeneraled us. He beat all our games of trickery. But I knew that we were bound to win—that he was slowly weakening because of exhaustion, and the sickness of his wounds. We loosed the dogs again, and another was killed.

Then, at last, came that splendid day when Thor, master of the mountains, showed me how contemptible was I—with my human shape and soul.

It was Sunday. I had climbed three or four thousand feet up the side of a mountain and below me lay the wonder of the valley, dotted with patches of trees and carpeted with the beauty of rich, green grass, mountain-violets and forget-me-nots, wild asters, and hyacinths. On three sides of me spread out the wonderful panorama of the Canadian Rockies, softened in the golden sunshine of late June. From up and down the valley, from the breaks between the peaks, and from the little gullies cleft in shale and rock that crept up to the snow-lines came a soft and droning murmur. It

was the music of running water—music ever in the air of summer, for the rivers and creeks and tiny streamlets gushing down from the melting snow up near the clouds are never still. Sweet [64] perfumes as well as music came to me; June and July—the last of spring and the first of summer in the northern mountains—were commingling. All the earth was bursting with green; flowers were turning the sunny slopes and meadows into colored splashes of red and white and purple, and everything that had life was giving voice to exultation—the fat whistlers on their rocks, the pompous little gophers on their mounds, the squirrel-like rock-rabbits, the big bumblebees that buzzed from flower to flower, the hawks in the valley, and the eagles over the peaks.

Earth, it seemed, was at peace.

And I, looking over all that vastness of life, felt my own greatness thrust upon me.

For had not the Creator, of all things, made this wonderland for *me*?

There could be no denial. I was master—master because I could think, because I could reason, because I held the reins to an unutterable power of destruction. And then the vastness of time seized upon me like a living thing. Yesterday, a thing had happened which came strongly into my thoughts of to-day. Under a great overhanging cliff I had found a part of a monster bone, as [65] heavy as iron—a section of a gigantic vertebra. Two years before I had found part of the skeleton of a prehistoric creature, identical with this, and, from photographs which I took of it the scientific departments of the University of Michigan and the government at Ottawa agreed that the bones were part of the skeleton of a mammoth whale that once had swum where the valleys and peaks of the Rocky Mountains now disrupt the continent.

And on this Sunday, looking down, I thought of the monster bone I had found yesterday in the dry shale and sand under the cliff. When the Three Wise Men saw the star in the east, that bone was as I had found it. It was there when Christ was born. It was there, unmoved and untouched, before Rome was founded, before Troy died in the mists of the past, before history, as we know history, began. It was there a million years ago, ten million, fifty, a hundred. And, thinking of this, I felt myself growing smaller and smaller; my egoism died away, and I saw these mountains obliterated and under the blue of a vast ocean, and rising out of that ocean I saw other continents, peopled with other people, moved by other religions, beating to the pulse of other [66] civilizations long dead. I heard the beat of waves below me, where grew the grass and the flowers of the valley. And the droning music of that valley seemed to change into the low whisperings of countless trillions of men and women and little children who had lived and died in those other civilizations of the lost ages; and that fancied whispering of dead worlds told me a great truth—that the Supreme Arbiter of things had watched over all those trillions just as he was now watching over me, that I was but a pitifully small grain of dust in the great scheme of things, that my egoism was criminal, sacrilegious, a curse set upon myself by myself. And the soft and droning whisper also told me the time would come when my own "civilization" would be obliterated, to be followed by a hundred, a thousand, or a million others, each in its turn to live and die.

And it was then, on that Sunday precious to me, that I asked myself an old, old question in a great, new way—"What is God?"

And looking down into the valley, and up into the sky, understanding came to me. God is there, and there, and there. He is the Infinite Power. He is Life. Life began infinities ago, and it will [67] continue through other infinities. While we are squabbling among ourselves with our little religions and our little views, while we are preaching the damnation of beliefs that are not ours, while sects fight to convert sects that do not think as they think, while our narrow-gage minds travel in their narrow-gage paths,—that Infinite Power is watching and waiting, as it has watched and waited from the beginning, and as it will watch and wait until the end. And I stared down into the valley, green and glorious and filled with sunshine and peace, and that low-sung whisper seemed to say, "If this is not God what *is* God?" And then also, in a new way, came something in my brain which said to me, "*And who are you?*"

I climbed higher up the mountain. I felt my greatness gone. Kindly, something had told me how pitiful I was. I was not mighty. I was no more in the ultimate of things than a blade of grass. My egoism, on that glorious Sunday, began to crumble in my soul. And then, by chance if you will have it so, came the climax of that day.

I came to a sheer wall of rock that rose hundreds of feet above me. Along this ran a narrow ledge, [68] and I followed it. The passage became craggy and difficult, and in climbing over a broken mass of rock, I slipped and fell. I had brought a light mountain-gun with me, and in trying to recover myself I swung it about with such force that the stock struck a sharp edge of rock and broke clean off. But I had saved myself from possible death, and was in a frame of mind to congratulate myself rather than curse my luck. Fifty feet farther on I came to a "pocket" in the cliff, where the ledge widened until, at this particular place, it was like a flat table twenty feet square. Here I sat down, with my back to the precipitous wall, and began to examine my broken rifle.

I laid it beside me, useless. Straight up at my back rose the sheer face of the mountain; in front of me, had I leaped from the ledge, my body would have hurtled through empty air for a thousand feet. In the valley I could see the creek, like a ribbon of shimmering silver; two or three miles away was a little lake; on another mountain I saw a bursting cascade of water leaping down the heights and losing itself in the velvety green of the lower timber. For many minutes, new and

strange thoughts possessed me. I did not look through my hunting-glasses, for I was no longer seeking game. My blood was stirred, but not with the desire to kill. [69]

And then, suddenly, there came a sound to my ears that seemed to stop the beating of my heart. I had not heard it until it was very near—approaching along the narrow ledge.

It was the click,—click,—click of claws rattling on rock!

I did not move. I hardly breathed. And out from the ledge I had followed came a monster bear!

With the swiftness of lightning, I recognized him. It was Thor! And, in that same instant, the great beast saw me.

In thirty seconds I lived a lifetime, and in those thirty seconds what passed through my mind was a thousand times swifter than spoken word. A great fear rooted me, and yet in that fear I saw everything to the minutest detail. Thor's massive head and shoulders were fronting me. I saw the long naked scar where my bullet had plowed through his shoulder; I saw another wound in his fore leg, still ragged and painful, where another of my soft-nosed bullets had torn like an explosion of dynamite. The giant grizzly was no longer fat and sleek as I had first seen him ten [70] days ago. All that time he had been fighting for his life; he was thinner; his eyes were red; his coat was dull and unkempt from lack of food and strength. But at that distance, less than ten feet from me, he seemed still a mighty brother of the mountains themselves. As I sat stupidly, stunned to the immobility of a rock in my hour of doom, I felt the overwhelming conviction of what had happened. Thor had followed me along the ledge, and, in this hour of vengeance and triumph, it was I, and not the great beast, who was about to die.

It seemed to me that an eternity passed in these moments. And Thor, mighty in his strength, looked at me and did not move. And this thing that he was looking at,—shrinking against the rock,—was the creature that had hunted him; this was the creature that had hurt him, and it was so near that he could reach out with his paw and crush it! And how weak and white and helpless it looked now! What a pitiful, insignificant thing it was! Where was its strange thunder? Where was its burning lightning? Why did it make no sound?

Slowly Thor's giant head began swinging from side to side; then he advanced—just one step—and [71] in a slow, graceful movement reared himself to his full, magnificent height. For me, it was the beginning of the end. And in that moment, doomed as I was, I found no pity for myself. Here, at last, was justice! I was about to die. I, who had destroyed so much of life, found how helpless I was when I faced life with my naked hands. *And it was justice!* I had robbed the earth of more life than would fill the bodies of a thousand men, and now my own life was to follow that which I had destroyed. Suddenly fear left me. I wanted to cry out to that splendid creature that I was sorry, and could my dry lips have framed the words, it would not have been cowardice—but truth.

I have read many stories of truth and hope and faith and charity. From a little boy, my father tried to teach me what it meant to be a gentleman, and he lived what he tried to teach. And from the days of my small boyhood, mother told me stories of great and good men and women, and in the days of my manhood, she faithfully lived the great truth that of all precious things charity and love are the most priceless. Yet had I accepted it all in the narrowest and littlest way. Not until this hour on the edge of the cliff did I realize how small can be the soul of a man buried in his [72] egoism—or how splendid can be the soul of a beast.

For Thor knew me. That I know. He knew me as the deadliest of all his enemies on the face of the earth. Yet until I die will I believe that, in my helplessness, he no longer hated me or wanted my life. For slowly he came down upon all fours again, and, limping as he went, he continued along the ledge—*and left me to live*!

I am not, in these days, sacrilegious enough to think that the Supreme Power picked my poor insignificant self from among a billion and a half other humans especially to preach a sermon to that glorious Sunday on the mountainside. Possibly it was all mere chance. It may be that another day Thor would have killed me in my helplessness. It may all have been a lucky accident for me. Personally, I do not believe it, for I have found that the soul of the average beast is cleaner of hate and of malice than that of the average man. But whether one believes with me or not, does not matter, so far as the point I want to make is concerned—that from this hour began the great [73] change in me, which has finally admitted me into the peace and joy of universal brotherhood with Life. It matters little how a sermon or a great truth comes to one; it is the result that counts.

I returned down the mountain, carrying my broken gun with me. And everywhere I saw that things were different. The fat whistlers, big as woodchucks, were no longer so many targets, watching me cautiously from the rock-tops; the gophers, sunning themselves on their mounds, meant more to me now than a few hours ago. I looked off to a distant slide on another mountain and made out the half-dozen sheep I had studied through my glasses earlier in the day. But my desire to kill was gone. I did not realize the fullness of the change that was upon me then. In a dull sort of way, I accepted it as an effect of shock, perhaps as a passing moment of repentance and gratitude because of my escape. I did not tell myself that I would never kill sheep again except when mutton was necessary to my camp fire. I did not promise the whistlers long lives. And yet the change was on me, and growing stronger in my blood with every breath I drew. The valley was different. Its air was sweeter. Its low song of life and running waters and velvety [74] winds whispering between the mountains was new inspiration to me. The grass was softer under my feet; the flowers were more beautiful; the earth itself held a new thrill for me.

A few nights later, beside a small fire we had built in the cool of evening, I tried to tell old Donald something about the Transfiguration, how Christ had gone up on the mount with Peter and John and James, and what had happened there.

"It wasn't that Christ himself was actually changed as he prayed on the mountain-top," I said to Donald. "The change was in Peter and John and James, who in these moments saw Christ with a new vision and a new understanding. The Transfiguration was simply a mental process of their own; they saw clearly now where before they had been half blind. And I am wondering if this old world of ours wouldn't change for us in the same way if we saw it with understanding, and looked at it with clean eyes?"

So, on this other Sunday, as the evening draws on, I look back through the years between me and [75]
that day on the mountain-top, and the memory of Thor fills a warm corner of my heart. Through him I have the happy thought that I was given birth into a new world, and all things now hold a new significance for me. I have discovered for myself, in a small way, the wonderful secret of the instinctive processes of nature, and in a thousand ways I have found this instinct, coming directly from the fount of supreme direction, far more amazing than reasoning itself. I understand more clearly, I think, why all humanity loves a baby, no matter how ugly it may be. It is because it is so utterly dependent upon instinct alone, so completely helpless, so absolutely without reason or protection of its own. We like to believe that a baby is very close to God, simply because it has no reasoning and because it is as yet purely a creature of instinctive processes. And yet, as we lay down our lives for its protection, we forget that adult man, with all his reasoning and his power, was originally a creature of instinct himself. We forget that it took millions of years to give him a language, and that possession of language alone has made him a super-creature. For it is
language that gives birth to reason, allows of communication of thought, and should man be [76]
suddenly bereft of all language and thought-communication he would, in the course of ages, revert again into a creature guided solely by instinct. In that event he would be nothing more or less than a brother to all other creatures of instinct. He would again become an ordinary member of the Ancient Brotherhood of Common Heritage, and could no longer call himself the Chosen One and the Ordained of God. But good luck came to him, perhaps even in the days when he may have swung from the trees by his tail—good luck in the discovery of a crude method of thought-communication, a discovery that developed through the ages, until now his head is turned, so to speak, and for tens of thousands of years he has looked down more and more upon his poor relations who have not had his own good fortune.

But I am learning that time has not freed him, and never will free him, from his blood relationship. And creed may follow creed, and religion may follow religion, but never will he find that full peace and contentment which might be his lot until he recognizes and admits into his
comradeship again the soul of that nature which is his own mother, and forgets his monumental [77]
egoism in a new understanding of those instinctive processes of nature through which he, himself, passed in the kindergarten of his own existence.

This is my faith, my religion. Close to where I am sitting is an old stub, clothed in a mass of wood-vine, warm and vivid in the golden glow of the setting sun. The wood-vine has climbed, instinctively, to the top of the stub, and now, finding their support gone, half a dozen long tendrils are reaching out toward a tall young birch six or eight feet away. One tendril, stronger and older than the others, has reached and clasped the nearest branch. The others are following unerringly. *Yet they have no eyes to see.* No voice calls back to them to point out the way. It is the instinct of life itself that is guiding them, the same instinct, in a smaller way, that dragged man up bit by bit from out of the black chaos of the past. In a thousand other ways, if one will take the blindfold from his eyes and try to understand, he may see this mightiest of all the forces of the earth—instinct—a vibrant, breathing, struggling thing about him, a force so much more
powerful than his own, so all-consuming and indestructible that it stands out as a giant mountain [78]
compared with the mole-hill of his own littleness. In my own faith, I see it as a vast and inexhaustible reservoir of life, of strength, of "upward climb," of inspiration. I see it as the one great, all-necessary force of creation—a force more precious to man than all the mines of the earth, more precious than all the treasure of the mints, if he would forget his greatness and reach out his hands to it in the gladness of a new brotherhood.

Dusk is falling. And, as I stop my work, here in the heart of a forest, I seem to see the smiles of many who will read this, and I seem to hear the low and unbelieving laughter of those who think themselves of the flesh and blood of God. And I seem to hear their voices saying:

"He is wrong. Nature is beautiful—sometimes. Also, it is crude. It is rough. It is destructive. It is, half the time, a pest. While we—we—have we not performed wonders? Have we not *proved* ourselves the chosen of God? Have we not created nations? Have we not built up great cities? Have we not accumulated vast riches? Have we not invented the Dollar? Are we not, in a hundred
ways, shackling nature as a man harnesses a horse, proving ourselves its masters, and it our [79]
slave?"

I hear—and then I hear another voice, and softly, distantly, it says:

"Yea! you are great—in your own eyes. You have made nations and cities and great tabernacles—and you have created the Dollar. But, when, for a moment, you cease the mad struggle you are

making, you are *afraid*. Yes; you cry out loudly then in your fear. You fight to bring ghosts back, that they may tell you what happens when you lie down and die. You cry out for a religion which will give you absolute faith and comfort and cannot find it. You think you are great because you have built skyscrapers and ride close to the clouds and have made it possible to rush swiftly through a country choked with dust. But you forget quickly. You forget how little you were—yesterday. You do not tell yourself that you are a pest, perhaps the greatest of all. Yea; you are great, and in your greatness you are wise, but all that which you have achieved cannot give you that which you so vainly seek—the contentment of a deep and abiding faith."

The Fourth Trail
THE ROAD TO FAITH

[83]

It has been some time since I sat down to work at my table under the tall spruce trees. I have had an experience during the past five or six days which is one of my rewards for letting nature live, and, for a space, it quite completely upset me, so far as work was concerned.

In other words, I have been having an experience with a species of vermin which I love. The baby vermin of this particular species are, to me, almost as lovable and quite as cute in their ways as human babies; and for the adult vermin, the mothers and fathers of the babies, I have a far greater love and respect than I have for many males and females of my own breed. And, taking it all round, they are a cleaner, handsomer, and more wholesome-looking lot than the average crowd of humans, though they are—because of the mightiness of man's edict—nothing more than vermin.

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I am speaking of bears. A few years ago, one of my most thrilling sports was to hunt them—blacks, grizzlies, and polars. Now I consider them, in a way, my brothers, and I am having a lot of fun in the comradeship. I am filled with resentment when I consider that in all the states of this country, with the exception of two or three, the law says these friends of mine are "vermin," along with lice and fleas and maggots, and that they may be killed on sight, babies and all, because,—perhaps once in his lifetime,—a bear living very close to civilization may make a meal of pig or lamb. If every human mother in the land could hold a baby cub in her arms for five minutes, there would be such an uprising of feminine sympathy that the laws would be repealed.

In thinking again of our mothers, I would give a good year of my life if a million of them could have seen what I have seen during the past few days. For, after all, I believe that nearly all great movements toward better and bigger and more beautiful things must and will begin with women. No amount of "equality" will ever take that blessed superiority to men away from them. To-day, even religion, shameful to men as the fact may be, rests on a pillar of women's white shoulders, and all the faith that the world possesses first finds its resting-place in their soft breasts. And I

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look ahead to the day, with unbounded faith of my own, when women will see, and understand, and begin the great fight toward comradeship with all that other life which is so utterly dependent about them now—life which throbs and urges in every living thing from the grass-blade and the oak to the "instinct" creatures of flesh and blood. Then shall we have a "religion of nature," with a force and a might behind it which will glorify the earth, and man will come to realize that he is not God, but only an insignificantly small part of God's handiwork. And when man comes to that point, where he casts off his arrogance and his ego, then will the time have come for the birth of a satisfying and universal faith in that great and all-embracing Power which we know and speak of in our own language as God.

And the very foundation of this faith, I believe, will be an understanding of *all* life, the acknowledgment at last that man himself may not be a more precious physical manifestation of the Supreme Vital Force than many of the other created things about him.

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It is because I believe that nature, the mother of all life, is trying to teach us this great truth in a thousand or a million different ways, in the smoke and grime and crush of big cities as well as in farm-land and forest, that I come back to my little experience with the bears.

About six or seven miles to the north of me is a great ridge, plainly visible from one of the halfway limbs of my lookout spruce, a sort of barrier which rises up between me and the still vaster hinterland beyond it. Sometime in the past, a fire swept over it, so that now it is covered with a gorgeous and splendid growth of young birch and poplars, and virile patches of vines on which, a little later, there will be an abundance of strawberries, raspberries, rose-berries, and black currants. It is also richly sprinkled with mountain-ash trees, which give promise of a yield of hundreds of bushels of fruit this late summer and autumn. Altogether, it is an ideal feeding-range for wild things, hoof, claw, and feathers. Three times I have traveled for miles along the cap of this ridge. To me, in all its richness and promise, it is a glorious manifestation of Life. It breathes under me and about me. I can fairly hear its compelling youth bursting from its growing leaves, its swelling fruits, its flowers, and from the mold that pulses and throbs with the vital

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forces under my feet. I almost think I could live and die on this ridge, or another ridge like it, and never be at loss for company.

On my first visit to the ridge, being overtaken by storm, I built me a brush shelter in a lovely spot close to it, with a tiny creek of spring-cold water not more than a dozen paces away. On my third and last visit, I returned to this spot, and ran face on into my adventure.

From the sheltered bower of balsams where I had built my wigwam, I could look up a rolling, meadowy breast of the ridge, so perfect in its adornment of vine and bush and small clumps of young trees that, to one not entirely acquainted with the exquisite art of nature, it would almost seem as though a human landscape-architect had "laid out" the little paradise which was my hillside back yard. On this particular morning, coming up quietly, my eyes were greeted by an amazingly pretty spectacle. The green hillside, soft and velvety in the sunlight and shadow of the morning, was in full possession of two families of black bears.

So close were the nearest of them to me that I dropped like a shot behind a big rock, and the breath of air that was stirring being in my favor, I was at a splendid vantage-point to take in the

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whole scene. Within forty yards of me were a mother and three cubs, and a little higher up—perhaps twice that distance—were a mother and two cubs. At almost the very crest of the ridge were two more bears, which I at first thought were adults. A closer inspection assured me they

were last year's cubs, and possibly not more than a third grown, though to which of the two mothers they belonged, if to either, I could not make up my mind. Frequently, instead of setting out in life for itself, a black bear cub will follow its mother through a second season, and I judged this to be the situation here.

For two hours, I did not move from my place of concealment. That spectacle of motherhood and babyhood on the hillside, with the virile and luxuriant life of nature pulsing and beating all about it, was a new chapter in my book of religion. It was pointing out to me, in perhaps a hundredth or a thousandth lesson, that all life is the same, and that it is only language, or the want of language, that makes the difference in the "life-relationship" of all created things. I could fancy, as I lay there, just how the Supreme Arbiter of things had given physical being to all this life that [89] was about me, as well as the life that was in me. It has all come from the same dynamo, so to speak—a spark of it in each tree, a spark of it in each flower and shrub, and blade of grass, a spark of it in each of the beasts of flesh and blood on the hillside, and a spark of it in me. Our life was the same. It had all come from the same vital source, from the same supreme fount of existence. Yet how different were the forms it animated! Close to my hand was a beautiful rock-violet, blue as the sky, its velvety petals freckled with tiny flecks of gold; a few yards away, perched among the rustling leaves of a birch, a brush-warbler filled the air with melody; back of me, the tops of the thick balsams whispered softly, and up there I could hear the grunting of the mother bears, the squealing of the little cubs, and a gentle murmuring sound that came from the ridge itself, as if all living things were fighting for a language, struggling to give voice to something that was in them.

I have had some amusement and a little discord over the teapot tempests that so-called nature-scientists occasionally stir up among themselves over the "humanizing" of wild life. Man's ego [90] has possessed him so utterly that it is distasteful to him to concede anything "humanlike" to any creature that is not in his own flesh and form. For my part, loving all wild life as I do, I am proud and glad that it does not possess more of our human qualities. If I write honestly of what has come to me in my own wide experience in nature, I must—no matter how unpleasant the statement may be—confess that wild life *does* possess a great many characteristics that are very "human," and the ways of its members are in many instances strangely the same. I could see little difference between my bears on the hillside and two human mothers and their children, except in their physical appearance, and the fact that the humans would undoubtedly have made a great deal more noise. But the bears were handsomer—begging the ladies' pardon. Their sleek coats shone like black satin in the sun, and the cubs were cute enough to hug to death. But they were a worry to their mothers for all that, and especially one of them, which appeared to be the hog-it-all member of the family nearest me. Whenever the mother bear pawed over a stone or pulled down a tender bush, this little customer was always there ahead of the rest of the family, [91] licking up the choicest grubs and ants and getting the first mouthful of greens. Half a dozen times, the mother slapped him with her paw, rolling him over like a fat ball. But there could have been no very great corrective power in the cuffings, or else he was toughened to them by usage, for he was back on the job again without very much loss of time.

For almost two hours, the bears fed on the hillside. Several times the two families drew so near together that the cubs intermingled and the mothers almost rubbed sides. I feel that the interest of this particular page would be greatly increased for many of my readers if I added a ferocious imaginary fight between the two mothers and a bloody feud between the youngsters. Bears do fight when they meet—sometimes—just like humans, only not as often. But it is my duty to relate that these bears were at peace on this particular day, and that they seemed to enjoy the mutual companionship. It was all so fine that I had an impelling desire to go up on the hillside and become a comrade with them. When the feeding was over, and the cubs were wrestling and running about in play, I almost rose up from behind my rock to call out my friendship to them. [92] The lack of one thing held me back—that one thing which all nature is crying out for—*a language*. I feel they would have welcomed me could I have told them I was a friend, and wanted to play with them, and make them a present of some sugar. But instead of that this is what happened:

In their play, two of the cubs had descended within twenty feet of my rock. One of these was the gourmand. Somehow, he lost his balance, rolled over, and came tumbling down. When he stopped he was not more than half a dozen feet from me. As he brought his fat little body to its feet he saw me. His eyes fairly popped. It seemed to me that for a full minute he did not move or breathe. And during that same minute I remained as still as a rock. In his amazement and his wonder, he was the funniest thing I had ever seen, and in spite of myself, my face broke into a grin. Instantly there came out of him a little, piggish grunt,—and he was off. Up that hillside he went as if the world was after him. He did not stop when he reached his mother and the other cubs, but seemed to hit it still faster for the top of the ridge. The mother looked after him, sniffed [93] the air, and rose to her feet. In half a minute, she was lumbering after him, the two remaining cubs hustling ahead of her.

A hundred yards away, the second mother bear took the warning. In a very short time, they had all disappeared over the cap of the ridge. I had not shown myself. I had made no sound. The wind was still in my favor. Yet the frightened cub had given warning to them all. For no other creature but man would they have fled like that. Even in the face of a pack of wolves, the mothers would have turned to fight. Something had told them that man was near—yet only the cub had seen and smelled that man, and he had probably never seen or smelled another. Yet he knew, and all the others knew, that man was the deadliest of all enemies. And I am half convinced, as I write this, that nature has at least the beginning of a universal language, that the centuries and hundreds of centuries have given it four words, and these words are: "Man is our enemy." I might fancy that

the winds carry these words, that the tree-tops whisper them, that they are in the undertone of running waters, that all life outside of man and man's pitiably few friends has, in some strange way, come to learn them. It is, I confess, an elusive sort of fancy,—but it sets one to thinking. [94]

It makes one wonder, for instance, why man is so jealous of himself. The Supreme Power is immeasurable, he tells himself. It has no such a thing as limitation. Heaven, no matter in what form he may conceive it, is utterly boundless. Yet he is jealous of it. He does not want to concede that any other life will form a part of it but that of his own breed. He has tried, through unnumbered centuries, to fool himself into the belief that he is the one and only thing in all creation upon which the Ruling Power of the universe has its guardian eye. He has tried to make himself believe that he is the one toad in the huge puddle of life. He has not conceded that an all-powerful but tender God might love flowers and birds and trees and many other living things as well as he loves man. And as I sit here under my spruce trees again, it seems to me that, just because he has been so near-sighted, man has not yet found a faith which is all-comforting and of which he is utterly sure.

I seem to see a very clear reason for this. In this age, though still fettered by his egoism, man is not utterly blind to his own deformities. As "civilization" progresses, he sees more and more what [95] a monster he has been in the past, and what a monster in many ways he is to-day. He sees his breed committing every crime known to the ages, from petty larceny to world-slaughters that devastate nations. He sees everywhere the strong taking advantage of the weak. He sees millions go hungry and cold that a few may profit. In great convention-halls, he sees the "statesmen" that rule the destiny of a mighty nation cutting capers and acting generally like a lot of silly little children. He sees every man in a great game fighting to see who can accumulate the most dollars, no matter at what cost to the others. He sees sickening and disgusting fads come and go. He looks on a world-brothel of iniquity, of discontent, of avarice and greed and butchery among men. Nowhere does he see the stability, the dignity, and the mighty forces of good that should walk hand in hand with "the chosen of God."

He is beginning to see himself, at last, as a contemptible specimen of life—in spite of his brain and his inventions.

He is beginning to understand that the most perfect airship his brain will ever conceive cannot take him to heaven.

He is beginning to realize that there is a thing greater than brain, greater than mechanical [96] progress.

And as he comes to understand more and more how imperfect a thing he is, the more unstable his faith becomes; and the sacrilegious thought comes to him, unconsciously but with terrific force: "If I am the chosen handiwork of God, then I can have no very great faith in the judgment and workmanship of God."

And as the suspicion grows upon him that he may not be the "one and only" child of God, he cries out wildly in these modern days for evidence. He tries to bring spirits back from the dead that they may offer him some proof. He quests vainly for "revelations" that may satisfy him. He says with his mouth, "Yes; I believe absolutely in God," yet, in his heart, he knows that he is half lying, —because of fear of what his neighbor will think if he speaks the truth. He wants to believe there is a God. He wants to *know* there is a God. Yet he is afraid.

And, personally, I am glad that the time has come when he is afraid. I think it is the real beginning of his salvation and the dropping-away of his egoism. To-day he is beginning to see all [97] life as he did not see it yesterday. And to-morrow his eyes will be wide open.

That is my faith. I believe that God is greater than humanity has ever conceived him to be. I think he is "a common sort of fellow," and I write these words with all the holy reverence of which the soul is capable. I do not mean to imply that I think he is in my form, or in any particular form. But he is Life. And it is his intention and his desire that every living thing that is worthy of life be a part of him. I am almost Indian in this faith. I can hear the buoyant, cheering call of Life in a waterfall. The inspiration of it comes into my own body from out of a whispering tree, from a bush glowing with bloom, from a flower, from the song of a bird, from the rain itself. I find great peace and contentment in my faith that this God is everywhere, and that we may meet him face to face fifty times a day if we throw off the hard shell of our egoism, and realize that all nature is God—and that we, as men and women and children, are a part of that all-embracing nature.

Even now the sun is filtering through the tree-branches upon this partly written page. I look at it, and I see again the inconceivable greatness of the Supreme Power, and my own microscopic [98] littleness. For we of the earth have thought that the earth is great, and that we, having inherited the earth, are of all things greatest. Yet is that sun which warms and lights my page as I write—more than a million times as large as the earth—more than eight hundred thousand miles from one end of its diameter to the other. And the still more stupendous fact is that this sun is itself only a small bit of mechanism in the mighty forces of infinity, for there are a *hundred million other suns in space*, each lighting and warming its own worlds—innumerable worlds—each peopled with its own type of flesh and blood, and each possessing, perhaps, its own peculiar forms of "civilization" and its own savagery.

Just that great, and vast, and all-embracing is the handiwork of that vital force which rules all infinity—and to which we have given the name of God.

And here I emphasize again that great truth which nature has impressed upon me—that, just so long as man considers himself the one and only chosen part of God, and therefore next to him in

[99]

greatness, just that long will his egoism and self-conceit blind him to the greatness and glory of the real truth, and to the glory of the faith which might be his. I believe that Christ was a great teacher, that he was a great student of his times, and incorporated into his teachings all that was highest and best in the teachings of other great men who had lived and died before him. And I have always regretted that Christ was unfortunate to have for his historians a set of men who were unequal to their task, many of them narrow-minded, moved by "visions" and superstitions instead of fact, men who believed in all the miracles of the imagination from conversing with angels to stopping the sun,—men utterly incapable of writing down calmly and truthfully those mighty teachings of Christ which, had they been written as they were spoken, would have meant so much for the world to-day. For I believe, in my own heart, that Christ was the greatest lover of nature that history knows of to the present day. I believe that in the many years of his "disappearance," Christ was not only studying the teachings of the past, but that, close to the breast of nature, he was learning the splendid truths of life—all life—which were afterward the very heart and soul of his messages to mankind.

I believe that Christ, could he return to earth to-day, would say: "My biographers have given you [100] a wrong impression of me, and they have misquoted me. What my soul was called upon to teach nineteen hundred years ago, they have clothed in the raiment of superstition, of misunderstanding, and of impossible miracle. For I am a man, even as thee and thine. But I have found the true faith. And that faith, as I told them then, depends utterly upon the dropping of the scales of self from man's eyes, and his understanding of *all life*. For that I gladly died."

The greatest regret I have is that Christ, as a man, did not foresee more clearly the tremendous influence his teachings were to exert upon humanity through the ages. Had he guessed this, he would have written down with his own hand those teachings which were so carelessly left to the mercy of superstitious—frequently fanatical—and at nearly all times incapable biographers. For Christ, of all men that ever lived, was undoubtedly one of the best and the most humble. His teachings came straight from his heart. He did not intend that they should be smothered in hyperbole, metaphor, and rhetorical embroidery until no two living men could agree absolutely [101] upon their meaning. I believe that he spoke simply and directly, for only in that way could he have reached the hearts of the masses. And I believe that the greatest of all his lessons was the lesson of humility. As a man, he had dropped his egoism, had submitted himself to the Master of all life, and in that submission he had found the truth, and the glory of a great faith. The misfortune of the humanity to follow in after-ages was that the world of Jesus Christ was small—so small that by word of mouth he could reach from end to end of it. Had he dreamed that there were still undiscovered worlds so great that in comparison his own was but a handful of dirt out of a wagon-load, I am convinced within myself that the world to-day would not be struggling to understand a faith written in parables and riddles, for Christ would have set his own hand to the task which others so poorly accomplished.

With such a priceless inheritance in the form of Christ's own handiwork, I am equally sure that humanity would no longer have an excuse for its egoism, or be ashamed of that humility which is necessary to the understanding of life, and essential to the possession of a deep and abiding [102] faith.

I have, at times, heard intelligent people express amazement that I should dare to place human life on an equal level with all other life, that I should so "blaspheme the Creator" as to say that the life in a two-legged animal who can talk is the same as that in a flower or a plant or a tree or some other animal which cannot talk. I have sometimes allowed myself to point out the innumerable advantages possessed over man by many living things which have no language, as we know language. I could fill a dozen volumes with word-pictures of the thousands and tens of thousands of advantages which living things outside of man possess over man, and which, if man could achieve, would be stupendous miracles. But man, collectively, is blinded by his egoism to the marvelous attainments of all life that does not walk and talk as he walks and talks. When confronted by the incontrovertible wonder and apparent miracle of other life as compared with his own I have nearly always found that men and women fall back, as a last resort, on the absurd and shallow argument: "But this other life you speak of has only instinct. It cannot talk; it cannot [103] reason, and therefore it is impossible for it to have a soul."

Once a beautiful young matron said to me, "There is much in your creed that is inspiring and beautiful, but it reaches a point where it is inconceivable, for you must concede that a human being is the most perfect of all created things."

I gave her an exquisite rose which I had plucked from my garden only a few minutes before.

"There are, outside of men and women and children, innumerable things more perfectly created than this flower," I said. "Are you, in your youth and beauty, as perfect as that rose?"

And yet I know that such arguments as these, innumerable though they might be, cannot prevail until men and women bring themselves face to face with nature itself, filled with a willingness and a yearning to understand. They point out the pests of life—the serpent, the deadly insects, the plants that scar and poison; yet they cannot see themselves as perhaps the deadliest and the most relentless of all pests. For it is one of the mysterious laws of Creation that every living thing [104]

—flower, and tree, and beast, and man—has a pest born unto it; and unto these pests other pests are born, until at last,—when the thing is analyzed,—a pest is a pest only in so far as its enemy, and not its friends, judge it to be a pest. If the world to-day were eliminated of human pests as each individual in the world might judge for himself, how many of us would be left alive to-morrow?

And always, when I have listened to the age-old arguments prompted by man's egoism and self-glorification, I love to return to the peace and the comfort of nature, whether that nature be in the form of a deep forest, a clover field, an orchard, or the little back plot of a crowded city home. And if I am where there is no cool earth to stand my feet upon, I find my peace and rest in the printed pages which describe that nature-world of mine. From the most beautifully written volumes to the honest pages and unembellished fact of farm-journals, I have, times without number, found enthralling interest, consolation, and the strength and courage of the cool and glorious earth itself. Nature's Bible is not hard to find. It is everywhere, living, breathing, printed —the one universal and ever-present Book of Life.

Whenever I think of the commonest of human arguments: "But this other life you speak of has [105]
only instinct. It cannot talk; it cannot reason, and therefore it is impossible for it to have a soul," my mind always travels back to a certain incident in my experience as a refutation. I could, had I the space, answer that argument with a hundred compelling facts; I might answer it from the point of the flower, the vine, the tree, the grass that carpets the earth, but I always think first of the particular tragedy I am going to describe, because of the chief human actor in it, and because this actor was, in my humble estimation, one of the most physically perfect of her species.

I will not give her name. She is the daughter of one of the best known men in the nation, and one of the foremost scientists of the world; and should she happen to read these lines, I hope that she will see, with a new vision and a new understanding, that "triumph" of years ago.

I think she was about twenty when my outfit happened to join trails with her father's in the far north. She will remember that early afternoon when we camped together close to the Cochrane, in the Reindeer Lake country.

I believe that I am quite reasonably sure of myself when I say that she was the most beautiful [106]
woman I had seen up to that time or have seen since. It is simply because of her perfection that she has always appealed as having furnished to me one of the most dramatic object-lessons of my experience. She was athrill with life. She worshiped her father. She loved the sun, the sky, the wind, the trees, the whole world. Life seemed to have given her everything that it possessed—the rare coloring of the most beautiful flower under her feet, a form that was divine, hair and eyes that no artist could paint, and, I think, one of the sweetest voices I have ever heard. She is, I have heard, beloved in her own environment. She is a worker for human betterment, and spends much of her time in actual work with the poor. Not long ago she was responsible for the building of a home for unfortunate little children.

That day in camp there was a sudden excitement. Three of the Indians had driven a cow moose, a yearling, and a bull into a small cover. It was a splendid chance for the girl. I can see her eyes glowing with the fires of excitement now, as she caught up her rifle and hurried with her father and brother and the Indians to the refuge-place of the family of moose. She was placed at the [107]
head of an open space, and the moose were driven out. First came the yearling calf, then the mother, and after them came the old bull. The girl's lovely face, as I looked at it, was flushed. It seemed as though I might hear the excited beating of her heart as she waited, quivering with the desire to kill.

She fired first at the calf, and then at the mother—and from that moment all that was big and beautiful and noble in life seemed to leave her own body and enter that of the old bull moose. For the first shot had struck the calf, laming it so that it could run but slowly, with the mother urging it on from behind. Not once in the moments that followed did the mother run ahead of her calf. And then I beheld a thing that I believe to be as noble as anything that man has ever done in all the ages. Believe, if you will, that the magnificent old bull had no reason. Believe, if you cannot sacrifice your egoism, that he did not think. Do not give him the credit of possessing a heart or a soul or feelings, if that sacrifice of egoism hurts you. But consider what happened.

The old bull ran alongside the cow, alongside the calf, and then, by reason or instinct, he *knew* [108]
what had happened. He did not forge ahead. He did not race for safety, but deliberately he dropped behind, turned himself broadside, and stopped, *making of his own splendid body a barrier in the path of the bullets*.

I heard the girl's rifle cracking. Twice I saw the bull flinch, and I knew that he was struck. Then I heard her cry out, almost frantically, that her last shot was gone. In the same instant, her brother ran up from the cover and thrust his own rifle into her hands.

"Give it to him, sis!" he cried. "Give it to him!"

The big bull had turned. He staggered a bit as he ran, but in a hundred feet he had overtaken the cow and the calf. The calf was going still more slowly, and in my desire to see the cow and the bull break away, I shouted.

Almost simultaneously with the sound of my voice, the bull stopped again. He placed himself broadside, at perhaps a three-quarter angle, so that, by turning his head slightly, he was looking back at us. He was directly between the cow and the calf, and the girl's bullets continued to rip into him. I remember that I cried out in protest, but she did not sense my words. Every fiber of [109]
her being was strung to the thrilling achievement of that crime. She was deaf and blind to the

nobility of the great-hearted beast who, in my eyes, was deliberately sacrificing his life. The flaming lust to kill had driven all other things out of her heart and soul. Her father had run up, and brother and father cried out in triumph when the old bull sagged suddenly in the middle and almost fell to his knees. Four times he had been struck when again he went on.

From my experience in big-game hunting, I knew that he was done for. Yet, even in these moments when he was dying, the glorious soul of him was unafraid. Three hundred yards away he stopped and turned again, giving the cow and the calf a last chance to reach the timber. The girl fired her last shots, and missed. Then the bull swung after the cow and the calf and disappeared in the cover. But, as he went, there came back to us a terrible, deep-chested cough, and my heart gave up its hope. It told me the heroic old bull was shot through the lungs. I did not hurry after the girl and her father and brother as they ran over the blood-stained trail. I continued to hear the coughing for a few moments. Then it was silent. When I came up to them, [110] just inside the timber, the three were standing in triumph close to the dead body of the bull. Hardly more than twenty paces from it was the yearling calf, dying, but not quite dead. The brother had ended it with a revolver-shot.

And then I looked at the creature who had committed this double murder. Many times I had done this same crime, but with me, crude and rough, with all the inborn savagery of man, killing had not seemed quite so horrible. And standing there, a little later,—red-lipped, her face aflame, her eyes glowing, exquisite in her beauty,—the girl had her picture taken in triumph as she stood with one booted little foot on the neck of her victim.

When I hear of the vaunted human soul, and when men and women tell me there is no soul but the soul of a human, my mind goes back to that day. I might tell of a hundred other instances that are convincing unto myself, but that one stands out with unforgettable vividness.

I am sure, for instance, that the soul of a flower once saved my life. This is not unusual, or even remarkable, for the souls of flowers have saved unnumbered lives, as well as giving cheer and courage to countless millions; and when we die it is still the Soul of the Flower that watches over [111] us in our resting-places. No place in the world do flowers live more beautifully than in our gardens of the dead, cheering us when we come with our grief to the place of our lost ones, giving us courage to go on. Take the Soul of the Flower away from us, and the world would be hard and bleak to live in.

To me, the soul is synonymous with life. I do not disassociate the two. When we breathe our last, our life—our soul—is gone. The two, I believe, are one. When we pluck a flower we destroy neither, but when we tear it up by the roots so that it dies, then has its soul, or its life, gone the same way as that of man who dies. I have spent many wonderful hours in those gardens of the dead which every city, hamlet, and countryside must have. To me, there are only beauty and the glory of God in a cemetery. It seems to me that there, if never before, one must come to understand the brotherhood of all life. It seems to me that the very stillness and peace of a resting-place of the dead softly whisper to us the great secret which those who are lying there have at last discovered—that life is the same, that its only difference is in form and manifestation. I seem to feel that I have come into the one place where there are only charity and faith and good [112] will, and I have always the thought—which to me gives courage and hope—that this is why the flowers and the trees are so beautiful and so comforting there. I have stood in other cemeteries which, to the passing eye, have been barren and ugly, where man has lent but very feebly a helping hand, but even there, if I looked a little closer, I have found the Soul of the Flower, the same peace, the same tranquillity, perhaps even greater courage to inspire one to “keep on.”

I have a case in point, so convincing to myself that all the preaching in the world could not change my sentiment in the matter. I happened, at this particular time, to be traveling alone in the Northland, and when a certain accident befell me, the nearest help I knew of was at a half-breed’s cabin between twenty and thirty miles away. Thirty miles is not a very great matter in a country of paved roads and level paths, but it is a far distance in a country of dense forest and swamp, without trails or guide-posts—and especially when one is badly crippled. Like the most amateurish tenderfoot, I took a chance along the face of a cliff near a small waterfall, slipped, [113] fell, and came tumbling down a matter of thirty feet with a sixty-pound pack and my rifle on top of me. In the fall, my foot received a terrific blow, probably on a projecting ledge of rock.

The man who has faced many situations is usually the man who is cautious, and though I had just committed an inexcusable error in my carelessness, I now lost no time in putting up my small silk tent while I could still drag myself about. It was well I did so. For ten days thereafter, I was not able to rest a pound of weight upon my injured foot.

With the music and refreshing coolness of the waterfall less than a hundred feet from my tent door, and the creek itself not more than a quarter of that distance, I was most fortunately situated under the circumstances. The first morning after my fall found me almost helpless. Every move I made gave me excruciating pain. My entire foot and ankle, and my leg halfway to the knee, were swollen to twice their normal size. This first day I dragged myself to a sapling, cut it as I lay on my side, and made me a rough crutch of it. The second day, my entire lower limb was swollen until it had lost all semblance to form, and was so badly discolored that a cold and [114] terrible dread began to grow in me. I had only thirty cartridges. I fired ten that first day, in the futile hope that some wandering adventurer might have drifted within the sound of my rifle. Occasionally I hallooed. Night of the second day found me in the beginning of a fever, and, at a cost of physical agony, I prepared myself for the worst—placed my possessions within the reach of my hands, and dragged myself up from the creek with a small pail of water.

I shall never forget the dawn of the third day. Racked with pain, with the fever in my blood, my

leg now stiff as a board to the thigh, I was still not blind to the beauty of the morning. The rising sun first lighted up the waterfall, then it fell in a warm and golden flood where I had made my camp. In that silence, broken only by the music of the water, every soft note that was made by the wild things came to me distinctly. It was a morning to put cheer and hope into the heart of a dying man. Then my eyes turned, and, a few feet beyond the reach of my hand, I *found something looking at me*.

Yes; to me, in that moment, it was a thing living and vibrant with life, and yet it was nothing more than a flower. It grew on a stem a foot high, and the face of it made me think of one of our home- [115] garden pansies; only, the flower was all one color, with longer petals—a soft, velvety blue. It seemed to have turned to face the morning sun, and, in facing the sun, it was squarely facing me —a piquant, joyous, laughing little face, asking me as clearly as in words, "What can possibly be the matter with you on this fine morning?"

I am not going into the psychology or soul-language of that flower. I am not going to argue about it at all, but simply tell what it did for me. Perhaps, if you want to lay it all to something, you may say it was because I was out of my head a part of the time with fever. But that flower was my doctor through the days of torture and hopelessness that followed. Now and then a bird sang near me; occasionally a wild thing would come and peer at me curiously, then go its way. But the flower never left me, and only turned its face partly away from me in the hours of its evening worship. For its God was the sun. It faced the sun in the morning, wide-awake and open. Late in the afternoon, it would turn a little on its stem, and with the setting of the sun, its soft petals would begin to close, and it would go to sleep, like a little child, with the coming of dusk. Day [116] after day, it grew nearer and more of a beloved comrade to me.

After the fourth day, it did not, for an instant, allow me to think that I was going to die. Never for an instant did it lose its cheer and confidence. It was there to say "Hello!" to me every morning, and there to say "Good-night" to me when the shadows grew deep—and all through the day it talked to me, and bobbed its little head in the whispers of the breezes, and I had the foolish sentiment, at times, that it was actually flirting with me. I do not think I realized how precious it had become to me until, one day, there came a terrific thunder-storm. I thought the first blast of the wind and beat of rain were going to destroy my comrade, and, almost in a panic, I dragged myself right and left, forgetful of pain, until I had built a protection about my flower.

That was the sixth day, and, from that day, the swelling and the pain began to leave my limb. On the tenth, I could move about a little on my feet. On the fifteenth, I was prepared to undertake my journey again. I felt a real grief in leaving that solitary flower. It had become a part of me, had encouraged me in my blackest hours, had cheered and comforted me even in the darkness of [117] nights, because I knew it was there—my little comrade—waiting for the sun. For me, it had individualized itself from among all the other flowers in the forest. And now, when I was about to go, I saw that the flower itself had about lived the span of its life; in a very short time it would fade and die. On the morning I left, the petals were drooping, and its tiny face did not look up at the sun and at me as brightly as before, and I fancied that I could hear its little voice saying, "Please take me with you." And I did. Call it foolish and trivial sentiment if you will, but the flower and I went together, and afterward I wrote a novel and called it "Flower of the North."

I have often heard strong men say, "Oh, that is merely a matter of sentiment. Life is too hard and real for a thing like that."

I agree with them to an extent. Sentiment does not play a large part in the world to-day. For sentiment, as that word is understood by the millions, is the heart and soul of all that is good and great. Without sentiment in the hearts of a man and a woman, there cannot be the fullness of real love between them, even though the law has made them man and wife. Without sentiment, no [118] good act is ever done from the heart out. Without sentiment—a sentiment that warms the soul as a fire warms a cold room—there will never be a deep and comforting faith. I have seen this "co-operation of rational power and moral feeling" make plain faces beautiful, and I have seen the lack of it make others hard as rock. Selfishness, egoism, the desire to get everything possible out of life, no matter at what expense to others, is its antithesis.

As I write these last pages, I have at hand facts which seem to show that sentiment, and therefore faith, is as nearly dead as it has ever been. For science in all the great nations of the earth is planning and plotting frantically for the extermination of their fellow men, and this, in the hour when all the world is crying out for a faith, is what is being achieved:

Deadly gases that will make gunpowder and the rifles anachronisms, that in the next war will depopulate whole regions, men, women, and little children alike.

Perfection of the lethal ray, which will shrivel up and paralyze human beings over vast areas, irrespective of whether they are combatants or not.

Development of plans for "germ-warfare," whereby whole nations will be infected by plagues. [119]

And then consider the words of one great military scientist of the English-speaking race: "Germ-warfare was tried on a small scale in the late war, and its results have been promising. The method of its use was in the poisoning of water supplies with cholera and typhus germs, and the loosing of dogs inoculated with rabies and of women inoculated with syphilis into the enemy country. *Here apparently is a promising beginning from which vast developments are to be hoped for.*"

A promising beginning—vast developments expected for the future—typhus—rabies—the commercial breeding of diseased women.

Yes; the world is crying aloud for a great faith, even as it smashes itself into moral fragments on the rocks of its own egoism and its own selfishness. But there has come a rent in its armor, and as it commits crimes and plans for still greater crimes, it also begins to realize its colossal wickedness. And in its terror it shrieks aloud for a manifestation of the Divine Power. It demands proof.

And again I say that the proof is so near that the world looks over its head—and does not see it. [120] Not until man's egoism crumbles will he understand. For ghosts will not come back from the dead to quiet his frenzies, nor will angels descend from out of the heavens. The Divine Power is too great and all-encompassing for that. God, speaking of that Power as God, is not a trickster. He is not a mountebank. He is not a lawyer arguing his case. He is Life. And this Life That Never Dies has no favorites. Such is my humble faith.

A long time has passed since I wrote these pages. All day the countryside has lain in that sleepy, golden shimmer that is the pulse of Indian summer. The nights are touched with frost. There is glory in the warmth of the sun.

I am in a little valley that I love—Sleepy Hollow, I call it. The farmhouse is old and unpainted, and it has stood on its stone foundation for almost a century. The barn is sagging in the middle, and between the barn and the house is an old well that a long-dead grandfather rigged when the timber in the hollow knew the howl of wolves and the screech of bobcats. Crowding close up to the back of the old house is an orchard of apple and cherry trees, so old they could tell many an [121] interesting story if they could talk.

And all about the sides and the front of the house are great trees—a huge cottonwood, and ancient oaks from which the Indians may have shot squirrels with their bows and arrows two hundred years ago. The "woman of the house" has been in an invalid's chair for years, and the husband does little but care for her. Therefore Life has crept up and almost inundated the place. The grass grows high and uncut. Wild flowers bloom in the yard. Quail come to feed with the chickens. And beyond this, all about, is the whisper of corn fields in growing-time, the ripples of fields of wheat and oats and rye, the music of the mowing-machine and the lowing of cattle. In this little old house of Sleepy Hollow, there is a woman who has not walked for years, and who will never walk again; and there is a little man with a great fierce mustache who watches her tenderly, and who knows that he must go on watching her until the end of her time—and yet in this house there is happiness, and also *a great faith*. And nature seems to rejoice in that faith. Birds build their nests under the porches. There is melody in the trees. At night, crickets sing in [122] the long grass under the open windows, and the whippoorwills come and perch on the roof under the old sycamore.

Here are suffering—and peace; few of the riches of man, but an unlimited wealth of contentment and faith. These two, prisoned to the end of their days, have found what all the world is seeking. The little old house of the hollow, even with its tragedy, is glad. And life has made it so, the understanding of life, the voice and living presence of life as it whispers about me now in the golden sheen of Indian summer.

And its whisper seems to be, "Men are seeking me, reaching out for me, crying for me—yet they do not find me. They are looking far, and I am very near—so far that they look over and beyond me when I am waiting at their feet. When at last they see me, and understand, then will they have discovered the greatest of all treasures—Faith!"

Transcriber’s Notes:

Punctuation has been made consistent.

Variations in spelling and hyphenation were retained as they appear in the original publication.

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