

THIS WAY LIES HAPPINESS.

BY ANNIE MARION MAC LEAN.

PHILOSOPHERS and fools alike have ever been on a quest for happiness; some have found it for themselves; others are groping along the way. Life must yield contentment or it has been lived in vain. And contentment is happiness.

This is not a digest of philosophical theories on the subject of how to attain happiness; it is a simple story of how one person found the road thereto when the gates seemed closed.

A few years ago all the seemingly desirable things in the world were wrested from me by disease. After the paroxysms of the first months had passed, and the hope of restoration vanished, I saw myself a derelict by the roadside. The present was a time of horror; the future black despair. Death was not to solve the problem; my sentence was life servitude in suffering. Wild tumults raged within; my universe was chaos. The cherished activities of preceding years were to be mine no more; there was only a dreary waste of drab existence ahead. With the realization of the full import of this situation, there finally came to me a practical knowledge of the power of the human will to control one's outlook on life. When once I faced the facts, I set about gradually reconstructing my view-point. Since life for me henceforth must be confined within infinitesimal physical limits, I sought re-adjustment. I who had gone through the world with winged feet must henceforth be only an onlooker with a narrow field of vision. But I vaguely realized that while life remained, interest in things without should not be relinquished. A new outlook tower must therefore be erected. To rear a new edifice one needs something on which to build. I had memories of dear dead days and friendships and intellectual interests. This way the light entered. Physical

wreckage is sad, but a broken spirit beating against the iron bars of circumstance is a sorer sight. Recognition of this truth was a harbinger of happiness. The body may be enchained, but the spirit may be free. The mind shall not be denied its joys.

Such thoughts came to me suddenly with vivifying force at the end of a tempestuous period during which I had realized, in all its stark horror, that the life which was of importance to me had gone out on a wild sea. In addition to this I was then engulfed in a great personal sorrow. It was as though a voice within had said, "You are the captain of your soul and you can guide your craft anew; happiness remains, only the emphasis is changed; people are here to be concerned about, and there still is something you can do, while underneath it all there is a purpose." Moments of illumination come to us all. Mine came at that time and I realized that a broken life could have its satisfactions. Happiness was then in the offing. Looking back through the years that have intervened since my mind was first soaked in desolation and despair, I am charmed with the vista of peaceful pleasures. For this reason I want to formulate for others the simple principles that saved the day for me. There is nothing new about them except their application to a given case, and for this reason they may bear re-statement.

1. Dejection is the lot of a sodden soul and has little to do with physical conditions or material things. "I am the captain of my soul." Mastery is mine when I recognize this truth. I do not claim that the human will can effect bodily changes. If it could, I would not be seeking an adjustment to disability; there would be no disability. The will, however, can determine the mental reaction to adverse physical conditions and make life worth while in spite of them.

Happiness is contentment, and contentment is adaptation. How to make our adaptation then is the problem. It can be done. The fabled quest for the shirt of the happiest man in the kingdom profited nothing. He was found to be shirtless. He had "adapted" himself without a shirt because he had a singing spirit. I may never more feel the good ground beneath my feet, but no one can keep me from traversing the wide spaces in imagination. Contact with the cool earth is for others; projection of a spirit along glad paths is mine because I will it so. I am no longer buffeted about by vain regrets of what might have been; I am buoyed up by what can be.

An aged man once called on me and his first question was, "Do you get anything out of life?" "Yes," said I, "do you?" He replied, "Of course, but that is different. You are helpless while I am free to come and go." He did not know that my spirit goes adventuring into regions he knows not of. I would not change places with him though he can stagger from his limousine to my door. He broods first that death approaches and then because it does not come when neither matters. He worries when some stocks rise, and when others fall. Such things are beyond my ken but they swamp that traveler's soul. The invalid journeys along over a hard road, sometimes very rough in places, but if he will look at the scenery along the way, he will find that it is often good. To jog along and not see things is the lot of a sodden spirit, but to suffer and bump and jolt and see, that is adventure of a high order.

2. Happiness is everywhere for the taking. There are those who travel far for happiness when, if they only knew, it is just around the corner, often hidden in the trivial. My friend on pleasure bent is chasing the ever receding horizon in his high power car and overlooks my joys. I see the crocus in the way-side park, the anemone in the grass, the sparrow in the snow, the wren building in the springtime, the spider walking its tight rope, and the ant running around its hill. These delightfully intimate sights are mine, while my friend, speeding over long stretches of road, sees only gasoline stations. I, too, should like to wing through space, yet I find adventure by the roadside. That dignified wolf hound strolling down the street is my friend, and the sportive young setter chewing the last bit of his master's galosh entertains me by the hour. The ownerless cur making its way among the garbage pails is full of interest, too, and the alley cat is wise as wise can be. The pony tethered in the corner lot is a comforting sort, and so are all the children and the grown-ups along the way. Never a dull minute do I have. My tortured body writhes at jolts, but we cannot turn back, for farther on our friend, the gray squirrel, is waiting for us with waving tail. He knows we have some nuts and it would never do to disappoint him. And Bruce, the proud Airedale, guarding his master's gate, knows I have a little bone for him. To have someone watch for your coming, ah, that is life! I know some haughty spirit is saying that I am much concerned with the common-place, and am distorting the values of life. My values are not distorted. Real happiness lies in garnering glory from the commonplace. Adventure into things afar is more spectacular; the

enchantment of distance entralls us, but it has no more of witchery than the wayside paths. Life among the little things is the common lot, and the one who fails to find enjoyment in this is stupid indeed.

3. The world is full of friendly people. Constant contact with others is one of the great deprivations of a person condemned to inactivity, but he can learn that there is surprising interest in merely watching the world go by. Meetings with people in unexpected places frequently yield abundant enjoyment. I am thinking of hospital sojourns, for example, and the free, untrammelled words that fall spontaneously from the lips of those returning from the land of ether. They are always refreshing. Never shall I forget the day the pious churchman called out to the listening walls from beneath his enveloping sheet that he used the home mission funds in a poker game. To me it was an intriguing declaration, but to the white-robed creatures flitting about it passed unheeded; yet later, when a girlish voice confided coyly that she loved Tom, they were convulsed. The mere matter of making off with church funds was grim prose to them compared with the poetry of loving Tom. A woman once called out to those of us still conscious, on the passing carts, that her husband was a good man, next to God, but Oh, how he got on her nerves? Merriment is a happiness potion and I quaff it where I can. This is my inclination and it helps me on my way.

Even though one is shut within four walls there are people all about; they come on the printed page, and fill up the lonely places. One can keep a suffering body under by listening to the friends in books. All the enthusiasms of life are there. There is interest, too, in the people who pass. They go their more or less mysterious ways, and I am off in interested speculation. Freed from the emotions born of competitive life, child-like, I look upon all people as my friends. And the cultivation of friends is, I believe, the main business of Life. It is the extension of the friendly spirit alone that can save the world from greed. And in this the physically handicapped can participate. Children playing on the street are also a connecting link with life; their joyous abandon communicates itself to me, and I am building castles, too. Then there is always the delight in the real friends whom one cannot often see because they are burdened with their own activities and worn by the frictions of life; but the knowledge that old friends always remember and sometimes come is an elixir. Through friends, I keep

my grip on the great world. I participate through them in its joys and sorrows. Through friends my horizon widens. And I feared when I was stricken that it would narrow to intellectual suffocation. Stereotyped forms of happiness have us in their grip till some cataclysm gives us a glimpse of new patterns. By an exercise of will beauty can be read into new combinations.

4. Something to do is a milestone on the road to happiness. To one who has had work that was a pleasure, this is a platitude; to him who has toiled without joy, it is stupid sentimentalism. But to one who has gone through the crucible of suffering, and is no longer able to grace an occupation, there emerges the strong belief that even the flimsiest avocation can contribute to mental well being. No human creature devoid of any task can reap enjoyment from the days that pass. Work is one of the permanent satisfactions of life. Something to do that links us to the rest of mankind is a desideratum. It is only through work that life can be more than the mere passing of time. An activity, however frail, has its blessed uses. Some one thing that is mine to do makes a personage of me; it dignifies me in my own eyes. To use a fly swatter effectively might preserve a man's reason. I hug my little job to my heart and go smilingly along my stony and narrow path. And thus I find happiness. Persons ambitious for high position will regard me scornfully, and scoff at the value of trifling things done in obscure places. In the end there is no difference. Happiness lies in doing acceptably the thing that can be done. I know that a great content steals into the human heart when one makes even a slender contribution to the work of the world. There is in addition the glad warmth of spirit that comes from attempting. Not to attempt means to let the mental powers atrophy; it eventually means intellectual death. Keeping the lamps of the mind trimmed and burning in spite of a disabled body requires courage, and nothing supplies the needed courage better than work.

If I am the captain of my soul and direct my own course; if I gather happiness from the little things that lie along my path; if I find joy in friendship; and if a small task exalts my spirit, is my happiness thereby complete? In answer to this question, I am constrained to add another link in the chain of my contentment, and this is

5. The recognition of a purpose in creation. Life came from chaos, but it proceeds to order. The universe itself is my evidence. All things have their place in the scheme of the whole;

the body though crushed by disease doubtless fills its niche. Dead leaves have their uses. With this I am satisfied, and happiness is mine.

Life is a resplendent thing; we can not withdraw from participation in it unless reason totters on its throne. It is cowardly to hide behind physical ills or sorrows. I am a part of a reasoned social process, and I shall not shirk responsibility even though disease has me by the throat. Physical disaster brought me to the parting of the ways. On one side was bleak despair; on the other was compensation, yes and joy, else what is a will for? Surgeons' futile knives may cut and cut again but they cannot take away the capacity for happiness.

Now as I look about, I see clearly that the things which have brought me calm, will bring peace to any traveler. I passed through my Gethsemane to find some guiding principles to carry me over the hard places, and I found sure milestones on the road to happiness. The recipe is good for all in health or in affliction. It sometimes takes a cataclysm to make us see things in their true perspective and learn that the simplest experiences of the race contain the essentials of deep content. They are quite apart from achievements that win recognition; their very simplicity enthralls us. Life is something sweet and strange if we would make it so, too precious to be lost before the depths of Lethe engulf us. Suffering is not futile if it can teach us that beside even the still waters lies happiness. -