

## A More Abundant Life

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In this season of the year, when all life is so rich and abundant, when plant life is jumping by leaps and bounds from its barren lair of Winter's rest to its golden beauty of an abundant harvest, when all animal life is telling its tale of love and parenthood, we cannot escape the subtle influence of the abundant life about us upon our own inner beings. At times the irrepressible impulses of the human soul, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, after life, rich, full and abundant, takes full and complete possession of us. We lift up our eyes unto the hills, and deep of the soul within us calls unto the deep of the reality without. A new power is stirring within us. The leaven of the spirit of the living God, the spirit of life, which is expressing its prodigal vitality and fertility all about us, has taken us in its grip. Strange thoughts, hopes, aspirations, the voice of the universal life are incessantly tapping, tapping at the door of our dulled and sleeping consciousness, and bidding us arouse ourselves, and live and grow and produce after the pattern of humanity in the garden of the Lord. We, answering the call of deep unto deep, long to go off on a great adventure, long to drink deeply and satisfyingly at the spring whence flows the waters of a full and abundant life. The spirit of Sir Launfal,<sup>2</sup> starting out in the glorious beauty of a June morning in search for the Holy Grail of life, is upon [us]. We are in the grip of one of those great swelling surging tides of life, such as have filled the world with romance, and thrown the highlight of human aspiration and achievement against the dead cold background of a dreary monotony.

When we are in the grip of this flood-tide of life we chafe under the restraint of common tasks and duties. The labor that

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<sup>2</sup> Sir Launfal is a Middle English tale dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> century describing Sir Launfal's search of the Holy Grail.

was uninteresting toil before, now becomes irksome drudgery. We fain would cast aside for a time the work that we have taken delight in doing. The common burdens and cares, as well as the common pleasures and delights, no longer satisfy the cravings of our inner spirit. A mighty passion is upon us.

As we walk along the street meeting the familiar faces and forms we look with searching glance into their faces to see if by chance there is aught there to suggest a similar longing in their lives. We note the familiar loafer, standing on the curb, and we ask ourselves as we pass, "Do you, listless and dormant soul, not feel the stirrings of a mighty power within? Do you not long to go with me on a glorious adventure?" We meet the drunken sot reeling along the street, and wonder if ever in his life there has stirred within him the great tremendous impulse of life that has taken us in its grip? We walk among the people returning from the whorl on the shops, tired and haggard, walking with nervous, yet inelastic step, and we search their faces and ask of them as we pass by, "Are you, too, not longing to drop the drudgery for a day and go with me to the great rugged mountainous country of adventure? What, pray, holds you so long and so persistently at your tasks? How can you resist this tremendous call to life that I feel surging through my whole being?" And again I scan the vacant faces of the idle pleasure-seekers, and I seem to see deep beneath the worthless rubbish that has [been] crushing and repressing the life within them, a longing, inquiring hunger for a real, glorious, task and work to do in this world. Still more do I inquire of the buoyant exuberant youth, the young men and the young women, whose plastic personalities, and plastic faces, are receiving the imprints that are to make them what they will become, "Do you, too, not feel the call to life, to some great adventure, do you not long to cast your all into some glorious task that shall tax every energy, that shall fill your whole life, and satisfy that craving hunger and thirst for life?"

So I return from my search among the common men and common women of common life for the evidences of that great passion that I feel within myself and see in those that are well known to me. I sit down in quiet to think it all over, and I say to myself, "Yes, it is all there. Even in the downcast eyes of the discouraged and the dejected, I see the occasional upward glance. Yea, the very passion for life, which is so fraught with possibilities, has been the agency of their hopeless condition,

for, not having the chance, not having the wisdom, the tremendous vitality has broken forth in blind and unthinking and undirected activities. Not knowing, not being free, they have followed their adventurous spirit, not into the great glorious country of true life, but into the blind alleys of necessity and ignorance. There alone, many a noble spirit has died, or is dying in the agony of unsatisfied hunger and thirst for life. I bethink myself that today many, filled with this same passion, this same irresistible impulse to a glorious life, that pulsates in your being and in mine, will of their necessity or their ignorance, seek to satisfy it amid the conditions and opportunities that have made them what they are. I know that the vacant-eyed pleasure-seeker will still cast himself into the wild whirlpool of excitement, because he knows of naught else. I know that [the] workman, worn and exhausted by his overtoil, will find some way to give vent to his passion for life. I know that the drunkard, recovering from the stupor of his excesses, as he feels the tide of life rising in his veins, will seek the same old channels of expression. I know that the young men and young women, with all the glorious daring of youth, will mix in the great seething tides of life, taking that which opportunity and wisdom offers, and I know that they will come out molded, and colored, by the environment in which they have lived, and the atmosphere of the opportunities offered them.

We are led still further to reflect, as we feel this tide of adventurous life rising within us, with its wild and glorious dreams of futurity ravishing our beings, and then compare the world that we build like castles in the air with the hard cold facts of everyday existence, and realize that the selfsame life spirit that made the one has also made the other. Then we ask ourselves, why this disparity between what is and what, in our inmost beings, we think ought to be? Why should not people in whom this passion for a great and adventurous life, have their great divine impulses satisfied? Why is the spirit still struggling to break forth from the clod? Is all this ideal world but a vast mockery to make more hideous the hell from which we cannot escape? Is the longing for a home that one can call one's own but a fiendish demon hectoring our over-wearied souls and making the uncertainty of life still more hellish by contrasting that which we are with that which we never can become, or have? Is the uninterrupted drudgery of monotonous toil, made terrible by the fear of poverty, to become a still more hellish nightmare because men can dream of a day of rest, and security that can

never be attained? Is the dark and dreary road of pleasure to be made the more terrible by casual glimpses and vistas of chimerical lands flowing with the real milk and honey of a satisfying human life? Must we look this ideal world of ours in the face and say that all is dross but the reality and the pain of things as they are made but a bit more beautiful, or a bit more horrible, as one may look at it, by the visions of what ought to be? Can we never hope that those who in ignorance, and in necessity, seek after truth shall find, and that when they knock at the door of real wholesome life, it will be opened unto them?

Must we forever remain in the closed-in castle of reality, or shall we venture forth like Sir Launfal to seek and to find the Holy Grail. All life and all history tells us that we must go forth to search and find the satisfying life. We must go forth, even if it leads us to the dreary barren dessert of Christian dogma, where we would fain seek the shelter of a great rock in a weary land. Today we are leaving the great castles of things as they are, and things as they have been, and we are putting forth in the morning in search of life. We are going to build the world after the pattern that we have seen on the mount of humanism. We are emerging from an age of formal despair and pessimism, into an age of hope and life and faith.

For how many years have the ideals and standards of human life been living under that great black cloud of Christian pessimism, formulated by Augustine and still further augmented by Calvin? But today we are emerging from the shadow of that horrible cloud into the sunlight, where we can see the possibility of life and faith, justice and honor. For what did these ancient teachers tell us as they went around among men, looking into their faces and asking them what hope there was and looking at the world and asking the world what there was of life? They told us that there was no God in the world, but only in some far off part of the universe. They told us that we were depraved human beings, justly condemned to the gross realities and brutalities of an immoral life, not alone here but hereafter. They told us that there was nothing of real truth or goodness or beauty in this world and this life, that all were under the condemnation and displeasure of a weak and impotent God, unable or unwilling to destroy the weeds and tares that he had permitted to grow up in his world. More than that, they told us in the ultimate despair of their irreligious pessimism, that these hopes and ideals that

surge through the human life were but added implements of torture to gourd the human soul in all its sufferings throughout eternity. The bit of relief to offset this dark and monstrous picture was just the faith that out of all the wreckage of the world and human life, that far off and monstrous God would select by his own will and caprice a few saints to enjoy with him the felicities of eternal life. It is not made clear that this was done out of any love, but simply that he might enjoy the more the writhings of the damned in their infinite torment. The agent of this stupendous bit of alms-giving was a gross caricature of one of the noblest souls in whom the spirit of the living God ever breathed.

But happily that terrible cloud is passing. Although the thunder and lightning are no longer terrifying, yet we get an occasional distant rumbling. We get consolation as we look back upon its passage in the old doctrine that it is necessary to go through purgatory before we reach heaven. Yet terrible and gloomy as was the real doctrine, it was immeasurably more virile and ethical than its washed-out degenerate descendants. But the knights of old, who went forth from their castle of things as they are, were strong and sturdy knights, filled with a moral vigor that far surpassed their immoral system of theology.

Today we are going forth again from this world of facts, following the leadership of what ought to be. Everywhere I feel the breath of a new life, everywhere I hear the sound of countless men and women, of young men and women, in whom this impulse of a new life is working, marching slowly and steadily through the Red Sea of corruption and the wilderness of selfishness and indifference, away from their bondage, to freedom and the promised land, where the hungry shall want no more and the weary shall lie down and rest. In this great humanistic movement of today, the hope and the joy of our times, I think that we have learned some lessons from the quest of Sir Launfal that are serving us in great stead. Sir Launfal went forth from his castle to seek for the Holy Grail, a complete and perfect thing, in a distant country. We have learned that the thing is not made, but is in the making. We have learned that the universe is not made, but is in the making. Nothing is complete, but in its very incompleteness rests its beauty and its hope, and its very life. Only that which is dead is perfect, but to that which is alive, imperfection is its glory, and growth is its vitality. We no longer are in despair, and condemn

the world as a bad job, because it does not measure up to our standards of life, but we say that in its imperfection is our opportunity, and in its immaturity is the challenge to the great pulsating life of humanity. Not by God has the world of human life been made, and spoiled in the making, but in us and through us it is being made, and growing to its destiny. So we seek not for the ready-made Holy Grail in a far-off land, but we make our own Holy Grail in the land in which we live. Here, if anywhere, must the water of life flow, and the soul find its satisfaction. We, human beings, weak and impotent as we are, are growing with the world, and are the agents of its glorious future.

But Sir Launfal made another mistake which we are avoiding. He went forth, heavily armed, and covered with a coat of mail. That has been one of the great drawbacks in the past. Men had no faith in their native endowments. Counting themselves depraved, they did not dare to venture forth unless they were protected by the coat of tradition, and armed with the sword of authority. They must needs say, "Thus saith the Holy Book," or "Thus saith the Holy Church," or the ancient prophet. But today men are more and more casting behind them that authority, and are daring to go forth as tradition pictures Sir Galahad, armed only with truth. That I take to be one of the most glorious aspects of human life today, the daring acceptance of the challenge of the universe, which tells us that truth is not handed out to us ready-made, but must be gleaned from the rock of human life as the gold is gleaned from the ore. The Bible is, and has been, one of the richest storehouses of human experience and aspiration that humanity has produced, but when men said that it is an authority and a guide, infallible in all the ways of life, they made of it a millstone and hung it about our necks, and it became a grievous burden. Happily, we are coming to have more faith in life and in God in these wonderful days, and we are coming to see that truth is not thus confined to the narrow limits of the area bounded by the circumference described by the tether rope of our divine authority. Our journey is not towards the beaten tracks of the past, but towards the fresh, and untrodden fields of today and tomorrow, where bloom in all the beauty of growing life, the plants and blossoms of God's vineyard. Behold in the men who live today, in the noble thoughts that they utter, and the heroic things that they are doing, as great certainly, if not greater, than the prophets of old. Dare to have a faith in the living, present divine life. I see it all about me, breaking through the crust of the soil of

yesterday, to grow and to bear fruit in the days that are before us.

Yet another mistake did Sir Launfal make. In setting out for the Holy Grail, he passed by in contemptuous charity the leper at the gate. I believe that we are going to avoid that error today. We are seeing that nothing is unclean. Even the most repulsive, and hideous of all our present conditions have in them the Christ spirit, ready and waiting to burst forth into the glory that surpasses our comprehension. Given the atrocious conditions of some of our great cities, how can ever the Holy Grail come forth from such leprous spots, says the Sir Launfal type. But is not that just the very glory of our modern life, that out of the very spots, that have seemed most black and hopeless is bursting forth the great Holy Grail of hope and vitality, and even as we go in pitying sentiment to give of alms to those in sore distress, we see the beauty of the Holy Grail taking shape and form in a working sensible idealism, based on, and growing out of, the realities of life. No, we shall no longer pass by the commonplace or even the leprous, but we shall see that out of it all shall burst forth the divine, for in it all is lurking the divine. The tides of the spirit fill every crook and cranny of humanity. Look closely enough and you will see.

But worst of all, Sir Launfal had no faith, and the most serious aspect of the old religion that we are leaving out of, was the fact that it had no faith. It dreams of life, its hopes of goodness, its aspirations for justice were but dreamy wanderings of a depraved mind. But today we are coming to see that our hopes of a better tomorrow grow out of the very nature of the universe in which we live, and out of the our own true nature. They are the voice of the living God speaking in and through us. We have them because we ought to have them, because they belong to us, because they are the natural product of the life that we live. Moreover, we have come to see that all the forces of life are, in the long run, working toward them. We know that they are not vapid products of fantasy, but in their essence, they are fruits of the past and the seeds of the future, and they are the pledge that the dream of truth, of justice, of goodness and beauty, once dreamed shall be true. I say we have faith today, faith in life and its possibilities, faith in man, faith in truth, and faith above all in the living spirit of life, faith in the living God. Out of all the vast

forces of life, we grasp those that we know and with them make in our own image our God who shall work with us in realizing and establishing truth and justice in the life of man.

So, in these glorious days, when the flood-tides of life are pouring in upon us and filling our whole being with these strange longings for a great adventure, for the satisfactions of the deeper life for which we all hunger and thirst, and when we look at some of the strange cruel realities, let us get down close to life, and see the Holy Grail forming where we least expect. Let us know that all these dreams of glorious human life are right, that they belong to us, that they speak to us of realities, that they are the faint outline of the new order upon which the sun of righteousness and justice is even now casting a faint light. Let us be up and preparing for the new day. Beneath the ashes of last night's campfire are the glowing coals which will light and warm us as we rise, stiff and cramped from our spiritual sleep through the dark night of a gross commercialism. The spirit of the living God is stirring in our life. Yet shall the deeper longing of the hungry soul be satisfied, not in some vague hereafter, but in the glorious day to which the rising sun of a real faith is calling us.