

**LITTLE JOURNEYS TO THE
HOMES OF
EMINENT ORATORS
STAR KING; PP. 89-119**

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Little Journeys to the Homes of Eminent Orators Star King; pp. 89-119 by Elbert Hubbard

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ELBERT HUBBARD

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Starr King

If you had chanced to live in Boston in the early Nineties, alert for all good things in a mental and spiritual way, you would have made the Sundays sacred to Minot Savage, Phillips Brooks and Edward Everett Hale.

Emerson says that if you know a clergyman's sect and behold his livery, in spite of all his show of approaching the subject without prejudice, you know beforehand exactly to what conclusions he will come. This is what robs most sermons of their interest. Preaching, like humor, must have in it the element of surprise. I remember with what a thrill of delight I would sit and watch Minot Savage unwind his logic and then gently weave it into a fabric. The man was not afraid to follow a reason to its lair. He had a way of saying the thing for the first time—it came as a personal message, contradicting, possibly, all that had been said before on the subject, oblivious of precedent.

I once saw a man with a line around his waist leap from a stranded ship into the sea, and strike out boldly for the shore. The thrill of admiration for the act was unforgettable.

The joy of beholding a strong and valiant thinker plunge into a theme is an event. Will he make the shore? or shall he go down to defeat before these thousands of spectators?

When Minot Savage ceased to speak, you knew he had won—he had brought the line safely to shore and made all secure.

Or, if you have heard Rabbi Hirsch or Felix Adler, you know the feeling. These men make a demand upon you—you play out the line for them, and when all is secure, there is a relief which shows you have been under an intense strain. To paraphrase Browning, they offer no substitute, to an idle man, for a cushioned chair and cigar.

Phillips Brooks made small demand upon his auditors. If I heard Minot Savage in the morning and got wound up tight, as I always did, I went to Vespers at Trinity Church for rest.

The soft, sweet playing of the organ, the subdued lights, the far-away voices of the choir, and finally the earnest words of the speaker, worked a psychic spell. The sermon began nowhere and ended nowhere—the speaker was a great, gentle personality, with a heart of love for everybody and everything. We have heard of the old lady who would go miles to hear her pastor pronounce the word *Mesopotamia*, but he put no more soul into it than did Phillips Brooks. The service was all a sort of lullaby for tired souls—healing and helpful. ¶ But as after every indulgence there comes a minor

strain of dissatisfaction following the awakening, so it was here—it was beautiful while it lasted. Then eight o'clock would come and I would be at Edward Everett Hale's. This sturdy old man with his towering form, rugged face and echoing bass voice, would open up the stops and give his blessed "Mesopotamia" like a trumpet call. He never worked the soft pedal. His first words always made me think of "Boots and Saddles!" Be a man—do something. Why stand ye here all the day idle!

And there was love and entreaty, too, but it never lulled you into forgetfulness. There was intellect, but it did not ask you to follow it. The dear old man did not wind in and out among the sinuosities of thought—no, he was right out on the broad prairie, under the open sky, sounding "Boots and Saddles!"

In Dr. Hale's church is a most beautiful memorial window to Thomas Starr King, who was at one time the pastor of this church. I remember Dr. Hale once rose and pointing to that window, said, "That window is in memory of a man! But how vain a window, how absurd a monument if the man had not left his impress upon the hearts of humanity! That beautiful window only mirrors our memories of the individual."

And then Dr. Hale talked, just talked for an hour about Starr King.

Dr. Hale has given that same talk or sermon every year for thirty years: I have heard it three times, but never exactly twice alike. I have tried to get a printed

copy of the address, but have so far failed. Yet this is sure: you cannot hear Dr. Hale tell of Starr King without a feeling that King was a most royal specimen of humanity, and a wish down deep in your heart that you, too, might reflect some of the sterling virtues that he possessed.



STARR KING died in California in 1864. In Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, is his statue in bronze. In the First Unitarian Church of San Francisco is a tablet to his memory; in the Unitarian Church at Oakland are many loving tokens to his personality; and in the State House at Sacramento is his portrait and an engrossed copy of resolutions passed by the Legislature at the time of his death, wherein he is referred to as "the man whose matchless oratory saved California to the Union."

"Who was Starr King?" I once asked Dr. Charles H. Leonard of Tufts College. And the saintly old man lifted his eyes as if in prayer of thankfulness and answered, "Starr King! Starr King! He was the gentlest and strongest, the most gifted soul I ever knew—I bless God that I lived just to know Starr King!"

Not long after this I asked the same question of Dr. C. A. Bartol that I had asked Dr. Leonard, and the reply was, "He was a man who proved the possible—in point of temper and talent, the most virile personality that New England has produced. We call Webster

our greatest orator, but this man surpassed Webster: he had a smile that was a benediction; a voice that was a caress. We admired Webster, but Starr King we loved: one convinced our reason, the other captured our hearts."



THE Oriental custom of presenting a thing to the friend who admires it, symbolizes a very great truth. If you love a thing well enough, you make it yours. //

Culture is a matter of desire; knowledge is to be had for the asking; and education is yours if you want it. All men should have a college education in order that they may know its worthlessness. George William Curtis was a very prince of gentlemen, and as an orator he won by his manner and by his gentle voice fully as much as by the orderly procession of his thoughts. Q "O, what is it in me that makes me tremble so at voices! Whoever speaks to me in the right voice, him or her will I follow," says Walt Whitman.

If you have ever loved a woman and you care to go back to May-time and try to analyze the why and the wherefore, you probably will not be able to locate the why and the wherefore, but this negative truth you will discover: you were not won by logic. Of course you admired the woman's intellect—it sort of matched your own, and in loving her you complimented yourself, for thus by love and admiration do we prove our

kinship with the thing loved. ¶ But intellect alone is too cold to fuse the heart. Something else is required, and for lack of a better word we call it "personality." This glowing, winning personality that inspires confidence and trust is a bouquet of virtues, the chief flower of which is Right Intent—honesty may be a bit old-fashioned, but do not try to leave it out.

George William Curtis and Starr King had a frank, wide-open, genuine quality that disarmed prejudice right at the start. And both were big enough so that they never bemoaned the fact that Fate had sent them to the University of Hard Knocks instead of matriculating them at Harvard.

I once heard George William Curtis speak at St. James Hall, Buffalo, on Civil Service Reform—a most appalling subject with which to hold a "popular audience." He was introduced by the Hon. Sherman S. Rogers, a man who was known for ten miles up the creek as the greatest orator in Erie County. After the speech of introduction, Curtis stepped to the front, laid on the reading-desk a bundle of manuscript, turned one page, and began to talk. He talked for two hours, and never once again referred to his manuscript—we thought he had forgotten it. He himself tells somewhere of Edward Everett doing the same. It is fine to have a thing and still show that you do not need it. The style of Curtis was in such marked contrast to the blue grass article represented by Rogers, that it seemed a rebuke. One was florid, declamatory, strong, full of