

• 20 MAY 1905

A glance along the crowded booths on Spitalgasse tells the story. The shoppers walk hesitantly from one stall to the next, discovering what each shop sells. Here is tobacco, but where is mustard seed? Here are sugar beets, but where is cod? Here is goat's milk, but where is sassafras? These are not tour-

ists in Berne on their first visit. These are the citizens of Berne. Not a man can remember that two days back he bought chocolate at a shop named Ferdinand's, at no. 17, or beef at the Hof delicatessen, at no. 36. Each shop and its specialty must be found anew. Many walk with maps, directing the map-holders from one arcade to the next in the city they have lived in all their lives, in the street they have traveled for years. Many walk with notebooks, to record what they have learned while it is briefly in their heads. For in this world, people have no memories.

When it is time to return home at the end of the day, each person consults his address book to learn where he lives. The butcher, who has made some unattractive cuts in his one day of butchery, discovers that his home is no. 29 Nägeli-gasse. The stockbroker, whose short-term memory of the market has produced some excellent investments, reads that he now lives at no. 89

Bundesgasse. Arriving home, each man finds a woman and children waiting at the door, introduces himself, helps with the evening meal, reads stories to his children. Likewise, each woman returning from her job meets a husband, children, sofas, lamps, wallpaper, china patterns. Late at night, the wife and husband do not linger at the table to discuss the day's activities, their children's school, the bank account. Instead, they smile at one another, feel the warming blood, the ache between the legs as when they met the first time fifteen years ago. They find their bedroom, stumble past family photographs they do not recognize, and pass the night in lust. For it is only habit and memory that dulls the physical passion. Without memory, each night is the first night, each morning is the first morning, each kiss and touch are the first.

A world without memory is a world of the present. The past exists only in books, in documents. In order to know himself, each

person carries his own Book of Life, which is filled with the history of his life. By reading its pages daily, he can relearn the identity of his parents, whether he was born high or born low, whether he did well or did poorly in school, whether he has accomplished anything in his life. Without his Book of Life, a person is a snapshot, a two-dimensional image, a ghost. In the leafy cafés on the Brunngasshalde, one hears anguished shrieking from a man who just read that he once killed another man, sighs from a woman who just discovered she was courted by a prince, sudden boasting from a woman who has learned that she received top honors from her university ten years prior. Some pass the twilight hours at their tables reading from their Books of Life; others frantically fill its extra pages with the day's events.

With time, each person's Book of Life thickens until it cannot be read in its entirety. Then comes a choice. Elderly men

and women may read the early pages, to know themselves as youths; or they may read the end, to know themselves in later years.

Some have stopped reading altogether. They have abandoned the past. They have decided that it matters not if yesterday they were rich or poor, educated or ignorant, proud or humble, in love or empty-hearted—no more than it matters how a soft wind gets into their hair. Such people look you directly in the eye and grip your hand firmly. Such people walk with the limber stride of their youth. Such people have learned how to live in a world without memory.

• 22 MAY 1905

Dawn. A salmon fog floats through the city, carried on the breath of the river. The sun waits beyond the Nydegge Bridge, throws its long, reddened spikes along Kramgasse to the giant clock that measures time, illuminates the underside of balconies. Sounds of

morning drift through the streets like the smell of bread. A child wakes and cries for her mother. An awning creaks quietly as the milliner arrives at his shop on Marktgasse. An engine whines on the river. Two women talk softly beneath an arcade.

As the city melts through fog and the night, one sees a strange sight. Here an old bridge is half-finished. There, a house has been removed from its foundations. Here, a street veers east for no obvious reason. There, a bank sits in the middle of the grocery market. The lower stained-glass windows of St. Vincent's portray religious themes, the uppers switch abruptly to a picture of the Alps in spring. A man walks briskly toward the Bundeshaus, stops suddenly, puts his hands to his head, shouts excitedly, turns, and hurries in the opposite direction.

This is a world of changed plans, of sudden opportunities, of unexpected visions. For in this world, time flows not evenly but

fitfully and, as consequence, people receive fitful glimpses of the future.

When a mother receives a sudden vision of where her son will live, she moves her house to be near him. When a builder sees the place of commerce in the future, he twists his road in that direction. When a child briefly glimpses herself as a florist, she decides not to attend university. When a young man gets a vision of the woman he will marry, he waits for her. When a solicitor catches sight of himself in the robes of a judge in Zürich, he abandons his job in Berne. Indeed, what sense is there in continuing the present when one has seen the future?

For those who have had their vision, this is a world of guaranteed success. Few projects are started that do not advance a career. Few trips are taken that do not lead to the city of destiny. Few friends are made who will not be friends in the future. Few passions are wasted.



For those who have not had their vision, this is a world of inactive suspense. How can one enroll in university without knowing one's future occupation? How can one set up an apothecary on Marktgasse when a similar shop might do better on Spitalgasse? How can one make love to a man when he may not remain faithful? Such people sleep most of the day and wait for their vision to come.

Thus, in this world of brief scenes from the future, few risks are taken. Those who have seen the future do not need to take risks, and those who have not yet seen the future wait for their vision without taking risks.

Some few who have witnessed the future do all they can to refute it. A man goes to tend the museum gardens in Neuchâtel after he has seen himself a barrister in Lucerne. A youth embarks on a vigorous sailing voyage with his father after a vision that his father will die soon of heart trouble. A

young woman allows herself to fall in love with one man even though she has seen that she will marry another. Such people stand on their balconies at twilight and shout that the future can be changed, that thousands of futures are possible. In time, the gardener in Neuchâtel gets tired of his low wages, becomes a barrister in Lucerne. The father dies of his heart, and his son hates himself for not forcing his father to keep to his bed. The young woman is deserted by her lover, marries a man who will let her have solitude with her pain.

Who would fare better in this world of fitful time? Those who have seen the future and live only one life? Or those who have not seen the future and wait to live life? Or those who deny the future and live two lives?