

The Diary of A Lonely Man

I am one of the busy workers of this world, worse luck! Not that I should ever wish to be idle. It seems to me that unemployed hours must hang heavily and life must lack much of its interest if there is no occupation to absorb superfluous energy. But when I think of my empty purse, of all the delights which that empty purse deprives me and of the years of uncontented work which lie before me ere I can hope to enjoy release from absolute worry, much less any degree of comfort then I feel that poverty is a hardship, and a hardship to which no man ought to be subjected.

Sometimes I have wild ideas about equalizing the distribution of property—forgetting how rich I was not so very long ago—and these ideas always lead me to still wilder dreams of the life that should be mine had I ever a "modest competence," as the phrase goes. I always picture myself living somewhere in the country, out of sight and hearing of this terrible London of ours and its money-rubbling hurry.

I imagine to myself a life free from the grind of office work and its detestable monotony—a life with leisure to paint the wonderful pictures which I have in my brain and which I know I could execute had I but time and opportunity and the means of completing my interrupted artistic education. Above all, I imagine my life crowned with happiness, filled, blessed by the presence of her whom I love.

I saw her—there is but one woman in all the wide world for me—last night spent the tenth of my weekly wage going down to visit her, I shall miss the money, I shall need it badly before the week has passed, but I had rather miss that than lose the joy of a few moments in her company. How many times have I lived over again in memory the happy hours of last night!

It seemed almost as if I had brought away a portion of her sweet presence. I have lived in a seventh heaven of imagined sweets. My whole day has been full of her remembrance. It haunted me in the long office hours; it was with me in the dingy restaurant where I ate my unpalatable dinners, it filled my thoughts during my short journeys to and from the city.

Almost I have dared to hope she loves me!

The reaction has come. The joy of yesterday is succeeded by the depression of to-day. What have I to do with love—I, who can hardly keep myself if she were some country wench, one who was used to hard work and rough life than perhaps I might marry her in a few years' time. But she—with her delicate frame and little, fragile, white hands—when could I make a home for her, with one-tenth of her accustomed case? It is madness to think of it!

I must cease going to see her. It unsettles me and makes me more miserable in the long run. And if—there is the slightest chance that it is as I dared to hope, then there is all the more reason for me to stay away. Better one aching heart than two.

There was a couple in the train to-night as I came home that attracted my attention. The man, a stalwart sailor, dressed and groomed with all a sailor's nicety and neatness, gave the whole of his attention to the evening paper, as if he were afraid to allow his eyes liberty to roam where they would.

The girl was small and pale, but plump and not bad looking. She was neatly dressed in a dark coat and skirt and a plain felt hat. The coat was open, to show a white blouse, and the little hands which lay in her lap were cased in a pair of perfectly new kid gloves. There was an air of ill-defined uneasiness about her as if she found herself in unaccustomed circumstances. Indeed, there was— to use a paradox—an air of pronounced unobtrusiveness about both of them, an avoidance of observation which is seldom met with in their class of life.

I fell to wondering who and what they were and whether they were connected with each other or only fellow-passengers whom chance had thrown together, when he leaned toward her and commenced reading something to her from the paper. The girl bent her head to catch his undertone, and lo! the secret was revealed, the situation explained. Resting on the brim of her hat under the carefully tied veil, were some grains of rice.

Happy pair! I am filled with envy. Like the dog in the manger, I am loth that others should enjoy delights which are denied to me.

It is one of the few amusements of my life to watch my fellow-passengers during my short daily journey to and from the city, and there are not a few whom I have grown to look upon as old friends.

I traveled home with one of them to-day—a small, fair girl, who wears a red cloak and a coquettish tam-o'-shanter of the same color. She, too, must be a busy worker. She travels backwards and forwards regularly, and she always carries a well-worn

music case. To-night she had a friend with her—a tall, fair boy, well made and manly for his years, for they were little more than children even yet. I was amused at the chivalrous way he carried her music case and helped her into the carriage. She accepted his services as a matter of course, and kept up a light strain of conversation, so that the whole carriage was gay with their laughter, and an additional gloom seemed to fall when they descended at their destination.

Were they girl and boy friends? Were they lovers? Or was she only playing with him? Boy and girl friends, I concluded. They were almost too matter of fact to be lovers, and the girl had too sweet a face to be a mix.

I have been miserable all day, tortured-haunted with visions of what might have been had fortune continued to smile on me. All through the long hours I have been tormented, goaded by temptation—temptation to go and tell her all, to lay my story before her in all its pitifulness and win her through her soft, womanly pity. Again and again I drove back the thought as unmanly and unworthy, but it grew upon me as the day wore on till at last I felt myself giving way, and I knew that ere long I should succumb and do the deed, though I hated myself for even thinking of it.

The train was crowded when I came home to-night. It had been raining, and the carriage reeked of damp and the faint smell of rain-soaked clothes. Up in one corner sat a woman trying to sleep. Her dress was poor and shabby, but the innate refinement of a gentleman stamped every feature of her face and every garment that she wore.

In her anxiety to shield the child she had allowed the rain to fall unchecked upon herself, and I shivered involuntarily as I looked at her wet garments. She was pale and thin, and a hacking cough kept interrupting her murmured endearments to the healthy-looking baby on her knee. I felt that she must have lived through years of worry to bring the deep furrows that wreathed her face and the look of patient suffering into her weary eye, which yet could beam with mother love.

I felt the carriage like a whipped cord, amazed at myself. The sight of that woman made me realize the full hideousness of the act I was contemplating. To think that I had ever dreamt of asking her to descend to a life such as that woman led! To think that in my blind foolishness I might have brought her to such a terrible pass!

The temptation has gone, and I am inclined to think that poor woman was one of the angels of God who are sometimes sent to open our eyes.

We poor workers who pass our time in the midst of London's loneliness are thrown in upon ourselves for companionship, it is our thoughts that bear us company. To-day my mind has been running through scenes in the past, living over again the days when I was rich and happiness seemed within my grasp. I have been trying to remember whether in these golden days I had any right to think she loved me, gathering up recollections of little tokens of her friendship which she vouchsafed me and trying to piece them together.

I can only remember one thing on which I can hang my hopes. It is nothing much, only a little tender look she gave me as I put her into her carriage after a dance. It made my heart leap at the time, and I determined to put my fate to the test on the morrow. The morrow came, and with it the crash that made me penniless, yet through all that terrible time I was comforted with the thought that if eyes spoke true she loved me on that night.

The girl with the red cloak was on the platform to-night, and with her the tall, fair youth. The train was late and they were pacing up and down, and I heard snatches of their conversation as they passed me.

"Yes, Jamie is coming by this train," I heard her say, then "Really engaged," in very low tones, while her companion's face was hidden as he bent over her.

So they were really engaged. That accounted for the bright color in her cheeks and the glad sparkle in her eyes. I was glad for them both, and glad she was not the mix I once suspected.

The train came in at last, wearing the look of self-complacent satisfaction which locomotives generally assume on very foggy or dark nights, as if they were proud of having pierced the obscurity in safety. There was a stifled cry from the girl with the red cloak, and I turned to see her with both hands clasped in those of a tall, bronzed man, and she was looking up at him with her whole soul beaming in her eyes.

"Jamie"—"Really engaged" I saw it all now, and I left them the carriage to themselves. She hardly paused to bid the other "Good-night," and when I saw his face as the train moved out, leaving him standing alone on the deserted platform, my heart grew bitter. She was a mix after all, and even the sweetest woman's eyes may look falsehoods.

But what a life I have been leading! I can hardly realize now that I am the same being that penned this paltry chronicle of wonderings and musings, these incoherent ramblings of a man in love. Such is life— one day in the depths, the next day on the heights, and so on to the end of time. Ah, well! I will finish the chronicle, and then— to the flames with it!

This evening while I waited for the train I paused by the bookstall and became absorbed in the specimen pictures of a new publication on the recent war. So engrossed was I that I do not think I should have noticed even the arrival or departure of my train had I not been aroused by a gentle touch on my arm.

I turned, and behold! she stood there before me, and the dingy place seemed like a fairyland because of her smile.

She held out her hand and looked up at me, blushing deliciously. "Ah, Mr. Hardinge!" she said. "What ages since I have seen you! Here is the train. Come back with me to-night. They will be so pleased at home!"

I do not know if I answered. I held open the door of a first-class carriage for her, and then would fain have turned away, for sudden pleasure is sometimes akin to pain, but she would have none of it.

"Come," she said, imperiously. "I have no ticket," I ventured. "Pay the other end," she commanded. And I yielded.

I was loath to break the silence. It was so like the old days—the comfort of the ease, above all, the bliss of being with her once more. It was she who spoke first.

"Why do you never come to see us now?" she asked, as the train glided easily through the smoky suburbs.

"I have no time for pleasure seeking," I replied reluctantly at last. "You said your evenings were always free," she reminded me reproachfully.

I turned away speechless. I knew she did not believe me, and to her I could offer no other excuse. "You are ill, you look so pale and worn."

I shook my head. "Why is it, then?" she persisted softly. "I can give you no other reason," I stammered, still keeping my face averted.

I felt her eyes travel over me from head to foot, and for the first time I became painfully conscious of my threadbare coat and the frayed edges of collars and cuffs. Then I felt her gaze upon my face, and I struggled not to meet her eyes, but there must have been some sweet mesmeric influence in their depths, for all my efforts were in vain. I turned my head. Her face was flushed, her dear eyes full of trouble and a deep, tender pity. Presently she held out her hands and her lips trembled as she spoke.

"Dick, why don't you tell me the truth?" Then, as she came nearer, prompted by her steadfast love, she whispered shamefacedly: "I have enough for both."

They have silenced my scruples, and now my troubles are at an end, have passed like a tale that is told. The weary tide of workaday life will go on as usual, the endless throng of busy workers plod on as before. But as for me, I shall live my life and love my love in the way I dreamed of—so vainly, as I thought—in the days when I traveled by the train— From an Exchange.

CATHERINE WAS SATISFIED.

Two young girls were talking the other day of a mutual friend. "I don't see how Catherine can endure a summer in that out-of-the-way corner of the world!"

"Oh, you need not pity Catherine!" replied her companion with something like a sneer. "If she has a bit of grass, a patch of sky to cover it, a flower or two, a tree with a bird's nest, or perhaps some little urchin playing by the roadside, she can be perfectly happy!"

Both girls laughed in dust, but the undertone of their merriment was not pleasant to my ears, although it set me thinking.

Of all traits of character there is one more conducive to happiness than the capacity of enjoying simple pleasures. This is not the less true because my young neighbors and others like them find it old-fashioned and ridiculous. "Fancy" dishes may be an occasional delight to the palate, but they certainly are not wholesome for exclusive diet, and similarly highly-seasoned enjoyments should be the luxuries rather than the sustenance of the mind. There are few sadder sights than that of the young person whose jaded emotions can be spurred only by novelty and excitement.

The power to enjoy is a natural evolution, passing from small things to greater. If you find no delight in the leap and sparkle of the woodland brook, you are not ready for a view from Niagara. If the undulating outlines of the hills about your home are without grace or beauty in your eyes, it will be in vain for you to journey to the Yellowstone or Switzerland.

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THE ATMOSPHERE CLEARED

(Written for The Catholic Register.)

If the readers of The Catholic Register will recall your correspondence's letters of some four, five and six weeks ago, prior to the return of the Premier from Europe, they cannot but agree that the "coming events" were carefully foreshadowed. For a time the political atmosphere was charged with electric surprises, while the rumbling of the generally expected storm was growing more and more distinct. At last the cloud that overhung the arena of Dominion politics burst, and there was a regular downpour of prophecies, of speculations, of anticipations, of exultations and of fears. But the calmness of judicious deliberation followed the tempest, and to-day the atmosphere is again clear, the sky serene, and the traces of the tumult are almost entirely effaced.

There has been no end of expressions, more or less contradictory, regarding the changes effected by the transferring of the Public Works Department to the keeping of an Ontario man, and the placing of the Marine and Fisheries in the hands of a Minister from Quebec. Quebec, in its dissatisfaction, considers that the Public Works Department belonged to it; the Maritime Provinces have long considered the Department of Marine and Fisheries as their special heritage. But neither seem to take into consideration that these departments, as well as all the other branches of the Federal Administration, belong to and affect the entire Dominion, and not any special sections of the country. And if the Government sees well to divide, or sub-divide, one or the other, or both of these departments, the process must be considered from the standpoint of the general results to be obtained and of the manner in which it will affect the Dominion's interests.

If the entire situation be taken, with all the changes effected or contemplated, it will be found that the work has been one of statesmanship, and not of either partyism or Provincialism. In the past Premier MacKenzie and Hon. William McDougall held the portfolio of Public Works, it passed to the hands of a Quebec representative for the good reason that such change corresponded exactly with the then existing claims of proportionate representation, both as regards numbers and patronage. If it be found necessary for the same reasons to-day, to allow that department to be directed by another Ontario representative, before criticizing it would be proper to establish some injustice done. Take the case of the Marine and Fisheries, all will admit that the gentlemen from the Maritime Provinces have more to do with matters of navigation and of fish than have the inhabitants of the inland provinces; but they would not like to be told that they must content themselves to these two elements, and that they are to have no say in aught else that affects the Dominion. If the handing over of this department to a Quebec minister can be called an encroachment on the prescribed privileges of the seaboard Provinces, it may be answered that the problem of transportation and navigation is far more important when concerning the St. Lawrence, the canals and the Great Lakes, than it is when connected only with ocean traffic. And it can be pointed out that throughout the years gone past the Maritime Provinces have not been confined to the Marine and Fisheries Department. They have had control of the Finance Department, of the Inland Revenue, of the Justice Department, of the Secretary of State Department, of the Railways and Canals Department, and even of the Customs, the Militia and the Post Office Departments. If there is aught more childish than this perpetual crying for the bigger piece of the candy-stick of patronage, it is the preposterous theory that any one section of the Dominion can have, by prescription, a monopoly of some certain portion of the Administration.

It has been made a subject of complaint in Ontario that the new Minister of Marine and Fisheries will have powers added to his jurisdiction that none of his predecessors in that Department enjoyed. Well, even so, Ontario has no reason to find fault, since by the very same readjustment it secures once more the Public Works. Some writer, who wished to be witty, has recently said that the division resembles that of the oyster between the two boys, Mr. Sutherland getting the shell and Mr. Prefontaine getting the meat. And this was calculated to furnish a text to those who were aching to deliver themselves of philippics against the Government, but who had not the subject-matter necessary to construct their harangues.

All this must sound very queer in the ear of the stranger. It is of a nature to establish very unenviable reputations for our country abroad. The Premier has scarcely returned from the strength-sapping ordeal of his important European visit, during the course of which he succeeded in bringing Canada most conspicuously before the eyes of the Old World, and in establishing for her such a status of national importance that the older nations have learned that they must calculate with her when devising schemes, commercial not yet had the opportunity of making the returns of his mission to the Parliament of the country. And

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