

ing rivalry of loveliness. All the features of nature, ideally appropriate to the Elements or the Seasons, were grouped around the Genius of the scene, presiding over swarms of inhabiting spirits. A wonderworld of ancient imagination comes down to us, materialized into a jewellery of intellectual art, all fashioned by patient but inspired thought from the apparently common surroundings of nature.

Fire, the ancients described as a treasure filched from heaven: and they deified the man who was traditioned to have brought it down to human use. We still pursue the allegory into the forms of modern speech. Fire in our language is the symbol of every delight and every power. We speak of the fire of poetry, the glow of patriotism, the light of truth, the flame of love. Human imagination seems always to kindle in its presence. What a phrase is that of one of the ancient sages, among the thoughts collected for all time in that great record of human introspection which we call the Book: "Man is born to trouble even as the sparks fly upward." What deep musings by desert camp-fires are embodied in his touching simile. The ancient scribe brings back to us, across the gulf of ages and the difference of races, a sympathetic glimpse of primordial life long ago suffered and past. We are claimed in kinship by this mournful and forgotten man. We distinguish him, one of a cluster of shadows surrounding a spark of ruddy light, bounded by immensities of desert darkness: a pitiful cluster of castaways comforting their loneliness upon the shore of the ocean of night. In the darkness behind that illuminated circle of humanity lie toils and cares of days past and days to come: within it, what hidden enemies! what dangers that may even at that moment be stealthily creeping upon them! Centered around that glow are all that is known to the little group, of friendship, fellowship and

defence. No wonder faces grow pensive in the blaze; that social sympathy waxes around it: that a sigh, by one consent, flies upward, following the sparks that melt and die away into the illimitable outer darkness.

Have we not a lingering fellowship with these long past conditions: an inheritance of ancient feelings and experiences? Is it not perhaps this that brings, especially upon Canadians, the recurrent fever of the woods? The camp-fire endears our summer memories. Can the house be perfectly happy, or perfectly artistic, that has no visible hearth, bringing the ancestral camp-fire within its four walls? Can any wealth of luxurious surroundings replace it? Bare walls and carpetless floors are glorified by the ancient magic that lurks in the living fire. We mourn its absence, even though surrounded with the wealth of costly carving, and the rarest skill of oriental looms.

At the recent Parliament of Religions, the Fire-worshipping Parsee was once more permitted to expound to the West the deeply religious thought which has consisted for so many ages with high civilization of life and a lofty code of morals. The sources of the spirit of religion are in awe and gratitude. It is no return to a meaningless idolatry—no despite to the high spirit of the most perfected religion—if we still do reverence to this strange living genius of Fire.

I venture to entertain a theory of my own as to the origin of those numerous and widespread historic religions which made fire solely, or, joined with sun, moon and stars, the central object of devotion. I am inclined to reverse the ordinary theory. It is usual to treat the fire on the altar as an image of the unquenchable source of fire: the god of day, forever circling in the heavens. It seems to me far more natural and more probable to suppose that the visible, tangible, and invaluable serviceable fire was