

NEIGHBORS

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One does have neighbors in the city, many, many neighbors if we define a neighbor as one who lives near at hand, or if we take the word in its Biblical sense as meaning any fellow mortal. In a city, however, one's intimacies are not likely to be determined by this fact of physical nearness, but rather by similarity in ideas on religion, business, recreation or politics, thus one may have no more than a speaking acquaintance with the people in one's neighborhood, or even in the same apartment house, while one's friends may be scattered widely over the city. There are other circumstances, too, which unite to give this word "neighbor" quite a different meaning in the city. There illness means a hospital, or a doctor and a trained nurse at home, and since hotels and delicatessen shops abound, we depend on them at such times rather than on our friends and acquaintances; for funerals there are the undertaker and the florist; for weddings, the caterer and the florist; indeed, what need has one of neighbors when he can rest his aching head on the shoulder of a trained nurse and tell his troubles to the crossing policeman?

In the country village and in the country, even in that changed country of telephones, rural delivery and automobiles, one still has neighbors in the fullest, truest sense of the word, really to be comprehended only by those who have had the experience. There are, it is true, certain manifestations of this friendly spirit with which we

might easily dispense, such, I mean, as are displayed in a most searching curiosity as to all one's affairs. When occasional bits of gossip and speculation come to one's ears, one is first angry, then sincerely amused, and lastly amazed that people can bring such profound interest to such trivial happenings. Clothes, food, love affairs, disagreements, income, expenditures, - no item of one's daily life escapes scrutiny, and when facts are lacking, many of one's neighbors do not hesitate to fall back on surmise and conjecture. If one's family has been for long resident in the neighborhood, these minute details are available for every living member, and one's personal peculiarities are often credited to relatives who have long passed beyond the reach of neighborly attentions. Uncle John's chin, Aunt Mary's nose and Grandfather Wilson's temper may make an undesirable combination, but we cannot help it and we are sensitive to criticism. How some of the more confirmed of these neighborly gossips learn the particulars which they repeat is a mystery, but the price of one's dresses, the trimming on one's underclothing, the words with which he asked the momentous question are not hid from them. This interest, exasperating at times, and at others merely amusing, has the one saving grace of rising from a real concern about our affairs. In a city one is a mere unit, a disregarded unit among an immensely large number of units; in the country or in the country village, however humble one's way of life, one is a personality and receives due weight and consideration from one's fellows. That this interest at times finds

Nowhere else is one so well known; nowhere else is one so subjected to the acid test for character, and the person who successfully passes this inquiry is a person to be depended upon in all emergencies.

The city dweller has an opportunity to conceal his weaknesses or his vices, and may pass current at a rate higher than he really merits. Not so the resident in the country town; his every fad and foible, his every sin of omission or commission, are blazoned abroad for all to see and hear. As a consequence of this lack of large interests which is evidenced by such exaggerated interest in trifling happenings, a slight difference of opinion sometimes becomes the cause of serious breach between friends, or even between relatives. Here, as everywhere, the religion, which should be an unfailing source of sweet and uplifting influences, becomes a bone of contention and many are the unkindnesses perpetrated in its name. In every town there are persons, once intimate friends, who, having quarreled over personal, business or religious matters, have not spoken for years, and since all move in the same social circle, hostesses must tread warily lest they bring into too close contact those who refuse to know one another.

In the really vital things of life, however, we are obliged to forget the prying curiosity and offensive criticism. Nowhere else do we find such true sympathy in sorrow, such real interest in our joys, as in the country and in the country town. The charivari, regarded by the town dweller as one of the interesting customs of our somewhat

remote ancestors, still flourishes in the country town. Nor is the celebration of this interesting custom confined to boys and irresponsible young men. If the newly married couple are well and favorably known everyone in town, including sedate business men and dignified matrons, arms himself with pot or pan, dinner bell or whistle, and all other known and some newly invented instruments of noise-making. The band usually is present and plays for a time before the real business of the evening is taken up. When the real charivari begins all similes fail one. The noise of a boiler shop isn't even a competitor, and the tumult continues until bride and groom appear and appease the crowd with offerings of candy and cigars. At times, it is true, one hears of instances where a spirit of malice seems to influence the serenaders, but in such cases we may look for some cause in the behavior of the young couple. The custom is so general, however, and usually so friendly in spirit, that the principals would feel quite slighted were it omitted in their particular case. The bridegroom counts upon a sum for the refreshment of his visitors quite as naturally as upon a fee for the minister.

I think we are most interested, however, when a new neighbor comes, a quite small neighbor, weeping over the strangeness, not of our village alone, but of all the villages and all the cities and all the world. Nor is it surprising that we feel most interest in this - it is one of the two greatest events which occur to all men alike. However far apart we may walk on earth, we have all passed wailing but unquestioning through the gates of birth into

this life, and must pass, wailing and questioning, through the Gates of Death into another life. So all the details about the new-comer have an abiding interest; the color of his hair and eyes, his weight, his tiny hands and feet and all his vague gropings and illusive smiles as he seeks to habituate himself to his new environment.

If the neighbors feel most interest at this time, the new arrival and his subject parents need it less, since a new baby can furnish physical occupation and mental stimulus for a whole family of grown-ups.

But when that other event comes, when the gates open for a friend and close behind him, never again to yield us any glimpse of him nor any echo of his voice, then it is that we appreciate in deepest measure the neighborly sympathy so unstintedly bestowed. It is not sympathy expressed in loving words or sustaining handclasp alone, but it finds concrete expression in all sorts of service. Some set the house in order, others bring food in plenty all ready to set upon the table, some run errands and some watch beside the body, as tho' their presence might bring comfort even now. And even in the midst of that long agony of parting, which they call the funeral service, one feels the sustaining sense that one is surrounded by those who grieve and those who pity.

When our friend begins his last earthly pilgrimage, passing so slowly through the village streets and up the long hill road to the tree-sheltered burying place, as tho' reluctant to depart forever from this well loved spot of earth, the procession is gazed upon by no alien and indifferent

eyes; the reverence and the sorrow is not merely that which all humanity must feel in the presence of death, but a personal, even a poignant, sorrow. Many follow in the procession and stand with us about the grave, by this mute companionship rendering more endurable our burden of grief. There must, indeed, be joy in Paradise for the freed spirit, if he is to know no fleeting moment of regret for this warm human sympathy.

In our cemetery there is no part set apart for the rich and important, no potter's field which frigid charity has reserved for the poor and miserable. The more pretentious stones look down upon the smaller ones, not with supercilious scorn, but with protecting benevolence. Here one feels little need of those oft repeated admonitions respecting the vanity of worldly possessions, the idleness of riches.

"Sceptre and crown must tumble down,
And in the dust be equal made,
With the poor crooked scythe and spade."

Green grass, sheltering trees, blooming flowers, are the same for all, and as in our lives we were close together, so in death we lie down side by side - in death as in life, - neighbors.

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scathing criticism has already been suggested. At
church or lodge, at club or Aid Society, the strange
behavior of the devotee is discerned with the subtlest
explanation as to what each one would do in the
position of the supposed misguided individual. The
explanations of other people's behavior is shown by the ease
with which a dozen variations of his difficulty are
mentioned and the readiness with which a proper
course of behavior is pointed out.

An announcement of betrothal is a delicate
moral - too exemplary young people and everyone
wishes them all joy, but - "How old is the young man?"
But we as her mother was married the year of the
big storm; she's a mile younger than I was but older
than Frank. Well, she must be about twenty eight,
not very young, "How old thought you was ten last
summer. What made him ask her? Should have he loved

Rev. Yes, she has some money, quite a little, this I don't suppose that made any difference, do you?" Thus neighborly tongues discuss every phase of the tender little romance which seems to the principals a thing too sweet and sacred to be put into words. Business troubles, family quarrels, expected children and the exasperating behavior of children already well started in life are legitimate matters of interest to those having the slightest acquaintance with the parties in question, and the person who can add any authentic details to the matter under discussion is instantly popular.

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