

Their Yesterdays

Harold Bell Wright

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[Illustration: In the glowing heart of the fire she saw her home warm with holy love.]

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THEIR YESTERDAYS

By: HAROLD BELL WRIGHT

Author of "The Winning Of Barbara Worth" etc., etc.

With illustrations by F. GRAHAM COOTES

To Mrs. Elsbury W. Reynolds

In admiration of the splendid motherhood that, in her sons, has contributed such wealth of manhood to the race. And, in her daughter, has given to human-kind such riches of womanhood. With kindest regards, I inscribe this book.

H. B. W.

"Relay Heights" June 8, 1912

_Behold the child, by Nature's kindly law, Pleased with a rattle,
tickled with a straw; Some livelier plaything gives his youth delight,
A little louder, but as empty quite; Scarfs, garters, gold, amuse his
riper stage, And beads and prayer-books are the toys of age; Pleased
with this bauble still, as that before; Till tired he sleeps, and
life's poor play is o'er._

"AN ESSAY ON MAN"--_Pope._

PROEM

There was a man.

And it happened--as such things often so happen--that this man went back into his days that were gone. Again and again and again he went back. Even as every man, even as you and I, so this man went back into his Yesterdays.

Then--why then there was a woman.

And it happened--as such things sometimes so happen--that this woman also went back into her days that were gone. Again and again and again she went back. Even as every woman, even as you and I, so this woman went back into her Yesterdays.

So it happened--as such things do happen--that the Yesterdays of this man and the Yesterdays of this woman became Their Yesterdays, and that they went back, then, no more alone but always together.

Even as one, they, forever after, went back.

What They Found in Their Yesterdays

And the man and the woman who went back into Their Yesterdays found there the Thirteen Truly Great Things of Life. Just as they found these things in their grown up days, even unto the end, so they found them in Their Yesterdays.

Thirteen Truly Great Things of Life there are. No life can have less. No life can have more. All of life is in them. No life is without them all.

Dreams, Occupation, Knowledge, Ignorance, Religion, Tradition, Temptation, Life, Death, Failure, Success, Love, Memories: these are the Thirteen Truly Great Things of Life--found by the man and the woman in their grown up days--found by them in Their Yesterdays--and they found no others.

It does not matter where this man and this woman lived, nor who they were, nor what they did. It does not matter when or how many times they went back into Their Yesterdays. These things are all that they found. And they found these things even as every man and woman finds them, even as you and I find them, in our days that are and in our days that were--in our grown up days and in our Yesterdays.

And it is so that in all of these Thirteen Truly Great Things of Life there is a man and there is a woman.

THE THIRTEEN TRULY GREAT THINGS OF LIFE

DREAMS

OCCUPATION

KNOWLEDGE

IGNORANCE

RELIGION

TRADITION

TEMPTATION

LIFE

DEATH

FAILURE

SUCCESS

LOVE

MEMORIES

THEIR YESTERDAYS

DREAMS

The man, for the first time, stood face to face with Life and, for the first time, knew that he was a man.

For a long time he had known that some day he would be a man. But he had always thought of his manhood as a matter of years. He had said to himself: "when I am twenty-one, I will be a man." He did not know, then, that twenty-one years--that indeed three times twenty-one years--cannot make a man. He did not know, then, that men are made of other things than years.

I cannot tell you the man's name, nor the names of his parents, nor his exact age, nor just where he lived, nor any of those things. For my story, such things are of no importance whatever. But this is of the greatest importance: as the man, for the first time, stood face to face with Life and, for the first time, realized his manhood, his manhood life began in Dreams.

It is the dreams of life that, at the beginning of life, matter. Of the Thirteen Truly Great Things of Life, Dreams are first.

It was green fruit time. From the cherry tree that grew in the upper corner of the garden next door, close by the hedge that separated the two places, the blossoms were gone and the tiny cherries were already well formed. The nest, that a pair of little brown birds had made that spring in the hedge, was just empty, and, from the green laden branches of the tree, the little brown mother was calling anxious advice and sweet worried counsel to her sons and daughters who were trying their new wings.

In the cemetery on the hill, beside a grave over which the sod had formed thick and firm, there was now another grave--another grave so new that on it no blade of grass had started--so new that the yellow earth in the long rounded mound was still moist and the flowers that

tried with such loving, tender, courage, to hide its nakedness were not yet wilted. Cut in the block of white marble that marked the grass-grown grave were the dearest words in any tongue--Wife and Mother; while, for the new-made mound that lay so close beside, the workmen were carving on a companion stone the companion words.

There were two other smaller graves nearby--one of them quite small--but they did not seem to matter so much to the tall young fellow who had said to himself so many times: "when I am twenty-one, I will be a man." It was the two graves marked by the companion words that mattered. And certainly he did not, at that time, feel himself a man. As he left the cemetery to go home with an old neighbor and friend of the family, he felt himself rather a very small and lonely boy in a very big and empty world.

But there had been many things to do in those next few days, with no one but himself to do them. There had been, in the voices of his friends, a note that was new. In the manner of the men who had come to talk with him on matters of business, he had felt a something that he had never felt before. And he had seen the auctioneer--a lifelong friend of his father--standing on the front porch of his boyhood home and had heard him cry the low spoken bids and answer the nodding heads of the buyers in a voice that was hoarse with something more than long speaking in the open air. And then--and then--at last had come the sharp blow of the hammer on the porch railing and from the trembling lips of the old auctioneer the word: "Sold."

It was as though that hammer had fallen on the naked heart of the boy. It was as though the auctioneer had shouted: "Dead."

And so the time had come, a week later, when he must go for a last look at the home that was his no longer. Very slowly he had walked about the yard; pausing a little before each tree and bush and plant; putting forth his hand, at times, to touch them softly as though he would make sure that they were there for he saw them dimly through a mist. The place was strangely hushed and still. The birds and bees and even the butterflies seemed to have gone somewhere far away. Very slowly he had gone up the steps to open the front door. Very slowly he had passed from room to room in the empty, silent, house. On the kitchen porch he had paused again, for a little, because he could not see the steps; then had gone on to the well, the garden, the woodhouse, the shop, the barn, and so out into the orchard that shaded the gently rising slope of the hill beyond the house. At the farther side of the orchard, on the brow of the hill, he had climbed the rail fence and had seated himself on the ground where he could look out and away over the familiar meadows and fields and pastures.

A bobo-link, swinging on a nearby bush, poured forth a tumbling torrent of silvery melody. Behind him, on the fence, a meadow lark answered with liquid music. About him on every side, in the soft sunlight, the bluebirds were flitting here and there, twittering cheerily the while over their bluebird tasks. And a woodpecker, hard at work in the orchard shade, made himself known by the din of his industry.

But the man, who did not yet quite realize that he was a man, gave no heed to these busy companions of his boyhood. To him, it was as though those men with their shovels had heaped that mound of naked, yellow, earth upon his heart. The world, for him, was as empty as the old

house down there under the orchard hill. For a long time he sat very still--seeing nothing, hearing nothing, heeding nothing--conscious only of that dull, aching, loneliness--conscious only of that heavy weight of pain.

A mile or more away, beyond the fields, a moving column of smoke from a locomotive lifted itself into the sky above the tree tops and streamed back a long, dark, banner. As the column of smoke moved steadily on toward the distant horizon, the young man on the hilltop watched it listlessly. Then, as his mind outran the train to the cities that lay beyond the line of the sky, his eyes cleared, his countenance brightened, his thoughts went outward toward the great world where great men toil mightily; and the long, dark, banner of smoke that hung above the moving train became to him as a flag of battle leading swiftly toward the front. Eagerly now he watched--watched until, far away, the streaming column of smoke passed from sight around a wooded hill and faint and clear through the still air--a bugle call to his ears--came the long challenging whistle.

Then it was that he realized his manhood--knew that he was a man--and understood that manhood is not a matter of only twenty-one years. And then it was--as he sat there alone on the brow of the little hill with his boyhood years dead behind him and the years of his manhood before--that his manhood life began, even as the manhood life of every man really begins, with his Dreams.

Indeed it is true that all life really begins in dreams. Surely the lover dreams of his mistress--the maiden of her mate. Surely mothers dream of the little ones that sleep under their hearts and fathers plan for their children before they hold them in their arms. Every work of man is first conceived in the worker's soul and wrought out first in his dreams. And the wondrous world itself, with its myriad forms of life, with its grandeur, its beauty and its loveliness; the stars and the heavenly bodies of light that crown the universe; the marching of the days from the Infinite to the Infinite; the procession of the years from Eternity to Eternity; all this, indeed, is but God's good dream. And the hope of immortality--of that better life that lies beyond the horizon of our years--what a vision is that--what a wondrous dream--given us by God to inspire, to guide, to comfort, to hold us true!

With wide eyes the man looked out upon a wide world somewhat as a conquering emperor, confident in his armed strength, might from a hilltop look out over the scene of a coming battle. He did not see the grinding hardships, the desperate struggles, the disastrous losses, the pitiful suffering. The dreadful dan

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