

ANTICIPATION

If we begin the week with a certain amount of aversion, as we must admit we sometimes do, no matter how we try to hide the unamiable mood, we are naturally disposed to end it with a feeling of satisfaction. The pleasant sentiment at the prospect of another day of rest is not, however, free from regrets, because of something unfinished, some desire not realized, that we had set our hearts on. But despite this feeling of dissatisfaction, we put to one side our disappointment with the reflection that better luck may await us next week. We shall, no doubt, catch up with the elusive objective that we failed by just a little to reach on Saturday night.

"Hope springs eternal in the human breast," and we sustain our sinking courage on the strong staff of anticipation. We manage to keep off to the last the period when we are forced to say, "It might have been," and that, perhaps, is the saddest utterance in life, for it is the epitaph of the lost cause. But is there not sometimes loss in gain and failure in success, good in seeming evil and, even in the depths of despair, a ray of hope? Ay, even then there is a sort of mad expectation that something will turn up to avert the seeming inevitable. For many, perhaps for most, it is, indeed, a merciful disposition of providence that the future is hidden from them. If, in the happy days of youth, the pages of their after-life were unfolded year by year before their eyes, how often would they not shrink horrified from the sight? In many and many a case the morning of life that broke in roseate splendour, so full of hope and promise, has set in a night of darkest horror, in the under-world of shame and sin and crime.

Life is sad enough for the most of us. There are few, indeed, who have not their regrets, even if it is only for a harsh word, or the omission of a kind one, the power, the influence of which we seem to forget. "The kindly word unspoken is a sin," as John Boyle O'Rielly says, with a beautiful little touch of human sympathy and insight that

must, we think, bring a pang of remorse to many. But sad as life is, how much sadder would it not be if there was not the pleasure of anticipation. The coming event may turn out to be something sorry enough when we view it at close range, but what of that? we see it only at a distance, and to us it shines. We look at the moon. To be sure we do not know what those mountains are that rise on its surface. Some say that they are ugly masses of burned-out lava, but to us, do they not shape themselves to the image of a genial funny man, who smiles on us through the night? Our fancy pictures to us the distant visitant whom we are expecting in the guise of an angel, though he may be little more than an ogre when he arrives.

Ah, let us have our castles in Spain, and our fool's paradise, and our dreams of delight. Are they not at least some little compensation for the rude disillusionment of the stern reality? It makes no difference even if the source is fictitious, since the joy that we derive from it is real. It is the nearest thing to the child's happiness, the only real happiness on earth, because the least unnatural. We sometimes smile at the child's unpretentious delight in some little, ridiculous nothing; but it is a smile that is almost akin to tears, tears of gentle regret "For the tender grace of a day that is dead," for a time that is gone forever. All the same, it is good to recall it at times, to forget the fateful years—how fateful they have been to some—and, for a blissful moment, to be a child again.

Experience, we feel sure, has taught us all, that our realizations generally fall far short of our expectations. This seems to be more especially true of persons, places, or things about which we have heard or read much. We see the famous preacher, orator, statesman, or singer and grasp the long desired opportunity of hearing him, but we have to admit that he is not quite what we thought he should be. We visit the world-renowned cities, churches, palaces; they are very fine to be sure, but there is something lacking; they

are not quite as grand as we expected them to be. Thus it is that *nihil admirari* is the philosophy of most people with wide experience in life. There is but one joy that we cannot be disappointed in—why? Because, “Eye has not seen nor ear heard” anything on earth that may be compared to that joy. And as regards the present, we shall do well to remember the words of Shakespear:

“It is better to be lowly born,
And range with humble livers in content,
Than to be perk'd up in a glistening grief,
And wear a golden sorrow.”

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