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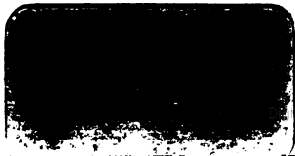
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AGNES REPLIER AT WORK.

AGNES REPPLIER

A Memoir

By Her Niece

EMMA REPPLIER
(Mrs. Lightner Witmer)



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DEDICATION

*To my Distinguished Aunt,
To Her Captivating Humor,
Her Wisdom without Conceit
And Her Wit without Malice*

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I

CHILDHOOD

Agnes Repplier used to say, glancing at me quizzically, "I love you in spite of your being my niece." Beneath this banter, there was a note of genuine surprise that so agreeable an association could possibly stem from the family tree. The kinship, thus disparaged, could not be ignored, and it lent to our close and happy intercourse a certain formality and reserve. This pattern did not change until my aunt was over eighty, when some life-long inhibitions dissolved and she spoke intimately of many things, including her early life. These moments were unfortunately rare. The most amusing and entertaining of talkers, and endowed with an extraordinary memory, she was bored by her own life, which she considered colorless and uninteresting. Those brief autobiographical notes which preface her book, *Eight Decades*, could not be briefer nor less revealing. She lacked the human urge to talk about herself.

Occasionally, she spoke of her parents, so that my grandfather, hitherto a somewhat shadowy figure, emerged as handsome, amiable, rather weak, and indulgent to his children. He adored his second wife, Agnes' mother, a plain, clever, ambitious and self-willed woman, to whom he left most decisions. Grandfather Repplier was French in race and appearance, his father

and uncles having emigrated to this country from Lorraine to escape high taxes. His wife's ancestry was German, and both were Catholics.

Perhaps it was her French blood that lent to my aunt's pen its delicate irony and wit, to her conversation, its gaiety, and to her taste, an aversion to reforms and easy enthusiasms. Maybe her debt to her German forebears was a rigid and curiously Protestant conscience, which suffered neither pleasure nor pain to divert her from an uncompromising pattern of work.

Agnes was the second of five children, a delicate, sallow little girl, with large, light blue eyes. Passive and yielding on the surface, she had a capacity for passionate emotion quite unsuspected by her elders. With some justification, the family considered her dull, for she had passed her seventh birthday without learning to read.

In the nursery stood a large, old-fashioned bookcase, holding such treasures as the *Arabian Nights*, *Robinson Crusoe* and *Hans Andersen's Fairy Tales*, books left behind by my father, her half-brother, George, when he ran away from home.

Listening to the stories read aloud, Agnes discovered "all that was lovely in life," but to her mind there was still no connection between the dull symbols called letters and the delight that lay between the covers of these books.

Mrs. Repplier struggled day after day with iron determination, small patience and less success, to teach Agnes to read. A friend of the family, listening to the apparently losing battle, remarked that it was a pity to waste

so much time and energy on a child who was obviously deficient and could not learn. To this defeatist, Mrs. Replier replied relentlessly—"Agnes will learn to read or perish in the attempt."

In the end, it was strategy and not force which won. From the day when reading aloud to her was forbidden, she began a slow and painful progress in a book shamefully misnamed *Reading Without Tears*.

To quote her own words, "It was a brown book and had on its cover a deceptive picture of two stout and unclothed cupids, holding the volume open between them, and making an ostentatious pretense of enjoyment. Young as I was, I grew cynical over the title of that picture, for the torrents of tears I shed blotted them daily from my sight." There was another child, destined to make history, Winston Churchill, who remembered this Reader with strong repugnance.

Agnes was eleven years old before she could tell time, and every one commented on such ignorance, yet no one ever offered to explain to her that somewhat complicated process.

However, if she lacked aptitude for reading and later for arithmetic, and could not tell time, Agness possessed a phenomenal memory. When she was six, her mother, a Baltimorean and an ardent Rebel, taught her with ease a lengthy poem, "The Guerillas," a violent and bloody attack on the Yankees. That same year on a visit to her aunt in Baltimore, she was introduced to an elderly stranger.

"Now, Agnes," said her aunt, "you have the good fortune to take part in an historic occasion. Mr. Wallace

is the author of 'The Guerillas,' and he will listen to you recite his poem." Whereupon she was lifted to a table in the center of the room, and, letter perfect, repeated in her childish treble the long, fanatical tirade.

Though it took Agnes three years to master the art of reading, she found small reward for all her efforts in the juvenile literature of the period. By the time she was ten, she had rejected such insipid fare and was reading with absorbed interest and not a little bewilderment, Hayward's translation of *Faust*.

Her mother's discipline, though stern and unyielding, did not extend to books. In the library, blissfully forgotten, she could read for hours. Writing about this time, she said, "Having never been told there was such a thing as forbidden fruit in literature, I was spared that alert curiosity concerning it which is one of the most unpleasant results of our present guarded system. Moreover, we have Goethe's word for it that Byron is not as immoral as the newspapers, and certainly he is more agreeable reading."

From the beginning, Agnes disliked all the domestic arts, and learned at an early age to profit from her complete ineptitude. In those pre-telephone days, children were the customary messengers, the fetchers and carriers, but not Agnes. If money were involved, she was apt to lose it, and just as often managed to lose herself. After kindly strangers had brought her home more than once to her disgusted family, this particular attempt to make her useful was abandoned.

Dusting was the only household task finally entrusted to her care, and she was not slow to appreciate its pos-

sibilities. In the parlor, she gravitated to the center table, on whose lower shelf lay certain precious volumes, among them Byron's poems. Of them she was to write, "Not that mysterious and malignant mountain which rose frowning from the sea, and drew all ships shattered to its feet, was more irresistible than this brown, bulky Byron. I could not pass it by. My dusting never got beyond the table where it lay, but sitting crumpled on the floor, with the enchanted volume in my lap, I speedily forgot everything in the world save only the wandering Childe, the Corsair of Mazeppa, or Manfred, best loved of that dark group."

Words grew ever more fascinating. Going to Confession when she was about nine, and wishing further enlightenment on the possible choice of transgressions, she consulted a printed list of sins and was strongly attracted to a particular one, by virtue of its appearance and sound. The fact that she hadn't the faintest idea what it meant, merely added to its desirability. Her retentive verbal memory tucked it away, and when the moment came, she confessed to the sin of sensuality. Her confessor inquired her age and then the word's meaning. When she was only able to answer his first question, he advised her in future to confess only the sins she understood.

Her comprehension of all she read lagged considerably behind her enjoyment, and there were often puzzling events which she solved as best she could. She noticed that the loss of the heroine's chastity revolved persistently, if mysteriously, around beds and bedrooms. Consequently, during some domestic crisis, when her

brother, aged five, was put in her bed for one night, she was consumed with forebodings.

Lying on the extreme outer edge of the mattress, as far removed from him as possible, she wrestled with the problem, deciding at last, before she fell asleep, that if a baby should result from this unwanted proximity, she would just say that it was only her little brother, Louis.

To the child, Agnes, her immediate world was a drab place, and offered her little, a walk in the dull city streets, skipping rope on her own pavement, and a patchwork quilt, which she was well aware would never be finished. Of this period, Miss Repplier once said, "My mother seemed to think that because I had no musical talent, and never in my life was able to tell one note—nor indeed one tune—from another, I must by way of adjustment, have artistic qualities. I was put to draw because I could not play or sing. An all-round incapacity was, in those primitive days, a thing not wholly understood."

A newspaper clipping, yellow with age, probably written in her twenties, and signed "A. R." reveals a lively memory of childish absorption in any happening, to break the monotony of the days. It tells of two little girls in the house across the street, who planted a tiny vine in a bit of earth beside their four marble front steps, put a fragile rail around it, and tied strings up to the top of the parlor window, on which it might climb. Each morning the little girls brought out a small, green watering pot and watered the vine, and each evening they brought their mother out to admire the vine's minute growth. It prospered under this tender care,

and some weeks later, its bright green leaves against the red bricks made the whole dull block more cheerful.

Agnes, and her older sister, Mary, were not allowed to visit the little girls, because their grandfather had peddled tins, but they, too, adored the vine, watched from their windows its steady progress up the strings to the parlor shutter, and planned some day to possess a vine just like it.

One fateful day, Mary, watching as usual at the window, screamed to Agnes to come quick. As Agnes tells it, "I rushed to the window. There, trotting sociably along, were two little goats, the only ones ever to be seen on that street. They ran stolidly along, their heads close together. Suddenly they caught sight of the vine. Here was the one oasis in this desert of brick and mortar, a lovely dinner spread for their especial benefit. Hastily they began to nibble, and while Mary and I stood transfixed with horror, the green leaves disappeared one by one down their hungry throats. With dreadful agility the goats thrust their heads over the ridiculous little railing and nibbled close to the ground. Then, standing on their hind legs, they managed to reach up to the very tallest stem. Two minutes later, the meal was finished, the little goats trotted contentedly away, leaving behind only a slender stalk, as bare as a walking stick. At this fateful moment, the little girls appeared on the steps, carrying the watering pot between them. They stared in blank dismay, while the water trickled unnoticed down the front of their frocks. Mary could bear it no longer. She flung up the

window, and, forgetting all about the tin peddler, thrust out her head and shrieked,

“Two horrid goats ate it!”

“What?” cried the children, incredulously.

“Goats! goats!” yelled Mary.

A stern voice behind us spoke our names with disapproval, ‘Mary, Agnes!’ Drawing in our heads, we closed the window with a jerk.”

Whenever possible, Agnes escaped from the world about her, which she generally disliked, to the world of imaginings, to the breathless re-reading of a well-loved tale, or to the discovery of a new one. For this intense and precocious enjoyment of books, she paid with many fears. Her fear of the supernatural was closely associated with her fear of the dark. Occasionally, these fears merged. On the wall back of her bed in the convent school, there hung a small oval mirror. Due doubtless to ghostly tales of weird apparitions seen in mirrors, Agnes conceived for this innocent object a secret terror. Each night she turned its face to the wall, but safe in bed, she was haunted by the same dread—that she had not turned it.

“Then, shivering with cold and fright,” she writes, “I would creep out of bed, and with averted head and tightly closed eyes, I would assure myself of what I knew already, that its harmless back alone confronted me.”

At home, she shrank from that inescapable moment when she would be sent to bed, up the two black, interminable flights of stairs, and along the equally black hallway to her solitary room on the third floor, a per-

ilous journey, haunted by all the ghosts and witches and murderers who had been so absorbing and exciting to read about in daylight. Her panic increased with every step, and stayed with her until sleep brought oblivion. So strong were these childhood terrors and her memory of them, that in her old age she always had a night light burning in her room.

Once I asked her why she had not told her fears to her parents. She answered that twice she overheard her mother say to a visitor, "You know, Agnes is very brave. She sleeps all alone in the third story." After this rare bit of commendation, wild horses could not have dragged the truth from her. Beauty and valor were the two qualities she adored; all her favorite characters possessed them, and if she could never have beauty, she would at least try for courage.

The world Agnes sought to escape from was not only dull; occasionally it was grim. Thus, she looked forward to her seventh birthday with apprehension and fear, for she had been told, and firmly believed, that after this date, she must assume full responsibility for her own sins. The whole of her seventh birthday was darkened by the dread of this impending obligation. Her mother did nothing to lighten a small girl's fears. Pious and uncompromising, she had certain inflexible rules on the bringing up of children, all of them, according to her daughter's mature judgment, wrong.

"My mother," she once said, "was nevertheless surprised at the small difference in results between her highly disciplined children and the offspring of her neglectful friends."

One morning, when Agnes was about eight, the family was gathered at the breakfast table. Mrs. Replier opened a letter and read of the sudden death of a friend, a young and brilliant man. Suddenly she burst into uncontrolled sobbing, and meeting the curious, frightened stares of her two little girls, she exclaimed passionately, "John dead, and here sit these two useless children!"

Mary was thirteen, of a phlegmatic temper and not easily disturbed, but the sensitive spirit of Agnes received the full impact of the blow and never forgot it. Other slighter incidents confirmed the belief, acquired that day, that her mother would have been happier without her, or indeed without any children.

Once, after a summer holiday at Andalusia, a friend asked Mrs. Replier if she had enjoyed herself, and Agnes heard her reply, "As much as is possible with children along!"

Apparently, no moments of maternal tenderness offset a chronic state of disapproval, with the result that for years, Agnes' secret desire was to be an orphan, a wish intensified by a poem in her *Reader*, beginning:

"Why wouldst thou leave me, O gentle child,
To return to thy forest so dark and wild?"

Succeeding verses revealed so much tenderness, and such dependence on the orphan's love, that they aroused a great longing in Agnes' starved young heart. She dreamed of owning a puppy, or, better still, a kitten, but she would have welcomed a rabbit, a canary, or even a mouse. Many were the secret trips she made after

dark to the mouse-trap in the pantry, in order to release the victim. Unfortunately, Mrs. Repplier disliked all animals in equal measure, so none were ever allowed under her roof. Agnes had an unfailing sympathy and affection for animals, and in maturity she never overlooked a chance to save them from neglect and cruelty.

In an article on her childhood which appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1938, Miss Repplier describes her passionate attachment to an object of surpassing inutility, a diminutive gilt chair, which she deemed too precious for the hazards of the nursery and so kept on the top shelf of her mother's closet, to be taken down and enjoyed on rare occasions.

One day, she looked for it in vain and was told it had been given to a charity bazaar. Agnes was stricken and in tears. "But it was mine," she cried passionately, to which her mother replied, "Nothing is yours unless I permit you to retain it."

My aunt was very old when she said to me, "My mother was perfectly just, but her justice was untempered by mercy. No one loved or tried to understand me, and I think I was an interesting child, if any one had cared enough to find out."

As sometimes happens with plain women, Mrs. Repplier placed an inordinate emphasis on physical beauty, and was wont to speak openly and disparagingly of their looks to both her daughters. Occasionally, she combined humor with her criticism.

When Mary was invited to a children's fancy-dress dance, her mother studied her a moment before remarking, "You really have only two good points—your legs

and your hair. Perhaps you should go as Lady Godiva." In the end, Mary went as a peppermint stick.

After the birth of their sister, Kate, both children remembered hearing their mother exclaim, "At last God has given me a beautiful child!" Kate died in infancy, but the stress laid on good looks was to influence Agnes all her life, disgust her with her own interesting, if not beautiful, face, and often influence her shrewd and balanced judgment.

Speaking of a beautiful and amiable playmate at her convent school, she said, "Perhaps we should all be sweet-tempered, if we could feel sure that people looked at us with pleasure." Her lack of beauty was a life-long regret, and whenever possible, she avoided looking in a mirror. There was, too, her often expressed belief that Fate, however cruel, could not really harm a woman blessed with naturally curly hair.

When Agnes was about eight, a cousin took her to see an acting version of Monk Lewis's *Maniac*, later called *The Captive*, which was withdrawn from the stage in England when Mrs. Litchfield recited it, because too many women had hysterics and too many husbands protested. Agnes sat frozen with horror and fear, horror for the poor, chained captive, and fear for herself, in a world where a sane person could be imprisoned as a maniac.

"The child looks frightened," said her cousin's companion.

"Frightened?" echoed her cousin incredulously, "What was there to be frightened about? But Agnes is just like that. If it was anything real, she would not

mind. I saw her the other day, watching a mouse running across the floor, and she actually seemed to be enjoying the sight."

Agnes was nine before she saw her first real play, *East Lynne*. Except for a child who died in a little bed, she understood nothing that happened on the stage.

As a mature lover of the theater, she always regretted that first experience and wished it could have been simpler and more thrilling, like *The Siege of Lucknow*, for example.

Convinced that a first play made an unforgettable impression, she was confirmed in this belief when, in answer to her query, five out of seven Bostonians replied, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, while the majority of Philadelphians said, "Edwin Booth in *Hamlet* at the old Walnut Street Theater," which, to quote her own words, "was, to us Philadelphia children, the paradise of delight, the abode of felicity!"

Going to the theater in those days usually meant going to hear Shakespeare. His plays were constantly being produced by Fechter, Booth, Davenport and Forrest. Together with other little girls, Agnes used to walk up and down Ninth Street on Saturday afternoons, "in the mad but never realized hope of seeing Booth emerge from the stage entrance."

There was also the Arch Street Theatre, run by Mrs. John Drew, where she saw Joseph Jefferson over and over again in *Rip van Winkle*, and a never-to-be-forgotten Charlotte Cushman in *Guy Mannering*.

My aunt was wont to say that the three most beautiful things she had ever seen on the stage were Rignold as

Henry V, leading his soldiers to the breach before Harfleur; Maurice Barrymore, flawless as Captain Absolute, and Adelaide Neilson as Juliet. Once, during a performance of this last, when Romeo offers a bribe to the nurse, who, though protesting, accepts it, a wag in the gallery called out, "O, Harrisburg!" The roar of laughter that followed was so loud that Miss Neilson's curiosity was aroused, and after the play she asked, "Whatever is a Harrisburg?"

When Agnes was fourteen, she learned Juliet's part by heart, with the sole purpose of "seeing again, in fancy, Adelaide Neilson, as beautiful a thing as the intoxicating old stage moon had ever shone upon." She never forgot such moments—Jefferson's wandering glance, his slow speech, his shuffling gait as Rip; Charlotte Cushman in the strangest medley of rags, as Meg Merriles, crooning over Henry Bertram. These memories enhanced her natural love of the drama, so that the theater remained for her to the end a place of enchantment.

Certain grand operas she enjoyed for their dramatic content, but she was tone deaf, and so, all her life, was shut out of the great world of music. She could not see how anyone would prefer an operetta to a play. To her, song was at best only an imperfect mode of speech.

II

SCHOOLS

It was April 22, 1865, and Agnes had just passed her tenth birthday, when the maid servant ran into the room, waving a paper with the news of Lincoln's assassination. Mr. Repplier snatched the paper and buried himself in the incredible words, tossing short answers to his agitated wife's questions. Agnes was too well disciplined to interrupt, or to tempt by a sound the risk of banishment.

Of her parents, she once said, "They did not seek intercourse with me, and I instinctively avoided all needless intercourse with them. If I were ignorant, I remained ignorant; if I were puzzled, I reached an erroneous conclusion and held to it."

So she sat very still, trying to piece together from her father's broken ejaculations the tragic story. One phrase—"he leaped on to the stage"—stuck in her mind. She retained a vivid picture of a stagecoach, the assassin leaping on to the step and hanging on desperately, as the horses broke into a gallop. It was some years before the true picture replaced this first false impression with its recurring, unanswered question, "Why didn't they stop the horses?"

When she was nearing her eleventh year, Agnes went as a boarder to Eden Hall Convent in Torresdale. She once remarked that, compared to the discipline in her

own home, the convent school might be described as a libertine's heaven.

"If ever a ten-year-old was fitted for a communal life," she wrote later, "I was that happy child," and she gladly exchanged all her beloved characters in romance and history for the flesh and blood companions at school. Several of these were to prove life-long friends, and one of them, Elizabeth Robins (Mrs. Joseph Pennell) was never to have a close rival in her affection.

"All our inspirations, all the novel features of our life, owed their origin to her. The fertility of her mind was inexhaustible," she wrote in maturity, with all the remembered enthusiasm of girlhood.

Of the seven little friends who appear in Miss Repplier's book, *In Our Convent Days*, Elizabeth was the acknowledged leader, on the strength of her abiding common sense, the apt and biting dryness of her remarks, and her unending resourcefulness. It was from her they learned the completely dead-pan expression with which they met any unusual situation. Elizabeth had years of practice in this art, for she began going to boarding schools at the tender age of seven.

"Childish even for our years," wrote Miss Repplier, "though our years were very few, and preserved mercifully from that familiar and deadening intercourse with adults, which might have resulted in our being sensible and well-informed, we cultivated our imaginations instead of our minds. The very bareness of our surroundings, the absence of all appliances for play, flung us back unreservedly upon the illimitable resources of invention. We were always under observation, but the

secret city wherein we dwelt was trodden by no other foot than ours."

Though the religious traditions and influences surrounding them naturally colored their play, they often injected into their games original ideas and interpretations. Thus, in depicting the "Temptation of St. Anthony," one of the players, a little French girl, created her own conception of the devil, which culminated in a flying leap over the prostrate hermit's head, a performance more startling than seductive. It was some time before the Mistress of Recreation became aware of the innovation, but when at last she did, it was sternly suppressed. To quote Miss Repplier's comment, "The primitive humor of the Miracle Play was not in favor at the Convent."

Torresdale was only a few miles from Philadelphia, and wealthy parents often drove out to the school in their private carriages. Energetic parents made the trip by street car and train. Mrs. Repplier, who was neither wealthy nor energetic, stayed at home. Occasionally she sent her husband (my grandfather), who did not much mind the wearisome journey, but was embarrassed at having to talk to nuns, with whom he had little in common. If they had praised his daughter, he would have been pleased, but Agnes was not the kind of child in whom teachers take delight.

Agnes was going on twelve when she made a secret and solemn pilgrimage with her friends, Elizabeth and Marie, to St. Joseph's shrine, the object being, to pray for husbands. Their offerings to the Saint were meagre.

Elizabeth had ten cents, Marie, six pennies and a car ticket, and Agnes, a nickel.

"And," said my aunt, telling me about this in her eighties, "we were rewarded in just ratio to our gifts. Elizabeth received the cleverest husband (Joseph Pennell), Marie, a handsome one, and I, none at all."

Revelling in the drama of weddings, they chose famous names and titles from history and went through the ceremony of marriage, three brides and three grooms; while Annie, the seventh and left over, reluctantly accepted the role of priest and read the service shamefully, being terrified lest she was committing a sin.

Plays acted by the big girls formed the chief diversion of their convent life, preferably historical dramas, full of great names and deeds, and, of course, with all sexual love and courtship omitted. This omission had small effect on their popularity. Recalling those days, Agnes wrote of them, "I looked forward to these performances with joyful excitement, I listened steeped in delight, I dreamed of them afterwards for weeks." The power exerted over her imagination by this unreal world was the cause of her most spectacular failure.

She had been given a small part in a school play, *Isabella Of Castile*. To her discomfiture, she found it impossible to translate into action the depth and ardor of her emotions. The words came out tame and halting, the gestures, stiff and awkward. She worked hard to remedy these defects.

The great night of the performance arrived, and she listened spell-bound to the unfolding of the drama. The moment came for her to whisper her two lines, "Quick,

quick, let us begone. To linger here is death!" But Agnes was no longer there to say the words. She was far away in the Spanish Queen's pavilion, living the tragic story, whose power over her no amount of repetitions and rehearsals had been able to diminish.

Not the glares of her fellow actors, nor the nun's loud promptings from the wings were able to break the spell and restore her to reality. Her dramatic debut ended in humiliation and reproaches.

For the acting diversion of their own small group, Elizabeth overcame her apathy to any form of composition, and wrote a curtain-raiser about a robber chief. When this had been performed to satiety, she wrote with the assistance of Agnes, *The Youth Of Michael Angelo*, dramatized from a story in *The Boyhood Of Great Painters*. This was no doubt Agnes' first literary venture, but there was also, deep hidden in her desk, "unseen by mortal eye save mine, an impassioned soliloquy of Jane Eyre in blank verse, which was almost volcanic in its fervor, and which perished unknown the following year."

Joining the Society of St. Aloysius, with the particular and lively expectation of sharing its secrets, she was dejected to find there were none. Pupils were supposed to advance from St. Aloysius to the Society of Angels, and finally to the Society of the Virgin, but Agnes failed to advance.

"What?" I said teasingly. "You were stuck in the Society of St. Aloysius?"

"Yes, I stuck there," she answered, "just as I stuck in fractions."

Naturally timid, deceptively docile, and easily abashed, Agnes could show an amazing fortitude and independence where friendship and loyalty were involved.

When she was twelve, neither parental authority nor the august Mistress General of the Convent could force her to sever her friendship with Lilly Milton. Mrs. Milton had been divorced more than once, and Mrs. Repplier had written Agnes, directing her not to make a special friend of the little girl, because she was not likely to see her after leaving the convent.

Agnes, finding Lilly as sweet and innocent as a kitten, and as a friend completely satisfactory, paid no heed to this admonition.

Owing to the convent's French custom of reading all the letters written to or by the pupils, the Mistress General, Madame Bouron, was aware of Agnes' intransigence. She waited ten days in vain for any sign of obedience to the maternal dictum, and then told Lilly of Mrs. Repplier's letter.

Agnes, puzzled by her friend's sudden coldness, extracted the truth from Lilly, and immediately told her it was a lie and there had been no such letter. Lilly, nothing loath, believed her. But at Confession, Agnes only received absolution after promising to do one of two things within twenty-four hours—tell the truth to Lilly, or tell Madame Bouron what she had done.

There was no wavering. With considerable trepidation, she sought out the Mistress General and poured out her story in one breath.

Madame Bouron, finding she could not move Agnes,

and that the affair, carried to its logical conclusion, would mean expulsion from the school, decided to take on herself the onus of the lie. She dismissed an admiring and sobbing Agnes with these words, "You have been false to your mother, to whom you owe respect and obedience; you have been false to me and you have been false to God, but you have been true to your friend."

She was equally stubborn where her known rights were infringed. When she was about six, Jane, a neighbor's child, was brought by her nurse to play. In the course of the visit, Agnes saw her toy dog confiscated by Jane. Agnes reported this to the nurse, who asked her charge, "Did you take her toy dog?"

"No," said Jane, stoutly.

"You see," said the nurse, "she didn't take it."

But Agnes was unconvinced. When the visitors prepared to leave, she followed them to the front door and made her last stand.

"If you please," she said to the nurse, "my toy dog is in Jane's pocket." It was, and she got it back.

Although devout by nature, Agnes could not truthfully be called pious. Accepting whole-heartedly the Catholic fundamentals, she was not deeply concerned with lesser details. At Eden Hall, she was far from sympathetic with the hallowed custom of doing without something desired, "of stopping short on the verge of an innocent gratification," known in convent parlance as "making an act." She brought to bear on this religious practice the same inexorable common sense which marked her approach to worldly matters. She decided that, carried to its logical conclusion, the constant prac-

tice of Acts would deprive life of everything that made it worth living. This was another early manifestation of her independence of thought and spirit of rebellion, which were intrinsic traits in her character.

In this era of modern education, such minor revolts might have been passed over, but it is not surprising that in a Catholic school of that period, the sum total of her small rebellions was sufficient in the end to cause her expulsion from Eden Hall.

Her mother's anger at this disgrace took the form of a persistent attempt to destroy Agnes' self-conceit, which she believed was at the root of her daughter's acts of insubordination. Mrs. Repplier was adept in deflating the smallest display of adolescent assurance. A guest, hearing Agnes express herself freely on some subject, remarked, "Your daughter has strong opinions."

"Yes, indeed," replied her mother, "in spite of their being worthless."

Agnes appreciated this reply, even though she was its victim, for she quoted it as proof of her mother's cleverness. Her own gift for repartee must have profited from this battle of the wills and the wits.

The following autumn, Mrs. Repplier enrolled her daughter, then fourteen, at the Agnes Irwin School, which had just begun what was destined to become a long and successful career in Philadelphia. Here, at first, she must have sadly missed her convent life, and felt alone and strange in this small, homogeneous Protestant group. Judging by my own later experience, a new pupil was practically certain to be asked three questions by her classmates, "Where do you live?"

“What does your father do?” “What church do you go to?” Depending on the answers, you were apt to be graded socially.

When Agnes was asked the last question, and replied, “The Catholic,” her interlocutor looked dumbfounded, but recovering herself quickly, she said with a nervous giggle, “Of course. Just for a moment I thought you meant the *Roman Catholic*.”

Incidents of this kind were hurtful, but the arresting personality of the school’s mistress soon compensated Agnes for all shortcomings.

A worthy descendent of Benjamin Franklin, Agnes Irwin was a dedicated scholar as well as a social and intellectual power in Philadelphia. She was a forceful, original, autocratic and impatient teacher, sometimes sarcastic, often witty, but never dull.

One remembers the small girl who had not bothered to even glance at her French history lesson.

“Why,” Miss Irwin asked her, “was Napoleon sent to St. Helena?”

Squirming under those eagle gray eyes, the victim, forced to draw on her own limited experience, muttered, “For his health.”

“Really?” said the biting voice. “As a health resort, it was singularly unsuccessful.”

It was in Miss Irwin’s classroom that the great events of history came alive, and works of genius assumed a place of supreme importance. Her austere distaste for sentimentality and every form of emotional excess, found in young Agnes a sympathetic soil. Much later, the seed sown then was to flower in this pupil’s work.

Moreover, the constant emphasis on men and women of genius, intensified in Agnes a passionate worship of the Immortals in literature, and a determination to emulate them, even though she had small hope of ever joining their ranks.

Agnes, with her strong bent towards hero worship, placed Miss Irwin on a pedestal, before which she never really ceased to kneel. This secret idolatry could not prevent, but rendered all the more puzzling, a clash of wills and an early tragic break, when Agnes was dismissed from the school. The pity of it was that, had Agnes Irwin stooped to conquer, she could have given her talented pupil the knowledge, self-confidence and skill she was to need so sorely in the years ahead.

In Miss Repplier's *Life Of Agnes Irwin*, she speaks of this incident, without disclosing her own identity. "Miss Irwin had spent much time and trouble on a pupil, who gave—so she thought—promise of ability. However busy she might be, she found leisure to read with this girl and steer her straightly on her way. The child, either from incredible perversity, or perhaps because she was discouraged by the total lack of commendation, deliberately rejected the help and refused to correspond with it. She then started to work out her own intellectual salvation, an arduous process, in the course of which she saw plainly the value of the aid she had discarded."

It was unfortunately true that Miss Irwin's many talents as a teacher did not include the ability to praise. Suffering from an excess of criticism at home, Agnes was especially in need of commendation. She was no

doubt pleading her own case when she wrote, "A little pleasure in oneself is pardonable at any age, but blameless, and even salutary, in the young."

Few letters written before 1885 were found among Agnes Repplier's papers, but there was one written on November 9, 1871, which must have been too crucial to destroy and is today too interesting not to print, for it shows that Miss Irwin was greatly troubled in her mind and heart by the drastic decision she had felt obliged to make.

My dear Minnie:

I have wished to hear from yourself in the last three weeks, but as it is, I cannot let you go without one word. I cannot but think you must have thought me right in taking the step I felt compelled to take for the sake of the School and for your own. If I could feel assured that it would be a lesson to you, I should cease to remember the pain it cost me personally, as well as through your mother. But I am not sure of you, Minnie. You do not believe—and yet you might know it—that self-will and perverseness are faults, that they may be indulged to the height of great moral delinquencies, that the attitude of humility is the only one for a learner, not of books but of wisdom, and that the affection that does not hesitate to inflict pain on its nearest and dearest, is not really worth the name. We cannot all be happy or wise or see life as it is, but we can all do the work next our hand and try to make life pleasanter and easier for those with whom we have to live, and a long fulfillment of near duties must make us better able to fulfill the farther ones. And, for my part, I cannot believe that any one

who earnestly strives to do right will not some day know rightly what should be done. The work that lies next you, you know better than I. That you may do it is my earnest wish, and I sometimes think that the child of so many prayers cannot always turn away from the light.

I do not know whether you will be glad or sorry to have this letter. If you take it as it was meant, you will not be vexed with me, for you will know that I am—as I think I have always been—

Your friend

Agnes Irwin

The singularly inappropriate pet name of Minnie was bestowed on my aunt as a child, but she hated it and took back her given name as soon as her own will prevailed, persuading her friend, Elizabeth Robins, to drop her equally inelegant sobriquet of Lizzie.

So it happened that Agnes left the Irwin School after only a year and a half. At first she was angry and resentful, but mixed with this feeling was a certain pride in the harshness and finality of her punishment. The personality of the school's mistress continued, however, to influence her development, and much later Miss Irwin's friendship and pride in her success were among her most cherished laurels. Her early adoration of this teacher was so exaggerated that it extended even to that lady's marked speech defect of pronouncing the letter R like W. Agnes humbly adopted this fault and persisted in it for several years in spite of a certain amount of chaffing from friends and relatives. It was not until she had to address audiences, that all trace of

this acquired lisp disappeared, and she paid strict attention to the advice of the actor, Francis Wilson, who once told her, "Look after your consonants and the vowels will look after themselves."

Mrs. Repplier decided that she had offered her daughter two opportunities to acquire an education, both of which she had rejected, and she was unyielding in her determination not to offer a third. Miss Irwin, though she never suggested taking Agnes back, was still deeply disturbed by so stubborn and drastic a decision, and urged Mrs. Repplier more than once to reconsider, but without avail.

Thus it came about that from the age of fifteen, all the knowledge that Agnes Repplier acquired and all the necessary skill to apply it came from her own efforts. She never underestimated the value of the professional help she had lost. There is a revealing note in her diary written after she had seen the sculptured "Teacher Imparting Instruction" at the Capitol Museum in Rome, "How I wish he could have taught me and looked at me with that strong, tranquil, beautiful face!"

There is a note from Agnes Irwin to her old pupil, written in 1892, à propos of a query as to Agnes Repplier's collegiate experience. "The truth could be simply told," she writes. "You certainly got nothing from a college—and I may say so—nothing from a private school. And surely you cannot think college training a necessity for literary work. After all, it comes back to the old prescription for mixing colors: 'With brains, sir!'"

III

HER FIRST ESSAYS

The first person to arouse in Agnes romantic emotions, hitherto reserved for characters on the stage or in books, was her half-brother and my father, George Repplier.

The year before her birth, finding his father's new wife completely insupportable, George had run away to South America at the age of sixteen, discarding both family and religion. He prospered there in business, and only returned to his country in order to enlist on the Confederate side in the Civil War. Now, in 1869, Agnes saw him for the first time, though she had idealized him in secret, and devoured all the books he left behind in the nursery. Moreover, the errand which brought him, after fifteen years' absence, was nothing if not romantic. He came to beg his father's presence at his wedding, a civil ceremony to be performed by the Mayor of Savannah.

Though she sat silent and ignored in a corner of the room, Agnes was completely happy. Here was a hero in the flesh, handsome, disdainful, spirited, dressed to perfection, with a winning voice and manner, which only partly veiled his natural arrogance. He seemed to her "a creature not of this earth." Byron she had worshipped unseen, but here sat a member of her own family, who in his aspect and quality, was not unlike

the beloved poet. She sensed that here, too, was "a young gentleman of tumultuous passions."

Many months later, Agnes learned to her sorrow that her brother's errand had been in vain. Her father, soft by nature, and especially soft to his first-born, had promised to go to the wedding, but his wife strongly opposed his lending the silent acquiescence of his presence to a civil ceremony. So, the promise was broken and with it the tenuous thread of George's affection for his father.

In this family quarrel, my aunt showed as usual her independence of thought and tenacity of purpose. In 1882, immediately after her mother's death, and while still in deep mourning, she appeared suddenly and without warning in my parents' home in New York. Her purpose was to make peace and offer amity, and the success of her mission brought to me, a little girl of five, the rarest of gifts, her life-long friendship and love.

One morning at the breakfast table, when Agnes was about fifteen, her mother regarded her critically and observed, "You look like a leper who has had smallpox."

Her daughter, already depressingly conscious of the blemishes on her skin, burst into tears, but her formidable parent rebuked such weakness, "Why do you behave in this silly way because you have a bad complexion? Mirabeau was ugly and pock marked, yet he grew up to become one of the great writers of France."

My aunt was over eighty when she told me of this incident, but there was no emotion in her voice, neither anger nor resentment. The years had erased all passion, but the words remained fresh and indestructible. She

always spoke of her mother with admiration for her clever mind and amusing conversation, but she confessed that she was never happy in her company. Unhappy or not, Agnes' loyalty remained unshaken.

As a child, she was the occasional, adoring companion of her older cousin, Frank Repplier. Once, when he complained, "Your mother is awfully cross," Agnes leaped to her defense. "She's not cross. It's only that her favorite brother died."

Frank digested this excuse with masculine slowness and thoroughness, and then replied, "I should think losing your favorite brother would make you kinder."

Agnes was miserably aware of her mother's disappointment in her looks and social success and was willing to go to extreme lengths to win some mark of approval. Recalling her mother's repeated desire that she enter a convent, Agnes went to her Confessor and asked if he would prepare her to become a nun. The priest, aware of her small inclination towards piety, tried to discover the reason for what must have struck him as a surprising request.

After listening carefully to her halting explanation, he said with sternness and finality, "My child, you must have some better reason for adopting the religious life than a wish to please your mother."

Perhaps there was another motive that her loyalty concealed, even from herself, and that was the pressing need to escape from the home atmosphere and its persistent disapproval and criticism.

One of Miss Repplier's early short stories, printed in 1884, was "A Lesson in Life." Here, in the description

of the sensitive and unhappy heroine, is a sentence too applicable to her own case not to have been conscious or unconscious self-revelation: "If she had gained nothing else in her guarded and disciplined childhood, she had at least learned to be silent under provocation, and that power of self-restraint gave a strength and dignity to her simplicity and inexperience."

Though Mrs. Repplier was apparently incapable of making her daughter's life more agreeable, she was not blind to the sadness of Agnes' lot. In spite of a narrow and conformed environment, she was a woman of independent thought. When she was beaten down by life and knew she was dying, she asked my aunt's forgiveness for bringing her into so undesirable a world.

Forced to protect herself from daily hurts, Agnes gradually built a defensive armor. She fashioned this protective shell out of a guarded reserve, a manner that discouraged intimacy, and an ironic habit of speech, which ranged from the mocking to the biting. With the passage of time, this shield became an integral part of her personality, often frightening young devotees, whose naive and enthusiastic approach was sometimes halted in its tracks. Only a very few knew that secret, emotional, supersensitive self, deeply compassionate and understanding, surprisingly modest in the judging of her own talent, often despondent, and always passionately loyal to her friends and to what she believed to be right. She had abandoned many early hopes, only to cling with increasing tenacity to one dominant ambition—to become a writer of distinction.

When Agnes was sixteen, her father met with serious

business losses, and the future of the family appeared hazardous. Mrs. Replier took charge at once and allotted to each daughter the course she considered her best able to follow. She advised Mary to obtain some pupils and perfect herself in the art of teaching. Having watched her younger daughter since birth with an observant, if unsympathetic, eye, she instructed her to write and to find a market for her work as quickly as possible. The first command was easy to obey. The only thing Agnes wanted to do, the only thing she could do, was write. The sudden pressing need for money drove her pen, which, up to then, had known only two masters, love and pride.

As to her mother's second command, she tried hard to obey that too. Quietly and persistently she endeavored to place her little stories and articles, and although the remuneration was pitifully small, she never desisted until every one was printed. The *Philadelphia Sunday Times*, *Frank Leslie's Magazine*, *The Young Catholic*, and others printed these early attempts. In the process, without help and with dogged determination, she was slowly and laboriously learning to be a writer, though the results were always disappointingly below the goal she had set herself.

Only recently there came to light in an old trunk a number of these early efforts, clipped from the newspapers and magazines of the period, yellow with age, their content emitting an Old World flavor and echoes of cherished English authors, Scott, Dickens, Jane Austen and Trollope.

In *Eight Decades*, speaking of this apprenticeship, she

says, "Naturally, I have nothing to say, but I have spent ten years learning to say that nothing tolerably well. Every sentence is a matter of supreme importance to me."

These first experiments possess a simple sincerity, a marked feeling for the right word, the elimination of all padding and an undercurrent of emotion, but there is small foreshadowing of the future successful essayist. She had a natural ability to invest any subject with interest, and her subjects covered a wide range. There were stories of ghosts and fairies, folklore from German and French sources, a few poems of a religious nature, and many tales of love, generally ending in separation or death. Some of the stories were written for children, and her pen was especially busy at Thanksgiving, Christmas, Washington's birthday, and Easter, for at such times it was easier to sell seasonal stories or articles.

When she wrote of some small personal experience, like trimming a Christmas tree, walking by lovely Wisahickon Creek on a Sunday in spring, or being the victim of a terrific bore on a train trip, there was an unconstrained and livelier note, giving promise of what was to come.

In May, 1877, when she was twenty-one, one of these autobiographical sketches appeared in "Monthly Gossip," a section of the *Catholic World*. Written at the time her parents had been obliged to dispose of their comfortable home on Chestnut Street near 20th and move to a much smaller house in West Philadelphia, it was a spirited account of all the minor vexations incident to such a sale. There is the picture of the big,

prosperous, too sociable buyer, who finally obtains the house for much less than the price asked. There is the irritation engendered by his habit of dropping in at the most inconvenient hours, and his patronizing, critical and proprietary comments.

“Now,” she writes, “everything about the house becomes regretfully dear to you, and yet their very merits make you more savage. You wish you had never put walnut stairs from top to bottom; pine would be quite good enough for the fellow. You think with regret of the expensive repairing you had done to the roof only last winter. . . . Your wine closet, your cedar closet, every thoughtful luxury your house contains now only serve to irritate you by their perfections. . . . Finally, he leaves you worked into such a state of exasperation that the only comfort you can find is in contemplating the cracks in the wall, which he will have to fill up, reflecting that the back furnace never did draw well, and furtively kicking the best paint with your very heaviest pair of walking boots.”

In 1879, she sent another personal narrative, “Lady Betty At The Zoo” to a Philadelphia newspaper. Betty, a small despot of five, insisted against strong family opposition, on lugging along her enormous doll, Theodolinda. This unusual name was not a tribute to the renowned Queen of the Lombards. It had been copied from a lowly box of stove polish. Many times the heavy doll was dropped or dragged along the gravel paths of the Zoo until the tragic climax, when Theodolinda fell from her tired mother’s arms into the bear pit. Instantly, three bear cubs fell upon her and tore her into

fragments, while her owner and a score of other children shrieked in horror.

The last paragraph of this tale reveals Miss Replier as a worthy ancestor of Mr. Hughes' *High Wind in Jamaica*. After Lady Betty's tears were dried and she was returned to her family, it was thought salutary to remind her that if she had consented to leave her doll at home, the tragedy would never have happened. To this incontrovertible fact, Lady Betty replied, "But I promised Theodolinda that she could go. Do you know what I am going to do the next time I go to the Zoo? I'll take Jane Ann, [her next largest doll] and let her see where poor Theodolinda died."

In 1881, a short story, "In Arcady," appeared in the *Catholic World*. It brought her a check for fifty dollars, the largest sum she had yet received. This was followed by other stories of the same sad and romantic cast.

Father Hecker, editor of the *Catholic World*, a wise man and Thoreau's friend, read these carefully phrased and constructed stories and then directed her firmly along another path, that of the essay. He judged correctly, that she knew a great deal about books and very little about life. When he discovered she was an admirer of Ruskin, he said, "Write me something about Ruskin then, and make it brief."

In 1884, the fruit of this advice, "Ruskin As a Teacher," appeared in the *Catholic World*. It is a thoughtful and sympathetic study, written from a Catholic viewpoint. The tone is serious and devout, and there is hardly a trace of her later style. The terrain is new to her and she treads it carefully and soberly.

In the years ahead, she was to become so much at home in this medium that no matter how serious the subject, she could treat it in the lightest manner and with the most beguiling humor. A year later, Mrs. Repplier died, too early to know that the child who had many times been a sorrow and disappointment to her, was destined to more than fulfill her frustrated ambitions.

After her mother's death, while she was still living in the West Philadelphia home, a friend arrived one day with the gift of a kitten, snugly ensconced in her muff. This small intruder grew to embody for my aunt all the happier qualities of home and hearth. Whenever she returned to the house after an absence, the sight of that little head protruding anxiously between the second floor banisters, welcoming her with a restrained mew, was to bestow on home-coming a new and precious value. She named the kitten Agrippina and by affection and understanding created a very special role in her life for a dependent. The kitten had her own ideas too, and as the weeks passed, she narrowed the space allotted to her. She sat and sometimes slept on the small, crowded desk, at intervals impeding the writer's pen with one soft gray paw, but the often troubled soul of her owner found compensations for these interruptions when her eyes rested on her pet's contemplative self-sufficiency and relaxed contentment.

Miss Repplier had loved cats ardently from childhood but had never been permitted to possess one. She found enchantment in the history of all those favored cats, chosen companions of men of genius—Muezza, the beautiful, white Persian, beloved of Mahommet; the

immortal cats of Pierre Loti and Theophile Gautier; Dickens' cat, Williamina, first christened in error William, who used to put out the candles with her paw if her master worked unreasonably late; Matthew Arnold's Atossa, Sir Walter Scott's Hinse, and the succession of cats in Carlyle's uncomfortable abode.

She deemed Hodge, Dr. Johnson's cat, the most fortunate. "To sit purring on Dr. Johnson's knee," she wrote, "secure of kindness, safe from that forcible contempt which no one but Boswell could bear smilingly, to be fed with oysters by that generous hand, and to be immortalized by the companionship which crowned his little life with content—this seems to me the best of feline fortunes, equalled only but not surpassed by the joy of being Sir Walter's cat at Abbotsford."

For Agrippina, Miss Repplier's affection was deep and lasting; quite different, as she remarked, from the measured esteem of someone like Elizabeth Drinker, who gave her cat "as good a regard as was necessary." Though my aunt was assuredly a one-cat woman who would never consider a successor to Agrippina, she eschewed sentimentality in this regard as in all others. She rejected the apocryphal tales of virtuous cats, as well as tales of cats with selfless devotion to their owners, but accepted with gratitude "that temperate and mutable affection which one must labor to retain." She defended their proved qualities and defects and "their immaculate freedom from enthusiasm, sympathy and benevolence,"—the little god of domesticity, she called them, the friend of those who are too happy or too wise for restlessness.

Essays in Idleness, a collection published by Miss Repplier in 1893, contains one paper entitled "Agrippina," a lively portrait of their brief association. She accepted the fact that she was not her cat's mistress. "If I call, she does not come; if I tell her to go away, she remains where she is; if I try to persuade her to show off her one or two little accomplishments, she refuses with courteous but unswerving decision." Her owner respected this feline characteristic of independence. "They will not strive for our approval," she wrote, "any more than they will toil for our convenience. They give man in return for his affection nothing but their gracious presence by his hearth," and she praised Buffon's words, "the cat is the only animal who accepts the comforts but rejects the bondage of domesticity, the only one which is tamed without servitude."

"I own," she confesses in this essay, "that when Agrippina brought her first-born son, Claudius Nero, and established him in my bedroom closet, the plan struck me at the start as inconvenient. Other arrangements had been made for the newcomer, but Agrippina was inflexible."

Giving in finally to this tenacity, my aunt removed her clothing from the closet, spread a shawl on the floor, had the door taken from its hinges, and resigned herself for the first and last time in her life to the daily and hourly companionship of an infant. Another essay, "The Kitten," reveals how closely she studied mother and son, their differing natures, and the unusually wide gulf that separates cats and kittens.

Agrippina was reserved, sedate and disdainful, while

the kitten, "that irresistible comedian," was vivacious, impulsive, impudent, and a continual show-off. In the daily games and struggles between the two, Nero generally won, but his mother achieved a half victory by sitting on her tightly coiled tail.

Before time had destroyed this close and transient union, mother and son perished from the effect of poisoned meat dropped in the yard where they played. It comforted my aunt a little that the cruel and fatal blow destroyed both in the heyday of their happy life together. They are buried at Lindenshade, the home of Dr. Horace Howard Furness, a great cat lover himself.

Seven years after Agrippina's death, Miss Replier published her book on cats, *The Fireside Sphinx*, dedicated to the "dear little ghost, whose memory has never faded from my heart." She had a particular love for this book, the result, she was wont to say, of doing once in a lifetime something one wants to do. After reading the foreword, Dr. Furness wrote to her—

Dear Agnes,

After reading your exquisite, equisite preface last evening, I breathed a holy vow that Agrippina's resting place should be incontinently marked by a headstone, diminutive but proportionate. Do you remember in which direction, north or south, her poor dear little head rests? Our house faces due south.

Always in feelin' bonds,

H. H. F.

So it happened that Agrippina and her son enjoy their small share of immortality in a great scholar's garden.

In 1886, the *Atlantic Monthly* accepted her essay, "Children Past and Present," the first of nearly a hundred essays to appear in this magazine. With its publication, Miss Repplier stepped into a wider domain, where dwelt the spirits of Montaigne, Lamb and Hazlitt. With the exception of a few fellow craftsmen, her own city remained unaware of her existence.

Dr. Furness, his sister, Mrs. Caspar Wister, and Dr. Weir Mitchell were overjoyed to see a new star emerge in the Philadelphia heavens, those heavens about which Emerson wrote, "If the world were all Philadelphia, although the poultry and dairy market would be admirable, I fear suicide would be exceedingly prevalent. I look eagerly for the stars at night for fear they would disappear in the dull air."

The Quaker City has an unenviable reputation for her treatment of men and women of genius. Poe and Audubon knocked in vain on those unperceptive and complacent portals. Philadelphia sitters refused to accept portraits painted by Thomas Eakins, paintings which are now sought by the museums of the world, and the city was thirty years late in acknowledging the talent of its townswoman, Mary Cassatt. Agnes Repplier was not unaware of this tendency. In her book, *The History of Philadelphia*, she says, "Above all, the Quaker City lacks that discriminating enthusiasm for her own children and the work of their hands which enables more zealous towns to rend the skies with shrill paeans of applause and to crown their favored citizens with bay. Philadelphia, like Marjorie Fleming's stoical turkey, 'is

more than usual calm,' when her sons and daughters win distinction in any field."

New England, on the contrary, has always cherished its talented citizens, and Boston, which perused its *Atlantic Monthly* with a loving and critical eye, held out a friendly hand to the newcomer in 1889. Fortified with letters from Dr. Furness and Agnes Irwin, Miss Repplier embarked, not without qualms, on a three weeks' visit. She was frightened at the prospect. Her mother had greatly impaired any natural confidence she might have possessed in her ability to succeed socially. She had scant experience in meeting strangers and little opportunity to sharpen her wits on her peers. And there was also her inability to remember names. Prior to her departure, a warm and friendly note arrived from Miss Irwin, asking her to like Boston a little for her sake, wishing her good luck, and mentioning all the clever Bostonians she wanted her ex-pupil to meet, adding, "All these people are too old for you, Miss, but they also regret it, I don't doubt."

A clipping of this period, cut from the personal column of a magazine, offered the following description: "Miss Agnes Repplier, the essayist, is about thirty-five years old and belongs to one of Philadelphia's old families. Her dark eyes, hair and complexion and her vivacious manner, betray her French extraction. While somewhat retiring in her disposition, and studious in her habits, she is a brilliant conversationalist, and is much appreciated when she goes into society." Except that my aunt's eyes were a light blue, and her hair, her prettiest feature, was golden brown, the account is fairly accurate.

In Boston, her first hostess was Miss Alger and her second was Mrs. George Hale. She had barely unpacked her trunk, when a visitor, Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes, was announced. "He talked to me a long time," she wrote to her sister, "principally about Dr. Furness, begged me to come and see him, and told me very frankly that I was nice—'a nice lady' was his exact expression."

Then began a round of parties, many in her honor. Mrs. Hale noted with satisfaction that her Philadelphia guest had met all the right people: James Russell Lowell, Julia Ward Howe, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, editor of the *Atlantic*, Mrs. Jack Gardner, Mrs. Whitman, Mary Wilkins, Sarah Orne Jewett, and a host of lesser lights. Mrs. Hale took great pains to brief her guest on each arriving visitor, but Agnes confessed in a letter home that she was almost distracted, trying to keep names and faces in her slippery mind—that same mind which possessed so uncanny a faculty for remembering words.

"The most impressive figure that dawned upon my Boston horizon," she wrote later, "was Mr. James Russell Lowell. There was nothing to mar the impression. He looked as he should have looked. He spoke as he should have spoken. Distinction marked him as her own, and he responded without effort to her election. Always the center of interest and attention, no one lost anything by granting precedence to a man so flawlessly urbane. His interest in me centered solely in the fact that I was a townswoman, or as good as a townswoman, of Walt Whitman, and fairly well acquainted with that

unclassified genius. 'Why,' he asked, 'do you Philadelphians call him the good, gray poet?' I explained that the name had been given him by a fiery New York journalist, and that he, Mr. Whitman, liked it.

" 'I dare say,' grumbled Mr. Lowell, 'but nobody calls me the good, gray poet, though I am as gray as Whitman, and quite as good—perhaps a trifle better.' He paused, and I was on the point of saying, 'Then there is only the poet to consider,' but I forbore."

My aunt was unaccustomed to continuous social activities and wrote home, "It is all very wonderful but extremely fatiguing. I have to try so hard to be as agreeable and amusing as I can, from the minute I get up until I go to bed, and it does wear on one after a while."

Mrs. Hale, realizing that her guest was not robust and that the strain was exhausting, insisted on her spending every spare moment in a four-poster, with the curtains carefully drawn and a maid to summon her whenever it was time to dress and appear at another function. My aunt's letters reveal that, despite exhaustion, the experience was breath-taking and heartening. People whose minds were out of the ordinary said lovely things to her and showed appreciation of her work. For the first time in her life, her cup of praise was overflowing.

To a Philadelphian, who had been limited to her own town and its conservative outlook, Boston offered some surprises. At Mrs. Barrett Wendell's, she met highly amusing women and heard some astounding views that all but reduced her to silence, they were so novel.

"Mrs. Fairchild," she wrote, "is another parlor Nihil-

ist, a race that flourishes in this luxuriously intellectual atmosphere."

She lunched with the faculty at Wellesley College, and confessed in a letter, "I struggled to maintain my reputation, and betrayed at every turn the profundity of my ignorance."

Faint whispers of her success puzzled her home town. A Philadelphia lady, enlightened by a Massachusetts friend, wrote Agnes Irwin that she understood all Boston was talking about an essay, "A Plea for Humor," and that the author was supposed to be a former pupil of the Irwin School. She wondered if she could tempt "Miss A. Riplear" to come to luncheon.

In September, 1888, *Books and Men*, Agnes Repplier's first collection of essays, made its appearance. She was not content to remain merely a contributor to magazines, however high their reputation. She knew that once read, such articles are soon lost or forgotten, and that if her essays possessed the literary value she strove hard to give them, they were worth re-reading. Therefore a book was the only solution. She tried and failed to find a publisher who was willing to risk money on so rash an undertaking. Mr. William Dean Howells, then the great oracle, had just delivered his opinion "that the best business talent did not go into essays," and it took the careless entrance of Augustine Birrell into this field of letters to belie the assertion.

Houghton, Mifflin were willing to publish at the author's expense, but advised against printing more than eight hundred copies. Miss Repplier's determination to invest her small savings in the enterprise was

equalled by the consciousness of her own temerity. In a letter to her old friend, Harrison Morris, she wrote, "My copies of the *Essays* have just arrived: neat, Quakerish little volumes with an air of deprecating modesty about them that forcibly suggests the most remote corner of the booksellers' shelf. I can see them already sinking bashfully into their appointed nooks and powdering their little gray heads with the dust of the undisturbed."

Four months later, there were only fifty-seven copies remaining of that first edition and she had already begun to wonder if there would ever be a second. In the end, there were twenty.

Two years later, Miss Repplier made her first trip to Europe. She was then thirty-five. The only way to measure the impact of this experience is to count the years of anticipation during which she had read and dreamed of the history, the places, the people and the works of art, fearing that she might never see them.

Her companions on that first exciting venture were not congenial. One was her older sister, Mary, whose intense conformity obliged her to register shock at the younger's spontaneous and amusing comments.

On shipboard, when it transpired that one member of the party had seen the Venus de Milo in the Louvre, Miss Repplier questioned her with the utmost eagerness only to discover that the experience had left no impression whatever. Very different was her own strong emotion when she speaks in her journal of the deadly horror of the sea, and adds, "I would cross the hateful ocean again to see the Venus and whisper to her how

I love and reverence and pity her! What has she seen, what has she known, what has she suffered? Think of her alone, brooding over it in the moonlight."

Her love of the Venus and of Rembrandt's "Night Watch" never changed, but as a neophyte in art, she made some early errors. Like Hawthorne, she was greatly moved by her first view of Guido Reni's "Beatrice" in the Barberini Palace and wrote in her journal, "Love Reni's 'Beatrice' more than ever. There is no use, thank Heaven, in blustering Irishmen like Mr. Connolly telling me it is a worthless picture. As if I did not see her eyes and mouth, eyes that have wept all their tears, a face that cries for pity." Nevertheless, as her knowledge of painting widened and deepened, she ended by agreeing with Mr. Connolly and eventually found the picture "a flat, faded and somewhat appealing canvas."

Her habitual armor of reserve was broken at times by being in the presence of all she had dreamed of and worshipped. In the Cathedral of Notre Dame, she kissed the tattered cassock of Archbishop Darboi when no one was looking. Republican France held no place in her heart. At the Place de la Bastille, she felt quite unable to evoke the proper sentiment "on that bare spot with its hateful column *à la gloire*."

Nothing of this Old World did she meet with indifference. Either she loved or she hated, rejoiced in a dream realized or was cast down by disappointment. Never a good traveler by land or sea, and detesting all forms of transportation, her spirit needed large rewards to compensate for bodily illness and fatigue, and these she garnered in abundance.

Her letter of credit was too modest to permit her to linger. Soon she was in Rome, where St. Peter's was smaller than she expected. On this first visit, it was the Colosseum that enraptured her. Her notes say, "Climbed to the highest available tier. The most impressive thing in Rome. How magnificently they built and how gorgeously and cruelly they played!" She confessed to feeling a little frightened by the strength of her emotion. Christian Rome did not at first sight make the profound appeal to her which came in later years, when she spent months in the city, grew to know certain churches intimately and to draw from them both religious and aesthetic satisfaction.

True to her period, she re-read Ruskin while looking at the frescoes in the Santa Maria Novella. It was not as an art critic that she gazed and marvelled and experienced joy and pain. It was rather as one who for many years had thirsted and gone hungry at the meager table life had set before her. Now, this new appetite grew with what it fed on.

In the Scuolo de S. Rocco in Florence, it was difficult to see the Tintoretos that Ruskin loved so dearly. She wonders "how much Ruskin really saw, how much he dreamed, how much he fancied." In Santa Croce she saw the tomb of an old Florentine that Ruskin had raved about. His admirers were always groping around for the slab, and this novel and unnatural enthusiasm worried the sexton, who had to explain to them repeatedly that "the critic *Anglais* was a little exaggerative."

And so, at long last, she came to London, and though she entered the city for the first time, it was like a meet-

ing of old friends, so vividly peopled were the streets and buildings with the famous characters in history and fiction, who had companioned her from childhood. The English speech was music to her ears, and she noted "how much London gives to people in its lordly fashion."

Here lived her first and favorite friend, Elizabeth Pennell, whom she had not seen for some years. She wrote of her fervently, "Every promise of her youth has bloomed into a delicious fulfillment, and of all the charming things in London, she seemed to me the best."

Her friend, Edmund Gosse, entertained her. An admirer of her work, there is an appreciative and amusing letter from him in 1893.

My dear Miss Repplier,

The first copy of your *Essays in Idleness* was sold to me. I did not intend to be so very previous, but sending to Gay & Bird for it, I was told that it would not be out till Monday, but that I might have a copy. This preference in reading you added a little to the gust with which I have devoured this, your latest volume. But I don't think that has prejudiced me in thinking you never have been more delicate, invigorating or coruscant. Your essays are always an unmixed delight to me, and I think your books among the few contributions to pure literature of a high order now coming from America.

Let me congratulate you on a fresh success. With the delightful knowledge that no one can write to you in praise of *Essays in Idleness* till to-morrow afternoon, I subscribe, my dear Miss Repplier, your constant and first admirer,

Edmund Gosse

P.S. I mourn over my own descent into a deserved oblivion. Hitherto, I have been clay in each of your lumps of amber, and hoped to survive as 'an obscure writer cited passim by Agnes Repplier in the encyclopaedia of 2093.' But I am lost already, and yet the fiendish name of Lang pranks it upon every page. Adieu Glory! Farewell, Posterity!

Before she left London, she met Sidney Webb and Whistler. She found Austin Dobson a dear and rejoiced in his cat, Joseph.

Philadelphia and her work were waiting, and all too soon she was back at her desk, wondering again why the Schuylkill was not permitted to lend beauty to its city.

IV

A LITERARY FRIENDSHIP

In "Children Past and Present," Miss Repplier's first essay to appear in the *Atlantic Monthly*, there was a passing allusion to a mediaeval scholar and writer, Guibert de Nogent, who chanced to be a star in the fastidious Andrew Lang's literary galaxy. Enchanted to find his idol mentioned in print, and intrigued by the fact that the author was—of all things—an American, Lang wrote her a charming note of appreciation. Thus began a correspondence and a friendship which continued from 1891 to 1912 and which brought something as stimulating as it was new into my aunt's life. At times, his letters were a veritable storm.

Andrew Lang was the first fellow craftsman of the Old World to offer friendship. A poet of delicacy and fantasy, a classical scholar and intellectual aristocrat, he possessed an amusing and wayward temper, capricious and prejudiced, with an underlying integrity and goodwill beneath a constant flow of raillery. If, as Rupert Brooke once wrote, "laughter is the very garland and head of friendship," theirs was properly crowned. Differing greatly in race, upbringing and environment, they yet possessed, as he wrote her, "a remarkable spiritual affinity," despite his descent from Scottish Covenanters and her adherence to Holy Rome.

When he read that she had been called the American

Andrew Lang, he wrote at once that he was proud of the compliment, though he didn't deserve it. They were both imbued with the spirit of mockery, but his was often a Puckish and malicious humor, and hers a more detached irony.

"We that have good wits have much to answer for," he wrote, "we will be gibing." And gibe they did, but their targets were different. She shot her arrows at fads, past and present. His favorite quarry was America and American writers, and he reminds her gleefully of Poe's remark, "As a literary people, we are a vast, perambulating humbug."

In 1892, Miss Repplier published her *Book of Famous Verse* for children, and within the year, Lang published his collection, the *Blue Poetry Book*. She readily admitted that his book was the more desirable, and praised its greater size, its copious illustrations, and the author's complete freedom of choice.

"Never before," she wrote, "has any selection appealed so clearly and insistently to childish tastes and hearts."

Her publishers naturally wanted their copyrighted American poets adequately represented, and it was not easy to find suitable examples by Aldrich, Bryant, Lowell and Whittier, verses she was "tolerably sure no child would willingly read."

Her dilemma evoked—not Lang's sympathy—but his impish humor. In his desire to annoy "American chit-terlings of letters," he made matters worse by first praising her book in the *Cornhill Magazine*, and then adding his regrets that an excess of patriotism had led her to

include Bryant's "Song of Marion's Men." Aldrich and the Muse, Lang considered very distant acquaintances, and though he adored Lowell as a friend and a man of letters, he did not think him a poet—certainly not an inspired poet.

Miss Replier's habit of quoting from English authors annoyed certain American critics, among them Mr. Brander Matthews, who scolded her soundly for writing a volume of essays without a single quotation from Lowell. Augustine Birrell came to her defense with a firm denial of any such obligation, and Lang wrote her to pay no attention to Matthews, whose essays he found "silly and snarling." He likened Matthews to those Americans who solemnly drag in quotations from Emerson as a sacrifice to their country, and dubbed him "a victim of patriotism in the wrong place," adding the usual epitaph, "nobody reads him in England."

"I have," he wrote her, "in pursuit of wealth, to write on Dr. Holmes. Surely, no one ever wrote so much verse, and so little of it good. His novels are diluted Hawthorne, but he had some—not very much—humor."

He tangled with Colonel Higginson because the Colonel called him a Londoner and also insulted his friend, Rider Haggard, by taking exception to his grammar.

"Compared to Miss Dickinson," Lang declared indignantly, "Haggard is a precisionist. He should have been born before writing was invented, and his yarns would have been subjects for epics and tragedies. It is a fine, untrammled, Troglodyte talent. . . . Unluckily, I burn what Higginson adores, and vice versa."

As to Howells, he conceded that "the fellow had lucid intervals, but of course he knows nothing about literature, only about a lot of Bostonian spinsters of letters, and casual modern foreigners."

Philadelphia's prowess in cricket won for the town a place in his hierarchy, but Boston sounded unworthy of its scenery. He could not see why Miss Repplier's deplorable country could stand the Irish—"a poor way of going to the devil—but there are few good ways." And his chronic indignation boiled over when an American sent an unlimited bid for a collector's copy of Lovelace's *Lucasta*—"What does he want with *Lucasta*?"

The receipt of Dr. Weir Mitchell's poem on Drake brought forth a fresh outburst, "O Bacchus, what am I to say? It is terrible. I cannot read it."

After months of inaction, he begged his friend to thank Dr. Mitchell for him, a request that we can be fairly sure was ignored.

About another Philadelphian, the delightful author of *Trivia*, he wrote, "Do you know a Mr. Pearsall Smith? He said so, but I think he was bragging. I met him at a weird party of Psychical Researchers. Henry Sedgwick was there, all stutter and skepticism. Pearsall told 'Joe Millers' with a fresh enthusiasm which shows little benevolence. He seems awfully good and should be canonized and buried tolerably deep—but this is dreadful; you may like, revere, adore this bald, blameless person. I'll chance it, as the little girl remarked when she went to bed without saying her prayers."

When attacked for his strictures on American writers, Lang defended himself stoutly. "I would be an idiot

to insult American literature," he wrote, "but contemporary trash is another thing."

One American author did receive a word of praise. Lang describes an authors' dinner in London, where he knew only half of the two hundred writers present. "The female authors of my country," he begins, "were very large and very warm. Some of them would have looked well by Rubens, sprawling on the ceiling." When called on for a speech, he passed the opportunity to Mr. Frank Stockton, "who made an oration of extraordinary eloquence, with a good but profane anecdote. The other speakers were all scientists—so like the English people to set science men up at a literary dinner!" After the foregoing uncomplimentary reference to English women, it is not surprising that he found dinners dull, and felt he cast "a wet blanket over the matrons."

Cotton Mather brought him something new and startling from America. "Why," he asks, "is not all of that peerless donkey's diary published? I am convinced it is improper enough to be very popular. He had the impudence to see angels, but unlike Joan, he described the angels' dress. I wish he hadn't seen any."

In one letter he complained bitterly of being dragged up to London from the country and the society of a fair being of nineteen, to meet an American professor of literature, very young and naif, who asked what he thought of teaching modern literature. "I said I thought it was awful skittles. The fellows who produce literature never go to lectures on it." Yet Lang relented, as he so often did, confessed he rather liked the professor,

had never before met anyone so serious, and inquired curiously, "Have you many such young men at home?"

Perhaps if Lang's books had sold better in the States, he would have been less caustic about America and Americans. When Miss Repplier transmitted to him an invitation to lecture on Mythology, his refusal is reminiscent of Bernard Shaw: "Let them buy and read my books and they will know more than I now know. So far, America has taken exactly one hundred of the cheap editions of my works, and even this number fails to sell."

He despairs equally of ever interesting the English Middle Classes, adding in his usual vein, "Even Dukes of Letters do not care for me much. It is sad because it prevents me from thinking well of the public."

Possibly, the true cause of his unpopularity is revealed when he confesses, "I like to toil at something curiously unvendible."

His remark that "the average Englishman or English woman would as soon think of buying a boa constrictor as a book," is quoted in the opening sentences of Miss Repplier's essay, "Our Belief in Books," but she hopes this is spoken in the enjoyment of a sardonic mood rather than after dispassionate observation.

The two friends exchanged copies of their books, and more than once Lang reviewed her essays favorably in the English papers. Writing her about the first of these reviews, he concludes his letter with this tantalizing sentence, "I have no copy of it, but I don't suppose you pine for reviews." Miss Repplier generally shunned critical reviews and never joined a clipping bureau, but

about Andrew Lang's published opinions of her work she must have been deeply curious.

As regards his own writings, he is carefully casual. He insists that he can recommend to her nothing of his own, saying, "An occasional quirk may please me in a wilderness of futilities."

When he sent her a book of his poems, he advised her "the sentimental ones are the best, though giving a not wholly correct impression of a heart in smithereens and a spirit in the dust." Offering her his book on Homer, he boasts that it is the only presentation copy to go to America, adding, "I don't know a soul on that vast Continent who cares a bawbee for Homer, except Professor Gildersleeve, and he can buy it or do without."

They were both contributors to the *Cosmopolitan*, though he didn't cotton much to the magazine; in fact, he considered that he and she "were the only readable authors represented, and a pity there was so little of them!"

If, in their different ways, the two friends were prone to gibe, they were also prone to worship. Lang had two supreme idols, Joan of Arc, and the Young Pretender, Charles III, who died in Italy in 1740. "My Prince of Wales" he called him, and wrote, "There never was a finer boy, O, Charles, O, mon Roy!"

As for Joan, there is no trace of his mocking spirit when he writes, "The more you know her, the more you worship her. Setting the Voices and Visions apart, she was a miracle herself."

He boasts that the Scots were on her side throughout,

and regrets that as a Covenanter, he cannot say his orisons to the Maid, but at least he can score off those who fail to say the right things about her. He exonerates Mark Twain in this connection, grants his heart was in the right place, even if his taste and erudition left much to be desired.

His friend, Lord Bute, amazed him by not only believing Joan a humbug but even that she was not burned.

"After that," he explodes, "a man might believe anything!"

For his part, he believed the Maid to be straight, sane and inexplicable. The *Catholic World's* statement that his poems reveal an animus against Joan, he denied, and protested, "They don't know their friends, candid friends, at least."

From her convent days, one of Miss Repplier's idols had been Mary, Queen of Scots. When she finally visited Holyrood Castle, it was far more to her than a landmark in history, as her journal reveals. "Poor Queen Mary! Dingy little rooms, turret stairs, cold rains, and John Knox to pester her! What a fate! The guide enlarged on her 'stormy interviews' with that very aggressive old bore, who is allowed to bore us nearly as much today. No mark of Rizzio's blood on the floor. There is no need of it. The tragedy of Mary's life is there, in those small, dark, tapestried rooms. There and everywhere, she is Mary the Queen, for whom brave men gladly died. She and Claverhouse and Sir Walter Scott give romance and beauty to Scotland. Let us forgive even that pestiferous old scold, John Knox, for their sake."

Lang was by no means averse to treading on another's sacred ground, so when he discovered her strong advocacy of Mary, he took delight in pointing out her idol's feet of clay. Writing her in Rome, he begs her to tell the Holy Father to "hurry up with Joan and drop Mary Stuart. She is not wanted by the Saints, and would make eyes at St. Louis."

Another time, he wrote cheerfully that in Scotland, where they knew Mary, she was deemed a fair lady, a fine, natural heathen, but no saint. He insisted she murdered Darnley, and "committed the oversight of not murdering Knox, compared to whom she was quite a Christian character." Summing it all up to his own satisfaction, he writes, "In February, Darnley was blown up. In March, she gave Bothwell the Chasubles of Aberdeen Cathedral to make waistcoats As a woman, a church woman and a widow, she comes badly out of it."

He had no illusions about the Scottish Reformation, which he thought a ruffianly affair, or about the other side, either, declaring, "They did not burn resolutely as if they liked it, not as our side burned witches."

Indeed, to express any historical enthusiasm merely tempted him to scoff. Miss Repplier's strong bias in favor of the Battle of Agincourt brought on her head the following: "You would probably have been on the wrong side, knocked off your horse, bruised horribly by your mail, and obliged to pay a large ransom. If such delights as these can move, no doubt Agincourt was the place to enjoy them. For me, *the* historical event would have been the Restoration, before the gilt wore off the gingerbread."

He was more sympathetic to her gift of satire, and begged her to continue exercising it on Mr. Gosse. "It greatly obliges his friends in England—also his enemies. Mr. Gosse is capital company, a little feline and a little feminine, but that is not unusual in men of genius, and he never scratched me more than a kitten may—alas, who knows how often I may have bitten him? I probably began any encounters of that sort."

Lang's letters were sprinkled with literary judgments. Jane Austen he placed next to Shakespeare. He acknowledged good points in Tolstoi, but called him "an appalling Muscovite prig." Marius the Epicurean he considered a prig, too, but a wistful type, and he complained that he read on and on, hoping for just one adventure, but nobody ever did anything. He brushed Pater aside with the remark that "he makes an Englishman ill, or a Scot, anyhow."

When he was engrossed in his *Life of Lockhart*, his letters were full of admiration for his subject, and regret, that delve as he might, he would never really know the man. He granted that Lockhart was a scorpion, but judged him "the equal of all us modern poets put together." In this biography occurs the charming phrase, "Letters are rain about the roots of friendship."

Lang's prejudices were easy to rouse, and they were generally long-lived. When he edited *Walton, The Angler*, the horrid fact that Walton was a bait fisher, and not, as he was, a firm adherent of the fly, kept obtruding upon his critical judgment. This heresy, together with Walton's vivid satisfaction in using live frogs as bait, prevented Lang from feeling at home with

him. Writing of all this to Miss Repplier, he adds teasingly, "In his heart, I am sure he was a member of your persecuted church—it comes out pretty plainly." No one, reading Lang's delightful preface to the *Angler*, would suspect that he was often out of sympathy with his subject.

After agreeing to edit a new edition of Scott's novels, he read *The Betrothed* for the first time, and wrote his friend, "Though not his best, it is yet worth a wilderness of Tesses and George Meredith." Except for a few favorites, this was his usual disparaging view of the new crop of distinguished English writers. The only work of Oscar Wilde that he found amusing was the *Essay on Lying*. He couldn't stomach young men like Le Gallienne, and fumed, "Confessions of a whippersnapper about his religion, forsooth! I don't suppose he can read the Greek Testament, so what right has he to an opinion? These are the sentiments of an old fogy, but I believe he wears long hair."

Sorrowing over the death of Robert Louis Stevenson in 1894, he called him "the best man of letters and the best liked. Though six years my junior, he published six years before I first maundered in public and an uncertain warbling made."

He had an affection also for his fellow Scot, Barrie, and expressed a weakness for Miss Braddon, adding, "There's always plenty to eat and drink in Miss B., ever a good sign of a healthy novelist," and he begs his friend to ponder on the relative proportion of venison pasties and kissing, in Scott and Miss Broughton. Miss Repplier not only pondered this statement, she quotes

it as the opening sentence in her essay, "At The Novelist's Table."

Lang would probably have agreed with a paragraph in another of her essays, "The Novel Reader," where she says, "The American novel depends too much on moral idealism and romantic love. The first will not bear a too heavy emphasis, and the romantic love does not lend itself to scrutiny and dissection. Man's moments of idealism and of love are as brief as they are beautiful. The world that we know is full of people who are not in love at all, whereas the world of fiction is full of people who are in love monotonously and continuously."

Lang's sardonic humor and the spontaneity of his barbed quips made a strong appeal to her. Even when she deprecated his extravagances and deplored his ill humor, she often quoted his remarks and was not unmoved by his strictures, especially when she herself, as happened once, was the target. In an early letter to him, she wrote, "Pa." for the name of her state, but when he promptly inquired her reason for desecrating with such an absurdity a beautiful word like Pennsylvania, she never used the abbreviation again.

Their correspondence was interrupted in the summer of 1894, by Miss Repplier's second trip abroad. They met for the first time when she came to London. He wrote, asking her to meet him on the porch of the Museum, and warned her gaily that she could spot him by his yellow tie and the peony in his buttonhole.

In a letter to her sister, she wrote, "Mr. Lang has been exceedingly kind to me, at which Londoners are

visibly astonished. I think him inexpressibly charming. He is a long, lean, gray-haired, handsome, supercilious creature, with a single eye-glass, a brusque manner, an enchanting smile, a mirthful laugh, and a very ill-natured fashion of speech."

He invited her to dine at his home, but warned her against expecting too much. "Any literary friends are in inaccessible retreats, or may have weariful women to wife, or I rather detest them—or they me—so look out for Philistines! I have asked Max Müller, but daresay he can't come or fears poison!"

But the Müllers did come and Miss Repplier described the company in a letter: "Mrs. Lang is moderately pretty and extremely clever. She was beautifully dressed and had fine diamonds. Max Müller is a genial old gentleman with a refined taste in cats. His wife is an imposing British matron with a lavish bosom, smooth and white, superb diamonds, a lace cap, a grand manner and a very poor opinion of Americans." The lady did not trouble to conceal this last, but lamented openly the strange custom of Americans, who visit you and then describe you afterward in the newspapers!

The two friends lunched and drank tea together, and went to the Grafton Gallery. About this last, there is a line in Miss Repplier's diary, "He appeared dimly bored, and looked all the time as if he wished I had died young." From there, she went with him to—of all places—a cricket match, where her notes say, "He brightened up amazingly, talked chiefly of ghosts and was the most charming of companions."

The strangest aftermath of these meetings occurred

more than forty years later, when she wrote in the biographical preface to *Eight Decades*, "He did all a reasonable man could for my entertainment. He said a cheerful farewell when I left and never wrote to me again. The inference is tolerably plain. There are not many things in this world that we absolutely know. The borderland between knowledge and ignorance is hazy with uncertainties, but on one point we are sure. We know when we have had enough of a friend, and we know when a friend has had enough of us. The first truth is no more palatable than the second."

In spite of the intense finality of this statement, and my aunt's undoubted belief in its accuracy, a number of later letters from Lang are convincing proof to the contrary. His very first note following her departure says, "London was an aching void after you left."

Though his letters ceased to be 'a storm,' he wrote three or four times a year until 1900, and then more rarely until 1910, two years before his death. The whole puzzling episode seems to reveal a secret wound so deep that no future word from him could alter her conviction that their friendship was broken. On July 23, 1912, there is a note in her diary, "A black day. Andrew Lang is dead. Once he was my friend."

Following their long and sympathetic communion by letter, in which medium they both excelled, the actual meeting could easily have proved less than the hoped-for deepening of their friendship. If there was disappointment, it was not on her side, for in a letter she wrote that he was sulky and irresistibly charming.

If it was then on his side and he allowed her to see it, the hurt must have been grievous.

Lang was impersonal, wayward, unpredictable, and a thorough Scot in his restraint. Miss Repplier had none of the feminine charm to counteract these qualities.

The long years of being regarded as plain, socially inept, and too clever for her own good, had left their mark. In manner, she was reserved, a little awkward, and extremely formal, especially with strangers. Very thin, noticeably erect, dressed always in black, with a high collar or black ribbon about her throat to conceal a scar, she had a superficial resemblance to the typical spinster or blue stocking of the period. Strangers often found her manner chilling, and sometimes intimidating. The truth was, she had succeeded almost too well in hiding her emotional and sensitive self. Her diary reveals that a careless word or the temporary forgetfulness of a friend had the power to darken a whole day or many days.

Even with friends, her guard was never wholly down. One of the earliest and closest of these was Harrison Morris, like Lang, a poet and scoffer. Their friendship held firm for sixty years, yet she knew him for two decades before she called him by his first name. There was in her make-up this great cleavage between the outer and strictly disciplined self and the inner emotional and rebellious spirit. She was aware of this conflict, for there is a note in her diary: "I get on much better when I am unconstrained."

Miss Repplier was in Porlock in the Highlands of

Scotland six years after she had said good-bye to Lang, when she received this characteristic letter from him. "Porlock is known as the place the person came from who interrupted Coleridge in copying out *Kubla Khan*. It is therefore deemed accursed. Why do you go there?" The letter continued to rail at her habit of traveling, averred she was unsurpassed by Marco Polo, and *admitted* that he could not win paradise via a sleeping car.

Later, when he heard she was in Turkey, he wrote crossly, "People who are so far away might nearly as well be dead and buried. If you expire of your cough, St. Peter will present you with poems from Philadelphia which have accumulated during your brief tour to Purgatory. *There* is probably the best company, and no fear of meeting Oscar Wilde!" Complaining that it is impossible to aim a letter at a lady who may be in Japan or Trinidad, Potsdam or Peru, he finally exposed the true reason for his churlishness: "It is provoking to hear from a lady who has been where I would go if I could, but can't."

If Lang's letters diminished in number and gaiety, they grew in intimacy. As his health, never robust, worsened, his irritability increased and his intermittent high spirits flagged.

"I was born," he wrote, "a dissatisfied little brute with an inefficient body. I daresay you are not such an anemic bundle of nerves and liver. Besides, things went wrong with me all round very early—not but what I have had good times, and I don't a bit desire to die."

He imagines that she doesn't fear death. "I do," he

continues, "like Dr. Johnson, I know my deserts, but we shall soon know better than the Prophets. I am more Presbyterian than one would expect—heredity, I dare say." Yet his comment on the chance of future survival is far from orthodox, "I can't say I feel calculated to enjoy immortality except on conditions that I cannot look for confidently. 'Eternal be the sleep except to waken so.'"

He confessed to not caring a bawbee for his fellows, and being myopic, to never observing anything but birds, fishes and cats. "This prevented me (among other preventions)," he writes, "from being a novelist. I have no more human nature than a turnip."

He disliked his fellow creatures en masse, or even in the screened sanctuary of an English Club, and agreed heartily with Sir Walter Scott, when he said he preferred a gillie to cultured mankind.

For Lang, life was not worth living in London, or any city. Hotels were anathema.

"Why," he asks, "are people in hotels so odious? We all are odious in hotels."

He hated the fatigues of travel, and railway stations reduced him to an embodied headache. Even in his beloved Scotland, engaged in his favorite pastime, salmon fishing, he dreams of a fairer place, "where the North wind takes a holiday."

His gay words concealed a sad heart, but as he wrote her, "It is not good manners to bestow that tedium on the public. It is too cheap."

The Boer War intensified his gloom. "I would be happier with a bullet in my heart," he wrote, "rather

than alive and impotent to put one in a Boer—not that I blame them—I am naturally on their side, if they would not wop their blacks.”

Twice after their first meeting, Miss Repplier was in London, but both times Lang was away to Scotland, fishing. Though in one of his letters he had written, “Whistle and I’ll come to ye,” she was as incapable of whistling as he was of leaving his salmon.

In the summer of 1899, seven years after they met, he does not try to mask his dejection, “I feel terribly old and played out. I weary of fighting the good fight against Mr. Hall Caine and vulgar ignorance, and science, falsely so called. I feel as old as Mr. Pat [his cat] looks, and nearly as toothless and dyspeptic. I have not bowed the knee to bosh. I have kept the faith and the bird in my bosom, and am fairly sick of the whole concern.”

This same year, hearing that she had been seriously ill, he begs for better news of her and reaffirms their spiritual affinity. Also, for the first and last time, he signs himself “yours affectionately.”

His notes grew shorter and more depressed. “I feel like an obsolete shadow,” and again with true pathos, “Fortune is my foe, too much so to trouble you about. You would be sorry if you knew.”

These last letters show no awareness that the tie between them was broken. They could have only been written to a friend, and in them is the clue to their gradual lessening and cessation. The ardent spirit could no longer conquer the body’s ills, nor the gay tongue conceal the sad heart.

V

TRAVEL ABROAD

"God never meant me to be a traveler!" she said once. Nevertheless, except for her work, foreign travel became, for fifteen years, the chief excitement and interest of Miss Replier's life. She was able to travel luxuriously and often, because she went as chaperone and cicerone to two young girls, Agnes and Sarah Boone, wards of Cardinal Gibbons in Baltimore. They were delightful creatures—handsome, ardent, keen to behold and to see, and possessed of an engaging humor.

During a happy December at Shepheard's Hotel in Cairo, they surprised her with the first Christmas stocking she had ever received, a much appreciated gift, even if nearly four decades overdue. They broke down their companion's reserve, called her "keeper," and teased and loved her in equal parts.

These vacations with "the children," as she called them, proved a warming and liberating experience, replacing to some degree the family affection she had missed.

In 1893, perhaps influenced by the advice of educators and patriots to see America first, she toured our West with her two young charges. Compared to Europe, she found the rewards moderate and the fatigues heavy. She sadly missed the treasures of art and the historic places which rendered the past so vivid, but there were

compensations, as a letter home reveals. "Well, I have seen the Yosemite, and all the hardship and exposure and hatefulness of travel are repaid a thousand times. Fancy staging over mountain roads from nine o'clock till seven at night, with one hour's rest for dinner, and starting off the next morning at six. Then, four hours climb on a sure-footed but jolting mule up the narrowest scrap of ledge you can imagine, is rather hard work for a middle-aged and decrepit person like myself, but the result is glorious and I am delighted at my own progress in athletics."

She admitted that the Vernal Falls was up to then the most beautiful sight of her life, but nature at its most savage and magnificent could not wholly compensate for the many times when she was acutely uncomfortable.

In the West of that period, the crudeness and lack of taste in much that she saw offended her. Her journal reveals that she thought the Leland-Stanford University a dejected sort of place, without space or dignity inside, and only a small library. Taken to admire Mr. Stanford's and Mr. Flood's magnificent homes, they struck her "as pleasant and homelike as barracks," and she asks plaintively, "What is the matter with our rich men?"

She found San Francisco more like Europe, especially on Sundays, with all the shops open and opera being played in the public parks. But she reserved her enthusiasm for the Chinese quarter, "the tea houses, the children and the cats, the fairest of their race."

In Portland, Oregon, they were shown through the Oregonian Building by a proud citizen, who pointed

out painstakingly the clock, the brass work, and the knobs on the doors, "all of which," he affirmed, to my aunt's delight, "would naturally interest an older person."

She was diverted by the naive bombast of the West, but when she saw "the pretty, jolly and wonderful town of Seattle," she thought it really justified the bragging of its citizens. It seems strange today to find Los Angeles described as a "sleepy town with pretty suburbs and low, dainty, wooden houses, embowered in flowers."

The trip had its exciting moments: the expedition to Mills Glacier, where they steamed "close up to those gleaming walls of ice, all shades of pitiless blue"; "the awful cold" when they climbed over the glacier, "heard the water roaring underneath, the sound of icebergs breaking away, and saw them fall crashing into the sea"; and the Grand Canyon, where, from Inspiration Point, she saw the eagle's nest on the bare rock, with the mother bird circling and screaming. Nevertheless, she failed to find that summer the mental spur or the relaxation she sought, and the following year she returned with renewed zest to the delights of the Old World.

Visiting London again, she found both Mr. Berenson and Gilbert Parker extremely amusing, and wrote in her journal, "I am so grateful to be entertained. The stupidity of people is a ghastly thing."

Though her gratitude for such windfalls remained to the end of her life, she learned in time to accept the prevalence of stupidity with kindly stoicism. Sometimes there were lapses from grace, like her note about

a boring female, "She is a perfected miracle of wearisomeness." In one of her most diverting essays, "The Preacher at Large," she acknowledges that dullness is the paramount note in human intercourse.

After going with Mr. Gilchrist to see the Guild Hall pictures, she remarks ruefully, "He forced my admiration painfully. Is it better to go to places with people who bore you or people you bore—a wretched choice!"

Alma Tadema's house she thought really beautiful, and found the artist "a kind, self-satisfied man, who told venerable stories all wrong."

At Mrs. Humphrey Ward's, she was amused by a serious young English girl, who had never seen a horse race but loved to look at the Royal Family. Toward the end of her London visit, she was disillusioned to discover that quite a number of English artists and writers seemed to despise each other.

Through palaces, churches and galleries, her eager and indomitable spirit carried her, and if there was something incongruous or funny in that enormous display, Miss Repplier's eye was sure to catch it. Of certain statues in the galleries of St. Paul in London, she notes, "Sir William Ponsonby, falling gloriously from his horse at Waterloo, dressed merely in a loin cloth, Samuel Johnson half naked in a toga, Richard Rundel Burges, Esq., standing naked on his own ship with only a rag over his shoulder, shaking hands with Victory!"

In St. Giles Church, Edinburgh, she decided the Scots must lack a sense of humor, when she saw a commemorative brass tablet to Jenny Geddes, the huckster woman who threw her stool at Dean Hannay. "It is

so deliciously funny to see her gravely commended as 'the brave Scotch woman who struck the first blow for religious freedom.' "

In Florence, there was her comment on Frumentì's "Raising of Lazarus," "The bystanders hold their noses so naturally."

She returned again and again to enjoy one tapestry in the Belle Arti, where the animals pass before Adam. "The snail heads the procession and sets the time. The lion and tiger stroll together gossiping. The Unicorn walks alone, very proud and stiff. Best of all, at one end walk two rats and two mice and right behind two splendid sleek cats, who are keeping them well covered and merely awaiting the time when Eve's welcome indiscretion will permit them to have a feast. They plainly foresee the end of all this amicable fraternity."

Miss Repplier said in one of her lectures, "If a love for books is the supreme solace of life, I am by way of thinking that a love for animals shares with a love for inanimate nature the second place in the list of compensations." Her heart was soft to all animals, and whenever possible she was their protectress, but no animal usurped the place of the cat in her affections. "If there were as many cats of old in Florence as there are now," she wrote, "it is little wonder the painters put them in their pictures, such splendid fat pussies as they are!"

Painters of cats, like Veronese, Bassanio and Cellini, made a strong appeal. Whenever she discovered a puss plainly belonging to the Virgin, or curled up in the Blessed Mother's work basket or on a corner of the

azure robe, her delight was childlike and spontaneous.

"One of the most perfect cats in all art," she notes, "is a beautiful tortoise-shell puss in Van Mieri's 'The Poulterer's Shop.' It looks up admiringly at a big duck. Its fur is exquisitely soft, its little face charming."

There is her comment on Giordano's "Birth of the Virgin," "The spacious room is full of attendants. Everybody but St. Ann is standing about or kneeling. There is but one chair, on the chair a cushion, and on the cushion sleeps, serene and undisturbed, a cat!"

In another painting of the Virgin's Birth, she had doubts about a beautiful black cat with gleaming yellow eyes and noted, "an intelligent cat—very—but neither amiable nor virtuous." The lack of virtue could not have surprised her, for a friend once heard her remark over the phone to an unknown interlocutor, "By no stretch of the imagination can cats be considered moral." Hence, her comment on a silver bas relief of "The Last Supper" by Cellini, "A large cat is curled up, I regret to say, at the feet of Judas."

Miss Replier thought the title, "Raphael of Cats," bestowed on Gottfried Mind by Mme. Le Brun oddly infelicitous, but "the genuine stupidity of the title," she wrote, "fixed it naturally and inevitably in all men's memories, so that no one ever dreams of alluding to Mind in any other terms."

Athens gave her all she had hoped for, as recorded in her journal. "The Acropolis on a clear afternoon, a memory for a life time! To see the Parthenon, to look through its great yellow columns upon the cloudless sky of Greece, and the sea gleaming always like a silver band;

to stand on the terrace of the little temple of Nike, and watch the crimson and gold of a sunset; to wander about the Erectheum, where grew the olives planted by Athena, and where dwelt the Sacred Snake; to examine at last the portico of the Caryatides, so familiar for many years; to scramble happily over the sacred ground amid broken and beautiful fragments of marble; to keep thinking how nice it would be if we found some dear little relic for ourselves—all these continued delights made up an afternoon of absolute pleasure."

Sailing between the Ionian Isles, she dreamed of the ground where Sappho trod. In Tivoli, she visited what was once the Villa of Maecenas, and wrote, "There Horace stayed on his way to his Sabine Farm, eighteen miles away. He dearly loved the place. I loved it, too." When she was eighty-one, her life-time admiration of Horace resulted in one of her finest essays, written *con amore* and with all her youthful enthusiasm.

She braved the long, difficult walk from Roslin to Hawthornden to see the house of the seventeenth century poet, William Drummond, and the trees under which he met and welcomed Ben Johnson. At Abbotsford, she lost herself, dreaming back the past, "imagining Scott as he used to live and work in those rooms, look out of those windows, and read those books." In this hallowed spot, she ran across a Mr. Langdon from the Argentine, who was hunting up scenes and places connected with Scott's novels. "Who," she asks her diary with frank prejudice, "will ever travel thousands of miles to see places connected with that goose, Howells?"

Some long-anticipated monuments and cities were disappointments. "Belgrade," she declares, "is the most awful, dismal, miserable hole we have yet seen, and they have gone and fortified it as if any one would want it, even as a gift. The only cheerful creature I have seen was a convict, clanking his chain, who grinned at me broadly, as if to say that once in Belgrade, his condition was as good as mine."

The Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey dwindled on sight, "with no hint of Keats, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley or Byron, and so many quite unimportant people."

Guides and beggars were perennial plagues. She was the kind of traveler who delighted in making her own discoveries. She loved to look in shop windows, to come suddenly upon an unexpected courtyard with an idyllic fountain, to step into a deserted church, to linger and meditate.

Her indignation, born of so many precious moments spoiled, brought forth her essay, "Guides, a Protest." "The guide," she writes, "deprives inoffensive strangers of that tranquil enjoyment they have come so far to seek. He has always something to tell me I don't want to hear, and his is that leaden touch which takes all color and grace from every theme he handles."

As to beggars, Agnes Repplier considered inequalities in riches as natural as inequalities in talent or ability. Poverty and wealth, she believed, would be always with us. Her faith in social reforms was small and quite out of step with her period.

She had been trained in the duty of charity, and the

bestowing of alms was an integral part of her faith. In spite of repeated appeals from organized charity not to give to mendicants, no beggar in Philadelphia ever held out his hand to her in vain. This was not an improvident act, even for a slender purse, there being comparatively few suppliants, but the beggars of Europe presented a different problem. Their numbers, their ills and their effrontry tended to discourage the most ardent giver.

In Spain, she found the beggars, especially the little boys, appalling. Even a well-dressed little girl, kneeling by her at Mass, whispered in her ear the inevitable "*cinque centesime.*" One beggar kissed the coin she gave him and then made the Sign of the Cross with it.

On her trip up the Nile, she left the boat with her two companions for a walk. Instantly, they were surrounded by hoards of children, begging. In order to avoid stepping on the smallest ones they had to retreat to the boat.

On Good Friday, outside a popular church in Rome, the crowd was so dense that the people barely moved, but as she got nearer the church, Miss Replier saw to her amazement that two long rows of beggars had been accommodated with seats.

She agreed with Sir Thomas Browne, who said, "I give no alms only to satisfy the hunger of my brother, but to fulfill and accomplish the will and command of my God." She was unconvinced by the excellent arguments of a recent phenomenon, the sociologist, and declares in her essay, "The Beggar's Pouch," "In the end, he leaves you perplexed in spirit and dull of heart

with sixpence saved in your pocket, and the memory of a pinched old face spoiling your appetite for dinner. . . . It may be wrong to give to a legless man at a street corner, but it is right and even praiseworthy to send ten tickets for some dismal entertainment to our dearest friend, who must either purchase the dreaded things or harass his friends in turn."

She points out that "it is not begging but the beggar, who has forfeited favor with the elect." Begging being universal, she could not see why the individual mendicant should be excluded. Her distaste for organized appeals went even further. "If we go to church," she declares stoutly, "we are confronted with a system of begging so complicated and so resolute that all other demands sink into insignificance by its side."

Each time she left the Old World to return to the Philadelphia scene, she was depressed. There is a plaint in her diary, "Never was I so anxious to remain. Never did I go home with such reluctance. My joys lie backward and my griefs before."

VI

THE ART OF CONVERSATION

In the essay, Miss Replier's chosen field for many years, she worked slowly, often taking a month to complete one paper. The remuneration was small. Five years after her first book of essays was published, her earnings from this source were only a little over a thousand a year. In 1889, it was apparent that some other way must be found to augment her income, and lectures seemed to be the answer.

Fortified by the advice and encouragement of Agnes Irwin, she therefore prepared herself to give a series of five or six lectures in Lent, when, as she said in a letter to Harrison Morris, "People will have nothing better to do with their time than to come and hear me."

It was a period when attending lectures was extremely fashionable. Miss Replier's response to this fad, as to most others, was distinctly cool. In an essay on the subject, she fails to see "the necessity of knowing a little about a great many things," and agrees with Dr. Johnson that "when all can read and books are plentiful, lectures are unnecessary." In the same essay, she relates with delight the excuses and evasions of Charles Lamb, when he was eluding his obvious duty to attend the lectures of Coleridge.

Completely skeptical of the popular belief that lectures were a pleasant and easy road to knowledge, she

nevertheless prepared her own with painstaking care. She made them light, gay, often witty, and as little informative as possible. Though without enthusiasm for this method of earning a living, she continued it successfully for over a quarter of a century, while finding most aspects of it distasteful. In 1922, she wrote Harrison Morris, "I am lecturing, north and south, east and west, and am worn into a heap of tired bones."

In another letter, she mentions her approaching lecture at the Dedham Club in Boston, a city much preoccupied just then with prostitutes, and adds that, the preceding month, the lecturer "was a real, live White Slave. Now, how can a respectable old lady like myself compete with such an attraction?"

She must have written Andrew Lang about some of these difficulties, for his answer is unusually sympathetic, "I know what a painful thing it is to lecture to the wrong audience. Once, in Leicester, lecturing on 'Puss in Boots,' I was considered extremely immoral for telling the old Egyptian folk tale, which borders on the history of Mme. Potiphar, with variants concerning cats."

There was an incident at one of her first lectures in Boston, that my aunt always enjoyed telling. Two Bostonians were overheard in the dressing-room exchanging enthusiastic remarks. Finally, one of them inquired, "Do you know where Miss Repplier comes from?"

"From Philadelphia, I believe," said the other.

"*Philadelphia?*" cried the first, in tones of shocked disbelief, adding after a pause, in an attempt to explain

the inexplicable, "probably a Bryn Mawr graduate."

In 1907, Mr. Thomas Masson, editor of *Life*, asked Miss Replier to send them a weekly contribution on topics of her own selection. The magazine was widely read and paid its contributors generously. Indeed, when the checks began to come in, she thought them absurdly big. For the next five years, she sent brief, amusing sketches, and for a time, book reviews. Then, an untoward thing happened.

Life ran one of those popular contests to increase circulation. It asked for the best title to a drawing that depicted a church wedding, the couple on their knees, the minister ready to begin the service. The winning caption, announced in the Christmas number, was:

Clergyman, (opening prayer book at wrong page),
"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

To the unbeliever, this was merely a display of bad taste, but to the believer it was truly blasphemous. Immediately on its appearance, Miss Replier wrote to Mr. Masson severing her connection with the magazine and cancelling her subscription. A note on this in her diary says, "Nicest letter in the world from Mr. Masson. The break hurts me horribly."

Mr. Masson had written:

Dear Miss Replier,

We are greatly distressed over your letter about *Life*. And to think all this should come about over a difference of opinion. As a matter of fact, I can

assure you that none of us realized the significance of that quotation until it was too late to change it. It was selected by each judge among a lot of others. Not until afterwards did we realize the enormity of the offense. It's a shame that we should lose such an old friend and contributor. I have ordered your paper stopped as you instructed, but I can assure you, Miss Repplier, that this has come harder to do than any of the hard things I have had to do in twenty years' connection with the paper.

Yours sincerely,

Thomas Masson

There was a similar instance in England, when Richard Doyle, the Catholic painter and humorist, left the staff of *Punch* after that paper took to abusing his church. However, in August, 1918, the breach was healed, and Miss Repplier again became a regular contributor to *Life*. She had stood up with her usual staunchness for what she considered right, though it meant giving up work she enjoyed and money she needed, but she must have decided that her six years' abstention was an adequate protest.

When Miss Repplier finally visited Spain, she fulfilled the most fantastic and unlikely of her childish dreams. It was here her fancy often strayed when it escaped from reality. Spain's somber glow fired her imagination, and the destruction of the Invincible Armada was, so she wrote, the permanent sorrow of her childhood.

"There is something kingly about Spain," her diary says, "even in her fall. She despises the thrifty devices

of Republican Italy. Her splendid pictures are always open to the public without charge."

Of all the paintings of the Crucifixion, she preferred Velasquez, and in Seville she found what was to her the holiest picture in the world, Murillo's "St. Francis," embracing and embraced by the crucified Saviour.

The hideous, gloomy Escorial in Madrid enthralled her. "The Escorial is Philip," she noted, "it is stamped with his somber, repellent, kingly personality."

Of Titian's Portrait of "Charles V on Horseback," she writes, "An Emperor and a soldier every inch, but nevertheless the image of Uncle Charles Repplier."

This trip was one of the last she enjoyed with the Boone girls, both of whom were soon to be married. Sarah's marriage took place in Baltimore. Her guardian, Cardinal Gibbons, performed the ceremony, and afterward at the reception, he teased my aunt, saying, "And when, Miss Repplier, shall I have the honor of performing a like service for you?"

"Perhaps Your Grace knows of a suitable applicant?" she countered.

He answered, his wise eyes twinkling, "Well, I know some fine men—and brave ones too!"

The truth seems to be that marriage played no part in her future plans, and though her tendency to hero worship inclined her to put friends like Dr. Furness, Theodore Roosevelt and Dr. William Allen White on pedestals, there is no hint in her life of any romantic attachment. Her youth had been passed without the usual diversions associated with that period. Her determination to educate herself as a writer consumed her

time and energies. Her personal responsibilities were heavy. When Mrs. Repplier knew she was dying, she demanded and received from Agnes a promise to look after Louis, her crippled brother, as long as he lived. This pledge was faithfully kept at no small cost, especially to her peace of mind.

Speaking once of "that jade, Duty," she said, "When I was a little girl, I was obliged to call on my two old aunts once a month, and I hated it. The visit always followed the same pattern. First, I was upbraided for not having come before; next, I was told in detail all their separate aches and pains; then, my general appearance and moral conduct were appraised at their exact but unflattering value, and at last it was time for my release and escape. There were no alleviating by-products, no sweets, no pennies. It convinced my infant mind once and forever that doing one's duty was invariably painful."

In her essay, "The Spinster," published when she was nearing fifty, Miss Repplier ridicules the old maid of the sentimentalists—"a creature stricken at heart, though maddeningly serene and impossibly unselfish."

Less impersonally and far more passionately than was her habit, she offers a modern view of the unmarried woman. "What if patient endurance be the very last virtue to which she can lay claim? What if she is not the least wistful, and never casts longing looks at her sister-in-law's babies, nor strains them passionately to her heart, nor deems it a privilege to nurse her nephews through whooping cough and measles, nor offers herself in any fashion as a holocaust on other people's

domestic altars? What if, holding her life in her two hands, and knowing it to be the only real possession, she disposes of it in the way she feels will give her the most content, swimming smoothly in the stream of her own nature, and clearly aware that happiness lies in the development of her individual tastes and acquirements."

Another essay, "Three Famous Old Maids," describes the serene, cheerful and successful lives of Miss Austen, Miss Edgeworth and Miss Mitford, "all rounded and completed without that element we are taught to believe is the mainspring and prime motor of existence."

The author shows very clearly where she stands on a woman's right to be her unromantic and independent self, if that be her real nature. In believing that many women can lead contented and fulfilled lives without romance or marriage, she ran counter to prevailing opinion then and now. Present day biographers of talented women take infinite pains to unearth some shadowy and ephemeral encounter, which can then be enlarged and blown up into a tragic and frustrated love affair.

Agnes Repplier said she lacked the one incomparable gift, an instinctive and illogical delight in living. Happiness for her was truly a matter of cultivation.

"It is not easy to find happiness in ourselves," she said, "and it is not possible to find it elsewhere."

The destructive criticism to which she was subjected in childhood and adolescence, resulted finally in a failure to see in herself anything worthy of admiration. This disrelish for both her inner and outer self bred

discontent and rebellion and sharpened her naturally clever tongue so that she alienated more often than she attracted.

With maturity and the flowering of her talent, she began to take a modest pride in her success and in the friendships growing out of it. In time, she developed a normal affection for herself, and with this change, her moments of happiness became increasingly less rare. She clung to these intervals with tenacity, for she believed with Emerson that if you think happiness worth enjoying, you must think it worth defending.

"We may fail of our happiness, strive we ever so bravely," she wrote, "but we are less likely to fail if we measure with judgment our chances and our capabilities."

Once, while president of the Contemporary Club, she listened to the speaker of the evening, Alma Tadema's daughter, outline a cheerful blueprint for the attainment of happiness. In closing the discussion which followed, Miss Replier mentioned her own small doubts as to the durability of happiness.

"We know well what it is," she concluded, "for we have all experienced it, and we cherish it all the more because it is so fleeting."

In her essay, "The Cheerful Clan," she says, "Joy is a delightful, flashing little word, as brief as is the emotion it conveys."

Her nature was naturally sad and her hard-won philosophy of cheerful pessimism easily shattered. An interruption to her work, a letter asking her to do something for which she had neither the time nor the

inclination, a friend's trouble or illness, the postponement of an anticipated pleasure, a telephone call at the wrong moment: any one of these likely happenings could shadow her day. On the other hand, a word of praise from the right person, a pleasant hour with a friend, a phrase neatly turned, could change and lighten her mood.

She said once that her happiest time was between the ages of forty and sixty, adding that it was a period comfortably removed from both inexperience and decrepitude.

With her ingrained dislike of reforms and the accompanying zeal of their advocates, it was not surprising that she was cool to the excesses of the suffragettes and their extravagant claims, but she never denied the essential rightness of their cause.

"Reformers," she pleads, "have unswervingly and un pityingly decreased the world's content, that they might better the world's condition."

There were days during the hottest period of the fight for the franchise, when it seemed as if she and her calm and contemplative friend, Elizabeth Pennell, were the only noncombatants in the field.

In her essay, "The Conservative's Consolations," she wrote, "The sanguine assurance that men and nations can be legislated into goodness, that pressure from without is equivalent to a moral change within, needs a strong backing of inexperience."

The twin stars that guided her judgment, common sense and the wisdom learned from a study of history, compelled her to see her sex as they actually were—

une grande réalité comme la guerre—and never as a moral force destined to eradicate corruption. She greatly admired her countrywomen's energy, efficiency and enterprise, while deprecating certain defects of these qualities. Once she wrote, "The superlative complacency of American women is due largely to the oratory of American men, an adulation that has no more substance than the foam on beer."

However, the keenest barbs of her wit were reserved for the helpless and sentimental females, the clinging vines of an earlier age. In her essay, "The Child," she quotes from Mrs. West's *Letters to a Young Lady*: "We unquestionably were created to be the wedded mates of man. Nature intended that man should sue and woman coyly yield." In *The Happy Half Century*, a collection of her gayest essays, which Mr. A. Edward Newton said was compounded of wit, wisdom, irony and exquisite learning, Miss Repplier makes delightful fun of that sentimental period in eighteenth century England, when the mediocre efforts of literary ladies were crowned with unmerited laurels. Talented males urged them fervently to pursue their mission to "elevate and refine," while expecting them to take a suitably humble attitude towards matters of the intellect. Women were sternly admonished as to their secondary place in Creation, and their education was designed to keep them well below their male consorts and relatives.

"It was hard," mocks Miss Repplier, "to speed the male child up the stony heights of erudition, but it was harder still to check the female child at the crucial point,

and keep her tottering decorously behind her brother. The one virtue she was taught to affect was delicacy; the one vice permitted to her weakness was dissimulation."

Quite early in her reading, Miss Repplier decided that the heroines of nineteenth century fiction were false and artificial creations. Although her admiration for Sir Walter Scott's novels never diminished, she could not agree with Ruskin's praise of Scott's heroines.

"It never occurred to the great moralist any more than to the great story-teller," she writes, "that a girl is something more than a set of assorted virtues." Virtue, in truth, was the last thing she demanded in her favorite heroes and heroines. In a spirited defense of Becky Sharp, she reveals her ever lively interest in the sinner, especially if the culprit is a staunch fighter, and if, as in Becky's case, her creator has stacked every card against her.

Miss Repplier was shocked when Dr. Eliot of Harvard spoke of "the malign motives and unclean soul of Becky Sharp," and wrote with unusual vehemence in her defence, "Her qualities are great qualities:—valor and wit and audacity and patience and an ungrumbling acceptance of Fate. I hope it comforts her in that shadowy land where dwell the Immortals of fiction, to know that her shameless little figure, flitting dauntlessly from venture to venture, from hazard to hazard, has never been without appreciative observers."

My aunt invariably preferred men's society to that of women. Perhaps she found men more stimulating listeners, and when they talked it was not apt to be on

domestic topics. Women, she thought, do not have that condensed and hoarded understanding which enables men to understand one another without many words. But whenever she discerned an injustice to her sex, she defended them stoutly. In Rome, her indignation was aroused by certain regulations. No woman was permitted to enter the Oratory of John the Baptist, and women were allowed only once a year to enter the Santa Croce Chapel of St. Helen. Men could go any morning into St. Peter's Crypt, but women needed a special permission. These distinctions she thought invidious.

Having been self-supporting and independent of the male since adolescence, she could not avoid being something of a feminist. In the career she had chosen, a woman could pit her talent against a man's with equal chance of success, and she was firmly opposed to making sex, morals or religion a yardstick with which to measure a writer's ability.

Once, when Miss Repplier was introduced to an audience as America's most distinguished female essayist, Mr. A. Edward Newton felt that her introducer was in for a bad quarter of an hour, and he was not mistaken.

When she quotes Edmond de Goncourt's remark that never has a virgin, young or old, produced a work of art, she wonders if the great French writer ever read Miss Austen's *Emma*. She believed that women should be judged—not by a lenient standard of their own—but by the common standards set the world. *The Woman's Who's Who*, she considered an insult to her sex.

"Women," she declared, "are not excluded from the original *Who's Who*. They fill their full share of

space. Why then treat them as if they were a different order of being, whose claims to notice do not compete with the claims of men?"

In her essay, "Our Over-rated Great Grandmothers," she puts herself resolutely on the side of the modern woman: "The economical independence of woman," she wrote, "her solvency in the industrial world, and her strengthening grasp upon the world of the intellect, had and has the supreme rightness of the inevitable."

The advocates for Votes for Women may have found her half-hearted, but when it came to the next great controversy, prohibition, she proved an all-out antagonist. She knew her compatriots to be anything but law-abiding. They failed to obey many laws already on the Statutes, and here was another law all too easy to break.

Though she could not foresee that the criminal would take over from the amateur law-breaker, she did foresee the futility of the experiment, and was out of patience with the woes that followed in its train, not the least being a persistent clamor by the anti-prohibitionists to have her speak on their platforms.

As a school girl, Agnes was compelled to read Milton's *Areopagitica*, which she found heavy going, but one sentence stuck in her retentive mind, "They are not skillful considerers of human things who imagine to remove sin by removing the matter of sin."

When her friend, Harrison Morris, promised to write a short biographical sketch of her for Scribner's "Book-Buyer," she offered him, among other points, the following, "I dearly love social life and amusing people, but I abhor (and here my French blood counts) the intru-

sion of serious matters into idle talk. I like conversation as an art, and the form is more to me than the substance."

In one of her most delightful essays, "The Luxury of Conversation," she sets forth what lifts this art to its highest level and what reduces it to a miracle of dullness or ineptitude. With her unerring talent for selecting the apt illustration, she quotes the remark of William the Fourth, who, confronted with the urgent need to say something to the Duke of Devonshire, his neighbor at dinner, asked him where he meant to be buried.

Though she mentions Byron's coolness to Mme. de Stael's type of conversation, she omits the poet's caustic comment during his brief encounter with the domestic variety. "I have been very comfortable here, listening to that damn monologue elderly gentlemen call conversation, and in which my pious father-in-law repeats himself every evening, save one, when he played upon the fiddle."

Once, speaking of good talk, Miss Repplier said, "When by some rare chance there is given us by day or night an hour of keen and animated talk, we do well to hold on to it and enjoy it without reckoning the cost. To lose such an hour for the sake of keeping an appointment or going to bed is sheer stupidity. We have often been to bed, and we shall have many more appointments before we come to die, but who can restore to us the opportunity we have lost?"

She thought the spoken word was the highest form of intellectual recreation, and that the Greeks were right in considering the written word inferior to it, and she

regretted the triumph of print over the more exhilarating pleasure of conversation. She recognized that her own country was more distinguished for the power of oratory than for the charm of talk, but to her, conversation was the medium of intelligence and taste, and a field for the finest amenities of civilization.

"It is not what we learn in conversation that enriches us," she said, "it is the elation which comes of swift contact with tingling currents of thought." None knew better how rare such contacts were, but when an opportunity did occur, she herself was greatly gifted for what Henry James calls "joyous discourse," and Jean Cocteau "the royal politeness of the ear."

Writing a tribute to Dr. Horace Howard Furness after his death, she said, "There is no talk like his, so full of substance, so innocent of pedantry, so perfect in form, so sweetened by courtesy."

As a shy adolescent, I used to marvel at the ease and vivacity with which she talked into Dr. Furness's formidable silver trumpet, an excruciating ordeal for the timid or self-conscious. The great scholar's deep affection for her and his delight in her wit gave her all the self-confidence she needed.

Unlike most authors, her talk bore a striking resemblance to her writing, with the added charm of spontaneity. There was the same felicitous phrasing, spiced with ironical and diverting comment, and an occasional apt quotation. That astonishing verbal memory was never more in evidence than when she plucked from the immense storehouse of her reading just the amusing example needed to emphasize or illuminate a point.

Her talent for the spoken word lent distinction and gayety to two literary clubs in Philadelphia, the Browning Society, which was poor, earnest, and often dull; and the Contemporary Club, a far livelier and more entertaining association. Here, in its early days, came Walt Whitman, looking, according to Miss Repplier, like a cross between a cowboy and Little Lord Fauntleroy, and displaying to one and all his natural loveable egotism. Many years later, there was the much-talked-about night when Amy Lowell read a serious and scholarly paper on the then controversial subject of "Modern Poetry" and was finally reduced to tears by another speaker, who, lacking both sense and sensibility, made crude fun of the whole movement.

Miss Repplier's presidency of the Contemporary marked the Club's highest peak of popularity and success. Under her expert guidance, there were memorable evenings, none equalling the night Henry James made his debut as a public speaker. Tense and nervous in his new and unaccustomed role, Mr. James read in a low, hurried voice his searching and analytical paper on Balzac, while a packed audience strove hard to hear, and even harder to understand, the intricate presentation.

Commenting on the evening later, Miss Repplier said, "It was plain that while his audience thought little about Balzac and a great deal about Henry James, Mr. James thought little about his audience and a great deal about Balzac, a happy adjustment of interest."

Writing about this time to Edmund Gosse, James said, "But I liked dear, queer, flat, comfortable Phila-

delphia, almost ridiculously for what it is, extraordinarily *cosse* and materially civilized and saw a good deal of your friend, Agnes Repplier, whom I liked for her bravery and (almost) brilliancy."

James may have regretted this niggardly "almost," applied to one who followed so faithfully his own credo of composition, selection and style, for he added a postscript, "I repeat the horrid act at Chicago, Indianapolis, St. Louis, San Francisco, and later in New York—have already done so at Philadelphia to a vast multitude, with Miss Repplier as brilliant introducer."

There is an echo of this evening in a letter Dr. Furness wrote to his sister, Mrs. Caspar Wister. "After dinner, Agnes told me much of her introduction of Henry James. As she memorized it at the time, she repeated it to me almost word for word, and, my faith! it was charming, sparkling with most felicitous phrases. Indeed, from what I have heard of the evening, her speech eclipsed Henry James' lecture, whereof the delivery was almost irredeemably bad."

When quite a young woman, my aunt was taken by her friend, Harrison Morris, together with a bottle of whiskey, to Camden to meet the man Morris believed was the greatest creative genius in America. Miss Repplier did not share his enthusiasm for Walt Whitman. His coarseness affronted her, and she had been too long steeped in the poetry of Byron, Shelley, Keats and Tennyson to recognize genius in so new and strange a mold.

The visit had its trying aspects. She was appalled at the disorder and dirt of the one room, and the unkempt

appearance of the poet himself. There was no drinking glass, only a solitary tooth mug, out of which each in turn had a drink of the whiskey. Nevertheless, the memory that endured longest was the poet's beautiful, elaborate, old world courtesy.

In Whitman's diary there is a brief mention of the day, "My friend, Harrison Morris, brought Agnes Replier, a nice young critter, to see me."

In recent years, if we are to believe Traubel, Whitman was not so kind in his comments and is quoted as saying, "A.R. is bright, smart, quick, knowing—and that is the trouble—especially the smartness from which I always shrink. Smart people, merely intellectual people, professionals, writers as such, cannot comprehend *Leaves of Grass*—none of them—might as well let it alone. She strains for brilliancy, tries hard and harder and hardest until she gets her wit just where she wants it."

Whitman's antagonism is not surprising, for he was a pioneer and an iconoclast, and Miss Replier, according to Ellery Sedgwick, was "a sort of contemporary ancestor, a summation of the best that has gone before."

But Miss Replier's opinion of Whitman altered with her growth, and in *Eight Decades* she speaks of "the new generation's widespread interest in that vital force, which was to vivify the nation at the expense of an occasional lapse from good taste."

One verse of Whitman my aunt often quoted in her old age and always with strong emotion, for it beautifully expressed her own capacity for passionately loyal friendship:

**“Surely, whoever calls to me with the right voice
Him or her will I follow
As the water follows the moon
With fluid footsteps all around the earth.”**

VII

IMPACT OF FIRST WORLD WAR

In *Our Convent Days*, there is a vivid account of the School's "spiritual retreat," with its four days of cloistered and enforced silence.

Once, on the third of these days of sermons, religious exercises and examination of conscience, Agnes had the luck to be sent out with Elizabeth Pennell for a breath of fresh air. Elizabeth instantly and defiantly broke silence to propose "a serious conversation." Though elated by the suggestion, Agnes salved her doubtful conscience by opening her *Ursuline Manual* at the familiar page, saying, "Let's find our predominant passions."

Elizabeth, nothing loth, read aloud strictures on the ruling passions of pride and ill-humor, and they both took considerable satisfaction in finding examples of these faults among their classmates.

Unfortunately, one passion caused Agnes' cheeks to flame and her soul to be filled with a sense of guilt. It was "a propensity to extravagant partialities which frequently predominate in some warm and impetuous characters." Persons with this fault selected their favorites rashly, espoused them with fervor, and desired to engross their whole attention to the exclusion of other friends. The harsh conclusion was that "as their affections are in general as short-lived as they are ardent,

no one person is likely to be long tormented with the title of their friend."

Elizabeth paused and Agnes waited in no little trepidation to hear her own name, but to her immense relief, her friend merely said, "I think that's silly. Nobody is like that."

But Agnes knew better. Her friendships were indeed impetuous, and varied, and with each one she had an all-consuming desire to be the favorite. These attachments were as warm, as full of hero worship and as fruitful of hurts as love affairs, and this was as true of her in later life as in adolescence.

There was nothing of the cool, the detached or the impersonal in Agnes Repplier's friendships, and they were almost never short-lived, though they fluctuated in intensity.

While Elizabeth's affection was the calm, unemotional kind, it nevertheless aroused in Agnes a response so fervid that she deemed concealment the part of wisdom. She never ceased to take delight in this friendship, as her diary proves: "E. P. is a blessed saint of reasonableness," and again, "there is no one like her. She has not a sharp edge . . . she is a solace to my soul."

There were some friends who were anything but reasonable, like the one who broke off all future intimacy because Miss Repplier "was partial to Henry James and callous to Ireland." There were other friends whose demands added to, rather than lifted her burdens.

Her ability to make a brief, charming and witty introductory or after-dinner speech was so rare and desirable a talent, that it was natural her friends should press her

to exercise this gift on behalf of the persons or charities they sponsored. It was very difficult for her to refuse such requests, yet these short speeches, which were polished to perfection, consumed precious time and had to be sandwiched in between her other pressing work. She was probably thinking of such involvements when she wrote in her diary, "A friend across the sea is all pure profit."

When she introduced André Maurois to an American audience, it offered her the always welcome opportunity to express her admiration for France. Quoting M. Maurois' opinion "that the charm of culture is that it humanizes love," she added, "but I rather think that the charm of culture is that it humanizes social relations and gives a recreation ground for friendship. For France is the country which, above all other countries, has produced the agreeable things of life, and the most agreeable of all these things is the ability to approach one another with mental ease. Therefore is she the luminous point about which rally the undefeated thinkers of the world. These are the men to whom intelligence is the highest form of vitality, who know that it is the critical faculty which prevents the creative faculty from running amuck through Art and Letters."

Her genuine regard for the distinguished writer and diplomat, M. Jusserand, for his work in cementing the friendship between her country and France, shines through the polished phrases of a speech she gave at a farewell dinner to the Ambassador.

"He came to know us so well," she said, "that friendship was established on a secure basis of absolute under-

standing, with a broad margin for enjoyment, and even room for a little mocking laughter here and there. I hope he read in an American newspaper the story of the little French boy who was bidden in the last year of the war, to write a composition on the Yankee soldiers, and who wrote, "They are more daring than our soldiers. They do not fear expense.' "

She quoted at the close from M. Jusserand's engaging book, *English Wayfaring Life in the Middle Ages*, where he describes a religious order founded in France in the 12th century, which devoted itself under the protection of the Church to the noble and necessary work of bridge building. It built the first and famous bridge at Avignon, and one still in use at Pont St. Esprit.

"The legitimate successor of these active and able men," said Miss Repplier, "is M. Jusserand himself. He has built a bridge across the estranging sea, and by virtue of his own personality has united France and the United States in a friendship which shall outlast time."

The Ambassador wrote the next day, begging for the text of "your beautiful address which would then become for us a joy forever. The words of such an admired friend of France in her hour of peril, and of such a kindly judge of her representative in America certainly deserve to be preserved."

Introducing M. Paul Claudel, she said, "Franklin thought he loved France because France loved liberty, but in truth, Poor Richard fell to Paris and blossomed in that rich soil into something which would hardly have been recognized in Philadelphia."

In contrast to family life, which Miss Repplier con-

sidered a kind of bondage, she found freedom in the society of her friends. "Between them," she wrote, "ever and always the waters of life flow on a level. Rational thought is theirs and the pleasure of unprejudiced speech." But now and then the waters even here were troubled, and speech sometimes hurt.

In her diary are many notes about her friends, how they failed or helped her, exhausted, annoyed or enchanted her: "A lovely evening with C.P. She was never dearer. I read aloud *The Man of Destiny*, and we talked till 2 A.M. White nights is the name. Marius had such." But of the same friend on another day, the notes say, "The afternoon a jumble of pleasure and pain. C.P. contributed the pain. I cannot help caring what she thinks."

Of all her friends, Cornelia Frothingham was the most companionable, if not the most dependable. After their meetings, she returned home, sometimes rested and refreshed, sometimes "half hurt, half happy."

Once after a visit to Dr. Furness in Wallingford, she wrote in her diary, "A charming day! If only such days could be our last on earth!"

Perhaps when friendship must fill the space generally occupied by family or romance, or both, these intimacies become richer, more emotional, and infinitely more important. Agnes Repplier's life would have been a somber and a lonely one without her friends. Lacking them, she says herself, her heart would fail her utterly. Yet, though they gave her so much, they were not able to give her what she craved most. Once she said with strong feeling, "I have never been first with anyone."

Certain well-to-do friends were concerned about her future and her continuing ability to support herself and family by a writing talent which could never produce best sellers. Over a long period of time, as death came in turn to four of these devoted friends, she received from each one a substantial legacy.

1912 was a year of mourning. That year Andrew Lang died in July, Dr. Horace Howard Furness in August, and Agnes Irwin in December. Of the great Shakespeare scholar, she wrote in her diary, "No death could hurt me more. I had hoped to die before him." And of Miss Irwin, "Life will always be emptier, sadder, graver for her loss." Her life of Agnes Irwin is a balanced, warm and heartfelt tribute. An appreciation of Dr. Furness, printed in the *Atlantic Monthly*, is one of the most appealing and enchanting of her shorter essays.

In 1896, her life and work were threatened by cancer, the disease that had killed her mother. She met this personal crisis with great courage, common sense and sanity. She refused to be secretive or evasive, as was the custom of the day. She wrote to Sarah Boone, "There's no disgrace about cancer, so I don't see why I should keep it a secret. It's not as if I had contracted it through some wilful act of my own."

Dr. William J. White came into her life then as her surgeon. He removed a malignant growth from her breast, and it was to his skill she felt she owed a long life free from the disease. Her gratitude to him as a surgeon and her admiration for him as a man more than outweighed the often irreverent remarks of this

outspoken heretic. She dedicated to him her gayest book of essays, *A Happy Half Century*, and received from him this characteristic letter:

Dear Miss Agnes,

Thank you for your kind birthday note. I am fifty-eight now, but I feel only thirty-eight. Of course I know that I am rotten somewhere, am being insidiously undermined, and am decomposing and disintegrating. I'll presently shed this outer fleshly, unattractive envelope and flutter upward in my pristine purity to take my proper place among your Saints. Only Heaven knows how Heaven has done without my presence and advice thus far! But in the meanwhile it is nice to know that someone—with influence—is hoping that I may yet have some fun here.

If you are doing any praying now-a-days, you might mention that I want a new saddle horse for Mrs. White, and a 1909 car for myself—six cylinder—but don't take any special trouble about it.

I hear that the sale of *A Happy Half Century* is unprecedentedly large. I am buying it freely myself, for invalid and absent friends, inscribing each copy "the regards of the dedicatee." Your name and mine together are irresistible.

Yours ever,

W. J. W.

From the beginning of World War I, Miss Repplier's emotions were deeply involved. The invasion of Belgium was an incredible shock to one who had spent many of her happiest hours in that country. She had taken for granted that never, except in the pages of history, would she encounter vandalism with its careless

destruction of safety, honor and beauty. Both in childhood and maturity her heart was stirred by stories of "old, unhappy, far-off things and battles long ago."

Like Andrew Lang, she loved Scott's ballads of war, and admired Sir Walter as the firm believer in action, the singer of strife and the supreme poet of battles. But in 1914, when Belgium was invaded and modern warfare with its mechanized might burst upon a peaceful world, her hitherto romantic approach to war received a crushing blow. Nevertheless, she had to take her stand with those who believed in fighting for the right. Her nature would not permit her to accept pacifism or neutralism.

History had taught her that nothing sacred and dear could have survived upon the earth had not men fought for their women, their homes, their individual honor and their national life. Outlawing war might take centuries and could only come after great, slow changes in the human being.

Heroism had always appealed to her as the stuff of which a great nation is made. She liked to think that all healthy men enjoy fighting, and she was certain that while men stay men, they must give up their lives when the hour strikes.

"Life is given us for a few years," she said. "Lose it we must. Its only value lies in the use we make of it." If, then, war gave men a chance to use it nobly, it could not be all bad. Yet she realized the weakness of putting the defense of war on a moral basis, for she wrote, "When treating a theme as many-sided as war, it is best to confine ourselves to that good old-fashioned simplic-

ity which was content to take short, obvious views of life. It is best to leave ethics alone and ride as lightly as we may."

Early in the war she joined forces with Dr. White to get her country on the side of justice and right as she saw them. One memorable night in 1915, she dined with Dr. White to meet ex-President Theodore Roosevelt and discuss these grave matters. Her diary contains a very feminine note, "Heavenly! There were seven men. I was the only woman."

In 1916, there is another entry. "Saw a lot of Mr. Roosevelt. Consider him brilliant, profoundly interested in himself, but decently interested in others." She liked his honesty, and found him rare good company.

At one dinner, Helen Howe, a charmer and an old school friend of my aunt, was complaining that her son, George, then about four, never said anything she could repeat.

"At last Helen," said Mr. Roosevelt, his eyes twinkling, "I know the secret of your popularity!"

He was delighted to enlist Miss Repplier's talents for the great cause, though by his standards, her zeal was a little disappointing. "You're no good as a partisan," he once said to her, "for you never go the whole way." He might have remembered Paul Valery's dictum, "Enthusiasm is not an artist's state of mind."

When Theodore Roosevelt died in 1919, she felt that America had lost her greatest citizen.

For many weeks she worked with Dr. White over a political pamphlet "Germany and Democracy," a reply to a paper by Dr. Dernberg in the *Saturday Evening Post*.

Dr. de Schweinitz, the famous oculist, called her Dr. White's literary wife. Writing about this period to her friend, Mrs. Schuyler Warren, she says, "We are working very hard, he and I, and his inroads on my time would be frightful if I did not love it so."

The headstrong and autocratic doctor was no easy collaborator, and there were times when only gratitude and affection held her to the task. Occasionally, she was driven to remind him that, after all, she was the better writer, a fact that he never gave her the satisfaction of acknowledging.

In Giraudoux's *Amphitryon* 38, Jupiter asks, "Friendship? I hear it for the first time. What does it mean? What is its object?" and Alkmena answers, "To bring together the most totally dissimilar people and make them equal."

Later that year, she wrote to Mrs. Warren, "Dr. White goes to France to arrange the Philadelphia Ward of the American Ambulance Hospital. I wish he would take me with him, but he says it would not be proper, which is nonsense, *à mon âge*."

Miss Repplier did not need any coaxing to attack Woodrow Wilson's "Watchful Waiting." Her natural aversion to reformers would inevitably have placed her in the opposite camp, even if she had not been a staunch Republican and a passionate adherent to the cause of France and Britain.

In 1916, there is an indignant note in her diary, "The President, brooding like a hen over Germany's fake peace offers!"

Her country's addiction to slogans exasperated her.

Of the publicized "a war to end war," she exclaimed, "Of course it wasn't, and nobody in their senses ever believed it was! There cannot exist in the world to-day a man so simple-minded as to accept at its face value any kind of slogan. People who pin their faith to a catch word never feel the necessity of understanding anything."

On Easter Sunday, 1916, Dr. White died. As both physician and friend he was irreplaceable. She had always prayed and believed that she would die first. Three years after his death, at the request of his family, she wrote and published his life. In this work she found some solace for her loss and an outlet for her gratitude and affection.

During the years of catastrophic war news, when each day she was afraid to open her newspaper, she welcomed any distraction that might afford a respite from the turmoil and anguish of that period. "Such hours," says her diary, "were good in the mortal sadness of life."

Early in 1918 she went to hear the Archbishop of York, Cosimo Gordon Lang, speak in Philadelphia's Academy of Music. She found him "wise, simple and spiritual, a healer of my sick heart."

On Easter of that year, her diary is despairing: "The saddest Easter day that ever dawned. Christ is risen but his brothers are still sacrificed. The war is beyond hoping, and America has not struck a blow."

But the blows were very near, and the close of the year was to see the end of the war. With peace, came a great surcease of emotional strain for Miss Repplier, and she took up again her former role of detached and ironic observer.

VIII

LIFE IN PHILADELPHIA

Each year marked an increase in the number of Miss Repplier's social and professional activities. She rarely spent an evening at home, a very good place, in her opinion, to stay away from. She continued to love the theater, and it was a miserable play indeed from which she failed to extract some enjoyment.

In January, 1912, she happened to be present when Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* was produced in Philadelphia amid a barrage of eggs and vegetables, an influx of policemen and the dragging out of offenders—"a grand rumpus," Miss Repplier called it.

Occasionally, her diary carried a short, sharp comment on the theater, as when, of O'Neill's play, *Welded*, she notes, "All sex and no sense."

From their inception, moving pictures were for the most part disappointing. They were too unreal, too sentimental, too distorted. Their conscious humor fell below her standards, but she enjoyed "the unconscious humor of the censor, which rivalled, though it could not surpass, the unconscious humor of the producer." In a lecture on the subject, she said, "The censor has to see to it that the average film resembles Mrs. Inchbold's countenance—'voluptuous without indecency.'"

In her essay, "The Unconscious Humor of the Movies," she wrote, "When Barrie's clever play, *The*

Admirable Crichton, was screened, the management, fearful lest the name should suggest to Americans something connected with the Navy, changed it to *Male and Female*, which had the advantage of being equally applicable to *Hamlet* or *Abie's Irish Rose*." She was certain that film directors made a mistake in so consistently underestimating the intelligence of their audiences.

Though she was well aware that pleasures are dubious things, she often gambled on the chance that a dinner or an evening of cards might prove enjoyable. Many times, she herself contributed the only amusement. Occasionally, circumstances defeated her best efforts, as when her diary reports: "A draft on my legs, a pain in my stomach, and not a card in my hand!" Yet she thoroughly agreed with the Ettrick Shepherd that to seek pleasure at the cost of a little pain is true philosophy.

After the War, there was an influx of distinguished visitors from England. Sitting next to John Galsworthy, she put forth all her conversational skill without eliciting one answering spark. She had better luck with General Allenby. After her first abortive efforts, she remembered the usual British reaction to examples of American extravagance, so she mentioned casually that the woman's club she belonged to paid an annual forty thousand dollars in rent. The result was all she had hoped for. The hero of Jerusalem came instantly and completely to life with exclamations of horror and disbelief. He assured her indignantly that not the most distinguished men's club in London paid a tithe of that sum. From then on, it was easy sailing.

The same year, she heard Mr. Middleton Murry talk

about himself for an hour, and she got the impression that he liked doing it. In her essay, "The Happiness of Writing an Autobiography," she wrote, "Mr. Theodore Dreiser's book about himself sounds like nothing but a loud, human purr." And once, lecturing on books and authors, she said, "I warn you plainly that no plummet is deep enough to sound the vanity of authorship."

These dear and inexhaustible delights of egotism were not for her. Whenever possible, she avoided talking about herself, was never content with her life, and only rarely with her work. She believed that no matter what we attain, the dissatisfaction of the thinking mind must be perpetual. "I wish I wrote better things," says her diary, and only once as regards her essay, "The Masterful Puritan," is there a restrained note of satisfaction: "It does seem good to me." However, a letter of praise from Mr. Brownell, a critic she greatly admired, caused her to write happily, "It makes life and work seem worth while."

As guest speaker at a dinner given for Lady Astor by the English Speaking Union, she expressed gratitude "to the adventurous spirit of roving Englishmen who laid the foundation of our commonwealth," and continued, "I, without one drop of English, Scotch, Welsh or Irish blood in my veins, have come into the matchless inheritance of the English tongue and of English Letters, which have made the happiness of my life."

This consciousness of her literary debt to England was part of her strong attachment to that country.

She believed the two great English-speaking countries had a practical need of each other. "Their contrasting

qualities," she said once in a lecture, "when fused, are much better for the fusion. Our aims and ideals are alike, our methods curiously dissimilar. If we excel in ardor and energy, England excels in patience. If we fling straight to the mark, England has learned that half measures are the law of progress, but the main currents that carry England to her goal carry America by her side."

She found Lady Astor clever and friendly, surprisingly familiar with her essays, and flattering in her open admiration. Her note on this is revealing, if, perhaps, a shade too sweeping: "It seems so droll, because my townspeople have always ignored me." This is the only comment on her native city's aloofness, unless an unexplained note refers to Philadelphia, "I am slighted where I merit recognition."

This was written many years before one Philadelphian, Col. Richard Gimbel, gave time and money so that his native city might better appreciate the literary gifts of two of her citizens. He bought the Edgar Allan Poe house and for many months exhibited Poe memorabilia there. Then, without informing Miss Repplier of his plan, he collected letters, photographs, manuscripts and other data for an exhibition in her honor.

When the collection was finished, he invited her to a private view. She was then over eighty, and though by that time tributes had lessened in importance, she was immensely surprised and touched by this proof that she could be so honored in her own town.

Spending the summer holiday with friends near Lenox, she drank tea one afternoon with Edith Whar-

ton. Her diary says, "She was charming and friendly and has an adorably beautiful home. What can Fate give that it has not given to her? She is and has everything worth being and having." Was there an understandable note of envy here for the sybarite who had never known hardship or financial anxiety, or the difficulties of those not blessed by fortune?

Her own life was so different. Indeed, after her parents died, my aunt never had a home in the true meaning of the word. She lived the greater part of her life in rented rooms, with her sister, Mary, and her crippled brother, Louis. In their different ways, though proud of her achievements, the sister and brother resented her constant engagements and growing fame.

These three ill-assorted characters, held together by the inexorable fetich of the family, took their meals at a small hotel in the neighborhood. However late my aunt had been up the night before, she rose at seven, walked in all kinds of weather a block and a half for breakfast *à trois*, a particularly trying meal, and then hurried home to start work at her desk by nine o'clock. When she wished to entertain friends, she took them to a restaurant or to the tranquillity of her Club. She heartily agreed with Santayana, that it takes patience to appreciate domesticity, and of that un-American quality, she possessed very little.

For over thirty years, the three Repliers occupied an apartment in a distinguished old house on Clinton Street between Ninth and Tenth, a street once called Saints Rest, but which was no longer saintly or restful, owing chiefly to the presence of medical students from

a nearby hospital. It retained, however, something of its ancient dignity and charm with its Colonial architecture and handsome doorways.

My aunt never learned to dictate. Every week-day, from nine to one, she wrote and re-wrote in long hand at her small and crowded desk, or when doing research in a rather exposed corner of the Philadelphia Library, founded by Franklin. In neither place did she have much protection from interruptions. These she learned to endure with more or less philosophy, a state of mind she was powerless to achieve when it became a question of noise. Being a complete city mouse, she was indifferent to the ordinary street sounds, but was dreadfully disturbed by types of indoor racket, like children, carpentering, pianos, dogs and high sopranos. Her diary reveals her distress: "I try hard not to hear the hammering, but my work is destroyed and my nerves laid bare."

When the subway was being constructed on Locust Street and the work approached the Philadelphia Library, the accompanying sounds affected her like physical blows. Describing it, she said, "The Siege of Sebastopol, the Siege of Saragossa, the Siege of Lucknow, and I might add the Siege of Troy, were in the nature of garden parties compared to the siege of Locust Street by the relentless builders of the subway. I had always considered drilling cement the worse noise there is, and riveting the next, but from the bowels of the earth there came, hour after hour, a series of shrieks that deadened the drilling and would have made riveting sound like the cooing of doves."

She struggled unceasingly and with only moderate

success for the quiet necessary to do her work, and she came to consider the command of solitude and stillness fortune's rarest gifts.

In "The Conservative's Consolation," she wrote, "He recognizes triumphant science in the telephone and the talking machine, and his wish to escape these benefactions is but a humble confession of unworthiness. He would be glad if scientists, hitherto occupied with preserving and disseminating sound, would turn their attention to suppressing it, would collect noise, as an ash man collects garbage, and dump it in some lonely place, thus preserving the sanity of the world."

In a lecture, ironically entitled "The Joys of Radio," Miss Replier called it "a discovery that makes it possible for a man to deliver a speech and not only bore those nearby, but others hundreds of miles away."

The summers she did not go abroad, she visited those friends who offered her a quiet room to work in. Once or twice she found the desired tranquility in a New England camp with her friend, Miss Frothingham, but all too soon an influx of tourists destroyed the peace. On one such disturbed holiday, her diary complains, "The baby yells for hours. Cornelia thinks I ought not to mind, because its father is a noble Bostonian who runs a boys' camp. I wish he would send his infant there!"

Miss Frothingham was one of the early pioneers in civic work, and tried earnestly but with small success, to change her friend's anything-but-serious attitude toward these reforms.

When the two were abroad together, Miss Replier

wrote this characteristic letter to Harrison Morris, "Miss Frothingham is trying to develop in me what she calls a civic conscience. I believe its finest fruit is to be the declaring of my beggarly purchases at the Custom House when I return home, but in the meantime I am expected to revere the Pilgrim Fathers, to read Emerson and the newspapers, to dilate with patriotic emotions, and not to throw match stumps out of the windows. Think of me with that halo of virtue around my head!"

While in Florence that same year, 1902, a letter to her sister describes an unforgettable experience. "We went yesterday to see a woman, named Isadora Duncan, dance, and it was more beautiful than anything I ever saw or dreamed of. She danced on a strip of green carpet in an old palace room, lit by candles. She danced Botticelli's 'Spring,' 'Pan and Echo,' 'Orpheus and Euridice,' and 'Bacchus and Ariadne.' She was bare-footed and wore no tights. Her exquisite, sheer draperies (the thinnest imaginable), showed the delicate outline of her form. Her motions were beautiful beyond description. Her Bacchic dance drove us fairly wild. Some think her indecorous, but where there is no touch of vulgarity, it is hard to think of indecorum."

During the war years, as the pressure on her time and health increased, her diary reveals her mounting distress. "Everybody clamors for my money, my time and my failing strength. I drag through my days and toss through my nights. It is horrid." And again: "My mail is preposterous. I cannot possibly master both my work and my letters."

Yet she never gave up trying to do just that. She

answered most letters, however foolish, and her Sundays, after Mass, were generally devoted to this tedious task. The majority of letters were from people she did not know, who sent her books she did not want.

"The mail begs for everything but my life," she exclaimed.

School children, usually Catholic, begged for her autograph, or worse still, requested advice on how to become a writer. In one of her essays, Miss Replier quotes Carlyle's weary cry when he heard the postman's knock, "Just Heaven! Does literature lead to this?"

Reporters were courteously received, even when they came to ask if she thought the President's wife could dress on a thousand a year, or with greater irrelevancy, what was her opinion of trial marriage. She was understandingly sympathetic to newsmen and women, and she gave generously to them of her precious time.

Though her doctor often urged her to take a period of rest, she always said she could not afford to. Perhaps her real reason for refusing was the uninviting prospect of doing nothing but concentrate on her health. Her indomitable will pulled her through many such physical crises. In 1916, she believed she had not many years to live. Had she been told then she had thirty-four more, no one would have been more astonished.

In 1936, she wrote me, "I am not yet strong, and I take as much care of myself as if I were worth preserving."

Her characteristic reaction to the concept of the dedicated writer in the Ivory Tower was to insist that she had no choice, but wrote to earn her living. And she

loved to quote Thackeray's remark, when asked what purpose he had in writing *Vanity Fair*, that he had reason to think he would make something out of it.

Though it was true she was financially dependent on her writing, the work itself became more and more her chief interest and pleasure, and when this creative well-spring ceased to flow, she was more than willing to die.

Though she had the temperament of the artist, the public rarely saw it. Her self-control, common sense and stoicism suppressed all outward display of hidden storms. Only occasionally in her diary are revealed the quick changes of mood, the depressions and anxieties which made her secret inner life a disturbed one. Through the practical, factual pattern of this daily record burst such phrases as, "Heavens! But life is either dull or troubled!" Or, "It is something to have a whole day without pain, worry or work. I value it highly."

With the passage of years, one small annoyance ballooned into an ever-present vexation of spirit. When Agnes was in her teens, she was understandably flattered to have a first cousin name one of her six daughters after her. By the time Miss Replier had achieved a place in American literature, this baby girl had become a Society reporter on the Philadelphia *Evening Ledger*.

Agnes Replier Junior, who often dispensed with the youthful appendage, was a comely, amiable young woman, not particularly intelligent, and as it turned out, not averse to reaping a little advantage from the hazards of mistaken identity. A sizable number of Philadelphians, to whom the word, "writer," merely

connoted an appearance in print, never disentangled the two disparate Reppliers. With increasing frequency, my aunt's legitimate pride in her work suffered from this duplication of name. Her close friends were so concerned over the constant and embarrassing mix-ups, that on their own initiative, they had a card printed and widely circulated in an endeavor to end the confusion.

But error, as is its habit, outran correction for more than fifteen years. A note in Miss Repplier's diary, one of many on the subject, attests to this: "Will never escape from my namesake except by death, and not wholly then." Yet she did escape in the late twenties when her namesake married at a mature age, assumed her husband's name and dropped newspaper work forever.

IX

HONORS AND AWARDS

Honors came to Agnes Repplier in ever increasing number. She received her first Degree in Letters from the University of Pennsylvania in 1902. On that Commencement Day, Dr. Horace Howard Furness was the speaker and said, "She has revived the art, well-nigh lost in these days, of the essay. There is no province of the essayist she has not touched, and there is nothing she has touched that she has not adorned. Her wisdom is illuminated by her wit and her wit is controlled by her wisdom."

In 1911, the University of Notre Dame awarded her the Laetare Gold Medal, her church's highest literary honor. In 1925, she received a Degree from Yale, the second woman to be so honored. Of this important occasion she wrote Harrison Morris, "I was puffed up with pride but have returned to my normal condition." Her diary says, "Phelps, (Wm. Lyon) presented me absurdly, Angell's words good."

Ex-President Taft was also present to receive a Degree, and sat beside her on the platform. It was a stormy day, and my aunt, looking down at her feet, saw with dismay that she had forgotten to remove her galoshes. Hurriedly getting them off, she whispered to Judge Taft, "May I push my galoshes under your chair?"

Looking first at his enormous feet and then at hers,

he replied, "You may, Miss Repplier, but it will deceive nobody."

In 1927, she went to New York to receive a Degree from Columbia University and to attend the dinner that evening. She has a puzzled comment: "President Butler lovely in the afternoon, and horrid at night. I wonder why!"

In 1926, she was one of the first four women elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters, the other three being Edith Wharton, Margaret Deland and Mary E. Wilkins Freeman. In 1935, she received the Institute's Gold Medal.

To quite a few persons, it is a puzzling circumstance that no Philadelphia prize was ever awarded Agnes Repplier. The former editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, Ellery Sedgwick, was one of many friends who tried in vain to obtain for her the Bok prize of ten thousand dollars, given annually to a Philadelphian of distinction in some special field.

At the height of her success, her work put Philadelphia on the literary map as surely as Connie Mack put the city in the spotlight of baseball, yet it was Mr. Cornelius McGillicuddy who received the Bok prize.

Perhaps an ironical essay, "Ever Grateful for the Prize," tucked away in an *Atlantic Monthly* of the year 1928, offers one explanation for her unpopularity with the sensitive donors of prizes. In it she pokes fun at the excesses of prize giving, and brings her usual wisdom to bear on the restrictions often attached to these awards, adding, "No good creative and critical work can be done without a broad margin of freedom." Another

sentence strikes nearer home, "Awards, especially recurrent awards, are a weighty obligation. Something has to be done with them, and the supply of prize money is occasionally in excess of legitimate demands."

She felt that prizes in the United States, more than in any other country, "take on numbers, magnitude and infinite variety. They are given for every imaginable form of excellence from high scholarship and Civil Service to designs for hot-dog stands and the possession of the ideal ankle. Nothing comes amiss to benefactors who are searching for some one to benefit."

Her fear of such excesses is justified today, when fabulous prizes are bestowed by Radio and Television on ordinary citizens, who have done nothing in particular to deserve them.

After ten years' abstinence, when Miss Repplier sailed once more for Europe in 1924, she thought and spoke of it as "a last time." However, five years later, much to her surprise, she was appointed by President Coolidge one of the Commissioners for the Ibero-American International Exhibition to be held in Seville. Thomas E. Campbell, former Governor of Arizona, was the Commissioner General, and two more men and three women made up the six Committee members.

I think she took great pride in this, the first honor bestowed by her government. She was seventy-four years old and far from strong, but although she had many qualms about this belated and novel adventure, she never considered declining it.

In reply to Harrison Morris' letter of congratulation, she wrote, "I wish I could feel I could ever be of any

earthly use as a Commissioner in Spain or elsewhere." But in spite of these doubts, some of her youthful zest returned at this unexpected chance to see again the lovely town of Seville.

Before the date of sailing, Committee meetings took her to Washington several times. On one of these, she met President Coolidge, "a tight little man," her diary says, and she notes with surprise that Mr. Hoover recognized her.

The administration apparently took its cue from the President, and was even tighter, with the purse strings. Miss Replier was told that all her expenses in connection with the appointment would be paid, but the official attitude was so niggardly as to be funny. When her expense account for the meetings in Washington listed taxi fares, she received a letter from the General Accounting Office with a blunt request to "explain the necessity for the use of taxis and the non-use of street car service."

On arrival in Seville, she found her chief duty was to arrange a library of standard American works, contributed by various book stores in the States. Her other duties ranged from choosing curtains for the rooms and making out cards for the Exhibits, to constant attendance at formal social functions with their long waits, late hours and fatigues.

One afternoon was spent marking time until King Alfonso and other members of the Royal Family arrived, and then in following them about the American Building. The King, in a brief talk, tried in vain to persuade her to put Madrid ahead of Seville in her affections.

This was the first time she had been a part of the diplomatic and social life of a European city, and she found it a small world of active jealousies and antagonisms. She accepted invitations to attend bull fights as a matter of politeness and diplomacy. As an official representative of her government, she could not criticize Spain's national pastime, but her notes on them are brief and unenthusiastic, ranging from "very poor" to "bad and brutal." Loving animals as she did and associated for so many years with Societies at home for their care and protection, she was naturally out of sympathy with this type of sport.

In the past, she and Dr. White had many fierce arguments about the Anti-Vivisection Society, of which she was a member. His arguments did not leave her unmoved. As the medical profession reformed its methods of handling animals, and the Anti-Vivisectionists grew more, rather than less, fanatical, Miss Repplier gradually withdrew from any active part in their propaganda.

Outside of her duties, her stay in Seville netted her many hours of happy wanderings through its streets, and of small gatherings with congenial spirits.

The two Boone girls, now married, but always "the children" to her, arrived for Holy Week and added greatly to her enjoyment of the colorful processions and beautiful music.

On April 25th, she flew for the first time, making the plane trip to Madrid in three hours. The party was to return on April 29th, but on that day the weather report was so unfavorable that all the women, except my aunt, gave up their reservations.

Nothing better illustrates Miss Repplier's life-long tenacity in adhering to a plan than her decision, storm or no storm, to keep her seat and fly back to Seville. It proved an unfortunate choice. The plane was blown off its course and was finally forced to come down in lonely marshland in a tempest of wind and rain.

After a long wait, a string of mules arrived with their muleteers. Each traveler was obliged to mount astride one of the soaking-wet animals, behind its equally drenched muleteer, and clasp him round the waist, or as nearly round as his corpulence and heavy clothing permitted. In this precarious and uncomfortable fashion, and soaked to the skin, they covered many weary miles before they arrived at the nearest village, one so small and remote that it lacked an inn of any kind.

The travelers took refuge in a peasant's cottage where they attempted, without much success, to get dry. After some delay the mules reappeared and again they mounted and rode miles in the pelting rain to where the rescuing automobiles waited. Climbing thankfully into these, they were shortly deposited on the night train for Seville.

I asked my aunt if she were not terrified when told the plane had to make a forced landing. She replied that some time before this announcement she had suffered acutely from air sickness and had held a book open on her lap to conceal her misery. Her one thought up to the moment of landing was not to disgrace herself in that completely masculine company. Amazing to

relate, she paid for this rough experience with nothing more serious than a head cold and stiff joints.

As the time approached for her return home, she wrote to her friend, Mrs. Schuyler Warren, of her sadness at leaving the city she so loved. "Last night I wandered until midnight through the tangle of narrow, slanting streets, and it seemed to me the most beautiful city in the world."

The succeeding four years show an increase rather than a diminution of Miss Repplier's powers. She published *Times and Tendencies*, a book of essays; a biography, *Mere Marie of the Ursulines*; *To Think of Tea*, and the final book of the Catholic Pioneer Series, *Junipero Serra*.

To Think of Tea was honored by an English edition, and there was an amusing incident in this connection. Writing of Dickens' firm prejudice in favor of people drinking something stronger than tea, Miss Repplier said, "Lovable characters reel through his novels; punch pervades them; and countless pots and half pots are tossed off at countless bars. No one is too young to begin drinking, or too old to continue. When Mr. Weller, Sr., takes his grandson, aged four, for an afternoon's outing, he is seen carrying him home on his shoulder at half-past nine. 'It has been whispered abroad,' writes Dickens gleefully, 'that the infant, Tony, was rather intoxicated.'"

Miss Repplier's publishers, more meticulous than their American counterparts, habitually checked all excerpts quoted by their authors. They wrote her a mildly chiding letter, saying they had gone carefully

through *Pickwick Papers* without finding the passage in question. It was no doubt with considerable satisfaction that Miss Repplier informed Mr. Dickens' countrymen that the reason they could not find it was simple. It was not in *Pickwick Papers*. It was in the weekly, *Master Humphrey's Clock*, published for a short time by Dickens, where *The Old Curiosity Shop* made its first appearance as a serial.

In the summer of 1934, Miss Repplier stayed late in town, to complete her biography of Agnes Irwin, and left for New England on July 11th, exhausted from working in the intense heat. She had hardly unpacked her trunk, before a wire brought her hurrying back home. Her brother, Louis, had been hit by a car which mounted the curb and struck him down on the pavement. Already crippled in childhood, by what now would probably be diagnosed as polio, his condition was most grave.

There was no vacation for her that summer nor the following ones. Louis was first in a hospital and then in a Nursing Home, where he died, five years later. Those years with their continuous strain and hopeless outlook took heavy toll of his sister, who spent many hours each week with him. Nevertheless, during this period, she published two books: *In Pursuit of Laughter*, and *Eight Decades*, the last, a collection of her best essays with the briefest autobiography to introduce them.

On Miss Repplier's eighty-second birthday, April 1, 1937, the Cosmopolitan Club of Philadelphia gave a dinner in her honor to about a hundred members and their guests. Mr. A. Edward Newton, author and book

collector, hurried home from witnessing the Coronation of George VI, to act as toastmaster. He was brisk, amusing and inexorable. Always her ardent admirer and friend, he was determined to spare her the strain of unhindered oratory. There were speeches by Professor Tinker of Yale, Harrison Morris, and Dr. Lightner Witmer.

Mr. Morris, then eighty-one, and a lifelong friend, told quite a long story of their youthful days. As he took his seat beside her, Miss Replier thanked him, adding derisively, "As retrospect, it merely lacked the one essential of truth." Mr. Morris gave an appreciative chuckle. It was by no means the first, but it happened to be the last time he was to have the pleasure of drawing her fire.

During dinner, Mrs. Newton declared she was going to send the guest of honor eighty-two roses the very next day. Her husband exploded, "What the hell would she do with eighty-two roses? I am going to send her eighty-two Benson and Hedges cigarettes."

Finally, Miss Replier stood up, a gallant and erect figure. She had written nothing down, and assured a nervous niece that she had not done this sort of thing for many years without acquiring the necessary competence. She spoke for ten minutes, each word falling into its perfect and allotted space. Age and illness had not yet changed by one iota her power to phrase felicitously, with brevity and wit, the emotion of the moment. A lifetime of work, of polishing and perfecting each sentence, lay behind that evening's speech, her last in public.

Mr. Newton was well aware that his present would be infinitely more desirable than roses. Cigarettes had been her solace for over half a century. At the Convent School, when Agnes was eleven, she smoked her first cigarette. As a joke, an older brother had bestowed on one of the youngest pupils almost a dozen of these rarities.

Miss Replier describes this event in *Our Convent Days*: "Dynamite could not have sounded more overwhelming. Never had a whiff of tobacco defiled the Convent air. Never had the thought of such unbridled license entered into any heart!"

Her own attempt to savor this new experience came as the secret climax to a feast of cake, fruit and candy on one of the school's rare holidays, and the physical result for Agnes was immediate and catastrophic. Nevertheless, this initial disaster did not discourage a second attempt some years later with happier results.

She regarded the habit of smoking as an innocent means of tempering life's rigors. To enjoy it she had to be a rebel, for she lived most of her life in an era where ladies, should they wish to be thought respectable, were obliged to do their smoking in secret. Even as late as the twenties, she was dining on the Roof Garden of the Ritz-Carlton in Philadelphia, and accepted the offer of a cigarette from her host. She had not taken three puffs before the Head Steward asked her apologetically to put it out. Several patrons had objected.

Some years later, in an interview for the *Press*, she said a word of praise for cigarettes. This brought an

angry protest from an unknown woman, whose letter ended dramatically, "How far you are from being an ideal Catholic woman, who patterns her life after the Virgin Mother!"

In her home, too, she encountered the same prejudice. Mary often warned her sister that she would die of smoker's heart. Once, she was heard to reply, "Why not? When you are eighty-five, it does not much matter what you die of."

X

HER RELIGION

Agnes Repplier was a devout Catholic, not only by inheritance and training, but by the strong and deep appeal the Church made to her temperament. To carry on her life with some sense of support and serenity, it was necessary that the serious questions of right and wrong should be decided for her. The Church was an indestructible bulwark against which she leaned.

In the days before birth control was called planned parenthood, an earnest worker for social betterment came to ask whether she was for or against it.

"I do not have to consider that question," she replied quietly, "my Church has decided that for me."

In her faith she found a shield against fears temporal and supernatural. Moreover, to one who adored color and drama, here was the greatest of all dramas, vivified by beautiful and terrible deeds, by sins and repentances, by miracles and sacrifices. And with all the Church's augustness, here was the simple love and kindness a child could approach without fear.

In her childhood, Agnes bestowed upon the Divinities and Saints the attributes and judgments her soul craved, and in return received love and consolation. As she says, herself, "In every trouble of my poor little gusty life, the Blessed Mother sided with me. Of that, thank Heaven, I felt sure."

Many contemporaries and admirers of Miss Repplier's essays found it difficult to reconcile her generally ironic and skeptical viewpoint with the fact that she was a Roman Catholic. She did, in truth, possess a marked skepticism apart from her religion. Utopian projects, reforms and reformers, pacifism, plans for human betterment, and the latest scientific discoveries left her unmoved and usually unconvinced. She laughed when I once hazarded a guess that in accepting all the tenets of her Church, she had probably exhausted her fund of credulity.

My aunt had her own extremely rigid code of ethics, distinctly Puritan in pattern, and along this line she had, perhaps, less need of the easements offered by her Church. This code, especially strict in all things connected with money, ruled her own life and often made her intolerant of certain types of dishonorable conduct in others, even in fictitious characters.

Once, when I read aloud to her H. G. Wells' *Mr. Polly*, she shared my delight with that small masterpiece until we came to Mr. Polly's crime of arson, his only available means of escaping an intolerable existence. From that moment, her care-free pleasure in the book was spoiled, even though all the characters were happier for the crime, except, of course, the Fire Insurance Company. She could not forget that the hero's subsequent happiness was based on cheating.

Morality meant more to her than dogma. A true hero worshipper, she was stirred to a rare enthusiasm by the indomitable courage and integrity of men's souls. When she spoke once at a Mark Twain Memorial,

it was not as a writer that she chose to offer him a laurel wreath, but as a man.

“When he found himself bankrupt in what most people call old age,” she said, “like Sir Walter Scott, he faced resolutely the gigantic task of paying his creditors by unflinching labor. He held his personal honor so high that no effort and no sacrifice were too great for its preservation. None knew what the heroic struggle cost him, but all of us know he faced the world again free and unscathed, owing no man and beholden to none. In the conduct of life he was supreme. The light-hearted, light-minded indifference with which the average American regards public affairs, was impossible to him. He had the same vigorous regard for the Nation’s honor that he had for his own. He was by nature fearless, and the cowardice of our legislators, their servile truckling to any organized body of voters, filled him with unmeasured scorn. Brought up in the roughest of schools, he was by the grace of God, honest, and he could never be brought to believe that stealing from the State was any less base than stealing from one’s neighbor. He laughed at many things, at some because they were absurd, at others, because he failed to understand them, but he never laughed at baseness and he never laughed at injustice.”

Another time when the subject of her address was Theodore Roosevelt, her style is fired by her admiration for his character. “He was both a lover and a scorner of life, knowing its value and its uses, but ready to nobly relinquish it, a man who believed in himself, yet was teachable to the end. For more than thirty years

he taught and illustrated the supreme merits of energy and discipline, of active and exuberant living, and of submission to those great moral forces and traditions which hold exuberance in check. He valued, even loved, popularity, but he never valued it too highly, nor bought it at too dear a price. Such a man cannot be born into the world and leave it without some definite result."

Once, speaking of George Washington, she said, "He had none of the qualities that take the popular fancy. As a soldier he lacked the hat-waving, sword-flourishing, white plume-of-Navarre touch which the public loves. As a statesman, he very definitely lacked the hail-fellow-well-met manner which covers a multitude of sins. Silent, reserved, distinguished and discerning, he stood by what he knew to be right, and he strove valiantly for what he believed to be attainable."

She was indignant when a writer called Lincoln an average man. "The average man," she said, "is a combination of buckram and putty. His stiffness is not strength, his softness is not sagacity. Lincoln was all steel, elastic and unbreakable."

Twenty-five years after her first work appeared in *The Catholic World*, she wrote an answer to a paper by the Reverend Talbot Smith, entitled "The Young Catholic Writer—What Shall He Do?" The question was whether he should conceal his faith during his early struggles, for fear it might blight his literary promise.

Miss Repplier's reply was forthright: "At the risk of being profoundly egotistical, I venture to offer my own experience as a refutation of this casuistry, because I am

a plain example of a lesser light whose publisher and public are assured, a small public, be it said, as befits the modest nature of the illumination. I have never in all these years found it necessary to ignore, much less to conceal, my faith. When faith is the most vital thing in life, when it is the source of our widest sympathies and of our deepest feelings, when we owe it whatever distinction of mind and soul we possess, we cannot push it intentionally out of sight without growing flat and dry through insincerity. Nor have I ever been able to trace failure on my part to an editor's distaste for my creed. When I have failed, it was because my work was bad—a common cause of collapse, which the author for the most part discredits. It is not too much to say that I have found my creed to be a matter of supreme indifference to the rest of the world as it is a matter of supreme importance to me. Moreover, the one book which I have written, which has a Catholic background, has been read with perfect good humor by a secular public."

This last is an understatement, for of all her books, *In Our Convent Days* has gone through the most editions and has given the most wide-spread delight, not for its religious background, but for its true and inimitable picture of childhood.

For half a century, Miss Repplier gave to her work the very best she had. She lived up to her belief that every word misused, revenges itself forever upon a writer's reputation. When she was exercising her craft as a jeweler in words, she was all artist, intent solely on the perfect welding of form and substance, and not in

those moments primarily a Catholic. In fact, it would be quite possible to read most of her essays and many of her books without guessing her religion. Nevertheless, it was always an integral part of her life. Piety was as alien to her as impiety. She accepted sermons as a necessary part of church going, but she felt strongly that they should be confined to pulpits, or to the pages of a book, where the title plainly warns of the contents. Of art, she once wrote with the sympathy of the artist, "It is never didactic, does not take kindly to facts, is helpless to grapple with theories, and is killed outright by a sermon."

If she had ever desired to proselytize, a fertile field was close at hand. Among her intimate friends were Protestants, Quakers, Unitarians, agnostics, and downright unbelievers, like her friend and surgeon, Dr. William White. She lacked the special talent required for converting the heretic. The truth was, she cherished her own spiritual freedom too deeply to intrude on another's. Her own faith was a part of that secret and inviolable self where she hid all strong and deep emotions.

In her essay, "To Counsel The Doubtful," she says, "The tolerance or indifference of our day has disinclined most of us to meddle with our neighbor's beliefs. We are concerned about his tastes, his work, his politics, because at these points his life touches ours, but we have a decent regard for his spiritual freedom and for the secret responsibilities it entails."

Toward the Catholic concept of the family, Miss Repplier's attitude seemed less than orthodox. Until

she was eighty-five, she felt it her duty to conform to a family life in which she was never happy and to which she was never adjusted. The consequence was that she was apt to look on all family life as more or less of a calamity. She writes of "relatives remaining faithful to the good old tradition on which family life is built—opposition!"

Once, in her seventies, when prohibition was the law, she consulted a doctor for a digestive disturbance. Unable to find any cause more serious than nervous tension, the doctor suggested a light wine and agreeable conversation with her meals. Miss Repplier eyed him sardonically before answering, "As to wine, I am opposed to employing a bootlegger, and as to agreeable conversation, I eat with my family."

In her essay, "A Question of Politeness," she says, "The disintegration of the home may be a lamentable feature of modern life, but since it has dawned upon our minds that adult members of a family need not necessarily live together, if they prefer to live apart, the strain of domesticity has been reduced to the limits of endurance."

Miss Repplier was opposed to certain forms of idealization as practiced in church literature. In her essay, "Goodness and Gaiety," she writes, "The saints of Heaven shine dimly through a nebulous haze of hagiology. They are embodiments of inaccessible virtues, as remote from us and from our neighbors as if they lived on another planet. It was Cardinal Newman who first entered a protest against 'minced saints,' against

the pious and popular custom of chopping up human records into lessons for the devout."

Summing up her case against the hagiologists in *Mère Marie of the Ursulines*, her own biography of a saint, she says, "In their desire to be edifying, they cease to be convincing."

Mère Marie was the second of her three historical biographies of famous Catholic pioneers and saints in the New World. In the last one, *Junípero Serra*, she expresses regret for something vital and direct that has been lost in the relation between the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant, and she quotes Cardinal Newman as blaming this loss on the hagiographers, "who eliminated every spark of humanity from those profoundly human servants of God."

For her part, she strove in each one of these lives to give a true picture of the deeply human qualities that strengthened and sweetened saintly piety, and made it believable.

In 1935, Ellery Sedgwick begged her to write the life of St. Theresa, "whose immense humanity," he wrote, "and the undercurrent of her humor would have a great attraction, far, far beyond the circle of those who have a right to adore her." Miss Repplier declined the offer. She must have had very strong reasons, because her admiration for St. Theresa was profound, and the practical, wise and amusing words of this saint appear often in her work.

Agnes Repplier was still quite young when she discovered the tameness of virtue. With her strong dramatic sense, she was more often to be found on the side

of the sinner than of the saint. This natural bias may have been strengthened by the Convent's realistic portrayal of great atheists and sinners as vehicles for the Christian concept of purification through sin. Of that awesome galaxy, Byron was the brightest star. Nothing could change her early adoration of the poet, and she would not read his modern biographers, with their disillusioning revelations.

Writing of him, she once said, "He was the most strenuous of poets and the most lax of lovers, but men and women who probably do not know by heart his one flawless lyric, are familiar with every indiscretion of a life that was singularly indiscreet. It is the same perverseness of the human heart which makes the public desire 'the personal touch,' by which harmless phrase they mean an insatiable curiosity concerning things which rational creatures do not care to reveal. This curiosity is remote from intelligence and understanding. It confines itself to details which are without value or to intimacies which will not bear disclosure."

So strong was her distaste for the modern type of biography that not even the impeccable style of a Strachey could overcome her prejudice. She could not emulate Froissart, who never allowed his hero's faults, as frankly narrated, to weaken his admiration, or that other sturdy hero worshipper, Carlyle, who faithfully adored Cromwell. She shrank from disclosures which would reveal her idol's weaknesses. For the rare gifts bestowed on mankind by the Immortals, she felt unending gratitude, and deemed it a poor return to dwell too closely on the shortcomings of genius.

She closed her eyes as much as possible to the presence of hell in her faith. The concept was painful to her compassionate nature and alien to all she cherished. There is a description in *Our Convent Days* of a spiritual retreat in the Sacred Heart School. This comprised four whole days of silence and a series of sermons, two of them on the terrors of Hell and the Judgment Day. Listening to these, Agnes was in a turmoil of misery and fright. Coming out of the Chapel, her face among the many tear-stained ones must have looked especially stricken, for it attracted the attention of Madame Rayburn, who paused a moment to bestow one of her rare caresses, and to murmur, "Not for you, Agnes, not for you. Don't be fearful, child!"

After her first view of Michelangelo's "Last Judgment," she wrote in her diary, "To look at it long would weaken a Christian's love. The damned are so unduly prominent." Tintoretto's "Last Judgment" was equally distressing: "Such a lot of damned, and the saved quite unimportant by comparison. Christ, who should be the central figure, almost invisible."

More sympathetic to her were the little sculptured figures on the north portal of the Rheims Cathedral, "who," she writes, "are wonderfully spirited and true to nature. They push open their coffin lids, sling their legs over the sides and hurry along to Judgment. They crowd to Heaven and Hell with equal vivacity and the *Bon Dieu* comes to bless all alike." This last phrase recalls that cheerful unbeliever, Anatole France, when he makes the *Bon Dieu* exclaim, "*Embrassons-nous, mes enfants, tout s'explique.*"

In her last years, Miss Replier thought much and spoke often of life after death, and once she said, "I think every one will be saved."

During her frequent trips abroad, her diary reveals an ardent loyalty to her church. In Constantinople she found the Mosque of St. Sofia "surpassingly beautiful, even in its degradation. Every detail is lovely. For once, there is no feeling of disappointment, and I know the church will one day be restored to Christian hands forever. Over the Apse rests the figure of Our Lord, concealed yet dimly visible, a sign and a token that the hour of reparation will come."

She was moved too by the sight of the Mother Church of England, the little old Church of St. Martin, built by Bertha seven years before the coming of St. Augustine, first Archbishop of Canterbury. After seeing the lepers' squint, an opening in the wall through which these unfortunates saw the Mass, she wrote wistfully, "I wish St. Augustine would give it back to us."

In this same partisan spirit she found Canterbury Cathedral "an empty shell inside. The shrine of the Saint has vanished, and his very bones were burned by that brute, Henry VIII. A chattering verger leads scores of chattering tourists over the level marble floor, once the holiest spot in England."

The Holy Pilgrimages moved her deeply, and writing of them she transfers her emotion to the reader: "They have the great and abiding charm of association. The hopes and fears of humanity press upon us at their doors. The prayers of the devout hang like incense in the air."

It was in this exalted mood she visited Gennezzano, La Salette and Lourdes. All fed her spirit and deepened her faith. At Lourdes, she found an impelling interest in watching the pilgrims and absorbing the atmosphere of pity, of kindness and of service. She wrote in her diary, "There came into every face a look that could never be mistaken or forgotten. It was the leaping of the human soul to the ideal. It was an inarticulate *nunc dimittis*, as the pilgrims entered upon the heritage of ages."

Her audience with Leo XIII in 1903, was for her a soul-stirring experience as described in a letter home: "I have had the most beautiful audience with the Pope. Monsignor Kennedy took me with him when he made his report at the Vatican and presented me personally to the Holy Father. I knelt at his feet for fully ten minutes, and he held my hand all the time, save when he laid his own hands on my head to bless me. He asked what I wrote and where I lived, and he spoke to me with unutterable sweetness and kindness. I told him a great deal about myself, pouring out my words with a half-frightened intensity, my heart thumping like a sledge-hammer."

Nevertheless, there were times and places when she apparently was her usual objective and detached self about the practices of her Church. At Scutari, her diary notes, "The howling dervishes are really interesting. Their chant sounds a little like Holy Week and their howl like famished wolves. They work themselves into a frenzy, and I found myself swaying back and forth in time with them."

The first Holy Week she spent in Rome proved disappointing. "The processions," she wrote, "were scrubby little affairs. On Holy Thursday, the central altar at St. Peters was washed with wine and water. All the Canons of St. Peter mop it dry with feather mops—a fantastic ceremony!"

How objective she could be when the question was one of literary style, is shown in a lecture she gave entitled "Survivals." "I am glad," she said, "to choose as my last, best and greatest instance of survival, the King James version of the Bible. My own church is represented by the Douay Bible, translated from the noble vulgate of St. Jerome, and published a few years before the King James Bible in Oxford. The Douay was the work of great scholars, but in beauty and majesty of style it has never equalled its rival. The English tongue at that time had reached its first splendor, with the tenderness, vigor and warmth of a language fresh from the mint. If all other English were to be blotted out from the world, the King James Bible would preserve intact its beauty and its power."

Though she was a staunch believer in the fundamental tenets of her Church, she managed to escape the additional restraints imposed on less independent spirits. At the time of World War I, when she spoke and wrote continually for the cause of the Allies and was therefore much in the public eye, she was asked by the Jesuits to take a "Director." To this she replied that she had a Confessor to whom she confessed her sins, but she would not accept a Director as there was no such command in her church.

In one of her most keen-witted and analytical essays, "The Masterful Puritan," she says, "If the Puritans never succeeded in welding together Church and State, which was the desire of their hearts, they had human nature to thank for their failure. There is nothing so abhorrent—or so perilous to the soul of man—as to be ruled in temporal things by clerical authority."

There was something in her that did not love a wall. In an interesting article, "Miss Repplier of Philadelphia," by Francis Sweeney, S.J., which appeared after her death in *The Catholic World*, the author said, "In her, Catholicism stood clear of its contemporary American adjuncts: a kind of Ghetto complex and the worst artistic taste since the Prussian Barok."

My aunt possessed a deceptive surface pliability which together with her reserved and formal manner successfully concealed her spirit's secret independence. In childhood, she pitted her puny strength against her formidable mother, and against both her Catholic and Protestant teachers. She must have believed in a "*sine qua non* Catholic principle which supersedes all others, namely, that the individual conscience, though in error, does have rights." There was, in truth, a strong non-conformist streak in her character.

No one came closer than she did herself to defining the ineradicable and compulsive nature of her acts of rebellion. "For when all is said and done," she wrote, "there still remains to us that painful and unconquerable originality which is not defiant but only helplessly incapable of submission." Nevertheless, her independ-

ence of thought and spirit never shook her belief that she was a daughter of the True Church, and she often quoted Cardinal Newman's words, "A thousand difficulties do not make one doubt."

XI

CRITIC OF THE AMERICAN SCENE

For half a century, Miss Repplier stood on the side lines, gazing with sanity, sympathy and common sense at the American scene, and declining to be swept into the stream of contemporary follies and false hopes. In retrospect, it is remarkable how often events proved her judgment right. She was consistently skeptical of ideals like pacifism, which floated in the ether, unfettered by the guy ropes of workability. She was right about woman suffrage failing to raise the moral standard, about the predestined failure of prohibition, and about the dangers inherent in progressive education. She was right about the moral inevitability of our fighting in World War I, and in smaller conflicts she showed her wisdom, as in her stand to keep children on the stage.

In education, she opposed the first exaggerated modern techniques, which in many progressive schools have now been changed or modified. In her essay, "Popular Education," she pleaded for greater discipline and less interference with the child's world, "an admittedly imperfect world which we are burning to amend, one which closed its doors on us forever when we grew into knowledge and reason. The helpless, inarticulate reticence of a child is not an obstacle to be overcome, but a barrier which protects the citadel of childhood from assault. We can break down the barrier in our

zeal, and if the child will not speak, we can at least compel him to listen. We can amuse and interest him until he is powerless to amuse and interest himself. We can experiment with him according to the dictates of hundreds of rival authorities. 'Child material' is never thrashed as little boys were wont to be. It is not required to do what it is told, it enjoys rights and privileges of a very sacred and exalted character, but on the other hand it is never let alone, and to be let alone is sometimes worth all the ministrations of men and angels."

She disagreed with Professor Gilman's statement that the word, task, should never be spoken by a teacher and never heard by a pupil. To her, there was lasting value in making a good job out of a given piece of work, and untold pleasure in the act of achievement. She believed that the child, like the man, must meet his difficulties and master them, and develop early a willingness to do what needs to be done, however distasteful. Summing up her case against too much license in the schoolroom, she declared, "Enjoyment cannot safely be accepted as a determining factor in education."

Of the growing belief in her country that children should never be depressed or saddened, or asked to assume responsibilities, or be called upon for self-denial, she said, "This prepares them carefully for that failure of nerve which would make them impotent in the stress of life," and again, "Our feeling that children have a right to happiness, and our sincere effort to protect them against any approach to pain, has led imperceptibly to the elimination from their lives of many strength-giving influences."

On the subject of imparting information on sex to children of tender years, she thought that the artificial stimulus supplied by the instructors in many cases was more likely to be a menace than a safeguard.

Recalling her own childhood, she says, "I fidgeted over my hair, which would not curl. I worried over my examples which never came out right. I mulled over every piece of sewing put into my incapable fingers, which could not be trained to hold a needle. I imagined I was stolen by brigands and became—by virtue of beauty and intelligence—spouse of a patriotic outlaw in a frontierless land. I asked artless questions, as for example, 'who massacred St. Bartholomew,' but vital facts, the great laws of propagation, were matters of only casual concern, crowded out of my life and out of my companions' lives by the more stirring happenings of every day. How could we fidget over obstetrics when we were learning to skate and our very dreams were a medley of ice and bumps?"

She did not plead for ignorance, but for the gradual and harmonious broadening of the field of knowledge, for the imparting of certain truths by the right person at the right moment, and not from the platform, the stage, the moving pictures, the novel or the monthly magazine. She was convinced that knowledge alone could not save young people from sin, and she put her faith as always in training, discipline and self-control.

Miss Replier stressed in more than one of her essays the importance in a child's future life of the books he is given to read. Because most children are endowed with the marvellous faculty of losing themselves easily

and utterly in the world of the imagination, and because these impressions are ineffaceable, she urged that the books they read should be very few and very good.

She was sure that the only way to tell a good book from a bad one was to be well acquainted with literary models. In a lecture on the subject, she said, "Plato urged the telling of only the noblest of fables, couched in the noblest of language, to the children of Greece. He knew that what is told to childhood is never forgotten, that what we learn when we are very young becomes our inheritance forever."

She felt that "nothing was so sure to shrivel a child's mind as the commonplace, nothing so sure to dull his intelligence as a plethora of insignificant story books."

Her indignation was once roused by the sight of a little boy, trying to read a nursery edition of *Hiawatha*, told in pleasant prose for children.

"Now, if we are not to read Longfellow's *Hiawatha* in childhood," she demanded, "when are we to read it? No one can expect an adult man or woman to sit down to its perusal. The youngest among us has no need to have anything so transparently artless written down to their understanding."

In her essay, "The Children's Poets," she writes, "The child who reads 'Young Lochinvar' is richer in that one good and gallant poem than the child who has all the modern substitutes heaped yearly at his foolish feet."

In an era in which the opponents of child labor almost succeeded in keeping children off the Stage, she was convinced that such a law was a grave mistake, and time has proved her right. In defense of her view she agreed

to an open debate on the subject with the nationally acclaimed sociologist and pacifist, Jane Addams. Miss Addams was the idol of the American public, and it took courage to oppose her publicly. Miss Repplier had Augustus Thomas, the playwright, and the actor, Francis Wilson on her side. No doubt her natural antipathy to do-gooders and pacifists added gusto to her speech.

She distrusted the emotional slant of the reformer and knew how often, under the vertigo of praise, he was tempted to pose as universal Oracle and Providence. In more than one of her war-time essays, Miss Repplier had quoted Miss Addams to emphasize this point. Miss Addams finally protested to Mr. Sedgwick against the essayist using her as a whipping-boy. The editor of the *Atlantic* was sufficiently moved by this plea to ask Miss Repplier's permission to allude to Miss Addams in "War and the Child," not by name but merely as a "searcher after peace."

As a Conservative who believed in holding firm to all the rich treasures of the past, it was natural to find her opposed to those who wished to discard the classics, to emphasize the practical, and to speed on to the goal of a diploma and a job. While the student was hard at work acquiring the kind of information the business man was going to demand, Miss Repplier wondered where was his chance "to administer to his own mind, to quicken his own imagination, or to reach even the threshold of erudition." She feared lest mediocrity might become a sacred thing.

With so much money being spent, there ought surely

to be some spared for a liberal education, "for man's own enjoyment, not to haggle with at the bargain counter of production, but the kind of education which enables him to cultivate discriminating sentiments, and to live under the distant influence of great minds."

Mental ease, she believed, was the reward of this liberal education. It enlarged the capacity to think and to take pleasure in thinking, and it was the keynote of subtle and animated talk.

The American ideal of success, the emphasis on a career, the insistence on hurrying to that goal, to the necessary exclusion of the old and the beautiful, filled her with dismay. She pleaded for some perception of the advantages of leisure over hurry and motion, some understanding of the powerful and purifying emotions which often follow in the wake of lost causes and failures.

In a lecture Miss Replier gave in the late twenties, "Success and Ideals," she commented on the self-congratulatory tone with which Americans ushered in the New Year. "Every message, every address, every editorial, every sermon has faithfully echoed this chant of triumph over the unparalleled prosperity of 1926 and the magnificent prospects of 1927. We are the super-state and we have been assiduously taught that, to be good and happy and prosperous, is to fulfill the designs of a singularly partial Providence."

Quoting the remark of a distinguished middle Westerner that "to be born in America is in itself a moral condition, an education and a career," she protests, "I daresay to be born anywhere might be called a

moral condition. To be born an Italian is to inherit an ancient civilization, and in a way an education. He can hardly lift his eyes without seeing something beautiful, whereas many thousand Americans live and die surrounded and hemmed in by ugliness. It must be more educational to walk the streets of Perugia than to walk the streets of Gopher Prairie. But in the matter of careers, the American comes out ahead. All the powers of his soul are concentrated on making his chosen career a success. His education is generally a preparation for it. His pleasures are limited by the amount of time and strength he can spare from it. His domestic life is a constant goad to action. Specialization is an American creed, but history shows how many things have been done by men outside their own bailiwick."

As to our consciousness of supremacy, the belief that we are setting a good example to the world, she thought such an attitude "as demoralizing to a nation as winning a beauty contest is to a woman." She considered "the American lacked the moral and intellectual humility, which would bring him an understanding of tragedies in which he has no share and supremacies in which he sees no significance."

Nicholas Murray Butler once gave this American self-esteem a rude jar under the approving eye of Miss Repplier, who had pricked many bubbles of home-grown complacency herself. He reminded his countrymen of several weaknesses in their intellectual and spiritual constitutions. Three points he made clear: "For a law abiding people, we are too lenient to violence; for a free people, we are too tolerant of tyranny;

for a people with high ideals, we are too unconcerned by the prevailing welter of materialism."

Following the Civil War, there was an earlier period of self-satisfaction, exaggerated patriotism and aesthetic isolationism. Many Americans were convinced that the nations of Europe united in envying and insulting us. Of this time, Miss Repplier wrote, "To be hated because we were young and strong and good and beautiful seemed to my childish heart a noble fate, and when a closer acquaintance with history dispelled this pleasant illusion, I parted from it with regret."

Her own experience of the country's exaggerated nationalism occurred with the publication of her first book of essays, when her habit of quoting from English authors was severely censured as unpatriotic. "Of all vices," said John Hay, "I hold patriotism the worst when it meddles with matters of taste."

In one of her lectures, Miss Repplier spoke with strong emotion of America's debt to the Old World. "It is not efficiency but a well-balanced emotional life which creates an enjoyable world. It is not wealth but intense personalities which make for Art and Letters. To be a little poorer and a great deal simpler, to produce less in order that the product may be more choice and beautiful and may leave us less burdened with unnecessary duties and useless possessions, is an ideal remote from the American mind. Out of Europe's years of barbarism, out of her strain and turmoil, out of her joys and sorrows, out of her triumphs and defeats, were born laws and liberty, Art and Letters, beauty, romance and distinction, all that makes life morally worth the living,

all that makes it physically and intellectually agreeable. This is our superb inheritance from the past, paid for by the blood and sweat of centuries. To it we have added confidence in ourselves and in our future, with the careless good nature that comes of ease, affluence and a comfortable absence of neighbors."

And in her essay, "The Divineness of Discontent," she says, "We cannot be nobly content with our unbroken strength, with the sublimity of size and numbers, unless there is something correspondingly sublime in our leadership of the wounded nations."

She regretted her countrymen's growing habit of interpreting success in terms of size and number. She did not think them more materialistic than other civilized people, and she did not believe they set a higher value on money, but "they talk about it in terms of staggering immensity because it is their symbol of success, intelligence and power."

Miss Repplier was always a staunch American. However, her critical detachment plus her desire to be proud of her countrymen, especially in foreign lands, made it difficult to ignore certain faults. Once, speaking in their defense, she said, "The American is not without gentleness of speech and spirit. He is not always in a hurry. He is not always elbowing his way or quivering with ill-bred impatience. Turn to him in a crowd and feel the bright sureness of his response. Watch him under ordinary conditions and observe his large measure of forbearance with the social deficiencies of his neighbor."

Her essay, "Are Americans Timid," is as timely today,

perhaps more timely, than the day it was written. In it she says, "It is a bearable misfortune to be called un-American, because the phrase still awaits analysis. The only sure way to escape it is by stepping warily, as in an egg dance, among the complicated interests sacred to Democracies." She warned that "Democracy may be divorced from freedom, and freedom is the breath of man's nostrils, the strength of his sinews, the sanction of his soul." She thought the only positive and worthwhile freedom was to live after our own minds and to exercise this prerogative quietly and calmly. "To dare to be unpopular," she declared, "in the best and noblest sense of a good and noble word, is to hold fast to the principles which speeded the Mayflower to Plymouth Rock and Penn to the shores of the Delaware."

In her essay, "Americanism," she wrote, "Democracy always teases us with the contrast between its ideals and its realities, between its heroic possibilities and its sorry achievements." "Democracy is our political creed," she said in one lecture, "our hope lies in her world-wide triumph. Yet we are strait-jacketed and beset on every side by exclusive interests which limit our freedoms. . . . Democracy is not necessarily liberal in its essence. It is not the final word of progress. To those who live in the spirit, as to those who live in the intellect, Democracy is rational but not luminous."

The integrity of her Government was of vital concern to her. She said once, "I do strive to think well of my fellow man, but no amount of striving can give me confidence in the wisdom of a Congressional vote."

In 1917, when Federal taxes were new and much

discussed, she expressed with her usual incisiveness an idea that was to become more and more a part of the American consciousness, "The debt of the taxpayer to the State is a business debt. The debt of the Government to the taxpayer is a debt of honor. He cannot enforce payment, but if it is withheld, the fine fabric of civilization crumbles into dust. The foundation of Democracy is a square deal between the men who pay the taxes and the men who spend them."

Of the emotional approach, generally in favor with her countrymen, she had little sympathy. "It is in our unconcern about crime," she wrote, "no less than in our leniency to criminals, that we let sentimentalism get ahead of common sense. . . . Sentiment, however exalted and however ardent, cannot be accepted as a scale for justice or as a test for truth."

Her stand against commercialized sentiment as applied to mothers has the tonic quality of a dash of cold water. In a lecture on sentimentality, she said, "The word, mother, has been so misused and maltreated since we entered the 20th century, that the only thing which keeps its goodness unimpaired is the unmoved front which nature presents to the antics of her sons and daughters. When an ardent feminist writes in a serious magazine, 'Woman means to be not merely the mother of the individual, but of the State, of Art, Science, Religion and Morals. All life, spiritual, personal and social, needs to be mothered,' we wonder if a singularly simple relation was ever before weighted with such a burden of hysteria. Art and Science do not submit to mothering. They are dominant forces, austere, puissant,

invincible and immeasurably aloof. Inspired artists, like inspired prophets, are homeless. Never since the world began have their souls been woven into the pattern of domesticity. Mrs. Eddy did indeed mother religion with some very remarkable results, but the State, like Science, has so far repudiated adoption."

In this lecture, too, she told the story of a Philadelphia woman who had murdered her husband and who was released from custody for a few hours to attend the funeral. "A funeral is always a funeral," was her comment, "and its attraction seems to be in no way lessened by the fact that you have murdered the deceased."

Although she loved animals and spent time and money for their safety, she warned their defenders that "an excess of emotionalism is the stumbling block of those noble associations which work for their protection. We know the full significance of that irresponsible sympathy which grows hysterical over animals it should soberly protect."

Summing up her feelings toward emotional excesses, she once said, "It is unwise to feel too much if we think too little. It is dangerous to trust to the mood instead of to the mind. If we value our sobriety and our safety, we must forever bear in mind that sentiment is a subjective and a personal thing."

Mr. Chauncey Brewster Tinker, in a short paper on Agnes Repplier, speaks of her abiding wilfulness, and points out in her character "something almost paradoxical, a rebellious independence set over against a confident conservatism."

It was true that all her sentiments and beliefs made her suspicious of innovation, but she was never blind to the radical's important role in life. In her essay, "The Conservative's Consolations," she wrote, "If the Conservative be hostile to the problematic, which is his weakness, he is passionately loyal to the tried and proven, which is his strength. He is as necessary to human sanity as the Progressive is to human hope."

And in one of her lectures, "Conservatism versus Radicalism," she said, "If education be the transmission of a moral and intellectual tradition, with its religion, manners, sentiment and loyalties, then surely the truly conservative are the truly educated. But if it be the funded experience which mankind has gathered by living, there is something to be said for the Radicals. To spare ourselves the labor of forming new opinions by recollecting and cherishing the opinions of yesterday, is a habit which promotes solidity rather than penetration of thought."

As Ellery Sedgwick once said of her, "In the withholding of praise and in its just bestowal, she had no match."

XII

HER LAST DAYS

In 1938, there occurred a marked change in my aunt, visible to those who knew her intimately. She suffered a severe attack of anemia, with general physical enfeeblement and a noticeable loss of memory.

When her brother died in 1939, and her solemn promise made to her mother to care for him to the end was fulfilled, there no longer existed a motive for her stubborn determination to fight on. That year she spent most of her days in bed. Her sister asked each Sunday if she would not get up, dress, and go to Mass. Once she replied, "No, I won't. God is a good deal more understanding than relatives."

Some time before, she had promised the *Atlantic Monthly* a paper on the Housman brothers, a subject she had long contemplated with pleasure. Starting on this, she discovered to her surprise and sorrow that the act of composition, which had grown easier with the years, had become immeasurably difficult. Nevertheless, she worked doggedly, forcing her failing powers, but in the end she had to make the essay disappointingly brief. It was then she realized she had lost something irreplaceable.

"The Brothers Housman" was printed in the *Atlantic Monthly* in January, 1940. When she sent them the manuscript, destined to be her last, there was a note

enclosed, "This is shorter than I intended but I was too tired to write more. I think I may be too tired ever to send you anything else again—but Lord knows I have written plenty."

Enclosed in Mr. Sedgwick's reply was a printed list of her essays, ninety in all, which had appeared in the magazine, with this notation on the margin:

"The list of all she has given to the *Atlantic* is offered Miss Replier that she may better understand the depth of the editor's regret."

During the years '38 and '39, her inertia continued to puzzle and distress her. The few notes she made then are revealing: "I am light-headed and heavy-footed." "All my time is now wasted. It has no meaning. Work is over." "Life is an unqualified burden, but I only half live it."

After a fall in her bedroom, she was in a hospital for many months, followed by a long period in a nursing home. The anemia was checked, and she recovered a little of her former strength and much of her former spirit.

When Miss Replier was eighty-eight, she was at last able to have an apartment to herself. Here, she was served the food she liked, and was waited on with devoted care. Her breakfast, brought to her each morning in bed, was for months a subject of thankful comment.

These last seven years of her life were free from pain and responsibilities, and were marvellously serene. The Second World War came and went but she paid it little heed. Wars could no longer bring her heartache. To enter her room, where she sat all day in a big, comfort-

able armchair, was to pass from the troubled world outside into a kind of sanctuary, where nothing worldly mattered, where books held sway, and the one or two friends still remaining were welcomed with outspoken joy.

She read poetry by the hour. She remarked once that it was a rare occurrence when the love of poetry, the first emotion to be awakened in the soul, was also the last to leave it, but this was true of her. When her eyes, which had served her so valiantly, grew weary, her nurse read aloud to her.

She rejected the new books in favor of the old, perhaps because her memory had failed too much to follow the intricacies of unfamiliar plots. Jane Austen, Dickens and Wilkie Collins lasted her to the end. She proved in her own case that Santayana was right when he said that Dickens was one of the best friends mankind has ever had. She knew many of his scenes by heart, and amazed her nurse by repeating the end of a paragraph which had been interrupted in the middle.

In a lecture on reading, she once said, "Most of us crave amusement as we crave sunshine and our dinners, and to live without Jane Austen and Dickens would be to reduce our sum of earthly gaiety." In the same lecture she wrote, "Emerson praises books because he found them, unlike people, docile to his will. Personally, I have never found this true. They are to me more like cats, possessing a serene freedom of their own, responding urbanely to certain moods, denying themselves to others. Like cats, they are superbly decorative,

whether they are as beautifully bound as Garrick's library, or shabby as Charles Lamb's."

Quite often she listened to her own essays read aloud. They afforded her some pride and pleasure, and she said an occasional word of approval if a phrase especially pleased her. She felt slightly self-conscious at this, for her, unusual display of conceit. If, at such a moment, a visitor was announced, she made her nurse replace the *Essays* in the bookcase, remarking that, to be found reading your own works, looked a little silly.

Like Oliver Wendell Holmes, once she had begun to read a book, she had to finish it, however disappointing the content. But she generally took the precaution of not beginning a book unless she had reason to believe it would be rewarding. From childhood, if a book spelled delight, then when the last page was finished, she would turn eagerly to the first one, anticipating even keener pleasure from a second reading. Books that children read but once, she thought, are of scant service to them. For herself, the real test of a book's worth was the number of times it could be read with enjoyment.

All her long life, books were her friends. They asked little and they gave generously. Sometimes they made life endurable and often they made it enjoyable. She was repelled by the idea of the five-foot shelf, and by all of its offshoots and descendants, together with Reading Clubs, and other inducements set forth to entice the reluctant reader.

If she could see today the Brobdingnagian edition of *Great Books*, she might be depressed, but she would not

be surprised. She saw with sorrowful premonition her country sold on the bigger and better ideal.

In a lecture, "The Courageous Reader," she said, "Prescriptions for reading, all these devices for swallowing prose like a tonic and poetry like pills, degrade the nobility of books. In periods when books were scarce and readers avid, women did not form reading clubs and charge at an author, shoulder to shoulder, seeking confidence in numbers. Reading is not a duty . . . It is a human delight or it is nothing." And she doubted if anyone born without a love of reading ever acquired it.

Once she met in Italy an old gentleman, an American, who was wading slowly and conscientiously through Tolstoi's *War and Peace*. "My daughter-in-law sent it to me," he explained, "and said I must be sure and read it. It is indeed a remarkable book. Thank Heaven one volume was lost on the way!"

Miss Repplier distrusted the genuineness of public enthusiasm for books and their authors, and once, to prove her point, she cited an incident when Mr. Edmund Gosse gave a series of lectures on English literature in Baltimore. He was urgently pressed to read some of his own poems at the close of his last lecture. His reluctance to do this was overcome when he was assured that hundreds of admirers of his poetry would be sorely disappointed if he refused. Then, and only then, the painful discovery was made that not in any Baltimore library or bookshop was there a volume of his poems. At the last moment, one was procured from New York, and the situation saved.

Each year, when her birthday arrived on April first,

the Philadelphia newspapers sent reporters to take her picture and ask the immemorial questions. As she grew older and her memory failed, events ceased to be so clear-cut and her naturally fine judgment became a little erratic and unpredictable. Knowing what reporters can make out of indiscreet replies, it was thought best to forego, on the score of her health, this particular manifestation of public interest. The interdiction brought forth the following amusing editorial in the *Philadelphia Record*:

“Historic Philadelphia can boast a lot of firsts—the first paper mill, the first Medical School, and of course the First Continental Congress. There is another, very much alive—Miss Agnes Repplier, first among our American essayists. We don’t believe for a moment the story that she couldn’t see reporters on her 90th birthday because she couldn’t stand the strain. We think it was because some humanitarian figured the reporters couldn’t stand up under her rapier wit. Three years ago, for instance, she told them, ‘I have no advice on the current situation. I am not, never was, and never want to be an advisor to the world.’ That was no way for a distinguished writer of eighty-seven to be talking. She should have solved all the world’s problems. Reporters meet plenty of people like that. Now, at ninety, she would have announced she didn’t have any formula for improving Dumbarton Oaks—and certainly didn’t have any idea what contributed to her longevity. We hope it was a happy birthday, with a book, a pack of cigarettes and no reporters.”

In this attitude towards advice, she was a true daugh-

ter of her literary ancestor, Montaigne, whose words on the subject Miss Replier has quoted appreciatively: "I seldom consult others, and am seldom attended to, and I know of no concern, either public or private, which has been mended or bettered by my advice."

Comforted by her religious faith, and by the surcease of all worry and responsibility, her days slipped by quietly and monotonously. They did not seem dull to her. Her mind was still a kingdom.

From her twentieth year, she had spent a large part of each day doing the work she loved. There is a sentence in one of Rodin's letters written to the young Rilke, which seems specially applicable to her, "In the precious exile of work, we first learn patience, and from patience we draw that latent power which endows us with an eternal youth, compounded of ardor and contemplation."

Her face was a picture of distinguished old age, with many delicate lines carved by intellect, reticence, sensitiveness and tolerance, yet she never seemed old. She did not regret or complain, for a lifetime of stoicism was not easily discarded. She still possessed ardor and contemplation, and when death came to her, he came softly, imperceptibly, hardly distinguishable from his half-brother, sleep.

Looking back on her life, she often said her success was greater than she merited, and she gave some of the credit for this to the era in which she lived. She doubted if any of her books would survive, and she contemplated this prospect with greater equanimity than is possible to her small host of admirers.

Were she given the choice, we know the kind of immortality Agnes Repplier would choose. The words are hidden away in her sympathetic introduction to the *Familiar Letters of James Howell*:

“If the unresponsive gods, so often invoked, so seldom complacent, would grant me one sweet boon, I should ask of them that I might join that little band of authors, who, unknown to the wide, careless world, remain from generation to generation the friends of a few fortunate readers.”

THE END

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