

# ADVENTURES WHILE PREACHING THE GOSPEL OF BEAUTY

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## III

### *Walking into Kansas*

IT has been raining quite a little. The roads are so muddy I have to walk the ties. Keeping company with the railroad is almost a habit. While this shower passes I write in the station at Stillwell, Kansas.

JUNE 14, 1912. I have crossed the mystic border. I have left Earth. I have entered Wonderland. Though I am still east of the geographical centre of the United States, in every spiritual sense I am in the West. This morning I passed the stone mile-post that marks the beginning of Kansas.

I went over the border and encountered—what do you think? Wild strawberries! Lo, where the Farmer had cut the weeds between the road and the fence, the gentle fruits revealed themselves, growing in the shadow down between the still-standing weeds. They shine out in a red line that stretches on and on, and a man has to resolve to stop eating several times. Just as he thinks he has conquered desire the line gets dazzlingly red again.

The berries grow at the end of a slender stalk, clustered six in a bunch. One gathers them by the stems, in bouquets, as it were, and eats off the fruit like taffy off a stick.

I was gathering buckets of cherries for a farmer's wife yesterday. This morning after the strawberries had mitigated I encountered a bush of raspberries, and then hedges on hedges of mulberries both white and red. The white mulberries are the sweetest. If this is the wild West, give me more. There are many varieties of trees, and they are thick as in the East. The people seem to grow more cordial. I was eating mulberries outside the yard of a villager. He asked me in where the eating

was better. And then he told me the town scandal, while I had my dessert.

A day or so ago I hoed corn all morning for my dinner. This I did cheerfully, considering I had been given a good breakfast at that farm for nothing. I feel that two good meals are worth about a morning's work anyway. And then I had company. The elderly owner of the place hoed along with me. He saved the country, by preaching to me the old fashioned high tariff gospel, and I saved it by preaching to him the new fashioned Gospel of Beauty. Meanwhile the corn was hoed. Then we went in and ate the grandest of dinners. That house was notable for having on its walls really artistic pictures, not merely respectable pictures, nor yet seed-catalogue advertisements.

That night, in passing through a village, I glimpsed a man washing his dishes in the rear of a blacksmith shop. I said to myself: "Ah ha! Somebody keeping bach."

I knew I was welcome. There is no fear of the stranger in such a place, for there are no ladies to reassure or propitiate. Permission to sleep on the floor was granted as soon as asked. I spread out *The Kansas City Star*, which is a clean sheet, put my verses under my head for a pillow and was content. Next morning the sun was in my eyes. There was the odor of good fried bacon in the air.

"Git up and eat a snack, pardner," said my friend the blacksmith. And he told me the story of his life while I ate.

I had an amusing experience at the town of Belton. I had given an entertainment at the hotel on the promise of a night's lodging. I slept late. Over my transom came the breakfast-table talk. "That was a hot entertainment that young bum gave us last night," said one man. "He ought to get to work, the dirty lazy loafer," said another.

The schoolmaster spoke up in an effort not to condescend to his audience: "He is evidently a fraud. I talked to him a long time after the entertainment. The pieces he recited were certainly not his own. I have read some of them somewhere. It is too easy a way to get along, especially when the man is able to work as this one. Of course in the old days literary men used to be obliged to do such things. But it isn't at all neces-

sary in the Twentieth Century. Real poets are highly paid." Another spoke up: "I don't mind a fake, but he is a rotten reciter, anyhow. If he had said one more I would have just walked right out. You noticed ol' Mis' Smith went home after that piece about the worms." Then came the landlord's voice: "After the show was over I came pretty near not letting him have his room. All I've got to say is he don't get any breakfast."

I dressed, opened the doorway serenely, and strolled past the table, smiling with all the ease of a minister at his own church-social. In my most ornate manner I thanked the landlord and landlady for their extreme kindness. I assumed that not one of the gentlefolk had intended to have me hear their analysis. 'Twas a grand exit. Yet, in plain language, these people "got my goat." I have struggled with myself all morning, almost on the point of ordering a marked copy of a magazine sent to that smart schoolmaster. "*Evidently a fraud!*" Indeed!

"Goin' Wes' harvesin'?"

"Yes, yes. I think I will harvest when I get to Great Bend."

JUNE 18, 1912. Approaching Emporia. I am sitting in the hot sun by the Santa Fé tracks, after two days of walking those tracks in the rain. I am near a queer little Mexican house built of old railroad ties.

I had had two sticks of candy begged from a grocer for breakfast. I was keeping warm by walking fast. Because of the muddy roads and the sheets of rain coming down it was impossible to leave the tracks. It was almost impossible to make speed since the ballast underfoot was almost all of it big rattling broken stone. I had walked that Santa Fé railroad a day and a half in the drizzle and downpour. It was a little past noon, and my scanty inner fuel was almost used up. I dared not stop a minute now, lest I catch cold. There was no station in sight ahead. When the mists lifted I saw that the tracks went on and on, straight west to the crack of doom, not even a water-tank in sight. The mists came down, then lifted once more, and, as though I were Childe Roland, I suddenly saw a shack to the right, in dimensions about seven feet each way. It was mostly

stove-pipe, and that pipe was pouring out enough smoke to make three of Aladdin's Jinns. I presume some one heard me whistling. The little door opened. Two heads popped out, "Come in, you slab-sided hobo," they yelled affectionately. "Come in and get dry." And so my heart was made suddenly light after a day and a half of hard whistling.

At the inside end of that busy smoke-stack was a roaring redhot stove about as big as a hat. It had just room enough on top for three steaming coffee cans at a time. There were four white men with their chins on their knees completely occupying the floor of one side of the mansion, and four Mexicans filled the other. Every man was hunched up to take as little room as possible. It appeared that my only chance was to move the tins and sit on the stove. But one Mexican sort of sat on another Mexican and the new white man was accommodated. These fellows were a double-section gang, for the track is double all along here.

I dried out pretty quick. The men began to pass up the coffee off the stove. It strangled and blistered me, it was so hot. The men were almost to the bottom of the food sections of their buckets and were beginning to throw perfectly good sandwiches and extra pieces of pie through the door. I said that if any man had anything to throw away would he just wait till I stepped outside so I could catch it. They handed me all I could ever imagine a man eating. It rained and rained and rained, and I ate till I could eat no more. One man gave me for dessert the last half of his cup of stewed raisins along with his own spoon. Good raisins they were, too. A Mexican urged upon me some brown paper and cigarette tobacco. I was sorry I did not smoke. The men passed up more and more hot coffee.

That coffee made me into a sort of thermos bottle. On the strength of it I walked all afternoon through sheets and cataracts. When dark came I slept in wet clothes in a damp blanket in the hay of a windy livery-stable without catching cold.

Now it is morning. The sky is reasonably clear, the weather is reasonably warm, but I am no longer a thermos bottle, no, no. I am sitting on the hottest rock I can find, letting the sun go through my bones. The coffee in me has turned at last to ice

and snow. Emporia, the Athens of America, is just ahead. Oh, for a hot bath and a clean shirt!

A mad dog tried to bite me yesterday morning, when I made a feeble attempt to leave the track. When I was once back on the ties, he seemed afraid and would not come closer. His bark was the ghastliest thing I ever heard. As for his bite, he did not get quite through my shoe-heel.

EMPORIA, KANSAS, JUNE 19, 1912.

On inquiring at the Emporia General Delivery for mail, I found your letter telling me to call upon your friend Professor Kerr. He took my sudden appearance most kindly, and pardoned my battered attire and the mud to the knees. After a day in his house I am ready to go on, dry and feasted and warm and clean. The professor's help seemed to come in just in time. I was a most weary creature.

Thinking it over this morning, the bathtub appears to be the first outstanding advantage the cultured man has over the half-civilized. Quite often the folk with swept houses and decent cooking who have given my poems discriminating attention, who have given me good things to eat, forget, even when they entertain him overnight, that the stranger would like to soak himself thoroughly. Many of the working people seem to keep fairly clean with the washpan as their principal ally. But the tub is indispensable to the mendicant in the end, unless he is walking through a land of crystal waterfalls, like North Georgia.

I am an artificial creature at last, dependent, after all, upon modern plumbing. 'Tis, perhaps, not a dignified theme, but I retired to the professor's bathroom and washed off the entire State of Missouri and the eastern counties of Kansas, and did a deal of laundry work on the sly. This last was not openly confessed to the professor, but he might have guessed, I was so cold on the front porch that night.

I shall not soon lose the memory of this the first day of emergence from the strait paths of St. Francis, this first meeting, since I left Springfield, with a person on whom I had a conventional social claim. I had forgotten what the delicacy of a cultured welcome would be like. The professor's table was a

marvel to me. I was astonished to discover there were such fine distinctions in food and linen. And for all my troubadour profession, I had almost forgotten there were such distinctions in books. I have hardly seen one magazine since I left you. The world where I have been moving reads nothing but newspapers. It is confusing to bob from one world to the other, to zig-zag across the social dead-line. I sat in the professor's library a very mixed-up person, feeling I could hardly stay a minute, yet too heavy-footed to stir an inch, and immensely grateful and relaxed.

Sooner or later I am going to step up into the rarefied civilized air once too often and stay there in spite of myself. I shall get a little too fond of the china and old silver, and forget the fields. Books and teacups and high-brow conversations are awfully insinuating things, if you give them time to be. One gets along somehow, and pleasure alternates with pain, and the sum is the joy of life, while one is below. But to quit is like coming up to earth after deep-sea diving in a heavy suit. One scarcely realizes he has been under heavier-than-air pressure, and has been fighting off great forces, till he has taken off his diving helmet, as it were. And yet there is a baffling sense of futility in the restful upper air. I remember it once, long ago, in emerging in Warren, Ohio, and once in emerging in Macon, Georgia:—the feeling that the upper world is all tissue paper, that the only choice a real man can make is to stay below with the great forces of life forever, even though he be a tramp—the feeling that, to be a little civilized, we sacrifice enormous powers and joys. For all I was so tired and so very grateful to the professor, I felt like a bull in a china shop. I should have been out in the fields, eating grass.

SUNDAY MORNING, JUNE 23, 1912. I am writing on the top of a pile of creosote-soaked ties between the Santa Fé tracks and the trail that runs parallel to the tracks. Florence, Kansas, is somewhere ahead.

In the East the railroads and machinery choke the land to death and it was there I made my rule against them. But the farther West I go the more the very life of the country seems

to depend upon them. I suppose, though, that some day, even out West here, the rule against the railroad will be a good rule.

Meanwhile let me say that my Ruskinian prejudices are temporarily overcome by the picturesqueness and efficiency of the Santa Fé. It is double-tracked, and every four miles is kept in order by a hand-car crew that is spinning back and forth all the time. The air seems to be full of hand-cars.

Walking in a hurry to make a certain place by nightfall I have become acquainted with these section hands, and, most delightful to relate, have ridden in their iron conveyances, putting my own back into the work. Half or three-fourths of the employees are Mexicans who are as ornamental in the actual landscape as they are in a Remington drawing. These Mexicans are tractable serfs of the Santa Fé. If there were enough miles of railroad in Mexico to keep all the inhabitants busy on section, perhaps the internal difficulties could be ended. These peons live peacefully next to the tracks in houses built by the company from old ties. The ties are placed on end, side by side, with plaster in the cracks, on a tiny oblong two-room plan. There is a little roofed court between the rooms. A farmer told me that the company tried Greek serfs for a while, but they made trouble for outsiders and murdered each other.

The road is busy as busy can be. Almost any time one can see enormous freight-trains rolling by or a mile-a-minute passenger train. Gates are provided for each farmer's right of way. I was told by an exceptional Mexican with powers of speech that the efficient dragging of the wagon-roads, especially the "New Santa Fé Trail" that follows the railroad, is owing to the missionary work of King, the split-log drag man, who was employed to go up and down this land agitating his hobby.

When the weather is good, touring automobiles whiz past. They have pennants showing they are from Kansas City, Emporia, New York or Chicago. They have camping canvas and bedding on the back seats of the car, or strapped in the rear. They are on camping tours to Colorado Springs and the like pleasure places. Some few avow they are going to the coast. About five o'clock in the evening some man making a local trip is apt to come along alone. He it is that wants the other side



of the machine weighed down. He it is that will offer me a ride and spin me along from five to twenty-five miles before supper. This delightful use that may be made of an automobile in rounding out a day's walk has had something to do with mending my prejudice against it, despite the grand airs of the tourists that whirl by at midday. I still maintain that the auto is a carnal institution, to be shunned by the truly spiritual, but there are times when I, for one, get tired of being spiritual.

Much of the country east of Emporia is hilly and well-wooded and hedged like Missouri. But now I am getting into the range region. Yesterday, after several miles of treeless land that had never known the plough, I said to myself: "Now I am really West." And my impression was reinforced when I reached a grand baronial establishment called "Clover Hill Ranch." It was flanked by the houses of the retainers. In the foreground and a little to the side was the great stone barn for the mules and horses. Back on the little hill, properly introduced by ceremonious trees, was the ranch house itself. And before it was my lord on his ranching charger. The aforesaid lord created quite an atmosphere of lordliness as he refused work in the alfalfa harvest to a battered stranger who bowed too low and begged too hard, perhaps. On the porch was my lady, feeding bread and honey to the beautiful young prince of the place.

I have not yet reached the wheat belt. Since the alfalfa harvest is on here, I shall try for that a bit.

SUNDAY AFTERNOON, JUNE 30, 1912. In the spare room of a Mennonite Farmer, who lives just inside the wheat belt.

This is going to be a long Sunday afternoon; so make up your minds for a long letter. I did not get work in the alfalfa. Yet there is news. I have been staying a week with this Mennonite family shocking wheat for them, though I am not anywhere near Great Bend.

Before I tell you of the harvest, I must tell you of these Mennonites. They are a dear people. I have heard from their reverent lips the name of their founder, Menno Simonis, who was born about the time of Columbus and Luther and other such



worthies. They are as opposed to carnal literature as I am to tailor-made clothes, and I hold they are perfectly correct in allowing no fashion magazines in the house. Such modern books as they read deal with practical local philanthropies and great international mission movements, and their interdenominational feelings for all Christendom are strong. Yet they hold to their ancient verities, and antiquity broods over their meditations.

For instance I found in their bookcase an endless dialogue epic called *The Wandering Soul*, in which this soul, seeking mainly for information, engages in stilted conversation with Adam, Noah and Simon Cleophas. Thereby the Wandering Soul is informed as to the orthodox history and chronology of the world from the Creation to the destruction of Jerusalem. The wood-cuts are devotional. They are worth walking to Kansas to see. The book had its third translation into Pennsylvania English in 1840, but several American editions had existed in German before that, and several German editions in Germany. It was originally written in the Dutch language and was popular among the Mennonites there. But it looks as if it was printed by Adam to last forever and scare bad boys.

Let us go to meeting. All the women are on their own side of the aisle. All of them have a fairly uniform Quakerish sort of dress of no prescribed color. In front are the most pious, who wear a black scoop-bonnet. Some have taken this off, and show the inevitable "prayer-covering" underneath. It is the plainest kind of a lace-cap, awfully coquettish on a pretty head. It is intended to mortify the flesh, and I suppose it is unbecoming to *some* women.

All the scoop bonnets are not black. Toward the middle of the church, behold a cream-satin, a soft gray, a dull moon-gold. One young woman, moved, I fear, by the devil, turns and looks across the aisle at us. An exceedingly demure bow is tied all too sweetly under the chin, in a decorous butterfly style. Fie! fie! Is this mortifying the flesh? And I note with pain that the black bonnets grow fewer and fewer toward the rear of the meeting house.

Here come the children, with bobbing headgear of every color of the rainbow, yet the same scoop-pattern still. They have

been taking little walks and runs between Sunday-school and church, and are all flushed and panting. But I would no more criticise the color of their headgear than the color in their faces. Some of them squeeze in among the black rows in front and make piety reasonable. But we noted by the door as they entered something that both the church and the world must abhor. Seated as near to the men's side as they can get, with a mixture of shame and defiance in their faces, are certain daughters of the Mennonites who insist on dressing after the fashions that come from Paris and Kansas City and Emporia. By the time the rumors of what is proper in millinery have reached this place they are a disconcerting mixture of cherries, feathers and ferns. And somehow there are too many mussy ribbons on the dresses.

We can only guess how these rebels most suffer under the concentrated silent prayers of the godly. Poor honest souls! they take to this world's vain baggage and overdo it. Why do they not make up their minds to serve the devil sideways, like that sly puss with the butterfly bow?

On the men's side of the house the division on dress is more acute. The Holiness movement, the doctrine of the Second Blessing that has stirred many rural Methodist groups, has attacked the Mennonites also. Those who dispute for this newism of sanctification leave off their neckties as a sign. Those that retain their neckties, satisfied with what Menno-Simonis taught, have a hard time remaining in a state of complete calm. The temptation to argue the matter is almost more than flesh can bear.

But, so far as I could discover, there was no silent prayer over the worst lapse of these people. What remains of my Franciscan soul was hurt to discover that the buggy-shed of the meeting-house was full of automobiles. And to meet a Mennonite on the road without a necktie, his wife in the blackest of bonnets, honking along in one of those glittering brazen machines, almost shakes my confidence in the Old Jerusalem Gospel.

Yet let me not indulge in disrespect. Every spiritual warfare must abound in its little ironies. They are keeping their rule against finery as well as I am keeping mine against the railroad. And they have their own way of not being corrupted

by money. Their ministry is unsalaried. Their preachers are sometimes helpers on the farms, sometimes taken care of outright, the same as I am.

As will later appear, despite some inconsistencies, the Mennonites have a piety as literal as any to be found on the earth. Since they are German there is no lack of thought in their system. I attended one of their quarterly conferences and I have never heard better discourses on the distinctions between the four gospels. The men who spoke were scholars.

The Mennonites make it a principle to ignore politics, and are non-resistants in war. I have read in the life of one of their heroes what a terrible time his people had in the Shenandoah valley in the days of Sheridan. . . . Three solemn tracts are here on my dresser. The first is against church organs, embodying a plea for simplicity and the spending of such money on local benevolences and world-wide missions. The tract aptly compares the church-organ to the Thibetan prayer-wheel, and later to praying by phonograph. A song is a prayer to them, and they sing hymns and nothing but hymns all week long.

The next tract is on non-conformity to this world, and insists our appearance should indicate our profession, and that fashions drive the poor away from the church. It condemns jewels and plaiting of the hair, etc., and says that such things stir up a wicked and worldly lust in the eyes of youth. This tract goes so far as to put worldly pictures under the ban. Then comes another, headed Bible Teaching on Dress. It goes on to show that every true Christian, especially that vain bird, the female, should wear something like the Mennonite uniform to indicate the line of separation from "the World." I have a good deal of sympathy for all this, for indeed is it not briefly comprehended in my own rule: "Carry no baggage"?

These people celebrate communion every half year, and at the same time they practise the ritual of washing the feet. Since Isadora Duncan has rediscovered the human foot æsthetically, who dares object to it in ritual? It is all a question of what we are trained to expect. Certainly these people are respecters of the human foot and not ashamed to show it. Next to the way their women have of making a dash to find their gauzy

prayer-covering, which they put on for grace at table and Bible-lesson before breakfast, their most striking habit is the way both men and women go about in very clean bare feet after supper. Next to this let me note their resolve to have no profane hour whatsoever. When not actually at work they sit and sing hymns, each Christian on his own hook as he has leisure.

My first evening among these dear strangers I was sitting alone by the front door, looking out on the wheat. I was thrilled to see the fairest member of the household enter, not without grace and dignity. Her prayer covering was on her head, her white feet were shining like those of Nicolette and her white hymn-book was in her hand. She ignored me entirely. She was rapt in trance. She sat by the window and sang through the book, looking straight at a rose in the wall-paper.

I lingered there, reading *The Wandering Soul* just as oblivious of her presence as she was of mine. Oh, no; there was no art in the selection of her songs! I remember one which was to this effect:

“Don’t let it be said:  
‘Too late, too late  
To enter that Golden Gate.’  
Be ready, for soon  
The time will come  
To enter that Golden Gate.”

On the whole she had as much right to plunk down and sing hymns out of season as I have to burst in and quote poetry to peaceful and unprotected households.

I would like to insert a discourse here on the pleasure and the naturalness and the humanness of testifying to one’s gospel whatever that gospel may be, barefooted or golden-slippered or iron-shod. The best we may win in return may be but a kindly smile. We may never make one convert. Still the duty of testifying remains, and is enjoined by the invisible powers and makes for the health of the soul. This Mennonite was a priestess of her view of the truth and comes of endless generations of such snow-footed apostles. I presume the sect ceased to enlarge when the Quakers ceased to thrive, but I make my guess that it does not crumble as fast as the Quakers, having more German stolidity.

Let me again go forward, testifying to my particular lonely gospel in the face of such pleasant smiles and incredulous questions as may come. I wish I could start a sturdy sect like old Menno Simonis did. They should dress as these have done, and be as stubborn and rigid in their discipline. They should farm as these have done, but on reaching the point where the Mennonite buys the automobile, that money and energy should go into the making of cross-roads palaces for the people, golden as the harvest field, and disciplined well-parked villages, good as a psalm, and cities fair as a Mennonite lady in her prayer-covering, delicate and noble as Athens the unforgotten, the divine.

The Mennonite doctrine of non-participation in war or politics leads them to confine their periodic literature to religious journals exclusively, plus *The Drover's Journal* to keep them up to date on the prices of farm-products. There is only one Mennonite political event, the coming of Christ to judge the earth. Of that no man knoweth the day or the hour. We had best be prepared and not play politics or baseball or anything. Just keep unspotted and harvest the wheat.


"Goin' Wes' harvesin'?"

I have harvested, thank you. Four days and a half I have shocked wheat in these prayer-consecrated fields that I see even now from my window. And I have good hard dollars in my pocket, which same dollars are against my rules.

I will tell you of the harvest in the next letter.

#### ON THE ROAD TO NOWHERE

*On the road to nowhere  
What wild oats did you sow  
When you left your father's house  
With your cheeks aglow?  
Eyes so strained and eager  
To see what you might see?  
Were you thief or were you fool  
Or most nobly free?  
Were the tramp-days knightly,  
True sowing of wild seed?*

*Did you dare to make the songs  
Vanquished workmen need?  
Did you waste much money  
To deck a leper's feast?  
Love the truth, defy the crowd,  
Scandalize the priest?  
On the road to nowhere  
What wild oats did you sow?  
Stupids find the nowhere-road  
Dusty, grim and slow.  
Ere their sowing's ended  
They turn them on their track:   
Look at the caitiff craven wights  
Repentant, hurrying back!  
Grown ashamed of nowhere,  
Of rags endured for years,  
Lust for velvet in their hearts,  
Pierced with Mammon's spears.  
All but a few fanatics  
Give up their darling goal,  
Seek to be as others are,  
Stultify the soul.  
Reapings now confront them,  
Glut them, or destroy,  
Curious seeds, grain or weeds,  
Sown with awful joy.  
Hurried is their harvest,  
They make soft peace with men.  
Pilgrims pass. They care not,  
Will not tramp again.  
O nowhere, golden nowhere!  
Sages and fools go on  
To your chaotic ocean,  
To your tremendous dawn.  
Far in your fair dream-haven,  
Is nothing or is all . . .  
They press on, singing, sowing  
Wild deeds without recall!*

## TIME, PAST MASTER OF ILLUSION

C. L. B. SHUDDEMAGEN

CONSCIOUSNESS, individualized life, evolves and grows in content and in organization. It grows in two distinct ways: first, within a world of a certain space, or dimension, coming into greater correspondence with the objects in that world, learning to understand more of the things which have reality in that world; and second, into a world of higher dimension which is related to the lower one as a solid body is related to its surface. The first mode is an expansion, a continuous increase along familiar lines; the second is a raising to a higher power, as it were, a growth along new lines. Growth of the first kind is in a certain sense prerequisite to that of the second kind.

The feeling of growth or change in consciousness is the philosophical basis of the conception of time, which must have arisen in the awareness or recognition of continual change in the external world as perceived by the consciousness, accompanied by permanent changes and increments in its growth. There are, therefore, two different classes of time: one measures the ordinary growth of consciousness within the world in which the being is accustomed to function, and the other measures it similarly for the world of the next higher dimension. However, as a matter of fact, the time-conception has become generalized in human evolution so as to apply rather to the collective change or growth of racial consciousness than to that of any single individual. It therefore does not take note of the second kind of change, as such changes are, at this stage of the evolution of humanity, rather exceptional and abnormal. Furthermore, the time-conception was standardized with reference to external changes and measured by the external apparent motions of the sun, moon and stars. It is logical and reasonable to regard these external changes and motions in nature as being in very truth nothing more or less than internal changes of consciousness and growth of one or more mighty universal Beings, of vastly greater inclusiveness in consciousness and powers than that of