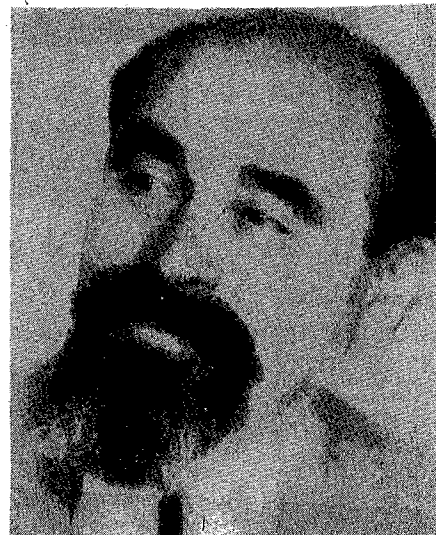


A DOCTOR'S APPRENTICESHIP

(Autobiographical Sketches)

by
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definitely about either God or the Devil, came to ask me what they were. Then he answered Victor: "I like the Devil more because everything he does is fun." Of course, he had distorted my reply.

7.

As Rosefine had—and even today, in her old age, still has—a splendid soprano voice, she sang to Amour from the wealth of songs that she knew and there was one in which a bird broke its wing ("*se cassa l'aile*"), and which had a particularly tragic ending. In spite of the fact that it made him cry bitterly, he begged her to repeat it every day for weeks.

The most difficult thing to explain to this child was the past. When told about the Romans, he remarked: "They existed before I was born, didn't they?" And when I thought I had clarified the matter, he still questioned me: "Then, you were not born in their time?"

He understood Buffalo Bill with his Indians and cowboys and Pawnee Bill with his Far East. But when told about the antipodes, he demurred. He would say: "It smells the antipodes," meaning a cellar. To him both were deep in the soil.

8.

At a given moment, he was the happiest child. We became members of the Single Tax colony, "Free Acres," founded by the then famous lawyer and author, Bolton Hall. We had a bungalow and a tent and we were part and parcel of the woods, the fields stretching out before us, the tall trees, the birds' nests, the insects, the frogs, the lizards, the snakes, the turtles, the mushrooms, the wild flowers. Now the boy was busy from early morning until bedtime. He worked, he studied, he cultivated, he planted, he transplanted. His eyes were full of dreams and contemplation.

Besides living in our world, he lived in another of his own creation. One would be incomplete without the other. His own mythology was as good as the one about which he had heard. And so he had the Nightches and the Yellow-winged

beings, whose "wings were yellow and more beautiful than gold." They, and others whose names I have forgotten, were unceasingly going and undoing things in the woods, making the rain, and the winds and stopping them. But they depended on Amour, who was, as he claimed, "the strongest man in the world." And when a lady neighbor asked him, "Why do you want to be so strong?" he replied. "Whether I want it or not, I cannot help it, I am."

He liked the fable of the oak tree that breaks and the reed that bends, and when asked which of the two was stronger, he said: "The wind."

Both he and his cousin Rions, who often lived with us, wanted me to play with them, and tried to interfere with my commuting to the city. So they invented various schemes to make my presence necessary at the colony, or trickeries to cause me to be late for the train.

Once Amour was sure that I would miss the train. True, I was fooled about the time, the clock had been fixed by them to indicate the wrong hour. But I still thought I could make the train.

It was raining hard, and my raincoat did not prevent me from getting wet. I hung my shoes over my shoulders, and carried my professional bag and ran. Amour and his dog accompanied me. It was almost two miles from where we lived to the station. I asked the boy to go back, to save him from getting wet. He said no; he must see whether I caught the train. Rions remained at home, being neither as curious nor as brave as Amour. But our boy was sorely disappointed when he saw me arrive at precisely the moment the train stopped, and I set foot on the car step just as the engine was about to pull out.

Five days later, when I returned from New York loaded with things I had brought and was about to walk up the hill to our bungalow, or "gunglalow," as the children of the colony called it, I found Amour waiting, who said: "All I want to know is what comes after twenty."

"You could have asked Rosefine, couldn't you?"

"No, I am sure she is wrong. She said thirty, then forty, then fifty, I know it is different."

"Do you mean twenty-one?"

"Oh yes!" And he clapped his hands and ran home ahead of me.

Here are some examples of lies told by our boy to his friends who believed his every word:

There was a plant that no one could touch except Amour. It was poisoned and one died as soon as one came in contact with it. He showed its leaves.

"Benoît has opened a person's head and showed me how the brain worked. Then he cut up the whole body and I saw the skeleton, the blood vessels, the heart, the nerves and the muscles. Then he put them all back and made the body alive again."

"I saw a golden statue that pours out gold when you insert a penny into it.

"My grandma bought me a balloon with which I went up to the moon and the stars and even higher.

"I have a machine with which I can cut liquids. This is the way it works," etc.

"I have made a voyage in Asia and I have seen lots of people there. Of course, they talk Asian. This is how: Carapasilawokrakulimato—palasomartificialpudralica."

And here is a trait which shows how a freely brought up child, who had never been taught politeness, understood things: He was sent to a Mrs. Murray, an elderly colonist, with a package to be handed to her. After she received it, the boy exclaimed: "Thank you!" He was all flushed with excitement and happiness at the idea that she was nice enough to accept the object.

And another instance of how a naturally brought up child reacts when he feels guilty: He broke a beautiful cup which we all liked and he began to cry. He came to his mother and accused himself. No one else blamed him for his involuntary mischief. He was so unhappy that he had to be consoled and kissed. Is there a need for any punishment?

Once he became interested in washing clothes. Of course, his work was messy. But no one interfered with it, because it meant another step toward the development of his character and of his sense of duty.

And at another time he discovered commerce. He loaned a neighbor his little carriage used for hauling small stones, and received ten cents. Since then, he began to try to sell whatever he could: For instance, the tomatoes grown in our garden.

He never felt offended when he was called "little pig." Indeed, that was what he wanted to be. He loved all the animals. Also the plants—and he dissected leaves and petals and rootlets and examined them with the magnifying glass

9.

Finally, he reached his sixth year. At that time, he wanted to learn to play the piano. It so happened that I, in spite of our poverty, had bought, on the installment plan, a good Knabe for Rosefine, and the boy was attracted to it.

For years, I had been impressed by Rosefine's voice. She, however, was not as ambitious as I; on the contrary, she belittled herself. But, when I took her to an honest and capable expert, my opinion was confirmed. Then she did submit to my exhortation and began to study singing, which she continued until the death of her brother in the first World War, as a soldier of the French army, in 1915. That terrible incident blocked her desire to improve her voice, and since then she rarely sang. Her voice had a Galli-Curci quality, and she even appeared in public a few times, quite successfully.

For practicing, she needed a piano, and Amour thought he too could accomplish something with it. I procured a good teacher for him, and later he was a pupil at the Damrosch school. But this was to no avail. He discontinued studying when he himself no longer was interested, and he never went back to it.

10.

Another important event occurred about that time, or when the boy was only five years old. The Ferrer school opened in New York, and I, who had been one of its founders, enrolled him there. Yes, he was the first to be registered and the first child who presented himself there. The person most responsible for its opening, the well-known Socialist-Anarchist writer, Leonard D. Abbott, was at hand to receive us and his first words to the child were: "Isn't it great, Amour?"

Our initial difficulty was that after two or three days the boy decided that he would go to school by himself, not having need of anyone to accompany him. There were several busy avenues to cross, having heavy traffic, and we of course were afraid, so we tried to deceive him by having an adult, his grandmother, follow him at a distance. But as soon as he discovered her presence, he quickly turned back home. From then on, he went alone, and no grown-up could be more careful than he.

While I am on the subject of caution, I may mention the fact that one of the few outdoor near-accidents that occurred to him during his childhood was when, under his mother's guidance, he was crossing Astor Place just as a huge fire engine drawn by four or six enormous horses came along at high speed from Third Avenue. The child, fascinated by the loud clanging, by the shining vehicle, and the wonderful animals, fell in front of them. Had it been a machine, he would have been killed, but the horse over him rose on his forelegs as high as he could, so that a man in the street had a chance within that split second to pick up the boy.

Also, this is the occasion to say that the first time he traveled by himself to our country place at the Free Acres colony, he was seven years old. He had assured us that he could do it, and it was true. He had to walk a great deal until he got to the street car that would take him to the Christopher Street Ferry, to buy his ticket, to cross the Hudson River. Then he had to get the Lackawanna train at

Hoboken, to stop at Berkeley Heights and to trudge or, for all I knew, to run up to the top of the hill. And once he went, instead, through Plainfield, New Jersey, which was even more remote. Happily, we thought, he usually did not have to do this all alone, but he never worried about it.

However, these new and more serious duties did not interfere with his humor and playfulness. For instance, he claimed that the moon belonged to him, that he was born in the lunar town called Tundguirigué. He often talked in a language of his own and when asked what it was, he said, "moonish."

He was so convincing that the children whose hero he always was, believed him implicitly.

He had learned to swim at a very early age and graduated as an extraordinary swimmer, leaving behind his teacher, that is his own father. By the way, I also taught him to ride a bicycle—a real, large one, while I, who had used this vehicle for some time, never became as proficient on it as he.

He told his little comrades that he swam in the ocean up to the horizon, where the water met the heavens and then continued swimming into the sky—only that was flying—and so he landed upon the moon.

He invented some animals. One of them was "gui—gui," with which he played a great deal, but which he was unable to sell to his friends, that is, they never believed in its existence.

He demonstrated to them—and to us—his handling of snakes. It was a fact that he was skillful in catching "garter" snakes and other harmless reptiles and carrying them by letting them slide from one of his hands and forearms to the other, so that they could not escape while he was running. To the children he said he was magic.

Once or twice he was slightly bitten, but he did not mind it.

In the early hours of an evening, he spied the shining planet Jupiter, and a crowd of boys and girls gathered around him. He lectured to them about this celestial object,

spoke about its moons and, when asked seriously whether he had been there, he said no, but he expected to visit it some time in the future. At that moment, the sympathetic secretary of the colony, Miss Hicks, appeared and asked: "Amour, what is that resplendent star?"—"A star? No, it is a planet! And since both of you have never met, let me introduce you to one another: Mister Jupiter, Miss Hicks."

She herself told us this story, and she repeated it to many in the years to come.

That was also the period when he invented various games. One of them was the opposite of racing for speed: "Let us see who could move slowest."

In his conversation with his group in those days, I overheard the question: "What's a hero?" and his answer: "A hero is one who dares." And he immediately illustrated it: There were two parties and he acted out both of them: "We are against the king!" "We are for the king!"—"But we are ten billion and you are only one billion!"

11.

We took him to the New Theatre, now long defunct, and he saw and heard Maeterlinck's play, "The Blue Bird."

The next time he met his friends, he acted out for them, "The Blue Bird." He did this too when he saw "Peter Pan" or Kitty Cheatham.

I used to visit Elizabeth Ferm's "school," located far downtown in New York. This splendid lady believed in full freedom for the children. She had, for the purpose of creating this school rented a store on an East Side street and transformed it into a school or kindergarten. (She would have objected to both these words.) The place was most interesting. But when I took Amour there, he did not like it and never returned.

Later, both the Fermes, the husband (Alexis) and wife, worked as teachers at the Ferrer School when it was located at Stelton, New Jersey, and they continued their jobs to the end of their lives. At least concerning her, I know that she died at the school at about the age of eighty-five. She left

behind a magnificent little book, *Freedom in Education*, a classic among its kind.

But Amour did not follow the Ferrer school when it moved out of town. In fact, he was its pupil for a few months only. He left it while Will Durant, who acquired fame later as an author, was still the teacher. Will used to compliment me regarding my way of rearing the child.

Amour hated the methods employed there, or at least they evoked no interest in him: "They only fight. Nothing else happens. I don't want to go there."

And he stopped attending the school, which brought back to me the problem of what course to follow concerning the boy's education.

He was critical of all the schools. About his Ethical Culture class, he said that its windows were open no more than a fraction of an inch, and illustrating this, he showed us the slit of a screw. At Ferrer, he objected to everything: the teacher, the teaching, the students.

But while I was still wondering what to do next, he was happy: he had brought back from the country a dog, a beagle, which he called, "*Croque-Callotte*" which is a sort of anti-clerical name, and when the animal was lost, he replaced it with a cat, also from the colony, "Winky Woolup."

12.

He and his young companions were forever interested in animals: one dog used to come to our camp, that is to Amour, as a guest for years—not for food either; it was a most platonic friendship. He was not hungry and the only things he accepted were walnuts, apparently because of the fun he had breaking them open and swallowing the contents, at which he was most efficient.

But once he came with at least one-third of his pelt ripped off, fur and all. This looked as if it had been the result of a fierce fight or a complicated accident that had happened when he walked through some cruel thorn-bushes or prickly bramble shrubs. A neighbor, who saw him, had his gun ready and said: "Let me free him from his misery."

The boy and I had just come from the woods where we, along with some neighbors, had been fighting a nasty fire. We had subdued it, and we were tired and dirty. Amour jumped on the fellow and clung to his weapon, and I said: "Please, leave the dog to me. There is still some hope."

Indeed, I took a bath, changed my clothes and then approached the animal. He permitted me to get rid of the muddy, necrotic skin that had been loosened by the fight or accident and was hanging from his body. He allowed me to wash some parts with an antiseptic solution and to cover the rest with a salve. He only barked a little from time to time, which made me fear that he might bite me. However, nothing happened to me.

I treated the dog once every few days. During all this time, he refused food. Amour and his friends made a nice bed for my patient and they danced around him. The first sign of improvement was the fact that he ate a meal. Within two weeks from that day or so, he disappeared, much improved.

Another dog, a very old one, called "grandpa" by the children, had been lost—as I learned later, he had fallen from an automobile on the road—and he too came to our camp. He could hardly walk, and he stopped where he saw the group of youngsters having a good time. They, of course, entertained him during the days when I searched for his owners, using the clue on the metal disc attached to his collar. It took several weeks until his masters came for him from some New Jersey town. They succeeded in removing him, but he was not very ready to go home, having fallen in love with our place.

Amour had domesticated a turtle, Jenny, who came regularly, twice daily, punctually, at the exact hour, for her meal.

We permitted a wasp colony to work on their rich and huge, multiple nest one whole summer, until it was suspended from the ceiling of our porch down the door, almost reaching my knees at the beginning of the fall. At the Museum of Natural History, where I went with Amour to deliver this

during the winter, they informed us that it was the largest nest of this kind they had ever seen in this area. Perhaps they still have it among their specimens in the insect department.

During its development, we were extremely careful concerning our entrance and exit through the door. But the wasps had grown so accustomed to us that during the entire period, none of us was stung, although we passed at only about a foot away from these little workers.

A Mr. Tucker, a lawyer at that time well-known as a radical, who was our immediate neighbor, had purchased an expensive "pedigreed" puppy, but the poor creature was always tied to a tree, which often meant from early morning to late evening. This, Amour could not bear, so he liberated the dog and played with him. As a token of gratitude, this four-legged friend brought him from the neighbor's bungalow all sorts of gifts: A shoe, a brush, a comb, a towel, a photo, and deposited them ostentatiously and graciously at his feet, begging for a caress simultaneously. In the evening, the dog was led back to his master's, and was chained once again.

This same neighbor had also hired an Italian laborer to cultivate his garden. However, he had no knowledge of the customs of Italians. And when friends of this workman came to visit him, there was a great deal of gesticulation and loud talk. They were often so volatile that Tucker would come rushing through the woods, and call out to me: "Dr. Liber, come quickly, they are killing each other!" But I retorted quietly: "Nothing is happening. They are only saying hello to each other," which was true.

The whippoorwill, that mysterious and invisible bird that scampers somewhere in the field at dusk or later and emits its soft, lugubrious cry at rhythmic intervals, intrigued Amour so much that he lay in wait for it several days until he performed the miracle of catching one. He only examined it under a light and then let it go free.

On that same night, he protested vehemently against this bird's name being spelled with a double *p* and double *l*, when a single one of each of these letters would have been

satisfactory. In the same way, he rebelled against the silent *e* that ended many French words.

In spite of his exactness in such matters, his wonderful imagination never was defeated or dried up. When Rosefine asked him how the knights could have got the large Round Table into the hall, he did not hesitate to answer: "It entered by itself."

One morning, he awakened, radiant, announcing: "At last, I have seen the Brownies!"

13.

I began to publish my health journal at that time, and he wanted to see where it was printed, so I showed him the rather spacious shop, filled with composing machines and presses, located in the down-town section of New York. It was difficult to persuade him to leave these fascinating machines and go home, and later he spoke to his mother about the noisy monsters he had seen.

Being over-stimulated, he quarreled with Rosefine and hit her. It was indeed a bad evening for him. He did not care to eat or to kiss anyone. He fell asleep in his clothes.

He often lifted his hand against us, more often against his mother, though neither of us had ever even threatened him concerning anything.

The next day, she asked him to promise that in the future he would not strike her. But he demurred: "I don't know about anything later." Then she asked him whether he would like to hurl himself into a big flame, for no reason at all, and he said no. And so, little by little it began to dawn upon him what it meant to make a promise. And then he began to "promise" cautiously, saying he "intended" not to strike anyone any more.

While visiting the Montross Gallery where ancient Chinese vases and pictures were exhibited, the boy, accompanied by his mother and myself, made the acquaintance of the famous painter and thinker Robert Henri, who also happened to be there. I had known him a long time and he said: "This

is the best school for your boy. I am glad you take him to see these things."

The child was pleased not to have to wear his babyish blouse any more. He was wearing, for the first time, a gray corduroy suit, but in order to be large enough for him, the size had to be a "seven-year-old" one, though he was probably then only five.

The following day, he modeled vases similar to those he had seen at the exhibition.

Leonard Abbott, then the editor of *Current Literature*, and Bruce Calvert, the editor of *The Open Road*, were visiting the Ferrer School, at the same time when Rosefine too happened to arrive there. Both had spoken to Amour, and had liked him very much. Calvert said: "Oh, Mrs. Liber, I am happy to know you. Your boy is great. He knows so many things, and in such a natural way. He is the real child."

That Amour was also beloved by the school leaders I knew from conversations with them. But I find now a long and beautiful letter to me by Lola Ridge, the well-known and great poet and at that time organizer of the Modern or Ferrer School, then still located in New York at 104 East 12th Street, confirming the fact that our child was a sort of mainstay there.

And Will Durant, the principal teacher, when he heard of the boy's decision to leave, wrote me (April 9, 1912) with a view that I might induce him to change his mind. He finished by saying: "Tell Amour that I miss him very much." In another letter, after he saw that the boy will not return, Durant wrote: "Of course, Amour is a thousand times better off with you than he would be with us. He enjoys such advantages as the wealthiest boy in the country cannot have. By the way, I heard it said that you often treat poor people without remuneration. That's inspiring; I take my hat off to you as a better man than I am."

He also wrote: "I had looked upon you all along as a man whose experience and studies in the matter of education made it inevitable that you should see hundreds of mis-

takes in my methods which could hardly appear at all to others."

While I am mentioning Durant, who in those days was still in his pre-fame stage, that is before his big book on philosophy appeared, I wish to note the following little detail: He, Emma Goldman, the Anarchist leader, my wife and myself were walking slowly down-town from Carnegie Hall after having listened from the highest balcony to an exquisite interpretation of Beethoven's fifth Symphony, I asked him if he whose ancestors were French, knew what the word "durant" meant. He said No. So I told him: lasting or durable. He laughed and said, Nothing is lasting, everything is temporary or changing. And I illustrated his words by quoting the little French ditty: *tout lasse, tout casse, tout passe*, which I also had to translate: everything tires, breaks, passes on.

Then he replied that his forefathers must have been fools—he evidently did not know that Durant was one of the most common French names—and he pointed to a nut and candy store on Broadway, with the sign "chuck-full-o'nuts" and made a wide gesture: "This is for all of us, for all humanity, the world is chuck full o'nuts."

Suddenly, without warning, Amour changed his viewpoint about his supernatural beliefs. He had enjoyed explaining all transformations by something imaginary. But one day, after some simple experiments, he said: "A chemical matter is one that changes things without magic." But this did not interfere with his use of imagination and exaggeration whenever he wanted to convey the idea of "much": "Twenty billions, many trillions, millions of sackakillions."

He also became courteous, perhaps through necessity, in his relations with people, since no one had demanded such behavior of him or had taught it to him. He said: "Please," "Thank you" (at the proper time), "Excuse me."

Perhaps this was in imitation of one of his Ferrer School teachers, Mrs. Coryell, whom he liked. Indeed, he once said he would like to marry her. She was only fifty five years old!

He admired her particularly since he had told her how some children near the colony had killed a bull frog and he described to her its agony. She cried along with Amour.

He was so busy loving many things and people, he thought there could be no more objects to claim his affection. But new ones kept intruding into his life. I had subscribed for him to the French progressive children's magazines, "*Les Petits Bonshommes*," which, among an unbelievably rich assortment of material, published lists of the names of youngsters living in all corners of France, to whom Amour sent illustrated cards and from whom he received replies on foreign picture postcards.

These activities did not interfere with his seeing and hearing the opera, "Hansel and Gretel" and to watch the movie, "Sahara Caravan" accompanied by Elmendorf's "travelogue."

He was also interested in actual events. He had heard about the revolution in China, the rumblings of which were already quite audible, and he asked: "Who is winning? The king or the people?"

14.

It seems that once, during my absence from the colony, he went to pick some watercress and he fell into the marsh, from where two boys pulled him out with great difficulty. He apparently had been in real danger of drowning.

He also went outside his own territory, and met a boy who attacked him. He was all scratched up when he came home, but he exclaimed gleefully: "At last I had a fight!"

He must have been in a fighting mood, for at a peaceful house "party" he had a terrible encounter with a cousin of his, then with his aunt, then with me, as I had to restrain him. He was unusually violent.

On the other hand, he refused to wear the kid gloves which he himself had chosen: "I have changed my mind, I know that for us to have the skin, the kids must be killed and I object to that."

And seeing me read the newspapers, he reflected, "How

can they print the sports today at the same time with the news of a big shipwreck which killed hundreds of people?"

Whenever he felt in a sad mood he went behind the house and plunged into his beloved woods, which we too enjoyed much.

The woods were middle-aged. There was but little virgin material. Some ancient giants and venerable grandfathers grew at some distance from one another. But the bulk of the forest consisted of birches, beeches, oaks, maples and locusts between fifty and a hundred years old. Perhaps the oldest among these were the wild chestnuts, but they were being destroyed by an epidemic disease, so that the railroad company bought them, felled them and transformed them into ties. There was much underbrush on the edges and in the few clearings. Only here and there were patches of sunshine visible. As a whole, a green darkness pervaded the area and mysterious motions and soft rustling sounds were everywhere. The woods were like one huge interesting body filled with its own life, which one could never tire listening to, and admiring.

Animal and plant life talked or whispered to us continually. It was rewarding simply to sit down on a rock quietly. Then a story, an endless tale, old as the world, would come, would descend from the trees, from the scanty glimpses of sky that were visible between the tall crowns and thick tree-trunks, and would envelop us—and no matter how many duties were awaiting you, you would sit and sit, unable to go away.

If you walked in one special direction, Southwest, you encountered a never-drying cool brook, where the water would skip over smooth, round boulders, singing a subdued song. Bathing there was refreshing and there was even some small space for swimming. I had tied some colored ribbons around the barks of some of the trees, so that we could find our way to the brook. And we would call out to one another by chanting: "*Tout va bien, on voit les rubans.*" (Everything is all right, we see the ribbons.) We often spent an entire summer afternoon in or around that little body of

water and every time we went there we all learned some new aspect of nature. This delightful place was so secluded and so unknown to the other members of the colony that we could monopolize it without their knowledge.

15.

While experimenting with schools for *Amour*, I revived: Not only did I begin publishing my magazine, in 1910, but I also took a course in sketching, drawing and painting, first at the Robert Henri school and later at the Art Students' League, where Henri was also teaching. Something in me was struggling to free my feeling for art and my old and deep desire to be an artist. Often I had to abandon this in order to give all my spare time to *Amour* and all along I was certain that some time in the future my art would vanquish my medical career. As to the boy's need of my teaching, I knew this could not be eternal, because he would grow up and out of my hands. But this reasoning turned out to be false.

True, I went back to the art classes again and again during the course of the next ten years or so, each time briefly. My obligations grew deeper and deeper. I had started too many things, I wanted to be involved in too many projects, I piled duties upon duties. So there came a day when I had to relinquish art forever, because I could not abandon medicine.

Meanwhile, I had met some of the best American painters and sculptors at the threshold of this century, among whom were: Jo Davidson, who was interested in my discussion of line and surface; Hondius, still a beginner then and forever in need of a job; Kuniyoshi, who sketched me while I sketched him; Baylinson, who could not free himself from his wonderfully painted voluptuous female flesh and who always ridiculed my ideas that art should be popularized; John Sloan, who was very radical but avoided revealing these feelings in public; Stuart Davis, who already, while observing the model attentively, was drawing something entirely different on his paper. By the way, he was the only student who

wore a derby and he never removed it while working; Lena Gurr, the indefatigable painter, who went from one extreme to the other in her art, then still a public school teacher in the day time and an artist at night; Dove, the "collage" man, Dabo, the artist of the Hudson river mists.

The wonderful painter of children of the New York poorest section, dancing in the crowded streets, Jerome Myers, whom I met everywhere, stepping slowly like a nightwalker, was always in a trance and saw only art subjects.

Walkowitz, whose sketches of Isadora Duncan in hundreds of her dancing positions, are marvelous, I did not meet in any school, but in social life.

Wanda Gag, the great illustrator of children's books and the author of "Millions of Cats," came my way as a patient. She was as flimsy physically as she was vigorous in her art. I once praised her for her originality and in a reply she wrote: "You, who have had so much experience in being yourself, surely find it much more fun to be so, I am sure." (1930). After reading my "As A Doctor Sees It" with its pencil sketches, she wrote: "I think your little drawings enhance the pages of your book and I was interested in the frank way you caught the characteristics of various types. One can visualize them sitting around in a doctor's room. I can also see that you have a real sympathy and understanding, not only for people in general, but also for artists, musicians, and so on."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

FREE ACRES

Twice during our life we lived for a number of years in the country: at Free Acres for fifteen years and at *Entre Nous* for seventeen years. Of course, mostly in the spring, summer and autumn months. One place was at Berkeley Heights, N. J., the other at Jefferson Valley, N. Y. The latter was near Osceola Lake, where we also owned a small patch of land—but sufficiently large to allow us access from the road to the water.

Free Acres was a single tax colony, where all we could rent was one acre, but on which we had full freedom to do as we liked. At present this settlement seems to be inhabited by prosperous persons of a social color which, at least at first glance, seems to be quite different from what it was in 1910 and during the few following years. There was a warmth permeating the place during our time, a feeling of friendship, and a good humor that cemented the entire membership, from the oldest grandpa to the youngest baby. The majority were intellectuals or artists or people interested in books and in art. They all loved nature and humanity and were radically inclined. With one or two exceptions we were all poor and not interested in making money. We were all happy to leave the city behind and to come here to build and grow things, each in his own way, usually unlike how it was done in any other community. No one ever appeared ridiculous to his neighbors, although outsiders, whenever they visited the colony, found much at which to poke fun.

We were among the nature cranks, those people who would choose to forego comfort and to live in an unpleasant manner—in other people's terms—for the sake of being part of

the natural world; we were those who would make the greatest efforts to be close to the soil.

Our regular business meetings were never boring, our dances and plays and parties were always lovely. Relationships were wonderful experiences.

We were all moral in our own way and tolerant of everyone else's behavior, save in the case of one male neighbor, who had invited several girls to his bungalow and apparently lived with all of them. No one liked his conduct, but almost no one criticized him either, or the girls, the exception being one member of German origin who evidently was the strictest but not the most popular person in our ranks.

As a whole, the woods and the sky and the colonists were like one. The people living there enjoyed every minute of the day. Very few were actually single-taxers and no new member became converted to the theory. Indeed, I was one of the pioneers and, although versed in Henry George's splendid work, remained outside his movement. What attracted me principally was their rule that no one should own land because no one can make it.

The colony has undoubtedly contributed some fine minds to the world.

Among the many wonderful people with whom we became friends there was one whom we cherished most, although he was the least prominent in the affairs of the colony—Thorne Smith, who was soon to become famous throughout the entire country as a humorous writer. He hardly ever attended our community business meetings, or came to our public dances and plays or literary evenings.

We became so well acquainted with him because he had moved into neighbor Tucker's place, which was only a stone's throw from ours.

There he lived with his wife and two small children—an exceedingly pleasant family—and we could hear their boisterous talk, their quarrels, their admonishments to the little ones and the noisy crying and laughing of the children.

Ordinarily Thorne—shorter than medium height, young,

blond and good natured—was a quiet and yes, the most serious person in the world in spite of his impish trend to make his readers laugh so much. But in those days he had not yet published anything or at least nothing worthwhile. He was employed as a copy writer for an advertising firm, and sometimes he walked near our field, apparently aimlessly but in reality in search of the proper word or expression for a story. Indeed, that was the way we first met.

He stopped me: "Dr. Liber, I am sure, you know everything. I have to write an advertisement about some plants and I haven't the faintest idea." To which I answered, of course, that I was far from being the wise man he imagined, but that I could inform him concerning that particular subject. We shook hands warmly.

However, the next time he visited our bungalow to make use of my "encyclopedic knowledge," as he explained, he was intoxicated. So much so that he had difficulty walking. He was carrying a full bottle of something which he offered me. I accepted it, of course, but carried it back to his porch a few hours later when they were all asleep. I knew that this gift amounted to a sacrifice because, under prohibition, he had to go to some trouble and great expense to get the stuff. I soon learned to diagnose the stage of this neighbor's inebriety from the loudness of the family reaction to it, which, from a distance, sounded more agreeable than it appeared to the eye.

One day he brought me a manuscript as he thought I might help him find a publisher. This was just when I was seeking one myself. I read only a few pages of his typed material and I was able to announce to him that any great publisher would take it.

It contained but few ideas, but provoked laughter immediately. He himself, when one succeeded in conversing with him for an hour, was a profound thinker and a severe critic of bourgeois society.

He died young, probably not reaching the age of forty, in his case surely killed by the demon Alcohol, as was also, apparently, another genius, Jack London, a few years earlier,

whom I had met also when he was in the period of ascension in his career.

To Thorne I prophesied his early death—that is, if he continued to drink heavily—during one of our talks, in as subtle a way as I could. He smiled and said he would welcome the end, and started a long tirade on the futility of life. But when I looked at him carefully, he seemed to be, as the Frenchmen say, *pas tout seul*. And he was surely right: *in vino veritas*.

Although I never envied Thorne his huge success, albeit post-mortem, or his writing ability, I would have liked to have the pleasure of making millions of individuals laugh in this "valley of tears."

Not only did he have several volumes printed containing both ticklish nonsense and material satirizing people's lives, but his publishers, after his death, hired ghost-writers to continue to fill books with imitative material in order to extend their commercial profits.

Once a fellow colonist gave me, as a present, a large, solid tent platform that was in perfect condition. It was situated two or three hundred feet from our bungalow so I had to move it to our place.

I had no help. It was one of the warmest days in the month of August. I made some good, cylindrical rollers which would have worked excellently on level or smooth ground. But there were innumerable depressions and elevations and many roots and stumps of trees and rocks jutting out of the surface. The platform, with some half side walls and frames of a door and of windows, was about 14 by 16 feet, if I remember rightly, which means that it was quite heavy.

I sweated a great deal, I drank lots of water. I tired quickly, but I was ambitious and concluded the job in one day. This was, of course, the first time in my life that I had done such hard physical work.

The next day I, who since my youth, perhaps since I was about twenty, had never been ill, became very sick. For a whole week I had an almost constant, non-typical, temperature of 106°5F, which would be between 41 and 42°C and

I suffered from distressing chills. Brought to New York, none of my physicians could diagnose my case. Neither my blood nor any other specimen was affected in any way. All examinations proved to be negative. I got well, as far as I know, because I fasted completely, with the exception of drinking water, during the entire period of that sickness.

I knew the diagnosis, but none of my colleagues accepted it. I had been aware for a long time that fatigue as such, especially extreme fatigue, could have such effects, although in my case long exposure to sunshine, insolation or sun-stroke, may have contributed to my trouble.

During this extreme fever I was not wholly unhappy. For instance, I revived within myself my childhood imaginary ability to fly up into space, by just starting to jump and refusing to fall back to the ground. Or I lived through various scenes of operas, like Lohengrin. I, who am unable to carry a tune but who remember all kinds of passages from instrumental music and voice, sang "*Nie sollst du mich befragen, noch Wissen's Sorge tragen, wer ich bin.*" This was curiously mingled with the hymn of the International.

So far, I have never been acutely ill since that time.

Let me add that during all our fifteen years at Free Acres I was the health officer of the colony, a job that I hated despite the fact that it was an honorary one, that is without salary. I had to inspect each holding, its toilets, its garbage disposal, its general cleanliness and enforce the rules set by myself, which meant that I was a nuisance to the people. In exercising my functions, I tried to be as tactful as possible.