

An Unknown Sacrifice

Earl C. Davis

Harvard University, Cambridge, MA

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They were standing, mother and son, just at dusk on a summer's evening, the one on the porch, the other just inside the house behind the screen door. The mother was playing with the door latch in a half-nervous half-meditative way, as if she were struggling with a present emotion, and at the same time reaching back into her early days when she too had stood hesitatingly on the porch, anxious for the new life, and yet relinquishing the old with many a heart aching thought forcing its way into the new hopes. It is always so. The past, with its choicest memories, comes rushing in upon our present in moments of deep emotion as the waters of a great river joyously lose themselves in the waters of the ocean ??? in the moment of return from a long journey. There is no present, no past, no future in our thoughts. It is all one eternal present. So, the mother's thoughts at this moment leaped joyously back to her happy days of betrothal, and back again enlivened by the journey, and without rest then bounded forward to the future in happy expectation. The sadness of today relieved by the joy of yesterday, and lighted by the hope of tomorrow; the joy of today softened by the sadness of yesterday and lighted by the hope of tomorrow. Thus, do we live. Such was the simple mingling of thoughts in the mother's mind as she stood just within the portal of her own home on the evening before her son was to be married.

Without, on the porch, stood the son, tall, manly, strong, half-facing the door where his mother stood, and half-facing the lawn, the street, the house across the way, the hill behind the house, the world beyond the hill. He looked now at his mother, and now out across the street and over to the hill beyond as he said, "Yes, mother. I know that the education and training which

¹ This is from a collection of manuscripts—mostly class papers—written while Davis was a student at Harvard Divinity School, 1902-1904. This manuscript is undated and not obviously connected to any specific class.

have been possible for me and are denied others less fortunate places upon me a responsibility which bids me [to] do what I ought to do, rather than what my most natural inclination prompts. I know that opportunities are open for me to do a service which humanity needs. My own conception of duty, the noble record of our family, for generations faithful public servants, the debt of love which I owe to you and father, and also the interests of the children which I hope one day may give life to our home, all these considerations tell me that I am doing right, that I can do no other thing than what has told me is right. But, mother, at times it seems as if the accumulated love of generations of ancestors, who have loved the simple country life, who have taken the greatest of satisfactions and drawn deep from the well of happiness here among these hills, and along this river, away from all the confusing complexities of the world outside, after they had done their work in the world, it seems as if all of it were welling up in me and forcing me to turn back, and live the quiet simple life that you and I both love. Not only do my own feelings, but _____ as well are continually calling us back to the country, here among the things and the people that we love. And yet, _____² well, I shall be back soon, and I am going for a walk."³

² These underlines appear as just this, underlines, in the manuscript.

³ There the manuscript ends, somewhat abruptly, likely incomplete.