



THE NEVINSONS' OLD HOME AT NEWBY, IN WESTMORLAND

From a Drawing by the Author

CHANGES AND CHANCES

HENRY W. NEVINSON



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HAVE always liked the Collect which prays that, among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to To recognise a guiding mark above all the tembe found. pest and flux of time must bestow an encouraging sense of security, such as mariners feel when they perceive the flash of a revolving light, though frequently concealed by waves. To be sure, opinions differ innumerably as to what may be true joys, and how they should be approached. The author of the prayer tells us the way to win them is by loving the thing which God commands and desiring that which He promises; and I suppose that for the author the joys consisted, not so much in the pleasures of a heaven foreseen by expectation, but in a love, obedience, and worship that would illuminate the passing course of his daily life. Others have sought true joys in the pursuit of scientific knowledge, the invention of mechanism for speed or manufacture, the creation of beauty, the service of their country or of mankind, and even, they tell us, of devoted love for one particular person. Some years ago I heard of a Duke who seemed to have inherited all the advantages possible for a human being, but declared in the end that eating and drinking were the only joys both true and permanent. Indeed, it is obvious that most people who possess wealth sufficient for a life of pleasure regard the pleasures of such a life as true joys, for otherwise they would not pursue them with such absorbing zeal. Whereas for the enormous majority of people in every country the main pursuit of their lives is to live.

And so the objects of the prayer become rather vague, and, amid such variety of opinion and practice, who shall decide where those joys are to be found? Moralists might tell us that even the Duke could have discovered joys truer and more permanent than eating and drinking, if only he had set himself to some useful or beautiful task, such as mowing his lawn or singing in the village choir. And once when, during a great railway strike, I heard that a member of the House of Lords was milking goats in Hyde Park, I thought that probably it was the happiest day in his life. But if the Duke or the Lord were to disagree with the moralists or myself, who could bring persuasion to change their minds? The place where a mathematician or inventor finds his joys would be no place for me, and where the heart of a chess-player or card-player is surely fixed, I would rather die at once than live. So that in the end I am driven back upon my own experience in a long life, marked by sundry and manifold changes, and disturbed by unruly will and desires.

I have certainly found true joys springing up along the edges of many different paths, but never for the seeking or "according to plan." Suddenly and unexpectedly they have appeared. It has been as the poet said, when singing of love's incredible reality:

"Unmöglich scheint immer die Ross, Unbegreiflich die Nachtigal."

But I have learnt that unless I was following certain paths, these true joys never appeared at all. As to what those paths might be, I must go back to the old Greek definition of happiness as "The exercise of vital powers along lines of excellence, in a life affording them scope." Unless I have been moving along such a path, all the attendant joys—love, beauty, and delight in nature—have either disappeared or have taken on a dull and sickly hue, like leaves shrivelled by a cold spring. Indeed, a departure from such paths, or an obstacle blocking the road, has often been sufficient to

kill the wayside joys of love, beauty, and delight in nature altogether.

There must be millions of young men and women who are now passing through similar experience, and perhaps some of them would like to hear about the course of a traveller preceding them. But there are two other reasons for writing these chapters of memory. Probably to most people it seems a pity that one's days should pass—yesterday and yesterday and yesterday—dissolving without record or memorial into what Sir Thomas Browne has called "the uncomfortable night of nothing." Each day of everybody's life is a miracle, more inexplicable and incalculable than the daily miracle of sunrise and sunset. To everybody it brings a commingled host of thoughts, feelings, and emotions -pains, pleasures, annovances, anxieties, hopes or disappointments. To everybody, except the few who can afford to dwell in hermit caves or on the tops of pillars, and who avail themselves of those advantages, it brings connection with other people—fellow-workers or fellow-idlers, allies or enemies, friends or relations. Even for the most torpid, the day is crowded with sensations; and even the most energetic enjoy, I suppose, brief intervals of calm. It is nearly incredible that all the vital experiences of to-day will by to-morrow have become a blank of nonentity, like the sums a child washes from a slate, irrevocable as the million ages before man made himself. It seems an extravagant waste, a lamentable squandering. And so a book of memories like this becomes an attempt to clutch at transitory time before it whirls into oblivion. It is a fond endeavour to retard that hurrying chariot, to grasp the vanishing shadow, and with Faust to cry to the moment: "Verweile doch, du bist so schön /" Or if the moment be not fair but grisly, still one would not have it blotted out for ever.

And then, as Arthur Ponsonby observes in his "English Diaries," egoism comes in too. In his Essays, so full of autobiography, Montaigne tells us he felt a passionate desire to make himself known. Anyone who has felt a

mythical reputation growing up around him would like to strip it off, as one would strip the creepers and crawlers from an ancient building. In my own case, for instance, I should have thought that anyone who knew me would have discerned that the curses of my life have been shyness, timidity, hesitation, a weak compliance, and a balance of judgment tormenting in its exactness. But I have evidence that such reputation as may have gathered around me appears to be strangely contrary to the truth. For when my son, the artist, once applied to the Foreign Office for a visa on his passport, the official asked him: "Are you related to that man. Henry Nevinson?" "He is my father," Richard replied. "He's a man of very violent opinions, isn't he?" asked the official. "Oh dear, no!" said Richard, having known me from his childhood: "he's the mildest of men." "When I say violent opinions," the official explained, "I mean he doesn't see eye to eye with the man in the street. Now, does he?" Only what Ministers call an answer in the negative was possible, and the visa was refused, but our language was enriched by an official definition of violence unsurpassed in precision.

In this record, which includes many people whom I have known or met, I have been obliged to drop titles and similar appendages, simply because so many of my friends have won such distinctions that, like panting time, I toil after them in vain. I ask them all to excuse my apparent bluntness, for even if I could follow the heights which they have reached, the repeated insertion of "(Now Lord So-and-So, or now K.B.E.)" makes heavy reading.

The two chapters called "A Merchant of London" and "Sabrina Fair" have appeared in almost the same form in my book, "Between the Acts" (originally published by John Murray), and are here included by permission of Messrs. Duckworth, the present publishers of that book.

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- "HERDER AND HIS TIMES" (Chapman and Hall, 1884; out of print). A biography of Herder as one of the Weimar circle, with many references to Goethe and other celebrities of that date, perhaps less forgotten than Herder himself. It was inspired by Carlyle's early writings, and my consequent fond but genuine hope of discovering the solution of the Universe among German thinkers.
- "LIFE OF FRIEDRICH SCHILLER" (Walter Scott, 1889; one of the "Great Writer" Series). A biography, containing translations of the "Xenien" and parts of the dramas.
- "Neighbours of Ours" (Arrowsmith, 1895). Scenes of ordinary life in the East End of London, the result of my long and intimate acquaintance with Whitechapel and Shadwell.
- "IN THE VALLEY OF TOPHET" (Dent, 1896; out of print).
 Scenes of ordinary life among the mines and ironworks of
 South Staffordshire, the result of residence among the
 miners, ironworkers, and nail-makers themselves.
- "Classic Greek Landscape and Architecture" (Dent, 1897); essays and descriptions to illustrate John Fulley-love's sketches in Greece.
- "Scenes in the Thirty Days' War" (Dent, 1898; out of print). An account of the part of the Graeco-Turkish War in 1897 that took place in Epirus while I was there.
- "LADYSMITH" (Methuen, 1900). An account of the siege, written day by day while we were shut in.
- "THE PLEA OF PAN" (Murray, 1901; republished in the "Road-mender" Series by Duckworth). Imaginative pictures on some aspects of life.
- "Between the Acts" (Murray, 1903; republished in the "Readers Library" by Duckworth). Imaginative scenes and stories from my experience.
- "On the Old Road through France to Florence" (Murray, 1904). Essays and descriptions upon the part of the road through France, accompanying Mr. Hallam Murray's pictures.

- "BOOKS AND PERSONALITIES" (John Lane, 1905; out of print). Essays, chiefly literary.
- "A MODERN SLAVERY" (Harpers, 1906). An account of my journey in the Angola Province of Central Africa, and the Cocoa Islands of the Gulf of Guinea, and an exposure of the Portuguese Slave Trade there practised.
- "THE DAWN IN RUSSIA" (Harpers, 1906; out of print). An account of the abortive Revolution in Russia during 1905—6 as I saw it.
- "The New Spirit in India" (Harpers, 1908; out of print).

 An account of my journey in India during the "unrest" of that and the preceding year.
- "Essays in Freedom" (Duckworth, 1909). Miscellaneous essays on life, politics, and literature.
- "THE GROWTH OF FREEDOM" (Jack, 1912). A sketch of the development of political and personal liberty.
- "Essays in Rebellion" (Nisbet, 1913). Essays and scenes.
- "THE DARDANELLES CAMPAIGN" (Nisbet, 1918; third edition, revised and corrected, 1920). An account of the expedition from authoritative documents and personal experience.
- "LINES OF LIFE" (Allen and Unwin, 1920). A book of verse
- "ORIGINAL SINNERS" (Christophers, 1920). A collection of ironic scenes, ancient and modern.
- "ESSAYS IN FREEDOM AND REBELLION" (Yale University Press and Oxford University Press, 1921). A collection of essays and scenes.

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