

Forgetfulness

By R. V. Risley

FRIEND, the years to you have been Autumnal, and when the war-horns of life are filled with dust you will not be frightened at the silence. Do you still feel the want for remembrance, the horror of the future's indifference? Do the faded figures experience has woven into the tapestry of your days still keep a reality for you that makes you sad to leave them? Do you dread the cold dark and the changelessness of oblivion?

For some lives the world is a waste of every-days that are all accounted for by mean causes and are useless and without a significant great end. And some lives are for ever haunted by an unattainable triumph that is for ever a little beyond—and beyond. But you have been interested in things as a sad, wise man, and yet have heard no loud ambition calling. A nature that realises sadness is never expressive, and its depths exist in silence and hide away from men. So, your life has been on the defensive, and in your isolation you have been mournfully unprotected against dreams. Your instinct of knowledge allowed you illusive consolations, and loneliness, the loneliness that dwells upon the altitudes, the loneliness of a wise mind, interpreted mankind to you.

Hope is God's jest and Memory His curse: but Indifference is
His

His blessing. And you have lived indifferent, but kind from a great pity ; and you have not been angry with men.

Some souls move through the world to soft sounds, but some, more wildly strong, sweep through the years with uproar and endeavour. But the tune of your life has been silence, which is the divinest harmony when understood in love.

If the unnumberable voices of the world's years live and echo everlastingly around the globe, I wonder whether they result in a mighty music huge with the accumulated cries of ages. Or do they drown away into the unbroken silence of the distances between the stars? I wonder which is the more awful and pitiful.

You have gazed from your isolation at the alien years as they trod unevenly past, and have seen how men must turn away from the faces of their old ideals, never looking back, lest former thought-friends become sad, as former world-friends, at re-meeting. Ideals are cruel in that they change, and the reason we pity them is because they cannot help being cruel to us. So, we constantly remove further along the paths of wonder, leaving the old places and levels empty. But time to you does not seem to progress, because you yourself do not change, and the moods of the years do not entice you.

You have seen how in these days men search for laughter, the slighted jester-angel too wayward for long attendance. Sick of the ache for truth, we turn to amusement to soothe the eternal disappointment. But we must woo laughter, and delicately practise it just enough, and entice it, for the hands of our minds are become awkward with work and their gentle touch is gone. But you have found laughter ready to your call, for your mind has remained sensitive in solitude.

You have seen how a spirit of discontent drives us, and how
weary

weary we are, and you have seen our sorrow in the age's dissolution, that man can not reverse time's glass when the sands run out. But you have not found music enough in the world's applause to care to listen for it, and you are so sad that you have become friendly with fatigue.

Oh, my friend, is there anything piteous like the piteousness of life, life that stretches its hands to the empty sky and says—"I came from yonder, take me back again"? And old Hope has blind beautiful eyes and smiles, and Sorrow's eyes are deep with sight, and she is always young.

Are you so spiritual that you feel the pain of the world's look? Does it see more than the reflection of itself? The world is a great dreamer though it credits only its exceptions with its dreams.

Facts and reasons we acquire and leave off again, their use dead. Experience is impersonal, only our applications of it become any kin to us. Time fades out of us the distinctness of old things, merging them in association in his shadow—reason's right is mixed with living's wrong, and what has stood large and plain is fore-shortened into dimness in the years; it is events that stretch the spaces in memory. We know only the midway of things and the beginnings and endings are in the dark; for man's knowledge is a lantern that he himself carries and the light falls round him. All this the world knows is true.

But when we hear youth calling, and, turning our heads, find that we are old, we take a landscape view of life, and we realise that our light has been the light of dreams, and with the puny lantern of our wisdom we have been groping in an unknown country and have not seen the sun.

Life tyrannises over us; ambition leads us on for ever after the illusive music of success played by the eternal invisible minstrels.

We burden our gods with useless prayers, and God is cruel when only His silence answers; or we pass our lives singing our consciences to sleep with excuses, its lullabies.

We are founded on dreams and greatly planned, but we are smaller-minded architects than nature, and have built every-day dwellings on the foundations of palaces.

The grassless path of generations still is resonant with the echo of ringing feet, now resting—the feet of the men whose minds struck a sharp note through the monotony of the years. But I think that beside the great ones there walk silently men as great, men who do not care so much for expression and whose souls sing to themselves alone.

Silence is master of spirits, but we must speak to him in a tongue of great emotions that we are not often cursed with the memory of. For silence to let loose his legions of thoughts upon us, we must be in the extreme to receive them, else they become silence again. So we rush to sound, and as noise is the standard of our importance, so music is that of our beauty.

Among men of keen senses the gate of the emotions most easily hinged is the gate of harmonious sound. Their souls are like guitar-boards—responsive innately to the running of the notes overhead. But in some men Nature's dulling thumb rests upon the high strings of their souls, her slow fingers touching only the bass chords of their heavy reason, drawing flat notes and level.

Surely our minds have many strings, and the harmony becomes a monotony by the twanging of any one of them. Surely it is the philosophy of the utter philosopher to spoil no harmony, though the vanity we call truth make a truthful discord. For when vanity has laid her painted hand upon our eyes we prate of truths we never saw before.

But you, my friend, are cursed with too clear sight in men—the
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the cold sight, not like the tinged vision of the enthusiast. You have not the blessing of credulity, that soothing hand that strokes keen thought to slumber. Surely men whose sharp perception has never been corroded with the rust of reverence see too finely to be ever quite content. And contentment is what we strive for by many strange, sad paths, trod out by the tired feet of former men.

One man's self holds many natures, some of them sleeping: perhaps we should be much alike could we ever be quite awake. And to be content is the result alone of that which we never practise nor give care to—our own natures. We live eager after exterior things, and try to yield to what is acquired the place of that which we boast is everlasting and cannot be acquired—our personality. But this unnoticed possession sits on a shadowy throne that cannot be usurped, and our noisy every-days pass over it like foam on deep water.

Once a story grew into a reality in my mind in the years, the story of an Indian beyond the Father of Waters. He grew mad and followed after the setting sun in its smoky crimson. But the place where it touched the earth receded and for ever receded across the plains, and the shadows grew suddenly out of the nowhere where they wait eternally. The gaunt hunter followed across the rolling lands and over the mountains, till, after many months, the ocean touched his hard feet. The strangers who watched from the shore saw his canoe lessen down the fiery path of the sunset, become small, very tiny, disappear into the sad last light; and the sun went down, and the dusk came, and the night came.

This is sad to you and me, for there is disappointment in it and ecstasy of too high ideals.

A boy walks in a cathedral, sacred and silent, in the city of reality. All round him rise the statues of his ideals, memorable
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and prophetic. Some day he goes out into the city to listen to its voices. And when he tires of the voices and enters again into the quiet cathedral, a very old man, the statues are all fallen down from their pedestals, and he walks among their ruins where he walked many years before.

Thus we hear the voices of thoughts calling, insistent, incomprehensible. They call to us in appeal, their questioning livens the dark—not only the voices of the shapes that we have passed within the staunch reality of the day, but the voices of the shapes that outnumber these, the shapes of loneliness and disillusion, and the wordless voices of those two are terrible. Our reveries are importuned by the past and the future, by that eternal future that we will not forget, by that eternal past that we cannot forget.

What else is there worth living or learning or laughing for, but forgetfulness? Expedient forgetfulness! Old successes come to be standards against our failures, old energies against our new fatigues; old happy moods become slight-pained regrets, and age laughs sadly at unwise, dear youth. Men swerved in the all-desire to forget, embrace oblivion, and they are wise. Forgetfulness is a blessing, like the blessing of whole-hearted, unwearied laughter to a world-tired man.

But, my friend, thoughts, too sad thoughts, have dulled the world to the shade of ashes and disappointment, and we are become old too young. There are autumn leaves in the bowls of our spirits, withered flame of bright colour. We have lived too much with books, and books eat out a man's youth; a spell of other days and other lives winds him in the melodious woof of dreams, and modern thoughts drown and die away in the unnoticed sound of modern years. To such minds the stones that bore the tops of history's heels are not mere paving-stones, and in all places where
men

men have thought great thoughts invisible cathedrals erect themselves where understanding worships.

Books pursue us through the long avenues of days that are not our own.

He bows unalertly, Mephistopheles. He is always tired, and he never quite convinces us, this German allegory of the ancient evil.

It is our dangerous friend Paul, of the subtle mind in debate, Paul the thistle-down-tongued, who spoke fetters aside.

It is the gentleman whom we know through the imagination of that Spaniard of whom we know so little. His blade peeps and his stocking is darned with a differing coloured silk. He stands, the wittiest, wisest, realest, maddest of mankind, cursed with a Sancho who has blessed us ever since—he bends and bows grave welcome.

The brittle laughter or the elastic cares of life find no response in the ceremonious welcome of their greeting.

Men leave us, and moods depart, and perhaps hurt memory at re-meeting; but books have no unkindness, and it is we who change. Friends force on us their content, or exhibit their woes as sign-boards to say our laughter trespasses on life. But books gravely await our coming and are our hospitable hosts entertaining the moods of us, their guests.

The better a book is the better it could be, yet it is a good book that for centuries can uphold reputation's incessant challenge, for it is more difficult to bear a reputation than to make it.

Now, our hurried days seldom admit of the building of a great fortress-book—our strong books are only outworks around literature. We are tired with eccentricity, the cheapest apology for originality. We are ashamed of the nakedness of sincerity and deal in transient things—from the shades no wail immortal of sad Orpheus ascends from his interminable search.

You,

You, my friend, see books from the standpoint of men, knowing men too well. Sorrow sees deep and is kind, and you know men yet you care for them. Yet surely it is more easy to feel friendly towards nations, for History is a cold-voiced minstrel, and her nonsense seems unhuman, and her griefs and laughter come from very far away.

People are like the weather. Some discourage us into departure for sunnier climates by their overcoat faces, some soothe us into resistance by their long-drawn content, till our levelled senses ache for a discord, but these are sordid, stupid men the temples in whose minds were built with closed doors; and the stupid man is his own contentment, as a great man is his own destiny.

A few cold winds have lifted voices sweet with the chill, pure wonder of the dawning air, and have spoken of the creations of their minds and called them loves. We have not such loves. Some men are blessed with never finding out that ideals live only in the ideal. The little door of Heaven does not turn on its hinges of light to our knocking, and only a ray of the luminous beyond steals out to us under its threshold.

A few men whose minds are dark with sorrows and whose laughers are all asleep have spoken in huge, soft organ tones, and made the world colder in the shadow of their everlasting pain as when a great berg passes by on the ocean in the dark.

But we cannot live upon the altitudes; our minds seek the balance of the valleys, and in our life's ending we see that the sum of the year's exaltations and depressions is nearly a level, and feel that it is well if our path has inclined but a little upward.

All great thoughts are sad because they are lonely, and there are only two whole, lonely joys, that of creation and that of destruction.

We try for distinction from the men about us, and our minds
become

become stages where our whims dance to the world's amusement. The various moods of our lives colour our souls with shades of impression, till memory in the years becomes tinged like the fiery afternoon woods in the autumn.

But loneliness is colourless, and remains as a shadow, for ever breeding strength. It is only in loneliness that a soul becomes defensive, as it is only in the silence of a great tragedy that it becomes impregnable. The growth of deep power in a mind implies a shady place aside from the surface sunlight of the day's events, a secret city in one's nature away from the noises of exterior happenings.

I know a story of a man who became divine in loneliness one night on the long sand, where the solemn thought of the sea spoke in a whisper. But afterwards he could not express the divinity he had understood, but he laughed his way through life to no tense purpose among the every-days. Once the midnight questioned him in the Fall of the year, and he answered that he had become a part of that divinity and could not speak. Surely all of us have one time understood a divinity that eludes expression. We feel it possible to be our best, but the harmony of our souls is broken by the discords of life, which demand loudly, and give no care to the hesitating depths of thought that stand always upon the threshold. Perhaps we are all the trumpets of the Deity, but we cannot speak what the invisible lips have breathed into our being. Possibly we are all beautiful each with a self beauty of our own, only circumstance spoils us.

We see this more easily in looking at the organised crowds of prejudices called Nations.

Nations die, some violently, struggling against outward causes, and their fall is noticed, making a page of battles in history; some slowly, and like a very old man, and their end comes as a transition,

transition, leaving a sentence as an epitaph. Sometimes the course of nations crimson at their setting, sometimes it fades like a twilight. A man being thought of as one, and as of a single impressiveness, his loss passes on with him and with him is forgotten, but a nation being a union of many voices becomes suddenly impressive when it breaks, the voices scattering. Nations roar to their finish, or change and grow indistinct as when one river joins another.

Death is always a tragedy because of its possibilities—perhaps it is change, perhaps oblivion, and the former is the more tragical, for when things change away and confute memory by dissemblance it is more pitiful than when they fall, becoming memories.

Sometimes nations die of their own satisfaction, and the strength grown vigorous in combating adversity sinks into listlessness in their ease; so, they decline of their own content, and die, like over-feeding men in an after-dinner mood.

Race, which is below nations, rests unseen for the reason of the silence, yet when, in its time, this deeper vitality that evolves nations, speaks, methods of rule are powerless, and governors seem insignificant.

When that great captive animal we call a people roars its fatigue the voices of the trainers are lost; when race grows feeble and old, the noise of government sinks into complaining.

Surely history, who was born old, is very tired, tired with the fatigue of the ages and their unoriginality, tired and sick, and sorrowful with knowledge of men. She has been so long ring-master in the circus of the generations, watching their ceaseless round to the cracked old music of the years, God must seem very cruel to her.

You feel the balancing of the centuries very delicately, my friend, and their results are finely weighed in your understanding,
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for your mind is sensitive to the characteristics of peoples, to the huge racial tones too large to be hurriedly heard. You know the roar of the ways of men, its sum and its insignificance. And, like God, in understanding man's fallibility you pardon it.

There are so few strong men. The strong man, self-willed and of no reverence, uses himself as a sledge, of which his will is handle, and bangs out the glowing shapes of his mind on the anvil of the world; he can look into the empty skies and tell his gods that he enjoys their life because he is their creator.

The wise man may be a fool in all but other men's gathered wisdom. The renowned man is a strange waster of the hours when he slights loud reputation. The fool may find his folly, in the end, applies to more of the world's days than does the hesitation of the overlearned mind.

But the strong deep man of modernity rests firm in self-reliance and command, and is not malleable; and he knows that he is strong. Egotism is a wageless labourer who begins our greatest works for us, and when our completions justify his grand beginnings we are as great as he whom we slighted is. A great man always has great egotisms. But modernity has given man a new sorrow, fatigue of man. We wonder which outbalances this weariness, and ingratitude, and sickness, and loss of companions, or laughing, the dear vanity of loving, careless thoughts, and the boisterous wills of the animal. Sometimes we have been hurried through these fancies when old moods hurt us, or when illness gave us tired knowledge of the persistent angles of a room. Time is tired of us, and we are tired of time.

Each of us walks with a companion called delusion towards whom we some day turn, and when we look into his face we see that we have been walking with a voice, an air, a mere reflection of ourselves, that only our love has warmed into the semblance of life.

life. We are come from the country of youth where life cried with a sound as of triumph in the morning ; now the valleys of evening hold us ; our energy glows dully in the ashes of fatigue ; and the wonderful voices of the dawn are whispers in the twilight of our lives.

My friend, you know great cynicism, too sad to be trivial, and an indifference born of fatigue ; but there is one thing that rests.

There is one pure emotion for man on earth, one huge, simple thing that expression shrinks from, that noise shuns, that the days slight. It slights, and shuns, and shrinks from being known. It does not feel the want of pity, for it is beautiful in an everlasting strength, and with the indifference beyond sorrow. This is hate.

Hate is a quiet giant who never explains himself to weak men. Anger, exasperation, envy, and jealousy pass by him unnoticed, and he sits brooding with an animosity that is too deep to stoop to revenge. He hopes that the soul he hates may know it, though, some day.

Exasperation fades from distance of time or place, and anger is as short-lived as a fire. We cannot remain faithful in these things. As the years of our life pass by, and we learn how pitiful things are, as time teaches us our vanity, and thought becomes bounded in thinking, memory draws back to the years that are gone, and joins the shadows of our ancient selves that lag behind us. But great hate, the hate that we have met upon the way and have looked into the eyes of, which so walks on with us for ever—this admits of no anger, no exasperation, no tirades, or curses. Its nature is silence and it shall not be forgotten.

Men are many-doored houses, and the visitors to our natures depart. But beyond the gaudy drawing-rooms, decorated with
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our best and least loved, there rests a sanctuary that strangers do not enter ; and here is such hate in place.

Envy is the slim rapier, and the more we handle it the lighter it feels to our grasp. It is a delicate weapon and prolific of imagination. Yet, once dropped, the cunning feel of the blade leaves us, and its fickle laugh looks whimsical, not formidable, along the ground.

Anger is sudden, or, like the storm long gathering, breaks in thunder and crooked lightning, that runs jagged over the face of the tumult, while our disturbed senses hurry across the lighter skies of our natures like clouds.

Exasperation is physical, the itch inside the thumb, the transient wish for suffering. Like a dog growling, or the Arab stabbing up between the bloody hoofs, we turn the gaze back to savagery, and with a shrug cast off the painted blanket of our civilisation. Then our arms are free, and we crouch and are dangerous.

Jealousy, the much maligned, yet a man's quality, and more tragic than funny, is much, in minds hard of trust. The jealous have been laughed at as buffoons and all their sadness missed, for it is long before some men trust and belief comes struggling ; yet once seated the fall of mountains is insignificant. Jealousy prompts men to rash deeds and often repented, yet it is but a winding path and it leads to a stronghold.

But great hate ; not dependent upon circumstances, not an elation nor a depression, unstorming, barren, lasting and unproductive—few natures have the silence to harbour it. Silence is the home of great emotions who feel the hopelessness of words. All great speech has broken silence, the noises scare it, and it remains underground ; only it comes forth in the stillness of the night like the elves and flies at the trivial tread of the light. In

such silence hate lives and draws its everlasting, imperceptible breaths.

Great places or great deeds can lift little men to their level, but hate is not violent and requires great men.

And there is a love in hate and a contentment ; a love of itself, and a contentment in its own existence. In the years it becomes a dear possession to a man as progressing with him, and its fidelity makes it firm-placed, and cared for as something to be trusted.

Nothing can so lift a thoughtful man in his own eyes as the realisation that something in his nature is faithful to him. For fidelity is the most nobly human of all qualities and a man faithful to himself the strongest of men.

So great hate becomes dear in the changes as something remaining beyond all things. Great hate and great love are pair, but love is the feminine and the most beautiful and is unhuman ; while great hate is a man and its strength is earth-strength, not like the woman's.

Hate also is unthoughtful, being thought, for the action or thinking implies levels, but hate rests quiet, and is almost forgotten. Memory is fickle, and a man must woo constantly or she becomes indifferent. Hate may drowse into sleep. Memory as often implies struggle as calm and sadness is her companion. But great hate is quiescent and can smile in its sure fidelity.

All large thoughts lift us on invisible wings broadening our horizon, yet make us sadder as seeing further ; the gods must be very sad from so far on high. A man of little thoughts can understand grief, but never sadness or sorrow. Thus great hate brings a man's position in self-command, and gives him sight in the distance.

And large thoughts remove a man so far out of the trivial,
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walling him apart from other men. And thus great hate gives a man distinction, as being individual, and not only relative as most of us are.

Great loves do not see oblivion, trusting through it, but great hate, not of God, but of the nature below our feet, has neither care nor trust, its existence being sufficient for its satisfying.

It leads in sleep the jangling emotions of the earth, while love stands by.