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Ernest Delahaye

– Ready for Everything –

He had the strong and sinewy look of the determined and patient walker, who is always going off, his long legs moving quietly and very regularly, his head straight, his beautiful eyes fixed on the distance, and his face filled with a look of steady defiance, an air of expectation – ready for everything, without anger, without fear.

On Arthur Rimbaud, 1925

Frank Tatchell

– Few People Walk Well –

Keep a Regular Stride, rising on the balls of the toes and not turning the toes out too much: Rodin's statue of St John, in the Luxemburg, shows the correct way to have the feet. How few people know how to walk well. The secret is to let the shoulder opposite to the advancing foot swing well forward at each step.

From *The Happy Traveller*, 1925

Søren Aaby Kierkegaard

– I Walk for Health and Salvation –

Dear Jette,
Above all, do not lose your desire to walk: every day I walk myself into a state of well being and walk away from every illness. I have walked myself into my best thoughts, and I know of no thought so burdensome that one cannot walk away from it. Even if one were to walk for one's health and it were constantly one section ahead – I would still say walk! Besides, it is also apparent that in walking, one constantly gets as close to well-being as possible, even if one does not quite reach it – but by sitting still, and the more one sits still, the closer one comes to feeling ill. Health and salvation can only be found in motion. If anyone denies that motion exists, I do as Diogenes did, I walk. If anyone denies that health resides in motion, then I walk away from morbid objections. Thus if one keeps on walking, everything will be alright. And out in the country you have all the advantages; you do not risk being stopped before you are safe and happy outside your gate, nor do you run the risk of being intercepted on your way home. I remember exactly what happened to me a while ago and what has happened frequently since then. I had been walking for an hour and a half

and had done a great deal of thinking, and with the help of motion had become very agreeable person to myself. What bliss, and, as you may imagine, what care did I not take to bring my bliss home as safely as possible. Thus, I hurry along, with downcast eyes I steal through the streets, so to speak; confident that I am entitled to the sidewalk, I do not consider it necessary to look about at all (for thereby one is so easily intercepted, just as one is looking about in order to avoid) and thus hasten along the sidewalk with my bliss (for the ordinance forbidding one to carry anything on the sidewalk does not extend to bliss, which makes a person lighter) – and run directly into a man who is suffering from illness and who therefore with downcast eyes, defiant because of this illness, does not even think he must look about when he is not entitled to the sidewalk. I was stopped. It was quite an exalted gentleman who now honoured me with his conversation. Thus, all was lost. After the conversation ended, there was only one thing left to do, instead of going home, to go walking again.

Yours, S Kierkegaard.

From 'Letter to Henrietta Lund', 1847
(trans. Henrik Rosenmeier, 1978)

Nicholas Shakespeare

– I Walk Because Senses are Heightened –

Early one morning, just before Easter, I shook my two young sons awake and took them, still blinking, down to the nine mile beach that fringes the northern shore of Great Oyster Bay. The temperature was cool, there were no insects, the sun was not up yet. There had been a storm a few days before, but now the bay was calm.

Who walks at dawn?

Perhaps it takes a certain calmness of the soul, but a walk before sunrise contributes to a person's tranquility. I defy anyone to come out walking in the early hours and not feel something – 'If we walk on the sands of the sea, we shall taste the various qualities of the salts therein,' wrote the passionate tramper James Bain in 1914. It's not merely that your senses of taste and touch are heightened, but your senses to see, hear. At night the sound of tyres on the road is muffled, as if absorbed by the darkness. In the dawn, noises are crisper, carry further. And the stars shine brighter. I look up at the Milky Way, astonishingly luminescent, and remember how Richard Holmes compared this bucket of stars splashed across the sky to something indescribable, but affirming 'like falling upwards into someone's

arms'. I nuture a ludicrous thought: if more people came out in the early morning, wouldn't there be less conflict in the world?

The moon has gone.

The colours seem opposite to what they were at dusk, as if put away at night and now unpacking for the day. As we walk barefoot on the sand, the cool sea boiling over our feet, I have a sense of the world beginning again; there's a furry glow behind the peninsula's dark silhouette, not an angry red, as at sunset, but the pastelly orange of a peach or cantaloupe. Light at dusk gathers all colours to the sinking sun, drawing them in; this morning I notice the colours expand and explore; fresh, clean, illuminating this pathway to the gods.

'Can we turn around now?' asks my eldest son, Max.

From *Dawnwalks*, 2015

Rebecca Solnit

– I Walk for Thoughts, Experiences, Arrivals –

I sat down one spring day to write about walking and stood up again, because a desk is no place to think on the large scale. In a headland just north of the Golden Gate Bridge studded with abandoned military fortifications, I went out walking up a valley and along a ridgeline, then down to the Pacific. Spring had come after an unusually wet winter, and the hills had turned that riotous, exuberant green I forget and re-discover every year. Through the new growth poked grass from the year before, bleached from the summer gold to an ashen grey by the rain, part of the subtler palette of the rest of the year. Henry David Thoreau, who walked more vigorously than me on the other side of the continent, wrote of the local, 'An absolutely new prospect is a great happiness, and I can still get this any afternoon. Two or three hours' walking will carry me to as strange a county as I expect ever to see. A single farmhouse which I had not seen before is sometimes as good as the dominions of the King of Dahomey. There is in fact a sort of harmony discoverable between the capabilities of the landscape within a circle of ten miles' radius, or the limits of an afternoon walk, and the threescore years and ten of human life. It

will never become quite familiar to you.'

These linked paths and roads form a circuit of about six miles that I began hiking ten years ago to walk off my angst during a difficult year. I kept coming back to this route for respite from my work and for my work too, because thinking is generally thought of as doing nothing in a production-orientated culture, and doing nothing is hard to do. It's best done by disguising it as doing something, and the something closest to doing nothing is walking. Walking itself is the intentional act closest to the unwilled rhythms of the body, to breathing and the beating of the heart. It strikes a delicate balance between working and idling, being and doing. It is a bodily labor that produces nothing but thoughts, experiences, arrivals. After all those years of walking to work out other things, it made sense to come back to work close to home, in Thoreau's sense, and to think about walking.

Walking, ideally, is a state in which the mind, the body, and the world are aligned, as though they were three characters finally in conversation together, three notes suddenly making a chord. Walking allows us to be in our bodies and in the world without being made busy by them. It leaves us free to think without being wholly lost in our thoughts. I wasn't sure whether I was to soon or too late for the purple lupine that can be so spectacular in these headlands, but milkmaids were growing on the shady side of

the road on the way to the trail, and they recalled the hillsides of my childhood that first bloomed every year with an extravagance of these white flowers. Black butterflies fluttered around me, tossed along by wind and wings, and they called up another era of my past. Moving on foot seems to make it easier to move in time; the mind wanders from plans to recollections to observations.

From *Wanderlust*, 2001

Lucy Hughes-Hallett

– The Dog and I –

Twice or three times a week the dog and I get up early to walk around a nineteenth-century cemetery in north London. I'm not going to name it. To do so might jeopardise the benign conspiracy between those of us who frequent the place, and its keepers, who pretend to be as blind as we are to the signs at the entrance about dogs and leads.

The cemetery is shaped like a round-shouldered coffin, which is fitting. It reminds me of a game from my childhood called Bagatelle. At the straight end of the Bagatelle board (which was more like a wooden tray) there was a kind of trigger, with which one shot a glass marble into a thicket of pins. It was a tedious game. When (and if) it was played at the Chateau de Bagatelle in the last days before the French Revolution, I guess it might have been enlivened by the wagering of stupendous sums of money.

I digress. This happens a lot. Part of the pleasure of walking is the way it sets your mind free to wander. Once we reach the cemetery my dog, who is a large hairy pointer called Kilburn, wanders too.

Our cemetery is not one of London's great cities of the dead, like Highgate or Kensal Green. It is only a few acres. To get a proper walk you have to

criss-cross it repeatedly, or circumnavigate it several times.

When it was first laid out it must have been forbiddingly prim. At its northern end the geometry of concentric semi-circular paths is still clear. Here there is tarmac, and the new graves are mostly made of black marble with a shine designed to last until the last trump, however long that may be delayed. Further from the entrance, though, pebbled paths are invaded by moss and flowery weeds. Shrubs planted a century ago, as neat knee-high mounds of green, are now house-high, each sprawling over the grave it was designed to adorn, and several of its neighbours too. Gravestones prop each other up. Stone crucifixes lie prone beneath the cow-parsley. There are grassy raised areas like the bases of pyramids. Are they hillocks of the piled-up dead? Maybe, but as I walk over them now, in early spring, they are starred with raggedy white anemones. Later the foxgloves will take over.

Among the early-morning walkers there are purposeful ones who hurry around the periphery with earphones in. There are pairs of friends who pace up and down the avenue of venerable plane trees. There is an open space where dog-owners stand like a clump of maypoles, discussing ailments and house-moves while their dogs run rings around them. We just stroll.

To Kilburn, a walk isn't exercise. It's a party, a

chance to find other beings with whom to perform clumsy, earth-bound pirouettes, or wrestle, or fall in love. He has a far wider acquaintance than I do. He comes here with his walker, later in the day, when I'm working. He has a private life. 'It's Kilburn, isn't it?' strangers say to me, as he whirls their spaniel or labradoodle off for a polka around the tombstones. Failing dogs, there are humans. Failing humans, there are squirrels, but they have a frustrating ability to dematerialise when in proximity to a tree. It never occurs to Kilburn to look up.

While he roams, I amble after him, and my mind, only newly awake, rambles as inconsequentially. Walkers, wrote Henry Thoreau, should imitate the camel 'the only beast which ruminates when walking'. Thoreau had to have his daily walk – without it he felt rust enveloping him. There was a Scottish clerk with the East India company known as 'Walking' Stewart. In the 1790s he walked all the way home from Madras, with side-trips into Abyssinia and Russia along the way – which makes Patrick Leigh-Fermor's much written-up walk to Istanbul seem paltry stuff. I'm not in competition with such marathon-men. What I like is that Thomas de Quincey (himself a great one for walking) got to know Walking Stewart when he had settled his old bones in London. He records that Stewart went each morning to St James's Park. There he would play his bagpipes. Or he would just sit, says de Quincey, 'in

contemplative ease amongst the cows, inhaling their balmy breath and pursuing his philosophic reveries'. My mind-wanderings are seldom philosophic, but reveries – dreamy meanderings – they certainly are.

Some of the time I'm reminiscing. I've been coming to the cemetery for years now and there are memories imprinted in the turf. Beneath this crooked pine tree I sheltered from the rain with my daughters, when they were small enough to walk into the cave it makes without bending their heads. 'It's like being a badger,' one of them said. By this holly-bush I took a call from my father's carer telling me he'd had his last fall. But I'm not seeking out the past. A lot of the time I'm observing passively. Reading my mind would be as dull as reading a shopping list. 'Primroses!' I think. Or 'Mud'. Or 'Parakeets'. But then a digression begins. Like that trip to ancien regime Bagatelle, it's often triggered by a name.

Near to the entrance, stands an imposing monument from the 1930s. A classically draped lady weeping over a veiled urn. It's the tomb of Garibaldi Stephenson, born in 1864. He must have been named in honour of the visit to London that year of Italy's nationalist hero. When the great Garibaldi came to London, tens of thousands of enthusiasts blocked the streets for hours, squashed-fly (or Garibaldi) biscuits went into production, and the Stephenson baby was saddled with his outlandish name. What

did his friends call him, I wonder? Garry? What else is Garry short for? Gareth? Are most Garrys Welsh, then? See what I mean by digressing. This is the way my walking thoughts drift.

Repeatedly, they are tugged back to the present by the cemetery's beauty. In winter the leafless plane trees veil the skies with black lace and the new-risen sun is an incandescent pink. Summer and autumn bring buttercups or berries, but now it's spring. Dainty miniature daffodils have spread outside the stone surrounds of the grave in which they were planted decades ago, and naturalised themselves. An ornamental plum tree has cracked a tombstone from side to side, and blossoms above it. I know the names of very few of my fellow walkers (although I know their dogs' names) but we all know each other well enough to remark what a wonderful year it is for violets. Every year, we say this.

So there's new life, and, given where we are, there's death to think about too. Or more particularly, mourning, and memorialising. It's rum what people think fit to put on gravestones. Names, and dates of birth and death, of course. Sir Thomas Browne, the seventeenth-century essayist, wrote that 'to subsist in bones, and be but pyramidally extant, is a fallacy in duration'. A monument must bear a name, but Browne wanted more. 'Who cares to subsist like Achilles' horses in Homer, under naked nominations, without deserts and noble acts, which

are the balsam of our memories?' There are very few deserts or noble acts recorded on the gravestones Kilburn and I pass by. There are a pair of brothers, as competitive in death as one imagines they were in life, whose pink granite slabs lie side by side, proclaiming their professional achievements. One was President of the Positivist Society. He died in 1915, in the middle of a war that must have made positive thinking hard. The other was Assistant Master at Marlborough College.

But these are exceptions. The great majority of the dead are defined only by their relationships. By the new graves there are foot-high words worked with flowers and shiny cellophane ribbon – seldom the dead person's name. Instead Grandad, Dad, Nan, My Wife. On the tombstones – 'My darling husband'; 'Our dear son'; 'A fonder mother and more loving wife/Ne'er breathed the breath of mortal life.' Living, these people must have had secret thoughts, lives that belonged to them as individuals, but now their relatives lay claim to them. From the 1850s, when this cemetery was established, right up to the present, the message is constant. 'The lord takes those we love from our homes but never from our hearts.' Through these dutiful descriptions sounds a childish plea for possession. She's mine. He's ours. 'God Knows Best' reads one tomb, but these mourners aren't going to stand aside and abdicate their claims to Him.

'I always thought I'd like my own tombstone to be blank,' said Andy Warhol, who wasn't much of a family man. 'No epitaph, and no name. Well, actually, I'd like it to say "figment".' Warhol was the figment of his own imagination – his public persona was his own brilliant creation. These dead Londoners are now the figments of their sorrowing relatives' imaginations. 'Our fathers find their graves in our short memories,' wrote Thomas Browne. And who really knows their parents? 'Not in front of the children' was a constant refrain of my childhood. People have lives their families know nothing of. But here complex human beings are reduced, in love and duty, to one-word job descriptions – 'Nan' 'Grandad' 'Mum'.

Kilburn is fond of mourners. I'm ready to drag him away from anyone sitting solitary on a bench, contemplating a grave. But some call him. He puts his head on their laps (he's tall enough to do so without jumping up) and waits to have his ears fondled. Then he's off again, skidding dangerously over the flat stone slabs, playing bending races around the standing tombs.

When we leave, stepping out into the din of modern London, there's a moment of jarring readjustment. The poet Gabriele d'Annunzio used cemeteries as an image of the rapt state of concentration in which he wrote. Breaking from his work, he said was like being turned out into a road bordering

a cemetery wall, and glimpsing above it trees, and the heads of the tallest statues, while being shut out of that mysterious space in which inspiration came.

Kilburn and I go home at a brisk pace for breakfast. We pass the house where Kilburn's friend the golden retriever lives (he always has to sniff the door). We pass the corner shop where vegetables are displayed in shiny aluminium bowls. We pass the little girls in headscarves going in a walking crocodile to the Islamic school. We're back in the land of the living, and glad to be there, ready to begin the day. But our early morning digression into reverie has been precious.

As Thoreau knew, all that sauntering and ruminating has its hidden purpose: 'The Saunterer is no more vagrant than the meandering river, which is all the while sedulously seeking the shortest course to the sea.'

From *Dawnwalks*, 2016