

The Wayfarer

Leaves from a Wanderer's Log

BY

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Toronto:

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY OF CANADA LIMITED

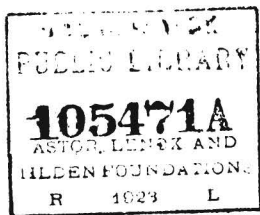
1922

NEW YORK

1911

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**Unto the Little Mother
in the Great Unseen**

FOREWORD

When some strange whim tempts a fellow out into the faery land of literary dreams, and, still more strange, prompts him to pen the shaping of them, who knows what then may come to pass? Lines thus turned to fill a leisure hour, here through several years, have come to light. Have dreams so gained a passing reality, or are they not still but echoing harmonies of the friendly past? Had they been made for telling, it may be they would have been told differently. I know not; dreams are not so made. So in part, not wholly, nor unchanged, the letters of Audrey are neither mine nor hers, and there are echoes of Amiel in one or two pages of my thought, yet who was Audrey . . . and what are dreams? Again, I know not.

Friends there are who speak to me as I turn my notebook leaves in retrospect, snatched from a life of promise to a nobler service. Friends there are, still lending of their strength, though long since lost amid the throng . . . Nay, are such friends ever lost?

For the rest, life itself, and this small tome which speaks thereof, belongs not to any Wayfarer, but to all those strong spirits of welcome place, and kindly person, the pledge of whose fraternity it is.

J. E. W.

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The Vale of Pilgrimage
Spring

*It is high golden noontide, and nature's springsong
lingers o'er the lea.*

THE WAYFARER

I.

THE VALE OF PILGRIMAGE

I AM but a crippled wayfarer, and one whose faring must needs be within the circling slope of the nearby hills which mark the limit of my strength. Yet, within that greenclad circle there is a little hearth where I may sit and look out upon the gleaming path made by the sun as it sinks to its evening rest within the western sea.

Some day, it may be, I shall fare out along that path into the Great Beyond, and the little brook within the valley yonder will chant a quiet *Nunc Dimittis* for one more of human-kind gone to hear the murmuring flow of a deeper river in another land. Yet in that deeper murmuring, methinks, there will be blended the rippling of the lesser stream that has taught me through many a quiet hour

the liquid language of its free heart. And on the banks of that welling flood, which flows through the garden of God, it may be I shall still hear the pure chime of the lily bells of the valley I have left behind. . . .

* * *

As I look from my humble cottage door a new spirit is abroad. . . . It is spring, and the spirit of springtide touches, even with the hem of its garment, the hill and vale of winter sombreness and snow. And, at that magic touch, new life starts forth to welcome the mounting summer sun. The daffodil recognizes the call to new birth and smiles in golden gladness at the spring's velvet touch. The brook laughs back at the laughing sky. There is a joyous harmony of all things animate in the singing of their natal Psalm, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in." Thus man goes out unto his work until the evening and finds the spirit of a larger springtide singing in his heart.

Of that life, beneath my quiet rooftree, I have

a sacrament; though he who lives it out for me knows nothing of it. There is a child heart, daily sent to me from Farmer Matthew's homely hearth across the fields, which brings a child's own freshening love to offer as the image of that I would my own should be. It is my sacrament, this warm heart's love of little Matthew from the farm . . . He brings me daily eggs fresh-gathered from the warm hidden straw. And daily, having made his own small wayfaring, he keeps me manly company as we build imaginary castles of the days to come . . . castles of the days, mayhap, when I shall have passed beyond the sun's setting and his child heart shall come to be the heart of manhood's settled prime.

Without my lattice, beneath the sunlit vault of blue, nature's full massed choirs sing their glad spring pastoral.

Each morn the glinting sunshine laughs alternate shade into an April smile. "The elm tree bole, in tiny leaf," looks up in faith to the deep blue sky, deepened a hundredfold since March winds scurried past. Spring laughter and spring tears go gaily hand in hand

throughout the countryside, alike as boy and cripple in their wayfaring. The gloom of the winter stream is gone, and, in its place, the rippling surface blithely mirrors the flickering sunlight as it filters through the overhanging boughs. Two lone birchen "Ladies of the Woods" scan its mirror in the donning of their new-found robes.

There is, once again, a springlike halo about the hedgerow crown of thorns as little Matt and I go wandering forth in search of the budding signs of the summer soon to be. Anon, we come to the sparkling brook that winds its ribboned way down to the sea. We pass the moss grown bridge long built by faithful service of hands that are no more, and, having passed, find the waiting path that beckons us to follow to the hills beyond. And there, as I look in musing mood over the spring-kissed meadow, it seems that the Lord is once more visiting the world He made.

Truly once in the little land of Palestine there was born another happy child, and all time bears date from a still night when shepherds left their sheep in stranger hands, and

hastened o'er the fields to see a new-born babe in a manger cot. Yet come again He must in other ways than to the shepherds at that humble caravansary of the mystic East. His silent advent surely is in ways we know not . . . in the giving of our daily bread . . . in the sun's warm ray, and in the midnight breeze across our window sill . . . aloft in the silent starlight, or in the throbbing heartbeat of the friend whose step keeps tread with ours upon our daily round. . . The tools we handle, the page we read, our song and laughter, our tears or watchnight pang, are but His way of knocking that we may open unto Him.

Thus it is, that through all His nature, He walks beside us as we turn again toward home.

* * *

Only the other day, it seems, little Matthew brought me in triumph the first bough of March-begotten "lamb-tails," happy in the thought of the new-born life of spring. But the other day it was that I asked him of the greater catkin's lady mate.

"The catkin's Lady, 'Benuncle,'" for so he

has learned to call me from his saucy sister at the farm. "Where does she live?"

"Why, little man, with the catkin, where else? High in his hazel home. And if you will go and look awhile you will find her there, in starlike form, blushing a deep love crimson waiting for her wedding kiss."

So little Matt is working out once more before me the problem of the life I've lived. Only the other day, he called me forth to tell him of the myriad lovers of the city of the catkins in their bridal robes . . . silver-green sallow and ruddy gold beech, purple poplar, and pale hued willow, telling their own sweet tale.

This but the other day, and now, borne on the soft southern breeze, comes the "chiming cry of the chiff-chaff" from Matt's same loved hazelwood . . . I saw the little feathered fellow a short hour since looking out a home in the snug lane which winds its sheltered course from my garden gate.

There he will wed among the earliest primrose blooms and carry their spring-tide glory on into his summer song. Then, having accompanied with us thus far in our pilgrimage, as

though his mission were to point us on to fuller days, he will leave us ere the fields' rich green turns to his own olive grey and take his southern journey to the strange country of the Moor.

* * *

My door, late opened wide to the gentle breeze of spring, must once more be fast closed, for it is a raw easterly morning with the wind sending scud after scud across the pond's clouded reach. A group of rushes stands shivering in the cold water and the colder air . . . Some children pause a moment on the narrow foot bridge, then hasten on, impatient of the inclement weather.

I miss little Matt's "Hello, Benuncle," from the garden gate.

The winding path seems to hesitate beside the water's brink, and then, reluctantly, to wind its way to the more sheltered recesses of the hedge-ringed field. The cattle browse restlessly under the shelter of the farmyard wall.

One's eye rests with gladness on the clear white flowers of the blackthorn hedge which laugh in confident assurance that the sun

will come again . . . almost, it would seem, waving their little hands in a beckoning welcome to its warm ray.

Truly, some flowers come with the sunshine, others are its forerunners. And I feel that the little white blooms call me out across the fields in wonder, for they tell me that, in the dull days when life's breezes are far from genial, when out of the cloudy sky little light of hope seems to find its way, 'twere better that we raise a face of gladdening welcome to fellow-man than await the warm ray of man's sun gladness to cheer our heart.

* * *

"Good-morning, Uncle Ben." . . . Not often do I hear the liquid voice of the laddie's sister so close upon the sun's rising.

"Why Audrey lass, why here so early? Indeed why here, today, at all? . . . And why so primly 'Uncle Ben'?"

No, her name is not just Audrey, but savours more of patriarchal times. For her stern old father Matthew, in the naming of his children, keeps well within the bounds of Holy Writ.

But I . . . must one tell the yearning of one's heart for days that can no longer be . . . days one dreamed of in one's strength? Shall one tell aught but this, that to me the name of Audrey needs must ever be most sacred; and why may I not hear it sometimes 'neath my own lone cottage roof?

"Well," she says, "'Benuncle' is for happy days, and today I'm sad, for little Matt is ill and could not come. He sent me on his errand and bade me fetch you quickly to him, bringing some snowdrops on the way

So she takes me forth . . . this Audrey that reminds me of the long-lost Audrey of a youth's strong love.

* * *

It is hard for the little chum to be laid aside such days as these, and harder than she knows for me to search the springtide fields alone.

Yet good it is, withal, that one may breathe the open air and rest beneath the warming noonday sun. For, by the hedge that runs from the stile towards the sunrising, there is a boulder rolled aside from the ploughman's way, and here I pause. It is my bench within the meadow park . . . a fit resting place for any

wayfarer, because the pebbled mass itself has been far wandering, and stores in Arctic silence the gleaming thought of winter snows, of whirling winds, and flashing fingers of the long, still, frosty nights' aurora within the northern circle of the icebound coasts. What a tale this old stone friend could tell of watching oft, of perils of glacial storm and tempest, as he travelled on his southern way.

In that grim age were giants in the land of dear old merry England . . . Mayhap some mighty dinosaur did even roam old Father Matthew's hedge-girt emerald field . . . Mayhap some knight of Arthur's making rode this way to play the game of love and war. In those far days when men must stake a sturdy manhood for their own homes' honour, and carking coin had less of place, war had more of love in it than nowadays . . . and love perhaps of war . . . or so one fain would feel, with that mellowed sense that ever covers the long distant past.

Is it but a feeling, this mellowing of the past?
Or is it not rather that eternal right of all things to be thus kindly understood when they

have gained their heritage, a heritage which is that merging into the all-comprehending Love of the infinite heart of things?

Thus do the little parts we have to play in the mighty drama take their rightful place within the circle of our own small hill-girt amphitheatre.

But a corner it is that we share, of that mightier stage that comes beneath the keen discerning of the Great Director's eye. I have my own small lines to learn . . . few words they are. Yet on that stage of life 'tis not the easiest part that's played in silence.

Some day it may be, when the meaning of my role is learned, there may be given me a place of higher honour and a part of nobler thought. Yet here, it is, among the few familiar friends of His great company, that I learn to live and love, and, in the living, fill the part that maybe I alone can fill, awayfaring in Farmer Matthew's flowered land.

Thus I find the old stone's spirit acting as a crystal through which I see my valley peopled with a full-souled living interest, until old Matt's very husbandman before me

treads his narrow furrow in pictured frock of centuries ago.

The old boulder seat seems to wrinkle up his pebbled face at the very thought of Arthur's distant time. He would have me understand that he himself is kin to that royal fellow in the far off hoary minster that cradles the crowning seat of England's kings.

And more, his wrinkling smile would tell me that, for all the noble throne environment of his friend, he envies him not. Because, hidden as that fellow is beneath the cushioned seat within Westminster's Abbey walls, God's own sweet sun does seldom come his way. Among the sad memorials of a world's great care, he has long since lost the joyous colour music of the massed cathedral choirs of spring. A field path seat has less of velvet on it, but surely more it feels of the great free spirit of God's own open air.

* * *

"Benuncle, did you ever love a lady?" . . . and, from behind my back, two tender, slender hands blind my eyes to the sunny fields. The

little minx, so to startle me in the midst of all my musing!

“Love a lady, Audrey? What is love?” I clasp those hands within my own and turning, look within two startled eyes, deep with the brown of the opening chestnut as it bursts in the heaven’s sun.

In earnest silence my answer comes to me.

“Nay, lass, there is no need for speech; Benuncle understands.” And, beneath the morning sky, lips hallowed by the love of another Audrey seal their blessing upon a youthful brow mantling a deeper crimson than that of any hazel catkin’s lady mate.

So she turns her eyes and slips away beyond the hedgerow to my garden gate.

* * *

“Benuncle, did you ever love a lady?” Ah Audrey, child so like another in the days gone by, did you but know . . . but mayhap with youth’s quick intuition you have already gained the secret of a lone wayfarer through the years of life . . . years that turn as the ploughman turns his greensward into deep brown loam.

Furrow by furrow, round on round, the polished metal quietly speeds upon its way in silent preparation for the planting. The field has seemed to gather to itself a great ambition. Here, if anywhere, the past is laid aside and the parted lips of the new-turned mould breathe out a new awakening.

But, beneath the curl of furrowed lines, there lie the leaves of last year's emerald sod. The daisy, born to bear its message of all-abounding hope upon the summer scene, the lark's long-vacant tiny homestead, clover luck and pebble polish, all have disappeared . . . yet all are there to play their part in the growing of Farmer Matt's new garnering.

There is no present without past and future, there is no future fabric save that woven from the spirit threads of hidden past. Those flowers of life's wide fields, that even are most hidden 'neath the intertwining leaves of a human rambling, leave their spirit touch upon the freshening loam of the future's growth, for weal or woe. This is the infinite law of Him whose life is one eternal "now," and by it only can we enter where His spirit is.

To use and not abuse, to win beauty out of error, from failure to gain a life's stability, so one weaves a future from the past and, weaving, makes both past and future one calm, present whole.

Yes, Audrey, I have loved a lady, and the great world Father still weaves that love around the effort of my day's lone pilgrimage.

* * *

So, slowly the ploughman wends his way and in his wake goes slowly on a great lone dissolution.

Many are the flower friends he takes from me. No more, perchance, shall their coloured gladness cheer my crippled way. Yet, abroad in the summer sunshine, there is a spirit above the fresh brown mould, that tells me that dissolution is but nobler freedom . . . fuller life from death.

And what of the grand spirit-energies set free by those who have graced for me the name of friend, now buried by a war's broad furrow in a foreign land? What of the friend-heart's spirit forces thus dissolved by the quiet alchemy of death.

Are they not still here around me, in the fuller freedom of the unseen life, calling me not to grieve the passing of an earthly form, but rather, to weave within my heart the duty that they richly lay upon me.

The petal's blue is lost indeed, unless it be that I alone who saw it can carry on its beauty into life . . . Yet in that life-enfolded beauty, there is richer gain in power, crushed though the flower be beneath the upturned mould.

Even so it may be with the love that they did give, now stored for richer use in the great treasury of those that follow on.

Teach us then, Thou Greater Lord of death, and life through death, rightly to use the spirit-power thus bequeathed by those we've "loved long since and lost awhile," that from beauty may come richer beauty, and, from friendship's love, the nobler love that finds its goal in Thee.

* * *

Little Matt is out again and is playing there, across the fields, with the farmer's lad as he scatters his golden seed.

Step by step, over the mellow land, they are unconsciously working out the Master Teacher's great principle of sacrifice that "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone."

Truly the Creator's constant law of conservation is ever written in letters of deep relief, welded by the flaming fires of toil.

"De Nihilo Nihil," He says.

The silken benediction on the honoured brow of aged human-kind; the wistful wandering glance of a young mother's love, Matt's small boyhood conquest of a boyhood trial; the determined profile of settled manhood's earnest prime, bear their silent testimony to a wise Creator's rule.

"Nothing from nothing."

Indeed no other canon could there be; To work the clay provided by the Master hand, to shape the Master Workman's raw material—earnestly to build up strength on strength—to weave beauty into beauty—eagerly to wrest, from the crude earth's hidden chaos, moulded form and burnished colour—to harmonise the wandering chords of God's great truth—to

give love for love, and life for life, and in the giving, to win our immortality—This surely were task sufficient for human heart and hand.

So, child sacrament of mine, go on blithely with thy sowing and some day the reaping shall be thine.

* * *

“Benuncle, come quickly and see. Our toad has wakened up and is scrambling from his winter house.”

So calls the boy in wild excitement, for, months ago, he would have it that the toad was dead, and we must have a burial.

Yes, Matt my man, things more dead than deep brown wrinkled toads sometimes startle us by living when we thought them dead.

“He is crawling out, Benuncle. Do come and see.”

“But Matt, I told you that he would, whole months ago, and soon will start with all his fellows through the country-side to make his Springtide pilgrimage to the pond. They all go together, you know, the one week in the year.”

“But Benuncle, how do they all know?”

They've been asleep so long. How could each one know when the others would waken up?"

"Nay, I cannot tell you lad. Many things we do not understand, yet, that we do not understand them, makes them no less true."

Yes, from their long sleep, the little honoured toads, hidden beneath my garden wall, join their kind from a hundred seeming graves within the valley, and obey the summoning voice that speaks to them in language that we cannot fathom. They make me feel a simple child like little Matt, and want to ask, —"How, Lord, can these things be?"

* * *

How one grows to love a thing inanimate. Of all things dear to me after the quiet cottage roof-tree, given for my resting by an unknown hand, is the little stile yonder upon the rise. Each morning it seems to beckon me to come to it and there to sit among the flowers and the sweet-smelling air.

What patient hands of those that fold themselves beneath the ivy-covered sward across the valley knew that, in the careful planting

of some rough hewn stakes, they were measuring the first resting place for future crippled limbs? Yes, more than that are they to me, those interwoven stakes, for like some strong heart of the years ago, toiling to a distant shrine on a greater pilgrimage, there I lay aside my oaken staff, and bow my head awhile in prayer.

“Lord God of Nature, Thy manuscript lies open to our eyes in field and wood and stream; Thy hand has written letters large of daily joy. Open Thou our hearts to feel Thy blessings infinite. Lift our downcast faces to the smile of Thy blue firmament above, and make us men among the myriad creatures of Thy love.”

So once more upon my daily pilgrimage, to the little glen where, with the brook alone for sacristan, I worship with the worshipping that knows no tie of wearied human flesh, but joins its spirit to that of a thousand leaves, and a thousand thousand blades of living green, in their glad, free rushing to the heart's love of Him Who made them one.

And are there not beauties of the valley that the hilltops give not unto man? God

made life's hill and vale and intended that both should be enjoyed. But for him who has not known at once the sad wistfulness and the quiet peace of the haunts of slender maidenhair and violet blue, much of the secret of the Master may never be revealed.

The octave chime rung by the pure white bells of the valley lilies is none the less resonant in that it must be heard in cooling silence by the heart's inmost ear.

The quiet lesson of the violet blue, nestling amid the interwoven fronds of maidenhair, is not the less real (indeed, maybe it is the more deeply real) because it must be sought far in the silent recesses, near the shadowed murmuring of some hidden brook.

Thus, if ye would hear the lilies where they grow, take off your earth-worn shoes, for the moss ye tread is holy, and the voices of the way ye go, are God's voices—to some, it may be, but the babbling of the waters upon the pebbled strand, but to others His still, small, sacred accents speaking to the inmost soul.

* * *

Audrey has been here but little of late. Why I do not know, yet perhaps one understands. So I was glad at heart this morning when I saw her lithe form wending its graceful way adown the valley path from the village beyond the hill.

Memory would fain flash back to other distant hours of dear anticipation—a memory that is one's weakness, or one's truest strength. Then, in turn, she comes stealing through my gateway, hoping to surprise an old tried friend.

"Well Audrey, chum."—My eyes meet hers in an earnest questioning, and two rough hands find their gentle resting place upon her shoulders—"Tell me."

Eyes must droop and ruddy twitching lips find difficult expression.

"Benuncle, please don't ask me. To-day I want just to feel you near and talk of other things."

Yes, the days have been when an older heart than hers gladly would have felt a friend's own quiet sympathy and have talked of other things.

“What are they, little chum?”

“Well, yesterday as I passed through the copse on the way to bring Matt home from school,” (grateful hands clasped mine and a quiet look of gratitude stole up from beneath long dark lashes,) “I found a glorious clump of the first bluebells flowering there.”

“And, today, I came that way to pluck them and bring them here for you and, oh, Benuncle, they are gone.”

“Yet you saw them, Audrey, didn’t you?”

“Yes, and the sun was just laughing from their bells.” It laughed again beneath her long dark lashes.

“And you felt the warm heart spirit of their laughter.”

“Indeed, Benuncle, so would you have, had you seen them,” and faltering lips no longer find speech a difficulty.

“Perhaps I have seen them, child — seen them maybe at their best—for, had you plucked them, they would have withered, and now you bring their sun-kissed spirit in your heart to me.”

So a little silence as two brown eyes search a

cripple's countenance, then a wistful look to where the wandering copse stands guard above the valley.

"Benuncle," she questions, with tense earnestness, "is love like such a flower?"

* * *

Out in a tangled hedgerow near the rough hewn stile, hidden far among the matted leaves, there is the sheltered home of a mother who quietly nurses the new life of her fledglings into mature strength for the winning of their daily bread; Matt and I found it as I passed with him on his way to school.

Mother and young are of that great feathered flock of whom we are told that not one falls beyond the comprehending vision of the All-seeing Eye.

Down the road's beaten path, to the left, over yonder stile, quietly mirrored on the limpid surface of an emerald-girt pool, shine the sun-kissed, snow-white petals of a lily with its pure message for mankind. Truly Solomon in all his glorious raiment was not clad like one of these. This morn I paused awhile to

worship there. Yes, surely if God so clothes the fields, if His wondrous compassion so extends to the feathered folk, if He can comprehend the insect life in yonder pool, of which some thirty generations crowd themselves into the labourer's single day, must not the labourer also, the honest roadmender as he rests his tools against the gnarled trunk at the end of another stage of the building, alike, of road and character, come within the all-compassionate love of the Divine Heart.

Far beyond the little mother's nest, just over the topmost rise, skirting Matthew's bounds, there is a bylane quietly stealing, as it were, between the hedge, lest it should show itself and be detected by those that pass upon the louder world's highway. Half along it, long years ago, a creaking cart, to avoid the mudding of its polished tires, circled the edges of a shallow pool and broadened out the road.

And later—years later it may have been—some careful hand drew about the broadened bounds the interwoven pattern of the thorny hedge.

There is shelter here in the springtide e'en

when an inauspicious wind sweeps over the fields beyond. And, among the green nettles rising new-born from the bleached stems of their own autumn loss, the butterflies are oft alert and busy.

As I would have passed along the main road over the hill into the village, toward noon, a "Tortoiseshell" flying across my path beckoned me to turn aside and follow him.

'Twas good to sense the sheltering warmth of the dust-free quiet lane, bathed in the morning sun. I wandered by the winding way, and at last came to where the circling wain had left its broadened path in the days of old, and found, not the butterflies alert and busy, but Audrey kneeling on the grass. As I came, she raised a slender hand as though at once to welcome me and bid me to be silent.

"But Audrey, chum, the butterfly will not fear my voice."

"Hush, Benuncle, I've just saved him from a fly-catcher, and yet I believe he did not know it, and isn't he too beautiful in the morning sun?"

"I fear I was thinking of other than butterfly beauty at the time, dear lady."

"Hush, Benuncle, you must not say such things."

"But why not? Indeed, I was but thinking of the unfolding glory of the life of one of God's sweet creatures in the sunshine."

Then eyes of the deep richness of the chestnut's hidden brown searched mine, a soft hand stole within a cripple's arm, and the butterfly was left in all its native glory to brighten, with its colouring, the old cart rut.

"I've been up so early, Benuncle—let's wander along the lanes to the old apple tree in the corner of Dad's orchard. It's such a mass of beauty now and, do you know, until this morning, I hardly saw it."

Long lashes drooped and a young heart seemed to find it difficult of utterance. "All the lovely trees and flowers and all their sweetness waiting for us to love them and enjoy them, and I scarcely realized they were there. This morning I felt so ashamed when I wakened, I just thought I would come out here, and say I was sorry. Now I feel better."

“Somehow I got on the wrong path and I want to stay just by the good old highway, now. The other wasn’t meant for me at all, and it’s stupid to trespass, isn’t it?”

Silence awhile, and then—“You can’t think how heavenly it’s been up there in the wood. I’ve been sitting on a fallen tree among the most lovely birches, with baby bracken uncurling round my feet and oaks all yellow and crumply still. And so many birds; blackbirds, cuckoos, and larks, and a rowdy pheasant, and even that vulgar old ‘Mrs. Peacock’, so amusing and so unmusical. I’ve enjoyed it all to the full. There’s nothing like it after all—now, is there, Benuncle? One can get such joy so easily and oh—the peacefulness of it all.”

A slender form stole closer to my side, and a warmer clasp seemed to draw me nearer to a young heart’s pain.

“May it not be, little woman, that peace and joy are two sweet flowers that unfold in the freshened air when thunder clouds have passed?”

And with this we had come to the great

white-robed apple tree and I, too, felt the more what Audrey meant by nature's spirit restfulness.

But soon a cuckoo sounded what seemed a dinner call across the meadows and I went on with Audrey to the homestead board.

* . * *

This afternoon staunch little Matt, bare-foot and happily content, came calling to me about the time the kettle sang for tea.

He brought six new snow-white eggs and, nestling upon them as though to keep their warmth, a cluster of new-fashioned cakes fresh from the great kitchen oven at the farm.

We talked of dappled eggs, and the interwoven twigs of the wren's small mansion in the hedge. And so, from confidence to confidence we came, until, from out a knotted handkerchief, the lad produced a box, and in it fresh leaves, late plucked from the mulberry bough beyond the water trough in greater Matthew's yard. In it he had some silkworms, working out the deeply simple rule of life bequeathed to them by an ancient Eastern ancestry. They

brought into my cottage the spirit of their fellow in freer native haunts.

Put into his place of God, worm though he be, he strives industriously to spin the fine, silken thread that goes, it may be, to broider the teaching symbols on some high altar front, or to the weaving of the Royal Ensign of the King.

Placed in an unalterable environment, with materials to work upon from which he cannot choose, he brings to them his own industry and his own understanding of his Maker's plan. So on the spinning goes.

And little Matthew—has he not his own green mulberry leaf, a little area on which his child-heart influence is brought to bear, an environment which he may not change? Yet there is spinning to be done by small child hands, and the quality of the spinning comes from unconscious sympathy with the Father's plan.

Humble duties they are, which are wrought into his thread of life, so humble that boy or man may seem a very worm on one of a million like leaves in God's great world. Yet I see

Matt's small lad spinning such a silken thread of character that his work shall find place within the ultimate good.

* * *

This morning, as I 'companied with him on his way to school, the boy would draw me from the beaten path to see where he had planted a slender seedling, where, fed by the waters of a little rill, it nestled beneath the shelter of a bank of moss.

There, as he stood fondly over it, they two seemed to share the promise of their joint maturity.

With its two green leaves outspread from its tiny stem, it seemed already so much a tree with a tree's grand upreaching towards the light.

Courage, endurance, illimitable hope, spake out from the staunch bearing of the little forms, telling me to value life not so much for what it is, as for what it may be. The tree of life itself, that weaves its history through the sacred page, was once just such a seedling, capable of being trampled under foot of man.

Yet this frail form shall live on to shelter
beneath its branches generations still unborn.

And what of those seedling longings of the
tiny fronds planted within the quickening soil
of little Matthew's own small soul, but as yet
timidly opening to the heaven's sun?

Are they to have a life less glorious than the
slender stalk within the dell? Shall their
strong influence be dead while it grows on in
the service of the race?

Oh, ye of little faith, wherefore do ye doubt?

* * *

Truly the whole earth seems to pulse with
the warm hopefulness that comes from the
freshening touch of a late spring shower.

Gladly one answers the joyous hail of farmer
Matt across the stile, and his handclasp
seems to say he has grasped fully, to his inner
heart, the truth, that seedtime and harvest
shall never fail again.

Over us both, with the fields and roads we
tread, God, in His marvellous beauty, spreads
the glorious colours of His rainbow band across
the sky.

It is all so beautifully pure and real.

Then the rainbow fades and a warmer sun comes out. Quietly I take the path across the fields. Up from the meadow land soars a lark on high. On every side is glad, free, hope-abounding life.

Here is a glint of colour in the grass. It is another rainbow, nay a thousand rainbows, smiling in every liquid drop on a thousand freshened blades.

To me they seem to speak of the presence of a beauty from the heavens in the lowly lives of men, of the glorious bounty of radiant spirit life, reflected in the liquid gladness of a thousand human hearts, until in His good time, His own great fuller sunshine shall receive all love of earth and sky up into His spirit life on high.

* * *

Little Matt has found another bird's nest in the hawthorn, a linnet lover's home, close guarded from the marauder's searching eye. The hedge yonder was once a tangled mass, sheltering beneath its thorny spikes every outlaw weed that ran riot through the countryside, a thing unlovely and unkempt. Then one might have said: "Root it up," but a

wiser hand came by with a scythe and pruning hook, a wiser heart with more far-seeing eye. And now the unbending boughs of gallant thorn are but the interwoven screen, sheltering the warm portal of a humble lover's home.

What glorious things there are in the thorny hedges. Bluebells ringing out their glad free chime; violets of a deeper blue; nesting, nestling bird and full flowing life of God's own creature-land are all among the thorny crown of England's country-side.

Could any other crown have been more beautiful than His—the "Lord of All Good Life" reigning with a crown of thorns?

And what of the circling hawthorn of one's own troubled heart? Are there no flecks of sunshine there, dancing in and out among the thorny screen of difficulty or wondering doubt? Are there no violets or bluebells, more rich in hue for the contrast of the deeper shades above? Surely blessed things are God's rich thorns when trimmed with hands of human love. Then let us not root them out, but use them, even with His blessing, as a circling guard for the warming hearth of our own heart's home.

One may well wonder whether dear old saintly Paul had wandered to a stile when he found it in his heart to write: "There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and no kind is without signification?"

* * *

Several days have passed since I could take my notebook from its shelf behind the cottage door, and sit quietly in the twilight to record a cripple's wayfaring.

I have been far afield, and it is good to be back within sound of the rippling stream, and to rest one's staff in the corner beside one's own hearth fire.

Tomorrow I shall have fresh joy in listening to the murmur of the brook. For, this time, I have fared far beyond the inland rise, to see a friend, not of my estate, it is true, but still, in his great goodness, one who calls me by the sacred name of 'friend.'

And there, last eventide, I sat long upon the terrace, with no thought for any care, all nature clothed with the warm velvet of the summer's night, the day's wandering and wondering alike long past with the setting sun.

So, sitting in the stillness, there seemed to whisper a voice from the pole star in its constancy.

It spake to me, and yet I could not understand.

Thus, from behind the folding shade of the copper-beech, no longer copper in the dusky night, my little friend sent out his message of goodwill to humankind.

Not until later, in the musing of fond memory's mind, did there come to me the reading, in human accents, of the pole star's speech.

In a far-off land I see myself again a wayfarer fur-clad, journeying across the driven snow, where furrow and flower were long since stilled by the frost's keen handicraft; the black night above, the crisp, white mantle underfoot, and the whisper round about of many voices, but of one that mattered most—the still, small, silent welcoming message of the lantern placed by constant loving hands in a distant window to guide me home.

And in the Father's Home of many mansions, is there not some latticed window that overlooks the way on which we fare? And

may there not be some loving heart whose own
deft fingers trim life's guiding lanthorn in the
night to lead us on? The little pole star seems
so to whisper unto me—Does it to you?

For . . .

“I know not where the white road runs, nor
what the blue hills are,
But man can have the sun for friend, and for
his guide a star.
And there's no end of voyaging when once the
voice is heard
For the river calls, and the road calls, and Oh, the
call of a bird.”

And this morning too, to be within the
sound of little Matthew's boyhood call, brings
gladness to the heart.

I've missed him whilst I've been away, and
I've missed his gentle sister.

There was a new heart's throb for me when
an excited little fellow hailed me from the gar-
den gate today—“Benuncle, quick, come and
see—”

He had found a green-flecked egg among the
four little blue ones of his hedge-sparrow's
nest.

“What could it be? Well Matt, it seems

your Cuckoo caller has found the sparrow not at home, and left her some trouble for the days to come.”

“But it’s such a tiny egg and so like the others, Benuncle.”

“Indeed, it may be, child, yet things are not always as they seem. Shall we take the new egg out, and keep it for your egg box at the farm, and so save four small lives from the wiles of the usurper? Some folks like to have their children but not the care of their upbringing, and I think we might dispense with cuckoo manners so near to home.”

* * *

“Come and see.” It is often the little fellow’s hail to me.

And sometimes as I look upon the even stretch of the nearby sandy beach, as it slowly merges in the mist, it seems to bring to me the vision of a figure against the azure of the foreland sky. Then two others come and, methinks, I hear once more an earnest questioning—

They say unto Him: "Where dwellest Thou?"

He saith unto them: "Come and see."

When He gave His quiet answer was not the Master but putting into human speech, the great call of God's universe to every man who wills to be His follower?

The granite pinnacle on yonder bluff, bathed in the golden ray of the setting sun, is but one of the Creator's fingers beckoning to human interest in the Great Beyond. The hidden brook's quiet murmuring in the dell is but the gentle modulation of one of His voices, sending out its gently insistent summons to man's heart and mind.

The azure grey of the evening haze over and beyond the city's myriad spires; the silent glint of the squirrel's fur-brown coat as he darts into the hollow of the fallen log; the laughing blue of childhood's happy eyes; the pure white daisy petal nestled among the growing corn; the great sombre fir's outstretched arms across the snow; these all speak out the message God has given them in the pure accents of all created life, "Come and see."

And if we understand the summons and will to enter in, He always leads the way to the open door of that great world-home, in which He lives and moves and has His being, that we may go in and dwell with Him and He with us.

* * *

When noontide's sun shines high in the heavens, and the little path beyond the stile seems to lead too far from the hearth-stone seat, there is another friend who reaches out his solemn arms to welcome me to rest beneath his shade. So, taking the privilege of the maimed, I make my way across the pasture land, and rest in the cool shade of my ancient friend, the oak.

And, in my resting, there comes to mind the motto I could ill interpret as a lad: "Velut arbor aevo."

"As the tree" forcing its ever-strengthening roots down into the soil of mother earth, clinging as by right to niche and crevice of the crannied rock, claiming its place in the serried ranks of the nature-born creatures of God's hands, drawing in the cool nourishing sap of

the earth's delight and the world's power: "So *I grow*;" so God made me, and so I am unashamed.

A thing of earth, conscious of earth's limitations and earth's love; feeling at once earth's coldness and earth's warm strength; glad to live among the creatures of its growth, yet more than earthly; using (and only rightly so) the sap of earth's legitimate strength to raise mortal arms in search of heaven's eternal truth; strong, staunch, established, God's creature among His creation.

"Velut arbor aevo."

* * *

When I came here to my cottage a few months ago I found in the winter stillness, sheltering close beneath the garden wall, an interwoven mass of briars. Neglected and forlorn, they seemed to take unto themselves some of that sad bitterness of life that comes from a heart yearning which has failed to find its kindly guidance in the days of youth.

A bed of despised nettles had settled at their door to make life's poverty more keenly felt.

It was the old story of the problem of evil and pain in a world of God's own beauty.

There has been some of the joy of the Redeemer in giving them a new spirit birth and I've had a happy morning clearing away the nettles and the thorns.

There, to me, came Audrey, in prim white garb, white as the day, challenging the spirit of the dew-freshened flowers across the sunny fields.

Little could one see of the love pain at her heart for one she had but found to lose again.

She had told me of the stranger youth who came to that heart's awakening, then passed out into the Great World where men go to their changing interests and may return no more.

"You're very busy, Benuncle. Don't you think you could just nod a little and say 'Good-morning' like the 'parson-in-the-pulpit' down the lane?" Young eyes laugh back at mine.

"Good-morrow, sweet lady. I stand corrected by the noble parson's example. But are you not fearful of breaking the good gentleman's ancient succession by plucking him so from his rightful place of worship beneath the hedge?"

“He’s a missionary parson, Benuncle. I’m trying to make you understand, he’s come from afar off to your Gentile garden to preach to you the flower’s kindly habit of saying ‘Good-morning’ by the way.”

* * *

It is Good Friday, and Parson Bartolmew has kept his Lenten fast, going at noon to lead the watchers in their Passion worshipping, and I—well would I have gone with them, but, pausing on the hill to rest, it seemed to me the day was well called “Good.” For is it not the Coronation Day of Him who, having been a Wayfarer, was given not only to live, but also to die, in the clear broad springtime open air.

I couldn’t find it in my heart to keep His Passiontide elsewhere than on the hilltop yonder beneath the outstretched arms of the silent oak.

* * *

At the stile this afternoon upon my homeward way, my eyes were carried heavenward by the happy song of the soaring lark. Upward and ever upward he mounted, yet I knew that somewhere in the meadow near at hand lay hidden the nest so dear to him. And, even

as I looked there fluttered silently to my feet a message from the very wings that carried him aloft.

I stooped and humbly picked it up—God's message "embodied in the feather of a bird"—a miracle so beautifully formed from the dull earth to lift man's thought on high.

And shall His wonder-working be less potent in the training of the human soul? Shall earth with all its sodden stain upon the hearts of men not be sufficient, in His hands, to weave for them wings of His strong character whereby the soul shall rise unto His heaven?

Shall my cottage door open less freely to the skies than does the home of this my feathered neighbor, on the same winding path across the meadow fields? Shall it not likewise be that haven dear to me, where, dwelling a little 'neath His guiding hand, I win my strength, and later learn to fly?

Even so I mused. But now in the twilight calm it seems the feather's coming teaches more than that. I cannot think it is lost upon the earth. For here, within my palm, it brings to me the feeling that, constantly, from out the

unseen blue, the spirit breath bears earthward,
fluttering on the breeze, feathers of sweet in-
fluence from those dear forms we have loved
and lost awhile, God's messengers who've
learned long since to soar beyond our human
vision.

* * *

There is something in the spirit of the
Springtime which strangely breathes of sweet-
est retrospect. Is it not so with others? Or is
it that Audrey, in her love's young dream, has
conjured once again for me the spirit of the
past?

“With the spring, long buried springs in my
heart awaken,
Time takes the years but the spring he has not
taken,
My thoughts with a boy's wild thoughts are
mixed and shaken.”

A loved form with the years has gone and
yet, somewhere near, near at hand, there is that
calm, sweet spirit of content, which even now
can live many of the happy hours of yore, and
too, there is strong hope astir in the springtime

sun, and retrospect is but the golden key which turns the secret lock of dawn.

Truly love hopeth all things, and all things speak of hope.

Beside the quiet pool, mirroring in its liquid surface the drooping willow branches above its brink, lies full-faced to the checkered sunlight an inscription that all may read—the Creator's teaching of this same full abounding faith.

On this sunny bank is it but a grass blade that you see shaped in tender slenderness by the Mighty Artist's hand, pointing with its frail form out to the sun? Is it merely a grass blade which to-day is, and to-morrow shall not be?

The little willow leaf, in its slim daintiness, laughing at its image in the mirror pool—is it to you but one of the million such green forms waving heedlessly in the gentle breeze, a form that with the autumn frosts will lose its comeliness? Nay, these were once earth, inanimate, parched, crumbling beneath a wayfarer's foot, but now they drink deep of life's own glad fruit of hope-abounding peace.

And too, the little daisies yonder, whiter than the white of Audrey's frock, surely they, alike with lark and linnet, bear His welcome message to the human breast that fullest hope breathes everywhere. And is not hope the essence of love, and love itself of God, strong, pure, eternal, all-pervading,

Beyond the Whitened Stile
Summer

There's food for thought out yonder in the hedges, and there's fellowship of worship by the fields.

II.

BEYOND THE WHITENED STILE

The great earth is asleep to-night under the watching summer afterglow of a sun that seems to linger in its setting, and to leave in its wake a cool grey trail across the starry sky.

The earth itself would imitate the heaven's way by its own flower stars spread abroad across the nearby fields.

As I wander through the garden gate contentedly and alone, yet not alone, here a white cluster of campion blossoms shows pallidly upon a grassy bank; there, elders and wild roses shape dimly an Ursa Major in the darkening hedge.

Room for thought there is abroad and room for wonder. My path leads farther afield than I am wont to go after the setting of the summer sun.

Tempted, I am, to pause a little at the stile, and let my fancy conjure white ghost moths into fairy forms, dancing a phantom summer revel round the fantastic grass palaces where,

for the nonce, their golden mates keep silent dwelling.

The birds have almost stilled their voices. Beyond the meadow there is the happy babble of the sedge warbler, telling out his talkative monologue of weak human triumph in having the last word among the fellows of his night company. Thrush and nightingale alike have left him to sound the scurrilous beauty of his song, and he would seem to make sport of my unwonted vigil.

Far up the valley two of his fellows, disturbed by some thoughtless moorhen, are pouring a flood of words into the alert ears of the night.

Anon they too are still, and through the pulsing silence of summer dusk the churr of a nightjar tempts me to wander on to Matthew's oak.

There for awhile, in the fading afterglow, I rest and feel great nature's brooding spirit breathing comfort deeply sweet to the human soul.

The homelike twinkle of the first farm lights bring me back to the thought of earthly interest, and, almost in answer to my thought, I

see moving toward my shelter, a graceful form, with seeming movement more lithe from the merging of its outline in the sombre silent tones of later eventide.

“Do not fear, Audrey, it is but I—Old Benuncle, wandering far from home under the shelter of the dusk.”

“Indeed I did not fear, Benuncle, for something in the hidden spirit of the leaves seemed to whisper to me to come to meet you here.”

A gentle hand steals within my arm and so, her liquid voice speaks to an understanding heart.

“I’ve wanted you all these days, Benuncle, —wanted you to share them with me—both their joy and pain.”

“Has there been much of pain, child—yet need I ask?”

“No, not so much of pain as of a sad, sweet spirit, speaking to me from the sky and the fields around, that tells me it’s good to live and to hope on, and in the night silence I feel the hope is real.”

“So you are hoping, Audrey?”

Across the meadow there was the silent stir-

ring of the summer breeze and I felt her move as though to feel me nearer.

“The word is not quite hoping, Benuncle,” she whispered in tense voice.

“Then is it loving?”

“Yes, I can say it here away from the broad daylight—just feeling the breathing life of things, and giving out of what my heart would give.”

“Keeping old Benuncle company, along the way we tread.”

* * *

Across the new mown meadows, fragrant with the hay, comes the tinkling message of the sheep bells as their bearers seek a lazy pasturage o'er the hill. In deeper tone the chime of evensong floats on the summer breeze from the four-square tower topping the rise.

Over the quiet stile, where a threefold finger points to distant urban ways of trade, a spreading chestnut grants its leafy benediction to a haymaker's rest, taken in gladsome joy from honest toil. His bronze face beams with the spirit of the meadow in the heaven-sent sun

and from him steals out, as he goes his homeward way, the message of his daily life.

Such is the inevitable atmosphere which gathers round the soul of one so occupied. Yea, truly his garments smell of myrrh, aloes and cassia, out of the palaces adorned with the ivory pillars of a great world's daily duty and hourly love.

The scent of life's rich influences, stealing out unconsciously from a heart clothed with the garments of faithful effort, leaving its trace in the hearts of those around, uplifting, invigorating, gladdening, is at once the Father's blessing most worth while, and our own sure way whereby we make Him glad.

* * *

Just before the first glimmering grey of dawn, when the morning's eyes look out through sleepy lashes not yet willing for a broad awakening, I lay lazily in my bed. And then there came the liquid patter of the feet of many raindrops on the cottage roof above my head. It seemed to me their busy hearts were gladly singing while they ran to get all things

in freshened readiness for the rising of the sun. And then their busy patter ceased.

So, methinks, for once in a while, I will outdo the sun, and springing from my cot, more as in the days before the crippling, I hasten as best I can unto the stile. And there I meet old Farmer Matthew, fresh as the morning dew, from viewing his well tilled fields. And, lest he should grow too egotistic, I tell him in all good humour that, like Parson Bartolmew of village fame, he spends his manly life in pulling weeds—that yet he has not learned the growing Gospel of the Corn.

“Nay friend” quoth he, “of Parson Bartolmew I cannot say, for, from too long dwelling on the thought of weeds, one well may lose the sunshine. And, mayhap, too oft his church has preached of death, not life from death. Yet one would be but a poor father of the corn did one not learn that, in the sunshine’s cultivating, the weeds will in their good time disappear.”

And so I leave him with his frank philosophy, and measure my return unto my breakfasting. There I think that dear old grayhaired

Matt's warm heart would preach some gospel such as this:—

“You would be pure. Then learn a positive religion; lead a positive life; live for the things that mean growth and action. Leave the stone that you cast at yourself to help pave the onward path of others that would follow in your steps. Waste no time in pulling weeds by life's broad roadside, but thinking always of the things that are true, the things that are honourable, that are of good report, press forward to the knowledge of life's nobleness, and love's pure power, and the God of purity and peace shall be with you.”

Thinking so I break my fast with God's own humble satisfying fare.

Yet not alone from the spread board do I find my want fulfilled, for yonder, as I sit with open door, there is a little Fellow, keen tugging at his Sister's hand, who comes within the view that's framed by step and lintel, and the breakfast loaf is broken in heart gratitude that life can ever gather to itself a young soul's sweet companionship.

* * *

There has been sadness in the heart for Audrey, to-day, and sadness for me. The valley, where runs the soothing ripple over the pebbled strand, was far beyond my morning's strength. The nearer meadow has been too bright to voice the sorrow that the heart has felt. So one is glad of eventide and of the meeting of the spirit of wondrous Holy Writ. Here in the old Book are pictured sadness and joy, sunshine and cloud, with reverent touch, and here one finds the peace the day has failed to give.

The Master, whose whole earthly life was one great parable, tells the story of one who, having his inheritance, went into a far country and there found his own true self while feeding swine. In the wilderness he heard the voice of one crying, and eventually found his way to his Father's house.

The wilderness has ever a worship, all its own. Out there to one wandering in the evening, among the bare stones, with the ground's parched lips expressing in silent utterance the world's great need, the rude cacti holding in memory a crown of thorns, the world's festive

altar seems to have been stripped of its scarlet and gold, and to have donned a more Lenten hue. One feels at last alone with one's Creator in silent wondering awe.

Has it not often so been, that when all life has become a wilderness for many a lonely soul, when all that has seemed beautiful and precious has been stripped from off the altar of one's heart, friendless and alone one has found, not parched desolation, but the fore-runner's voice speaking in accents that can be understood only in the soul sore need of the Great Princely Friend to come?

Thus comes comfort and a Spirit that can better understand the Father's ways, and gratitude there is for trial.

Lord, for the grace to recognize the love that sometimes hurts to help, we thank Thee; we bless Thee for the times that, in Thy higher wisdom, Thou hast deemed it best our prayers should not be answered,—and for Thy great with-holding hand in loving kindness to human frailty and ignorance, we praise Thy Holy name, Who givest all.

* * *

Down along the hedge and across the meadow I have been wandering carelessly, feeling the trend of the green things toward the light. Tree and fellow bush are no simpletons in their frank philosophy of life, nor do they fail to make kind provisioning for the leaflets upon their spreading twigs. For them there seems to be but one calm purpose, the drinking of the glad free spirit of the sun. Oak, alike with ivy, worships in the same frank way.

All down the hedge I passed, until I could not help but feel the light-loving fellowship of the religion of the leaves. There is no jealousy or introspection in their worshipping. They do but claim the right, each one, to have sufficient place that they may spread their own small forms toward the benediction of broad sky and freshening shower. It is a fellowship which knows no overcrowding, but forms in its mosaic a broad communal worship under the summer sun. It is a worship that has learned the secret strength of all men's richer heart-partaking of the spirit life divine; a worship that is a search for an ideal, and a growth ever onward in joy of life.

Man grows full skeptical of miracle, yet here in Matthew's fields a million blades, a million leaves upon the hedgerow, laugh heartily at his fond conceit. I plucked an ivy leaf and laid it in my broad palm, and asked it of the faith that gives it power to bridge the world's great kingdoms and to weave strong matter from the spirit rays of golden light.

Yes, there's food for thought out yonder in the hedges, and there's fellowship of worship o'er the lea.

I lay a long while in the grass near Matthew's barn and watched a solemn evergreen deepening his colour in the brightening of the sun, then sauntered back across the flower-bedded carpet fast fructifying in the noon-day heat.

And what a bond of glad dependence and glad foster-parenthood there is between nature's children and old Sol. Clover flower, and hazel bud, know full well that life and fertilizing power are in his keeping, and tree and hedgerow reach their arms out to his life-giving light.

How human nature is in her chance contra-

dictions. Passing through the copse with mind full stored with her calm teaching I found a periwinkle flowering in the gloom as though to say: "You see how simple you have shown yourself—I get along quite merrily without your sun philosophy." Yes, full well I know a few such periwinkles in the world's human flowering, and glad I am that they can gather pale beauty in life's deprivation, but—well it's time for noonday setting of a bachelor's board, and thanks unto God that I am not called to be a periwinkle.

* * *

"Here you, young Matthew, what is that you have bulging from your pocket? Green apples?"

The little scamp looks full guilty as though in instinctive acknowledgment of the breaking of good nature's laws.

"Don't you know, young man, that the apple was trying to hide from such as you and put on his green cloak of sourness to guard the little trust he keeps for tree planting in the days to come. Why subject him to the rough humours of the world when over there

the old farm homestead shelters your own small self from such marauders as would keep a lad from coming to his full maturity?" But what's the use—I too was once a boy and Matt is after all a part of nature's great mysterious scheme.

* * *

"Why Audrey, lady, what do you abroad in such a drenching rain?"

One of those dark storm whims of nature has swept across the farmstead since sunrise and poured its passing displeasure on the land.

"I do not know, Benuncle, I had a message to bear for Father, but that, he said, could wait—I wanted to come—You are not vexed with me?"

"Vexed child?—How could I be?"—A cotter's lone lattice is but poor company in such a storm.

"And look, Benuncle, what I've rescued in my coming." So from rolling apron folds she takes a small bedraggled brood of fluffy part-ridge chicks.

"What does my slight wetting matter, for these can now be dry."

Bless the child. What a heart she has for human mothering.

“I found them near the hedgerow, just the very wickedest place that a young thing could go—where Monsieur Reynard waits stealthily. But out there in the field old Mrs. Rheumatism would catch them just the same on a day like this. Dear old Benuncle, I’m glad I came in the rain because I’ve learned this morning that I’ve two warm dry homes where neither Reynards nor Rheumatism come.”

Hereupon the little lady puts clasped hands around a privileged neck and draws my head down to within a secret whispering degree. Yet why such secrecy I know not, for none but the pattering raindrops are about to hear.

“Dear old friend of mine,” she breathes, “last night I lay a long time in the silver moonlight thinking of you here all alone—then blew you a kiss out of my open window right along a silver moonbeam, before I went to sleep, thanking God for all you’ve been to me, and shall I tell you?—In my sleep I dreamed that you would give me back—my lover man.—Oh, Benuncle, I was so happy, happy hearted. I

know he will return—I had to come to tell you of it.”

* * *

It is one of those days that must have been when God first beheld His handiwork and said that all was good. Looking seaward as far as human vision avails, there is the gleaming ripple of the sunshine upon the welling bosom of the ocean blue. Out along the field-girt shore there mounts up into the heavens a messenger whose liquid note seems to carry the soul's own longings to the boundless infinitude above.

Landward, the green reaches journey to their haven where, on the horizon, sky clasps grassy earth unto itself. Everywhere is the silent message from the infinite Maker's heart.

“Man never wearies if he can see far enough.” Is this not even so to say that the reading of God's boundless message ever brings him strength and that, in the ability to read, he proves the answering infinity of his own soul. 'Tis the very nature of his heart to follow the eye to its farthest ken and then to outrun it

in its quest. Sea and sky and furrowed foreland but express for him, in language that he reads but cannot speak, the outreaching of a nature too great for the confines of a mortal life; a nature partaking of, and yearning as by right for, the boundless glory of the Divine, Eternal, Immortal, Invisible; a nature that can find its own satisfaction only when it knows as it is known, when it sees with a vision that looks out beyond the horizon to the Spirit's unending day.

I mean to rest awhile to-day upon the foreland grass and let my heart go on its quest whitherso'er it will.

* * *

They tell me I am poor and true enough it is that of silver and gold I have none. Yet there is the stile yonder, and beyond it the thousand, thousand blades of verdant green, lining my path to the valley brookside worshipping. And when they speak of poverty I wonder at the meaning of that word. Cannot even a cripple love? Cannot even a crippled wayfarer look up into the sky's glad face?

And when they speak of giving, I think me

of a little worm on the serrated green of the mulberry leaf, carefully working out the daily round, which, in the Creator's time, shall produce the silk which deft hands weave into glorious apparel for the daughter of the King.

So too, I remember the microscopic toiler of the hidden deep giving daily of his being to form the coral that is prized by humankind, and I see a little speck of scarlet insect life, whose sacrifice it is to form the flaming colour of the Emperor's royal robe. Of silver and gold these have none, yet of their tiny being they render such as they have to the weaving of the complex life of the realm of the King of Kings.

And of me, His human subject, He requires not more than this, that, with such as I have, I should render unto Him faithful service in that nook of His own great realm in which he has been pleased to give me stewardship's grace.

From those who have it not, he asks no golden coin, but that each render humbly, earnestly to God the things of God, the coin of golden character stamped with His Divine image

in the royal mint of patient hourly loving toil.

And so, methinks a cripple has his place.

* * *

This calm clear morn of Sabbath rest, Audrey would have me come out upon the common, to see a hidden lark's nest, deftly fashioned, with naught but open nature as its guardian canopy. There they are, four small awkward creatures pinned to earth by that weak impotence that as yet cannot grasp the spirit flight of the grown soul. But are they not the little throats that, in another summer, will sing aloft the heartening optimism of the Spirit of the world's blue sky?

I bared my head and knelt beside the little nest, grateful for the message of their kind, and did them homage while yet 'twas given me to come so near.

And now the Sabbath day is done and Sabbath eventide settles quietly upon the day's still resting. The chimes ring out a glad sweet summoning to worship and to praise — clear bell-toned witnesses of the Divine eternal harmony in time of man's bitter heart discord.

Down across the stillness of the little vale, the old church tower has sent many a merry peal, and to-night, as the echo of the bell's clear tone still answers echo over the lea, I hear the mellow intonation of another chime summoning human-kind to bow in humble adoration beneath the great outspreading dome of heaven's evening blue.

My eyes wander from the well-thumbed page upon my knee and I see a broader lectern made of meadow mould, and wide upon it, laid ready for the reading, His sacred lesson for the day.

Men have often quarrelled about the Word of God, yet had the Wonder Book been destroyed, to its last page in the consuming fires of Alexandria, or under the persecuting eye of some ruler of ancient Rome, there would still remain rich words of His that are spirit and are truth.

Down the quiet lane, where patient hands have set a limit to the browsing of the lowing herd and furry fox-glove bells ring out, in wonder-coloured gladness, their silent summer tone, there, in the stillness, is a Book written

that he who runs may read. A Book, it is, printed in the press of ages by the Master Printer and opened wide for him to see who will.

The liquid patter of the raindrops on my cottage roof, the rustling of the summer breeze across the corn, the gentle lapping of a hidden bough upon the brooklet's shadowed brink, these are words of His speaking unto hearts that hear.

And the great wide parchment printed with signs from the myriad font of nature's type is His own manuscript, inspired and holy, the truthful reading of whose Spirit ever brings life to the children of His hands.

* * *

The day has given me of that calm peace of soul that finds its deeper language in the twilight. It is a peace that steals close round one's heart and gives life's questioning a mellowed quietude. Long I am tempted to sit with book laid by, still open where some words, written by a hand that is no more, have carried my

spirit out beyond the touch of time. It is the calm sweet twilight hour of memory.

There the land is peopled by those wayfarers who have kept heart pace with me in a wider faring—souls who of this world's beauty are no more. Nay, that is not true. Of worlds there is no this and that. Of hearts that beat as one there is no near or far. Of that wide spirit bond that knows not of mortality I dare not predicate a then or now. For they are with me always in strong, pure, immortal fellowship, calm guiding spirits of the world's great silent twilight company.

And of them all to-night in nearness, e'en most dear is one in spirit close commingled with the eventide's own blessed Spirit peace.

She comes not when noon is on the roses—
Too bright is day.

She comes not to the soul till it reposes
From work and play.

But when night is on the hills, and the great voices
Roll in from sea

By starlight, and by candlelight and dreamlight
She comes to me.

* * *

A little way beyond the stile, so placed that I may pause a space by its mirrored brink, there is a pool too small to boast the name of pond. Hardly would little Matt honour it with a trial race of his tiny sailing craft. Innocent it looks of all design, unless it be of use to feed a clump of rushes so evidently stragglers from their kin.

And pray what use are three lone rushes raising their slim forms in the summer air? They have no fold of coloured petal to open to the sun. They have no mellow scent with which to lade the meadow breeze. Yet I think them not of little worth.

They are my summer sundial, and daily do they mark the noontide hour with three several shadows which embrace a granite arrow on the bank. And when those shadows come to merge in one, it is a token to one who knows their signalling, that the coloured plaque, framed by the distant meadow hedge, will soon turn from gold to gray, and a lone Wayfarer must seek the vesper benediction of a kindly rooftree's sheltering.

* * *

The Lord has opened again the eyelids of the morning and awaked the world from sleep to the joys and efforts of another dawn. One has asked in simpleness for the morning heart and morning mind. Thanksgiving has been rendered to an understanding Spirit for refreshing sleep and sleeping place. There has been the crackling of the dry twigs gathered from the dell. Bread and fast are broken while the Friend Invisible stands beside the hearth. The quiet sweeping of the cottage flags; the making of the humble bed; the drawing of the sparkling water from the windlassed well; such of the rooftree duties finished, one reads awhile of the rumbling world beyond, and then, with thankful heart and strong supporting staff, the path is once more taken to the stile and over it again to the brook beyond.

How many times and oft one has gone out in the morning gladness, and from the golden curtain of the sun-panelled sky, felt—seen almost — a glad Spirit with life-giving, happy tread hasten to meet one with out-stretched arms, to uplift and imbue with the strength-giving light of the dawn.

How often in the days of other wayfaring, as one has knelt in weariness beneath a vaulted roof, worn with the day's anxiety, mind and heart unable to quicken the weary limbs, there has come gently, compassionately, through the arched aisles, the soothing spirit of harmony sent upon its life-compelling mission by the fingers of a master on the organ keys. And, there in the gathering twilight, it has taken on the form of One Other who ever knows, and feels, and understands the need of weary souls, who, coming, lays His hand upon the bowed head and grants one peace.

The Spirit of music, the Spirit of the sun's glad dawn, the Spirit of the lapping waters on the beach, even the Elfin Sprite that smiles a child's glad smile from the field pansy's dimpled cheek, are not they, with many a human touch of courage in the hourly need, hands of His reached out to lift above those weakening influences which come to every heart in every clime—handclasps to be taken gladly to hearten us and give us strength.

* * *

The wild roses are fully abloom — Audrey has just now left a great bundle of them in their unkempt revelling to grace my oaken board. They are not as those my hands have tended there by the garden wall nor can they show such clear perfection, but the heart of man goes out to them in all their wild frank beauty. They win the love that the wild unkempt ones of the race do always find is theirs, even beneath a human self-complacency. True they are of a wild briar's bearing in their pink singleness, but it is the wild briar that gives strong durance to the budded plant, and, it may be that, in a nation's culture, the wanderers from the path of stern convention may have their place, as well as those their seeming betters.

Even this morning little Matt did startle me when, across the bridge, I saw him laughing full heartily in intimate companionship with one who knows himself as the village outcast and strangely cares not for the knowing.

It may be he would come and move some briars from the roadside to my garden for my future budding. It may be that he himself—

nay I will not say it so. He is but one of those wild creatures who in rough singleness know not the cultured double bloom that men full often falsely deem sincerity.

* * *

So I wrote, last eventide, and this afternoon young Matt would beguile me into a journey to that same group of briars to which I had looked for my future rosebush strength. There among the glory of the wild blooms' laughing beauty is nestled a lichened chaffinch nest holding in the sunlight the hope of a mother's future pride. The thorns of England are not far from that which makes the Throne of God.

* * *

To every traveller as he journeys over the unknown way of life, for no chart of others can ever wholly avail for those who follow, to every such an one there must come much gladness and many a joy with the travel toil.

Many a surprise view will open among the trees to some distant tower of nature's building. Many a little flower, hidden among the rocks or fallen trunks, will claim his interest in a great Creator's wonder working power.

Here, the cool inspiration of the starlit night-watch; there, the hidden glory of the noontide sun as it sparkles in the torrent spray of the gorge beneath: To-day it will be a little child at play among the firs; to-morrow a hoary-headed stalwart nearing his goal on life's horizon: These and a thousand other crowding interests will help him in the winning onward to his ideal. But ever to the travel-parched lips of his heart there must come the thirst for the hidden waters of the spirit river which flows from the throne of God, a thirst which may be slaked, here and there, by a quiet spring of earth's feeding, but which can only find its ultimate satisfaction in the drinking of that water which He gives within, welling up into eternal life.

It is the mind's thirst for the Absolute; the heart's longing for the Infinite! the soul call of the Divine;—or so a tiny ring of petal blue seems to say to me as I cross the meadow to the seat that Matt has lately placed for me beneath the oak. I pluck it from its hidden place among the grasses, and bear it with me to think of it awhile.

What is there in these blue flakes to make the worth of life of such a flower, born to bloom but for a few short days, to raise its coloured cup above the earth, then plucked to wither in a cripple's hand? Yet, here, within my palm, lies the richest blue of heaven carrying my thoughts afar into the heart's own Absolute.

As I hold it, settling upon its azure fringe, there comes a tinted butterfly with a life fleeting as its fleeting wing, yet drawing its existence from that of the intangible Spirit of the Infinite.

And what of the palm on which they rest? Is it more worthy of respect than they? It is the instrument of a human soul, and yet how small that crippled soul—unless it truly be Divine. God knoweth more than I, yet, as I ponder on the petal blue, methinks that He would interpret it alone as part of His great life and worthy its existence only so.

And, coming nearer home, my mind can judge its own thought but in such a light. What are those fond, frail feelings that come daily to a lowly heart of one so circumscribed?

Feeble they are, and mayhap foolish (so men would say) surely fleeting, and of little seeming worth, yet when carried unto the heart's love of the great Interpreter, methinks that in the light in which He reads, Divine, Eternal, Sure, they will be understood and worth a cripple's while.

* * *

Mine, truly, is a humble home—but two small rooms—a rough hewn board on which to break my fast—an armchair—the bench is seldom used—a cottage cot, so set beneath the eastern lattice that I may see the sunlight bathe the morning sky.

And those, my fellow creatures, who travel up the road across the rise, would tell you that I live alone—But what is loneliness?

Yet, mayhap, they do not understand, nor can one tell them, never coming to enquire? These two rooms are but the place of sheltering, kept for a crippled creature within the palace gardens of my Lord.

The door, there, opens out upon the golden pathway across the summer sea unto His sunset throne. The interwoven lattice work,

above the little cot, fingers the quiet moonlight's silver-silken locks gently moving in the breeze upon the sleeping bosom of the summer fields. These larger rooms of His great house do freely open unto me, and who shall say that they do rest untenanted.

Nay, at eventide, when deep gold does merge to silver, and again at morn when burnished silver flashes back the light of living gold, when men do say that all is still, and feeble mortal breath is like to cease, then most it seems to me His palace is alive with His great retinue, and then most like, that He Himself may tread the flag that marks my humble door and, opening, may enter in and speak with me and I awhile with Him.

* * *

Why is June the month of human wedding unless it be as the month of song? Fussy robin, flashing swift, and crafty old cuckoo, all of them are vieing in the sunlight to make the great world seem an even brighter place. Blackbird, thrush and lark vie with them in more melodious tones. I know them all for

they are the blithe members of my summer company. What loss it were to those dull minds, who do but plod each day their earth-born way unto the village labouring, to be unconscious of the welling notes in meadow and glad hedgerow. What care they even for the blackbird's fluty tone; their heart's interest is not for the spirit things of nature's life. Their day full often is to add coin to coin in sordidness, not as the labourer's due hire for noble work, but as the goal of thought and of muscle's cleaving, to leave in the end but weary care. To be rich their everything, God help them! Could they but stop awhile on the greensward and listen to the gold-crested wren in yon tall cedar; could they but know the life's keen interest of my cirl bunting in Matt's o'erspreading elm; could they but breathe the heart music of e'en those sevenfold clear notes of the blackbird's sunrise reveille, or let him sound again his evening carolling as a song of blessing on their day's dull toil, life would be the nobler for them . . . But they will not.

There he is, the dear old fellow, my friend

comes blithely into vision, framed in the white covering of a sunbonnet and arched by a moss Rambler bloom.

"Welcome lady—and to what frank warbler shall we liken your maiden song?"

"Why, Benuncle, if it is but in the spirit of it, the lark could feel no more of sunny happiness than I would sing this evening. But, Benuncle, it isn't the bird songs alone that make them all so sweet. Sometimes I steal out early in the morning and sit so quietly in Dad's big copse and listen."

One could so easily picture her intent upon her quest.

"Then you hear them talking to each other at their breakfast. The little mothers whisper out their secrets, and lover calls lover from branch to branch. Yes even the cock forgets his worldly pride in the quiet love of home and croons quietly to his sweetheart wife."

"Benuncle, do you think it's wrong to hear them—It seems as though one had no right to listen and yet I love to go because . . ."

A deepening maiden blush is all the reason the dear child can give and for once I'm not ungrateful for small Matt's revelry.

“Benuncle, wouldn’t you know that was yellow-bunting if you couldn’t see me? Do say you would, Benuncle.”

“Bless the child; yes, surely I would, Matt. You would look so like a yellow-bunting if I couldn’t see you.”

Would God the world had more such yellow-buntings whistling through the fields of life. Would God, that a few more of us might go unguiltily in the clear fresh morn to nature’s sweetest domesticity, and reawake the yearnings in a world’s seared heart.



At high summer noontide to-day, the great blue vault of the sky seems so far beyond man’s reaching. Yet withal the spirit of its clear light seems to stoop and bless all things animate, yes, and things inanimate, within the hedge-girt bounds of my crippled tread.

One marvels at the distant nearness of the blessed Spirit Lord of Life.

To many, God is a great Being, far away in the Heavens ruling a wonder world in His

great might, the God of storm and sun-fringed cloud, transcendent in His glory. To others He is the still small voice within the heart cautioning, guiding, comforting in the day's toil. To how many is He what He teaches us He is, at once the God of heart and river, the all-loving Father of family fold, and field, and stream, all-powerful but all-wise, both transcendent and immanent.

His Eastern children, rich in their mystic imagery, have grasped the truth of His indwelling. To their brothers in the West, His overruling power has made its strong appeal, but it is only when we fully learn that He is in the King's heart as well as in the water course, that His power is ours and our life His, that we can see His glory in the "daily round and common task," found this side the garden gate.



Shearing day has come, that day of busy joy when man and maid join heart and hand in human happiness, and lads look on in glee. Matt has counted the days to it for a fort-

night's space and, true to his promise, has called me with the sun's clear dawn as he claims free entrance at my garden gate. With an early breaking of our fast we sally forth.

It is good to see the wondrous plaque of golden morning colour framed by the interwoven hedges on the hill. One can feel the Great Artist's heartfelt joy at beholding His living canvas in the summer sun.

We hasten on to the farm and help make busy with that busy-ness which means the labourer's content: So on to high noon's rest, tired but at peace.

Then, by a long standing promise, little Matt comes laden from the kitchen with picnic hamper and Audrey with him, garbed in the whitest of white summer frocks, her deep brown eyes full of youth's own sweet happiness.

Weeks ago these two had ranged the fields to choose a place for the shearing-day tea. Nestled within a corner of the hedge upon the hillbrow, they had found one, sheltered here, but opening there to the view down the grassy slope unto where the curling smoke signals a snug hearth's hospitality.

The hedge to-day seems to have taken to itself the Spirit of youth's joy, for, through the tangled mass of sturdy twigs, gross grass and stitchwort have commenced their upward race to the sun, as though to see who first shall wave fair flowers aloft and bind the coming summer to the spring.

Audrey is fingering the clever coils of the brave white bryony; coils that look on to the weathering of the test and trial of many a summer storm with nought of human fretting.

Brave white bryony, it is, that leaves not progress to the chance of chiding circumstance but stores full deep the needed food for use at the signal of the summer sun.

Beyond Matt's bird-nest, over the stile there to the left, all the week I have watched the wild frenzy of the egotistic clematis, brooking no delay but grappling with friend or enemy in the one aim of winning a way higher than its neighbour, every means seeming just for such an end. -

And here, beside me, run the wedded stems of the beautiful black bryony, namesake but not akin to its white fellow, with dark leaf emblem, shaped in heartlike form, happily un-

conscious of the poison berries they will leave behind in the autumn day.

It is a fitting place for maidenhood to bring its summer joy . . . and for a lone wayfarer to turn back awhile to the happy hours of youth's own keen ambitioning.

* * *

'Tis Sunday morning. The Roadmender has donned his Sabbath homespun and wends his way across the flowered fields to take his place among the sturdy ringers who summon their fellow worshippers to prayer. Matt's farmer lad leans lazily over the stile. The cattle, conscious of the Sabbath calm, lie circled round the elm's shady trunk. The atmosphere of summer, sun-laden and scented with the perfume of a thousand blooms, breathes its silent blessing over hill and vale. And man, in his ignorance, speaks of nature's stillness on a Sunday morn.

Yet to nature the days are all as one, and her still worship is an hourly uplifting of her great heart to the Lord whose blessings wait not the pause in human toil.

Wilt give us, Father, at the gleam
Of morning's dawning ray,
The child-heart trust that slips its hand
In Thine throughout the day;

To walk with Thee, through life's broad hour,
The winding path's incline,
O'er crag or stream, through thorn or flower,
In ways so truly Thine;

Throughout the noontide sun's broad heat,
Or 'neath some passing cloud;
Along Love's archéd avenue reach
With head in reverence bowed.

Full knowing that, through quiet shade,
Thyself wilt surely guide
Us unto peace, and sheltering home
And sleep at eventide.

* * *

The day has had that lazy kind of peacefulness that comes to one most surely in the quiet lapping of the water over some pebbled reach. It has been spent in a restful roaming along the many windings of my friendly stream; beneath the ancient timbered bridge and on along the narrow loam-pressed path through overspreading undergrowth; fresh, cool, glad, cleanly spirit of river and rivulet welcoming

as one trod one's silent way. Here was less of England yet only truly less in so far as England's heart has lost the spirit of Arthur's staunch manhood in the fens. The valley in its quietude seemed more to have clasped in memory the atmosphere of those wild days of the land's youth.

Half ancient tropic, half breathing out the life of the Arthurian fen, a massed growth of broad British waterdocks, crowned in their luxuriance with the seeming azure gems of the circling dragon flies, take refuge from the more modern encroachment of the upland life. Here is a world with spirit all its own, clinging in unconsciousness to the far ancient flora, older far than the storied dwelling of the nearby proud Hall's human ancestry.

Tempted I was at noon to rest a little and let the spirit of the age (an age at times too careful of its own self interest) slip from me, and feel once more the freedom of that free manhood which made great England's prestige in the days of yore. All round me in my resting, great banners floated, pictured in heraldic blazonment by the massed flowers which the

yellow iris lifted far on high. Even in the bluish sheen of their leaves' strange green, they bring to mind the knightly shield of steel.

Beyond them as though a picked guard from a royal host of spearmen, a hundred rushes rustle in the breeze. They are in turn flanked on either hand by a group of brown majestic reed-maces, spurning mightily their vulgar designation of mere "bulrush" given by a careless peasantry.

Here in the valley, with ancient nature's long descent about me, mellowed in the sweet present by the pure late-opening white and gold of the water-lily cups, it is so easy to lose the sense of time and space, and voyage out into the unknown.

It is not the least of man's soul greatness, this spirit voyaging. It seems to mark him as of that stuff which has its deep reality beneath the surface of mere form and place. It seems to carry him beyond time's quick change of rich environment, into some sphere, some other state of being, which is not of these, yet which interprets them for its own wealth.

Strange creaturelings there are here too, by

the waterside. Late emerged from its two years' internment in the river's mud, a mayfly makes much ado of the few days given it to pay its court, as well it should. Strange caddis worms stumble unwieldily among the weedy growth. Swift water boatmen, in their brown dull livery, dart here and there, propelled by their own deft paddles. Deliberate water snail and swift lithe minnow, humanly scorn their fellow sprawling beetle, and the gay dragonflies fear not to enjoy their own philosophy of life. Here by the riverside it's a queer world, and not without its parallel in that strange realm where men do quaintly pride themselves upon their wise superiority.

Well, what of it? To-day I may shrug my shoulders, for the spirit knows no crippling, and fall once more to happy musing in the summer sun.

Those dragonflies, "darning needles" as we children called them in a boyhood's far colonial home: Oh, the wondrous beauty of the oft spurned creatures of man's despising! The Creator is not careless of the little things of life. See them dwelling by the sunny

reaches of the rippling stream, still garbed in the dress of a more courtly age, steel-purple wing clasping in love his maiden mate of ruddy bronze. What care they for me, or for aught else beyond the lazy river? Ruby, too, and sapphire, sport themselves, proud of their scintillating beauty in the summer sun. Dragonflies all, yet more like fairies in a fairy world.

Here the flashing iridescence of a kingfisher startles me and above I hear a rippling laugh. It is Audrey who has found my resting place, but there is no time when Audrey is not welcome.

“Why, Benuncle, I thought a veteran could never be surprised or startled; and the old Kingfisher must be chuckling at you too.”

“Well Friend-lady, the veteran was wayfaring somewhere in King Arthur’s dear old land, and the Kingfisher—was much on business bent in a very living present.”

“Well sir,” with a twinkling smile of confidence, “I’m really sorry to disturb you in your wandering but you seemed to me to be quite stationary, and I propose just sitting close beside you while I watch the reedwarblers do their gymnastic exercises.”

“Look quick, Benuncle, at that little russet fellow slipping sideways from reed to reed. I suppose he is right busily hunting food for some voracious cuckoo who has played a sorry trick upon him, and taken an underground passage into the world. There, look!—there he is, in all his copper coloured nakedness, for all the world like a toad in the hole, and I expect he has made clean riddance of the rightful brood.”

“It isn’t easy to love a cuckoo disposition in the world’s big fellowship, is it Audrey?”

“He is not of the fellowship, sir; I will not have it that he is —He’s bad right through— He murders when he’s young, and is a child deserter when he’s grown.”

“Yet he makes a very effective dinner trumpeter as little Matt will tell you.”

“Yes, and people take him at his own appraisal.”

The little lady’s mother instinct will see no music in my cuckoo dinner call. It may be she is right, and yet perhaps the reedwarbler’s fostering is not lost upon the cuckoo chick, nor is glad heartedness so plentiful through-

out a world's drab life that we should wish him silent, knowing his much delinquency.

"Well, madam, I can commend you to the respectable old moorhen yonder."

"She is the very model of orthodoxy and would neither think of wearing jewels or dancing in the moonlight—though, it may be, she would tell you all the latest scandal of the backwater."

"Benuncle, you are incorrigible, and I think it's time I took you home to tea."

* * *

As I look from open window, across a little plot of my own tending, to the rising of the sun, the clear fresh morning rays shine forth upon the slender weaving of a silken web with the morning dew still sparkling upon it . . . the spider's handiwork.

The spider builds little but cobwebs, but they are not cobwebs for the spider. They are just those wonder-weavings taught him by a loving mind, over which he plays in the sunlight, along which he sees the sparkle of the early morning dews, which guard his home

and help him in the earning of his daily food.

It is only men who call them cobwebs. The worthy spider's way is to make such weaving, and he does no other building than God intended he should do. Can man say always so of his own earthly plans? . . . Man, who goes out of his heaven-taught path to weave meshes to snare his fellows, who works on into the hours of the night, and outdoes the sun in its morning awakening, to devise schemes, apart from any thought of God, whereby to exalt himself, little heeding their debasing touch upon the hearts of those, alike with him made in the image Divine.

But He did not make us insects. Why then weave we webs on which His sun can never shine?

“If we would build anew and build to stay we must find God again and go His way.”

* * *

This morning as I made my way across the meadowland unto the brook, I turned aside to shelter from one of those sweet fresheners of oak and flower, and of humankind—a morning

sun shower. So having laid aside my staff, I stayed on resting within the dry circle kept for me by the overspreading branches of a friendly tree. And there I mused upon a white messenger that comes each month on this its natal day, like God's bounty, free and unconditional, except that it shall have its proper use, the letter in my hand.

These months past, since my wounding, there has come this surety for the roof-tree o'er my head. Whence it comes I know not, nor may I ask, for I am told that he who sends it would fain be the Father's human instrument, keeping from his left hand the knowledge of the right. And, in such spirit, I can but use and not abuse.

Yet, unto this his bounty is added a great word of hope, for, chosen perchance by one of those far off scions of a noble house, there is inscribed upon the overcovering envelope a motto in the ancient tongue, — "Aqua cadit resurge." Thus my friend has given me a bearing meet alike for lord and cripple— "Water falls to rise again." Given in crystal purity to cool the parched lips of mother earth,

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a tiny globe from out the azure sky—a single, simple drop of water from the sun shower of heaven, so also was child Matt's soul in its advent days upon the breast of mother love, God-given, clasped upon the great world's heaving bosom for weal or woe.

Then on it goes, in laughing gladness, to swell the rills of childhood's joyous fields, frankly glad to be alive. Doomed to fail it may be; doomed to be whirled on through gorge and canyon of the earth's withstanding rock of test and trial yet, in its liquid gladness, gathering strength as it surges forward on its crystal way.

Thus will it pass, out into the deep earnestness of the welling tide of manhood's prime, there to bear its share of the burden of the world's great commerce and life's ocean toil.

It is still a little childhood drop in crystal clearness, yet part of the welling waves that fall to rise again. Yes, rise it must, higher than the topmost curl of life's battling surge. For when the Sun of the Divine Love sends forth its golden summons to draw it back, it will find its home on high once more in the vaulting blue.

A raindrop, a child soul, given awhile in service to struggle, it may be, yet to be received back whence they came for — “Aqua cadit resurge.”—“Water falls to rise again.” Child and raindrop, fellow-wayfarers in God’s own world.

The hour is late. Ursa Major has swung far round his pole star axis toward the horizon, and yet the mood is on me, in the stillness, to trim the candle and sit at mid of night with my note book as friend counsellor. The warmth of the summer dusk permeates the air and tempts me out to wander. God’s still peace stoops down to earth unseen and breathes of sweet content. Nor is there beauty lacking in the dark quietude. Only man in his conceit would speak of night’s black shroud.

Would that a world’s lean scepticism might learn from the Crimson Underwing’s frail moth form that the Master Artist in His creating knows no such human barrier to beauty and to joy as that of darkness—or indeed of death.

Out there, even now, beyond the hedge and far abroad if one could follow in its leading, is the warm throb of pulsing life, drinking to the full of that joyous beauty which man full

freely claims alone from the summer sun. The flowers' nectar is not alone sipped at noon, for at midnight, frail moth revellers float gently down the velvet mist and carry rich fertility from bloom to bloom. My garden is no still desert while I sleep, but rather the meeting place of that swift silent concourse which loves the flowers and comes full welcome to their feast.

Spotted scarlet upon green, blue shot, is not less of colour contrast on my white petunia because a human world in its weariness is fast aslumbering. Dashing midnight emerald is not less emerald because the sun has passed awhile beyond the horizon.

There is no night. It is but man who, in his dim visioning, writes it so.

Abroad in myriad form and colour, the earth's great welling life, even as I sit in the candle glow, spends itself and is spent, while many a slate and orange herald goes flower-wedding in the dusk.

There is no night. It is but that trysting time when velvet empress sends mysterious call to her moth "emperor," to lure him to the

consecration of their life's fond love until the morn; that morn when, in man's wakening the deep reality of silence too oft gives place but to the sham of sound. In the beginning, there was evening and there was morning—one day, God made them better so, and God saw that it was good.

* * *

Audrey is away awhile with that throng so differing from those few simple hearts whose yearnings find their satisfaction within our hillside bounds. I miss her from my field path. Yet may I not still let her speak within the companying pages of my small log. Her greeting comes to me, borne by my trusty friend, who takes full pride in being postal servant to His Majesty.

“Dear old Benuncle,” so she writes, “The sea is such a different sea when there are people by it. Nearly all the days I spend in the sand, with a blue, blue sky rolling overhead and an even bluer sea at my feet, lazy, reading, watching the children play, dreaming dreams that will never come true. You build

castles in the air, don't you—anyway you look as though you do.

“Once I used to long for a little hut in the heart of a forest where no one would ever come. Then I wanted to have a big house with all sorts of things growing up it—Virginia creeper and ivy and clematis, and roses red and white, and lovely golden berries. It was to have a big garden and face sunny fields full of flowers and have a cool, shady forest behind—and was to be full of children playing.

“The children down here are wonderful, and there is one little fellow—John they call him—just two years old, with a thick mop of brown hair, the bluest of eyes and round rosy cheeks—such a sturdy independent little man and absolutely fearless. He walks calmly into the sea and shouts with glee when the waves come. He rides solemnly on a large pony up and down the sands and refuses to be held. You'd love him if you could see him, Benuncle. I've had a chance to speak with him every day now and I am breaking the tenth commandment all the time, for I'm coveting John. I want to run off with him. He was so fascinating yes-

terday that I thought I had better run *away from* him and started off inland. Later I found myself on the Chichester road and, later still, in time to steal in to Evensong at the wonderful cathedral.

“The hedges are full of beauty just now, with honeysuckle and meadow sweet, ragged robin, buttercups, clover, and tall waving grasses. I climbed over a fence and got some forget-me-nots and yellow irises, and there were lots of dogroses out. Only three people passed me all the way, but I met a robin and a yellow-hammer, some tits and two young thrushes, and a chaffinch and his lady.

“I had tea by the roadside up a nice leafy lane and watched a lark soaring, up and up, until he became a tiny speck in the blue and, at last, vanished from sight.

“Shelley’s ‘Ode’ came into my mind and I found that I could remember it all—and I owe all that to you, don’t I Benuncle?”

So she talks to me on paper—this Audrey child who has won a wanderer’s heart.

Does old Matthew know the treasure that

he keeps within his old wooden chest of a home -- I wonder, does he?

So, a few days later she resumes her log—

“I’m feeling forlorn, Benuncle—John has gone home, a passenger upon his father’s shoulder, clutching his hands to hold on by. If only I could sketch I would send you hundreds of John—dear soft baby thing and he has gone.

“It isn’t easy to write to-day. The wind blows the paper round and I have to decorate it with pebbles. I’ve been off along the sands this evening while the tide is out. It all seems so wonderful—the sea and the tide—to think that it should have been here for years and years and years—the tide going out and coming in—just so far and no farther. There are lots of wee baby crabs along the sand when the tide is out and they scuttle alone and hide underneath if they think you are watching them. Even the tiniest one can dig himself in so quickly.

“Two evenings ago there was a storm coming up right over the sea; part of the sky was a beautiful blue black and, in the west, over

the land, the sun was setting also behind clouds. But it made the backs of them all golden and then suddenly shone through until there appeared big orange gaps in the black clouds opposite. There was such a strange light on the sea and the sea-gulls and dark shadows formed a vivid contrast. There was an angry wind blowing. It was just splendid to walk along with it and feel it in one's hair—a rainbow afterwards appeared — such a lovely one. Benuncle man; I wanted you to see and feel it all.

“Now and again one makes out big steamers far away in the distance, all grey. Sometimes I rather wish I could be on one of them, and go out into the western sea toward the sunseting.

“Well my very best Benuncle—Good-Night.”

Bless the child, may not a lone heart be forgiven its joy in her strong happy youth. I too can look out to sea—and yet for me, at times it is a far, wild, restless, surging sea and savours little of the hill-girt vale's calm peace, so dear in all its sweet companionship.

Yet I love the sea for it speaks of God's great absolute, and leads one out in yearning for the infinite expression of the boundless heart of man.

* * *

An hour ago I lay foolishly, face downwards, with bared head among the waving of the summer grasses, imaging for myself a forest from their stalks. For the nonce I had the viewpoint of some brown field mouse or even a wandering "daddy-longlegs."

All round me huge forms reared themselves aloft in their seeming enormity. What a primeval wilderness must be the grass-grown fields to such small creatures. Man pities them, and yet their world may be for them a world of greater marvel than our own.

I turned upon my back, and, with head hand-pillowed, gazed into the azure of God's heaven. It seemed to smile upon me and my fellows in kindly tolerance of our slim dogmatism, and gave me to think how unstable are the standards of a human reckoning. Then some strange prompting led me out along a lower limb of Matthew's oak, a child once

more, yet not a child, for to my maturer reasoning there opened beneath me the vista of flashing colour and quick life among the grasses.

As the limb bent toward the earth, there unfolded to a mind intent upon a new interest the inner life of a small circle of a farmer's field—Yes, you may think it so; a mere patch of brown grass-clad earth, barren a few months ago, barren again a short space hence, only a hayfield. Nay, rather, it is a marvellously wonderful world in which goes on each hour that miracle, so little grasped by man's incredulity, "in which God turns hard matter into throbbing life."

This afternoon I go with little Matt to help among the hay. It is one of the few strong occupations open to the working of a crippled frame. The field-mouse's forest will be mown down by a ruthless knife—yet if purpose counts for aught, it is not ruthless—and I shall know the joy of honest toil rewarded in the evening by the right to a handmaid's care at a humble board. Audrey is back again and comes at five to make us tea, and here I know

will welcome us with food and gathered flowers from the hay.

Matt's most despised farm corner is the land of greatest beauty. Is it not often so?—Once again the shifting standards of the human estimate. For there is no greater beauty of the hayfield than when the sunset sky finds earthly parallel in the colour of the slanting ruddy light through tawny dock and sorrel, fed by a sour soil. In the eventide it shades from luminous cinnabar to dull purple and so is caught up by the wild moon daisies and transformed to a netted work of stars.

The beauty of the grasses is that beauty which has its wondrous nature, but full oft no name, and is content to take its place in the great colour scheme of the Lord of Life, unheralded. To-morrow I have great joy in store, and to-night dear peace content in the sweetest of all England's soft sweet scents born of the new mown clover.

* * *

Sometimes when, in the day's heat, a willing spirit finds a too unwilling flesh, and my wayfaring must needs be laid aside, I wait

until the evening, and then, when the last sounds of a work-a-day world have been received up into the night, I venture forth, with none to see my measured tread. And so I come unto the valley brook and rest.

It is not always in the broad light of the glorious noontide sun that God unfolds the inner secrets of His spirit life to humankind. Often the beauties of a sun-bathed world are too manifold, too rich, for the finite mind to grasp. The wealth of golden colour woven by nature for the royal robe of the King of Kings, the welling harmony of joyous song, the full free breath of heaven's air wafted in gentle waves across the upland's new mown hay, all minister to Him, and, in their ministry, tell of His love and life: But His own sweet voice is ever more like the silver cadence of the rippling brook under the midnight sky.

Still, small, speaking in accents calm and clear in the quiet watches of the heart's lone night, tenderly intimate in the darkness of sorrow, alone, yet not alone, the humbly holy feel His touch, and hear His voice, telling the needed word of strengthening hope amid the encircling gloom.

O Thou great spirit of the living God, without Whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy; Who dost pervade all space and time, seeking expression through the souls of men; grant that we, too, may feel out after Thee and find Thee; that in Thy life we may have life, and in Thy love, may come to know Thee even as we are known.

* * *

Beyond my garden gate along the hedge there are a thousand little fearless hearts beating beneath a myriad of feathers, and every tree and tussock shelters its quota of blinking eyes. Fledgelings, yet unconscious of the fear of man, keep look-out for their returning forager. Even Parson Bartolmew's church tower echoes the harsh tumult of a white owl's boisterous family. My own ivied eaves murmur with the martin's murmuring and the ubiquitous sparrow cheeps not unshrilly from the trellised path.

Young Matt is yonder searching for the unpretentious hole in the oak tree limb whence issues the noisy debate of a woodpecker's brood.

A young cuckoo, unashamed alike of its

meadow pipit's voice and heritage, cries petulantly for a puny foster mother's foolish care. Brooding, breeding life is everywhere.

Up the river yesterday a much-married moorhen could be seen as anxious for a third brood as for a first, and nature's seeming prodigality goes on apace there as here. A few weeks hence, though still in childhood's dress, they will have gained a grown self-consciousness and fear, and then will leave me to wonder of their journeying.

Yet why should I, in egoism, apply man's standards to the solemn row of kingfisher young, sitting stolidly upon a rail above the river? What know I of the sensing of that brief week of sun, ended by a waterside storm, which tells the life of many such? If life indeed be told not in terms of time and place, but by that rich experience which leaves its stamp upon the folds of memory, how few the hours that many men have lived,—how slight the meaning of that epithet called death.

Spoilt children there are among the feathered world, likewise rugged spirits keen to fly, and many, many an empty place within

the feathered nest—yet these too have seen the sun and felt the throbbing stir of life, albeit unconsciously. What would you more; is man's self-consciousness always a source of strength?

Matt is coming along the path with a young robin in his hat—fellow fledgelings in a Father's fair field—each with his own mystery and each unconscious of it.

* * *

Up a slight valley where dip the hills of Matthew's farther farmstead there spreads a field of corn full waving in the sun. And with it waves up either undulating hillside a poppy woven scarf of scarlet hue. It is as though great nature would confound Matt's talk of "weeds" and "world utility" by a flash of scarlet beauty in the golden summer sun.

Poppies and corn-marigold, they have no pride of "use" in Matthew's farm economy. Weeds they are of weeds begotten. Yet to the Divine Economist they surely have their spirit value. Mayhap beauty's worth is not less permanent than that of Matthew's use. I

know not, yet I know that for a lone cottager, searching the deeper meaning of a wider world than that of man's single and oft selfish interest, the frail, free message of a scarlet flower is not the least welcome of the myriad means used by an understanding mind to hearten a day's responsibility.

But little Matt has come to tempt me out abroad and I must down my pen and pass with him beyond the bridge to a glade I know so well within the wide reaches of the park that guards the Hall's home peace.

He wants to find a purple emperor and, it may be, will leave an old tried friend to muse and sense awhile the woodland's pure cool strength.

"Yes, Matt, the emperor does so gracefully by instinct that which man has full often failed to do."

There aloft, in the high sun of the dog days a sweeping circle of pure iridescence draws its line of grace and beauty round the upper contours of the oak.

There aloft, anon, white spots and bands mark, in flashing pure relief, the infinite care of

the Divine Artist for the frail things of life's great studio.

Here and there at play and interplay, a dozen small purple "hairstreaks" mimic the emperor's seeming prouder life.

Yonder where wanders my "Mattling" in his quest, for well nigh a twelvemonth space, some lowly sallow, amid the damp tangle of the undergrowth, has been imperial nursery for a royal brood.

Beside me a white "admiral" settles silently upon the rich growth of laughing honeysuckle slow swinging in the gentle breeze from a gnarled oak bough. Well might a musing wanderer ask the meaning of it all.

I know not, yet 'tis wonderful—Yet sure I am that not life's length of day, but life's full rich achievement can mark the solving of the riddle of my emperor, or of Matt and me, within our sunny oakland glade.

* * *

There is no singer that brings one nearer to the sound of heaven's spirit choirs than the joyous heart-free lark full oft invisible in

the early hours, as he sings somewhere aloft where dawn steals through the portals of the opening day.

A starling, at once fond imitator of the chants of earth and heaven (truly a human-hearted bird) summoned me from my rest to his place in the old elm tree while the world was yet asleep. God bless him; what a gift he brought to me in the keen free enjoyment of a summer's early morn.

The birds are more silent than they were a month ago. They tell man's years in the sunny space of summer and have sung well the joy of youth. The grasshopper still mimics, scraping right lustily on his weird one-stringed fiddle.—Yet it is summer, and it is morn, and starling and lark sing on, great hearted witnesses to the joy of nature which is truly the joy of life.

Head bowed, I stood awhile beneath the elm and let the soaring lark express that within the soul which he alone could voice.

So, to the clearing of the morning board and to a talk with one "Old Jim" who daily passes o'er the hilltop to an honest occupation at

a village cobbler's bench. His to fit man's feet for the ways of men—no mean profession; for the ways of men are not unoft the ways made visible of the unseen ways of God. Moreover Jim is no mere trafficker in the village mart. His it is, always to rejuvenate and ever to rebuild. What more of interest could one have than such a master instinct for redemption.

Anon, it may be, I shall follow in his steps through the roadway gap yonder and down the farther gentle slope to where, in the cobbled village street, an outjutting thatch marks the overshadowed doorway of his unpretentious shop. Within that portal there is always kindly cobbler's hospitality for a wayfarer. There, too, is a leathern seated bench whereon to sit awhile and nicely weigh the echoed arguments of mighty capital and horny handed toil in social tug-of-war, or test the worth, in words, of some glib demagogue, who would fain shape a nation's destiny.

Then it may be, from the village street will come Matt's husbandman, Parson Bartolmew's clean frocked rosy maid, or e'en child

Matt himself, to pay due meed of gratitude at the cobbler's bench and fill my parable of the great Redemptor working in the lowly haunts of humankind.

* * *

So I went, and on returning came by the devious path that skirts a pond backwater of the nearby river's reach. It is the pond most dear to me, because in it, in their quiet summering, dwell the rich pure waterlilies, divinely unconscious of the murked waters whence they find their life.

Quietly I paused, for there, too, was Audrey, in snow white frock, pure maiden flower of the deviating ways of men.

Great nature's wondrous Divinity, why do we doubt Thy miracles? Has that, Thy child, less need of Thy great alchemy, has she less claim upon Thy heart's keen love, than the belated flower which tells of the working of Thy ways? Well may a crippled form hesitate to enter where nature's angel spirits softly tread.

"Audrey child, don't move—let me reach it for you." So I would fain find some frail ex-

cuse to share the inner circle of that white company.

“Thank you so, Benuncle—I’m glad you see it there before it comes to live with you; for now you will see with it all the beauty of the pond’s leaves, and the lilies that have gone before.” This nymph of Matthew’s lifts her flower aloft in the morning sun and so, in ecstasy, implants a maiden kiss within its snow-white fringe, then shelters it within a place for which keen nature made it — the throbbing bosom of her joyous maidenhood.

“I’ll see much more than the beauty of the pond, child.” And indeed, so it was. Oh, Bartolmew, in all your meditations within the four dull walls of a stuffy study, interpreter to men of the letter of the Law, have you so rich a homily as that wide-spread this morn, in all white pure humility, upon the mirror surface of a stagnant pond? Cannot you more find, mid those your fellows, the secret of the Spirit Alchemist who turns pure petal somehow from earth’s dark mud?

“Benuncle, you haven’t told me that you will like my flowers. Oh, I wonder which is

nicer to be, the first flower in the Spring or to come after all the other lilies have gone away?"

Is there then pause or reason in youth's bright day for such a choice?

"My lady, if you will accept a cripple's courtesy, methinks, this morn there is no small advantagement in flowering late."

* * *

Within the copse yonder, to-day, I found a rowan tree, quietly making preparation for the time when it shall deck itself in all its autumn glory. Since the beauty of its blossoms faded with the days of May it has been content to look unheralded to days of other triumphing. So, alike, does hawthorn vie with rosehip in the shading of that odd complement of colour from growing green to riper ruddiness.

Autumn, disguised but potent, walks abroad within the woods despite denial of a stock-dove's late brood, or the strange habiting of some buzzing bees within a wren's deserted home. At the Hall the lime's scent tells of summer's turning tide. The catkin upon some

bending chestnut bough speaks to one of days that are no more, and of others that are still to be. A myriad of insects carry on their commerce in the catkin's world. Soft burrs, so mated even now, give promise of a rich fertility and look to the opening chestnut glory of the autumn day.

Even the summer tide of sound sings with the humming bees a song of coming change. The fluttering fall of a first red lime leaf tells me that, anon, my door will have to be fast barred against the storm and stress of nature's travailing.

* * *

Near the stile in the late lazy afternoon I happened on young Matt with arms akimbo taking mental measure of a giant stag-beetle on the path. Doubtless a more giant fabrication would have come to me had I not found them there myself.

This weird creature, denizen of both earth and air, had caused no mean impression, armed with his great horns and coat of mail.

“Well, Matting man, what of it? Have you

found the great Black Prince of the beetles, mounting guard?"

"Oh, Benuncle, you should have seen him fly down from the oak and then pack up his wings inside their case—But he's very clumsy, Benuncle."

"So would you be, Sir, if you tried to fly—It's what comes of making a miner into a sky-pilot all suddenly, or a saintly breather of the heavens into a subterranean worldling—He needs a good hard case to keep his wings from soiling when earthly digging is the vogue."

I left the lad sitting all patiently upon the green until his new found armoured creature should again laboriously test his flying powers, or dig himself beneath the sod.

Yet why should one grow so meanly cynical. When all is said, what a human head has my old stag-beetle friend. How oft I've watched him full carefully unfold his close-packed wings, in awkward seeming doubt as to their dependability. How often, in some flight into a less mundane atmosphere, have I seen him carry clumsily the impedimenta of a more sordid life's environment, not infrequently to

bump again to earth in order to make another start.

Yes, my old friend beetle, there's something in your faith-faltering, still-weather, awkward effort that makes us not unclothe akin.

* * *

Shall I sit mute among the riches of the summer scene? Shall I, with many a silent poet, spend the idle summer days in lazy leisure, giving no signs of the valueing of summer wealth? Even so I question at high noon, for everything is indolent, and why should I not likewise make a summer noontide offering of quiet heart content.

The golden chalice of the buttercup is full of the sun's rich wine; may I not drink it on bended knee and taste of nature's peace?

The full stringed chords, alike of nature's colour and of song, are subdued in a whispered benediction.

The nightingale's evensong of ecstasy has given place to a mother's quiet lullaby in a hidden coppice home.

The dog-rose flame along the hedgerow, no

longer wafted by the winds of Spring, has sunk into the likened tint of the glowing coals.

What matter if the flowers do fade if seeds there are that store in their sleeping cells the spirit of the summer fields to come?

“Here where the reaper was of late,
In this high field’s dark corner, where he leaves
His coat, his basket and his earthen cruse,
And in the sun all morning binds the sheaves;
Then here, at noon, comes back his stores to use;
Here will I sit and wait.

While in my ear from uplands far away
The bleating of the folded flocks is borne,
With distant cries of reapers in the corn,
All the live murmur of a summer’s day.
Screened in this nook over the high half-reaped
field

And here till sundown, Shepherd will I be,
Through the thick corn and scarlet poppies peep,
And round green roots and yellowing stalks I see
Pale pink convolvulus in tendrils creep;
And air swept lindens yield
Their scent, and rustle down their perfumed show-
ers

Of bloom on the bent grass where I am laid,
And bower me from the August sun with shade.”
(*Matthew Arnold.*)

Here will I rest and wait the kiss of sweeter eventide’s cool breeze, and here, it may be, come again when the night has gone its silent

way into the West and left its late pressed foot-prints at the gate of dawn.

* * *

There is a great golden sea inland, curling its waves from my garden gate, as though the ocean had burst its bounds and overrun the land with a yellow surge of full ripe corn. The spirit of the late summer breeze laughs, in rippling mirth, as wave on wave of a thousand beaded heads rolls beneath its touch.

Here is a season one may well love with all its own sweet sadness—the season of fair fruition and of fairer faith—for one has stored, in the heart's own garnering, a trust akin to that carried by the missel thrush through the driven snow to Spring. Last year I heard his song at Christmastide, binding the Old Year to the New.

Yestereven I found a violet peeping from the leaves at the setting sun and yet men would well nigh call it Autumn.

“Spring songs sing on beneath my window sill
In joyous praise of summer flowers still unending,
And golden fields laugh in my face until
I feel a manhood's Autumn still unbending.”

It is the springtime spirit that I love stored up with the full summer's garnering to give a warm heart's gladness throughout the white winter snows.

There is no fear of winter's day for him who loves the summer's flowering.

I was tempted out at the sunrising to see its rich light upon the ripe fields of corn, and, as I stood, stooping to pluck a belated scarlet poppy and to hold it aloft above the sea of gold, a joyous laugh came to me from the distant hills. Its ring of mirth was as the poppy hue in life's great garden, springing up amid the deeper tones of prayer and meditation, opening to meet the sun's bright rays from heaven and frankly glad to be alive in God's good world.

Some would root this poppy out from its allotted place and make life one long drear monotony. But God gave it the brightness of its colour, then let it be. It cheers the landscape and lightens many a step throughout the day.

I stored up the spirit of care-free laughter of my unknown friend, and brought it with me to my breakfasting—and I placed the poppy

lovingly upon the board to smile upon my humble fare.

* * *

Round Parson Bartolmew's square tower the swifts have been busily weaving invisible curves in the clear air, filling, in their joyous way, the best of the Summer time.

Only this morning, as I stood awhile at the roadside gate and exchanged a matintide greeting with two honest, toil-bedewed friends, on their way to the village forge, I saw, thrown into plain relief, a number of my feathered fellows restlessly perched upon a distant wire. And, from watching them awhile, I came to break my fast with the knowledge that this restlessness betokened an early farewell and a parting for other lands.

These hunters of the high sky air have felt the chill above and know full well that their store of insect food is falling low. In a week or two they will be no more, yet I shall think of them as they dash upon their southern way in the darkness of the night, with a frail feathered instinct for their Divinely sufficient compass.

On odd days in the few weeks to come, some lone stragglers from a more northern clime shall bear with them, in passing, my grateful memory of their wondrous freedom of God's clear air.

Many a day's glad wayfaring have I had in spirit with the circling swifts, many an hour's free flight in regions beyond the dust of the sombre road. Now I must have heart's content in the watching of the swallows in their less lofty haunts, until they too shall say farewell and pass to other scenes.

* * *

Again Audrey has gone away beyond the horizon, and writes from the moorlands by the northern sea.

What is that strange wistfulness that comes to the soul when the form that one has learned to love has vanished from the circle of one's daily round?

Is it the clinging of the heart to the things of earth, or is it the craving for human expression of the unseen spirit bonds of life?

I sat long this evening in the gathering twi-

light, fondly, maybe even foolishly, scanning the pale blue sheets which the postman left me within the roughly shapen box at the turning of the path across the nearest field.

“From the top of the world,” she begins, in her dear familiar scribbling—“My very good Benuncle.

“Why cannot one blow a fairy wish down your way and transplant you over here this morning. You would be steeping yourself in beauty, and you would feel yourself growing and growing as I do when I get right up above the world.

“All my little busy life, so full of tremendously important tiny things, seems to be a dream and this the great reality, and most of those foolish people we know would put it the other way round.

“I’m right at the top of the world, Benuncle, and lying full length in a perfect sea of heather. The wonderful purple kind is at its best and the smaller kind is just coming out in every shade of delicate pink and mauve and all in waves of colour.

“All-a-growing, all-a-blowing, quite un-

knowing of its loveliness—No one to make much ado of it or pay it compliments.

“I expect the bees and the wind bring it news—Perhaps they whisper soft nothings to it and take some of its sweetness away with them, to cheer the rest of the world.

“It’s so lovely to think of these miles and miles of heather and bracken, no hedges or gates or other signs of man, only now and again a rough stone wall, put together loosely.

“There are strips of larch and fir woods with a gleam of cornfields beyond—So from the edge of the moor on to the cliff and then the sea—And the wind comes straight from there to-day.

“Over seaward there’s a haze, which gets quite thick at moments and hides the distance, only to make it look lovelier than ever when it rolls away.

“Not even dear old Dad’s home has such a lovely sky. Quite near there is this haze, then thin clouds scurrying past, and above them great soft masses, so soft one cannot see where they begin and where they end.

“Looking far off southward and toward you

—a long line of grey blue—with just enough mist over them to hide the stiff lines of corn-fields and hedges, and tilled garden rows which might bother one otherwise, and tucked away almost out of sight in the valley, are all the little respectable villages—all very demure and proper in their Sunday bonnets at this very moment.

“There now, Benuncle, can’t you come just up on top o’ the world, and sit beside me?”

So she passes to other things—her friends—the cottage home on the edge of the moorland village—the distant seaside joys.

Audrey fond child, are you trying to cheer a lone wayfarer’s soul or do you, too, truly feel the call of the Good Spirit of all kindly comradeship stealing out from nature’s glad free heart?

Am I too old to sleep upon the folded pale blue pages and conjure, in my dreams, a way unto the “top o’ the world” on which you lie among the heather?

* * *

My little brook is running dry. This morning, it was, that I noticed little pools forming

round the stepping stones, and Matt's small craft moored to a bare tree root, where once was flowing current.

For months it has sent its liquid message to cool the hearts of those who had come to it for solitude and peace.

At dawn and in the eventide, the traveller has gained fresh inspiration from the gentle murmuring of its lapping of the pebbles in its course. Alike beneath the quiet of the silver stars and in the noon's glad resonance, it has gone on its way, in calm, clear, sparkling purity; at once pure and purifying, as it flows onward to swell the heaving bosom of the broader tide of life.

And now it is drying up.

In all its pure life it has been dependent on a purer fuller source. For all its service to mankind it has ever waited upon strength behind and beyond its own control.

To the traveller in its refreshing influence, alike as to the green blade upon its bank, it must ever be but the instrument of the welling spring which alone could feed it.

Such also is the Great Lord's will for mankind.

Brooks we are, capable of bearing the cooling waters of His Spirit in living influence out into the broadening fields of a great world's work; capable of being imbued, at once, with His purity and His wondrous power to purify the circles in which we move. But always, if this power be ours, may we keep fresh in mind the one essential need, that ever at life's fountain-head the Source of the feeding spring be unencumbered lest it come to pass that the cooling waters fail.

* * *

How wonderfully pure must be the joy of the Reaper as he gathers in his corn.

And yet I wonder whether Matt's own glorying in the glorious grain is more to him than the joy to a cripple's heart, in the sense he has of attainment, in the fulfilled harvest of his summer months of watching over the fields' broad growth.

True, the fields belong to Matthew, yet, in all my poverty, there is the richest sense of ownership which, it may be, even Matthew does not know. For under all the gathering there is the

spirit of a deeper purpose which they who till the fields may often miss.

Wrapped up in the laughing gladness of the harvest joy there is something deeply earnest, deeply real, as indeed there must be in all glad-some joy.

The springtide seed's growing consciousness of power is there, beaming from the golden grain. Life's early morning welcome of the sun's warm rays, the heart-whole gratitude for many a freshening shower, the staunch frankness born of the summer breeze, all have played their part in the making of the harvest. Nor is the anxious watch of many a stormy night forgotten, for the harvest gladness is the gladness of attainment, and there is no attainment without struggle or without pain.

To strike deep beneath the superficial crust of earth's crude interests; to seek, and find, and cling to the nourishing soil found there; to lift head above the interwoven mass of clutching weeds into the purer air above; to strive on still further into the sunlight of the Divine Love, until, at last, over the field of life, there is the golden harvest joy of character attained;

such was the Springtime hope of the Reaper for us when he cast the fertile seed of His holy, all-pure Spirit within the new-turned furrow of a world's broad soul.

The glorious privilege of fulfilled attainment is ours to bring to the harvest home.

* * *

So, daily for me now, as I rest beside my stile, there is the spirit of a deeper worship in my prayer, the spirit of the singers who "build-ed them villages round about Jerusalem"; the spirit of holy, heartfelt, grateful praise.

How many a time and oft have men failed to build anything near the city of the Holy Temple save dwellings for those who plead and praise not. Prayer and petition have become synonymous, expressive of the attitude of mind and heart that go to God ever to ask and seldom to give. Yet even the lower human tie which depends on such an attitude alone is a meagre bond indeed.

An earth beneath, clad in verdant hue in glad acknowledgement of refreshing dew and shower; a sky above, radiant in the sun's bright ray; flowering hedgerow; leafy tree; lark and

linnet, each with powers given by a bounteous Hand; and now the great white fields, ready to the reaping, shame, in their very gladness, the man who builds not daily, round the shrine of his inmost heart, rooms for the spirit of praise.

Little can he ever know of the heart of that One Who inhabits the high and holy place, who pauses not in his upward path to learn the glad song of the singers in the villages round about the world city of his God.

And thus my heart goes out in gladness that still, across my little vale of life, seedtime and harvest do not fail, but that, in His goodness, I too may some day have my harvesting.

* * *

On the wall beside my latticed window hangs a little print of Millet's "Gleaners." It was given me by some laughing children as they passed upon their way from the village school. They did not know that it was a fitting picture for a humble cripple's home. For as I look from it, out through the lattice to the busy scene of Matthew's field, it seems to weave itself into my quieter life.

How, even here upon my valley slopes, the world has lost the spirit of the gleaner, the spirit that, through patient garnering of the scattered grains, finds its content in carrying home the barley ephah at the long day's eventide.

It may be but fancy, yet I like to think that, in the painting of those stooping figures, the artist had in mind the honoured gleaner of the sacred page, and I wonder which of the well-known trio is the beloved Ruth.

Again I seem to see those faithful wayfarers from the Moabitish land, passing along a sun-baked Eastern road, looking ever on, over rise by rise, to Bethlehem, "the house of bread."

Yes, and it is written that "they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of the barley harvest." They had had many a sad day together, Naomi and Ruth, and now they had come home. And under the Eastern sky the barley was casting its golden mantle over the rolling hills.

Little things had influenced their daily path—a delay at a wayside inn; the chance conversation of a fellow traveller along the dusty road; a sudden scintillating ray of the star of

eventide; a halt at noon, it may be, to cool the hot sandalled feet beside a trickling rill. Yet they were on the path of duty, and in the evening they found rest.

And there, as they trod highway or footpath, they were unconsciously working out the plan of the God of Bethlehem, that, in His own time, there should be born in the city of David, a King Who should be Christ the Lord.

May it not be too with me that the influence of a chance acquaintance, the clinging to a humble tie, the daily following of duty as one sees it, may be God's appointed use for life in influence upon the age to come.

It may not be mere chance that brings us through the garnering of a little grain to some great crisis in His noble plan.

* . * * *

In the freshness of the early morn Ruth had gone forth as a stranger in a strange land to glean in the barley harvest. It was an occupation that was humble enough, this gathering together of the stray ears that lay tangled among the yellow stubble. It was an occupa-

tion at which one might well wander far afield among the flowers, forgetful of the day's need. There were many fields for gleaning, and, in Ruth's case, as in ours, it mattered much which one she chose. For in the evening there was almost sure to be the question, "Where hast thou gleaned to-day?"

* * *

In the morning the day's pure purpose . . . at eventide the day's result. And as one comes home to rest, conscious so often of the little that one has seemed to glean, feeling the heat of the sun at noon, the anxiety that there should be some fruit for labour, the uncertainty as to the wisdom of that labour's sphere, so often a stranger in a strange land, what gleaning of God's teaching has one gathered to one's heart? That to the place wherein one finds oneself it may be God has guided, and that, even in the humble role of gleaner, one does not escape the watchful eye of the Lord of the Harvest whose golden fields are trod; this surely and it were enough.

* * *

Strangely unreal it seems this afternoon to see the funeral train wind slowly through the harvest fields, to pass in time beneath the lighthouse roof to the towered church beyond; Strangely unreal, but infinitely real, for the Lord is ever giving, and ever taking. In a world of growth and change and again changing growth, gift and deprivation are constant strands in the one long living thread.

The silvered birchen ranks, on either bank of the river of life, shed their serrated leaves to sink beneath the flowing waters, or pass on its mirrored surface to scenes beyond our ken. Yet we have seen God's wonder growth arising strong, life from death, around us, and we trust that, somewhere in that great Beyond, His power also joins His Love in wonder work for those stray leaves of humankind we have loved and lost.

And for us, in the losing, it may be His will that the value of the love may come, for in that love, it may be, He brings home to our hearts the realization that, deep in our inmost being, we know we have not really lost.

The Lord ever gives and takes, but the bles-

sing for him who truly receives, always remains as the earnest of that Wisdom Divine, All-wise, All-pure, both here and there, of the One who gives and takes away, but ever keeps from harm the children of His heart.

* * *

Then, perhaps, the cortege among the corn was not so strangely out of place, unless it be for thinking that man, unlike the wheat, is sometimes gathered ere the ripening of his manhood into fertile seed. -.

What joy there is when, in the harvesting, one looks abroad upon the fields one loves and feels that in maturity their fruits are being gathered in the garnering. In the early Spring those myriad grains were ready listening with their ears keen set to hear the sound of the raindrops on the gentle soil.

And now, in the Autumn setting of the Autumn sun, with strength stored up of life potential through gladsome days, their ears are still listening for the calling of the reaper who shall bear them home.

Would they not teach me simplicity of duty ;

would they not urge our readiness in simplicity of life?

A wondrous universe, permeated through all time, with a simple, Divine activity which is keenly alert to the adjustments and readjustments of throbbing life; which quietly keeps the even balance of interacting powers; which is ready always to grasp and forge forces, visible and invisible, in the outward manifestations of a pulsing heart; such is the God-given environment of the human day.

Feeble would he be who could not read the lesson, hourly written by the Eternal Master's hand, on the broad expanse of golden stencilled field or starry blue.

Steadily keen, simply alert, strong in the consciousness of a divine right to breathe deep the clear heaven's air; never unprepared to use the power given to win to a higher life; always ready to take a place in joyful service for Him who ever comes, and has the noble right to come, in ways invisible, instant, strange, to summon those who watch and slumber not; so, and only so, His humble followers justify their right of being numbered daily among the fel-

low workers of the Lord of Life, ever prepared and unashamed.

“To know how to be ready is to know how to live.”—To know how to be ready is, in essence, to know how to die—and live again.

* * *

All the day I have been pondering on the freedom of God’s creatures in their great world home. The swallow who has chosen to make a haven of my roof will soon be off afar to other haunts. My spider friend will spin no more across the corner of my window pane. The hum of the busy bees will cease along my garden path. Each will have answered a call to acknowledge the binding spirit of a law that few would dare to contravene.

It is the law of the preservation of their own hearts’ life. Yet each is free as the air to wander over the hillsides as I never am.

The swallow might have chosen Matthew’s home, not mine, nor need he join his fellows in their southern course.

From such thought I am tempted out way-faring far beyond the powers of a humble reasoning.

Am I like the swallow, or is my spirit of a different caste?

Free I feel myself, albeit the possessor of a crippled freedom. Yet here, in my valley wandering, is space in plenty for the working of the problem of both heart and mind. And heart and mind I have that have been prone long since to wander far afield.

Free to roam they are, I know, yet now they wander in a different land than once they did, for, in the crippling, my heart has learned the understanding wish for other spheres of thought.

Is there some great Power outside my ken who has thus crippled me, or used my crippling to change the nature of my free heart's interest? Has He indeed been shaping the moulded form of my own destiny, or does He even change the inclination of my own soul's soul?

Such are the winding ways of thought I am tempted out to tread, and they are ways of which I cannot know the end.

Free I am, yet bound to give acknowledgement to the great law of all mankind that one must render unto God the things of God, must

recognise the Fatherhood's All-wisdom and All-love.

Free I am, yet bound to know that, in His goodness, He has made me kin to Him.

And, so at eventide, my faring heart is tempted back to the simpler faith in a Father's guiding love.

Feelings I have, which maybe come with the heritage of one He calls in some sense "Son." The simple right is mine, and mine by His Great Fatherhood, to dwell a child within His own world-home.

The glad spirit of love beneath His roof does lead me to know the paths that do best suit my soul's health, that I may grow, and in the growing, come more near to His maturity. Were His All-wise love not able thus to lead our errant pupil hearts, worthy He could never be the name of Father.

Yet this is not compulsion, but deepest freedom to walk in paths that angels well might fear to tread.

Breezes and Brown Berries
Autumn

*The sure, sweet Autumn knowledge of the
well-stored years.*

III.

BREEZES AND BROWN BERRIES

It has been a day that spake of autumn, and one can sense the autumn spirit in its eventide.

There has been little craving in the heart for speech with fellowmen, and one has found more sweet companionship in the unseen mystery of the September woods. I went abroad early after the noonhour's chime had sent its circling intonations from the tower on the hill, abroad on an unknown quest. There was a spirit of restlessness within the soul that could find no answering chord in human speech, and the heart yearned for solitude.

It was not far to the sheltering of the arched boughs of slender birch and overspreading elm, and there, in Matthew's friendly woodland glade a restless form found peace.

Nature's sweet autumn brown is laying its quiet hand upon the countryside, yet the leaves are still whispering aloft. A few of them, as though in the finding of an earlier maturity, nestled in the sheltering of a gnarled and hoary

trunk. There, upon a leafy couch prepared for such a wanderer's restlessness, I sank in gratitude.

How oft, when man's convention is found wanting, and a stilted praise or censure finds little echo of reality in a heart's experience, nature reaches out a handclasp which tells of a deeper understanding and a richer strength. Thou Spirit of the woodland glade, art Thou more truly ours than kith or kin, or are we all, mayhap, the utterance of Thy mysterious thought?

There on my moss, leaf-covered, there came to me that peace and power that ever come of the life Divine which is the life of harmony.

I spread my arms abroad and with bowed head gave breathless utterance to Lanier's words—

“Ye lispers, whisperers, singers in storms,
Ye consciences murmuring faiths under forms,
Ye ministers meet for each passion that grieves,
Friendly, sisterly, sweetheart leaves, . . .
Teach me the terms of silence . . . preach me

The passion of patience, . . . sift me, . . . impeach
me, . . .

And there, oh there

As ye hang with your myriad palms upturned in
the air

Pray me a myriad prayer."

* * *

The golden bristles of the stubble have taken the place of the waving corn. The summer's sanctuary door is open for the tread of the huntsman's eager foot. A restlessness roams uncertainly across the hills. Big Matt is out fresh planning for the turning of the stubble into tilth.

Even cobbler Jim has just betaken himself with gun ashoulder to celebrate "the First." The human huntsman's instinct has conquered, for the day, his plodding spirit of humble toil.

Through my lattice, wide open to the morning sun, comes the sweet scent of the ripening flowers of Matthew's clover field.

The bees are busy on their marriage round, wedding flower to flower before they take their winter rest. The sound of their busy hum can be heard abroad throughout the countryside and tempts me out to wander, while yet I may,

scattering many a seed as I make my path to the hedge on the hillside fields. I have yielded to the unbidden desire to watch a great family of longtailed tits sporting in the sun.

Men would tell me that they come in families so the more easily to find their food and fend off the dangers of the day. Well, so it may be, yet I fain would feel that the bowl of lichen, moss and down, in which the little mother reared a dozen young, was no less nursery of the human joy of comradeship than some squire's gabled roof atop white manor walls.

A lone heart knows full well, in deprivation, the joy of sweet companionship, and that hour is not the poorest of a cripple's day which takes him, in silent gratitude, to share the laughing play of a score of happy balls of down darting here and there along the hedgerow, making fun of every vagrant puff of wind—laughing, it would almost seem, at an old cock partridge beyond the hedge who is trying to shame his feathered fellow cuckoo by rearing a brood of healthy chicks whose mother has deserted them to rear another family for a newly found mate.

Polyandry is a strange thing to a long-tailed tit—yet not less strange, it may be, is the problem of a human wayfarer's solitary nest.

* * *

Little Matt's small rugged form has passed beyond the footpath to the farm.

The day is done and peaceful eventide gives place to still more peaceful night. The stars speak to one another, and to man, of the inner heart content of the Life Eternal.

The whole of my small countryside seems to have laid its head upon the Maker's breast and there closed its eyes in rest. I am tempted out to think of Him awhile beside my stile.

The heavens are so full of thought—full as the broad earth and infinitely more "Infinite" . . . each star a noble thought of God passing upon its own appointed way above my head.

Is it not also with the feelings of our inmost being? Once and only once in their mysterious course do they pass the zenith of our heart's heaven . . . once they shine forth in all their splendour and then sink into the unknown. Grasp them at their full we must, to

live supremely, for, having passed, they are gone beyond our reach.

Is this not life's ideal, to feel each throb of the heart at the instant of its fullest beat; to weigh each thought of the mind when at its greatest vigour; to joy in the pulsing of our noblest effort; to live for every moment at its best . . . to "strive to work; to help, and helping to be helped; to suffer and by suffering to learn sweet sympathy; being perplexed to see on through perplexity to faith"; to wonder, and in our wonder to learn the truth of God; to worship, and worshipping to feel the worth of life.

Is it not only so we really *live* in passing through life's vale, and learn to climb the height on yonder side o'er which the sun sets and whence we see the fuller vision of the life beyond?

* * *

"Come and sit beside me, Benuncle, and watch." So Audrey as I found her this morning seated in a farm fence corner contentedly watching a squirrel scatter seeds to the four winds of heaven, lavish as the mother that begat him.

“He’s a wasteful fellow isn’t he, Benuncle?” and well he might be with the storehouse at his command; yet is he wasteful?

“I know not child. It may be that a higher instinct guides him and he knows great nature’s law of conservation and development, for nature ever builds and wastes not.”

“But Benuncle, there are a dozen tiny trees growing over there beneath an overshadowing branch that is bound to kill them. Why should they live so keenly only to die by being starved of light?”

Oh, Bartolmew, come answer me the riddle of all life asked in the questioning of my Audrey’s clear brown eyes.

“I know not child . . . How can I know? Yet nature loves not that her children live unto themselves. May it not be that the squirrel’s prodigality is used as the squirrel’s great Mother’s rich economy?”

Little seeds there are that come to us in ways so devious that we cannot tell, borne it may be on the wind of some strange influence, carried mayhap far afield by a freshet stream of the fleeting hour’s interest, clinging by some

unseen spur of human hearted love. Such seeds innumerable there are, scattered in the ways of men by the cunning of a spirit whose wisdom is supreme. And who shall say that they are waste, or what waste is in God's great realm?

"Bartolmew, old friend," I mused, "we don't quite seem to understand that squirrel's philosophy in a world where we have lost the meaning of your God's great Fatherhood. May it not be the All-pervading Spirit source whence we are which alone can weave our seeming waste into a grander spirit whole."

"Benuncle, do you know it's autumn, and yet the woods have sown all their seeds weeks since for the year to come?"

"Or is it years, lass . . . Who can say?" . . . I think I know a seed sown in the summer sun by some strange chance that carried it aside from the beaten ways of man, whose own maturing must search the meaning of many a spring's glad carolling . . . till life must gain that deeper life which finds its being in God's strange alchemy.

"Come, Audrey lass, the ivy will alone still

save its seeds until the pigeons come to do their planting . . . Let's come again some day just you and me, to watch them, and to think of autumns that come from summer and which point to richer spring."

* * *

This morning I was tempted out to Matt's great barn. Little Matthew would insist that I should go and watch the threshing of the corn. So there, we two, the lad in all his young vitality, and I, proud to be his friend—a crippled wayfarer—sat among the gathered sheaves and watched an earthly father's garnering. And as the hours of morning sped on unto noon, the essence of the summer labour flowed out, a seeming dead, but truly living stream of golden grain.

A few hours since, my little friend and I had crossed the autumn stubble and, in crossing, passed beneath the sturdy oak, rustling as though to say that, in its greatness, it had outlived the fleeting life of the summer's grain.

But now I fain would wonder what greatness is. For there, in the seeming sacrifice of

a million golden heads, I see the power of human fibre, multiplied a thousandfold, fed by a bounteous hand, and field on field flowing again in golden beauty beneath the summer sun. I wonder is the wheat less great in all its sacrifice than the gnarled trunk that stands foursquare to the winter wind.

God is great, and God is Love . . . It is His own heart's choice to be known so. And in the measure of the sacrificing love which we do mirror in our lives, it may be that the measure of our greatness is. Thus, who shall judge his neighbour great or small? The oak has its sacrifice no less than the corn beneath its spreading arms, and both are products of His husbandry.

* * *

Thou human-hearted land of England, who shall love thee who knows not how to love thy grey days and thy silver mists? Long hours I've stood musing at my lattice, scarce able to penetrate the curtain gauze that hangs along the valley and leaves but the muffled harmony of tone on tone that once was voiced in the flaming colour music of the summer sun. Yet

human that thou art, my valley land, my understanding of thee is not least when least there is to see. Nay rather, thy mists do tempt me out in yearning mood to learn of the silent spirit that enshrouds thee and to sense thy warm sweet spirit worth.

How often, in the morn, the great mist nymph would seem to clasp fond hands before my eyes (as Audrey sometimes does), and ask of me thoughts of what the day shall bring . . . and then, its fingers parting, I see once more the smiling beauty of the vale's brown autumn eyes.

Purple September speaks peacefully in sunny nature's autumn rest from change. All is still, save when a congregation of feathered folk pay their last reverence ere they part with fond familiar scenes. Oh, to see once more the purple bells of heather on the moors before the stern spirit of the winter comes. Yet I know a grassy hollow where I shall find the meadow saffron's royal blue e'en now waiting patiently the days when September purple shall be blended into October's more ancient scarlet of the King of Kings. Then the beauty of the

hedges will find heart expression, for nature knows no mourning garb in her last hour. Yet of all her valley colouring I love none more than the deep beechen brown whose richness tells me of the worth of all great nature's sacrifice so richly clothed.

Give me no land where green there is throughout the livelong year. God's calm deep spirit breathes to me in the breeze that steals throughout Matt's brown beechen glade and smiles in every berry tangle of the bushy hedge.

May my own life's autumn find its power thus to show rich storing of youth's fond years and may it point on to immortal spring.

* * *

"Well Audrey girl, are you gathering garlands of the fruits of spring?"

So I greet the lady as she merges from the gate which marks the place where berry coloured hedge meets hedge on Matthew's rise. Crimson vies with orange in garlanding the Audrey that I've grown to love, for not alone

is the gathered corn in witnessing to the prosperity of the year . . . night-shade and black bryony challenge the field's pale tints in a wealth of autumn beauty. Woodmouse and squirrel alike revel in their autumn garnering.

A skilful nuthatch has fixed a nut in the old oak's barky crevice and hammers it to pieces with its bill. Yet the sunshine hours are growing fewer . . . the fields' fair friends will soon pass upon their winter way.

"Benuncle, the city folk must often miss the beauty of the berries."

"Yes, child, and yet there are beauties of the city street."

So I say, although my heart misgives me. What is that vagrant thing called happiness that this my friend and I so fully know. Methinks I envy not the heart that vaunts its pride in place won from the glory of a city's circumstance, yet wisdom tells me that such an one can claim its own advantagement.

"The city folk would think us so uninteresting, dear old friend."

"And so they would, lass" . . . "Well, what of it?" . . .

We hear no singers of a world's broad stage, save the thrush's carolling in the early morn; no academy can we inspect with seeming preference for this or that, yet God has hung for us a canvas in the sunset sky; my village gossip differs not so greatly from that of my manor lord's own London club; Matt's interest in the prices on the mart of corn is the interest of those perhaps on 'change.

Around the corner of the hill, there, with uneven gables gathered stragglingly about the village pump—there is London, for there is human life. And I need but wander to the door of the cobbler's proud place of labour to find keen interest, fond love, and even those strong shreds of hate that go to make a world's great commerce. His pride in politics is not so greatly different to that which poses in a nation's parliament.

* * *

Great God why should I write these things when round me the withered leaves are whispering them. Birth, fortune, mutability, strange death, do pass my door no less than

were it hinged in Piccadilly, and of my lot and youth's sweet company I need crave no betterment.

* * *

A wayward mood has tempted me these three hours past to sit in musing silence by my lattice and watch the gathering of the autumn gale.

In the early hours of morn the sky was clear with that cool October clearness that often welcomes the autumn sun. Then, out from the infinite unseen, there came the first gust of a southeaster telling of the coming unsettlement of wind and rain.

Not long did I spend in sheltering the few stray bits of worth in a humble garden close, hoping the while that Matthew would not let the boy abroad: then to my eastern lattice to play the role of watchman of the heaven's wayward sport.

Silently, almost as though in pious act, making the sign of my crossed window leads upon its broad forehead, the mounting sun's red ball sinks into the gathering haze . . . stealthily the blue grey haze shapes a greyer

cloud. There is a strong full welling of the heaven's air, and then a lull as though conspirators unseen are shaping their nefarious plans. So a surprise gust startles one from the southwest, a sort of spirit caprice from an unexpected quarter. Cloud on cloud, in pale blanket mantle, forms behind the darker screen of grey; my roof tiles sound the first oncoming of the spattering outriders of the rain.

The room within my lattice grows more dark and I at heart more lone, thinking of those souls abroad who must needs brave the anger of the naked sky.

Beyond the roadside hedgerow, great rolling clouds of dust reel in headlong rout through the cutting in the hill.

A news-sheet, late bearer of the tidings of the world's broad happening, sweeps aloft a frantic signal of the oncoming storm. Leaves of elm and oak scamper here and there for shelter beneath the hedges, and one lone leaf sprite finds itself encaged within the corner of my window pane, lashed pitilessly by the growing wind.

A hundred rivulets form across Matt's field

and force new channels in the soil as they surge on their short-lived course to the greater stream which bears them to the sea.

Anon above the roar and slash of wind and rain there comes a startled knock and cry . . .

“Open the door, Benuncle, and let us in,” and entering, with a rush of the spirits of the storm that sadly sets my breakfasting in disarray, is that astounding urchin who bears the name of a saint.

“Matt, you ragamuffin, what means this guilty wayfaring on a morning such as this . . . and whom have we here to take welcome shelter with us from the gale?”

“I’m sorry indeed, Sir, so to intrude,” . . . and a frank smile lightens a manly brow whose fine dark locks are hatless and dishevelled, as hand grasps welcoming hand . . . “But I found the laddie sheltering behind the great oak upon the hill-rise yonder, beyond the brook, unable to gain further on his way to school; not in fear, for he was busy tracing the course of a ‘little Revenge’ as it fought its way among a fleet of great cloud galleons pictured in his mind as late from the Spanish Main.”

“I might have carried him on with me to the Hall but he begged me bring him to ‘Ben-uncle.’ And truth to tell I was not loath to bear him company; for he showed me many things beneath that old oak’s sheltering that are not contained in books or in the world-wise minds of men.”

“I thank you, and I’m glad to have your company. The little lad is dear indeed to the heart of a lone dweller far from a more vigorous human comradeship. We call each other wayfarers, Matt and I, and our steps are not always bound to the paths of earth.”

“We just pretend sometimes, don’t we, Ben-uncle,” and a child’s fond hands grasp my threadworn jacket and toes are tipped to tell me of a secret.

“Aye, lad, all the world pretends but mostly with no such real pretending . . . But now you have come, let us gather round a forgotten breakfasting and keep good company at a humble board.”

So we three, stray hearts of the sons of God, give thanks for shelter and the hearth fire’s glow and leave the gale to its own wild ways without.

Little Matt must take the master's place at the board and the stranger seems no stranger to our company.

He talks of storms in other lands and of the lone night-lashing of the sea. He tells us too of another boy, his boyhood self a decade since, a rider of the foothill ranches of the far off West, of ponies spotted in peculiar ways, of gopher burrows and of white owls, whiter than the Winter snows. I wonder not that little Matt had so soon learned to call him friend.

He notes the beauty of the cyclamen star shower on the window sill and tells of a thousand such wildly shedding their motherland's home comfort and home care.

So the music of a full youthful voice leads us out into the romance of the New World's life, and Matt is lost in wonder. 'Tis one of those chance happenings of the unplanned day which bring to men great issues in their train.

The wind abates, the pauses in our converse are marked by faint flashes of a sun, crossed by scurrying clouds. Then a long warm ray seems to sign a benediction on nature's peace.

We look out to see the beech boughs stripped

of their summer garb, yet shining every twig of them, mirrored in their beauty by fresh formed pools.

“May I not some day come again and thank you for your shelter from the rain; and shall I find the laddie when I come?”

“’Twere our poor gratitude to say you welcome, and the boy needs no lip expression of his joy.”

So firm friends we part . . . man and youth and joyous boyhood each bearing his part of that great divine appreciation of a divine environment which the Master Man might well name His own heaven.

* * *

It is hours since little Matt took his evening way unto his Father’s farm . . . hours since the red ball of the sun sank into the sea haze.

My quiet vespers have been said, and the vesper prayers have brought me to what would be the hour of compline in the distant monastery long since dismantled by an age too little reverent of the chiselled handicraft of willing hearts. I like to think that still, in the gathering twilight shadows, the spirits of prior or

cowled monk pace yon arched aisle and say again a peaceful "Pater noster" as the world settles itself to sleep.

Long I have sat dreaming as twilight grey has given place to the silver moon's sweet mystery, and that vague radiance of hers has stolen into quiet heart and mind.

The clearer outlines of thought and feeling have become merged into something of the phantasm that partakes of the moon's silver sheen and all is vague, indefinite, intangible, inarticulate. The mind's voices are confused and ghostlike as the distant murmuring of a thousand tongues of man, or of wave upon the autumn coast.

The coals are dying on the hearth; the broad moon shines across silvered fields full into a lone mortal's solitary room. It is the hour of the day's calm reckoning of the worth of life; the hour when time and tide give place and the fundamental being stands shorn of the cramped accretions of an earth's vicissitude.

With head on hand and face keen fixed toward the lattice-figured sky, there comes to one a mingled murmuring of a thousand unsatisfied yearnings of the soul.

Unfulfilled and inarticulate desires long since stifled by hard circumstance; sorrows and regrets innumerable, oft born in silence beneath a superficial mask of pleasantry; joys scarce sensed yet infinitely real; heart vibrations that have ever added their deep undertone to the day's material aims, mingle and take shape beneath the moon's calm understanding in that deep spirit consciousness which is neither heart nor mind. Take shape, aye and become the voice which, in its calm full tones, speaks of a man's real self.

There in my solitary habitance in the moon's full silver searching of my heart, thank God, I am not crippled and in years I am content.

* * *

Far eastward and somewhat in from the coast there is a little wood, hidden within the hollow of the hills, which shelters a cottage like my own yet long dismantled by the tests of time. For me it is beyond the distance marked as pleasurable in my crippling, yet with Matt's own happy laughter and the tempting goal of Audrey's opened hamper, I find myself

a not unwilling captive in the train of youth, marched to it in triumph o'er the rolling meadow hills.

Just now there is the greater joy of gathering those strangest of all nature's progeny, the mushrooms, much prized for the table at the farm.

Within the hidden bounds of the little wood, with the mellowed environment of an old cottager's still four standing walls, we three recount those ancient tales of fairy ring and stool, with canopy pink coloured, used for the sheltering of some princely fairy throne, for the nonce unmindful of that ill attractive word of human weaving, "parasite."

What boots it to a happy trio on pleasure picnic bent that these small forms of beauty are but emblems on the coloured windows of the halls of death. Are there no human parasites of loathlier form gathering their sustenance from others' weakened fibre who cannot e'en lend substance to a fairy tale.

Nay, why dole dry wisdom in the filtered autumn sun when Matt is calling me to "see the witches' brooms" black outstanding on the beeches through the paddock gate? Why take

from earth the spirit of the elves who fashion, in their moon-light frolic, Chinese umbrellas for some fairy Oriental, or crinkled puff ball cushions for a lady of the silver lighted glade.

“Why, Audrey child, we humans never dream of such an elfin consummation as an oyster feast upon an old tree stump. Look, it seems they’ve even left their menu half hidden in the moss.”

A startled cry and Audrey has sprung forward, and menu and maid alike have disappeared leaving me to feel that the old world is not less full of mystery than “faery rings” and glades where elves hold midnight revel.

Well what of it? . . . truly the ways of womankind are wondrous ways . . . The child’s secret is her own, nor is mine to ask who leaves such message hidden in the moss. “Ho, Matt, come and help me pick these champignons.”

* * *

For a week past the old oak has been shedding its leaves gradually, yet in such a way as to make one feel that it had come to a point where it could give no more. There the shedding

ceased until this morning's frost stripped it bare of covering.

The dear old fellow would seem almost to have been trying slyly to cheat nature of her due. How human he is after all, to go on adding up his days and to think that as he adds the total will not come.

Yet he is ready for the winter, and he can see on to the spring.

Down, deeprooted in his nature, safely guarded from the winter's frost, is the sap that shall spring into new life with the mounting April sun. His bark shows signs that tell of other leaves to come.

So with the passing of the tree's brown covering one numbers one's years. They are but marks on the great calendar of the Lord of all good life, put there by loving hands lest we forget the message of the month. They point on to His earthly natal day and past it to an Easter resurrection.

To many a sad heart it may be that they speak of death, yet, in their sadness, they bring the autumn peace.

No less truly in their passing do they speak

of life from death, for, from them comes the verdure of a future growth beneath the summer sun. In their own autumn way they tell out the Lord's great message of all-abounding hope, that from earth and all things earthly can grow strong life, and life, beneath His caring, grow to perfect love.

While I may, in these still days before the winter winds prevent my going forth, I take me to my prayer seat at the stile, and there I breathe the spirit of the autumn air that bears even now the scent of summer flowering and of winter snow.

From the thought of these there comes, across the meadow's fresh turned loam, the spirit hope of a nobler springtide in the divinely human lives of men.

* * *

The Master Artist has been busy on a study in autumnal gold and man to-day well revels in Nature's own proud heraldry.

True, it's not the kind of day that poets have been tempted out to live in rhythmic metre . . . November has been ever slighted by

minds steeped in the flower warmth of sunny June, or set aglow by the flickering romance of Noel's hearth-side cushioned chair.

Yet spirit there is in this brown golden autumn month, when Sol goes wayfaring beneath the Sagittarian sign, that speaks in pensive accents to the human heart, and calls it out to sense a sterner air than June e'er fosters.

The scarlet of the huntsman's coat finds meet setting in the green and gold of such a day, and the hunting horn sounds right merrily over the rolling slopes of the upland glebe.

The bay of the hounds seems sweet music, swelling here and there in its emergence through an opening in the copse coated land. Even bracken and wild blackberry grow richly ruddy in the excitement of the chase.

Ploughman and peasant alike, with each great heart of gentle birth throughout the countryside, share the morn's glad holiday.

Before he disappeared in the gathering dusk last eventide little Matt whispered to me that much prized, common secret that the hounds would gather near the coppice by the eastern lodge at "three bells of the morning watch."

Matt has been boon companion to one, Midshipman Easy, since they were introduced by his storm rescuer from the overseas a fortnight since.

Oh, the clean joy of the woods in the early morning, cub or no cub; to breathe the still November air, frost tinged; to pass fond hands along the dew-washed saplings; to watch those contrasts cast Rembrandtesque, by the slant sun within the birchen glade.

Keen artistry so challenges my huntsmanship that I, for one, feel no sorrow for a cloudless sky. The sure joy of a cripple in such a scene needs no such misty aiding.

“Good-morrow, good Benuncle, dispenser of kind hospitage in stormy weather;” . . . so hailing me, Matt’s friend, smocked in the bright regalia of the hunting morn, draws rein in his merry canter and reaches down to me a frank glad handclasp from a wide dominion beyond the ocean main.

“Good morning, Friend, whose name as yet I know not, fearing indeed to use Matt’s nomenclature, for he, I gather, has dubbed you ‘Rollo’ from the ranch.”

“This morn indeed you look not much a ranchman and yet there is the homely mien of comfort on your steed that is not learned in sundry canters down our tree girt bridle paths.”

So comes youth’s rippling laugh which it’s always good to hear.

“Now Benuncle,” quoth he, “surely you would be the last to judge a man by the scarlet weaving of a loom concocted by Semiramis.”

“Friend, new found, twere a far flight e’en for youth, from Nineveh to a watcher of the western plains.”

One does not often have the joy of tilting so with mind keen shaped to mind within the confines of my small domain.

“Nay, Benuncle would shiftily evade the prairie’s frank philosophy,” . . . “But anon I shall come visit him and discourse right heavily upon the ways of man.”

“Aye, come lad, and welcome always at Benuncle’s open door.”

“This morning with a huntsman’s scarlet coated chivalry . . .”

low workers of the Lord of Life, ever prepared and unashamed.

“To know how to be ready is to know how to live.”—To know how to be ready is, in essence, to know how to die—and live again.

* * *

All the day I have been pondering on the freedom of God's creatures in their great world home. The swallow who has chosen to make a haven of my roof will soon be off afar to other haunts. My spider friend will spin no more across the corner of my window pane. The hum of the busy bees will cease along my garden path. Each will have answered a call to acknowledge the binding spirit of a law that few would dare to contravene.

It is the law of the preservation of their own hearts' life. Yet each is free as the air to wander over the hillsides as I never am.

The swallow might have chosen Matthew's home, not mine, nor need he join his fellows in their southern course.

From such thought I am tempted out wayfaring far beyond the powers of a humble reasoning.

Am I like the swallow, or is my spirit of a different caste?

Free I feel myself, albeit the possessor of a crippled freedom. Yet here, in my valley wandering, is space in plenty for the working of the problem of both heart and mind. And heart and mind I have that have been prone long since to wander far afield.

Free to roam they are, I know, yet now they wander in a different land than once they did, for, in the crippling, my heart has learned the understanding wish for other spheres of thought.

Is there some great Power outside my ken who has thus crippled me, or used my crippling to change the nature of my free heart's interest? Has He indeed been shaping the moulded form of my own destiny, or does He even change the inclination of my own soul's soul?

Such are the winding ways of thought I am tempted out to tread, and they are ways of which I cannot know the end.

Free I am, yet bound to give acknowledgement to the great law of all mankind that one must render unto God the things of God, must

recognise the Fatherhood's All-wisdom and All-love.

Free I am, yet bound to know that, in His goodness, He has made me kin to Him.

And, so at eventide, my faring heart is tempted back to the simpler faith in a Father's guiding love.

Feelings I have, which maybe come with the heritage of one He calls in some sense "Son." The simple right is mine, and mine by His Great Fatherhood, to dwell a child within His own world-home.

The glad spirit of love beneath His roof does lead me to know the paths that do best suit my soul's health, that I may grow, and in the growing, come more near to His maturity. Were His All-wise love not able thus to lead our errant pupil hearts, worthy He could never be the name of Father.

Yet this is not compulsion, but deepest freedom to walk in paths that angels well might fear to tread.

Breezes and Brown Berries
Autumn

*The sure, sweet Autumn knowledge of the
well-stored years.*

III.

BREEZES AND BROWN BERRIES

It has been a day that spake of autumn, and one can sense the autumn spirit in its eventide.

There has been little craving in the heart for speech with fellowmen, and one has found more sweet companionship in the unseen mystery of the September woods. I went abroad early after the noonhour's chime had sent its circling intonations from the tower on the hill, abroad on an unknown quest. There was a spirit of restlessness within the soul that could find no answering chord in human speech, and the heart yearned for solitude.

It was not far to the sheltering of the arched boughs of slender birch and overspreading elm, and there, in Matthew's friendly woodland glade a restless form found peace.

Nature's sweet autumn brown is laying its quiet hand upon the countryside, yet the leaves are still whispering aloft. A few of them, as though in the finding of an earlier maturity, nestled in the sheltering of a gnarled and hoary

trunk. There, upon a leafy couch prepared for such a wanderer's restlessness, I sank in gratitude.

How oft, when man's convention is found wanting, and a stilted praise or censure finds little echo of reality in a heart's experience, nature reaches out a handclasp which tells of a deeper understanding and a richer strength. Thou Spirit of the woodland glade, art Thou more truly ours than kith or kin, or are we all, mayhap, the utterance of Thy mysterious thought?

There on my moss, leaf-covered, there came to me that peace and power that ever come of the life Divine which is the life of harmony.

I spread my arms abroad and with bowed head gave breathless utterance to Lanier's words—

“Ye lispers, whisperers, singers in storms,
Ye consciences murmuring faiths under forms,
Ye ministers meet for each passion that grieves,
Friendly, sisterly, sweetheart leaves, . . .
Teach me the terms of silence . . . preach me

The passion of patience, . . . sift me, . . . impeach
me, . . .

And there, oh there

As ye hang with your myriad palms upturned in
the air

Pray me a myriad prayer."

* * *

The golden bristles of the stubble have taken the place of the waving corn. The summer's sanctuary door is open for the tread of the huntsman's eager foot. A restlessness roams uncertainly across the hills. Big Matt is out fresh planning for the turning of the stubble into tilth.

Even cobbler Jim has just betaken himself with gun ashoulder to celebrate "the First." The human huntsman's instinct has conquered, for the day, his plodding spirit of humble toil.

Through my lattice, wide open to the morning sun, comes the sweet scent of the ripening flowers of Matthew's clover field.

The bees are busy on their marriage round, wedding flower to flower before they take their winter rest. The sound of their busy hum can be heard abroad throughout the countryside and tempts me out to wander, while yet I may,

scattering many a seed as I make my path to the hedge on the hillside fields. I have yielded to the unbidden desire to watch a great family of longtailed tits sporting in the sun.

Men would tell me that they come in families so the more easily to find their food and fend off the dangers of the day. Well, so it may be, yet I fain would feel that the bowl of lichen, moss and down, in which the little mother reared a dozen young, was no less nursery of the human joy of comradeship than some squire's gabled roof atop white manor walls.

A lone heart knows full well, in deprivation, the joy of sweet companionship, and that hour is not the poorest of a cripple's day which takes him, in silent gratitude, to share the laughing play of a score of happy balls of down darting here and there along the hedgerow, making fun of every vagrant puff of wind—laughing, it would almost seem, at an old cock partridge beyond the hedge who is trying to shame his feathered fellow cuckoo by rearing a brood of healthy chicks whose mother has deserted them to rear another family for a newly found mate.

Polyandry is a strange thing to a long-tailed tit—yet not less strange, it may be, is the problem of a human wayfarer's solitary nest.

* * *

Little Matt's small rugged form has passed beyond the footpath to the farm.

The day is done and peaceful eventide gives place to still more peaceful night. The stars speak to one another, and to man, of the inner heart content of the Life Eternal.

The whole of my small countryside seems to have laid its head upon the Maker's breast and there closed its eyes in rest. I am tempted out to think of Him awhile beside my stile.

The heavens are so full of thought—full as the broad earth and infinitely more "Infinite" . . . each star a noble thought of God passing upon its own appointed way above my head.

Is it not also with the feelings of our inmost being? Once and only once in their mysterious course do they pass the zenith of our heart's heaven . . . once they shine forth in all their splendour and then sink into the unknown. Grasp them at their full we must, to

live supremely, for, having passed, they are gone beyond our reach.

Is this not life's ideal, to feel each throb of the heart at the instant of its fullest beat; to weigh each thought of the mind when at its greatest vigour; to joy in the pulsing of our noblest effort; to live for every moment at its best . . . to "strive to work; to help, and helping to be helped; to suffer and by suffering to learn sweet sympathy; being perplexed to see on through perplexity to faith"; to wonder, and in our wonder to learn the truth of God; to worship, and worshipping to feel the worth of life.

Is it not only so we really *live* in passing through life's vale, and learn to climb the height on yonder side o'er which the sun sets and whence we see the fuller vision of the life beyond?

* * *

"Come and sit beside me, Benuncle, and watch." So Audrey as I found her this morning seated in a farm fence corner contentedly watching a squirrel scatter seeds to the four winds of heaven, lavish as the mother that begat him.

“He’s a wasteful fellow isn’t he, Benuncle?” and well he might be with the storehouse at his command; yet is he wasteful?

“I know not child. It may be that a higher instinct guides him and he knows great nature’s law of conservation and development, for nature ever builds and wastes not.”

“But Benuncle, there are a dozen tiny trees growing over there beneath an overshadowing branch that is bound to kill them. Why should they live so keenly only to die by being starved of light?”

Oh, Bartolmew, come answer me the riddle of all life asked in the questioning of my Audrey’s clear brown eyes.

“I know not child . . . How can I know? Yet nature loves not that her children live unto themselves. May it not be that the squirrel’s prodigality is used as the squirrel’s great Mother’s rich economy?”

Little seeds there are that come to us in ways so devious that we cannot tell, borne it may be on the wind of some strange influence, carried mayhap far afield by a freshet stream of the fleeting hour’s interest, clinging by some

unseen spur of human hearted love. Such seeds innumerable there are, scattered in the ways of men by the cunning of a spirit whose wisdom is supreme. And who shall say that they are waste, or what waste is in God's great realm?

"Bartolmew, old friend," I mused, "we don't quite seem to understand that squirrel's philosophy in a world where we have lost the meaning of your God's great Fatherhood. May it not be the All-pervading Spirit source whence we are which alone can weave our seeming waste into a grander spirit whole."

"Benuncle, do you know it's autumn, and yet the woods have sown all their seeds weeks since for the year to come?"

"Or is it years, lass . . . Who can say?" . . . I think I know a seed sown in the summer sun by some strange chance that carried it aside from the beaten ways of man, whose own maturing must search the meaning of many a spring's glad carolling . . . till life must gain that deeper life which finds its being in God's strange alchemy.

"Come, Audrey lass, the ivy will alone still

save its seeds until the pigeons come to do their planting . . . Let's come again some day just you and me, to watch them, and to think of autumns that come from summer and which point to richer spring."

* * *

This morning I was tempted out to Matt's great barn. Little Matthew would insist that I should go and watch the threshing of the corn. So there, we two, the lad in all his young vitality, and I, proud to be his friend—a crippled wayfarer—sat among the gathered sheaves and watched an earthly father's garnering. And as the hours of morning sped on unto noon, the essence of the summer labour flowed out, a seeming dead, but truly living stream of golden grain.

A few hours since, my little friend and I had crossed the autumn stubble and, in crossing, passed beneath the sturdy oak, rustling as though to say that, in its greatness, it had outlived the fleeting life of the summer's grain.

But now I fain would wonder what greatness is. For there, in the seeming sacrifice of

a million golden heads, I see the power of human fibre, multiplied a thousandfold, fed by a bounteous hand, and field on field flowing again in golden beauty beneath the summer sun. I wonder is the wheat less great in all its sacrifice than the gnarled trunk that stands foursquare to the winter wind.

God is great, and God is Love . . . It is His own heart's choice to be known so. And in the measure of the sacrificing love which we do mirror in our lives, it may be that the measure of our greatness is. Thus, who shall judge his neighbour great or small? The oak has its sacrifice no less than the corn beneath its spreading arms, and both are products of His husbandry.

* * *

Thou human-hearted land of England, who shall love thee who knows not how to love thy grey days and thy silver mists? Long hours I've stood musing at my lattice, scarce able to penetrate the curtain gauze that hangs along the valley and leaves but the muffled harmony of tone on tone that once was voiced in the flaming colour music of the summer sun. Yet

human that thou art, my valley land, my understanding of thee is not least when least there is to see. Nay rather, thy mists do tempt me out in yearning mood to learn of the silent spirit that enshrouds thee and to sense thy warm sweet spirit worth.

How often, in the morn, the great mist nymph would seem to clasp fond hands before my eyes (as Audrey sometimes does), and ask of me thoughts of what the day shall bring . . . and then, its fingers parting, I see once more the smiling beauty of the vale's brown autumn eyes.

Purple September speaks peacefully in sunny nature's autumn rest from change. All is still, save when a congregation of feathered folk pay their last reverence ere they part with fond familiar scenes. Oh, to see once more the purple bells of heather on the moors before the stern spirit of the winter comes. Yet I know a grassy hollow where I shall find the meadow saffron's royal blue e'en now waiting patiently the days when September purple shall be blended into October's more ancient scarlet of the King of Kings. Then the beauty of the

hedges will find heart expression, for nature knows no mourning garb in her last hour. Yet of all her valley colouring I love none more than the deep beechen brown whose richness tells me of the worth of all great nature's sacrifice so richly clothed.

Give me no land where green there is throughout the livelong year. God's calm deep spirit breathes to me in the breeze that steals throughout Matt's brown beechen glade and smiles in every berry tangle of the bushy hedge.

May my own life's autumn find its power thus to show rich storing of youth's fond years and may it point on to immortal spring.

* * *

"Well Audrey girl, are you gathering garlands of the fruits of spring?"

So I greet the lady as she merges from the gate which marks the place where berry coloured hedge meets hedge on Matthew's rise. Crimson vies with orange in garlanding the Audrey that I've grown to love, for not alone

is the gathered corn in witnessing to the prosperity of the year . . . night-shade and black bryony challenge the field's pale tints in a wealth of autumn beauty. Woodmouse and squirrel alike revel in their autumn garnering.

A skilful nuthatch has fixed a nut in the old oak's barky crevice and hammers it to pieces with its bill. Yet the sunshine hours are growing fewer . . . the fields' fair friends will soon pass upon their winter way.

"Benuncle, the city folk must often miss the beauty of the berries."

"Yes, child, and yet there are beauties of the city street."

So I say, although my heart misgives me. What is that vagrant thing called happiness that this my friend and I so fully know. Methinks I envy not the heart that vaunts its pride in place won from the glory of a city's circumstance, yet wisdom tells me that such an one can claim its own advantagement.

"The city folk would think us so uninteresting, dear old friend."

"And so they would, lass" . . . "Well, what of it?" . . .

We hear no singers of a world's broad stage, save the thrush's carolling in the early morn; no academy can we inspect with seeming preference for this or that, yet God has hung for us a canvas in the sunset sky; my village gossip differs not so greatly from that of my manor lord's own London club; Matt's interest in the prices on the mart of corn is the interest of those perhaps on 'change.

Around the corner of the hill, there, with uneven gables gathered stragglingly about the village pump—there is London, for there is human life. And I need but wander to the door of the cobbler's proud place of labour to find keen interest, fond love, and even those strong shreds of hate that go to make a world's great commerce. His pride in politics is not so greatly different to that which poses in a nation's parliament.

* * *

Great God why should I write these things when round me the withered leaves are whispering them. Birth, fortune, mutability, strange death, do pass my door no less than

were it hinged in Piccadilly, and of my lot and youth's sweet company I need crave no betterment.

* * *

A wayward mood has tempted me these three hours past to sit in musing silence by my lattice and watch the gathering of the autumn gale.

In the early hours of morn the sky was clear with that cool October clearness that often welcomes the autumn sun. Then, out from the infinite unseen, there came the first gust of a southeaster telling of the coming unsettlement of wind and rain.

Not long did I spend in sheltering the few stray bits of worth in a humble garden close, hoping the while that Matthew would not let the boy abroad: then to my eastern lattice to play the role of watchman of the heaven's wayward sport.

Silently, almost as though in pious act, making the sign of my crossed window leads upon its broad forehead, the mounting sun's red ball sinks into the gathering haze . . . stealthily the blue grey haze shapes a greyer

cloud. There is a strong full welling of the heaven's air, and then a lull as though conspirators unseen are shaping their nefarious plans. So a surprise gust startles one from the southwest, a sort of spirit caprice from an unexpected quarter. Cloud on cloud, in pale blanket mantle, forms behind the darker screen of grey; my roof tiles sound the first oncoming of the spattering outriders of the rain.

The room within my lattice grows more dark and I at heart more lone, thinking of those souls abroad who must needs brave the anger of the naked sky.

Beyond the roadside hedgerow, great rolling clouds of dust reel in headlong rout through the cutting in the hill.

A news-sheet, late bearer of the tidings of the world's broad happening, sweeps aloft a frantic signal of the oncoming storm. Leaves of elm and oak scamper here and there for shelter beneath the hedges, and one lone leaf sprite finds itself encaged within the corner of my window pane, lashed pitilessly by the growing wind.

A hundred rivulets form across Matt's field

and force new channels in the soil as they surge on their short-lived course to the greater stream which bears them to the sea.

Anon above the roar and slash of wind and rain there comes a startled knock and cry . . .

“Open the door, Benuncle, and let us in,” and entering, with a rush of the spirits of the storm that sadly sets my breakfasting in disarray, is that astounding urchin who bears the name of a saint.

“Matt, you ragamuffin, what means this guilty wayfaring on a morning such as this . . . and whom have we here to take welcome shelter with us from the gale?”

“I’m sorry indeed, Sir, so to intrude,” . . . and a frank smile lightens a manly brow whose fine dark locks are hatless and dishevelled, as hand grasps welcoming hand . . . “But I found the laddie sheltering behind the great oak upon the hill-rise yonder, beyond the brook, unable to gain further on his way to school; not in fear, for he was busy tracing the course of a ‘little Revenge’ as it fought its way among a fleet of great cloud galleons pictured in his mind as late from the Spanish Main.”

“I might have carried him on with me to the Hall but he begged me bring him to ‘Ben-uncle.’ And truth to tell I was not loath to bear him company; for he showed me many things beneath that old oak’s sheltering that are not contained in books or in the world-wise minds of men.”

“I thank you, and I’m glad to have your company. The little lad is dear indeed to the heart of a lone dweller far from a more vigorous human comradeship. We call each other wayfarers, Matt and I, and our steps are not always bound to the paths of earth.”

“We just pretend sometimes, don’t we, Ben-uncle,” and a child’s fond hands grasp my threadworn jacket and toes are tipped to tell me of a secret.

“Aye, lad, all the world pretends but mostly with no such real pretending . . . But now you have come, let us gather round a forgotten breakfasting and keep good company at a humble board.”

So we three, stray hearts of the sons of God, give thanks for shelter and the hearth fire’s glow and leave the gale to its own wild ways without.

Little Matt must take the master's place at the board and the stranger seems no stranger to our company.

He talks of storms in other lands and of the lone night-lashing of the sea. He tells us too of another boy, his boyhood self a decade since, a rider of the foothill ranches of the far off West, of ponies spotted in peculiar ways, of gopher burrows and of white owls, whiter than the Winter snows. I wonder not that little Matt had so soon learned to call him friend.

He notes the beauty of the cyclamen star shower on the window sill and tells of a thousand such wildly shedding their motherland's home comfort and home care.

So the music of a full youthful voice leads us out into the romance of the New World's life, and Matt is lost in wonder. 'Tis one of those chance happenings of the unplanned day which bring to men great issues in their train.

The wind abates, the pauses in our converse are marked by faint flashes of a sun, crossed by scurrying clouds. Then a long warm ray seems to sign a benediction on nature's peace.

We look out to see the beech boughs stripped

of their summer garb, yet shining every twig of them, mirrored in their beauty by fresh formed pools.

“May I not some day come again and thank you for your shelter from the rain; and shall I find the laddie when I come?”

“’Twere our poor gratitude to say you welcome, and the boy needs no lip expression of his joy.”

So firm friends we part . . . man and youth and joyous boyhood each bearing his part of that great divine appreciation of a divine environment which the Master Man might well name His own heaven.

* * *

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cowled monk pace yon arched aisle and say again a peaceful "Pater noster" as the world settles itself to sleep.

Long I have sat dreaming as twilight grey has given place to the silver moon's sweet mystery, and that vague radiance of hers has stolen into quiet heart and mind.

The clearer outlines of thought and feeling have become merged into something of the phantasm that partakes of the moon's silver sheen and all is vague, indefinite, intangible, inarticulate. The mind's voices are confused and ghostlike as the distant murmuring of a thousand tongues of man, or of wave upon the autumn coast.

The coals are dying on the hearth; the broad moon shines across silvered fields full into a lone mortal's solitary room. It is the hour of the day's calm reckoning of the worth of life; the hour when time and tide give place and the fundamental being stands shorn of the cramped accretions of an earth's vicissitude.

With head on hand and face keen fixed toward the lattice-figured sky, there comes to one a mingled murmuring of a thousand unsatisfied yearnings of the soul.

Unfulfilled and inarticulate desires, long since stifled by hard circumstance; sorrows and regrets innumerable, oft born in silence beneath a superficial mask of pleasantry; joys scarce sensed yet infinitely real; heart vibrations that have ever added their deep undertone to the day's material aims, mingle and take shape beneath the moon's calm understanding in that deep spirit consciousness which is neither heart nor mind. Take shape, aye and become the voice which, in its calm full tones, speaks of a man's real self.

There in my solitary habitance in the moon's full silver searching of my heart, thank God, I am not crippled and in years I am content.

* * *

Far eastward and somewhat in from the coast there is a little wood, hidden within the hollow of the hills, which shelters a cottage like my own yet long dismantled by the tests of time. For me it is beyond the distance marked as pleasurable in my crippling, yet with Matt's own happy laughter and the tempting goal of Audrey's opened hamper, I find myself

a not unwilling captive in the train of youth,
marched to it in triumph o'er the rolling meadow hills.

Just now there is the greater joy of gathering those strangest of all nature's progeny, the mushrooms, much prized for the table at the farm.

Within the hidden bounds of the little wood, with the mellowed environment of an old cottager's still four standing walls, we three recount those ancient tales of fairy ring and stool, with canopy pink coloured, used for the sheltering of some princely fairy throne, for the nonce unmindful of that ill attractive word of human weaving, "parasite."

What boots it to a happy trio on pleasure picnic bent that these small forms of beauty are but emblems on the coloured windows of the halls of death. Are there no human parasites of loathlier form gathering their sustenance from others' weakened fibre who cannot e'en lend substance to a fairy tale.

Nay, why dole dry wisdom in the filtered autumn sun when Matt is calling me to "see the witches' brooms" black outstanding on the beeches through the paddock gate? Why take

from earth the spirit of the elves who fashion, in their moon-light frolic, Chinese umbrellas for some fairy Oriental, or crinkled puff ball cushions for a lady of the silver lighted glade.

“Why, Audrey child, we humans never dream of such an elfin consummation as an oyster feast upon an old tree stump. Look, it seems they’ve even left their menu half hidden in the moss.”

A startled cry and Audrey has sprung forward, and menu and maid alike have disappeared leaving me to feel that the old world is not less full of mystery than “faery rings” and glades where elves hold midnight revel.

Well what of it? . . . truly the ways of womankind are wondrous ways . . . The child’s secret is her own, nor is mine to ask who leaves such message hidden in the moss. “Ho, Matt, come and help me pick these champignons.”

* * *

For a week past the old oak has been shedding its leaves gradually, yet in such a way as to make one feel that it had come to a point where it could give no more. There the shedding

ceased until this morning's frost stripped it bare of covering.

The dear old fellow would seem almost to have been trying slyly to cheat nature of her due. How human he is after all, to go on adding up his days and to think that as he adds the total will not come.

Yet he is ready for the winter, and he can see on to the spring.

Down, deeprooted in his nature, safely guarded from the winter's frost, is the sap that shall spring into new life with the mounting April sun. His bark shows signs that tell of other leaves to come.

So with the passing of the tree's brown covering one numbers one's years. They are but marks on the great calendar of the Lord of all good life, put there by loving hands lest we forget the message of the month. They point on to His earthly natal day and past it to an Easter resurrection.

To many a sad heart it may be that they speak of death, yet, in their sadness, they bring the autumn peace.

No less truly in their passing do they speak

of life from death, for, from them comes the verdure of a future growth beneath the summer sun. In their own autumn way they tell out the Lord's great message of all-abounding hope, that from earth and all things earthly can grow strong life, and life, beneath His caring, grow to perfect love.

While I may, in these still days before the winter winds prevent my going forth, I take me to my prayer seat at the stile, and there I breathe the spirit of the autumn air that bears even now the scent of summer flowering and of winter snow.

From the thought of these there comes, across the meadow's fresh turned loam, the spirit hope of a nobler springtide in the divinely human lives of men.

* * *

The Master Artist has been busy on a study in autumnal gold and man to-day well revels in Nature's own proud heraldry.

True, it's not the kind of day that poets have been tempted out to live in rhythmic metre . . . November has been ever slighted by

minds steeped in the flower warmth of sunny June, or set aglow by the flickering romance of Noel's hearth-side cushioned chair.

Yet spirit there is in this brown golden autumn month, when Sol goes wayfaring beneath the Sagittarian sign, that speaks in pensive accents to the human heart, and calls it out to sense a sterner air than June e'er fosters.

The scarlet of the huntsman's coat finds meet setting in the green and gold of such a day, and the hunting horn sounds right merrily over the rolling slopes of the upland glebe.

The bay of the hounds seems sweet music, swelling here and there in its emergence through an opening in the copse coated land. Even bracken and wild blackberry grow richly ruddy in the excitement of the chase.

Ploughman and peasant alike, with each great heart of gentle birth throughout the countryside, share the morn's glad holiday.

Before he disappeared in the gathering dusk last eventide little Matt whispered to me that much prized, common secret that the hounds would gather near the coppice by the eastern lodge at "three bells of the morning watch."

Matt has been boon companion to one, Midshipman Easy, since they were introduced by his storm rescuer from the overseas a fortnight since.

Oh, the clean joy of the woods in the early morning, cub or no cub; to breathe the still November air, frost tinged; to pass fond hands along the dew-washed saplings; to watch those contrasts cast Rembrandtesque, by the slant sun within the birchen glade.

Keen artistry so challenges my huntsmanship that I, for one, feel no sorrow for a cloudless sky. The sure joy of a cripple in such a scene needs no such misty aiding.

“Good-morrow, good Benuncle, dispenser of kind hospitage in stormy weather;” . . . so hailing me, Matt’s friend, smocked in the bright regalia of the hunting morn, draws rein in his merry canter and reaches down to me a frank glad handclasp from a wide dominion beyond the ocean main.

“Good morning, Friend, whose name as yet I know not, fearing indeed to use Matt’s nomenclature, for he, I gather, has dubbed you ‘Rollo’ from the ranch.”

“This morn indeed you look not much a ranchman and yet there is the homely mien of comfort on your steed that is not learned in sundry canters down our tree girt bridle paths.”

So comes youth’s rippling laugh which it’s always good to hear.

“Now Benuncle,” quoth he, “surely you would be the last to judge a man by the scarlet weaving of a loom concocted by Semiramis.”

“Friend, new found, twere a far flight e’en for youth, from Nineveh to a watcher of the western plains.”

One does not often have the joy of tilting so with mind keen shaped to mind within the confines of my small domain.

“Nay, Benuncle would shiftily evade the prairie’s frank philosophy,” . . . “But anon I shall come visit him and discourse right heavily upon the ways of man.”

“Aye, come lad, and welcome always at Benuncle’s open door.”

“This morning with a huntsman’s scarlet coated chivalry . . .”

“From Semiramis’ loom? . . .”

Surely there I nearly had the vantage
and he, it was, this time, that practised slim
evasion.

“I must be off to greet one even fairer than
Nineveh’s fair queen. So, Benuncle . . . for
thee this day, ‘Good luck,’ and this and every
day ‘Good hunting’.”

With doffed cap, low bending, with the grace
of courtier born, lithe form is one again with
the thoroughbred swing of the hunter, proud
in filial contentment to claim breeding from
old England’s sires.

With deep pride I stand upon the rise . . .
pride in the young life of a new acquaintanceship,
until having cleared the thorny line that
bars his way, I see him draw rein again to hold
the converse of youth’s fond chivalry of which,
thank God, no age has known monopoly, with
. . . *Audrey!* Yes surely it is she . . . I
think I’ve learned the meaning of the message
in the moss . . .

* * *

A day or two ago the ground was white with
a winter sheet of prophecy of the snowbound

days to come. The trees have been fast robbed of their autumn ruddiness. The beeches pale-tinted for the festival of Luke, have doffed their leafage for Martinmas.

For Matt and me it is high festival indeed, for Audrey comes to-day to keep us house, and this old cottage has been decked from sill to oaken beam with crimson clusters of the rowan.

There is something in the colour scheme of brown and gold and russet sombreness flicked by the clear autumn sun that comes home to a heart long since schooled to know its limitations.

The red and amber hues of autumn have no less of strength to bear to the life of man than those bright flashes under the summer sun.

Nay, Martinmas does bring me the deep sense of God's eternal durance won through a life's shedding of glib colour and loud song.

There were no sense of Nature's squandering to the heart that feels, through seeming flagrant waste and rankest riot, the leading hand of the unseen spirit of spring within the autumntide.

So, amid Matt's prattle and the scurrying

spirit of his boyhood's friendly whistle there breathes for me the Prayer born of nature's kindly teaching.

Give us, Great Spirit, the peace of the fields' calm autumn touch, the sure sweet knowledge of years well stored, that summer's sunny knowledge may ripen into winter's wisdom and bring the mellowed heart, and kindly mind, born of the firm free clasp of nature's friendly hand.

Indeed I find its utterance echoed by the robin's returning song, a song plaintive maybe, but surely with nought of dull melancholy, for why should bird or man not sing glad gratitude even under a November sky? Is there no autumn joy of accomplishment, as there is spring gratefulness for hope?

A song thrush, late mindful of the loss of the silent summer months, sends me a spirited affirmative from beyond the garden close.

Full readily I accept his challenge and set out across the fields to meet our maiden visitor, if visitor one can be where one's spirit ever finds its habitude.

The boy can play Benuncle for a half-hour's

space; play his manhood's imaging of the future days as I saunter forth.

What fields there are in life to tempt the wanderer's heart out to fresh learning even in the late lone autumntide. How many scenes there are full comparable to that of neighbour Matthew's dark faced barn, raising aloft its red roof shield of tile, only to be outdone again in loftiness by the golden amber and smoky yellow crown of the close grouped elms. Yet men have talked of autumn poverty and autumn gloom.

God forgive the meagre minds and dull sad hearts which spread their own slim scandal to taint fair nature's name.

God be blessed for the increase of the glad birds' carolling which ever challenges their springtide joy.

Why should not nature be so sung to autumn sleep?

Gracefully, as the floating of the sweet, sun-silvered thistledown which glides past me borne on the morning breeze, comes Audrey, pausing awhile at the near-distant panelling of the white farmyard gate to add life's form to the golden colour of my canvas.

There is something in the lithe step which hastens as though at the sight of me, and then hesitates in drawing near, which brings to me the feeling that for Audrey new days have dawned, and that, for her, autumn speaks full joyfully of spring.

“Good-morrow, good Lady, the sun is not more welcome in its gladness than your own glad heart’s reflection of it.”

So she comes and looks up into my face a full frank, honest look and then puts two slender fingers on my lips as though to say . . .

“Benuncle, there are no secrets between us two, but the morn’s no time for a lip imparting of something we both already know.”

Thus my autumn canvas in its gold and brown shows no tragedy, and my own figure added to it in the turning means but added hope.

“The birds are singing so clearly this morning, Benuncle, and look how dear and ‘homey’ your old cottage looks nestled in the valley’s lap.”

“And ‘homey’ it shall be, child, when you are there. See how the curling smoke signals

of an oven warmed to the preparation of our festive fare. When home there is within the heart, what need has the great wide world of housewarming?"

There we leave the golden study and walk on to the cottage as it stands four whitened against the clear blue sky . . . Welcome, you are, Matthew, to your dark full barns . . . Let me have my kindly cottage gate and the oak beamed roof-tree above a humble board. Let me but exercise my franchise as a citizen of nature's no mean city and feel the great heart commonweal of man, in gratitude, beside a glowing cottage hearth.

To sense the morning sun through latticed windows, to give fresh 'courage to passing peasant upon his honest way, to raise glad face to the glad sky, to hold kind converse with the denizens of Mother earth, to know of noontide bounty, and eventide content . . . to bless and envy not.

Surely this were life and mayhap this too were deeper worship.

* * *

I have left Audrey singing at her housewifely art, and Matt full busily deciding whether the part of baker or of butler in his visionary palace is the more delectable, and have come out here to the white gate that opens down the path unto the distant sea.

Far over the shimmer of the lapping water a sail, sun-painted, is borne on to its "haven under the hill."

Some day I too shall seek my haven . . . yet needs it seeking? Who knows?

With youth and sun-illumined beauty and the autumn song of the thrush telling of a vision of sure spring, can human heart not reverently feel that heaven is, mayhap, but truly the Divine appreciation of a Divine environment even beside life's roadway at a white cottage gate.

* * *

Daily, almost hourly, the land prepares for the winter months. It is a time when men do think it sad . . . the autumnal seeming sadness settles upon hill and dale . . . sadness for the loss of much that is dear to humankind. The summer's sunshine colour

scheme has given place to deeper tones of brown and grey. The spring freshet's flow has settled into the quiet mirroring of naked overreaching boughs. Yet man still goes onward to his labour until the evening. And He who keepeth all things animate within His store, works onward too. With Him is no autumn sadness nor aught of autumn loss, for all things come within His garnering.

The blessed necessary salt of human life is made of two injurious substances. The poisonous exhalation from the lungs of the invalid feeds the budding rose upon his window sill. The red rose petals, living emblems of a living love, drop at last into the silent palm of a hand that gathers all things living for another life, and are given to replenish the odours of the scented urn. So the loving Father ever transforms, ever blesses, and wastes not.

The common seasoning upon my humble board, the tiny flower of a hidden weed, the great free heaven's air I breathe, are sacraments of the Divine love, in their way no less real than the bread of Eucharist formed from the golden wheat, that sweet evidence at once

of the blessed "curse" of human toil and of the life that was lifted up to cleanse mankind.

Joy from sorrow, strength from weakness, harmony out of discord, immortality through death, such is the Lord's great autumn paradox.

* * *

All is still to-night as I quietly open my cottage door and cross the stone flag out into the starlight. I see in the distance the old stile, my humble prie-dieu, bathed in the silver light. The fields themselves seem silver-stencilled by some sable sprite.

The whole vale has won through the day's autumn sadness to a serenely wonderful starlight peace . . . the peace of God's own indwelling Spirit in all life becomes subdued into the deeper feeling of eternal love.

The day's interests, feelings, thoughts, are tuned in one still eternal harmony. And so, standing in the clear cool air, I am conscious of a Presence ineffable, Divine. It is the "temple of the Infinite" and the High Priest offers the sacrifice of loving praise before the throne of God. The starlight draws me on from earth

into the spirit of earth's heaven. And Heaven's spirit is one of grateful loving praise.

Beneath the clear star peace, even my testing seems a thing Divine, for did not He too suffer? Yes, in the starlight spirit's peace, I find my heart's heart going out in a song of blessing to the infinite for the joys brought to a cottage door by a crippled limb.

I cannot offer much. Yet, when all other offering fails the human heart, man finds the grace of thankfulness the one atonement strong to cleanse from imperfection. Strong to cleanse, yea, stronger still to prompt to better action and to nobler thought.

It is a gift that blesses sevenfold in the rendering and, in acceptance, brings sevenfold gladness to the heart of giver and of God.

Then, however else I fail, let me be grateful for mercies numberless in a world of toil.

* * *

“Good-night Sir Benuncle . . . Are you, too, drinking in the peace of the starry heavens?”

A manly voice thus startles me and I am

glad, for I would fain hold converse with this my new found friend of the hunting field.

“Why, Sir Knight, what do you so far afield, at this late hour?”

Yet do I not surmise what brings him from his uncle’s board, within the great Hall’s oaken portal through the moonlight?

“Benuncle I’ve been roaming over the carpeted fields as Knights were wont to do, yet this time without steed or lance, dreaming of dreams I erstwhile thought impossible.”

“To the weaving of such spirit poetry,” I am prompted to answer. “as that of which dream gossamer is made, surely nought is impossible to the heart of youth.”

There I wondered whether I had spoken overmuch, knowing full well what filled his mind, and would have asked him in to conference but the glad old moon said me nay, not yet awhile.

“But, Sir, this were no gossamer of weak and dreamy poet but the most beautiful of poetic prose . . . Benuncle the heart of youth must needs at times be limited by the head of older years.”

So a strong arm links itself to mine and draws me out along the field path.

“What is it lad that troubles? Tell me even though it is not easy in the telling.”

Silence steals around us and a distant bird calls out his night “All’s Well.”

“Well, Sir, far out across yon silver sea, so still in its moonlight sheen, there is a dwelling place, woven of felled mountain logs, where rests one born of gentle blood yet to whom life is the broad breathing of the boundless spirit of the plains; a spirit which knows nought of cramping class and almost less of man-made creed.”

Not often does one hear of such converse with a guest from yonder Hall.

“Yet, Benuncle, the men that company across the plains are not gentle.”

“For gentleness belongeth not of necessity to woven cloth or rich emblazonment, eh, Lad?”

“Then,” grasping my hand, “you will not misunderstand . . . To-night I’ve said a prayer beneath the old oak yonder that the hand that snuffed the candle in the farm house case-

ment there, might some day light one to guide this plain wanderer to his far log home."

"And do you think the prayer will have an answering?"

Well I could know the deep searching of the heart of youth to reach out beyond a circle of circumstance and cling to that which answered to its spirit's wakening . . . Could I not fare out beyond the intervening years and picture my own heart's yearning, yet reversed, for that which could not be? Could the bar of poverty be a greater barrier than the pride of blood?

"Not quite that, Benuncle . . . rather the question is would it bring happiness in the answering? What think you who also love, yet with the wiser reasoning?"

Unconsciously, two figures, deep in the questioning of human joy and pain, paused and turned from the glimmering light that marked old Farmer Matthew's kindly hearth, to where the rolling hilltop shouldered its way into the moonlight and marked the path unto the not less kindly Hall.

And as they paused above the hilltop rise, there shone forth, clear and quietly, that Pole-

star message of the eternal stability of the eternal Love.

“Look, Lad, is God’s own star’s still leading, sufficient for your faith, as it would be in these wiser years for mine? . . . Does it not shine too above the timbered home in the foothill land beyond the sea?”

So we bade “Good-night” and parted . . . He to be received within the lordly portals of a world’s material convention . . . I to the freedom of a hearthside which knows no care of old tradition’s circumstance, save that which is ever conjured in the glowing coals . . . Yet each to muse, and musing mayhap dream of a beguiling candle lit by Audrey o’er the lea.

Hearth Fires and White Heather
Winter

*One lone flake . . . a silent messenger
from the Great Unseen*

IV.

HEARTH FIRES AND WHITE HEATHER

This morn I came musingly by a wider berth from Matthew's farm and took the path which skirts the coppice on the upper rise. The morn's clear frost made fairy fantasy of many a nature's miniature in silvered ivy green.

The red sky of yestereven fulfilled its promise of a shepherd's day of peace and there was dear delight in valuing the rich beauties of the scene. Those things which come to us in rarity we ever deeply prize. Not less dear to me in fingered tracery is the bare frosted oak than when in leafy dome it is covered from the summer sun.

What is there more beautiful than frosted holy holly-leaf plucked in reverence from the winter hedge?

And peace of mind there is in nature's winter rest. Yet peace dwells not in sluggishness, nor does nature ever savour of cold death.

I paused awhile close where the footpath forks, to watch young Matthew, unobserved,

making Pickwickian sport with a staunch young schoolmate on the ice-stilled pond. Fain would I have joined them, but a cripple needs must have acknowledgement of life's full limitation.

Farther on I found two busy thrushes at one in sowing seeds of mistletoe wiped from slim beaks on the brown bark. Hip and haw and holly-stone to-day are finding winter bed beneath the hedges ready for a spring's awakening. Sadness came to me for much of retrospect, yet sadness would not stay within the heart. Winter's spirit whispers good-will and peace.

Months have passed since that day, so deeply branded in my memory, when I must face the world with bated strength. Many are the fellow wayfarers who have passed across your stile since then. I have been alone, and yet that day has brought me much of joy, for in this little world of mine, bounded by sea and tree-girt slopes, there have been those who have borne the sacred name of friend. And hallowing their friendship's love, there has blossomed in a cripple's heart the heaven-sent blessing of the grace of sacrifice.

God is Love, and He has overspread our lives with a rich mantle woven, warp and woof, with the eternal thread of His Divinity; dyed in the heart's blood of His Being.

It is no earthly thing, this cloak of love, but the symbol of our spirit's sonship and our spirit's power, to be borne nobly and unashamed.

Life without its covering must needs be cold, naked, crude and undefined. With its ennobling influence it can never lose its fire until it is consumed in the Great Creator's flame. And thus I gather it closely round me in my need. Mine it is by sacred right; His wondrous gift to man through man.

Nor are Love and Honour separate things, nor may they clash. He is Love, and who would follow Him must worship in the interwoven Spirit of both Love and Truth. There is no other road into His life.

Bypaths there may be for a space. Have you never trod them alike with me? But the one great way of truth, into which all paths must lead, is only to be found by him who wears God's cloak of Love, lined with silken Honour, and clasped with Faith.

The Love divorced from Honour is no Love of His, and Honour as a thing apart is a rending of the eternal Spirit's warm harmony of life.

Thus I think, and trust my crippling has its place, for no true love there ever is which partakes not, in its essence, of selfgiving.

And so, if God is Love and Love must give, then sacrifice is of itself Divine, and freely emanates from the Spirit Life on high. It is not least among the steps that lead to the many mansions of the Great Father's home.

Dear to the child heart, as to the man's, it most wondrously shows its beauty in the Mother love of the Mother heart in its service to mankind.

So it must ever be that, by the casting of the bread of love upon life's waters, it shall come back with a sevenfold blessing to the heart that sent it forth.

My sacrifice is His, my love is of His nature, and so I live within my valley unashamed.

* * *

This evening in the blood red sinking of the

sun into the winter mist young Matt has kept me company at play before the cottage hearth. He must needs wait until his sister, freed from duty at the farm, could come and bear him home across the fields beneath the late evening's starry sky.

There have been days when I have wondered at the hold a child hand has upon a full grown heart. For little Matt does rule me as no hand of man's estate could rule, and makes me full of wonderment. Yet yesterday it had a clearer meaning.

Once in a while I have to go aside from the beaten valley path to the city street, and into byways little known to my ordinary day. So yester morning brought me the heart of a Columbus, and found me exploring beyond the ken of all respectability to find . . . a ragman playing with a child; a child ill clothed but joyously content in its alley sordidness.

It would seem that even down there in the slums the child heart weaves its spell about a crude materialism. Bless you, what dupes we are of our own folly; what a Ragman is the great lone world.

Hard through the whirling eddies of the city dust men scoff and bicker at the counters of an unreal convention . . . Skeptics in a surging round of human pessimism, paid for by carking coin and care . . . Ragmen of the world's hard thoroughfare. Then perchance some day a sudden ray of God's own sunshine pierces the leaden sky, and a sordid world stands abashed to find itself, as Amiel says, caught at play with an ideal.

Deep beneath its cold stern crust lies ever hidden a child soul, frank and simple, instinctive in its naive nourishing of a mystic faith, careful of love; mindful, mayhap, of holiness; foolishly fond of a fairy tale, when, forsooth, it can taste untrammelled by its own fond conceit.

Surprised in its hour of pessimism, the child faith insisently will come unbidden to disperse the world's dark gloom, and bid men hope on, until they shall no longer need to shield themselves behind the darkling glass of the counting house of a nation's care, but come out to play in the frank heaven's sun.

So I should be sad indeed to lose my lad in the happy strength of boyhood's happy day.

* * *

This afternoon, as I strolled across the fields to warm my heart at Matthew's broader kitchen fireside, a silent herald of the winter snow met me on the way.

One lone flake, more fleet maybe than the main van of the great white fellowhood, came silently on into an unknown land and softly settled on the darker background of my homespun.

And there awhile, a tiny six point star, it rested until once again it vanished into the invisible world that gave it birth.

A silent spirit messenger it seemed, sent from the Great Unseen, to help one feel the hidden beauty about one in the daily path. And I wonder why He chose a six point, snow white star, unless in truth it should be that it spake in spirit language of a trinity of manhood merged in the Trinity Divine . . . mind, soul, body, cleansed, exalted by the inborn fellowship of a Triune God.

There awhile it rested . . . then on in silence . . . into the Unknown, yet well known, where still it speaks to me of a myriad such like shapes, emblems of pure souls of His own forming, freed for fuller service in an unseen sphere.

They too, it may be, are not more distant than the gentle touching of my homespun in ways I know not, to lead me on.

* * *

The old Book in its message, this quiet eventide, tells me that, "The Carpenter encouraged the Goldsmith." And as I read, "Old Matt" (so I call him for endearment more than for his many years) strides up the path. And there he makes acknowledgement that for his present trial his brawn avails him not.

"Can I with heart and head come to his rescue?"

Thus as the greys on the horizon sink into deeper greys marking the coming of the night, we settle as best we may, how he is to win through unto the light.

And having companied with him through the twilight halfway down the path unto the

stile, I turn and take me once again unto my reading.

“So the Carpenter encouraged the Goldsmith.”

It seems that down in the workshops of the great world's work, there are divers gifts and differing materials. It is not given unto all to work in gold. Yet it is humble encouragement to those who must needs fashion the crude materials of His making, that God requires, of each and all, good workmanship. He looks past the material to the workman . . . would it be more true to say that He looks deep in the workman's heart and there sees the true material that he is fashioning. It matters not much whether hands build in wood or gold. Of little consequence it is that work is at bench or lathe or forge. In every case, in every clime, he who will, builds character, and character is that in which God deals.

The goldsmith is not ignorant of this great principle of the Master workman, and he can well afford to be encouraged by the success of one who works in seeming humbler sphere.

On early morning walk to bench or stool, well it is to remember in passing, that the roadmender prepares the way o'er which the King may make his pilgrimage.

If hard for me, how hard it must be for old Matt to trust his child unto another's keeping. Yet so it is with all our greatest treasures in their shaping to maturity.

* * *

Last night the sun sank down in smoky orange hue behind the distant hills, and Matthew's farewell prophesied of snow. So, this morn, I raised a lazy form up to the lattice to look across the fine white fields to where he would be busy feeding his much loved cattle from the mow.

There, in great wondrous rolling billows, the white drifts flowed down from the hills over the sleeping land beneath, and I knew that on toward the noon little Matt's glad voice would hail me to come and help him build snow castle promises of the sterner building of the years to come.

Just so he did, and there, for an hour, I was more the boy I used to be, and we two were

as gods in the soft scintillating light of the sun's long rays, making men in our own image, and therewith, not content, must also build them habitations wherein to dwell.

So strong is the instinct to create within the human heart. So human was our Maker in Eden's distant day, or is it that man's heart is so Divine?

* * *

Dear old Matt has won his sad fight . . . I met him on the road this afternoon . . . won it by kindly gentleness.

There was new heart life in his honest face.

Is not gentleness the fine gold won through toil and hardship, disappointment and mistake, and refined in the blasting fires of life's grim turmoil, and love's pain?

It is that grain of Mother love planted in our nature in the earliest environment of mother arms, and needs but tending to blossom forth into the mature flower of life's strength, to shed its perfumed benison upon the wayfarer and to bring a glimpse of peace to many a weary soul.

Then let us speak gently and be kind one to

another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as the Old Book says, "even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven us."

Then Audrey shall be given, as is wont, by him whose guardianship has kept her for womanhood's estate, to go unto that ever unknown land of love's deep mystery, where youth and maiden modesty join hands and God draws near.

* * *

A small thing this afternoon has brought to me a friend and with the friend an opportunity of service, and with it all one has been led to marvel at the slight chances that turn men's lives. Indeed one wonders whether to God, in His Eternal Being there is any such condition as man's "small and great."

Who has not despised the day of small things? Yet out across the meadowland of life, long trodden, how often one's path has been influenced, here, by the desire to pluck a hidden flower, there, in an effort to find three tiny blue-flecked eggs concealed among the

thorny branches of the hedgerow. How often one has paused beside the stile to listen to the joyous song of the lark as he would soar into the sunbathed vault of blue.

Who has not dwelt with fond memory upon some little incident in the days gone by, when the small things did not make life less real or earnest? And may it not be that, in a world created by a Master Mind, the little things receive no less careful thought than those age upheavals which overawe but do not bring the kindly mind, the warmer heart, that stoops beside the little daisy in its path?

In the building of heart character, one does not often use the method of the mountains but rather the daily round and common task of the coral island in the southern seas. It may be good to long for great crises, noble tasks, but in the meeting of such opportunities it is given only to the heart that has learned the lesson of the day of small things, to endure, to stand firm, to win and not to fail, in the hour of trial.

“Strength is not won by miracle or rape; it is the offspring of the modest years.”

So wrote one who could but feel God's power, speaking through the agelong wonders formed within the shaping of His mighty hands. And so I feel, as I look in gratitude over the quiet peace and snow clad durance of the Winter fields, for there stored up in silence, is a spirit won through many a day of steady plodding and earnest work . . . the spirit of a world that hears the happy dictum of the Master's own . . . "Well done."

* * *

Again late yester eventide full up and down the road great banks of snow shouldered their way into the moonlight, and there rested, with the fingered shadows of the trees playing upon their driven crests. I watched them long before I drew the warm curtains across my lattice, and settled to muse beside the slowly dying coals upon the grate.

This morning the wayfarers are there leveling my snow mountains for the traffic of the day. The leveller has gone forth at Demos' command, and one is given to wonder how many of such days will go to make an era of democracy.

The Art of a thousand interwoven moonbeams is trodden under foot of daylight's Industry. The spirit speaking silence that brought to me the sense of God is ushered out by the crudity of the world's work. The leveller is at work in this our day and generation.

One would fain ask with Amiel, must poetry ever thus vanish at the advent of a utilitarian prose? Must the moonbeams of a mystic life ever give place to a world's bright superficial glare? Must the cost of a broadened well-being ever be the suppression of the individual soul's deep breath of being? Must society ever swallow up the yearnings of the heart of man?

Nay, rather, may not utility, that altar of a modern world, on which so oft are sacrificed man's dear art and woman's sacred beauty, be made the sure base on which to build the housing of the rich soul life of a wider whole; a whole whose ideal shall be that great Kingdom founded in the Heaven's pure sun of beauty, love's devotion, manhood's heroism, and the infinite harmony of the nobler heart of all good things.

* * *

The trees that line the valley and make a wide circle beyond the stile yonder toward the hill-ringed horizon, have lost their verdant foliage long months ago . . . only a few patches of oak and beech keep a rustic mantle, clinging until Spring. But their beauty is none the less, for beauty is no twin fellow of mere luxuriance.

Standing, bare-boughed, full front to the winter winds, they speak to me of enduring strength won through many a day of trial and winter storm.

The stalwart oak in Matthew's nearby field, spells power in every twist and curve, caused by some youthful testing.

Beech and wych-elm grace the winter sky with more tender lines — tender like the strength of Audrey's graceful womanhood, and make me think of days that might have been but for a war's chill crippling.

And, too, near the stile, of late unvisited, stands, nobly browed, a spreading elm of that fine texture loved of all yet having slender foothold to withstand a winter gale.

Types they are of one's own humankind,

standing clear outlined against the cold grey sky: types more clearly seen when arms are stretched aloft in a human winter's worshipping and made more real by the deprivation of the snow bound human day.

It is in their days of less extreme prosperity that we see our fellows most truly as they are, and see them, God be praised, full oft with bared souls whose beauty shows no lack.

* * *

The snow is gone, and in its place is spread a dark soft carpet of winter brown and softer winter green. The moon will not rise until the midnight hours have passed in the day's broad wake into the west. Still peace there is abroad, and the heart, full often charged of late with restlessness, has taken of its spirit. Long I've mused with head in hands, and wistful eyes searching the hearthside coals . . . What living company there is in the glow of the wide seated settle to warm a Wayfarer's heart.

Alone—Nay not alone, for to-night that deep spirit which gathers up for one the strength of years gone by, that makes of memory a loved

form of all that's good in the Great Father's past kindness, stands beside one here within the cottage. For awhile I would commune with it and then, wrapping its influence round my heart as with my homespun cloak against the stillness of the winter night, I go abroad to share it with those silent wanderers who know no sun to guide them, yet whose days alike are numbered by his round.

There, where the circling outline of the hill has faded hours since in the overspreading dusk of night, a starlike twinkle shows where Bartolmew with candle company ponders the page of some ancient exegete . . . Along the way where late the frost-bound road betakes its evening way into the village, a moving lantern speaks of some belated traveller . . . a drift of distant intermittent song tells me of his eventide content.

Beyond, where weathered stile still stands grim sentry, another twinkling beacon marks the resting ground of Matthew's peaceful homesteading. Unto it I would go with less of sadness than the days have meant for me these weeks gone by.

As I find a well accustomed way through the darksome alleys of the rickyard, the homestead door sets free a welcoming glow cast from the crackling log of Matt's fond fireside . . .

There in silhouette Audrey's slender form searches the dark for one who would claim the right of entrance from out the shadowing night . . . and there (it means no sadness to me now) another form emerges, broad, strong, youthful, and of manly kind, standing in reverence on the threshold of a fuller life.

"Come in lad" . . . I hear the deep paternal accent of dear old Matthew and well I know what it all means to him. "Come in lad . . . Thou art full welcome . . . And thou Audrey lass; come you both here."

Should a crippled wayfarer be pardoned, if pardon there need be, that in the overshadowing night a head is bowed and lips do frame, but fail to utter, a silent "*Nunc dimittis*."

More I cannot write to-night . . . too charged the hours are with retrospect here within a valley's winter home.

* * *

At last the sweet strong beauty of the ever-green has come into its own. To-day, as I stand and muse at my latticed window, holly, yew, and pine, seem to speak of quiet waiting until mankind shall gauge the differing values of quick time and strong eternity. It is as though the whirlwind and fire of summer gaiety and autumn flame have passed with the passing of the deciduous leaves, and the still full voice of God speaks out, in quiet insistent strength, telling of years that blend together in His deep-souled love. They carry, in their spirit mantle of deep-lined green, the call to hold to all that is permanent in the days gone by . . . They point no less to the renewed vigour of the days to come.

I used to think yon holly was a gloomy denizen of a happy world. But now he speaks to me as one of those my best of friends, whose friendship outruns the passing summer's gaiety, the sun of life's more superficial joy, and stands full sure of health and vigour, from very foot to topmost twig, laughing a deeper laugh of gladness from every scarlet berry to cheer my winter's pain.

He is a friend in need and I like to think that, back in yonder midsummer when I could wander far afield and scent the gladdening spirit of the flower-laden air, when other friends were giving me of kindly cheer, this droll old fellow was ashedding of his leaves and making ready for a more enduring service in the mid-winter winds. And when I think of how he helps me now, I feel keen shame that in those summer days I failed to see him in his quiet flowering, failed full oft in memory of the legend that of his wood the Master's cross was made, and that each red berry once more sacraments a deep hued drop of strengthening blood.

* * *

Just within the ivy mounted wall at the foot of my cottage garden stands an old apple tree long since past its heaviest bearing.

Almost glad it seems to rest in quiet peace, fully conscious of a life well spent. Yet one more service it can render to the world's warm heart, for there, like the circling crown of some old victor in the race of life, it wears a halo of sweet mistletoe.

My own old Druid friend, I think him, and yet a Druid used methinks, in a more Christian worshipping. For to him comes the gentle form of the woodland dove, that speaks to me of peace on earth and a quiet voice in benediction from the opened skies.

To him also, at the children's Christmastide, comes little Matthew to bear away his laughing burden of winter berries home to his father's farmhouse festival. And there, if truth must be, I gather too, my own small missel offering to bind within my lattice, in the soft filtered light of the silver midnight snow-reflected moon. It is a true heart token of a faith in God's good teaching that life is richer for a love that men, in their blind ignorance, call lost than one that ne'er has come at all.

* * *

"Good Benuncle, Sir . . . the merriest of merry Yuletide joys be thine" . . . So I'm greeted in the early morn by one whose greeting I have come to value.

"And you, Sir Yuletide Knight . . . is there need to wish you more than just your own strong youth and the grace of Audrey's womanhood to bless its effort?"

“Benuncle, man” . . . and youthful hand clasps mine in understanding . . . “some days there are in life when one may shed one’s boyhood and know oneself for debtor in a world’s great treasury. Audrey has told me much of your lone life, and somehow I feel that I am trespassing.”

“Nay Lad, not that. ’Tis God’s own way— The love that comes to us is of His being, strong and infinite, and grows no less for sharing so, but rather draws us nearer His great heart.”

“But you will be alone when Audrey’s gone.”

“Lonely surely, but not alone, for here she will still dwell in spirit; and here the spirit of her laughter will find a willing echo in a cripple’s heart. . . . Nay Lad . . . I too am debtor and *I* cannot e’er repay.”

* * *

A day full unto the brim with mixed emotions, it has been . . . Audrey’s New Year wedding morn . . . The glad free joviality of Bartolmew toasting the future of a home across the seas . . . The Squire’s silver locks cast-

ing a benediction on Matthew's board . . . Young Matthew reaping full joy with naught of sadness in it . . . And I, well would I write of my own feeling but cannot. There are things in life too sacred to be penned . . . too intimate for aught but weaving into the texture of the soul.

'Tis the dawning of the New Year, let me keep it so: for once in gratitude to be alone. For once 'tis good to feel the innate sense of ownership that comes to me in the closing of the shutter on the winter cold. A blazing fire beckons me to throw aside all else and take full joy of its frank cheeriness.

Ghosts of former years . . . Sad ones? Nay, not so, for e'en a crippled life lacks not in happiness . . . are conjured up by the flickering of the flame upon the timbered wall. The hallowed gems of memory are lifted, one by one, from the sacred cabinet of time and sparkle once again within the warming light.

How many threads of kindness there have been woven through the cloak of the past . . . How much of kindness there is abroad to-night.

My old oaken board becomes a symbol to me of the overflowing bounty of England's good-will. My bench the token of a noble New Year fellowship which keeps me silent company.

Some are scattered to the compass points by a world's necessity . . . some long since laid beneath the greensward in other lands, are claimed by the great unknown. Yet what of that? They give me no less sure companionship than that they gave me in the days of yore. The dead . . . yet why so call them . . . they are more present in their strong resting than are full many of the living . . . their spirit free from trammelled bias or from ought but serving strength.

Yes;

"Some are dead who laughed. Some scattered are
Around the sultry breadth of foreign zones.
You, with the warm clay wrapt about your bones,
Are nearer to me than the live afar."

Thus I feel this New Year's evening tide
by my hearth's warm glow. Thus I keep still
company with memory's free spirits of the
past.

* * *

Of late, I've been in London on pilgrimage made once a twelvemonth to long loved shrines. Indeed I've friends in London and love Paul's pigeons not less truly than the shrine of old St. Martin-in-the-Fields. I love the black old habiter of Gray's Inn rookery. There's a brown owl lives not far from little Peter's statue in the "Gardens" and there are friendly wagtails on the Thames.

And there beyond the railing which marks the friendly roof which shelters me is a drab tree, confrere of those in Matthew's copse, smut-begrimed and leafless. Yet, in the light of the flickering street lamp, the live-long night a band of street sparrows take their fitful rest within its limbs.

They carry me in mind to the cottage morning window sill, where come their fellows for their daily bread crumbs shaken from a bachelor's table-covering . . . unlovely things and full of perspicacity. A half year since their place was taken by a humming bird in all its scintillating beauty in a search for honey in the columbine. Their interest was the same and the same good Lord did feed them, withal the strange contrast of their dress.

R

And how many sparrows there are in the world . . . sparrows of the street and of the market place. In that great human fitting that goes on hour by hour beneath my city window, it is not easy to sort the heart pretension of creature from creature. In Demos' great family it is no sinecure to winnow the golden grain of merit from the bushels of pretension gathered in the harvesting of a city's restless life.

Sparrows full many there are within the human brood, and as I think of them their call is much the same as that of the chatterers at my cottage lattice bar. They ask of me a restraint of frankness by a kindly reserve . . .

Imperfection, error, impurity and waywardness . . . such and many more are the failings of humankind that will flutter to one in a search for crumbs upon a world's great window sill . . . If they must be stifled then let me take them in old Amiel's spirit to my breast and stifle them with humble, human love.

* * *

Since the sun counted the tree tops in the

park on his awakening and called me out to sense the morning air, I've seen many things to give me pause for thought and wonder.

A dark eyed Russian maid crossed my path as she was led by her lover from a wedding altar in a strange land. I've felt the freshening of the city streets by the morning sun. There was an old street fiddler playing in his ragged grayhaired youth, and, near him, mocking, those who knew no reverence in their young senility. I've seen a grey squirrel playing with the sunbeams along the silvered branches of a fallen birch near by the parkland watercourse. I've felt the boyhood joy of a tread upon the first spring grass. I've found a rosary . . . long forgotten mayhap by some votary . . . for sale among the junk in a Jew's shop-window. Surely there's been much of tragedy and no less of humour in the good old town.

Hope has often passed me on the way and fear has not infrequently drawn stealthily aside. And oh, how many a face has shown the deep soul surge of human yearning for things that may be, or that may not be.

Then, to add to the harvest of the soul, about noon I passed a creaking wagon load of lumber on its way to make a fresh new home (though houses are not always homes.) The keen clear scent of it carried me six thousand miles beyond the sun-setting to the Rocky heights of that great western range where, years ago, my own young brawn was joyous in the frosty snow, and axe was laid to the root of many an upright pine. It called me on to be bus-voyager to a mill I know right well, hidden among the myriad activities of London town whose doors have caused full many a detour in the path of these dust-weary feet, that the odour of the pines, long left beyond the seas, might, in the passing of its busy portal, once more be drawn deep into lungs of one forest native born.

Surely humanity is full of human nature and there's much for thought and wonder in the world.

* * *

To-morrow I must say adieu to London's homely grey. There is something of a mes-

sage in the thrushes' song borne unto one here, despite all fog across the park, which comes not to us yonder in the wider countryside. A blue-tit in the city garden seems more a nature's missionary than there in its hedge-row haunt. Why indeed does man so herd together? . . . Yet there is magnetism in the throng.

Passing along one of the older thoroughfares at noon, pausing here to catch a glimpse of colour, not uncrude, upon an ultra modern canvas, and there quietly to inspect the fond shaping of a master-craftsman of good Chippendale's careful day, I came unto a corner and into a crowd.

There was gathered one of those surging agglomerations called together by the spirit of a twentieth century strike. One could well feel the appeal to human frailty and ignorance, by the spirit of all discontrolled multitudes . . . the dominance of force.

In that surge of human hearts could be sensed the spirit that would turn force to right, and make of Demos a stern and pitiless autocrat. Nay, more than that, there was the

spirit that would claim for blind passion the right of reason and, for brute instinct, wisdom's place.

For awhile I watched a conjurer, on rostrum improvised, charm a multitude's will to his own ends by the play on the harp of flattery.

Then I passed on in sadness to feel that man could so easily juggle with the will of man and that a multitude of individuals meant so little store of thought and keen enlightenment.

I longed for the breath of the sea breeze floating inland over Matthew's fields.

Interrupted in my wayfaring, I held a parcel for a sturdy lad, eager to make the kindly rescue of a feline inhabitant the virtuous excuse for an ambitious scramble to the top of a nearby tree . . . an urchin embryo of honest social service or, mayhap, another courtier of a future crowd.

Who knows?

* * *

How good it is to tread again the green soft carpet of the home path. For other heart the town's wide pavement speaks of home, yet not

to me. What is there that can make good the loss they bear in knowing not the joy of nature's glad free bounty?

Already the yellow aconite lifts a smiling face to welcome me . . . the snowdrop, sweet forerunner of the blooms of spring, is even now abroad announcing its silent faith of a coming flowered company.

Well may I find content once more within my cottage close.

Here Matt has brought to-day the daily corn for the early mating birds. There is so much stored up in the garnered grains as they slip between my fingers, full golden on my oaken board. They seem to speak to me of all the years long passed . . . little leaves of meditation on a life spent within a hill-girt glebe.

Beautifully golden is each little grain and behind their beauty lies all the stored reality of human toil. Myriad hours of human labouring are gathered there . . . and all the deeply simple earnestness of humble life.

This golden treasury was born beneath the sun that shone on Audrey's love . . . her lov-

er's tread has pressed the soil from whence these seeds have sprung. Little Matt helped the Maker in their garnering.

Thus musing, I find my own heart picturing its years in the grains within my palm. Years scattered like errant seeds, they are. Wasted . . . but who shall say what wasting is? . . . Crippled, yet one hopes but crippled as the crippling of the wheat which gains but firmer texture from its trial.

So years perhaps they are that, in His careful gleaning, may be impressed with the pattering of the raindrops of another season into golden prayer.