

THE PILGRIMS' MARCH

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The Pilgrims' March by H. H. Bashford

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H. H. BASHFORD

**THE PILGRIMS'
MARCH**

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THE PILGRIMS' MARCH

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H. H. BASHFORD



NEW YORK
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY
1909

M. S. M.

TO

T. F. G. M.

MY DEAR FRED,

This little yarn owes so much to you, both in the actual putting together and in other less obvious ways, that it ought not to take its first plunge into the uncertain waters of publicity without acknowledging the debt. Stripped of all its might-have-beens and want-to-bes, and shivering on the bank in its suit of cold print, it looks (and no doubt feels) a little naked and diminished. But that is no fault of yours; and if it has not dedicated itself to you or anybody living, it is only because it possessed a yet bigger creditor—as nobody will more readily realize than yourself.

Ever yours,

H. H. B.

August, 1908.

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THE PILGRIMS' MARCH

CHAPTER I

IN WHICH A BUGLE IS SOUNDED

IN recording the history of a little journey, or even the fragment of a greater one, it might be difficult, perhaps, to find a more appropriate beginning than a breakfast-table in spring. And Broggers would go further, and assure you that no story could have a more fortunate birthplace than this particular valley of the Upper Thames; nay, than this identical breakfast-table, with Mrs. Charlock's cooking up to its usual standard.

It would be only Broggers himself, the incarnation of an unromantic middle age, and, it must be confessed, of a certain prosperous rotundity, who would strike the incongruous note; and perhaps tend, at the outset, to bestow upon a serious narrative an unintended birth-right of bathos.

Moreover, as he would be the first to point out, it was not his pilgrimage that was of any interest at all; and if he ever became, even for the briefest occasion, a *deus ex machinâ* in the wanderings of anybody else, it was by no design of his own, but in fact in his own despite. Added to which, there would be the fact that, although he undoubtedly possessed a weakness

for good breakfasting, he was at the same time perfectly conscious of cutting a somewhat grotesque figure in the arms of spring.

And yet while, to the end, he would protest against becoming the introductory figure in any story whatsoever, his deeper convictions would be almost certain to bubble up to the surface, sooner or later; and he would assure you that to the true pilgrim such details as age and avoirdupois are of very little account—that to such an one the season must always be spring, and, in a sense, breakfast-time, since in the progress of the Spirit (which is the only one worth emphasizing) the months of fruition are generally somewhere a little way in front; while, if one must needs dine in Olympus, it is best to start the journey with a well-filled stomach. From all of which it will be gathered almost immediately that Broggers, while conscious of his own possibilities, had yet managed to temper his enthusiasm with a certain philosophy.

That these possibilities had delayed somewhat in showing any adequate promise of fulfilment, he himself would be the first to deplore; and searching about for reasons would, in his honester moments, admit a temperamental affection for leisure, to which an easy environment and a sufficient income would seem to have entitled him. Besides, as he would tell you, life was so very good in itself, and his friends were so numerous, that the merely passive and grateful acceptance of benefits bestowed seemed to occupy the greater portion of his time. There was so much to absorb that the moment for production never succeeded in coming definitely to hand.

"And yet there can be no doubt," he observed, "there cannot be the least doubt that to rise at eleven