

AFTER SUMMER

SOME people seem to thrust a disappointment aside, as one brushes mud from clothes; their attitude agrees with the saying that it is a poor coat that will not bear brushing, but it is possible that they never envisage the amount of brushing that a life-time calls for. Others can find a cynical satisfaction in disappointment: it affords support to pessimistic expectations, for one of the strangest possibilities of the human mind is to feel a disappointment that was half-expected, and then to salvage a pleasure from contemplating bewrecked schemes. Such a hardness of the mind is a defensive armour of dangerous heaviness, and it may become the permanent covering of the spirit—a prison rather than a vesture.

Disappointments in a sequence accumulate a power of destruction which only a corresponding growth of resilience or a developing fortitude can counteract. Infinitely various are the means by which we evade or overcome the worst malignities of Fate. On the chess-board of life, whereon we range the black pieces of Despair and the white pieces of Hope, the most transparent cheating will satisfy us: White must win, of course. The first move is with Hope and the last also must be, or who would play this game? The calendar serves us well as a team umpire, though it can be a little stubborn soon after midsummer. Every twelve-month the conventional division of time gives capital letters to a new year. This is as good as restoring the Queen to Hope; for what else is a New Year but to encourage Hope? And if Hope should find itself rather cramped when midsummer has come and gone, why, is not the year then beginning to run out, tempting the optimistic glance towards its destination—the next year? But we are skilful enough to wait till the year shows the Old Man's Beard of November before risking the bold backward gaze that counts the disap-

pointments. One step forward then, and they belong to the past, that bottomless receptacle of what we would forget.

The eternal spring comes next. Cheating, yes, by the printed rules, but is this cheating a sign of in-born wisdom? Is Hope truer than the logic of facts? The sages have said that Fate is in the heart: acting in accordance with ourselves we make our private universe. Thoughts are acts of a kind, and every good and every evil deed has to be compensated for at its opposite extreme, though this may be invisibly distant, even beyond our temporary universe. Yet surely it is a fallacy that anyone can always command circumstance or ignore it, remain unmoved and unchanged by what we are pleased to call external accidents. Unresponsiveness to the external world is impossible to a creature flooded with the river of life and covered with a minute mesh of sensory nerves. The approach to such an isolation is usually an extremely self-centred state; but that way lies madness. External events own an ineluctable power over the individual; they make impressions on the soul, whether recognized or ignored. A disappointment is such an unavoided event, recognized. Its effects will be coloured by the deliberate reception accorded to it, and still more subtly altered by some essential quality in the individual. A disappointment, though bitter, may be medicine, or, but trivial, may empoison. A man's life is a crucible in which, by the mind's alchemy, events are changed into experiences. Our cheating in the game of life is, after all, only a cheating over trivialities, and Hope and Despair may be misnomers for the real contestants that play for possession of the soul. There may be victory in Hope's defeat and disillusionment in Despair's.

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