Letter Eighteen

TELLS HOW THE PROFESSOR AND I FOUND THE PRECIOUS REDICULOUSES AND HOW THEY CHAUTAUQUACKED AT US. PUTS INTO PRINT SOME SENTIMENTS BETTER LEFT UNRECORDED, AND PROVES THAT A NEGLECTED THEORY WILL BLOSSOM IN CONGENIAL SOIL. CONTAINS FRAGMENTS OF THREE LECTURES AND A CONFESSION

“But these in spite of careful dirt
Are neither green nor sappy;
Half conscious of the garden squirt,
The spendlings look unhappy.”

1 April 1890  Pioneer

OUT OF THE SILENCE under the apple-trees the Professor spake. One leg thrust from the hammock netting kicked lazily at the blue. There was the crisp crunch of teeth in an apple core.

“But get out of this,” said the Professor lazily. As it was on the banks of the Hughli, so on the green borders of the Musquash and the Ohio—eternal unrest, and the insensate desire to go ahead. I was lapped in a very trance of peace. Even the apples brought no indigestion.

“Permanent Nuisance, what is the matter now?” I grunted.
“G’long out of this and go to Niagara,” said the Professor in jerks. “Spread the ink of description through the waters of the Horseshoe Falls—buy a papoose from the tame wild Indian who lives at the Clifton House—take a fifty-cent ride on the Maid of the Mist—go over the falls in a tub.”

“Seriously, is it worth the trouble? Everybody who has ever been within fifty miles of the falls has written his or her impressions. Everybody who has never seen the falls knows all about them, and—besides, I want some more apples. They’re good in this place, ye big fat man,” I quoted.

The Professor retired into his hammock for a while. Then he reappeared flushed with a new thought. “If you want to see something quite new let’s go to Chautauqua.”

“What’s that?”

“Well, it’s a sort of institution. It’s an educational idea, and it lives on the borders of a lake in New York State. I think you’ll find it interesting; and I know it will show you a new side of American life.”

In blank ignorance I consented. Everybody is anxious that I should see as many sides of American life as possible. Here in the East they demand of me what I thought of their West. I dare not answer that it is as far from their notions and motives as Hindustan from Hoboken—that the West, to this poor thinking, is an America which has no kinship with its neighbour. Therefore I congratulated them hypocritically upon “their West,” and from their lips learn that there is yet another America, that of the South—alien and distinct. Into the third country, alas, I shall not have time to penetrate. The newspapers and the oratory of the day will tell you that all feeling between the North and South is extinct. None the less the Northerner, outside his newspapers and public men, has a healthy contempt for the Southerner which the latter repays by what seems very like a deep-rooted aversion to the Northerner. I have learned now what the sentiments of the great American nation mean. The North speaks in the name of the country; the West is busy developing its own resources, and the Southerner skulks in his tents. His opinions do not count; but his girls are very beautiful.

So the Professor and I took a train and went to look at the educational idea. From sleepy, quiet little Musquash we rattled through the
coal and iron districts of Pennsylvania, her coke ovens flaring into the
night and her clamorous foundries waking the silence of the woods in
which they lay. Twenty years hence woods and cornfields will be gone,
and from Pittsburgh to Shenango all will be as smoky black as Brad-
ford and Beverly: for each factory is drawing to itself a small town,
and year by year the demand for rails increases. The Professor held
forth on the labour question, his remarks being prompted by the sight
of a train-load of Italians and Hungarians going home from mending
a bridge.

“You recollect the Burmese,” said he. “The American is like the
Burman in one way. He won’t do heavy manual labour. He knows too
much. Consequently he imports the alien to be his hands—just as the
Burman gets hold of the Madrassi. If he shuts down all contract la-
bour immigration he will have to fill up his own dams, cut his own cut-
tings and pile his own embankments. The American Citizen won’t
like that. He is racially unfit to be a labourer in muttee. He can invent,
buy, sell and design, but he cannot waste his time on earthworks. Is-
waste, this great people will resume contract labour immigration the
minute they find the aliens in their midst are not sufficient for the
jobs in hand. If the alien gives them trouble they will shoot him.”

“Yes, they will shoot him,” I said, remembering how only two days
before some Hungarians employed on a line near Musquash had seen
fit to strike and to roll down rocks on labourers hired to take their
places, an amusement which caused the sheriff to open fire with a re-
volver and wound or kill (it really does not much matter which) two or
three of them. Only a man who earns ten pence a day in sunny Italy
knows how to howl for as many shillings in America.

The composition of the crowd in the cars began to attract my at-
tention. There were very many women and a few clergymen. Where you
shall find these two together, there also shall be a fad, a hobby, a the-
ory, or a mission.

“These people are going to Chautauqua,” said the Professor. “It’s a
sort of open-air college— they call it— but you’ll understand things
better when you arrive.” A grim twinkle in the back of his eye awak-
ened all my fears.

“Can you get anything to drink there?”

“No.”
“Are you allowed to smoke?”
“Ye-es, in certain places.”
“Are we staying there over Sunday?”
“No.” This very emphatically.

Feminine shrieks of welcome: “There’s Sadie!” “Why, Maimie, is that yeou!” “Alf’s in the smoker. Did you bring the baby?” and a profli-gate expenditure of kisses between bonnet and bonnet told me we had struck a gathering place of the clans. It was midnight. They swept us, this horde of clamouring women, into a Black Maria omnibus and a sumptuous hotel close to the borders of a lake—Lake Chautauqua. Morning showed as pleasant a place of summer pleasing as ever I wish to see. Smooth-cut lawns of velvet grass, studded with tennis courts, surrounded the hotel and ran down to the blue waters, which were dotted with rowboats. Young men in wonderful blazers and maidens in more wonderful tennis costumes; women attired with all the extravagance of unthinking Chicago or the grace of Washington (which is Simla) filled the grounds, and neat French nurses and exquisitely dressed little children ran about together. There was pickerel fishing for such as enjoyed it, a bowling alley, unlimited bathing and a toboggan, besides many other amusements, all winding up with a dance or a concert at night. Women dominated the sham medieval hotel, rampaged about the passages, flirted in the corridors and chased unruly children off the tennis courts. This place was called Lakewood. It is a pleasant place for the unregenerate.

“We go up the lake in a steamer to Chautauqua,” said the Professor.
“But I want to stay here. This is what I understand and like.”
“No, you don’t. You must come along and be educated.”

All the shores of the lake which is eighteen miles long, are dotted with summer hotels, camps, boat-houses and pleasant places of rest. You go there with all your family to fish and to flirt. There is no special beauty in the landscape of tame cultivated hills and decorous woody trees, but good taste and wealth have taken the place in hand, trimmed its borders and made it altogether delightful.

The institution of Chautauqua is the largest village on the lake. I can’t hope to give you an idea of it, but try to imagine the Charleville at Mussoorie magnified ten times and set down in the midst of hun-
dreds of tiny little hill houses, each different from its neighbour, brightly painted and constructed of wood. Add something of the peace of dull Dalhousie, flavour with a tincture of missions and the old Polytechnic, Cassell’s Self Educator and a Monday pop, and spread the result out flat on the shores of Naini Tal Lake, which you will please transport to the Dun. But that does not half describe the idea. We reached it through a wicket gate where we were furnished with a red ticket, price forty cents, and five dollars if you lost it. I naturally lost mine on the spot and was fined accordingly.

Once inside the grounds on the paths that serpented round the myriad cottages I was lost in admiration of scores of pretty girls, most of them with little books under their arms, and a pretty air of seriousness on their faces. Then I stumbled upon an elaborately arranged mass of artificial hillocks surrounding a mud puddle and a wormy streak of slime connecting it with another mud puddle. Little boulders topped with square pieces of putty were strewn over the hillocks—evidently with intention. When I hit my foot against one such boulder painted “Jericho,” I demanded information in aggrieved tones.

“Hsh!” said the Professor. “It’s a model of Palestine—the Holy Land—done to scale and all that, you know.”

Two young people were flirting on the top of the highest mountain overlooking Jerusalem; the mud puddles were meant for the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee, and the twisting gutter was the Jordan. A small boy sat down on the city “Safed” and cast his line into Chautauqua Lake. On the whole it did not impress me. The hotel was filled with women, and a large blackboard in the main hall set forth the exercises for the day. It seemed that Chautauqua was a sort of educational syndicate, cum hotel, cum (very mild) Rosherville. There were annually classes of young women and young men who studied in the little cottages for two or three months in the year and went away to self-educate themselves. There were other classes who learned things by correspondence, and yet other classes made up of teachers. All these delights I had missed, but had arrived just in time for a sort of debauch of lectures which concluded the three months’ education. The syndicate in control had hired various lecturers whose names would draw audiences, and these men were lecturing about the la-
bour problem, the servant-girl question, the artistic and political aspect of Greek life, the Pope in the Middle Ages and similar subjects, in all of which young women do naturally take deep delight. Professor Mahaffey\(^{13}\) (what the devil was he doing in that gallery?) was the Greek art side man, and a Dr. Gunsaulus\(^{14}\) handled the Pope. The latter I loved forthwith. He had been to some gathering on much the same lines as the Chautauqua one, and had there been detected, in the open daylight, smoking a cigar. One whole lighted cigar. Then his congregation or his class, or the mothers of both of them, wished to know whether this was the sort of conduct for a man professing temperance. I have not heard Dr. Gunsaulus’ lecture, but he must be a good man. Professor Mahaffey was enjoying himself. I sat close to him at tiffin and heard him arguing with an American professor as to the merits of the American Constitution. Both men spoke that the table might get the benefit of their wisdom, whence I argued that even eminent professors are eminently human.

“No, for goodness’ sake, behave yourself,” said the Professor: “You are not to ask the whereabouts of a bar. You are not to laugh at anything you see, and you are not to go away and deride this Institution.”

Remember that advice. But I was virtuous throughout, and my virtue brought its own reward. The parlour of the hotel was full of committees of women; some of them were Methodist Episcopalians, and some were Congregationalists, and some were United Presbyterians, or Old Presbyterians, or Free and Accepted Presbyterians; and some were faith healers and Christian scientists, and all trotted about with notebooks in their hands and the expression of Atlas on their faces. They were connected with missions to the heathen, and so forth, and their deliberations appeared to be controlled by a male missionary. The Professor introduced me to one of them as their friend from India.

“Oh, indeed,” said she, “and of what denomination are you?”

“I—I live in India,” I murmured.

“You are a missionary, then?”

I had obeyed the Professor’s orders all too well. “I am not a missionary,” I said, with I trust a decent amount of regret in my tones. She dropped me and I went to find the Professor, who had cowardly deserted me and I think was laughing on the balcony. It is very hard to
persuade a denominational American that a man from India is not a missionary. The home-returned preachers very naturally convey the impression that India is inhabited solely by missionaries.

I heard some of them talking and saw how, all unconsciously, they were hinting the thing which was not. But prejudice governs me against my will. When a woman looks you in the face and pities you for having to associate with “heathen” and “idolaters”—Sikh Sirdar\(^\text{15}\) of the north, if you please, Mohammedan gentlemen and the simple-minded Jat of the Punjab—what can you do?

The Professor took me out to see the sights, and lest I should be further treated as a denominational missionary I wrapped myself in tobacco smoke. This ensures respectful treatment at Chautauqua. An amphitheatre capable of seating five thousand people is the centre point of the show. Here the lecturers lecture and the concerts are held, and from here the avenues start. Each cottage is decorated according to the taste of the owner and is full of girls. The verandahs are alive with them; they fill the sinuous walks; they hurry from lecture to lecture, hatless and three under one sunshade; they retail little confidences walking arm in arm; they giggle for all the world like uneducated maidens, and they walk about and row on the lake with their very young men. The lectures are arranged to suit all tastes. I got hold of one called “The Eschatology of Our Saviour.” It set itself to prove the length, breadth and temperature of Hell from information garnered from the New Testament. I read it in the sunshine under the trees, with these hundreds of pretty maidens pretending to be busy all round; and it did not seem to match the landscape. Then I studied the faces of the crowd. One quarter were old and worn; the balance were young, innocent, charming and frivolous. I wondered how much they really knew or cared for the art side of Greek life, or the Pope in the Middle Ages; and how much for the young men who walked with them. Also what their ideas of Hell might be. We entered a place called a museum (all the shows here are of an improving tendency), which had evidently been brought together by feminine hands, so jumbled were the exhibits. There was a facsimile of the Rosetta stone, with some printed popular information; an Egyptian camel saddle, miscellaneous truck from the Holy Land, another model of the same, photographs of Rome, badly-blotched drawings of volcanic phenom-
ena, the head of the pike that John Brown took to Harper's ferry that
time his soul went marching on, casts of doubtful value, and views of
Chautauqua, all bundled together without the faintest attempt at ar-
range ment, and all very badly labeled.

It was the apotheosis of Popular Information. I told the Professor
so, and he said I was an ass, which didn’t affect the statement in the
least. I have seen museums like the Chautauqua before, and well I
know what they mean. If you do not understand, read the first part of
Aurora Leigh. Lectures of the Chautauqua stamp I have heard be-
fore. People don’t get education that way. They must dig for it, and cry
for it, and sit up o’ nights for it; and when they have got it they must
call it by another name or their struggle is of no avail. You can take a
degree from this Lawn Tennis Tabernacle of all the arts and sciences
at Chautauqua. Mercifully the students are womenfolk and if they
marry the degree is forgotten, and if they become school-teachers
they can only instruct young America in the art of mispronouncing
his own language. And yet so great is the perversity of the American
girl that she can, scorning tennis and the allurements of boating,
work herself nearly to death over the skittles of archeology and for-
eign tongues, to the sorrow of all her friends.

Late that evening the contemptuous courtesy of the hotel allotted
me a room in a cottage of quarter-inch planking, destitute of the most
essential articles of toilette furniture. Ten shillings a day was the
price of this shelter, for Chautauqua is a paying institution. I heard
the Professor next door banging about like a big jack-rabbit in a very
small packing case. Presently he entered holding between disgusted
finger and thumb the butt end of a candle, his only light, and this in a
house that would burn quicker than cardboard if once lighted.

“Isn’t it shameful? Isn’t it atrocious!” A dak bungalow khansamah
wouldn’t dare to give me a raw candle to go to bed by. I say, when you
describe this hole rend them to pieces. A candle stump! Give it ‘em
hot.”

You will remember the Professor’s advice to me not long ago. “Fes-
sor,” said I loftily (my own room was a windowless dog-kennel), “this
is unseemly. We are now in the most civilized country on earth, enjoy-
ing the advantages of an Institution which is the flower of the civili-
sation of the nineteenth century; and yet you kick up a fuss over being
obliged to go to bed by the stump of a candle. Think of the Pope in the Middle Ages. Reflect on the art side of Greek life. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy, and get out of this. You’re filling two-thirds of my room.”

Apropos of Sabbath, I have come across some lovely reading which it grieves me that I had not preserved. Chautauqua, you must know, shuts down on Sundays. With awful severity an eminent clergyman has been writing to the papers about the beauties of the system. The stalls that dispense terrible drinks of Moxie, typhoidal milk shakes and sulphuric-acid-on-lime-bred soda-water are stopped; boating is forbidden; no steamer calls at the jetty, and the nearest railway station is three miles off and you can’t hire a conveyance; the barbers must not shave you; and no milkman or butcher goes his rounds. The reverend gentleman enjoys this (he must wear a beard). I forget his exact words, but they run: “And thus, thank God, no one can supply himself on the Lord’s Day with the luxuries or conveniences that he has neglected to procure on Saturday.” Of course, if you happen to linger inside the wicket gate—verily Chautauqua is a close preserve—over Sunday you must bow gracefully to the rules of the place. But what are you to do with this frame of mind? The owner of it would send missions to convert the “heathen,” or would convert you at ten minutes’ notice; and yet if you called him a heathen and an idolater he would probably be very much offended.

Oh! my friends, I have been to one source of the river of missionary enterprise and the waters thereof are bitter—bitter as hate, narrow as the grave! Not now do I wonder that the missionary in the East is at times to our thinking a little intolerant towards beliefs he cannot understand and people he does not appreciate. Rather it is a mystery to me that these delegates of an imperious ecclesiasticism have not a hundred times ere this provoked murder and fire among our wards. If they were true to the iron teachings of Centreville of Petumna or Chunkhaven, when they came they would have done so. For Centreville or Smithson or Squeeahkanen teach the only true creeds in all the world, and to err from their tenets as laid down by the bishops and
the elders is damnation. How it may be in England at the centres of supply I cannot tell but shall presently learn. Here in America I am afraid of these grim men of the denominations who know so intimately the will of the Lord and enforce it to the uttermost. Left to themselves they would prayerfully, in all good faith and sincerity, slide gradually, ere a hundred years, from the mental inquisitions which they now work with some success to an insti too tion—be sure it would be an “insti too tion” with a journal of its own—not far different from that Torquemada ruled aforetime. Does this seem extravagant? I have watched the expression on the men’s faces when they told me that they would rather see their son or daughter dead at their feet than doing such and such things—trampling on the grass on a Sunday, or something equally heinous—and I was grateful that the law of men stood between me and their interpretation of the Law of God. They would assuredly slay the body for the soul’s sake and account it righteousness. And this would befall not in the next generation, perhaps, but in the next, for the very look I saw in a Eusufzai’s face at Peshawar when he turned and spat in my tracks I have seen this day at Chautauqua in the face of a preacher. The will was there, but not the power.

The Professor went up the lake on a visit, taking my ticket of admission with him, and I found a child, aged seven, fishing with a worm and pin, and spent the rest of the afternoon in his company. He was a delightful young citizen, full of information and apparently ignorant of denominations. We caught sunfish and catfish and pickerel together.

The trouble began when I attempted to escape through the wicket on the jetty and let the creeds fight it out among themselves. Without that ticket I could not go, unless I paid five dollars. That was the rule to prevent people cheating.

“You see,” quoth a man in charge, “you’ve no idea of the meanness of these people. Why, there was a lady this season—a prominent member of the Baptist connection—we know, but we can’t prove it that she had two of her hired girls in a cellar when the grounds were being canvassed for the annual poll-tax of five dollars a head. So she saved ten dollars. We can’t be too careful with this crowd. You’ve got to
produce that ticket as a proof that you haven’t been living in the grounds for weeks and weeks.”

“For weeks and weeks!” The blue went out of the sky as he said it. “But I wouldn’t stay here for one week if I could help it,” I answered.

“No more would I,” he said earnestly.

Returned the Professor in a steamer and him I basely left to make explanations about that ticket, while I returned to Lakewood—the nice hotel without any regulations. I feared that I should be kept in those terrible grounds for the rest of my life.

And it turned out an hour later that the same fear lay upon the Professor also. He arrived heated but exultant, having baffled the combined forces of all the denominations and recovered the five-dollar deposit. “I wouldn’t go inside those gates for anything,” he said. “I waited on the jetty. What did you think of it all?”

“It has shown me a new side of American life,” I responded. “I never want to see it again—and I’m awfully sorry for the girls who take it seriously. I suppose the bulk of them don’t. They just have a good time. But it would be better—.”

“How?”

“If they all got married instead of pumping up interest in a bric-a-brac museum and advertised lectures, and having their names in the papers. One never gets to believe in the proper destiny of women until one sees a thousand of ‘em doing something different. I don’t like Chautauqua. There’s something wrong with it, and I haven’t time to find out where. But it is wrong.”