

SENTIMENTAL MEMORIES

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SENTIMENT is defined as emotion awakened by things which appear to have worth, the noble, tender and artistic feelings that make real culture of spirit. The sentimental or romantic, involving or inciting fine sensibilities of capacity for feeling and aspiration, is found in every breast. It reveals the soul, and when tempered by intellectual discipline and purpose this soul comes to its greatest value. Feelings recalled, memories stirred up, act as a kindly control over all days. Stored up they become a vast reservoir from which much can be drawn to cheer parched days. Goldsmith looked forward to the day when he could gather about him boyhood companions and tell of all he had seen in his long wanderings over the world. Many others share a like pardonable hope. The well filled life, abundant in every power and possibility of the mind, pouring itself out for the delectation of the less favoured, gives a fine picture of fruitful age as an inexhaustible unfolding of its treasures in unselfish benefit and delight. The wells of recollection are opened, tender memories that neither cold materialism nor the struggle for selfish ends can completely cover over, are tapped: eager, thirsty ones drink deeply of its good. To sip the honey from every flower, taste the fruit of every tree, draw from every herb and shrub, feast on all the wonder and beauty of the universe, assimilate and grow therefrom that others might catch a reflected glow, is a worthy dream indeed. It is sentiment, but nothing greater is found in human beings. Sentiment is strong, struggles for expression, and finds it sreward in many rare and sparkling memories.

Memories can be so delightful. One of the finest treasures age can hope for is the richly stored mind from which priceless things can be drawn to give grace and charm to every relationship. Too soon the lengthening shadows remind us of the sunset, and often sadness is very heavy because the day of storage has passed so quickly and with so little result. The sense of loss makes the fading day bitter. Age does not always prove the Elysian field that youth expected, but it can always be a castle of brilliant and happy memories:

Dear as remembered kisses are,
And sweet as those by hopeless fancy feigned
On lips that are for others.

The tender grace of a day that is gone returns, the flood of all the beauty and marvel of the past comes again in full tide, not as wild waves breaking on a rock-strewn shore, but as a golden stream carrying renewed life and cleansing:

. . . sensations sweet
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
And passing ever into my purer mind
With tranquil restoration.

The heart cries out that time would take a backward flight, that childhood might be relived if only for one night. When the tide has turned, what a flood is unloosed! The old home, family circle, early companions, the daily round through summer and winter, which has become glorified beyond the seeming dullness of that day, the school and church, chores, play, adventures take on a rosier hue. Recollections of those scattered far and wide, of those gathered into the regions beyond the sight are trebly precious:

I have had playmates, I have had companions,
In the days of my childhood, in the joyful school days.
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

How some they have died and some they have left me,
And some are taken from me, all are departed;
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

Lamb was over depressed when he wrote these lines. For though there was lack of physical presence, memories remained, and is this not a link with the eternal, a foregleam of immortality? They have not gone beyond love and the touch of spirit. They are even nearer, and in this men rejoice. The thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts, and youthful days are never lost. The treasures in the mind's storehouse become the best companions age can have. In them is perennial delight not only for the possessor but for all who come within range of the magic that makes a happy past alive once more:

Oft in the stilly night,
E'er slumber's chain has bound me,
Fond memory brings the light
Of other days around me;
The smiles, the tears
Of boyhood's years.

I remember, I remember
The house where I was born . . .
The roses red and white . . .
The fir tree dark and high;
I used to think their slender tops
Were close against the sky;
It was a childish ignorance,
But now 'tis little joy
To know I'm further off from heaven
Than when I was a boy.

The real days are when a child can sing beside the brook, the school boy at his play. The heart is then free from care; age has not touched the soul with cynic frost or guilty fear. Youth can sing because its faith is whole. Its days are bright, its nights calm and untroubled, its hours filled with magic. Many a one, weary with the toil and anxiety of a long life, yearns for the return of what seems forever lost. Memory persists, and what a mercy may be in its return amid the weight and chill of advancing years. Joyous innocence, warm and unselfish attitudes of youth become an unfailing source from which age draws its refreshment. The reminders of innocent and wholesome days, fitting into childhood's mould again, throws a glamour over those times which grows brighter as the value of innocence is more clearly seen. Reunions in later days are dear because time has turned backward and old incidents are relived with renewal of spirit. Youth builds its castles in the air, age recalls the phantom structures, and rejoices in the youth that could dream and hope.

This is mere sentiment, for no day of youth can be so good as the days of maturity might be. The tendency is to glorify the past, and this can be dangerous to the enjoyment of the present. To linger in the past may be only seeking an excuse for present futility. Still, the joy of memory when honour, affection, loyalty, unselfish attitudes rose above those of cruelty, treachery and selfishness must not be forgotten. Simplicity of faith, fidelity in friendship, willingness to share are like the sweet music heard far off and are the heralds of the day that may be. Memories quicken trust that that day will yet be "factual". Thoughts and fancies entertained in childhood may appear weak to the more sophisticated, but were held as most important at that time. The day when it was possible to see visions turns into one that can dream well. Without the visions dreams could not be. Maturity may bring more logic, more smugness, but it often takes away more than it gives. The feelings and stirrings

of the lad may not come to full fruition, but the hope that was there and the quality of spirit that raised the hope were sublime. Kept alive in man's recurrent memory means fresh vigor and steadies the gaze as it reaches beyond the horizon. Childish things are not always superseded in riper years, the thoughts of maturer life are not always an advance on the ideas and hopes of callow days.

The home with all its happy associations is the subject of much apostrophe. Thus it should be. Love and innocence reach full bloom within the family circle, and everything about it becomes a centre of reverent memory. The furniture, pictures and adornment, the fireside, the winter evening's gay chatter around the hearthside occupy chief places in the palace raised by memory. *Home Sweet Home, The Old Arm Chair, Rock Me to Sleep, Mother* express what many feel most deeply. The exile on the far off summer shore longed for the humble home in colder lands. The old arm chair became a sacred symbol because it was a mother's throne and altar, from which guidance and intercession flowed steadily for those who gathered around it. The floor about it was holy ground on which no earth-stained foot could stand. Another, weary under burden and frustration, tired of the hollow, the base, the untrue, weary of flinging soul wealth away, turned back to the days of a mother's watchful care, that the furrows of fret might be kissed from the brow and the silver threads restored to earlier shades. Sick at heart, world weary in brain, it sought restoration in nestling close in the embrace of mother love. Only memory, but so potent in its ministrations. Sentiment, but replete in meaning as the jaded soul found peace and healing. Hope in the eternal wisdom is brought to bud, the gracious arms are found around and underneath. There is stay and support. One who comforts as a mother comforts, who sent forth the prophet to declare solace to a broken people, finds type in the heart's ease of a mother's arms holding the child tight and snug through fear or pain. Sublime in its rapture is the giving way to this life-restoring sentiment. Its fullness is known only through the many decades of human life. Every quiet joy and refuge of the home circle becomes a foretaste of the greater joy and rest men ever seek.

Equally bright and vivid are the reminders of school days, Work and play, friendship and merry incident, sentimental and fanciful, carry much cheer through turbulent and anxious days that quickly come. Boyish pranks, skating parties, coasting

frolics, boating escapades contribute to the gaiety of memory. The thrill of being swept along on skates, fast as the wind could blow, of holding secure to the gunwale while the boat was hurried on by swift air, with mast nearly parallel to the sea, can never be forgotten. Nor will rapt memory of the day when the boy, just in his teens, stood at the wheel of a hundred foot schooner and guided her along the channel of Acadia's noblest river. The school concert, the public examination, the Sunday School picnic, days when in the shade of brush built camps, under the inspiration of inhaled smoke from dried lichens being burnt in an old clay pipe, when dreams were dreamed and confidences of love's fancy exchanged, mark high points in those halo crowned times of rare enchantment. The old readers, the old games, the old jokes, the old ways of doing things seem best as a glow is shed on them by the sun as it drops to its setting. Memorials of the past are carefully preserved. In old albums or family Bibles are found pictures, ribbons, and faded flowers that recall fond and proud moments. Thoughts of them dim the eyes and, though age hastens to brush away the tear as if ashamed, it returns to renew the sensations raised by these dear relics.

Prose and poetry have been used to express feelings regarding old scenes and events. The pathetic made lasting impressions. Recitations and tales in the old readers made much of this softer feeling. *The Death of Little Jim* never failed to bring tears, and even in manhood reading of this mournful poem makes one realize that the recent shave was not as close as thought. A lump raised in the throat and huskiness of voice proclaims that the heart is still softened by the sentimentally pathetic. Generosity on the part of the boy who said "Bite bigger, Billy, bigger yet, You're welcome that you know", the courage of the lad who kept to the burning deck though all the rest of the crew had fled, *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, gave a tang to the days when these first became known and it is revived in the more hardened days of cold and abstract thought. The joy of being able to say, from the height of superior virtue, of a friend who has come under some blame, "I'm sure he's an honest though stupid old ass" still tempts to the usage. *The Orphan Boy's Tale* touched the depths of sympathy, and has not lost its appeal in these days when men still are called to lay down their lives in the nation's quarrels. The lesson taught in "Oh how I wish I had the crust that once I threw away" was soon lost. *The Downfall of Poland*, *The Wreck of the Hesperus*, *The Triumphs of the English Language* were fitting vehicles for the emotions that filled the youthful heart. The gusto with which freedom

was made to shriek when Kosciusko fell is still loud in the ears. *The Village Blacksmith*, *The Graves of a Household*, *The Slave's Dream* created diverse feelings. These are not great poems, but they were eagerly read and remain sources of joy. *Grip* and *The Illustrated London News* add their quota to the entertainment the present has in the revival of what those days were. Tingling feelings are aroused, though the edge may be dulled. These mean so much when one is in the sere and withered leaf. The day of advance ideas may deaden the keen interest of previous estimate, but does not deter one in a steady return for sentiment's sake. And the wish is that the early delight would never fade. A neighbour said to Mark Twain that he would give one hundred dollars if he had never read *Huckleberry Finn*. In face of Mark's surprise he hurried on to finish his statement, "that I might have the exquisite joy of again reading it for the first time." Lost ecstasy may not be completely recaptured, but the remembrance grows more precious.

The Loss of the Royal George, Byron's stanzas beginning "Roll on, thou dark and deep blue ocean, roll", Fitz-James in "Come one, come all, this rock shall fly from its firm base as soon as I" excited feelings of sheer rapture. *The Scottish Chiefs*, *Tom Brown's School Days*, Henty's story of the Franco-Prussian war were read with the heart in the mouth. The reading was heaven enow. The old songs, *Old Folks at Home*, *Annie Laurie*, *Bonnie Doon*, *Loch Lommond* quicken renewed and fragrant memory. *I'm Dreaming of Jean of the Nut Brown Hair*, *In the Gloaming* and *Auld Lang Syne* speak of the days that grow sweeter as time whirls on in its speedy flight. In the memory of these, life is again fitted into childhood's mould and its joy regained. The richness of youth is restored to old age, and youth is made immortal. Mr. Harcastle, in *She Stoops to Conquer*, says to his wife, "I love such old fashioned trumpery. I love everything that's old: old friends, old times, old manners, old books, old wine; and I believe, Dorothy, you'll own I have been pretty fond of an old wife." Old books are read as old wood burns brightly, old pipes are smoked while talk grows merry over the adventures of by-gone days. A charm is thrown over the evening of life, and the blood is kept warm against the inevitable thinning worked out in the process of nature. Memories give their flavour to the continuous stream of life, and the sentiment that underlies the flowing current is what the life has been. Those who have at hand plenteous memories of good companions and worthy deeds or interests have an unfailing fountain of comfort and companionship, without which life is poor and desolate.