

The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the
Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

Founded by EDWARD C. HEGELER

VOL. XXXIII (No. 1)

JANUARY, 1919

NO. 752

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The Open Court Publishing Company

122 S. Michigan Ave.

Chicago, Illinois

Per copy, 10 cents (sixpence). Yearly, \$1.00 (in the U.P.U., 5s. 6d.).



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THE CAPTURE OF JOACHIM MURAT AT PIZZO, CALABRIA,
October 8, 1815.

Frontispiece to The Open Court.

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THE INNER KINGDOM.

BY E. MERRILL ROOT.

WHEN Thoreau lay dying he dictated his last letter. It read: "I *suppose* that I have not many months to live, but of course I know nothing about it. I may add that I am enjoying existence as much as ever, and regret nothing." Long before he had written: "I love my fate to the core and rind." And in *Walden* he wrote: "Nothing can rightly compel a simple and brave man to a vulgar sadness. While I enjoy the friendship of the seasons I trust that nothing can make life a burden to me."

Now what would the average man say of the *success* of Thoreau's life? Thoreau tried school-teaching and gave it up—pencil-making and had no financial success; all his life he worked with his hands, fared simply, and lived in what we should call poverty. Like Milton in Wordsworth's sonnet,

"His soul was like a star and dwelt apart."

As a writer—and writing was his chosen profession—he did not succeed: his first book threw him into debt; even *Walden*, though it became well known, never won the admiration it holds to-day. His journals, and most of his scattered articles, were published after his death. Solitary, poor, disregarded, after having apparently done little to thaw the icy crust of the world, he died when he was only forty-five. What is the secret of his unconquerable happiness in the face of all this?

There is another happy man, very different, and yet very similar—William Blake. Lonely, save for the society of a few artists who understood him, like Fuseli and Linnell (toward the end of Blake's life), he lived unregarded by the public (which increasingly shunned him as the years went by, and—knowing nothing of his actual life—called him mad), insulted and cheated by his ignorant

and vulgar employer, Cromek, and with no success as poet or painter. The story is told that when he went from publisher to publisher with an illustrated volume of his wild, prophetic poems, and all refused to publish them, "Well, it is published elsewhere," he would quietly say, "and beautifully bound" (meaning in Heaven). Almost no one believed his poems or pictures unusual or even beautiful. He had only himself, his wife, and God for comrades. Cromek wrote that at one time Blake was reduced "so low as to be obliged to live on half a guinea a week." When Blake lay on his death-bed, he sent out almost his last shilling, in order to buy a pencil! And yet one who knew him (Mr. Palmer) wrote, "If asked whether I ever knew among the intellectual a happy man, Blake would be the only one who would immediately occur to me." And Blake himself, once, laying his hands on a little girl's head, said to her, "May God make this world to you, my child, as beautiful as it has been to me." And on his death-bed he chanted pleasant songs (which he improvised—both music and words), till his wife cried out that he was an angel and no man!

I think it is well to ask what made these two poor and lonely men happy. In the greatest of modern poetry since the early Victorian period—in James Thomson, in Rossetti, in Swinburne, in Morris, in Henley (despite his love of vigorous living), and in Rupert Brooke, there has been a brooding melancholy, a despairing dread, a disbelief in the essential kindness of the world, a fierce distaste for the conditions of modern life, a weariness with the futile monotony of an industrial civilization. There has been none of the assured tranquillity, the serenity, the brave and simple happiness of Thoreau and Blake. What great modern poet has been *happy*? And if none of them has been *happy*, in the sense that, no matter how the legions of Death and Evil, with dirges and cloudy banners, have besieged the kingdom of their mind, that kingdom has retained its inward peace, then none of them has been *healthy*. For as health is perfect harmony of the body, so happiness is perfect harmony of the spirit. A mind is *happy* when it is inwardly *serene*. Epictetus was outwardly a slave; he knew Evil; but inwardly his mind was tranquil and serene, that is, it was happy, which is another way of saying that it was healthy. And since it is well to inquire into the principles which make bodies healthy, is it not equally well to inquire into the principles which make minds healthy? And so I wish to study the principles which made Thoreau and Blake happy even though they were fallen on evil days and poor.

In the first place, both Blake and Thoreau emphasized the *inner* life of man. Through all Thoreau's letters this emphasis on the personal, the mental life, runs like a serene and irresistible river, like a strong smooth wind. In *Walden* he wrote: "If I were confined to a corner of a garret all my days, like a spider, the world would be just as large to me while I had my thoughts about me." Gilchrist, in his *Life of William Blake*, wrote: "For it was a tenet of his that the inner world is the all-important; that each man has a world within greater than the external."

Now there are several results of this emphasis on the inner life. Most evident is the result that time or place, wealth or poverty, health or sickness, fame or obscurity, loneliness, misunderstanding, or scorn have no power over that mind which lives in itself. It can make a prison or a poorhouse a gate to fairyland; it can be happy even in a palace. It does not *need* amusement and diversion: moving pictures, operas, circuses, parties, or even music, pictures, books, or nature; it can be content and interested in its own thoughts, its own fancies, the glory of that infinite empire of the mind of which Thoreau wrote: "Every man is the lord of a realm beside which the earthly empire of the Czar is but a petty state, a hummock left by the ice." Instead of vainly trying to run away from that infinite loneliness into which every man is born, or trying to drug itself into forgetfulness of that solitude by gaudy pleasures, the mind may face the loneliness, and find that best of comrades—*itself*. A second result is this: to one who emphasizes his own internal life, the petty standards of others—their worship of respectability, a competence, and the conventions of social life,—are as impotent as the spells of Circe against Odysseus. One ceases to fret about conforming one's self to the opinions of others, for one realizes the truth of Blake's apothem: "The apple-tree never asks the beech how he shall grow, nor the lion the horse how he shall take his prey." And so we cease to fret, to fume, and to worry; we feel a great serenity, an infinite peace, such as one might feel who should be drawn suddenly from some trivial earthly whirlwind into the tranquillity of the ether. A third result is that one ceases to be interested primarily in Self. The more one leans on his own mind, and the less one plants his feet on custom and on the good opinion of others and on ease, the less one cares for the selfish heaping up of riches, or safety and comfort at the expense of honor: serene, and careless of the world, one may live for truth, for love, for beauty—as one cannot if one lives for the goods of the world. A fourth result is that one sees the things of the world truly, when one sees

them impartially and not as means or hindrances to some end. If one cares for cherry-pie supremely, one does not see robins so impartially (and consequently so clearly) as when one cares supremely for spiritual serenity. Ants, mills, butterflies, missionaries, sand-grains, railways, cannot be truly known until they are seen from the smokeless and untroubled towers of that kingdom which is within us. A fifth result is that one can love whatever and whomsoever one will, for what they *are* and not for what they have, or what they can do for or to us. And finally, to him who lives in the fortress of his own mind, death, which is only an external accident and not an internal weakness, has no terror.

And Thoreau and Blake, who emphasized this inner life, were consequently happy. Like Kipling's Purun Bhagat, or the old Chinese poet and philosopher Chang Chih-Ho who "lived as a lonely wanderer, calling himself 'the Old Fisherman of the Mists and Waters,'" they disregarded riches, society, conventions, worldly reputation, and lived in that inward empire which is not bounded by space or time, in that City of God which is not built with hands.

Yet I wish rather to state a different, though cognate, reason why Thoreau and Blake were happy. They were happy because the world never ceased to be beautiful and mysterious to them. Painting pictures, writing poems, watching frisky lambs, or fish, or the battles of ants, were, to them, surpassingly interesting. The splendor of tigers, gardens, the color of autumn leaves, children, lakes, birds, were to them beautiful imagery in a poem that never grew trite, that was never too long. They never ceased to *wonder* at life. Blake was so interested in the wonder of creating beauty that he painted on whether he were sick or well, and expressed surprise that his friends could desire holidays. Yet he took joy even in the drudgery which was necessary to procure him bread, although it curtailed his own peculiar work. And he could be happy when he was not at work. This little fairy-tale which he told will prove it: "I was walking alone in the garden; there was a great stillness among the branches and flowers, and more than common sweetness in the air; I heard a low and pleasant sound, and I knew not whence it came. At last I saw the broad leaf of a flower move, and underneath I saw a procession of creatures, of the size and color of green and gray grasshoppers, bearing a body laid out on a rose-leaf, which they buried with songs and then disappeared. It was a fairy funeral." Such men can spend an afternoon watching swallows weave blue threads in the air; or peering into the enchanted forests of the grass where minstrel-cricket, blundering grasshoppers, forager ants,

burgher beetles, and hovering butterflies hunt, or play, or court, or quest for adventure, in a world of dim and rustling green where mystery and romance yet abide. The busy mole, the poised hawk, the russet-gray woodchuck nibbling clover, the fitting troubadour-birds, the moving pictures of the clouds—all these are to such a man endlessly and fascinatingly interesting. Violet lakes, crispering into foam under the dancing feet of the wind, are more (to him) than reservoirs whence he may extract black-bass. He can lie on their banks for hours,

“And fish for fancies as they pass
Within the watery glass,”

and say, with Blake,

“I'll drink of the clear stream
And hear the linnet's song,
And there I'll lie and dream
The day along.”

To such a man the world is an absorbing book, whose pages are days, whose chapters the seasons: a book full of lovely and melodious poems, of moving stories, of grave tragedies, of lustrous pictures. And though such a man turn the pages for a thousand times a thousand years he can never find the pages dull. Life is all too short for him.

“To make this earth, our hermitage,
A cheerful and a changeful page,
God's bright and intricate device
Of days and seasons doth suffice.”

To such a man the world is more than the world of science—more than a rotting apple, full of restless maggots, swung at the end of a string by a blind idiot boy around a guttering candle. Is there not mystery in whippoorwills and nightingales? or in the stillness of a moonlit forest at midnight? What do we care about God or matter or immortality? They are unimportant questions: what is important is to *live*: to move as a dancer in the masque of life, to delight in the pageant of life with a graver yet no less enthusiastic zest than that of a small boy in a circus, to find, like God or like hawthorns and lilacs, the world good. The man who thus wonders is intoxicated with the beauty of life: he is happy in the flowers and birds and beasts and sunsets which Life has given him for picture-books and toys. And such men (and how true it was of Blake and Thoreau!) have been too happy to grow cross or fretful:

they fall sweetly and happily to sleep when their nurse comes for them at the end of the day.

Contrast such lives—lives that frankly delighted in the poetry of life—with the austere life of the contemner of happiness—Carlyle. The staunch, crabbed, stern, deep-seeing, magnificent, narrow, vehement, tender, cruel old Scotchman! What a grand, unhappy life he lived! How miserable he made himself, and how miserable he made his wife, and how unnecessarily! It is nobler to teach your brother men to love a lamb or to sympathize with a chimney-sweeper, or to take delight in woods and lakes and lonely happiness, than to confirm them in silence and an intense diligence in the manufacture of—coffins and ropes of sand. Only where a life is happy (even in the midst of pain and want and loneliness and death) is it truly healthy: where there is inward misery and doubt there is a smoking fire, a half-uprooted tree, an axle that needs greasing, a ship that has not found itself. Where life functions as it should there is that inward harmony which we name happiness. Thus Christ (who had much more to dishearten him than Carlyle) spoke continually of his "*joy*." And perhaps "*joy*" is a better word than happiness: for I do not mean a passive, placid content: there is the calm of a stagnant fen as well as the calm of the starry heaven: there is the peace of sloth, of stupidity, of placid callousness to intolerable evils, all of which I abominate. And that Carlyle was never spiritually healthy is proved by his lack of joy.

The road to this joy or happiness leads into that inward empire of which I have spoken. And he who dwells in that spiritual city which is founded upon a rock, on which mundane floods beat and earthly rains descend without avail, can look serenely out of his irreducible fortress with a calm delight in children, in lilies of the field, in tigers that burn bright, and in lakes. It is our duty, no less than our privilege, to turn our footsteps thither. Christ taught joy; even church creeds have been known to bid us "*enjoy*" God forever; a well-known document states that the "*pursuit of happiness*" is the inalienable right of all men. And beyond all evidence of petty creeds, we have but to look at life to see that all life, however blindly and unsuccessfully, turns toward what Wordsworth in a magnificent phrase calls "*the grand elementary principle of pleasure*," as plants grow toward the light. Indeed, as Stevenson implies, it is a sin—a treachery to Life—to lose joy.

"If I have faltered more or less,
In my great task of happiness

.

Lord, thy most pointed pleasure take
And stab my spirit broad-awake."

Yet happiness as a duty! Might we not as well talk of constraining love by law, of *forcing* men to be *friends* at the point of a pistol? Happiness is not something to be attained, but something granted or withheld, like rain or sunshine: like the wind, it bloweth where it listeth. Can one say, "Go to! I will be happy to-day"? Can one catch the uncaged bird, Joy, and make it lilt for him? Sometimes the bird perches on the hand, but what cord will hold it? Who can follow it into the clouds? It is too true, alas! that one can never *make* himself happy, any more than one can *make* himself loved. But just as certain acts and a certain attitude may favor love more than others, just so a certain tendency toward certain acts and toward a certain attitude may bring one nearer to happiness. We cannot cage the bird, but we can frequent the country which it inhabits, and we can refrain from throwing stones at it. The way to be happy, then, is to learn to love and trust yourself, to live in that inward empire of the mind whither one may retire from

"Evil tongues,
Rash judgments, (and) the sneers of selfish men,
(And) greetings where no kindness is, (and) all
The dreary intercourse of daily life,"

the worry, the fretful inanity, the loneliness, the misunderstandings, the pain, the cruelty of life into the citadel of one's self. It was on those battlements that the slave Epictetus, the emperor Marcus Aurelius, defied the world. But to be really *joyful* one must not remain merely a Stoic—the defensive, not the offensive, warrior. Carlyle won almost as far as that (as his "Everlasting No" proves). Rather one must step out, like Stevenson, like Thoreau, like Blake, like Christ, and joy in all simple and lovely things—in the color and sound and majesty of life—in friends—in laughter—in rain—in the miracle-play of the seasons, with nature for stage, scenery, and actors—in thought—in painting—in poetry—in all the tremendous and mysterious romance which is Life. You will never be truly *unhappy* (although you may often be very sad), if, like William Blake, you are able

"To see the world in a grain of sand,
And heaven in a wild flower;
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
And eternity in an hour."