SOME MUSINGS OF AN IDLE MAN.

By Colonel R. H. FIRTH.

I.

I picked up the daily paper, a few days ago, and saw the death announced of a man who had been a fellow-student with me and an intimate friend of early days. How many years ago, I was reluctant to estimate. His path had diverged widely from my own and we met but rarely, still the notice of his death roused many memories of happy days, of occasional riotous living, and of consistent rivalry in the schools. He and I had competed for many prizes and it was satisfactory to recall that I had more firsts than he had. He was a dear good fellow, as generous and sporting as he was industrious and clever. He was what they call a brilliant young man, and it was around that brilliancy that my thoughts wandered. It comes quite naturally to call him a brilliant young man, but how difficult to refer to him as a brilliant middle-aged man. It seems as if there is a time of life at which most of the brilliant cease to be brilliant, and that time appears to be the moment at which men engage in the serious business of life. I believe that I myself was occasionally referred to as being a brilliant young man, but what little brilliancy I may have had soon got rubbed off and I found that it is easy to be brilliant only when you are doing nothing in particular and have no responsibilities or, at any rate, doing nothing for which you are paid. The moment you begin to earn money or try to earn it, the difficulty of being brilliant increases many times. Possibly, therein lies the reason why middle-aged men are so dull; for one thing, it is difficult to be brilliant over a task imposed by necessity and, for another, the world, most certainly the official or service world, does not want or encourage you to be brilliant. Those who applauded your brilliance before, now become impatient of it, and the safe course is outlined by the old tag, "medio tutissimus ibis." Emerson has put it well: "The moment a youth sets to work to earn his living he is intellectually married and must settle down to a different state of existence without attempting to prolong the airs and graces of youth."

Of course, there are men who will not consent to this change, for they persist in their brilliance much as an elderly coquette persists in the exercise of her charms. These, however, are the people who are more impatient than youth itself at the dullness of successful middle age; but, for all that, their brilliance is forced, because youth loses its charm when it is no longer young. There is no getting away from the fact that there is a season for everything, and the season for brilliancy is over for the man who is past 25. The thought comes—if only brilliant youth knew how many of the dull were brilliant once it would be less confident in its own

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brilliance. But youth sees no likeness between middle age and itself; it thinks ever that the last generation must be the dullest ever born because it is just that generation which it sees at work. I believe Titian was a brilliant painter until well over ninety years of age, but Wordsworth had lost all his brilliancy as a poet by the time he was forty. Much as we may lament our loss of brilliancy, yet it is remarkable how cheerfully we face that loss. We realize that our business in life is to do rather than to be. By doing our best at what we are doing, we forget how brilliant we once were when doing nothing particular; or, we remember it only when we see the brilliance of the next generation with pleasure and a little sadness. Young men may wonder why and how we older ones can be so dull, but they will learn the secret only too soon, and meanwhile it behoves them to be kind to us. We were sparkling fellows once, but we have ceased to sparkle so that we may live. Therefore, let brilliant youth be not too contemptuous of middle-age dullness; it has not faced the ordeal that all brilliance must submit to. If the brilliant youths of this day can keep their brilliancy through all the dust of sweeping offices or whatever other task is set them in the struggle for existence, then they will have the right to laugh at our dullness; but, only then, and that then is as far off as the Greek Kalends.

II.

We constantly see references to what is called the *moral* of troops. It is a word we have taken from the French and very frequently spell wrongly by adding an "e," which then makes it mean fair-dealing or honesty. By *moral,* one means that something the need of which by the soldier was never greater than now. Formerly the acquirement of that degree of discipline, confidence and spirit, which the French call *moral,* was a question for the professional soldier only, but, in these days, it affects the whole manhood of our race. Fortunately, a general high standard of intelligence makes the acquirement of the asset relatively easy. If we analyse the quality, we find there is a *moral* of the officer and a *moral* of the other ranks. The latter is largely a matter of environment and food supplemented by good leadership. It is something automatic in nature and manifested by good spirits, cheeriness and confidence. The *moral* of the officer is a more delicate thing to acquire and perhaps cannot be taught, for it embraces the whole art of leadership, which itself is the womb of *moral,* and many men are incapable of leading their fellows. In plain language, it is not every worthy man whose *métier* it is to be an officer and, unless it be his *métier,* that man should not be placed in the position. We all remember the centurion of the Scriptures, and, just as the officer of to-day is tested by the way in which he says "Go" and "Come," so the man is tested by the way in which he "goeth" and "cometh." Whether the men respond by going and coming with hesitation and misgiving or with speed and confidence depends on how much they mistrust or believe

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in the officer. It is a great gift to have the knack of managing men, some men being born with it, but not all men can be taught it.

There are some who think that a good officer is born not made. Personally I doubt the truth of that, for the fairest field will grow weeds instead of corn if not cultivated, and a barren field will grow corn if it is tilled. Probably, the greatest influence of *moral* is in respect of its control over fear. Every man is susceptible to fear, and because it is the skeleton in every soldier's knapsack it is the one moral factor more potent for evil than any other. There are a few men of whom it can be said that they are so little shaken by fear that it is no burden on them: the greater number of men are susceptible to fear, but their self-respect is proof against any possibility of their being betrayed by it. These are the people who do not want to die, but would much rather die than be seen to flinch. Then at the bottom of the scale are a few miserables whose moral strength is incapable of overcoming fear; they are the men who would sustain any disgrace rather than submit themselves to great bodily danger. For all these types the development of *moral* is a great help, and when the officer can show to his men that he is as superior to them in all moral qualities as he is in rank, he has gone far towards developing his own *moral* and theirs too. It is the curious combination of tact, efficiency and sympathy in the officer which engenders that still more extraordinary spirit of cheerfulness, even under acutely depressing conditions, that establishes the *moral* of an aggregation of men. Emulation and *esprit de corps* are valuable factors, but they must not be confused with those vulgar vices jealousy and cheap swagger; these latter are destructive of respect, confidence, contentment and comradeship. Respect is a valuable moral factor, but it must begin at home. If a man does not respect himself, he must not expect others to respect him.

The whole question of *moral* is one of the most interesting of psychological studies, and nowhere does one find a greater field for observation on these points than in the new armies. Napoleon is said to have remarked that he would rather have an army of stags led by a lion than an army of lions led by a stag. It is epigrammatic but true and, in quality of leadership, expresses the whole truth. We need to remember that men can so saturate themselves with the will to conquer that, even if they fail of conquest, they can at least render themselves invincible in a real sense. This is true of both officers and men, and the latter can best catch the infection of *moral* from the former.

III.

The appearance of a certain Gazette gave rise to some caustic remarks in a mess in which I live. As one listened to the comments regarding certain people being members of a mutual admiration society, one was reminded of Æsop and his fables. Admitting that there may have been some taste of sour grapes in the mouths of the more talkative of our

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number, still, one found it difficult to avoid reflection on the general question. Of course, for men outside the pale there is something very irritating about a coterie whose chief characteristic is admiration of each other, much as there is often something irritating in the infatuation of lovers. With these latter, however, we can be lenient, as we all have been or may be in love. In both cases illusion plays a big part. However true this may be, it is difficult to deny that there is something derogatory in our irritation at what are called mutual admiration societies. That irritation is but another word for envy of a little world within a world, and whose inhabitants seem to have some secret of power denied to ourselves.

In my younger days I moved in certain artistic circles, and was brought much in contact with a set of men and women who had been and were much under the influence of Rossetti, and who all admired each other and all their work. To me, as a Philistine, they were amusing people for whom I had an active scorn, but maturer years have convinced me that had it not been for their association with the master and with each other, few of them would have attained the eminence they did reach and so much above their natural powers. To them, geese of the right kind were always swans, and many geese became swans by mere contact with and suggestion of the others. I have no desire to be cynical, but undoubtedly the most mediocre of them were redeemed from mediocrity by the fact that they could recognize a teacher in their master and in each other. It was this fact which distinguished them from all outside, and which was the basis of their mutual admiration. In official circles, the same is operative; accident often brings a set of men together, but common tastes and a common aim are a bond of which mutual admiration is the natural result. Their idealization of each other may find expression in Gazettes, but the ideal is based upon realities and a freedom from all delusions about human nature. Their guiding philosophy is that it is a greater error to mistake swans for geese than to mistake geese for swans; the latter may be a matter of nomenclature but the former never so.

IV.

The juxtaposition on the same page of a daily paper of a summary of our losses in this War and the latest returns of the birth, marriage and death rates of the home population gives food for thought. It is an old question, but one about which we cannot think too much. Last year[1] we lost in round numbers 100,000 men killed, or about half as many again as the deaths from tuberculosis, which is our most deadly disease; but tuberculosis does not take our best men. Meanwhile, what was happening in compensation? The only true compensation for deaths is births, and yet the birth-rate for 1915 is the lowest on record, or 21·9 as compared with

[1] This was written in February, 1916.

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the previous lowest of 23·6 in the preceding year. To make matters worse, the civil death-rate rose much above the average of the last ten years. One is not much surprised at this latter fact as the death-rate must rise the more we become a nation of elderly people. Before the commencement of this century, the rate of increase of the age-group (15-20) was at least four times that of the age-group (65-70). Between 1901 and 1911, however, the actual growth of the younger population was some 86,000, while the growth of the older group was 156,000. Further, these disquieting facts are not softened by the circumstance that the present infantile mortality rate of 110 is the highest since the hot and unhealthy summer of 1911.

No matter how we look at the question, we have to admit that 1915 was a bad year, and the irony of the position is emphasized when we realize that the same period saw our Imperial possessions increased by many hundreds of thousands of square miles. Thus, our Imperial responsibilities have been and are increased while the white man, whose burden they are and will be, is failing in the task of maintaining the living foundations of empire. So much for the question of numbers. As regards quality, the racial prospect is almost as serious. The dysgenic influence of the war touches only one sex, but maternal alcoholism, distinction between social classes and the disinclination of our best women to marry under present conditions involves the other sex and next generation, besides aggravating the whole case. Disturbing as the facts and the thoughts which they raise undoubtedly are, still there is nothing inevitable in the Imperial fate towards which we seem to be drifting. The range of remedial action is immense and its possibilities adequate if the need be realized. The lines of action are clearly defined and point to concerted and national endeavours to secure and safeguard ante-natal, natal and early infantile stages of nurture. Further, on the Imperial plane, we need to remedy that great factor of our low birth-rate at home and in the Colonies which depends upon the excess of women at home and the defect of them overseas. If returned soldiers are to emigrate and populate our new and old territories, we must see that those who go take wives with them. The writing on the wall is plain, and we need to rescue eugenics from being a cover for opposition to certain social reforms. The goal for which all should strive is the preservation and increase of the race. In so striving, there must be no hiding of the truth, but the dissemination of knowledge of facts and needs; the needs are a recognition and fulfilment by women that Nature intended them to be the mothers of children with, once the children are born, individual and corporate effort to secure their survival. Our profession has done much for individual hygiene, surely it is time that it worked explicitly for racial hygiene? Let us not forget that each one of us is or ought to be a teacher, and our duty to ourselves and our race is to make the heads of our fellow compatriots not graves but mines of knowledge concerning the facts of this national question. It is for us

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all, be we in civil or military life, to educate the laity, making facts plain and not mincing words as to the remedy. Only if we be wise in such ways can the innumerable unborn of our race inherit from us the vital means wherewith to discharge their task, as the trustees of the greatest empire and of the highest ideals which the world has known.

V.

I have just come back from a conference at Army headquarters. There, a man had explained that his corps was wonderfully free from a certain disability and, suddenly, interrupted his remarks by saying, "I touch wood," and grasped the back of a chair. As I rode back in the car to my own headquarters, I got thinking over the whole incident and am tempted to jot down one's thoughts. Now, it is evident that we have in this incident the survival of a curious custom which helps to make us understand what superstitions were to people who really believed in them. The man who was the cause of these notes is, I happen to know, one who would be much hurt if anyone said he was superstitious. Yet, unconsciously, he betrayed a fear of a Nemesis provoked by boasting so much that by a habit he checked the confession of a pleasure or happiness. I own that I have been guilty of the same act myself, and admit that it is an expression of half unconscious misgiving which overcomes me now and then, indicative of a fear to believe that I have weathered certain troubles and still more afraid to say so. At such times, superstition is no mere romantic diversion but a relic of the real intimidating demon of the past.

I have a sister-in-law who is a veritable high-priestess of small observances of this kind, and she is a fruitful source of amusement to me. Often, as I have noted her quaint remarks or acts, has the thought come that superstitions of the kind are but survivals of a more primitive state of society. There was a time when superstition was a real and overshadowing fear to everyone, and, as people had a complete belief in their superstitions any rites which they imposed were regarded as disagreeable necessities. With us, under a looser dispensation, such superstitions as we retain have become romantic curiosities to frivolous minds. The killing of wild animals is no longer necessary as a means of getting food, but it delights people from its spice of danger and its chances of failure or success; in the same way, superstition being no longer seriously believed presents an element of fear which appeals to certain minds. Their real fears are elsewhere, and these sham fears cause enjoyment simply because they are incongruous with our conception of the universe, and do not entail the constant and cumulative anxiety caused by real fear.

Another factor which tends to encourage the observance of such acts as taking one's hat off to the new moon, or turning one's money at the sight of her, and the reluctance to sit down thirteen at table is the circumstance that many of us are a trifle bored by our sense of the relation between cause and effect, and we strive to explain or imagine escape from it. Our

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friends who do these things know perfectly well that the course of events will not be affected really by helping some one else to salt or walking under a ladder, but it is pleasant to them to believe in a surviving arbitrary streak in the constitution of the universe and we, of less sensitive minds, find the dullness of the day relieved by a streak of unreason betrayed suddenly in rational people. The reader must not think that these thoughts are expressive of any personal sense of superiority; far from it, they are but an attempt to argue out why and wherefore certain lapses to a primitive mode of thought occur. They come down to us from a time when there was no sense of the relation between cause and effect, and when everything out of the common was regarded as the interposition of some unknown power. None will admit a wish to return to this conception of things, but few of us are free from a pleasure in primitive thrills of the kind, for they enliven the dullness of civilized life, very much as some ancient curio contrasts with and relieves the dullness of photographs and other timid ornaments of a modern drawing-room. In thus thinking of the ritual of the superstitious, we obtain a warning that our modern security is not secure and our modern reason not yet wholly rational. We find that we are less civilized than we thought, and that we must not play tricks with our minds out of mere lightheartedness. How much each one of us needs the lesson can only be answered by ourselves.

VI.

The present time of worry and anxiety is a fruitful source of growls and grumbling. At lunch the other day, a man came in and exclaimed, "Oh that I had wings like a dove, for then would I fly away and be at rest." He belonged to our "Q" branch and evidently had been having a bad time of it in the office. Strictly speaking, rest is not immediately to do or be, but to cease from doing and being. It is difficult to associate rest with a bird, because it is among the most restless of creatures; that is, it is either all movement or all repose. Yet, to many people in our modern life, the idea of rest is inseparable from that of movement. When we are weary or bored, most of us feel sure that if we could be somewhere else we should find refreshment in the change and, in our modern version of the Psalmist's aspiration, we should substitute the words "motor-car," "yacht" or "wagon-lit" for "dove." The funny part about it is that, when we have thus gone in search of rest we rarely find it, but stumble merely on to a different kind of weariness. The truth is, rest like happiness is one of the many things which are not to be found by pursuing them. Rest must be a visitor and not a captive; moreover, rest is a shy visitor for whom preparation must be made and then perhaps if we keep still it will come.

All who have been in the East are familiar with the degree of cultivation of the art of repose manifested by Orientals. Their idea of rest is repose in its simpler forms and in marked contrast to the Western

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gospel of being strenuous for its own sake, and as the only way in which life could be made worth living. To many, what we call strenuousness is but another name for restlessness and inability to keep still. There is no merit in activity for its own sake or irrespective of the ends to which it is directed. Unless watched, such strenuous activity becomes a disease whose symptoms are only to be allayed by a constant indulgence in the irritant which causes them. Examples of this misdirected or pathogenic activity are familiar to us in the women who can never be still, who hate to be alone, and who must be ever rushing here or there. True, this time of war has pulled up many of these women as with a bit, and not a few are working efficiently and well, and also glad at the end of the day to sit alone and enjoy repose. This is one of the few good things we have obtained by serious war, and it is the discovery of work that has brought to many restless women the discovery of real rest also. For the one is the complement of the other, so much so that it is nearly as important to know how to rest as it is to know how to work. These and others, but a few degrees different, are the people who have discovered their own homes and their own resources for the first time. And although over almost every home there is a shadow, since that home must be the centre of real things, so people, instead of running away from their sorrows, are able to remain and face them, and perhaps to find that such sorrows are not all bitterness.

It may be paradoxical, but war with all its horrors has given to many as well as taken away. It seems a terrible cure, and one prefers to think that the benefit comes less from the cruel realities of war than frcm causes which are incidental and truly good in themselves. One may be an optimist, but the signs of the day suggest that organized idleness has disappeared, and that both men and women find real work to do instead of what was only make-believe. From this real work comes weariness, and from that weariness comes rest. So, in this manner, a benefit from the war lies in the circumstance that many people have learnt to rest in a new way, namely, by being still. The particular kind of fidgety restlessness that was afflicting the modern world, and of which perhaps this war was the culmination, has been soothed, and so for some, at least, the present great upheaval is by no means all on the wrong side of the account.

VII.

Going home on leave, lately, one of the first things to arrest my attention, on a hoarding as the train ran slowly through Folkestone, was a placard on which the words "Bad Form" stood out prominently. Subsequently, I found out that the placard was an appeal to women to refrain from extravagant dressing. During the journey to town, I got thinking over the phrase "bad form," and to analyse the question as to whether there is any criterion of right and wrong in matters of "form" or taste. Good or bad "form" is nothing but a colloquial variation on

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having or not having good or bad "taste." This is an instance of how thought is curiously at the mercy of words and often confused by the use of words in different senses. Now, one man may like red hair on a woman and another dislike it, also one man may prefer spending his holiday in the Alps and another at Swanage or St. Andrews. We may regard each of these likes and dislikes as a matter of taste, but we may not label them as being either good or bad taste. If we speak of good or bad taste and form, we refer clearly to those likes and dislikes into which the will and mind enter and which can and ought to be affected by judgment, the outcome of training or experience.

There was a time when people thought of taste as something arbitrary and unconnected with intellect. We think differently now, since we speak of good or bad form and taste in matters of conduct. It is an interesting development as it indicates that we are aware of a connexion between beauty and goodness, and judge of the motives of an action by the manner in which it is performed. This appreciation of manner of doing a thing is further an artistic standard, for a work of art is judged by the manner in which it is executed rather than by the motives of the artist. In matters of conduct, bad form or bad taste is only brought home to us when it makes some appeal to the emotions and makes it badly. A man may be brutal, selfish and ruthless, but so long as he does those acts of conduct without any attempt to conceal their character by incongruous excuses, we do not label his actions as being bad form or in bad taste. In many of our daily actions we display no kind of taste or good and bad form, because we make no kind of emotional appeal in our performance of them. So long as we perform our actions simply and without trying to produce effects not proper to them, we can escape the imputation of bad form. Our dislike to bad form in matters of conduct would seem therefore to be dependent on the recognition of some kind of insincerity that disgusts us. Many acts may be in bad form though not wrong in themselves; but bad form is the product of a man's whole nature because if he could see that it was bad he would not be guilty of it. His acts are such as would move him if some one else did them, and any appeal made to us in what we deem is bad taste involves the assumption by the appealer that our own taste is the same as his own, and then follows our resentment and desire to prove that it is not so. It is always more difficult to protest against bad form than against actual wrongdoing; for how is one to prove that it is bad form?

This brings us back to our original thought; is there any criterion of right and wrong in matters of taste or form? A tempting answer is "no," or to say *chacun à son goût*. A moment's reflection, however, suggests that in all questions of form or taste there is as much right or wrong as there is in morals. We all admit that, in matters of conduct, there is a definite standard of right and wrong. In such cases, the only criterion is the judgment of the right-thinking man, or of the man whose habitual

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right conduct has endowed with a right judgment. Similarly, in matters of form, the man of good taste is also best fitted to decide. The critic may here say, "I recognize the need of some standard of conduct if I am to live at peace with my neighbours and myself, but whether I have a sound standard of taste is a question which concerns mainly myself." True, but good taste and its brother good form is indissolubly associated with good conduct, as judged by the standard of the period; further, good taste is partly an inborn gift and partly one cultivated by practice and study. Just as there are men born with an inherent bias towards virtue, so there are men born with an inherent gift of good taste. In each case, the study of great examples is needed to refine and perfect the native gift. The human mind has a certain timidity which dislikes what is precise and original, hence imitations, vague and sentimental things have their short day. It is the mark of bad form to be taken in by these, to prefer the imitation to the original, hence bad taste is usually deceived only by the frauds of its own time; and the man who has good form is he who conforms most closely to the best ideals of the age in which he lives. Tastes vary from age to age, but certain things delight all generations and these are the materials on which all good taste must be based, and the man who bases his conduct on those things is he who has good form. It is only by the study of the high thoughts of men and the contemplation of noble deeds that an unimpeachable good taste can be acquired. The judgment of the world refined and rectified from generation to generation is final and brooks no appeal, and St. Augustine's dictum *securus judicat orbis terrarum* comes back to us as meaning more than we used to think it meant. Few of us who wrote that line in our copy-books as boys realized that a day would come when the principle which it inculcated would need to be placarded all over the country to prevent people flaunting about in fine clothes, cheap furs and shoddy jewellery, pretending to be better than they are. In other words, we are asked to show good form and to judge conduct as the old Greeks judged it by regarding the æsthetic and moral standard as the same. Unfortunately, for the greater number, the words and confession which Ovid put into the mouth of Medea in her famous soliloquy are only too true, and most of us have to say, in respect of this matter, *video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor.*

VIII.

Circumstances have placed the Corps Headquarters to which I belong in a true piece of rural France and one's surroundings in the balmy days of early April make one realize that the biology of spring is a book of many pages. Our spring does not come in one triumphant rush; it promises and disappoints, it advances and retreats, but still we feel the difference between its earliest signs and the last belated day of autumn. Even the birds feel the difference, and seem warned by the change in the sunlight and the stir of the wind that their time of work and happiness is coming.

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One looks for early migrants and wonders how they, in their southern winter quarters, begin to grow restless and remember the pleasant woods of northern Europe. For those wanderers there can be no news except by change in Nature, and they do not know the extent of man's folly and ambition as imprinted on the corn and beet fields of France. For them, the world is but the earth with its natural changes and future, and though they have to wage the struggle for life they have made no cult of it. Death comes to them, but it is not foreseen, glorified or prepared for. Possibly they have no souls, but having none they do not misuse them, and we can understand why the Teacher spoke of them and the lilies of the fields to men for whom the soul had become a trouble to itself.

I look about me and all around is the message that this is the time of year associated with that capacity of becoming young again which so many living creatures, including man, have lost in greater part. Each walk I take shows me signs of rejuvenescence in Nature, but in the world for which man is primarily responsible it is all too easy to find examples of senility. Such senility, marked by degeneration or inhibition, liability to disease, and an ungearing of important parts of the organism is more or less unknown in wild Nature, or that which has not suffered from man's interference. One asks the question, Why? The answer seems to be that the conditions of the struggle for existence in Nature are such that senility is not tolerated, and that the average duration of life is punctuated in reference to the welfare of the species. Plants and creatures come to a natural end when their processes of rejuvenescence fail to keep pace with their processes of senescence.

As distinguished from senility, senescence is an all but universal retardation of vigour or resisting power, and itself the consequence of changes in the colloid substratum which forms the chemico-physical basis of life. In plants and some creatures, such as the protozoa, the recuperative processes are so perfect that natural death need never occur, or at least be long delayed. In them the colloidal and protoplasmic substratum can be restored piecemeal, and the creature never grow old. But as life becomes more complex and the organism more of an agent, it becomes more difficult for the processes of rejuvenescence to keep pace with those of senescence. As one looks at the bursting buds the thought comes, Has not this led to special periods of rejuvenescence in plants, or to those remarkable phenomena of a return to almost embryonic life familiar to us in the pupa stage of flies and insects? In man, the physiological stability of his protoplasmic substratum and its associated increase of individuality would seem to limit the capacity for rejuvenescence. The penalty is individual death, for the very processes in the human organism which lead to death are the processes which make man what he is. As to why we grow old, many answers have been given. Metchnikoff's theory of an auto-intoxication from the large intestine is familiar to most of us; others refer senility to mere wear and tear. None of these theories are of

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universal application, and all fail to answer another question—Why do not all animals exhibit the perfect recuperation to which some have attained? Some worms have the capacity for periodically becoming young again. Thus, a Planarian may separate off a third of its body, which speedily grows into a whole, while the diminished original heals itself and grows a new tail. This process synchronizes with an increased metabolism and an increased power of resistance to poison vapours. Assuming these to be qualities of youth, then the regrowing fragment is again young. Similarly, we all know that ascetics and people who are spare in their diet often become curiously young in appearance. These are facts which suggest that creatures become younger in whole or in part by lying low for awhile, and that herein may be the clue to those curious processes of dying-back which occur during the hibernation of some animals and the winter changes in plants or trees.

These thoughts, arising from the many signs of spring, suggest a speculation that possibly the very early pre-differentiation stage of embryonic life in some complex organisms, where the individual is known to fail in evading senescence, may afford opportunities for rejuvenescence at the very start of life and a lessened risk of being born old. One draws from such an idea no dream of an *elixir vitæ* being extracted from an embryonic tissue; but it encourages the view that while habits age us, new work, new play and even new diet are but means of showing man that he is as young as his mind is, though he may be as old as his arteries. In any case, our efforts to stave off senescence may be rewarded by an evasion of senility, even though we find it difficult in these spring days to be either as gladsome as the finches or as rejuvenant as the newly-gilded larch or the freshly-purpled birch trees. If human life were longer, we might in time grow so used to the signs of spring's return that they gave us little pleasure; but although time flies quicker in later life than it does in childhood, a year remains a sufficiently large fraction of our whole experience for spring to keep for us until the end all its earliest fascination, and make us see the incongruity between what we are and what we might be. Perhaps, to enjoy fully the Lenten lilies of spring we must come to them with the spirit of Lent, but this is not given to us all.

Next, a turn in my walk brings me to a giant elm torn up and flung across the path. It is the aftermath of a recent gale, and near by, too, is a hornbeam resting against another with all the suggestion of a wounded man supported by a comrade. It is a picture of death in life and a reminder of those human derelicts who, but a mile or so away, are the piteous fruit of that other blizzard, a blizzard of iron and lead which sears, scorches, breaks and maims. It is difficult to suppress sad and suggestive thoughts, and yet the havoc wrought by Nature and by the fury of man will be repaired. But what years must pass by. Generations must come and go before another elm of the girth of that before me rears and holds its head. So, too, all those whose hearts are wounded by the red ruin of this war must pass to the great place of reunion ere mankind forgets the

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anguish of this kind. None of us who are now alive will see it, but by the eye of faith. For us, it suffices to know that it will be, and we once more realize the unimportance of our own little span in the "unfathomable sea whose waves are years."

IX.

Returning from leave, I was sitting in the train just before its departure, noting the varied groups of people who had come to say good-bye to friends and relatives. Just outside my carriage were a couple who attracted my attention. They were a young pair and it was obvious that to both the parting was momentous. It was difficult to avoid hearing some of their words; the woman begged the man to take care of himself, not to be reckless, to remember all he was to her and the value of his life to others in the particular business of his life. What his reply was I did not hear, but doubtless the usual promise of a due regard for self-preservation, subject to the prior call of duty and honour. The whole incident was pathetic, and but one of many of the kind which have been enacted for many months on many railway platforms. The man got into his carriage and the train moved off. During the journey down to Folkestone, I found myself thinking of it all and recalled a farewell of my own and of my family to a fine young man at Peshawar city station, where he had come to say good-bye to us. It all came back, his cheery smile of confidence and deprecation at our parting bidding to take care of himself, if only for the sake of one of us. And then came the remembrance of the sequel, for he was killed in action within three months, whilst rescuing a wounded officer. It was difficult to avoid sad thoughts and serious reflection.

As I sat musing, the paradox presented itself that we wish or will for those whom we like and love that which we would prefer them never to will for themselves. Because the woman loved her man and I liked my friend we each willed their safety. If those two men had willed their own safety as ardently as the woman and I had wished and willed it on their respective behalfs, would they hold the same place in our estimations and be our heroes? One doubts it, and realizes that had they said, "I will take good care of myself for I perceive the loss you all would suffer if harm came to me," we should have felt in gaining our desire we had dishonoured the object of it. The fact is, the woman on the platform loved her man and I liked and gloried in my friend because we knew that each of those men despised or held at its true price the safety in which we would keep him. Both the woman and I had willed for our respective friend that which, when he willed it for himself, deposed him from our reverence and affection. We are here confronted with the fact that the view we take of our beloved or liked and the view our beloved or liked takes of itself are different. To us, the beloved must be preserved, but the beloved are not concerned with self-preservation and reserve for themselves a recklessness which we, on their behalf, would forbid.

It presents an interesting situation, and the difficulty is not lessened by our being obliged to admit that the safety which the woman and I desired

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for our friends was not the last word of our minds, but that there is or was in us both an inward, deeper, subconscious will which consents to their sacrifice of themselves. In my own case, that subconscious will whispers now to me that had my dear dead friend hesitated to make the sacrifice, I should have reverenced him less. I do not know the subsequent history of the woman's man, but one is confident that, should he fail in making the great renunciation, her mental attitude would be similar to my own. If so, then the wills of our two friends were and are the same as that of the woman and myself. Even admitting this, a difficulty arises that when the woman and I have gone over to the side of our respective friends and consented to the temerity which destroys them, our other will, or the will for their safety and preservation, is not extinguished. It continues to utter a protest. Another argument comes along which says, that the sacrifice of the noblest and the best is a necessary factor in the progress of the world. To this the question arises, How many victims does the world require? Are there no limits and can self-sacrifice never be overdone? May not my friend have represented one more than was necessary and are the right ones always selected? To understand why the whole creation must suffer pain is not enough to reconcile us to the sorrow that actually exists. We must be satisfied that there is not one groan too many or too few, not one mistake in the persons selected for sacrifice nor in the time allotted for their pain. Between the abstract truth that someone must suffer and the concrete fact that my friend and no other has suffered, here is a wide gulf. Though convinced of the first, I am not reconciled to the second. Of the two wills within me, that which decreed the safety of my friend is far more assertive and argumentative than the other will which consented to and approved of his self-exposure to risk. If we ask a man why he risks a valuable life like his own, his reply will be, "I cannot do otherwise." If we turn back to ourselves, we find that this also is the attitude of our own second or subconscious will, and we say to ourselves 'I cannot do otherwise than consent to the course he has taken.' This brings us back then to the conclusion that, after all, my will and the woman's will were at one with my friend's will and her friend's will. Further, the conclusion is unavoidable that neither the woman and I nor our respective friends decided the question for ourselves. The decision had been decided by some Third Party, which we may call conscience or anything else we please. Much the same difficulty doubtless worried the Apostle when he asked himself why he in particular, and not one of the other Apostles, should have been selected as chief ambassador to the Gentiles. It is difficult to avoid making the same answer in our own case as St. Paul did, and say, "By the grace of God I am what I am." The truth seems to be that we have little say in the making of these decisions, and that is why we must and do say so little as to why and wherefore. There is comfort in the thought, because it confirms the presence of the power within us of a beyond-self, and it explains the instinct we possess that it is good to give all when a higher than self demands it.

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