

MOODS AND MEMORIES.

I.

As I sit at my window on Sunday morning, lazily watching the sparrows—restless black dots that haunt the old tree at the corner of King's Bench Walk—I begin to distinguish a faint green haze in the branches of the old lime. Yes, there it is green in the branches; and I'm moved by an impulse—the impulse of spring is in my feet; indiarubber seems to have come into the soles of my feet, and I would see London. It is delightful to walk across Temple Gardens, to stop—pigeons are sweeping down from the roofs! to call a hansom, and to notice, as one passes, the sapling behind St. Clement's Danes. The quality of the green is exquisite on the smoke-black wall. London can be seen better on Sundays than on week-days; lying back in a hansom, one is alone with London. London is beautiful in that narrow street, celebrated for licentious literature. The blue and white sky shows above a seventeenth century gable, and a few moments after we are in Drury Lane. The fine weather has enticed the population out of grim courts and alleys; skipping ropes are whirling everywhere. The children hardly escape being run over. Coster girls sit wrapped in shawls contentedly like rabbits at the edge of a burrow; the men smoke their pipes in sullen groups, their eyes on the closed doors of the public house. At the corner of the great theatre a vendor of cheap ices is rapidly absorbing the few spare pennies of the neighbourhood. The hansom turns out of the lane into the great thoroughfare, a bright glow like the sunset fills the roadway, and upon it a triangular block of masonry and St. Giles' church rise, the spire aloft in the faint blue and delicate air. Spires are so beautiful that we would fain believe that they will outlast creeds; religion or no religion we must have spires, and in town and country—spires showing between trees and rising out of the city purlieus.

The spring tide is rising; the almond trees are in bloom, that one growing in an area spreads its Japanese decoration fan-like upon the wall. The hedges in the time-worn streets of Fitzroy Square light up—how the green runs

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along ! The spring is more winsome here than in the country. One must be in London to see the spring. I can see the spring from afar dancing in St. John's Wood, haze and sun playing together like a lad and a lass. The sweet air, how tempting ! How exciting ! It melts on the lips in fond kisses, instilling a delicate gluttony of life. I should like to see girls in these gardens, walking in the shadow and light, hand in hand, catching at the branches, dreaming of lovers. But there are no girls, only some daffodils. But how beautiful the curve of the daffodil when the flower is seen in profile, and how beautiful the starry yellow when the flower is seen full face ! Why do these flowers remind me of the grace of bygone times ? So does this old canal, so pathetic ; a river flows or rushes, even an artificial lake harbours water-fowl ; children sail their boats upon it ; but a canal does nothing.

Here comes a boat ! I had hoped that the last had passed twenty years ago. Here it comes with its lean horse, the rope tightening and stretching, a great black mass with ripples at the prow and a figure bearing against the rudder. A canal reminds me of my childhood ; every child likes a canal. A canal recalls the first wonder. We all remember the wonder with which we watched the first barge, the wonder which the smoke coming out of the funnel excited. When my father asked me why I'd like to go to Dublin better by canal than by railroad, I couldn't tell him. Nor could I tell anyone to-day why I love a canal. One never loses one's fondness for canals. The boats glide like the days, and the toiling horse is a symbol ! how he strains, sticking his toes into the path !

There are visits to pay. Three hours pass. At six I am free, and I resume my meditations in declining light as the cab rolls through the old brick streets that crowd round Golden Square ; streets whose names you meet in old novels ; streets full of studios where Hayden, Fuseli and others of the rank historical tribe talked of art with a big A, drank their despair away, and died wondering why the world did not recognise their genius. Children are scrambling round a neglected archway, striving to reach to a lantern of old time. The smell of these dry faded streets is peculiar to London ; there is something of the odour of the original marsh in the smell of these streets ; it rises through the pavement and mingles with the smoke. Fancy follows fancy, image succeeds image, and I look into the face of London. I would read her secret now while she wraps herself in draperies, the

mist falling like a scarf from a pensive arm; and to attempt a reading of London I send away the cab. Oh, the whiteness of the Arch, and the Bayswater Road, fading like an apparition amid the romance of great trees.

The wind thrills in the cheek and a dusky sunset hides behind Kensington. The Park is full of mist and people, it flows away dim and mournful to the pallid lights of Kensington; and its crowds are like strips of black tape scattered here and there. By the railings the tape has been wound into a black ball, and, no doubt, the peg on which it is wound is some preacher promising human nature deliverance from evil if it will forego the spring time. But the spring time continues, despite the preacher, over there, under branches swelling with leaf and noisy with sparrows, the spring is there amid the boys and girls, boys dressed in ill-fitting suits of broadcloth, geraniums in their buttonholes; girls hardly less coarse, creatures made for work, escaped for a while from the thralldom of the kitchen, now doing the business of the world better than the preacher; poor servants of sacred spring. A woman in a close-fitting green cloth dress passes me to meet a young man; a rich fur hangs from her shoulders; and they go towards Park Lane, towards the wilful little houses with low balconies and pendant flower baskets swinging in the areas. Circumspect little gardens! There is one, Greek as an eighteenth century engraving, and the woman in the close-fitting green cloth dress, rich fur hanging from her shoulders, almost hiding the pleasant waist, enters one of these. She is Park Lane. Park Lane supper parties and divorce are written in her eyes and manner. The old beau, walking swiftly lest he should catch cold, his moustache clearly dyed, his waist certainly pinched by a belt, he, too, is Park Lane. And those two young men, talking joyously—admirable specimens of Anglo-Saxons, slender feet, varnished boots, health and abundant youth—they, too, are characteristic of Park Lane.

Park Lane dips in a narrow and old-fashioned way as it enters Piccadilly. Piccadilly has not yet grown vulgar, only a little modern, a little out of keeping with the beauty of the Green Park, of that beautiful dell, about whose mounds I should like to see a comedy of the Restoration acted.

I used to stand here, at this very spot, twenty years ago, to watch the moonlight between the trees, and the shadows of the trees floating over that beautiful dell; I used to think of Wycherly's comedy, "Love in St.

James's Park," and I think of it still. In those days the Argyle Rooms, Kate Hamilton's in Pantou Street, the Café de la Régence were the fashion. Paris drew me from these, towards other pleasures, towards the Nouvelle Athènes and the Elysée Montmartre; and when I returned to London after an absence of ten years I found a new London, a less English London. Paris draws me still, and I shall be there in three weeks when the chestnuts are in bloom.

II.

I arrived in Paris this morning, and I remember the sea like a beautiful blue plain without beginning or end, a plain on which the ship threw a little circle of light, moving always like life itself, with darkness before and after. And I remember how we steamed into the long winding harbour in the dusk, half-an-hour before we were due—at day-break. Against the green sky, along the cliff's edge a line of broken paling zig-zagged; one star shone in the dawning sky, one reflection wavered in the tranquil harbour. There was no sound except the splashing of paddle wheels, and not wind enough to take the fishing boats out to sea; the boats rolled in the tide, their sails only half filled. From the deck of the steamer we watched the strange crews, wild looking men and boys, leaning over the bulwarks; and then I sought for the town amid the shadow, but nowhere could I discover trace of it; yet I knew it was there, smothered in the dusk under the green sky, its streets leading to the cathedral, the end of everyone crossed by flying buttresses, and the round roof disappearing amid the chimney stacks. A curious, pathetic town, full of nuns and pigeons and old gables and strange dormer windows, and courtyards where French nobles once assembled—fish will be sold there in a few hours. Once I spent a summer in Dieppe. And during the hour we had to wait for the train, during the hour that we watched the green sky widening between masses of shrouding cloud, I thought of ten years ago. The town emerged very slowly, and only a few roofs were visible when the fisher girl clanked down the quays with a clumsy movement of the hips, and we were called upon to take our seats in the train. We moved along the quays, into the suburbs, and then into a quiet garden country of little fields and brooks and hillsides breaking into cliffs. The fields and the hills were still shadowless and grey, and even the orchards in bloom seemed sad. But what

shall I say of their beauty when the first faint lights appeared, when the first rose clouds appeared above the hills? Orchard succeeded orchard, and the farm houses were all asleep. There is no such journey in the world as the journey from Dieppe to Paris on a fine May morning. Never shall I forget the first glimpse of Rouen Cathedral in the diamond air, the branching river and the tall ships anchored in the deep current. I was dreaming of the cathedral when we had left Rouen far behind us, and when I awoke from my dream we were in the midst of a flat green country, the river winding about islands and through fields in which stood solitary poplar-trees, formerly haunts of Corot and Daubigny. I could see the spots where they had set their easels—that slight rise with the solitary poplar for Corot, that rich river-bank and shady backwater for Daubigny. Soon after I saw the first weir, and then the first hay-boat; and at every moment the river grew more serene, more gracious, it passed its arms about a flat green wooded island, on which there was a rockery; and sometimes we saw it ahead of us, looping up the verdant landscape as if it were a gown, and the river a white silk ribbon, and over there the gown disappeared in fine muslin vapours, drawn about the low horizon.

I did not weary of this landscape, and was sorry when the first villa appeared. Another and then another showed between the chestnut trees in bloom; and there were often blue vases on the steps and sometimes lanterns in metalwork hung from wooden balconies. The shutters were not yet open, these heavy French shutters that we all know so well and that give the French houses such a look of comfort, of ease, of long tradition. Suddenly the aspect of a street struck me as a place I had known, and I said, "Is it possible that we are passing through Asnières?" The name flitted past and I was glad I had recognised Asnières, for at the end of that very long road is the restaurant where we used to dine, and between it and the bridge is the *bal* where we used to dance. It was there that I saw the beautiful Blanche D'Antigny surrounded by her admirers. It was there she used to sit by the side of the composer of the musical follies which she sang—in those days I thought she sang enchantingly. Those were the days of L'Œil, Crevé and Chilpéric. She once passed under the chestnut trees of that dusty little *bal de banlieue* with me by her side, proud of being with her.

She has gone and Julia Baron has gone ; Hortense has out-lived them all. She must be very old, 85 at least. I should like to hear her sing "*Mon cher amant, je te jure*" in the quavering voice of eighty-five. It would be wonderful to hear her sing it ; she doesn't know how wonderful she is ; the old light of love requires an interpreter ; many great poets have voiced her woe and decadence.

Not five minutes from that *bal* was the little house in which Hervé lived, and to which he used to invite us to supper ; and where, after supper, he used to play to us the last music he had composed. We listened, but the public would listen to it no longer. Sedan had taken all the tinkle out of it, and the poor *compositeur toqué* never caught the public ear again. We listened to his chirpy scores, believing that they would revive that old nervous fever which was the Empire when Hortense used to dance, when Hortense took the Empire for a spring board, when Paris cried out, "*Cascade ma fille, Hortense, cascade.*" The great Hortense Schneider, the great goddess of folly, used to come down there to sing the songs which were intended to revive her triumphs. She was growing old then, her days were over and Hervé's day was over. Vainly did he pile parody upon parody ; vainly did he seize the conductor's *baton* ; the days of their glory had gone. Now Asnières itself is forgotten ; the modern youth has chosen another suburb to disport himself in ; the ball-room has been pulled down, and never again will an orchestra play a note of these poor scores ; even their names are unknown. A few bars of a chorus of pages came back to me, remembered only by me, all are gone like Hortense and Blanche and Julia.

But after all I am in Paris. Almost the same Paris ; almost the same George Moore, my senses as awake as before to all enjoyment, my soul as enwrapped as ever in the divine sensation of life. Once my youth moved through thy whiteness, oh City, and its dreams lay down to dream in the freedom of thy fields ! Years come and years go, but every year I see city and plain in the happy exaltation of spring, and departing before the cuckoo, while the blossom is still bright on the bough, it has come to me to think that Paris and May are one.

GEORGE MOORE.

(To be continued.)