

## Of Pleasant Things

WHEN I was a child we lived on the border of the town and the road that passed our windows went in two ways. One branch ran up the hill under the old city gateway and out through the mean city "lanes." The other branch turned round our corner and ran into the countryside. Day and night many carts lumbered by our windows, in plain hearing. In the daytime I took no pleasure in them, but when I woke at night and the thick silence was broken by the noise of a single deliberate cart it filled me with a vague enchantment. I still feel this enchantment. The steady effort of the wheels, their rattle as they pass over the uneven road, their crunching deliberateness, gives me a sense of acute pleasure. That pleasure is at its highest when a solitary lantern swings underneath the wagon. In the old days the load might be coal, with the colliery-man sitting hunched on the driver's seat, a battered silhouette. Or the load might be from the brewery, making a start at dawn. Or it might be a load of singing harvest-women, hired in the market square by the sweet light of the morning. But not the wagon or the sight of the wagoner pleases me, so much as that honest steady homely sound coming through the vacancy of the night. I like it, I find it friendly and companionable, and I hope to like it till I die.

The city sounds improve with distance. Sometimes, in lazy summer evenings, I like the faint rumble, the growing roar, the receding rumble of the elevated, with the suggestion of its open windows and its passengers relaxed and easy after the hot day. Always I like the moaning sounds from the river craft, carried so softly into the town. But New York sounds and Chicago sounds are usually discords. I hate bells—the sharp spinsterish telephone bell, the lugubrious church bell, the clangorous railway bell. Well, perhaps not the sleigh bell or the dinner bell.

I like the element of water. An imagist should write of the waters of Lake Michigan which circle around Mackinac Island: the word crystal is the hackneyed word for those pure lucent depths. When the sun shines on the bottom every pebble is seen in a radiance of which the jewel is a happy memory. In Maine lakes and along the coast of Maine one has the same visual delight in water as clear as crystal, and on the coast of Ireland I have seen the Atlantic Ocean slumber in a glowing amethyst or thunder in a wall of emerald. On the southern shore of Long Island, who has not seen the sumptuous ultramarine, with a surf as snowy as apple-blossom? After shrill and meagre New York, the color of that Atlantic is drenching.

The dancing harbor of New York is a beauty that never fades, but I hate the New York skyline except at night. In the daytime those punctured walls seem imbecile to me. They look out on the river with such a lidless, such an inhuman stare. Nothing of man clings to them. They are barren as the rocks, empty as the deserted vaults of cliff-dwellers. A little wisp of white steam may suggest humanity, but not these bleak cliffs themselves. At night, however, they become human. They look out on the black moving river with marigold eyes. And Madison Square at nightfall has the same, or even a more ethereal, radiance. From the hurried streets the walls of light seem like a deluge of fairy splendor. This is always a gay transformation to the eye of the citydweller, who is forever oppressed by the ugliness around him.

Flowers are pleasant things to most people. I like flowers, but seldom cut flowers. The gathering of wild flowers seems to me unnecessarily wanton, and is it not hateful to see people coming home with dejected branches of dogwood or broken autumn festoons or apple-blossoms already rusting in the train? I like flowers best in the fulness of the meadow or the solitude of a forsaken garden. Few things are so pleasant as to find oneself all alone in a garden that has, so to speak, drifted out to sea. The life that creeps up between its broken flagstones, the life that trails so impudently across the path, the life that spawns in the forgotten pool—this has a fascination beyond the hand of gardeners. Once I shared a neglected garden with an ancient turtle, ourselves the only living things within sight or sound. When the turtle wearied of sunning himself he shuffled to the artificial pond, and there he lazily paddled through waters laced down with scum. It was pleasant to see him, a not too clean turtle in waters not too clean. Perhaps if the family had been home the gardener would have scoured him.

Yet order is pleasant. If I were a millionaire—which I thank heaven I am not, nor scarcely a millionth part of one—I should take pleasure in the silent orderliness that shadowed me through my home. Those invisible hands that patted out the pillows and shined the shoes and picked up everything, even the Sunday newspapers—those I should enjoy. I should enjoy especially the guardian angel who hid from me the casualties of the laundry and put the surviving laundry away. In heaven there is no laundry, or mending of laundry. For the millionaire the laundry is sent and the laundry is sorted away, blessed be the name of the millionaire. I envy him little else. Except, perhaps, his linen sheets.

The greatest of all platitudes is the platitude that life is in the striving. Is this aspiration alto-

gether true? Not for those menial offices so necessary to our decent existence, so little decent in their victims or themselves. But one does remember certain striving that brought with it almost instant happiness, like the reward of the child out coasting or the boy who has made good in a hard, grinding game. It is pleasant to think of one's first delicious surrender to fatigue after a long day's haul on a hot road. That surrender, in all one's joints, with all one's driven will, is the ecstasy that even the Puritan allowed himself. It is the nectar of the pioneer. In our civilization we take it away from the workers, as we take the honey from the bees—but I wish to think of things pleasant, not of our civilization. Fatigue of this golden kind is unlike the leaden fatigue of routine or of compulsion. It is the tang that means a man is young. If one gets it from games, even golf, I

think it is pleasant. It is the great charm that Englishmen possess and understand.

These are ordinary pleasant things, not the pleasant things of the poet. They barely leave the hall of pleasant things. A true poet, I imagine, is one who captures in the swift net of his imagination the wild pleasantnesses and delights that to me would be running shadows quickly lost to view. But every man must bag what he can in his own net, whether he be rational or poetic. For myself, I have to use my imagination to keep from being snared by too many publicists and professors and persons of political intent. These are invaluable servants of humanity, admirable masters of our mundane institutions. But they fill the mind with rules. They pave the meadows with concrete, they lose the free swing of pleasant things.

F. H.

## A COMMUNICATION

### An Open Letter to Attorney General Palmer

**SIR:** In the days of the old New England town meeting, which was the womb of our nation, each individual had an equal liberty of delivering his opinion, says a writer of the period, and was not liable to be silenced or browbeaten by a richer or greater townsman than himself.

May I, for the purpose of this open letter, consider that we are in such an honest-to-goodness democratic meeting, and that you are the chairman of it, and speak my mind to you?

I must speak out. It is with me, at this critical moment of the denouement of the tremendous democratic drama—"Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death"—now playing to crowded houses, not only on the stage of America but the whole world, as it was with young Elihu in the ancient drama of Job. After keeping silence through thirty-one chapters he rises to speak. Among other things he says, substantially: "There is a spirit in man, in all men. This spirit is no respecter of titles or persons. It is intensely democratic. It comes from the Almighty, not aristocratically, but democratically. It gives understanding to plain people, and by no means merely to *ex-plain* people. Great men, indeed, are not always wise. Sometimes the Almighty chooses the foolish and weak things of the world to confound the wise and mighty. Sometimes He sets his choice upon base things, even upon despised things, yea, even upon things which are not, to bring to nought things that are. This divine, up-springing democratic spirit, which is within me, constraineth me. Behold, my belly is as wine which hath no vent; it is ready to burst like new bottles. I will speak. I must speak or burst."

That is just my state. *I Must Speak or Burst.* It is interesting to me to know that Dr. Arnold of Rugby, used

often to feel just that way, say so, and then speak his mind without fear or favor.

Were you an impatient chairman, blind and deaf to the mighty sights and sounds that seeing eyes and hearing ears see and hear today, and too obfuscated to put two and two together, you would be tempted, at this juncture, to give way to pettishness, and try to squelch me by shouting at me, "Burst and be d—d!"

Let me take it for granted, for the purposes of this open letter, that you are not a political or social blind and deaf man, not obfuscated, not given to pettishness, not impatient. It would be a serious matter indeed were it otherwise. It would be worse than scandalous. It would be an over-cordial welcome to avoidable national calamity were you such a man. For you happen to be Attorney General of the United States. As such, you are in a peculiar sense the medium through which not only a hundred million pairs of American eyes, but the earnest eyes of the whole world, see American Justice. At an hour in which the cry for Human Justice is ascending to the throne of the Eternal Just One, and shaking the seats of the mighty on earth, as never before, you happen to be the person upon whom the great responsibility devolves, of speaking and acting in such a manner as to commend American Justice to the innate sense of justice in the bosoms of our vast and varied citizenship, to the strangers within our gates—here, for the greater part, by urgent invitation, and to the citizens of our neighbor nations throughout the world for whose opinions we expressed a "decent respect" with our first national breath. It needs a clear, cool, level head, a good enough imagination to visualize not only men and women at work, but men, women and little children in their homes, and a sound human heart, to enable a man to measure at all up to the responsibilities of such a position at such a time. A mere proverbial Philadelphia lawyer in such a position would be a mischievous misfit.