

DREAM LIFE:
A
FABLE OF THE SEASONS
BY
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— — We are such stuff
As dreams are made of; and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep

A NEW PREFACE.

Twelve years ago, this autumn, when I had finished the concluding chapters of this little book, I wrote a letter of Dedication to Washington Irving, and, forwarding it by mail to Sunnyside, begged his permission to print it. I think I shall gratify a rational curiosity of my readers (however much they may condemn my vanity) if I give his reply in full.

"My dear Sir, —

"Though I have a great disinclination in general to be the object of literary oblations and compliments, yet in the present instance I have enjoyed your writings with such peculiar relish, and been so drawn toward the author by the qualities of head and heart evinced in them, that I confess I feel gratified by a dedication, over-flattering as I may deem it, which may serve as an outward sign that we are cordially linked together in sympathies and friendship.

"I would only suggest that in your dedication you would omit the LL.D., a learned dignity urged upon me very much 'against the stomach of my sense,' and to which I have never laid claim.

"Ever, my dear sir,

"Yours, very truly,

"Washington Irving

"Sunnyside, Nov. 1851."

I had been personally presented to Mr. Irving for the first time, only a year before, under the introduction of my good friend, Mr. Clark (the veteran Editor of the old Knickerbocker in its palmy days). Thereafter I had met him from time to time, and had paid a charming visit to his delightful home of Sunnyside. But it was after the date of the publication of this book and during the summer of 1852, that I saw Mr. Irving more familiarly, and came to appreciate more fully that charming *bonhomie* and geniality in his character which we all recognize so constantly in his writings. And if I set down here a few recollections of that pleasant intercourse, they will,

I am sure, more than make good the place of the old letter of Dedication, and will serve to keep alive the association I wish to cherish between my little book and the name of the distinguished author who so kindly showed me his favor.

For the first time, after many years, Mr. Irving made a stay of a few weeks at Saratoga, in the summer of 1852. By good fortune, I chanced to occupy a room upon the same corridor of the hotel, within a few doors of his, and shared very many of his early morning walks to the "Spring." What at once struck me very forcibly in the course of these walks, was the rare alertness and minuteness of his observation: not a fair young face could dash past us in its drapery of muslin, but the eye of the old gentleman drank in all its freshness and beauty with the keen appetite and the grateful admiration of a boy; not a dowager brushed past us bedizened with finery, but he fastened the apparition in my memory with some piquant remark,—as the pin of an entomologist fastens a gaudy fly. No rheumatic old hero-invalid, battered in long wars with the doctors,—no droll marplot of a boy, could appear within range, but I could see in the changeful expression of my companion the admeasurement and quiet adjustment of the appeal which either made upon his sympathy or his humor. A flower, a tree, a burst of music, a country market-man hoisted upon his wagon of cabbages,—all these by turns caught and engaged his attention, however little they might interrupt the flow of his talk.

I ventured to ask on one occasion, if he had depended solely upon his memory for the thousand little descriptions of natural objects which occur in his books.

"Not wholly," he replied; and went on to tell me it had been his way, in the earlier days of his authorship, to carry little tablets with him into the country, and whenever he saw a scene specially picturesque,—a cottage of marked features, a noticeable tree, any picture, in short, which promised service to him,—to note down its distinguishing points, and hold it in reserve.

"This," said he, "is one among those small arts and industries which a person who writes much must avail himself of: they are equivalent to the little thumb-sketches from which a painter makes up his larger compositions."

On our way to the church on a certain Sunday morning, he tapped my shoulder as we entered the little gate, and called my attention to a lithe young Indian girl, who had strolled down from the campment on the plains, and was standing proudly erect upon the church-porch, with finger to her lips, scanning curiously the worshippers as they passed in.

"What a splendid figure of a woman!" said he, "she is puzzling over the extravagances and devotions of the white-faces."

The black, straight elf-locks, the swart face, the great wondering eye, with the gay blanket, short gown of woollen-stuff, and brilliant moccasins, made a striking picture to be sure; and I could not help thinking, that if the apparition had chanced upon him earlier, she might have figured in some story of Pokanoket or of the Prairies.

I took occasion one morning to ask if he was always able to control the "humors of writing," and to put himself resolutely to work, whatever might be the state of his feeling.

"No," he said, very decidedly, — "unfortunately I cannot: there are men who do, I believe. I always envied them; but there was a period of a month or more, after I had finally decided upon literary labors, and had declined a lucrative position under Government, when it seemed as if I was utterly bereft of all the fancies I ever had; for weeks I could do nothing; but at last the clouds lifted, and I wrote off the first numbers of the 'Sketch-Book,' and dispatched them to my good friends in this country, to make the most of. I feared it would not be much.

"And the worst of it is," continued he, "the good people do not allow for these periods of depression; if a man does a thing tolerably well in his happy moods, they see no reason why he should not be always in a happy mood."

I asked if he had never found relief, and a stimulant to work, in the reading aloud of some favorite old author.

"Often," said he; "and none are more effective with me for this service than the sacred writers; I think I have waked a good many sleeping fancies by the reading of a chapter in Isaiah."

In answer to inquiries of mine in regard to the incomplete state of several of the stories of "Wolfert's Roost," he said: "Yes, we do not get through all we lay out. Some of those sketches had lain in my mind for a great many years; they made a sort of garret-trumpery, of which I thought I would make a general clearance, leaving the odds and ends to take care of themselves.

"There was a novel too, I once laid out, in which an English lad, being a son of one of the old Regicide Judges, was to come over to New England in search of his father: he was to meet with a throng of adventures, and to arrive at length upon a Saturday night, in the midst of a terrible thunder-storm, at the house of a stern old Massachusetts Puritan, who comes out to answer to the rappings; and by a flash of lightning which gleams upon the harsh, iron visage of the old man, the son fancies he recognizes his father."

And as he told it, the old gentleman wrinkled his brow, and tried to put on the fierce look he would describe.

"It's all there is of it," said he. "If you want to make a story, you can furbish it up."

There were among other notable people at Saratoga, during the summer of which I speak, the well-known Mrs. Dr. R — —, of Philadelphia, since deceased, — a woman of great eccentricities, but of a wonderfully masculine mind, and of great cultivation. It was a fancy of hers to give special, social patronage to foreign artists; and among those just then at Saratoga, and the recipients of her favor, were a distinguished violinist — whose name I do not now recall — and the newly married Mme. Alboni. Mr. Irving, in common with her other acquaintances, she was inclined to make contributory to her attentions. To this Mr. Irving was not averse, both from his extreme love of music, and his kindness toward the artists themselves; yet, in his own quiet way, I think he fretted considerably at being pounced upon at odd hours to give them French talk.

"It's very awkward," said he to me one day; "I have had large occasion for practice to be sure; but I rather fancy, after all, our own language; it's heartier and easier."

He was utterly incapable of being lionized. Time and again, under the trees in the court of the hotel, did I hear him enter upon

some pleasant story, lighted up with that rare turn of his eye, and by his deft expressions, when, as chance acquaintances grouped about him,—as is the way of watering-places,—and eager listeners multiplied, his hilarity and spirit took a chill from the increasing auditory, and drawing abruptly to a close, he would sidle away with a friend and be gone.

Among the visitors was a tall, interesting young girl—from Louisiana, if I mistake not—who had the reputation of being a great heiress, and who was, of course, beset by a host of admirers. There was something very attractive in her air, and Mr. Irving was never tired of gazing on her as she walked, with what he called a "faun-like step," across the lawn, or up and down the corridors. Her eyes too—"dove-like," he termed them—were his special admiration. He watched with an amused interest the varying fortunes of the rival lovers, and often met me with—"Well, who is in favor to-day?" And he discussed very freely the varying chances.

One brusque, heavy man, who thought to carry the matter through by a *coup de main*, he was sure could never succeed. A second, who was most assiduous, but whose brazen confidence was unyielding, he counted still less upon. But a quiet, somewhat older gentleman, whose look was ever full of tender appeal, and who bore himself with a modest dignity, he reckoned the probable winner. "He will feel a Nay grievously," said he; "but for the others, they will forget it in a supper."

I believe it eventually proved that no one of those present was the successful suitor. I know only that the fair girl was afterward a bride; and (what we all so little anticipated) her home is now a scene of desolation, her fortune very likely a wreck, her family scattered or slain, and herself, maybe, a fugitive.

I saw Mr. Irving afterward repeatedly in New York, and passed two delightful days at Sunnyside. I can never forget a drive with him upon a crisp autumn morning through Sleepy Hollow, and all the notable localities of his neighborhood, in the course of which he kindly called my attention, in the most unaffected and incidental way, to those which had been specially illustrated by his pen; and with a rare humor recounted to me some of his boyish adventures among the old Dutch farmers of this region. Most of all, it is impos-

sible for me to forget the rare kindness of his manner, his friendly suggestions, and the beaming expression of his eye.

I met it last at the little stile from which I strolled away to the station at Dearman; and when I saw the kind face again, it was in the coffin, at the little church where he attended service. But the eyes were closed, and the wonderful radiance of expression gone. It seemed to me that death never took away more from a living face; it was but a cold shadow lying there, of the man who had taught a nation to love him.

Edgewood, *Sept.* 1863.

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INTRODUCTORY.

I.

With my Aunt Tabithy.

"Pshaw!" said my Aunt Tabithy, "have you not done with dreaming?"

My Aunt Tabithy, though an excellent and most notable person, loves occasionally a quiet bit of satire. And when I told her that I was sharpening my pen for a new story of those dreamy fancies and half-experiences which lie grouped along the journeying hours of my solitary life, she smiled as if in derision.

----"Ah, Isaac," said she, "all that is exhausted; you have rung so many changes on your hopes and your dreams, that you have nothing left but to make them real—if you can."

It is very idle to get angry with a good-natured old lady. I did better than this,—I made her listen to me.

----Exhausted, do you say, Aunt Tabithy? Is life then exhausted; is hope gone out; is fancy dead?

No, no. Hope and the world are full; and he who drags into book-pages a phase or two of the great life of passion, of endurance, of love, of sorrow, is but wetting a feather in the sea that breaks ceaselessly along the great shore of the years. Every man's heart is a living drama; every death is a drop-scene; every book only a faint foot-light to throw a little flicker on the stage.

There is no need of wandering widely to catch incident or adventure; they are everywhere about us; each day is a succession of escapes and joys,—not perhaps clear to the world, but brooding in our thought, and living in our brain. From the very first, Angels and Devils are busy with us, and we are struggling against them and for them.

No, no, Aunt Tabithy; this life of musing does not exhaust so easily. It is like the springs on the farmland, that are fed with all the showers and the dews of the year, and that from the narrow fissures of the rock send up streams continually; or it is like the deep well in

the meadow, where one may see stars at noon when no stars are shining.

What is Reverie, and what are these Day-dreams, but fleecy cloud-drifts that float eternally, and eternally change shapes, upon the great over-arching sky of thought? You may seize the strong outlines that the passion-breezes of to-day shall throw into their figures; but to-morrow may breed a whirlwind that will chase swift, gigantic shadows over the heaven of your thought, and change the whole landscape of your life.

Dream-land will never be exhausted, until we enter the land of dreams, and until, in "shuffling off this mortal coil," thought will become fact, and all facts will be only thought.

As it is, I can conceive no mood of mind more in keeping with what is to follow upon the grave, than those fancies which warp our frail hulks toward the ocean of the Infinite, and that so sublimate the realities of this being, that they seem to belong to that shadowy realm whither every day's journey is leading.

—It was warm weather, and my aunt was dozing. "What is this all to be about?" said she, recovering her knitting-needle.

"About love, and toil, and duty, and sorrow," said I.

My aunt laid down her knitting, looked at me over the rim of her spectacles, and — took snuff.

I said nothing.

"How many times have you been in love, Isaac?" said she.

It was now my turn to say, "Pshaw!"

Judging from her look of assurance, I could not possibly have made a more satisfactory reply.

My aunt finished the needle she was upon, smoothed the stocking-leg over her knee, and looking at me with a very comical expression, said, "Isaac, you are a sad fellow!"

I did not like the tone of this; it sounded very much as if it would have been in the mouth of any one else — "bad fellow."

And she went on to ask me, in a very bantering way, if my stock of youthful loves was not nearly exhausted; and she cited the episode of the fair-haired Enrica, as perhaps the most tempting that I could draw from my experience.

A better man than myself, if he had only a fair share of vanity, would have been nettled at this; and I replied somewhat tartly, that I had never professed to write my experiences. These might be more or less tempting; but certainly if they were of a kind which I have attempted to portray in the characters of Bella, or of Carry, neither my Aunt Tabithy nor any one else should have learned such truth from any book of mine. There are griefs too sacred to be babbled to the world; and there may be loves which one would forbear to whisper even to a friend.

No, no; imagination has been playing pranks with memory; and if I have made the feeling real, I am content that the facts should be false. Feeling, indeed, has a higher truth in it than circumstance. It appeals to a larger jury for acquittal; it is approved or condemned by a better judge. And if I can catch this bolder and richer truth of feeling, I will not mind if the types of it are all fabrications.

If I run over some sweet experience of love, (my Aunt Tabithy brightened a little,) must I make good the fact that the loved one lives, and expose her name and qualities to make your sympathy sound? Or shall I not rather be working upon higher and holier ground, if I take the passion for itself, and so weave it into words, that you and every willing sufferer may recognize the fervor, and forget the personality?

Life, after all, is but a bundle of hints, each suggesting actual and positive development, but rarely reaching it. And as I recall these hints, and in fancy trace them to their issues, I am as truly dealing with life as if my life had dealt them all to me.

This is what I would be doing in the present book. I would catch up here and there the shreds of feeling which the brambles and roughnesses of the world have left tangling on my heart, and weave them out into those soft and perfect tissues which, if the world had been only a little less rough, might now perhaps enclose my heart altogether.

"Ah," said my Aunt Tabithy, as she smoothed the stocking-leg again, with a sigh, "there is, after all, but one youth-time; and if you put down its memories once, you can find no second growth."

My Aunt Tabithy was wrong. There is as much growth in the thoughts and feelings that run behind us as in those that run before us. You may make a rich, full picture of your childhood to-day; but let the hour go by, and the darkness stoop to your pillow with its million shapes of the past, and my word for it, you shall have some flash of childhood lighten upon you, that was unknown to your busiest thought of the morning.

Let a week go by, and in some interval of care, as you recall the smile of a mother, or some pale sister who is dead, a new crowd of memories will rush upon your soul, and leave their traces in such tears as will make you kinder and better for days and weeks. Or you shall assist at some neighbor funeral, where the little dead one (like one you have seen before) shall hold in its tiny grasp (as you have taught little dead hands to do) fresh flowers, laughing flowers, lying lightly on the white robe of the dear child,—all pale, cold, silent—

I had touched my Aunt Tabithy: she had dropped a stitch in her knitting. I believe she was weeping.

—Aye, this brain of ours is a master-worker, whose appliances we do not one half know; and this heart of ours is a rare storehouse, furnishing the brain with new material every hour of our lives; and their limits we shall not know, until they shall end—together.

Nor is there, as many faint-hearts imagine, but one phase of earnestness in our life of feeling. One train of deep emotion cannot fill up the heart: it radiates like a star, God-ward and earth-ward. It spends and reflects all ways. Its force is to be reckoned not so much by token as by capacity. Facts are the poorest and most slumberous evidences of passion or of affection. True feeling is ranging everywhere; whereas your actual attachments are too apt to be tied to sense.

A single affection may indeed be true, earnest, and absorbing; but such an one, after all, is but a type—and if the object be worthy, a glorious type—of the great book of feeling: it is only the vapor from