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NOSTALGIA IN THE SUPERMARKET

DEAR FRIENDS:



While waiting in line for nearly half an hour at the checkout counter at a local grocery emporium, my thoughts drifted back to my early life with my esteemed Grandmother. About a block from where we were living at the time was Grandmother's grocery store. There were several in the neighborhood but this was her favorite, and she never failed to have a pleasant chat with the proprietor. He was a portly man with a large white apron and a rather cherubic expression. His store was about thirty feet square, neatly lined with shelves. A considerable part of the floor space was occupied by barrels and tubs. Prominent among these were a large tub of dill pickles and massive containers for flour and sugar. Grandmother always knew exactly what she wanted. If she was of a mood to clean the kitchen, she immediately selected a large bar of Fels Naptha soap. If her concern was for personal cosmetics, Ivory soap was her favorite. She scrubbed her face thoroughly twice a day, and to her last years had a youthful complexion. Shopping at Overholt's grocery was neither complicated nor time consuming. If you wanted canned peas there was just one brand to choose from, and it was quite unnecessary to read the label which bore only the manufacturer's name. Rice was scooped out of a bin, weighed, and packaged on the spot. A country family regularly brought in eggs which were always large and fresh. When the shopping was over, Grandmother placed a dollar bill on the counter, and there was always change.

Grandmother never liked congestion but was seldom inconvenienced. A few automobiles occasionally appeared and she viewed them suspiciously. She believed in progress but not when it interfered with leisurely living. A friend had bought a Winton car. It was a glorious vehicle with shiny brass fittings and a vase of flowers for the benefit of those who occupied the back seat. Grandmother approved of the flowers. We took a short drive around the upper end of Central Park, and Grandmother fingered the upholstery appraisingly. As the car rolled along at about fifteen miles per hour, Grandmother looked like a duchess and obviously enjoyed the splendor of it all.

After her husband's death, Grandmother was required to put on widow's weeds and she found them quite becoming. She continued to wear them until the time of her death. It is not quite certain that her grief extended over this entire period of time. Perhaps she was influenced by the example of

Queen Victoria to whom she believed she was distantly related. Victoria survived her Prince Consort by some forty years, and the fact that she dressed in black to the end of her days caused her to be referred to as "the widow of Windsor." Some strangers believed that Grandmother might belong to some religious order and treated her with special deference. She was of Scotch extraction and was always a thrifty soul. It was unnecessary for her to cater to the various changes in ladies' attire, but wherever she went she enjoyed sympathetic attention. She maintained her wardrobe by an occasional purchase of new ruching for her bonnet or a pair of sturdy black walking shoes. As she had a limited income the arrangement was most practical.

Grandmother was also dominated by the conviction that the best was none too good. She never looked for bargains and was very quality conscious. She had bought most of her clothing before I was born, and it survived her. One of the secrets was to "keep things up." She was skillful with the needle and was a genius at invisible mending. Her most prized possession was a black broadcloth coat lined with Persian lamb. When the collar became a little worn she replaced it with fur from the inside of the sleeves, and when pinholes in her veil became too numerous she refolded the pleats and went happily on her way. She was no shopper, but occasionally found it necessary to buy new clothes for a growing boy. On such occasions her prime consideration was wearing quality. The new coats and trousers might not match or fit too well; but they were all wool, preferably Scottish. When I was growing up most young boys wore knickerbockers and ribbed cotton stockings. When Grandmother decided that I should wear long pants, she adjusted to the innovation but insisted that I wear under them stockings that reached above the knees. After all, if well darned they would be useful; and it would be a shame to throw them away.

During my school years, Grandmother felt it her moral duty to assist me with my homework. There were few educational changes in those days, and her systems were often helpful and informative. Whenever we changed schools, which was quite frequently, she would go to the principal and explain to him my cultural needs. She made cookies for my teachers and sent them Christmas cards at the proper season. While anarchy was not prevalent in the schoolyard, nearly all children picked on each other when the occasion afforded. Grandmother warned me that I should never retaliate or engage in any rough play for such actions are not appropriate to a young gentleman. Once a crisis arose and Grandmother moved in on the culprit who was properly intimidated; the offence was not repeated.

Grandmother had a special fondness for museums, art galleries, and zoos. The Metropolitan Museum of Art reminded her of the Louvre. The Museum of Natural History recalled to her the galleries of the British Museum, and the Bronx Zoo was not nearly as good as the one in Berlin. No professional guide could describe exhibits with the firm certainty of Grandmother. She had strong artistic inclinations and was well read on a diversity of subjects. She was never quite satisfied with the way American galleries displayed their treasures. She often said that she



would discuss it with somebody but never got around to it. She lived a quiet, well-ordered life; and guided my early years with patience and loving care. She passed on before World War I and escaped most of the pressures of social change. There was little or no inflation during her lifetime, and I'm sure that she never paid a tax on anything.

My illustrious Grandmother believed in service. She served others when need arose, and expected to be served in her turn. When she went to a store she took it for granted that she would be waited on. She would never have survived a self-service supermarket or a quick-lunch restaurant. She would never have waited for hours in a doctor's office or stood in line to mail a letter. She always traded in

establishments where a pleasant and leisurely atmosphere prevailed. She believed, like John Wanamaker, that the customer is always right. When entering a place of business, Grandmother always looked for a comfortable chair. When she couldn't find a seat she firmly requested one and chose the exact spot where it should be placed. She also let it be known that articles in which she was interested should be brought to her for inspection. I cannot remember any occasion when management was not happy to cooperate. It may well have been that her widow's weeds gained her the little courtesies which she felt to be due and proper.

For some unknown reason these thoughts passed through my mind while I was waiting in the supermarket. Incidentally, there was adequate time for further reflections but I will save these for later occasions.

Always most sincerely,

Marilyn P. Hall

A partial list of Books available in the PRS Gift Shop recommended by
 Manly P. Hall in his booklet GREAT BOOKS ON RELIGION AND ESOTERIC PHILOSOPHY

Arnold, Sir Edwin	The Light of Asia	\$ 1.25
Atwood, Mary	A Suggestive Inquiry into the Hermetic Mystery	\$15.50
Avalon, Arthur	The Serpent Power	\$ 5.50
Bacon, More, and Others	Famous Utopias of the Renaissance	\$ 2.25
Balzac, Honore de	Seraphita	\$ 2.50
Baring-Gould, S.	Curious Myths of the Middle Ages	\$ 8.95
Bayley, Harold	The Lost Language of Symbolism	\$21.50
Besant, A.	The Ancient Wisdom	\$ 5.95
Besant, A.	A Study in Consciousness	\$ 5.95
Bucke, Richard M.	Cosmic Consciousness	\$ 5.95
Bunyan, John	The Pilgrim's Progress	\$ 2.95
Bynner, Witter	The Way of Life, According to Laotzu	\$ 1.95
Carter, Charles E. O.	The Astrological Aspects	\$ 4.50
Case, Paul Foster	The Tarot: A Key to the Wisdom of the Ages	\$ 6.95
Cheiro	Language of the Hand	\$ 1.95
Emerson, R. W.	Essays	\$ 3.95
Evans-Wentz, W. Y.	The Tibetan Book of the Dead	\$ 3.95
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