

## Flotsam and Jetsam.

"And far away the battle  
Went roaring up the pass."

As you grow older the inevitable thought obtrudes itself upon you, that the time is coming surely nearer when you must lay down your sword, your axe, your pen, or your sceptre, according to the work that is yours in this world, and step aside from the great battle that rages unceasingly, and will do until the coming of C'ocqeigrues, and listen to the great strife where once you took your part. We count those mortals happy who lie with their harness on their backs, for we still have a modern sympathy with the old Viking lines:—

"A straw death, a cow's death,  
Such death likes not me."

but those whom the gods love well and slay young are few, compared with those who, with a sigh, unbuckle their armour and leave the ranks old, worn out, and past fighting, to wait in an unwelcome place the inevitable end.

It is such a pity. We have ripe judgment, caution, wisdom—all the lessons taught us by the bitter goddess Experience have been learnt, yet when we reach the finis of the book we find that the struggle to master it has sapped our strength and wearied our muscles and the sword we had forged for ourselves with such care and toil according to its instructions must be relinquished to younger hands, whose eager owners scarcely thank us for the gift, so hot are they for the fight, so anxious to show how much better they are going to do than those that went before. Youth will have its day, and age is swept on one side.

And this generation is essentially one to waste no time over changing its old lamps for new; except as a curiosity or a relic or a memory or as a proof of the efficacy of some fad, it has less use for old age than many centuries that went before. It is pleasant, of course, to read. "There is an inmate of the W—Workhouse over 100 years old, she can still see to read large print, and takes an intelligent interest in her surroundings. She has never touched tobacco," or "John Jones of — parish has passed his hundredth birthday, he is able to leave his bed for a few hours daily. He has been a strict teetotaler since ninety," or something of that kind, but it sounds a little dreary to those who are still full of life and vitality and to whom tobacco and beer or their equivalent still taste good. Think of the years of enforced inactivity that lie between the time when Elizabeth laid down her scrubbing brush

and John hung up his shovel and hoe and sat down to wait for that hundredth birthday.

And I do not think there is a calling or a profession in the world to whom the fiat "passed work," or "too old," sounds more terrible than our own. Once a nurse, always a nurse, and the interest we take in that complex and quaint institution, a hospital, in the baffling and endless war against the hydra of disease, long outlives our power to take part in the fray.

What Matron has not heard the appeals from those who have broken down and had to "give up"—the entreaties to be allowed to "try again," or to come back "later on." Pale little wrecks will assure you that they will be quite all right if they only have a tonic, or that their leg really does not hurt them much if they hold it in *that* position. For I differ greatly from those who say nurses easily give in. In the vast majority of cases I have found them tremendously plucky, and it is far more difficult to get them to conform to the rule to report themselves when ill than any other. They do not at all like going off duty, and the right sort are generally worrying as to how on earth the ward is getting on without them.

But to go off duty permanently is a very trying thing to face, and it hits some of us very hard. It never, perhaps, struck me so strongly as when I read the other day (for the first time I am ashamed to say) the "Memoirs of Miss Loch," and found myself fully appreciating the almost despair with which she received the decision that her health would never allow her to return to her post in India—because nothing can ever take the place of that which has been the chief interest in your life: it is what you have fought hardest for that is your greatest delight and joy—and no matron who has been "through the mill" but will read with understanding Miss Loch's intense affection for the work that had given her so much fighting, so many heartbreaking defeats, so many joyful triumphs. It is after all in activity and effort that our real happiness is to be found; nebulous imagery takes a second place.

Still, it made me think seriously, because twist and turn things as we may, we all grow older:

For Time will rust the sharpest sword,  
And Age will bend the toughest bow:  
Was never wight so strongly made,  
But Time and Age would lay him low.

and the problem we have to face is not so much how to put off the evil hour, but how to meet it when it comes. Daily we draw nearer to the time when we shall be mere flotsam and jetsam

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