THE TRAIL OF LIFE IN THE MIDDLE YEARS

BY

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

I HAVE already published two little Trail Books, *Finding the Trail of Life,* and *The Trail of Life in College.* They have been widely read both by young and old, and I have often been asked to add another volume to the series. I have hesitated to attempt to carry the story any farther. Whatever of charm or interest there may have been in the two earlier books was in large measure due to the simplicity of the narrative. It was the story of a boy finding himself at two stages of his formative period. It was a spontaneous report of the more or less unconscious and naïve steps from the cradle of the child to the threshold of active life.

In those early periods the Trail was *found,* not built. It was to a degree made by others and slowly discovered by the person who told the story. My two "saints," who dominate the two books—Aunt Peace in the first one, and Pliny Chase in the second one—were there waiting for me to come, to discover them and to draw upon the grace and richness of their lives. Miracles of discovery like that do not keep repeating themselves.

One does not expect to find wayside "saints" at each epoch of the journey. The kind of saint I came to admire and to seek as guide in my middle years was not a person who could ever expect canonization by the church. It was the "happy warrior" in the everyday battles of life. It was the person who walked the common highroad as good neighbor, loyal citizen, lover of truth, with prophetic vision of the intrinsic worth of life, and with radiant light on his face.

But in any case, the time comes when the traveler must cut his own trail and make his own path if he is to count for anything. Dante, at a momentous crisis in his spiritual journey, heard his guide say to him: "Now thee o'er thyself I crown and mitre," which means that henceforth he is to be his own king and his own priest, with authority over his own acts and over his own progress. When that stage of self-development is reached it is difficult to preserve the old-time simplicity and naïveté. Life, if it is self-directed, is bound to increase in depth and in the range of inter-relationships. One can refuse to travel far beyond the coasts and margins of dependence upon others, but if he does go forward toward *realization of personality,* he will find life steadily becoming more complex and intricate. I have always liked the story of the boy in the primer class who was told by his teacher at the beginning of

his education to say "A," as she pointed to the letter. "I am not going to say A," the boy replied, "for if I say A, you will want me to go on and say B!" He dimly foresaw the drag of the whole alphabetic system which would eventually carry him irresistibly on to Z, and with precocious wisdom he announced his declaration of independence before the remoter complications emerged.

And yet it is possible to maintain a quiet simplicity of spirit in the midst of a vast complexity of issues and tasks. The steady rainbow at Niagara curving over that tumultuous rush of ever-shifting water may perhaps be taken as a symbol of a mind which retains its inward peace and poise in the midst of the turmoil and welter of events and duties. Simplicity of life is a wholly relative matter. It is not secured necessarily by withdrawal from activity nor is it necessarily forfeited by the acceptance of heavy responsibilities of life. It will be a genuine triumph if this old-time note of simplicity which naturally belongs to youth continues to run on through these busy middle years of life. *Becoming* like a child is a very different thing from *being a child,* or from having a childish mind. None of us wants to go back to the cradle stage or to the days of the rattle and the hobby horse, but it is a mighty achievement to maintain with the maturity and strength

of manhood, the trust and confidence, the gentleness and simplicity of an unspoiled child.

Jacob in the Genesis stories saw angels ascending and descending above him at Bethel as he started out on his journey to realize his life, but it is comforting to note that on his way back, in middle life, with his flocks and herds about him, and when he was walking in the midst of the dusty highroad, he had a return of the angels. This return of the angels in the midst of the crowded affairs of life, in the dust and heat, is still as possible as it was for an old-time patriarch on the highroad of Mahanaim and at the Jabbok. It was for this experience that John Henry Newman was longing when, in a sharp crisis of his life, he wrote the last stanza of "Lead Kindly Light":

> And with the morn
> Those angel faces smile
> Which I have loved long since
> And lost a while.

These "angel faces" are not the spirits of beloved friends who have gone before us and are waiting to welcome us on the other shore, as so many readers may suppose; they are, rather, the aspirations and ideals of youth which have been lost or forgotten in the rush and drive of later life, but which are once more rediscovered in happy moments of vision, and which are found

to be as full of light and as attractive as ever, smiling to us and beckoning us on.

I have implied that no single "saint" dominates this middle period of life as in the other two periods, but that must not be taken to mean that there was in this period of my journey a dearth of persons who possessed the saintly qualities of life. It becomes henceforth a cloud of witnesses rather than a single figure standing apart in solitary splendor. For the molding of my intellectual outlook in this period I owe most to my teachers at Harvard, Josiah Royce and George Herbert Palmer. Josiah Royce was utterly unique. He was one of the oddest-looking men since Socrates, whom, as has been often noted, he somewhat resembled. His mind had an extraordinary range of capacity and interests. There was a *volume* to his thought like that of a great river in full flood. His sentences rolled out as though there was an immense pressure behind. He had the moral passion of a great prophet and he always glorified the creative power of man's *will.* He was the formulator of a unique type of *idealism,* the exponent of a striking philosophy of loyalty, and the interpreter of the significance of "the beloved community" in which the individual finds his life. I was never his "disciple" in the sense that I adopted his system of thought as my own, but I was powerfully stimulated by his lectures

and his books, and I had the rare privilege of enjoying his friendship and personal intercourse as long as he lived.

George Herbert Palmer was not the founder of a system of philosophy as Royce was, he was rather the lucid interpreter of the great ethical systems of the centuries. With him I studied Kant, Fichte, and Hegel and, what was hardly less important, in his famous course known as Phil. 4, I had from him a vital interpretation of the most significant ethical systems of modern times, including his own philosophy of life. There were profounder ethical teachers during this period, but nowhere, at home or abroad, was there to be found a teacher who had a more sure touch for the deep-lying springs of moral action, or who had a more comprehensive grasp of the ethical thinkers of the nineteenth century, or who was more luminous and revealing as an interpreter. His English style was well-nigh perfect in form, and it was a joy to listen to him. A year's work in that Phil. 4 course came nearer being a "complete education" than any other course of study I have ever known.

Under Professor Palmer's direction I made a thoroughgoing study of Thomas Hill Green's *Prolegomena to Ethics* and came for the time under the spell of that great Oxford thinker, as I had already done earlier

with Edward Caird, the Master of Balliol. I formed an intimate and lasting friendship with Professor Palmer and I owe him an immense debt for what came to me from him. He utterly disapproved of mysticism and he disliked the basic conceptions and principles of Quakerism. They did not fit into his system of life and thought. With a frankness characteristic of his nature he used to tell me what he thought of what he liked to call my pursuit of "wandering fires," but with a kindly smile he would always end his criticisms with an affectionate appraisal of my work and my aims, and I never had any doubt that the bonds of friendship between us were deep and strong.

William James, on the other hand, had the heartiest sympathy both with my interest in mysticism and with my devotion to Quaker ideals. I never had definite university work with him, but for many years I was strongly under his influence and guidance. I began to consult him even before I was a student at Harvard, and as soon as he discovered the main lines of my interest there was no limit to his readiness, in fact eagerness, to help me forward. It was a characteristic of James to see "genius" in every young man who confided in him. He would always give up anything he might be doing to give aid and comfort to a chance visitor who was dreaming a great dream. He made one feel

as though one's own ideas were Platonic in importance. When you saw how enthusiastic this great man was over your half-born mental child, you were assured that it must be a superlative offspring. He gave a young person a new faith in himself. You quickly believed in his belief. Like Socrates, he was a midwife of the mind for the youth of his time, though he was not quite so discriminating as Socrates was in his judgment as to which offspring was worthy of nurture and likely to be "a child of promise."

William James was so fascinating and captivating that one was always in danger of being carried off his feet by that remarkable man's enthusiasms. I went too far in my early period toward the adoption of his theories of the religious significance of the subconscious, though I never did accept the central principles of his pragmatism as a sound theory of truth. But whether I agreed or disagreed with his views, I have never regretted any aspects of the part William James played in the formation of my intellectual life or my spiritual ideals. He helped me, among other ways, to discover the importance of simplicity, as I shall indicate at a later stage. When William James died in 1910, I wrote my estimate of his work and my appreciation of his life. A short time afterwards, I received this surprising letter from Mrs. William James:

95 Irving Street, Cambridge.
October 30, 1910.

"MY DEAR MR. JONES:

I should like to thank you for the Editorial Letter in the *American Friend* on the death of William James. Many voices have been raised in affectionate memory of a man who truly loved his kind but no one has spoken more justly or with finer appreciation than yourself.

I should like to have read it to my dear husband who counted himself so lightly—and yet *how* he honored his work and loved it!

Thanking you for our children and myself, I am,

Sincerely yours,

ALICE H. JAMES."

It was during these rich Harvard days that I formed an intimate friendship with Professor Francis G. Peabody, which has steadily grown in richness and depth through all the years that have intervened. Dr. Peabody was one of the pioneer interpreters of "the social gospel" and one of the foremost preachers of my generation. He acquired a consummately beautiful style of expression, a penetrating insight into the most significant values of life and a unique way of making some central truth of religion come to life as he unfolded its meaning. But besides all this, it was the charm of his personality and the rich and lovable qualities of his life that drew me to him. Through him I had the rare and wonderful privilege of intimate association with

President Charles W. Eliot, who was Dr. Peabody's brother-in-law and who lived as near neighbor to him at Northeast Harbor, Maine, where most of my visits with Dr. Peabody have taken place.

One other Harvard influence ought to be singled out for special mention in this brief preliminary chapter. I studied Plato and Aristotle with George Santayana and thus entered with this extraordinary guide the spiritual domain of these two supreme thinkers of the human race. The Platonic stream of life and thought, most certainly a gulf-stream which circulates through the entire history of the Western world, has been ever since one of my major interests. It should be noted that we now think of Aristotle as a disciple of Plato rather than a rival.

During this period of intellectual preparation, I had the constant companionship of my own little boy, Lowell, to whom I had to be both father and mother. I know how easy it is to hallow the memory of a child after he is gone and to see him under the dominion of a glowing imagination. It is quite possible that I fell into that well-known habit and glorified that little Iulus of mine who walked beside me with unequal steps—*non passibus æquis.* It matters little now whether he *was* what I saw in him, or whether I throw about him a halo of my own creating. The important point is that

he taught me more about life than any one of my philosophers did and he carried me farther into the heart of things than any one else did at that period of life. I learned through him the immortal quality of love. He loved me with a pure and exalted love that always seemed to be washed clean of all utilitarian expectation. And I loved him as a being in whom I saw the love of God revealed to me. For him the visible world was a thin veil which let God's deeper world of beauty break through into manifestation. Flowers thrilled him as though they had been angels sent to minister to him. To walk in the woods with him was like a journey to Eldorado. There was gold or the elixir of life at the end of every path.

How can one ever learn to live again after such a companion departs into the invisible? Just that lesson I had to learn, and there can be no other lesson on earth that is more difficult to learn. How little of life is in the books of the philosophers, and how much of life must be learned in the school of experience!

Through all the period covered by this book I lived in close intimacy with that fine oriental scholar and inspiring religious interpreter, Dr. George A. Barton, who was at this period a professor in Bryn Mawr College. For four years we lived in the same house and ate our meals together. We walked the beautiful roads

around Haverford together, we sat side by side in Haverford Friends' Meeting, sharing our thoughts with that interesting group, and we travailed together as we thought our way through the spiritual problems of our time, reading pretty much the same books and working at common tasks in mutual joy. A friendship like that is a heavenly gift when it comes to a man.

CHAPTER II

A NEW BEGINNING

IN the early summer of 1893 two doors unexpectedly opened for me and disclosed two tasks waiting to be done, either one of them large enough for the whole of a man's energies. I have always had a propensity to take *both* alternatives when an *either-or* situation has been presented to me. It is a peculiarity of Hegel's philosophy, but I had discovered the wisdom of the principle even before I had heard of Hegel. So now I resolved to enter both doors and take up both tasks. One of them was to become editor of *The Friends' Review,* a weekly Quaker periodical, published in Philadelphia; the other was to become Instructor in Philosophy in Haverford College, with the prospect of being eventually professor. I had for many years, though quite unconscious of these goals, been preparing for these two tasks. When they suddenly knocked at my door, I "felt in my bones," as we say in popular speech, that I was ready for them and, at least in spirit, matched with the call of the hour.

The Friends' Review was at the time in its forty-

seventh volume, having had its birth in 1847, in the midst of a disastrous Quaker controversy, which brought a sad "separation" in the Quaker fellowship. *The Friends' Review* represented in the period of its birth, the "evangelical" or "progressive" section of the Society of Friends in America. It especially appealed to those who were in sympathy with the famous English Quaker leader, Joseph John Gurney, who had been one of the causes of the "separation." *The Friend* of Philadelphia was the conservative paper, expressing in large degree the ideas and ideals of those who were popularly called "Wilburites," so called because of their sympathy or affiliation with John Wilbur, the stern opponent of Gurney. The controversy which had been the occasion for the birth of *The Friends' Review* had become a dead issue before I came on the scene, and that old Gurney-Wilbur straw, so empty of seed corn, will not need to be threshed over again here.

It will be only for a brief space, here in the foreground, that Quaker issues will be in the focus. The picture will soon widen out and include the central spiritual movements of the time. I must begin with the actual tasks which lay straight in front of me. There are distinct advantages in belonging to a specific religious denomination, as there are of having membership in a definite family group. The interests which are