

HAPPINESS.

BY ARCHIBALD LAMPMAN.

TO each man, emerging from the period of childhood, the thoroughfare of life branches into three ways—one to the right, one to the left, and the third, the broadest, straight ahead. The portal to the right is lofty but narrow, and over it is hung the ægis of Pallas Athene. Within stand the attendants of the goddess, an innumerable throng, infinitely various in face, figure, and attribute. Some one of these advances to the greeting of every man as he comes up from the open meadows of youth. This is his good genius; in other words, the radical gift through which he is intended by nature to be operative and fruitful among men. If he yield to her, she will take him by the hand, and thenceforth become his guide. He will journey by upward and difficult paths, often losing his way, often retracing his steps; sometimes piercing the unbroken wild, uncertain as to the immediate goal, for even the appointed guide rarely sees with unerring instinct. But the sense of health, of general rightness, of gratified individuality, will continue to be with him. In the end he will reach high table-lands, from which he will survey the world and mankind, and perceive that even the cloudiest tracts are overarched by the interminable blue, and dreamed upon by inexhaustible sunshine. This is the road of happiness—such happiness as can be commonly attained by man.

The pathway to the left opens through

a portal festooned with vines and heavy with the scent of roses. From it issue sounds of music and mysterious revelry. Near the threshold, beautiful and alluring, stands Circe with her cup, a figure endlessly changing, fitting herself to every man's desire. This is the road of mere delight, of emotional inclination, of aimless excitement. We need not follow its windings, till it ends at last in that gloomy lake, full of the nameless outcries of creatures abject and deformed, writhing under the final incantations of the dreadful goddess, now horribly revealed and stripped of all her beauty.

The third portal is broad and obvious and unattended. No goddess stands there, for it is an entrance abhorred and shunned by all the immortals. This is the way of the commonplace, the path of routine. Into it drift the majority of men, blindly and aimlessly, not having fire enough in their blood to choose the wrong road, nor sufficient consciousness of soul to choose the right. Here there can be no true happiness; for the pale multitudes that infest it live no life, are stirred by no inspiration, yield to no movement of individual purpose. The most that they do is to blunder into some pleasant land of Cockagne, where puddings grow upon stalks like cabbages, and roasted pigs run about under the trees.

There appear to be certain rare temperaments to which a sort of happiness is

attached as a gift of nature. The complete egoist, absorbed in the exploitation of the powers and impulses of his own nature, provided he has little imagination and is gifted with faculty to attain his ends, may be happy with a sort of solitary and arid happiness. The perfect altruist also, that rare spirit that devotes itself wholly and willingly to the profit and pleasure of others, may be happy with a happiness beneficent and sublime. Between these lies the vast range of temperament in which the alter and the ego are in every degree of conflict. Here there are broken lights and shadows, storm and stress, aspiration and despair, and all the tragical battles of desire and conscience. Only a few blessed souls stand scathless above the common tumult—those in whom nature has balanced the conflicting motives of selfishness and devotion in so rare and fitting a harmony that they seem never to be at variance, but one gives way to the other at the proper moment, as if by a delicate, divinely adjusted instinct. These are the beings who move among men like the gods—at ease, joyous, and untroubled, receiving and conferring pleasure, universally loving and beloved. Joy comes to them with the fulness of health. Sorrow afflicts them but as a noble chastening. Conscience does not prick them. Indeed, they have no need of it, for conscience is the monitor of the unbalanced.

To such of us as would not have the callous self-satisfaction of the egoist if we could—to whom the spiritual perfection of the altruist is impossible—the chance of happiness rests upon the development of the individual gift. Let each man find out what thing it is that nature specially intended him to do, and do it. Work is only toil when it is the performance of duties for which nature did not fit us, and a congenial occupation is only serious play. If a man has an overruling talent for music, let no force or persuasion, or trick or trend of circumstance, induce him to become a lawyer, or a physician, or a stock-broker, or anything but what he wants to be and nature distinctly indicates that he should be.

The happy are those who possess their own souls, whose attitude toward life and their fellow-men is firmly chosen and faithfully preserved. This mastery can only be attained through the liberal development of that special aptitude or fac-

ulty which nature has implanted in each man for the purposes of self-expression and the service of his kind. The unhappy are those who lack faith in themselves, who do not know what they want, who are at variance with nature in the corroding conflict of passion and uncertain ideals. Nature abhors, above all things, a vacant soul, and she seems disposed to let loose upon it every poisonous humor, in order that it may become untenable to its possessor.

In a free and characteristic activity, though we may never fully attain the ends we seek, we shall easily annul and disregard all the secondary and feverish yearnings which harass and perplex the soul. What man is more happy than the retired student, who desires no better company than his beloved books, and to whom there is no keener pleasure than the possession of a new volume? The devoted artist who has made his canvas magical with some subtle effect of light and atmosphere, unaimed at or unconceived before? The poet who has succeeded in perpetuating in perfect verse some genuine sally of beautiful emotion? Or, to come down to modes of self-expression as honorable if less distinguished, the true carpenter, or iron-worker, or stone-cutter, whose spirit is eagerly occupied in the production of things excellent in their practical beauty and usefulness? Such spirits have it in them to flow lucidly and serenely, lapsing over all obstacles with the silent smoothness of deep and swift waters. They are happy not because they have no rebellious propensities, no faults or discords of temperament, but because they have shaped for themselves an adequate safety-valve. There is in every character that is worth anything a good deal of superfluous energy—energy over and above what is required for the discharge of the common duties of life. If a man has not some living occupation, born of the quality of his own soul, in which the superfluous energy may expend itself in creative activity, it gathers and ferments there as a bitter and destructive humor. If it is strictly suppressed, it breeds ennui, hypochondria, and despair. If it explodes, it goes far to ruin and wreck the frail tenement which it might have inhabited as a spirit of glowing and beneficent power. Unhappy is the soul which is possessed by an energy too wayward and too violent to be ap-

peased by any normal activity, an energy driven to find vent in wild and tragic excesses.

To those natures whose aptitudes and impulses are exceptionally quick and strong, one of the greatest dangers to happiness is in the refusal to accept generally the limitations which society has set to the undue expansion of the individual. The uncontrolled nature of genius has often dashed itself in youthful rebellion against the hosts of circumstance, and brought forth from the struggle only wretchedness and ruin. To each one of us there seems to be a barrier here and a barrier there, which we cannot but think that nature intended us to roughly overstep, since she planted in us exceptional forces. But it is not so. Nature's method is always that of development. Her violences are only incidental. It is our business to plant ourselves coolly within the narrow limits of practical life, and let the spirit shine there to its utmost intensity. It will shine if its quality is humanly sweet and genuine. At first the walls that close us in appear to be cold and massive; but if we watch and listen attentively, forgetful of ourselves, our ears become infinitely sharpened, our eyes are made clairvoyant. The sounds of life come to us from beyond the walls; their thickness fades away, and all the wealth and distance of the world lie open to us, even as the heaven above. In the end the soul is rewarded with the humanest and most natural liberty. If we rebel and violently struggle, if we endeavor to force our ground, the barriers only loom the loftier and darker; our excursions beyond them are fruitless to ourselves, and accompanied by infinite horror; finally they fall upon us and crush us.

To the vigorous and well-nurtured soul there is the finest of all joys in triumphing inwardly over the external pressure of circumstance, and thus displaying in the noblest and most human fashion the unconquerable lordship of the spirit. Thus the poet, when he might give to the impulse of expression the freest and wildest liberty, chooses for his own pride and pleasure to confine himself within the difficult bounds of the sonnet. The form is finite and severe, but it is his glory to prove that the spirit within may be gracious and infinite.

We should accept the limitations of

life with this noble and pliant generosity of the poet; not with the austere spirit of the stoic, who plants himself in hostility to joy, gathers his skirts about him, and holds aloof. Stoicism is not happiness. It is simply armed peace, an attitude barren and comfortless. Happiness may almost be defined as the consciousness of adequate self-expression attained by the individual, within the limitations imposed by the social structure. A free expression of the individual, won by the transcending or violating of those limitations, may be accompanied by immense emotional gains, but the result is not happiness, for it is marred by the tragic sense of isolation and struggle. I do not mean to condemn those natures that are driven by the pressure of energies sometimes divine to overstep the bounds of custom and law—they are often the unhappy pioneers of better things—but I am speaking now of happiness, and such natures are not happy.

A quick sense of humor is surely one of the happiest of mortal possessions. It saves a man from many a bitter fall consequent upon his taking himself too seriously. He who has learned to laugh at himself is a near neighbor to happiness, for vanity never increases beyond the danger-point in the truly humorous man. A kindly feeling for the ludicrous easily smooths away the sharp edges of disappointment and humiliation, and the wise man draws back from many an act and many a speech which passion or even calculation dictates, but which humor instantly represents to him by an image as undignified and absurd. Humor also, which is inseparable from tenderness, illuminates for us the cranks and eccentricities of our neighbors, so that we are attracted by them rather than repelled. It is the source of that joyous spirit of tolerance which is a necessary condition of happy living. Through it we learn to find our delight in the mere sound and spectacle of life.

The season at which happiness is most fully within our reach is not, it seems to me, the season of youth, so much extolled, but rather that of early middle age. We have passed through our period of storm and stress. We are no longer torn by the deep agitations of youth. With the full capacity to enjoy, our mental and spiritual faculties are settled and matured. We are in a position to appreciate expe-

rience, to digest and make the most of it. Moreover, the soul is stored with memories, a possession of which few of us sufficiently avail ourselves, or realize the value. It is in memory, the recollection of things adventitious or episodic, that our deepest and surest pleasures consist. Let us illustrate this by a parable.

We paddled into a little lake—I and my friends—in our Indian birch canoe. We were hungry, and we wanted fish. We found a tanned and wrinkled trapper at the door of his cabin, and questioned him as to the waters. There had once, he said, been many gray trout there, but now they were all gone, and we must look for them in the next lake. We portaged and passed into the next lake. We found there another trapper, thin-lipped, and with deep-set furtive eyes, who told us that the gray trout had descended into the deep waters and could only with great difficulty be caught, but that there were many in the next lake. Into the next lake we portaged and passed, only to learn that the gray trout must be sought in a lake still farther beyond. On we went from lake to lake, till we had lost ourselves in the wilderness, but we never found the gray trout. Not the gray trout, indeed; but how many other things were conferred upon us, things vital and beautiful, a store of inextinguishable reminiscence!

Years afterward we remembered the rare brown water, deep and dark, in the cool abysses of lakes, golden and glowing at mid-day over the rocks and shallows; the tingling forest air; the solemn and fane-like pine woods; the morning mists reeling before the sunrise into rosy shattered spirals; the cold and lonely nights, near and radiant with stars; the passing of the loons above us; voices of the Northern solitude, weird and disconsolate; the ringing of the axes of woodmen at dawn hewing a path in the unbroken wilderness. These and many other things we remembered afterward with luxurious joy, when the gray trout were no longer a care to us.

So is it with happiness. We spend long lives in the pursuit of objects which we seldom attain, but always before us are the glories of anticipation, and behind us the magical playhouse of memory. Let us therefore cultivate a mood of the utmost spiritual openness. Let us not be exacting with life, nor demand too much of the present hour. Let us be content if we lay up for ourselves treasures of fruitful memory; for there is an alchemy in the imagination which can brew pleasure out of the most unpromising material, and gleams of a curious sunshine will some day fall even upon the recollection of our darkest miseries.