

# PRENTICE MULFORD

"NEW THOUGHT" PIONEER

THE  
SECRET

BY

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"THE SECRET OF A STAR," ETC.

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# PRENTICE MULFORD

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### CHAPTER I

#### SHIP'S BOY AND SEA-COOK

IT sometimes happens that there is an extreme detachment between a man's inner and outer life, or that as regards environment and occupation one period of his life differs so much from another that the two seem scarcely reconcilable. Whether this detachment was, in the case of Prentice Mulford, as complete as would appear from his own account is a matter for some doubt; but certainly the contrast between the early and later portions of his life was great enough to make it difficult, in retrospect, to weld them into a coherent whole.

So unusual and adventurous a career as his is worth considering in detail, for there is something of peculiar interest about a man who, having from early youth up endured the fatigue and drudgery of many different kinds of hard physical labour—from sheer necessity and in order to live—has yet made himself known and remembered in two continents entirely by the fruits of his mind. Yet, if we

study Mulford's early years carefully, we shall see how their varied experiences and hardships gave ample opportunity for the growth of those ideas which later he expressed with so much force and vigour.

He was born on April 5, 1834, at Sag Harbour, Long Island, in the State of New York, and we can gather from his own story a fairly definite impression of his early surroundings. His birthplace was a whaling-village, where two-thirds of the male population were bred to the sea, and boys learnt to know the ropes of a ship more easily than their multiplication tables. The names of strange and distant lands were commonplaces of everyday talk, and children grew up familiar with the idea of leaving home and sailing away into unknown seas in search of fortune.

During Mulford's boyhood the Californian gold fever was raging, but we have small information about these years, and he seems to have been about twenty-two when, in company with five other youths from his native place, he shipped "before the mast" on the clipper *Wizard*, bound for San Francisco. The first duty allotted to him was the cleaning out of the ship's pig-pen, and, while not objecting to the task in itself—"Cincinnatus on his farm," he remarks, "may have done the same thing"—the curses and abuse showered on him and his fellows, on this and similar occasions, by their superior officers, seem to have made a deep and bitter impression on his mind. It was,

indeed, a rough and even brutal life, and when the miseries of storm and sea-sickness were added to other trials, the six unhappy youths thought longingly of the comfortable homes they had left so light-heartedly. In time they grew accustomed to the harsh discipline and coarse fare, which had at first seemed unbearable, but a long voyage in the *Wizard* can have been no pleasure-trip. She leaked, and had to be pumped all the way round Cape Horn; she shipped huge seas unexpectedly, decks and cabins alike being swept by tons of water that often carried away their very meals from under the hungry sailors' eyes; worst of all, she was undermanned to such an extent that when fifteen seamen mutinied, on being called to the pumps out of their turn in the small hours of the night, and were put in irons, they had to be released next day because it was found impossible to work the ship without them.

Mulford seems to have felt some doubts as to whether he had chosen the right calling. He was handicapped for more than half the voyage by an injured finger, but apart from this, and despite his early environment, he was found to be of little use in the continual operations of loosing or reefing sails. Though anxious to help, and quick to get into the rigging, he invariably found, when there, that he could do nothing save hold on with both hands. "On a yard in a storm," he says with characteristic humour, "I believed and

lived up to the maxim: 'Hold fast to that which is good.' The yard was good."

The captain of the vessel apparently had no doubts in the matter, for when in August 1856, after a four months' voyage, the *Wizard* at last lay safely at anchor in San Francisco harbour, he informed Mulford that he did not consider him "cut out for a sailor." The latter took the hint, together with his wages, and left the vessel. Nevertheless, he did not accept the captain's verdict as final, and it is at this point that we come upon the first suggestion of those strongly-held views of his on the power of thought, which were to be expanded and developed to so great an extent in later years. "Never," he declares emphatically, "accept any person's opinion of your qualifications or capacities for any calling." And he enlarges on the numerous lives that have been spoilt and crippled by the discouraging influence of parents and relatives, which "remains within them, becomes a part of them, and chokes aspiration and effort. Years afterward I determined to find out for myself whether I was 'cut out for a sailor' or not. As a result I made myself master of a small craft in all winds and weathers, and proved to myself that, if occasion required, I could manage a bigger one."

Mulford omits here to consider the possibility that the captain's frankly expressed opinion may have been the very stimulus that bred in him the determination to prove

it wrong; and he entirely ignores the fact that many of the most successful lives of which we have record have been the fruit, not of early parental praise and encouragement, but of their exact opposites. That factor in human nature which causes it to fight best against great odds, and to achieve its finest results in the face of obstacles and difficulties, seems by him to have been left out of account altogether, though its active working in his own case is constantly suggested by the story of his life.

However that may be, it certainly seemed as though life at sea, in some capacity or other, were his destiny at this time, for after a few months' "drifting round," as he puts it, in San Francisco, he shipped as cook and steward on a whaling vessel, the schooner *Henry*. Once at sea, his unsuitability for the post became immediately apparent. For the first two weeks he was miserably sea-sick; his culinary efforts were received by all concerned with disgust and rage; and it took him three months to learn even the rudiments of his trade. But he persevered in the face of threats, abuse, and discouragement, and at the end of a ten months' voyage had attained, in his own opinion, the status of a second-class sea-cook.

The idiosyncrasies of the *Henry* seem to have been even more trying than those of the *Wizard*. She was "a most uneasy craft," says Mulford, "always getting up extra lurches, or

else trying to stand on her head or stern." He had to perform acrobatic feats in his cramped cook's galley, and when whaling was actually in process he was shoved into any available corner, to be out of the way, and remarks that he "expected eventually to be hoisted into one of the tops, and left to cook aloft." He looked back on this year as the busiest of his whole life, for he was up early and late, and had to act as single-handed cook, scullery-maid, and steward for a company of twenty men. Even his stove was not a proper marine stove with a rail round it to keep pots and pans from falling off, and he had to invent an ingenious system of wires by which his cooking-pots and their lids were attached to the ceiling, so that when lurched off their holes they could not fall, but swung to and fro like so many pendulums.

What was purgatory for the cook was nothing better for the crew. We hear some grisly tales of coffee made with salt water; of a dead mouse rolled up inadvertently in a mass of dough, and served up steaming hot for breakfast—"an involuntary meat-pie"; of uneatable "duffs" with the currants evincing "a tendency to hold mass meetings at the bottom"; and of terrifying sausages made of whale-meat, which "has an individuality of its own," and "will keep on asserting itself, no matter how much spice and pepper is put upon it. It is a wild, untamed steed." But the undaunted one still cooked on persistently,

while, in his own words, "those I served stood aghast, not knowing what would come next." He admits with some naïveté that he was "an experimental cook," but the reader is left in doubt as to whether any ship's crew would have been quite so long-suffering as depicted, had not the cook's successes outweighed his failures. Certain dishes which proved popular are, it is true, mentioned. They included a strange-sounding sea-mince-pie, "one of the few feathers in my culinary cap"; stewed turtle tripe, and abalone soup. Probably there were others, for it is difficult to believe that one who showed such dauntless perseverance could have been a complete failure, or that Mulford's views—to which he returns more than once—on the extreme importance of the gastronomic art could have been held by one without some talent in that direction. He considered that the cook at sea "should come next or near to the captain. It is the cook who prepares the material that shall put mental and physical strength into human bodies. He is, in fact, a chemist . . . who prepares meat, flour, and vegetables for their invisible and still more wonderful treatment in the laboratory which every man and woman possesses—the stomach—wherein they are converted not only into blood, bone, nerve, sinew, and muscle, but into thoughts. A good cook may help materially to make good poetry. An indigestible beefsteak, fried in grease to leather, may, in the stomach of a General lose

a battle on which shall depend the fate of nations. A good cook might have won the battle. . . . It would be a far better and happier world were there more really good cooks on land and sea."

At a later period of his life Mulford himself seems to have suffered from the operations of one whom he describes as "an unbalanced cook." This was one of his mining partners who was apt to get anxious and flurried while cooking, and Mulford found that "an unbalanced cook puts flurries into his stews, for I felt sometimes as if trying to digest a whirlwind after eating his dinners." Further, he gives it as his opinion that "two hours' work about a hot stove exhausts more than four hours' work out-of-doors," and that the European women who work in the fields are better off than the American women who spend the greater part of their time in the kitchen.

All things considered, it is plain that he had not found his true *métier* in life among the saucepans.

But relief was not yet at hand.

## CHAPTER II

### LIFE ON A WHALING VESSEL

THE *Henry* lay for four or five months in St. Bartholomew's, or Turtle Bay, all hands—except the cook—engaged in finding and curing abalones, a kind of shell-fish. The lovely prismatic hues of the shells made them valuable for inlaid work, and the contents, when cured and dried, were intended for the Chinese market in San Francisco.

Mulford gives some vivid and arresting pictures of the sights and sounds that often drew him away from his labours during these months—of the howling of the coyotes; of the swarms of black sea-birds that gathered on the rocks every morning at dawn, and remained “crowded thickly together, all silent and immovable, until apparently they had finished some Quaker form of morning devotion”; of the wonderful mirage, in which regularly before sunrise the towers, battlements, and spires of some ancient city seemed shadowed forth in the sky, all veiled in a mysterious purple haze. He tells of the chattering Sandwich Islanders who formed the greater part of the crew, and their interminable, monotonous Kanaka chants which haunted

him for the rest of his life ; and of his efforts to circumvent their thieving propensities by laying hot stove-covers on his kitchen floor, with the result that his own bare feet were burnt more frequently than theirs ; of two shipwrecked American sailors rescued from a neighbouring island, one of whom was " a powerful talker " ; but the other " never spoke unless under compulsion. . . . Once in a great while there came from him a slight shower of sentences and facts which fell gratefully on our parched ears, but as a rule the verbal drought was chronic." However, the speechless one had other qualities that commanded respect. His " greatest use to mankind lay in his hands, in which all his brain-power concentrated, instead of in his tongue. From splicing a cable to skinning a seal he was an ultra-proficient. Others might tell how, and tell well, but Miller did it."

During the abalone-gathering Mulford was left on the vessel all day, from dawn till sunset, " alone with my own thoughts, pots, pans, and kettles. . . . No companions save gulls in the air and sharks in the water." The gulls were sociable, and occasionally entered the cabin to pick up crumbs, and he can scarcely find words to express his amazement at their capacity for food. " A Pacific-coast gull does not feed," he says. " It seeks simply to fill up the vast, unfathomable space within. Eternity is, of course, without end, but the nearest approach to eternity must be the

inside of a gull ; I would say stomach, but a stomach implies metes and bounds, and there is no proof that there are any metes or bounds inside of a gull."

In the intervals of preparing an evening meal for the hungry "insides" of his absent comrades, the self-made cook had plenty of time for observing the animal and bird life surrounding him, and so entertaining are some of his comments and descriptions that one feels he must have had in him the makings of a successful naturalist. Apart from such observations, however, we are told little of the thoughts that filled his mind during these long solitary days. Knowing what we do of his later life, we may conclude that they ranged far and wide, and touched on subjects that would have astonished those who looked on him merely as the ship's provider of meals, good, bad, or indifferent. He makes no mention of books, and probably none existed on a whaling-vessel, but this deprivation would not be a great one to a thinker of Mulford's particular type. In one of his essays he inveighs against the dangers of too much reading. "New thought," he says, "cannot come from books or from the minds of others. . . . If you depend altogether on books or people for new thought, you are living on borrowed life. . . . You must draw your own sustenance from the infinite reservoir of truthful thought." He evidently acted on this conviction, for after his death a friend wrote : "In his earlier

years he was afraid of reading many books. He wished to receive all his impressions at first-hand, and not to confuse his mind with the individual ideas and impressions of many others."

No doubt the freshness and raciness that characterise his writings are partly due to this avoidance of books. Yet a closer familiarity with the great minds of the past, and with the beauty and dignity of great literature, might have given them a quality that is lacking, while enabling him to avoid the faults of confused expression, clumsy construction, and undue repetition which annoy many of his readers. A man who has something new to say—as Mulford undoubtedly had—will not say it any the worse for having cultivated a sense of "style." To study the great masters of prose and poetry who have preceded him does not necessarily induce slavish imitation and loss of originality in the student. That is a danger only to the weak, and Mulford was not of their company, despite his emphatically expressed fear of "the rules and canons of art, which shackle and repress originality." "Genius," he says, "knows no old master," thus declaring himself, long before their day, in sympathy with those modern schools of poets, painters, and musicians who desire to escape from the trammels of classical tradition in every form of art-expression.

Whether he would have approved of the extreme forms taken, in their attempts to

overthrow form, by the efforts of some of these modernists, is a question we can scarcely attempt to answer. Nor would the opinion of one who had little of the artist in his composition be of any real value.

To return to the *Henry* and her experimental cook, we find that the months of comparative peace in Turtle Bay were brought to an end by a passing steamer with news of a sudden fall in the market price of abalones. "So we hauled up anchor," says Mulford, "and hunted the sea-lion and the whale."

This new quest brought them to Marguerita Bay, on the Mexican coast, and here the unhappy cook's trials recommenced and even increased. In the lagoons that ran parallel with the coast for a hundred miles or more, the *Henry* grounded at each ebb-tide, usually keeling over at an angle of forty-five degrees. Awkward as this was for those who had to take their meals at a table set at such an angle, it was still more awkward for the cook-cum-steward-cum-butler.

His stove worked badly, and kettles and saucepans could be only half-filled, but to transfer the food from the fire to the cabin-table was the real problem. "Transit from galley to cabin," he says, "was accomplished by crawling on two legs and one arm, thus making of myself a peripatetic human triangle, while the unoccupied hand with difficulty bore aloft the soup-tureen. It was then I appreciated the great advantages afforded in certain

circumstances by the prehensile caudal termination of our possible remote ancestors. With such a properly equipped appendage, the steward might have taken a close hitch round an eye-bolt, and let all the rest of himself and his dishes safely down into the little cabin. It is questionable whether man's condition has been physically improved by the process of evolution."

The lagoons of Marguerita Bay were used by the female whales, or "cows," as a nursery. Here in the spring months they gathered to bring forth their young, while the male parents remained outside—and here came man to track them down, knowing them unprotected and hampered by the half-grown "calves," whom they would never desert. Mulford often watched them "play with their young, and roll and thrash about in mammoth gambols." "There is a great deal of affection," he remarks, "in that big carcass." His description of the killing of a whale is so vivid as to be almost blood-curdling, and, while fully alive to the horror and cruelty of it from the whale's point of view, he gives full credit to the human courage required for such an enterprise. "It is no skulking fight like shooting lions and tigers from the shelter of trees or rocks. It's a fair stand-up combat between half-a-dozen men in an egg-shell of a boat and five hundred tons of flesh, bone, and muscle, which, if only animated by a few more grains of sense, could ram the whale-ship herself as effectually as an

ironclad." When the great creature is at last overcome . . . "it is a mighty death," he says, "a wonderful escape of vitality, power, affection, intelligence, too, and all from the mere pin's prick of an implement in the hands of yon meddlesome, cruel, audacious, greedy, unfeeling pygmies. . . . All the while the calf lingers by the dying mother's side." And later, when the carcass has been stripped of its blubber, when gulls and sharks have had their fill, and the vast, mutilated, gaseous, swollen mass is cast adrift, to be swept to and fro by wind and tide, the calf still keeps it company, until dead of starvation or mercifully devoured by sharks. Mulford recounts all this with a certain pity, but it is a detached, impersonal pity. He was not, apparently, shaken by the deep passion and loathing that would have filled the hearts of many men on seeing such outrages committed in the sacred name of "Trade"; nor was he at this time inspired, like Saint Francis, with an abiding sense of the universal Divine Life in all sentient creatures. Yet certain of his later writings show a clear awareness of this, and knowing that he was always, in his own degree, a mystic, and endowed with refined and sensitive feelings, we needs must wonder how he ever endured the appalling sights, smells, and sounds of these awful days. Of the smells he has, indeed, much to say. There seems to be nothing in the universe that can be aptly compared to the smell of boiling blubber and decaying whale

combined, and he even tells us how, when serving the meals, he often had to climb and crawl over the huge chunks of blubber which were piled all over the deck and up to the top of the bulwarks.

After six weeks' whaling the *Henry* set sail for the lonely island of Guadalupe, 200 miles off the coast of Lower California. Here, says Mulford, "it was our business to murder all the mother sea-lions . . . and a boat-load of murderers was quickly sent on shore." But for once luck was on the side of the to-be-murdered, for the boat's crew disappeared, and was not seen again for three days. At the end of this time they returned to the ship in a much-battered yawl that they had found on one of the island beaches, probably left there by former sealers, and it transpired that they had lost sight of the *Henry* in a fog, been driven ashore, had their boat smashed to pieces in a semi-hurricane, and lived on shell-fish in the interval. The cook was kept busy ; they ate steadily for an hour.

No sooner was this adventure over than the ship was caught in a treacherous current that threatened to drive her straight on to an enormous rock, five hundred feet high. Just in time a breeze sprang up and saved her, but, says Mulford, "we trifled no more with Guadalupe, but sailed straight away for our old harbour."

As the *Henry* thus ignominiously departed, there was heard "the howling and barking of

what, judged by the sound, might have been ten thousand seals. It was as the roaring of a dozen combined menageries. . . . These seals were howling at our discomfiture. The rock was half veiled in a mist, through which we could indistinctly see their countless forms writhing and tumbling about."

This was the end of Mulford's youthful sea-experiences. He landed at San Francisco after a ten months' cruise with a share of the proceeds amounting to 250 dollars; shipped, after a time, as cook on a coasting schooner, but was discharged before she left the wharf, his preliminary efforts having failed to please the captain's palate. When he next set foot on the deck of a ship it was to steam eastwards to New York, after sixteen years of laborious exile.

## CHAPTER III

### GOLD-MINING AND SCHOOL-TEACHING

ONLY two of these years were, however, behind the wanderer when in 1858 he decided to leave San Francisco and try his luck as a "digger." He made his way to Hawkins' Bar, on the Tuolumne River, and was engaged by a firm of butchers to distribute meat to the miners of the district. This lasted only for a week, for on one disastrous morning his horse ran away and scattered the miners' steaks far and wide in the dust, and Mulford received his dismissal. "I think Hawkins' got its share of grit that day in its beef," he remarks drily. His next job was that of errand-boy and general factotum to the keeper of the Bar store and saloon, but here again equine vagaries brought about his undoing. He was ordered to lead a horse laden with miners' supplies to a camp three miles away, but the wily beast tore the halter from his grasp and set off alone at full speed, while sacks and parcels burst open, clouds of flour rose in the air, potatoes flew in all directions, and, worst of all, the track was watered by copious jets of whisky. "It was like a snow-squall travelling on horse-

back," says Mulford. Finally the animal allowed him to catch it, and he led it back to the store with a heart as heavy as its load was light.

After this he started washing river-bank gravel for gold, and, after some difficulty in mastering the process, was able to earn the princely sum of one-and-a-half dollars per day. He found a mining partner, "a melancholy-looking man with three dogs," with whom he lived for some time in a brushwood hut built by themselves on a sloping ledge above the river. It was so small that at night their legs stuck out of the front entrance, and when the autumn rains came they were washed out of it altogether. The other man, Mulford declares modestly, "had all the skill, all the experience, and all the dogs, and I all the general ignorance and incapacity." The partnership did not last long, for about this time it became the general custom for each miner to "keep house" by himself. Even under such lonely and isolated conditions, it was found that for human beings of differing habits and temperaments to live in too close contact with one another did not conduce to the general peace and happiness. This lesson seems to have sunk deeply into Mulford's mind, for its fruits are obvious in his later writings.

His next attempt to make a fortune was at Swett's Bar, further up the river, and he gives a very striking description of the rough life, the incessant work, and the almost incredibly

hard conditions under which the gold-miners lived in those middle years of the nineteenth century. After more than three years of back-breaking, muscle-rending toil he found himself no better off than he had been at the beginning. He was weary of "digging," and longed to escape and see more of the world, but lacking means, clothes, and all the necessities of civilised life, he seemed as though chained down by sheer force of habit. Memories of home were growing dim; old ties were broken, old friendships forgotten. He heard, through a chance notice in a paper, of his former sweetheart's marriage to another man. There seemed nothing left to live for. Not yet, however, could he succeed in breaking away.

In 1861, he tells us, a mania for cow-keeping spread through California and reached even the isolated mining-districts, where milk was almost an unknown luxury. Every miner must have his cow, and so the unfortunate beasts were bought and dragged by ropes through the river, arriving usually more dead than alive. The sequel can best be told in Mulford's own words.

"Then came a season of hope and expectation as to fortunes through cows. We arose at five in the morning, built the fire for breakfast, went out and sought our cows, generally feeding or reposing a mile or more from our cabins, caught these cows, milked them, returned to the cabins, finished the cooking of either a burned or cold breakfast, went forth

and laboured in the claim till noon, came home, cooked dinner, went forth again at 1 p.m., laboured till 6, went back to the cabins, chopped wood for fuel, travelled 500 feet or yards to the spring for water, returned, mixed our bread, put it in the oven, went out and milked the cow, bent over the hot stove for an hour until bread was baked, and then, heated, flushed, perspiring, exhausted from the day's work, and with nerves quivering by reason of such exhaustion, we arranged the miners' table, sat down to the meal, and wondered why we had so little appetite."

In other ways, also, the cow-keeping business proved a failure. The animals craved for salt, and would eat anything that held the least suggestion of it. Once when Mulford had been away from his cabin for three days he found, on his return, that a cow had eaten her way right through the cloth wall, had devoured all his stores of rice, flour, and vegetables, and had then eaten her way out at the other side. On another occasion a cow seized his best coat, and before it could be rescued had chewed one sleeve, "for salt's sake, to the likeness of a fish-net."

The next idea was to "keep hogs," who were supposed to live on acorns and produce unlimited quantities of pork. Mulford bought a sow and seven young pigs, who immediately proceeded to break into his neighbours' cabins and devour all their stocks of provisions. Furthermore, it was their habit to sleep in a

heaving, squealing pile outside their owner's cabin door, the cold pigs outside trying to get inside the pile, while the warm pigs inside resisted. His nights, consequently, were far from restful, and his days were made troublous by the complaints and threats of his plundered neighbours, so we gather that he was not sorry when a storm killed off half his pigs and he was able to sell the survivors.

Red Mountain Bar was another mining-camp of which Mulford has recorded his memories, one of the most pleasing being of a rainy winter's day when the "boys" congregated in "Thompson's store," and "became seized with a whim for the manufacture of little pasteboard men turning grindstones, which, when fastened to the stove, were impelled to action by the ascending current of hot air." Numbers of the little men had been made and set to work when there arrived at the store one "George," sent by his father-in-law to borrow an axe. This "George" fell a victim to "the pleasing manufacture of hot-air-driven little pasteboard men turning pasteboard grindstones." He forgot the axe, sat down, and joined in. All day he stayed, and all night; all the next day, and again the night after—"until the stove-pipe was covered to its very top with little men, all working away for dear life turning grindstones." The pleasant party was at last broken up by the arrival of an irate father-in-law demanding son-in-law and axe.

It was at Red Mountain Bar that Mulford narrowly escaped death by drowning. He had ferried a Swett's Bar miner across the river, and on returning (with, as he confesses, certain draughts of Red Mountain wine "working within him"), he began to play tricks with his boat in the rapid current. Suddenly he found himself overboard, heavily clad in flannels and mining boots, and in a few minutes was clinging to a rock half a mile further down the river. He had been swept under water through a narrow rocky channel known as Willow Bar, a succession of wild eddies and whirlpools through which no man had ever been known to pass alive. When he ventured to tell the story afterwards his veracity was always seriously questioned unless one of the few eye-witnesses happened to be present.

It is interesting to notice that even in this rough and soul-deadening environment his feeling for natural beauty did not desert him. At Red Mountain Bar, he says, "we spent time and strength in a scramble for a few ounces of yellow metal, while in the spring-time the vales and hillsides covered with flowers argued in vain that they had the greatest rewards for our picks and shovels. But none listened." One there was, nevertheless, who heard, even if he could not heed, the call. In another place he tells of the beauty of the condensed vapour which rose daily from the melting snows on the high peaks of the Sierra Mountains, more than eighty miles away. "It

is imposing in its silent, imperceptible rising, its wonderful whiteness, its majesty, its distance. It seems a fit bed of snowy splendour for fairies or some sort of ethereal beings to bask and revel in. It seems to be looking down—half in scorn, half in pity—at us four weary, miserable worms of the dust, feebly pecking at a bit of mother earth.”

We cannot help wondering whether these thoughts were ever expressed in words; whether any of the young digger's comrades were aware of the fancies and longings that visited him. But a change in his fortunes—though not a very brilliant one—was about to take place. After a spell of hard and unprofitable labour at Red Mountain Bar, he was offered the post of school-teacher at Jamestown, a neighbouring mining-camp.

It was not an easy post. The school-house was the church, a small and stuffy building in which Mulford now found himself shut up for six hours daily with sixty children and youths, varying in age from four to eighteen years. In summer it became almost unbearable. The Californian summer heat was, as the teacher truly thought, “unfit for educational purposes,” at any rate, under such conditions; but the parents, being chiefly New Englanders and North Americans, wished their offspring to be educated with all the strictness to which they themselves had been accustomed. Frequently the children fell ill; sometimes they fainted; and once, when a fainting child was

sent home, it was brought back by an angry father an hour afterwards. "He was fierce, and said he wanted his child kept in school when he sent it to school." At this time, surely, Mulford would have felt deep sympathy with William Blake's "Schoolboy":

"To go to school on a summer morn,—  
Oh it drives all joy away!  
Under a cruel eye outworn  
The little ones spend the day  
In sighing and dismay. . . .  
How can the bird that is born for joy  
Sit in a cage and sing?"

If only he could have taken his pupils into the open air, and have talked to them for an hour or two each day in the shade of a group of oak-trees near the school-house, he believed that in a week they would have learnt more than in a month under the cut-and-dried system he was obliged to follow. "A teacher must learn himself in order to teach," he says, and goes on to explain how he would have liked to tell the children about the motive power of steam, the causes of rain, coal-mining, the structure of birds' wings, and so on. But no such thing was possible. He had to teach grammar, arithmetic, and geography on the approved conventional lines, and his efforts resulted in the firm conviction that, instead of wastefully expending so much force, it would be better to use it "in teaching the boy to shoe horses and the girl to make bread, or let the girl shoe the horses if she wants to,

and the boy make the bread"—sentiments with which many of our modern educationists would, no doubt, heartily agree.

Most of Mulford's pupils brought their dogs with them to school as well as their lesson-books—a habit which cannot have simplified the task of imparting instruction. "The labour of teaching the alphabet to ten infants is," he says, "in my estimation, greater than that of swinging a pick in the surface gold diggings. I have tried both, and prefer the pick infinitely." He tells of one child who could not get beyond the letter F, so that at last, after weeks and months of vain endeavour, he felt ill at the sight of her. Another stammered badly, and the teacher was expected to cure him. Several were Mexicans who could speak very little English; and one particularly troublesome pupil was "a great stout boy, full of vitality," who had "force enough inside him to run a steam-engine," and "held a pen as he would a pitchfork." The older girls also caused him a good deal of anxiety, for women were scarce in the mining districts, and even girls of fifteen had, on an average, two chances of getting married in every month. The teacher was thankful when they finally did marry and enter "another school of life"!

But in spite of all trials and drawbacks, life in "Jimtown" had compensations. Though the population hardly equalled that of a single block in New York City, there was, in Mulford's opinion, "a far greater average of mental

activity, quickness, and intelligence to the man—at least so far as getting the spice out of life was concerned.” An eccentric character whom he has sketched in his usual racy fashion was one Carroll, who believed in total annihilation after death, and whose only relief from the misery caused by this opinion lay in converting others to it. “He came to me one day,” says Mulford, “and on his face was the grin of a fiend. ‘I’ve got Cummings,’ said he. ‘I’ve been labouring with him for weeks. . . . I knocked his last plank of faith from under him to-day; he hasn’t a straw to cling to, and he’s as miserable as I am.’ ‘But with Mullins,’ he remarked afterward, ‘I’ve slipped up on him. I wrought three weeks with Mullins . . . got him down to the last leaf in the last chapter of the Book of Revelations, and there, fool like, I let up on him to go home to supper. And, do you know, when I tackled him next morning I found Mullins, in my absence, had got scared. He galloped in belief way back to Genesis, and now I’ve got all that job to do over again.’ ”

The Bella Union Saloon in “Jimtown” was, in Mulford’s words, “a circus, because men of individuality, character and originality met there.” Many of them were born mimics, and no peculiarity of any member of the community went unmarked among them. Brown, the lawyer, for instance, was in the habit of reading French by an open window, inventing his own pronunciation as he went along, and it was

part of the "circus" to hear an imitation of this. Another would-be scholar was studying Webster's Dictionary, and interspersed his conversation with words of astonishing length. "And, sir," said someone to Mulford, "he can spell the word 'particularly' with six i's. How he does it I can't tell; but he can."

So we gather that life at this time had its lighter side, and one not unappreciated by the school-master in the intervals of teaching the young idea how to shoot.

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## CHAPTER IV

### LAST ADVENTURES

PRESENTLY Mulford was seized by the "copper fever" which raged throughout California in 1862 and '63, and after a few weeks imagined himself an "expert," capable of finding veins anywhere and everywhere. He went off to prospect a claim near Table Mountain, and thought he had "struck it rich"; formed a company, and planned out a city to be called "Copperhead City." But company and city alike vanished into thin air when it was found that the deeper the shaft went the less copper and the more water was discovered. Mulford, however, comforted himself with the thought that both he and his shareholders had for several months "felt rich"—"and if a man feels rich, what more should he want? A millionaire can do no more than feel." Far from being disheartened, he next evolved a new and much more ambitious scheme. He says of himself that he had "the happy talent of living in these golden visions," holding that "the anticipation of a thing is sometimes more 'the thing' than the thing itself." So, about

a year later, when the copper craze had been superseded by the wild search for silver, due to the discovery of silver leads in Nevada, he projected, as he puts it, "one of my grandest failures." This was the Mulford Mining, Prospecting, and Land Company, consisting of thirty members, with himself as general prospector, discoverer, and holder of all properties accumulated.

He set out on foot with only a few dollars, but presently received the loan of a horse, "the slowest of his kind in the Great West," a saddle, a shot-gun, a dog, and some provisions, in return for enrolling the lenders as shareholders in his company. For months he wandered through the primeval forests of the Sierras, searching for mineral ore, or for possible sites for farms and towns, and sleeping under the stars. Often for a week or more at a time he saw no human face, and the vastness and loneliness became overpowering. "I longed generally about sundown for someone to talk to. . . . There was companionship in the trees, the clouds, the mountain peaks, far and near; yet there were times when the veriest clod was better than all of these. Sometimes nothing but another human tongue will answer our needs, though it be a very poor one."

He was often in the track of grizzlies, and was badly scared by the howling of wolves at night, or by chance meetings with Indians, who, fortunately, did not prove hostile. He

learnt many useful lessons and soon knew all there is to know concerning the art and craft of camping-out ; but it was a hard life, especially for one who was not physically strong, or even, as he said, " a well man." Only his keen desire to find fortune in some mineral vein enabled him to continue and survive. In the name of the company he pre-empted " some of the grandest scenery in the world "—but stronger claimants had firm possession of these enchanting valleys, lakes, and forests, the chief being snow, which buried them from 10 to 15 feet deep for seven months out of every year. The shareholders were not moved by considerations of the sentimental and picturesque. They wanted gold, silver, or copper—large quantities of all or any. When it appeared that none was forthcoming—at least, none that was likely to pay without an initial heavy expenditure of capital—their interest waned, and, the loaned horse being peremptorily demanded back by its owner, the company perforce came to an end.

This disaster overtook Mulford in Eureka Valley, some 8,000 feet above sea-level, and obliged him to spend the winter of 1864–65 on a mountain ranch there with two other men. Winter set in early, and with winter came snow, which continued to fall almost without cessation till the following spring. The stillness and isolation, the long nights and short, sunless days, the intense cold and extreme monotony, must have been a strange

and trying experience. "We were outside of creation," says Mulford; "we had stepped off; we seemed in the dread dreary outer regions of space, where the sun had not warmed things into life. It was an awful sort of church, and a cold one; it might not make a sceptic devotional, but it would certainly cause him to wonder where he came from and whither he was going."

In spite of the genuine admiration he seems to have felt for the two ranchers, his companions, he decided, towards the end of March, that he must escape from these snow-bound mountain solitudes and make his way to Sonora, in Tuolomne County, fifty-six miles distant, with a view to realising certain political ambitions that had taken hold of him. He set forth on snow-shoes one day before dawn, but had to turn back very soon with three frozen toes. However, he wrapped flannel round his boots and started again, hoping to reach an empty log-house twelve miles away before nightfall. But the journey was far more difficult and perilous than he had imagined, owing to numerous avalanches having descended upon the track, and presently he missed his footing and slid for three hundred feet down the precipitous, snow-covered mountain-side. The slide occupied about six seconds, but the thoughts and impressions crowded into those seconds made them seem like many minutes to the descending one. "The human mind is a wonderful piece of business," he remarks.

“The more it is shocked, agitated, and stirred up, the faster it works.”

The slope down which he was precipitated, generally in a sitting position, terminated in a cliff two hundred feet high overlooking the Stanislaus River, but mercifully some soft snow stopped his career just in time. Realising that it would be madness to attempt to ascend again that evening, he scooped out a cavity in the snow, made a fire of dead pine-branches, boiled some coffee, and settled down for the night. His impedimenta had, of course, been strapped to him, a fact which stood him in good stead, together with his natural fund of humour and sound common-sense philosophy. He declares that he spent the night “very pleasantly,” and after supper sang, recited passages from Shakespeare, and rehearsed the political speech that he had prepared with the idea of standing for the Legislature for Tuolumne County. “I felt,” he says, “that here I could sing in safety and without damage to other ears.” It is a pleasing picture, and the more we envisage it, the greater our admiration for the central figure. His own account belittles the danger and hardship. He declares that he had spent many worse nights “surrounded by all the so-called comforts of civilisation,” and reminds us that “snow, rightly applied, will prove man’s greatest protection from cold, provided it is deep enough.”

When dawn came, he reconnoitred his posi-

tion, and found that his only way of escape lay in climbing up the three hundred feet of icy slope down which he had fallen. There was no way round, and no short cut possible. It took him the whole morning, for he was hampered by snow-shoes, pole, and pack, and in many places a missed foothold would have meant a far worse fall than that of the evening before. He arrived at the top about noon, thoroughly exhausted, and, says he, "I wished I was a goose, for a goose could in four minutes have accomplished a distance which took me all day."

About an hour before dark he reached the deserted cabin which had been his goal the previous day, forced an entrance through the window (the door being blocked by masses of snow), and then found himself driven forth again to seek firewood. He says the place was "melancholy, murderous, and cold . . . a gloomier camp than the one of the night previous," and regardless of a heavy snow-storm, he started out again the next morning. But the strap of one of his snow-shoes gave way, the snow whirled in his eyes and blinded him, thin films of ice kept forming over his whole face, and when at last he had covered four miles and reached another empty hut, he found it crushed in by the weight of snow on the roof—nothing remaining of it save a few timbers and splinters. There was nothing to be done but fight his way back to the first cabin, and, after twice losing his way, he suc-

ceeded in doing this, gathered in more fuel, and spent two days and nights there, momentarily expecting the strained and cracking roof to come down on his head. The situation must have required all the calmness and philosophy that he could bring to bear on it.

When the storm ceased he made another effort, but was impeded by the softness of the newly-fallen snow, the necessity for wading creeks and rivulets that continually crossed the road, and the impossibility of sitting or lying down to rest—for to take off his snowshoes meant sinking waist-deep—not to speak of the difficulty of providing himself with warm food or drink. "A watched pot never boils," he says, "but a watched pot of plain water is velocity itself when compared with a pot of snow and water watched by a tired and hungry being in the wilderness." Darkness fell, and he was still twelve miles from Strawberry Flat, the nearest camp, but soon after midnight he came upon a desolate cabin with a dead cow in the kitchen, and made a fire there, using the frozen cow as a seat, and the broken doors and window-frames for fuel. He was too impatient to wait for daylight, and tried to accomplish the final stage of his journey in the dark, with the result that he repeatedly missed the track and had to retrace his footsteps. When dawn broke he at last struck the right path, only to be set upon, as he reached the camp, by six dogs, whose aim

and purpose seemed to be to devour all that was left of him. But all was well in the end, and this, perhaps the most trying of all his adventures on the physical plane, turned out to be also the last.

## CHAPTER V

### THE PEACEFUL END

THE final change from hard physical labour to mental work was not immediately accomplished, but it was now very near at hand. After reaching Sonora, the budding politician for a time dug post-holes for a living, meanwhile rehearsing lectures and speeches to the trees, rocks, and barns. He wanted, yet feared, a human audience, and one evening he gathered a few acquaintances together, led them to the empty court-house, and, from the judge's bench, with two candles stuck in bottles to throw light on the scene, delivered to them one of the lectures he had so carefully prepared. Unfortunately, we are not told the subject of this maiden effort, but, though Mulford himself declares that he was never a good speaker, his friends encouraged him to persevere, and he next hired a hall in order to give his lecture in public. The charge for admission was twenty-five cents, and the lecturer seems to have been so overcome by his own audacity in charging anything at all that

for days beforehand he scarcely dared to show himself in the streets. When the time came he was paralysed by the basilisk orbs of a few stern and practical-minded critics among the audience to such an extent that he left out most of his "best bits," through sheer embarrassment. But again, his friends spurred him on, and, relieved that his failure had not been a worse one, he wrote and advertised another lecture. This was delivered to almost empty benches, so he betook himself to Columbia, a neighbouring township, and lectured there, as well as at Jamestown and other places, with varying success. He travelled from one town to another on foot, and posted his own bills, coming in later years to the conclusion that he had held himself "too cheap," and that if he had ridden in a carriage and doubled his prices his audiences would have been considerably larger.

In 1866 came a chance to realise his political ambitions, and he announced himself as a candidate for the State Assembly, with qualifications, according to his own estimate, "about equal to those with which I entered the *Henry's* galley as sea-cook." Whatever his lectures had been, his nomination speech before the County Convention was an undoubted success. "I left out politics altogether, made no pledges, discussed no principles, and talked no sense. At first the audience stared ; then they laughed immoderately. So did I. Then they nominated me by acclamation." He declares that

he was at this time actuated solely by the mercenary desire to occupy a seat in the Assembly at ten dollars a day, that he was "a snake in the grass" among righteous and single-minded men, and that his assets consisted of no position, next to no reputation, no property, no good clothes, no whole shoes, no fixed habitation, and three frozen toes—a relic from his adventure in the snows that still troubled him. We gather that he was the only member of his party who did not believe that that party could do no wrong and the opposing party no right, and that he envied the others their faith and longed to be able to share it. In the end, however, notwithstanding strenuous efforts and much public speaking, he was not elected—and so one more failure seemed to be added to a growing list.

But at this critical moment, destitute and in imminent danger of starvation, he received a letter from Joseph Lawrence, publisher of a weekly paper, *The Golden Era*, inviting him to come to San Francisco, and write for it. He had already done some unpaid free-lance writing for local papers, and he jumped at this heaven-sent offer, which brought about with the proverbial "stroke of the pen" a startling and sudden change in his whole outer life. "It was from the mountain solitudes to the bustle of a great city, from the miner's cabin to the elegancies of a first-class hotel . . . from the society of the 'boys' to that of artists, actors,

editors and writers—some since of world-wide reputation. It was the sharpest corner I had ever turned in my life.”

But though the corner was turned, Mulford did not seem able to remain on the level to which his new friend had lifted him. Though placed in comfortable surroundings, and given introductions to all sorts of interesting and successful people—among them Bret Harte, Mark Twain, and Artemus Ward—he descended, when Lawrence left the city a few months later, to cheap lodgings and a mean and cheese-paring method of life. This is his own version. He calls himself “awkward and unassimilative,” and blames the unconquerable shyness which prevented him from taking advantage of the new openings offered to him. He declares that his own state of mind and general level of development were responsible for his inability to “make good”; that because he feared starvation and failure they were always near at hand; and that “when you are in a certain mental condition your physical life and fortune will be an exact material reflection thereof.” However, that may be, the difficulties at the time were probably greater than he allowed in retrospect, for *The Golden Era* had soon changed hands, and he was left to depend for a living on the precarious rôle of “occasional contributor” to various other papers. Yet he did, though dogged by hardship and poverty, progress so far as to fill, temporarily, that proud position

known as an "editorial chair." His duties were in connection with the Sunday supplement of a city daily paper, and he does not seem to have found the performance of them unmitigated bliss. He writes feelingly of his difficulties with printers and would-be contributors; of his hatred of rejecting proffered manuscripts; and of his efforts to get the rejected ones to believe that his was "the greater misery"—efforts which doubtless failed, though they may have softened the blow to the luckless authors. He tells of how he was beset, among other cranks, by "a delusionist who had a theory for doing away with death, and who left me, as he said, to 'prefer death' and die in my sins, because I told him I had really no desire to obtain information on the subject"—an episode that reads strangely when we consider the theories on this very point that Mulford himself developed later on. That time, however, had not yet arrived.

He worked in San Francisco as "newspaper man" in one capacity or another for five or six years, and when the time came for him to leave California he found that he had struck roots there, and, to his surprise, that he could not tear himself away without a last visit to his old haunts among the mountains and mining-camps. It must have been a depressing pilgrimage, for most of the camps were deserted and had fallen into a state of hopeless decay. This accomplished, there followed the

long voyage East, and, after sixteen years of exile, New York once more.

Mulford was now thirty-eight years of age. He was extremely shy and almost over-modest—though he labels his own modesty “moral cowardice”; liable to be pushed into the background by anyone possessed of greater self-confidence, no matter how far inferior to himself in other respects; painfully afraid of ridicule; yet at the same time gifted with an almost startling mental audacity, as witness his copper-mining schemes and his unrealised political ambitions. He was aware of these contradictions in his nature, and, referring to his own “temperamental see-saw,” says that he was “always too far above the proper scale of self-esteem one day and too far below it the next.” More than once he speaks of his tendency to “accept the bottom of the heap as inevitable,” and consequently to remain near the bottom, and he asserts that his long struggles with misfortune were almost entirely due to his “average shabby and inassertive mental level.” Only with pen in hand did he seem really to “find himself,” and to be able to give free play to one of his most valuable possessions—his sense of humour. He wrote with facility, but in conversation he seems to have been “difficult,” owing to his deeply ingrained fear of boring those to whom he was talking. It was only when the ice had been thoroughly broken that the real man would appear, the fund of quiet humour be revealed,

and his views on the subjects nearest to his heart find free expression.

One who knew him well has remarked that so great was his modesty and conscientiousness that he always seemed impelled to unveil rather than to hide his own shortcomings, and would carefully explain himself—to himself, as well as to his friends—striving to analyse his motives and to decide how far they were actuated by self-interest. He was also extremely sensitive, and apt to be too easily upset by any trivial slight or omission on the part of others. But all who came into close contact with him found him sympathetic and lovable, tolerant and broad-minded, and, except for occasional fits of taciturnity, a genial and amusing companion.

His visit to New York in 1872 was merely a flying one, for he was *en route* for Great Britain, where he had been commissioned by the *San Francisco Bulletin* to spend a couple of years writing and lecturing about California. He was financed to the extent of 500 dollars, and delivered his lectures in all parts of the British Isles, visiting the Vienna World's Fair in between whiles, also on behalf of the *Bulletin*. While in England he fell in love with a young English girl belonging to a Roman Catholic family. The difference in age and in religion seems to have caused some difficulties with her parents, but these were successfully surmounted, and the marriage turned out a very happy one, despite the poverty which still

dogged Mulford's footsteps—though even he could scarcely have persisted in asserting that his own state of mind at this time was the cause of it! An intimate friend of his has recorded that love and marriage seemed to bring out all that was best in him, and that henceforward the supreme happiness arising from the true mating of man and woman became one of his favourite themes.

He returned to New York with his young wife and nine dollars, and once more eked out a precarious existence on the proceeds of freelance journalism and Sunday lectures. It was a time of great anxiety, but the worst seemed over when he was sent as newspaper correspondent to the Centennial Exhibition at Philadelphia, afterwards obtaining a post on the staff of the *New York Graphic*. Four years after his return to America he was sent to the Paris Exhibition of 1878 as correspondent by the *San Francisco Bulletin*, and he and his wife spent six months in France. "I am a fortunate man," he wrote in a letter. "The reality of Paris far exceeds the anticipation. . . . I have plunged into French life. I live French, eat French, read French, speak French—and *such* French!" A short visit to London followed, with a renewal of friendships made during his former stay. Then they crossed the Atlantic once more, and for the last time as far as Mulford was concerned.

He continued his journalistic work until 1883, when he retired on what he called "a

very small fortune," and built with his own hands, and at a cost of forty dollars, a shanty in "a New Jersey wilderness," ten miles from New York. There he wrote the series of essays which he began to publish in Boston in 1886 under the name of the *White Cross Library*, having just enough money to print the first number. In this case, and perhaps for the first time in his life, his hopes and his faith were fully justified, for the enterprise, though started in so small a way, without either influence or capital behind it, was an unqualified success, and has made his name widely known on both sides of the Atlantic.

Long before success visited him, and notwithstanding his inherent modesty, he seems always to have had a deeply-rooted conviction that sooner or later he would be enabled to command it. Writing to one of his English friends in 1873, he said: "The sympathy and hospitality of your fireside could have been extended to me at no more opportune period. Commonly such attentions come *after* one has won a name. . . . The world gets dreary at times with scarce a hearthstone to sit by. The true pilgrims of to-day carry pens, not staffs. Nurse a man in solitude for years, and the simplest meal partaken among warm hearts is for him a royal feast. When I *conquer* my place you and yours will find I can remember."

In a later letter to the same friend he wrote: "It doesn't so much concern me what may

become of my soul or being hereafter, as what to do with it *now*. I think one grand secret, if not the pivot of the grand secret, is to learn how to live in the *Now*. . . . When the laws of spirit intercourse are better known . . . the race will learn far better how to live . . . bodies will retain symmetry and all that renders them attractive to what now we term great age. Death will be a translation rather than a sad and dreaded ending. . . . This world, this race, this universe, is a growing world, a growing universe. . . . You, I am sure, are far too sensible and clear-sighted to say that there shall be a stop anywhere to the possibilities of humanity. *There are no finalities.*"

He was a firm believer in the survival of personality after death, and on one occasion was seen to be smiling thoughtfully after having heard of the death of a very dear friend. On being questioned he answered, "I'm thinking how J—— always doubted whether there was another world. And I'm just picturing him walking about there to-day and wondering at all he sees."

In Mulford's own case death did indeed come as a "translation." He had a little sailing-boat called the *White Cross*, and on May 27, 1891, he set out in it for a cruise alone, as was frequently his custom. Some days later the boat was found anchored off Long Island. Everything was in perfect order, and Mulford lay as if asleep, wrapped in his blankets, with a tranquil expression on his face. He

had been dead for three days, and it was truly said at the time by those who knew him that if he could have planned the manner of his earthly passing he would have chosen no other way than this.

## CHAPTER VI

### HEALTH AND SELF-DEVELOPMENT

SOME rather severe criticism has been levelled at the essays <sup>1</sup> in which Prentice Mulford expressed his philosophy of life, and as far as his method of expression is concerned, it is not always easy to defend him. Though his style is often fresh and arresting, with a forceful directness that makes his ideas easily grasped and has been largely conducive to their popularity, its redundancies, crudenesses, and general lack of grace and polish are likely to irritate readers with a sense of beauty of form in literature. It has been said <sup>2</sup> that "all that he has to tell us could be said in a third of the space that he occupies, and he fills it not by reason of decoration or entirely of prolixity, but by reflections and echoes of what has occurred to him previously. . . . I believe, however, that a book of more than usual suggestion could be made by the reduction of all that he has written into a treasury of detached thoughts."

<sup>1</sup> Published in England by Messrs. W. Rider & Son, Ltd.

<sup>2</sup> By Mr. A. E. Waite. See Introduction to *The Gift of Understanding*, Essays by Prentice Mulford.

There is some truth in this, but perhaps what needs chiefly to be remembered is that Mulford was writing not for the highly-cultured few, but for the great mass of average men and women in a work-a-day world. It is to these that his style and his theories both make their main appeal. As Clifford Harrison said: "He spoke to busy men and women and met them on their own lines. But those who care to see his purpose will find the words capable of great expansion and high application." And the American poet Whittier, in some memorial verses written after Mulford's death, referred to him as "a sage and seer"—terms which those who give his essays a more than superficial reading will allow to be deserved.

The value and helpfulness of his work is very largely due to its unique quality of *freshness*. Though in danger, nowadays, of losing some of its force through endless repetition, Mulford's thought, at the time when he wrote, was in very truth "New" Thought, and the welcome that it met with was not surprising. A more serene confidence than his in the reality of unseen things, a more encouraging view of the purpose of human life, or a more cheerful outlook upon the world in general, could scarcely be imagined. The attainment of harmony, happiness, completion, was to him the chief aim and object of earthly existence. To this all things tend, and to this all efforts should be directed. A few phrases from one

of his best-known essays, *The God in You*, will illustrate the point of view in his own characteristic fashion.

“What is the aim of life? To get the most happiness out of it; to learn to live so that every coming day will be looked for in the assurance that it will be as full of pleasure as the day which we now live in, and even fuller; to banish even the recollection that time can hang heavily on our hands; to be thankful that we live; to rise superior to sickness or pain; to command the body, through the power of the spirit, so that it can feel no pain; to control and command the thought so that it shall ever increase in power to work and act separate, apart and afar from our body, so that it shall bring us all that we need of house or land or food or clothes, and that without robbing or doing injustice to any one; . . . to make ourselves so full of happiness and use for others that our presence may ever be welcome to them; to be no one's enemy and every one's friend. . . . That is the inevitable destiny of every individual spirit.”

Mulford believed that every man has his own special path to follow, by which alone he may attain to that fulness of being which is perfect happiness. None can be guided by another's experience; none should rely upon another's judgment. “You are a book for yourself. . . . When you accept any man or any woman as an infallible guide or authority, and do exactly as they say, you are off the

main track. . . . Doing right is not doing what others may say or think to be right." In this connection he lays great stress on the necessity to break, and break ruthlessly, all old ties which are felt to hamper or injure the individual growth. The power of association is, according to him, one of the most important factors in our lives.

"Proper association is one of the greatest of agencies for realising success, health, and happiness. . . . Where is the benefit of two persons being tied together in thought or remembrance if one or both are injured? If one is injured, so also must be the other in time. But the superior mind receives more immediate injury. . . . True life . . . involves . . . an endless association with other like minds, giving ever to each other, and receiving unfailing supply of strength, vigour, and the elements of eternal youth. . . . To throw our whole being, care and thought into the welfare of others, no matter who they may be, without first asking of the Supreme if it be the wisest thing to do, is a sin, for it is an endeavour to use the forces given us by that Power as we think best. The result is damage to self and a great lessening of ability to do real good to others."

In general, Mulford preached a doctrine of "Divine Economy," "which orders that when we give even our thought, we must give only as much as will really benefit others. . . . What people cannot appropriate is lost for

them, and when you have once sent it out you cannot recall it." It might perhaps here be objected that no human being has the right to make himself the judge of another's capacity to receive—and the point certainly admits of argument. Mulford is on safer ground when he writes of the desirability of conserving our forces in the numerous activities of daily life. "One great source of our present waste of force lies in the mood of impatience or mental intemperance. . . . The force or thought which we call to us in lifting a feather comes from the Infinite Force and Mind. Money cannot buy it. . . . Its sacredness and worth is never lessened by the nature of the act that we do. . . . In the Higher and Coming Economy this force will be so regulated as to outlay that it will draw more, just as when you put out a dollar in business you expect that dollar to gain more. That result comes of a reposeful mood carried into every act." In this and many similar passages he expresses a truth to which none can take exception, a truth whose realisation would be of infinite value in combating the feverish rush and lack of repose so characteristic of modern life. No doubt every modern physician would agree with his dictum that "the habit of hurry wears out more bodies and kills more people than is realised."

One of the chief lessons that Mulford sought to inculcate was that of "the higher love of self," without which he insists that there can

be no true spiritual growth. On the subject of those who are unable to control or restrain their sympathies, but pour them forth indiscriminately in all directions, he waxes eloquently sarcastic; likewise concerning those who believe that in neglecting self for the sake of others they are taking a "short cut" to eternal salvation and endless spiritual reward.

This doctrine of the higher self-love certainly has in it something more bracing than the opposing theories of weak-kneed and sentimental self-immolation. Mr. A. E. Waite, though not a lenient critic, and far from agreeing with Mulford on all points, is warmly appreciative on this one. "I do not know," he says, "that of its own kind a truer note could be struck than his discourse upon the higher love of self, since we are kings and princes in exile, and it is becoming that in all things we should treat ourselves with great courtesy and dignity. The true honour and chivalry must begin at home, and if anyone will reflect on this statement, he will see that herein is the root of all perfection." The idea is, of course, one that has been developed by many modern writers in many different forms. One of William Blake's biographers<sup>1</sup> has said very succinctly: "From Ibsen's *Doll's House* to Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra* confidence in the *ego* has been proclaimed as the means to liberty,

<sup>1</sup> See *William Blake: the Man*. By Charles Gardner.

beauty, and sovereignty. . . . Blake believed that the real self was made in the image of God, and therefore it must be loved, revered, and obeyed. The recognition of the same divine principle in others enables one to love one's neighbour as oneself. All German mystical talk of hatred to self and death to self was repudiated by Blake as artificial and unreal."

To avoid misapprehension we should perhaps add that Mulford, like all endowed with true insight, made a very clear distinction between this higher love of self and love of the body, its pleasures, its food, or its raiment. A reasonable love of the body, a self-respecting pride in its beauty and healthfulness, he warmly approved, but, he says, "it is not a real love for self which indulges to excess in any pleasure to be obtained from the body." In this, as in most other matters, he is, however, content to leave the final word to each individual judgment. "The government of your life is a matter which lies entirely between God and yourself. . . . Regarding others, 'ought' is a word and idea with which we have nothing to do."

His theories concerning health, mental and physical, are by now so well known and have become, in slightly varied forms, so widespread that it is unnecessary to deal fully with them here. "Ill-temper or despondency," he says, "is a disease. The mind subject to it in any degree is to that degree a sick mind."

Again : " Ennui is sickness. . . . The monster of discontent and ennui rages as much in the palace as in the hovel. Solomon was in the claws of this beast when he said : ' Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.' That exclamation is a libel on the Infinite Mind." He exhorts his readers never to think of themselves as ill or in pain, and never to " expect " anything but health, strength, and vigour. " When any material remedy is applied, the main dependence should not be on that remedy but on the power of mind. . . . Healthy thought can revive and put strength-into sick bodies."

He believed that there is no need for man to grow old, either mentally or physically, and even thought that the body might be retained indefinitely by those desiring it. " One attribute of the relatively perfected life to come to this race is the retention or preservation of a physical body so long as the mind or spirit desires it. . . . We think the old age or wearing out of the body must be, because, so far as we know, it always has been." This is a controversial subject, but, apart from that, it may be remarked that not all men would desire to prolong physical existence indefinitely, even in a perfectly healthy body, were the secret of so doing ever to be discovered. It is on points such as this that Mulford parts company with the more deeply mystical schools of thought, for he is so immersed, at times, in the task of making the best of this life, and getting the best out of it, that he is apt to forget that the

true life of the spirit in man is not here—though temporarily focussed in this world—but in those dwellings “not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” Still, with regard to the possible prolongation of human life, he is not alone in his belief. There are modern scientists and others who support his view to a considerable extent,<sup>1</sup> and it is extremely interesting to note the similarities that exist between Mulford and two writers so far apart in time as Dr. Gustave Geley—author of that remarkable book *From the Unconscious to the Conscious*<sup>2</sup>—and Thomas Vaughan, the seventeenth century alchemist, both of whom were in all probability equally unknown to him.

Says Mulford :—“Reincarnated we have all been many times. Regeneration is a step beyond reincarnation. . . . Regeneration means the perpetuation of an ever-refining spiritual body without that total separation of spirit and body called death. . . . A spiritualising and refining power has ever been and ever will be working on this planet. . . . It works with man as with all other organisations. It is ever changing him gradually from a material to a more spiritual being. It is carrying him through his many physical existences from one degree of perfection to another. . . . There

<sup>1</sup> See *Death, its Causes and Phenomena*, Carrington & Meader; *La Philosophie de la Longevité*, Jean Finot; *Why do we die?* T. Bodley Scott; and *Back to Methusaleh*, G. B. Shaw.

<sup>2</sup> English translation by Stanley de Brath, published in 1920 by Messrs. W. Collins, Sons & Co., Ltd.

will come in the future a more perfected life, when for the few at first and the many afterwards there will be no physical death. In other words, every spirit will be able to use both its spiritual and physical senses through the continual regeneration of its physical body."

Dr. Geley, in Book II of his illuminating study of creative evolution, arrives at an almost identical conclusion. After stating his conviction that evil is neither absolute nor irreparable, but merely "the inevitable accompaniment of awaking consciousness . . . the measure of inferiority, alike for worlds and for the living beings they contain," he continues :

"As evil is strictly provisional, we can form some idea of the future good which the higher phases of evolution have in store. In the first place, the idea of annihilation will have disappeared. Death will no longer be feared either for ourselves or for those we love. . . . Disease will be vanquished, accidents will be rare ; old age will no longer devastate and poison existence with its infirmities, but instead of coming as it now does even before full maturity, it will come only in the closing years, leaving physical and intellectual strength, health and energy untouched up to the end. . . . The organism will be perfected and idealised, if not actually transformed. . . . Concurrently with the lessened causes of suffering there will be, naturally and inevitably, an accession of causes for happiness. . . . The realisation of sovereign good, in a word, will

necessarily and inevitably accompany the realisation of sovereign consciousness and sovereign justice." Further: "There may be in our subconsciousness or in the subconsciousness of the universe, some latent preparation, some slow elaboration of a new form which will appear suddenly when the favourable conditions obtain. This new form . . . would appear with an organism less gross, less subject to material needs, more free in time and space, and reflecting at last our ideals of intelligence, balance, youth, strength, and health, our hopes of liberty, beauty, and love. This form of life and consciousness would dominate matter instead of being, as it is now, in servitude to it."

The comparison with Thomas Vaughan is no less striking, for this philosopher in equally direct, though quainter, language writes as follows:

"The body itself is brought to harmonise. . . . This is that wonderful philosophical transmutation of body into spirit and of spirit into body about which an instruction has come down to us from the wise of old: "Fix that which is volatile and volatilise that which is fixed; and thou shalt attain our Mastery." That is to say: "Make the stiff-necked body tractable and the virtue of the higher soul, operating with the soul herself, shall communicate invariable constancy to the material part, so that it will abide all tests."

To "make the stiff-necked body tractable"

was, indeed, for Mulford one of the foremost objects of human endeavour, though there are many passages in his books which show plainly that he did not consider its attainment probable within the narrow space of a single earth-life. He believed, in common with the French scientist just quoted, and with many of the deepest thinkers of East and West, that man progresses towards perfection through a vast series of earthly existences, with an ever-widening circle of experience and consciousness.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE POWER OF THOUGHT AND LOVE

THE followers of those systems of popular philosophy that are grouped together to-day under the general title of "New Thought" or "Higher Thought" owe a great deal to Prentice Mulford. He was an early pioneer in these now well-trodden paths. We find him constantly laying stress on the need for preserving a calm and serene attitude of mind, for avoiding gloomy and worrying thoughts, and for deliberately "forgetting" all those things that cause pain and mental distress. "By forgetting," he explains, "I mean that you should avoid living in unpleasant past scenes and remembrances. . . . In place of the term 'forgetting,' it would be better to say that you should cultivate the power of driving from your mind and putting out of sight whatever makes you feel unpleasant, or whatever you discover it is unprofitable to remember. . . . All experiences are valuable for the wisdom they bring or suggest. But when you have once gained wisdom and knowledge from any experience, there is little profit in repeating it, especially if it has been unpleasant. You do

actually repeat it when you remember it or live it over again in thought." The psychoanalysts might have something to say here concerning the danger of "repression" and of driving unpleasant past memories into the regions of the "subconscious mind," but in Mulford's day their theories had not been developed. In any case, he fully realised the impossibility of completely wiping out any past experience from memory. "Your spirit," he says, "is made up of all its experiences and consequent remembrances extending to an infinite past. Of these some are vivid, some vague, and much is buried out of present sight, but capable under certain circumstances of being called to remembrance." His warning against allowing one's thoughts to dwell on bygone unpleasantnesses may certainly be listened to with profit.

Control of thought and the use of thought-power (or of "the Law of Silent Demand," as he sometimes phrased it) were two of the main pivots of Mulford's philosophy; and if he seemed at times to advocate the use of this power for merely material ends, we must remember, again, that he was writing for business men and women, and that he himself, for all his theorising, never possessed even a moderate share of this world's goods. In his own words, he never did more than "skirmish on the ragged edge of a decent living," and Mr. A. E. Waite has compared him, not inaptly, to "an insufficiently equipped alchemist, who, pre-

tending to the secret of all material wealth, must yet have recourse to a patron for the means to continue his processes." "It is a little sorrowfully comic," he remarks, "that he who puts forward such strange yet obvious secrets for getting on in the world could at no time command in his proper person even a slender security for the daily needs of life."

But though Mulford seemed unable to make practical use of the advice he imparted to others, there must nevertheless be thousands in the world to-day who would freely acknowledge that they owe a large measure of their success in life to that same advice, whether met with over his own signature or over that of one of his numerous successors. With regard to himself, we are probably not far wrong in concluding that his struggles with adverse circumstance, and consequent lack of material prosperity, were no inconsiderable factors in promoting that soul-growth, that individual development, which he looked upon, in reality, as the most important of all things. His pronouncements on these matters are somewhat contradictory, for he admits in one place that "the spirit of man becomes the stronger for all which it struggles against"; and, while constantly advising the use of what he calls "the drawing power of mind" for the attainment of health, fortune, and success, he suggests, more than once, the possibility of cases in which the absence of these things might even be preferable to their possession. "Al-

ways in your individual aims and purposes defer to the Higher Power and Infinite Wisdom. The thing you most desire might prove a curse." And in the "Church of Silent Demand" which he desired to see erected and dedicated "to silent prayer to the Supreme Power," the first text, or maxim, to be placed on the walls for all to read, was to run as follows:—"Demand first wisdom so as to know what to ask for."

Yet he seems fully convinced that persistent and forceful desire will attain its end, whether that end prove curse or blessing. "Whatever the mind is set upon, or whatever it keeps most in view, that it is bringing to it. . . . Our thought is the unseen magnet, ever attracting its correspondence in things seen and tangible. As we realise this more and more clearly, we shall become more and more careful to keep our minds set in the right direction."

Passages such as these show that Mulford had undoubtedly grasped the secret of true prayer, which, as he always insisted, implies an intense and concentrated activity of mind, rather than an attitude of passive request. At the same time, his recognition of the fact that there is "a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them as we will," and that, consequently, occasions must arise when even the most intense prayer fails to attain its object, is shown clearly enough in his remark elsewhere that "in a sense you cannot aim your own life. There is a destiny that aims it,

a law which governs and carries it ” ; and “ a Higher Wisdom and Intelligence than ours sees what is really best for us. . . . It may see and deny our wish.” It is a little difficult to reconcile these warnings with his emphatic statements that every man can attain whatever he sets his mind upon, but the confusion of thought is apparent rather than real, for no doubt Mulford’s meaning was that a man can either work with the Higher Law and Intelligence that governs his life, or set himself against it, and that the conscious direction of his thought is his chief means of assisting its beneficent action.

It is interesting here to compare his views once again with those of some of his fore-runners in similar paths of thought. Thomas Vaughan speaks of the “ magnet ” possessed by the human soul, “ wherewith she can attract all things—as well spiritual as natural ”—words of which Mulford’s just-quoted sentences about the “ unseen magnet ” of thought might be taken for a close paraphrase ; and a greater than either of them, Cornelius Agrippa, writes emphatically : “ There is no work in the whole course of Nature, however arduous, however excellent, however supernatural it may be, that the human soul, when it has attained the source of its divinity—which the Magi term the soul standing and not falling—cannot accomplish, by its own power and apart from any external help.”

But though in the far past we can trace

parallels of thought such as these, Mulford was in many respects a prophet born in advance of his age, and not least in his insistence on the need for a "return to Nature" and the many benefits to be derived therefrom. Complete isolation from humankind he does not advocate, as we have already seen, but he implores his readers not to fear solitude, rather to seek it at frequent intervals. "You are fortunate," he says, "if you love trees, and especially the wild ones growing where the Great Creative Force placed them"; and "whoever can retire for periods to Nature's solitude and enjoy that solitude, feeling no solitude at all, but a joyous sense of exhilaration, will return among men with more power and new power. For he or she has literally 'walked with God' or the Infinite Spirit of Good."

Another of Mulford's commentators, Mr. Ralph Shirley,<sup>1</sup> has pointed out that the revolt preached by him against the artificiality of civilisation and city-life is one of the most important parts of his whole message. "Each movement of the kind has been followed by a great uprising of the life forces of the nation or nations to whom it was preached. It acts on the generation which listens to its preaching like the winds of spring on the sap of winter trees. . . . Christianity was the result of one such great movement. The French Revolu-

<sup>1</sup> See Introduction to *The God in You*, a Selection from the Essays of Prentice Mulford (W. Rider & Son).

tion was the result of another. The gospel of Rousseau was preached not to the French nation only. . . . Prentice Mulford was right, the Gospel of Nature, wherever preached, 'has ever made man feel an indescribable exhilaration and freedom.' " And to Mulford this exhilaration and freedom was the result of getting into touch with Nature not only in her outer dress of beauty and splendour, but of penetrating through this to the Infinite Force and Mind of which it is the visible expression. He believed that trees, flowers, and even rocks, are capable, in their own way, of responding to a genuine feeling of love for them, and of imparting, in their turn, something of great value to man. "Love is an element which, though physically unseen, is as real as air or water. . . . We get the element of love only in proportion as we have it in us. . . . When we really love all these expressions of the Infinite Mind—tree, plant, bird, and animal—and leave them entirely alone, they will send out to us in love their part and quality of the Infinite. . . . What we really love we cannot abuse, kill, or enslave. We cage a bird for our own pleasure. We do not cage a bird for its pleasure. That is not the highest love for the bird. The highest love for all things is for us a literal source of life"—and, we might add, not only for us but for the objects upon which our love is bestowed, so that the caging of a bird, being no "source of life" for it, but rather the opposite, is an action nearer akin

to hatred than to the love which Prentice Mulford advocated.

On this subject of love, whether for natural objects or for human beings, he is at his best and most illuminating. His views on marriage and on the spiritual power to be drawn from a true union between man and woman have been expressed in a number of his essays. "Nowhere in nature," he says, "has the Spirit of Infinite Good, or God, made a world exclusively masculine or exclusively feminine," and he shows how these two forces—the masculine and feminine principles—act and re-act on one another throughout the whole created universe, attaining their highest expression in the blending of two human souls in a perfect marriage. "For every created man"—according to him—"there is a created woman, who stands to him, and him alone, as the only true wife he can have in this world or any other. . . . Many couples are genuinely married now who do not get along at all happily. They may never live happily together in their present embodiments. But they will assuredly meet in other re-embodiments as other physical individuals—man and woman—and with other names, and their spiritual or higher selves will eventually recognise each other." A comforting belief to those who can take a long view, but one that human nature may find it a little difficult to work out in practice.

Mulford draws a very clear distinction be-

tween the powers and functions of man and woman, looking upon woman as the refining and inspiring influence, and man as the constructive and energising force by means of which the feminine inspirations and intuitions are expressed in action. "Woman has more power to-day, and uses more power, than even she realises. The power and effect of woman's thought are everywhere, and every man feels it according to his sensitiveness or capacity for feeling, or for absorbing, thought. . . . The perfect blending of the masculine and feminine minds . . . is a combination of woman's spiritual far-sightedness and man's strength for working out the result of her superior vision." He is a strong believer in the beneficial influence of constant companionship between the sexes, from childhood upwards, both in work and play, and again shows himself in advance of the time in which he wrote when he declares: "It is this unnatural separation of the sexes, which long custom has made an unconscious habit in so many phases of life, that begets the very evils it is intended to prevent."

The more we study the Mulfordian philosophy the more clearly do we see that its keynotes are love, joy, and freedom. There is no room in it for hatred, discontent, or melancholy. It embodies the hopeful outlook of a sincere optimist who sees in everything that exists, from the atom to the planet, "the Supreme Wisdom, Power, and Intelligence," in life "a continual advance forward," and in man a

constantly, if slowly, progressing being won over to ultimate good by the promise of ever-increasing happiness, not by fear of punishment.

“The Supreme Power has us in its charge, as it has the suns and endless systems of worlds in space. As we grow more to recognise this sublime and exhaustless wisdom, we shall learn more and more to demand that wisdom, draw it to ourselves, make it a part of ourselves, and thereby be ever making ourselves newer and newer. This means ever perfecting health, greater and greater power to enjoy all that exists, gradual transition into a higher state of being and the development of powers which we do not now realise as belonging to us.” . . .

“God has been pictured as a stern, merciless, avenging deity. The burden of the preacher’s song has been Penalty and Punishment! Punishment and Penalty! . . . The warning of penalty was necessary when humanity was cruder. It could only be reached by the rod. The race was blind . . . and had to be kept somewhere near the right path by a succession of painful prods and pokes with the sharp goad of penalty. But when we begin to see clearer, as now the more quickened and sensitive of our race do begin to see, we need no rod, any more than you need a man with a club to prevail on you to go to a feast.”

It would be difficult to estimate the effect of so cheering and courageous a philosophy

upon the minds of the multitudes who have come under its influence. Though in the hands of some of its latter-day exponents it has taken on an unduly materialistic colouring, and has at times shown a tendency to degenerate into a policy in which "getting" plays a considerably larger part than "giving," it was conceived originally on broader lines than these, and, far from being confined to the attainment of narrow personal desires, included the whole of nature and of humanity in its embrace. In spite of hardship and struggle, in spite of ill-health and poverty, Prentice Mulford ever saw life as a "feast," and the vision revealed to him was a vision of the time when all human beings shall share in the feasting and not one be left out.

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