

hands and sat, a feeble old man and a feeble old woman, with all the other feeble old men and women—like people in a doctor's anteroom, waiting to be called. They learned all their names, and all their little feuds and jealousies; they took part in their senile sports, ate the predigested foods, dressed up and sat through the charity entertainments on Sunday afternoons. And at the end of two years they went to the directors of the home and asked for their five thousand back, all but the amount to pay for their two years' board; they were going to leave the home. But the directors said it could not be done; the money was forfeited and they must stay. And, with their heads up, those two told the directors to keep the money, and they walked out of the old people's home, with nothing but their youth and their health, and a tremendous zest for life, to face the future again. That was fifteen years ago—and they are still living, the busiest pair I know, well and happy and prosperous.

You see, they had worked the law instinctively, as children often do when, having fallen down, they cry very loudly without waiting to see how much they are hurt.

Oh, it is very simple, the law; and, once learned, increasingly easy to demonstrate. If, for instance, the idea that I am getting old enters my mind, I do not find it necessary to dispose of all I have and rush off to an old ladies' home. Neither do I deny it; nor do I attempt to substitute for it the thought of gooseberries on a bush. No. I simply say to myself: "Yes, I am getting old. I am old. Very old indeed. My face is wrinkled and baggy and sagged. My eyes are dull and weak. My hair is thin and lusterless and streaked with gray." I visualize these things as I speak. And then, holding the vision firmly in my mind, I walk to the mirror—to be astonished by my youth, my color, the firm contour of my face, my bright, luxuriant hair, my clear and sparkling eyes.

It has the simplicity of all great truths

and requires neither faith, nor fasting, nor mighty works. And I do not even know my benefactor's name!

THE BEST MOMENTS OF THE MIND

BY MARGARET BALL

"NO, no!" said Harriet Beecher Stowe to the baby. "Take your dolly and don't touch mother's work-basket." Then she returned to the writing of *Uncle Tom*. She must have said something like this at least as often as she arrived at the middle of a chapter. Her book furnishes one of the great problems of literature: If it had succeeded in being better, could it possibly have been so good?

Maria Edgeworth also wrote her novels in the family living-room. And such a family! With each new step-mother came children to renew the youth of a sufficiently distracting environment, and the affectionate and always practically helpful Maria wrote on. I shall never cease to speculate as to whether she would have written as well in scholarly seclusion.

I am aware that the work of women leaves still unanswered the question as to whether the feminine mind may possess the highest creative power. And still it remains true that the woman who is an artist is likely to be burning the prunes while she loses herself in her art. One is tempted to think that the feminine poet who could acquire a competent wife might rise to the higher and more sustained flights by which only Sappho has so far blazoned the rights of women upon the upper ether. Sappho may have had satisfactory servants; she lived a long time ago.

What are the best moments of the mind? Do they tend to come in the midst of those hours of concentration demanded by all single-minded students, secured with elaborate circumstance by all captains of finance, safeguarded for all poets who have competent wives? Or do they present themselves, as more than one creator of important ideas in

literature or science has testified, in those hours of relaxation when one walks in the garden with the children, or with the crowd in a city street? Even walking may not be necessary. And the alleged concentration may not suffice. Philosophic detachment has occasionally been impelled to report of itself, "Sometimes I set and think, and sometimes I just set."

"A good meal" has ushered in best moments for more than one poet, we gather from an attentive reading of autobiographical fragments. But the case is not so simple as even the rare good meal might suggest. A sleepless night has sometimes been the scene of the best, as it has often involved the worst, of the moments a person looks back upon through the vista of years. The potency of the good meal is perhaps less likely to wear an intellectual aspect. A resourceful photographer, recently trying to get a portrait of a difficult subject who obviously hated to leave his study for such trifles, put a book into the man's hand and tried to catch the first upward glance when the reading was interrupted after some moments. If the man had selected his own book the results might have justified so excellent a device. Many a painter must have longed to fix the expression that lights a keen face in the midst of good conversation, but good conversation is even rarer than a good meal or a good book.

Knowing that the angel comes seldom to stir the pool beside which we spend our humdrum days, we get out of the habit of holding ourselves ready. The photographer never seems to do us justice. Our best moments are very delicate affairs. The reason why an executive mind comes high, when salaries are involved, may be its power to work effectively under the stress of many insistent demands and a degree of confusion and interruption that would be beyond the endurance of ordinary folk.

Most of us burn the prunes while we are creating something very different from masterpieces, and our problem of

how to give our minds the advantage of frequent best moments is not one which concerns the critics of art. It is nevertheless important and acute. And like most questions of practical comfort and convenience, it has also its ethical implications.

Who is responsible for our best moments—ourselves, our wives, or an inscrutable providence? The question has remained with me ever since the time when I wrote a long sophomore "brief" to prove that a man has not the right to be judged by his best moments. Possibly I was wrong. The man may have secured those best moments by prayer and fasting, and he ought to have the credit of them.

We are under obligations, surely, to make a reasonable number of best moments for ourselves, and first of all to find out how we can do it. There is no general formula. Not even the "stimulants" are a dependable source of stimulation, however indispensable they may become. The negative virtues of coffee and tea, without which we cannot get through the day, can be the subject of only mild enthusiasm; and, although alcohol and tobacco are regarded with affectionate sentiment, this is perhaps more because they keep a man from minding his poor moments than because they multiply his good ones. At the instant when opium or alcohol is removed from the field of individual experimentation it undeniably acquires a new charm, but even at their best they involve the problem of the high cost of exhilaration. However indirectly and variously we may approach our better moments, by woodland path or by hard exercise in the gymnasium, by days and nights in a library or by vacations against which every fiber of our being rebels, by starvation or by milk-gruel at three-hour intervals, we are responsible not only for reaching our highest capabilities at least every once in a while, but also for maintaining unimpaired our power to climb.

Our obligation as to the best moments

of our companions is hardly less clear. Difficulties inevitably occur, however, along the lines of intersection, where one's own lofty plane cuts across the high aspirations of other people. The baby must be kept from the scissors even when its father is a clergyman, its mother a novelist, and the nurse-maid a walking delegate. The milk-gruel precious to one member of a family is all too apt to become the indigestible supper of another; the midnight oil of a happy student shines too often into the dozing eyes of one who would prefer to find his best moments at the opening of the day. Many a daughter has been allowed to go to college only on condition that she continue to fulfil all her engagements in society; many a parent has been whisked off to Palm Beach for a rest that interfered with his most cherished plans. Happy the family in which united affection braces without hampering the free impulses of its members—fortunate the comrades who manage to stand behind one another and never block the path ahead!

The sad fact is quite literally true that many a group of people achieves by dint of commonplace and unintelligent living a complete elimination of the best moments that ought to come to one and another of them, now individually, now together. Adjustments that often disguise the lamentable situation are made by people so sweet and good that we fail to recognize what they are losing. We are too ready to assume that the self-sacrificing soul finds its best moments in denying its own intellectual possibilities, as if these, too, did not constitute an obligation.

Our personal contentments and dissatisfactions are gradually defined for us, as life carries us along, by a set of imponderable weights and imperceptible

standards. Into this collection we must admit at least a few of the tests that wives and children and friends, and even enemies, are eager to contribute; but mainly, if we are wise, we cherish our own highest moments as measuring-rods for all our ensuing experience. This, I take it, gives us a fair and reasonable amount of the divine discontent which the poets have long exhorted us to cultivate.

A BALLADE OF PESSIMISTS

BY RICHARD LE GALLIENNE

(Dedicated to the Little Masters of Decay)

PESSIMISTS all, all ye that swear
By Nietzsche, Freud, and Edgar Poe,
Remy de Gourmont, Baudelaire,
And Gabriele D'Annunzio,
And other gentlemen of woe—
All that is nasty, "strange," and "new";
I'd like—and yet not like!—to know,
If Life's all wrong—what's wrong with you?

You that pollute the wholesome air
With nauseous pullulating flow
From brains unclean, and sick despair,
Doting on dirt, and footing slow
Where leprous-spotted fungi grow,
Abhorring all the gold and blue
Where morning sings and brave winds
blow—
If Life's all wrong—what's wrong with you?

O world that Shakespeare found so fair,
This goodly and most gallant show,
This bannered, flower-strewn thoroughfare,
Where Life and Love in glory go,
And Courage Sorrow doth o'er-crow,
And Wonder, with perpetual dew:
For me this world is well enow—
If Life's all wrong—what's wrong with you?

ENVOI

To Hades, Prince, these caitiffs throw,
Rat-poison for the sickly crew
That reap not, neither do they sow!
If Life's all wrong—what's wrong with
you?