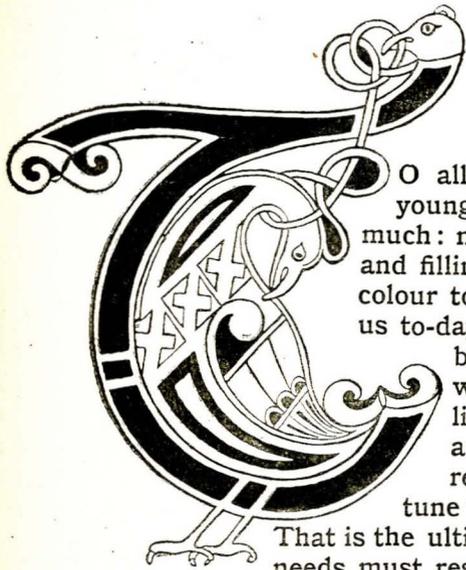


**'Four seasons fill the measure of the year ;  
There are four seasons in the mind of man.'**



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O all simple peoples in history, as to the young in every age, the seasons have meant much: not only marking out the paths of action and filling the cup of sense, but giving varying colour to thought and fancy. And even among us to-day, so slenderly related as we are apt to be to the primary Nature of Things, it would yet seem that the most harmonious lives—seen in glimpses now and then—are those whose times of effort and of rest, of growing and of ripening, are in tune with the seasonal rhythm of the earth.

That is the ultimate system in which we live; and we needs must respond to it, however reluctantly, as the finger acknowledges the heart-throbs and the fjord the tides. So, at this time, the voice of Spring echoes through us all, and is felt as a tidal message in the landlocked places of our being. The evergreen feels it, even. For though its branches are never bare, it now shares in the fulness of sap that is given to all things living.

The sun has swept through Aries, the west wind blows, the showers soften the earth—and behold! the world is young again and visionary. The Sleeping Beauty has awaked in fragrance; Proserpina, escaped from Hades, goes joyously about the fields, hearing the sprouting of the corn, the rising of the sap, the tiny clamour of buds new breaking into life. Some of the Wanderers who went last Autumn have returned with the sunshine, and the little hills shout for joy. It is a time of Renascence. And not only do we rejoice because what has been is again, but we feel that every Spring is the epochal dawn of a new age. This time of birth is also the time of

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variations, when new forms and new habits flow from the well-head of change.

And so it will be not amiss if we try in the present foreword to give some hint of what our particular variation may be, what is our conception of that present from which we start and the future towards which we tend—unanimously, if in broken order. For though we are one, we are also many; and the words and lines which form our book will show how variously each, according to his or her listening, interprets the seasonal melody—the true song of the spheres—which we all bow to.

And first we would say that we do not ignore the Decadence around us, so much spoken of. If we wished, we could not. For while at one social level, all the land over, it fills the gaze with a vision of slums and the hearing with outcries of coarseness and cretinous insanity—at another it is trumpeted as a boast and worn as a badge and studied as the ultimate syllable of this world's wisdom. So many clever writers emulously working in a rotten vineyard, so many healthy young men eager for the distinction of decay! And yet, out of each other's sight as those two worlds lie, there is but a step between and their kinship is unmistakable. A literature of distinguished style and moral vulgarity is indeed a misproduct of the same process that gives us in our meaner streets a degeneration of human type worse than what follows famine. We see also the restless craving, high and low, for undignified excitement, the triumphant system of education which is the nationalised blasting of buds, our science metamorphosed into the man with the muck-rake, our religion become the symbol of a drifting ship. All these things we see, if we are for the most part silent regarding them. It may be that they are a part of us; for even from the evergreen the leaves fall singly at this time of greatest hopefulness. By reaction, at least, and by counter-influence, we would gladly have our relation to them made certain and a remembered thing. Nay, already we seem to see, against the

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background of Decadence, the vaguely growing lines of a picture of New-Birth.

And as the evil began in the social and economic sphere, it is there that we first mark the remedial beginnings of a better order. A generation or two ago, in an age committed to arid industrialism and the keenest practice, men happened on a half-thought which had strayed from science into the marketplace. That thought was the conception of the Struggle for Existence as Nature's sole method of progress. It was, to be sure, a libel projected upon Nature, but it had enough truth in it to be mischievous for a while. For now the pitiful creed of individualism—'Each for himself!'—seemed to have gained unexpected sanction, as a cosmic process. Egoism and recklessness, provided they be on a large scale and out-of-doors, were evolutionary forces as fair as the sunlight, making ultimately for the welfare of the race. We need not wonder, then, that the individualist waxed arrogant, that his work prospered, that he built cities which are a degradation unto this day.

But all error is a deciduous growth: truths and evergreens only are perpetual. Science, working honestly within its own region, has perceived in good time how false to natural fact the theory was, and has lately vindicated for Nature a more logical method and a nobler character. It has shown how primordial, how organically imperative the social virtues are; how love, not egoism, is the motive which the final history of every species justifies; how fostering, not ravaging, is the pioneer process in the ascent of life. The practical inference has been quickly made: that a rule of conduct—'Each for himself!'—which is not half good enough for the beasts, has but little relevance to human intercourse and social action.

And thus the good sense and sympathies of the best men and women are no longer at heresy with the accredited teaching of their time. A communal quickening of the conscience is one of the most marked notes of recent history: that, and a growing faith in the value of all good precedents, an increasing

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confidence that one man's gain need not for ever be another man's loss. Experiments in co-operation have been an effective object-lesson in citizenship; the union of workers is rapidly passing beyond its earlier character as a mere article of war. And this had need to be so. For the social organism must integrate, or perish of its own energies: and our hope can never be in any banding together which shall merely make bread and butter cheaper, still less in any massing of similar interests which shall enable a legion to triumph over a phalanx, or a city to prosper at the expense of a shire. Least of all with the desperadoes of chimerical reform can we have anything to do. Our trust is rather in following a subtler indication which Nature gives to those who study her domestic economy: by trying to bring the most diverse interests under the dominance of a common civic ideal, in what to naturalists is known as a Symbiosis—in which the strength of one shall call forth, instead of cancelling, the strength of the other, in which each shall have his place, and even his privileges ungrudged, but shall feel that he has them through and for all.

A second way of escape we are reminded of now, when we throw our windows open to the morning air. The time of the singing of birds has come, and in the city precincts a thousand voices are gossiping of green fields beyond, calling upon us to go out into the country. The decadent of idleness is putting his yacht in trim, the decadent of another order now buys to himself a singing bird—a pathetic act, surely, to make the angels weep! Both are witnesses to one truth, and it is an old one: that Nature, whether you drive her out with a pitchfork or with material progress, never ceases trying to come back. We can never quite lose a kindly feeling towards the old memories and the old menage of the race, unless ourselves be lost altogether. The desire of them is an organic inheritance of the heart, and the need of them haunts our spirit in every generation. We are wont enough to look for health in the rural ways of living to which all our pedigrees so

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quickly revert; but we do not consider that our ways of thinking, also, would be saner and more wholesome if we listened to the counsel of the birds, or drew an inference from the trees in the city square:—

‘Can such delights be in the street  
And open fields, and we not see’t?  
Come, we’ll abroad: and let’s obey  
The proclamation made for May!’

From urban to rural, from fever to fresh air—that may fitly be the second rallying-word of Renascence.

And let no one too promptly construe our saying, or accuse us of ignoring the forces which bind men to their fate. Cities there are and must be, and it is in cities that much of to-day’s work and breadwinning must needs be done. But a more open route from town to country is surely not beyond achieving, nor is it necessary that all the travelling should tend for ever one way. People might at least be kept from forgetting that the fields are still under the open sky, that the occupations of Adam still go on, that the nature of things and man’s relation to the earth have a creation freshness still, some ten miles from town. Of the moral value of even such knowledge as that, and of the present-day need for it, many things might be said. But here we shall rather say that the means of salvation lie not in any unhopèd migration to the solitary places of the land, but in a transformation of the populous centres. While the town grows year by year in our heart’s despite, we can determine in some degree the aspects it shall take. Spaces may be left for the sunlight to fill, trees may redeem the dismal street, fit architecture call forth the pride of citizenship. Some sylvan graces may brave the vicinage of the factory, and the cultivation of flowers become a school of manners. So we may draw a little nearer to the City Beautiful—the rural town—in which joy inhabits, and righteousness has a chance of increase.

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And we have many cities that are called to a splendid future, if men were only wise. Before all others there is our own, unique in the world: 'A city that is set upon an hill.' Its houses are in mourning, and its streets have been washed with tears; but it has kept well its brave outlook over sea and land, its own gifts of sanity and eagerness. Paved with history, echoing with romance, rich in an unbroken intellectual tradition—what might not this city become! Meanwhile it sends forth its sons, there being little for them here to do, and they are of service in carrying on the wasting business of that metropolitan life which resembles so much the proliferation of a cancer. Yet the stirrings of better things are visible here also; there are those who do not hesitate to discuss already the tendencies of the local Renaissance as a thing assured. Howsoever that be, there are many places in the land which seem marked just now for hope to alight upon. In a vision of fair cities—Houses Beautiful or about to be—we cannot miss the grey town in the east, splashed with sea-foam, cinctured by green fields and the paradise of golfers; nor the city of industry in the west, mistress of many ships, trafficking with all peoples; nor the granite city of the north, cold and clear, defined into dignity, softened into music. Upon them all is the flying shadow of a regret, the breaking light of a promise. We see them—with Durham, York and Liverpool, Manchester, Bristol, Dundee and Perth—all with a struggling sublimity, all dishevelled and disgraced, all alive and full of hope!

One thought more. Now is the season of young things, of buds and seedlings, of lambs and other children. Round the earth has gone a cry of resurrection, and Life renews itself from point to point. It was in vain, seemingly, that Autumn withered and Winter laid waste—for behold! the muster of young lives, the splendour of fresh energies. The hawthorn which the hedger stripped, leaving it a gaunt skeleton, is clothed again with green leaves, and among the leaves is the shining of blossoms. And looking at the blossoms we are

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mind of the Children. Through them also reparation is unceasingly being made. The dust of life dries up the heart of a generation, character is fretted out in mean practice, thought itself is frittered down to cheap expedients and broken views (for which reason, notice, every vicious age and circle is addicted to epigram as a means of masking its emotional impotence, its bankruptcy of generous human qualities). With all this cheapening, we are driven to think, the moral wealth of mankind must be dwindling, the common fund will soon be dissipated, the human average tends steadily downward. But such fears are fanciful; against those evil issues there is an eternal safeguard. For while the love of man and maid is a daily discovery for some one in town and village, and while the greater love it leads to supplies the powerfulest motive in life and the most pervading, human nature can never permanently forfeit either its dignity or its strength. The higher truths are in the keeping of every household, while the women educate and the children lead the Race. Through them in every generation Nature conserves her good, and returns always to the standard of normality for a fresh outfaring. We have reason therefore, when, looking at the Children, we feel that the blossom is of more purchase than the tree. Another line of the Renaissance must surely be in the right unfolding of these, in care for the new that is in them, in perfecting their powers, in teaching them to love, in helping them to learn by living. This, then, in the Springtime, would be our particular variation, if only we might achieve it perfectly: to think and to dream, to rhyme and to picture, in unison with the music of the Renaissance. Of that music we hear as yet only broken snatches. But in these snatches four chords are sounded, which we would fain carry in our hearts—That faith may be had still in the friendliness of fellows; that the love of country is not a lost cause; that the love of women is the way of life; and that in the eternal newness of every Child is an undying promise for the Race.

W. M.  
J. A. T.