

**IN MY YOUTH**



# **IN MY YOUTH**

**BY**

**JAMES BALDWIN**

**YESTERDAY'S CLASSICS  
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TO MY  
DEAR PRESUMPTIVE DESCENDANTS  
OF THE FOURTH DEGREE  
LEONIDAS AND LEONA  
THESE RECORDS  
OF THE SIMPLE LIFE IN  
THE MIDDLE AGES OF  
THE MIDDLE WEST  
ARE ADDRESSED AND BEQUEATHED



## EDITOR'S NOTE

When Robert Dudley began to write the chapters composing this unique autobiography he had no thought of their ultimate publication. His object was rather to produce something to be preserved to the edification and entertainment of his remote posterity, and for that reason he addressed his work to Leonidas and Leona, his imaginary descendants in the fourth degree. But to a man who dies childless there is not much hope of posterity; and it has seemed to the friends of Mr. Dudley that to withhold these sketches until the advent of impossible great-great-grandchildren would be to deprive the world of as many rare chapters of literary worth and historic interest. They are, therefore, now offered to the public with the confident hope that as contributions to the early history of life and manners in "the Middle Ages of the Middle West," they will have an enduring value.

It will be observed that the author has taken his readers unreservedly into his confidence and has concealed none of his own frailties nor the peculiar and humble environments of his youth. Although his narrative is sometimes illuminated with the colors of his exuberant fancy, he has related no incident that

was not a matter of actual occurrence. Wherever a revelation of identity might cause embarrassment to sensitive souls, the names of persons and places have been thoughtfully disguised. In the case, however, of historical personages or of men in public life no such caution has appeared to be necessary.

# CONTENTS

I. THE CENTER OF THE WORLD.....	1
II. POSSESSED!.....	13
III. "THIS IS MY LIBRARY".....	27
IV. EVENINGS AT HOME.....	39
V. BORROWING FIRE.....	47
VI. IN THE BIG WOODS.....	66
VII. AT COUSIN SALLY'S.....	73
VIII. GOING TO MEETIN'.....	96
IX. THE ANGEL OF THE FACIN' BENCH .	107
X. IKEY BRIGHT.....	125
XI. THE BIG-HOUSE.....	143
XII. A MEMORABLE OCCASION.....	149
XIII. THE FRIEND FROM ENGLAND.....	158
XIV. SOMETHING FROM THE SADDLE-BAGS.....	173
XV. THE DEPARTURE OF THE CARAVAN.	178
XVI. FEVER'N'AGUR.....	198

XVII. WHAT THEY BROUGHT FROM THE 'HIO .....	208
XVIII. NEWS FROM THE COUNTY SEAT ...	235
XIX. "THE SLAVERS" .....	254
XX. THE GREAT MORAL EXHIBITION. ...	269
XXI. A FRIEND INDEED .....	296
XXII. MY DAY IN PARADISE .....	310
XXIII. OLD AUNT SARY. ....	332
XXIV. "GOING TO SCHOOL?" .....	358
XXV. "SHADES OF THE PRISON HOUSE" ..	382
XXVI. MY FIRST MERRY CHRISTMAS .....	404
XXVII. THE AWAKENING .....	425
XXVIII. NOPPLIS. ....	436
XXIX. CHARITY AND PATIENCE. ....	460
XXX. LOCHINVAR. ....	481
XXXI. THE RAISIN' AND THE QUILTIN' ...	491
XXXII. THE RUSE .....	508
XXXIII. THE LONG WAY ABOUT IT .....	517
XXXIV. FRAGMENTS .....	541

## CHAPTER I

### THE CENTER OF THE WORLD

THE picture which I would paint on your mental canvases, my dear Leonidas, my dear Leona, is that of a backwoods settlement in the Middle West at the time when such settlements were by no means rarities. It lies deeply sequestered in the forest, ragged, raw, and of uncertain extent. Its prevailing rudeness and uncouthness may at first repel you, but its air of newness and simplicity will surely deserve your admiration. Here you may see the beginnings of things. The roads, the fences, the houses, the clearings, the farms are all just emerging from the embryo state; they are the promises of what are to come in later days. And the people—how old-fashioned they are, and how unspoiled by the ways of the world! The simple life exists here in its primitive purity, the rawness of innocence prevails.

Now imagine in the midst of that settlement a squatty, little log cabin standing quite alone near the edge of a clearing. It is one among many of its kind, and is in perfect harmony with the mingled newness and old-fashionedness of its environment. It is such a habitation as can not be found to-day in the whole length and breadth of Hoosierdom; but, in that backwoods

## *IN MY YOUTH*

period to which I am introducing you, it is the type of hundreds and thousands of homely dwellings. The logs which compose its walls are unhewn, some having the bark still clinging to them, and the spaces between are chinked with clay and moss. The roof is low and covered with broad split clapboards which are held in place by long and heavy poles. The chimney is of the stick-and-clay variety, cavernous at the bottom and tapering narrow at the top, and rivaling the proverbial mud fence in its unapproachable ugliness. At the end of the cabin, opposite the chimney, there is a lean-to shed, made of poles and puncheons, and called the "weavin'-room" because it contains the loom and other appliances for making home-made cloth. Beyond this shed rises the skeleton of a new frame house which, when completed, will be the wonder and admiration of the entire New Settlement.

There is but one doorway in the cabin. The door itself is broad and strong, and it is hung on wooden hinges and fastened with a wooden latch. To lift the latch, you must pull a string that is passed through a gimlet hole in the board above it. At night, or when there is no admittance for intruders, the latch-string is drawn inside and the cabin becomes a castle. But, see now! The latch-string is hanging out—a signal that all comers are welcome. Let us pull it, lift the latch and walk in.

The smooth floor of basswood puncheons, scoured to a snowy whiteness, invites our admiration and admonishes us to linger on the threshold and wipe our muddy soles. We enter. On this side of the room

## *THE CENTER OF THE WORLD*

are a few splint-bottomed chairs ranged with precision against the wall, a three-legged “candlestand” and an ancient bureau. On the opposite side are the spinning-wheels, a square table, and a corner cupboard wherein are contained rows of tin cups and shining pewter plates and an array of “chany cups and sassers” and blue-figured dishes reserved for use “when company comes.”

The rear end of the commodious room is curtained off into three sleeping apartments, each exactly large enough to contain a single spacious bed with a trundle-bed for children and emergencies beneath it. And see, now, the huge fireplace at the opposite end. It is a poem of comfort in winter, and a magazine of homely cheer in all seasons. Dinner is in preparation. The fire is blazing on the hearth. Steaming pots and skillets, on beds of glowing coals, send out savory odors to whet the jaded appetite. Potatoes are roasting in the ashes, a fowl is broiling in the “reflector,” a “mess of greens” is boiling in the big dinner pot. A feast shall be ours if we will but accept the housewife’s kindly invitation to “take a cheer and wait a bit.”

The ceiling over our heads is low; it is made of rough clapboards laid upon a series of smoke begrimed poles which serve the purpose of joists. From the “j’ists” many things are suspended: hunks of jerked beef and links of home-made “sassage,” bunches of dried catnip and fragrant camomile and pennyroyal, strings of red peppers for medicinal uses, and ears of choice seed corn. And if you look for it, you may see the square hole in the ceiling through which access is had to the

## IN MY YOUTH

boys' sleeping-room above—a dark low loft, the abode of mud-wasps and spiders and creatures of the night.

And now, having these pictures well outlined and impressed upon your imagination, direct your eyes once more to the open door of the cabin. A boy is standing there—a little pale-faced fellow with tow hair, and with eyes indicative of the shrinking shyness of his heart. He is clothed scantily in a coarse shirt of home-woven linen and long “britches” (trousers) of brown jeans; other apparel he has none. The “britches,” which are much too large for him, are held in place by a pair of “galluses” (suspenders) made of narrow strips of blue-colored tow-cloth. The lad's feet are bare, betraying a familiarity with the soil and showing the marks of many conflicts with briars and sharp-edged stones. His large frowsy head is also bare.

Observe him as he stands in the door, looking out and listening to the varied sounds that come from the fields, the clearings and the dense wild woods. Birds are singing, frogs are croaking, bees are humming, the fresh new leaves of the cottonwood trees are rustling to every movement of the morning air. The voices of nature are calling, and the lad's face beams joyously as though he were enraptured with the melody and the mystery that surround him.

Looking straight ahead of him, he has a somewhat obstructed view of what he believes to be a very large portion of the known world—the hundred-acre farm which his father has literally hewn out of the wilderness. In the foreground are the garden and orchard, a dozen

## *THE CENTER OF THE WORLD*

cherry trees loaded with white blossoms, a straggling “laylock” bush, and a crooked rail fence overgrown with briars and tangled vines. Here also, at a bow-shot’s distance from the cabin, runs the “spring branch,” a little stream that never goes dry; and spanning it, amid a lush growth of calamus and cattails, is the “spring-house,” a frail structure in which numerous crocks of milk and cream are standing to be cooled in running water. Beyond are two large corn-fields, dotted with charred stumps and separated by a narrow lane which leads down to a tract of wet alluvial land known as “the bottom.” There, an irregular line of white-trunked sycamores marks the meanderings of “the crick”—a stream so broad that the boy has never been able to jump quite across it, and so deep that in places it is impossible to wade without getting wet above the knees.

On the farther side of the “crick,” and extending to the southernmost border of the farm, lies “the new deadenin’,” where hundreds of leafless trees stand in mute agony, lifting their gaunt arms toward heaven as though dumbly protesting against the cruelty of the man who has girdled their trunks and doomed them to a lingering death. And finally, beyond this landscape of fields, pasture-land, bottom and deadening, rises the forest primeval, “the big woods,” a region of mystery, stretching away and away to the very rim of the sky, the edge of the world.

As the boy gazes upon this scene, so familiar and yet always wonderful to him, his heart grows big with pride. For do not all these orchards and fields and

## *IN MY YOUTH*

“deadenin’s” belong to his father? Is there anywhere in the world another farm such as this? Is there in the New Settlement or elsewhere another lad so blessed as he with every comfort and, more than all, with a parent so strong, so wise, so well-to-do as his father?

Elated and well contented with his outlook on life, he leaps from the door-step and runs round to the other side of the cabin in order to view the northern half of the universe. There the scene is quite different and the landscape more extended. The rim of hazy blue where the sky, like an inverted dinner pot, rests upon the earth, is more plainly visible. The forest survives only in patches and strips of timberland between the fenced fields of friendly neighbors. The roofs of two or three dwellings may be seen, indistinct in the distance; and an orchard of apple trees, snowy white with bloom, crowns the summit of a little hill not far away.

Scarcely more than a stone’s throw from where the boy is standing, there is a high rail fence which marks the northern boundary of his father’s domain; and here is the big gate through which visitors enter and depart, and where egress is had to the unknown regions of the circumambient world. The gate opens outward into a broad lane, green with burdock and soon to be flowery with dog-fennel. At the end of the lane, not more than half a mile distant, the great highway known as “the big road” invites acquaintance with foreign lands.

The big road is here but little more than a wagon track, winding this way and that between stumps and stones, chuck-holes and decaying logs. But if you should

## *THE CENTER OF THE WORLD*

follow it toward the right, it will lead you in due time to the Dry Forks, where you will see a meeting-house, a schoolhouse and a blacksmith shop. If you should take the opposite direction, you will by and by, so people say, come to a mighty river and the half-mythical city of Nopplis, and then to Pogue's Run and the jumping-off place.

The boy is familiar with the road to the Dry Forks, for he has traveled to the "meetin'-house" there twice every week since he can remember. But of the other end of the great highway he has no knowledge save that which he has gained through hearsay. The country through which it passes is a region of mystery and dreams, where worldly and wicked people dwell and the sun shines but dimly.

Suddenly a strange impulse comes into the lad's mind, and he climbs to the top of the gate-post to study the problem that is perplexing him. He looks around. The view has improved, but not much. He reasons that he is not more than eight feet from the ground; what would happen if he could be a hundred? What vistas of creation might he not behold from so grand an elevation!

Quite near at hand there stands a giant oak which the settler's ax has reverently spared because of its size and beauty. The trunk is studded almost to the ground with branches small and large, and as the boy looks that way, the leaves of the great tree begin quivering and dancing, and a sweet voice seems to murmur, "Come and climb me! Come and climb me!"

## IN MY YOUTH

He leaps down from his perch on the gate-post, and the next moment is swinging himself up into the oak, clinging with hands and feet as best he can, and steadily ascending toward the sky. He thinks of himself as a squirrel—a big clumsy squirrel—and the thought causes him to forget the fear which otherwise might have unnerved him and set him trembling. Up, up, up he goes, panting, courageous, aglow with eagerness. At length, at a height far above that of the neighboring trees, he pauses. There are now no more lateral branches large enough to support him. He can go no farther. His heart thumps hard, and he clings with both arms clasped around the slender trunk which is here no larger than his leg.

Soon his courage revives and he begins to gaze around him. From his lofty perch he can look down on the trees in the deadenings and the forest. He has an unobstructed view of the entire horizon, the rim of the sky encircling the world. How vast and strange! Looking toward his right, he sees clearing after clearing and farm after farm; and, seeming almost directly below him, he recognizes the meeting-house and the blacksmith shop at the Dry Forks—but oh! how small they have become, and how near they seem!

He turns and looks in the other direction. Nothing but woods, woods, woods as far as the world extends! But in one place he sees a great smoke ascending. It is near the edge, where the sky is very low, and he wonders whether this may not be Nopplis, of which he has often heard—or whether it may not be that vague region of vanity and wickedness where George Fox used to preach

## *THE CENTER OF THE WORLD*

to a godless people, or perhaps the wilderness wherein the Israelites wandered with Moses. He raises his eyes and sees how evenly, like the interior of a monstrous bake-oven, the sky curves upward and inward from the horizon until it reaches the highest point, which is exactly above the dear, glorious log cabin which he calls home.

His whole being throbs with exultation as his mind grasps at the mighty truth. "Yes, yes!" he whispers to himself; "the world is round, and we live at the very center of it. I wonder if father thought of that when he picked out this place for our home."

But hark! What gentle voice is that, calling him from below? "Come down, my boy! Come down, come down!"

Ah! he has been forbidden, often and often, to climb this tree—to climb any tree. His mother will see him—and then what will happen? He hears the voice again: "Come down! Slide along my great body. Don't be afraid." It is the old oak itself that is speaking, as the wind passes through its branches and its thousands of young leaves are set to rustling and quivering.

With imminent peril to neck and limbs, the boy slides rapidly down, swinging himself from branch to branch like an experienced athlete, and finally leaping lightly to the ground. No one has seen him—no one but the kind, sweet, mighty oak, and oaks never tell secrets.

He runs to the house. He bursts in upon his mother,

## IN MY YOUTH

busy with her baking and stewing, and cries out, “O mother, guess what I know! Guess what I know!”

“It is not best for little boys to know too much,” says the mother, much accustomed to such speeches.

“But, mother, listen!” persists the child. “The world is round—as round as that plate in thy hand. I know it is so, mother; and our house is right in the center of it!”

And now, my dear presumptive descendants, it is time that I should whisper in your ears a momentous secret. The simple backwoods lad whom I have tried to portray to your imagination was myself—myself, Robert Dudley,—in one of the various forms that have been mine. It was sixty years ago—yes, more than sixty, *more!*—that I thus climbed the giant oak, gained my first outlook upon the world and awoke suddenly to the consciousness of existence. Since then I have passed through many transformations, I have experienced many changes, but in all things essential, I remain the same individual that I was on that day of sudden waking.

Did you speak, my dear Leona? Did you say, “Impossible”? And Leonidas, do you smile at what you are pleased to call an old man’s foolish conceits?

See this sheet of paper so white, so spotless, so free from the slightest defect—a pure creation fresh from its maker’s hands! It is the young lad; it is myself, a mere infant, inexperienced, innocent, just starting on

## *THE CENTER OF THE WORLD*

the journey. But wait a minute—only a minute. Here is the identical sheet of paper: it is covered with scrawls and blots; it is discolored, creased and wrinkled; it has had rough usage. And yet the same combination of elements is here; it is the young lad after seventy years of contact with wind and weather; it is myself. I have described the appearance of the lad at the beginning of his career; if you would see him when nearing its end, look at me now.

I count it my peculiar good fortune that I first saw the light of day in that humble log cabin which I have endeavored to picture to you. It was not the sort of dwelling which most people would, nowadays, choose for a birthplace. Indeed, I myself would probably not have chosen it, had my prenatal preferences been consulted; and there have been times when I have bitterly complained of Providence because of the humbleness of my beginnings. But it is not the palatial home, the gilded cradle, or the silver spoon that makes the happy life or the successful career. The child of the log hut, naked, and toyless, and strange to luxuries, is nearer to Heaven (and often in a double sense) than is the pampered offspring of wealth with no wish ungratified, no comfort unprovided.

Providence—at least, let us say it is Providence—has wisely decreed that no one can choose the place of his borning. If it were otherwise, royalty would be congested, and the common people would be too few to serve and support the myriads of princely paupers that would rush into existence: the case of the Countess

*IN MY YOUTH*

of Heneberg would be duplicated in every palace of Europe!<sup>1</sup>

And here let us have an end of moralizing.

<sup>1</sup>“Among the chief remarkables of Holland are two brazen dishes in the village of Losdun, in which were baptized (anno 1276) by Don William, suffragan bishop of Treves, 365 children, all born at one birth, of the Countess of Heneberg, daughter of Florent IV, Earl of Holland; the body of one of which children (although the whole matter of fact is called in question) being now preserved in the Museum Regium at Copenhagen.”—Senar’s *Modern Geography* (London, 1702).

## CHAPTER II

# POSSESSED!

**O**F all my earliest and pleasantest memories, by far the greatest number are in some way connected with books and reading. Often have I heard my mother say that I was born, not with a silver spoon under my tongue, but with a book in my hand. Book love, that peculiar passion which has shaped and controlled my life, was strangely manifested even in my cradle. I cried for books as other babies cried for the nursing bottle or the sugar treat; and a copy of Emerson's *Primer* or George Fox's *Journal*, if laid within reach of my fingers, seldom failed to soothe my feelings and hush my infantile wailings. The very feel of the paper, its smoothness, its thinness, the cabalistic marks which it bore, had a magical influence no less potent than mysterious.

To the good people among whom fate had decreed my birth, this strange predilection seemed little short of miraculous—it was the source of much curiosity and speculation in which contempt was sometimes more strongly manifested than admiration. To my poor mother, the thought that her only son was “queer”

## *IN MY YOUTH*

brought seasons of infinite disquietude and silent grief. Ancient aunts and busy-minded neighbors were not slow to suggest various prenatal causes of so strange, so unnatural a twist in the mind of a child. Some wondered, and some pitied, while others were moved to the making of remarks which were neither complimentary to myself nor kind to my parents.

As I grew older, my queerness became accepted as a thing which could not be cured and therefore must be endured; and our home folks, instead of continuing to grieve about it, gradually became proud of the fact that the household included at least one person of bookish habits. They humored my taste for reading, and sternly apologized for it while they were inwardly unable to understand it. Nevertheless, the friendly women of the Settlement never quite ceased to gossip and wonder, and sometimes they felt called on to show their interest by condoling with mother concerning her unfortunate son. I remember overhearing a conversation that occurred between two of our neighbors long after I had grown to the years of understanding and could fully appreciate their intended kindness. Seeing me sprawled upon the floor with the inevitable book before me, they began their palaver, as indifferent to my presence as though I has neither ears nor intelligence.

“Laws a me!” cried the elder of the two, an ancient maiden whom we knew familiarly as Mahaly Bray. “If there ain’t that booky boy that we’ve heerd so much about. Now, it don’t seem possible that sich a leetle feller as him can read, does it?”

*POSSESSED!*

“Well, it surely ain’t nateral,” answered her companion, friend Liddy Ann Dobson, the sturdy mother of six overgrown sons. “It ain’t nateral, and I reckon it ain’t right, nother. Why, there’s my Eli, he’s goin’ on sixteen, and he’s jest now beginnin’ to read in the Bible, and the rest of my boys, they seem to jest naterally hate the very sight of books—and they’re bright boys, too. Thee may rest sure, Mahaly, that a screw’s loose somewhere when thee sees such a leetle feller as that there Bobby Dudley a-porin’ over his letters and a-learnin’ things he oughtn’t to.”

“Well, it’s too bad, I do declare,” rejoined Mahaly Bray. “How did it happen, anyhow? Has thee any notion about it Debby?”

Then mother, with a quaver in her voice, began kindly to explain: “He always had a great likin’ for books. I think he must have got it from his father, and it was born in him; for Stephen is a good deal that way too, only not so bad.”

“Laws a me!” cried maiden Mahaly. “Could the leetle feller read as soon as he was bornded?”

“Not exactly, answered mother; “but he could read pretty well before he was done cuttin’ his teeth. For a long while he was a great bother to all of us; for, whenever he seen a new word he would p’int to it and say, ‘What’s this? what’s this? what’s this?’ And when he was told, he never forgot. But we don’t know exactly how he learnt to read; it just sort of come nateral to him, like learnin’ to eat comes to the rest of us.”

“My sakes alive!” said Mahaly. “I’d be afeard to have

*IN MY YOUTH*

a child like that. I'd be always a-lookin' for somethin' to happen."

"And it will happen, too," added her friend. "Sich wayward children don't never live very long. They ain't made for this world." And a great sigh escaped from her capacious bosom.

But it was Friend Margot Duberry who caused mother the greatest disquietude. Margot had been quite frequently moved to "speak in meetin'," and she was therefore looked up to as an oracle and a mother in Israel. She came to our house one afternoon and announced that she had been drawn, in the spirit of meekness and love, to have a season of quiet waiting with father and mother and myself. She failed to notice our dear old Aunt Rachel who was sitting in the chimney corner and seemingly oblivious to her presence—oblivious to everything save the soothing joy that she was inhaling through the long stem of her clay pipe. Father was promptly called in from the field, and the "season" began. It lasted for about an hour, during which time we four sat beside the clean-swept hearth, as silent as the door-jamb and as motionless as the gate-post, waiting for the spirit to make itself manifest. Then Margot, shaking hands with us all, declared that she "felt free," but that a concern still weighed upon her mind to have a private "opportunity" with mother.

Father accordingly withdrew, and Aunt Rachel began nodding over her pipe. I shrank into the farthest corner of the room, curious to see the outcome of the

*POSSESSED!*

opportunity, and Margot, riveting her steel-gray eyes on me, delivered her message.

“My dear friend,” she began, holding mother’s hand in her own and speaking very softly as if every word was oiled—“my dear friend, my heart goes out to thee in pity. But I have long been burdened with a concern for thee and thy offspring and am charged with a message which I must deliver. For if I deliver it not, the woe is already pronounced against me.” Here her voice rose from mezzo to soprano, and then ascended the scale by leaps and bounds until it resembled the screeching of an unlubricated wagon wheel. “Rumors upon rumors are afloat,” she continued, “yea, many and diverse rumors. It is said that this offspring of thine, tender of age though he be, is given to the study of many books, and it is written that much study is a weariness to the flesh. To read the Good Book is well, but to read any other is to fall into the snares of Satan, that Old Feller who goeth about like a roaring lion. And as I look upon thy offspring and take note of the baneful things in his hands, I am moved to cry out, Lo, he is already the prey of the Evil One, he is possessed, he is possessed! The Old Feller has entrapped him; he is possessed. So I exhort thee, Deborah Dudley, to pray without ceasing; for this kind goeth out only by prayer and fasting. And I exhort thy erring offspring to repent, repent, while the offers of mercy hold out. Yea, repent, repent!”

She might have continued her senseless ranting indefinitely, but at this point old Aunt Rachel rose suddenly from her cozy armchair and came to the rescue. Knocking the ashes from her pipe, while her

IN MY YOUTH

eyes flashed the indignation of her heart, she spoke sharply and with undisguised wrath.

“Margot Duberry, thee is younger than I am, and thee thinks thee is a saint from Heaven, but I tell thee thee’s mistaken. I ain’t good enough to speak in meetin’, but I know that the Old Feller hain’t got no possession of our Robby, and he never will have. Just because Robby likes to read, and thy big boy is so dumb that he don’t know A from Izzard, thee has come here with all thy drivell about rumors and the Old Feller and repentin’ and the like, as if somebody had been doin’ somethin’ wicked. I tell thee, Margot Duberry, the Old Feller has got *thee*; and he’s got thee so tight that even prayer and fastin’ won’t make him let loose! *Thee* is the one to repent.”

And having thus spoken her mind and effectually closed the mouth of a saintly nuisance, the good woman returned to her favorite corner. She took up her knitting, which had been laid aside for her afternoon nap; she refilled her pipe, dropping a red-hot coal upon the fragrant tobacco; and then in a delectable cloud of smoke, she relapsed into the silence that was far dearer to her than speech.

I had never been taught to say, “I thank thee”; but a strange indefinable feeling welled up within me, tears filled my eyes, and going softly across the room, I stood beside my aunt and laid my hand gently in hers. I knew no other way to express my gratitude.

Nevertheless, that foolish “message” of foolish Margot Duberry made a deeper impression, a sadder

## *POSSESSED!*

wound, than even she could have imagined. I was at the time not more than six years of age, but so strangely did her remarks take hold of me, that for six times six years the word "possessed" had to me a sinister meaning. Whenever it was spoken in my presence it called up visions of Margot Duberry crying, "Repent, repent!" and of the enemy of souls holding a helpless white-haired lad in his clutches and urging him to do a most wicked deed. Sometimes, on dark windy nights, I could plainly hear the Old Feller tramping about on the roof of the cabin, rattling the clapboards and scraping his cloven feet against the chimney. When driving the cows home in the evening twilight I was always on the alert, lest this same evil one should leap suddenly out from behind some thorn bush and claim me for his own. And very often, even after I had outgrown the belief in devils and hobgoblins, my dreams at night were varied by visions of the Old Feller chasing me, catching me, sitting upon me and dragging me bodily to the verge of a smoking pit, while Margot Duberry fluttered above us on the wings of a bat, shouting, "That's right! He's possessed. He's thine! Scorch him!"

Nor did my mother's perplexities end here. To her increased dismay, I early began to manifest other peculiar twists which were as unaccountable as the book-madness and even more to be deplored. Being the only child in the house, and neighbors being remote, the ordinary joys of companionship were almost wholly unknown to me. I therefore loved solitude, and was never so happy as when I was alone. An abnormal shyness, partly hereditary, but largely

## IN MY YOUTH

due to environment, began its restraining influence upon my life. I trembled in the presence of strangers. I shunned all intimacy with persons outside of our little home circle. Friends said that I was bashful, backward, timid; and they rubbed salt into my wounds by lightly apologizing for my weakness. Through lack of similar experiences, they were incapable of comprehending that subtle ailment which clouded my boyhood and was destined to beshrew my later existence. Nevertheless, there came moments of supreme courage when I rose superior to this besetting frailty; and there was never a day when my heart did not hunger for comradeship and the delights of friendly intercourse.

In this dilemma I found consolation not only in books but in a sort of mystic friendship with the wild creatures of the fields and woods. With the latter I grew to be on terms of peculiar intimacy, for in our common shyness there was ground for mutual sympathy. I had the habit, when alone, of talking to these little brothers, and I fancied that they often replied to me in language which I, but no one else, could understand. This habit, of course, soon became known to the rest of our household, and while some ridiculed, others pitied me as a dunce and grieved because of this additional evidence that I was “not right”—perhaps really possessed.

Despite both jeers and fears, however, there was another source of comfort which I prized more highly than the friendship of singing birds or timid small beasts. This was the occasional companionship of one who was all my own, and whose existence no one else suspected. When I was in my loneliest, shyest moods,

## *POSSESSED!*

anxious to escape notice and yet eager for sympathy, an invisible playmate would come suddenly into my presence, bounding joyously from some secret place, putting his arm around me, whispering in my ear, romping with me in the sunlight. And what glorious times we had together! Sometimes, on summer days, we would lie side by side on the grass watching the procession of white clouds floating so silently in the infinite depths above us. Sometimes, in rougher weather, we would sit together on our hearth before the great wood fire, his hand in mine, his cheek against my own, while we watched the curling flames and rare moving pictures of magic in the glowing coals. And oftentimes, when duty or pleasure led me into dark places in the woods where the slightest unusual sound would send the shivers coursing along my spine, this invisible friend would make his presence known by giving courage to my heart and strength to my trembling knees.

There were occasions, also, when my loneliness was relieved by the dreaming of dreams. Then all familiar things took on new aspects, and visions of indescribable beauty unfolded themselves before my eyes. These were frequently so vivid, so thrilling, that I was forced unconsciously to give expression to my feelings, at times shouting joyously, at times bursting into tears. Upon such occasions the hindering things of time and sense were for the moment forgotten, and

“The earth and every common sight,  
To me did seem  
Appareled in celestial light,  
The glory and the freshness of a dream.”

## IN MY YOUTH

Gladly would I have described my ecstatic experiences, shared my joys with others of our household; but at the slightest mention of them I was ridiculed as a dunce or reproved as a liar. Thus my mouth was closed, and I turned to my invisible playmate for sympathy; for he alone could understand.

One day when I was unusually happy, I began to describe something I had seen, and was checked with the usual reproof.

“Robert, thee mustn’t tell fibs,” was mother’s sharp caution. “It’s wicked, very wicked, and thee’ll have to be punished for it.”

And Cousin Mandy Jane, who stood in place of sister to me, hastened to give emphasis to the remark. “Yes,” she added, “the Old Feller will git thee, sure. I reckon he is watchin’ round for thee now. He’s peepin’ in through some crack and listenin’ to everything thee says.”

Then father, in his stern dignified way, rebuked us every one. “I don’t think that we understand Robert very well,” he said. “To my mind, his story is quite as likely as Mandy Jane’s; but I wish to advise him to be careful of his words, and to speak neither foolishly nor falsely, lest the habit becomes fixed and he falls into disgrace.”

I looked up into his strong sun-browned face, and inwardly promised that I would follow his guidance in everything. I resolved that I would keep all my precious experiences to myself; and, as far as I was able, I would speak the plain unvarnished truth at all times.

## *POSSESSED!*

Nevertheless, to my parents' grief and my own frequent discomfiture, I failed to live up to the latter part of this resolution, and I became known, even among the neighbors, as an inveterate "fibber." I fell into the habit of exaggeration, not because I wished to tell falsehoods, but because the plain truth seemed so plain indeed that I wished to garnish it with some sort of decoration. For example, if I saw three wild geese silently winging their way northward, my imagination straightway pictured a hundred waterfowl following their leader in mid-air and crying, "Honk! honk! honk!" in unison with the flapping of their wings. If Cousin Mandy Jane reported the finding of a single johnny-jump-up by the roadside, it was easy for me to describe the discovery of a hundred wild roses in the meadows. My imagination was forever turning prose into verse, making mountains of mole-hills, and tinting every cloud with rainbow hues. It was in vain that my fibs and hyperboles were exposed and condemned; in vain that I was solemnly warned of the Old Feller's persistent efforts to capture bad boys; in vain that my legs were vigorously tickled with the hickory switch which mother kept always in readiness—the habit of exaggeration grew upon me, and I could no more overcome it than the proverbial Ethiopian can change his skin.

At length, however, there came to our house, for a day, a beautiful old man. His face glowed with goodness and good nature, his voice was as rhythmical and sweet as the song of a wood bird, and his long snow-white hair was significant of the purity that dwelt in his heart. My parents called him William, everybody called him

## IN MY YOUTH

William, and to this day I am uncertain what other name he bore. I understood that he had come from his home in some distant land to bring a message of love and truth to Friends in Injanner, and specially to those who were dwelling in that most central and most favored portion of the earth, the New Settlement. My parents, having unlimited confidence in his wisdom, told him much concerning their griefs and hopes, their disappointments and their trials. He was supposed to speak as the spirit gave him utterance, and therefore his advice was thought to be infallible, and his words were regarded as the words of an oracle.

“William,” said mother, “what does thee think we had better do with our son, Robert? We are very much concerned about him.”

And then she began telling him of all the twists in my mental composition, of my book-madness, of my queer goings-on when alone, and of my inveterate shyness. Friend William listened patiently, smiled benignly, patted his knee gently with his open palm, but said nothing. After some hesitation, as though fearing to approach the subject, mother went on to describe my wicked habit of telling little lies and of seeing things double—yes, much more than double; and she ended by expressing her fears that perhaps the Old Feller had indeed marked me for his own.

The saintly man remained silent for several minutes, his hands folded, his eyes half closed, as if communing with the Inner Light which I had been told was the possession of every sincere soul. At length, without

*POSSESSED!*

answering mother's questions, he beckoned to me. I came out of the corner where I had been shrinking, and with an awesome feeling in my heart, went across the room and stood by his side. He laid his big warm palm upon my submissive head, and spoke to me very gravely:

“Robert, I hear that thee loves books and reading. Is this so?”

I nodded my head, for I was too full to speak.

He went on: “I hear that thee has sometimes spoken of seeing things which other people have never seen, and that thee is given to meditation and sometimes talks to thyself when alone. Are these things so?”

I nodded and felt a little braver.

“I hear that thee sometimes says *four* when a stricter adherence to bare facts would require thee to say *one*. In other words, it is said of thee that thee enlarges the truth. Does thee acknowledge this?”

Again I nodded, and began to feel as a penitent at the confessional; and Friend William continued:

“The love of reading is a great gift, for books will not only add to thy knowledge but will make thee acquainted with good and noble thoughts. Hold fast to them, Robert. And as to seeing wonders where others see only commonplace things, I lay all that to thy gift of imagination, which may be a blessing or a curse according to thy way of using it. Let me say to thee therefore: Be guided by the Light that is in thee. Love

*IN MY YOUTH*

thy mother, love the truth, cultivate thy gifts, and all will be well with thee.”

Then, turning to mother, he said, “Deborah, thee asked my advice and I will give it to thee. Don’t worry about the boy. Let him see visions and dream dreams and love books; and if he sometimes enlarges the truth, thee may also pass that over as a gift of the imagination. If I remember rightly, I was a good deal the same way when I was his age. And as for Satan, or the Old Feller as thee calls him—well, I don’t believe he has any claims worth speaking of on any of us.”

He lifted his hand from my head, and at the same moment a great load was lifted from my mother’s heart.

## CHAPTER III

### “THIS IS MY LIBRARY”

**I**F there was one thing of which my father was justly and openly proud, that was his library. There was nothing like it in the New Settlement, and I fondly believed that there were few collections of books in the whole world that could rival it in variety and completeness. Some of our neighbors possessed an almanac or two, and in every Friend's house there was a family Bible, to say nothing of an occasional tract on slavery. In homes where there were children, one might find a few dilapidated school-books, hidden away in old hair trunks or among the cobwebs and dust of the cabin loft. But nowhere was there such a collection of printed works as that which gave honor and distinction to the cabin wherein I was born.

Our bookcase, as we called it, consisted of two shelves, made by laying short boards upon some wooden pegs that had been driven into the wall, midway between the fireplace and the corner cupboard. It was so high that in order to reach the lowest books I was obliged to stand upon a chair. The shelves were placed one directly above the other, and they were scarcely half

## IN MY YOUTH

as long as the five-foot shelf recently made popular and glorified by an ex-president of our oldest university.

The books were arranged with some care, the larger volumes on the upper shelf, the lesser on the lower. The collection made such an unusual appearance, that the neighbors who sometimes visited us seemed awed when they came near it, as though uncertain how to behave in the presence of so much preserved wisdom.

“This is my library,” father would say, standing up very straight and tall and running his fingers lovingly across the backs of the books. And our visitors would stand with open mouths, gazing and wondering—some admiring, but more condemning and all questioning the propriety of a thing which seemed so like a worldly diversion.

Now, what were the contents of that wonderful library?

In the upper shelf were six portly quarto volumes, in sheep binding, very appropriately entitled *Friends' Library*, and comprising a series of memoirs and journals of eminent members of Our Society from the date of its organization down to the first years of the nineteenth century. Flanking these volumes on the right was a very old copy of the Bible, in leather covers, thumb-worn and greasy. It had belonged to my great-grandfather, eminent in the ministry, and it was so sacred that the mere touching of it sent an electric thrill of goodness to the heart. It was never taken from the shelf or opened, save now and then by good Aunt Rachel for the concealment between its leaves of a faded

“THIS IS MY LIBRARY”

precious love-letter, preserved, I verily believed, since the days of the flood. There was room on this shelf for only one other book, and that was a thin gray-backed volume, written by William Penn and entitled, *No Cross, No Crown*. It was the dullest, dryest, most unsatisfactory book in the library, for I could get no sense out of it, no matter how persistently I wrestled with its big words and complicated phrases.

On this upper shelf there was but little to tempt the voracity of so young a bookworm as myself. Nevertheless, I more than once attacked one or another of those musty volumes, and with a determination worthy of success pored long over their pages. I took no little pleasure in turning the leaves of the *Friends' Library*, picking out the easy passages, and studying the chapter headings and the tables of contents; and I soon came to know the books so well that if any particular biography were mentioned I could immediately tell where to find it.

It was the lower shelf, however, which contained the treasures best suited to the enrichment of youthful minds. Here was John Woolman's *Journal*, that record of a gentle life, which Charles Lamb advises everybody to get by heart. What a picture John Woolman made upon my imagination as I thought of him clad in his undyed garments of exceeding plainness and refusing to ride in carriages because they were painted! I got none of his writings by heart, but the story of his remorse for killing a mother robin I read and reread many times with never-failing sympathy and admiration.

The next volume was a well-thumbed copy of

## IN MY YOUTH

George Fox's *Journal*—why were there so many journals? With dogged perseverance, I read every word of this book from its title-page to the end; but it was a reading of words only, for I failed to understand the meaning of the stiff unadorned sentences, and the greater part of the book was as unintelligible as Greek or Arabic. Nevertheless, there lingers in my memory a vivid picture of that doughty old champion of non-resistance, wearing leather breeches, preaching from the tops of haystacks, and refusing to doff his hat even to kings. I admired the heroism of the man who shrank from no danger and boldly spoke what was in his mind, regardless of scourgings and imprisonments and the revilings of the ungodly; but somehow I hated his egotism and thought of him as a crusty, opinionated and unlovable man whom I hoped I should never meet in this world or in the world to come. My notions of time and place were confused and indefinite, and I thought of George Fox and William Penn and Oliver Cromwell as still being much alive and only waiting for a convenient opportunity to visit the New Settlement. I had no realization of the fact that two hundred years and a broad ocean lay between me and those valiant heroes of another civilization.

Next in order upon the lower shelf were three of four school-books to which I had not yet attained. My father, in the process of educating himself, had mastered these books with a great sense of pleasure and profit, and he assured me that they would be very handy when I became old enough to be sent to school. Among these, I remember Pike's *Arithmetic*, a stiff little

“THIS IS MY LIBRARY”

volume from which with father’s help I early learned the tables of multiplication and dry measure. Its nearest neighbor was Lindley Murray’s *English Reader*, a book of classical selections with which I frequently wrestled, sometimes to my edification, but often to my serious discouragement.

Reposing conveniently near these was a thin cloth-bound volume familiarly known to us as *The Discipline*, wherein were printed the principles of faith and the guiding rules of Our Society, together with the forms to be observed on all occasions of worship, of business, of marriage and of death. It was an ugly book, repugnant to my sight, and I seldom disturbed its solemn repose.

Then there was that old blue-backed spelling-book with the name of Noah Webster on the title-page—a dog’s-eared, dilapidated, ill-smelling little work which was the common property of our two “big boys” and marked the limit of their literary attainments. Its general contents consisted of meaningless rows of words, words, words, and task lessons in which I could discover neither rhythm nor rhyme nor common sense; and for these I conceived an intense dislike, which even to this day is revived at the mere mention of a spelling-book. But there were occasional lines of reading at the bottom of the page—short proverbs, pithy sayings, bits of information—which I frequently perused with interest. And toward the end I found a collection of four or five fables which afforded enjoyment for many an idle hour. The story of the “Milkmaid and Her Pail” was so nearly in the line of my own experiences that I committed it to

## IN MY YOUTH

memory and recited it one day to Cousin Mandy Jane, greatly to her amusement and disgust.

Fit companion for the spelling-book was a belabored little volume, with broken leather backs, entitled *Walker's Dictionary*. Its use was not well understood, and therefore it was but seldom referred to; yet the memory of its first important service to me still lingers in my mind. It happened one day after we had all been to meetin' and had heard there an eloquent discourse from a traveling Friend upon the wonders of the invisible world. Our womenfolk were busy putting the dinner on the table, the big boys, David and Jonathan, were loitering impatiently by the hearth, and father was looking at his library. Very naturally everybody was thinking about the strange minister and his unusual sermon.

"Well, he can preach right smart, anyhow," remarked Cousin Mandy Jane, as she laid the dishes in their places. "I could jist set and listen to him all day, he speaks his words so plain and so purty."

"But did thee understand all of his purty words?" queried Aunt Rachel, adjusting her cap strings. "Sometimes thee can be pleased with the sound of things without knowin' much about their sense."

"Well, it seems to me his words was nearly all Scripeter," answered Mandy Jane; "leastwise he spoke 'em so plain that a body couldn't help but understand. But, come to think of it, there was one word that I never heerd before. He kept sayin' it over and over, over and over, and it sounded so uncommon that I thought I'd

“THIS IS MY LIBRARY”

ax what it meant. He must have spoke it twenty times, and he spoke it in a mighty purty way, too.”

“Does thee remember what partickler word it was?” inquired mother, as she stooped over to remove the smoking-hot corn dodgers from the covered skillet in which they had been baking.

“Well, no,” answered Cousin Mandy Jane; “but it was a mighty queer-soundin’ word and it had somethin’ to do with the world. I do wish I could recklect it. I think it begun with *in*, or *un*, or some sich thing.”

“Maybe it was ‘invisible,’” said David, whose memory of words was sometimes superior to his power of using them.

“Laws’ sakes, yes! That’s the very word. It’s queer, ain’t it?” And Cousin Mandy Jane ran to bring a pitcher of milk.

“It’s a good-soundin’ word,” placidly remarked Aunt Rachel. “I noticed how beautiful he rolled it off his tongue—‘in-vis-i-bul-l-l wor-r-ld!’ It was better nor a pipe of tobacker to hear him roll them words along like rollin’ punkins over the barn floor.”

“But what does it mean? *I’d* like to know,” said mother.

“I think it means somethin’ that’s clean gone out of sight,” answered Aunt Rachel. “What does thee think, Stephen?”

Father, being thus appealed to, made reply in his usual quiet way: “Suppose we look and see what the dictionary says.”

## IN MY YOUTH

He took the leather-covered volume down from its place and turned the leaves with much deliberation. Finding a word in the dictionary was no common process with him, and he progressed slowly. At length, however, he announced the result: "Here it is. 'I-n, in—v-i-s, viz, inviz—i, invizi—b-l-e, bul, invisible, something that can not be seen.' The minister spoke of an invisible world meaning a world that we can not see."

"Well, I don't keer what the meanin' of it is," said Aunt Rachel, "it's a mighty purty-soundin' word, leastwise as the preacher spoke it."

And we all sat down to dinner.

In truth, the minister had given to the word a peculiar musical inflection which it is impossible to indicate on paper. There was a singsong melody connected with it that had pleased my imagination mightily—it was the nearest approach to real singing that I had ever heard. As I sat at the table I repeated it softly to myself with varying intonations and inflections. Immediately it was echoed back to my mental tympanum in tones exactly like those of the minister. My unseen playmate was certainly near; I felt his soft breath upon my cheek.

"I can not see thee," I said.

"No, for I am *invisible*," he answered.

"Well, that's a good name for thee," I returned. "I think I will always call thee Invisible—yes, I will name thee Inviz, Inviz."

"I shall like that name," he whispered. And we were both happy.

“THIS IS MY LIBRARY”

But, to the library again.

At the extreme right-hand end of the lower shelf, you might have seen my treasure of treasures—the three precious little volumes that were all my own. They were Emerson’s *Primer*, McGuffey’s *First Reader*, and the “*Child’s Instructor*, by a teacher of Philadelphia.” In presenting these books to me, father had said, “Robert, these are thine. They are the beginning of thy own library. Take good care of them, and as thee grows older, perhaps thee may have others given to thee.”

Oh, the delightful memories that are awakened by the mention of those books! In Emerson’s *Primer* were my first lessons in reading—little stories of the most absorbing interest, of which the following is a sample:

“Is he in? He is in.

“Do we go up? We do go up.

“Go in. Do go in.

“We go in. We go up.

“Up we go. We do so.”

This was a great romance, a charming fairy tale related in words of two letters, and leading up to a delightful climax. And when the action proceeded to words of three letters, how thrilling was the result!

“You are wet.

“Can you get dry?

“See him run.

“The sly fox met him.”

## IN MY YOUTH

The yellow covers of the *Primer* were faded and torn, the leaves were thumb-worn, every page was grimy and soiled from much handling, but to me it was a garden of perpetual delight through which I was never weary of strolling.

McGuffey's *First Reader* was not inferior to it in interest, and it was a grade higher in language and thought. In it I reveled over the stories of "The Poor Old Man" and "The Broken Window." Good moral tales these were, my dear Leonidas, and they were calculated to help in the building of good moral men—which can not be said of the slush and rot that are too often found in the so-called "method" readers of to-day. And there were a few delightful poems, too—poems of the kind that children understand and enjoy. Chief among these was that little masterpiece which never grows old:

"Twinkle, twinkle, little star,  
How I wonder what you are,  
Up above the world so high,  
Like a diamond in the sky."

And scarcely inferior to it was another poetical gem which I memorized and spoke as my first "piece" at school.

"I like to see a little dog  
And pat him on his head;  
So prettily he wags his tail  
Whenever he is fed."

“THIS IS MY LIBRARY”

The brightest and best, however, of my trio of literary treasures was the little volume entitled *The Child's Instructor*. This was a veritable storehouse of knowledge, a collection of all sorts of good things, an array of thought gems adapted to the understanding of children of every age. What could be more musical to the ear or more suggestive to the imagination than this little lesson?

“Ab eb ib ob ub; ac ec ic oc uc.

“Ad ed id od ud; af ef if of uf.

“Ag eg ig og ug; ak ek ik ok uk.

“Ba be bi bo bu; ca ce ci co cu.

“Da de di do du; fa fe fi fo fu.

“Ha he hi ho hu; ja je ji jo ju.”

There was a peculiar fascination in such exercises as this, and I think they were fully as sensible and useful as much of the present-day babble under the head of phonograms and blends, families and stock words. When weary of real study or of wrestling with George Fox and his followers, I often took great pleasure in humming these over and over to my invisible playmate, varying the order of the syllables and forming new ones as he would from time to time suggest.

Many things in this odd little volume fixed themselves indelibly upon my memory, and they, no doubt, have had a subtle influence upon my thoughts and actions at times when I least suspected it. Among such was the following couplet on the first page, which pleased me so much that I adopted it as my motto, wrote it down and never forgot it:

## IN MY YOUTH

“Let this be your plan,  
Learn all that you can.”

Here also were occasional touches of humor tempered with a droll philosophy which at times set me to thinking and furnished me with food for speculation. One passage, which I remember, appealed to my imagination with such force that I learned it by heart, and afterward went out into the pasture and declaimed it to the sheep:

“History informs us that Tom Thumb grew up to be a greater man than his mother; but before we attempt to prove this, we must inquire what makes a great man. Is it a big head? No. Is it a strong arm? No. Is it a fat body? No. Is it a long leg? No.—But I will tell you what it is. It is a wise head and a good heart.”

The sheep were probably not much edified by this brief discourse; but there was one barefooted boy who went to his bed that night fully resolved that he would some day become a greater man than Tom Thumb. He thought of his three, thin little volumes on the lower shelf, and pictured to himself the great library which he hoped to possess by the time he had grown to manhood. And Inviz whispered to him that perhaps, if he were very good, he might acquire a collection of books equal if not superior to that of his father.

## CHAPTER IV

### EVENINGS AT HOME

**D**IRECTLY beneath our bookcase there stood a little candlestand with three carved legs and a round top of wild cherry wood. Small as it was, it was the finest piece of furniture in the house, and upon it reposed the book that was best known and oftenest read, the Bible. I do not remember the time when my acquaintance with this volume began, but I have been told that it was often my companion in the cradle. Even before I could read I had acquired some notions about the Creation and the Flood, for these were the subjects which mother liked; and not “feeling free” to sing even to her child, she often found relief in crooning to herself and me certain favorite psalms and the first chapter of Genesis.

It was the rule and custom of our family to listen to a “Scripter readin’” every night, just before retiring to rest. When the labors of the day and evening were completed, we would assemble in a semicircle around the great clay hearth, each in his favorite place. Aunt Rachel sat as usual in her chimney corner, her pipe in her mouth, her knitting in her lap, her wrinkled face enwreathed by the frills of her snow-white cap.

## *IN MY YOUTH*

Although only an aunt of my mother's, she had been given a permanent home with us, and she seemed to me as necessary to the completeness of the family as did either of my parents. She was old, very old, and I sometimes looked at her with awe, wondering if the angel of death had not somehow passed by and forgotten her.

Next to her on the hearth sat her granddaughter, an angular awkward maiden of uncertain age whom everybody called Cousin Mandy Jane. She had been adopted into our household at about the same time with myself, but in a different way, and had proved to be my mother's most efficient helper, being esteemed the best butter-maker, the best spinner, the best all-round housekeeper in the New Settlement. She had not much beauty, but she had a willing hand and a kind heart, and these go a great deal farther than a well-chiseled nose or a good-featured face.

A little back from the hearth, on a short bench against the wall, sat the two "big boys," David and Jonathan. They were twins, several years my seniors—burly husky fellows, the orphaned sons of a distant relative, whom father had undertaken to raise as his own. They had been in our family a shorter time than I, and yet I had always thought of them as my elder brothers. They were farmers and pioneers by nature; they liked to talk of horses and cattle and crops, but in book-learning they had never gone further than the rudiments. While they were father's willing helpers in the fields and clearings, they were his despair in matters pertaining to mental culture. The down on their lips

*EVENINGS AT HOME*

and cheeks was fast taking on color and stiffness, and soon they would be big boys no longer, except in their artless simplicity.

Directly fronting the center of the fireplace was the easy rocking chair which my mother occupied—a seat of honor, as it were, where she might overlook not only the rest of the family but the usual objects of her industry, the pots and pans, the spinning-wheels and the corner cupboard. Near her feet, so near that I might lay my head upon her lap when I was tired, was the three-legged stool which served me as a seat. It was low and narrow, but large enough for Inviz to come quite often and sit beside me; and he sat so quietly that no one but myself knew of his presence.

Lastly, in the place of dignity near the extreme right-hand corner of the hearth, sat father, thoughtful, solemn, with a heavy sense of life's duties and responsibilities resting upon him. When all were assembled in order and in becoming silence, he would say in the commanding tones of a patriarch:

“David, thee may fetch me the Book.”

And David would rise from the bench, and going proudly round to the other side of the room, would pick up the little candlestand, with the Bible, a pair of snuffers and a lighted candle upon it, and carrying it across the hearth, would deposit it in the right position between the patriarchal knees. Then he would resume his place, and silence would again fall on the household.

Father would snuff the candle, put on his spectacles and open the book—I suspect with a little inarticulate

## *IN MY YOUTH*

prayer as he did so. Very deliberately he would turn the leaves until he came to a chapter or a passage which harmonized best with his feelings, or which in his judgment was best adapted to our instruction and edification. Sometimes he would read a penitential psalm, sometimes a narrative passage from Genesis or Ruth or Esther, and sometimes a selection from the Proverbs which seemed to strike home at certain of our own shortcomings and backslidings. He was better pleased, however, when reading a chapter from one of the old prophets proclaiming vengeance upon a wicked and idolatrous people; and he was at his very best when he opened the book at one of the gospels and read there of the doings and sayings of Him “who taught as never man taught.”

My dear Leonidas, my dear Leona, it was worth being born in a log cabin to be privileged to sit upon that little three-legged stool and listen to those wonderful readings. Very rich and full was father’s voice, and at times exceedingly melodious. He began softly, in tones somewhat deliberate and slow; then soon he seemed to forget everything else and to throw his whole soul into the semi-musical rendition of the text before him. To me it was much like going to the opera will be to you, Leona, but I suspect that the impressions were somewhat different. I had never heard any one really sing, I had never seen a musical instrument; and if it had been suggested to father that there was aught of music in his readings he would have been overwhelmed with shame and a sense of wrong-doing. The hosts of Heaven might sing around the Throne, the psalmist might play

## *EVENINGS AT HOME*

upon the psaltery and the harp, but such diversions were not for Friends and common folks in the New Settlement; in these degenerate times the tendency of all music was to worldliness, and worldliness only.

When at length the reading was finished, father closed the Book, snuffed the candle again and pushed the candlestand a few inches away. A brief moment of silence followed, and then each member of the family began to prepare for retiring. Aunt Rachel covered the fire, father wound the clock, mother filled the teakettle, the boys brought in an armload of kindlings, Cousin Mandy Jane set the chairs in their places, and I—well, I pulled my little trundle-bed out from behind the green curtains in the corner, crept into it, with Inviz beside me, and was soon oblivious to all the world.

My dear Leonidas, does this remind you of anything? Perhaps not; but there was once a Scottish poet, much loved and admired, who wrote a description of a similar scene in his own home almost a century earlier—a description which puts my own efforts to shame. I trust that you will find that poem and read it, and that you will especially give thought to a particular stanza which I committed to memory at an age when you will scarcely have heard of the name of Robert Burns:

“From scenes like these, old Scotia’s grandeur springs,  
That makes her lov’d at home, rever’d abroad:  
Princes and lords are but the breath of kings,  
An honest man’s the noblest work of God.”

## IN MY YOUTH

One day, when I was a very small boy, father said to me, “Robert, how many pages are in the Bible?”

I looked at the figures on the last page, and answered, “Eight hundred and twenty.”

“Well,” said he, “if thee will begin at the first chapter and read three pages every day, thee can read it through in less than a year. Do this, and I promise to give thee a new book for thy library.”

I was overjoyed. To win so valuable a prize by performing a task that appeared to be in itself so pleasant—who could have desired anything better? I began at once with “In the beginning,” and persevered, day after day, until I had read every chapter, every work, to the “Amen” at the end of the Apocalypse. There was, of course, a great deal that I could not comprehend—in fact, the major portion of it consisted of words and phrases that conveyed no distinct meaning to my mind; but I knew that there were pages and pages in that book which father himself could not comprehend, just as I now know that there are chapters and chapters which have so little relation to our present-day needs that they are scarcely worth reading. I found many passages, however, which seemed full of meaning even to my childish mind, and there were some narratives that were so full of the spirit of adventure that I read and reread them with ever increasing relish.

I found, also, episodes and stories which, if printed separately in modern English, would now be banned from good society and from the United States mails—very improper reading for young boys and pretty

## *EVENINGS AT HOME*

maidens, people would say; but I stumbled through all these things with the utmost innocence, reverently believing that they were entirely good and proper “because they were in the Bible.” In fact, in those early years, the Bible was a fetish which I worshiped blindly and without reason, just as a good many older people do to this day. I believed that whatever was contained between the lids of our family volume was absolutely and undeniably true. If some one had written on the margin of one of the pages that “White is black,” or that “Robert Dudley is a hundred years old to-day,” I should have regarded it a sin to deny those statements; for I believed that it was utterly impossible to write or print an untruth anywhere inside of that holy volume.

You smile at my simplicity; but let me say to you that there are millions of grown-up people living to-day who pin their hopes of salvation on beliefs equally as childish and opposed to reason and good sense. The race has so long been fed upon articles of faith, that credulity has become an instinct; and it often happens that those doctrines which are most directly opposed to the evidence of the senses secure the adherence of the largest number of converts.

It was a great accomplishment—that reading of the entire Book from beginning to end—and I should have faltered more than once had it not been for the promised reward. But at length it was finished, the “Amen” pronounced, and the Book returned to its place on the candlestand.

“Robert,” said father, “thee has been very faithful,

## IN MY YOUTH

and thee has persevered wonderfully for a boy of thy age. If thee feels inclined to read the Book a second time, I shall not discourage thee.”

Then from the small box under the bed, wherein he kept his treasures, he drew forth a brand-new book, a beautiful little volume bound in green paper boards with gilt lettering on its back.

“Here is thy reward, Robert,” he said. “I bought it for thee when I was in Nopplis last week.”

He put it in my hands, and I opened it. It was a *Boy’s Book of Animals*, containing many interesting pictures and chock-full of wonderful stories. I had never seen anything like it. My cup of joy was full to over-flowing.