The Blindman's World

by Edward Bellamy

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By Edward Bellamy 1898

The narrative to which this note is introductory was found among the papers of the

late Professor S. Erastus Larrabee, and, as an acquaintance of the gentleman to whom they were bequeathed, I was requested to prepare it for publication. This turned out a very easy task, for the document proved of so extraordinary a character that, if published at all, it should obviously be without change. It appears that the professor did really, at one time in his life, have an attack of vertigo, or something of the sort, under circumstances similar to those described by him, and to that extent his narrative may be founded on fact How soon it shifts from that foundation, or whether it does at all, the reader must conclude for himself. It appears certain that the professor never related to any one, while living, the stranger features of the experience here narrated, but this might have been merely from fear that his standing as a man of science would be thereby injured.

THE PROFESSOR'S NARRATIVE

At the time of the experience of which I am about to write, I was professor of astronomy and higher mathematics at Abercrombie College. Most astronomers have a specialty, and mine was the study of the planet Mars, our nearest neighbor but one in the Sun's little family. When no important celestial phenomena in other quarters demanded attention, it was on the ruddy disc of Mars that my telescope was oftenest focused. I was never weary of tracing the outlines of its continents and seas, its capes and islands, its bays and straits, its lakes and mountains. With intense interest I watched from week to week of the Martial winter the advance of the polar ice-cap toward the equator, and its corresponding retreat in the summer; testifying across the gulf of space as plainly as written words to the existence on that orb of a climate like our own. A specialty is always in danger of becoming an infatuation, and my interest in Mars, at the time of which I write, had grown to be more than strictly scientific. The impression of the nearness of this planet, heightened by the wonderful distinctness of its geography as seen through a powerful telescope, appeals strongly to the imagination of the astronomer. On fine evenings I used to spend hours, not so much critically observing as brooding over its radiant surface, till I could almost

persuade myself that I saw the breakers dashing on the bold shore of Kepler Land, and heard the muffled thunder of avalanches descending the snow-clad mountains of Mitchell. No earthly landscape had the charm to hold my gaze of that far-off planet, whose oceans, to the unpracticed eye, seem but darker, and its continents lighter, spots and bands.

Astronomers have agreed in declaring that Mars is undoubtedly habitable by beings like ourselves, but, as may be supposed, I was not in a mood to be satisfied with considering it merely habitable. I allowed no sort of question that it was inhabited. What manner of beings these inhabitants might be I found a fascinating speculation. The variety of types appearing in mankind even on this small Earth makes it most presumptuous to assume that the denizens of different planets may not be characterized by diversities far profounder. Wherein such diversities, coupled with a general resemblance to man, might consist, whether in mere physical differences or in different mental laws, in the lack of certain of the great passional motors of men or the possession of quite others, were weird themes of never-failing attractions for my mind. The El Dorado visions with which the virgin mystery of the New World inspired the early Spanish explorers were tame and prosaic compared with the speculations which it was perfectly legitimate to indulge, when the problem was the conditions of life on another planet.

It was the time of the year when Mars is most favorably situated for observation, and, anxious not to lose an hour of the precious season, I had spent the greater part of several successive nights in the observatory. I believed that I had made some original observations as to the trend of the coast of Kepler Land between Lagrange Peninsula and Christie Bay, and it was to this spot that my observations were particularly directed.

On the fourth night other work detained me from the observing-chair till after midnight. When I had adjusted the instrument and took my first look at Mars, I

remember being unable to restrain a cry of admiration. The planet was fairly dazzling. It seemed nearer and larger than I had ever seen it before, and its peculiar ruddiness more striking. In thirty years of observations, I recall, in fact, no occasion when the absence of exhalations in our atmosphere has coincided with such cloudlessness in that of Mars as on that night. I could plainly make out the white masses of vapor at the opposite edges of the lighted disc, which are the mists of its dawn and evening. The snowy mass of Mount Hall over against Kepler Land stood out with wonderful clearness, and I could unmistakably detect the blue tint of the ocean of De La Rue, which washes its base,—a feat of vision often, indeed, accomplished by star-gazers, though I had never done it to my complete satisfaction before.

I was impressed with the idea that if I ever made an original discovery in regard to Mars, it would be on that evening, and I believed that I should do it. I trembled with mingled exultation and anxiety, and was obliged to pause to recover my self-control. Finally, I placed my eye to the eye-piece, and directed my gaze upon the portion of the planet in which I was especially interested. My attention soon became fixed and absorbed much beyond my wont, when observing, and that itself implied no ordinary degree of abstraction. To all mental intents and purposes I was on Mars. Every faculty, every susceptibility of sense and intellect, seemed gradually to pass into the eye, and become concentrated in the act of gazing. Every atom of nerve and will power combined in the strain to see a little, and yet a little, and yet a little, clearer, farther, deeper.

The next thing I knew I was on the bed that stood in a corner of the observing-room, half raised on an elbow, and gazing intently at the door. It was broad daylight. Half a dozen men, including several of the professors and a doctor from the village, were around me. Some were trying to make me lie down, others were asking me what I wanted, while the doctor was urging me to drink some whiskey. Mechanically repelling their offices, I pointed to the door and ejaculated, “President Byxbee

—coming," giving expression to the one idea which my dazed mind at that moment contained. And sure enough, even as I spoke the door opened, and the venerable head of the college, somewhat blown with climbing the steep stairway, stood on the threshold. With a sensation of prodigious relief, I fell back on my pillow.

It appeared that I had swooned while in the observing-chair, the night before, and had been found by the janitor in the morning, my head fallen forward on the telescope, as if still observing, but my body cold, rigid, pulseless, and apparently dead.

In a couple of days I was all right again, and should soon have forgotten the episode but for a very interesting conjecture which had suggested itself in connection with it. This was nothing less than that, while I lay in that swoon, I was in a conscious state outside and independent of the body, and in that state received impressions and exercised perceptive powers. For this extraordinary theory I had no other evidence than the fact of my knowledge in the moment of awaking that President Byxbee was coming up the stairs. But slight as this clue was, it seemed to me unmistakable in its significance. That knowledge was certainly in my mind on the instant of arousing from the swoon. It certainly could not have been there before I fell into the swoon. I must therefore have gained it in the mean time; that is to say, I must have been in a conscious, percipient state while my body was insensible.

If such had been the case, I reasoned that it was altogether unlikely that the trivial impression as to President Byxbee had been the only one which I had received in that state. It was far more probable that it had remained over in my mind, on waking from the swoon, merely because it was the latest of a series of impressions received while outside the body. That these impressions were of a kind most strange and startling, seeing that they were those of a disembodied soul exercising faculties more spiritual than those of the body, I could not doubt. The desire to know what they had been grew upon me, till it became a longing which left me no repose. It seemed

intolerable that I should have secrets from myself, that my soul should withhold its experiences from my intellect. I would gladly have consented that the acquisitions of half my waking lifetime should be blotted out, if so be in exchange I might be shown the record of what I had seen and known during those hours of which my waking memory showed no trace. None the less for the conviction of its hopelessness, but rather all the more, as the perversity of our human nature will have it, the longing for this forbidden lore grew on me, till the hunger of Eve in the Garden was mine.

Constantly brooding over a desire that I felt to be vain, tantalized by the possession of a clue which only mocked me, my physical condition became at length affected. My health was disturbed and my rest at night was broken. A habit of walking in my sleep, from which I had not suffered since childhood, recurred, and caused me frequent inconvenience. Such had been, in general, my condition for some time, when I awoke one morning with the strangely weary sensation by which my body usually betrayed the secret of the impositions put upon it in sleep, of which otherwise I should often have suspected nothing. In going into the study connected with my chamber, I found a number of freshly written sheets on the desk. Astonished that any one should have been in my rooms while I slept, I was astounded, on looking more closely, to observe that the handwriting was my own. How much more than astounded I was on reading the matter that had been set down, the reader may judge if he shall peruse it. For these written sheets apparently contained the longed-for but despaired-of record of those hours when I was absent from the body. They were the lost chapter of my life; or rather, not lost at all, for it had been no part of my waking life, but a stolen chapter,—stolen from that sleep-memory on whose mysterious tablets may well be inscribed tales as much more marvelous than this as this is stranger than most stories.

It will be remembered that my last recollection before awaking in my bed, on the morning after the swoon, was of contemplating the coast of Kepler Land with an

unusual concentration of attention. As well as I can judge,—and that is no better than any one else,—it is with the moment that my bodily powers succumbed and I became unconscious that the narrative which I found on my desk begins.

Even had I not come as straight and swift as the beam of light that made my path, a glance about would have told me to what part of the universe I had fared. No earthly landscape could have been more familiar. I stood on the high coast of Kepler Land where it trends southward. A brisk westerly wind was blowing and the waves of the ocean of De La Bue were thundering at my feet, while the broad blue waters of Christie Bay stretched away to the southwest. Against the northern horizon, rising out of the ocean like a summer thunder-head, for which at first I mistook it, towered the far-distant, snowy summit of Mount Hall.

Even had the configuration of land and sea been less familiar, I should none the less have known that I stood on the planet whose ruddy hue is at once the admiration and puzzle of astronomers. Its explanation I now recognized in the tint of the atmosphere, a coloring comparable to the haze of Indian summer, except that its hue was a faint rose instead of purple. Like the Indian summer haze, it was impalpable, and without impeding the view bathed all objects near and far in a glamour not to be described. As the gaze turned upward, however, the deep blue of space so far overcame the roseate tint that one might fancy he were still on Earth.

As I looked about me I saw many men, women, and children. They were in no respect dissimilar, so far as I could see, to the men, women, and children of the Earth, save for something almost childlike in the untroubled serenity of their faces, unfurrowed as they were by any trace of care, of fear, or of anxiety. This extraordinary youthful-ness of aspect made it difficult, indeed, save by careful scrutiny, to distinguish the young from the middle-aged, maturity from advanced years. Time seemed to have no tooth on Mars.

I was gazing about me, admiring this crimson-lighted world, and these people who

appeared to hold happiness by a tenure so much firmer than men's, when I heard the words, "You are welcome," and, turning, saw that I had been accosted by a man with the stature and bearing of middle age, though his countenance, like the other faces which I had noted, wonderfully combined the strength of a man's with the serenity of a child's. I thanked him, and said,—

"You do not seem surprised to see me, though I certainly am to find myself here."

"Assuredly not," he answered. "I knew, of course, that I was to meet you to-day. And not only that, but I may say I am already in a sense acquainted with you, through a mutual friend, Professor Edgerly. He was here last month, and I met him at that time. We talked of you and your interest in our planet. I told him I expected you."

"Edgerly!" I exclaimed. "It is strange that he has said nothing of this to me. I meet him every day."

But I was reminded that it was in a dream that Edgerly, like myself, had visited Mars, and on awaking had recalled nothing of his experience, just as I should recall nothing of mine. When will man learn to interrogate the dream soul of the marvels it sees in its wanderings? Then he will no longer need to improve his telescopes to find out the secrets of the universe.

"Do your people visit the Earth in the same manner?" I asked my companion.

"Certainly," he replied; "but there we find no one able to recognize us and converse with us as I am conversing with you, although myself in the waking state. You, as yet, lack the knowledge we possess of the spiritual side of the human nature which we share with you."

"That knowledge must have enabled you to learn much more of the Earth than we know of you," I said.

"Indeed it has," he replied. "From visitors such as you, of whom we entertain a concourse constantly, we have acquired familiarity with your civilization, your

history, your manners, and even your literature and languages. Have you not noticed that I am talking with you in English, which is certainly not a tongue indigenous to this planet?"

"Among so many wonders I scarcely observed that," I answered.

"For ages," pursued my companion, "we have been waiting for you to improve your telescopes so as to approximate the power of ours, after which communication between the planets would be easily established. The progress which you make is, however, so slow that we expect to wait ages yet."

"Indeed, I fear you will have to," I replied. "Our opticians already talk of having reached the limits of their art."

"Do not imagine that I spoke in any spirit of petulance," my companion resumed. "The slowness of your progress is not so remarkable to us as that you make any at all, burdened as you are by a disability so crushing that if we were in your place I fear we should sit down in utter despair."

"To what disability do you refer?" I asked. "You seem to be men like us."

"And so we are," was the reply, "save in one particular, but there the difference is tremendous. Endowed otherwise like us, you are destitute of the faculty of foresight, without which we should think our other faculties well-nigh valueless."

"Foresight!" I repeated. "Certainly you cannot mean that it is given you to know the future?"

"It is given not only to us," was the answer, "but, so far as we know, to all other intelligent beings of the universe except yourselves. Our positive knowledge extends only to our system of moons and planets and some of the nearer foreign systems, and it is conceivable that the remoter parts of the universe may harbor other blind races like your own; but it certainly seems unlikely that so strange and lamentable a spectacle should be duplicated. One such illustration of the extraordinary deprivations under which a rational existence may still be possible ought to suffice

for the universe."

"But no one can know the future except by inspiration of God," I said.

"All our faculties are by inspiration of God," was the reply, "but there is surely nothing in foresight to cause it to be so regarded more than any other. Think a moment of the physical analogy of the case. Your eyes are placed in the front of your heads. You would deem it an odd mistake if they were placed behind. That would appear to you an arrangement calculated to defeat their purpose. Does it not seem equally rational that the mental vision should range forward, as it does with us, illuminating the path one is to take, rather than backward, as with you, revealing only the course you have already trodden, and therefore have no more concern with? But it is no doubt a merciful provision of Providence that renders you unable to realize the grotesqueness of your predicament, as it appears to us."

"But the future is eternal!" I exclaimed. "How can a finite mind grasp it?"

"Our foreknowledge implies only human faculties," was the reply. "It is limited to our individual careers on this planet. Each of us foresees the course of his own life, but not that of other lives, except so far as they are involved with his."

"That such a power as you describe could be combined with merely human faculties is more than our philosophers have ever dared to dream," I said. "And yet who shall say, after all, that it is not in mercy that God has denied it to us? If it is a happiness, as it must be, to foresee one's happiness, it must be most depressing to foresee one's sorrows, failures, yes, and even one's death. For if you foresee your lives to the end, you must anticipate the hour and manner of your death,—is it not so?"

"Most assuredly," was the reply. "Living would be a very precarious business, were we uninformed of its limit. Your ignorance of the time of your death impresses us as one of the saddest features of your condition."

"And by us," I answered, "it is held to be one of the most merciful."

"Foreknowledge of your death would not, indeed, prevent your dying once,"

continued my companion, “but it would deliver you from the thousand deaths you suffer through uncertainty whether you can safely count on the passing day. It is not the death you die, but these many deaths you do not die, which shadow your existence. Poor blindfolded creatures that you are, cringing at every step in apprehension of the stroke that perhaps is not to fall till old age, never raising a cup to your lips with the knowledge that you will live to quaff it, never sure that you will meet again the friend you part with for an hour, from whose hearts no happiness suffices to banish the chill of an ever-present dread, what idea can you form of the Godlike security with which we enjoy our lives and the lives of those we love! You have a saying on earth, ‘To-morrow belongs to God;’ but here to-morrow belongs to us, even as to-day. To you, for some inscrutable purpose, He sees fit to dole out life moment by moment, with no assurance that each is not to be the last. To us He gives a lifetime at once, fifty, sixty, seventy years,—a divine gift indeed. A life such as yours would, I fear, seem of little value to us; for such a life, however long, is but a moment long, since that is all you can count on.”

“And yet,” I answered, “though knowledge of the duration of your lives may give you an enviable feeling of confidence while the end is far off, is that not more than offset by the daily growing weight with which the expectation of the end, as it draws near, must press upon your minds?”

“On the contrary,” was the response, “death, never an object of fear, as it draws nearer becomes more and more a matter of indifference to the moribund. It is because you live in the past that death is grievous to you. All your knowledge, all your affections, all your interests, are rooted in the past, and on that account, as life lengthens, it strengthens its hold on you, and memory becomes a more precious possession. We, on the contrary, despise the past, and never dwell upon it. Memory with us, far from being the morbid and monstrous growth it is with you, is scarcely more than a rudimentary faculty. We live wholly in the future and the present. What with foretaste and actual taste, our experiences, whether pleasant or painful, are

exhausted of interest by the time they are past. The accumulated treasures of memory, which you relinquish so painfully in death, we count no loss at all. Our minds being fed wholly from the future, we think and feel only as we anticipate; and so, as the dying man's future contracts, there is less and less about which he can occupy his thoughts. His interest in life diminishes as the ideas which it suggests grow fewer, till at the last death finds him with his mind a tabula rasa, as with you at birth. In a word, his concern with life is reduced to a vanishing point before he is called on to give it up. In dying he leaves nothing behind."

"And the after-death," I asked,—"is there no: fear of that?"

"Surely," was the reply, "it is not necessary for me to say that a fear which affects only the more ignorant on Earth is not known at all to us, and would be counted blasphemous. Moreover, as I have said, our foresight is limited to our lives on this planet. Any speculation beyond them would be purely conjectural, and our minds are repelled by the slightest taint of uncertainty. To us the conjectural and the unthinkable may be called almost the same."

"But even if you do not fear death for itself," I said, "you have hearts to break. Is there no pain when the ties of love are sundered?"

"Love and death are not foes on our planet," was the reply. "There are no tears by the bedsides of our dying. The same beneficent law which makes it so easy for us to give up life forbids us to mourn the friends we leave, or them to mourn us. With you, it is the intercourse you have had with friends that is the source of your tenderness for them. With us, it is the anticipation of the intercourse we shall enjoy which is the foundation of fondness. As our friends vanish from our future with the approach of their death, the effect on our thoughts and affections is as it would be with you if you forgot them by lapse of time. As our dying friends grow more and more indifferent to us, we, by operation of the same law of our nature, become indifferent to them, till at the last we are scarcely more than kindly and sympathetic

watchers about the beds of those who regard us equally without keen emotions. So at last God gently unwinds instead of breaking the bands that bind our hearts together, and makes death as painless to the surviving as to the dying. Relations meant to produce our happiness are not the means also of torturing us, as with you. Love means joy, and that alone, to us, instead of blessing our lives for a while only to desolate them later on, compelling us to pay with a distinct and separate pang for every thrill of tenderness, exacting a tear for every smile."

"There are other partings than those of death. Are these, too, without sorrow for you?" I asked.

"Assuredly," was the reply. "Can you not see that so it must needs be with beings freed by foresight from the disease of memory? All the sorrow of parting, as of dying, comes with you from the backward vision which precludes you from beholding your happiness till it is past. Suppose your life destined to be blessed by a happy friendship. If you could know it beforehand, it would be a joyous expectation, brightening the intervening years and cheering you as you traversed desolate periods. But no; not till you meet the one who is to be your friend do you know of him. Nor do you guess even then what he is to be to you, that you may embrace him at first sight. Your meeting is cold and indifferent. It is long before the fire is fairly kindled between you, and then it is already time for parting. Now, indeed, the fire burns well, but henceforth it must consume your heart. Not till they are dead or gone do you fully realize how dear your friends were and how sweet was their companionship. But we—we see our friends afar off coming to meet us, smiling already in our eyes, years before our ways meet. We greet them at first meeting, not coldly, not uncertainly, but with exultant kisses, in an ecstasy of joy. They enter at once into the full possession of hearts long warmed and lighted for them. We meet with that delirium of tenderness with which you part. And when to us at last the time of parting comes, it only means that we are to contribute to each other's happiness no longer. We are not doomed, like you, in parting, to take away with us the delight

we brought our friends, leaving the ache of bereavement in its place, so that their last state is worse than their first. Parting here is like meeting with you, calm and unimpassioned. The joys of anticipation and possession are the only food of love with us, and therefore Love always wears a smiling face. With you he feeds on dead joys, past happiness, which are likewise the sustenance of sorrow. No wonder love and sorrow are so much alike on Earth. It is a common saying among us that, were it not for the spectacle of the Earth, the rest of the worlds would be unable to appreciate the goodness of God to them; and who can say that this is not the reason the piteous sight is set before us?"

"You have told me marvelous things," I said, after I had reflected. "It is, indeed, but reasonable that such a race as yours should look down with wondering pity on the Earth. And yet, before I grant so much, I want to ask you one question. There is known in our world a certain sweet madness, under the influence of which we forget all that is untoward in our lot, and would not change it for a god's. So far is this sweet madness regarded by men as a compensation, and more than a compensation, for all their miseries that if you know not love as we know it, if this loss be the price you have paid for your divine foresight, we think ourselves more favored of God than you. Confess that love, with its reserves, its surprises, its mysteries, its revelations, is necessarily incompatible with a foresight which weighs and measures every experience in advance."

"Of love's surprises we certainly know nothing," was the reply. "It is believed by our philosophers that the slightest surprise would kill beings of our constitution like lightning; though of course this is merely theory, for it is only by the study of Earthly conditions that we are able to form an idea of what surprise is like. Your power to endure the constant buffetings of the unexpected is a matter of supreme amazement to us; nor, according to our ideas, is there any difference between what you call pleasant and painful surprises. You see, then, that we cannot envy you these surprises of love which you find so sweet, for to us they would be fatal. For the rest,

there is no form of happiness which foresight is so well calculated to enhance as that of love. Let me explain to you how this befalls. As the growing boy begins to be sensible of the charms of woman, he finds himself, as I dare say it is with you, preferring some type of face and form to others. He dreams oftenest of fair hair, or may be of dark, of blue eyes or brown. As the years go on, his fancy, brooding over what seems to it the best and loveliest of every type, is constantly adding to this dream-face, this shadowy form, traits and lineaments, hues and contours, till at last the picture is complete, and he becomes aware that on his heart thus subtly has been depicted the likeness of the maiden destined for his arms.

“It may be years before he is to see her, but now begins with him one of the sweetest offices of love, one to you unknown. Youth on Earth is a stormy period of passion, chafing in restraint or rioting in excess. But the very passion whose awaking makes this time so critical with you is here a reforming and educating influence, to whose gentle and potent sway we gladly confide our children. The temptations which lead your young men astray have no hold on a youth of our happy planet. He hoards the treasures of his heart for its coming mistress. Of her alone he thinks, and to her all his vows are made. The thought of license would be treasop to his sovereign lady, whose right to all the revenues of his being he joyfully owns. To rob her, to abate her high prerogatives, would be to impoverish, to insult, himself; for she is to be his, and her honor, her glory, are his own. Through all this time that he dreams of her by night and day, the exquisite reward of his devotion is the knowledge that she is aware of him as he of her, and that in the inmost shrine of a maiden heart his image is set up to receive the incense of a tenderness that needs not to restrain itself through fear of possible cross or separation.

“In due time their converging lives come together. The lovers meet, gaze a moment into each other’s eyes, then throw themselves each on the other’s breast. The maiden has all the charms that ever stirred the blood of an Earthly lover, but there is another glamour over her which the eyes of Earthly lovers are shut to,—the glamour of the

future. In the blushing girl her lover sees the fond and faithful wife, in the blithe maiden the patient, pain-consecrated mother. On the virgin's breast he beholds his children. He is prescient, even as his lips take the first-fruits of hers, of the future years during which she is to be his companion, his ever-present solace, his chief portion of God's goodness. We have read some of your romances describing love as you know it on Earth, and I must confess, my friend, we find them very dull.

"I hope," he added, as I did not at once speak, "that I shall not offend you by saying we find them also objectionable. Your literature possesses in general an interest for us in the picture it presents of the curiously inverted life which the lack of foresight compels you to lead. It is a study especially prized for the development of the imagination, on account of the difficulty of conceiving conditions so opposed to those of intelligent beings in general. But our women do not read your romances. The notion that a man or woman should, ever conceive the idea of marrying a person other than the one whose husband or wife he or she is destined to be is profoundly shocking to our habits of thought. No doubt you will say that such instances are rare among you, but if your novels are faithful pictures of your life, they are at least not unknown. That these situations are inevitable under the conditions of earthly life we are well aware, and judge you accordingly; but it is needless that the minds of our maidens should be pained by the knowledge that there anywhere exists a world where such travesties upon the sacredness of marriage are possible.

"There is, however, another reason why we discourage the use of your books by our young people, and that is the profound effect of sadness, to a race accustomed to view all things in the morning glow of the future, of a literature written in the past tense and relating exclusively to things that are ended."

"And how do you write of things that are past except in the past tense?" I asked.

"We write of the past when it is still the future, and of course in the future tense," was the reply. "If our historians were to wait till after the events to describe them,

not alone would nobody care to read about things already done, but the histories themselves would probably be inaccurate; for memory, as I have said, is a very slightly developed faculty with us, and quite too indistinct to be trustworthy. Should the Earth ever establish communication with us, you will find our histories of interest; for our planet, being smaller, cooled and was peopled ages before yours, and our astronomical records contain minute accounts of the Earth from the time it was a fluid mass. Your geologists and biologists may yet find a mine of information here."

In the course of our further conversation it came out that, as a consequence of foresight, some of the commonest emotions of human nature are unknown on Mars. They for whom the future has no mystery can, of course, know neither hope nor fear. Moreover, every one being assured what he shall attain to and what not, there can be no such thing as rivalship, or emulation, or any sort of competition in any respect; and therefore all the brood of heart-burnings and hatreds, engendered on Earth by the strife of man with man, is unknown to the people of Mars, save from the study of our planet. When I asked if there were not, after all, a lack of spontaneity, of sense of freedom, in leading lives fixed in all details beforehand, I was reminded that there was no difference in that respect between the lives of the people of Earth and of Mars, both alike being according to God's will in every particular. We knew that will only after the event, they before,—that was all. For the rest, God moved them through their wills as He did us, so that they had no more dense of compulsion in what they did than we on Earth have in carrying out an anticipated line of action, in cases where our anticipations chance to be correct. Of the absorbing interest which the study of the plan of their future lives possessed for the people of Mars, my companion spoke eloquently. It was, he said, like the fascination to a mathematician of a most elaborate and exquisite demonstration, a perfect algebraical equation, with the glowing realities of life in place of figures and symbols.

When I asked if it never occurred to them to wish their futures different, he replied that such a question could only have been asked by one from the Earth. No one could have foresight, or clearly believe that God had it, without realizing that the future is as incapable of being changed as the past. And not only this, but to foresee events was to foresee their logical necessity so clearly that to desire them different was as impossible as seriously to wish that two and two made five instead of four. No person could ever thoughtfully wish anything different, for so closely are all things, the small with the great, woven together by God that to draw out the smallest thread would unravel creation through all eternity.

While we had talked the afternoon had waned, and the sun had sunk below the horizon, the roseate atmosphere of the planet imparting a splendor to the cloud coloring, and a glory to the land and sea scape, never paralleled by an earthly sunset. Already the familiar constellations appearing in the sky reminded me how near, after all, I was to the Earth, for with the unassisted eye I could not detect the slightest variation in their position. Nevertheless, there was one wholly novel feature in the heavens, for many of the host of asteroids which circle in the zone between Mars and Jupiter were vividly visible to the naked eye. But the spectacle that chiefly held my gaze was the Earth, swimming low on the verge of the horizon. Its disc, twice as large as that of any star or planet as seen from the Earth, flashed with a brilliancy like that of Venus.

“It is, indeed, a lovely sight,” said my companion, “although to me always a melancholy one, from the contrast suggested between the radiance of the orb and the benighted condition of its inhabitants. We call it ‘The Blindman’s World.’” As he spoke he turned toward a curious structure which stood near us, though I had not before particularly observed it.

“What is that?” I asked.

“It is one of our telescopes,” he replied. “I am going to let you take a look, if you

choose, at your home, and test for yourself the powers of which I have boasted;" and having adjusted the instrument to his satisfaction, he showed me where to apply my eye to what answered to the eye-piece.

I could not repress an exclamation of amazement, for truly he had exaggerated nothing. The little college town which was my home lay spread out before me, seemingly almost as near as when I looked down upon it from my observatory windows. It was early morning, and the village was waking up. The milkmen were going their rounds, and workmen, with their dinner-pails, where hurrying along the streets. The early train was just leaving the railroad station. I could see the puffs from the smoke-stack, and the jets from the cylinders. It was strange not to hear the hissing of the steam, so near I seemed. There were the college buildings on the hill, the long rows of windows flashing back the level sunbeams. I could tell the time by the college clock. It struck me that there was an unusual bustle around the buildings, considering the earliness of the hour. A crowd of men stood about the door of the observatory, and many others were hurrying across the campus in that direction. Among them I recognized President Byxbee, accompanied by the college janitor. As I gazed they reached the observatory, and, passing through the group about the door, entered the building. The president was evidently going up to my quarters. At this it flashed over me quite suddenly that all this bustle was on my account. I recalled how it was that I came to be on Mars, and in what condition I had left affairs in the observatory. It was high time I were back there to look after myself.

Here abruptly ended the extraordinary document which I found that morning on my desk. That it is the authentic record of the conditions of life in another world which it purports to be I do not expect the reader to believe. He will no doubt explain it as another of the curious freaks of somnambulism set down in the books. Probably it was merely that, possibly it was something more. I do not pretend to decide the question. I have told all the facts of the case, and have no better means for forming an opinion than the reader. Nor do I know, even if I fully believed it the true account

it seems to be, that it would have affected my imagination much more strongly than it has. That story of another world has, in a word, put me out of joint with ours. The readiness with which my mind has adapted itself to the Martial point of view concerning the Earth has been a singular experience. The lack of foresight among the human faculties, a lack I had scarcely thought of before, now impresses me, ever more deeply, as a fact out of harmony with the rest of our nature, belying its promise,—a moral mutilation, a deprivation arbitrary and unaccountable. The spectacle of a race doomed to walk backward, beholding only what has gone by, assured only of what is past and dead,' comes over me from time to time with a sadly fantastical effect which I cannot describe. I dream of a world where love always wears a smile, where the partings are as tearless as our meetings, and death is king no more. I have a fancy, which I like to cherish, that the people of that happy sphere, fancied though it may be, represent the ideal and normal type of our race, as perhaps it once was, as perhaps it may yet be again.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE BLINDMAN'S WORLD ***

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