

***MORLEY
ROBERTS***

A photograph of a dirt path leading through tall, golden-brown grasses towards a range of mountains in the distance. The scene is bathed in a warm, golden light, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The path is narrow and leads the eye towards the mountains. The grasses are tall and dense, framing the path. The mountains in the background are hazy and have a soft, golden glow.

***A TRAMP'S
NOTEBOOK***

Morley Roberts

A Tramp's Notebook

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TRAMPS

TEXAS ANIMALS

IN A SAILORS' HOME

THE GLORY OF THE MORNING

A WATCH-NIGHT SERVICE IN SAN FRANCISCO

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How much bitter experience a man keeps to himself, let the experienced say, for they only know. For my own part I am conscious that it rarely occurs to me to mention some things which happened either in England or out of it, and that if I do, it is only to pass them over casually as mere facts that had no profound effect upon me. But the importance of any hardship cannot be estimated at once; it has either psychological or physiological sequelæ, or both. The attack of malaria passes, but in long years after it returns anew and devouring the red blood, it breaks down a man's cheerfulness; a night in a miasmatic forest may make him for ever a slave in a dismal swamp of pessimism. It is so with starvation, and all things physical. It is so with things mental, with degradations, with desolation; the scars and more than scars remain: there is outward healing, it may be, but we often flinch at mere remembrance.

But time is the vehicle of philosophy; as the years pass we learn that in all our misfortunes was something not without value. And what was of worth grows more precious as our harsher memories fade. Then we may bear to speak of the days in which we were more than outcasts; when we recognised ourselves as such, and in strange calm and with a broken spirit made no claim on Society. For this is to be an outcast indeed.

I came to San Francisco in the winter of 1885 and remained in that city for some six months. What happened to me on broad lines I have written in the last chapter of *The Western*

Avernus. But nowadays I know that in that chapter I have told nothing. It is a bare recital of events with no more than indications of deeper miseries, and some day it may chance to be rewritten in full. That I was of poor health was nothing, that I could obtain no employment was little, that I came to depend on help was more. But the mental side underlying was the worst, for the iron entered into my soul. I lost energy. I went dreaming. I was divorced from humanity.

America is a hard place, for it has been made by hard men. People who would not be crushed in the East have gone to the West. The Puritan element has little softness in it, and in some places even now gives rise to phenomena of an excessive and religious brutality which tortures without pity, without sympathy. But not only is the Puritan hard; all other elements in America are hard too. The rougher emigrant, the unconquerable rebel, the natural adventurer, the desperado seeking a lawless realm, men who were iron and men with the fierce courage which carries its vices with its virtues, have made the United States. The rude individualist of Europe who felt the slow pressure of social atoms which precedes their welding, the beginning of socialism, is the father of America. He has little pity, little tolerance, little charity. In what States in America is there any poor law? Only an emigration agent, hungry for steamship percentages, will declare there are no poor there now. The survival of the fit is the survival of the strong; every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost might replace the legend on the silver dollar and the golden eagle, without any American denying it in his heart.

But if America as a whole is the dumping ground and Eldorado combined of the harder extruded elements of Europe, the same law of selection holds good there as well. With every degree of West longitude the fibre of the American grows harder. The Dustman Destiny sifting his

cinders has his biggest mesh over the Pacific States. If charity and sympathy be to seek in the East, it is at a greater discount on the Slope. The only poor-house is the House of Correction. Perhaps San Francisco is one of the hardest, if not *the* hardest city in the world. Speaking from my own experience, and out of the experience gathered from a thousand miserable bedfellows in the streets, I can say I think it is, not even excepting Portland in Oregon. But let it be borne in mind that this is the verdict of the unsuccessful. Had I been lucky it might have seemed different.

I came into the city with a quarter of a dollar, two bits, or one shilling and a halfpenny in my possession. Starvation and sleeping on boards when I was by no means well broke me down and at the same time embittered me. On the third day I saw some of my equal outcasts inspecting a bill on a telegraph pole in Kearny Street, and on reading it I found it a religious advertisement of some services to be held in a street running out of Kearny, I believe in Upper California Street. At the bottom of the bill was a notice that men out of work and starving who attended the meeting would be given a meal. Having been starving only some twenty-four hours I sneered and walked on. My agnosticism was bitter in those days, bitter and polemic.

But I got no work. The streets were full of idle men. They stood in melancholy groups at corners, sheltering from the rain. I knew no one but a few of my equals. I could get no ship; the city was full of sailors. I starved another twenty-four hours, and I went to the service. I said I went for the warmth of the room, for I was ill-clad and wet. I found the place half full of out-o'-works, and sat down by the door. The preacher was a man of a type especially disagreeable to me; he looked like a business man who had cultivated an aspect of goodness and benevolence and piety on business

principles. Without being able to say he was a hypocrite, he struck me as being one. He was not bad-looking, and about thirty-five; he had a band of adoring girls and women about him. I was desolate and disliked him and went away.

But I returned.

I went up to him and told him brutally that I disbelieved in him and in everything he believed in, explaining that I wanted nothing on false pretences. My attitude surprised him, but he was kind (still with that insufferable air of being a really first-class good man), and he bade me have something to eat. I took it and went, feeling that I had no place on the earth.

But a little later I met an old friend from British Columbia. He was by way of being a religious man, and he had a hankering to convert me. Failing personally, he cast about for some other means, and selected this very preacher as his instrument. Having asked me to eat with him at a ten-cent hash house, he inveigled me to an evening service, and for the warmth I went with him. I became curious about these religious types, and attended a series of services. I was interested half in a morbid way, half psychologically. Scott, my friend, found me hard, but my interest made him hope. He took me, not at all unwilling, to hear a well-known revivalist who combined religion with anecdotes. He told stories well, and filled a church every night for ten days. During these days I heard him attentively, as I might have listened to any well-told lecture on any pseudo-science. But my intellect was unconvinced, my conscience untouched, and Scott gave me up. I attended a number of services by myself; I was lonely, poor, hopeless, living an inward life. The subjective became real at times, the objective faded. I had a little occasional work, and expected some money to reach me early in the year. But I had no energy, I divided my

time between the Free Library and churches. And it drew on to Christmas.

It was a miserable time of rain, and Christmas Day found me hopeless of a meal. But by chance I came across a man whom I had fed, and he returned my hospitality by dining me for fifteen cents at the "What Cheer House," a well-known poor restaurant in San Francisco. Then followed some days of more than semi-starvation, and I grew rather light-headed. The last day of the year dawned and I spent it foodless, friendless, solitary. But after a long evening's aimless wandering about the city I came back to California Street, and at ten o'clock went to the Watch-Night Service in the room of the first preacher I had heard.

The hall was a big square one, capable of seating some three hundred people. There was a raised platform at the end; a broad passage way all round the room had seats on both sides of it, and made a small square of seats in the centre. I sat down in the middle of this middle square, and the room was soon nearly full. The service began with a hymn. I neither sang nor rose, and I noticed numbers who did not. In peculiar isolation of mind my heart warmed to these, and I was conscious of rising hostility for the creatures of praise. There was one strong young fellow about three places from me who remained seated. Glancing behind the backs of those who were standing between us I caught his eye, which met mine casually and perhaps lightened a little. He had a rather fine face, intelligent, possibly at better times humorous. I was not so solitary.

A man singing on my left offered me a share of his hymn-book. I declined courteously. The woman on my right asked me to share hers. That I declined too. Some asked the young fellow to rise, but he refused quietly. Yet I noticed some of those who had remained seated gave in to solicitations or to the sound or to some memory, and rose.

Yet many still remained. They were all men, and most of them young.

After the hymn followed prayer by the minister, who was surrounded on the dais by some dozen girls. I noticed that few were very good-looking; but in their faces was religious fervour. Yet they kept their eyes on the man. The prayer was long, intolerably and trickily eloquent and rhetorical, very self-conscious. The man posed before the throne. But I listened to every word, half absorbed though I was in myself. He was followed in prayer by ambitious and emotional people in the seats. One woman prayed for those who would not bow the knee. Once more a hymn followed, "Bringing home the sheaves."

The air is not without merit, and has a good lilt and swing. I noted it tempted me to sing it, for I knew the tune well, and in the volume of voices was an emotional attraction. I repressed the inclination even to move my lips. But some others rose and joined in. My fellow on the left did not. The sermon followed, and I felt as if I had escaped a humiliation.

What the preacher said I cannot remember, nor is it of any importance. He was not an intellectual man, nor had he many gifts beyond his rather sleek manner and a soft manageable voice. He was obviously proud of that, and reckoned it an instrument of success. It became as monotonous to me as the slow oily swell of a tropic sea in calm. I would have preferred a Boanerges, a bitter John Knox. The intent of his sermon was the usual one at such periods; this was the end of the year, the beginning was at hand. Naturally he addressed himself to those who were not of his flock; it seemed to me, as it doubtless seemed to others, that he spoke to me directly.

The custom of mankind to divide time into years has had an effect on us, and we cannot help feeling it. Childhood does

not understand how artificial the portioning of time is; the New Year affects us even when we recognise the fact. It required no florid eloquence of the preacher to convince me of past folly and weakness; but it was that weakness that made me weak now in my allowing his insistence on the New Year to affect me. I was weak, lonely, foolish. Oh, I acknowledged I wanted help! But could I get help here?

It was past eleven when they rose to sing another hymn. Many who had not sung before sang now. Some of the girls from the platform came down and offered us hymn-books. A few took them half-shamefacedly; some declined with thanks; some ignored the extended book. And after two hymns were sung and some more prayers said, it was half-past eleven. They announced five minutes for silent meditation. Looking round, I saw my friend on the left sitting with folded arms. He was obviously in no need of five minutes.

In the Free Library I had renewed much of my ancient scientific reading, and I used it now to control some slight emotional weakness, and to explain it to myself. Half-starved, nay more than half-starved, as I was, such weakness was likely; I was amenable to suggestion. I asked myself a dozen crucial questions, and was bitterly amused to know how the preacher would evade answering them if put to him. Such a creature could not succeed, as all great teachers have done, in subduing the intellect by the force of his own personality. But all the same the hour, the time, and the song followed by silence, and the silence by song, affected me and affected many. What had I to look forward to when I went out into the street? And if I yielded they might, nay would, help me to work. I laughed a little at myself, and was scornful of my thoughts. They were singing again.

This time the band of women left the dais and in a body went slowly round and round the aisle isolating the centre seats from the platform and the sides. From the platform the preacher called on the others to rise and join them, for it was nearly twelve o'clock, the New Year was at hand. Most of the congregation obeyed him, I counted but fifteen or twenty who refused.

The volume of the singing increased as the seats emptied, in it there was religious fervour; it appealed strongly even to me. I saw some young fellows rise and join the procession; perhaps three or four. There were now less than twelve seated. The preacher spoke to us personally; he insisted on the passing minutes of the dying year. And still the singers passed us. Some leant over and called to us. Our bitter band lessened one by one.

Then from the procession came these girl acolytes, and, dividing themselves, they appealed to us and prayed. They were not beautiful perhaps, but they were women. We outcasts of the prairie and the camp fire and the streets had been greatly divorced from feminine sweet influences, and these succeeded where speech and prayer and song had failed. As one spoke to me I saw hard resolution wither in many. What woman had spoken kindly to them in this hard land since they left their eastern homes? Why should they pain them? And as they joined the singing band of believers the girls came to those of us who still stayed, and doubled and redoubled their entreaties. That it was not what they said, but those who said it, massing influences and suggestion, showed itself when he who had been stubborn to one yielded with moist eyes to two. And three overcame him who had mutely resisted less.

They knew their strength, and spoke softly with the voice of loving women. And not a soul had spoken to me so in my far and weary songless passage from the Atlantic States to the

Pacific Coast. Long-repressed emotions rose in me as the hair of one brushed my cheek, as the hand of another lay upon my shoulder and mutely bade me rise; as another called me, as another beckoned. I looked round like a half-fascinated beast, and I caught the eye again of the man on my left. He and I were the only ones left sitting there. All the rest had risen and were singing with the singers.

In his eye, I doubt not, I saw what he saw in mine. A look of encouragement, a demand for it, doubt, an emotional struggle, and deeper than all a queer bitter amusement, that said plainly, "If you fail me, I fall, but I would rather not play the hypocrite in these hard times." We nodded rather mentally than actually, and were encouraged, I knew if I yielded I was yielding to something founded essentially on sex, and for my honesty's sake I would not fail.

"My child, it is no use," I said to her who spoke to me, and, struggling with myself, I put her hand from me. But still they moved past and sang, and the girls would not leave me till the first stroke of midnight sounded from the clock upon the wall. They then went one by one and joined the band. I turned again to my man, and conscious of my own hard fight, I knew what his had been. We looked at each other, and being men, were half ashamed that another should know we had acted rightly according to our code, and had won a victory over ourselves.

And now we were truly outcasts, for no one spoke to us again. The preacher prayed and we still sat there. But he cast us no word, and the urgent women were good only to their conquered. Perhaps in their souls was some sense of personal defeat; they had been rejected as women and as angels of the Lord. We two at anyrate sat beyond the reach of their graciousness; their eyes were averted or lifted up; we lay in outer darkness.

As they began to sing once more we both rose and with a friendly look at each other went out into the streets of the hostile city. It is easy to understand why we did not speak.

I never saw him again.

SOME PORTUGUESE SKETCHES

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The Portuguese are wholly inoffensive, except when their pride is touched. In politics, or when they hunger after African territory we fancy needed for our own people, they may not seem so. When a rebuff excites them against the English, Lisbon may not be pleasant for Englishmen. But in such cases would London commend itself to a triumphant foreigner? For my own part, I found a kind of gentle, unobtrusive politeness even among those Portuguese who knew I was English when I went to Lisbon on the last occasion of the two nations quarrelling about a mud flat on the Zambesi. Occasionally, on being taken for an American, I did not correct the mistake, for having no quarrel with Americans they sometimes confided to me the bitterness of their hearts against the English. I stayed in Lisbon at the Hotel Universal in the Rua Nova da Alameda, a purely Portuguese house where only stray Englishmen came. At the *table d'hôte* one night I had a conversation with a mild-mannered Portuguese which showed the curious ignorance and almost childish vanity of the race. I asked him in French if he spoke English. He did so badly and we mingled the two languages and at last talked vivaciously. He was an ardent politician and hated the English virulently, telling me so with curious circumlocutions. He was of opinion, he said, that though the English were unfortunately powerful on the sea, on land his nation was a match for us. As for the English in Africa, he declared the Portuguese able to sweep them into the sea. But though he hated the English, his admiration for Queen Victoria was as unbounded as our own earth-hunger. She was, he told me, entirely on the side of the Portuguese in the sad troubles which English politicians were then

causing. He detailed, as particularly as if he had been present, a strange scene reported to have taken place between Soveral, their ambassador, and Lord Salisbury, in which discussion grew heated. It seemed as if they would part in anger. At last Soveral arose and exclaimed with much dignity: "You must now excuse me, my Lord Salisbury, I have to dine with the Queen to-night." My Lord Salisbury started, looked incredulous, and said coldly, "You are playing with me. This cannot be." "Indeed," said the ambassador, producing a telegram from Windsor, "it is as I say." And then Salisbury turned pale, fell back in his chair, and gasped for breath. "And after that," said my informant, "things went well." Several people at the table listened to this story and seemed to believe it. With much difficulty I preserved a grave countenance, and congratulated him on the possession of an ambassador who was more than a match for our Foreign Minister. Before the end of dinner he informed me that the English were as a general rule savages, while the Portuguese were civilised. Having lived in London he knew this to be so. Finding that he knew the East End of our gigantic city, I found it difficult to contradict him.

Certainly Lisbon, as far as visible poverty is concerned, is far better than London. I saw few very miserable people; beggars were not at all numerous; in a week I was only asked twice for alms. One constantly hears that Lisbon is dirty, and as full of foul odours as Coleridge's Cologne. I did not find it so, and the bright sunshine and the fine colour of the houses might well compensate for some draw-backs. The houses of this regular town are white, and pale yellow, and fine worn-out pink, with narrow green painted verandahs which soon lose crudeness in the intense light. The windows of the larger blocks are numerous and set in long regular lines; the streets if narrow run into open squares blazing with white unsoiled monuments. All day long the ways are full of people who are fairly but

unostentatiously polite. They do not stare one out of countenance however one may be dressed. In Antwerp a man who objects to being wondered at may not wear a light suit. Lisbon is more cosmopolitan. But the beauty of the town of Lisbon is not added to by the beauty of its inhabitants. The women are curiously the reverse of lovely. Only occasionally I saw a face which was attractive by the odd conjuncture of an olive skin and light grey eyes. They do not wear mantillas. The lower classes use a shawl. Those who are of the *bourgeois* class or above it differ little from Londoners. The working or loafing men, for they laugh and loaf, and work and chaff and chatter at every corner, are more distinct in costume, wearing the flat felt sombrero with turned-up edges that one knows from pictures, while the long coat which has displaced the cloak still retains a smack of it in the way they disregard the sleeves and hang it from their shoulders. These men are decidedly not so ugly as the women, and vary wonderfully in size, colour and complexion, though a big Portuguese is a rarity. The strong point in both sexes is their natural gift for wearing colour, for choosing and blending or matching tints.

These Portuguese men and women work hard when they do not loaf and chatter. The porters, who stand in knots with cords upon their shoulders, bear huge loads; a characteristic of the place is this load-bearing and the size of the burdens. Women carry mighty parcels upon their heads; men great baskets. Fish is carried in spreading flat baskets by girls. They look afar off like gigantic hats: further still, like quaint odd toadstools in motion. All household furniture removing among the poor is done by hand. Two or four men load up a kind of flat hand-barrow without wheels till it is pyramidal and colossal with piled gear. Then passing poles through the loop of ropes, with a slow effort they raise it up and advance at a funereal and solemn pace. The slowness with which they move is pathetic. It is suggestive of a dead burden or

of some street accident. But of these latter there must be very few; there is not much vehicular traffic in Lisbon. It is comparatively rare to see anything like cruelty to horses. The mules which draw the primitive ramshackle trams have the worst time of it, and are obliged to pull their load every now and again off one line on to another, being urged thereto with some brutality. But these trams do not run up the very hilly parts of the city; the main lines run along the Tagus east and west of the great Square of the Black Horse. And by the river the city is flat.

Only a little way up, in my street for instance, it rapidly becomes hilly. On entering the hotel, to my surprise I went downstairs to my bedroom. On looking out of the window a street was even then sixty feet below me. The floor underneath me did not make part of the hotel, but was a portion of a great building occupied by the poorer people and let out in flats. During the day, as I sat by the window working, the noise was not intolerable, but at night when the Lisbonensians took to amusing themselves they roused me from a well-earned sleep. They shouted and sang and made mingled and indistinguishable uproars which rose wildly through the narrow deep space and burst into my open window. After long endurance I rose and shut it, preferring heat to insomnia. But in the day, after that discord, I always had the harmonious compensations of true colour. Even when the sun shone brilliantly I could not distinguish the grey blue of the deep shadows, so much blue was in the painted or distempered outer walls. It was in Lisbon that I first began to discern the mental effect of colour, and to see that it comes truly and of necessity from a people's temperament. Can a busy race be true colourists?

In some parts of the town—the eastern quarters—one cannot help noticing the still remaining influence of the

Moors. There are even some true relics; but certainly the influence survives in flat-sided houses with small windows and Moorish ornament high up just under the edge of the flat roof. One day, being tired of the more noisy western town, I went east and climbed up and up, being alternately in deep shadow and burning sunlight and turned round by a barrack, where some soldiers eyed me as a possible Englishman. I hoped to see the Tagus at last, for here the houses are not so lofty, and presently, being on very high ground, I caught a view of it, darkly dotted with steamers, over some flat roofs. Towards the sea it narrows, but above Lisbon it widens out like a lake. On the far side was a white town, beyond that again hills blue with lucid atmosphere. At my feet (I leant against a low wall) was a terraced garden with a big vine spread on a trellis, making—or promising to make in the later spring—a long shady arbour, for as yet the leaves were scanty and freshly green. Every house was faint blue or varied pink, or worn-out, washed-out, sun-dried green. All the tones were beautiful and modest, fitting the sun yet not competing with it. In London the colour would break the level of dull tints and angrily protest, growing scarlet and vivid and wrathful. And just as I looked away from the river and the vine-clad terrace there was a scurrying rush of little school-boys from a steep side-street. They ran down the slope, and passed me, going quickly like black blots on the road, yet their laughter was sunlight on the ripple of waters. The Portuguese are always children and are not sombre. Only in their graveyards stand solemn cypresses which rise darkly on the hillside where they bury their dead; but in life they laugh and are merry even after they have children of their own.

Though little apt to do what is supposed to be a traveller's duty in visiting certain obvious places of interest, I one day hunted for the English cemetery in which Fielding lies buried, and found it at last just at the back of a little open