The Essence of Simplicity

People are tempted to believe that simplicity presents certain external characteristics by which it may be recognized, and in which it really consists. Simplicity and lowly station, plain dress, a modest dwelling, slender means, poverty—these things seem to go together. Nevertheless, this is not the case. Just now I passed three men on the street: the first in his carriage; the others on foot, and one of them shoeless. The shoeless man does not necessarily lead the least complex life of the three. It may be, indeed, that he who rides in his carriage is sincere and unaffected, in spite of his position, and is not the slave of his wealth; it may be also that the pedestrian in shoes neither envies him who rides nor despises him who goes unshod; and lastly, it is possible that under his rags, his feet in the dust, the third man has a hatred of simplicity, of labor, of sobriety, and dreams only of idleness and pleasure.

... Livery counts for nothing: we must see the heart. No class has the prerogative of simplicity, no dress, however humble in appearance, is its unappealing badge. Its dwelling need not be a garret, a hut, the cell of the ascetic nor the lowliest fisherman’s bark. Under all the forms in which life vests itself, in all social positions, at the top as at the bottom of the ladder, there are people who live simply, and others who do not. We do not mean by this that simplicity betrays itself in no visible signs, has not its own habits, its distinguishing tastes and ways; but this outward show, which may now and then be counterfeited, must not be confounded with its essence and its deep and wholly inward source. Simplicity is a state of mind. It dwells in the main intention of our lives.

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