

**Charlotte Perkins
Gilman**



*Moving
the Mountain*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

[Cover](#)

[Titlepage](#)

[Text](#)

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PREFACE

One of the most distinctive features of the human mind is to forecast better things.

"We look before and after
And pine for what is not."

This natural tendency to hope, desire, foresee and then, if possible, obtain, has been largely diverted from human usefulness since our goal was placed after death, in Heaven. With all our hope in "Another World," we have largely lost hope of this one.

Some minds, still keen in the perception of better human possibilities, have tried to write out their vision and give it to the world. From Plato's ideal Republic to Wells' Day of the Comet we have had many Utopias set before us, best known of which are that of Sir Thomas More and the great modern instance, "Looking Backward."

All these have one or two distinctive features—an element of extreme remoteness, or the introduction of some mysterious outside force. "Moving the Mountain" is a short

distance Utopia, a baby Utopia, a little one that can grow. It involves no other change than a change of mind, the mere awakening of people, especially the women, to existing possibilities. It indicates what people might do, real people, now living, in thirty years—if they would.

One man, truly aroused and redirecting his energies, can change his whole life in thirty years.

So can the world.

CHAPTER I

On a gray, cold, soggy Tibetan plateau stood glaring at one another two white people—a man and a woman.

With the first, a group of peasants; with the second, the guides and carriers of a well-equipped exploring party.

The man wore the dress of a peasant, but around him was a leather belt—old, worn, battered—but a recognizable belt of no Asiatic pattern, and showing a heavy buckle made in twisted initials.

The woman's eye had caught the sunlight on this buckle before she saw that the heavily bearded face under the hood was white. She pressed forward to look at it.

"Where did you get that belt?" she cried, turning for the interpreter to urge her question.

The man had caught her voice, her words. He threw back his hood and looked at her, with a strange blank look, as of one listening to something far away.

"John!" she cried. "John! My Brother!"

He lifted a groping hand to his head, made a confused noise that ended in almost a shout of "Nellie!" reeled and fell backward.

* * * * *

When one loses his mind, as it were, for thirty years, and finds it again; when one wakes up; comes to life; recognizes oneself an American citizen twenty-five years old——

No. This is what I find it so hard to realize. I am not twenty-five; I am fifty-five.

* * * * *

Well, as I was saying, when one comes to life again like this, and has to renew acquaintance with one's own mind, in a sudden swarming rush of hurrying memories—that is a good deal of pressure for a brain so long unused.

But when on top of that, one is pushed headlong into a world immeasurably different from the world one has left at twenty-five—a topsy-turvy world, wherein all one's most cherished ideals are found to be reversed, re-arranged, or utterly gone; where strange new facts are accompanied by strange new thoughts and strange new feelings—the pressure becomes terrific.

Nellie has suggested that I write it down, and I think for once she is right. I disagree with her on so many points that I am glad to recognize the wisdom of this idea. It will certainly be a useful process in my re-education; and relieve the mental tension.

So, to begin with my first life, being now in my third——

* * * * *

I am the only son of a Methodist minister of South Carolina. My mother was a Yankee. She died after my sister Ellen was born, when I was seven years old. My father

educated me well. I was sent to a small Southern college, and showed such a talent for philology that I specialized in ancient languages, and, after some teaching and the taking of various degrees, I had a wonderful opportunity to join an expedition into India and Tibet. I was eager for a sight of those venerable races, those hoary scriptures, those time-honored customs.

We were traveling through the Himalayas—and the last thing I remember was a night camp, and a six-months-old newspaper from home. We had rejoicingly obtained it from a party we met in the pass.

It was read and re-read by all of us—even the advertisements—even the editorials, and in one of these I learned that Mrs. Eddy had been dead some time and that another religion had burst forth and was sweeping the country, madly taken up by the women. That was my last news item.

I suppose it was this reading, and the discussions we had, that made me walk in my sleep that night. That is the only explanation I can give. I know I lay down just as I was—and that's all I know, until Nellie found me.

* * * * *

The party reported me lost. They searched for days, made what inquiry they could. No faintest clue was ever found. Himalayan precipices are very tall, and very sudden.

* * * * *

My sister Nellie was traveling in Tibet and found me, with a party of peasants. She gathered what she could from them, through interpreters.

It seems that I fell among those people—literally; bruised, stunned, broken, but not dead. Some merciful—or

shall I say unmerciful?—trees had softened the fall and let me down easy, comparatively speaking.

They were good people—Buddhists. They mended my bones and cared for me, and it appears made me quite a chief man, in course of time, in their tiny village. But their little valley was so remote and unknown, so out of touch with any and everything, that no tale of this dumb white man ever reached Western ears. I was dumb until I learned their language, was "as a child of a day," they said—knew absolutely nothing.

They taught me what they knew. I suppose I turned a prayer mill; I suppose I was married—Nellie didn't ask that, and they never mentioned such a detail. Furthermore, they gave so dim an account of where the place was that we don't know now; should have to locate that night's encampment, and then look for a precipice and go down it with ropes.

As I have no longer any interest in those venerable races and time-honored customs, I think we will not do this.

Well, she found me, and something happened. She says I knew her—shouted "Nellie!" and fell down—fell on a stone, too, and hit my head so hard they thought I was dead this time "for sure." But when I "came to" I came all the way, back to where I was thirty years ago; and as for those thirty years—I do not remember one day of them.

Nor do I wish to. I have those filthy Tibetan clothes, sterilized and packed away, but I never want to look at them.

I am back in the real world, back where I was at twenty-five. But now I am fifty-five—

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Now, about Nellie. I must go slowly and get this thing straightened out for good and all.

My little sister! I was always fond of her, and she adored me. She looked up to me, naturally; believed everything I told her; minded me like a little dog—when she was a child. And as she grew into girlhood, I had a strong restraining influence upon her. She wanted to be educated—to go to college—but father wouldn't hear of it, of course, and I backed him up. If there is anything on earth I always hated and despised, it is a strong-minded woman! That is—it *was*. I certainly cannot hate and despise my sister Nellie.

Now it appears that soon after my departure from this life father died, very suddenly. Nellie inherited the farm—and the farm turned out to be a mine, and the mine turned out to be worth a good deal of money.

So that poor child, having no natural guardian or protector, just set to work for herself—went to college to her heart's content, to a foreign university, too. She studied medicine, practiced a while, then was offered a chair in a college and took it; then—I hate to write it—but she is now president of a college—a *co-educational college*!

"Don't you mean 'dean?'" I asked her.

"No," she said. "There is a dean of the girl's building—but I am the president."

My little sister!

* * * * *

The worst of it is that my little sister is now forty-eight, and I—to all intents and purposes—am twenty-five! She is twenty-three years older than I am. She has had thirty years of world-life which I have missed entirely, and this thirty

years, I begin to gather, has covered more changes than an ordinary century or two.

It is lucky about that mine.

"At least I shall not have to worry about money," I said to her when she told me about our increased fortune.

She gave one of those queer little smiles, as if she had something up her sleeve, and said:

"No; you won't have to worry in the least about money."

* * * * *

Having all that medical skill of hers in the background, she took excellent care of me up there on those dreary plains and hills, brought me back to the coast by easy stages, and home on one of those new steamers—but I mustn't stop to describe the details of each new thing I notice!

I have sense enough myself, even if I'm not a doctor, to use my mind gradually, not to swallow too fast, as it were.

Nellie is a little inclined to manage me. I don't know as I blame her. I do feel like a child, sometimes. It is so humiliating not to know little common things such as everybody else knows. Air ships I expected, of course; they had started before I left. They are common enough, all sizes. But water is still the cheaper route—as well as slower.

Nellie said she didn't want me to get home too quick; she wanted time to explain things. So we spent long, quiet hours in our steamer chairs, talking things over.

It's no use asking about the family; there is only a flock of young cousins and "once removed" now; the aunts and uncles are mostly gone. Uncle Jake is left. Nellie grins wickedly when she mentions him.

"If things get too hard on you, John, you can go down to Uncle Jake's and rest up. He and Aunt Dorcas haven't moved an inch. They fairly barricade their minds against a new idea—and he ploughs and she cooks up on that little mountain farm just as they always did. People go to see them——"

"Why shouldn't they?" I asked. And she smiled that queer little smile again.

"I mean they go to see them as if they were the Pyramids."

"I see," said I. "I might as well prepare for some preposterous nightmare of a world, like—what was that book of Wells', 'The Sleeper Awakened?'"

"Oh, yes; I remember that book," she answered, "and a lot of others. People were already guessing about things as they might be, weren't they? But what never struck any of them was that the people themselves could change."

"No," I agreed. "You can't alter human nature."

Nellie laughed—laughed out loud. Then she squeezed my hand and patted it.

"You *Dear!*" she said. "You precious old Long-Lost Brother! When you get too utterly upset I'll wear my hair down, put on a short dress and let you boss me awhile—to keep your spirits up. That was just the phrase, wasn't it? —'You can't alter human nature!'" And she laughed again.

There is something queer about Nellie—very queer. It is not only that she is different from my little sister—that's natural; but she is different from any woman of forty-eight I ever saw—from any woman of any age I ever saw.

In the first place, she doesn't look *old*—not at all. Women of forty, in our region, were *old women*, and Nellie's near

fifty! Then she isn't—what shall I call it—dependent; not the least in the world. As soon as I became really conscious, and strong enough to be of any use, and began to offer her those little services and attentions due to a woman, I noticed this difference.

She is brisk, firm, assured—not unpleasantly so; I don't mean a thing of that sort; but somehow like—almost like a man! No, I certainly don't mean that. She is not in the least mannish, nor in the least self-assertive; but she takes things so easily—as if she owned them.

* * * * *

I suppose it will be some time before my head is absolutely clear and strong as it used to be. I tire rather easily. Nellie is very reassuring about it. She says it will take about a year to re-establish connections and renew mental processes. She advises me to read and talk only a little every day, to sleep all I can, and not to worry.

"You'll be all right soon, my dear," she says, "and plenty of life before you. You seem to have led a very healthy outdoor life. You're really well and strong—and as good-looking as ever."

At least she hasn't forgotten that woman's chief duty is to please.

"And the world is a much better place to have in than it was," she assured me. "Things will surprise you, of course—things I have gotten used to and shall forget to tell you about. But the changes are all good ones, and you'll soon get—acclimated. You're young yet."

That's where Nellie slips up. She cannot help having me in mind as the brave young brother she knew. She forgets that I am an old man now. Finally I told her that.

"No, John Robertson," she says, "that's where you are utterly wrong. Of course, you don't know what we're doing about age—how differently we feel. As a matter of physiology we find that about one hundred and fifty ought to be our natural limit; and that with proper conditions we can easily get to be a hundred now. Ever so many do."

"I don't want to be a hundred," I protested. "I saw a man of ninety-eight once, and never want to be one."

"It's not like that now," she said. "I mean we live to be a hundred and enjoy life still—'keep our faculties,' as they used to put it. Why, the ship's doctor here is eighty-seven."

This surprised me a good deal. I had talked a little with this man, and had thought him about sixty.

"Then a man of a hundred, according to your story, would look like—like——"

"Like Grandpa Ely," she offered.

I remembered my mother's father—a tall, straight, hale old man of seventy-five. He had a clear eye, a firm step, a rosy color in his face. Well, that wasn't so bad a prospect.

"I consent to be a hundred—on those terms," I told her.

* * * * *

She talked to me a good bit, in small daily doses, of the more general changes in the world, showed me new maps, even let me read a little in the current magazines.

"I suppose you have a million of these now," I said. "There were thousands when I left!"

"No," she answered. "There are fewer, I believe; but much better."

I turned over the one in my hand. It was pleasantly light and thin, it opened easily, the paper and presswork were of the best, the price was twenty-five cents.

"Is this a cheap one—at a higher price? or have the best ones come down?"

"It's a cheap one," she told me, "if you mean by that a popular one, and it's cheap enough. They have all of a million subscribers."

"And what's the difference, beyond the paper and print?" I asked.

"The pictures are good."

I looked it through again.

"Yes, very good, much improved. But I don't see anything phenomenal—unless it is the absence of advertisements."

Nellie took it out of my hand and ran it over.

"Just read some of that," she said. "Read this story—and this article—and that."

So I sat reading in the sunny silence, the gulls wheeling and dipping just as they used to, and the wide purple ocean just as changeable—and changeless—as ever.

One of the articles was on an extension of municipal service, and involved so much comment on preceding steps that I found it most enlightening. The other was a recent suggestion in educational psychology, and this too carried a retrospect of recent progress which gave me food for thought. The story was a clever one. I found it really amusing, and only on a second reading did I find what it was that gave the queer flavor to it. It was a story about women—two women who were in business partnership, with their adventures, singly and together.

I looked through it carefully. They were not even girls, they were not handsome, they were not in process of being married—in fact, it was not once mentioned whether they

were married or not, ever had been or ever wanted to be. Yet I had found it amusing!

I laid the magazine on my rug-bound knees and meditated. A queer sick feeling came over me—mental, not physical. I looked through the magazine again. It was not what I should have called "a woman's magazine," yet the editor was a woman, most of the contributors were women, and in all the subject matter I began to detect allusions and references of tremendous import.

Presently Nellie came to see how I was getting on. I saw her approaching, a firm, brisk figure, well and becomingly dressed, with a tailored trimness and convenience, far indeed from the slim, graceful, yielding girl I had once been so proud to protect and teach.

"How soon do we get in, Lady Manager?" I asked her.

"Day after to-morrow," she answered back promptly—not a word about going to see, or asking anyone!

"Well, ma'am, I want you to sit down here and tell me things—right now. What am I to expect? Are there *no* men left in America?"

She laughed gaily.

"No men! Why, bless you, there are as many men as there are women, and a few more, I believe. Not such an over-plus as there used to be, but some to spare still. We had a million and a half extra in your day, you know."

"I'm glad to learn we're allowed to live!" said I. "Now tell me the worst—are the men all doing the housework?"

"You call that 'the worst,' do you?" inquired Nellie, cocking her head to one side and looking at me affectionately, and yet quizzically. "Well, I guess it was—"

pretty near 'the worst!' No dear, men are doing just as many kinds of business as they ever were."

I heaved a sigh of relief and chucked my magazine under the chair.

"I'd begun to think there weren't any men left. And they still wear trousers, don't they?"

She laughed outright.

"Oh, yes. They wear just as many trousers as they did before."

"And what do the women wear," I demanded suspiciously.

"Whatever kind of clothing their work demands," she answered.

"Their work? What kind of work do they do?"

"All kinds—anything they like."

I groaned and shut my eyes. I could see the world as I left it, with only a small proportion of malcontents and a large majority of contented and happy homes; and then I saw this awful place I was coming to, with strange, masculine women and subdued men.

"How does it happen that there aren't any on this ship?" I inquired.

"Any what?" asked Nellie.

"Any of these—New Women?"

"Why, there are. They're all new, except Mrs. Talbot. She's older than I am, and rather reactionary."

This Mrs. Talbot was a stiff, pious, narrow-minded old lady, and I had liked her the least of any on board.

"Do you mean to tell me that pretty Mrs. Exeter is—one of this new kind?"

"Mrs. Exeter owns—and manages—a large store, if that is what you mean."

"And those pretty Borden girls?"

"They do house decorating—have been abroad on business."

"And Mrs. Green—and Miss Sandwich?"

"One of them is a hat designer, one a teacher. This is toward the end of vacation, and they're all coming home, you see."

"And Miss Elwell?"

Miss Elwell was quite the prettiest woman on board, and seemed to have plenty of attention—just like the girls I remembered.

"Miss Elwell is a civil engineer," said my sister.

"It's horrid," I said. "It's perfectly horrid! And aren't there any women left?"

"There's Aunt Dorcas," said Nellie, mischievously, "and Cousin Drusilla. You remember Drusilla?"

CHAPTER II

The day after to-morrow! I was to see it the day after to-morrow—this strange, new, abhorrent world!

The more I considered what bits of information I had gleaned already, the more I disliked what lay before me. In the first blazing light of returned memory and knowledge, the first joy of meeting my sister, the hope of seeing home again, I had not distinguished very sharply between what

was new to my bewildered condition and what was new indeed—new to the world as well as to me. But now a queer feeling of disproportion and unreality began to haunt me.

As my head cleared, and such knowledge as I was now gathering began to help towards some sense of perspective and relation, even my immediate surroundings began to assume a sinister importance.

Any change, to any person, is something of a shock, though sometimes a beneficial one. Changes too sudden, and too great, are hard to bear, for any one. But who can understand the peculiar horror of my unparalleled experience?

Slowly the thing took shape in my mind.

There was the first, irrevocable loss—my life!

Thirty years—*the* thirty years in which a man may really live—these were gone from me forever.

I was coming back; strong to be sure; well enough in health; even, I hoped, with my old mental vigor—*but not to the same world.*

Even the convict who survives thirty years imprisonment, may return at length to the same kind of world he had left so long.

But I! It was as if I had slept, and, in my sleep, they had stolen my world.

I threw off the thought, and started in to action.

Here was a small world—the big steamer beneath me. I had already learned much about her. In the first place, she was not a "steamer," but a thing for which I had no name; her power was electric.