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CHAPTER XX

NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN

Here then is the record of my day's work still unfinished at eighty. Nobody can be more surprised than I am that I am still at work. Looking forward at life at thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, generally finding myself tired and a little discouraged, having always taken on things for which I was unprepared, things which were really too big for me, I consoled myself by saying, "At seventy you stop." I planned for it. I would burrow into the country, have a microscope - my old love. I knew by this time ~~that~~ that was not the way for me to find God, but I expected to have a lot of fun watching the Protozoa and less anguish than watching men and women.

But I discovered when seventy came that I still had security to look after. I could make it by seventy five, I thought. But I did not. And I have come where I am with a consciousness that so long as my head holds out I shall work. More important, I am counting it as one of my blessings. In spite of the notion early instilled into me that the place of the aged is in the corner resignedly waiting to die, that there is no place for their day's work in the scheme of things,

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that they no longer will have either the desire or the power to carry on, I find things to do which belong to me and nobody else.

It is an exciting discovery that this can be so. Old age need not be what the text books assure it to be. Shakespeare is wrong. Cicero, dull as he is in comparison, is more nearly right. More, it can be an adventure. My young friends laugh at me when I tell them that in spite of creaking joints and a tremulous hand, there are satisfactions peculiar to the period, satisfactions different from those of youth, of middle life, even of that decade of the '70's which I supposed ended it all.

I have been finding it a surprising adventure, if frequently disillusioning and disturbing, to review my working life, to pick out what seems to be the reason for my going here and not there, for thinking this and not that. It has been a good deal like renewing acquaintance with a friend I had not seen since childhood. Probably the reason for this is that I have never stopped long enough after any one piece of work to clean up, evaluate what I had done. Always a new undertaking was on my table before I was finished with what went before. Packing boxes and letter files of badly classified material, still clutter up my small space with the physical evidence of the incompleteness of every piece of work I have undertaken.

This explains why telling my story has been so full of surprises. "I did not realize I felt that way", I have told myself more than once. "I had forgotten I did that." "I cannot imagine why I thought that."

I took on self-support at the start that I might be free to find answers to questions which puzzled me. After long floundering I blundered into man's old struggle for the betterment of his life.

My point of attack has always been that of a journalist after the fact, rarely that of a reformer, the advocate of a cause or a system. If I was tempted from the straight and narrow path of the one who seeks for that which is so and why it is so I sooner or later returned. This was partly because of the humor and common sense of my

associates on McClure's and The American Magazines, and partly because the habit of accepting without question the teachings and conventions of my world was shattered when in girlhood I discovered that the world was not created in six days of twenty four hours each. That experience aroused me to questioning, qualifying, even what I advocated, as no first class crusader can afford to do.

I have never had illusions about the value of my individual contribution! I realized early that what a man or a woman does is built on what those who have gone before

have done, that its real value depends on making the matter in hand a little clearer, a little sounder for those who come after. Nobody begins or ends anything. He is a link, weak or strong, in an endless chain. One of our gravest mistakes is persuading ourselves that nobody has passed this way before.

In our eagerness to prove we have found the true solution we fail to inquire why this same solution failed to work when tried before for it always has been tried before, even if we in our self-confidence do not know it. 2

We are given not only to ignoring the past of our solutions, their status when we took them over, but the variety of relationships they must meet, satisfy. They must sink or swim in a stream where a multitude of human experiences, prejudices, ambitions, ideals, meet and clash, throw one another back, mingle, make that all-powerful current which is public opinion - ~~the trend~~ which swallows, digests or rejects what we give it. It is our indifference to or ignorance of the multiplicity of human elements in the society we seek to benefit that is responsible for the sinking outright of many of our fine plans. 7

There are certain exhibits of the eighty years I have lived which particularly impress me. Perhaps the

first of these is the cyclical character of man's nature and activities. If I separate my eighty years - 1857 to 1937 - into four generations, examine them, compare my findings, I find startling similarities in essentials. Take the effort to create, distribute and use wealth. How alike are the ups and downs that have marked that effort.

I was born in the year of a major panic.

The depression which followed it was smothered in war. That war over, quickly there followed in 1866 a serious depression - world wide. In 1873 came a major panic. When ^{its} this first period came to an end in 1877 the country was still deep in the clutch of the unhappy depression which followed that panic.

Each of my three successive generations beginning in 1877, 1897, 1917, has featured a "major" panic, followed by five to seven years of depression. Then has come a brilliant short-lived recovery ending in what we euphoniously call today a recession.

My fifth generation just opening promises well to duplicate its predecessor⁹. If I live ten years longer I no doubt will see another major panic, and one still more difficult for the productive individual or group to handle because the practice of following the provident ant's example and storing up in the good time reserves to meet the bad has been made a political offense.

Each generation repeats its leaders. Each sees men endowed with superior inventiveness, energy and genius for business, inspired by love of power and possession launch selfish schemes - Carnegies, Rockefellers, Goulds. If each of these strong men left something sinister behind, each also contributed to higher living standards and hurried on the nationalization of the country. The public without whom they could not have lived a day saw in their greedy grandiose undertakings whatever was for its benefit, and took it, while ordering its government to control whatever was sinister.

And while they built and served and exploited, other men endowed with far greater idealism than practical sense planned new forms of government, new laws, advertised panaceas, all guaranteed to produce security and justice. Each generation has had its Henry George, its Bellamy, its Bryan, intent on persuading mankind that he had found the way, could lead men to the good life.

In each generation employer and employee have faced the decision - war or cooperation. If war has been the answer in the majority of cases there have always been those who have gone ahead building up a great mass of evidence of what men inspired by goodwill, free from suspicion and self-interest, can do in industry by patient cooperative experiments.

Side by side with these exhibits have gone magnificent governmental attempts to correct abuses, to make man's life in the Republic freer, securer, more just, efforts to carry out the avowed purpose of the government we started a hundred and fifty years ago. And these efforts are alike in essentials - the New Deal of Franklin Roosevelt's, the New Freedom of Woodrow Wilson, the Square Deal of Theodore Roosevelt, the fight for a larger freedom of opportunity of Gover Cleveland, the struggle to wipe out slavery of Abraham Lincoln.

Again and again in these generations have we seen the great ship of democracy lift from the ground, stagger, gather itself together, soar, sail, while those who had chosen the pilot and loaded in his cargo watched the flight with confidence and exultation. This time their dream had come true.

But the ship has always come back, its journey unfinished and doubters have jeered at those who believed in it, cried out that it would never run, that freedom, equal opportunity were only foolish fancies; men, they gloated, function only under strong single rulers. Dictatorship alone makes efficient government - national power and glory. The state, not the individual, is the end.

There is no denying that these repeated failures of half successes have made cynics of many who have had a hand in the flights, or at least been sympathetic watchers.

It has been sickening to see hopes grow dim under the hammering of reality, to see a generation losing its first grand fire sinking into apathy, cynicism. One asks himself if man has the staying power ever to realize his ideals. He is inclined when this hour of futility comes to agree with Arthur Balfour that human life is but a disreputable episode on one of the minor planets. As far as I am concerned that smart and cynical estimate never could stand a good night's sleep.

If I find little satisfaction or hope in examining and comparing one by one my four successive generations I find considerable in looking at them as a whole. When I do that I see not a group of cycles rolling one after another along a rocky and uneven road but a spiral - the group moves upward. To be sure it is not a very steady spiral, but I am convinced that is the real movement.

Could there be greater evidence that this is true than that the world as a whole has today come to conscious grips over that most fundamental of problems: Shall all men cooperate in an effort to make a free, peaceful, orderly world, or shall we consent that strong men make a world to their liking, forcing us to live in it. More than that, train us to carry it on.

It is well that the issue should be clear, so clear that each of us must be forced to choose.

Even more hopeful, if not so clear to so many people, is the increasing knowledge that we are getting of man as an individual and as a mass, coming to us particularly from men of science. What we have yet to find out apparently is what we can expect of man under this or that circumstance, what words and what promises stir him, what persuades him to cooperation or to revolt, why he follows a particular type of leader at a particular time and how long he can be counted on. Once we know better what we can get out of man under particular circumstances we can plan our action with something like the certainty the electrician plans his machine. He knows the nature of the current, what it will do and not do. He puts no strain on it which experiment has proved fatal.

When we reach that knowledge and control of human forces we shall know why the League of Nations works so badly, why we have before us the terrible and apparently uncheckable shambles of Spain and China, why an intolerable outbreak of racial and religious prejudice should shame us as this period of our history, why we must be prepared to meet the savage outbreaks of men and peoples still contemptuous of contracts, unamenable to ideals of honor, peace and conciliation.

One consolation in any effort to socialize and democratize our plans of life is that the mass of men want a simple world. In every country they ask little more than security, preferably of their own making, freedom to build in the way they like so far as possible. They will follow any system or any leader that promises them that. Politicians would do a better job for men if they wrote fewer Constitutions, devised fewer automatic cures, gave more attention to disciplining and training common men and women the world over to honest labor, to cooperation with their fellows, to sacrifice when necessary, keeping alive in them their natural spark of freedom.

How are we going to do it? That is one of the gravest questions we face. In 1921 I went to Washington to report Secretary Hughes' Conference on the Limitation of Armaments. It seemed to me that I better do some preliminary reading on the problems, so I went to a wise man at the Carnegie Peace Foundation for advice. He turned out to be a philosopher.

"First," said he, "read Don Quixote. He will tell you what they cannot do. Then read Aesop's Fables, that will tell you what they can do. But above all read the St. James version of the Bible which tells you that peace on earth is promised only to men of good will."

There you have it. If we want peace we must make men of common sense, knowing what can be done and what cannot be done, also men of good will.

How are we to do that? I see no more promising path than each person sticking to the work which comes his way. The nature of the work, its seeming size and importance matters far less than that its right relation to the place where he finds himself. If the need at the moment is digging a ditch or washing the dishes that is the greatest thing in the world for the moment. The time, the place, the need, the relation, is what decides the value of the act.

It is ^{by} ~~our~~ following this natural path that new and broader roads open, ^{that} moments of illumination come. There is the only reliable hope of the world. It takes in all of us, but puts it up hard to each ~~of us~~ to fit the day's work into the place where we stand, not crowding into another's place, no imitation - no hurry - growth always - knowing that light and power come only with growth, slow as it is.

Madam Curie so saw it. Asked what a woman's contribution to a better world should be she replied that it began at home, then spread to those immediately connected, ones immediate friends, then the community in which one lived, and if it so happened that the work turned out to meet a need

of the world at large ~~but~~ it spread there. But the important thing was the beginning, and that beginning, Madam Curie insisted, was in the home, the center of small things.

Work backed by such a faith makes life endurable. I doubt if I could have come into my '80's with anything like the confidence I feel in the ultimate victory of freedom, the ultimate victory of man's self-respect if I had not groped my way through work into some such faith.

And I know I should find this end of life less satisfactory if it were not a working end, conditioned as it must be by certain concessions to years, easements necessary if I am to keep ~~this~~ ^{some} vigor for my three or four hours a day at my desk, and ^{once} accepted, becoming more and more enjoyable.

No one can imagine what a satisfaction it is to me to find that I need not go to conferences and conventions and big dinners. That job belongs to youth. It alone has the appetite, the digestion, the resilience for the endless talk and late hours of these functions, also the confidence that salvation is to be reached through them.

Still more satisfactory is the acceptance of the fact that I have not the strength to run about on trains and give lectures. That, too, is the job of youth, and the best I can hope for them in carrying it on is that they learn

as much about people as I think I did. The humility that will engender will be all to their good.

A discovery which has given me joy and which had something of the incredible about it is the durability of friendship born at any period in one's life. I have enlarged in this narrative only on professional friendships, those that belong legitimately to my day's work, but this discovery does not cover them alone, but all the range from childhood to now.

Circumstances, time, separations, may have completely broken communication. The ^{divergence} break may have been caused by complete divergence of opinion, differences as grave as those which caused the ^{break} breaking up of our old McClure crowd, as grave as the ghastly separations that war brings, but you pick up at the day when the friendship was ^{only} not broken, but interrupted.

One of the most beautiful personal demonstrations I have had of this unbreakable quality in friendship was a birthday party which S. S. McClure gave Viola Roseboro, John Phillips and myself when he was seventy eight, and I close to it. Miss Roseboro had stayed with Mr. McClure when the rest of us left him. That had never made a rift in anybody's relations with her, and now we all sat down together as once we had sat down in the old St. Denis, the old Astor, the old Holland House - lunching places marking the stage by

which McClure's worked itself successively into better quarters, went up town. And we talked only of the things of today, as we always had done. We sat enthralled as in the old years while Mr. McClure enlarged on his latest enthusiasm, marvelling ~~as he did it~~ as we always had done, at the eternal youthfulness in the man, the failure of life to quench him.

One of my great satisfactions has been a revival of curiosity. I lost it in the 1920's and early 1930's. Human affairs seemed to me to be headed for collapse. The war was not over and men were taking it for granted it was. The failure of the hopes of previous generations had taught us nothing. The sense of disaster was strong in me. What I most feared was that we were raising our standard of living at the expense of our standard of character. If you believe as I do that permanent human betterment must rest on a sound moral basis then our house would collapse sooner or later.

It was ~~at~~ taking a longer view, looking at my fifty years as a whole that revived me. I thought I saw a spiral, was eager to prove it.

Once more I am curious, but it is an armchair curiosity. No longer can I go out and see for myself, but that has its advantages. It compels longer reflections, intensifies the conviction that taking time, having patience,

doing one thing at a time, are the essentials for solid improvement, essential to finding answers. Perhaps, I tell myself, I may from an armchair find better answers than I have yet to those questions which set me at my day's work, the still unanswered questions of the most fruitful life for women in civilization, the true nature of revolutions, even the mystery of God. It is the last of the three which disturbs me the least. The greatest of mysteries, it has become for me the greatest of realities.