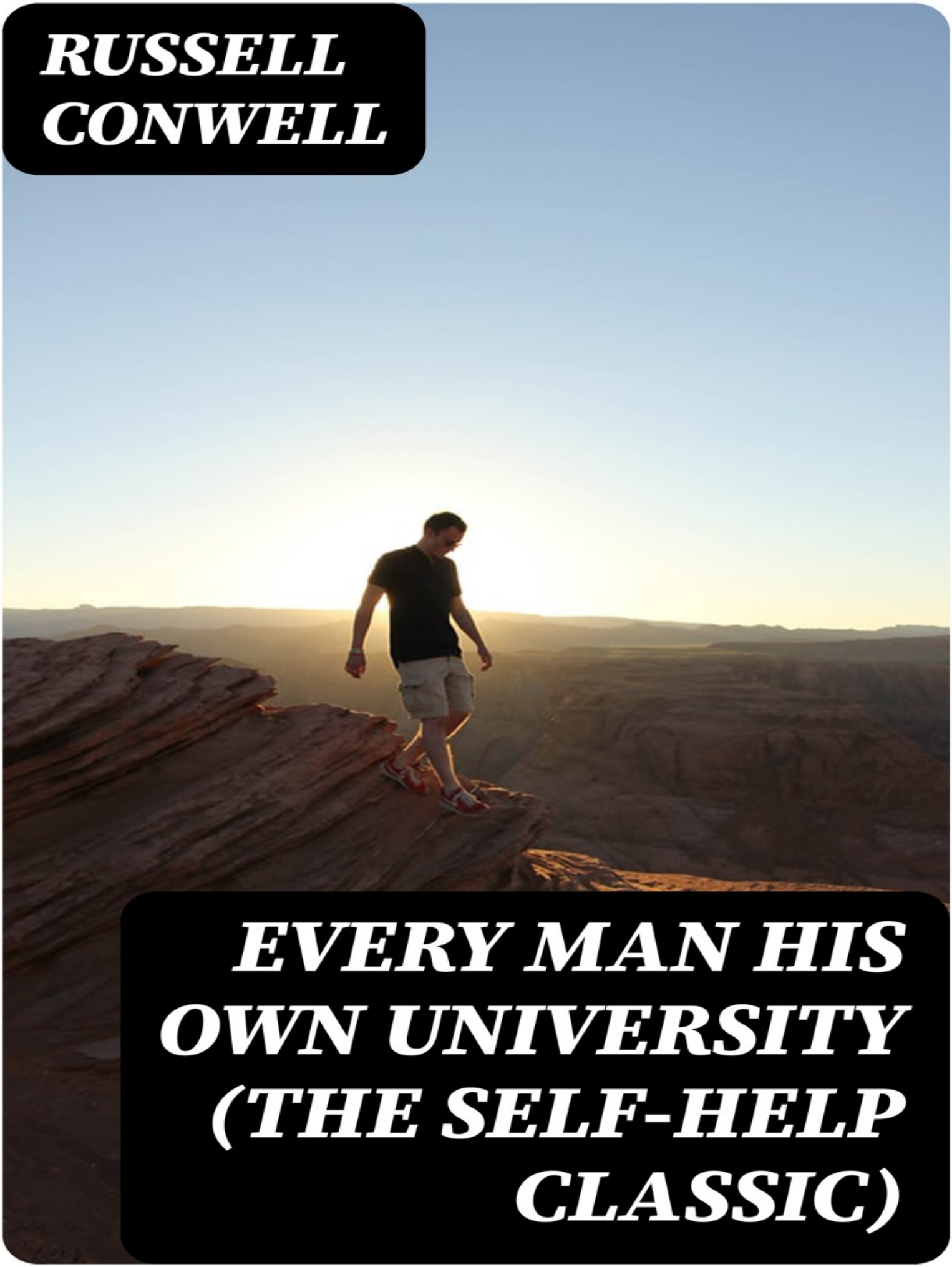
RUSSELL CONWELL



EVERY MAN HIS OWN UNIVERSITY (THE SELF-HELP CLASSIC)

Russell Conwell

Every Man His Own University (The Self-Help Classic)

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Every Man His Own University
The Key to Success
Acres of Diamonds
What You Can Do With Your Will Power

Every Man His Own University

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Chapter I. Every Man's University

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A distinct university walks about under each man's hat. The only man who achieves success in the other universities of the world, and in the larger university of life, is the man who has first taken his graduate course and his post-graduate course in the university under his hat. There *observation* furnishes a daily change in the curriculum. Books are not the original sources of power, but observation, which may bring to us all wide experience, deep thinking, fine feeling, and the power to act for oneself, is the very dynamo of power.

Without observation, literature and meditation are shower and sunshine upon unbroken soil. Only those schools and colleges are true schools and colleges which regard it as the chief business of all their teaching to persuade those under their charge to see more perfectly what they are looking at, to find what they should have been unable to observe had it not been for their school instruction. You can't make a good arrow from a pig's tail, and you can seldom get a man worth while out of one who has gone through the early part of his life without having learned to be alert when things are to be seen or heard. John Stuart Blackie says that it is astonishing how much we all go about with our eyes wide open and see nothing, and Doctor Johnson says that some men shall see more while riding ten miles upon the top of an omnibus, than some others shall see in riding over the continent.

How to observe should be the motto, not only in the beginning of our life, but throughout our career. With the same intellectual gifts, interested in the same ideas, two

men walk side by side through the same scenery and meet the same people. One man has had much inspiration from the country traversed, and has been intent upon all that he has seen and heard among the people. The other has caught no inspiration from beauty or bird or blossom, and only the trivialities of the people have amused him.[1]

A traveler in Athens or Rome, Paris or London, may be shown these cities by a professional guide, and yet gain only a smattering of what these cities hold in store for him, and remember little of what he has seen. Another traveler, unattended by a guide, but observant of everything that comes to his eyes and ears, will carry away stores from his visit to those cities, which shall be of life-long interest and be serviceable to all who shall travel his way. The solitary but observant stranger in a country almost always profits most from his travels. He is compelled to notice boulevards and buildings, parks and people; and every day of his travels is a lesson in observation that accustoms him to remember all he has once seen. The newspaper correspondents of other days had no guide-books or guides, and they were entire strangers in the places they visited. They relied entirely upon themselves to find their way, and to discover everything that was valuable and interesting. They found much that the modern guide either overlooks or disregards, and wrote for the papers at home what would most interest and instruct their readers.

When Henry M. Stanley first visited Jerusalem he insisted that the dragoman in charge of his party should keep all guides and guide-books out of his sight. In two days Stanley knew the streets and the location of the Temple and the Holy Sepulcher and all the notable places in that old city. If Stanley is to-day known as one of the most intelligent of travelers, it is mainly because he excelled in daily *observation*, which every one who thinks for himself recognizes as the supreme acquisition of a liberal education.

He often said that he knew Rome, Naples, and Vienna far better than he knew New York, where he had lived many years of his life. In that he resembled the rest of humanity, who generally know less about what is notable in their home places, than observant visitors know who stay there only a short time during their travels. What we pay for in time and labor seems more valuable—nothing pay, nothing value.

A great foreign correspondent of his day, Henry W. Chambers, remained only six hours at Baalbek, near Damascus; yet he wrote the clearest description that probably ever was written of the magnificent temples at Baalbek—and he wrote these descriptions, too, at Hong-Kong, after many and varied experiences while visiting other places of greater importance. Many archeologists and literary men before him had visited the moat of the great fortress at Baalbek. Still, they had never observed as Chambers observed, and so they missed seeing the arrow-heads and all the other warlike instruments used in those ancient days, which had lain unnoticed among those huge pillars and great foundation-stones.

Although General Lew Wallace lived a long time at Jerusalem, he only imagined that there might have been an inner dungeon underneath the great prison; so when he wrote *Ben Hur* he put his leprous heroine into this imaginary prison-house. A school-teacher from northern England, with her tourist-candle, afterward found the doorway of this prison which Wallace had only imagined to be there. On their way from Egypt and Palestine to the Euphrates, travelers had for centuries passed over the same path in the desert; but it was reserved for a cutter of marble inscriptions, after all these centuries, to *observe* the Rosetta Stone, by the help of which archeologists can now read the inscriptions upon the tablets in the ancient palaces of Babylon and Ninevah.

Millions and millions had seen the lid of a teakettle bobbing up and down over the boiling water before that

Scotchman, Watt, observed it while making watches. But he was the first of all those millions whose close observation led him to investigate this force of boiling water in the teakettle. Then he applied this power to the steam-engine, which is still the great propelling force of the world. From the time of the Garden of Eden apples had fallen in the orchards of the world, through all the harvest-days. Of all the billions that had seen apples falling, only Sir Isaac Newton observed the law of gravitation that was involved in their falling.

All the great discoverers began with nearly the same meager powers for observation that the rest of the world has, but early in life came to value above all other mental powers this incalculable power to closely notice; and each made his realm of observation much richer for his discoveries.

Why do the majority of us go through life seeing nothing of the millions of marvelous truths and facts while only a few keep their eyes and ears wide open and every day are busy in piling up what they have observed! The loss of our instincts seems to be the price we pay to-day for the few minor acquisitions we get from school and college; we put out our brains to make room for our learning. The man who assiduously cultivates his powers of observation and thus gains daily from his experiences what helps him to see farther and clearer everything in life that is worth seeing, has given himself a discipline that is much more important than the discipline of all the schools and the colleges without it. The greatest text-books of the greatest universities are only the records of the observations of some close observer whose better powers of seeing things had been acquired mainly while he was taking his courses in that university under his hat.

The intellect is both telescope and microscope; if it is rightly used, it shall observe thousands of things which are too minute and too distant for those who with eyes and ears

neither see nor hear. The intellect can be made to look far beyond the range of what men and women ordinarily see; but not all the colleges in the world can alone confer this power—this is the reward of *self-culture*; each must acquire it for himself; and perhaps this is why the power of observing deeply and widely is so much oftener found in those men and those women who have never crossed the threshold of any college but the University of Hard Knocks.

The quickening power of science only he
Can know, from whose *own* soul it gushes free.

When we look back over our life and reflect how many things we might have seen and heard had we trained our powers of observation, we seem to have climbed little and to have spent most of our time upon plateaus, while our achievements seem little better than scratches upon black marble. Mankind has a greater esteem for the degrees conferred by the University of Observation and Experience than for all the other degrees of all other Universities in the world. The only thing that seems most to win the respect of real men and women for the degrees conferred by colleges is the fact that the graduates have first gained all that close observation and wide experience can confer.

The lives of the men and the women who have been worth while keep reminding us how vastly more important is this education from ceaseless observation than all the mere learning from school courses. It takes ten pounds of the stuff gotten from observation and experience to carry one pound of school learning wisely. The thinking man will never ask you what college you have gone through, but what college has gone through you; and the ability and habit of observing deeply and broadly is the preparation we all need that the college may go through us. Confucius of China, Kito of Japan, Goethe of Germany, Arnold of England, Lincoln and Edison of America, stand where they stand to-day in

thought and action solely because they had in a masterly way educated their power of minute attention. In building up a huge business or in amassing enormous riches, such men as Rothschild, Rockefeller, and Carnegie show us especially how vitally important to all material success is steadfast attendance at the school of attention.

The colleges that to-day are advancing most rapidly in esteem are those which are recognizing more and more the importance of observation. They require their men to spend some portion of their college time in gaining experience in their various lines through observing the practical workings of their calling; medical students are in hospitals; students of law attend courts; theological students engage in mission work; and engineers are found in shops. Neither lectures nor speculations can take the place of these experiences; each is helpful to the other. When only one may be had, the experience from observing actual work is far more important. Opportunities for observation of practical matters, along with theory, is the modern idea toward which all the best modern institutions are tending in their efforts to fit men for the active business of life.

Nor has greatness from careful observation and large experience distinguished men of action alone. Shakespeare, Goethe, Bunyan, Burns, Whittier, Longfellow, James Whitcomb Riley, and a host of the great men of philosophy, science, and literature are where they are to-day in the esteem of their fellow men, and in their service to humanity, because they were the keenest among the men acute in observation.

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[1] The failure to observe is strikingly proved by practical experiment in the psychological laboratory. Reproductions of a familiar or unfamiliar scene are placed in the observers' hands and they are instructed to study the reproductions carefully and to remember what they see. After 5 minutes careful study, the reproductions are taken away and a series of questions

concerning them are put to the observers. The contradictory answers to these questions is strikingly eloquent of the all-too-human inability to observe. Hugo Munsterberg, the famous psychologist, made a number of psychological experiments to determine the limits of error in observation as these limits affect the credibility of witnesses in the court room. Some of his findings are summarized in "On the Witness Stand."

Your good newspaper reporter is a trained observer who describes exactly what he sees. Yet the manner in which even the trained observer fails to observe correctly is unfailingly demonstrated by the widely differing accounts of the same occurrence as reported in the various newspapers of a community.

One of the best ways to learn to observe correctly and in detail is to take a hasty glance at the display in a store window, pass on and attempt to recall that which you have seen, the number of objects, what they were, etc., and then check your observing faculties by returning to the window and listing its contents. Continued practice of this sort will greatly increase your observing powers. Perhaps the most famous known exponent of this method for training the observing faculties was Houdini, the famous magician, who describes the method in detail and his experiences in applying it in his memoirs.

Chapter II. Animals and "The Least Things"

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The benefits brought to humanity through the study of lower animal life are incalculable, and could not be told in one book. With all that vivisection and post-mortem dissection have revealed to scientific examiners, contagious and infectious diseases have been nearly removed from the human family. We have been taught to live better from observing animal habits in searching for food, in building their habitats, in their mode of living, in their fear of man, and in the methods they adopt to preserve their health. All this knowledge has been gained for us, for the upbuilding of humanity, through the efforts of *close observers*. They have studied the cat by the hearth, the dog by the door, the horses in the pasture and stall, the pigs in their pens, and the sheep in their folds. Closely associated with the investigators of animal life are those who have observed the origin, habits, and influence of birds, insects, and creeping things.

But what we have learned from animals in the past seems only a trifle in comparison with what they will teach when we go to them with more serious purpose and more carefully observe them. The leaders in all these investigations of animal life have all been distinguished for their power to discover in animals what has escaped other people.

Professor Darwin's close observation of the doves he fed at his door opened up to him important suggestions and laid the foundation for his great treatise, "The Origin of Species." When Professor Niles of the Boston School of Technology was a boy he caught a minnow while returning from school.

At his father's suggestion he put the fish into a simple aquarium and studied its movements. When it died he carefully examined its parts under a microscope—and this experience was the beginning of his vast knowledge of the animal realm.

While a Philadelphia clergyman was visiting a farmer in northern New Jersey, the family became perturbed because their dog had "gone mad." They fastened it in the kitchen and sought somebody to kill it by shooting at it through the window. A neighbor observed the dog carefully and told them it was poisoned. He advised the family to loose it in order that it might get some antidote for itself in field or forest. He told them that cats, cattle, and horses are often compelled to find an antidote for some poisonous herb they have eaten, and that the animals know more about such things than any teacher in the medical schools. As soon as the dog was unfastened he hastened across the field to a brook, and ate a weed that was growing beside the water. The dog soon returned to the house, and ate heartily after a two weeks' fast.

The clergyman had followed the dog and observed the plant which it had eaten. After the dog had returned to the house he uprooted the plant and took some of its leaves to a Philadelphia firm of chemists. Acting upon the firm's advice, he sent the leaves to the Smithsonian Institution at Washington, and they were found to be a valuable antidote for poison. Not only was humanity given a better medicine from this discovery, but the clergyman also derived a competency from it. This remedy for poisoning is often used in prescriptions; so even doctors sometimes "go to the dogs" for instructions.

Like Professor Agassiz and Sir Oliver Lodge, many find their best instructors in domestic animals. The fowls around the house and the barn may be whole universities for developing the sciences. Through her dependence on nature the hen is a more efficient instructor than the majority of

college professors. She knows by instinct so much of the laws of nature that wise men may sit at her feet or her bill and learn. Perhaps she may seem a little foolish in proclaiming her achievements in egg-laying by a cackle, but her knowledge of the necessities of life, her careful oversight of her brood, the way she uses her feet and her wings, her foreknowledge of approaching storms, her means of defending herself when attacked by hawks, her knowledge of the formation of the egg and of the proper time to break the shell for the release of her chick—all these are worthy of the attention of even the greatest scientists.

In an address at a poultry-men's convention, Oliver Wendell Holmes said that chickens seem to have in them much more to study than did Darwin's doves. While Holmes was once summering at Kennebunkport, Maine, he trained five chickens to come at his call, to fly upon his head, and to leap with open bills to catch a kernel of corn. Before the season closed the chickens would come to his bedroom even after he had retired—making it necessary, as Doctor Holmes said, for the landlord to serve them up for dinner. Doctor Holmes's parody on Longfellow's "A Psalm of Life" shows what a careful observer he was. While some of Longfellow's admirers resented the parody as a slight, Longfellow himself always treated it as complimentary. He once told James T. Fields that, in one couplet of the parody, Holmes had excelled the entire original poem:

Not like muffled drums be beating
On the inside of the shell.

Longfellow told Fields that there are always millions of men standing like chickens in the shell, with wings they know not how to use, having calls to a larger life outside of which they can see nothing; that some peck away until dead on the inside of the shell, while others, assisted by a friend on the outside, step out into a life beautiful and complete.

In the egg or molecule we get nearer to God than we do through the telescope or by encircling the earth. He who lived nearest the first cause gets the best inspiration for visions of all greater sights or events; so the cottage is a happier place than the palace for him who wishes to get better acquainted with what shall arouse finer thought and feeling. The cottage is the best preparatory school for the mansion, provided always that the cottage course has been thorough. He who has worn his cottage life with manly dignity shall be the man to wear his mansion life with composure. Emerson said "the entire system of things gets represented in every particle."

Uneasy is the head that wears the crown, and unfortunate is the man who gets a smattering of many things yet does not know even one small thing thoroughly. The power of little things to give instruction and happiness should be the first lesson in life, and it should be inculcated deeply. The chief need of this discontented and sinful world is to comprehend that in one blade of grass or the shading of an evening cloud there is sufficient reverence to fill the largest heart, and sufficient science to occupy the greatest passion.

We saw a delicate blue flower in the grass this morning which I had never noticed before. It seemed a different flower from each angle and, when put under a magnifying-glass, had colors I had never noticed before in flower or art. The field where it was growing had been familiar to me for threescore years and ten, yet the flower was entirely new to me. It was so dainty and attractive and inspiring that I felt I had lost something important to my spiritual growth all these years—something like the experience of Virgil, Guizot, Carlyle, Grotius, or like Tennyson in the "Holy Grail," who declares that he had left a real and wonderful life behind to follow the unknown. This little flower in the morning sunlight awakes thoughts of years long past—of the faces of marshaled hosts of battle, of eyes deep and calm with the