

## The Fountain in Market Square

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I sit by the fountain in Market Square. It is evening-time; the sun is setting quietly; the shades of evening are falling; peace settles on the people; the frenzy of day has given way to the murmur of occasional traffic. People sit around the fountain on the marble benches, some on the edge of the pool, others walk slowly through the Square, sometimes arm in arm. There is a sense of well-being, of peace and togetherness. Nobody wants to break the mood it is as if all are feeling together: "It is good for us to be here. "What is it that draws us here and creates this harmony? Is it the City Hall standing so elegantly in conscious stateliness in the background? The Square itself, of course is an oasis of peace. And as benefits an oasis there is the water pool, the fountain. There is the center of attraction, the point on which we are all focused, the magnet that has drawn us here, "the holy of holies." It is a magnificent fountain. From my vantage point its jets of water, leaping into the air, seem to rise higher than the houses on the street. There must be sixteen of them at least and they leap high into the air with tremendous gusto; sometimes at the climax of the leap a blob of water detaches itself and, with a saucy fling of its head, as it were, leaps higher still in one brief moment of glory before falling back with all the rest into the bosom of its mother-pool. It is a glorious fountain, sixteen jets at the center gushing water twelve feet into the air and four smaller companions playing chords in harmony with the others. It is a poem expressed in water, a homely symphony. It leaps and dances before us. It performs acrobatics, it leaps and pirouettes; it is not unconscious of its admirers. It wants to perform well. It wants to be admired and praised, to be talked about. It is Alexandria's Nadia Comaneci in water. It is the permanent performer of Alexandria; every day

its show goes on. It gives. And because it gives, it receives. And people are drawn to rest beside it and are quieted after the turbulence of the day.

Many memories flow into my mind as I watch the fountain, memories of streams and rivers, lakes and seas of far away, and the emotions connected with them flow contemplatively or tenderly, enthusiastically or joyfully through my heart. I remember the "spout," as we called it, which fell with a steady rumble from a pipe into my aunt's yard; winter or summer it never failed. It was, and is, a constant source of refreshment for man and beast. I recall tiny streams that played among the rocks and sedges, gurgling with innocent laughter as they ran. They are baby rivers and have the spirit of childhood about them. How many times their unselfconscious rejoicing in existence has lifted my heavy heart in delight to praise the kindness of their Maker. There were bigger streams, almost rivers, that dashed and brawled along their ways, noisy and careless as adolescents, heedless of the rocks that tried to bar their paths, bounding from boulder to boulder, cornering recklessly, yelling as they leaped with frightful abandon and fell foaming into pools confused with froth and whirlpools, moving, then, a little chastened and almost dismayed by their own lusty abandon down quieter paths. But even in their wildest moments there were dark pools of stillness, mysterious places, withdrawing a little, with something about them of the mystery, the quizzical wondering glance one sometimes sees in the eyes of a growing girl. Into my mind flow scenes of a much-loved river where, o, serene and lingering summer evenings, the trout I sought leaped heedlessly after the floating fly. It was a maternal river, gentle, calm, sometimes smooth and deep, sometimes flashing in the sun, at other times alluring in the moonlight, bearing life within its bosom, nourishing everything it touched, compact, self-contained and assured, confident in its capacity to impart life to the land that held it close. I recall lakes enfolded in the iron arms of mountains, deep, dark and still, hiding from the probing eyes of men, timid in their mountain fastnesses. And then there was the sea, the ocean in all its moods, its broad expanse uniting sky and land. The sea, the mother of life, the receiver of the dead. The sea, guardian of the life within it, highway for ships, offering its own substance to the sky to nourish the land, the sea which receives all things and gives itself in return. I remember the moods of the sea, the muffled beat upon the sandy shore where sea and land entwine, its calm serenity on sunny days, its crested waves as the breeze combed through its satin locks, its angry pounding on the cliffs when the hysterical wind strained its patience beyond limits. I recall all this and more with gratitude as I watch the dancing, swaying fountain in Market Square.

I am reminded of incidents when water has a special meaning. There was the time when King David thirsted and two of his men, at risk of their lives, slipped through the enemy lines to his favorite well and brought him back a skin of water. David was so touched that, rather than drink such valuable water, he poured it out in offering to God. There was the day that the Syrian general, Naaman, was instructed by the prophet Elijah to wash himself seven times in the Jordan and he would be healed of his leprosy; his skin was made clean like the flesh of a little child. There was the day in the desert at Horeb when from the hard rock there gushed out a torrent of water to refresh the weary Israelites. And there was the epoch in the beginning when the spirit of God moved over the face of the waters, bringing order to the world of chaos.

As I look at the water I realize it is a symbol of the One who made it. It is life bearing like its Source. It gives itself like the One who used it to wash his disciples' feet so he could express his serving heart. It is a testimony to Him who is the living water which, if a man drinks, he will find a fountain springing up within him and leaping up to provide eternal life. And not only that but "from within him rivers of living water shall flow."

I return to the present and to Market Square. I am almost alone there now. Suddenly the fountain falters and stops. Its work is done for the day. It has earned its rest. But I am lonely now and I rise to go home, marveling as I go that He whose nature is to give could find so simple and so eloquent a way to express His heart in water.