A Book of Joys

Lucy Fitch Perkins

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A BOOK OF JOYS

By Mrs. Perkins.

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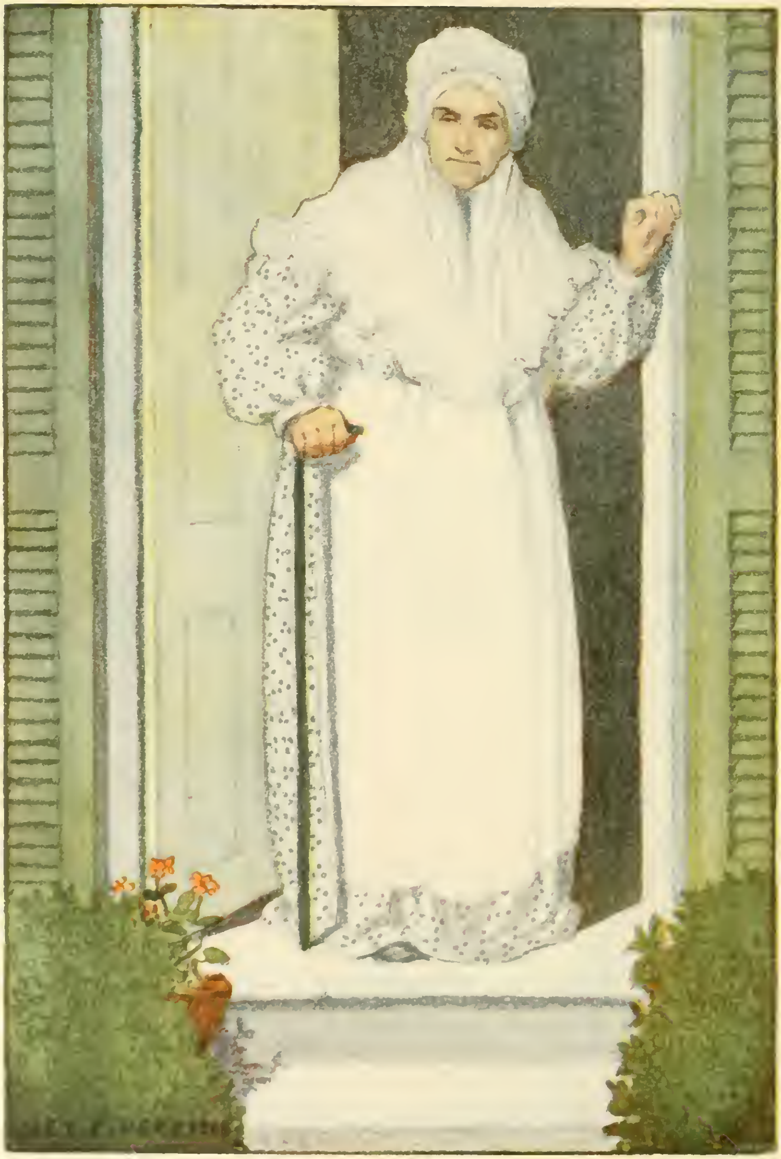

"The Widow Hill"

[Page 27]

A BOOK OF JOYS

THE STORY OF
A NEW ENGLAND SUMMER

BY

LUCY FITCH PERKINS

AUTHOR OF "THE GOOSE GIRL,"
EDITOR AND ILLUSTRATOR OF "THE DANDELION CLASSICS," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOR
BY THE AUTHOR

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TO

D. H. P.

FOR WHOM THIS RECORD OF A HAPPY NEW
ENGLAND SUMMER WAS WRITTEN

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A BOOK OF JOYS

CHAPTER I

MAY IN NEW ENGLAND

AND to begin, such a morning as it is! As if it were the first that dawned — I had almost said bloomed — in Paradise! And I, looking out upon it, feel like Eve returned to Eden, only with Adam left still without the gate to earn his bread — and mine — "by the sweat of his face." Could any one, I wonder, sit by this window, on this day of the world, and look out upon a New England orchard in bloom, with birds nesting and singing among the fragrant boughs, and not brim over with the joy of it?

I am not the first to observe that Nature is a delight at all seasons of the year; but just now and here she is a delirium, and I marvel that I do not spontaneously gush poetry from the wells of feeling within me! If it is true, as the philosopher asserts, that speech is silver and silence golden, then I am sure of my verbal policy. I am a bimetallist, and believe in the free and unlimited coinage of silver in the ratio of sixteen to one,—that is, sixteen speeches to one silence, at least at such times as this, when the joy of living makes more silence than that quite impossible.

I have been counting my Springs — not all of them — and it is quite ten years since I was in the country, especially this dear New England country, at this season of the year. To be sure, my Adam and I have had each Spring a few rapturous hours with the apple blossoms in our private Paradise of crab trees and hawthorns in the woods; but to live in an orchard during the bridal season of the year,— that comes but seldom in the life of a city woman, and alas! almost never to a city man. If only my Adam could persuade that severe angel with the flaming sword, whose name is Necessity, to look the other way for a moment while he crept past into Paradise with me, my cup of joy would be as full as the Psalmist's; and his ran over.

To come directly from the noise and confusion of the city to this rural loveliness, is like going from a sick bed straight to heaven, only to a much nicer heaven than some saints have pictured; for I never could understand why the Christian heaven should be described as a city. My Little Maid once expressed her views and mine on this subject: "Heaven," she said with conviction, "is not in the city; it is in the country."

MAY IN NEW ENGLAND

I suppose the idea of a celestial city may have been natural enough to a shepherd nation; or possibly to John on lonely Patmos the city presented a symbol of the companionship without which heaven cannot be; but what are pearly gates and golden streets compared with garden walks and the smell of apple orchards in bloom? It is but a sort of artificial Aladdin's palace of a heaven to which some of us look forward. For my part, I prefer a heaven paved with such turf as I look out upon now — all spangled with buttercups and broidered with violets, with the shadows of apple boughs dancing over it, and living silence all about, the stillness of singing birds and humming bees.

Bird songs and pleasant barnyard music mingle so sweetly in my happy ear, that this morning I could even find room in my heaven for less ethereal birds than those admitted in poetry to be fit for Paradise. So hospitable is my mental state indeed, that I think I should like a few barnyard fowls there, fowls that need never minister to carnal appetites nor be looked upon as subjects for culinary art, but peaceful biddies which might be allowed to wander unmolested, leading their downy broods through bypaths of the Elysian fields.

I think too, that I should miss the sleepy afternoon crowing of cocks in an ultra-refined heaven where only song birds were admitted! Perhaps I might advance into more exalted circles after a time, but I am sure I should like a good many of the dear commonplaces of earth at first to make my progress more easy and gradual. Hens are not so obviously suited, perhaps, to the spiritual sphere as the lark which already at heaven's gate sings, but they have their own place in the invisible universe; and I believe with George Eliot that many a lesson of quiet content in limiting circumstances may be learned from an old hen clucking to her brood or sunning herself in a dust pile, that we cannot get from more ambitious fowls.

This plebeian taste in paradises may result from my ancestry having been uncompromisingly American for many generations, or it may be natural to wish to include in the vision of the Ideal, the sweet features of the Actual. At any rate my conception of heaven is distinctly democratic, a place where all birds are born free and equal, and brought up without invidious social distinctions. We shall surely need some such world in which to perfect the democratic ideals so sadly shattered in this.

But this savors of politics, for which there is no room in any kind of a paradise, so I come back to my window, from which I can look out over the pinky-white tops of the orchard trees to the hills beyond which border the river. They too are clad with blossoms and verdure in all the tender spring shades of celestial millinery, and when the sunshine sifts through it in the early morning, the whole landscape melts into a golden mist that makes it seem like a tapestry woven of the stuff of dreams. I am, I fear, quite out of harmony with it all, clad in this too, too solid flesh — not to mention a woollen dress,— for it is still cool, and I long for a garment woven of spindrift, and a less carnivorous appetite, and specific levity instead of specific gravity, as the appropriate animating force for us all. To suit this environment one should be, indeed, but a very little lower than the angels.

From the window I see my Little Maid placidly digging in a garden bed, while my cousin Henrietta, whose love for this old home makes one forget that there are such things as flats and rented houses in the world, instructs her in the alphabet of gardening.

It seems impossible, as I look out upon this serene loveliness, to believe that such a place as the metropolis exists, or that man could have used his heaven-born gift of ingenuity to invent such a chaos of life. I even found myself a moment ago checking the thought of the city — any city — as if it were improper out of its context,— like profanity in church. Though I am a woman, I have enough of the doublet and hose in my disposition to concede that there are occasions when profanity is fitting and perhaps necessary. I am willing to admit that cities also have their uses. But in the country, in May, they seem to the normal life of man as an orphan asylum to a home, or as comic opera to real life.

Among other pleasures and emancipations of this happy holiday, I rejoice to find that I am not in a mood to think seriously of Modern Problems, that unfailing diversion of the conscientious modern woman. One could scarcely, indeed, take them into a blossoming orchard! So I am thankful to forget them and to rest for a brief space from worrying about the world; in fact, I have almost made up my mind to let the universe run itself this Summer, and to "let my own orbit be all my task." I think perhaps the reason we of the city feel so much responsibility about the world ordinarily, is because it is difficult to believe that God can be in the city at all. Yet I suppose His purposes are no more to be thwarted in city life than in the rest of the natural world: what is needed is the insight to see in experience the unalterable beneficence that science reveals in the order of nature. In a May orchard, at any rate, it is easy to believe "that we cannot escape from our good."

This beautiful old home where my Little Maid and I are happy guests is locally known as Marston Hill. Its broad acres were yielded to the forbears of the present owners by the Indians, and have been handed down from father to son through all the generations since. Mr. Marston, the last of a vigorous line, was born here, and has never known any other home. Here he brought Cousin Henrietta as a bride, from a similar home in Massachusetts, and here they have lived through all the quiet years since that happy event. In England this would not be noteworthy, but the migratory instinct of Americans is too pronounced not to make it a distinctive circumstance. Whether the estate was originally acquired by criminal aggression or by benevolent assimilation, it is impossible now to state; but if the latter, it is certain that the Indians were completely assimilated long since, for the place bears unmistakable marks of its two centuries of loving home life.

The house itself is more than a hundred years old, and has sheltered so many generations of Marstons that family associations are grown like lichens all about. This succession of owners may be chronologically traced through the portraits upon the walls, and the furniture is an accumulation of choice old mahogany that radiates memories of all the former owners of the place. If one were gifted with the powers of a psychometrician, what histories these old sideboards and tall clocks, high-boys and spidery tables, might reveal! The house, sheltered behind elms and pines, stands back from the street in dignified seclusion, while its generous expanse of terraced lawn gives a soothing expression of comfort and accustomed leisure.

Old-fashioned flowers crop out here and there in the turf about it, the survivors of a long-past garden where now the green lawn slopes down to the orchard's edge. Great lilacs, almost as high as the apple trees themselves, mingle the winy scent of their white and purple flowers with the odor of the orchard blooms, and near by are titan bushes of the African rose, a flowering shrub that looks like a rocket, as it bursts and falls in a shower of gold. There are hundreds of these graceful sprays, and the flowers have a delicate old-time fragrance that makes one think of the dear old-fashioned ladies who wore mitts and carried sprigs of things to church, and who made this home what it is.

MAY IN NEW ENGLAND

All the delights of Spring crowd themselves through my open window, and first of all pleasures is the open window itself; for what a sense of freedom comes to one who has been shut in behind storm sash all winter, when it is first possible to throw everything open and invite the outdoors in! And it comes in — the blessed air of heaven — without a cinder in it, blowing straight from Arcady into my room, laden with the fragrance of a blossoming world, and the songs of the feathered bridegrooms in the trees. It brings, too, softened by distance, the cries of men to their oxen as they plough in a neighboring field, the lowing of cattle, and the crowing of cocks. In the immediate foreground of sound is the clucking of Old Betty White, the setting hen, who is taking her morning exercise followed by an imaginary brood. Everything speaks of love and promise.

> "We may shut our eyes, but we cannot help knowing
> That skies are clear and grass is growing."

The cardinal virtues of faith and love are easy in a May orchard, and I find myself thinking more severely of Adam and Eve than I have done heretofore.

There might have been ample excuse for the fall if our first parents had been thrust into a city environment with all its complexities, but it should have been comparatively easy to stay good in a garden, where Nature seems seeking by every beautiful device to express the beneficence of the divine plan. Standing as we do between the infinitesimal and the infinite, with capacity to appreciate the perfection which expresses itself in both worlds, the understanding of it becomes a cumulative experience and the natural human being must be reverent.

Yesterday I showed the Little Maid a wonderful new world which we entered by way of the microscope. A speck of vegetable mould was magnified to many times its size and revealed a field of delicate green upon which grew plant forms as complex, perfect, and beautiful as the trees and plants of our larger world.

To-day I could understand the growing revelation which caused her to say solemnly, as she looked at the bees humming ecstatically above a blossoming apple tree, "I believe God has more power than I thought he had!"

And as the speck of mould is to our world, so is our world to the universe. What words shall we have when that, too, is revealed!

CHAPTER II

A SOLITARY SUNDAY

IF ALL Sundays could be like this one I am sure I should like to go "where Sabbaths have no end," for a surfeit of such loveliness could not be imagined. I might find some difficulty in becoming reconciled to the former proposition of that hymn, "Where congregations ne'er break up," however; for to go into a church filled with what Charles Dudley Warner called "old Gothic air," to hear about God, when every twig, branch, and visible object, sparkling in the sunshine and bathing in the breeze, speak of His love so unmistakably without, seems a sheer perversion to me.

I had the firmness to adhere to this point of view at church time this morning, which was a test of conviction, if not of piety, since the trend of public opinion is the other way here. But how could I miss two hours of such heavenly solitude as this, there being no human being anywhere about, except the dogs and myself, since the family drove away. My Little Maid begged to go to church "to hear the music," she said, but intuition tells me that her new pink-flowered gown added some persuasions of its own. At any rate, she went, and I am now seated in state upon the veranda with my writing materials before me, and my Wordsworth to take occasional refreshment from when I can no longer endure being unable to write poetry myself.

An orchestral concert is going on in the air about me, and as I sit here lost in a paradise of sound, I feel like Psyche in the Palace of Eros, the Soul in the House of Love, served with every desirable thing to the sound of invisible music. The bees murmur a soft accompaniment to the songs of robins, meadow-larks, bluebirds, orioles, and tanagers, each carolling his favorite melody in an independent obligato manner, destructive to one's ideas of musical form, possibly, but very satisfying to the ear. Even the occasional harmonic note of a mosquito does not disturb my serenity on this day "crammed with heaven," and the crowing of the cock in the barnyard positively adds to the effect of the cluster of sweet sounds wrapped around with silence.

Now the bells of the village church three miles away gently break the living stillness with their stately invitation. I like the bells the best of anything about a country church; their melody seems to belong with the gentle landscape and the peaceful day; but to be quite truthful, "I like a church, I like a cowl," in perspective only on such a day as this.

On dark winter days, when it requires rose-colored spectacles with telescopic lenses to see the beauty of life at all through the drifted miseries of the city, the church service reminds us of the welcome truth that after all we are but pilgrims and strangers here — that heaven is our home. But on such a day as this, intoxicated with the loveliness of life, I feel no more need of the consolations of theology and the doctrine of renunciation than a young-eyed cherubin does of a doctor, for to-day I can agree with Omar that "I myself am heaven." It is well, no doubt, that some days should be so filled with the actual Presence that seeking becomes unnecessary, and we may "sit at home with the Cause." One's impulses in the matter of church-going or home-staying are not, however, easily accounted for, and it is something more than easy to convict oneself merely of a feeble appreciation of the means of grace. Possibly, however, the means of grace may track me to my joyous and pagan lair; for be it confessed, last week the minister called, bringing his Easter sermon in his pocket, which at Cousin Henrietta's request he read aloud with the silent illustration of a re-born Earth all about him.

I like the old-fashioned relation of minister and people which is still possible in rural life. It makes the ministry more personal in character, more like spiritual healing — a veritable cure of souls. The minister here is an agreeable Englishman who must find much to remind him of home in the picturesque country life about him. He and his sweet-faced wife and five happy children live together in a dear old gabled parsonage across the street from the village church.

This yellow parsonage in its setting of lilacs and elms is a real heart picture, and I tantalize myself by imagining the impossible in the form of the discovery of some such ideal spot near the metropolis, and our appropriating it at once and living there happily ever after. This makes me long for the faith that removes mountains. If I had it I should pray, not for a mountain, for which I have no immediate use, but for the removal to the city of a dear old empty house and several acres of abandoned land near here, which would exactly suit our practical and æsthetic requirements. These old New England homes are so roomy and cosy, so homelike and domestic, that I do not see how the expression of them could be improved.

In the West, alas, tradition does not hallow old houses as it does here. Though I am a loyal Westerner, candor compels me to admit that old houses there shock my æsthetic sensibilities. They are too often high and narrow, with ugly humpy roofs and sides shingled in a manner to suggest eczema. Merely to look at one invites symptoms of acute nostalgia. There our oldest houses are apt to be but degenerate survivors of the Queen Anne period, mongrel descendants of a noble race. Their original lack of dignity becomes with advancing years a hopeless combination of folly and decay — like an old woman with kittenish manners and a black false front.

The Westerner who comes East is bound to grow idolatrous before these dignified remnants of ancestral days, and with characteristic zeal returns home to call upon his architect for a reincarnation of some fine old elm-shaded New England home, which, stripped of its surroundings and imitated in a city street, is as forlorn a spectacle as that of a widowed grandmother living in a family of her Things-in-Law.

My cousin Henrietta tells me about the people who live in the quaint old houses we pass in our drives, and her tales impress me anew with the thought that whether it be desirable or not, people have room for individuality in the country. Cities have a graded-school effect upon society, for people of the same class all know the same things, and make it a point of etiquette to act as much like one another as possible. In rural New England, at least, there still remains a commendable independence of character, and a notable pride in eccentricities. This was plainly indicated by the complacent comment of a neighbor with whom we stopped to chat on our drive yesterday.

"My sister and me," she explained, "ain't no more alike than if we was n't us! She 's just as different as I be the other way."

Just "to be different" seems to satisfy a New England appetite for distinction, and as an appetite it has certain advantages over that for conformity.

Here peculiar people mature and go to seed and then, as Mrs. Stowe has said, "go on lasting"; for it is a place where people never die and are seldom born. The air seems an excellent preservative — possibly because there is so much salt in it, and every one has a reasonable chance of attaining the prestige of the oldest inhabitant.

One of our nearest neighbors is the Widow Hill, a hearty old lady of ninety, who is interested in everything that goes on in her world, and who still walks about with all the energy and vigor of a young woman of seventy-five. We called upon her yesterday, and I shall never forget the charming picture she made as we passed between the borders of box to her Colonial front door, where she stood as in a frame, waiting to greet us. She wore a snowy cap, with strings of the finest muslin hanging over the little cape which covered her shoulders, and her white apron was as immaculate as her cap.

She ushered us into a parlor with paper on the walls of a pattern half a century old, and seated herself in a high-backed chair which had belonged to one of the ancestors whose silhouettes hung in oval frames above her head, while Cousin Henrietta and I found seats on a horsehair-covered davenport opposite her. As she sat with her blue-veined hands crossed over the white handkerchief in her lap, she made a striking resemblance to Whistler's portrait of his mother.

To see her, and to hear her quaint comments upon the events of her world, was like stepping directly into a descriptive passage of a historical novel. I always skip them in books, but it was a pleasure to traverse the seventy-five years which stretched between the gate and her front door, and to live for a little while a contemporary of my own ancestors.

The widow lives with a female dragon known as Hannah Ann, who keeps her in perfect if uncomfortable order, and guards the flickering flame of life with the faithful zeal of a vestal virgin. Hannah Ann is "a housekeeper by the wrath of God"—a Calvinist in kitchen management; and the widow evidently holds her in an esteem not unmixed with awe.

The smell of soap pervaded the rooms, and the sound of a scrubbing brush was heard in the nether portion of the house, where, as the widow explained, "Hannah Ann was purifyin' her kitchen in preparation for the Sabbath." As she opened a door leading into the front hall to wash the threshold, the odor of baked beans and brown bread came in an appetizing gust from the kitchen. The widow sniffed it appreciatively.

"Seems 's if we should n't hardly know 't was Saturday without the smell of beans in the house," she said; "Hannah always has 'em for supper same as we always did when I was a girl at home."

Who shall say we have no traditions in America? Without his Saturday night beans no New Englander feels really prepared for his religious privileges on Sunday.

From the windows of the Widow Hill's house I could see a charming cluster of buildings in the distance, and when we stepped from her front gate into this century once more, I asked Cousin Henrietta if we might not drive that way home. The buildings proved to be an old mill, a printing office, and a country store, picturesquely grouped upon the bank of a mill-pond.

The pretty mill-stream at this point spreads into a quiet pool, filled with reflections of the group of gray buildings on its banks, and then dashes impatiently over the dam, and hurries on to join the river two miles away. The printing office was as neat as wax, and advertised its owner's New England conscience to such a degree that at a glance I guessed him to be a descendant of Jonathan Edwards, at least. The press, the mill, and an adjoining store are all owned and operated by different members of one family, living in a comfortable white house near by. The father of this industrious family, whom we found sitting in a depressed attitude beside the door, is described by Cousin Henrietta as a professional invalid and hypochondriac. Sometimes he goes from house to mill backwards and on crutches; at other times in a normal manner, looking forward and not back; while at other times he refuses to speak for days together. One son has dyspepsia and symptoms of melancholia, and the other members of the family display varying degrees of deflection from the paths of health in the midst of an extravagantly healthful environment.

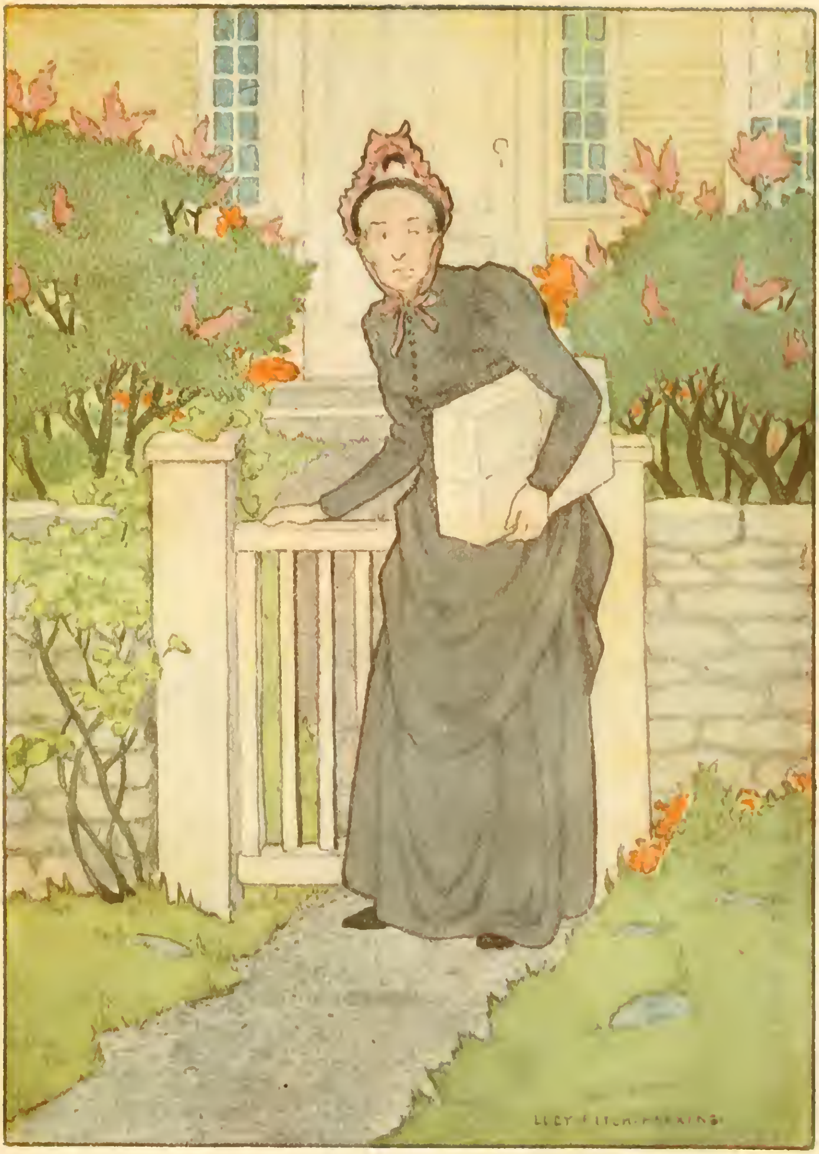
Here is a situation to puzzle an evolutionist; and the explanation offered by Cousin Henrietta is a devoted, hard-working, self-sacrificing New England mother, who cooks griddle-cakes for the family breakfast every single day in the year, unless, possibly, she makes an exception of Fast Day, and it would certainly seem that that day might well be spent in fasting and prayer for the gastronomic sins of the rest of the year. I could but admire the heroic remnants left in the composition of this family which enable them to carry on three industries in spite of such diet.

In a picturesque old house farther down the hill two women live who might have stepped bodily from the pages of one of Mrs. Freeman's stories of New England life. They are not to be classed among the "lovely baubles" of their sex, but are of that more austere feminine type described by Henry James as "spinsters by every implication of their being." Untoward circumstances make it necessary for them to eke out a scanty income by baking cakes and cookies to sell, and this occupation so offends these old aristocrats that they try to keep it a profound secret from their little world. If in the early morning one should pass their tiny gambrel-roofed cottage, half buried among riotous perennials, one may catch a glimpse of them furtively digging in their bit of garden, or "skittering along under the fence" carrying a pasteboard box of cookies to the village. The townspeople tacitly accept their view and maintain a polite and official ignorance of this pursuit.

There was a time in New England when such skill in cookery would have been a point of honest pride, but in spite of sturdy traditions it would seem that the attitude toward work in New England is not quite what it was in the days of the fathers. New England's worship of the head has lessened her appreciation of skill of hand, and has tended to develop class distinctions, and an undemocratic respect for the aristocracy as such. In fact, one of the proudest boasts of this dear old Eden is that it has a "leisure class." Distinctions of nationality are also more sharply felt here than we feel them in the West, and the preservation of democratic ideals is one of the great compensations in living nearer to the present location of the Star of Empire. Since I am in love with life, I am glad not to have missed knowing well that great City of the West where women have more opportunities, I believe, than in any other place in the world.

It is wonderful to me to see the patient women who live lonely yet cheerful lives in these old-fashioned New England towns, shut in with few interests, limited means, and little companionship through the long winter months. To one surrounded with normal family life their conditions appear intolerable; yet their interest in life seems unflagging, and they carry on their round of duties with as fatiguing a zeal as if the comfort of others depended upon their efforts. Moreover, they keep in their houses an expression of quiet comfort which renders them homelike in appearance, however lonely they may be in fact.

Among the virtuous ornaments of their sex, there are no more uncompromising feminine types to be found in this region than Dr. Mary Brown and her sister, two women who perform the miracle of making money by farming, and are said to be compounded of the hardiest elements in human nature. Cousin Henrietta and I drove up the lonely road on which they live, in quest of ferns, and when we reached their rambling brown house, I begged her


LUCY FITCH PERKINS

"'Skittering Along under the Fence,' carrying a Pasteboard Box of Cookies"

to devise some errand thither, that I might see Dr. Mary and her sister in their chosen environment. In addition to their farming activities these thrifty sisters keep in one room of their house a stock of provisions to sell to neighboring farmers; so it was an easy matter to discover a sudden appetite for late apples, and I went to the door to ask for them. The gate opened upon a dooryard of clipped turf, which looked as if it were swept and garnished every morning. A few well-tended garden flowers bloomed near the door, which stood invitingly open, and through it I could not resist peeping as I let the knocker fall.

It revealed a room, austerely clean, which was evidently kitchen and living-room in one. A shining stove stood in one corner against a fireplace which had long ago been bricked up to make way for its successor, the kitchen range. Old-fashioned chairs with straight backs and woven seats stood about, silently eloquent of respectable ancestry, and a worn and dull mahogany table which had escaped the rapacity of collectors was covered with books and farming journals. It stood so near the door that the titles were plainly visible, and among them I noted some old bound books on medicine, a pamphlet called "The Family Horse Doctor" lying in neighborly proximity to a copy of "Ben Hur," and a worn Bible; and since neither of the sisters appeared in answer to my knock, I allowed myself the indulgence of imagining them from the suggestions afforded by this table of books. My conclusion was, that the Bible and "Ben Hur" were expressive of the tastes and inspirations of good Miss Esther, while the scientific journals gave hints as to the more severe pursuits of Dr. Mary.

A table of books is a terrible telltale. One might go into any house and divine the character of the inmates by the volumes found there. Books there are sure to be of some kind in this book-worshipping country, either positively or negatively accusing the literary tendencies of the family. Even where they are not read, they have a function in establishing claims to literary respectability, and there are some books that no New England family could afford to be without, any more than they could face public opinion without the consciousness of a parlor. I was gratified to see that there was nothing to convict Miss Esther and Dr. Mary of literary hypocrisy. Their books were evidently read, and in the middle of the table a dish of apples suggested pleasant evenings spent in refreshing both the inner and outer woman.

A curious turkey peered inquiringly around the corner, and as there was still no response to my knocking, I opened a little gate and went to the back of the house. The orchard sloped from the garden to cultivated fields beyond, and order and peace reigned here as elsewhere; but there was no one in sight, and I was obliged to return to the carriage empty-handed. Fortune favored us on our way home, however, for we had not driven far when we met Dr. Mary returning from a journey to town.

I had been told that in her young days — how long ago it were impious to inquire — Dr. Mary had left her farm home, bitten with a fierce desire to experience city life and to study medicine. When she at last attained her degree she returned to Eden and for some reason buried herself and her professional ambitions on the old farm. I tried to imagine the reason for this, for it would seem there must be a story back of it, but Dr. Mary herself as she appeared in her wagon, effectually nipped any romantic explanation. The instant I saw her I knew that nothing but conviction could ever have moved her to any course of action whatsoever.

"When first she gleamed upon my sight" she sat bolt upright on the wagon seat, her lips compressed in a straight line, her nose tense, and her elbows set at an uncompromising angle as she kept a tight rein upon her spirited horse; for the one luxury and indulgence which Dr. Mary permits herself is a fast horse, in which she takes a stern sort of pride. This of course explained "The Family Horse Doctor" on her table.

Her hair was short, and bristled in a fringe over her ears under the straight brim of a man's straw hat, which she wore pulled down over her forehead, and her tiny figure was encased in a man's coat of severe cut. So erect was she, and so cylindrical in shape, that she gave the impression of a highly explosive, but very small firecracker. So far as the world can discover, Dr. Mary has never practised her profession, but she clings to her title, perhaps feeling as Portia did about Bassanio — that since it was dearly bought she would hold it dear.

I wish that I might have been present when Barney Bump, the loose-jointed town philosopher of the Sam Lawson type, in an excess of liberality assured her that she was a "good fellow," and added, benevolently, "You know, Doctor, when I talk to you I don't never realize that I'm speakin' to an inferior, tho' I suppose you be a woman after all." Whether orthodoxy or strong-mindedness prevailed in Dr. Mary's reply is not recorded.

It cannot be truthfully claimed for the Doctor that she is calculated to win her way by the accepted method of feminine charm, but her uncompromising angularity presented some refreshing features to one weary of the exaggerated and offensive femininity — or feminanity — thrust upon us in the columns of the daily press, and even in more pretentious periodicals, published to appeal to a feminine constituency.

The women's magazines are not wholly complimentary to the sex in the material which they offer as a response to the demands of feminine taste. I am sure I do not overstate facts when I say that we do not always wish to wade knee-deep in sentiment, much less in sentimentality, and that we sometimes crave other mental nourishment than beauty recipes, gossip about the personal life of famous people, illustrated articles on "Attractive Facial Expression," or heart-to-heart talks on "How to Win Husbands." To read an issue of the Woman's Supplement of almost any Sunday paper is a humbling exercise, and leaves one with chastened views as to the progress of the Sex, and in a mood to embrace any symbol of protest against such a parade of physical attractiveness as the one and only appeal of womankind. Such papers certainly provide justification and welcome for such a courageous and antipodal type as the little doctor.

By the operation of the law of contrast we met on the way home one of the sisters who live in the gambrel-roofed cottage. She had met the same problem of poverty, loneliness, and repressed wishes, but in such a different way! Craven fear of public opinion, and the suffering which comes from inability to keep up appearances, were written in every line of face and figure. Angular and spare, she walked her solitary way, shrouded in a black dress of a fashion many years gone by, and with a bonnet which in this day of low crowns was a volcanic pyramid, from the apex of which an eruption of faded ribbon flowed like a molten stream down its sides and around her pointed chin, framing a face so sad, so withered, so starved in affection that it has haunted me ever since. In the younger portions of the country we have this advantage: Our miseries are at least likely to be robust and positive affairs. Such a life of slow starvation of mind and affections is rarely found in growing communities.

Poor Miss Maria is a sort of spiritual Robinson Crusoe without his power to wring victory from hard conditions. The memory of her is like the memory of pictures of the famine sufferers in India, only hers is famine of soul, and the suffering lasts longer.

The sad element in these lovely old towns is undoubtedly the dearth of young life in them, and the lonely conditions of old age. There are comparatively few children to be seen in the picturesque streets, except those of foreign birth, and clean white cottages inhabited by solitary spinsters or lonely widowers, or even occasionally by a bachelor, are by no means uncommon. They suggest to an eager sentimentalist from the West a rearrangement which would set the solitary in families and ease the strain upon the sympathies. It is difficult indeed to account for such situations in a part of the country where there are so many "superfluous females," for if there is one masculine trait to be generally relied upon it is the habit of matrimony. Yet on this same lonely road we passed two pretty houses within half a mile of each other, one inhabited by a solitary spinster, and the other by an equally solitary widower of suitable age. The spinster is a thrifty soul whose cooking has an honorable reputation, and whose house is a model of neatness, from the two shells which embellish the stone doorstep in front to the tidy clothes-yard in the rear. She has what in New England parlance is known as "some proputty" too, and in summer her bit of garden blooms as luxuriantly as the pictures in the seed catalogues. She is sure to see you if you pass, and come sociably to the carriage with a bunch of flowers from her garden to tell you of the progress of her house-cleaning or preserves, or whatever annual activity may be in season.

The widower's house beyond gave a delicate suggestion of congenial pursuits, for his porch was covered by a climbing rose, and flowers bloomed in awkward clumps about his lonely doorstep. In spite of these tributes to the Spirit of Home, his house had distinctly the forlorn atmosphere which is the usual accompaniment of a masculine *ménage* and which makes unfailing appeal to the heart of womankind.

With drives like these over charming country roads, and walks through flower-decked fields, " my days are passing swiftly by," and to-morrow it will have been a week since we came. I am already three pounds heavier than when I was last weighed, which was at the ferry in Brooklyn on a versatile penny-in-the-slot machine, which told my fortune and my weight and played a tune, all at the same time! The fortune read, "You will soon get what you little expect." Probably it referred to these three pounds of flesh.

Now for one more bit of Wordsworth before I hear the wheels of the carriage bringing the family home from church. Here it is: "*Daffodils*"—apropos of the round bed of them under my bedroom window which looks like the halo of a pictured saint. How well I appreciate the joys he describes in these last six lines:

"For oft when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills
And dances with the daffodils."

I can open not only my "inward eye" and see my jocund company of daffodils and the blooming orchard beyond, but I can hear with my inward ear the singing of birds and bees, and smell with my inward nose — for why should I neglect that meritorious organ?—all the tender fragrance of the Spring; and these joys I can summon at will. So great a gift is memory!

CHAPTER III

AN INDOOR DAY

THIS must be an indoor day, for the "rain is raining all around," it being Monday, and Nature having a touch of perversity in her, even in Arcady. However, I do not mind, for all days are alike to me in my present care-free state; and Melissa, the rosy-cheeked maid who incarnates all one's ideals of pretty milkmaids, does n't seem to mind it either, being of that sanguine disposition which always trusts there 'll be more sunshine coming in which to dry her clothes. Besides, the rain has its own charms.

I have just thrust my head as far as possible out of the window, to the immense damage of what in deference to the spirit of romance I call my rebellious curls, to take a prolonged sniff of the outdoor odors made more vivid by the rain. This reminds me of my long-standing grudge against the type of heroine in fiction whose rebellious curls remain bewitching under all circumstances, and who is always distracting *en déshabillé.* The wind-blown and water-soaked maiden who appears most attractive when the elements have done their worst by her does not exist outside of novels and magazine covers, and as a literary property she should be boycotted by every conscientious woman over thirty years of age. The bad-tempered beauty whose sole claim to consideration is her good looks is a product of man-tailored books, and is an affront to the feminine virtues which the sex is constantly urged to exemplify. What real woman has not acknowledged a debt of gratitude to Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, and other writers of their own sex, for giving the plain heroine her innings? Jane Eyre owes her undisputed popularity to her resignation of all claims to beauty. As a pretty governess, what a minx she would have been! Even Charlotte Brontë paid tribute to the conventional theory of romance, by making Rochester a *roué* and striking him blind, so that no one could feel that plain little Jane had got any more than she could reasonably expect to buy with her looks and fortune.

But I must not allow the consideration of curls to distract me from the testimonial I was about to pay to another feature! I was on the point of saying that I am certainly coming to a greater appreciation of my nose. In the city it seldom rises to the sphere where it administers æsthetic pleasure, being chiefly useful as a means of home sanitation, and its value being fully understood only during colds. But here I discover it to be a battery of concealed associations, memories, and emotions; and I am constantly indebted to it for rare moments in which I return to childish delights.

I suppose there may be as agreeable odors elsewhere, from the standpoint of sensuous gratification alone, but an odor that is merely pleasing does not rank with the combination of sweet smells and delightful memories which I enjoy here. It is, of course, because the happiest part of my childhood was spent in New England; and the smell of the sea, of flowering currants, of lilacs and apple blossoms, of moist earth, and even an occasional whiff of burning leather, all have indescribable charms, because they were first impressed upon me at that happy period of my life. The smell of burning leather is associated with delightful walks to and from school along a roadway bordered with wild grapevines and still wilder rocks, with hills swimming in the blue distance and little brooks dancing over stones near by. The boot shops of New England used to burn their refuse leather; and this smell, not usually classed as a fragrance, became inalienably associated with care-free hours when we played house upon the shadowy rocks, with broken dishes for our only furniture, and wild blackberries for our only provender, and looked down an endless vista of delightful to-morrows. No wonder my inward nose takes pleasure in the odor of reminiscence.

I have had lately a delightful ride with Cousin Henrietta's husband, and an equally delightful walk in the woods. The drive took us around by an out-of-the-way road, through the one long street of the village to the station which lies two miles beyond the town, directly at the mouth of the river. The river is a half-mile wide at this point, with a very swift current; and I thrilled with a pleasing horror to hear the story of a local Leander, who swam across it, not for to kiss his dear, alas, but because he had an ungodly thirst upon him, and this is a prohibition town. Under cover of the darkness of a summer night, he took a jug upon his shoulder and swam to the other shore, where he got the jug filled with whiskey; after this he nonchalantly swam back home, and later filled himself with the whiskey, no doubt to prevent taking cold.

Near the station, hidden in a curve of the road, we found a picturesque cluster of fishermen's cottages, where men live who come to Eden for the summer fishing. There were picturesque groups of them sitting on the river-bank mending their seines, tying sinkers to their lines, and winding their nets upon huge reels. The fish are, of course, abundant and good, and I am developing quite an epicurean taste; for it is a point of honor to pay the respect of an appreciative appetite to the native products.

The residents now pride themselves upon their river shad, though there was a time in the golden age of plenty when it was a disgrace to be seen carrying one of these fishes home. There are two respectable families here of the same name who are nearly related, but between whom and their neighbors is fixed a social gulf as the result of the Watsons' ancient appetite for shad. They are still known respectively as the "Pun'kin Seed" Watsons and the "Shad" Watsons, both families evidently having low tastes in fish.

There seems to be a pronounced New England tendency to invent nicknames for local characters whose unique qualities rise to sufficient proportions to be noticeable. The village gossip, for example, is usually referred to as Queen Anne; and Barney, the Philosopher, received his alliterative title from the same public source. Bump is his last name, and Barney was so euphoniously desirable that it was contributed to him by the appreciative community.

He is pleased with this double system of nomenclature, for, as he says, "It 's all-fired convenient: f'r instance, when they was givin' out a silver teaspoon (plated, I s'pose,) with every pound o' tea, and only one pound was allowed to each customer, 't was as nateral as livin' to take one pound for Barney Bump and one for William Henry Bump, and did n't do nobody no harm neither." With which formidable array of double negatives he must certainly have proved the affirmative proposition.

A drive through the one long street of this town is a continuous delight at this season of the year. It is a picturesque avenue arched with magnificent elms, and on each side, hidden away among shrubbery and vines are old Colonial houses which were once the homes of retired sea captains and other people of means. What a good word "means" is! It has lost its significance since wealth came to be considered end instead of means. The captains are dead and gone now, all of them, and so is their industry; for with the decay of the East Indian trade these old New England ports fell into disuse, and are now chiefly valued as sketching material by bands of artists, who come from New York and Boston in the summer to fill their portfolios with pictures of dismasted and dilapidated vessels moored to tumble-down wharves. Artists live like vultures upon the remains of defunct industries and departed grandeur! I confess to feeling the spell myself, though I admit that it is the charm of imagination quite as much as that of objective beauty that holds me.

There is such a group of artists here, living in one of the most picturesque of the old Colonial mansions; and the spots commanding striking views are dotted with easels and men in Tam o' Shanter caps and golf stockings, doing landscapes. We surprised one of them painting by the roadside on our drive; and though he looked almost as respectable as an undertaker, being one of the least dishevelled and Bohemian of his kind, the astute horse we drove had his own views, and stood upon his hind legs, waving his front ones in the air, apparently in surprise at the picture. The painter took it good-humoredly, and rose to exhibit the fact that after all he was a man though an artist; the horse accepted his apology, and we moved on.

The attitude of the natives toward these artists is one of amused and tolerant interest, and their pictures are valued according to the degree of exactness with which local views are portrayed.

A beautiful painting of the Widow Williams's pasture sold in New York for a thousand dollars, and when this fact was reported to the Widow she said, with contempt: "A thousand dollars for the likeness of my pasture! My land! They could have had the hull field for less than that!"

There was a time, it is true, when Deacon Wright put up a sign which read "No artists allowed in this pasture," but it was only after one of his cows had met an untimely death through eating the paint rags left in the wake of an enthusiastic painter, and does not argue that the Deacon had no soul for Art.

Barney Bump, indeed, has become such a connoisseur that he is accustomed to offer benevolent advice and criticism to such artists as he finds painting by the roadside in his journeys about town. It must be acknowledged, however, that his suggestions are not always received in the right spirit. One of the painters so far forgot himself as to say irritably to the philosopher, "If you know so much about how it ought to be done, why don't you paint pictures yourself?"

"Ain't got no paints," said Barney.

To have the pursuit of beauty the business of life seems to the serious mind of the rural New Englander but a paltry way of spending the span of existence; but acquaintance with this group of genial painters is doing much to limber local prejudice and to give an insight into the meaning and compensations of the artist's life.

The painters, as always, bring Bohemia with them and are happy in their own way in the midst of this charming environment. With characteristic generosity, they have left priceless souvenirs of their happy Summers in Eden upon the door panels of the old mansion which is their headquarters, and these paintings add new features of interest to an already historic house.

All the dooryards in Old Eden are now fragrant with Persian lilacs and gay with bushes of bridal wreath, and the porches are draped with the most magnificent wistarias I ever saw outside of a Japanese photograph. My gardening microbe, which is a recent acquisition, grows apace in such a congenial atmosphere, and I continue to dream dreams and see visions of a charming garden of our own in which all the work shall be as delightful as the nature books profess it to be. I even went out this morning and picked lilies of the valley in the sun for half an hour, until my back ached and my knees wabbled, to see if it would n't scare away the vision, but I still have it. It will be thrust aside only by the advent of a new germ, which will surely be waiting for me at my next stopping-place, for I am very susceptible to enthusiasms.

This particular microbe has found a congenial culture in the fact that Cousin Henrietta is making a new garden on the east side of the house, and she and I have been accustomed to sit in state upon camp stools on the lawn while Hiram makes a rustic gateway under her direction. The gate opens upon a broad grass walk, in the middle of which, where four paths meet, is to be a sundial, to mark the sunlit hours. This garden is to be that most sensible and consistent of combinations, a flower and kitchen garden. The vegetables are to be massed in beds, the military onions, the delicate parsley, the modest pea vines, and the stately corn, all arranged according to their nature and necessities, and at the same time with due regard to æsthetic effect. Cousin Henrietta is a conservative, I find, for there are to be social distinctions even in this democratic area of a combination garden; the vegetables are to be humbly placed behind ornamental borders of flowering plants. When I make a garden I shall give the place of honor to working vegetables, as a matter of principle, for it is easier to reform a garden than social life — and I must provide some safe outlet for a protest against the precedence given to drones and butterflies in society everywhere.

This new garden is to complete the Colonial picture made by the old house in its setting of shrubs and vines. In one corner is a pergola covered with a grapevine and climbing roses. This and the rustic gate aroused a fine scorn in Barney Bump, who was helping to make them when he had the misfortune to break his leg. Why any one should desire an arbor with the bark left rough on the wood, when to "skin it proper" and have a nice smooth effect would be such a simple matter, he could not fathom. So he expostulated with Cousin Henrietta.

"That 'ere arbor," he said, jerking his thumb in the direction of the pergola, "looks so wild you'd expect gorillars to come out on it any minute; and as for that 'ere rustic gate — the report 's goin' round that Mis' Marston 's goin' to raise turkeys, seein' as she 's gettin' a roost all ready for 'em."

Therefore it is that in the family circle the pergola has become the "gorillar arbor," and the rustic gate the "turkey roost." It must be said for Barney that he is one of those rare philosophers whose philosophy bears the test of events without cracking at the seams.

After his accident, which occurred before I came, Mr. Marston went to see him, and his comment on his misfortune was a triumph of stoicism.

"Wall," he said, shifting his comforter into the other cheek, "I ain't no call to complain. We got to take things as they come along, but it does seem as though Providence had been handin' out misfortins pretty plentiful to me, lately. I got my peas all planted along there by the buryin' ground last week, before I met up with this affliction, but Mis' Sander's hens come out and scratched up every danged one on em' the very next day. I went over to see her about it the last act I done, 'n as soon as she see me comin' she called out, 'I can't do nothin' about it, and you need n't ast me to. I won't shet up my hens, not for nobody.' Say, Mr. Marston, I wisht you'd ast Hiram what he 'll trade for that fightin' bantam of his'n. I'll bet he 'd keep Mis' Sander's hens in their own h'ants! He 's killed two of Hiram's for interferin' with him. I guess he 's the only proper anecdote for them p'isonous hens o' Mis' Sander's, and I can't do anything excep' by proxy whilst I'm a-lyin' here; and it does seem as if it would kind of ease me to watch that there bantam teach them female hens their proper sphere."

My walk in the woods was yesterday with Cousin

Henrietta. We drove through the meadow to the woods, or rather, the others did. I preferred to walk through fields gay with buttercups, painter's brush, and red sorrel, and bordered with hedges of apple trees and dogwood still in bloom. In the woods the ground was blue with violets, and pink with wild geraniums — and such woods! Rocks piled high up in the air, with great trees growing in the crevices and silhouetting their delicate foliage against the bluest of skies, and embroidered at intervals with bunches of laurel and sparkling dogwood. We had to look almost vertically to see the sky in places, the great masses of rock so overhang the woods below.

While I skirmished about investigating the cavern and its environs, Cousin Henrietta was filling her basket with ferns, wake-robins, and other pretty things; and when this was done we climbed the rock,— butte it would be called in Arizona,—and at the top came upon a view of views! The rock is so high that it commands not merely many miles of surrounding country, but a beautiful sweep where the river joins the sea, and of distant lighthouses and "painted ships upon a painted ocean." The day was perfectly clear and warm, the sky cloudless, and the air like the elixir of life. The top of the rock was embowered in laurel which will soon be in bloom, and I was surprised to find great festoons of what we are in the habit of calling Southern moss hanging from many of the shrubs and trees. I never before had a chance to examine any while growing, and it seems incredible that it can be an organism at all, for it has no roots, being an air plant, and hangs by the most slender filament imaginable to the bark of the shrub.

We sat on top of the rock for some time, expanding in the sunshine, and watched Mr. Marston and my Little Maid, whom we had left waiting for us at the bars in the sunny hollow, drive home through the meadows. When we reached the bars Mr. Marston was there once more, having taken the child home and returned for us.

I saw a most lovely scarlet tanager and his mate in the woods, the first I had ever seen, and his wonderfully brilliant plumage caused me to meditate again upon the partiality shown to the male of every species among the beasts and birds: they wear the plumage all the way up the scale. But women are avenging their sex in this generation, and the male of the human species even in the melancholy splendor of evening dress makes a sad anticlimax to the gay procession behind him. Ah, here comes the sun again!

"There's joy in the mountains;
There's life in the fountains;
Small clouds are sailing,
Blue sky prevailing;
The rain is over and gone!"

And so I must be also, for the work I brought with me waits while I idle away my time on my Book of Joys. I must save time for going out of doors, now that the sun shines again. Melissa's optimism is justified — her clothes will dry to-day after all.

CHAPTER IV

SOCIETY NOTES

I HAVE chosen a romantic spot for my writing this afternoon. I am sitting on the pump platform on the west side of the barn, sunning myself to get warm, like a good fat hen. I catch the fragrance of the wistarias here, however, and the roses near by show pink buds; so I know that summer is here, even though at the present moment I have on furs, and the weather continues to be sulky.

I am reminded every day of Emerson's "Compensation," for this country life is an illustration, as everything is, of the truth of it. Of course, the one lack in real country life is all that belongs with constant association with one's own kind, and for my part I am ready to confess that I consider this a genuine drawback. I have none of the tendencies of a recluse, and find my fellow beings excellent company. There are delightful people here, but the benefit from them is occasional, and one has to jog oneself instead of depending upon outside associations for intellectual stimulus.

On the other hand, this social lack is atoned for by a more intimate acquaintance with cats and dogs and other live stock; and if one agreed with the misanthropist who said that the more he saw of men the better he liked dogs, it might be considered a fair exchange. At any rate, I never appreciated the individuality of animals so much before; for here every creature has a local habitation and a name, just as much as if he lived on Fifth Avenue with a number on his door, and his doings are discussed at the table instead of gossip or problems. There are now four cats and two kittens on the premises. The two house cats, Mary and Martha, are sisters, and have many characteristics of their scriptural namesakes. Martha is the proud parent of one striped kitten with an Irish cast of countenance. There were more in the family originally, but there has been a shocking mortality in cats here this Spring, and still the birth rate shows no alarming symptoms of race suicide.

Mary is an artless puss, affectionate and confiding to a degree that touches the emotions. We had all been affected by her unselfish devotion to Martha's kitten, which she seemed to love as tenderly as if it were her own. She seemed, in fact, a sort of cat philanthropist, for she would spend hours cuddling it while that more austere female went hunting or indulged herself in pleasant excursions after bugs in the early twilight. We all felt that Mary had chosen the better part of maternal solicitude, while we were equally sure that Martha was unduly cumbered about other things and showed an instinct for a career. What was our surprise, then, yesterday, when our artless Mary appeared at the kitchen door with two kittens of her own which were evidently two weeks old, and which she had kept carefully secreted while she was deceiving the public by acting as trained nurse in Martha's *ménage*. She should have disclosed her secret earlier, for one kitten was dead when she brought it in, having met an untimely end from being bitten through the neck by the paternal cat. This, I understand, is a habit with them. Here one seems to discern a break in the operation of the evolutionary process that makes parents carefully guard the promise of future generations, and one feels inclined to commend to all cat mothers the excellent example of the bees, who once a year put to death all superfluous males.

Mary shows a more than Christian resignation to her loss, which may possibly be accounted for by a lack of mathematical powers; in which case I am qualified to understand her position and to sympathize.

The two families are now reposing in the basket in the kitchen, an example of the communal state, for both cats show that exalted socialism which recognizes all children as of equal value, and scorns the weakness of excessive regard for one's own. I have warned Cousin Henrietta that if she acquires any more cats I shall rename this place the Chateau.

We are now discussing a name for Mary's black kitten; I suggested that it might be called "Loathed Melancholy," because it is so very black that it looks as if it might have been "of Erebus and darkest midnight born"; but I think Cousin Henrietta has no more principle than to call him plain "Nigger." Who would have believed this of a Northern woman of abolitionist ancestry? We are now wondering if Martha was looking after Mary's children when we thought she was simply enjoying herself hunting. Such misjudgment seems quite possible when we have been so misled by Mary's candid ways.

This morning was a real champagne morning, clear, sparkling, and exhilarating. Perhaps, out of deference to my abstemious principles I ought to say a ginger ale or root beer morning. It was so fine that I went out on the veranda before breakfast and there met my old friend Fritz, the superannuated dog which has retired on a pension, the regular duties of country dog devolving upon his understudy, Dixie, a cocker spaniel whom my Little Maid describes as "full of blood," which is her version of "full-blooded."

Fritz was my playmate when I visited here in the golden age, and he is now as deaf as an adder and stiff with rheumatism, while I feel as young as ever I did. It seemed quite heartless for me to be so well preserved, while he had reached the seventh age of dog, and I tried to recall to his mind one glorious day in our youth when he and I ran races on the veranda and vaulted the railing together. To be sure, afterwards I learned that a college professor, a relative of the family, was in the parlor at the time and must have commanded an excellent view of the performance; but even that chastening sequel could not altogether deter me from wanting to do it again; so, after examining the parlor to make sure there were no professors lurking there, I sought a secluded corner and tried. And I could! Fritz, however, remained in the parquet, as became his age, and merely led the applause.

One of the roosters has lost his voice. Popularity has ruined him. He had what a woman whom I knew in childhood used to call "a dretful pretty crow," but I think he must have strained it by excessive use, and now he is obliged to listen to the insulting remarks of his rival without power to retort. My sympathies go out to him, for who does not know how maddening this is? I have been out to see how he bears it, and it is pathetic to see his neck feathers rise and the expression of inarticulate rage gather in his red-rimmed eyes when the other cock stands on the fence and shows off.

Chanticleer Number Two has not the principles of true sportsmanship, and shows a cowardly disposition to make the most of his rival's disabilities. He lowers his head and runs at him sidewise in a threatening manner, with wing feathers sweeping the ground, whenever his unfortunate enemy ventures to appear; and the erstwhile "cock o' the walk" turns and flees most dispiritedly. This little comedy is enacted over and over again, to the entire indifference of the hens and the increasing satisfaction of the victor, who struts about in a pompous manner, occasionally pulling up a crow — with tremendous effect — from the remotest recesses of his being.

Barnyard fowls have always been a delight to me. Nothing rests me more than to lie in a hammock and watch hens stroll about on the grass in their aimless and inconsequential manner, occasionally raising one foot in the air in an attitude of surprise and addressing a few maundering remarks to no one in particular, apropos of nothing at all. A hen seems always mentally abstracted. Occasionally she has the air of being on the verge of an idea, but she never really gets there except when she wants to sit. When she has once made up her mind on this point, however, she is adamant. Persuasion and force leave her alike unmoved; she bears persecution with the unshaken faith of an early Christian martyr, and in the end she invariably wins her point. All minor issues a hen is willing to waive. There are only three things that she insists upon,— the privilege of running squawking across the road under a horse's feet, of sitting when she will, and of striking on her job when eggs are high.

Cocks are more brilliant mentally and more aggressive in disposition, but they are not useful members of society after all. They supply the fascinating military element in their own circles, and are excellent fried in ours; and when that is acknowledged, there is little more to be said of them.

Not so with ducks. Among the barnyard inhabitants I am surprised to find the high position in point of moral influence which they hold. They lay few eggs, have no social graces, and are extremely exclusive with little or no reason for it, as is usually the case with exclusiveness wherever found. I should have considered them the useless leisure class of the barnyard, had we not observed their ethical value in the community.

We were all sitting on the back terrace a few days ago, watching the aimless wanderings of the liberated fowls, when two cockerels with budding tail feathers began to settle a difference within a few feet of where we sat. They had finished several rounds and were still eying each other savagely, with their ridiculous little pin feathers bristling, when two ducks waddled up. They approached together at right angles to the combatants and firmly separated them, one pecking at one, the other at the other. They then walked majestically between them; but the roosters closed in after them and renewed their quarrel. Thereupon the ducks turned, gently quacking, and walked between them again, each administering an admonitory peck in passing, which effectively stopped the quarrel. In subhuman spheres also it seems, those who do little themselves have ample leisure to correct their neighbors.

We have made a discovery. Melissa's name is

Melissa Jane, which my Little Maid considers a remarkable coincidence, particularly when combined with her distracting prettiness, and the fact that she has a lover. Both these things were true of a Jane Melissa who was the heroine of a song which was one of my early delights and which now is equally pleasing to the poetic fancy of my child.

The Little Maid loves her, and so also does Henry, the grocer. He comes to see her, on an average, eight evenings a week. When there is moonlight they wander about out of doors or sit on the vine-clad porch, but when it is cold they occupy the old-fashioned kitchen. At such times the family is constrained to respect the conditions and to show a decent moderation in errands thither. But alas! the short cut to our chamber is through this friendly room, and I involved myself in an embarrassing situation a few evenings since, not having been informed in regard to the system.

Everything in this house, even to the love affairs of the maids, is thoroughly systematized and furnished with every modern convenience. Mr. Marston had tried to save me from social disaster by suggesting that I go up the other way, but I failed to grasp his meaning and said with cheerful alacrity, "Oh, no, I 'd just as soon go up this way."

I thereupon opened the kitchen door and burst in upon love's young dream in a most sudden and disconcerting manner. There was a dissolving view of a tender scene, which I saw as one sees the landscape from the windows of a lightning express, while I fled through the room and precipitated myself violently up the stairs, entirely forgetting in my mad haste my usual preliminaries of a glass of water and a lamp.

The next night I had learned wisdom by experience, which is after all what life is for; but I had my regular nocturnal thirst, which, owing to a narrow temperance training could be assuaged only with cold water, and water could be obtained only in the kitchen. Mr. Marston bravely cast himself into the breach. Taking the lamp which I had been thoughtful enough to secure before dark, he walked boldly and as noisily as possible to the kitchen door, giving a warning rattle to the latch before lifting it. This wise precaution had the effect of ringing the stage bell, and when the curtain went up the tableau was entirely safe and presentable. When he returned with the drink-offering I felt that had my piety been equal to David's I should certainly have poured out as a libation water obtained at such a social hazard.

CHAPTER V

AN OUTDOOR DAY

"JUNE, dear June! now God be praised for June." What should we do at this time of year without that immortal line to fall back upon? I am sitting this lovely morning upon a rustic seat in a wistaria bower with the intention of indulging myself in a whole day out of doors.

The Little Maid has just brought me red and white roses, using me on all occasions, in default of a vase, for the safe deposit of her plunder. Moreover she considers me as "strictly speaking, a spectacular success" only when I have one kind of flower growing from my hair, a bed of another variety springing from my belt, and a third sprouting from my buttonholes, provided I have any; and, rather than hurt her feelings, I go about looking as mad as Ophelia, if not quite so picturesque. Just now she called me to the great pine that stands near the drive "to tell me a poem that she could n't say anywhere else," and, when we were both sheltered under the fragrant boughs she recited with shining face:

"Come up here, O dusty feet!
Here is fairy bread to eat;

Here in my retiring room,
Children, you may dine
On the smell of broom
And the shade of pine."

There is wind enough this morning to blow the blackest spirits into good humor and cheerfulness. The air sparkles after the night's rain, the newly washed leaves twinkle in the sunlight as the wind shakes them, and the roses blooming on fifty bushes nod and bend in a perpetual dance, while neighboring elms throw their branches about like Eastern dancers, who sway the body and make graceful motions of the arms without moving the feet.

I have had two or three such noble joys lately, first among them the festival of roses here; and, second, the festival of laurel in the woods. Both are in full bloom now; and Cousin Henrietta took me yesterday for a most delightful drive through Blood Street, which is an "uncommon sanguinary" title for as harmless a road as ever I saw in my life, even though somewhat stony and wild for a well-tamed New England State. With their genius in naming their fellow-citizens, it seems as if the inhabitants might have found a more appropriate name for a wood road which yielded me memorable delight in its views, and a whole armful of pleasure in the laurel we brought home.

The story of Apollo and Daphne took on new colors as I saw the laurel in its glory for the first time; and I did not wonder at the choice of that ardent wooer who said "If you will not be my bride, you shall at least be my tree," and thereafter wore her leaves upon his brow. Now I am afraid to spoil my image by looking in the classical dictionary, where I should perhaps find that there is no relationship between that laurel and this. If they are not of the same family, so much the worse for the laurel of Greece, for it cannot be prettier or more maiden-sweet and expressive of Daphne than this. It looks indeed as if it might be the metamorphosis of a lovely young girl with its delicate pink blossoms and shy, retiring ways. They tell me here that it almost never bears transplanting, but left in its own solitudes it blooms lavishly and thrives under the hardiest conditions. The natives, with another example of infelicity in the way of names, call it "ivy" which is again corrupted into "ivory"; thus is language made.

Halfway in our journey through Blood Street Cousin Henrietta stopped the horse and let me get out to explore a little lane leading over the rocky hill. I almost said, o'er the hill, the mere recollection of the place making one likely to fall at least as far into poetry as that, which could hardly be called more than a stumble. Such a bit of heaven it was that when, after a few moments of speechless delight, I heard Cousin Henrietta's voice calling, "Are you lost?" I called back with emotion, "Not lost, but gone before!" When I see such places on earth, I am perfectly willing to wait a while for heaven. The little lane was a bower banked on either side with great masses of the pink blossoms, and leading on from grace to glory, until it seemed as if the blue sky itself toward which the rocky path aspired were the only proper destination to reach at the end of it.

We came home with the carriage full of great boughs of pink bloom and another joy stored away for my inward eye. I have still the promise of one or two more laurel-crowned spots before the end of the week, when my Little Maid and I take our staff and scrip and start for Boston, there to meet her father, who will go with us to Grandfather's house and the real country once more, for a holiday together in my childhood's home.

My day out-of-doors to-day, happy with the world and my own thoughts, recalls one lovely afternoon of last week less wisely spent. I threw myself down for just a moment's rest upon my bed and opened Malory's "Morte d' Arthur" at that chapter of enchantment where true love is likened unto Summer. "The month of May was come, when every lusty heart beginneth to blossom and to bring forth fruit; for like as trees bring forth fruit and flourish in May, so likewise every lusty heart that is in any manner a lover, springeth and flourisheth in lusty deeds."

So enticed, the hours passed while I read on through the tale of that luckless time when Queen Guenever "rode on Maying into the woods and fields beside Westminster, with certain knights of the Round Table clad all in green," and what disaster there befell; and I ended as I always do, in spite of virtuous efforts to the contrary, in following Guenever's example and loving Launcelot better than Arthur. He wears better in the end, for I cannot reconcile myself to seeing that radiant youth, Arthur, grow up into the King who, after condemning his Queen to be burned, put his grief for the disasters which ensued into these words, "I am sorrier for my good Knights' loss than for the loss of my fair Queen; for queens I might have enow, but such a fellowship of good knights shall never be together in no company."

This is too practical a viewpoint to elicit the emotions of romantic womankind, be she never so stout and middle-aged.

Joys, like everything else, have their seasons, and to read of Queen Guenever's Maying in January is to make the Spring blossom in midwinter; while to read of it in May, when the Spring's self calls to the same joys instead, is like eating preserves in a June strawberry bed.

I made up for my loss of the golden afternoon hours out of doors by staying out in the evening to watch the dance of the fireflies. Lives there a man with soul so dead as to call these beautiful insects lightning bugs? Every evening as soon as it is dark they appear above the grassy field, looking like little young stars escaped from the sky to play a while upon the meadows of earth. They made me think of Vedder's Dance of the Pleiades, only there were as many supernumerary pleiads as there are spinsters in Boston, which quite distracts the simile.

Later, in the middle of the night, I got up and sat by my window to feel and see and hear its beauty. The dissipated fireflies were still dancing madly, attended by patient little glow-worm wallflowers, who could n't dance, but who sat in out-of-the-way places and beamed cheerfully upon the company, like governesses in English novels.

The birds were quiet except for an occasional sleepy chirp from a hidden nest, or a remonstrant cry, no doubt when some lively birdling refused to "spoon" comfortably, or took more than his share of their downy bed. The maudlin whip-poor-wills were at their usual din, of course, and one of their number with embarrassing gallantry sat upon the fence and serenaded his ladylove until the peep of day. Hitherto I have had respectful and even sentimental interest in his plaintive song, but familiarity has bred its proverbial consequence.

Any reasonable bird would swoon and fall from his perch after iterating and reiterating his song for so many hours without pausing for breath, but the endurance of a whip-poor-will equals that of a political candidate before election. If it is for love, then I am sure that his lady hears him at last for his much speaking, hoping the old delusive hope that marriage will reform him, or at least keep him quiet. I am sure, too, that rival lovers in whip-poor-will circles do not fight it out in honest jungle fashion, but sit upon boughs and try to talk each other to death, the surviving suitor, of course, winning the lady. Moreover, I suspect the whip-poor-will of convivial habits. His is not the sober demeanor of the reputable citizen of feathered society, and there is to my ear a *blasé* "won't go home till morning" quality to his song, in spite of its minor cadences. There is only one creature in nature fitted to rival the endurance of the whip-poor-will, and that is the katydid. May they never enter into an argument to which I shall be called upon to listen!

Every other inhabitant of earth and air seemed charmed to silence by the spell of moonlight and the odor of blossoms heavy with the night's dews. The moon shone mildly through a mist, and I watched her serene progress through the sky with the perennial wonder of lovers in my heart, that two people may still keep tryst by looking at her radiance even though they be a thousand miles apart in space.

Just then the Little Maid stirred in her sleep and, not finding me beside her, called "Mother!" As I answered from the window she crept out of bed and came to sit sociably in my lap to enjoy with me the fireflies, the whip-poor-wills, and the loveliness of night. Her fancies seemed to take a speculative rather than a sentimental turn, and looking up into the sky she said, "What holds the stars in their places?" I told her a little about the force which we call gravitation and know no more about for naming; and she said, "But s'posin' it should let go, and let us fall into the Universe, what then? I know what I 'd do," she went on after a moment's thought, "I 'd just catch hold of some star as we passed,—I 'd choose one about half way between the sun and moon so the climate would be something like this,—and I 'd stay there and make a paradise of my own! I 'd find a cave, and begin as the Swiss Family Robinson did, and by and by when my paradise was all done, I 'd drop off and come back home."

"But," she mused, as difficulties presented themselves to her imagination, "if you should drop into the Universe where would you go?"

"What is the Universe?" I asked.

"Why, it 's — all there is — sun — and moon — and stars, and worlds, and space — it 's all there is! Why — I believe it 's God! And we 're all in God — and can't fall out if we try!"

With this comfortable even if pantheistic conclusion we again sought our pillows, leaving the other watchers to finish the night in their own fashion, while we slept in order to be ready for the finer music which ushers in the "rosy-fingered dawn."

My last thought as I trailed off into dreamland was, No wonder the Shepherd King was also the Psalmist! I should think all shepherds and goose girls would speak in blank verse!

CHAPTER VI

NATURE STUDY AND PROFANITY

IT IS one of my pleasures, as I sit at my window overlooking the orchard, to take a polite interest in the affairs of my feathered neighbors, and I am already slightly acquainted with two families of robins and with a catbird and his mate, which are nesting in the nearest trees. I am also interested in the love affairs of a saucy little robin which could but recently have made her *début* in bird society.

She is evidently a belle, for she has been flirting outrageously for three days past to my certain knowledge with two ardent wooers, who follow her about from tree to tree and pour forth melting songs for the enchantment of her wicked little ear, while she sits — the picture of indifference — upon a twig, with her head cocked on one side, planning to lead them upon a new chase the moment she gets her wind again.

Ah, naughty little coquette! I 've seen you before, in other than bird society, and have marvelled at the blind infatuation which you are always able to inspire in the opposite sex. Have you no Birds'

Home Journal, little bird, to teach you the kind of robin to be desired as a wife? She should be modest and quiet, the recipe says, with gentle, winning manners, sincere and considerate of her lord, sympathetic and subdued; she should set herself to him like perfect music unto noble words. Are you anything like this, saucy bird? Not a bit! You surprise and startle your wooers at every turn. You have an infinite variety of teasing devices which you delight in practising upon them; and as for treating them with deference and sympathy, why, you know very well you trample upon their feelings and make them ridiculous with every flirt of your saucy wings.

You should certainly have no lovers at all, naughty bird, for you are not domestic, and show no fitness for family cares, and you are everything that the male sex says it considers undesirable in a wife. Why, then, are you so madly sought and so ardently wooed? Ah, you know better what they want than they do themselves? Observation has taught you more than the books? Besides, you know when to quit? Tut, tut!

I do not know what the little mother robin in the nest nearest my window may have been before her marriage, but now she is a model of domestic virtue, and the heart of her husband delighteth in her. He affords a truly Tolstoian example of the original function of art as he swings upon a swaying branch near the nest, his song serving as a delightful solace to the labor of brooding, which she patiently performs. His mellow, flute-like tones are echoed from time to time by the reedy notes of the catbird next door, which shows a commendable love for variety in his songs, and offers his mate not merely his own legitimate melody, but selections from the repertoire of other birds as well.

This is a pleasant neighborhood. I'm glad I moved in, and I'm glad also that I do not know enough about birds as a class to spoil the charming surprises which my neighbors give me every day as I watch them from my window. If I knew always just what to expect of a robin or a catbird, the sense of discovery would be lost; and recognition is but a poor substitute for the more poignant experience of original observation.

To observe birds for the sake of being able to call their names like a lackey at a ball, as they appear, or for the sake of ulterior educational ends, is like reading a tale for the moral at the end of it instead of for the joy there is in the story itself. If I ever had such pedantic ambitions I have reformed, for I have not a bit of desire — any more — to say airily to an ignorant friend, "Ah, do you see that rare bird on the fence yonder? It is quite unusual to see one in this region at this season of the year; but I know him by the markings and by his note, which you will observe is" — etc., etc.

I maintain that this sort of thing is unkind to one's ignorant friend, and I am in a position to know. I prefer a level of ignorance which saves me the necessity of using tact to conceal an embarrassing superiority, and which leaves me free to enjoy the carolling of a robin with as grateful and appreciative a heart as if he were the mavis, or Love's own bird, the nightingale. When I hear a bird sing I do not care to start after him with a spy-glass, a camera, and a note book; I prefer to lie back in the grass or hammock and say thankfully to myself, "Another joy for the taking!" In fact, not to know the singer adds a positive zest to the entertainment. It is like hearing a great musician incognito, and judging the performance without waiting to see the critic's article in the morning paper.

It was before she ate of the tree of knowledge that Eve enjoyed the garden, I remember, and I am resolved to avoid her mistake and not shut myself out of Paradise by an undue curiosity about things which do not concern me. I freely admit that there may be other points of view, and I would not be understood as making a gospel of my limitations. I simply accept them with resignation, and try to be happy, though ignorant. It is but just to record for my chastening, that I did not arrive at this abstemious point of view without effort. I adopted an infant crow once, temporarily, intending to use him as a sort of primer of bird lore. Instead, however, he led me into sin, and my forswearing a too intimate knowledge of birds has in it a saving element of penance and piety. I found my character unequal to the strain. It happened in this way.

A nature-wise friend, with whom I was enjoying a woodland stroll one day, told me that she was going out of town for a short time, and offered me the use of her baby crow during her absence. I was delighted at this opportunity for nature study, as well as for entertaining the Little Maid and her cousins who were visiting her, and accepted the offer with enthusiasm. In due time the crow arrived, sitting in a malignant sort of calm upon a nest of twigs nicely made for him in a basket. He was very tidy and was covered with a white towel, which was like nothing in the world so much as the mantle of charity in what it concealed, as I afterwards learned.

My friend gave me some parting instructions in regard to him over the telephone.

"He does n't require much care," she said. "Just feed him every hour and a half with such simple foods as he likes. I give him a hard-boiled egg or cooked meat (he prefers it rather rare) about twice a day, and at other times I give him bread and milk."

"Does he use a bottle?" I asked, beginning to feel that the feeding and education of this orphan was something more than I had bargained for, "and shall I sterilize the milk?"

"How absurd," she laughed; "if he does n't have an appetite for the bread and milk, give him angle worms, only be careful to crush both ends, as they might eat a hole through his crop otherwise. You know they are dangerous at both ends, and do great damage if swallowed whole."

"How should I know that?" I mentally soliloquized, "I never knew any one who swallowed any! Here's a predicament for a woman who can't bait a hook!" But aloud I only thanked her politely, and asked if he said his prayers at night, and who their family physician was in case of illness.

Just at this point, his cage — a piano box with wire netting over the open front — arrived by express, and I went out with the children to superintend his installation in the back garden, and to make my first original observations. The Orphan had no markings, I conscientiously noted, his plumage being mourning color throughout, as well it might be for his sins. Also it showed no dirt, and therefore suited his habits, as I was destined to discover. Moreover, his song was easily memorized, as it consisted of one indignant squawk, composed entirely of consonants, with which he expressed his feelings when he was hungry and did n't care who knew it.

No description could do justice to his sinister appearance as he sulked upon his perch, like Achilles in his tent, or rolled his wicked eye when he gave forth that authoritative sound, which meant dinner, and quickly too. Though it invariably was brought with all expedition, he sounded this peremptory note before each mouthful, closing his bill upon the morsel with a snap; then he waited for it to be digested before he deigned to take another. This process took so long that the intervals between feedings were necessarily short. Moreover, if I missed my aim by a hair's breadth he allowed the bread and milk or the crushed angle worms or the choice confection of bugs —

whatever it might be — to slip out of the corner of his bill and drop on the floor. Then he squawked derisively for more.

The family fed him in relays. One fed while another dug worms and a third attended to the boiling of the eggs; and the evening and the morning were the first day. This programme continued for two days, and on the third as an unpropitious fate sent rain, the Orphan, according to advice, was brought into the house and put into his nice nest of sticks. When in his cage he never stirred from his perch, but sat immovable with the sinister expression of a Japanese carving. In the house it was different.

After a morning of feeding and anxious care I indulged myself in such a brief walk as a trained nurse is permitted to take, and upon my return found the trail of the serpent in every room. Newspapers, upon which he declined to walk, were spread in the library, and in the middle of the best rug stood his bowl of bread and milk, with various souvenirs of the same scattered about the floor. Twigs and leaves from his nest were strewn everywhere, and following their trail I found the miscreant himself in the music room sitting quiet in his nest, which was tastefully arranged upon the piano top like an article of vertu — which he was not, in any way you may spell it.

I called the children and told them with some emphasis to take the Orphan upstairs and keep him there. So they bore him away, while I removed the wreckage, and made a few mental notes on nature study in the home. I was just beginning to forget my cares in a book, when a squawk and a shriek from above made me fly upstairs to find that the ingenious fowl had crowned a series of calamities by spilling his last meal all over my daughter's best dress. As she had already sacrificed two other frocks to this Moloch, this final blow was too much. I stripped off the dress and sent the Little Maid to bed while I went to the bath-room in a blind fury to clean it. Himself stepped in just as I slammed the door and locked it, and then — and not until then, and for once only — I said deliberately, as I threw the dress into the tub and turned on the water — but no! — I cannot bring myself to set down in cold blood what escaped me in the heat of wrath! It is enough to say that it was brief, emphatic, graphic, and terse. After an astonished pause, my Adam's face became a pattern of sympathy and he said hypocritically, "That 's right, my dear, let it out; it will ease you. I 'm going to put the Orphan in the cellar." And he departed in great haste on this errand.

The next day, knowing that my friend was at home again, I sent the crow back by express, and two days later felt sufficiently normal spiritually to talk to her over the telephone. "I suppose I shall add lying to swearing when it comes to a struggle between the truth and politeness," I thought miserably as I took down the receiver and called for her number. "I wonder which is the worse sin, unkindness, or prevarication," but before I could decide I heard her voice.

"I called you to inquire about the crow," I began; "he did n't seem quite well, and I was afraid something might happen to him and that your study of him might be spoiled, so I thought I 'd better send him home before he got worse."

"He has n't seemed well since he came back, but I should have been quite willing to let you keep him longer," said the generous enthusiast. "I 'm varying his diet a little now and he seems better. Did the children enjoy him?"

"Oh, very much," I said, "in fact we all miss him." No lie about that, I mentally remarked to my conscience; one misses an aching tooth when it 's pulled. "He is certainly an interesting bird, even if he is n't really beautiful; we all learned a great deal from him for which we have you to thank," and I hastily hung up the receiver before I should be overtaken by further temptation.

That night in the privacy of our room, I confided to Adam that henceforth I chose the safe path of ignorance, as that of knowledge presented too many temptations and risks.

"Yes," said he, "I think you have chosen wisely. 'Be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever.' It 's evident your thoroughness is such that you can't be both at once."

"I'm afraid that 's true," I admitted, remorsefully remembering the words that no perfect lady would have uttered, "but I 've learned one scientific fact which sentiment had never before let me believe."

"And that — ?"

"That birds are closely related to reptiles," I said. I will make one exception to my notes about birds in heaven. I hope there 'll be no orphan crows there; for if there are, it could never be looked forward to as a place of rest.

Since this experience I have reflected a good deal on the profanity of the pious — not that I consider myself worthy to be classed among them. It affords a pleasing study, and is a personal comfort to me in that it marks the triumph of nature over grace; for I find that vice is as social in its instincts as misery is reputed to be.

A few days ago we attended a play given by the boys of the Glen View School for the benefit of the town library here. The play delighted me because of the display of the inextinguishable Boy in various characters. It was, of course, a farce acted entirely by the lads, whose changing voices and manly strides made the female parts particularly effective and pleasing. The town turned out in its best clothes and encouraged the performers by liberal applause and an abundance of lemon squash and delicious homemade cake. I watched the emotions of this New England audience as displayed in their expressions while the performance went on; for the plot was somewhat French beneath all the nonsense, and the wicked word "devil" occurred several times in the part of an explosive Englishman, who was one of the chief characters of the play. As I glanced furtively at the minister from time to time to see how his mind was working, there were plain indications of a falling barometer. Afterwards he joined me on the veranda as I waited patiently about for Cousin Henrietta to appear, and asked how I had enjoyed the performance.

"Oh, very much! I like Boy," I said, "and he is such a shy animal that one seldom has a chance to study him unawares. The play was like an argument. It did not shed any light upon the subject discussed, but plenty of it upon the characters who took part in the discussion. But I thought that you hardly approved," I finished, hoping to draw his fire.

"No, I must confess," he replied, "I do not like the use of profane words. I feel that it has a searing effect upon the Young Mind. It really is n't necessary."

"Perhaps not," I admitted, "and of course you could n't be expected to approve exactly; but do you honestly think there is much harm in little ones? Don't you think they may afford a safety valve for the Boy's love of shocking people, which is quite harmless after all? It is bound to have some outlet! Is n't it like giving a boy torpedoes on the Fourth of July to divert his mind from toy pistols and cannon crackers?"

"No," he said solemnly, "I do not recognize it as a necessity. I am reminded of an old and very profane man who used to work for me. He swore so profusely, and it had become such a habit, that he did not himself know when he did it. I used often to correct him for it, and finally said to him, 'Now I'll teach you something to say when you feel like that! It will answer every purpose, and it is n't wrong. Just say "Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta."'"

"But, my dear minister," I protested, with neuralgic twingings in the region of my conscience, "you surely did n't lead that old man to think that the evil lay in the selection of words? Would n't the entire Greek alphabet be as wicked as anything else if used in the same way? Just see how you bereft the poor creature of his accustomed tools, and tried to teach him the use of a new and less handy set for the same old purpose! I should be rather sorry for him if I did n't feel reasonably certain that he would return to his idols and swear on comfortably to the grave. Does not the Bible say that God looketh upon the heart and not upon the vocabulary?" But it was evident that he regarded these arguments as specious and heretical; and I, myself, was not sure that they did not emanate from a seared conscience. What would he think of me if he knew!

His orthodox point of view was called to mind early this morning by the consoling fall from grace of the hired man, who feeds certain select and aristocratic hens cloistered in separate coops in a secluded spot near my window. I knew that he had recently experienced religion and had become a devout Baptist, for he borrowed a horse only a Sunday or two ago to convey himself to the scene of his own "baptizin'."

Henry, the grocer, was engaged in the secular occupation of making up his accounts that Sunday; so Melissa could n't attend this function, much to her regret, for, as she said with some plaintiveness, "she 'd never been to but one baptizin' in all her life." "But then, when a man 's in business for himself, there 's excuses," she added, not wishing us to misjudge Henry, who is a Catholic. So by all these tokens I knew Hiram for a man of religious convictions.

This morning as I lay listening to the chorus of birds, I heard his step on the drive, as he came to make his regular call upon this Hampton Court of hens, carrying with him a dish of grain for their breakfast. One hen had a wandering disposition and a chance to get out, judging by evidence of excitement on the part of the hen and a smothered exclamation from Hiram as he approached the coop. Then I heard his voice calling alluringly, "Chickie-chick, chick, chick," and the sound of grain falling upon the ground. I could image from my pillow his unsuccessful effort to prevent the escape, for there came the sound of a squawk and a scramble as the hen flew the coop and cackled derisively from a distance. "Chickie, chick, chick!" called Hiram in tones of calculated seductiveness contending with suppressed wrath. "Chickie, chick, chick!" (*sotto voce*, "Go-ram you, you infernal old idiot!") "Chickie, chick!" (louder) "Dum you to the devil,— thar!"

An instant of stricken silence was followed by the sound of a stick hitting the branches of the apple tree, and evidently failing in its mission, for the derisive squawk sounded from the remote regions of the barnyard, and I could see in mental vision the liberated fowl making the best of time in a hundred-yard dash for an inaccessible spot under the barn, with Hiram in a breathless fury sprinting after her. The staccato sound of his footsteps died away in a gradual diminuendo, and I was left once more to the enjoyment of the morning bird songs as I lay in an unhygienic attitude with my hands clasped under my head.

The whole episode was quite Wagnerian in suggestion, and reminded me of the opera of "Siegfried." First came the rustling of leaves and the birds' songs blending with the morning breeze; then the confident appearance of Hiram and his encounter with the Hen, followed by his defeat and hasty departure, leaving the stage once more to the rustling leaves, the bird songs, and the morning breeze. I even began a symbolic musical rendering of the drama, and had devised a most expressive treatment of the call of Hiram —"Chick, chick, chick," and an excellent rendering of the Hen motif as the two most important contrasting elements in the composition, when the breakfast bell rang. During a hasty toilet I comforted my conscience and absolved Hiram by recalling other examples of pious profanity, such as the case of the Quaker whose cow displayed all the exasperating tricks of which a cow is mistress, as he tried to milk her. At last he arose and, true to his non-resistant principles, explained the case to the cow. "I will not kick thee," he said sternly, "and I will not beat thee, but —(crescendo) I will twist thy tail!"

It may be sinful, but I cannot help rejoicing that his ingenuity found a loophole for the escape of his natural feelings. Besides, I appreciate the temptation, having been well acquainted with quite a number of cows.

After all, experience leads me to believe that there are advantages in taking a middle course between vice and virtue. There are still occasional moments when I long for the uncompromising and consistent virtue and villainy into which the world is divided by the very young. Evil deeds performed by the righteous, and kind actions by the unregenerate, are terribly disconcerting to one's ethical geography, and demand the recognition of a common ground between saints and sinners. I remember attending a performance of the opera of "Asrael" in New York once, when the libretto announced that "the first scene was laid in Heaven, the second in Hell, and the rest in Flanders." This, to my mind, placed Flanders in a compromising position.

Heaven was all in gold and white and pale blue, with a great stairway disappearing into clouds, and upon this stairway bored-looking angels appeared at intervals, holding golden trumpets in their listless hands. There seemed to be very little going on there, and very few people in residence. Hell, on the contrary, was a lively place, with the glow of hospitable fires shining on multitudes of busy little red devils.

The friend who was with me expressed an unhesitating preference for this latter place; but after seeing the whole play I decided upon Flanders as the appropriate field for my tempered and alloyed virtues, and my subsequent career has justified the symbolism of my choice.

CHAPTER VII

THE MEANS OF GRACE

MY DEAR cousin Henrietta is indeed, as Hiram admiringly asserts, "a great commander." She not only knows what you ought to do, which is often more than you know yourself, but she makes you want to do it, and in the end you find that her ways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace.

Now, I thought I did n't want to go to church this morning — not that I love church less, but this beautiful blossoming world more. When the subject was first opened I offered a feeble resistance, but was driven from one argument to another until I was forced to take refuge in my last stronghold of objection, which was the condition of the Little Maid's Sunday hat.

"Just look at it," I said, holding it up; "the scarf is all melted down by the sea air. It looks like a cold compress. I can't allow her to go to church looking like that!"

"Melissa, put on a flat-iron!" was all she said, and I knew at once that my fate was sealed, and that while I continue under Cousin Henrietta's roof, I shall have to retrim that wilted hat every Sunday morning before church. When a decision is really made it is my principle to carry it out with spirit, not allowing myself to go through any experience, as Mrs. Stowe has said, "like a little dog tied under a wagon, hanging back and yelping."

So I pressed the scarf and put it on again, dressed myself and the Little Maid in our Sunday best, and meekly joined the family at the carriage step in time for the drive to church.

It is true that virtue is its own reward, even an assisted, not to say compulsory, virtue like mine; for the drive was delightful and I enjoyed the Sabbath feeling, which is in the New England air as it is nowhere else in all the world on Sunday morning. The religious privileges of the servants are, like all their other needs, treated with consideration at Marston Hill. So Melissa, in a fresh muslin gown and pink ribbons, sat on the broad front seat with Mr. Marston, making a refreshing picture for the rest of us in the back of the carriage. The journey was delightfully punctuated all the way by Mr. Marston's kindly greeting to every one we passed, — for he is universally beloved in Old Eden, — and their friendly answers were equally cheering to hear.

Hiram, as driver, was at a social disadvantage, for he was obliged to balance himself perilously on the little sliding shelf which projects from under the front seat of the carriage, and was so absorbed in maintaining his equilibrium that he was unable even to salute his sweetheart, whom we passed on the way. The resourceful and sympathetic Mr. Marston rose to the emergency, as he saw the conscious color creep back of Hiram's ears and deepen his bronze complexion to a brick red. He is accustomed to assisting in unobtrusive ways in affairs of the heart, his own being always young. I was not wholly surprised, therefore, to see him lean forward, lift Hiram's hat from his head, and wave it ceremoniously to the blushing girl, while he said *sotto voce*, "You do the bowing, Hiram, and I'll attend to your hat."

With such a spirit of coöperation, no wonder that social affairs go smoothly at Marston Hill. In fact, it has become such a paradise for lovers that Cousin Henrietta complains that she cannot keep her maids, because they infallibly marry during their term of office.

As we came into town we passed little groups of people, dressed in their Sunday best, walking sedately over the green turf from neighboring houses toward the little church; and as we approached the church itself we were obliged to wait our turn at the carriage step while from other carriages elderly ladies in creaking black silks descended laboriously to the ground, and with great solemnity passed up the gravel walk and under the classic portico.

The church is a building of perfect Colonial type, very small, but quite large enough to hold the little congregation of old residents and summer visitors who find their way to the morning service. As for the sermon, it would have done credit to a much larger edifice and satisfied a more critical audience.

Back of the church building and outside the consecrated precincts of the churchyard is a flat stone upon which the great Whitfield once stood to preach in the open air, since he was forbidden the use of either sacred edifice or ground for the spreading of his heresy. Now the church receives its chief claim to public interest from this historical fact; but I shall resist the opportunity to moralize upon it. I should have regretted leaving all the external loveliness of the world to enter even a cathedral, I think, but was comforted to find that from the open windows there were refreshing glimpses of green branches swaying in the gentle breeze, while sweet odors of wistaria and apple blossoms floated in, providing a pure incense for the service.

It was pleasant to sit in this place of peace and watch the people pass through the little pew-doors, close them, and bow their heads in a moment of silent reverence. It is good to stay away from church, and it is good also to go. Each method of worship fills a need in our complex make-up; and who shall doubt that God is everywhere, and therefore as accessible in one place as in another to any true seeker?

The little congregation presented variety, even in its small number; for Old Eden has been discovered by the city, and has a colony of New Yorkers, many of whom knew the region in childhood and now return to it with increasing love to spend the leisure days of their prosperous age.

Moreover the town boasts a school for girls, and therefore, inevitably, one for boys also; and the pupils of both are assisted in the formation of correct habits by being ushered in a body to church on every Sunday morning.

The Marston pew is favorably situated, as it commands an excellent view of both these charming groups, and my eyes were refreshed throughout the service by occasional glances at their young, happy faces. Their behavior was exemplary in the extreme — how could it be otherwise? Possibly their virtue was of the same inevitable nature as my own, for their pews were very near the pulpit, and at the ends of each sat official chaperons who exercised omniscience — through the elbows, I judged, for their eyes never wandered from the minister's face during the entire service.

In a spasm of emulation I, too, endeavored to fix the minister with that stony stare, which, in New England, is evidence of having been properly "raised." This effort carried me back on the wings of memory to the days of my childhood, when I sat in the old family pew, and in obedience to whispered admonitions, and encouragement from the elbow of my grandmother, fixed my eyes upon the minister so unwinkingly that I saw a halo of light play about the black figure in the pulpit. At that time I had never heard of the law of vision by which the eye, wearied with attention, supplies the color complementary to the one looked upon, and in my innocence I imagined this to be such a glory as I had seen in pictures surrounding the saints, and ascribed it to the extraordinary virtue of the man of God.

On Sunday mornings in the dear pious days of my childhood, our family always assembled in state at the south door of the old homestead, with the impressiveness of a caravan about to start across the desert, and was there stowed away in the two or three cavernous carry-alls waiting for us under the old elm trees that arched the drive. A numerous family it was, with grandfather and grandmother, father, mother, and uncles enough to insure the good behavior of more restless children than my sisters and myself, even through the longest engagement possible to orthodox theology. When we had been packed with the greatest economy of space into these carry-alls, they were driven at a sedate pace over the hills, with the music of distant bells filling all the air, to the church where grandmother's father had preached for fifty years, and where before him the pulpit was filled by more remote ancestors, to a date of antiquity too distant for my childish mind to grasp. There we filed into the family pews in solemn and definite order, and following the example of my grandmother, who observed every tradition as law and gospel, stood through the unmercifully long prayer, because it was the custom to do so in the days when her father shepherded this flock.

"My father used to say," she solemnly instructed us, "that only those who were too lazy to stand or too proud to kneel would sit during prayer time"; and so we stood, fearing to be numbered among the proud and the lazy — which included all the remainder of the congregation except two faithful old deacons. These decaying relics of a past regime also stubbornly and accusingly stood, with my grandparents and their sons and more reluctant grandchildren, to record a last protest against the decadent spirit of the times.

This clerical great-grandfather was a resourceful man. He employed more than one device to secure wakefulness on the part of his weary congregation. Standing during the prayer was but one of many. My grandmother used to tell us with pride of an instance which occurred at a time when a new church edifice had been proposed and was under warm discussion; great-grandfather thought this a worldly and unnecessary expense, and emphasized his opinion by pausing in the midst of his sermon on a Sabbath day, saying impressively as he fixed the somnolent members of his congregation with a stern look:

"You are talking about building a new church: it seems to me quite unnecessary, since the sleepers in the old one are all sound!"

It was from this militant spirit that my grandmother imbibed a taste for nonconformity with new customs, which kept the congregation in a chronic state of interest to discover what she might do next; and when, a martyr to her principles, she one day fainted from exhaustion during the long prayer, there were sisters in the flock who thought this a providential dispensation to bring her to a different view of her duty. They little knew her. She was soon brought to, and stood as undauntedly as ever in her place on the following Sunday.

How long the hour's sermon seemed, only suffering childhood with legs too short to reach the floor can ever know. The footstools in the pews were but broken reeds to depend upon, for they were of the variety that tipped over easily; and a sudden crash was sure to fix the eyes of the whole congregation upon the culprit's wretched back, where they seemed to burn round holes in her clothing.

It was difficult to know how to adjust one's downsittings and uprisings in church, and sometimes one could not help feeling that advantage was taken of one's conscientious desire to do the right thing in the right place. A fatality seemed to attend my efforts in this direction. I once happened to be in a revival meeting when the minister requested all those who wanted to go to heaven when they died to rise. I did not wish to invite a horrible fate by sitting still, for I knew what was to be expected of the Adversary, and was acquainted with the terrors of hell; so I rose, even though I noticed with surprise, after I had committed myself, that all the church members remained callously seated. We were then told to step forward, and I found myself without any volition on my part, with others upon the "anxious seat," where we were prayed over with embarrassing personal directness. To be rescued from my sins in this unpremeditated manner was an alarming experience, and for years I was afraid to meet ministers upon the street for fear they might be tempted to seize me and save me over again.

I had an uneasy feeling that I was not immune, for it never seemed to me that my first experience had really "taken" as it should, and I feared that I might be obliged to have it a second time if I exposed myself. I had been told by the minister, on this occasion, what the symptoms of a saved condition were; among other things, I was to " love my daily task," and if the love of God was really in my heart I should find myself quite unexpectedly singing over my work. My daily task was dish-washing, and I hated it with a perfect hatred; so this seemed an improbable result even then. However, I earnestly tried to feel as I should, and conscientiously raised a few quavering hymns over my tub in the ensuing days, since the singing refused to gush forth spontaneously according to prophecy; but, much to my disappointment, I never came to love my daily task as I should.

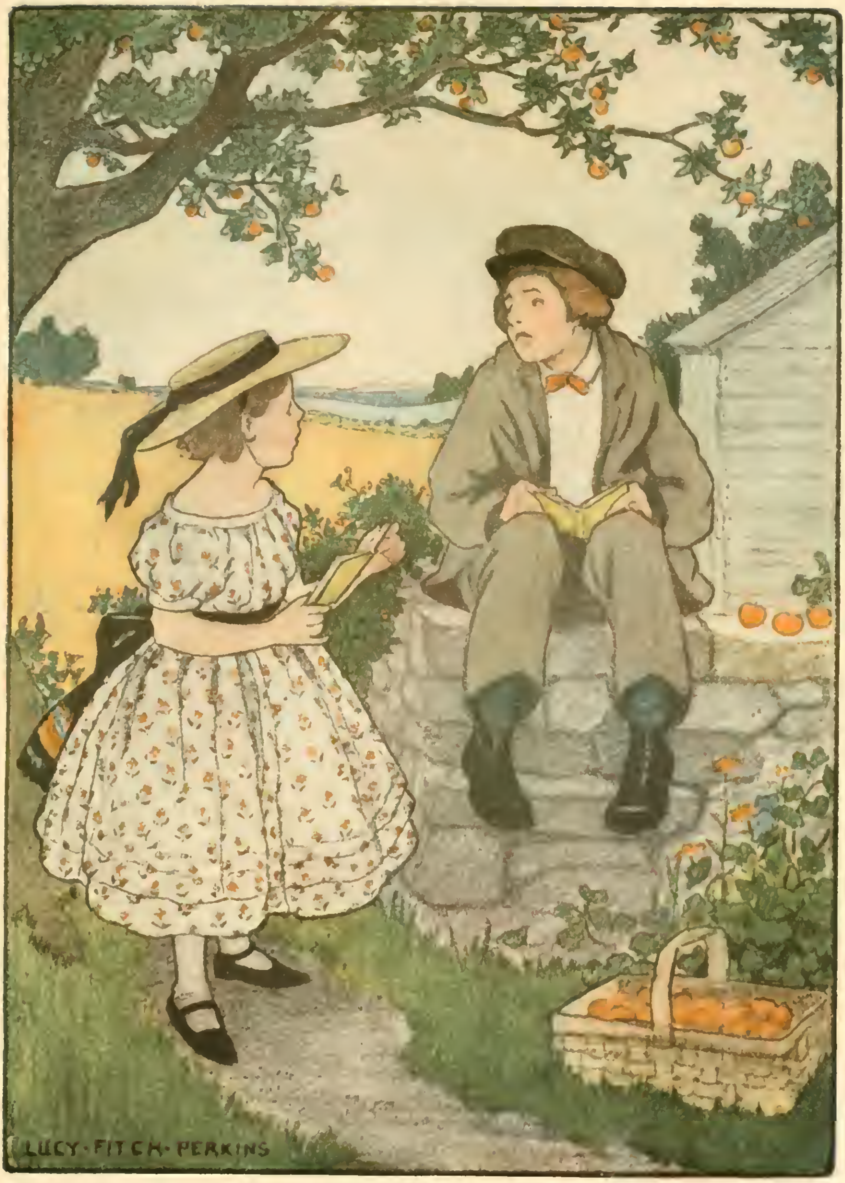
No such emotional stress attended the staid preaching of the word by our own minister, and on week days the children quite liked him. On Sunday it was a mere matter of enduring an hour of talk that we could not understand, and being prepared to answer all the questions and repeat the Golden Text of the Sunday school lesson. If we faithfully performed this task we were given a little yellow card; after a certain number of these receipts had been achieved they were taken up by the Sunday school teacher, and we were given in exchange a blue card of a higher denomination. In due time, if we did not become weary in well-doing, we received a picture card three inches square in exchange for a certain number of blue tickets.

What higher awards awaited children of more sustained virtue I do not know from experience, but I seem to remember an older sister receiving a yellow catechism as compensation for learning an extra number of verses; and then, as a reward for learning the entire catechism and reciting it to the minister, she obtained a small Bible with very fine print. This seemed to me too much like the system of the parent who bribed his child to take cod-liver oil by giving him five cents for each dose, requiring him later to spend the money thus earned to buy more cod-liver oil. I therefore stopped at the picture card myself.

At the close of the first preaching service we were allowed to spend the brief intermission between Sunday school and the next sermon in quietly eating two Boston crackers apiece, to stay the gnawings of hunger and to fortify ourselves for privileges yet to come. Sometimes as a special favor we were permitted the secular diversion of a walk among the graves of our ancestors in the churchyard, but this was rare. The Boston crackers munched in a secluded corner of the sacred edifice were all that we could safely count upon, and by the law of association this durable article became identified in our young minds with the shewbread of the temple and had a distinctly religious flavor. Split in two and nibbled in crumbs they were quite a long time in disappearing, and helped bridge over the awful chasm that yawned between breakfast and dinner.

After the last sermon we climbed into the carry-alls once more, and drove home in the chastened joy of duty faithfully and exhaustively performed, and in fervent anticipation of Sunday dinner. On this day we slowly and properly masticated our food, for we well understood that it was the only carnal concession coming to us, and that after this respite we must wrestle with such subjects as Predestination, Original Sin, and other items of faith and doctrine, in the pages of the Westminster Catechism. I found out early and to my cost, that even if one abstained from acquiring the catechism as a reward, it came just the same, though in a less friendly guise.

On pleasant days we were permitted to conduct this spiritual exercise out of doors; and I well remember carrying the little yellow book with me into the garden and mumbling, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever," to an audience of secular bees who were ostentatiously gathering honey in open defiance of the commandment to abstain from accustomed labor. I was also shocked by the nonconformist behavior of the cows, who persistently gave milk on the Sabbath day, and I asked the chore-boy — whom I found in all the splendor of his Sunday clothes, sitting miserable on the wall of the pig pen, munching green apples and studying his little yellow book — if he considered milking on Sunday a work of necessity or mercy. He gave it as his opinion that while it might perhaps be called a necessity, it could n't be called a work of mercy on any day in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"I asked him if he considered Milking on Sunday a Work of Necessity or Mercy"

the week; so my attempts to reconcile the secular order of creation with the divine command to cease from all ordinary pursuits on the seventh day, caused me much spiritual uneasiness.

How grateful I am to that wonderful quality common to all mankind by which all things seen in retrospect seem "apparelled in celestial light, the glory and the beauty of a dream!" Kind memory, like a bee, culls only the honey from experience. Those arduous Sabbaths of my childhood are sweet to look back upon, and who knows how they may have contributed to the formation of my character!

Possibly the way the tree is at present inclined is not wholly convincing as to the way a twig should be bent. My Sabbath virtue was perhaps then, as now, somewhat assisted. Perhaps indeed, that was the inclination given to the twig, and my enforced virtue of to-day is the result of an early dependence upon having the path of rectitude too unmistakably pointed out to me.

Sometimes, on Sunday afternoons, to keep us from more secular diversions, my Spartan grandmother used to entertain us with accounts of her methods of instilling in her children habits of industry, this being the first virtue in her code. "When your father was a little boy," she would say, "I had him and his brothers learn to braid straw. Then every day each one had a stint to perform, according to his age. Your father used to braid ten yards every day; and when he had gone to bed at night I would burn it all up, for I had him do it, not because I needed the braid, but to inculcate habits of industry in his youth. I think it would be much better if each of you little girls performed some such task each day, for you know 'Satan always finds some mischief still for idle hands to do.'" She always finished this exhortation with a raisin apiece, drawn from the depths of her capacious pocket; so the severity of the moral was somewhat mitigated in application.

Ten yards a day — poor little boy! With all the glory of sunshine and enticing breezes without; with apples on the trees, and water in the swimming-hole; or in winter, with all the delights of coasting and skating to help keep Satan out of a job, what a terrible waste of golden hours!

The bringing up of children is no such simple matter now as it was in early New England days. I too have had my theories and illuminations; but alas, I never loved a theory yet "but 't was the first one to decay." It is difficult to steer a safe course between the extremes of the old-fashioned monarchical system of bringing up children, and the modern democratic perversion of letting them govern themselves by their whims, lest their individuality be lost.

True to my disposition,— conscientious but compromising, — I sought help from a kindergarten mothers' class, in the early days of the Little Maid's life, thinking that there I should find an inspired substitute for blind obedience. One evil day, when we were to be taught how to play with our darlings, I arrived late at the class, to find some stout and earnest mothers of my acquaintance trying to hop about the floor on their hands and feet after the manner of frogs, while the other mothers stood in a circle singing to the tune of "My Maryland":

"Taddy Pole and Polly Wog
Lived together in a bog,
And here you see the very pool
Where they went to swimming school."

I walked home behind the somewhat dishevelled Taddy Pole and Polly Wog, who earnestly discussed the morning's lesson, and since that time I have fallen back upon merely loving and giving my honest best to my child in sincere daily companionship, not attempting to stand to her "in the place of God," as the heroic parents of former generations felt called upon to do, nor yet to make a tadpole of myself in her educational interest.

It is certainly an easier path, and for this reason my inherited conscience suspects it of lurking dangers. I confess to a pang of a purely hereditary nature when the Little Maid looked up to-day from the pages of a book she was reading and said, "Mother, who was Satan, or Sätan — however you pronounce him? Sometimes I see his name in books. And what is the Catty Chisum?" The sense of right and wrong is often as discriminating among children as among most grown people, for conscience is a universal gift; and I confess that I hesitate to force young innocence too soon into the path of conscious virtue. My own experience puts a premium upon natural growth in such matters and discounts hothouse methods of spiritual culture.

These conclusions from the lessons of the past swept over me with the flood of memories, as I conscientiously gazed at the minister of Old Eden and let my thoughts wander in pleasant retrospect, keeping up meanwhile a deceitful appearance of absorbed attention. There are no mental excursions so delightful as those taken when there is occasion for attention. The soul seems to prepare its own feast even when it sits at the table of the Lord. The music and the sermon afford suggestions and hints which open vistas of memory and hope or visions that are too delightful to turn away from.

After all, I believe if I were minister or musician, I should prefer to open the way for such joyous wanderings among the green pastures in each individual soul, rather than to secure an enforced and literal attention to the details of my own performance. The spirit of the discourse determines the direction of one's excursion into the kingdom of the mind, and I am sure the little minister of Old Eden would not have felt that there was anything uncomplimentary to him or to the service could he have looked into my thoughts. He certainly could not have been other than pleased with the favorable contrast which I drew between the sweet reasonableness of his service and the exhaustive nature of those I remembered; and as for the joy of childhood which flooded my retrospection, I have it still in such measure that I can say with my Wordsworth,

> "Oh, joy, that in my embers still doth live
> Something of that which was so fugitive!"

My embers were further stirred to active glow by a delightful walk home from church, while the Little Maid and the rest stayed to Sunday school.

The day was so beautiful, so full of Sabbath peace and stillness that I found myself humming as I walked along:

> "Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright,
> The bridal of the earth and sky,"

and feeling a wave of real thankfulness to my somewhat strenuous early church privileges for the familiarity they enforced with the dear old hymns of Mother Church. It is a loss not to have them incorporated in one's very being.

A mile or so from the church I left the highway and wandered along the river bank in an ecstasy of spring joy. The rippling water, the fresh salt breeze, the bird songs, and the charming stretches of meadow and hill all contributed to a state of beatitude which was crowned by the discovery of wild azalea in all the glory of its pink bloom. Some sprays of this I carried with me to a high rock which commanded a sweeping view, and there I stayed in a passion of love for life, until the carriage appeared down the road bringing the family home from church.

I watched it as it grew from a mere speck in the distance to a recognizable shape, until I heard the wheels rattle on the little bridge spanning the mill stream, and the sound of voices; then I came down from my eminence, intercepted the carriage, and rode the rest of the way home.

I am convinced that Cousin Henrietta is right. I ought to go to church, and I like to go!

CHAPTER VIII

VIEWPOINTS

I HAVE found out that virtue offers other rewards than itself; for last Sunday on the church steps I met a little dove-colored lady whom I had enjoyed looking at during the service, and she kindly invited Cousin Henrietta and me to call upon her that she might show us the old-fashioned garden which lies behind her beautiful old Colonial mansion.

The little lady herself deserves a word of special description, for she is so quaint a type, so wholly a New England product, that one would know her habitat at sight if one were to meet her in the antipodes.

She was the distilled essence of Old Family. Serenity of conviction sat enthroned upon her brow, and her dress was a rebuke to the vulgar love of display sometimes found in less refined localities. It was a soft liquefaction of gray silk, made in a style so simple as to be a moral lesson in itself, and with no ornamentation whatever. Her bonnet, a real bonnet, with a bow under the chin, was also dove-colored and demure, and her face was saved from primness only by its rounded contours and sweetness of expression. It was a Sunday face every day in the week, and in looking upon it one's sins of inelegant English, of occasional colloquialisms, not to mention worse things, loomed large in the foreground of consciousness.

I felt distinctly unworthy of her, and fortified myself as I prepared to-day to call upon her, by an inward appeal to my ancestry, as I am sometimes driven to do when visiting in this part of the world. When I am at home they are allowed to rest in peace, as they are enjoined upon their tombs to do; for in the West one is not judged by his ancestry but by his own behavior and achievement, and it is of no use to appeal to antecedents for present consideration, though reputable family history, even there, is no disgrace.

"Don't be downcast! You can dig up graveyards with anybody," I sternly quoted to myself. "Your ancestors came over in the 'Mayflower' just as much as hers did — perhaps more. You were trained in infancy to leave out your *r*'s and use a broad *a*, and can still do it if you give your mind to it. All that any Chicagoan can hope for is to seek inconspicuousness by conformity."

"I will do my best," said myself to me, and remembering that a Boston woman had once said that she liked to hear me speak because she enjoyed dialect, I set about restoring my English to its native purity by practising a few simple sentences like "Annar has gone to the bahn," and "I told them to drawr it as they sawr it."

"Maybe she will forgive my coming from the West after all," I thought, hopefully, as I completed my intellectual preparation and put on my hat. "She certainly looks like a Christian."

Alas for my preparations! When we reached our destination I gathered up all my rejected Western *r*'s into one joyful "How perfectly lovely!" as I looked for the first time at the view from the gate. One who wishes to appear well in borrowed pronunciation must never be betrayed into enthusiasm.

The large old Colonial mansion was framed in an archway of the high hedge which surrounded the grounds, and directly in front of the door was the most wonderful dogwood I ever saw, in an exuberant riot of white bloom. It stood by itself in the centre of an oval plot of grass bordered with a box hedge, and the effect was like that of a lime light thrown upon the star in the centre of a beautifully set stage. From every angle as we approached the house this lovely tree made a new and distracting composition, until at last we stood upon the high veranda and gazed back into its perfect beauty through festoons of blooming wistaria.

Our hostess met us at the entrance, and we lingered in the long hall which passed through the centre of the house to enjoy the vistas revealed by the open door at either end. Through the doorway at the front of the house we saw the white wonder of the dogwood, while that at the rear revealed such a garden as one sees but rarely even in New England.

For many generations this garden has been kept and tended, each successive owner adding new beauties and carefully preserving the old, until now there are fifteen hundred feet of box hedges bordering garden paths, shaded in places by the overhanging boughs of apple and other blossoming trees. The flowers are arranged for careful combinations of color in succeeding blooms, and the paths are laid out in a quaint sort of maze, with an old fountain at the centre, the formal and picturesque features being blended in such a way as to produce an effect full of character as well as charm.

Individuality is as marked in gardens as in people, and this one was perfect of its kind. It was eloquent of hereditary respectability and refinement, a typical Colonial garden.

As we wandered about among the paths I was startled by a slender girl in white who was feeding three infant crows bread and milk, with a spoon. Was there ever a paradise without its temptation, I wondered, and remorseful remembrance of my personal fall pursued me to the front veranda, where our hostess placed chairs for us and continued the conversation about the last missionary meeting, which she had begun with Cousin Henrietta in the garden.

I was happy, gazing into the heart of the dogwood, breathing the scent of the wistaria, and asking no more of life than just to be, but the hostess politely included me in the conversation by means of a question addressed to my cousin. "Is your friend interested in foreign missions, Mrs. Marston?" she asked, with an encouraging smile at me.

Henrietta took base advantage of the implication of her glance, and left me to answer for myself. I hastily considered my convictions. "If I say I am, Cousin Henrietta will think me mendacious; and if I say I'm not, they'll both think me irreligious. As I can't face either alternative I'll fall back on Flanders," was my conclusion; and aloud I compromised after this impersonal fashion:

"Missions everywhere are entitled to respect, and I certainly would not set geographical boundaries to helpfulness, though perhaps the need for home missionary effort appeals to me most strongly. In this beautiful country you have so little misery at hand, it is natural to seek to relieve it at greater distances. The missionary spirit, like every other, seeks new forms of expression; and the settlement movement in our large cities seems to me one of the most helpful and effective of its modern incarnations." And in my blindness I congratulated myself on having spoken the truth with tact, and trumped the trick since I was unable to follow suit; I was therefore surprised to see that she looked gently disturbed.

"I 've heard something about settlements," she said doubtfully; "but — they are not religious, are they? Of course I cannot but feel that unless they are religious in character they are but temporary expedients and not upon permanent foundations."

I thought of some of the settlement workers whom I knew, and contented myself with saying that I supposed that could hardly be answered without going back to one's definition of religion — and there I had the extraordinary wisdom to pause, for I learned long ago that there are two subjects which Chicago women cannot safely trust themselves to discuss, and religion is one of them. Chicago is the other.

Her next question made escape impossible, however, and broke my excellent record for the day; for what I forbore saying to her I poured forth upon my innocent cousin Henrietta on the way home.

"You come from Chicago, do you not?" she said, with more of pity than of blame in her voice.

"Yes, but—," I began, with a despairing clutch at my ancestry.

"Perhaps you can tell me, then," she continued, not noticing my attempt to introduce extenuating circumstances, "why it is that such a very large proportion of the money sent to foreign missions comes from New England, and so little from the West?"

"If it is true, I 'm afraid I can't," I said with a miserable sense of responsibility, "unless it is because we see so many things to do nearer home. You see, we are still young, and have many things yet to conquer which older places overcame long ago."

"I should think that might be so," she assented, "for I visited Chicago at the time of the World's Fair. Of course the Fair was — quite nice — but *Chicago!*" — an expressive shudder finished the sentence.

"Chicago is rather an acquired taste as a rule," I admitted, "but if one lives there long enough to get any appreciation of the real Chicago, it is impossible to help loving it for its liberality and progressiveness and its splendid energy. It is inspiring to be in the making of things.

"No one has to learn to love New England; you just can't help it. But I love the West too, and am glad I have had the opportunity to live there long enough to appreciate its great significance to our times. We are living history there to-day as earnestly as it was lived in New England a few generations ago, don't you see?" I finished with what was intended for a conciliatory smile, but she wore a frozen look.

"Indeed!" she said. "Well — I have heard that you are very progressive out there — if you call it so. But who is it that says 'Mere motion is not progress'? You tolerate all sorts of strange heresies, do you not? I trust you personally are not in sympathy with any of the absurd movements which I understand are allowed to flourish there. The religion of my fathers is good enough for me, and I think a reasonable conservatism a great safeguard. The tendency of the West to run after every new thing would seem to me a serious menace to real spiritual progress."

I had sins enough of my own to answer for without being held responsible for the aggregate shortcomings of Chicago, and I cast an imploring look at Cousin Henrietta to urge a termination of our call before our hostess should inquire about the stock yards, or any other of my hidden vices. She mercifully responded to my signal and made a tactful move, and after sliding gently down an "inclined plane of conversation" reaching from the veranda to the front gate, we took our departure.

My cousin Henrietta is a well-poised woman of large silences and well-considered speech. Her reticence acts like a poultice, and draws out all the talk there is in me, while her poise heals any inflammation of ideas from which I may be suffering. It was, therefore, a joy indeed to pour into her attentive ear, as we drove home, some of the things I had longed to say and did not, in regard to the Eastern point of view.

"Why is it, oh, why is it," I complained, "that the attitude of the New Englander is as it is toward people who live west of the Alleghany Mountains? Even an Eastern ancestry scarcely mitigates the rigor of their opinion. It is not my experience alone, but the general verdict among Western people that they are treated like a Race Problem by those who live in the East. It is n't because they know the West, for we are accustomed to patronage from people here who have scarcely travelled out of their own county in their lives. One might think that was what ailed them, if the educated ones were not the same. It points the moral of Howells's remark that 'Bostonians should never travel — it undermines their judgment.' There is no comprehension of the significance of Chicago in the history of our country, nor of the great world-forces that are grinding together there as nowhere else in the world."

"Hear! Hear!" interrupted Cousin Henrietta; "you sound like a Fourth of July speech." But I was not to be diverted by flippancy.

"Chicago is no Cranford, I 'll admit, and it has n't the natural beauties of Boston; it 's no place to die in, and it 's not a good place to display acquired wealth; but for the living man and woman, interested in the world's work and progress and feeling the pulse of humanity, it is full of opportunity and interest. It is the heart of our democracy, and the failure to understand it is evidence that we must look for the preservation of our democratic ideals to the younger communities rather than to those which have arrived. What would the authors of the Declaration of Independence say —"

"Oh, come now," said Cousin Henrietta, "you need n't drag that immortal document into this discussion! It needs rest, it is so overworked by other orators. Come back to your own grievances and take on! Let me know the worst!"

"I could n't relate all the instances that have come under my personal observation in the years that I have been so well acquainted with East and West," I replied. "Besides, I try to forgive and forget, but I suppose the worm has turned. You know that I am a mild woman" (she dared to laugh), "but a short time before I left home I encountered a young woman who had not yet lived down her Eastern origin, who was expressing herself with much point and emphasis after having spent but a few days in Chicago. She said all the people were common and vulgar, that it was nothing but an aggregation of filth and materialism,— and so on, until she had quite spent her vocabulary of detractives. You may not believe me, my poor Henrietta, but I did not answer back! I just said with marked relevancy, 'How do you like the last Sargent in the Boston Library?' But she held to her subject with wonderful tenacity, and finished by pronouncing Chicago men 'unspeakable.' She said they 'made her regret all the men she had been turning down in

Boston.' This was so overwhelming when you consider their scarcity there that I was rendered speechless. Why — when I was a young girl in Boston I vowed I would never marry an Eastern man because it would be impolite to take one when there were n't enough to go round. Do you know, she actually married a Western man after all! She had no more principle! I suppose she has found out by this time that they have hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions, like other people."

"That 's sheer perversion of Shakespeare — it 's worse, — it 's play to the galleries," Henrietta said severely. "I don't pity you at all. You are able to look out for yourself when you are trampled upon. Moreover, you can't blame people for loving their own homes. It has certainly been one of the great factors in making New England what it is, and when the result is so satisfactory it is no wonder we appreciate it. I suppose our complacency is the natural tax of our advantages."

"There 's only one drawback to New England," I sighed, "and that 's its perfection and consciousness of it. It 's a spoiled child. Because it is so beautiful it really thinks it has some sort of divine right. I suppose we have helped in the spoiling, for Westerners love the East more than is good for it. It is n't that I want New Englanders to love New England less, but the West a little more. We 're her children, and she should be more maternal in her feeling toward us."

Circumstances and Cousin Henrietta allowed me the last word, for just as I reached this period, we turned in at the gate of Marston Hill. Her forbearance moved me to a just appreciation.

"At any rate, I will say for you, Cousin-once-removed Henrietta," I concluded, impressively; "that you are a notable exception. You have never said an unkind word. May Heaven bless you for your kind ones; there have even been a few of those. But it is the way of the world that the innocent should suffer for the guilty, and you have borne my jeremiade like the saint you are! Don't you know temperance lectures never reach the ears that need them, but are listened to by kind ladies of sober habits? and I —"

"Stop your nonsense and get out," she commanded, and I obediently descended from the carriage into a chaos of barking dogs and the Little Maid's outstretched arms.

CHAPTER IX

INTERMEZZO

FOR several days I have made no record, for the final hours of the final days of our visit to Marston Hill were too full to permit me to dwell upon experiences and taste their flavor with true epicurean relish. Moreover, this is a book of joys, and I should not wish to class my departure from Marston Hill as a joy, even though the journey from Old Eden to Boston resolves itself in my memory into a continuous panorama of lovely pictures framed by the car windows.

There is no more beautiful ride in beautiful New England, I am sure, than that provided for the pleasure of the traveller in this journey. The process of going affords such delight to the eye that the wishing carpet of Arabia would be a drug on the market to right-minded travellers in this region, which, for its luxuriant beauty, has been justly described as the tropics of the temperate zone.

Glimpses of a blue, blue sea, flecked with occasional sails in inlets and bays; of old wharves and shipping, of picturesque houses of the beautiful gray color found only near salt water, of tumultuous hills garlanded with elms, of farms with cattle idly chewing their cuds, beside little rivers flowing through golden marshes into the sea — these succeeded each other in kaleidoscopic variety and an infinity of charm throughout the entire distance. In the State of Connecticut there are no grade crossings, and the traveller enjoys a sense of security rarely possible in our America. In many places where it had been necessary to cut through solid rock to make the road-bed viaducts bridged the chasms, and the rocky passages were so covered with vines and buried in shrubbery that it was like passing from bower to bower as the train flew along.

At this time of year when the world is adorned with the fresh green of young summer, when the eye meets surprises of beauty at every turn, when blossoms and verdure rival each other in loveliness, and the blue distance shows opalescent tints under the flying clouds, I know of no more satisfying experience than to ride thus through God's country, to enrich the memory by such a store of beauty. Best of all the journey was the conclusion of it, for it ended as journeys should, in a lovers' meeting. There, on the station platform as the train pulled in, stood my Adam, faithful to his promise to join us in Boston and go with us for a summer holiday to the dear old homestead; and we made all haste in crossing the city from one station to the other in order to get the first train for Elmwood. Finding that we had a few moments to spare, we went over to the Public Library near by to enjoy the Sargent decorations, and to show the Little Maid once more the pictures of the Quest of the Grail; for I have been reading to her from the "Morte d' Arthur" since she saw them last, and she is therefore better prepared to understand and appreciate them.

We were repaid for the effort in more than one way, for in addition to our æsthetic satisfaction, we really saw and heard the typical Boston female as portrayed in cartoons and libellous jokes.

We were sitting in the hushed atmosphere of Sargent Hall, gazing at the first lunette, when a strident voice shattered the silence. Everybody started and looked around in time to see a determined-looking female emerge from the stairway, followed by a meek but disturbed-looking man. She was a formidable person, with a figure suggestive of a fallen cake, and clothes of a fearlessly sensible cut, which did not fit her. Her hair was strenuously arranged in a round door-knob at the back of her head, and she was crowned by a crime in millinery — no less. It was a hat of severe shape and proportion, with a floral wreath like a funeral piece surrounding the crown. The whole structure was anchored by an elastic band which passed under the door-knob, giving an undeniably tidy effect to the composition. Her glance was of uncompromising directness, even though it was obliged to pierce the heavy lenses of a pair of spectacles to reach its object, and she addressed her companion as if he were an audience, interspersing her remarks with Latin quotations. This is no fancy picture. So she really appeared.

As she paused before the first lunette, we apprehended that she was about to let fall an oracle, and listened attentively. We were not disappointed. She waved a forefinger at the Children of Israel, writhing under the lash of the kings, gazed sternly at the Assyrian lion and the Egyptian Sphinx, and said, disapprovingly:

"I cannot understand how any person of taste could put such messes of red and blue as that upon a wall. It offends my color sense. Moreover, I do not approve of the subject. I do not object to historical things, and real ancient historical things at that, but such creatures as those [indicating the Sphinx] never really existed, and I cannot see why they should be represented in such a place as this! For my part, I think it would have been much more appropriate to place there portraits of some of our leading Boston Citizens!"

Then she passed beneath the tables of the law in the hands of Moses, and disappeared into the dimness of a room beyond, while we made all speed downstairs and out into the sunlight of Copley Square; for, as Kipling says, "the necessity was upon us to laugh," and also to catch the train for Elmwood.

CHAPTER X

THE OLD HOMESTEAD

THIS day has held a double measure of joys, for in its golden hours I have had the realization of present happiness mingled with the pleasures of memory; and now, though it is late and every other member of this great household is probably asleep, I have crept out of bed to enjoy it all over again quite by myself; to caress the day and appreciate it anew before it slips away into the past to become a memory in its turn.

"This time," I said to myself, as we — a reunited family — prepared to take the train from Boston which was to carry us to the homestead and the waiting clan, "this time I will not be tardy with my happiness. I will keep tryst with it to-day, and realize how rich my life is now. Experiences are always slipping by without my tasting them with true relish, but to-day I will live my life to the full"— and I believe that I have!

This has been a day of family reunions in the lovely surroundings which are associated with childish joys, and to-night as I sit in the room which I left as a bride, and to which I now return "bringing my sheaves with me," I am overcome with a realization of the cumulative wealth of experience. My sheaves are both sound asleep, and I have carefully screened their eyes from the light lest my vigil disturb their repose, while I give thanks for the divine mathematics of family life.

My father and mother are perhaps wakeful too, thinking similar thoughts, and counting their harvest of thirteen souls, children and grandchildren, all garnered under the old roof to-night. Even this is not a complete account, for another son will be added to the number in a few days, when this house party culminates in a wedding under the elms on the lawn; where also my Adam and I were married.

To come again after any absence into the encircling shadow of the dear old trees which crown the hilltop and embower the old house in a wealth of living green is like being brooded under maternal wings. The elms of New England are an element in the homesickness of every one of her wandering children; and the trees which give Elmwood its name arch above the entrance drive, fling protecting branches over the ancient rooftree, shade the spacious lawn, give harbor and comfort to our occupations, and healing and solace to weary bodies and minds. They even enter with beautiful playfulness into the sports of the children, and droop long branches nearly to the ground for them to catch and swing upon in their play, as their parents and grandparents did before them.

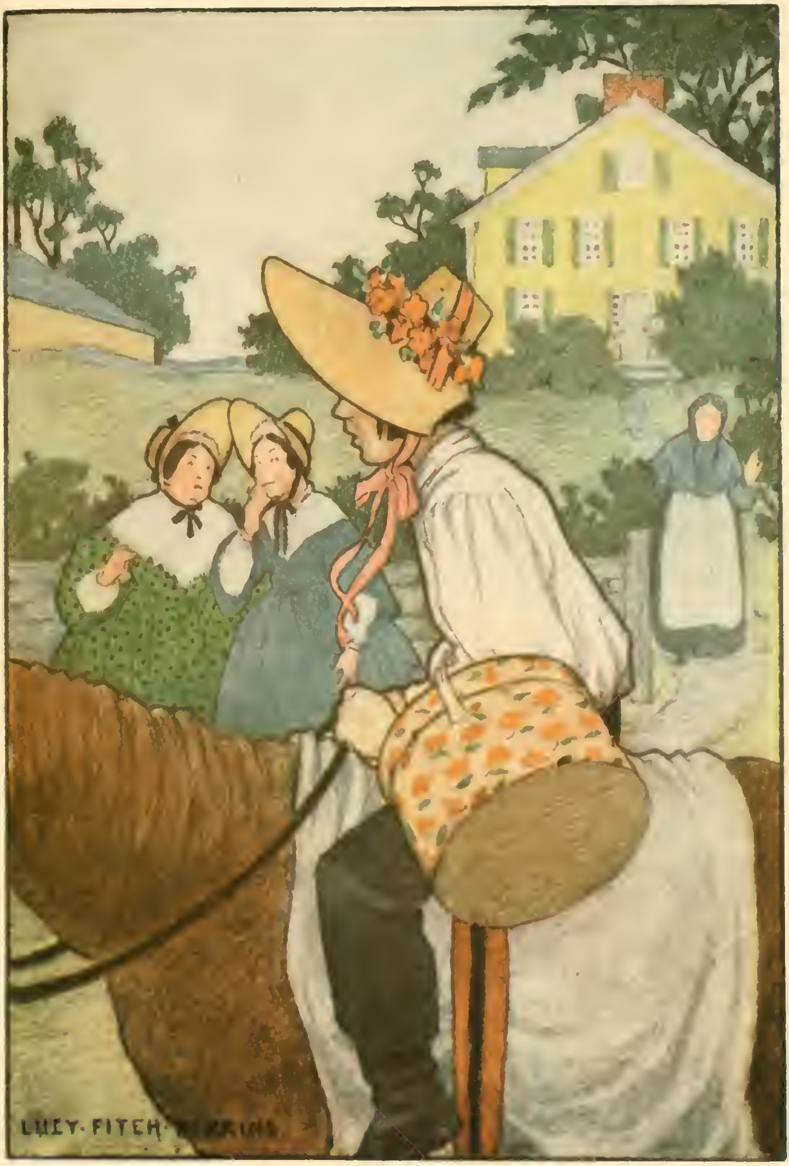
These trees are also our private family chapel; under their spreading branches a hundred years ago the strict old Puritan divine whose portrait looks down so severely from its place in the hall upon his descendants, used to write the sermons which are still spoken of in this region for their pungent and personal applications, and the homestead and town both bear even now the marks of his strong personality. I can see him in imagination in his cocked hat, knee breeches, silk stockings, and silver-buckled shoes,— a costume which he wore long after every one else had adopted the bifurcated horror of trousers, — responding gravely to the respectful salutations which were accorded him by every one who passed him as he walked along the village streets. A bow from the boys and a courtesy from the girls were the invariable tributes paid the sacred office, for the New England minister was regarded as the ambassador of God.

The idea of aristocracy dies hard, and in New England it manifested itself in a certain distinction conferred upon the minister. He was a sort of spiritual feudal lord, and the superiority of his family was such that marriage with any member of it was looked upon as a social event requiring due observance.

When the dominie's eldest daughter went to Boston to buy her household treasures before her marriage to a young doctor, the whole town turned out to see her go; and for a time it seemed doubtful if the second daughter could marry at all, for she was loved by a mere deacon's son, whose humble social position made it difficult for him to address her. She, however, had no mind to miss the common joys of life for such a cause, and having made a shrewd guess about the state of his feelings, she took the reins in her own hands. At a party, from which she made exemplary departure at nine o'clock, John's state of mind was apparent, yet he did not dare offer to see her home; so she stepped to the middle of the room, her black eyes dancing with mischief, and said in a clear voice, "If no one here has any objection I should like to have John wait upon me home; and if any one has, let him speak now or forever hold his peace." It is needless to add that the delighted John settled the matter on the walk home that night. They were married soon after, and came to this dear old place to live.

Here as time went on she developed more of the fearless characteristics of her father, the minister. She wore her clothes twenty years out of fashion as he had done before her, and never parted with a bonnet. The ladies of the church got tired of seeing the same one appear year after year and they expressed themselves about it at a historical meeting of the Sewing Society, from which she was absent. The village doctor happened in for a moment on an errand, when the ladies were at the most animated point, and as he dearly loved a joke, he repeated the whole thing to madam within the hour, and together the two miscreants planned a bombshell for the Society. While the ladies were at their tea the doctor appeared once more and announced to the meeting that Mrs. John sent word that, if the ladies would decide what sort of bonnet she ought to wear, she would try to meet their views, but pending such instruction she would continue to wear her old one, which was still in good condition. And wear it she did, until it went the way of all the earth and a new one became a necessity.

The new bonnet was to be finished on a Saturday ready for church on Sunday morning, and as Sunday observance began at nightfall Saturday evening, one


LUCY·FITCH·PERKINS

"He dated a Broken Spirit from that Hour"

of her sons was despatched betimes to bring it home from the milliner's. He went on horseback, and as she feared for the safety of the box by this means of transportation, she commanded him to wear the bonnet home on his head. Disobedience was a thing unthought of in that family, and the town was therefore shaken to its foundations by the spectacle of a wretched boy riding through the main street of the village with Mrs. John's new bonnet displayed upon his head.

As for the boy, he dated a broken spirit from that hour and never suffered again from false pride. Whether or not Grandfather John was always comfortable, it is certain that he was never bored, for there was not a dull moment between their marriage and their golden wedding, when he exhibited his wife to his many descendants with all the pride of a young bridegroom.

Some of her bonnets still remain in an old chest, under the eaves in the attic, which is even now full of old-fashioned clothes and furniture, a veritable treasure house of the past. Her father's hat and shoe-buckles and many of his sermons are still there; and the last years of her life were spent in going over these hoarded treasures, reading old love-letters or fiery sermons and transforming them into tapers for lighting candles — for to waste a scrap of paper was an unpardonable sin in her eyes. In this way she passed the torch of one generation on to the next, using the record of one flame, appropriately, in the kindling of another.

Her excessive regard for ministers caused her to treasure with particular care everything that had ever belonged to one. It is for this reason that the chairs in the house have most of them theological leanings. The old Queen Anne corner chair opposite me belonged to the Reverend Elijah, who antedated the Reverend Nathaniel of the portrait; and the chair in which the carver sits at the table went through the Harvard divinity school in the early seventeen hundreds. The one in which I am now sitting belonged to a distinguished divine of Arminian tendencies, who was a friend of the Rev. Nathaniel in spite of the discrepancies which yawned between their theological views; and the little oval table on which I write was one from which he often ate a repast spread for him by the hands of his dutiful wife, Olive, whose portrait hangs near his in the hall.

Under the great elms which formed his outdoor study, some of us of this generation were baptized into the faith of our fathers, and here, too, we have brought our own children for christening. In their shadow in these later days have been held many parliaments on Sunday afternoons, when the deeply rooted polemical instincts of the family, perhaps inherited from this same preacher of the church militant, have been allowed free play in the discussion of some book or event of public interest. At such times one member of the family reads aloud to a congregation scattered about in untrammelled attitudes upon the grass, and starts by this means a discussion in which young and old take earnest and voluble part.

In a large family of varied opinions we have found that there is no safety valve, if we would dwell together in unity, like taking an impersonal subject and discussing it freely. It is like providing a puppy with a harmless root to prevent his chewing up one's wardrobe, or like a lightning rod, through which mental electricity may be safely conducted into the ground.

In this out-door forum we have disposed of the various questions of interest which have agitated the public mind during the Summers that we have gathered here. It has been a valuable experience in itself; for though it was seldom that we all arrived at the same point of view, we at least individually found our own, and that is perhaps the best possible result in any discussion.

If the spoken word is eternal, as mystics claim, then what echoes and contradictory murmurings from all the things that have been said here in the past must still linger among the swaying branches of these old elms! I can almost catch the sound of them as I lean from my window and look up into the leafy dome. How true it is that "the theology of one age is the mythology of the next"! Fierce denunciations of the sinful race, and vivid word pictures of a lake of perpetual fire, from some of the sermons prepared on this spot by the Rev. Nathaniel, alternate with selections from Andrew D. White's "Warfare between Science and Theology," or with recent contributions to the literature of the Higher Criticism read by his descendants.

Crashing sermons on the subordinate sphere of Woman, also in the voice of the preacher, make common cause with Münsterberg's modern "American Traits" in condemning some of the activities of that sex which has always provided so many riddles for masculine solution.

Occasionally there is a topic upon which the voices of both past and present agree. Arguments over the Race Problem there are none, for the doctrines of the early abolitionists were heard long ago under these trees, and the stories of fugitive slaves as well; for Elmwood was a station of the underground road before the war, and family convictions on this question have never altered, even though there is an ancient will among the archives, in which a Massachusetts ancestor bequeathed a slave to a member of the family of Great-grandmother Olive.

In some respects the voices of the past, as they come back to me in the murmurings among the trees, are less stern than those of the present. The words concerning questions of industrial reform and the liquor traffic are all modern. In the old days these problems had no existence in the minds of even thoughtful people, and the minister has no doubt sipped his toddy with serene relish on the very spot where later generations have declared for prohibition.

There are also a thousand echoes of less strenuous occasions — of gay talk about a table twenty feet long, of after-dinner stories and hearty laughter; for the old elm trees have arched our dining-hall through many golden summers, and hosts of friends have been sheltered here under its hospitable green roof. Here have come during the years people not unknown in the world's work, who have sat under the elms beside an outdoor hearth fire, and talked of many things, while the moon hung low in the sky, lighting the table about which we lingered late.

Life in all its phases, generations of life, have passed in continuous procession under the Gothic arch of these old trees, and every root, branch, and twig is nourished with family history and tradition. What wonder that to us they seem different from all other trees in the world, and that we feel toward them as toward silent friends who know but never betray the secrets of the years? Their branches have arched over some funerals during the years, and over many brides, but I was the first to be married under them in the Cathedral of Out-of-Doors.

If the romances they have witnessed were recorded upon their leaves, what a library they would bear! They were here when the Indians were still wandering over these hills. They were here to watch the building of the old homestead. They welcomed my grandmother as a bride, and in after years sheltered the window which framed her old face until she too slipped away to join the invisible choir, and passed beneath them for the last time. Here her sons brought home their brides to visit the old father and mother, and here they were welcomed on their return from the war. Beneath them every day for many years their children passed, creeping not unwillingly to school — for what New England child ever scorned an education? And now their children's children play in their generous shadow and swing from the swaying limbs, which droop as of yore almost to the ground.

How amid such a sea of memories am I to sound only those deeps of feeling which I have voyaged through to-day? Every view from the car windows, as we came from Boston, was as familiar as the face of a friend; and when we reached the old station which has been the scene of so many dramas of meeting and parting, my heart was already crowded with reminiscences.

The first reunion on this spot that I remembered came one snowy day of my childhood when grandfather met us at this station to take us to the old home for a genuine New England Thanksgiving. There too I had passed through every conceivable comedy of errors attendant upon arrivals at a station four miles from home, in a region where communication by mail or telegraph is still subject to the deliberate movement of officials who always put off till to-morrow what should have been done last week.

Here I had arrived to spend many a school holiday, and here at last I met and welcomed my Adam himself when he came to marry me under the old elm trees. There was no unseemly throwing of rice and old shoes when we set forth, for the wedding guests went before, leaving an opportunity for a quiet good-bye to the family gathered under the trees to see us off, and a last view of handkerchiefs waving in the moonlight as we drove beneath their drooping arch out into the world together.

Thus the old trees helped us to avoid the frivolities and indignities which too often accompany American weddings. I wonder how a Buddhist, or a Hindoo philosopher would describe our American wedding customs. They furnish legitimate ground for missionary efforts on our behalf, to any people of an alien point of view.

But I must come back to the happy present, out of which I am continually dropping into the happy past. The electric road has now become such a feature of rural life in New England that, as one sententious Yankee said, "You can go somewhere nowadays quicker than you can stay at home."

This destroyer of distance now takes us three miles of our homeward way so swiftly that we never attempt to have carriages meet us at the station; and so the Little Maid, her father, and I climbed to the front seat of the car in order to get the first view of all the familiar scenes as we flew along. The landmarks in the Land of Dreams were all about me; for to childhood that land lies in the very midst of the actual, yet is not the actual.

On the right we passed the red brick house signalized to my childhood as the "Home of the Two Old Maids and the Two Old Bachelors." Only two old faces look from the window now as we hurry by.

Beyond this lies the house built by Sir Harry Frankland as a home for Agnes Surriage; and near it is the old place where great-great-grandfather lived; and in the dooryard is a giant elm which, as a sapling, he once nearly mowed down with a scythe!

At the top of the next hill we knew where to look for the old red barn, miles away, in which so many delightful rainy days of childhood were spent, and the sun, shining on the windows of the cupola, flashed a welcoming signal. The house was hidden behind the elm trees, which even at this distance made a mighty mound of green on the hilltop; and the barn also disappeared as we rounded a curve and sped on, past the ancient burying-ground where "the rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep," past the wood road where we used to hunt arbutus in the Spring, up and up the next long hill, until at the top we saw again the familiar church spire, climbing still farther into the blue.

Here beside the church more ancestors are buried, and Adam asked solemnly if the two graveyards were rival plants. I was proud to tell him that in this town we had always been of a liberality so pronounced that we had buried all sects except Catholics in the same plot of ground. Down on the cape each denomination had its own burying-ground, but here death has always swept denominational lines into the oblivion they deserve.

The corner of the common beside the drinking fountain has been for many years the family trysting place, as the pyramids were to the Peterkin family in Egypt; and there we found the carry-all, beloved of our infancy, now almost too ancestral to be useful, waiting to take us over the remaining hills to Elmwood, while an open wagon was in attendance to receive our trunks. We were a merry procession as we jogged along through the long street of the village, past houses in most of which, as I explained to Adam, I had been born and had died many times; for all of them had been inhabited for generations by different branches of the family, and every one of them is engulfed in the subconscious areas of my being.

Under the trees in one dooryard they were having a family party,— years before I was born,— when the news of the death of an uncle in the border troubles of Kansas came to sadden the merrymaking; yet I feel that I was there. Under the same trees, years later, we played at recess time, or, during the long nooning, ate the luncheon we had brought to school in the cherished little tin pails which were our chief treasures. We had picked blueberries in the pastures to purchase these tin pails and had bargained for them ourselves with the tin peddler when that romantic character one day stopped at our kitchen door to exchange new tinware for old rags and something to boot. The winding roadways of New England seem to miss this once familiar figure with his load of bright tinware flashing in the sun. He made a wonderful appeal to our childish imaginations.

Oh, for the joy in present possessions that there was for us in those little tin pails! They seemed to suggest and carry with them an aroma from the fields of clover and golden-rod which they had looked down upon from the top of the cart. They had seen the great world which lay beyond the distant rampart of blue hills that bounded our horizon. These tin pails had but one fault. Sometimes they seemed too small to hold all that our healthy young appetites demanded at noon. A piece of pie was nearly always shorn of some of its corners to be made to fit. On the other hand, it seemed framed by Providence for the transportation of the Boston cracker, which formed the foundation layers of our luncheon; doughnuts also fitted to perfection, though the hole in the middle seemed rather a waste of space. Cold bread pudding could be most economically packed away in them, but cold bread pudding we felt to be an imposition upon hungry childhood. Nothing reconciled us to it but the generosity of the supply, which is often a characteristic of undesirable things, and the occasional raisin buried in its depths.

A yellow barn on our left was once the schoolhouse, and the disused room, filled with little desks, still remains as it was in the distant days when Miss Mary and Miss Hannah had charge of the training of our infant minds.

Into this very barn, Bertie, the best loved and the naughtiest boy in school, one day rode a stray pig, to the rapt admiration of the younger girls of the school, who had assembled to encourage valor with the presence of beauty. There too, during the long noonings, after having emptied the tin pails, we beguiled the time with tableaux, arranged with great effect in the empty stalls of the stable portion of the building. On one such occasion I remember the pride with which I personated the "Madonner Doloroser"— who she might be being quite beyond my severely Protestant ken — under the skilful management of an older and more sophisticated girl. I remember that I was draped in an old black shawl and knelt in the Rembrandt shadow of the clean stall gazing with an agonized expression at a crack in the roof, while a real tear, extracted from the pump, twinkled effectively in the light upon my upturned cheek.

The tableau dearest of all to our hearts, and enacted over and over again to delighted audiences, was arranged in two scenes, known respectively as the "Happy-Family-Without-Suspicion," and "The Sequel." The first scene disclosed the happy family artistically disposed in the somewhat limited space of the horse stall. A barrel served as a centre table, and upon it stood an imaginary lamp. Beside it, reading instructive literature to a numerous progeny, sat a mother who endeavored to express in her chubby face all the virtues ascribed in scripture to the model wife. The children were gathered in attitudes of absorbed attention about the mother's knee, while in the background one of the boys — when we were able to persuade him — loomed large as the father of this ideal group.

The cast was not always so complete, for if there happened to be only one boy available, as was usually the case, he preferred to take the other masculine role in this affecting picture. It was his privilege to lie in an attitude of fearful stealth, along the top of the stall, pointing a loaded broom handle with deadly aim directly at the Happy-Family-Without-Suspicion. There was no affectation of a dropped curtain between this and "The Sequel." The villain merely shouted, "Bang!"— and instantly every member of the Happy Family dropped to the floor and expired without a struggle, though how such fearful carnage could be accomplished with a single shot must forever remain one of the unsolved mysteries of Art.

On and on we drove past the Old Yellow House, where a ministerial ancestor four generations back raised a numerous family,— relying more upon his agricultural than upon his pastoral labors for support, as he caustically informed his flock; past the great ash trees that he planted; down the long hill which always seemed so endless when we climbed it on our way to school, and so short when we played along the way as we went home; across the brook in the hollow where the first wild-flowers bloomed and up the hill on the other side, on top of which we could already see glimpses of the Old Red House, buried almost out of sight behind the overarching elms. Oh, how good it all is to come back to! To see the blue hills so changelessly beautiful in the distance, to hear the carriage wheels grind over the rocky road, to smell the well-remembered fragrance as we pass each familiar tree and shrub on the way! Here is the spot where the evening primrose blooms, and just at the expected moment we are welcomed by its sweet odor. On top of a birch tree in the sunlight a scarlet tanager sways and sings. Now we have passed the first bars on the left, and now we are on home land, and now at the top of the hill. See what a group! All the family stand there in silhouette, waving arms and handkerchiefs and shrilling the family salute, while old Gyp, the dog, gambols about with rheumatic grace, waving his tail and barking a welcome! And now we spring from the carriage into the midst of the group under the homestead trees, and run the gantlet of affection, — taking Father and Mother, four sisters, two brothers in-law, (but just as good as the real), and the brother-in-law elect, in turn. Then follow in due course, three nieces, a nephew, one uncle, and a cousin, while last of all comes Norah — the Institution!

Norah is the old retainer of the family, without whose somewhat intermittent service but unalterable affection these family reunions at Elmwood would be hedged about with insurmountable difficulties. She bears down upon us with a mighty Irish guffaw, her arms oustretched, her stout person listing to port with every heavy step like an ill-ballasted vessel, and engulfs us in an ample embrace.

Poor old Norah! Without her familiar face, framed in its white cap gathered over her hair, and her capacious person leaning from the back window on a sunny afternoon, no summer picture of Elmwood would be complete. How many afternoons I have spent on that lawn, with the sound of her afternoon recreation upon the jews' harp borne fitfully upon the breeze, looking across the miles of intervening country to the faint outline of Nobscot and the blue hills of Milton in the azure distance, while I ate oxheart cherries brought from the nearest tree and steeped my soul in peace!

How many times, too, I have been startled out of my reverie by the tinkling of cow bells and the barking of Gyp, and have found myself suddenly surrounded by all the cows, taking the forbidden short cut across the lawn on their way to the barn to be milked! This is my signal for a walk to the hilltop beyond the orchard, where I watch the lengthening shadows, and the growing splendor in the west, and listen to the evensong of thrushes and vesper sparrows, until Norah's summoning voice and the supper bell reach my ears, and I return to join the family around the table spread under the old elm trees. And now these familiar joys are beginning over again, and this time my Adam shares paradise with me!

Ah, there 's the hoot of the owl in the elm tree, the same old owl that has watched there for years! You never hoot until the small hours, old friend, so I 'll close my vigil and go to sleep, thinking that all my nearest and dearest rest, an unbroken circle, under the old roof to-night, guarded and protected by the swaying branches of the elms of Elmwood.

CHAPTER XI

WORK AND PLAY

THIS morning I was awakened by that sweetest of country sounds, the music of cow bells, and sprang at once to the window to get the picture that I so love, of the cows going down the road to pasture. There were sixteen of them, with Gyp wagging along in the rear ready to give any hints that might seem necessary to those who strayed from the path after tempting mouthfuls of juicy grass, fresh with the morning dew. This pastoral procession wound toward the sunrise along a roadway bordered with living green, while across the lawn there appeared another procession, less pastoral but equally significant, for it foretold June peas for dinner.

The five sisters, three brothers, and one elect have arrived at a simple system of family nomenclature. The men are of the adorable American type of husbands who pay absolute deference to their wives in all matters pertaining to what the world calls "woman's sphere"; we have, therefore, appreciatively named them The Lambs — each being designated according to the date of his acquisition, as Lamb I, Lamb II, Lamb III, and the brother-in-law elect is already known as Lamb IV. It is the privilege of each Lamb to assist his wife in such ways as are possible to the merely masculine, when she takes her place as caterer for the family. This office is filled in rotation by the sisters, and it is no sinecure. For this reason a delightful holiday feeling crept over me as I looked upon the housekeeper and her consort on their way to the garden to gather the vegetables for dinner, though I well know the task has its own compensations. When one is really out in the beautiful dew-washed world with all the freshness of the morning upon it, the task assumes a poetic quality, and one feels a wholesome scorn for the sleep-bound laggards in the house. When such duties are accomplished early, the day from breakfast on is free for less practical pursuits, and this morning the Lambs completed the work of laying out a golf course in the field beyond the orchard. As a finishing touch they tacked a score card to the trunk of an apple tree near the first hole, with all our initials, in order that our records may be preserved and compared.

For myself, I appreciate golf as a "full-sized game," as Lamb II, who is an architect, is wont to say, but I do not need to be coaxed out of doors to chase a little ball over the world. It seems such a meagre selection out of the beauties of the day to focus the vision upon a thirty-cent ball and lose the view of the Milton Hills on the horizon. And when it has fallen and disappeared, what a waste of time it seems to turn one's back upon the landscape to hunt for it among the weeds! It goes against my sense of relative values. I have a truly remarkable mental score of the game I played this afternoon. If recorded it would read something like this:

". . . Spent three hours and a half on the golf grounds and did n't get round the links at all. After the first drive, lost my ball. Climbed over the wall into the pasture to hunt for it. Found the place was inhabited by a colony of brown thrashers, and rested a few minutes while I listened to their song. I have been told that the mavis belongs to this family. Must look this up for I 've always wanted to meet a mavis. Did not find the ball.

"My Lamb called me and said I must return or resign. Called back to him to go on, that I was hunting my ball — which I immediately began to do. He offered to help me, but I declined with spirit and said I knew just where it had fallen and would find it myself. Found the brook running full, and a specimen of orchid growing near by. Took it back to show to the Little Maid, who was perched in the apple tree near the teeing ground. Returned to hunt for the ball. Gave it up and took a new one. Had made my third hole and was on the point of a supreme effort, when the cows suddenly appeared from somewhere, headed straight for the sweet-corn patch in the garden. Ran to the rescue of the corn, which I tenderly love. Got out two cows with a lofter and a third with a brassy, which is a better score than I have made at any other time with these sticks. Then I went back to the second ball but could n't find it. It was n't there. Lamb II came back — also from the corn — to help me hunt it, and asked me guardedly if I liked croquet. Said he thought with a good partner I might make a success of it.

"Then I said I thought working for a score demoralizing, and that I preferred to sit in the apple tree with the Little Maid; which I did."

The true way to enjoy golf is by a vicarious process. It is very pleasant to sit in an apple tree and watch others, picturesquely disposed about an emerald field, working hard to get little balls into little holes a great way off; but when one is down in the landscape merely chasing the ball, the effect of the whole is lost in an insignificant detail.

"He who stands on Mt. Athos does not see Mt. Athos," and likewise he who plays golf cannot see the game.

Then again, if one is actually playing, and some one else makes a splendid drive, the seeds of envy ripen at once in the soul; and if one is playing and makes a wretched play, there is a tendency to other sins. I have learned, I trust, not to lead myself into temptation.

From the safe point of view of the apple tree one can feel a general benevolence toward all golfers. There one may enjoy a good play made anywhere in the field without the twinge which accompanies a spoiled record. Moreover it gives one a pleasing sense of virtue to enjoy the good plays of others instead of being in the midst of the *mêlée*, contending for a prize. There is so much competition in life that I am content to keep my pleasures on a socialistic basis of coöperation, even if in doing so I sacrifice all professional ambitions, and never am in the race for a championship.

Each day is one long delight to the little children, for while the grown-up ones amuse themselves with their golf and other pursuits, the real children riot over the entire farm, playing in the brooks, sliding in the haymows, hunting eggs, and driving to market. This last occupation is more arduous than it sounds, though Elmwood is only a mile from the village. Our horses are almost as remarkable for their method of progress as the boy in Cable's romance, over whom his discouraged teacher exclaimed, "With what rapiditive celeritude does he advance backwardly!"

There are two animals on this farm which have received the brevet rank of driving horses. One is named Jim, and the other Fanny, and they epitomize, respectively, all the assorted vices of their race and sex. If one wished to give the briefest possible *résumé* of the points of a horse, all he would need to say to one acquainted with them would be, "everything that Jim and Fanny are not."

Jim is a well-meaning animal — I will not call him a "dumb friend"— but he is stupid and lazy, and slower than the processes of justice. He is an equine loafer, with no respect for the lash, which, in feminine hands at least, he recognizes to be merely an empty symbol. Driving him is an exhaustive process, for the experienced person is afraid to let him really cease moving for fear he will set — like cement — and never move again; and the slowest rate of progress is achieved only at the expense of unceasing encouragement and cluckings as constant as those of a brooding hen.

We drive Jim until patience is exhausted and then turn to Fanny, not for relief — we know better than to expect that — but for a counter-irritant, and in this capacity she excels a fly blister. Saints and sages are not proof against the extreme variety of her imbecilities. To look at her is in itself an exasperation — she is such a homely, rat-tailed, ill-tempered little brute. The rim of her eye, which she rolls wickedly, is always red, and the normal position of her ears is at an obtuse angle with her head. In fact, all Fanny's angles are obtuse. She would not wear any other kind. The only time she ever wishes to go is when you wish her to stand still, and the only time she moves quickly is when she has an impulse to shy coquettishly at some object which she has seen daily from her long-vanished youth to the present time. To see Fanny put on the airs of a colt is a lesson to middle age.

Her method of progress is to crawl unwillingly all the way to town, stopping at every house unless urged to go on, until we finally reach the market, where we always stop, and there nothing will induce her to stand. While the caterer is within attending to the ordering, she plunges forward, then backs as suddenly; and if she happens to be tied she breaks the strap in this way. Once she got away and went home. Her fidgeting makes the task of getting back into the carriage a difficult one, and when the shopper is at length established with all her parcels, and the driver says "Get up," Fanny immediately lays back her ears, humps her back, plants her four feet together, and clamps her rat-tail over one rein. This, of course, pulls it to one side, and for once she obligingly responds to a signal and climbs upon the curbstone. Then comes the humiliation of being rescued by the butcher's boy, a chubby child in a white apron, who leads the horse around with an air of superiority, as if the whole difficulty were due to inexperienced driving; and Fanny, to give color to the theory, behaves with lamb-like docility.

Once pointed in the right direction, however, she loses all ambition and crawls along the homeward way with a sagging gait, as if she were ninety years old, with every disability known to veterinary wisdom. The whip accelerates her speed in up and down directions only — never forward.

Yesterday I drove her to town, and my wrongs are fresh in my memory; for she side-tracked in an unguarded moment when I was talking with some one on the back seat, and when I looked around again, she had gone into one of the ancestral yards, and was in the act of getting down upon her knees to eat the rich green grass, which she could not reach in any other way.

If we pass a graveyard she has an impertinent habit of stopping for us to get out. Jim, on the other hand, has the religious tendency so often characteristic of resigned natures. He always turns in at the church, for he is more reconciled to waiting than to any other form of service, and he remembers that he stands still longer there than at any other stopping place. One Sunday morning when he had waited a reasonable length of time at the south door for the family to appear, he absent-mindedly went to church alone, turning in at the drive and finding his accustomed place in the horse sheds, quite without guidance.

Lamb I. drove Fanny to town a few days ago, and was jogging slowly down the long hill toward home, when he unwisely touched her with the whip. She responded so enthusiastically with her hind legs that the entire carriage box was loosed from its moorings and slid off, leaving the astonished driver sitting in it in the road, while Fanny made unprecedented time, with the four wheels rattling after her, up the next hill and home.

Since Jim, Fanny, and the trolley car are our only means of transportation we make a virtue of necessity and do most of our journeying on foot. There are many compensations in this way of getting about, for it permits one to seek fresh paths. To go to the village by a new way has in it an element of novelty and adventure which is full of charm. For one thing, there is always the entertaining possibility of losing oneself, and ever since I can remember I have longed to be safely lost in a forest — lost just long enough for the thrill without actual suffering. In crossing the fields and woods to town I have twice been near accomplishing this ambition, and have experienced that exhilaration which comes only with the summoning of one's powers to deal with an unusual situation.

For an hour a few days ago, my Lamb and I were not only lost, but imprisoned in a wild tangle of interlacing grapevines and blackberry bushes which enmeshed the entire side of a steep and rocky ravine, and it took both patience and ingenuity to work our way out. When at last we came out it was upon an unfamiliar road at such a distance from town that we did not do our errand at all.

This road was not really unfamiliar to us, but we had so firmly believed that we were in another locality that we did not recognize landmarks which we knew quite well. To start out in a definite direction and to follow it through fields and roads, and then suddenly to find oneself in an entirely different place from the one intended, provides a sensation not unlike that experienced in a first attempt at a somersault over the horizontal bar. Familiar things wear a strange and alien look, for the physical revolution is quicker than the mental one, and adjustment takes time. Habits are so arbitrary that it seems to be difficult to think in a reversed position, and it is equally difficult to realize where you are when you have your mind made up that you are somewhere else.

After a few such experiences I found it better never to have too fixed notions at any time about my own location on the map. It is preconceived ideas of where one is that cause all the trouble. One can always get out of a difficulty and find one's way home, if one has no false pride, and no theory to maintain, and but one purpose — to get there.

As a family we have a horrible tendency to mislay ourselves, and on such occasions we lose more time arguing over our whereabouts than it would take to get us home. We seldom go for a long drive that we do not get home by some unpremeditated route, and usually by the time-honored device of allowing the horse to choose his own road.

To be outclassed as a pathfinder by a horse of Jim's mental calibre is humiliating, and his instinct for finding a steep, rocky, and perilous short-cut to the barn may be relied upon. After such a journey we get out the road maps and try to find out where we have been, with the result that each member of the family retires with a different conviction, with which she attempts to illumine the pathway of our next excursion.

There are many roads about Elmwood, and when in a statistical mood it might be instructive to compute the possible combinations to be made in a drive of six to ten miles. This would forever set at rest the family superstition that we all know the region too well to be surprised into any unknown paths.

As it is, we have reached one compromise. There is a blind overgrown road marked "Dangerous passing," which no one seems able to fix definitely in mind, but which bears, along some portion of its tortuous way, the name of Pig Lane. We have struck this road so many times when we did not intend it, and did n't know where we were, that it has become the official explanation for any unpremeditated route, and is, in reality, a mere symbol for the intuitive method. It has passed into a proverb at last, and when one of us reaches a conclusion by a mental process whose steps are not apparent, the Lambs are wont to say, "She got there by the way of Pig Lane."

In an adventurous mood I have frequently said goodbye to the sun and plunged recklessly into the woods with a mind free from all effort to remember directions, points of the compass, or landmarks. It is a mood which gives delightful zest to a walk — a zest which safely may be indulged in this country, where there are no very great areas of unbroken forest. On such walks, either alone, or in that best kind of solitude which the Irishman described as being alone with one's sweetheart, come the finest revelations of our kinship with Nature. I wonder if the evolutionary doctrine interprets the feeling which we all have at times, of having all lower forms of life incorporated in our own!

On such walks I sometimes marvel at the temperate statement of the poet: "I feel two natures struggling within me." If I were called upon to estimate the number that struggle in me I should not reckon it at less than a dozen. In the midst of them somewhere am I, recognizing all of them, pitying some, trying to banish others, and enjoying myself mightily with a few of me. With such a variety of selves solitude of either sort becomes a social experience, for one can never foretell which or how many of one's natures are coming to the foreground of consciousness.

I remember that Thoreau speaks of being differently moved at different times in his contact with Nature, sometimes the spiritual man being uppermost, while at other times he would range the woods with all the instincts of a wild creature. Both these moods I know well and revel in. They seem to respond with some degree of certainty to different environments and suggest that there is in all animal life a subtle relationship with the seasons and the changing year, of which we become almost unconscious in our hothouse ways of growth and living.

Yet even in the city, in the Spring there comes a vague elemental thrill, which I can only compare to the rising of sap in the trees and the renewal of life. "Then all herbs and trees renew a man or woman."

On a sunny hilltop in a June afternoon, when one sits gazing into the blue distance lost in wide-eyed meditation, there are moments when the spirit seems to belong in the ether — when one feels the wings! The body, heavy and cumbersome, seems to slip away from consciousness, and one can enter into the experience of the dragon fly, bursting its shell to find its home in a different element.

In these transfigurations one touches the heights of consciousness and feels identified with the great First Cause, rather than with the flesh of the body, and the spirit is steeped in a pure joy. At other times the animal self is paramount, and this self responds to the environment of the forest, and to activity rather than to contemplation. Then one vibrates with the physical life of Nature, and becomes a part of the very earth and trees; speculation vanishes; contemplation, conscience, duty — all slough away like artificial trappings, and a pure joy of sense swallows up all lesser degrees of consciousness. The wild tide of life sweeps into full pulsation, the instincts reassert themselves; watchfulness, the sure impulse of self-protection, and a sense of physical powers which one has never possessed, brought from some subconscious depth, flash into reality.

Then it seems quite possible to run on all-fours through forest and brake with the swift-footed fox, or to rise on whirring wings with the partridge just frightened from one's path; and one feels a vague surprise that the creatures should run away from one so like themselves.

Human life, houses, cities, become alien and remote, and life seems to belong to the forest and field, free from the perversions and distortions wrought by those acquisitions of the soul of man — vices and virtues. From such depths of forest even virtues wear a foreign and hostile air, as if they had no part in the unmoral but wholly good course of Nature. The natural world seems to run smoothly enough without them.

Virtue and vice belong alike to that sphere of choice foisted upon primal innocence by the advent of knowledge, truly enough. How strange the Fall of Man looks from the forest, as if one had got around to the animals' point of view in the matter, and saw the full significance of expulsion from innocence into the field of conscious endeavor!

I can imagine the animals having their own opinion of the situation when they were called before Adam to be christened; perhaps they felt that he paid a heavy price for the privilege of "accomplishments and sins." At any rate I know that at times it is a great rest for his descendants to take a vacation from besetting virtues and vices in either the realm of Nature or of spirit — either below or above the stratum of struggle and endeavor. The dangers of the wild life are few and harmless beside the perils that beset the immortal soul in the early stages of its climb, and the incessant nagging of that tireless guardian, the conscience, forms a cheerless accompaniment all the way.

We cannot always dwell on the mountaintop of spiritual vision, and I confess to an occasional longing for a brief respite in a faun-like life, just for a breathing spell on the inevitable upward journey.

Sometimes when wandering over hill and dale, driven only by the winds of fancy, one may enter this midworld between flesh and spirit, and live for an hour the life of fairies and pixies and all the spirits which inhabit the realms of myth and wonder tale. Then, to dance by moonlight on hilltops, and to ride upon the wings of the wind, giving full play to all elf-like impulses, seem possible delights.

The fairies and sprites are surely within us, or they would not be in literature, and sometimes I take a walk with the one who lives in me. Then it seems a pure joke that any one seeing me should think me the staid and proper person which I fear I look. It is only a masquerade — one of the swift disguises possible to fairies and witches! In reality "I am a spirit of no common rate" flying over hill and meadow with the skimming motion of the swallow, and tasting the delights of every creature.

How astonishing — not to say alarming — it would be to my nearest and dearest if sometimes my exterior semblance were to take on the hues of imagination! The Little Maid quite understands it. Sometimes we lie down together upon some orchard slope and with our faces close to Mother Earth peer into the rich grasses and lose ourselves in the World of Littles. The unwieldly length of body and limb is out of sight and forgotten, and we live for a time with the crickets and the ants, watching their pursuits with the sympathetic interest of an inhabitant of their own world. The grasses loom into a great thicket — a jungle inhabited by many kinds of creatures, and to walk through its mazes fills the minified consciousness with a delightsome awe.

It is our experience that a healthy body may sometimes be forgotten and put aside as too cumbersome luggage for such a journey, but that when dinnertime comes it reasserts its claims and drags us back to the world of common things by an insistent contrivance called the Pangs of Hunger. We may be able to lose ourselves temporarily in Fairy Land, but these dreadful, searching unavoidable Pangs of Hunger find us out as certainly as a guilty conscience, or even more certainly. And when they do — the grassy slope is no longer a dense forest, peopled by fairies and other winged creatures, but a small space which intervenes between us and the dinner table; and over it we hasten, hand in hand, to the gay music of the dinner bell.

CHAPTER XII

A DAY IN ARCADY

I AM sure that Elmwood Farm is not to be found on the map. It belongs in the same landscape with the sheepfold of Celia and Rosalind, and the Forest of Arden. Not only have clouds and sky, twilight and evening star, and all the setting of nature contributed to the illusion, but ourselves and our pastimes have been truly Shakespearean to-day. It has been an idyl from beginning to end — a day to reassure one as to the beneficence of all the issues of life, and the uselessness of our indoor fears. We have lived under the pleasant sky from early morning until the waning moon warned us that it was time for bed, and even now I hesitate to blow out my candle and turn the leaf of night between the illumined pages of to-day and to-morrow. It began in the garden, where my Adam and I gathered vegetables and fruits for the refreshment of guests from the city who were expected to spend the day, for this week I am experiencing what Whitman would call the housekeeper's joys.

The garden was all ashine with the morning dew, and the glistening drops showered over our hands as we gathered crisp lettuce and cucumbers for the salad, and green peas enough to feed a regiment, by the reckoning of our backs, and then went to the front porch to shell them.

The most poetic duty of all housework is shelling peas under a vine-clad porch, and I always rejoice when this task falls to my lot. If one is alone it permits the imagination perfect liberty and at the same time acquits the hands of idleness. Meditation is my pet intellectual dissipation, but a haunting recollection of the Adversary who always seeks employment for idle hands, makes free indulgence in it a matter to be adjusted with conscience. I do not make tatting, and when I sew the work demands my concentrated powers and a little more; and knitting and crocheting are both occupations which I scorn. Cooking, however, is a congenial pursuit. It is the most creative of all the household occupations. It demands judgment, skill, and gastronomic imagination, and when I am engaged in any of its processes I feel a comfortable self-respect.

"When I cook I do not merely get a meal — I prepare refreshment for my beloved," Lady Somebody said; and I agree with her that womankind in general has taken altogether too sordid a view of this necessary task. Since cooking must be done constantly, I am glad that there is in the nature of the work itself an element of variety which must always keep it in the ranks of the skilled industries. To shell peas in solitude is therefore sweet, but to shell them when one's beloved assists in the operation apotheosizes it. There is but one trouble with this arrangement, and that is that the task lasts but half the time when two engage in it; and so I sent my willing Lamb for Emerson's Essay on Farming, and he read aloud to an accompaniment of morning bird songs, while I shelled peas in a state of complete content.

Norah rang the breakfast bell just as we finished the last pod and paragraph, and when the pan of pretty green balls had been put away in the refrigerator, we felt that we had made an excellent beginning to the day. After breakfast, while the sun was still low and the shadows were long, we went to the spring for water for the table, for in Arcady one drinks only from running springs. Our spring is half a mile from home, and the way thither lies through a rocky pasture with only a winding cart-path for a road.

My Lamb and I drove through this field, between wild hedges of barberry, blueberry, and bayberry bushes, stopping occasionally to refresh ourselves with a long, long look at the distant hills, until we passed through a pair of bars into a still more rocky field beyond. Here the road disappears, and the land slopes suddenly toward a little wood. The spring is not visible from any point near it, but at the edge of the wood it announces itself by a faint rippling sound which makes itself heard like a running accompaniment to the bird songs all about. Here we left Jim to solitary meditation and his favorite pursuit of standing still, took our water cans and pitchers, and, happy in our pastoral service, plunged into the little wood.

It was like stepping from broad sunshine into the quiet coolness of an empty church, with a hidden organist playing little vagrant trills and snatches of melody upon the upper keyboard of the organ. The thick branches made a bower above the spring, and from its source the water danced away down the rocky ravine, lighted here and there to diamond brightness by flecks of sunshine sifted through the tangled maze of green.

"Here I raise my Ebenezer," I said, and with deliberate disregard of duty sat down upon the rock above the spring.

"Don't you think it's rather selfish of us to go on this errand when it would make such a beautiful incident for the bride and groom to remember of their bridal summer?" Adam asked, as he sat down beside me, "and they have n't many more days left."

"We 'll let them go some of the time," I said, "but just now I 'm not worrying about any form of altruism whatever. One of the worst things about our family is its pernicious habit of self-sacrifice. If we plan a drive each individual insists on staying at home to allow the others to go, and when at last some are reluctantly made to go, conscience harasses them all the way because they are enjoying a pleasure that all the rest cannot share. Was n't it Mark Tapley who said, 'A good out and out mean family would open a field of action as I might do something in. I must hope for the worst!' Our family makes itself miserable with misplaced consideration, and I mean to set them a good example of selfishness."

Supported by this sophistry we deliberately played by the way, sending fleets of green leaves down the stream, paddling in the shallows, and building dams like two small children, until Adam had a second attack of conscience.

"This is scandelicious," he said, coining a word; "when we get home we shall find everybody going about with parched throats and protruding tongues, crying for water; and it will be time to go to meet our guests, and the errands must be done before that, and you know very well that Jim has n't the speed of a sawhorse." Reluctantly I acquiesced, and very reluctantly we turned toward home.

We found Fanny in harness when we got there, for two carriages were needed to bring home our guests and the provisions for the day, and we set forth at the reckless speed of a funeral procession, Adam driving Jim, and I Fanny. Both horses were in their most deliberate moods, and we resigned ourselves to the journey as to an ocean voyage, occasionally enlivening the tedium of the way by laying wagers as to which horse would get there last.

The tedious process of getting one's order filled in a country grocery, though not a Shakespearean occupation, had its place in our day. There was a time when I used to try by observation to discover how the clerks managed to consume so much time at it, but experience soon taught me to give that up. Their movements were like the slow progress of the seasons, and as impossible to accelerate.

Just as the sower puts seed in the ground and trusts to the deliberate processes of nature to bring about a crop, so I entrusted my list to the grocer and awaited our supplies without being able to detect any steps in the accomplishment of our purpose. "In due time we shall reap if we faint not," I said over my shoulder, at last, to Adam, whose carriage was standing just behind. There was no answer. I looked around and there he sat with his head resting against the side of the carriage, peacefully sleeping, with Jim in a somnolent attitude, his ears drooping, and his left hind leg crooked to complete the picture.

We got our parcels just in time to reach the drinking fountain and to greet our guests as they alighted at the trysting place. Adam invited the Editor to ride with him, while I made room for our dear friends, the white-haired German professor and his wife, since I had the two-seated carriage.

It is the family custom to distract the attention of guests as much as possible from our horses by pointing out the beauty of the views, with the appearance of making an effort to give them plenty of time in which to enjoy them.

All such devices were rendered quite impossible for me, however, by the chivalrous determination on the part of the Professor to drive. In vain I told him that I was accustomed to Fanny and that she was peculiar in disposition. He placed me on the back seat, with gentle courtesy, saying to me, "Get in, get in, my child"; and then to Fanny as he seated himself and shook the reins, "Get up."

As I feared, she got up. At least, she got up at one end — that nearest the carriage — with such energy that she nearly came over the dashboard into his lap. Feeling a new hand, and a gentle one, upon the reins Fanny planned to give the driver a surprise, so she snorted fiercely to call his attention, laid her ears back, kicked up her heels, and came down with her tail clamped over the reins. In vain the Professor pulled and manœuvred. The tail apparently was fastened with a spring lock and Fanny alone knew the combination. We were like a ship in midocean with disabled steering gear, and there was nothing to hinder her going where she pleased. This she proceeded to do, going off in a sort of cake walk to one side of the road in pretended fright at a stone lying in the gutter. Then she stood still and craned her neck over the stone wall after some green leaves hanging just beyond her reach.

"I 'll have to give her a little advice before she tries to climb a tree," I said; "she 's perfectly capable of it"; and I got out of the carriage, seized her by the bridle, and dragged her back into the road, giving her meanwhile mental treatment of a kind not found in any text-book on the subject. I climbed back into the carriage, and after clucking a few moments apparently without result, like an automobile before it starts, she had an impulse to move; then, hearing Jim behind her, she resolved to get into the yard first for the honor of her sex. So at last we reached home and found the family assembled under the elm trees waiting to greet us.

The long table was spread, the sunshine flecking it with dancing spots of gold, as the green boughs waved above us in the breeze; and the guests would have been worthy of seats at the board of the banished Duke himself where only choice spirits assembled.

The Professor and the Professorinn beamed with gentle benignity upon the company from the seat of honor at the head of the board, and the Editor made his grace before meat by catching the youngest baby and riding her about the lawn on his shoulders, while the other children made a procession behind him clinging to his coat tails.

Norah had outdone herself in preparing the dinner, for our guests were all old-time favorites with her too. It is wonderful how the flavor of peas is improved by picking them yourself, and all the poetry of the morning seemed to be preserved in those we had to-day.

The Professorinn exclaimed over them, and I told her solemnly that they had been gathered by true lovers in a garden, in the rose-colored dawn, and cooked in honey dew, for the perfection of a charm; and she said they tasted like peas of paradise.

We had no need of wine, for the clear air and good spirits were exhilarating enough without it, and our dessert was a gift direct from Nature. It consisted of beautiful cherry branches, laden with deep red oxhearts, fresh from the tree.

The Japanese have their feast of cherries in their blossoming time. Our appreciation of them in their fruitage was perhaps more carnal, but equally enthusiastic; for they please every sense, and the deep red fruit is as delightful to the eye as to the palate. It was therefore both artistic and epicurean delight that caused the Editor to skip like a boy, as he rose from the table, and taking my hand, to lead the way in an impromptu dance, down the driveway to the trees.

I called to the others over my shoulder to follow, and they came in a gay procession, hand in hand as for a minuet, dancing after us in the sunshine, — the white-haired Professor and his beautiful wife in the lead, with Father and Mother, brothers and sisters, the babies and Gyp, all dancing in their wake.

At the trees we saluted partners and swarmed up ladders and over stone walls, those above throwing down branches to those below, and all feasting until our lips rivalled the color of the lips of ladies in Elizabethan poetry.

Then we wandered on down the lane, with apple boughs hanging over the walls on either side and the musical cow-bells tinkling in the distance, and came at the end of it upon pasture land with a lovely view of far-away hills, their deep blue outlines drawn against a cloudless sky.

The New England hill pasture! What a land of dreams it is — where the very air seems to sleep in the sunshine, and even the bees buzz drowsily as they visit the white clover among the grasses!

To-day the air was filled with the sweetness of aromatic shrubs, of sweet fern and sassafras, of bayberry and brake. Here and there across the slopes we saw beautiful white sprays of the stately queen of the meadows, and white and pink spiræas bloomed everywhere against backgrounds of old stone walls and hedgerows of the wild rose.

The cawing of crows is a characteristic sound which belongs with the pasture as truly as the music of the cow-bells, and in spite of my prejudices I should miss them if they were left out of any rural landscape. To-day they filled their place well in the drama of nature, and far away to the north we saw two buzzards, sailing "on sleeping wings," in wonderful circles over the woods.

There is something peculiar about crows and buzzards. Among the creatures of the air they bear the relation to singing birds that the old witch woman bears to the lovely young girl in fairy tales. There is always something sinister about them — their very attitudes have an evil and tragic suggestion. It must be an inner sense of the unity of things — of the symbolisms of nature — that produces those strange associations and emotions of childhood, for they cling to one through life. In her use of black, cheerful Nature is so sparing that a touch of it in the landscape makes a profound impression.

To walk alone in the pastures is always to me like opening a garden gate and slipping through it into my own little past — to feel again the mystery of Nature with the solemn joy of childhood.

To walk there with friends is another kind of pleasure, like being in two worlds at once. That dear old child, the Professor, walked with me to-day, and we talked of such things. He told me that the hilltop was the place of age, serene and contemplative, where one may look back over the way he has come, and see all the experiences of life spread out before him in their relative places and values. And I told him that the forest was the place of youth, with the path hidden and to be found, and with the necessity upon one for going on, even if the way should be uncertain; and then we both laughed and said how wonderful it was to have the trite similes of the poets made vital and real by an intense realization of the feeling which prompted them to expression. Thus the whole world is made new, and the oldest comparison is like a newly discovered truth!

Once as we were driving I spoke to Cousin Henrietta out of a reverie and said, "Did you ever really feel how like youth is to May?" And she laughed mischievously and said, "It seems to me I have heard something of that sort before." And I woke up, came around to her point of view, and laughed at my perception of a likeness which has affected the mind of man since the beginning of time, and which had come upon me at that moment with a freshness of realization which removed it from a historical fact to a vital experience. I suppose the psychologist would say I had got the same old fact lodged in a new apperceptive centre.

The Professor is a delightful companion on a walk: he has the faculty of falling into the same apperceptive centre with spontaneous cordiality, and understands one's short-cuts through the emotions.

I told him to-day how the sight of buzzards sailing in huge circles affects me, and the feeling caused by three trees against the sky, and how sweet it was to remember my childhood as I did in walking over these dear old hills. And he said, "Yes, dear child, it is all so, no doubt; but you are yet too young to enjoy all the pleasures of memory which help to make life's latest sands its golden ones. I have now the happiest years of my life — the golden harvest years — 'the last of life, for which the first was made.' 'Do not fear to grow old, for truly for you the best is yet to be.'" And his eyes followed his wife, more beautiful in her white hair than any young girl, as she walked ahead of us over the brow of the hill, with the free step of youth.

On the top of this hill is a rock which commands a view of the blue rim of the world, and this rock is my own particular fortress and city of refuge, both in times of trouble and of joy. There I have fought many a hard battle with that intimate enemy, myself; and there I have dreed my weird at other times, when other moods were upon me. Thither I used to march sometimes in windy February weather, taking a fierce joy in braving the cold and fighting it out with the elements; and thither I have fled to read letters — which shall never, never be made into tapers; and thither on pleasant days I have walked with friends, and we have talked, as one talks under the sky, of all the real things of life. It is a trysting place for me and my thoughts and my friends, and so it seemed natural that we should wander in the familiar direction to-day

— all of us — and sit down together upon the rock and the bare hilltop.

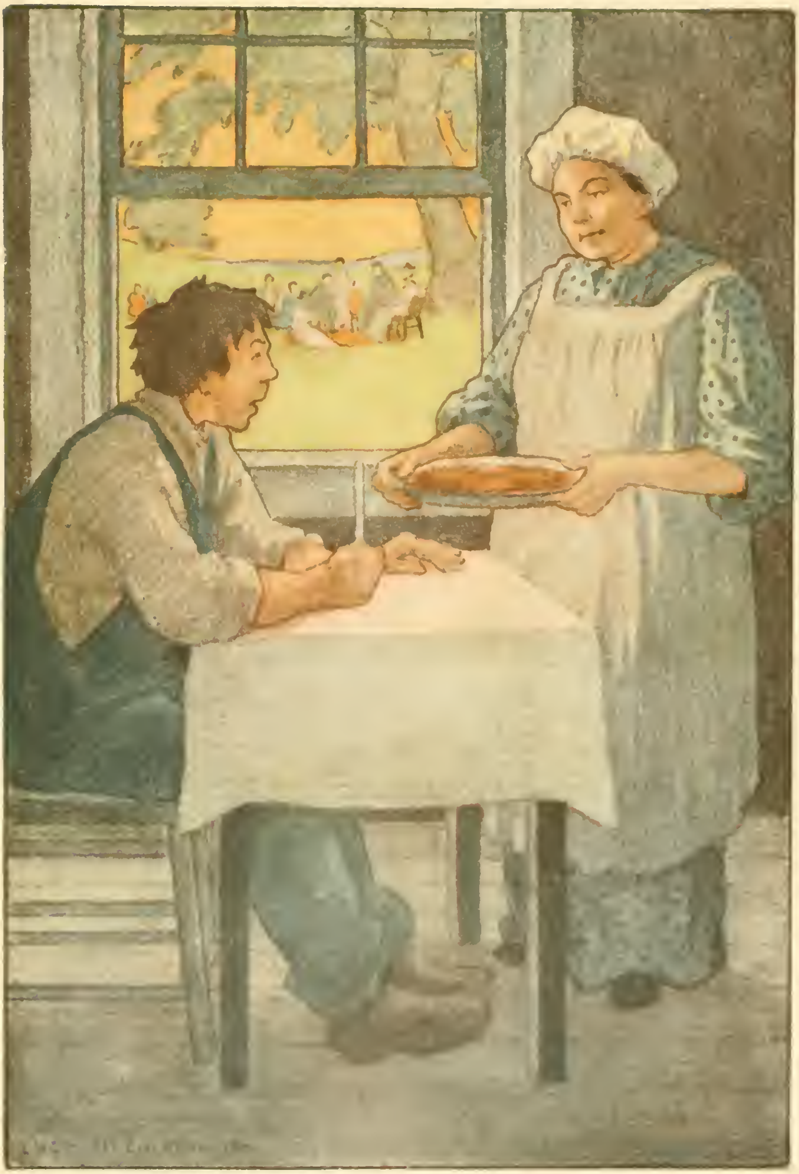
The children immediately sought the neighboring thicket of young birch trees, and bending them down swung ecstatically from their tops.

"I have n't done that since I was a boy," said the Editor, and he joined the children.

"I am still a boy," said the Professor, and he also went; the Lambs went, "to bend down the trees for the others"; and there were other good reasons left for the rest of us; and soon old and young were dancing up and down with a delightful feeling of levity, akin to the floating sensation one experiences in dreams.

Later, as we sat under the trees on the lawn, the Professor and his wife told us of their winter in Italy and the Orient; and we listening read between the lines the secret of their perennial youth in the freshness and sweetness of their devotion to each other, and in the perfection they had attained in the great art of living.

Each day, as they described it, glowed with the color imparted by the cultivated imagination, which turns the prose of life into poetry. No day finds them at the mercy of events, but all the small incidents of life are by their skill made into a rich and beautiful mosaic of experience. To think of them is inspiration, and



"She said, 'What do you say to you and me gettin' married?' "

to be with them is delight. They belong indeed in Arden, for they are among the few people in the real world who, like Rosalind and Celia, can transform exile into a holiday, and defeat adversity by using it as opportunity.

The Bride-elect and her lover looked into each other's eyes and smiled with a happy confidence that the later chapters of their love story would be like this also, and I felt a hand searching for mine, and the other married lovers in the group gazed proudly upon their children and upon each other in a general atmosphere of family felicity.

Even Norah from her window caught the infection, for later, as I approached the kitchen door to confer with her about breakfast, I heard her address the hired man — a human wreck answering to the name of Dan — in accents of unmistakable sentiment.

"Dan," she said, as she placed a well-filled plate of beans before him, "what do you say to you and me gettin' married?"

"No, you don't," said Dan hastily, "not by a blamed sight," and heavy silence fell upon the kitchen.

Our supper table might have belonged to the Duke himself, for it was out of doors, under the trees, and in two directions no house was visible — only the trees and the distant lines of hills.

The sun sank over the western brink of the world in a glory of scarlet and gold, and the full moon rose in feminine splendor in the east, so that both sides of our table were provided with celestial spectacles; and the children added a third illumination by lighting a fire in the roadway near the table as the twilight deepened. There they toasted marshmallows after the dessert, which, in deference to our location in the great pie belt, was cherry pie.

When the moon was high enough so that the whole earth lay under the spell of her mystic light, we escorted our visitors once more to the village fountain, and then from the hilltop watched the sparkle of its lights as their wonderful chariot, propelled by a spark, wound over the hills carrying them back again into the world of things.

CHAPTER XIII

A MEDITATION ON MARRIAGE

THESE are busy days for the Bride-elect, and days of somewhat modified rapture to the Bridegroom, for he is having the chastening experience of being introduced to his prospective things-in-law, and the ordeal, to a modest man, is not a happy one. Whether all the world loves a lover or not, all the world is certainly curious about him, and we have striven to assist Lamb IV to a quick achievement of the approbation he deserves.

When one dwells among one's kindred all one's antecedents are of importance, and the examination as to eligibility extends backward into the family history of the candidate; and since it is impossible to change one's ancestry after it has become known, we have striven in all imperceptible ways to have it understood that the forebears of our new brother are all that could be demanded even in a New England village. His Pilgrim ancestors were among those who "caught the first boat," as Mr. Dooley says, and though he is a Western man, he is entitled to the proud distinction of "Eastern extraction."

To be an extraction has always seemed to me a somewhat doubtful blessing, but to the New England mind it is the only compromise between the elect state of a born-and-bred Yankee, and the outer darkness of being indigenous to less worthy soil.

The Bride-elect, it must be confessed, takes a mischievous satisfaction in the psychological moments which are the present portion of the Bridegroom, knowing well that she is destined to similar ones when she is introduced to his relations and friends.

Their first appearance together is a sweet agony never to be forgotton by any married pair. On the day when my Adam took me for the first time to the church where he had been brought up, and ushered me into the family pew, a dear old lady leaned forward from the pew back of us before the service began, patted me on the shoulder in a motherly way and whispered, "I know who you are, and I 'm real glad to see you. I 've known your husband ever since he was a little boy, and I hope you 're good enough for him. He deserves a good wife." Then she settled back and said in an audible whisper to her next neighbor: "What do you think of her looks? I was n't led to expect much. I believe I 'm favorably disappointed on the whole."

After this it was difficult to sit in front of her and fix my eyes on the minister and my thoughts on the sermon; but I soothed my embarrassment by reflecting that there are advantages in not being called upon to live up to too perfect an exterior.

It is not successful, outside of novels, for character and appearance to be out of harmony with each other. If the person be beautiful and the character disagreeable, the observer feels, when he discovers the real state of affairs, that his admiration has been obtained under false pretences, for, word it as we may, we always and instinctively look upon beauty as the outward symbol of inner perfection; and those of us who are still several laps behind a perfect ideal in character may thank a kind fate for not saddling us with a physical beauty impossible to live up to.

Luckily for bridegrooms, nobody demands that they shall be beautiful. A certain strong and uncompromising plainness is indeed almost an advantage; and this fact makes the fairy prince the most difficult figure in fiction. His perfections are almost wearisome; but this is a theoretical disadvantage from which real men seldom suffer.

There has been such a premium upon physical beauty in women — such an undeviating demand for it since the beginning, that it would seem as if the operation of evolutionary law should by this time have succeeded in establishing beauty as the birthright of every girl. The facts are against the theory, as they so often are, and we must content ourselves in this incomplete world with alloyed beauty to correspond with our alloyed virtues, or else recognize a spiritual instead of a physical standard.

Children invariably look for and expect to find ultimately — in somebody — the perfect incarnation of the beauty about which they dream. It is only when life has shattered faith in the existence of that perfect ideal anywhere on earth, that we begin to realize and appreciate the measure of beauty that is all about us; and that is one of the reasons why I can say with George Eliot that the real outcome of life is better than my childish dreams.

It takes one a long time to get to the point of not demanding too much, and the way thither is marked by the wreck of many an illusion. We are born with the vision of the perfect, and suffer long because of the grief of the actual. At length we arrive at a juster estimate of the present position of the human race in the scale of being, and are content to wait a little longer for the manifestation of the sons of God.

The way is smoothed for children by the transforming power of the imagination, which gilds the actual with the hues of the ideal. I knew once a freckle-faced, pudgy, snub-nosed little Hoosier girl, whose delight it was to tie on a gingham apron, wrong side before, for a train, turn up her tow hair and fasten it with a hairpin, and place a brass ring upon the forefinger of her right hand. Then she would secure a goblet of thick glass from her mother's pantry, and, standing barefooted upon the stoop of their log house, read from the school reader the story of that beautiful bride who electrified the wedding guests by discovering an imaginary serpent in her glass of wine, converting them all to lives of total abstinence on the spot. I can see her rapt expression now, as she took careful aim with her stubby forefinger at the goblet and declaimed: "Pointing her jewelled finger at the glass!"

What I saw and what she saw were so very different! She was about twelve at the time, and I was possibly a little younger. She, at any rate, felt a degree of superiority, and told me in confidence about numerous admirers who were suffering on her account. I had no similar experiences to offer, and was stung to the point of insinuating that possibly these youths had an eye to her father's money!

So the drama begins almost in the cradle, and goes on to the very end; it is quite impossible to say when we are either too old or too young to feel the influence of romance, and equally impossible to decide how much of the time we act a part, even to ourselves. This blessed imagination bridges the gulf between the actual and ideal, and gives us the vision of the destination which makes the actual so significant and worth while. If I were a poet I should dedicate my pen to its praise. To it we owe all progress, all piercing of the veil of flesh to find the deeper realities beyond. It dignifies duty and makes it more attractive, it soothes sorrow, and finds the way through all the difficult passes of experience.

When the Bride-elect was a little girl she depended upon this immaterial assistance to help her through trying duties. When her room was left as it should not have been, and she was sent to put it to rights, she assisted rebellious nature by sitting down first with slate and pencil to write a story about it, beginning, "Little Helen's room was in great disorder." Then she rose and acted the part of a bustling housewife quite happily, making a drama of a disagreeable necessity.

I have tried to impress these psychological principles upon the Bridegroom, and have encouraged him to play his role with zest, and he has risen to the occasion with a spirit which has thus far won him golden opinions. The ordeal will soon be over now, for the wedding is to be day after to-morrow. The invitations have been out for a week or more, and we are in the full tide of preparation.

Ours is a loyal family; in carrying through any event of importance we are each sure of the interested coöperation of all the others, and the fitness of different members for special functions is determined by the process of natural selection.

Those who are equal to certain tasks are sure to find opportunity to use their talents, and those who show special unfitness are thrown aside with as little ceremony as is shown in the orderly processes of nature. So it happens that by virtue of a general unfitness for useful occupations, I am appointed to do the worrying. If one of the babies eats a green apple or gets into the neighborhood of poison ivy, I forecast the probable result and give a proportionate amount of concern to the matter.

Worrying is something of an art when conscientiously pursued. It involves a dragon-like watchfulness over events lest some misfortune take us unawares. I do not know just why we should be so anxious to taste misery before it really comes, and spend our lives, as so many of us do, "in the midst of terrible tragedies, most of which never happen." It seems a small privilege to accord to Fate, to let her surprise us with sorrows, when by foreseeing them we make ourselves twice wretched; but since so the world wags, the office of a professional worrier is no sinecure.

Personally, I have the greatest admiration for those who accept life — "the pot luck of the day" — with philosophy, good temper, and positive faith; and very little use for that kind of resignation which is but a form of inertia. It is so easy to confound feebleness of will with piety, in accepting the trials that come to us. When soldiers can advance to battle and sudden death to the sound of gay music, surely we ought to be able to meet the common lot with composure.

However, since worrying is tribute exacted by the conscientious, I am a willing scapegoat for the family anxieties; just now I am engaged to forecast the weather possibilities, and speculate on what we shall do if it rains on the wedding day.

The grass has been carefully cut, all the farm implements have been put away, and even the cows wear an unusual aspect of sleekness and expectancy. Jim and Fanny have had their harnesses newly done over, and the carriages are in immaculate order, while the house has been swept and "garnisheed," as the Little Maid asserts with pride, from garret to cellar. Wedding gifts arrive each day, to be opened by the Bride-elect and viewed with delighted approval by the members of the family. There are people, I know, who take an exalted view of the custom of giving wedding presents, and feel that it is not always free from an element of calculation from which such a solemn transaction should be exempt, but for my part I confess to a weakness for it.

The friends are by this means allowed a share in the event which mere attendance upon a ceremony could not give; and it is pleasant to feel that you have helped to complete the happiness of two persons, and in the establishment of a new home upon this hoary old earth.

I knew a man once who said that he saw no fitness in making such a fuss about a marriage ceremony, " since it was a transaction which one might enter into a number of times during a lifetime." It was not an absolutely unique experience, he argued, and to treat it as such an extremely pivotal occasion seemed disproportionate emphasis.

I spoke of this the other day to a grand-aunt, as we were discussing our simple preparations, and had my reward in the look of frozen horror with which she listened to this alarming point of view.

"I've heard a great deal about Chicago laxity," she said with severity, "but that goes beyond anything I ever heard of. Do you actually *calculate* on separations out there before the marriage takes place?"

"Why, Aunt," I said, reassuringly, "I suppose he thought of it as only a safe consideration of future possibilities, like getting his life insured. I don't indorse it. I think it 's wrong not to have weddings and invite your friends every time, and I do not approve of having divorce coupons on your marriage certificate at all. You must not believe —"

But I got no further; and it took another member of the family some time to convince her that the coupon idea was fiction which had been offered in a spirit of pleasantry.

Since that ill-starred conversation, I have been in disgrace, and am regarded as a person of dangerous social tendencies.

The felicity of the Bride-elect was not to be disturbed, even by the arrival of Norah's gift, which was opened in the presence of a suffocating family and of Norah herself. The situation was one to tax the powers of a diplomat; for Norah had been bent on a surprise for "Trouble-de-house," which is her pet name for the Bride-elect, and she achieved it. Her gift was a bouncing sofa cushion covered with white satin, upon which was painted, in a sanguinary combination of colors, an Indian head, decorated with war-paint and feathers. "I heard ye was goin' to have yur weddin' ring carried on a cushion," she said, "and I sez to mesilf, 'Trubble-de-house shall have the largest cushion in Boston wid a picture on it for her weddin' ring,'— and here it is!" That arrant hypocrite looked neither to the right hand nor the left as she opened the package and disclosed its contents. She merely clasped her hands and said, "O, Norah! You should n't have bought anything so expensive for me! I shall never allow this cushion to be used for fear of spoiling that clean white satin, but I shall keep it always to remember you by," and Norah went back to the kitchen looking as happy as the cat who had just eaten the canary. Norah is to be feared — bearing gifts. There is a fatal quality in her "surprises"; it is not long since she presented me with a widow's cap which she had found,— heaven only knows where,— because she thought that flimsy bit of lace which I had worn over my head out of doors, "would do me no good at all."

The bride is determined to have music at her wedding, and since there is no orchestra in the region, she has decreed that the Lohengrin March is to be sung by a quartet of her sisters and their husbands.

To the rest of us this seems like tempting Providence; for we are none of us expert in this form of expression, and I cannot be trusted not to choke and grow tearful when that lovely group moves across the lawn, I know; and the others are no more to be relied upon than I. I am always sentimentally moved at weddings, and when this one so reproduces my own, what else could possibly be expected?

However, we have bravely consented to try, being determined that she shall have her will on that day if it is possible to accomplish it. Therefore it is, that early in the morning, and at intervals during the day, and again at sunset, the passer-by might be confounded by seeing this sacrificial group assemble under the elm trees, sit down upon one of the benches brought from the long table, and after various halting efforts at the pitch, rend the air with rehearsals.

The music has so taken possession of us that all the preparations move forward to its strains. Norah hums it as she beats cake, the Lambs whistle it as they march to the woods after wagon-loads of growing ferns, and yesterday even Dan was heard carolling "tum-tum-ti-tum" to the cows as he milked. The melody runs like a golden thread through all the fabric of the festival, and the preparations have been characterized by a harmony and effectiveness which have suggested the idea of having the ordinary household tasks accomplished thus to strains of music.

A music box playing Sousa marches in a kitchen presided over by a slow domestic, for example, might effect a transformation which admonitions could never accomplish.

The Bride-elect has been putting some finishing touches to her trousseau herself, and one of her fancies is that each member of the family must set some stitches in her bridal robe. For this reason she prepared a seam and taking each of the Lambs in turn instructed him in the gentle art of needlework. It was a moving spectacle to see their frantic efforts to hold the filmy thing in place and set the stitches before it got away from them again, and it is fortunate for her that she cares more for sentiment than good sewing, for there is plenty of the former and very little of the latter in that particular seam.

The house party now numbers twenty-five, the ordinary number having been increased by the acquisition of the family of the Bridegroom, and the minister, who is an old friend of the family and here for a few days' visit, while we are all together to enjoy it.

Growing older is not a sad experience when one's friends are alongside, sharing in common the effects of time. There are already some gray hairs in the minister's brown locks, and we remember him as a college youth! A careful inspection in the mirror reveals a few even upon my head, but people certainly grow gray at an earlier age than they used to. When I was a child, gray hair was really an indication of age, but now it is quite, quite different! It is surprising to count the number of prematurely gray people I know, — and gratifying to observe that life has not become the empty and worn-out thing to them that I once thought it must be to people with gray hairs. As a matter of fact they seem more interested in living as time moves on.

I can recall the greetings between my parents and their old friends when I was a child. "Well, well," they would say, "so you are getting a little gray! But gray hairs are becoming to you. You look just as you used to, and I feel like a boy still." And I used to sit by, lost in silent wonder at the foolishness of people who could be so blind to their own antiquity.

Why, they were as much as thirty years old, and still cherishing the idea that they were young! I used even to weep at night, after I had gone to bed, over their impending death, and worried a good deal about the possibilities of recognizing friends in heaven. It was thus that my coming vocation of worrier cast its shadow before.

I have caught a curious expression on the face of the Little Maid once or twice to-day, as we sat under the trees with the minister talking of old times, and I suddenly saw ourselves with her eyes, and realized that she too was wondering at the blind infatuation of the aged who still consider themselves young! It is comfortable in reflecting upon the vicissitudes of life and the certainty of its passing, to realize how difficult it would be to improve upon the established order of things, even though in common with all mankind, I sometimes complain of its provisions.

If life here is but one segment of an infinite circle, as I truly believe, how could our journey through it be more crowded with blessings, and the difficult places more gently bridged?

Sorrow and pain there must be until we find out the secret of existence and learn to keep step with beneficent laws, but the sorrows are gently distributed; the separations do not all come at once; and as the Professorinn says, "There is always enough for happiness if we will only see it."

To live richly and fully through all the experiences which belong to this sphere of existence, even though some things are painful to our misunderstanding, is a blessing in itself, and I long to be able to say, "I am not afraid of anything that life can bring."

The fate of the Wandering Jew has been mercifully spared every human being; he is the most pathetic figure among all myths. We walk along with our own generation all the way, and when complete loneliness might overtake us, we too slip through "the low green tent whose curtain never outward swings," and join our own again on the other side. It is only a short vision that makes life look sad and bitter.

These meetings and partings and solemnities might be made sad by a sentimental insistence upon a material point of view; but looked at in the light of Forever, they slip into their own relative position, and the heart recognizes the essential permanence of all good and the temporary nature of all else, — if in the last analysis there is anything else, — and is satisfied.

The trouble with us is that we do not accept change as desirable. We are not willing to "let our half-gods go that the gods may arrive."

I have often wondered what I should do with the fairy's three wishes, if they had been offered me. It is one of the oldest questions in the world, and the essence of fairy tales since the days of ancient Egypt.

When one has exhausted the entire list of material things and recognizes that not all of them put together "have the power to make one bootblack happy," the infinite worth of the contented mind is apparent. Not the contentment which springs from thoughtless acceptance of things as they are, but that higher contentment which sees the ultimate beneficence of all things and rests in the realization of it.

All other blessings come with the vision that sees the end of it all and perceives the immense value of the means to that end. Even the everlasting effort of the human race "to catch up with its dinner" serves the highest immaterial ends: courage, fidelity, and a thousand fine spiritual qualities are born of the struggle. In this view all life becomes full of significance, and all work worth while. The long perspective casts doubts upon some forms of success, and sets small value upon many things which look desirable from the more short-sighted point of view, and it draws a sharp distinction between work, real creative work, and "operations"; but those who have the vision, and keep it, are after all the favored ones of earth.

I suppose this freight train of reflections comes from a contemplation of impending changes, and a realization that these Arcadian days will soon be over, and that we must go back to our tasks. Well — while these days last I will live them, and I will welcome the others when they come!

CHAPTER XIV

THE WEDDING

THEY 'VE gone — and God bless them! — "over the hills and far away, beyond their utmost purple rim." The wedding day is over — such a long, beautiful, happy day! This has surely been one of the illumined pages of life.

The day began early, for an afternoon wedding demanded that we be up betimes, to do the things that could not be done in advance. One of the chief duties of the day was the making of a hedge to screen the lawn from the highway; and as this hedge was of a temporary character, made by cutting young birch trees and sticking them in the ground, it had to be done but a short time before the hour of the ceremony, which was four o'clock.

Therefore it was that before breakfast all the men and some of the girls and the older children were sent to places, previously selected in the pastures, where birch trees and golden-rod grew in neighborly proximity; and while the men cut the birch trees the girls gathered great masses of the first yellow flowers of the late summer. Dan drove the oxen and loaded the trees on the cart as fast as they were cut down; and when the wagon was heaped high with the fresh green boughs, the men helped the girls to climb to the top of the pile, heaped about them the masses of flowers which they had gathered, and then walked along beside this glorified hay-cart with its load of living bloom.

It was a pretty sight for those of us who did not go to the field to see their return. The Bridegroom had placed the Bride in the centre of the group, with her attendants about her, and he himself drove the oxen; while the other Lambs, the best man, and the minister walked on either side of the wagon, and Dan brought up the rear "to gather up any young 'uns that might drop off." We heard the sound of merry voices before they rounded the turn of the road and came into sight, and even the Forest of Arden never saw a more charming sight.

The sun was still low, and they seemed to materialize out of the colors of the morning as they came toward us out of the sunrise, throwing long, long shadows before.

Norah and her corps of assistants, secured for the occasion, were ready when they returned with such a breakfast as might have attended the nuptials of Rosalind; for to-day all our meals have been served out of doors, in a green bower, under the apple trees separated by a hedge from the rest of the lawn.

The Bride and Groom were seated together at the head of the table; the rest of the family, from white hair to downy tow-heads, were ranged with the guests along either side in two long rows; the minister rose from his place at the lower end of the table and said grace, and then we fell upon the hot rolls and golden coffee with appetites sharpened by the excursion to the field and exercise in the open air.

To manage a house party of twenty-five and a wedding at the same time, with such conditions as prevail in a country town, is a difficult matter if the attempt is made to treat guests with customary consideration, and save them from every exertion. This could not be under such circumstances; and the only solution of the difficulty was for every one to enter into the spirit of the event and make duties which might have been a tax upon a few, the pleasure of many.

So when it was time to clear the table, instead of waiting for the maids some one automatically struck up the wedding march. All joined in, and by a common impulse each person seized his plate, and marching in procession in time to the music, carried it to the kitchen, where Norah received us. In a shorter time than would be believed possible the breakfast was quite cleared away, and we were ready to give our undivided attention to the more serious matters of the day.

The Bridegroom disappeared soon after breakfast and was gone until noon, searching fields and roadsides for fresh sprays of the lovely white virgin's bower to twine in his Bride's hair. When she was quite ready and waiting in her bridal robes, he gave them to her with his own hand.

At last the minister took his station at the altar under the overarching tree; the fathers and mothers drew near; the choir, with inward quakings, took its appointed position near the altar on the other side; and the strains of the wedding march gave the signal to the bridal party waiting just out of sight behind the old south door.

The Groom and the best man rose up out of the earth in some mysterious fashion, and appeared at the minister's elbow; the Groom fixed his eager eyes upon the doorway, and then every one waited that breathless moment which precedes the advent of the Bride.

At last the door swung open, and the two little four-year-olds, with faces of preternatural solemnity, appeared. The choir wavered and nearly broke down as they drew nearer, — but with laughter, not tears; for the little lad, impressed by the unusual nature of the exercises and by a desire to earn the candy with which he had been bribed to the office, was doing his best to perform his part in a way that should be above criticism.

As the march was rather slow for short legs, and he appreciated the necessity for keeping time, he had solved the difficulty by raising his leg at right angles to his body and holding it there until the tempo permitted him to drop it and elevate the other in the same fashion. His small cousin was doing her best to imitate this fantastic step, and the effect of their solemn faces combined with this cake walk was overwhelming.

Then came the smiling bridesmaids, no less lovely than the Bride, walking like tall lilies along the white pathway; and at last, the Bride. The face of the Bridegroom was not the only one to light up at the sight of her in her misty gown, with the white virgin's bower crowning her serene brow, and her hands full of its delicate sprays. Her face was aglow with the light that never was on sea or land, and as she floated along her white pathway, the sunbeams straying through the green boughs above her played lovingly over her face and figure, and danced in the meshes of her hair. Just as she reached the end of her maiden journey, the oriole, whose nest hangs from a swaying bough high above the altar, suddenly began to sing. All through the service he poured forth his madrigal, until the ring was on the bride's finger, and she turned to greet the guests who came to give her joy.

At last all the guests were gone, and again the family assembled under the elm trees to give a quiet farewell to the two children setting forth for the long journey of life together. Truly, the old trees have another group of happy associations added to their abundance to-night.

After they had driven away into the moonlight, and the flutter of their white handkerchiefs was no longer discernible from the hilltop where we all stood to watch their departure, the rest of us sat down together about the blossoming altar under the elm tree, and discussed the day from every point of view.

"It is all beautifully over," sighed the eldest at last, "and there is n't a thing to regret, not even the cake walk of those blessed babes! Even the choir acquitted itself creditably; every one looked beautiful; the supper was good; and the local papers can truthfully announce to-morrow — as they always do — that 'an enjoyable time was had' by all present."

When at last the Little Maid had been cuddled and put to bed, my Adam and I crept away together across the lawn through the orchard, and up the hill, and found a seat upon my rock, standing bare and alone upon the hilltop in the moonlight. There we stayed and watched the moon sailing placidly through the sky, speaking to each other winged words. "Eight years ago to-night at this time, we were just where they are, driving over the hills into paradise," said Adam.

"And seven years ago to-night we were watching the surf in the moonlight and enjoying a second honeymoon," said I. And between following the bridal pair in imagination, and living over our own happy past and present greater joy, the time slipped away so fast that it was quite late when I brought our vigil to a close by saying to Adam, "Weddings are so very nice that I should like to be married as often as once in two years. Should n't you?"

"My dear!" said Adam, aghast, "don't, for Heaven's sake, say such a thing to any one here! They will think it 's because you have lived in Chicago too long!"

"But, Adam," I said, "of course you know I mean always to you." And what my Adam said to me is not to be confided even to my Book of Joys.

THE END

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