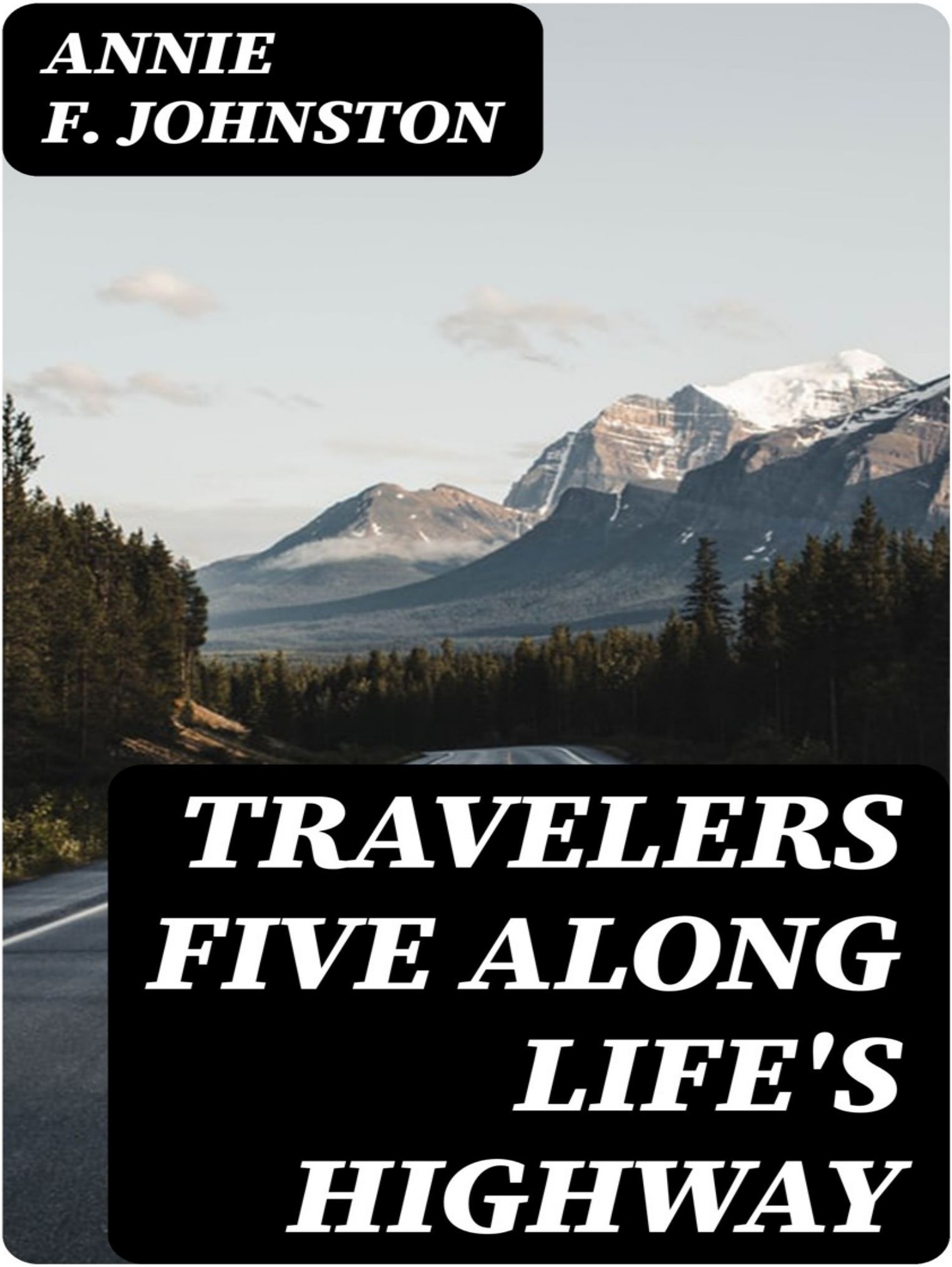
ANNIE F. JOHNSTON



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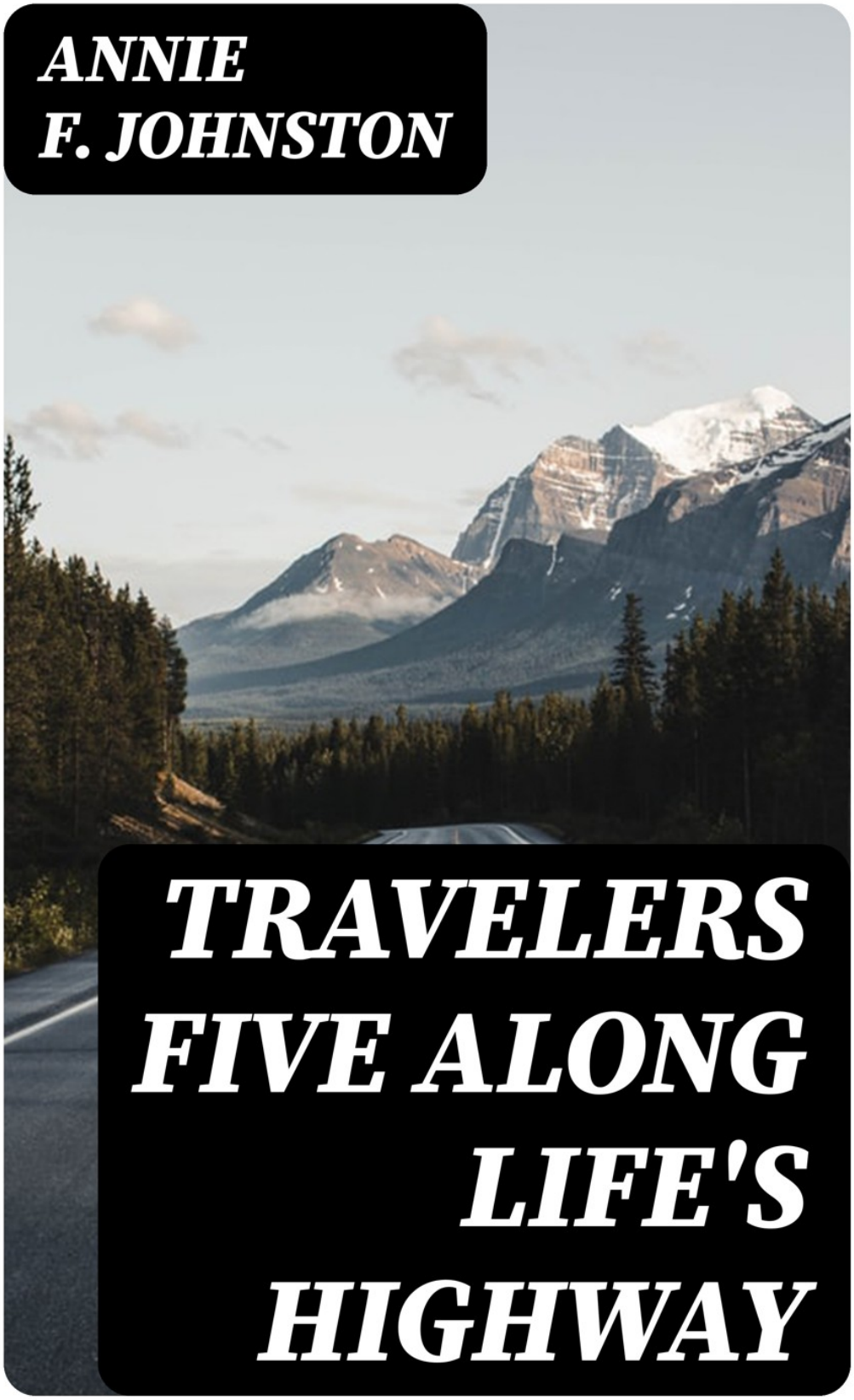

TRAVELERS FIVE ALONG LIFE'S HIGHWAY

Annie F. Johnston

Travelers Five Along Life's Highway

Jimmy, Gideon Wiggan, the Clown, Wexley Snathers, Bap. Sloan

EAN 8596547160496

DigiCat, 2022
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Foreword

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Of all the elements that go to make up a good story,—plot, verisimilitude, happy incident, local colour, excellent style,—none perhaps is more important than the touch of understanding sympathy. The writer must not only see his characters clearly and draw them with a masterly hand; he must have the largeness of heart that can share in all the turbulent experience of the human spirit. His people must be set against the vast shifting background of destiny. He must show their dramatic relations, one to another, and the influence of life upon life; he must also show their profounder, more moving and mysterious, relations to fate and time and the infinite things.

The writer of fiction creates for us a mimic country, peoples it with creatures of the fancy, like ourselves and yet different, and asks us to stray for our entertainment through that new kingdom. The scenes may be as strange or as familiar as you please; the characters as commonplace or as exceptional as you will; yet they must always be within the range of our sympathy. The incidents must be such as we ourselves could pass through; the people must be such as we can understand. They may well be exceptional, for that enlists our interest and enlivens our curiosity; they must not be beyond our comprehension nor outside our spiritual pale, for then we could have no sympathy with them, and our hearts would only grow cold as we read.

And what is at the base of our sympathy and interest? Nothing but our common life. They, too,—all the glad or

sorrowing children of imaginative literature from Helen of Troy to Helena Richie—are travelers like ourselves on the great highway. We know well how difficult a road it is, how rough, how steep, how dangerous, how boggy, how lined with pitfalls, how bordered with gardens of deadly delights, how beset by bandits, how noisy with fakirs, how overhung with poisonous fruit and swept by devastating storms. We know also what stretches of happiness are there, what days of friendship, what hours of love, what sane enjoyment, what rapturous content.

How should we not, then, be interested in all that goes by upon that great road? We like to sit at our comfortable windows, when the fire is alight or the summer air is soft, and "watch the pass," as they say in Nantucket,—what our neighbours are about, and what strangers are in town. If we live in a small community, there is the monotony of our daily routine to be relieved. When an unknown figure passes down the street, we may enjoy the harmless excitement of novelty and taste something of the keen savour of adventure. If we are dwellers in a great city, where every passer is unknown, there is still the discoverer's zest in larger measure; every moment is great with possibility; every face in the throng holds its secret; every figure is eloquent of human drama. The pageant is endless, its story never finished. Who, indeed, could not be spellbound, beholding that countless changing tatterdemalion caravan go by? Yet all we may hope for of the inner history of these journeying beings, so humanly amazing, so significant, and all moved like ourselves by springs of joy and fear, hope and discouragement, is a glimpse here and there, a life-story

revealed in a single gesture, a tragic history betrayed in the tone of a voice or the lifting of a hand, or perhaps a heaven of gladness in a glancing smile. For the most part their orbits are as aloof from us as the courses of the stars, potent and mystic manifestations of the divine, glowing puppets of the eternal masked in a veil of flesh.

This was the pomp of history which held the mind of Shakespeare, of Dickens, of Cervantes, of Balzac, in thrall, and drew the inquiring eye of Browning and Whitman, of Stevenson and Borrow, with so charmed and comprehending a look. To understand and set down faithfully some small portion of the tale of this ever changing procession, which is for ever appearing over the sunrise hills of to-morrow and passing into the twilight valleys of yesterday, is the engrossing task of the novelist and the teller of tales.

How well that task is accomplished, is the measure of the story-teller's power. He may pick his characters from homely types that we know, and please us with the familiar; or he may paint for us some portion of the great pageant that has never passed our door, and raise us with the mystery of unaccustomed things. In either case he will touch our hearts by revealing the hidden springs of action in his chosen men and women. He will enlarge the borders of our mental vision and illumine our appreciation by his greater insight, greater knowledge, finer reasoning. In his magic mirror we shall not only see more of life than we saw before, but we shall see it more clearly, more penetratingly, more wonderfully. And ever afterwards, as we look on the world we know, life which perhaps used to seem to us so commonplace, and events

which used to seem such a matter of course, will take on a significance, a dignity, a glamour, which they never before possessed,—or, to speak more truly, which they always possessed, indeed, but which we had not the power to see. This is the great educative use of creative literature; it teaches us to look on the world with more understanding, to confront it in manlier fashion, to appreciate the priceless gift of life more widely and generously, and so to live more fully and efficiently and happily.

The great opportunity of literature, then, and its great responsibility, are evident. As Matthew Arnold put it, "The future of poetry is immense." In an age when men and women are coming more and more to do their own thinking and form their own ethical judgments, the power and moral obligation of letters must tend to increase rather than to diminish. It is an encouraging sign of the times and of growing intelligence, that we demand a greater veracity in our stories, and like writers who find significance and charm in common surroundings. Our genuine appreciation has produced a very real national literature, great in amount and often reaching true eminence and distinction in quality. Books like Miss Alice Brown's "Meadow Grass" and "Country Neighbours" are at once truly native and full of the dignity and poetry and humour of life. At their best they reveal depths of human feeling and experience with a telling insight and sympathy, and with a felicity of style, which belong only to masterpieces of fiction.

To this charming province in the wide domain of letters "Travelers Five" belongs, and Mrs. Annie Fellows Johnston's many admirers must congratulate themselves on its

appearance, as they stir the fire of an autumn afternoon. Here once more we may sit as at a pleasant window and "watch the pass" on the great highway. Here you shall see approaching, in that delightful and motley cavalcade, Irish Jimmy in his ranchman's dress, his warm Celtic heart urging him on up the obscure trail of unselfish good; here, grotesque old Gid Wiggan, flouting the shows of fashion, yet himself a showman conspicuous in the greater show of life; here, the old story, a fine gentleman's sense and feeling masquerading under the antics of a traveling clown; next, an embarrassed villager with something like greatness thrust upon him; and last, another strange example of silent persistent New England idealism, too proud to confess itself and only reaching its goal through a lifetime of repression and apparent failure.

But I am obstructing your view while I prate! Forgive me. I will step aside and let you have the window to yourself, so that you may quietly observe these Travelers going by.

New Canaan, Conn.,
26 September, 1911.

The First Traveler

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Jimmy
On The Trail of the Wise Men

ORDINARILY a fleck of cigar ashes in the pot of mashed potatoes would not have caused a row in the ranch kitchen,

but to-day old Jimmy had had a sup too much. At such times the mere sight of Matsu, the Japanese cook, could provoke him to oaths, and it was Matsu who had unwittingly dropped the ashes into the pot, as he laid his cigar stump on the shelf above the stove, preparatory to dishing up dinner.

Time was when Jimmy had been the cook at Welsh's ranch, and had had it all his own way in the greasy adobe kitchen. But that was before Ben Welsh's last round-up. Since then his widow had been obliged to turn part of the cattle-ranch into a boarding camp for invalids; the part that lay in a narrow strip along the desert. Health-seekers paid better than cattle or alfalfa she found.

Many things came in with the new administration. Matsu was one of them, in his white chef's cap and jacket. The spotless linen was a delight to the boarders, but to Jimmy, deposed to the rank of hewer of wood and drawer of water, it was the badge of the usurper. Naturally enough his jealousy took the form of making Matsu live up to his linen, and he watched him like a cat for the slightest lapse from cleanliness.

This constant warfare with Matsu was one of the few diversions the camp afforded, and every man made much of it. Had he been let alone, old Jimmy would have accepted the situation as merely one more ill-turn of Fate, which had left him as usual at the bottom of the wheel. But his futile resentment was too funny a thing for his tormentors to allow to die out.

It was a remark made early that morning which set him to brooding over his wrongs, and finally led to the sup too much which precipitated the fight over the potato-pot. Batty Carson made it, in a hoarse whisper, all the voice left to him