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PITTSBURGH FIFTY YEARS AGO AS I RECALL IT¹

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AT THE OUTSET it is to be noted that these personal reminiscences hover, not around Pittsburgh as such, but more about the part that was once its sister city, originally known as Allegheny Town and now as Pittsburgh's North Side. It was a town, in this early time, of something life innocence and charm. Built like a city, houses set in alignment as city houses should be set, not sprawling suburbia-fashion on irregular plots. Circled by hills, of course, with its own special Monument Hill (otherwise known as "Hog Back") dominated by a Civil War statue and vocal on the Fourth of July with thunderous cannon. Most notable, this Allegheny Town, for its transformation of the outmoded Commons, where patient cows had sparsely grazed, into a system of parks of which the citizens could be proud. Something akin to peace then brooded—not a motor vehicle, not a radio, no telephones, juke boxes, or loud-speakers, no glare of electric lights. It seems, at this distance, an era of calm—if not the Golden Age, at least not one of chromium. Fifty years ago—put it in candor at sixty or seventy for recollection—see, to begin with, a typical picture.

¹ Presented at a meeting of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania on October 30, 1946. The author is a descendant of the founder of the Bakewell Glass Works.—*Ed.*

Three little girls sat on the top step of a porch fronting the park, eager, waiting, each one clasping a silver mug—watching for Mr. Waters, the Milkman. A quiet street, that, bordering the park, its two divisions distinguished in the children's vocabulary as "Our Park" and the "Far Park." The latter, across Western Avenue, where horse cars were a threat, was only to be entered when in hand of Sarah, but the other was truly ours, as soon as we had had our milk. Mr. Waters appears, heralded by the clanging of his bell; dignity surrounds his equipage; the horse halts at the hitching post; Mr. Waters puts the bell between his feet, unnecessarily addresses the horse, "whoa," and to the girls, "hello, kids!" The gate yields to our thrust; we run, mugs upheld, eyes eager. On half of the wagon seat looms a great brass-bound hogshhead; Mr. Waters turns the spigot, and — marvellously — out gushes the white stream, bubbling, splashing, not only into mugs but almost into three open mouths. We drink and are fed. Undoubtedly germs abounded but we knew them not.

Sarah comes forth, hats and coats over her arm. We are ready; no carriage in sight; we scamper across the street, down the slope of Our Park past the Lombardy poplars. Other children are already playing; we pause for conversation. Lily has lost a tooth; she exhibits the hole; we gasp in awe. "Did it bleed?" Gratifyingly, it did, and all over the floor! Thirst for gore satisfied, Sarah detaches us, we roll hoops along the walk, and meet Jimmy Greenwood, the Park Policeman.

Park Policeman indeed, but not the suave, shaved, trained, polished Officer of the Law, being merely a stooped and rather shabby old man, blue of jaw, dusty with snuff, face grinning around a few remaining teeth. Still, like measles, one can never tell where love will break out. He and Sarah sit on a bench; we dance around on the grass—*on* the grass, it is to be noted, defying the notice, "Keep *off* the grass." The other children hesitate, and turn to the Fountain. We feel superior. The love story develops above our heads. Each day has always brought its joys—and Sarah. But "Sarah will be leaving, you know, to marry Jimmy," we are told. Why not, we say gaily, and we can play on the grass all the

time! "But Sarah must go away to live with Jimmy." Ah, that is a different story, nor may rivers of tears assuage our woe. Was not Sarah ours, forever, and exclusively? (Dear Sarah, her memory still warm.) We turned against the Institution of Marriage then and there.

Sometime in this period came the Railroad Riots—far removed from Our Park, but a subject of adult comment beating upon our consciousness. We gleaned thrilling items. Because of Civil War pictures in old copies of *Harper's Weekly*, it was a lasting regret that our father showed no traces of Battle, nor ever wore his Sword, not even on Sunday! Bloodthirsty, we drank in all the news, sniffed the air for smell of gunpowder, and hoped for the worst. We were not allowed to hang about the kitchen—it seemed that Mary Haley sympathized with the Strikers! Thereafter, one night, issued shrieks from the children's room. An agitated parent presented himself. The trouble? "There's a Striker under my bed!—there *is*—there *IS*!—I heard him as plain as anything!" But a parent has power over any emergency—even without a sword.

Of the tragedy enacted—the blood and flames, destruction and black hatred born—the children realized nothing. To them it was an exciting story before which Mother Goose paled. To gather further detail a student from the Seminary was approached. He, stalking along the pavement, gravity on his brow, books under arm — he, then, must have answer to all questions. "Mister," said the little girl, "is things serious?" But at this length of time his reply is not recalled.

However, on the general matter of war we were fortunate in acquaintance with the United States Arsenal, miles across two towns but accessible on invitation, there being two little girls who, as daughters of the Colonel, lived in this exalted abode. With such invitation in hand, the pleasant prospect was discussed at the table. We had driven past the entrance before—to be much impressed. "But," said one, "we haven't got the watchword; what'll we say when the Sentry challenges us?" Here was food for thought—chilling thought. Adult counsel was helpful, confidence restored. Then, washed and combed, put into any num-

ber of stiff-starched underthings, frocks slid over sleek heads, advice received, and finally, hearts beating high, we left the door. Arrived—yes, the Sentry! a Soldier every inch of him! Rifle over shoulder, pacing the prescribed round, he wheeled, faced about, saw us, and grinned! The day was saved. “Is this the way to the Colonel’s house?” “Sure thing, can’t miss it.” Another grin—soldier though he was, he showed himself completely human! We turned; left him with regret—after all one can see any number of children in Our Park, but a Sentry is not met with every day.

Of public affairs only the surface was skimmed — obviously. The burning question of the Election was over our heads. Yet, strongly partisan, we knew our role — as father voted so would we! — except, of course, no woman ever could, or would; nor did the future enlighten us. Sternly we demanded of our parent: “Why did God make Democrats?” This, as a theological query, was evaded by word of the Torch-light Procession shortly to be viewed—passing directly in front of *one’s own door*. Bedtime to be postponed; preparations to be made. We bustled; all window shades were run up to the top; all gas burners lighted everywhere—even in the bathroom where of course they would be invisible, even to a Republican. Then we waited—the time was long. Hark! a drumbeat, shrill of the fifes, the real Brass Band—not quite yet, but coming. And here! Over the railroad bridge, up the street, Yankee Doodle Came to Town! We shouted in delight, faces plastered to the windowpanes, breath suspended. Through the dark night tramped the Marchers, each with a magical torch fastened to his cap; flags waved in the night breeze; Yankee-doodle-doodle boomed the Band. Lights twinkled—lessened—dimmed—were gone. It was all over. One of us wept.

The next night belonged to the Democrats’ Parade. The house was darkened, shades down, burners out. Patriotism—if so the word could be understood—was satisfied.

Once again at long intervals the little girls spent the day at the Glass Factory—miles to go to the South Side, by two soaring bridges over two

rushing rivers—millions of people to be seen—conveyed by the Surrey, family equipage, by grace of George and Sam, horse and driver respectively. We sat either on hassocks on the floor, or, legs dangling, on the seat, in any case clutching at paternal support as one hand clung to the sandwich brought for emergency—but with difficulty kept from being consumed instantly. The Factory, an inchoate mass of dingy buildings, tracks, smokestacks, dummy engines, piles of slag—this, outside; but within the Factory itself, it was magnificent — roaring ovens full of sound and fury; hordes of workmen busy and unconcerned; loaded trucks glittering with glassware; empty trucks rolling up for more. One man, an imported worker schooled in Old World courtesy, spoke: "Sir, would the young ladies themselves be wishful to blow some glass?" *Would* we! We stepped nearer these fires-of-hell—watchful. A thing like a pipe of sorts was thrust into the molten glass, twirled, brought forth with a red-hot lump at its tip, and the other end offered to one of the girls. "Now, blow!" we were enjoined. We set our lips as told, urged our lungs—the miracle was granted! Where had been a thing defiant, solid, burning, hurtful, now was emerging something other—before our eyes something was being born! "Keep turning, keep on blowing," we were ordered. But, at that, the man had to take over. The wonder of it—form began to be—glass tried to come. He plunged this hissing mass into a pail of water—a giant bubble shone upon our startled eyes! Drawn forth, detached, placed in our hands—this was a thing of sheer beauty of a creating in which we had a part; like nothing ever seen before; like light itself, wherein a rainbow had been entangled—gleaming, shimmering . . . With difficulty goodbyes were remembered. We stepped lightly, holding our treasures as high as our hearts—treasures eventually to be broken, but—so may hearts.

Sundays saw two of us on the way to Trinity Church. Looking back it seems surprising that so young a Christian should have marched forth as a matter of course, taking the mile in her stride, which was short, owing to abbreviated legs. Indeed, it was necessary to run, occasionally, to match the parent's long-limbed progress, and, now and then, to cling

to that big strong middle finger. The day of skyscrapers not yet having dawned, Trinity Church stood unmolested, in dignity, if not in some grandeur. Space abounded; not yet was the First Presbyterian Church (then on Wood Street) a next-door neighbor. Thus, at one side of Trinity was the solemn graveyard where were laid some of Pittsburgh's Founders—early builders and worshippers—their headstones worn and stained. At the rear, facing one of the transepts, the Sexton's little house had place. A nice, cheerful little house; friendly, when we entered for drinks of water. A pleasant woman in a gingham apron, cat asleep on the rug, fire glowing, kettle singing—all nearer to one's comprehension than were the Thirty-nine Articles. But we would recall what was one's present duty, and return to our pew. Gaze then fastened upon the Chancel, where seemed mystery beyond compass of the understanding—beauty of that white and glowing altar—though what it meant, who knew? Blaze of color from the great windows, storied, and familiar. No Processions of a robed Choir in that day; a Quartette was stationed in a transept, there to sing as devoutly. Friends and neighbors surrounded the pew; other children, unnaturally quiet. The little girl clutched her Prayer Book, though to read it was out of the question. One stood, knelt, or sat as did the others, but when the Rector mounted the pulpit a wide yawn proved that endurance was at an end. So the weary worshipper was laid upon the pew cushion, and sleep was welcomed until dispersed by the final hymn and the necessity for joining therein. Pleasant people, thereafter, to be met in the vestibule, and on the walk, with the father aware of everybody's name, or title—his finger once more clung to, in accession of shyness. Then the long walk home to the mother and the other children and Sunday roast beef with Yorkshire pudding.

The Aunt had invited us to go to Mrs. Morgan's for ice cream—five of us, sisters and cousins. Curled and very clean we skipped up and down at the gate. "Hurry, hurry," we cried, "the car's at the corner of Irwin!" And still there was ample time for the dignified Aunt to gather gloves and handkerchief and lead the way across the Park and up the

mounting path to the railroad bridge while the street car jingle-jangled its deliberate way to full stop. The smallest sister knelt on the seat, for uninterrupted enjoyment of the scenery. We, the elders, argued the merits of strawberry or chocolate. Along Western Avenue, 'round the corner of the Hay Market, downhill on Federal Street, brakes grinding hard. Downhill full on the grade crossing of the Pittsburgh, Fort Wayne and Chicago Railroad—a risk now impossible to believe, so threatening the danger. For, brakes not holding, we might all slide directly onto the engine's cowcatcher! Indeed the hill was a real hill, up or down; always, to help on the upgrade, an extra horse waiting by the curb; in winter, all three horses, sliding and slithering, making poor time. Winter, which brought necessity for bales of straw to be lavishly spread upon car floors; no heating apparatus yet invented, and straw cheap at the price—though thoroughly unsanitary owing to tobacco. But on this special day of ours summer was in, and ice cream to be had. We rattled across the bridge and were at Mrs. Morgan's—the Catering Establishment of the city—in a house at the end of the bridge with a fine view of the river and its never-ending procession of boats. We entered, treading the black and white tiled floor, telling each other it must be Real Marble, like a Palace! Seated at a marble table, then, attended by a smiling Dan or Thomas, Waiters-Extraordinary for all the Parties; ready for strawberry *or* chocolate *or* mixed. And all for fifteen cents the heaping saucer.

Older grown, we were permitted to go farther afield—in Septembers, as far as the Exposition down at the Point. This Institution being an outgrowth of the less sophisticated County Fair was a valuable asset for merchants and manufacturers as a medium for advertising. Twenty-five cents and we were in the midst of it—a welter of grinding or pushing or rolling machines of every description; dry goods exhibits, materials of large variety; samples of pickles, jellies, "butters" smilingly proffered. Popcorn—most of all, Popcorn—who, once munching, could ever forget! There would be another quarter paid to enter the Big Hall, where twice in the day Music could be enjoyed, brought from that Land of

Culture, the East—meaning, of course, Philadelphia and New York. There was usually a Brass Band, offering medley of martial melody; but, notably, came Dr. Walter Damrosch, bringing Wagner to Pittsburgh. Heard dubiously at first, though, even to the girls' untrained ears there was something great in the sound of the Pilgrims' Chorus, in the Song of the Evening Star; and we could afford to wait patiently, not then knowing how far along the road to glory Tristan and Isolde would lead us.

In this division of personal chronology comes mention of the Duquesne Theatre. Curiously enough this far-gone day knew more of the legitimate theatre than the present cinema-ridden era: Pittsburgh had no less than three representatives—the Nixon, the Alvin, and, if the writer is not mistaken, a Bijou. To the loss of Pittsburgh these, excepting the Nixon, are no longer in existence. The Duquesne was a friendly little theatre, intimate, whose comfortable seats were but a step from Penn Avenue, and its Wednesday matinees all popular. No trash, be it noted; here was a part of one's education; here it was to know the theatre as joined to all other expressions of Art. So, breathless with interest, we saw Booth and Barrett, Mansfield, Otis Skinner, Sothorn and Marlowe, the Barrymores, and others. And we lived for part of our lives, as all wise people do, in the world of Romance.

Close to one's consciousness—this time of fifty, sixty, seventy years ago. Alive with emotions not to be disregarded. Memory, joy, regrets—so much on the part of individual and city that should have been accomplished. Here has been place for learning, for loyalty, for realization of the long hold of love—which is love only if it be forever abiding. Hope, at this end—and hope for the aspirations of Pittsburgh. Does "the Countenance Divine shine forth upon our clouded hills?" Have we built "Jerusalem among these dark, Satanic Mills?" William Blake gives a clue: "I will not cease from mental fight, nor shall my sword sleep in my hand." And this direction is for the city, and for the one who knew it long ago.