

% Dorothy Day

1924

Summary: (DDLW #874).

CHAPTER V.

Thanks to the fact that one had to pay only ten dollars matriculation fee and twelve dollars a semester, June was able to spend the next two years at the state university.

One of the boys she went with there told her one time after he had read some of the short stories she had written for her English class, "what you need is perspective, my dear." And when June looked back on those two years in after life, it was always with what she thought of as perspective.

Of her studies, she remembered very little. She flunked in a course in biology because she skipped most of the classes and when her examination papers were set in front of her, the only thing she could remember was the definition of the word "sport."

She took a bird course because it consisted of two trips a week through the fields and woods about the little town and because a boy she liked was taking it with her.

The thing which impressed her most in the course in American literature was the professor's futile attempts to implant in the minds of his students the love for the poetic phrase. She could still hear that class of sixty, yelling in every pitch:

"THE DESERT AND THE ILLIMITABLE AIR."

"Do you get the beauty and swing of that? Say it again!"

"THE DESERT AND THE ILLIMITABLE AIR."

The most valuable bit of information she received in rhetoric 3a was the fact that if you pressed the length of your forefinger to your upper lip every time a sneeze threatened, the spasm would be averted.

June often had the occasion to do this in after years, and since it was always efficacious she sometimes wondered why people who were plagued with hay fever had never heard of it.

The Latin professor was always quoting a line which he said came from one of Dickens' novels. June didn't know which one for she hadn't read them all. "When found, make a note of it!" Fifteen or twenty times a day, this remark would be the signal for notebooks and pencils. She liked the Latin class because her seat was next to the window which looked out over the south campus to the forest where the pines were blue black. Every now and then a meadow-lark threw her into a trance out of which it was hard to awaken.

What stood out most clearly in her university life were the jobs she held in order to earn board and room and pocket-money.

At the home of one professor where June washed dishes for her lunch and supper, it was necessary to say grace before eating. The three children said it, the old grandmother said it, the professor said it, his wife said it, and June had to say it too. Its simplicity made it very hard to say.

"Be present at our table, Lord.

Be here and every where, Adored.

Bless Thou this food and grant that we

May feast in Paradise with Thee."

There was the job of the four babies, all under five years of age, and when one of them went to sleep, another would awaken it by crying. (Their sex was hard to determine.) And when June went into another room looking for a dry diaper for this one, still another would take the opportunity to fall off the couch. At one time, all of them were howling together and then June had to gather them up in her arms which were long enough to go around, fortunately, and finding an upholstered rocking-chair big enough to swallow them all, sang them to sleep. It was smothering work.

Occasionally she had to scrub floors and beat rugs, and once she had to wash baby clothes and all the skin peeled off her knuckles. She swore over such work, but having accepted the job she could not turn it down when she found out what it was.

Working for the Y.W.C.A. was difficult. For a while June set the tables and changed the linen for one hundred and fifty students and in return received her board. For several months she washed dishes after the one hundred and fifty (with two girls to help her dry them) and realized how simple a thing it was to wash dishes for a family of six.

After that she moved her belongings into the home of a bootlegger to assist his wife in the care of the children and in return received board and room. June didn't know she was working for a bootlegger and probably wouldn't have minded. What forced her to leave was the evident amorous intention of her employer.

Then there was Mrs. Wittle who was expecting her second baby in July. She was "three months gone" as she explained to June. And every afternoon at four when June came in from her last class, Mrs. Wittle gave her some flannels or diapers to hem and told her how it felt to be a prospective mother.

"It's so long since I had Edwin," she told the girl, "that I've forgotten all about it and I'm absolutely terrified. And haven't you always heard it was dangerous to have a baby at my age? I'm thirty-eight, you know."

"Mother was forty when she had her last baby," June comforted her, "and it didn't bother her a bit. She told me it was nothing at all and women made entirely too much fuss about such things."

"Some women have an easier time than others," Mrs. Wittle said gloomily.

June found her in tears one afternoon over a book of Upton Sinclair's. "Just listen to *this*, June," she almost wailed, and between the snuffles read an elaborately detailed scene of the birth of a child.

"Now isn't that horrible? I had forgotten it was as bad as all that. Oh, oh, oh!"

"I think it's disgusting—I mean for a man to write stuff like that. It would be different if it were a woman. I suppose he hung over his wife's bed while she was having a baby, carefully observing in order to make copy of it."

"He might have gone to a hospital," Mrs. Wittle suggested, in the writer's defense.

"But they don't let young authors in the maternity wards of hospitals to watch

the birth of children.”

“It is a rather disgusting idea, isn’t it,” Mrs. Wittle agreed, “a man watching his wife with scientific interest while she was in such agony. It’s humiliating enough to have to lie still and holler while you’re performing such an important piece of work.”

“It does take away some of the dignity of motherhood, I should think. When a woman has to lie still and protest at the top of her voice, it makes her seem such a passive instrument instead of an active one—a child-bearer.”

“I’ve been thinking of it all afternoon,” and Mrs. Wittle almost began to weep again, “and I think it’s outrageous that women should have to suffer so. Here they’ve been bringing children into the world for thousands of years, and they’re doing it in the same prehistoric way—a little chloroform maybe, but a lot of good that does! If it was men who had to bear children, you can bet doctors and scientists would find an easier way of doing it.”

“Yes, and they glorify it and put a halo around motherhood, I suppose, so that we’ll keep on doing it,” June put in, becoming ardently feminist. “It would be much better if it could be regulated. First the woman should have a baby, then the man. The discomfort would be more evenly divided that way.”

That night at supper the subject was rehashed, somewhat to June’s embarrassment, for Mrs. Wittle insisted on reading aloud the most gruesome bits of the story and commenting on them, every minute remembering more of her early agony. The cause of it sat very still in his chair, lest attention be called to him and he be sent out of the room. It was the custom of the Wittles to speak freely before Edwin, Mr. Wittle being something of a modern educationist, but occasionally in the midst of a most interesting discussion, Edwin found himself suddenly on an errand.

The next afternoon Mrs. Wittle remembered that in her distress she had forgotten to tell June about the rape which had occurred earlier in the book, and unable to convey all the excitement, turned to reading it aloud.

“For my part,” Mrs. Wittle said as she put the book down, “I don’t see why it didn’t happen long before. It seems to me the physical side of marriage is the most important one and how these two people lived together so long!—why it’s contrary to human nature.”

“My instructor said that the American race were as a rule so reticent about sex that they laid too much stress on the frankness of French literature. That applies not only to the people who read, but to the people who write. When they are frank, they go to such extremes,” June said.

Not yet having read enough of Dr. Wittle’s library (he was professor of psychology) June could not give expression to her ideas as to suppressions. But Mrs. Wittle was not interested in generalities. She preferred debating whether or not rape was possible; cited cases in the newspapers, the opinions of her friends; told of things that had happened in her town when she was a girl; things that she had heard had happened in other towns.

She hated to have June leave her to prepare supper.

For a month breakfasts were embarrassing meals to June. At that time investigations were being made in the city into the activities of midwives and every

morning the most lurid of the newspapers was delivered at the Wittle door. After the editorial page had been torn out for Dr. Wittle, the rest of the paper was Mrs. Wittle's in which to scavenge for news of salacious interest. The most interesting bits were read aloud and were greeted with non-committal grunts by Dr. Wittle who had his sheets propped up before him. "What different ways are there for performing abortions? Have you ever heard, June? I must ask Mrs. Bigley when she comes over this afternoon." "Oh, here's a sad case. Young girl, eighteen, consulted Dr. S.—and told him that—" It wasn't only from Mrs. Wittle that June was beginning to learn of sexual problems. Dr. Wittle's library was an extensive one and contained not only some valuable works on psychology and education which June availed herself of, but also books on sexual pathology by Havelock Ellis, Forel, Krafft-Ebing, Brill and Freud. For the most part, she was repelled by what she read. She preferred her early glamorous idea of life and blotted out of her mind, as much as she could, the glimpse into the abnormal which her reading had given her. Even though June didn't remember what she learned in classes, she would always remember the instructors. There was one group especially which afforded her a great deal of delight. And once she and her room-mate were invited to tea by Mr. Lord, their instructor in rhetoric that semester. He was a very blonde, enthusiastic young man who tried to hide his enthusiasm by a drawl, rendered more effective by a Harvard accent (he had graduated from a western college). In the heat of discussion he almost lost his drawl and recovered it with a gasp, and as this was often, his discourses were punctuated with abrupt intakings of breath. He was one of a little group of English instructors who professed themselves modern and unfettered. It was rumored about the campus that indeed some of them were living together, perhaps Miss Hubbard and Mr. Lord, or maybe Miss Hubbard and Mr. Fenton. Nobody knew. Although there were other women in the group, everybody suspected Miss Hubbard because she read Oscar Wilde's poetry aloud to her classes. An ephemeral flavor of sex hovered around her, and young men were drawn to her classes and held there. What clinched the matter was the report that she had read those verses of Swinburne in which the lines occur
 *"Curled snakes that are fed from my breast"
*Bit hard lest remembrance come after
 And press with new lips where you pressed."*
 It was decided then once and for all that she was living with some one—not exactly immoral, but unmoral, it is true. Lots of literary people were like that and it was understood she was writing a book. So her angularity of form and feature was endowed with a decadent grace in the eyes of her students and the gasping blondness of Mr. Lord and the stentorian triteness of Mr. Fenton were disregarded in the awe they aroused as possible inspirers of passion. There were a few other young men and women in the same group—all instructors and all taking postgraduate courses, but these three stood out by their enthusiasm for things literary.

It was rumored about the campus that at a picnic given by this group, some students came upon them engaged in theatricals. Mr. Lord was said to have been clothed only in his B.V.D.'s and a tiger skin (Miss Hubbard had one on her library floor) and was declaiming George Bernard Shaw while his blond shock of hair waved over his face. This report served only to turn the students of English to Shaw.

Mr. Fenton had an apartment in one of the large new apartment houses which had been built overlooking the campus and in which the more wealthy students had furnished flats.

When the girls arrived, the tea-party was in full progress. Mr. Lord and Miss Hubbard were sitting side by side on a couch and leading the conversation.

"But how can one really *know* without a trial marriage?" Miss Hubbard was saying languidly, while her bright sharp eyes sparkled around the group. And perhaps there was no answer because of the general rustle, attendant on the arrival of June and her roommate Regina. Then when Miss Hubbard assured June that there was plenty of room on the couch and Mr. Fenton had placed another chair for Regina, Mr. Lord brought back the conversation to where it was when the girls entered.

"How can one really know," repeated Miss Hubbard, full of the italics of earnestness.

"Know what?" Regina startled them all by asking.

But such a question could never be answered directly and Miss Hubbard went on, "The only true mating is a complete harmony of the spiritual, mental and physical—and preferably in that order, my dear."

"But surely that's the usual order. We usually get acquainted with a man before we marry him," Regina put in matter-of-factly.

"Not at all," boomed Mr. Fenton. "Too many young things are attracted by mere physical passion." A slight stir passed over the room. "They know little or nothing of their mate's intellectual or spiritual life and care even less. In fact," he went on in his best class-room manner, "it is by the sublimation of passion, or rather, the directing of it into higher channels that we arrive at the basis of an understanding."

The ladies nodded in agreement. Somehow it was more fitting for a man to speak of passion than a woman.

"But how long should a trial marriage last before one can really know?" spoke up Miss Smythe, English 2b, sitting on the edge of her chair and twitching with interest.

This question, couched in her own italics, was a little too direct for Miss Hubbard, who went on, "I don't know that I wouldn't advise a rather full experience for women before marriage. How else can we get into direct contact with the intricate nature of man?"

Another little stir, this time masculine. Mr. Lord "hawed" rather loudly, settling himself more firmly between June and Miss Hubbard, and as the "haw" was understood to be the preface to a speech, every one kept silent.

"And when you speak of full experience, I presume you are thinking of a single standard for men and women—"

"Yes, yes! That women should be allowed the freedom from condemnation that man enjoys, since in having freedom, it is generally understood that they will exercise it with the moderation natural to their sensibilities."

"But isn't that presupposing"—June unconsciously fell into the didactic tone of the others. "But isn't that presupposing that the mental and spiritual can only be reached through the physical?"

"Or do you mean Platonic trial marriages?" Regina contributed.

"You have to take into consideration the nature of the man and woman involved," Miss Hubbard said gently, as from a height.

"Then too," Miss Smythe reminded them, "one must remember the emotional wave line of women which stands in contradistinction to the steady even flow of that of man. After all, one cannot ignore the physiological basis of existence. According to recent tests made by Dr. Peraugh," then remembering that the explanation of the tests was couched in language perhaps not fit for the ears of undergraduates and mixed company, she paused.

"You mean those published in 'Eros'?" Mr. Fenton helped her out.

"Quite so," Miss Hubbard agreed. "And do you remember those in an earlier issue which proved that woman's brain is fully equal to a man's and quite as capable of grappling with problems of state. There can be no doubt therefore that Pompadour and du Barry swayed the rulers of France, not through physical charm, but through their mental and spiritual qualities."

"But I can't see that their physical qualities weren't the basis," June protested. "If du Barry hadn't been beautiful she would have always been a milliner's apprentice. As it was, she attracted men, and they were the ones who educated her till she passed out of their hands and became Louis XV's mistress."

"You are getting down to specific cases, my dear," Miss Hubbard reminded her, but before she could raise the conversation to generalities again, Regina had pitched in.

"I liked du Barry," she assured them. "She was so beautifully frank. When she discovered in her footman an old lover of hers, she honestly confessed in her memoirs to falling a victim to his charms and being faithless to the king and didn't try to excuse herself. All she did was to admit she was a flighty creature and dismiss him from her service for fear she'd fall again."

"You must remember that French literature," said Mr. Lord, succeeding where Miss Hubbard had failed, "is not restricted in the sense that English literature is. This freedom is apt to lead us to lay undue emphasis on that frankness and our reticence."

"But then there is always the implication," Miss Smythe hastened to say, "of character in our sublimest moments. You must remember those lines of Henley—

*"Some starlit garden grey with dew"**

Some chamber flushed with wine and fire

What matters so that I and you

* *Are worthy of our desire."*

"Ah! 'Worthy'! That is the point," said Miss Hubbard softly. "And those other lines—

"Some moment that will magnify the universal

soul,

And quicken and control."

The usual pause that separates a quotation from the rest of the conversation fell and the guests began to deposit their empty cups and saucers on the center table and to brush the crumbs from their knees. And in the pause Regina jumped up. "Lordy, an editorial conference at five, and we're late," she reminded June.

"You *must* come again," Mr. Fenton assured them.

"Yes, it has been very interesting," was all the girls could say and as they went out they could hear Miss Hubbard italicizing—"Youth shows but half. See all. Be not afraid," and Mr. Lord's "Quite so!"

"Do you suppose they hang over their teacups and worry about sex every afternoon?" June asked Regina as they were getting into bed that night to read history for an hour before going to sleep.

"I wonder why they don't live a full life as Miss Hubbard called it. Then they wouldn't spend so much time gabbling about it."

"I don't believe for one minute that she's living with anybody, Regina. You know the rumors that go around the campus. This is the way it looks to me. Mr. Lord, probably, is urging her to take the fatal step and she feels she is in danger of doing it. That gives her a feeling of superiority over the other old maid instructors and she speaks with authority. But if she had taken it, she wouldn't talk so much about it, or if she did talk, what she'd say would have made more sense.

"Do you know, I'd like to write a theme for Mr. Lord only it would get me in a mess—"

"What sort of theme? Your brain is entirely too active, June." Regina settled back, glad to postpone the history reading for a time.

"On those things they were talking about this afternoon." June pondered deeply.

"Well in the first place, you know by all sorts of ways whether you like a man physically or not. You can tell without living with him first, I should think. And you can tell whether a man keeps himself clean and what sort of table manners he has, so you get an idea of what breakfast with him would be like in the morning. That's the physical side of it.

"On the other side, the mental and spiritual, all the men we know and talk to try to impress us with their mentality and they put their best mental clothes on for us just as a male bird displays all its beauty of coloring for the sake of the female. Not that they want to marry us. They just want our admiration, the same as we like theirs."

"That disposes of trial marriages, in a superficial way," Regina agreed.

"Unless a trial marriage lasted for several years," June went on very seriously, "it wouldn't do any good. For any shorter time, a man would feel that he's on his good behavior and just show off all the time—put his best foot first. Of course on a desert island the time could be shorter, but not in our present civilization when a man is away all day working and sometimes the woman, too.

"Then if you lived with one man for a year or so and got tired of him, physically and mentally—and found he hadn't any depths to discover, then I should think you'd lack the courage to change and take another mate for fear you'd tire again.

"Such a course would just lead to promiscuity, I should think, even though it deserves a more dignified name than promiscuity."

"Promiscuity wouldn't be so bad," Regina said thoughtfully. "There's Madame du Barry. Think of the education you'd get by living with one man after another. That is, if you have a receptive mind and pick out intelligent men."

"But couldn't you get it without the physical side entering in?" June protested, a little shocked.

"No," Regina decided. "You'd get just the smattering of an education. If you want to make an intensive study, you'd have to live with the man who knew all you wanted to know. You see with women of brains, an intelligent man uses his mental charms rather than physical to captivate her."

"Yes, and when the personal equation enters in, you learn much more than when you're studying by yourself. I was slumping in history till you joined the class in January. Then I felt I had to go you one better, so I've been studying like mad ever since."

"I want a thorough knowledge of biology," Regina went on dreamily.

"But who would want to live with a man like Professor Hawkins?"—June interrupted her practically.

Regina made a wry face. "That's the trouble. You've got to have a mental and physical combination and I suppose it's rare. No, I couldn't ever live with Professor Hawkins."

"Even if we were immoral—"

"No, unmoral," Regina corrected.

"Either way. As long as you're independent about it, you don't care whether people call you the one or the other. Anyway, even if we were immoral we couldn't—we wouldn't have any opportunity—we probably wouldn't even be asked if we did have the opportunity of knowing them—to live with the men we wanted to; Anatole France, for instance, or Fritz Kreisler, or H.G. Wells. But think what we'd learn if we could!"

The girls sighed.

And there were the other conversations that would always be remembered. One morning Regina cut a class to interview Mrs. Rose Pastor Stokes who was lecturing at the university on socialism. The girls took turns getting stories for the school paper and the well known radical had fallen to Regina, much to her delight. She was still blazing with enthusiasm that afternoon at tea, and her eyes had red lights in them. Tomorrow she would talk with equal fire of Benvenuto Cellini but today radicalism, as expressed by Mrs. Stokes, flowed through her veins.

"What a wonder she is! Didn't you think she was stunning, June? Tall and distinguished and just as poised!" (Poised was one of Regina's favorite words at the time.)

"And she was so lovely to me. She said she had red hair the color of mine and that I reminded her of herself when she was a girl. That was a real compliment, I think. She told me how she worked in a factory on the East Side of New York when she was a girl and how she struggled for an education in the university settlement there. And this New York millionaire came along and married her.

There's romance for you. It'll make a ripping story for tomorrow morning's paper. I'll write it after tea."

Socialism as a creed did not appeal to Regina. Perhaps it was because on the only occasions she had attended the Socialist local in the town, two of her instructors had been there, and held positions as executives in the branch. This was sufficient evidence that socialists were not persecuted, as she had imagined, and that free speech was not merely a phrase in the constitution. She could learn all she wanted on the subject from her economics professor, who was a well-read and non-partisan teacher. "I am an instructor," he once told them, "not a politician." So Regina, partly as a result of American indifference to politics and partly through a Nietzschean conviction that the mob wasn't worth assisting, learned just enough about socialism to pass her term examinations in political economy, and no more.

"I told Mrs. Stokes why I wasn't interested in Socialism and she laughed at me and said I was very young." Regina dimpled ruefully. "So I told her I would like to hear about her activities in the birth control movement, since they didn't teach that in Economics I b and didn't have a society in the town."

"You're not going to say anything about that in the *Mirror*," Regina's fiancé Ray broke in. "We'd be suppressed and probably we'd be canned."

"There you are—there's your free speech," pointed out Jim, who had his astute moments.

"Here is part of the feminist movement which people don't know about except when they pick up their papers and find out Mrs. Stokes has gone to jail for a month for distributing pamphlets on the subject. What wouldn't tenement mothers give to have one of those pamphlets. But they haven't any chance to learn until the newspapers agitate for it and the legislature changes the laws. It's up to the press."

"You're editor, Jim. If Regina or I wrote an article on the history of the birth control movement, would you print it?" June asked.

"Nope."

"Of course not. You haven't the guts. But this is what would happen. The article would be printed and you and the person who wrote it would be called up before the dean and expelled. The rest of the staff would stand back of you, print a farewell edition of the paper, shouting for liberty and free speech, and they also would get kicked out. An uproar in a university of five thousand students wouldn't go unnoticed and just because Regina's father was President of the Board of Trade and Jim's father owns railroads, the big papers would make a stir. And in all the fuss, people would hear about birth control—it would be advertised, so to speak, and mothers would cry for it. And demand is always followed by supply—so there you are."

"I love the way we sit around and talk about what we could do," Regina sniffed.

"Get a couple of people like Mrs. Stokes on the staff and something would be done."

"Bah! placed in the same situation we are, she'd do just what we do—nothing! Besides," Jim suddenly remembered, "I thought we decided last week we were Nietzscheans."

"That's one way of getting away from responsibilities," Regina protested, still under the influence of Mrs. Stokes.

"I'll stick to Nietzsche," June decided consistently. "Why give up several years of good fun and education and incur the wrath of the worthy Mr. Henreddy by fighting for a mob of stupid, dirty people. They haven't gumption enough to lift up their voices and complain. I'll fight for myself and for what I want and that will keep me busy, I guess. I'm not in danger of having babies yet a while, so why worry? And I want another sandwich!"

There were three poets who visited the university that year, and caused much discussion—John Masefield, Edgar Lee Masters and Vachel Lindsay.

Before the first arrived June cut all her classes, spent the day in the library, gloating over "The Everlasting Mercy," "The Widow in the Bye Street," "The Daffodil Fields" and "Dauber." Regina, Ray and Jim followed her example and there were energetic discussions of Masefield, Masters and Lindsay.

"It's a good thing we read Masefield's stuff before he got here," Regina said over the inevitable cup of tea. "In that huge auditorium he was the hardest man to hear! But I think he's a wonder."

"I think he was bashful, he sounded so muffled; but I'd much rather have a poet act that way. Lindsay was too flamboyant. As a matter of fact," June continued, "Masefield acted as though he were shy and unwilling. He probably needed the money. Books of poetry are never best sellers."

"I was all prepared not to like him," Ray confessed. "I have a prejudice against English writers coming over to America to be hailed as geniuses. We pay too little attention to our own product to know whether it's any good or not. We take English writers for granted. But Masefield's all right and I think his poetry's great stuff."

It was an opinion that was echoed by the several thousand students who went to hear him. And when it was rumored that Masefield had actually been a sailor, and had acted as assistant bartender in a New York saloon, there was a run on the library for his books. He was a man who had "lived," it was decided.

Whether free verse was really poetry was a much debated question for a time. Vachel Lindsay had declaimed verse of the open road, immaculately dressed in an evening suit.

"The incongruity of his dress and the roughness of his poetry sets me against him," Regina insisted. "Let him wander around the middle west dressed in corduroys and recite in the wheat fields if he wants to. The farmers and field hands probably looked on him as a lunatic, that is, unless he composed and chanted as he worked, pitching hay, for instance. He'd be like sailors with their chanteys in that case and in establishing a precedent all sorts of songs of the fields would crop up."

"I understand that's what he did do," June put in. "He worked in the fields, living the life of the people, and writing a poetry of the people. His songs are like the negro melodies in the south—they have real beauty—or like the cowboy songs which have never been well done."

"What I object to about the man is his misplaced enthusiasm in appearing before

two or three thousand students who have little appreciation of art or beauty. If he'd blackened his face to recite 'General Booth Enters Heaven' they might have enjoyed his recitation as they would a minstrel show. As it was, his way of reciting was unprecedented and therefore ridiculous and they didn't catch at all the lilting music of it. I didn't myself until I read it the next day and got away from the spirit of the crowd in judging it."

Then came Edgar Lee Masters, not in person, but in the shape of a small green volume from which Mr. Lord read short "vitriolic" epitaphs. The adjective was Mr. Lord's.

Immediately rhetoric instructors were deluged with themes in free verse, and a free verse column appeared in the *Mirror*.

"It's a marvelous piece of work," Jim decreed. "Anybody who has lived in a small middle western town would know that. It's real poetry because it has a languorous, sad rhythm in it, a desolate undercurrent note that you feel in an ugly little town on a summer afternoon."

"You're inspired," June laughed. "I distrust it as poetry because everyone is so enthusiastic and is trying so hard to imitate it. They think it's easy. I'm something of a snob, I suppose, but I think true poetry is like true music, not to be appreciated by the multitude. Look at Germany. It produces Wagner, and people only accept him under protest and are bored to death if they have to sit through a Wagnerian opera. Most German music is sickly sentimental stuff—waltzes played by fat beery men on huge horns. That's what makes the multitude thrill."

"And look at us. We produce an Edgar Allan Poe—a great poet—and he dies of starvation. The crowd has never raved about him. But look at the furor about Masters. It's a vulgar enthusiasm in which I refuse to join."

Then, just as the free verse mood was beginning to dissolve, Scott Nearing, another socialist lecturer arrived, and wild political articles and dissertations on free speech filled the columns of the *Mirror* and there was something else to talk of at tea.

"That's American democracy for you," sniffed Regina, "a man is kicked out of one state university for expressing himself too freely, and is allowed to lecture at another. Why won't the people in authority be consistent? That's another reason why I can't believe in socialism—capitalists are never consistently oppressive."

And so the tea-time debates went on—whether capitalists did more harm than good, whether state control had ever been successful, the possibility of a brotherhood of man—and usually concluded each day with a realization that all discussion was futile.

"No use talking, I'm going into the railroad business when I've finished my course and no socialistic ideas will keep me from becoming the president of a railroad."

"And I'm going to write novels that are best sellers just to make a living," Ray decided, "and all my desire to devote myself to art and perfection won't keep me from doing it."

"I'd like to get a job on a big daily paper and my fun in going out after stories or running a woman's page will keep me from worrying because the press is governed by its advertisers."

“Me too,” Regina agreed, then—“I’m afraid we’re awfully lacking in ideals.”

[Continue to the next chapter. . .](#)

[Return to Table of Contents. . .](#)