

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers* 2, 1886 – 1887 June 5, '86 to May 21, '87)

Coal and Iron

The fire burns fitfully: ever and anon, a bright spur of flame springs up from the glowing mass, and illuminates all the surroundings, and then sinks quietly to rest in its warm bed of coals, as if to hide from sight its daring, not unmingled with coquetry as it bids its admiring beholder seek further acquaintance at his peril. And yet the very challenge adds to his ardor, as he peers into the many-stoned mass. What history that is written is so valuable as the history of a man's life: not the life that he has lived, but the life he has hoped to live? For a man's life is in no wise indicative of his character. His acts and deeds are the creatures of circumstance, – not of his will. The true life is that which he lives within himself, concealed from the world and its scoffings, – in his own thoughts and feelings, his ideal life; and of the minor hopes there is no outward expression. –

And so tonight as I sit gazing into the bed of fire before me, I read therein my true history: the history of my life as it should have been, and as I had hoped it would be. There came to my mind all my unfulfilled desires, all lost opportunities, all destroyed ideals, all inarticulate longings for the spiritual life, and my soul sinks within me. What has this world given me in the past, and what has it to offer in the future? Vain pursuit of shadows that lure me ever on and on, and which when just within my grasp fade from my site as the flashes of flame in the hearth there, only to rise again and again to torment me as before. Is it to be ever thus?

But no, behold! Whom do I see coming toward me from the Golden book spread open before me? It is she, the “not impossible she” whom I have been seeking through all this weary existence, she the inspiration of all that I have desired to be, she, the source and companion of all my ecstatic strivings for the higher life,

“For I

Can see no beauty on this beauteous earth
No life, no light, no hopefulness, no mirth,
Pleasure, nor purpose when thou art not nigh.”

She comes to me from the coals, my fair love, her hair streaming bright about her shining face, and in her gleaming eyes the light of intelligence, truth, and inspiration. She has been always near me, encouraging me in my efforts, and soothing me in my disappointment, and yet I have not seen her. I know not the color of her hair, nor the shade of her eyes, but that all is brilliant, – and now, at last I am to possess her. The light of gladness is in her face, the bliss of perfect content, as she stretches out her fair arms to enclose my eager form, anxious to gain forever freedom; her glorious face is resting on my shoulder, her lips pouting its demand for the seal that is now at last to bind us forever to each other. All the joy of the heavens and the earth is mine as I bend my head to press her tender lips, –but

“Find lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
Though winning near the goal,”

for suddenly the fitful blaze enviously flashes forth again, and then dies away, – the last, expiring gasp of what is now a bit of ashes, and there stare me in the face, shutting out forever the vision of my love, – the cruel iron bars of the great, the pitiless prison bars with which the actual ever vanquishes the ideal

Charles Theodore Greve

Budget

Hooper Editor

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