

GROVES OF GLADNESS

In the dreamy and, according to our Western views, very impractical Orient, where the deeply religious sentiments of the people as a rule far outweigh the material instinct, the dream sometimes materializes in a most startlingly practical manner. Though England has introduced the “iron horse” in a number of places, the bulk of travel is still accomplished in the primitive way, on foot or by beasts of burden, which aid in the traffic of the trails; and frequently by the wayside the tired traveler finds a Grove of Gladness, a clump of trees with a small house where, as a religious duty, a free meal is furnished for man and beast by the people of the vicinity, who thus unobtrusively give of their scanty store that their brother may be refreshed, rested, and recuperated to start afresh upon the next stage of his journey. What must be the feeling of thankfulness and joy, the sense of rest and relief, felt by man and beast when they enter such a place after a day in the dust, glare, and heat on the road; and what an atmosphere of altruism must be there, to the incalculable spiritual benefit of both giver and receiver, benefactor and beneficiary. On the other hand, what a calamity it would be if the majority of travelers along these highways and byways were blinded by the dust of the road or the glare of the sun, so that they could not see these Groves of Gladness. How much they would miss! How hard and how difficult would be their journey!

Our life is such a journey from the cradle to the grave, and as Job says, “Man that is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble.” Even those among us who are living in the most sheltered environment have our sorrow and suffering at times. What, then, about those unfortunates who are beset with trials and tribulations all the days of their lives? All of us have to bear bodily affliction in some measure; some suffer mental or moral afflictions; some suffer through the loss or disgrace of loved ones; not one of us is free from the scars of sorrow that sometimes sear the soul to the very core of our being. Some are disappointed in their ambitions for themselves or for others, after a life of sacrifice, and go down to the grave drooping with disappointment, and all because we are blinded by the dust and glare of delusion and allow the specter of sorrow to obscure the Groves of Gladness that are all along the highway of life, abounding in altruism and ready to receive us, removing from our eyes the glare and glamour, to fill our soul with gladness and send us rejuvenated and rejoicing upon our way, making it clear to us that we are journeying not towards the grave but to God, the giver of all good.

Life is a race, but it is not by any means a hundred-yard dash that may be accomplished in a moment by a spurt of energy. It is an endurance test and therefore we should realize that it is a fatal mistake to set up a pace faster than we can keep. It is also a well-established rule that in a race one must lay aside every weight that is not absolutely necessary, and if we learn to make haste slowly, we shall probably live longer and learn more because less hampered by the dust of sorrow and the glare of delusion. If we take time to visit the Groves of Gladness—where the sheltering shade of religion relieves our weary eyes from the glare of illusion of what the world values, and opens up the true standards of love and light, where we may live near the brooklets of joy to wash away the dust of sorrow that weighs us down, hindering us in our race, and casting our cares upon Him who careth for us, as shown by His invitation, “Come all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”—then we shall feel, oh, so

much lighter! Our feet shall be shod with the wings of the wind and we shall walk onward sustained by the strength gained in the Groves of Gladness. We shall then be able to accomplish a greater work in the world.

It is not a waste of time to begin the day with prayer and praise and worship of God, the giver of all good, no matter how hurried we may feel. The time taken for this purpose will soon be made up by the lightened attitude of upliftment that we take with us from this communion with our Source and our Goal. It is not needless to turn to our Father when weary, spent and fatigued with the work and worry of the day. We shall sleep the more soundly, we shall rest and recuperate the better. We are usually very religious in our observance of the times when food is served for the restoration of the physical man, "but man liveth not by bread alone," and no matter how sumptuous may be our fare, we shall starve if we visit not the Grove of Gladness where our Father waits for the wandering ones, ready with the bread of spiritual stimulation to banish dull care, to revive the sinking spirit. Ours is the loss if we allow the dust and glare on the highway of life to blind us so that we pass by these rest houses; ours the gain if we often take the time to turn off from the way of sorrow to eat the bread of life in the Groves of Gladness.