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FIELD-PATH AND HIGHWAY



BY E. E. MILLER



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FIELD-PATH AND HIGHWAY

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B Y E . E . M I L L E R



E. E. MILLER
BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

1912

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The Apology.

IN publishing these little sketches—most of them reprinted—I am quite complacent in my confidence that they will not appeal to those who demand action and excitement of the books they read. Nor do I expect them to be much esteemed by the learned and the critical. I am optimistic enough, however, to believe that a few people will care for them because I wrote them, and to trust that a few others—leisurely souls who know the paths through the fields and are glad of the sun and the wind—will find in them something not wholly foreign to their own thought and experience.

E. E. M.

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An Autumn Ride.



AS I swung the girl into her saddle the breeze came over the hilltop aromatic with the odors of September, hints of juicy apples and ripened grapes, and the delicate, elusive fragrance of the fields. From far-away purple horizons it came, blowing her hair in tiny ripples about her face, coloring her cheeks, and bringing the dancing light of gladness into her eyes. Poems have been written about the sweetness of the autumnal air—poems touched with all the mellow beauty of the season—and there remain yet many to be written.

We did not have time to think of all this, however. We were only glad to be alive on such a morning—glad to have the sky above us and the sunshine in our faces, glad to feel the tug of our horses against the reins and the swing of their motion beneath us. They, too, were fresh and eager. The bracing air was

like wine to them as to us. The girl leaned back in her saddle with the reins grasped tightly in both gauntleted hands, laughing with the pure joy of mastery.

The first requisite of a good saddle horse is not speed, not even ease of motion; it is the desire to go forward. Give me a good horse, clean-limbed, wide-nostriled, strong-muscled, eager, enjoying the road, a firm, smooth path, and the wind of early autumn in my face, and I cannot help forgetting all my little quarrels with fortune and all the little annoyances and wearinesses of life.

It is a treat, for that matter, to ride at any time with the girl. She sits her saddle with the grace of the born horsewoman, and her eyes and thoughts are for all around her—for the wide reaches of the rustling, rasping corn-fields and for the late daisies that grow beside the road. I know, too, that she feels, as I do, the subtle intoxication of the season's beauty as it creeps into her blood and tingles through every nerve with the thrill of life which per-

vades the softest air at this time. It is something more than a coincidence that the sections where the finest saddle horses are raised can also lay strong claim to having the fairest women. No girl who rides well can be other than pretty—while she is riding.

Two miles down the hard white road and our horses were still pressing on fresh and eager, but steadily, rhythmically, keeping step together, easily swayed by the lightest grasp of the finger tips against the reins. A lane, narrow, grass-grown, with scattered thickets and neglected fence rows on either side, turned off to climb a long hill. "Let us go this way," I said. So we slowed down to a walk and turned off into the beauty of the neglected way.

Here the sassafras, the black gum, and the sumac were putting on the red and brown of autumn. Tall ironweeds were opening their purple flowers, the wild carrot was blooming everywhere, and the goldenrods, hesitating a little while before displaying their full splendor, showed glimpses of yellow against the

prevailing green. Artichokes lifted their stars of pure gold. The quaint, misnamed "river-weed" waved ragged crowns of darker hue, and through the tangle of vines and bushes stray gleams of blue and yellow or white caught the eye. The golden fruit of the bitter-sweet hung thickly over the decaying fences, ready to burst a little later into a brave show of scarlet. Chinquapins gleamed from between their opened burrs; and over a tall sassafras a wild grapevine had climbed and spread and fruited until the whole tree was laden with the rich-hued clusters. We drew our horses up beside it and gathered the cool, piquant, nectar-flavored fruit, so delicious in the tang of its wild individuality.

The grapes of our vineyards and gardens have in them the flavor of mellowed soils and careful tendings and all the long years of watchful training. The wild grape is truly wild, not only in its growth, but in its very nature. It tastes of unchecked breezes and untilled soils, of dews that form on starry

nights and of sunlight that trickles down through layers of swaying leaves. Of it, I am sure, the fauns and dryads make their wine, if fauns and dryads haunt our American thickets and forests.

A lane climbed over the hill and dipped down into a little valley where a small stream ran between banks which in a week or so would be a wonderful riot of color. Goldenrods and artichokes and ironweeds and asters, white and purple, and a dozen others, all in blue or white or yellow, will hang over that brook and mark its course with hues such as "no painter has the colorin' to mock." Yet for all this beauty, if the farmers who own those meadows had done their duty, they would have cut those weeds and bordered the stream with plain red-top and timothy.

We followed a narrow footpath up the creek till we came to a little mill—an old-fashioned mill which ground corn into the unbolted meal from which the "mush" of our childhood days was made. Down over the moss-grown wheel

the water tumbled, breaking into shining drops of crystal and tinkling and splashing like silver through all the creaking and rumbling and groaning of wheel and pinion. "O! let's go in," cried the girl when we had persuaded our suspicious horses that the thing was not going to eat them for all the racket it made, and that even the spray from the falling water would not hurt them. A towheaded boy—just such a boy as I used to be when I rode to mill on a big horse with my bare legs sticking straight out and a sack of grain tied on, because I was not big enough to balance it—watched my manner of helping the girl to the ground in open-eyed wonder and then held our horses while we went inside.

The miller and a farmer waiting for his "turn" greeted the girl with subdued deference and myself with offhand familiarity. The mill was nothing new to me. So while she studied the whitened walls and the powdered rafters or watched the corn trickle down out of the hopper, and the big burr revolve, and the

coarse, fragrant meal pour out below, I talked crops and politics.

The farmer told with smiling eyes of how poor his corn was going to be, and the miller laughingly predicted all sorts of hard times for both man and beast. They were not afraid, though, for all the damage the drouth had done, and wisely preferred laughing at their disappointments to moping over them. Country folk learn both patient humility and quiet contentment from their dealings with the weather. Man may control steam and electricity and harness them to do his bidding; but the winds and the clouds, the sun and the rain smile or frown as they will, and men may as well be content.

“I don’t expect to hitch up at all to bring in my corn,” said the farmer. “I’m just goin’ to take a sack an’ carry it in an’ be done with it.” Then we all laughed. I swung the girl into the saddle. The white-haired boy opened his eyes to their utmost degree of roundness, and with a merry wave of hands we rode away.

Soon we were on the main road again with our horses' heads turned toward home. "Single-foot," said the girl. And we went on between pastures and cornfields and lands newly plowed for wheat, the rhythmic clicking of the horses' hoofs making music and the easy gait carrying us on swiftly, smoothly, delightfully. The single-foot is the poem of gaits for a saddle horse. A fragment of verse came into my mind and I repeated aloud the tender, plaintive lines:

"No ghost there lingers of the smile that died
On the sweet, pale lip where his kisses were;
Yet still she turns her delicate head aside,
If she may hear him come with jingling spur:
Through the fresh fairness of the spring to ride,
As in the old days when he rode with her."

The girl looked out across the fields and sighed. There is nothing so deeply interesting to hopeful, life-pulsating youth as the tender sadness of unavailing love. This touch of pathos was needed to tune our hearts to the faint minor melody that breathes through ev-

ery song of autumn. And as we came in sight of home she sighed again.

“Life and laughter and songs of love,
Then silence and loneliness ending it all.”

But these moods of gentle sadness endure for but a moment and serve only to make life and laughter and love the sweeter. For life is good, wonderfully good, to even the poorest of us all. So it is, that with the friendship of a girl who can ride and think and dream, with a horse and the freedom of road and lane, with the beauty of field and wood and far-off, sky-touched hill about me, with September skies above me, and with all the gladness and pathos of the season for my own, I often forget that I am only a very ordinary sort of fellow and not one of fortune's favorites.

The Unchanging Love.



BEEKEEPER whom I visited once went out among his hives, where the bees were flying all about, walked fearlessly up to them, put his finger down at the entrance of a hive, and let a bee crawl up on it. Then he held it up to show me the bee's good points"; and when it flew away he "caught" another the same way and continued his discourse, calling them pet names and praising their virtues. Not being afraid of bees, and being doubly reassured by the company of so intimate a friend of the little honey-makers, I put my finger out too, and the bees climbed up it, investigated a little, and flew away. Yet half the people I know would have begun striking and dodging the moment a bee flew near, and would have had a swarm buzzing about their ears in a very few minutes.

Bees demand certain things of those who

would be their friends: confidence, self-control, quietness, gentleness, and due regard of apian feelings and whims. One may possess all these qualities except the last and utterly fail to win the confidence and the love of living things. A dog may obey and slavishly follow a man who has no feeling for and no appreciation of him. But before the man can make the dog his friend he must show himself capable of understanding that a dog, too, has perceptions and prejudices, sentiments and sensibilities—yes, that he has vague, strange dreams of things not understood, just as men have.

There was something of truth in the answer of the vagabond dog trainer to the college professor.

The ragged mendicant had his dog doing all sorts of tricks in the street. The professor came by and stopped to watch. "How is it," he asked after a while, "that you can get your dog to do so many things? I have never been able to teach mine a single trick."

The man with the dog looked at him a

moment and said: "Well, it's this way: if you don't know no more than the dog, you can't learn him nothin'."

And true it is, that many a man who has many kinds of knowledge fails utterly ever to come into any intimate relationship with either animate or inanimate nature. He sees the violets blooming, perhaps, and thinks them beautiful; but his interest in the violets ends there. He walks through the woods in the spring and notes that the leaves are putting out; but all their wonderful range of color, red and brown and yellow and green and gray and rose and purple—for all of these are there—he never sees. Nor does he catch the varied fragrance that floats from opening flower and expanding leaf and awakening soil. Such men may write learned books about plants and know them thoroughly from a scientific point of view, but they will never have that intimate relationship with plant life which enables the quiet, rosy-faced old maid to keep her garden or her window-bed a glory of foliage and blossom.

This subtle appreciation and understanding of living things, when it reaches out to nature generally—to all plants and animals and insects, not simply to roses or dogs or bees—makes the true seer of nature, the Thoreau or the Burroughs.

It is, indeed, a wonderful thing, this real understanding of the world about us, which is the basis of the truest and deepest nature-love. Keats puts the common lack of it into lines of haunting beauty:

“The wind,
Whose language is to thee a barren noise,
Though it blows legend-laden through the trees.”

Some who have written glittering verses or purple prose in praise of nature's charms have, I feel sure, heard only the wind as it blew, while barefooted farmer boys and grizzled old woodsmen have heard and understood, in part at least, the tales it told. For one's love of nature is not always to be judged by his words. The silent lover may love most truly and woo most successfully.

Two people I have known who seemed to me to possess beyond all others I knew this deep, confident, unswerving intimacy with the world about them. One of them was a fellow, half gentleman and half vagabond, who had a strong aversion to work and a perpetual delight in hunting and fishing. He was called shiftless and lazy and all that ; but I think most folks had a touch of respect for him, because he loafed so openly and unabashed. As another man might go to his office or take his team to the fields, he shouldered his rifle or took his fishing rod and went his way, unashamed, indifferent to the gibes of those who toiled. When he needed a little money, he might be persuaded to do a few days' work ; and he worked faithfully, but with an evident lack of joy in his tasks. It was to him an unpleasant matter made necessary by circumstances, but a sheer loss of time that might have been devoted to better things. I have seen him sitting on a fallen log, his long-barreled squirrel rifle in his hand, waiting as still almost as a stump for the

reappearance of a squirrel that had dodged into a hole; and he seemed, from the placid patience with which he waited, to have no care of the lapsing hours. I have seen him, too, on mysterious trips afield or through the woods when there was nothing to kill. It was in the woods and fields that he belonged; and whenever he could, there he went. He might have been another Thoreau if he had had the ability of expression, but he was unlettered. I doubt, too, if in his calm detachment from what most people regard as the important things of life he would have thought it worth while to try to make these hurried, busy men understand the things that filled his heart.

So he lived and died, a shiftless, improvident fellow whose name was synonymous with indolence and worthlessness. Yet I have wondered if he was not worthy to be accounted a success, since his life evidently brought to himself no sense of failure; and he walked amid his fellows with unimpaired self-respect, for all his laziness, "a gentleman unafraid."

Loving nature with an equal fervor, but in a very different fashion, was one whom I first knew as a girl of sixteen—a wholesome girl, full of life and youth and gladness, who revelled in growing crops and shadowy woods and sunny fields, and made friends of all the animals on the farm. She handled the horses without fear; the cows would follow her in from the fields, while the boys had to drive them; her chickens and turkeys seemed to thrive from her very presence among them, and all the dogs on the place were her willing slaves. She had a reading nook half hidden in the willows down by the brook. Followed by the dogs, she would take long rambles over the fields and through the patch of near-by woodland; and I have seen her, with flushed face and glowing eyes, breaking a path through the snow that covered pasture and meadow when she had no other reason for doing it than that it was good to be out of doors.

Why a girl like this should be taken to town by parents who thought they could get rich by

a business of which they knew nothing, and who speedily lost the competency they had in the attempt, is past understanding; but so it was. At twenty-three she was in an office supporting a widowed mother and looking out in her few breathing spells on blank walls and paved streets. This might have been no real hardship for many girls, but it was for her. It was by accident that I found her, and the compressed lips, the pale face, the wistful eyes prevented my knowing her at first. Because I was of the country and had shared in the pleasures and to a certain extent the hopes of her girlhood days, she told me all—all the dreams and the longings and the weariness of this cramped and alien life with which she dared not burden her mother. I, too, was of the country and would understand. Sick at heart that I could not help her, I went my way; and though the weary, wistful face came often before me, I did not see her again for two years.

Then I saw her with startled pain. There

was hardness in her lips, hints of unfathomable bitterness in her eyes. She did not turn to me with trustful friendship this time; she was half defiant, half fearful. The reckless laugh cut me deeper than the fitful sighs she could not stifle. I asked no questions, because I feared to learn the truth.

“Nell,” said I, “you have no one here now; you are going back to the country.”

Gladness flamed into her eyes for a minute and then faded into the ashes of a hopeless grief.

“I can’t,” she said. “I’ve nowhere to go, nothing to do.”

“Do you remember the Widow Bennett?” I asked. She was a simple, loving soul with a fund of nature-wisdom who lived in a little cottage on the edge of the village where Nell and I had often gone to buy groceries or to get the mail.

“She wouldn’t have me.” But there was hope in her voice.

“We’ll try,” I said. “Can you be ready by Sunday?”

We went. The unassuming old saint in the blue calico dress heard our story and hesitated for a minute. Then she said: "Yes, Nell; I guess you're a pretty good farm hand, and I'm sure it'll be better for you here." She put her arm about the girl, who went down on her knees in an outburst of tears.

I felt the tears smarting my eyes too as I went away, but I was glad. The country had her own again; and there is wonderful healing for tired mind and sickened spirit, as well as for overworked muscles and jaded nerves, in the companionship of the pastures and the garden.

“Not Unavailing.”



THE most cheerless of all days in this latitude are the days of winter rain—cold, gray, with fitful winds and slow, murmuring, “shivery” showers. A muddy earth, damp, raw air, and skies hidden ever so deeply by wind-driven masses of shadowy mist—surely there is no other time when a good fire and a good book are so comforting.

On such a day I sat with my book dangling idly in my hand and looking at the fire. Fire-gazing is one of the most cheerful recreations for people of all ages and conditions. Little children can see wonderful things in a blaze or a bed of coals, and I am sure that we older folks could too if we would only take the time to look for them. I saw none of those wonderful things this day, however, for I was thinking of other fires I had known in other days—big, cheerful wood fires that crackled and blazed

and threw flickering shadows over the walls and ceilings. Such fires are getting sadly uncommon. Coal is winning its way far into the country districts, even in the wooded sections. We did not appreciate the forests until we had almost destroyed them, and the worst of it is that even to-day the forces of destruction are more potent than are those of renewal and conservation. A coal fire in an open grate is by no means to be despised. Ik Marvel has celebrated its beauties in a book that keeps its youth and freshness despite its abounding faults. I have no desire to imitate him. I have known better fires—fires in great stone fireplaces in humble hill country cabins where there were big four-foot logs ablaze. Cheerful, indeed, those fires; but O how wasteful!

It is a long reach from the Tennessee hills to the arid plains and rugged mountains of Old Spain; but I had only to turn to my book to make the change, for the neglected volume in my hand was "Don Quixote."

There are great books and good books, and

the two terms are by no means synonymous. So there are interesting books and comfortable books, and they are not always the same. I remember my first dip into Dante. For hours I hung over the “Inferno” with eager ardor; and for two or three days the shadow of that terrific vision lay on my mind like a great stupefying cloud. There are books that inspire me to do things—to dream, to write, to work—but the “Divine Comedy,” “Paradise Lost,” and “Macbeth” are not in that class. They fill me instead with a sort of helpless awe and wonder. Great books they are, with the greatness of the unmeasured elemental forces, and perennially fascinating. Yet who would dare call them comfortable books, or go to them for recreation in a lazy hour?

“Don Quixote” is at once a great book and a comfortable one. The wise and the simple may both find interest and profit in it, food for studious reflection or amusement for hours of idle leisure. When I first read it as a mere child (and how much better it is for a child

to read "Don Quixote" than to be brought up on most of the so-called juvenile literature of the present day!) I found in it only a laughable account of a crazy old man and his foolish servant. I only wondered what ridiculous thing would happen next; and if I felt any pity for them, it passed away before the overpowering realization of their absurdity.

The humor of the book does not diminish or stale, but as one grows older there comes to him a new conception of the deeper meaning of it. For, as Prof. George E. Woodberry has said, "Don Quixote" is, after all, a sad book. This poor old crazy knight, fighting windmills and doing penance, has more good qualities than most of us will ever possess. He is twice as knightly as Lancelot. All that Sidney had he has, except sanity. Nobler ambitions and purer purposes nowhere exist. Yet they make of him a laughingstock for the ages. Never was there such a comedy, and yet it is a tragedy as deep and of the same kind as "Hamlet" or "Lear." Are we not all Don Quixotes,

ridiculous to every one but ourselves, fit subjects for laughter or for tears? What do all of our most self-satisfying exertions amount to in the end? How foolishly futile may all our most earnest strivings for better things yet be!

Reaching this point in my reflections, I turned from the now smoldering fire and looked outside, where a listless shower was stirred now and then by a keen, ill-tempered gust of wind, which passed away with a long, peevish wail. I put on a raincoat, drew my hat down over my face, and splashed out into a little patch of woods just across the way.

This wood is only a little oasis of trees—oak, chestnut, and pine—on a gravelly hillside, surrounded by fields and streets and houses. The undergrowth is almost crushed out by the ever-passing feet from the town. The thin coating of fallen leaves, drifted into little heaps here and there, was water-logged. Tiny streams crept slowly down the wet trunks. Under the pines the brown carpet was soft and oozy. In places moss covered the rocky slope,

and it was fresh and green between the bright, clean-washed pebbles. All else was dull and colorless. The force of the wind was broken, although it stirred the branches overhead. There was an incessant, soft, sibilant murmur that made it all seem strangely lonely, as if I were in the heart of a sure-enough forest instead of within easy call of half a dozen houses. In a little patch of briars and dead grasses a covey of quail ran about, frightened, it seemed, but unwilling to fly. A slender pine had lost its grip in the unceasing struggle for existence, and had been crowded to death by its sturdier companions. I could almost pull it over. Its efforts, too, had been in vain.

I went back to the edge of the wood, and a sharper gust drove the cold rain into my face. Instinctively I threw back my head and drew a deeper breath. Then I made a rush against the wind and rain and tumbled into the porch flushed and laughing.

Inside I took up my book again and read to two or three children the notable adventure of

the peerless knight with the lethargic lions. They seemed to enjoy it even if they did not understand it. Yet why should that matter? I am by no means sure that I understood it myself. Enjoyment does not depend altogether on understanding. At any rate, with a smile I laid the book away. The luckless hero has brought cheer to unnumbered thousands, and will continue to do so through all the ages. Who, then, will say that Don Quixote de la Mancha fought in vain?

When the Circus Came to Town.



WAS wakened in the cool gray dawn by the rattle of wagons and the clatter of hoofs on the hard road. People were already streaming toward town, some of them having come for miles. As the sun rose, their numbers increased and their pace accelerated. All through the early part of the glorious October day they went on, a motley multitude, singly and in groups, in wagons and carriages, on horseback and on foot—all eager to get away from the everyday beauties of cloudless skies and purple horizons, of russet fields, of woods yellow and scarlet and brown, and to reach the more unusual charms of tinsel trappings and shrill-toned music.

I went with the latest of them and soon lost myself in the changing, jostling crowd which hurried here and loitered there, at one place breaking into little groups, at another thicken-

ing into an impenetrable mass. There were people of all kinds, fashions of all dates, and colors of every conceivable shade. The people of the town looked with smiling pity on the folks from " 'way back in the hills," who went their way in peaceful ignorance of their urban critics. The near-by farmers and their wives stood in groups at the street corners shaking hands and laughing and talking. The children surged restlessly in an undercurrent about the more sturdy forms of their elders. Everywhere was crowding, pushing, and good-natured chaffing.

At length the parade came by. Between two solid lines of gaping humanity it passed with all its sham glory, its bizarre costumings, its tarnished finery. The great lumbering carriages, the screeching calliope, the blaring, thundering bands, the grotesque clowns—all received their share of admiration. Deeper interest, however, centered in the animals, from the familiar horses to the unknown yak. I knew that more than one boy, as he saw the

great elephants pass with majestic tread, caught wonderful glimpses of Indian jungles, strange and shadowy and unreal; or, as he looked at the polar bear in his pool, tingled with a longing for the great white solitudes of the North and recalled all he had read of the heroes of that desolate clime. And who of us can see unmoved the lords of the tropical forests, with all their elemental fierceness still burning in their eyes, crouch and cover before the man who has tamed them?

So the procession passed while all stared and wondered and stood on tiptoe. Rich and poor, white and black, aristocrat and outcast stood side by side with one common interest until it had gone.

Later came the performance; and who can describe the glory of it all? Wonderful animals, daring deeds, impossible feats, the whole enthralling atmosphere of the ring—these may not have thrilled those poor creatures who were indifferent, because they had seen many such things; but the boys and girls and all who had

kept the faith and simplicity of childhood knew and felt their magic spell. It is the person who is not afraid to yield himself to the sensations of the hour who can succeed in having a good time; others only try. The hill folk, simple, uncultured, sometimes uncouth, find an almost excessive joy in escaping for a day from the strong, orderly dominion of nature into the freedom of the noisy, crowded, glittering town. The darkies too, with their barbaric delight in show and sound, in pomp and pretense, and their childlike love for the new and the marvelous, derive from the circus an intense happiness. How inferior is the pleasure it gives to the stylishly dressed young lady who surveys the crowd with disdainful eyes and comments on "the queer old creature with the red-and-yellow shawl, the green waist, and the purple plumes!"

For all, however, "show day" is a day of unreality, of detachment from the common round of life. That is why the fakers can that day sell all sorts of things that nobody needs,

and why so many are ready to spend their last dollar to see the circus, or to buy presents for wife or babies, or candy and lemonade for "the girls" and "the rest of the fellers." Tomorrow will come the old familiar duties and cares. To-day we will forget it all and live only for to-day. We will make the most of this strange, new, crowded, feverish world while it is passing, for there will be many days in which to work and think and live our wonted lives. Of course the hard-headed business men of the town and the prudent, conservative farmers do not yield themselves to this feeling; but the young and the thoughtless, the improvident and the simple embrace it with abandon.

Next winter many a hard-earned dollar that has been spent for an hour of strange sights or for worthless baubles will be needed to buy the necessaries of life. Is it wasted then? I am not so sure. It is a great thing to have pleasant memories and beautiful dreams, even if the memories are only of a day of thoughtless pleasure and the dreams are inspired by the tawdry glitter and dazzle of a circus.

I went through the day as did my friends. My object was to have a good time. Accidentally I came upon a boy and a girl. They were sitting on a goods box in the rear of a store and had evidently forgotten all about the circus and the crowd. He was holding her hand, and both were looking over the housetops at the placid sky. Occasionally, however, they glanced at each other, and then both smiled frankly and happily. They were dressed simply, in very evident country style, and the few words I heard them speak were in undeniable defiance of the first rules of grammar. There was a little bag of something—candy, I supposed—sitting between them, and as she lifted her hand to push back the hair which the breeze was blowing into her eyes and mouth she knocked it over. Neither noticed it, and her hand fell back into his. It was evident that both were poor. He was not handsome, and she was not pretty; but what did these things matter? They were in love.

As quickly and quietly as possible I with-

drew, though they would have heeded me no more than they did the bustle and noise of the crowd. They will remember that day, not for its sights and sounds, but because it was a day of the heart. For under all the panoramic changes of outward circumstance the great realities of life steadfastly endure.

A Teller of Tales.



HAVE had the pleasure of knowing a few great men and the honor of knowing a great many men who were not great. Among them all there was none more worthy of honor than one of the plainest and most unassuming of the friends of my boyhood. Because I knew him I am sure that my whole life has been brighter, and I have had through all the years a fuller and truer appreciation of the sweetness of life—the laughter and the smiles that lurk in the commonest tasks of everyday existence.

He was not great either by birth or achievement. A simple carpenter, he loved his work and evidently spent little time in futile dreaming. Neither would his features, if they had been preserved in marble or bronze, have charmed the world by their beauty or majesty. Not more than five feet two in height, with the hands of the toiler, bald head and snowy

beard, kindly wrinkled face and twinkling eyes—such is the picture memory paints of my hero.

Plain, with no great talents, without wealth or fame or great influence; but I never heard any one accuse him of wrongdoing or speak unkindly of him. Temper he had and stern determination, but I think few people suspected it. Strictly honest, doing good to all—these are noble traits, but I have known others who shared them. But never have I known any one so saturated with good humor, so redolent of good cheer, so fond of telling a good story, and with so many good stories to tell. A chance remark, a passing neighbor, a piece of work, a change in the weather—all these reminded him of more stories. A dozen times a day something would happen to call forth the familiar “That reminds me of”— Then as the laugh went round he would go back to his saw or chisel, ready to be reminded of something else. All his stories were worth while. I never saw a man bored by one of them; and higher praise than this, within the bounds of truth, would be

hard to find. They were clean, too; not raked from cesspool and gutter, but fresh from field and market place and fireside. And if the story made you laugh at your neighbor, it was a laugh in which he could join.

Folks wondered where he got them all, for the supply seemed inexhaustible. Whatever he may have forgotten, he must have remembered every good story he ever heard. His delight at hearing a new one was equaled only by his joy in telling it, and it always left him better for its sojourn with him. None of them will ever be as fresh or as pertinent when put into dead letters as when they fell in living words from his lips. They were mostly little anecdotes of common life which often one cannot recall when he wishes, but which come up when least expected to make one laugh all to himself.

A favorite was the tale of the young store-keeper in the land of the Malungeons, who had the misfortune to lose an eye. He went across the hills and procured a glass one. After he had come back to his old place, an old lady came

into the store one day to wonder at this marvelous thing. The storekeeper answered her questions patiently until she wound up by asking: "And, Mr. Blank, kin ye see as well out of thet eye as out of the other'n?"

It might have been at the same store that one of those good-natured, worthless fellows whose main purpose in life is to avoid labor, owed a bill which had been running for some years. In an unguarded moment he sold the storekeeper some hogs, and that thrifty man proceeded to collect his account when he paid for them. The old citizen stood it with the best grace he could muster and then walked out to where a crowd of his cronies were standing. "Well, boys," he announced, "I've paid Bill Green up. I don't owe him anything now but good will, and mighty darned little of that."

Over in the same region lived a pair of lawyers of rather indifferent reputation. They were defending a pretty tough character in a case that looked hopeless. During the trial, as was often done, they took him into a little side

room for consultation. The junior member of the firm soon returned, but the older man stayed out a long time. Suddenly he came running in, exclaiming that the fellow had jumped out of the window and "skedaddled." There was, of course, great excitement, and the placid innocency of the lawyers' faces excited the judge's suspicion. Turning to them in anger, he exclaimed: "If I knew that either of you had anything to do with this, you should be disbarred from the courts of this State forever." The older lawyer arose and bowed politely. "If it please your honor, you shall never know it." Later it was learned that they had turned the trick, just as the judge suspected.

Of more practical application was the account of the boy who was apprenticed to a carpenter. When he came home at the end of his first week, his father wanted to know what he had learned. "I've learned how to make a wedge just an inch long." "Huh! I can do that," retorted the old man. "Let's see you." The father sawed off a block an inch in length and went

to work with his hatchet. About the third lick he cut a chunk off his thumb and jumped up in a rage. "Here! you get down here and make one," he ordered. The boy picked up a long stick, made his wedge, and then sawed it off an inch long. "Well, you have learned something," admitted the man.

There was a moral, too, in the tale of the man who fed his slaves very scantily and watched them while they were at work. One day two of them were sawing wood with true darky slowness when one caught a glimpse of the master peering through the bushes. "Sam," he demanded, "what's dis saw sayin'?" Sam listened to the slow strokes and shook his head. "It says, 'D-r-y b-r-e-a-d, d-r-y b-r-e-a-d.'" The owner slipped off home, had a big dinner cooked, and that afternoon listened again. The saw was going at a lively pace. The first darky asked once more: "What's dis saw sayin' now, Sam?" Sam gave an extra sweep to his stroke as he answered: "It says, 'Bacon an' beans, sop an' puddin'; bacon an' beans, sop an' puddin'.'" "

Wholly without uplift or inspiration was the account of the hill farmer's band of roving sheep which a neighbor, angered by a raid upon his crops, put up and held for ransom. Receiving word of what had happened, the shepherd went to town and sought for inspiration. He received it, too, for that evening he came back riding rather unsteadily, and called his angry neighbor to the gate. "Bill," he asked in tones of maudlin penitence, "don't you love me?" The neighbor evaded the question, but he persisted: "So you don't love me, Bill?" "Yes," said the neighbor, tiring of his questions and presence, "I love you; go on home." "So you love me, Bill?" "Yes," with much impatience. "Then why don't you feed my sheep?" The next morning the released sheep went wandering homeward.

Nor was there much of sanctity in the story of a big revival during which one of the brethren became very much excited and very fervent in prayer. "O Lord," he shouted, "send down a blessing as big as Brother Jackson's foot, so

that this house may not be able to contain it.” And over in the corner another brother piped in a shrill voice: “The Lord grant it—ah!”

This “ah” at the end of a sentence, or rather of a respiration, familiar to all who have heard Dunker or “Hardshell” Baptist preachers, added a unique flavor to more than one yarn. For example, that of the inspired minister in some far-away mountain cove who, in speaking with prophetic vision of the days to come, rose to this height of eloquence: “And, my brethering—ah—the day will come—ah—when the sound of the gritter—ah—and the tinkling of the sang hoe—ah—shall be heard in these hills and hollers no more, no more forever—ah.”

“No more forever” will the cheery face and the hearty laugh of the old carpenter be seen or heard, but so long as one who knew him lives he will be remembered. Better still, he will always be remembered with a smile. Possibly, too, with a sigh; for though he lived out man’s allotted time, it seemed strange and sad that one so radiant of life and joy should die.

Yet if there is a touch of sadness in our memory of him, there is nothing of bitterness. There could be none in the memory of a man who gathered and reflected all of life's sunshine, and who went through the world gladly, hopefully, dispensing laughter on every side, and yet

“Through all this tract of years
Wearing the white flower of a blameless life.”

The Master's Discipline.



FOR twenty years Edmund Garnett had ruled over the school at the old academy. Then he decided that he needed rest, and a new teacher was secured. This new hand naturally failed to give satisfaction, and there was a general demand for the old master to take his accustomed place. He was glad to do it, too, for his year's rest had told on him more than had any three years of work.

On the first morning of the school we were all early in our places waiting for his arrival. Larry King, the oldest student, had told us what to do, and we were ready. As soon as the familiar figure entered the door we began a great stamping of feet and clapping of hands by way of welcome. He gave a quick glance over the room, brought his old hickory pointer down across the table which served him for a desk, and said sharply: "Enough of that, now!" In an instant we were all sitting silent and

rigid. Yet for all his terrible frown I do not think he was much displeased. He knew there was no mockery in our welcome, even if he could not tolerate such a breach of discipline.

Discipline was Mr. Garnett's strong point, and his methods and rules were all his own. We had many privileges, but there were a few things we must not do. First-year pupils were exempt from all but the mildest punishments; but for all others, to throw across the room, to cheat at lessons or at play, to strike or tease a smaller child, or willfully to disobey any command was a capital offense, and the punishment was certain and unvarying. The culprit, if a girl, big or little, was sent home for a day; but when a boy was guilty the teacher would pick up that same stout pointer, beckon with it to the offender, and say in a voice hard and tense: "Come up here, sir!" Then the room would be vibrant with the rhythmic swish and thud of a four-foot switch. The bigger the boy, the more he got; but aside from this, no partiality was shown.

Mr. Garnett had a sharp voice, too, and could bring that deadly pointer down on the table with a "Well, now!" that was guaranteed to frighten any six- or seven-year-old half out of his wits. Yet with these same noisy, restless tots he was the most patient of men. He never tired of explaining the mysteries of elementary mathematics or of rubbing in the alphabetic formulæ. The little ones may have feared him during school hours, but when he laid aside his hickory scepter there was always a clamorous insistence for him to "come and play." He often went; and once, when a little girl was accidentally knocked over and hurt, he picked her up and carried her home, nearly a mile, while we stood about and waited for his return.

There was, for a while, little or no difference in that last year from all the years that had gone before. True, he lingered more fondly over the torturous and knotty problems he loved, and told with more thrilling emphasis those old history stories of courage and devotion which under his magic touch had always worn for us

the garments of romance and poetry. True, his hair was whiter and his eyes dimmer than they had been; but his voice was as sharp, his discipline as exacting, and his slim, wiry figure as active as ever.

Suddenly with a stinging shock the change came. Bob Harris was caught at his old trick of flipping gravel across at the girls. The teacher stepped to his desk, picked up his pointer, and said in the old, familiar way: "Bob, come up here, sir." Bob came and stood before him. He raised the pointer once, twice, and lowered it each time. Standing grim and silent, he looked at the long-legged, muscular chap of fourteen whom he had seen grow up from a chubby, red-faced youngster of six, and into whose stubborn, wrong-set head he had drilled and coaxed and frailed all of the little knowledge it held. Then, as Bob looked around, he said brokenly: "I am not able to do it. I shall never whip you again, Bob. Go back to your seat and behave yourself." And Bob, who had taken many whippings and grinned

complacently under the hardest of them, went to his seat, put his head down on his arms, and cried like a baby. That was on Tuesday. All the rest of the week the teacher was very gentle, and we were all so good that it was positively painful. The next Monday morning Larry King took charge of the school.

The old master did not get sick. He only sat around by some friendly fireside and dozed or told tales of Roman or American history while the flame of life burned lower and lower. He had no home. Most of the time he stayed with his crony, Squire King, although he occasionally visited about in his old fashion. It never, I think, entered his mind that he could be unwelcome anywhere; and if any of his people had felt that it would be a burden to care for him a whole year, I am sure they would have been ashamed to say so.

Singly or in little groups all of us visited him occasionally, and he greeted us as equals, not as pupils. I do not know whether any one told him of our growing realization of what

we all owed him, but we tried in every other way to make him feel it. And none of us tried harder than did Bob Harris.

Poor old Bob! He was the old man's faithful attendant until that sunny June day when we stood around the open grave in the quiet old churchyard. Since then he has won his way and made his mark, has become the great man among all of us who left the peaceful neighborhood of the old schoolhouse to go out into the great world. But when I talked with him a few days ago the tears came into his eyes as he spoke of the old master who had labored so long and patiently with him, and of that last thrashing which he did not get.

For Love of Margery.



T was the middle of April, and the wild crab tree was in full bloom. Standing in a little thicket of plum bushes in the midst of the rolling, rich-green pasture on which the cattle had not yet been turned, it gripped the outcropping limestone with knotty roots and lifted its wonderful crown of pink above the white blossoms of its humbler neighbors. In its branches the bees came and went with untiring murmur of delight. The shadowed space beneath was a veritable temple of fragrance, warm, rich, sensuous. The sunlight patterned a soft mosaic on bare brown earth and gray lichened stone.

The girl sitting there was, however, only vaguely conscious of all this; and while the boy beside her now and then lifted his head and drew in a deeper breath, his thoughts too were plainly of other things. To both of them,

springtime and summertime, the fertile stretches of pasture and meadow and fresh-harrowed cornfields, the vivid green of the young wheat and the varied hues of the half-grown leaves in the woodlands, even the beauty and sweetness of their own blossom-bowered retreat, were matters of little concern.

Lawrence had been unfolding his plans, and to them Lena had been forced to listen with thoughts of admiration and words of approval. But the more he talked, the more keenly she felt that, whether or not he so willed it, he was planning a life with which she would have less and less connection; that if he did the things he had set his heart upon doing, he must be lost to her.

Sweethearts they had been from childhood. They had played together, gone to school together, and felt themselves now pledged to each other even without formal words of betrothal. Both had known more of privation and struggle than came to most of the young folks of their neighborhood. Lena's mother was a

widow who had made her living by helping the wives of the prosperous farmers of the community with their household tasks; and circumstances had forced the girl, young as she was, to bend her shoulders to the yoke of labor. Lawrence, equally poor, had struggled well against the odds of fortune, and was now at twenty a leader in some respects among the sturdy boys who had enjoyed far greater opportunities. There was decision in his chin and confidence in his eyes; and when he flung up his head and announced that he was going to college and that he had plans even beyond that, the girl at his side had no doubt that he would do it. She knew enough of life, too, to know that a man of the kind he meant to be would seek other companionship than hers. Nor had she failed to note lately a less demonstrative affection, an air of meditative preoccupation, and eyes that turned in silent admiration too often to another face. Lena had not given up her lover; but she felt that he was surely slipping away from her, that the childhood love

which had deepened in her heart as the years passed by was gradually ebbing away from his.

It was cruel, too; for Lawrence was all she had, and Margery—Margery had everything! Wealth, beauty, a rich dower of culture, above all a sweet simplicity of nature and a purity of soul which made her loved of all who knew her. Lena herself loved Margery; for when the dark days had come the petted darling of fortune had gone into the little cabin home tenderly and helpfully as a sister might have done and, despite the differences in their lives and their fortunes, had become the best of all of Lena's girl friends.

None could know how much the love of Margery had helped the proud, hot-tempered little girl to bear the slights and the unspoken scorn of other more fortunate maidens, how much comfort she had had from the unaffected, unselfish friendship of one who was the acknowledged leader among all the girls she knew. Until Margery had shown her, she had not known how beautiful she might be. It was

Margery who taught her how to dress her hair in the way Lawrence liked best, Margery who helped her to make her simple frocks so fit and tasteful, Margery who had spurred her to carry on her early neglected education. Yet all this had been no hardship to Margery. Lena could not feel that she should be asked to pay for it with all her hopes of the future.

But she could not blame Margery, and she never dreamed of blaming her sweetheart. To her he had long been so nearly perfect that his actions went unquestioned; and when she felt that he was going away from her, she blamed herself, not him.

So she praised his high ideals and encouraged his ambitions, while her heart cried out: "O! why not a little home here for you and me, and for us the old familiar life with only love to make its burdens easier?"

Perhaps the boy divined something of this, for a shadow came across his face and his eyes grew troubled. He laid his hand on hers. "I wish you could go too, Lena. Maybe I can find

some way to make it easier for you. If you could only have a year at school and get to rest a little!"

"You know I can't leave mother," she said.

"No," he agreed, and both were silent.

Directly she arose. "I must go home."

"I'll go with you."

"No, not this time, Lawrence. I'll see you at church to-morrow."

He was mystified and half piqued by her refusal. He did not guess that she only wanted to cry.

Scarcely had she passed from sight when he caught a glimpse of a little green jacket in the valley road. In an instant he was on his feet watching with parted lips, for Margery was riding there. Had Lena seen him then, her tears might have fallen even more profusely. Yet for love of Margery, Lena, reaching home with reddened eyes and troubled spirit and finding her friend there, greeted her with more than usual kindness.

The summer grew old, and all the neighbor-

hood gossips said that it was for love of Margery that Lawrence toiled so fiercely and studied so earnestly. When he left in the fall, these wise ones said she had smiled on his going. Lena mattered little to them. They could not know the loneliness of that wounded heart, torn between gratitude and a fierce primal sense of wrong, suffering alone with no friend to confide in, and with a confiding friend whose gentlest hint of joy was as the thrust of a knife. Still Lena heard without one word which might have brought doubt or trouble, repressing bravely her constant desire to cry aloud: "You have everything, and he was all I had; yet you take him away from me and still pretend to be my friend."

Two years had passed, and again a youth and a maiden sat under the blossoming crab tree. Lena had seen them going that way, and somehow she felt that the end had come—the end, not of life, but of dreams, a far sadder thing. From the window of the little cabin she saw them leaving, hand in hand, just as

the sun touched the hills in the west and threw over the delicate beauty of the blossoming tree a shimmering mesh of translucent gold. She gripped her hands and, looking out across the shadow-barred landscape, saw the long, dull years that waited her, the ceaseless round of toil, the slow relapse into the slipshod manners and vacant thoughts of drudgery's daughters, the ever-recurring sense of wrong and pain at each sight of the happiness in which she had once fancied she should share. She cried aloud and buried her face in her arms, sobbing without restraint. Then as the faint voice of her mother came to her in frightened inquiry, she dried her eyes and softly murmured false excuses while she soothed the troubled invalid back into calmness. This, it seemed, was the one good thing life now held for her.

All the neighborhood gossips said that for love of Margery Lawrence had toiled and wrought and made himself a man—he who had been the very synonym for poverty and lowliness of birth. They did not know that for

love of Margery a little, loving, rebellious girl had done a far finer and an incomparably harder thing—that Lena had been able to greet Margery with smiling lips, to seek to add to her already overflowing happiness, and even partly to forgive.

For all that he had done, moreover, the man had his abundant reward; but to the lonely woman there could be no recompense. Even neighborhood gossips do not see all that is taking place before their eyes, nor has any revelation yet answered for us the simplest riddle of the humblest life.

Days of Happiness.



Y happiest day? It is hard to say, for into each day both joy and sorrow enter. Looking backward through the years, it is often hard to decide whether a particular day holds more of happiness or of sadness. Still there are a few days which I remember as preëminently days of gladness.

I was certainly happy that August afternoon when my friend and I lay in the shade of the big elm tree in the meadow and talked of our plans and hopes for the future. We both had high aspirations and great ambitions. And as we lay there and watched the white clouds drift across the sky and the black shadows silently lengthen as the slow hours went by, they seemed easy of attainment. He was to be rich and powerful; I was to delve deeply into rare old volumes of antiquated lore and forgotten wisdom and from them to draw the inspira-

tion that should make me wise and famous. Knowledge and wealth, honor and power seemed to us then all that were to be desired; and we had no doubt that they would one day be ours. We did not dream that we were as near them then as we should ever be, or that, should we attain them, they would bring no joy equal to that of our fond and vain anticipation. Soon we had to take our places in the prosaic, workaday world and turn our hands and our thoughts to life's common tasks. Still it was not until long years had come and gone that our bright dreams faded and our thoughts fitted themselves to the real world about us.

Another happy day was that on which a letter came to me bringing the first note of acceptance for one of my verses. The kind words of the editor brought a deep, quiet joy to my heart and seemed to foretell the realization of another radiant dream. It seemed to me then that the world must see my verses and note them and feel their thrill as I had felt it. Perhaps it will—for that was several years ago,

and they are yet unpublished—but I doubt it. Others equally good have been published and no one apparently has heeded them, while some of those which seemed to my partial mind to hold most of sweetness and beauty are still with me after many rejections.

Joy clings, too, about the memory of that night when some half dozen of us stood in a little room, silent but with smiling faces and buoyant hearts. For months we had labored—all of us ardently; all of us, as I believe, unselfishly—for a cause which had seemed to us worthy of such devotion. Now it had triumphed; and each of us, I doubt not, felt that he had done something tangible to make the world happier and better. We fancied that by our help it had taken an unmistakable step toward the better day, but now we know that it felt our efforts only “as the sea’s self would heed a pebble cast.” I still think that we did well; but what seemed so much then is now very little.

Happiest of all days, perhaps—and yet most

deeply sorrowful—was one in mid-autumn, when the woods were ablaze with color and the distant hills blended into the purple sky. She sat on a stone, I on the grass at her feet. The breeze, soft, clinging, fragrant, blew her hair about her face and chased tiny shadows across her dimpled chin. Her eyes were as blue as the zenith, as deep and tender as the haze of the valleys. It seemed then that the earth was only goodness and beauty and love and joy. To-day was sweet, and all to-morrows should be as to-day. But we were young, and the years were long and wrought great changes; and it is easy to love, but hard to be brave and patient and true.

So sorrow and darkness came, and the knowledge that the real tragedies of life lie not in defeat or failure or death, but in broken faith and in thoughtless cruelty to those we love.

The Lure of To-Morrow.



ONE'S ideals and ambitions change wonderfully with the passing of the years. The boy growing to manhood outgrows his ideas of life and his aspirations for himself just as surely as he outgrows his coat and shoes. The man, too, if his spirit be not wholly stagnant, flows on, almost imperceptibly to himself perhaps, from one viewpoint and one stage of desire to another and another; and while each successive conception or longing is likely to be closely related to the one preceding it, this gradual progress may lead him on to opinions and hopes as different from those of his youth as the marshes at the river's mouth are different from the hills among which it had its source.

Generally, too, the aspirations of youth are lofty and picturesque, and those of maturity are flat and commonplace. The young collegian, if our jests have any basis in fact, has

an ambition to reform his fellow men, to change the destiny of the State, to make himself famous and powerful. We laugh at the ambition; but for all that it seems to us a splendid thing, a much more splendid thing, than the modest ambition of the same collegian when he has become a man of middle age and is likely to be ceaselessly busy with such problems as those of family support, neighborhood welfare, and the adjustment of his work to his strength. Truly these are small affairs compared with the guiding of the State or the writing of an epic. Yet is it so certain, after all, that because the life current flows more smoothly, with less of rippling sound and bubbling brilliance, it flows with less power or is less pure and refreshing?

This is the preachment which was meant to be a logical conclusion to the matter following—that is, that the desire to do a little thing, if the thing be necessary to be done, may be as laudable and as truly heroic as the desire to do a great thing.

The moral has been placed at the beginning lest any should fail to come to it, and also to assure those who dislike consequential moralizings that the worst they have to fear has been reached. If the moral displease any, let him leave the fable unread; for beyond the lesson he will find only the happy recollections of a boyhood day and the soberer meditations of one of manhood's leisure hours, and these recollections and meditations, to one who has not felt the like, may prove but tiresome things.

I.

Down into the little hollow, carpeted thick with leaves of lustrous brown and darkened red and shaded yellow, the sunlight crept to cling and linger. The few leaves yet hanging on the oaks and dogwoods and hickories loosened themselves one by one and came down to the earth softly, slowly, turning round and round, sinking to rest with only the faintest murmur of content. Now and then a nut or an acorn fell swiftly with a sharp click. A

wood sparrow or two moved about in the undergrowth; from a distance came the chirring of a squirrel; a noisy jay flew overhead once with a sharp, hoarse cry. The winding woodland ways were hazy with the autumn smokiness, softly bright with the slanting sunshine, restful with drowsy warmth, sweet with the faint fragrance of leaf and bough and ripened forest fruit. From the leaf-flecked masses at the base of the white oaks on up to their topmost glistening twigs the peace of perfect maturity and of ended effort reached, filling the hollow as completely and as perceptibly as did the gold and purple of the sun-woven haze.

The boy sitting on the old log with the gun across his knees let the squirrel grate on unheeded, and did not even raise his eyes to watch the course of the screaming jay. He seemed a part of the landscape, so still he was, so dreamily intent on things of other days. But while the dreams of tree and shrub were plainly reminiscent of summer, his thoughts were all of the future.

One would scarcely have fancied it from his idle hands and listless pose, but he was even then looking at himself through the eyes of happy anticipation and seeing a man strong, active, wise, standing like Saul among his fellows, and leading them by force of his own great name wherever he would. Parts of the pictures moving before his eyes were vague and formless; but always there was in the center, clearly outlined, the image of the man he meant to be. And ever this man was doing some heroic thing, something from which lesser men shrank or for which their strength would not avail.

Not once did he falter—this brave, wise man—not once did he stoop to aught that was little or mean. True to his own high ideals, he, the champion of a people's rights, faced, calm and resolute, the forces of evil and, though sorely beset and often hindered, marched steadfastly on to complete victory. Standing before the men of his time when they were in the wrong, this hero spoke to them with words so wise, so

true, so sweetly persuasive, and so irresistibly convincing that all saw the soundness of his reason, and those who had come to question or to scoff remained to pay him the homage of applause.

So the pictures passed, one after another, as clear unto the spirit's rapt vision as were the clustered tree trunks and the inviting vistas between them to the placid eyes that looked out into the forest's depths. Statesman, orator, soldier, poet, counselor, friend of all good, foe of all evil—what was not this man to be? The best of every hero the lad had known went into his make-up; he could not but be greater than them all.

A vain dream? Yes, but a noble one—one of that splendid race of dreams to which all our worthiest actions and our truest ambitions trace their language. Heroic deeds are not born of unworthy ideals, nor did shameful hope ever beget noble achievement.

So the afternoon crept gently by, while the brooding sunshine paled and died away; and

the boy, with gun and game forgotten, held high converse with the noblest of mankind.

A glorious dream; for however much it might fail of realization, his life could not but be better because of it.

When at length the sun dropped out of sight and he waked from his reverie, rose from his primitive seat, and turned his face homeward, his eyes were those of one who has seen a vision, and his step was that of a conquering king.

II.

A gray day in mid-October with threats of rain and hints of coming frost. The woods were mostly green as yet, although the dogwoods and sourwoods were brilliant in red and the walnuts and hickories were light yellow. Other trees, too, were preparing themselves for the autumn festival, unusually delayed. The persimmons and sassafras bushes were splotted with brownish red and dark yellow; lemon-tinted leaves spotted the sweet gums; the ash trees at a little distance showed

silvery gray with hints of rose; even a few of the oaks displayed patches of gay color against their sober green. To the man striding rapidly down the narrow footpath through the wood the trunks all seemed gray—light gray with tints of green those of the ash and sweet gum, darker those of the aged chestnuts, almost black those of the slender walnut and stalwart black oak. Under his feet bright, new-fallen leaves lay on the faded foliage of former autumns.

The man, walking with quick, decisive steps, noticed all these things, but gave them little real heed. He was too busy with his plans and dreams. Little, indeed, did these dreams resemble the gorgeous pictures that unrolled themselves before the boyish vision. The man had no thought of leading his fellows, of swaying them with fervid eloquence, of dazzling them with brilliant achievements. He found it hard enough, in the rasping contact of business life, to make those with whom he dealt sure of his honesty and good will. It was not always easy at the same time to render to others what he

felt due to them and to protect himself from injury. Taking an earnest interest in the great world movements of the race, he hoped to exert no influence beyond the narrow circle of his own acquaintance. He dwelt as fondly on the idea of providing a better school for his own and his neighbors' children as the boy had dwelt on the inspiring message of the man who was to bend wrong-thinking multitudes to his will.

Even the darling dream of the man—the one dearest ambition, whose promised realization now lent vigor to his step and luster to his eye—would have seemed to the boy a trifling thing. It was only to make a little home, to add to its beauty and charm and cheer, to make it a place of comfort and repose to those he loved, to watch it grow ever sweeter and dearer to them, and to have it send abroad from open door and shining window a light of welcome or of kindly sympathy to every guest or passer-by. Should not any man in this land of opportunity be able to do all this and to count it but part of his day's work and achievement? So it would have

seemed to the boy; but to the man the prospect was one of supreme allurements. Could he but do this, he would feel that all his years of effort had been well repaid.

By no means an unworthy ambition; but could it be the deepest and most abiding this strong man knew? He said to himself that it was; but perhaps he was mistaken, for there still remained to him one boyish dream. To write something, however small it might be, "that the world would not willingly let die;" to leave behind him with even a few of earth's myriads one little gleam of cheerful memory and a half-forgotten name—deep down in his heart this longing still abode and would not let him rest. Often and often he had felt that the miracle was wrought and had written down the wonderful new thought with eager hand and panting breath, glad beyond the conception of those who think only of the sordid things of life. But ever, when the spell had been broken, when the instant's white-fused heat had died out of the fashioned words, he had looked upon

them and sighed and known that the dream had not yet come true. For always the finest and purest of the golden thought or the crystal emotion had been lost in the making of phrase and sentence; and always the written word, form and polish it as he might, was lacking in the celestial gleam.

Still the dream endured. Perhaps, he was thinking even now, when the roses should garland the fence of the cottage yard and the village children should stop to watch the pigeons on the roof, there might come the finer inspiration and life's great aspiration be realized.

And so, indeed, it might; for the possibilities of youth are beyond the solemn computation of the wise, and he is still young who retains even one of his youthful dreams.

The Chords of Memory.



IN places the branches of the oaks and chestnuts met across the narrow road, and here my horse walked over a rustling carpet of yellow and brown and dark, dull red. Again, the road wound along the hillside, and I could look down into the gray and brown clearings of the valleys or across above them to the opposite hills glorious in all the colors of the mountain autumn. Once I rode for a little while along the crest of one of the higher ridges and saw, beyond the gold and crimson foothills, the mighty summits of the Smokies rising in purple majesty until they faded away into an indistinct union with the purpler sky.

The leaves fell ceaselessly and with a soft, whispering sound that seemed part of the prevailing silence. Once or twice a jay called harshly or darted, a gust of vivid blue, through the glowing branches. Shy quail and timid

ground squirrels, with coloring as rich as that of the leaves, scurried fearfully away at my approach, and gray squirrels whisked themselves out of sight around the trunks of protecting trees. A yoke of little oxen I met, dragging a two-wheeled cart, on which were a bag of corn, the boy who was driving, and two little girls in pink dresses and sunbonnets. And a mile farther on a long, lanky mountaineer, clad in a striped shirt and blue trousers which lacked two inches of meeting his shoes, crossed the road in front of me. He had an old squirrel rifle on his shoulder, and passed without turning his head. The rest of the way I saw no one, except once, half a mile down the valley, I saw a woman building a fire under a big kettle out in the yard.

I was just beginning to wonder if I had missed the way when I saw the little clearing far up on the side of the hill—the gray cabin with the orchard behind it and the flaunting cosmos and rich-hued marigolds in front. Half a dozen hounds sprang from nowhere into loud-

mouthed evidence as I rode up, and then my friend, the mountaineer, came around the corner of the house.

He seated me in a split-bottomed chair on the narrow porch, and while the dogs gravely examined me he told of their wonderful qualities. I know nothing of hounds except that they make fine music when they run of nights; but a kindred spirit of vagabondage had drawn their owner and myself together. We both loved the woods and the long, leisurely days of idle pretense at hunting. So in a world of men who seem to have little time to get acquainted with the kindly old earth and small desire to quit working and thinking and just to live through the mellow, rich-flavored autumn days, we two had become in a short week or so the best of friends—friends who did not pretend to understand each other, but who were glad to accept and be accepted on trust.

Around the corner of the cabin came, as the hunter had come, his wife, wrinkled, keen-eyed, thin, and with the sharp, whining speech so

common among the women of the hills, and his daughter, graceful, slender, with eyes that sparkled and cheeks as rosy as the apples she carried. Beautiful she was with that beauty which is purely of the flesh, and which, among the women of her class, usually fades so early. I envied her sweetheart, but I could not but feel sorry for her. Scarcely eighteen, "she was a woman now, with the hopes and the heart of a woman." At forty she would be old, wrinkled, perhaps hard of feature and sharp of speech like her mother.

We sat there eating apples, crisp and juicy and flavored with all the aromatic wine that nature could distill from the soil and the air of the mountains, and saw the sun go down in a far-flung splendor of flame and scarlet behind hills where orange and red and gold and green were mingled in a prodigal profusion of richness. Then as the western sky faded from flame to rose, from rose to pink, and from pink to a clear, cold gray, we saw the darkness thicken in the valley and slowly creep up the hillsides

until the world was an indistinct tumult of formless shadows and the stars shone bright and keen from the depths of the infinite vastness.

We ate supper in the kitchen with the flames clambering about the pot that swung from the old crane in the fireplace and the dogs lying on the hearth. The meal finished, the mountaineer and I went into the little front room, where another fire was burning; for warm as the afternoon had been, the air now had in it the touch of frost.

“Must I bring the lamp in here?” the girl asked.

“No,” said the hunter.

She withdrew, and he went over to a chest in the corner. I had not thought of him before as a musician, but when I saw the old brown fiddle I was glad. He handled it with the tenderness of a lover, and there in the dimness of the firelight his grizzled face took on a new aspect and his eyes grew softer at once and brighter. Out in the woods he was a warrior,

pitting his skill and strength against that of the animal he would kill or capture ; here he was a king, and the marvelous and mystic bow did his bidding.

Old dance tunes he played first—"Arkansas Traveler," "Farmer John," and "Sourwood Mountain"—melodies that have grown, because of their intimate relationship with the soil, to be a part of the life of the people ; folklore tunes that are handed down "by ear" from one player to another just as the old ballads were passed on from one singer to another, to be changed and adapted by each according to his taste and feeling.

These were the old strains I had heard when I first tried to dance the Virginia reel with a girl whose bright eyes were long since clouded by a life of shame and sorrow. And one night I had sat outside in the honeysuckle-scented shadows and taken my first kiss from another fiddler's daughter while he played "Sourwood Mountain" inside and the couples swung and changed and promenaded in the dusty dimness

of the lantern-lighted room. Ah, what a girl she was! Dark hair that rippled and waved, eyes brown and soft and full of dreams, and a slow, sweet voice and little hands that trembled when I touched them! That was a delicious summer. But the fiddler, her father, was a ne'er-do-well, and he moved five whole miles away from where I lived; and a few years later she married a big, raw-boned fellow with a voice that grated like a rasp, and they moved to Texas.

So are born our dreams of love, and so they die. But as I remembered this and a hundred other incidents of those early days, when there was always the promise of to-morrow to heal the disappointment of to-day, the old fiddler wandered off into other strains—plaintive chords that sighed with vain wistfulness, breaking now and then into sobs of pain or the long moan of helpless endurance. There is many an untaught master of the violin who can put into sound the thoughts and emotions that no master has ever yet put into words; and as the old

man went on I knew that he was telling the story of his life—the real life, that of the emotions. He let the last long wail die away into silence and sat gazing into the fire for a long time.

“When I was about twenty,” he said at length in a voice I had never heard, “ol’ man Wheeler that you saw yiste’day lived over back of Gray’s Knob, and his Lizzie was the purtiest girl in the whole kentry. I ust to go to see her onct ev’ry week and sometimes twict, till I had a racket with the ol’ man, an’ he’d never let me go back. I’d git to see Lizzie now and then, but not much, for he watched her like a hawk. Then in the spring I went off up in the mountains to peel tanbark; and one night, jist about this time, we was all settin’ around the fire and some feller was playin’ the fiddle when Bill Wheeler (he was her brother) come in. He called me out and said, ‘Lizzie’s sick and wants to see you. The ol’ man said for you to come.’ We rode all that night, but when we got there she was dead.”

The old man wiped his eyes frankly and without shame, but as his wife opened the kitchen door he picked up the fiddle again.

“She used to sing this,” he said softly and slipped into the tender chords of “Sherwin Valley:”

“Then remember the sweet Sherwin Valley,
And the girl who has loved you so true.”

Another girl had sung that song in the days of long ago—a girl with tender eyes and gentle ways—and she too was silent for evermore. I knew that the golden leaves of the big tulip trees were even now falling on her grave.

When I had gone to bed, I lay and looked into the fire as brand after brand darkened and faded, and slowly there came to me the realization of why my friend so loved the woods and the streams and the silent companionship of the hills. To have dreamed and hoped, and to have seen the dream fade into nothingness, and felt the hope wither into the dead

certainty of impossibility is to have lived a life that cannot be shared with men, that asks in its unmeasured sadness for the solace of the vast, kindly earth and the enduring comfort of the infinite, tender sky.

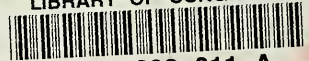
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