

THE SIMPLE LIFE

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The simple life by Charles Wagner & Henry Llewellyn Williams

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CHARLES WAGNER & HENRY LLEWELLYN WILLIAMS

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
MEMOIR OF CHARLES WAGNER.....	vii
AUTHOR'S PREFACE	xxvii
CHAPTER I.	
Our Complicated Life.....	31
CHAPTER II.	
The Spirit of Simplicity.....	46
CHAPTER III.	
The Simple Mind.....	54
CHAPTER IV.	
Plain Speech	72
CHAPTER V.	
Simple Duty	86
CHAPTER VI.	
Simple Wants	102
CHAPTER VII.	
Simple Pleasures	114
CHAPTER VIII.	
Simplicity and Venality.....	130
CHAPTER IX.	
Advertising and the Hidden Talent.....	146
CHAPTER X.	
Home Life and the Worldly One.....	162

	PAGE
CHAPTER XI.	
Simple Beauty.....	173
CHAPTER XII.	
Arrogance and Simplicity under Social Relations.....	184
CHAPTER XIII.	
Training for Simplicity.....	200
CHAPTER XIV.	
Conclusion	221

MEMOIR OF CHARLES WAGNER, AU-
THOR OF "THE SIMPLE LIFE."

A French poet has pathetically condoled with the mothers of the time of the Great Napoleon's downfall, that their sons should have been born to the thunder of the death-dealing cannon and the wails of the wounded. But while the birth of our subject occurred when the Second Empire was in its ephemeral glory his youth was to be surrounded by that same awful salutation of cannon and mutilated humanity around the fall of another Napoleon but not another hero.

Charles Wagner was born at Wieberville or Webersburg, (as the case may be put according to the German or French distinctions,) a hamlet in that perturbed border land between the two realms, where the strange sight has been witnessed of a people delivered by their former brothers, repudiating the fraternal

hand and clinging to their first vanquishers.

It was the third of January, 1852, and the happy father was the pastor of the Dutch Reformed church at Webersburg. It was Sunday morning and the preacher came home from his duties to learn the news that a child was born to him. The season and the day, as well as "the cloth" influenced him; he "devoted his child to black," a saying for intending him for his own profession. Webersburg is a quiet place save for glassworks and potteries requiring wood for their furnaces, obtained in the then plentiful forests of the Vosges Mountains, overshadowing the village. The country folk remain primitive, honest, frugal, hard-working and reverent. At two years of age the boy was taken to another such hamlet, called Tieffenbach, where about a thousand honest souls were toiling and drudging without any intimation in the tranquil "blue Alsatian sky" of the song, that the gunpowder would yet cloud the vales and scorch the peaks. Indeed, the townlet is under the frown of *Petite Pierre*, a fort which was surrendered eventually to Germany. Our little Charles grew up in a family which increased to five, when they all lost their father. The scene can be

realized by those who have seen New England before the woodland was diminished, and reading the local tales of Ereckmann-Chatrion will also help to picture the surroundings of the future moralist.

With her helpless brood the lone woman had to go home to her family. This was at Pfalzburg, where Marshal Lobau was born and which retains Napoleonic memories and those of the First Republic from the veterans who passed their life-ends here. In the intervals of going to the primary school taught by the rector for the Protestants, the Wagner children roamed the woods and fields, eking out their plain bran bread with wild fruit and drink from the many springs. The rivers Meurthe and Moselle traverse this district, and the wine is celebrated. As soon as the boy was old enough to be useful he was crow-scarer in his off hours and otherwise worked for the farmers. But the Lutheran dominie had heard of the paternal vow to bring the orphan up as a minister and he applied himself like a new parent to this pious task. Though the pupil had native liking for the field work, with its communing with nature, he took kindly to book study. For he ac-